

Narrative, Structural and Visual Connections
in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*

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1 - Abstract

While not at the very centre of scholarly discourse, *House of Leaves* is still a highly discussed work of fiction. Even before its appearance on the print market, internet communities had started to analyse the confusing book, explore every nook and cranny and take part in the multi-medial scavenger hunt that includes companion media, interviews, the author's website and a highly populated discussion forum. Professional scholars began to take note soon after, focusing mainly on two types of approaches to deal with the phenomenon that is *House of Leaves*. On the one hand, some scholars attempted to interpret the novel as a member of a genre or tradition, detailing how it fits a certain genre or does not. Danielewski's work was analysed on whether it fits Gothicism or Postmodernism (cf. Althoff, 2009), on whether it is, in its entirety, a metaphor for a digital environment like the internet (cf. Chanen, 2007) or on how it compares to works by Gascoigne (cf. Brick, 2009), by Abrams/Dorst (cf. Gibbons, 2017) or by DeLillo and Moore/Campbell (cf. Cordero, 2013). On the other hand, individual aspects and plot points were chosen to focus on, such as Nihilism (cf. Slocombe, 2005), Spatiotemporality (cf. Kissinger, 2012) or Globalisation (cf. Stephens, 2010).

My approach differs from these. Ignoring aspects that are located outside the novel (such as genre or the 'purpose' of *House of Leaves* in some grander sense), I will explore the inner workings of the book. The question motivating this paper is simple in its conception, yet it encompasses several features of the book that will all have to be explored in detail: How do the multiple

levels of *House of Leaves* connect to each other narratively, structurally and visually?

I will propose a system comprised of two sets of levels, which I will then use to first analyse the narrative and structural connections between the several levels. The section containing this analysis will follow the chronology of the novel, since the frequency at which and the order in which plot points are hinted at, raised, evolved and concluded are major contributors to how the narrative functions. In a separate section following this analysis, I will concentrate on visual and typographical details that are closely connected to the findings in the previous section.

2 - The Two Sets of Layers in *House of Leaves*

With its "substantial print body [which] contains an extensive hypertextual navigation system connecting multiple narratives and reading paths" (Pressman, 2006: 107), *House of Leaves* can only be analysed in a scholarly fashion if one understands how its different narrative and structural levels relate to each other. Merely dividing the text by chapters would be a fundamental misunderstanding of how it functions. Categorising the text on the basis of narrative content - what happens to this character, what happens to that character - does work, however it is not sufficient if one aims to truly understand how the novel was crafted. Therefore, I propose a two-fold categorisation that defines a set of levels based on narrative content (levels 1-4) and a second set based on the structure of the book and the (fictitious)

author allegedly¹ responsible for a specific passage (levels A–D). As will be shown in this section, the two sets of levels do not always correspond to each other. For easy reference of the individual levels, please see tables 1 and 2 on pages 56–57.

The narrative levels 1–4 can be seen as a set of concentric circles with the outer circles enclosing the inner ones. At the centre of the narrative, level 1, are the Navidson family and their interactions with the house on Ash Tree Lane. Will Navidson's expeditions into the maze beneath the house result in a documentary film, *The Navidson Record*, which in turn leads Zampanò to write his academic treatment on the film. Zampanò's level, level 2, offers his thoughts on *The Navidson Record* and a slew of theoretical background on filmmaking, physics and anything else he considers relevant to his treatment on the documentary. Both levels have in common that their in-world representation, i.e. the physical representation of the narrative within the fictional plot, differs from the actual representation in the book, *House of Leaves*. Readers do not have access to a video file of *The Navidson Record*; the documentary is exclusively mediated through text allegedly written by Zampanò and his sources. Similarly, Zampanò did not write his treatment as a continuous book on sorted reams of paper. His scribbles on envelopes, business cards and myriad other surfaces inappropriate for academic writing are only

¹ The true author, of course, is always Mark Z. Danielewski. Whenever I concern myself with multiple authors within *House of Leaves* in this paper, they are in truth characters within the fictional work. Due to my focus on the inner workings of the novel and the relationship of the internal levels to each other, I will omit Danielewski who, strictly speaking, would deserve an all-encompassing additional level in both sets if I were to focus on the creation of the novel and Danielewski's intentions or vision.

included in excerpts as photographs as part of the Appendix. For the most part, their physical representation in *House of Leaves* is hugely different from the way they appear within the story: a film is represented by its critical treatment but never appears in its original medium, and an assortment of scraps and papers turns into an actual book.

Level 3, the story of Johnny Truant, is where the differences between the in-world representation and the actual representation disappear. Within the story, it is alleged that Johnny edits and annotates *The Navidson Record* and provides additional material for the second Appendix. This is exactly how his work is represented in the actual, physical book, *House of Leaves*. The same holds true for level 4, the Editors' additional footnotes and Appendix III. The Editors merely add translations and clarifications to Johnny's annotations, yet they clearly have a voice of their own and are not part of any inner narrative. They are the outermost 'circle' in my proposed model.

The four narrative levels - Navidson, Zampanò, Truant and Editors - are not as clearly separated in terms of structure and authorship. From a strictly structural perspective, the four levels are as follows: Level A are all the writings authored by Zampanò, level B consists of Johnny Truant's footnotes and his appendix, the Editors present level C in their footnotes and in the 'Contrary Evidence' chapter, and the letters in Johnny's appendix were allegedly written by his mother, Pelafina. I argue that Pelafina's letters, although included in Truant's Appendix II, are their own level, D, since they were not authored by Johnny. He merely provided them to

the Editors and changed "many" names (Danielewski, 2000: 586).

These two sets of levels are necessary to adequately describe the workings of *House of Leaves*. In level B, Johnny frequently provides additional information about Zampanò's life (narrative level 2) in addition to his own narrative (level 3). Even more information that belongs to narrative level 3 is presented by the editors in level C and Pelafina in level D - and level 1 does not have its own structural representation whatsoever but is mediated by Zampanò, as described above. Between the two sets of levels there exists a tangled web of cross-references mirroring the tangled narrative itself, making it necessary to juggle both sets if one wants to understand and analyse the novel.

3 - Narrative and Structural Connections

3.1 - The Surface - Introduction and Chapters I-VI

House of Leaves begins with an introduction written by Johnny Truant on October 31, 1998. In it, Truant sets up several plot lines that come into fruition later in the novel. He claims that "the documentary at the heart of this book is fiction" as is "a good portion" of the books cited in the footnotes and "most of what's said by famous people" (Danielewski, 2000: xx), from the very start informing the reader that the foundation on which the whole book is built is shaky at best. In a similar vein, he classifies not only the basic foundation as problematic, but also extends this classification to his own

work as an editor, acknowledging that he might have made "mistakes (and there's no doubt I'm responsible for plenty)" (ibid.) that further endanger the novel's authenticity.

Johnny Truant extrapolates his own relationship with Zampanò's writings onto the level of general readership, thereby suggesting that *The Navidson Record* inherently causes the symptoms he is experiencing, regardless of who reads it. He describes an increasing obsession with the book, with reading sessions suddenly lasting longer and his sense of time severely lacking (ibid.: xviii), followed by a passage directed at the reader, claiming, "you will no longer be the person you believed you once were" (ibid.: xxii). Graulund (2006: 387) is correct in calling this section "a threat [...] made by many writers of the uncanny", however he also points out that this way of "rattling the reader's confidence [...] is an integral part of both plot and structure of *House of Leaves*". In Chapter XVII, Zampanò quotes the entirely fictitious "Haven-Slocum Theory" (Danielewski, 2000: 396) and, as an integral part of it, the "POST-EXPOSURE EFFECTS RATING". It claims that people who were exposed to the house on Ash Tree Lane experience insomnia, scratches, rising aggression, obsessive behaviour, weight loss, night terrors and vivid dreaming. All of these symptoms present themselves to Johnny Truant and, if his threat at the end of the introduction is to be believed, are awaiting the reader if they dare to proceed. Truant's threat is the first of many parallels between his and the Navidson family's plot lines in that it provides a link between exposure to the actual house and exposure to the text, claiming (on level B, to which his introduction belongs) that the symptoms described on

levels 1, 2 and A also manifest themselves on level 3. The walls between the levels already prove porous some twenty pages into the book.

The question of authenticity raised by Truant in his introduction serves as the main focus in Zampanò's first chapter, as well. According to him, "skeptics call the whole effort a hoax" (Danielewski, 2000: 3), making it "a hoax within a hoax", as Althoff points out (2009: 23) with regard to the novel's structure. In the same breath, Zampanò claims that "the more interesting material dwells exclusively on the interpretation of events within the film" (Danielewski, 2000: 3), i.e. that the question of authenticity is irrelevant if one sets out to analyse the inner workings as if they were true. Incidentally, this is also the fundamental assumption this paper is based on.

In Chapter II, authenticity continues to be a focus on Johnny's level. While Zampanò deals with Will Navidson's reasons for making the film, sets up the plot point of Karen's infidelity and the reader reads Delial's name for the first time, Truant admits to purposefully changing the writings he is editing. Will's and Karen's conversation about a heater triggers a footnote by Johnny that initially concerns itself with the lack of warm water at his apartment - a common theme in *House of Leaves*: a single word or sentence can lead to major asides whose relationship with the main text are tangential at best. In his footnote, Truant recounts one of several lies he constantly tells women at bars, this one "about some insane adventure I supposedly had when I was a Pit Boxer" (ibid.: 12). The story sets him up as a proficient storyteller and liar who gives "everyone a chance to come up with their own answer" (ibid.: 14)

before providing his own conclusion, suggesting he not only tells lies but toys with the expectations of his listeners. The footnote culminates in an admission: "The word 'water' back there—I added that" (ibid.: 16). As Scarano and Krause rightly point out, "from that point forward Johnny cannot be completely trusted by the reader" (2006: 3). Although he admits to the change he made, there is no guarantee that he will do so in the future. The reader is at the mercy of a proficient liar who, before long, will begin to hallucinate.

Chapter III further establishes Truant as a liar on the basis of "a whole bunch" (Danielewski, 2000: 20) of origin stories for his scars. Contrary to the previous chapter, in which it seemed as if his lies were motivated by a desire for fun and sexual intercourse, Truant provides a reason: "We all create stories to protect ourselves" (ibid.). Invariably, the reader must ask themselves: what is Johnny trying to protect himself from? The fact that the lies in this instance are about his scars provides the first clue, soon followed by a brief glimpse into his childhood: "when I was ten my father died and almost nine years later my crazy Shakespearean mother followed him" (ibid.: 21). Details about his childhood will only follow later, yet the reader already knows it was not a happy one. This links Johnny to Will and Tom Navidson, again across the boundaries between their levels. The Navidsons, too, were formed by an unhappy childhood: "Because the enormous narcissism of their parents deprived Will and Tom of suitable role models, both brothers learned to identify with absence" (ibid.: 22). On level 1, Will and Tom are the products of absent parents; on level 3, Johnny is the same. This parallel only presents itself through the reading of (at

least) levels A and B, already hinting at the labyrinthine structure that shall soon make an appearance.

The parallels continue in Chapter IV, although in a subtler way. On level 1, the house on Ash Tree Lane changes for the first time as a closet inexplicably manifests itself and prompts Will Navidson to start measuring his new home, soon discovering the impossibility that is an interior larger than the corresponding exterior. As the first supernatural phenomenon makes itself known on this level, Johnny (on level 3) also experiences a first occurrence. For the first time, he hallucinates, "everything gets substantially darker", followed by a stench and the sensation that something else is there, "some tremendous beast" with "ragged claws" that soon changes from an it to a she; "Had I been thinking of a woman?" (ibid.: 26). The content of this hallucination has been noted by several scholars, including Katherine Cox who claims: "The threat of the stalking monster is a metaphor for the genetic link to his mother and her stigma of madness" (2006: 13). However, in addition to the content and its implications, the time at which this hallucination occurs should also be noted, as it clearly starts a pattern: whenever the Navidson family comes into contact with the supernatural, superficially at first, increasingly more deeply throughout the plot, Johnny mirrors this by becoming increasingly unwell. The more deeply the house on Ash Tree Lane is explored, the closer Truant gets to remembering his mother and fearing her (and his) madness.

In Chapter V, the book's characteristic parallelism stretches itself over three levels. During Zampanò's explanation of the physics of sound in general and echoes in particular (complemented by the Greek myth of Echo,

marrying physics and mythology), the blind author also touches on the concept of echolocation in bats. As Will explores the maze within his house, noticing the shifts around him and promptly getting lost, he uses echolocation to find his way back, yelling "Hey!", "Balls!" and "easy" (Danielewski, 2000: 67) and using the ensuing echoes to navigate the labyrinth. His interjections and curses are soon replaced by Karen's and Tom's names as well as "I'm in here!" (ibid.: 68). What finally saves him is the voice of his daughter, Daisy.

As Will ventures deeper and gets lost, Truant's hallucinations increase in severity. This instance starts with a rotten smell, turns into the sensation of rot "suddenly packed up my nose, slowly creeping down my throat" and culminates in vomiting (ibid.: 43). After clearing his throat, he realises "the smell [is] gone" and he has not thrown up. His next hallucination, after his boss insults his designs, involves another person and violence for the first time:

And so it was that before another synapse could fire within my bad-off labyrinthine brain, he was already lying on the floor. Or I should say his mangled body was lying on the floor. His head remained in my hands. Twisted off like a cap. Not as difficult as I'd imagined. The first turn definitely the toughest, necessitating the breaking of cervical vertebrae and the snapping of the spinal cord, but after that, another six or so turns, and voilà—the head was off.

(Danielewski, 2000: 51)

This instance deserves a detailed analysis, which is why it is included here in its entirety. Up until this point, Johnny's hallucinations dealt with sensations concerning his own body - olfactory sensations, panic,

vomiting - and the suspicion that some other entity, the best, is close. Now that he imagines hurting another human being, the amount of detail suggest either experience or at the very least the capability of hurting a person. This hallucination is deeper than those before it simply because it involves the inner structure of a body that is not his own; Johnny can feel the vertebrae and the spinal cord break, making this imaginary act of violence frightfully realistic.

The two hallucinations described above chronologically coincide² with Zampanò's scientific explanations. The third one, however, occurs while Navidson is lost and panics. In the storeroom at his work, Johnny has to "feel [his] way around in the dark" (ibid.: 70), stretching the parallelism of navigating the darkness to the third level after Zampanò's musings on echolocation and Will Navidson's application of the concept. In this darkness, Johnny succumbs to the third hallucination in this chapter, once again starting with "that awful taste" (ibid.) and followed by the appearance of the beast, not bodiless this time, but in possession of eyes that "have no whites" and "extremely long fingers". Hearing a "scream, a howl, a roar" - another common occurrence on multiple levels in *House of Leaves* and ultimately linked to Johnny's father - he is certain he has urinated and defecated (all quotes: Danielewski, 2000: 71) until, after the beast "slashes out at the back of [his] neck" (ibid.: 72), the hallucination fades. "Later a patron

² In this context, "chronologically" refers to the reading experience of *House of Leaves*, not to the plot. I am not implying that Johnny Truant's writings happen at the same in-world time as Navidson's explorations but stating that the footnote and the main text deal with similar occurrences and concepts in close physical proximity to each other.

points out the long, bloody scratch on the back of my neck" (ibid.), suggesting that this specific hallucination extends its reach into the real world. The origin of the bloody scratch in general (albeit not in this specific scenario) will later be explained in Pelafina's letters. Fittingly, this is where the Editors provide the reader with a choice. They mention the obituary and Pelafina's letters; the reader can decide which path to take, changing their reading experience drastically.

Chapter VI seems largely uneventful on the Navidsons' and Zampanò's levels. On Johnny's, this chapter sets up two plot lines that will gain in importance later: the story of the Pekinese, "one I won't, I cannot tell" (ibid.: 77), and Truant's foster father, Raymond, "who called me beast" (ibid.: 78).

3.2 - The Maze - Chapters VII-XVII

The three explorations recounted in Chapter VII further prove how unbelievably vast the labyrinth is. Holloway, Jed and Wax hear the growl several times and notice the way the labyrinth shifts and changes. After discovering the Anteroom, the Great Hall and the Staircase (ibid.: 85) during Exploration #2 with negligible shifts, they notice "that the diameter [of the Staircase has] also increased" (ibid.: 86), more than doubled. The constant shifts provide another parallelism between the Navidson level and the Truant level. Johnny, who finds it increasingly difficult to sleep (ibid.: 88), points out that, like the labyrinth, the stories he tells to people keep "shifting and re-shifting" (ibid.: 92).

If one decides to believe Johnny (which, after the water heater, proves difficult), he follows this admission by the true story behind his broken tooth. During his time in his foster family around Raymond, he constantly managed to get into fights at school; at one point, he "clawed up his [opponent's] face pretty bad", which gets him "expelled" (ibid.: 93). Raymond's reaction consists of (presumably) beating Johnny, yet Truant omits the details. The two aspects to take away from this are Raymond's addressing Johnny as a "[b]east" (ibid.: 92) and the choice of words in the above quote, "clawed up". With claw marks and a beast being a common theme in Truant's hallucinations (and later dreams) and violence becoming one such theme, the reader most likely notices the similarity between what Johnny imagines and fears on one hand and how he is described and acts on the other. As quoted above, Cox (2006: 13) sees the beast as a manifestation of Johnny's looming madness, i.e. a potential future. It is also a manifestation of his violent past. Violence and his potential future also converge in the other sub-story provided in this chapter: Johnny meets and sleeps with Kyrie, who, along with her boyfriend, will be at the centre of Johnny's most violent hallucination near the end of the book.

Exploration #4 begins in chapter VIII, but the narration stays with the Navidson family outside the labyrinth, focusing on Will's frustration of being locked out of the exploration thanks to Karen's insistence he stay behind and his resentment for her. When they hear a knocking that "sounds exactly like someone rapping his knuckles against the wall: three quick knocks followed by three slow knocks, followed by three more quick knocks" (ibid.: 101), Will, remembering that he "waited

too long with Delial", immediately prepares for a rescue mission. Zampanò points out that the film is cut in an SOS pattern, the distress call "literally incorporated into the sequence" (ibid.: 102). Chapter VIII itself mirrors this, as shall be explored in the typography section of this paper, leading to another clear parallelism across narrative and structural levels. Truant's story about the sinking fishing boat (ibid.: 104) connects to this as another instance in which an SOS distress call is warranted or, as Brick puts it: "Truant offers an emotional parallel" (Brick, 2009: 10).

The actual Exploration #4, from the team's perspective, is told after the distress call that launches the rescue attempt in Chapter IX. The claw marks and the growl make several appearances, once again linking level 1 to Johnny's level 3, as do the team's troubles falling asleep (Danielewski, 2000: 122). While the previous chapter was set outside the labyrinth and had Johnny recount a past story without any instance of hallucinations or heavy distress, Chapter IX thrusts both narratives deep into the realm of horror. As Holloway shoots Wax in a bout of madness and paranoia deep inside the maze, Johnny successfully struggles with his incapability of leaving the manuscript and venturing outside (ibid.: 107), only to then vividly imagine being run over by a truck (ibid.: 108). By way of a one-night stand of his appearing on a radio show, he learns that he screams and yells "terrible things in his sleep, about blood and mutilations and other crazy %&#@'" (ibid.: 149), triggering his paranoia again and leading him to shut himself in with a chain and more locks (ibid.: 150). Still, he cannot lock out the next hallucination of the

stench and the roar, once again sensing the presence of the beast (ibid.).

Zampanò's writings in the same chapter draw parallels between Holloway and famous explorers like Magellan (ibid.: 135) in a long aside in the middle of his retelling of the team's fate. When Cordero speaks of "a sense of suspense as resolution is delayed" (2013: 93), she does so in the context of pages with little text and "hurried paging" (ibid.). It can be argued that the same result can be achieved by inserting (arguably superfluous) biographical details on Magellan and other explorers as well as a discussion of authenticity in Hollywood and documentaries between a plot point's set-up and its conclusion. Zampanò's long footnote acts as a wall between Wax's being shot and the arrival of the rescue party; the reader "will be frustrated" (Hayles, 2002: 796).

While Tom stays behind at the top of the Staircase, Reston and Will descend in Chapter X. They find Jed and Wax, but so does Holloway; he shoots and kills Jed (ibid.: 193-207). Johnny's mental state once again mirrors what is happening in the maze: his "fear's gotten worse", he is "tired and afraid" and feels an "awful anxiety" (ibid.: 179). More abstractly, he enters a state of duality between being a reader (and therefore close to the actual reader of *House of Leaves*) and an author (closer to Zampanò):

Ever since leaving the labyrinth, having had to endure all those convolutions, those incomplete suggestions, the maddening departures and inconclusive nature of the whole fucking chapter, I've craved space, light and some kind of clarity.

(Danielewski, 2000: 179)

He refers to Chapter IX as a labyrinth and experiences many of the frustrations the actual reader must experience, as well. Yet, he becomes the author (not simply editor) of a labyrinthine, inconclusive, frustrating stretch of text later in Chapter XXI. Caught between two roles, Truant can claim neither as his own; his only escape is into the role of a mediator, telling Zampanò's story after reading it and adding his own experiences. This role, of course, is complicated by the fact that he "can't remember [his] own beginnings" (ibid.: 181), but he is getting closer to both his own beginnings and the madness he so fears. "I'll die before I go there" (ibid.: 180), he writes on the topic of madness. As I shall explore later, chapter XXI belies his resolve.

In Chapter XI, while Tom is struggling with his fear at the top of the Staircase and conversing with "Mr. Monster" (ibid.: 254) in a much more humorous manner compared to Johnny's interactions with his own beast, Zampanò blocks the way between the reader and the resolution of the current plot line once again, this time by comparing Will and Tom to the biblical Esau and Jacob in an incomplete collection of paragraphs (starting at p. 246). A wrong reference to the bible made by Zampanò leads to a correction by Johnny, who is also incorrect and prompts the Editors to step in with the correct reference (ibid.: 252). This is the closest the three structural layers A, B and C ever get to a conversation, further establishing both Zampanò and Truant as accident-prone and latently untrustworthy and the Editors as more reliable. The same chapter also provides the resolution of the 'Pekinese' story hinted at earlier, proving that Johnny is a compassionate man as he mourns the

tragic and unnecessary death of the dog, killed by the hands of the porn-star Johnnie (ibid.: 267). The startling similarity of their names can be read as foreshadowing Truant's capability for violence.

The rescue attempt proves a partial success in Chapter XII. Jed's body and Wax - injured yet alive - can be rescued, and Reston returns with them on a stretcher manufactured by Tom with Karen's help (ibid.: 279). Prior, Will believes himself let down by his brother (ibid.: 277). Unlike the story of Jacob and Esau, Tom proves Will wrong, yet they cannot reconcile at this point, as the Staircase stretches before Will can be rescued (ibid.: 285-303). By tossing a coin, Tom determines that the depth of the Staircase now exceeds the earth's circumference (ibid.: 305).

With Will caught impossibly deep in the maze, Johnny again mirrors his fate. "Time has accelerated" (ibid.: 296), Johnny concludes as he finds out he has not been to work for three weeks. He keeps waking up unable to breathe and is consumed by an obsessive desire to finish the book: "Right now the only thing that keeps me going is some misunderstood desire to finish The Navidson Record" (ibid.: 297). The following three pages are one long tangent revolving around a sinking ship, sentences constantly breaking, paragraph breaks non-existent, any sense eluding the reader and any conclusion lacking. After resolving not to allow himself to become insane and complaining about the labyrinthine Chapter IX, Johnny now creates a textual maze of his own, and not for the last time in *House of Leaves*.

In Chapter XIII, three major parallelisms connect the levels to each other. When Holloway, firmly located on level 1, shoots himself, "the tape still records that

terrible growl" (ibid.: 338), which is mirrored by Johnny's imagined "roar" (ibid.: 327) as he considers burning the book and himself to somehow escape his waking nightmare. This urge might have occurred to Zampanò before, as "[s]ome kind of ash" is present in his notes, "eradicating large chunks of text" (ibid.: 323), making ash the second linking parallelism, this one linking Johnny's narrative level 3 to Zampanò's level 2 and structural level A.

In the book that Truant edits, the passage describing this horror is also scarred by ash: [...] Just as Navidson's house rejects explanation, so too does Zampanò's manuscript become illegible.

(Pressman, 2006: 112)

This first instance of the concept of ash and burning as a linking mechanism foreshadows Truant's actual attempt at burning the book and Will Navidson's successful one later in the book, which will be discussed further below, and also links the plot to the graphical rendering of *House of Leaves*.

The third parallelism in this chapter is a continuation of the trend identified above - Truant veering closer to madness the deeper the characters of level 1 venture into the labyrinth. Just as Holloway's paranoia reaches its climax deep in the maze, Johnny "strain[s] now to see past The Navidson Record" (Danielewski, 2000: 337), his obsession deepening, his insomnia worsening and his past opening up once more as he remembers more details of Raymond's abuse (ibid.: 324-325). It makes sense that the minotaur - initially struck by Zampanò and partially restored by Truant - appears again as Johnny senses the beast that is his looming insanity and

discovers "a particularly disturbing coincidence" (ibid.: 336). "Although he does not specify the coincidence, we can guess it is the discovery that within the phrase 'The Minotaur' is the anagram 'O Im he Truant'" (Hayles, 2002: 798). Once again, the link between Truant and the beast is only hinted at and will come into fruition near the end of *House of Leaves*.

In the third part of this three-part chapter, subtitled "Escape", a title Truant questions in his footnote (Danielewski, 2000: 339), the focus is entirely on the Navidson Family. Johnny's storyline is absent as Will returns and the maze's shifts extend to the actual house for the first time. Will manages to save Karen and Reston but not his brother Tom who, after rescuing Daisy, is crushed by the walls of the house and plummets into darkness. As level 1 does not offer a point of view from anyone currently inside the maze (and, arguably, even the maze's supernatural powers are temporarily outside the maze), Truant remains silent, suggesting that his story and his pending insanity are linked to the depths of the maze, not to the Navidson family as such.

An inside point of view is absent in the following three chapters, as well. In contrast to chapter XIII-3, however, the characters on level 1 expose themselves to items created during the explorations and are therefore partially inside the maze, albeit not physically, so Johnny's story can continue without destroying the link between the maze and him. In Chapter XIV, Karen begins editing her absent husband's recordings into a film (ibid.: 352) while the return of Gdansk Man, Kyrie's violent boyfriend, pressures Johnny into an editing frenzy: "There's little else I can do now but copy it all down. And fast" (ibid.: 348). Still, he finds the

time to reminisce about his mother in a surprisingly heartfelt manner. Although his memories are fragmented and his interest in reclaiming them seems muted at best, he admits: "I'd sell body parts before I'd consider taking cash for this relic", speaking of the heart-shaped locket his mother left him. This is yet another connection to narrative level 1, except it does not deal with the Navidson family but with Holloway:

The locket connects his narrative to Holloway's mediated autobiography [...] As an adult, Holloway is tormented by the memory of the girl, doe-like in her fragility, who jilted him when he was a teenager, linked in his mind with the doe he accidentally shot as a young man [...] [Johnny] buys two guns, one the same kind with which Holloway committed suicide, and keeps them under his bed as a last resort.

(Hayles, 2002: 799)

In Chapter XV, while Karen's editing process continues and results in the *Exploration #4* excerpt and Delial is finally revealed to be the subject of Will's Pulitzer-winning photograph, the girl he deeply regrets not saving (Danielewski, 2000: 368), Truant's obsession with *The Navidson Record* grows yet again, even replacing his obsession with Thumper:

Beautiful as her voice is, it's just not strong enough to draw me from this course. Where eight months ago I'd have already been out the door. Today, for whatever sad reason, Thumper no longer has any influence over me.

(Danielewski, 2000: 365)

When his resolve falters for a moment, his unpaid phone bills result in the permanent disconnection of his line.

In Chapter XVI, the focus of level 1 shifts towards Reston and Will's analysis of the wall samples recovered during the earlier expeditions. Although most of Zampànò's text is missing thanks to Johnny's mishap with a bottle of German ink (*ibid.*: 376) and, as the Editors point out, an inexplicable disappearance of whole pages (*ibid.*), there is enough to come to the conclusion that the deeper into the labyrinth one ventures, the older the material it is made from becomes; the oldest scratchings the team has extracted is (literally) impossibly old and predates the earth (*ibid.*: 374). While Reston and Will unearth old secrets, Truant still cannot grasp relatively recent history: "I cannot for the life of me remember" (*ibid.*: 380) the day his mother was taken away to the Whalestoe Institute and does not believe the series of events expressed in her letters, refusing to believe she choked him.

Letters continue to be the linking element in Chapter XVII. Will's drunken letter to Karen (*ibid.*: 389-393) explains his reasons for returning to the house, including the lasting effects of the Delial incident on his psyche (*ibid.*: 391) and prompts Truant to comment: "the greatest love letters are always encoded for the one and not the many" (*ibid.*: 393). Although prompted by Will's calling his letter "a code to decipher" (*ibid.*: 391), Johnny's comment clearly connects to Pelafina's letters and the actual codes embedded therein. He knows that the letters he supplies to the editors and, by proxy, to the general public were love letters meant for him and presumably include codes (other than the obvious ones) nobody but him will ever be able to decipher.

The same chapter also introduces dreams as a new linking element. Will's dreams (*ibid.*: 398-403) are

interesting by themselves as they “end with Navidson puzzling over a decision [...] and not being able to choose” (Stephens, 2010: 9) and represent “the need for Navidson to reach an understanding about his life” (ibid.). It is Stephens’s second quote that makes the connection between Will’s and Truant’s dreams (and stories) obvious. While Navidson is aware of his past and endeavours to identify its meaning for his future, Johnny is missing large parts of what occurred during his childhood but gradually remembers it, culminating in a confusing dream full of imagery that hints to his past. In his dream, Truant is “deep in the hull of some enormous vessel”, threatened by a frat boy with a fireman’s axe, his hands “dipped in boiling oil” (Danielewski, 2000: 403) like in the frying pan incident in his childhood. Johnny resembles the minotaur and knows, “I’m here because I am deformed” (ibid.: 404). After being dismembered by the frat boy, an event that reverses itself seconds after the fact, the dream changes as the frat boy turns into Kyrie, then Ashely, then Thumper, then a strangely familiar woman “who with infinite tenderness is trying to hack Johnny into pieces [...] But then he remembers he is powerful: he can resist and need not play the helpless victim” (Hayles, 2002: 798). This tender and deadly woman is none other than his mother, made obvious by the very dichotomy of tenderness and danger she personifies in her letters, in his memories and in his dream.

Will’s third dream is missing, but one of its aspects is known: “this dream is particularly difficult to recount and requires that careful attention be paid to the various temporal and even tonal shifts” (Danielewski, 2000: 402). This is a property the missing dream shares

with Truant's. Between the frat boy dismembering him and the dream changing, Johnny, in the labyrinthine fashion he used to mock and be frustrated with in Zampanò's writing, inserts an aside about meeting Kyrie at a grocery store, thereby delaying the resolution of his dream the very same way Zampanò does in Chapter IX. In addition to this temporal shift away from the dream, his interjection of "Fuck 'em Hoss" (ibid.: 404), when compared to the not necessarily highbrow but less flippant tone of the dream itself, can be argued to be the tonal shift mentioned by Zampanò in the context of Will's missing third dream.

3.3 - Escaping the Depths - Chapters XVIII-XXIII

In Chapter XVIII, the house on Ash Tree Lane is at the centre of both Karen's and Johnny's desires. Karen returns to the house to search for Will (ibid.: 408) and, after considering selling it, moves in again (ibid.: 415). Although Will has been gone for over a month, Karen is certain she occasionally hears his voice (ibid.: 417). The chapter ends with the disappearance of the wall behind her through which she will eventually enter the labyrinth in chapter XXII. Johnny, too, wishes to see the house; in contrast to Karen, however, he does not know where to find it. With Lude in hospital after a beating by Gdansk Man (ibid.: 411), Johnny sells his mother's locket with his letter inside (ibid.: 410) and sets off to find the house. As his search for the house is told in Chapter XXI, a chapter focusing entirely on him and ignoring all other narrative levels, he is absent for the next two chapters.

After his preparations in Chapter XIX, Will ventures into the labyrinth for the last time in Chapter XX. This chapter is both a temporal shift back to before Karen returns to the house and a shift forwards to when Karen enters the maze. In what he dubs *Exploration #5*, Will aims to explore the corridors, not the Staircase (ibid.: 424). The entire exploration is characterised by enormous shifts around him, initially making his trip by bicycle considerably easier, as, no matter the direction he chooses, he always rides downhill (ibid.). Through a series of impossible shifts, accompanied by the growl (ibid.: 432), he finds himself inside a sideways staircase (ibid.), a rotating house within the maze (ibid.: 438) and, as he ascends a narrow staircase ending in a ladder with the floor beneath him and his supplies simply vanishing (ibid.: 439), a shrinking hallway (ibid.: 445). He ends up on an "ashblack slab [...] now apparently supported by nothing: darkness below, above, and of course darkness beyond" (ibid.: 464). All that remains of the labyrinth is darkness with nowhere to go. His flashlights and flares run out (ibid.: 465) and "he turns his attention to the last possible activity, the only book in his possession: *House of Leaves*" (ibid.).

In this moment of extreme narrative reflexivity, Navidson, the title character of the film and manuscript describing it, becomes a reader within the ever-changing network of the house that is the title character in the book he reads. [...] In this scene, the book *House of Leaves*, contained within the novel of the same name, is burned to ash and merges with the ashen walls of the house on Ash Tree Lane.

(Pressman, 2006: 113)

Not only does this sequence spell out the interconnectedness of both narrative and structural levels by

impossibly transporting the entirety of structural levels onto the central narrative level in "a violation of linear time" (Cordero, 2013: 104), it also "presents us with a vivid warning that this book threatens always to break out of the cover that binds it" (Hayles, 2002: 802), thereby transporting the reader back to Johnny's initial warning in his introduction, once again linking the characters of Johnny Truant and Will Navidson, this time by experiencing similar effects in wildly different ways. The book and its contents have a bidirectional reach across structural and narrative boundaries; Will experiences one direction as *House of Leaves* moves inside itself, and Johnny experiences the other as the inside of the book reaches out to him and deeply affects his outside life.

On a structural level, this passage also enables Zampanò to once more get in the way of the reader and deny them instant gratification. The reader, of course, wishes to know what happens to Will Navidson in this seemingly inescapable situation. Zampanò, however, spends two pages on the "academic onanism" (Danielewski, 2000: 467) of a certain Hans Staker, calculating how many pages of *House of Leaves* Will Navidson can read by the light of his matches (whose origin he also recounts) and, later, by the light of the burning pages he has already read. Once this tangent is over, another half-page footnote tells the reader of the controversial effect Navidson's decisions as a filmmaker had on critics (ibid.: 468).

Only after these asides may the reader learn of Will's fate. He floats, reminiscing in the darkness, thinking of Tom, Karen, Delial and his children, noticing the absence of the growl (ibid.: 470); he believes himself

to be dying (*ibid.*: 483) until, suddenly, a bright light like a star (*ibid.*: 488) shines down onto him and the film ends (*ibid.*: 489).

So far, the Editors have been non-intrusive and helpful. In this chapter, their credibility is muddied by two actions they take. The chapter opens with a paragraph in braille - "faux braille [...] not imprinted upon the page" (Slocombe, 2005: 103), to be precise, and therefore as unreadable to a vision-impaired reader as the rest of the book. The Editors helpfully translate the braille into standard English. However, they mistranslate the original "You will never find Mark there" as "You will never find a mark there" (Danielewski, 2000: 423). If one believes this to be a simple 'Easter egg' left by Mark (!) Z. Danielewski, it is inconsequential to both the Editors' reputation and the plot of the book. However, this instance seems rather crude compared to Danielewski's usual hints and riddles. Regardless, the Editors prove to be less trustworthy once one examines the Index with its 'DNE' (Does Not Exist) claims for words that do exist in the book, e.g. "toad" (*ibid.*: 610), and their use of the Ground-Air Emergency Code symbols in their own footnotes (see the typography section of this paper).

Johnny presumably writes most of Chapter XXI after the initial private distribution of the First Edition, as the First Edition does not include this chapter (*ibid.*: VII). It features multiple jumps in time in both directions, delaying the conclusions of multiple storylines in a similar way to Zampanò's habit of doing so. The chapter starts with the realisation that "Lude's dead" (*ibid.*: 491). In the days leading up to his creation of the Introduction, Truant moves closer and closer

to his looming state of madness, feeling possessed by "a progeny of anger and rage" (ibid.: 493). In this state of being possessed, he is ultimately found by Gdansk Man; in the ensuing fight, the reader initially believes that Johnny kills Gdansk man, tears him open and eats his liver before raping and dismembering Kyrle (ibid.: 496-197). After, he realises he has "lost sense of what's real and what's not" (ibid.: 497) and has lost his memory of the previous months. "I must remember. | I must read" (ibid.: 498).

The reader joins Truant in his journey of rediscovering his immediate past in a jump back to May of the same year. In the time from May to September, Johnny attempts to find the house on Ash Tree Lane and is ultimately unsuccessful. He remembers more details about his mother and comes to the realisation that "in her own beautiful, and yes horrifying way, [she can] instruct me on how to murder" (ibid.: 502), finally consciously realising that his mother's madness might be genetically predisposed, might live inside him. In an attempt to find closure, he visits Whalestoe and finds it "[c]losed in April. Over five years ago" (ibid.: 503). A similar experience waits for him at the house he grew up in, which is now "gone. A bunch of houses gone" (ibid.: 505). He is barred from closure in this aspect but begins "to recall something else" (ibid.: 506) - his father's growl during the frying pan incident, another parallel between *The Navidson Record* and his life.

This passage is followed by an entirely imagined stay at a psychiatrist couple's home during which his mental state supposedly improves (ibid.: 507-509). At this point, he is still aware that he "just made all that up" and "was trying to trick [himself]" (ibid.: 509),

although this will change in due time. The narrative jumps forward to October at this point, after the fight with Gdansk Man, when Johnny sells the weapons and leaves L.A. again (ibid.: 510-511), followed by yet another jump of ten months to August 1999. In Flagstaff, he meets a band whose members are in possession of his First Edition (ibid.: 513). When he leaves the bar, Flagstaff and (chronologically speaking) the plot of *House of Leaves* for good, he knows "it's going to be okay. It's going to be alright. It's going to be alright" (ibid.: 515).

A jump back to 1998, after the completion of his Introduction, denies the reader any sense of resolution in terms of Johnny's future and whereabouts after the publication of the Second Edition, yet it offers the severely delayed resolution of the fight with Gdansk Man. Neither Gdansk Man nor Kyrie are dead (ibid.: 516), leaving Truant alone and in thought. He convinces himself his mother "hadn't tried to strangle me and my father had never made a sound" (ibid.: 517), using the same skills of tricking himself earlier with the made-up story of Doc in Seattle but this time actually believing his own story and giving a contradictory account that is now inscribed, for him, as the truth. More concerning still, the last story he tells is "the one Doc told me when I was up in Seattle" (ibid.: 518). He never was in Seattle, Doc does not exist, the story cannot have originated from him. It seems Johnny has rewritten this memory, too, leaving the reader confused and the truth unidentifiable.

With Truant gone, only the Navidson family's story remains to be finished in Chapters XXII and XXIII. As Karen discovers the disappearance of the wall, she enters

the dark space behind with a flashlight that might be the light seen by Will in Chapter XX (ibid.: 522). The wall reappears behind her, locking them both in the maze, until, 49 minutes later, they reappear on the front lawn, an ambulance is called and Will is finally safe (ibid.: 523). According to Karen, after stepping inside the maze, the house "just dissolved" (ibid.: 524), granting them an unlikely happy ending that is further detailed in Chapter XXIII. This ultimate chapter describes the closing sequence Will films almost a year and a half after the events of *The Navidson Record*. Although he has lost a hand and an eye and Karen had to undergo a mastectomy due to malignant breast cancer, the family seems happy and finally free of the influence of the house (ibid.: 526-528).

3.4 - Pelafina's Letters

Although physically separated from the rest of the narrative by ways of an appendix, the letters penned by Pelafina are so strongly connected to the other levels that some suggest "she may be the writer who creates both the old man's narrative and her son's commentary" (Hayles, 2002: 802): "many readers ultimately attribute the entirety of *House of Leaves* to Pelafina" (Althoff, 2009: 31). An answer to the author question shall not be attempted here, yet the readership's suspicions and scholars' interest in Pelafina as a potential author of the whole narrative both prove how closely connected the letters are to the main narrative.

One such connection, the most natural and easiest to draw, consists of Pelafina's retelling of events that

happened to her son. While Johnny does tell the reader about his foster families, his name-giving truancy and his tendency to run away, Pelafina offers additional details as to the length of his absence (Danielewski, 2000: 590, 600) and the frequency at which Johnny switches families (ibid.: 587, 589). Already her unusual assessment of her son's behaviours becomes tangible: where a mentally healthy parent should be concerned by their child's running away, she considers him her "cunning, resourceful little boy" (ibid.: 590). In some of her letters, especially the one following his first reply (ibid.: 591), "[t]he extent of her motherly love [...] appears abnormally intense and extreme" (Cox, 2006: 12), emphasising not only that she is unwell but also that Johnny grew up in an environment in which, presumably, this twisted motherly love was a regular occurrence.

Her interpretation of love drives Pelafina to fantasies and actions that are closely linked to what Johnny experiences during and after his editing process. Upon hearing of her son's abuse by Raymond, she expresses her wish to "end him". "I would like nothing more than to tear out the liver of your purported protector [...] he will have witnessed the total dismemberment and consumption of every limb and organ" (Danielewski, 2000: 596-597). The same imagery haunts Johnny in his dream in Chapter XVII, in which he is dismembered by the changeling figure whose final form seems familiar, and his fight with Gdansk Man in Chapter XXI, in which he himself is the agent of imagined dismemberment and liver consumption. An abundance of connections between his hallucinations and his barely remembered past can also be found in the letter in which she confesses her attempted filicide. "Your grip loosened and you wet yourself. You

did more than wet yourself" (ibid.: 630), she recounts, identifying herself as the source of his faeces-related hallucinations and his "half-moon cuts on the back of [his] neck" (ibid.), created by her "ridiculous purple nails" (ibid.), explaining why this particular hallucination is triggered by the purple ink he is carrying (cf. Hayles, 2002: 790). Back in Chapter XXI, a rare instance of purple text can be found: "what I'm remembering now" (Danielewski, 2000: 518). Johnny's quest for his memories ultimately leads him to this attempted murder, "an act that Truant eventually refutes as a fabrication" (Cox, 2006: 12) and to the colour purple, which also happens to be a combination of blue (the colour of the house) and red (the colour of the minotaur). Pelafina is where the labyrinth and the minotaur meet; Pelafina is the centre.

She is also central to why Johnny is arguably the best non-professional editor Zampanò's manuscript could have found. The "communiqués" from his "mère" (Danielewski, 2000: 589) already confront him with foreign languages early on, including Latin in which "he's practically fluent" (ibid.: 631), an assessment he refutes in Chapter IV (ibid.: 34). As far as his native language is concerned, she sends him "a Concise Oxford English Dictionary" (ibid.: 591), encourages him to look up words (ibid.: 593, 594) and is convinced he will learn Old English some day and then revisit her letters (ibid.: 595). Meanwhile, her own language is mostly correct and high-register, one of the rare exceptions being "matter a factly" (ibid.: 588), which reminds the reader of Johnny's constant "would of" as opposed to 'would have / would've' (e.g. ibid.: 15). Her abundant mentions of mythological figures and location - to only name a few:

Hades, Hecate, Acheron, Clytemnestra (ibid.: 597) - all but set him up for Zampanò's writings about the minotaur, Icarus and Daedalus.

Lastly, her penchant for codes (or, more accurately, ciphers) is indubitably an influence that can help Truant with his task of editing *The Navidson Record*. In her coded letter, she accuses the employees of Whalestoe of rape (ibid.: 620), hiding an unsettling, horrible message in what first seems like a rambling mess of nonsense. Even then, she uses clever plays on words, such as the word "hell" being spelt out with "heaven" providing the 'h' and vice-versa (ibid.: 622), hinting that one cannot exist without the other and their conceptual separation is all but simple, while the word "loved" provides the first letter of the coded "loved" and "Johnny" the first letter of the coded "Johnny" (ibid.), as if both love and Johnny were so pure that they cannot possibly contain anything but themselves, once again showcasing her abundant (albeit misguided and obsessive) love for her son.

4 - The Visual Rendering of *House of Leaves*

In the previous section, I explored the various connections and parallelisms between multiple narrative and structural levels created by shared plot points, metaphors stretching across narratives and similarities in the personalities and histories of the actors on their respective levels. All these parallelisms are content related in nature, yet *House of Leaves* possesses a number of unusual formal properties, all of which result in a whole new layer of connections. In this section, I will

explore typographical aspects - such as the position and reading direction of the text on the page, the fonts chosen for different structural layers and the use of symbols - but I will also focus on orthographic oddities and wordplays, which further connect the narrative level to its graphical rendering.

4.1 - Pictorial Rendering vs. Camera Effects

Throughout *House of Leaves*, the layout of individual pages changes drastically and can often be described as unusual. Among scholars, there are two main interpretations of this aspect. Some speak of "pictorial rendering of the actions [the] characters are performing" (Brick, 2009: 5), while others refer to Danielewski's experience with the medium of film and prefer to interpret the graphical oddities as a literary equivalent of "camera effects" (Althoff, 2009: 15). While these two interpretations might seem similar and some scholars use a combination of both, it should be noted that there is a key difference in terms of the text's proximity to its characters. The assumption that the unusual layout is a 'camera effect' implies that the book is a screen that merely shows pre-recorded events in a way that was carefully planned and edited in the time between the events and their mediation. While live editing processes do exist in television technology, they are severely limited compared to what non-live video editing suites like Adobe's Premiere and After Effects can achieve. These suites require a process of 'rendering' after the editing stage, temporally removing the final result from the events it depicts. While this interpretation

thematically links the formal properties of *House of Leaves* to its plot, more specifically to Will Navidson's documentary film and Karen Green's editing process which is, indeed, chronologically removed from the events, and while Danielewski himself prefers this interpretation in interviews when asked about the layout and his filmmaker father (cf. Althoff, 2009: 15; Cordero, 2013: 91; Hayles, 2002: 793), it also robs the connection between layout and content of the immediacy the pictorial rendering approach suggests.

If one ignores Danielewski's intention to use typographical measures as camera effects, one is left with the more immediate pictorial rendering. In this interpretation, the text is not a screen but "a mirror of the novel's plot" (Brick, 2009: 5). A mirror does not require an additional device like a camera, and the temporal delay between receiving light and bouncing it back to the eyes of the onlooker is too short to be perceived. Similar to how Johnny's footnotes were written years after the events on the Navidson level but still seem immediate due to their close thematic connection, the pictorial rendering approach creates an illusion of simultaneousness that makes the reader feel as if the events were taking place at the time of reading.

Due to the nature of *House of Leaves*, a combination of the two approaches - perhaps named 'Pictorial Effects' - seems appropriate. Throughout the novel, both a lack of immediacy (through Johnny's editing of notes written years ago and Karen's editing of Will's film weeks after the recordings took place) and a sense of immediacy (through Johnny's hallucinations and the way the years-old story viscerally affects him and brings back even older memories) coexist alongside each other. The idea

of telling and retelling, mediating, re-mediating and remediating is central to all of the book's levels and finds its expression in a typographical rendering that is both immediate and removed.

4.2 - Pictorial Effects in *House of Leaves*

Pictorial effects make their first appearance in Chapter VIII, the SOS chapter. As the Navidson family hears the familiar Morse pattern, the text mirrors this sequence:

Danielewski structures the text of this chapter to resemble the S.O.S. code. He presents three blocks of text of about ten lines each, followed by three blocks of roughly thirty lines, returning to three blocks of ten lines.

(Brick, 2009: 8)

While Brick's interpretation of the main text's layout is indubitably correct, his focus on the real author, Danielewski, fails to remark upon a discrepancy between the structural levels of this chapter. It is Zampanò who, through a quote, "notes that Navidson intentionally cut those scenes of his film in short and long shots" (ibid.: 11), and one must assume that it is Zampanò who makes the main text mirror this structure - until one realises that Zampanò's footnotes do not follow this pattern but Truant's do. In his first footnote, triggered by the word "fuck" (Danielewski, 2000: 99) in the main text and ending in, "Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck you. Fuck me. Fuck this. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck" (ibid.: 100), he not only creates a three short, three long, three short pattern with this last barrage of expletives but also structures its paragraphs to spell out "FUCK" in Morse code.

The fact that Zampanò's footnotes do not follow the omnipresent pattern in this chapter could potentially mean that the layout of the main text was created by Johnny Truant, who has been established as partially unreliable and meddling by the water heater passage. However, it is also likely that Zampanò simply excluded his footnotes from the pattern in an attempt to reserve at least some academic integrity, that he considered the citations as an untouchable external element whose integrity should not be compromised by playful typographical games. There is not enough evidence for either of these two hypotheses, yet the discrepancy should be noted.

Chapter IX continues the trend of pictorial effects started in the previous chapter. On the content level, the chapter follows Holloway's exploration of the labyrinth. On the layout level, the "labyrinthine nature" (Cordero, 2013: 86) of the chapter expresses itself in two major ways. Firstly, on a purely visual level, the text making up this chapter is distributed in various unusual ways. Secondly, in a more abstract way, the way in which the footnotes are set up becomes as maze-like as the visual layout.

The visual oddities - whose author, similar to the SOS layout, is unclear, as the Editors note (Danielewski, 2000: 134) - start on page 119, when for the first time a footnote breaks free of the space designated for it at the bottom of the page and appears in a blue-rimmed box within the main text like a window. This footnote spans several pages, always staying in its blue window, always on odd pages up to and including page 141. On page 143, only the blue box remains until it vanishes on page 145 and leaves a blank space. The footnote inhabiting this

window lists things that are not in the house - a list that, by definition, cannot be exhaustive and is in itself nonsensical. The blue window's analogous entity on the content level does not enter the narrative until Chapter XX when Will Navidson, as deep inside the maze as never before, encounters an open window that, along with the house within the maze it belongs to, vanishes (ibid.: 464). On even pages, starting on page 120, the window presents the same footnote text reversed, as if looking through a window from the outside and reading what someone wrote on the inside. This window culminates not in a blank white space like its twin but in a black square on page 144 similar to the one featuring in the children's drawings in Chapter XIII (ibid.: 313).

While footnote 144 - the blue window footnote - is in an unusual place, other footnotes combine an unusual place with an unusual reading direction. Footnote 147 requires the reader to turn the book upside-down (ibid.: 135), footnote 167 is sideways (ibid.: 131), and footnote 182 wraps itself around the blue window (ibid.: 139). All of these mirror the confusing architecture of the house with its "absurd way the first hallway leads away from the living room only to return through a series of lefts" (ibid.: 120), creating "a complex network that cannot simply be read like a traditional linear text but must be 'navigated'" (Chanen, 2007: 167).

As hinted at before, this network is not merely visual. While the distribution and direction of footnotes certainly makes for a confusing and laborious reading effort in a physical sense, they are also conceptually compromised. In traditional academia, the main text includes a footnote symbol (often a number), signifying that a portion of the main text requires an annotation.

A footnote without a correspondent in the main text is an impossibility. This impossibility exists in Chapter IX. The Chapter starts with two three quotes, one of them triggering a series of footnotes that take up the rest of the page (Danielewski, 2000: 107) and the entirety of the following page. On the next page that should contain a main text, page 109, the portion above the footnote separator is itself preceded by a separating line and begins with a footnote symbol (see the symbols section of this paper). This symbol appears at the end of a footnote on page 114. If one were to follow each symbol one encounters, one would be trapped in a never-ending loop, as this instance sends the reader back to the beginning of the chapter; "there is the real possibility of being lost" (Chanen, 2007: 171) in the "many infinite loops and dead ends that are essentially traps" (ibid.: 172). This feeling of getting trapped is achieved by both the distribution and direction of footnotes ('Where does this footnote continue?') and the circular references created across footnotes ('What part should I read next? Haven't I read this before?'). This entire effort serves to create in the reader the feeling that explorers of the labyrinth have, as Zampanò remarks: "We cannot relax within those walls, we have to struggle past them" (Danielewski, 2000: 114), and: "In order to escape then, we have to remember we cannot ponder all paths but must decode only those necessary to get out" (ibid.: 115).

While Chapter IX achieves a feeling of being lost and trapped mainly by toying with the footnotes, Chapter X takes a similar but different approach:

even the primary narrative begins to careen out of focus as its story takes on momentum, finally bouncing from side to side and top to bottom of page, changing and transforming in accord with the action described.

(Graulund, 2006: 381)

For the first few pages, Will Navidson is still in his family's house and has not entered the maze yet. Accordingly, the main text only occupies the upper portion of each page. On page 159, the point of view rests with Tom and Reston, who remain at the top of the Staircase, and the text only moves to the bottom of this page when the narrative shifts to Navidson, who is at the bottom, and back to the middle of the page as he ascends again on the following page. The next few pages detail the rescue team's actions down in the labyrinth, with the text resting firmly in the bottom portion, interrupted by Zampanò's tangents on the top of pages 165-181. This trend continues until, beginning on page 193, Holloway shoots Jed. Here, one could be inclined to firmly side with the 'camera effects' theory as the layout changes to perfectly mirror a frame by frame analysis of the recordings as described by Zampanò. Thirty words are spread out across pages 194-205 (corresponding to the frame numbers mentioned by Zampanò), a method repeated several times after, including exactly one hundred pages later when the rope used to rescue Will snaps (Danielewski, 2000: 294-296). This leads to the aforementioned "hurried paging" (Cordero, 2013: 93) but also mirrors the action through the literary equivalent of slow motion or, perhaps more accurately, "bullet time" as popularised by 1999's *The Matrix*. Following this sequence, Will Navidson captures what in this instance can actually be called a 'camera effect'. The team's

flashlights cannot "effectively penetrate that far into the black" (Danielewski, 2000: 212), so Navidson uses his camera, equipped with a strobe. It can be argued that the clusters of words on the following dozens of pages reflect what happens when one uses a camera strobe as a light source: the flash fires, recharges, fires, recharges, incapable of providing a continuous and steady light source; analogously, the book is incapable of providing continuous and steady sentences and thus delivers them in bursts. Further examples of pictorial effects are interspersed throughout the sequence, including disorganised splinters of words as a bullet splinters a door (ibid.: 233).

With all the layout tricks used in Chapter IX, only the orientation of the text remains consistent. In Chapter XII, this changes at the most appropriate time. Between the characters, there is confusion as to what is happening to the Staircase during the attempted rescue of Will Navidson. In the passage asking, "what could possibly be pulling Reston to the top?" (ibid.: 286-287), the last word has its own page located at the top of the page and upside-down. The resolution is that Reston is not being pulled to the top - "Navidson is sinking . . . Or the stairway is stretching, expanding" (ibid.: 289). With all the confusion as to whether Reston is rising or Navidson is sinking, the orientation of the text on the pages reverses several times, the text sinking as Navidson is, stretching as the stairway is, dragging as Reston is being dragged upwards, culminating in the aforementioned snap of the rope.

Similar techniques are in use during Navidson's final expedition in Chapter XX. As the ceiling gets "progressively lower and lower" (ibid.: 428), so does the text,

followed by both "rising higher and higher" (ibid.: 429). As "the hallway widens", so does the text (ibid.: 431), until it first describes confusing motions as the shifts become stronger (ibid.: 432) and finally rests, for a moment, flatly across two pages as Navidson explores the plateau (ibid.: 434-435). During this expedition, the Editors seem to be playing along, as their translation of a sideways footnote is, too, sideways (ibid.: 437). So far, they have been refusing to indulge this kind of layout, acting as the voice of reason always located at the bottom, where their annotations belong. Here, their authority becomes highly questionable as they, the last step of editing that neither Johnny nor anyone else could possibly change after the fact, participate in the act of adding pictorial effects.

There are, of course, many more instances of pictorial effects throughout *House of Leaves*. Their purpose, however, should be clear at this point. They serve to mirror the plot and the mental state of its actors, to derail and trap the reader and to further connect the appearance of *House of Leaves* to the titular house's architecture as the "house-book spreads outwards through the layers of mediated narration from Navidson to Zampanò to Truant, and then, to the reader" (Pressman, 2006: 112). Their inclusion is effective because, like the plot itself, they stretch across all levels. Zampanò, Johnny and (albeit sparingly) the Editors use them, and so does Pelafina in her increasingly confusing letters (cf. Danielewski, 2000: 631-633).

4.3 - Symbols

Beginning in Chapter V, *House of Leaves* uses symbols in addition to numbers to denote footnotes. It is inherently unclear whether it was Zampanò or Truant who came up with the idea, although some rare hints can be found and shall be explained in this section. The main focus, however, is on how the meaning of the symbols coincides with the plot, thereby creating yet another layer of connections between different levels of the novel.

In Chapter V, which deals with the mythological origins of the word 'echo', "Zampanò penciled many of the translations for these Greek and Latin quotations into the margins. [Johnny has] gone ahead and turned them into footnotes" (Danielewski, 2000: 41). Fittingly, he uses (amongst others) astronomical/astrological and alchemical symbols as footnote signifiers: Earth (41), Pluto (42), Mars and Venus (43), a stylised half-moon with a face, Jupiter, the infinity symbol and omega (44). In some cases, a tangential connection between the meaning of the symbol and the context in which it appears can be asserted; the Venus (or female) symbol appears in the context of Muses and divine ones, and the infinity symbol signifies the translation of a quote about putting an end to sadness by letting time pass. A significantly closer connection between symbols and the plot exists in the context of the Ground-Air Emergency Code.

Johnny first hints at this code on page 48 before any of the symbols makes its first appearance: "X marks the spot: Unable To Proceed". This suggests that he has at least looked at the table explaining the code found among Zampanò's possessions (Danielewski, 2000: 582) or even read the whole book and noticed the symbols in Chapter

IX and onward. Since the origin of the code as footnote symbols is unclear, it could also point to Truant being responsible for including the code in the first place, although there is no further evidence supporting this hypothesis. An abundance of GAEC symbols can be found in Chapter IX, where they mirror their immediate surroundings perfectly.

Chapter IX, the labyrinth chapter full of traps and dead ends, begins with the X-like symbol mentioned by Johnny, meaning "unable to proceed" (ibid.: 107). Not only does this symbol accompany the translation of a quote about a "house difficult of exit" (ibid.) and is therefore already thematically relevant, it also tells the reader what awaits them in the entirety of the chapter. The next symbol the reader encounters is a K-like shape (ibid.: 109) with the ascribed meaning: "indicate direction to proceed". Fittingly, it begins the ambiguous 'footnote or main text?' passage that serves as a landing point for two circular references that could barely be farther apart: a footnote on page 114 ends with this symbol, sending the reader back five pages and encouraging them to get stuck in the infinite loop, and so does a cryptic journal entry in the Appendix on page 545. It should be noted that the choice appears somewhat odd to a reader who has not progressed further into the chapter yet. The symbol for 'unable to proceed' would have been the obvious choice for an infinite loop with no way out; however, Zampanò or Truant chose 'indicate direction to proceed', as if to express a belief that the labyrinth can be navigated with the appropriate sense of direction, perhaps provided by the passage already quoted earlier in this paper: "In order to escape then,

we have to remember we cannot ponder all parts" (ibid.: 115).

On page 109 as well, Johnny demonstrates that he knows how to use the code and is aware that it can be used to express meaning beyond the aeronautical context. He encounters the word "*bauplan*" (ibid.: 109) and does not know how to translate it. His footnote merely reads, "So sorry" (ibid.), but is preceded by the GAEC for 'not understood'. Since Johnny knows the meaning of the symbol *and* trusts the reader to either know the code or find the table, he lets the symbol speak for itself.

Page 114 contains a total of three instances of two symbols, all of which attempt to send the reader back to the beginning. The already mentioned K-like symbol is the last, while the X-like 'unable to proceed' symbol appears twice and refers the reader even farther back to page 107. Since both the K and the X are now used for the same purpose, the earlier potential confusion as to why K was used when X seemed more appropriate is both resolved and unresolved: K is still an odd choice, yet the fact that X is now being used as well makes more sense.

After another instance of X on page 115, the symbols continue on page 119. Holloway's process of mapping the team's path through the maze using fishing line and neon markers prompts a footnote signified by the square symbol for 'require compass and map'. The line and the markers are his compass and map, but there is an additional layer of resonance between the symbol and the plot. The footnote speaks of fishing line as "a metaphor for an umbilical cord" (ibid.: 119). It can be argued that Johnny Truant lacks orientation in life because his bond with his mother was severed at a crucial point of his

development - he, too, would have required a motherly compass and map.

When the team's provisions and supplies are swallowed by a shift of the labyrinth (ibid.: 122), the F-like symbol for 'require food and water' seems apt. It is followed by another instance of X and several pages without a symbol before Jed's first aid efforts in an attempt to save Wax trigger a footnote detailing the consequences of mild, moderate and severe shock (ibid.: 133). The symbol for this footnote, again mirroring the plot, is the II-like symbol for 'require medical supplies'.

The presence of W, 'require engineer', ten pages later is not as easily explained. Up until this point, the question of *who* requires a certain item has never been complicated: Holloway requires tools for orientation, the team requires food and water, Jed requires medical supplies. Although the context of this W-symbol is about photographic objectivity and image manipulation, it is not entirely clear who needs an engineer in this context. Perhaps the presence of the symbol is simply a play on how photoshopped pictures are often referred to as 'engineered'. Perhaps Johnny still doubts the existence of *The Navidson Record* and refers to Zampanò's treatment of the film as engineered. Perhaps Johnny is admitting he has engineered the entirety of Zampanò's alleged material (see the discussion of fonts further along in this paper). The existence of the W-symbol is ambiguous at best.

On page 144, the symbol that resembles two downward arrows on top of each other was clearly inserted by Johnny Truant. A struck passage in a footnote that contains the phrase "Truth & Truth" triggers a footnote

about the explosive TNT (which then turns into another footnote about Technological Neural Transmitters and, from there, into a tangent dealing with Lude's acronym for "Tits And Tail" (ibid.: 145)). The symbol, whose meaning according to the table is 'require firearms and ammunition', supports Johnny's association of T&T with TNT and reminds the reader that Johnny does, indeed, believe he is in need of firearms and ammunition. The last symbol in Chapter IX - except for yet another instance of the circularly referential K on the same page - denotes 'will attempt to take off' and accompanies Jed's and Wax's being trapped in a small room while "[s]omething is on the other side [of the door], hammering against it" (ibid.: 151). Depending on who or what is on the other side, they might be doomed or rescued. This is, metaphorically speaking, their last chance of potentially being rescued; their last chance to 'take off' and hopefully leave the labyrinth.

While Chapter IX contains the majority of instances in which GAEC symbols are used, they occasionally appear in other chapters. In Chapter XIII-2, when Holloway's flare runs out and he is devoured by the labyrinth, the documentary turns into a purely auditory experience (ibid.: 338). In this context, the symbol for 'require signal lamp' is self-explanatory.

Chapter XX features arrows - 'am proceeding in this direction' - that also belong to the GAEC. The first, an arrow to the right, links the Braille text at the start of the chapter (ibid.: 423) to its translation by the Editors; readers who feel disoriented by Braille are provided 'direction' by the Editors. When Navidson finds himself on the infinite plateau suddenly replaced by nothingness (ibid.: 434-435), an arrow forward indicates

what happens on the next page: his bicycle's brakes fail, resulting in his continued forward momentum although he attempts to stop (*ibid.*: 436). As the text then runs from the left to the right of the page and the reader needs to read it from the bottom upwards (*ibid.*: 440-441), an arrow downwards sends them to a footnote whose orientation is directly reversed in comparison to the main text; the two instances of the symbol are only the same upon turning the page by 180 degrees. This serves to transport the confusion and sheer impossibility of the architecture that surrounds Navidson - directions are entirely unclear, up is down, left is right. Similarly, when Navidson appears to be floating (*ibid.*: 468), an arrow to the left turns into an arrow to the right due to the reversed text, once again highlighting his directional confusion.

In the same chapter, the LL-like symbol for 'all well' appears when Navidson encounters an "unanticipated shelter" (*ibid.*: 437), the L-like 'require fuel and oil' in the context of matches (*ibid.*: 466) and, when Navidson finally sees the light and is all but rescued, a foreshadowing instance of 'require doctor, serious injuries' (*ibid.*: 488). In the last chapter, during the family's happy end, a last instance of a symbol - a triangle - declares their new house 'probably safe to land' (*ibid.*: 527).

In addition to their readily apparent connection to individual points of the plot detailed above, the GAEC symbols are inherently linked to Johnny Truant in multiple ways. Firstly, as explained by his father's obituary (*ibid.*: 585), he is the son of a pilot and might already be familiar with the code before even encountering Zampanò's work. Secondly, as Cox points out:

he is cast as an Icarus, who finds the mechanisms of his inventions disintegrating around him. [...] Pelafina elevates Truant from the shadows and encourages him to soar only to fall later, Icarus-like, to Earth.

(Cox, 2006: 11)

Johnny Truant is grounded and in dire need of help. Without a sane mother or other role model, he is without orientation, without compass and map, and requires medical assistance for serious injuries of the mind. At more than one point in the narrative, he is unable to proceed. Regardless of whether he inserted the GAEC symbols, they are appropriate and closely linked to his past, present and future.

4.4 - Orthography, Wordplay and Fonts

As mentioned in the Pelafina section, Johnny Truant has a habit of constantly spelling 'would have' as 'would of', a mistake mirrored by Pelafina's "matter a factly" (Danielewski, 2000: 588). This is, however, not the only suspicious similarity between different levels in *House of Leaves*. In Chapter IV, "could of" appears in Zampanò's main text (ibid.: 39). This is in no way enough evidence to assert that Johnny invented the whole story of Zampanò and Navidson, but it does seem to point to at least some similarities - unless one prefers the possibility that Johnny simply made an error while transcribing Zampanò's work. In that case, one must wonder if he transcribed his mother's letters, too, not only based on 'matter a factly', but also on the two instances of tearing someone 'to pisces', one fittingly appearing in the section about

mythology and Echo in Zampanò's work (ibid.: 41), the other in Pelafina's letters (ibid.: 599). If one does not believe in a simple mistake, one must also see parallels between Pelafina and Zampanò and, instead of considering Truant the inventor of only one of them, either accept the possibility that Johnny might have invented his mother's letters or the option that Pelafina might be behind the whole book.

If these three characters do in fact exist within the narrative, they all equally like playing with words. To name only a few examples: Zampanò discusses Navidson's youth and misspells 'parenthetical' as "parentethical" (ibid.: 401), which Truant picks up on and decides not to correct "because it seems to [him] less like an error of transcription and more like a revealing slip" (ibid.). Just a few pages earlier, Johnny makes a closely related pun. In the middle of the discussion of the wall scratching results, he begins to muse about his past and about "written legacies" (ibid.: 379) like his mother's letters. In the process, he opens several parentheses and ends with: "ah but to hell with the closing parent)he)see)s(sic)" (ibid.). The "(sic)" clearly shows that he is aware of what he has done, identifying the memories of his mother 'closing' in on him and deciding to joke about it as opposed to confronting it. Earlier, in a footnote Hansen identifies as an "expanding jumble of nonsensical associations" (Hansen, 2004: 622), Truant tells an utterly irrelevant story that Hansen identifies as "Truant's effort [...] to concentrate on interpreting events *within* the text" (ibid.), yet Hansen seems to ignore the pun that comes in the form of a certain "Connaught B. N. S. Cape" (Danielewski, 2000: 149). Spoken out loud, the name sounds an awful lot like '[there]

cannot be an escape', referring to the inescapable nature of the horrors contained in *The Navidson Record* that threatens to break through to Johnny and, ultimately, the reader. Disguised as a name, it is slightly harder to pick up on than the entirely nonsensical "[k]nown some call is air am" (ibid.: 72) which Stephens identifies as "the phonetic spelling of the Latin sentence 'Non sum qualis eram'" (Stephens, 2010: 10) which Johnny repeats in plain English (Danielewski, 2000: 72) and, perhaps more importantly, is featured in the correct Latin in one of Pelafina's letters (ibid.: 602).

With the levels of Truant and Zampanò sharing these similarities and often occupying the same page, it is necessary to separate them as clearly as possible. Since Zampanò's and Johnny's footnotes share the same space on any given page that features both, the line between main text and footnotes is not enough. The Editors decide to use fonts to distinguish between the three levels:

Each of these narrative voices is identified by a different font and is associated with a specific medium: Zampanò's academic commentary appears in Times Roman, the font associated with newspapers and the linotype; Truant's footnotes are in Courier, imitate a typewriter's inscription, and thematically identify him as the middleman, the "courier" of the manuscript; the terse notations from the Ed. are aptly presented in Bookman.

(Pressman, 2006: 109-110)

It is important to note that these font decisions - apt as they are - were made by the Editors, presumably in the final stage of the editing and printing process. Therefore, these fonts may not apply to the various photographs of pages and notes included in Appendix C,

' . . . and Pieces'. This section includes the photograph of a damning note:

Perhaps I will alter the whole thing. Kill both children. Murder is a better word. Chad scrambling to escape, almost making it to the front door where Karen waits, until a corner in the foyer suddenly leaps forward and hews the boy in half. At the same time Navidson, by the kitchen, reaches for Daisy, only to arrive a fraction of a second too late, his fingers finding air, his eyes scratching after Daisy as she falls to her death. Let both parents experience that. Let their narcissism find a new object to wither by. Douse them in infanticide. Drown them in blood.

(Danielewski, 2000: 552)

This passage, accompanied by a handwritten note that once again mentions "pull to pisces", is written in Courier and therefore seems to suggest that Johnny wrote it and invented Zampanò and his book. According to the note introducing the appendix, however, Johnny supplied all the contents (ibid.: 529). He might be unreliable, but hardly stupid enough to forge a whole book and then include evidence pointing to him. Had he known which font the Editors would choose for him, he might have added an explanation to the photograph of the note. It is Johnny who, in multiple places, doubted the veracity of Zampanò's account. He never included this note, which seems to prove his suspicion, in the main portion of the book, which seems strange even after acquitting him from the accusation of being the fabricator. Since the origin of the photographed note cannot be verified, it must remain a highly suspicious and uncomfortable thorn in the side of anyone attempting to analyse *House of Leaves*.

5 - Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to identify the various connections between the different narrative and structural layers of *House of Leaves*. As shown above, these connections are multifaceted and tangled, yet they are identifiable through slowly and carefully untangling the myriad strings connecting them. In separating the multiple alleged authors from the narrative to which they contribute and analysing each level on its own before connecting the threads to an analysis of the links and connections, the distinction between narrative and structural levels was helpful, as was the separation between in-world phenomena and their graphical rendering on the page, hence the structure of this paper.

Different linking elements on different layers work together to create a labyrinthine novel with countless riddles yet unsolved and spawned a community of both amateur and professional scholars. On the narrative layer, the most striking of these elements are the similar childhoods between Navidson and Truant and the labyrinth as an actual structure and as a metaphor for the depths of Truant's memories and madness. On the structural layer, it is the interplay between different structural levels - with one level supplying additional information about another level's content - that provides the connections which turn the novel into more than a sum of its parts. Finally, on the typographical level, a combination of the visualisation of the plot, the use of symbols to add and enhance meaning, the ambiguity of fonts and spelling and a variety of telling puns and Freudian slips, it all comes together to form a book that differs in its implications from chapter to chapter

and yet prevails as a cohesive work of literary art whilst leaving the reader wondering and without a conclusion.

Whether *House of Leaves* has some greater purpose, something to prove or something to show that lies outside of its narrative and its inner workings is frankly irrelevant to anyone interested in a compelling and unusual story told in a similarly compelling, unusual and at times frustrating way. Finding the parallels, connections and links is its own satisfying reward, even if one does not concern oneself with the larger implications or the grand postmodernist twist behind the novel's existence.

There is, of course, more to be discovered. Some riddles have still not been solved, some aspects are still unexplored and some conclusions made in this paper (and others by other scholars) might prove to be wrong at some point in the future. The community around Danielewski's novel will most likely never rest. I, however, have reached the page limit allotted to me, and cannot delve deeper into the author question, the companion book *The Whalstoe Letters*, the musical album by Danielewski's sister, Poe, and other mysteries barely hinted at in this paper. I am, unfortunately, 'unable to proceed'.

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Appendix - Tables 1 & 2

Table 1 - Narrative Levels

Level	Content	In-world representation	Representation in the book
1	Navidson's family life Expeditions into the maze Creation of the film	Navidson's documentary film, <i>The Navidson Record</i>	Zampanò's descriptions of the film in chapters I-XXIII
2	Zampanò's thoughts on and interpretation of the film Theoretical background on physics, filmmaking, mythology, etc. Scholars' opinions on different aspects of the film	Zampanò's treatment, <i>The Navidson Record</i> , scribbled on all sorts of objects	Chapters I - XXIII Zampanò's footnotes Exhibits One - Six Appendix: Zampanò
3	Johnny's experiences whilst transcribing Zampanò's work Johnny's past - childhood, travels, exploits with Lude Johnny's search for the house on Ash Tree Lane	Johnny's footnotes within Zampanò's work Appendix II: Johnny Truant	
4	Editors' clarifications, translations and additional materials	Editors' footnotes within Zampanò's work Appendix III: Contrary Evidence Index	

Table 2 - Structural Levels

Level	Content	Author (Supporting Authors and Sources)
A	<i>The Navidson Record</i>	Zampanò (a multitude of academic sources)
B	Johnny's footnotes and appendix	Johnny Truant
C	The Editors' footnotes and Contrary Evidence	The Editors
D	Pelafina's letters	Pelafina Lièvre

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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