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Title: Explorative exposure : Media in and of Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves

Year: 2018

Version:

Please cite the original version:

Kilpiö, J.-P. (2018). Explorative exposure : Media in and of Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves. In H. Pyrhönen, & J. Kantola (Eds.), *Reading Today* (pp. 57-70). UCL Press. *Comparative Literature and Culture*.
<https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787351950>

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Explorative exposure: media in and of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*

Juha-Pekka Kilpiö

Even though there has been considerable interest in the medial and material features of literature in recent years, the different research fields may not have converged in quite the same way as media themselves are said to have done. There is a distinct line of enquiry devoted to media as interface (with print versus digital as the most hackneyed example) and quite another to media as subject matter (ekphrasis, the musicalization of fiction and so on). Certain works, however, call for a joint approach. In this chapter, I examine mediality as it cuts across Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), from cumulative representations in the storyworld to the physical presence of the book itself.

Espen Aarseth's study *Cybertext* makes a useful distinction between *textonomy*, the study of textual media, and *textology*, the study of textual meaning (15). In analysing *House of Leaves*, it is worthwhile to determine its media position according to Aarseth's typology, but also to carry the notion of media over to the textological analysis. The former reveals how the book actually functions, and the latter how different media are discussed in the discourse and what kinds of meanings they are assigned.

By now Danielewski's novel has generated almost as much academic commentary as the fictitious documentary film *The Navidson Record* in it. But the ways in which the two medialities, both within the storyworld and on the textual surface, inform and affect one another have not been thoroughly analysed. Reminiscent of but also going beyond Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), it consists of several narrative layers where narrators mediate, comment upon and obviously distort the texts of the preceding narrators, thus throwing into relief all manner of epistemological instabilities. The layered commentaries and metatexts

are realised by way of different fonts and their disposition on the page, but the salient typographic variation also reflects the volatile ontology of the storyworld. The novel's discourse is mainly based on the representation of the fictitious film. Thus, it uses a form of intermediality that I suggest could be called *kinekphrasis*: building on the traditional rhetorical term *ekphrasis*, I use this neologism to designate verbal representations of cinema or other forms of moving image. In addition, the visuality of the novel's text (layout, fonts, colours, footnotes) is foregrounded so that the characters' explorations in the storyworld are iconically transposed to the act of actual reading, navigating the forking text and operating the book. This makes the novel *ergodic literature*, where 'nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text'. The term is composed of the Greek words *ergon*, meaning 'work', and *hodos*, meaning 'path'. The required effort is physical, or 'extranoematic', and entails selection. Thus, the reader's movement through the text involves something other than the standard practice of turning pages when reading a traditional novel (Aarseth 1–2).

My reading, then, deals with the confluence of *kinekphrasis* and *ergodics*. This enables us to address the activity of reading on more than one level. *House of Leaves's* *kinekphrasis* is a critical reading of *The Navidson Record* by a character in the storyworld. This embedded reading is in turn set up against the actions of the actual reader, who must in effect become a user: manoeuvre the book, turn it around, leaf back and forth to follow the notes, use a mirror to decipher a piece of mirror-writing, and so on.

House of Leaves is about a photo-journalist named Will Navidson and his family, who discover that their new house opens a portal to an immense labyrinthine underground space that defies the laws of physics and proves impossible to map. Navidson and his companions search the space and record their explorations on film and video. This material he compiles into a feature-length documentary, *The Navidson Record*. The most extensive diegetic level is a scholarly exegesis written about the film by an old man named Zampanò living in Los Angeles. The work is left unfinished at his death. The material is discovered, transcribed and compiled into a book by one Johnny Truant, a young man working in a tattoo shop. Truant also provides an extensive commentary of his own and reveals, among other things, that Zampanò was blind – an unlikely candidate to do film studies – and that *The Navidson Record* is itself fictitious, Zampanò's make-believe. The outermost level is that of unnamed 'editors': an amended version of Truant's manuscript, ostensibly making the book the reader is actually holding *House of Leaves by Zampanò with*

Introduction and Notes by Johnny Truant, 2nd Edition. In short, a reading of a reading of a reading.

In the text the diegetic levels are separated by different fonts. For the most part Zampanò's discourse occupies the body text and his sources are given in the footnotes (the other studies about the film obviously being fictitious, while most of the other theoretical and literary sources are real and cited correctly according to academic practice). Truant's discourse is placed mainly in the footnotes. Quantitatively, the editor's role is the least significant and is limited to the paratexts and some amendments to Truant's notes.

Zampanò's discourse forms the kinephrastic core. Also titled *The Navidson Record*, it purports to be an academic thesis complete with the appropriate references and stylistic decorum. As is the custom, it goes through and synthesizes the previous academic and critical reception of the film and claims superiority over earlier efforts because of its meticulous close reading and the most apposite interpretations. The analysis follows the film chronologically, scene by scene and even shot by shot, and recounts the unfolding narrative in overt detail. In a sense this gives away that the film probably does not exist in the storyworld either, since the narratee clearly is not expected to have seen it. This does not, of course, diminish its signifying potential in the least.

Cybertextual analysis should be first grounded in textonomy and proceed from there (Aarseth 15), so I begin by addressing the work's media position and then move on to the intermediality within the storyworld.

Cybertext theory and *House of Leaves's* media position

While *Cybertext* can be seen as a critique of and improvement on the hypertext theory that prevailed in the 1980s and 1990s conducted by George Landow and Jay David Bolter among others, Aarseth calls for a new understanding of textuality in general. Cybertext theory signifies a perspective on all textuality and resists any essentialist distinctions between digital and print media (Aarseth 17–18). In addition to introducing ergodic literature, Aarseth makes a terminological distinction between *scriptons* and *textons*. Scriptons form the output, the signs that are actually presented to the reader. Textons comprise the reservoir from which they are created (Aarseth 62).

Even though Danielewski's novel is routinely referred to as ergodic literature – it says so in Wikipedia (s.v. '*House of Leaves*') – so far it has not been placed in Aarseth's textonomical typology. Generally, it has been

analysed with reference to hypertext and digital media (e.g. Chanen, Hansen, Pressman). Oddly enough, its engagement with the cinema has not received particular attention either. Although Paul McCormick mentions its ‘typographic montage’ (64), he discusses primarily the ways in which *House of Leaves* confronts cinema as a cultural form in the media environment of the 1990s. My analysis, in turn, zooms in on the textual and material devices used in representing the moving image.

Cybertext theory conceptualizes the text as a triad consisting of the operator, the verbal signs and the medium, which are interdependent (Aarseth 20–1). Instead of describing the alleged essence of separate media, the theory presents a typology where individual works can be placed and where they can be observed in relation to each other. It is built on seven variables (Aarseth 62–4):

- (1) Dynamics: both textons and scriptons can change, or scriptons alone can change while textons stay the same, or both can be static.
- (2) Determinability: in a determinate text the adjacent scriptons are always the same; in an indeterminate text they are not.
- (3) Transiency: scriptons may be either transient or intransient; in other words, they either have a temporal dimension or they do not.
- (4) Perspective: if the user can become a person in the fictional world, the perspective is personal. Otherwise it is impersonal.
- (5) Access: the user’s access to scriptons may be either controlled or random. Aarseth mentions the codex, or the bound book, as a typical example of the latter.
- (6) Linking: if there are links in the text, they can be either explicit or conditional. The conditional links do not function always but only under certain conditions.
- (7) User functions: as this variable is the most important to my analysis, I quote it directly:

Besides the interpretative function of the user, which is present in all texts, the use of some texts may be described in terms of additional functions: the explorative function, in which the user must decide which path to take, and the configurative function, in which scriptons are in part chosen or created by the user. If textons or traversal functions can be (permanently) added to the text, the user function is textonic. (Aarseth 64)

The typology has later been expanded with new variables (see Eskelinen). I deal with some of them in the end section of the chapter, but for *House of Leaves*’s actual media position the original ones suffice.

When placed in the typology, *House of Leaves* yields the following values: it (1) is static, (2) is determinate, (3) is intransient, (4) is impersonal by perspective, (5) can be accessed at random, (6) has explicit links and (7) has an explorative user function.

Some of these categorizations are due to *House of Leaves* being a printed book. For example, transience – that is, scriptons appearing or changing over time – cannot be realized in print, for the time being at least (Eskelinen 37). A printed text need not necessarily be static, since in a typical gamebook the textons stay the same but the scriptons change because the reader may realize a different string of signs on each reading (Aarseth 68–9, table 3.1; Eskelinen 390n19). At least in part the question comes down to reading conventions. *House of Leaves* is meant to be read in full, or at least there is no indication to do otherwise, which makes it static.

Random access, on the other hand, is intrinsic to the codex in general, but in this case it is called to mind more distinctly. Because of its framing as a mock scholarly volume, *House of Leaves* includes an index at the end. The index is a strange one, in that it presents not so much the significant concepts and proper names but a kind of frequency analysis on even such words as ‘and’, ‘for’ and ‘out’, and significantly some that do not exist, designated ‘DNE’ (except that, by way of the liar’s paradox, they do exist in the index). The index in general, and the obvious insinuation that the ‘non-existent’ words are merely concealed somewhere (for clues, see for example Hayles, ‘Mapping Time’), encourage the reader to take advantage of random access and dip into the book more freely.

In the loop

Aarseth’s examples include a text with the same media position as *House of Leaves*, Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (1963), where the reader is allowed a choice between two paths through the chapters. *House of Leaves*’s ergodics, however, is more complex. The explorative user function is mainly brought about by links and the forking layout of the text. At its most simple, a link leads the user from one place in the text to another. Terminologically, *link* signifies the connection between source and destination. What appears at the scriptonic level is more precisely called an *anchor*. The way the anchor is made to stand out – for instance the colour blue designating hyperlinks – is called a *cue* (Gunder 212–13, 222). Mark B. N. Hansen suggests that the word ‘house’ printed in blue throughout *House of Leaves* makes a ‘pseudoserious

reference to the blue highlighting of hyperlinks on Web pages' (598). Links indeed figure conspicuously in the novel, but the word 'house' is not one of them. The links in *House of Leaves*, to apply Anna Gunder's (213–16) terminology, are all analogue, but there are both internal and external links. They are mostly realized as footnotes modelled on academic references.

A typical typographical link in an academic text has two phases: first from the superscript number in the body text to the corresponding number at the foot of the page (internal) and then to the material outside the book (external). In *House of Leaves*, it is mainly the internal ones that are used for ergodic purposes, although the principles of both are problematized. In Gunder's (217–19) terms, an ordinary typographical footnote is bidirectional and homoanchoral both at source and destination. In other words, the superscript number (or similar) in the body text leads to that same number in the footnotes, and that same number from the footnotes back to the body text again – two directions, one anchor at each end. A footnote amounts barely to a minimum degree of ergodics, but in *House of Leaves* annotation coincides with 'concrete prose', to use Brian McHale's (184) complementary term to the better-known concrete poetry. Both the link source and the destination are coded to match, but their location in the book goes against the convention. In chapter 9, or the 'Labyrinth' chapter, the typographical balance and hierarchy between the body text and footnotes is disrupted. The notes are distinguished typographically and attributed to narrators on different diegetic levels, each commenting on the preceding ones. However, since ergodics is a particular level distinct from narration (Aarseth 92–5), I will first deal with the actual use of the text and return to the narrative issues below.

Since the text in chapter 9 is laid out in multiple columns, both vertical and horizontal, in geometric patterns varying in shape and size, in mirror image, upside down, and so on, locating the link destination becomes laborious. Source and destination may also be several pages apart. Even though Gunder (222–3) quite correctly points out that in a printed text there cannot be any hidden links, since the link must be indicated by a cue for it to be a link at all, finding the link destination is left to the reader (unlike in a digital text, where clicking on the anchor brings forward a new lexia). In *House of Leaves* the search for the destination is particularly foregrounded, and by the same token an inherent medial feature of the codex, namely random access, is charged with meaning.

The bidirectional linking is short-circuited, however, when there are subordinate notes leading to more notes instead of back to the source. In chapter 9 the superscript number 135 leads from the 'body text' to

footnote 135. This footnote leads both to an external destination – Daniel Hertz’s fictitious book *Understanding The Self: The Maze of You* – and internally to footnote 129, located three pages back. Note 129 aptly quotes Derrida on the centre not being the centre and diverges to two notes, 130 and 137. Note 130 leads to successive but not forking notes, so finally there is an end-point. Note 137 leads, by way of some intermediate stages, to note 135 where the reader began, thus creating a feedback loop. To be able to continue the reader must step outside the loop, retrace her steps and try a different path.

What is more, two mismatched systems have been used to code the anchor cues: one based on consecutive numbering consistent with the rest of the book, the other on the international ground-to-air emergency signals, or more precisely their typographical renderings, since the actual signs are meant to be built from natural materials on a scale big enough to catch the attention of an aircraft. (A chart explaining the symbols can be found in a photograph in the Appendix II C.) In the numbered links the source and the destination may be pages apart and they require constant flipping back and forth, but they at least conform, by and large, to the numerical order. Page numbers lose their significance – only to be semanticized later – but one can assume that footnote 133 is in the relative vicinity of 132 and 134. The emergency signals have no such order, so the path from source to destination is more challenging, indeed more ergodic.

If a typical gamebook produces a particular sequence of scriptons on each reading and so allows or urges the reader to ignore parts of the text, *House of Leaves* works differently. Rather, the implicit urge to go through all the textual material predominates. Lexias containing several links do not in fact offer the reader alternative paths. If a link appears in the middle of a lexia instead of the end, and the reader follows it, she must also make sure to come back and read the rest of that lexia. If a lexia contains more than one link, the reader is not so much allowed a choice as expected to follow all of them as far as they lead, so as not to miss anything. Here ergodic work is related to work ethic, for it appeals to the reader’s sense of completing the task, reading absolutely everything there is in the book.

All speculations on authorial intention aside, I claim that cybertextuality and the explorative user function have been inscribed in the novel’s discourse as well. Among Aarseth’s strict nomenclature that eschews metaphor, naming a user function ‘explorative’ may seem almost flightily poetic. When characters in *House of Leaves* enter the strange labyrinthine space, these journeys are labelled ‘Explorations’ in the discourse: first ‘Exploration A’ and then numbered from one to five. ‘Exploring’ has been

frequently transposed from the literary object language to the critical metalanguage (*sic*) but its cybertextual implications have been overlooked. Furthermore, *Cybertext* and the scholarly thesis in the novel, *The Navidson Record*, share some of their theoretical framework. The labyrinth chapter draws heavily on Penelope Reed Doob's *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*, an actual book published by Cornell University Press. Doob's study and its analysis on different labyrinthine structures such as the unicursal and the multicursal maze have likewise inspired Aarseth's (5–9) distinction between texts with only one possible path and those with several.

The examples of printed ergodic literature in Aarseth mostly exploit the spatial dimension. Ergodics is based on the layout (Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*) or the disposition and linking of lexias (Cortázar's *Rayuela*, the gamebooks). This is of course apparent already from the definition of ergodic literature as requiring non-trivial effort 'to traverse the text'. The emphasis lies on physically passing through the text. This type of ergodics does dominate in *House of Leaves* as well, but there is in addition a brief passage that requires a different kind of effort. At the end of the book, Appendix II E compiles letters written by one of the characters in a mental institution. Paranoid about the staff reading and manipulating her letters, she encrypts one with an acrostic. The key is given in a previous letter, which obviously makes little sense cryptographically, but in the absence of the narratee's responses, the reader is left to decipher the message.

Aarseth does not specifically discuss cryptographic techniques, but his most general definition of cybertext as those 'texts that involve calculation in their production of scriptons' (75) would seem to accord with linguistic steganography, the practice of concealing texts within other texts. Even though deciphering the acrostic does not pose an enormous challenge – it is after all a traditional form of constrained writing, and there are no glitches or further complications – it obviously differs from reading straight through and requires non-trivial effort.

Having determined the novel's media position, I zoom in on the discourse and the storyworld. This does not mean disconnecting it from the media ecology, however, for here the notion of media is realized as intermediality.

Kinekphrastic intermediality

According to Irina Rajewsky, the three basic types of intermediality for the analysis of particular texts or media products (instead of more

general media-historical perspectives) are the following: (1) medial transposition, where a media product is created through transformation into another medium, such as in adaptation; (2) media combination, or multimedia, where more than one conventionally distinct medium or medial form of articulation come together, such as in theatre or cinema; and (3) intermedial reference, where only one medium is materially present but (a work in) another medium is referred to, such as in ekphrasis (Rajewsky 51–3). With regard to cybertext theory, we could say that media combination or multimediality is more likely to affect the work's media position and it should be taken into account in the textonomical analysis. The intermedial reference, in turn, would seem to fall on the textological side.

A large portion of the discourse in *House of Leaves* consists in the verbal representation of a fictitious film titled *The Navidson Record*. To signify this particular subtype of intermedial reference, I have suggested the neologism *kinekphrasis*, by which I mean the verbal representation of cinema or another form of moving image. The signifier obviously builds upon *ekphrasis*, defined by James Heffernan as 'the verbal representation of visual representation' (3; emphasis in original). The study of ekphrasis has tended to focus on static artworks such as paintings and statues, and understandably so, since such depictions have a distinct tradition from the *Iliad* onward. However, I would like to emphasize the particular sensorial and semiotic challenge that cinema sets to a printed text. *House of Leaves*, in particular, proves that representing temporal and moving images brings about a form of intermediality quite unlike traditional ekphrasis.

Kinekphrasis comprises a wide range of genres and forums, literary, journalistic and private alike. For the present, however, I will limit my discussion to the literary context, where, I think, the most medially conscious cases can be found. *House of Leaves* has, to my knowledge, the most extensive kinekphrasis in literature.

If we were to imagine, for the sake of argument, a kind of kinekphrastic degree zero, it would most likely consist in an ostensibly neutral and objective description of a spatial setting, characters' appearances and their outward actions, shying away from depicting the consciousness. On these grounds much of the French *nouveau roman* has been routinely labelled 'cinematic'. Compared to this hypothetical kinekphrasis, Zampanò's *The Navidson Record* is the exact opposite.

As any analysis of a film, Zampanò's exegesis verbalizes *The Record*, carries it to the linguistic realm, contextualizes it and assigns meaning to it. Even though there are lengthy passages recounting the events in the

film, lexically the analysis is marked by the abundance of abstraction, the kind of words most often used for thematic analysis:

Myth makes Echo the subject of longing and desire. Physics makes Echo the subject of distance and design. Where emotion and reason are concerned both claims are accurate.

And where there is no Echo there is no description of space or love.

There is only silence. (Danielewski 50)

Such theoretical categories or generalized emotions cannot be visually present in the film. Here, then, Zampanò's discourse engages in abstraction and interpretation.

The labyrinth chapter is characterized by lengthy non-narrative sections. There are gargantuan lists detailing the influences on *The Navidson Record*, such as books, films and documentary film-makers. Likewise, the interior of the house is meticulously catalogued, but this time, by way of negation, listing what is not to be found there. It is, so to speak, de-described. The characters in the film are obviously viewed from the outside, but that does not restrain Zampanò from speculating readily on their mental state, motivations and feelings. Against the film's iconic semiotic mode, the kinephrastic discourse pits its own symbolic mode and, instead of imagistic images or camera-eye narration, amplifies the conceptual qualities of language. The film is overdetermined with semantic excess. From the point of view of actual readers, this kind of discourse highlights the difference of the interpretative from the explorative user function and drives a wedge between them.

Among the literary kinephrases, *House of Leaves* is peculiar also in that the representation of cinema, the kinephrastic discourse, is realized as the kind of text that foregrounds its own mediality and requires ergodic use. Here the two medialities, the represented and the present, are folded upon one another. Yet at the same time there is a fundamental break between them: here we, the readers, have the book, the material object in its substantial heft, in which we invest our embodied presence, since it comes into being only through physical manoeuvring, turning it around, flipping the pages back and forth and so on; and there a film, represented by text with medial qualities quite unlike its own and placed three diegetic levels below – a film (meta-metadiagnosis in Gérard Genette's nomenclature) that, moreover, is not only fictitious but is fictitious in the storyworld, conjured up by a blind man.

The ontological cut

How, then, do these different medialities come together? According to N. Katherine Hayles, *House of Leaves* is an exemplary *technotext*, her term for literary works ‘that strengthen, foreground, and thematize the connections between themselves as material artifacts and the imaginative realm of verbal/semiotic signifiers they instantiate’ (*Writing Machines* 25). This description seems to capture the novel quite well. With regard to the term itself, however, it could be argued that every text is, one way or another, already technological from its production.

In his theory of postmodernist fiction, Brian McHale holds that there exists a ‘major ontological “cut”’ (180) between the material book object and the fictional world depicted within it, and this cut is particularly foregrounded when the text’s materiality obtrudes upon the reader. This concept of an ontological cut seems to me most useful, and we might even invest it with an additional cinematic meaning. In a technological and material sense, a cut between two shots marks both a break and a seam.

Furthermore, Didier Coste has coined the term *graphopoeia* to complement the familiar concept of onomatopoeia at the graphic level (88). More generally it falls under Peircean iconicity – one-third of the well-known triad – where sign and meaning are related by similarity.

Since Zampanò’s diegesis is basically one long kinephrasis, the problems of representing the moving image verbally figure in it throughout. There are particular sections, however, where the issue is specifically materialized and embodied – that is, transposed from the merely discursive domain to the level of the printed text and the book as a medium. The most conspicuous is chapter 10, ‘The Rescue (Part One)’.

Zampanò describes a scene in *The Record* where Jed Leeder, a member of the team exploring the underground space, is unexpectedly shot in the head by the team leader, Holloway Roberts, maddened during his wanderings in the labyrinth. By chance, the event is captured by Navidson’s camera and the killing is included in the film. The polysemous word ‘shot’ figures conspicuously throughout the scene. Zampanò mentions that the brief passage has been subject to a detailed frame-by-frame analysis rivalling that of the Zapruder film of President Kennedy’s assassination. He goes on to identify the individual frames:

one bullet pierced his upper lip, blasted through the maxillary bone, dislodging even fragmenting the central teeth, (Reel 10; Frame 192) and then in the following frame (Reel 10; Frame

193) obliterated the back side of his head, chunks of occipital lobe and parietal bone spewn out in an instantly senseless pattern uselessly preserved in celluloid light (Reel 10; Frames 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, & 205). (Danielewski 193)

Thus the death takes up 14 frames of film, from frame 192 to 205 on reel 10: a fraction of a second at standard projection speed. All this has to do with film technology at the most basic level. What is notable is its representation beyond the merely discursive. In the book, 'frames' 192 to 205 on reel 10 are placed on pages 192 to 205 in chapter 10. Here, then, a page of the book is explicitly equated with a film frame. However, this should not be taken as an attempt merely to mimic cinema, a desire somehow to turn text into moving image. Even viewing a film frame by frame goes against the whole point of cinema as a medium, since it eliminates the movement – the presentation surface is in fact turned intransient.

In classical narratology, it is precisely with regard to speed that the question of the physical surface comes up, if only ever so shyly. Genette remarks on speed:

By 'speed' we mean the relationship between a temporal dimension and a spatial dimension (so many meters per second, so many seconds per meter): the speed of a narrative will be defined by the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of the text, measured in lines and in pages). (87–8)

Genette's corpus, however, consists of medially unmarked print literature (Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*). In *House of Leaves*, what also matters is the amount of text on a page.

Graphically the text in the passage is made up of a single line that traverses the page and continues horizontally across several spreads. This obviously affects the rhythm of actual reading and thus goes beyond the traditional parameters of narrative speed. What is more, it concentrates attention on what is probably the most automatized aspect of reading – namely, turning a page. Here the fundamental material limit of the substrate is saturated and charged with meaning. In the course of the sentence 'A life // time // finished / between // the space of // two / frames' (Danielewski 197–201) – where the discourse even summarizes Genette's point about time being represented as space – the break created by the gutter and the edge of the page occurs no fewer than four times: an ontological cut, then, in more than one sense of the term. Although the

textual gestalt is very much foregrounded, it is in fact non-figurative. The horizontal line represents nothing on the film, and the white space taking up most of the page is in direct opposition to the labyrinth's pitch-black interior.

Cybertext embedded

All this hinges on the question of iconicity, graphopoeia and the connection between the medial layers. The basic critical response with regard to form and content has been that *House of Leaves* is both a book about a labyrinth and a book as a labyrinth. This, however, is only the first branch on the way. Since different media positions are extensively thematized in the storyworld, they deserve a closer look.

Even though its origin, makers and purpose remain unknown, the disposition and functioning of the labyrinth are conscientiously described in *The Navidson Record*. It seems infinitely malleable and is able to alter its shape at any time without physical constraints. It also seems to react to the emotional state or the movements of anyone who enters it. If we were to consider this labyrinth a piece of ergodic art in a broad sense – though it is debatable whether there are any signs to be read – it would certainly prove textonomically dynamic, indeterminate, personal and explorative by user function, to name only the most dominant features. Moreover, it would call for more recent, additional textonomical parameters put forward in Markku Eskelinen's *Cybertext Poetics* (35–6), such as the user position and its subtypes, namely, positioning and mobility. The house is a site-specific work and depends upon the user being in a particular location to access it (positioning), and it requires bodily movement, travelling within the work (mobility). One should bear in mind, however, that this is a work envisioned in the storyworld alone, and the actual user exists at more than one remove from it.

In representing the film representing the labyrinth, Zampanò frequently points out how the space seems to resist all forms of documentation and technological representation; it absorbs the light that is vital to cinematography. On the other hand, the film displays formal artistry with perfectly timed jump-cuts and beautiful compositions of lush colours. Despite its pronounced formal features, however, the film's media position in no way differs from a standard feature film. It allows nothing but the interpretative user function. A complexly dynamic ergodic text, the labyrinth, is represented by a medially conventional film. In addition to formal and medial reflections and resemblances,

then, there are cases where the medial layers are pitted against one another and do not cohere.

To conclude, I hope to have demonstrated that the status of Danielewski's novel in contemporary media ecology is even more vexed than it might at first appear. It has been said to simulate and reflect upon digital environments. And, quite the opposite, it has been said to revalorize the printed book and all its possibilities. Either way, what matters most when actually reading the novel is not its alleged ideological stance but how it functions and how the user might operate it best.

I believe the above attests to the need for the methodological distinction between textonomical and textological analysis – so as to move from the former to the latter and account for their mutual exchange. Moreover, even textological analysis should not neglect mediality, especially in cases such as *House of Leaves*, where media abound in the storyworld.

There is a peculiar oscillation at work between the medialities in *House of Leaves*: a disjunctive feedback loop, a cut in the sense of both break and contact. Its media position and intermediality certainly interconnect, but not to mimic and reassert one another; rather, in light of this dual mediality, this double exposure, and viewed against one another, different medial means and material resources can come forth. It may be that the discordance between the medialities in *House of Leaves* is the nexus most laden with meaning. And if the work itself pre-empts and banalizes interpretation in the traditional sense, all the more reason for the reader to find meaning in its use.