

There is Nothing There: The Twentieth Century
Notion of Supplementation within Mark Z.
Danielewski's *House of Leaves*

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Abstract

Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* sheds light on many topics that were commonly explored in the twentieth century including supplementation, language, photography, film and authenticity. However, using a unique fictional style, *House of Leaves* expands, alters, critiques or overturns these theories in a day and age where digital technology has drastically changed the way we interact with media. Using devices such as reinterpretation, excessive footnotes, allusion and appendices, *House of Leaves* becomes the embodiment of the supplemented object, making it apparent that supplementation can alter the original, shift intention and resist definition. At first glance, *House of Leaves* may seem like an overproduced, flashy work of fiction, but upon further inspection it is clear that the novel has been meticulously put together in a deliberate fashion that comments on authenticity within communication and the impact of digital technology on the image in the twenty-first century.

When the differences of twentieth century film photography and twenty-first century digital photography are compared, the implications can be astounding. Once the shutter opens and closes on a film camera, a chemical reaction has occurred on the filmstrip. This “negative” becomes the physical manifestation of the photograph and certifies that the event captured took place as shown. In order to destroy this object, it must be burned, chemically dissolved or physically erased in some way. When compared to film photography, digital photography is markedly different. In the latter, there is no chemical reaction, no negative, no physical object left behind and deleting it is as easy as pressing a button. For the film photograph, the original can be traced back to the negative; for the digital photograph there is nothing we would recognize as an original. Digital photography differs in all these ways, but also introduces supplementary elements of photo enhancement, realistic manipulation and incredible distribution technology. Without an original, how can a digital photo remain authentic? How are we supposed to know when a photo has been digitally altered? Is photography becoming more illustrative and less informative? This example and the resulting questions help us realize the drastic influence that digital technology has had on our current notion of authenticity.

Mark Z. Danielewski’s debut novel *House of Leaves* (2000) has directly confronted these tensions between twentieth and twenty-first century notions of authenticity regarding language, art, film and photography. Through his unique four level split narrative structure (Hamilton 3), Danielewski exemplifies how a singular work, *The Navidson Record*, can become endlessly supplemented, not only through Johnny Truant and Zampanò’s reinterpretations, but also through the use of

extensive footnotes. As supplementary devices, these footnotes and interpretations act as external entities that supposedly enhance or create a better understanding of *The Davidson Record*. The relationships between The Editors, Johnny Truant, Zampanò and *The Davidson Record* emphasize the notion of supplementation and enter the novel into a discourse surrounding authenticity. Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* expands the twentieth century notion of supplementarity and authenticity, with their regard to language, art, photography and film while reworking these concepts in the context of the Digital Age.

House of Leaves confronts the radical changes that the advent of digital technology has introduced: how the ease of reproduction, expectation of digital manipulation and excess of supplementation has changed the way we view media. In doing so, Danielewski makes claims about the changing nature of authenticity in the digital age and how it has shifted from a Benjaminian authenticity with auratic tendencies to one defined by scientific fact and correlation with reality. Danielewski uses twentieth century ideas from critics such as Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin, concerning supplementation, language, photography, authenticity and film. By expanding, altering, critiquing and overturning these theories, he makes them applicable to the twenty-first century. The text alludes to historic literature such as Dante's *Inferno* and *Clarissa* while also quoting numerous other sources without developing them or following them through. This points to how supplementation can question the original, throwing it off center. The implications of Danielewski's *House of Leaves* relays that many theories written on language, photography, film and authenticity in the twentieth

century have either become more accurate with the advent of digital technology or have entirely expired.

Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher and literary critic, defines supplementation as the “movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin,” (Derrida 229). This definition carries out the idea that supplementation offers a derailing from a center and instead offers a deferred, retroactive, but not definitive meaning. The supplementary device undermines any claim to totalization of the original, and as can be seen in *House of Leaves*, opens up the possibility for additional layers of supplementation, including commentary, criticism, reinterpretation and footnotes. Questioning the “center or origin” of things opens an ontological discussion with respect to authenticity, where authenticity, here, refers to the origin of a work or artifact, or indeed whether it exists at all.

“While enthusiasts and detractors will continue to empty entire dictionaries attempting to describe or deride it, ‘authenticity’ still remains the word most likely to stir a debate. In fact, this leading obsession – to validate or invalidate the reels and tapes – invariably brings up a collateral and more general concern: whether or not, with the advent of digital technology, image has forsaken its once unimpeachable hold on the truth.” (Danielewski 3)

Like many great novels, the opening two sentences of Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, not only sets up many reoccurring questions, but also alludes to the legacy of twentieth century theory concerning language, art, photography, film, and, of course, authenticity. Looking within the novel itself, these sentences question the

general validity of sources, the reliability of the narrator and the legitimacy of the very documentary film the entire novel is based on, *The Navidson Record*.

The discussion surrounding supplementation and authenticity inevitably includes the function of language, the very medium that Danielewski chooses to use. Language within this novel seems to be understood from a poststructuralist viewpoint, influenced by theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Paul de Man. The faith that these men have in language is not exceptionally high, a claim reinforced by Paul de Man in his 1967 essay "Criticism and Crisis," de Man writes, "The same discrepancy exists in everyday language, the impossibility of making the actual expression coincide with what has to be expressed, of making the actual expression coincide with what it signifies" (11). There is a strong correlation between Paul de Man's poststructuralist essays and Danielewski's underlying claims within *House of Leaves*, something that is best comprehended with a solid understanding of de Manian theory.

I

Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course on General Linguistics* presents essential ideas that become the very basis for poststructuralists like Paul de Man. In the introduction, Saussure brings up the relationship between the individual and society and how he or she is forced to work within that system. He "can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community," (Saussure 14). Anyone who is part of this community has, by default, accepted these previously established rules of language. This system

is essentially made up of signifiers (words or sound images) that are associated with different concepts, (the signified). The signifiers and the signified are “intimately united, and each recalls the other,” (Saussure 66). This seems like a clear-cut relationship; however, the relationship between the two is arbitrary. There is no inherent correlation between the word and the concept. For example, the word “flower” has no “inner relationship” (Saussure 67) with the actual concept of a flower. They exist independently of each other and the only reason they have an affiliation at all is because it has been assigned by our accepted conventions of language.

Saussure is not only concerned with the isolated relationship between the signifier and the signified, but also how each signifier is in direct discourse with every other signifier. This is described as a “horizontal relationship” between the sign and the signified, meaning words gain their meaning from how they differ from other words. An example of this would be how there are many different words for the general concept of “nice,” such as kind, good, fine, lovely, perfect, acceptable, decent, etc. While all these words are similar to one another, each differs in a slight way. If one of these words were to disappear, it could be substituted by one of the others, but that slight difference would be lost and the term would be less precise than the original one. This example displays the problematic nature of language: how words never describe exactly what they mean, but instead gain meaning from their slight difference from one another.

Paul de Man continues this conversation about the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified that Saussure started with various essays

including “Criticism and Crisis” and “The Rhetoric of Temporality.” Both of these essays display de Man’s doubts of the social institution of language. In “Criticism and Crisis,” he writes, “The fallacy of the belief that, in the language of poetry, sign and meaning can coincide, or at least be related to each other in the free and harmonious balance that we call beauty, is said to be a specifically romantic delusion,” (de Man 9). Language, this “romantic delusion” that de Man casts aside, is something that poets, writers and readers have always found a sort of refuge in. Paul de Man, however, refuses to privilege any sort of language, be it everyday, poetic or scientific. He argues that there is a duplicity, a confusion and an untruth that we take for granted in the everyday use of language (de Man 9).

Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* adds to the discourse surrounding misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and ambiguity that Saussure and de Man contributed to. The fabric of the novel is woven with the interpretations of Zampanò, Johnny Truant and The Editors, each an interpretation of the one before it. The film, *The Navidson Record*, which does not seem to exist, is the main topic of this convoluted novel. The confusion that lies within the novel is a reflection of the concepts presented but also manages to extend beyond the theory. The footnotes, overrun with false sources and real people, dwarf the plotline at points. References to etymology, mythology and psychology run throughout the story but then die out, without a sound claim made. Rather than attempting to make sense out of all these dead-end points, it is more beneficial to look at *House of Leaves* as poststructural theory put into practice, an allegory of sorts.

The Navidson Record supposedly tells the story of Will “Navy” Navidson, his partner, Karen Green and their two children moving into a house in rural Virginia. Permanently settling down makes Navidson anxious since he is used to the transitory life of a traveling photojournalist. He attempts to cope with this by documenting the process of a family putting down their roots. Navidson insists on installing video cameras throughout the house to capture particular moments that would otherwise be lost. However, when Navidson discovers that his house is a quarter of an inch larger on the inside than on the outside, this sentimental family documentary takes a turn for the worst.

Johnny Truant writes the introduction that explains the death of Zampanò and warns the reader of the consuming nature of Zampanò’s writings, advising that it would be best to put the book down and move on. This warning, however, just sucks the reader in even more. Through his footnotes, offset in Courier font, Johnny conveys his own experience with *The Navidson Record* and bits and pieces of his life history. We quickly learn that he grew up in foster homes and now lives in Los Angeles working in a tattoo parlor and tries to maintain an active presence in the party scene. His unreliable anecdotes relay brief encounters with young women and his casual drug use while also recounting his growing obsession with *The Navidson Record*.

Zampanò’s ghostly presence haunts *House of Leaves* from the introduction onward since he acts as the missing key to the entire novel. At the very beginning, Johnny Truant gets a late night call from his friend Lude telling him about something that he has come across. When they walk into Zampanò’s apartment they find his

body and next to it four long scratches in the wood floor. As he steps in, Johnny notices that the windows are nailed shut and sealed with caulk, books are stuffed in the refrigerator, Zampanò's writings are strewn everywhere and on top of everything, a strong odor. It is quickly revealed that Zampanò was a blind man; the presence of burnt out light bulbs, unlit candles and braille literature illustrates this. However, this small detail soon becomes problematic as we realize all of these unorganized writings are about *The Navidson Record*, a documentary film. While Zampanò's disability may prevent him from being able to actually see this film, it does not prevent him from writing on it.

The inconsistency that is immediately problematic is the fact that Zampanò is a blind man recollecting a film, a medium intended to be seen. Johnny Truant points this out beautifully saying, "Zampanò's greatest ironic gesture; love of love written by the broken hearted; love of life written by the dead: all this language of light, film and photography and he hadn't seen a thing since the mid-fifties. He was blind as a bat" (Danielewski xxi). This flaw becomes more and more serious as the novel develops around a blind man's interpretation of a documentary whose existence is improbable. There are two explanations for this: 1) Zampanò completely fabricated *The Navidson Record* 2) Someone else recounted the documentary to Zampanò, therefore adding another level of mediation. Either way, there is some level of interpretation that goes on between the film and Zampanò's pen, but whether it is another human being or simply Zampanò's imagination, we never find out.

These themes of interpretation and mediation reappear throughout the novel. Tom Navidson, Will's brother, tells a joke that recounts how a newly accepted

monk questions the long established method of copying the Bible by hand into illustrated manuscripts. "He's concerned that all the monks have been copying from copies made from still more copies," (Danielewski 257), so the priest decides to check the original copy with the most recent one. After spending days locked in the vault with the books, the priest emerges, proclaiming, "Oh Lord Jesus, the word is 'celebrate!'" (257). This joke points out one of the potential flaws of any type of mediation: the "original" may lose its first intention, and even worse, completely reverse its meaning. The two-letter change that the word "celebrate" goes through in order to become "celibate" is one that changes the course of human history. While this joke is something that is easy to immediately laugh at, when thought about, it can be slightly terrifying considering people have been copying things by hand for the majority of recorded time.

While this joke is told in an informal manner, it is a subtle commentary on the novel itself since it points out the possibility of a small, yet serious, alteration. *House of Leaves* is essentially the story of four different accounts that relay their own version of each other's writings and documentations. This forces the reader to ask: what was left out? What was fabricated? What was misinterpreted? What was simply a mistake? However, it is important to realize that all of these ambiguities are simply another dimension to the novel, something that is just as much a part of the work as Zampanò's blindness. *House of Leaves* is not real. It is one work that was put together by one person in a complicated, meticulous and, most importantly, deliberate, way. The questions that should be asked are what is Danielewski trying to show us by colliding the voices of *The Navidson Record*, Zampanò, Johnny Truant,

and The Editors? Is he commenting on our authenticity in an increasingly mediated society? Not necessarily all of these questions get answered as the layers of *House of Leaves* are peeled away.

In one of the more telling footnotes of the novel, The Editors write, “By relying on Reston as the sole narrative voice, [Navidson] subtly draws attention once again to the question of inadequacies in representation, no matter the medium, no matter how flawless. Here in particular, he mockingly emphasizes the fallen nature of any history by purposefully concocting an absurd number of generations,” (346). This footnote also “mockingly emphasizes” the ridiculous amount of retellings that we are exposed to while reading *House of Leaves*, immediately imposing a “fallen nature” to the entirety of the novel. Not only is *House of Leaves* composed of several different accounts, but as the novel goes on, the existence of the original documentary, *The Navidson Record*, seems less and less likely. To put the idea simply, it is much like the children’s game telephone. The game starts with one word or sentence and can easily finish with an entirely different one after the original idea has been interpreted by a dozen or so people. As the idea flows from person to person, it can be misheard, purposefully altered and in rare cases not altered at all. Danielewski, however, seems to be interested in the gap that occurs between the original idea and the resulting alteration.

Much like the story of the monk, this idea harks back to the fact that nearly everything we say, think or read can be misunderstood during one interpretation or another. This, however, can lead us into an entirely different form of mediation, which takes us back one step further: the mediation of language. The gap that occurs

between our thoughts and our language is similar to the gap that occurs from one retelling to another. Since language is the medium in which we are forced to express our thoughts, we sometimes compromise ourselves in order to express ideas and feelings.

This idea directly relates to de Man's thoughts concerning the inauthenticity of language. In his essay "Criticism and Crisis" de Man declares, "We know that our entire social language is an intricate system of rhetorical devices designed to escape from the direct expression of desires that are, in the fullest sense of the term, unnameable – not because they are ethically shameful (for this would make the problem a very simple one), but because unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility," (de Man 9). De Man's idea is closely tied with Danielewski's simply because they both point out the blatant fallacy that is so apparent, yet so ignored, within language. If this medium is so intimately tied to our thoughts and desires, we would have a much easier time communicating. *House of Leaves* points out the problems that are found within language by showing the men that have literally gone crazy in pursuit of the meanings behind words.

Zampanò and Johnny Truant are perfect examples of this. Zampanò is found dead surrounded by his own obsessive writings on *The Navidson Record*, and as Johnny points out, "The woman who saw him for the last time, remarked that 'whatever it was he could never quite address in himself prevented him from ever settling,'" (xxii). Try as he might, Zampanò could never find the right words for whatever it was he was attempting to express in himself, an important fact to take into consideration when examining the novel. Although it is easy to forget,

Zampanò's voice is present throughout *House of Leaves* since he was the first compiler of the documents. Given the different layers that Zampanò has constructed, it is unclear to what exactly he was trying to get across. Zampanò's tangents, such as a chapter relating to the etymology of the word "echo" and the backwards, upside-down and blacked out text he includes, is another way he attempts to convey his ideas, but they still come out convoluted and unorganized. The overwhelming amount of excerpts from different sources and his neurotic footnotes are evidence to his meticulous research on *The Navidson Record*. This further proves Zampanò's fascination, and ultimate frustration with language since he put so much effort in conveying his ideas into words, yet he could never completely exhaust his thoughts.

Danielewski uses Zampanò as an extreme example to show the "inadequacies in representation," the representation here being language. At the end of footnote 308, it is noted, "representation does not replace. It only offers distance and in rare cases perspective," (346). This "distance" becomes increasingly problematic as we are forced to compromise our ideas in order to express ourselves through language. We are socialized in such a way that our thoughts conform more and more to language. Perhaps Zampanò resisted this conformation and in resisting it he finally went mad.

Much like Zampanò, Johnny Truant displays a similar fascination and frustration with language, especially concerning *The Navidson Record*. Being the person that stumbled across and became obsessed with Zampanò's writings, Johnny Truant feels responsible for the work itself. Zampanò left a note saying, "Whoever finds and publishes this work shall be entitled to all proceeds [...] They say truth

stands the test of time. I can think of no greater comfort than knowing this document failed such a test," (xix). Zampanò is aware of the powerful nature of his work, however, he is unsure of its validity, which may be an indicator that he has lost touch with reality. Johnny Truant follows Zampanò's spiral into madness and also becomes lost in the intricate web that is *The Navidson Record*, further proving the miscommunication that lies within the barriers of language.

Truant responds to Zampanò's note saying, "I sure as hell didn't pause to think that some lousy words were going to land me in a shitty hotel room saturated with the stink of my own vomit," (xix). Johnny, being the one to inherit Zampanò's burden after he died, acknowledges not only his undesirable position, but also the consuming power of *The Navidson Record* that landed him there. Truant is stuck on trying to interpret the work of Zampanò, a man that went crazy in a futile attempt to express his self. This inevitably sets Johnny Truant up for the same fate since there is no way to know if there is any legitimacy behind the deceased Zampanò's work. The frustration that Zampanò feels in conveying his ideas becomes Johnny's frustration in interpreting them.

Zampanò and Truant seem to privilege the power of words otherwise they wouldn't have this relentless obsession with language as a means of expression. This problem of interpretation becomes even more apparent when one consciousness attempts to interpret another; in this case, Johnny Truant's attempt to decode Zampanò's work. In de Man's words, "a fundamental discrepancy always prevents the observer from coinciding fully with the consciousness he is observing" (11). De Man's skepticism in language largely explains Zampanò and Johnny Truant's

apparent fascination with it. He recognizes the struggles that people have communicating through this system and he acknowledges how this sheer frustration, once recognized can turn to sheer insanity.

Paul de Man elaborates on this point of madness within language in his essay "Rhetoric of Temporality." He writes, "Sanity can exist only because we are willing to function within the conventions of duplicity and dissimulation, just as social language dissimulates the inherent violence of the actual relationships between human beings. Once this mask is shown to be a mask, the authentic being underneath appears necessarily as on the verge of madness," (de Man 215-16). This radical statement that de Man makes lines up well with the fall into madness that both Zampanò and Johnny Truant experience. Zampanò's madness being a result of his attempt at expressing himself and Truant's a result of his attempt at interpreting Zampanò's manuscript. The further each one becomes invested in their respective goals, the further removed the mask is, ensuing in madness.

Before Johnny Truant came across Zampanò's works, he was more or less sane and living within the confines of "duplicity and dissimulation." However, as his obsession with *The Navidson Record* grows, he begins to gradually collapse deeper and deeper into a tortuous insanity. Truant locks himself in his cramped apartment with only Zampanò's work, surrounding him with exclusively language and the desire to interpret it. For de Man, this is an absolutely futile attempt and can only lead to his inevitable madness. As he falls further into this abyss, his relationships with the people in his life become estranged while some fall apart entirely. Truant's "authentic being" is slowly revealed as his mask dissolves, but this more genuine

person is not one more relatable to the people around him. People see that Truant is on the “verge of madness,” and most want nothing to do with him. The same can be said for Zampanò. The more he struggled with language as a way to address the inexpressible, the more he began to lose touch with reality. *The Davidson Record* became the unmasking agent for both Zampanò and Truant since it pointed out the flaws within language. When this mask comes off, both men quite literally go insane.

While de Man would never privilege any sort of linguistic medium, he does acknowledge that fictional literature at least recognizes the gap between reality and language. In “Criticism and Crisis” de Man writes:

For the statement about language, that sign and meaning can never coincide, is what is precisely taken for granted in the kind of language we call literary. Literature, unlike everyday language, begins on the far side of this knowledge; it is the only form of language free from the fallacy of unmediated expression. (17)

De Man understands literature to have a certain disclaimer that recognizes that it is not a part of reality, but rather exists within itself as a self-contained system. Since these fictional pieces do not claim a direct correlation to reality, they can be seen in a less critical light. If we understand fiction as allegory and everyday language as symbols, then what de Man writes in his later essay “The Rhetoric of Temporality” explains the advantage that fiction has over everyday language. “Allegory appears as dryly rational and dogmatic in its reference to a meaning that it does not itself constitute, whereas the symbol is founded on an intimate unity between the image that rises up before the sense and the supersensory totality that the image suggests”

(de Man 189). Symbols imply transcendence between signifier and signified, where in fact there is none, while allegory does not claim to resolve this gap, and when fiction is understood as allegory, it becomes a more authentic language or, at least a more sound understanding of the limits of language. This is where novels such as *House of Leaves* grasp something close to true expression.

II

The sheer materiality of *House of Leaves* is something that is hard to ignore. The novel is more than the traditional conception of what it means to be a novel: the book itself weighs a couple of pounds and beneath the black-on-black etching of a maze on the cover lies a dizzying compilation of letters, footnotes, poems, collages and definitions that all tie together the multiple layers of *House of Leaves*. This, however, does not go unnoticed by the text itself. Katherine Hayles mentions this in her article, "Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*" saying, "[T]he text insists on its specificity as a print novel, showing a heightened self-awareness about its own materiality," (784). The physical format of the novel that Danielewski embraces grants the text itself a role that continues to blur the lines between fiction and reality. While the layers of *The Navidson Record*, Zampanò, Johnny Truant and The Editors are spelled out for us, a fifth layer emerges as the authors hand becomes visible. An instance of this is when Johnny Truant writes:

A moment comes when suddenly everything seems impossibly far and confused, my sense of self derealized & depersonalized, the disorientation so

severe I actually believe – and let me tell you it is an intensely strange instance of belief – that this terrible sense of relatedness to Zampanò's work implies something that just can't be, namely that this thing has created me; not me unto it, but now it unto me, where I am nothing more than the matter of some other voice, intruding through the folds of what even now lies there agape, possessing me with histories I should never recognize as my own; inventing me, defining me, directing me until finally every association I can claim as my own...is relegated to nothing; forcing me to face the most terrible suspicion of all, that all this has just been made up and what's worse, not made up by me or even for that matter Zampanò.

Though by whom I have no idea. (Danielewski 346)

It is extremely rare for a character to express anxiety about his or her existence, especially by seriously implying the author's creative license. Danielewski, however, successfully leaves a trace of his hand by using Truant's perception in a subtle and quite beautiful way. This again opens up the question of the ontology of the layers of *House of Leaves*. Danielewski, the sole creator, spawns these multiple layers that momentarily overlap with one another. Johnny Truant recognizes that Zampanò's manuscript may not only be a captivating manuscript, but the genesis of his existence. He realizes that he may be the figment of someone's imagination as he comes to the conclusion "that all this has just been made up." This ontological question is complicated as it becomes clear that *House of Leaves* is based on a fictional documentary, fictional not only within *this* reality, but also within the constructed reality of *House of Leaves*. When the characters begin to sense their own

fictionality and *The Davidson Record*, the object of its genesis, is called into question, it becomes evident that these layers are not as clear-cut as they seem.

The academic discourse that is parasitically present throughout the footnotes seems to be Danielewski's mockery of the tediousness of academia, with endless supplementation that verifies the existence of the non-existent. Truant's introduction before *House of Leaves* acknowledges this disparity saying, "See, the irony is it makes no difference that the documentary at the heart of this book is fiction. Zampanò knew from the get go that what's real or isn't real doesn't matter here. The consequences are the same," (xx). Supplementation has the powerful ability to create something out of nothing, like in the case of *The Davidson Record*, a documentary that does not exist but has become real in its consequences.

As noted before, Derrida expands on the definition of supplementarity in his "Structure, Sign and Play," defining it as "movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin," (229). Derrida's essay is one part of the rich history of supplementation represented within art and theory during the twentieth century. *House of Leaves* continues this discourse in the digital world of the twenty-first century where supplementation is more prevalent than ever before. When something is supplemented, it is enhanced or changed by an external entity. This entity could be anything from a short wall plaque to an endless article, both of which attempt to make the original object more complete or better understood. Supplementation can also be seen as an act of verification of something's authenticity, for example, a certificate of authenticity for a piece of art or jewelry. Without this certificate, these items have little to no value. These pieces of

supplementation can act to define and complete an object, an idea that that has been explored and represented within the art of the twentieth century.

In 1917, an anonymous artist submitted a tilted urinal entitled “Fountain,” signed “R. Mutt” to The Society of Independent Artists, who claimed they would accept anything as long as the artist paid a fee. “Fountain” was rejected. This moment has been deemed by many to be the landmark in which twentieth century art was permanently changed. Marcel Duchamp, the renowned artist behind “Fountain” and other readymades, questioned what it meant for something to be deemed “art.” Duchamp helped introduce the notion that the commonplace object could be considered an art object. His declaration of “Fountain” as art can be seen as supplementation since he is attempting to change the definition of this commonplace object.

Later, in the 1960’s, the conceptual art movement was picking up where Duchamp left off, exploring topics such as art, language, authenticity and supplementation. Robert Morris’ “Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal” is such a piece that points to the relationship between the original artifact and the subsequent supplemented material. Morris leaves behind only the silhouette of his previous artwork and next to it, posts an administrative document. By completely removing the original, he withdraws “all aesthetic quality and content” (Osborne 69) from the piece of art, replacing it with a document. In doing so, Morris challenges the traditional idea that the aesthetic is held above artistic intention. Morris also exemplifies supplementation as representation in effectively representing his artwork with nothing but a simple bureaucratic document.

A small portion of these conceptual artworks were considered “tautologies,” or works that exist completely within themselves without any sort of outside verification or supplementation. Haans Haeck’s “Condensation Cube,” a completely sealed plastic cube with a small amount of water contained inside, is considered one of these. However, the moment something is labeled a tautology it breaks away from the definition of a true tautology since the act of labeling is itself supplementation. Much in the same way art needs to be verified as art, a tautology needs to be verified as such, but this verification prevents it from being a pure tautology. In Benjamin Buchloh’s article “Conceptual Art 1962 – 1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” he cites Roland Barthes’ definition of a tautology, saying:

Tautologie. Yes, I know, it’s an ugly word. But so is the thing. Tautology is the verbal device which consists in defining like by like...One takes refuge in tautology as one does in fear, or anger, or sadness, when one is at loss for an explanation...In tautology, there is a double murder: one kills rationality because it resists one; one kills language because it betrays one...Now any refusal of language is a death. Tautology creates a dead, a motionless world.

(Buchloh 129)

This definition of tautology pins it as an “ugly” thing that resists interaction, refuses supplementation and exists in a static, detached context. For something to be supplemented means that it can engage in some sort of discourse with the world around it, while tautologies, which isolate themselves in a self-defining relationship, refuse this openness. Conceptual art’s investigation of supplementation, or lack

there of, demonstrates the continuation of the conversation surrounding supplementation in the twentieth century.

House of Leaves takes this conversation into the twenty-first century with its pages of footnotes, extraneous appendixes, a useless index and plethora of fake sources. Danielewski's excessive supplementation points at how, in order for something to be taken seriously, it needs to be completed in a standardized way and verified by a reputable source. *House of Leaves* provides all of this academic commentary on *The Navidson Record* in an attempt to recreate the circulatory nature of how things are understood. Dozens of people contemplate and write about this documentary, giving rise to hundreds more interpretations that spring off of the originals. Hayles writes about this approach in her article, saying, "[*House of Leaves*] suggests that the appropriate model for subjectivity is a communication circuit rather than discrete individualism; for narration, remediation rather than representation; and for reading and writing, inscription technology fused with consciousness rather than a mind conveying its thoughts directly to the reader," (803). Compared to the twentieth century stream of consciousness writing style that privileges an individual interpretation, Danielewski introduces this "communication circuit," in which not one, but multiple interpretations are presented in dialogue with one another. This approach does not privilege the isolated, individual consciousness, but rather acknowledges that they are all influenced by each other.

Zampanò's influence on Johnny Truant is the most obvious example of this "remediation" that Hayles defines as "the representation of material that has already been represented in another medium," (781). Remediation is closely tied with the

term “appropriation,” commonly applied to art to imply that something has been taken out of its original context in an effort to change its meaning. This was a common practice among twentieth century artists, including Marcel Duchamp, whose conception of the readymade exemplifies this idea. He takes an already existing object and by slightly changing it, it is interpreted in an entirely different way. Joseph Kosuth and his notorious “Art as Idea as Idea” series is another later example of this technique being used once again. Kosuth used white-on-black photostats of preexisting dictionary definitions and placed them in a context to be viewed as art. The definition itself is not original but by re-presenting the material, he changes how it is to be viewed.

While similar, remediation differs from appropriation because it focuses on the individual re-interpretation of certain material rather than the copy-paste model that appropriation within art follows. For example, Zampanò is not taking *The Navidson Record* and placing it in a different context to be viewed. Rather, he is transcribing the film to a manuscript with his various notes, citations, tangents and models embedded within, altering the medium entirely. Remediation allows for more change and interpretation than does appropriation.

This open circuit model that Danielewski creates mimics how information is reinterpreted, re-presented and exemplifies how once an idea is created, it can transform as time goes by. The Internet has created a world in which nearly anyone can be a published author allowing for an even greater pool of critics, not to mention allowing access to an incredible amount of information. This is the digital environment that an author sets lose his or her work, inevitably giving up any

control of where it goes from there. It is then in the hands of the hundreds of analyzers, commentators, and critics that will always have the most recent, but not necessarily last word as the work gains momentum and creates a greater life through various redmediations and supplementations.

Danielewski's experimentation with remediation is a culmination of the long history of supplementation and appropriation that results in an open circuit style discussion with the advent of digital technologies. The never-ending chain of analysis that remediation embodies explores the metamorphosis and alteration of information that has become so rapidly prevalent in our modern society. Much like stream of consciousness writing was for the turn of the twentieth century, Danielewski's new style of remediation mirrors the advances in information distribution that occurred at the end of the twentieth century.

III

Danielewski alludes to a wide variety of authors and stories throughout the novel, from *Dante's Inferno* to the 1748 classic British novel *Clarissa*. This continual referencing adds to the supplementary nature of *House of Leaves* by constantly referencing outside novels and sources. In referencing these other works, Danielewski tactfully brings up timeless topics such as the hero's journey, the beauty and pain of love, and the isolation of insanity. The constant literary supplementation also helps the novel resist a central point since the endless

references create tangents to the plotline, but this reinforces Derrida's idea that supplementation exists within the lack of a center.

From the very beginning of *House of Leaves* there are strong allusions to the *Aeneid*, Dante's *Inferno* and *Paradise Lost*, which all dive into the depths of the underworld. *House of Leaves* seems to loosely follow some sort of underworld exploration, however, it is not a concrete comparison. Will Navidson and Johnny Truant seem to fill the roll of the heroic, but naive explorer attempting to gain something from their exploration of a world beneath this one. Zampanò quotes Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *Inferno* side by side saying:

In the 17th century, England's greatest topographer of worlds satanic and divine warned that hell was nothing less than "Regions of Sorrow, doleful shades, where peace/ And rest can never dwell, hope never comes/ that comes to all" thus echoing the words copied down by hells most famous tourist: '*Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create/ Se non etterne, e io eterna duro./ Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate.* (Danielewski 4).

Not until Johnny Truant's footnotes is this passage clarified and translated:

That first bit comes from Milton's Paradise Lost, Book I, lines 65-67. The second from Dante's Inferno, Canto III, lines 7-9. In 1939, some guy named John D. Sinclair from the Oxford University Press translated the Italian as follows: 'Before me nothing was created but eternal things and I endure eternally. Abandon every hope, ye that enter.'

This quick exchange that is set up between Zampanò and Johnny Truant exemplifies the coded style that Zampanò writes in, with his vague descriptors like "greatest

topographer of worlds satanic and divine” and “hells most famous tourist” while almost never translating things from their original language. This is where Truant’s supplementary footnotes come in as a clarifying source so that we are able to understand where these assumed quotes are coming from.

Danielewski linearly traces this commentary, originating with Dante’s *Inferno* and concluding with Johnny Truant, emphasizing the fact that there is no exchange here, just a linear progression from literary work to commentator. Dante cannot comment on Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and Milton cannot respond to Zampanò while Zampanò cannot correct Johnny Truant. Death separates them all. This again points at the idea that the commentator will always have close to the last word. However, that “last word” will never really be the final word because someone else can always add his or her thoughts.

Chapter III is opened with a quote from Dante’s *Inferno* that reads, “But I, why should I go there, and who grants it? I am not Aeneas; I am not Paul.” To which Truant responds later in the footnotes, “A question I’m often asking myself these days.” (Danielewski 19). The placement of this quote from Dante’s *Inferno* finds common ground between Aeneas, Dante, Navidson and Truant in their unexpected journey of the underworld. For Aeneas and Dante, that underworld is commonly known as Hell but for Will Navidson and Johnny Truant it is the house on Ash Tree Lane and *The Navidson Record*, respectively. These allusions to these classic works place *House of Leaves* in dialogue with these often-referenced stories.

While, as Zampanò admits, Will Navidson is not lucky enough to have a guide to his dark underworld, Johnny Truant’s guide could be seen as Zampanò. Although

Zampanò is absent due to his death, the manuscript that he left behind acts as the guide for Johnny. Like Virgil is for Dante, Zampanò's incomplete manuscript equips Truant with the things he may need but it never explains the ontology of *The Navidson Record* itself. It simply presents information that is supposed to be regarded as factual. Through the manuscript, Zampanò's presence, and everything else for that matter, is projected and an entire other "underworld" is opened up for Johnny Truant. However, Zampanò is not the most reliable or efficient guide, and following him more often than not results in dead ends or labyrinthine trails of fabrications. The difference between Dante's guide, Virgil, and Truant's guide, Zampanò lie in their reliability and presence.

Clarissa, an eighteenth century novel by Samuel Richardson, is also heavily referenced in *House of Leaves* within the section titled "The Whalestoe Letters." These letters, written from Johnny Truant's mother, Pelafina, to Johnny Truant, explain not only Truant's tragic past but also the unstable mental condition of his mother that only continued to worsen with her incarceration. While "The Whalestoe Letters" are contained within the novel in Appendix E, there is also an entirely separate collection of the letters published separately of *House of Leaves* entitled *The Whalestoe Letters*, setting them apart as an epistolary counterpart to *House of Leaves*. The letters begin with a fairly normal correspondence from mother to son, with many allusions to poetry and the occasional sentence or two in French or Latin. As the correspondences continue, Pelafina becomes more and more suspicious of her letters being intercepted, forcing her to hand off the letters to attendants so as to avoid the so-called "prying eyes" of the New Director. Whether or not this is a real

or just perceived threat is unclear due to Pelafina's persistent manic episodes that result in her forgetting days or weeks at a time.

It is only after she is drugged and traumatically raped by the New Director (which, the reader finds out through a coded letter to Johnny) do her accusations seem serious. After this incident, Pelafina's letters begin to get markedly more peculiar. The sentences become slanted on the page and eventually begin to overlap, making it nearly impossible to read. The font size varies widely with tiny font juxtaposed to large font. She writes without any spaces between words in incoherent sentences and sometimes just the repetition of a particular phrase or Johnny's name. While Pelafina's mental illness may have been delicately controlled before she was raped, the rape seems to throw her over the edge, exacerbating her illness and ultimately leading to her death.

This section of *House of Leaves* shares many parallels with the epistolary novel *Clarissa*. Though much, much longer, *Clarissa* also portrays the letters of a woman in a desperate situation who, after she is drugged and raped, begins to write letters in an incoherent and disjointed way. The novel also ends in her death. These overlapping events are in no way a coincidence since Mark Z. Danielewski consciously put together the entire novel well aware of the novel *Clarissa*. The question then becomes why did he put the novel together in such a way and what exactly is he attempting to reflect by coinciding "The Whalestoe Letters" so perfectly with *Clarissa*? Is it a purely aesthetic move that makes the novel a sort of coded adventure that only the well read are able to partake in? Or is there a deeper

meaning to it? While it is impossible to say with any type of authority, it is possible to speculate on Danielewski's intentions given what he has left us with.

There are other inexplicable coincidences in *House of Leaves* such as a repeating reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown," once when Karen comes out of the house holding Will at the end with "a pink ribbon in her hair" (Danielewski 523). Also when Pelafina compares herself to Faith saying, "Like Hawthorne's Faith, I put pink ribbons in my hair," (Danielewski 599) out of her excitement to see Johnny. An entire chapter is dedicated to the word "echo" and it explores the origin of the word, stemming from the myth with Echo and Narcissus and continues to delve into what it means, scientifically, for an echo to happen. Then later throughout the novel, we are confronted with echoes within the dark hallways beneath the expanding hallways within the house on Ash Tree Lane. Another parallel is the repeating image of lemon meringue pie within the Navidson's household and Johnny Truant's upbringing. All of these are presented as coincidences that are not acknowledged or explained, creating another puzzle that may not have a solution.

Appendix F is entitled "Various Quotes" and includes a plethora of quotes using passages from Carl G. Jung, proverbs from around the world and numerous translations of the *Illiad*. These quotes continue to confuse and scatter the orientation of the novel since the reader assumes that each quote is meticulously selected for some sort of meaning that would function to improve or explain *House of Leaves* in some way. However, figuring out how each one of these quotes relates to and enhances *House of Leaves* seems like an endless, vain task.

It is always fun to notice certain similarities between novels and when it becomes obvious that it is intentional, it can feel like the reader is in touch with the author. Danielewski, however, resists this oversimplification and rather than feeling like the reader has gained a better understanding of the novel, noticing these parallels brings on another level of confusion. It forces the reader to search for some sort of meaning behind the intention, however, more often than not the reader will be left empty handed. Much like Johnny Truant attempts to find a moment of clarity within Zampanò's unfinished manuscript, the reader looks for this same refreshing connection when noticing the bountiful allusions and parallels strewn throughout the novel. For *House of Leaves*, however, this search is more often than not, in vain.

One hypothesis of Danielewski's coincidence dropping style brings us back to Derrida's idea that there is no central point within something. Danielewski's constant allusion to something outside of the novel derails *House of Leaves* from a central point since it is not based on one certain thing, but rather a multitude of disconnected references. There is no point of origin for *House of Leaves*. It simply exists in a way that incorporates an infinite number of references, existing or non-, and in doing so, physically manifests many themes that are presented in the text. For example, the notion of something's origin, or existence for that matter, is a repeating theme throughout the book. That origin or existence could be *The Navidson Record* itself, the background of Johnny Truant, or the etymology of a word. Danielewski presents all three of these things in a way that resists the idea that there is a true point of origin of something's existence. By bringing together this

nearly endless list of references, Danielewski has created a novel that refuses to accept a central point.

IV

House of Leaves has an intimate connection with the production of film, mainly reflected through its concentration on the fictional documentary, *The Navidson Record*. The creator and main character of this documentary, Will Navidson, is a retired Pulitzer Prize winning photojournalist who spent years in war zones surrounded by famine, but is now restless in the domesticity of his new life. In an attempt to defuse his boredom he decides to create a harmless documentary focusing on his family's adjustment to their new home in rural Virginia. Will states at the beginning of *The Navidson Record*, "I just want to create a record of how Karen and I bought a small house in the country and moved into it with our children. Sort of see how everything turns out. No gunfire, famine, or flies. Just lots of toothpaste, gardening and people stuff," (Danielewski 8). Zampanò remarks on the naivety of these beginning lines saying that "[the opening of *The Navidson Record*] remains one of the more disturbing sequences because it so effectively denies itself even the slightest premonition about what will soon take place on Ash Tree Lane," (Danielewski 8).

Will Navidson installs enough Hi 8 cameras around his house to catch nearly everything that goes on within the walls. He even gives his life partner, Karen, a camera to use like a journal, which she uses to record her emotional distress

through the entire experience. Things become interesting when Will begins to notice that his house seems to defy physics. After doing a series of precise measurements with his estranged brother Tom, Will reaches the conclusion that his new home is literally bigger on the inside than on the outside. Then, after a short vacation, Will and his family come home to a completely new door that starts out as a dark closet that quickly expands to hallway that grows and shifts by the day. This is when the documentary moves from portraying a domestic utopia to showing the horrifying nature of the house on Ash Tree Lane. Naturally, Will Navidson's adventurous spirit is reawakened and, despite Karen's best efforts to keep him away, Will explores the ever-changing dark hallways hidden behind the mysterious door. He brings with him a video camera, his brother, a small crew of his close friends, flares, fishing line, walkie-talkies and equipment as if they were going on an extended backpacking trip.

What develops is a conversation about the representation of reality through the mediums that we have created to capture it. Since Navidson is an acclaimed photojournalist, photography inevitably becomes part of the discussion as well. Danielewski subtly introduces how photography's authenticity and credibility is threatened in the age of digital manipulation. Various landmark quotes are hidden within Chapter IX, which is given the "possible chapter title" of "The Labryinth," as noted in Appendix A. It has upside down, backwards, sideways, crossed out and boxed off text with footnotes within footnotes that jump around so much they certainly create a labyrinthine effect. One of these quotes, from Andy Grundburg, a real journalist for the *New York Times*, reads

In the future, readers of newspapers and magazines will probably view news pictures more as illustrations than as reportage, since they will be well aware that they can no longer distinguish between a genuine image and one that has been manipulated. Even if news photographers and editors resist the temptations of electronic manipulation, as they are likely to do, the credibility of all reproduced images will be diminished by a climate of reduced expectations. In short, photographs will not seem as real as they once did. (Danielewski 141)

Clearly Mr. Grundburg does not have much faith in the future of the credible image, and rightly so since nearly every single image we are bombarded with in this digital age has been airbrushed, enhanced, touched-up or otherwise manipulated in some way. These images no longer have any correlation to reality and function more as illustrations than reflections.

A couple pages later, Danielewski cites the National Press Photographers Association, a real association:

As photojournalists, we have the responsibility to document society and to preserve its images as a matter of historical record. It is clear that the emerging electronic technologies provide new challenges to the integrity of photographic images. The technology enables the manipulation of the content of an image in such a way that the change is virtually undetectable. In light of this, we, the National Press Photographers Association, reaffirm the basis of our ethics: Accurate representation is the benchmark of our profession. (Danielewski 143)

This excerpt from the ethics of the NPPA displays the staunch traditional values that this association is unwilling to change in the face of technology, an incredibly admirable feat. Their stance is more optimistic than Grundburg's in that they do not consider the reactions of the viewer to the image but simply focus on what they have ultimate control over: the accurate representation of unaltered reality. The fact that some viewers may not even consider unaltered photographs unaltered is not of concern to the NPAA. They simply refuse to change their ethics regardless of the general public's preconceived expectations of photography.

The fact that Danielewski chose to use quotes from actual sources rather than his typical fake citations points to the idea that this is in fact a real controversy. Academics have been discussing the impacts of photography ever since it was first introduced. Roland Barthes, a mid-twentieth century French theorist, elevates the medium for its indexical properties and claims in his last book *Camera Lucida* that "[t]he photograph is literally the emanation of the referent. From the real body, which was there, proceed radiations that ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star," (Barthes 80-81). Barthes pays attention to the physical interaction that the camera has with its subject and through this, the camera certifies the subject's existence. Much like a footprint or bite marks, photographs, for Barthes, offer indexical proof of something's presence.

Barthes was familiar with a very different form of photography than what it has developed into today. The camera during the first three quarters of the twentieth century functioned much in the way that Barthes describes, but with the

advent of digital photography, the relationship between the camera and its subject is entirely changed. This indexical connection is broken since there are no “radiations that ultimately touch” the subject. Instead digital photography takes an image and puts it in a context that can be completely manipulated and even entirely deleted. Traditional photography does not work in the same way since it offers a physical manifestation of the image itself that cannot be deleted or enhanced like a digital photo can.

Danielewski quietly mentions Roland Barthes in footnote 146 during Chapter IX, perhaps in an effort to include his voice in the discourse surrounding photography. However, Danielewski also continues this conversation in the digital age, a time where Roland Barthes position on photography has essentially expired. Zampanò writes, “As Grundberg, Alabiso and Mitchell contend, this impressive ability to manipulate images must someday permanently deracinate film and video from its now sacrosanct position as ‘eyewitness’ [...] Truth will once again revert to the shady territories of the word and humanity’s abilities to judge its peculiar modalities,”(Danielewski 145). Danielewski’s compilation of these different thoughts on photography present a new viewpoint of the medium, one that is more allegorical than literal, more illustrative than representative, one that is not to be trusted for its content but rather enjoyed for its aesthetics. Digital photography can no longer be viewed as “proof” since it is not inherently indexical like its ancestor, film photography.

The idea of providing substantial proof to verify something’s existence is a common theme throughout *House of Leaves*. Does *The Navidson Record* exist and if it

does was it completely fabricated or does it portray real events? Is the house on Ash Tree Lane even a real place? Who or what is making these large scratches and deep grumblings within the dark, ever-changing hallways? Is Johnny Truant reliable in even the slightest sense? All of these questions saturate *House of Leaves* with ambiguity and to the reader's dissatisfaction or delight, they never get answered. In the words of Katherine Hayles, these unanswerable questions force the novel to "inhabit a borderland between the metaphoric and the literal, the imaginary and the real," (Hayles 789). This position is similar to the indefinite place that digital photography has begun to occupy, a space between the real and the imagined, the metaphoric and the literal.

The conversation surrounding the modern development of photography certainly does not end within the confines of photography, but overflows into the realm of film. In this day and age when we have access to extravagant films overrun with computer generated imagery the notion of what is "real" continues to be blurred. Three-dimensional movies like *Avatar* and *The Hobbit* immerse the viewer into an entirely different but convincing reality. However, while impressed and entertained by the experience, the audience will never be completely fooled by the special effects since they know that a gap exists between this cinematic world and our own reality. The small details that are meticulously added by the masters of CGI, such as perfectly crafted flora or subtle tears in clothing, are supplementary details that work together to create what is known as the "reality effect," a term coined by Roland Barthes. This refers to the small but realistic details within literature, and now film, that signify nothing but realism. However, in an age where we are exposed

to these minute and extraneous details in a fictional context, it is easy to see how they could have the opposite effect. The more detailed and clear something is, the less likely it is for us to believe it is completely realistic.

When a movie like *Avatar* is compared to a home video, the difference is overwhelming. If you ask almost anyone which one they believe to be recorded reality, they will choose the home video, the home video recorded on an inexpensive camera bought from Target compared to the millions and millions spent on the advanced technical equipment used to make *Avatar*. The element that this fancy equipment does not capture is the grit of reality. Zampanò comments on this, misquoting Anthony Lane, a real film critic from *The New Yorker* saying, “grittiness is the most difficult element to construct and will always elude the finest studio magician. Grit, however, does not elude Navidson.” Zampanò continues saying, “Consider the savage scene captured on grainy 16mm film of a tourist eaten alive by lions [...] and compare it to the ridiculous and costly comedy *Eraser* in which several villains are dismembered by alligators,” (Danielewski 145). We have learned to find a negative correlation between production costs and correspondence to reality and there have certainly been more than a few filmmakers that have taken advantage of this observation.

The Navidson Record is accused by many critics within *House of Leaves* of being a fake documentary, a documentary that seems to be real footage, but is actually entirely staged. This is not an original idea. Movies like *The Blair Witch Project* and *Paranormal Activity* use this idea and effectively create a more terrifying experience since the viewer is led to believe that they are watching actual footage.

Zampanò attempts to debunk the idea that *The Navidson Record* is anything but real saying, "Perhaps the best argument for the authenticity of *The Navidson Record* does not come from film critics, university scholars, or festival panel members but rather from the I.R.S. Even a cursory glance at Will Navidson's tax statements [...] proves the impossibility of digital manipulation," (Danielewski 148). Later it is estimated that if manipulated digitally, *The Navidson Record* would have cost at least \$6.5 million dollars, putting the possibility completely out of Navidson's price range. Zampanò continues, saying, "Thus it would appear the ghost haunting *The Navidson Record*, continually bashing against the door, is none other than the recurring threat of its own reality," (Danielewski 149). This statement again points to the liminal space in between fact and fiction, exactly where *The House of Leaves* continually proves to reside. The question then shifts from is *The Navidson Record* based on actual experience? to does *The Navidson Record* even exist in the first place? Much like the "fake documentary" style horror movies, the uncertainty that this discrepancy between fact and fiction presents creates a disturbing tension that is present throughout the novel.

This conversation of authenticity brings us back to the very first line of *The House of Leaves*, "While enthusiasts and detractors will continue to empty entire dictionaries attempting to describe or deride it, 'authenticity' still remains the word most likely to stir a debate," (Danielewski 3). Zampanò certainly is fascinated by the authentic nature of *The Navidson Record*, something Johnny Truant comments on saying in footnote 195, "Despite claiming in Chapter One that 'the more interesting material dwells exclusively on the interpretation of events within the film,' Zampanò

has still wandered into his own discussion of ‘the antinomies of fact or fiction, representation or artifice, document or prank’ within *The Davidson Record*” (Danielewski 149). Zampanò, or more accurately Mark Z. Danielewski, continues this conversation of authenticity in the digital age, picking up where “enthusiasts and detractors” like Paul de Man, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and the NPAA leave off.

Walter Benjamin discusses the notion of authenticity within various mediums of art in his essay, “Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction,” written in 1936. He argues that with the continual advances in the reproduction of artwork, beginning with lithography and ending with film, the “aura” of the art object gradually withers. This aura is essentially defined by the historical legacy that an art object’s authenticity claims to capture, whether that is through the physical “here and now” of the piece, the genius of the artist that created the object, or the sheer mystery that the artwork seems to encompass. All of these things are traits of unique, singular artworks, such as Da Vinci’s *The Mona Lisa*, Michelangelo’s *David*, or even the Sistine Chapel. When the reproducibility of art is introduced with lithography and later cinematography, these traits become negligible. Benjamin describes the shift from the two art forms saying, “Uniqueness and permanence are as closely entwined in the latter as are transitoriness and repeatability in the former,” (Benjamin 23). Film is essentially defined by its endless repeatability, lack of original and, especially in the digital age, an increasing transitory nature while any sort of singularity is completely evaded.

However, with the advent of digital technology, the authenticity question is brought to the surface once again. Authenticity, then, is not defined by a historical legacy or creative genius, but simply by whether or not something happened the way film portrays it happening. This new authenticity is defined by factual evidence and is threatened by any sort of mysteriousness, unlike the auratic art object.

Whether or not a film is inline with reality is the new question that presents itself, in a digital age when it is so easy to create an entirely new world with Computer Generated Imagery. What it means for something to be “authentic” today has changed with the advent of digital technology and this extension of the debate surrounding authenticity proves this notion. The question of film depicting reality is something Benjamin would have never questioned since film in 1936 had a direct correlation with reality, void of realistic special effects or any type of Computer Generated Imagery.

Digital manipulation has triggered doubt within the field of photojournalism, instilled a general distrust of illustrative photographs, and has completely changed the way in which we view film. Danielewski seems to comment extensively on the ways in which digital technology has turned photography and film on its head, especially in the way it is thought of academically, with theorists like Barthes and Benjamin. The fake documentary *The Navidson Record* creates a space for this discussion, bringing up topics such as accurate representation, the integrity of photojournalism, and the authenticity within photography and film. While no definite conclusion is reached, Danielewski’s attempt to shed light on the changing

nature of film and photography in the digital age unravels the thousands of pages written on photography and film in the twentieth century.

It has been said that Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* all began with a short story he wrote on a cross-country bus ride en route to see his dying father entitled "Redwood." It may seem that within this short story lies the originating point of *House of Leaves*, the ontological beginning, if you will. Katherine Hayles calls this story the "kernel" of *House of Leaves*, the place where it all began. This simple observation apparently does damage to one of the prominent themes within *House of Leaves*, that nothing has a definite center, an origin or is concretely based on something else. The way that Danielewski has permeated his work with the refusal of an original with endless remediations from Zampanò to Truant and so on points at this incessant refusal of a beginning. In other words, it is hard to believe that Danielewski would allow for such a contradictory predicament that could effectively discredit one of the prominent themes that runs through *House of Leaves*.

In an interview, Danielewski speaks to this saying, "What became part of *House of Leaves* and what did not is a complicated issue. It is not exactly accurate to say that it 'originated' with "Redwood" in the sense that "Redwood" directly anticipated what I did in the novel. It was more a matter of "Redwood" having a certain spectral presence as I began my formal pursuit of the novel," (Danielewski). It here we again see Danielewski refusing to accept a definite originating point and instead turns to the supernatural, the "spectral presence" that "Redwood" had while he was writing the novel. Although *House of Leaves* may have been influenced by

“Redwood,” it was not built around it. *House of Leaves* has effectively become the supplementary device to “Redwood,” expanding, enhancing and perhaps even questioning this first story.

The finished product of *House of Leaves* turned out to be a hyper-supplemented, convoluted but deliberately constructed postmodern novel. Danielewski has proved that, in the digital age, the printed book has not entirely faded away. *House of Leaves*, while at first may seem cheeky or overdone, is an artfully crafted literary object that comments on the continuing metamorphosis of the written word and reproduced image under the pressures of technology. Danielewski takes twentieth century ideas and theories surrounding language, art, photography and film and he appropriates, twists and flips them so as to create a twenty-first century understanding of the respective mediums. While it is hard to say, concretely, where Danielewski stands for nearly anything, this ambiguous approach forces a reflection of these various topics.

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