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A Parable about Space: Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*[1]

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Abstract

This article examines Mark Z. Danielewski's debut novel *House of Leaves* by looking at the ideas of space and spatiality that are presented through the novel's content, form, and shape. Employing postmodern narrative devices extensively such as metafiction, multiplicity of narratives, intertextuality, and genre-blurring, *House of Leaves* makes use of the spatial form and extends it with the use of hypertext. The novel's narrative space also focuses on a spatial construct, the Navidson house, which is a vast labyrinthine space. Danielewski uses the Navidson house as an inspiration for the spatial design of his novel. He does this by incorporating the visual and material devices and reorganizing the page with topographical and typographical experiments. The novel makes use of spatiality on different levels and as a result of the interplay between these spatial practices, it produces a dynamic fictional and material space. *House of Leaves* reconsiders the novel's shape and materiality in the late age of print and redefines it as a material art object through the use of postmodernist elements, hypertext, and materiality.

Keywords

Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, spatiality, hypertextuality, materiality

Bir Mekân Hikâyesi: Mark Z. Danielewski'nin *Yapraklar Evi* Romanı[2]

Öz

Bu makale, Mark Z. Danielewski'nin ilk romanı olan *Yapraklar Evi*'ni, romanın içeriği ve biçemi aracılığıyla sunulan mekân ve mekânsallık kavramları çerçevesinde incelemektedir. *Yapraklar Evi*, üst kurgu, çoklu anlatılar, metinlerarasılık ve türlerin karışımı gibi postmodern anlatı öğelerinden faydalanarak mekânsal biçemi kullanır ve bunu hipermetin sayesinde genişletir. Romanın kurgusal mekânı da yine bir mekânsal ve mimari oluşum olan, Navidson'ların geniş bir labirent şeklindeki evine odaklanır. Danielewski, Navidson'ların bu labirent evini romanın mekânsal tasarımı için de bir ilham kaynağı olarak kullanır. Bunu da metnin görselliğini ve maddeselliğini alışılmışın dışında bir şekilde kullanarak, sayfanın alanını topografik ve tipografik deneysel araçlarla yeniden tasarlayarak yapar. Roman, mekânsallığı, çeşitli biçimlerde öne çıkarır ve bunlar arasındaki karşılıklı ilişki sonucunda hareketli bir kurgusal ve maddesel mekân yaratır. *Yapraklar Evi*, roman türünün şeklini ve maddeselliğini, yeniden mercek altına alaraktürünü, postmodern özellikler, hipermetin ve maddeselliği kullanarak yeniden tanımlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Mark Z. Danielewski, *Yapraklar Evi*, mekân, hipermetinsellik, maddesellik

Now that postmodernism has been in the intellectual area for decades, the debates continue as to whether it has completed its dominant phase or still holds an important place in providing significant critical tools to understand works of art and the culture in which they are produced. Because postmodernism is an umbrella term and has been adapted by different disciplines throughout its progress, it is almost impossible to reach an all-encompassing positive or negative answer to this question. Whether the trend has died out or is still present, postmodernism has definitely opened up critical discussions on the accepted and generalized notions, discourses, and tendencies that govern societies, individuals, arts, and sciences. The concepts of space and spatiality are among the discussions effected by the postmodern

consciousness. Named as "The Spatial Turn," there has been a growing critical interest on space, spatiality, and spatial practices in the works of critics such as Michel Foucault[3], Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Henri Lefebvre, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, and Edward W. Soja. From different perspectives, these philosophers and critics regard space and spatial practices as inseparable from an analysis of social and cultural contexts.

Similar to other fields of study that are concerned with space and its various constructions and practices in society, culture, and arts; literary studies focus on the use of space and how it is shaped by different spatial practices. By focusing on three major spatial practices in literature; spatial form, narrative space, and spatial design, this article aims at analyzing the literary architecture of the contemporary American novel *House of Leaves* (2000) by Mark Z. Danielewski. As a late postmodern novel, *House of Leaves* responds to the spatial turn of postmodernism both by employing spatial form and extending it into a tripartite structure that is seen in the novel's formal and material features as well as in its content. Danielewski turns a parable about architectural space into a structurally and materially innovative book through the use of spatial form and visual experimentation. The novel produces and reproduces space on different levels besides reconsidering the novel's shape and materiality in the late age of print and redefines it as a material art object through the use of postmodernist elements, hypertext, and materiality.

In his analysis of space and spatial practices, the French critic Henri Lefebvre points out to the increasing interest in the notion of space, and how it is becoming difficult to reach an overarching definition for space that would be valid for different fields of study. Therefore, he distinguishes between various kinds of spaces and he proposes three major types of space with the aim of "constructing a theoretical unity between the 'fields' which are apprehended separately" (11). These spaces are the physical space (natural space, "Cosmos"), mental space (space of "logical and formal abstractions"), and social space (space of "social practice . . . including products of imagination) (11-12). Through different categorizations of space, Lefebvre comes to the conclusion that, space is a field that produces and is also produced by human activities and power structures. Space is a constantly operating force regulating social mechanisms, production methods and domination tools. Space is a product, Lefebvre suggests, that "serves as a tool of

thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (26). In this respect, space is not under the control of a single dominant power, but is forever produced and reproduced by people as a means for expressing ideas and taking action and also as an area for using power and control. According to Lefebvre, space should be understood as "a multitude of intersections, each with its assigned location" (33). These intersections can be grouped under three major categories—spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces—which Lefebvre proposes not for designating a strict theoretical model but for understanding space as a product of different political, economic, and social processes.[4] From these multiple categorizations proposed by Lefebvre, it is challenging to reach a single definition or theoretical model that can be applied to literary works. However, his multi-directional approach towards space and seeing it as a dynamic product that is constantly in the process of being produced become helpful in analyzing the different types of spatial practices in *House of Leaves*. Reminiscent of Lefebvre's spatial triads, this paper will analyze *House of Leaves* as a spatial product produced through another spatial triad that includes spatial form, narrative space, and spatial design which work together to produce the space of the novel.[5]

The first part of the spatial triad that is going to be discussed is structural space of the novel which is built up by spatial form. Spatial form has been reviewed in depth analysis in Joseph Frank's influential essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1945). Frank regarded spatial form as the dominant mode in the modernist works of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Djuna Barnes. Frank's essay marks a critical awareness of the change in the nature of narrative. In his reading of Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood* (1936) and a selection of modernist poems, Frank points out the change in narrative organization and structure, which are not based on a chronological sequencing but on a spatial ordering. He suggests that *Nightwood* departs from any naturalistic tendency in narrative structure and leaves its readers with a puzzling text because of the spatial organization of the novel. According to Frank, just like the experiments in the paintings of Cézanne and Braque and later abstract expressionists, spatial form in *Nightwood* departs from the naturalistic tendencies of reflecting the world and people as they really are, thus it becomes a self-reflexive and self-conscious narrative (57). Frank suggests that in modernist poems

and novels, "the inherent consecutiveness of language" and thus "the reader's normal expectation of a sequence" are disrupted, therefore the components of a literary work are conceived "as juxtaposed in space rather than unrolling in time" (47). He regards this non-sequential narrative structure as the basic tenet of spatial form.

As Jeremo Klinkowitz points out, since the publication of Frank's article, a new style in fiction writing has emerged that is highly dependent on spatial form. The major characteristic of this new fiction, according to Klinkowitz, is its abandoning "conventional notions of character, action, thematic development, narrative sequence, and ultimately illusion itself ("suspension of disbelief") in favor of a fully self-conscious form of writing" (39). In the novels that use spatial form, these techniques are commonly used and they end "time's tyranny over space" by changing "the illusion of narrative with the self-conscious artifice of compositional order" (40). Spatial form in postmodernist works is shaped and extended by literary devices such as nonlinearity, fragmentation, multiplicity of narrative voices, and multiple and dense textual layers. The spatial form as Frank discussed in his essay and as it is exemplified in *House of Leaves* should be understood as a structural metaphor because the reader enters this space on a conceptual level while reading and putting the elements of fiction together in her/his mind. Therefore, the space created by spatial form can be named as the structural space of the novel that is built in the reader's mind as the narrative unfolds. As a work of the late postmodern period and early digital era, *House of Leaves* uses spatial form to the fullest with postmodern narrative elements and hypertextual form that connects passages through a linking mechanism. First of all, it is a polyphonic novel in which multiple narrative voices are given synchronically through footnotes. The readers enter into the fictional space of the novel through Truant's first person narration and move forward with Zampanò's critical reading of the film *The Navidson Record.*

House of Leaves starts with Johnny Truant's narration who finds a script that was written by a dead man named Zampanò. The script is about a film record produced by a man named Will Navidson. Navidson is the first creator within the novel and he shoots a film about his experiences in a strange house; the script of this film is taken up by Zampanò and added many critical readings, and later ends up at the hands of Truant who tries to combine Zampanò's notes and make them cohere. However, as has been stated just at the beginning of the novel,

the script named *The Navidson Record* does not exist even within the world of the novel. After making a research, Truant sees that nobody has ever heard of neither a man named Navidson nor a film by him. It turns out that *The Navidson Record*, which employs imagery details like "light, space, shape, line . . . color . . . [and] composition" (xxi), is all made up paradoxically by Zampanò who was a blind man. Like the film mentioned in the *The Navidson Record*, the secondary sources put by Zampanò into the script do not exist. They are either made up totally by Zampanò or exist in real life (outside the novel) but do not contain anything about the film. Although it is fictional, and we as the readers, know that it is a fiction within the fictional world of the novel, *The Navidson Record* still occupies the main place within *House of Leaves*. As Truant suggests "[t]he irony is, it makes no difference that the documentary at the heart of this book is fiction. Zampanò knew from the get go that what's real or isn't real doesn't matter here. The consequences are the same" (xx). *The Navidson Record* is about the story of Navidson and his wife Karen after they move out to Virginia to a new house to mend their relationship. The house, however, turns out to be bigger inside than outside. Appalled by this strangeness, Navidson, who is an internationally acclaimed photo-journalist, begins his search and shoots scenes from the house and the hallway which newly appears in their living room. The hallway leads to a labyrinthine darkness which causes Navidson to hire a group of discoverers and friends to search inside the darkness. Their quest turns out to be a tragedy killing three of them and injuring others. What kills these men, however, is nothing they found in the house but an endless darkness that keeps on expanding which can in no way be explained by anybody at the end.

The synchronic narratives of Truant, Zampanò, and Navidson are given through footnotes. As the critic Brianne Bilsky states, the footnotes in the novel "often traverse several pages and compete with the 'narrative proper' for the reader's attention" (*Revolutionary Leaves* 141). *House of Leaves* uses different fonts in order to identify each voice in the larger narrative. Zampanò's critical work is fittingly given in Times New Roman, and Truant intrudes into Zampanò's narrative with an increasing number of footnotes given in Courier by identifying him as "a courier of Zampanò's otherwise dead letters" (Little 195). The fictional editors in the novel also provide additional information in some cases, which are given in Bookman type font. Therefore, the

use of different fonts informs the reader about "the shifts in narrative voice" (Graulund 383). Despite this differentiation in typology, there are still instances in the novel in which type fonts merge into each other such as "when the check-mark from Johnny's mother appears in the narrative (*House of Leaves* 97), or the SOS in the diegetic level of the expedition into the House permeates Johnny's world (*House of Leaves* 103)" (Huber 126).

These synchronic narratives given on the same page side by side and their intrusion on and taking over each other are examples of postmodern fragmentation because they disrupt the continuity in narrative voices. As a result, they break linearity and chronology by forcing the readers to move between different narrative voices and lines. Besides the three main narrative voices, other voices are playfully added to the narrative. In this plural space, it becomes hard to privilege one narrative over the other. The use of such multiplicity extends spatial form in the novel. As Bilsky's statement given above shows, there is no "narrative proper" (141) or a major narrative voice, which can be taken as the center, as the authority. This challenge against a grand narrative by many narrative voices in the novel is reminiscent of Jean-François Lyotard's definition of incredulity towards master and metanarratives as a dominant sensibility in the postmodern times (xxiv). In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Lyotard puts forward that

> [s]implifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. . . . The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements--narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. (xxiv).

Devoid of its great "functors," narrative along with the meaning it carries is disseminated in language elements in the postmodern world of fragmentation. The grand narratives of the previous eras are now under the attack of unstable and uncommunicable language combinations. The different interpretive activities the readers impose on texts and narratives actually in a state of not knowing what is real, sacred or grand are part of the language combinations that work

against the meta-narratives. In self-reflexive moments, questions regarding the legitimacy of the texts and to what extent the narratives we read have undergone changes and editing are frequently addressed in *House of Leaves*. Through his characters, Danielewski challenges the assumptions regarding the originality of the texts illustrating that everything the reader regards natural, original or sacred are indeed under the workings of language. One significant example occurs in the section when Truant reveals that he adds the word "water" to Zampanò's text and changes the wording as "water heater" (12). Here, in a direct address to the reader, Truant admits his intrusion into Zampanò's "original text:" "Now there's an admission, eh? Hey not fair, you cry" (16). In another instance, some of the footnotes in Zampanò's text are missing and they are given in a "mass of black X's" (376). To footnote 326 that ends with a note of missing information is added another explanatory footnote, this time by the Editors, stating "[c]rossed out with what looked *suspiciously* like black crayon and tar" (354; emphasis added). Twenty pages later, Truant confesses that he had accidentally spilled black ink on one of the batches of Zampanò's notes and thus lost some of the material including Exhibit 3 (376-379). The suspicion towards originality also shows, according to the critic William C. Little, "the problem of determining the extent of the editor's authorial role in delivering a project to publication" (195). While the Editors are suspicious of Truant's intrusion into Zampanò's narrative, the readers should be suspicious of all levels of narrative and be alert about their fictionality.

The relationship between Zampanò and Truant attains a greater significance as Truant goes on editing Zampanò's notes. Having been found dead in his house at the beginning of the novel, Zampanò's experience exemplifies "the death of the author" in a literal sense. In his absence, his text is to be read, edited, and rewritten by the reader-character Truant. As Roland Barthes maintains in his essay "The Death of the Author" (1967), during the process of writing "the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his death, writing begins" (142). In *House of Leaves*, since the writer Zampanò is already dead and his voice is lost, a new writing process is initiated by Truant. Truant becomes the modern scriptor whom Barthes introduces as an alternative to the author. "The modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text," Barthes states, and s/he starts to "perform" the role of scribbling with a consciousness of the language he is using and without seeking originality (145-146).

The novel deliberately starts with Truant's discovery of Zampanò's text, and the readers get to know Truant only through his activity of scribbling both Zampanò's and his own text. Although Truant was the reader of Zampanò's text at first, he finally becomes the compiler and writer of the whole story.

House of Leaves constantly plays with the idea of textuality and fictionality with postmodern narrative elements that are spatially dispersed throughout the novel. The Chinese box embedded narratives of Truant, Zampanò, and Navidson act as metafictional devices. Examples throughout the novel show that all the stories recounted are somehow changed, played upon, or fictionalized. Not one story is to be relied on during the reading process, and almost all of the narrator characters are unreliable. Truant proves to be an unreliable narrator, sometimes confessing that he is changing Zampanò's story, and sometimes he is writing during his panic attacks and hallucinations, which distort the sequence of events. In spite of his blindness, Zampanò writes about a visual text and he draws on a number of critical sources that do not exist in the fictional world of the novel. The readers encounter crucial moments in the novel when the characters confess that they are created with the stories they are reading and writing.

Providing almost all possible critical readings within its fictional and narrative space with the inclusion of a variety of critical arguments, the novel both anticipates external reading tendencies and becomes a text about its own textuality. Self-reflexivity reminds the reader that what he/she is reading is a "text." This act of reading and interpreting the events within the scope of the novel is another way of enriching the text with multiple layers and viewpoints, discrediting as well as mocking outside over-interpretive activities. This metafictional tendency in fiction is called "overinterpretation," (Malmgren 192) which is a tool for the author to preempt any outside critical reading. In his book *Fictional Space in the Modernist and Postmodernist American Novel*, the critic Carl D. Malmgren maintains that

> contemporary metafiction is aware of the prestige accorded the critical activity and devotes some of its energies to debunking critical authority. One way to accomplish this end may be termed overinterpretation. The metafictionist incorporates within his fictional space so much evidence pointing at a particular reading that the reading is paradoxically invalidated;

> it becomes gratuitous, superfluous, or too easy. . . . The systematic deployment of such elements makes for a text that resists, defies, or ridicules interpretive activity. (192-194)

House of Leaves similarly predicts critical approaches that might be used while analyzing the novel. The critical discussions about the Navidson house, its meaning and the process of writing have already been presented in the novel through the three main characters; Truant, Zampanò, and Will Navidson. Their narratives have been embedded within each other and within the frames of their stories; the characters are dealing with the problems of textual construction, textual analysis, and representation. The novel does not highlight the successive events taking place in the lives of the characters but the processes of reading, writing and creating various texts. The recursive narrative device of multiple narratives embedded in each other constructs a web of stories that are connected to each other, although these narratives do not occupy the same narrative levels in the novel. As Brian McHale suggests in his book *Postmodernist Fiction*, when embedded worlds do not occupy the same narrative and fictional worlds, they destabilize each other's ontological status and create numerous fictional worlds (113-114). Because these worlds create a cyclical narrative structure rather than a linear one, embedded narratives construct a spatial plane of narration. There are two major examples in the novel that show how embedded narratives create narrative loops and bring "the possibility of infinite regress" (McHale 114). During Exploration #5 in the labyrinthine house, Will Navidson is alone and after long hours and even days of exploring nothing in the house, he runs out of batteries, food, and supplies. At a moment when he decides to take a rest in his sleeping bag reading a book: "Taking a tiny sip of water and burying himself deeper in his sleeping bag, he turns his attention to the last possible activity, the only book in his possession: *House of Leaves*" (Danielewski 465). The narrative threads, in which Truant is reading and editing the critical study on *The Navidson Record* where Navidson reads the book Truant is editing, overlap and render the borders of narrative frames ambiguous, and they create infinite regress. By employing the strategy of recursiveness,[6] *House of Leaves* shows that it is a nested chain of representations, a critical account on a film that is about a house, and within the house there is a book called *House of Leaves*. This creates a regressive structural narration, or as McHale defines a "heterarchy:"

> Like M. C. Escher's famous lithograph of Drawing Hands (1948), in which a left hand draws a right hand while at the same time the right draws the left . . . A heterarchy is a multi-level structure in which there is no single "highest level." This means, in the case of a literary text, that it is impossible to determine who is the author of whom, or, to put it slightly differently, which narrative level is hierarchically superior, which subordinate. (120)

As one of the characters in the novel, Will Navidson's reading a book named *House of Leaves* within the novel entitled *House of Leaves* creates a paradox as well as complicating the narrative levels. The second example of the narrative looping happens when Truant stops at a bar in Flagstaff, Arizona after his trip to Virginia to find the house in *The Navidson Record*. As he listens to a music band at a bar, he hears a song with the lyrics "I live at the end of a Five and a Half Minute Hallway" (Danielewski 512). Since "Five and a Half Minutes Hallway" is part of *The Navidson Record*, Truant is surprised by the possibility that there are other people who also know about the Navidson house. He approaches the band and inquires about the song and *The Navidson Record*. The answer surprises Truant when one of the members of the band says that "the lyrics were inspired by a book he'd found on the Internet quite some time ago" (513). When Truant takes a look at the book, he sees his own name as the editor on the cover of the book, although he himself has not published any part of Zampano's text. What Truant faces here once more destabilizes the narrative sequence and creates a cyclical structure, because he comes across himself as a character in the story he is writing.

The metaphor of a spiral is very revealing in understanding the positioning of embedded narratives that are created *ad infinitum* in *House of Leaves*. Spatiality is further developed in the novel with hypertextual design. As Jay David Bolter and Marie Laure Ryan maintain, the most recent type of spatial form is hypertext as it breaks down chronology and linearity with links between narrative units or nodes ("Space"). Hypertext creates a spatial platform in *House of Leaves*, which necessitates the reader to move back and forth among the pages to follow the footnotes and thus the narrative threads. As has been stated before, Truant's account is given in footnotes at the bottom of the pages. There are also three different sets of footnotes: footnotes added by Truant to his own text, footnotes added by Zampanò to his

critical account, and footnotes added by the Editors to Truant's text. The footnotes function as the major linking mechanism in *House of Leaves*. As Theodore H. Nelson describes in his book *Literary Machines*, hypertext is a non-sequential layout in which "pieces of writing [are] connected by lines" (15). Hypertext not only includes chunks of written texts but also visual and audial media connected to the written text. Because of the rich media it includes, hypertext can also be called hypermedia (Landow 3). It can be seen that *House of Leaves* is both hypertext and hypermedia since the footnotes are connected to written texts as well as to visual media such as pictures, photographs, and collages. In the appendixes, there are pictures of Zampanò's original manuscript and pictures of papers on which he wrote pieces of *The Navidson Record.* Such examples that necessitate the reader to navigate through the text abound throughout *House of Leaves*. This navigation, however, does not always reach anywhere. Some of the footnotes to footnotes are reported missing, and in those cases, the reader reaches nowhere that echoes the futile search of the explorers within the labyrinthine house of the Navidsons. Therefore, there is no linear progression in the novel but a synchronicity of narrative voices which should be heard simultaneously with all the components of hypertext. As Katherine Hayles comments in her article, narrative multiplicity in *House of Leaves* "is indicated through spatial form" (794) and is enabled by hypertext. Such a design through hypertext creates a "simultaneity" of voices through "spatial discontinuity" (795):

> Rather than a spatially continuous narrative in which different voices speak in turn, as when dialogue is indicated by paragraph breaks in a realistic novel, *House of Leaves* creates spatially distinct narratives with multiple cross connections, as if multiple voices were speaking simultaneously. Instead of temporal sequence indicated by spatial continuity, *House of Leaves* uses spatial discontinuity to indicate temporal simultaneity. ("Saving the Subject" 794-795)

As a novel that extends spatial form with postmodern narrative techniques, *House of Leaves* creates a cacophony of narrative voices that are presented via a hypertextual design that brings along "simultaneity" instead of linearity. Without this design, it would not have been possible for Danielewski to sustain the multiplicity of narrative voices synchronic. In this respect, the form of the novel can be said to respond to its content. Hypertextual links also enable intermediality with the

inclusion of visual media as well as intertextuality with the inclusion of numerous texts, lists and quotations within the novel. Danielewski uses most of the characteristics of hypertext in the printed book as listed by George Landow in his book *Hypertext 3.0.* These characteristics of hypertext are "non- or multilinearity, its multivocality, and its inevitable blending of media and modes, particularly its tendency to marry the visual and the verbal" (Landow 220). In this respect, hypertext should be considered as the extension and the most recent adaptation of spatial form.

With various narrative devices such as fragmentation, synchronicity, metafictional elements, and hypertextual organization, *House of Leaves* uses and extends spatial form. The second level of space in *House of Leaves* that interacts with and is also shaped by spatial form is the narrative space of the novel. According to Marie-Laure Ryan, narrative space is "the physically existing environment in which characters live and move" ("Space"). It contains the setting which is "the general socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action takes place," and the story space which is "the space relevant to the plot, as mapped by the actions and thoughts of the characters" (Ryan). Narrative space can be understood as the narrative world which is "the story space completed by the reader's imagination on the basis of cultural knowledge and real world experience," and the narrative universe which is "the world (in the spatio-temporal sense of the term) presented as actual by the text" ("Space"). The narrative space can also be thought as the "referential" or "diegetic" space which is the fictional world of the novel. This space ranges from the smallest place like a room in which an event takes place to the narrative universe including all the physical and mental spaces created in fiction.

The labyrinthine house in *House of Leaves* is treated as a character and indeed it has a more significant place than most of the characters in the novel. As narrative space can have a wide range of elements and meanings, the focus in this section will be on the labyrinthine Navidson House since it has a special importance in the novel. If there was a center, the center of *House of Leaves* would be the Navidson house that forever keeps on shifting. However, as post-structuralist theory and deconstruction maintain, one cannot talk of a definite and stable center in the issues constructed through language. As his criticism of *The Navidson Record* shows, Zampanò is well informed in contemporary critical debates on deconstruction. There were a number

of people reading to him as he was blind. From his journals, which are given in one of the appendixes, it is stated that he desperately wanted to have Derrida's work *Glas* but the libraries from which he requests the book did not send it to him. Zampanò analyzes the house from different points of view and quotes from Heidegger. He views the house as the crystallization of Heidegger's concept of "unheimlich" or the uncanny which he discusses in his book *Sein und Zeit*. At another instance, he quotes from Derrida's famous essay entitled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences." The critical consciousness Zampanò has towards the material he is writing on guides the readers to understand that the house is a product of deconstructive logic and architecture.

After the Navidson family comes back to their house in Virginia after a vacation, they realize that there is something strange in their house. The book shelf they placed in one of the rooms has fallen down because the distance between the walls of the room has changed. The family later comes across a new door in their living room which opens into a dark hallway. As they explore further, they find out that the house measures bigger inside than it does on the outside. This impossibility ignites a curiosity in Navidson, who becomes the most recent owner of the house after many years since the house was built in 1720. As Zampanò suggests, it is not a coincidence that this person is Navidson

> with a camera and a zest for the dangerous [who] would show up at this Mead Hall and confront the terror at the door. . . . Considering his own history, the talent and emotional background only Navidson could have gone as deep as he did and have successfully brought that vision back" (21-23).

Given this heroic task of going to the house and bringing a vision back like Odysseus descending into the underworld—a comparison echoed in the novel—Navidson ends up coming back without any vision but the nothingness he faces on and on in the house. Like the form of the novel, which is spatially dispersed, the Navidson house on Ash Tree Lane rejects conventional definitions of architecture and space. The labyrinth within the Navidson house keeps growing day by day until it turns into a huge gap one day. The house is not only a labyrinth, but a shifting structure in which one cannot gain any sense of perspective, and an endless darkness in which the laws of physics are not valid. For instance, it cannot be inhabited by animals

because it throws them out or echoes cannot be heard in it although it is empty (50). The house is described as a "trope for the unlimited and the unknowable" (Zampanò 6), "a strange spatial violation" (24), as "destroy[ing] any sense of security of well-being" (28), as a "spatial disparity" and even "a goddamn spatial rape" (55).

As the texts in *House of Leaves* branch off with narrative voices and footnotes, the labyrinth branches off too, and the explorers in the house find an endless series of doors and rooms with nothing inside them. Ryan views the novel as a "rare example of a narrative that gives a central role to a spatially impossible object" ("Impossible Worlds" 372). Similarly, the house is viewed as "a figure of impossibility" by the critic Will Slocombe as he states in his article "Nihilism and the House that Jacques Built," and he goes on by defining the house as "a nihilistic void that the text, through language, continually pretends is not there" (100). This impossible space is reminiscent of the ideas on deconstruction in general and deconstructive architecture in particular.

In his book *Beginning Postmodernism*, Tim Woods states that deconstructivist architecture "has openly challenged the humanist construction of space, or the way in which conceptions of space have relied upon unities and harmonies established in reason, representation and truth" (104). It is a kind of architecture that has been influenced by the post-structuralist views on language and it "adopts an aesthetic of fragmentation" (Woods 104) as a sub-branch of postmodern architecture. Forever shifting and expanding, the Navidson house breaks down unities that one expects to see in such a building and it resists representation as deconstructivist architecture aims at doing. According to Danielewski, "[r]esistance to representation . . . is not the only difficulty posed by those replicating chambers and corridors. . . . [T]he whole house defies any normal means of determining direction" (90). Offering no sense of direction, but a sense of an endless repetition, the house makes the explorers get lost although they enter the house fully equipped. Deconstructive architecture has a "close theoretical engagement with poststructuralist theories of language" and the practice of applying them to architecture is called "archetexture" (Woods 104). The characteristics of the labyrinthine house can be called "archetexture" because the house in the novel is not only an architectural structure but it is also a metaphor for the workings of verbal, visual, and hypertextual elements of language and narrative.

The characters in *House of Leaves*, especially the ones in *The Navidson Record*, try to understand the meaning of such an uninhabitable house. Their explorations do not yield any information as they are lost within the house. A recurrent element in Zampanò's account is the diverse experiences of the characters who have been in the house. Each character defines the labyrinthine house subjectively. For example, one of the explorers in the house, Halloway yields to his fears and his psychological demons while in the labyrinth, and kills another explorer. Navidson's final exploration in the house is viewed by one of the critics in Zampanò's text as an "attempt to territorialize and thus preside over that virtually unfathomable space" (Danielewski 386). Drawing on critical sources, Zampanò thinks that the descriptions of the house change according to the "psychology of anyone who enters it:"

> Dr. Haugeland asserts that the extraordinary absence of sensory information forces the individual to manufacture his or her own data. Ruby Dahl, in her stupendous study of space, calls the house on Ash Tree Lane "a solipsistic heightener," arguing that "the house, the halls, and the rooms all become the self—collapsing, expanding, tilting, closing, but always in perfect relation to the mental state of the individual." (165)

The subjective interpretation of the spatial characteristics of the house is similar to interpreting the labyrinthine text of *House of Leaves* by different readers. There are instances in the novel where the experience of reading the novel *House of Leaves* is mirrored by the characters who venture into the labyrinthine space. While the explorers are trying to make sense of the space of the house, the readers of the novel are trying to bring pieces of texts together and to navigate through the text. Being the reader within the story and "riddling through Zampanò's bits" (Danielewski 35), Truant represents the readers who riddle through Danielewski's hypertextual web. He is also like the explorers in the labyrinthine house. Each explorer/reader has to navigate through the text, whether it is a verbal/visual or an architectural text. Textuality inherent in architecture and spatiality, as well as in language and text are juxtaposed in *House of Leaves* to show their influence on each other. In his article "Architecture Where the Desire May Live," Derrida says

> what connects deconstruction with writing [is] its spatiality,

> thinking in terms of a path, of the opening up of a way . . . This writing is truly like a labyrinth since it has neither beginning nor an end. One is always on the move. The opposition between time and space, between the time of speech and the space of the temple or the house has no longer any sense. One lives in writing. Writing is a way of living. (321)

Danielewski succeeds in building the deconstructive labyrinth Derrida mentions above with the spatial form in *House of Leaves*, its experimental and non-linear narration, its structure, and characters who live in it and through the acts of writing and reading. The narrative space of the novel does not only remain as a setting but throws a spotlight on the concept of space by making an architectural structure a character occupying a crucial place in the narrative.

The third category of space that displays a thorough understanding of spatiality in *House of Leaves* is the spatial extension of the text. The spatial extension of the text is seen physically and materially on the pages of the print book. In *House of Leaves*, the material space and the technology of the print book become metaphorical components to the structural and narrative spaces of the novel. Ryan maintains that there are four levels of material spatiality that different forms of narratives present:

> Spatial extension ranges from zero spatial dimensions (oral narratives, excluding gestures and facial expressions; music) to quasi one-dimensionality (a text displayed on a single line with letters moving from right to left, as in television news lines, electronic billboards, and some digital literary texts), two-dimensionality (printed narratives, film, painting), all the way to genuine three-dimensionality (theatre, ballet, sculpture). ("Space.")

As for the printed narratives, two-dimensionality in material space has been open to experiments especially since the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century like Dadaism and Futurism (Davidson 127). Concrete and visual poetry take the lead in terms of the topographic experiments on the page. By using the white space of the page as a design field, concrete poetry uses verbal text with an emphasis of its visuality on the page.[7] Similarly, experiments in prose writing have turned to the materiality of language and altered its manifestation

on the page. The critic Brian McHale coins the kind of fiction writing that makes a conscious and experimental use of page space "concrete prose" or "concrete fiction" (*Postmodernist Fiction* 184). Upon being asked about the effect of visual culture and representation on *House of Leaves*, Danielewski remarks that the novel is a genre that offers a wide variety of possibilities for visual representation besides the more accustomed and conventional way of verbal representation. He believes in the "power and flexibility of phrases unfolding on the page" and he uses his words with a consciousness of "their meanings, their sounds, and certainly their visual embodiment" ("Haunted House"). As a result, he does not want to sell the film rights of *House of Leaves*. He stresses that his fiction should be read and interpreted by taking its visual dimensions into account. Therefore, in the novel, he has embarked on using the "the shape and design of text not just to conjure up some static visual impression but use it to further enhance the movement of meaning, theme, and story" (Danielewski "Haunted House").

House of Leaves can be placed among the works of concrete fiction which use the written text with a certain visual impact. It displays how the space of the page is open to visual and material activities such as the use of graphic elements and changes in the topography of the page. *House of Leaves* employs a spatial form with postmodern narrative elements and presents a narrative space with deconstructive elements thereby extending its postmodern characteristics further towards deconstruction. This third level of spatiality, the spatial extension of the text, situates the novel in the digital era as a work of art that is conscious both of the technology of the print book and the digital writing.

In her book *Electronic Literature*, Katherine Hayles notes that electronic writing has stimulated an "interest in the book as a medium" (20) as can be seen in the works of artists' books and "experimental practices exploring the potential of the book as an artistic and literary venue" (20). Likewise, Jay David Bolter argues that the influence of digital media is "refashioning the printed book" (*Writing Space* 3). The practices through which the printed book is refashioning itself include "innovative typography" and a "new aesthetics for book design" (Hayles *Electronic Literature* 159). Hayles sees *House of Leaves* as an example which mimics the digital text while it also "intensif[ies] the specificities of print" (175). In the late age of print,[8] by refashioning itself, *House of Leaves* insists on the book's role as a powerful medium

image, creating an effect of windows opening to the house. From these windows, the readers cannot see anything but long lists of objects which are not in the house. Hayles thinks that the opening of the windows functions as a reminder to the readers of their assumptions about the borders of printed pages:

> The box calls into question an assumption so commonplace that we are not normally aware of it: book pages are opaque, a property that defines one page as separate from another. Here the back of the page seems to open transparently onto the front, a notion that overruns the boundary between them and constructs the page as a leaky container rather than an unambiguous unit of print. Treating the page as a window can be seen as a way to compensate for the House's viewless interior. After denying us any transparency through which we can look into or out of the House, the text turns its own material substrate into a window that proposes to bring into view everything not in the house, an enterprise as paradoxical as it is quixotic. ("Saving the Subject" 792-793)

The blue framed boxes that seem to open up into the space of the house as windows are used by Danielewski as a tool to remind the readers of the physicality or materiality of the book. Usually, the "opaqueness" of the page is something that is taken for granted during the reading activity. However, when the page attains transparency with these blue framed boxes, the reader is reminded that pages are made up frames rather than "unambiguous unit[s] of print" (Hayles 792). Although the pages seem to attain a quasi-transparency with the blue framed boxes first, they later deny showing the inside of the labyrinthine house. Instead, they show what is not in the house. The act of looking into and through these windows becomes a self-reflective encounter that faces the readers with nothing but words.

In *House of Leaves*, hypertext is structured through footnotes that function as links. Such use of footnotes changes the way the material space of the book is used. While the novel abounds with many examples showing the workings of hypertextual linking with footnotes and footnotes to footnotes, there are some footnotes, or links, which appear to be broken in digital terms. The footnotes send the reader to different pages or different parts on the same page, however, in the case of the broken footnotes/links, the search for finding the footnote

and the related information given in that footnote becomes a futile endeavor leading the reader nowhere. While the broken links recall the digital hypertext, they also serve as self-reflexive tools to urge the readers to be conscious of the labyrinthine nature of the book and the process of reading it.

House of Leaves incorporates not only a hypertextual web of narration but also pictures and collage works given in its Appendix. The photographs of Zampanò's notes, pictures of art works that have been inspired by the Navidson house, and some sketches showing parts of the labyrinth serve to intensify the authenticity effect despite the constant reminder that none of the stories in *House of Leaves* are real, authentic, or sacred. This juxtaposition of the two discourses, one being that the stories in the novel are factual, and the other one being that they are fiction, creates a tension recalling the crisis of representation in the postmodern world. The readers cannot be sure of the authenticity of any text and must depend on their own interpretation in order to make sense of them. Once again, like the explorers in the labyrinth, readers of *House of Leaves* cannot maintain a similar and unified perception of the material space, as each person has different cognitive abilities influenced by their psychology.

Danielewski's use of the topography of the page to heighten the narrative effect surfaces in more innovative ways when the character Will Navidson explores the labyrinth on his own. In the moments when he is in the dark corridors and rooms, the pages of the book visually reflect the emptiness he encounters in the house. The verbal text on these pages is very little and the pages are designed in such a way that they mimic the movements and position of Navidson in the vast space. In his interview "Haunted House," Danielewski says his aim is to create a visual effect as one can come across in movies. In this respect, these action-oriented pages are designed with a camera eye as if the readers are watching the pages as a camera follows Navidson. Danielewski explains how his upbringing as the son of a filmmaker as well as his interest in the visual impact of words on the page have found an outlet in *House of Leaves*, a novel that is highly influenced by theories on cinema and literature:

> [T]he visual experiments in *House of Leaves* are mostly based on the grammar of film and the enormous foundation of theory established over the last century. There's a complicated

> craftsmanship involved in controlling the viewer's perception. It's a craft where details count. ("Haunted House")

The influences and grammars of different media on *House of Leaves* exist side by side creating not only a visual but also a dynamic web of interactions. Danielewski's final touches such as the inclusion of an index at the end of *House of Leaves* presents a verbal map of the web of the novel. However, the index is unusual because it does not only present important entries but commonplace words such as "and" (665), "for" (676) and "with" (703). Danielewski plays with and deconstructs all naturalized assumptions of fiction, writing, and reading as well as common assumptions concerning how a novel or an index should be. As Bolter puts forward,

> [b]y offering multiplicity in place of a single order of paragraphs and pages, an index transforms a book from a tree into a network. There need not be any privileged element in a network, as there always is in a tree, no single topic that dominates all others. Instead of strict subordination, we have paths that weave their way through a textual space. (34)

With the index at the end of the novel, the space of the novel is reproduced and completed as a network without a hierarchy of narrative levels. By finally adding the image of "Yggdrasil," the tree of life in Norse Mythology, Danielewski completes his multilayered web. Yggdrasil is "an eternal green Ash tree" with branches stretching out into the worlds in Norse Mythology connecting them to each other (*Norse Mythology*). This metaphor of the tree is very significant in that it provides the "bauplan" or the "building plan" of *House of Leaves* that Zampanò wished to have previously in the novel. The space of the novel constantly branches off like the tree of Yggdrasil. The image serves to link the spatial triad of the structural, narrative, and finally material spaces of the novel as has been discussed.

In *House of Leaves*, Danielewski builds a literary architecture in which the readers have to "weave their way through [the] textual space" (Bolter 34) created in different structural, narrative, and material ways. Space is produced in the novel first through spatial form that is extended by postmodern narrative elements and hypertext. Secondly, the narrative space of the novel is dominated by the Navidson house that is treated as a character and acts as a reflector of the novel's innovative

form. Finally, by extending the spatiality onto the materiality of the page through visual elements and topographical experiments, Danielewski completes his novel rendering it a concrete spatial artifact. *House of Leaves* shows that space and spatial practices are not to be disregarded in literary analysis, on the contrary, they are crucial in understanding the mechanisms of fiction writing and the creation of the print book as an art object.

Notes

[1] This article is derived from the author's Ph. D. Dissertation entitled "Postmodern Space Revisited: Hypertextuality and Materiality in the Selected Novels of Mark Z. Danielewski, Steve Tomasula, and Lance Olsen."

[2] Bu makale, yazarın "Postmodern Mekâna Dönüş: Mark Z. Danielewski, Steve Tomasula ve Lance Olsen'ın Seçili Romanlarında Hipermetinsellik ve Maddesellik" başlıklı doktora tezinden alınmıştır.

[3] In his lecture entitled "Different Spaces," Michel Foucault points out to the change in epistemology since the nineteenth century which was characterized by the past, the different concepts of time and its accumulation, and topics such as crisis and cycle in history. However, that zeitgeist with an interest in history came to an end with the twentieth century, which Foucault thinks is the age of space (175). Space has come to regain its important status and thus life in the present epoch "develop[s] . . . like a network that connects points and weaves its skein" (175). The twentieth century is "an era of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the scattered" which all bring along a spatially organized context (175).

[4] Similar to Lefebvre's reading of space as a product of political, economic, and social processes, Michel Foucault's "heterotopias" are a crystallization of his reading of space as a way to understand how society functions within and through a set of places. According to Foucault, while heterotopias were spaces of crises in the primitive societies, today they are replaced by heterotopias of deviance (180). For instance; cemeteries, prisons, rest homes, and psychiatric hospitals are the heterotopias of the twentieth century and they function in the classification of "marginalized" people as well as containing them within the discursively shaped social structures (180). Foucault points out that heterotopias function "in relation to the remaining space" (184), they either "creat[e] a space of illusion that denounces all real space [or] a different real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well-arranged as ours is disorganized, badly arranged, and muddled" (184). In either case, they act as spaces that reveal and highlight the characteristics of not just themselves but

of other spaces. Foucault's essay in which he defines utopias and heterotopias is regarded as a work that is more associated with his "early structuralist phase" (Leach 348). He later turned to an analysis of "power in its more diffuse forms" by using poststructuralist theories as he exemplifies with his analysis of panopticon and its being a surveillance mechanism in societies (348).

[5] From Lefebvre's book, it can be gathered that literary works and the spaces they represent are part of the social space and its representations. In other words, literary works are one of the signifying systems which contribute to the production of social space. According to Lefebvre, literature uses spaces of various types, "enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about" (15), but because of the variety of literary representations, he does not consider literary texts "special enough" to "provide the basis for a 'textual' analysis" (15). Instead, he sees "texts relating to architecture . . . a better choice than literary texts" (15). As *House of Leaves* is a literary text about architecture, it can be viewed as an appropriate text to look at in order to see the workings of space.

[6] By employing recursiveness through the use of nested narratives, critical readings within the novel, or mentioning the title of the novel or the name of the author within the novel, the postmodernist novel blurs the boundaries between fiction and fact. This strategy destabilizes the world created by fiction, and it becomes difficult to notice for the reader where the boundaries of fiction introduce into the real world occupied by the writer and her/himself. By constantly referring to the novel within its own fictional world, recursiveness becomes a metafictional tool to remind the fictionality of the text (McHale 115).

[7] The outlines of concrete poems depict a shape on the page for the reader. The visual appearances on the page complement the meaning of the poem. Giving up on the tradition of using the poetic line, concrete poets use geometric and graphical elements viewing the page as an open space for creating new structures of composition.

[8] In his book *Writing Space* (2001), Jay David Bolter defines the contemporary age as "the late age of print" (2). This coinage signals the changing trends in the use of media seen in the transition from the printed book to the digital writing systems.

[9] These strikethroughs, or words that are crossed out but stay in the text, are "words under erasure," or "saus rature," a term defined by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger to refer to the inability of language to express ideas while it is still the only tool to depend on for communication. Following Heidegger, this writing strategy is later used by Jacques Derrida as a "practice of placing certain verbal signs sous rature, under erasure" (McHale *Postmodernist Fiction* 100). As McHale points out, "Derrida's purpose in using this typographical sleight-of-hand is, of course, to remind us that certain key concepts in western metaphysics—such as . . . existence and objecthood—continue to be indispensable to philosophical discourse even though that same discourse demonstrates their illegitimacy" (*Postmodernist Fiction* 100).

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