# HOUSE OF LEAVES AND JUNGIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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*House of Leaves* **and Jungian Psychology**
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*House of Leaves* **and Jungian Psychology**
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# Contents

SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad istražuje roman *House of Leaves* Marka Z. Danielewskog kroz Jungov arhetip Sjene, Derridovu dekonstrukciju i digitalno posredovanje, kako bi pokazala kako fragmentirana struktura romana odražava psihološku dezintegraciju. Sjena nije samo prisutna u likovima, već je ugrađena u promjenjivu, nespoznatljivu kuću i samu nestabilnu naraciju, izazivajući Jungov pojam integracije. Ova teza također otkriva kako Danielewski koristi nelinearno pripovijedanje, tipografske distorzije i nepouzdanu naraciju kako bi se uskladio s Derridovim pojmom 'différance' koji se opire fiksnom značenju i jača nestabilnost identiteta. Osim toga, format romana nalik hipertekstu odražava nelinearnu prirodu podsvijesti, proizlazeći iz uvida u teoriju digitalnih medija. U konačnici, *House of Leaves* navodi svoje čitatelje, kao i njezine likove, da se kreću labirintom psihološke i tekstualne neizvjesnosti, ostavljajući pitanje može li se suočiti sa Sjenom ili će ostati stalno promjenjiva prisutnost.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

House of Leaves, Jungova psihologija, sjena, dekonstrukcija

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores a novel by Mark Z. Danielewski - *House of Leaves* through Jung's Shadow archetype, Derridean deconstruction and digital mediation, demonstrating how the novel's fragmented structure mirrors psychological disintegration. The Shadow is not just present in the characters but embedded within the shifting, unknowable house and the unstable narrative itself, challenging Jung's notion of integration. This thesis also uncovers how Danielewski uses nonlinear storytelling, typographic distortions and unreliable narration to align with Derrida's différance resisting fixed meaning and reinforcing the instability of identity. Additionally, the novel's hypertext-like format reflects the nonlinear nature of the unconscious, drawing from insights in digital media theory. Ultimately, *House of Leaves* forces its readers, like its characters, to navigate a labyrinth of psychological and textual uncertainty, leaving the question of whether the Shadow can be confronted or if it will remain an ever-shifting presence.

KEY WORDS

House of Leaves, Jungian psychology, Shadow, deconstruction

# 1. Introduction

*House of Leaves* (2000), Mark Z. Danielewski's debut novel was 10 years in the making by the time he published it (McCaffery and Gregory 124). This is a book that prompts you to ask yourself what constitutes a definition of a book because, in the time when everyone feared that the Internet would take literature away from us by providing stimulation through multimedia, Danielewski dared to think of the Internet as an advantage by creating this multilayered work packed with intense storytelling and captivating physical appearance (McCaffery and Gregory 99). The phrase "don't judge a book by its cover" has never proved itself more under reality than when looking at *House of Leaves.* At first, you might believe it is truly just a horror novel about a house that is bigger inside than outside, as many categorize it. Once you open it, the onslaught of information in the form of different texts, voices, typographical designs, poems, commentaries and footnotes, pictures, photographs and other documents resemble everyday logging on the Internet which fits properly to our information-dense age.

It is something that started as literary experimentation, but ended up solidifying postmodern literature and, just like a maze, offered many new pathways for the novel as an art form. *House of Leaves* defies conventional narrative and structural norms, weaving together multiple storylines with a physically disorienting layout that includes footnotes, mirror writing and divergent typographies. Using such components, Danielewski mimics the Internet layout and demands active reader participation.

Many experts and literary critics have grappled with this giant piece of literature for 24 years and they have covered fundamental notions that *House of Leaves* prompts its readers to touch upon. Ideas like theoretical concerns of the postmodernist perspective, the physical composition of the book and the interplay of reality and fiction demand from its audience to leave the familiar, linear progression of reading a novel and engage in the expedition of a labyrinth-like piece of text to discover what it has to offer.

Other research is focused solely on its embedded narrative, unconventional storytelling, typography, character relationships, location of meaning and discussions of structuralism and

postmodernism or the meaning of the labyrinth (Bida, Gibbons, Jeffery, Pressman, Travers, Zidan). In this thesis, I propose reading *House of Leaves* with a focus on the complex interaction between the novel's structural complexities and the psychological collapse of its characters. While I'm interpreting *House of Leaves* using Jung's psychological concepts, particularly Shadow and individuation, I also utilize Jungian literary theory to explore how the novel's postmodern narrative, like deconstruction, resists Jung's ideas while still engaging with them. This multidisciplinary approach allows readers to understand how psychological themes are embedded within the unique narrative structure of the novel.

Central to this study is the examination of the Jungian concept of the Shadow, those aspects of the Self that are rejected from the conscious and reside in the unconscious, and how this concept manifests within the novel and its characters and the way they interact with the enigmatic and ever-shifting space of the house.

Simultaneously, this work explores how Danielewski employs deconstructive strategies to mirror the psychological deterioration of the characters, thereby challenging traditional forms of narrative coherence and stability. This way, the reader is meant to grasp the essential components of this literary text and use them to uncover new layers of interpretation that connect the physical spatial complexities of the house (and consequently of the book) with the fragmented nature of the human psyche.

While some individual works (mostly other master theses) mention the possible existence of Jungian themes in *House of Leaves*, no one analyzes these aspects in the context of the psychological framework that influences the plot, characters but also structure of the novel.

The whole novel is riddled with potential psychological analyses, but for this thesis, I use Jungian concepts like Shadow and individuation to not only show how the archetype shapes the characters and drives the plot, but also to present that in doing so, Jungian concepts link to the novel's fragmented narrative structure, showcasing a deeper understanding of the fragmented human psyche through deconstruction.

Hval's *Navigating the Labyrinth of House of Leaves Through a Postmodern Archetypal Literary Theory* master thesis is of great importance for my analysis of the novel. As the title

suggests, Hval "will analyze Danielewski's House of Leaves through this revised archetypal theory, paying special attention to prevalent archetypes in the novel and their potential meanings" (2). By focusing on the labyrinth as an archetypal image with psychological and philosophical significance, Hval provides a foundation for my thesis to further explore the importance of the Shadow archetype in both the narrative and structure of the novel.

Building on Hval's insights about the instability of archetypes in *House of Leaves*, I extend this argument by focusing specifically on the Shadow archetype and its role in the novel. While Hval investigates the fragmentation of archetypal images within the text through both archetypal analysis and deconstruction and focuses on archetypal reading, my analysis extends this by directly linking Derrida's deconstruction of language with Jung's concept of the fragmented psyche. By examining how the Shadow archetype is not only confined within the characters but also through the novel's structure and narrative, I argue that the Shadow becomes a site where psychological and narrative instability meet, revealing the novel's engagement with and resistance to traditional archetypal frameworks.

*House of Leaves* draws on Jung's timeless archetypes, especially the Shadow, while simultaneously embedding these universal symbols within a historically specific digital and postmodern framework. Since the novel's prominent feature is a fragmented nonlinear structure, it mirrors the unconscious' timeless nonlinear processes which suggests that digital mediation can bring the readers into close contact with the archetypes, in this case with their Shadow.

In the context of *House of Leaves*, Jung is often mentioned for his notion of the house or his "architecture of the psyche". At the beginning of his academic paper, Johansen immediately puts the house in Jungian terms that it "can be viewed as an architectural model of the self" (412), but then rather goes on to discuss *House of Leaves* and other spooky houses in the context of Freud's *The Uncanny*, only mentioning Jung once more as he is reminded of his model of human psyche in context of Lovecraft's story *The Rats in the Walls* (417). Since the mention of Jung in connection to *House of Leaves* is obscure, using works like master and bachelor theses in my own paper is necessary to highlight there is still some interest. Therefore, Krasenberg in her thesis *Assembling the Pisces* also writes how Navidson's mapping of the house "can be seen as a more extensive example of Jung's theory of the architecture of the psyche" (20). Previous to this

conclusion, the author mentions Jung's quote about the house being human psyche just like Johansen and later on concludes that it seems the houses project different situations and traumas specific to the character, as seen in this quote "Even though Johnny has never been in direct contact with the house on Ash Tree Lane, simply reading and working with the Navidson Record brings out certain experiences for him…It is as though the house on Ash Tree Lane provokes these experiences, manifesting in a way that is specific to Johnny's psyche" (21). However, Krasenberg never develops this in the context of Jungian psychology and his archetypal theory.

On the other hand, it seems like the main topic of most academic papers considering *House of Leaves* is its structure and deconstructive elements. The first notion of deconstruction is seen in the way of reading the novel, as Throgmorton put it in well written words that "House of Leaves deconstructs readers' understanding of how a novel should look, act, and be read by showing that language isn't as reliable as is commonly believed" (1). While Throgmorton focuses on showcasing that *House of Leaves* is intentionally deconstructed novel, Jeffery is more concerned with showing that *House of Leaves* is constructed "in an overtly theoretical manner by an author versed in postmodern literary theory, to the extent that the book can be regarded as epitomizing the postmodern literary text" (5). Both authors bring great insights considering the deconstruction and structure of the novel which helps with a deeper understanding of the novel.

Teske, for example, took a more philosophical approach in reading *House of Leaves* as she attempted to offer a structuralist study of contradiction in discourse in the context of fictional narratives while taking into consideration deconstructionists and Jacques Derrida's views on contradiction (1).

"Deconstruction, according to the standard (simplistic) interpretation, maintains that all discourse, being fraught with contradictions, fails to convey any consistent message. This skeptical conclusion, however, might be too rash since contradictions present in postmodern fiction do not seem to have a destructive effect" (Teske 2). Being guided by this interpretation of deconstruction, after discussing the contradictions in the *House of Leaves* (and other books), the author comes to the conclusion that the numerous contradictions do not prevent the books from being meaningful. This insight is important for other parts of the thesis, but it still does not tie the deconstruction of the novel to the psychological state of the characters.

In fact, none of these papers connect it directly to Jungian depth psychology or the Shadow archetype. While many of these papers make connections between the labyrinth and how it must reflect the characters' psychological state, they do not make it archetypal. Danielewski himself, in the role of many academic researchers in *House of Leaves*, makes the obvious connection that the uncanny spatial complexities reflect the characters' psyche. But besides Jung's occasional quotes, Danielewski does not delve deeper into his psychology and leaves it to the reader.

Therefore, my thesis tries to give insight into a different reading of *House of Leaves* without leaving out the deconstructive narrative structure which makes it unique, but rather to showcase that the Jungian concepts (like the Shadow, the Self or individuation) could be the core of the novel.

My reading of the novel is explicitly through Jungian lenses which included a few prerequisite thoughts as I delved into the text. My focus was to look out for the Shadow as I was reading which meant that I looked for potential archetypes at any given moment. The archetypes generally help with interpreting the symbolic content since Jung presents them as universal, but the reading of this book presents you with a challenge to realize how traditional interpretations of archetypes (the house, the labyrinth, the monster) are deconstructed with the narrative framework of *House of Leaves.*

Another notion that my thesis tries to prove is how the physical layout of the text, which often forces readers to turn the book in different directions or navigate through footnotes and appendices, mirrors the psychological disorientation or the process of confronting the unconscious. If read through Jungian lenses, it is obvious that the structure of the novel follows the psyche of its characters up till the end. The psychological depth of characters and narrative complexity does not escape to other authors, but my thesis tries to show how these narrative techniques reflect and enhance the Jungian psychological processes occurring within the characters. This way my thesis builds on the potential Jungian psychology has as a literary theory.

Despite the problems that Jungian discourse has, I believe his concepts can be modified to go with the times and open a different path for text analysis in modern literary theory. Susan Rowland's *C.G. Jung and Literary Theory* gives a comprehensive overview of how both Jungian psychology and modern literary theory can benefit from each other. Rowland's main idea is to integrate Jungian theory into modern critical frameworks like deconstruction, feminism,

postmodern spirituality, reader-response and postcolonialism, in a way similar to how Freud's theories have already been effectively absorbed and applied within these discourses. She also grapples with Jung's political views, including accusations of anti-Semitism and his moral blind spots toward Nazism, in her chapter "Jung: Political, Cultural and Historical Context". However, this thesis does not engage with the validity of Jung's personal beliefs or actions. Rowland addresses these issues to ensure that Jung's theories and concepts are critically examined without allowing his political controversies to overshadow their value. If these biases have influenced aspects of his theories, then it is appropriate that his ideas are open to critique and deconstruction, as this allows for a more ethical and nuanced application of his psychology. However, my analysis remains focused on the application of Jungian psychology as a framework for understanding *House of Leaves*.

The research methodology for this thesis incorporates both structuralism and deconstruction, two critical frameworks that provide complementary insights into the complex narrative and thematic dimensions of *House of Leaves*. Both terms need some clarification to understand why these approaches work in this analysis.

Teske in her paper on contradictions gives definitions for both structuralism and deconstruction. The author refers to Robert Scholes and defines structuralism, as initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss, as fundamentally a methodological approach that assumes that the world has an objective reality and can be understood through its structures and the relationships among their elements. Structuralism seeks to identify general laws and integrate scientific knowledge about both nature and culture, therefore, in the humanities, this approach is characterized by epistemic realism where the scientific method is adopted to investigate cultural phenomena. This interpretation can be seen as an example of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's work on narrative poetics. This view should be differentiated from interpretations that emphasize an inherent epistemic skepticism in the structuralist theory of language (3).

As referred to in the definition, structuralism allows us to analyze *House of Leaves* with the interpretative methodology of Jung's depth psychology. Since it asserts that elements of human culture must be understood in terms of their relationship to a broader, overarching system or structure, I can apply this idea to analyze the relationships of the characters with the house in the

novel through Jungian psychology to connect it to the overarching system that is the physical deconstruction of the novel to prove it represents the fragmented psyche of the characters.

On the other hand, deconstruction is particularly suited for analyzing *House of Leaves* because the novel itself engages in a deconstructive process. The text's structure, marked by footnotes, appendices and typographical experiments, disrupts traditional narrative coherence and challenges readers to question the reliability of the narrators and the stability of the story. Deconstruction helps to analyze how Danielewski's novel subverts conventional narrative forms and exposes the underlying ambiguities and tensions in its exploration of reality, identity and meaning.

In the book *On Deconstruction,* Culler discusses Derrida's central arguments. Derrida asserts that deconstruction involves two approaches - reversing traditional oppositions and generally displacing the entire system. This dual strategy is essential for deconstruction to effectively engage with and critique the oppositions within the system. Practitioners of deconstruction operate within the system's parameters with the intent to disrupt and challenge it (85-86).

The deconstructive method, in this simplified form, suggests a form of skepticism: texts do not successfully convey meaning, people struggle to communicate, and reality remains beyond comprehension. A thorough approach to analyzing a literary text should acknowledge both its inconsistencies and its coherences (Teske 17). Therefore, combining both structuralism and deconstruction allows for a comprehensive analysis that acknowledges both the coherence and fragmentation within the text, reflecting the complex interplay of psychological themes and narrative techniques.

Before analyzing the text, two important bases need to be covered. Chapter two gives you an overview of *House of Leaves* which includes a synopsis of the novel, structural and narrational complexities as well as Danielewski's commentary on extensive usage of film and other media. Chapter three introduces Carl Jung and his psychological concepts, mostly those important to this thesis. Then chapter four and chapter five delve into the analysis of *House of Leaves* to provide another interpretation that combines the Jungian psychological framework deconstructed both in the characters and novel's structure and narrative.

## 2. Overview of *House of Leaves*

*House of Leaves* is a novel written in an abnormal form which is reflected in its stacked or layered narrative structure and unusual usage of different typographies, footnotes, writing styles and uniquely utilized physical space of the page. Since the novel operates on multiple levels, it allowed Danielewski to blend engaging storytelling with complex theoretical discussions.

Before analyzing the form and key themes of the novel, let's look at different narratives in the book which are crucial for getting familiar with the plot.

While Hval focuses on two major plotlines, Natalie Hamilton in her paper *The A-Mazing House* explains in detail how narrative is split into four levels. At the center of *House of Leaves* is a story about Will Navidson, a journalistic photographer, his partner Karen, a former model and their two children Daisy and Chad. To salvage their faltering relationship, they move into a new house in the countryside. As Navidson's worth is tied to his work, he is not able to completely give it up. To cover up the innate desire to look at the world through camera lenses, Navidson chooses to make a film documenting his family's move into their new home, capturing their efforts to start fresh, rebuild their lives and establish new roots.

However, the cameras set up in every corner of the house start to record some unsettling events. The sudden appearance of a short, dark hallway between the master bedroom and the children's room prompted Navidson into action. He repeatedly tries to measure the house from the inside and the outside to convince himself there is a logical explanation, but all he finds out is that the house is larger inside than it is on the outside. Navidson asks for help from his estranged brother Tom and his old friend Billy Reston to measure the house, but the dimensions continue to defy logic, shifting constantly until a new hallway unexpectedly appears in the living room wall. This hallway feels even more ominous, completely shrouded in darkness and accompanied by a low, menacing growl. Since Karen forbids Navidson from entering the hallway himself, he hires three explorers, Holloway Roberts, Jed Leeder and Wax Hook, to venture inside. What they find seems like an endless labyrinth of dark passages, and deeper still, they discover a massive staircase within a vast hall, with every room in the labyrinth shifting mysteriously. The hallway is empty, stripped

of any objects or recognizable architecture, adding to its eerie, unwelcoming presence. The expeditions into the house lead to death, the breakdown of a relationship and overwhelming fear. This unsettling environment deeply impacts everyone living in the house, especially Navidson and Karen's relationship. The whole ordeal is captured on video and still cameras, creating what is eventually known as The Navidson Record. The way this footage is edited plays a significant role in how we understand the novel's structure (Hamilton 3).

The second narrative layer of *House of Leaves* revolves around 'The Navidson Record', a supposed documentary that, as we come to learn, does not actually exist. This narrative is presented through the critical analysis of Zampanò, a mysterious and blind scholar who is unable to have ever seen the film he describes in meticulous detail. The irony of Zampanò's work lies in the fact that he is creating a comprehensive examination of a film that itself is a fabrication, further complicating the boundaries between reality and fiction. But what could possibly be a reality within the realm of the novel is that Zampanò most likely studied film his whole life. There were heaps of scattered papers and articles all filled with his notes on the subject but extremely well annotated just like The Navidson Record itself. However, an interesting thing is that for his reference supply in the text and the footnotes, Zampanò chooses both fictional and nonfictional sources that exist outside of the novel. Another enigmatic thing about this character is that he is found dead with claw marks on the floor next to his body. Since he appears to be dead from the beginning of the novel, the only way the reader interacts with Zampanò is through the manuscript and someone else's recollection of him, mostly Johnny's.

This brings us to the third narration. We are introduced to Zampanò's work through Johnny Truant, a young tattoo artist with a troubled past who discovers the incomplete manuscript after Zampanò's mysterious death. Johnny becomes increasingly absorbed in piecing together the scattered pages of Zampanò's work, which has been left in disarray, adding his extensive footnotes throughout the text. His commentary is chaotic and often digressive, revealing his own psyche as he becomes more entangled in the strange and obsessive world that Zampanò has created.

Johnny's life, filled with nights of excess and unruliness in Los Angeles' shameless and hedonistic lifestyle, contrasts sharply with the scholarly tone of Zampanò's manuscript. Yet, as Johnny dives deeper into the task of assembling The Navidson Record, he begins to experience

disturbing nightmares, flashbacks of his traumatic childhood and a growing sense of paranoia and terror. His footnotes become increasingly erratic, spanning pages and reflecting his psychological descent as he confronts his own inner demons. In this way, Johnny's narrative complements Zampanò's commentary, but also expands the labyrinthine nature of the story. This lurs the reader into a web of delicate complexities such as fact and fiction while highlighting the fragility of human perception.

The fourth level of narration, consists only of footnotes, appendices and an index compiled by unnamed editors. One of the novel's longest appendices comes from Truant's mother, Pelafina Lièvre. She was placed in an insane asylum when Truant was very young and she wrote him letters throughout his whole life. This allows us another insight into Johnny's psyche but also showcases the deterioration of Pelafina's. Some authors believe that this can be seen as a level of narration by itself.

Pressman in her paper *House of Leaves: Reading the Networked Novel* brings our attention to an elaborate visual vocabulary Danielewski uses to convey the novel's multilayered narrative, utilizing what can be described as hypertextual heteroglossia. This term refers to the presence of multiple voices and styles within a single text, creating a rich blend of different narrative perspectives that overlap and interact in complex ways. The novel achieves this through its innovative use of typography, layout and font choices, which distinguish between different narrators and narrative levels.

The distinct fonts assigned to each narrative voice serve not only to guide the reader through the convoluted structure but also to reinforce the thematic content of the novel. Zampanò's academic analysis appears in Times Roman, a font traditionally associated with formal, printed media such as newspapers and academic journals, emphasizing his role as a scholarly commentator. In contrast, Johnny Truant's footnotes are presented in Courier, a typewriter-style font that reflects his role as the intermediary or 'courier' of the manuscript, while also invoking a sense of immediacy and personal narrative. The editorial notations are in Bookman, a font that conveys authority and reliability, adding yet another layer to the text's complex narrative structure (Pressman 4-5).

This typographical diversity is more than a stylistic choice. It serves to remind readers that the text is a constructed, material object created through the interaction of multiple authors and transcription methods. The novel's form mirrors its content by embodying the very fragmentation and multiplicity it explores. One aspect of my thesis is built on this alone. The novel does not only explore the fragmentation in storytelling but represents a fragmented psyche. The physical act of reading requires navigating footnotes, turning the book to read upside-down text and interpreting gaps in the narrative. This forces readers to actively engage with the text, mirroring the characters' journey through the house's labyrinth, but also to be able to follow the layered commentary that surrounds and disrupts the narrative.

Structurally, the novel functions as a hypertext, with interwoven narratives connected through an extensive system of footnotes. Notably, every instance of the word 'house' appears in blue, resembling an active hyperlink typically seen on the Internet. *House of Leaves* not only mirrors the infrastructure of the Internet but also extends this connection through URLs on its covers, linking the physical text to a real-time, digital component. This strategy engages a digitally literate audience and exemplifies what J. Paul Hunter describes as a "present-centered form of narrative," wherein the novel adapts to emerging narrative and media formats to stay relevant and connected to contemporary storytelling techniques (Pressman 3).

*House of Leaves* is both a gripping narrative and a strongly theoretical work. It deals with the intersections of the 'real' world of the readers of the novel, and the metanarratives of science and art that attempt to offer conceptual explanations of the world. The novel therefore builds a textual scaffolding which Danielewski uses to support a discussion of current epistemological theories, some of which remain stable and some of which collapse. The 'house' (Navidson's labyrinth and all it represents) is a small, visible part of a much larger structure, most of which is (metaphorically) hidden deep underground. These are depths which are often identifiable in myths, for instance the myth of the Minotaur. *House of Leaves* is a myth-making text insofar as it reveals the ideology underlying both present and past mythologies (Jeffery 4).

Film also plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative style and thematic content of *House of Leaves*. Danielewski's use of cinematic techniques, such as jump cuts, shifts in perspective and the detailed description of camera movements, creates a unique reading experience that blurs the

boundaries between literature and film. The novel's structure mimics that of a film, with its fragmented narrative and multiple points of view, reflecting the influence of cinematic storytelling on the author's approach (McCaffery and Gregory 101).

The significance of the film in *House of Leaves* extends beyond its narrative style. The novel also engages with film theory, particularly the idea that film, like literature, is a constructed medium that shapes our perception of reality. By presenting "The Navidson Record" as a fictional documentary, Danielewski draws attention to the ways in which films can manipulate time, space and narrative to create a particular version of reality (McCaffery and Gregory 101). In this interview Danielewski also touches upon the connection between film and structure of the novel.

"The idea of how text might be placed on the page was something I'd always been interested in, probably due to all those discussions I'd had with my father about technical elements directors use to control the viewer's perceptions. But as you've recognized, the visual experiments in House of Leaves are mostly based on the grammar of film and the enormous foundation of theory established over the last century. There's a complicated craftsmanship involved in controlling the viewer's perception. It's a craft where details count" (McCaffery and Gregory 21).

Here is a great example of what Danielewski meant when he said this. As Navidson and his team end up deep in the House's labyrinth with a psychotic Holloway gunning for them and Jed already injured, the pages read like, each time you turn the page, it is the camera making the cut. Thus, from page 193 to 207, where the conclusion of one of the most dramatic moments in the novel takes place, each page serves as a frame, meaning there are mostly not more than a few words on the page. Then, just before you find out that Jed isn't safe and that Holloway's bullet leaves him "dead on the floor, a black pool of blood spilling out of him" (Danielewski 207), Danielewski cuts the scene and brings the reader's attention to a completely unimportant footnote of editorial correction of grammar and syntax ("To begin with; Typo. "T" should read "t" with a period following "with.""). The juxtaposition between the emotionally charged moment in the scene and the content and the tone of the footnote leaves you completely perplexed.

Besides being startling, this passage illustrates the novel's control of different discourses as well as its precise display of technical matters which makes the awfulness of what happened

have an even greater emotional impact as you backtrack to realize what transpired in the actual scene (McCaffery and Gregory 124).

Moreover, the novel's engagement with film theory reflects its broader theoretical concerns about the nature of representation and perception. In film theory, the camera lens can often be seen as both a tool for revealing truth and a means of constructing reality. This is mirrored in the novel where Navidson's obsession with filming his family's life reflects his desire to capture and control reality through the camera, even as the house itself resists any attempt to be fully documented or understood. To follow Grierson's concept of a documentary in which he states it is a form of "creative treatment of actuality" (8), the constant framing, editing and re-editing of The Navidson Record suggest that any representation, whether in film or text, is inherently partial and constructed, always subject to the limitations and biases of its creator.

Even though this is true for the documentary in isolation, if we look at the *House of Leaves* as a whole, it is appropriate to mention how Danielewski not only gives us almost a bit too much insight but he also explicitly makes it known that he does not interpret his own work because he is "unwilling to compromise the thrill that comes when a reader privately uncovers a meaning not yet circulated" ( McCaffery and Gregory 122). Danielewski expects from his reader not only to believe in him, but also to try and follow his thoughts. The author himself gives an example from the book in the interview. It's in the way the word "snaps" appears on pages 294-296. A closer look over the pages allows the reader to recognize how these three pages blend cinematic and thematic ideas. The word "snaps" is literally fragmented across pages as follows - "sn" on page 294, a tilted "a" on 295, and "ps" on 296, visually representing the snapping of the rope. This visual break reflects not only the physical event but also suggests how words and themes can break in fragments, inviting fresh interpretations. The fragmented "snaps" can also be read backward as "spans," allowing it to simultaneously convey snapping and spanning. Thus, the word itself becomes a literal, thematic and semantic representation of the novel's unfolding events (McCaffery and Gregory 122).

With the conclusion that the author expects his readers to analyze *House of Leaves* in depth, I present a fresh perspective. However this novel is analyzed, all of them are focal points depending on the way it is read. In this thesis I provide insights into the novel's narrative, structure and characters as read through the lens of Jungian depth psychology. This chapter showed us some of

the most important parts and influences of the novel that have been analyzed in great detail in other academic texts. Further as this thesis progresses the analysis reveals how Jungian archetypes, with focus on the Shadow, and psychological processes shape the characters, drive the plot and contribute to the novel's overall meaning. I also touch on the novel's tension between its postmodernist narrative style and Jungian theories, suggesting that the text both engages with and resists traditional psychological frameworks.

# 3. Introduction to Jungian Psychology

Approaching such a complex and broad topic as Jungian psychology warrants for introduction about Jung from other academic minds. His work is extensive and difficult so before delving into an important surface level overview, here is a quote that in my opinion embodies Carl Jung and his work.

"Carl Gustav Jung was a psychiatrist and psychotherapist. He was a scientific thinker but also a dealer in visions, dreams and imagination. He came to believe that who we are as human beings is powerfully influenced, even determined, by unconscious forces outside of our awareness. At the same time, he strongly promoted the vital task of the individual to find out who they are and become that person as fully as anyone can become within the three score years and ten of an average human lifespan. Jung saw this as our central task in life, our task of individuation" (Goss 6).

Stein, in his introduction, shows Jung as a systematic thinker with a guarded yes. His theory is coherent in a way that Switzerland is a coherent country even though the people speak four different languages, however, Jung did not think systematically in the way philosophers do. Rather he claims to be an empirical scientist so "his theorizing matches the dis-orderliness of the empirical world". He lays out big concepts, gives out some details, then proceeds to other concepts as his stream of consciousness navigates him. Since he repeats himself and backtracks often, it makes for difficulty in reading him (11).

However, Carl Jung is still a pioneering figure in 20th-century psychology as he introduced innovative concepts that profoundly influenced the understanding of the human psyche and its complexities. Perhaps Jung's most significant contribution was his emphasis on the psychological value of spiritual experiences during a time when traditional religious beliefs and practices were in decline across Europe. The center of Jung's theory system was the respect for the entirety of an individual's experience, advocating for the integration rather than the pathologization of all aspects of one's personality, including the shadow aspects, those aggressive, envious or destructive qualities, alongside spiritual yearnings. He saw these spiritual inclinations as expressions of the

psyche's natural drive towards wholeness, necessitating an expansion of the self beyond everyday perceptions.

Although Jung began as an empirical psychologist within Freud's circle in Vienna, he gradually went off to develop the theory of individuation as a practical alternative to his master's method. At first, he used some examples from actual patients, but then he became more and more interested in examining the role of archetypes in literary and other texts (Leigh 97). Later in his life, Jung turned his attention to the study of religion, concentrating on its mythic patterns and their connection to his psychological theory of individuation, which was influenced by the archetypes of the collective unconscious. As a psychologist, however, he distinguished his interest in religion from that of Freud, whom he saw as reducing religious experiences to infantile sexual sources (Leigh 100).

Jung's investigation of the psyche was also highly personal. His exploration of the unconscious mind was not only carried out on patients and experimental subjects, but he also analyzed himself. In fact, for a time he became his own prime subject of study. By carefully observing his own dreams and developing the technique of active imagination, he found a way to enter more deeply into the hidden spaces of his inner world. To understand his patients and himself, he developed a method of interpretation, he called amplification, that drew upon comparative studies in human culture, myth and religion. In fact, he used any and all materials from world history that had a bearing on mental processes (Stein 5).

Carl Jung's major contribution to psychology was his focus on the importance of the individual, particularly the meaning and purpose of both the inner and outer life on both conscious and unconscious levels. For Jung, the ultimate goal for any person is to integrate the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche, recognizing that these elements operate on both a personal and collective level.

Jung emphasizes that there are three psychic levels: (1) consciousness, (2) the personal unconscious and (3) the collective unconscious. Consciousness seems to stream into us from outside in the form of sense-perceptions. We see, hear, taste and smell the world, and so are conscious of the world (*Portable Jung* 25).

According to Jung, on the first level, the personal unconscious consists of all the contents that lost their intensity and therefore were forgotten or the contents that were repressed and on the second level, it is content in the form of sense-impressions that was never intense enough to reach consciousness but somehow entered the psyche.

On the other hand, the collective unconscious is presented as the inherited repository of potential forms of representation which is not individual but forms the true foundation of the individual psyche and is in fact common to all people, perhaps even animals (Jung, *Portable Jung* 38). Jung goes on to explain that the collective unconscious appears to consist of "mythological motifs or primordial images" which is exactly why the myths of various cultures serve as its true representatives. From this, Jung concludes mythology as a whole can be regarded as a kind of projection of the collective unconscious (*Portable Jung* 39).

In conversations with his patients and while analyzing himself, Jung recognizes that the psychological conditions of a given environment inevitably leave behind similar mythical imprints. Situations that pose threats, whether to the body or the soul, evoke emotionally charged fantasies, mostly in dreams. As these scenarios tend to recur across time, they lead to the formation of archetypes, a term Jung uses to describe these recurring mythological motifs (*Portable Jung* 42). He also said they are "simply the forms which the instincts assume" (*Portable Jung* 44), leading to a definition from *Psychoanalytic terms and concepts* where Moore and Fine explain archetypes as an innate, inherited patterns of psychological functioning, closely connected to instinct. When activated, they manifest through behavior and emotion (18).

These archetypes often surface in dreams, myths, literature and other imaginative outlets. Some of the most important archetypes include the Persona (our social mask), the Shadow (our darker, hidden side), the Anima/Animus (the inner opposite-gendered aspect), the mother, the child, the wise old man and the Self, which represents the central goal of integration and wholeness. These archetypes play a key role in shaping not just individual development, but also the broader human experience (Leigh 96).

Jung wanted to create a complete map of the psyche, so before diving into unconsciousness, the ego-consciousness is a prime feature of the territory he was exploring and therefore needs to be defined. "Ego" is a technical term whose origin is the Latin word meaning "I". Consciousness is the state of awakeness and at its center there is an "I". (Stein 13). In his later work *Aion* Jung defines Ego as follows, "It forms, as it were, the centre of the field of consciousness; and, in so far as this comprises the empirical personality, the ego is the subject of all personal acts of consciousness" (*Portable Jung* 139). For Jung, the ego is a complex different from those of persona, shadow, anima/animus, etc. and is the central and the executive part of the personality. Beit-Hallahmi explains this in simple terms of personality dealing with reality through the ego. Also adding that another layer of unconscious processing plays a crucial role in shaping a person's observable behavior. At this deeper level, the ego manages unconscious anxiety that arises from within (274).

Originally, the term persona comes from the Latin word for the mask worn by actors in classical times. Therefore, persona represents the mask or face a person puts on to navigate the world. It can encompass elements such as gender identity, life stages (like adolescence), social roles or professional identities. Throughout a person's life, numerous personas are adopted and several can coexist at any given time. Jung viewed the persona as an archetype, indicating its universal and inevitable presence in human experience (Samuels et al 107). Persona is then the part of the personality developed and used in our interactions as our conscious outer face and our social mask. As Jung says in *Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious* "the persona is nothing real: it is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be" (*Portable Jung* 106).

According to Jung, the archetypes that are most empirically distinct are those that frequently and disturbingly impact the Ego. Among these, the Shadow, the Anima and the Animus are the most influential (*Portable Jung* 145). The Shadow, as described by Jung, represents the traits a person wishes not to acknowledge but inherently possesses. These are the aspects of ourselves that we deny, are unaware of or conceal from others. In some cases, the Shadow may also contain positive qualities that have been suppressed, leaving them inaccessible and unused.

The Shadow presents a moral challenge that confronts the entire ego-personality, as acknowledging it requires significant moral effort. Becoming aware of the Shadow entails accepting the darker aspects of one's personality as genuine and real. This recognition is a fundamental prerequisite for any form of self-awareness, which is why it often encounters considerable resistance (*Portable Jung* 145).

The role of the Shadow within is very well explained in the *International dictionary of psychoanalysis*. At times, the Shadow is concealed, while at other times it is rejected or suppressed by the conscious Ego. When suppressed, it is driven into the unconscious, where it operates with its own energy, often manifesting as a complex. For instance, individuals might fully recognize traits like greed or aggression within themselves but successfully conceal these aspects from others behind the mask of the Persona. Alternatively, these traits may be repressed entirely, becoming unconscious, which allows the individual to restore their sense of moral ego (Dieckmann 1596).

Everyone possesses a Shadow, and the less it is acknowledged in conscious awareness, the darker and more burdensome it becomes. The Shadow also varies greatly from person to person, shaped by the family, community and cultural norms in which an individual is raised. If a sense of inferiority is recognized consciously, there is an opportunity to address and improve it. Being conscious of the Shadow keeps it in contact with other interests and allows for ongoing modifications. However, when it is repressed and cut off from consciousness, it remains unaltered and may erupt unexpectedly in moments of unawareness. In any case, the Shadow creates an unconscious obstacle, often sabotaging even our best intentions (Jung *Collected Works 11* 76, par. 131).

Going into details about Anima/Animus is not required for this thesis, but as mentioned above these archetypes also have a great influence on the Ego and as such need to be at least defined. The Anima and Animus are archetypal structures within the collective unconscious, each serving as a counterpart to an individual's conscious gender identity. The Anima represents the unconscious feminine aspect in a man, while the Animus embodies the unconscious masculine aspect in a woman (Meador 86).

As Jung mostly analyzed himself for this concept, his writings focus more on the Anima therefore leaving the process of individuation for women lacking in a sense. However, acknowledging his bias towards masculine, Jung encourages his wife and other female researchers to look for their Animus (Yeoman and Lu 128).

Since it has been established that the archetypes influence Ego, it is important to mention that Ego also has to be seen as responsive to the demands of something superior. This is the Self, the ordering principle of the entire personality. The relation of the Self to the Ego is compared to that of "the mover to the moved". For Jung, the Self represents the deeper aspect of the psyche, embodying the totality and unity of an individual. The primary goal of psychological development is to integrate all elements of the psyche, both conscious and unconscious, through a process Jung called individuation. This journey toward becoming a fully conscious and unified Self typically unfolds in two stages - youth and middle age (Leigh 96). "Empirically, therefore, the self appears as a play of light and shadow, although conceived as a totality and unity in which the opposites are united" (Jung *Collected Works* 6 636, par. 790). The concept of the Self then suggests an enduring, ontological identity that can be discovered or cultivated through the individuation process, offering a deeper sense of wholeness and authenticity.

Besides individuation and archetypes, which are central to Jung's studies, several other concepts from his body of work have gained significant influence, both in psychological practice and in everyday life. Some of these ideas include psychological types, dream analysis and myth, all of which offer profound insights into the workings of the human psyche. Jung's theory of psychological types introduced the concepts of introversion and extroversion, as well as four cognitive functions: thinking, feeling, sensing and intuiting. These types provide a framework for understanding individual differences in perception, decision-making and interaction with the world. While dream analysis and myth are directly connected to unconscious and realization of archetypes. Jung believed dreams provided access to the unconscious and served as a bridge to archetypal symbols. Mythology was regarded as a collective projection of the unconscious, reflecting archetypal patterns shared by humanity. Myths not only provide a lens for understanding ancient cultures but also serve as a framework for interpreting contemporary narratives, including literature and film.

## 4. Interpretation of Jungian Shadow Archetype in the *House of Leaves*

The fragmented and labyrinthine narrative of *House of Leaves* provides an intriguing framework for examining the interaction between psychological processes, archetypal structures and postmodern theories of meaning. At the center of this analysis lies Carl Jung's Shadow archetype, one of his most influential concepts, representing the hidden, repressed or denied aspects of the psyche. These qualities, avoided or rejected by the conscious mind, remain active in the unconscious, influencing behaviors, thoughts and emotions. As Jung argues, "the unconscious is the source of the instinctual forces of the psyche and of the forms or categories that regulate them, namely the archetypes" (*Portable Jung* 45). For Jung, confronting the Shadow is essential for individuation, a process that demands individuals integrate the darker, fragmented aspects of their psyche to achieve wholeness. In *House of Leaves*, this psychological tension is externalized in the novel's characters, its labyrinthine house and its fragmented structure.

The Shadow archetype is not only a psychological force but also a dynamic construct whose manifestations depend on cultural, historical and individual contexts. As Hillman explains, archetypes extend beyond the confines of the individual psyche, linking with "culture and imagination" to manifest in "physical, social, linguistic, aesthetic, and spiritual modes" (1). This duality between the universal and the specific is particularly evident in *House of Leaves*, where the Shadow operates both as an internal psychological force and an externalized symbolic presence. The house, with its infinite corridors and shifting, unknowable spaces, mirrors the disorienting qualities of the Shadow. Its chaotic and destabilizing nature forces characters like Will Navidson, Johnny Truant and Karen Green to confront their repressed fears, guilt and trauma, exposing the psychological fragmentation at the heart of the novel.

However, *House of Leaves* complicates traditional Jungian frameworks by situating its exploration of the Shadow within a postmodern narrative structure. Derrida's deconstruction and Lacan's mirror stage theory offer tools for analyzing how the novel destabilizes meaning and reconfigures archetypes as fluid, context-dependent constructs. Lacan's mirror stage emphasizes

the misrecognition inherent in the formation of the Self, where the individual perceives a coherent identity through an idealized image that is ultimately illusory. This concept challenges the stability of Jung's archetypes by suggesting that even these universal forms are subject to the same processes of misrecognition and fragmentation as the Self. This perspective aligns with Derrida's notion of différance, "neither a word nor a concept" (lxxi), which reveals how meaning is perpetually deferred, resisting fixed interpretation. In *House of Leaves*, this dynamic is evident as the Shadow archetype transcends the psychological, becoming a destabilizing narrative element that reflects the fragmented and chaotic nature of both language and the unconscious.

Furthermore, the novel's fragmented and nonlinear structure mirrors the disorienting effects of digital mediation, bringing readers closer to the Shadow through their engagement with its unconventional form. Katherine Hayles observes how the reader's navigation of the complex functionalities affects what the text signifies, which can be applied to the hypertextual and multi-layered narrative of *House of Leaves*. Readers navigating the text's footnotes, typographical shifts and fragmented narratives are forced to confront the instability of meaning, much like confronting the Shadow in Jungian terms. The house parallels the experience of engaging with the novel itself, where readers are immersed in a psychological and symbolic journey that mirrors the challenges of individuation.

This thesis bridges Jung's archetypal psychology with Derrida's deconstruction and insights from digital media theory to explore how *House of Leaves* interrogates the fragmented psyche. By analyzing the Shadow archetype within the novel's characters and narrative structure and this work demonstrates how the text embodies the tensions between timeless archetypal patterns and contemporary anxieties about meaning, identity and psychological processes in a digitally mediated postmodern world.

## 4.1. The Shadow in the Characters

We meet John Truant in the introduction and by his first words, "I still get nightmares", we are aware that what awaits us is a troubled character. He warns us against the horrors of what follows, "It will get so bad you'll be afraid to look away, you'll be afraid to sleep" and how things will inevitably change because "beyond any cause you can trace, you'll suddenly realize things are not how you perceived them to be at all" (xxii).

We continue to follow his chaotic life as he explores his repressed trauma through his obsession with Zampano's manuscript. He is a deeply complex and unreliable narrator whose psychological descent parallels the dark, labyrinthine mysteries of the book itself.   Johnny is deeply haunted by his extreme family issues as he was abandoned by his father and abused by his mother. As Johnny recounts the memories through his follow-up writing on the manuscript, she tried to kill him and then ended up in a psych ward. This is reflected in his destructive behavior - pathological liar, inability to hold down a relationship while slowly losing his job as his substance abuse gets worse. His discovery of Zampanò's manuscript amplifies his instability, as the manuscript's content begins to blur with his reality, drawing him into the same existential dread that surrounds the Navidson family.

Johnny's Shadow manifests in his paranoia, nightmares and fragmented, inconsistent narrative, all signs of his inner turmoil. As he edits the manuscript, it does not take him long to feel another presence around him. Reading about Heidegger's uncanny affects him and physical symptoms of sickness start to present which leads him to his first encounter with his Shadow. He sweats, has difficulty breathing and in his haze in the hallway of the tattoo shop he works in, he smells something "bitter & foul, something inhuman, reeking with so much rot & years, telling me in the language of nausea that I'm not alone" (26). Gripped with fear, he does turn around to "discover only a deserted corridor, or was it merely a recently deserted corridor?, this thing, whatever it had been, obviously beyond the grasp of my imagination or for that matter my emotions, having departed into alcoves of darkness, seeping into corners & floors, cracks & outlets, gone even to the walls" (27).

As time passes by, Johnny only descends further into madness, his hallucinations get worse, his descriptions more manic, his psyche dividing into fragments he cannot quite grasp. At first, he chalks it up to his excessive drug and alcohol use, but at some point, he had to face his reality. It can be seen in this passage below.

"Sadly enough, despite all this—even six weeks without alcohol, drugs or sex—the attacks persist. Mostly now when I'm sleeping. I suddenly jerk awake, unable to breathe, bound in ribbons of darkness, drenched in sweat, my heart dying to top two hundred. I've no recollection what vision has made me so apoplectic, but it feels like the hinges must have finally failed, whatever was trying to get in, at last succeeding, instantly tearing into me, and though I'm still conscious, slashing my throat with those long fingers and ripping my ribs out one by one with its brutal jaws. […] Right now the only thing that keeps me going is some misunderstood desire to finish The Navidson Record. It's almost as if I believe questions about the house will eventually return answers about myself, though if this is true, and it may very well not be, when the answers arrive the questions are already lost." (Danielewski 296-297)

Here we can notice Johnny in the middle of the process of integration. Even though Johnny himself does not call it Shadow as Jung would, he recognizes it as *something* and it is "getting in". He believes that the questions about the house will lead to himself as if "there's some kind of connection between my state of mind and The Navidson Record" (25). This sets the stage for understanding how the house acts as both a reflective surface and a transformative space. For both Will and Johnny, the house manifests uniquely, presenting challenges that drive them into the deepest, most hidden corners of their psyche. It is not merely a physical structure, it is a living entity that adapts to the fears, desires and unresolved traumas of those who enter. When Johnny confesses that he is "lost inside and no longer convinced there's a way out" (300), it parallels Will's own descent into the labyrinth, where the staircase stretches impossibly, and the rope snaps, trapping him within its shifting dimensions. The house "wants" Will inside, just as it seizes Johnny in his spiraling psyche, refusing to let either escape until they face their inner shadows.

Johnny projects his repressed fears onto the manuscript, but it does more than serve as a vessel for his projections. It functions as a mirror, reflecting his fragmented identity and the chaos of his mind. This dynamic collapses the boundary between internal and external realities, creating a disorientation that Johnny himself articulates, "What I hoped to lock out I've only locked in here

with me" (Danielewski 326). This moment highlights the interplay between Johnny's personal Shadow and the manuscript's role as an external trigger. However, the novel's postmodern structure resists a purely Jungian interpretation. The layers of text, footnotes and fragmented narratives create an illusion of depth rather than revealing an authentic, cohesive ego identity. This aligns with Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, where the ego is constructed through a process of misrecognition, reflecting an idealized but ultimately fragmented self (76).

The Shadow's archetypal imagery permeates Johnny's narrative, manifesting in hallucinations as murky presence in the dark with a menacing growl, but also as human with "extremely long fingers" and the eyes that "have no whites…they glisten they glisten red" (71). However, as Johnny appears an excellent writer, his Shadow also appears by covering him in black ink and "words filling [his] head". He is assaulted with "shrapnel like syllables" and "stories heard but not recalled". While he recognizes the words are incoherent, he is afraid they are not without meaning. After the episode he realizes that he is not what he used to be.

Johnny's friend Lude also makes a comment on Johnny's manic drawings, noticing just "hundreds of black, empty fucking rooms" (324). It is an image that captures both his internal void and the collective nature of the Shadow. In Jungian terms, "everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is" (*Collected Works 11* 76, par. 131). The house amplifies these repressed elements, magnifying Johnny's and Will's personal Shadows while simultaneously tapping into the collective unconscious.

Marie-Louise von Franz illustrates in *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales* a sentiment that can be applied to the house's behavior. She writes, "When parts of the personal shadow are not sufficiently integrated, the collective shadow can sneak through this door," which in context can be understood how the house functions as a trigger and amplifier for the negative traits. The house does not create darkness, it draws it out, tailoring its manifestation to the unresolved fears and desires of its occupants. For Johnny, it amplifies his paranoia, his fractured identity and his inability to distinguish reality from hallucination. For Will, who will be discussed later, it manifests as the physical labyrinth that mirrors his internal struggle for control and understanding.

The house's capacity to manifest differently for everyone supports the thesis that it operates as a representation of the collective unconscious. While Jung's collective unconscious is a repository of archetypes shared across humanity, the house takes on the role of the collective Shadow. It is a shared space where personal and collective repressions bleed together, creating a dynamic of individual and universal fears. In this sense, the house functions less as a space to integrate the Shadow and more as a mirror that exposes its overwhelming presence. The house's amorphous nature destabilizes the characters' attempts to construct coherent narratives, both about themselves and the space itself. Johnny's obsessive effort to organize Zampanò's fragmented manuscript mirrors his attempt to reassemble his fractured psyche. Yet, as Jeffrey points out, "this lends another aspect to Johnny's attempts to compile Zampanò's work into some sort of coherent whole, to de-fragment the narrative. He is in effect seeking to overcome the effects of the change in the means of distribution of literature from print format to web-based…to overcome the fragmentation of Zampanò's and his own identity-narratives" (111).

As he pours over Zampanò's fragmented notes and annotations, the text seems to take on a life of its own, mirroring and magnifying his paranoia. The more Johnny tries to impose order on the manuscript, the more chaotic his mental state becomes, as though the very act of engaging with the text pulls him deeper into the labyrinth of his mind. The manuscript does not just reflect his fears; it amplifies them, functioning as both a mirror and a gateway to the darkest corners of his psyche. His breakdown, a complete surrender to the fragmented and chaotic, is not just a personal failing but a reflection of the house's ultimate power which is to destabilize and deconstruct any attempt at coherence, whether in the self, in the text, or in the labyrinth.

The house, then, becomes a liminal space that resists resolution. It destabilizes the boundaries between personal and collective, between self and other. By functioning as both a manifestation of the collective unconscious and a Lacanian symbolic realm, the house forces its inhabitants to confront the reality that identity is not fixed but endlessly constructed and reconstructed through external and internal interactions. Johnny's descent, culminating in his complete unraveling near the end of the novel, is a representation of the impossibility of fully integrating the Shadow in a space that continually shifts, defers meaning and amplifies the

unresolved. In the end, the house does not give answers, it only exposes questions, mirroring the novel's postmodern refusal to offer closure or singular meaning.

Will Navidson, the central character of the manuscript and Johnny's mirror, finds himself in a similar predicament. His relationship with the house on Ash Tree Lane reflects his personal confrontation with the Shadow as well as an archetypal journey through the unconscious. The labyrinth of the house, with its shifting architecture and void-like darkness, represents the unconscious, therefore Will (and the rest of the team) start their journey as soon as they step into the newly appeared hallway. His descent into the psyche's uncharted depths is where he must face his unresolved guilt, fractured relationships and failure to reconcile his internal conflicts.

Moving to a new home, trying to start over with his family is characterized as escaping his underlying issues, however, his unconscious intervenes, forcing him to confront his reality. As Jung says in *Aion,* "It is often tragic to see how blatantly a man bungles his own life and the lives of others yet remains totally incapable of seeing how much the whole tragedy originates in himself, and how he continually feeds it and keeps it going" (*Portable Jung* 147). His inability to recognize his own shortcomings to connect his external accomplishments with internal desires drives him into another obsession where he meets his Shadow.

The Shadow, "the thing a person has no wish to be" (Jung *Collective Works* 16, par. 470), includes all suppressed and unacknowledged aspects of the Self. For Navidson, the center is his guilt over the starving girl he once photographed, a moment that continues to haunt him and shapes his perception of morality and control. This guilt is reflected in his struggles to sustain relationships with Karen, Tom (his brother) and others, his obsession with control and measurement and fear of failure and incompletion.

Even though they agreed "Karen would refrain from relying on other men to mollify her insecurities if Navidson curbed his own risk-lust and gave domesticity a real shot, […] the appearance of the hallway, however, tests those informal vows. Navidson finds himself constantly itching to leave his family for that place just as Karen discovers old patterns surfacing in herself" (Danielewski 82).

The house and its inexplicable, shifting architecture represent a metaphorical externalization of his inner conflict and draws him into a labyrinthine confrontation. Still, Navidson did not feel the pull from the endless darkness filled hallway because he thought he would finally face his inner turmoil. He wanted to go inside because of his primal need to investigate something new, to find out the answers to all the questions that suddenly appeared. Later, even after four explorations, deaths of his teammates and absence of his partner, Navidson goes back because "he wanted to get a better picture" (Danielewski 418). Will going into the labyrinth even though he promised Karen he would not is a typical relapse of an addict. While inside of the labyrinth, Navidson himself comments, "I must be nuts to enjoy this so much" (Danielewski 462).

However, from his first exploration when he entered the hallway alone, he is unable to ignore the call of his Shadow. Danielewski writes, "Navidson keeps his attention focused on the floor ahead of him, and no doubt because he keeps looking down, the floor begins to assume a new meaning. [...] Suddenly immutable silence rushes in to replace what had momentarily shattered it. Navidson freezes, unsure whether or not he really just heard something growl" (67). The growl, a manifestation of his repressed fears, signals the Shadow's active engagement, demanding Navidson's acknowledgment and confrontation. However, this confrontation is not solely his own. It affects those around him, particularly Karen, whose growing fear of the house parallels Navidson's descent into obsession. It also affects Johnny Truant and other readers by proxy.

Danielewski frequently emphasizes Navidson's growing alienation from himself and those he loves. The camera, a tool of control and perspective in his professional life, becomes a witness to his disintegration. By documenting the house's shifts, Navidson attempts to impose a rational framework upon the irrational. Yet, as the house resists measurement and defies logic, Navidson's own sense of control and meaning becomes destabilized. His recordings are less about capturing the truth and more about confronting the void and finding the meaning of it. This can take on a postmodernist look that there indeed is nothing but darkness.

"Darkness is impossible to remember. Consequently cavers desire to return to those unseen depths where they have just been. It is an addiction. No one is ever satisfied. Darkness never

satisfies. Especially if it takes something away which it almost always invariably does" which brings up the belief that "Navidson began believing darkness could offer something other than itself" but "even the brightest magnesium flare can do little against such dark except blind the eyes of the one holding it. Thus one craves what by seeing one has in fact not seen" (Danielewski 387).

However if we consider his obsession with discovering whether the labyrinth holds anything of significance, as seen through his analyzed dreams, one of imaginary researchers in the manuscript gives a good explanation. The three dreams that were analyzed were "previously planted by the house in his unconsciousness" which suggested to Navidson the possibility that "he could locate either within himself or within that vast missing some emancipatory sense to put to rest his confusions and troubles, even put to rest the confusions and troubles of others, a curative symmetry to last the ages" (Danielewski 402). This passage encapsulates the psychological need Navidson faces, seeking answers not just from the house, but from within himself. As Danielewski writes, "for Navidson to properly escape the house he must first reach the understanding about his own life, one he still quite obviously lacks" (399).

The house's silence and its refusal to provide answers are central to its connection to Navidson's Shadow. In one of his moments of despair, Navidson asks, "How the fuck did I end up here?" The house responds with nothingness, "resounding silence. No divine attention. Not even an amaurotic guide" (Danielewski 21). This reflects the solitary and self-directed nature of confronting one's Shadow since it offers no external guidance or resolution. Instead, Navidson must navigate this psychological space himself, with the house manifesting his unarticulated fears and doubts. As we follow Will through his expeditions, we can notice he develops his own theories and goes through acceptance that he needs to look inward, "Soon though he grows less concerned about where he is and becomes more consumed by who he once was" (Danielewski 473) and then the house lets him out.

At the end he never finds out "why" and it stays with him to haunt him. "I kept looking for assurances, for that gentle ending, but I never found it. Maybe because I know that place is still there. And it always will be there" (Danielewski 527). Some would argue this perpetual existence of the house signifies the unresolved nature of his Shadow, forever demanding engagement even though the house dissolved in front of their eyes (Danielewski 524). Although the labyrinth forces

him to reckon with aspects of his psyche, he fails to fully integrate his Shadow, as evidenced by his inability to leave the house behind mentally even after physically escaping it. His compulsion to return reflects the unfinished nature of his psychological journey.

On the other hand, Navidson's journey through the house parallels what Jung would call a process of individuation. His confrontation with the Shadow culminates in the climactic moment when he is forced to acknowledge his vulnerability and dependence on others. Karen's intervention, her willingness to re-enter the house to save him, serves as a counterpoint to his isolation. The Shadow, then, is not something Navidson overcomes but integrates. He learns that survival and meaning require surrendering control and embracing mutual dependence. "Navidson's troubles may not have created the house, but they did ultimately shape the way he faced it" (Danielewski 22).

Zampanò's framing of the house as a projection of the psyche reinforces its connection to Navidson's Shadow. While the house's horrors are not exclusively tied to him, "Navidson was not the first to live in the house and encounter its peril" (Danielewski 21), its mutations mirror the psychological pain of each inhabitant. "[...] quite a few people have slept and suffered within those walls. If the house were indeed the product of psychological agonies, it would have to be the collective product of every inhabitant's agonies" (Danielewski 21). This aligns with the concept of the collective unconscious, where the Shadow archetype is shared but uniquely expressed. Sean Travers describes this admission as such, "Zampanò suggests that the house's mutations are a projection of the individual's 'psyche' because each person who enters the labyrinth appears to experience it differently" (qtd. in Hval 46-47). Thus, while the house embodies a universal Shadow, Navidson's experience within it is deeply personal, shaped by his internal struggles and unresolved conflicts.

Ultimately, Will Navidson's relationship with the house is a profound exploration of his Shadow. The house reflects both his personal unconscious and the collective Shadow, producing meaning only through the trials it imposes. The labyrinth transforms Navidson, but it also leaves him perpetually in its grasp, a shadow he cannot escape but must continue to confront.

Karen Green emerges as a complex character whose psychological conflicts, fears and actions showcase a different interaction with the Shadow archetype - that one of avoidance. Karen's fear of the house, particularly its dark and infinite spaces, symbolizes her psychological resistance to confronting these repressed elements. The house functions as an externalized representation of her Shadow, a space where unconscious fears take on a tangible form. In Jungian terms, here we make distinction between the archetype, Shadow, and the house, the archetypal image. Similarly, but evoking postmodern sense, this can be looked at through Lacan's dynamic of signifier and signified where the house, more specifically the labyrinthine shifting spaces, functions as a signifier for her unconscious fears and unresolved psychological conflicts. However, the signified, the meaning of these fears, remains perpetually deferred and elusive.

Karen's paralysis at the threshold of the house's mysterious hallway epitomizes her reluctance to engage with her Shadow. "Without hesitating, Navidson plunges in after them. Unfortunately the living room Hi 8 cannot follow him nor for that matter can Karen. She freezes on the threshold, unable to push herself into the darkness toward the faint flicker of light within. This is the first sign of Karen's chronic disability" (Danielewski 57). The hallway's darkness, its unknowable and infinite nature, mirrors the overwhelming threat posed by the repressed parts of her psyche. This chronic disability can be understood as both literal and symbolic. Her physical inability to cross into the house's deeper spaces represents a deeper resistance to acknowledging the Shadow's existence. By denying this essential part of her psyche, Karen perpetuates her inner fragmentation, leading to strained relationships and a lack of psychological integration.

Danielewski made it known to the reader that the concept of uncanny is significant for understanding of the house. Bemong in her essay, which focuses on uncanny, mentions how "it's extensively introduced, described and theoretically studied in the footnotes, where Danielewski combines the theories of Freud, Lacan and Heidegger". Uncanniness is especially important in Karen's point of view. While Will jumped at the first sight of something that would fuel his addiction, Karen expected this house to become her home. So as the house starts involuntarily changing shape, Karen feels uneasy and "in anxiety one feels uncanny […] here "uncanniness" also means "not-being-at-home"" (Danielewski 25). Karen refuses to even entertain the thought of an unknown and brings in everyday familiarity by catching up with a friend and shelving some

books. Bemong phrases this as Karen developing her own mechanism against this intrusion of the uncanny, the unhomely. "This demeanour is typified as denying as well as showing maturity, in which case maturity has everything to do with the acceptance of 'not knowing'". This very nicely corresponds to my interpretation of Karen's reticence as avoidance of her Shadow. And while Freud's characterization of the uncanny is everything that should have remained secret and concealed, Jung encourages the Shadow to come to light.

Karen not only refuses to discuss it, but she is in such strong opposition that she presents Will with an ultimatum - if he goes inside, she leaves. Navidson's pull to uncover the unknown was stronger than his partner's pleas who was gripped with terror. She stays with Navidson and the rest of the team, but rather reluctantly. However, as one part of the team gets lost, it is on her to help them maintain radio contact when Navi, Tom and Reston go save the rest.

"Karen may lose herself in resentment and fear, but the Navidson we see seems joyful, even euphoric, as he sets out with Reston and his brother to rescue Holloway and his team. It is almost as if entrance let alone a purpose—any purpose—in the face of those endless and lightless regions is reason enough to rejoice" (Danielewski 153). As the action unravels in the pits of the labyrinth, Karen is left alone with radio silence and then "she has every intention of leaving for New York that day" (Danielewski 316).

"After Navidson had vanished down the Spiral Staircase, Karen found herself trapped between two thresholds: one leading into the house, the other leading out of it. Even though she finally did succeed in leaving Ash Tree Lane and in some respects Navidson, she was still incapable of entering any sort of dark enclosed place. Even in New York she refused to take subways and always avoided elevators" (Danielewski 347).

It was not just Karen that exhibited symptoms of illness. One of the imaginary theorists made an anxiety scale "rating the level of discomfort experienced following any exposure to the house" (Danielewski 396). Alicia Rosenbaum, for instance, experiences sudden migraines, while Audrie McCullogh reports mild anxiety. Others suffer from persistent insomnia and nausea, which may contribute to a suspected ulcer. Billy Reston endures a constant sensation of cold and Daisy displays a mix of excitement, intermittent fever, scratches and echolalia. Kirby "Wax" Hook,

meanwhile, falls into a state of stupor marked by enduring impotence. Even children are not immune, as seen with Chad, who exhibits tangentiality, rising aggression and a tendency to wander persistently. Karen Green's symptoms include prolonged insomnia, frequent and unmotivated panic attacks, deep melancholia and a persistent cough. Finally, Will Navidson becomes consumed by obsessive behavior, accompanied by significant weight loss, night terrors, vivid dreams and periods of increased mutism. These varied responses highlight the house's profound and disturbing impact on the psyche and body, leaving no visitor unaffected.

This is directly tied to Jung perceiving neurosis as "the state of being at war with oneself". Anything that deepens this inner divide makes a person's condition worse, while anything that eases it helps with healing. This inner conflict comes from the realization, whether conscious or not, that a person has two opposing sides. This struggle might be between their sensual and spiritual selves, or between the Ego and the Shadow (Jung, *Modern Man* 273).

Hillman, one of most prominent Jung's students and analysts who moved Jung's depth psychology forward, observes how "symptoms remind us of the autonomy of the complexes; they refuse to submit to the ego's view of a unified person" (49). Jung defines complexes as "psychic contents which are outside the control of the conscious mind. They have been split off from consciousness and lead a separate existence in the unconscious" (*Modern Man* 90). Although complexes have repeating patterns and can be grouped around certain archetypes, their nucleus will always be an individual experience. When we deal with the Shadow, these repressed aspects of the psyche manifest as complexes when triggered by external events or interactions.

Karen's fear of the house can be seen as a manifestation of such an autonomous complex. Her paralysis at the threshold, explained by her claustrophobia and eventual illness (cancer), highlights how the Shadow operates independently, asserting itself through disruptive symptoms that defy her Ego's attempts at control, further fragmenting her psyche and relationships. Jung, additionally writes in one of his essays, "We carry our past with us, to wit, the primitive and inferior man with his desires and emotions, and it is only with an enormous effort that we can detach ourselves from this burden. If it comes to a neurosis, we invariably have to deal with a considerably intensified shadow.

And if such a person wants to be cured it is necessary to find a way in which his conscious personality and his shadow can live together" (*Collected Works* 11 par. 132).

Karen's cancer diagnosis at the end serves as the ultimate manifestation of her repressed Shadow. From a Jungian perspective, unaddressed psychological conflicts can somatize, emerging as physical ailments. Lacan's notion of jouissance, the excessive, often destructive pleasure tied to repression, offers another layer of interpretation. Karen's avoidance of the Shadow may have provided temporary relief but ultimately led to a destructive culmination in her illness.

Derrida's ideas on the materialization of abstract concepts further illuminate this transformation. The Shadow, as an archetype, is intangible until it is represented in some form, be it the dark hallway, Karen's fear or her illness. The cancer signifies the Shadow's insistence on being acknowledged, forcing Karen to confront what she has long denied.

Once Navidson decides he needs to go back alone for exploration #5, she returns from New York because "Karen may hate the house but she needs Navidson" (Danielewski 414). Her decision to enter the house is also archetypal in nature. Her act of self-sacrifice to save Navidson reflects a moment of redemption, a temporary transcendence of her earlier avoidance and denial. In Jungian terms, this can be seen as a symbolic union of opposites. The Shadow, previously repressed, is engaged with, albeit incompletely, through her willingness to face danger for the sake of another.

This act of redemption, however, does not erase her previous ignorance of the Shadow. Instead, it underscores the tension between her avoidance and this singular moment of bravery. Karen's journey into the house might symbolize an initial reconciliation with her Shadow, but it also reveals how such confrontations are often incomplete and contingent. Her willingness to enter the darkness for Navidson rather than for herself suggests that her relationship with the Shadow remains externalized and mediated through others.

## 4.2. The Shadow in the Physical and Narrative Structure

The house in *House of Leaves* serves as a projection of the collective unconscious, embodying the archetype of the Shadow which, as previously mentioned, covers the unknown, the repressed and the chaotic forces lurking beneath the surface of the psyche. This archetypal symbol functions on multiple levels, aligning with Jungian theories of the unconscious while reflecting the fragmented and unstable nature of postmodern identity. The house, much like the labyrinth it contains, resists simple categorization. It is both a physical space and a psychological landscape, shifting and endless, it forces its inhabitants to confront the darkest parts of themselves. This confrontation is neither uniform nor predictable, as the house's labyrinth manifests differently for Navidson, Tom, Holloway and the rest of the team, but it also has influence on anyone who comes in contact, namely Karen and Johnny. This way the subjectivity of the Shadow's influence is emphasized.

Navidson's attempt to document the house represents an effort to confront and integrate the Shadow. Yet even his systematic approach falters as the house resists understanding, expanding and shifting without warning. Tom, in contrast, embodies avoidance, using humor and detachment as defenses against the terror of the unknown. Holloway's paranoia, on the other hand, leads to complete psychological disintegration, a stark reminder of the destructive potential of a Shadow left unchecked. Each character's unique experience with the house reflects their differing levels of engagement with their unconscious, illustrating Jung's notion that the process of individuation is deeply personal and fraught with challenges (*Portable Jung* 122-123). The house's ability to adapt to the fears and perceptions of those who enter it suggests a dynamic interplay between conscious and unconscious forces, blurring the boundaries between the two.

The narrative structure of *House of Leaves* further reinforces this thematic exploration. Its fragmented format, extensive footnotes, nonlinear progression, shifting fonts, multiple points of view and random indexes, mirror the psychological disorientation experienced by the characters. The disjointed narrative serves as a structural representation of the Shadow, reflecting the fractured nature of the psyche when confronted by repressed fears and desires. This structural disorientation extends to the reader, who, like the characters, must navigate a labyrinth of text that defies easy

comprehension. The interaction between narrators, Navidson, Zampanò and Johnny, creates layers of meaning that further destabilize any sense of narrative or psychological wholeness. This multiplicity mirrors the layers of the Shadow itself, which resists simplification and demands engagement on multiple levels.

The house's labyrinthine spaces are particularly significant in their symbolic resonance. The initial, inhabited part of the house represents the conscious mind - a safe, known territory. However, the discovery of the hallway marks the intrusion of the unconscious, a space that is both alluring and terrifying. As the characters venture deeper into the labyrinth, they encounter not only the physical manifestation of the Shadow but also their own psychological limitations. The labyrinth, with its endless hallways and oppressive darkness, symbolizes the vast and unknowable depths of the unconscious. The sense of disorientation and fear that accompanies these explorations mirrors the psychological terror of confronting the Shadow. The house, like Lacan's mirror stage, represents an illusion of integration rather than a genuine reconciliation of opposing forces. In Lacan's theory, the mirror stage gives rise to a sense of a unified self, but this coherence is illusory, masking the fragmented and incomplete nature of the individual's identity (3). Similarly, the house offers the appearance of a stable space where the conscious and unconscious might merge, but this harmony is only superficial. As the unconscious Shadow from the labyrinth increasingly bleeds into the house, its sense of known territory resolves, revealing its inability to truly integrate the Shadow. The house's eventual collapse mirrors the dissolution of illusory coherence, exposing the fragility of its constructed boundaries.

Jungian theory suggests that the integration of the Shadow is essential for psychological wholeness, a process he describes as individuation. However, *House of Leaves* complicates this idea by highlighting the potential for disintegration when the Shadow overwhelms the Ego. The novel's fragmented structure and unresolved narrative threads mirror Derrida's concept of deconstruction, particularly his assertion that meaning is always deferred and unstable (Mendie 48-49). Just as Derrida suggests that language can never fully convey a fixed or universal truth, the house's shifting architecture resists comprehension and forces characters to confront the instability of their perceptions. One of Danielewski's imaginary research statements prompts the connection between the Shadow which needs to be individual and its mirroring onto the

architecture. "Our perception of the labyrinth is thus intrinsically unstable: change your perspective and the labyrinth seems to change!" (Danielewski 114).

When the Shadow and the deconstruction of meaning reciprocally influence each other, it creates a commentary on the fragility of identity and the difficulty of reconciling opposing forces within the psyche. Including both Jungian and postmodern perspectives in this analysis invites a deeper exploration of the consequences of confronting or avoiding the Shadow. While Jung emphasizes the importance of integration for achieving psychological wholeness, the novel suggests that such integration is not guaranteed and may even be impossible for some. Johnny's failure to integrate his Shadow leaves his psyche fragmented, reflecting the broader postmodern critique of psychological wholeness as an unattainable ideal. At the same time, Hillman's archetypal psychology offers a potential counterpoint, focusing on the symbolic and imaginal aspects of the Shadow rather than striving for integration (9). The house, as an archetypal image, embodies this tension, serving as both a representation of the collective unconscious and a site of individual psychological struggle.

Ultimately, the house's transformation from a personal to a collective symbol showcases the universality of the Shadow as the archetype but does not negate the primary role of the archetypal image. As the boundaries between narrators, characters and readers dissolve, the house becomes a shared space of psychological confrontation. The novel's fragmented structure, shifting perspectives, and unresolved tensions invite readers to engage with their own Shadows, mirroring the characters' struggles within the labyrinth. The question of whether the Shadow can be integrated or whether it will inevitably destabilize the psyche remains open, reflecting the novel's alignment with postmodern uncertainty. In this way, *House of Leaves* challenges us to reconsider our relationship with the Shadow: do we accept it, fear it, or attempt to deny its existence? The outcome, as the novel demonstrates, is as varied as the individuals who encounter it, leaving us with the unsettling realization that the only certainty is the Shadow itself.

## 4.3. Non-Linear Digital Mediation in Connection to the Shadow

*House of Leaves* exists at the intersection of timeless Jungian archetypes and historically specific digital (postmodern) structures, by embedding these universal symbols within the postmodern framework. The novel's non-linear structure scattered in narrational fragments mirrors the unconscious's timeless, non-linear processes, suggesting that digital mediation brings readers into closer contact with archetypal experiences.

Archetypes transcend cultural and historical boundaries, representing deep, unconscious truths while the novel's digital inspired form reflects the contemporary subjectivity, marked by fragmentation, multiplicity and a sense of disconnection. *House of Leaves* bridges these perspectives, sharing how universal psychological processes manifest in a specific cultural and historical moment.

Jung's concept of archetypes as universal patterns emerging from the collective unconscious offers a framework for understanding how the Shadow operates within *House of Leaves*. As Jung explains, archetypes regulate the instinctual forces of the psyche through dynamic and symbolic forms (*Portable Jung* 45). However, Frye's description of archetypes as "associative clusters" that are contextually flexible (102) aligns more closely with the novel's fragmented, postmodern form. The house in *House of Leaves* exemplifies an archetypal image of the Shadow but its digital-inspired, hypertextual structure deconstructs this image, presenting it as a mutable, non-linear construct rather than a fixed symbol.

As the novel reflects the Internet, in his paper, among other commentaries about social conditions the novel reflects, Jeffery goes into a deep exploration of hypertext and reality. However, he takes it in the way it is concerned "with developments in the means of distribution and their effects on literature" (108).

The terms often used are the user interface and hypertext, which need to be briefly defined in the context important to the novel. The user interface can be explored in a random manner and its narratives can therefore be regarded as fragmentary while the hypertext (HTML) is structured according to the laws of Boolean algebra, each action so that a single misstep requires a restart (Jeffery 110). Therefore, beneath the surface of apparent random choice, there's a system of guided choice and limited possibilities for return once a choice is made. "The Internet then offers an

illusion of choice, as 'surfing' the web is guided by the HTML programming" (Jeffery 110). However, in the *House of Leaves* analysis usage of 'hypertext' refers to the user interface as it represents the way the reader is subtly guided to lose themselves in layers and layers of text in search of answers, just like Jung requires an individual to look for the hidden, accept and integrate it to make a whole Self.

While Jung is aware of the subconscious that subtly directs the narrative of the individual, primarily in the complexes, he does not account for the distraction and illusion of the outer world. He states, "that the complexes offer resistance to the conscious intentions," and "lead a separate existence in the unconscious, being at all times ready to hinder or to reinforce the conscious intentions" (*Modern Man* 90).

Lacan's concept of illusion highlights how individuals misrecognize themselves and their reality, constructing idealized perceptions through external roles and societal expectations (5). This is not that different from what Jung calls Persona, a mask an individual wears for the public. However, a similar notion arises when discussing the projections of the Shadow, only here "it is not the conscious subject but the unconscious which does the projecting" (*Portable Jung* 146). The individual does not make the projections, they meet them which alienates the subject from their environment because instead of the real relation, now they are in contact only with the illusory one. "Projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face" (146).

This is what the characters and subsequently the reader engages with in the unnerving structure of the novel and multiplicity of the narration interwoven into the structure. In both frameworks, the individual is often unaware of these underlying forces, whether they arise from the unconscious or the external world.

The novel's structure amplifies this tension. Just as the digital world immerses individuals in fragmented, algorithm-driven experiences, the house's labyrinthine, disorienting nature reflects the subconscious pull of the Shadow. Both the digital landscape and the novel provide a false sense of agency, offering paths that appear self-determined but are ultimately shaped by hidden forces. Readers, navigating the nonlinear, hypertextual narrative of *House of Leaves,* must confront this same illusion. The sense of control is destabilized as the text resists coherence and forces engagement with its chaotic form. Katherine Hayles writes, "One of the insights electronic

textuality makes inescapably clear is that navigational functionalities are not merely ways to access the work but part of a work's signifying structure" (264). This idea resonates deeply with the discussion of the integration of the Shadow embedded in the structure of the text. In *House of Leaves*, the navigational challenges mirror the psychological process of confronting and integrating repressed aspects of the psyche. Readers are forced to address the fragmented nature of the text and actively navigate its narrative, making choices about how to engage with its footnotes, layered storytelling and typographical shifts.

Yiassemides in her book *Time and Timelessness: Temporality in the theory of Carl Jung* notes that for Jung "the psyche exists above and beyond the physical reality; it is a phenomenon in its own right which transcends the material world" (93). Yiassemides goes on to discuss what she named as Jung's 'time theory', mentioning how Freud was the first one to contribute to understanding of time in the psyche with his 'timeless unconscious'. Then the author realizes that "Freud's 'unprecedented discovery' of the timelessness unconscious was in fact developed by Jung's 'time theory'" (94). The author comments how Jung then goes on to take timelessness one step further because "in the psyche everything is simultaneous and contemporaneous" (94).

From this we can conclude that Jungian Shadow is inherently non-linear, existing in the unconscious which operates outside the constraints of time and space which is why it is not only present in the plotline but also in the fragmented structure. The Shadow is not a single, unified entity but a composite of repressed traits, emotions and instincts, which makes it inherently fragmented. These traits are often contradictory, creating a dynamic tension that resists linear categorization. The Shadow emerges in patterns of behavior and symbolic forms (archetypal images) that are highly context-dependent, appearing differently in different situations or cultural frameworks.

Non-linear digital structures mirror the timeless, fluid nature of unconsciousness, bringing the reader into a closer interaction with the Shadow since the fragmented structure forces the readers to navigate the text which resists linearity much like navigating the unconscious. Therefore, digital mediation, the hypertextual and fragmented narrative, replicates the disorientation and

multiplicity characteristic of unconscious processes. This allows the reader to engage with uncertainty and chaos mirroring the confrontation with the Shadow that Jung describes.

Digital mediation not only reflects the structure of the unconscious but also creates a contemporary context where readers are actively engaging with archetypal processes, in this case confronting their Shadows, through the act of reading. Here Hval goes into naming the reading itself as an archetypal act so we can "further acknowledge that the images that are produced from that reading are individual and unique" (37). This leads me to the purpose of the thesis which is to demonstrate how the unconventional structure of *House of Leaves*, while challenging both the characters and the reader, fosters a deeper psychological awareness. Postmodernism, often characterized by its critique of fixed meanings and its embrace of multiplicity, intersects with the novel's layered narrative, encouraging readers to confront its nonlinearity and engage with their own unconscious processes.

While Derrida's deconstruction initially appears to challenge Jung's principles by emphasizing the instability of meaning through additions and subtractions in language, it aligns with the flexibility of the Shadow archetype. The Shadow, much like language, is shaped by historically and culturally specific structures, allowing it to emerge and be interpreted as the individual engages with the text.

# 5. Confinement of Human's Psyche through the Lenses of Deconstruction

The intellectual landscapes of Carl Jung and Jacques Derrida, although in tension, provide potential connection that offers valuable insights into the fragmented psyche explored in *House of Leaves*. Jung's depth psychology centers on psychological integration, where individuation unites the conscious and unconscious dimensions of the Self. Derrida's deconstruction, by contrast, interrogates the binaries structuring thought, exposing their instability and challenging the assumption of coherence by decentering our systems of thought and meaning (Mendie 48).

In *House of Leaves*, these frameworks engage in a dynamic reciprocal action. The novel's fragmented structure and labyrinthine narrative reflect Derrida's principles of fragmentation and deferral, while simultaneously engaging with Jungian archetypes and the journey of individuation, albeit unfinished in the novel. This chapter explores the conflict and intersection of these perspectives, advancing our understanding of psychological development and meaning in a fragmented world.

Jung's model of individuation presupposes the possibility of integrating disparate elements of the psyche, such as the Shadow, Anima/Animus and unconscious contents, into a coherent whole. This process assumes the distinctness and eventual synthesis of these elements (*Portable Jung* 122). Derrida's deconstruction, however, disrupts such assumptions. He outrightly criticizes logocentrism (an idea that speech is prioritized over writing) which gives greater value to one of the two binary oppositions (Mendie 47). This challenges the stability of binaries like Ego/Shadow or conscious/unconscious. "The unconscious is undecidable, either the always already other, out of reach of psychic descriptions, or else it is thoroughly and constitutively implicated in so-called conscious activity" (Derrida lix). By revealing the interdependence and inherent instability of these oppositions, deconstruction undermines the notion of psychological integration as a stable outcome.

However, by understanding the reading process as inherently subjective, a merging of archetypal ideas with postmodernism is possible.

In his introduction to literary theory Peter Barry articulates deconstructionist's focus on uncovering "gaps, breaks, fissures and discontinuities of all kinds", demonstrating that apparent unity and coherence contain "contradictions and conflicts which the text cannot stabilize and contain" (qtd. in Teske 17).

Derrida's deconstruction demonstrates "the extreme instability of our understanding of the world in which we live and argues that everything we understand about the world is based on ideologies, [which] are built on never-ending chains of signifiers" (Throgmorton 2). These ideologies seeking stability rest on ambiguous language and mutable structures.

The deconstructive method implies radical skepticism which extends to texts, communication and reality itself, which remain perpetually unstable. Barry critiques the one-sidedness of deconstruction, suggesting that a comprehensive approach must account for both contradictions and coherences (Teske 17).

Jung's archetypes exemplify this tension. The Shadow, for instance, is conceptualized as the repressed aspects of the Self, external to the Ego. Yet Derrida's critique reveals that the Shadow cannot exist wholly apart from the Ego; it is an organized existence of absence, shaping the Ego through its exclusion. Thus, the Jungian notion of integration becomes less a synthesis and more an acknowledgment of perpetual instability. Jungian archetypes function as organizing principles of the collective unconscious, providing frameworks for constructing meaning. However, Derrida's critique of structuralism destabilizes these archetypes, exposing their contingency on cultural, historical and individual contexts.

In *House of Leaves*, the labyrinth operates as a deconstructed archetype. Hval's thesis suggests that the labyrinth destabilizes the archetypal journey of integration, serving not as a site of resolution but as one of fragmentation and deferral. This reflects Derrida's concept of *différance*, where meaning is never fully present but always deferred. The labyrinth's shifting dimensions evoke a fragmented psyche, resisting unity. The description below illustrates nicely the shifting structure which can metaphorically be applied to a psyche an individual encounters.

"Of course rooms, corridors, and the occasional spiral staircase are themselves subject to patterns of arrangement. In some cases particular patterns. However, considering the constant shifts, the seemingly

endless redefinition of route, even the absurd way the first hallway leads away from the living room only to return, through a series of lefts, back to where the living room should be but clearly is not; describes a layout in no way reminiscent of any modern floorplans let alone historical experiments in design" (Danielewski 119–120).

By emphasizing the symbolic connection between archetypes and archetypal images, the novel operates on both universal (archetype) and specific (image) levels. While the archetype (Shadow) is universal and timeless, archetypal images (labyrinth, house) are culturally and textually specific, subject to reinterpretation and deconstruction.

If archetypes provide a foundation for Jung's framework, Derrida's focus on the instability of central terms provides a counterpoint. While reading *House of Leaves*, it becomes immediately apparent that the text is self-consciously deconstructed. It draws attention to the centrality of central terms, yet simultaneously subverts them, following Derrida's understanding that central terms must be destabilized to allow marginalized terms to come to the front. ""Architectural space certainly exists independently of the casual perceiver, and has centres and directions of its own." […] it is only when focusing on Navidson's house that these assertions begin to blur" (Danielewski 171). This quote prompts us to think how psychological processes in the novel illustrate this dynamic, regardless of whether structured or deconstructed, these processes inevitably surface. However, Derrida's theory cautions against replacing one center with another, emphasizing that such substitutions merely recreate instability. Instead, Derrida advocates for "surrendering to the complete free play of the binary opposites in a non-hierarchical way" (Powell 39). By 'play', Derrida means "openness to unexplored possibilities and novel approaches" (Mendie 48). Since Derrida concludes that language is arbitrary, the notion of différance can always be applied since it is intended to cover all meanings. Therefore there are no limits on the play of meanings and interpretations readers may find in a text.

This also reflects a broader cultural anxiety characteristic of postmodernism. Postmodernism, defined by its skepticism toward those with power and biased points of view and its embrace of fragmentation, resonates deeply with the themes of *House of Leaves*.

The disorientation and instability experienced by the characters mirror the challenges faced by the postmodern mind in a world where traditional structures of meaning have collapsed. The

labyrinth becomes a potent symbol of these anxieties, encapsulating the tension between seeking coherence and accepting multiplicity. Both Jung's archetypes and Derrida's deconstruction provide frameworks for navigating these uncertainties, highlighting the necessity of engaging with complexity in an era defined by ambiguity.

This perspective complements Jungian theory, not through direct opposition but by reframing the reading process. Jung seeks integration and coherence within the psyche, while Derrida deconstructs such frameworks to highlight the multiplicity and instability of meaning. In this context, the Shadow functions as a deconstructive force within *House of Leaves*, destabilizing the Ego and exposing the instability within both the psyche and the text. The novel demonstrates that deconstruction does not negate psychological processes but rather illuminates them through a new lens.

The destabilization of central terms naturally leads to a deeper exploration of individuation itself. Jung's process of individuation culminates in the realization of the Self as a unified totality, symbolizing the reconciliation of opposites. But, as previously mentioned, Derrida's deconstruction challenges this notion, suggesting that individuation cannot achieve a final synthesis. Instead, it becomes a repetitive negotiation, where boundaries between conscious and unconscious, Ego and Shadow, self and other, dissolve.

In *House of Leaves*, deconstructing the novel does not strip it of meaning but rather illuminates the characters' psyches and their connection to physical reality. Jung's emphasis on integration is juxtaposed with the novel's suggestion that integration is elusive or even impossible.

As the traditional representation of Shadow has been explored, it is possible to conclude the novel's narrative structure itself serves as a deconstructed Shadow. In the novel, the fragmented narrative and recursive layers embody this Shadow, resisting coherence and resolution. Each narrative level, from Zampanò's manuscript to Johnny's annotations to the Navidson Record, undermines the others, mirroring Derrida's concept of textual interplay, where meaning is perpetually deferred.

The novel's ending demonstrates this deconstruction. Johnny's narrative ends abruptly in Chapter XXI, leaving readers with an enigmatic story of a child's death. The labyrinth within the

house vanishes inexplicably, and Zampanò's character remains an absence, simultaneously present and absent through his writings. This suspension of resolution illustrates Derrida's différance, where meaning is deferred through an endless chain of signifiers (Throgmorton 10).

Throughout the discussion, the fragmented structure of *House of Leaves* invites to consider it as a reflection of the fragmented psyche, destabilizing boundaries between conscious and unconscious, narrative and interpretation. The text becomes a psychological labyrinth, where meaning is constructed and deconstructed simultaneously. Derrida's emphasis on fragmentation aligns with Jung's recognition of the psyche's multiplicity but reframes it as a fundamental condition rather than a flaw.

From this perspective, we can see how Derrida's deconstruction enriches Jungian characterizations. By applying Derrida's deconstruction to Jungian archetypes, we uncover new dimensions of psychological complexity. Archetypes become sites of tension and flux, where individuation becomes a process of negotiation and deferral. Shadows destabilize the Ego's coherence, functioning as deconstructive forces within the psyche and text.

Reflecting on the connection between integration and deconstruction, we arrive at the limits of Jungian integration. Jung's emphasis on psychological integration is limited by its reliance on binaries and the assumption of a unified Self. Derrida's deconstruction exposes these limitations, offering a view of the psyche as inherently fragmented and fluid.

Ultimately, placing Jung and Derrida in the dialogue allows us to gain a richer understanding of the fragmented human psyche. This reflects broader cultural shifts, moving from coherence and stability to multiplicity and fragmentation, offering a metaphor for the complexities of identity and meaning. Together, Jung and Derrida illuminate the challenges and possibilities of navigating the labyrinth of the Self in a fragmented, postmodern world.

# 6. Conclusion

This thesis looked at *House of Leaves* through the complex interaction of its structural complexities and the psychological disintegration of its characters. While grounded in Jung's psychological framework, particularly the Shadow and individuation, Jungian literary theory prompts this analysis to explore how the novel's postmodern narrative, like deconstruction, resists Jung's ideas while still engaging with them. This multidisciplinary approach has allowed for a deeper understanding of how psychological themes are embedded within the novel's unique structure, demonstrating how Danielewski's unconventional storytelling techniques reflect and reinforce the psychological fragmentation within the text.

Central to this study has been the examination of the Shadow archetype, which represents the repressed and unconscious aspects of the psyche. Throughout the novel, the Shadow is not only manifested in its characters, Johnny Truant, Will Navidson and Karen Green, but also in the shifting, unknowable space of the house itself. The house, with its ever-expanding, chaotic hallways and darkened voids, serves as an externalization of personal and collective repression, mirroring Jung's assertion that what remains unintegrated within the self emerges in projection. This analysis has demonstrated how the house functions less as a place for individuation and more as a site of confrontation, where the unconscious demands to be acknowledged yet offers no clear path to resolution.

At the same time, this thesis has explored how Danielewski employs deconstructive strategies to mirror the psychological deterioration of the characters, thereby challenging traditional notions of narrative coherence and stability. Derrida's différance and Lacan's mirror stage have provided critical tools for understanding how *House of Leaves* disrupts the stability of meaning, reframing the Shadow not as a fixed archetype but as a fluid, shifting construct shaped by textual and cultural mediation. Just as Jung sees the Shadow as an unconscious force that must be integrated into awareness, Derrida's deconstruction reveals that language itself is structured through absence, fragmentation and instability - an idea deeply embedded in the novel's typographic disarray, unreliable narration and nonlinear storytelling.

Through this combined lens, I have argued that House of Leaves functions as a literary and psychological labyrinth, where meaning, identity and narrative coherence remain unstable, mirroring the unresolved nature of the Shadow itself. The reader is not merely an observer but an active participant, forced to navigate the text's disorienting structure much like its characters struggle to navigate the house. The physical complexities of the book, like its shifting fonts, footnotes and erratic spatial layouts, directly correspond to the fragmented nature of the psyche, reinforcing the idea that both the house and the narrative enact psychological disintegration rather than simply describing it.

Furthermore, this thesis has positioned *House of Leaves* within the broader context of digital mediation, highlighting how its hypertextual qualities mirror the nonlinearity of the unconscious. As Katherine Hayles notes how different ways of navigation are not only to access the work but rather part of the work's signifying structure, it directly applies to the novel's experimental format. This thesis has demonstrated how the novel's labyrinthine structure parallels the way digital interfaces shape cognition, much like Jung's timeless unconscious, where meaning arises in associative and non-linear ways rather than through linear progression.

By tracing the Shadow's presence within the characters, the house, and the text itself, this analysis has demonstrated that House of Leaves does not merely depict psychological disintegration, but it enacts it within its form, forcing both characters and readers into an active confrontation with the unconscious. Additionally, by integrating Jungian psychology, Derridean deconstruction and theories of digital mediation, this thesis has shown that the novel challenges not only traditional narrative stability but also the idea of stable psychological integration itself.

Ultimately, *House of Leaves* suggests that the Shadow cannot be neatly resolved or fully integrated, and instead functions as a destabilizing force, much like Derrida's notion of deferred meaning. The novel's refusal to provide closure mirrors the process of individuation itself, which Jung described as a lifelong journey rather than a final destination. By examining how the physical and psychological structures of the novel mirror each other, this thesis has contributed to the understanding of how literary form can reflect psychological processes, particularly in postmodern narratives that deconstruct identity and meaning.

This study opens pathways for further research into how postmodern literature interacts with Jungian theory, particularly in hypertextual and nonlinear narratives. Future studies could examine how other contemporary fragmented texts engage with the unconscious or how digital subjectivity continues to reshape our engagement with psychological and literary complexity.

In the end, *House of Leaves* resists definitive interpretation, just as the Shadow resists full integration. Whether read as a postmodern critique of stable meaning, a psychological case study of repression and individuation or an experiment in digital-age narrative structures, the novel remains an unresolved labyrinth of text, identity and unconscious depths. It forces its characters and its readers to confront their own limitations in understanding both the self and the world. In this way, *House of Leaves* challenges us to reconsider our relationship with the Shadow: do we integrate it, do we fear it or do we become lost within it? The answer, much like the novel itself, remains elusive, an ongoing confrontation between fragmentation and meaning, certain only in the existence of the Shadow itself.

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