INTERPRETING THE MULTIMODAL NOVEL: A NEW METHOD FOR TEXTUAL SCHOLARSHIP

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by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................ vi

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ....................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Multimodal Novel – An Emerging Genre ................................................. 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the &quot;New Genre,&quot; or Overlooked Aspect of the Genre. What is &quot;The Multimodal Novel&quot;? ................................................................. 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Problem – Monomodal Interpretive Strategies for Multimodal Novels .......... 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms .......................................................................................... 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Solution – A New Interpretive Method for the Multimodal Novel .......... 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline of Dissertation ................................................................................... 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing the Multimodal Novel Multimodally ........................................... 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review .............. 15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Debate over Medium-Specific Theory ................................................... 46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. METHODOLOGY: ANALYZING THE MULTIMODAL NOVEL</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WITH A TAXONOMY ........................................................... 71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question .......................................................... 71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for Selection of Novels .............................................. 73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method .................................................................................. 74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account of Developing the Taxonomy – Method of Developing Descriptive Tool ........................................................... 75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxonomy of Devices in the Contemporary Novel ................................. 84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Taxonomy ........................................................ 88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure for the Multimodal Analysis of the Novel ......................... 89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Happens Next ................................................................... 98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV. READINGS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading 1 - The Fourth Treasure ............................................................... 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading 2 – The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet ..................................... 129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading 3 – House of Leaves .................................................................. 163</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iii
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1. Diagram of a Two-Page Spread in a Standard Novel
2. Standard Structure of Narrative Communication
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Comparison of Conceptualizations of Multimodal Elements and Functionalities in Print</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Multimodal Novel – An Emerging Genre

The use of multiple modes in the novel is not a new phenomenon. There are many examples of novels that combine visual and other modal elements with the expected verbal content. Mark Twain’s novels originally included illustrations. The text block of Sinclair Lewis’ *Babbitt* suddenly gives way to images. Newspaper clippings are reproduced in The *U.S.A*. trilogy by John DosPassos. Faulkner wanted to represent narratorial shifts in *A Light in August* with different colors of ink. Kurt Vonnegut’s novels include drawings that must be read with the words to understand ideas. The chapters of John Gardner’s *Grendel* are accompanied by changing chapter head illustrations. But it goes beyond this. Even novels with the most standard design subtly use nonverbal modalities to structure the flow of information, to suggest order and hierarchy, and to construct navigation tools and reinforce a standard reading path. In many cases, nonverbal aspects of standard novels are also used to convey aspects of the stories they tell. Font styles are often mixed in novels to illustrate different speakers, flashback, and so on. Hard returns or ellipses are often used to show changes in time or place. Different sections of novels are visually demarcated by section dividing pages, sometimes with illustrative or decorative images, other times with a title set apart in a great deal of white space.
Recently there has been an increase in novels that not only incorporate images, they incorporate multiple font styles, unusual layouts that cannot be read in a linear or hierarchical way, and other graphic elements that must be processed with verbal and other textual aspects in order to understand the story. What are we to make of these multimodal novels – novels that utilize the conventions of the print novel in new ways, and that use nonverbal modal elements with verbal elements to actively convey narrative information?

**Defining the “New Genre,” or Overlooked Aspect of the Genre.**

What is “The Multimodal Novel”?

The Multimodal Novel is a developing genre in which multiple modalities are foregrounded, used self-consciously, to convey narrative information alongside verbal content, and to create innovative layouts that sometimes alter the conventional reading path. The use of multiple modalities, then, is both a means of conveying story detail and a means of restructuring the reading experience, playing with novelistic design and layout conventions.

Though all novels are already multimodal, most are not designed to foreground their use of nonverbal modalities, to actively rely on nonverbal textual elements to convey narrative detail, and most use conventional layout patterns. The most accurate way of thinking of this distinction between the multimodal novel and the traditional novel is to consider one multimodally styled – crafted to foreground its use of multiple modes – and to consider the other, while containing elements in multiple modes, monomodally styled – crafted to foreground the verbal content and to de-emphasize structural contributions of textual elements in nonverbal modes. Monomodally styled novels, the traditional novel, offer the illusion that the verbal content is the only aspect of the text.
signifying, and thus are often praised for offering readers a sense of becoming immersed in the running stream of verbal content as they can focus on just one type of modal translation. Multimodally styled novels, or multimodal novels, require readers to decode content using a variety of different strategies involving layout, page hierarchy, sequencing, juxtaposition of elements on the page, and of course combining narrative information decoded from one kind of mode with other narrative details that have been given in several different kinds of modes – cross-modal interpretation.

Multimodal novels not only look different than monomodally styled novels, they must be interpreted using entirely different strategies because of the necessity of combining information from different modes, and because of the frequent introduction of new rules for reading. While many multimodal novels open with traditional reading rules – beginning at the top left, reading from left to right, and proceeding from the top of the left page to the bottom of the left page before processing elements given on the right page of a spread – they often change these rules at least once in the novel, some doing so more than once.

A Problem – Monomodal Interpretive Strategies for Multimodal Novels

Though a great deal has been written about these novels, paradigmatic and methodological problems hobble the analysis of multimodality in the novel. Without agreement among scholars on the best ways to process such novels, scholars tend to perform a literary analysis of the verbal content of the multimodal novel, and then use that interpretation to decode nonverbal textual elements. Other scholars focus too narrowly on a few nonverbal details of multimodal novels, neglecting a thorough analysis in the process. Current methods of literary interpretation do not equip us to incorporate
observations about these multimodal elements into a literary analysis, and it is this gap in our analytical toolkit that we must cross disciplinary boundaries to remedy.

A systematic method is needed for interpreting these increasingly common multimodal texts, and in this dissertation I offer a new method for close reading the multimodal novel that could also be used to explore nonverbal aspects of standard novels that have previously been overlooked. Though this method may not always provide evidence that multimodal textual elements are active participants in narrative signification, an awareness of the many dimensions of textuality will equip scholars to recognize instances in which there is something interesting or productive in the multimodal aspects of a novel.

In this dissertation, I propose a new method for systematic analysis of the multimodal novel. This method can also be applied to monomodally styled novels. I have developed a descriptive taxonomy of textual elements in multimodal novels, along with specific steps for analysis. Drawing upon concepts of design, textuality, multimodality, and literary analysis from Book Design, Typography, New Media Studies, Narratology, and Reader-Response Theory, this taxonomy enables the user to take a complete survey of textual elements in a given text, identifying the elements that occur most frequently or that seem to play important roles in the text. This initial survey ensures that the user does not artificially separate modal analysis into several separate steps, instead offering a global view of the text before the user identifies the most important devices and patterns for each specific novel.

After abstracting the most notable elements of the text, the user develops a working theory of how the most used elements might be working in the semiotic system
of an individual novel. The user then re-concretizes these key elements, observing how they seem to function within the context of the page, and in relation to other textual elements. At this point, these observations are used to create a literary analysis of how textual elements work to convey narrative information, within the narrative structure of the novel.

Through the application of this new method for interpreting the multimodal novel to three representative texts, I demonstrate that using grounded observation with a literary analysis allows users to observe textual detail and mechanisms in the multimodal novel that would be missed using a traditional literary analysis. Each reading demonstrates that using the method yields a view of the ways multimodal novels make meaning, and also that the method with the second step of re-concretizing textual elements within their original context, observing their relationships with each other in creating meaning, is flexible enough to be used to analyze many different kinds of multimodal novels. Using a descriptive taxonomy directs the user’s attention to specific aspects of the novel, preventing them from settling on one aspect of the text to the exclusion of other information about the textual elements.

The second step ensures a thorough observation of the possibly meaningful roles played by the novel’s layout and the arrangement of textual elements within that space. With the second step, the kinds of connections between textual elements become visible, which permits the study of reading paths throughout the novel. This is crucial because, though reading path may seem to be standardized in most novels, in the multimodal novel it is often used productively to amplify narrative ideas or to embody key ideas.
Definition of Terms

The print novel has long been considered monomodal, and critical literary reading strategies have followed this definition. However, our cultural and readerly paradigms about print as a medium have shifted as digital media throw the affordances and constraints of print into relief, as well as its multiple modalities. We can see that the idea of print as a transparent medium, a monomodally signifying medium, ignores not only many narrative devices in that medium, but the modalities of the medium itself: verbal/typographic, spatial, temporal, and visual.

While the novel as a genre has a dominant set of modal conventions designed to foreground the linguistic/typographic aspect of the page while rendering less visible its graphic, spatial, and even typographic organization – encouraging the reader to focus on the content expressed in one modality and to ignore the design choices that go into expressing those ideas – some novels deploy multimodal signifying strategies in an overt manner, foregrounding the multimodal qualities/other signifying levels of print (typographic, spatial, and graphic) and consciously utilizing the conventions which for years helped print to seem to be a monomodal medium, a medium of pure linguistic content without graphic or spatial levels. These novels accentuate and play with the traditional conventions of print as a medium, in part, to illustrate that print is not a monomodal medium.

Though the concept of modes and multimodality are used in many of the works of scholarship I consulted from narratology to new media, the best definition comes from The New London Group’s “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies.” In many ways, the multimodal novel interrogates “mere literacy” and monomodal modes of representation...
through its restructuring of the reader’s experience of novelistic textuality. Instead of foregrounding the linguistic content of the novel with the emphasis of the traditional text block as an uninterrupted stream of verbal modal content, the multimodal novel presents readers with ideas given in multiple modes, multimodal sentences composed of words, images, symbols, use of white space, and morphing of layout conventions, requiring readers to decode elements of a complete thought in multiple modes to understand the events of the story. The effect is often jarring, resulting in new paradigms of what it means to read and the experience of navigating a text. The idea that the novel is monomodal is destabilized, replaced by a concept of unruly, fluid textual space and elements that can be arranged in unexpected ways within it.

A mode is a semiotic category for meaning-making. The New London Group identifies five global categories for modes, including linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial. Each medium, or site of appearance of a text, affords the use and blending of different modes and modal combinations, or multimodal elements. In this dissertation, I will reference modalities that are combined to create the organizational structures and textual elements of the novel, a medium-specific genre with an established set of medium specific conventions of use for modal combinations and overall design. The modes at work in the novel are verbal/linguistic/typographic, visual, spatial, and temporal.

There are key features of books that I also reference a great deal, including basic components of the page and spread from book design and typography. These include the names of various quadrants of the page, including the traditional text block, the head, the foot, the gutters of white space running down the middle of a two-page spread, and the margins (which are at times used as sidebars in multimodal novels, meaning that they are
used as a space for giving information and textual elements outside of the traditional text block)

Figure 1 – Diagram of A Two-Page Spread in a Standard Novel
The Solution – A New Interpretive Method for the Multimodal Novel

In order to determine whether nonverbal textual elements actively contribute to narrative meaning in the multimodal novel, my study applies a new interpretive method to three exemplary multimodal novels. I identify key textual elements using a global taxonomical survey, developing hypotheses about how these textual elements might function within the novel. Then, I review the text to identify key points where these textual elements appear, noting both their context in the design of the page, and their relationships with other elements on the page. Finally, I test whether they seem to actively contribute narrative detail in the novel, or whether they seem to be used more passively.

This project argues that current methods of literary analysis cannot adequately address multimodal components of the novel, and because of this, a new method is necessary to analyze and understand the emerging genre of the multimodal novel, as well as to measure and delineate the ways nonverbal elements function in these new novels. Applying this new method to multimodal novels results in a large data set, from which complex patterns can be observed in the ways traditional novelistic elements and innovative textual elements make meaning. A literary analysis based on such a detailed and thorough study of the elements at work in the multimodal novel is able to define aspects of the text operating at the intersections of design, layout, and textual elements. These observations cannot be derived from a traditional literary analysis because there is no language for observing, or assessing the narrative contributions of nonverbal modal elements, as well as of design and layout. Interpreting nontraditional aspects of the novel according to a monomodal initial interpretation of the verbal content conscripts
observation of the workings of the multimodal novel to the extent that most of its innovative and unique qualities will be completely overlooked.

Outline of Dissertation

In my first chapter, I review analyses of the multimodal novel from scholars who apply narratology, new media theory, and typography/design principles to the unique situations presented by these texts. The multimodal novel calls for different analytical techniques than those used in traditional literary analysis. Not only do multimodal novels often reference multiple types of media and tell stories that involve the themes of medium and representation, they communicate these ideas through verbal, visual, spatial, temporal, and other means. The result is a cross-disciplinary body of scholarship on the subject, with contributions from book design/typography, media studies, new media, literary studies, comics studies, and multiple branches of narratology. While much of the work in these different areas offer similar observations on the multimodal novel, there is little critical consensus on which tools to use in analyzing these texts, calling for a common methodology.

My second chapter addresses the problem posed by a lack of systematic methods of analyzing the multimodal novel. A successful analytical method should facilitate the examination of the novel as a whole, avoiding the bifurcated method used by many scholars in which verbal elements of the novel are prioritized the highest in analysis, and all other modal elements are interpreted according to what the verbal content alone communicates. I develop this method in the third chapter to answer the question of whether nonverbal modal elements contribute significantly to narrative meaning in the novel, addressing the degree to which each element contributes, and whether this
contribution is integral to the communication of story or is extradiegetic, performing a less active role such as structuring the flow of the text. To this end, I review several methodological tools that may be useful in the analysis of the multimodal novel, outlining how cross-disciplinary tools might be combined in a single methodology to address the specific features of the multimodal novel. I present concepts from New Media, Narratology, and Book Design/Typography and propose a method combining the most useful features of the three areas. Chapter three explains the development of the descriptive taxonomy and lays out my methodology for using my taxonomy to analyze multimodal novels.

My fourth chapter gives readings of three representative multimodal novels. I selected these texts because they were literary as well as visibly multimodal. These qualifications rule out samples that, while containing multimodal elements, are not examples of this emerging genre, such as artist’s books, graphic novels (in a genre of their own, with their own separate media history), and illustrated editions of novels, as well as gimmicky popular novels.

Reading One – In the first reading, *The Fourth Treasure*, I demonstrate several ways that multimodal form functions to draw attention to the narrative themes of the novel. These include the key theme of learning to read, for the reader must learn to navigate the spatial construct, a new language, new concepts, and the fragmentary narrative.

Reading Two – With the second reading, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, I discuss the challenges posed by less active multimodal elements, and explore the way layout
constructs the reading path, including the ways reading paths can offer an additional level of meaning in multimodal novels.

Reading Three – In the final reading, *House of Leaves*, I discuss problems posed by multimodal novels that do not repeat layout patterns or use multimodal elements in a fixed way. With this reading, I explore the necessity of analyzing both the textual elements and their contexts and relationships to one another within layouts.

Chapter Five is a global discussion of my findings, including the discoveries about how multimodal textual elements function in each of the three novels I analyzed. I also discuss the limitations of using a descriptive taxonomy and my decision to add a reconcretizing step to the analysis of multimodal textual elements. My study focuses on applying a new method for analyzing how elements of multimodal novels work together to convey information and structure the narrative. The goal of this study is to determine whether nonverbal textual elements contribute to how multimodal novels tell a story, and to determine the level of activity of these textual elements in the communication of narrative information.

This project argues for a more systematic method of analyzing multimodal novels, a necessary change from methods that begin with interpretation of the verbal modal content and then an analysis of nonverbal modal textual elements through the limited frame of the verbal content, an ineffective way of analyzing multimodal novels because it does not take the composition as a unified whole text, but instead as a traditional novel with pictures. My findings show that the textual elements of multimodal novels create meaning through complex interactions that would not be observable using a monomodal
interpretive method. This is why using my method is essential to an interpretation of multimodal novels, beginning with the taxonomy to focus the user’s attention on specific levels of a text, identifying specific textual elements, and then focusing on whether meaning is made through their arrangement in a specific layout, or their relationships. A monomodal interpretation misses the larger concept of how these novelistic systems work, and the two-step verbal and then visual analysis misses meaning made through an element’s context and relationships.

Using my taxonomy, I discover that identifying textual elements and examining their place in the narrative structure was not enough for an accurate understanding of the individual systems at work in each novel. Understanding the multimodal novel requires both the abstraction of key elements, which are textual elements we can identify, and the re-contextualization of these elements through a second step – observing the context in which the elements appear on the page, within a layout, as a singular instance or a series of such instances in the novel, and also their position, hierarchy, and whether they precede, follow, or interrupt other elements. These textual systems would be invisible without the initial taxonomic survey to identify key elements, and the larger systems would be missed without the second re-concretizing step. This addition of a second step resulted in a method of analysis that, while time-consuming, yielded a much larger data set and a much deeper, richer literary analysis of each multimodal novel than what would have been possible with a traditional literary analysis or an interpretation of how the words and the images made meaning in the multimodal novel. The structures of the multimodal novel became clear through these readings, proving the effectiveness of this new method of interpretation.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Analyzing the Multimodal Novel Multimodally

In the work to date on the multimodal novel, few studies address nonverbal textual elements. The studies that do address multimodal elements in their analysis of these novels neglect to consider these elements part of the immediate narrative. Because they begin with an interpretation of the verbal content alone, they ignore possible relationships between the verbal, visual, temporal, and spatial modes in the initial analysis, taking nonverbal modal elements into account only after a traditional narrative interpretation of the verbal elements. This method of analysis is problematic because it creates a two-step interpretive process in which only a portion of the text is analyzed, and then the interpretation of all other textual elements must follow from that initial, partial interpretation. Multimodal novels communicate narrative information through textual elements in multiple modes. These textual elements are sometimes tightly integrated units of the narrative, while in other novels, they may play a less overt role in communicating narrative information. Regardless of their level of activity in communicating narrative, when an interpretive method categorically divides a novel into a two-step process wherein one group of elements is interpreted according to an early partial interpretation, many aspects of textual meaning are distorted or missed entirely because of the limitation of scope created with the first interpretation. Approaches to reading the multimodal novel tend to read the verbal mode as a separate and dominant
aspect of the work, the governing feature of narrative, and the sole location of narrative meaning.

To offer an alternative to these practices that will be more aptly suited to multimodal practices in the novel, I have reviewed interpretations of the multimodal novel, identifying common problems that recur in approaches to multimodal interpretation as well as strengths worth extending or incorporating into a new reading methodology. I have also identified four common approaches or schools of thought. From these readings, I have identified techniques with which the print novel might be read multimodally, synthesizing the most useful concepts from these fields in a new reading methodology.

**Literature Review**

This literature review will begin with an overview of current approaches to the multimodal novel before identifying promising tools for multimodal reading from several disciplines. These areas of focus approach the unique set of issues involved in reading multimodal elements in the novel in strikingly different ways and are drawn from several distinct disciplines, including narratology from literary studies, new media theory, and textual design theory (including book design, new media design, and typographic style).

Though novels with multimodal elements are a rising trend, few critical readings incorporate the roles played by these elements or their potential contributions to the traditional verbal narrative. Contemporary approaches to reading multimodal elements as part of the narrative structure of the novels have been impressionistic and asystematic.¹

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¹ Wolfgang Hallet approaches the multimodal novel in an asystematic way, unevenly tacking together sections of traditional literary criticism with sections in which he addresses multimodal elements in the novels.
often interpreting theories of multimodal textual practices from new media too vaguely,\(^2\) using overly general rules for reading multimodal elements alongside verbal content in
texts which has been offered by comic book theory,\(^3\) or reducing the textual system to a
remediation of the characteristics of digital textualities.\(^4\)

**Current Approaches to Interpreting Multimodal Novels –
Parallel Single-Mode Analyses, Textual Design, and Technotextuality**

Recent work is far from unified in attempting to define or discuss the inner
workings of a narrative system with multiple modalities. Scholarly work on
multimodality in the novel is limited both by lack of shared theories or methods and in a
lack of awareness of other work on the subject. While The Hamburg Group\(^5\) has offered
the beginning of a discourse on the multimodal novel, other approaches are so disparate,
there is little common ground for the discussion, let alone for a methodology.

Much of the scholarship to date on the multimodal novel examines how elements
work in isolation, abstracted from the narrative system and interpreted as somehow
separate from the whole of the narrative. In addition, scholars often place multimodal
elements in binary opposition to verbal content, problematically breaking the narrative
content into two semiotic systems that take on parallel but separate meanings in the space

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\(^2\) Hallet defines New Media terms in a vague manner, and his ensuing application of his definitions of the
concepts the concepts is also too vague to offer specific observations.

\(^3\) Scholars attempting to apply principles of word and image based on Scott McCloud, *Understanding
Comics* often fail to either unpack the theoretical ideas undergirding McCloud’s methods, or fail to adjust
these methods to the medium and genre specific contexts they are working in, greatly limiting the scope of
their observations of how verbal, spatial, visual, and temporal elements work in various textual situations.

\(^4\) In focusing solely on observing the mark of the digital in multimodal print texts, N. Katherine Hayles in
*Writing Machines*, Marie Laure-Ryan, and Jessica Pressman miss the larger discussion of multimodal
textualities across media.

\(^5\) The Hamburg Group consists of several scholars who focus on intermediality. The group includes
Wolfgang Hallet, Werner Wolf, and Silke Horstkotte.
Many scholarly works on the novel view nonverbal textual elements as oddities rather than as one element of an integrated semiotic system.

Instead of conceptualizing nonverbal multimodal elements and verbal textual content as separate aspects of the text which must be puzzled out in isolation from one another, it is more useful to think of them as signifying elements unified by their appearance on the page. The idea of the novel as a system unifies both multimodal and standard elements. This concept facilitates interpretation of how textual elements contribute to narrative effect in two ways: first through spatiotemporal relationships – because the different kinds of elements are all placed together in the space of the page, and second, through their participation in the novel’s genre conventions. After reviewing current scholarship on multimodal novels, I have identified three common approaches to interpreting multimodal novels.

**Parallel Monomodal Interpretation, or “Word Vs. Image” – Sillars, Hallet, and Gibbons**

While many studies of contemporary literature include novels that would be considered multimodal, most apply traditional literary critical methods, ignoring content in modes other than the verbal. This leaves only a handful which attempt to craft a method specifically for interpreting the multimodal novel.

Scholars approaching the multimodal novel from a traditional literary background often begin their analysis of the text with an interpretation of the traditional verbal content. After establishing the novel’s key themes and concepts, these analyses typically take a second reading of the text, applying their knowledge of the themes and tropes expressed in the verbal content to the task of interpreting the other modal elements (visual, spatial, temporal, and other elements included in the text). Three scholars
working with the parallel monomodal interpretive method offer distinctly different insights, each taking the method in a slightly different direction.

Though Stuart Sillars’ essay “The Illustrated Short Story” deals with short fiction in popular magazines, not the multimodal novel, he sets out to craft a typology to deal with many of the same issues scholars writing about the multimodal novel grapple with. He finds Roland Barthes’ concepts of two key relationships between word and image – that of the anchor and the relay – to be the best tools for describing the relationships at work in a multimodal narrative. Although interpreting one modal element in relation to another is a necessary move toward reading multimodally, Sillars finds more examples of the anchor relationship, (or one modal element’s meaning being determined by the meaning of the other modal element), in his data set. This finding leads him to the conclusion that multiple modes in a single text create a dual text (72) and that other modal elements often occur on a different level of story than that of the various aspects given in the verbal narrative. Sillars splits multimodal texts into two parts with two different potentialities and functions: the verbal narrative, and the separate contributions of illustrative images.

Wolfgang Hallet calls for a multimodal approach to thinking about narration in the novel with his 2009 article, “The Multimodal Novel: The Integration of Modes and Media in Novelistic Narration.” While he acknowledges that both narratology as a field and literary criticism have not addressed the concept of multimodality, a new type of novel has emerged over the last two decades, and it is observably different from what he terms the “traditional novel” (129). He defines this new novel, the multimodal novel, as a narrative form that, “while still relying to a considerable extent on the traditional
language of the novel, incorporate[s] a whole range of non-verbal symbolic representations and non-narrative semiotic modes” (129).

In Hallet’s system, traditional novels with elements in nonverbal modes can be delineated from multimodal novels when we look at how consistently they appear within the novel’s semiotic system. He explains that “it is the systematic and recurrent integration of non-verbal and non-narrative elements in novelistic narration that makes the difference” in whether we should read the work as a multimodal novel or a traditional novel (130). He goes on to assert that these elements are not paratextual or extratextual, but narratologically speaking, these elements comprise the world of the story at different diegetic levels, and that they are “directly articulated with the characters that inhabit them, their actions and their cultural environments” (132).

Hallet’s analysis helps to define the issue of multimodality in the novel and delineate its key components, but does not provide a systematic analysis of the visual and spatial aspects of these works in his explanation of multimodality in the novels. Hallet attempts to extrapolate an interpretive system that will fit every multimodal narrative instance, but his method falls short in interpreting the multimodal elements of the novel as information about the fictional characters that supplements information given through the verbal content. When that does not work, he creates a bifurcated strategy, first performing a monomodal analysis of the verbal elements alone, then interpreting the nonverbal content according to this conception of the novel’s major narrative tropes.

Though Hallet discusses the novel as multimodal, he neglects a detailed discussion of the novel as a medium. Instead, he takes media and mode in slightly

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6 He terms these “non-novelistic and non-verbal elements” including such things as images, footnotes, and so on (130).
different directions than many scholars working on this issue. For example, Hallet asserts that "the traditional novel . . . relies totally on the written word in printed form" (129) and that it does not signify visually, spatially, or in any way other than linguistically. Here, he makes the implicit argument that print, without nonverbal elements, functions monomodally—only verbally, not visually or spatially, and that the visual and spatial dimensions of the traditional novel cannot convey narrative information. He argues that multimodal signification in the novel is a new development (implicitly suggesting that the novel was once monomodal), and that this kind of reading strategy should be applied to novels containing images and other multimodal elements.

Visual, temporal, and spatial dimensions have always been part of textual discourse, as I argue, contributing to narrative signification. Not all multimodal elements in novels contribute the same way or to the same degree in the narrative. Instead, the contributions of multimodal elements range from passive to active in the textual system of a multimodal novel. An element is passive when it does not convey narrative information, but instead organizes or frames the text and the flow of the page. Active elements communicate essential narrative information in such a way that, if a reader skips the element, the story will not make sense.

The degree to which these dimensions contribute to narrative meaning varies from novel to novel, falling along a spectrum ranging from elements actively and overtly participating in narrative discourse to elements that contribute more passively, remaining in the background of the foregrounded verbal content. Novels with passive, covert multimodal elements have a design that foregrounds the verbal content, maintains traditional layout conventions, and strives to render the medium, as well as the visual and
spatial aspects of print, invisible (pretending at monomodality in an era of monomodal reading strategies). At the other end of the spectrum are novels with overtly multimodal styles that foreground the visual, temporal, and spatial modal aspects of print textuality and actively employ them in their narrative signification, using them alongside the verbal modal content to tell the story.7

Allison Gibbons takes another approach in “Multimodal Literature ‘Moves’ Us: Dynamic Movement and Embodiment in VAS: An Opera in Flatland” (2008). Gibbons argues that multimodal literature is a new genre based on earlier novels that included multimodal elements, though they did not use them in the same way. Multimodality is a new version of this old phenomena which has re-emerged visibly in the new millennium (108). Gibbons defines multimodal literature as “literature that utilises more than one semiotic mode in the expression of its narrative” (107). Gibbons, like Johanna Drucker and others, references “graphic elements,” but in her definition differs significantly from Drucker’s. Gibbons identifies graphic elements as “typography, graphics and illustration” (107) included in the body of the fictional text. She identifies a spectrum of multimodality in literature, much as I have, ranging from texts with less active multimodal elements to texts whose meaning relies as much upon nonverbal textual elements as upon the verbal content. This spectrum

ranges from using pictures in a merely illustrative fashion to a mediating form in which type face, type setting and images play a role in the progression of the narrative . . . toward the extremity of the spectrum are situated texts in which the presence of visual modality forms a more equal

7 Drucker, Mitchell, Bringhurst, Hendel, and others make similar arguments.
relationship between verbal and visual. In other words, the different
modes of expression are located on the page not in an autonomous or
separate fashion, but in such a way that, while these modes have distinct
means of communicating their narrative voice, they constantly interact in
the production of textual meaning. (108)

Gibbons’s concept of multimodal literature is quite similar to mine except for the
methodology she develops to reading it and, more crucially, in the way her account
positions image and text as binary opposites, a move that prevents the reading of the
multimodal text as a fully unified signifying system. Gibbons explains that she will read
the visual aspects of the multimodal text using “theories from visual perception and
multimodal research” (108), a strategy that splits the methods of reading into two
somewhat contradictory and separate practices instead of integrating these theories to
create a reading methodology that would analyze the different modal aspects of the text
as a single system, not as two separate semiotic systems. Throughout her work, Gibbons
crafts a method for multimodal novels by drawing together concepts from cognitive
neuroscience, new media theory, and theories of embodied cognition to interpret how the
reader might process multiple elements in the textual space, the foregrounded materiality
of the medium itself, and how certain reading paths are suggested in multimodal novels.

Gibbons begins her assessment of the multimodal narrative with the idea that the
modes must be read together, explaining that in novels like Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House
of Leaves*, “while modes have distinct modes of communicating, they constantly interact
in the production of textual meaning” (“Narrative Worlds” 287), a claim she makes in
several other essays. Immediately after this claim, however, Gibbons sets forth a
description of how modes interact in a multimodal novel that separates verbal content from other modal content, a move that implies that textual elements such as font, white space, visual elements, and layout are not narrative elements, and that their contribution to narrative meaning is not as significant as verbal contributions. While it might seem a good hedge to assert that not all multimodal elements of a text contribute significantly to narrative meaning, this statement implies that the verbal mode is the sole location of narrative meaning, and that other modes exist outside of the category and perhaps the world of the narrative. “One mode is not privileged, but rather narrative content, type-face, type-setting, graphic design, white-space, and images all have a role to play” (“Narrative Worlds” 287).

Despite her argument that the modes all have a role to play, and the implication that they should all be read together, Gibbons proceeds with an analytical method that takes the verbal as the semiotic anchor for the visual, and does not analyze other modes. She alternates between reading the multimodal elements of a text together and reading the modes separately, often reading the verbal modal content first in order to use this primary interpretation as thematic key to other modal activity in the text. Gibbons clarifies this point, explaining that in some multimodal texts, narrative meaning is produced “by the tensional differences between the verbal and visual modes” (“Narrative Worlds” 298). This shows how her method is at odds with her prescription of reading all modes together – instead of viewing narrative meaning as communication by many modes, she sees it as composed of a verbal level plus a visual level – two distinct textual dimensions. This ignores other modes and other levels of meaning in multimodal texts – temporal, spatial, juxtapositional, and so on, but she does make a good point in noting
that multimodal novels often use trans-modal coding – tensions when switching semiotic methods of interpretation – to create meaning.

**Textual Design and Imagetext - Mitchell, Drucker and Norgaard**

Many scholars cite W.J.T. Mitchell’s idea of the imagetext\(^8\) as key in beginning to think about how print works might signify both visually and verbally – multimodally. Much of the scholarship inspired by Mitchell’s ideas extends and modifies his concepts to craft tools for digital textualities or to call for new ways of thinking about the larger paradigm shifts brought about by the rise of digital media. However, several scholars whose theories use Mitchell’s concepts continue to focus on print narrative.

One of these scholars is the transmedia narratologist Nina Norgaard, who argues that adding typographical analysis to the critical tools available to literary scholars would be very beneficial. Citing work from the field of typography as well as several recent articles by Theo VanLeeuwen calling for a method for typographical analysis, Norgaard extends existing models and applies them in literary analyses, explaining that there is a need for typographical analysis of literary novels even when the typographical style seems quite standard, because even the self-effacing typographical style is a statement to be considered in relation to the themes and ideas the work expresses. In other words, typography is always a signifying aspect of a literary text – whether it signals textual conventionality (an attempt to render the medium more transparent), or whether it is overt in its role co-signifying with the verbal meaning it embodies. Norgaard explains that attendance to typographic style in literary analysis may change the way people conceptualize the medium of the book in a digital era:

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In contrast to the infinitely changeable textuality of digital media for example, people generally regard the book as a finished stable product, yet with the focus on the materiality of the book proposed, for instance, by the Gutenberg project and endorsed by multimodal theory, the stability of the meaning of the book must be questioned.

[This is] just a small corner of an as yet far from fully established field of multimodal stylistics which aims to combine multimodal theory and methodology with that of literary stylistics in an attempt to systematically take into consideration all modes involved in literary meaning-making. (‘The Semiotics of Typography’ 159)

The work of Johanna Drucker presents another approach to reading literary works multimodally. Although Johanna Drucker initially focused more on the word as doubly meaningful – as verbal and visual signifier – rather than on the use of different modes in narratives, over the past thirty years she has produced a varied body of scholarship attendant to the multimodal aspects of works in print, working on both the scholarly and creative sides of this issue. Her studies have included word-image relationships in artist’s books, the semiotics of typographic style, book design, and reading the word as both a verbal and visual signifier. In addition, she has designed and authored her own multimodal books.

In her 2008 article, “Graphic Devices: Narration and Navigation,” Drucker furthers the argument she has been making for decades – that the various graphic elements of a print text are functional parts of the narrative itself, adding meaning to the content they convey. These “graphic devices,” including punctuation, pagination, and
tables of contents, historically were added to provide easy access through an indexical organization and structure to texts that had contained a single unbroken stream of words.

Organization is not the only thing graphic devices have added to texts. Drucker explains that the devices added to structure the text “also carry rhetorical emphasis, structuring argument, creating pause, effect, and conceptual punctuation within a text. The hierarchy of graphical ordering and the typology imposed by size, font, and other features borders perilously close to semantic value” (126). Drucker goes on to emphasize that if these organizational graphic elements were to be removed from a text, the ‘story’ is now changed. Parts of it are missing. The graphic devices, so incidental-seeming they could pass as mere means to move among elements, turn out to have served a narrative function, were bearers of semantic value. The navigation function and narrative substance were one and the same, even though they were presented as graphic devices” (130).

Drucker also suggests that it may be useful to think of the reader as the means by which a text achieves signifying closure, offering one potential solution to the problem of how to unify the multimodal text’s different semiotic elements.

Drucker’s observations support the argument that textual elements in multiple modes help to carry the signification of a narrative. This is an important move because of the debate over whether or not to be concerned with the issue of narrativity for nonverbal textual elements. Narrativity is the medium-specific qualities that make a medium well-suited to conveying narrative ideas, or poorly suited. In the past, print was considered the prime medium for conveying narrative, while other media were considered non-narrative. While other scholars focus on the issue of whether nonverbal textual elements have
narrativity in ascertaining whether elements can function as parts of a narrative, Drucker observes that, regardless of whether a graphic device has narrativity on its own, it acts as a functioning part of the narrative because it is part of the textual system.\(^9\)

Drucker’s move away from debates over nonverbal elements and whether they have narrativity is useful in delineating between two different issues in multimodal analysis; first, whether the text’s elements have narrativity, and second, the very different issue of how textual elements perform narrative functions within a text. It is important to refocus the discussion of multimodality in the novel from the first case to the second because many discussions of multimodal elements in the novel become mired in theorizing whether different elements have narrativity, never arriving at the point of analyzing the novel’s system as a whole. A more useful way of theorizing the activity of these graphic devices is to place their contributions to the narrative on a spectrum, from elements which function actively in co-creating narrative signification to elements contributing more passively to the narrative.

John Cheever’s short story “The Swimmer” provides an excellent example of a multimodal element participating more passively in narrative signification. Cheever’s story has a very conventional design and layout. Every design choice has been made to efface the non-verbal modes of the story and to foreground the verbal content, with one exception. At the center of the story, the uninterrupted stream of text is abruptly broken

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\(^9\) “Textual System” refers to the text as it is on the page, an artifact subject to interpretation, regardless of whether the elements function in semiotically harmonious or discordant ways. On another front, I’m speaking of interpreting the relation of elements on the page in a mechanical/technical sense (at the level of devices, design, and layout, page hierarchy, reading order, and so on). This enables me to examine how the form and design of the text relates to the ideas it conveys verbally. The terms “textual system,” “narrative system” and “system of the novel” are not meant to imply an authorial or editorial intentionality, nor the assumption that all of the elements in the textual system function seamlessly or cohesively, because often they do not.
by a hard return, after which the story resumes with a slightly different tone. The hard return at the center of John Cheever’s short story “The Swimmer” is an example of a multimodal element participating more passively in narrative signification. The space created by the hard return performs a key narrative function – creating a gap in time, a break between the tenor of the early part of the story and the later part, the spatial interruption signifying a change in the mood of the story – yet when taken out of the context of the page, it has no narrativity.

If such a conventional device of the design of literary texts contributes to the narrative, then we must reconsider the assumption that nonverbal modes have less narrative impact, or always have less narrativity, than verbal elements in the text. Additionally, such a discovery calls for a re-examination of the implicit assumption that each medium has quantifiable, stable qualities that determine what uses the medium can be put to (technological determinism), and that certain media have higher narrative capacities that determine what kinds of texts can be produced through them – a medium essentialist argument. The debate over which media have narrativity does not have much traction when considering the situation of the multimodal novel. This is because the inflexible definitions of what each medium is best at doing with modes cannot accommodate the existence of works in a medium that use its affordances and constraints against the grain or in new ways. Multimodal textualities do not work according to medium essentialist definitions, which define print as a medium that primarily uses the verbal mode to convey its messages.

In many multimodal narratives, a nonverbal element could very easily be said to have narrativity, or carry its own piece of the story even when taken out of its context in
the novel, telling something on its own which we do not get in the verbal content, and something which moves the narrative forward. Regardless, this independent narrativity is not necessary in analyzing how that element functions within the system of the novel. This makes Drucker’s move to opt out of the debate over narrativity in multimodal narratology economical and wise.

Johanna Drucker’s work brings together tools from book design, narratology, and literary criticism to make a strong case that, not only is the printed word itself a verbal and visual signifier, the entirety of the printed text with its graphic devices has the potential to add meaning to a narrative. Unlike others working with narratology, Drucker’s analyses avoid falling into the trap of creating the dichotomy of “word vs. image,” instead using her textual design and narrative analytical skills to call for attendance to how graphical devices – font style, layout, and white space – contribute to narrative experience. Drucker’s work grapples with many questions we must answer about how graphical elements can be considered narrative, yet it leaves room for the development of a systematic approach to assessing the contributions of graphical devices to narrative meaning.

*Hayles and Pressman – Multimodal Novel as Technotext*

Other scholars view the phenomenon of the multimodal novel as part of a much larger cultural movement from the era of print as the dominant cultural medium to the era of digital media – an era of increasingly multimodal communication practices. With this paradigm in mind, this school of thought argues that the multimodal novel is a remediation of digital textual practices, citing the concepts of links within text, the
reading of the importance of layered elements which must be read together to collaboratively produce meaning – a networked model of textuality, much like a webtext.

This is a limiting paradigm, preventing observations of the workings of multimodal elements within the medium of print, or the different modal elements in the text as part of a unified whole. The technotextual approach to multimodal novels in print also tends to place each novel on a progressivist spectrum in which print is being transitioned or phased out for the digital. Focusing only on the mark of the digital in the novel obscures the fact that the print novel has been multimodal throughout its history.

The novel is overtly multimodal now in ways that are different than before, as it is situated in a digital and a multimodal era, but this increasing foregrounding of the multimodal and the medium of print also must be situated within the larger history of multimodal foregrounding in the novel, an area of study that has been sorely neglected. The multimodality of the contemporary novel is both old and new in this way, and these scholars make excellent observations that tell part of the story of the multimodal novel.

N. Katherine Hayles first addressed the multimodal novel in *Writing Machines* (2002), in which she studies narrative texts are making meaning in new ways. Her study focuses on print and digital texts that use multiple modes in innovative layouts to achieve various narrative effects. Of the print works she focuses on, she devotes an entire chapter to *House of Leaves*. Like so many other scholars working with multimodal novels, Hayles calls for a new paradigm for reading and new interpretive tools with which to analyze these texts.
Hayles finds the call to open literary analysis to “words and images” too limited in scope, arguing that we need to go far beyond this to understand textuality as it transitions from print to digital, and as digital forms are remediated increasingly by print.

The loyal opposition has been insisting for some time now that literary studies must expand to include images… the position that although image was of course important, the expansion of literary attention should stop there. Once image has been introduced into the picture, so to speak, literary critics have everything they need to deal adequately with literary texts. *This print-centric view fails to account for all the other signifying components of electronic texts*, including sound, animation, motion, video, kinesthetic involvement, and software functionality, among others.

(*Writing Machines* 20)

With this pronouncement, she calls out scholars who limit their studies to “word and image,” and who observe emergent textualities through the lens of a traditional literary, print-based textuality. Though she admires W.J.T. Mitchell’s contributions to the project of breaking textual analysis free of its monomodal paradigms, she argues that his notion of textimage and the binary analysis of the verbal and visual modes in a text cannot describe the dynamic functions of new kinds of narratives.

Hayles goes further with her definition of the multimodal novel, arguing that these novels are part of a larger, intermedial or hybrid class of texts – both print and digital – that foreground their own media and material form:

Literary works that strengthen, foreground, and thematize the connections between themselves as material artifacts and the imaginative realm of
verbal/semiotic signifiers they instantiate open a window on the larger connections that unite literature as a verbal art to its material form. To name such works, I propose “technotexts,” a term that connects the technology that produces texts to the texts’ verbal constructions. (Writing Machines 25)

Initially, the distinction between the texts Hayles terms “technotexts” and hypertexts seems blurry. However, Hayles clarifies technotexts as a category, and in doing so outlines a means of conceptualizing the relationships of different modal elements within the graphic space of either print or digital multimodal texts.

All of the technotexts I discuss in this book could also be called hypertexts. Hypertext has at a minimum the three characteristics of multiple reading paths, chunked text, and some kind of linking mechanism to connect the chunks. From the definition, it will be immediately apparent that hypertext can be instantiated in print as well as electronic media (Writing Machines 26).

With her 2006 essay “House of Leaves: Reading the Networked Novel,” Jessica Pressman takes N. Katherine Hayles’ basic premise that multimodality in the print novel is a remediation of digital culture, and extends it to describe a specific type of multimodal novel that functions as a central node in a network of interconnected narratives in multiple media. Mark Z. Danielewski’s House of Leaves as the object of Pressman’s study, in which she maps the tropes related to the issue of media and describes how the novel relates to a fan website about the novel and an album by the author’s sister, alternative music artist Poe. Pressman interprets the entire novel according to the theme of media and the process of learning to make sense of so many narratives across media.
However, in reading solely for this theme, many details that do not fit the paradigm are not included in her study.

One major detail about *House of Leaves* that both Hayles and Pressman neglect is the fact that the novel is available in four different editions: the black and white edition, the full-color or tri-color with blue, red, and purple edition, the blue ink “House” edition, and the red ink “Minotaur” edition. This detail is key to a complete interpretation of *House of Leaves* because both Pressman and Hayles write about just the blue inked edition, in which the word “House” is printed in blue ink and thus is highlighted or placed in visible contrast with the black and white text throughout the novel. Both scholars take this to be a remediation of the digital, interpreting the blue ink of “house” as a reference to a digital hyperlink, noting that readers can use the blue-inked word as an alternate navigation tool with which to move through the novel. Both note that the blue ink is like a hyperlink, neglecting the way that, in other editions, the word “Minotaur” is printed in red ink changes this reading, or the way that omissions and strikethroughs are printed in purple ink in the full-color edition.

In contrast to the associations blue ink might bring forth in the text for these scholars, of which one is the hyperlink association, red ink might be read as a reference to “red-letter” or key phrases, and could be interpreted as a reference to many kinds of early calligraphic works incorporating blue and red, or to the red-letter edition of the bible, the former a reference to the history of bookmaking, the latter referencing the history of the medium of print. Both could be read just as easily as referencing the materiality of print as a medium.
Hayles was one of the first to perform a literary interpretation of multimodal texts, but her project was always to investigate connections between the print epoch and the digital era. Her work has been pioneering and has advanced literary critical examinations of several existing schools of thought – particularly that of the importance of incorporating other modalities into a literary reading, but also digital textualities and narrative as it makes the transition between and across media. However, it has perhaps been limited or conscripted by its digital progressivist focus on multimodal novels as remediations of digital culture, leading to a paradigm that misses much of how multimodal narrative in print might be functioning in the rush to extrapolate how textual innovations reflect digital culture.

**Problematic Assumptions in Current Methods for Interpreting the Multimodal Novel**

Among current approaches to interpreting the multimodal novel, three problematic approaches recur. Each of these approaches was crafted in order to avoid a specific problem. However, they have taken too extreme a position to overcompensate for perceived stumbling blocks. As a result, they often overlook important aspects of the situation of interpreting a multimodal text, and offer tools which are too limited in scope as a result.

**The Verbal Anchor Problem**

The first kind of problematic approach to interpreting multimodally is something I will refer to as the verbal anchor problem. Roland Barthes describes two potential semiotic relationships between different modal elements in “The Language of Advertising,” he calls the first type of relationship a relay, and the other an anchor. Signification in a relay system occurs when meaning is circulated between semiotic units.
This type of meaning is less hierarchical in that one element does not determine the meaning of the other, and because the elements must be read together in order to produce a full meaning. However, with an anchor, one element must be read according to an interpretation of another element in order to complete the meaning of the text. One common approach to the multimodal novel does just that, using the verbal content as the semiotic anchor for the other modal elements in the text. Instead of creating meaning with all of the semiotic elements on the page contemporaneously, the critic completes a monomodal literary interpretation first, and then interprets the other modal elements according to this primary interpretation.

The assumption that the verbal mode is always the semiotic anchor in the text – or assuming that the traditional verbal content should be read as the central source or key to the meaning of all other textual elements – would at first seem like a logical move because the multimodal novel participates in a genre with a history of monomodal interpretive practices – though when we take a second look, there are examples of novels which would have benefitted from a multimodal reading strategy all along the way, right beside novels with more monomodal signifying systems. However, interpreting a multimodal novel in two steps negates the interaction of various modal elements to co-create meaning, instead making the verbal the explanatory set for all other modal content and phenomena.

Another form of the verbal primacy problem is understanding the multimodal system through a false dichotomy, oversimplifying the multimodal elements as “word and image.” This approach seems to have originated in comics studies, but it has been applied by many scholars to the multimodal narrative situation in a move that seeks to
begin a multimodal interpretation on familiar ground – with a literary analysis of the
verbal content – and then incorporate the next most visible feature of the multimodal
novel, images. The popularity of this dichotomy stems from an understanding that the
era of print as the dominant media form may be past, and that the image is now the new
dominant paradigm.

Hayles, Hallet, Sillars, Gibbons and others analyze multimodal novels with this
two-step process that separates verbal discourse from other modal discourse, conscripting
the interpretation of the other modal elements according to this initial reading of the
verbal content alone. This method of analysis relies in part upon the implicit assumption
that in a multimodal text, the verbal should be read as explanatory of all other content, as
it is semiotically more precise, whereas images are less concrete signifiers, and more
open to interpretation. The word-image binary can also be seen in digital progressivist
accounts of multimodal textualities, perhaps due to a view of multimodal textualities
through the lens of a media shift, from print media as the old dominant paradigm to
digital media as the new. This view places a tension between print and digital media at
the center of the conception of multimodal textualities, a lens that focuses the most
attention on issues of remediation as well as cross-media influence.

Barthes describes three ways images and words can be read together, and this
offers a model for ways we can read multimodal elements together in a textual space.
Verbal, visual, temporal, and spatial modal elements can work together in several
different ways. Two modal elements working together can function as anchors, with one
element explaining or anchoring the semiotic contribution of the other. A modal element
may also function as a relay, in which the juxtaposition of the two modal elements creates
a movement or circulation of accumulating signification, instead of having one element
as the semiotic resting place. This latter situation is closer to what I have observed and
referred to as multimodal functionality – in which semiotic signification is distributed
among elements that must be read together to signify. Also, in a sense, any composition
involving visual elements like print cannot claim to locate their signification purely with
the connotative and denotative meanings of the verbal elements.

The “word and image” approach is problematic because it focuses on two
modalities in a text containing many more than just two, and also because it creates an
artificial tension and boundary between the two modes, and with it an implicit tension
between two interpretive discourses: that of the verbal (literary studies), and that of the
visual (art and design). This reasserts disciplinary divisions and invokes two different
methods of semiotic analysis. In a way, the “word and image” approach appeals to those
new to multimodal textualities, as it suggests a Progressivist equation of moving from a
familiar method of analysis – the monomodal verbal method – and takes a single step
conceptually from familiar ground to new. Unfortunately, this binary creates one large
category into which all nonverbal modal elements then fall – “the visual aspects of the
text.”

Reading the verbal mode as semiotic anchor for the text and interpreting the word
as the opposite of the image are both problematic because they lead to dual monomodal
interpretations of the multimodal text – one monomodal interpretation of the verbal
content using a traditional literary method, then a second monomodal interpretation of the
visual components of the text, often interpreting the meaning in terms of the traditional
monomodal reading. In the case of the verbal mode as anchor, the scholar interprets the
verbal content of the text first, then using this as an interpretive key for interpreting everything that falls outside of a traditional literary interpretation. A second interpretation, based upon the findings of the first, is then performed. With this method, words and images cannot collaborate to create meaning, but instead one is interpreted in terms of the other.

When an interpretation begins with the perception that the multimodal novel should be read in terms of how images interact with words, other modal aspects of the text that do not fit the word-image dichotomy are ignored, and the emphasis is already placed upon the difference between modes in how they make meaning, instead of multiple modes as parts of a textual system.

It is more effective to interpret the multimodal text as a system, looking at how the elements signify in relation to each other, and not granting one primacy over the others purely because of conventions of criticism of the medium the elements appear within (Hallet, Hayles, Sillars).

**Digital Progressivism**

The second problematic approach to interpreting the multimodal novel is the digital progressivist approach. Digital progressivism, a component in both technotextual\(^{10}\) and new media multimodal reading practices, situates multimodality’s new popularity within the larger cultural context of the increasing influence of digital culture. However, in focusing on how print multimodal novels are examples of remediated digital culture, it does not describe, situate, or comment upon how the textual phenomena of multimodal novels and of digital textualities are developments and

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\(^{10}\) The concept of the technotext comes from N. Katherine Hayles, who defines and gives examples of the phenomena in her 2002 study of literary works that defy the rules of print as a medium, *Writing Machines*. 

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extensions of five centuries of print culture, or how multimodal novels foreground and flaunt their meta-awareness of the affordances and constraints of print as a medium. They also do not comment upon how print as a medium has always been multimodal, and in neglecting this point, perpetuate the chronological fallacy that print had these affordances before digital culture, and though it has become much more active again in the current digital culture, multimodality as a textual practice has not come about because of digital culture. However, overtly multimodal textual practices have increased with the influence of digital culture, and work in print more often foregrounds the constraints of print, often offering metacommentary on issues of medium.

The multimodal text is often viewed as a liminal territory bridging from the traditional print medium toward the digital in digital progressive works. There is also a tendency to interpret multimodal elements and functionalities as print remediations of digital textual practices, as in the works of N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman.

**Transmedial Analysis**

The transmedial approach is the third type of problematic method for the multimodal text. Transmedial studies strives to remove medium specificity\textsuperscript{11} from consideration in textual interpretation, in the interest of developing tools for interpreting narrative across media (Ryan). In avoiding medium essentialization and in the interests in developing tools flexible enough to be used across different media without medium-specific modification, transmedial narratology has completely ignored the important issue of how a medium influences the shape and expression of narrative texts. Though the tools it has developed are well suited for use in non-print, non-linguistic, non-literary

\textsuperscript{11} Medium Specificity, or Medium-Specific Analysis, is analysis that considers how medium effects the articulation of a text.
disciplines and in multiple mediums, these tools are too generalized to offer much insight into the workings of a multimodal novel.

Marie Laure Ryan is trying to develop non medium-specific tools for a transmedial narratology, specifically avoiding concepts from what she terms the “language-based” school of narratology – concepts which she argues were developed specifically for the medium of print and for the verbal modality alone, and therefore are not applicable across media. Ryan urges scholars working in multimodal textualities and narrative across media to avoid “medial relativism” – a view that we cannot compare texts in different mediums because they are fundamentally untranslatable from medium to medium, as each medium must be read in its own individuated language system, its own semiotic situation with specific affordances, and these make texts in one medium completely inaccessible in another, or in a different medial language, such as literary criticism and film studies or music.

She breaks narratology into two camps, the first based on Genette’s concepts, which she calls “language-based” or “speech act narratology” (Avatars of Story 5) and Barthesian “transmedial narratology.” Barthesian narratology, according to Ryan, was a transmedial project offering tools for interpreting texts across media, avoiding medium-specific methods. She views Genette’s work in narratology as a corruption of Barthes’ development of narratology as a transmedial project, and considers Genette’s concepts unsuited to multimodal and transmedial interpretation (Avatars of Story 5-6).
Multimodal Reading Strategies: Promising Tools in New Media Theory, Book Design, Comics Theory, and Intermediality

Multimodal Reading Strategies, a cluster of ideas from diverse fields, includes different techniques for the analysis of textual constructions. These range from basic print conventions to comics theory, book design, typographic choices, and the semiotics of textual design. This group of ideas offers promising ways of looking at the basic conventions of print narrative in terms of multimodality, and then investigating how these conventions can contribute narrative signification.

In addition, this group of ideas offers promising tools for new ways of analyzing novels with more traditional designs and layouts. Any print work then contains both verbal as well as other modal elements, regardless of whether it has a conventional design or a design emphasizing multimodal features, and any of these may contribute to narrative meaning. In this way, textual elements can be read according to a spectrum of potential narrative signification, from elements that do not contribute narrative information (passively signifying), to elements that contribute essential narrative information (actively signifying). Print texts are often designed to convey information without drawing attention to their visual, spatial, textual levels, and to efface the print conventions that are used to communicate that information.

The standard print novel is designed to render the medium and its use of modes transparent, foregrounding the verbal content over the vehicle of communication. These kinds of works use traditional design conventions in terms of organization and flow in order to present readers with a format they could navigate easily. This places the emphasis on the content given in the verbal mode, de-emphasizing the material and modal form of the text, foregrounding message and de-emphasizing medium. This
carefully engineered disappearance of the material interface has enabled the perpetuation of the idea that print is the most transparent medium, when in fact this is not so – though standardization of conventions, both of reading and of format, have made it seem this way.

Regardless of whether textual designers have the illusion of medium transparency as their goal, regardless of whether the designers use the medium to communicate in a way that foregrounds the status of print as a medium (less medium-effacing), or strives to make the visual and spatial elements of print invisible (more medium-effacing), these design choices use the medium’s affordances and constraints to structure reading paths, to show a hierarchy of elements and areas of the page, to suggest the narrative genre of the content being communicated through use of medium-based genre conventions (typographic arrangements such as poetic end-stops versus longer narrative form, tone as communicated through typographic style, etc.), and finally the use of design to convey a certain mood or tone for any work in print.

Book design starts from the premise that each element on the page has been chosen and arranged for a specific effect, for a specific rhetorical purpose which ideally would relate closely to the content of that work. Again, these design choices exist on a spectrum ranging from a design which strives to render the medium invisible (transparency), to a design which emphasizes the medium’s affordances, constraints and genre conventions.

Assessing the text’s semiotic system through the lens of design and layout concepts allows us to look at the overall organization of textual elements on the page, taking a close look at how these elements express something either clearly and simply
communicating the content (medium effacing) or how these elements communicate something about the content through their appearance and layout in a way that brings the medium’s affordances and constraints, as well as the conventions of use for this medium-specific genre to our attention (medium emphasizing).

Analyzing each element of the design of page and how this design relates to content extends Charles Kostelnick’s idea that breaking the text down into several textual levels (Kostelnick) allows the user to abstract aspects and specific elements of the text, identifying specific features and speculating about their functions in creating flow and meaning. This allows the analyst to analyze the rhetorical purpose of specific design choices. In using an overall categorizing schematic, the analyst can see how the elements in the textual system function together, as a textual system, offering specific ideas about how to read the rhetoric of things as basic as font choices and spacing, page hierarchies.

Sometimes, however, design is divorced from content. While these theories of design, layout, and typographic style, are useful for an analysis of how the text uses various elements to make meaning, we must be careful not to interpret textual design and layout as the intentional work of an author or even as the deliberate collaboration of an author and textual designer.

To avoid this problematic assumption and the temptation to tie it into literary concepts about authorship, I will read the texts as artifacts whole and complete as they are instead of researching the design history and attempting to situate interpretation of each text in its design process to determine the degree of collaboration and intentionality between author and designer, or between designer and text (whether the designer read the text, communicated with the author). I begin my interpretation with the premise that the
text is an artifact which can be analyzed as a unified signifying system as it is, instead of according to a process of distributed authorship and design. This basic premise enables me to encounter the text as a reader might, without discounting nonverbal modal aspects and design aspects of the text as insignificant.

Comics theory, a third approach with very promising tools which in my lit review will be part of my discussion of how the multimodal narrative in print has been discussed. Multimodal Novel Theories has among its advantages a paradigm for reading multimodal elements as a cohesive and unified narrative, and among its constraints its focus on the specific genre of comics and sequential art (which is a type of multimodal narrative). This focus on comics as a genre is limiting for study of the multimodal novel because of comics scholarship’s focus on the sequential form, which structurally has many differences when compared with the multimodal novel, specifically that the comics/graphic novel form has more overt temporal organization and sequential/hierarchical ordering than that of multimodal print narratives. Another constraint is that comics criticism, or the study of comics as a genre, has been developed for the interpretation of genre conventions specific to comics, making some of the tools and ideas developed for it too specialized for the comics genre to be applied to the multimodal novel.

Comics Theory also often glosses too easily over the intricate relationships between the multiple media its texts contain, focusing perhaps too often more on overall story as a unifying force within which all media systems are unified, when in fact more scholarly attention needs to be paid to how we can read similar looking genre and narrative structures (the function of speech balloons in relation to the images shown, for example) as functioning quite differently in the semiotic system of the multimodal
narrative. Focusing too much on the story and glossing over or eliding the precise details, of analyzing what specific textual and generic structures function to create a narrative effect is a major problem with comics criticism.

Another area of concern for me in considering using Comics Theory is that, although it offers tools which are easy to grasp and use in multimodal analysis, it bases these tools on theoretical constructs it does not rigorously unpack and examine as they work together. I have opted to follow the best ideas from comics theory back to their original theoretical sources for my study instead of using them as they are given through such succinct accounts as Scott McCloud’s. I feel that McCloud’s excellent studies in comics theory offer valuable tools which enable those new to multimodal reading practices to immediately grasp and apply fairly difficult and diverse sets of theoretical concepts – I advocate using such constructs for students new to the concepts, but not in studies in which one must be attendant to how the various theoretical approaches function together.

Applying comics theory unmodified to the multimodal novel is also problematic because it is governed by the paradigm of word and image – a system of textuality in which verbal elements are studied in how they relate to visual elements, creating a binary semiotic system in which one of the two modes modify the other in signifying narrative information: verbal modifying visual, or the other way around. Both are systems comprised of two modalities and based on a linear system of semiotic (additive) buildup of narrative meaning. While the multimodal novel can be structured to function this way, and while novels with illustrations or images can function in ways similar to the comic book’s semiotic systems, the multimodal novel often functions in less linear, less additive
ways in combining multiple modes. The flow of a spread or a page in the multimodal novel is not as precisely modulated as the additive narrative flow in comics which often use frames, which control narrative pieces and disperse them in a particular sequence, with specific pacing and a specific page hierarchy/reading hierarchy that must be followed by the reader. The multimodal novel remediates more genres and often plays with the frame of page, spread, page turning sequence, and the material bonds of the book itself in ways that the comic book does not.

What comics theory does do well, something I strive to emulate in my combination of these theoretical approaches, is to maintain focus on both form and content, on medium and message, in its analytical process. Form and textual devices as articulated through the medium of print are combined with image in an analytical technique that looks at the whole text, how its textual design combine with story told in multiple modalities.

The Debate over Medium-Specific Theory

There has been much debate over how much attention should be given to how medium shapes iteration, and whether medium-attendant theories lose sight of the unique qualities of the iteration itself. The medium specificity argument, which has further developed in the digital era in response to the work of developing a method of close reading and analysis across media, began with Noel Carroll’s call to forget the medium in *Theorizing the Moving Image* (1996). Approaches to incorporating the issue of medium into the analysis of narrative texts have varied widely, from new media attendance to affordances and the medium’s cultures of use, to the narratological discussion of
intermediality, or the blurring of conventional ideas of medial boundaries within and across narrative works.\textsuperscript{12}

There’s a lot at stake in the medium specificity debate for various theoretical camps, and for good reason. Accepting the idea that medium may have a shaping influence on message leads into the larger discussion of technological determinism – about whether a medium’s use is predetermined by its structure, or whether the users, cultural practices, and other social factors determine how it ultimately will be used.

\textbf{Book Design and Typographic Style as Part of Narrative Meaning}

As the book is the medium through which the multimodal novel is expressed, and due to the necessity of developing an awareness of the components at work in the medium, the design of the medium, the related fields of book design, textual design, and typographic style offer useful information for the description and analysis of the multimodal novel. Book design offers many useful ideas for reading the signification of the design of the text, from its font styles to layout and the hierarchy of the page. Richard Hendel discusses several useful concepts for analyzing how book design signifies alongside the verbal content it is conveying, including three main approaches to book design:

1. typography that is as neutral as possible, suggesting no time or place,
2. allusive typography, which purposely gives the flavor of an earlier time,
3. new typography, which presents the text in a unique way.

\textsuperscript{12} “Medial” is a German narratological term generally used to mean “pertaining to aspects of media or a medium.” I use the term “medial” in the same sense that Werner Wolf and Irina Rajewsky do – in the broad sense to indicate an analytical focus on issues of medium, and in the narrow sense to indicate an analytical focus on aspects of the text which can be read as being influenced by the system of that text’s medium.
Hendel goes on to call the first kind of design style “Classical typography,” the second “Traditional typography” which uses little to no ornament or decoration, and the third “Allusive typography” which uses embellishments and an unconventional typographic style to convey an impression. While all three styles are difficult to design well, Hendel remarks that allusive typographic style is particularly risky in book design because there is the chance that the reader may not take the same connotative meaning from the design that the designer does, or that there will be dissonance between the work and its style of embodiment in the printed text (12).

Robert Bringhurst’s classic guide to typographic style and issues of book design, *The Elements of Typographic Style* (Version 3.2) offers many useful ideas for designers and textual analysts. Bringhurst discusses the principles of good book design, including the idea that form and content should relate to one another in meaningful ways. Medium shapes what can be said in meaningful ways, and argues that we should be attendant to design in our compositions and in our interpretative practices. Bringhurst makes clear that font conveys a tone for what is said through it, extending the idea that the printed word communicates both verbally and visually. The word in print is both word and image simultaneously. Textual designers have known this for years, but literary critical practices focus almost exclusively on the verbal contribution of a text over other modalities, and methods for interpretation ignore the status of the printed page as a medium, as well as the typographic component as something which is both visual and verbal simultaneously.
Bringhurst’s accounts of typographic style and the analysis of design are very helpful in discussing how something as basic as typographical design carries narrative signification, at its most basic level expressing the genre or tone of a work:

Letters are microscopic works of art as well as useful symbols. They mean what they are as well as what they say. Typography is the art and craft of handling these doubly meaningful bits of information…When the type is poorly chosen, what the words say linguistically and what the letters imply visually are disharmonious, dishonest, out of tune. (23)

Johanna Drucker’s work in the areas of design and typographic style combined with her literary background provide an especially useful discussion of typographic style, layout concerns, and how they affect literary meaning. Drucker has a wide-ranging background in book design that includes the study of design in The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art (1996), and Figuring the Word: Essays on Books, Writing, and Visual Poetics (1998) as well as the application of design practices to the codex with many well-known experimental typographic and design projects, including A Girl’s Life (2002), The History of the/my Wor(l)d (1995), and Stochastic Poetics (2012). Drucker’s scholarship on typographic style began with the argument that letters have more than a verbal meaning – the way they look, the ways they can be arranged on a page also shape the meaning they make. More recently, her work has investigated the roles of juxtaposition and context on meaning-making in texts. Book design concepts are not usually applied to analyzing how style intersects with narrative signification, a gap my methodology for reading will attempt to rectify, bringing design ideas to a narrative analysis.
Comics Theory

Scott McCloud’s groundbreaking book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993) mapped out the graphic, spatial, and textual devices at work in comics, building upon Will Eisner’s pioneering *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practice of the World’s Most Popular Art Form* (1983). McCloud’s work organizes the principles of textual semiotics introduced by Eisner, condenses them into sets of easily applicable rules, and adds to these a psychology of reading and reader identification. The popularity of McCloud’s templates in multimodal analysis today is due to the ease and immediacy with which the sets of rules can be applied in an analysis of how the textual levels function to co-create narrative signification with the reader. Due to this ease of use, scholarly works attempting to map out the functioning of comics as well as other multimodal print forms use his work as a multimodal reading methodology.

McCloud’s work offers close reading templates for comic book devices, and these concepts are very similar to the ways multimodal texts function. Through the metaphor of comic book panels within the page, users can view elements on the page in multiple modalities as narrative units which can be read together as a semiotic system, albeit as a system with fixed positions or fixed functions for each kind of part. One example of this problem is the pervasiveness of a “words vs. image” dichotomy in explanations of how different modalities function within a multimodal work. McCloud also tends to assign words a range of types of functions in relation to a separate range of functions for images, a technique which works well for narratives in the comic book format, but falls short in describing the differently regulated textual operations of the multimodal novel.
Another major drawback to using McCloud’s theories in an analysis of the multimodal novel is that, in creating tools which can be comprehended and used with such immediacy, McCloud has combined ideas from different fields without much attendance to whether the concepts work together theoretically. This makes McCloud’s tools excellent as a pedagogical tool for an introduction to multimodal textual analysis, but a poor choice for more rigorous analysis when one cares about the sources of terminology and the specific application of broader theoretical ideas. It is best to approach and assess the ideas McCloud applies to multimodal textual analysis in the original works of the theorists the concepts in his work are based upon.

**New Media Theory**

New Media Theory, a field of study which has grown around looking at how the specific properties of a medium influence how something is communicated and what is communicated, offers another potentially fruitful approach to reading the interactions of textual elements in a print novel. New Media maps the affordances and constraints of old and new forms of media in order to make comparisons. Print media devices, functionalities, and cultures of use are becoming more visible as we begin to bridge from an era of print as the dominant cultural medium into an era of the rise of digital media.

In mapping these changes, New Media examines multiple kinds of translations from medium to medium, providing useful tools for analyzing how print narrative works, and how elements in different modalities might interact in the graphic space of the page. Pioneering multimodal literary scholars have turned to New Media Theory to attempt to explain innovations in the print novel as it coexists with the digital boom and changes in
the digital era, establishing a precedent. These scholars include N. Katherine Hayles, Marie Laure-Ryan, Espen Aarseth, Geoffrey Nunberg, and many others.

New Media Theory offers tools to describe ways digital media contribute to the shape of narrative, and to conceptualize how issues of medium influence textual effects and interactions of intratextual elements. New Media Theory also offers several potential approaches to reading multimodal signification within the unifying textual construct of the medium, a concept crucial to discussing the semiotic workings of the various elements in multimodal novels.

Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen’s groundbreaking book *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (2001) defines multimodality and explains its roles in textual signifying practices. *Multimodal Discourse* offers useful tools for reading the interactions of several different modes within a singular work. Gunther Kress elaborates upon the properties the medium brings to the message in *Literacy in the New Media Age* (2003), outlining a method for reading the affordances and constraints of a medium, observing their effects on texts produced through various media, and how different modalities are used within a single medium to produce a unified textual meaning.

One limitation of Kress and Van Leeuwen’s work as is that it reinstates the concepts of singular authorship and authorial intention with the argument that, because we now live in an era of digital production in which a single person can easily construct each modal level of a text alone, the text can be unproblematically read as an intentional and unified rhetorical composition. This step will not work in an analysis of multimodal
novels, which are still on the most part produced by several individuals – the author, sometimes an illustrator, the editor, a text designer, a cover artist, and a publisher.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s groundbreaking work *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2001) asserts that media increasingly remediate older mediums. However, Bolter and Grusin’s theories do not cover specific problems I would encounter in my reading of the multimodal novel, specifically how to interpret the narrative signification of these media reproduced in the remediating medium, and how to include the signification of more common textual devices.

**Intermedial Narratology: Genette, Mitchell, Hayles, Ryan, and Wolf**

Narratology offers an effective set of tools for delineating the levels and specific working parts of a narrative. These tools delineate specific narrative functions in a way that is useful to analysis of the multimodal novel, yet they are flexible enough to be adapted to describe narrative functions across media and modalities. Though narratologists have not successfully articulated a theory of multimodal narratology, several generations have approached the issue, and the contemporary areas of transmedial and intermedial narratology seem close to offering useful tools. In addition, basic narratological concepts, including narrative levels and how story and discourse work together, constitute a solid base upon which I can map the functions of multimodal elements within the novel.

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13 Narratology set a precedent in attempting to systematically analyze texts with multiple modes and texts in multiple media, such as comics and film, using concepts for analysis that would work across different mediums. Several scholars worked in this area, including Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Seymour Chatman, David Bordwell, and Mieke Bal.
Intermedial narratology looks at elements typically outside of the context of another controlling medium. As a result, there has been no study of how to systematically assess the multimodal construction of narrative in a work. This is because of disciplinary boundaries as well as methods of analysis that have traditionally been monomodal, not considering that a narrative might use modal signification patterns that differ from the conventions for that medium. Wendy Steiner’s groundbreaking work on the narrativity of images, “Pictorial Narrativity,” focuses solely on defining narrativity in painting. Her study has great applicability in determining the level of narrativity in a work that emphasizes the visual mode, but it has little applicability in looking at narrativity for a work that actively uses multiple modes, particularly when the work communicates narrative information in modal combinations that differ from the combinations generally used for that medium-specific genre.

Werner Wolf’s work looks at each medium on its own to debunk older narratological claims that media other than long narrative in print (fiction) has narrativity, but his work maintains an artificial delineation between media, taking each individual medium as essentially different from all other media – a method that ignores devices common to all media, or the ways that works in media don’t always fit the conventions of use for that medium. Wolf assesses the elements in other media separately, looking at each medium’s narrativity.

It is difficult to think about the issue of narrativity in reading a mixed modal system that operates as a whole, as a unified signifying system, as a narrative which is being simultaneously told in multiple modes. These problems include how to assess
related narrative aspects of the different pieces of narrative across media, as well as how to assess the complex ways modal aspects are combined, and how an element in one mode in a text can be interpreted with an element in another mode in the same text. Narratologists can agree that painting can have narrativity, and that print can have narrativity, but when an image is embedded in the text block of a page in a novel, the procedures for assessing the narrativity of images will not begin to cover the complexity of the narrative situation - a printed page which unifies verbal, visual, spatial, and temporal elements in a singular narrative situation, a singular narrative articulation. With this printed page, we find an example of a medium that does not use the conventions for modal combination typical for that medium. Changing the way these modes are combined in a given medium changes the status of that medium’s narrativity.

The narratological methods for assessing narrativity in print as they have currently been articulated in contemporary narratological theory only address the narrativity of print media used conventionally, novels designed to emphasize the traditional text block and the verbal modal content given there, de-emphasizing any visual, spatial, or temporal aspects of textual design by following genre conventions for the novel – the font must be understated, the organization of information must be what is expected, and any images must be ornamental or redundant, not central elements of the text that must be consciously processed in order to complete an idea. Current theories cannot explain or map out how nonverbal modal elements function (to what degree they function) according to the conventional paradigm of print narrativity and medium essentialism that focus on verbal modal contributions as the semiotic center of the novel.
How should we begin a narratological analysis, and what procedure should be used, when the medium is not being used according to the normal genre conventions and narrative information is given in multiple modes?

Should an analysis of a multimodal novel artificially separate out the elements of the text mode by mode, investigating first whether the image has narrativity, then which verbal elements have narrativity, and then try to then weave the two analyses into one coherent account of the narrative system as a whole? This does not seem optimal, given that these multimodal textual elements appear together in a single text, and given the possibility that they signify as a unit. Each separate textual element at work in a medium may have narrativity on its own, but this does not tell us how they do or do not have narrative signification together, when a nonverbal or multimodal textual element appears on the page of a novel in print, when they function together on the page.

Narratology has many useful concepts for close reading, for identifying and mapping the relationships of the working parts of a narrative in a single medium when interpreted with a monomodal reading style. However, a challenge in a multimodal analysis of a text is how to assess the narratological function of nonverbal textual elements of the work, and how to create an analytical method that allows for interpretive movement from one mode to another, and from one modal combination to another.

Some of these potential problems when assessing the narrative function of textual elements in multiple modes include how to determine how a visual element in the text relates to the text block around it – it could merely be ornamental and could have little narratological signification, it could merely echo a concept from the verbal text in an illustrative way, or it could express something which, when interpreted alongside verbal
content, has an additive signification function, contributing narrative information to the work in a way verbal content could not. Another potential problem with applying narratology to the multimodal novel is determining which narrative level a nonverbal textual element occurs on, and what this means to an interpretation of the verbal textual elements. Is an image given from a point of view? Is the inclusion of an image or footnote something we are to read as occurring on the level of fictional narration, or as something arranged extradiegetically, not to be read on the same level as that of the fictional storyworld?

Genette’s trilogy *Into the Architexte* (1979), *Palimpsests* (1982), and *Paratexts* (1987) mark the beginning of a new kind of narratological analysis – one which focuses on print narrative, but sharpens the focus to look at liminal printed, spatial, and graphic elements of the standard novel which, though they structure and organize our reading of the literary text, have been overlooked by literary studies and narratology. Genette has been referred to as a “transtextualist . . . a detailed analyst of textual transcendence.” Clearly, Genette’s transtextualist work on the devices of print text is a key precursor to contemporary conversations on interpretation of nonverbal textual elements in print narratives.

However, the conversation on how works in print signify has rapidly grown in other directions due to both the pictorial turn\(^\text{14}\) and the rise of the digital,\(^\text{15}\) both of which have resulted in

- focus on materiality of communicative practices, and

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\(^\text{14}\) As W.J.T. Mitchell discusses in several works, most notably *Picture Theory*.

\(^\text{15}\) The Digital Turn is covered at greater length in the works of Hayles, Bolter and Grusin, and Kress.
focus on medium and mode, on the affordances and constraints of medium. Today, Genette’s pioneering ideas on how the medium effects the narrative message are key precursors to current work on transmediality, multimedia, multimodality, mixed media, intermediality, and intramediality.

Placing Genette’s concept in conversation with later attempts to analyze print narrative and similar aspects of textuality – things once considered the marginal but which now are revealed as key structuring and at times actively signifying aspects of print texts – illustrates the enormity of the paradigm shift which has taken place in the last few decades as the concepts of New Media and the Rise of the Digital have taken root.

The ways medium affects message has become a major discussion across disciplines, including new media. Consequently, many of the key debates in contemporary narratology involve questions of how narrative is shaped through the affordances of a medium. Technological determinism is the less popular paradigm of contemporary narratology, though it has been used in the past to call for medium-specific approaches to reading narrative in mediums such as film and painting. The appreciation and evaluation of a work’s success as art was traditionally based upon based on how appropriately each type of art utilized the specifically delimited “key attributes” of its medium. Many contemporary critics focus on ways the material and technological affordances and constraints of a medium shape what kinds of things can be communicated through that medium, as well as how they are articulated.

The issue of medium-specific analysis is discussed in the works of Noel Carroll, John Guillory, and David Bordwell.
### Table 1

Comparison of Conceptualizations of Multimodal Elements and Functionalities in Print.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A movement in response to:</th>
<th>PARATEXT (Genette)</th>
<th>IMAGETEXT (Mitchell)</th>
<th>TECHNOTEXT (Hayles)</th>
<th>TRANSMEDIAL (Ryan)</th>
<th>INTERMEDIAL (Wolf)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Multiple Modes is Called for Because:</td>
<td>The whole text is considered semiotically meaningful.</td>
<td>The printed word is both IMAGE and WORD at the same time.</td>
<td>Novels in print remediate culture and forms of the digital, they are digital born before being printed, and they are digital literature.</td>
<td>We must distill and generalize narratological ideas in order to apply them across disciplinary boundaries.</td>
<td>Narrative texts increasingly blur medial and modal boundaries within and between genres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Method for This Approach Involves:</td>
<td>Applying concepts of order, duration, frequency, mood, and the voice of the narrative structure to analyze how medium and material form contribute to narrative.</td>
<td>Literary studies must expand to include images, and a semiotics of images, or Iconology.</td>
<td>Analyzing image, sound, animation, motion, video, kinesthetic involvement, software functionality. For paper-based narrative, Hayles looks at cutouts, textures, colors, moveable parts, different hierarchies of the page (as I do), and page order.</td>
<td>Tools for analysis must be applicable across mediums. Attention to specific qualities of medium is thus a danger to the transdisciplinary applicability and flexibility of the tools.</td>
<td>Applying narratological concepts with attention to medium specificity in a way that does not essentialize the medium. Intermedial narratology focuses on works which blur the boundaries of media and signify using multiple modalities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A second theoretical position, social constructivism, is a more widely accepted position in contemporary narratology for many reasons. Social constructivism is the view that multiple factors outside of the medium’s affordances and constraints influence how the medium is used and what kinds of things can be articulated through it. From a social constructivist perspective, factors such as the cultural and historical context in which a medium is used, habits of use by specific groups of users, and the conventions of use determine the kinds of texts that can be produced through that medium. As the search for narratological concepts which can be applied across mediums continues to grow, the question of how to read the role of medium in narrative construction,\textsuperscript{17} has been neglected.\textsuperscript{18}

When considering how we ought to read narrative, and to what degree the issue of medium ought to be either addressed as a natural part of narrative analysis or ignored in the interests of developing a unified narrative theory across medium,\textsuperscript{19} we can begin to address the issue of the proper degree of emphasis to place on medium in the analysis of narrative by asking a question. We first need to ask whether we see narrative practices as developing through the social and cultural use of a given medium, or whether instead we see narrative practices as developing as a result of technological determinism – narrative form and style as predetermined by the affordances and constraints of the medium a work is articulated through.

\textsuperscript{17} Its material affordances and constraints, its use history, its culture of use, its genres, and rules of typical use.

\textsuperscript{18} This issue involves both the project of crafting narratological tools that can be used to analyze narrative across mediums, and the project of crafting tools which can be applied across disciplines.

\textsuperscript{19} As Marie Laure-Ryan asserts in regard to the project of developing a transmedial narratology.
Next, we must evaluate the importance of an analysis of the medium’s effect upon narrative practices. Within the large collection of practices grouped under the title narratology, there are camps that argue for including consideration of medium in the analysis of narrative, and camps that argue for the exclusion of the issue of medium-specific affordances from such analyses. This latter group falls under two categories. The first of these camps argues for exclusion on the grounds that the focus of analysis should be on story characteristics common across media. This group asserts that a focus on medium in narrative analysis might lead to a dangerous drive to essentialize each medium (to develop a set of key characteristics at which each separate medium excels or specializes) and a secondary drive to evaluate the quality or success of an articulation based purely on its utilization of these seemingly arbitrary characteristics. The second camp argues that medium should not be considered in narrative analysis in the interests of developing a set of practices applicable articulations in any medium or discipline – a transmedial narratology.

Marie Laure-Ryan’s work represents a branch of narratology which blends traditional narratology with new media theory in an effort to develop a transmedial narratology, or a narratological set of tools applicable across mediums, offering a method for analysis of issues of narrative regardless of the medium they appear in. Ryan and others in the school of transmedial narratology argue against attention to medium in the development of narratological approaches, considering this a dangerous theoretical position, but her approach fails to account for how one might look at the affordances of

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20 Noel Carroll discusses this at length in *Theorizing the Moving Image* (1996).

21 Marie-Laure Ryan’s work best expresses the project of transmedial narratology.
medium and how narrative/story transmitted or translated between mediums are shaped by that medium.

A better approach blends transmedial flexibility with reasonable attendance to the affordances and constraints of medium, examining how story concepts, which are transmedial, are actualized in a medium-specific text. Because narrative genres have medium-specific conventions, attention to medium is very important. Analyzing the multimodal novel therefore requires not only attention to the interaction of the modal elements, but an awareness of how they are deployed with and potentially against the grain of various print literary conventions. Multimodal elements participate in genres that are often, but not always, associated with the medium in which they appear, such as the genre of the novel and the medium of print. This makes attendance to medium key to observing self-conscious use of medium, and also to the discourse developing through continuation, extension, and modifications of medium-specific genre conventions.

A new group of theorists known as The Hamburg Narratologists, most notably Werner Wolf, are developing a narratological toolkit which would be useful in describing many different kinds of transmedial and intermedial narrative arrangements. This new set of tools takes medium into consideration, but balances this with a focus on developing tools which could be used across media.

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22 Werner Wolf and others have delineated several types of intermediality – the most visible type of intermediality involving elements conventionally thought to be of other media appearing in a medium which would not traditionally contain that medium, a phenomenon also referred to as multimodality, mixed-media, and so on. The second type of intermediality involves one medium’s use of concepts and structures from another medium in a less overt blurring of medial boundaries (Musicalization 35).

23 The Hamburg Narratologists, as Manfred Jahn calls the group in Narratology (N2.1.7), facilitate a wide-ranging program of narratology including a series of books on contemporary narratological issues to an online guide to narratology. The Hamburg Narratologists work out of The University of Hamburg.
Werner Wolf crafts his own approach to a transmedial narratology in the article “Narrative and Narrativity: A Narratological Reconceptualization and its Applicability to the Visual Arts” (2003). Wolf surveys narratology’s theories and tools for reading transmedially to date, reviewing Gerald Prince, Seymour Chatman, and Monika Fludernick’s definitions of which types of works have “narrativity,” and which kinds can be usefully analyzed using narratology. Wolf selects the more useful aspects of Fludernick’s recent work and constructs his own system for theorizing and analyzing transmedial works – that is, works in mediums other than the traditionally verbal genres. Wolf’s schematic shows promise in incorporating issues of medium into a narratological analysis of text, though it requires significant modification in order to work in a multimodal print context. However, Wolf’s method does not include tools for analyzing multiple modalities in a narrative system – instead, it only works for analyzing narrative in one modality at a time, and only through the paradigm of medium as largely governed by a single dominant modality. Wolf’s method does not help in analyzing verbal, spatial and temporal elements simultaneously, a technique necessary for interpreting multimodal novels.

Although Wolf’s approach incorporates an innovative and useful consideration of medium and mode into a model of narrative levels, Silke Hostkotte argues that his method is insufficient in that he establishes a scale of narrativity upon which he assigns fixed places for various kinds of media, placing images at the lowest end of the scale – arguing that while nonverbal media have narrativity, they have a lesser degree of narrativity when compared with verbal print media (“Double Dynamics” 32). Because his model focuses on the narrativity of various media, it is hobbled by an implicit
medium essentialism – the argument that there is one thing that each medium does best, or that each medium is governed by the logic of its dominant mode.

In basing his concepts upon a traditional understanding of each medium as possessing essentially distinct qualities which create strong categorical divisions rather than overlapping, Wolf perpetuates an essentialist understanding of media, erroneously placing media in fixed positions on his scale of narrativity. In doing so, he creates a system of differentiated and isolated media without common semiotic units, subverting his own purported assertion that qualities and genre practices of one medium can be communicated (albeit in other modes), in a different medium.

While I also argue that other media have narrativity, I do not think that the degree of an element’s narrativity can be measured on a fixed scale based on its medium or dominant modality, because each multimodal textual system functions differently, and a semiotic element (a word, an image, a spatial configuration) in one textual system might have an entirely different function than in another. 24 Degree of narrativity should not be determined by the type of medium a semiotic element appears in, but instead by how the element is used in the whole system of a novel. 25 My argument therefore includes the requirement that the critic first take a reading of the textual system for the individual text, then observe how actively or passively the multimodal element functions to carry narrative signification within that specific text’s system.

24 A “semiotic element” is a discrete unit in any modality, occurring in any medium, which plays a role in creating meaning in a text. This element can be a word, an image, a sound, a spatial device, and so on.

25 The “system of the novel” should not be considered an intentional construction by author, editor, or textual designer, but instead refers to an approach in which the novel’s elements are read as potentially meaningful as parts of the novel as an artifact. The novel’s system involves the layout, images, font choices, as well as the traditional verbal content.
The multimodal novel requires a critical reading procedure that goes beyond analysis of one modality at a time, or structured by the idea of medium as monomodal. We must read the multimodal text as a functioning whole, a dynamic system comprised of semiotic or textual elements acting much the same way in the system as would traditional literary elements such as simile and metaphor to construct the whole of the narrative, instead of parallel but separate signification systems in different modes.

The commonly referenced “Chinese boxes” model depicting how narrative levels work does not explicitly include a model of how to read multimodal elements in a narrative system, or whether they can be read as having narrativity. However, the delineation of the basic levels which structure a narrative from the outside of the material work to the inside of the diegesis or story level of the work offers itself well to the application of the idea that any element on the page, if it can be read as conveying part of the story, could well be attributed to one of the diegetic levels of the narrative regardless of its modality.

This model’s flexibility makes it an ideal addition to a methodological toolkit for reading multimodal narrative. Beginning with the question of the basic existence of the multimodal elements in the text, we can ask whether they belong to the level of story – whether an element is a character’s or narrator’s production and thus belonging to the level of the diegesis, or whether it turns out to be an explanatory or illustrative element included by an extradiegetic and nonfictional editor, not part of the story and therefore an element with less active narrative role. In the latter case, however, it is important to note that this type of element would still influence the meaning one would make of the

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26 For further explanations of the Chinese Box model for narrative levels, see Genette’s *Narrative Discourse* and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, as well as Manfred Jahn’s *Narratology*. 
composition as a whole, a meaning produced in the element’s juxtaposition against the verbal portion of the narrative.

Figure 2. “Standard Structure of Narrative Communication.”

This framework enables a description of how a modal element on any textual level (spatial, textual, graphic) functions within the semiotic system of the novel – whether it functions extradiegetically or as part of the diegesis. This promising narratological tool allows me to take the information I have gathered with my taxonomy of textual levels – a medium-attendant reading of the elements present in the text – and to assess the role of the multimodal element in the narrative, assigning each element a level of narrative activity. In a narrative analysis of works with multimodal elements, the issues of medium and medium-specific genre need to be taken into consideration because the specific affordances of medium and its culture of use shape the text’s art, tone, and effects. Though narratology has begun to debate whether works in non-verbal media have narrativity, it has not yet put forth a comprehensive theory or methodology for reading multimodal works, an area this study adds to with tools and paradigms drawn from multiple theoretical and disciplinary perspectives.
Though the term multimedia has been used to describe texts in which other mediums are explicitly referenced and the borders of the medium challenged and blurred, it is not a workable term in my study. For my study, the term “medium” will refer to the material site of appearance of a text, some examples of which are a painting on canvas, a digital narrative on a computer screen, and a printed page in a folio. If we accept that the novel is a genre which has traditionally appeared in the medium of print, we can understand that no other medium can be incorporated into the pages of the print novel.

The printed page is the site of appearance for the text, which is the medium-specific articulation of the work (a story or concept which can be told through any number of different media). The novel as a genre traditionally has one site of appearance, a single medium through which it has been articulated, and in that medium, a medium-specific discourse, which in the case of the print novel is the literary genre of the novel.27 While narrative communicated through a single medium is not always the rule, as with a film accompanied by a live orchestra or a pop musician performing before a large screen upon which videos are being streamed, it is the rule for the novel in print because print as a medium does not incorporate other mediums in a literal sense. Other mediums can be referenced in many ways within a text, but in each case this still occurs within the medium of print. A printed page might include a printed reproduction of a painting, for example, but it cannot be modified to include a painting on a small canvas. In the same way, it can reference a fugue by Bach, but it cannot store and play back the

27 Though novels appear in multiple mediums now through the use of e-readers, personal devices, and computer screens upon which the printed page is remediated, print is the traditional medium for the novel as a genre, and it is the modal logic that dominates the organization of novels despite changes in their site of appearance, even governing most of the content of enhanced novels (novels incorporating video, audio, images, interactive layouts, bookmarking features, and other content produced specifically for digital media).
fugue. Even in the case of enhanced novels (in which print novels are adapted for digital media), all content included in the digital text is remediated through the digital format, and it cannot be considered a medium within a medium. In this way, print as a medium can reference other media through printed reproductions and textual allusions, but it is not a medium that can remediate them with verisimilitude.

This phenomenon is distinct from that of multimodality, as a medium utilizes several modalities as a matter of course. For this reason, multimodality is a better term for describing the ways print as a medium breaks the boundaries of its traditional monomodal uses. Print utilizes multiple modalities: a visual modality, a spatial modality, a verbal modality, and a temporal modality, but it does not utilize multiple mediums. However, the types of references within one medium to other mediums, as mentioned earlier, are a phenomenon increasingly referred to as intermediality.

Intermedial narratology offers many useful paradigms for reading multimodal inclusions within a print novel. In contrast to transmedial narratology, in which issues of medium are ignored, intermediality is a group of narratological practices which focuses on the analysis of boundary-blurring in media, including the instances of texts including elements from other media (Rajewsky 35). The issue of narrativity across media has been taken up here as well, but with adjustments to methods of measuring this quality. In intermediality, narrativity is one of many points of debate, not a central focus as in transmediality. Theories of intermediality offer a means of looking at multimodal novels through narratological developments which have begun to be shaped specifically to comment upon issues of medium and mode, and also offer a finer distinction between these concepts.
Intermediality discusses works which blur the conventionally held boundaries of medium (including multimodality), specifically discussing the phenomenon of how medium-blurring texts invite a comparison of different conceptions of media. This comparison makes the functions and borders of medium more visible, challenging the notion that media are completely distinct and unrelated to one another. As Irina Rajewsky observes in her study “Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality” (2010),

we should first of all bear in mind that in dealing with medial configurations, we never encounter ‘the medium’ as such, …but only specific individual texts…we must necessarily take into account that we always only encounter concrete medial forms of articulation, which moreover are characterized by a multilayered and multimodal complex mediality.(53-4)

Rajewsky goes on to observe that “media combinations expose – or at least can expose – the constructedness of delimitations of individual media”(60). She discusses a process of interplay between media which can occur in intermedial situations, explaining that “this oscillation per se, and any apprehension of it, necessarily presumes commonly held distinctions between the different media in play”(60). Rajewsky is careful to discuss media boundaries as historic, discursive, and subjective constructs, repeatedly referring to medial boundaries, distinctions, and functionalities as “conventionally held” to emphasize the constructedness of our concept of the qualities, strengths, and limits of media, a move to begin to correct the commonly held conceptions of medium
essentialism, the idea that each medium has a dominant modality, a natural strength, which its most successful products illustrate.\textsuperscript{28}

For my project, the definition of intermediality will include a focus on multimodal elements and on multimodal and intermedial functionalities. I distinguish intermedial phenomena from multimodal phenomena because both are observable in the multimodal novel. The novel exhibits both multimodal functionalities and the interplay of non-verbal modes.\textsuperscript{29} At the same time, because the novel is a medium-specific genre that traditionally foregrounds only one mode, the multimodal novel’s unconventional use of modalities and functionality makes it an example of intermediality. Multimodal activity in a genre conventionally thought to be monomodally functioning causes a foregrounding of the medium, its boundaries, its traditional genre conventions, and blurs the boundaries between media practices. For my project, intermedial practices include textual features and functionalities that blur media boundaries, challenge traditional conceptions of a medium’s conventions and practices (monomodal or medium-essentialist assumptions), and which foreground the medium and suggest a complication of traditional notions of its boundaries and properties. Within the medium of the print novel, multimodal elements and functionalities will include textual elements in multiple modalities, including the verbal, the visual, the spatio-temporal, and others, which work together to produce narrative meaning.

\textsuperscript{28} John Guillory, “Genesis of the Media Concept” (2010).

\textsuperscript{29} Multimodality is a specific subcategory of intermedial relationships that describes both multimodal elements and multimodal functionalities.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY: ANALYZING THE MULTIMODAL NOVEL WITH A TAXONOMY

Research Question

While the multimodal novel is becoming increasingly common, a systematic interpretive approach to the novel in multiple modes has yet to be introduced. Scholars have attempted to interpret this genre using various methods: using traditional literary analytical strategies followed by secondary interpretations of nonverbal textual elements, applying new media concepts to the multimodal narrative form, and drawing upon ideas from book design, typography, and transmedial and intermedial narratology. Though each of these areas offer useful tools for the analysis of a multimodal narrative, there is a need for a method that facilitates interpretation of the multimodal novel as a unified whole instead of as a verbal text plus supplementary modal elements.

I have chosen to study multimodal aspects of the contemporary novel in order to determine how they contribute to narrative signification. Instead of approaching the subject from a traditional literary critical method, I will first observe and analyze the ways narrative meaning is made in a sample of contemporary multimodal novels, and then propose a systematic interpretive approach to such novels. To achieve this, I will draw together the most useful threads from new media theory, book design, typography, and narratology in a new reading methodology, describing how I developed and tested the application of a descriptive taxonomy of textual devices in the multimodal novel. I
will define and describe several different levels or aspects of the text and the specific elements I have observed and collected in the taxonomy. Additionally, I will explain how the taxonomy might be applied to a new novel – including the importance of determining the degree of activity of each modal element in the narrative, and how it might influence a multimodal reading of the novel.

A variety of novels include multimodal elements and multimodal functionalities in overt ways, changing the normal layout of the page, using space and the arrangement of text innovatively, incorporating images and other material in nonverbal modalities. In selecting samples for my analysis, I have been careful to focus on mainstream literary novels with multimodal content, avoiding avant-garde novels and artist’s books because they have different aims, representing an entirely different genre than the literary novel. I also selected these specific works because I want to look at how multimodal features and functionalities might contribute to the literary novel’s overall narrative signification. Looking at mainstream literary novels is also key for my project because I want to study how a genre whose interpretive and generic conventions have been developed for a monomodal reading style – specifically the verbal mode – can be read in a new way, multimodally.

The novels I have selected for analysis are literary novels that incorporate elements in multiple modalities, and use innovative textual design and layouts. Two of my samples, Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* and Reif Larsen’s *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, are often studied as the most successful, and therefore the most important contemporary examples of literary multimodal novels. To balance this selection, the third novel, Todd Shimoda’s *The Fourth Treasure*, is a less well-known work with multimodal qualities and a layout that has interesting similarities and
differences compared to the other two novels. I found each of these novels important to my study because they are structured in an overtly multimodal way, but I included The Fourth Treasure thinking that it might operate differently than the first two novels, which are more widely studied examples of the multimodal novel.

Criteria for Selection of Novels

House of Leaves, a novel by Mark Z. Danielewski, incorporates many different layouts in its many sections. Initial sections shift between fonts, and begin to upset the ratio of the area of the page devoted to the traditional text block-to footnotes. From there, there are sections in which the traditional text block is split into two columns running down the center of the page, at times interrupted or re-oriented in the space of the page. Depending upon which of the four print editions of the novel one studies, the color(s) of ink used will highlight a different word or concept throughout the novel. For example, in the blue ink edition, the word “house” is printed in blue throughout the novel, but in the red ink edition, the sections about the idea of the minotaur appear in red ink. Not only is House of Leaves a novel that incorporates multimodal elements, it does so in ways not common to many other examples of multimodality in the novel.

Todd Shimoda creates novels in collaboration with his wife, artist Wendy Shimoda which fuse his prose with artwork she develops for the novels. Of their four collaborations, I have chosen to include the novel The Fourth Treasure in my study for its unusual layout and frequent use of nonverbal textual elements. This novel divides the page into two wide columns, one the text block that runs in columns down the center of the page, the other unusually large margins that sometimes include images and notes. The novel is organized into sections that are demarcated by full-page images, and
frequently chapters conclude or are interrupted by quarter-page images. The novel’s organization from page to page creates an unusual reading path.

Another novel that also incorporates unusually wide margins is Reif Larsen’s *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*. In this novel, the margins are filled with illustrations, pages are at times almost completely filled with diagrams or images, color printing is used in some places, and dotted lined arrows link pieces of the text filling the centers of each page with marginalia. I add this novel to the set under investigation because it uses devices and elements common to other novels in the set, and it will be fruitful to be able to compare the way they use these similar-looking elements across different texts.

**Method**

Taking a survey of multimodal elements in a large group of novels and developing categories explaining how each type functions is one approach to systematic study of how they operate in print narrative texts. However, it was immediately apparent in my initial surveys of the novels that similar-looking elements may have different functions from novel to novel. This concept of similar appearance and differing roles can be quickly illustrated if we remember Barthes’ study of images and words, “The Rhetoric of the Image,” in which he notes that modal components of mixed mode messages can function in very different ways from composition to composition, despite having a similar appearance – an image combined with verbal text. Barthes noted two major ways they can function, anchor and relay. With this and my initial observations in mind, I set out to develop a system of cataloguing and observing elements in multiple modes in the novel that might avoid the interpretation of imposing a fixed function upon visibly similar types. In order to accommodate the complex and potentially changeable roles of the multimodal devices at work in novels, I developed a descriptive taxonomy.
Account of Developing the Taxonomy –
Method of Developing Descriptive Tool

Though I was aware of many examples of earlier novels incorporating content in modes other than the verbal – Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis, *The U.S.A. Trilogy* by John DosPassos, Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X*, John Gardner’s *Grendel*, and several of Kurt Vonnegut’s novels – Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* included nonverbal textual elements in ways that raised questions about how multimodality, layout, and design in the novel as a genre works.

*House of Leaves* begins with a traditional-looking chapter heading and text block. A few footnotes begin to appear, and then footnotes in different fonts appear simultaneously at the bottom of multiple pages. Next, the footnotes begin to occupy more of the space of each page than the chapter’s text block. Key words are printed in color, setting them apart from the rest of the text. As the novel progresses, the traditional layout dissolves into kinetic style text (text that attempts to mimic movement or motion), visual style text (text that foregrounds a visual style or aspect), and is at times arranged in the space of the page in ways that call attention to the materiality and the traditional conventions of print novels. Appendices contain short comic book sequences and letters that also progress from a traditional layout and look toward overtly different look, pushing the boundaries of the page. *House of Leaves* as a sample contains the largest variety of kinds of multimodal elements and devices of any of the novels I surveyed.

I searched new releases and current novels to discover if many were using devices and elements similar to texts like *House of Leaves*, *Generation X* (with its inclusion of small images and its use of sidebar images and text alongside a more traditional text block), or *Grendel* (with its changing chapter head illustrations, a subtle multimodal
addition common in many novels that are otherwise fairly traditional in their design and layout). In deciding what novels to add to the data set, I set about cataloging all modal elements in print novels. I was attendant to both conventions of design and organization in overtly multimodal novels, and to aspects of design in more traditional print novels that minimize or downplay visual, spatial, temporal, and other nonverbal modal aspects of the text.

I assembled a large sample of novels that contained a variety of kinds of overtly multimodal characteristics. These novels included images, marginalia, and unusual layout and design features, among other kinds of elements. I created a comprehensive list of these features, noting which features seemed similar to one another in type, in function, and so on. From the beginning of my conceptualization of types of multimodal elements in novels, I had noticed that there was a broad spectrum of multimodal components, from those that contrast sharply to our concept of a monomodal verbal novelistic text (textual elements and functions that clearly fall outside of a traditional literary reading) – for example, images and experimental layouts – to those which are very easily missed because they are self-effacing (or elements and functions commonly found/present in many novels of standard design) – for example, font shifting, a common feature of novels throughout the genre’s history. Book design and typographic design manuals provided an initial vocabulary for naming these more common textual and bibliographic features, while new media theory provided a means of conceptualizing relationships between different modal elements and textual phenomena beyond the traditional print.

Before interpreting the narrative function of the multimodal elements in the novel, I had to develop a systematic account of the elements I would be studying, both to define
the object of my study and to begin thinking about how these elements were related to one another in appearance alone. Without narrative function in mind as an interpretive frame, and thinking about kinds of modalities, I compiled an extensive list of every kind of element I could observe in modes other than the verbal in these novels. I quickly noted that a significant percentage of the elements were types of text which also used another mode - visual, temporal, spatial – to achieve an effect in the novel. I listed every element I could find in each of the novels, and described their textual appearance in terms of their overall types, condensing my list into categories for these elements.

Though I already had the idea of reading in multiple modes in mind and ideas from book design and typography, and while these were excellent for describing the features of multimodal novels, the categories I had developed lacked a global system of organization. There were many examples of ways other scholars had organized textual description: Genette’s division of the categories into paratextual elements (outside the traditional design location for the verbal narrative content) versus textual elements (the traditional text block and the verbal content), Book Design’s exhaustively detailed account of the design space – the page, the spread, moving from element to element through the book, Gunther Kress’ use of the modes in describing the elements at work on each individual page of a work (temporal, spatial, visual, verbal, and so on).

Charles Kostelnick’s “Supra-Textual Design: The Visual Rhetoric of Whole Documents” (1996), offered a useful example of a systematic analysis of the visual rhetoric of document design. Kostelnick’s descriptive taxonomy of document design covers the global organization of a text. Though I found the main three categories of supratextual organization a good fit with multimodality in textual design of novels, his delineation of four categories of document design – supratextual organization,
intratextual organization, intertextual organization, and the extratextual level – were not workable for a multimodal analysis in that they posited that images and charts, as well as internal relationships of elements in a text, are not part of the global document in semiotically equal ways. This established a hierarchy of elements with the verbal modality and the traditional at the top, and problematically recreated the delineation of an “inside” and an “outside” of a text, with things such as images and graphs belonging to the “extratextual” level (10). Though I initially agreed with theories that posited the text had an inside, or a figure, or the traditional text block as the location of story in verbal content, and an outside, the ground for aforementioned figure, extratextual or paratextual elements\(^3\), such a distinction did not work in the analysis of various multimodal novels because it re-established the verbal as an anchor semiotically for all other modal elements, and because it assumed that the verbal modal content would always be the center of gravity for the narrative production of meaning. Taking a baseline survey of multimodal and textual devices in contemporary multimodal literary novels, I began the development of my taxonomy.

There are many potentially useful paradigms for theorizing how the parts of a multimodal text contribute to the semiotic functioning of the whole, including Genette’s idea of the paratext, Barthes’ concepts of anchor and relay, Herman’s storyworld, New Media’s modes, and Narratological concepts of extradiegetic and diegetic elements. However, Charles Kostelnick’s concept of texts having observable levels that contribute to the production of meaning function the best, offering a method with which I can take

\(^3\) The two main arguments I am responding to are Charles Kostelnick’s “Supra-Textual Design: The Visual Rhetoric of Whole Documents,” and Gerard Genette’s conception of text and threshold in Paratexts (1997).
I modify Kostelnick’s idea of using a taxonomy representing multiple textual levels to take a descriptive account of the various modal elements present in a text, extending these ideas with concepts from typography, book design, narratology and new media. With these complementary conceptions of textuality, I have created a taxonomy of features commonly found in mixed mode novels. After an extensive survey of novels with a wide array of multimodal features, I compiled a spectrum of textual features common to multimodal novels and developed my own descriptive taxonomy.31

In “Supra-Textual Design: The Visual Rhetoric of Whole Documents,” Kostelnick describes the “supra-textual rhetoric” of a given textual artifact. This article extends his description of the rhetoric of textual artifacts from the “inside” workings of the documents to the “outside,” or as he explains, “Attention to the visual rhetoric of the document, then, must extend to the whole document – its global framework – not only its internal workings”(10). This descriptive taxonomy sets out to give us a series of templates in the form of textual levels with which to describe the elements rhetorically arranged or designed in any document. Kostelnick’s taxonomy does not take a sustained close look, however, at the rhetoric of the inside of documents, a limitation I have to be attendant to in constructing my taxonomy.

Another problem with Kostelnick’s work that must be modified for the multimodal novel is that his is purely a descriptive taxonomy, not a functional one. Although Kostelnick discusses issues with good applicability such as functionality and

31 Appendix A.
authorial intentionality, the functionality Kostelnick observes here is between the supra-textual level (what Genette would refer to in narratology as the paratext, content traditionally perceived as supplementary and non-essential to the narrative), and the material levels of the text, and how these cues help readers understand and process a document. Unfortunately, Kostelnick’s model for textual analysis does not offer great detail about the relationships between information given at the supra-textual level and how it might more directly co-signify with information on the “inside” of the document. Kostelnick discusses how this supra-textual design helps us to see interrelationships between units of information or delineated spaces, sequences, and hierarchies within a whole work. In terms of how to begin to observe different modal aspects of the text as semiotically equitable elements of narrative, this offers a bit of insight, though it cannot be directly applied to the situation of the multimodal novel, in which textual elements in multiple modes must be processed in the order they appear in.

Arguably, Kostelnick’s “supra textual elements” and the concept of textual levels we observe are at work in multimodal novels, and this is why readers will prioritize verbal content over content given in other modalities, creating a reading order and hierarchy that relegates nonverbal elements and nonstandard layouts to the margins of a reading instead of marking them as key aspects of the text that must be processed simultaneously. If textual hierarchy is central to an interpretive schema, nonverbal elements and unusual layouts would be interpreted as supplementary or secondary in importance to verbal elements given in the traditional text block. Kostelnick’s model is therefore problematic for a multimodal interpretation because it is based upon traditional novelistic conventions of layout and modal communication, which multimodal novels do not always follow.
Kostelnick conceptualizes the page in process-oriented terms, or in how the page design suggests a navigation pattern. To correct this problem, I return to Barthes’ notions of the relationship between word and image in trying to map how textual elements on the page work in relation to other textual elements.

I must attempt to incorporate Barthes’ concepts of text-image relationships – text creating meaning through an accompanying image, image creating meaning through accompanying text, and text and image together creating a third meaning that neither element communicates alone. This approach will not work for the word as image, as it holds word and image apart. This may be a useful critique of much other work reading the page and the book at a later point, but it does not work in a conception of the page as a visual, dynamically active reading space.

Kostelnick posits three coding modes with which we can map the page.

1. TEXTUAL
2. SPATIAL
3. GRAPHIC

In trying to draft a more systematic descriptive model for a taxonomy suited specifically to the novel in print, I consistently drafted models that were somewhat similar to Kostelnick’s model, yet not as well developed in the organizational categories for elements that they described. In several initial models, mapping dynamic process functions of the page were combined with trying to interpret the degree of narrative activity of various types of elements through a global organizer or trying to use the conventions of the printed page for novels (graphic genre conventions – novel as type) as a global organizer. After testing other organizational models, I arrived back at Kostelnick’s model and the idea that using a modified form of this is the best way I will
arrive at mapping the graphic genre conventions of the page in the print novel. Genre conventions cannot be an organizational category because they encompass everything in the categories and create a problematic structure focused on whether a text’s layout and modal combinations work with the grain of medium-specific genre conventions or against the grain. This would be very detrimental to analysis of samples.

Kostelnick’s three categories work well for analysis of the multimodal novel on the most part. However, there is no account of text blocks in the model. Looking for Kostelnick’s justification for this omission, I found a seeming division in conceptualizing a document’s “global framework” and “its internal workings.” Kostelnick does not discuss or observe text blocks in document design because his work is concerned with document design, and also because he creates the further distinction of supra-textual levels as separate from intra- and inter-textual levels in which it seems he includes text blocks and other features comprising the body of the text. These divisions work well in enabling him to discuss the global framework of a print text as a visual language of the text separate from the body of the text (where we might be tempted to tie supra-textual features into an analysis of the content of the body of the text), which prevents us from making the error of interpreting textual design according to its verbal content.

Despite the advantages offered by Kostelnick’s model of the supra-textual levels of the text, analysis of the multimodal novel requires a model that incorporates layout and conventions of the text block. Kostelnick’s model takes into account signals such as the incipits and endings of such things as paragraphs and chapters, but book designers go further in their analysis, looking at styles of paragraphing and other details of the text block on the same level as the elements Kostelnick isolates with the idea of the supratextual, intratextual, intertextual, and extratextual levels.
I needed to find a way to logically adapt a simple structure like Kostelnick’s to incorporate the ideas about textual design I had been gleaning from book design – to take the textual design as a whole, all parts being potentially active in the narrative, and to use my taxonomy to describe all of the devices at work in the novel one level at a time, a feature allowing the user to focus on one aspect of the textual design at a time.

Using Kostelnick’s model as a rough guide for revising my own model, I altered and removed organizing categories which did not fit the types of elements I had observed, as well as aspects of his model which specifically addressed types of multimodal texts other than the novel. I also integrated concepts from book design and typography into the taxonomic categories to describe material, spatial, and design features of the text including details such as font style, use of white space and text blocks in the graphic space of the page, and other layout considerations.

Finally, I began to consider how I might use my taxonomy as more than just a tool for taking a baseline reading of the multimodal elements in a text – how to begin to ascertain the functions of these elements within the narrative systems of different multimodal novels. At this point, I decided to incorporate the concept of narrative levels from narratology as an interpretive move the analyst would complete after taking an unbiased catalogue of features in a multimodal text. The analyst would revisit their inventory of textual features with the map of narrative levels in mind, and based on a reading of the narrative, would interpret how each element functions in these novels. However, I later removed the narrative levels from the method of applying the taxonomy to a novel because it is an interpretive move too early in the process of grounded observation. Instead of categorizing modal elements as existing on one narrative level or another in order to determine how they were added to the text based on the world of the
narrative, I decided to foreground another concept – that of the narrative function of textual elements. Regardless of their provenance in the world of story, elements participate in the narrative to varying degrees, ranging from the less active to elements essential to semiotic closure in the narrative.

Beginning any interpretation of a multimodal novel with a descriptive catalogue of elements in that specific novel enables the scholar to thoroughly describe the novel’s specific elements, to classify them using an element-specific vocabulary. After using the taxonomy to observe and classify specific elements at work in the novel, the scholar can use that data to create a nuanced, detailed description and analysis of how each element appears to work within the textual system and the novel’s narrative system, and also to begin to make connections and comparisons between novels. Using this taxonomy, we can begin to think about the entire textual system, or dynamic relationships between modal elements of the text by first observing and taking down a full account of all the elements in each individual novel.

Taxonomy of Devices in the Contemporary Novel

I. SCRIPT LEVEL – Includes all alphanumeric content on the page. This alphanumeric content provides visual and organizational information about the text. Because the visual style of this level helps to set the tone of the work, the script level can simultaneously convey both the linguistic and visual meaning through stylistic detail and spatial detail. These details include typographical style, the layout of the text blocks both within the white space of the page and in relation to other elements on the page.

--- When used conventionally, these elements create a global organizational framework for the narrative. This global framework can be observed in both
conventionally designed narratives (narratives designed to foreground the verbal mode over other modes), and in narratives that foreground the contributions of multiple modes (visual, spatial, temporal, verbal, and so on). These organizational conventions can be incorporated into the structure and/or themes of the narrative itself in some instances.

a. **Font Shifting** – From one font style to another

b. **Font Size**

c. **Emphasis Indicators** – Underlining, Bold Print, Color Print

d. **Drop Caps or Raised Caps**

e. **Marginalia**

f. **Section Dividing Devices** (Hard Return, Dotted Line, Three-Dash, dingbats, fleuron/ printer’s flower, etc.)

g. **Overwriting** - A written or visual element imposed upon another to create a meaning neither element would have alone. Often used to illustrate shifting thoughts. This includes handwritten notes over typed content, as well as typed over typed.

h. **Macro-Organizational Devices** – Table of Contents, Index, Appendices, etc. Devices giving readers an overall concept of the work’s organization.

i. **Continuous Organizational Devices** – Devices used on nearly every page to give the reader an organizational context for the novel and sometimes their place in it. Running Head, Running Foot, Folio/ Pagination, Section Titles/ Chapter Titles.

j. **Micro-Organizational Divisions** – Devices used to demark the division of a section or chapter into discrete sections. These divisions serve many functions,
among them the movement of the narrative through time and space. (Subheads, Elements Marking the Division of the Sections. Note that visual and spatial elements are also used in this capacity, but that they should be recorded in their corresponding section – Spatial and Visual, respectively).

II. **SPATIAL LEVEL** – This dimension of the workings of the page includes all white space on the page, and more specifically issues of the directionality of the page, and the flow of text within the white space of the page. It also includes the design and placement of elements in the space of the page, within the larger flow and design of the recto-verso page spread, and of the codex (Left to right, top to bottom, linear flow).

-The spatial level, then, is how white space, design, layout, directionality, hierarchy, and flow are created by the placement of elements of any modality in the white space of page, spread, and codex.

a. **White Space** - Use of space to divide segments or elements, and to control flow and organize the design of the page, spread, and codex. From use of hard return as section divider to less conventional uses of white space.

b. **Recto-Verso Relationship** – The spatial-temporal relationship of left page of a given spread with right page, and the dynamic relationships of material arranged on either side of the gutter or across the gutter.

c. **Directionality** of the page, or of the material on the page. (Landscape, Portrait, etc.)

d. **Position of Elements on the Page** - How various modal elements are arranged in relation to each other upon the page. Ex: Boxed Material in relation to main text blocks, or graphic elements in relation to text blocks.
e. **Sidebars** – Textual space left blank, or elements arranged in the margins beside the traditional text blocks on the page.

f. **Columns** - Segments of text divided by white space into two or more columns of text (Newspaper).

g. **Gutter** – The white margins running down the middle of a spread.

h. **Bleeds** – When elements run off of the page in an intentional layout.

i. **Opacity** – The measurement of the transparency of paper. Higher opacity = printing is less likely to show through the page.

j. **Margins** – A general term for the white space, or varying widths, that generally frames the printed matter of the page on all sides. This designation is a generic term covering the side margins, gutters, head space, and foot space of the page.

III. **GRAPHIC LEVEL** – The graphic dimension encompasses all images and non-alphanumeric design elements in the novel, including any color-processed pages or sections of the novel. Basically, if an element has been printed but is not a word, a printed symbol, or an alphanumeric symbol, it is a graphic element.

a. **Images** – All images which are included in the text.

b. **Illustrations** – Images which represent ideas, themes, and passages from the verbal portion of a narrative text.

c. **Maps, Graphs, and Tables** –

d. **Boxes and Borders** – A ruled border used to set a portion of text set apart from the traditional text block/ the main body of the text/ or apart from other modal elements of the text.

e. **Photographs** – Printed reproductions of photographs.

f. **Drawings** – Images in rough or hand-drawn style.
g. **Script** – The image of handwritten text.

h. **Overwriting** - A written or visual element imposed upon another to create a meaning neither element would have alone. Often used to illustrate the subjective thoughts of a fictional character about the overwritten element. This includes handwritten notes over printed content, as well as printed notes over printed content (Font switching often denotes commentary there, as in *House of Leaves*).

i. **Highlighted Text Blocks** – color or shading behind a word, line, or text block as contrast to set it apart from the traditional text block or from other modal elements.

j. **Chapter Head Illustrations** – Images appearing along the head of new chapters.

k. **Section Dividing Images** – Images on titled or otherwise unlabeled pages, or at the bottom or top of a page, denoting the end or beginning of a section.

l. **Collage** – An image composed of several distinct graphic components, sometimes including images of printed matter, often mixing words and images to create a single integrated image.

m. **Icon** – An image invested with a specific symbolic meaning, such as a corporate logo or a symbol used throughout a novel in a specific way.

**Application of Taxonomy**

This study is based on a group of literary novels which include elements in modalities other than the verbal alongside traditional verbal content. This group of objects of study has been compiled through the careful review of a large number of contemporary novels. While many contemporary novels still foreground the verbal mode and de-emphasize design choices and other visual and material aspects of the text, a growing number of
novels include images, footnotes, sidebar information, exhibit font shifting, and highlight shifts in mode and material aspects of the text.

**Procedure for the Multimodal Analysis of the Novel**

First, I will catalogue the multimodal elements present in the novel, using my taxonomy to proceed level by level through the work. For example, first I will read the script level of the novel, cataloguing all the typographical content on the page, also paying close attention to issues of genre in how and where multimodal elements are deployed. My reading of the novel begins, then, with attention to both form (both in the literary sense and in the sense of how the medium is being used), and content (again, with a focus on the literary and the medium).

After the multimodal devices for each textual level have been catalogued, I will use the following steps to develop an interpretation of the modal elements’ level of narrative activity in the novel:

1. **Description of Each Element** – What is it? (Local Textual Observation).

   Inventory of Elements (Category by Category, or Roughly Observed Inventory followed by Fine-Tuning with Another Pass Through).

2. **Relationships of Elements on the Page** – Observing the layout and relationships of the elements as they have been placed in the graphic space of the page. A secondary step in which we look at how elements are situated:

   i. **In the Textual Space** (Page, Spread, In Relation to Traditional Navigational Elements of the Novel – Incipits, Endings, etc., Chapter Heads, Section Divisions, etc.)

   ii. **In Relation to Each Other**.
iii. **In Frequency throughout the novel** – might they have accumulative meaning? Are they SYSTEMATICALLY INCLUDED in the text? Are there observable patterns of elements occurring commonly with or after or before other elements?

3. **Suggested Reader Activity with the Element/ Description of how Element Fits into Textual Layout of the Novel** – What does the reader do with it? How does it appear to operate in the textual system? At this level, it is key to broaden our observation from looking at the element itself in isolation from its larger textual context to a view of how the single element fits into the larger schematic of the text. This includes observations of where in the flow of the text it appears, how often/ frequency, context in which it appears, and so on. (Global Textual Observation/ Context Within Which Element Appears).³²

4. **Use of Textual Observations (Both of Elements and Overall Context) to Interpret What Goes On in the Novel** – How does it fit into the novel’s overall system. Is there narrative significance to the frequency of element occurrence,

³² In taking a multimodal survey of the novel’s textual devices, I’m looking not only at nonverbal modal elements such as visual, spatial, and so on, but also at elements of the traditional text block or the verbal content. This level of analysis occurs with all of the components – the multimodal elements which have been deemed relevant and contributing and the verbal narrative elements – on equal footing. There may still be interpretive work regarding how the use of medium/modal shifts add metacommentary to novels (either through the content of the other modal inclusions, or if the inclusions are read as metaphorical commentary on the verbal mode, the medium of print, or the medium-specific genre of the novel), how patterns of shifting from type of element/ narrative unit might offer commentary or narrative signification (verbal narrative unit or nonverbal narrative unit), or how the whole novelistic system of appearances/ inclusions signifies as a pattern in the novel. The modal form of the narrative elements, the pattern or frequency of modal shifting in the novel, or the content of the narrative units could be investigated as potentially meaningful to the narrative.
placement of the element either within the novel or within the graphic space of the page, linkage of elements with narrative themes or concepts (Interpretive Step/From Textual Observation to Narrative Observation).

Does the narrative account for the element? How did the element get there? To what degree does it participate in or contribute to the narrative? In what ways, or to what degree does it add to the themes or narrative exposition of the novel?

5. **Placement of Element on an Interpretive Level** – On a spectrum ranging from the element having a static appearance in the text (or playing a static role in the workings of the textual system) to the element having a somewhat or very dynamic relationship that requires interpretation and/or requires that the reader interpret it in order to achieve narrative closure or semiotic closure.

The point of multimodal narrative analysis is thus the study of how multimodal elements participate in print novels. In taking a multimodal survey of the novel’s textual devices, I’m looking not only at nonverbal modal elements such as visual, spatial, and temporal modal combinations, but also at elements of the traditional text block and verbal elements. This level of analysis places all of the components on equal footing, as potentially active in the workings of the narrative – the multimodal elements which have been deemed relevant and contributing and the verbal elements.

Further interpretive work is possible regarding the thematic use of modal shifts in the novel, whether they occur at significant moments in the story, (content-focused, though the textual elements can be read as their own metaphorical commentary on the verbal content or on narrative themes), how patterns of shifting from one type of element to another might offer commentary or produce narrative signification (verbal narrative unit or multimodal narrative unit), or how the global pattern of the
occurrences of a type of textual element creates a meaningful pattern in the novel. Using these ideas, the form of each part of the text in a multimodal novel or the overall pattern of shifting from one type of section or layout to another, or the content of the narrative units could be interpreted as keys to the novel’s meanings.

Using my taxonomy, multimodal elements will be read as components of the text that can be identified as actively or passively contributing to the text, but narratologically speaking each element must be interpreted in terms of how actively it conveys aspects of the story, allowing us to ascertain its level of participation in conveying the narrative, and its position within narrative levels. An image may, in one narrative system, be part of a series of images occurring at the beginning of each chapter with no real signification narratively, functioning as part of the discursive frame much the same way as the font style to help set a tone, but not to communicate specific narrative information. This kind of image would belong to the extradiegetic level of the narrative. Another image might be part of the story, included not at the extradiegetic level but actually occurring at the level of character-to-character communication, at the level of diegesis or fictional discourse. In this way, we could have multimodal elements which are of the same type but which function in relation to their narrative system in markedly different ways. We can thus avoid using tools to generalize the function of an element based on a simple identification on the taxonomic scale. This also helps in determining whether an element participates at the more passive end of the spectrum communicating the basic genre and tone of the work, or in a very active way communicating part of the narrative.

My taxonomy functions not as an interpretive schematic but as a guide to observation of textual detail we are not used to seeing in a medium, specifically multimodal elements one might find on various levels of a printed text. Without such a
guide, it is difficult to identify these features because the verbal is often emphasized over
the other modalities in theories of interpretation. Though it is difficult to learn to read in
multiple modalities coming from a monomodal interpretive tradition, learning to
recognize the different modes of a text and layout/design concepts lends systematic
method to the task of the initial observation of multimodal textual devices, especially the
less overt ones.

My conception of levels helps readers to develop greater awareness of textual
phenomena at the initial observation stage, offering a way of thinking about how
elements function within the overall design of the text. This initial classification tool is
used to create observations about each individual textual element, as their narrative and
textual functionalities vary from work to work. Once the multimodal element is
catalogued, I determine its level of semiotic participation on the spectrum of elements
that actively contribute to narrative meaning to passive contributions, concluding with an
interpretation of its function in the novel.

First, I will catalogue the multimodal elements present in the novel, using my
taxonomy to proceed level by level through the work, beginning with the textual level,
proceeding to the graphic level, and finishing with the spatial level of the text. I will
analyze the textual levels of the novel, cataloguing all the typographical content on the
page, also paying close attention to issues of genre in how and where multimodal
elements are deployed. My reading of the novel begins, then, with attention to both form
(both in the literary sense and in the sense of how the medium is being used), and content
(again, with attention to the literary conventions and the medial/textual conventions).

After the multimodal devices for each textual level have been catalogued, I will
determine how the identified multimodal elements function – whether they organize and
provide guidance, whether they compliment the verbal content of the narrative, or whether they actively offer narrative information in modalities other than verbal. I will place each element within the context of my taxonomy of textual levels in order to observe how it functions.

After describing each multimodal element, I will discuss what reader activity would be associated with it as it appears in the larger system of elements on various textual levels. I will use the discussion of reader activity with the multimodal element to interpret the element’s functionality in the narrative structure of the novel, at which level I can observe whether the element participates at the level of story. Finally, I will determine where the multimodal element falls on the spectrum of passive signification to active co-signification in the novel.

I use the term “conventional verbal narrative” to delineate between the verbal narrative content and textual elements in modes other than the verbal\(^\text{33}\), in part to discuss how the multimodal components of the novel function in relation to the traditionally foregrounded verbal modal content. It is important to note that, theoretically, not all...
multimodal novels invest the bulk of narrative signification in a verbal modality, though in analysis of multimodal novels we must always first ask the question of whether multimodal elements are being played against the conventional verbal narrative, or whether the novel uses a different modal distribution in its system.

Asking the question of whether there is a traditional verbal narrative at the outset is important to determining whether the multimodal system is working with the grain of the genre conventions of the medium-specific genre, the novel, or whether it is working against them, commenting on medium, mode, or genre. My move to begin with the question of whether the traditional verbal narrative is a primary carrier of meaning is due to consideration of the workings of several multimodal novels. Because the print medium is the site of appearance for all subsequent multimodal elements, these elements are subject to not only the medium’s affordances and constraints, but also to any medium-specific genre conventions – in this case, those of the novel.

In referring to the verbal narrative portion of a multimodal novel as the traditional verbal narrative, I do not intend to communicate the bias that narrative can only exist verbally, or that the verbal component in the medium of print should carry or does carry more of the narrative signification – rather, that because the multimodal inclusions appear in a print novel, they must answer to the conventions of that medium-specific genre, conventions which have been developed largely to foreground the verbal. The multimodal inclusions must also exist within a medium whose conventions of use for readers and writers have foregrounded the verbal over other modalities, even though the medium facilitates the inclusion and use of other modalities – the use of space to organize information, the visual styles with which the verbal content is presented, and so on.
Ascertaining the level of narrative activity a multimodal element has within the narrative also answers the question of how we should interpret the existence of the multimodal element in terms of the world of the fiction. Asking how the element got there in narrative terms confuses the issue of reading the multimodal novel as a whole object, a whole text, because it artificially separates the traditional verbal content from other or nontraditional modal elements and requires that the other modal elements be accounted for as either anchored directly to the verbal content and be judged more active narratively than elements contributing to the overall narrative in less traditional ways or in ways not directly linkable with the verbal content.

Interpreting the elements according to narrative levels may be useful in ascertaining who speaks in some of the novels, but it cannot be standard interpretive procedure for all multimodal novels because not all novels use the modes in this relationship, with one the anchor for the other. This assumption springs from an expectation, based on both traditional reading habits and on the print medium effacing its multimodality, that other modal elements will act as illustration or support for verbal content instead of as elements capable of making meaning on their own. An interpretation based upon this illustrative assumption will often be blind to the independent narrative contributions in non-verbal modes, and will also have trouble recognizing the interdependence of modes in producing meaning, and the dynamic and varied semiotic relationships among multiple modes. If the multimodal element in question actively contributes to the narrative, I will analyze its functionality within the narrative system by revisiting the process of using this information to determine what goes on in the novel, and how the element fits into the novel’s overall structure.
Finally, I will look at how the multimodal element makes a contribution to the novel’s narrative signification as a whole, and to what degree. In order to do this, I will evaluate the relationships of textual elements on the page, moving from textual element (whatever modality it appears in) to the next, and determine what kind of meaning is made in the relationship between these elements. The juxtaposition of elements in multiple modes have the potential to produce meaning through both content and form, sometimes contributing additional commentary in shifting between traditional print media practices to multimodal practices. Shifting between medial practices can also produce commentary about the conventions of the medium, another possible level of how the multimodal novel can signify both in form and content.

1. Use of Textual Observations (Both of Elements and Overall Context) to Interpret What Goes On in the Novel – How does it fit into the novel’s overall system. Is there narrative significance to the frequency of element occurrence, placement of the element either within the novel or within the graphic space of the page, linkage of elements with narrative themes or concepts (Interpretive Step/From Textual Observation to Narrative Observation).
Does the narrative account for the element? How did the element get there? To what degree does it participate in or contribute to the narrative? In what ways, or to what degree does it add to the themes or narrative exposition of the novel?

2. Placement of Element on an Interpretive Level – On a spectrum ranging from the element having a static appearance in the text (or playing a static role in the workings of the textual system) to the element having a somewhat or very dynamic relationship that requires interpretation and/or requires that the reader interpret it in order to achieve narrative closure or semiotic closure.
What Happens Next

I will use this method to perform readings of a collection of novels I have identified as having multimodal characteristics. I will begin by using the taxonomy to survey the textual elements present in a multimodal novel. After taking a taxonomic inventory of textual elements in a set of multimodal novels, I will examine how each type of element functions within the context of that novel. With these observations, I can also observe how actively the textual elements I am observing participate in the telling of the story. I will conclude each reading of a text with an analysis of how the elements of the text operate as a whole in communicating narrative information, whether the textual elements are actively involved in this process or whether they function more as background or illustration to the action and themes of the narrative.
CHAPTER IV
READINGS

This chapter will be a series of individual readings using my taxonomy to analyze how multimodal elements contribute to narrative on different textual levels through multiple modalities.

In this chapter, I will apply my taxonomy and my reading method to three overtly multimodal novels - *The Fourth Treasure*, *House of Leaves*, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* to analyze how novels function on multiple levels in addition to the verbal. I will examine the narrative significations not only in a novel’s verbal content, but also in its use of the space of the page, its choice of fonts, use of images or graphic elements, and other textual details. I will consider what it means to read the novel multimodally— a method which encompasses the graphic, the textual, and the spatial levels. I will analyze the data I collect through my readings of these multimodal novels in order to begin to answer these questions.

As with textual elements in the verbal modality, elements in nonverbal modes can be part of any of the diegetic or extradiegetic levels of the novel: a device can be extradiegetic if it merely organizes or guides a reader, it can be something attributable to the narrator, or it can be something added by a character in the world of the story. In using my taxonomy with the concept of a spectrum of activity ranging from passive to active, I will be able to determine the level of participation in narrative signification of each kind of textual element, describing how it functions in the narrative.
Reading 1 – *The Fourth Treasure*

**A Novel Reading Strategy: Learning to Read More than Words in *The Fourth Treasure***

The first multimodal novel that I will apply my interpretive method to is Todd Shimoda’s *The Fourth Treasure*. To begin my analysis, I took a global survey of each type of textual element I could observe in the text, using the taxonomy to focus and guide my observation of each textual level. After assessing which textual elements occurred the most frequently in the novel, I re-concretized the textual elements in a second survey, this time focusing on their context within the layouts. I also noted the placement of textual elements in relation to other types of textual elements, looking for any patterns in which types of elements occurred together, or in certain points of the section and chapter progressions. Finally, I read the narrative, observing as I did how textual elements linked together in specific reading paths, and how other elements appeared in relation to major narrative events.

*The Fourth Treasure* is a novel told in fragments through multiple perspectives. The events of the story span three different eras and two continents. The intricate narrative is in part a musing upon what separates a proficient performance from a work of art, and a reflection upon what makes each human being unique despite, or perhaps because of our common elements. These topics are explored in two quite different ways; first through the experiences and writings of the characters, and second, through intricate sequencing of narrative fragments with other narrative elements that, in relation to one another to create moods and significations that they wouldn’t have if told in a linear, monomodal way. At the same time, the novel uses its form as metacommentary upon the thematic content and movements of the central storyline. A few of the elements used
to create this additional layer of meaning include large kanji images, sequences of kanji images and notes in the margins of the novel excerpted from character’s journals about shodo (the Japanese art of calligraphy), and about neuroscience, but more globally, the graphic plotting of nonverbal and verbal elements in the traditional text block and the sidebar.

**Layout - Unusual Aspects of The Fourth Treasure**

While most novels use a standard layout, with the main body of text occupying most of the page, leaving thin margins around the text block, *The Fourth Treasure* begins immediately with an unusual layout. The title page is dominated by a grayscale kanji phrase reading top to bottom of the far right edge of the page, and the eye must travel more than halfway down the page before arriving at the title in English – small, italicized, and as an element of the page, almost lost against the head-to-foot motion of the kanji. Turning the page, we find a negative scale reproduction of the kanji phrase alone, untranslated, the page completely controlled by the top-to-bottom movement of the characters.

On the first side of this mirror-image sequence, some familiar ground is given even as the reader begins to navigate the unfamiliar direction and visual nature of the elements and their arrangement on the page - the reader has to work to begin to understand that the kanji reaching top to bottom are the title, but finds a helpful translation appears near the bottom of the image. While this is clearly not the format of a standard novel, it provides the reader with a page structure that rewards the initial work

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34 The main body of text is usually a broad column of verbal text that runs from head to foot down the center of each page. For descriptive purposes, I will refer to this area of the page as the traditional text block, called “traditional” because it is the location of the paragraphs that tell the story in novels with standard layouts.
of navigating the nonstandard page with the translated title, an initial lesson in the changes that will need to be made to the usual reading path in order to fully process the elements of *The Fourth Treasure*.

The reverse page is unexpected – another top-to-bottom reading path to navigate, which throws the reader into a page governed by an unfamiliar hierarchy, this time unrelieved by a shift into the familiar ground of left-to-right reading and an easily understood translation. Readers unfamiliar with kanji will need to flip back and forth between the two images, moving their eyes in unfamiliar ways across the symbols to attempt to determine if both sequences are identical, and if the translation of the first page applies to the kanji on the second.

After a series of prefatory pages which also include large calligraphic images in positive and negative scales, the reader is immersed on page one in the system of the novel’s unusual page layout. The first two-page spread is a negative-scale kanji image – which later in the novel become familiar as section-dividing images – against a page of narrative that begins at the head of the page and moves solidly to the foot in a narrow stream compressed by the large margin to the right of the central text block. The main story begins to unfold in a narrow column running along the gutters, only extending across two-thirds of the page’s usual text block area. The remaining third of each page is an oversized margin running alongside the traditional text block.

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35 A reading path is the order, direction, and sequence of interpreting textual elements that the reader must follow to make meaning of the text. This path can be standard, in which case it begins at the top left portion of a page and proceeds left to right from top to bottom, one sentence following another. In multimodal novels, however, a nonlinear, unusually ordered reading path is common. These paths can be recursive, they can require skips ahead or backward, and they are often nonstandard in the beginning of a multimodal novel, changing at least once during the course of the book.
Halfway down this margin on page one, a sidebar note appears, prefaced by an illustrated kanji radical, the note’s text block running in its narrow column to the foot of the page. Turning the page, the reader finds another sidebar note, this one without the prefatory illustration, beginning at the top of the page and running halfway down, concluding with the signature of its author. These large margins are occupied by ghostly-grayscale running titles, and the foot folio (page numbers) bracket the gutter on each page.

The next page concludes the main text block in the first fifth of the page, followed after one hard return by a quarter-page kanji image. This image is quite disruptive to the order of the folio layout, breaking the line between the margins and the core text block space. Hovering in a small, italicized font just beneath that image is a translation of what it expresses.

Sometimes the margins remain empty for several pages, but sidebar notes with and without illustration are interspersed at irregular intervals throughout the book, some in chains one following the other, a few trailing into the margins of the following page unrelated to the flow of the core text block material, are. Occasionally, a quarter-page illustration appears, foregrounded against a large amount of white space, always with the small-print italicized translation. At other points, when one section ends and a new section is about to begin, a full page section dividing illustration is used, both sides of one page printed with the image – one in positive scale, the other with light printing and dark printing reversed in a negative-scale.

_The Fourth Treasure_ is the story of a Japanese sensei living in Berkeley, his former student, and her daughter, a student of neuroscience who isn’t very interested in
Japanese culture. The narrative moves back and forth through three different time periods – the lifetime of an early shodo master in Japan, Japan in the sixties, and contemporary Berkeley. In narrating through the perspectives of multiple characters, Shimoda weaves together discussions of the mechanics and art of the mind as well as the mechanics and art of Japanese calligraphy, making the point that the most exact scientific execution of something, even the most technically proficient performance or discussion of a thing, leaves out the unique and irreplaceable spirit or spark which elevates the thing to the level of art, and which takes simple neuronal firings to the level of a unique individual consciousness. The bare technical mechanics of a thing do not fully or adequately account for the full experience of that thing – studying and mapping the pieces does not enable us to comprehend the mind of a living person or how a work of art elicits such a response in us.

**Why Read *The Fourth Treasure* Multimodally?**

What does reading multimodally, or interpreting the linguistic content as well as layout and nonverbal elements, add to the reader’s experience of *The Fourth Treasure*? What does it mean to read the novel multimodally – a method which encompasses graphic, typographic, and spatial levels of the text?

Multimodal reading strategies enable us to examine the ways narrative is expressed through the medium of the book at the same time that it enables us to complete a more traditional literary analysis – in fact, a multimodal reading approach takes both verbal and nonverbal textual elements into account as key aspects of the text that each carry a part of narrative signification. A novel multimodal reading strategy (or a multimodal reading strategy for the novel) involves considering the spatial, graphic, and
typographic levels of the text as inextricable and potentially signifying levels of the narrative. It is important to note that reading multimodally requires multiple passes through the text (like any well-executed monomodal close reading effort), in which the reader assesses not only what is going on at the verbal level (what happens?) and whether the organization of verbal content also contributes meaning to the story, but also whether the novel’s multimodal content and layout works with the verbal content to convey narrative information.

Todd Shimoda uses a fragmentary narrative structure in order to construct potentially productive juxtapositions of multiple narrative moments and tones. In an author’s note for his similarly designed novel *365 Views of Mount Fuji* (1998), Shimoda suggests a strategy for reading his work:

> The recommended way to read the book is to read [material in the traditional text block] and [the sidebar material] as they occur. Another way is to read the main story line first, then go back and read the other stories. (vii)

In suggesting that there is a “recommended way” to read the novel, Shimoda implies that this reading strategy – processing all of the elements, central and marginal, together as they occur for signification – offers the optimum and the planned effect. In discussing a more traditional and linear reading strategy below this optimum strategy, Shimoda acknowledges that there are multiple possible ways for readers to process the narrative, but that the results will be different. The “recommended way” is a multimodal reading

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36 These aspects of a text are always signifying, just not always with deliberate narrative coordination - sometimes they function passively to foreground the verbal content of the narrative as a pure unmediated transmission, as they do in a novel with a traditional layout.
strategy in which the reader must process sidebar notes and images alongside the core narrative, and the “other way” is a monomodal and more linear reading strategy for readers not yet ready to leave the comfort zone of viewing print narrative as linear and monomodal.

Shimoda uses a free-floating narrative technique in *The Fourth Treasure*. The storylines are told in seemingly random bits from multiple perspectives. There isn’t a controlling or focalizing perspective, but the object referenced by the book’s title, The Daizen Inkstone, is quietly present as a force that links the timelines and storylines in the novel, inspiring the many characters who come into contact with it. Though the characters are not cognizant of this unifying object and theme, the stories of the three main characters are where all of the narrative threads converge, exploring the novel’s key questions. However, the structure of the narrative does not make it easy to initially identify any single character as the nexus for the web. Instead, the pieces of the story must be joined together by the reader using both standard narrative cues, including the themes of the novel and how they offer commentary and parallels when placed in conversation, and using cues in multiple modalities from textual elements which, at first/using monomodal or standard print narrative reading practices, appear to be marginal in relation to the story being told in the traditional text block. These marginal elements or “sidebar material” include both verbal content and visual elements which are laid out in the margins of each page and between paragraphs interrupting the traditional text block. These spatial, visual and textual elements are arranged in such a way that the reader is encouraged to shift from a standard reading pattern – left to right, top to bottom, beginning to end – and to learn to navigate or read the meanings created by the
interrelations of these sidebar elements. The form of the text, which forces readers to piece together their own significations of the bits and pieces given, mirrors and extends major themes and ideas in the novel.

**Form is Content: Multimodal Reading**

*The Fourth Treasure* communicates its central themes not only through the verbal content, but also through its form. The reader is asked to be attendant not only to the story unfolding in the traditional text block, but notes on calligraphy and neuroscience as well as images produced by the characters in the novel, which are included as sidebar notes and images appearing in the margins, on half-pages, and as transitional elements between the novel’s three sections.

Shimoda creates a nonstandard layout of differently prioritized textual information which the reader must navigate in ways the standard novel typically does not require. Though the reader has the option of reading the novel in a standard way, focusing on the story elements given in the traditional text block, a richer sense of signification can be created in reading the material in the traditional text block along with the sidebar material, paying attention to the spatial organization of text on the page and temporal flow of the elements of the text. The process of learning to navigate this innovative layout with its visual, spatial, and at the same time verbal elements parallels and draws attention to the theme of learning to read in a multimodal way, navigating a new way of seeing the world. In the story, characters are seeing the world in new ways because they are post-stroke, or learning a new subject. Readers are drawn into identifying with the characters’ struggles with learning another language and writing system with different conventions, rules, and directionality through their own parallel
activity learning to navigate a text that has destabilized the conventions of reading and writing. The multimodal deployment of narrative and the unusual layout of information on the page also draws attention to ideas of ordering of strokes and directionality, pressure, and the novel spatially enacts these dynamics through the patterns of textual elements on the page.

The disclosure pattern in the telling of the narrative also parallels the idea of the importance of ordering, pressure, and directionality. The story is given to us in pieces or fragments, moving back and forth through time and places, from perspective to perspective, and the ordering of these narrative fragments enables the tensions and themes in one piece to signify in juxtaposition against the next fragment.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate several ways in which the innovative and more overtly multimodal form of the novel functions to draw attention to the themes of the novel. These include the key theme of learning to read, which is echoed through multiple threads in the novel, for the reader must learn to navigate the novel’s spatial construct with the unusual layouts, a new language, new concepts, and the fragmentary narrative.

**Sidebar Elements – Sidebar Notes, Quarter-Page Illustrations, and Section Dividing Images**

The elements that make up what I call “sidebar elements” in *The Fourth Treasure* fall into four categories. There are intermittent entries in the oversized margins of the novel, which are definitions of the technical terms from the main text of the novel. These terms are outtakes on Shodo from Zenzen Sensei’s Instructor’s Journal and excerpts on neuroscience with personal musings from Tina Shimoda’s neuroscience notebook.

The bulk of these sidebar outtakes are verbal content alone, which is the first type of sidebar element, but many of the notes on shodo are prefaced with visual kanji
illustrations – some just a single radical or stroke upon which the note focuses, others
entire phrases. The third type of sidebar element is the quarter-page kanji-hybrid
illustration. This element occurs less regularly in the narrative’s arc, but at a certain point
increases in frequency. Each quarter-page illustration includes not only a large hybrid
kanji-esque image produced by Zenzen Sensei after his stroke, but also an unknown
editor’s annotation translating the message or mood of the image. The fourth type of
sidebar element is the full-page section dividing kanji image. These images are often
extended communications from the previous section’s kanji, sometimes printed in a
negative scale, other times printed normally.

The overall function of the sidebar material in the signifying system of *The Fourth Treasure* is to highlight narrative themes, ideas, and details, giving them greater
significance in the narrative and making them more visible to the reader. At the most
basic level, the sidebars explain and explore the ideas about neuroscience, shoto, and the
main characters’ personal thoughts in such a way that the reader gains more
understanding of their significance in relation to the story. However, through
juxtaposition with verbal sections in the traditional text block they also allow the reader
to make proleptic and analeptic connections throughout the network of the textual
system, at times forecasting the possible impacts of ideas or events. The sidebar elements
also create a signifying dialogue between (emphasizing the possible connections of) the
narrative fragments, creating a complex layering of primary and secondary narrative
elements in conversation that readers can use to add another layer of meaning on top of
the information given in the traditional text block alone.
Todd Shimoda’s *The Fourth Treasure* is a novel in which multimodal textual elements actively convey narrative information. All print works are always already multimodal, and the novel is no exception, despite a history of layouts designed to foreground the traditional text block, and to minimize the visual aspects of the text. The novel as a form uses verbal, visual, spatial, and temporal modal combinations to communicate the story, communicate tone and genre, and to create optimal flow. When novels with monomodal layouts are designed well, readers familiar with the genre will be able to navigate the text, finding narrative information without having to think about it. They can read most novels front to back, from the top of each page to the bottom, and they do not need to consider whether elements outside of the traditional text block offer important narrative information. However, in novels like *The Fourth Treasure*, the reader must process multimodal details and navigate new kinds of layouts in order to unlock information needed for narrative closure. In such novels, we can observe modalities actively working together to produce narrative signification, as opposed to monomodally designed novels whose modalities merely work together to express an overall tonal signification that might help readers identify genre, to convey a certain voice through design choices, or to give readers organizational cues that help them navigate the various aspects and parts of the narrative.

In *The Fourth Treasure*, the reader is called upon to leave the familiarity of a monomodal reading strategy and to develop a multimodal reading strategy in order to process narrative information presented in challenging configurations and given in multiple modes. They must simultaneously process differently prioritized information on the page that is laid out in a way prohibiting the use of usual rules of hierarchy and
reading order, reading sidebar elements in juxtaposition with the narrative fragments and sections of the traditional text block. In this novel, sidebar elements are placed in juxtaposition with specific paragraphs in the traditional text block in order to suggest that the reader process specific sidebar elements, figuring out their relation to overall traditional text block information, building additional meaning and establishing tone through the resonances between elements in these two areas. This is a novel that makes the reader aware that, although print is the medium through which this narrative is communicated, print is and has always been a visual medium, a medium that exists in a certain plotted way within its graphic space, and a medium utilizing typographic conventions – a very visual and spatial aspect of any print text.

Another function of the sidebar material is that it helps the readers to fill in narrative gaps or aporia in several ways. The sidebar material assists the reader in processing story events, key themes, and character development. The sidebar material highlights certain ideas which otherwise wouldn’t stand out in the traditional text block, and it also fills in narrative gaps which lead to a better understanding of the world of the story.

As the novel begins, its signifying system becomes clear to readers – this is a novel told in narrative fragments from several different points of view. Initially, we aren’t certain how the fragments relate to one another – whether a theme we have yet to discern holds the threads together, or whether the characters’ worlds intersect in the past or future of the narrative. The sidebar material helps readers make relational connections between seemingly unrelated narrative threads.
Secondly, the sidebar material functions to help the reader understand how visual, spatial, and temporal aspects of the text relate to the verbal content, a metatextual key to understanding how the graphic and spatial form of the novel are pieces of the narrative. The novel’s design, with the sidebar material in a column that runs alongside the traditional text block column, creates a juxtapositional signification between textual elements. This juxtaposition is created by the placement of a sidebar element between two different narrative moments, whether these moments are different character’s storylines, or different chronological moments from the same character’s narrative thread. When these differing character or temporal fragments are connected by a sidebar element, this element serves to offer a sort of metacommentary in the form of a tone, a theme, an idea from one subject which the reader can view as commentary on either or both fragments.

Sidebar elements function in one of several ways in relation to the traditional text block, as well as within the story, of the novel. They serve to:

- highlight a core narrative theme across several otherwise unrelated segments or narrative threads,
- build upon or elaborate upon a theme expressed in the verbal content of the traditional text block, and
- create asynchronous connections between otherwise thematically or chronologically unrelated material using juxtaposition. Elements in this case appear asynchronously both thematically (theme juxtaposed against differing theme for effect), and chronologically (theme excerpt from a different moment in time given in sidebar material juxtaposed against similar or differing theme from
a different time in the core narrative) in relation to the themes and ideas in their core narrative frames (the material that brackets the element, or the material that is juxtaposed alongside).

One example of this kind of asynchronous juxtaposition occurs when, decades before the story’s present-day timeline in Berkeley, Hanako Suzuki and Zenzen Sensei go away on a mountain retreat together in Japan. It is on this trip that their affair begins, but by this point in the novel we know that both characters live in Berkeley and that they aren’t on speaking terms. The reader cannot yet discern what ended the relationship in the past, or how each character feels about the other in present-day Berkeley. Sidebar notes excerpted from Zenzen Sensei’s Instructor’s Notebook, written after the affair ends and after his moving to America, occur at the beginning of the mountain retreat section, skip one page, and appear again on the next page when Hanako arrives.

During the retreat, Hanako and Zenzen Sensei practice shodo, the art of Japanese calligraphy, and the Instructor’s Notebook excerpts in the sidebar of the spread begin to explain the Japanese kanji characters that make up the phrase Hanako writes. As the Instructor’s Notes are written with the subscript or signature “Zenzen School of Japanese Calligraphy” after each major entry, the reader quickly surmises that the entries for his notebook were composed in order to teach shodo to an American audience, after his move to Berkeley, long after the love affair that begins on the retreat.

The sidebar notes, written so many years later and in another life, on another continent, are about the poem that Hanako and Zenzen Sensei choose to practice shodo with at the retreat, but the notes are signed Zenzen Sensei, with the title of his school, (the one he establishes later in Berkeley), beneath them. These details tell observant readers
that his time at the mountain retreat with Hanako, and his feelings for her, are memories
he is still working through, memories he is keeping alive.

Sidebar Notes – Illustrated and Text-Only

The sidebar notes might seem to simply be definitions given to help the reader
understand specific ideas from neuroscience and shodo. However, looking at the
directions for shodo, it becomes clear that they map onto how we are to navigate the
graphic and spatial elements of the novel’s unusual layout in relation to the narrative
being told fragment by fragment. In fact, we find that the sidebar notes often serve as
directions for reading the seemingly peripheral information and images, a guide to how
they relate to material in the traditional text block.

The most explicit of these keys for reading occurs in the form of directions for
performing shodo, or calligraphic art:

Stroke order: While there are exceptions, in general the stroke order is
governed by these rules:

1. top to bottom
2. left to right
3. horizontal before vertical when crossing. (58)

The rules for the correct stroke order in shodo practice parallel the usual rules for reading
(with the exception that it prioritizes top to bottom, an eastern convention, over the
western left to right). They also highlight the importance of processing text elements in a
specific order in interpretation, or the importance of interpreting spatial, directional and
visual cues alongside the verbal content of any writing system. Readers already aware
that narrative has both form and content must extend their definition of form to include
issues of modal combinations within a specific medium and how those elements actively
add to the narrative or passively structure the reading experience, communicating genre
and providing navigation and reading paths through the material. We must learn to see
print on the page in a new way to gain a full understanding of what is being
communicated and how the medium is used to convey ideas.

Like shodo, this is a novel that communicates verbally through words, visually
through how those words are articulated visually with a shodo stroke or font choice, and
spatially in terms of how each element of the work produces signifying meaning in
relation to other elements of the page.

Though Western readers have been inculcated with the rules for procedural
processing of the page, systems developed to render spatial, directional, and visual cues
of the system and the medium invisible, a novel like Shimoda’s asks us to learn to read
again, incorporating not only the visual, spatial values of shodo, but also incorporating
the visual, spatial, and directional aspects of print as a medium which have always been a
part of the practice of designing and reading the page but which have been de-emphasised
in our practices of reading. Print, like shodo, is a medium which exists within a material
context. Like shodo, multimodal cues are a part of the art of a well-designed page,
whether it is a more standard format, or whether it emphasizes or foregrounds its graphic,
spatial and visual elements as *The Fourth Treasure* does, emphasizing for the reader that
we are reading a narrative told through a medium with specific affordances and
constraints, a medium with conventions that are being broken graphically, spatially,
textually, and with genre through Shimoda’s use of sidebar material in *The Fourth
Treasure*. 


The narrative theme exemplified by the stroke order sidenote and others similar notes on the importance of directionality and in general the importance of the spatial, directional, and material and in general the importance of the visual-spatial in communicating an idea – the idea that, as in shodo, in the system of this novel, on the printed page, the status of writing as something that is both visual-spatial-material and linguistic.

*The Fourth Treasure* illustrates to the reader through the metaphor of shodo that there is a conscious rhetoric to the ordering of writing, and that there is also therefore something to be gained through being attendant to the order of the elements we find in this novel. Shodo can be read as an extended metaphor for learning to process seemingly disparate, ornamental aspects of the printed page as meaningful elements that at minimum construct and give a tone to the story, and that often communicate story information.

The sidebar notes also offer an example of how the sidebar elements fill in narrative aporia related to the events of the narrative. For example, readers who decide the sidebar material is supplemental to the content given in the traditional text block may miss a clue offered in an early sidebar text-only note from Tina’s neuroscience notes. After an entry on the corpus callosum, we see a signature which gives us the character’s full name for the first time in the novel – “Christina Hana Suzuki”. We’re already familiar with Hanako Suzuki of Japan. Here, we find that the neuroscience student at UC Berkeley not only shares this surname, she also has a middle name that is possibly a shorter (Americanized – offers yet more insight into the place of Tina’s birth) version of Hanako’s name. Though we can’t be absolutely certain it indicates a direct familial
relation, we’re familiar with the logic of the novel and know that everything in the world of the story, if skillfully wrought, is there for a purpose. The reader who incorporates a reading of the sidebar matter can guess on page 25 that the young neuroscience student, Tina, is possibly Hanako Suzuki’s daughter.

Sidebar notes also highlight or sustain an idea from the traditional text block they are situated next to. Each sidebar note corresponds fairly directly to a key idea in the main text block. This directs reader attention and creates a broader resonance across the structure of the text regarding that idea. Readers must put together how the emphasized idea fits into the central themes and issues of that section and of the novel’s themes overall. This function is quite different from the function of the quarter-page illustrations, which are sandwiched between two different narrative moments, sometimes moments with different characters.

The Quarter-Page Illustration

The sidebar elements (and the graphic, spatial, and textual elements of a work in a multimodal sense) carry narrative voice in their own distinct ways very much like the narrative elements which have been outlined in monomodal methods of literary analysis. The quarter-page illustrations, for example, are initially all produced by Zenzen Sensei, with accompanying “translations” which we later find out are by Hanako Suzuki. After learning to interpret the quarter-page illustrations as Zenzen Sensei’s stroke-modified voice, one of the quarter page drawings turns out to be Hanako’s, disrupting the expectations put in place by the otherwise uniform system of the quarter-page illustrations being visual representations of the voice or mind of Zenzen Sensei, who cannot speak or communicate linguistically, instead offering his own individual
symbology in the form of mutated kanji. This, however, isn’t the only way quarter-page illustrations convey narrative tone in the novel.

These quarter-page illustrations appear between two different narrative sections, creating a narrative connection and shared extra layer of meaning on top of the narrative tone and meaning of the core text. A good example of this is a quarter-page illustration that links two narrative pieces about Tina’s life mid-novel. Extra space concludes the narrative segment preceding the illustration, and it boldly heads the next page, occupying an entire half-page. The kanji-esque image has a strong, dry downward stroke first, as the head-to-base is always the first line to be drawn. This strong line begins dark and a bit crooked, and fades almost halfway down so that every line of the brush is visible in the downstroke’s ending. The ending is vague, not at all a careful angling of the stroke as it should be for a proper shodo character. The troubled line is encircled halfway down by a swooping half-circle, a stronger and more hopeful line beginning on a well-executed downstroke into the curve of the line, terminating behind the strong portion of the main line. Radiating out from the fading base of the main line are two thin dashes, one directly beneath the half-circle, the other angling down away from the main line.

Hanako’s translation of the character reads “What’s worse/ caring enough/ to hate/ or not caring/ at all”(190). This isn’t just an ambiguous poem – this “translated” shodo image offers unknowingly commentary upon Tina Suzuki’s situation with her significant other, Mr. Robert, as well as the confused feelings that remain between Hanako and Zenzen Sensei after years of silence. In the narrative section preceding the image, Hanako and Tina discuss whether a new friend is in fact a boyfriend, and Hanako
encourages Tina to continue with Mr. Robert rather than venturing out into life on her own.

The disagreement about Tina’s situation with Mr. Robert causes disharmony between mother and daughter, and the section closes with this tension. After the glyph, we find Tina back home in the apartment she shares with Mr. Robert. Tensions between them have reached a keening high as she continues to use her studies as an excuse to avoid addressing the fact that she cannot bring herself to stay with him any longer – her life is calling. This is the first section that begins to reveal the level of apathy in Tina’s feelings toward Mr. Robert. As the reader moves through the narrative, they will recall the first section and its tone when they see the glyph-poem, and after the effect of the poem, will find that the tone continues in much the same way in the next two sections from Tina’s point of view. The mood of the poem-translation of the quarter-page illustration in this instance bridges narrative fragments and offers commentary on them in a much more conflicted voice than that of the free-floating narrator’s reportage of Tina’s perspective on her unabandoned yet dead relationship.

Earlier in the narrative arc, the same kind of quarter-page illustration functions in a different way in relation to its framing narrative fragments. This glyph appears mid-page, wedged tightly between two segments. It is a strong curving upstroke which underscores a floating dot, the dot accented by a small line curving in the opposite direction. It looks a great deal like the concept Hanako’s translation expresses, “In your hands/ I’ll rest here” (181), an object safely protected within a pair of hands. The illustration is preceded by a section in which she has volunteered to care for Zenzen Sensei at the school after he is released from the hospital.
Mr. Robert, a student of the sensei’s, stops in to see how his teacher is faring and is disconcerted to see Tina there caring for the man. He questions her motivation, doubting any altruism on her part and suspecting her of attempting to set up an opportunity to study the post-stroke brain as it begins to rework its neural connections. Despite Mr. Robert’s suspicions, Tina has connected with the sensei in a real way as he offers her the use of his best inkstone and she encourages his shodo.

The sensei has crafted the message “In your hands/ I’ll rest here” to communicate with Tina, and a healthy bond is forming. At the same time, she’s beginning to see Mr. Robert in a different, much less favorable light, and there’s the suggestion that she should not continue to rest in a meaningless relationship. In the segment following the kanji, we see Tina searching for a safe place to rest as she pursues what she hopes will be a better relationship with a colleague. By the end of the dinner date she sets with her colleague, it is becoming obvious that the colleague’s hands aren’t a good place to rest, either, and that Tina will need to care for herself.

**Section Dividing Elements**

The section dividing elements fall into two categories which determine how they are used in relation to the beginning or ending of each section. Some section dividing images occur on pages as the only graphic element. These section dividing pages transition the reader into a new part of this three-part narrative. The second category of section dividing devices is the title page image – an image which appears juxtaposed directly against the title of a new section of the narrative. In many cases, the former type of image repeats the long phrase which is first printed as an introductory page with no
titles or words in the first pages of the book, before the first chapter. The long phrase repeats throughout the novel, before each title page image.

The title page images, on the other hand, precede the quarter-page illustrations showing the same image along with Hanako’s translation of the image’s meaning. One might expect these images to reference quarter-page illustrations that the reader is already familiar with from previous sections, building a shodo vocabulary and calling upon it, and the reader’s ability to recognize it, return to its original page, and apply the translated meaning of the kanji to the narrative situation of the section that bears its image. However, the title page image works the opposite way in terms of its placement in the narrative structure.

Instead of asking the reader to recall the translated quarter-page illustration that appears earlier in the book and the narrative context it appears in to create a proleptic juxtaposition, the tone it evokes in that former narrative setting, these images foreshadow the appearance of the translated quarter-page illustrations. As with the focusing upon an idea of theme we see with the chapter titles, this image asks the reader to be on the lookout for the image as they proceed through the text, an image they have little narrative associations with previous to this point. The reader must then backtrack in order to read the meaning of the juxtaposition of the kanji and its translation against the titles of each section.

The section dividing image sequences – which begin with the untranslated title of the novel and then offer a kanji-esque symbol which will appear later in the narrative as backdrop for the title of the new section – are very significant. For one thing, they present an argument about decoding complicated and unusual layouts. They also model
how to read multimodally in this novel. Though the section dividing pages look simple with their kanji and kanji-esque images and they might be taken for merely ornamental divisions between the novel’s sections - the section dividing page sequences instead ask the reader to perform a complex multimodal interpretation (not monomodal, though they can be read that way for lesser signification).

The first element in the sequence is a long phrase in kanji, none of which appear translated in the novel. The phrase repeats throughout the book, beginning with the title page and recurring as the first page of each section dividing sequence. The reader without a kanji dictionary can infer that this may be the title of the novel in kanji (which it is), but it remains untranslated. The next element in the sequence is always the full-page grayscale kanji-esque image taking up the full page, and foregrounded in bold print against the image is the title of the new section in English.

It would be simple to consider the grayscale kanji-esque image an illustration placed behind the title to ornament the page, but as aforementioned, the shrewd reader recognizes the symbol embedded in the narrative as a quarter-page illustration in the novel chapters that follow. Each quarter-page illustration is presented with its translation. Readers who, upon this discovery, take note of the translation and return to the section title to read one against the other – translation against section title, against theme, and against the content of the section - are rewarded with an additional layer of commentary and signification, an extension of the tone of aspects of the narrative. The juxtaposition, as with other juxtapositions of elements in this novel, has significance and adds even more to a reading.
A monomodal reading strategy will not yield as rich a reading in *The Fourth Treasure* as a multimodal, nonlinear reading strategy. Read as separate elements, the juxtaposition of the section dividing pages do not signify – instead, the image merely illustrates the page, a blank yet beautiful cipher – because read separately, the distinct modes of the graphic and the textual do not relate. A monomodal reading of a narrative is purely verbal. A multimodal reading of a narrative encompasses the multiple modalities inherent in print as a medium. However, the typographic codes used in the section dividing sequences allow for either type of reading strategy.

For example, monomodal readers might consider the image as merely ornamental. Several typographic and graphic cues could be read as supporting a monomodal reading: the image is grayscale, a choice that is often used to de-emphasise an element that is less important than a bolder-print element. The kanji-esque image appears behind the English title of the section – a design choice which might be read as indicating that the kanji is being used in an illustrative capacity, echoing a concept that has already been given through verbal content.

Another possible reading would be to believe that the kanji-esque image is “translated” by the English title before it. If a monomodal reader understands the design in this way, they might reconsider their reading strategy, seeing the multimodal reading required by the narrative, when they recognize the kanji-esque image later, embedded in the narrative with a different English translation. At this point, there are several options available to the reader – they might interpret the repetition of the kanji-esque symbol as being like a magazine article’s “pulled quote,” a section from later in the work which appears, repeated, enlarged/ emphasized by placement, in order to highlight its content as
a key idea in the article. They might begin to realize that the kanji-esque image is juxtaposed as it is against the English title for the section for some reason, but that the image is not “translated” by the English title. It must, then, serve to highlight an idea about the section, or be intended to be read alongside the title as an overall commentary on the tone of the section, its themes, its events. So what do these juxtapositions potentially add to the narrative?

As with drawing kanji, the order of the fragmented elements that comprise the narrative – traditional text block and sidebar material - (as with kanji’s order of the strokes) is key to comprehension and is the most effective communication of an idea. The author is emphasizing this key to reading this novel’s unique signifying system through this close relation of form and content, the spatial-temporal structure with narrative ordering and the placement spatially or sequentially of narrative fragments in relation to sidebar content.

One key to the novel is the sidebar note about the importance of the order of strokes in crafting kanji. I read this sidebar note as key and one of the few nearly overt parallels to the difficulties of reading the novel. The order of strokes sidebar note hints that order is of great importance in the novel in terms of making meaning (thematically for making sense of the fragmentary narrative, and more concretely as a strategy for navigating the unusual graphic/spatial structure). This note also suggests that there might be a best way to approach the order of reading (spatial-temporal dimension), as well as a best way to approach reading the signification of the order the information is given in the narrative structure.
This order of strokes, along with the careful instructions about how to produce calligraphic works throughout the novel, highlight the importance of reading not only the linguistic content of the novel, recognizing words and stringing together paragraph after paragraph in a linear pattern, but of reading the spatial, sequential, and graphic aspects of how each element comes together on the page. Shodo is an art which presents us with a character which is at once a word and an image, in which the order of placement temporally has meaning, and the novel in print, whether it has been highlighted in such a way in the standard type or not, is also both typographic and visual. Shimoda’s novel, thanks in part to close collaboration between illustrator and author and the careful and significant layout, font, and material choices of the book designer, is an exceptional statement of the inextricable unity of the visual, spatial, and temporal aspects of what is often thought of primarily as a repository of linguistic content presented in a linear fashion.

Often, the sidebar elements of the novel are *juxtaposed against* or *framed by* the events in the narrative in ways that create an additional commentary. This additional commentary can set a tone that *parallels or foreshadows* the mood/ tone in the sections before and after the sidebar element, placing one concept next to another seemingly unrelated concept in order to make new meaning in sounding both notes in sequence of narrative time so close to one another. The sidebar element serves to carry the tone of one narrative fragment into the next narrative fragment, unifying the pieces of the narrative in one sense and creating an interesting overlay or juxtaposition between the similarities and differences of the application of that idea within each different narrative fragment.
The Print Novel – Always Already Multimodal

The sidebar elements in Todd Shimoda’s *The Fourth Treasure* illustrate that multimodal textual elements (graphic, spatial, and textual) are narrative elements that communicate aspects of the narrative alongside traditional print-linguistic content alone. At the most basic level, even the most visually traditional novels communicate on these three levels, communicate multimodally. Take, for example, the hard return. This is a spatial convention literary analysts often overlook as not part of how the story is being told. However, the hard return is deployed in many different ways in different narratives, and it signifies information about the story, giving the reader direction for interpreting or usefully connecting the narrative pieces. It is a spatial-temporal and visual –signifying strategy, in this sense utilizing the graphic space of the page to signify that narrative time has passed, that the narrative will resume from another character’s perspective, that vast distances have been traversed. The hard return signifies within a unified multimodal signifying context, a system which includes input from all three textual dimensions – graphic, spatial, and textual.

These results illustrate the success of my reading methodology in enabling the user to isolate specific textual features, and then re-contextualize them to make observations about the systems at work in the multimodal novel. Taking a global inventory of textual elements before deciding which of those elements might be the most important or meaningful to the narrative, and then surveying those elements as they functioned in the narrative, facilitated the discovery of how productive juxtapositions are in setting a tone in *The Fourth Treasure*. While a traditional literary analysis would have also noted meaningful juxtapositions in thematic content and in the timelines and
perspectives each storyline produced, it would have missed the intricacies of textual elements in multiple modes all working together to evoke concepts, to set the tone for each section, and to create chords of different times, moods, and character ideas in the novel. The difference between a traditional interpretation of *The Fourth Treasure* and a reading using a multimodal interpretive method is striking and significant, proving that this multimodal interpretive strategy is needed for the multimodal novel to be fully understood or completely analyzed.

**Reading 2—*The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet***

**The Challenges of Meaningful Form: Embodying Tensions in the Multimodal Novel**

The second novel I chose to test my methodology on is *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*. I selected this text because it has a feature similar to one in both *The Fourth Treasure* and *House of Leaves*, the other two novels in this study. This feature, which has a similar appearance in all three novels, is a large sidebar running alongside the traditional text block, often containing brief segments of text. Though this is a clear point of interest, I first conduct a global survey of all textual elements in the novel. It is crucial to the successful use of the method that the user not follow such an agenda. Focusing on the potential features as well as new features of *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* that fit the described criteria for elements of each level of a text in the taxonomy allowed me to avoid the pitfall of moving from general textual observation to interpretation too early in the process. However, re-concretizing the textual elements was the interpretive move that revealed the differences in how *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet’s* textual elements contributed to narrative meaning. This application demonstrates the effectiveness of my method in revealing more complex textual systems at work in a multimodal novel, as
well as its effectiveness in highlighting elements with similar appearances that do not function in the same ways from novel to novel.

Reif Larsen’s first novel, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, includes textual elements in multiple modes that are arranged within an unusual layout. Though the use of these elements in the different sections of the novel is uneven and at times simply illustrative, there are a great many more moments wherein these multimodal textual elements and the nonstandard layout contribute actively to the narrative.

In *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, multimodal textual elements are often directly related to the narrative content of the traditional text block. Most often, they continue a thought or storyline from the traditional text block in a sidebar text block and image or caption, then returning to the traditional text block. When textual elements aren’t directly connected to the traditional text block, they comment indirectly upon it, referencing or building upon narrative information given previously in the text. Often, they juxtapose an earlier narrative mood or theme with the current action of the page upon which they appear, striking a chord that produces additional room for interpretation.

The form of the text of *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* – layout of pages, establishment of patterns and then breaking patterns – offers metacommentary, or another layer of narrative meaning, emphasizing narrative themes through layout and the flow of elements.

Throughout *Spivet*, we encounter pieces of a linear narrative represented in multiple modes that has been broken up into units and arranged/redistributed in the space of the page or spread in order to signify through both the form and content in a way they would not in a linear, monomodal form. Much of the multimodal narrative sequences
communicate ideas that could not be expressed in a monomodal way – instead, they communicate through unusual reading paths, and through the complexity and detail added to the narrative in the move to unpack the ways an image comments upon or adds another layer of meaning to the verbal content in the traditional text block. However, the novel’s use of such complex multimodal statements is uneven, and some of the nonverbal elements have very simple relationships to verbal elements of the text, especially in the last third of the novel.

There are moments in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* where the verbal and nonverbal elements of the text are merely chunks of a linear narrative distributed across modalities and across the layout of the page, and there are other places where textual elements achieve narrative effects that would not be possible in a monomodally styled, linear narrative.

The novel’s arrangement of multimodal narrative information within an unusual layout creates a nonstandard reading path, reiterating the novel’s themes of maps, journeys, and the dangers of overreliance on empirical data sets as ways of understanding human beings. Some critics have argued that this use of multimodal narrative elements and nonstandard layouts is not earned or warranted for this particular story. At times, the novel seems like a traditional narrative exposition broken into pieces, translated into other modalities, and rearranged on the page purely to create these unusual reading paths.

Though multimodal elements and nonstandard design contribute actively to the narrative throughout most of *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, in some places they become more passive aspects of the narrative – the images merely illustrative, the layout

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37 A multimodal statement is a sequence of textual elements in multiple modes that all participate in conveying a single idea.
creating simpler reading paths that offer no additional narrative commentary. The form of *Spivet* changes several times in the course of the novel. These changes, which comprise three distinct sections, occur in both the layout and the use of multimodal textual elements. In the first section, sidebars, multimodal textual elements, and alternative reading paths lead us to read in a new way. With the second section, nearly all multimodal and sidebar activity ceases and the form evokes the monomodal style of the traditional novel. The third section, the conclusion of the book, initially appears to function like the first section, but instead has less active signification between sidebar and traditional text block, and between the multimodal textual elements.

These different ways the textual elements and layout works in the three different sections of *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* might be read as its own metacommentary upon the protagonist’s journey of loss of faith in the scientific method and discovery of faith in family. However, the breakdown in active signification in multiple modes is representative of the tensions between method of narrative telling and medium of our era – tensions between monomodal and multimodal narration, between nostalgia for novels that accomplished great things emphasizing the verbal modality over the visual, spatial and temporal and the textual utopia promised by the screen, and tensions between linear reading paths and new kinds of reading paths.

**Beyond Narrative in Multiple Modes – Textual Navigation vs Narrative Information**

In *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, multimodal elements and nonstandard layouts offer narrative information throughout the novel, but the relationships between them, as well as the reading paths that must be followed to make sense of the narrative elements on the page – also performs a signifying function in the narrative. Reading
paths in Spivet build upon the conventions of standard novels, but use dashed arrows to create a directed alternate (nonstandard) reading path, and in many instances, textual elements in unusual formations which must be read in a certain order to create meaning (implicit reading paths). These reading paths themselves offer another level of commentary on the narrative themes of Spivet, reinforcing the themes through the movement across the page and offering insight into the protagonist’s thought processes.

Form and content in The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet are closely related in ways that actively contribute to the narrative throughout much of the novel. Though there are many instances in which the nonverbal modal content in sidebars performs a simple illustrative function, a greater portion of the relationships between textual elements and the way these relationships suggest reading paths contribute significantly to the narrative, both in reinforcing the themes of the content in the form/layout through construction of types of reading paths (in the flow of information), and in how the verbal information given in the traditional text block interacts with information given in other modes, both in the sidebar and in the traditional text block.

**Narrative Contributions of Textual Elements In Multiple Modes**

The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet is a novel about a young genius, T.S. Spivet, who is obsessed with cartography. As the story begins, he obsessively maps and studies every aspect of his life, trying to find meaning and impose order through the application of scientific observation. After losing his older brother tragically, Spivet redoubles his efforts to map, chart, and explain the minutiae of human behaviors and daily life in the hopes that his scientific inquiries will eventually lead him to understandings of why
people do the things they do, to an understanding of his parents and sister, and of his own place in the world.

A Typical Page in Spivet

The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet has an unusually wide page, upon which there is a traditional text block at the center of the page, and in the unusually wide margins, a large sidebar in which images and notes appear. The information in the novel’s sidebar is often connected to specific aspects of the traditional text block or to other elements either in the sidebar through dashed arrows, or arrows with dotted lines. The design convention of the page - traditional text block and sidebars - is fairly consistent throughout the novel, though there are several instances of a large image interrupting the traditional text block and occupying the sidebar space as well, reorienting the page briefly.

Other conventions introduced early in Spivet also change a bit throughout the novel. On some pages, elements bleed off of the page, and in drawing the eye to another page, invite the reader to connect elements on the first page with elements on other pages. The short dotted-line arrows are one of the most common elements that function this way in Spivet. These are dotted lines with directional arrows that run from a specific point within a paragraph or from a textual element to another element. Sometimes, this endpoint of the dashed arrow is on the same page as its point of origin, but often it runs off of the first page, continuing on the next to guide us to a specific second textual element. When an element crosses the boundary of the margins of the page, readers are compelled to see whether it will continue on another page, or whether the bleed is simply a single-page element.
The directional printing or orientation of sidebar contents changes from horizontal to vertical, breaking the reading conventions the novel initially established (perhaps another comment on maps). In a few places, the page does not contain a sidebar, replaced instead by a wide full-page image or element that is sometimes embedded in the traditional text block using text wrap.

**Nonstandard Reading Paths and Page Navigation**

Does the reader have much of a choice in how they navigate a page in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*? In being offered a nonstandard reading path, it might seem that the reader has been given the choice between a conventional reading of the novel following only the traditional text block in the center of the page. However, an attempt to follow the narrative flow using a standard reading path reveals that each piece of the text is required to make sense of the narrative, and not only that, but that the pieces must be processed in a specific order. We are following the path that has been charted for us, completing a sequence that requires putting together pieces in a specific order to make sense of the story, not choosing our own reading path from multiple offerings, despite the presence of a traditional text block, a sidebar with its own content, and textual elements in multiple modes.

While it might seem as if there are points in *Spivet* where we have more choice, more control over our own reading path, the only real freedom we are given is in the choice of how to begin - whether to begin by looking at the chapter head image or to begin the traditional way, seeking out the traditional text block, the first lines of the verbal narrative portion of the text.
The page hierarchy, however, does not support multiple reading strategies. Though it places the thorough reader on a much less conventional reading path that might seem to suggest that it is one of two reading options (when remembering a traditional reading pattern—top to bottom, left to right, in a sequential order from page to page), there is only one way the reader can process the elements on the page.

First, the chapter head image directs us to the explanatory lines, which lead to the detail image, which invites the familiar situation of then reading the words in the sidebar below with the expectation that they explain the image, only to find the sidebar text drawing us into the final sidebar image on the first page. Before we know it, we have been taken on a side trip along the margins of the page, content that would be called marginalia and illustration becoming perhaps the true introductory portion of the chapter, resetting our expectations first thing within the portion of the novel we most expect to settle down into predictable conventions of layout and modal foregrounding. But is this first page, and the prefatory pages before it, exemplary of the rest of the novel?

**Catalogue of Textual Features in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet***

**Textual Elements in Layout Patterns and in Relation to Each Other**

The arrangement of textual elements in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* seems random at first due to its use of a nonstandard layout and multimodal elements to tell the story, but the novel establishes patterns in flow from section to section, chapter to chapter, and between modal elements and areas of the page.

New sections of the novel are signaled by a two-page spread with a sepia-hued image, generally a map portraying a section of the title character’s location within his trans-continental journey, and a section title. This is followed by the standard incipit for each
chapter—a blank color-processed page on the left and a chapter head image or chapter head notes, and chapter incipit on the right. Section endings vary—some end with an image, others end with more standard verbal content in a traditional text block down the center of the page.

Within the space of each chapter, there are sidebars containing images, images with captions, and sometimes just blocks of text. These elements are often, though not always, connected to a specific line of the traditional text block’s verbal content with a dashed arrow beginning at the traditional text block line and pointing to the sidebar element.

The reading paths of *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* are constructed based on standard reading practices for novels—that readers begin at the top of the page and move in a linear fashion down the page, reading one element (generally verbal elements) after another to make sense of the text. Readers begin at the left of pages and sentences and read from left to right until they reach the bottom of a page, at which point they expect to continue the thought at the top left of the text block on the next page. The nonstandard reading paths of this novel build upon these rules of hierarchy and order of reading operations (top to bottom, left to right). Unless otherwise directed through dashed arrows or elements interjected into the traditional text block, readers use these standard rules—top to bottom, left to right—to make sense of the text.

There are moments where these rules break down and readers must figure out without direction where to read next. Many of these moments occur after a call-out, or dashed arrow, takes us from the traditional text block to the sidebar to take in other modal textual elements and sidebar text. Often, after reading the element we have been directed
to by a dashed arrow, we are stranded without a subsequent arrow or observable directive as to whether to read the other elements in the sidebar in a top-to-bottom sequence, or whether to return to the line in the traditional text block we departed from and resume reading there. The reader must in these instances use the strategy of trial and error, trying first one path (often, reading the sidebar elements in order) to see whether the elements make narrative sense when read together, and then if they do not, taking the path back to the traditional text block and seeing whether picking up that narrative thread results in a productive narrative flow. In some cases, another dashed arrow is visible further down the page connecting from the traditional text block to the sidebar elements just below the ones we have been directed to read, and this scanning ahead confirms that the sidebar elements below ours will be for later in the narrative, calling for us to return to the traditional text block and read through to that moment before returning to the sidebar. This illustrates that there are moments in which the reader cannot make sense of the text without altering the rules of hierarchy, sequence, or ordering, new rules are added to the old, and that both sets of rules operate together to help the reader sort out the correct order of operations in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*.

**Shifting Layout and Element-to-Element Design Patterns in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet***

The Prefatory Pages in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* present us with a text in which narrative information will be given in multiple modes, and in which we must be attendant to narrative information given in non-standard areas of text. In introducing us to these two key rules for reading *Spivet*, the prefatory page sequence serves to take the conventional rules of notice (Rabinowitz), or the cues readers find in a text that give direction for reading, for significance of elements in a novel, and asks us to question the
familiar conventions, forging new connections and new pathways for reading. These new reading skills are built upon, and build signification from how they alter, a reader’s knowledge of the traditional conventions of reading in the print novel.

After this point, we cross the threshold from prefatory pages to the first chapters of the novel. These first chapters also build upon a basic knowledge of layout and reading pathways for the traditional novel in order to learn to navigate the design of the page in *Spivet*, as well as the rules of order for the modal elements on the page, meaning the flow from element to element – which is in question at several points, and the flow from sidebar to traditional text block and back again) and hierarchy figuring out, sometimes with a directed path, other times with an implicit path, what order to read narrative elements in) that are unique to *Spivet*, but which gain meaningfulness when read with an understanding of how they modify or alter reading conventions for more traditionally designed novels.

The rules for navigating the first chapters of *Spivet* depend on the skills primed with the prefatory page sequence, in which readers learn to look for meaning in elements of multiple modes, and to look for meaning in any area of the page or text, even those traditionally off-limits to narrative meaning-making (such as the publication information in the prefatory pages). However, in order to use the reading pathways in the first few chapters, readers must also build upon the observational skills learned in the prefatory pages, taking those skills and learning to follow a reading pathway and process textual/narrative information in very different ways than at first. The first chapters establish rules for moving through the narrative pieces, and these rules remain somewhat constant for a time before changing at key moments – building upon reader proficiency
with the pattern of the first chapters to emphasize moments in which the given pattern is broken.

**How the Prefatory Pages Establish the Novel as Multimodal and Train the Reader to Utilize Different Pathways and Patterns, to Apply New or Unique Reading Conventions to Make Sense of the Novel**

*The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet* is constructed to not only meaningfully play against conventions of traditional reading, but to also present the reader with its own unique conventions of use, teaching them a new way of reading through the initial navigation of its unique layout and multimodal elements.

The novel opens with immediate indications that it will break out of traditional print conventions, and that it will require the reader to adopt unconventional reading and interpretive practices. This begins with a sequence of prefatory pages that in a standard novel would include a blank free front end page, a title page, publication information, the main title page, and then the first lines of story. In conventional novels, though narrative information is suggested by the title, the novel’s subject and genre information that are given in the indexing and publication information, narrative content at the story level is seldom included until the diegetic threshold of the novel has been crossed with the beginning of the first chapter.\(^{38}\) In breaking this basic convention, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* immediately cues that it will break design conventions, change the standard

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\(^{38}\) The title conveys subject, tone, theme, attitude toward subject in novels. The subject and genre information selected for library indexing and often displayed on the publication information page also conveys information about the novel, classifying and at times pigeonholing it for referencing consensus among library collections. While readers often skip this information because they do not consider it part of the story itself, these suggested categories make an argument about how the novel should be read – what genres it should be considered part of, which of the subjects in the narrative should be considered central to the novel’s meaning, and so on.
reading path, and expect readers to look for narrative meaning in aspects of the text and areas of the page not traditionally used to communicate narrative information.

A two-page spread immediately following the free front end pages is printed to resemble the front endpapers of an antique book, the image detailed with signs of visible wear including the endpapers worn through to reveal the crocodile skin cover, the plate of the former owner covered with smeared ink, and an image of a loose slip of paper marked “Hobo Hotline” affixed with scotch tape to the lower right hand side of the page.

The next prefatory page is lightly printed with a graph paper patterning, upon which there is a compound image which encloses the introductory quotation for the novel, the quote being a convention of standard novels here transformed slightly into something different. The quotation is part of the complex palimpsestic image, layers of maps upon which a banner reads “it is not down in any map; true places never are,” a quotation from Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Immediately the contradictions inherent in this composition raise questions about the novel’s themes and overall statement, for imposed upon maps is a statement questioning the explanatory power of maps, graphs, and perhaps of the human endeavor to understand through creating systems.

The use of dashed arrows and multimodal textual elements to augment the traditional center of meaning in a novel, the traditional text block, and the potential failure of these addendums to systematically clarify or explain, also fits into this theme in the novel. The dashed arrow takes readers on alternate routes through a genre of text that traditionally has rigidly prescribed routes for readers to follow. For the novel, these conventions are that we process the text from top to bottom, left to right, that we can find narrative content in a verbal mode in the traditional text block, and that illustrations,
marginalia, and footnotes are secondary, even optional, for readers. The traditional novel also has prescribed features to look to for meaning—a running head, page numbers, chapter titles, a table of contents, sometimes an index, publication information, and even the convention of page-to-page linear progression of a single column of text running down the center of each page. The organization of elements in the graphic space of the page in *Spivet*, however, denies readers the familiar paths and legends of the novel’s narrative meaning-making, but at the same time a fairly rigid procedural path is laid out for readers using the dashed arrows and elements that must be read in a certain order to make sense.

The title page for the novel is also unusual, for in place of the standard title in a font against the white space of the page, there is a complex layered image, a kind of logo for the novel. The title image for the novel is a sepia map of the United States within which the title of the novel appears in white serif font. A dotted line charting a journey also appears in white, bisecting the title and the continent.

Along the top of the icon are three titled sections, “The West,” “The Crossing,” and “The East.” These section titles are underlined, and beneath each are numbers with dotted lines pointing to specific locations on the journey line on the map. “The West” is the header for numbers one through four, “The Crossing” for 5-10, and “The East” for 11-15. Of these fifteen chapters, which are visually linked by dotted lines to specific points on the journey, two of the lines descending toward the map do not connect to a specific point on the map, terminating instead in question marks. This image seems at first simple, just a title page illustration, a decoration, but upon closer inspection, especially when looking for a table of contents thereafter, it becomes apparent that this
image is both map of the course of the story in narrative space and time, and table of contents for the novel.

Turning the page, the standard ISBN and library cataloguing and copyright information page have been modified. In addition to the usual information given in standard format, handwritten annotations set apart by sepia ink appear, an exhaustive numbered list of twenty-seven subjects that “this book is about”. A dotted lined arrow, also printed in sepia, connects the ISBN in the upper half of the page to the first handwritten set of thematic topics. A second dotted line connects the end of this short first list to the second handwritten set, and a similar third dotted line runs from the end of this second grouping down the left margin to the bottom of the page, to the longest set.

An image of a compass in the center of an empty page prefaces the sepia-printed map, which occupies a two-page spread introducing the first section of the novel and introducing the main portion of the novel. This image, a two-page spread printed in several shades of sepia, is a map of Montana. The left page portion of the image maps the continental divide across the state, including an arrow indicating a point of interest, Coppertop Ranch. The right page portion of the image begins at the top right corner with a large label, which is the image of a compass crossed by a banner, upon which is printed the section title “Part I: The West.” In the white space surrounding the image at the lower right corner of this page, there is a small graph titled “Montana as Rivers,” and an even smaller boxed signature, “TSS.”

The next spread is a blank, color-processed page (peach hued), with the first chapter of the novel beginning on the verso page. The chapter opens with a half-page chapter head illustration, a zoom-in detailed map of the novel’s fictional setting, The
Coppertop Ranch. The map is printed in black ink, with two dashed arrows (arrows with dotted lines) linking a point on the map with a sidebar caption, “My Bedroom,” with latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates and beneath this handwritten portion, a detail map drawing of the bedroom’s layout, with detail labels, boxed in a dotted line. In a smaller font than that of the traditional text block, in the open space of the sidebar is a block of text which discusses the bedroom’s role in the story in greater detail and links to an image of a sparrow skeleton drawn on graph paper just below this sidebar text block.

The action of the chapter head image directing us to the detail map of the room, which directs us to the caption (convention holds that the caption in the sidebar might have explanatory power), and the caption connects the detail map with the subject image of the sparrow at the bottom of the sidebar. This is curious, as it takes the reader’s path off of the traditional reading course of top to bottom of the traditional text block at the center of each page. In this way, different procedural rules for reading are being suggested to us as readers, and right at the outset of the novel.

It seems thematically relevant to the discussion of maps and the value of maps, to the character-driven dotted-line directives for reading and annotations that attempt to control the course of the narrative unfolding, and to the mixed modal status and nontraditional format of *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* that the prefatory pages and also the very first seemingly standard (or expectedly standard novelistic) chapter continually sweep the standard reading path off course, forcing us to learn to process the elements on the novel’s pages a new way.
Spivet and other multimodal novels often play upon or rely on a reader’s familiarity with both basic textual conventions such as design, organization, and layout for the novel and procedural reading rules for the novel – overall, a set of skills that I will refer to as textual competence - in creating reading paths and order of operations for processing the textual elements in the space of the text. The design of the text requires reader knowledge of conventions – that we read left to right, beginning at the top of a page and proceeding in a linear L-R, top to bottom fashion until we reach the bottom of the page, that we begin the following page, that after we are finished there we turn a page to continue. Textual competence for the standard novel might also involve familiarity with the convention that the textual elements outside the traditional text block are supplementary to the central meaning production of the verbal content in the text block running down the center of the page. Additionally, textual elements located outside the traditional text block on the page are optional, provide organizational cues, or are merely ornamental and not meant to be interpreted as significant parts of the narrative.

The textual and the narrative, form and content, are divorced – form is not interpreted as contributing to narrative meaning in more than an aesthetic way - in the traditionally designed novel, with textual features outside the text block that signal genre, tone, and so on, but that do not participate actively in providing narrative information

**Reading Paths**

The role of the dotted-line call-outs or arrows in *Spivet* is complex. First, the arrows create a sequence, or sequence the elements on the page, creating a path that the reader must follow to make sense of the story, as the linkages are often additive, each adding some meaning to the previous and often prefacing or introducing the next. Second, the
arrows in several places not only create sequence, they order the multimodal elements of the novel and dictate somewhat fixed relationships between elements and between different areas of the page, establishing a procedural order for making meaning between elements, and between vectors of the page. These dashed arrows fix or dictate the relationships between elements and areas of the page for the reader because they create an order of interpretation, guiding the reading both through form and content from element to element, from one space on the page to another, and the path they indicate must be followed to put together elements that must be interpreted in a specific order. In order to make sense of the narrative pieces in multiple modes, the reader must process them in the order that the dashed arrows indicate, coupled with use of the standard reading conventions for the novel – that we read from the top of the page to the bottom, from left to right—and the dashed arrows work within these rules to intermittently change the reading path before returning to the normal path. The reader does not have the option to ignore these dashed arrows if they wish to follow the narrative.

The dashed arrow device controls the relationships between the textual elements, and controls the reader’s path through the vectors of the page. In this way, though the dashed arrow takes readers on a less conventional reading path, it still relies upon standard reading conventions, and a narrative that, though it is told in multiple modes and in pieces such as in the traditional text block, in bits of text in the sidebar, and through various spatial and visual elements, must be read in a certain order. Despite the appearance of a complex, open reading path, the multimodal system of *Spivet* requires little interpretive work from readers in connecting and discovering relationships between
modal elements, relationships between various vectors of the page, and reading path options, prescribing a reading path with the dashed arrow.

There are two kinds of reading paths at work in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*. The first type of reading path is given to the reader explicitly through a combination of directional arrows and basic rules of standard reading procedures (top to bottom, left to right) – this is a directed reading path. With this kind of reading path, the reader initially follows the hierarchical flow of the page, beginning with the top and moving left to right until they reach the end of the page. When they encounter elements set apart from the text block (perhaps through boxes, or when they are in a modality other than the verbal), they must scan the text for contextual clues indicating whether the text before the element explains or introduces it, whether verbal text after the element explains it or continues its idea, and connect the verbal with the visual elements in that way, following the top to bottom flow of the page. When directed by a dashed arrow to leave the traditional text block (because the dashed arrows either call out from traditional text block to a sidebar element, or link sidebar elements to one another or across pages), the reader follows the arrow to the indicated textual element in the sidebar. From there, the reader will either be given another dashed arrow leading to another element, will be expected to scan ahead and determine whether subsequent elements in the top to bottom order of the sidebar are meant to be read after the directly linked element. If the elements in the sidebar following the directly linked one flow as one complete thought, the reader follows the entire sidebar chain of ideas and then is left at the bottom of the page with no arrow. This often becomes a cue to return to the traditional text block and resume reading at the point the reader originally departed from.
Much of the first section of the novel utilizes directed reading paths, in part as introduction to the conventions of reading that must be used to make sense of the content in *Spivet*. Many of the dashed arrows lead out to sidebar content, often going a step farther and connecting the elements in the sidebar that are meant to be parts of a single line of thought. There are moments in which the dashed arrows connect a series of textual elements in the sidebars, such as sequences with a map, a close-up on the map, and an extreme zoom image of a location from the close-up – a very cinematic use of a sequence of images, giving a kind of establishing shot before zooming in so that we are aware of the placement of the focal element within a larger context. In the middle section of the book, this device shifts away from zooming in on maps and begins to show us our location in a book the main character is reading, making the connection between geographical pathways and reading pathways, between the geography of physical space and the equal importance of the graphic space of the pages within books. It is one of many points in which the author draws attention to issues of layout and reading pathways as meaningful to the narrative.

Additionally, the number of different ways directed paths are used in the first section of the novel instructs us to be attendant to even these new conventions might be used in different ways. At the bottom of one verso page, T.S. describes the way his father takes sips in the traditional text block, and a dashed arrow tracks down from the end of that line in a bleed. When we turn the page, we find that the dashed arrow continues at the top of the next page’s sidebar, which contains a diagram about the frequency of the sips along with an image of the father (15). Though there are other
bleeds throughout the novel, often images unifying several pages with a general theme, the dashed arrow bleeds make precise, specific connections between textual elements.

Later in the novel, the dashed arrow takes us away from the traditional text block, but instead of leading to specific textual elements in the sidebar, forms a t-junction with blank space at both ends to visually represent a dilemma or crossroads the main character finds himself confronting. The dashed arrow which up until this point has been a directive for a reading path here doubles as a visual symbol of a state of mind, a confusion, directions on the mental maps T.S. always makes that lead to no solid data or answers, no known locations. The dashed arrows are here both directed reading path that we must follow, and the path that we take illustrates the main character’s state of mind symbolically (27). This is an important moment, for it tells us that the way we move about within this text is sometimes another level of textual meaning-making. The journey is part of the meaning/message.

The second type of reading path requires the reader to follow standard reading procedures in addition to (or interchangeably with, as the situation requires – switching between reading rules) the reading conventions uniquely set forth by the early patterns of information flow in the novel in order to *discover* the connections between textual elements/ pieces of narrative information suggested by the areas of the page in which these elements are arranged. In *Spivet*, this reading path occurs both between the traditional text block and the sidebar material, and from textual element to textual element within the sidebar. Though this reading path seems open, as if readers can choose whether to incorporate sidebar elements or undirected subsequent textual elements into their reading, there is a single correct order in which the elements must be read to make
narrative sense. This requisite procedural order of the textual elements on the page is not explicitly stated, but rather must be discovered through trial and error, making it an implied reading path.

Implied reading paths can be situations in which there are no call-out dashed arrows giving readers directions on how to connect sidebar elements to the traditional text block’s content, but can also include situations in which readers follow a dashed arrow into a full sidebar and must determine the order of processing the elements there (as in the case of three-part images that flow against reading conventions, moving from bottom to top), and also whether to continue to read the entire sidebar before returning to their original departure point in the traditional text block.

The original reading path used throughout the novel - in which a dashed arrow leads us from the traditional text block to a sidebar element, we read the sidebar top to bottom, or read the designated element of several, and have the cue to return to the traditional text block and continue reading there – is disrupted with a pattern on page 68. On this page, readers encounter the familiar traditional text block with a dashed arrow instructing us to make the connection between, and read in a sequence, a specific point in the text block and a specific element in the sidebar. However, after following the dashed arrow from the traditional text block out to the sidebar, we read the first sidebar element and find no indication that we should return to the traditional text block. In the absence of a cue to return to the place in the text block where we left off, we can attempt to use a different rule of processing and follow the sidebar content from top element through to the bottom element. Moving down the sidebar, we encounter another image with no explanatory label or procedural cue except that it occurs just beneath the image we are
directed to read above it. Because the layout so often uses sequential sets of images and there is no visible divider between these elements, it seems most logical to proceed with reading the second element after the first in the sidebar before returning to the traditional text block. If readers do try to make meaning of the two sidebar images together or as a logical or semantic sequence, however, they find themselves at a dead end. The second image makes no sense when read after the first image – it is not thematically or in any way related to the first sidebar element. Another reading strategy is called for, yet the text gives no clear indications of the correct order of operations.

There is no clearly marked prescribed path – we must infer it through trial and error. This does not mean that the reader has come to a point in the novel where they have a choice in taking one of several possible reading paths, but instead is just an unmarked trail. Returning to the traditional text block, it becomes apparent that the narrative flows properly if the reader moves from the first sidebar image back to the point of departure in the main text block, then further down the page discovers a second dashed arrow that moves from the bottom of the page up to the second sidebar image, leaving no clear textual delineating marks between the two images to show that they are not a sequence. This is one of many such instances of an implicit reading path rather than a directed reading path. The distinction between these two could be very useful in interpreting the unique patterns of the novel’s traditional text block and sidebar element relationships, as well as the overall relationships between the textual elements in the space of the page.
Meaningful Juxtapositions—Narrative Information Distributed Across Multiple Modalities

Another way textual elements in multiple modes make meaning in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* is through several types of word and image (cross modal) or traditional text block and sidebar element (cross textual space) juxtapositions with specific lines and sequences in the traditional text block. These include the simplest type of meaning – illustrative, a more complex relationship in which the illustration continues and builds upon the ideas given in the traditional text block, and finally moments in which the image negates or gives evidence to refute or bring into question an idea presented in the traditional text block. These juxtapositions often occur between traditional text block verbal content and sequences of images and captions or images and text blocks in the sidebars, but they can also occur between verbal and visual elements in the traditional text block, as well as between verbal and visual elements in the sidebar.

*The Sidebar – As a Space, and in Conversation with Traditional Text Block.*

The sidebar’s relationships with the traditional text block is one in which juxtaposition often creates signification between textual elements in multiple modes. The sidebar in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* contains text blocks and images that are linked either directly or implicitly to specific ideas and/or specific lines in the traditional text block. At certain points in the novel, the sidebar is interrupted by images that fill the margins. At other points in the novel, though not frequently, the sidebars contain an image that runs for several subsequent pages, thematically unifying them. The relationship between sidebar and traditional text block is used to actively convey narrative information throughout the novel, but the most overt signification occurs when the main character loses his place on a journey, and the coordinate markers vanish from
his series of running full-sidebar maps of the railroad lines before the maps vanish completely, leaving a conspicuous silence that indicates both his loss of awareness of his place literally and figuratively, and his loss of confidence in the power of science and cartography to represent lived experience in a meaningful way. This conspicuous silence stretches on for many pages, a stark contrast to the busy, confident ongoing asides the character interjects throughout the progression of the narrative.

**Building New Reading Conventions and then Breaking Them**

Narrative signification also occurs in moments when the unique pattern of flow between textual elements and the expected flow from one area of the page to another is broken. As mentioned earlier, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* builds upon the traditional novel’s reading conventions, including linear accumulation of information from beginning to end of the novel, and creates its own unique sequence of elements given for every section, every chapter, and on most two-page spreads. It also establishes a pattern of flow from one area of the page to another. It is notable, then, when this pattern is broken and these new rules for reading broken. The moments when this system of layout, sequence of elements, and flow on the page break down become conspicuous because they break not only our expectations (based on experience with the novel’s previous content) of what element might come next in the novel, but also in the case of *Spivet’s* unique reading paths, break the rules we have learned to follow to make sense of the text, sending us back a page, leading us a page ahead of the traditional text block following a footnote that continues, changing the new rules we have learned to use to navigate the novel and jarring the flow of our reading. These moments often communicate narrative meaning at key points in the storyline.
One of the most notable breaks in pattern occurs in the section “The Crossing,” in which a running motif sidebar image continues on multiple pages. This is attention grabbing because motifs do not last for more than two pages generally, but this map of the main character’s position on the train lines continues for twelve pages before picking up again thirteen pages later, this time running for fifteen pages.

**Meaningful Omissions – Breaking the Pattern in A Meaningful Way**

After the constant back-and-forth between the protagonist’s running commentary in sidebar elements and the verbal narrative running forward in the traditional text block, the sudden absence of any commentary or sidebar elements (and the absence of nearly any textual elements other than the narrative in the traditional text block) interrupts the patterns of reading we have become accustomed to, drawing our notice. The novel’s narrative style shifts from that of a multimodal novel in which meaning is made in adding elements together to that of a conventional novel in which content given in the verbal mode is foregrounded and this content is given solely in the traditional text block. After almost two hundred pages of using a new set of rules for reading—reading content across modes and the requirement that elements in the sidebar be read in accompaniment to specific lines of the traditional text block—rules of operations for the novel suddenly change. The story begins to account for this shift in the rules for reading in Chapter 9 with the young cartographer both questioning the explanatory power of maps and becoming so absorbed in another mode of representation – fiction – that he loses track of his location in reality.

Initially, we are introduced to a map of the railroad line the main character will ride to his destination. The map of the railroad route appears as a running motif on
alternating pages in the sidebars, the portion of the map displayed shifting up the page with a different place marker and note as the main character moves along the line, including intermittent observations about places the train passes through, for over thirty pages. As the protagonist reads a novel that is included in the traditional text block alternating with his own present-time story of the journey by train, he mentions beginning to lose track of his location on the train route. This parallels the beginnings of his questioning the value of mapping and science as means to represent and understand human behavior. As this immersion in the novel and disorientation progress, the sidebar running map of his railroad journey begins to change. First, the small observational notes about locations disappear from the railroad map in the margins of the first several pages, then the names of locations the train passes through, and finally after running along blankly for a few pages, the tracks themselves are printed lighter and lighter until they vanish. This coincides with the protagonist losing track of where he is, both geographically and ontologically.

**Review of Literature Multimodal Devices—Effective Narrative Elements, or So Many Bells and Whistles?**

*The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* had a notably large release, with coverage in major magazines, popular literary blogs, and online literary reviews as well as the expected coverage through newspaper book reviews. Many reviewers found the novel impossible to ignore because, in a challenging publishing climate, it had commanded a publisher bidding war and a reported million dollar advance for Larsen, with widespread press coverage of the novel’s release.

Most reviewers found the subject of the novel fascinating and the voice of the protagonist engaging, but felt that the novel lost its focus and momentum halfway
Most reviews noted the unusual layout and the incorporation of visual elements in *Spivet*, though there was disagreement about whether these elements added or detracted from the power of the narrative. Surprisingly, only one reviewer, Ginia Bellafante, wrote about how the dashed-arrow call outs create unusual reading pathways through the text.

A number of reviewers and interviewers related the style of layout in *Spivet* to various literary predecessors, including the expected comparisons to Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, Steven Hall’s *The Raw Shark Texts*, W.G. Sebald’s *Rings of Saturn*.40 Most of the reviews were mixed – reviewers felt that the novel was extremely innovative and ambitious, but that the narrative had serious flaws. The most significant critique levied against *Spivet* was that in creating an ambitious format, with its unusual layout and multimodal elements, the quality of the story itself suffered (Bellafante).

In a split that reflects the tensions between the novel in print as it was and the developing genre of the multimodal novel, reviewers generally fell into one of two camps regarding *Spivet*’s multimodal content and its more traditional content. Reviewers either loved the traditional verbal section at the center of the novel, claiming it as evidence of the author’s literary chops and arguing that without the marginalia, the novel might have been stronger, or they loved the experimental layouts and multimodal narrative style, arguing that the novel was slowed down too much by the monomodal-styled section in the middle. It is apparent that critics are using two different reading methods, and those

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40 Michele Filgate and Matt Thorne.
applying a traditional reading method to a multimodal narrative do not get satisfying results. Likewise, readers applying the multimodal reading strategies introduced in the first portion of *Spivet* have to adjust their reading paths and their sense of which elements of the page are significant in the monomodally-styled middle section of the novel.

*New York Times* television critic Ginia Bellafante’s review of *Spivet* is perhaps one of the most significant because it articulates the paradigms underscoring a valuation of the monomodal reading experience and dismissiveness of multimodal textualities. Her review is striking for two reasons; first, for its venom, and second for its discussion of multimodal textuality. Bellafante doesn’t merely critique the novel for falling short of its own ambitiousness as many other reviewers do – she mocks both novel and author. The level of rancor in her review is a reaction against calling this new form of novel literary, a reaction whose source we can locate in closer analysis of the types of digs she makes.

One of the recurring aspects of the novel Bellafante attacks is its use of modes other than the traditional verbal to tell parts of the story. This leads to the second striking aspect of her review – Bellafante considers the verbal mode to be the only narrative mode, and views textual elements in other modes as distracting and restrictive, remarking that with the inclusion of images, “what [Larsen] has done, in some sense, is deny the reader’s own instinct for visualization.” Ginia Bellafante’s wordings uphold this conception of narrativity of the modes, discussing narrative as something that is naturally verbal and that *Spivet* is “a novel to be appreciated rather than adored, devoured, or even acutely analyzed, for it is not a narrative that brims with big ideas, and in fact, there is little narrative to speak of.” In remarking that the novel contains little narrative, Bellafante seems to be suggesting that the marginalia does not count as part of the
narrative—that only the traditional text block given in the verbal mode is truly narrative, and that the center of every kind of novel will be located in words, not in multiple modalities. Also implicit in Bellafante’s argument is the idea that deep analysis, close reading, is something we do with words, not with images, not with layout, and certainly not with reading paths. She continues this idea later in the review with a critique of the sidebars and the reading path from traditional text block to sidebar that readers must take, noting that the sidebar content is not optional for readers, and that the kind of reading that it requires is distracting, ruining the experience of reading for those who wish to escape multimodal, hyperlinked textualities.

_The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet_ creates the illusion of choice; you might…assume you could simply ignore the sideline material, except that actually you can’t, because Larsen puts key elements of the story in it. The reader’s attentions are consistently shifted, refocused so that suddenly the experience of reading a novel becomes not a refuge from the distraction of Internet life but a more insistent facsimile of it…you must go to all the places Larsen’s arrows point.

This critique seems to be directed not only at the alternate reading paths the novel requires, but also, again, at the multimodal method of reading that the novel requires. When Bellafante mentions the other modal elements of the novel, it is illustrations that threaten to think for the reader, but not as elements of narrative given in a mode other than the verbal. She does not quite know how to interpret the visual, spatial, temporal, and other non-verbal modes alongside the verbal content of the novel, and it so frustrates her that she has written a review that seems more like a frustrated reader’s venting. For
example, when she mentions the novel’s use of space and directionality in the text, the critique loses focus and devolves into a rant:

Following some of the marginalia requires repositioning the book, turning it around and sideways, making it something for neither the formalist nor the arthritic. I imagine Larsen was trying to do David Foster Wallace’s deployment of addenda one better.

Bellafante is the only critic who gets at some truths about the way the reading pathways work in The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet – noting that although one has the illusion of choosing to follow the dashed arrows to sidebar material or instead to choose to read just the traditional text block, one must read everything to make sense of it. She also notes that the form of the novel – following links to a sidebar, reading notes, and returning to a central text block – is much closer to internet reading styles than to the linear reading styles of traditional novels. Bellafante, along with many defenders of the continuing value of print as a medium, values the focus readers can experience with a monomodal style novel and is skeptical about the intellectual worth of the noise or scattering of focus that occurs when following links in and out of a central text block. This exemplifies an important conflict between two different evaluative criteria, that of monomodally-styled writing, and that of multimodally-styled writing.

In a short essay for Amazon.com, “The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet: The Lost Images,” Reif Larsen discusses the process of developing the novel. He began with a full draft without any illustrations, but soon felt that the character would be better represented through a format that reflected the way T.S. Spivet saw the world – through maps, diagrams, and other illustrations. Larsen describes the relationship of moving from what
he terms “the main story” to “the marginalia,” as “disparate leaps,” and the relationship between the verbal content of the traditional text block or “text” and marginal textual elements, or “images” as “a kind of graphical parallelism.”

There is an unresolved tension in his account of the novel and in the novel itself - between the web and the page, between the idea of readers having a choice in processing the elements of the novel and scripted pathways, and between monomodal and multimodal narrative. *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* embodies these tensions in its deployment of modes in narration – while much of the novel uses modes in a multimodal way, in other moments the form slyly references traditional print’s claim that it is monomodal, showing it to be illusory. These tensions can also be located in the novel’s two types of reading pathways, directed and implicit. The tensions are also evident in Larsen’s use of images sometimes as independent narrative elements, but in other moments as simple illustrations. Finally, these tensions are evident in the rough transitioning between reading strategies—-from sections that demand a multimodal reading style to monomodal reading strategies and back again before the novel concludes with material that returns to using images as simple illustrations. As multimodal novels innovate, they also reflect the transitional point we are currently in with how we write and read books, and *Spivet* embodies these tensions, a reflection upon the traditional novel, the hypertextual future that didn’t quite take off, the way we read with the internet, and the ways that is changing how we might be able to write and read with the medium of the book.
Reif Larsen’s account of designing *Spivet* is well documented in interviews and in several articles he has written. In several of these accounts, he discusses his encounters with hypertext fiction at Brown, noting that though the new form was all the rage, it felt like a lot of bells and whistles to me. It was the 90s, and we were in love with the hyperlink, but something was lost. With the high-level mechanics, something at the heart was lost (*StopSmilingOnline*).

In the same interview, Larsen goes on to describe the design of *Spivet* as “an exploded hypertext book,” noting that this is a new way of enacting some of hypertext’s more interesting ideas in a way that he argues has nothing to do with the failed experiment of hypertext. Larsen explains that while hypertext reflected the non-linear nature of the web... you couldn’t see the marginalia.

[*Spivet*] has borders. Seeing [the book’s] expansiveness but also its limitedness is important (*StopSmilingOnline*).

Larsen’s statements about the design of *Spivet* and his condemnation of hypertext are somewhat contradictory. Add to this confusion the contradictions within the novel itself and it becomes evident that *The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet* exposes the tensions present in the genre, and in a broader sense the conflicts present in the larger transition from monomodal to multimodal textualities, and from a medium that bears the marks of its own materiality as well as the marks of digital culture.

The successful moments in the novel are genre-changing, but the overall storyline suffers – not due to the incorporation of narrative elements in multiple modes or due to challenges of layout, but mostly due to large tonal shifts in the narrative itself, which is strikingly uneven in its consistency of method. For example, the novel begins with
multimodal rules for reading and proceeding along the pages. When T.S. begins to read his mother’s novel and loses his place geographically while on a train, the marginalia and the information being given in multiple modes stop, and the pages become his mother’s monomodally styled book alternating with his now monomodally styled thoughts on it, all of this appearing in the traditional text block only. The marginalia and alternate reading paths appear again in the last portion of the novel, but the marginalia serves an illustrative function and has a simplified relationship to the progress of the narrative.

We might read this progression through three distinct styles in the novel as form commenting upon T.S.’s journey from believing in the power of maps and the scientific method to losing his faith in them (during the portion of the book with blank margins and few images), followed by a new attitude toward them, perhaps an attitude that maps and charts are beautiful but have little power to speak on their own (as they have been for the greater portion of the novel). However, even if this was the intent, it is clumsily executed, and the simplification of the novel’s multimodal functioning at the end diminishes the power of the innovative style it began with. Overall, the novel’s successful innovations outweigh its shortcomings.

Critics observe that the novel’s pacing, tone, and patterns of information disclosure changes at several points. The first third of the novel establishes a pattern of dashed arrow call-outs from the traditional text block to marginalia, creating complex reading pathways, but then drops these elements and becomes an almost traditional-looking novel for a time with only the traditional text block and almost no illustrations, the margins blank. In the final portion of the novel, the margins spring to life again, but in a simplified relationship with the traditional text block. Instead of the narrative being
told through elements in multiple modes between the traditional text block and the sidebar, the sidebar is used for images that have a merely illustrative relationship with the narrative events, which are being told with almost exclusively verbal content located in the traditional text block. The relationships of the modes has suddenly returned to that of nineteenth century novels – the narrative action happening in a single mode, the verbal, and images being used simply to illustrate information given in the verbal mode. Although these shifts in the novel create a jarring reading experience, they serve a narrative purpose in that they are another aspect of how the form of the work comments upon the content. The sections of the novel are quite different from one another – some require the reader to use alternate rules for making narrative meaning, overtly calling for a multimodal reading approach, while others downplay the visual and spatial elements at work in the text, making a pretense of being monomodal, allowing readers to shift back into the familiar monomodal reading style.

This meshing of form and content is quite productive at several points in the novel, but the connections become less ambitious, less significant to the narrative, and less productive during the last portion of the book. The form of the novel is active in communicating narrative points in several ways, but this engaging use of form with content is inconsistent – some of it is very productive when read as contributing narrative information, while some of it – especially later in the novel – reads as merely decorative or illustrative of content given in the traditional text block.

Moments in which the design and the textual conventions established early in the novel are momentarily violated. This kind of establishing a literary code and then breaking it in significant moments to make a statement is a standard source of
discovering the deeper significance of elements in traditional literary texts, and it makes
sense to pursue these moments that don’t fit the established pattern in the multimodal
novel, as well.

*The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet*’s shortcomings are instructive. They illustrate
the limitations of thinking in terms of hypertext or even internet links, warn against
simplistic paradigms such as “word and image,” illustrate the benefits and costs to
narrative of designating the traditional text block “the main story/ the text” and thinking
of other modal elements as mere marginalia (the breakdown at the end of the novel is
example of this). But *Spivet* also shows how textual innovations can achieve narrative
synthesis, multimodal elements telling a story across traditional text block and margin in
such a way that textual elements often viewed as marginal become central to the story
being told.

Analyzing *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* using my methodology enabled me
to analyze patterns of multimodal element usage throughout the three major sections of
the novel. Without a global assessment of textual elements as the first step of multimodal
narrative analysis, and the final step of ascertaining how the data set correlates with an
interpretation of the events of the narrative, its points of major change, many aspects of
the structure of the novel would have remained invisible, from the scaffolded multimodal
instructional aspect of the novel’s sections and the changing of the rules for interpretation
and navigation of the text, to the shift to simpler sidebar element to traditional text block
matter in the final section. This demonstrates the methodology’s flexibility for offering a
structure that can be applied very successfully to different novelistic systems, as it yields
specific information about the text but does not allow the user to erroneously generalize
about the potential functions of textual elements, or about the interactions of each part of the text.

Reading 3 – *House of Leaves*

**New Aspects of Multimodal Reading – Context, Relationships and Semiotic Code-Switching in Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves***

The third and final novel I interpreted using my methodology was the most immediately complex of the three readings. Mark Z. Danielewski’s well-known novel, *House of Leaves*, was the first overtly multimodal novel I encountered, but it was clear from the start that the novel’s textual elements and structures changed quite frequently. It was an added bonus for my selection of readings for this study that the novel features a large sidebar, in which many kinds of textual elements appear. Initially, I thought that my method would cut through the confusion of constantly changing layouts and types of elements, revealing a pattern, a sort of linear ordering. Instead, my application of the method revealed a serious deficiency in the method – because there was no stable pattern emerging after my initial global survey of textual elements, I realized the need for a second step in my methodology to enable the user to observe the relationship of textual elements to their context, and of textual elements to each other.

In Mark Z. Danielewski’s groundbreaking novel, *House of Leaves*, medium-specific qualities of the print novel are emphasized and deconstructed. Elements that usually remain in the background of a traditional novel but help it function, such as white space, the shape and length of paragraphs, layout of content on the page, font styles, and the position of elements on the page, are foregrounded, altered or removed piece by piece. Instead of simply facilitating the communication of an idea through the organization of pieces of text on each page of the novel, these elements become signifiers
themselves. These now foregrounded elements are then applied in innovative ways that both highlight and subvert the conventions of the print novel.

*House of Leaves* is divided into fifteen sections that include a Foreword, Introduction, a record of events, six exhibits containing evidence, two appendices – each with a different editor, an index, and other material. The story is told through a collection of fictional documents from various perspectives giving accounts of a house whose dimensions do not remain constant. Within this collection of fictional primary documents, the narrative also emerges through the annotations of three chronologically distinct editors. These editors are obsessed with collecting, verifying, and presenting as much information as possible regarding the events said to have taken place at the house, and in the process of doing so their annotations amount to independent stories, as well as a metanarrative about unreliable narration.

In *House of Leaves*, multimodal textual elements actively convey narrative information. However, these elements work together on the page in ways quite unlike those of textual elements in other multimodal novels. While other multimodal novels begin with traditional print novel design and layout conventions and then modify them to create a single new set of signifying and reading patterns, the design and layout of *House of Leaves* constantly changes.

In addition, *House of Leaves* uses layout conventions against the grain in ways that make linear, hierarchical, and juxtapositional meaning-making – the typical strategies deployed when reading a novel in print – difficult. Standard reading strategies do not work with this novel – readers cannot follow a single textual line from page to page, or even from the top of the page to the bottom. It can be difficult to find
connections between textual elements in a given graphic area of *House of Leaves*, and readers must frequently use trial and error to discover a strategy for making meaning amid changing layouts and different kinds of textual representations.

At times in the novel, connections between the textual elements are not clear because the way signification is produced continues to change, from the shifting of layout patterns in the novel to changes in the ways the text makes meaning. Though the novel initially communicates narrative information through verbal content in almost conventional ways, it begins to shift, communicating through both verbal and visual aspects of the content, including the concrete shape of sections of the text. Glyphs in the novel begin as standard letters that make meaning linguistically, but change to become characterizing elements through shifting font styles and layout styles, and then go even further, representing characters, scenes, and actions, and finally become so divorced from linguistic meaning-making that individual letters become visual representations of objects in the story. These connections are also difficult to understand within the larger context of the novel as layout patterns continue to shift, calling for close attention to determine which textual elements actively communicate narrative information.

In *House of Leaves*, the space of the page, occurrence of elements within the page-delimited time of reading, repeating layouts and distortions of these repetitions are used to suggest relationships between textual elements and to carry these relationships from page to page. Sequences of similar layouts are used different ways in the novel, from textual elements changing place in gradations across several pages to suggest movement to sections of text that are placed in the same position in the layout to signal that they are one running line of thought. These and other multimodal techniques are used
for characterization, establishing tone, enacting events of the story, mapping the world of
the story, and for orienting and then disorienting readers.

Like other multimodal novels, *House of Leaves* establishes new rules for how to
read and then modifies them in semiotically productive ways. However, *House of Leaves*
is unique in that it does not give consistent direction in making connections between the
textual elements on the page, or how to navigate the changeable and often quite difficult
layout styles of the novel. One difficulty is that the novel continually modifies and
adjusts rules for reading, seldom reaching a resting point. As a result, readers must
continue to develop new reading strategies in order to make meaning of new textual
rules, new types of textual elements, and new signification methods. While some cues
suggesting how to connect textual elements are more directly given to readers, as with the
familiar convention of finding a numbered call-out to a footnote at the bottom of the
page, most of the cues in *House of Leaves* are implicit, requiring that readers make these
connections through trial and error.

Complicating the description of textual features even more, the novel is available
in four different formats: the black and white edition, the edition that prints the word
“house” in blue throughout, the edition that prints the word “minotaur” in red throughout,
and the full-color edition which has the blue print, red print, and adds purple printing. I
use the blue edition in my study, though I have also consulted the full-color edition. Each
edition highlights certain aspects of the novel, but the blue edition contains a great deal
more color printing than the red edition, as the house is the subject of the novel. The red
edition’s use of red printing is consigned to only a few pages in comparison, while blue
printing appears on nearly every page in the blue edition. The effect of reading the blue
edition is a heightened awareness of moments when the idea of the house is being referenced, whether directly with every blue-printed “house,” or indirectly with blue-printed frames around text blocks. The red-printed sections are scarce, and in reading the red ink edition, they have an increased impact due to this scarcity. Turning the page and finding a large red section is jarring after so much black and white – it is the textual design equivalent of the Minotaur suddenly emerging from the labyrinth of the novel.

The choice of edition also highlights one of two themes in *House of Leaves*. The blue edition emphasizes the theme of the search for meaning and the discovery of an absence of deterministic meaning with the shifting subject of study, the flickering signifier with no real center. In contrast, the red edition shifts the textual emphasis to the theme of epistemology and the discovery of a presence at the center of inquiry – something under erasure, but something that refuses to be repressed. This makes the decision to use the blue edition or the red edition a choice of focus – whether to focus on the absence that exists at the center or “truth” of every human attempt at meaning-making, or whether to focus on the fact that there is always something present in meaning-making endeavors, like the minotaur at the center of the mythological labyrinth.

*House of Leaves* opens with a textual layout similar to an academic study – explanatory information is given in the traditional text block, well marked by conventional organizational markers including a table of contents, chapter numbers, and an introductory quotation. This initial layout presents readers with a familiar, somewhat linear style as the novel’s subject and characters are introduced. As the chapters of the novel or sections of the study progress, these organizational markers shift gradually from the familiar organization, the footnotes at first becoming more obsessive in length, taking
up more and more of each page until they occupy most of the graphic space and at the same time replacing the academic study with a personal narrative that becomes the only portion of the text furthering the story for several pages. On multiple pages, the traditional text block disappears completely as the line demarking the footnotes from the “central discussion” above it creeps to the top of each page, flipping the hierarchy of the layout as one line of discussion completely eclipses the other. Then instead of resting, this newly familiar arrangement mutates beyond a recognizable format as the novel’s layout and textual elements continue to change. The changes continue to accelerate at a pace that does not allow the reader to use any single new reading strategy demanded by the layout for long.

In this way, *House of Leaves* differs from many other multimodal novels, does not give the reader clear direction regarding how to put together the disparate types of elements and sections that comprise the text, how to follow any of the lines of narrative that sprout at all angles from its pages, or even how to proceed from one page to the next. House of Leaves is a novel that violates new reading strategies (conventions) as quickly as it establishes them. There is no typical layout to point to as representative of *House of Leaves* – instead, it is a novel in which change is the only constant.

In the following sections, I will give a synopsis of the plot of *House of Leaves*, followed by a detailed account of the ways the graphic space/layout is arranged. After reviewing various approaches to interpreting the novel, I will discuss a new approach that extends the taxonomic method I have applied to the novels in this study.
Plot Synopsis

In *House of Leaves*, fragments of a story are given to us from several different perspectives. Pieces of a nearly complete scholarly study tell the story of a famous photographer, his family, and documentary evidence that may or may not exist about the monstrous house they have moved into – a house that changes size and shape without warning. To complicate things further, each piece of the narrative is given from the perspective of one of three potentially unreliable narrators. The most overt and prolific editors are Johnny Truant, a young man trying to complete the scholarly manuscript, and Zampano, the author of the incomplete manuscript examining Navidson’s strange house.

The most covert of the editors and least visible through narrative comments are the anonymous Editors, who have had final control of preparing the manuscript for publication. Not only have each of these narrators edited, commented on, arranged, or tampered with the manuscript, two of them - Johnny Truant and Zampano - are also characters involved in the story they disclose.

The first of these, Johnny Truant, is a young man entrusted with the manuscript by the other homodiegetic narrator, the scholar and chief preparer of the manuscript, Zampano. Truant opens the novel with an Introduction and soon offers more than extensive autobiographical footnotes that begin to swamp Zampano’s scholarly study of the stories and evidence. Truant’s additions to the central narrative, the study, change in frequency throughout the novel, eventually disappearing near the end of Zampano’s manuscript.

The third editing presence is a more covert presence in the novel, adding the final notes and appendices and removing pieces of information without explanation. These
editors are bureaucratic in their lack of accountability and lack of transparency in handling the manuscript.

The manuscript at the center of this editorial battle collects studies, documents, and a verbal description of phenomena involving a house that will not stay the same size or shape. Will Navidson, prizewinning photographer, and his family move into the house, and after discovering its unusual qualities, they draw several other people into the story, exploring and studying the house in the hopes of finding a definitive reason for its metaphysical qualities. The evidence involving the house’s transformations is a series of videos which may or may not exist, as the only record of them are blind narrator Zampano’s descriptions of the shots. These videos document Will Navidson and his team’s explorations of these strange new spaces within the house.

Appendices present additional information and documents after The Navidson Record concludes, though exactly how this material constitutes evidence is unclear. At this point at the end of the manuscript, Zampano’s study has faded and becomes less coherent, Johnny Truant has disappeared, and the mysterious “Editors,” who are less than forthcoming about the subject, are the only explanatory voices left. Though these appendices are supposed to present evidence related to the mysterious house on Ash Tree Lane and the Navidson family, one contains letters from Johnny Truant’s mother, Pelafina, an institutionalized woman writing to her son.

In a pattern of disclosure that parallels the documents of The Navidson Record, Pelafina’s letters shift from organized, conventional letters to disorganized, coded requests for help. These include sections of text composed in unusual typographic styles that are strongly reminiscent of portions of The Navidson Record. Her letters return to
standard letter form eventually, concluding with a lucid period just before she dies in which she reveals that while she was not psychologically sound, she used several reams of paper and typed a document, which she mailed. The page count for her reams of paper roughly matches the page count of *House of Leaves*, further complicating the questions of who narrates and of how reliable the novel’s narrators are.

**Design and Layout**

Layout, or the arrangement of textual elements in the graphic space of the page, is key to making sense of the elements that comprise *House of Leaves*. The design of the page, of the spread, and of the turning page sequence in *House of Leaves* is actively involved in conveying through design the actions taking place in the verbal content of the novel. The typographic content of *House of Leaves* communicates narrative information in several different ways: through iconic or shaped paragraphs, layout changes, directionality shifts, font shifting, the arrangement of elements in the graphic space of the page/spread, graphic matches as well as elements of repeating layouts that shift position within that layout as it recurs over several pages, and the position relative to elements on previous and subsequent pages in sequences across several pages, and through different lengths of text pieces along with how these text pieces are linked.

*House of Leaves* has been described as a novel full of remediations of other media, a charge that proves accurate after observing the differing media conventions that are applied to text on a page. *House of Leaves* draws upon and modifies print novel conventions, film conventions, typography and design conventions, and hypertext or networked textual conventions (through the ways one can follow narrative lines linking different types of textual pieces in a nonlinear way through the novel).
Taken as a whole, the shifting layout styles of the novel are both a deconstruction of the form of the novel in print. They also amplify narrative themes and tensions through changes in the form of spread and page. The novel begins unassumingly, using a traditional layout with Zampano’s study occupying the traditional text block as the “primary” information source and Truant’s footnotes limited to the foot of each page. Then a second kind of layout is introduced in which the hierarchy of information disclosure shifts, the notes growing to several full pages a piece, completely choking out through sheer volume the space that had been reserved for the traditional text block.

Next, a chapter is interrupted both in the scholarly study and the footnotes by portions of morse code, the interruption pattern seemingly without reason, the interruptive force unclear. Another section leaves off the introductory text of the study, and breaks from a traditional book page layout with one long portion in the middle of the page to a grid layout with multiple columns. Multiple blocks of verbal text run in different directions in the same page, and then a new running motif in the layout appears – a blue-ink bordered “window” in which a portion of text appears on each page – normally on the recto sides, and in mirror writing on the verso pages.

The theme of the Minotaur also emerges in this stretch of text, and with it the suggestion that the novel and its shifting layouts are like a labyrinth. Next, the clutter gives way to pages dominated by white space, against which textual patterns repeat meaningfully, suggesting movement in longer sequences of repetitions in which columns shrink or expand, and words move across the white space of the spread. Following this, the page is used as a landscape with words as actors performing the actions of the narrative through use of the kinetic movement across spreads, the lines of words across
the pages acting as maps of actions in the story. After this, the novel is disrupted at the level of the words themselves, fracturing words within increasingly tighter, smaller columns of text, letter breaking free to float across the negative space of the page, and sentences spaced to stretch time across the space of the page.

Each innovation in layout is a further decontextualization of the elements of and a probing of the format of the traditional novel. After the glyphs themselves have been broken from the contextual meaningfulness of words, erasure begins, along with a return of the Minotaur theme and the question of whether there is anything present at the center of the human meaning-making endeavor. There is a brief respite from the deconstruction with a return to a traditional layout when Karen Navidson gives her perspective on the events of the section.

Next, the layout morphing intensifies. The page loses any hierarchical center at all, margin and gutter cease to delimit content that streams right across or sprouts from gutter and runs into margin. This long stretch of shifting layout continues, with lines that wrap around the edges of the pages, text blocks printed at diagonals in the corners of pages, font sizes that continue to shift, and spacing between letters and words changing to create multiple types of columns, line breaks, and word structures in the space of the page. The novel’s appendices have relatively stable layouts until the final section, a selection of letters from Johnny Truant’s institutionalized mother that have text blocks changing directionality, layered text, and use codes, suggesting that a single author may have composed both the letters and certain sections of The Navidson Record.

In this way, the novel’s layout moves from a deconstruction of hierarchy within layout to deconstruction of paragraph, line, word, margins and gutter, orientation of lines
on the page, spacing between words and then letters, the glyphs themselves as units of meaning that can become characters in a story, and then breaking the notion of the book page as frame for text, utilizing a complex grid to create a field with multiple hierarchies that function at the same time.

*House of Leaves* includes paragraphs that are simultaneously linguistic carriers of meaning and concrete representations—the paragraph is shaped to create an image related to the verbal content of that paragraph—layout changes that suggest different genres of discourse whose conventions are broken meaningfully, font style shifts to differentiate narrative voices. The novel also includes several multi-page sequences of similarly arranged layouts in which the arrangement of textual elements in the space of the page and spread is at points almost cinematic in the sense that lines of text changing position in the space of the page convey a sense of motion, becoming agents enacting the physical events being described in the verbal content, at times using sequences such as page turns or page-to-page transitions over a spread to enact the actions of the plot.

In *House of Leaves*, negative space is used to suggest connections and to maintain distinctions between textual elements. The spatial level is one of the most highly utilized aspects of *House of Leaves*’ textual levels. The positions of textual elements – whether they are high or low in the space of the page/spread, as well as the position of one element relative to another, and sequences of textual elements are all key aspects of how the spatial level - are used to create relationships, the illusion through sequence and similar or sequential positioning on subsequent pages of cinematic movement, and many other effects that enable printed elements to assume multiple types of symbolic and representative functions in relation to the themes and events of the story.
The other multimodal novels in this study used a main set of textual devices to make meaning. Textual elements in *House of Leaves* contribute to narrative meaning through movement, orientation shifts, footnotes, and use of space. However, with *House of Leaves*, there is not a dominant layout pattern or a dominant textual device. There is a pattern of narrative footnotes, of the use of the space of the page as a visual field, and of having words “move” through this visual field using the sequence of pages as “frames”. Principles of good design advise against busy layouts that do not clearly communicate a main focus or are difficult to navigate. The layout of *House of Leaves* is so full of “noise” with an excessive amount and variety of elements in the space of the page, unclear page hierarchy as sections of text run in different directions, unclear reading paths as text splits into multiple potential paths, rules for reading no longer producing meaning, and textual elements being used in different narrative ways simultaneously, it is clear that a reader might feel overwhelmed. In this novel, textual elements can symbolically represent an idea, concretely embody an image of the idea, embody the action of the story through cinematic “movement” of elements across a sequence of pages, and more. Some of the time, multiple aspects of the text communicate narrative information at the same time, requiring readers to switch interpretive strategies from section to section and even within the space of a single page.

There are many different types of layout conventions in *House of Leaves*, though each type of layout begins in one way and then plays upon the conventions it starts with, changing into a different type of layout or changing the rules of hierarchy or reading order.
Section By Section Description

This section-by-section description will progress chronologically through House of Leaves, but it is worthy of note that the layout changes progress through a deconstruction of the form and components of the novel, beginning with disruption of page hierarchy, then disruption of layout with a shift to a grid layout, removal of text blocks, then working at the conventions of single lines of text in the white space, finally breaking the words themselves apart, and then exploding the graphic form of the word itself, using individual letters as representative units before hybridizing all of these deconstructions in a pyrotechnic finale.

Layout Type One – Standard Print Novel

The novel opens with an Introduction by Johnny Truant. This section is set in Courier, a font that lacks the polish and professionalism of the fonts used by other editors. This section is told in very long, dense, awkwardly set paragraphs. They are left justified with a ragged right margin, using a full tab at the end of each sentence which leaves distracting rivers running down the page, drawing the eye down the page instead of along the lines and making it difficult to read. In addition, the typeface creates thick, almost bolded looking letters that do not sit attractively on a line – they appear misaligned in a sentence, and this impression becomes even stronger when a word is underlined.

This sense of misalignment is heightened when the word House appears in blue ink, offset slightly from the line. The Introductory paragraphs are packed against one another with the exception of hard returns as transitions between paragraphs changing subject. Lines are at times indented at the ends of paragraphs for emphasis – sometimes
just a single line, but a few times several. Some of these indented final lines are in paragraphs not separated by a hard return, and in these instances the indented final line matches exactly with the indented first line of the next paragraph, creating an odd sense that we aren’t sure where the paragraph before is ending or where the new paragraph begins. We are attendant to the possibility that the final line is indented even when we cannot distinguish it from the indented first line because of the paragraphs after hard returns and their indented lines.

One paragraph in Zampano’s font and spacing is included in the Truant Introduction, embedded and anchored to the text before and after it with a call-out from the sentence above, a hard return above and below, indentations on both sides to frame the quotation and set it apart from the rest of the text. The placement of the chunk of text within the host text makes the boundaries between the two narrative components very clear, and highlights through font, spacing, and the use of a date the different provenance of the text portion/alien paragraph/excerpt. The introduction closes with a typed signature, date, and location, giving the section the appearance of a document separate from the rest of the novel – separate in textual positioning in relation to the rest of the novel, separate in layout and font styles, and marked clearly by the date as separate in time.

In the first section of the novel, Section I of The Navidson Record, we find the next type of layout. Section I looks like a typical academic study with strong hierarchical organization, including the roman numeral at the head of the first page marking the number of the section, a quotation relevant to the subjects the section will deal with, then
a traditional text block at the center of the page, and below a line separating the main text block from the footer, several footnotes (3).

This layout begins to change subtly on the second page of Section I with the intrusion of Johnny Truant’s first footnote. Truant’s notes, which are still set in clumsy-looking Courier Sans, contrast sharply with the smoothly organized visual style of Zampano’s study, creating a jarring and disjunctive visual effect on the page.

**S.O.S./ Dot-Dash Section – Meaningful Interruptions**

In Section VIII, the layout of the study and footnotes is broken into shorter bits of text on the page by regularly occurring dot and dash symbols. The dots and dashes, which repeatedly spell out S.O.S. in Morse Code, begin immediately after the chapter heading quotation about S.O.S. wireless code-signals. After the full S.O.S. code, the section begins, presenting a text block that would be very standard except for the jarring sentence breaks caused by now-decontextualized bits of the SOS code – a single dot splits a line, then another. The lines are not part of Zampano’s analysis, which they interrupt, nor are they part of Truant’s footnotes when they begin to interrupt those. At the lower right corner of the first page of the chapter, there is a single bold printed check mark.

The second spread of the section opens with the full SOS code as the top line of the verso page. Another stray dot splits a sentence halfway down this page, but there are no more disruptions of the text block on the verso page. The stray dots begin to fracture Truant’s footnotes at random points. The dots cannot be read as meaningful parts of the sentences they interrupt, and the narratives they fracture show no awareness of the interruptions. On the next page, Truant’s sprawling, full-page footnotes are continuously interrupted, but the dots are at times solid, at other times empty cubes (100). The verso
page of the spread begins with a single dot, then after the first half-page of text, the SOS code repeats (101).

The next page continues Zampano’s discussion of a crisis in Navidson’s career for half a page with one dot interrupting, but then there is a partial code – part of an O, and then the full signal for S. This dot-and-dash code is used at this point as a section divider marking the transition between one moment in narrative time and a different moment in time. Directly beneath this OS fragment used as a section divider, the text continues with its long margin-to-gutter lines for five lines before the paragraph changes shape without a break in a narrower version of a block quote. Taken together, the long paragraph and the centered block quote are a shaped paragraph resembling a figure presenting an SOS code with flags in place of the Morse Code. The torso portion of the block quote is broken with a single dot at the belt level (102). On the verso page, the relationship of the dots and dashes to the action of the narrative in the text block shifts as Zampano incorporates dots and dashes into the narrative:

In other words:

.  
. . . _ _ _
.  
. (or)
.
SO?!” (103)

Just beneath this, in the footnotes, another dot interrupts one of Truant’s sentences. The chain of custody of the manuscript for House of Leaves in the novel tells us that Truant’s
footnotes have been written after Zampano’s study, and that the mysterious Editors have had the final say in the format for the novel. This makes it difficult to explain how the distress code interrupts material written by Zampano and by Truant in a section thematically relevant to the SOS code.

The final three pages of this section are a continuous footnote narrative by Truant that fills each page completely. In each of these sections, his narrative is neatly broken into paragraph-sized chunks by dots and dashes, some hollow, others solid. Sometimes the dots create logical section breaks in Truant’s long narrative, but these moments occur randomly alongside moments in which his sentences are meaninglessly fractured (104-6).

**Removal of Narrative Context – Absent “Main Narrative,” - No Threshold, Labyrinth, Minotaur, and Book as House/Labyrinth**

Section IX is the first section to have footnotes immediately follow the section header with no introductory text from Zampano’s study. The header itself is laid out in an unusual way, with three quotations arranged in a triangular shape. The footnote narrative continues on the next page, changing from the usual long lines that stretch from margin to gutter to something resembling shaped paragraphs. The verso page opposite opens with a line to demark footnotes from the main text, but the line appears near the top fifth of the page with no main text to refer to. Below it is a footnote in a larger version of Zampano’s font discussing the theme of labyrinths. At the end of the section of Zampano’s footnote, a line under erasure describes the Minotaur and the labyrinth of King Minos, but the footnote breaks off and is continued after the page turn on the next verso page. Unlike other broken footnotes, however, it does not end at the bottom of the page, but instead is followed by another footnote signaling line, below which footnotes by Truant, the Editors, and Zampano appear.
The verso page of the next spread continues Zampano’s footnote about the Minotaur under erasure, this time at the top of the page and not beneath a footnote line. Directly beneath this small piece of text is a footnote line, followed by a shaped footnote large enough to consume the rest of the page. The shape is vague, shifting from a left justified edge that slowly extends to create a curved base to a ragged right edge with line breaks creating a monolithic shape. On the upper fifth portion of the verso page of this spread, there is a brief piece of Zampano’s main study followed by the footnote line and another shaped footnote, this time with both sides justified in the upper half of the paragraph, both sides tapering down on both sides uniformly to end with a short fragment. Below this, footnotes in Truant’s font and in Zampano’s fonts alternate before a long footnote under erasure on the Minotaur motif (110-111).

In the next spread, both footnotes and Zampano’s study are broken into blocks of text roughly similar in size, though the alternating Courier and Times New Roman fonts create slightly different widths. Two-thirds of the way down the verso page, the blocks of text again become the familiar long form gutter-to-margin lines (112-113). These seem to foreshadow or preface the distinct units of text that begin to occupy the graphic space in new ways several pages later.

A footnote in block form appears in the upper right corner, emphasized in the layout in part because it is boxed and set apart from the rest of the elements on the page, but more so because the box is printed in bold blue ink, implying a connection with the house motif that also appears in blue ink throughout this edition of *House of Leaves* (119). This initial blue-boxed block of text signals the beginning of an entirely new layout for the novel, as well as the beginning of a running layout element that is repeated.
in the exact same location in verso and recto pages for the next 27 pages. The boxes terminate with a trilogy – a blue-bordered box that is blank inside (143), a blue-bordered box filled in with solid black ink (144), and finally a negative space in the page with no blue border and no text at all (145).

This new layout style is a sequence of similarly formatted spreads – verso and recto – that combine multiple segments of text in the graphic space in ways that suggest connections between some elements and that use textual devices such as white space, boxing, direction of text, and lines to indicate that each textual chunk is distinct from the others. Throughout the sequence, the portion of the page given to the footnote area at the bottom of the page varies.

Many elements remain the same across this series of spreads, however. The blue-boxed footnotes contain sections of text that are printed normally on the verso page of each spread, but that can be seen reversed, as through a window, on each following verso page. Each margin is set apart by border lines with a footnote that reads top to bottom running the length of the section in the verso margin, and a footnote that reads backward – from the last page of the section moving backward toward the beginning, in italicized font and printed upside-down. The margins, then, are mirror opposites in terms of the way they are arranged in the section – one top-to-bottom of the pages, moving from front to back, the other inverted and backward. Zampano’s study still appears at the center of each page, but the blue windows interrupt the text block on both verso and recto sides, and the text block is bordered by the running margin notes, as well as at the foot of the pages with footnotes.
After continuing across four more spreads in the sequence, Truant’s footnotes again creep up the page until they eclipse Zampano’s narrative, and two new running block footnotes appear, one at the lower right corner of each verso page printed upside down flush against the gutter, the other halfway down the recto page printed sideways with the block footnote running top to bottom, its bottom line running into the gutter. This layout pattern again shifts two pages later, repositioning the two new running block footnotes to lower positions on each page of the spread to accommodate an expanse of white space in the area that was formerly the traditional text block. Within this white space, the words “Perhaps” and “here” are printed in stepped positions, spaced out so that they create a longer time of reading (134). The spaced-out stepping-stone sentence is continued in a block of text beginning halfway down the page at the far right side of the verso page traditional text block.

The verso page continues as in previous pages, adding a lengthy study by Zampano to his footnotes. The next spread has the traditional text block empty, bordered by the windows, the running margin footnotes and the sideways gutter footnotes gone again. The footnoted content continues on the next two pages, occupying most of the page on the verso side. However, the recto side has changed again, including a long thin columnar footnote that runs from the top of the page to the border line for the footnotes. Beside this, a square two-columned footnote printed sideways in the page frames the blue-framed window, which continues the running footnote (139).

The next verso-recto spread repeats the arrangement of specific text blocks in the space of the pages while again subtracting others, leaving negative space in their vacated positions in the layout. In this case, everything has been subtracted on the verso page
except for a long text block running flush with the gutter and then a footnote constrained to half the usual space for footnotes. This arrangement of elements not only emphasizes the missing text blocks, it also dramatically juxtaposes the remaining two text blocks in the space of the page so that the only element on the left half of the page is the footnote, while the only element on the right is the long text block. On the recto page, elements are also missing and negative space left to mark their absence, but this page leaves a very small text piece in the upper left portion of the page, followed by two long lines of a footnote that then continues in a wrap around the empty space in the lower left portion of the page (146-7).

The following spread reverses the order of textual elements on the verso page, beginning with a small square of text in the upper left corner, then including a single line on its own almost as a dividing or linking element between the first text block and the slightly longer text block in the lower right corner of the page. The recto page begins with a shaped paragraph that takes a small portion of the graphic space, and the rest of the page is given over to footnotes, the bulk of which is a sprawling narrative by Johnny Truant (148-9).

Taken together as a sequence, these two spreads following the notable windows section arrange textual elements in the graphic space in two very different ways, the first reversing the usual reading order and hierarchy for a page, the second following both the conventions of reading elements in the upper left first before moving down the page and to the right.

Section X introduces a new layout focusing on the placement of lines and short sections of text blocks in the graphic space of the page. This is also one of the longest
sections of The Navidson Record, lasting for almost a full hundred pages of the novel because the use of negative space is so pronounced. The section begins with a very standard opening header and quotation – it is worth noting that the quotation refers to architecturally structured paths. After the header, however, there is only a single paragraph of Zampano’s study and then a half page of empty space. At least half of each page is left blank for the first portion of the section, and footnotes disappear after the second spread. Eventually, lines begin to appear with a half page or so of negative space between these and the opening paragraph. Abruptly, the negative space shifts to the top of the page with the single paragraph along the bottom (162-4) before again resuming its appearance at the top (165), this time with footnotes again. The negative space is briefly occupied fully with a long narrative footnote from Johnny Truant (179-181), and then the single paragraphs appear at the foot of the pages again.

**Concrete and Kinetic Verbal Elements Against A Backdrop of White Space**

A new layout pattern begins in the middle of Section X as sentences break into single words that drift across the spread. The spacing of the words varies, leading to different emphases on specific words within the sentences, as well as sentences lasting for longer or shorter spaces in the text, causing the time it takes to read the sentence to speed up and slow down.

Several pages beyond this, the few words per page are centrally aligned, the visual form of the column of words and their position in the center of the page representing the content:

standing

dead
A representational layout of the words in the graphic space continues in increasingly unconventional ways, with arrangements that visually and sometimes kinetically represent the concepts and actions of the narrative.

The spread describing a bullet passing through a door and splintering a wooden panel describes the action of the scene and shows the bullet hole through the door on the verso side with a concrete paragraph:

```
the
round
powerful
enough to propel
the bullet into
the second
door. (232)
```

On the recto side of this spread, the words of the next sentence are arranged in the space of the page to resemble the action of the wooden panel splintering:

```
though
not
powerful
enough
to do more
than
splinter
a
```

panel. (233)
Section Eleven of The Navidson Record begins with a quotation about a menacing staircase, and the layout embodies this thematically through Zampano’s study in the traditional text block being broken into two narrow columns with a wide negative space in the middle of them, unlike most two-column layouts. This layout emphasizes the constructedness of each column, and its isolation from the other. The material in this section is fragmented into bits divided with a device that might also be read as a running sound – the word “rzzzzz.” A section at the end of this jarringly shifts in both font style, font size, and layout. Titled “Tom’s Story: [Transcript],” it is surprising in that there are no editorial notes explaining why this document has not been prepared by any of the editors of House of Leaves – the font style does not belong to any of the editors. At the end of the section, a footnote reveals that Truant has prepared the section in an unprecedented new font style.

The Page as Landscape, Text as Actors

Section Twelve of The Navidson Record introduces layouts that do not obey the page hierarchy or rules of directionality, at times running upside down from bottom to top, changing from being printed upside down to being printed regularly, the spacing and movement of the words in the space of the page communicating both story content and the movement taking place in that story. The section begins with the standard opening for each section of The Navidson Record – a chapter number header with a quotation, this time about spelunking, in which a caver is described as knowing a cave as well as one knows his own home. The traditional text block does not begin a few spaces below, but instead a single line laid out with the bolded drop-cap first letter running across the very bottom of the page, visually representing through its position at the bottom of the page
the scene it describes – the characters reaching the foot of a staircase. The next spread continues this way with brief text blocks at the foot of pages that are otherwise blank, emphasizing the scale of the space represented in the scene.

The following spread has a single line at the foot of the verso page, but then the recto page begins with the text block again at the top as the scene shifts from the bottom of the staircase to a new scene taking place upstairs in the house (278-279). The next two spreads have both text blocks as the sole elements running along the bottom of the pages. In a new layout, the verso side of the next spread describes someone being pulled via a pulley mechanism. This appears at the base of the page, but the recto page is blank except for a single word which appears at the upper right hand side of the page, printed upside down. The action of a character being pulled from one area to another is represented in this shift in line position in the hierarchy of the page, and the disorientation in the story’s fictional house represented with the changed directionality of the word on the page (286-7). The orientation of the pages in the book has changed in this spread, with the top of the book having been flipped to become the bottom. This is jarring because it goes against every other marker of the book’s correct orientation from the cover to the direction and hierarchy of the pages.

In the next spread, the verso side continues the text block at the base of the page, while the recto page again illustrates through juxtaposition with the verso layout an action taking place, a change in state. The recto page again changes the orientation of the page from top to bottom to bottom as top with upside-down printing. Reading from the base of the page toward the top, the lines are printed with differing leading between letters and spacing between words to represent the action of the main character “sinking..
Or the stairway is stretching. expanding” (289). The word “sinking” is spaced with letters appearing on lower and lower lines of the page, enacting sinking itself through its spacing and layout. The next line is identifiable by its beginning with a capitalized letter, and instead of sinking it stretches toward the gutter before spacing out the word “stretching” so that it expands from the bottom of the page to the top to fit half the page. The final letter, “g” in “stretching,” is placed at the top left-hand corner of the page so that both the word “expanding,” which runs from the top right corner to the left gutter, and the word “stretching” running from bottom to top, are completed by the single letter (289). The sentence then reads two ways, depending upon whether it is read top to bottom from left to right or whether the word running along the gutter is read as the final word of the sentence. Either word – top to bottom “stretching” or right to left “expanding” – can be read as the completion of the sentence.

The pattern of verso side being printed with the grain of the book’s initial orientation, with the top of the page as top, bottom as the end, text readable with this orientation and then the recto side reversing the page hierarchy with the words printed from bottom to top continues in the next spread. In each of these, the layout of the verso page serves as a beginning position for the movement of the text on the verso page, and it is through this meaningful juxtaposition, from static to active, from a more standard page hierarchy to a reversed one, from normal spacing to spacing that signifies something, that the lines seem to move, representing the action of the plot through the changing positions of lines of text and fragmented words in the graphic space of the page.

The line continues from 289 to the spread of 290-291, appearing at the bottom of the verso page with “dropping, and as it slips,” and again reversing the page hierarchy on the
recto page, exploding the word “drawing” to fill the page along the gutter, running from the bottom of the page to the top, where the name of the character being dragged, “Reston,” appears printed upside-down at the top left corner, running into the gutter.

The Glyphs Themselves—Decontextualized Letters As Objects in the Story, Actors Upon the Stage of White Space

The next spread presents another deviation from the pattern of static recto, active verso spreads. On the verso page there are only three words, but they appear in linear form running from left to right with ordinary leading, but separated by a space a third of the page from the first word to the second, and a half page from the second to the final word at the lower right corner of the page. All three words are justified against the gutter on the right side of the page. They read “up with it”(292). The recto page again reverses the page hierarchy, this time beginning with a paragraph printed upside down at the bottom of the page. The paragraph breaks off without conclusion, the word “the” appearing three lines up the page (upside down) from the paragraph itself, and then the next word, “rope,” spaced out letter by letter so that it embodies the rope being described, reaching from the paragraph which is literally (in the reversed page hierarchy above the continuation “the” and “rope” to the top of the page. The paragraph is right justified against the gutter, and the words “the” and “rope” also run against(along?) the gutter (293).

The following verso page is nearly empty except for a fragment of a word, “-us,” printed upside down near the bottom of the gutter. The recto page shows a single “a” bracketed by dashes on each side, this printed diagonally so that the top of the letter suggests a page orientation with the top as the lower right hand corner, flush against the
“-us” of the recto page. This juxtaposition in the spread suggests a movement or fracturing of the pieces of the text, the “-a-“ following a line as if it has been propelled from the “-us,” the dashes suggesting a relationship between the fragments, a former connection (294-5).

Johnny Truant’s narrative fills the next spread, though at the top of the verso page, there is a final fragment, “ps…,” which links to a footnote by Truant (296). It is only several pages later, when Truant’s page-choking footnotes again vanish, that the page opens up again to a line by Zampano at the head of the recto page explaining that the rope represented by the extended words has snapped, the pulley torn completely from the banister at the top. The –a- arcing away across the spread from the –us is the broken pulley flying through the space of the stairwell.

As Section 12 of The Navidson Record concludes, a line at the very bottom of the recto page tells us “The film runs out here”(307), and after the page turn, words begin to space out at even intervals across the base of the page, “leaving nothing else behind but an unremarkable” enacting film running out, frames slowing down. On the recto page of this spread, the word “white” continues the sentence (308-9). The next page is blank, followed by another recto spread with a single word, “screen” (311), and then as conclusion, a large black dot in the same upper mid portion of the page that “screen” occupied, relating the two through the shared visual space within the page layout across the page turn. This tells us that, where the screen was, there is now a black dot – another medium-referencing juxtaposition that evokes old television sets and images suddenly shrinking to a pinpoint when the set is switched off (312).
All Hell Breaks Loose – Hypermorphing Layout and The Failure of Exploration

Section twenty is one of the longest in the novel, stretching on for 67 pages with differently spaced pieces of text and directional shifts - the textual layout changes more frequently in this section than in any previous part of the novel.

The first spread begins at the very top of the verso page with a raised cap letter, indicating that the note in Braille at the beginning of the chapter was either a quotation without attribution or an unofficial note by Zampano and not part of the official section (424). After a half page of regularly spaced paragraphs, pieces of text begin to take on unusual spacing that shapes them somewhat.

These paragraphs are not concrete paragraphs in the sense that previous shaped pieces of text have been – they are not arranged through spacing to resemble an object, but instead enact the journey Navidson is taking into the house with his fifth exploration. Whereas the paragraphs on the first half of the page are justified to present very linear edges, the paragraphs that follow are center-line justified with briefer and briefer lines (424). The paragraphs from the lower verso page to the upper recto are shorter in length, often just a sentence or two long, all of them centered. At the top of the recto page, there are three such paragraphs, each with broader and broader margins to create shorter lines in each paragraph until a fourth paragraph drops down in a rectangular column of justified text, each of its lines just over an inch long (425). This columnar paragraph seems to hover in an otherwise blank page.

The next spread introduces text a line at a time, the verso page’s line in the middle of the page, the recto at the bottom. These lines are arranged in relation to one another to suggest movement, a layout expression of the content of the lines, which describe
Navidson moving through a hallway in the house that continues to change size and dimension. Taken together, the text of this two-page spread begins high on the verso page as the character begins to travel down the corridor, and drops to the very bottom of the recto page as the ceiling of the hallway drops (427).

The sentence continues across the page turn and across the next two-page spread, but instead of the sentences running left to right in fragments, they begin at the top of the verso page and progress word by word down the center line of the page. The spacing between each word from top to bottom is also changeable, illustrating through greater and less spacing the actions of the hallway in the story. At the bottom of the page, the same sentence continues in a short, two-line segment before continuing across the gutter in the lower left corner of the recto page. Instead of the words running from top to bottom, each word rises one by one from lower left to upper right, continuing across the page turn (428-9). The next spread concludes the long sentence at the very bottom of the page.

Because the sentence does not continue, it is difficult to find the beginning of the following sentence, which appears in an arc from left to right on the recto page. The capitalization of the first word in the sentence and its placement at the upper left hand corner of the arc marks it as the beginning, and it runs in one and two-word fragments across the top and then curving down from one word in the left-hand gutter across a significant white space to the right-hand margin, back and forth from left gutter to right margin until its conclusion with a paragraph-long quotation that runs with normal spacing at the base of the page (431).

A single-column wide, centered paragraph introduces the next two-page spread. After a space of a single line, a single sentence is offset printed at an angle that draws the
eye from the centered introductory paragraph with the highest point of the sentence is the beginning, leading the eye from the centered top paragraph down to the next sentence, which is angled the opposite way, the beginning of the sentence low and the end high so that we read it from lower left to upper right.

The next sentence begins as an even line, broken in the center to create a column-sized gap in the middle, before changing in several ways, filling half of the page. The next word, printed on its own line just below the first part, is spaced letter by letter to stretch across the gap. The next five words run, line by line, down the left side of the page before the next word in the sentence appears, five lines up from the last word on the left. This word is a juncture from which two identical sets of words spring, each set moving at a different angle across the page, one stretching up from lower left to mid-page right, the second sinking one line before rising in a smaller arc of words from lower left to lower quarter-page right and then sinking to the very last line in the lower right corner of the page. These twinned but distinctly laid out lines present three possible reading paths in completing the same sentence (432). This type of line, which offers multiple potential paths through words that are reprinted in different areas of the page, also occurs at other points in the novel.

The verso page begins with the words “direction no longer matters” (433) centered at the top. Fragments of lines and brief sentences about Navidson lighting several flares are arranged in the space of the page to begin with a short line, explode into a nearly full gutter to margin-length line, and then shrink back to very small points of text. This pattern of a brief line, an explosion to longer lines, and then fading to short lines again repeats two more times before trailing out and becoming one word per line, each centered
to create a vertical unity that draws the eye down the page instead of supporting a strong left to right motion. The last word in one of the final sentences on the page is given only one letter at a time, completely reorienting the direction that the text must be read in from left to right with a visual organization drawing the eye down to a completely vertical word. It is disconcerting in the layout both because it changes the reading pattern of left to right and because it can only be read vertically, but its letters are all oriented to be read horizontally, two reading cues that directly conflict with one another. The final sentence is spaced out to resemble the tripod it describes, beginning with a single word that seems to connect to the base of the vertically oriented word, then spaces out each subsequent word with large pieces of negative space between word segments to create the look of the words on the left, in the middle, and on the right side appear to be the legs of the tripod. The tripod structure makes reading the sentence in the correct order challenging because the two lines in each of the three “legs” might also be read vertically instead of horizontally, a vertical reading suggested by the grouping of the lines – the top line of the left leg is further from the top lines of the middle leg and the right leg that complete the sentence than it is from the word immediately beneath it (433).

The next spread presents a new arrangement – one long paragraph running across the entire top of the spread, verso and recto, almost eliminating any white space in the gutter that generally creates white space to divide the two pages visually. The first sentence begins at the top of the verso page and continues at the exact same position at the top of the recto page. This paragraph lasts for four lines across the spread, referencing a footnote that also violates the boundary of the gutter to continue across the spread (434-5).
Turning the page, a new paragraph runs sideways along the verso margin, orienting the page with the gutter as the “top” and the margin as the “bottom” (436). The recto page, which has a standard page orientation, situates two text blocks in the white space. A rectangular text block broken in the middle by an indented, spaced out line sits just above the middle of the left side of the page. It concludes with a footnote with lines short enough to make the entire note a square text block, oriented to the gutter as top of the page and margin as base (437). The orientation of text blocks within the space of the page changes quite often in Section Twenty, heightening the sense of disorientation communicated by the verbal narrative elements.

**Not Simple Mirroring, Not Just Opposites – Layouts Designed to Fool You**

The next spread repeats the pattern of creating a page in which two distinct text blocks have different orientations in relation to the page and to each other. In this case, the first paragraph on the page, printed sideways, has the margin as the “top” and the gutter as “bottom.” The paragraph trails off with an ellipses which continues two lines below it to indicate that the other paragraph on the page, which is oriented through the direction of the words with gutter as “top” and margin as “bottom,” though to make sense it must be read backwards from the last word at the bottom of the paragraph (the ellipses) back up to the top, where after the final word is printed, a period ending the sentence sits at the “top” of the text block.

The two text blocks sharing the middle of page 438 then reverse each aspect of one another – the left text block running from top of the paragraph to the bottom, but oriented with the top of the text block aligned with the margin and the base aligned with the gutter, while the right text block not only reverses the orientation, running as a text
block from gutter to the base of the other paragraph, it also reverses the order for reading words and lines in a paragraph, with the content of the paragraph only making sense when read from the left side of the bottom line backward toward the top, this first line running from left to right, the second line right to left, and then each subsequent line reversing until the statement ends at the top of the text block with a period hovering above the word at the top of the page.

This pattern reverses on the recto page with a sideways square paragraph that changes the orientation of the page to the gutter being the top and margin the bottom (439). This paragraph describes Navidson beginning to climb up a vertical shaft, and after the page turn, a ladder-spaced thin column of text stretches from verso to recto sides, beginning at the upper left corner of the verso page, each line fragment or “rung” angling down two tabs until the line fragments reach the center of the spread, at which point they stretch two-line rung by rung across to the margin of the recto page. The lines forming the ladder are oriented so that the top of the page appears to be the recto margin and the bottom the verso margin, but again the lines only make sense if read backwards, from the bottom toward the top of the column, or from the left margin up the ladder rung by rung to the right margin. At the “top” of the ladder, there is a small arrow pointing down the ladder – initially, this appears to be a reading direction, but when taken in the context of the other elements in the two-page spread, it matches a second arrow pointing in the opposite direction, below a footnote line and a footnote that is printed sideways running from the recto page gutter to the recto margin (441).
Column Compression – Shrinking and Expanding Column Widths as Performance of Narrative Events

Next, there is a sequence of pages with a narrow block of text that grows smaller and smaller in the space of each page. Unlike previous text blocks in *House of Leaves*, here the words break off exactly at a certain point and spacing between them is uneven to create a clear justification on both sides of the paragraph. The words are broken to the extent that the last one on a page is frequently continued in the next page’s centered text block. The broken words create a feeling of being rushed or compressed that echoes the action of the story at this point, as Navidson attempts to make his way through a labyrinth at the center of the house and the walls begin to close in, the passageway becoming increasingly more narrow. The text block representing this passageway shrinks in size at the center of each page, from nine lines from top to bottom and two to three words wide on the first page to eight lines by three, then six by three, five by one, four by one, until on the final page of the sequence there is only a single word centered in a page dominated by white space (443-460). The words not only break off, at certain points in the shrinking of the text blocks from page to page, there are sections of text without a single complete word (448). At this point, the text block is flattened with the top to bottom line count falling from three to two and the width increasing to accommodate at least two to three complete words per line of each text block (450-458).

The conclusion of this sequence occurs with the word “changes” on the verso side of a spread and a new type of image created with text on the recto side. Brackets frame the left and right sides of a large rectangular block of Xs (461). Near the center of this mass of Xs, one line is left blank on the left and right sides to frame a five character wide, five line deep block of bolded Xs that are the center of the image. The next two-page
spread begins with normal lines of text at the top of the verso page and the same
brackets with the central five by five block of bold Xs at the center, this time minus the
framing rows of Xs (463).

The next spread presents paragraphs that are inverse mirror images of one
another, one on each page, though each has different content. The verso page’s
paragraph is printed at an angle to run from the upper left corner in a triangular paragraph
to mid-page. The recto paragraph, printed from the lower right-hand corner at the same
angle up toward the middle of the page, is the inverse of the first paragraph (464-5).
These two triangular paragraphs are Zampano’s detailed account of the exploration film.

The following page brings a shift in layout – verso and recto pages are nearly
filled by long text blocks continuing the analysis of both the film footage and of critical
response to it. These paragraphs are slightly smaller in the space of the page, leaving
large margins and gutters and a great deal of space at the foot of each page. The text
block on the verso page concludes with a footnote at the lower right-hand corner that is
printed as two concentric circles, the outermost circle linking the idea in the paragraph
with a book, the inner circle giving the publication information (466).

The next sequence begins with a brief paragraph printed upside-down, beginning
near the top of the verso page and concluding at the very top of the page with an
unusually thin margin. There is a call-out to a footnote, this time a bold arrow pointing,
instead of outward toward the page, back into the paragraph’s final line. The arrow
points right if we read the paragraph upside-down, though if the book is turned to read
the paragraph right side up, the arrow points left. There is a dividing line halfway down
the page, and following that, a small arrow that points left when read with the book right-
side up. Knowing that footnote call-outs match the footnotes they correspond to, the
direction of the footnote symbol in the upside-down paragraph and the symbol in the
right-side up footnote suggest that the layout directs the reader to turn the book as they
read directionally changing sections. At this point in the story, Navidson is no longer
sitting on anything solid, and is unsure whether he is falling or floating (468), a state of
being that is enacted with the changing direction of the paragraphs, lines, and other
elements in the text. The recto spread contains a single line which runs along the gutter
printed with the top of the page as the margin and bottom as the gutter (469).
Font sizes begin to shift from page to page. Another single line runs printed upside-down
along the bottom of the verso page in a very small font, while the recto page has a line
run, also printed upside-down, along the top (470-1). All of the pages with text printed at
different angles and directions continue a running foot with the page numbers, these
always oriented to the book’s original direction.

Two long, three and four line paragraphs stretch from top to bottom along the
gutters of the next verso and recto pages, the recto paragraph printed with margin as page
top and gutter bottom, the recto its mirror with recto margin as top of the page and gutter
as bottom (472-3). This creates a situation in which the reader cannot read both
paragraphs from a single vantage point, but must change position in relation to the text.
Another long paragraph stretches from the bottom of the next verso page to the top,
printed sideways so that the margin is the head of the page and the gutter the base. The
recto page contains a much smaller triangular paragraph printed at an angle in the lower
right-hand corner with the corner as top of the page and upper left-hand corner as the
base (474-5).
This triangular pattern’s orientation to the page is reversed after the page turn, appearing in the lower right-hand corner with the top of the page as top left corner and the bottom of the page as lower right-hand corner (476). This angled paragraph is the opposite of the angled paragraph on the previous page, and does not line up to appear in the same position across the page turn as similarly shaped textual elements such as the “windows” did earlier in the novel. The second page of this spread initiates a sequence of textual elements printed along the center line of each page, each aligning across page-turns to create the sense of a single element that moves or changes (477-479).

The first page is a line from a popular song printed sideways on the recto page so that the margin is the head of the page and the gutter the bottom (477).

The page after the turn shows just five parallel lines running from the head of the page to the foot. On the recto page, these five lines are transformed into a line of music (479).

The next spread has only two short lines, both printed upside down but at opposite positions on the pages – the verso page’s brief line appears at the very top, while the recto appears upside down at the very base of the page (480-1).

Next, brief lines appear printed sideways in each margin, but printed in different directions so that on the verso page the line makes the head of the page the gutter and the base the margin, while on the recto the head is the gutter and the base the margin (482-3). Turning the page, we find a line of text spaced out along the middle left column of the page with a right justification, and just to the right of it, a musical notation symbol – the repeat symbol, one that also resembles a colon. The recto page contains a half-page white space marked off with a long line of bracket symbols that form the left and right
sides of it (485). The next spread repeats this pattern with yet another spaced-out right justified line of text beside another repeat symbol, and on the recto side another half-page white space demarked by two lines of brackets. However, the white space inside the brackets contains a single asterisk in the upper right-hand corner. The expanded lines of text on the verso pages gesture to and describe the bracketed or bordered white space of the recto pages – discussing Navidson’s continued exploration of the house, the two sentences describe a space he finds himself in, depicting it in the first maplike bracketed space image (485). In the second spread, the expanded sentence reveals that something else is suddenly in the room with Navidson, and the asterisk appears in the upper corner of the maplike image (487). A single line appears at the very top of the next page, its footnote at the base, and the next page has a final brief, spaced out paragraph describing the film running out. A single, one-word footnote appears at the base of the next page, which concludes Section 20.

**Layout as Thematic Link Suggesting Connections Across Novel, or Layout as Characterization and a Suggested Answer to the Question of Who Narrates**

Section E is the longest section in Appendix II at nearly fifty pages, collecting all of the letters from his mother Pelafina, who is institutionalized, to Truant. The letters date from 1982-1989, at which point a letter noting that his mother died is included. The letters are a very significant portion of the end of the novel, as this is a point during which the layout begins to shift again, this time more obviously as the result of manipulation by Pelafina in her less balanced moments. The letters, which are a page or so in length each and have their own distinctive font, remain standard in format for several pages, containing words that hint at aspects of The Navidson Record, including a reference to “blue pages”(608), numerous references to codes, and then a massive,
seemingly random, strangely capitalized three page letter in which the first letter of every word is a letter in a code spelling out a cry for help (620-23). After this point, the typographic style of the letters begins to shift in ways very much like that of The Navidson Record. Lines of text alternate at angles across the page, first running from the upper right hand corner of the letter space to the lower right, then an angle running the same direction but a few degrees more, followed by three shorter lines running from the lower left corner of the page to the middle, under which there is a signature and his mother’s initial at an angle (623).

The next letter in the series begins with one straight line before a bold line that begins at the end of this line, turns downward at a right-degree angle, where it connects with a six line paragraph printed sideways with the head at the page’s gutter and the foot toward the margin. After this, it is not clear where to proceed next in the space of the page. A single line in Spanish runs at an angle from just below the first line of the letter, starting at the upper left and concluding at the lower right, nearly touching the final word of the sideways paragraph. Though the entire signature and initial portion of the end of the letter is printed sideways all in one piece with its top toward the margin and base toward the gutter, the signature initial is the element nearest the angled line in Spanish, and seems to almost connect that piece of the composition to everything else even though the section must be read beginning at the furthest edge of the letter by the margin, and then followed down to the final initial (624).

The recto page opposite this letter is also full of innovative typographic arrangements. The letter begins in a normal sized font with regular spacing between each line, and continues this way for the first six lines. Suddenly, words in each line appear in
different sizes, manically repeating the words “The New Director.” Soon, random letters in the repeating phrase are capitalized, creating different stresses and inflections in each repetition of the phrase. A solid page of the phrase continues in gradually shrinking font until, near the base of the page, it is barely legible. Halfway through this page of words, one of the large ‘e’s in ‘new’ is crossed out with a blue x. The very final line suddenly changes, reading “Hoping love still conquers death or at the very minimum fear” in one long run-on sentence. Below the paragraph, there is a square-shaped grouping of Pelafina’s signature initial in differently sized fonts, and to the right of this, a large bold printed ‘P.’

The next spread begins with a brief but oddly spaced letter on the verso side. After the date is printed evenly, each line is printed at an angle in different font sizes. The first line begins at the upper left and angles down to meet the end of the second line, which begins lower and rises at an angle to almost meet the first line. The third line begins high just beneath the second sentence, angling down across to mid-page. The fourth and fifth lines are very brief, the first angling up again, the second angling down in a very small font. The sixth line, in huge font, begins beneath the halfway mark of the page and rises up to meet the fifth line. Near the end of this line, a line broken into three segments to form a small block of text runs from the large text line down toward the final line, which is only slightly angled upward at the end. In all, the lines alternate directional angling – one angles top to bottom, the next bottom to top, and the pattern continues down the entire page. This has the effect of drawing the eye from line to line, albeit in a way that interrupts rather than facilitates easy reading – the lines nearly join at the point
where one line concludes and the next also concludes, causing the eye to perpetually jump to the end of the next sentence (626).

The letter on the recto side again takes a phrase and repeats it in varying sized fonts, but this time takes it further and creates illegible palimpsest blocks of the phrase “forgive me” one printed atop another atop another atop the original. The layout combines the linear repetitions of the phrase in the letter for most of the page, and then clutters the bottom third of the page with the phrase arranged in nearly squared blocks, like a stamp, repeated in thick layers so that nothing is legible but a tangle of serifs and bold glyphs. The squares appear at several angles, from upside-down to angled, and within the palimpsest there are also larger font lines and words from the phrase (627). At the bottom of this thick bramble of text blocks, there is a single initial, ‘P,’ in the smallest font size among all of the elements on the page.

The next letter presents a block of the same word printed over and over again with letters capitalized at points in the text block that first seem random. When the capitalized letters are read as a sequence following normal reading rules – top of the paragraph one line at a time to the bottom, left to right, the capitalized letters are nonsense: “DDEEAADR” (628). However, in reading the words against the grain of the standard reading order, with the first letter on the left as the first in a meaningful sequence, followed by the next letter mid-paragraph to the left, then the one directly below that, followed by the bottom left letter, a word emerges – “DEAD.” The four letters in the mirror positions along the right side of the paragraph also spell a word this way – “DEAR.” A line that begins as an alphabet but changes to spell “Johnnyz” after the ‘J’
begins at an angle near the top middle of the paragraph, angling down to the right and ending near the middle of the page.

A series of lines in a different sized font rise from the lower half of the page at the opposite angle, starting low at the left of each line and rising higher on the right. This angled series of lines must be read from the top line to the bottom, but unlike other sets, it is not unified by a justification, each line beginning and ending at a different place than the line preceding and following it.

On the next page, this pattern of beginning lines at different intervals is combined with the novel’s patterning device of alternating the first element’s position with the second element, back and forth down the page. After the letter’s normally printed header, the left-justified first paragraph is double indented, while the second paragraph begins on the same line as the header. The third paragraph is double indented like the first, while the fourth returns to the position of the header except with lines under half the size of all the others. This pattern continues as the letter runs for another full page, all of it an apology of sorts for trying to kill Johnny Truant, concluding with the initial ‘P’ in an extremely small font, self-effacing again as with previous apology letters (630).

The next letter begins with a distorted header, an unusual thing. The date, instead of appearing in a normal level line, is printed at an angle, the line beginning near the top of the right-hand corner of the page and running down toward the lower right corner.

Following this, there is a poem in which it is suggested that Johnny is missing or absent, Pelafina using the phrase “JOHNNY IS TRUANT,” before concluding with her signature initial in an enormous font (631).
The next spread begins with the repetition of the name Johnny to form lines that begin at different points on the page to create a gracefully arcing structure, thick with the repeated name at the top, thinning out into less dense single lines with more space between them as it moves back and forth down the page. It continues on the next page, beginning with long centered lines and eventually narrowing in spacing to single words, creating a shaped column reminiscent of others in The Navidson Record (633). Turning the page, the verso side has the single concluding word “safe,” above a long bold line running across the center of the page. Beneath the line is empty white space. The letter on the recto page is back to normal in terms of form, spacing, and content, but it is a key piece of the narrative, as Pelafina admits to having been in an agitated state and having used “five reams of paper and postage,” which she is not certain really occurred (635). After this point, the letters remain somewhat lucid and subsequently normal in layout. The exception are two letters in smaller, more official font from the director of the institution, informing Johnny about a change in his mother’s condition and then about her death (639,643). The final element in this section is a small centered paragraph – a receipt claiming that a piece of jewelry owned by Pelafina was claimed by her son, Johnny (644).

These sections and their shifting layouts can be generalized to an extent. *House of Leaves* begins with a familiar layout, the academic study with footnotes. This layout involves clearly delineated organizational headers at the beginnings of sections, a substantial amount of information in the traditional text block, and footnotes at the bottom of each page below a line, allowing readers to use familiar navigation strategies and to find significant narrative information in conventional semiotic domains. After this
initial step, however, this original layout is modified, requiring readers to use a new reading strategy from which reading path to take to what textual elements communicate narrative information. Step by step, beginning with smaller semiotic shifts and reading path challenges and building to layouts that offer little familiar ground, this pattern of introducing a new aspect of layout or a new semiotic domain for narrative information and then changing it continues throughout the novel - layouts are introduced and then altered.

For example, the first layout – Zampano’s academic study, with key information mainly appearing in the traditional text block and footnotes at the foot of each page - changes to two-column entries, then multiple pages upon which the footnotes swamp the traditional text block, lapses into lines of text that enact or mimic the action of the story, and finally incomplete sections of the study. A second type of layout in House of Leaves is a sequence of pages in which lines of text or words of various spacing change position and sometimes direction against a static backdrop of white space. A third layout is a sequence of multiple two-page spreads in which textual elements occupy the same space on multiple pages in a row, so that when the page is turned, the same element appears on the same side of each new spread. In this type of layout, text blocks are arranged so that they run in multiple different directions in the space of each page, but the direction of each of these textual elements is consistent across multiple pages in the sequence.

The appendices introduce several different layouts, including a section of letters beginning in a typical style and changing to more disordered styles, a section of poems in small print, several per page, and a final page with an imagistic word.
Further analysis is needed to determine whether *House of Leaves* offers implicit instructions on how to read multimodally/ how to read the nonstandard layout of the text, as in other multimodal novels such as *The Fourth Treasure* and *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*.

The complexity of *House of Leaves* has both thrilled and perplexed readers and critics. Critical, theoretical, and fan interpretations are shared on its official discussion board website in nine years’ worth of reader discussion threads. There is not a great deal of consensus about the novel’s meaning, or about the best strategy for navigating its changing reading paths and interpreting its multiple elements, which has presented problems for readers as well as for critics.

**Literature Review**

Critics have called *House of Leaves* “ergodic,” (Aarseth), a “technotext” or “networked novel” remediating the internet (Hayles, Pressman) and more, because it is a novel that resists traditional reading strategies. The diverse amount of kinds of textual elements in changeable layout patterns preclude linear, hierarchical reading strategies, and while the novel rewards a monomodal reading style, that style leaves out key elements of the narrative, as well as important narrative cues regarding the narrators and other aspects of the narrative. The reader must exert considerable effort to make connections between textual elements, and even to figure out how to proceed from page to page, across difficult pages and spreads, and overall how to put together pieces of textual information without reliance on typical reading conventions or even direction/ cues from the text.
Scholarly response to *House of Leaves* is marked by tension between the theoretical and the material. Many scholars do not yet have access to a way of discussing the textual phenomena – font shifting, concrete text, iconographic and kinetic text, and textual pieces – that make *House of Leaves* so unique. They approach the novel at the level of commenting on the content but not the form—the monomodal approach. Though the novel is available in four different editions, scholars and booksellers alike neglect to account for which edition they are dealing with – black and white only, the edition with “house” in blue ink, the edition with “minotaur” in red ink, or the full color edition, which includes the blue ink, red ink, and adds purple ink.

Even when scholars take the monomodal approach, however, they cannot completely leave out an account of the typographical uniqueness of the novel, though they do not know how to discuss this in relation to the more conventional literary scholarship they are doing. As a result, sections of these studies can veer from discussion of how the content and subject matter of the novel are deconstructionist to a section of textual description, a move from the novel as vehicle for concepts to the novel as typographic object (Slocombe 99-100, Hansen 599-600).

The novel focuses extensively upon themes of media and mediation (Hansen, Gibbons). Perhaps because of this thematic focus and because of its metanarrative qualities that foreground the text as a material, typographic construction at the same time that it conveys content through a variety of modes, scholars must discuss the content and form as interrelated. However, this leads to discursive slippage between a focus on form and a focus on content, or even a focus devoted to reading both together, in many scholarly studies. Instead of discussing both form and content together as interrelated,
their arguments move from more traditional literary analyses of the content of the novel to multimodal analysis of how the typographic style and layout of the novel conveys meaning.

For example, in one section of his analysis of *House of Leaves*, Mark B.N. Hansen goes on to use mediation as a term meaning both mediation in terms of how story is conveyed by a specific medium, and mediation in terms of levels of narrative mediation, or how the story is disclosed through the perspectives of different narrators. Granted, both are types of narrative mediation, but they are two very different kinds – one dealing with issues of textual form, the other dealing with story form – and thus, the terms are not interchangeable. The temptation to place the issue and marks of mediation (in the media sense) at the outer level of the familiar narratological “levels of narration” nested boxes model is understandable. However, sustained study of multimodal novels reveal that mediation (media sense) is inextricably a part of and a tool utilized by all levels of the narrative. Though it can be used in non-narrative ways at times in novels, mediation is not a tool that is exclusively used in a nonfictional sense, as its devices at times operate at the level of story. Instead, the devices of medium-based mediation can mark important details of characterization, and clues about the world of the story in a homodiegetic sense, as they do in *House of Leaves*. This is not the case with all multimodal novels. When Mark B.N. Hansen uses the term “mediation” to refer simultaneously to both narrational mediation and medium-specific mediation, it does not work despite the fact that medium-specific mediation can also function as narrative mediation. Instead of pointing to the same quality in both layout/textual style and in levels of narration, or pointing out that the medium constitutes another layer of narration
(which it does), it makes the term mediation too general to enable it to gesture very precisely toward the ways medium-specific narration within the narrative function, conflating those effects with mediation by characters. One type of mediation is on a different discursive level than the other, and we cannot shift focus between story details conveyed in the verbal print mode and story details conveyed through details of layout and mediation without prefacing that shift or accounting for the shift in terms specific to that aspect. Hansen later notes that he sees this tension between medium-specific mediation and character-mediation in *House of Leaves* as an “irreducible complicity between character and mediation in [a] novel of mediations,” (614).

Mark B.N. Hansen bases his reading of *House Of Leaves* in part on the idea that the novel responds to or remediates the digital, noting “The text’s thematic concern with the digital coincides with its most extreme typographical deformation…the culmination of the text’s thematic engagement with the digital…a concern with the digital as a subterranean deformational force that threatens the integrity of the (traditional) text” (609).

Hansen is most concerned with theorizing the novel’s use of a somewhat open structure of narrative pieces to create a kind of empty signifier that the reader can always return to and fill with new meanings, new discoveries each reading.

Nearly every study of *House of Leaves* notes the novel’s multiple levels of narration and the use of typographical experimentation such as the use of colored ink, different fonts, iconographic sections of text, and concrete text. Many of the studies also note that *House of Leaves* is an attempt to recuperate the novel in a digital age, the technotextual and hypermedia approaches, taking this as a departure point for discussion
of media and mediation in a digital age (Hayles, Hansen, Gibbons). Alison Gibbons takes this further, writing about the novel as a material artifact that requires us to become aware of our own embodied relationship to the medium of print.

Wonder and fear characterize typical responses to Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*. Part of this is due to the unusual sense of movement resulting from the changing of positions of text pieces in the white spaces and within the constructed spaces of paragraphs and columns in the text. In many places, scholars note that the text on the page either enacts the events taking place in the story, or represents ideas from the events of the story iconographically (Gibbons, Pressman).

Many critics note the use of blue ink to mark the word “house” throughout the novel as a reference to the internet and hyperlinked information (Hayles, Gibbons). Because of the fragmentary nature of the pieces of information we are given in the novel and because of the extensive footnoting that links one piece to other pieces, readers can choose to navigate the text in a straightforward way (to some extent, the novel resists this type of strategy), or to follow footnotes to different points in the novel. Each strategy produces a different text for the reader.

The reader’s role in making sense of *House of Leaves* is another major point – because the novel offers multiple pathways and choices along the way to readers, there are many possible strategies and many possible readings of the novel. It is important to note what kind of reading paths are available to readers, and whether these paths are optional or required. The reader is very involved in what kind of text they encounter in *House of Leaves*, as there are directed and implicit cues, but whether to follow directed
cues or to use trial and error is up to the reader. Inevitably, a bit of both strategies must be employed in the course of the novel.

Whether they take a monomodal or technotextual tack in analyzing *House of Leaves*, studies of the novel, perhaps due to the overwhelming amount of design and narrative elements at work, tend to focus on one aspect of the novel rather than taking a global survey of its devices. In this way, studies of the novel are not systematic in their engagement with the text. Falling back upon monomodal methods of interpretation or failing to look further than the aspects of the novel that fit a specific interpretive theory, scholars have missed a great deal of what is going on in the novel, as well as how its effects are achieved in terms of story and layout. Although the novel has been written about a great deal, it is overdue for a more global reading method and a systematic method of analysis.

A Possible Solution: A Second Interpretive Step

In a novel like *House of Leaves* readers cannot look for story content in the same modes throughout the text, or in one constant location in the layout. In other words, they cannot rely on a single, fixed semiotic code with which to locate the most meaningful content or to piece together content that is difficult to navigate, see connections between, or decode. Because of this, we need a more powerful tool to detect which aspects of the text to read as meaningful. Ideally, we need a tool that enables us to find how meaning is made between textual elements, and between textual elements and their contexts in the layouts and overall patterns of the novel. Using such a tool, we might observe how different elements make meaning together and how these relationships change, enabling
us to locate the kinds of semiotic codes readers need to use in making meaning of the novel.

As a result, one of the most important aspects of House of Leaves is looking at how the arrangement of the text seems to prompt readers to make meaningful connections between textual elements in an unruly graphic space. Because House of Leaves’ layout changes so often, the connection of one element with the next must be found by way of trial and error by the reader – scanning through the available material to see which pieces seem to fit together or if the ideas flow logically if processed in one order or another order. However, within each section of House of Leaves, there is an initial pattern established which is then deformed or decomposed in a way that contributes to narrative meaning. The graphic disorientation of textual elements across a series of pages is often used to emphasize and embody the action of the story.

There are areas in House of Leaves in which a local organization emerges, or sequences in which a pattern is established and rules for reading are suggested, but then the pattern unravels, is reversed, or rules are violated. There is no consistent global organization of the layout of pages, hierarchies of textual elements, or suggested reading strategies for the novel. This forces readers to switch techniques in making connections between textual elements, relying on implicit cues in order to piece together a complete multimodal sentence, or to pick up an idea continuing after a long aside.

Given the lack of an overall, unifying set of textual conventions, textual elements, textual devices, or shared layout to unify House of Leaves, just using the taxonomy to observe and extrapolate key features and then to study how they work across the novel is a method that, while a good starting point for analyzing the structures at work in the
novel, needs a different step after the initial inventory. Furthermore, the next step must be flexible enough to enable interpretation of a text whose common pattern is change.

In order to read how these connections are suggested in the novel, *House of Leaves* calls for a second interpretive step, a move beyond using just the descriptive taxonomy to observe textual features. In order to do this, it is useful to think of the graphic space as mapped (or deliberately structured to communicate information in various ways) and to think about how it structures and suggests relationships between textual elements, textual sequences and series.

In studies such as “Mapped Pictures” and “Words, Numbers, Images”, Edward Tufte describes multiple examples of relationships between textual elements and the space of the page and how these suggest connections, contexts for seeing, and direct a reading of meaning. Tufte’s work covers both compound images, or mapped pictures as he calls them, and how a series or sequence of textual elements suggest a reading path, a hierarchy of meaning, and connections between them/ a multimodal sentence. These ideas have also been discussed in similar ways by Roland Barthes (the compound image, or the type of semiotic interaction occurring when an image is paired with words), Scott McCloud, who discusses the subject in the context of comics (layout, hierarchy, use of white space), and many scholars working with multimodal texts (Kress and VanLeeuwen, Wysocki, etc.).

Anne Francis Wysocki describes how sets of elements create order and meaning in a graphic space in her multimodal rhetoric *Compose, Design, Advocate*. She notes that a given set of textual elements (when they are arranged with a solid rhetorical purpose) use a visual hierarchy to suggest a visual path (for the multimodal novel’s situation, this
is a reading path) that suggests which element should be processed first, second, and so on to create meaningful connections. This visual hierarchy is often established using contrast and sameness, something also discussed in film theory with concepts like the graphic match, in which the visual space of one frame has a similar layout or similar element that establishes a visual relationship to a separate but similarly laid out frame. Wysocki goes on to state that elements in a graphic space must be ordered so that there is a beginning point to a given set of textual elements to be interpreted and an end point to this set – groups of textual elements can then form a statement, instead of seeming like a rambling and random collection of items.

Tufte also discusses ways texts signal that textual elements should be read together, but he refers to not the elements and their relationships with one another signaling this participation in a single statement, but instead to the context’s role in helping to unify the elements. He refers to how textual elements can be arranged within the context of a “common visual field” to suggest shared participation in meaning-making through adjacency and other techniques (“Words, Numbers, Images” 91). Conversely, Wysocki, focusing on element-to-element signals of connectedness, describes several ways that textual elements can create through their arrangements a “visual unity” (a visual rhetoric of which things belong in the same statement) using repetition and alignment – “your visual compositions must look like a set of unified pieces so that your audience understands that the pieces are meant to work together to make one main argument” (ordered sets of elements, visual hierarchies and reading paths, unifying a set of elements to create a single argument). It becomes clear when engaging with a text like *House of Leaves* that both types of cues – that of the common visual field,
and that of the element-to-element signals – are at work in signaling which textual elements we should read as connected, how to navigate a path through unusual layouts, and when the multimodal semiotic statements that these collections of textual elements comprise begin and end.

A second step in the method of interpretation is required to make sense of all the elements at work in this constantly changing novel. The sheer number of textual elements on a two-page spread at a given time and the fact of these configurations changing constantly, running for a section, and changing again, means that there is no stable or typical page hierarchy, no typical configuration of textual elements for House of Leaves.

Reviewing Edward Tufte’s work and the work of graphic design, multimodal rhetoric, and typographic style experts Ellen Lupton, Anne-Francis Wysocki, and others, a possible means of reading such a changeable textual environment begins to emerge. Tufte discusses how textual elements mean things both in relation to the other elements in a visual field such as a page, a two-page spread, or the like, and within the context of that page or the context of a pattern across several pages (which I term a sequence). A necessary second step for interpreting multimodal textual situations, then, is to reconcretize the elements that were abstracted from their overall context and relationships in the first step – the identification of every type of textual element. These abstracted pieces must be contextualized, both in relation to the layouts of the text and in their relationships with other textual elements. This second step begins with noting the positions of textual elements on the page, on the two-page spread, and in relation to other elements. In addition, it is important to note their relationships with other elements
overall – in patterns of elements frequently occurring together, across page turns, and when each element appears or disappears for a time throughout the novel.

In reading multimodal texts, it becomes apparent that certain textual elements must be read together, in a specific order, at a certain pace or in a certain time which is governed by the position of the elements in the space of the page (which creates temporal pacing), in order to fully understand the ideas being conveyed in the work. This connected group of multimodal elements might be thought of as akin to a sentence, albeit without as strictly regulated grammatical roles for each element. The disparate textual elements, though not always explicitly connected, comprise a complete thought, and readers have a sense of when one of these multimodal sentences begins and when it is completed.

This secondary interpretive step will enable us to determine the individual multimodal novel’s unique (and sometimes changeable) situation regarding how it indicates connections and relationships between textual elements in the visual field of the page or spread or sequence of pages, and how it indicates or suggests rules of order – both in terms of hierarchical cues given through design, organization, or groupings, and in terms of the reading paths suggested by layout (these have, as previously noted, directed or implicit cues). In short, what are the text’s rules of relationships between textual elements in the visual field, and what are the rules of order – hierarchical (what gets noted and read first, what next), and for reading paths?

**A New Method for Reading Connections Between Textual Elements**

In order to read not only “regularly structured” multimodal novels but especially multimodal novels like *HOL* that change their structure and signification techniques
throughout the text, this second interpretive step must begin with basic properties of how contexts and relationships suggest connections between textual elements.

In general, there are two aspects of how to read connections in ordering and producing meaning among different textual elements and different textual layouts. These are directed or implicit cues for how textual elements are connected, and for how reading paths are created within the text.

Whether directed or implicit, cues for reading connections in ordering and producing meaning among different textual elements occur at three levels of the text and can be either easily recognized by the reader – directed cues, or arrived at through a great deal of reading work – implicit cues. In order to understand how multimodal or monomodal texts make meaning between textual elements, we need to be able to observe the functioning of these two kinds of cues, which show us how to interpret the elements of the text and what order to interpret them in. Connections are made within a common visual field, within a space demarcated from other space, or across spaces which signal their relatedness with other cues. The visual field both serves to suggest relationships between textual elements, and gives them a unity through their shared site of appearance.

These are the things we need to observe the functioning of in reading multimodal or monomodally-styled texts to understand how they make meaning. Directed or implicit connections are made in several different ways. They can occur within a common visual field, as with hierarchical connections, directional connections, verbal or visual call-outs, juxtaposition, parallel location within the graphic space, and so on. They can also exist within a space demarcated from other space – for example, boxed elements, elements set apart by a line or border, different columns, traditional text block as an area distinct from
margin or foot of the page, and so on. They can also be drawn across spaces when
textual elements signal their relatedness using other cues, such as common position in the
layout, directionality in relation to different directional textual pieces, common visual
appearance such as font or other stylistic device, and so on. The visual field serves to
suggest relationships between textual elements, giving them a unity of rhetorical purpose
through their shared site of appearance.

Overall, textual elements can be presented as connected or related through three
basic categories of cues, which can be either directed or implicit.

These cues can be embedded in the text at the level of:

A) Narrative/ Story

B) Layout/ Design, or

C) Conventions of the Medium-Specific Genre in which the material appears.

Narrative cues can include such things as contextual meaning that is directly or
implicitly given through story. Cues might be verbal call-outs to other modal elements,
or other situations as when one modal element gives one piece of narrative information
and a different modal element gives a subsequent piece of narrative information.

Layout or Design cues have been discussed at length in works involving
typography, book design, layout, multimodality, comics, and the rhetoric of design.
These cues can include textual elements relationships with one another as suggested by
elements of the layout such as directionality, juxtaposition, hierarchy, and so on. These
cues can also include suggested order of operations for textual elements in multiple
modes in a unifying visual field/ graphic space, such as the page, the spread, or even the
sequence of pages that comprises a section.
Medium-specific genre cues are ways of suggesting textual element linkages or reading order through the usual conventions of a type of text in the given medium. In the case of the multimodal novel, this would be the genre of the novel in the medium of print, and some of this medium-specific-genre’s conventions include the expectation that the text will flow from L-R, from Top of a page to the Bottom, and from the Front of the volume to the Back. This would also include other cues such as a table of contents, chapter headers, running heads, use of pagination, footnotes, an index, and so on.

In general, CONNECTIONS can be:

I. DIRECTED (Linkage markings, verbal directives – narrative or call-outs, or clear/with the grain use of genre conventions to suggest reading path and order of operations for textual element processing)

A. Textual Layout or Design, Spatial Arrangement of Elements, Temporal Arrangement of Features. This includes clear juxtapositions in layout between two textual elements, series of elements that are either alike to draw comparisons, or that are similar in some ways and distinct in other ways to draw attention to the difference in a meaningful way. This also includes indications of hierarchy and order on the page.

B. Textual Layout or Design includes Spatial Cues – When elements are placed in juxtaposition with other elements in the layout of space on the graphic surface.

C. Textual Layout or Design also includes Temporal Cues – Reading conventions dictate a certain order of operations within the page, the spread,
and the sequence of the folio. These conventions are L-R, T-B, and Beginning to End with the assumption that elements read one after another (in sentences, paragraphs, and chapters) will cumulatively produce meaningful statements. Elements placed within temporal relationships with other elements can be read as connected (at times, given other textual cues like punctuation in verbal sentences, graphic organizational and relational cues in multimodal texts, paragraphing, chapters, etc.).

D. Medium-Specific Types of Directed Cues- Verbal Call-Outs (Or Visual Call-Outs) – Connection directed by one modal content in a key position in the layout. Connection directed, for example, by a verbal call-out linking the other modal element to the verbal text block, or more generally one modal element to other modal elements.

E. Medium-Specific Types of Directed Cues include the (shared with Textual Layout) category - Temporal Cues – Reading conventions dictate a certain order of operations within the page, the spread, and the sequence of the folio. These conventions are L-R, T-B, and Beginning to End with the assumption that elements read one after another (in sentences, paragraphs, and chapters) will cumulatively produce meaningful statements. Elements placed in temporal relationships with other elements can be read as connected (at times, given other textual cues like punctuation in verbal sentences, graphic organizational and relational cues in multimodal texts, paragraphing, chapters, etc.).
F. **Narrative Types of Directed Cues (Story Cues)** – (Perhaps shares with medium-specific genre cues, as linear meaning-making is how story unfolds, MM or monomodally. Also shares with Layout in call-outs, though narrative call-outs or story call-outs would differ from layout call-outs in that the narrative or story call-out is any part of the story that explicitly links a different textual element or textual section to the traditional text block or the textual element telling the story. It uses any modal element that is participating actively in the narrative to link through story to another modal element.

II. **IMPLIED** - Implied Cues are ergodic, unmarked, nonsequential, unconventional in terms of genre. They present a situation in which

A. Procedural, linking, or hierarchical cues are not **directly** given to the reader, but instead these cues **must be inferred from narrative, spatial, temporal context in order to create meaningful units** (“sentences,” “complete thoughts,” etc.). (Inferring connections between elements – Intra-Textual Relationships or Relational Meaning).

B. The reader must work through and attempt several potential ways to read the textual elements within the visual field in order to create meaning. (Reading paths), or ways to link textual elements that may seem at first tenuously, not overtly, not explicitly, or not at all related (perhaps due to the elements being in different modes, or the layout not strongly linking the various pieces, a confused or unconventional order in the layout, a confusing use or modification of genre conventions for the usual
organization and use of that specific medium. **Local Context** – Page, Spread, Sequence, or **Global Textual Context** – Patterns of Use in the Overall Text).

**Applying the Second Step - Changing Rules of Signification – Semiotic Code Shifting and Code Combining**

Many of the tools *House of Leaves* uses to create a sense of disorientation come into focus when the Second Step is applied. The novel combines types of textual elements in different ways, and constantly shifts the semiotic carrier of meaning from one aspect of the verbal, visual, spatial, temporal, and relational to another without establishing a predictable pattern. Though key narrative information is initially expressed through traditional verbal and visual aspects of the text such as font style and the relatively standard layout of the Introduction and first sections of The Navidson Record, it then expands to less traditionally used visual aspects, and spatial aspects of the text.

In these new sections, there are sequences in which text changes positions against a somewhat static repeating layout to give the illusion of movement, passages of text that convey meaning through both the shape of the line or paragraphs as well as verbally in a manner akin to concrete poetry, placement of textual segments alongside differently oriented textual segments that communicate meaning directionally in relation to the original grain of the layout. In other words, narrative information can be conveyed not only through the traditional verbal content of the novel, but also through the shape of lines or paragraphs, spacing, position of elements on the page, juxtaposition of an element against other types of content, and even the shifting of meaning from one aspect of the text to another.) Other sections communicate meaning spatially as well as visually,
with letter spacing communicating narrative information along with the verbal content and the layout.

**Application of the New Method to *House of Leaves***

Applying the second step to analysis of how *House of Leaves* makes meaning, two things become apparent. First, the fact that *House of Leaves* is unique among multimodal novels in that the relationship of the textual elements to their context in the layout changes constantly. Second, the relationship of textual element to textual element changes constantly. The rules for reading change throughout the novel – from the standard rules for reading to what elements on the page are read first, then directional rules changing, then sequential rules are abandoned. The reading paths change from being somewhat open, structured to give the reader a choice of following one of multiple paths, to being more fixed—readers do not have a choice of path, and must follow a specifically directed sequence of textual elements to make meaning. The ways textual elements signify change from page to page and from section to section in *House of Leaves*, as well – beginning with the linguistic meaning of the word, then making meaning through the visual appearance of paragraphs and words, then their positions on the page. The lines and paragraphs of the novel also shift among different techniques for making meaning, including linguistically, concretely using the shape of text blocks to signify, kinetically with a textual element changing position against a static layout to evoke motion, cinematically with layouts and textual elements used as actors and frame, symbolically, and typographically.

*House Of Leaves* uses directed medium-specific genre cues initially to introduce the reader to the novel. This involves using the conventions of the medium-specific
genre of the novel in a conventional way, including the arrangement of information in the layout so that narrative elements are placed where readers will expect to find them, and are on the most part expressed in the modes readers expect to find them in. The story begins in an Introduction by a narrating character, Johnny Truant, and it is traditional text blocks arranged conventionally on the page, albeit in a less than conventional font.

Following the Introduction, a second conventional layout places key background on the subject of the story in the traditional text block, relegating asides to footnotes at the bottom of the page. Though this medium-specific page organization will not last, it allows the reader to begin on what seems like familiar ground – these sections are linear and primarily play out in the traditional text block in the center of the page. These initial sections look familiar – they are recognizably parts of a novel.

The book begins with a relatively standard novelistic series of components, from the title page which lists a different author than the cover, and has the word HOUSE in blue, to the table of contents, to a foreword from “The Editors” (somewhat odd if you consider that they are not named on the title page, and that they appear so anonymously here), to the dedication “this is NOT for you,” to the Introduction by Johnny Truant. This is where the font shifting will first really catch the reader’s attention, as it is somewhat fatiguing to read the entire long Intro in a font that looks like typewriting, in contrast to the cleaner, more official-looking font of the Title Page.

The font of Truant’s introduction is a style that clashes with the pagination font style of the running foot, a noticeable disjunction that emphasizes the interference of two distinct authorities in the preparation and presentation of the text. Generally, if a
different font is used for introductory materials, it is selected to fit the same tone and theme as the font of the body of the text.

The first linkages between the traditional text block and the marginalia of the first chapters are directed by call-outs to the footnotes. This is an example of a layout/design cue. In terms of design, a call-out like a number, symbol, or letter directs us to a footnote offering additional information about a subject being discussed in the traditional text block. Initially, these call-outs direct us to footnotes that conform somewhat to convention, though they become increasingly conversational and begin to narrate in a more traditionally novelistic way than the fictional study that is being presented in a scholarly genre in the traditional text block. In this way, the material one might expect to find in the traditional text block of a novel and the scholarly annotations one would expect in a footnote are occupying the opposite positions in the novel.

As House of Leaves progresses, the layout continues to shift and mutate, ceasing any resemblance to the layout of a typical novel. In places, it goes further, ceasing to resemble or build meaning with words in a linear sequence across a page as a book would, instead using words as both conveyors of meaning and as visual icons moving upon a screen, enacting the action of the narrative at the same time that they verbally express it. Word as icon and denotative element, page as paper and screen, page turns as images that gain momentum and begin to move.

Finding A Path: The Reader and House of Leaves

Finding a primary reading strategy for House of Leaves is difficult. The sheer overload of information, the number of different ways it is communicated in the space of the page, and the way multiple narrative threads run discontinuously throughout the novel
leads us to the question of how to approach such a difficult text. It is unclear what reading strategy best helps order and navigate the novel, or if readers can proceed in a linear way through one part of the novel – say the traditional text block, in which the narrator Zampano gives his study of the house, and then return to read the footnotes. Can readers choose not to read the footnotes and still make sense of the text, as in other multimodal novels? Which reading paths are necessary, and which are options? What different reading experiences are created by different paths? If they choose to follow alternate reading paths such as Johnny Truant’s footnotes, do readers stay on course, in tandem with Zampano’s study in the traditional text block (and later, the space it used to inhabit), or do they wander off, and then have to search for a path back?

If *House of Leaves* has a pattern, the pattern is the shifting itself, from layout shifts within sections, shifts in genre through playfulness with the form of the traditional novel, shifting among narrators, and the constant shifting of semiotic locations of meaning. These shifting patterns of signification, which I will refer to as semiotic code shifting, are the result of employment of different styles, fonts, and layouts that communicate or suggest different authorship for each “component” of the supposed anthology of data from different sources. Shifting patterns of information disclosure in the novel also reinforce the themes of the narrative, and obfuscate possible “solutions” to this multimodal puzzle.

Essentially, ergodic literature is something in which “nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text” (Aarseth 1). He distinguishes this form of literature from forms requiring little of a reader except to follow a line of text and then turn the page. Referring to ergodic forms as having “forking paths,” Aarseth goes on to
explain how ergodic literature in the print medium is bounded but variable. Because it appears in the print codex, there is not infinite recombinability within the elements of the text. However, there is a great amount of play in how the reader might choose to produce a pathway from the “meaning-generating machine” they find in the ergodic novel.

Does this hold true with novels like *House of Leaves*? It would initially appear to, but my study of other multimodal novels has revealed that every multimodal novel contains both implicit and directed reading pathways. In some of these novels, the reader does indeed have a choice in how to read – with *The Fourth Treasure*, the reader can completely ignore the sidebar marginalia and stick to the familiar traditional text block, and while they will miss out on much of the novel’s nuances and deeper meanings, they will have understood the main portion of the action. With *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, the reader appears to have a choice in how to read the text, but in fact needs to follow call-outs and implicit connections between sidebar material and other textual elements in order to complete an idea, to complete a multimodal sentence, and to gain full understanding.

**Readers Forging Paths - No Direct Line Through the Text Available, Many Forking Paths**

In *House of Leaves*, the situation is decidedly different from both of these previous studies. The reader does have a choice in whether to read footnoted material – or appears to have this choice – but must follow nontraditional reading patterns produced with directionally shifting text, concrete text units, and so on. In order to “choose” to skip the footnotes (which are so extensive, they eclipse the “traditional text block” on many pages), they will need to scan each page in search of the “traditional text block,” weeding out elements that turn out to not be the main text.
In order to read only one pathway, the reader will also need to skip multiple pages upon which the traditional text block does not appear, and in some sections, they will need to let go of notions of how the traditional text block flows on the page, as with the double-columned, shaped, differently directed, and intruded upon portions of the text block. If the reader decides instead to follow the footnote narrative of Johnny Truant, they will skip around as well – sometimes on directed paths (many of the footnotes reference other material, some with a page referent), sometimes with no direction, needing to read and scan back and forth to locate Truant’s bits and figure out how they connect – sometimes the Truant footnotes are one running narrative, but other times they act more as traditional footnotes, commenting on the material in the traditional text block or on other footnotes which are notes themselves on the material in the traditional text block.

Directed and Implicit Cues in Reading Paths for *House of Leaves*

*Directed Cues in HOL*

The reader is given multiple types of cues that directly connect one textual element with another in *House of Leaves*. The greatest portion of the novel’s directed cues are medium-specific genre cues, which for the novel in print are basic reading conventions such as to begin reading from front to back, left to right, and from the top of the page to the bottom.

In addition to this type of genre-based cue, the overall organization of the novel into sections – The Navidson Record, Appendices, and so on - devoted to different portions of a study provide a hierarchically organized base structure, a mapped space in the novel that textual elements and sections can link within and link to. Though these
cues are not applied consistently throughout the novel, much of the novel’s unconventional meaning-making is based on a competency with these conventions that can be built upon and improvised with.

At the textual level, there are directed cues throughout the novel with each call-out to a footnote or item in an Appendix. The numbered call-outs directly link specific lines of text or ideas in the narrative with content given elsewhere, and though the reader has a choice in whether to follow the linkage or not, the connection is an overt and indisputable one, not open to interpretation.

Implicit Cues in HOL

At times, there are multiple types of implicit cues are present in linking textual elements or suggesting a reading pathway. Though there are likely more than these types of implicit cues, many of the individual examples of implicit connections between textual elements fall beneath one of four representative types of implicit cues in *House of Leaves*. Though each single type of cue functions to link textual elements on its own, implicit cues sometimes use combinations of these categories.

**Visual Cues that Implicitly Link Textual Elements – Boxed Content in “Windows” Section**

One of the most distinctive layouts in *House of Leaves* is a long section in which textual pieces appear within a single spread, maintaining their separateness while suggesting connections through implicit visual cues. Section IX of “The Navidson Record” rearranges the layout until it looks nothing like a traditional novel page or spread. Eventually, there is a series of twenty-six pages upon which a blue box containing a lengthy footnote appears in the upper right of the recto page and upper left of the verso page (119-146). The box appears in exactly the same location on each recto page, the
upper right half of the page, and is printed on the verso side of each page in such a way that it perfectly matches the position on every recto page, creating a mirror image or a window upon which the content presented on the recto page before each page turn appears backwards in each verso box. Though the boxes are on different pages, the consistent position within the layout suggests a connection between each box, in fact giving the reader the impression that there is only a single box in which new content appears. This visual continuity emphasizes that the content in the boxes should be interpreted as related, and after further inspection, that it is a window through which a single lengthy piece of text is presented.

**Directional Cues – In Sequence of Busy Layouts again in “Windows” Section**

Directionality is another kind of cue that signals relationships between the textual pieces in Section IX of *House of Leaves*. After a series of somewhat normal layouts in the first quarter of the section, the layout seems to splinter, presenting a layout delineating four to five distinct areas for textual pieces on the page, each set apart through the blue box, a footnote border, or direction of printing as separate from the others.

**Directionality and Continuing Sections in Long Sequences**

Multiple devices in *House of Leaves* work within the layout of the page and spread to signal connections between textual elements and to suggest continuities between material that appears in the same layout position across several pages. The first of these is directionality, a device in which textual components are oriented at different angles or directions from one another. Directionality is used to indicate connections between elements as well as distinctions between them. The novel includes sequences of repeating layouts within which text blocks appear in the same spot across
several pages, as well as individual instances of text blocks, some of them appearing within different text blocks, such as smaller text blocks within the traditional text block, as well as running margins and running footnotes. In many sections, we see text running against the grain of the text, within text blocks, and around other sections of text. These textual portions must be visually and spatially (and sequentially) set apart from the text they are embedded in, text they are not as directly a part of (as in footnote-type discussions of material several pages past that appear running for several pages within unrelated material in the traditional text block). So these segments of text are at once set apart from each other using various textual devices, but also connected through implicit cues for how to read them together as a whole narrative.

These textual parts are set apart in one of three ways. In the first way, the text is boxed to set it apart from the traditional text block (TTB). In the second way, the text is set apart hierarchically, either in sidebar/margins, or footnotes, areas of the page designated by conventions for components which are not part of the TTB, elements which are meant to be understood as supplemental. However, with *House of Leaves*, we must ask whether they are merely supplemental in this case. These textual pieces set apart hierarchically can be placed without graphic markers in margin or running foot, or can be set apart even more decisively with a graphic marker like a line to demark where the TTB ends and the “marginalia/footnote” begins.

In the third way, text interrupts TTB Text – it appears in the body of the TTB without graphic device to set it apart (aside from footnote number or other such mark). Directionality is used quite often to set different text blocks apart when they occupy the same space, but a thin margin of white space can also indicate that text blocks in a shared
area are separate – whether directionality or white space delineates this textual element, it is an interruptive text block\textsuperscript{41} when it is included within a TTB. This text interrupts the TTB with no marks (save but for directionality of the text block, or perhaps a numbered mark) to delineate it from the traditional text block or where, traditionally/according to the novel’s traditional conventions, the main idea appears (to which marginalia and footnotes will be read as supplementary), from notes/optional textual information/supplementary material. In many other multimodal novels, textual elements relate to the traditional text block, creating interplay between the traditional center of the novel and other areas of the page. Readers cannot locate familiar textual landmarks, and cannot consistently find a place in the layout where the main idea or main action of the narrative might be in \textit{House of Leaves}.

\textit{Spatial Cues}

\textit{House of Leaves} also connects one textual element to another using graphic matches. With a graphic match, a textual element appears in the same place within the layout of the page across several subsequent pages, indicating through the sequence of one similar layout following another that the elements appearing in the same place for each layout are connected to each other and should be read as semiotically related.

\textsuperscript{41}Edward Tufte speaks of nonverbal textual elements as being integrated well or poorly in the traditional text block in “Words, Numbers, Images.” My observations of nonverbal elements as they appear in multimodal novels are that quite often, nonverbal elements in the traditional text block are used interruptively – in a genre like the novel in print, nonverbal elements appearing without verbal call-outs or anchorage, elements that are not expected or that are not used in the ways expected for the genre (e.g., as illustration of ideas presented verbally in the traditional text block), though I think that nonverbal elements could also be used in a well-integrated way even without a verbal call-out or context, with the nonverbal element acting as the next independent piece of a multimodal “sentence.” Depending on how nonverbal elements are used in the multimodal novel, then, they can be either interruptive (not anchored, against conventions for the genre), or integrated (through call-outs, use that is expected of the genre, etc.).
Juxtaposition

The juxtapositions of one element against another in the layout of *House of Leaves* creates an association of the juxtaposed textual elements through their concurrent appearance within a spread or page’s layout. These juxtapositions produce additional meanings in the novel.

**Juxtaposition and False Cues**

Again and again in the novel, one layout innovation will be placed on a page adjacent to what appears to be a simple inversion of the new layout innovation. However, when the reader tries to apply the same rules for reading to the element, it does not function the same way, teaching us not to rely on previous rules but to continually assume nothing about the layouts and flow of the text. Section XX of “The Navidson Record” (423-490) is one of the most active sections for shifting layouts and false mirrors. In this section, the words “direction no longer matters,” refer to both the actions of the plot as the characters explore the house’s changing hallways and to the embodiment of this in the constant layout shifting.

Many of the false cues in this section seem to suggest that the reader should take one directional path in reading textual elements, but when readers apply this strategy to the next portion of text, often one that appears to be similar to the first piece of text, the strategy garbles the meaning and a new strategy must be applied to understand the meaning of the piece. A good example of this occurs with the spread on 438-9. On the verso side of the spread, a capital letter denotes the beginning of a chunk of text arranged sideways at a ninety degree angle from the grain of the text so that the paragraph begins with the “top” of the page as the left margin. The paragraph ends in an extended ellipsis.
halfway across the page, and a differently shaped text block begins after a brief negative space. The new text block is also sideways on the page, but instead of following the hierarchy of the left-hand margin being the page top, the words appear to start exactly opposite, beginning from the gutter and running back toward the center of the page.

Readers would guess that the juxtaposed paragraph should be read this way because it is exactly the opposite of the first paragraph, and because it is printed with the letters directed so that their tops are at the gutter and bases toward midpage. It is only the punctuation marks, which have appeared elsewhere in the novel at this point without signifying a lot, that tell us to read it differently than mirror opposite. The first mark after the gutter is a period on a line by itself, followed by the first word, ‘room,’ then the next word on its own line, ‘cramped.’ Confused readers might then scan to the bottom of the text piece, finding that after the white space separating the two textual pieces, there is another long ellipses to match the one at the end of the first paragraph. These punctuation marks suggest a different reading strategy – that the second paragraph is a continuation of the first, and that it continues after the ellipses, only reading backward word by word. Indeed, reading the paragraph backward from the base of the chunk toward the top, it makes sense – “in the ceiling where it lodges” from the ellipsis backward, as opposed to from the top of the paragraph down with “room cramped exit out of that through the only” (438).

 Connections between Textual Elements and Layout

 Different Textual Lengths and Functions, and How this Facilitates Multiple Pathways

*House of Leaves* is not just a long work - a novel that has been broken up into smaller chunks and rearranged to fit into innovative layouts. If we took a narrative
written with the grain of the novel in print as a medium, for example *Moby Dick*, and broke the text into parts to fit the templates of *House of Leaves*’ layouts, it would not make sense, and it would not work the same way, offering readers multiple pathways and connecting multiple ways. This is because *House of Leaves* is constructed differently than traditional novels at the basic narrative level, though it shows various influences such as hypertext, novels in several voices such as Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, nested narratives like the novels of Henry James, novels with excessive footnotes like *Pale Fire*, and textual units arranged in smaller blocks within a layout, as with Derrida’s typographically experimental theoretical work *Glas*.

At the textual level, the length of verbal segments varies to facilitate a nonlinear narrative with several narrative pathways available to readers. At the narrative level, each type of verbal segment has been written to fulfill a different function, facilitating different types of linkages in a multi-thread narrative.

The verbal portions of the narrative is told with three (and perhaps more) different types of textual pieces. The first type of verbal segment, long pieces, are written in a traditional novelistic style, explicating narrative events using the verbal modality. In a narrative thread of different types of verbal segments, these long pieces act as anchors from which shorter segments can connect in multiple ways to other short segments. We see this kind of element multiple times in the novel – it sustains the feel of an integrated narrative, stabilizes the pace of the narrative after the briefer, more choppy, ambiguous, or frenetic sections, and acts as anchor to all of the nodes and fragments. The longer pieces of prose contain hierarchically arranged, linear sentences, and these units are
complete thoughts in themselves. One example of this the introduction by Johnny Truant, as well as the first chapter of *House of Leaves*.

The second is a shorter piece of text that can connect one segment of the story to another segment – a type I refer to as a node. They can be used in many different configurations with the other kinds of verbal segments to connect the long pieces, which are specific, stabilizing, and semiotically less flexible, with other nodes and shorter verbal fragments. This part links different portions of the story, and can transition from a long piece to a fragment or a terminus, a concluding portion of a specific narrative thread. Nodes can also connect to other nodes, as they are short bits that can be mixed up or connected in various ways.

The third type of textual piece in the novel are fragments - brief, ambiguous lines or words that can stand alone, or can be interpreted as connecting to nodes and to long pieces in order to create a complete thought. The fragment is the most flexible type of narrative component. A complete thought, or chain of different kinds of elements, concludes with a terminus, a decisive endpoint that grounds any ambiguity and reconnects the pathway to a specific narrative and layout location in the text. These combinations are important because they are the building blocks of the novel’s multiple reading paths, and they can create multiple narrative meanings that branch from a single long verbal section but follow different nodes to different terminus in the novel. These differing types of textual pieces allow the narrative to branch into multiple potential meaning-making paths, letting the reader choose one of several options that each lead to a semiotically meaningful terminus or endpoint. Each endpoint may not
offer the reader direction back to the point at which they departed the kernel, or one of the main narratives, but there is an endpoint for each line readers might pursue.

**Narrative Cues**

There are also narrative cues linking textual elements, from the ways different textual elements in multiple modalities share in the task of presenting the story to the ways one textual element is linked to another by theme or subject (or by attributed author?).

However, because the narrative is given from several perspectives, and through a collection of disjointed and incomplete documents, it is not the cue most often used to connect textual elements. It does need to be used in conjunction with larger cross-textual design cues in order to piece together the solution to the question of whether the narrators are reliable and of who ultimately narrates *House of Leaves*.

When the sequence and hierarchy of text on the page is not clear, readers must read for the story to discover the best order to read in, and the best reading path. This occurs at several points, including with the scattered, splintered-looking words on 233, the spread on pages 430-31 in which the space between words across the gutter of the spread becomes wider and wider, and we must discern what order to read them in – clockwise, counterclockwise, according to the top to bottom page hierarchy, but in the end they must be worked through with trial and error in order to understand the sentence. This is true of several of the layouts and verbal constructs, which can only be understood if read through for what makes sense verbally – spatial, hierarchical, and relational reading strategies don’t give us any clues as to how to read it.
At a certain point, we lose our familiar means of connecting the different textual elements with narrative, layout, or medium-specific genre conventions. This sequence of pages occurs in Chapter Nine (119-148). At this point in the novel, a team of men are conducting the fourth exploration of the mysteriously changeable space in Will Navidson and Karen Green’s house. The space changes shape and size so unpredictably, the men have packed for an expedition, complete with flares, rope, flashlights, and other survival gear. At several points in the novel before Chapter Nine, the carefully prepared study of the evidence in the case of the changeable house has been overtaken completely for multiple pages by amateur editor Johnny Truant’s footnotes that amount to an autobiographical account of his own encounters with the evidence. In this way, the genre conventions which were initially followed in the layout and narrative design have been introduced and then mutated into something completely different, with amateur editor’s autobiographical notes overtaking the traditional text block and eventually choking it out, and after that, omissions and gaps beginning to appear in the scholarly presentation of evidence. Also, the narrative distance between the material in the traditional text block and the material in Truant’s footnotes and even Zampano’s footnotes has been increasing so that footnotes are merely departure points for associative essays by Truant or long, increasingly encyclopedic, obscure, and obfuscating sequences of references to increasingly random sets of references by Zampano (a kind of hermeneutic mania). Footnotes no longer clarify points given in the traditional text block. Instead, they lead to unwieldy and undigested lists of loosely thematically related sources.
Medium-Specific Genre Cues

The novel opens with traditional medium-specific genre cues – discussions begin at the beginning of chapters, paragraphs flow logically throughout, and footnotes attempt to clarify the material to some extent. These initial pieces are clearly organized chapters in which the material in the traditional text block takes up the majority of the page, as it is carrying the majority of the discussion, with call outs to brief footnotes. However, the hierarchy of the chapters begins to be reversed when editor Johnny Truant’s footnotes become essayistic, slowly taking a greater and greater percentage of the page in the layout until they eclipse the traditional text block. The first eclipse of text block by Truant’s footnote lasts five pages (12-16). In Chapter 3, another eclipse occurs for three pages (19-21), then in the next chapter four pages (25-28), another four pages (34-37), and then seven pages in Chapter 5 (48-54).

In Chapter 5, genre cues are further altered when the system of numbered call-outs for footnotes inexplicably changes to symbols for call-outs, sometimes including symbols in the midst of a numbered system and switching back to numbered call-outs. (41-50).

Other details which have been used in the expected manner in subsequent chapters begin to shift – a dropped cap spaced a full third of the way down a page, in the style of a chapter head but with no new chapter number, appears, resembling a new chapter cue but not beginning a new chapter (59). Footnotes begin to include their own footnotes, as with footnotes 69 and 70 (59). This is a double call-out for the reader – it takes us to an appendix at the end of the novel and does not return us to the point of departure. The scholarly character, Zampano, up until now the voice of reason and order
in the text, begins to include excessively encyclopedic footnotes that eclipse even Truant’s, completely stopping the flow of the narrative with solid walls of citations without any discussion of how they are relevant (64-67). Truant’s footnotes take on the spacing conventions of the traditional text block (71). Throughout the section, we see textual conventions being altered in a way that foregrounds the medium, the traditional layout and mechanisms undergirding the novel as a genre, and even our sense of where the central discussion of a chapter should be – the traditional text block, conventionally – being played with as footnotes change place with them. Overall, this initial section sets out the expected genre conventions and then plays with these conventions one by one in a way that foregrounds the conventions for the reader, making the devices at work in the novel, in print as a medium, explicit.

**Font Switching in *House of Leaves***

From the beginning of *House of Leaves*, font is used to unify textual elements and draw connections between sections of material on different pages. The sections linked by the same font style unify textual elements that are not always unified by the page, spread, or even sequences. Textual elements throughout are related by font, creating voice, characterizing that voice, connecting it even when it nearly gets lost in the noisier/busier layout/spreads.

The word ‘house’ is printed offset in blue ink throughout *House of Leaves*, emphasizing the central metaphor of the novel – that the book is the house, or at least is like the house, always shifting, never offering stable ground upon which readers can rest and make sense of the disparate pieces of information it generates at a horrifying rate.
The Introduction is expressed in a conventional novelistic style except for the font choice. The section is unified by Johnny Truant’s typewriter-esque font, though the offset blue word ‘house’ interrupts the otherwise familiar looking textual features. As the first chapter begins, Truant’s font contrasts with the scholar Zampano’s more scholarly, authoritative font, lending a sense of voice to each and unifying what would otherwise be two sections running at the same time, Zampano’s in the traditional text block and also in footnotes, Truant’s in footnotes that begin to eclipse the “main” text block and the explanatory purpose of the collection of the documents with a compelling narrative account of the character’s direct experience with the manuscript.

Organizational cues at the global level of *House of Leaves* are stable and create a clear, linear account of the elements of the novel (Medium-Specific Genre Cues). There is a clear hierarchy, organization, and the flow of elements in the table of contents suggests logical, progressive connections between sections. It is at the local and page/spread level, as well as in the short sequences and sections within the chapters and sections of *House of Leaves* that the novel becomes ergodic and difficult to navigate.

Form is tightly related to content in *House of Leaves*, and because the subject of the story is a house that continually shifts form and defies explanation, the local level of the text, a series of smaller sections, is expressed through formats and layouts that continually shift. The novel’s exterior, or overall organization at the global level, has a deceptive solidity and a recognizable, familiar genre-shape like the fictional house. In many ways, then, the relationship between form and content for *House of Leaves* suggest that the codex itself is a metaphorical representation of the house – complete with stairways, windows, and hallways, changing as the house changes. The novel also
suggests through this extended metaphor commentary on the human meaning-making endeavor, and specifically the state of the novel and books in an era where the cultural dominance of the codex is declining.

Font and Layout as Characterization – Unifying Textual Elements and Sections Across the Novel, Revealing Key Discontinuities in Narrative Voice and Authority

*House of Leaves* is a novel divided into multiple sections, each of which is purportedly composed by different authors. A close reading multimodally of the sections reveals common traits across several sections which are attributed to different authors. These common traits – the style of the graphic elements as they are arranged on the page – suggest either knowledge of the various sections and subsequent reference to the other sections because the conventions are not common textual conventions but instead are unique markers, or that multiple sections were composed (or rearranged) by a common author.

In this way, the visual style, the textual conventions, and the layout of portions of *House of Leaves* support the interpretation that the authorship of the text is problematized/compromised, and that there is potentially a covert narrator creating an elaborate false storyline which almost completely masks the identity and verifiable events of the novel, kind of a schizophrenic Scherezhade. Details such as font choice and an overarching organizational schema mark the table of contents as the work of “The Editors.” In narrative terms, it foreshadows a negative fate for second narrator Johnny Truant, as the organization of the manuscripts cannot be completed before “the end” of a story, and as it is not in Truant’s font or voice, he clearly does not, in the end, arrange the manuscript. Details such as font choice are important throughout the novel for several reasons: font choice unifies textual elements across
pages and across sections, font choice visually characterizes each narrator, allowing readers to quickly recognize which character is telling the story. Genre conventions specific to the print medium also characterize and tell readers which narrator has prepared each textual element, as Zampano’s sections are at first highly organized, presented in a scholarly style, and can even be characterized somewhat in the initial chapters by a predictable layout style – there are introductory quotations at the beginnings of chapters, chapter numbers, significant portions of discussion in a verbal modality, and footnotes outlining the proof and veracity of the claims.

However, after a few chapters, these medium-specific genre conventions are used to represent the psychological breakdown of the psychological health of the narrators. Zampano forgets to finish things, gives footnotes symbols, gives footnotes their own footnotes, and the predictable structures of the genre begin to unravel.

While medium-specific characteristics and font styles provide characterization, by the end of the novel, readers discover that they cannot rely upon these cues as stable markers, or if they do, the markers begin to indicate or suggest something disturbing about the narrators. This occurs when readers reach the appendices and “The Whalestoe Letters”, supposedly authored by Johnny Truant’s institutionalized mother, Pelafina. Initially, the letters seem a curious addition by any editors to a collection of documents lending veracity to each editor’s account of contact with the manuscript and myth of the house and the Navidsons. Are the letters to verify that Truant is real? To clarify an issue with Truant’s past that sheds some light on the facts of The Navidson Record? Reading through the letters, readers find Pelafina attempting to send codes for help, trying to escape the institution and “The New Director.” The letters follow typical epistolary
format until the codes begin to be introduced, and later, as tension builds, there is a
rupture in the layout and format of the letters, and readers find themselves confronted
with several familiar typographic irregularities which appear earlier in the novel.
Pelafina’s layout style suggests connections to layout styles which had previously been
attributed to other authors, editors she never met.

Also quite mysteriously, at a certain point in the novel, Johnny Truant disappears
except for increasingly rare intrusions. This may be read as a narrative necessity to make
space in the spreads and sequences of pages for kinetic sections in which the arrangement
of elements on the page is key to creating the illusion of movement and concrete textual
structures. However, this reason would be editorial, not narrative, and though it is
possible it seems less likely than the fact that Truant isn’t as present in these sections – is
truant from them, or has become an observer like the reader who cannot interfere, a
narrator who is part of the frame but does not appear in the picture of the story being told.
So who is telling the story at this point, and through what medium? It appears to be
Zampano, but markers of characterization and voice have become sparse and uneven at
this point. Also, at this point, Truant’s voice has begun to vanish from the text, and it
does not come back in a significant way, as it had in the beginning. Reading further in
The Whalestoe Letters reveals a second major metatexual moment in which Truant’s
institutionalized mother seems to snap out of her bad spell, and remembers vaguely using
several reams of paper (the count matches the page count for the novel), and mailing the
completed document. This stands in contrast to Zampano’s account of the videotape of
Navidson’s exploration of the house in which, having run out of survival supplies,
Navidson is forced to burn a book to stay warm. The volume is titled *House of Leaves*, and as he burns it, the reader sees it has a few more pages than the edition we have.

**Connecting Sections Using Violation of Genre and Narrative Conventions – The Dot Dash Section**

Medium-specific cues in Chapter 8 suggest connections between sections of the story that are attributed to different authors. These connections lead to serious questions about whether the entire manuscript is verifiable or whether it has been meddled with, whether Truant is merely referencing Zampano with his use of a device (which seems unlikely, given the pattern of the device’s distribution throughout the chapter), or whether authorship of the whole manuscript is singular rather than plural.

The section that suggests this is in Chapter 8 of *House of Leaves*, in which patterns of the traditional text block content and footnote content established up until this point are subtly disrupted by the appearance of dots and dashes in various typographic forms – some hollow dots next to solid dots, others dashes and dots. The pattern begins with a section divider comprised completely of dots and dashes. This sequence is long enough to catch the reader’s attention, and replaces a familiar solid-line section divider. The position of this dot-and-dash section divider is conspicuous and out of place in the usual pattern of the chapters, as well – it appears before the first paragraph on the page, marking the cutting off of the flow of paragraphs in a place where the shift to the verso page of a spread would naturally create a gap between material on recto and verso pages. A dividing marker as the first element on the page is out of place in a novel because it (as Tufte remarks in how text and images are integrated) is not integrated visually in that field with any text that needs to be marked as separate from the text that follows (97).
On the next page, the traditional text block’s line is broken by the dot sign in an ongoing dot and dash pattern for this section. At one point, the pattern interrupts a word, splitting it at the line break and stopping the flow of the word itself, demanding attention (98). To this point, the dot dash patterns have appeared solely in the sections authored by Zampano, and could be interpreted as a sign that his sanity is slipping—it would fit the story context at this point. However, on the next page, the dot dash pattern appears in Johnny Truant’s footnotes (99). This could be interpreted as a coherent portion of Truant’s narration if it is viewed as Truant echoing or commenting upon the degradation of Zampano’s sanity in the source documents he has been left to edit. However, this theory does not hold up when we notice that the dots interrupt Truant’s flow of narration at irregular intervals. The dots are interrupted, and cannot be interpreted as a deliberately integrated part of Truant’s commentary.

A great percentage of the cues linking and organizing textual elements in *House of Leaves* occur between pages, in part because the segments of text spill out of their boundaries, the changes in the page-to-page layouts visually enacting the events of the story as the monstrous house continues to grow and change shape. Because of this, Edward Tufte’s delineation between elements that are integrated well into the logical flow of the work (elements appear adjacent or sequentially next to other elements that they modify or are conceptually related to), or elements that are integrated poorly (he discusses the textual element equivalent of orphans—content that elaborates upon, modifies, or discusses one element spilling across the verso page of a spread onto the recto page of a new, and unrelated, spread). In the case of poorly integrated elements, he argues, readers have to exert a lot of effort to figure out how one textual element
accompanies, modifies, or is connected in a signifying way with the other textual elements and within the overall scheme of the grouping in the visual space of the page.

In the case of the dots and dashes appearing not only in several different narrator’s sections but also in areas of the layout of the page that typically would not be controlled by the Truant or Zampano narrators, readers must combine different codes in order to realize how great a narrative violation the dots and dashes represent. To understand this intrusive textual element in the section, we must combine the information about narrators given with font choice, the information about editors given through the layout of the text in the section, and narrative cues – specifically verbal, spatial, and temporal narrative cues that tell us the interruptions between lines and elements are not the intention of the speaker, and are not part of the form of the discourse they interrupt. In fact, the dots and dashes give the sentences line breaks that are neither poetic nor meaningful.

Near the beginning of this section, a dot splits in half Zampano’s line reading “In the background, the ever-present hiss of the radios continues to fill the room like some high untouchable wind” (98). The spatial and temporal result of the interruptive dots and dashes signal that they are not part of the original manuscript. Another cue is that the editors do not comment on them, and they begin to interrupt Truant’s footnotes as well. It might make narrative sense to attribute them to Truant, or even to find out through Truant’s footnotes that they are part of Zampano’s manuscript as his mind begins to slip, but the dots and dashes interrupt Truant’s notes in a way that makes it clear he must not be aware of them,
either: “As I’ve been doing my best to incorporate most of these amendments, I didn’t think it fair to

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suddenly exclude this one even if it did mean a pretty radical change in tone”(99).

**Static Layout as Context for Creating Backdrop for Kinetic and Concrete Text Blocks**

Changing textual elements and patterns on an otherwise static layout backdrop is a technique Danielewski employs throughout the novel, though in several different ways. There is the series – several similarly laid-out pages in a row, with words changing position in the white space of the page in a way that conveys shape, direction, tempo in the “time of reading” and in the spacing distance and proximity of words and lines in relation to the other words and lines on the page – tight spacing creates speed and acceleration, spaced out words take longer to read in the space-time of the page.

The words at times represent concrete places, embody characters, and kinetically play out events in the novel – typographic equivalent of narrator being part of the world of the story and in the world of the story, as opposed to the words conveying the story and moving but not representing characters, places, or events in a physical sense that occur in the story. Instead of using words to represent or convey ideas, they are being used to embody characters or represent actions.

One such static layout which is repeated later with a significant change that registers as movement is the section in which there is a pause in the action, in which there is an empty “room” constructed of brackets. A page later, the “room” is repeated, but within it, an asterisk has appeared, representing a “character.”
In this way, *House of Leaves* offers readers two types of typographic representation – one in which words, letters, symbols and paragraphs embody action, and the other in which words, letters, and paragraphs thematically represent the ideas. In the typographic representations that represent physical places and people, there are elements that draw parallels between the house in the story and the status of the book as a construct which has “windows,” “thresholds,” “staircases,” mazes with people “moving” within them/ typography as a map or schematic in which movement is simulated through the repetition of the layout component over several pages with the component as static and one aspect of the component as changing to mimic movement. Characters and situations being represented by concrete or kinetic typographical constructions.

For kinetic, either a series of static backdrops with a single changing element creates sense of movement, or the movement of requisite reading path in the graphic space of a single page or a spread creates timing and sense of movement (the staircase, words forming a loop, or Navidson’s tunnel shrinking around him). So kinetic and concrete texts are the two types of this directly representative style of use of typography/layout. Then there are thematically representative ways the layout is used.

The Exploration Sequences are several sections of pages with static layouts upon which lines of text and text blocks are arranged so that they take on the appearance of movement within the space. There are four of these sections, the first of which describes and represents a labyrinth and then creates of concrete text blocks a sort of house in the center of the section (107-152), which I will discuss later. The three subsequent exploration sequences are significant because they use implicit cues, create two kinds of text – kinetic text and concrete text – to represent narrative action and narrative themes,
respectively, and because three different types of codes are used to convey information in these sections – concrete textual considerations (the size, shape of textual pieces), position of these pieces in the space of the page - arrangement of textual pieces in the white space of the page), and the pacing, temporal flow, and changes in position of text from page to page (including word spacing, line spacing, where a line of text appears on the page, and so on).

**Directionality of Textual Elements in Relation to Other Elements as a Cue for Reading Running Columns that Continue Across a Sequence of Several Pages**

One of the most visually striking and most often pictured layout sequences in *House of Leaves* occurs in Chapter 9, in which there is a long discussion of the metaphor of the labyrinth and the Minotaur with concrete text blocks representing these ideas. At the heart of the chapter, or at the center of the “maze” we are discussing and that the layout and text is beginning to embody, there is a section in which different text blocks are set apart from one another in a way that creates of them a kind of representation of the house, complete with blue-framed windows and staircase-like columns of text running in separate directions in the space of the page.

This section uses several different directed and implicit cues to indicate that material appearing in a certain area of the layout is a continuation of material in the same position in the similarly constructed pages before and after in this sequence. Frames are one of the more directed cues for indicating that material on pages 119-145 is one running discussion. The directionality of pieces of text that appear in the same area of the layout across these pages is a different cue, a more implicit one that the reader must discover through trial and error reading the margin notes running from top to bottom in the recto margins and, initially perhaps trying to connect that information with the margin
notes running from bottom to top, with the text printed upside down, in the verso margins. Directionality is used for a new textual section, footnote #166, beginning with page 134-130 and running in the lower right portion of the recto page printed upside down, a section that contrasts not only against the text block it is embedded in through this directionality, but contrasting also against footnote #167, which runs from pg. 131-135. Footnote #167 is situated in the middle of the verso page, running from mid-page into the gutter, and is printed sideways with right as top of the paragraph and left as bottom.

As a result of these pieces of text moving independently of the pacing of the material in the traditional text block, the text ceases to proceed in a unified, linear fashion and becomes multiple smaller narrative pieces demarcated by the position on the spread, typographical choice, and at times footnote numbers or boxes. Even these individual narrative components within House of Leaves end, giving way to new textual configurations. House of Leaves calls for a different reading strategy, even after applying the taxonomy of devices and abstracting key multimodal elements for analysis – there is no consistently used device to unify threads that run throughout the novel.

Conclusion

House of Leaves is a type of multimodal novel that requires not just a multimodal reading strategy, but a secondary set of tools, tools that are flexible enough to facilitate the apprehension of how textual elements are connected in a textual environment in which medium-specific genre conventions are often being used against the grain, and in which textual connections are not explicit, and reading paths often undirected, hierarchies of elements and order of operations unstable.
Semiotic code shifting, or the changing patterns of which modes and aspects of layout key narrative information will be given through, is another major discovery resulting from my application of the second interpretive step. While most novels code meaningful narrative material into certain modal patterns and certain layout locations and conventions, *House of Leaves* continually shifts the location of meaningful content, requiring ever-vigilant readers to investigate as many aspects of the text as possible to understand its meaning. The novel’s Semiotic Code Shifting is a technique that makes the connections between textual elements so hard to find.

This second step reveals that there are dominant or common/consistent linking or contextual cues, devices, and techniques in any text, and that they can be located and observed when we have a starting vocabulary of the types of connections they might have (implicit or directed), and on what grounds these connections can be observed (at the level of story, at the level of the text’s medium-specific genre, or at the level of layout). In applying the second step and observing element to element connection types as well as element to context connection types, it became apparent that the methods of linking textual elements was continually shifting throughout the novel. This shifting of the rules for readers, shifting of where and how to look for meaning in the novel, or semiotic code shifting, is something that can be observed when we investigate how consistently a novel uses a specific technique for linking textual elements or for signaling the connection of textual elements to their context.

Though *House of Leaves* lacks a consistent pattern, the initial global survey of textual elements, followed by a re-concretization of these elements in their contexts, revealed mechanisms and patterns within the changing text that facilitated a much richer
and more nuanced interpretation of the novel. The fact that the methodology was flexible enough to incorporate the second step, and detailed enough to provide such a wealth of usable data for a literary analysis, reaffirms the value of this process for the analysis of any type of multimodal novel.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Research Problem

Though the multimodal novel is a rapidly developing genre, there is little scholarly consensus on the best method of interpretation. In fact, multimodal novel scholarship has been strikingly unsystematic - in most studies, methodologies are unevenly applied in an unintegrated two-step process, beginning with a traditional literary analysis of the verbal content alone, followed by a secondary interpretation with a separate methodology to address nonverbal elements.

In order to interpret the multimodal novel as a unified narrative, it is necessary to view it as an integrated whole communicating through multiple modes, and to craft an interpretation based on elements in several modes. To find a solution for the inconsistency in the interpretation of multimodal novels, I proposed a method for gaining an overview of textual elements and then an interpretive strategy. In my interpretive schematic, multimodal, literary, and design concepts are integrated into a single practice that offers a more systematic approach to the multimodal novel. I have applied this method to several multimodal novels in order to study how various textual elements contribute to narrative meaning in this type of narrative.

Reflecting upon my project, I will discuss this method in light of my findings, and will suggest why we should read novels multimodally instead of monomodally. This chapter will revisit issues pertaining to a method of interpreting textual elements in
multimodal novel in a unified way, discuss what kinds of novels qualify as multimodal, and explain why developing an interpretive method for this kind of novel is important. Finally, I will explain how multimodal reading is beneficial, delineating a variety of situations in which the multimodal approach can be usefully integrated with a literary interpretation.

I developed this study to examine how textual elements of multimodal novels contribute to narrative signification. A second goal was to examine how the descriptive taxonomy I have developed might be applied to a novel. How might using the taxonomy influence an analysis of a multimodal novel? Would using my taxonomy to develop a data set for each novel lead to a more systematic and deep close reading of the workings of multimodal novels, while still enabling the user to develop a new kind of literary argument about the narrative? Finally, could determining the degree of activity of each textual element in the novel also contribute to an interpretation of the overall narrative?

Findings and Their Importance

Overall Findings on the Proposed New Method of Reading

A Second Step

In applying the taxonomy to multimodal novels, I discovered that merely identifying textual elements and analyzing how they might be used from novel to novel did not provide enough information about the structures and principles at work in these novels. I found, especially in novels that had multiple changes to patterns of layout and patterns of use for textual elements, that I needed to re-concretize the textual elements I had identified using the taxonomy. This is the only way to gain an understanding of how
thee elements might be functioning in the novels, and it is necessary for a full understanding of each novel’s unique organization and functioning.

Identifying and hypothesizing upon the function of textual elements isn’t enough to completely understand their contributions to the narrative in multimodal novels. After the initial move of abstracting textual elements and examining them outside of the context of the page, there must be a second move to re-concretize these identified elements in order to observe them functioning both with the other components of the novel, and as parts of the whole. Adding this step to the method allows us to note the context for the textual elements, and the interactions between these elements, providing a deeper data set including not only textual elements, but their interactions with the layout and with one another. This will result in a more thorough, detailed account of how multimodal elements contribute to conveying narrative information in the novel.

Scholars and students get a more accurate interpretation of the elements at work in multimodal novels using the taxonomy with this second step, which moves from the level of textual elements’ appearance to their relationships and interactions, than when they attempt to interpret the same novel using a traditional literary interpretation and then a secondary analysis of multimodal elements. This method requires that a great deal of work be completed initially, generating a large, often complicated data set (complicated in that it notes not only each kind of element, but occurrences of each type, combinations with other elements, and types of layout context the elements appear in) before beginning analysis of the novel. However, the resulting account of the workings of the novel is incredibly nuanced and leads to unexpected discoveries; this method as a whole takes us from hypothesis based on the appearance of textual elements and general layouts to a
methodical mapping of kinds of elements, relationships between textual elements, and a closer observation of the interaction between elements and arrangement.

In comparison, a more traditional method of analysis can limit the field of observed detail to the most visible or pronounced aspects of interest in the novel. Without the second step recontextualizing textual elements in their complicated original environments, we analyze the appearance of these elements in small sectors of the page, failing to notice a larger map of interconnections. Taking a larger, more methodical data set before beginning interpretation creates a global view of the workings of the novel, preventing the interpretive step from following one local point of interest, and suggesting a view of abstracted details as something that must be understood as parts of a working whole in the final analysis.

**Appearance of Textual Elements and Layouts Is Not a Reliable Indicator of How they Function in the Novel**

*Elements with Similar Appearances Often Function Differently from Novel to Novel*

Though we can find similar textual elements in multiple multimodal novels, such as the sidebar that showed up in multiple novels in my study, these features function in different ways in different novels. It is important when taking a taxonomic account of elements in the multimodal novel to avoid generalizing or assuming that elements with similar appearances function in similar ways from one novel to the next.

It is also best not to assume that a layout will function a certain way because it appears as if it should. All three of the novels I studied had material that appeared in the center of the page, a placement that, according to standard novelistic reading conventions, indicates that the material placed there is the most important information on the page. Any other textual elements on the page, especially those in margins, in the
footer area of the page, and illustrations, are placed in those less prime locations on the page to communicate that they are supplements that follow or are explained by that prime material. In the three multimodal novels I analyzed, however, it is clear that the material in the traditional text block does not necessarily act as semiotic anchor for other textual elements.

In my first reading using the taxonomy, I observed that, though the novel had an unusual layout, the nontraditional-looking aspects of the novel’s design—textual elements presented in the sidebar and the images in the body of the text—relied upon the traditional-looking long blocks of verbal content at the center of each page. The novel’s unusual textual elements only made sense when they were interpreted in relation to the traditional-looking verbal text at the center of each page. Based on this, I developed the idea of a “core narrative,” or “core/central text block” in my study of *The Fourth Treasure*. I used this term to describe a print novel design convention in which the bulk of narrative signification is given in a text block that is located at the center of each page. I began to refer to this feature as the “traditional text block,” the area in which verbal narrative content appears in traditional or monomodally styled novels.

I used the term “core narrative” in my analysis of *The Fourth Treasure* to describe text’s location on the page, its function in conveying the bulk of narrative information, as well as its function as anchor for all other textual elements. Because most novels share a layout in which narrative information is conveyed through paragraphs that run down the center of each page, deviation from this convention is striking, a purposeful foregrounding of the layout conventions of the standard novel, a break with convention for the purpose of communicating something.
What I did not realize when I began to note this “core narrative” in *The Fourth Treasure* is that it would begin to reveal the different ways multimodal novels organize narrative information in the space of the page using multiple techniques. Reviewing the reading path types in all three of the novels, it becomes clear that textual elements relate to one another differently in each novel. In each multimodal novel, there are distinctly different element-to-element relationships.

The first is that sidebar elements and marginalia relate differently to content in the traditional text block from novel to novel. Each of the multimodal novels in my study had an unusual layout that, in at least part of the novel, included large margins full of textual elements that played key part in telling the story. The sidebar and the kinds of textual elements that appear there have a very similar appearance across all three novels. The presence of a sidebar suggests that the elements included might be supplementary to the verbal content in the text block of each page (the traditional text block), and that readers can choose if they would like to read these extraneous notes, or at least when they would like to read them in relation to material that we think of as providing the main narrative information in the traditional text block. In *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, however, readers must follow directed call-outs from the traditional text block to the sidebar elements in order to understand what is happening in the story. The sidebar elements often fill in background information about the protagonist’s family, his feelings about what is going on, and subjects he is curious about (including his family members).

In addition, the relationship of the material in the sidebars to the material in the traditional text block or other textual elements in the space of the page varies a great deal. In one novel, the sidebar elements are excerpts from the characters’ journals, training
manuals, and class notes. In another novel, the elements in the sidebar are footnotes or lines and paragraphs broken apart and presented in alternating spatial patterns on the page. The final novel’s sidebars are full of excerpts from the protagonist’s journal and his private thoughts about key ideas presented in the traditional text block.

**Texts are Constructed of Discrete Units that are Arranged for a Specific Rhetorical Purpose**

Any text, whether multimodal or monomodally styled, is made up of many smaller units of meaning that the user must combine to make meaning. These units may be in any mode – verbal, visual, and so on – but the units are given in a specific arrangement in order to convey meaning. Rearranging these building blocks of a longer work changes the meaning of the overall work regardless of whether the words or images themselves are changed. Arrangement is an important rhetorical aspect of any text, but with multimodal texts, it is foregrounded and played with even more to specific semiotic effect.

Comparing the layout and reading paths in *House of Leaves* to those in *The Fourth Treasure* and *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, it became apparent that multimodal novels use discrete textual units of different modes that can be combined into longer multimodal strings. These strings create a complete thought in the novel, and can branch at points to create multiple threads that the reader must choose between or navigate. In order to analyze textual elements in their context and in relation to one another, and in order to discover the organization undergirding multimodal novels, we must become aware of these textual units and their place in strings and branches within the text.
Though traditional novels are formatted in smooth, continuously flowing blocks of verbal text, multimodal novels often intersperse other modal elements with smaller, often variably sized units of verbal text. Initially, it seemed that I could identify several different types of these verbal units. In other multimodal novels, the size of verbal units has been an indicator of function. For example, in *The Fourth Treasure*, the type of verbal unit suggests that it is either the main narrative (a larger verbal unit), or an excerpt from a character’s journal (a brief verbal unit of a few lines to a paragraph). In *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, the type of line often denotes interior thoughts by the protagonist that shed light on plot points in the main body of text.

*House of Leaves* used three different kinds of verbal units, leading me to the initial conclusion that in this kind of multimodal novel, the author composed three different kinds of textual units and then arranged the different types carefully to achieve a certain effect. However, in *House of Leaves*, closer study of the relationships between the three types of verbal units reveal that the author has merely broken a longer verbal passage into differently sized pieces, using devices such as leading or spacing between letters, the separation (and highlighting through being set apart) of discrete and specific pieces of text from the rest (like a pulled quote), the use of line breaks, concrete paragraphs, and the arrangement of pieces of text in the space of the page in relation to other elements and each other to create effects with text. Surprisingly, the spacing and arrangement of lines and pieces of text create noteworthy semiotic effects, changing the meanings these textual units make and the effects they produce.

These effects range from text that is kinetic or seems to move against a static layout across several pages, text that seems to speed up or slow down due to the density
or sparseness of the lines, compression and expansion of paragraphs, text that, in its spatio-temporal arrangement, suggests poetry because line breaks that are not usually used in prose create emphases and groupings of ideas from line to line, emphasizing certain ideas by setting them apart from the rest of the text, and text that connects to non-sequential and non-hierarchically synchronous other segments of text, generating surplus meanings juxtaposed against other pieces of text out of place or in different positions in the space of the page.

These pieces of verbal text can be arranged within the layout to create a reading path that wanders back and forth between one part of or aspect of the text and others. This action creates more meanings through both juxtaposition and in creating a path for the reader that relates to narrative themes in the novel. Sometimes, the arrangement of textual elements offers readers multiple paths through the novel. These units of meaning and their arrangement on the page are significant because they let us create multiple reading paths, including nonsequential, nontraditional, reading paths. This is much more than the concept of textual elements that I focused my early categorizing and interpretation on. Textual elements are recognizable textual features. These modular units of multimodal texts are the structures that allow for such striking layouts and enable multi-path narratives in print. Overall, reading paths in multimodal novels are atypical because they aren’t always as linear, progressive, hierarchically structured as they are in the traditional novel.

**Multimodal Novels with More Conventional Layouts**

While it is readily apparent that not every multimodal novel breaks the page into pieces – some have a more traditional flow – one thing all multimodal novels have in
common is that content is presented in multiple modes. This requires readers to interpret the text by moving from one method of interpretation to another, such as from decoding a verbal element to a visual element and so on. This creates a recursive pattern of reading instead of an additive pattern in which the same method of decoding can be applied to each element. This multimodal recursivity occurs on two levels, one in terms of the reader needing to move back and forth between the textual elements on the page, and the other in terms of the reader needing to move back and forth between semiotic codes – between modalities, between more complex multimodal constructs in various textual elements, and that this recursive reading pattern is a new way of reading, multimodal instead of monomodal.

Observing the path readers take through the novel is important because the reading path is another aspect of the multimodal novel that often carries narrative meaning. Reading paths in these novels often create a movement through the layouts that reflect themes, and work with verbal and visual elements to establish a narrative pace that match the pace of events. This pace is controlled through layout, which can present long, dense compositions that take more time to process, or elements that are easy to interpret because they appear singly in a larger amount of white space. Establishing a given text’s reading path is also important because it allows us to observe meaningful juxtapositions between textual elements as we examine how elements must be processed sequentially or hierarchically within a given layout.

Reading paths in multimodal novels are structured by layout, narrative continuity, and the genre conventions of the print novel. Though The Fourth Treasure has a very unusual layout that enables pieces of the text to comment upon other pieces and link them
together in ways monomodally styled novels cannot, it still retains a core narrative element at the center of each page, an anchor that can be used to make connections between all of the elements in the novel–sidebar notes and images, quarter-page images, and section dividing images. It offers readers a familiar starting place, giving them the option to read monomodally (without the sidebar and section dividing elements), or multimodally. Either way, readers can understand the basic story and follow narrative events–the story makes sense monomodally or multimodally, despite the fact that a great deal of nuance and additional narrative information is added when it is read multimodally.

This is not true for the other two novels, however. In *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, it appears that the reader has an option to either follow the narrative elements given in the traditional text block, or to navigate the novel using a multimodal style. Choosing the multimodal method of interpreting the novel not only involves combining material in multiple modes, but also following an unusual pathway and combining elements presented in a non-linear, non-traditionally hierarchical order. However, despite the appearance of choice in the novel, readers must follow the call-out lines to sidebar elements in order to understand the ideas that are being presented. What appears to be choice for the reader is actually a fixed pathway that, while leading us through a nontraditional disclosure pattern and across the page in an unusual way, is required. Though the novel appears to be ergodic in layout and because there are several different types of verbal textual components in the course of almost every chapter–“core narrative” pieces, first person asides, and notes from character journals–it is linear and fixed, or closed, in function, taking readers on a fixed pathway that they must follow for narrative
closure. Surprisingly, though *The Fourth Treasure* appears to be more conventional in layout than *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, it is constructed to offer multiple reading paths, allowing readers options for how to proceed through the material given in the traditional text block and margins. Readers have the option of ignoring marginalia, nonverbal elements such as kanji images, and proceeding with a monomodal reading style, or reading all of the textual elements—sidebar and traditional text block, paragraphs and images, together. In contrast to *The Fourth Treasure’s* options, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* requires that readers follow a single path, though they still must combine textual elements in different modes to understand it.

*House of Leaves* is a nonlinear narrative regardless of how one chooses to navigate its components. Though some sections of the novel use directed paths, others are implicitly connected with the novel’s other textual elements. Either way, readers have many choices to make in forging a path through the novel’s elements. There are two central large narratives competing for the position of “central narrative” in *House of Leaves*. This competition plays out both in terms of which narrator’s words occupy the greatest amount of page space and in terms of which narrative is allowed to occupy the position on the page of the traditional text block, a location that signals narrative primacy to readers. This jostling for position also plays out in terms of the reliability claims each narrator is asserting – Johnny Truant’s claim is based on direct, personal experiences and his personal responses to the claims of the manuscript, while Zampano’s claim is based on scholarly study of the legend of the terrible house.

The novel has multiple paths, and a layout that clearly communicates in many ways that it requires a different interpretive strategy than traditional novels require, but
upon closer reading, the unusually arranged blocks of narrative turn out to be pieces of a longer narrative that maintains a consistent style, not differently written types of narrative components as I first thought. Though the lines presented on their own, broken apart from their position in the longer paragraphs, seem to convey a more poetic tone while other kinds of line groupings in the text convey other tones, it is the way that these lines and paragraphs are spaced out and juxtaposed against one another that creates different significations in *House of Leaves*, not a different style of writing. Line breaks, paragraphing, layout, and spacing then create the basis for each type of text piece in the novel. These pieces are then combined in many different ways to create multiple pathways through the novel. It was very surprising to discover that merely breaking a longer text into pieces, paragraphing, chunking, spacing, and choices of layout control the effect of a piece of text to such a great extent.

My early use of the idea of a “core narrative” illuminates an interesting way that multimodal novels work. Some, the ones that give readers the option to either process the text multimodally or monomodally, have key narrative events in a central area of the page or in a text block taking up more space than other elements on the page. This is what I referred to as the “core narrative,” text that can be located in the traditional text block, the place monomodal readers or those most familiar with traditional novel layout patterns expect to find the main information of the text.

In the second reading, *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, I dropped the term. If I had not stopped using the idea of text in the traditional text block as being the anchor to all other textual elements, I could not have observed the different kinds of reading paths in the novels, and would have completely missed the idea that multimodal novels are not
core text linking to marginalia and multimodal elements, but that multimodal novels are complex, unique systems of textual elements that can be connected through layout and writing choices to create multi-track narrative structures. Interpreting multimodal novels, then, is not a situation in which one begins with the material in the traditional text block and then ascertains how marginalia, footnotes, and other modal content can be interpreted according to this “core narrative.” Instead, we need to approach multimodal novels as systems of textual elements arranged in the graphic space of the book, searching for a reading path using the cues the text itself gives us, not operating from the assumptions learned in lifetimes of monomodal reading and memories of the conventions of the traditional print novel.

**Code Shifting**

Multimodal novels break open our set reading habits by presenting us with unusual layouts and textual elements that we must process and combine in nontraditional ways. In the initial portion of a multimodal novel, readers are introduced to new ways of reading through implicit sets of instructions. Sometimes these new reading methods also suggest a metanarrative parallel to the main plot – a house that is always changing but that we must try to explore, a journey across geographic space and time by railroad in an era of many more contemporary travel options, lessons in how to draw kanji across unfamiliar page layouts on a trip toward knowledge of a truth.

Each of the multimodal novels in this study begins with a section in which we are taught new interpretive methods through an unfamiliar layout that must be navigated and decoding narrative content in mixed modes, and then builds upon this knowledge, adding a second section that builds upon these initial rules for reading, whether through
modifications of the first set of rules we learned, or through the introduction of a second set of rules.

The multimodal novel often communicates through both form and content that we must examine our ideas of what it means to read texts in any medium. It also teaches us to see textuality multimodally, breaking readers out of monomodal habits of perception, and out of a view that narrative in print must be monomodal and must follow traditional rules of order, sequence and hierarchy.

**Arrangement of Textual Components Contributes to Narrative Meaning**

Textual elements are like building blocks that can be arranged on the page in various ways to make different types of meanings, as well as different types of reading paths. When arranged one way, textual elements can easily be processed in a traditional manner – from the top of the page to the bottom, left to right, in a linear order. However, if they are arranged in different ways, they can create reading paths that are nonlinear, that offer more than one path choice to readers, or that are recursive.

The segments of verbal text in *House of Leaves* are not actually written in multiple different styles. Instead of actually being several different types of text pieces – poetic lines, shaped paragraphs, long dense paragraphs - the pieces of verbal narrative in this novel are just pieces of a continuous longer narrative which has been broken up and arranged using spacing, paragraphing, and line breaks to create different effects.

Upon closer examination, these effects are the result of different ways of spacing and arranging units of text on the page. Brief lines of text are expanded using leading changes, short paragraphs are contracted into narrow columns and sections or even compressed gradually in the space of several page layouts to flat lines in space, and lines
are broken from paragraphs and set apart in large amounts of white space. Though initially it seems as if these segments of text are written differently, from a dense paragraph that has the feel of a section from a traditional novel to a line presented in a blank page that seems to be ambiguous and poetic, it is the arrangement of these sections of text in space and in the temporal structure of the page that creates different effects for *House of Leaves*.

Creating different types of text blocks and lines in multimodal novels is not unique to *House of Leaves*, however. Both *The Fourth Treasure* and *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* contain text blocks that are actually written in a different way than the verbal content in other portions of the novel, and are not fragments of a single longer narrative. Like the variously sized pieces of text in *House of Leaves*, the text blocks in *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* and *The Fourth Treasure* generate meaning in several different ways, often through the length of text pieces and the placement on the page in relation to other textual elements.

However, the arrangement of text blocks and isolated lines in *House of Leaves* differs in that these units of text have been graphically, spatially, temporally, hierarchically altered in ways that play differently in an interpretation. Lines presented in isolation from other text suggests poetry when exploded and expanded, magnified, so large on the page that it almost loses its context (though if you look, the context within a sentence is there), and the layout results in readers applying reading strategies for poetry rather than for novels. It is very difficult to conceptualize these single lines on an otherwise blank page or in a large window of negative space as parts of one of the long, dense paragraphs we expect to find in novels. Interpreting such disconnected lines as
directly proceeding or following lines in a paragraph of novelistic action goes against the grain of the genre cues the layout presents us with temporally and spatially.

At other points in *House of Leaves*, breathless, tightly packed long paragraphs speed up the time of reading, or the speed with which a reader can navigate the material in a given spatio-temporal layout, and this increased speed conveys a rushing feeling. These dense, fast text blocks seem more like traditional novelistic content despite the fact that the kind of writing is the same for each kind of textual piece.

The positioning, spacing, leading, line breaks, and positioning of lines of text in white space has a great deal of influence on how it makes meaning. Layout and spacing can make a line of a paragraph visually resemble a line of poetry, or a paragraph communicate something greater than just the meaning of its verbal content – themes, visual images, pathways, narrative pacing, and the relationship of part to part all can be influenced by design considerations, and can therefore a single line of text can be designed to communicate many different things without altering the verbal content at all.

**Individual Findings on the Proposed New Method of Reading and Multimodal Novels**

**The Fourth Treasure**

In *The Fourth Treasure*, readers are asked to not only be attendant to the story unfolding in the traditional text block, but also to sidebar elements and section-dividing images. The reader has a choice to either process the novel monomodally, following a single pathway and only looking at the material in the traditional text block, or to read multimodally, integrating the kanji-esque images and marginalia that interrupt the text block, divide the novel’s sections, and share nearly every page with the main running narrative.
My reading of *The Fourth Treasure* clearly showed that the graphic form of the novel and the content are tightly related and both offer narrative information. The themes of the novel, learning to read and learning to write kanji, parallel the reader’s process of learning to navigate the book’s unusual layouts. The themes also parallel the reader’s task of interpreting the hybrid symbols produced by stroke-addled Zenzen Sensei. These symbols, neither truly a writing system or images, but both at once, represent the reader’s task of learning to interpret not only the verbal content, but multimodally, finding meaning in the word itself as well as in how the word looks visually. This study of *The Fourth Treasure* illustrates that textual elements given in modes other than the verbal actively participate in conveying narrative information.

The juxtaposition of sidebar elements with notes and specific passages of verbal content in the traditional text block are meaningful as well. Whether this is the author’s intent is an open question – future branches of multimodal novel criticism may well study editing and layout within the framework of editing, book design, and publishing, including information on how closely involved the author was in the process of design and layout. However, for my study I consider the text an artifact, something to be interpreted as it is. Though some reviews of multimodal novels report the level of involvement of the author in the process of book design and layout, this is not something consistently covered, and so it should not be a given aspect of interpretation. The novels in my study are somewhat unusual in that each of the authors were closely involved in illustration, layout and design of the text, though for each, the process was different. Todd Shimoda worked closely with his wife, artist Linda Shimoda, as she produced the kanji-like images for *The Fourth Treasure*, but it remains unclear how much he was
involved in the design of the novel’s layout. Reif Larsen produced the illustrations and
designed the layout for *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, allowing for a reading that
would include claims of intentionality, though for my study, these claims are not useful to
an interpretation of how the elements of the text work together in a graphic space because
elements do not function as anticipated, and some intentional designs can clash with or
make arguments against the material they are communicating. Mark Z. Danielewski’s
involvement in the layout and design of *House of Leaves* is well known—he not only
designed the layouts before taking the novel to the publisher, he also took up residence in
a room at the publishing house and entered the design of the text in by hand, making sure
every detail was accurate to his vision for the novel.

**The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet**

A close reading of *The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet* using the taxonomy
revealed a great deal about the mechanics of how multimodal novels combine multimodal
elements and how they direct the reader both in navigating and interpreting their unusual
layouts. Such a close reading also spotlighted points in the novel where the layout and
textual elements do not contribute narrative information, despite the fact that they do in
much of the text.

Like other multimodal novels in my study, the form and content of the narrative
are tightly related. The layout patterns offer metacommentary on the narrative themes of
the novel. The layout of the pages communicates the idea of a journey across a broad
expanse of space with the book’s spreads function like maps, and often the theme of a
journey is invoked by the temporal-spatial pattern created by the reader’s navigation of
the elements of the page.
In this novel, textual elements in different modes must be combined additively, often across different sectors of the page, in order to convey a complete idea. This novel uses multimodal statements, or a sequence of textual elements in multiple modes in which the textual elements all participate in conveying an idea.

There are not always straightforward ways of recognizing what order to read textual elements in or which ones should be combined in order to decode a complete idea. It can be difficult to know where one such multimodal statement begins in an unusual layout and where it ends, which elements on a busy page belong to which strand of concepts. In *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, there are overt textual devices guiding the order of processing textual elements, sometimes indicating when a multimodal statement ends overtly, but more often through narrative cues such as an anecdote coming to a close.

I discovered that novels deploy two major kinds of cues for readers to follow in understanding the order and hierarchy of elements on the page, in order to suggest a reading path. These two kinds of signals are called directed cues and implicit cues, and they organize the content of multimodal novels in ways that might be missed in more traditionally designed works, but that become more obvious in works with unusual layouts like *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*. These two types of cues operate in part due to a reader’s assumed knowledge of basic conventions of western reading—that a reading path begins at the top of the page and moves left to right across a single page from top to bottom, and then from the front of the book toward the back.
This discovery allowed me to investigate whether readers actually had the choice of path that it appears they do in navigating the layout and design of *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*.

Using the concept of directed and implicit paths, I was able to map the flow of the multimodal statements throughout the novel. In this novel that there are three distinct sections that have very different layouts and reading rules. Using the taxonomy and the idea of directed and implicit paths to map the options available to readers in each of the three sections of the novel, I discovered instances in which textual elements actively contribute to the narrative, and instances in which textual elements appear to function actively but actually reiterate or illustrate narrative information given previously in another mode.

The overall data set for *The Selected Work of T.S. Spivet* shows that the first section is dense with complex and very active narrative contributions from both modal textual elements and from the unusual layout. In this section, the novel’s unusual layout and multimodal reading rules guide readers to navigate and make narrative meaning multimodally. The second major section of the novel changes the rules for reading once more and features multimodal textual features in a traditionally styled layout. Surprisingly, the third section of the novel appears to again take up the first section’s complicated and rich layout and pattern of interconnections between textual elements. However, closer work with directed and implicit cues for reading and the semiotic connections between textual elements in multimodal statements reveals that a large portion of the relationships of elements in visual or spatial modalities in this part of the
novel have a merely illustrative or ornamental relationship to narrative details given in the verbal mode.

Though the novel looks more complex initially, the reader does not have a choice in what path they take, meaning it is a fixed narrative, not an open one. Also, despite the sharp learning curve demanded of readers in the first third of the novel, where they must navigate the unusual layout and learn to read multimodally, the final section of the book offers little to nothing to decode multimodally. The final third is, in many places, just an illustrated novel in its reliance on the verbal content.

*House of Leaves*

Applying the taxonomy to *House of Leaves* posed many challenges because the novel does not establish a pattern of layout or a set of frequently used textual elements. Instead, the novel begins with a familiar layout and familiar textual elements and continues to change from there, rarely repeating layout changes or new types of textual elements, instead altering them or repositioning them so that they must be processed differently by readers in order to be understood. In this novel, layers of the familiar are deconstructed one at a time and new layout conventions introduced. Unlike the other novels in my study, *House of Leaves* has a layout and disclosure pattern that resists a consistent interpretive strategy.

**Code Shifting.** If we can think of standard reading practices as a “code” that readers learn to apply in order to locate meaningful aspects of the text, multimodal novels frequently ask readers to shift strategies from one code to another in order to understand the events of the story. I call this strategy changing in multimodal novels semiotic code shifting, because it often asks that we learn and then re-learn methods of decoding the
meaning of unconventional layouts and content given in different ways in multiple modes. The method of communicating meaningful content in *House of Leaves* constantly changes from aspect to aspect. While a traditional novel makes meaning through the verbal content that is located in the traditional text block, active semiotic areas of *House of Leaves* can shift from traditional aspects of the novel to many other aspects, including the shape of paragraphs, directions of lines, location on the page in relation to other items, the reading path one has to take, the color of printing, the font used, and so on. This pattern is different than that of other multimodal novels, which change the location of meaningful content and the modalities of meaningful content from an initial or introductory set to a secondary set that is multimodal, then to a third set that takes the new ways of signifying and breaks or changes those rules. Instead of having a pattern of information disclosure in an A, B, C structure, it begins with A, shows new patterns in B, and continues to introduce new patterns from there, never resting. This is part of what makes it such a difficult book – the reader cannot learn a new set of rules and then apply those to further sections of the book. This changing location of meaning in the text is code shifting. Code shifting, or when a text changes the location of meaning in the text from one aspect to another, might occur when a novel has been communicating all narrative detail through the verbal content in the traditional text block, and then begins to communicate narrative details through the shape of the paragraphs, or changes in the font. These are just a few examples of code shifting, which can occur in texts at the level of modal combinations that convey story detail being changed, as well as with where meaningful narrative content is in a novel’s initial layout versus where meaningful information appears in the same novel’s later layouts.
Element to Element and Element to Context Relationships

Identifying the most commonly used textual elements and layout patterns is an ineffective method with *House of Leaves* because of its ever-changing design. Analyzing novels like this requires a second interpretive step. I had to re-examine what the taxonomy actually did – it enables the user to abstract elements from a system and define their possible functions in that system. The problem with abstraction as the only interpretive move is that it does not allow observation of the interactions of these elements within an active system. Instead, abstraction places textual elements in artificial isolation, removing them from their relationships with one another and from their context. Removed from these key relationships in which they make meaning, it is impossible to observe the ways textual elements relate to their context and to each other, and any meanings that might be produced with these interrelationships are lost. Much of the signification going on in novels like *House of Leaves* is occurring between elements, and also between elements and their contexts. To address this situation, I developed a second interpretive step that would re-concretize textual elements after their abstraction, allowing the user to note their interactions with each other to create meaning and with the context they are a part of. This additional interpretive step enabled me to collect a more detailed data set from *House of Leaves*, producing material from which I could observe patterns in novels with complex, changing layout patterns.

Multiple Pathways and The Function of Different Sizes of Text Pieces on the Page

The elements of the novel are laid out in such a way that the reader has the choice to follow one of multiple potential pathways through the text. These pathways at first appeared to be structured by three different kinds of narrative components, one a brief
and ambiguous line, the second a square paragraph of exposition, the third a long, dense column of exposition that covered a great deal of narrative ground and took the better part of a page. Upon closer inspection, however, it is clear that though there are differently sized and spaced units of text that create multiple reading pathways in *House of Leaves*, they are all written in the same exposition style. Their use of spacing and line breaks cause them to function differently in the novel. For example, a line decontextualized from any surrounding paragraphs and surrounded by white space takes on an ambiguous, poetic tone. A long, dense paragraph, on the other hand, is read faster because the words are all so close together in a single visual field, and through its appearance, spacing, and arrangement on the page, it suggests to readers a more traditionally novelistic tone.

Breaking a long piece of text into pieces and arranging them in space either close to one another or set apart by white space changes how they make meaning in relation to one another, and changes what they mean to an extent, suggesting through the appearance of the text various modes or genres of writing and invoking specific reading strategies that are commonly used with these genres. This play with units of text and the space of the page reveals the degree to which meaning is a product of both the content of a novel, and the design and layout of that content in the graphic space of the page.

Spacing, leading, and the arrangement of textual elements in the space of page or spread control the speed of reading and through that, the pace of the novel. In affecting the pace of the novel, spacing also changes the tone of differently spaced sections, altering the meaning. I discovered that every page has a quality I call its time of reading,
the pace at which it can be read based on spacing and the arrangements of textual elements within each page, spread, and sequence.

Different editions of the same novel will have a slightly different speed at which they can be processed based on their design and the ease with which readers can navigate it, as well as the time it takes readers to get from one word or sentence to the next. In *House of Leaves*, lines and even words are often fractured and arranged as the only element in a page or spread full of white space. This not only gives the line or word a different feel than if it were merely one in a long, dense paragraph; it also means that, following basic reading conventions, it will lengthen the amount of time that it takes a reader to move from the last textual element to the next, which might appear after a time-consuming page turn. This makes the novel’s disclosure time stretch out, increasing feelings of suspense, often also creating a feeling of being marooned or trapped without the context needed to complete the idea that the sentence or word is a part of. Other scholars have also noted the importance of spacing and time of reading to meaning-making, though they call it different things. Something as seemingly innocuous as layout and spacing, leading, and whether a line break occurs one place or another has a measurable impact on the pace of a narrative, as well as its tone and how it might be interpreted. Spacing and layout directly impact what a text means.

**Concluding Points**

Not only do multimodal elements add narrative information either passively or actively in novels, but the arrangement of these elements, and of verbal text in the space of the page also significantly influences what the text communicates, from genre cues such as the novel’s traditional dense, long paragraphs to poetry’s shorter lines that are
fragmented to place emphasis on one part of a longer sentence, to changing the context within a line or paragraph, changing the speed of telling, and changing our navigation of the ideas on the page, even changing the orientation of the page itself meaningfully.

The design of books, the layout of material in the space of the page, and the inclusion or emphasis of other modes are more important in what they communicate than we had previously anticipated, and clearly there is much to be discovered in multimodal or even traditional novels when we use the tools offered by a multimodal reading strategy.

While some have called multimodality a harbinger of the end of print, the study of multimodal textualities has actually thrown into relief textual practices already at work in the print novel, from the traditional novel to novels that incorporate elements in multiple modes. Instead of the flourishing of digital and multimodal media signaling the end of print, it is an opportunity for an invigoration of study of a heretofore neglected aspect of the novel – specifically, the novel’s status as a medium-specific discourse, and with that the ways medium and mode function to convey narrative information.

**Relating these Findings to Similar Studies**

I am not the first to note that each multimodal novel utilizes/deploys a system for making meaning that is, at least at this point early in the development of the genre, specific to each individual novel. This system, as I have described through my taxonomy and observed functioning through readings, is composed of textual (or semiotic) elements, the layout and design of these elements within a visually unifying space or site of appearance, and how these elements and arrangements play with or against the grain of
medium-specific conventions – in this case, the medium-specific conventions for the print novel.

Roland Barthes famously discusses types of image-word relationships, noting that in each, one element is the semiotic “anchor” for the other. This is an interesting concept to apply to my early (and incorrect) idea that the verbal content in the traditional text block was the “core text,” a term that implies it carries the main actions and events of the narrative, and that it is the center of textual meaning-making in the system of the narrative, that every other textual element only has meaning in relation with it.

Edward Tufte also discusses the relationships of elements in a text in *Beautiful Evidence*, noting that the arrangement of images and words in relation to one another within a common visual field suggests relationships between them (“Mapped Pictures” 25, “Words, Numbers, Images” 94). Additionally, Tufte describes the ways that different images in a sequence can convey fairly complex ideas such as a narrative “Words, Numbers, Images” 92).

In a 2006 article, “Graphical Readings and the Visual Aesthetics of Textuality,” Johanna Drucker describes an idea that she and Jerome McGann developed, that the print novel as one of many potential sites of appearance for “graphical entities” that can be read as making up a unique system for signification (“Graphical Readings” 271).

In *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008), N. Katherine Hayles focuses on reading paths and navigation of the multimodal novel, which she defines as a “technotext,” a text that foregrounds its status as a medium and remediates navigational conventions of hypertext and the internet in its textual operating system.
Along the same lines, Lev Manovich’s work on new media artifacts raises important questions about the ways contemporary media work. In *The Language of New Media* (2001), he is not addressing multimodal novels or even the print book in any detail, but the principles he identifies at work in new media texts, particularly the ways new media texts combine discrete units into larger ideas, shed light on the ways textual elements function in a unifying visual field in the multimodal novel (28-31).

George Landow’s account of hypertext structures in *Hypertext 3.0* (2006), specifically his ideas about how discrete elements can be combined and form chains of ideas are strikingly parallel to some of my findings about the way units of text makes meaning both in relation to other units of text and within a certain temporal and spatial context. His account of how hypertexts are navigated by a user is also very close to my findings on directed and implicit pathways in multimodal novels, and the importance of reading paths that are either fixed or open to reader navigation. Reflecting upon the parallels between much of the recent work on hypermedia and the structures of multimodal novels, I would assert that while the golden age of hypermedia has been said to be over (Coover), each of the writers in my data set are writing in this post-golden age era and have an awareness of hypertext as a project to extend the novel into a new media field that supposedly failed (or at least, failed to become a major new way we read narratives, with the exception of online works such as *Homestuck* and the structure of video game narratives). It occurs to me that, while the golden age of hypertext is probably over, memory of this endeavor lives on powerfully in the minds of contemporary writers. Hypermedia concepts also survive consciously or not in print narrative Remediations because it is how the internet works, how we follow links from
idea to idea, how we structure the material that we all read online. It makes perfect sense that the contemporary novel would remediate the structures of the internet. It also makes sense that these authors are attempting to play with the affordances and constraints of print as a medium, in order to reassert how advanced and well-developed it is as an art form, and to reinvigorate the medium or perhaps rediscover its pleasures in light of too much screen media that, in many cases, is too young a medium to achieve the pyrotechnic narrative and structural effects that the codex and the novel in print do, materially, psychologically, and narratively.

Espen Aarseth applies the fields of textual navigation and game architecture to the subject of novels with alternate layouts, nontraditional methods of linking ideas, calling them “ergodic literature.”

**Limitations of the Study**

**The Taxonomy Must be Used as a Descriptive Tool, Not as an Interpretive Tool**

My taxonomy functions not as an interpretive schematic but as a guide to observation of textual detail we are not used to seeing in a medium, specifically multimodal elements one might find on various levels of a printed text. Without such a guide, it is difficult to identify these features because methods of literary interpretation have habituated us to see the page as monomodal. Novels with traditional layouts have backed this habituation, as in these texts the verbal is often emphasized over the other modalities through which the text communicates meaning. Though it is difficult to learn to read multimodally coming from a monomodal interpretive tradition, the concept of textual levels lends systematic method to the task of the initial observation of multimodal textual devices, especially the less overt ones. My conception of levels is more to assist
in classifying kinds of textual phenomena at the initial observation stage, and to think about how elements on this textual level can generally function in the workings of the text in terms of design function. This initial classification tool is used to create observations about each individual multimodal element, as their narrative and textual functionalities vary from work to work.

The taxonomy is essential for a close reading of multimodal novels because it leads to the generation of a great deal of observational detail for analysis, enabling us to see what is there instead of our familiar schema of how a novel works, or instead of using a first impression of how the novel works as the basis for the entire interpretation.

The taxonomy must be used to closely examine the entire work instead of to find a few promising textual elements to analyze. Gaining an overview of all the elements working in a text instead of focusing immediately upon a first observation of the element, layout, or rule of order is important because an analysis that selects the most visible or striking aspects of a multimodal novel and goes no further misses the larger/global organization of the novel, the full spectrum of textual elements in the novel, and aspects of the occurrence and organization of elements in the novel that don’t fit an initial impression of how the textual elements function. I found with each reading that things that didn’t fit an initial concept of how the novel works often end up yielding the richest discoveries about how the elements of the multimodal novel worked.

When they are used correctly, these descriptive tools allow us to uncover relationships and features of a text that we couldn’t find through our habituated paradigms of reading the print novel. However, we must also resist the impulse of using
our discoveries to create fixed definitions that we impose upon the whole of a text, or a series of seemingly similar features/texts.

The imposition of new media as the key to interpreting the multimodal novel recurs in much of the scholarship on the multimodal novel. Many scholars note that the way multimodal novels require readers to navigate from one segment of text to another, from traditional text block to footnote, for example, or from one element in one quadrant of a page to another, is a print approximation of the way digital hypertext works, or a remediation of internet textuality with its hyperlinked jumping from page to page or text segment to text segment. Though we can find traces of this and make strong cases for it in many multimodal novels, it is not true of all multimodal novels. Just as the margin as a feature in multimodal novels is a textual feature that is used quite differently from one novel to the next, as evidenced in *The Fourth Treasure, The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*, and *House of Leaves*.

**Textual Features with Similar Appearances Function Differently from Novel to Novel**

While *House of Leaves* might seem like a hypertext, aspects of the novel are indeed hypertext-like, while others have the appearance of hypertext functionality but do not actually use the same tools that hypertext does. We see this in the way a reader jumps in textual navigation from one page and portion of the text to another using references in the marginalia or footnotes is a hypertext-like aspect of the novel. The most deceptive aspect of the novel, however, is the way that the pieces of text in the traditional text block appear to be discrete, individual hypertext lexia, or pieces that can be navigated in multiple ways and can connect to other lexia to create multiple different pathways and through those, many different versions of the narrative.
I initially reviewed the textual pieces that appear to be hypertext-like lexia and found three distinctive types of textual pieces, each with a different function, that I believed could connect to one another in multiple different patterns according to the path the reader chose to follow. However, when I attempted to map out a schematic of these types of textual pieces and how they connected with the other types to create multiple reading paths, it was clear that the pieces didn’t function differently in the space of the page due to having been written in three different types – there actually were not three different prose types. The aspect that allowed the three different textual piece types to operate differently in the text was purely how they were laid out and spaced in the spreads of the novel.

Although the broad margins in all three of the novels might suggest similar functionality in how we might read the text and create a reading path, each text used the large margin differently. *The Fourth Treasure* was not structured in a way that required readers to process the elements given in the margins contemporaneously with the material given in the traditional text block. Instead, readers have the choice of either reading the novel monomodally, without the notes, following the traditional linear, hierarchical organization of the print novel, or of reading back and forth between the traditional text block and margin notes. A reading of *The Fourth Treasure* is deeper and richer when the reader chooses the more challenging path, leading to disclosure of deeper narrative detail and significant narrative foreshadowing, but the novel also works without the margin notes.

*The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* also has these extra-large margins. However, this novel is structured in a way that does not allow readers to select their own paths. The
marginalia does not make sense without the anchor of the main narrative unfolding in the traditional text block, and actually provides a place for the main character’s private thoughts on the action taking place in the traditional text block. If the reader skips the margin notes in *Spivet*, they will become lost, miss key narrative information, and get stranded in the text. However, processing the marginalia along with the traditional text block in *Spivet* requires the reader to follow a nonstandard reading path which can become non-hierarchical and require the reader to find their way back to their point of exit from the traditional text block.

*House of Leaves* allows the reader to choose between one of two or three different reading paths on average per section, following Zampano’s study primarily, Johnny Truant’s autobiographical notes through the study, or one of the other options that are built into the different layouts. Each reading choice yields vastly different pathways through the book, with different narrators, different events, and different information about the house at the center of the story. At multiple points in the book, the wide margins become the top of a reoriented page layout with the gutters as the foot of the page. At other points, the margins are choked with footnoted information. In other points, the margins cease to function as a delineated columnar space in the page layout as lines of text space out across the whole page, or the whole two-page spread.

**Textual Elements Are Not Codifiable, But Are Used Many Different Ways from Novel to Novel**

This discussion has parallels to the assumption of a code, or codifiable set of patterns in the multimodal novel – elements common to multimodal novels, conventions of multimodal elements, etc. – which can be codified and described by something like the descriptive taxonomy. This raises an important point about the taxonomy as an entry
point for textual description and then further textual analysis. For one thing, the
taxonomy must be used as a changeable, fluid tool, not as a stringent and inflexible set of
rules about how textual elements will appear or function within multimodal texts. This
became apparent during my application of the taxonomy to *House of Leaves*, a
multimodal novel which presented many similar textual elements and a few similar
layouts to other multimodal novels, but which used these things in completely different
ways.

It became apparent that a key step in any multimodal interpretation of the field of
signs represented by a multimodal novel is not mere identification of each individual
textual element and the description of how that element seems to work within the novel,
but a second interpretive step in which the abstracted elements are re-contextualized, re-
concretized through another observation, this time of the elements in relation to other
elements, and within the context of the layout and design-structured pages, spreads, page-
turns, and sections of the multimodal novel. So it is key to have both abstraction and re-
concretization for close reading of a multimodal novel’s individual system, but the key
thing to remember in using the taxonomy and then second step to perform a close reading
of a mm novel is that each novel is a unique and individual system of textual elements
and layout, and must be processed that way. It is a dangerous and counterproductive to
assume that textual elements that resemble each other or layouts with similar features will
perform or signify or function in the same way from novel to novel. Each novel must be
approached (at least initially, until after the close reading is complete), as an entirely new
system with unique rules governing reading order, hierarchy, relationships, layouts, and
the functions of textual elements.
It can also be counterproductive to assume that, once observed in a single multimodal novel, a textual element or aspect will continue to function in the exact same way throughout the novel – in many multimodal novels, it is common to find that an element that initially functioned one way shifts to function a new way in the end, often with this functional shift meaning something within the narrative. This is both why the descriptive taxonomy and second step are both essential to describing what is actually on the page and how it is working at that moment in the text in relation to other textual elements and within layouts, and why this knowledge cannot be the end of observation of the way the element functions in a single text, or across different novels.

In “Sign and Contextualization” from (S L C), Roy Harris discusses the problematic view that “systems of signs [are] fixed codes,” as well as the assumption that “conflates the language of a community with its codification,” or “not wishing to question that…communication requires a public code of some kind, or that this code exists and is describable, [segregational theorists, those who assume ..] have had doubts about whether the existence of a code is sufficient to explain communication, or else about whether it [the code they assume exists] is altogether fixed”(147).

Finally, the different uses of textual elements across these novels calls for further study to determine if, given a broader sample of multimodal novels, a consistent pattern might emerge. The multimodal novel is a genre that is still developing. Presently, conventions of use are not set for the kinds of textual elements we see in many of the novels, so the larger margin area, footnotes, use of spacing and breaking up pieces of text tend to function differently in each novel. Play with established conventions of use may
be one of the defining features of the multimodal novel, however, and if this continues to be so, we can expect the use of textual elements in new novels to build upon and alter ways such elements were used in previous novels.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

I applied my methodology to multimodal novels with strikingly different layouts, and did not include multimodal novels that have more standard layouts, or traditional novels with standard layouts. I leave these types of analysis for future study, as they enter into different territory and approach answering different questions than the ones I was seeking answers to. The group of novels I selected had strikingly different layouts than traditional novels, but they also had features that were quite similar to one another – sidebars, footnotes, pieces of text and multimodal elements arranged differently in the space of the page. A good follow-up study might include multimodal novels with more traditional layouts, contrasting them with these nonstandard layouts, or might compare and contrast a reading of a monomodally styled novel with a multimodal novel.

In further research, I would conduct a study of a broader sample of multimodal novels to determine if the fluctuations in use of textual elements persists. If it does, we might conclude that the multimodal novel does not yet have set genre conventions. However, I might also posit that a key characteristic of the multimodal novel as a genre is exactly this kind of playfulness with precedent established by not only the textual conventions of other multimodal novels (predecessors), but a playfulness within many multimodal novels with the conventions for use established in the first section. Unlike monomodal textual conventions for the novel, which establish a hierarchy and method for decoding the elements of the text and then stick to it, multimodal novels often introduce
two or more different sets of reading rules per novel. By playfully establishing and breaking their own reading conventions, multimodal novels not only foreground the devices present in print media, they also ask readers to rethink how they traverse the page and decode textual elements. Requiring or in many cases inviting the reader to take a different approach to navigating the text also reinforces the fact that elements of the text that would not be carriers of meaning in a monomodally styled novel must be re-examined in the multimodal novel, as any one of them may be convey narrative meaning. The narrative use of alternate reading paths and semiotic use of traditionally inert textual elements in multimodal novels serve to highlight that the location of meaning in the print novel is changeable, requiring that readers closely examine every aspect of the novel in a way that leads us to discover the devices at work in print as a medium, and to question what elements can be used in narrative.

In taking a multimodal survey of the novel’s textual devices, I’m looking not only at other modal elements such as visual, spatial, and so on, but also at elements of the traditional verbal text block or the verbal narrative. This level of analysis occurs with all of the components – the multimodal elements which have been deemed relevant and contributing and the verbal narrative elements – on equal footing.

There may still be interpretive work regarding the use of medium/modal shifts in the novel to support or introduce narrative themes (content-focused, though the inclusions can be interpreted as their own metaphorical commentary on the verbal content or on narrative themes), or how patterns of shifting from type of element/narrative unit might offer commentary or narrative signification (verbal narrative unit or multimodal narrative unit), or how the whole novelistic system of appearances/inclusions signifies as a pattern
in the novel. So the form of the narrative units or their overall shifting pattern, or the content of the narrative units could be interpreted as keys to the narrative’s meanings.
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APPENDIX A

A COMPLETE CLOSE READING OF A NOVEL USING THE TAXONOMY
APPENDIX A

A COMPLETE CLOSE READING OF A NOVEL USING THE TAXONOMY

This data would then be coded and analyzed in creating an interpretation of the novel.

Section by Section Description –
Description of Each of the Main Types of Layouts
in Mark Z. Danielewski’s House of Leaves

Layout Type One – Standard Print Novel

The novel opens with an Introduction by Johnny Truant. This section is set in Courier, a font that lacks the polish and professionalism of the fonts used by other editors. This section is told in very long, dense, awkwardly set paragraphs. They are left justified with a ragged right margin, using a full tab at the end of each sentence which leaves distracting rivers running down the page, drawing the eye down the page instead of along the lines and making it difficult to read. In addition, the typeface creates thick, almost bolded looking letters that do not sit attractively on a line – they appear misaligned in a sentence, and this impression becomes even stronger when a word is underlined. This sense of misalignment is heightened when the word House appears in blue ink, offset slightly from the line. The Introductory paragraphs are packed against one another with the exception of hard returns as transitions between paragraphs changing subject. Lines are at times indented at the ends of paragraphs for emphasis – sometimes just a single line, but a few times several. Some of these indented final lines are in paragraphs not separated by a hard return, and in these instances the indented final line matches exactly with the indented first line of the next paragraph, creating an odd sense that we aren’t sure where the paragraph before is ending or where the new
paragraph begins. We are attendant to the possibility that the final line is indented even when we cannot distinguish it from the indented first line because of the paragraphs after hard returns and their indented lines.

One paragraph in Zampano’s font and spacing is included in the Truant Introduction, embedded and anchored to the text before and after it with a call-out from the sentence above, a hard return above and below, indentations on both sides to frame the quotation and set it apart from the rest of the text. The placement of the chunk of text within the host text makes the boundaries between the two narrative components very clear, and highlights through font, spacing, and the use of a date the different provenance of the text portion/alien paragraph/excerpt. The introduction closes with a typed signature, date, and location, giving the section the appearance of a document separate from the rest of the novel – separate in textual positioning in relation to the rest of the novel, separate in layout and font styles, and marked clearly by the date as separate in time.

In the first section of the novel, Section I of The Navidson Record, we find the next type of layout. Section I looks like a typical academic study with strong hierarchical organization, including the roman numeral at the head of the first page marking the number of the section, a quotation relevant to the subjects the section will deal with, then a traditional text block at the center of the page, and below a line separating the main text block from the footer, several footnotes (3).

This layout begins to change subtly on the second page of Section I with the intrusion of Johnny Truant’s first footnote. Truant’s notes, which are still set in clumsy-
looking Courier Sans, contrast sharply with the smoothly organized visual style of Zampano’s study, creating a jarring and disjunctive visual effect on the page.

**S.O.S./DOT-DASH SECTION – MEANINGFUL INTERRUPTIONS**

In Section VIII, the layout of the study and footnotes is broken into shorter bits of text on the page by regularly occurring dot and dash symbols. The dots and dashes, which repeatedly spell out S.O.S. in Morse Code, begin immediately after the chapter heading quotation about S.O.S. wireless code-signals. After the full S.O.S. code, the section begins, presenting a text block that would be very standard except for the jarring sentence breaks caused by now-decontextualized bits of the SOS code – a single dot splits a line, then another. The lines are not part of Zampano’s analysis, which they interrupt, nor are they part of Truant’s footnotes when they begin to interrupt those. At the lower right corner of the first page of the chapter, there is a single bold printed check mark. The second spread of the section opens with the full SOS code as the top line of the verso page. Another stray dot splits a sentence halfway down this page, but there are no more disruptions of the text block on the verso page. The stray dots begin to fracture Truant’s footnotes at random points. The dots cannot be read as meaningful parts of the sentences they interrupt, and the narratives they fracture show no awareness of the interruptions. On the next page, Truant’s sprawling, full-page footnotes are continuously interrupted, but the dots are at times solid, at other times empty cubes (100). The verso page of the spread begins with a single dot, then after the first half-page of text, the SOS code repeats (101).

The next page continues Zampano’s discussion of a crisis in Navidson’s career for half a page with one dot interrupting, but then there is a partial code – part of an O, and
then the full signal for S. This dot-and-dash code is used at this point as a section divider marking the transition between one moment in narrative time and a different moment in time. Directly beneath this OS fragment used as a section divider, the text continues with its long margin-to-gutter lines for five lines before the paragraph changes shape without a break in a narrower version of a block quote. Taken together, the long paragraph and the centered block quote are a shaped paragraph resembling a figure presenting an SOS code with flags in place of the Morse Code. The torso portion of the block quote is broken with a single dot at the belt level (102). On the verso page, the relationship of the dots and dashes to the action of the narrative in the text block shifts as Zampano incorporates dots and dashes into the narrative:

    In other words:
    .
    ·
    · · · _ _ _
    ·
    (or)
    ·
    SO?!” (103)

Just beneath this, in the footnotes, another dot interrupts one of Truant’s sentences. The chain of custody of the manuscript for *House of Leaves* in the novel tells us that Truant’s footnotes have been written after Zampano’s study, and that the mysterious Editors have had the final say in the format for the novel. This makes it difficult to explain how the distress code interrupts material written by Zampano and by Truant in a section thematically relevant to the SOS code.
The final three pages of this section are a continuous footnote narrative by Truant that fills each page completely. In each of these sections, his narrative is neatly broken into paragraph-sized chunks by dots and dashes, some hollow, others solid. Sometimes the dots create logical section breaks in Truant’s long narrative, but these moments occur randomly alongside moments in which his sentences are meaninglessly fractured (104-6).

**No Threshold, Labyrinth, Minotaur, and Book as House/Labyrinth (Windows Section). TEXT BREAKS FROM TRAD LAYOUT TO GRID LAYOUT (In which each component bears equal weight, as opposed to page-as-frame/trad design).**

Section IX is the first section to have footnotes immediately follow the section header with no introductory text from Zampano’s study. The header itself is laid out in an unusual way, with three quotations arranged in a triangular shape. The footnote narrative continues on the next page, changing from the usual long lines that stretch from margin to gutter to something resembling shaped paragraphs. The verso page opposite opens with a line to demark footnotes from the main text, but the line appears near the top fifth of the page with no main text to refer to. Below it is a footnote in a larger version of Zampano’s font discussing the theme of labyrinths. At the end of the section of Zampano’s footnote, a line under erasure describes the Minotaur and the labyrinth of King Minos, but the footnote breaks off and is continued after the page turn on the next verso page. Unlike other broken footnotes, however, it does not end at the bottom of the page, but instead is followed by another footnote signaling line, below which footnotes by Truant, the Editors, and Zampano appear.
The verso page of the next spread continues Zampano’s footnote about the Minotaur under erasure, this time at the top of the page and not beneath a footnote line. Directly beneath this small piece of text is a footnote line, followed by a shaped footnote large enough to consume the rest of the page. The shape is vague, shifting from a left justified edge that slowly extends to create a curved base to a ragged right edge with line breaks creating a monolithic shape. On the upper fifth portion of the verso page of this spread, there is a brief piece of Zampano’s main study followed by the footnote line and another shaped footnote, this time with both sides justified in the upper half of the paragraph, both sides tapering down on both sides uniformly to end with a short fragment. Below this, footnotes in Truant’s font and in Zampano’s fonts alternate before a long footnote under erasure on the Minotaur motif (110-111).

In the next spread, both footnotes and Zampano’s study are broken into blocks of text roughly similar in size, though the alternating Courier and Times New Roman fonts create slightly different widths. Two-thirds of the way down the verso page, the blocks of text again become the familiar long form gutter-to-margin lines (112-113). These seem to foreshadow or preface the distinct units of text that begin to occupy the graphic space in new ways several pages later.

A footnote in block form appears in the upper right corner, emphasized in the layout in part because it is boxed and set apart from the rest of the elements on the page, but more so because the box is printed in bold blue ink, implying a connection with the house motif that also appears in blue ink throughout this edition of *House of Leaves* (119). This initial blue-boxed block of text signals the beginning of an entirely new layout for the novel, as well as the beginning of a running layout element that is repeated
in the exact same location in verso and recto pages for the next 27 pages. The boxes terminate with a trilogy—a blue-bordered box that is blank inside (143), a blue-bordered box filled in with solid black ink (144), and finally a negative space in the page with no blue border and no text at all (145).

This new layout style is a sequence of similarly formatted spreads—verso and recto—that combine multiple segments of text in the graphic space in ways that suggest connections between some elements and that use textual devices such as white space, boxing, direction of text, and lines to indicate that each textual chunk is distinct from the others. Throughout the sequence, the portion of the page given to the footnote area at the bottom of the page varies. Many elements remain the same across this series of spreads, however. The blue-boxed footnotes contain sections of text that are printed normally on the verso page of each spread, but that can be seen reversed, as through a window, on each following verso page. Each margin is set apart by border lines with a footnote that reads top to bottom running the length of the section in the verso margin, and a footnote that reads backward—from the last page of the section moving backward toward the beginning, in italicized font and printed upside-down. The margins, then, are mirror opposites in terms of the way they are arranged in the section—one top-to-bottom of the pages, moving from front to back, the other inverted and backward. Zampano’s study still appears at the center of each page, but the blue windows interrupt the text block on both verso and recto sides, and the text block is bordered by the running margin notes, as well as at the foot of the pages with footnotes.

After continuing across four more spreads in the sequence, Truant’s footnotes again creep up the page until they eclipse Zampano’s narrative, and two new running
block footnotes appear, one at the lower right corner of each verso page printed upside down flush against the gutter, the other halfway down the recto page printed sideways with the block footnote running top to bottom, its bottom line running into the gutter. This layout pattern again shifts two pages later, repositioning the two new running block footnotes to lower positions on each page of the spread to accommodate an expanse of white space in the area that was formerly the traditional text block. Within this white space, the words “Perhaps” and “here” are printed in stepped positions, spaced out so that they create a longer time of reading (134). The spaced-out stepping-stone sentence is continued in a block of text beginning halfway down the page at the far right side of the verso page traditional text block. The verso page continues as in previous pages, adding a lengthy study by Zampano to his footnotes. The next spread has the traditional text block empty, bordered by the windows, the running margin footnotes and the sideways gutter footnotes gone again. The footnoted content continues on the next two pages, occupying most of the page on the verso side. However, the recto side has changed again, including a long thin columnar footnote that runs from the top of the page to the border line for the footnotes. Beside this, a square two-columned footnote printed sideways in the page frames the blue-framed window, which continues the running footnote (139).

The next verso-recto spread repeats the arrangement of specific text blocks in the space of the pages while again subtracting others, leaving negative space in their vacated positions in the layout. In this case, everything has been subtracted on the verso page except for a long text block running flush with the gutter and then a footnote constrained to half the usual space for footnotes. This arrangement of elements not only emphasizes
the missing text blocks, it also dramatically juxtaposes the remaining two text blocks in
the space of the page so that the only element on the left half of the page is the footnote,
while the only element on the right is the long text block. On the recto page, elements are
also missing and negative space left to mark their absence, but this page leaves a very
small text piece in the upper left portion of the page, followed by two long lines of a
footnote that then continues in a wrap around the empty space in the lower left portion of
the page (146-7).

The following spread reverses the order of textual elements on the verso page,
beginning with a small square of text in the upper left corner, then including a single line
on its own almost as a dividing or linking element between the first text block and the
slightly longer text block in the lower right corner of the page. The recto page begins
with a shaped paragraph that takes a small portion of the graphic space, and the rest of the
page is given over to footnotes, the bulk of which is a sprawling narrative by Johnny
Truant (148-9).

Taken together as a sequence, these two spreads following the notable windows
section arrange textual elements in the graphic space in two very different ways, the first
reversing the usual reading order and hierarchy for a page, the second following both the
conventions of reading elements in the upper left first before moving down the page and
to the right.

Section X introduces a new layout focusing on the placement of lines and short
sections of text blocks in the graphic space of the page. This is also one of the longest
sections of The Navidson Record, lasting for almost a full hundred pages of the novel
because the use of negative space is so pronounced. The section begins with a very
standard opening header and quotation – it is worth noting that the quotation refers to architecturally structured paths. After the header, however, there is only a single paragraph of Zampano’s study and then a half page of empty space. At least half of each page is left blank for the first portion of the section, and footnotes disappear after the second spread. Eventually, lines begin to appear with a half page or so of negative space between these and the opening paragraph. Abruptly, the negative space shifts to the top of the page with the single paragraph along the bottom (162-4) before again resuming its appearance at the top (165), this time with footnotes again. The negative space is briefly occupied fully with a long narrative footnote from Johnny Truant (179-181), and then the single paragraphs appear at the foot of the pages again.

**CONCRETE, KINETIC VERBAL ELEMENTS AGAINST A BACKDROP OF WHITE SPACE**

A new layout pattern begins in the middle of Section X as sentences break into single words that drift across the spread. The spacing of the words varies, leading to different emphases on specific words within the sentences, as well as sentences lasting for longer or shorter spaces in the text, causing the time it takes to read the sentence to speed up and slow down.

Several pages beyond this, the few words per page are centrally aligned, the visual form of the column of words and their position in the center of the page representing the content:

standing

dead

centre. (214)
A representational layout of the words in the graphic space continues in increasingly unconventional ways, with arrangements that visually and sometimes kinetically represent the concepts and actions of the narrative.

The spread describing a bullet passing through a door and splintering a wooden panel describes the action of the scene and shows the bullet hole through the door on the verso side with a concrete paragraph:

the
round
powerful
enough to propel
the bullet into
the second
door. (232)

On the recto side of this spread, the words of the next sentence are arranged in the space of the page to resemble the action of the wooden panel splintering:

though

not

powerful

enough

to do more

than

a

splinter

panel. (233)
Section Eleven of The Navidson Record begins with a quotation about a menacing staircase, and the layout embodies this thematically through Zampano’s study in the traditional text block being broken into two narrow columns with a wide negative space in the middle of them, unlike most two-column layouts. This layout emphasizes the constructedness of each column, and its isolation from the other. The material in this section is fragmented into bits divided with a device that might also be read as a running sound – the word “rzzzzz.” A section at the end of this jarringly shifts in both font style, font size, and layout. Titled “Tom’s Story: [Transcript],” it is surprising in that there are no editorial notes explaining why this document has not been prepared by any of the editors of House of Leaves – the font style does not belong to any of the editors. At the end of the section, a footnote reveals that Truant has prepared the section in an unprecedented new font style.

**THE PAGE AS LANDSCAPE, TEXT AS ACTORS – PAGE STAGE WITH WORD ACTORS, PATH THROUGH TEXT AS MAP THROUGH WHICH A LINE OF THOUGHT (REPRESENTING ACTION OF THE AGENT IN THE STORY) TRAVELS**

Section Twelve of The Navidson Record introduces layouts that do not obey the page hierarchy or rules of directionality, at times running upside down from bottom to top, changing from being printed upside down to being printed regularly, the spacing and movement of the words in the space of the page communicating both story content and the movement taking place in that story. The section begins with the standard opening for each section of The Navidson Record – a chapter number header with a quotation, this time about spelunking, in which a caver is described as knowing a cave as well as one
knows his own home. The traditional text block does not begin a few spaces below, but
instead a single line laid out with the bolded drop-cap first letter running across the very
bottom of the page, visually representing through its position at the bottom of the page
the scene it describes – the characters reaching the foot of a staircase. The next spread
continues this way with brief text blocks at the foot of pages that are otherwise blank,
emphasizing the scale of the space represented in the scene.

The following spread has a single line at the foot of the verso page, but then the
recto page begins with the text block again at the top as the scene shifts from the bottom
of the staircase to a new scene taking place upstairs in the house (278-279). The next two
spreads have both text blocks as the sole elements running along the bottom of the pages.
In a new layout, the verso side of the next spread describes someone being pulled via a
pulley mechanism. This appears at the base of the page, but the recto page is blank
except for a single word which appears at the upper right hand side of the page, printed
upside down. The action of a character being pulled from one area to another is
represented in this shift in line position in the hierarchy of the page, and the disorientation
in the story’s fictional house represented with the changed directionality of the word on
the page (286-7). The orientation of the pages in the book has changed in this spread,
with the top of the book having been flipped to become the bottom. This is jarring
because it goes against every other marker of the book’s correct orientation from the
cover to the direction and hierarchy of the pages.

In the next spread, the verso side continues the text block at the base of the page,
while the recto page again illustrates through juxtaposition with the verso layout an
action taking place, a change in state. The recto page again changes the orientation of the
page from top to bottom to bottom as top with upside-down printing. Reading from the base of the page toward the top, the lines are printed with differing leading between letters and spacing between words to represent the action of the main character “sinking...Or the stairway is stretching. expanding” (289). The word “sinking” is spaced with letters appearing on lower and lower lines of the page, enacting sinking itself through its spacing and layout. The next line is identifiable by its beginning with a capitalized letter, and instead of sinking it stretches toward the gutter before spacing out the word “stretching” so that it expands from the bottom of the page to the top to fit half the page. The final letter, “g” in “stretching,” is placed at the top left-hand corner of the page so that both the word “expanding,” which runs from the top right corner to the left gutter, and the word “stretching” running from bottom to top, are completed by the single letter (289). The sentence then reads two ways, depending upon whether it is read top to bottom from left to right or whether the word running along the gutter is read as the final word of the sentence. Either word – top to bottom “stretching” or right to left “expanding” – can be read as the completion of the sentence.

The pattern of verso side being printed with the grain of the book’s initial orientation, with the top of the page as top, bottom as the end, text readable with this orientation and then the recto side reversing the page hierarchy with the words printed from bottom to top continues in the next spread. In each of these, the layout of the verso page serves as a beginning position for the movement of the text on the verso page, and it is through this meaningful juxtaposition, from static to active, from a more standard page hierarchy to a reversed one, from normal spacing to spacing that signifies something, that
the lines seem to move, representing the action of the plot through the changing positions of lines of text and fragmented words in the graphic space of the page.

The line continues from 289 to the spread of 290-291, appearing at the bottom of the verso page with “dropping, and as it slips,” and again reversing the page hierarchy on the recto page, exploding the word “d r a g i n g” to fill the page along the gutter, running from the bottom of the page to the top, where the name of the character being dragged, “Reston,” appears printed upside-down at the top left corner, running into the gutter.

**THE GLYPHS THEMSELVES! DECONTEXTUALIZED LETTERS AS OBJECTS IN THE STORY, ACTORS UPON THE STAGE OF WHITE SPACE**

The next spread presents another deviation from the pattern of static recto, active verso spreads. On the verso page there are only three words, but they appear in linear form running from left to right with ordinary leading, but separated by a space a third of the page from the first word to the second, and a half page from the second to the final word at the lower right corner of the page. All three words are justified against the gutter on the right side of the page. They read “up with it”(292). The recto page again reverses the page hierarchy, this time beginning with a paragraph printed upside down at the bottom of the page. The paragraph breaks off without conclusion, the word “the” appearing three lines up the page (upside down) from the paragraph itself, and then the next word, “rope,” spaced out letter by letter so that it embodies the rope being described, reaching from the paragraph which is literally (in the reversed page hierarchy above the continuation “the” and “rope” to the top of the page. The paragraph is right justified
against the gutter, and the words “the” and “rope” also run against(along?) the gutter (293).

The following verso page is nearly empty except for a fragment of a word, “-us,” printed upside down near the bottom of the gutter. The recto page shows a single “a” bracketed by dashes on each side, this printed diagonally so that the top of the letter suggests a page orientation with the top as the lower right hand corner, flush against the “-us” of the recto page. This juxtaposition in the spread suggests a movement or fracturing of the pieces of the text, the “-a-” following a line as if it has been propelled from the “-us,” the dashes suggesting a relationship between the fragments, a former connection (294-5).

Johnny Truant’s narrative fills the next spread, though at the top of the verso page, there is a final fragment, “ps…,” which links to a footnote by Truant (296). It is only several pages later, when Truant’s page-choking footnotes again vanish, that the page opens up again to a line by Zampano at the head of the recto page explaining that the rope represented by the extended words has snapped, the pulley torn completely from the banister at the top. The –a- arcing away across the spread from the –us is the broken pulley flying through the space of the stairwell.

As Section 12 of The Navidson Record concludes, a line at the very bottom of the recto page tells us “The film runs out here”(307), and after the page turn, words begin to space out at even intervals across the base of the page, “leaving nothing else behind but an unremarkable” enacting film running out, frames slowing down. On the recto page of this spread, the word “white” continues the sentence (308-9). The next page is blank, followed by another recto spread with a single word, “screen” (311), and then as
conclusion, a large black dot in the same upper mid portion of the page that “screen” occupied, relating the two through the shared visual space within the page layout across the page turn. This tells us that, where the screen was, there is now a black dot – another medium-referencing juxtaposition that evokes old television sets and images suddenly shrinking to a pinpoint when the set is switched off (312).

**ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE – HYPERMORPHING LAYOUT AND THE FAILURE OF EXPLORATION.**

Section twenty is one of the longest in the novel, stretching on for 67 pages with differently spaced pieces of text and directional shifts - the textual layout changes more frequently in this section than in any previous part of the novel. The first spread begins at the very top of the verso page with a raised cap letter, indicating that the note in Braille at the beginning of the chapter was either a quotation without attribution or an unofficial note by Zampano and not part of the official section (424). After a half page of regularly spaced paragraphs, pieces of text begin to take on unusual spacing that shapes them somewhat. These paragraphs are not concrete paragraphs in the sense that previous shaped pieces of text have been – they are not arranged through spacing to resemble an object, but instead enact the journey Navidson is taking into the house with his fifth exploration. Whereas the paragraphs on the first half of the page are justified to present very linear edges, the paragraphs that follow are center-line justified with briefer and briefer lines (424). The paragraphs from the lower verso page to the upper recto are shorter in length, often just a sentence or two long, all of them centered. At the top of the recto page, there are three such paragraphs, each with broader and broader margins to create shorter lines in each paragraph until a fourth
paragraph drops down in a rectangular column of justified text, each of its lines just over an inch long (425). This columnar paragraph seems to hover in an otherwise blank page. The next spread introduces text a line at a time, the verso page’s line in the middle of the page, the recto at the bottom. These lines are arranged in relation to one another to suggest movement, a layout expression of the content of the lines, which describe Navidson moving through a hallway in the house that continues to change size and dimension. Taken together, the text of this two-page spread begins high on the verso page as the character begins to travel down the corridor, and drops to the very bottom of the recto page as the ceiling of the hallway drops (427).

The sentence continues across the page turn and across the next two-page spread, but instead of the sentences running left to right in fragments, they begin at the top of the verso page and progress word by word down the center line of the page. The spacing between each word from top to bottom is also changeable, illustrating through greater and less spacing the actions of the hallway in the story. At the bottom of the page, the same sentence continues in a short, two-line segment before continuing across the gutter in the lower left corner of the recto page. Instead of the words running from top to bottom, each word rises one by one from lower left to upper right, continuing across the page turn (428-9). The next spread concludes the long sentence at the very bottom of the page. Because the sentence does not continue, it is difficult to find the beginning of the following sentence, which appears in an arc from left to right on the recto page. The capitalization of the first word in the sentence and its placement at the upper left hand corner of the arc marks it as the beginning, and it runs in one and two-word fragments across the top and then curving down from one word in the left-hand gutter across a
significant white space to the right-hand margin, back and forth from left gutter to right margin until its conclusion with a paragraph-long quotation that runs with normal spacing at the base of the page (431).

A single-column wide, centered paragraph introduces the next two-page spread. After a space of a single line, a single sentence is offset printed at an angle that draws the eye from the centered introductory paragraph with the highest point of the sentence is the beginning, leading the eye from the centered top paragraph down to the next sentence, which is angled the opposite way, the beginning of the sentence low and the end high so that we read it from lower left to upper right.

The next sentence begins as an even line, broken in the center to create a columnsized gap in the middle, before changing in several ways, filling half of the page. The next word, printed on its own line just below the first part, is spaced letter by letter to stretch across the gap. The next five words run, line by line, down the left side of the page before the next word in the sentence appears, five lines up from the last word on the left. This word is a juncture from which two indentical sets of words spring, each set moving at a different angle across the page, one stretching up from lower left to mid-page right, the second sinking one line before rising in a smaller arc of words from lower left to lower quarter-page right and then sinking to the very last line in the lower right corner of the page. These twinned but distinctly laid out lines present three possible reading paths in completing the same sentence (432). This type of line, which offers multiple potential paths through words that are reprinted in different areas of the page, also occurs at other points in the novel.
The verso page begins with the words “direction no longer matters” (433) centered at the top. Fragments of lines and brief sentences about Navidson lighting several flares are arranged in the space of the page to begin with a short line, explode into a nearly full gutter to margin-length line, and then shrink back to very small points of text. This pattern of a brief line, an explosion to longer lines, and then fading to short lines again repeats two more times before trailing out and becoming one word per line, each centered to create a vertical unity that draws the eye down the page instead of supporting a strong left to right motion. The last word in one of the final sentences on the page is given only one letter at a time, completely reorienting the direction that the text must be read in from left to right with a visual organization drawing the eye down to a completely vertical word. It is disconcerting in the layout both because it changes the reading pattern of left to right and because it can only be read vertically, but its letters are all oriented to be read horizontally, two reading cues that directly conflict with one another. The final sentence is spaced out to resemble the tripod it describes, beginning with a single word that seems to connect to the base of the vertically oriented word, then spaces out each subsequent word with large pieces of negative space between word segments to create the look of the words on the left, in the middle, and on the right side appear to be the legs of the tripod. The tripod structure makes reading the sentence in the correct order challenging because the two lines in each of the three “legs” might also be read vertically instead of horizontally, a vertical reading suggested by the grouping of the lines – the top line of the left leg is further from the top lines of the middle leg and the right leg that complete the sentence than it is from the word immediately beneath it (433).
The next spread presents a new arrangement – one long paragraph running across the entire top of the spread, verso and recto, almost eliminating any white space in the gutter that generally creates white space to divide the two pages visually. The first sentence begins at the top of the verso page and continues at the exact same position at the top of the recto page. This paragraph lasts for four lines across the spread, referencing a footnote that also violates the boundary of the gutter to continue across the spread (434-5).

Turning the page, a new paragraph runs sideways along the verso margin, orienting the page with the gutter as the “top” and the margin as the “bottom” (436). The recto page, which has a standard page orientation, situates two text blocks in the white space. A rectangular text block broken in the middle by an indented, spaced out line sits just above the middle of the left side of the page. It concludes with a footnote with lines short enough to make the entire note a square text block, oriented to the gutter as top of the page and margin as base (437). The orientation of text blocks within the space of the page changes quite often in Section Twenty, heightening the sense of disorientation communicated by the verbal narrative elements.

**Not Simple Mirroring, Not Just Opposites – Layouts Designed to Fool You**

The next spread repeats the pattern of creating a page in which two distinct text blocks have different orientations in relation to the page and to each other. In this case, the first paragraph on the page, printed sideways, has the margin as the “top” and the gutter as “bottom.” The paragraph trails off with an ellipses which continues two lines below it to indicate that the other paragraph on the page, which is oriented through the direction of the words with gutter as “top” and margin as “bottom,” though to make sense
it must be read backwards from the last word at the bottom of the paragraph (the ellipses) back up to the top, where after the final word is printed, a period ending the sentence sits at the “top” of the text block. The two text blocks sharing the middle of page 438 then reverse each aspect of one another – the left text block running from top of the paragraph to the bottom, but oriented with the top of the text block aligned with the margin and the base aligned with the gutter, while the right text block not only reverses the orientation, running as a text block from gutter to the base of the other paragraph, it also reverses the order for reading words and lines in a paragraph, with the content of the paragraph only making sense when read from the left side of the bottom line backward toward the top, this first line running from left to right, the second line right to left, and then each subsequent line reversing until the statement ends at the top of the text block with a period hovering above the word at the top of the page.

This pattern reverses on the recto page with a sideways square paragraph that changes the orientation of the page to the gutter being the top and margin the bottom (439). This paragraph describes Navidson beginning to climb up a vertical shaft, and after the page turn, a ladder-spaced thin column of text stretches from verso to recto sides, beginning at the upper left corner of the verso page, each line fragment or “rung” angling down two tabs until the line fragments reach the center of the spread, at which point they stretch two-line rung by rung across to the margin of the recto page. The lines forming the ladder are oriented so that the top of the page appears to be the recto margin and the bottom the verso margin, but again the lines only make sense if read backwards, from the bottom toward the top of the column, or from the left margin up the ladder rung by rung to the right margin. At the “top” of the ladder, there is a small arrow pointing
down the ladder – initially, this appears to be a reading direction, but when taken in the context of the other elements in the two-page spread, it matches a second arrow pointing in the opposite direction, below a footnote line and a footnote that is printed sideways running from the recto page gutter to the recto margin (441).

COLUMN COMPRESSION – SHRINKING AND EXPANDING COLUMN WIDTHS AS PERFORMANCE of NARRATIVE EVENTS

Next, there is a sequence of pages with a narrow block of text that grows smaller and smaller in the space of each page. Unlike previous text blocks in *House of Leaves*, here the words break off exactly at a certain point and spacing between them is uneven to create a clear justification on both sides of the paragraph. The words are broken to the extent that the last one on a page is frequently continued in the next page’s centered text block. The broken words create a feeling of being rushed or compressed that echoes the action of the story at this point, as Navidson attempts to make his way through a labyrinth at the center of the house and the walls begin to close in, the passageway becoming increasingly more narrow. The text block representing this passageway shrinks in size at the center of each page, from nine lines from top to bottom and two to three words wide on the first page to eight lines by three, then six by three, five by one, four by one, until on the final page of the sequence there is only a single word centered in a page dominated by white space (443-460). The words not only break off, at certain points in the shrinking of the text blocks from page to page, there are sections of text without a single complete word (448). At this point, the text block is flattened with the top to bottom line count falling from three to two and the width increasing to accommodate at least two to three complete words per line of each text block (450-458).
The conclusion of this sequence occurs with the word “changes” on the verso side of a spread and a new type of image created with text on the recto side. Brackets frame the left and right sides of a large rectangular block of Xs (461). Near the center of this mass of Xs, one line is left blank on the left and right sides to frame a five character wide, five line deep block of bolded Xs that are the center of the image. The next two-page spread begins with normal lines of text at the top of the verso page and and the same brackets with the central five by five block of bold Xs at the center, this time minus the framing rows of Xs (463).

The next spread presents paragraphs that are inverse mirror images of one another, one on each page, though each has different content. The verso page’s paragraph is printed at an angle to run from the upper left corner in a triangular paragraph to mid-page. The recto paragraph, printed from the lower right-hand corner at the same angle up toward the middle of the page, is the inverse of the first paragraph (464-5). These two triangular paragraphs are Zampano’s detailed account of the exploration film.

The following page brings a shift in layout – verso and recto pages are nearly filled by long text blocks continuing the analysis of both the film footage and of critical response to it. These paragraphs are slightly smaller in the space of the page, leaving large margins and gutters and a great deal of space at the foot of each page. The text block on the verso page concludes with a footnote at the lower right-hand corner that is printed as two concentric circles, the outermost circle linking the idea in the paragraph with a book, the inner circle giving the publication information (466).

The next sequence begins with a brief paragraph printed upside-down, beginning near the top of the verso page and concluding at the very top of the page with an
unusually thin margin. There is a call-out to a footnote, this time a bold arrow pointing, instead of outward toward the page, back into the paragraph’s final line. The arrow points right if we read the paragraph upside-down, though if the book is turned to read the paragraph right side up, the arrow points left. There is a dividing line halfway down the page, and following that, a small arrow that points left when read with the book right-side up. Knowing that footnote call-outs match the footnotes they correspond to, the direction of the footnote symbol in the upside-down paragraph and the symbol in the right-side up footnote suggest that the layout directs the reader to turn the book as they read directionally changing sections. At this point in the story, Navidson is no longer sitting on anything solid, and is unsure whether he is falling or floating (468), a state of being that is enacted with the changing direction of the paragraphs, lines, and other elements in the text. The recto spread contains a single line which runs along the gutter printed with the top of the page as the margin and bottom as the gutter (469).

Font sizes begin to shift from page to page. Another single line runs printed upside-down along the bottom of the verso page in a very small font, while the recto page has a line run, also printed upside-down, along the top (470-1). All of the pages with text printed at different angles and directions continue a running foot with the page numbers, these always oriented to the book’s original direction.

Two long, three and four line paragraphs stretch from top to bottom along the gutters of the next verso and recto pages, the recto paragraph printed with margin as page top and gutter bottom, the recto its mirror with recto margin as top of the page and gutter as bottom (472-3). This creates a situation in which the reader cannot read both paragraphs from a single vantage point, but must change position in relation to the text.
Another long paragraph stretches from the bottom of the next verso page to the top, printed sideways so that the margin is the head of the page and the gutter the base. The recto page contains a much smaller triangular paragraph printed at an angle in the lower right-hand corner with the corner as top of the page and upper left-hand corner as the base (474-5).

This triangular pattern’s orientation to the page is reversed after the page turn, appearing in the lower right-hand corner with the top of the page as top left corner and the bottom of the page as lower right-hand corner (476). This angled paragraph is the opposite of the angled paragraph on the previous page, and does not line up to appear in the same position across the page turn as similarly shaped textual elements such as the “windows” did earlier in the novel. The second page of this spread initiates a sequence of textual elements printed along the center line of each page, each aligning across page-turns to create the sense of a single element that moves or changes (477-479).

The first page is a line from a popular song printed sideways on the recto page so that the margin is the head of the page and the gutter the bottom (477).

The page after the turn shows just five parallel lines running from the head of the page to the foot. On the recto page, these five lines are transformed into a line of music (479).

The next spread has only two short lines, both printed upside down but at opposite positions on the pages – the verso page’s brief line appears at the very top, while the recto appears upside down at the very base of the page (480-1).

Next, brief lines appear printed sideways in each margin, but printed in different directions so that on the verso page the line makes the head of the page the gutter and the
base the margin, while on the recto the head is the gutter and the base the margin (482-3). Turning the page, we find a line of text spaced out along the middle left column of the page with a right justification, and just to the right of it, a musical notation symbol – the repeat symbol, one that also resembles a colon. The recto page contains a half-page white space marked off with a long line of bracket symbols that form the left and right sides of it (485). The next spread repeats this pattern with yet another spaced-out right justified line of text beside another repeat symbol, and on the recto side another half-page white space demarked by two lines of brackets. However, the white space inside the brackets contains a single asterisk in the upper right-hand corner. The expanded lines of text on the verso pages gesture to and describe the bracketed or bordered white space of the recto pages – discussing Navidson’s continued exploration of the house, the two sentences describe a space he finds himself in, depicting it in the first maplike bracketed space image (485). In the second spread, the expanded sentence reveals that something else is suddenly in the room with Navidson, and the asterisk appears in the upper corner of the maplike image (487). A single line appears at the very top of the next page, its footnote at the base, and the next page has a final brief, spaced out paragraph describing the film running out. A single, one-word footnote appears at the base of the next page, which concludes Section 20.

**LAYOUT AS THEMATIC LINK SUGGESTING CONNECTIONS ACROSS NOVEL, OR LAYOUT AS CHARACTERIZATION and a SUGGESTED ANSWER TO THE QUESTION of WHO NARRATES HOL**

Section E is the longest section in Appendix II at nearly fifty pages, collecting all of the letters from his mother Pelafina, who is institutionalized, to Truant. The letters
date from 1982-1989, at which point a letter noting that his mother died is included. The letters are a very significant portion of the end of the novel, as this is a point during which the layout begins to shift again, this time more obviously as the result of manipulation by Pelafina in her less balanced moments. The letters, which are a page or so in length each and have their own distinctive font, remain standard in format for several pages, containing words that hint at aspects of The Navidson Record, including a reference to “blue pages”(608), numerous references to codes, and then a massive, seemingly random, strangely capitalized three page letter in which the first letter of every word is a letter in a code spelling out a cry for help (620-23). After this point, the typographic style of the letters begins to shift in ways very much like that of The Navidson Record. Lines of text alternate at angles across the page, first running from the upper right hand corner of the letter space to the lower right, then an angle running the same direction but a few degrees more, followed by three shorter lines running from the lower left corner of the page to the middle, under which there is a signature and his mother’s initial at an angle (623).

The next letter in the series begins with one straight line before a bold line that begins at the end of this line, turns downward at a right-degree angle, where it connects with a six line paragraph printed sideways with the head at the page’s gutter and the foot toward the margin. After this, it is not clear where to proceed next in the space of the page. A single line in Spanish runs at an angle from just below the first line of the letter, starting at the upper left and concluding at the lower right, nearly touching the final word of the sideways paragraph. Though the entire signature and initial portion of the end of the letter is printed sideways all in one piece with its top toward the margin and base
toward the gutter, the signature initial is the element nearest the angled line in Spanish, and seems to almost connect that piece of the composition to everything else even though the section must be read beginning at the furthest edge of the letter by the margin, and then followed down to the final initial (624).

The recto page opposite this letter is also full of innovative typographic arrangements. The letter begins in a normal sized font with regular spacing between each line, and continues this way for the first six lines. Suddenly, words in each line appear in different sizes, manically repeating the words “The New Director.” Soon, random letters in the repeating phrase are capitalized, creating different stresses and inflections in each repetition of the phrase. A solid page of the phrase continues in gradually shrinking font until, near the base of the page, it is barely legible. Halfway through this page of words, one of the large ‘e’s in ‘new’ is crossed out with a blue x. The very final line suddenly changes, reading “Hoping love still conquers death or at the very minimum fear” in one long run-on sentence. Below the paragraph, there is a square-shaped grouping of Pelafina’s signature initial in differently sized fonts, and to the right of this, a large bold printed ‘P.’

The next spread begins with a brief but oddly spaced letter on the verso side. After the date is printed evenly, each line is printed at an angle in different font sizes. The first line begins at the upper left and angles down to meet the end of the second line, which begins lower and rises at an angle to almost meet the first line. The third line begins high just beneath the second sentence, angling down across to mid-page. The fourth and fifth lines are very brief, the first angling up again, the second angling down in a very small font. The sixth line, in huge font, begins beneath the halfway mark of the
page and rises up to meet the fifth line. Near the end of this line, a line broken into three segments to form a small block of text runs from the large text line down toward the final line, which is only slightly angled upward at the end. In all, the lines alternate directional angling – one angles top to bottom, the next bottom to top, and the pattern continues down the entire page. This has the effect of drawing the eye from line to line, albeit in a way that interrupts rather than facilitates easy reading – the lines nearly join at the point where one line concludes and the next also concludes, causing the eye to perpetually jump to the end of the next sentence (626).

The letter on the recto side again takes a phrase and repeats it in varying sized fonts, but this time takes it further and creates illegible palimpsest blocks of the phrase “forgive me” one printed atop another atop another atop the original. The layout combines the linear repetitions of the phrase in the letter for most of the page, and then clutters the bottom third of the page with the phrase arranged in nearly squared blocks, like a stamp, repeated in thick layers so that nothing is legible but a tangle of serifs and bold glyphs. The squares appear at several angles, from upside-down to angled, and within the palimpsest there are also larger font lines and words from the phrase (627). At the bottom of this thick bramble of text blocks, there is a single initial, ‘P,’ in the smallest font size among all of the elements on the page.

The next letter presents a block of the same word printed over and over again with letters capitalized at points in the text block that first seem random. When the capitalized letters are read as a sequence following normal reading rules – top of the paragraph one line at a time to the bottom, left to right, the capitalized letters are nonsense: “DDEEAADR”(628). However, in reading the words against the grain of the standard
reading order, with the first letter on the left as the first in a meaningful sequence, followed by the next letter mid-paragraph to the left, then the one directly below that, followed by the bottom left letter, a word emerges – “DEAD.” The four letters in the mirror positions along the right side of the paragraph also spell a word this way – “DEAR.” A line that begins as an alphabet but changes to spell “Johnnyz” after the ‘J’ begins at an angle near the top middle of the paragraph, angling down to the right and ending near the middle of the page.

A series of lines in a different sized font rise from the lower half of the page at the opposite angle, starting low at the left of each line and rising higher on the right. This angled series of lines must be read from the top line to the bottom, but unlike other sets, it is not unified by a justification, each line beginning and ending at a different place than the line preceding and following it.

On the next page, this pattern of beginning lines at different intervals is combined with the novel’s patterning device of alternating the first element’s position with the second element, back and forth down the page. After the letter’s normally printed header, the left-justified first paragraph is double indented, while the second paragraph begins on the same line as the header. The third paragraph is double indented like the first, while the fourth returns to the position of the header except with lines under half the size of all the others. This pattern continues as the letter runs for another full page, all of it an apology of sorts for trying to kill Johnny Truant, concluding with the initial ‘P’ in an extremely small font, self-effacing again as with previous apology letters (630). The next letter begins with a distorted header, an unusual thing. The date, instead of appearing in a normal level line, is printed at an angle, the line beginning near the top of
the right-hand corner of the page and running down toward the lower right corner. Following this, there is a poem in which it is suggested that Johnny is missing or absent, Pelafina using the phrase “JOHNNY IS TRUANT,” before concluding with her signature initial in an enormous font (631).

The next spread begins with the repetition of the name Johnny to form lines that begin at different points on the page to create a gracefully arcing structure, thick with the repeated name at the top, thinning out into less dense single lines with more space between them as it moves back and forth down the page. It continues on the next page, beginning with long centered lines and eventually narrowing in spacing to single words, creating a shaped column reminiscent of others in The Navidson Record (633). Turning the page, the verso side has the single concluding word “safe,” above a long bold line running across the center of the page. Beneath the line is empty white space. The letter on the recto page is back to normal in terms of form, spacing, and content, but it is a key piece of the narrative, as Pelafina admits to having been in an agitated state and having used “five reams of paper and postage,” which she is not certain really occurred (635). After this point, the letters remain somewhat lucid and subsequently normal in layout. The exception are two letters in smaller, more official font from the director of the institution, informing Johnny about a change in his mother’s condition and then about her death (639, 643). The final element in this section is a small centered paragraph – a receipt claiming that a piece of jewelry owned by Pelafina was claimed by her son, Johnny (644).