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Analogue Invention: *S.* and *House of Leaves* as Integrated Texts

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education
Supervisor: Yuri Cowan
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Kunnskap for en bedre verden

Abstract

Since the turn of the millennium there has been an emergence of novels that incorporate unorthodox page design as part of their narrative toolbox, some of which have acquired a cult following that still comb through their atypically designed pages. This thesis provides a qualitative study of modern publications that use digital typesetting to produce an untraditional analogue experience. The contemporary materialist field is often primarily concerned with hypertexts and other forms of digital literature, while this thesis is focused on the potential still present in physical books.

Because categorization of this kind of atypically designed book is lacking, I suggest the term “integrated texts” to describe them. The definition of this term as well as a general description is provided in chapter 1. Chapter 2 and 3 will provide case studies of Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* and Abrams & Dorst’s *S.* to illustrate how integrated texts work. Both of which remediate their themes through multiple levels of storytelling but through drastically different techniques. *House of Leaves*’s ludic text making and experimental page design look nothing like *S.*’ marginalia and use of paratextual inserts, but both are examples of integrated text. This thesis argues for the aesthetic potential in moving beyond the traditional borders of the page.

Acknowledgements

My supervisor Yuri should be acknowledged first of all for his encouragement and guidance. His (at times blunt) comments were incredibly helpful, as well as his pointers to sources and stories made this thesis much more complete. For both the quality and the expediency of his response I am very grateful.

For being kind and answering my questions regarding the behind-the-scenes process in printing I would like to thank Frode Søyby, as well as the authors Solveig Helland, Zeshan Shakar, Erlend Loe, and Edvard Hoem, among others. Their responses were both enlightening and reassuring amidst a confusing and uncertain time.

I would also like to thank the unnecessarily long lunches I partook in during this year, they were very enjoyable. I suppose there were also a group of people at those lunches whom I love dearly and I will always cherish the moments I spent with them as a break from the (seemingly) never-ending pandemic. Chiefly among my friends is Regine, whose love and support made this thesis possible, which she could not be thanked enough for.

Lastly, I would like to thank my grandfather for his encouragement, interest, and support throughout all my years in Trondheim. Moving here I have followed in his footsteps and I hope to continue doing so going forward.

Dag Hjorth Endresen
Trondheim, May 2021.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	II
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION AND TERMINOLOGY	1
1.1 HERMENEUTICS AND POST-STRUCTURALISM.....	6
1.2 READER EXPERIENCE	8
CHAPTER 2 - S.	13
2.1 – MYSTERY & SELF	17
CHAPTER 3 – HOUSE OF LEAVES.....	25
3.1 FLEXIBILITY	30
CHAPTER 4 – CONCLUSION	35
BIBLIOGRAPHY	39
APPENDIX – TEACHER RELEVANCE	43

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Terminology

Robert Brown wrote the following in 1931 about the poem “Eyes on the Half-Shell”:

I like to look at it, merely sit and look at it, take it all in without moving an eye. It gives me more than rhymed poetry. It rhymes in my eyes. Here are Black Riders for me at last galloping across a blank page.¹

We often think of text as something we use, a convenient way to bridge the gap from author to reader asynchronously. But bridges between two locations are often places in and of themselves, even though their intended purpose is purely transitory. This is what William Morris discovered when illuminating classic texts. The text is not just a signifier of something more important, it carries its own meaning as well.² This is why Robert Brown has such an intense reaction to an optical poem. The text is not just an attempt of recreating an author’s idea, it has a form of its own. To Brown, the experience of watching the letters ride across the paper is separate from the experience of the poem. Normally there is more of a confluence between material and narrative, but Brown’s statement illustrates the importance of the “materiality of experience”³ quite clearly. This thesis will examine novels that explore the optical aspect of the page and allow the Black Riders to march in rare patterns.

Novels like Abrams & Dorst’s *S.*, Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, and Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* all stand out if one were to leaf through them when walking through a bookstore. They can be described as antinovels, novels that go against the conventions and traditions of their medium. Antinovels have existed for centuries, as authors of all eras experiment with form and genre. We can see this in works such as *Don Quixote* or *Ulysses*. But modern works like *S.* differ from these other antinovels as they take advantage of digital print. The digital age means that they can experiment with page design at a much larger scale than previously. They are antinovels, but in a different way than previous works were. The label for these new antinovels seems to be a subject of disagreement among scholars. Espen Aarseth coined the term “ergodic literature” to describe literature in which “nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text.”⁴ This seems a fitting description of the books in question, after all one has to flip the books around, decode messages, make choices of what text boxes to read when, and deduce the chronology of text boxes in some of these novels. The Wikipedia page for ergodic literature also classifies *House*

¹ Brown: 1931: 162

² McGann 1991: 85

³ McGann 1991: 83

⁴ Aarseth 1997: 1

of *Leaves* as an example of it.⁵ But Aarseth would probably categorize the effort required to traverse *House of Leaves* as too trivial to merit the ergodic label, as “non-extranoematic actions” such as turning the page or interpreting the text does not result in ergodic literature.⁶ Ergodic literature seems to be restricted to texts that literally change dependent on the reader’s actions, such as hypertext, adventure games, or the text *I Ching*, which the reader would ask a question through manipulating coins and yarrow stalk and the text would produce one of 4096 possibilities.⁷

There appears to be a new form of novels present that does not fit neatly into these relatively modern categories. They do exhibit some of the traits in established genres, but operating with only these terms is, in my opinion, reductive. As illustrated, “antinovel” is too broad and “ergodic” is not accurate, so what term is appropriate? Katherine Hayles uses the term “technotext” to describe works which “interrogate the inscription technology that produces it”⁸, a technique that both *S.* and *House of Leaves* incorporate. *S.*, for example, has a different title on the slipcase than on the cover and *House of Leaves* the book appears in the story both as the main character is writing it and as the diegetically fictional character burns it. Unless one were to limit Hayles’s definition of technotexts to books which explicitly comment on their form, all of the novels I describe would be technotexts. By drawing attention to their form they are interrogating and playing with their inscription technologies. Although technically an appropriate term it is too broad to really tell the reader anything about the book its describing. A more accurate term might be “polytextual”, which Patrick Bazin describes as the integration of

diverse types of texts and images, sounds, films, databanks, mail services, interactive networks” which interfere and mutually resist one another, and which result in a progressively new dimension of reading that is “polymorphic, transversal and dynamic.”⁹

This term is nice and broad, but at the same time it extends beyond physical text. Bazin’s emphasis on films and databanks draws us out of the material text, which is a key component in these books. Other terms such as “cybertext”, “hypertextual novels”, and “textual dematerialization” have also been used when describing similar novels, but they fall short in various areas.

⁵ Wikipedia 2021. Although they site Ogden 2013 who appears to only have read the first page of Aarseth and have a flawed perception of what ergodic actually entails.

⁶ Aarseth 1997: 2

⁷ Aarseth 1997: 10

⁸ Hayles 2002: 64

⁹ Qtd in Wocke 2014: 3

Introduction and Terminology

As I view this category of new antinovels they share four common elements. Firstly, as mentioned, they are physical texts. Their themes or story is intrinsically tied to their form in a way that usually does not happen in traditional books. I will provide two case studies of this in the following chapters, but the effect is clear in books such as Hall's *Raw Shark Texts* and Plascencia's *People of Paper*. Secondly, they are often meta commentaries on the nature of books, making them all by Hayles's definition "technotexts".¹⁰ In my experience, these books are also attractive, or at least intriguing, to new readers. This element might seem trivial, but it is the easiest way to recognize these texts¹¹. Lastly, and most importantly, these texts must integrate other communication forms into themselves. It is key that they still remain analogue texts, while they integrate conscious page or paratext design¹² such as photography, marginalia, typography, and code. This final point ties into all the others. It is the integration that makes them comment on their form, makes them attractive, and makes them physical and tactile. Because I have not found a term that accurately describes these works, I propose "integrated texts." This term highlights their most important features, integration and text. "Text" can be used to mean something abstract¹³, but usually and in this case refers to written words.

Several of the elements one can see in integrated texts might seem similar to those in graphic novels or artist's books. In fact, books like *S.*, *House of Leaves*, and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* seem tame compared to highly stylized graphic novels or artist's books. Artist's books vary in form, but some notable examples are *Universum*, a book that is bound on both sides so it cannot be opened; *Lac des Pleurs*, a study of lake-biology through extremely detailed wood carvings; and *The Medium is Word*, a black kaleidoscope with a single word written inside. These somewhat absurd works highlight the fact that integrated texts are in fact not as unorthodox as one might initially think. The trait central to all integrated texts is that the text is always in focus. Joan Lyons, founder of the artist's books printing house Visual Studies Workshop, notes that artist's books are more interesting visually than verbally¹⁴. She suspects that the reason for this is that most artists tend to locate metaphoric intensity and play in images rather than words. The words in artists books are

¹⁰ Hayles 2002: 64

¹¹ Although of course not all attractive books are antinovels.

¹² Genette originally defined paratext as anything textual that is outside the main story, such as epigraphs, prefaces, footnotes etc. (McGann 1991: 13). McGann highlights the insufficiencies of this view (ibid.), and therefore I have chosen to expand the definition of paratext to include non-textual elements such as page design, typography, paper quality etc..

¹³ Such as in Barthes' "From work to text" for instance

¹⁴ Hayles 2002: 70

often used to explain or amplify the images and come off as rather flat.¹⁵ Hayles writes that this is inversely true for literary scholars, who prefer to focus on the words and let the rest of the visual be window dressing. Integrated texts are different in this respect because their visual stimulation is also verbal. What catches the reader's attention in a graphic novel is precisely the graphical elements. This does not mean graphic novels are inherently flat. Because of their form it is natural for them to use a wide arsenal of narrative tools, which means that the text is naturally not the aesthetic center of the story. One cannot say that integrated texts are "flat" or somehow incomplete as texts because of their paratextual elements. "Ship of Theseus", the book within *S.*, has been described as its own complete work¹⁶, which has then been annotated and added to, making it a unique piece of literature. The book has tied its visual and paratextual elements to the text more tightly than traditional novels or graphic novels do, which avoids any "flatness" that might have occurred otherwise¹⁷.

All the novels I examine are from the twenty-first century. At first glance it might seem problematic to not include texts from different time periods in order to examine the genre's development. It seems to me that integrated texts occupy a space which can only exist in a world with modern printing technology. One might be quick to point out that digital printing has existed since the 90s, and laser printing since the 70s, but "existed" is not synonymous with "practical." 3D printing has also been around since the 70s and 80s but has only recently found widespread popularity. Danielewski, author of the seminal integrated text *House of Leaves*, has a love for the analogue and proudly professes that:

'HA!' (Please quote me on that accurately, with 'Ha' being capitalized, italicized and followed by an exclamation point.) And I say 'HA!' here because I didn't write *House of Leaves* on a word processor. In fact, I wrote out the entire thing in pencil!"¹⁸

Danielewski seems to relish the analogue quality of literature and, as Pressman argues, juxtaposes its ability to convey authenticity with the digital cameras which malfunction throughout *House of Leaves*. Danielewski's insistence on the analogue might appear to be in discord with my claim about how essential digital printing and typesetting is to *House of Leaves*'s genre. However, as with his character Johnny Truant, Danielewski himself does not seem to be the most reliable narrator. In contrast to his remark about pencil he has admitted that he typeset the novel digitally he also claims to never have read *Infinite Jest* or *Pale Fire*,

¹⁵ Hayles 2002: 70.

¹⁶ Cumaaa 2014

¹⁷ In fact, the book does not even lay flat when taken out of its slipcover.

¹⁸ Pressman 2006

despite obvious allusions and influences.¹⁹ The fact that Danielewski typeset the novel himself speaks to the material conditions of necessary for a work like this to exist. Even though his books could have been produced before the digital age through photo offset printing, it would not have been a project that could have been accomplished by one man in a rented office.²⁰ A structuralist or hermeneutician might point out that it is strange that if a work like *House of Leaves* could have existed in a pre-digital world, as Danielewski implied, it would have. Of the few proto-integrated texts from before the digital age I was able to find, the most popular by far was *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. *Tristram Shandy* can be considered a precursor to integrated texts because of its use of strange punctuation, extra-textual elements such as the “diagram” describing the story arc, the completely black page after a character death, and the blank page preceded by an invitation to describe the most beautiful lady you can imagine, because Tristram could not do her justice. Most of these elements are used to great thematic effect, avoiding the “flatness” that can occur with artist’s books, while remaining visually interesting. It is strange that we do not see more books building on these techniques, given the books success, both contemporaneously and today. There is of course the possibility that there are other factors that play into integrated texts not being created aside from technology (i.e. tradition²¹, market, or lack of influence) but it seems improbable that given the variety and genius exemplified in the 560 odd years of movable type that we would have seen one *S.* or *The Raw Shark Texts* before the advent of digital printing if it was technologically possible.

Anecdotally, I inquired about the topic of book and page design to a handful of authors and their responses largely confirmed my suspicions. When asked about how much input he was given into the process of turning his text into a finished book, Zeshan Shakar writes: “[s]ome, but my primary focus was that of getting the text done. I did get the “typeset” versions prior to the final print though.”²² He also states that page design was not something that he gave much thought to during the writing process because both his books were “relatively traditional”.²³ As a final note he writes that this is something that he will keep in mind in the future and that he had not really considered this as an avenue for artistic expression. Edvard Hoem takes a firmer stance on the subject: “I have great respect for

¹⁹ Pressman 2006

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Probable, as Dr. Johnson was highly critical of *Tristram Shandy* and professed to its inevitable short-lived fame (Ricks 1967 in Sterne 1978 (penguin))

²² Shakar 2021. My translation, as with all messages to authors.

²³ Ibid.

[printers] professionally, and I therefore avoid meddling in their business.”²⁴ Hoem states several times that editors and printers work in their own field and they have their own artform that they know better than he does. There are some dissenters, like Erlend Loe, who says that he is and has always been highly involved in all aspects of the material book. Loe writes that he “has a lot of opinions about what you call paratextual elements.”²⁵ Even so he notes that this is a tiresome process, and that he has annoyed and nagged his editor into giving him more insight into the process as the book is being produced than is usual. He also notes that even though this is a point of emphasis for him, he “does not believe it to be very common.”²⁶ In other words there usually seems to be a disconnect between the text the author produces and the text that is eventually sold to the public in which the authors are either not able or not willing to influence the process. Nevertheless, I believe these comments speak to the general sentiment amongst Norwegian authors. They want to stick to their field and are largely unaware of the possibilities that lie in the printing process.

1.1 Hermeneutics and Post-Structuralism

It is important to have the terminology in place when talking about this genre as it is dependent on challenging the reader’s “horizon of expectations.”²⁷ Books such as *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* or *People of Paper*, seem like traditional novels at first glance but will surprise readers with their form. Because of the disparity between the reader’s horizon and the work’s horizon we can expect that most readers will experience a large “aesthetic distance” and “horizon of change” when interacting with integrated texts. Jauss writes that this can be either positive or negative, but that texts with no horizon of change are “culinary” or “light reading.”²⁸ The word culinary is used because works inspire little change of horizons in the reader merely satisfies, fulfils us, confirming existing tastes, instead of challenge and engage us. Jauss uses this argument to criticize the “classic nature of so-called masterworks.” Because classic literature has helped define tropes and therefore adhere to them, we often find them less engaging than contemporary literature.²⁹ While few would consider Shakespeare or Hugo “light reading”, they should still look towards contemporary literature to experience the greatest horizon of change according to Jauss.

²⁴ Hoem 2021

²⁵ Loe 2021

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Jauss 1970

²⁸ Jauss 1970: 15

²⁹ Ibid.

Horizon change is, however, not the lone aim of literature. The beauty of integrated texts does not lie in their novelty, but rather their familiarity. While it would be strange to purchase a new book and find that someone has written in the margins, but writing in the margins is not *inherently* strange. Readers can understand marginalia and article cut-outs, even entirely new things that integrated texts incorporate are fairly easy to figure out. For example the volvelle in *S.* is not something most readers would have used since the pop-up books of their childhood. There are instances of works that push the horizon of change to a negative experience of course, for instance *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*'s numeric code and *House of Leaves*'s numerous pages of random names. However these sections are not required, or even intended, reading for experiencing the text. One achieves horizon change because one has not seen these elements in books before, but one is able to traverse the text because one is already familiar with the elements. Even though hermeneutics give us some insight into how integrated texts work, post-structuralism will also provide a useful insight into integrated texts.

Roland Barthes, in his essay "from work to text" outlines a framework that can help us understand integrated texts. As the title alludes to, there is a difference between a literary "work" and a literary "Text." The work is the material pages and words we can see, the Text is a "process of demonstration", it is only experienced in an "activity of production."³⁰ The Text is in other words, the symbolic experience and interpretation of all who interact with the work, something quite reminiscent of the hermeneutical ideas of Jauss. In "From work to text" he proposes that the author owns their *work* in entirety, but that they can only visit the *Text* as a guest.³¹ Barthes concedes that the author has an impact on the Text, but as a part of the characters and as an influence on the reader. The author is not the dictator of meaning, as the Text has an "irreducible plural" of meaning.³² It is this plurality that plays so well in integrated texts, given their diasporic nature. Barthes writes

[t]he intertextual in which every text is held, itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text. (...) The citations which go to make up the text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read.³³

It is this exact intertextual element of all texts that integrated texts use and enhance. As he states, all texts are woven together out of codes and connotations, but few traditional novels include literal codes. One can then argue that if all novels inherently have this element that

³⁰ Barthes 2006: 2

³¹ Barthes 2006: 5

³² Barthes 2006: 4

³³ Ibid.

supposedly makes integrated texts unique, how are they then different from their non-integrated counterparts? A nuclear power plant functions on inherently the same principles as an eighteenth-century steam engine, but the efficiency of the newcomer is undeniable. I would instead argue that because all Texts rely on the principle of intertextuality, integrated texts are a natural evolution of the form and not something niche that can only be enjoyed by a select few readers. The citations which go to make up the integrated text are foreign, novel, and yet already familiar.

Through citations that transcend what one usually expects from a text, the integrated text forces the reader to “produce” the Text. Barthes uses several terms to describe what he means by “produce”, but in short he means to read, interpret, and engage with the text. This is put in opposition to merely “consuming” the text³⁴, which Barthes accredits the “[b]oredom experienced by many in the face of the modern (‘unreadable’) text”. If we acknowledge this boredom as one source for the decline in readership³⁵, integrated texts might serve to mitigate this decline. I imagine most people would find it difficult to lazily consume a book like *House of Leaves* in the same way one might consume one’s Twitter feed. One is forced to produce, engage, and negotiate with an integrated text, as it requires decoding and reassessing in unexpected ways. But one can assume that because it requires more effort than some other types of reading, that one would also feel more attached to the novel and therefore get more enjoyment out of it.

1.2 Reader Experience

Integrated texts are not only difficult to interpret on a narrative level on account of their layers of storytelling, but also in that some passages in them are purposefully illegible. This aspect might turn away readers. For instance, in the climax of *People of Paper* the black boxes blocking the text become more and more frequent and interrupts the action (see figure 1.1), while *House of Leaves* and *Extremely Loud* both feature extreme reduction of the line spacing to the point of being illegible (figure 1.2 and 1.3). To some extent these parts are meant to be unreadable, as they illustrate that communication has failed between two characters. Leading up to these sections the text is merely hard to read, not impossible to read. Diemand-Yauman et. al. claim that harder-to-read fonts result in higher retention for students.³⁶ This goes counter to general typography theory, which assumes that clarity makes it easier to

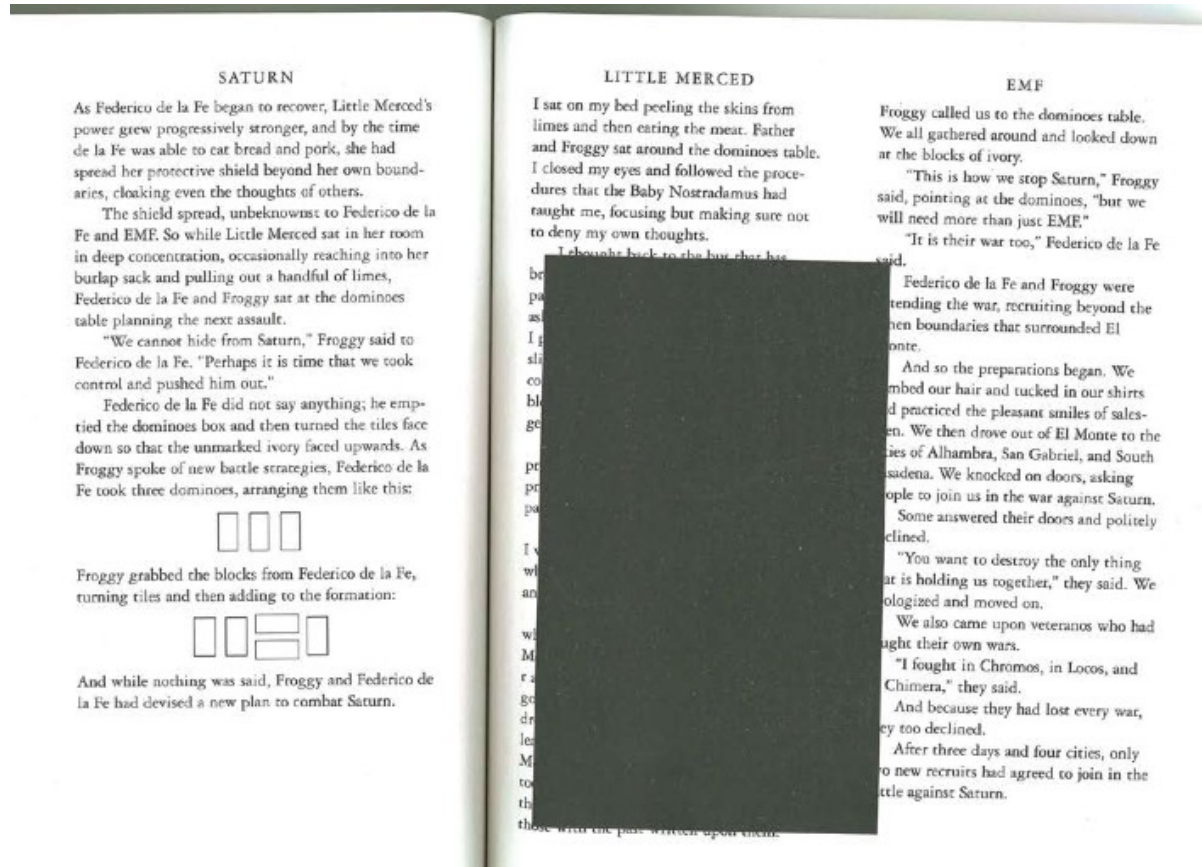
³⁴ Barthes 2002: 6

³⁵ American Academy of Arts & Sciences 2019

³⁶ 2011

Introduction and Terminology

comprehend a piece of text (as would be tautologically obvious).³⁷ It should also be noted that there is not a complete consensus for exactly how this phenomenon works, but there is data to support the claim.³⁸ “Disfluency” or “hard-to-read fonts” are general terms, and it would be disingenuous to propose that Diemand-Yauman claimed that “the harder the text is to read the more people understand”. In reality what happens is that with “some obscuring” of the text the brain engenders deeper processing which leads to less tmesis and higher retention.



³⁷ Thiessen et. al.

³⁸ Ibid.

Introduction and Terminology

What pertained as “some obscuring” in the study was 60% grayscale comic sans font and 60% grayscale Bodoni MT font.³⁹ Two groups were given the same material about a fictional alien, but one group’s material was fluent and one was disfluent. The disfluent group performed 14 percentage points better on average when asked to recall facts about the alien.⁴⁰ Results were similarly replicable in a real classroom setting. Because of their different nature, we cannot draw a one-to-one relation between the disfluent and integrated texts. It does nevertheless show that use of integrated texts could lead to higher retention for readers than traditional literature has. Retention does not correlate directly with enjoyment or engagement, but it does help to avoid confusion which can often be the reason readers do not finish certain books. Interestingly other studies have shown that participants are less confident in their ability to use information given to them in disfluent typefaces but are ultimately more successful.⁴¹ Even though integrated texts may be more enjoyable and understandable than traditional literature, there could be a fear associated with committing to such strange looking books. But if the reader does start traversing the book, they are unlikely to be as confused as they might have feared. This possible intimidation is an unavoidable side effect of integrated texts’ form, similar to how their form can affect their narratives.

I have outlined the common characteristics of integrated texts, and I would like to add one more feature. This is not a feature that helps define integrated texts, but rather an inherent quality originating from their shared characteristics. It would seem that most integrated texts have a mystery or thriller element to them. *House of Leaves* tries to answer the mystery of the Navidson record and Zampanò; Jen and Eric in *S.* try to figure out who the author and editor of the book is; Oskar in *Extremely loud* tries to find his father and the key to his lock; *The People of Paper* is concerned with the mystery of who is watching/reading them and how to stop him; and *The Raw Shark Texts*’s protagonist suffers from complete memory loss. The novels that incorporate the most integrated elements are also the stories where mystery is the primary component, namely *S.* and *House of Leaves*. These novels both contain at least two layers of story. The main characters in both novels, Jen & Eric and Johnny, both concern themselves with a fictional text which is the key to some “real” mystery. By juxtaposing themselves with the fictional text, these characters become less fictional to the reader. The reader knows that the protagonists are not real, but both the reader and the characters are working simultaneously to understand the same fictional text. The multiple layers of these

³⁹ Approximately this typeface. Diedman-Yauman et. al. 2011: 2

⁴⁰ Diemand-Yauman et. al 2011: 3

⁴¹ Alter et. al. 2007

Introduction and Terminology

two novels increase their perceived verisimilitude, which is crucial to the thriller genre. This is similar to the epistolary frame narrative which was common during the Romantic period. While the frame narrative also served to add authenticity, it was not present throughout the story the same way that the layers in an integrated text are. One classic example of a frame narrative is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where the captain's letters to his sister retelling the story of Frankenstein is only present at the beginning and the end of the novel. This is different from an integrated text, where the layers will appear throughout the story, sometimes even overlapping the text. The story of Frankenstein is not really about a captain sailing in the Arctic, but the story of *S.* is about the character S. in *Ship of Theseus* as well as Jen & Eric's paratextual mystery and relationship. Therefore, one should not confuse the layers of integrated texts as the same narrative technique as frame narratives, as the layering adds more than just authenticity.

Chapter 2 - *S*.

*I have a Trick for writing in the Margins of my Books, it is not a good trick,
but one longs to say something...*

– Hester Piozzi ⁴²

S. was developed by Doug Dorst and J.J. Abrams, who describe it as a love letter to the written word⁴³. They also emphasize how important the materiality of the book is, discouraging the purchase of the e-book. There is a certain irony in their emphasizing the analogue when discussing a book that could not have existed without digital typesetting and printing.⁴⁴ *S*. is a fairly unusual book, and therefore hard to categorize, something Wocke makes a point of.⁴⁵ But he illustrates why one has to broaden one's categorization when discussing books such as *S*.:

The central interest of *S* however lies in the manner in which it remains decidedly analogue despite being cast as a “technotext.” *S* evokes the epistolary novel, the found object and its own coded creation in the complex process of reading it invites, generating a reflexive loop between the physical notion of the book and the complex interweaving elements of which this particular book is composed.⁴⁶

S. is both an analogue creation and an experimental technotext. It exists both as the future and as the past. This is evident in *S*. 's two narratives, one being set 70 years in the past and one in the present, and in the book's form, the physical book evoking wear and tear similar to an old library book despite being new and experimental. The reader is therefore constantly negotiating with the book about what it is and how to engage with it, which makes the novel interesting despite some of its narrative shortcomings. This chapter will illustrate that regardless of *S*. 's discord between its narrative and materiality, it is a good example of how paratextual elements can be used to tell a more interesting story and better remediate a theme than would have been otherwise achieved if it was a traditional text.

S. contains two stories. The primary text is called “Ship of Theseus”, a faux-1940s Kafkaesque thriller by the mysterious V. M. Straka. The plot revolves around the amnesiac S. and his search for an identity and escape from the villain Vevoda. The secondary text takes place in the margins and paratext of “Ship of Theseus.” College undergrad Jen and disgraced

secondary in form, but the main focus for most readers

⁴² Piozzi 1942: 780

⁴³ Abrams & Dorst 2013 back cover

⁴⁴ Wocke 2014: 2

⁴⁵ 2014: 3-4

⁴⁶ Wocke 2014: 4

if one reads both intermittently, it comes across as a regularly paced story. This makes sense for *S.* but not for “Ship of Theseus.” The book looks at first glance very convincingly old and worn. There are smudges from water, yellowing in the paper, all the marginalia is handwritten, and all the small items Jen and Eric leave in bring a sense of authenticity to the final product.⁴⁷ The illusion is not perfect, however. When examining the book, which the book encourages you to do, one starts to notice a few minor anachronisms. Firstly, there is an extremely wide bleed in the novel, which is practical for Jen and Eric to write in but makes little sense to be there in the original print. The authenticity illusion is also cracked when Jen & Eric leave a comment about how great old books smell, a smell this book naturally does not have. The book’s non-diegetic slipcase is also in stark contrast to the very authentic library stamps found on the book’s cover, breaking the illusion of authenticity when the synopsis and corporate logos reveal themselves on the back.

These gripes are relatively minor, the real problem is the artificiality one finds in the text itself. As mentioned, the book is centered on the mystery of who V. M. Straka is, so Jen, Eric, and the editor Filomela, a contemporary of Straka, are constantly speculating and dropping hints as to whom it might be. They point to artistic and historical clues, site papers, and reference well-known events. The only problem is that essentially none of the things they refer to exist. There are a couple of allusions to Shakespeare and Hemingway, but aside from those, the mystery is purely in a fictional world. This is in discord with the authenticity that the materiality is working so hard to create. As mentioned in the previous chapter, verisimilitude is essential for thriller novels, which this very much is, perhaps even two thriller novels in one. This lack of real-world ties then feels cheap. Jen & Eric are doing great bibliographical and detective work, but everything they find is plucked out of thin air. Historical epistolary mysteries need to have a connection to reality to work. It seems strange to criticize a work of fiction for being fictional, but the gripe stems from the use of marginalia and other means to make the books seem like an authentic epistolary novel. The material novel is constantly trying to convince the reader that this story is real, but the illusion is broken when every reference outside of the book is to an imaginary reality instead of to the world in which you picked up the book. Despite this discord between narrative and materiality, there are still a lot of interesting aspects to examine in *S.*, the biggest one being the marginalia.

⁴⁷ The book includes pictures, postcards, napkins and a volvelle.

Heather Jackson outlines the marginalia tradition and separates it into three “kingdoms” to illustrate how the praxis has changed over time. These are named “The Kingdom of Competition” (up until 1700⁴⁸), “The Kingdom of Sociability” (1700-1820), and “The Kingdom of Subjectivity” (1820-now). These kingdoms represent marginalia for study and challenging of ideas, for discourse and sharing, and for private dialogue with a dead author, respectively. Though they are neatly categorized, Jackson notes that these kingdoms flow into one another and that there were of course private, subjective marginalia before 1820. To highlight the arbitrariness of the categories she states that her first reason for picking 1820 as the cut-off point is that it is “a nice round number.”⁴⁹ Jackson’s study primarily concerns itself with the latter two kingdoms, which also are the ones that are the most relevant for understanding *S.*

Despite the warnings on the back cover of “Ship of Theseus” to “KEEP THIS BOOK CLEAN”, there are only a handful of pages in *S.* that remain unsullied by Jen or Eric. Much of the marginalia is what we can call academic, either from Jen & Eric who are trying to decipher the code left by the editor or by one of them commenting on the text. Everything written in pen are examples of what we would find in the Kingdom of Sociability, they are writing to each other, and these read as distinctly different from the marginalia written in pencil by a young Eric. As Jackson points out “[i]f books are to be shared even with intimate friends, readers will be on their mettle and on their guard, putting on—however unconsciously—a kind of performance”.⁵⁰ The fraction of text in pencil is often just underlining or vague comments, sometimes prompting Jen to ask what they mean. These are often the least interesting kind of annotations in *S.* Marginalia written with no presumed readers (except for the author) is a private affair and is written as a minor addition to the text. For the marginalia-author, their annotations are simply cementations of their relationship to the text, something which they already are aware of. The marginalia in *S.* shows us how important the hermeneutical relationship is in literature. Without a designated author, reader, and work, literature does not function. But what marginalia literature highlights is that when it is read by unintended readers, the cycle stops as well. Personal marginalia only works for the person that wrote it. When other people read personal marginalia, they find it “dull”⁵¹ or

⁴⁸ According to Michael Camille, margins were only codified as a concept when literacy became widespread, so this Kingdom is not as far-stretching into the past as it might seem 1992: 21.

⁴⁹ Jackson 2001: 77

⁵⁰ Jackson 2001: 74

⁵¹ Orgel 2015: 50

“banal”⁵², while we imagine that the marginalia author would find it ^{useful?} helpful in some way. In addition to interrupting the cycle between marginalia author/reader⁵³ and the book, reading personal marginalia also interrupts the relationship between the original work, the author, and the reader. Because of marginalia’s intrusive nature, the reader expects the marginalia’s distraction to be more interesting than the core work when they are pulled out of the text and into the margins. Because personal marginalia is not intended for them, they often feel disappointed. So Abrams & Dorst has realized both of these features of marginalia: personal marginalia is boring and that when you pull the reader out of the text it better be worth it.

2.1 – Mystery & Self

S.’s form is very intriguing. You have to cut open the slipcase, the inserts promise a reward for making your way through the story, and the volvelle in the back hints at mysteries to be solved. The themes of *S.* are portrayed both in its materiality as well as in its narration. The marginal story revolves around the two literature students as they try to unravel the mystery in “Ship of Theseus”, and for the most part they do the job for you, the only exception being in chapter 10, where a secret message is hinted at, but never solved. Using the volvelle, you can decipher it.

S. fan blogs like to use this quote from the books producer JJ Abrams: “I urge you to dig. Give in to the unknown for a while and ponder the mystery. It’s worth it.”⁵⁴ Which is not directed at *S.* at all in fact, but is intended to be applied to mystery stories in general and was written well before *S.*’s publishing. But let us nevertheless see where digging leads us in *S.*. In chapter 5 *S.* receives a message in some strange hieroglyphic language. It means nothing to him, but as Jen points out, it is a code for page, line, and word, in a cipher.⁵⁵ Jen uses the cipher in a different fictional book to reveal the message the editor left for the author: “WILL WAIT TEN YEARS THEN HOME.” This made-up cipher seems like a perfect opportunity for Abrams & Dorst to hide a secret message in their book which would, for a thorough reader, reveal one of the book’s mysteries. Because the cipher does not have to map onto anything it could easily have been used to point to something hidden in “Ship of Theseus”. This would have been a prime moment to illustrate Hayles’s argument that these kinds of books are flexible and allow for different experiences depending on the reader. Abrams and

⁵² Jackson 2001: 3

⁵³ The reader of personal marginalia would be the author in the future. The key point being that it is not the present author.

⁵⁴ Abrams 2009

⁵⁵ Abrams & Dorst 2013: 184

Dorst did something excellent by having this code be solved by the character so that a casual reader can watch the mystery unfold before them, but for fans that go searching for something more they only find complete nonsense behind the cipher. Some fans nevertheless cling to Abrams's quote about the digging being worth it, so let us examine what has been dug up by enthusiastic readers.

According to the *S.* wiki, the WordPress blog "whoisstraka.wordpress.com" is the "most conclusive, in-depth analysis you can find about *S.*",⁵⁶ and it would seem that it is the most active online forum. The problem with this blog, and with looking too close at *S.* in general, is that there is very little behind the curtain. This is illustrated in Shipman's, the author of the blog, post "Every 19 pages – A Walkthrough."⁵⁷ In this post, Shipman looks closer at all the pages that are divisible by 19, a significant number for one of the ciphers in "Ship of Theseus". These are his findings:

- S. and Sola see each other for the first time
- S. names Maelstrom
- S. sees Sola for the second time
- S. sees Corbeau for the first time
- S. and Corbeau hold hands
- S. sees The Lady for the first time
- Signe Rabe is discussed repeatedly
- The Archer's Tales is discussed repeatedly
- Desjardins is discussed repeatedly
- The obsidian pieces are discussed repeatedly
- We see Pfeifer for the last time before discovering later that he is Governor Nemec
- We see a connection between Signe Rabe and Sobreiro.⁵⁸

These points start off as significant, but gradually decline in relevance and importance. Most of what the marginalia in *S.* consists of is plot points being discussed, so one would expect to find something "significant" on nearly every page. Shipman also skips 19x18, page 342, because even though a lot of Shipman's observations are tangential, 342 contains almost nothing except for depictions of nature. But even if all of these pages were significant in some way, what would they mean? Shipman nor any of the commenters offer any insight into this. No cipher reveals itself, no coordinates, no key. Here lies the problem of *S.*, there are plenty of roads to go down, but they all seemingly lead to nowhere. This is not an indictment on Shipman nor any of the other fans that are combing through the book, it is on the book itself. Despite Abrams's reputation for weaving mysteries and his statement about the dig being worth it, there seems to be little mystery left after one's first casual reading of it. The only

⁵⁶ Ship of Theseus Wiki 2013. Although I do suspect this to be written by Brian Shipman, the author of the blog.

⁵⁷ Shipman 2014

⁵⁸ Ibid

exception is the uncracked code in chapter 10, which not only appeals to the puzzle enthusiast-readers, but also adds more layers to the novel's narrative and theme.

The missing code in chapter 10, along with the enclosed volvelle suggests something hidden in the book that Eric & Jen could not work out. The code can be found by entering the coordinates of the cities mentioned in the chapter's footnotes into the volvelle. This reveals the message "I HAVE -OVED YOU FR-M THE BEGIN-ING I WILL L-VE YOU TO TH-END." It is the editor Filomela who puts together all the footnotes and sometimes fills in blanks in the chapters, so one's first assumption is that this message is intended for Straka, whom we are told multiple times she loves. However, the volvelle was made for Straka's earlier book *Coriolis*, so the message must have been inscribed then. Straka and Filomela were in other words playing a game of codes, communicating through the books as editor and author. By including this code Filomela is not professing her love, but recognizing and reciprocating Straka's. Having the audience work out the coordinates for a reveal we already know, that Filomela loves Straka, would be anticlimactic. The reveal that Filomela and Straka are communicating through "Ship of Theseus" on the other hand, just like Jen & Eric is, is unexpected and intriguing. This theory is strengthened by Jen & Eric's marginalia on page 234:

Green (Eric): What if they were sending messages to each other in the book? Both directions...

Yellow (Jen): That would be really, really cool.

Green: -Too cool, maybe – like we want that to be true, so we see what we want to see. And anyway: if he is sending messages, why not do it by phone/letter/telegram, or even on the manuscript pages? Why include it in the story itself – in the art?

Yellow: -> Maybe that was the safest place. Or maybe he wanted to do it in a way that combined art+politics+feeling – showing everything he was made of.⁵⁹

This rather self-aggrandizing passage echoes Jen & Eric's way of communicating. They have some excuse about this book being the safest way to communicate, but even after the book is compromised and they have exchanged cell phone numbers they keep using the book to communicate. Years later, after they have moved to Prague together, they still use the book a few times to write to each other. By using this piece of art they both love they can more easily express themselves and pour some of themselves into the book, and some of the book into their relationship. This relationship between the text and its readers is part of the reason why the core text is titled after this specific Greek thought experiment.

"Ship of Theseus" as a title becomes a bit strange as one examines the story closely. Jen & Eric, two scholars, seem to have no knowledge of the thought experiment put forth by

⁵⁹ Abrams & Dorst: 234

Plutarch. Despite the numerous occasions the metaphor could be brought up, they never do, opening the door for the possibility that “The Ship of Theseus”⁶⁰-thought experiment does not exist in this world. However, this is unlikely, as there is no reason for Straka to title his book “Ship of Theseus” if the metaphor does not exist. The ship element is central to the story, but there are never any allusions to ancient Greece. The Ship of Theseus is said to be a vessel that was kept by Athenians for several years. As the planks of the ships decayed, they replaced them. The thought experiment asks if all the parts of the ships are replaced, is it still *The Ship of Theseus*? One could go on to ask if the previous planks were salvaged and made into a new vessel, which would be the new ship? One could apply this to countless fields but this thesis will stick to The Ship of Theseus as its original legend and apply it to human identity and literature’s materiality. As the title is printed on every page of the book, instead of the more common practice of one or both pages’ header containing the author or the chapter, I believe it safe to assume that this thought experiment is a point of emphasis for S. Chapter 5, in particular, illustrates how The Ship of Theseus relates to both the book’s story and a larger overall theme. In chapter 5 S. and his companions are being chased by Detectives, the villain’s henchmen. As the Detectives are closing in on them, the amnesiac main character S. realizes something about himself:

[w]hoever he was before he found himself in the Old Quarter, he realizes, he was not a soldier or a spy or a revolutionary or an assassin or any such thing. He was – is – a meager man, not at all prepared for a situation like this.⁶¹

This passage is underlined by gray pencil, meaning that the teenager Eric had marked it earlier along with the annotation: “S. is just a guy...crawled out of the water + ended up in the middle of something huge + dangerous”.⁶² The story of “Ship of Theseus” is in large part About an amnesiac discovering his own identity, and this realization is a milestone in his journey. Towards the end, he discovers that he is actually an assassin, and a very proficient one at that. But to get to that point he has to experience, write, learn – exchanging old planks for new ones. Later in the chapter, there is another allusion to the thought experiment. “She’s not who she was this morning. Never will be. ->Eric: Isn’t this just a truism? E.G., Can’t step into the same river twice?”.⁶³ This comment is again made by the young Eric, so the critique of the sentiment is not necessarily made to be taken at face value. But even here when The

⁶⁰ The thought experiment will be referred to as The Ship of Theseus, while the core text of S. will be referred to as Ship of Theseus, without the determiner.

⁶¹ Abrams & Dorst 2013: 174

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Abrams & Dorst 2013: 183

dividing cells
in human
anatomy, the
rise and fall
of civilizations,
even this text...

Ship of Theseus “truism” is staring them in the face and is underlined, Jen & Eric makes no direct allusion to it, begging the reader to draw the parallel themselves. Even if the reader has not caught on to the theme yet, the chapter ends shortly after this passage:

(...)what he sees is impossible.

Anchored in the cove is a ship. The ship that carried him here, the xebec that he left as it was torn apart by a waterspout. It is here, patched and floating, somehow, in much too short a time. Rebuilt strangely, to be sure: the hull is an even more battered gathering of mismatched wood scraps, the height ratios of its three masts seem different, the bowsprit stouter and stubbier. Any doubt, though, that it is not the same vessel is erased when the gaff hook catches him by his shirt⁶⁴

There is a literal ship that has been rebuilt with new planks while our character has had adventures and learned more about himself. We can see this as an instance of “lampshading.” A term used in screenwriting to describe something that is obviously in the scene or story, but not acknowledged by the characters. In other words, it is something put there by the producers just for the audience. Because of its form as an integrated text, *S.* can expand on these elements. Integrated texts can incorporate themes in other ways than just in the narrative. As we have seen, there is a very obvious theme in the core text itself, *The Ship of Theseus*, but we can also see it in the paratext. As mentioned introductorily, we often think of novels as abstract stories, not physical objects. For critics and authors that is where the novel exists. *The Catcher in the Rye* is found in our common understanding of the story, not on the shelf. Roger Stoddard wrote: “authors do not write books, they produce texts that get turned into books by scribes, editors, printers”.⁶⁵ And whilst this is probably the most valuable and productive way of thinking of novels, we must also remember that they occupy a physical space as well. Stories first appear to us on tree pulp, framed by covers and surrounded by margins. To fully understand a novel we must look at the page, not just the text.

Heather Jackson outlines one way of understanding marginalia:

“[a] marked or annotated book traces the development of the reader’s self-definition in and by relation to the text. Perhaps all readers experience this process; annotators keep a log.”⁶⁶

As has been discussed, marginalia is understood as personal, dialogical, and social, and here Jackson describes how it plays a part in the self-improvement that can come from reading. Marginalia is used throughout *S.* in all the ways Jackson discusses: competitively, socially, and subjectively. But *S.* also uses marginalia to convey the theme reflected in the title of the core text. Inherent change as well as horizon change is at the core of *Ship of Theseus*, the boat

⁶⁴ Abrams & Dorst 2013: 200

⁶⁵ Stoddard 1987: 4

⁶⁶ Jackson 2001: 87

changes and our perception of what the boat is is challenged. The same thing can be said to happen to Jen & Eric as they work through the text together. They change and their perception of what the text is and who Straka was is challenged. As Jackson says, this could happen to any reader, but the marginalia is proof of exegesis and change. Because of the anachronistic nature of the marginalia, the changes in character are so clear to us. Pencil-Eric scribbles very mundane marginalia, typical for young students,⁶⁷ and black-felt-Eric is standoffish to Jen. The later iterations of him, the red and green pens, are caring and concerned about Jen. The fact that all of these characters can appear clearly differentiated on the same page highlights the themes of personal growth in a way that could not be done in traditional texts. It should be noted that this is a feature of marginalia, not integrated texts. Works like *House of Leaves* which also annotates on its core text does not achieve this interesting discordant chronology, the effect in that case is more similar to Nabokov's *Pale Fire*⁶⁸, where the annotator slowly reveals himself through the footnotes.

The theme of “Ship of Theseus” could even be argued to extend one level further. The book itself could be viewed as the ship. The book’s back cover shows return dates from its days in “Laguna Verde High School Library”, each date presumably signifying a new reader who has touched the book and changed it in some minor way (figure 2.1). Then there are all the changes made by Jen & Eric: the aforementioned marginalia and underlining, the postcards, newspaper clippings, photographs, and napkins. It is also implied that some other unknown reader has gotten hold of the book at some point, perhaps the nefarious Professor Moody.⁶⁹ Finally, there is the actual reader’s marginalia and markings. The real reader will mark the book in some way, either through fingerprints, forgetting where some of the inserts are supposed to be, or their own marginalia. Anecdotally, I felt quite free to mark this book given how much it is drawn in already, sometimes for this thesis but mostly just for my own sake. Nevertheless, this begs the question also asked by Plutarch in regard to Theseus’s ship: when does this become a new entity? *S.* is clearly not the same work as “Ship of Theseus”, but is my copy of *S.* a different work than a fresh printed copy? After having read *S.* the reader is uncertain of where a new work starts and the old one ends. This is an effect that could not have been achieved through a purely textual narrative. The metaphor of Ship of Theseus is reinforced through it being communicated through the narrative’s multiple levels.

⁶⁷ Jackson 2001

⁶⁸ Likely inspiration for both *House of Leaves* and *S.* (Pressman 2020)

⁶⁹ Abrams & Dorst 2013: xii

There is one more example I would like to highlight from *S.* which shows how unorthodox page design will change how a story affects the reader. In chapter 7 Jen & Eric have more or less figured out Filomela's and Straka's relationship and their difficulties. The annotators switch between flirty jabs at each other and confessing their intentions of this being a real relationship, not a "last-month-in-town-fling".⁷⁰ Several of these comments are made at different times in the fabula, as marked by the colors of the marginalia, but in the syuzhet it all appears simultaneous, so the flirty tone is heightened for the reader. On page 277 Eric proposes to go to the park where Jen ran away from her parents and had a moment of self-discovery.⁷¹ The reader does not yet know the full story of the park, but they know she has some sentimental connection to it. On the following spread of pages, there is no marginalia except for an old comment from young Eric. After the steady flow of comments and flirting that has been leading up to it, this is a little jarring. As I read it, these two pages are representative of Jen & Eric in the park. On the next set of pages, their discussion returns to the mystery of Straka, but as they had vowed to not talk about their research and problems in the park, these park pages are a break from the book. I will note that diegetically, it does not make any sense for these pages to be empty. Jen & Eric would not perceive the chronology the way the readers do, so it would make little sense to pause and ignore two pages that might contain clues or otherwise be relevant for understanding the text, but for us, it is a rather endearing moment. The reader is no longer guided by the marginalia and gets to pause and imagine Jen & Eric in the fresh air just being together, instead of them being stressed about hitmen, arsonists, parents, and exams. This is all achieved by *not* including marginalia, which brings me to a concept put forth by Joanna Drucker and touched on by Heather Jackson. Jackson talks of an essay by Kenneth Graham entitled "Marginalia" in which he wishes for "a book of verse consisting entirely of margin."⁷² Jackson points out that "[n]ot wishing to break a butterfly on a wheel or take a chainsaw to a birthday cake, I have to protest, all the same, that a book without text is a book without marginalia".⁷³ This is getting at a concept conveyed in Johanna Drucker's article "Graphical Readings and the Visual Aesthetics of Textuality."⁷⁴ Here Drucker draws the parallel between page design and quantum physics, outlining that even though "[m]ost style choices are made to please the eye, make a text legible and presentable, or produce an "aesthetic" design-not as studies in

in no particular order of severity

⁷⁰ Abrams & Dorst 2013: 273-277

⁷¹ Abrams & Dorst 2013: Insert at 376

⁷² Qtd. In Jackson 2001: 81

⁷³ Jackson 2001: 81

⁷⁴ 2006

historical understanding,”⁷⁵ she argues for an understanding of page design similar to that of a quantum field, not a toolbox. This means that one cannot choose to incorporate page design or not, the field exists regardless of how much thought is put into it. When we are categorizing and describing a page we are often misled into a “sense that graphic elements (type style or size, column-width, or leading) are “things” to be collected from an inventory and then used.” In other words, the field that is the page is still in play whether or not it is being paid attention to or not. The typeface, the margins, and the spacing, are still affecting the reader regardless of whether or not it was the author’s or publisher’s. That is what the empty page on 278 in *S.* exemplifies. The negative space left by the lack of marginalia is still space, it is still part of the field. In reality authors and publishers have no choice whether or not to “use” page design when telling their story, the choice is in whether they are aware of it or not.

⁷⁵ Drucker 2006: 268

Chapter 3 – *House of Leaves*

It hardly needs to be added that books do none of this without readers,
just as the elixir in the vial has no efficacy unless you drink it.⁷⁶

– Stephen Orgel

House of Leaves is less materially eccentric than *S.*, and regardless of this is a product of its time and budget or a conscious choice by the author, I claim that this enhances the quality of the final product. *House of Leaves* does, like *S.*, present itself as an epistolary novel. But *House of Leaves* differentiates itself by presenting as one that has been first found by editors and officially published before reaching the hands of the reader. This makes it so that the suspension of disbelief is broken less frequently when reading the book. Not only does this enhance the novel's verisimilitude, a key point for thriller and horror books' effectiveness, but it also more holistically communicates the story's themes and commentaries on the genre and literature in general. This chapter will explore how *House of Leaves* incorporates its form to communicate horror and deliver ideas about our consumption of literature.

House of Leaves has one frame narrative and one core narrative. The frame is communicated to us through Johnny Truant, a twenty-something tattoo apprentice with a substance abuse problem that finds a manuscript in the apartment he moves into. This manuscript is the core text of the story. The frame is communicated through footnotes written in Courier typeface, as opposed to the manuscript's Times typeface. In the footnotes, we experience Johnny's journey as he is trying to piece together the manuscript from notes written by Zampanò, the blind man who has produced an academic study of a fictional film called "The Navidson Report." Johnny frequently interrupts the core text with footnotes, some being small digressions or comments similar to marginalia, other footnotes span several pages. The manuscript tells the story of a *Blair Witch Project*-like documentary that shows a house that has an impossibly large space within it and the people that attempt to explore it. It is complete with rigorous analysis, quotations and comments from authors and scholars, and such detail that both Johnny and the reader are liable to believe it is real. The process of putting together this manuscript seems to corrupt Johnny, whose life slowly falls apart and he

⁷⁶ Orgel 2015: 8

lives in a constant state of fear. Bekavac describes the two stories as extremely different,⁷⁷ but one common thread is that they both share the quality of “unheimlich”. There is not actually anything chasing Johnny, yet he keeps running. There is nothing in the house, yet it swallows people. What *House of Leaves* does very well is communicate the same themes of void and authenticity through multiple layers.

I will argue for the effectiveness of integrated texts on both the micro and the macro level, in other words, both as an effective tool for specific chapters or scenes in a narrative, and as remediation of the narrative’s theme as a whole. I will first examine the micro level. The novel’s unorthodox design nature is present throughout almost every chapter of the book, but it is perhaps most evident in Chapter XX. This chapter involves Navidson’s last exploration into the bowels of his house and it is told to us through the usual, dry, academic tone in which Zampanò retells everything. This neutral voice could be problematic on a narratological level, as Chapter XX is the climax of “The Navidson Record”, but as we will see Danielewski finds a way around this issue. The chapter starts with an elaborate list of what Navidson brings with him on the journey, mostly survival and camera equipment, along with one book. As soon as he steps into the impossible corridor the text changes from fully justified to center justified, with increasing margins as he pedals downwards. The text is not aligned in a traditional manner for the remainder of the chapter. Danielewski is left now with the challenge of how to relay impossible size, darkness, and horror vacui with text, and how to do this in Zampanò’s dry academic tone? The answer is apparently to go beyond the text and onto the page. At first, the text stretches the page;

emulating

a staircase

for instance,

or suddenly dropping and ^{rising}.⁷⁸ But as the journey progresses the text becomes more and more ludic and confusing, playing with the western standard of left-to-right and top-to-bottom reading patterns⁷⁹. It can even be minor things, such as the text not representing what the words mean, perhaps disorienting the reader slightly, as on page 433:

“direction no longer matters.”

Navidson stops and lights four magnesium flares which he throws as far as he can to the
right and left.

⁷⁷ Bekavac 2020: 316

⁷⁸ Danielewski 2000: 428-429

⁷⁹ Danielewski 2000: 431-432

Danielewski is not recreating the experience of the house like a film or painting would do, but he is remediating the confusion felt by Navidson. As fewer and fewer words appear on each page two effects are achieved. Firstly, the reader will turn the pages more quickly. This creates a feeling of urgency, perhaps even resulting in an slightly increased heartrate in the reader. So Danielewski is able to maintain the dry academic tone of Zampanò that is crucial for verisimilitude but also create an urgent climactic moment. This would have been difficult if he had stuck to a traditional format. One might say that the wild orientation of the text breaks verisimilitude, but one must keep in mind that the form of the novel is a product of Johnny, not Zampanò. The book has almost completely broken Johnny at this point so the discord between the academic writing and the chaotic page design makes sense. None of Johnny's Courier footnotes are in this chapter, but his voice is still present in the paratext. The second effect that is achieved is control of tmesis. For Barthes, tmesis is the unavoidable cutting or skipping that occurs in the reader when reading a book.⁸⁰ One does not read every single word in a book. In integrated texts, one can control this "unavoidable"⁸¹ phenomenon to a certain extent, either by highlighting the text by isolating it on its own page⁸² or forcing tmesis by drowning the text with nonsense.⁸³ Throughout Chapter XX the reader is engaging with the book, helped by controlled tmesis and by incentivizing them to take physical actions to traverse the story; quickly turning pages, rotating the book, or tapping out musical notes. One can assume that this level of reader engagement helps to enhance the horror elements in the presented horror vacui. Horror, more than most genres, relies on creating strong emotions in the reader. Therefore it is crucial that the reader is attentive, something Danielewski makes sure of through disfluency, controlled tmesis, and somatic movement.

The elements that make up this integrated text also help to enhance the theme of the narrative on a macro scale. As Bekavac points out, the aesthetic style evoked by *House of Leaves* is not original. The ingenuity lies in applying the creative page design to the narrative.⁸⁴ The diasporic nature of *House of Leaves*'s narrative makes it so that numerous readings of it can be made. A select few would be: the inherent horror in the "metalepsis" present in postmodern literature;⁸⁵ the superiority of print as opposed to film or web;⁸⁶ and

⁸⁰ Aarseth 78

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See for instance Danielewski 2000: 456

⁸³ See for instance Danielewski 2000: 132

⁸⁴ Bekavac 2020: 329

⁸⁵ Graulund. See Landais 2017 for examples.

⁸⁶ Hayles 2002, Pressman 2006

books as a communication circuit rather than a monologue.⁸⁷ Instead of focusing on how *House of Leaves* represents the field as a whole, I will examine how *House of Leaves* remediates the theme of a void throughout its different layers and in its form, specifically how we fill voids. I will first examine the core text and then ascend through the levels. Will Navidson is a Pulitzer prize winning photograph most famous for a shot of a vulture looming over a starving African child named Delial, a picture based on the real-life picture by Kevin Carter, tragically remembered for killing himself three months after winning the Pulitzer for “The vulture and the little girl.”⁸⁸ The fictional picture of Delial has a key change in composition. Apparently, the right side of the photograph is kept empty, but at the same time, it is allegedly filled by the audience’s feeling that they could have been there to intervene.⁸⁹ Or as Zampanò suggests, that the void is filled by Navidson himself, who never forgot about Delial and is haunted by his lack of action when taking the photo.⁹⁰ It might be important to remind ourselves again that the man describing all of this is blind and the movie “The Navidson Record” does not exist diegetically, and the “editors” reminds us of this as well: “⁴¹⁶Presumably Zampanò’s blindness prevented him from providing an actual diagram of the Delial photograph. -Ed.”⁹¹ Given how much space is allotted to a discussion of this void I believe it fair to view it as a metaphorical void. In the chapter preceding Navidson’s final expedition we get some speculation as to why he would embark on this journey:

Navidson’s eye for perfection was directly influenced by his internal struggles, whether possession, self-obliteration, or the social good implicit in any deeply pursued venture. But as Deacon Lookner smugly commented: “We mustn’t forget the most obvious reason Navidson went back to the house: he wanted to get a better picture.”⁹²

Navidson is then entering into the void, the absolute darkness, what Bekavac calls “the Folly”, or possibly a portal to another dimension, in order to fill it in a way he did not with Delial. He is inserting himself into the empty space in his life, which coincidentally happens to be the emptiest space on the planet and also is under his house. If we move one layer up from the core text we can see this theme remediated again in Johnny’s story. Johnny, just like Zampanò, “Ed.”, and Danielewski, lies frequently throughout the novel and it is only in the final chapters and the appendix where we get his full story. When Johnny is piecing together Zampanò’s story he is radically altering it, whether or not he is adding elements or merely

⁸⁷ Hayles 2002

⁸⁸ Wikipedia 2021a

⁸⁹ Danielewski 2000: 421

⁹⁰ See for instance: Danielewski 2000: 17, 102, 323

⁹¹ Danielewski 2000: 421

⁹² Danielewski 2000: 418

transcribing the original notes to a new format. Every time a text is remediated it is fundamentally changed.⁹³ We can read this as Johnny inserting himself into the voids of Zampanò's story. Both Johnny and Navidson are consumed by the House of Leaves, the difference being that Navidson's house is on Ash Tree Lane and Johnny's is a house of paper leaves. But this theme exists in more than the subtext. After Johnny travels to where he thinks Ash Tree Lane is and finds no trace of the house he realizes that "The Navidson Record" is more metaphorical than literal, despite its denotative style:

A quick re-read of all this and I begin to see I'm tracing the wrong history. Virginia may have meant a great deal to Zampanò's imagination. It doesn't to mine.
I'm following something else. Maybe parallel. Possibly harmonic. Certainly personal.⁹⁴

Johnny eventually travels to his mother's old asylum and his foster parents' home, neither of which are there anymore. The story ends with Johnny seeming to come to terms with himself as the son of a sick, but loving mother. This is further elaborated on in the Whalestoe Letters, which were originally published separately from *House of Leaves*, but are included in later editions. Johnny pours himself into the void that is Zampanò's manuscript, establishes a foothold in it, and grows because of it. Johnny never had a close relationship with his mother, even though she was constantly reaching out to him.⁹⁵ His letters to her sometimes only contained two words, leaving a void.⁹⁶ He finally filled this void, although too late for his mother to see it. Zampanò's art did not result in any sort of objective truth, but it led Johnny to find the truth in his own story.

Art leaves voids, spaces for us to occupy, like Navidson's photo or Zampanò's manuscript. In hermeneutics, this void is filled by a cooperative effort of the work, the author, and the reader, and we can see this in the theme when we move one layer above Johnny's story. Hayles describes this book as

so energetic, labyrinthine, and impossible to command. (...) It grabs us, sucks out our center, and gives us back to ourselves through multiple remediations, transforming us in the process⁹⁷

In other words, we must engage with the book to understand it, and it forces us to engage with it through the integrated elements. The voids left by the ambiguous ending, the unreliable narrators, and the wide spaces on the page must be filled by the reader. According to Hansen,

⁹³ Koziol 2015: 264

⁹⁴ Danielewski 2000: 502

⁹⁵ Danielewski 2000: 586-644

⁹⁶ Danielewski 2000: 616

⁹⁷ Hayles 2002: 129

House of Leaves's true protagonist is the reader, because the novel's other themes of objective truth and authenticity could not function in a work of fiction without involving the role of the reader.⁹⁸ Here lies the beauty of *House of Leaves*, the book forces reader engagement through its form, it needs reader engagement to mediate its themes of authenticity and voids, and the themes reinforce engagement by making the reader fill the voids. This eternal cycle could be the reason for *House of Leaves*'s cult following. Although, as Hayles points out, the book offers something different to every kind of reader, and one does not have to go into the rabbit hole of eternal cycles and code-cracking to enjoy the book.⁹⁹

3.1 Flexibility

This leads us to *House of Leaves*'s, and integrated texts in general's, flexibility. Because even though this niche layered story with meta-commentary about the role of the reader in literature is interesting to discuss, it does undermine my initial claim that there is untapped potential in books if we are willing to push the margins. If these books require, as might seem to be the case with *House of Leaves* and *S.*, a hyper-focused and engaged reader to function, then there is little hope for integrated text going forward. Luckily, as Hayles also points out, this book can be experienced on many levels.¹⁰⁰ I would argue that this is because integrated texts are inherently flexible. If the reader is not engaged by the narrative that does not necessarily mean that the reader did not enjoy the integrated texts. Even though non-integrated texts can have multiple interpretations and a multitude of aspects to them, I believe it fair to claim that they do not have the same breadth of options as an integrated text has. One aspect of *House of Leaves* that often gets overlooked in critical studies of the book is the main appeal for popular audiences: the horror. I will include this appeal alongside what Hayles describes as the straightforward action sequences that are the appeal for the "neuronally challenged."¹⁰¹ The unnecessarily blunt description aside, I think what Hayles is getting at is the Kantian "barbaric tastes",¹⁰² such as the feeling of thrill or terror. This is in opposition to civilized taste, which is derived from intellectual stimuli such as making connections, solving puzzles, or interpreting a text. The action scenes Hayles mentions are a direct result of the book's horror elements, so I see them as the most fruitful to analyze. The book has taken the

⁹⁸ Hansen 2004: 602

⁹⁹ Hayles 2002: 125

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Hayles 2002: 125

¹⁰² Kuspit 1974

German term “unheimlich” to heart,¹⁰³ which does not translate perfectly into English, but is commonly seen as “uncanny” or “not-being-at-home.” In other words, a feeling of something being off, but not dangerous. This feeling ties into Bekavac’s “horror vacui”, as there is nothing inherently dangerous about empty space,¹⁰⁴ but we are still unsettled by it. These two elements combine into what Stephen King calls terror.¹⁰⁵ In *Danse Macabre* King differentiates between three types of fear: terror, horror, and revulsion, in descending order of desirability to achieve by the author. “Revulsion” is body horror, blood and gore, the reflexive impulse of disgust.¹⁰⁶ It is safe to say that *House of Leaves* has little revulsion, as there is rarely discernible harm being done to the characters. Horror is the emotion most closely connected with fear. It is what makes us scream in movie theatres.¹⁰⁷ There is little horror in *House of leaves*, although the scenes of the team being trapped with Holloway in chapter XX and the house collapsing in on itself¹⁰⁸ might evoke this feeling. *House of Leaves* most often invokes “terror.” King defines this as the feeling of knowing with absolute certainty that just out of your peripheral vision is a great beast waiting to tear you to pieces, only to turn around and find nothing.¹⁰⁹ The knock on the door when no one is out there is worse than whatever anyone could have put there.¹¹⁰ This uncanny, but ultimately harmless notion is what *House of Leaves* does so well, it pushes the idea of nothingness to the point where it terrifies us. This barbaric feeling is where the mass-appeal of *House of Leaves* lies, as well as in the action scenes. The action scenes Hayles mentions are few and far between but are impactful precisely because of this constant build-up of anticipation. Time and time again Johnny turns around to find nothing, time and time again Navidson peers down the hallway and finds nothing. When the house finally acts there is so much suspense to draw from that the impact of the few horror elements is heightened. The suspense-building aspect of terror would of course work in a non-integrated text as well. Danielewski did after all sell his manuscript as just a full body of text without the iconic typesetting.¹¹¹ But as has I have already argued, the integrated elements lead to a more engaging experience than would have been achieved without integrated elements, something which could, in turn, lead to a greater feeling of

¹⁰³ See: Danielewski 2000: 24, 28, 359

¹⁰⁴ Unless we take it to a massive scale such as outer space or the house

¹⁰⁵ King 1981: 21

¹⁰⁶ King 1981: 25

¹⁰⁷ King 1981: 22

¹⁰⁸ Danielewski 2000: 341

¹⁰⁹ Danielewski 2000: 71

¹¹⁰ King 1981: 22

¹¹¹ Hayles 2002: 126

terror. In addition to the tmesis control already outlined, the unreliable narrator¹¹² and unusual page design contribute to the feeling of *unheimlichkeit*. This stretches from every instance of the word “house” being offset and faded to the unnatural page design already discussed. This is not how you are used to reading, the setting is new and unfamiliar, one could say it is a feeling of “not-being-at-home.” The horror elements are in other words remediated in the novel’s form, just like its theme. This is nothing new. No publisher would give a horror novel a pastel blue cover, or print it in Comic Sans MS. Integrated texts simply take this logic a bit further. We often think of literature as something immaterial that we make material after putting them through a printing press, but in reality, it is the other way around. Literature becomes immaterial after having been material, and the material does not only consist of printed words.¹¹³

As mentioned the book can be enjoyed on levels between a hermeneutical breakdown of the field and the “barbaric” affective levels. One of these in-between levels lends itself quite nicely to integrated texts, the labyrinthian aspect of the book. This does not refer to the several references to the Cretan minotaur,¹¹⁴ but rather the puzzles and layers the reader must maneuver through while traversing the. *House of Leaves* has fewer riddles than, say, *S.*, but the ones they have might be more impactful to the story. There are the previously mentioned music notes which one can solve with a simple Google search, but one could also play them on an instrument and deduce which song it was, leaving the reader with further questions regarding authenticity and authorship. For a more straightforward puzzle, one can look to the appendixes. Appendix II E was originally published as a separate book but has been included in later editions of *House of Leaves*. The code not only reveals the sexual abuse Pelafina suffered during her years at the Whalestoe Institute but also includes the line “My dear Zampanò who did you lose”¹¹⁵ coded into her letters. This suggests that she is writing either the entire book and possibly even the Courier part allegedly written by Zampanò and Johnny.¹¹⁶ Some forum posts from the early 2000s are still up and show the game that the readers are still engaged in when trying to untangle the book and its addition, notably *The Whalestoe Letters* and Danielewski’s sister Poe’s accompanying music.¹¹⁷ The book can, in other words, engage readers on another level than the narrative. The narrative is the reason for

¹¹² Hayles argues for a “remediated narrator” instead, but the two terms are not mutually exclusive.

¹¹³ Koziol 2015

¹¹⁴ Danielewski 2000: 110-111, 313, 335

¹¹⁵ Danielewski 2000: 615

¹¹⁶ Also discussed in Hayles 2002:129

¹¹⁷ Calibos 2003, Arturo 2021

the puzzles to exist, but it is not the reason why people solve them. Some of course are very invested in what “really” happened in the book, but some readers just like puzzles, and gain affection for the narrative because it indulges their interests.

Lastly, there is what Hayles calls the “cognoscenti”. The cognoscenti finds enjoyment in the pseudo-academic style of Zampanò, as well as the footnotes referring to famous and fictional authors. It should be noted that the absolute majority of the academic “work” Zampanò has done is fictional, but some of his references are real. One example is on page 42 where Zampanò is referencing a literary analysis of *Don Quixote* by Pierre Menard. This analysis does exist, but Pierre Menard is a fictional character created by Jorge Borges¹¹⁸ in *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*. There has in other words been some actual research done, but it is hidden behind a layer of fiction. *House of Leaves* is again operating in this pseudo-authentic hinterland. In other places the references are more straightforwardly authentic as with the use of Krakauer’s “Into thin air”.¹¹⁹ The appeal for the cognoscenti also lies in understanding references and parodies of academics or historical figures. Names like Piaget, Barthes, and Diderot are quoted intermittently,¹²⁰ whilst other members of the “glitterati”¹²¹ get fully-fledged interviews talking about the book, in which they are comedic exaggerations of themselves. Take for instance the interviews with Stephen King and Camille Paglia, author of what is often considered simplistic literature and a feminist critic:

Paglia: Notice only men go into it. Why? Simple: women don’t have to. They know there’s nothing there and can live with that knowledge, but men must find out for sure. (...) They must penetrate, invade, conquer, destroy, inhabit, impregnate and if necessary even be consumed by it. It really comes down to what men lack.

[...]

King: Symbols shmimbols. Sure they’re important but... Well look at Ahab’s whale. Now there is a great symbol. Some say it stands for god, meaning, and purpose. Others say it stands for purposelessness and the void. But what we sometimes forget is that Ahab’s whale was also just a whale.¹²²

These exaggerations only really work as jokes if one is familiar with the writers, and most are very marginally famous, even in academic circles. I will acquiesce that these kinds of jokes can of course be made in non-integrated texts as well, but I will also argue that these references fit better in *House of Leaves* than most traditional novels because of its play on authenticity, layering, and remediation of narrators. Fictional interviews and references in a

¹¹⁸ Given *House of Leaves*’ labyrinthine theme (also seen on the book’s cover), it is strange that Borges is only once (an briefly) mentioned explicitly in the story when so many other authors are. One can read this as another instance of lampshading to reiterate the novel’s play on authenticity

¹¹⁹ Danielewski 2000: 434-435, Krakauer Outside September 1996

¹²⁰ Danielewski 2000: 177, 146, 58

¹²¹ Hayles 2002: 125

¹²² Danielewski 2000: 357, 361

book that constantly plays with the concept of authenticity and verisimilitude (with integrated elements) incorporate these jokes into its narrative and theme in a way that it would be hard for a non-integrated text to do.

House of Leaves's title alludes to the work being heavily book-centered. It might then seem strange to focus on the way it points outward towards the reader, academics, fan speculation and Danielewski's sister's music. But as I read it, that was always the intention of the book. It was always meant to break out of its covers, just as it breaks out of its margins on the page. And from an hermeneutician's point of view, all texts exist outside of the covers. They are shared experiences that exist in relation to author, work, and audience. *House of Leaves* uses certain techniques to push the reader out of the page, such as playing with authenticity¹²³ or leaving clues towards the true ending outside of the book, reaffirming the hermeneutic view that the novel exists outside of itself. I am not claiming this is a new idea. One can for instance look to the publication of Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* for historical evidence of similar techniques,¹²⁴ but *House of Leaves* uses integrated text elements to achieve this effect to a greater extent than what non-integrated texts usually can.

¹²³ This starts even before the first page, as the page containing ISBN number and printing information states that everything in this book is fiction and that everything that happens in it does not happen or is "set in the future". The different editions they mention on the same page do not exist, leaving the reader with a sense of uncertainty even before the narrative starts.

¹²⁴ See: Redekop 1985

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

I have argued that in the last two decades there has emerged a new genre of books that have not yet been appropriately categorized, which I have dubbed “integrated texts.” Several of the books in this genre have, as I see it, been miscategorized as “ergodic literature.” And even though many of these texts can be seen as “technotexts” or “cybertexts”, these descriptions give little information to a reader as to what exactly these books do. Integrated texts all take advantage of digital printing techniques to varying degrees, which is one reason for their recent emergence.¹²⁵ Although there seem to be several confounding factors, this thesis is more concerned with how they work, not why they exist.

To understand integrated texts this thesis presents them in a framework based on hermeneutics and Barthes’s post-structuralism. At its core this simply means to understand texts as relationships between author, audience, and medium. Integrated texts are interesting in this context because they rely heavily on their audience to engage with the mediums presented and bring their own understandings of said mediums to the text. For example, readers have connotations to marginalia, certain types of handwriting, and napkin-scribbles. Therefore, when these elements are integrated into a novel the audience infers aspects of the plot and characters without needing to be explicitly told. In regards to elements that might be too unfamiliar for readers, I point to disfluency studies that show that if a text challenges the readers’ perception of it, their retention of it actually increases.

To illustrate the functions of integrated texts I provide two case studies. The first one is of the Abrams & Dorst book *S.*, which heavily incorporates marginalia and inserts to achieve the appearance of an epistolary novel. Even though *S.* has several narrative shortcomings, the integrated elements make the novel interesting enough to warrant study. Abrams & Dorst’s play with chronology and different kinds of marginalia makes the novel intriguing on several levels. Based on my correspondence with authors, it seems as though writers rarely consider the look of their final text. Because of what I found in *S.*, I think they are making a mistake by overlooking the quantum field, as Drucker puts it, that is the page. This is not to argue that every book should look like *S.*, but rather that there are some novels that would be improved if marginalia, typography, or page design were considered in the writing process.

¹²⁵ There are of course historical prototypes of integrated texts, but they are not widespread enough to constitute a trend or genre as I have found.

Conclusion

The second case study is of Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. While also presenting itself as an epistolary novel, this text states that it has been processed by editors prior to landing in the reader's hands. In order to convey themes of void and authenticity on several levels *House of Leaves* incorporates ludic text making, experimental typography, and free-form page design. Like *S.*, *House of Leaves* can be enjoyed in several ways, and I argue that this is because of its integrated text elements. These elements also reinforce aspects found in traditional novels, primarily their horror. While I view *House of Leaves* as a more technically sound novel than *S.*, one can draw the same lesson from both of them. Just because these integrated text elements work in these two novels does not mean that all novels should incorporate everything that these novels do. The paratextual elements utilized are very conscious choices made for a particular story. That being said, *House of Leaves* succeeds in illuminating the possibilities of what can be done if authors allow themselves to think outside the box in regard to the work's materiality. Even though the integrated elements are tailored to fit specifically *House of Leaves*, there is nothing stopping other books that have a theme of disorientation to utilize spacious page design or thrillers to utilize controlled tmesis.

After reading this thesis one might be left with the question: "if integrated texts are so great, why have not more of them broken into the mainstream?" My answers to this will be largely educated speculation. We can for instance look to prototypes of integrated texts from before the twenty-first century. *Tristram Shandy* incorporates some of the elements we see in later works, there is a certain playfulness to the use of the page, leaving it blank to allow the reader to fill in their ideas in some instances or filling it with ink to represent loss in others. Although revered by later critics, *Tristram Shandy* was not received well by contemporary critics,¹²⁶ even though the public seemed to enjoy it a great deal.¹²⁷ Sterne was in a privileged position in regard to printing and publishing his book. He was able to pay for the first few volumes himself, to gauge public interest before selling the entire manuscript.¹²⁸ Despite considerable risk, evident by the fact that the publisher did not want to purchase the manuscript outright, Sterne was able to use his position to make *Tristram Shandy* a reality. One can imagine that not all experimental authors could publish integrated texts on their own volition, even if they were to write them.

Based on my correspondence with authors, it seems that they also believe that everything that is not explicitly writing is not part of their craft. They seem to prefer leaving

¹²⁶Penguin Random House

¹²⁷ Curtis 1932

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Conclusion

bookbinding, page design, layout, and printing to specialists. I will admit that this could be a hurdle for integrated texts. Historically, creating books has always been a group effort, from scribes and illuminators to modern-day publishing houses. Even if an author wanted and was given the freedom to experiment with their materiality, there is no guarantee they would have the skills required to execute their ideas. This could account for some of the dearth of integrated texts. There might be few artists that are interested in both the visual and the textual that have not already committed themselves to other art forms such as screenwriting or graphic novels. This factor could also be a cultural one, perhaps many graphic novelists would very much like to create integrated text novels but do not view it as a real genre that one can carve out a niche in. Incidentally, this could also be the case for publishing houses, they might view experimental books as hard to sell, intimidating to readers and therefore push to reduce the paratextual elements in integrated texts that might be presented to them. After all, Danielewski's planned 27-volume project *The Familiar* was dropped after 5 volumes. While I do acknowledge that integrated texts can be intimidating to some readers, as I stated in chapter 1, I believe integrated texts to be inherently attractive. Balancing the border between attractive and intimidating for all readers is impossible, but I view it as worth the risk for the opportunity for more experimental books. A proper integrated text is able to stand out from the crowd without their elements devolving to gimmicks. Their elements are intended to enhance the reading experience, not just to separate themselves from the crowd.

Integrated texts have a role in the growing movement to increase what we mean when we say literature, text, and literacy.¹²⁹ Expanding our field to include databanks, hypertexts, or music¹³⁰ does not mean excluding physical books. Even though they are firmly analogue objects they still require readers to use a wide arsenal of interpretation to traverse the text. This would lead to not only engagement as argued, but also a greater horizon change and possibly even the acquisition of new literacy skills for use outside of integrated texts. Books have a rich history of variety and experimentation, but often feel uniform today. It seems to me that there is still so much that can be done with the page, so we should allow the black riders to go where they may, not just along their familiar lines.

¹²⁹ See for instance Bazin 153

¹³⁰ The 2016 Nobel Prize in literature for instance

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Appendix – Teacher Relevance

Literature has always been a bildung subject in the classroom, and that is unlikely to change. Therefore I would argue that any thesis on literature is inherently valuable to a teacher as it brings both a broader and deeper understanding of the field to their praxis. The more a teacher reads and engages with literature the greater understanding that teacher has of the humanities and has more tools available to them when teaching. Even though I see this as a valid enough reason for a teacher to pursue a MA thesis in literature, my subject matter also includes two other aspects which I view as highly relevant to my future teaching.

The first one is in dealing with my research into disfluency studies. Even though I apply them to ludic text making, they are originally meant to be used in the classroom. Some interesting techniques can be learnt from these studies with how I design assignments, making them deliberately obtuse for instance. The studies also give insight into the fact that in dealing with disfluent text, students often perceive their retention of the text to be worse than it actually is, something to keep in mind when discussing with students. Even though it is important to meet students where they are, we must also keep in mind that students are often more competent than they themselves believe.

Secondly, I believe the main focus of my thesis, the integrated texts, to be highly relevant for my future teaching. As the concerns about students choosing other media over literature rises, integrated texts can perhaps pull students back into the world of paper. If it is true what I argue that integrated texts have a broader audience and are more immediately attractive than non-integrated texts, it is easy to see how they can be used to entice young non-readers. The puzzles, intriguing form, and mystery are things that teachers can use to sell unmotivated pupils on the books, and then hope that the strength of the stories sparks a joy of reading that extends to other books.

In short, I believe this thesis has improved my competency in three key areas. Firstly I have a deeper understanding of literature and theory, secondly, I have a new understanding of disfluency and reader perception, and thirdly I have a unique arsenal of books that might help me reach the less motivated readers in my future classes.

