

**BA(Hons) English Dissertation**

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**Game-space: Limits and Ludology**

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## ***Introduction***

My proposition is that considering texts in the same way we might games invokes the inspection of a multitude of different spatial layers of interpretation. These layers in contemporary society are largely rendered in media as a site of conflict between reality and other worlds. The interjections of game-space into an individual's daily life is being treated as a speculative future and from this observation, the entrapment of the individual in texts is being carried out through metafictional techniques designed to promote the text as a 'real world' artefact. Game-space cannot be solely defined within the digital realm because play is never so defined as to be on or off, 1 or 0. Play, and the game-space, are analogous components that are constantly involved in the individual's relationship to the world.

“God grant me distraction” (542) is but one line hidden within the vast architecture of *House of Leaves* an architecture designed to draw the reader into an ever changing hermeneutic contest. The novel aims to distract the reader from the passivity of reading and uses metafiction to develop a hermeneutic game-space inhabited by play. Johan Huizinga's classic sociological text *Homo Ludens* defines play as “a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'.” (1949:28). *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski contains within its narrative a very approximate embodiment of this definition and it is from these allusions that we can find a beginnings to analyse the ludic nature of contemporary fiction and the dominion of play in society. Of ludology this essay will attempt to broaden the concept of study to include symbolic and spatial aspects of games and their relation to context and narrative. As a system for criticism ludology by its nature should be a subject with great investment in the understanding of spatial aesthetics and symbolism. To broach this topic the interrelations of media and game-space are foregrounded as elements complicit in the creation of cultural experience and the appropriation of symbolic meaning. By which I mean simply that from play we learn culture, and from play we learn to interpret the world differently. With reference to space, its encapsulation and division from reality, digital-media and algorithmic reproduction is in stark contrast to Euclidean physics but not too dissimilar from metaphysical realms discussed in philosophy for over a millennium. From the birth of simulation to the replication *ad infinitum* of experiential dimensions the digital game

is acting as a catalyst for cultural transitions and anxieties. Treating games as transitional phenomena in the current digital climate has become a concern of current mainstream media. The invasion of game-space into the 'ordinary life' is being foregrounded as a legitimate concern as technology is providing both a means to develop real items and a place to retreat to from the stresses of real world limitations. Described in H.o.L. by "Grunther Murphy", "Digital manipulation allows for the creation of almost anything the imagination can come up with" (144) this development of photography is exponentially more realised in immersive technologies. *House of Leaves* has its cultural roots firmly planted in the digital age. And the extensions of these symbolic themes have been appropriated by Danielewski to provide an imagining of the invasion of text into the empiric environment of the reader. The cadence of contours warps the act of reading into what can be described as a hermeneutic haptic puzzle. This layer of interactivity between text and reader is a method by which the reader becomes aware as their function as a focaliser for the story. Centralising ludic criticism around the reader and their role as players or operators of the text is a metafictional technique that creates the story as a transitional object. Something that exists as part of the self within the inner psychic reality yet is also external to it. The transition of the text between these polarities is the game-space, where rules are different from reality and disbelief can be suspended. To lay out space as a primary concern in digitally advanced simulation is to entertain the idea that the polemics of games is the acceptance of modality, that as ludologists, the implication of study is more multifaceted than action and events. In summation, the proposition is that with the advent of video-games there has been a shift in emphasis towards texts that treat the world as a receptacle item. A constant uncertainty about the limits of the 'real' world, and what may lay beyond it, has culminated in various explorations of style in printed literature. By making the reader work the book around in their hands it moves the layers of reading to transition between the inner psychic reality and the external world. These transitions are linking the psyche more deeply with the game-space and so games are becoming one of the primary drivers of culture and as such are influencing literary works with their own specific ludic nuances.

### ***House of Leaves (2000)***

The paper trail that constitutes the varying narratives of *House of Leaves* is a veritable labyrinth within itself. The self-proclaimed unreliable narrator Johnny Truant is only the

beginning of a story that plays with its role as fiction and immerses the reader in a hermeneutic riddle which can never truly be resolved. Will Navidson and his family have recently moved into a new house on Ash Tree Lane, Navidson tells us “I just want to create a record of how Karen and I bought a small house in the country and moved into it with our children. Sort of see how everything turns out. No Gunfire, famine, or flies. Just lots of toothpaste, gardening and people stuff” (8). Navidson wants to capture the gentle changes that occurs to space when it becomes tied with individuality and creativity, to watch the rooms become home. However the house has its own source of creativity, the apparition of a labyrinthine structure delving impossibly into dimensions of space from within the house. The ever expansive hallways of the Navidson house are the malevolent structure driving the creation of a film called *The Navidson Record*. The black ashen hallways change and disorient the characters entwined within their mystery, an effect mirrored through ergodic design to transition the world of the text into the reader's awareness. Presented as a collection of documents found by Johnny Truant and written by the enigmatic Zampano, the multiple narrators seem complicit in their aim to present their works as more than just fiction.

## Contemporary Ludology

In the words of Patricia Waugh “The most important feature shared by fiction and play is the construction of an alternative reality by manipulating the relation between a set of signs as 'message' and the context or frame of that message” (2003:35). She goes on to say that “all play and fiction require 'meta' levels which explain the transition from one context to another”, these meta-levels are positioned uniquely in both reality and understanding. The ontology of play is defined in spatial and semiotic borders that draw inferences from the environments and psychic landscapes conjoined to the act and existence of play. *House of Leaves* defines the artist as being forged through “seven incarnations (and six correlates) [...] “1. Explorer (courage) 2. surveyor (Vision) 3. Miner (Strength) 4. Refiner (Patience) 5 Designer (Intelligence) 6 Maker (Experience) 7. Artist” This progression is very connected to the concepts of space and creativity. The explorations of the Navidson house are always accompanied by the attempts to survey and represent space in objective terms. The artist of H.o.L. creates a world and populates it with spatial topology and refines the world through subsequent versions to express the simulation of a differing reality. Metafiction as a technique aids in turning the reader into an artist as well, exploring the structures of the text-world, surveying and mining meaning from its passages, refining their ideas and designing strategies to experience the text more fully. The game-orientated text uses semiotic space to turn the reader into the artist and so inspire a finding of the self in the semblance of a real world. To create this self-image the text must call into question areas where reality and it diverge. These junctures exist in the game-space as fictions carried out by the mind to be playful testing grounds where the self can be defined in circumstances more broad than the limited scope of reality.

Play has always been in language, word-play exists as a source of separation from the word's meaning and context. Huizinga presents riddles as competitions of knowledge deeply rooted in sacred ritual as ancient cultures realised the 'spoken word has a direct influence on the world order' (1949:105). At the heart of riddles, as with jokes, pluralities of meaning have always invited human thought. This joke from *Philogelos* transcribed circa 200-500 A.D. serves as beginnings to see the importance of studying play in narrative context:

An intellectual came to check in on a friend who was seriously ill. When the man's wife said that he had 'departed', the intellectual replied: "When he arrives back, will you tell him that I stopped by?" (Quin, 2001:70)

It is not hard to distinguish the word play in this joke and its reliance on context. Imagine yourself as the Intellectual and you can appreciate, perhaps, their misunderstanding; departed does mean 'has left'. It makes literal sense to follow the Intellectual's reasoning because the implication of 'departed', on which the joke relies, is based on its adoption as a social colloquialism for dead. In this scenario interpretive rules have been constructed; (1) imagine being the intellectual, (2) interpret the data literally, (3) interpret the data within cultural semiotics, (4) compare the differences of the two. This is the mechanic that drives the joke, it could be described as the underlying action that takes place in linguistic play. The same pattern exists in Tom's joke about the priests (See Appendix 1) and matches the words of the Pelican poems where the pelican "fragmented his friend's sense" (577). The fragmentation of sense, the dichotomy of meaning, is at the heart of jokes, the sudden realisation of a difference from real-world expectations. In the same way as any puzzle-based computer game the joke has its foundation in problem solving, it 'acts' through the semiotic wiring of the words. Waugh highlights this reasoning as a predominant metafictional concern, illustrating that metafiction focuses on the interpenetration of the contexts into the opposing level – from reality to fiction, fiction to reality. The occupation of metafiction situates its interpretation in the ludic sphere by evoking changes in the game-space's focal position. D.W. Winnicott however, sees play as "neither a matter of inner psychic reality nor a matter of external reality" (1971:129) that in "the employment of a transitional object, the first not-me possession, we are witnessing both the child's first use of a symbol and the first experience of play." (1971:130). Winnicott talks of the relation of transitional objects, as a symbolic union of mother and child, in terms of "the point in time and space of the initiation of their state of separateness" (1971:130). It is my inference here that the game exists in the same way as the transitional object, as something that is "alternatively being experienced" as a space "to be perceived rather than conceived of" (1971:130). So with the example above the moment of 'play' in the joke exists precisely at the time the



word 'departed' begins its separation from reality to fiction, or vice versa. To understand this separation, contextual cues drawn from the narrative must act as indicators towards the location of the separation, the twofold meaning of departed. The conception of the game-space in the same frame as a transitional object or phenomena imbues the allusions of space with greater affect in the digital age. As places that exist alternating between perception and thought game-spaces are in a constant process of coding and decoding within the brain, drawing from perception the possibility of physical boundaries, distance, pitch, board, screen etc... and cognitively the acceptable boundaries in play, as determined by rules, social-taboo, capacity for action and time, the game-space has the semblance of limits and yet can be possible everywhere. All decisions in the game-space are effected by the human capacity for understanding the probability of modal contingencies and relating them to real world decisions. All thought, as a function of decisions, is a space in which a game is played against the illusion of a real world.

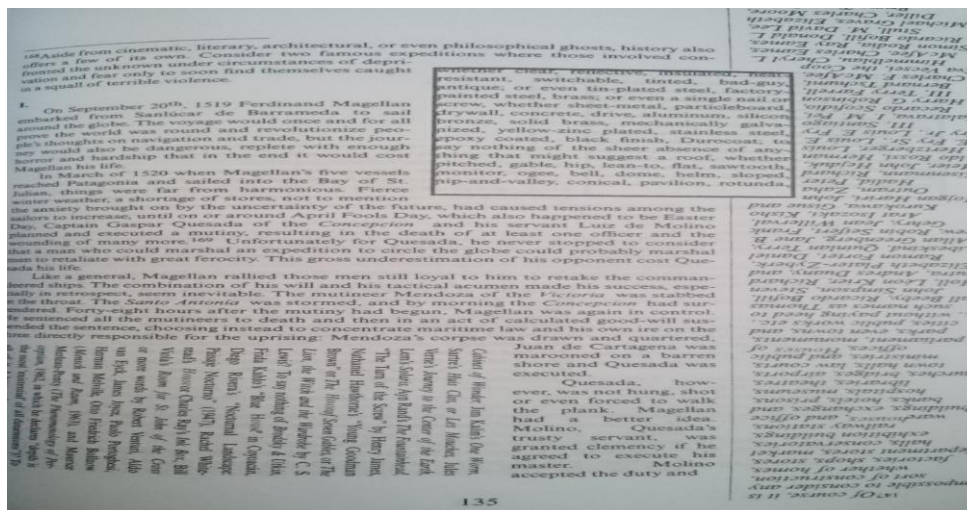
The origin of ludology, from the Latin “*Ludus*”, would include the examination of “feigning”, “taking the semblance of” and ultimately being an investigation of “the unreal, the illusory” (Huizinga 1949:35-36). The exploration of the house imitates the examination of play in its capacity to represent the illusions of game spaces. Zampano compares Jed's description of the staircase to the words of “American cavers”, one of which quoted as saying “I had the feeling that I was descending into an illusion and would soon become part of it as the distances became unrelatable and entirely unreal” (85-6). Games are receptacle items “they can't be read as texts or listened to as music, they must be played” (Aarseth In: Galloway, 2006:3) and yet the game-space incorporates into itself all the elements of the real and the illusion. Ludic interpretation may focus on how the semblance of action is itself acting and how the unreal or illusory are being represented and played with. The division of narratology and ludology as central to game creation exists in the divide between two notions, the importance of fictional context and the importance of gamic action. As mentioned earlier however the importance of fictional context is paramount to human thought, the level of realism contained within the illusory world is greatly affected by our capacity to see the *Kosmos*. In the case of Navidson his subjective illusory world can no longer be a reliable representation of the newly formed 'real' world, the hallways have irrevocably reshaped

the world he is trying to present to himself. As the conflict between the real and the illusion takes place, the illusory game-space adopts the role of reference to the conflicting reality. It is no longer the case for Navidson that he reaffirms his subjectively simulated world against the real world because the external reality has transgressed his computational ability.

Another dividing factor of the debate is the conception of narrative as a predetermined linear structure separate from the multi-linearity of games. Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern, collaborators on the digital play *Façade* explain '[Their] playable results, albeit in need of further refinement, suggest that the ludologists' assumptions about the compatibility of narrative with interaction, including the technical impossibility of generative story systems, are overreaching and premature.' (Mateas, M. and Stern, A. 2005:11). The argument made by Mateas and Stern, that narrative is capable of interaction, was a ubiquitous presence in the critical responses to *House of Leaves*. Johnny Truant writes "I couldn't care less how you read any of this. [Zampano]'s wandering passages are staying, along with all his oddly canted phrases and even some warped bits in the plot" (31) which opposes the limitations of change by implying the sequence of reading as undefined. The ever present references to other pages can either be followed immediately, forgotten, or investigated after a set goal (chapter, paragraph, sentence etc...). The story can be read in a multitude of ways and each time the responses to the text will rework connections between allusions and create a more diverse imagining within the individual.

In response to Aarseth and Galloway's definitions of action *House of leaves* evoked a different reaction than simply being 'read'. Jessica Pressman says "the book becomes a medium through which action happens, a place wherein things live, and a physical object which readers manipulate" and this process becomes playful in the eyes Kelly who relates the fact "[H.o.L.] is full of games" (Pressman, 2009. Kelly, 2000). What is seen by Galloway as a boundary texts cannot cross, the instigation of material change, has been challenged through ergodic structures creating haptically active reading. To answer Aarseth's dispute over the receptacle nature of games, the lexia presented in the H.o.L. are themselves subject to receiving change approximated by their multi-linear nature. Mateas and Stern comment that "ludologists argue narrative is fundamentally

inconsistent with interaction” and “narrative is fundamentally incompatible with agency” (2005:4). It may be the case that in traditional linear structures the levels of agency are limited in printed text because there is little that can alter the plot or events. During the late 1980s and early 1990s however there was a shift in how narratives were constructed. Agency in *House of Leaves* is a matter of following 'links' and organising the reading of sections to best construct a narrative that makes sense to the reader. There are multiple examples of this on the MZD forums, avenues of thought created by readers on their personal dissemination of information. When confronted with information displayed erratically on the page the agency is simulated in the reader's approach to disseminating the information and grafting together meaning through its design (Image 1). Part of the ludic sphere of influence must be the strategies taken by the reader in processing this information.



**Image 1. Multi-linearity in *House of Leaves* (135)**

The multiple dimensions of textual orientation and their relation to one another is a structure reminiscent of hypertext literature. Mark Bernstein writes on the importance of inter-connectivity “that Links could change point of view, enact a time shift, or hold contradictory elements in suspension. Links could suggest new formalisms, new structure, a new large-scale punctuation. Indeed, even the absence of an expected link, or the readerly effort require to decode the gap between the point of departure and the point of arrival, could prove as eloquent as a dramatic musical rest (Bolter and Joyce 1987; Joyce 1988; Harpold 1991. In: Bernstein 2004). The linking of different lexia in the

space of the page provides much needed agency within the printed novel and opens a critical analysis to “decode the gap” between the illusory world and the real. As interconnected worlds open up, the methods to analyse them are ones grounded in speculation on their divergent qualities.

### ***Game-centric criticism***

Game theory can be used in ludic literary interpretation to understand more about the events a character faces. As a critical tool, Game theory is an informatic, subjective, and ludic, system for the evaluation of a character's behaviour. Not only does its incorporation widen the interpretive arsenal available but it does so in a method very similar to the how video games themselves operate. Game theory acts similarly to the structuralist principle of semantic axes. Semantic axes, as described by Mieke Bal, are polarised divisions of characteristics like “rich-poor, or man-woman, kind-unkind, reactionary-progressive” (Bal, M. 2009:127). In the following application of game theory an approximate reading is adopted numerically rather than a polar scale or a sliding scale such as “certainly, probably, perhaps, probably not” (Bal, M. 2009:127). As in the case of a game such as *Fallout 4* (Bethesda, 2015) or *Divinity: Original Sin* (Larian Studios, 2014) probability is used to determine the outcomes of a player's action. This information is presented to players prior to any enacting and is a necessary part of the game to develop tactics and strategy, for Galloway this exists in the 'nondiegetic informatic layer' once removed from the pretend play scenario of representational character and story' (Galloway, A. 2006:14). The character in their world can be represented with a probability of success, failure, or even more complex pay-offs (see Figure.1). Including the study of game theory into criticism allows for the interpretation of the game-space that stems from the subjective illusory worlds constructed to act as reference for decisions consciously, or unconsciously, experienced.

When analysing Holloway's decision to join the expedition, within the ludic field of interpretation, a suitable method to demonstrate a narrative necessity is to consider a pay-off matrix based of prospective rewards or losses he faces in response to this event. Ideally this construct will better inform us of the state of Holloway's illusory game-world and provide a better understanding of the how he has interpreted the real world of the novel. Holloway can expect fame if he accepts the invitation and he can expect a

continuance of the norm if he refuses, yet each outcome carries the potentiality of death. By presenting the tensions as numeric values, and interpreting them accordingly, a more detailed analysis of Holloway's gamic action may take place. For example; we can speculate that being famous is a desirable outcome and may be valued at 60, being non-famous is a less desirable state so we may suggest perhaps 40 as an acceptable reciprocal value; life is desirable so we may value it at 80. Considering Holloway's inability "to see how much he has already accomplished" and that "he constantly dwells on suicide." (328), we may infer some desire for death and as well reaffirm the importance of fame or success in Holloway's mind. Simply imagined his pay-off matrix is as follows;

	Outcome 1	Outcome 2
Join expedition	(50%): Fame (60) & Life (80)	(50%): Fame (60) & Death (20)
Refuse invitation	(90%): Non-fame (40) & Life (80)	(10%): Non-fame (40) & Death (20),

**Figure 1. Holloway's decision matrix.**

By incorporating probability estimates into this matrix the data can be read as follows; given a 50/50 chance of either outcome when entering the labyrinth in the Navidson house. Holloway nominally averages a pay-off of 110:  $(60+80+60+20)*0.5$  . In contrast, given the unlikely event of his death as a result of not entering the hallway, the division between outcome 1 and 2 becomes lopsided in favour of outcome one, this weighting provides the result 114:  $(40+80)*0.9 + (40+20)*0.1$ . As it stands it would provide Holloway with the highest average pay-off if he were to refuse the invitation to the exploration and continue with his life as per usual. This game theory model has deemed Holloway to be making a bad decision, or perhaps the model itself is not yet complete. As mentioned previously the context of the action is something that is necessary for ludic interpretation. Already Holloway's suicidal nature has been attributed as a factor in play, but his experience and skills are something that has been missed out. As an experienced outdoorsman Holloway may feel his odds of survival are better than 50/50, whether objectively true or not. Adjusting Figure 1. to suggest Holloway believes his chances of survival to be just 7% better than even alters the pay-off of joining the expedition to the higher value of 114.2:  $(60+80)*0.57 + (60+20)*0.43$ . In the process of adding further context to a reading of an event the decisions made take on new meaning.

Instead of viewing Holloway's decision as bad, the emphasis is that we can understand his decision better based on information provided in the context of his life. This structuralist interpretation of the text helps discern certain understandings of the text's environment and provide a brief insight into Holloway's understanding of the world about him. To suggest that a life or death situation hinged on a 7% change in perspective is a uniquely ludic vision of a decision. Choices are a necessity to games, at the heart of each action and event is the choice made by the individual. Even with life at stake there is still an element of play that exists and overrides the seriousness of the situation.

## **Ubiquitous play**

The film *Alien* (1979), by Ridley Scott, depicts a creature that enjoys no time for play, its relentless pursuits are carried out with the utmost seriousness. The concepts of politics, trade, and war, are non-existent to the alien as life exists only in the way it survives and reproduces itself. The creature adopts no further reflection on representations of the world but focuses solely on the world as it is, as it is perceived and not conceived. Huizinga says 'we find play as a given magnitude existing before culture itself existed, [...] we find play present everywhere as a well-defined quality of action which is different from "ordinary" life' (1949:4). Our detachment from the single-minded ideology of the alien serves as a reminder of the time spent in pursuits that are not fundamental to serious activities. Play is only ever an illusion or a distraction from the real. In play, however, is the only 'space' D.W. Winnicott feels "the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self"(1971:73). Wherever the self is defined there must always be a reciprocal creating of the world the individual experiences, the spread of immersion technologies is developing the fictional world as something capable of impacting reality. As play becomes more ominous in this respect, its relation to people is being represented as a site of tension and danger: To be trapped in a simulation of a world forever cut off from the space of the real is a popular fascination of the manga or anime artist. In *Sword Art Online* the perceived reality of the game cannot be retreated from, instead the game-space, the interaction between perception and cognition, is not compared to the external world but to a digitally created illusion. For Zampano, the creator of the fiction, Johnny Truant submits that he is "incarcerated" by his own

creation. “[Zampano] tries to escape his invention but never succeeds because for whatever reason, he is compelled, day and night, week after week, month after month, to continue building the very thing responsible for his incarceration” (337). The space of play is changing with the advent of augmented reality and the borders connecting the digital to the real are merging closer together. Zampano expresses this fear by saying “Strangely then, the best argument for fact is the absolute unaffordability of fiction. Thus it would appear the ghost haunting *The Navidson Record*, continually bashing against the door, is the recurring threat of its own reality” (149). The escape of game-space into reality is enforced by the ubiquity of its presence; play can occur anywhere at any time, play can begin in play, can exist as performances such as gender or identity, and can be movement in space, such as dance, or transitions in meaning as riddle or joke. Play exists in potential and reality, it is mimesis and artifice, aestheticism and pragmatism, secret, mysterious, and yet ostentatious and spectacular. The omnipresent availability of play is inextricably linked with the hallways and thus, by association, topographical issues of play:

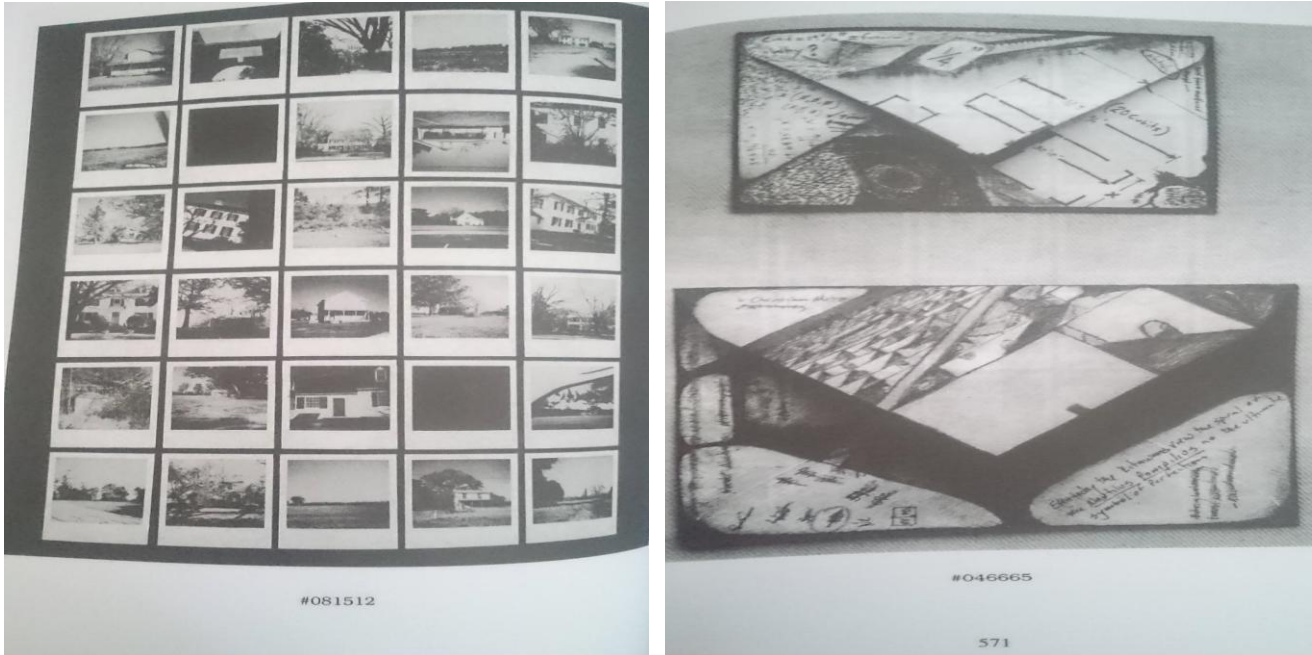
“Come play with me daddy.”  
Navidson lifts his daughter onto his lap.  
“Okay. What do you want to play?”  
“I don’t know,” she shrugs. “Always.”  
“What’s always?”  
[...] no one has ever commented on the game Daisy wants to play with her father, perhaps because everyone assumes it is either a request “to play always” or just a childish neologism.  
Then again, “always” slightly mispronounces “hallways.”  
It also echoes it. (73)

### ***Text-world topology***

H.o.L. challenges the extradiegetic concept by exploring the roles of footnotes, appendices and even “Possible Chapter Titles” to *The Navidson Record*. The addition of this information develops multiple layers of meaning on the Navidson's story. The availability of extradiegetic resources on texts, films and games seemingly creates a more complete scope of rhizomatic hypertext representation. Given “[H.o.L.'s] narcissistic preoccupation with its own status as fictive art” (Lord, N. 2014:1) the indepth creation of multiple subjective worlds addresses the fictive narratives we construct to ourselves. The

illusory game-space from which, and of which, these narratives exist can be transferred between realms of the psyche to different effect. Cutaneous engagement with the pages, the use of colours, musical score and braille, make the book a very sensory external experience. The complex topology of H.o.L.'s riddle, in relation to the space in which interpretive action occurs, promotes the physicality of the world. H.o.L. Is in essence telling the reader to examine their environment, make note of things they may have forgotten or not noticed, move things, feel them and in doing so come to realise the interplay between expectation and experience. The drive towards realism, or realisticness, is similar to the human endeavour to create a functioning illusory space in which to play out expectations, or fantasies, of reality. These illusions, whilst functioning as a potential reality for interpretation, are not limited by the plausible or the rational. A subtle catalyst is the beginning of the House's infringement on the Navidson's world. The halls themselves are neither rational nor plausible and yet the structure of them exists. "Jennifer Antipala. Architect & Structural Engineer" questions the nature of the halls "that place, beyond dimension, impossibly high, deep, wide - what kind of foundation is it sitting on? And if it's not, I mean if it's like a planet, surrounded by space, then its mass is still great enough it's gonna have a lot of gravity, driving it all inward, and what kind of material then at its core could support all that?" (355). Objects in digital landscapes are given attributes symbolic of their mass, size, and dimensions, though these objects externally exist only as pixelated representations of their signified. In literature Waugh focuses on metafiction as it demarcates literary conventions and explores "fictional rules to discover the role of fiction in life" (2003:35) this exploration of fiction is in effect the same exploration of the game-space as a fiction representing life. The process of object definition can be read through Waugh's review of *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965) by Samuel Beckett. She ventures that "poetic descriptions are no longer valid" and the substitution of mathematics, in Beckett's work, reduces the world to variations of alignments. H.o.L. utilises both meaning and scientific reasoning into to unify the text-world and real-world as similar structures, even so far as the images contained in "Sketches & Polaroids" (568-572).





***Image 2. Photos and Sketches. (571-2)***

To return to the consideration of Holloway's decision (Figure 1) the similarity between Game theory and reasoning lies in their structuring of a world based on predictable equations. Zampano writes “At 68 degrees Fahrenheit sound travels at approximately 1,130ft per second. A reflective surface must stand at least 56 1/2ft away in order for a person to detect the doubling of her voice.<sup>64</sup>” (50). The connection between equations and understanding highlights the focus on objective knowledge in contemporary culture. The technological reproduction of reality must always contain information attached to each and every object inhabiting it. One level of interpretation may suggest that the post-production inclusions of peritext simulate the world as digital, not truly metafictional, as it is drawing focus to the world as real. Allowing the incorporation of footnotes into the peritext of a novel suggests an informatic layer as a key part to understanding the story. Layering an entire narrative, extensive index, a collection of poems and letters within the peritext foregrounds the connection of the text to an external world. A world of informatics brought into a direct association with the work by its approximation upon the space designated for the representation of the text's 'real' world.

### ***Centralising game-space***

To see games as fundamentally part of digital culture sheds on them the same thematic concerns prevalent in contemporary literary criticism. Criticisms focused on issues of digital culture are often, ironically, centered on topology. As seen through the eyes of George Landow, among other critics, the conceptualisation of space is one of the revolutions of understanding that come with the rhizomatic structures of information. Lev Manovich writes in relation to the digital environment, ‘if there is a new rhetoric or aesthetic possible here, it may have less to do with the ordering of time by a writer or an orator, and more to do with spatial wandering’ (*The Language of New Media*, MIT Press, 2001:78). Manovich's term wandering draws its own allusion to adventure, play, and exploration through its connection to wanderlust. Bernstein suggests “Interactive fictions tend to be spatial; the implicit narrative of Adventure and Myst is one of travel and discovery (Jenkins and Fully 1994)”, H.o.L. makes an unreliable connection to Myst through Johnny Truant's comment in footnote 203 “[ see Chad; p. 99.]” (167). The passage in question reads “Time passes. There are long conversations, there are long silences.[...] Sometimes one reads aloud to Daisy<sup>111</sup> while the other assists Chad with some role-playing game on the family computer.<sup>115</sup>” which again delves into the peritext and to inhabit the reader's inner world with information that can be easily referenced to the external, “<sup>115</sup> See Corning Qureshy's essay “D & D, *Myst*, and other future paths” in *MIND GAMES* [...] [http://cdip.ucsd.edu/;](http://cdip.ucsd.edu/)” . The book in this instance has traversed the site of interpretation by sending the reader back 68 pages, then down into the footnotes and further to check the internet for the real site in question. The fact that “The requested URL /; was not found on this server” only acknowledges that the centre of the game-space has been experienced beyond the artifact of the text. A reader could understandably see in their representation of reality the potential that Danielewski has quoted a real source. So the situation of the game can be seen to have moved away from the text into the real world and returned to it once more, a micro journey that is replayed extensively throughout the novel. These excursions from the text paradoxically do not set the text as a fictional artifact, it presents the text as a transitional object entwined with the external world.

Travel can be simplified to an “alternation of going away and coming back” (Bollnow, O. F. 1963:56) Wanders through space, as Otto Friedrich Bollnow comments in *Human Space*, are inextricably linked with human concepts of 'going from' and 'returning to' places where a person feels is 'home'.

Every house is an architecturally structured “path”: the specific possibilities of movement and drives toward movement as one proceeds from the entrance through the sequence of spatial entities have been pre-determined by the architectural structuring of that space and one experiences the space accordingly. But at the same time, in its relation to the surrounding space, it is a “goal”, and we either advance towards this goal or depart from it  
(House of Leaves. 2000:153)

A concentric perspective of space, and spatial borders, layers reality with definitions of location, direction and limitation either measured objectively or figured in subjective simulation. The game-space acts as an “architecturally structured” reproduction of space and as “architecture is always a reflection of the psychological make-up of the human subject.”(Hendrix, J. In: Lord, N. 2014:1) it is a place where, through creativity, “the individual discovers the self” (Winnicott, 1971:73). By approximating a reality based on subjectivity the world consists of ever changing goals, or desires (Objet petit a) leading the individual to struggle against the chaotic natures of their own drives and ambitions. As Karen finds “the compass refuses to settle on any one direction inside the house” (90) there is an inability to centre the world, or the self, inside the house, the goal remains indefinable. As much as the inference is that the hallway exists in a space 'going from' the house it must also be considered to be rooms contained within the structure of the house. So as Navidson may experience it, the house may be a branch on an infinitely large structure or it may be the centre from which an infinitely large structure expands. The position of the halls mirrors the position of illusory elements in relation to reality. They seemingly expand from a singular point, the mind or the doorway, and yet never leave the space they are confined within. The potential centre of the story transitions from house, to character, to reader, and in doing so centres the action, or interactivity, from the imagination to the external world. But in response to these interactions between the fiction and the external world Johnny Truant memorably writes “See, the irony is it makes no difference that the documentary at the heart of this

book is fiction” (xx) as the weight of these transitions cause effect regardless of the fictional centre. Attempting to centralise the game-space in this fashion highlights that the game exists in whatever layer the mind is currently engaged in, the alternation between perception and cognition or imagination and reality, moves the central focus of the game-space on a spectrum of interpretive relevance. The 'centre' of the game is the position in which the player, or reader, is currently engaged with, the space external to that remains a potential site focused on and forgotten in response to the interaction of the player with the game or text.

### ***Proliferation of algorithmic areas***

The game *No Man's Sky* (Hello Games, 2016) boasts an unbelievable 18 quintillion worlds to explore, a number so vast that it is beyond the realm of realistic human endeavour to ever truly 'visit' them all. Unlike the human concepts of an ever expanding succession of finite spaces, digital-reality is produced as and when needed, space in computer terms exists in the realm of possibilities and algorithms. Similarly the algorithmic expansion of the house seems endless, yet the house's horrors may also have been “merely manifestations of [Navidson's] troubled psyche. Dr. Iben Van Pollit in his book *The Incident* claims the entire house is a physical incarnation of Navidson's internal pain.” (21). What strives to be continuity is accordance to the real, simulations of gravity, of light and shade, day and night, all populate the incarnation of game-space inside the psyche. The inner-space must mimic the space external to itself so as to be a reference for change and a source of fantasy. The game mechanic that defies traditional reality too soon loses affect, it never forces the player to process the 'feigning' of the real and thus causes no “state of separateness”. The hallway that appears in *The Navidson Record* begins first as a real space in the eyes of Will and Karen, perceived as an oddity to their known world. However as the halls stretch beyond the Navidson's perceived continuity of reality the family is displaced by the semblance of hallucination. Yet there is no hallucination, the reality they are used to has been irrecoverably changed to include a mimesis of both the unreal and the real. There exists the potential for a symbolic merging of the real with the simulacra. To further present this communion the association between the endless precession of simulacra and the endless creation of algorithms must be noted.

Of this relationship the 'technological reproductibility' explored by Walter Benjamin (1973) proposes that the endless replication confounds notions of art centred on uniqueness. Simulations according to Baudrillard replace the real and digital simulations may proliferate exponentially in potential space. The interplay of simulated spaces and real spaces are juxtaposed by the way in which the space itself is treated by the human psyche.

In terms of age the digital landscape is much younger than the printed book and is still newly interacting with space in its own specific way. Rather than being constrained to the voids that make up margins the digital webpage contains many areas of content designed to advertise. Largely there is a lack of space as the aesthetics of emptiness is something that is becoming absent in digital environments. The ambiguous source referred to as “[U]” writes that “youth always tries to fill the void, an old man learns to live with it”(546-547), perhaps alluding to a fundamental difference in printed and digital design strategies and the human response to it. Algorithms define the contents of space in a way very different to how space has been considered in human thought. Bollnow, in his description of the German word *Raum*, comes to some interesting conclusions of space as being something made by 'hollowing out'. A forest may be hollowed to make space for a settlement but in digital worlds a space is instead filled with elements which are stored in metadata. Initially a canvass of predetermined size ceases to not exist, this newly-born space is then coated with textures appropriate to its representational objects, these objects are surrounded by collision boxes, and these boxes may be transient or absolute in terms of character interaction or movement. The filling of digital game-space is not a hollowing out of a space to make way for developments but the expanding of representation from numbers to pixels, a better visual sense of the signified. The house on Ash Tree Lane expands an unreality within its structure that reduces the availability of sensory perception. The absence of real-world stimuli closes the mind in representations without substance. Yet when these representations can transition within the individual from illusion to fully sensually realised items the game-space becomes a site that is capable of embodying fully any human desire. The limitations of reality are dwarfed by the house, “God's a house. Which is not to say that our house is God's house or even a house of God. What I mean to say is that our house is God.” (390). The genesis of digital environments

is the birth of simulation, the first instance of creation is a reference of direction. As soon as a dimension is summoned into existence space can be said to exist, and as it exists it can be partitioned to include things. The potential space of the house expands from a ¼ inch onwards to a vast architecture transcending the environment of the house and reproducing itself according to some unknown algorithmic equation. This juxtaposition of mathematics and religion is brought together in H.o.L “as science writer and sometime theologian David Conte wrote: “God for all intents and purposes is an equal sign, and at least up until now, something humanity has always been able to believe in is that the universe adds up” (32). Making sense of the universe as following some grand design involves the progression of entropy an inescapable aspect of this design. The universe in the Navidson house has partitioned a space in which entropy is foregrounded in the disintegration of items distanced from the central human perspective. The objects that exist in game spaces are transitory, remembered and forgotten over and over again or, with a simple edit, changed throughout all reckonings of the game world. It is surely then a product of human experience in digital environments that objects and reality are functions which need to be repeatedly reasserted in a symbolic reference to each other. The boundary of play as Huizinga posits is 'apart from the ordinary' and yet in this formation the play environments are being constantly compared to normative reality. Navidson's problem with the labyrinth is its position in relation to the normal definition of real he has experienced. Bal's association between focaliser and space is that “places are linked to certain points of perception” and it is their relation to perception that constitutes the story's space. In this instance Navidson is the “point of perception” and his observations and reactions to the space are in following with a certain type of rational thinking (2009:136). The inclusion of investigative work, leading to the “incontrovertible facts” (370-371), highlights the necessity to compare unreal spaces to a system of values fitting to reality. Karen's attempts to use a compass (90) and Navidson's attempts to measure the age of the samples (378) are ways of limiting the dimensions of space, and time, into fragments drawn from human thought. Navidson's view is that the space and contents of the halls must conform to his understanding of spatial creation, they, in essence, must be relative to some familiar scope of reference. Yet as described earlier, games such as *No Man's Sky* go beyond any fathomable imagination of human reference.

This sense of endlessness is a by-product of the algorithmic nature of games and their ability to sequentially or randomly select variables from which to develop more and more content. So in ludic understanding, the space of the Navidson house is merely a canvass being filled with information as and when needed, the scope of creation never further than the horizons of the individual at its centre.

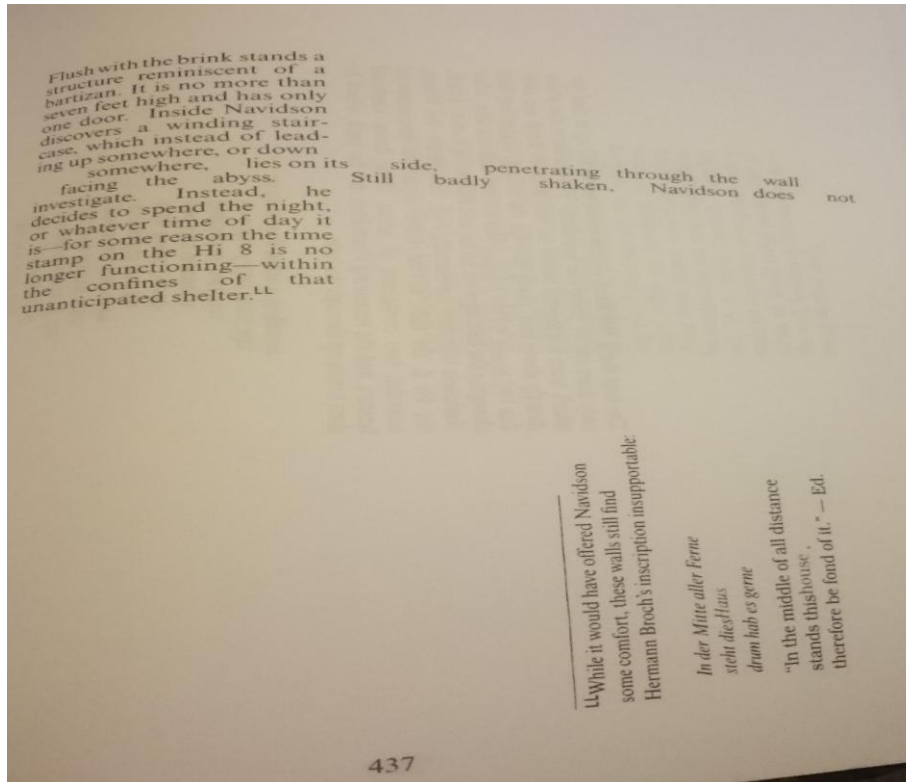
### ***Invasion of the unreal***

A recent trend in media has spawned works in which the digital occupies the same relevance as reality as mentioned earlier programmes such as *Digimon* and *Sword Art Online* incorporate the 'unreal' simulations of life as life proper. The shows foreground the role of digital simulations within the borders of cultural thought. Interchangeably the role of invader is played by humans or 'others' violating the borders of simulation and interjecting themselves on the worlds foreign to their origin. The Navidson house is both invaded and invader, the eventual influence of the black-ashen walls contaminates the borders of the home with unreal space, reality collapses around them as “we watch the ceiling turn from white to ash-black and drop”(341). The psychological influence this has is echoed by Karen's fear of “confronting dark, enclosed spaces, usually windowless and unknown” her attacks were “characterised by (1) accelerated heart rate [...] (8) derealization (feelings of unreality) and eventual depersonalization (being detached from oneself) (9) culmination in an intense fear of dying.” (59). As with the definition provided earlier the digital creates space through a means of expansion rather than of hollowing. The house reacts to Tom in a paradoxical way, the conveyor-like behaviour is drawing to its centre the contents surrounding it. However at its border there must be a singularity from which more ashen-floor is being produced, a layer of potential space that expands material into the world of the book. Concentrically envisioned the unreal space bordered the real, an unreal space can only ever remain outside of the real in much the same way that David Lewis envisioned parallel worlds theory. Interpretations of potential space have circulated in Western philosophy since at least the time of Anaximander who envisioned a place which gave all things their origin and yet had no origin of its own, he termed this *apeiron* or “that which has no boundaries” (Couprie, D. 2003). Given that there must exist a boundless potential space, capable of spawning an entire universe from a singular point, the structure of the house elicits a personification of a space beyond the

reader's capacity to hollow out. The expansion of the boundless structure of the house replicates the algorithmic qualities of formulas derived from a Mandelbrot set. The plotting of a space that endlessly expands and contracts concentrically appears as a metaphoric representation of the human occupation with bordering zones.

The world of a game can be represented in either two or three dimensions but, until recently, was confined as simulations represented on a two dimensional screen. The world of a book however represents no dimensions of the character's world and so the architecture of the impossible halls are able to be represented in ways beyond human spatial understanding. *House of leaves* breaks norms by applying ergodic formations, the book develops its ekphrastic space to aid the reader in feeling the contours of the house as they break the continuity of real spaces (425-466, 469-477). Breaking the continuity of borders is something that H.o.L. enacts through the process of causing effect in the reader's ability to perceive information on the page. Forcing the reader's hand, as it were, to manipulate the space around them brings the text's world outside of a representation and into an event in the real world.



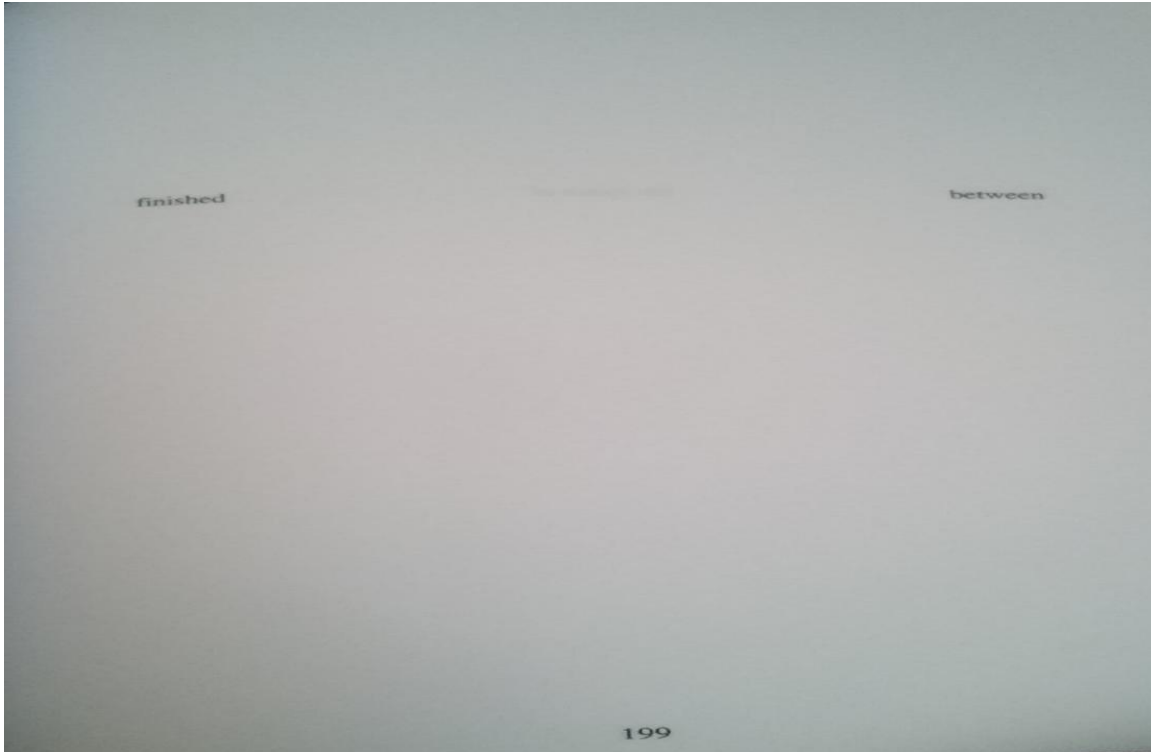


**Image 3. Breaking symbolic borders (437)**

### *Senses of space*

*House of Leaves* creates a haptic engagement through which the empiric environment plays a part in literary interpretation. As defined earlier the game-space not only exists internally but the external items figure as much in the interpretive process. Conventions, such as being read left to right and top to bottom exist in the game-space as rules for how reading should be performed. H.o.L. breaks these conventions to force the reader to be more assertive in their quest for understanding. The reader has to manipulate and force the book through movement to relinquish its story in the way we are accustomed. Resisting the passivity of reading adds a deeper cutaneous quality to the work, the work becomes something that is the centre of sensory awareness. This focus represents the text as an item whilst engrossing the reader deeper within the riddles of space. *House of Leaves*' self-awareness and subsequent appearance in the text highlights that novel as an item that each individual reacts to and alters physically. Johnny Truant notices "In a few of the margins, there were even some pretty stunning personal riffs about the lives of the musicians themselves." (514). The structure of the book is changing

physically each time it is read, the novel is never physically complete, it is always restructuring itself in the hands of the reader. The physical changes created by readers can lead to new understanding of the text just as “[Johnny Truant] transcribed without ever detecting” “the encoded appearance of Thamyris on page 387” (514). Events are taking place within the reader's environment, and that of the text, bringing the process of interpretation from the internal structural formations of the text to 'real space'. The correlation between physicality, tactility, and the real, are visited by H.o.L.'s explorations of ergodic structure. The act of reading becomes an 'ostentatious spectacle' that can be viewed, H.o.L.'s symbolic movement lies not only in its performative active function but also in its 'ostentatious typography' (Lord, N. 2014). The clear metafictional quality of the novel creates a haptic awareness of the text as a material object in the real world. As the reader's physical borders are challenged by the structure of the text and its defiance of linearity. The book becomes a transitional object that stands for the reality of the world represented in the pages, and ties the reader's 'inner psychic reality' and external world. D.W. Winnicott talks of the transitional object as something that does not come from without “neither does it come from within; it is not a hallucination” (1971:7). The transition of the world within the book to a position that is not hallucination, or imagination, but rather a physical structure within the reader's hands leverages the fourth wall to create a merging of the text space and the reader's space. Reader interaction is foregrounded in the decision to struggle visually with the words or to effect a change to their spatial perception of the text by rotation, mirroring or transposing passages (120-148). The physical sensation of turning the book, puzzling over it and coming to a sense of satisfactory understanding is not limited subjectively or even simply to the xyz dimensions. Temporal boundaries are crossed that condense or expand time in methods designed to frustrate or 'lag' the reader. The transcript of “Reel 10: Frames 194 [...]205” (194-205) uses this temporal dimension by allocating only short sentences or even fragmented words to each individual page. The density of focus is a complete juxtaposition to the sparseness of content, the effect of the text acquires meaning relative to the space it inhabits and the time it takes to process the meaning. The distances between words on the page make the reader aware of space and the physical absence of symbols on the page.



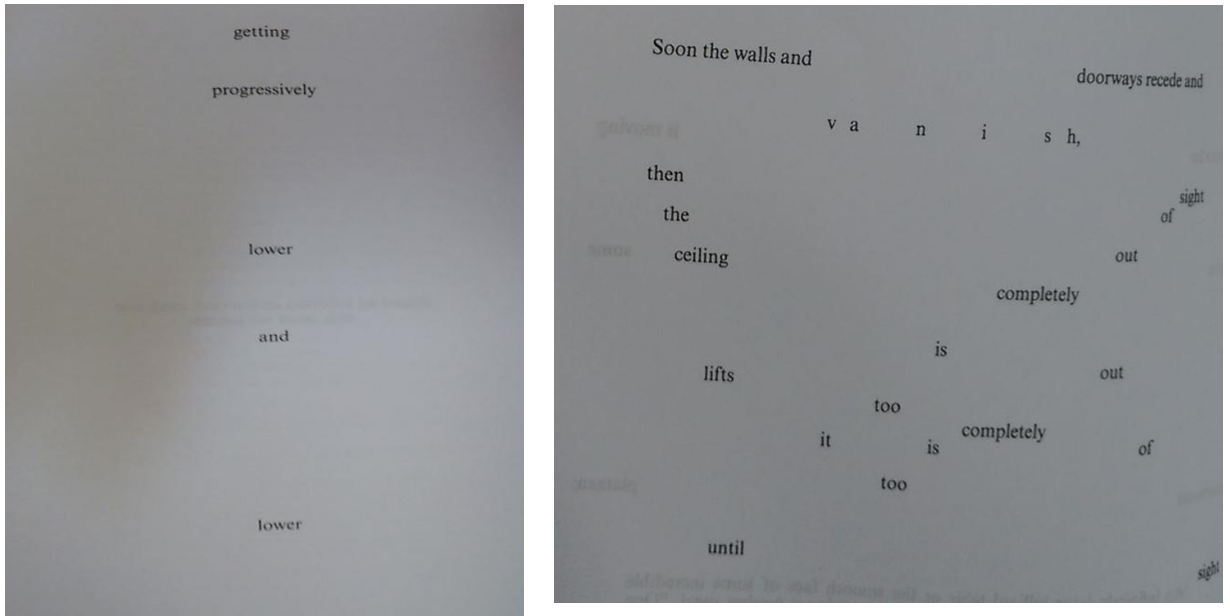
*Image 4. Awareness of physical space (199)*

### ***Hermeneutic spaces***

In keeping with this digital phenomenon, H.o.L. adapts a multifaceted approach to language through the effects of its ergodic design (Image 5). The text expands, contracts, and shares, the complexities of the Navidson house as it appropriates varying forms to challenge the reader, whose ludic position is that of the centre. The game-space, writes Neil Alphonso, “Is tailored and controlled by the designer to convey a specific experience to the player” (In Borries, Walz & Bottger. 2007:144) Danielewski's design is customised to relay a certain sense of space to the reader. The house's space exists in their hands, and in their visual stimulus, it is transcending the symbols of language to include a variety of other avenues for text-world mimesis. The explorations of space and traditional page structure are less prescriptive than the black and white division of words on a page. The word itself can be overridden by the context created by spatial representation. The absence of information displayed on the page does not limit the information that exists as a potential source of representation. The layering of semiotic space augments an artistic encapsulation of literature, one where even colours are felt with impact as the text utilises their mythological history for its own purposes.

Books don't have to be so limited. They can intensify informational content and experience. Multiple stories can lie side by side on the page. . . . Words can also be colored and those colors can have meaning. How quickly pages are turned or not turned can be addressed. Hell pages can be tilted, turned upside down, even read backwards (Interview with Mark Z. Danielewski In: Hansen, M.B. 2004)

H.o.L. creates the impression of rules and order but, gradually, these rules disintegrate, new rules emerge and, eventually, rules seem to pass beyond reason. Opposed to the absolutely binding notion of Huizinga's play the words themselves are defining new interpretive spaces by challenging the rules of traditional literary works. The misshapen letters of Truant's mother, blank spaces, reversed lines and so on... demonstrate how the "commitment of the word to space, enlarges the potentiality of language almost beyond measure" and, in this case perhaps, represents a "[restructuring of] thought" (Ong and Hartley, 2012:8). Restructuring is a common topic for the digital age, as people are beginning to see the potentiality of working with digital environments unbound by the traditional physical limitations of space. Restructuring of architecture is a recurrent theme in the novel but this application of Ong's theory on language is mimicked in "The ploy that put syllabic stress differentiation over art" one of the Pelican poems which says "Pelican continued on /and in between enjoyments /he fragmented letters /like he fragmented his friend's sense" (577). The focus on language play also occurs in "Pelican's cocktail Mythology" which begins "Three muse /over an elegant ruse /concerning a lingual wall /which only I can pass" (574). The three may be the reader, Truant and Zampano engaged in the transition of the house's walls over the symbolic divide between language and representation, the fourth wall. H.o.L. attempts to foreground its own status as metafiction to increase the reader's awareness of the barrier between imagination and reality, a pursuit symbolically central the main characters (Truant, Zampano, Navidson). As Navidson becomes more entwined with the ¼ inch discrepancy (29-32), his immersion in the 'riddle' of space is a frustration caused "by the incongruities of yesterday's riddles with answers when compared to today's riddles without" (33). The riddles of the poems serve as, one of many, conduits for H.o.L. to play with different representational constructs and restructure the interpretation of the reader to transition the story from the mind to the material world.



**Image 5. Ergodic structures in *House of Leaves*. (428, 432).**

Finding reason or purpose within a spatial anomaly, like the monochromatic labyrinth, would require a monumental shift in the structures of spatial understanding. The game-space and the hallways are capable of breaking the continuity of the worlds inside a text and warping them into fantasy or nightmare, existence or absence. Places that are both in and out of the video game's world often described as 'glitches' can appear as places with their own geometry and objects. Elements of a designed world removed from the game's 'real' space. It may be the case that the player is able to exit or enter the map at positions previously unavailable to them and from these positions voyeuristically see space beyond the ordinary. Zampano expresses the desire for voyeurism when Navidson first approaches a window "Here at last is something to behold beyond the interminable pattern of wall, room, and door; a chance to reach a place of perspective and perhaps make some sense of the whole" (464). Bollnow describes the window as a 'secure' place, where a man "sees the world spread out before him [...] but the world does not see him, for he is hidden in the darkness of the room" (1963:152). The game-space could be thought of as an aperture through which events are played out in safety hidden in the mind of the individual. This interpretive correlation with the window mimics the screen and the site of video game-play, the tension is removed in both the game-space and the video game as they exist largely without real world ramifications. To expand on the allusion to glitches there is often the recourse in games that leads the character to fall

endlessly until they reach an absolute exit to the generated game space, simply an end to their existence. Navidson experiences a descent towards an unknowable end and in the process lives out the real tension caused by the end of space “There is no bottom. It does not exist for me. Only my end exists” (472). It would be possible to include glitch accessible spaces as digitally-inferred diegetic elements of the game world. The glitch-space is characteristically included in the game's potential world but remain separate to how the world's reality is perceived. These spaces and the interactions players have with them resonate with a sentiment raised by Constant Nieuwenhuys in his imaginative '*New Babylon*'; a place where people explore “seeking new experiences, as yet unknown ambiances” (Nieuwenhuys 1974 In Borries, Walz & Bottger 2007:220). The contorted language on the pages of H.o.L. (120-148, 426-490, 623-634) mimic the spatial violations and absurdities exemplified through Navidson's house. Assorted documents are foregrounded as being disheveled and so the separation from standard structure engages with the thematic atmosphere of the novel as a breaking down of traditional spatial linguistic hierarchies. This adaption of space into literature reiterates a concern for video games raised by theorists Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnanåas as they define space “a key meta-category of games” and go onto to ascertain the prevalence of games utilising “space and spatial representation in some way” (2003). The “evoking [of] spatial structures” is an effective strategy H.o.L. adopts to create an “immersive phenomena” one, which like Navidson, piques our adult instincts to create order and understanding within our world.

Rolf Nohr, in his discussion of *Tron* (Midway, 1982), notes “The most impressive trick of [Films & Video Games] is their capacity to conceal their manufactured character and to appear immediate to the spectator – in short, to seem entirely natural.” (In Borries, Walz & Bottger. 2007:140). The 'out of the ordinary' immersive qualities of H.o.L. such as; images, letters, ergodic structures and foregrounding, are presented within the narrative in much the same style as gothic literature, to add authenticity, but in doing so symbolically align themselves with Huizinga's description of play as something 'different' from 'ordinary life' or in this case different from ordinary text (1949:28). By appropriating authenticity in its representation of a disorganised mind the fragmented works initial estrangement of form brings the strangeness of the Navidson's house into

the reader's hands. The novel twists, reflects, and denies, the linearity traditionally seen in language and literature, playing with the rules of a predetermined system. This effect contradicts the algorithmic qualities of digital games by twisting the rules of creation to generate content that is deformed by comparison to the text at large. There exists a correlation between literature and economy tying back to the ludic methods of interpretation. In games the idea is to get the highest score, or greatest payoff, and the approaches to this are what constitute game and mechanism theories. H.o.L.'s anti-optimisation of language transcends the constraints of form and utilises multiple levels of interpretive frameworks including, but not limited to; size, shape, colour, position, axis, direction, and layering. Yet in a paradoxical sense this failure to optimise in standard linguistics is overshadowed by the optimisation of spatial dimensions and correlative meaning. By adapting the physical elements of its structure into metafictional techniques H.o.L. exchanges sparseness for emphasis and movement for authenticity. The more real the imitations of the wandering halls are on the reader, the more immersive the experience of imagining and playing within the illusory world. H.o.L. exhibits a strange interplay of conventions one designed to pique the intellect with an academic approach to reading, the other, a more raw physical approach designed to give greater affect than reason. Huizinga suggested that play existed before culture and Winnicott that play was a source of cultural experience, by combining these two notions together we can see in H.o.L. the development of instinctual physical play into a complex analytical play. In H.o.L.'s words "Explanation is not half as strong as experience but experience is not half as strong as experience and understanding."(547). The optimal way to understand must be a combination of both explanation and experience, the unity that H.o.L. strives to create with its ergodic aesthetic. The book remains a source that needs to be decoded through movement and thought, perception and cognition, to ultimately provide understanding about life external.

In essence not only does the novel follow ludic patterning as a metaphoric creation, but also, the novel plays within the scope of its own game-ideology, the ideology of language. Ong's premises on the differences between orality and literacy help envision the ideological discourse of literary societies and their focus on definitive understanding. Counter-posing this cultural thinking, as does the house, arguments

circulate the deconstruction of language, critics such as Derrida, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate the impossibility of structured meaning. The Navidson house's mysterious hallways mirror the rhizomatic nature attributed to language and thought, the endlessly differed halls, paralleling the deferral of meaning, exist in a realm of nothingness. The black rooms are all vacantly representational of the hyperreality of Baudrillard where even the physical products (rations, camping supplies, neon markers) degrade under the gravity of the endless void of representation. The temporary nature of items within a game is replicated by the impermanence that exists within the hallways. The gradual decay is a reminder that nothing remains eternally as “The house is history and history is uninhabited”(546). Many games include the slow decay of items to unseen forces (corpses disappear, items fade over time etc...) and the connection to forgetfulness challenges the illusion of permanence and continuity within the internal game-space. The constant referral of items to and from memory leads to a degradation of their structure as the house has the “power to exorcise any and all things in its midst” (122). The play-space is always being forced to reconcile the unreal against reality and in the process items of importance like the transitional object simply cease to be relevant to both the game and the player.

## Conclusions

To what extent the game-space carries weight onto the real is a matter explored through metafiction. The game-space is a testing ground where we may use “fictional rules to discover the role of fiction in life” (Waugh, P. 2003:35). Novels such as *House of Leaves* are involving spaces within spaces to explore the relationship between human, reality and imagination. The symbiosis of games and sensory experiences is a current driving force in game design and as levels of immersion increase these fictional worlds may become capable of entrapping the player, reader or operator, within the fiction itself. The shifting nature of the game-space in literature, as a location where play exists, traverses reality and illusion through its interactive components and metafictional techniques. The semiotic system denies an objective understanding of these spaces and their situation as reality. As mentioned in H.o.L. “the house on Ash Tree Lane is a self-created portal into some other dimension (...) it would seem the language of objectivity



can never adequately address the reality of that place on Ash Tree Lane.” (378-9) . So when objectivity cannot be upheld as the truest understanding of the world then an understanding of how the world is conceived or perceived is foregrounded. Worlds capable of affect through simulation, approximations of reality, which are indistinguishable from reality itself paradoxically dwell as relatable and unrelatable, real and unreal. To the subject of the simulation in complete immersion there are two realities each acting as a reference for the illusory game-space created within the psyche. It will not be a case that the simulation replaces the real because they will exist in tandem, it is a situation where the real gets its reference from the simulation which is appropriated into the mind of the individual. A work such as H.o.L. is foregrounding the fiction at its core and yet constantly reminding the reader of its presence in the real world as an object separate to the reader. The fantasy of bringing unreal places into fruition is an ever increasing desire for contemporary players, readers, and, in general, dreamers. The game-space is a site of cultural change in which values and systems beyond real world constraints can be modeled and developed into systems reality can appropriate. There is no cost to living within the game-space and it can afford all manners of simulations unavailable as real. The price of this life comes with the fear of an inescapable subjective-reality when the fiction itself can replicate sight, smell, taste, touch, and all that experiences the external. Yet beneath that fear is the palpable lure of fictional constructs over the real, the reason Navidson returned to the hallway, the belief that in the true immersion of game-space, where play is real, the individual can experience the semblance of omnipotent play. And that omnipotence is troublingly capable of entwining itself within the very structures of our home reality.

## Appendices:

### *Appendix 1: Tom's joke*

A monk joins an abbey ready to dedicate his life to copying ancient books by hand. After the first day though, he reported to the head priest. He's concerned that all the monks have been copying from copies made from still more copies. "if someone makes a mistake," he points out. "it would be impossible to detect. Even worse the error would continue to be made."

A bit startled, the priest decided that he better check the latest efforts against the original which is kept in a vault beneath the abbey. A place only he has access to.

Well two days, then three day passed without the priest resurfacing. Finally the new monk decides to see if the old guys alright. When he gets down there though, he discovers the priest hunched over both a newly copied book and the ancient original text. He is sobbing and by the look of things has been sobbing for a long time. "Father?" the monk whispers. "Oh Lord Jesus," the priest wails. "The word is 'celebrate'"

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