

The Spatio-Temporal Dimensions of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*: 'Real Virtuality' and the 'Ontological Indifference' of the Information Age

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Abstract

This essay attempts to examine Danielewski's experimental novel from the standpoint of postmodernity, architecture, and information theory in order to demonstrate how it exemplifies the new modes of spatio-temporal ordering which characterize late capitalist society in the digital age. Both the figure of the house and the form of the text suggest the futility of spatially and temporally fixed identities in contemporary society. The fictional house contains a corridor that constantly expands, defying any attempts to accurately record its interior. Typographical innovations are used to merge the tempo of the narrative with the readers' sense of space and time. Furthermore, the online forum where readers discuss the text serves as an extension of the narrative into digital space and also exemplifies the spatio-temporal dimension the novel evokes. Situated within this context we can understand the novel as a meditation upon the ontological uncertainty produced by the ubiquity of digital technologies, as we are no longer able to clearly demarcate the boundaries between online and offline, fact and fiction, real and fantasy.

Keywords: *space, time, remediation, hypertext, real virtuality, postmodernism*

In *House of Leaves* Mark Z. Danielewski creates a labyrinthine web of narratives that defy chronological and spatial ordering, disrupting traditional conceptions of space and time. The instability and uncertainty of these purportedly 'objective' constructs lies at the heart of 'the postmodern condition'; however, the stress has been further extenuated with the advent of the internet and mass communications technology. Danielewski's novel was originally published online, alongside a forum where readers were able to discuss the book, opening up a further narrative space beyond the confines of the book itself. This essay explores *House of Leaves* as a reflection upon the effect of digital technologies on our conceptions of space-time, and consequentially our lived experience. The novel will be analysed in the context of these changes, with particular focus on two aspects: the distortion of space-time in the fictional house on Ash Tree Lane and in the book itself as a tangible object, alongside its online dimension. Theoretically, this essay engages with literature on postmodernity, architecture and the rise of what Manuel Castells terms the "network society" in order to illuminate these issues, building upon existing criticism of the novel. Through this analysis we can understand how Danielewski utilizes contemporary notions of space and time in order to evoke the uncanny in the information age.

The essay begins by situating the novel within the theoretical context through which it is to be explored, focusing in particular on the postmodern geographies of David Harvey and Jean Baudrillard, and Manuel Castells's writings on the technological transformations that he terms the "information age". We then turn to the existing contributions to the topic, exploring the literature on *House of Leaves*. Finally, we move into an exegesis of the text from the perspective of the theoretical standpoints that have been elaborated, utilizing Castells's concept of "real virtuality" in order to understand the space-time distortions that produce what Mark B. N. Hansen terms the "ontological indifference" of *House of Leaves*.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity* David Harvey posits that "from a materialist perspective, we can argue that objective conceptions of time and space are necessarily created through material practices and processes which serve to reproduce social life [...] [thus] time and space cannot be understood independently of social action." Consequently, "each distinctive mode of production or social formation will, in short, embody a distinctive bundle of time and space practices and concepts."¹ The postmodern epoch, he asserts, is marked by "an intense phase of time-space compression that has had a disorientating and disruptive impact upon political-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life."² He does not go as far as to call for "a total dissolution of the objective-subjective distinction", but insists that we "recognize the multiplicity of the objective qualities which space and time can express, and the role of human practices in their construction."³ Harvey argues that under these forces, "the home becomes a private museum to guard against the ravages of time-space compression."⁴ It is a sphere in which the occupants supposedly have control and protection from the unrelenting ravages of neoliberal capitalism. *House of Leaves* exemplifies these spatio-temporal dynamics, yet it stands in contrast to the latter assertion — for Mark Z. Danielewski there is nothing sacred about the home, or the text.⁵ *House of Leaves* blurs the liminal boundaries between public/private, interior/exterior, producer/consumer, to the point where neither the home nor the text possesses any ultimate truth or even meaning. Despite Zampanò's best efforts to hermetically seal his apartment, he is unable to keep what is outside from coming in, and the contents of his journal seemingly enter the public domain as the reader becomes privy to them through the eyes of Johnny Truant. This brings him much closer to the position taken by Jean Baudrillard in *The System of Objects*, who asserts that postmodernism's challenge to formerly 'objective' conceptions of spatial-temporal reality has led to the breakdown of traditional conceptions of form and the boundaries between inside and outside; "of the whole dialectic of being and appearance relating to that boundary".⁶

House of Leaves was written parallel to the internet boom of the 1990s, a period that can be understood as what Harvey calls a "phase of maximal change"; when "the

¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 203-4.

² Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 284.

³ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 284.

⁴ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 292.

⁵ Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, "Haunted House — An Interview with Mark Z. Danielewski," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 44.2 (Winter 2003): 131.

⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 2005), 27.

spatial and temporal bases for reproduction of the social order are subject to the severest disruption.”⁷ These disruptive changes to society and our conceptions of space-time are explored by Manuel Castells in *The Information Age*. Expanding upon Baudrillard’s notion that there is “no separation between “reality” and symbolic representation”, Castells asserts that we live in an era of “real virtuality”. Not only is it a simulacrum where “all realities are communicated through symbols [...] all reality is virtually perceived”, it is

a system in which reality itself (that is, people’s material/symbolic existence) is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual setting, in the world of make believe, in which appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they *become* the experience.⁸

Johnny Truant states this right at the beginning of the novel, “See, the irony is it makes no difference that the documentary at the heart of this book is fiction. Zampanò knew from the get go that what’s real or isn’t real doesn’t matter here. The consequences are the same”⁹. For Castells we live in a hybrid world where there is no clearly demarcated division between online and offline realms, mirroring Danielewski’s assertion that it is futile trying to separate facts from fiction.

We can situate *House of Leaves* firmly within the postmodern tradition as identified by Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction*. For McHale, whereas modernist literature foregrounds epistemological questions, ontological questions are dominant in postmodernist literature. The following ontological questions he identifies all resonate strongly as we read the novel:

What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?¹⁰

Moreover, McHale contends that

Literary texts project at least one internal field of reference, a universe or semantic continuum (loosely, a “world”) constructed in and by the text itself. In addition, they inevitably refer outside their internal field to an external field of reference: the objective world, the body of historical fact or scientific theory, an ideology or philosophy, other texts, and so on.¹¹

House of Leaves contains multiple internal worlds; that of Zampanò, the Navidson Record, and Truant’s narrative. Each of these extensively refers to a plethora of external fields of reference. The novel violates the boundaries between these worlds, forcing the reader to constantly switch between different referential points, to the extent that they

⁷ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 239.

⁸ Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture – Volume I: The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 403-4.

⁹ Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon, 2000), xx.

¹⁰ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), 10.

¹¹ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 28-9.

begin to converge. Through looking more closely at the spatio-temporal dimensions of the novel we can better understand these phenomena.

As Harvey asserts, "objective conceptions of time and space are necessarily created through material practices and processes which serve to reproduce social life."¹² For Manuel Castells, these material practices and processes are determined by contemporary informational technology. He asserts that we live in a culture of "real virtuality", in which we experience time in two forms: "simultaneity and timelessness". Events that previously would have occurred in linear sequence (predominantly due to technological and geographical limitations) can now occur simultaneously: timeless time has "no beginning, no end, no sequence".¹³ The reconfiguration of the temporal dimension is only made possible by the reorganization of space through the use of new technologies into what Castells calls the "space of flows". This space consists of "the material organization of time-sharing practices that work through flows".¹⁴ It is the antithesis of the traditional "space of places", "a locale whose form, function, and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity".¹⁵ Instead, space is characterized by a network of geographically dispersed, yet interconnected nodes across which agency is distributed. The cacophony of footnotes and hyperlinks in Danielewski's novel and their extension into the online forum by a scattered community of readers typifies this form of space. The dialectical opposition between these two forms of space helps us to understand the uncanny nature of the novel.

Understood through Castells's paradigm, both the house on Ash Tree Lane and the multiple layers of narration are resistant to any traditional ontological or epistemological order. There is neither a linear sequence of time nor a consistent place through which the narrative progresses, both in terms of Danielewski's characters and their explorations of the house and the text, and in relation to the reader's movement through the novel. For Castells "the space of flows and timeless time are the material foundations of a new culture that transcends and includes the diversity of historically transmitted systems of representation: the culture of real virtuality where make-believe is belief in the making."¹⁶ The novel forces us to address McHale's ontological questions yet consistently refuses to provide any definitive answers.

These ontological questions and the space-time reconfigurations force one to reconsider the idea of the subject. N. Katherine Hayles asserts that in *House of Leaves* the subject is a palimpsest — a manuscript that can be wiped clear and re-inscribed — emerging only through multiple layers of inscription. These inscriptions, and the subjects they produce, are themselves created through the process of remediation, or "the re-presentation of material that has already been represented in another medium."¹⁷ She argues that this process is key to understanding the nature of space-time in the novel:

The story's architecture is envisioned not as a sequential narrative so much as alternative paths within the same immense labyrinth of fictional space-time that is also, and

¹² Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 204.

¹³ Castells, *The Information Age*, 491-2.

¹⁴ Castells, *The Information Age*, 442.

¹⁵ Castells, *The Information Age*, 453.

¹⁶ Castells, *The Information Age*, 406.

¹⁷ N. Katherine Hayles, "Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*," *American Literature* 74.4 (2002): 781.

simultaneously, a rat's nest of inscription surfaces. Moreover, these surfaces prove as resistant to logical ordering as the House is to coherent mapping. Locating itself within these labyrinthine spaces, the text enfolds together the objects represented and the media used to represent them.¹⁸

Castells asserts that if the sequence of time is distorted and compressed, then time itself also disappears, forcing us to enter the dimension of timelessness.¹⁹ Likewise, we cannot have a specific place if it cannot be clearly delineated. This means that we cannot locate the Navidson Record 'objectively'; we can only understand it as it is situated in the equally volatile locations of the Zampanò and Truant narratives. The spatio-temporal dimension produced is symbolic of what Castells sees as "a new culture that transcends and includes the diversity of historically transmitted systems of representation".²⁰ The contiguous layering of narratives — each of which is further layered through multiple remediations — creates a simultaneous and timeless time. A true sequence of events at any level of narrative is indeterminable.

Mark B. N. Hansen contends that *House of Leaves* is marked by an "ontological indifference [...] and the definitive departure that it signals away from the tired postmodern agonies bound up with the figure of simulation."²¹ If the real and the fictional have equal affective power over the subject, then the distinction between the two no longer matters. The abstract particulars of real virtuality come to occupy a central place in our lived experiences and understanding of reality. The role of this ontological indifference is apparent as "the novel insistently stages the futility of any effort to anchor the events it recounts in a stable recorded form."²² We never have an accurate sense of the layout of the hallway; Navidson's camera equipment cannot even capture its internal dimensions. When attempting to map the interior of the hallway Holloway states: "It's impossible to photograph what we saw".²³ When Karen attempts to position her Feng Shui ornaments using a compass, she finds the needle never stays still: "North it seems has no authority there." Even when it the interior seems to be stable it still exerts a "resistance to representation".²⁴ Hansen interprets this resistance as a metaphor for the "waning of the orthographic function of recording",²⁵ the declining ability of media to accurately represent a historical moment. It is impossible to *authenticate* anything that could be produced to represent the house.

The role of digital technologies in initiating such an ontological crisis is highlighted by Rune Graulund: "the digital medium is not only capable of aping reality, but of fabricating "the real" from scratch."²⁶ Just as the digital recordings can be altered and manipulated, our interpretations of the narratives in *House of Leaves* are altered by the perspectives of other narrators, problematizing any search for authenticity. Graulund contends that the "house is so blatantly a construct, built by leaves torn from other texts—by references, quotes and ideas — it is a very clear reminder that no one original

¹⁸ Hayles, "Saving the Subject," 784.

¹⁹ Castells, *The Information Age*, 464.

²⁰ Castells, *The Information Age*, 406.

²¹ Mark N. B. Hansen, "The Digital Topography of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*," *Contemporary Literature* 45.4 (2004): 601.

²² Hansen, "Digital Topography," 602.

²³ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 86.

²⁴ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 90.

²⁵ Hansen, "Digital Topography," 601.

²⁶ Rune Graulund, "Text and Paratext in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*," *Word & Image* 22.4 (2006): 385.

source exists.”²⁷ Hansen concurs with Graulund, arguing that digital technology brings into question “the very possibility for accurate recording per se, the capacity of technical inscription of capture what Danielewski celebrates [...] as the singularity of experience.”²⁸ In fact, Danielewski's novel can be interpreted as a parodic take on the postmodern condition, creating a physical space that represents this problematic, both in the form of the novel as an artefact and the house it depicts.

In Danielewski's world “representation is short-circuited by the realization that there is no reality independent of mediation.”²⁹ We have no choice but to follow the narratives through layers of mediation, each explicitly and implicitly questioning the authenticity of all the other layers and narratives. The “house itself”, Hayles contends, “inhabits a borderland between the metaphoric and the literal, the imaginary and the real.”³⁰ The liminal spatial-temporal dimension in which it is situated prevents any ‘objective’ categorisation of its features or chronology. This lack leads Hansen to contend that the novel's central challenge is to “generate belief without objective basis”, a challenge that “only becomes apparent when the role of the reader is taken into account.”³¹ By looking at the structure of the novel and the reading process we can better understand how Danielewski blurs the lines between imagination and reality, evoking an uncanny existential crisis in the reader.

The reading experience mirrors the quests of Danielewski's characters due to his use of experimental structural innovations. Unlike traditional narratives, where “temporal sequence is indicated by spatial continuity”, the novel uses “spatial discontinuity to indicate temporal simultaneity.”³² There is no linear route through the novel; as readers we must create our own individual paths through the labyrinthine structure of the text. Hayles describes how Danielewski blurs the boundaries between the spatial-temporal dimensions of the text and that of the reader:

Whether excruciatingly slow or amazingly fast, the time it takes to read a page functions as a remediation of the narrative action in the life-world of the reader, linking real-time decoding with the intensity and pacing of the represented events [...] Here the materiality of the page is mobilized to create a cybernetic loop that runs from the page through the reader's body and back to the page, a process that links the temporality of reading with the emotional pacing of the narrative. As a consequence, the time of reading no longer takes place in an ontologically distinct realm separate from the narrative but itself is used as a resource for literary effects.³³

This affectivity conforms to the transformed spatial-temporal dimensions Castells identifies. With the advent of the digital age, time is dependent upon space: “Space shapes time in our society, thus reversing an historical trend: flows induce timeless time, places are time-bounded.” This, he argues, has led to “the contrasting logic between timelessness, structured by the space of flows, and multiple, subordinate temporalities, associated with the space of places.”³⁴ As the reader traverses

²⁷ Graulund, “Text and Paratext,” 385.

²⁸ Hansen, “The Digital Topography,” 606.

²⁹ Hayles, “Saving the Subject,” 779.

³⁰ Hayles, “Saving the Subject,” 789.

³¹ Hansen, “The Digital Topography,” 602.

³² Hayles, “Saving the Subject,” 795.

³³ Hayles, “Saving the Subject,” 794.

³⁴ Castells, *The Information Age*, 495-98.

Danielewski's narrative she experiences this logic, as the many narratives and places in the novel begin to intertwine and overlap, the different affects they induce coalescing together in a space of flows. This facilitates an emotive response as the flow of the text merges together with the reader's own sense of space and time. The reader takes part in the process of remediation, bringing her own reality into the novel and vice versa. The ontological security provided by historical authenticity is not simply elusive — as one might originally think when reading the novel — but *illusive*. There is no one right way to navigate the house or the novel.

Hayles uses Richard Latham's theory to show how the reader simultaneously looks *through* and *at* the page in order to understand both the semantic and semiotic content of the novel. One is looking *through* a page "when we are immersed in the fictional world and scarcely conscious of the page as a physical object", whereas one is looking *at* the page when the "typography and other interventions encourage us to focus on the page's physical properties".³⁵ These two components work together because "the verbal content gives meaning to physical properties, which inflect verbal content at the same time".³⁶ Hayles calls this "double vision", as the reader is forced to consider both elements as they navigate the text, evoking Castells's dialectic of space, as we are constantly aware of both the place of the text on the page and the surrounding space within which it is situated, each phenomena contributing to the affectivity of Danielewski's novel. This mode of reading creates what Hansen calls "reality affects"; as we seem to experience the novel in the same way as the narrators, we actively integrate ourselves into its discursive structures.³⁷ Whether the reader is spending time pouring over the voluminous footnotes and attempting to decipher foreign languages, or swiftly flicking through a series of pages that each contain a single word, alters the mode of reading and subsequently feeds back into the way we interpret the text. As Danielewski himself asserts, "I can use the shape and design of text not just to conjure up some static visual impression but use it to further enhance the movement of meaning, theme, and story."³⁸ By looking at hypertextual and paratextual elements of the novel we can further explore how the reader is integrated into this "cybernetic loop", allowing us understand the affectivity *House of Leaves*.

Danielewski's novel blurs "the boundaries between traditional print and hypertexts."³⁹ Hagler contends that "hypertext narrative systems esteem the power of an intrusive, active reader over the traditional autonomy of the single author",⁴⁰ as the reader is able to navigate and thus interpret the narrative via a plethora of non-linear paths. The process of interpretation is an active one, forcing the reader to make decisions as to how to read the text, which subsequently informs their understanding of it. The clearest example of this is Danielewski's use of colours to denote hyperlinks within the text. The word 'house', and its foreign language equivalents, always appears in blue because it signifies a hyperlink back to the notion of the house itself. Passages that were struck out by Zampanò are coloured red, signifying "an active link", calling attention back to the word 'Minotaur', which is also coloured red. Finally, purple

³⁵ Hayles, "Saving the Subject," 794.

³⁶ Hayles, "Saving the Subject," 790.

³⁷ Hansen, "The Digital Topography", 621.

³⁸ McCaffery and Gregory, "Haunted House," 106.

³⁹ Sonya Hagler, "Mediating Print and Hypertext in Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*," *MODE Literary Journal* 2004, accessed March 18, 2014, <https://www.arts.cornell.edu/english/publications/mode/documents/hagler.doc>.

⁴⁰ Hagler, "Mediating Print and Hypertext."

functions as a “visited link”; it is used to signify Johnny’s memory of his mother because it is associated with the colour in her letters. These links provoke an “unintentional return” to the house and the beast; the “unintended repetition [...] transforms what would otherwise seem quite harmless into something uncanny and forces us to entertain the idea of the fateful and the inescapable, when we should normally speak of “chance”.”⁴¹

Furthermore, Graulund contends that whereas “the majority of novels attempt to make the paratextual elements as unobtrusive as possible [...] [*House of Leaves*] transcends the limits of paratextual experimentation”.⁴² Right in the beginning, the word ‘House’ in “Random House” is coloured blue, as even the legal information is subsumed into the hypertextual network. The editors’ disclaimer appearing on the same page is also a parody. Both serve to blur the boundary between fiction and reality; the “fringe” between text and paratext is crossed again and again, until “delineation between the two is eliminated”.⁴³ This situates the text in a liminal position where “the world of the text and “the real” overlap”.⁴⁴ The reading experience therefore mirrors that of the novel’s internal remediation process: as we lose our sense of place and enter into the space of flows due to the “dynamic interactivity”⁴⁵ of the novel, we are also forced to accept its simultaneous and timeless time as we adjust our reading and interpretation speed to the form of the book.

Using Castells’s analysis of postmodern architecture we can understand the significance of the spatial-temporal uncertainty at the core of the house and the novel. Castells contends that if we take the form of the built environment as a symbol of “basic structures of society’s dominant values”, we can understand postmodern architecture to “declare the end of all systems of meaning.” This is due to a “blurring [of] the meaningful relationship between architecture and society. Because the spatial manifestation of the dominant interests takes place around the world, and across cultures, the uprooting of experience, history, and specific culture as the background of meaning is leading to the generalisation of ahistorical, acultural architecture.”⁴⁶ The house on Ash Tree Lane is an extreme manifestation of this term. It does not occupy a historically specific place (although historically rooted notions of place are applied to it by all the narrators). Truant goes on a journey across America to search for it, but eventually sees the futility of this quest: “I was still stuck on this notion of place and location”.⁴⁷ He finally becomes completely disconnected when he visits the site of his old house. He writes “I had no idea where I was in relation to what had once existed”; he no longer has a place to call home. The place Truant searches for is located in the ahistorical and scattered space of flows, existing only insofar as it is represented through layers of remediation. It is an ontologically uncertain place, for it does not even have a stable location in his subjectivity: “The memory mixes with all the retellings and

⁴¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), 144.

⁴² Graulund, “Text and Paratext,” 379.

⁴³ Graulund, “Text and Paratext,” 381.

⁴⁴ Graulund, “Text and Paratext,” 383.

⁴⁵ Hayles, “Saving the Subject,” 803.

⁴⁶ Castells, *The Information Age*, 448-49.

⁴⁷ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 504.

explanations I heard later. It's even possible what ought to be a memory is really only the memory of the story I heard much later. No way to tell for sure anymore."⁴⁸

Truant's dilemma — as he is torn between the two spatial logics — induces a schizophrenic identity. Jameson argues that we must understand the

spatial peculiarities of postmodernism as symptoms and expressions of a new historically original dilemma, one that involves our insertion as individual subjects into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities [...] Not even Einsteinian relativity, or the multiple worlds of the older modernists, is capable of giving any adequate figuration to this process, which in lived experience makes itself felt by the so-called death of the subject, or, more exactly, the fragmented and schizophrenic decentering and dispersion of this last.⁴⁹

Truant's location as a subject within a "multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities" is the cause of his schizophrenia. Both Danielewski's text and the house on Ash Tree Lane are marked by their fragmented and decentred nature, mirroring the architecture of the postmodern. When Truant can no longer position himself as a being located in a specific space and time, as he is lost within both the house and the Navidson Record, he begins to lose all sense of place, time, and identity. Truant lies to both the reader and himself, creating a fictional history for almost a month: "Are you fucking kidding me? Do you really think any of that was true? September 2 thru September 28. I just made all that up. [...] Though here's the sadder side of all this, I wasn't trying to trick you. I was trying to trick myself".⁵⁰ As Truant gets deeper into Zampanò's manuscript the spatial dialectic shifts from the space of places to the space of flows, causing him to become increasingly "disorientated" and "detached from the world".⁵¹ Truant breaks down because he loses his connection to his own reality and increasingly develops a schizophrenic identity that leads him to conflate Will Navidson's and Zampanò's identities with his own. Eventually he descends into madness, having become 'ontologically indifferent', in the sense that he is unable to locate himself spatially or temporally outside referential points of the Zampanò notebook and the Navidson Record.

By looking at chapter IX we can understand the futility of Truant's search, as we see that no one system of meanings or values associated with architecture can be applied to the house with any degree of certitude. The list of buildings running in the left-hand margin and the list of fixtures in the blue boxes represents the lack of historical and cultural specificity.⁵² The first list is of buildings that the house is *not* and the second is a list of objects that the house does *not* contain. This list of negative attributes helps to produce a sense of limitless, negative, uncategorized space. Therefore traditional notions of architecture or interior design cannot represent the labyrinthine interior of the hallway. It cannot be categorized by any particular history or place. Therefore, if none of the characteristics listed pertain to its form, it "is nothing more than corridors and rooms".⁵³ This lack of any familiar referent is why Holloway is unable to navigate the house, as his search mirrors Truant's in its tragic consequences:

⁴⁸ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 505.

⁴⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 413.

⁵⁰ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 509.

⁵¹ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, xviii.

⁵² The lists can be found in Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 120-34 and 119-41 respectively.

⁵³ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 119.

You know where you're going, Holloway?" But Holloway just scowls and keeps pushing forward, in what appears to be a determined effort to find something, something different, something defining, or at least some kind of indication of an outside-ness to that place [...] This desire for exteriority is no doubt further amplified by the utter blankness found within [...] not one object, let alone fixture or other manner of finish work has ever been discovered there.⁵⁴

Holloway becomes lost and confused as he is unable to locate the semantic objects that he needs to guide him. He too cannot reconcile his inability to conceive of space without place.

Ultimately, Truant becomes disillusioned as he is unable to grasp the meaning he strives for in Zampanò's text:

'What's the difference,' he asks, 'especially in difference, what's read what's left in what's left out what's invented what's remembered what's forgotten what's written what's found what's lost what's done? What's not done? What's the difference?'⁵⁵

Just as Holloway is unable to find any way of understanding the hallway and Truant is unable to understand Zampanò's labyrinthine manuscript, the reader is also faced with a similar dilemma. McCaffery and Gregory contend that there is no

single "sacred text" that readers can consult to determine distinctions between objective truth versus subjective interpretation (or madness or flights of fancy) or between what is meant to be taken as textually "real" versus what is imaginary or made up within this fictive reality.⁵⁶

It is this lack of ontological certainty — which manifests itself as the reader begins to question the narrator's and their own understanding of the text — that makes the novel uncanny. As Sigmund Freud contends, the "uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes."⁵⁷ The paratextual and hypertextual referents form links to both internal and external information, instigating a sense of the uncanny in the reader. The further the reader gets into the novel, the more immersed they become and, as the reader absorbs more information and begins to check the authenticity of the narrators for themselves, becoming part of the remediation, it becomes more likely that Danielewski's fictional world will cross over with their reality. This is exemplified by the way readers use the *House of Leaves* online forum, to which we shall now turn.

Like the internet, the labyrinthine network of text and hypertext forms a structure that is impossible to view from a single perspective or navigate in a linear fashion. The novel is a rhizomatic space of flows, a networked structure of both internal (e.g. hyperlinks) and external (Danielewski's sister Poe's pop album and the *House of Leaves* forum) nodes that all link to the interconnected narratives. Hayles asserts that the

⁵⁴ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 119.

⁵⁵ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, 515.

⁵⁶ McCaffery & Gregory, "Haunted House," 132-33.

⁵⁷ Freud, *The Uncanny*, 150.

“fictional house can and must be understood as a figure for the digital: it challenges techniques of orthographic recording and, by evading capture in any form, reveals the digital to be a force resistant to orthothesis as such, to be the very force of fiction itself”.⁵⁸ The protagonists’ struggles to record the house and its story are mirrored by the online discussions of readers who seek to better understand the riddles of Danielewski’s novel.

The forum was created to coincide with the release of the novel, and fourteen years since its release, it is still in use by Danielewski’s readers. There are sub-forums in nine languages, although English and French are the only two that have a significant number of posts. In the English forum there are 55,878 posts on over three and a half thousand topics.⁵⁹ Readers use the forum to discuss the text, test their own theories and interpretations, and to share reviews and other media about the novel. These topics vary greatly, some focusing on *internal* aspects of the text; for example there are many threads discussing the impact of Derrida and Barthes on Danielewski’s text and their significance in the novel, as both are directly quoted in the text. We can also observe participants discussing phenomena *external* to the text in their discourse about the novel. One reader even asserted that scientific evidence of a meteor crater underneath the fictional location of the house is corroborated in the text, though the crater itself was not known of until after the novel was released! The *House of Leaves* forum provides a communal space where readers can share their interpretations of the text in an effort to understand Danielewski’s labyrinthine text. However, the online writings do not simply help readers to understand the novel; they also create a new narrative entanglement produced by thousands of narrators. Through their online discussions the readers of *House of Leaves* cause the text to expand in new ways, making it grow just like the interior of Ash Tree Lane.

As the reader is always already part of the remediation process located within the novel’s labyrinthine structure, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the distinction between the internal and external worlds of the novel. It epitomizes what Baudrillard declares in *Simulations and Simulacra* as the end of the panoptic view, as “it becomes impossible to locate one instance of the model, of power, of the gaze, of the medium itself, because *you* are always already on the other side.”⁶⁰ It is this lack of power over space and time that causes Truant to follow Zampanò in fortifying his apartment: “I wanted a closed, inviolate and most of all *immutable* space.”⁶¹ Our absorption into the remediation process means that, just like Danielewski’s characters, we cannot have a panoptic perspective of the labyrinth or the text. Just like Slavoj Žižek’s “typical World Wide Web surfer”, the reader becomes “a monad with no direct windows onto reality, encountering only virtual simulacra, and yet immersed more than ever in a global communication network.”⁶² He can experience the text only through the layers of remediation; his perspective is always filtered through the subjectivities of Danielewski’s characters. However, he also contributes to the remediation as he projects his own personal experiences onto the narratives. A third level of remediation occurs as

⁵⁸ Hayles, “Saving the Subject,” 781.

⁵⁹ “House of Leaves forum,” Mark Z. Danielewski, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://forums.markzdanielewski.com/forum/house-of-leaves>.

⁶⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 29 (emphasis in the original).

⁶¹ Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, xix (emphasis added).

⁶² Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile, 2008), 29.

readers discuss their ideas and theories about the novel on the online forum. The reader becomes enveloped in the network of remediations, both internal and external to the novel, entering a real virtuality where the spatio-temporal dimensions of the text begin to converge with their own. Danielewski describes the relationship between the reader and the text:

I've always wanted to create scenes and scenarios that verge on the edge of specificity without crossing into identification, leaving enough room, so to speak, for the reader to participate and supply her own fears, his own anxieties, their own history and future.⁶³

It is this uncertain liminal realm — manifest only with the participation of the reader — that characterizes the space-time of the novel. Danielewski blurs the boundary between his characters and the fictional world they reside in with our own realities, experiences, and identities.

With the advent of the information age our conceptions of time and space and their impact on our lives are radically transforming. History is accessible instantly and continuously and geographical space no longer matters much to the construction of our identities, at least to those who possess the material and social resources to thrive within neoliberal, globalized late capitalism. *House of Leaves* shows how the system of real virtuality provides new space onto which to explore the uncanny and the human imagination, as the novel, like the house, is bigger on the outside than it is on the inside. Both the book and the story break out from the cover of the book and permeate the experiences of the reader. The thousands of posts on *House of Leaves* forum are testament to both the integration of the book into this wider network and the ongoing process of remediation.

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Dimensiunile spațio-temporale ale romanului *House of Leaves* [Casa frunzelor] a lui Mark Z. Danielewski: 'virtualitatea reală' și 'indiferența ontologică' ale epocii informatice

Eseul își propune să examineze romanul experimental al lui Danielewski din punctul de vedere al postmodernității, arhitecturii și a teoriei informației pentru a demonstra cum acesta exemplifică noile modalități de ordonare spațio-temporală care caracterizează societatea capitalist târzie în era digitală. Atât figura casei, cât și forma textului sugerează inutilitatea identităților fixe ale spațialității și temporalității în societatea contemporană. Casa ficțiunii conține un coridor care se lărgeste în mod constant, sfidează orice încercări de a înregistra cu acuratețe interiorul său. Inovații tipografice sunt folosite pentru a îmbina tempoul narativ cu percepția cititorilor asupra spațiului și timpului. Mai mult, forumul online unde cititorii discută textul servește ca o extindere a narațiunii în spațiul digital și exemplifică dimensiunea spațio-temporală pe care romanul o evocă. Situat în acest context putem înțelege romanul ca meditație asupra nesiguranței ontologice produse de ubicuitatea tehnologiilor digitale, întrucât nu mai suntem capabili să demarcăm limitele dintre online și offline, faptă și ficțiune, real și fantastic.