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“A MAZE:

Unnatural Narratology and the Reader’s Perception
of Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*”

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Hinweis

Diese Masterthesis hat nachgewiesen, dass die betreffende Kandidatin befähigt ist, wissenschaftliche Themen selbstständig sowie inhaltlich und methodisch vertretbar zu bearbeiten. Da die Korrekturen der Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist daher nicht erkenntlich, mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Es wird gebeten, diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.

Note

This thesis has proven that the candidate is qualified to work on scientific topics independently and that the contents, as well as the methods used were ethical. Since the supervising professor's corrections and comments are not publicly available, it is not detectable which grade this thesis received. The range spans from very good to sufficient. It is thus advisable to pay close attention during the reading process.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Little solace comes
to those who grieve
when thoughts keep drifting
as walls keep shifting
and this great blue world of ours
seems a *house* of leaves

moments before the wind (*House of Leaves* 563).

Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) thematizes the fragility of those elements which constitute reality. Much like a pile of leaves in the autumn wind, the book's characters and plotlines become loose and flutter around the pages in a menacing fashion, intertwining and blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. The topic of this thesis centers around the unnatural elements of *House of Leaves* (henceforth abbreviated as *HoL*) and the labyrinthine structure of the novel which is reflected on numerous levels of the story. Furthermore, the title of this thesis also reflects the unnatural character of the book and was borrowed from a wordplay-quote by one of the main narrators: "A maze. Amazing maze. A maze meant. [...] A May zing perhaps. M.A.s" (*HoL* 544).

The main focus of this thesis lies on the unusual and impossible elements found in the novel, the three main research questions being:

1. Which unnatural elements can be identified within *HoL*?
2. What are the effects of these elements?
3. How does the reader handle these aspects?

These three questions shall be answered in the three chapters following the introductory section on the theoretical background.

The idea for this thesis came to me a year ago during a seminar on unnatural narratology in which I was reminded of a novel I had found in 2008 and which had fascinated me because it deviated from every book I had read so far. Furthermore, as luck would have it, Mark Z. Danielewski came to Vienna for a reading of his fourth book *Only Revolutions* (2006) in March 2012, and I was able to meet him in order to ask a few questions while he signed my book, drawing multicolored trees and boundless rooms in my copy of *HoL*. Thus, with my now unique version of the novel in hand, I decided to approach the disturbing maze with the help of the new framework of unnatural narratology.

In *HoL* the reader is introduced to the Chinese-box plot structure by Johnny Truant who warns the reader about the dangers of the novel. The young man explains that he and his friend Lude found a number of papers and manuscripts in the apartment of a recently deceased blind man named Zampanò. Johnny assembled, sorted and edited these documents and compiled them in the book that the reader is now holding. However, the basic narrative collected by Zampanò centers on a series of documentaries by another narrator, namely William Navidson, a Pulitzer-price winning photographer, his friends and his wife Karen. All of these films attempt to capture the bewildering events surrounding the Navidson's house in West Virginia. From chapter one until chapter twenty-three, the reader is told about the short documentary films via interviews, references, meticulous scene descriptions, cinematic analyses and academic discourse about the critical reception of the films. Furthermore, in lengthy footnotes Johnny Truant links Zampanò's life to his own and reveals that the documentaries have either been lost or never existed at all. Ultimately, Navidson and his family are partly able to escape the horrors of their house while Johnny Truant's life and the book itself slowly fall apart.

Critics have described the book as “a monster”, “[a]n assault on the nature of story”, or “a strange, dream-like excursion into the subconscious (*HoL* front endpaper) and it seems like Danielewski has indeed aspired to new levels of unnaturalness and has created a terrifying novel in the process. Because descriptions like “uncanny Other”, “abjected Being” or “Gothic horror” are mentioned repeatedly in relation to the novel and also recur within the work, it was decided that the association with Gothic fiction cannot be ignored in a comprehensive analysis of the novel. Therefore, elements of the Gothic (many which correspond with concepts from psychoanalysis) will serve as points of comparison.

Another feature which proved hard to ignore was the unusual structure of the novel which was also mirrored in the text's layout and its topicalization of its own materiality. Katharine N. Hayles (781) once said about the novel:

In a sense, *House of Leaves* recuperates the traditions of the print book – particularly the novel as a literary form – but the price it pays is a metamorphosis so profound that it becomes a new kind of form and artifact. It is an open question whether this transformation represents the rebirth

of the novel or the beginning of the novel's displacement by a hybrid discourse that as yet has no name.

However, I would argue that this hybrid discourse indeed does have a name: ergodic literature, an approach that stresses the materiality and multiplicity of literature. The book that is a house of leaves seems unstable and its message depends on the pathways a reader chooses to take. Therefore, apart from unnatural narratology and Gothic elements, ergodic concepts will also be considered during the analysis of *HoL*.

In chapter two of this thesis, unnatural narratology will be introduced and a working definition for this final project will be developed. Furthermore, this framework will be supplemented by terminology and concepts borrowed from the long established theories on Gothic fiction, on the one hand, and the recently developed ergodic framework, on the other hand – a novel approach which will facilitate a more comprehensive analysis of *HoL*. In the last subchapter on the theoretical background, reading processes such as conventionalization and naturalization along with their strategies will be examined for later use in section five. Although there are many other approaches that could have added insights to this thesis, the space and time restrictions prevent the consideration of more than those theoretical frameworks which seemed most relevant.

In chapter three, the actual analysis of the unnatural story elements will begin with an investigation of *HoL*'s setting. In this chapter, the focus will be on the impossibilities of the Navidson's house and especially its labyrinthine mutations. The second subsection will give some information on the novel's characters, their connections, relationships and developments. Here the focus will be on the concepts of The Other, the Abject and the Uncanny, as well as the power struggles between different pairs.

In chapter four, the focus will shift to the unusual discourse elements of *HoL*. There will be two subchapters, one on the narrative situations and one on the layout of the novel. The emphasis will be put on the structural aspects of the novel and the display of ergodicity. Furthermore, the different paratexts and overall construction of the book will be discussed.

In the last chapter, the reader will be the center of attention. Although, there are comments on the effects on the reader throughout the thesis, this chapter will

take a closer look at actual reader-reactions found in forums and data collected with regard to naturalizing strategies. Furthermore, intertextuality and intermediality in *HoL* with regard to their relations to the world outside the novel will be discussed, and finally there will also be a section on ideological concerns in the novel.

It is clear that not all elements in *HoL* are on the same level of unnaturalness. Therefore, while the focus of the thesis is on the unnatural elements in *HoL*, there will also be a limited number of classical narratological concepts involved in the analysis. Natural elements on the story level are for example Johnny's adventures with his friend Lude, and on the discourse level the sequence of page numbers. Although these elements are only peripherally important, they should not be ignored for the sake of completeness. After all homogeneity is not one of the strengths of *HoL*.

There are numerous different editions of *HoL* in circulation, which make a universal interpretation impossible. After the first online edition, there were five different versions alone in the US and numerous foreign editions (*Exploration Z*). However, the most interesting novels are the unique ones which include personalized items like letters, drawings and pictures by Danielewski, and which were distributed randomly among the first copies sold of the novel. For this thesis, the US full-color edition was used in order to guarantee a detailed analysis of all different topographical and layout aspects which were only partially included in other versions. Furthermore, all instances where the word "house" appears in blue, will be italicized in this thesis. Cases of red struck through text will be italicized as well as struck through, and other conventions like underlined text or bold print will be maintained. Furthermore, Random House granted permission for the inclusion of some pictures of the novel in the appendix.

Although it seems like *HoL*'s self-reflexive character already includes enough levels of literary analysis, there are many aspects which are concealed on purpose and which can only be clearly presented with the help of theoretical frameworks and close-reading techniques. Thus, this thesis attempts to present a clearer and more comprehensive picture of the polyphonic text that constitutes *HoL* by proving that unnatural narratology can be a helpful device for the analysis of impossible texts.

2 UNNATURAL NARRATOLOGY AND APPROACHES TO THE UNNATURAL

The impossible is one thing when considered as a purely intellectual conceit. After all, it is not so large a problem when one can puzzle over an Escher print and then close the book. It is quite another thing when one faces a physical reality the mind and body cannot accept (*HoL* 30).

In this quote Mark Z. Danielewski hints at the story's tight unnatural grasp which the reader cannot escape. Contrary to the kinds of unnatural narratives readers have got used to, this novel claims to haunt the reader beyond its pages. In order to come to an understanding of the strategies and methods that were employed in the formation of *HoL*, and to help the reader understand the deeper significance of some of the unnatural mechanisms chosen by Danielewski, a close reading of the novel with an emphasis on the unnatural aspects will be conducted. While classical narratology is too limited in its time-tested classifications to grasp the uncommon, labyrinthine character of *HoL*, unnatural narratology can form a clearer picture of what constitutes the exceptionality of this work. However, before discussing the novel in detail, the theoretical framework of this thesis needs to be established.

Brian Richardson explains that "[u]nnatural narratives can be identified as those texts that violate mimetic conventions by providing wildly improbable or strikingly impossible events" which are "not simply nonrealistic but antirealistic" (*Basic Concepts* 95). Richardson's definition summarizes the most important aspect of what makes a narrative unnatural, namely antimimeticism (independent of whether the impossible occurs on the level of time, space, or with regard to characterization, the narrative mode, content or layout). Although the term "unnatural" often has a negative connotation, it can also have a number of different positive or neutral meanings in connection with literary studies, ranging from "fabulous" to "magical", or "supernatural", as well as "impossible" (Fludernik, *How Natural* 362). Since unnatural narratives are antimimetic texts, unnatural narratology is the field which systematically studies unusual works.

Returning to Richardson's definition at the beginning of this thesis, it becomes clear that the primary aim of this narratological school is to argue against "mi-

metic reductionism” and to reveal the flaws of critical assumptions based solely on reality (Alber et al., *Unnatural Narratology* 115). However, conventional narratives and unnatural narratives are not so much dichotomous as they are continuous or overlapping. According to Alber, Iversen, Nielsen and Richardson (*Unnatural Narratology* 116), the fault of classical narratology lies in its narrow focus on stories that are modeled on the actual world, which leads to a marginalization of unusual texts in narrative theory. In an online statement issued by Aarhus University’s Narrative Research Lab, the scholarly interest in the field of unnatural narratology is explained in the following way (*Unnatural Narratology*):

In the research group "Unnatural narratology" we analyze and theorize the aspects of fictional narratives that transcend the boundaries of traditional realism and violate the conventions of natural narratives. Though many of us are particularly interested in non- and anti-mimetic kinds of narrative such as postmodernism, we also point out the many unnatural, [un]conventional, and unrealistic elements of realism. These include omniscience, paralepsis, a streamlined plot, a definitive closure, and what James Phelan refers to as redundant telling.

Although unnatural narratology is a very recent field in literary studies, unnaturalness itself is neither a novelty nor a phenomenon limited to 20th or 21st century texts. Jan Alber (*Diachronic Development* 61-62) explains that unnatural literature has always been popular due to its unique ability to “widen our cognitive horizon [...], challenge our limited perspective on the world [...]”, helping us experience scenarios which are otherwise impossible to witness in our reality. However, many elements that were once considered novel, experimental and unnatural have become conventionalized over the years, showing that the mechanism of invention – imitation – conventionalization is iterative and that it results in an unlimited force of creation.

Jan Alber (*Diachronic Development* 42) traces the English literary history of unnatural narration back to the Old English period (although not many texts have survived over the centuries, he names the poem *The Dream of the Rood*¹ as an example), and explains that the radically new approaches in postmodern and post-postmodern literature were anticipated by earlier developments. According to Alber (*Diachronic Development* 46), the progression of literature can be seen

¹*The Dream of the Rood* is an Old English Christian poem in which the cross on which Jesus was crucified speaks to the narrator in a dream (Swanton 2).

as a “constant interaction or dialectic between the natural and the unnatural – the realist and the impossible”. Furthermore, he sees the constant shaping and reshaping, invention and integration of unnatural elements as a driving force behind the development of new genres evident in their historical evolutions (*Diachronic Development* 47).

It seems as though each literary period had its own form of unnaturalness. One crucial element in medieval English literature, for example, was the supernatural – the “physically impossible forces that transcend the scientific visible universe” (*Diachronic Development* 47-49). In the 18th century, object narratives (it-narratives) by animals or inanimate objects which acted and expressed themselves like human beings became popular and were used to provide satirical perspectives on humankind (*Diachronic Development* 51). *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767) by Laurence Sterne is another early example of literature in which innovatively unnatural aspects surface, for example that the narrator knows more than is possible. Apart from stories about fantastic or paranormal phenomena, which were quite popular from the late 18th and early 19th century onward, spawning the first works of science fiction, a number of 20th century works display new forms of the unnatural.

The unnaturalness of the 20th century is even more centered on the psychologically disturbing than its predecessor. In modernist fiction, psychological insights into characters’ minds were gradually conventionalized and elements such as psychonarration or free indirect discourse were no longer regarded as odd (*Diachronic Development* 57). One example of a genre which developed through the application of unnatural elements such as metafictional comments or fantastic creatures, is the South American *realismo mágico*, or magical realism, with well-known representatives such as Gabriel García Márquez or Jorge Luis Borges (Parkinson, Zamora, and Faris 8). Furthermore, notable Irish authors such as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, or French and Italian authors, for example Raymond Queneau and Italo Calvino (members of Oulipo²) started to play with the unnaturalness of language (Consenstein 16-22).

² *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* (founded in the 1960s) is the name of a group of French authors who sought to break with the constraints of classical writing techniques (Consenstein 16-17).

Nowadays many of the early unnatural genres evolved further, but some of the impossible works of past centuries still remain unnatural to the contemporary reader. Twenty-first century authors such as Haruki Murakami, Jeanette Winterson or Neil Gaiman incorporate fantastic and unusual elements into their stories which often allude to older unnatural works. As a work of the 21st century, Danielewski's *HoL* can be positioned as a contemporary unnatural novel which shows both postmodernist and oulipoesque influences, but also integrates many elements from Gothic tales and has a heightened sense of its own materiality which is typical for works of the Internet Age. However, before going into detail with the various different unnatural features of *HoL*, I will present some differences in the definition of unnaturalness, points of disagreement within the group of unnatural narratologists, and Monika Fludernik's critique of their framework.

Although the corpus of unnatural texts seems quite unequivocal if one looks at the historical development, scholars of unnatural narratology do not agree unanimously on a list of features or definite genres. Brian Richardson, for example, insists on the distinction between the supernatural and the unnatural, and explains that nonrealistic poetics found in nonmimetic texts such as fairy tales cannot be considered to be on the same analytical level with antimimetic or unnatural texts which subvert reality (Richardson, *Basic Concepts* 96-97). He further argues that the term *unnatural* should be reserved for "innovative, antimimetic strategies" and that a text may only be considered unnatural if it incorporates "a significant number of antimimetic scenes" (*Basic Concepts* 96). This means that only those texts can be considered unnatural which result in an alienation of the reader who has formerly mainly experienced classical examples of narration. According to Richardson (*Basic Concepts* 95), this still leaves a very large corpus of texts available for unnatural narratological analyses and he gives the following examples:

most of the plays of Aristophanes, the work of Rabelais, many texts by Jonathan Swift, and modern metadrama and theater of the absurd. It is also present in some oral tales [...], children's literature [...] and many works of popular culture [as well as] self-conscious graphic fiction.

However, unnaturalness is not limited to fiction only, but can also be found in historical or biographical accounts in which traumatic events are mediated with the help of unnatural elements (Richardson, *Basic Concepts* 100).

Jan Alber, on the other hand, considers a wider corpus of texts than Brian Richardson, which includes, for example, science fiction and fables, because he defines *unnatural* as anything physically, logically or humanly impossible even if the form of unnaturalness is conventionalized in certain genres (*What Is* 373). Therefore, his focus is less on the reader's alienation and more on the unrealistic aspects of any text regardless of genre. This makes Alber's definition very inclusive because it takes into account those texts which were once considered unnatural, but do not have an estranging effect on its readership any longer. Furthermore, he does not define a text's unnaturalness based solely on how readers perceive it, which is highly subjective and dependent on individual reading experiences, but also looks at authorial intentions.

Stefan Iversen focuses on the clashes between the storyworld's rules and events that defy all easy explanations (Alber et al., *What Is* 373). His definition of unnatural narration is similar to that of Alber, but he concentrates especially on the role of the narrator (Iversen, *States of Exception* 127). Omniscience and features such as redundant telling or second person addresses (both of which are quite common in everyday conversations) play an important part in his analysis of the clashes between fictional storyworlds and non-fictional, natural narratives.

Henrik Skov Nielsen's definition centers on the opposition between the natural and the unnatural which causes the readers to change their interpretational strategies (Alber et al., *What Is* 373). He investigates the relationships between authors and narrators (Nielsen, *Natural Authors* 275), focusing especially on the identity of first-person narrators (Nielsen, *Impersonal Voice* 133). Thus unreliability plays an important role in his analyses of narrative voices. Furthermore, like Alber, Nielsen also looks at reading strategies and the role focalization plays in the perception of a work.

Although the four scholars agree on many indicators of unnaturalness there are also a number of opposing views on some aspects. One of the major points of disagreement within the group is concerned with the relation between embodiment and the perception of unnaturalness (Alber et al., *What Is* 375-376). While Alber believes that “the unnatural is ultimately a function of our bodily existence”, Iversen and Nielsen think that “the unnatural lies beyond the scope of our embodiment” (Alber et al., *What Is* 375-376). Furthermore, Richardson considers physical embodiment to be non-defining for his approach to the unnatural, but still relevant for the analysis of some texts (Alber et al., *What Is* 375-376).

Another point of disagreement is the relationship between cognitive theory and unnatural narratology. In Alber’s opinion, cognitive narratology can be a helpful device for the interpretation of excessively estranging texts and the way the human mind can make sense of unnatural works (*What Is* 376). He explains that cognitive frameworks can reveal important interpretational mechanisms and may add to a better understanding of the difficulties and pleasures unnatural texts exhibit (*What Is* 376). Furthermore, he explicates that the unnatural urges readers to find new cognitive categories which are able to surpass the limitations of real-world knowledge (*What Is* 376). Richardson and Iversen, on the other hand, do not wish to explore the cognitive mechanisms readers exhibit when engaged with unnatural texts because they are non-central to their view on anti-mimeticism (*What Is* 377). Moreover, Henrik Skov Nielsen argues that readers really only have two options: either to naturalize a text or to accept the unnaturalness as given without limiting themselves to any one interpretation (*What Is* 377).

Of course there are also several points of critique by other scholars regarding the still novel narratological approach. The most prominent critique comes from Monika Fludernik who wrote several responses to Alber’s, Iversen’s, Nielsen’s and Richardson’s articles on unnatural narratology, including “Naturalizing the Unnatural: A View from Blending Theory” (2010) and “How Natural Is Unnatural Narratology; or, What Is Unnatural about Unnatural Narratology” (2012). Although Fludernik describes unnatural narratology as “timely and significant”

(*How Natural* 364), she nevertheless explains that there are certain errors in the theory's reasoning according to her point of view.

Firstly, Fludernik criticizes Alber's definition of logical, physical and human impossibility, explaining that these categories are overlapping and no clear distinction can be made between them, which ultimately makes a formal separation redundant (*How Natural* 363). Alber counters this argument by admitting that many works indeed yield a certain overlap of these categories, but that there are enough instances of stories which only fall into one category (*What Is* 375).

Fludernik's second argument centers on the opposition between the natural and the unnatural. In tracing the development of these dichotomies, Fludernik states that she prefers the term *non-natural* over *unnatural* because of the negative connotations of the latter (such as "denatured" or "deviant"), and that most of the non-mimetic elements pointed out by the four theoreticians can in fact be easily naturalized during the reading process and are therefore not significantly unusual (*How Natural* 362). However, Alber and his colleagues (*What Is* 374) stress that the importance of unnatural narratology lies exactly in the recognition of texts which have hitherto been described with purely negative terminology as "abnormal" or "deformed", or which have been ignored. Therefore, their goal is to take the negative connotations and turn them into something positive, void of any stigmatizing ideology with an emphasis on the neutrality of the term in literary theory (Alber et al., *What Is* 374). Furthermore, they do not recognize a clear dichotomy between the natural and the unnatural, but they express the opinion that they are dialectical and that it was never their intention to create binary oppositions since the two approaches are necessarily in an interactive mode (Alber et al., *What Is* 374).

According to Fludernik's third point of critique, most of the analyses done under the name of unnatural narratology are simply postmodernist readings and frequently mimetic foci seep into the interpretations (*How Natural* 365). However, Alber, Iversen, Nielsen and Richardson (*What Is* 374) recognize that other theories and approaches function as resources and inspiration for their theories of the unnatural. Unnatural narratology does not seek to replace dominant theories such as postmodernism, but wishes to supplement existing analytical tools (Alber et al., *What Is* 374). The aim of the theoretic approach is not to create a

false totality or to impose rules, but to offer an alternative for those texts which cannot easily fit into classical narratological frameworks.

Furthermore, the distinction between conventionalization and naturalization is invalid in her opinion and she finds the concept of narrativization³ more helpful as an explanation of the sense-making processes (*How Natural* 367-368). For her, the question between conventionalization and naturalization is one of mere quantity in which naturalization is the same as conventionalization on a smaller scale. Alber and his colleagues (Alber et al., *What Is* 379) explain that conventionalization is not detached from naturalization, but that the main difference lies in the application of the strategies: naturalization is debatable because it a very subjective process while conventionalization draws on shared cultural norms (Alber et al., *What Is* 379). Furthermore, they (Alber et al., *What Is* 379) argue that Monika Fludernik's narrativization is nothing else than a mixture of naturalization and conventionalization.

In a fifth argument Fludernik (*How Natural* 367) criticizes how Alber and his colleagues treat omniscience because in Fludernik's opinion the third-person omniscient narrator can be seen as a blend of natural combinations and self-analysis. According to Fludernik (*How Natural* 367), this blending results in the insight into other peoples' minds via an empathetic process. However, this critique of omniscience as an element of unnaturalness is disputable since in most omniscient narratives the all-knowing narrator does not mention that he, she or it acquired the knowledge through a process of obstruction, but it is simply presupposed within the storyworld that omniscience is a possibility. Apart from this fact, the narrator is usually very certain about the other characters' thoughts and feelings.

All the above-mentioned conflicting, complementary and opposing views of the central aspects of unnatural narratology make it necessary to define what will be considered as unnatural in this thesis. For the purpose of positioning *HoL* within this narratological framework, Alber's, Iversen's, Nielsen's and Richardson's statements were compared and the following definition of unnaturalness in *HoL* was created according to my own focus on certain elements:

³ Narrativization is the process of "constituting narrativity" which is grounded in experientiality, the cognitive parameters based on real-life experience (Fludernik and Olson 6).

Unnaturalness in this thesis constitutes anything that diverges from traditional, mimetic texts regardless of whether the aspect is physically, logically, psychologically or aesthetically impossible on the story or discourse level of the novel. Thus, unnaturalness can be equated with anything that seems striking or unusual in the text's content or formal arrangement.

The aim of this definition is to be as inclusive as possible because *HoL* yields many different types of unnaturalness. There are those aspects which immediately alienate the reader, such as the physical impossibility of the constant mutability of the house, and there are those aspects which display a more subtle unnaturalness, for example spacious footnotes or extensive appendices. Although aspects such as narrative situation and layout seem to have nothing to do with each other on a first glance, it becomes clear during the reading process that both features are involved in creating a lingering unnatural aftertaste. However, in order to facilitate an easier reading, categories were made to organize the content of this thesis more clearly.

There are two basic ways in which unnaturalness can occur in a text. The first option is that the text is unnatural because something impossible is told. This means that the mode of narration, the temporal sequencing and other narrative features can be mimetic, but the story itself tells something impossible in relation to our real-world knowledge. Fairy-tales are typical examples of this kind of unnatural narration. In the second variety, a text is unnatural because something probable is told in a highly unusual manner. This option can be seen in many texts of the postmodern era.

However, there is also a third option which presents a mixture of the two basic modes. *HoL* is an example of this mix because, on the one hand, it tells the impossible story of an ever-changing house, and on the other hand, it reflects the house's unnaturalness within its own textual layout. Therefore, all content unnaturalness will be presented in a chapter on the story level of the book which borrows terminology from Gothic fiction and psychological literary approaches, and all unusual aspects which deal with how the story is presented will be collected in a chapter on discourse unnaturalness in which both classical narratological terminology and Espen Aarseth's ergodic framework play an important role.

There are a number of reasons why this thesis presents such an eclectic mix of approaches, theories and terminology. Firstly, unnatural narratology is itself a novel field which has borrowed many terms and methods from other fields – a fact which makes it very versatile and helpful for the analysis of many different texts. Secondly, there are many different text types within *HoL*, for example letters, essays, newspaper clippings, diary entries, or glossaries, and this multiplicity is also reflected in the genre distribution. Although one can find the description “a novel” on the book’s cover, it becomes clear very soon that the distinctions between the fictional and the non-fictional are exceedingly blurred. While one can find horror, mystery, poetry and romance in the fictional corners of the book, the narrators support with bulks of evidence the claim to biographical and academic essay-style non-fiction. Among these genres Gothic horror fiction and ergodic literature elements correspond with the most unnatural aspects of *HoL*. Therefore, Gothic and ergodic terms were chosen to serve as theoretical basis for the analysis of *HoL*’s story and discourse level respectively.

Apart from the unusual aspects of the novel there is also an abundance of mimetic strategies which enable the reader to traverse the text. As Alber and his colleagues (*What Is* 372f.) explain, the emphasis of unnatural narratology is on the unusual aspects of a text, but they should be seen as points in a spectrum that ranges from exact mimeticism to the most antimimetic elements. Since *HoL*’s can also be placed on this scale, it will not be possible to avoid mentioning some natural aspects along the way. However, through the inclusion of some of the interesting mimetic features, the contrast between them and the uncommon elements will only be emphasized and the tendency towards the unnatural will be clarified.

In the following three subchapters, a closer look will be taken at story level deviances and discourse level unnaturalness along with the categories that enable a systematic investigation of *HoL*’s unnatural elements. In the third section, the focus will shift towards reader-strategies which will be crucial in the last chapter of this thesis.

2.1 Unnaturalness on the Story Level

Unnaturalness on the story level is concerned with unusual elements that constitute what is transmitted by the text with regard to the content. In *HoL* these unnatural story elements range from the character dynamics to the alarming activities of the house, and emphasize the horror and othering of the text. Furthermore, these story features remind the reader of many aspects of Gothic fiction such as the haunted house or psychologically tortured protagonists. Before going into detail with the elements that will be investigated in *HoL*, a brief definition of Gothic fiction and its origin will be given.

On the most basic genre level, Gothic fiction is a blend of horror and romance (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 1-6). While the term is reminiscent of the historical period, the Gothic (approximately 1180-1550), it can be seen as an entirely post-medieval phenomenon (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 1). Hogle (*Gothic Fiction* 3) distinguishes further between the “terror Gothic” and the “horror Gothic”. The “terror Gothic” centers on the state of fear resulting from suspense. It threatens the characters and readers with secrets or dangers from a hidden past (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 3). The “horror Gothic”, on the other hand, “confronts the principle characters with the gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering assumed norms, including the repressions of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences” (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 3). Therefore, *HoL* can be seen as an example of the horror Gothic because it presents its characters with the physical impossibilities of a morphing house, reflecting psychological repression and other psychological throes of its protagonists, and destroying any sense of safety.

The origins of Gothic literature seem to lie in Horace Warpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764), which spawned a number of imitations in the 1790s and has influenced countless works ever since its first appearance (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 1). Although the genre has changed considerably over the last few hundred years, expanding to include a variety of subgenres ranging from Romanticism, *Schauerroman* and *roman noir*, to Pulp and the American Southern Gothic, there are a number of features which seem to be defining for Gothic literature.

Firstly, the Gothic tale usually takes place in an antiquated space, or pseudo-medieval building (from whose architectural design the genre potentially inherited its name), the most popular ones being castles, abbeys, prisons, sewers, crypts, or more contemporarily, spaceships and computers (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 2). The feature that makes these spaces interesting for the exploration of Gothic themes is that they usually possess a hidden secret which haunts the characters and foreshadows their imminent downfall (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 2). Furthermore, the haunted space is usually an “oscillate [of] the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural” (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 2), resulting in a blurriness of the boundaries between fact and fiction, and creating perfectly unnatural situations in these frequently confined spaces.

Secondly, the constantly recurring oppositions in Gothic fiction, the incongruity of light/dark, life/death, natural/supernatural, ancient/modern and so on, can be witnessed on all levels of the narratives (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 9). Furthermore, there is frequently a struggle between the old and new, or tradition and technological progress, as witnessed for example in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). Adverse forces are often mirrored in the existence of foil characters or in the characters’ psychological struggles.

Therefore, a third feature of the Gothic is the investigation of psychological states and the minute examination of the unconscious processes of characters (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 3). Hogle (*Gothic Fiction* 3) argues that the proliferation of Gothic literature in the mid-nineteenth century with Edgar Allan Poe’s *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840) and the *roman frénétiques*⁴ led Sigmund Freud to his “*fin de siècle* sense of the unconscious as a deep repository of very old, infantile, and repressed memories or impulses, the archaic underworld of the self”. The examination of the characters’ psychological constitutions also led to the incorporations of the concepts of the Other, the Abject and the Uncanny into theoretical examinations of the genre which will be discussed shortly.

Another partly psychological feature which is often criticized and has recently been altered following postcolonialism, is the focus on white middle- and upper

⁴ The *roman frénétiques* is an early version of modern French horror narrated in a fast and frantic way (“Roman frénétique”). Examples are Jules Janin’s *The Dead Donkey and the Guillotined Woman* (1829), or Jean Nodier’s *Smarra, or the Demons of the Night* (1821).

class characters, who are in their most clichéd form often priests, aristocrats or wealthy, hypersensitive artists (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 10ff.). Hogle (*Gothic Fiction* 4) explains that due to these elements, most 20th and 21st century readings of the Gothic “find [...] class-based, ideological, and even technological conflicts of particular historical times underlying the spectral or monstrous manifestations in Gothic” literature. Hogle (*Gothic Fiction* 3) believes that this is the reason why the Gothic has survived over so many centuries and is still popular because it helps authors and readers alike address some of the internal and external contemporary problems of the respective times in a creative manner.

Fiedler (129) elaborates further on this topic, stating that there is an internalized guilt in the characters of Romantic and American Gothic novels because of their wish to replace the old orders of the church, aristocracy or political systems which, however, conflicts with their wish to possess the same powers as their predecessors. Therefore, the contradictory relationship of fear and desire in its many forms remains a constant element in Gothic fiction, most likely responsible for the narratives’ dichotomous characters. Furthermore, Hogle (*Gothic Fiction* 8) argues that the binary, conflicting relationships displayed in Gothic fiction might even stem from the genre’s origin itself which represents the “tortured mix” of what was considered high-cultural writings, for example epics and tragedies, and what was considered low in comparison, for example comedies and folklore tales.

There are also a number of thematic issues which reoccur in Gothic fiction that all have to do with the “blurring of metaphysical, natural, religious, class, economic, marketing, generic, stylistic, and moral lines” (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 8-9). Among these are the “[t]hreats of and longings for gender-crossing, homosexuality or bisexuality, racial mixture, class fluidity, the child in the adult, timeless timeliness, and simultaneous evolution and devolution” (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 12). Furthermore, all of these themes reflect the conflicts that arise with the prolific integration of opposing forces.

The thematic issues of Gothic fiction can also be seen in the stories’ characters themselves. One of the most prominent Gothic stereotypes is that of the helpless and at the same time terrifyingly powerful woman, representing an oppression as well as “othering” of the female (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 10). Other often

recurring and sometimes clichéd characters are the tortured artist, the suicidal lover, the obsessive hunter, the long-lost heir or the lonely monster (“Typical Characters”). Kosofsky Sedgwick (141-142) explains that these characters often seem “devitalized or two-dimensional” because their characteristics are inscribed on the surface, repeated on many levels, making it easier for the reader to recognize their function and to read them psychologically and thematically.

As mentioned-above, there are three psychoanalytical concepts which reappear in many Gothic pieces and which are inherently tied to the Gothic genre: the Other, the Abject and the Uncanny. In the following section each shall be discussed in more detail.

In philosophy the Other is conceived as opposed to the Same – logically, this means that if x is not y, y is the Other against x which is the Same (Peperzak 19). The result is that everything and everyone can be conceived as the Other with respect to a contrasting self. In Gothic fiction, the Other is usually represented as a racial, cultural or gendered Other often in the form of monsters, supernatural beings, criminals or the physically and mentally unstable. Ruth Bienstock Anolik and Douglas Howard (1) write that “[t]he Gothic is marked by an anxious encounter with otherness, with the dark and mysterious unknown”.

The Other has several functions in fiction, as well as reality. Firstly, the Other is used in the process of self-definition because it is created from a subjective perspective of one entity which functions as a homogenous mass (Brinker-Gabler 4). According to Michel Foucault in his reexamination of Hegel’s teachings, “[a]ny articulation of identity is understood in terms of exclusion and estrangement and otherness is always subjected to the same” (qtd. in Brinker-Gabler 4). Gisela Brinker-Gabler (1) explains that the result of this is that in Western thought the Other is either rejected until it no longer seems otherly, or considerable efforts are made to mask the otherness. Furthermore, Emmanuel Lévinas (qtd. in Brinker-Gabler 1) writes: “From its very beginnings philosophy has been stricken with horror by anything that is other and remains other, as if it had an incurable allergy to it”.

All these comments on the subject of the Other make clear why the concept plays such an important role in Gothic fiction. The classic Gothic narratives provide an array of otherness in the form of monsters, women, madmen or exotic

creatures often also in combination with each other or incorporated into one character. Furthermore, the Other is also important in unnatural narratology which becomes clear in Monika Fludernik's (*How Natural* 357) quote about "natural narratology": "the moralistic, phallogocentric, heterosexual and generally conservative ideologies of the natural and their rejection, if not demonization, of the (unnatural, perverse) Other". The parallel of the Unnatural and the Other can also be seen in *HoL*'s character relationships and especially the interactions between the house and its inhabitants.

A second very important concept related to otherness is the process of abjection. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, abjection denotes "[t]he state or condition of being cast down or brought low" and the Abject is therefore "[t]hat which is cast off or away" ("Abjection", OED). Julia Kristeva (*Powers* 9) writes that "abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger". This means that the Abject is made aware of its imminent rejection and it is very similar to the Other because it is aware of its incongruity with the abjecting entity.

In poststructuralism the concept of "Abjection" is often used to signify "that which inherently disturbs conventional identity and cultural concepts" (Childers and Hentzi 1). Its three major functions are to help produce the subject, threaten the subject's existence and finally to secure the subject's continuation through this danger (Kristeva, *Powers* 2). Because it is so closely tied to the idea of individuality, Kristeva (*Powers* 1f.) proposes in her psychoanalytical readings that the Abject is the part of ourselves which we cast off in order to construct our own identity. However, in contemporary cultural theory, the Abject is extended to function as a synonym for a marginalized group and the term "space of abjection" signifies the environment inhabited by these rejected beings (Wardi 52).

The Abject is in itself conflicting – horrifying and fascinating, repulsing and attracting, it lies somewhere between the object and the subject, in the realm of the taboo (Kristeva, *Powers* 2). Kristeva (*Powers* 1) herself defines the Abject through what it is not:

The abject is not an object facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an object, and otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of de-

sire. What is abject is not my correlative, which providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous.

According to Meaney (192), the Abject precedes both the subject and object and complements the superego. Hogle (*Gothic Ghost* 295), for example, points out that the first split from the subjectless state of *chora* takes place at birth. However, it has to be noted that at this stage the child is the Abject rather than the mother, a position which is later reversed when the child begins to form its own identity.

Nevertheless, the Abject does not only constitute an external entity, but is also part of ourselves. If the subject is seen as the mind, the Abject becomes the body from which the humanist ideal seeks to distance itself (Kristeva, *Powers* 3). Since both cannot be separated the Abject always remains at the brim of our awareness: "It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva, *Powers* 1).

Abjection also poses the threat of indistinction between subject and object, leading to a profound confusion and the loss of the ability to communicate – constituting and reinforcing the formation of taboos (Kristeva, *Powers* 1f.). Becker-Leckrone (33) explains that the only possible escape from this state of ambiguity is to abject again which proves the subject's existence to itself.

Apart from the psychological dimension of abjection, the process can also be observed on a societal level (Kristeva, *Powers* 68):

Abjection is coextensive with social and symbolic order, on the individual as well as on the collective level. [...] [It] is a universal phenomenon; one encounters it as soon as the symbolic and/or social dimension of man is constituted, and this throughout the course of civilization.

The process of abjection is a constant reminder of the illusion of selfhood because it is existentially based on the repulsion of elements that inherently belong to the self. In Gothic fiction, the Abject is represented by both internal psychological struggles and external monstrous beings. Because of this mutability of the Abject, it can take many forms, ranging from bodily fluids, to death or a character's relative. Clearly, the Abject induces fear into the subject and social order, but at the same time dependency and fascination. It is thus that the Ab-

ject, through creating a cognitive dissonance, is often not only the Other, but simultaneously the Uncanny.

The third concept which needs to be mentioned in relation to Gothic fiction is the Uncanny. Synonyms for *uncanny* are “mischievous, malicious, incautious, unreliable, unsafe” and if connected to a person, it is often “associated with supernatural arts or powers” (“Uncanny”, OED). Freud (13) observes that the Uncanny is also the Unhomely and “in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression”. Therefore, the Uncanny is concerned with that which is known to us, but at the same time weird or mysterious, often with an atmosphere of the supernatural.

Ernst Jensch, who defines the Uncanny as something unknown to us (as opposed to Freud’s understanding), describes the Uncanny as something which causes a fundamental insecurity and therefore “a lack of orientation” (Vidler 23). He (Vidler 23) describes it as a sense of something foreign, new and hostile “invading an old, familiar, customary world”. As Royle (1) puts it comprehensively: “The uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper. [...] [I]t is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar”.

There are two basic forms which it can take – either as “something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context” (Royle 1). Often it is the encounter with something that should have stayed hidden – a disturbance of the natural, resulting in heightened opacity (Royle 2).

It is closely tied to the notion of the Other since it is always that which is not oneself (even in instances where the Uncanny is evoked by one’s own body) and therefore “the deeply and internally familiar [...] as it reappears to us in seemingly external, repellant, and *unfamiliar* forms” (Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 6). This is also a notion picked up by Anthony Vidler in his book entitled “The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely” (1992), which is mentioned in a footnote in *HoL* (359). Vidler (37-38) gives a special status to “the spatial uncanny” which is displayed in endless repetitions of “the imaginary void” – a truly perfect categorization of the Uncanny in *HoL*.

To summarize the most important unnatural aspects of Gothic fiction, two basic categories can be deduced on the story level: the unnatural space and the unnatural character. On these two levels there are again two main aspects which can be investigated, namely the relation between oppositions which is ultimately a question of power and the psychological dimensions which also comprise the concepts of the Other, the Abject and the Uncanny.

2.2 Unnaturalness on the Discourse Level

Unnaturalness on the discourse level of a text is concerned with the unusual aspects of how the content is transmitted. Consequently, it focuses on the manner of transmission and more specifically on the medium, the language, the narrative techniques and the textual layout of a story. The strong focus on the technical aspects of the message creates many parallels between the unnaturalness in *HoL* and those features which are commonly found in ergodic literature. In the following subchapter, a number of ergodic features will be exemplified for their later use in some sections of the analytical chapter on discourse unnaturalness in *HoL*.

The term “ergodic literature” was first introduced by Espen J. Aarseth in his 1997 book *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Ergodic literature is essentially structurally complex, multidimensional, branching literature and the term “ergodic” derives from the Greek word *ergon* (work) and *hodos* (path), emphasizing the work it takes to follow the text’s path (Aarseth 1). Therefore, Herman, Jahn and Ryan (141) explain that ergodic literature is not strictly-speaking a literary genre, but “a perspective focusing on the structural aspects and differences of literary media that go beyond the standard and dominant sequential structure of [codices]”.

Although the terminology is rather new, the texts that Espen Aarseth chose as examples in his book reach as far back as the *I Ching*, a Chinese text from 1000 BC. However, given the many subsequent essays of which the majority focuses on ergodicity in video games, it is clear that the recent spread of Inter-

net technology and new computer programs⁵ triggered the development of the theory. Other important academic influences were the works of Marie-Laure Ryan, Donna Haraway, David Jay Bolter, Richard Grusin and Katharine N. Hayles which are in turn rooted in Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) and Marshall McLuhan's comprehensive media theories.

Among the most prominent types of ergodic literature are cybertext and hypertext fiction (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 141). Cybertext is defined as a subcategory of ergodic literature and is essentially a text which involves "calculation in [the] production of scriptons" (Aarseth 75). Aarseth (17) explains that a

cybertext [...] is the wide range [...] [of] various kinds of literary communication systems where the functional differences among the mechanical parts play a defining role in determining the aesthetic process.

The term "cybertext" itself was influenced by Norbert Wiener's "cybernetics" – an approach which explores the structures, limitations and possibilities of regulatory systems (Aarseth 1). Aarseth (3) explains that cybertext always reminds the reader of the paths not taken and of the inaccessibility of the text to some extent without giving the possibility of ever knowing the results of the reader's choices.

An important aspect of the ergodic text is its limitlessness which can be seen in its application of hyperlinks. In his 1965 essay "The Hypertext", Ted Nelson defined hypertext as any text opposing "the linear constraints of printed texts" (Söder 36). At a later point Nelson (82) revised his perspective to include "branching and responding text[s]" which are infinitely re-enterable and non-sequential. Therefore, hypertext emphasizes both authors' and readers' freedom to create unlimited content even in constrained spaces such as books, thus representing the most modern version of intertextuality.

Both cybertext and hypertext make use of processes such as recursion, reflexivity and remediation. Therefore, in the following section, the three concepts will be briefly explained with regard to their roles in literature.

⁵ The first literary experimentations with new programs created books like *The Policeman's Beard Is Half Constructed* (1983), a collection of prose and poetry written exclusively by a computer program named Racter.

Recursion is the process whereby the same elements are used repeatedly, and the term stems from mathematics and computer sciences in which it is a method of defining functions which are included in their own definition (Causey 1). In literature, recursivity is primarily the process in which narrators, characters and readers “become aware of their own awareness” through seeing themselves or features of themselves recur in other forms (Tabbi 80). Therefore, it is a form of solipsism⁶ and can be seen as “a hyperreal positive feedback loop” (Featherstone and Burrows 9). Another form of recursivity is the *mise en abyme* with its scaled mirroring effect – a feature which is often associated with postmodernist deconstruction (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 312).

A second ergodic technique employed in many texts is reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to a metafictional awareness similar to recursion, but usually tied to the consciousness of a work’s own fictionality in relation to an outside world (Huber, Middeke, and Zapf 8). Reflexivity in literature is most often seen in those narrations which make themselves their own subject-matter (Huber, Middeke, and Zapf 8), for example in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions, or Goodbye Blue Monday* (1973) in which the narrator behaves as the author of the novel and speaks with his characters about the book.

Therefore, metafictionality plays an important role in the investigation of reflexivity in ergodic literature. The term itself was coined by William H. Gass in his essay “Philosophy and the Form of Fiction” (1970) and denotes a work’s consciousness of its own artificiality. The effect of the term has been disputed with some critics arguing that it is a sign for the exhaustion of literature, while others are claiming that it signifies a rebirth (Huber, Middeke, and Zapf 8). According to Huber, Middeke, and Zapf (8), this self-awareness of literature’s “own constructedness and textuality” has been a part of fiction since the very beginning and can be found in many famous works like Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1603) or Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759 – 1767). Common metafictional or reflexive techniques are the intrusions of narrators into the storyworlds, comments of characters acknowledging the non-fictional writing process, direct addresses of the reader and questions about the relevance of a work or literature in general (Huber, Middeke, and Zapf 9). The various techniques of reflexivity are also

⁶ Solipsism is the state of self-assurance of one’s own mind (Huber, Middeke, and Zapf 8).

found in unnatural narratology and are part of ergodic literature because of the level of independence the reader achieves through them.

Another important part of reflexivity is self-reflexivity. Huber, Middeke and Zapf (7) write that self-reflexivity is “both an expression of and a basic requirement of modern rationality and self-consciousness” because it is an inherent capacity of the subject/self. Self-reflexive writing is an examination of fictional storyworlds, incorporating both criticism and theoretical aspects (Huber, Middeke, and Zapf 9). A number of issues and tropes are frequently connected with (self-)reflexivity among them logical dilemmas, paradoxes and infinite regressions/recursions (Huber, Middeke, and Zapf 7).

The third feature which needs to be mentioned in relation to ergodic literature is remediation. Remediation is “the re-presentation of material that has already been represented in another medium” (Hayles 781). Hans-Peter Söder (34) writes that the current “cut and paste” culture of the digital age primarily repurposes, redefines and borrows content, naming this practice remediation (which is closely connected to intertextuality). However, in the process of remediation the content has been appropriated while the medium has not been adapted (Söder 34). From a poststructuralist point of view remediation primarily aims to challenge aspects of authorship, identity and authenticity, and is therefore closely tied to recursivity and reflexivity in their common goals (Söder 34).

Although most examples of ergodic literature are works found online or read in an electronic medium, the genre is not limited to non-print sources (Aarseth 1). The reason for this media nonspecificity is that ergodic literature is defined by the way a text works and not the medium in which it is released (Aarseth 1). Since the material is not significant and the focus shifted towards the text’s functions, the reader takes a more important position during the reading process (Aarseth 179):

The ergodic work of art is one that in a material sense includes the rules for its own use, a work that has certain requirements built in that automatically distinguishes between successful and unsuccessful users.

The reader who is trying to decipher these complex texts is also at the focal center point of the interpretational process because texts which demand that a “non-trivial effort” (Aarseth 1) is spent during the reading process also empha-

size interactivity and communication. Furthermore, since ergodic literature is dynamic, it can produce different readings repeatedly and often infinitely, stressing the subjective experience of every reader.

These aspects also clarify the distinction between the reader as a voyeur of the non-ergodic text and the reader as the creator/operator of the ergodic text – the essential difference being that between “metaphorical structure and logical structure” (Aarseth 4). While in a metaphorical structure the readers have the option to observe and follow pre-constructed paths, the logical structure permits readers to explore by themselves, extrapolate and influence the text, but it also puts the reader at risk of rejection (Aarseth 3-5). Therefore, ergodic texts shift the focus away from the classical author/sender, text/message and reader/receiver pairs to a process of multiplicity where the participants’ roles are more versatile (Aarseth 18). Ultimately, this is also the main reason why ergodic texts usually incorporate such an array of unnatural features which challenge long-established forms of literature and point towards new forms of literary creation.

In summary, ergodicity in *HoL* can be equated with the unnatural structure of the novel. Therefore, intricate structure elements will be emphasized in the discourse section on unnatural elements and special attention will be paid to elements of cybertext and hypertext. Furthermore, the concepts of recursivity, reflexivity (including metafictionality and self-reflexivity), as well as remediation will be included in the chapter on the unnatural narrative situations in *HoL* and the unusual layout of the novel.

2.3 Reading an Unnatural Text

Although some aspects concerning the reader of unnatural texts have already been mentioned in the last chapter with the prominence of interactivity in ergodic texts, there are still some aspects concerning the role of the reader of unnatural text which need to be illuminated. So far it has often been mentioned that the reader of unusual texts is required to put a greater effort into the reading process, but it has not been explicated what those reader-mechanisms are. There are two processes which are repeatedly mentioned throughout articles on unnatural narratology: conventionalization and naturalization.

Conventionalization occurs when certain unusual scenarios become familiar to such an extent that the reader produces a new frame which is generally accepted (Alber et al., *What Is* 379). This familiarization of initially strange elements is usually achieved through repetition or proliferation until the oddities are noticed less and less. Therefore, a mental conversion takes place in which unnatural elements are transformed into “basic cognitive categor[ies]” (Fludernik, *How Natural* 256). There are a number of genres which use such conventionalized unnatural elements as genre markers much like science fiction uses aliens or fairy tales use anthropomorphized animals.

Naturalization is the process in which the reader reverts to familiar ideas in order to make sense of otherwise inexplicable aspects of texts (Alber et al., *What Is* 379). Therefore, “[n]aturalization is a type of rationalization” (Eagleton 51-52) in which readers draw parallels between inexplicable events and that which they are familiar with. In his 2009 article “Impossible Storyworlds – and What to Do with Them”, Jan Alber proposes five different strategies the reader reverts to when faced with unnatural elements in texts. In 2012 (Alber et al., *What Is* 376-377), he expanded the list to the following nine ways of reader reactions:

1. *Blending/frame enrichment*: The reader tries to recombine, extend or alter his or her cognitive frames in order to allow the elements to become possible.
2. *Generic Conventions*: This mechanism is basically the same as conventionalization in which certain unnatural features are seen as belonging to a certain genre.
3. *Interiority*: Unexplainable events are seen as internal events such as hallucinations, dreams or signs of a mental sickness.
4. *Thematic*: This mechanism helps the reader see the unnaturalness as a theme.
5. *Allegorical*: The process whereby the reader interprets an impossible event as a representation of an abstract idea or lesson about humanity.
6. *Satirical*: When the unnatural narrative events are a mockery of other works or events and can therefore not be taken at face value.
7. *Transcendentalistic*: The anti- and non-mimetic elements are seen as part of another realm or universe such as heaven or hell.

8. *“Do it yourself”*: Contradictory, complex or multiple story lines are indicators of reader emancipation, meaning that every reader is invited to form his or her own story and play with the unnatural elements.
9. *“The Zen way reading”*: reading an unnatural text just as it is and accepting all the weird, incompatible, horrific or discomforting features as they are without applying any other strategies.

These nine strategies are what Alber considers the most common techniques readers employ when they are faced with highly unnatural aspects. However, some of these categories are certainly overlapping or at least very similar such as strategies four and five, or possibly one and seven. Moreover, there are also “unnaturalizing readings” (Alber et al., *What Is* 377) which resist the application of any real-world explanations, but which are for obvious reason very similar to “The Zen way reading”.

Although the emphasis on readers’ opinions and their strategies will be discussed more closely in the last chapter of this thesis, sense-making processes will also be mentioned in the other chapters of the book, but with a different focus on the characters of the novel. In the last chapter, it will be shown whether readers do indeed primarily revert to Alber’s naturalizing strategies and to which in particular, or whether they prefer an unnaturalizing reading of *HoL* as favored by Richardson.

3 UNNATURALNESS ON *HOL*'S STORY LEVEL

3.1 Unnatural Setting

"We are all haunted houses" (Doolittle 146).

HoL is an unnatural Gothic space – haunted house, uncanny, abjected and abjecting Other at the same time. The unnaturalness is grounded in the oppositions, power struggles and psychological manifestations of *HoL*'s spatial irregularities. Thus, the novel can be seen as a study of "the physics of 'otherness'" (*HoL* 50) reflected in "the absolute physical absurdity of the *house*" (*HoL* 146), or as Mark Taylor put it: "the uncanny or the strange on steroids" (Taylor) which is beyond the classical haunted space because it represents the non-supernatural, but mimetically unexplainable Uncanny. Furthermore, *HoL*'s abstractness is not limited to the content of the novel, but projects its irregularities onto the physical book itself (which will be explained in more detail in chapter 4.2), making the reading process a physical experience instead of a purely intellectual one.

The house is located on Ash Tree Lane in Virginia, USA. It was built in 1720 and is influenced by the American colonial style, more precisely Georgian colonial, and represents the antiquated space of Gothic stories with a hidden secret that will haunt its inhabitants. Its exterior is painted white and there are a few tall trees surrounding the house. Furthermore, it seems to be rather isolated since there is never any mention of neighbors or other buildings nearby. Otherwise, there are little descriptions about the exterior of the house or the terrain surrounding it since the focus lies on the space within it.

The interior of the house is separated into several rooms of which only some are mentioned in more detail because the unnatural events occur in them. On the first floor there is a sort of foyer, a kitchen and a living room, and on the second floor two bedrooms. These rooms are the reason why the Navidsons' house has been described as "a goddamn spatial rape" (*HoL* 55), "a horizontal eight" (*HoL* 364) and a "slaughterhouse" (*HoL* 314), representing the epitome of unnaturalness within the book. Although space generally denotes a physical

presence and an object state, *HoL* celebrates its antipode as it describes these rooms as “the perfect pantheon of absence” (*HoL* 423).

The first unnatural mutation takes place on the second floor between the two bedrooms. When the Navidsons return after a vacation there is suddenly a “white door with a glass knob” in the wall between the parents’ and children’s bedroom. However, this door does not lead directly into the other room, but opens up “into a space resembling a walk-in closet” with “perfectly smooth and pure black” (*HoL* 28) walls. At first the family thinks that they had overlooked the room previously, but they soon realize that something abnormal has occurred in their home: “What took place amounts to a strange spatial violation which has already been described in a number of ways – namely surprising, unsettling, disturbing but most of all uncanny” (*HoL* 24). The opposition between the lightness and comfort of the bedrooms and the darkness of the walk-in closet immediately establishes it as the Other which is not welcome. Furthermore, when Navidson tries to make sense of the new addition by measuring the inside and outside of the house, he discovers that the space inside is one quarter of an inch bigger. After several attempts and refined measurement methods, Navidson and his brother finally determine that the interior is even $\frac{5}{16}$ ” bigger than the exterior and therefore growing. These measurements then trigger a long series of attempts to repress the Other, to abject it or to assimilate it, but the blurred boundaries between the mimetic and anti-mimetic cannot be overcome.

The second unnatural expansion takes place in the living room where suddenly in the middle of the day “a dark doorless hallway” (*HoL* 57) appears in the west wall. However, throughout the story the hallway does not remain in the west wall, but is also said to be set in the northern one. Although the hallway is at first only five and a half minutes long, it soon changes into an infinite maze in the interior of the house. When Navidson and his friends start to explore the hallway they soon discover that the infinite corridor leads to an anteroom and then to the great hall with an enormous spiral staircase (*HoL* 85):

[T]he Great Hall has a ceiling at least five hundred feet high with a span that may approach a mile [...] [and] a staircase in the center which is over two hundred feet in diameter and spirals down into nothing.

To the explorers, this uncanny horrorresque places feel “like the inside of some preternatural hull designed to travel vast seas never before observed in this world” (*HoL* 155), threatening the men’s existences with their supernatural otherness.

Furthermore, at the bottom of the staircase the explorers find an endless labyrinth. They frequently hear growling noises within this maze and Holloway is convinced that there is some sort of monster wandering the corridors. However, the growling could very likely be the result of the house’s inner motions and expansion processes. Moreover, although the fear of a looming Other spreads through the narrative levels, there is only one instance in which any sign of a monster is found: the deep claw marks on Zampanò’s floor (*HoL* xvii).

Another element of the house’s labyrinth is sound and more precisely echo. It is discussed in detail in chapter five of the novel. This auditory phenomenon is important because it helps both humans and animals orientate themselves in places their eyes cannot penetrate. It is interesting to note that Johnny describes Zampanò’s blindness as that of a bat which sees through reflecting sound signals (*HoL* xxi), and that Daisy suffers from echolalia which is caused by the house and could be her way of coping with the inapprehensible events taking place in her home (*HoL* 78):

[D]espite the tremendous amount of material generated by Exploration A, no one has ever commented on the game Daisy wants to play with her father, perhaps because everyone assumes it is either a request ‘to play always’ or just a childish neologism. Then again, ‘always’ slightly mispronounces ‘hallways.’ It also echoes it.

Zampanò explains that the primary function of an echo is to reveal emptiness and that there is an “eerie quality of otherness inherent in any echo” (*HoL* 46). Furthermore, taking a look at religious choir music, Zampanò deduces that divinity is defined by echo (*HoL* 46). However, an echo can also be comforting because it resounds the familiar (often one’s own voice) and presupposes the existence of objects that can create an echo, thus contrasting the void.

The unnatural spaces within the house are characterized by absence and their clear binary opposition to the natural fractions of the house. There is no light, no humidity, no air movement, no sound (except for occasional dull roars) and no direction (compasses and altimeters do not function while radios have only a

limited range). Moreover, there is no dirt, or dust, or any kind of object. The walls are black with an ashen hue and there are no windows. However, the size and depth of the corridors and rooms seem infinite and their dimensions can change in an instance. Furthermore, there are infinite doors, but never any windows. Throughout the various explorations there is only one door without a doorknob and strangely enough this door is locked, hiding a wounded member of the team.

The house also acts physically against its inhabitants by abjecting people, transporting everyone wherever it likes (*HoL* 74-75), or swallowing them if it has the chance. At the end of the novel three people will have died inside the walls or been swallowed by the dark, however, only Jed's body will be recovered. Apart from the overt violent actions against its inhabitants, the house also seems to have negative physical effects on every single person who enters it even if their dwelling there is only short-lived. Furthermore, these effects even surface when the person does not actually enter the unnatural spaces, but stays in the unchanged rooms or the outside premises. The physical and psychological side effects the house produces span from migraines, insomnia, melancholia, echolalia, impotence and nausea, to ulcers, coughs, weight loss, vertigo, mutism and an enduring sensation of cold (*HoL* 396). These are all symptoms which vanish immediately or improve drastically when the person leaves the house and stays away from it (*HoL* 406). Furthermore, the forces inside the house seem to gradually destroy any form of trust and comfort in order to isolate its inhabitants, making them more vulnerable.

Royle (1) mentions uncanniness in relation to properness and explains that the uncanny is among other things "the disturbance [...] of personal or private property" which perfectly fits the narrative's focus on the "disturbed" house. The scholar states that uncanniness is above all "in the uncertainties of silence, solitude and darkness" (Royle 2) which constitute the vastness of the space altered and continually reinvented by the dynamics of the house. The reader witnesses Navidson's strange fascination and repeated returns to the house, which can be read as typical symptoms of the "'homesickness' [or] in other words a compulsion to return to the [repressed] inorganic state, a desire (perhaps unconscious) to die, a death drive" (Royle 2). Freud (3) also explains that the Uncanny is

“something one does not know one’s way about in” which is mirrored in the characters’ state of confusion and their helplessness to find any direction within their own home (all technical aids, e.g. a compass, fail to function within the walls). In *HoL*, the Uncanny is most obviously apparent in the house’s false “domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits” (Vidler 17). The first intrusion of the Other and the sudden unexpected (although still small) change becomes apparent in a quote from the novel (*HoL* 28): “In their absence, the Navidsons’ home had become something else, and while not exactly sinister or even threatening, the change still destroyed any sense of security or well-being”. Here the spatial uncanny causes both denial and repression, and shows the struggle to explain the unnatural. This can also be seen in the characters’ attempts to find a rational explanation for the unusual mutations which take place in the house, or in Karen’s refusal to discuss the anomalies at all.

In an effort to naturalize the events and in order to find the cause of the mutations the inhabitants all turn to different methods ranging from Feng Shui, religion and humorous stoicism, to chemical analysis and historical research. However, this coping methods are utterly futile and do not lead to a better understanding of the mechanics of this unthinkable space.

The inhabitants’ first attempt to naturalize the impossibilities of their house is to seek for a historical explanation. Since the house on Ash Tree Lane was supposedly built in 1720, Zampanò contemplates that “quite a few people have slept and suffered within those walls” possibly making it “the collective product of every inhabitant’s agonies” (*HoL* 21). Apparently, the house has frequently changed owners in the past, but has never stayed empty for a long time. The real estate agent, Alicia Rosenbaum, explains that the house had twenty different owners in the last fifty years, but that the only memorable fact from the house’s past was that it was build on the remains of Jamestown Colony (*HoL* 409). This is supported by Zampanò’s discovery of journal entries of a man who lived in Jamestown during the 1610 winter of starvation in which the last entry exclaims that the inhabitants had found stairs in the middle of nowhere. This of course might signify that the house had already existed in some forms in the

17th century and is therefore much older than anyone has believed so far. However, it also raises questions about the original owners and their purpose in building the house. Unfortunately, the historical investigation leads no further and does not help the Navidsons in comprehending their unhomely property.

In a next step, the family and their friends try a natural science approach by analyzing samples from the unnatural space within their living room. The detailed chemical and geological analyses of the material collected inside the ashen walls of the infinite corridor indicate that every element and sediment known to mankind is present within the walls of the house. Although many pages from the report are missing and most of the text has been destroyed by Truant's clumsiness with ink, there are still some interesting parts which reveal that some samples are billions of years old, possibly originating from meteors (*HoL* 378). Furthermore, one scientist explains that the samples taken from the bottom of the staircase inside the house, could even be older than our solar system (*HoL* 378). Therefore, it is not surprising that some claim that the house has an extra-terrestrial origin or might even be a portal into another dimension. However, Zampanò dismisses this hypothesis by citing a critic named Justin Krape (*HoL* 375): "Both arguments are probably best attributed to the persistent presence of schizophrenia plaguing the human race". Furthermore, the old man explains that "the language of objectivity can never adequately address the reality of that place on Ash Tree Lane" (*HoL* 378-379), declaring any scientific approaches to the unnaturalness of the house null and void.

In a third strategy, several scholars who supposedly commented on the film sought a more internal explanation. As was mentioned above, the house has certain negative psychological effects on the people entering it and so a number of people have asked themselves whether the issue was not a mental one to begin with? On page 165 (*HoL*), for example, Zampanò mentions that some critics believe that "the *house's* mutations reflect the psychology of anyone who enters it" and later he mentions that there certainly is a psychological dimension to space (*HoL* 175). What if the house is simply the dynamic manifestation of everyone's greatest fears, and because it can change and adapt, it will never lose this power? Furthermore, one scholar argued that the house should be seen as a vagina or more comprehensively as a woman: "Notice only men go into it?"

Why? [...] [Men] are haunted by that infinite hollow and its sense making allure, and so they crave it, desire it" (*HoL* 357). This is supported by Verhaeghe's comment: "Every female opens up the abyss, in which the male fears, but at the same time longs to fall into" (Verhaeghe 143). This ties the fear of the unnatural to the desire to explore it in order to naturalize it. However, if any of the psychological theories are true, there is still neither an explanation for the space's origin nor its ultimate purpose.

The last approach mentioned in *HoL* is tied to religion. Quite frequently, the house is seen in connection with a god-like entity. On page 121 (*HoL*), Zampanò references to the bible: "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the *house* of God, and this is the gate of heaven". Given the age of the house and its infinite number of rooms, it might not even be far-fetched to come to this conclusion, however, Will Navidson takes it even one step further (*HoL* 390): "God's a *house*. [...] What I mean to say is that our *house* is God." Navidson wrote this in the letter he sent to Karen before he entered the infinite hallway for the last time and the Bister-Frieden-Josephson Criteria hypothesizes that Navidson thought he would die: "whoever sees God dies" (*HoL* 388). However, in the discussions Karen has with a bunch of scholars, a fictionalized and parodied Harold Bloom explains the following about the house (*HoL* 359):

You see emptiness here is the purported familiar and your *house* is endlessly familiar, endlessly repetitive. Hallways, corridors, rooms, over and over again. A bit like Dante's *house* after a good spring cleaning. [...] It's a lifeless, objectless, soulless place. Godless too. Milton's abyss pre-god or in a Nietzschean universe post-god.

Clearly, none of the four main naturalizing approaches truly work for the inhabitants, scholars or Zampanò because they cannot grasp all the different forms of unnaturalness which destroy any form of continuity. In its perpetual state of fear, opposition, power struggles, othering, abjection and uncanniness, the house cannot be rendered unthreatening or natural, and so the Navidson's home will forever stay unhomely, repellant, familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Thus, the advice given by Navidson might best be heeded (*HoL* 4): "If one day you find yourself passing by that *house*, don't stop. Don't slow down, just keep going. There's nothing there. Beware."

3.2 Unnatural Characters

The Gothic unnaturalness with regard to the characters in *HoL* lies in their power struggles and oppositions to each other, as well as in their psychological instabilities. Although, the unnaturalness on the character level is minor compared with the spatial peculiarities in the novel, it is nevertheless important to examine them in order to show that there are many different shades of unnaturalness. Similar to other Gothic stories, all, but one character (Billy Reston) are white, middle class people who struggle with the Other which is the house for the Navidsons, the documentaries for Zampanò, the manuscripts for Truant and the book for the editors and fictionalized readers of the novel.

As was mentioned in the introductory chapter on Gothic features, incongruities are frequently stressed and adverse forces are often combined in a novel's character list. In *HoL*, the characters display a contradictory relationship between the fear of the Unnatural and the absolute fascination for it. Furthermore, the novel is packed with foils and other contrasting pairs, the most prominent couples being Will Navidson and his fraternal twin brother Tom, and the narrators Zampanò and Johnny Truant. In both pairs two very different figures strive for power and domination, but at the same time seek acceptance from the other person.

Navidson, or Navy as he is affectionately dubbed, is a “disarmingly pleasant man, lean, attractive, slowly edging through his 40s” (*HoL* 9) and a Pulitzer Prize⁷ winning photojournalist. Tom, on the other hand, is an alcoholic, corpulent, mild-mannered, humorous and unemployed carpenter. On page 247, it is mentioned that the two brothers are the “contemporary Esau & Jacob” and they never seem to be able to agree on anything. Through the course of the story, Navidson becomes more and more estranged from everyone around him and obsessed with the house. He is indeed so involved with the exploration of the uncanny house that he fails to notice that he is losing everything else in developing a sort of cult-like masochism in which “the entire *house* is a physical in-

⁷ Almost at the end of the documentary the reader finds out that the secret person, Delial, Navidson always referred to, was a girl who was starving while he photographed her with a vulture, and that this photo won him the Pulitzer Prize. In this context, Navidson also makes a significant typo: “the girl in the photo that won me all the fame and *gory*” [emphasis added] (*HoL* 391).

carnation of Navidson's psychological pain" (*HoL* 21). In contrast, his brother Tom seeks company and spends his time playing with Navidson's children or talking to Karen, Navidson's wife. At the end of the documentary, Tom loses his life saving Daisy, his brother's daughter, from being swallowed by the house, but plunges himself into the dark void of the abyss. At this point, Will Navidson finally realizes what his alienation and power plays have created, but is never able to overcome the guilt of having brought Tom into this situation.

Zampanò and Johnny Truant show the largest disparities which is best illustrated in their narrative strategies. For example, Zampanò's style is very impersonal compared with Johnny's since he rarely intrudes into the story and does not reveal much personal information. In fact, the reader would never know anything about Zampanò if Johnny did not occasionally reveal certain details about the old man's life (which need not be taken at face value given Johnny's unreliability). Interestingly, Johnny Truant was also unable to obtain any form of identification while looking through Zampanò's documents: "Who knows where his name really came from. Maybe it's authentic, maybe made up, maybe borrowed, a nom de plume or – my personal favorite – a nom de guerre" (*HoL* xii). Since the novel makes use of various filmic references it soon becomes clear that the parallel to one of *La Strada*'s main characters was not a coincidence. Johnny, on the other hand, is all too eager to share information about his life and could be seen as the roundest and most dynamic personality in the novel.

The most unnatural content feature in Zampanò's narrative is the fact that the old man could not possibly have seen the documentaries because he was "blind as a bat" (*HoL* xxi). The immediate question is: How then is Zampanò able to make such scrutinizingly detailed descriptions of the footage? One possibility could be that he saw the film before he went blind. Another theory could be that he invented everything, cunningly fooling all the women who came to read to him and Johnny as well. A third option which would explain the detailed knowledge of the characters, house and events, could be that Zampanò is not who he claims to be, but was part of the events taking place on Ash Tree Lane.

The third Gothic feature mentioned in the theoretical introduction was the investigation of psychological states which is highlighted in Johnny Truant's character. He is a person of contradictions and continually exhibits new agonies. Alt-

though he frequently lies about his past, much of the oddity grounded in Truant's psychology was certainly created by his troubled history. Early on in the novel Truant illuminates his circumstances: "when I was ten my father died and almost nine years later my crazy Shakespearean mother followed him" (*HoL* 21). In other passages the reader finds out that even before his father's death, his mother was committed to The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute (The Whale) because she was violent and tried to kill Johnny as a child (*HoL* 629). Thus Johnny Truant became part of the US foster care system and changed families frequently. On page 93, Johnny hints at the abuse he suffered from his foster father and in many other passages it becomes apparent how badly he had been treated as a child. He suffers from night terrors which became worse when he started working on the book and to ease his pain he takes a considerable amount of drugs. Furthermore, he suffers from paranoid attacks and it becomes apparent that he might have inherited the same mental disorders his mother displayed. Finally, through Johnny's critique of Zampanò's writings and style, the young man also seeks to free himself of the old order's constraints while still trying to fill the old man's shoes by editing the story.

In the constant metacommentaries of famous critics and scholars Gothic psychological features are also discussed in the form of parody (*HoL* 365): "Derri-da: The other. [Pause] Or what other, which is to say then, the same thing. The other, no other. You see?". A features which adds to the unusualness of *HoL* is the othering of female characters. This is most obvious in Karen Green, Will Navidson's wife, and Pelafina Lièvre, Johnny Truant's mother. While the former presents the gendered Other, the latter is a psychological Other.

Karen is helpless when faced with the unnaturalness of the house and her crippling claustrophobia, which she supposedly developed after having been raped as a child (*HoL* 57-58), only adds to her dependency on Navidson. She is portrayed as a cheating, psychologically troubled esoteric who is reduced to her beauty not only by the fact that she was a model, but also by many of the characters and scholars in the novel. In the transcripts of her interviews with famous experts (*HoL* 354-365), she is repeatedly approached in a sexual manner by Byron Baleworth, Andrew Ross, Jennifer Antipala and Camille Paglia. Although she often seems to play the part of a degraded toy, she is also powerful when

she saves her husband from the house, overcoming all her fears. Furthermore, she assembles two documentaries on her own, showing that she does not want to be a victim of the house. However, throughout the narrative she remains rather two-dimensional and there are only few direct comments from her. Ultimately, she is at the same time the fragile and the potent female Other who is so often stereotyped in Gothic texts.

Pelafina is a psychological Other manifested through the collection of letters sent to her son (*HoL* 586-642). She represents the unstable, neurotic lunatic mother who is a danger to her son and unable to fulfill the role of a mother because she could not be assimilated to societal norms. One impossible aspect of her letters is that she knows about Zampanò because she encodes one of her letters with the question (*HoL* 615): “Zampanò who did you lose?” Furthermore, given the fact that the letter was written in 1985, it is impossible that Johnny had already told her about the old man’s text which he only found in the 1990s.

Abjection is best represented by the house which could be seen as another character in the novel. It is horrifying and fascinating, scares away many people and attracts even more. The house disturbs conventionality and any concepts of familiarity tied to the idea of a house. Furthermore, its unnatural parts are not only rejected by the other characters who are trying to naturalize it, but also abjects its inhabitants physically by expulsing them from its interior. At first, the house was supposed to be an integral part to the Navidson family’s happiness, but it soon created a dissonance that conflicted with the family’s idea of home.

The uncanniest element in *HoL* is the looming sensation of a monster. This possibly malignant creature is mentioned in *The Navidson Record* in the form of unbearable growling noises within the ashen walls of the house, the claw marks found in Zampanò’s floor after he died and Johnny’s paranoid visions: “I’m afraid. It is hungry. It is immortal. Worse, it knows nothing of whim” (*HoL* 79). Within the house this creature produces a sort of “lack of orientation” which Anthony Vidler (23) mentions as one of the effects of the Uncanny. It invades the familiar and though it is never actually sighted, it stays one of the unnatural creations trespassing across the boundaries of the different narrative levels in *HoL*: “This time it’s human. Maybe not. Extremely long fingers. A sucking sound too. Sucking on teeth, teeth already torn from the gums” (*HoL* 71). In one of the fic-

tional comments, a scholar (*HoL* 375) proposes that humans' ideas of monstrosity vary according to their nationality:

Your monster [...] is purely American. Edgeless for one thing, something a compendium of diverse cultures definitely requires. [...] You know when I first saw the monster, I thought it was a Keeper. [...] It's a very mean *House* Keeper who vigilantly makes sure the *house* remains void of absolutely everything.

The horror aspect is also highlighted in the recurrence of Halloween. On Halloween, the festival of the dead, Johnny writes his last comment for the novel as well as the book's introduction and Navidson's documentary ends on October 31st too: "In those final shots, Navidson gives a wink to the genre his work will always resist but invariably join. Halloween. Jack O'lanterns. Vampires, witches, and politicians" (*HoL* 527).

In summary, there are several aspects which highlight the Gothic horror influence on *HoL*, apparent in the themes of lunacy, otherness, abjection and clichéd oppositions. Furthermore, if the house can be seen as a living entity which reacts to other people, the monster might not be what everyone imagines is living within the walls, but the walls themselves – the creature already having swallowed Navidson and his family. If this metaphor is extended, the book becomes to the reader what the house has become to its inhabitants – a monstrous entrapment. Therefore, the parallels between these two constructions – house and book – will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters and the effects on the readers who are struggling to free themselves will complete the synthesis in the last chapter.

4 UNNATURALNESS ON *HOL*'S DISCOURSE LEVEL

4.1 Unnatural Narrative Situations

"A book is a vast cemetery where for the most part one can no longer read the faded names on the tombstones"⁸ (*HoL* 646).

Similar to an old cemetery, Danielewski's novel makes it exceedingly hard for the reader to identify its many competing narrative voices. Not only is it hard at times to distinguish the narrators' roles at any given moment in the novel, but the levels of narration also overlap considerably and deception seems to be the main goal. Thus, it soon becomes clear that *HoL* is an ambitiously multi-layered narrative which dynamically explores the dimensions of narrative and reader competence, making it a great example of an ergodic piece of print literature.

The book in itself presents a paradox: "it is a print novel for the digital age, a book that privileges print while plugging into the digital network" (Pressman 107). So while the novel is of the usual paper make, it references to many digital technology aspects such as a Linux Operating System named "Yggdrasil", has a heightened sense of its own materiality, being a technotext, and employs the recurrence of the blue hypertext print of "house" in any language. In this printed digital web the different narrators play an essential role in the remediation of Navidson's story. Hayles (785) explains the role of the narrator in the ergodic work the following way:

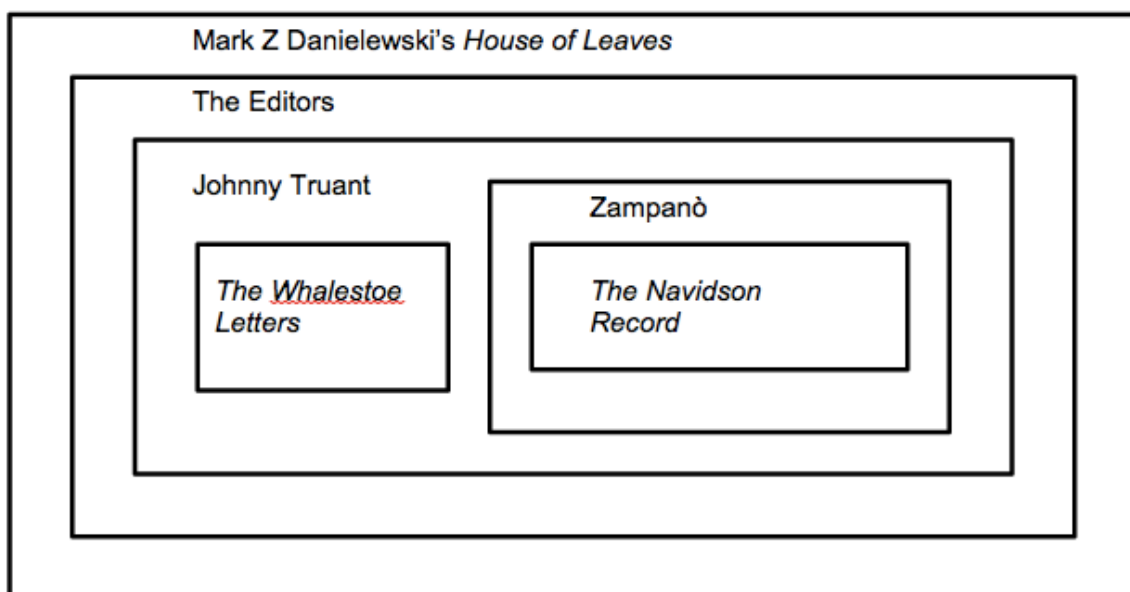
The unreliable narrator, a literary invention foregrounding the role of consciousness in a constructing reality, has here given way to the remediated narrator, a literary invention foregrounding a proliferation of inscription technologies that evacuate consciousness as the source of production and recover in its place a mediated subjectivity that cannot be conceived as an independent entity.

Therefore, the main sources of unnaturalness with regard to the narrative situations stem from the metatextuality, the impossibility of the narrators' multiplicity and the unreliability of the various characters.

⁸ Originally a quote by Marcel Proust which has been translated by *HoL*'s editors: "Un livre est un grand cimetière où sur la plupart des tombes on ne peut plus lire les noms effacés" (*HoL* 646).

Although the book's cover states that Mark Z. Danielewski is the author of the novel, on the second title page Zampanò becomes the author with the addition of the "introduction and notes by Johnny Truant". At this early point in the story the reader first notices that the novel is not quite naturally structured. Before the actual introduction by Truant, there is yet another foreword added by unnamed editors who build another level around the remediated narrative presented by the most immediately present editor – Johnny Truant. However, in the introduction itself, the reader finds out that there is another level within the pages written by Zampanò. This internal layer is the actual primary narrative centering on the unnatural events occurring in a house in Virginia. This story is narrated through documentaries produced by William Navidson, his family, colleagues and friends. These circles of remediation are dizzying "[a]s if learning about omnivorous appetite from the computer, *House of Leaves*, in a frenzy of remediation, attempts to eat all the other media" (Hayles 781). Thus, the structure of the novel is very similar to that of a box with hidden compartments where the reader only finds certain treasures by following different paths. The novel's stories can be visualized in the form of boxes representing different narrative degrees:

Figure 1: The narrative structure of *HoL*



Taking the Chinese box structure of the above illustration, the following subchapter will detail the narrative situations of *HoL* from the most internal level to the outer layers, focusing on each narrator, or in the case of *The Navidson Record* on several storymakers. Furthermore, if one takes an even closer look

at the different narrative levels, one would have to add that Zampanò's and Truant's stories consist of a large number of intertextual references pointing to still other narrative levels. It is clear that *HoL* is convoluted and seemingly infinite in the ways it narrates. There are two theories about why *HoL* could have such a peculiar structure and what this structure might signify.

Huber, Middeke and Zapf (10) explain that the Chinese box structure of a novel can be representative of so-called "fractal personhood". This means that the various layers of *HoL* might be different manifestations of one character. The narrator who is best suited for a split-personality analysis is Johnny Truant. Compared with the other characters, he is more mentally unstable and as the most prominent and immediate narrator of the novel, he is powerful enough to control and possibly also create all other narratives. If interpreted in this way, *HoL* could be seen as the manifestation of one narrator with multiple personalities. This would mean that Johnny's function is that of an omniscient narrator and he is only fawning ignorance in many instances. Furthermore, it is clear that nothing in the novel is a coincidence and that Mark Z. Danielewski carefully constructed this dangerous, trapping narrative web.

Another interesting notion is that of *HoL* as a palimpsest (Hayles 784). The text is certainly layered and the narrators' motivation seems to be the recovery of the first narrative as fully as possible. However, Navidson's story cannot be seen as the most valuable one among the different texts and it would be deceptive to assume that the other narratives cover up *The Navidson Record*. Furthermore, the reader is not dealing with only one inscribed medium, but apart from paper and electronic texts, with visual materials as well. The video documentaries seem to be at the heart of *HoL* and film techniques are integral to the narrative style. Although it is certainly true that *HoL* is palimpsest-like, it is much more than that.

Although some classical narratological frameworks can also be applied to Danielewski's novel, many fail to highlight the finer patterns of the work. For example, it is impossible to determine whether Zampanò or Truant are hetero- or homodiegetic narrators. Since they are both characters within the story, but in some cases also primarily outside narrators, they could be seen as a mix of both. Furthermore, while it is certainly more practical to present the narrative

levels in embedded boxes to establish that the novel is multilayered, the narratives are not always a clear-cut case of matrix-narrative – hyponarrative, and might be better represented in terms of degree instead of hierarchy. In terms of mood, the novel is best described as having variable focalization although Zampanò attempts an empty center focalization through his academic style.

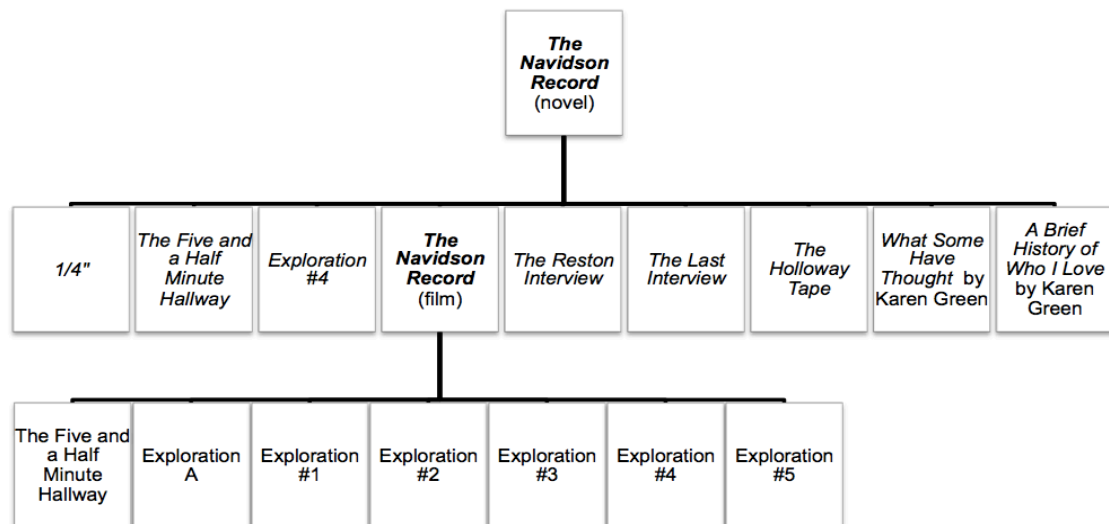
In the following subchapters, Navidson's, Zampanò's and Truant's story levels will be discussed in more detail, followed by shorter sections on the marginal narrative roles of Pelafina Lièvre, the editors and Danielewski within the novel.

4.1.1 *The Navidson Record*

The innermost narrative of *HoL* is *The Navidson Record*, a lengthy account by Zampanò about the misfortunes of the Navidson family. While the story is essentially renarrated by Zampanò, a number of smaller sections and quotes are primarily Will Navidson's narrative and not influenced by Zampanò's voice. Throughout the old man's story, Navidson and the other characters intrude into his academic discourse and the boundary between the critical reception of Zampanò and the original visual narration of the documentaries frequently becomes blurred because the reader cannot understand how some information was recovered without any filmic evidence when no camera was present.

Therefore, the narrative situation is highly unnatural, unreliable and makes no clear distinction between the inner level narrators (Navidson and the other characters) and Zampanò on the outer level. However, the whole of what has been titled *The Navidson Record* can be subdivided according to the different documentaries relating to the house and its inhabitants:

Figure 2: The various parts of *The Navidson Record*



As can be seen in the graphic above, there are four documentaries made by Will Navidson, two interviews from other sources, a diary-like tape by Holloway Roberts and two films by Navidson's wife Karen Green. Apart from Navidson, who made the majority of the film material, and his wife Karen, the other central characters in this narrative are Will Navidson's twin brother Tom, his paralyzed friend Billy Reston, the explorer Holloway Roberts with his assistants Jed Leeder and Kirby 'Wax' Hook, and Navidson's and Green's children Chad and Daisy. The three films preceding *The Navidson Record* are *1/4"* (referring to the length that the house seems to be bigger inside than outside at first), *The Five and a Half Minute Hallway* and *Exploration #4*. The latter two are also incorporated into the feature length documentary and are therefore often seen as trailers or teasers. However, the largest part of the novel consists of a detailed discussion of the lengthy documentary which can be subdivided into seven parts, capturing "the most difficult subject of all: 'the sight of darkness'" (*HoL* xxi).

The documentaries are not presented in a linear fashion, but as is common in ergodic texts, seem branching and contain a lot of recurring material, for example long shots of the door to the infinite corridor. Furthermore, *The Navidson Record* stands at the center of *HoL*'s remediation process which winds through the different narrative levels of the book. The multiplicity that is so defining for the novel, can also be seen in the variety of different film techniques, ranging from tilted frames to freeze frames and black screens.

Another feature that is discussed considerably is Will Navidson's reliability. Zampanò mentions several sources which doubt the authenticity of the material, stating that the documentaries are more fiction than fact and digital manipulation has facilitated the house's special effects. However, Zampanò himself argues that Navidson could never have had the budget to produce such realistic results. Furthermore, since none of Navidson's or Green's documentaries were ever commercially publicized, there seems to be no reason to believe that they might be inauthentic. Thus, it is insisted that the novel deals with a legitimate documentary and not a horroresque mockumentary.

Will Navidson is the primary narrator of the documentaries because he alone edits all the material captured by various cameras installed in the house and carried by the other characters. Although, Navidson is clearly more apt at filming than the other characters, he still includes their material in his documentary as well (*HoL* 64):

Comparisons immediately make Navidson's strength apparent. Holloway Roberts' tape is virtually unwatchable: tilted frames, out of focus, shakes, horrible lighting and finally oblivion when faced with danger. Likewise Karen and Tom's tapes reflect their inexperience and can only be considered for content. Only the images Navidson shoots capture the otherness inherent in that place.

Navidson is the only one who can look at all the tapes made in the house and in this role he becomes an omniscient, god-like voyeur. The others are of course aware of his power, but do not seem to mind this imbalance as he does not seem to pay any attention to their mistakes. This is especially apparent when Wax kisses Karen and Navidson views the material several months later without any reaction to it.

At the end of the documentary, Navidson decides to enter the dark tumor-like corridors of the house again all by himself estranged from everyone else. Zampanò asks in his notes: "Why Did Navidson Go Back to The *House*?" (*HoL* 385) which is discussed in three scholarly answers: The Kellog-Antwerk Claim, The Bister-Frieden-Josephson Criteria and The Haven-Slocum Theory (*HoL* 385). All three display the academic parody attempted in *HoL*, but also reveal Navidson's fears, dreams and secrets.

Before Navidson is saved by Karen, there is yet another highly unnatural meta-fictional section where he suddenly begins to read the book that he is in the future becoming part of: "Taking a tiny sip of water and burying himself deeper in his sleeping bag, he turns his attention to the last possible activity, the only book in his possession: *House of Leaves*" (*HoL* 465). This surprising element stresses the ergodicity of *HoL* and baffles the reader who must wonder in which universe this could possibly happen.

4.1.2 Zampanò

Zampanò renarrates the documentaries on the second innermost level of *HoL*. His role is neither omniscient nor fully limited to the perspective of an observer, but rather speculative and at times his insights and knowledge of the events taking place in relation to the house seem unusually detailed. He is a mix of overt and covert narrator and on his own narrative level he presents a heterodiegetic narrator while in Johnny's narrative he changes roles and becomes part of the story.

Unlike the chronological narrative of the documentaries, Zampanò combines all sorts of information, various theories mixed with incoherent statements about art, politics or cinematography, and the films. He makes it exceedingly difficult for the readers to stay focused and to be able to orientate themselves in his narrative web because the reader is unsure which path to follow. Furthermore, he mocks academic writing by using certain conventions hyperbolically.

Firstly, his style is very elaborate, complicated and ornate for which he is often criticized by Truant who describes Zampanò's language as "pseudo-academic hogwash" (*HoL* 100) or "pretentious as all fuck" (*HoL* 127). The text is crammed with jargon, loanwords and Latinate vocabulary, such as "vituperative" (*HoL* 16) or "amaurotic" (*HoL* 21), and it remains very elevated, academic and sometimes poetic throughout the novel even when describing the gory details of Jed's shooting (*HoL* 193). Zampanò frequently plays with words as well as with the layout and it is not uncommon to find phrases like: "((((((((((((Jonah in the belly of the beast))))))))))" (*HoL* 545) where textual features symbolize content ones, in this case the parentheses stand for the belly of the whale who swallowed the

biblical Jonah. All of these linguistic features display Zampanò's narrative playfulness and humorous attacks at scholarly genres.

Other features are the many extensive footnotes and sources he quotes. Some of his quotations seem entirely unnecessary, for example on page 28 (*HoL*) when he writes "to quote Rilke, *Wer?*" which appears to be simple name-dropping. Additionally, he incorporates many superfluous asides, like a lengthy passage on Magellan (*HoL* 135). Though some of the theoreticians and authors are well-known, there are also several bibliographical references which do not exist and the reader is often left to wonder whether the extensive invisible library he constructed has any significance at all. Some of the footnotes are page long enumeration, for example on page 64 to 67 (*HoL*), and the readers are left wondering whether they are really supposed to read this information.

Furthermore, he incorporates long passages from German, Latin, Old Greek and French. However, some of these passages are faulty, one example being a German text from Heidegger on page 24 (*HoL*), and reveal that either Zampanò wanted to parody the highbrow style of these scholars, or that he failed to cite them correctly because he did not grasp their content. Therefore, it is questionable whether Zampanò was really able to understand these languages at all or if the various women who read to him (many of whom were multi-linguals and college educated) picked these passages according to his wishes. Apart from classical languages, he also transcribed quotes in Morse code (*HoL* 97) and in Braille (*HoL* 423), and though he failed to translate some quotes himself, Johnny Truant and the editors complete the rest.

He constantly foreshadows events taking place in the following chapter or gives away many tragic incidents which occur at a later stage in the novel, for example when he tells the reader in chapter seven that Wax will now make his "last foray down the hallway" (*HoL* 81). Though he seems to like foreshadowing, he is equally fond of its opposite, namely cliffhangers, which he employs by sometimes abruptly ending a chapter in mid-sentence (*HoL* 417). Both techniques are reminiscent of the style of modern TV shows, reflecting the filmic aspects of *HoL*.

As mentioned above, Zampanò's role in the novels is that of a keen observer, and there are only few instances when he intrudes into the story, for example

when he gives the finder of his notes some advice, or when Johnny recovers Zampanò's journal. In the main text the old man never uses the first person pronoun, but in the footnotes the reader can sometimes find rare concessions (*HoL* 137):

An old man's mind is just as likely to wander as a young man's, but where a young man will forgive the stray, an old man will cut it out. [...] It took me twenty years to unlearn the fortunes found in a swerve. Perhaps this is no news to you but then I have killed many men and I have both legs and I don't think I ever equaled the bald gnome Error who comes from his cave with featherless ankles to feast on the mighty dead.

The same quote is also included in the appendix where the print is red and struck through, referencing the Minotaur story. It is also in the labyrinth chapter that the reader learns that Zampanò wrote an essay about the Greek myth and it is one of only two passages where the narrator shows any form of passion or personal involvement, the other being the collection of poems and quotations in the appendix.

Of the eight poems included in the appendix (*HoL* 557-565) most are only fragmentary and three remain untitled. However, the overlapping topics are nature, love and architecture and he often combines house-, eye-, moon- and leaf-motifs. These are of course all indicative of general topics within the novel such as family ties, madness, transience and infinity. Furthermore, the appendix also includes a collection of quotes such as an ominous "I miss you." (*HoL* 547). Given the many references to a son, whether as a wordplay with "sun" or in relation to the bible (*HoL* 542-543), one possible explanation could be that Johnny Truant is really Zampanò's child. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that in Johnny's father's obituary (*HoL* 585) all the names are omitted which would seem unnecessary if Johnny's last name was really Truant.

However, at another point in the narrative Zampanò suddenly becomes Tom, Navidson's lost brother, which could either be an insignificant typo or a Freudian Slip (*HoL* 320): "He might have spent all night drinking had exhaustion not caught up with *me*" [emphasis added]. Again, this would point to an interpretation where Zampanò was part of the immediate group of people who explored the house and who made the documentaries. The enigma of his blindness could be explained by the injuries he received when the house swallowed him and his detailed knowledge of the events would seem more plausible.

However, both theories about who Zampanò might be cannot be fully proven and therefore he remains the most mysterious of all narrators in *HoL*. Interestingly, a day before he died, he left a note to his successor where he cedes all rights to the finder. In it he also advises against any false trust and pride: “They say truth stands the test of time. I can think of no greater comfort than knowing this document failed such a test” (*HoL* xix). This summarizes the unreliability of the narrator and the untrustworthiness that demands considerable efforts from the reader of the ergodic text.

4.1.3 Johnny Truant

Johnny Truant appears to be the most immediate narrator in *HoL* because he does not shy away from being personal. Although the title page states that he is merely responsible for the notes, his narrative almost eclipses that of Zampanò and his comments are often quite lengthy and unrelated to *The Davidson Record*. His introduction sets the tone for the rest of the novel and his overt intrusions already start on page four. Thus, he seems to be the typical first person, unreliable narrator who consciously makes his stories exceedingly emotional with an emphasis on anecdotes.

While Johnny’s aim is to describe everything meticulously and unnaturally exact (especially his drinking sprees and sexual encounters), he often states that his descriptions are not “entirely accurate” (*HoL* xvi) although he also says that he is sincerely trying to be as exact as possible. However, he admits to certain changes and additions in Zampanò’s work, but his attitude is never humble and he never seems to strive for approval: “Zampanò only wrote ‘heater.’ The word ‘water’ back there – I added that. Now that’s an admission, eh? Hey, not fair, you cry. Hey, hey, fuck you, I say” (*HoL* 16). Although he is very talkative and excessive in his accounts, there are instances when he fails to put his thoughts into words or when he cannot express himself, for example when he writes about his mother, for example typing “(- can’t write the word -)” (*HoL* 50) instead of “mother”.

Johnny Truant is very critical of Zampanò and very aware of the old man’s tricks. In the introduction Johnny explains that *The Davidson Record* cannot be found anywhere and those famous people who allegedly made comments on

the documentaries had never heard of Navidson or Zampanò when they were confronted with the quotes. Furthermore, he establishes right away that many of the books cited by Zampanò do not exist and that nothing in the narrative is trustworthy especially he himself. Furthermore, he comments on his own role in the narrative and on the interrelationship between his own and Zampanò's stories, trying to establish that he has the power to change anything he wants to. Thus, his behavior as a narrator seems infantile, unapologetic and rambunctious.

The language he uses is very inconsistent, ranging from swearwords, pseudo Latinate expressions, as in "[k]nown some call is air am" which is a phonetic approximation of "non sum qualis eram" which translates as "I am not what I used to be" (*HoL* 72), colloquial expressions and mistakes, for example using "of" in phrases like "he wishes he would *of* lived a little differently" [emphasis added] (*HoL* 100), to very elaborate and academic jargon. On the one hand, his text is cluttered with contractions, expletives and pseudo worldly wisdom, like "[b]eautiful women are always drawn to men they think will keep them beautiful" (*HoL* 19). On the other hand, he uses double entendres, e.g. "Parent he sees [sic]" (*HoL* 379), wordplay and intertextuality to show that he is in fact very knowledgeable: "An essay I'd written on the painter Paulus de Vos (1596-1678) had won me an all-paid summer abroad" (*HoL* 350). Moreover, in the second appendix, the readers can find a number of poems entitled "The Pelican Poems" which seem to be a collection of verses Truant wrote during his travels in Europe. In these poems (*HoL* 574-580), Johnny makes references to Shakespeare, Eliot, Proust, Hawthorne, Poe, Edison and the bible. Nevertheless, he is annoyed by some academic scholars and finally also admits that he might not have been the best person to edit Zampanò's texts (*HoL* xx):

In retrospect, I also realize there are probably numerous people who would have been better qualified to handle this work, scholars with PhDs from Ivy League schools and minds greater than any Alexandrian Library or World Net. Problem is those people were still in their universities, still on their net and nowhere near Whitley when an old man without friends or family finally died.

Truant enjoys playing games with the reader and he often insults the readers personally, for example when he writes “you’ve got a TV dinner for a heart” (*HoL* 53) in case they are not interested in his love life. He often addresses the reader in rhetorical questions: “Ever see yourself doing something in the past and no matter how many times you remember it you still want to scream stop, somehow redirect the action, reorder the present?” (*HoL* xiv). Furthermore, he plays with the readers’ expectations and incorporates many twists into his narrative, for example in the introduction where he fawns naiveté (*HoL* xi):

I’d been in the throes of looking for an apartment after a little difficulty with a landlord who woke up one morning convinced he was Charles de Gaulle. I was so stunned by this announcement that before I could think twice I’d already told him how in my humble estimation he did not at all resemble an airport though the thought of a 757 landing on him was not at all disagreeable. [...] As it turned out Chuckie de Gaulle burnt the place to the ground a week later. Told the police a 757 had crashed into it.

Though he is usually very negative and ill-tempered at a later point in the story, he suddenly becomes very positive and just when it looks like there might be a happy ending, Truant reveals his lies: “Are you fucking kidding me? Did you really think any of that was true? [...] I just made all of that up” (*HoL* 509). Nevertheless, he seems to care about the readers, repeatedly warning them not to read the novel. In the introduction (*HoL* xxiii), for example, he states that the readers of *HoL* will never find peace in anything anymore once they have started reading (“Then the nightmares will begin” (*HoL* xxiii)) and they await a similar fate to his own.

Though his games and unreliable comments would be enough to establish that Johnny Truant is mentally unstable, he adds extensive accounts of his frequently recurring visions of monsters, murders and accidents (*HoL* 108):

People started screaming. Though not about me. Something to do with the truck. It was leaking all over the place. Gas. It had caught fire. I was going to burn. Except it wasn’t gas. It was milk. Only there was no milk. There was no gas. No leak either. There weren’t even any people. Certainly none who were screaming. And there sure as hell wasn’t any truck. I was alone. My street was empty. A tree fell on me. So heavy, it took a crane to lift it. Not even a crane could lift it. There are no trees on my block.

At the end of the novel, Johnny Truant even seeks to combine all the narrative levels by searching for the house in order to become part of the unnatural construction. However, the house he finds is not the one Navidson filmed, but the property where his own parents' house stood. Although there is no clear resolution to Johnny's story, there are several hints at a violent end in which Johnny is lost in his own oblivious thoughts (*HoL* xix):

I haven't even washed the blood off yet. Not all of it's mine either. Still caked around my fingers. Signs of it on my shirt. "What's happened here?" I keep asking myself. "What have I done?" What would you have done?

Although this is his most recent diary entry (August 28th 1999), it is not the last comment by Truant in the book. The introduction is dated October 31, 1998 and the reader learns that the blood Johnny has on his hands is from his former lover's boyfriend, Gdansk Man. Finally, he concludes the last section with a story about a mother who learns to let go of her dying baby. It is disputable whether this is just a random story (which is contradicted by the emphasis of purple print) or a symbolic story representing the author's struggle to set his work free.

The conundrum with the first and second edition of the novel also recurs on Johnny's narrative level. When he supposedly searches for Navidson's house, he meets the band *Liberty Bell* who possesses the first edition of *HoL* which has the same cover pages as the actual second edition, stating that Johnny Truant is one of the editors, but that the publishing company is "Circle Round A Stone Publication" (*HoL* 513). The drummer of Liberty Bell explains that he found the book online "quite some time ago" (*HoL* 513) and simply printed the pages out: "Take a look for yourself," he said, handing me a big brick of tattered paper. "But be careful," he added in a conspiratorial whisper. "It'll change your life." Curiously enough it changed everything for Truant who now aware of his own impact, feels flattered by their comments and "happy about it all" (*HoL* 514). He mirrors the sentiment of an author who has been very unsatisfied with his work until he realized that it does not matter if it is imperfect or incomplete.

4.1.4 *The Whalestoe Letters*

Pelafina Heather Lièvre, which is frequently misspelled "Livre" (*HoL* 643), is the narrator of the second appendix's E-section. Her fifty-five letters to her son

Johnny start on July 28th 1982 and end on May 3rd 1989⁹, and are only interrupted thrice by an editorial comment and two letters from the director of the Whalestoe Institute. This personal universe is entirely dependent on the view of Lièvre because reactions from Johnny Truant and other people are filtered through her narrative.

The tone of the letters is loving at first, but with time a reproachful undertone creeps in. With this tendency the level of paranoia also rises and Pelafina feels exceedingly cheated by everyone around her. She fantasizes herself into a frenzy which is mirrored in the layout of her letters which start out casually, proceed to be more mysterious, then incorporate riddles and tasks, and at last become unreadable. On pages 620 to 623, she starts to ramble incoherently, but if the first letters of every word are combined, she really asks Johnny to help her (see Appendix 1 of this thesis on page 82). Then after this dark section, she finally reveals that she had tried to kill Johnny when he was seven years old by strangling him (*HoL* 629-630):

How red your face got then even as your tiny and oh so delicate hands stayed clamped around my wrists. But you did not struggle the way I anticipated. You probably understood what I was doing. You were probably grateful. Yes, you were grateful. [...] [S]hould I be ashamed? For wanting to protect you from the pain of living?

The letters are also brimful with intertextuality and many Old English quotes. She refers to Goethe, Shakespeare and Greek mythology. Furthermore, she seems to speak several languages, cluttering the text with Spanish, Latin and Italian, but her own poems (*HoL* 631) are rather simple rhymes. On page 599 (*HoL*), there seems to be a spelling mistake, “pisces” instead of “pieces”, however, remembering the echo chapter on page 41 (*HoL*), one will see the reference to the tragic love story between Echo and Pan, in which Echo is also torn to “pisces”, as well as the reference to the zodiac sign.

The most interesting impossible feature is the hidden question directed at Zampanò which can be assembled by joining the first letter of every word in a paragraph from the letter sent on November 1st 1985 (*HoL* 615): “Zampanò who did

⁹ Eleven additional letters ranging from March 9th 1983 to December 24th 1988 were included in the separately published *The Whalestoe Letters* (2000).

you lose?”¹⁰. This links the ergodic sidetrack back to the main narrative and raises several questions with regard to the connection between Zampanò and Pelafina.

Finally, Pelafina admits that she is “hopelessly unreliable” (*HoL* 636) and hangs herself with her bed linens, leaving Johnny a Pelican pen with which he will later write his poems.

4.1.5 The Editors

Although the role of the editors seems only marginal in *HoL*, they have a great impact on the credibility and authenticity of the story as a whole. They do not reveal anything about themselves, neither how many they are nor whether they are actually editors employed by the publishing company or independent reviewers. However, in the foreword to *HoL*’s second edition, they assure the readers that they can fully trust them:

Every effort has been made to provide appropriate translations and accurately credit all sources. If we have failed in this endeavor, we apologize in advance and will gladly correct in subsequent printings all errors or omissions brought to our attention.

Their primary narrative function is to reveal Johnny Truant’s flaws and mistakes because they never comment on Zampanò’s or Navidson’s texts. Their tone is unemotional and mimics the professional style of publishing experts perfectly. Therefore, they are the epitome of publishing ethos while Johnny Truant with his interferences presents the antithesis of the professional editor.

In the subsequent chapters they only intrude occasionally to point out omissions, mistakes or add translations which Johnny was unable to obtain. Furthermore, they reveal that they do not know and have never talked to Johnny Truant because he declined to comment on his choices: “Mr. Truant refused to reveal whether the following bizarre textual layout is Zampanò’s or his own” (*HoL* 134).

The editors do not only incorporate texts from Johnny Truant’s personal history, but also alleged reader responses to certain sections in the book. For example,

¹⁰ The paragraph seems like a maniacal rambling in its original form: “zealous accommodations, medical prescriptions, & needless other wonders, however obvious – debilitating in deed; you ought understand – letting occur such evil?” (*HoL* 615).

when Johnny lists all the women Lude has slept with and their characteristics, a number of female readers send e-mails to the editors: “Lude was such a jerk and a shitty fuck. You can tell him that. – Clarissa, April 13, 1999” (*HoL* 263). Other responses which followed the first edition’s online release were included at different points of the novel. One page 151 (*HoL*), Hailey, a woman who was also mentioned by Johnny in his story, wrote that she was sorry to hear that he had disappeared, asking the editors whether they know what might have happened to him (*HoL* 151).

Furthermore, on page 72 (*HoL*), the editors offer advice to the readers to aid them in their interpretation:

Though Mr. Truant’s asides may often seem impenetrable, they are not without rhyme or reason. The reader who wishes to interpret Mr. Truant on his or her own may disregard this note. Those, however, who feel they would profit from a better understanding of his part may wish to proceed ahead and read his father’s obituary in Appendix II-D as well as those letters written by his institutionalized mother in Appendix II-E.

In this quote the ergodic element of the novel is highlighted in the cross-referential aspect of the direction and the link to later parts. The readers may chose themselves whether they want to stay in the linear direction of the text or make jumps within the novel.

4.1.6 Mark Z. Danielewski

Mark Z. Danielewski never personally appears in the narrative, but his presence as the real world author becomes clear through the self-conscious metafictional comments of his characters (*HoL* 326):

More and more often, I’ve been overcome by the strangest feeling that I’ve gotten it all turned around, [...] forcing me to face the most terrible suspicion of all, that all of this has just been made up and what’s worse, not made up by me or even for that matter Zampanò. Though by whom I have no idea.

It is unclear where Johnny Truant’s doubts come from, but at times it seems like the author is indeed a looming, if hidden, presence in the novel. This is also apparent if one assembles the first letters of every footnote from number 27 to 42 which spells “Mark Z Danielewski”¹¹. Although elements like these are certainly

¹¹ “Michelle 28 A 29 Rita 30 Kellor 31 Zampanò 32 Declared 33 And 34 Neatly 35 In 36 Easily 37 Look 38 Edith 39 Walter 40 Something 41 Know 42 In (*HoL* 22-37).

well-hidden, they are unlikely to be a case of pure chance. As hard as Danielewski tries to obscure his impact on the story by building a complex systems of narrators who blame each other for the unnatural deviances in the book, it is still apparent that he does not want his impact to go unnoticed.

4.2 Unnatural Layout

The spatial unnaturalness that occurs in the house is also mirrored in the physical properties of the book. There are two main elements which emphasize the anomaly of the novel's layout, namely the structure of the text and its typography. Both feature an array of complex components, highlight the limitlessness of ergodic texts and do not want to be forced into the straitjacket of classical arrangements or outlines. Apart from the many unusual elements, there are nonetheless some features which are reminiscent of natural texts to preserve some degree of readability. In the following section, the book's natural and unnatural constituents will be discussed in great detail on the premise that the author must have deliberately designed his narrative in this peculiar way in order to create a more immediate physical experience of the novel's unnaturalness for the reader.

The structure of the book is very similar to that of academic secondary works, but rather unusual for literary primary works. The book consists of several different sections: a foreword, an introduction, the main text, three appendices, an index and the credits. The foreword, for example, comprises only three lines which are merely a note on the publishing process without any explanation of the main text or additional informative notes. Furthermore, the introduction is more of a warning to stop reading the novel than an incentive or guide to the text which clashes with the common expectations of the reader's understanding of such a text. The main section itself, which is entitled *The Navidson Record*, is divided into twenty-three chapters with unnatural elements in every single one of these chapters, ranging from impossible content to highly unusual layouts where the text turns in every possible direction or vanishes altogether. *The Navidson Record* is followed by a section entitled "Exhibits" all six of which are missing and which simply constitute instructions of what should have been included. Furthermore, the appendix section is very recursive with "Appendix",

“Appendix II” and “Appendix III” of which each is further divided into alphabetical subsections, making them unnecessarily convoluted and extensive.

The first appendix contains tables of contents, quotes from Zampanò and anonymous sources, photographs of the original script, a letter by Zampanò to the editors of a newspaper about a mistake made in a gun advertisement, a missing song (“The Song of Quesada and Molino” (*HoL* 556)) and eight poems of which many are untitled. This first appendix has been compiled by Johnny Truant, but is entirely made up of material written or collected by Zampanò. The most curious aspect is that everything that could have been relevant for the main narrative is missing while there are numerous texts that seem entirely irrelevant for the promotion of the story.

Appendix II, which was written in a different font and was supposedly only included in the second edition, consists of six sections which present material by Johnny Truant, but which was compiled by the editors. Section A is a collection of sketches and polaroids of the house and B comprises Johnny’s “The Pelican Poems”. Part C presents collages similar in style to those found after the title page of the book. Section D is the obituary of Truant’s father which in itself raises a lot of questions given the fact that his father’s last name was omitted which would be entirely unnecessary if Johnny’s last name was really Truant, and E a number of the letters sent by Truant’s mother. The last part F includes various quotes by famous authors in many different languages and fonts.

The short third appendix has the mission to present “contrary evidence” (*HoL* 657) compiled by the editors. It is primarily material which is supposed to prove that the house and the documentaries really exist and were not merely inventions by either Zampanò or Truant. There are clips from comics, drawings of the house, pictures, paintings and collages. However, none of these visual representations really prove the authenticity of the films. The most interesting piece is the photograph on page 662 (*HoL*) that is allegedly a film still from Exploration #4, but since it is blurred and rather obscure, it could likely be a fake.

After the appendices there is also a very comprehensive index. In fact the index is so unusually detailed, listing words like the verbs “can” (*HoL* 668) and “keep” (*HoL* 682), or “all” (*HoL* 664) and “lemon” (*HoL* 683) that it altogether fails to fulfill the academic function of an expedient index. Moreover, there are a number

of entries¹² which simply state “DNE” which stands for “Does Not Exist”. The list of DNE-words is quite long and seems random, but the question is why they are included in the index at all? For example, “ramp” is marked as DNE, but ramps, which surfaces on page 158 (*HoL*), is not included in the index. Furthermore, the index lists “Minotaur (red)” (*HoL* 686) on page 4, but there is no trace of the word to be found on that page. Though the list of DNE-entries does not seem to hold a particular message for the reader, it is curious that the word “house” can be found in various languages, but with the addition that it cannot be found in black. Another interesting reference is the word “spans” (*HoL* 698) which can be found on pages 294 to 296 where the letters tumble across the page backwards: “sn-“, “-a-“, “-ps”. These are all features which the readers will only notice if they look very closely at the text, following the curious referential paths, and which function as a kind of reward for those who spend time and energy on the the book.

The penultimate section consists of the credits which name various publishing companies and curiously give “[s]pecial thanks to the Talmor Zedactur Depository for providing a VHS copy of “Exploration #4” (*HoL* 708). Finally, the book ends with a verse entitled “Yggdrasil” (*HoL* 709):

What miracle is this? This giant tree.
It stands ten thousand feet high
But doesn't reach the ground. Still it stands.
Its roots must hold the sky.

HoL's peritexts¹³ seem like this mythic tree's roots, superficially framing the text not showing the end of the narrative with the help of recursive and reflexive strategies.

¹² A list of all the words which can supposedly not be found in *HoL*: “Aggressor, arterial, ballerina, bandage, buckles, bundle, buttress, canine, capricious, cartouche, claps, collagen, confuse, copacetic, crab, custodian, dazzle, *déqueulasse*, denounce, denunciation, detritus, diner, disclose, discombobulating, disintegrate, dispossess, dolphin, *domus* (black), donkey, eject, embalm, embarrass, entomb, fiend, flaws, float, galleries, glean, hallucinate, hallucination, *haus* (black), hippo, *house* (black), huddle, immaculate, Immelmann, imminence, infanticide, Iran, Janitorial, Jerusalem, lime, literati, lubricants, *maison* (black), *mal de mère*, mast, masturbate, mauls, *Minotaur* (black), miscreant, mis-read, molest, muddle, mutilation, nudes, offends, parse, perplexed, pigments, plummet, plywood, poach, premeditation, profuse, ramp, rend, retire, *schwarz*, snowball, sprockets, stains, surreptitious, swivel, toad, triangle, tulip, turtle, *umlaut*, unsettled, whine, whore, willow, willowisp, wrench, yank” (664-705).

¹³ Peritexts are texts within the book that mediate the work itself to the reader, e.g. forewords, appendices, etc. (Genette, *Paratexts* xvii).

Apart from the complex, peculiar structure of the book, the typography also presents a conundrum. There are four distinct fonts in the novel: Times used by Zampanò, Courier used by Johnny, Bookman used by the editors and Dante used for a part of the additional material at the end of the book. Times New Roman is one of the most widely used classical fonts and especially valued for its legibility (*Font Histories*). It is usually perceived as neutral and can be seen to reflect Zampanò's wish for anonymity. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the main text and biggest part of the novel is kept in this font. Courier was originally named Messenger and is evocative of typewriter print which stresses Johnny's role as the transmitter of Zampanò's notes (*Font Histories*). Furthermore, the editors' use of Bookman is quite self-evident. The reference to Dante in Pelafina's letters is interesting given the many classical quotations and suggestions of hell, purgatory and paradise. From page 408 (*HoL*) onwards, there are sporadic instances of "s" being substituted by a long "s" (hence "f") ending when the editors mention that the typographical change took place in the 18th century (*HoL* 313). Moreover, on page 333 (*HoL*), two words and two numbers are typed in Janson and Zampanò explains that this typography was employed in the Holloway Tape. Therefore, it becomes clear that each font is supposed to highlight certain characteristics of one of the narrators.

However, the types of font are not the only noticeable deviation in the appearance of the text. There are three colors in the novel – blue, red and purple – a feature which is highly uncommon in modern books. Any instances of the word "house" (including those in other languages), whether in the running text, title pages or index, are blue. On the one hand, blue could symbolize hypertext as was mentioned in chapter three, but on the other hand, it could also be a reference to cinematic techniques (Wittmershaus):

Navidson's house acts as a psychological "blue screen", meaning those who enter the maze effectively come into an empty structure on their own, with their psyches providing the background images and sound much the way Industrial Light and Magic provided the asteroid fields pummeling the Millennium Falcon in *Star Wars: A New Hope*.

A third interpretative option as suggested by Martin Brick would be that the blue symbolizes the anti-rubrication of the text (Brick). This would mean that instead of the medieval technique of privileging certain words in order to make the in-

tended reading of the text clear to interpreters, the blue could symbolize the anti-authoritarian multiplicity of *HoL*. In the labyrinth chapter, there are several boxes of text framed blue. Here the blue rim defines the space that is a window to the prior page. Therefore, it can be argued that blue in the novel symbolizes links and connectivity between the pages and stories of *HoL*.

Red ink appears in all the passages about or related to the Minotaur story and the text itself is always struck through. The question is: why would the author highlight a text only to mark it redundant? One possible explanation could be that these passages have a deeper meaning for Zampanò. Although the struck-through passages and red font hint at the work-in-progress nature of *HoL* they also reveal that something about the topic upsets Zampanò and the fact that he himself wrote about the myth in “Violent Prejudice in Knossos” (*HoL* 111) reveals that he is personally invested in the topic.

Curiously, the last color in the book is a mixture of blue and red, namely purple. In chapter 21, there is one phrase, “~~what I’m remembering now~~” (*HoL* 518) which is both crossed out and purple. It stands at the beginning of a story about a mother who learns to let go of her sick infant. Of course, this could represent the role of the narrator in setting free his work, or point to the complex relationship Johnny Truant has with his mother. It is clear that Danielewski uses font and color to transmit content information on an additional level, while helping the readers orientate themselves and aiding their interpretations.

Plunging even deeper into the typographical experiment that constituted *HoL*, the reader will find many other examples of the deviant typological structure. The whole typography of the book seems messy and fragmental, but the blanks and disorder are certainly significant for the narrative. The text is usually justified and every new paragraph is indented in Zampanò’s text. In Johnny’s section the text is left aligned, but many of the other footnotes behave in different ways. On page 110 to 111 (*HoL*), for example, the text is centered, growing wider and then slimmer again (see Appendix 2). In other parts the text is suddenly in the form of columns. These instances are still relatively natural, but in other cases there is no sense of direction whatsoever. When Navidson enters the unnatural parts of the house for the last time in chapter twenty, all sense of textual alignment is lost with text shrinking, spreading, reversing, running over

two pages from left to right and anything else one could possibly think of. However, the texts movements are not random or meaningless, but mirror the experience Navidson is having inside the corridors. For example, when the hallway widens on page 431 (*HoL*), the text forms an expanding passage as well, or when Navidson climbs a ladder on pages 440 to 441 (*HoL*), the reader needs to follow a text that is in the shape of a ladder to be read from the bottom to the top (see Appendix 3). Furthermore, the book requires repeated turning when the text is suddenly turned around in chapter twelve.

Furthermore, the narrative exhibits many gaps where whole pages are missing (*HoL* 403), where the text has been destroyed (marked by xs or blanks (*HoL* 328)) and where there are deliberate omissions. There are even instances where Zampanò provided underlined blanks, but never filled in the information. The text is so scattered with missing parts that the readers have to ask themselves: What is missing here and why? Although, taking the whole novel into account, the missing material is quite extensive, it always seems to be exactly enough material for the reader to make sense of the sentences and their content. Furthermore, the blanks are often conveniently placed at points where the narrators must have had a very hard time providing information, for example the laboratory reports (*HoL* 372-377), but many of the missing exhibits also seem insignificant for the content development. Therefore, Danielewski was very crafty in choosing the blanks and leaving the readers enough autonomy to fill in these spots for themselves. Thus, it is left to the reader to either feel frustrated by the omissions, or actively encouraged by the challenge.

Starting on page 119 (*HoL*), the book's pages are furnished with windows where the text can be read from both sides of a page – one in the usual direction and on the other side of the same page from behind. In these cubes there are lists of things which cannot be found inside the walls of the unnatural parts of the house ending on page 141 (*HoL*) with "~~Picture that. In your dreams~~" (see Appendix 4). Additional enumerations of architectural styles and famous buildings which do not resemble the house along with their architects start on page 120 (*HoL*), running backward and forward on opposing pages. Clearly, the common denominator in all these lists seems to be absence. The house is unnatural to such an extent that it can no longer be characterized by anything

else, but what it is not. All the usual sense-making processes in which a relationship between an entity and an idea that is well-understood fail, and repression and absence take their place instead.

Footnotes are an integral part of *HoL* with the largest sections presenting Johnny Truant's narrative. In the whole novel there are 450 footnotes of which many are recurring. Most of the footnotes are not primarily referring to sections in the main text, but are in fact footnotes to other footnotes. This process is repeated ad absurdum and it is no isolated case that the readers have to follow pages full of footnotes until they can proceed with the main text. This diversionary tactic can lead to confusion or possibly even frustration which in turn could result in resignation. Partly, this chain reaction is stopped by the fact that Johnny's storyline is quite capturing and partly by the diversity of attention grabbing devices which Danielewski employs in the text. Apart from the usual numbering of footnotes, there are also an array of strange symbols, ranging from crosses to bombs and gender icons. Many of the symbols are catenarian, some are used more than once and for some the corresponding text can only be found after extensive browsing. Repression also surfaces on the typographical level as the footnotes and main text seem to be fighting over the provided space of the novel. There are no firm hierarchies and it is impossible to determine which text could be the most important one. Furthermore, many of the footnotes have subnotes and some are so entangled that it is hard to find the source of their reference at all.

However, the footnotes are not the only places in the text where symbols or pictures surface. The cover of the "remastered full-color edition" is mat black, but if the book is held against the light, shiny elements surface which look like the outlines of the unnatural corridors and the spiral staircase in the Navidsons' home. The cover features a depiction of a compass, but without the cardinal directions which is a reference to the loss of all sense of orientation within the house's walls. Furthermore, on the inside of the front and back cover of the novel, there are a green and a golden circle with two black lines in them. Curiously Danielewski uses the same symbols for Hailey and Sam, the protagonists of his 2006 novel *Only Revolutions*. Other illustrations are musical scores, collages, comics or long complex formulae which break up the continuity of the text. Most

of these visual representations' primary function seems to be ornamentation and distraction, but the pictures in the third appendix also function as proof of the authenticity of the documentaries. On page 97 (*HoL*), Johnny Truant placed a check mark in the right corner which is a feature referring to a letter by Pelafina (*HoL* 609) in which she asks him to put a check mark in his letters if he received her last correspondence.

[illegible]

Although all the structural and typographical aspects mentioned so far range from subtle features to bluntly obvious hints at the content, there is one layout peculiarity which has not been discussed yet, but which is a perfect symbol for the novel's content and narrative style. At the first glance, the reader might not even spot this oddity, but the book's front cover page is approximately one centimeter smaller than the rest of the novel. It is clear from all the attention given to the layout of the novel that this was not a merely aesthetic decision, but that it is in fact a perfect representation of the diligence paid to every last detail in *HoL*'s construction in order to mirror the unnatural house.

The artificiality of *HoL* is also stressed in its proliferation of complex architectural designs: “It’s a book about a book about a film about a house that is a labyrinth. In short, it’s a book that is a labyrinth” (“Literature: House of Leaves”). Although the terms *labyrinth* and *maze* are often used interchangeably, there are crucial differences in their design. While both structures consist of a series of complex pathways, a labyrinth has a unicursal and therefore non-branching

course that leads the navigator to its center (“Labyrinth vs Maze”). A maze, on the other hand, has a multicursal track which forces the navigator to make choices and can include dead ends (“Labyrinth vs Maze”). However, Espen Aarseth (6) sees the maze as one of two subtypes of labyrinth, the other being the linear, and he mentions that labyrinths can be combinatory structures as well. *House of Leaves*, for example, allows the reader to navigate the narratives relatively freely and with the missing material and exhibits there are a number of dead ends. However, large parts of the novel function like non-ergodic, linear narratives that steer the reader towards one end. Mark Z. Danielewski explained his intentions behind the labyrinthine structure of the novel in an interview in the following way (Taylor):

A simple example is in the labyrinth chapter of *House of Leaves*. It intentionally slows you down. It confuses you. It disorients you. Then the following chapter has only a few sentences per page, and suddenly, you’re reading 100 pages. No matter who you are, there’s something very satisfying about reading 100 pages in a few minutes.

This strategy is used as a kind of reward for those readers who have made it through the maze of enumerations and tilting book pages. In one of the closing quotations in the appendix, the readers are reminded of the labyrinth of repression and absence they can encounter in reality and the worth of endurance: “We must speak also of the labyrinths, the most astonishing work of human riches, but not, as one might think, fictitious” (*HoL* 651). Danielewski provided a literary labyrinth for readers to explore, but it is still the reader who decides to accept the challenge or reject the offer. In the next chapter, the role of the reader in *HoL* and readers’ perceptions will be examined more carefully.

5 READING *HOL*

“This is not for you.”

This anti-dedication greets every reader at the beginning of the volume and it is followed by many warnings and insults throughout the text, especially in Johnny’s footnotes. However, instead of deterring the reader from proceeding to read the novel, these strategies seem to have the opposite effect by sparking the audience’s curiosity even more. Throughout the preceding chapters, the effects the novel can have on its readership have been referred to repeatedly and several interpretations have been discussed which could be helpful during a reader’s sense-making process. However, most of these were purely hypothetical and from my subjective point of view. Therefore, in this last thesis chapter, the focus will shift towards a wider real world readership and their naturalizing strategies.

There has hardly been a book in the last twenty years which has gained such a steady online presence and dedicated blogger fanbase. There are countless forums in which anything from fan fiction to extensive theoretical treatises on *HoL* can be found. Furthermore, there is also a sort of “House of Leaves for Dummies” (*The Idiot’s Guide to House of Leaves*) and explanatory video critiques on youtube (Goranites). The fact that these opinions and explanations of reader processes are readily available, offering rare information about first-hand reader experiences, makes the novel ideal for an analysis of reading strategies. Because only few novels offer the Internet as an analytical tool, the approach chosen for this thesis is still novel and very future-oriented.

There are many tasks readers of *HoL* have to master in order to succeed in this reading venture and many sections of the text are like puzzle games. The exercises Mark Z. Danielewski incorporated are both on an intellectual, as well as physical level where sometimes the heavy volume has to be twisted in all possible directions. However, the physical nature of the reading process is also one of the reasons why the novel captures its readers so completely and successfully, offering the content in the form of a somatically engaging experience. The non-trivial effort that is typical for ergodic works is defining for the novel and the spatial multiplicity generates much of the unnaturalness within the book.

However, *HoL* might not only have positive effects on its readers. Zampanò, for example, warns against negative physical effects that surface when one spends too much time thinking about the house or talking about the films (*HoL* 407):

People suffering anything from sleep disturbances to sexual dysfunction to poor rapport with others, [...] obsessiveness, insomnia, and incoherence. [...] Three cases resulted in suicide.

All of these side effects are illustrated in Johnny Truant's experience as the first reader of Zampanò's work. In this role Truant shines as the instable, obsessive and, in some aspects, ideal fictional reader. Although the roles of the fictional and the intended readers are very interesting, the following sections will concentrate on the experiences of real readers and the question of how these audiences make sense of the text.

In *HoL*, the reader is an entity of the novel as can be observed in the many comments directed at the audience and Johnny Truant's second person addresses. Many ergodic texts and the majority of unnatural narratives incorporate the act of reading into its metafictional narratives, making the reader a central character in their dynamic content. Therefore, those readers who did not heed Johnny's warnings, for example on page 27 (*HoL*): "You sure as hell should be getting rid of this book – you won't have time to even scream", have a choice of pathways and the fictional characters seem to be conscious of the reader's power. This also reflects the development of web 2.0 and the changing perception of an individual's involvement in literature.

However, it appears that Danielewski is also aware of these sense-making strategies and does his best to render them inapplicable to his novel. While *HoL* depends on the impressions of each individual reader, Roland Barthes' concept of authorial death does not apply because Danielewski is very careful in crafting his story in order to become more than a mere scripter. This can also be seen in the way his readership concentrates on the intended meaning, trying to find all the hints and riddles Danielewski has incorporated in his work and related texts, such as his sister's music album. Furthermore, in distributing personalized copies, which contain letters and illustrations, he makes the reader very conscious of his authorial impact. Through this constant interaction of reality and the storyworlds "the antinomies of fact and fiction" (*HoL* 3) become blurred and artifice becomes reality.

The reader of *HoL* seems to be fascinated with the repulsion mechanisms and blurring boundaries of the text, trying his or her best to delve into the novel as deeply as possible. Online, more than one (mock-)guide for the most appropriate reading strategy can be found (RandomWildwood):

- 1) Lock yourself in your apt/house.
- 2) Cover the windows with foil and your walls with egg cartons (empty of course).
- 3) Put measuring tape all along the rooms [sic] dimensions (you don't want reality messing with you while you are not looking).
- 4) Quit bathing. For that matter, don't worry about eating either. Reading *HoL* will consume your life making personal hygiene seem trivial and unnecessary.
- 5) Don't answer your phone.
- 6) Keep your ink bottle's lids on tight.
- 7) And lastly, buy *Haunted* (by Poe) and play it repeatedly.

Not only the “common” reader uses clarification strategies, but it is also noticeable that critics use comparisons to initiate a sort of conventionalization process: “It's [...] like David Foster Wallace channeling H.P. Lovecraft for a literary counterpart to “The Blair Witch Project” (Moore). *HoL* is most prominently compared to *Infinite Jest* (1996) and *Pale Fire* (1962), but it also seems to have influenced other artists like Bret Easton Ellis (“Das Haus”) or Chuck Palahniuk, who said that the last book that truly frightened him was *HoL* (Dunn 49).

On the one hand, there are many elements which can theoretically alienate the reader, on the other hand, Danielewski uses a lot of humor and suspense to capture the readers’ attentions. There are often components which seem purely aesthetic at first, but turn out to be encoded messages, or hints at characters’ interconnectivity, e.g. the footnote symbols (*HoL* 151). This constant struggle between the forces of alienation and information creates a lasting fascination with *HoL*. Since Danielewski himself never commented on any posts made on his website’s forum (Taylor), the theories and ideas about the book remain unverified, but leave a lot of imaginative potential for each individual reader. Danielewski’s attitude also seems to be mirrored in Johnny’s comments to the reader (*HoL* 31): “The way I figure it, if there’s something you find irksome – go ahead and skip it. I couldn’t care less how you read any of this.” Ultimately, it is left to the reader to make sense of the novel in his or her own way and subjective worldview.

5.1 The Reader's Perception

There are two main forums which cover any material related to *HoL* – *Forum Z* and *This Is Not for Us*. *Forum Z* has more than fifty-five thousand posts with the first one dated June 10th 2001 and the last one August 24th 2013, while *This Is Not for Us* is significantly smaller listing 108 different topics with a total of 592 posts starting only in 2011. However, many post on *This Is Not for Us* have more than two thousand views with topics ranging from “Why all the foreign languages?” to “Um, what was the point?”, or “Pelican poems wtf?”. Of these two forums, fifty different topics served as data for this thesis with each topic having a variable amount of posts ranging from the smallest being one comment to the largest with twenty-eight comments.

Moreover, these forums are not the only places where readers can voice their opinions and discuss their reading strategies. There are people who create tumblr pages solely for the purpose of posting quotes from the book, pictures of the author at book signings, collages and other creative material they have collected and made themselves (Bustee). Furthermore, many readers have created youtube videos detailing their critical reception of the novel, giving advice or dissuading others from reading the novel (SpindlesFingers). The trichotomy of writer-user-reader created in the ergodic network of *HoL* yields material which could fill volumes of secondary works on the novel, however, to give the reader of this thesis a general idea of what can be found, a few representative posts were chosen to illustrate readers' responses.

Reading through the large amount of data (approximately a total of 350 posts), I was able to identify three general readertypes: the discouraged reader, the dismissive reader and the dissecting reader. While the first two types seem to be more critical of the novel, the last kind is part of an almost cult-like following that spends an enormous amount of time online discussing the various messages of and possible strategies to approach *HoL*.

In the first group one usually finds those readers who seem utterly confused by the eclectic nature of the novel and who log on to forums to get help from other readers (Starlite3781):

Ok I am not very far in the book yet, but I am confused. If someone could straighten out the basics for me that would be awesome. Where I got

confused was when the footnotes got to be like pages long. I get the story confused. Is the story being written by Zampanò and the courier footnotes by Lude's friend?

This reader does not apply any naturalizing strategies because he or she is too overwhelmed with the unnatural structure of the novel. Furthermore, the unnatural elements are so novel to these readers that they need external help, clarifying the basic aspects of the novel. One possible explanation could be that this kind of reader has not encountered many unnatural or ergodic texts before and is frustrated as well as overwhelmed with the freedom the reader enjoys in these works.

A second common response is more critical of the novel and usually insults the work or its author. This attitude is found less frequently among the official website's posts even though the page is not censored, but occasionally the dismissive reader will post it on other websites or on youtube. This user voices his or her discontent with post such as "too gimmicky" or "po[st]mo[dern] dreck" ("House of Leaves") and generally sees *HoL* as a pseudo-intellectual joke on the reader. Some users seem to feel cheated of what they conceive to be "a good read" and increasingly frustrated by the amount of work they need to do in order to make sense of the novel (Kaelirenee):

I've tried, unsuccessfully, to read House of Leaves twice. [...] [E]very time I start, it just seems too out there. [...] When I started reading it, it seemed like he was messing with plot flow and fonts to cover up for a lack of talent.

Unlike the first group of readers who are unable to naturalize the novel, this group of readers consciously chooses not to make sense of the work. However, similarly to the discouraged reader, the dismissive reader shares a different taste in literature and is usually not very familiar with postmodern fiction.

The third kind of readership is very involved with the novel and this group presents a sort of circle of experts. Naturally, this seems to be by far the largest group because literary forums are usually frequented by those people who want to prove their expertise to the public. Once in a radio interview one reader asked Mark Z. Danielewski whether he minds this sort of obsessive "code breaker sect" and Danielewski answers that to a certain extent he fosters such behavior because he incorporated a lot of codes into *HoL* in order to promote a more visceral engagement with the text (Taylor). There are quite extensive lists

of encoded elements and detailed chronologies of the novel (Merouda), as well as observations about mistakes, for example technological anachronisms (MicheleVR5) and acrostics (“Codes for Dummies”). The dissecting reader makes use of various naturalizing strategies in order to gain a feeling of control over the unnaturalness in the text. The main motivation of this group seems to be the satisfaction of one’s own intellectual prowess.

In all three groups, one can find many different strategies to approach *HoL*’s ergodic maze, either starting with Zampanò’s or Johnny’s stories: “Following Johnny’s story first until my interest was thoroughly perked to begin reading Zampanò’s story” (Gertie). Naturalizing theories range from the possibility of Zampanò being Will Navidson (Felicia), either Pelafina or Karen being the authors of the volume, or Truant as the sole creator (Formerlysane), to the possibility that the young women reading to Zampanò played a hoax on him by inventing the documentary (Tempast33). A number of readers also prefer to explain certain elements, for example the dominance of male narrators, by making deduction from Danielewski’s biographical data. Although all of the bright ideas and interesting strategies to naturalize the narrative are relevant, they remain theoretical and as one user rightly observed (DrGizmo):

I think whatever you think is real, is real. [...] Mr Danielewski wrote the book in a way that allows for every reader to come up with his own reality. [...] Because when you look at it with an analytic eye, none of it is real. Everything is made up by Mr Danielewski.

However, the question remains whether the readers can really adopt such a Zen-like stance towards the narrative without applying any form of adjustment to it whether on the story or discourse level.

5.2 Reading Strategies

While scanning the various forums for readers’ naturalizing strategies, I was left wondering whether the actual experiences correlate with Alber’s ideas by sticking to his theoretical claims, or whether these strategies are purely hypothetical. Therefore, a list of the idealized reading strategies was composed and it was checked whether any readers posted about similar naturalizing techniques. According to Alber’s theory, *HoL* could be naturalized in the following nine ways:

1. *Blending/frame enrichment*: If one stretches existing frames beyond real-world possibilities, Will Navidson and his family could have been transported into a world where houses are living entities which can change its spatial nature according to their own wishes.
2. *Generic Conventions*: *HoL* is a science fiction novel and the house is an alien entity which wants to destroy human life. This extraterrestrial life form could be a form of virus that infects both objects and living organisms, spreading over physical and psychological contact, therefore causing unnatural events within the house, its inhabitants and everyone who knows about it.
3. *Interiority*: Johnny Truant has drug-induced hallucinations in which he believes he has authored a book. He dreams that he found Zampanò's script and adds his life story to the notes. This would mean that Johnny Truant is indeed the only narrator and has invented all the other levels which could be unprocessed conflicts from his real life, for example Zampanò being the father he has lost.
4. *Thematic*: The mutations of the house and of the book's layout stand for power struggles, especially between high cultural writings and low cultural writings (see Gothic elements), which are symbolized through the competing voices of Truant and Zampanò.
5. *Allegorical*: One possible underlying message exemplified by Will Navidson's and Karen Green's relationship could be that love endures everything as some have argued that *HoL* is more of a love story than a horror novel.
6. *Satirical*: The whole novel is simply a mockery of academic writing, ridiculing the pompous, complicated style of scholarly works. It is especially critical of scientific papers on popular culture, which stands in stark contrast to these high cultural writings. Furthermore, this would mirror Johnny's opinion of Zampanò's text and explain the many superfluous references within the novel.
7. *Transcendentalistic*: The Navidson's house is the entryway to hell or gate to another dimension.
8. *"Do it yourself"*: Danielewski created multiple pathways and story lines so that each reader can form his or her own story. The different unnatural

aspects function as a construction kit where parts can be assembled to every reader's own taste.

9. "*The Zen way reading*": The reader does not mind the spatial abstractness or unreliability of the narrators and simply accepts *HoL* as it is – a weird horror story.

Taking a closer look at the online comments, it soon became clear that most readers blend different strategies together according to their needs. For example, many suggested a form of the internalized reading where Johnny Truant is influenced by his drug abuse combined with the satirical reading. Others saw the satirical and thematic readings of Zampanò's academic style as helpful explanations. Moreover, a majority of the comments (approximately 80%) concentrated on a reader-centered DIY-method, stressing the interactive aspects of the novel by decoding all the hidden clues in the stories. However, the first, second, fifth, sixth, seventh and ninth naturalizing strategies proposed by Alber did not appear in any of the posts in the two source forums or additional material. Although, they are not useful for readers of *HoL*, other readers, when faced with different unnatural texts, could still apply these strategies.

5.3 Intertextuality and Intermediality

The term "intertextuality" was first introduced by Julia Kristeva and denotes the shaping of a text by incorporating another text. She (*Word* 66) claims that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations" and that any piece of writing is the "absorption and transformation of another". Gérard Genette (*Palimpsests* 1) postulates "transtextuality" as a term for all ways in which texts can be linked to other texts and lists intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and architextuality as sub-categories of transtextuality. In this list, there is no mention of intermediality since it is a concept that only emerged in the 1990s (Rajewsky 43). Intermediality is the concept that comprises relations between different media into one work (Grishakova & Ryan 3). However, intermediality can be seen as a subcategory of intertextuality if "text" does not only denote written text, but also film or other visual representations found in non-written media.

Intertextuality and especially intermediality have a very interactive reader-focused emphasis. Wolfgang Iser (10) claims that “every literary text invites some form of participation on the part of the reader” who is therefore actively involved in the sense-making process and invited to identify the intertextual references. Furthermore, in Kloepper’s theory of sympraxis (38f.) the meaning of a text is developed in the reader’s mind which means that the reader becomes a sort of co-author escaping the role of the passive absorber – a notion which is also important in Aarseth’s ergodic framework. These considerations also have to do with the intensity of the intertextual or intermedial reference, which has been graded into six categories by Broich and Pfister (26-30):

1. Referentiality: How much one text refers to another and reveals this connection.
2. Communicativity: How conscious the author and reader are of the reference.
3. Auto-reflexivity: How much the author broaches the issue of intertextuality.
4. Structurality: How much of an intertext is incorporated into the author’s work.
5. Selectivity: How precisely an intertext is presented in the author’s work.
6. Dialogicity: How much tension there is between the intertext and the author’s work.

Looking at Broich’s and Pfister’s categories, it becomes clear that *HoL*’s intertexts exhibit a varying intensity. On the one hand, the majority of references are clearly disclosed and thematic, making the reader very conscious of the intertext, but at the same time they are only short and do not provoke any tensions. These references which present the majority of quotations in the text have a high degree of referentiality, communicativity, auto-reflexivity and selectivity, but are rather weak in terms of structurality and especially dialogicity. However, on the other hand, the labyrinth chapter presents the myth of the Minotaur in a very interesting and differentiated way, causing a high level of structurality and dialogicity.

Mark Z. Danielewski explained that during the more than ten years that he was writing the novel, many references crept in: “The thing about *House of Leaves* is that it’s very transparent about what I was reading, so all those lists of books those were books that I was involved with” (Taylor). With regard to *HoL*, the

main questions are which references can be found in the novel and how do they impact the text?

There are basically three different strands of intertextuality and intermediality in relation to *HoL*: internal, fictional, external. There are those references within the novel that refer to works outside the book. Then there are those references that are purely fictional and only exist within the novel. The last type of referentiality concerns the kind of intertextuality and intermediality that is outside the book, but explicitly relates to the novel. Furthermore, there are two cases that transcend these boundaries, namely Danielewski's sister Poe's CD *Haunted* which is both internal and external, almost functioning like an auditory companion piece, and Danielewski's novel *Only Revolutions* (2006).

Inside the novel many references are made to pop cultural aspects and literary sources. Contemporary intertext appears exclusively in the form of TV shows, for example *The Simpsons* (*HoL* 3 & 371) or *America's Funniest Home Videos* (*HoL* 140), while the filmic references are more varied in terms of their release date, including *Eraser* (*HoL* 145) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (*HoL* 60). Furthermore, there are literary references, e.g. "The Rime Of the Ancient Mariner" (*HoL* 138), as well as many quotations from academic researchers and scholars, e.g. Marshall McLuhan (*HoL* 141). Greek mythology is a recurring element in *HoL*, for example in the form of the nymph Echo (*HoL* 41), the blinded Thamyras (*HoL* 387) or the Minotaur story in the Labyrinth chapter. Most overt references are found in Zampanò's text while Johnny Truant uses indirect intertextuality, for example through evocations of *Fight Club* (*HoL* 13) or Salome's *Dance of the Seven Veils* (*HoL* 69). The visual unnaturalness aspect is also stressed through frequent hints at M. C. Escher's artworks (*HoL* 441), and another intermedial reference is presented by the musical scores on page 479 (*HoL*). Furthermore, the effects are completely different because Zampanò wants to stress his connections to academia and legitimize his work, while Johnny Truant wants his coolness acknowledged although sometimes he tries to prove that his intellect is not inferior to Zampanò's.

The fictional references in *HoL* can be found primarily in Zampanò's sections. The invisible library, for example, consists of those imaginary works which Zampanò included in his text and which have no real world correlation. Johnny

Truant and the editors identify a large number of these works, for example *La belle nicoise, le beau chien* (*HoL* 145), which cannot be found in any library or archive, the biggest intermedial reference being *The Navidson Record* which stands at the heart of the narrative. Furthermore, other fictional intertexts are the comments by famous people (*HoL* 355-365) and the so-called glitterati: “Jay Leno quipped, ‘You know how they made *The Navidson Record*? Left the lens cap on. This really was a home movie” (*HoL* 468). These comments are used to validate the existence of the documentaries and to confuse the line between fact and fiction.

The last kind of intertextuality or intermediality is external to the novel, but makes the novel itself an intertext. Since *HoL* has been a successful novel in many languages while still keeping a sort of underground coolness to it, there were various musical adaptations of the novel. While Poe’s (Anne Decatur Danielewski) album *Haunted* is certainly the most well-known external reference, other bands like Circa Survive, who included a secret track in their album *Juturna* which is called “House of Leaves”, or a lesser-known band named The Navidson Record (*The Navidson Record*).

An especially interesting kind of intertextual relationship is that between *HoL* and *Only Revolutions* (*OR*). Although there are six years between their respective dates of publication, there are some features in *HoL* which already reference *OR*. On page 150 (*HoL*), Johnny Truant speaks of a young woman named Hailey, who has the same name as one of the two protagonists in *OR*. Furthermore, the circular sign with the two vertical lines that can be found everywhere in *OR* is also on the inside of *HoL*’s back cover, and the 360 degree text that becomes central in *OR* is hinted at on page 466 in *HoL*. Interestingly, all of Danielewski’s novels carry this form of interreferentiality. *HoL*, for example, ends on Halloween and *The Fifty Year Sword* (2005) begins on the same date, which, knowing Danielewski’s strategies, cannot be a coincidence.

5.4 Ideologies

All cultural creations carry an ideological dimension and though often hidden deep inside a book’s pages, certain worldviews are transmitted to the reader. In *HoL* several often conflicting ideological concerns can be identified though

whether these were intended by the author remains unverifiable. Furthermore, the following issues are those that were identified through close reading of the text and not because there were any openly sermonizing passages. The presentation of worldviews and social issues is necessarily a subjective one and it needs to be stressed that the following statements are made without judgment.

Firstly, the novel is mostly set in the United States of America of the late 20th century and therefore, mentions many culturally specific aspects of American life, such as Halloween or Martin Luther King Day. In Johnny Truant's and Zampanò's sections there is certainly a liberal undercurrent which can be seen in the anti-gun statements connected to Holloway (*HoL* 95), the hyperbolic argument of the paranoid Truant and the fact that Truant does not show a lot of national pride by forgetting about 4th of July (*HoL* 181).

Secondly, religion plays a role in *HoL* because Navidson reverts to it in order to explain the unnaturalness of his house. However, his explanations fail and his approach is ridiculed by Truant. Other alternative methods are also viewed critically and Feng Shui is called "some such shit" (*HoL* 316). Therefore, the general ideological aftertaste is more atheistic.

Thirdly, all the main characters and narrators in *HoL* are white men between the age of twenty and fifty, and women are not portrayed in a favorable light. They are presented as adulteresses, sextoys or psychopaths. Karen, Pelafina, Daisy and Thumper are rather flat characters compared with Navidson or Truant, which further stresses the misogynous tone.

However, the question whether there is an underlying moral message in *HoL* can be negated. If there is one thing which stands out in the unnatural maze that constitutes *HoL*, it is its inherent nihilism or existentialism attracted by the deconstructed elements of the novel. The unreliability of the narrators produces a multiplicity of opinions that cannot be trusted and altogether rejects any universal meaningfulness. Ultimately, every reader will take his or her own message away from the book, a fact which has been proven by the variety of reading strategies that were employed by the audiences in their approaches to the novel.

6 CONCLUSION

As was shown in the last three chapters, *HoL* is a masterfully constructed unnatural novel with impossible spaces, maniacal characters, manipulative narrators and an intricate layout. All these unnatural features and their effects were unleashed on the readers who struggled to maintain a hold of reality by making sense of the impossible. However, the novel could not withhold its hidden secrets and like autumn leaves, the natural protective facade of the story crumbled under the weight of close examination, revealing the interesting components of *HoL*.

While the house's unnaturalness infected the characters and the book's pages, creating an endless recursion of structural deviancy, power struggles and inconsistencies, there were some elements which brought stability to the work like page numbers or the way each page needs to be turned in order to proceed with the story. The prolific existence of mirror and foil characters facilitated othering and abjecting process, creating a fertile atmosphere for the Uncanny. Although, six narrative levels were identified, a closer inspection showed that they were largely overlapping, referencing each other and making use of secret messages. In addition to the several layers presented in the book (some of them extending beyond the cover boundaries into the realm of the real world), another dimension might be added with this thesis. Just as Zampanò critically investigates Navidson's documentaries, and Johnny Truant reviews Zampanò's text, so does this thesis critically reflect on the novel, making all its narratives internal to its own discourse. Furthermore, the anomalies displayed in the layout of the book, revealed more character-secrets than any explicit characterization could.

Apart from the unnatural story and discourse elements, the book enabled naturalization processes even though certain strategies asserted themselves and most comments were attributed to three reader-types: the discouraged reader, the dismissive reader and the dissecting reader. Thus, it became clear that for *HoL* at least, Alber's strategies could be easily condensed and were not clearly separated, but combined. Moreover, intertextual and intermedial aspects pervaded the text, linking it to the outside world via internal, fictional and external

references. At last, the ideological fixtures of the novel revealed more about aspects that demanded a degree of criticism and careful contemplation.

One of the aims of this thesis was to promote unnatural narratology and ergodic literature because both approaches are still rather unknown, but present a lot of interesting ideas for the analysis of artworks in general. Furthermore, both frameworks can easily be supplemented by other more developed theories and after all a concentration on unnatural narratology does not mean that all mimetic aspects have to be left aside, but in fact both strands should be seen as necessary complements. Furthermore, it needs to be stressed that although eclecticism sometimes has a negative connotation, it can also provide a necessary regeneration and might reveal new insights.

Most importantly, this thesis celebrates the integration and engagement of the reader in 21st century literary works, as well as the close reading of not only a text, but all features of a book from the material aspects to its typographical character, both being crucial elements in the formation of a piece of art. Furthermore, it shows that literature is influential in many ways and at times, I even felt that the novel changed my own writing and the structure of this thesis.

On a final note, it needs to be stressed that although this thesis claims no false completeness because *HoL* is immensely complex work, it nevertheless tried to incorporate all the most significant aspects of the novel. Furthermore, the approaches chosen for this thesis produced copious material, but not everything could have been included and other equally fertile frameworks had to be omitted. However, this only shows that there is still enough material left for the analysis of Danielewski's novels and similarly unnatural works. After all it is one of the tasks of literature to fascinate and enchant the readers with every possible natural or unnatural scenario, and the duty of literary studies to find out how the trick was done.

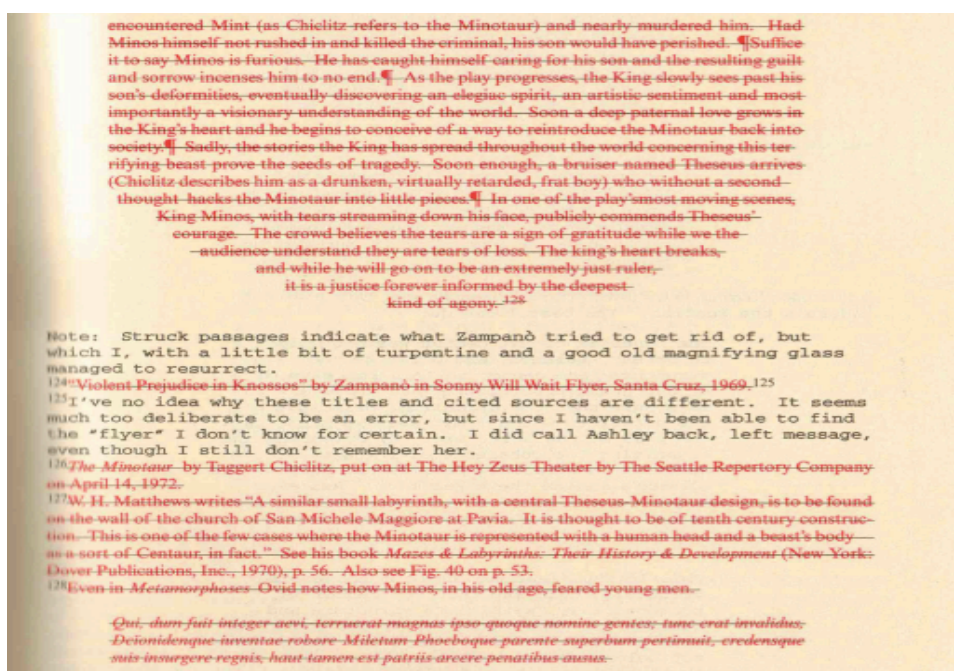
7 APPENDIX

Appendix 1 The hidden message on pages 620 to 623 (*HoL*) in Pelafina Lièvre's letter to Johnny Truant on May 8, 1987:

Dearest Johnny,

They have found a way to break me. Rape a fifty-six year old bag of bones. There is no worse and don't believe otherwise. The attendants do it. Others do it. Not every day, not every week, maybe not even every month. But they do it. Someone I don't know always comes. When it's dark. Late. I've learned not to scream, screaming gave me hope and unanswered hope is shattered hope. Think of your Haitian. It is far saner to choose rape than shattered hope. So I submit and I drift. I let caprice and a certain degree of free-association take me away. Some times I'm still away long after it's done, after he's gone – the stranger, the attendant, the custodian, the janitor, cleaning man, waiting man, dirty MAN – the night tidying up after him. I'm in hell giving in to heaven where I sometimes think of your beautiful father with his dreamy wings and only then do I allow myself to cry. Not because your mother was raped (again) but because she loved so much what she could never have been allowed to keep. Such a silly girl. You must save me Johnny. In the name of your father. I must escape this place or I will die.

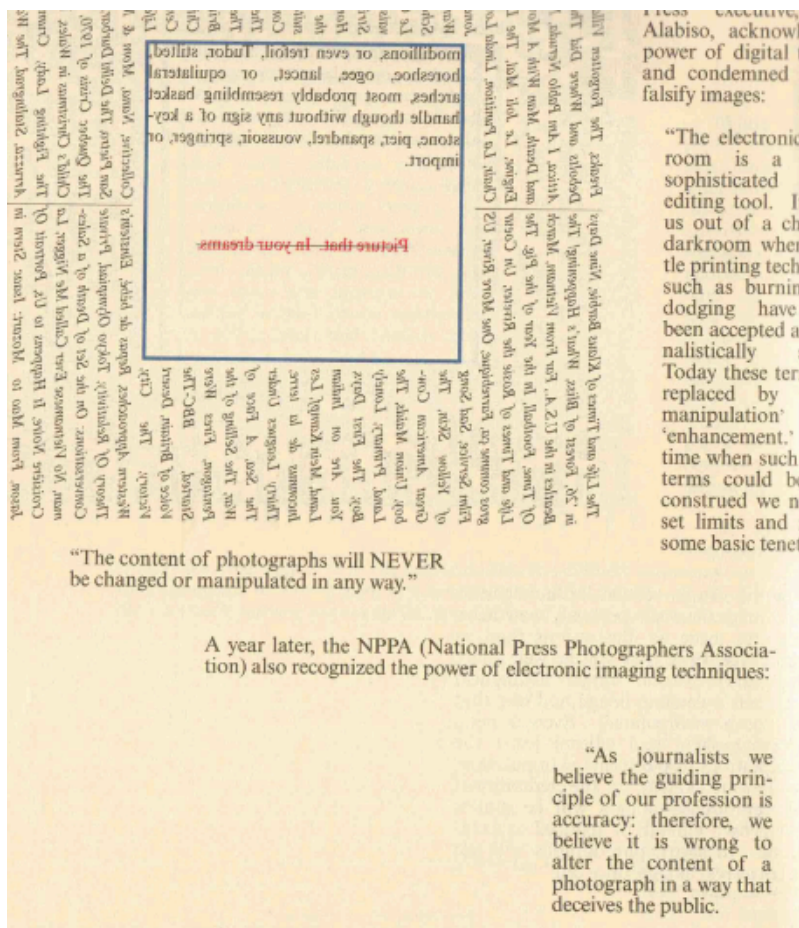
Appendix 2 Deviant text alignment on page 111 (*HoL*)



Appendix 3 Text in the form of a ladder on pages 440 to 441 (HoL)



Appendix 4 Mirrored box on page 142 (HoL)



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9 ENGLISH ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) with the help of unnatural narratology. Therefore, the focus lies on the unusual elements of the text and their functions, as well as their effects on the readers of the novel. In order to show that unnaturalness is not limited to a single aspect within this work, the components were separated into story and discourse elements. On the story level, the spatial deviations and the characters' psychological struggles were analysed, and on the discourse level, the narrative structure and the layout of the text were examined. Furthermore, the still novel theoretical approach of unnatural narratology was supported with concepts from Gothic fiction on the story level and ergodic literature on the discourse level. In the final chapter of this thesis, reading strategies along with intertextuality and intermediality, as well as ideological aspects became the center of attention. Extensive online material from forums, blogs and video messages was used to illustrate the audience's opinions of the novel and three reader-types were identified: the discouraged reader, the dismissive reader and the dissecting reader. Furthermore, these three groups' conventionalization and naturalization mechanisms were compared with those proposed by Jan Alber (2009). The findings showed that methods were usually combined in order to guarantee a maximization of the naturalized outcome.

Keywords: unnatural narratology, Gothic fiction, ergodic literature, reading strategies, intertextuality, intermediality, ideology, online material, forums, blogs, video messages, reader-types, conventionalization, naturalization

10 GERMAN ABSTRACT

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht verschiedene unnatürliche Erzählelemente in Mark Z. Danielewskis Werk *Das Haus* (2000) und deren Funktionen im Text. Diese Aspekte reichen von inhaltlichen Bestandteilen wie den Merkmalen des Schauplatzes und den psychologischen Dimensionen der Charaktere bis hin zu strukturellen Besonderheiten wie den verschachtelten Erzählebenen und der labyrinthischen Ausstattungen der Typographie. Darüber hinaus werden besonders die Funktion der LeserInnen sowie deren Prozesse der Naturalisierung und Dechiffrierung beleuchtet. Im Zuge dessen soll der merkwürdige Text anhand von bestimmten Strategien erklärbar werden. Im letzten Kapitel sollen auch Intertextualität, Intermedialität und Ideologien eine Rolle bei der Vermittlung des Textes spielen und aufzeigen, welche versteckten Elemente in dem Roman noch zu finden sind.

Die theoretischen Aspekte sowie die Terminologie der Arbeit stützen sich auf zahlreiche Artikel von Jan Alber, Stefan Iversen, Henrik Skov Nielsen und Brian Richardson zum Thema „Unnatürliche Erzählweisen“. Auch Merkmale des Schauerromans und des ergodischen Ansatzes nach Espen J. Aarseth finden Eingang in den theoretischen Teil der Arbeit, wodurch eine Gliederung in unnatürliche inhaltliche Aspekte und unnatürliche narrativ-formale Elemente entsteht.

Das Material für den empirischen Teil der Arbeit, der sich mit der Rezeption der LeserInnen befasst, wurde aus zwei umfangreichen Online-Foren gewonnen, wobei in etwa fünfzig Themen mit einer variablen Zahl von einem bis achtundzwanzig Beiträgen untersucht worden sind. Ausgehend von diesen Beiträgen ließ sich eine Struktur ableiten welche sich in folgende drei Gruppen gliedern lässt: entmutigte LeserInnen, ablehnende LeserInnen und zerlegende LeserInnen.

Ergebnis der Arbeit ist es, die Zusammenhänge der verschiedenen Ebenen aufzuzeigen und darzulegen, dass die unnatürliche Erzählforschung durchaus einige Beiträge zur gründlichen Analyse jener Werke beitragen kann, die in der klassischen Erzähltheorie sonst üblicherweise vernachlässigt werden. Weiters wird gezeigt, dass LeserInnen nicht unbedingt die von Jan Alber eingeführten

Prozesse der Naturalisierung verwenden, sondern Strategien vermischen oder ganz auf diese verzichten.

Abschließend sei noch anzumerken, dass diese Abschlussarbeit keinen Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit erhebt, jedoch eine Art Anregung für die Auseinandersetzung mit unmöglichen Elementen in Literatur und Kunst sein sollen, denn diese bisher kaum beachteten Zugangsweisen sollen eine Grundlage für neue Erkenntnisse bilden.

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