UNTHAWING THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE:

EXPERIMENTAL SPACES IN HOUSE OF LEAVES AND HOPSCOTCH

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of postmodern and hypertextual novels, literature has opened up to new forms and processes to tell different types of stories even within the same bounds of a printed book. This thesis examines two texts, *House of Leaves* by Mark Danielewski and *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortazar, as specific texts that challenge the reading process and create new meaning through their forms.

Both books are analyzed under the rhizomatic structure first proposed by theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. This theory suggests that information is transferred through disparate nodes that are only loosely connected, rather than being transferred in a hierarchical or “root” structure. When applied to a fictional story, the natural outgrowth of such a system is one with many points of view, often non-sequential, with differing points of access into the story. Also, this impacts the physical structure of the book as well.

Further, it is suggested that to comprehend such a complex system that model readers must be developed so that readers are effectively trained in the ways of the novel. The books actually use their own mediators/model readers to synthesize and demonstrate how the texts should be consumed.

With these new formats, a new meaning develops, called the third meaning. This meaning occurs beyond any written word. The reader instead experiences new values through the layout, design and juxtaposition of information in the novel.
INTRODUCTION

In a recent interview, Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos noted how book technology has remained essentially the same over its long history: “Given how much change there has been everywhere else, what’s remarkable is how stable the book has been for so long. But no technology, not even one as elegant as the book, lasts forever,” Bezos told Newsweek (Lyons 86). The book and the reading process is changing. But that change is more than just a transition from printed text to digital, but the format and design of stories within those books is also changing.

When people think of reading a novel, the habit of reading is almost an unconscious action--read from left to right, down and turn each page in a progression from front to back. Like the book itself, the fictional stories within them have remained remarkably stable in appearance, structure and narrative construction. The most familiar and typical stories consist of a first or third-person narration that invites a reader into the “world” of the book. The experience of reading a novel is typically perceived as a dictatorial process by the author, rather than a collaborative process with the reader. But as the technology to transmit books changes, the storytelling format is also changing. Cracks in the book format have been persistent and dogged. Laurence Sterne’s Tristam Shandy has characters aware of their existence in a story; William Faulkner and James Joyce pioneered “stream of consciousness” elements in their narrative structure and Thomas Pynchon’s complex textual labyrinths and sentence structure.

A book’s arrangement can be divided into three parts, according to critic Steve McCaffrey in his book, Rational Geomancy: Kids of the Book Machine. Those three parts are the linear or “lateral” flow of sentences, the vertical pile of lines one on top of another and the movement of
the reader through a set of pages (60). In this system of parts, meaning in the story is gleaned from what the sentences indicate in meaning rather than by what they physically represent.

Typically, books rely on the understood definition of words to make meaning, but some books foster meaning where others do not—in the visual, in the tactile or in the “lateral” flow and “vertical pile” of sentences. Visual elements in the text, nonlinear chapter sequences or enhanced use of footnotes change how literature is read and perceived. More books cracking the norms.

Texts that disrupt and change those established parameters encourage reader exploration into new spaces. In the new semiological status of those spaces is the potential to create new signifiers through blank pages, non-linear story breaks or unique textual layout. Through those spaces, there will be new energy and focus in trying to understand the signs. Meaning can be made and found in new places.

Gerard Genette in *Figures of Literary Discourse* says that this disruption of signs “breathes new life into the world, freeing it from the pressure of social meaning, which is a named meaning, and therefore a dead meaning” (41). Old words will have new meanings in these new book spaces, pulling the old stale signifier of textual linearity and measured line breaks into a new and ambiguous realm.

With this can of uncertain signs now open, the ability of books will be opened wider. The potential for different narrative points of view—including the readers’—possesses an exciting energy and urgency. McCaffrey says that narrative can either be “rooted in oral tradition and the typographic ‘freezing’ of speech,” the way most stories are composed, or can contain “an awareness of the page as a visual, tactile unit with its own very separate potential” (63). Within that separate potential means more freedom for both the author and reader.
Despite more textual and graphic collaborations in popular media, including the incorporation of photographs alongside text in magazines and newspapers with stories that feature jump pages, novels have remained mostly “frozen” in their typographic style. A notable exception to this is the rise of graphic novels, but those are still usually afforded a specific genre category outside the realm of “serious” or “literary fiction” in most bookstores and libraries. How to unthaw the typical narrative structure and to tap into that “separate potential” of format will be the focus of this thesis.

The structures of books must adapt due to changing circumstances in the media landscape—not only from the point of view of a physical object to an electronic one in literature, but the transition that is occurring in reading habits. Multiple forms of media have changed their format—films migrated from silent to sound, altering the way they were perceived, and also jumped into the home. Music has had several format changes—from live performance to being recorded on vinyl, 8-track, cassette tapes, CDs, digital files and back again. Television has migrated from a live experience watched in the living room to a delayed one watched on computer screens and recording devices. The book has persisted through all of these, but media influences have changed reading patterns. With those changes in other media formats, readers come to books with altered expectations for media.

Two books, *House of Leaves* by Mark Danielewski and *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortazar, exemplify some of those changes. Published in 2000, *House of Leaves* is an unnerving modern gothic novel involving a house that does not know any physical limits. Will Navidson and his partner Karen Green move into the house in Virginia, hoping to settle into a normal life. Navidson creates a film of their experiences and the book involves multiple commentaries from
outside narrators.

*House of Leaves* questions the textual surface, drawing attention to the typography and format and how those generate new meanings. With the textual surface altered from a more traditional linear format, the reader is asked or forced to make jumps and conclusions to complete the physical absences in the text. *House of Leaves* uses blank spaces to great effect, as the white space develops suspense and emphasis. The reader quickly realizes that the blank spaces and pages do not indicate the end of a thought, but the beginning of interpretation.

Originally published in 1963, *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortazar is the disjointed story of Horacio Oliveira, who tries to live every present moment as significantly as possible. He analyzes himself to wonder about every action, every moment and is interested to see how life blends into literature. Cortazar offers two different reading paths, one to be read straight through to Chapter 56, and a second option read in a non-sequential order that involves more chapters than just those original fifty-six.

Similar to *House of Leaves*, *Hopscotch* alters the reader’s expectations through its many textual paths, offering a different commentary on the characters for those readers who endeavor past the first fifty-six chapters. Meaning is not only derived from the additional chapters, but by flipping between chapters that are read in a non-sequential order.

According to McCaffrey, this process of reader assimilation into new patterns and actions previously unknown causes discomfort because it bucks against traditional reader expectations. McCaffrey asks “[i]sn’t part of the shock of typographic experiment, of unorthodox packaging, of non-habitual forms, due to the reader simply running up against his or her own conditioned responses?” (91). These books confront the conditioned response of reading by
asking the reader to take physical action within a book. Revealing new patterns for the reader is what these books do exceptionally well.

As the books unfold, it becomes apparent that these two texts challenge the space usually held by readers and the ability of the reader to think within the bounds of the novel. Readers are not only asked to think beyond how stories operate, but also how the books as machines and objects operate. The interplay between the fictional story and the physical book is a field where new meaning about stories and readers can be cultivated. These texts ask readers to recognize and complete gaps in the text in what critic Carl Malmgren calls the “paraspace.” Paraspace “consists in just those gaps of which the text space refuses to fill or to complete; the space of the reader consists in a kind of paraspace that exists ‘next to’ the text space of the fiction” (33). Those gaps can be large or small, depending on the narrative choices that border the gaps. Paraspace is commonly thought of as a method utilized in interactive fiction. Critic Andrew Gibson says that reading “no longer simply involves construction on the one hand or reading on the other, but what is called ‘browsing around’ in a given narrative environment. We can ‘fill narrative in’ both visually and aurally, choosing and adding to what is seen and heard in a given narrative space” (11). Allowing the reader to “browse around” in a fictional narrative environment constitutes interactive fiction.

These two novels use paraspace to give the reader broader spaces to fill in the gaps—whether it be in sentences with unusual spacing between words, blank pages, or the “gaps” that arise when flipping through non-sequential chapters. This new request of the reader to complete the gaps and the subsequent ability to interact within a book reinvents the way novels are consumed.
With the reader’s newfound ability to move, the reader begins to create their own version and sequence of events within the narrative story. Sentences, chapters, sections can now be regarded as a piece of a larger story that the reader patches together themselves. Critics Deleuze and Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* call this an “assemblage” or “multiciplity” of literature (4).

But the parts of this assemblage are not individual parts at all, but are instead what Deleuze and Guattari call a rhizome. They describe rhizomes as loosely connected bits that spread and evolve, that grow and move like rats or crabgrass rather than up and away like a tree (6-7). Their argument is an advocation for a Marxist-type system of government, in which there is no central hierarchy of power (a tree-like structure), but instead a state of flux depending on how people and ideas spread (the rats or crabgrass) and subject to poststructuralist ideas of open signification and meaning.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, there are “no points or position” in a rhizome but instead a seamlessly moving map that is “entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious” (12). The rhizomatic map guides and leads through new territory and experiences. In *House of Leaves* and *Hopscotch*, there are multiple points of entry, some more rhizomatic than others, but what is clear is that the ground of certainty keeps shifting beneath the characters and the readers. The books are maps, though not fully opened, so the next direction is revealed one section at a time.

The rhizomatic map becomes an assemblage that the reader stitches together with parts supplied by the author (4). Though similar to what William Burroughs did with his famous “cut-
up” method, the rhizomatic operates as if the reader is re-enacting a similar process while reading the text. Deleuze and Guattari say that Burroughs’ method implies “spiritual labor” as readers fold and unfold texts upon themselves (6). Each reader cuts and pastes parts in their own fashion, completing stories with similar parts but in different orders and functionality. In *Hopscotch*, Cortazar says in the Table of Instructions that “in its own way, this book consists of many books,” meaning that the reader can construct multiple stories. This exemplifies the rhizome, because though the points are static, they fluctuate in relationship to one another. The bits can be organized in a variety of ways, allowing the reader to construct their own sequences using the framework provided by the author.

*House of Leaves* and *Hopscotch* do not appear similar at first glance. *House of Leaves* features many different textual layouts, while initially it seems that *Hopscotch* does not possess these elements. But Cortazar asks and allows the reader to move and read in various non-sequential orders, while the layout and format of the text in *House of Leaves* also challenges the typical lateral flow of the novel. While sections may be skipped and jumped in *Hopscotch*, *House of Leaves* alters speed by only including a few lines of text on some pages or overcrowding the page in other parts, utilizing different font sizes, color and printing techniques to achieve a similar, but different “non-sequential” effect.

To discover how these texts alter narrative structure, this thesis will first examine their rhizomatic nature, pursue the idea of developing a "model reader," document the emergence of the "third meaning," consider the formatting and entry points of the novels, and evaluate the impact of these elements on the characters and reader.
RESEARCH, METHODOLOGY AND TEXTS

In both *House of Leaves* and *Hopscotch*, disjointed elements of characters, story narrative and formatting are present, as if clues to a larger story are only beginning to emerge. In *House of Leaves*, the main narrator Johnny Truant is invited to Zampano’s house by his friend Lude to view the vast amounts of notebooks and fragments of left by the loner Zampano. Zampano’s life project was an academic treatise on the Navidson family and their search for the meaning in their ever-expanding house. Katherine Hayles in *Writing Machines* refers to inscriptions upon inscriptions in the book, as each written evidence creates another layer of meaning for the reader to sort out. Similarly, *Hopscotch* releases fragments of meaning into the psyche of the main character Horacio Oliveira, a likely bipolar intrigued by Morelli, a character whose occupation is a writer and author. Morelli’s interest is in how literature and life meet in the immediacy and relevance of everyday experience. Horacio is unsettled in his life, trying to reconcile everyday existence with literary theories purported by his favorite author and mentor, Morelli.

In both books, a stable center does not exist for the characters. The dominant structures in the text (the house in *House of Leaves* and Horacio in *Hopscotch*) are floating signifiers searching for a signified—meaning flows by and through them. These books are not about characters trying to find themselves, but rather their hopeless discovery that there is no meaning where they deem meaning to be present. Will Navidson and his family did not know the history of the house they were entering, but it knew them; Horacio knew that the message and methods of Morelli were beyond him. Horacio was just a tool to try and grapple with those methods.

Like Horacio, the rhizomatic form always resists authority and proper direction, with no hierarchy or management. The breadth and depth of the rhizome emerges not in a foundational
approach, but in a horizontal takeover, like spilled water on a tabletop. Deleuze and Guattari advocate “finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other, the stems or channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their state at a given moment...without a central agency” (17).

What the authors give to the readers are loosely established boundaries within which the readers float and exist. Deleuze and Guattari says that “there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree or root. There are only lines” (8). Along this framework, the reader reads what the author has loosely bounded. In the paraspace, the reader connects their own dots, makes their own structure and essentially “writes” their own story from the necessary pieces the author has provided, hence resulting in literature as an assemblage.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, writing itself is not an ideology, but instead must involve itself in “surveying, mapping even realms that is not yet to come” (5). Quite literally, House of Leaves surveys and maps a house, noting its inconsistencies, its contradiction, its falling and expanding corridors, while making a map of family dynamics. Through Zampano, Truant, and literary critic characters, the book maps the transmission of a message. With its various in-text interpretations of meaning, Deleuze and Guattari’s point is inadvertently proven--many interpretations do not create an ideology, except to prove there is no coherent ideology.

For the rhizome cannot be completely understood, because it will never be completely composed--as Deleuze and Guattari argue, the rhizome is a map and not a tracing (12). The rhizome is not an exact representation of anything, it is only a guide to its observers because “what distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in
upon itself; it constructs the unconscious” (12). As the characters proceed in *House of Leaves* and *Hopscotch* their actions create the unconscious, unsuspecting to the characters and the reader alike. After an explorer of the Navidson house is attacked by an unseen monster in the film, the book quotes filmmaker Ken Burns as saying: “‘Nothing’s predetermined or foreseen. It’s all painfully present which is why it’s so painfully real’” (Danielewski 206). The unconscious nature of the rhizome is about the “painfully present.” The map unfolds as it is made and developed.

The reader does not know the end path, and there’s an exciting realization that the author may not know it either. But this map is constantly changing, rearranging, surprising the unconscious as to where it leads, because each reader’s unconscious will engage the guidepoints in a different way—it will morph and change along the rhizomatic. Deleuze and Guattari say that the map of the rhizomatic is “detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” and can be “adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation” (12). The rhizomatic asks for readers to reconstruct the boundaries between text, author and reader, but it does not mean that readers will accept the structure.

According to Umberto Eco, the work of artists is eventually accepted as “the inevitable process of popularization and banalization that occurs to any novelty, any original work, the moment people get used to it” (*Open Work*, 53). At this point in its lifespan, the rhizomatic structure still takes getting used to. It is a possible bridge between what is accepted and expected versus the potential inherent in the construction of the two texts.

Both books offer different directions for readers to pursue, but present them in different ways. In *Hopscotch*, Cortazar offers two different paths for readers. The first is a more linear traditional route and the second takes advantage of a rhizomatic structure in which multiple
chapters of varying length are read in a non-sequential order. They are points of demarcation that
the reader may or may not follow. Cortazar also allows the reader to construct their own order,
believing that the story of Horacio could still be told beyond the suggested orders. It is not quite
as easy (or difficult) to dive into House of Leaves in that manner, because its story is based on a
more linear progression of plot when compared to Hopscotch. Instead, the book is rhizomatic in
many different ways. Its utilization of footnotes, blank spaces between words and paragraphs,
font differentiations, and changes in narrative perspective all utilize the rhizomatic structure to
create a story about a house that is in flux.

But instead of just presenting a story about the house itself or just Horacio, both
Danielewski and Cortazar establish other characters and scenarios for the rhizomatic situations to
be explained to the reader. The reader, due to traditional reading styles and habits, may not be
accustomed to this challenging format. The authors deal with this problem by establishing in-text
mediators (or in the words of Barthes, “scriptors”) to help the reader navigate and understand the
central rhizomatic problems. Malmgren says that “the quintessential feature of narrative is that it
is mediated, that a narrative presupposes a speaker to narrate its events” (32). Every text has
some type of mediator-scriptor, whether it is an omniscient third-person narrator or a first-person
protagonist, pushing or informing the reader of story conflicts and progressions. Often, the reader
is a bystander rather than a participant in the narrative construction. But in these texts, the reader
is given space to move.

In House of Leaves, the mediators have space to speak in addition to the space given to
the reader. Malmgren refers to a space for the speaker as well as the paraspace for the reader and
in certain cases the speaker/mediator/scriptor is made known through their own enunciations that
indicate the presence and characterization of the speaker (41). According to Malmgren, the space that the speaker occupies in a text is the “discursive space” which fluctuates dependent on the “speech acts that deliberately draw attention to the enunciation and therefore tend to foreground the presence of the speaker in the story” (40). *House of Leaves* mirrors this fluctuation, often blending first and third person narratives, with main narrator/mediator Johnny Truant in the first person. He also serves as a mediator in the text, translating and interpreting Zampano. With this blending of narrative points of view, the reader is not sure which source to trust and is saturated with multiple points of view in different points of time to reveal how enduring an impact the house makes on its inhabitants and those who come into contact with its story.

Traditional or classic texts have strong speakers like Truant in *House of Leaves* that inhabit the discursive space that “keeps the distance between the speaker and the world as great as possible so as to verify the logic and sequentiality of the tale,” in a form of “privilege” above the common story (Malmgren 44). However, modern texts began abandoning the discursive space as “the whole notion of author-ity becomes suspect” (Malmgren 43). This is reflected in *House of Leaves* as Truant fact-checks and tries to reference all of Zampano’s ideas, only to discover that most of his citations do not exist, just like the *Navidson Record*. Thus, the reader is not certain of Truant and Zampano’s authorship or authority in discussing the Navidson house, as a result the “notion of author-ity” is most certainly under suspicion. Despite this lack of “author-ity,” the purpose of mediator/ascriptor functions to draw and propel the action of the story. Barthes says that leaving the ascriptor within the text is intended “to make action and affection coincide, to leave the ascriptor inside the writing--not as a psychological subject, but as agent of the action” (*Rustle*, 18).
Beyond propelling the story forward, the mediator/scriptor in these stories ultimately become “model readers” for the final reader, displaying how to read or act within these textual frameworks. Eco, in *Role of The Reader*, says authors must “assume that the ensemble of codes...is the same as that shared by his possible reader” (7). Called the “model reader,” Eco says that a reader must be trained or guided by the author to understand the codes used or to “create the competence” of the reader so that the author and reader achieve a communication between one another.

These novels invite a different type of interaction than the traditional linear text, but the books ease into their non-linear formats, establishing and gradually introducing their unique materiality. Hayles says that instead of a reader, a “user/reader” hybrid is created as that materiality “allows us to see the dynamic interactivity through which a literary work mobilizes its physical embodiment in conjunction with verbal signifiers” (130-131). Because of the freedoms given to the reader in the forms of the textual layout in Danielewski’s novel and Cortazar’s options for sequencing, movement within the novel is encouraged.

An increased awareness of the materiality in the text increases the reader’s movements inside of it as the reader becomes familiar with its setup. The author is challenging the reader to engage with the written word in a different way and both of these texts recognize the “page as a visual, tactile unit with its own very separate potential” (McCaffrey 63). And the space left for the reader is accessed in a combination of pathways. Espen Aarseth in his book *Cybertext* says that there are two forms of entry into a text, the unicursal and the multicursal. In the unicursal there is only one way through the text, whereas the multicursal multiple paths exists (Aarseth 6-7). The potential of multiple paths gives the reader’s “space,” freeing the reader to move in one
or several directions, whereas in most traditional novels, such a choice does not exist in the narrative structure.

Though both books use similar theoretical techniques in creating pathways, in practice the results differ. The multicursal pathway is stronger in Cortazar. His nonsequential ordering of chapters involves a different physical movement of the reader than Danielewski’s movement through blank pages, text formations and physical turns of the book. *House of Leaves* incorporates more of a unicursal direction, with a few roadblocks with alternate paths that eventually meet again.

In *Kids of the Book Machine*, Steve McCaffrey welcomes the divergent methods that allow movement through various pathways provided by the author. Some of these options are a combination of unicursal and multicursal, such as the use of footnotes that eventually bring the reader back to the main text. Multiple techniques encourage movement, which encourages more interaction and freedom for the reader. McCaffrey calls for “realigning the energy patterns within literature” that would involve a “a mastery of, or at least familiarity with, a multiplicity of techniques” (153-154). What McCaffrey and co-author Nichols advocate is a higher use-value of the book to reallocate reader energies and not just perceive the book as a sign/text exchange center. Their best example is the pop-up book because readers “must adopt the role of operators, workers and machine hands” (183). The reader goes from just reading to a mechanical set of operations within the text thereby changing how the word “book” is perceived. According to McCaffrey and Nichols, pop-up books “remove writing and reading from the contemplative and ideal domain and reposition them on the frontier of activity” (183). Therefore, the reader is physically as well as mentally engaged in the texts, and new meanings can emerge in this
physical experience.

Books are capable of more movement and different activities than they usually provide. Suspense is magnified in *House of Leaves* when a blank page is presented and a new understanding of Horacio’s struggle and mindset is understood when a reader chooses Cortazar’s more difficult second option in *Hopscotch*.

With different ways for the readers to perceive the mindset and situations of the character, the activity and the physical gaps of the book open up the paraspace for reader interpretation. McCaffrey says that with this new movement in a book “there is no predetermined direction” and that “writing can develop new space-time contexts related more to phenomena than to thought” (87). The direction of the movement is not important, just the fact that movement exists. With that ability to move, the reader constructs new “phenomena” outside of the written word but within the book.

These texts are an attempt to capture the elusive present--with their gaps, blank pages and moments between flipping and finding chapters. The lessons learned in the act of flipping chapters is to capture the ever-escaping present. It is the gaps, the moments of conversation, the moment of a house inexplicably opening and closing with no record of it doing so, that these books try to illustrate and explain.

Danielewski and Cortazar develop the situations and characters; the reader interacts within those situations and spaces. There is still communication, but perhaps not absolute communication, but more of a conversation between the author and reader to create an experience that only the reader and author could create together, not apart from one another. To foster communication in conversation, there is more collaboration in interactive fiction than
in traditional non-interactive fiction. The end goal in these novels is not to just tell a story, but to invent a space for the author, the characters and the readers to participate. But the physical bounds of the book restrict the reader’s movement. The author establishes the physical limits of the text, but the extrapolations beyond those physical limitations rely upon criticism and interpretation by the reader. Movement within a text is inevitable, some writers just allow more movement than others.

However, the movement has purpose. New meanings are derived from what is experienced, within the effect of something that may not be scripted. Barthes in the *The Responsibility of Forms* calls this an “obtuse meaning” or “third meaning” and specifically applies it to film. He says that the obtuse meaning cannot be “structurally situated” or necessarily identified, but rather is a “signifier without a signified” that “remains suspended between definition and approximation” (54-55). That realm “between definition and approximation” is the experience found in the gaps, the white space and the time it takes to flip through chapters. The third meaning develops outside the words of the book and the story that comes from those words. It occurs by way of the juxtaposition of visual elements, reader movement and inferred meaning. It is hard to define but important in the story’s development.

Like Barthes, Malmgren identifies a third meaning in the juxtaposition of two separate “facts” side by side. Malmgren says that John Dos Passos’ *USA* creates a new “third entity of a different nature, a mental event” with the use of the newsreel text (135). Though the meaning is beyond the text, it is implicit in the text--the reader makes and creates the conclusion that is only inferred within the text. The inferences (or “intimations”) create significations which “are purely connotative and therefore must be supplied by the reader; the text is silent in this
respect” (Malmgren 136). Silent, but very speculative and loud in its silence. The meaning is there, though unstated.

A way to think of that unstated meaning is Freud’s idea of the uncanny. He describes uncanny as part of “the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (930). The third meaning emerges in the familiar setting of words in a book, but is found in the unusual juxtaposition of words in the layout, format or order, like an uneasiness with the familiar in the uncanny. The third meaning is a “gap” between how the words are written and how the words are to be read, such as when Danielewski uses sentences spaced into a shape or a sentence written and spaced over several pages, with only a few words appearing on a page. That gap radiates an uneasiness and suspension between words in unusual circumstances.
EFFECTS OF THE RHIZOMATIC

Though *House of Leaves* and *Hopscotch* are set in their respective presents, the anxiety of historical influence looms large. It is difficult to escape the influence of the linear print structure. Common complaints from readers about these texts is that they are difficult or challenging. Similarly, the characters in these two books are plagued by their own mental illnesses, especially Horacio who may have an emerging madness that manifests itself more fully in the chapters set in Argentina. It is as if navigating the problems of their modern life mirrors handling the full weight of history behind the linear text. The texts reflect the (post)modern condition in its characters with the rhizomatic format in the construction of the texts.

The multiple paths available in the novels present a quandary of existence--how will each choice affect the present and the historical record of the present? Robert Brody in his commentary on *Hopscotch* says that Horacio is “tortured by his inability to ‘be’” (13). Horacio is constantly in a metaphysical crisis about the result and impact of being present. Capturing the present is a task characters in both novels are consumed by. Horacio wonders how to best record his existence and Navidson sets up a system of video cameras to capture his family’s every move in their new home.

In some ways, Navidson was preparing for the possibility of something grand or momentous to occur, without knowing fully if it would. He was readying himself and his family for a possible phenomenon. He thought it would be the phenomenon of a family settling down. Instead it was the phenomenon of the house settling and consuming them. Guessing how history will develop before the present occurs is what Massumi calls “predictive knowledge” (68). He says that “predictive knowledge is a myth” and that “the perpetual invention called ‘history’
paces a void of objective indeterminacy. All we can do is experimentally perturb it as we walk our life’s path, and see what comes” (68). The rhizomatic structure recognizes that multiple paths allow for multiple choices which have the potential of forming multiple histories. As Massumi says that “judgment” is “on the brink of a teeming void” (68). The “teeming void” is the vast possibility of choices, which interestingly enough is what the house in *House of Leaves* becomes.

With this “teeming void” of possibilities, there are a multiple of histories that the reader can have with the book. There is not a whole system or a closed system to the novels, but multiple systems working in their rhizomatic way. They do not grow from one another, instead they may reflect, collide, collude and sometimes even grow together, but never part of the same system.

These texts are not pure representations of the prismatic for there is a chronology to the stories that build and gestate with the scattered parts that make it an “assemblage” of various systems. The stories of how to handle an internally expanding house or a dispirited schizophrenic over-thinker are tackled through structures that mirror the problems within the story. The format reflects the divisions in the stories themselves; the medium and the message turn out to be the same. The rhizomatic occurs in both the format and in the development of the story. Both books feature disparate parts brought together in an “assembled” fashion through their formats.
HOUSE OF LEAVES

As in Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, *House of Leaves* by Mark Danielewski explores how a narrative is constructed among other texts. Utilizing the central text of the fictional film *The Navidson Record*, the book spreads from commentary on the film, with additional commentary upon commentary, even using the names of real critics with fictional quotations and references.

In *House of Leaves*, Will Navidson tries to control his house with a series of video cameras in each room to monitor his family’s movements and settling process. But Navidson learns that the house cannot be contained and that the inside is bigger than its outside dimensions. The staircases and corridors shift and expand. As Navidson explores further and further the stairs shift into new planes and dimensions, the corridors expand as Navidson’s belief in them expands. There is “growth” in the corridors, but the source of that growth cannot be shown to be one point. Sure, there is only one entry into the plane from the closet door, but that does not necessarily mean that the corridor grew from there, only that it reveals its access at different times, depending on the experience of the character. The house’s expansion always sneaks up and frightens Karen, representing her high anxiety about her family’s safety and well-being. Navidson, on the other hand, is not usually scared by the house’s expansion, but is intrigued by it. The house expands the greatest when Navidson is most confident, especially when he returns to the home alone after it takes the life of his brother, Tom. Navidson “could not stop thinking about those corridors and rooms. The house had taken hold of him” (384). The return of Navidson is mind-blowing to Zampano, who lists three intensely researched theories for Navidson’s return, which toggle from a great “possession” and “obsession” in the house and a
“‘desire’ for self destruction” (386, 388). Navidson’s obsession with the house seems more plausible, as from the beginning, it has been a mathematical problem and riddle that could not be solved.

The structure of the book itself mimics a complex problem. New planes and textual shapes take hold on the page; the page as a plane opens into other dimensions—such as “the ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). All of these form the different nodes of the rhizomatic.

Will Navidson and his wife Karen wanted the house to serve as their foundation, the root to which a more typical family life would grow. Deleuze and Guattari describe “the classical book” as a “root book” in which there is a “subjective organic interiority” (5). Like the hopes of the Navidson family, <i>House of Leaves</i> begins with what appears to be a typical root structure, and only begins to deviate once the Navidsons deviate from their plan of trying to establish a traditional family environment.

The changes in the book’s structure also reflect the unraveling of this plan. The situation of the house’s corridors question the possibility of any root-foundation structure. There is no “typical” or “simple” family life to settle into—the book upends that idea as it also upends the typical, linear structure of the book as well. Instead, the domestic structure has always been scattered or disjointed, whether it was just kept “inside” or not. In her book <i>Writing Machines</i>, Hayles calls the levels of scriptor/mediator of <i>House of Leaves</i> “The Meditation Plot” and focuses on the temporal nature of the characters and the house.

<i>House of Leaves</i> uses several different in-text mediators. Main narrator Johnny Truant
unearths the writings of Zampano which describes a film about a house owned by a man named Will Navidson and his family. These narrative points of view are complicated further by the film, *The Navidson Record*, which may or may not exist. But Navidson creates the film, Zampano describes it and Truant adds his own lengthy commentary to Zampano’s writing. Also, though in a minor role, another set of editors leaves obscure comments throughout Truant’s notes.

What is presented to each textual mediator and to the final reader are mediations upon mediations. The house itself is only a mediated myth, or fractured parts invoking psychological harm upon all of its readers, as evidenced by the death of the second mediator, Zampano. The first mediator of *House of Leaves* is the film *The Navidson Record*, the film resulting from the character Will Navidson establishing a network of cameras situated around his house. The film is what Barthes called “the scriptor inside the writing” as Navidson tries to read his own story, while simultaneously starring in it, the conflict being whether Navidson is to protect his family or to explore his continually widening house. The subsequent contracting and expanding of the house represents Navidson’s own internal struggle with his family and his career.

However, Navidson eventually succumbs to the effects of the rhizomatic. He finds “an ashblack slab upon which he is standing, now apparently supported by nothing: darkness below, above and of course darkness beyond” (464). On the next page, it is no surprise that Navidson is “slowly becoming more and more disoriented” (465), all authority in the house and story slipping away. Johnny Truant eventually succumbs to a similar madness, stripping him of his “author-ity” as well.

Navidson’s disorientation in the house and in the story manifests itself in the design of the book, as the reader tries to figure out what the blank pages, gaps, fonts and box-labyrinths of
text means. Katherine Hayles in *Writing Machines* says that “as readers enmeshed in the book, we find ourselves positioned, like Will Navidson, inside the book we read, receiving messages to be sure but also constituted by the messages that percolate through the intersecting circulatory pathways of the book called *House of Leaves*” (130). But where the book ends and where the reader begins in *House of Leaves* is not overly clear. Much like the links on a webpage, there are options for the reader to explore and then sections to which the reader may return. The effect is that the reader chooses the level of involvement they want in the story. Every part may or may not be crucial depending on the experience the reader desires. The Zampano or Truant parts and some of the text boxes can be read independently of the other sections.

For full narrative impact, the book still needs to be read from beginning to end, from front to back in a linear fashion, yet the footnotes offered by Truant and some of the graphical textual representations allow other divergent paths for the reader.

In addition to the characters in *House of Leaves* serving as mediators, Zampano and Truant also become “model readers” to the readers of the book. As readers discover the characters, they also learn about the format. *House of Leaves* introduces a few footnotes at the beginning, begins to highlight the word “house,” then extends Truant’s footnotes further and further. The footnote system is a more classic non-linear device that most readers would be familiar with, though perhaps with not so much introspection and narrative direction. It is not until about 100 pages in that Danielewski begins textual experimentation that represents the confusion the characters feel about the house.

The introduction of the footnotes and the divergent stories that Truant tells within them is representative of the multicursal. One of the elements that Aarseth identifies as a divergent
option is the footnote. Aarseth says that the footnote establishes “a bivium, or choice of expansion, but should we decide to take this path (reading the footnote), the footnote itself returns us to the main track immediately afterward” (7). The “choice of expansion” is represented in both texts, but is especially present in House of Leaves as the house opens Navidson, his brother, Tom, Reston and the Holloway team to corridor upon corridor. The “choice of expansion” becomes difficult for them to navigate--they use string and markers to find their way back, though those get disturbed by an unknown creature within the halls. It drives part of the Holloway team to sickness and Holloway to mental instability. They cannot handle the chaos and unknown of the house. Similarly, the book as a labyrinth is frustrating at points, paralyzing choice with the possibility of potentially missing meaning within the choice not taken.

The multicursal discovery process is complicated within House of Leaves because of the multiple layers of footnotes present in the text--those provided by Zampano, by Johnny Truant and then lastly by the “editors” themselves that check and fact-check Truant. The comments upon comments upon comments create a never-ending grid for which the novel to expand, each comment hoping to provide the last definitive word, that is until that last definitive word reaches the reader.

A combination of the unicursal and multicursal is at work in House of Leaves. There is an obvious stopping point (the end of the book), but also with the many footnotes and critics mentioned, research beyond the text can occur, therefore signaling a multicursal entry.

This sectioning of footnotes and stories also presents the opportunity to read in a multimodal manner, in that Zampano’s recounting of The Navidson Record can be read separately from Johnny Truant’s story, or a mixture of the two can be read for a differently
experienced story, and then the editor’s footnotes along with the exhibits and additional footnotes offer yet another story and angle on the story.

*House of Leaves* ultimately relies on the tension derived from the “is there or isn’t there” question about *The Navidson Record*. Even reading fragmented pieces of *Houses of Leaves* illustrates that the story presented is just a fraction of the whole story. All of the pieces can never be fully assembled. Zampano can never fully reconstruct the Navidsons, because he does not have the record, Truant cannot fully reconstruct Zampano because he is now dead, and the reader may never understand Truant either.

But as Navidson and Truant both become consumed with the possibilities of the text, they find themselves further alienated from their circles of support and general society. Aarseth says that the ergodic or cybertext “puts its would-be reader at risk: the risk of rejection. The effort and energy demanded by the cybertext of its reader raise the stakes of interpretation to those of intervention” (Aarseth 4). The house for Navidson, then the text for Truant becomes so compelling that they have no other choice but to act upon it, though it has a chilling effect on all their personal relationships.

Just as the reader is trying to navigate the text of what Danielewski has left, so are the central characters of the novel. Truant is trying to learn the codes of Zampano and *The Navidson Record*, as the reader learns the codes of the book. Similarly, Navidson must become a "reader" of his own house, as he attempts to figure out the codes and passages it has left for him and his family. He himself is opened to its fictive world, trying to understand how a house can be larger in the inside than the outside. What opens before Navidson in his own house is a place with very few markers and signposts in a series of contracting and expanding corridors. Likewise,
Danielewski presents the reader with a similar dilemma, opening and closing various pathways in the text for the reader to wander, while also developing Zampano and Truant as scriptor/narrators guiding themselves and the reader through the labyrinth of text that mirrors Navidson's search through the labyrinth of his house. What lies inside remains unknown.

Hayles says that “in *House of Leaves* consciousness is never seen apart from mediating inscription devices. The text emphasizes that people within the represented world--Will Navidson and Karen Green on one level, Zampano on another, and Johnny Truant on yet another--exist only because they have been recorded” (116). Johnny Truant’s fact checking of Zampano reveals no textual authority and brings awareness of the textuality of the work; it too is a fictional document only brought into being by inscription by Danielewski. Though the stories upon stories may be false, the effect of those stories is still real, as evidenced by Zampano’s madness, then Truant’s impending madness, then the effect of this text on the readers themselves. Perhaps the text does not as fully disorient readers as the house does the characters, but it changes tone and points of view through careful breaks, font changes and typography, allowing the reader to recognize the changes and alterations in the book’s makeup, just as the characters realize the changes in the house.

Inscription is an integral part of *House of Leaves* as each commentary builds upon the next commentary, and each point of view leaves a scrap of remembrance behind. From Truant being a tattoo artist to the indelible memory of Delial in Navidson’s memory, to the imprint of Zampano on *The Navidson Record*. What does it mean to “make a mark” on the text, does it bear an actual symbol or is it just curated? Truant makes a conscious effort to record notes as footnotes in his research, which transforms into a story of his life, but the text is conscious of the
fact that a character is writing, and that Zampano was writing and that Navidson, Holloway (the
cave spelunker) and Karen were all recording. Without the purported physical record, the
characters do not exist. Of course the genius in Danielewski’s’ fiction is that there is no actual/
physical record of The Navidson Record available to Truant. The film is purportedly fiction, like
the book the reader holds in their hands. But then there it is, it materially exists, inscribing itself
upon the reader. In this text, the model readers not only read, but also write the parts that must be
assembled by the reader. The characters’ dual purposes are the readers’ dual purpose also.

The only reason that the house exists is that it has been recorded, the only reason that it
effects Truant is because Zampano wrote about it, the only reason it affects Zampano is because
Navidson edited the footage. Hayles says that these further mediations go beyond a unreliable
narrator to the “Remediated Narrator, a literary invention foregrounding a proliferation of
inscription technologies that evacuate consciousness as the source of production and recover in
its place a mediated subjectivity that cannot be conceived as an independent entity” (116). Each
further “inscription” on the text (such as Karen interviewing the various literary critics) of The
Navidson Record furthers its consciousness and reach. The house is only as powerful as it seems
because of the continual act of inscription.

A curious case of this mediation process is when Navidson burns pages of a book called
House of Leaves. Just as Navidson’s life is close to ending in the caverns of the house, he begins
to read the book House of Leaves and slowly burns each page after reading (467). The possible
end of his life is reflected in the end of the book. He finishes reading the book and literally
finishes off the book with fire. His life has become the literature and Zampano relates the story to
us, via the recorder that Navidson had with him at the time. Zampano translates Navidson’s
inscriptions of the Navidson. In describing the beast that patrols the house, Hayles actually describes Navidson’s frame of mind as he thinks his life is about to end: “Representing both the interiority of psychological trauma and the exteriority of raging appetite, the beast, like the House itself, inhabits a borderland between the metaphoric and the literal, the imaginary and the real” (120). In this quote, if “beast” is replaced with “book,” Navidson confronts that very border area in his reading of House of Leaves, blurring the lines of the fictional and the real. The mediation process and the model reader process become one and the same for the reader.

The house in House of Leaves is never proven to exist by Truant nor can the video that Zampano interprets be found either, yet the idea of the house drives the whole work. Then to Zampano and Truant, the house’s existence, or the very idea of the house, has a maddening impact on the two men.

Just like the house in the story, the ideas and impact of the book House of Leaves extends beyond the time the physical book is closed. The text does not end with a conclusive stop, but a continual lingering effect. The third meaning is not derived from the actual printed text, but from the effects of the experience in the text. But the third meaning can be experienced on the micro and macro levels. On a micro level within the act of reading the book, the third meaning is delivered through the multicursal elements of the book--the footnotes, the textual interplay of differing fonts, the blank spaces and gaps within sentence construction.

These elements create a different metaphor for how the characters impact the story. An example is the box on pages 119-145 in House of Leaves. A footnote appears in a blue-outlined box in which the words printed on the right-hand page are seen again on the following left-hand page, but backwards, as if they were originally written on a window. The box identifies the idea
that pages are usually opaque, even though they are in fact one page but double sided. Hayles says that “the back of the page seems to open transparently onto the front, a notion that overruns the boundary between them and constructs the page as a leaky container rather than an unambiguous unit of print” (123). What is written in the box is a list of construction materials and other household items that are not found in the house’s corridors, defining the absence with an extremely long list of nothingness. The corridors are defined by an absence, rather than a presence. This is an interesting section of the novel, because around the omnipresent window-box, the other text begins to form a square labyrinth as if the pages are becoming a squared staircase. As the chapter ends, so does this staircase, with a black box then a white space in the shape of a square, the boundaries of the other text making a square without any lines defining the square. A presence defined by absence. Though Danielewski describes the house’s underground corridors as being vacant and void of color or fixture, this long list displays both the perceived depth of the corridors and absence. The box is a list of materials but has no defining material or meaning; it is present, but absent, like the house and the Navidson video.

According to Hayles, the box also defines the book as an object that contains only pages and scattered words. But how the words work with the object is what makes House of Leaves a challenging work. Hayles says that words, object and reader “work together to construct the book’s materiality so that it functions as a mirror to the mysterious house, reversing, reflecting and inverting its characteristics even as it foregrounds its own role as a container for the fictional universe in which such an impossible object could exist” (124). This interaction is described through the words and object and the reader’s interpretation into a new method of communication that could not be described by the presence of text alone, but in the interaction
with the text, the third meaning.

The third meaning for the reader is also created within the subsequent “absence” in *House of Leaves* and *Hopscotch*, though the form of absence takes on different shapes in the two books. For example, in chapter XX of *House of Leaves*, pages have large white spaces between paragraphs. Sometimes only a few words are written on a page. Other times the white blankness may take on a definable shape. The words in sentences are unusually spaced. The absence is a situation created by the author, but experienced in multiple ways by the reader beyond anything written on the page. In *House of Leaves* the absence manifests itself mainly in the form of white pages, blank spaces or “gaps” left by Danielewski, possibly for suspense or for intrigue or to let the reader develop their own meaning.

In addition to this third meaning, Malmgren also references the “camera eyes” implicit within Dos Passos’ *USA*, a similar trope used in *House of Leaves*. Malmgren says that the camera eye sections of *USA* “depicts a consciousness that grows from perception through reflection to evaluation” (140) and that the camera eye contains “the stringing together of associated images or impressions” (141). The field of the camera eye is what makes up *The Navidson Record*. The film is first set up as a non-threatening experiment that then chronicles bits of family and marital difficulties in the Navidson house and the adventures of the expanding house, and then is used as an evaluative tool by Karen to reveal to critics.

Danielewski is intentional in the use of “camera eyes” and its resulting flat, unbiased imagery about the state of the Navidson household. In an early description about the use of video cameras that Navidson establishes, it clearly sets a metaphor for the disjointed, gap-filled text that is to come:
“[Navidson] is not interested in showing all the coverage or attempting to capture some kind of catholic or otherwise mythical view. Instead he hunts for moments, pearls of the particular, an unexpected phone call, a burst of laughter, or some snippet of conversation which might elicit from us an emotional spark and perhaps even a bit of human understanding. More often than not, the near wordless fragments Navidson selects reveal what explication could only approximate” (10).

Beyond Dos Passos or Malmgren’s other example of textual/narrative fragmentation, Naked Lunch, Danielewski uses Zampano to react to a fragmented text: the life and times of the Navidson family. Though this may increase the readability of the text, Danielewski couches his main fictional narrative in the pseudo-rigor of an academic piece to make the changes to come much more jarring. Zampano tries to study the tape and lives of the Navidson family, while Truant reveals the impact of the house on the Navidsons, then the impact on Zampano, then the impact on himself.

The third meaning works in House of Leaves because the concept of the house is predicated on the characters and the readers of the book trying to “read” and interpret the actions of the house.

The house’s destructive effects are all that can be described, not the essence of the house itself, because it is unknown. Though wind can be interpreted but not seen, so the house is not fully seen, only interpreted. The book is similar to the house--the “gaps” realized in blank pages, typography and color are the consequences that must be interpreted.

This is the essential task of first Zampano and then Truant--to build on the scraps and remains of what is there. For these characters, the existence of the house is always in doubt. All
that is seen are “fragments” of the house--bits and pieces left in the wake of the house's force, the scraps of writing, the Navidson videos are all that is known about it. But the fragmentation extended to its logical end questions the existence of the house. If the existence becomes so fragmented, the fragments cease to exist or to even be recognized. Consequently, these fragments leave gaps in between them. They leave an incomplete picture that is open to interpretation within those gaps. As Marie Rose-Logan remarked, there is a gap between the real and virtual language. In *House of Leaves* the gaps are evident and start early. In the opening pages, Johnny Truant has to fill in and reconstruct the narrative from its own pieces. He fills in the gaps himself so to speak, describing the narrative of Zampano on multiple and different surfaces in an “endless snarl of words” that included everything from envelopes to postage stamps in fragments of varying quality (xvii). From these scraps, Truant is not sure what he has, either a “legacy of prophecy or lunacy or nothing of the kind? and in the end achieving, designating, describing, recreating--find your own words” (xvii).

The reader must “find words” to make the gaps and absences make sense. Not to say silence is not a large part of the book. The unhinging silence in cavernous corridors of the house and the creepiness associated with Zampano’s house unnerves Truant the most. As he’s trying to sort through the scraps, Truant and his friend Lude began to feel the weight of Zampano’s manuscript with its eerie qualities. They felt “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” (xvii).

Truant takes a few diversions along the way that should not necessarily be overlooked. He creates these diversions as their own type of gaps; spaces that divide attention to enrich the
power of the central narrative about the Navidson house. Danielewski, through the Truant character, makes the gaps, forces them even. After approximately 100 pages, Danielewski assumes that the reader has become accustomed to the style and tone of the writing and then disrupts the system again and then again. Using the multicursral entry points, Danielewski trusts the reader to make these jumps with the story, and if they don’t quite make it or connect so be it.

The first disruptive strategy Danielewski adopts in the story is in the footnotes running across the bottom of the page. They begin as typical footnotes but then begin to cover multiple pages (pgs. 12-16) hinting to the reader that this book is not an academic one, no matter the form. In these footnotes, the “text” of the main narrative appears on the page. In this section, the Truant character tells a story about a barge, exotic birds, and a fistfight he got into, all of it false and developed at the goading of Lude, Truant’s friend who introduces him to Zampano and The Navidson Record. Oftentimes in the retelling, Truant notes the glances and gestures between him and Lude to establish the dialogue and situation that would be in Truant’s false made-up story and sums it up by stating: “anyway, I didn’t mean to wander into all this,” before mentioning that he added the word “water” before “heater” in the main Navidson text.

That addition indicates a change in the function of the object, and after making his admission in this long footnote, Truant says that a “nerve’s been hit somewhere, but I don’t know how, why or by what,” but he says he doesn’t believe “it’s because of some crummy made-up story or a lousy (water) heater” (16). Personal asides by Truant in the larger context of the story about the Navidsons are typical in the novel. The gap between the two pages of the Navidson narrative and the Truant asides model possible connections that the reader is later asked to make.
on their own. Or at least possible connections that the reader can make on their own.

Just as the character Truant, the reader processes the words, phrases, narrative and plot of the words and story; the reader is also thinking and contemplating their own lives, thoughts, words, memories involved in the text. The white space in pages 190 to 240 prompts the reader to think, imagine, develop their own intermittent stories and memories related to those words printed, to develop their third meaning. The gaps also “pause” the narrative from continuing, allowing for reflection on what was presented. But in the example of Truant’s story, the gap is a filled gap so to speak, while in the later portions of the book, the gaps remain empty creating a suspense and tension about what will proceed.

The house in Virginia was meant as an escape for the Navidson family, but it instead revealed their own insecurities about moving forward beyond their own personal histories. Massumi’s idea of “predictive knowledge” to determine history can apply to the Navidsons. Will and Karen tried to establish the path of their careers and their families to high expectations only to realize that those lives were not meeting their expectations, i.e, their predictive knowledge that they hoped to make true did not work. The house revealed to them the impossible, the ability of the house to stretch internally beyond its own outside physical bounds. Going beyond their previously closed system into an open one, a chasm opened in the house that eventually tries to pull them in. The opening of the house shows one of Massumi’s points—that an open system is always open to possibility, and that this constant indeterminacy leads to frustration, even madness and then death.

The spelunker Holloway abandons his team and goes on an ill-fated search for the howling that haunts the corridors and eventually loses his mind and his life. But Danielewski
recognizes the odd situation of manifesting a hidden fear. The remaining image of Holloway is too great for the film to capture—”the immensity of Navidson’s house eludes the frame. It exists only in Holloway’s face, fear etc[ ] deeper and deeper into his features, the cost dying paid out with p[un]s of flesh and e[ch s]llow breath” (Danielewski 334).

Danielewski writes that Holloway is confused by the “endless contours” of the house (334). Those “endless contours” mirror the “endless contours” of the book--the book opens divergent paths just like the house that is described. Massumi says that a space can never fully capture all of the possibilities and paths of a system’s dimensions and that no system can “grasp the real indeterminacy of the everywhere-all-the-time density of the virtual, which ultimately forbids any system, however controlled, to have a whole dimensionally and entirely predictable behavior” (68). He later says that the “world is an infinite(simal)ly strange double-headed monster fractal attractor. Step lightly. Your judgments dance on the brink of a teeming void” (68). Holloway is consumed by the void, his judgments leading him to madness. Tom (Navidson’s brother) also falls into the void, his judgments more noble, but just as undetermined.

Good or bad deeds do not lead to their deaths. In House of Leaves there is no controlling the system, only containing it. Outside the house, there is no evidence that anything is amiss, but the structure of the house ultimately drives Holloway to his death. Also, Zampano’s house is normal until Truant and Lude learn of the mess once Zampano dies. Similarly, the outside of the physical object of the book House of Leaves appears normal, but once it is opened, the experience is different than reading a “normal” book.

After Holloway’s death is proven with evidence, the house acts against Will, Karen and the children once they begin to pack up their belongings. Evidence of the house’s cavernous
insides is now about to leave the premises, and the house opens itself up. It is the collapse of the
system, but the tapes serve as a “book” of sorts to the house’s existence. Perhaps it is a reaction
against being read, or being understood.

In what Barthes calls a “mad reading,” it is the “subject who rediscovers himself in his
own, individual structure: either desiring or perverse, or paranoiac, or imaginary, or neurotic--
and of course in his historical structure as well: alienated by ideology, by the routine of
codes” (Rustle 43). Because Navidson has “written” or recorded the house, it is now trapped in a
form of coded structure. Being understood outside of its own context is maddening to the house
itself, as it collapses upon itself to try and prevent it from happening--but it is has already been
written by Navidson. Understanding or “reading” the house opens it up to interpretations beyond
its control--as Barthes says: “reading is the site where structure is made hysterical” (43). The
house and Navidson both become estranged in the reading process. The same happens to
Zampano and Truant, and to a different extent, Horacio goes “mad” in trying to read and
interpret his own experiences in Hopscotch.

In addition to Navidson, Holloway serves as a narrator of sorts, having his own set of
tapes that show his demise. He also tried to transcribe the house, trying to “read” it, trying to
understand it, which ended in his death and slow descent into delusion. Barthes says that
“reading is the site where structure is made hysterical” (Rustle 43), but in the situation with
Holloway and in the suicidal condition of Horacio in Hopscotch, the characters interpreting the
structure are also made “hysterical.” This echoes Zampano’s and Johnny Truant’s retelling, as the
reverberations of madness that Holloway felt are continued to be felt beyond the space, i.e. the
“system” of the immediate house.

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With this book, Danielewski is asking if the madness of the house, i.e. the madness of reading, can be fully contained in a “system” of an object or machine like the book. In many ways, *House of Leaves* is an exciting departure from the traditional, linear narrative, but are its discombobulating effects, multiple pathways, divergent footnotes and changing typography only appropriate in demonstrating madness? Once the system of the book is opened, madness may be the only choice.
HOPSCOTCH

Though Hopscotch and House of Leaves share some of the same narrative deconstructions, the form of Hopscotch is vastly different than that in House of Leaves. But as in House of Leaves, Hopscotch takes scattered bits of narrative and makes them into a whole—or at least they are all included in the same physical book object. The central story focuses on Horacio Oliveira, a possibly bipolar protagonist who divides his time in the novel between France and Argentina. Through the course of the novel, he tries to understand the meaning of his existence, with his bifurcated nature, his despondent selves made whole only through his thought processes and literature. In the novel, Horacio is a fan of the fictional author Morelli, who is ill and is often visited by Horacio and most readily indulges Horacio in discussions about literature and existence. Morelli also has a fractured self and usually explains it in great detail. Bits of the book are told from Morelli’s perspective as a writer and a composer of stories that serve both as metafictional analysis and points for Morelli to map out the plane of his unconscious. The reader then “invents” their own story among scattered points by choosing the direction that the story will be read, either in a linear manner with chapters 1 through 56 read straight through or option two that lists the chapters non-sequentially. Santiago Colas in “Inventing Autonomies” describes Cortazar’s role as the “poet inventor” as one whose job it is to “connect,” or make “new relationships among otherwise ‘solitary’ elements” (2), but in actuality, it is the reader that is the “poet inventor.” With Hopscotch, the basic parts are provided and the reader is the inventor, the one who takes the parts and makes an “assemblage.” The reader is left with Cortazar’s insatiable whims of story--the plot is not predictable, but dispersed. The reader is privy to parts of conversation between Horacio and Morelli about the meaning of meaning, or the meaning of
literature. Horacio is either an introspective wanderer or a bitter, confused sociopath, maybe both, and it is the task given to the reader by Cortazar to connect the dots. Cortazar does not invent the connections, but merely provides the tentative framework.

As mentioned previously, the book is split into at least two possible readings, but the duality or multiple natures of an object or person are its main focus; Cortazar truly believes that “literature is an assemblage,” and thus understanding the whole among many parts is the book’s aim. *Hopscotch* is very much a story about the coming together of a person, how different elements and experiences still are contained within the person as a whole.

For all of Horacio’s constant questioning, back and forth, and confused relationship with other people, Cortazar’s style and arrangement mimics Horacio’s state of mind. The same thing could not be achieved in chronological order because then Cortazar’s technique would be altered. The characters explore multiple elements that make a person a human, such as experience and love and friendships, while understanding that none of that actually makes a person into who they think they are. In Chapter 83, Morelli is eating soup when he stops and thinks: “The soup is in me, I have it this pouch which I will never see, my stomach.’ I feel with two fingers and I touch the mass, the motion of the food there inside. And I am this, a bag with food inside of it” (Cortazar 412). He goes on to say in reference to his soup and stomach, “‘No, I am not that,’” “‘I am also that’” and “‘I am in that’” (412).

The resulting book is the process of compiling these multiple parts of self into a cohesive unit. *Hopscotch* discusses the effects of compartmentalization of the self, when identity is only recognized in the gaps, such as between the soul and the stomach full of soup. The body in this case is the plane where the rhizomatic resides. Cortazar is intrigued with the fractured self, the
many parts of self that are assumed to be whole, but in actuality have to be brought together to be made whole. An assemblage of parts. An assemblage of emotions. An assemblage of a how a self can be understood and created. Though the rhizome consists of many different parts and points, it is situated on the same plane, i.e., in the same book or in the same person.

Morelli is most aware of the fractured self within the context of pain. Perhaps pain is the splitting or the finding of the various parts, but in any case, it creates an awareness of being. Morelli says that “all pain attacks me with a double-edged sword: it makes me aware as never before of the divorce between my ego and my body (and its falseness, its consoling invention) and at the same time it brings my body close to me, dresses me in it as pain...If I could sketch I would gladly show pain chasing the soul out of the body, but at the same time I would give the impression that it’s all untrue: mere characteristics of a complex whose unity lies in not having any” (412-413). The “unity lies in not having any” aptly describes both an individual person and Hopscotch as a work.

Though the elements of the rhizomatic are separated by gaps they are unified within the same plane. This discontinuity and fractured nature of self connects the two books. All the sets of characters feel displaced or are trying to reinvent themselves into different types of people; both books display that transition in process.

The discontinuous nature of the self is further revealed and the also bears evidence in the formatting. Instead of choosing between Aarseth’s uni-cursal or multicursal paths, Cortazar offers a choice of choices: a uni-cursal or multicursal path is offered. The first option allows for a traditional reading with some evidence about Horacio withheld, or the second option lists the chapters in a non-sequential order, but with a prescribed outlined order listed in the “Table of
The choice allows for readers uncomfortable with participating in or “inventing” the story with a more standard option. These readers instead learn about Horacio’s state of mind without, in some ways, experiencing Horacio’s state of mind. Cortazar lists chapters that “can be read in a normal fashion” in a Table of Instructions along with a second order starting with chapter 73, a chapter the first choice does not even suggest. Cortazar even offers absolution for those who choose the first option to read through Chapter 56, noting that those readers can “ignore what follows with a clean conscience” (Table of Instructions). This split in many ways mirrors the central theme and problem of Horacio but it also introduces Cortazar’s formatting strategy in a non-threatening, almost genial way. Cortazar doesn’t intend to surprise, only to “model” the reading process for an experimental novel and invite readers to try out his experimental order only if they want to.

Cortazar could have listed the additional chapters in order after chapter 56, but to do so would rob the reader of the “inventive” nature of the reading process. The physicality in flipping the pages and searching for the proper chapters mimics the paranoid nature of Horacio and shows how Horacio processes information.

And in a coy maneuver, Cortazar also suggests that his two orders for reading the book may not be the best way to read the book at all. He writes that “in its own way, this book consists of many books, but two books above all” (Table of Instructions). Cortazar invites the reader to move in the book, to choose or create their own order, with assurance that the meaning of the book will still be preserved. McCaffrey in Kids of The Book Machine says that “meaningful movement depends (in non-narrative writing) on the reader’s productive role in reading. The
writer does not predetermine his work’s sequence but rather leaves the act of sequencing to the reader. The writer simply delimits the choices” (112). Freedom is granted to the reader in *Hopscotch*, because Cortazar encourages movement within his text or reader-powered narratives using the parts that Cortazar provides. What Cortazar advocates is the concept of Malmgren’s paraspace--movement within and around the space of the author, the space of the story, the space of the words themselves, empowering the reader to map out the rhizome in whatever direction they choose, rather than following the simple tracing of a designated path.

In Chapter 154, Morelli hands over his manuscript and notebook to Horacio and asks him to order and sequence it. In this circumstance, Morelli is the scriptor and becomes a model reader for Horacio to follow. When Horacio asks how he knows he is sequencing the book properly, Morelli says, “Who cares...The most I do is set it up the way I would like to reread it. And in the worst of cases, if they do make a mistake, it might just turn out perfect” (565). As Cortazar does with *Hopscotch*, an author can only take a book so far, the reader takes the rest.

In *Hopscotch* and *House of Leaves*, the multiple handoffs within the text are a metacommentary on itself, which removes the author as author, but presents the author as part of the hand-me-down process (albeit, a labor intensive process). If, as Deleuze and Guattari say, “literature is an assemblage,” then these books should come with a warning to potential readers--some assembly required. Thus, the text is not for the author, but for the reader or for a reader/author collaboration. Barthes says that the author cannot “‘return’” but comes instead “as a guest; if he is a novelist, he inscribes himself there as one of his characters, drawn as a figure in the carpet” (*Rustle* 61). It is not that the author has vacated the text, only that the author has built the text in such a fashion that the reader must cross and possibly build some of the bridge along
the way. A new freedom is created in the text for the reader to make their own mark on the text, in sequencing or parsing fragments of the narrative together.

Because the reader is empowered with the inscription and the invention process, the reader constructs their own sequential story in *Hopscotch* and physically interacts with the book in a more direct way than in *House of Leaves*. Cortazar has created a character that can really be understood through many different access points; his point is to reveal the nature and decisions of the character, which will be learned no matter from which direction the reader may come or begin. Hayles says that the books or “writing machines” that involve such physicality “connect us as readers to the interfaces, print and electronic, that transform us by reconfiguring our interactions with their materialities. Inscribing consequential fictions, writing machines reach through the inscriptions they write and that write them to re-define what it means to write, to read, and to be human.” (131) By allowing readers to “assemble” parts of the text themselves, new inscriptions take place in the reader and on the text. Just as Horacio and Navidson had transcendent metaphysical experiences as characters in a book, Hayles is saying that similar experiences can happen within a book, though it may not be implicit in the text. It is the third meaning that derives out of these physical/material experiences—the books’ own inscriptions upon its readers.

In *Hopscotch*, Cortazar uses Horacio to discuss life’s purposes and form and Morelli to discuss literature’s purposes and forms. According to Robert Brody in *Julio Cortazar: Rayuela*, the “barriers dividing life and literature” are “destroyed or, at least, removed” (35). Horacio attempts to live out the theoretical ideas of Morelli and Morelli’s literary theories are the guidepoints of the book’s rhizomatic plane. As in *House of Leaves*, the structure of the book
begins to reflect the choices of its main characters. Morelli and Horacio “feel oppressed by forms
of custom and tradition from which they seek release and, as a consequence,
authenticity” (Brody 84). The desire for freedom from this oppression is symbolized by
Cortazar’s structure breaking free of the traditional, sequential text.

Horacio and Morelli both have a “spiritual poverty” that they are trying to solve--
Horacio in his existence and Morelli in the literary arts (Brody 84). Brody calls this a “dual
quest,” one where Horacios’s path ends in insanity and Morelli’s remains on the “theoretical
level” (36). Brody says that Cortazar does not completely negate the walls and stricture of
literature, or fulfill his mission of developing “anti-literature,” where life ends up reflecting the
story. In part, Brody says that Cortazar does not go as far in his experimentation as what Morelli
calls for, who wants the boundaries between life and literature to completely fold (36).

Though Cortazar offers two paths, the second reading is essentially a footnotes version to
the first reading--the sections from the first reading provide the general plot narrative, and the
sections included in the second reading are additional commentary, but dwell more on the psyche
of Horacio and introduce Morelli. Though the path is prescribed by the author, the subsequent
chapters are numbered in a linear fashion; however, they are not to be read in the order, at least in
regard to authorial intention, as the reader moves and creates their own sequence of events.

Of course, there is nothing to physically stop the reader from reading them in that order.
In Chapter 95, the readers of Morelli thought it “laughable to try to write the kind of novel that
would do away with the logical articulations of discourse” (439). In fact, according to Espen
Aarseth, a book with no direction could put off readers because of the risk involved in
incorporating unicursal and multicursal elements within the text. The cyber or hypertext “puts its
would-be reader at risk: the risk of rejection. The effort and energy demanded by the cybertext of its reader raise the stakes of interpretation to those of intervention” (4).

The difficulty in Hopscotch is that there is no stable narrator to explain (or at least navigate) the complex arrangement of the story and text to the reader. The designated narratascriptor, Horacio, is paralyzed by his own thoughts about literature and the world. Thinking of Morelli’s ideas and texts drives Horacio towards madness, as when Holloway in House of Leaves was confronted with the complexity of the house. Thus because of Horacio, the reader is left in an awkward position. The reader must decide if Cortazar’s style (and hence Morelli’s ideas) are logical and workable and Horacio’s mental breakdown is completely separate from the style shown or if Morelli’s ideas (which are reflected in the structure of the book) cause Horacio’s breakdown.

Cortazar compares the art of writing a novel with the totality of an actual life. In Chapter 137, Morelli says that “if the volume or the tone of the work can lead one to believe that the author is attempting a sum, hasten to point out to him that he is face to face with the opposite attempt, that of an implacable subtraction” (536). Art may explain the artist, but then something is missing from the artist once the art is created. If Horacio is constantly considering his own life as art, then he eventually becomes bereft of artistry.

The cause of Horacio’s breakdown is not apparent without choosing the second reading in Hopscotch; the first gives no indication that narrative style may have caused Horacio’s breakdown, it only functions as a consequence of the action within the novel. The inclusion of Morelli’s writing and thoughts is the third unknown “path” in the book, serving a similar purpose to the Navidson video in House of Leaves. Both follow and mirror the breakdown of a subject--
Horacio and the house. Only bits and pieces of Morelli’s writings are revealed, but the character Horacio discusses them quite often, yet the full writings of Morelli are never revealed, only in fragments, like the disputed nature of *The Navidson Record*.

About halfway through the first reading option in *Hopscotch*, Horacio leaves Paris for Argentina and joins his friend Traveler and his wife Talita. In Traveler and Talita, Horacio finds a complementery pair to him and La Maga. There is a focus from Cortazar on the dualities: essentially two stories within one book with two places: Paris and Buenos Aires.

As Horacio probes life in the present, Morelli probes notions of experimental literature. Talita calls Horacio and Traveler “doppelgangers” but Brody says “Cortazar does not really make clear which self is the original and which the second. What is perfectly clear, though, is the fact that Traveler is what Horacio would have been had he not left for Buenos Aires” (39). However, Horacio and Traveler recognize the similarities between one another, but Traveler does not know about La Maga. Horacio begins to compare Talita to La Maga and eventually confuses her with La Maga.

The dualities fragment when only Horacio can see the doubling of La Maga and Talita. Brody says that the projection of La Maga on Talita by Horacio is “a projection of an imagined future” (40). This “imagined future” is one in which Horacio is reunited with La Maga. But Brody’s idea that only Horacio realizes or creates the La Maga/Talita doubling is an interesting one, similar to Navidson’s own projections onto the house. Perhaps only the house expanded because of Navidson’s fear or insecurity, becoming and manifesting itself as a realization of his own familial and career insecurity, in much the same way that Horacio projects a possible future onto Talita. Perhaps the house folds and the doubling occurs as a direct result of the insecurities
of the protagonists.

This is bolstered by Cortazar’s exclusion of chapter 55 in the second reading. In that chapter, Talita and Traveler reveal candid doubts about the mental state of Horacio and Talita tells Traveler about Horacio’s constant confusion between her and images of La Maga. That chapter, however, is included in the first order of reading. Because Horacio is excluded as a character in this chapter, it is perhaps the clearest writing from Cortazar. It also justifies the “clean conscience” approach of those readers that opted for sequence one; they know the full story of Horacio’s mental state without having to experience his mental state in the disjointed reading that results in the non-sequential reading. The order of the non-sequential reading is formatted that way as an example of the Horacio’s unstable mental health. It is an example of the third meaning emerging outside of the actual written text.

Horacio is always concerned about the present and how to document the present. In one of the more dramatic scenes, Horacio tries to explain the condition of the present to Traveler as they both hang in the balance of a wooden board stretched across the outside windows of their apartments. Instead of going down the stairs of one and up the stairs of another to deliver food, they decide to try and pass it across the gap of their apartments. As Traveler, Talita and Horacio hang outside their windows, Horacio is fascinated by what has transpired around them, the detailed movements of the housekeeper and Traveler leaving to find a Panama hat. Horacio tells Traveler that he will “tend to move in the continuum” as Horacio himself “is quite sensitive to the giddy discontinuity of existence” (266). It is the fractured nature of the present that is most interesting to Horacio, rather than the chronological continuous nature of time.

The confusion that Horacio experiences in knowing the difference between La Maga and
Talita also represents Horacio’s difficulty in comprehending the difference between dreaming and waking—or what is real and what is not real. Though Colas looks at the separation between dreaming and waking, and as Horacio and Traveler as essential foils to one another (5-6), he leaves the “mistake” between La Maga and Talita untouched. Horacio interprets his situations not as separate spaces, but as differing spaces within life—a fact that chronology or time should not be able to touch or change. Therefore, Cortazar’s strategy of non-sequential chapters may read as a disruption to some readers, but possibly as an enhancement to other readers, those like Horacio who wish not to separate their spaces but to experience and make connections across divides of experience. Essentially, Horacio is “reading” from a different book than the other characters surrounding him in Argentina. He infused his own experiences back into his life, the past became present, literature became life.

It is an accepted, though often not acknowledged, fact that novels are not usually read in a single sitting (though not to say it can’t be), which then allows for outside experiences, travels, memories to more easily creep in, compared to a movie where it is expected (because of the theater system and medium) to be consumed as a whole work in one rather similar period of time.

The two fractured existences in the life of Horacio are represented in the two different methods for reading Hopscoth. The reader can choose to read in the “continuum” of the first fifty chapters which is how Traveler thinks, or in the disoriented “discontinuity of existence” which is what the second reading in the book presents.

Brody’s idea of a “third way” is that the characters are searching for a compromise between the nature of reality and the nature of existentialism, that Horacio is uncomfortable with
either giving into the rigors of modern life or fully rejecting them for a monastic lifestyle. Brody says that “it is clear throughout the novel that Cortazar feels that we must recover the hidden dimensions of our nature, of reality itself....A monistic consciousness is certainly not the answer, nor is dualism. Rather, a third way is called for, which may be perceived with the aid of an expanded consciousness” (54). No doubt the third meaning of the “expanded consciousness” is offered, but it’s hard to say that Cortazar prescribes such a third way, since Horacio goes mad and almost kills himself. As in House of Leaves, the book’s format mirrors the character’s psyche; it represents fragments and pieces that leave gaps in the meaning. What the characters and readers do with these gaps is where the meaning develops--the third meaning in the non-linear continuation of the story.

In Hopscotch, the “gaps” are present in the flipping of pages. The non-sequential order of the pages is used to represent the scattered elements of Horacio’s mental state. For Cortazar to have put the chapters of the second reading in a particular order would have disrupted the flow and understanding of Horacio. The flipping of the pages and the finding of the appropriate chapters is meant to represent the mental state of Horacio. If Cortazar would have arranged the chapters sequentially, the obtuse or third meaning would have been lost.

Colas likens Cortazar’s chapters to an anagram, stating that the “makers of anagrams create something new by constituting a new set of relations among given elements” (3). The gap occurs in the process of discovering the anagram, the lag time between the recognition and the new invention. Morelli equates reading with invention. Colas says that “invention is the only solution to the dilemma because it takes as its point of departure not the problem of how to get from this side to the other, or vice versa, but of how to generate multiple spaces from the space in
which you find yourself” (9). Horacio admires Morelli as his favorite writer specifically because he offers Horacio a way to be autonomous beyond his own, undependable self and mind--Morelli offers Horacio a chance to be autonomous, even when his self and mind fail. His scattered, paranoid qualities find rest in the writings of Morelli, because, as Colas notes, reading allows for invention and not just representation. This is liberation for Horacio, as multiple spaces can be created in literature from the one space or situation that Horacio finds himself in.

Cortazar faces the unenviable task of trying to translate this invention into a story and onto the page, or into a series of pages as it were. Cortazar’s strategy follows Morelli’s own theory--that to read is to invent. But to physically demonstrate his point, unless some may argue about what is actually being invented in the act of reading, Cortazar “invents” another system of reading. Though his chapters are numbered chronologically, there is a suggestion to read them in a different order.

This works against common reading practices for a few reasons: 1) it balks against the conventional order of how a story should be told; a quick flip through the book would show that the chapters are indeed in order, but are they really in order? The pieces are laid bare, yet the story has to be invented from these numbered pieces; it is a large puzzle waiting to find its proper place. From the conventional angle, they are in order, but Cortazar’s differing order shows only that they are a collection of pieces, but not necessarily a whole.

In Chapter 71, labeled “Morelliana,” the character Morelli adopts the tone of the narrator and says that “everything is written these days and worth reading is oriented towards nostalgia” (387). That is a problem for Morelli because nothing is being invented, nothing new is progressing forward. Morelli goes on to say that that another world may exist, but it will not be
found by “cutting out its silhouette from the fabulous tumult of days and lives.” Cortazar hints that the new form has to be created, not just cut out from previous experiences, except that is exactly what Cortazar does with the book--uses the pieces of prior experiences to create a new experience.

Cortazar does not echo another work, he offers the reader a new experience to link seemingly disparate chapters together. If, as Morelli says, “the world is a figure it has to be read. By read let us understand generated,” then it is invented (389). Reading is not simply turning the pages; it is inventing a new order of arrangement. This arrangement involves developing a map of the unconscious, charting the peaks and valleys of the rhizomatic problem into a solution. But that solution, or the reading of the novel, will not be reached the same way each time. The novels leave quite a bit of freedom for the reader to come and go; they are structured and involve characters that can be experienced in glimpses, while the nature of the characters will still be revealed. Of course, the more that is read or invented in the books will mean a deeper experience with the characters, but there is no reason to think that the whole of the books has to be read to be understood. Instead the authors of the novels feed the reader the parts, and the reader invents and assembles their own experiences, and a true third meaning inherent only to that reader may be revealed each time.
CONCLUSION

The process of invention or reading House of Leaves and Hopscotch can be taxing and uneven to the reader. It is not unlike seeing a reflection in a mirror at a very close distance, only to blink and find that you are now standing 100 yards away. The depth of field in these books changes frequently and often without warning. Narratology, according to Marie-Laure Ryan in Narrative as Virtual Reality, is a recalibration of perspective. She says that the narrative scene can be “so intense and demanding on the imagination that it cannot be sustained for a very long time” and that “an important aspect of narrative art consists, therefore, of varying the distance, just as a sophisticated movie will vary the focal length of the camera lens” (139). If House of Leaves and Hopscotch do anything, the books vary their depth of field, shifting between various narrative perspectives, formatting elements and reader expectations. Their jumps in perspective are troubling, contemplative and often difficult. The books ask the reader to use reading skills not typically used--including juxtaposition, composition and collage--to form a picture assembled from various fragments. It is McCaffrey’s “shock of typographic experiment” meant to open the reader to new possibilities in a book.

The books are at once intimate and incredibly distant. Both use omniscience and then doubt the presence of the omniscient. Their characters are immediate and then removed to varying degrees. The layout signals shifts in tone, place and perspective. These elements reinvigorate the reader, as they must re-evaluate and reconsider their role in relation to the story, the book, and the author through the workings of the text.

Instead of adhering to one point of view, one setting, one linear narrative and conventional paragraph structure, the disruptions in these texts refocus the narrative lens, through
which the reader is kept alert to the textual surroundings. No matter the general effectiveness of
the novels at telling a story, at least the reader will be engaged by the visual elements and by the
story-telling method. If the reader enjoys or loathes the reading process is not really of issue, it is
the experience of reading, of sensing how the distance between reader and author and text
readjusts.

Just as different authors will exploit the methods mentioned in this argument in different
ways, so will different readers understand, enjoy or learn from these experimental possibilities.
But for immersion in a book, or the act of immersion to remain relevant, it not only needs
different stories, but different methods as well. Ryan in Narrative as Virtual Reality says “for
immersion to retain its intensity, it needs a contrast of narrative modes, a constantly renegotiated
distance from the narrative scene, a profile made of peaks and valleys” (137). The unevenness
felt in House of Leaves or Hopscotch is part of the immersive element of reading being
readjusted and refined. The intensity sustained. The readers’ expectations when coming to a
novel can and should change. Surprises and new challenges refresh the reading process; different
narrative and surface elements to push storytelling into different realms.

House of Leaves and Hopscotch are not perfect, these methods are not perfect. The
novels represent more of a transition from author-controlled novels to reader-controlled ones.
These formatting choices are not desirable for some authors, but the writer-reader/story
relationship needs to be tweaked and changed, or the elements of literature will slowly fade out
of relevance. Not only must the immersive element adapt, but also the form itself, as more and
more media assaults the relevance of printed literature. In the past, those changes have occurred
in style, function, setting or in the types of characters and subcultures discussed. This next
evolution into hypertext, ergodic, or non-linear texts will not be a clean break from its forebears, but will instead perpetuate pastiches and amalgams of form just as literature has done previously in varying fashion. This evolution is needed for the novel and for literature to remain and stay intense and vital. As the technology of the book shifts and changes, so will the formatting of the book and how readers consume and read it.
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