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Textual Persuasion: Trauma Representation in Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves

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Abstract of Thesis

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Textualization is the act of putting words on a page. Typography is the style and way in which the textualization of the text appears to the reader. Together, textualization and typography have the ability to coerce the reader into a specific reading pattern. Mark Z. Danielewski has combined textualization and typography in his complex novel *House of Leaves* as a unique attempt to represent trauma in the space between language and written language. Typical textual play becomes textual persuasion as the reader is guided through the labyrinth of text by typographical coercion. In this novel, these elements of play essentially force the reader to partake in a trauma-inducing literary, physical, and mental journey by means of engaging with a story that challenges reality and perception. This thesis will explain how textualization and typography create a powerful and manipulative guide through both the novel and the maze that folds within the house at the center of the novel. Lastly, it will demonstrate how to travel through the house and describe the effect in which this journey attempts to have on a reader.

Key words: trauma, manipulation, textualization, typography

State University of New York
College at Buffalo
Department of English

Textual Persuasion: Trauma Representation in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*

A Thesis in
English
by
Elizabeth A. Wall

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For the Degree of
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Chapter One: Understanding the Text as the House

The full color edition of Mark Z. Danielewski's debut novel *House of Leaves* follows the puzzling story of intertwined narrators each on a path to self-discovery. The story is built around the premise of a shapeshifting house that becomes the source of self-realization and self-exposure to previous trauma. It is a work of literature that requires an immense amount of strength and stamina. One of the leading theorists of representational trauma, Cathy Caruth, suggests that trauma cannot be captured plainly in literature. While Caruth's understanding of trauma would suggest that there is something unrepresentable in language, deconstructionism suggests to us that one of the fundamental questions in literature is how language comes to be representative of any experience at all. Critics like Derrida invite us to think of how any literary text has sensible unification. Whereas, Conor Dawson, a scholar of trauma in literature, claims "Danielewski employs his own variant of the mythical method in *House of Leaves* to give a shape and a significance to personal horror, thus demonstrating the mythical method's continued relevance for contemporary trauma artists. In *House of Leaves*, Danielewski combines infernal motifs of imperfect repetition, the composite figure, and frozen landscapes represent trauma" (Dawson 285). It is my contention that while Danielewski's work may very well be marked, as Dawson suggests it is, by postmodernity, horror, and notions of play, it is also a text that challenges how language may be able to represent trauma. *House of Leaves* goes beyond attempting to represent the unrepresentable trauma through language alone, and instead engages in elaborate typographical games, which make meaning, sequentially, and even sentence level temporality impossible. The result of this is a text that is constantly requiring the reader to inscribe the meanings produced, as the text itself continually ruptures on the level of the page, suggesting that the limits and possibilities of narrative to cover trauma are not always concrete.

Trauma in literature is enigmatic. In other words, to define or describe trauma in literature is believed to be profoundly challenging, if not impossible. To exactify trauma in literature would be to assume trauma is one dimensional and can be understood by all. Although, some critics¹ argue that trauma can be represented in literature through language. It can be argued that Danielewski plays on the fine line between these beliefs and shows that trauma can in fact be depicted in literature through the use of non-linear narrative and typography. Danielewski shows that language alone cannot capture trauma and incorporates a unique style of play to explore effective ways of counteracting the common belief that literary trauma is untouchable. Oftentimes, content and delivery tend to be the focus rather than the power and play of the implications of the typography that appears on the page. In order to add to the analysis of the critics, it will be important to expand on the intense results of reading the novel by studying the way in which Danielewski has written a story that is capable of representing trauma simply by guiding the reader through a textually developed labyrinth. Ultimately, it is going to become important to understand the chasm between real and perceived as it creates a major source of play on the physical pages.

Trauma derives from the Greek word “wound” and originally refers to a physical injury to the body by an external force. Trauma has evolved to encompass the implications of a wound, a hurt, a defeat. This extends the idea that trauma can occur within and be inflicted on a person’s psyche. Literary trauma is a unique theme for authors to invoke because of this encompassing definition. Trauma is specific to each individual and resides inside however quietly or loudly the affected allows. Oftentimes authors are able to depict the source of a trauma so clearly and in depth the reader who identifies is able to relate. Danielewski cuts out the middleman here and

¹ For more on this, see the work of Ann Chetkovich, Naomi Mandel, Michelle Balaev, and Greg Forter.

creates a novel that does not depict one specific event nor one person to identify, but chooses an otherwise unconventional path. The reader does not fit the book, the book fits the reader. Cathy Caruth, who intensely studies Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic work,² offers input on trauma that aligns with Danielewski's text:

Freud wonders at the peculiar and sometimes uncanny way in which catastrophic events seem not to be initiated by the individual's own acts but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control.
(Caruth 1)

What Caruth touches on here, through Freud's lens, is the idea that our traumas are triggered by outside factors more often than by our own will. Although this reader exists outside the house and the text, the text and house become interchangeable at points and pulls the reader inward. In order to engage with an individual's vulnerability, Danielewski must find a way to bring them to the source of the trigger, the house, by relying on the text to forcefully encourage the reader through the hallway. This phenomenon is illustrated in the text through the use of a fictional theory, The Haven Slocum Theory, in which individuals are rated by their symptoms due to exposure to the house:

...The concluding paragraphs claim that people not even directly associated with the events on Ash Tree Lane have been affected. The Theory, however, is careful to distinguish between those who have merely seen *The Navidson Record* and those who have read and written, in some cases extensively, about the film.

² Freudian psychoanalysis deals with how representing trauma is problematic. Although the trauma is often represented by mundane aspects of life, such as the Freudian description of the Fort/da game.

Apparently, the former group shows very little evidence of any sort of emotional or mental change...While the latter group seems to have been more radically influenced...The Haven-Slocum Theory also points out that this course is not without risk.³ An even greater number of people dwelling on *The Navidson Record* have shown an increase in obsessiveness, insomnia, and incoherence... (Danielewski 407)

The theory helps to explain why Truant and Zampanó have such lasting and consuming side effects of simply reading the *The Navidson Record*. Danielewski utilizes the Haven-Slocum Theory to play with the structures of textual trauma. The theory, which includes the post-exposure effects rating, creates a system for the individual to classify themselves based on experiences. Danielewski creates a place in the text for individuals to identify based on post-trauma side effects. By incorporating this technique Danielewski employs a metatextual gesture that blurs the line between real and fiction. The effect of this is that it can allow a reader to identify with the characters or allow a reader to immerse themselves into the text by rating themselves on the scale. A reader who, like Truant and Zampanó, are readers of the whole encompassing work, which proves capable of causing similarly severe symptoms.

In comparison to Caruth, Dawson studies Freud in relation to Danielewski's work to conclude his differing view of literary trauma. Dawson explores the presence of the uncanny in *House of Leaves* as it leads to the representation of trauma:

³ The Haven-Slocum Theory is a fictional idea created for this text as a way for Danielewski to create a category to explain the effects of reading his novel. Are you invested enough to become defectively traumatized or did you simply just read the book so as not to become too attached?

In *House of Leaves* this oneiric unreality leads to the return of the repressed in the form of uncanny composite figures⁴ for Johnny...Freud notes the existence of composite figures in dreams: 'the dream-image contains features which are peculiar to one or other of the persons concerned but not common to them; so that the combination of these features leads to the appearance of a new unity, a composite figure'.⁵ By following the knotted threads of Johnny's narrative, we can examine these uncanny composite figures and relate them to Danielewski's extended meditation on posttraumatic reverberations. (Dawson 288)

Truant unravels throughout the reading of the novel and as Dawson suggests through Freudian terms, he relays his dream-like images induced by fear and anxiety to the reader who engages with the text. Again, Dawson is describing this notion of Truant representing the repercussions of trauma and therefore through the play of the text is able to project his infernal experiences as a result of engaging with the manuscript himself. Truant, several times, takes note of how if he could have gone back and never gone into Zampanó's room or gathered the manuscript, he would. Truant explains in his telling of first coming in contact with the manuscript:

One thing's for sure, even without touching it, both of us slowly began to feel its heaviness, sensed something horrifying in its proportions, its silence, its stillness, even if it did seem to have been shoved almost carelessly to the side of the room. I think now if someone had said be careful, we would have. I know a moment came when I felt certain its resolute blackness was capable of anything, maybe even of

⁴ In psychoanalytic theory, composite figures are understood to be people or objects created from combining two or more individuals. This occurs in a dream-like state.

⁵ See Sigmund Freud's work *The Interpretation of dreams*.

slashing out, tearing the floor, murdering Zampanó, murdering us, maybe even murdering you. (Danielewski xvii)

This moment illustrates the idea that to even be near the manuscript creates an unsettling feeling, so to engage with the manuscript, as the active reader sees Truant do, connects to Dawson's notion of posttraumatic reverberations. There is a sense of discomfort that arises from the words "maybe murdering you" to insinuate that the manuscript is powerful enough to cause death is helpful in understanding the daunting presence of fear and trauma in the novel. Again, in this moment, Truant is reliving an event that, in front of the reader, has caused him to unravel and furthermore exemplifies how trauma is grounded in the language before immersing into the typography.

The novel is a compilation of perspectives derived from a mysterious shape shifting house. As homeowner and troubled award-winning photographer, Will Navidson creates a film in which he explores the oddities he uncovers at Ash Tree Lane. *The Navidson Record* documents the compelling discovery of a house that no longer fits inside itself. With the sudden appearance of a dark and alluring hallway, Navidson accounts for his family's experience in exploring, exposing, and coping with a house that actively taunts them. In creating the film, he draws the attention of Zampanò, an addled old blind man who creates an uncanny written portrayal of Navidson's house despite never having seen it. The text alludes to the possibility that Zampanò's remaining senses must be heightened as he is able to capture the labyrinth of the house on paper textually replicating each twist, turn, and drop off of the hallway. Upon Zampanò's eerie death Johnny Truant uncovers the scrawled manuscript recreating the exploration of the house.

Danielewski even goes as far to create a key for the novel to assist us in our travel (although, certainly not to make the journey easier). Each narrator speaks under a corresponding font. The differentiation of fonts allows the reader to recognize the stories and break the story into pieces, smaller to dissect. Johnny Truant's Courier font allows the reader to follow closely, keeping track of where he is traveling to. The editors of the novel write in Bookman and represent a bold presence that acts to show the "final" version of the story. Zampanó's classic Times New Roman font acts as the standard, to remind the reader what is the story of the house and what is not. Interestingly, Johnny's mother has her own font as well. When Johnny's mother speaks her words are written in Dante. It is odd to see why someone playing no role in the story of the house comes to be an important narrator. We can attribute this to her crucial role in the traumatizing childhood of Johnny Truant. His trauma is a key factor in moving through the story and therefore to understand the source of his trauma, his mother becomes a dominating presence in his own narrative. This mode of differentiating the font allows for the reader to maintain a sense of stability, a way to recognize familiarity and associate it with each speaker.

To begin to unravel the overlapping narrative, it is important to differentiate who is who and what is what. *House of Leaves* is a manuscript written by the deceased and addled Zampanó upon watching and reviewing Will Navidson's film recording his experience with the house on Ash Tree Lane. This creates a unique layer of textualities here as various narratives and forms or narrative compete to tell overlapping stories. Essentially, this development of layers builds on the idea of the novel becoming a puzzle as a reader is pushed to uncover the layers to find answers. This idea of Zampanó recreating the film in a book gives him the opportunity to tamper with Navidson's story and to insert his own story within. As a result of his edit Zampanó brings to text the vision of the hallway. The text, as it typographically depicts the house, contributes to

the overall ploy to use language and textualization as an attempt to represent trauma. Zampanó now takes partial authority in the novel's textualization. For example, his numerous footnotes alter or add to the original purpose of Navidson's film. On top of this unadvised partnership, Zampanó's bizarre manuscript falls into the hands of Johnny Truant who cannot help but to also embed the preexisting stories with his own. This labyrinth of stories becomes intertwined as each one forcefully fights to remain relevant on the page. Danielewski assists us on our journey to unravel the labyrinth by creating corresponding fonts and colors along with their narrator. The hope is that the reader, ideally, has one less trouble to endure while maneuvering through the text and yet it appears to add to the level of complication. Again, Danielewski's work with metatextuality creates the fractured convergence of a postmodern narrative with a trauma narrative as a reader's reality merges with fiction through the language and typography. Danielewski encourages this reader to engage with the text by creating a sophisticated narrative that layers narration to simultaneously provide answers and conceal answers. With that being said, as the reader we know we have three separate stories to navigate and map. Although, we may argue that Johnny Truant's character will become much like our own and his story will become the most relatable to our outside experience.

As this novel is widely regarded as postmodern, it is recognized for its absurd nature and narrative development that revolves around the instability created by combining various art forms and elements. Although, beyond postmodernism, this novel embraces aspects of deconstruction and trauma theory that work to simultaneously create discomfort. Postmodern works tend to reject the boundaries of a novel, as we see Danielewski do. Postmodern theorist Fredric Jameson describes:

schizophrenia as the breakdown of the relationship between signifiers.⁶ For Lacan, the experience of temporality, human time, past, present, memory, the persistence of personal identity over months of and years - this existential or experiential feeling of time itself - is also an effect of language.⁷ It is because language has a past and a future, because the sentence moves in time, that we can have what seems to us a concrete or lived experience of time. (Jameson 6)

Jameson refers to this theory of schizophrenia as he claims it best helps to discuss textuality. It is important to note that Jameson does not refer to schizophrenia as a diagnosis but as a language disorder. This idea then becomes helpful when analyzing *House of Leaves* because it helps create an approach to understanding the techniques Danielewski employs in order to experiment with the reader's sense of time and identity. Jameson uses the theories of Lacan in order to explain the relationship between the signified and the signifier in language. This is important in *House of Leaves* because Danielewski challenges the idea that a word can only have one meaning.

Jameson continues to explain the schizophrenic experience as “isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up in coherent sequence. The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ over time” (Jameson 7). Danielewski plays with this idea, knowingly or not, as he strategically manipulates the words and their meaning and their appearance, engaging directly in the fundamental questions of deconstruction and late postmodernism. Ultimately, the typography, textualization, syntax, and ordering disrupt the logic and meaning to engage in a playful reminder of meaninglessness despite the significance

⁶ Jameson is adamant that he is using “schizophrenia” in terms of description and not diagnostics.

⁷ Refers to Jacques Lacan, French psychoanalyst.

associated with parts of reality. As a result, the reader too, has to take a trip back to the origin of oneself in order to understand the difference between perception and reality or perhaps reveal that reality and perception become blended.

By design, *House of Leaves* is fragmented and does not create a solid and singular meaning which gives way for Danielewski to challenge his reader's ability to decipher the puzzle he has developed textually. In works of postmodernism, this idea that "The individual or subject depicted in these works is often decentred, without a central meaning or goal in life, and dehumanized, often losing individual characteristics and becoming merely the representative of an age or civilization", is often present (Paul 2). For instance, in *House of Leaves* this notion that Johnny Truant, the reader's strongest connection, becomes one with the reader and blurs the line between insider and outsider, character and reader. As a result, both character and reader find themselves completely lost inside the taunting house that actually pushes and pulls them to the center. Interestingly enough, by creating a decentralized text that circularly follows different narrators in different worlds, Danielewski has created a guide for the reader to find and manipulate their own center. As a result of this technique, Danielewski adds yet another twist by embedding a false sense of center that is projected by the intruders of the hallways within the shifting confines of a labyrinth as to throw the reader off balance. Essentially, because this work of postmodern literature is a dual performance between character and reader, the end result is that the reader is employed to create the center and stabilize the house, so that the novel may remain enigmatic.

In appearance, the novel is thick and heavy, holding enough words to build a house and enough weight to burden the reader. With this conflicting sense of incongruous components of the text, *House of Leaves* can be studied under a deconstructionist lens in order to begin

processing the novel's textual makeup. The connection between meaning and words is relevant when analyzing the text; in this case, as it acts as a stable element that creates puzzles and hidden meanings for the reader to uncover. The novel is not a cohesive unit but a collection of pieces merely threaded together under contradictory circumstances. The language cannot always be interpreted as the layer of typography helps to confuse the meaning. By playing with the puzzling layer of narrative and manipulating language through textualization Danielewski creates disorder. Deconstruction allows the novel to be read detached from words and their meaning so Danielewski may build on the play of typography. Furthermore, deconstruction is a critical dismantling of tradition as the meaning of words becomes separate from its origin. This allows the text to create an exteriority of meaning not only represented in the language but from the deliverance as well. The meaning of words then is not fixed but constantly evolving, which in turn replicates the movement found within the house. In essence, Danielewski challenges the structure of the novel and the integrity of its structure when he allows the words to move on the page (see fig. 1).

He goes further in his pursuit of a truly nuanced novel by toying with the standard style of narration. *House of Leaves* is a combination of documentary style, storytelling, and first-person narration all distinguishable by font type. When breaking down this novel it becomes a process of organization and unraveling the components of the narratives. A portion of the text is described as follows by Johnny Truant, the novel's protagonist:

Endless snarls or words, sometimes twisting into meaning, sometimes into nothing at all, frequently breaking apart, always branching off into other pieces I'd come across later...everything and anything but empty; each fragment covered with the creep of years and years or ink pronouncements; layered, crossed out,

amended...legible, illegible; impenetrable, lucid...burnt or folded and refolded so many times the creases have obliterated whole passages of god knows what--sense? truth? deceit? a legacy of prophecy or lunacy or nothing of the kind?, and in the end achieving, designating, describing, recreating--find your own words; I have no more; or plenty more but why? and all to tell--what? (Danielewski xvii).

What this quote provides is an example of what to expect moving forward in the text. This furthermore is a description of how the text will appear as we delve in. Again, this presents an initial purpose of turning to deconstructionism to help understand the complexity of the dismantled novel. The imagery of this description allows the reader to see what Johnny Truant sees: a disgruntled and eclectic mess of words and notes meant to be a manuscript. The way in which the words are not in a subsequent order, how they are scattered in such a way as to create a variety of different possible reading methods, exemplifies Danielewski's efforts to present a novel that does not obey the guidelines (see fig. 2). It also guides us through a quick summary of the textualization. The quote describes the appearance of the text as well as the implications. For example, in the end what does this conglomerate of words even mean and how and what are we even going to be able to explain? If we read this novel will we be able to put into words exactly the experience we have? By understanding that deconstruction is a method of analyzing a text that is purposefully broken into pieces and intertwined layers that now become play. J. Hillis Miller, a literary critic, explains Derrida's method by claiming, "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself" (Hillis Miller 28). In other words, what Hillis Miller is claiming is just what we see with Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. In addition, the combined work of postmodernism and

deconstruction create space for trauma theory. Postmodernism and deconstruction allow for textualization and meaning to deliver a representation of trauma.

In agreement with Hillis Miller's remark, it is best to understand Danielewski's novel as having all of the correct elements, but in no sequential order with a foreign list of instructions. Not only does Danielewski present an unassembled text, but he also presents an improperly assembled house that taunts both character and reader. Again, when the Navidsons return from vacation they discover their house has become this uncanny representation of their individual perception of home. In order to possibly make sense of the unrecognizable distortion Navidson begins the initial research to stabilize the home. To begin:

...Navidson returns to the building plans. At first this seems pretty innocent until he gets out the measuring tape. Idly, at first, he starts comparing the dimensions indicated in the plans with those he personally takes. Very soon he realizes not everything adds up. Something, in fact, is very wrong...The puzzling part comes when Navidson measures the internal space. He carefully notes the length of the new area, the length of both bedrooms and then factors in the width of the walls. The result is anything but comforting. In fact it is impossible...The width of the house inside would appear to exceed the width of the house as measured from the outside by $\frac{1}{4}$. (Danielewski 29-30)

~~In this quote, the reader gets the understanding that~~ the house is truly a spatial phenomenon as the house exceeds its own allocated space. In addition, the reader can see how unsettling this spatial disturbance is to the inhabitants, despite the mere $\frac{1}{4}$ inch difference. In essence, the moment Navidson begins to use logic to understand his own home is the exact moment things

become illogical. To exemplify this fear and uncertainty that jostles not only the explorers, but the reader, is a page in the novel that reads:

Then as the stairway starts getting darker and darker and as that faintly illuminated circle above--the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel--starts getting smaller and smaller, the answer becomes clear:

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The typography of the page forces the reader to physically turn the novel and read the words upside down. The manner in which these words appear on the page replicate the way in which Navidson physically becomes disoriented similarly to the reader. In order to engage with the literature, the reader has to enter the labyrinth and put the puzzle together. Danielewski has created a novel so advertently disjunctive that it is somehow simultaneously cohesive only when read by an outsider. He has truly manipulated all components of literature: words, meaning,

⁸ The text reads “Navidson is sinking..Or the stairway is stretching, expanding” (Danielewski 288-299). The text appears as is on the page, upside down and staggered across and down the page.

typography, reader response, reader engagement, etc., in order to captivate the possibility of trauma in literature. The only other element that holds as much power as Danielewski's text is the trauma that it evokes.

This level of depth and investment in the text and its ability to engulf the reader is precisely why critics are able to deem Danielewski's novel as a work of horror. It becomes one of the possible responses that this work of literature pulls an outsider into a house by means of textual manipulation in order to experience a newfound sense of self-rediscovery under a traumatic lens. So how does Danielewski manage to pull off this dramatic feat? He strategically creates a disassembled text that requires the reader to mentally make the connections necessary to hold the story together in a haphazard cohesive piece that only becomes whole by the inclusion of the reader. This technique of manipulation through text can be viewed through a reader-response lens if the reader becomes impacted or influenced by the text.

Stanley Fish, literary theorist, develops a theory of the influence of reader-response. Reader-response theory focuses on the consumer of literature and their experience of literary works rather than content and form. Stanley Fish intends to challenge how a reader understands the meaning of a word by explaining that a reader incorporates their own experience. Fish writes:

...the objectivity of a text is an illusion and, moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The illusion is one of self-sufficiency and completeness. A line of print or a page or a book is so obviously *there* -- it can be handled, photographed, or put away -- that it seems the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it. (Fish 140)

In other words, Fish explains that in order to shift meaning, the object of the text must be replaced by the experience of the reader, if the reader projects their own experiences informed by trauma. Therefore, if the reader does in fact conform to this notion, the reader can now interject themselves into the text and become a part of what creates the meaning. This is crucial in Danielewski's novel because he ultimately relies on the reader's ability to impose upon the language in order to uncover their own self within the text. Reader response theory provides a way to better understand how the novel most effectively attempts to represent trauma when the reader operates from trauma. A traumatized reader who inserts their own experiences into a text allows the text to manipulate the ways in which the text is understood. Not all readers experience trauma or access trauma similarly which creates a possible gap in understanding. To close this gap Danielewski relies on the connection between language and typography as noted through deconstructionism. Reader-response theory explains how each reader experiences a given text, which uniquely holds true to this text all the while also imposing the character's own experiences onto the reader. A cyclical experience. *House of Leaves* is an eclectic summation of trauma from a diverse collection of narrators.

Psychophysiological researchers have worked through experiments to further explain the reader's experience. Psychophysiology is the branch of psychology that deals with the physiological bases of psychological processes. In other words, the field studies the relationship between the function of the body and the function of the mind. This field is helpful in understanding the process of reading the novel as the act of absorbing the literature can correlate with the brain's response. For instance, how the text is read, written, and displayed can affect the reader's interpretation. Danielewski plays with this idea that the typography of his text is capable of interfering with his traumatized readers who, by means of reading the contorted novel, will

affect the reader's psyche. Researchers Scott R. Vrana, Bruce N. Cuthbert, and Peter J. Lang have examined how imagery-related text processing can influence the heart rate of readers. The purpose of their study is to explore how readers process a text that has the capability to provoke a mental response by means of a bodily response. As a result, the research concluded that "heart rate accelerated more during fear imagery than during neutral imagery or silent repetition of either type of sentence" (Vrana S.R., et al). In addition, the researchers noted, "it has been repeatedly shown that people respond to effectively descriptive text with patterns of autonomic activity similar to those found in the actual, emotional situations" (Vrana S.R., et al). In other words, as stated, the reader Danielewski's typography is most capable of manipulating is the reader who has experienced past trauma. A theory of Peter J. Lang explains how patterns of physiological activity are produced, "emotion is conceived to be an action set, defined by a specific information structure in memory, which, when accessed, is processed as both a conceptual and a motor program" (Vrana S.R. et al). Furthermore:

Text describing an emotional situation can activate such a memory network:

When the script of an episode matches the relevant concepts in memory, and when the subject is under instruction to imagine active participation in the event described, a response program is accessed which results in measurable activity in the appropriate effectors.

This study can be applied to Danielewski's novel as the text attempts to stimulate a traumatic reader response by those who identify with the episodes. Danielewski's novel relies on typography to help deliver the image of the labyrinth and therefore the act of engaging in the text, under this theory, will then activate the traumatized reader's mind by way of evoking emotions similar to the characters. Lang further explores possible variables that influence text-

prompted emotion: mode of processing, emotional relevance, and concept match. Mode of processing refers to the idea that “descriptive text may be processed as an image” (Vrana S.R., et al). Danielewski helps to enhance this idea by creating the image through typography. Emotional relevance discusses how emotions require activation, while concept match refers to the possibility of the text matching concepts found in memory. The typography, or representation of the labyrinth, activates emotions in addition to the possibility of the various narratives matching the experiences of the reader. Furthermore, this construction appears intentional in order to appeal to the physical construction of the text that may affect readers. This study of the psychophysiological effects of reading texts relates nicely to the idea that Danielewski’s novel works to evoke similarly discomfoting effects.

This work will act as your tour guide through the house, as a parallel of the text. First, providing a thoughtful analysis of the text itself on the surface level and furthermore the goals of the text on the surface level. Then, taking a step further, establishing the dynamics of the house as an attempt to stabilize the grounds. As a result, this analysis will expose the trauma that may be induced while enduring the horrors of the shifting house. Next, this work will explain how Danielewski was able to manipulate textual distortions in order to create an experience that lays the groundwork for readers to reflect the trauma of the characters. Lastly, I will ultimately bring the reader full circle, showing how each aspect of Danielewski’s stylistic and formulaic textualization creates a domino effect, triggering each new layer of trauma.

The word literature often has this negative connotation that it is meant to follow a specific rigid academic formula and when a text strays from the normative definition, it is perceived as play. On the contrary, literature is a compilation of play and word games that ultimately provide the opportunity for the reader to indulge and decipher and it is oftentimes that

the act of reading and processing the traditional text becomes playful. On the other hand, it is not often that the physical textualization embellishes the journey of reading and playing. Steven J. Brams, literary game theorist, explains, “Although there are no rigorous tests to determine what the ‘right’ interpretation of a work of fiction is, some interpretations are clearly more tenable than others. Game theory, in my opinion, has proved useful in explicating the strategic choices of characters by making tighter the linkage between motives and actions in plot construction” (Brams 33). As Brams suggests, there does not need to be a singular concrete method of reading *House of Leaves*, but through play, there becomes more justifiable positions of response. Game theory further gives purpose and strategy to the way in which Danielewski has constructed characters and narratives. In doing so, the playful nature of the text is what makes way for the possibility of reader inclusion. When the typography mimics the story, a work of literature becomes, in a sense, a sophisticated game that involves a conglomeration of tricks and pathways. The playful nature of literature can be created in a variety of different ways allowing for creative approaches in engaging the reader.

Danielewski creates a novel that not only is a terrifying game of establishing belonging, understanding and daunting dark hallways, but he creates a book that embodies the appearance of a game, including a start button, a pause button, and a collaged cover page encasing the traveling text. This theme of intricate, strategic and master mindful play is overbearing in Mark Z. Danielewski’s ergodic novel *House of Leaves*, as he develops a labyrinth of words that represent the labyrinth of the enigmatic house that resides beneath the cross-hatched layers of compelling darkness that invoke terror in those that dare invade.

Understanding the basis of reading is crucial in furthering the journey of this particular text. Danielewski relies on reading to be playful in order for him to complete his task of

disturbing the reader's mentality. His apparent understanding of how the adult brain operates, what it detests and what it absorbs, is key in his conception of the intricacies of the text. Each component plays a role in developing and triggering the neurosis in his reader. This idea of reading becoming an act of gaming, or playing, is presented in the text itself. Danielewski strategically provides the reader with information that specifically defines the practice of reading and yet, as adult readers, we still disobey and ignore the presentation of the riddle (a riddle in itself). Despite clearly telling us the issue, readers almost try harder to prove him wrong, and as a result, prove him right: that the physical text has an element of control over how it is read and understood. The text continues to inform us about how people tackle unanswered questions:

The adult world, however, produces riddles of a different variety. They do not have answers and are often called enigmas or paradoxes. Still the old hint of the riddle's form corrupts these questions by re-echoing the most fundamental lesson: there must be an answer. From there comes torment...It is beneficial to consider the origins of "riddle." The Old English *rǣdelse* means 'opinion, conjure' which is related to *rǣdon* 'to interpret' in turn belonging to the same etymological history of 'read.' 'Riddling' is offshoot of 'reading'...To read' actually comes from the Latin *rerī* 'to calculate, to think' which is not only the progenitor of 'read' but of 'reason' as well, both of which hail from Greek *arariskein* 'to fit.' Aside from giving us 'reason,' *arariskein* also gives us an unlikely sibling, Latin *arma* meaning 'weapons.' It seems that 'to fit' the world or to make sense of it requires either reason or arms. (Danielewski 33)

Furthermore, this complexity between riddles and reading is connected. As we read we are calculating, we are thinking, and in turn when we are riddling we are reading. Hence, we get this

duality involved in reading and riddling that comes alive in Danielewski's text as we are not only thinking about what we have read in a passive manner, but we are actively reading and moving through the text, or the hallway.

If reading, as the quote says, is to "reason" as well, then this idea again connects us to riddling as we make sense of ourselves and ourselves within the labyrinth. To go further, the quote supplies us with the meaning of "arma", or weapon, which is necessary in defense of reading this text. In other words, we must be "armed" in order to sustain the traumatic grasp of the novel. In this case, we can even begin to think of the weapon as knowledge. Caroline Hagood examines this quote from the novel in order to explain how challenging it becomes to figure out life while at the same time attempting to review the manuscript. Her work helps ground the idea that Danielewski establishes a sense of violence in his text. She explains:

Through an etymological analysis he travels through reading as interpretation in the face of the unknowable, to mental calculation and analysis, and finally takes a startling turn. He concludes, from the association between riddling, reading, and weapons, that the act of conceiving of, belonging in, or seeking to control, the world necessitates either supreme rationality or outright violence...Firstly, he takes his premises a step further by linking them to writing, because the one who fits the world is the writer and the one who tries to make sense of that fitting is the reader. Secondly, he identifies reason and aggression as the two main categories of information management. Of course, Danielewski's words, too, are subject to violence and limitation. (Hagood 92)

It is the reader's translation of the text that stirs violence in the process. Furthermore, the reader, simply by the act of engaging in the riddling text, evokes the authority and violence the words

hold. This work helps to establish the notion that Danielewski's novel ultimately guides a reader into an outwardly violent trap. Essentially, Danielewski tells us exactly what our minds are about to embark on as we are reading. He manipulates our reading by means of the riddle. The riddle being the text as a replica of the shifting hallway. As the reader, we will not be able to stop ourselves from entering the text that Danielewski warns us about, and we will not be able to withstand the cryptic riddling he embeds in the text that forces us to enter the hallways through parallel text and house.

Danielewski is very strategic in his textual manipulation that forcefully transports the reader through the text following close behind the characters. The text is presented in a multitude of unconventional methods; the reader is exposed to words that have been crossed out, appear in different colors, must be read at an angle, require a magnifying glass, begin large and grow smaller and so on. This technique of replicating the character's journey through the physical words on the page brings the reader to adapt to the text in such a way that we find ourselves stuck in similar spaces as the multiple narrators. By engaging in Danielewski's novel we become susceptible to the horror within. As the manipulator, he knows that as his intended audience will not be able to resist his warning and as we turn the pages of the text, we travel through the house. The reader first enters the scene of this enigmatic house with interior dimensions that exceed the exterior, a physical phenomenon that is never explained. As the characters first enter the limitless boundaries of the house's interior spaces, we too as the reader enter this place of complete and total darkness. The residents of the house are warned upon entering the depths of the appearing and disappearing hallways just as the readers who insist on proceeding through the text. As the reader we disregard his suggestion and continue on in curiosity, most likely regretting our decision shortly after but finding ourselves at the point of no return. This becomes a merge of

reading and riddling that work cohesively to contradict and confuse the reader who is actively trying to remember their own empirical self-inside the confines of a reflective labyrinth.

First, Danielewski creates his intense “game” of reading by employing textual manipulation and typography to convey a sense of disturbance as something that mentally takes the reader through the house. This reading then becomes our own exploration of the house. As we delve into the text we delve into the labyrinth of the shifting house. In order to then convey a similar experience to traveling the hallway, Danielewski creates a labyrinth of text to parallel the journey through the house. This manipulation is a key component in delivering and captivating the sense of unwelcomed mental disturbance. To elaborate or express the potential emotions of the reader it is useful to analyze Poe T’s poem from the partial transcript by Karen Green “What Some have Thought”:

i had no recollection of how i got sucked in there. it was pitch black. i suspected
the power had failed. i started moving. i had no idea which direction i was headed.
i kept moving. i had the feeling i was being watched. i asked ‘who’s there?’ the
echoes created a passage and disappeared. i followed them. (Danielewski 360)

In essence, this character, Poe T, is a fellow reader or viewer of the experience and therefore this poem comes to represent a version of what we might feel ourselves as we continue to travel through the house, or the text. In addition, Poe T comes to represent Danielewski’s own sister; this connection is important as it imbeds Danielewski into his own textual labyrinth.⁹ This inclusion brings him onto a level similar to the characters and readers as it insinuates that even

⁹ Danielewski’s sister Anne Decatur Danielewski goes by the name Poe. She is an American singer, songwriter, and producer. It seems fitting that she appears in the novel as a poet. It is notable that Poe released an album titled *Haunted* the same year that her brother debuted *House of Leaves*. It has been suggested that her album coincides or acts as a soundtrack to the haunting novel.

he is not safe from the labyrinth. Furthermore, despite the warnings, we have continued to read the text and as a result we are also trapped within the mystery of the house. We are lost in the darkness, we have no clear sense of location, we are paranoid, but we still continue to search. Ultimately, as the reader we are experiencing second hand trauma of the house and the daunting darkness. In order to convey and evoke this trauma from characters to readers, Danielewski delivers the text in a manner that represents the traps, suspense, disturbances and displacement that comes from exploring the house. As the characters are punished for invading the house, we too are punished for invading the characters and therefore the house ourselves.

This layer of typographical play in the text further adds to the unsettling nature of the narrative as it degrades the reader's mental state. It is purposefully crafted in order to convey the missing knowledge that is presently not present. For example, when there is a lack of information there may be a blank space, a line through the words or bold "x" marks. This shows that although the information is out there, it is not available for our knowledge. This lack of knowledge therefore comes to represent the darkness that is heavily present in the novel. Darkness is the absence of light; it is the void of which color is meant to fill; in other words, darkness is then the absence of knowledge or the void in which information is meant to fill. To shed light on the darkness would be to reveal information and uncover leads on the mystery of the house. Again, information which we are not given access to.

The text reads, "Ironically, the very technology that instructs us to mistrust the image also creates the means by which to accredit it" (Danielewski 144). This statement further describes the book itself as it provides us with information and then negates that information. This negation is on display for the reader when Danielewski inserts a blacked-out square in the middle of the page and wraps the backwards and sideways text around the space (see fig. 3). On the

same page we are given the lengthy footnotes, as well as the continuation of the narrative squeezed in a column on the right. Within that footnote appears red text all crossed off with an irregular gap between the words. Another layer is embedded with a footnote to the footnote. On this single page, Danielewski has his reader decipher the mirrored text and lead us around the missing information or the black space. On the alternate page the text is spaced out as to create a large blank square to negate the previously displayed black square. Here we are not necessarily missing information but there is a physical gap in our information to replicate the mental gap we suffer from the story itself.

To go further, Danielewski carries the theme of blank space through the next few pages. The irregular arrangement on the page leaves the reader searching for the text as we search for clues in the house as well. As we venture in deeper, another page displays for us the repeated and jumbled words, “Please forgive me please” (Danielewski 627). The way in which the words on the page repeat and begin to overlap each other creates this darkening effect on the bottom of the page where we can no longer decipher the text. We are sent to the dark and therefore sent without knowledge. In another instance, Danielewski utilizes 17 whole pages to portray the narrowing hallway. The words are constrained within an invisible shrinking boundary and each page loses more and more space representing those walls closing in. When taking the reader down the hallway that grows and widens Danielewski opens up the space between words, where they now push against the borders of the page. When showing unstable movement across the shifting floors, he inserts tilting text and again on the same page in order to create the loss of vision; the words begin to space out and scatter in nonlinear patterns across the page to replicate that feeling of trying to grasp a fleeing vision. To replicate the dropping and heightening ceilings, the text is presented as such:

getting

progressively

lower

and

lower

until it begins to graze his head,

only to shift a few minutes later,

until

higher

and

higher

rising. (Danielewski 429)

Ultimately, Danielewski reminds us that, “direction no longer matters” (Danielewski 443). In this instance, the roof of the hallway is closing in on the explorer, Will Navidson, touching his head and proceeding to expand upward once more until the space grows bigger and bigger. As you can see in the typography, the words represent this sudden movement in the ceiling. As the ceiling drops lower and lower the words fall vertically as the space between the words expands. As the ceiling rises back up the words replicate the space that grows if we read the words left to right. Here is an instance where Danielewski expects the reader to read in sequential order rather than in roundabout methods. This moment in the hallway occurs in total darkness, and leaves Navidson in confusion as what he had expected had already changed, completely rendering his sense of direction useless. In other words, Danielewski is going to continue conveying the debilitating darkness within the changing walls to inflict upon his reader the confusing reality for the characters. Once again, to negate what we have been told, the direction is no longer moving; to show this Danielewski writes vertically as to not allow the words to move forward, to impede further movement. But again, we are fooled; as the text begins to turn down the side of the page

rather than across, we are moving once more with the characters inside. The uncertainty of the house hides beneath the darkness and leaves us vulnerable as it degrades our mindsets in order to protect its truth. Ultimately, the house wishes to remain an enigma and therefore it refuses to be discovered, and in order to maintain its structure it must use darkness within its changing walls as its shield. Although, in the case of the house, darkness has no boundaries, and therefore the house itself has no boundaries as we see the dimensions change at an irrational speed.

Essentially, Danielewski controls the information we receive by manipulating his text to throw us off course as the hallways of the house misguide the characters. It is as if when we uncover one layer of darkness, another layer appears on the cross hatch. It is a never-ending cycle of information that brings us further and further into the dark. The more we try to make sense of things the less sense we make, and more frightening things become. As well, when we read the transforming text we must retrace our steps and re-read in order to understand what it is we have just read; in the meantime, the house has changed again. The play with darkness is not only its presence in the text, but as a form of discomfort that leaves the characters and secondly the reader in a state of unknowing or darkness. We must then try to puzzle out what we see or have knowledge of in order to progress through the narrative. The darkness leaves the characters and the readers unknowing about what is actually going on as nothing can be defined with certainty.

The play then is not in dramatic irony or engagement from the reader filling in the blanks, as there are no blanks so to speak. The play is that the novel becomes a riddle, but no one has the answer. Furthermore, riddles, “do not have answers and are often called enigmas or paradoxes. Still the old hint of the riddle’s form corrupts these questions by re-echoing the most fundamental lesson: there must be an answer. From there comes torment” (Danielewski 33).

Essentially, the information or hints we get do not properly accommodate our questions and therefore the hints become inadequate and we are never satisfied. There is no answer and yet, there must be an answer. In other words, all of the information is given to us (like a riddle), there are no tricks (that we know of) or missing information, we know everything there is to know, and yet we cannot figure it out because we have been denied access to the most critical pieces of information.

As the house refuses our interpretation, it repels our knowledge. When we fight back with new information it shifts once more in order to contradict our old information and therefore the cycle continues. Our information is never enough to satisfy the riddle that is the house and that in itself is the riddle. Ultimately, we are on a conveyor belt where we appear to be moving forward but no physical progression forward is made. It's merely an illusion or as previously mentioned, a trick trying to hide that it is a trick. After completing the narrative, there is ultimately no definite resolution or happy ending for either the characters or the reader. We are only left with the disturbances the house has imprinted on us and the disturbance we have then contrived ourselves from the perceptions the house has also imprinted on us.

The darkness of the house exceeds the blackness of nighttime; it is a darkness that blinds you and yet a darkness that makes you see things (that aren't necessarily there); a mind-altering darkness. It is this layering of dark on dark that impedes our ability to use our senses properly and in turn our senses play tricks on us and we cannot make sense of what we are experiencing. Danielewski plays on this confusion and causes our journey through the text to be a traumatic one. The darkness forces us to become vulnerable and the text forces us to partake in exploring the labyrinth and therefore ourselves. Not only does darkness coerce us physically, but it absorbs our knowledge and therefore our safety and distorts it. When we are given moments of clarity,

they are brief, and oftentimes the knowledge is too complex. For instance, the science and myth of the echo are significant to the story as it helps to explain the phenomenon of how sound travels in space. Echoes occur inside the hallway and the sound level varies as the space shrinks or expands. To help clarify the science of the echo the text provides a formulaic expression of echoes. The equations read: “Sound + Time = Acoustic Light” and “Sound + Time = Acoustic Touch” (Danielewski 47). When given the equation for echoes it seems as though we can make sense of things and then it is as if we have found out too much and the house rejects our knowledge and shifts. To go further, the description of echoes in the text acts to explore the properties of reflection; which interestingly is how the labyrinth is arguably created. With that in mind, the first formula explains how echolocation can determine the exact distance between two points and the second equation establishes how vision is explained by illumination rather than a signal. Within the hallway arises this eerie groaning that’s pitch and volume seemingly increase as the walls shift. Although, the groan can never be located and hence why the equation of echolocation becomes trivial. On the other hand, if we refer to the second equation, nothing can be illuminated to the explorer’s eyes as the hallway is concealed by a weighted darkness. Essentially, this echo, this reflection, the illumination, it is all an ever-changing riddle, an enigma that wants you to pay attention but does not want you to understand.

In the end, this extreme house of darkness, of layered perspectives and manipulated perceptions, is working to ensure that the characters and therefore the reader cannot penetrate and decipher the riddling phenomenon (the torment of the riddle). In the case of this particular novel, the level of play is so advanced and extreme it becomes a nightmare. Typically, when it comes to playful literature it is oftentimes the case that the author works to include the reader as they fill in the blanks and lead the narrative. For example, chapter 16 of the novel is an attempt

to explain the house as a scientific phenomenon. Throughout the chapter a total of 19 pages are marked missing leaving a chapter of only 13 pages. Within the remaining 13 pages, 4 pages nearly, in total, are covered in bold X's. The lack of explanation of the house and lack of language exemplifies how difficult it is to understand the house as the obscure entity it has become. The reader is left to make sense of all that is made available to them in this section, which is not much, and therefore guides them to their own conclusions. Essentially, everyone is working to fill in the blanks. In the end, the play is that no one can make sense of the story and therefore there is no influence like there might be in other forms of playful literature.

Danielewski creates this labyrinth of text that parallels the labyrinth of the house; as we try to navigate our paths through the hallway, we must illuminate the darkness that surrounds us. We are left in the unknown, or the darkness, and the play is then to solve the riddle. However, the point is that we never uncover the riddle and the journey becomes laborious. It is a cycle of text that invites you to play, the hints we are given keep us engaged because we want to resolve the issue, and yet we are only strung along to be tormented with no understanding, and no resolution. Essentially, it is Danielewski playing with our minds through his literature, rather than us getting to play with the literature.

Ultimately, Danielewski has successfully manipulated the reader and coerced us through the unsettling narrative through irregular typography. The cryptically layered and representative physical text on the pages is what traps the reader in the dark, blank space that is the ever-changing dimensions of the house. Yes, the text provides information, but it is only "Enough to see but not enough to see by" (Danielewski 489). Essentially, the text is designed to carry the reader through the narrative and leave us in the dark along with the characters who are now left with the trauma and uneasiness that ensues. We have enough knowledge but not enough to

answer the riddle of the house. We are left both physically and mentally exhausted after working through a text that demands to be played with.

The remarkable palimpsestic quality of *House of Leaves* is created by the overlapping, contradicting, and overall agitated perceptions of each narrator. As each narrator alters the markings of those who came before, the story creates a direct line to the reader. As Navidson establishes the story, Zampanò records the story, and Truant interprets the story, the reader becomes next in line to personally tamper with the horrors of the house. Essentially, because we see Truant's whole process of gathering the manuscript, we can see all ways in which the house has changed in the past by what has been erased and crossed out or eliminated by a black or blank space. This creates a premonition for the reader who has, by now, realized they too are a part of this manipulative text.

By designing a text that becomes a replica of a contorted house, the text must follow the cryptic path of the interior blueprint; therefore, the book evokes in its reader a similar experience to those characters within the house itself. Danielewski creates an unpleasant balance between the known and the unknown. By strategically and masterfully relying on textualization and typography as a guide, Danielewski is able to create play and further develop each ensuing layer of darkness, of uncertainty, of instability, of trauma that leave us engulfed within the disorienting walls of the house and text.

Chapter 2: Mapping and Exploring the Labyrinth

The characters in the novel individually experience a varying level of acute emotional trauma from exploring the home. There is death, infidelity, sexual abuse, suicide, claustrophobia, agoraphobia, a total fear of darkness and the unknown, and so on, that ultimately render each individual in a paralyzing state of vulnerability at the hands of the labyrinth. Again, trauma, in the sense of this analysis, is recognized as the ongoing effect of an event that has hindered an individual's ability to properly process, cope, and understand future events linked or triggered by the past. Truant's story explains this phenomenon of the inability to express closure with the past:

Ever see yourself doing something in the past and no matter how many times you remember it you still want to scream stop, somehow redirect the action, reorder the present? I feel that way now, watching myself tugged stupidly along by inertia, my own inquisitiveness or whatever else, and it must have been something else, though what exactly I have no meaningless combination of words, 'nothing's all', but one I like just the same. It doesn't matter anyway. Whatever orders the path of all my yesterdays was strong enough that night to draw me past all those sleepers kept safely at bay from the living, locked behind their sturdy doors, until I stood at the end of the unremarkable door too, but still a door to the dead.

(Danielewski xiv-xv)

What he appears to be questioning here is one's ability to change the past. It is the collection of one's past that forms the present and that is enough to create the direction in which one moves forward. With that in mind, the character's past seems to compel the future and lure them through the labyrinth despite their attempts to resist. It is arguable that mapping and exploring

the house is what leads to the apparently inevitable exposure to an ongoing trauma. For example, Karen and Will Navidson suffer from jealousy and paranoia of infidelity in their marriage. Their strained relationship is put to the test with “privately voiced ultimatums” on how they expect one another to behave with the hallway (Danielewski 62). When the couple has famous friends visiting for dinner the night takes a turn given Will’s compulsiveness in showing the hallway. Navidson begins,

‘Here _____, you wanna see a darkroom, I’ll show you a dark room.’

‘Don’t you dare, Navy!’ Karen immediately cries. Everyone is pretty tipsy and the general mood is so friendly and easy it seems impossible to to disturb. Which of course all changes when Navidson unlocks the door and reveals the hallway...._____ takes one look at that dark place and retreats into the kitchen. Ten minutes later _____ is gone. _____ steps up to the threshold, points Navidson’s flashlight at the walls and floor and then retires to the bathroom. A little later _____ is also gone.

(Danielewski 63)

The idea that is shown here is that, regardless of who enters the hallway, the individual is overcome with this unexplainable inner disturbance that causes them to disappear. This notion replicates, on a similar scale, what the reader experiences as well. For instance, as the hallway is revealed to the dinner guest, they disappear leaving them unable to express what they have experienced.

The textual representation of the hallway, viewed through the eyes of Johnny Truant, becomes overwhelming in its power, suggesting that the act of textual engagement has the potential to overwhelm reality. It is important to note that the mood during this time has

changed. Navidson believes the evening is going so well that not even the ominous hallway could ruin it, and yet when the dinner guests believe they are simply going to see a party trick they are exposed to this overbearing sense of the unknown and darkness that evokes a disturbing response. Here the dinner guests, invited to engage in a surface level parlor trick, are disturbed to confront their own darkness. Danielewski, through levels of textual play in the novel, is also inviting the reader to engage in a similar exploration. Navidson goes on to explain this thought that, “Absolutely nothing visible to the eye provides a reason for or even evidence of those terrifying shifts which can in a matter of moments reconstitute a simple path into an extremely complicated one” (Danielewski 69). Essentially, nothing that the readers see seems to explain the contortions of the house and as they journey through the text and move toward the center, trauma becomes the guiding force through means of the shapeshifting house.

The archetypal descent into the hallway that continues to embellish the idea that the hallway exposes the explorers to their own traumas and fears. The labyrinth then becomes a guide to the center of identity. Moving through the text requires maneuvering through the house, and as Hansen notes, “...there are many ways to enter *House of Leaves*” (Hansen 111). While the characters may have numerous ways to enter into the physical house represented in the text, the meta-narrative construction of the novel also invites the reader to enter in any number of ways. The meaning of the text is not reducible to words on a page, whose meaning the reader grasps. Rather the text requires a level of engagement -or not- from the reader who is constitutively engaged in a process of meaning making with the text that goes beyond reading words on a page. In terms of postmodernism, Fredric Jameson’s work examines:

As in film, the first questions are those of minimal units: the words of built space, or at least substantives, would seem to be rooms, categories which are

syntactically or syncategorematically related and articulated by the various spatial verbs and adverbs--corridors, doorways, and staircases, for example--modified in turn by adjectives in the form of paint and furnishings, decoration, and ornament...Meanwhile, these 'sentences'--if that indeed is what a building can be said to 'be'--are read by readers whose bodies fill the various shifter-slots and subject-positions... (Jameson 105)

Jameson helps explain how the readers can become connected to the work and fulfill roles created by the author. The reader is given an opportunity to navigate through the rooms built by sentences. The sentences in turn create the house and entranceways for the readers to be absorbed. In other words, the reader may enter the house as any various character who is granted access and in turn our understanding of the text becomes a replica or even an extension of the character. Depending on who is the guide, the manner in which we understand the text can alter our perception. For example, to follow Navidson's trail would be one dimensional in a sense that the text offers more than his perspective alone.

The formal structure of the text creates an eerie sense of uncertainty, making the course of Zampanó's narrative fragmented and unstable. Johnny Truant's guides the reader through an edited version of Zampanó's tale alongside his own personal and tragic narrative. As a result, the journey inside becomes clearer, in the sense that he has done some of the puzzling work for us. Truant resides in all dimensions of the text and is able to journal his own experience in a way that tackles the house, the manuscript, and the implications of both.

Essentially, the reader can meander through the text unattached to a character, and yet Danielewski's technique in displaying the text as a mirror of the house does not allow the reader to be a separate entity. The daunting task of decoding and deciphering the text is:

with its different blocks of text and fonts, its maze of footnotes and editorial asides provided by different commentators, its struck-out passages, citations in Latin, and its nearly buried references to sons slain by fathers-illustrates the ways that Danielewski typographically transforms the space of the page into a literary labyrinth that readers must learn to negotiate. (Hansen 128)

Hansen's analysis explains that the text appears as a layered puzzle and furthermore how the text becomes the actual labyrinth reflected by the house. Ultimately, it is the goal to make it to the center of this labyrinth as it becomes symbolic of our own selves. This recalls the work of Chandler who connects the architecture of literary houses to the characters.¹⁰ Essentially, the labyrinth, as it changes, projects the internal map of the explorers. If that is the case, then the individual inside must come to terms with their own self and master their own self in order to exit. In *House of Leaves* the novel and the complex typography represent the house. In order to make advances through the labyrinth we must analyze each component of the text. This task becomes crucial when reading *House of Leaves* as deciphering the typography will help to unveil the labyrinth and better explain the mind of the characters. The primary motivation of the text is to submerge the reader into a trap through means of the labyrinth both on the house and on the page. Those strategic markings and typography both hinder and guide the reader, and as a result we become immersed in this need to solve the riddling labyrinth. For example, Michael Hemmingson, who studied the footnotes of the novel, comments that, "Johnny Truant's reading of a manuscript moved from mere curiosity to manic obsession" (Hemmingson 273). His remark focuses on the notion that Johnny Truant, like the outside reader, becomes ferociously engulfed through engagement of the story. Furthermore, the outside reader follows the maniacal path of

¹⁰ See Marilyn Chandler's work *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction*, where she studies various novels and how their characters come to represent or are represented by the architecture they inhabit.

Truant's reading of the manuscript. Again, the reader of this text begins to replicate his move from curiosity to obsession as well. As an educated reader engages in typography the physical act of reading controls the mental act of reading. For instance, the reader must, at times, turn the book upside down to understand the words written. The reader, like Truant, may become obsessed with how to possibly use this incredibly aggravating and unstable house to simply understand ourselves as human beings. For example, recall the moment when Truant copies Tom's transcript during his time at the house. After working on the scene Truant mentions how it makes him feel bad and attributes this to his sudden outburst of shouting at the tattoo parlor. He writes:

I was in some weird kind of jittery daze. Everyone was there, Thumper, my boss, the usual visitants, along with some depraved biker who was in the middle of getting an octopus carved into his deltoid. He kept blathering on about the permanence of ink which I guess really got to me because I started howling, and loud too--real loud--spit sputtering off my lips, snot shooting out of my nose...Thumper came to my rescue, quickly escorting me outside and ordering me to take the day off: 'I don't know what you're getting messed up in Johnny but it's fucking you up bad.' Then she touched my arm and I immediately wanted to tell her everything. Right then and there. I needed to tell her everything. Unfortunately, there was no question in my mind that she would think I was certifiable if I started rattling on about animals and Hand shadows, mutable letters... (Danielewski 261)

Here Truant shows his loss of control and recognizes it is from his attempt to make sense of the writing that pushes him to make sense of reality. Although he realizes that, to another person

who is not a reader of the manuscript, they will not share the same disruption. If the reader Danielewski best appeals to is the one who relates to Truant in the sense of traumatization they are likely to succumb to similar side effects of reading the troubling manuscript.

Before we can enter the house, Navidson must set up the scene of his enigmatic home. It is the family's return from their trip that signifies the change of their home to a house. It is also this change from home to house that signifies the psychological changes within the family's structure. Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny is relevant in our reading of *House of Leaves* as it creates a preternatural understanding of "home". Freud explains the uncanny as a psychological experience as something that is strangely familiar. In other words, what is understood as strange or mysterious in the seemingly ordinary. Anthony Vidler, architectural historian, describes the uncanny as "...not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial confirmation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming" (Vidler 11). To go further, the term unhomely in this case can best be defined by connecting the ideas of Freud and Vidler. The unhomely then is understood as a feeling of dislocation of reality. In other words, the hallway renders the house unhomely as the hallway represents the troubles that impede the family. At this instant, we must investigate the altercations of a home as it coincides with the metamorphosis of a family's stability. It is no longer solely about the infrastructure of the home, but the structure of the family as a reflection of the home. We are given a glimpse into the house and the neighborhood in order to clarify the mysteriousness of a seemingly normal life:

the Virginia countryside, the rural neighborhood, purple hills born on the fringe of night, before moving past these establishing shots and focusing more closely on

the process of moving into the house itself, unrolling pale blue oriental rugs, arranging, and rearranging furniture, unpacking crates, replacing light bulbs, and hanging pictures, including one of his own prize-winning photographs. In this way, Navidson not only reveals how each room is occupied, but how everyone has helped apply his or her own personal texture. (Danielewski 9)

It is important to note here that Navidson's attempt with this detailed image is to show his viewer how serene the environment is and how the house is coming along to represent their family. This image normalizes the house to enforce that although it appears to be a beautiful family home, it is not all it seems, on the inside. This idea is parallel with people as well, who conceal a multitude of characteristics and memories and traumas and yet appear put together on the outside. Marilyn Chandler explores this notion in her work on Willa Cather's novel *The Professor's house* as she writes:

The house's ugliness and inconvenience simply enhance his affection for it as something others do not value as he does because he sees beyond surfaces. It puts him in a position of moral superiority to be 'above' mundane concerns. But the house and its demands also epitomize the demands of family life--always too multiple to be fully met. Objects degenerate slowly, like his marriage, while he skirts around them, decides not to see them, though he trips over them daily as he does the crooked stairs. (Chandler 187).

Although she discusses a different novel and character, the idea that the man lives in a house that is in dire need of fixing reflects how he does not tend to the needs of his real life. For Navidson, he does not trip over crooked stairs in his well-manicured mansion, but his neglect of his familial life and marriage ultimately results in the instability both inside and outside of this house. What

the crooked stairs represent for the professor is what the labyrinth represents for Navidson; a reflection of individual turmoil that impacts the others living in the affected house. This is shown in *House of Leaves* under chapter 14 following the section of the manuscript that documents the unraveling of Navidson and Karen's marriage in correlation with the collapse of the house. This chapter unveils the struggles the couple faces while attempting to escape despite the home being purchased to bring the family together. During a time of Karen's infidelity, it is said, "Navidson was no longer around, except of course Karen still saw him every day and in a way she had never seen him before--not as a projection of her own insecurities and demons but just as Will Navidson..." (Danielewski 352). This helps to explain the idea that the couple has experienced a form of trauma that has hindered their ability to perform in a stable relationship. Even though the seemingly happy couple sees each other every day they never truly know each other. This is reflected in the beauty of their home that becomes the monsters they have hidden in their pasts. Again, this idea is now carried through the characters who have found themselves in the process of losing themselves in the labyrinth as an attempt to reveal their own pasts.

Navidson's family appears to be ideal and yet as we come to know them, they are hanging on by a thread. The same can be said for Johnny Truant who presents himself as a tattoo artist and slowly begins to unravel in front of us. In consideration of Navidson's success as a photographer and filmmaker along with his wife's success as a model, it is reasonable to assume that the couple have bought a rather large home in a particularly nice neighborhood. With that being said, a large house leaves a lot of space for secrets and hallways, doors, passageways, stairs, etc. To illustrate this point the text describes the phenomenon of space in the house:

Still, no matter how far Navidson proceeds down this particular passageway, his light never comes close to touching the punctuation point promised by the

converging perspective lines, sliding on and on and on, spawning one space after another, a constant stream of corners and walls, all of them unreadable and perfectly smooth. Finally, Navidson stops in front of an entrance much larger than the rest. It arcs high above his head and yawns into an undisturbed blackness. His flashlight finds the floor but no walls and, for the first time, no ceiling. Only now do we begin to see how big Navidson's house really is. (Danielewski 64)

Furthermore, this description of the interior and exterior view of the house on Ash Tree Lane leaves the reader more confused as to how the home of an award-winning artist and a model, has become so distorted. This recalls Freud's idea of the uncanny or *unheimlich*. Maria Tatar elaborates on the definition of these terms in her work:

For Freud, the uncanny is connected to the reappearance of something familiar from the childhood of an individual or of mankind. He sees the uncanny--to reiterate--as 'something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged by the process of repression'... 'something familiar made strange by the repression of knowledge'-can prove fruitful for a literary analysis of uncanny events. (Tatar 169-70)

Essentially, his idea of what creates the uncanny is the trauma of the past. That which traumatizes an individual causes the individual to repress those memories which creates that feeling of familiarity all the while feeling strange. It is that strategic repression of knowledge that becomes reflected in the typography of the text as Danielewski tampers with the information the reader is given. To return to the passage from the novel, with this definition in mind, it is important to note that each family member has projected their own style on the house in one way or another. In other words, the house becomes a reflection of those who reside there. With that in

mind, if we believe the house to reflect its inhabitants, then the mysterious hallway must also be a continuation of their identities. We are no longer traveling through the house, but we are exploring the status of the Navidson family as it is projected within the house. Upon the family's return from a weekend trip, we know the house has acquired some unaccounted-for space. Although, as the reader, we do not know what transpired on the family's trip. That missing information may be the culprit in relinquishing the couple's building tensions and the contortion of the house prods at the insecurities, ultimately testing the durability of the family.

Navidson's strong desire to enter the hallway and explore the changes of the house he once believed to be a home, is concerning to Karen. When Karen requests that her husband not enter the hallway, the text nonetheless encourages a connection with Navidson. There becomes this overwhelming urge to explore when told not to. This happens to the reader when Danielewski warns those who dare open the novel. Danielewski warns the reader of the risk of entering the text, as the house, as Karen warns Navidson that if he enters the hallway, he will destroy the family. In this moment it becomes easier to absorb Navidson's internal conflict because it is put on display. Although, readers may relate to Johnny Truant's character and find a loophole in entering the hallway because he, like us, is reviewing the story. This idea that he is willing to pry into the unknown, threatens the marriage on one hand, but on the other, if he explores, he may discover the source of tension. If Navidson explores the hallway that Karen forbids him to travel, he will discover the issues that reside within and as a result, their marriage and family are put at risk. As the reader assumes the guilt and uncertainty Navidson faces with the decision to enter, or not, we begin to feel it is our duty to release our connection with Navidson for the sake of receiving permission to enter.

Navidson employs explorers to do the searching for him fully equipped with Hi 8's, down parkas, hats, Gortex gloves, powerful halogen lamps, extra batteries, a radio, and two miles of fishing line. The fishing line acts as an anchor to the outside world and as a connection for Navidson and the explorers. In this moment, in order to move forward we become an extension of Johnny Truant, as an intruder of the house. In other words, the presentation of chaotic word play that we engage in, is a projection of the intertwining labyrinth that further represents the tension of identity. Johnny Truant's description of the jumbled words comes to describe the text before us; as he must rearrange and puzzle the words into coherent order, the reader must strategically maneuver through the story. At this point, Truant becomes, in a sense, an editor of the text, as he is left to reconfigure the scattered writing. Again, if the maze in the house represents the internal chaos of the inhabitants, a reflection of the mind, then the reader's mind also becomes reflected. With this combination of distress across the board, Danielewski is portraying this lack of safety in that no one person or family is safe from the taunting hallway and what resides in the center. Again, this idea of the center remains a constant as we wonder more about the space that evades us: "Is it merely an aberration of physics? Some kind of warp in space? Or just a topiary labyrinth on a much grander scale? Perhaps it serves a funereal purpose? Conceals a secret? Protects something? Imprisons or hides some kind of monster? Or, for that matter, imprisons or hides the innocent?" (Danielewski 111). Truant does the research for us, as he translates Jacques Derrida:

The function of a center was not only to orient, balance, and organize structure...By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form....This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically,

within the structure and *outside* it...The center is not the center. (Danielewski 112)

Derrida challenges the Law of Identity that states that anything believed to be true is true without contradiction. Of course, the issue is that the Law of Identity presents a paradoxical belief as Derrida suggests. Everything Truant had once believed to be true of himself and his world have become disoriented. This idea that the center is both inside and out acts as a reflection of one another, but each becomes altered based upon environmental factors. Hence, the paradox that appears in *House of Leaves*. If the paradox of identity is that everything believed to be true is not in fact what it seems then it begins to make sense of how the house is able to shift as it does. Essentially, the center inside the house is a diversion of the center outside and thus begins the cycle of trying to ground one's identity to truth. In other words, the center becomes the source of alteration within the house, and on the outside the reader becomes altered upon their own center. The center then comes to represent the power source for any labyrinth whether physical or ornamental. Hence, why the center is present both within and outside the structure. Then the labyrinth becomes this sense of internally organized extensions of the inhabitant's minds.

The text begins to map the turns of the hallway, and as the hallway makes sudden changes, so does the text. Those changes in the text can bring the reader's mind on the same course the inhabitant's minds have used to make the labyrinth. For instance, when Navidson takes a turn in the labyrinth the reader takes a turn via typography. Yet, when the maker of the labyrinth cannot understand his own twists and turns, it becomes challenging for the reader to meander through. The text explains:

Unfortunately, the anfractuosity of some labyrinths may actually prohibit a permanent solution. More confounding still, its complexity may exceed the

imagination of even the designer. Therefore, anyone lost within must recognize that no one, not even a god or an Other, comprehends the entire maze and so therefore can never offer a definitive answer. Navidson's house seems a perfect example. Due to the wall-shifts and extraordinary size, any way out remains singular and applicable only to those on that path at that particular time. All solutions then are necessarily personal. (Danielewski 115)

As the quote suggests, some mazes are simply too intricate to actually have a logical solution. Although the maze does have an exit, the ability to reveal the exit is challenged. When we become lost in this maze then, we have to embrace the idea that no one will be able to guide us, except our own self. Essentially, it is the chronic instability of the house and the severe complexity of the hallway's alternating blueprint that deter any traveler from finding the center. Danielewski replicates that constant negation to exemplify how the traveler is unable to make it to the center due to insufficient knowledge and understanding. To enforce the idea that the labyrinth's center is seen as unachievable, Danielewski guides the reader towards what seems to be useful information, only to defy the rules or change the information. Navidson's house is a complex maze that refuses to allow intruders an easy path to the center, regardless of who you are, the maker or the intruder. It can further be explained by literary critic Natalie Hamilton through the help of theorist Wendy Faris:

Literary theorist Wendy Faris suggests that two groups of texts employ the labyrinth as a symbolic landscape: those include a voyage toward the self and those that contain a voyage toward the text. Whereas the 'first category is more psychologically oriented, the second of a more metafictional nature, the lines of

these two journeys--toward the integrated self and toward the artistic text--will tend not only to intersect but converge'. (Hamilton 5)

Hamilton refers to Wendy Faris for her contextualization of the labyrinth as a comparison to one's self-exploration. This connection of self and character converge as Faris would suggest as the two journeys will overlap. In this situation, the labyrinth in the text becomes complicated by the intersection of the reader's own internal labyrinth.

To complicate the journey, we are given a page that features a large blacked-out square. Around this feature is text that wraps around the square through a mirrored technique, sideways and backwards. When we see the adjacent page, there is a large blank square, so that when the book is closed, the black square fits inside the blank square. Almost like a key, but of course when the book is closed and the key is inserted, we no longer have visual access. We are given information but cannot do anything with it, a trending theme in the novel. Visually, the squares on the pages, blank and white, quite literally come to represent negation of color as a symbol of negating knowledge. It begs the question: "Can Navidson's house exist without the experience of itself? Is it possible to think of that place as 'unshaped' by human perceptions? Especially since everyone entering there finds a vision almost completely—though pointedly not completely—different from anyone else's?" (Danielewski 172-174). In essence, as we learn about the house it does not seem possible that it would occur "naturally" without the projection and pressure from a human. The reader, alongside the character, shapes the house based on their own realities and turns their perception within the hallway into a uniquely individualized center of trauma. Ultimately, the reader projects the shape of the labyrinth as a reflection of the inner twists and folds of the brain, or the center.

This master idea of the center becomes a recurring motif of the text. To find the center of the house, is to find the center of the labyrinth, is to find the center of the self. The unique challenge of this text is unlike other novels with a handful of interpretations of the same story, *House of Leaves* does not leave room for interpretation as the story's meaning only becomes available when the reader dares to read and turn in on one's self. In other words, the novel is reflection rather than an interpretation as the text mirrors rather than absorbs. One way to understand this is to see, "The novel, like the hallway, encloses us, yet it is meaningless in and of itself, it needs the dweller, or the reader, to give it shape and body" (Koot 18). Ultimately, the text cannot function without the presence of an individual who is in search of self-reconciliation. What the characters see inside the house is what the reader sees in the text and in turn what we see inside ourselves reflects what is inside the characters. Danielewski utilizes the text as a direct connection between reader and character. What we perceive to be inside the hallway is what we project inside of the hallway.

Danielewski insists that the reader is unable to escape the black hole hallway. In order to exemplify the horrors of the house as they carry across narrators, the explorers must study the growl that is heard within. The unnamable growl in the hallway consumes the black space, and the sound waves are suspended in the air, lingering, never getting closer to the sound, never getting further away. The growl permeates the three layers of the novel and haunts the Navidsons, Zampanó, and Johnny Truant. As a result of intense permeation, the reader is absorbed within the haunting confines as well. The growl of the house creates conflicting feelings and understandings. For instance, "Navidson had settled on the belief that the persistent growl is probably just a sound generated when the house alters its internal layout" (Danielewski 95). Although, can the growl truly be the shifting house, if it is in fact heard through all three

layers of narrative? It challenges that idea of the creaking house. Nonetheless, the growl with its countless possibilities comes to represent, in any regard, a scare tactic. An audible unknown that builds a layer of fear and uncertainty in the story. Navidson goes on to describe the growl, “You hear it first in the distance, a gentle rumble, slowly growing louder as it descends, until finally it’s all around you, sweeping over you, and then past you, until it’s gone, a mile away, two miles away, impossible to follow” (Danielewski 123). His description allows us to come closer to understanding the conceptual sound of the noise and how it seemingly surrounds you completely in such a way that it fluctuates in the airwaves. The individual within the hallway simply projects their fears which begin to talk back in sounds of moans and growls. The more afraid the explorer becomes, the more often the individual hallucinates the volume and proximity of the noise, and in turn the fear causes the house to shift. As some critics believe, the noise is actually the sounds of the architectural materials shifting, it brings us full circle to what causes the house to shift in the first place, fear. As the text confirms, “The unfreezing of form in the Navidson house releases that music. Unfortunately, since it contains all the harmonies of time and change, only the immortal may savor it. Mortals cannot help but fear those concurring walls” (Danielewski 123). The text points out this innate sense of fear that human beings will face as the stability of life contorts itself. This constant metamorphosis creates a labyrinth inside the house that debilitates the individual’s ability to break free. The transfer of fear from the character to the reader is seen as an imitation of fear.

The complexity of the labyrinth in the Navidson’s house creates an overwhelming sense of urgency and panic that leaves the individuals, both explorer and reader, fumbling through the hallway and text. The labyrinth often appears as a theme in literature as a way for authors to create a structure or pattern. The etymology of “labyrinth” is not nearly as complex as an actual

labyrinth. Although, it does present more than one meaning. A labyrinth is commonly understood as an intricate network of pathways that complicate the journey from beginning to end. The late Middle English word refers to the maze constructed by Daedalus to house and conceal the Minotaur. The labyrinth, then, may have served to help one find their spiritual path by purposefully removing one from the common understanding of linear time and direction between two points. As one traveled through the labyrinth, one would unexpectedly discover one's true path in life. This myth of the Minotaur exemplifies this idea of discovering oneself by means of becoming disconnected from the outside world and connected with an internal one. Zampanó includes the Minotaur creature in his own work in an attempt to decode the labyrinth himself. Again, when Zampanó attempts to analyze the story of the Minotaur he strikes through his red writing as if to suggest this information can be forgotten or is useless. When this occurs, Truant feels it is best to include Zampanó's study and provide the reader a look in the footnotes. For example, Zampanó writes:

~~At the heart of the labyrinth waits the Mi[]taur and like the Minotaur of myth its name is-[] Chielitz treated the maze as trope for psychic concealment, its excavation resulting in (tragic-[]) reconciliation. But if in Chielit'z eye the Minotaur was a son imprisoned by a father's shame, is there then to Navidson's eye an equivalent misprision of the-[] in the depths of that place? And for that matter does there exist a chance to reconcile the known with the desire for its antithesis?....~~

~~Navidson is not~~

~~Minos. He did~~

~~not build the lab-~~

~~abyrinth. He~~

~~only d[]covered it.~~ (Danielewski 335-36)

This example from Zampanó's extensive theory of the Minotaur's labyrinth and Navidson's labyrinth attempts to explain how the hallway becomes a confined space hiding an ultimate secret. Arguably, that hidden secret varies upon explorer, but may be referred to as the secret of oneself. It is important to note in this quote that Zampanó is working to explain that if the Minotaur is hidden due to his father's shame, that Navidson must also be hiding something due to shame. Is this idea of hiding due to shame not also what the traumatized brain does? Hide memories and events from the victim in order to protect them from further danger. In the end this idea arises that if we acknowledge the traumas of the past that we should be able to move forward with our own perceptions of life continuing to suppress reality.

The purpose of the labyrinth then, is to create a circuitous path that takes the explorer from beginning to center. In order to offer a variety of complex intricate pathways, a labyrinth is presented in two varieties. First, there is the maze of repeatedly dividing paths, some dead ends and some that double back, as to confuse the traveler. This allows for options. On the other hand, there is the meandering labyrinth, an undivided path that leaves no option to stray. The meandering pattern winds inward, outward and in a circle, but with no dead ends the traveler always discovers the center; whereas, the maze pattern threatens the traveler with the possibility of never finding the center. It is the meandering labyrinth that is built to protect the minotaur and is arguably the labyrinth developed with the house on Ash Tree Lane. Although, what Zampanó is missing in his understanding of the labyrinth's purpose is the spiritual aspect; the one that replicates the inner workings of a human rather than buildings and corridors. Perhaps this is why his portion of the text that discusses the Minotaur appears in red font behind a strike out; to show

that we are meant to have access to this knowledge but not meant to follow it. The elaborate designs of a labyrinth often insert obstacles along the way as a further attempt to hinder the journey to the center. The Cretan Labyrinth that hides the Minotaur furthermore comes to symbolize the journey into the center of our own being or quest for wholeness, and the subsequent return to our divine source. In other words, it is the travel towards the center that becomes the ultimate quest of self-discovery; then, the labyrinth becomes a projection of the individual's journey to self. To go further, the labyrinth is also recognized as a symbol of wholeness as it brings together the image of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. Walking the labyrinth becomes a journey to our own center and includes the journey back again and into the world. This idea is transposed in the novel as the characters who enter the shifting hallways are forced to discover their need to reconcile their identity which they did not know needed reconciling at all; and is this book not about the daunting quest for self, the forced confrontation of status? Interestingly, "Since the late nineteenth century, archaeologists, documentary-makers and novelists have asserted that the Cretan Labyrinth – the lair of the terrifying Minotaur – was a real place. But now a major paper suggests that the legendary maze was just that – legend, a figment of the collective imagination" (Kapetopoulos). This may beg the question of whether or not Danielewski values the Cretan Labyrinth or is playing on it in fact being a figment of the imagination rather than a stable truth. Which in turn would expose the shifting of the house as a reflection of the brain playing tricks and not actually a scientific conundrum of spatial matter.

If we are to understand that the labyrinth becomes a projection of the characters and the text becomes the blueprint of the house, then it becomes easier for the reader to establish the grounds of the house, or rather whose mind we are exploring. In other words, the text is the map

of the labyrinth and by practice of reading we will fall into a character. Although, as Maureen Hosay, postmodern scholar, writes, “Danielewski does not favor one interpretation over the others, and by doing so, leaves the readers without bearing as to which path of his labyrinthine book they should safely follow. This also means that the path they choose is personal and that the labyrinth reflects their choices rather than the author’s design” (Hosay 9). The course of the novel and the journey of self-realization depend on who the reader emulates. Although, Danielewski allows the reader to choose a personal path, yet strategically creates a character he can assure we will relate to. The deliverance of the manuscript guides the reader to an experience best suited for our travels. In other words, had we followed Zampanó’s story we would be missing extra research done by Truant. Despite our ability to choose our maze, we become tied to Johnny Truant, “who not only assembles the pieces of the manuscript into a cogent order, but in the process adds a series of footnotes and appended documents that detail the destabilizing effects of the narrative on his already confused personal life” (Hansen). Luckily for us, he holds possession of both Zampanó and Navidson’s accounts, and as a result we have the whole eclectic version of the story. Unluckily for us, that leaves us with the most content to decipher.

With that being said, we will no longer have to study the entirety of the text as one map, but three smaller maps that may even create sub-maps, or another layer of the puzzle within one larger piece of the puzzle. This allows the reader a chance to stabilize the grounds of the house and break down what is causing the house to metamorphosize according to those who penetrate the hallway. The text sets up the difference in experience between the reader and characters who travel through the hallways. It is important to differentiate the two experiences and set the reader, who becomes an explorer, apart from those physically within the house:

Maze-treaders, whose vision ahead and behind is severely constricted and fragmented, suffer confusion, whereas maze-viewers who see the pattern whole, from above or in a diagram, are dazzled by its complex artistry. What you see depends on where you stand, and thus, at one and the same time, labyrinths are single and double: they simultaneously incorporate order and disorder, clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity, artistry and chaos. They may be perceived as a path or a pattern...our perception of labyrinths is thus intrinsically unstable: change your perspective and the labyrinth seems to change (Danielewski 113-114).

We can begin to see ourselves as the maze-treader; with the text in front of us and the replica of the labyrinth in our very hands, we have access to each twist and turn and yet this order we possess is exactly what creates disorder. Essentially, in order to understand the house, we must understand the text that replicates the labyrinth and vice versa. Stabilizing the house will be crucial in the quest to determine why the house is in a state of constant incongruence and metamorphosis. The novel intricately weaves together layering and inconclusive narratives from the characters who advertently or inadvertently suffer the consequences and side effects of the house's incessant mutation. This acts as a guide for us to follow the complexity of intertwining stories. To "simplify" the quest, Truant's story is what will create a direct line of clarity in the confusion. The question becomes, how do we use the narrative to help us secure the interior space of the house? Ultimately, as readers tasked with exploring, we adapt to the continuous change, we have to see beneath the darkness, and we have to locate the epicenter of the house's trauma. Again, Danielewski has strategically made it easy for the reader to identify with Truant's character who unravels throughout the text as a means of showing us exactly what is to come of

ourselves. In Danielewski's attempt to throw the reader off course, he intertwines the narratives as if to signify a sense of responsibility. Navidson must tell his story of the house and Zampanó must ironically depict the vision of the unseen that resides inside the hallway in order to ultimately guide Truant to his own inner self, by means of exposing his trauma through the taunting forcefulness of winding darkness.

Johnny Truant recalls a memory of his own, or a dream, that acts to remind us of Navidson's account of the house. He explains this dream he has that leaves him trapped within a vessel:

Something tells me I've been here a long time, endlessly descending into dead ends, turning around to find other ways in which in the end lead only to still more ends....I chose instead to wander these cramped routes which in spite of their ability to lose me still retain in every turn an almost indiscreet sense of familiarity. It's as if I know the way perfectly but I walk them to forget.

(Danielewski 403)

This dream accurately depicts the notion that a traumatized brain holds the memory at fault but selectively chooses not to keep it in the forefront. As Truant tells his dream he explains this feeling of unsettling familiarity, and although the maze attempts to throw him off course, he insists on exploring further as a means of processing the trauma and forgetting or letting go. Furthermore, it is this dream that awakens the reader to see that they have also endured this experience as they have traveled with Truant throughout the manuscript as well as the house on Ash Tree Lane. To "simplify" our journey, we must only allow ourselves to become one and the same with one character. As Johnny Truant discovers the manuscript, we too discover the manuscript. It is imperative for us to understand Navidson's mind. Truant becomes our figure on

the inside, on the outside. In other words, like Johnny Truant, we are given access to the disturbing details of the house, and like Johnny Truant, we never are permitted access to physically enter the house. Ultimately, we give ourselves permission to penetrate the house vicariously through Navidson's experience and it is our unwillingness to listen to Danielewski's warning that leads to our trauma. Essentially, because we force ourselves into the house, like Danielewski knows we will, he has become successful in tricking us into doing the opposite of what we are told. As we begin to steady the foundation of the house, we simultaneously disrupt our own foundation as a result of discovering the center and the self. Danielewski has inverted the method to stabilize the house and turned it in on the reader, reflecting the labyrinth from the outside, the text, onto the inside, the self.

Similarly, to the reader opening up *House of Leaves*, Johnny Truant invades Zampanó's privacy and becomes compelled to uncover the mystery of the discovered manuscript. Zampanó's portion of the labyrinth is his edited manuscript of the Navidson film. His manuscript is an attempt to rewrite or to understand the mysterious shifting of the house. If we understand that Navidson's account is the primary source, and Zampanó's is the secondary, then Truant, like us, becomes the reviewer of the whole account. He creates the master blueprint that is a composed collection of Zampanó and Navidson's story. If we are to become parallel readers to Truant, then we too are the ones capable of research and compilation, deciphering the obstacles of the maze.

The process of mapping the labyrinth, then, becomes a more feasible task when we allow the book to become our guide. Truant strategically acts to organize the manuscript. He, "...not only assembles the pieces of the manuscript into a cogent order, but in the process adds a series of footnotes and appended documents that detail the destabilizing effects of the narrative on his

already confused personal life” (Hansen 600). As the words become the guide for the journey, they quite literally lay out the path of the labyrinth and therefore act as the map of the house, impediments and obstructions included. Again, because the text becomes a projection of the house, it acts both as our map and as our obstacle. This idea renders the words unreliable and yet at the same time gives them the power to manipulate the pathway.

Zampanó’s account of Navidson’s experience is perhaps the part of the map where the reader creates a bridge between Truant and Navidson. Essentially, each portion of the map that has been created by Zampanó, Navidson and Truant become cohesive in creating the story, while at the same time drawing drastic and negating understandings of the house. While Navidson’s film follows the changes that take place in the house upon the family’s return, Zampanó solidifies the movements of the house in the film by writing them into a book. This additional overlapping on top of the layered narrative work to stabilize the house as the manuscript, as a text, immobilizes the changes of the labyrinth on the page. It is Truant who opens the written manuscript and opens a space for the story to come alive again. For the text, or the map, to be mobile, a reader has to actively endure the journey of the words. When Truant reads the manuscript, he accepts the risk of the text’s story. His act of annotating the manuscript and reading the manuscript exposes him to the trauma of the characters and in turn ropes him in, and the reader as well. His map becomes our map to reading the text and yet as we read his experience of someone else’s experience then we are embedding our own story as well. Ultimately, if we become Johnny Truant, we become the master map maker of the labyrinth as we have all accounts of the house. In other words, Truant is only given access to Zampanó’s version of Navidson’s version, whereas the reader is given access to all three. This is what helps us to create the master map as we now have the three stories, woven together, to unweave.

Essentially, the reader is the crucial component in working to stabilize the house as we are given access to all of the stories. Although, in the end, the idea is never that the physical entity of the house is made sense of, but the sense of self-realization, origin of trauma, and future of reconciliation.

The text operates to create a reader mechanized “machine” that motors us through the labyrinth as the reader follows the keys Danielewski has strategically put in place for us. The nonlinear fashion of the text is what creates the motion that carries the reader through an imitation of the labyrinth. Danielewski gives the general warning to his reader, although he certainly toys with the notion that he knows his audience well and they will in fact read on. It is because he knows us well that he creates a key for us and a path to follow. He creates the map for us quite literally, as the book itself, and in turn corrals us to follow closely to the character’s journey to self-discovery and in turn our own inevitable exposure to our own labyrinths of turmoil.

Danielewski invokes a uniquely demanding presence of trauma and literally forces the reader through textual manipulation into a swirling abyss of mental chaos, which includes the suppressed experience and the real experience. The expectation is that the reader succumbs to the coercion of the meaning behind the words and the typography of the words as a literal building block of the hallway.

Chapter Three: Connection of Trauma in the Text and the Reader

As the reader maneuvers through the labyrinthine text, the exposure to the unknown and the familiar becomes increasingly distorted. Reader-response theory becomes useful when analyzing the effects of reading *House of Leaves*. Danielewski utilizes the puzzling design of textualization, form, and structure to manipulate the reader's response so as to ensure the practice of typography evokes literary trauma. This reintroduces the effect of the reader-response theory as according to Stanley Fish. The aftermath of reading and engaging calls to attention the notion of the uncanny. Fish explores the reactions of readers through the delivery of sentence structure. To Fish, reader response theory studies the way in which a reader interprets and interacts with the language. Fish explains how textual lines, if made logical, take away from the effect of leaving the reader suspended between the alternatives of syntax. Danielewski plays with the alternatives of syntax in both language and typography. Danielewski's language has the tendency to provoke uneasiness and furthermore develop a depiction of trauma. Fish explains this concept in detail:

That Judas perished by hanging himself, *is* (an example for us all).

That Judas perished by hanging himself, *shows* (how conscious he was of the enormity of his sin).

That Judas perished by hanging himself, *should* (give us pause).

The range of these possibilities (and there are, of course, more than I have listed) narrows considerably as the next three words are read...As a result, the terms of the reader's relationship to the sentence undergo a profound change. The natural impulse in a situation like this, either in life or in literature, is to go forward in the

hope that what has been obscured will again become clear; but in this case going forward only intensifies the reader's sense of disorientation (Fish 124-125).

Danielewski is able to switch the reader's response by utilizing levels of differing narration.

Truant acts to represent a reader in this as well as he readers though the manuscript. He is able to interject his own story through footnotes as the manuscript reminds him or triggers his personal life. This cyclical style of narration works to provide the various examples of reading as Fish would suggest. To go further in establishing Fish's claim that the author is able to strategically present text to manipulate the reader, Danielewski writes:

Soon the wall and
doorways recede and
vanish,
then
sight
the
of
ceiling
out
completely
is
lifts
out
too
completely
it is
too
of
until
sight (Dan
ielewski 432).

Typographically, this reads chaotically but presents various means of interpretation. For instance, it may read, “Soon the walls and doorways recede and vanish, then the ceiling is completely out of sight lifts out too until it too is completely out of sight” or the reader may be overwhelmed

and simply pull out, “Soon the walls and doorways recede and vanish and the ceiling lifts too until it is completely out of sight.” Neither option presents a clear sentence, there is no punctuation other than one comma, but still the obvious idea that the room is expanding beyond sight is clear. Not only do the words alone deliver this message, but so too does the shape the words make on the page, both of which occur before the sentence is ordered. The way in which this is interpreted of course impacts the reader’s understanding of what is happening. One reading is more disorienting while one is more concrete. The way in which a writer selects specific word order directly relates to how the reader will interpret the meaning. Furthermore, the way in which the reader chooses to select the words directly relates to the interpretation. Again, Fish notes the natural instinct is to continue reading to uncover more, but of course, by doing so only guides the reader further from clarity. This is exemplified in *House of Leaves* as Danielewski strives to establish a reader who becomes invested in going forward, knowing that his plans are to disorient the path to understanding.

In terms of *House of Leaves*, if we understand that the darkened hallways are a representation of one’s fear, the text then comes into play in order to erase the line between reality and not. The house then simply represents a space for the uncanny to take place. As scholar Marilyn R. Chandler writes in her work *Dwelling in the Text*:

The houses...thus reflect not only the psychological structure of the main character or the social structures in which he or she is entrapped but the structure of the text itself, thereby setting up a four-way, and ultimately self-referential, analogy among writer, text, character, and house. The same architectural habit of mind that designs and builds a house both to reflect patterns of life within and to

configure life in certain patterns may design a narrative to reflect and recast what the author conceives to be the essential structures of our lives. (Chandler 3)

Chandler's understanding of how the house comes to life can be tied to Fish's reader response as the way in which an author constructs a narrative attempts to replicate the reader's lives on a broad scale that grows narrower if a reader engages. For example, the previously mentioned disorienting quote from Danielewski and the vanishing room, is a creation of the author but presented so that the reader may interpret how jarring the act of a room vanishing actually is. The text elaborates on this notion of the unknown versus the known and its connection to reality and fiction. The mutations of the house:

...reflect the psychology of anyone who enters it. Dr. Haugeland asserts that the extraordinary absence of sensory information forces the individual to manufacture his or her own data. Ruby Dahl, in the stupendous study of space, calls the house on Ash Tree Lane 'a solipsistic heightener,' arguing that 'the house, the halls, and the rooms all become the self - collapsing, expanding, tilting, closing, but always in perfect relation to the mental state of the individual. (Danielewski 165)

In other words, all the explorers, characters, and readers of the hallway are afraid that it is contrived by their own mind, which Chandler might suggest is true. To support this notion that the experience reflects the individual, it is important to note that Danielewski actively incorporates fictional scholars, theorists, references, and quotes. Ultimately, the effect this has on the explorer and reader is that nothing is concrete and we can never be certain of what is meant to be reliable and what is meant to be a ploy to gain trust. In the introduction Truant makes the claim, "See, the irony is it makes no difference that the documentary at the heart of this book is fiction. Zampanó knew from the get go that what's real or isn't real doesn't matter here. The

consequences are the same” (Danielewski xx). Essentially, although the novel’s groundwork is fictional, the effect or consequences will still be the same. The premise that the hallway is a version of the inner individual’s mind is concrete and helps create the foundation of the house. If this idea is true, then Zampanó is right, what is real and what is not does not matter, at least in the realm of the text. This is described by Marilyn Charles through Caroline Savitz, both scholars of psychoanalytics:

The labyrinth is also a profound metaphor for the inherent dialectic between order and confusion that is a function of being human. ‘It holds a tension between order and chaos, pattern and disarray, clarity and confusion, depending on the perspective of the viewer; how we experience the maze depends on where we stand.’ From inside the labyrinth, only the individual bends and turns along the way are visible but not the whole. It is only from the outside that the overall pattern can be seen. (Charles 160)

In other words, this explains how the reader has the power of the whole novel, or the whole blueprint, whereas the characters in the novel lack that overall ability to see both past and present. At this point it is only the reader and the labyrinth of the text that hold weight, albeit the individual’s response is unique.

This idea then, that the house becomes a reflection of the self in search of the center is supported by this quote as Ruby Dahl claims the movement of the house exposes and replicates the stability, or lack thereof, of the individual. In order to successfully reflect the distortions of the inner self, “The novel works, on the far side of orthographic recording, not by capturing a world, but by triggering the projection of a world--an imaginary world--out of the reader’s interpretive interventions and accumulating memorial sedimentations” (Hansen 603). In essence,

because the text does not read as conventional or traditional, it becomes easier for the words to manipulate the reading of the individual. Trauma, like fear, can be triggered by a feeling one is in danger, rather real or imagined. Essentially, this is true with trauma as a specific trigger may force a victim to recall a distressing event, real or imagined. Anything that is capable of reminding one of a traumatic event is a potential trigger. Triggers are typically associated with the senses: touch, taste, scent, sight, hearing. Danielewski plays with the senses through his typography as it disorients the reader's vision or image. Caruth speaks on this idea of self-erasure in an interview, "To get the distinction between memory and history, the erasure is happening not through 'I don't know how to tell my memoir' or 'I have a bad dream and I can't express it.' It's not 'I can't remember it.' It's actually that the event itself- the repetition without grasping- is the erasure" (Caruth "Who Speaks from the Site of Trauma"). This idea is what leads an individual to a disorienting interpretation of how one recollects their past alongside the truth. This erasure, as Caruth puts it, is what creates space for Danielewski to guide a reader's interpretation of real and imagined.

It is important to note that we, along with Johnny Truant, fall into the category of those who have read and written about *The Navidson Record*. Furthermore, we have been impacted greatly by the text. Danielewski has created this experience through the text as the words make the journey through the labyrinth inevitable. The text then holds more power of manipulation and control than the film. This fictional theory acts as a way to categorize the affected on a scale of one to ten based on the seriousness of symptoms. The theory "rates the level of discomfort experienced following any exposure to the house, The Haven-Slocum Theory, as previously mentioned, assigned a number value '0' for no effect and '10' for extreme effects" (Danielewski 396). The anxiety scale is referred to as PEER or post-exposure effects rating.

In order to show how the house affects the explorers it will be helpful to analyze Navidson's rating. Upon his first time entering the house Navidson is rated a ten on the PEER scale due to his "obsessive behavior; weight loss; night terrors; vivid dreaming accompanied by increased mutism" (Danielewski 396). He becomes so engulfed by the house and in turn unravels as he processes the inner turmoil of bringing his family back together. When Navidson comes to "understand that the house would calm if he entered it" he is rated a one on the PEER scale (Danielewski 396). He no longer suffers from night terrors nor mutism. This suggests that when Navidson first tried to resist entering the hallway he suffered greatly, but when he began to come to terms with it and tackle the labyrinth to his center, he overcame his suffering. Johnny Truant records his journey of following through the labyrinth, similar to Navidson. Truant's record of his own events is ultimately what exemplifies the reader's experience with the labyrinth and with the recollection of trauma that ensues. For example, when Truant reads the manuscript it says:

No doubt speculation will continue for a long time over what force alters and orders the dimensions of that place. But even if the shifts turn out to be some kind of absurd interactive Rorschach test resulting from some peculiar and as yet undiscovered law of physics. Reston's nausea still reflects how the often disturbing disorientation experienced within that place, whether acting directly upon the inner ear or the inner labyrinth of the psyche, can have physiological consequences. (Danielewski 179)

Truant responds to this with, "No doubt about that. My fear's gotten worse...I wake up tired and afraid. I wonder if the morning rasp in my voice is just from sleep or rather some inarticulate attempt to name my horror" (Danielewski 179). He relates to the message from the manuscript and translates it for the reader to identify with. It is interesting to note the mention of the

Rorschach test as it measures mental and emotional stability and can be used in diagnosing mental illness. This idea of an “interactive Rorschach test” refers to the way in which the individual projects their own perception into the labyrinth causing it to shape shift, similar to the inkblots shape being determined by the viewer. Furthermore, each individual endures a unique experience by means of their own perception.

Trauma is also an individualistic quality. To say two persons hold and endure the same trauma is impossible. Although the event that causes the trauma may be similar, the result is never the same. Caruth explores this theory that trauma cannot be replicated in literature. There is the idea that, “The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life” (Caruth 7). She argues that literature cannot capture a traumatic event that occurred before the text, that part of being traumatic is being surprised and literature cannot effectively recreate the unplanned. Again, as Danielewski challenges this belief of trauma representation he uses typography to create the element of surprise rather than the language itself. For instance, when Danielewski explores the labyrinth of the hallway he uses the words to build the maze that traps the explorers rather than making the explorers simply read that they are trapped. The hallway then is not a maze to escape the world on the outside, but a trap that leaves you repeating the horrors. What is noteworthy about Danielewski’s method is that he is able to invoke all different variations of trauma all through the same maze. As a result, a reader may become alienated from their own reality as they become absorbed in uncovering what they have repressed in their center. Truant ponders a connection between this overwhelming sense of alienation, fear, and anxiety to the manuscript:

It's probably just a coincidence--I mean that there's some kind of connection between my state of mind and The Navidson Record or even a few arcane sentences...More than likely, it's something entirely else the real root lying in my already strange mood fluctuations, though I guess those are pretty recent too, rocking back and forth between wishful thinking and some private agony until the bar breaks. I've no fucking clue. (Danielewski 25)

Here Johnny Truant broods over the change in his demeanor. He is unable to pinpoint the moment in which he began to unravel and the cause alone. Danielewski applies unwanted pressure on his reader as he threatens the character's sanity and his reader's reality. The cruel effect here is that the characters are just that, fictional characters. Whereas, the reader, a real life being, is subjected to a text that does not stop where the page ends but extends into reality.

The reader becomes a player in the maze alongside the characters. The emotional disturbance occurs simultaneously. The typography of the novel induces a sense of play that necessitates the presence of the reader. Jessica Pressman, a scholar of experimental texts, claims that in order for the novel to move forward the reader must be engaged; "This collapse between reader and the narratives they read is even more apparent later on, when, in a tour de force of recursivity, *House of Leaves* forcefully collapses the walls between Navidson's house and Zampanò's book as well as between the readers in the text and the reader of the novel" (Pressman 112). This moment of reflection is exemplified in the moment in which Navidson chooses to burn the only book in his possession, *House of Leaves*, in order keep himself from freezing in the dark coldness of the hallway. This image of the book's pages burning in flames before Navidson can read, comes to represent the notion of the reader's struggle to decipher the message hidden within the typography. This creates an aggressive method of engagement. For

instance, when the text becomes disoriented it forces the reader to physically twist and turn the novel in order to consume the story in a traditional method as we have been taught. To ensure the reader's engagement, Danielewski develops a text that projects the house onto the page as a means to include the reader on the journey. Danielewski admits:

I was also very aware that I was creating something akin to a vast literal theater, one that the reader could use to project his or her own histories and anxieties.

There are many different ways to describe what is happening in *House of Leaves*, but I myself have always looked at it as being basically a three-character play.

The footnotes just expanded the number of characters who could participate and interact with this main narrative. (McCaffery and Gregory 107)

Danielewski acknowledges the power his text holds and its domineering effect of pressuring the reader into past traumas by means of engaging with the character's events. To go further, he suggests that the reader can play alongside Truant through the use of footnotes. The footnotes, again, are the expansion of Johnny Truant's process of discovering his center. He creates the bridge for the reader to enter into the house. Ultimately, the footnotes play a large role in forcing the reader to be an additional explorer. Not only does the reader become immersed in the persuasive typography of traveling through the hallway's labyrinth, we also become engrossed in Truant's own narrative through the lens of the maze. Danielewski has woven his reader's narrative into the novel in a nuanced way of interactive literature. As a result of this vehement inclusion in the text, the reader is encouraged to become a bystander to the Navidsons' dilemma while actively questioning their own existence. In turn it is the Navidsons' house that invokes the trauma of Johnny Truant and extends to the reader. Danielewski states that the reader will use the text as an outlet, a way to cogitate past traumas suppressed in an internal labyrinth. As we

become one with Johnny Truant, his quote from his beginning letter now comes back to haunt us:

This much I am certain of: it doesn't happen immediately. You'll finish and that will be that, until a moment will come, maybe in a month, maybe a year maybe even several years. You'll be sick or feeling troubled or deeply in love or quietly uncertain or even content for the first time in your life. It won't matter. Out of the blue, beyond any cause you can trace, you'll suddenly realize things are not how you perceived them to be at all. For some reason you will no longer be the person you believed 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. But you won't understand why or how. You'll have forgotten what granted you this awareness in the first place...Then no matter where you are, in a crowded restaurant or on some desolate street or even in the comforts of your own home, you'll watch yourself dismantle every assurance you ever lived by. You'll stand aside as a great complexity intrudes, tearing apart, piece by piece, all of your carefully conceived denials, whether deliberate or unconscious. And then for better or worse you'll turn, unable to resist, though try to resist you still will, fighting with everything you've got not to face the thing you most dread, what is now, what will be, what has always come before, the creature you truly are, the creature we all are, buried in the nameless black of a name. (Danielewski xxiii)

What this quote from Traut's opening letter to the reader helps to explain, is the internal phenomena capable of consuming the individual. His words come back to haunt the reader as we

come to the end of the novel, realizing that the affected readers are not safe from the aftermath of the labyrinth's hold on this reader's psyche. This monstrous feeling of losing a perceived idea of oneself will revert back to the empirical self, that one must have subconsciously attempted to neglect. This event brings forward the idea of derealization, a disorder that leaves a person with intrusive thoughts that are difficult to get away from ("Depersonalization/Derealization Disorder"). Furthermore, derealization can be brought on by trauma as a coping mechanism to distance oneself from reality. This notion is relevant in relation to the text as it explores the methods and lengths at which an individual will attempt, subconsciously or consciously, to forget. With that in mind, this is what a reader of the text may feel themselves succumbing to as we recognize our fate of intruding in the house. Truant explains this phenomenon as he contemplates the complexity of the labyrinth:

More and more often, I've been overcome by the strangest feeling that I've gotten all turned around, by which I mean to say--to state the not-so-obvious--without it I would perish. A moment comes where suddenly everything seems impossibly far and confused, my sense of self derealized and depersonalized, the disorientation so severe I actually believe--and let me tell you it is an intensely strange instance of belief--that this terrible sense of relatedness to Zampanò's work implies something just can't be, namely that this thing has created me; not me unto it, but now it unto me, where I am nothing more than the matter of some other voice, intruding through the folds of what even now lies there agape, possessing me with histories I should never recognize as my own; inventing me, defining me, directing me until finally every association I can claim as my own...is relegated to nothing... (Danielewski 326)

At this moment, Truant begins to realize the extent to which he has become a pawn in the maze. The self-vision of how the labyrinth has taken over one's being and projecting onto you the past which has since been suppressed exemplifies the extreme in which the literature has manipulated the reader's mental capacity to move beyond trauma. Truant has been reduced to his own traumas as a result of maneuvering through the taunting space of the text and the hallway. Essentially, the textualization of the labyrinth renders the individual helpless in the search of their self and does the work for the individual instead. Again, as Truant states, everything he once claimed as his own becomes nothing.

What connects the reader to Johnny Truant initially, is the curiosity to explore another individual's trauma, but as a punishment for not minding our business, Danielewski pulls a reader all in. This idea that, "Trauma violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound. Trauma also appears to be transmissible: it leaks between mental and physical symptoms, between patients...between patients and doctors..." is present in the novel (Luckhurst 3). Ultimately, trauma has this power of control over the affected individual and when provoked, s/he becomes violent. Truant makes a connection by speaking directly to the reader; he often reminds us by warning, that you too will experience a similar consequence. By periodically signaling that the reader will endure a puzzling sense of trauma, like himself, Truant begins to treat us as his confidant. In order to successfully make a connection to the reader, Truant reveals his most private and vulnerable thoughts and memories. To further complete this link between character and reader Danielewski relies on the text to bring his reader into the labyrinth. Again, the maze-like typography replicates the distortion of the labyrinth of the hallway. What the explorers may see is never what it seems and what it seems is never what is believed in the face of the labyrinth. In order for the

text to mold itself to the reader, it speaks in a way that is so broad to not exclude anyone, but so specific to make one feel understood. This idea brings back the work of Dawson who writes, “*House of Leaves* suggests that the experience of trauma is far from an unclaimed experience, and its shadows lie within the parameters of self-knowledge” (Dawson 285). Any given event, as the cause of distress, resides within the victim or explorer of the labyrinth. Essentially, even when an individual suppresses a traumatic event it does not erase the event altogether.

House of Leaves reverses the role of the “standard” trauma tale. Rather than study the specific event that causes the distress, Danielewski pushes his reader to recall traumatic events that leave one suspended in the hallway through the combined use of language and typography. Navidson displays this notion of finding yourself completely lost in a place you thought you had finally figured out:

Navidson swiftly turns around. Much to his horror, he can no longer see the arch let alone the wall. He has walked beyond the range of his light. In fact, no matter where he points the flashlight, the only thing he can perceive is oily darkness. Even worse, his panicked turn and the subsequent absence of any landmarks has made it impossible for him to remember which direction he just came from.

(Danielewski 67)

Navidson is left totally stripped of security. He has entered unrecognizable territory in the hallway. This complete lack of darkness and unfamiliarity is ironic in a place where Navidson was never familiar to begin with, but to acknowledge his now unnerving sense of instability is panic worthy. When the individual no longer even recognizes oneself, one becomes more vulnerable, more susceptible to exposure, which Navidson appears to encounter in this moment. Again, this idea of never truly knowing oneself or one’s place is apparent and Danielewski

pushes this idea further by taking away any shred of hope in an already hopeless space. This state of aimless wandering and uncertainty provokes a sense of relatable fear from the reader. Fear of being trapped, fear of being lost, left alone, fear of not knowing, fear of empty space, fear of the dark, fear of dealing with trauma. This completely disorienting effect on Navidson in the hallway can replicate the reader's state of panic of being lost in the house and ultimately being lost within your own head. In order to trap the reader inside their head in a completely dark and lonely state, Danielewski takes Navidson into the engulfing hallway and removes any sense of security. Essentially, the text that mirrors the hallway attempts to guide the reader into the dark, defenseless against their own inner thoughts, pasts, and fears. Not only are we left with what we cannot see in the dark, but we are left with what we know or perceive to be in the dark. Our minds project our own fears into the hallway, and we turn in on ourselves. Danielewski pulls the reader to their lowest level, playing and preying on the mind of those who dared to enter. In essence, we are in our own hell.

Notably, the typography that guides us to this hell-like hallway becomes an attempt at invoking trauma. Not only does Danielewski use his words to describe the horror but his words depict the horror by design. Stylistically and textually, the novel's structure creates a horrifically imaginable space that lures you and yet pushes you away. With this in mind, then, the descent signifies the fear of coming to know yourself and the restraint needed. To suppress trauma is put to the test, as the reader comes to let go and give into the manipulative text. To replicate that fear of small spaces, of darkness, of unknowingness, he uses the words to push you to small spaces and into the dark. The labyrinth represents the descent through the hallway and in turn the descent within us. The events in the hallway replicate the events in the mind; if we are to travel down a darkening hallway we are to travel into our dark pasts. In order to play on this,

Danielewski is sure to lose us in the darkest, most elaborate labyrinth and leave us completely alone inside.

To continue the elaborate scheme of the taunting nature of the novel, Danielewski creates a maze where the reader cannot escape. The labyrinth of the hallway forces the reader to replay the trauma as a triggering attempt to push us even further into our own depths of hell. The “replay” that occurs within the labyrinth becomes a projection of what we would expect to see within our own past. Our trauma precedes us and takes on new forms, shape shifting, as we move throughout in order to maintain relevance in our brains. Again, “For Danielewski, trauma becomes representable through the archetype of katabasis by way of infernal phenomenal reference. Through these composite figures, Johnny comes to know himself and the wounds that constitute his identity” (Dawson 288). Danielewski seems to believe the most effective way for his reader to revisit trauma is to experience a spiritual descent represented by a physical descent. He ensures this descent by linking the reader to Johnny Truant who acts as the “model” for what to expect. Like Truant, the reader is guided towards discovering who they are based upon their own wounding experiences. In order to do this, the text has to pull the reader exactly where Johnny goes as this journey replicates his own, despite the differing story lines. To elaborate:

Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* aptly demonstrates the potentially imperfect nature of traumatic repetition while challenging Caruth's sweeping claim that trauma inevitably lies beyond the limits of self-knowledge and therefore beyond representation in language. In *House of Leaves*, Johnny Truant will come to know both self and wound intimately during his journey to the end of the night. (Dawson 287)

This idea that trauma is beyond that capacity of representation through literature is challenged when Danielewski creates a novel that incorporates interactions that actively push the reader to know themselves, deeply and intensely. Again, this motif of trauma in literature is daunting to capture through words, and this is why we see Danielewski combining words and typography to carve a path or trap for the reader. Rather than attempt to explain how the reader feels, Danielewski strategically lets the reader explain the novel. In other words, the reader is submissive to the text and begins to unravel and go beyond the limits of self-knowledge that typically trauma literature confines you to. In relative terms it is simple to recognize trauma, but as the events become wilder in experience and endurance, we can no longer find it as easily as before. Trauma becomes suppressed or is no longer recognizable in the many forms it has assumed and because of this the process of uncovering an individual's wound is no longer "simple". Danielewski toys with the idea that if trauma is too much to be depicted in language alone, that he must carefully craft a guide through typography that is capable of bringing a reader towards their own self-discovery. Caruth writes that it is worthwhile to "explore the complex ways that knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma and in the stories associated with it" rather than a straightforward description of actual trauma cases (Caruth 4). This can explain why Danielewski goes beyond simple language and employs typography as a means of representing trauma. Danielewski, in part, illustrates this idea of knowing and not knowing as it encourages some readers to move forward in hopes of gaining more understanding or grounding of trauma. Not only does he play with this idea in his textualization by leaving out information so as to leave the reader unknowing, but this replicates Caruth's idea of an individual unsure of their reality and sure of their trauma. An individual who has experienced trauma acknowledges the event, but mentally suppresses aspects of the event so as to not fully

accept the damage in total. As Danielewski lures the reader into his trap and relinquishes power to the narrators, we become totally engulfed in the labyrinth. Ultimately, we turn in on ourselves just as Truant did. Prying into Johnny Truant's mind while he peers into the story of Will Navidson, gives access to what will happen as Truant begins to expose his inner demons. This self-realization for Truant comes simultaneously to reading the manuscript. Although, we cannot say Danielewski did not warn us not to read ahead and Truant himself begins the novel with a lengthy letter exposing the symptoms a reader of the text will experience as well. He uses himself as an example to the reader, that reading the text as he suggests, may haunt you as it has him.

Johnny Truant becomes the novel's acting narrator as Danielewski allows readers entry to his mind. Truant is a duplicitous character who edits Zampanò's manuscript and who acts as the protagonist in the novel through means of the footnotes. As he begins to read through Zampanò's manuscript, he gains direction by the textual mapping of the house. These directions guide Truant towards his own center, his pinpointed cause of trauma. Johnny Truant begins to expose his own shortcomings and familial distress that would have previously been subconsciously neglected. Near the end of the novel is a collection of letters from Johnny's mother, sent from an institution. It appears Johnny does not respond to his mother's frantic writing, perhaps a tactic of suppressing trauma. On April 27, 1987 Johnny received a letter from his mother preparing him for her next letter that will require decoding. The first letter of each word will build words and phrases. Truant now is uncovering his puzzling trauma, quite literally, while also discovering the labyrinth that is bringing him to his center of rediscovering those suppressed events. Similarly, the reader endures a reliving of trauma as they become attached to the footnotes and explore alongside Truant.

XX

XXXXXXXXXXXX... (Danielewski 354)

This quote helps illustrate the notion that trauma is often suppressed in the brain, or there is a lack of memory as the text leaves out names, and the ability to connect names and faces, and furthermore the actual event is unspoken. The blank lines show that the names of those who entered the hallway cannot be shared and furthermore their experience in the hallway is represented by a long series of bold X's as if to show an inability to revisit the triggering event. It is further noted that this section of the text is strangely crossed out with black crayon and tar. Extreme measures were taken for this information to be blacked out and unable to be spoken about. Again, the text explores how trauma affects the way in which our brain and our cells control our perceived reality in order to suppress traumatic memories. This idea comes to life in the novel as the shifting labyrinth comes to represent the shifting of our physical brain cells that work to recreate the past in order for the victim to move forward. Ultimately, the complexity of the labyrinth depends on the trauma of the individual and the perception of reality through a manipulated lens. This begs the question, is Danielewski helping us cope with reality or is he taunting us with control over our perception?

As Johnny Truant's edition of the manuscript ends, he provides a glimpse into his personal diary exposing the struggle of his day to day. He begins nearly each entry with a message exemplifying the effects of engaging with the text:

Wow, not doing so well. But where else to turn? What mistakes have been made.

A sudden vertigo of loss, when looking down, or is it really looking back?, leaves me experiencing all of it at once, which is way too much...Numb now. Moments when my face tingles could be my imagination. I'm not feeling anything let alone

some motherfucking tingle...An incredible loneliness has settled inside me. I've never felt anything like this before...What's happened here? My memory's in flakes. Haven't slept. Nightmares fuse into waking minutes or are they hours? What scenes? What scenes. Atrocities. They are unspeakable but still mine...I've lost sense of what's real and what's not. What I've made up, what has made me.

(Danielewski 491-497)

Truant's recollection of his experience at this point depicts the idea that the text manipulates the individual's reality by means of the individual's perception determined by the trauma. He describes this status of total helplessness and confusion as to what is real and what is merely perceived as real. This provides the reader with a horrifying sense of what is to come for themselves as well. The reader develops a premonition as Truant becomes a reflection of inner turmoil as a result of becoming immersed in the taunting textualization of the manuscript. Will Navidson insists, "And if one day you find yourself passing by that house, don't stop, don't slow down, just keep going, There's nothing there. Beware." followed by the statement, "Considering how the film ends, it is not surprising that more than a handful of people have decided to heed his advice" (Danielewski 4). Again, despite the fair warnings, the reader, like Truant, has entered the house.

The overwhelming sense of uncertainty and the consuming wrath of trauma is ultimately what permeates through the layers of characters and readers by means of manipulative textualization. For Danielewski to prompt his reader to engage in his playful text he employs a uniquely coercive typography that pushes the reader into the depths of inner trauma. His overt focus on the journey to the center of the labyrinth turns in on itself to create the intense reader-response phenomenon of self-rediscovery. Although the remark that, "The absence of the center

of this space is not merely nothing, it is so commanding and absolute that it paradoxically becomes an especially intense kind of presence, violent in its impossibility and impossible to ignore” becomes incredibly relevant (Hayles 788). Essentially, this quote aims to explain how the center appears absent and yet only becomes fulfilled by the reader, a sort of mind trick. The quote goes further to describe this puzzling fulfillment as violent in the sense that it cannot be real and yet is real inside the individual upon its awakening. This idea of awakening the space refers to the suppressed trauma that is called to the surface as the individual engages in the labyrinth. No two versions of the journey are the same as no two individuals ever experience or recall a trauma inducing event the same. As trauma manipulates the brain, the brain manipulates reality and therefore our perception. As a result, the process of unraveling the characters as they enter the labyrinth reflects the journey the reader will take by nature of the text replicating the hallway. The masterful way in which the novel takes us through layers of storytelling, layers of narrations, layers of characters, and layers of the individual reveals the inevitable vulnerability of the reader.

Most often, trauma theory in literature focuses on how traumatic events can best be explained through story-telling. Furthermore, many writers aim to capture the overwhelming sense of uncertainty and fear associated with trauma and next, how trauma can be overcome, if at all. Yet, many writers and critics have failed in focusing on literature that manages to solely work on the reader’s own trauma through means of engaging in literature. For instance, Danielewski’s novel does not specifically disclose the trauma of each character, but puts forth their own corresponding triggering events. With that being said, the reader only becomes exposed to Truant’s personal trauma by the method of watching him engage with the manuscript. By connection, the reader becomes one with Truant and takes on their own journey of self-

reconciliation of the past. Danielewski's ability to grasp his reader and coerce them into facing their own trauma in the darkness of the labyrinth is like no other. Again, trauma theory focuses on how reading can create a space for the reader to understand or relate to rather than create a space for the reader to fill in for themselves. For a writer to tell a story that their reader can relate to would be to create a story in which only a specific reader can identify with. For example, if a writer aims to create a space for a victim of domestic abuse to relate to, that creates a powerful space for only those who have endured domestic abuse and those who can empathize. Whereas Danielewski does not write to a specific victim with a specific story, but he writes to all victims to any source of trauma. It is because of this all-inclusive tale of trauma that Danielewski has created a new realm of exploration in trauma theory and in literature all together.

This thesis aims to question the effects of engaging in literature that goes beyond inviting the reader to play but luring the reader into a darkness that becomes both inside and outside. In addition, this works to illustrate the ability of an author to combine language and typography to merge the gap between representability and irrepresentability of trauma in literature. Furthermore, this analysis acts to explore the missing elements of trauma theory and how precisely writers are evolving in order to capture the diversity and yet unfortunately inclusive side of trauma. This is to say that because trauma exists in various forms and various human beings, that there is a demand to fulfill each form. Again, Danielewski's novel *House of Leaves*, opens the floor for scholars and readers alike to begin investigating the ability of literature to create a connection for victims through his cohesive use of language and typography. Finally, this thesis examines the way in which literature can be coercive by textual design so as to simultaneously include the reader in the assignment and seclude the reader from reality. Further analysis and examination of literary works similar to Danielewski's can create a space for

expansion in trauma theory and more specifically in the study of how textualization and therefore typography can play a significant role in manipulating the reader's experience both physically and mentally.

APPENDIX

No stranger to shock,¹¹ Jed immediately raises Wax's legs to increase blood flow to the head, uses pocket heaters and a solar blanket to keep him warm, and never stops reassuring him, smiling, telling jokes, promising a hundred happy endings. A difficult task under any circumstances. Nearly impossible when those guttural cries soon find them, the walls too thin to hold any of it back, sounds too obscene to be shut out, Hol-loway screaming like some rabid animal, no longer a man but a creature stirred by fear, pain, and rage.

"At least he's far off," Jed whispers in an effort to console Wax.

But the sound of distance brings little comfort to either one.

and telling her the truth:
e never been to Texas."

Following definition is from *Medicine for Mountaineering*, 3rd edition. Edited by A. Wilkerson, M.D. (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1985), p. 43:

"Mild shock results from loss of ten to twenty percent of blood volume. The patient appears pale and his skin feels cool, first over the extremities and later over the trunk. As shock becomes more severe, the patient often complains of feeling cold and he is often thirsty. A rapid pulse and reduced blood pressure may be present. However, the absence of these signs does not indicate shock is not present since they may appear rather late, particularly in previously healthy young adults.

"Moderate shock results from loss of twenty to forty percent of the blood volume. The signs characteristic of mild shock are present

and may become more severe. The pulse is typically fast and weak or 'thready.' In addition, blood flow to the kidneys is reduced as the available blood is shunted to the heart and brain and the urinary output declines. A urinary volume of less than 30 cc per hour is a late indication of moderate shock. In contrast to the dark, concentrated urine observed with dehydration, the urine is usually a light color.

"Severe shock results from loss of more than forty percent of the blood volume and is characterized by signs of reduced blood flow to the brain and heart. Reduced cerebral blood flow initially produces restlessness and agitation, which is followed by confusion, stupor and eventually coma and death. Diminished blood flow to the heart can produce abnormalities of the cardiac rhythm."

der Rohe, Philip Johnson,
Hans Hollein, Rem
Koollhaas, John S. Chase,
Harvey B. Gantt, Robert
Venturi, James Stirling,
Norman Foster, Richard
Rogers, Renzo Piano,
Alvar Aalto, Lou Switzer,
Robertia Washington, J.
Max Bond Jr., Robert
Kennard, Luigi Nervi,
Jorn Utzon, Eero
Saarinen, Buckminster
Fuller, Louis Kahn,
Roderick Lincoln Knox,
Paul Rudolph, James M.
Whitley, William N.
Whitley, R. Joyce Whitley,
Paul G. Devroux, Charles
Duke, Marshall E.
Purnell, Robert P.
Madison, Sir Leslie
Martin, Harry L.
Overstreet, Sir Denys
Lassdun, Sir Basil Spence,
Peter Smithson, James
Gowan, Gordon Matta-
Clark, Howard F. Sims,
Harold R. Varner, Roger
W. Margerum, Harry
Simmons Jr., Wendell J.
Campbell, Susan M.
Campbell, James Stirling,
Oscar Niemeyer, Norma
Merrick Sklarek, Le
Corbusier, Frank
Lloyd Wright,
William J. Stanley,
Irene Love-
Stanley, Vernon A.
Williams, Leslie A.
Williams, Cornelius
Henderson, Paul
Revere Williams,
Boris Mikhailovich
Iofan, Vladimir
Aleksandrovich
Shchuko, V.G.
Golosov, Konstantin
Melnikov, Moses
McKissack,
William S. Pitman, John
A. Lankford, El Lissitzky,
Aleksandr, and Viktor
Vesnin, Serge Chermayeff,
Charles Holden, Sir John
Burner, Edwin Rickards,
H. V. Lanchester, Wilhelm
Kreys, Giles Gilbert Scott,
Frederick Gibberd, Sir

Fig. 1

And then the walls reappear, along with the ceiling and numerous doorways; the shifts always accompanied by that inimitable, and by now very familiar, growl.

As the days pass, Navidson becomes more and more aware that he is running precariously low on water and food. Even worse, the sense of inevitable doom this causes him is compounded by the sense of immediate doom he feels whenever he begins riding his bike: "I can't help thinking I'm going to reach an edge to this thing. I'll be going too fast to stop and just fly off into darkness."

Which is almost what happens.

On the twelfth or thirteenth day (it is very difficult to tell which), after sleeping for what Navidson estimates must have been well over 18 hours, he again sets off down the hallway.

Soon the walls and

doorways recede and

v a n i s h,

then

sight
of

the

out

ceiling

completely

is

out

lifts

too

completely

it

is

of

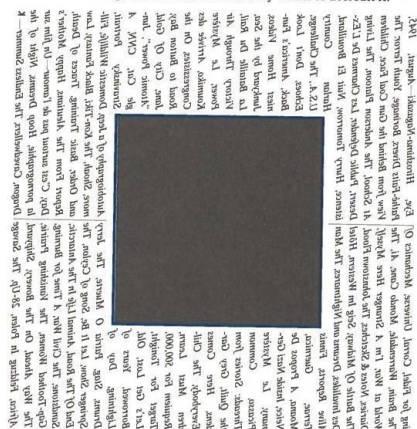
too

until

sight

Fig. 2

Ironically, the very technology that instructs us to mistrust the image also creates the means by which to accredit it.



186 Murphy Gruner's *Document Detectives* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), p. 37.¹⁸⁷

One can imagine a group of Documentaries whose sole purpose is to uphold Truth & Truth. By guaranteeing the authenticity of all works, there is no of approval would create a sense of public faith which could only be maintained if and Documentaries Detectives were as fierce as pit bulls and as scrupulous as saints. Of course, this is more the kind of thing a novelist could write with and as I am pointedly not a novelist or a playwright I will leave that tale to someone else.

Or TNT. Truth And Truth therefore becoming another name for the nitrating of toluene or $C_7H_5N_3O_6$ —not to be confused with $C_{10}H_8N_2O_2$ —in other words one word: trinitrotoluene. TNT¹⁸⁸ telegraphing a weird coalition of sense. On one hand transcendent and lasting and on the other violent and extremely flammable.

As author Murphy Gruner once remarked:

"Just as is true with Chandler's Marlowe, the viewer is won over simply because the shirts are rumpled, the soles are worn, and there's that ever present hat. These days nothing deserves our faith less than the slick and expensive. Which is how video and film technology comes to us: rumpled or slick."

"Rumpled Technology"—capital M for Marlowe—hails from Good Guys, Radio Shack or Fry's Electronics. It is cheap, available and very dangerous. One needs only to consider *The George Holliday Rodney King Video* to recognize the power of such low-end technology. Furthermore, as the recording time for tapes and digital disks increases, as battery life is extended, and as camera size is reduced, the larger the window will grow for capturing events as they occur.

"Slick Technology"—capital S for Slick—is the opposite: expensive, cumbersome, and time consuming. But it too is also very powerful. Digital manipulation allows for the creation of almost anything the imagination can come up with, all in the safe confines of an editing suite, equipped with 24 hour catering and an on site masseuse.¹⁸⁹

As Grundberg, Alabiso and Mitchell contend, this impressive ability to manipulate images must someday permanently deracinate film and video from its now sacrosanct position as "eyewitness." The perversion of image will make *The Rodney King Video* inadmissible in a court of law.¹⁹⁰

seem, Los Angeles statement—"You deceive us. We saw and what we saw seems ludicrous. Truth ain't revert to the sh the word and hum judge its peculiar m this a particularly tion. Anything from ton's *Rising Sun*, to *Tricks*, or Lisa Marie's *Confession of a True Grit*", Anthe New Yorker clai e New Yorker clai the most difficult e ct and will always e dio magician. Grit, t elude Navidson."

Consider the savage scene captured on grainy 16mm film of a tourist eaten alive by lions in a wildlife preserve in Angola (*Traces of Death*) and compare it to the ridiculous and costly comedy *Eraser* in which several villains are dismembered by alligators.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸which also stands for Technological Neural Transmitters (TNT)¹⁸⁹ — another pun and another story altogether.

¹⁸⁹Or what as Lude once pointed out also means Tits And Tail, i.e. also explosive, i.e. orgasmic, i.e. a sudden procreating pun which turns everything into something entirely else, which now as I catch up with myself, where I've gone and where I haven't gone and what I better get back to, may very well have not been a pun at all but plain and simple just the bifurcation of truth, with an ampersand tossed in for unity. A sperm twist another form of similar unity, and look there's an echo at hand. The articulation of conflict may very well be a better thing upon which to stand—Truth & Truth's all, after all, or not at all. In other words, just as Zampànò wrote it.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰Jennifer Kale told me she'd visited Zampànò around seven times: "He liked me to teach him filmic words. You know, film crit kind of stuff. Straight out of Christian Metz and the rest of that crew. He also liked me to read him some of the jokes I'd gotten on the Internet. Mostly though I just described movies I'd recently seen." *Eraser* was one of them.

Fig. 3

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