THE BEHEMOTH AND THE SLEUTH

Metaphysics of the Contemporary Encyclopedic Novel

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Abstract

The Behemoth and the Sleuth: Metaphysics of the Contemporary Encyclopedic Novel explores the integration of the metaphysical detective story into the maximalist narrative forms of twenty-first century. More specifically, I study how the encyclopedic novel after Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) produces its unique, abundant mode of representation, that is, its *encyclopedism*. I have picked four contemporary narratives for closer scrutiny, namely Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988), Richard Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991), David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000). Through close reading of these works, I argue that the postmodern genre of the metaphysical detective story has become a dominant genre of fictional encyclopedias. Although the heyday of the genre has passed, it has found a new home in the literary environment where multiple plot lines and characters, unnecessary lists and digressions, centrifugal narrative structures, and the excess of narrative material are common. Thus, on the one hand I study the literary phenomenon of maximalist storytelling on the brink of the new millennium, but on the other, I aim at outlining a possible future for the metaphysical detective story.

What in particular is at stake is the shared *epistemology* between the postmodernist detective story genre and the encyclopedic modality. Both being descriptions of the learning process, I specify and analyze three key narrative elements that are used in all discussed novels. First, the main character, the narrator, and the reader are *epistemological agents*, who, on their separate levels of narrative, work with some investigation or quest. Second, the world around the detective character, or the literary milieu he or she is working with, forms a maze-like, ambiguously *epistemological environment*. The epistemological agents also do what they can to conceptualize and tame this environment that is out of control, and usually this *encyclopedic aim* to create a comprehensible system characterizes the bulk of the narrative. Third, also the narrative as such is epistemologically composed, and typically it has *a geometrical design of order*. I call this order *a radicle system*, that is a form of pseudotree consisting of the base and the network. In consequence of these three components and their dynamics, each narrative, I argue, frames a set of philosophical, usually ontological questions. Furthermore, in the heart of each encyclopedic novel, there is a metaphysical mystery that fundamentally concerns the subject investigating it. Hence, the absolute merger between the self and the world is also included in each fictional encyclopedia studied in this dissertation.

These framings of question are, in my view, a legacy from Edgar Allan Poe and Jorge Luis Borges, two key authors of the metaphysical detective story. While adopting narrative ideas from Pynchon and other encyclopedic authors, Eco, Powers, Wallace, and Danielewski are then very aware of the legacy of the

metaphysical detective story and do not hesitate to take advantage of it. The main argument of the dissertation is to show that the key elements of the metaphysical detective story both expand and control the typical modality of the encyclopedic novel, that is, its simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal nature.

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Contents

Abbreviations

Mark Z. Danielewski

HL   *House of Leaves* (2000)

Umberto Eco

PF   *Il Pendolo di Foucault* (2001a)
FP   *Foucault's Pendulum* (2001b)

Richard Powers

GBV   *Gold Bug Variations* (1992)

David Foster Wallace

IJ   *Infinite Jest* (2006)

Introduction

"Wayne's got everything. Hal's strength has become knowing he doesn't have everything, and constructing a game as much out of what's missing as what's there."[1]

Though many continue to devote substantial time and energy to the antinomies of fact or fiction, representation or artifice, document or prank, as of late the more interesting material dwells exclusively on the interpretation of events within the film. This direction seems more promising, even if the house itself, like Melville's behemoth, remains resistant to summation.[2]

"Look. Analysis depends on breaking down complex hierarchies into understandable parts. That's indispensable to good science, and I did it for years. Even got a paper out of it, as you junior sleuths insist on reminding me. But analysis is just part of the method. When you catch a glimpse of your smallest, discrete components, and even these don't explain the pattern you are after, sometimes the situation calls out for another motion […]."[3]

Tennis, film studies, biology. At first glance, none of these areas of knowledge and expertise belong to the usual arsenal of detective fiction. Chess may be played, and Sherlock Holmes may have a profound knowledge of chemistry, but an ordinary detective story refrains from giving these topics too much space, and focuses instead to telling two stories: the story of a crime, and the story of a deduction. We know this dual story very well: in the beginning, a body is found, and it, as a sign, poses an epistemological riddle. An expert is summoned to solve it, and to restore the balance between order and chaos. The detective arrives, casts an eye over the crime scene, interrogates possible suspects, and finally, supposes a case, thus creating a scenario of what may have happened, and who did it. In regard to this epistemological procedure, the detective story is, then, an extremely economical tale, for all that is narrated is there for a reason. And that is why topics such as tennis, film studies, and biology would be irrelevant, even harmful in bringing forward the

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[1] *IJ*, 681.
[2] *HL*, 3.
[3] *GBV*, 609.

detective story. At best, they would decorate the narrative setting, but at worst, they would only mislead, not just the detective, but also the reader. There would, in other words, be a chance of creating *a wrong scenario*. By following irrelevant clues, the detective would err in his deductions, and thus the riddle would remain unsolved. In a similar way, the reader, following the detective, would lose the sense of what the story was supposed to be about in the first place. Even the crime would start to look like a side issue.

There are, nevertheless, narrative forms that maintain epistemological quests without shunning far-fetched, even unrelated topics. Indeed, such contemporary novels as Richard Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991), David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) – from which the quotes above are taken – embrace *an excess* of topics, voices, and narrative methods. Instead of being economical, these novels are extravagant: there is too much narrative material, too many plot lines, too many minor characters. Each novel being a behemoth of a book, they are newer links in a long chain of *encyclopedic narratives*, descendants of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). And Powers, Wallace, and Danielewski are not alone with their heritage, as they only embody a North American sampling of an international literary phenomenon that surfaced in the 1980s and still continues to charm, fascinate, and confuse readers. The study at hand concentrates on them, but *through* them, a more general question is discussed: how does the contemporary encyclopedic novel produce its own, abundant mode of representation, that is, its *encyclopedism*? If excess is of the essence, what generic features and mechanisms fuel and tame it?

The generic register I hold crucial for the latest development of the encyclopedic novel is the postmodern genre of *the metaphysical detective story*. Usually depicted as a hybrid of epic, essay, and Menippean satire, the encyclopedic narrative has cherished the idea of *quest*, or learning process, as the backbone of its plot, but the detective story, as a perfect example of the quest formula, did not integrate with it not until World War II. More precisely, it was as late as the 1980s, I argue, when Umberto Eco, in the clearest possible way, played with the detective story formula and linked it with the aesthetics of excess. Having demonstrated with *The Name of the Rose* (1980) how nicely the genres of historical novel and detective story can be put together, Eco, with his second novel *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988), brought the sleuth into the same big picture with a literary behemoth. For this reason I see it as fundamental for the argument of this study to discuss Eco's role as well. Instead of starting from *Gravity's Rainbow*, which has been held as a key manifestation of the encyclopedic narrative, I study *Foucault's Pendulum* beside *The Gold Bug Variations*, *Infinite Jest*, and *House of Leaves*, for it is a much more appropriate representative of my main argument than Pynchon's first fictional encyclopedia.

My argument is this: the metaphysical detective story may be a late addition to

the toolkit of the encyclopedic narrative, but relatively quickly it has become its dominant genre. Even though the other genres have their roles too in the narrative whole, several contemporary encyclopedic authors exploit the detective plot in their compositions so that the motif of epistemological investigation establishes, expands, and regulates the maximalist treatment of the plot. Interestingly, this development conforms to the general development of the metaphysical detective story. Since *Foucault's Pendulum*, the heyday of the genre seems to have passed. Best-selling novels such as Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1985–1986) are still selling, and some of the classic authors, such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Robert Coover, are still writing metaphysical detective stories, but the popular zeal has gone.[4] The genre has not ceased to exist, however. On the one hand, it has found a new home in the genres of science fiction and the new weird, and in this development, authors like Haruki Murakami, China Miéville, and Simon Ing have led the way.[5] On the other, and this is the generic development I want to argue for, it has integrated itself into more realistic contemporary narratives that treat the issues of *information* in an excessive fashion, narratives that can labeled encyclopedic. According to Patricia Merivale:

> [t]he metaphysical detective story is a genre necessarily infused throughout with irony, and thus open to the darkly comic, especially in its maximalist forms. These embrace a Joycean aesthetics of excess, "anatomy," polyphony, Menippean satire, and – Borges's strategy for being minimalist and maximalist at once – synecdochal lists.[6]

In addition to developing the theory of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, this study aims at specifying and developing Merivale's argument, as well as her and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney's earlier suggestions concerning *the maximalist forms of the metaphysical detective story*. According to them, a maximalist representative of the genre is typically "carnivalesque in mode, maximalist in style, and centrifugal in structure. It has far too much plot, leaves loose ends all over the place, and supplies everyone with identities as uncertain as they are multiple."[7] Loose ends, synecdochal lists, centrifugal structure, and polyphony are also typical features of fictional encyclopedias. But while the metaphysical detective story has its maximalist forms, not all of them represent encyclopedic narratives. All contemporary encyclopedic novels are not plainly metaphysical detective stories either. How should one deal with this partial overlapping, then? Unlike it is occasionally argued, the

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[4] See Robbe-Grillet's *Repetition* (2001) and Coover's *Noir* (2010).
[5] See Merivale 2010, 319–320; Sweeney 2017. Another, and perhaps more influential new ground for it, has been film and television: Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000), David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001), and the *True Detective* television series (2014–), created by Nic Pizzolato, as well as Sam Esmail's *Mr. Robot* (2015–) are remarkable representatives of this progression. In this way, the metaphysical detective story, which originally was a form of experimental fiction, has started to merge with mainstream detective fiction.
[6] Merivale 2010, 315.
[7] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 19.

encyclopedic novel, in my view, is not so much a genre as a *modality*. It is a complex and hypertrophic form of narrative that devours genres and uses them for other purposes. While I identify many of its features in the course of this study, these features are ultimately more related to the modality of representation than they are to some encyclopedic genre. Thus, instead of considering encyclopedism as a group of features, I find it more fruitful to approach the topic from another direction. By examining one specific genre this narrative modality has absorbed into itself, I intend to illustrate what kind of narrative characteristics an epistemological genre such as the metaphysical detective story produces in abundant narrative environments. Before anything, I approach the contemporary encyclopedic novel as a dynamic, both expanding and self-regulating, *process*. It may include all sorts of material, but even then, contrary to this expansiveness, the contemporary encyclopedic novel has identifiable regulating mechanisms as well. Without them, it would not be encyclopedic; it would be a mess, not a mesh. Identifying these mechanisms is one task set for this study, and it helps us to conceive what generic, thematic, and formal features of a text turn a maximalist narrative into an encyclopedic novel. However, as much as this procedure concerns the contemporary encyclopedic novel, in the course of this study we learn a lot – a lot of it new, I may add – about the metaphysical detective story as well.

Combined, the maximalist mode and the epistemological genre introduce in each narrative a wide array of fields and ideas, which is why some of them need to be taken into account. Nevertheless, while I do not want to make my study as encyclopedic as the objects of study are, the main areas from which I draw are the genre studies of the metaphysical detective story. But since the metaphysical detective story, in accordance with its name, deals with philosophical, mostly epistemological and ontological but also existential issues, some of these questions are discussed as well. Nor should we forget the predecessors of the metaphysical detective story: as a postmodernist genre, it exploits and parodies both classical and hard-boiled detective fiction, which is why these contexts, as well as the key roles of Edgar Allan Poe and Jorge Luis Borges, need to be kept in mind.

To gain a solid grasp of the issue, in the first part of the study I outline common denominators between the encyclopedic narrative and the metaphysical detective story. Special emphasis is put on *metaphysics* that they both share. Chapter 1 introduces my topic, and besides mapping what actually is encyclopedic in the encyclopedic narrative, I discuss its metaphysics. In practice, by metaphysics I refer to those narrative components (themes, motifs, ideas, formulas) the contemporary encyclopedic novel has either adopted from the metaphysical detective story or cherished for a longer period of time. Since both depict epistemological projects in which, for instance, seekers and mazes play an important part, I divide the metaphysics of encyclopedism into three, that is, epistemological, ontological, and self-inclusive narrative elements that either increase or balance the hypertrophic

setting. Beside this discussion, I analyze *Foucault's Pendulum*, first in relation to *The Name of the Rose*, and then, in Chapters 2 and 3, in the light of its main intertexts. While *The Name of the Rose* includes theological debates alongside the criminal investigation, its successor replaces this investigation with meandering conversations, detailed lectures, and imaginative readings of occult historiography. Moreover, instead of solving an existing crime, the detectives create a new one. In the first part of my close reading (Chapter 2), I pay special attention to three aspects of the story: the detective character, the first clue, and the two fundamental intertexts of the narrative. That is, the composition of *Foucault's Pendulum* owes a great debt to the two key pieces of the genre, Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844) and Borges's "Death and the Compass" (1942), and precisely by using – duplicating, even triplicating – these stories, *Foucault's Pendulum* turns from a formula-ridden metaphysical detective story into a centrifugal, fictional encyclopedia. Hence, Eco's second novel operates very impressively in an intersection between the metaphysical detective genre and the encyclopedic modality.

Chapter 3 continues this close reading. Here I discuss a whole way of reading that is deduced from the first clue and complemented with the aid of the computer. In order to parody the semiosis of their clients, the editors of a publishing house, create an ultimate conspiracy, but this project has tragic consequences: they, the detectives, following the conventions of the metaphysical detective story, become the victims. It is also notable that the quest for knowledge – or more precisely, creating a false scenario – involves the most recent information technologies of its time. In fact, the quest for knowledge is no longer such a burning issue; instead, *access to information* is. Since information technologies both old and new – computers, databases, books, and films – are fundamental for the contemporary encyclopedic novel, their role is also conceptualized in Chapter 3: the logic of the computer used in *Foucault's Pendulum* is examined, and the role of information in general is contextualized. In my view, information in the encyclopedic narrative is, above all, *material*. It is potentially valuable knowledge that one may find amidst the excess. As such, it concerns the protagonist, the narrator, and the implied reader, which I call collectively *epistemological agents*, that is, players who seek, evaluate, and organize material, distinguishing valuable from less valuable data. This is a major task, since the encyclopedic novel on all levels is prone to providing excessive amounts of information: there is, to put it simply, too much of everything. But the task is not, however, impossible. The epistemological agents of these novels do not merely seek, they also find suitable models to arrange the amount of information and give it order. Traditionally, encyclopedias have presented this order in the form of a tree, and my argument follows the same idea: contemporary encyclopedic novels also sketch out a version of a tree model, but equally, they formulate a reader position – the implied

reader, or as Eco puts it, the model reader – from which this organizing can be done.[8] Thus, the narrative may appear to be full of apparently superfluous material, such as unnecessary lists, digressions, and fragments, but to counterbalance this entropy, the narrative also has centripetal components and features. In *Foucault's Pendulum*, such an organizing device is the Sefirot, a mythological tree model that the narrator-protagonist borrows from Jewish mysticism. I end my discussion of Eco's novel by investigating its role, as well as laying out the common ground between the contemporary encyclopedic novel and the metaphysical detective story.

The second part of my study concentrates on a close reading of *The Gold Bug Variations*, *Infinite Jest*, and *House of Leaves*. Three novels are examined from three separate standpoints: *the metaphysical detective character* (Chapter 4); the metaphysical detective's field of knowledge, that is, *the epistemological environment* (Chapter 5); and *the narrative form*, the available *geometrical orders of design* that represent the epistemological environment and the agents who observe it (Chapter 6). All these aspects deserve a careful and in-depth reading. Together, these three chapters aim to show that the components familiar from the metaphysical detective story clearly fuel the encyclopedism. The protagonist's quest, the sphere in which the detective progresses, along with the centrifugal and yet self-inclusive narrative form, feature in this production of disorderly order.

In Chapter 4, I analyze four embodiments of the metaphysical detective character. *The Gold Bug Variations* introduces two of them: *a mastermind character*, and his assistants, students or *junior sleuths* who, after the mastermind's death, continue his work, a metaphysical quest for an analog that would, in the best possible way, depict the scale of life. Mutual relations between various characters are particularly important in encyclopedic narratives: the mastermind and his sidekicks are not only a common motif of classical detective story, they also represent *a mentor motif*. The secondary thread of Chapter 4 is, therefore, *the absence of a teacher*: each novel depicts a character, or characters, who have lost the one person they admire, and usually this person is either a biological or a metaphorical father figure. As I proceed from the analysis of *The Gold Bug Variations* to the readings of *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves*, this motif becomes increasingly painful for the characters themselves: while the protagonist of Wallace's novel embodies *a paralyzed detective*, a hero of non-action, in Danielewski's novel we encounter *a traumatized detective*, a character whose quest

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[8] For the sake of clarity, by "the reader" I henceforth refer to the general, non-specified, and yet hypothetical addressee of the narrative, whereas "the actual reader" refers to a flesh-and-blood reader with individual tastes and interests. This study rarely deals with the latter. Instead, I mostly pay attention to the purely textual reader positions that each narrative formulates, that is, the reader or the readers these texts presuppose for themselves by and through the narrative form. I refer to these positions as "the implied reader" or "the model reader." However, since there are readers "outside the text" as well, I have chosen to call this audience simply "the reader," as the reader is an ideal addressee who reads the narrative as it is supposed to be read. In the case of encyclopedic fiction, the reader can be said to enjoy the typical characteristics of the narrative form and is willing to act as an epistemological agent.

raises traumatic childhood memories. Both characters have lost their father at an early age, and this loss is reflected in the narrative events. In all the narratives, there is also a crime, or crimes, or a mystery that the characters aim to solve by reading texts. Exploitation of the father figure's teachings or other attempts to deal with his ambiguous influence come into equation as well.

In Chapter 5, I shift from the detectives to the epistemological environments they encounter: the texts they read, the people they associate with, even the house they seek to inhabit. However, the earlier analysis of detectives is also developed further, but now the behemoths – monstrous entities that embody the quantity and quality of information – enter into the picture. As the protagonists push their way through the labyrinthine spaces both textual and physical, they come into contact with Minotaurs and other beasts that represent the repressed side of themselves. While the search for knowledge is often a form of self-searching, more often than not it leads both the characters and the reader to the hardest, even to the unsolvable philosophical questions of being and knowing. Again, the most optimistic in this regard is Powers, as in *The Gold Bug Variations*, even students without a mentor are capable of producing a solution to the metaphysical mystery, the solution being the narrative we are reading. In *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves*, *the closure*, a crucial part of the detective story, is instead left open.

Chapter 6 ends my discussion, and in it, I examine the epistemological order of the contemporary encyclopedic novel. In each case, the narrator or narrators give their story the form of a simple tree model that exploits the idea of dialectics between the base, or a center, and the network of connections. The contemporary encyclopedic novel has a paradoxical narrative form, for simultaneously it represents itself as both centrifugal and centripetal. It has a visible epistemological root – a symbolic object, a thematic center, or a main idea – around which the narrative digressions and the protagonists' investigations circle. On the other hand, the plot may be buried under the narrative material so that the reader needs to comb the material in order to find it. In the closing chapter I study these dialectics and argue that the formal features of the narrative bring forward key themes, character relations, theoretical motifs, or intertextual links. Above all, in each case, the formal features constitute the specific reading position for the actual reader to accept, accompanied by a tree model that can be used in order to organize the narrative material epistemologically, that is, to conceive and comprehend the big picture and what the narrative is about.

I limit my discussion to one Italian novel and three North American novels, although the general interest in the maximalist mode of storytelling has increased during the past thirty years in many countries, from Finland to Spain, and from Italy to the United States. While emphasizing American narratives, the novels I have chosen for closer scrutiny occupy different positions in the literary culture. Apart from *Foucault's Pendulum*, whose importance for both the metaphysical detective

story and the encyclopedic narrative I have already highlighted, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* is probably the most famous of these novels, a "Great American Novel" and a bellwether for many young authors worldwide. From the standpoint of the metaphysical detective story, it is one of the most interesting novels in this study, since on the face of it, it does not seem a detective story at all. But as I will argue, even the key themes of Wallace's magnum opus – cultural solipsism, self-searching, the meaning of life – are metaphysical by nature. And more importantly, the treatment Wallace gives these questions comes very close to the conventions of the metaphysical detective story.

Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations* is not as well known as *Infinite Jest*, but has nevertheless been a national bestseller. Among the novels included, it is the "science novel" of the group, a narrative that indicates the author's great expertise in science, in this case molecular biology, systems theory, and informatics. Powers's novel combines this expertise with art history and music theory, and in this respect it can be considered, if not the most technical, then at least the most data-oriented novel in my sampling. *The Gold Bug Variations* was published in the first wave of the encyclopedic novel of the 1990s, and while it is not a metaphysical detective story in the same sense as *Foucault's Pendulum*, it does exploit conventions closely related to the genre. The most important of these conventions is the dual quest structure in which two differently aimed investigations – the first biographical, the other metaphysical – intertwine and remain next to unsolvable.

The third novel, Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* is not only the most recently published novel of this study, it also embodies the experimental side of both the metaphysical detective story and the encyclopedic novel. Furthermore, it forms an apt pair with *Infinite Jest*: while the suspicious reader may wonder whether *Infinite Jest* has enough metaphysical detective story in its composition, he or she may similarly wonder whether *House of Leaves* is encyclopedic enough. A closer scrutiny reveals these suspicions to be groundless: while Danielewski's novel exploits similar quest structures as *The Gold Bug Variations* and Nabokov's famous *Pale Fire* (1962), it contains ostensibly irrelevant material even more than *Infinite Jest* does. The irrelevancy of material as such does not make the novel encyclopedic, but the great amount of material and the ambiguous aim of organizing this material do. Lists, catalogues, digressions, and all kinds of additional material belong inherently to the repertoire of the encyclopedic novel, and when it comes to *House of Leaves*, the bulk of the main narrative consists of nothing but additional material. In addition to its experimentalism, Danielewski's novel suggests where the encyclopedic novel may head in the coming decades. To get there, however, we must start from basics.

PART I

1.
The Encyclopedic Novel,
and Metaphysical Detective Fiction

Two groups of questions outline the area of this study, that is, the integration of the metaphysical detective story into the encyclopedic novel. The questions of the first group can be formulated as follows: Why has it become, on the brink of a new millennium, an international literary trend to tell a story by means of excessive narrative forms? What sparks the interest in these hypertrophic forms of literature? Is the social background of late capitalist culture, for instance, an eminently fruitful soil for them? While these questions are certainly worth asking, this question is even more to the point: how does the so-called Information Age, and especially the rise of new information technologies, medias, and digital platforms, affect the characteristics of these excessive narratives? In other words, which narrative elements are emphasized in the contemporary encyclopedic novels?

Although we are familiar with a number of encyclopedic narratives from the past, from François Rabelais's *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel* (1532–1564), Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605–1615) and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767) to Melville's *Moby-Dick* and John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* (1938), not to forget James Joyce's *Ulysses*, World War II forms a watershed for the development of the fictional encyclopedia. During the second half of the twentieth century, the encyclopedic novel crystallizes into a genre of its own or at the least becomes more common.[9] In this regard, the key role of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is widely recognized – and not only for postmodernist fiction in general, but also for the development of the encyclopedic novel. After Pynchon, the encyclopedic novel has often been unambiguously associated with the Great American Novel, especially in the United States, but as Edward Mendelson, the pioneer scholar of encyclopedic narratives and the main person responsible for the term, emphasized, *Gravity's Rainbow* was, at the moment of its publication, highly unique in its encyclopedism, since as a novel it marked the advent of a "newly-forming international culture, created by the technologies of instant communication and the economy of world

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[9] Burn 2007, 50.

markets."[10] In other words, Pynchon had written the first encyclopedic novel to truly cross national boundaries. In this newly-founded internationalism, *Gravity's Rainbow* was also "an introduction of an order based on information, of data."[11]

Most of the encyclopedic authors in contemporary literature owe an explicit debt to Pynchon's key ideas – especially his experiments in entropy – but each author exploits this literary legacy differently.[12] David Foster Wallace and William V. Vollmann, for instance, saw the postmodernist phenomenon mainly as a burden that needed to be replaced with some more serious and more sincere literary movement.[13] What encyclopedic novels have in common today, besides their "multiform maximizing and hypertrophic tension," is, in any case, a growing interest in the problems of information.[14] These narratives depict, for instance, "the patterns of living that emerge from and depend on access to large data banks and instantaneous transmission of messages," to quote N. Katherine Hayles's definition of informatics.[15] Contemporary encyclopedic novels are then aesthetic, cultural, and epistemological projects that aim at studying the central role of information in contemporary society. Due to this pursuit, they are also reformulating the role of human agency in the history of encyclopedias. Differing especially from the encyclopedias of the Enlightenment, in which the epistemological models were fundamentally *anthropocentric*, encyclopedic novels after Pynchon are *posthuman*: "during an era in which the world's knowledge is vastly greater than any one person can encompass," potential knowledge is outsourced and assigned to different sorts of databanks and data systems, so that instead of *mastering* knowledge, *accessing* information becomes the key issue.[16] Thus the contemporary encyclopedic novel treads a fine line between databases and encyclopedias, and often represents the main characters as information specialists facing problems with databanks.[17]

Consulting databanks leads us to the second group of questions, which concerns the development of the metaphysical detective story. Since the detective story as a genre has always reflected the social tendencies of its time, in the millennial context one is obliged to ask: what happens to the detective story in the Information Age? And above all, what happens to the *metaphysical* detective story? Has it continued its evolution as a postmodernist genre?

Answering the first of these questions, Charles Brownson has suggested that

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[10] Mendelson 1976a, 164–165.
[11] Mendelson 1976b, 1272.
[12] See Pynchon's "Entropy" (1960), republished in the short story collection *Slow Learner* (1984) that also includes Pynchon's own comments about the idea of entropy (1984, 12–15). For more about the connections between entropy, art, and literature, see Arnheim 2010. For entropy in Pynchon's fiction, see Schachterle 1996.
[13] For American fiction in the new millennium, see Burn 2008, 1–27.
[14] Ercolino 2014, xi.
[15] Hayles 1999a, 313n. 4.
[16] Mendelson 1976b, 1269.
[17] Cf. LeClair 1989, 15.

generally the detective story has gone through *a metaphysical shift*: the reader replaces the protagonist as prime detective of the story.[18] But while Browson's argument holds true, it is somewhat behind the times. The heyday of postmodernist fiction has been and gone, and the metaphysical detective story as one of its manifestations went through this shift decades ago. Most of Brownson's literary examples (Nabokov, Robbe-Grillet, Carlo Emilio Gadda) belong to the early classics of the metaphysical detective genre, and his examples from cinema are not particularly fresh either.[19] Therefore, what Brownson's argument is actually concerned with is the possibility whether the mainstream detective fiction might follow the early development of the metaphysical detective story or not. By contrast, the current situation of the metaphysical detective story is left open.

Let us, then, reformulate the above-mentioned second question: what happens to the metaphysical detective story *after* this period? After Borges and Nabokov developed the genre, Robbe-Grillet and Georges Perec added their French twist, and Auster culminated the genre in his *New York Trilogy* – what happened next? Reflecting not only social tendencies both global and local, the detective narrative is also cross medial and transgressive where genre boundaries are concerned. As Peter Baker and Deborah Shaller formulate, it "effortlessly crosses media and national boundaries, embeds itself in other stories, lurks in the corners of vastly different landscapes."[20] This holds true for the genre's metaphysical cousin as well. According to Patricia Merivale, one of its tendencies today is to blend in with the maximalist narrative forms that exploit dissonant chorality, Menippean satire, epic, and synecdochal lists.[21] Since all of these textual features are fundamental for both fictional encyclopedias and for the contemporary encyclopedic novel, the initial conclusion would be that the metaphysical detective story is equally capable of being integrated into the encyclopedic novel.[22]

It is this process, I argue, that forms *one* line of development that the metaphysical detective story has taken since its heyday. Thus, my main focus concerns what narrative features of the metaphysical detective story emerge as leitmotivs in the contemporary encyclopedic novel. But in addition to simply illustrating this fusion, the study at hand aims to argue that the metaphysical detective story becomes the key genre that both motivates and produces the *encyclopedism* of the contemporary encyclopedic novel. By encyclopedism I refer to the narrative elements or other operational tools which agents such as protagonists, narrators and the author, as well as the implied reader, exploit in order to establish

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[18] Brownson 2014, 172–176.
[19] These are, most of all, Lynch's *Twin Peaks* and *Mulholland Drive*, along with Nolan's *Memento*. Brownson's most interesting example is Alain Resnais's *The Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) in which the role of the reader is definitely emphasized.
[20] Baker & Shaller 2012, xi. See Kyllönen 2016c.
[21] Merivale 2010, 315; see Introduction.
[22] Clark 2011, 6–13.

an epistemological system. The encyclopedic features of the excessive narrative forms in contemporary fiction are, then, produced in a process in which four fundamental components of the metaphysical detective story are dominant. These components are:

> (1) the metaphysical detective character as an epistemological agent,
>
> (2) the maze-like, ambiguously epistemological environment,
>
> (3) the self-circulating, geometrical composition of the narrative in a form of a pseudo-tree, and
>
> (4) in consequence of the previous three components, the framing of ontological questions.

In order to be sufficiently equipped to discuss these components, we need to begin from basics and map, for a start, the common ground between the metaphysical detective story and the contemporary encyclopedic novel. A general outline of the main epistemological features of the encyclopedic novel is therefore in order.

1.1. The Encyclopedism of the Encyclopedic Novel

The encyclopedic novel is an all-inclusive narrative. It is a maximalist form of novel that is based on the systematic hypertrophy of narrative material; a "great novel" in which a multitude of characters, narrative voices, plot lines, styles, and other textual features are all defined in terms of excess. Hence, the most characteristic feature of the encyclopedic novel is its *high information content*: simply put, too much material is included. As Tom LeClair illustrates, the high information content in a narrative is often represented in "[m]ultiple characters, abundant events, discontinuities and unpredictable connections, exactitude and opacity of language, unusual allusions, paradoxical metaphors, odd proportions and new systems of form."[23] Generally, in the context of narrative studies, information manifests itself mainly as a two-way exchange of potential meanings between the reader and the narrative form, and this co-operative *feedback loop* invites the reader to contribute to the organization of the material. On this basis, one can say that when the narrative is high in information content, it also contains, from the reader's perspective, both relevant and irrelevant narrative material, occasionally taking the form of a list, for instance. Of course, the actual catalogues belong to the stylistic arsenal of the encyclopedic novel, but listing marks the narrative methods as well. As Hannu Riikonen points out in relation to Joyce's *Ulysses*, when one or another thing is mentioned in a cataloguing narrative, all sorts of additional material are also included.[24] The purpose of cataloguing as a

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[23] LeClair 1989, 14.
[24] Riikonen 1985, 54.

narrative method is, then, to prolong and enrich the narrative, but also to intrude upon it.[25] As the narrative consequently grows in size, from the reader's standpoint all the narrative material included does not appear necessary. In fact, especially for the plot-oriented reader, only a fraction of it is valuable. For this reason, it is appropriate to complement this feature with the concept of *informational excess*: as a narrative form, it does not distinguish valuable data material from unhelpful material. This separation is left to us, and therefore requires a marked contribution from the reader.

Indeed, since the encyclopedic novel is digressive and rich in detail, the surplus of material makes the narrative open to interpretation. As Stephen J. Burn points out, the reader needs to reconstruct "a larger narrative from a number of subtle hints and apparently incidental details."[26] This is especially the case of *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest*, for instance. Interpreting becomes a form of investigating and organizing the material. For the reader, the vague appearance of the main plot already implies the reader's necessary role as an organizer: the plot is buried under the high information content, and it is often the reader's duty to seek it out. However, there are other organizing agents as well. Just as *the reader*, through the position of the model reader, seeks to reconstruct the plot, it is characteristic for the encyclopedic novel that its *protagonist* too is on a quest for knowledge. The third agent, that is, *the narrator*, mediates between these two, but besides having this mediating role, the narrator (often the narrator-protagonist) is also the first one to arrange the plot material. Together these three agents form a group of agents I call *an epistemological agency*. This multifaceted organizer spreads out on the levels of plot, narrative, and interpretation, and operates with three sorts of data material: cultural knowledge (of the protagonist), plot-related material (of the narrator) as well as the high information content (of the reader) are all equally important from the standpoint of epistemological agency. Briefly put, this network works as a collective agent that arranges the material in order to create a meaningful order, and in this respect the encyclopedic novel always covers at least these three "circles of knowledge." However, as we will see later, the actions of these agents often increase the degree of disorder in the novel as well.

The third general epistemological feature of the encyclopedic novel ties the high information content and the epistemological agents together. This feature is *the encyclopedic urge*, that is, an educational attempt to organize the epistemological material (cultural knowledge, plot material, high information content) into *a system*. As Luc Herman and Petrus van Ewijk begin their article on the encyclopedism of *Gravity's Rainbow*, this urge is based on the human desire to "summarize and organize the information pertaining to the world around us."[27] With respect to this desire, it

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[25] See also White 1992, 14–15.
[26] Burn 2011, 24.
[27] Herman & van Ewijk 2009, 167.

is then believed that human concepts have their equivalents in the "outside" world, that is, the extramental reality, whereupon the world around us can be comprehended as a representational (linguistic) system. In the encyclopedic novel, the urge to create a taxonomic totality, a second-degree representative system for the world, manifests itself as the epistemological agents' three-fold cataloguing process.

In order to explore the encyclopedic urge, I shall keep to the phrases coined first by Mendelson and later by Burn, rather than using concepts such as the maximalist novel or the mega-novel.[28] This decision stems from the fact that "the encyclopedic narrative" and "the encyclopedic novel" emphasize not so much the narrative form with specific stylistic features, as *the epistemological aim*, or modality that justifies the project of narrative all-inclusiveness. Moreover, it is noteworthy that as a term, "encyclopedia" is derived from Greek *enkuklios paideia*, "encyclical education" or "general education," which primarily refers to the Neoplatonic philosophy of education in Late Antiquity.[29] "Encyclopedia" does not mean then only a book that includes a circular body of knowledge. Just as importantly it relates to the educational role of oral and literate cultures.[30] In this respect, encyclopedia as a term reflects *a learning process*, and this is what the epistemological agents, especially the protagonists of fictional encyclopedias go through. Hence, as important as the taxonomy of knowledge is for the encyclopedic novel, it also describes "the process of coming to know."[31] By using the concept of "the encyclopedic novel" I wish to stress this aspect.

But while *enkuklios paideia* originally referred to educational pursuits, in contemporary use the term "encyclopedia" is loaded with an extra dimension, namely the idea of "space, the empty, enclosed arc of the circle."[32] Ever since the Middles Ages, encyclopedias have been connected to this idea of cyclical space that, as a framework, echoes the world and helps bring different entities under classification.[33] It is also this connotation of the term "encyclopedia" that we are most familiar with: in the regular use of the word, an encyclopedia is viewed as *a system,* an ordered set of knowledge that is structured on the basis of specific *logic*. It is not then only that the encyclopedic urge is based on the desire to create order; the order itself also has to be a logical system.

So far, we have outlined three key aspects that constitute the encyclopedic

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[28] Mendelson 1976a, 1976b; Burn 2007; Ercolino 2014; Karl 2001. I also refer to the concept of fictional encyclopedia (Clark 2011), which I see as synonymous with these terms.
[29] See West 2002, 16–18; Kuusisto 2001, 22–28.
[30] Clark 2011, 17. As William N. West (2002, 16; original italics) points out, although composed of Greek elements, *enkuklios paideia* "is in fact not the product of any Greek-*speaking* culture, but rather of one that *read* Greek voraciously, early modernist humanist Europe." In the original Greek context, the term did not refer to universal knowledge but to the "general education" of a young man.
[31] Clark 2011, 17.
[32] West 2002, 17.
[33] Ibid., 17.

novel as an epistemological narrative system. High information content, epistemological agency, and the encyclopedic urge to create a logical system are the most important factors that define what I call encyclopedism. The purpose of these features is to help us conceptualize encyclopedism as an epistemologically ordered whole. Let us next deepen the view by introducing three other features, namely the concepts of totalization, synecdoche, and epic.

Totalization, Synecdoche, and Epic

The encyclopedic urge is marked by *totalization*: the epistemological agents, especially the narrator, aim at covering all that can be known. Thus, the agents usually seek to represent the culture as a whole, and include all of its areas of knowledge. In Mendelson's demanding view, in order to create an encyclopedic whole, the author has to include in his work numerous accounts of art, science, and technology, and represent, for instance, a history of language. By embedding either metaphorical or concrete monsters in the narrative, the author underlines the massiveness of the narrative.[34] Fulfilling these requirements make the encyclopedic novel look like a *totality*, but as is generally acknowledged, this totality is essentially an illusion.[35]

Creating such an epistemological system does not create a totality in a true sense, since all encyclopedias are doomed to remain incomplete.[36] The totality is window dressing, and hence special attention needs to be paid to the encyclopedic urge as such, the desire that Stefano Ercolino describes as an attempt at "synthetic representation of the totality of the real."[37] Thus, even though the encyclopedic novel may acknowledge the impossibility of this project, it never gives up creating at least an illusion of that totality. One of the key paradoxes of the encyclopedic novel then is that while appearing complete and total, it "lacks any sense of completion."[38] The encyclopedic urge is a driving force behind the encyclopedic production, and this pursuit as *an act of totalization* should be held as just as important as the excessive *appearance* of the novel.[39]

In its attempt to cover the "big picture" of culture, the encyclopedic novel and its epistemological agents rely on the use of lists, digressions, analogies and

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[34] Mendelson 1976a.
[35] Ibid.; LeClair 1989, 18; Herman & van Ewijk 2009; Kyllönen 2018. According to Mendelson, there are only a few narratives that deserve to be called encyclopedic. Besides *Gravity's Rainbow*, these are Dante's *Commedia* (1320), Rabelais's books of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Goethe's *Faust* (1808, 1832), Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*.
[36] E.g. Ikonen 2010, 54; Ercolino 2014, 30–31.
[37] Ercolino 2014, 31.
[38] Karl 2001, 155.
[39] This duality is a modern manifestation of *enkuklios paideia*: totalization is a form of learning process, whereas the appearance equals the body of knowledge. For the difference between totalization and totality, see also Ercolino 2014, 30–31.

especially *synecdoches*. The chosen parts (of vocabulary and culture) are meant to represent all the other parts – and if needed, their privileged positions as representations are supplemented with details from each area of knowledge. For instance, Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997) aims at representing the totality of American culture during the Cold War. Since this representation necessarily remains incomplete, DeLillo's novel does not cover the Cold War culture in its entirety, but only "selected fragments public and private."[40] However, together these represented excerpts give an impression of the whole *as if* the sections describing the everyday life in Bronx in the 1950s would *also* illustrate, for instance, the local Midwestern culture of that time. The same applies to other fields of culture. Whereas Mendelson wrote that "[n]o encyclopedic narrative can describe the whole range of physical science, so examples from one or two sciences serve to represent the whole scientific sector of human knowledge," in *Underworld* graffiti art, installation art, and cinema are meant to convey the whole art sector of the Cold War culture.[41]

Synecdoches and analogies activate the reader. So do the properties that LeClair mentions in relation to high information content, namely discontinuities, unpredictable connections, unusual allusions and odd proportions.[42] In this way, *the feedback loop* between the reader and the narrative form is born as the reader participates, through recognizing literal meanings and connotations, in the production of possible meanings and connections. Since the encyclopedic novel deals so much with arranging dispersed pieces of information into a logical system, it demonstrates "cognitive mapping," a concept Fredric Jameson has used to describe subjects' attempts to think themselves into the social totality.[43] While these attempts often fail in everyday life, it is not uncommon either that the epistemological agents in the encyclopedic novels create illogical or arbitrary connections: the reader, for instance, may add to the narrative some elements and features that explicitly are not "there." This is especially the case in Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, as we will see.

From the standpoint of narrative form, the encyclopedic novel has a "strong morphological and symbolic identity."[44] In general, it is a long, polyphonic, and materially exhaustive genre-hybrid in which encyclopedism plays one, albeit an important, part. Stefano Ercolino has given a perceptive, and, for the time being, the most elaborate outline of elements that define "the maximalist novel" and I find no need to disagree with him.[45] Besides the encyclopedic mode, this narrative form

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[40] DeLillo 2003, 499.
[41] Mendelson 1976b, 1269. For the use of synecdoche, see also LeClair 1989, 18–20. For *Underworld* as an encyclopedic novel, see Kyllönen 2016a.
[42] LeClair 1989, 14.
[43] Jameson 2009, 51.
[44] Ercolino 2014, xiii.
[45] Ercolino 2012, 2014.

is characterized by length, dissonant chorality, diegetic exuberance, completeness, narratorial omniscience, paranoid imagination, intersemiocity, ethical commitment, and hybrid realism.[46] What is noteworthy in Ercolino's typology is that, for him, the encyclopedism of the narrative does not constitute a genre but a mode of representation.[47] This mode, or modality, is:

> a particular aesthetic and cognitive attitude, consisting of a more or less heightened and totalizing narrative tension in the synthetic representation of heterogeneous realities and domains of knowledge, ascribable, in essence, to the powerful hybridization of maximalist narratives with the ancient epic.[48]

Ercolino thus disagrees with Mendelson and Burn, who consider the encyclopedic novel to be a genre.[49] A problem with Ercolino's treatment is, however, the position of genres *within* the "maximalist novel," which is a question he leaves open. If the encyclopedic novel is not a genre, which genres constitute it to be a genre-hybrid? Does the "particular aesthetic and cognitive attitude" prefer some genre over others?

Two formative answers can be given. For Mendelson, the encyclopedic narrative has incorporated "the conventions of heroic epic, quest romance, symbolist poem, *Bildungsroman*, psychomania, bourgeois novel, lyric interlude, drama, eclogue and catalogue."[50] Moreover, the characters in novels such as *Don Quixote* aim to live according to the conventions of some specific genre but do not succeed. In Mendelson's view, these individual failures stem from "the intolerance of encyclopedic form for the small claims of personal expectation and perspective."[51] There is, in other words, a conflict between subjective experience and the totality, as well as between minor genres and the encyclopedic form, and this conflict seems to be intrinsic for the generic constitution of the encyclopedic novel.

Compared to Mendelson's view, another answer, Hilary Clark's argument concerning the presence of epic, essay, and Menippean satire in fictional encyclopedias, remains on a more general level and is more tolerant. Essayistic elements increase the range of topics, the menippea alters the carnival atmosphere of the narrative, and the epic "totalises and encloses a […] perfect cosmos."[52] What Clark emphasizes in her analysis, is the role of a singer, an agent who makes the

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[46] Whereas length, completeness, narratorial omniscience, and ethical commitment are quite unambiguous to comprehend, by dissonant chorality Ercolino refers to polyphony. Diegetic exuberance means for him inclusiveness, while intersemiocity is simply the literary exploitation of other medias. Hybrid realism is perhaps the most complicated feature of Ercolino's outline (2014, 163), since it refers to a new form of realism in which the real is defamiliarized, and yet explored "in an ethical impetus without precedent." Paranoid imagination is further discussed in ch. 2.2.
[47] Ercolino 2012, 244–245; Ercolino 2014, 39–47.
[48] Ibid., 39.
[49] Mendelson 1976b, 1267; Burn 2007, 50.
[50] Mendelson 1976b, 1270.
[51] Ibid., 1270.
[52] Clark 2011, 11.

fictional encyclopedia appear both individual and cultural at one and the same time.[53] This agent easily shifts from intimate descriptions to public accounts and does not speak out of personal experience only. Moreover, unlike the oral epic, the fictional encyclopedia is parodic as it "brings all of its inclusions down to the same level, where they may be subjected to playful manipulation."[54]

Since Ercolino, Mendelson, and Clark each pay attention to the role of epic as constituent of fictional encyclopedias, we cannot leave it aside either. In fact, the consideration of epic helps us, first, to better conceive the epistemological questions at the heart of the encyclopedic novel, and then, to connect these questions to the burning issue formulated above: does the encyclopedic urge prefer one genre over others?

Generally, the epic is of course a genre that is most often connected with the encyclopedic novel.[55] For Mendelson, the encyclopedic narrative is even a lineal descendant of epic, but instead of narrating about the past like its predecessor, it is often set "*near* the immediate present."[56] Modern epic, Franco Moretti's name for the encyclopedic novel, is enlightening in this regard: the encyclopedic novel is epic since it shares similarities with the past forms of epic, and it is modern since the space it represents is polyphonic, discontinuous, and "supranational."[57] Complementing it with Clark's argument above, this space is also democratic, parodic, and non-hierarchical.

But what the epic form specifically seals in is the idea of order. As a written epic the encyclopedic novel sets, first of all, the order of events. The events are narrated at length, with numerous digressions and episodes, but in a specific and strict order. Second, especially the classical epic is narrated from a supernatural perspective that gives the narrative its "global view of events."[58] While this already implies a hierarchical order between gods, demigods, heroes, and human beings, in the context of "modern epic" the supernatural perspective refers to the hypothetical position from which all human knowledge can be covered. Even though knowledge is brought down to the same level, the requirement for this parodic gesture is an original idea of hierarchical order.

The third idea of order that can be found from the encyclopedic novel is the order set "by the will of the gods."[59] As Clark considers, in fictional encyclopedias this order delimits the possibilities of the epic hero but nevertheless drives him to pursue knowledge.[60] Clark's further observation comes close to Mendelson's idea of

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53 Ibid., 10.
54 Ibid., 11.
55 E.g. Frye 1973, 315–326; Moretti 1996; Burn 2007; Clark 2011, 10–13; Ercolino 2014, 10–16.
56 Mendelson 1976b, 1269–1270; original italics.
57 Moretti 1996, 2; e.g. Mendelson 1976b, 1269–1272; Ercolino 2014, 14.
58 Clark 2011, 10.
59 Ibid., 12.
60 Ibid., 12.

monsters: during the quest for knowledge, the hero either faces his own ironic double or "his extension in an untenably extreme form."[61] In this respect, knowledge becomes either ambiguous or pernicious. The totality it constitutes defeats the hero or falsifies his individual perspective.

These three sets of epic order give support to my initial assumption that the dominant genre of the encyclopedic novel is in tight connection with epistemological questions – questions that concern the nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. The three sets also stress the anthropocentric standpoint: when trying to gain and represent knowledge, the human subject faces several epistemological issues in epic narratives. The quest formula, which is related to the epic form, is also modernized in the encyclopedic novel. Rephrasing Northrop Frye, one could say, however, that in contemporary encyclopedic fiction the hero's quest is not so much a knightly adventure leading to the slaying of a monster as it is a quest for "buried treasure."[62] The "treasure" in question is a guiding methodological principle that could establish the epistemological order, and the hero is a collective of epistemological agents. This does not mean that monsters, albeit metaphorical ones, would be absent from contemporary encyclopedic novels: for epistemological agents, the excess of material as such appears monstrous.[63] The treasure is buried under this data material, and it is not extraordinary that the epistemological agents fail to discover the treasure. In fact, sometimes they simply fail to discover the *right* treasure.

On the basis of the points made so far, the above-mentioned "cognitive attitude" that forms the encyclopedic modality in Ercolino's argument, is exemplified in the encyclopedic novel with a two-fold quest formula. On the one hand, the encyclopedic novel formulates an adventure in an epistemological labyrinth with a monster of its own. On the other hand, it often includes a quest for hidden knowledge, namely a search for lost or undiscovered connections between phenomena by using the power of deduction. Traditionally, these two intrinsically *romantic* elements – adventure and ratiocination – have been combined in the detective stories of Edgar Allan Poe and G. K. Chesterton, and they constitute an early basis for the detective genre in general as well as for the metaphysical detective story.[64] The next step is to ask in which ways the detective story – and in particular the metaphysical detective story – merges with the encyclopedic novel.

[61] Ibid., 12.
[62] Frye 1973, 189–195.
[63] All encyclopedias, as Mendelson (1976b, 1272) points out, "are *monstra* in the oldest Latin sense [...] the omens of dire change." Set close to contemporary life, encyclopedic novels thus predict the future and through their protagonists' action, comment on the present (Ibid., 1270). Wallace's *Infinite Jest* portrays, for instance, the postmillennial American culture in such a satirical way that it forces the reader to pay special attention to the role of entertainment in contemporary Western culture. For this aspect of *Infinite Jest*, see ch. 5.1.
[64] E.g. Scheick 1990; Pyrhönen 1994, 10–11.

1.2. Enter the Metaphysical Detective Story

The metaphysical detective story is a postmodernist, and hence experimental form of detective story that recycles and subverts the conventions of both classical and hard-boiled detective fiction, usually in parodic fashion.[65] As Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney have underlined, the metaphysical detective story is also "distinguished […] by the profound questions that it raises about narrative, interpretation, subjectivity, the nature of reality, and the limits of knowledge."[66] This urge to raise more fundamental epistemological and ontological questions separates it into a genre of its own. And because the metaphysical detective story asks these questions, as a genre it rises above the "mere machinations of the mystery plot."[67] A typical detective story plot, that is a simple representation of a detective who solves a crime, is thus put to serve other purposes, namely cultural, political, and philosophical issues.[68] The target of the metaphysical detective story is then not only the whodunit and the hard-boiled detective story, the critique is also aimed at the modern imagination, Aristotelian conventions of literature, and Western logocentrism in general.[69] What especially is at stake, as William Spanos puts it, is the Western perspective of the "rational or […] positivistic structure of consciousness that views spatial and temporal phenomena in the world as 'problems'

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[65] E.g. Merivale 1967; Pyrhönen 1994, 10–11, 40–44; Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 1. As with the encyclopedic novel, many names have been given to this genre: besides "the metaphysical detective story" (Merivale 1967; Holquist 1971), terms such as "the anti-detective story" (Spanos 1987, Tani 1984), "the analytical detective story" (Irwin 1996), and "the *post-nouveau roman* detective novel" (Sirvent 1999) have been used. The latest addition to this group of terms is Charles Brownson's (2014) "metaphysical modern." Originally, however, "the metaphysical detective story" was first used by Howard Haycraft (1974, 76) to describe G. K. Chesterton's *Father Brown* stories. For the sake of clarity, I will stick with the most frequently used of these concepts. For more definitions, see Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 2–4. Regarding the role of parody in the metaphysical detective story, I have intentionally left it in a secondary position in this study. In my view, parody is an indisputable part of the genre, but it is mainly an instrument for the further study of other topics (e.g. Hutcheon 1985, 52). As an instrument, it primarily reveals the more serious undertones in the stories.
[66] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 1.
[67] Ibid., 2.
[68] Having backgrounds in the avant-garde movements of their time, or being simply a writer of experimental fiction, the foremost authors of the metaphysical detective story, such as Nabokov, Borges, Robbe-Grillet, Perec, and Eco, came from outside the detective fiction genre. For these backgrounds, see Holquist 1971. The common intention to use the detective formula in the first place was not, then, so much to update its conventions as to apply the formula to other literary concerns. According to Stefano Tani (1984, 34), especially Borges, Nabokov, Robbe-Grillet, and Carlo Emilio Gadda "deconstruct the genre's precise architecture into a meaningless mechanism without purpose; they parody positivistic detection with an intention to formulate new narrative techniques." However, deconstruction is not the only technique the authors apply to the detective formula. Tani distinguishes three techniques that the metaphysical detective story (or "the anti-detective novel" as he calls it) use to handle the idea of solution: innovation, deconstruction, and metafiction. Whichever of these techniques the story exploits, it nevertheless stresses a "teasing, puzzle-like relation between the text and the reader," which, in turn, stresses not only the role of chosen narrative techniques but also the ontological difference between the reader and the detective (Ibid., 45).
[69] Pyrhönen 1994, 42; see Holquist 1971; Tani 1984; Spanos 1987.

to be 'solved.'"[70] Solving the problem as an act of restoring the balance within reality, is in turn an expression of domesticating, of "rigidified, evasive, anthropomorphic, [...] metaphysical consciousness, which obsessively attempts by coercion to fix and stabilize the elusive flux of existence."[71]

The particular way the metaphysical detective story represents this critique can be deduced from the features Merivale and Sweeney hold to be elemental for the genre. The epistemological center is usually an amateur or an armchair detective who either by examining texts or investigating a crime (or a mystery) suffers defeat. The milieu in which the detective operates, be it the text he examines or the streets of the city he wanders in, is labyrinthine; and as the detective works his way through this labyrinth, he gathers ambiguous or trivial clues. Even though "the absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation" is often held to be the most important feature of the metaphysical detective story, one should not neglect the special tie that exists between the detective and his epistemological environment.[72] The absence of closure reflects the problematic premises of the investigation, most importantly the detective's rational certainty that, by inferring a causal relation between clues, one is able to order (or, more often, restore the balance in) the world. This confidence is fundamental not only for the generic logic of the detective story but also for Western rationality in a traditional sense.

In the light of John T. Irwin's brilliant analysis, the fundamental mystery in the metaphysical detective story is in fact the sleuth's own identity and aspects of reality related to it.[73] The quest is a project of self-consciousness, and the labyrinth of investigation through which the detective goes is by nature a projection of the self's own complex structure. For this very reason, the metaphysical detective story often blurs the distinction between the detective, the perpetrator, and the victim on the one hand, and uses the ideas of double and forged identities on the other. What these features reflect with regard to the questions of being and knowing, is that the epistemological agent is "a doomed detective" to start with.[74] When the fundamental mystery is existential, and concerns the nature of reality, along with the detective's metaphysical homelessness, it is obvious that there are no fixed solutions.[75] It is especially this feature we need to keep in mind when we aim to map the connections between the metaphysical detective story and the contemporary encyclopedic novel.

Since each metaphysical detective story has aims and targets of its own, the territory of the genre is also wide. Besides the neighboring genres of *nouveau roman*,

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[70] Spanos 1987, 16–17.
[71] Ibid., 17.
[72] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 8; e.g. Tani 1984, 41.
[73] Irwin 1996.
[74] Tani 1984.
[75] Or as Michael Holquist (1971, 155; original italics) puts it, "[i]f, in the detective story, death must be solved, in the new metaphysical detective story it is *life* which must be solved."

the spy story, the mystery story, science fiction, and the occult thriller, the metaphysical detective story can be divided into two main types, namely minimalist and maximalist.[76] What distinguishes these types from each other is, I think, their relation to the idea of epistemological space. Minimalist stories mostly illustrate labyrinthine spaces "where plural identities are reduced into one, usually by pursuit": these stories are centripetal and revolve around a limited number of topics (the detective's identity, the crime, the text as object, etc.).[77] Maximalist-type metaphysical detective stories are, instead, centrifugal and carnivalesque. A typical maximalist story "has far too much plot, leaves loose ends all over the place, and supplies everyone with identities as uncertain as they are multiple."[78] In other words, a story of this type is usually expansive, both epistemologically and materially. The narratives Merivale and Sweeney categorize as examples are illustrative: in addition to Carlo Emilio Gadda's groundbreaking *That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana* (1946), these include, for instance, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), and Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, as well as Robbe-Grillet's *La Maison de Rendez-Vous* (1965), and Robert Coover's *Gerald's Party* (1986). Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* (1857) is held to be a forerunner of this group.

From the standpoint of this study, one additional distinction to Merivale and Sweeney's tentative genealogy needs to be made. Namely, within the maximalist branch of the metaphysical detective story one can distinguish at least two different categories of maximalism: first, narratives that are maximalist mainly in regard to the process of detection (Coover, Gadda, Robbe-Grillet); and second, narratives that are encyclopedic throughout, especially due to their high information content (Pynchon, Eco, Reed).[79] More specifically, in the first, only the quest is meandering, while in the latter, a detailed body of knowledge – a representation of culture – is given, because or despite of detection. Hence, what is necessarily required of the metaphysical detective story of the maximalist type to be encyclopedic, is an assemblage of cultural passages: whether interested in detection or not, the narratives should aim at giving at least a brief illustration of the local or global totality. From this it follows that the encyclopedism of the narrative is not necessarily tied to length – as Borges's short fiction, especially "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (1940) brilliantly demonstrates.[80] But not only is a body of knowledge required, the

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[76] See Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 18. For the relation of the metaphysical detective story to other genres, see e.g. Merivale 2010.

[77] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 19.

[78] Ibid., 19.

[79] For Merivale and Sweeney (1999, 17–19), Pynchon's first three novels, which they also include in the maximalist category, are "all massively influential encyclopedic texts, in which failed searches for truth, certainty, and identity, where the world can only be interpreted by means of paranoid patterns." However, instead of calling *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), and *Gravity's Rainbow* simply *encyclopedic novels*, which these narratives are, Merivale and Sweeney consider them instead to establish "metaphysical conspiracy fiction."

[80] For the encyclopedic short story, see Kuusisto 2013.

protagonist should also, in one way or another, handle or negotiate this totality, thus illustrating the learning process that is an intrinsic part of *enkuklios paideia*. Therefore, if either of these two aspects is missing, maximalism, not encyclopedism, is the prime concern.[81] It is also for this reason I avoid immediately equating the maximalist branch of the metaphysical detective story with the encyclopedic novel: there are encyclopedic narratives which do not have elements of the metaphysical detective story (such as DeLillo's *Underworld*, or Vollmann's *Europe Central*, 2005), and there are maximalist metaphysical detective stories that are not encyclopedic.[82] This fact necessarily delimits the area of this study.

There is, however, common ground between the metaphysical detective story and the encyclopedic novel, and these mutual links enable the integration of the first into the latter. Before we explore that further, however, let us take a brief look at some differences between the minimalist and maximalist types of the metaphysical detective story. The chosen examples summarize nicely the phrasing of my question, and work as a practical introduction to the maximalist branch of the genre.

From Detective Adventures to Hermeneutical Delirium

Gravity's Rainbow is a cornerstone in the development of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, but in relation to the metaphysics of encyclopedism, it is more proper to begin with three key authors of the metaphysical detective story. Edgar Allan Poe, Jorge Luis Borges, and Umberto Eco belong to those writers who, in modern literature, can be said to have established what Pekka Kuusisto calls "the poetics of encyclopedic."[83] Moreover, Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844), Borges's "Death and the Compass" (1942) and Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* form a continuum of influence. As John T. Irwin has proved in his thorough study, Borges does not only exploit the geometrical structure of Poe's "The Purloined Letter" in his own story, but he also rewrites all of Poe's key detective stories.[84] From this standpoint, it is noteworthy that in a passing remark, Irwin asks an interesting question "whether

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[81] One should not neglect, however, the historical and cultural differences within maximalist authors. There is, for instance, a clear difference between Pynchon and Robbe-Grillet, or Coover and DeLillo, even though the first two published their key novels approximately at the same time, while the second two are fellow countrymen. In fact, if there are any flaws in Merivale and Sweeney's tentative genealogy, one may concern its emphasis on the detective story formula over those historically determined approaches individual authors adopt in order to exploit that formula.

[82] It would, however, be tempting to read *Underworld* as a metaphysical detective story, since one of the most meaningful events in the novel is a manslaughter committed by the protagonist, and this crime is not represented until the end.

[83] Kuusisto 2013.

[84] Irwin 1996, 30–42. Borges's project consists of "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941), "Death and the Compass", and "Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in His Labyrinth" (1951). These stories are rewritings of Poe's famous Dupin stories, namely "The Murder in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842), and "The Purloined Letter."

someone in the future will do for Borges what Borges has done for Poe."[85] Albeit rhetorical, this question deserves an answer: Irwin's "someone" is none other than Eco, who not only recycles the structure of "Death and the Compass" in *Foucault's Pendulum* (now in a more complex fashion), but also takes Borges's corpus widely into account in his other novels as well.[86]

"The Purloined Letter," "Death and the Compass," and *Foucault's Pendulum* form an interesting series of duplication, especially in one relation: each of the narratives gives birth to a new genre or subgenre. In his third Dupin story, Poe gives his finishing touches to the birth of the detective story. Borges's "Death and the Compass" in turn, is the first perfect example of the metaphysical detective story – even though "The Garden of Forking Paths" was published a year earlier, not to mention Chesterton's stories before that. *Foucault's Pendulum* is complementary in relation to these two short stories: Eco's novel exemplifies perfectly the maximalist type of the genre Borges founded and Poe inspired. Later in this part of the study I will give a thorough reading of the explicit connections between these three narratives, but at this point the more fundamental question is what in Eco's fiction lets us to see *Foucault's Pendulum* as an all-inclusive narrative in the first place. To get an idea in what way *Foucault's Pendulum* is maximalist, and how it is to be read as an encyclopedic novel, we need to compare it with Eco's earlier bestseller, *The Name of the Rose*, a novel that, for many, is the best-known metaphysical detective story. Unlike *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Foucault's Pendulum* and the lineage from which it descends, offer us the clearest and most genre-oriented demonstration of how the metaphysical detective story can in practice fuse with the encyclopedic mode of narrative. In this development, *The Name of the Rose* is an essential landmark.

Foucault's Pendulum is a work that positions itself at the crossroads of several influences. Like *The Name of the Rose*, it shares a dual audience of sorts: on the one hand, both novels are works of a scholar-author, and are partly addressed to readers who appreciate philosophical conversations and detailed accounts of religion and esotericism. One foot in semiotics, another in literature, Eco has also been able to offer his educated readers "critifictional" novels that deal with the same problems of interpretation that twenty-first century literary criticism has held in high regard.[87]

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[85] Irwin 1996, 137.

[86] After the release of *The Name of the Rose*, Eco admitted that the plot of "Death and the Compass" might have influenced the detective plot of his story, whereas the only Borgesian ideas in *Foucault's Pendulum* worth mentioning seem to be the Rosicrucians from "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and the theme of Golem. See Eco 2004b, 125–131; for Golem, see ch. 4.4. "Tlön" is, as Pekka Kuusisto (2013, 45) points out, the key story of Borges' poetics of encyclopedic, but in relation to the plot of *Foucault's Pendulum*, "Death and the Compass" is a more important allusion, I think.

[87] Norma Bouchard (2005) connects *Foucault's Pendulum* to the genre of *critifiction* that is defined by Siegfried Mews (1989, 714) as a subgenre of the academic novel, "penned by critics and professors of literature." Critifiction combines critical theory and fiction in an attempt to revive an interest in both. Bouchard's addition (2005, 69–70) is, however, more important: as critifiction, *Foucault's Pendulum* aims at bringing the general public closer to those questions posed by critical theory that often only remain within the sphere of academia. For more theoretical aspects of Eco's novel, see

On the other hand, both novels borrow their form from the detective story, which is one of most popular topologies among existing narrative formulas. Hence, especially *The Name of the Rose* has also been able to attract the general public. The popularity of the novel can be explained by the fact that Eco has collected in it all the familiar features from the classical detective stories of the 1930s, namely "maps, cryptograms, unbreakable alibis, a locked room, a labyrinthine library, clues in a variety of foreign languages, all surrounding a series of grisly murders, carefully spaced one per day with an elaborate textual pattern to them."[88] Eco even completes his first detective story with an actual closure, the solution to the series of crimes.[89]

Foucault's Pendulum differs from its predecessor in several aspects. Most of all, it emphasizes more the critifictional side of the combination, the dangers of interpretative pluralism that result from the detective's own "hermeneutical delirium."[90] The novel recognizes the maximalist possibilities of fanatical interpretations and fuses them with the possibilities that the first generation of home computers made available. Simultaneously, it also explores the informational *threat* that this union between epistemological fanaticism and the electronic machine poses.

Also, whereas *The Name of the Rose* focused on the challenging process of detection in a closed milieu, that is, in a monastery with a large, labyrinthine library in the year 1327, *Foucault's Pendulum* is set in present-day Italy, beginning from 1970 and ending in 1984. Europe is in ideological turmoil, and the publishing companies are being approached by different sorts of zealots. Thus, the monks of *The Name of the Rose* have been replaced with the scholars of modern times, publishing editors. Indeed, whereas Eco's debut was an innovative combination of historical novel and detective story, *Foucault's Pendulum* treats history and historiography in a more productive way: *The Name of the Rose* was set *in* history, but *Foucault's Pendulum* is a novel *about* history, a narrative that describes the reproduction process of the marginal past. Historiography is a storage of information to which the scholars, fanatics, and private eyes of learning have access, and of which they take advantage.

Besides rewriting history, *Foucault's Pendulum* deals not so much with detectives as with detection. In this matter, it has a position in the same continuum with Eco's preceding work of fiction. The most striking difference between *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* is that the latter deals with the same questions of detection as Eco's debut but in a more theoretical way. *The Name of the Rose* was, after all, a clear-cut detective story that added some metaphysical elements to the formula of mainstream detective fiction, but its general emphasis was still "on the detective's character and his adventures, with the revelation of a hidden truth simply serving

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Phiddian 1997.

[88] Richter 1997, 258.

[89] For Eco's relation to the history of detective fiction, see e.g. Bondanella 2009.

[90] Zamora 1997, 328.

as a device to illuminate the former and motivate the latter."[91] In *Foucault's Pendulum*, the emphasis is on the culture, and the detective and his adventures are subordinate to it.

Although much has been written about the storyworld of *The Name of the Rose*, as a detective story the novel is at heart a narrative about the adventure of a detective mastermind and his assistant William Baskerville and Adso of Melk – both referring, of course, to Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and his Watson. The climax at the end of the story has less to do with in the events of the monastery and more with Baskerville's sense that he has failed in his detection, albeit having been able to point out the offender. The ending sentence of the novel – "stat rosa pristina nominee, nomina nuda tenemus," or, "the primordial rose abides only in its name; we hold names stripped" – resonates with his confusion: on the one hand, the verse tells about the transience of all things, but on the other, it describes the postmodern incompatibility of sign systems – languages – and the world.[92] The detective is incapable of bringing the epistemological order to the cosmos by extirpating those irrational forces that temporally threat it, since the cosmos as such is not harmonious in the first place.[93] (Non)closure like this makes *The Name of the Rose* a textbook example of the metaphysical detective story: the solution to the crime takes place, but it is casual, and the detective reaches it by chance, leaving him, if not his assistant as well, disappointed.[94] For an Eco scholar such as Peter Bondanella, the end of *The Name of the Rose* even marks Eco's own disappointment in semiotics: the all-encompassing, yet thoroughly human study of signs is in the final analysis similarly incapable of producing a theory that could cover the world.[95] All we have are empty names whose meanings we invent.

Foucault's Pendulum enters at this point. As Lois Parkinson Zamora observes, in it, "there is no mythic master code, no potential or occulted truth validated by the narrative, no conclusion that contains or reflects upon the meaning of the whole. There is only information."[96] Given this "postmodern condition," the characters of Eco's novel are left in uncertainty, in which their chances of detecting meanings appear to be limited to two options: either to take the world as a univocal text in which every sign refers to every other sign, or, to take every text as an unfinished world of its own.[97] Both options emphasize the rights of interpreters, however. William Baskerville's disappointment is solidified in *Foucault's Pendulum* as a general condition of reading and living: if there is no order in the universe, like Baskerville concluded, this condition leaves the interpreter in a state of epistemological doubt,

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[91] Irwin 1996, 1.
[92] Eco 2004a, 502.
[93] See Knight 1980, 39.
[94] See Tani 1984, 72; Caesar 1999, 137; Bondanella 2009, 99.
[95] Bondanella 1997, 93–125.
[96] Zamora 1997, 330.
[97] Eco 1990, 21; Bennett 1998, 82.

or solipsism.[98] Everything around the interpreter – the cosmos, culture, others, science, art and literature – feels unsure and unstable, and the only thing one can rely on seems to be one's own senses, feelings, reasonings, and inventions.[99]

Especially inventions are what matter: if there is only information without any underlying pattern, the detective's investigation is about inventing references that could establish a pattern or order. This idea forms the key lesson of *Foucault's Pendulum* as a metaphysical detective story. In a situation like this, the naive detective projects his idée fixe onto the world and searches his own idea behind all texts and phenomena as objective essence. The more critical detective however would learn his lesson and keep his distance to not only this "obsessive" reading strategy but also to the other extreme as well, namely interpretative pluralism.[100] Above all, *Foucault's Pendulum* tells a story about the incapability of keeping one's feet on the ground between these two interpretative poles.

Whether one thinks of the world as a univocal and textual secret, or the textual web of literature as a world distinct from the actual world, serious problems are ahead. From a theoretical point of view, the latter standpoint has been a stronger tendency in the literary theory of the past century, and *Foucault's Pendulum* emphasizes it as well. Eco's narrative allies itself occasionally with postmodernist ideas of bricolage, parody and pastiche, and argues that when everything has already been said, there is nothing left to do but copy and paste, perhaps adding irony here and there. But these critifictional notions should be taken with a grain of salt, since in the end, Eco brings together "a radical reader-oriented theory of interpretation" and the doomed detectives.[101] By using the transgressive techniques of the metaphysical detective story as an aid to criticize theory-oriented arguments about the limits of interpretation, Eco inverts the parties involved in parody: those who parody the hunters of secrets too extensively eventually become the prey to these hunters.

All in all, the crucial idea in Eco's second novel is a side-effect of this parody. The mistreatment of obsessive semiosis leads the protagonists to egregious inventions of possible references. Given the lack of semiotic control, anything goes – and as free associations are allowed to rule the semiosis, their numbers are legion. Above all, the world seems to be a maximal web of mutual resemblances as it becomes confounded with the text-related ideas of semiosis. It is this idea that finally separates *Foucault's Pendulum* from *The Name of the Rose*, and gives Patricia Merivale

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[98] Eco 2004a, 492.
[99] If *Foucault's Pendulum* embodies the postmodern condition, the external world of its protagonists can, with good reason, be called *chaosmos*, a cosmos based on the principle of chaos. To resist and to survive in this situation, the characters of *Foucault's Pendulum* define, as Eco (1982, 83) would put it, "the new world by assembling a chaotic and dizzy encyclopedia from the old one and filling it with explanations that once seemed mutually exclusive."
[100] Eco 1990, 24.
[101] Eco 1992a, 25.

and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney a tenable reason to typify the first within the maximalist branch of the metaphysical detective story and the latter within the minimalist branch.[102] Simply put, the detective's practice in *Foucault's Pendulum* does not lead him to the solution of one crime. Instead, he invents another crime, or better, a web of crimes, a conspiracy. Conspiracies in turn are not only thinking patterns that violate epistemological boundaries, they also create separate worlds – and expand the narrative. Keeping the example of *Foucault's Pendulum* in mind, we can now proceed to formulate the shared epistemological and ontological features that allow the metaphysical detective story to merge with the contemporary encyclopedic novel.

1.3. The Metaphysics of Encyclopedism

Both the encyclopedic novel and the detective story are epistemological narratives. Both deal with questions of knowing and are driven by the principle of arranging given information into a coherent order. Thus, not only the encyclopedic novel but also the detective story describe, to quote Hilary Clark, the "process of coming to know."[103] But when these two literary phenomena are given a postmodernist treatment – the treatment we saw taking place in *Foucault's Pendulum* – the learning process as *an epistemological quest* also becomes an ontological issue. Of course, knowing is necessarily linked up with being, since the epistemological concern always contains an ontological element, namely a set of assumptions concerning the nature of reality. But especially in the metaphysical detective story, epistemological and ontological questions are connected to each other in an even more explicit way: as *Foucault's Pendulum* illustrated, careless interpretations may lead characters to build alternative realities, rather than discovering some hidden or implicit aspects of reality. Thus, in the metaphysical detective fiction the characters' subjective epistemological assumptions and delusions are not necessarily shown to be right or wrong at the end of the narrative by demonstrating what has objectively happened. Instead, either the reliability of these assumptions is left open, or reality as such turns out to be much more complicated than the characters imagined. The difference between illusion and reality is not a question; the question is the collapse of reality into a countless number of subjective illusions. For this reason, the epistemological environment – the milieu in which the detection takes place – is so often linked with the detective's unintentional quest for self-discovery. As a narrative, the metaphysical detective story nearly always involves a change: due to the detecting process, either reality or the detective's self-conception changes, and the

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[102] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 18.
[103] Clark 2011, 17.

epistemology of the narrative is, as Brian McHale puts it, "*backgrounded*, as the price for foregrounding ontology."[104]

We are now in a position in which the exposition for my fundamental argument can be laid out. In the following three sections, I anchor three key similarities that connect the metaphysical detective story to the encyclopedic novel. These links, namely *epistemological*, *ontological*, and *self-inclusive* uniformities are our next subject of scrutiny and will also form the guidelines of the chapters to come.

Epistemological Labyrinths: the Base and the Network

On the most fundamental level, the encyclopedic novel and the metaphysical detective story share the same spatial model when treating epistemological issues. This model is the idea of the *labyrinth*. As for the encyclopedic novel, the epistemological labyrinth consists of informational relations, or as they appear to the reader, the high information content. Loyal to historical encyclopedias, the high information content in the encyclopedic novel is arranged according to a particular model, such as around the image of a tree.[105] Thus, the textual composition usually follows – but also comments on – a hierarchical image of knowledge: the encyclopedic novel is seen to have one dominant, *epistemological center*, a prime category that determines other categories and subcategories of content. In other words, a dominant theme or an object of research determines the ordering and value of the content.

Melville's *Moby-Dick* is an obvious example. The whale as *a symbolic object* of the story works as an epistemological center, and as a base for a tree model, it determines all the relations of knowledge in the novel.[106] In this respect, the tree model is a version of a labyrinth with one center. But what is specific in this model is that the center is set from a humanistic premise. The hierarchy reflects more the assumed unity of human knowledge than the actual order of nature. The white whale is an object that illustrates the human capacity to gain knowledge about it: the whale, as well as the narrative as a whole, is not so much about the whale as it is about our human knowledge about the whale. Hence, like taxonomies of historical encyclopedias, this labyrinthine model reflects the priority of human knowledge. The high information content is intended to be mainly arranged from this basis.

A cognitive process of learning that takes place in a geometrically modeled

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[104] McHale 1987, 11; original italics. McHale's contributions to developing the theory of the metaphysical detective story, as well as postmodernist fiction in general, are discussed in this chapter.

[105] The tree model came to historical encyclopedias from Christianity. In the late medieval period the biblical tree of wisdom (*arbor sapientie*) played the same organizing role as libraries, gardens, and museums did during the Renaissance. See Yeo 2001, 10, 23.

[106] In Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and DeLillo's *Underworld*, this center is the threat of apocalypse in the forms of the V-2 rocket and the atomic bomb.

space of logical system, is not, however, characteristic of the encyclopedic novel alone. Detective stories also exploit this process – not only by taking a maze as their concrete model, but also by representing a detective in a continuum of deductive decisions.[107] Robert Rawdon Wilson illustrates this idea by connecting together the metaphysical detective story and what he calls a "godgame" – a labyrinthine play of successful and unsuccessful choices.[108] According to Wilson, every narrative that focuses on a character in a series of labyrinthine situations, is basically a godgame. This game occurs "when one or more characters creates an illusion, a mazelike sequence of false accounts, that entraps another character."[109] The labyrinth constitutes a playground for the godgame: the detective as an entrapped character makes successive decisions to get out (and reach the creator of the labyrinth, that is, the perpetrator), but these decisions are determined by the rules of the game, and may lead to impasses.[110] In this sense, the labyrinth works as a symbol of "cognitive bafflement" which the entrapped character pursues to overcome by clearing up "the frustratingly hidden rules of godgames."[111] This romantic idea of exposing hidden knowledge, and the godgame it constitutes, are also present in the metaphysical detective story. In it, however, the detective's risk of losing in this godgame increases: hidden knowledge may turn out to be worthless.

Revealing the identity of perpetrator and deciphering the sequence of events that led to the crime, are certainly two sides of the *raison d'être* of the detective story. Together these functions also constitute the epistemological center, and around it the network of valuable clues. However, what distinguishes the metaphysical detective story as a godgame from other forms of detective story, is that in mainstream detective fiction all action is supposed to lead to a solution. Even though the detective may follow the wrong track for a while, there is no real threat that the detective would completely fail in his investigation, which means that the clues and other key texts are always more or less relevant.[112] In the metaphysical detective story, however, as Jeanne C. Ewert describes Patrick Modiano's *Missing Person* (1978), "[c]lues are given that are in fact irrelevant to the mystery. Clues that may be relevant go unheeded, and 'significant' coincidences mean nothing more than another turn in the maze."[113] As this obviously evokes the ostensibly unnecessary information included in the encyclopedic novel, it is noteworthy that two key examples (besides Robbe-Grillet and Borges) Wilson has picked to demonstrate his

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[107] E.g. Ewert 1990; Irwin 1996.
[108] Wilson 1982.
[109] Ibid., 6.
[110] Wilson's example is Borges's "Death and the Compass," which in a very clear way demonstrates the labyrinthine trap of the detective. John Fowles's *The Magus* (1965) would be another, valid example of the godgame.
[111] Wilson 1982, 8.
[112] According to Joel Black (1999, 79), the key text is a usable document, or a clue, the detective uses "to achieve his final goal, which is to discover or recover a prized object [...]."
[113] Ewert 1990, 168–169.

theory are both encyclopedic works, namely *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Don Quixote*.

Indeed, whereas Wilson's remarks fit more than well with the epistemological motives of the metaphysical detective story, it is equally easy to expand the idea of "godgame" first, to the level of reading, and then, to the encyclopedic novel as a maximalist touchstone of reading. After all, the detective story formula is an interpretative game that models all reading, thus being a minimalist godgame. As Peter Hühn puts it, characters reflect the process of reading, a process of "reconstructing a hidden or lost story (that is, the crime)."[114] More precisely, the crime-solving detective is an embodiment of *a model reader* that is embedded in the story, whereupon "the representation of the detective's reading affects the reader's own reading process."[115] In adjusting the detective story formula as a model of reading, the role of the metaphysical detective story is equally important. Since it pays critical attention to the detective's role as surrogate reader, it explicitly stresses the ambivalence of the reading act.[116] If the detective can reach deductive deadlocks, so can the reader.

When one compares these premises to the aesthetic-cognitive attitudes of encyclopedism, the encyclopedic novel appears as a maximalist godgame. Both the characters and the reader operate as epistemological agents in an illusionary sphere of a "mazelike sequence" of expansive, exhaustive, even contradictory accounts of information. What is emphasized is the role of the reader as an agent who learns to find his way through the interpretative labyrinth of high information content. This means that, on the one hand, the encyclopedic novel forms an illusion of totality through a recognizable architectural, geometrical, or temporally circular shape or topology.[117] On the other, this labyrinthine shape, along with the excessive representation of material, affects the way in which the reader perceives the narrative. As David Letzler points out, due to its expansiveness and messiness, the encyclopedic novel serves "as a kind of all-purpose gymnasium for mental filtering skills."[118] For this reason, the amount of narrative material may increase the risk of misinterpretation. It is not then a coincidence that the protagonists in encyclopedic novels so often deal with problems of interpretation: just like detectives, they are embodiments of the model reader, surrogate readers who aim at deducing their way out of the godgame. The only remarkable difference between these two character types concerns their position in the epistemological environment. For understandable *cultural* reasons, this space is much broader in the encyclopedic novel than it is in a typical metaphysical detective story with a centripetal, detection-focused structure.

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[114] Hühn 1987, 451; e.g. Dove 1997.
[115] Pyrhönen 1999, 5.
[116] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 2.
[117] E.g. Hite 1983; Kuusisto 2001; Ercolino 2014, 78–96.
[118] Letzler 2012, 313.

Nevertheless, Wilson's godgame is only one theoretical reference point when it comes to the epistemological labyrinth as a shared idea between the encyclopedic novel and the metaphysical detective story. Another remarkable conceptualization can be borrowed from Eco, who represents three models of labyrinth first, in the context of the metaphysics of "encyclopedic competence," and then, in the context of "the metaphysics of the detective story."[119] For him, the labyrinth is a semiotic image for modeling interpretations, meaning, and chains of reasoning. In this view, the encyclopedia is "the average competence that an individual needs to acquire to belong to a given culture," whereas the labyrinth works as an image of this competence.[120] The three types of labyrinth that is, *a classical labyrinth*, *a maze*, and *a net*, are, however, also cognitive models for narratives in general. This is especially the case with the detective story which, as a formula, relies on the idea of successful interpretation performed by the competent protagonist. But whereas Eco and some others have used this topology to explain the epistemology of the metaphysical detective story, it is noteworthy that these models are just as applicable to the epistemological order of the encyclopedic novel.[121]

The first of these models, a classical labyrinth in which one cannot get lost, is applicable with the first and the most idealistic detective stories. As is the case with Poe's Dupin and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, the detective's reasoning is unerring, while the clues form a straight line labyrinth. The story has a clear-cut antagonist who is defeated, or a crime that is solved without difficulty. The second of Eco's labyrinths, a mannerist maze, is a "visitor's trial-and-error process."[122] It applies to most classical and hard-boiled detective stories: detectives such as Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe "follow a series of misleading and dead-end clues before they discover the correct direction for their investigations."[123] As regards the metaphysical detective story, it is worth noting that the maze-like cognitive model gives the narrative a potential to leave the criminal investigation open. The closure may be unsatisfying, or the story may even lack one.[124]

The third image, a net or *a rhizome*, is the most problematic of Eco's cognitive models since, on the one hand, it would be tempting to use the net as an epistemological illustration of the metaphysical detective story, while on the other, the rhizome is a concept that is more or less *inapplicable* to printed literature. However, to get an idea of this incompatibility, let us make a short digression. This

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[119] Eco 1986, 80–84; 1984, 54–58.
[120] Violi 1998, 30.
[121] E.g. Eco 1984, 54–58; Ewert 1999, 187–188.
[122] Eco 1986, 81.
[123] Ewert 1999, 187.
[124] I have elsewhere demonstrated the role of the mannerist maze in Jaakko Yli-Juonikas's *Neuromaani* (2012), a Finnish novel that, precisely by being an encyclopedic novel, can be epistemologically ordered as a metaphysical detective story. See Kyllönen 2016b.

sidetrack leads us to define further the nature of the epistemological labyrinth represented especially in the encyclopedic novel.

Following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Eco holds the rhizome to be a multi-level network of relations:

> Every point of the rhizome can and must be connected with every other point. […] There are no points or positions in a rhizome; there are only lines […]. A rhizome can be broken off at any point and reconnected following one of its own lines. […] The rhizome is antigenealogical. […] a rhizomatic whole has neither outside nor inside. […] A network of trees which open in every direction can create a rhizome.[125]

While the printed book has its material limits (the beginning, the end, the linear order of words), the narrative as found in the metaphysical detective story may have an ergodic structure, but even then, it has a genealogy of its own, one base from which the network of interpretative relations springs. At the level of the reading act, this base is a concrete order of sentences. Thus, there are no hyperlinks in the print novel, and the lack of this option makes it difficult to conceive of the printed narrative as "antigenealogical." Following Deleuze and Guattari, on a metaphysical level it is *the world* to which *the book* is still subordinate: if the storyworld is not mimetic in relation to our world, then at least the book, in which the storyworld is represented, remains a physical product. It is a virtual world that is less real than reality.[126]

Rather than a rhizome, it would be both more careful and more truthful to call the epistemological labyrinth of the metaphysical detective story a "radicle-system."[127] Following Deleuze and Guattari, the radicle system is a labyrinthine, and an ostensibly chaotic structure that nevertheless maintains a loose hierarchical structure. This structure consists of two elements: *the base* and *the network*. While especially the maximalist type of the metaphysical detective story may appear completely centrifugal, even then its reasoning lines and labyrinthine gateways are connected to a specific, albeit hidden center (from which they lead away). But even in such a case, the multiplicity of meanings becomes limited, and "its growth is offset by a reduction in its laws of combination."[128] Therefore, the book cannot be

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[125] Eco 1986, 81; Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 3–28.

[126] E.g. Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 7. Even Eco (1984, 57) seems to admit this limit in relation to *The Name of the Rose*: his "labyrinthine library," that is, his novel, is a mannerist maze, although the world its protagonist experiences has started to resemble a rhizome. In *Semiotics and the Philosophy and Language* (1986, 83–84), Eco explains that "[t]he Universe of semiosis, that is, the universe of human culture, must be conceived as structured like a labyrinth of the third type [that is, the rhizome]: (a) It is structured according to a network of interpretants. (b) It is virtually infinite because it takes into account multiple interpretations realized by different cultures […] (c) It does not register only 'truths' but, rather, what has been said about the truth or what has been believed to be true […]. (d) Such a semantic encyclopedia is never accomplished and exists only as a regulative idea."

[127] Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 6.

[128] Ibid., 6.

interpreted in any possible way, and not even a maximalist type of the metaphysical detective story can expand infinitely.

In any case, Eco's cognitive models can be applied just as easily to encyclopedic novels as to metaphysical detective stories. As a hierarchical image of knowledge, the encyclopedic novel clearly resembles the maze, that is, according to Eco, "a particular kind of tree in which certain choices are privileged in respect to others."[129] Yet one needs to remember that the encyclopedic novel is not a totality but an illusion of totality; not the order of the world but a human perception of that order. It is only a systematic representation of a "presumed structure of the world."[130] But since the encyclopedic novel never adjusts to remain a mere presumption but strives to create a total representation of the world, the maze appears to be an insufficient epistemological model. The rhizome, for its part, is not only impossible to be executed in printed literature but is also a non-hierarchical map which "*globally* can only be described as a potential sum of *local* descriptions."[131]

Eco's own "midway solution" between the maze and the rhizome, is more useful: *the eighteenth-century encyclopedia*, or *a pseudotree* is a version of a radicle system, since it creates a totality of networks which the encyclopedist acknowledges to be an illusion. In Deleuze and Guattari's words, "the principal root has aborted": the illusion of coherence of knowledge in the encyclopedic novel is based on the seeming absence of the base.[132] Yet absent or not, this center is there to hold together the centrifugal network.

Moreover, as Eco argues, the eighteenth-century encyclopedia:

> presents itself as the most economic solution with which to confront and resolve a particular problem of the reunification of knowledge [...] The encyclopedist knows that the tree organizes, yet impoverishes, its content, and he hopes to determine as precisely as he can the intermediary paths between the various nodes of the tree so that little by little it is transformed into a geographical chart or a map.[133]

But the problem of the reunification of knowledge does not concern "the encyclopedist" only. Epistemologically, both the metaphysical detective story and the encyclopedic novel work with a same set of problems – namely, the heterogeneity of knowledge, and the diversity of clues – whereupon their epistemological agents are always searching for uniting ideas, and for suitable cognitive models and principles of categorization. Their learning processes are driven by the desire to organize the data material – cultural knowledge, narrative material, high information content – into a comprehensible totality. Yet the principal root has been

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[129] Eco 1986, 81.
[130] Ibid., 82.
[131] Ibid., 82.
[132] Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 6.
[133] Eco 1986, 82.

aborted; the guiding idea, which in *Foucault's Pendulum* is represented as the fixed point of the universe, is either absent or fleeing.

These epistemological starting points, I hope, justify us to see the radicle system as the shared epistemological model between the metaphysical detective story and the encyclopedic novel. From this basis, we can take into account the next connecting similarity, namely *ontological consequences*.

Ontological Consequences

The heterogeneity of knowledge implies another fundamental link connecting the metaphysical detective story and the contemporary encyclopedic novel. Whereas the radicle system is for both a spatial model to deal with epistemological issues, these issues have a tendency to turn into ontological questions, especially in the metaphysical detective story. Yet the ontological issues concerning, for instance, the ambivalent nature of reality are also common to the encyclopedic novel, in which the totalizing pursuits to cover the "world system" (that is, the totality) produce a number of surrogate systems, explanatory models, and alternative ontologies. Hence, the second link can be named *ontological consequences*.

In the encyclopedic novel, these consequences relate to the encyclopedic urge, and in the metaphysical detective story they rise from the detection process. Both urges are also either disguised or explicit *acts of fictionalization*. They are improvisations of a possible world: the encyclopedic novel establishes an alternative world system, whereas in the metaphysical detective story the story of the investigation already works as a possible world for the story of the crime.[134] After all, both the sketch for the world system and the explanation of the crime concern "imaginative projections" of what there is, and of what has happened.[135] But as much as both projects were originally attempts to attain reliable knowledge about the world, in the postmodernist context they also, to an ever-increasing degree, differ from their former pursuits. This deviation implies an ontological emphasis, for eventually the projections themselves turn into possible worlds.

As an idea, this ontological concern is in line with Brian McHale's theory of postmodernism, according to which the shift from modernist to postmodernist fiction is in practice a shift from the epistemological to the ontological dominant.[136] By the concept of dominant, McHale refers to Roman Jakobson's idea of "the focusing component [that] rules, determines, and transforms other components."[137] Thus the dominant gives the narrative its integrity as a "structured system, [as] a

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[134] See McHale 1987, 10; Todorov 1977, 46–47.
[135] McHale 1987, 10.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Qtd in Ibid., 6.

regularly ordered hierarchical set of artistic devices."[138] In the light of the earlier discussed radicle system, despite the ontological side-effects the dominant still works as the epistemological center of the narrative, and this center determines the network of the rest of the material. In McHale's terms, the easiest way to describe this kind of system of the dominant would be to name it a "focalization of all the evidence through a single 'centre of consciousness.'"[139] For us, it is equally easy to link this center of consciousness with the detective.

In McHale's view, the epistemological dominant deals with the subject's cognitive relationship to the objective world, but leaves the "structures," and especially the possible instability of that world untouched. For him, the mainstream detective story is a perfect example, as in it, the detective seeks to know how the crime has happened, why it has happened, and, most of all, who has committed this crime.[140] Nothing in the world changes, however. Even though McHale does not explicitly mention the metaphysical detective story, it is obviously a perfect example of the shift from one dominant to another.[141] The metaphysical detective story takes, first, the problematics of ontological structures seriously, as its metafictional narrative form tends to violate the borders between the worlds and asks what is real in the first place.[142] Secondly, metaphysical sleuths are "capable of sustaining propositional attitudes and projecting possible worlds" inside the storyworld.[143] These projections are often more than mere projections: they are creations, or they question the social and institutional laws of the storyworld. Hence, what in postmodernist fiction begins as a quest for knowledge about the world, turns into a violation of ontological foundations and boundaries. If the crime is not an event that irreversibly alters reality, it is the investigation that does.[144]

Indeed, the postmodern world, which forms the social horizon for the metaphysical detective story, is usually seen as lacking epistemological foundations. Not even scientific knowledge can be fully legitimated, and hence the postmodernist condition is perceived as an era of radical suspicion. Two *negations* are adopted from this condition into the metaphysical detective story. First, postmodern "anti-epistemology" denies that the epistemological core of detective fiction, that is, the detective, is a scientifically reasoning expert. And in this way, second, the postmodern condition takes issue with the detective story form as such. Given the lack of a reliable perceiving subject (the competent detective), the world too loses

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[138] Ibid., 6.
[139] Ibid., 9.
[140] Ibid., 9.
[141] He does, though, write lengthily about Pynchon, Robbe-Grillet, Nabokov, and Eco. See also Merivale & Sweeney 1999.
[142] Ewert 1999, 189.
[143] McHale 1987, 34.
[144] McHale's reading of Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* nicely summarizes this shift between dominants: the protagonist's epistemological inquiries concerning the ambiguous crime lead her to suspect whether the underground postal network exists or not. See Ibid., 22–23.

its reliability. It is for this reason that the metaphysical detective story is occasionally called *the anti-detective story*: the narrative suspects both the "dead-end rationality" of the genre, and the very reality it reluctantly represents.[145] Denying the detective's competence raises the burning issue of ontological uncertainty: "the problem-solution perspective of the 'straightforward' Western man of action" is not only misleading but also it mistreats, even loses the reality.[146]

It is easy to apply postmodern suspicion to the contemporary encyclopedic novel. In a passing remark, McHale argues that postmodernist literary works parody encyclopedic forms and substitute "for 'encyclopedic' knowledge their own *ad hoc*, arbitrary, unsanctioned associations."[147] These misattributions mean bending the tacit rules that epistemological agents follow to organize knowledge into a system. Thus, while it goes without saying that the postmodernist encyclopedia is not formulated in a traditional way, epistemological agents draw on methodological shortcuts, such as analogies.[148]

Since Pynchon's first three novels, the most popular literary motif with these shortcuts has been the motif of cultural paranoia, or conspiracy.[149] For the metaphysical detective story, cultural paranoia has been a logical choice as a parodic device, since paranoia is in glaring contrast with scientific empiricism, for which the detective character is known. Cultural paranoia is also probably the only possible method of interpretation that is able to enforce the confused postmodern world experience back into the problem-solution "world template" of the detective story. In this sense, it truly seems an attractive way of thinking because it is a simple, and yet all-embracing tool of systematizing knowledge and observations of society. As Fredric Jameson argues, "conspiracy theory (and its garish narrative manifestations) must be seen as a degraded attempt […] to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system."[150] Simply put, the paranoid aims at thinking of the world system as a whole, but with poor rational equipment. He seeks hidden connections between phenomena, and does not follow conventional or argumentative rules of thinking. Following Stefano Ercolino, I call this kind of thinking procedure "paranoid imagination."[151]

Since cultural paranoia is a postmodern way to construct, or more precisely, to fictionalize the world, it is widely used in the contemporary encyclopedic novel as

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[145] Tani 1984, xv.
[146] Spanos 1987, 17.
[147] McHale 1987, 48.
[148] All the novels I study are not, however, unambiguously postmodernist encyclopedias. The definition is valid in Eco's case, but as regards the rest, *The Gold Bug Variations*, *Infinite Jest*, and *House of Leaves* may, in the long run, represent a literary phenomenon that comes "after" postmodernist fiction. The novels, nevertheless, share a number of qualities with postmodernist fiction.
[149] E.g. Black 1999; O'Donnell 2000; Melley 2000; Coale 2005.
[150] Jameson 2009, 38.
[151] Ercolino 2014, 105–113.

well. In fact, as Ercolino claims, paranoia is "the very *motor* of the maximalist literary imagination" as it fuels the plot in novels such as *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Underworld*, and *Infinite Jest*.[152] But besides being a part of plot, epistemologically understood paranoia is also a method to map the world and re-establish its supposed order. Hence, it is problem-solving on a grand scale. And as such, the paranoid imagination serves the encyclopedic urge to cover the totality of culture. For this reason, it also tends to spread from the thoughts of the main characters to the level of reading, whereupon the reader is also encouraged to seek for hidden connections amidst the high information content.

Nevertheless, the paranoid-driven world template is fiction at heart, and ontologically, it differs from both the storyworld and the world we know. As a fictional territory situated "between" these two worlds but existing mainly in the character's mind, the paranoid world template creates an ontological tension within the encyclopedic novel. For instance, the thread of DeLillo's *Underworld* is a baseball, the microhistory of which we follow throughout the novel. At the same time, however, the exact size of this ball is connected to the size of the radioactive core of a nuclear bomb.[153] Thus, the speculations about the baseball are an example of those numerous claims concerning the hidden connections between things that guide the reader to embrace the paranoid world template of the novel. In this view, the storyworld of DeLillo's novel has an epistemological center, namely the (threat of the) nuclear bomb to which all the other areas of American culture are submitted. Yet ontologically, we know that the phenomena of Cold War culture are not that simple or well-organized. We know that there is neither hidden, synecdochic nor appropriate connection between the baseball and the nuclear bomb; their identical size is *just* a coincidence. And we know that these speculations are not true either in the storyworld or in the world we know. But simultaneously, there is no one but us to declare the inaccuracy of the paranoid worldview, whereupon the epistemological doubt raised by the paranoid imagination begins to have ontological consequences. What if there *is* a connection?

I discuss the role of paranoia further in the context of *Foucault's Pendulum*, but at this point, it is worth noting that the paranoid imagination does not only aim at establishing a fictional, and yet believable new world order of its own. It also maps, and further alters, the (story)world as a network of signs and clues. As an antidote to the postmodern condition, conspiracy thinking turns the world into an endless stream of key texts, a great puzzle, and it is here where paranoia ceases to be a conscious decision.[154] But equally, the creation of a fictional world within the

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[152] Ibid., 106; original italics. Ercolino also finds the trope of paranoid imagination in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001), and Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004). A contemporary encyclopedic novel that does explicitly deal with cultural paranoia is *Foucault's Pendulum*, which, however, Ercolino surprisingly leaves out of his study.
[153] DeLillo 2003, 172.
[154] Coale 2005, 4; Ercolino 2014, 107.

storyworld – that is, a subworld – and the alteration of the real world, are combined in the paranoid's mind. In McHale's terms, the paranoid *superimposes* two spaces, or systems: the conspiracy as a model of reality is placed on top of reality.[155] Consequently, not only does the model explain reality; together these two spaces also create, as McHale sharp-sightedly observes, "through their tense and paradoxical coexistence a third space identifiable with neither of the original two – a zone."[156]

What is the ontological "zone" in the contemporary encyclopedic novel? This is not necessarily a question of paranoia any more, since more recent postmodern authors do not exploit the motif of paranoia as intensively as Pynchon does. For this reason, their characters may be called "post-paranoid," as these characters, without being explicitly paranoid, nevertheless tend to superimpose two spaces, as we will see especially in *Infinite Jest*. From Eco's theory of metaphysics of encyclopedia we learned that "[t]he encyclopedist knows that the tree organizes, yet impoverishes its content."[157] According to Stephen J. Burn, after William Gaddis had updated the modernist encyclopedic form especially with his *The Recognitions* (1955), subsequent generations of encyclopedic writers have had a tendency "to use the encyclopedic form to dramatize more explicitly the limitations of the encyclopedic urge."[158] Thus, encyclopedic authors after Gaddis and Pynchon do not just blindly place one world model on top of reality; instead, they are very aware of the fallacies of this model. The taxonomies that were originally supposed to mirror reality not only skew our image of reality, but also distance us from this reality. The model and reality, the map and the territory, are then two separate "spaces."

The raised awareness that concerns the incompatibility between the totality and the act of totalizing, is, however, only a theoretical point of departure for mapping the actual zone in encyclopedic novels. McHale connects the concept of zone to an inappropriate, discontinuous and inconsistent space in the narrative, in which "worlds of incompatible structure" are juxtaposed.[159] From this position, it seems more likely that the zone is *a metaphorical space* between two kinds of network: on the one hand, there are epistemological agents that operate on several levels of narrative, seek hidden connections, link the phenomena together, and thus create an epistemological network. On the other hand, there is a network of information content, the labyrinthine space that epistemological agents go through. The latter network is not the (story)world as such, but *a reality* the epistemological agents perceive as *the world*. Throughout this study, such a metaphorical space is simply called *an epistemological environment*.

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[155] McHale 1987, 45–46.
[156] Ibid., 46.
[157] Eco 1986, 82.
[158] Burn 2007, 60.
[159] McHale 1987, 44.

Totalizing attempts, along with the paranoid imagination, tend to presuppose and establish a fixed foundation for the totality. Typically, the epistemological agent thinks that this foundation orders and unites the other aspects of the system. It is here where epistemological agents often go wrong, however. The ontological dominant changes the epistemological environment of the narrative. With postmodernist fiction, it is thus the awareness concerning ontology – the structures of the world – that challenges the idea of order. Is the storyworld really a *cosmos*? What about the actual world whose reflection the storyworld aims to be – is that world also a cosmos? If so, what kind of cosmoses are these two worlds? And how does the author take their metaphysics into account? Obviously, radical suspicion does not only fall on the hierarchy of the system. It also falls on the presupposition that there is only one system. After all, the ontological dominant concerns the coexistence of several interpolating, juxtaposing, and even contradictory ontologies, or systems.

Ontologically, then, the great paradox of the encyclopedic novel is that actual encyclopedism *threatens* cosmic unity, while at the same time, encyclopedism simply aims at representing this unity. In fact, it is due to the encyclopedic urge that the contemporary encyclopedic novel creates new systems all the time. In addition to the length of the narrative, polyphony and inclusiveness, encyclopedism is a narrative feature that expands the narrative as a whole, and only the limits set by narratorial omniscience, along with the idea of completeness, can keep it from dispersing completely.[160] The encyclopedic urge also sets the storyworld in expansive motion.

The motif of gathering information in the form of an epistemological quest is the same kind of act of violation in many metaphysical detective stories: traditional ontological boundaries are violated, which in turn, creates new territories, or areas in a larger zone. Detection as a textual practice produces *a map* that is not compatible with *a territory*. The map, however, begins to resemble an independent territory. And if this were not enough, there also are as many maps as there are epistemological agents, so that there are basically several territories as well. Since "there are no exterior, objective viewpoints from which to observe," as N. Katherine Hayles describes the postmodern consensus, the protagonists, the narrators, and we, as readers, can only wander from one territory to another, through a zone, a network of territories.[161] This ontological challenge affects the ways that epistemological agents conceive themselves. The final feature that is adapted from the metaphysical detective story to the encyclopedic novel concerns these characters.

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[160] Ercolino 2014, 114.
[161] Hayles 1990, xi.

Metaphysical Detectives

What happens when epistemological agents, such as detective characters or encyclopedic learners, find themselves inside the ontological zone that at first looked simply to be an epistemological labyrinth? Realizing that one is living in a world of coexisting realities can be both a world-shaking and self-shattering experience. For instance, Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* loses herself to paranoia. In Gilbert Sorrentino's *Odd Number*, each of the sections of the narrative "offers a unique history, and the detective loses himself in negotiating the maze that they form when added together."[162] Tyrone Slothrop, the protagonist of *Gravity's Rainbow,* literally disappears after he has arrived at the "zone" – only to reappear as an anonymous, collective, and even more fragmentary consciousness.[163] The latest of these alternative developments is also the most extreme, especially as regards the ways that the metaphysical detective story relates to the fundamental role of *closure* in the detective story formula. If the expected solution to the crime is predetermined, even in a loose sense, it is usually absent, false, circular, or self-defeating.[164] Thus, in addition to the disappearance of the detective character, *the failure* in a metaphysical search can take many forms, from failing in reasoning (Eco's *The Name of the Rose*) to becoming the victim (Borges's Death and the Compass"). It is, however, finding oneself inside the zone, or between the worlds, that usually leads to endings such as these.

Unlike Stefano Tani has argued, I suggest that the closure in the metaphysical detective story is not necessarily a convention that determines the characteristics and course of the story in the first place.[165] Important factors in succeeding or not succeeding in the detection are more likely the protagonist's *degree of professionalism* as a detective on the one hand, and *the ontological complexity* of the described world on the other. Since these two factors frequently overlap, they are approached here as one. In fact, the detective's characteristics and the world he perceives do not just overlap, for the first also motivates the latter. Following John T. Irwin, I refer to this feature of the metaphysical detective story as a motif of *self-inclusion*: the individual consciousness of the detective and his epistemological environment are closely linked so that the mind is nearly always embedded in the perceived and represented totality, not outside it.[166]

The fundamental role of self-inclusion forms the third aspect connecting the metaphysical detective story with the encyclopedic novel. But whose self is included? Earlier I defined epistemological agents as multifaceted organizers of

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[162] Ewert 1999, 190.
[163] McHale borrows the term "zone" from Pynchon.
[164] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 8.
[165] Tani 1984.
[166] Irwin 1996, 1–21.

cultural knowledge, plot material, and high information content, who spread out on the levels of plot, narrative, and interpretation, and simply refer to the protagonists, narrators, and the reader as agents contributing to the encyclopedic production. The detective story gives this trinity of players an explicit model: at the center of the narrative there is a detective who deducts; he is a surrogate, or a model reader who is followed by, first, the narrator, and then, the reader. The latter two follow the detective, but simultaneously they are also active participants in reconstructing the story of the crime: the narrator frames the detective's reasoning (the detection process) whereas the reader, by following this framing (as a narrative), deduces along with the detective, and even competes with him.

In the encyclopedic novel, this arrangement is more disguised, but is nevertheless similar. Especially the role of the narrator separates the encyclopedic narrative from detective fiction: the narration is more digressive, fragmentary, and multifaceted. Moreover, the number of focalizers is not limited to the protagonist's sidekick. Instead, there may be several, separate framings of individual cases, and two or three detectives working with parallel quests. Whereas the reader has to adopt methods that allow one to organize large amounts of fragmentary content, it is, however, the protagonist that deserves closer scrutiny at this point: it is his self that is usually included in the totality. As with the detective story in which the sleuth operates as a leading epistemological agent, so too in the encyclopedic novel the protagonist appears as a model reader, an agent whom the reader is encouraged to follow. The encyclopedism of the narrative is often motivated by the actions of this agent.

Rarely, however, is the epistemological agent at the level of plot a clear-cut or professional detective. Following Tom LeClair, the protagonists of the encyclopedic novel "are more than often producers, sorters, and consumers of information," but this does not necessarily mean that they are professionals as well.[167] In fact, in most cases, they are self-educated amateurs and dilettantes who are simply acquainted with scholars, scientists, and information specialists. This convention comes close to the conventions of the metaphysical detective story, as it similarly rejects the epistemological presumption typical of modernist fiction, according to which a powerful consciousness at the center of the narrative easily organizes the information content. Instead, since the "detective" in many metaphysical detective stories is an amateur, an armchair detective, or simply a relative or a friend of a victim, he is not professional in deduction either. Therefore, what the reader should expect from the story, are complications in detection.

In the encyclopedic novel, these complications come in the form of personal pathologies. The protagonists share an eager, albeit complicated relationship to information, and frequently they are, for instance, former child prodigies. A typical

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[167] LeClair 1989, 15.

background of the protagonist is as follows: the main character has learned new skills quickly, even mastering them at an early age. Alternatively, the parents have bought the protagonist a set of encyclopedias, which he has then, again in a short time, memorized thoroughly. The narrative events describe, at least partly, the outcome of this education, which is unexpected: after having peaked early in his childhood, the main character is faced with the negative consequences of being a prodigy. Like many metaphysical sleuths, the protagonists often suffer from paranoia, traumatic disorders, addictions, but above all, a specific kind of solipsism. The protagonist's relation to the community is loose and ambivalent, and he may have a background with domestic issues. Also, his former education only seems to give him an extraordinary amount of mental ballast. This leaves him alone with his own obsessions and misconceptions.

Since problems like these are visible in the protagonists from the very beginning, such issues also define the general course of the encyclopedic narrative. In fact, like in metaphysical detective stories, the quest is frequently connected to the protagonist's sense of identity, his suppressed or otherwise rejected side of self. Thus, as much as the encyclopedic novel concerns the cataloguing of totality (of extramental reality), its embedded quest is more than often a disguised search for the lost parts of the self (that is, of mental reality).

Jorge Luis Borges, whose work has affected the development of both the metaphysical detective story and the encyclopedic novel, is one of those authors who, along with Poe, has explicitly cherished the motif of self-inclusion in the representation of totality.[168] In his work, the individual mind (of the protagonist) equals the represented totality (or the world), but in a way that makes the totality include the representation of this mind both as a duality and creates the difference within both the mind and the totality.[169] Thus, according to Irwin, "a total representation of the universe" can be said to be, in fact, an idealized version of "the individual mind's theoretical absoluteness."[170] Since encyclopedias are totalizing images of our taxonomy of knowledge, and are not so much the order of phenomena as such, Borges's idea of self-inclusion can be applied to the encyclopedic novel relatively easily as well. In Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, for instance, even the smallest details mentioned in the narrative can be reduced to the complications of the individual mind of the protagonist. In fact, the whole novel can be read in this way, as I subsequently argue in this study.

The theme of self-inclusion is even more evident when we take into consideration the presence of other characters beside the protagonist. In addition to being a former child prodigy, the protagonist of the encyclopedic novel is often a novice who needs a specific mentor. Thus, the most important character besides the

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[168] E.g. Irwin 1996; Kuusisto 2013.
[169] See Irwin 1996.
[170] Ibid., 16.

protagonist is a father-like teacher character. The quest for knowledge is related to this mentor: either the original quest concerns him, and his quest expands the original quest, or these two quests turn out to be reflections of each other. To illustrate this overlapping, I briefly highlight a concept that summarizes the relationship between the protagonist and the teacher character. Merivale and Sweeney refer to the genre of *elegiac romance* in their genealogy of the metaphysical detective story without stating, however, that the elegiac romance is in fact, often a fundamental formula in constructing the metaphysics of the metaphysical detective story.[171] According to the creator of this concept, Kenneth A. Bruffee, the elegiac romance can be summarized as a narrative form in which the narrator remembers his deceased friend or mentor by narrativizing not only the story of this friend but also the narrator's own mourning.[172] What is significant in the elegiac romance is the intertwining of two kinds of quest: first, the narrator's minor and more conventional tracking, and second, the hero's major, and more metaphysical quest.

In the context of the metaphysical detective story the intertwining of two quests (and in general, the elegiac romance as a formula) is connected to the motif of the double, or the idea that the object of detection is the detective himself. This intertwining also means that the epistemological environment is predetermined by the detective's identity, his obscure origin, or past trauma: clues and key texts, albeit arcane, point in this direction, whereupon the teacher character is not so much the mentor than an idealized version of the protagonist, an improved double, as is the case in Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941). And even though the minor and major quests take place on different diegetic levels, there is a continuum between them: the embedded, metaphysical quest reflects the minor quest just as the latter projects, even participates in, creating the first.[173]

From the protagonist's standpoint, the encyclopedic novel keeps to a similar order. The protagonist, as Hilary Clark argues, faces either his ironic double or "his extension in an untenably extreme form."[174] The double may appear as a monster that the protagonist is deep down, or simply as an amount of information, a devouring entity. But before this can happen, two important phases are gone through. First, the mystery, or the key problem of the narrative, seems to center around the ambiguousness of the teacher character. He is either deceased, mentally ill, or simply a doomed detective, just like the protagonist. This is an important tie between the characters, since deep down, the teacher's state is at least partly a projection of the protagonist's state. If the teacher is absent or dead, the protagonist has to work alone: the papers left behind by the teacher are the pupil's only educational guidance. Consequently, the educational horizon that the teacher has

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[171] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 8; Merivale 1999, 113n. 2.
[172] Bruffee 1983, 51.
[173] E.g. McHale 1987, 113.
[174] Clark 2011, 12.

guaranteed, is determined by his character, position, and expertise. In some cases, as in Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, it is nevertheless disputable whether the teacher character even exists. Yet whatever his position is, he and his textual remarks operate as a remarkable mirror for the protagonist's self-discovery. And this is what the detection process is fundamentally about: seeking the guidance of the mentor, or continuing the metaphysical quest of this mentor, the novice seeks self-knowledge. Following Irwin, both the metaphysical detective story and the encyclopedic novel are at heart analyses of self-consciousness within the larger totality of differences.[175]

As a second phase, before facing the double, the hero needs to be initiated into being a hero. At the beginning of the narrative, the pupil is, after all, a novice who needs guidance. The protagonist begins his quest by studying the work of his mentor, or by working under his guidance – we see this convention in all of the works of this study, especially in *Foucault's Pendulum* and *The Gold Bug Variations*. Then, gradually, a minor search turns into a metaphysical quest. It is here where the encyclopedic novel differs from the metaphysical detective story: whereas it is common in the latter that the detective works alone, in the encyclopedic novel gaining knowledge is nearly always a mediated process. Only the mentor's guidance guarantees access to valuable information. And since the quest is about self-education, teachers play a crucial role. Whatever finally causes the face-off between the protagonist and his own "encyclopedic double," the process of education plays an important part.

So far, I have been laying down my basic arguments concerning the integration of the encyclopedic novel and the metaphysical detective story. On the basis of epistemological, ontological, and self-inclusive tendencies that both narrative types share, it is likely that encyclopedic authors integrate the ontological dominant to the educational idea of encyclopedia. Not only does the process of coming to know end in ontological confusion, also, unable to perceive the epistemological environment as a totality, the protagonist may hold his conception of the totality in higher regard than the extramental reality ever was for him. Thus, on the most fundamental level, the encyclopedic novel tends to tell a story of unintended self-search, a story in which both the mind and the world are being questioned. Before we examine further the additional, and more formal characteristics of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, let me first provide a reading of *Foucault's Pendulum* from the standpoint of these basic principles. This treatment guides us to the problematics of information. In the contemporary encyclopedic novel, information is the catalyst of epistemological expansion, and yet this information is motivated by the metaphysical detective story.

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[175] Irwin 1996, xvii.

2.
Duplicating Borges:
Eco's Maximalist Web of Mutual Resemblances

Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Death and the Compass" is a classic of metaphysical detective story, and his influence over Umberto Eco is indisputable. It is hence striking that the intertextual connections between the fictional works of these two writers have been left almost unanalyzed in the studies of the metaphysical detective story. Certainly, some general remarks concerning these links have been made, but so far, fundamental intertextual links, such as "Death and the Compass" as a blueprint model of *Foucault's Pendulum*, have not been tackled. Joel Black, for instance, notes that the title of Eco's first novel is a reference to the key text in "Death and the Compass" ("The first letter of the Name has been uttered"), but fails to point out the even more explicit connection between the titles "Death and the Compass" and *Foucault's Pendulum*.[176]

Hence, just as John T. Irwin has done a remarkable job in analyzing the ways Borges intentionally rewrote Edgar Allan Poe's famous Dupin stories, a similar reading in this Bloomian chain of influence should be made with regard to Borges and Eco.[177] While Eco's original intentions as an author are secondary in our case, in what follows I aim to pinpoint key similarities and differences between Borges's short story and Eco's novel – narratives that represent their authors' second enterprise at reworking the detective story. Thus, just as Irwin sees Borges as rewriting Poe, I see Eco as rewriting Borges. In this way, my reading necessarily involves, albeit indirectly, also Poe. By pinpointing the intertextual links between these three authors, I aim at showing, first, that Borges – and perhaps Poe too –

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[176] Black 1999, 84. "Death" in Borges's title is analogical with "Foucault," for Michel Foucault declared the death of Man. The link between the compass and the pendulum as instruments of navigation (of space and time) is even more explicit.
[177] Irwin 1996.

sowed the seeds of maximalism in his story, and second, that via intentional rewriting Eco helped these seeds to sprout. It is not a coincidence that the encyclopedic novel and the metaphysical detective story partially merge for the initial steps were taken very early.

We get a preliminary idea of how Eco duplicates Borges already by observing the starting points and the outcomes of both narratives. The common theme of both stories is the danger of intentional misreading: the detectives begin to follow an unlikely clue, and this leads both into mortal danger. In both stories, the premise is also the same, namely a reader-like detective misreading a spurious key text.[178] But as regards the closure, so important for the metaphysical detective story, there is a quantitative difference: while Borges's conclusion is the murder of the detective, Eco manages to double, even triple, this outcome by offering as a closure the deaths of two detectives and the mortal danger of its protagonist. Though in Eco's novel three detectives work as a team and thus practically follow the same clue, this triplication of human fates implies two things: on the one hand, the novel deals with one major investigation with three different emphases; on the other, it literally binds itself to the maximalist ideal of "1 to many."[179] Yet more important than following what finally happens to the detectives in these stories, is to map out what happens *between* the first scene and the last, and then to relate these discoveries to our original concern, that is, the encyclopedism of the contemporary encyclopedic novel. Accomplishing this task is the aim of the following two chapters: first I aim to identify the key elements of the metaphysical detective story in *Foucault's Pendulum*, and after that, in chapter 3, I consider how these elements actually motivate the narrative as an encyclopedic narrative and accelerate its informational excess.

In order to demonstrate the duplication process performed by Eco, along with the maximalism that follows, let me begin by comparing the parallel narrative situations that launch the detection processes in both Borges's short story and Eco's novel. Following the themes that are common to both stories involves analyzing four interrelated factors. First, in "Death and the Compass" the initial narrative situation is the death of a rabbi, and a similar event – now in the form of an alleged murder and the disappearance of the victim – takes place in *Foucault's Pendulum*, although much later. Second, both of these narrative situations culminate in a conversation between two detectives, and this collegial talk sends them on their separate investigations. Third, in both, a slip of paper plays a key role: in Borges's story, a typed beginning of a message is found in a typewriter at the crime scene, and in the case of *Foucault's Pendulum*, the victim forgets an arcane code at the publishing company on the same day he disappears. The fourth, and perhaps most important factor is that both clues refer to the direction of "a purely rabbinical explanation," a

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[178] See also Black 1999, 83–84.
[179] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 18.

line of thinking that Erik Lönnrot, the protagonist of "Death and the Compass" calls one possible interpretative path that could lead him to the solution of the crime.[180]

In *Foucault's Pendulum*, these rabbinical explanations form "the Plan," an invented grand narrative that is based on the alleged movements of Western esoteric traditions, and especially on the parody of the interpretative strategies the ambassadors of these traditions lean on. The Plan is also the key to the encyclopedism of *Foucault's Pendulum*. Now, keeping this in mind, along with the other three factors above, we can move to the analysis itself.

2.1. Clues, Victims, and Armchair Detectives

Foucault's Pendulum tells the story of a young student, Casaubon, who befriends two publishing editors, Jacopo Belbo and Diotallevi, and becomes partially employed by their publishing house, Garamond. What raises the role of this literary milieu to such a remarkable position in the novel is the content of the manuscripts Garamond receives daily. As the protagonists are living amidst the political turmoil in Italy during the 1970s, only "lunatics or nonlunatics" approach the publishing house.[181] For this reason, Garamond is not the only publishing company under the same roof. It has a partner, Manutius, which concentrates on areas that the science-oriented Garamond rejects: fiction, poetry, and most of all, esotericism.[182] These areas also constitute the key spheres of knowledge in *Foucault's Pendulum*, and for Casaubon, especially esoteric literature will form his epistemological environment: in sum, the narrative is about reading books and inventing an alternative history through them.

At the beginning of the story Casaubon is working on his master's thesis on the trial of the Templars, and if there is one and only one topic for "lunatics," it is, according to Belbo, the Templars. Casaubon narrates:

> At the time, when we were struggling against those in power, I was wholeheartedly outraged by the trial in which the Templars, through

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[180] Borges 1998, 148.

[181] *FP*, 63 [*PF*, 72: "savi e matti"].

[182] Loyal to Eco's trademark, several names of the characters or places included in *Foucault's Pendulum* have historical references. Manutius, for instance, refers to Aldus Pius Manutius, a well-known publisher in Renaissance Venice and a friend of the humanist philosopher Pico della Mirandola. Manutius became famous for publishing new editions of the literary classics of Antiquity. Similarly, Casaubon's name refers primarily to the Renaissance philologist Isaac Casaubon, who proved that *Corpus Hermeticum* – one of the main sources of Western esotericism – was remarkably more recent than it was supposed to be: *Corpus Hermeticum* was not an ancient Egyptian work ascribed to the mythical Hermes Trismegistos, but the forgery of an unknown author, written in 300–400 AD (Eco 1990, 195; Eco 1995, 157). On the other hand, Casaubon's name goes back to Edward Casaubon, a character in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), who writes a book called *The Key to all Mythologies* (cf. Hutcheon 2005, 31–32; Noble 1995, 145). For Eco (1997, 67–68), this connection is, however, more like a lucky coincidence than an intended reference.

evidence it would be generous to call circumstantial, were sentenced to the stake. Then I quickly learned that, for centuries after their execution, countless lovers of the occult persisted in looking for them, seeking everywhere, without ever producing proof of their existence.[183]

Once, during Casaubon's visit to Garamond, Belbo asks him to join the meeting with a would-be writer who wants to show Belbo a book concerning the secret history of the Templars. Introducing himself as Colonel Ardenti, the writer claims that he has deciphered the message, which consists of a secret code and an additional note that is partially illegible. The mysteries related to the trial indicate clearly, he argues, that the Templars did have a plan of revenge – and this is what the message instructs. The goal of this plan, Ardenti continues, has been to avenge the death of Templar leader Jacques de Molay, but for some reason or another, the long relay – consisting of "six knights appearing six times in six places" in the course of 720 years – has failed.[184] Ardenti's intention is, then, to call forth all those who might have knowledge concerning the topic. He wants to "stir up reactions, to collect new information" for "there are people who surely know but won't speak."[185] Accidentally, however, Ardenti forgets this important message on Belbo's desk.

A day after the meeting, Belbo and Casaubon are summoned to a police interrogation by phone: "The colonel's been murdered, or something of the sort."[186] Until this point, due to the noir elements, the narrative of *Foucault's Pendulum* reads like a similar detective story as *The Name of the Rose*, although the reader's introduction to the case has been longer, and more abundant in historical, trivial, and esoteric details than the author's previous novel. This initiatory phase has taken 150 pages, and by trying the reader's patience with unnecessarily long descriptions of the Templars' history, it has guided the reader to a deeper interpretative involvement with the story. It has also introduced the main detective, that is, Casaubon, along with his motives, and the epistemological environment around him. Moreover, the narrative has granted the reader stylistic and explicit hints of things to come to such a degree that when the phone rings and the Colonel is announced to be dead (or, "something of the sort"), the reader feels hardly any surprise. Since the novel has already rejected the straight-forwardness typical of the mainstream detective fiction by delaying the plot with a number of digressions, and introduced the motif of textual detection, *Foucault's Pendulum* clearly goes beyond the mechanics of a common detective story. This transcendence is, as recalled, a prerequisite for

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[183] *FP*, 63 [*PF*, 60: "In quell'epoca in cui si lottava contro il potere, mi indignava generosamente la storia del processo, che è indulgente definire indiziario, con cui i Templari erano stati mandati al rogo. Ma avevo scoperto ben presto che, da quando erano stati mandati al rogo, una folla di cacciatori di misteri aveva cercato di ritrovarli ovunque, e senza mai produrre una prova."].
[184] *FP*, 137 [*PF*, 150: "sei cavalieri per sei volte in sei luoghi"].
[185] *FP*, 148 [*PF*, 160: "suscitare reazioni, raccogliere notizie [...] In giro, c'è chi sa e non parla"].
[186] *FP*, 150 [*PF*, 162: "Hanno ammazzato il colonnello, o qualcosa del genere"].

the metaphysical detective story.[187]

Even the circumstances of the first crime are vague. A desk clerk saw Ardenti going up to his room with two men. A few hours later he asked the porter on duty to take up Ardenti's late-night order. The alcoholic porter goes and finds everything in disarray, the Colonel lying on the bed "with a length of wire wound tight around his neck, his eyes staring."[188] The porter runs back down, wakes up the desk clerk, and together they wait for the police to come. The squad car arrives at the scene after twenty minutes, but when they go up to Ardenti's room they find nothing. The corpse has gone. One alcoholic eyewitness, but no corpse: this is the starting point for the only real criminal investigator of the novel, Inspector De Angelis.

Ardenti's disappearance, the Templar message, the crime committed at midnight in a hotel room and the slip of paper found at the crime scene (or left behind by the victim) are all familiar narrative motives from classical detective stories: the crime states *the problem* of the detective story, whereas the slip of paper works as *the first clue*. The reader familiar with the detective form also knows that what usually follows the first clue is a phase in which necessary data is produced. This data is, then, used as the basis of the detective's reasoning.[189] In *Foucault's Pendulum*, as we will see, the phase of data production is not only the whole point of the story but it is also ironized by bringing the process to a more arbitrary level: the necessary information is not used to solve the crime in the most economical way but to create new crimes in the most poetic way.[190] Additionally, the novel concentrates on the rules (or the lack of them) according to which the evidence is produced.

Nevertheless, before the data production phase can begin, detection duties must be delegated. The initial conversation between the police commissioner and his colleague about first impressions concerning the case, is an equally familiar narrative situation from mainstream detective stories. However, in *Foucault's Pendulum* it also evokes Borges's "Death and the Compass." Ardenti lying on the bed is, first of all, comparable with Dr. Yarmolinsky, the first victim in Borges's story who is "found lying on the floor of his room, his face by now slightly discolored."[191] Second, and more importantly, in Borges's story the police commissioner Treviranus draws a quick conclusion and gives an economical explanation: due to the fact that Yarmolinsky was given a room across the hall from the room of the Tetrach of Galilee, somebody with the intention of stealing the Tetrach's world-famous sapphires broke in accidentally, and as Yarmolinsky woke up, the intruder had to kill him.

For us, it is Erik Lönnrot's answer that matters, and looking out for the phase

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187 Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 2.
188 *FP*, 152–153 [*PF*, 165: "con gli occhi sbarrati e un filo di ferro stretto intorno al collo"].
189 Pyrhönen 1994, 16–17.
190 Cf. Eco 1992b, 48–49.
191 Borges 1998, 148.

of data production, it is also our first explicit key to the reading of *Foucault's Pendulum* as a whole. As Lönnrot considers, Treviranus's explanation is "possible, but uninteresting […]. You will reply that reality has not the slightest obligation to be interesting. I will reply in turn that reality may get along without that obligation, but hypotheses may not."[192] Compared to *Foucault's Pendulum*, hypotheses in Eco's novel *can* be interesting, and from Ardenti's reading on, these interesting and imaginative explanations – "counterfactual conditionals" – are what fills the narrative.[193] In fact, these detectives could not care less about reality.[194]

The conversation scene taking place in *Foucault's Pendulum* only differs superficially from the conversation of "Death and the Compass." Both conversations define the detective roles and the chosen detecting methods. Obviously, the crime as a problem and the slip of paper as a first clue also predetermine what sort of data can be produced in the first place. The only crucial difference between the two conversations is, then, that in Borges's story there is only one first crime and two detectives who take different paths of reasoning, whereas in *Foucault's Pendulum*, there are two first crimes, one for each detective: Ardenti's disappearance and the arcane message he left behind. Therefore, the conversation between two detective characters in Eco's novel remains more symbolic than practical: duties are delegated before Ardenti's disappearance, and the conversation scene only seals the deal.

Since there are two first crimes, the detectives can have many roles. Whereas Lönnrot's professional status in relation to Treviranus is never specified in Borges's story, Casaubon first appears to be an outsider.[195] Initially, the summons to an interrogation by phone implies, however, the point that Belbo supplies immediately after: "We're the only clue."[196] Moreover, if Belbo and Casaubon were among the last ones to see Ardenti alive, and therefore the only clue, they are likely to be the guilty party too. In fact, the only concrete clue the police have found at the crime scene is a slip of paper referring to the meeting with Belbo on the previous day. A natural conclusion would then be that Belbo has something to do with Ardenti's disappearance. Unlike Casaubon, Belbo is mentioned on the slip of paper: the note at the crime scene is a schedule and Ardenti was supposed to meet only Belbo. But

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[192] Ibid., 148.
[193] *FP*, 132 [*PF*, 144: "I condizionali controfattuali"].
[194] Moreover, as chance plays a role in Treviranus's explanation – the burglar came in by accident – Lönnrot chooses "a purely rabbinical explanation" (Borges 1998, 148) instead. Thus, he does not only model Casaubon's future thinking in *Foucault's Pendulum*, he also repeats the critique Auguste Dupin expresses in Poe's "The Purloined Letter": "The measures, then […] were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case, and to the man" (1978b, 983–984). After all, Yarmolinsky is a dead rabbi, hence Lönnrot's explanation is surprisingly much more applicable to the case than Treviranus's explanation based on chance.
[195] According to Red Scharlach, the antagonist of Borges's short story, Lönnrot has arrested Scharlach's brother three years before the events (1998, 154), which implies that Lönnrot is not so much a consulting detective like Sherlock Holmes, as a member of the police who has the power of arrest.
[196] *FP*, 151 [*PF*, 163: "siamo la loro unica traccia"].

since Belbo tells De Angelis on the phone that Casaubon was present at the meeting as well, Casaubon must have come along. This, in turn, is a typical convention of the metaphysical detective story: an outsider, or an amateur is drawn into the detection unwillingly.[197] After all, Casaubon is at this point just a student without a profession.

What happens in the actual conversation scene, then? In the interrogation De Angelis treats Casaubon fairly. It is Casaubon who feels uncomfortable, and again for uncommon reasons: "It was then," he narrates, "that I learned that a graduate student is less an object of suspicion than an undergraduate."[198] In relation to "Death and the Compass," De Angelis's words give food for thought, however: "Without a degree you won't be able to take the police exams, and you don't know what you're missing."[199] Although De Angelis is joking, his remark indicates the direction the narrative is about to take: as Casaubon will soon get his degree, he does not join the police but becomes a Lönnrot-like textual sleuth. After all, he already has his *first* crime that awaits a solution. Hence, Casaubon is not only a witness and a possible guilty party but also a self-appointed armchair detective who is about to crack Ardenti's arcane message and follow the rabbinical explanation. Paths are about to fork, and in the storyworld of *Foucault's Pendulum*, the conversation scene implies only an ontological separation: the two first crimes constitute a world of their own, two different epistemological environments.[200]

As characters in a detective story, De Angelis and Casaubon do not then embody the criminal investigator and his partner, but two different detectives. After this conversation, Casaubon and De Angelis, like Treviranus and Lönnrot, take up investigations of their own. The long introduction considered, Ardenti's disappearance gives De Angelis an assignment, but as his role is to stay on the margins of the narrative, he actually transfers the real authority of detection to Casaubon. Therefore, their conversation also causes the inversion of traditional roles of detective and his partner.

The conversation takes place between Ardenti's disappearance and the (re)discovery of his message, and is, as has been pointed out, symbolic. The exchange of words marks a spot where someone has physically gone missing, but his thoughts – interpretations and visions of the past – are quickly found afterwards. Again, "Death and the Compass" operates as a subtext: as a rabbi, Yarmolinsky "set out his many books […] on a bureau" before his death.[201] These books included Kabbalistic and Hermetic works, one them being "a literal translation of the Sefer

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[197] Consider, for instance, Oedipa Maas in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, who becomes an executor of her former lover and, without any real profession, begins to expose a much larger conspiracy.
[198] *FP*, 157–158 [*PF*, 171: "Ma ful allora che mi convinsi che ad essere studenti si è sempre più sospetti che ad essere laureati"].
[199] *FP*, 152 [*PF*, 164: "Se non si laurea non potrà fare i concorsi per entrare nella polizia e non sa che cosa perde"].
[200] Moreover, both clues refer to completely different events, the first taking place in the present, the other in the supposed past.
[201] Borges 1998, 147.

Yetsirah," a book containing the cosmogonical description of the world.[202] With Treviranus's permission, Lönnrot takes these books home with him and begins to follow his rabbinical explanation independently. The crucial difference between Borges's story and *Foucault's Pendulum* in this regard is that in Eco's novel, the protagonists do not ask for such a permission. Instead, on the way to the interrogation, Belbo asks Casaubon to keep quiet about the details of the message: "Maybe my mind is warped. But where I come from there's a saying: 'Whatever you do, don't name names.'"[203] And as De Angelis already has his practical slip of paper – the one found at the crime scene with Belbo's name in it – and the police intelligence of his own, he has no need for other non-practical and textual clues. Hence, the fact that there are two first clues – a slip of paper with Belbo's name, and the message Ardenti has left at Garamond – supports the difference of detections as well. For a practical investigator such as De Angelis, the message containing a vision of conspiracy would not be a proper clue at all – unless it led him to find Ardenti's corpse. For a textual detective such as Casaubon, it is the most valuable and interesting clue there can be.

So far, it has become clear that the conversation between De Angelis and Casaubon is a narrative situation that emphasizes the crucial difference between detective processes. But if De Angelis turns out to be a minor detective in the story, whose suspects are Belbo and Casaubon, similarly Casaubon's own role as an armchair detective needs more specification. In relation to the classical detective stories, the conversation of two detectives also signifies a shift in the point of view from a detective's sidekick to a bystander, or an outsider. As pointed out earlier, traditionally the detective's partner has also been the narrator of the story as well as the sleuth's friend. The sidekick's role has been to follow the investigation led by the detective and to share his or her observations with the reader.[204] Casaubon, however, is not even a sidekick in the traditional sense. But as the story is nonetheless narrated by him, his observations stray quickly away from the criminal investigation, for he has no active role in it. Due to this shift in point of view, the focus of the narrative is not on Ardenti's alleged murder at all. As Ardenti's message can be considered the first clue in Casaubon's investigation, the crime – if there is a crime – may only "*belong* to the history of Jewish superstitions," as Lönnrot supposes in "Death and

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[202] Ibid., 148. Casaubon arranges his narrative according to same cosmogonical description of the world, that is, the Sefirot. For Casaubon's narrative composition see ch. 3.3.

[203] *FP*, 151 [*PF*, 163: "In ogni caso, mio dio, forse ho uno spirito contorto, ma dalle mie parti si dice 'sempre meglio non far nomi'"]. Belbo's words correlate partly with the slip of paper found at the crime scene in "Death and the Compass," which says: "The first letter of the Name has been written" (Borges 1998, 149). As the series of crimes occur according to Lönnrot's study of the Tetragrammaton (YHWH representing the name of God), Belbo's reference to "naming the names" should be considered a warning: neither Casaubon nor Belbo should give De Angelis anything that might lead to further investigations, which, in Borges's story, eventually have fatal consequences.

[204] Haycraft 1974, 233.

the Compass."[205]

But whereas Lönnrot acts alone, "indifferent to the police investigation," *Foucault's Pendulum* recycles more explicitly some additional conventions of detective fiction in this regard as well.[206] As a bystander and a narrator, Casaubon is able to focus on the superstitions concerning the Templars, just like Lönnrot does, but as a sidekick, he is for a while without a teacher. Nonetheless, as he has already banded together with Jacopo Belbo – after all, they share a secret – one side of Casaubon's story describes their mutual companionship. Thus, even though the main emphasis is on the rabbinical explanations, in the course of events Casaubon also becomes increasingly interested in Belbo's character. First, the interest reminds one of the sidekick's fascination with the master detective, but later, this admiration of the sleuth's intelligence turns into an interest in intentions – in why Belbo decided to get involved with the invention of the Plan in the first place. In their mutual project, that is, the invention of the Plan, Belbo is, as a senior colleague, the master detective and Casaubon his assistant.

All in all, in the first parts of *Foucault's Pendulum*, the two crimes and the two first clues, along with the conversation scene, bring forth the forking of investigations. In addition, the detective roles and detecting methods are introduced and specified. But in relation to Borges's short story, the paths fork even further while the roles become more complicated. On the one hand, the conversation between Casaubon and De Angelis emphasizes the fact that like Lönnrot, Casaubon needs to follow the rabbinical explanations, a textual investigation that is reserved for him by accident. On the other, as the sleuth of the narrative, Casaubon does not operate alone, however. Sharing a bond and secret, Belbo and Casaubon form a duo of armchair detectives, a mastermind character, and his assistant. Later, Diotallevi joins them. Hence, instead of one sleuth, *Foucault's Pendulum* introduces several detectives during the first 150 pages – De Angelis, Belbo, Casaubon, Diotallevi – and instead of one criminal investigation, the novel introduces many possible, forking lines of detection. Let us concentrate on Casaubon for now and deepen our view of him as a metaphysical detective character.

Casaubon as the Sam Spade of Culture

In the first paragraph of "Death and the Compass," the narrator points out that Erik Lönnrot "thought of himself as a reasoning machine, an Auguste Dupin, but there was something of the adventurer in him, even something of the gambler."[207] While the reference to Dupin clues the reader that "Death and the Compass" is based on

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[205] Borges 1998, 148; original italics.
[206] Ibid., 149.
[207] Borges 1998, 147.

Poe's pioneering work with the detective form, one should not neglect the other references either: after all, Borges's story also stresses on various levels an infinite game of opposites, that is, a form of gambling.[208]

In the first chapters of *Foucault's Pendulum* we find similar references, but instead of the classical detectives, Casaubon associates himself with the hard-boiled detectives, who, if any, are adventurers and gamblers. The novel begins with a description of Casaubon hiding inside a periscope at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers in Paris. Belbo has been kidnapped and Casaubon is waiting for the kidnappers to show up, as the Conservatoire is going to be an arena for the final act. Belbo is obviously in danger: Casaubon has found out that his friend is going to hear about the Plan, which is no longer a game with books. Casaubon reasons: "The only thing you can rely on at a time like this is the laundry list. Stick to facts, causes, effects. I am here for this reason, and also for this reason and this... ."[209] Just a moment before, he reassures: "Come, you're supposed to be Sam Spade. Exploring the mean streets – that's your job."[210] In addition to identifying with Sam Spade, one of the first hard-boiled detectives of the genre, it is noteworthy that, when compared with "Death and the Compass," Casaubon does not think of himself as a detective to the same degree as Lönnrot. He merely thinks that he *is supposed* to be Sam Spade: if real life were a detective story, a Sam Spade would be the role he ought to take in a situation like this.

Let me contextualize Casaubon's self-view. A few years after Ardenti's disappearance, the now graduated protagonist has left his teacher's post in Brazil and returned to Milan. Unemployed, he has decided to invent a job for himself. Casaubon contemplates his interests and skills and has a sudden inspiration: "I had a trade after all. I would set up a cultural investigation agency, be a kind of private eye of learning."[211] Soon afterwards, Casaubon bumps into Jacopo Belbo, who names him "the Sam Spade of culture."[212] Although the nomination comes from Belbo, Casaubon's mentor and the master detective of the story, the fact that from then on Casaubon associates himself with the sleuth of the hard-boiled detective story, and not with the Ur-detective of the genre, emphasizes that his quest will have features not only from Borges and the classical detective stories, but also from the hard-boiled tradition. But the reference to Sam Spade, like Lönnrot's reference to Dupin, has a literary value of its own: Casaubon refers to the task of the sleuth on the one hand, while on the other, his own investigation, unlike Spade's, is a form of

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[208] Irwin 1996, 57.

[209] *FP*, 17–18 [*PF*, 25: "L'unica cosa che in quei momenti non ti tradisce è la lista della lavandaia. Riandare ai fatti, elencarli, individuarne le cause, gli effetti. Sono arrivato a questo punto per questo, e per quest'altro motivo... ."]. For the laundry list, see chapter 3.3.

[210] *FP*, 12 [*PF*, 20: "Andiamo, tu sei Sam Spade, d'accordo? Devi solo esplorare i bassifondi, è mestiere."].

[211] *FP*, 224 [*PF*, 238: "avevo un mestiere. Decisi di mettere in piedi un'agenzia di informazioni culturali. Come una specie di piedipiatti del sapere."].

[212] *FP*, 227 [*PF*, 242: "il Sam Spade della cultura"].

textual detection, tightly related to reading literature. Thus, if Lönnrot identifies with Dupin and by doing so emphasizes the role of abstract reasoning, Casaubon, in turn, by identifying with Spade, stresses the importance of adventurous gambling rather than reasoning. However, both detectives imitating detectives conceive themselves primarily as readers.

Sam Spade was introduced in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). According to Leonard Cassuto, Hammett's ground-breaking novel is among the first crime stories in which characters lack deep ties to relatives, friends, or other people, and are mainly driven by self-interest. Thus, in *The Maltese Falcon* one can see, as Cassuto points out, the problematic triangle "among the credit-driven, corporate capitalism that had established itself in the previous decades; the home- and family-based 'sentimental culture' that it supplanted; and the lone-wolf, old-time entrepreneurial ways of Sam Spade that stand at odds with both."[213] In this regard, "the mean streets" Casaubon mentions, mainly refer to the (historical) progression within the detective fiction, during which the spaces ruled by domestic relations (home units) began to give more and more ground to relations of industrial capitalism and the milieus it had designed. In short, the changes in epistemological environments became more complicated. As Stefano Tani describes it, the detective process also came to be "no longer only the solution of the riddle, but a quest for truth in a reality far more complex and ambiguous than in the stereotyped 'fairy tales' of the British tradition."[214] Consequently, in American crime fiction of the same period, virtuous and intelligent detectives gave way to crapulent and fist-fighting private eyes – "a normal man with a hangover the next morning, a jaw that really hurts" as Tani remarks – such as Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, Hammett's Sam Spade and Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer.[215]

Of these three sleuths, it is Spade that David Lehman describes as a Luciferian soul whose behavior is hard to predict and whose key feature is remissness – and it is Spade who brings forth a radical new way of seeing this new world order.[216] As a detective, he seems to be out of place, doing his duties only if he sees them to be profitable. On the other hand, Spade is a prototype of the doomed detective, "a lonely hero who clings to a personal moral code, no matter how absurd his devotion

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[213] Cassuto 2009, 47.

[214] Tani 1984, 24. In this matter, Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) can be read a predecessor of the hard-boiled detective story. First, it is uncertain whether there is a crime or not – even though the narrator begins the story with speculations of "some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told" and of "the essence of all crime" that "is undivulged" (Poe 1978b, 506–507). Second, Poe's story introduces the literal mean streets: the story takes place in the open and crowded environments of the city at night. And third, the description of the exercise of following "the man of the crowd" also implies that perhaps it is the narrator who is actually the symbolic object of the story, the man of the crowd. On "The Man of the Crowd", see Merivale 1999.

[215] Tani 1984, 24. The epithet "normal" is, let me add, an interesting word choice of Tani's, especially because otherwise, hard-boiled detective characters of that time have tended to be not only violent but also aggressively racist, sexist, and homophobic.

[216] Lehman 2000, 155–156.

to it may seem."[217] Spade and the Continental Op from Hammett's previous novel *Red Harvest* (1929) do not, however, accept being just doomed knights on a moral quest in the immoral world of corruption.[218] They do not only behave according to the new rules of irregularity, but are also eager "to stir things up" – to use the exact phrase the Op reiterates. According to Steven Marcus, this behavior is related to the situation the detective is being thrown into: he is invited to solve the case – be it a murder, a theft, or a lost person – but the world he enters from the outside is a fictional, framed reality, created by other characters, such as gangsters, a corrupt police force, or crooks. Thus he "almost invariably walks into a situation that has already been elaborately fabricated or framed."[219] The Op, especially, is highly conscious of the "artificiality" of this epistemological environment, and for him, stirring things up is, if not a moral, then at least an intentional act: it is meant to solve (or create) the case by disturbing the framed reality and the strength of the involved parties.

As a literary Sam Spade, Casaubon is more like an active reader than a private eye investigating real crimes. His "mean streets" are the labyrinths of literature, but like Spade and Colonel Ardenti before him, he too wants to "stir up reactions."[220] In relation to "Death and the Compass," the references to Hammett's hard-boiled detective stories also support Casaubon's next step as an armchair detective. As pointed out earlier, Hammett's protagonists aim to overthrow the fictional-hypothetical representations of the world they have walked into and replace it with their own, irrespective of whether these representations are "true" or not.[221] The turn in *Foucault's Pendulum* that is about to happen after Ardenti's disappearance, concerns precisely the same pursuit: Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi begin to reread and reconsider Ardenti's interpretation irrespective of whether Ardenti's reading is true or false. The secret history of the Templars is the fabrication they very clearly recognize as a fraud.

After the investigators in Borges's story uncover the first concrete clue, Lönnrot sets about studying Yarmolinsky's books for no apparent reason. The narrator of "Death and the Compass" does not go further in explaining Lönnrot's behavior: "Suddenly turned bibliophile or Hebraist," and "indifferent to the police investigation," Lönnrot just turns away from the criminal investigation to explore "the many names of God."[222] But whereas Lönnrot identifies with Dupin and turns towards the world of books, Casaubon's nomination as the Sam Spade of culture

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[217] Tani 1984, 22.
[218] See Ibid., 24–25.
[219] Marcus 1983, 202; e.g. Grella 1988, 111.
[220] *FP*, 148 [*PF*, 160: "suscitare reazioni"]. As Ardenti is the previous interpreter of the rabbinical explanations concerning the Templar revenge, he appears as a kind of unintentional role model for Casaubon.
[221] See Marcus 1983, 203.
[222] Borges 1998, 149.

implies the same turn, but also the influence of social pressure on the detective's self-understanding. For instance, soon after the beginning of *The Maltese Falcon*, Sam Spade's partner dies. Spade considers: "When a man's partner is killed, he's supposed to do something about it."[223] In the absence of clear virtues, both Spade and Casaubon sense that in a situation like this, they are simply supposed to take a certain role. Spade tries to consult the virtues of the old world – Truth, Equity, and Justice – without substantially succeeding. After realizing that this is how the case is, he begins to think instead in terms of new methods, which means playing along, gambling, and stirring things up. Casaubon chooses the same path much earlier, long before *his* partner gets killed.

Why might this be so? In the aftermath of the political radicalism in the 1960s, Casaubon has already been in an unfamiliar situation for a while: in a world where the grand narratives are losing their grip, marginal narratives, even conspiracies seem to have their moment. As Ardenti points out at their meeting, "Official history […] is written by the victors. According to official history, men like me don't exist."[224] Therefore, if men of his kind, alongside the hard-boiled detective-wannabes like Casaubon, have had their share of defeat, this period of political turmoil seems a window of opportunity to grasp victories. Similarly, if there is a case waiting to be solved, perhaps it is by stirring things up, not by reasoning, that will help the detective gather evidence for the case.

Let us recall, however, that as much as Casaubon personally leans on Sam Spade, his narrative leans on Borges. The most famous aspect of "Death and the Compass" is the outcome of the chosen methods. After Lönnrot has begun to explore Yarmolinsky's books, it is basically his reading that carries out a series of crimes with a geometrical structure, planned by Red Scharlach, Lönnrot's arch villain. Thus, the references to Borges's story in *Foucault's Pendulum* hint to the reader that on the one hand, the prospects of Casaubon's textual quest are not very promising, as, after all, Lönnrot gets shot by his opponent at the end of "Death and the Compass." On the other hand, Casaubon's outcome results from his own actions: he is not just lured to his death, he participates in the crime series through his rabbinical explanations. This formula is the finest example of metaphysical detection: the sleuth goes through the interpretative labyrinth of his case just to find that *he* is the case, or the victim of the story.[225] And since Casaubon's narrative additionally refers to the detectives and spaces of the hard-boiled detective story, the interpretative labyrinth of detection is in fact the sleuth's own invention in a virtueless situation. As a doomed detective, Casaubon produces with the help of his colleagues a world-explanation without peer, and this explanation is at heart an expression of his own

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[223] Hammett 1992, 213.
[224] *FP*, 123 [*PF*, 134: "La storia ufficiale […] è quella che scrivono i vincitori. Secondo la storia ufficiale gli uomini come me non esistono"].
[225] Merivale 1999, 20.

alienation from a society in ideological turmoil.

An armchair version of Sam Spade, Casaubon stirs things up by inventing with his colleagues the Plan, an explanation that would organize the new conformities of an open world system and replace, if not the grand narratives, then at least the minor and marginal narratives. In outline, "Death and the Compass" operates a subtext of these "rabbinical explanations." But as there are several detectives and processes of detection in Eco's novel, the Plan is not the only quest in which Casaubon participates. Like his idol Sam Spade, after his partner Belbo is killed, Casaubon does "something about it": he begins another investigation, a more serious one. In his case, an appropriate reaction to Belbo's death is to tell a story in which he arranges the events into a coherent narrative.

As a whole then, the narrative of *Foucault's Pendulum* ties two investigations together: Casaubon describes the creation process of the Plan and detects Jacopo Belbo's intentions that led to its creation. At the Conservatoire, Casaubon's position has changed from Belbo's sidekick to a lone Sam Spade who faces the real situation: Belbo has disappeared, interrogated at the Conservatoire and finally, after a regrettable process, has been accidentally killed. Chronologically, this shift takes place relatively late, near the end of the novel. At this point it seems to the reader that Belbo is the (only) Lönnrot in the story, whose aims Casaubon now begins to explore. Nonetheless, instead of bringing Belbo's murderers to justice, Casaubon goes even further in his metaphysical detection. By exploring the motive for Belbo's participation, he indeed does "something about it," but for him, choosing to narrate instead of chasing the murderers is a way to textualize, even fictionalize, the primal quest of the novel. His act is also the only thing he *can* do, since his deeds have so far consisted of reading and information retrieval only.

As Eco holds his dual position of author and scholar and analyzes questions of contemporary literature theory in his first three novels, in the wider critifictional context Casaubon's decision to narrate certainly makes sense. If Casaubon's second quest for Belbo deals with authorial intentions, the chronologically first quest – the quest for the Plan – deals more with reception. The Plan as the central quest of the novel is about inventing an interpretation by repairing the preceding interpretations. As we have seen, the references to Borges's "Death and the Compass" suggest that this first quest is not going to end well: at the end of the quest lies the death of the detective. Hence, *Foucault's Pendulum* describes the dual cycle of two reading methods instead: the first quest begins with the death of the author, that is, Ardenti's supposed disappearance, and lasts until Belbo, the interpreter and the reader (but also an author of sorts), is killed at the Conservatoire. Belbo's death begins, then, the second cycle. The first quest concerns interpretative pluralism disguised as rabbinical explanations, and when it ends badly, the second quest begins as a biographical survey. From the perspective of literary theory in the twentieth century, one can see the second cycle as a return to the author. Together, however,

these two cycles can already be found in the classical *whodunits*, as they contain two stories, one the crime and the other the investigation.[226] In *Foucault's Pendulum*, the critifictional potentialities of these two stories are simply brought forth more explicitly.

To conclude, Eco's novel does not begin with a crime, but with a relatively long introduction. The first three sections acquaint the reader with the key components of metaphysical detection: ambiguous armchair detectives, literary quests, and forking detection processes. But as I have aimed to underline so far, Eco, above all, exploits conventional elements from the history of detective story, both from Borges's "Death and the Compass" and the hard-boiled detective story, to provide a centrifugal setting for his encyclopedic novel. The most important of these components is Borges's idea of rabbinical explanations. Recalling the encyclopedism of Eco's novel, it is next necessary to discuss these explanations, as they form the thread of the novel. The innovative, even poetic readings of an arcane message constitute the textual base for Casaubon's maximalist quests, but before we can analyze what he, Belbo, and Diotallevi do with the message, and how this procedure accelerates the encyclopedism of *Foucault's Pendulum*, we need to take a moment and look at what his predecessor, Colonel Ardenti, has already done with it.

2.2. The First Clue and the Standards of a Lunatic: Ardenti's Message and His Interpretation

The first clue in Borges's "Death and the Compass" is a sheet of paper, "with this unfinished declaration: The first letter of the Name has been written."[227] Before the clue is discovered, Lönnrot has noted Yarmolinsky's small library of Kabbalistic literature. Due to the fact that one of these books deals with the Tetragrammaton, Lönnrot connects the content of the clue with the name of God and begins to study Yarmolinsky's books. Since our purpose is to map *Foucault's Pendulum* as a maximalist duplication of Borges's story, and especially as a narrative that is driven by rabbinical explanations, at this point we need to ask whether Eco's detectives follow Lönnrot in this manner. Do they take a clue and link it with the victim's library? To answer these questions, let me begin with Ardenti.

Colonel Ardenti leaves a sheet of paper at Garamond, and this paper works as a fundamental key text for Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi. Alone the clue is, however, full of white gaps, and lines without context, whereupon as important as the sheet is, it would not be as appealing as it is without Ardenti's interpretation.

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226 See Todorov 1977, 44.
227 Borges 1998, 149.

Like the slip of paper in Borges's story, the key text as such is an unfinished *open work*. As Eco points out in his early theoretical writings about this concept, "the author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work *to be completed*."[228] Similarly, Ardenti offers a text that is open to different contexts, to both moderate interpretations and radical misreadings alike.[229] Therefore, the ambiguity of open texts throws down a gauntlet of reading as if it were the interpreter's task to accomplish the meaning, or the purpose of text. And in *Foucault's Pendulum* it is.

Nonetheless, Ardenti is not an author – not at least in the most common sense. Resembling a message in a bottle, his text may well be a top secret document, a forgery, a joke, a poem, or a laundry list. Among these alternatives, Ardenti has chosen the first: the obscure text is a document that discloses a Templar conspiracy that has been going on for over 600 years. As it is Ardenti's own reading – the context he gives to the text – that is the prime line of interest to Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi, his interpretative methods set the standards for the creation of the Plan. In line with Eco's resistance to the radical reader-oriented theory of interpretation, Ardenti stands for a reader who, rather than the author or any other party, defines the final meaning to the text and is therefore a more active "author" than the actual writer of the artifact. Down the line, *Foucault's Pendulum* polemicizes and parodies the rights of this overactive reader, but it is noteworthy that this parody is not limited to Ardenti's case. In the light of Casaubon's narrative, Ardenti's reading is merely a first chapter in a series of different readings, the content of the series being comparable with the content Ardenti gives to his text. The critifictional thread for both Ardenti's reading and the series that follows his reading is that:

> [t]exts are the human way to reduce the world to a manageable format, open to an intersubjective interpretative discourse. Which means that, when symbols are inserted into a text, there is, perhaps, no way to decide which interpretation is the "good" one, but it is still possible to decide, on the basis of the context, which one is due, not to an effort of understanding "that" text, but rather to a hallucinatory response on the part of the addressee.[230]

Rephrasing Erik Lönnrot's argument, the most "interesting" parts of *Foucault's Pendulum* are nevertheless based on Ardenti's "hallucinatory response" to a text that has, as Eco would say, neither a "voice that speaks to us affectionately that wants us

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[228] Eco 1989, 19; original italics.

[229] In this respect, Ardenti's case can be read as a "critifictional" demonstration. According to Eco (1992, 23), after he had introduced the concept of open work (*opera aperta*), his readers mistook the implications. Instead of focusing on "the dialectics between the rights of texts and the rights of their interpreters," a consensus grew that neither the author nor the text can set any limits to interpretations. In other words, *opera aperta* was seen to advocate interpretative pluralism. See also Eco 1990, 6, 50, 148.

[230] Eco 1990, 21.

beside it" nor a narrative strategy.[231] Hence, it is an open work, a text which the reader has to complete by contextualizing it. Since, as we will see, Ardenti is obsessed with Western esotericism, not only does his interpretation lean on his own library of occultism but also the message as such simply points to these texts. It is not, then, difficult for Casaubon and Belbo to treat Ardenti's sheet of paper and his interpretation together, as an intentional text that operates as a semiotic gateway to the larger library of esoteric literature. But unlike Yarmolinsky's bookshelf, their library is much vaster, and their methods to connect the key text to their sources of information much more complex.

Whereas "Death and the Compass" parodies classical detective stories, especially when it comes to patterns of crimes, *Foucault's Pendulum* doubles the parody in this matter, but now with regard to interpretative patterns. Borges used in his story a classical pattern of murders taking place as per letters of the word. This pattern correlates with the concept of an open work – by following the letters of the name, Lönnrot finds his way to the crime scene of the fourth crime, only to get murdered – and this makes it possible for Eco to widen the parody to the critifictional level: by focusing more on the *potentialities* of the pattern that Borges used in his parody, Eco connects the possibilities of detection and reading together even more tightly. The name (the first letter of which is written) is thus replaced with a text full of white gaps, and the content of this message consists of all the possible contexts and synecdochic relations one is able find. Therefore, when Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi start to play with this idea, the narrative description of their quest also moves quickly from the centripetal metaphysical detective story towards the encyclopedic narrative. Fundamentally, however, this maximalist shift happens thanks to the semiotic step Ardenti's interpretation makes available to them.

But what makes the original content and context of the key text so ambiguous is not only that the text is full of white gaps. When Ardenti arrives at Garamond, he carries a photocopy of the copy of the lost original text with him. It is thus unsure from the beginning whether the original ever existed. Ardenti nevertheless claims he has found the copy at the estate of dragoon Edouard Ingolf. Immediately after introductions, Casaubon and Ardenti have their first argument about the authenticity of this paper:

> "Gentlemen, I will now show you this text. Forgive for using a photocopy. It's not distrust. I don't want to subject the original to further wear."
> "But Ingolf's copy wasn't the original," I said. "The parchment was the original."
> "Casaubon, when originals no longer exist, the last copy is the original."

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[231] Eco 1994, 15.

"But Ingolf may have made errors in transcription."

"You don't know that he did. Whereas I know Ingolf's transcription is true, because I see no way the truth could be otherwise. Therefore, Ingolf's copy is the original."[232]

Besides the unknown origin of his parchment, one may already catch a glimpse of Ardenti's reasoning at this point. Ardenti's hypothesis is that Ingolf had found a parchment from the catacombs of Provins in 1894.[233] Ardenti supposes that the parchment belonged to the Templars who had fled from persecution during the 14th century and had hidden there since, amongst other places. But as Casaubon has rightly noted earlier, there is no proof of this matter, for all that comes after the trial of the Templars is purely occult speculation of "countless lovers of the occult" and "hunters of secrets."[234] Hence, the existence of the Templars *after their trial* is more or less fantasy.

The message Ardenti introduces has two parts. The first part is a cipher that he has decrypted with the help of Trithemius's cryptography instructions. He supposes that Ingolf has also been familiar with these instructions *because* of Trithemius's familiarity with the occult tradition. This is how the "demoniacal litany" runs:

> Kuabris Defrabax Rexulon Ukkazaal Ukzaab Urpaefel Taculbain Habrak Hacoruin Maquafel Tebrain Hmcatuin Rokasor Himesor Argaabil Kaquaan Docrabax Reisaz Reisabrax Decaiquan Oiquaquil Zaitabor Qaxaop Dugraq Xaelobran Disaeda Magisuan Raitak Huidal Uscolda Arabaom Zipreus Mecrim Cosmae Duquifas Rocarbis.[235]

As Ardenti perceives it, this "parody of a Semitic language" turns out to mean "Les

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[232] *FP*, 131 [*PF*, 143:"'Ora mostro a lor signori quel testo. Mi consentiranno di esibire una fotocopia. Non per diffidenza. Per non sottoporre a usura l'originale.'
'Ma quello di Ingolf non era l'originale,' dissi. 'Era la sua copia di un presunto originale.'
'Signor Casaubon, quando gli originali non ci sono più, l'ultima copia è originale.'
'Ma Ingolf potrebbe aver trascritto male.'
'Lei non sa se è cosi. E io so che la trascrizione di Ingolf dice la verità, perché non vedo come la verità potrebbe essere altrimenti. Quindi la copia di Ingolf è l'originale.'"].

[233] Provins is a commune in the department of Seine-et-Marne in northern France. Considering *Foucault's Pendulum* and especially Casaubon's girlfriend's later rereading of the Plan as a laundry list, it is noteworthy that during the Middle Ages, Provins was a well-known marketplace. As regards Ardenti's discoveries, what he has actually found is a handwritten sheet of paper between an old book: "it was notebook paper, and the texture and ink suggested that it wasn't very old: it could have been written in the last years of Ingolf's life" (*FP*, 130 [*PF*, 142: "Dal tipo di carta da quaderno e dall'inchiostro, non pareva molto antico, poteva essere stato scritto negli ultimi anni della vita di Ingolf"]). Ardenti suspects that Ingolf had found something from the catacombs, probably a parchment, and a golden case. As Ardenti continues, Ingolf had then sold the case – Ardenti has found an annotation implying this – and retired from service to study the parchment. From this basis, Ardenti supposes that there is a connection between the piece of paper he himself has found and the original parchment of whose existence there is no further proof.

[234] *FP*, 52 [*PF*, 60: "una folla di cacciatori di misteri" [...] "cacciatori di misteri"]. The "visionary excess" practiced by these people is also one reason why Casaubon stuck to primary sources.

[235] *FP*, 132 [*PF*, 144: "litania demoniaca"]; *FP*, 132; *PF*, 144.

XXXVI inuisilles separez en six bandes" when it is decoded with the two separate cryptosystems Trithemius had developed.[236] Ardenti treats "the thirty-six invisibles divided into six groups" as "a kind of headline announcing the establishment of a group. It was written in secret language for ritualistic reasons. Our Templars, satisfied that they were putting their message in an inviolable inner sanctum, were content to use their fourteenth-century French."[237]

One should note that the decoded message does not explicitly announce that the invisible groups really are either the descendants of the sentenced Templars or the Templars. Neither does the parchment imply that the two parts are necessarily related to each other. The only provable relation between Ingolf and the Templars is that Ingolf had some books about the Templars – a fact that nicely correlates with Yarmolinsky's books and the paper found at the crime scene in Borges's story. All these ambiguities considered, it is Ardenti who connects the snippets of information and textual fragments together by contextualizing them in the light of the Templars.[238] If the two parts of the parchment are, then, considered to be a

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[236] *FP*, 132 [*PF*, 144: "una parodia di lingua semitica"]; *FP*, 134; *PF*, 147. All in all, according to Ardenti, Trithemius developed "forty major and ten minor" cryptosystems (*FP*, 133 [*PF*, 145: "quaranta criptosistemi maggiori e dieci minori"]). Here Ardenti's logic is interesting to say the least. He claims, for instance, that it is Trithemius who "somehow […] learned the cryptographic systems used by the Templars" (*FP*, 133 [*PF*, 145: "Per qualche via Tritemio apprende gli stessi sistemi crittografici usati dai Templari"]). But the fact that someone initiated into occult systems is living after some others does not mean that there is a true causality, or "an anxiety of influence," as Harold Bloom would call it. And yet, Ardenti validates the connection of the Templars and Trithemius, who was born a century later, with a secret society called Sodalitas Celtica and the overall wisdom of the ancient Celts. Besides this, tracing the origin of some occult phenomenon far back in history is not uncommon in the history of esotericism. The history of esotericism knows, for instance, about Isaac Casaubon's – one of Casaubon's referents in Western history – proofs that *Corpus Hermeticum* was a forgery. His son, Méric Casaubon, a classical scholar like his father, edited John Dee's spiritual diaries. Casaubon considered John Dee, an English mathematician and Magi, as "someone who had become possessed. That is, he came to present the Other as something to be frightened of, something that had to be separated and isolated from the community" (Sjőnyi 2004, 272). "This was," according to György E. Sjőnyi (2004, 272–273), "accomplished by labeling him a 'heretic' and a 'witch'; however, the following step was to demystify his magic by explaining his angelic conferences as delusion and madness. I want to bring forward this referent, for it provides an interesting aspect to the Casaubon of the novel: he, as a publishing editor, is treating his wannabe-authors with the same sort of critical dismissal as Méric Casaubon treated John Dee and his "angel magic."

[237] *FP*, 134 [*PF*, 147: "i trentasei invisibli divisi in sei gruppi"]; *FP*, 134–135 [*PF*, 147: "Si tratta di una sorta di intestazione, di costituzione di un gruppo, scritta in lingua segreta per ragioni rituali. Poi, per il resto i nostri Templari, sicuri che stavano collocando il loro messaggio in un penetrale inviolabile, si sono limitati al francese de quattordicesimo secolo."].

[238] In addition to the fact that Ardenti is fixated on "Our Templars," his interpretation relies on the numerology that plays a crucial role in Western esotericism, especially in Kabbalah (Eco 1995, 25–33). The art of *gematria* assigns numerological value to a word, and by comparing words in the light of these values, it is believed that the hidden connections between phenomena can be found (Scholem 1978, 337–343). Counting is also significant. Diotallevi, a wannabe-Jew, gives a lead: "Thirty-six knights for each of the six places makes two hundred and sixteen, the digits of which add up to nine. And since there are six centuries, we can multiply two hundred and sixteen by six, which gives us one thousand two hundred and ninety-six, whose digits add up to eighteen, or three times six, or 666" (*FP*, 139 [*PF*, 151–152: "Trentasei cavalieri per ciascuno dei sei posti, fa 216, la cui somma interna fa 9. E siccome i secoli sono 6, moltiplichiamo 216 per 6 abbiamo 1296, la cui somma interna fa 18, vale a dire tre per sei, 666"]). These sorts of "games with numbers" (Tammi 1995, 185)

reproduction of Saussurean schema of signified and signifier, as Joel Black does, "the resulting bipartite key text becomes a signifier with respect to the elusive prize text, the transcendental Signified that is the detective's ultimate goal."[239] Therefore, it is only consistent that Ardenti deduces that the parchment is a short description of some other, more important text. For him, the parchment is just a schedule of a much greater plan.

The second part of the message is a remnant of some other text:

> a la … Saint Jean
> 36 p charrete de fein
> 6 … entiers avec saiel
> p … les blancs mantiax
> r … s … chevaliers de Pruins pour la … j. nc.
> 6 foiz 6 en 6 places
> chascune foiz 20 a … 120 a …
> iceste est l'ordonation
> al donjon li premiers
> it li secunz joste iceus qui … pans
> it al refuge
> it a Nostre Dame de l'altre part de l'iau
> it a l'ostel des popelicans
> it a la pierre
> 3 foiz 6 avant la feste … la Grant Pute.[240]

The dots in the message mark the absence of signs and illegible words. Thus "a," for instance, after numbers 20 and 120 may be a symbol in itself or the first letter of a word. Ardenti's interpretation goes like this:

> THE (NIGHT OF) SAINT JOHN
> 36 (YEARS) P(OST) HAY WAIN
> 6 (MESSAGES) INTACT WITH SEAL
> F(OR THE KNIGHTS WITH) THE WHITE CLOAKS [TEMPLARS]
> R(ELAP)S(I) OF PROVINS FOR (VAIN)JANCE [REVENGE]
> 6 TIMES 6 IN SIX PLACES
> EACH TIME 20 Y(EARS MAKES) 120 Y(EARS)
> THIS IS THE PLAN
> THE FIRST GO TO THE CASTLE
> IT(ERUM) [AGAIN AFTER 120 YEARS] THE SECOND JOIN
> THOSE (OF THE) BREAD
> AGAIN TO THE REFUGE
> AGAIN TO OUR LADY BEYOND THE RIVER

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and combinations of words are open to interpretations and misinterpretations from the beginning, and do not, therefore, help only Ardenti but Casaubon as well.
[239] Black 1999, 85.
[240] *FP*, 135; *PF*, 147.

AGAIN TO THE HOSTEL OF THE POPELICANS
AGAIN TO THE STONE
3 TIMES 6 [666] BEFORE THE FEAST (OF THE) GREAT
WHORE.[241]

As he says, his "final transcription and translation" is "based on surmises that are, if I do say so myself" not only unassailable but lucid as well.[242] The conclusion Ardenti delivers from *the combination* of these two parts, goes then as follows: Ingolf's transcription is the right one and he has managed to decrypt these messages *because* Ardenti also managed to do so. The original concerns revenging the death of Jacques de Molay, last Grand Master of the Templars, and bringing to an end a mission that has been carried on for centuries. The revenge mission is about to be realized at the turn of the new millennium, in the year 2000. Ardenti explains that the second part of the message reveals the procedure according to which 36 groups of Templars have been hiding throughout Europe. The original plan (not described in the lost parchment as such but in some other similarly lost message, whose instructions the parchment seems to describe) has been divided into six parts. The first part is set together with the second when the first 120 years have passed, then these two are set together with the third, 120 years after this, and so forth until all six parts are brought together by the work of all 36 groups.

According to Ardenti, after 600 years of a relay race like this, carrying the plan ends in 1944, leaving 66 years to organize the actual revenge. The castle, "those (of the) bread," the refuge, "our lady beyond the river," the hostel of Popelicans and the stone are the legs of this relay. The process begins in a distant castle in Hyperborea, goes through Jerusalem, Agarttha, Chartres in France, some Mediterranean land, and so on to Stonehenge.[243] "The feast of the Great Whore," Ardenti continues, refers to the rise of the new Babylon that would happen when the millennium occurs. The relay race lasts 600 years but a better count of years, he continues, would be 666, and this is, as one might guess, yet one further reason why the revenge ought not to be realized until the millennium: 666 not only has a satanic tone, it has

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[241] *FP*, 135–136 [*PF*, 148: "LA (NOTTE DI) SAN GIOVANNI / 36 (ANNI) P(OST) LA CARRETTA DI FIENO / 6 (MESSAGGI) INTATTI CON SIGILLO / P(ER I CAVALIERI DAI) BIANCHI MANTELLI [I TEMPLARI] / R(ELAP)S(I) DI PROVINS PER LA (VAIN)JANCE [VENDETTA] / 6 VOLTE 6 IN SEI LOCALITÀ / OGNI VOLTA 20 A(NNI FA) 120 A(NNI) / QUESTO È IL PIANO: / VADANO AL CASTELLO I PRIMI / IT(ERUM) [DI NUOVO DOPO 120 ANNI] I SECONDI RAGGIUNGANO QUELLI (DEL) PANE / DI NUOVO AL RIFUGIO / DI NUOVO A NOSTRA SIGNORA AL DI LÀ DAL FIUME / DI NOUVO ALL'OSTELLO DEI POPELICANT / DI NUOVO ALLA PIETRA / 3 VOLTE 6 [666] PRIMA DELLA FESTA (DELLA) GRANDE MERETRICE."].

[242] *FP*, 135 [*PF*, 147: "trascrizione finale"]; *FP*, 135 [*PF*, 148: "per congetture che mi permetteranno di"].

[243] Hyperborea is a mythical distant plain beyond the home of Boreas, the Greek god of north wind. Agarttha, in turn, is a subterranean city somewhere in Tibet from which, according to Ardenti, "the Masters of the World control and direct the developments of human history" (*FP*, 144 [*PF*, 156: "i Signori del Mondo dominano e dirigono le vicende della storia umama"].) It is not, however, Ardenti's invention, but a very popular subject in Western esotericism.

also had a historically remarkable numerical value in the history of religions. The cherry on top of this plan is the stone that Ardenti interprets as the Grail. This gives him reason to turn Jesus into an Aryan and connect both the Grail and Jesus with Celtic myths and the Cathars, who played their part in the plan as well.

As "[t]his is the plan," a skeleton of instructions, it is noticeable that Ardenti does not actually know *what* the Templars are up to. Nor does he know *how* the plan is going to be carried out. He knows only the schedule. This is the reason Ardenti has come to Garamond; he is there to cast the bait.[244] Due to some historical accident, the relay has gone off, whereupon Ardenti seeks "to make contact with people who can help me look for the answer in the labyrinth of traditional learning."[245] Before we discuss how exactly these people help Ardenti, a short comparison with Borges, as well as a contextualization of Ardenti's interpretative methods, are in order.

The Reading Strategies of an Obsessed Detective

On the strength of Ardenti's reading, one can say that he has a guiding idea that he uses to contextualize the message. The Colonel has been obsessed with the Templars mysteries since his childhood, and especially the mysterious "hay wain legend" and the sudden surrender of the Templars has fed his imagination from one year to the next. Since this obsession has left an indelible imprint on his thinking, and the original content of the parchment is unclear, Ardenti simply uses his favorite idea as an interpretative key to decipher (or produce) the meaning of each line. Moreover, the Templar obsession has convinced him that there really *is* a mystery to solve.

In classical detective stories, the question whether there is a mystery or not has been dependent on the availability of key texts. According to Peter Hühn, the general convention of the genre has been that criminals bar none leave a trace or two: "the murder story is always in some way 'imprinted' on the world."[246] Thus, the detection process has also essentially been a reconstruction of a hidden or lost story, the driving force in this reconstruction procedure being the detective's goal-oriented reasoning.[247] Compared to the tradition of the classical detective story, it is not then unusual that Ardenti intuits the existence of a crime. What is unusual is his peculiar way of producing data concerning it: since the original context of his first clue is lost, he, instead of seeking historical probabilities, simply projects his obsession onto the message.

The reader has been introduced to Ardenti's interpretative method even before

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244 *FP*, 148; *PF*, 132.
245 *FP*, 148–149 [*PF*, 160: "[C]erco di pormi in contatto con persone che possano aiutarmi a cercare la risposta nei meandri del sapere tradizionale"].
246 Hühn 1987, 454.
247 Ibid., 451.

this character appears. During Casaubon's first encounter with his future mentor, Belbo jokingly puts people into four categories: cretin, fool, moron, and lunatic. Unlike the first three, Belbo suggests, a lunatic:

> doesn't concern himself at all with logic; he works by short circuits. For him, everything proves everything else. The lunatic is all idée fixe, and whatever he comes across confirms his lunacy. You can tell him by the liberties he takes with common sense, by his flashes of inspiration, and by the fact that sooner or later he brings up the Templars.[248]

Ardenti has no need to bring up the Templars, the idée fixe of his manuscript. But Belbo's banter hits the target: like other lunatics, Ardenti uses any data available as long as it justifies his conclusions. As forming an argument is comparable to thinking in general and to the detective's reasoning especially, Belbo implies that just as there is room in this world for all kinds of readers, not all sleuths are cut from the same cloth either: some succeed, while others get muddled with their reasoning. When Ardenti explains the message (or his interpretation of it) to Casaubon and Belbo, he says on several occasions that he has looked "for a trail" and "uncovered a clue," one after another.[249] He has "had a trail to follow, erroneous but useful," and now, at Garamond, he wants to tell his interpretation to the world, "hoping that there may be somebody out there who can fit the rest of the puzzle together."[250] Thus, like the supposed dragoon Ingolf before him, Ardenti too has acted like a detective. He may not be a brilliant detective but, like some of the hard-boiled detectives, he is eager to do whatever is necessary to solve the mystery. And like Lönnrot, who sticks with his rabbinical explanations, Ardenti too is unwilling and unable to read the arcane message in a way that would *not* involve the Templars.

In this respect, Ardenti's character can be compared with the Prefect in Poe's "The Purloined Letter." Like Treviranus in Borges's story and Ardenti (as well as De Angelis) in Eco's novel, the Prefect is the minor detective in Poe's short story whose crime the main detective, C. Auguste Dupin, solves. The formal goal of investigation in "The Purloined Letter" is to find a missing letter, but in practice the plot emphasizes the investigation, and more specifically, the chosen methods of investigation; how to find the letter is dependent on where and how one decides to search for it. Detection has as much to do with the object of detection as with detection itself; the availability of the object depends on the principles of detection. Unlike Dupin, the Prefect and his cohort "consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity;

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[248] *FP*, 67 [*PF*, 76: "non si preoccupa di avere una logica, procede per cortocircuiti. Tutto per lui dimostra tutto. Il matto ha una idea fissa, e tutto quel che trova gli va bene per confermarla. Il matto lo riconosci dalla libertà che si prende nei confronti del dovere di prova, dalla disponibilità a trovare illuminazioni. E le parrà strano, ma il matto prima o poi tira fuori i Templari."].

[249] *FP*, 123 [*PF*, 134: "cercare una pista"]; *FP*, 133 [*PF*, 145: "trovato una traccia"].

[250] *FP*, 143 [*PF*, 155: "io avevo una pista, errata ma utile"]; *FP*, 121 [*PF,* 132: "in modo che se c'è qualcuno che è in grado di completare questo gioco a incastri"].

and in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden."[251] For this reason, the Prefect becomes blind to things in plain sight as he does not, even for a second, question his own "invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed."[252]

Similarly, Ardenti cherishes a hope that there truly is a Templar mystery, and thus neglects other possible contexts of the parchment, among them the original historical context. Dupin identifies the Prefect's fallacy, which is also Ardenti's: "The identification […] of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends […] upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured."[253] When a detective, such as Ardenti, sees only his own principles and sticks with them, the opponent, disliking "all the ordinary *nooks* of concealment," is able to change tactics.[254] Thus, by turning to the principle of simplicity the Minister D – the criminal of "The Purloined Letter" – is capable of tricking his opponents. The same holds good for Red Scharlach in "Death and the Compass": Erik Lönnrot is no fool, but he operates on the limited basis of his comfort zone and is unwilling to reevaluate his strategies. He is then an easy victim to Scharlach.

Since *Foucault's Pendulum* explores different sorts of detectives and detection processes, Ardenti's position needs, however, more specification in relation to the fallacies of the detective. In Belbo's categories, the lunatic is also "a moron who doesn't know the ropes," whereas the moron has a sporadic inkling of logic, but gets "his reasoning wrong": "morons will occasionally say something that's right, but they say it for the wrong reason."[255] Interestingly, Belbo's description of a moron is close to the character of William Baskerville, who at the end of *The Name of the Rose*, comes to the right conclusion by accident. Baskerville's reasoning is, in other words, wrong but he nevertheless solves the crime series in the monastery. As for Ardenti, he does not care about the outcome, for all that he comes across confirms his idée fixe, and

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[251] Poe 1978b, 985; original italics. In practice, the Prefect and his cohort investigate thoroughly the Minister's office without result, and this gives Dupin a reason to criticize the Prefect's methods and accomplish his quest. In *Foucault's Pendulum*, De Angelis suspects that Ardenti had tried to blackmail a man called Rakovsky – just like in Poe's story, the Minister had tried to blackmail the lady with the letter he had stolen from her – and in this pursuit, he had been killed (*FP*, 155–156; *PF*, 168–169). Also, like the Minister's office, Ardenti's hotel room is found to be in disarray. As "The Purloined Letter" emphasizes, mess is a sign of failed detection: Ardenti's killers were possibly searching for his papers, but as he had by accident left the message at Garamond earlier that day, the intruders found nothing.
[252] Poe 1978d, 988.
[253] Ibid., 985. From a theoretical perspective, this idea of the identification of the reasoner with his opponent comes close to Eco's theory (1981, 7) about the dialectics of model author and model reader: the reader seeks to take up an ideal position in which he or she is "supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them." The model author, on the other hand, is present in the text as a recognizable style and as a narrative strategy. Ibid., 10; Eco 1994, 15.
[254] Poe 1978d 988; original italics.
[255] *FP*, 66 [*PF*, 76: "uno stupido che non conosce i trucchi"]; *FP*, 65 [*PF*, 74: "Sbaglia nel ragionamento"]; *FP*, 65 [*PF*, 74: "lo stupido può anche dire una cosa giusta, ma per ragioni sbagliate"].

that is all that matters to him. Moreover, when he says that he has had luck with his guesswork, what he actually means is that he has found – or more likely, invented – connections. But as he does not know the ropes, *anything goes*: "counterfactual conditionals are always true, because the premise is false," as Casaubon points out later.[256]

"The Purloined Letter" sheds light on Ardenti's "lunacy" as well. After the discovery of the letter, Dupin refers to mathematicians and their reasoning as part of his explanation of the crime. Mathematicians suppose that "the truths of what is called *pure* algebra, are abstract or general truths."[257] These truths are not, however, universal in all circumstances. For Dupin, mathematicians are like pagans: quoting Jacob Bryant, a British mythographer, he explains that "Pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually, and make inferences from them as existing realities."[258] In the light of Ardenti's character, Dupin's addition to this quote is more than apt: "With the algebraists, however, who are Pagans themselves, the 'Pagan fables' *are* believed, and the inferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory, as through an unaccountable addling of the brains."[259] Thus, in the light of Dupin's view, Ardenti embodies a confused and credulous detective, an obsessive mind who mistakes the world for a univocal text that under its surface hides an ultimate secret. It is this interpretative logic Belbo, Casaubon, and Diotallevi later exploit, but before we delve further into that, let me conclude the analysis of Ardenti's deeds by analyzing his reading strategies a little further.

The "unaccountable addling" of Ardenti's brains leads him to fill the white gaps of the parchment with symbols. The story of "the hay wain," for instance, the conjecture that some of the Templars had managed to escape before their arrest, is something he does not take literally: "It's a symbol […]. The Temple's secret nucleus moved to a quiet spot, and from there they began to extend their underground network."[260] Similarly, the refuge, the lady beyond the river, the hostel of the Popelicans and the stone in Ardenti's paper are all *signatures* for him, signs that *refer to* the Templar secret.[261] In this matter, Ardenti does not differ much from the classical detectives. If detection in the classical detective story is the process of reconstructing a hidden story, then the detective always sees clues and key texts as signatures of sorts, thus emphasizing the priority of their latent content. Following

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[256] *FP*, 132 [*PF*, 144: "I condizionali controfattuali sono sempre veri perché la premessa è falsa"].
[257] Poe 1978d, 987; original italics.
[258] Ibid., 987–988.
[259] Ibid., 988; original italics.
[260] *FP*, 123 [*PF*, 134: "così ingenuo da prestar fede alla storia della carretta. È un simbolo [...]. Il nucleo segreto si trasferisce in un centro tranquillo e di lì inizia a costituire la sua rete clandestina."]. But although Ardenti sees the hay wain as a symbol, he takes the underground network literally. For him, Provins appears to be the most obvious place where the Templars would have fled as the village is "a magic place" (*FP*, 125 [*PF*, 137: "luogo magico"]), with a prehistoric network of tunnels. This exemplifies the way that Ardenti is also, when he needs to, capable of bending the rules.
[261] Cf. Eco 1990, 24.

the same interpretative logic, Ardenti takes the lines of parchment as signs that refer to something else, to "the expression or the content of any other thing."[262] Therefore, the lines refer to the strong transcendental subject (that is, the Templars), and this explains both the expressions, and the occult links between the expressions. The content as such, is, however, dependent on Ardenti's obsessions. Like Dupin's mathematician, he errs in holding his fixation as a universal truth.

If all that comes across confirms the obsessed detective's views, the idée fixe keeps things in order. The detective's obsession forms literally a fixed point, a "hook around which the universe could move" thus permitting "everything to connect with everything else by a labyrinthine web of mutual referrals."[263] However, seeing similarities between phenomena not only asks for *rules* – or "the ropes," as Belbo puts it – but also *competence*: just like any other reader, the detective needs to compare his perceptions with the texts he already knows, to be able to recognize intertextual references, levels of meaning, and probable contexts. Like history and reality, the textual universes – the narratives describing possible worlds – as well as the detection situations are in this sense approachable only via literary interpretation, that is, in the presence and usability of other texts.[264] Highly-educated interpretative communities such as literary scholars, are of course quite used to applying this kind of interpretative pluralism: the evident meanings and the most obvious interpretations are recognized and appreciated only in relation to implicit meanings and allegorical, symbolic, or otherwise suggestive interpretations.[265] In fact, these communities also tend to maintain that overinterpretation – an interpretation that focuses on the chosen, perhaps even marginal level of meaning – may be, as Jonathan Culler argues, "a practice of asking precisely those questions that are *not* necessary for normal communication but that enable us to reflect on its functioning."[266]

But as Dupin explains, the sleuth, just like any other reader, has to be capable of switching his tactics, and if necessary of moving between different levels of meanings. Having got used to exposing hidden connections on the basis of "invariable principle," the Prefect, Erik Lönnrot and Colonel Ardenti all fail due to their "moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident."[267] Among them, Ardenti's powers of deduction are the poorest, as he draws connections that are chosen most arbitrarily. After all, Lönnrot's rabbinical explanation, leads at least towards the (unfortunate) solution. Ardenti has instead sketched only an interpretation in which everything proves everything else. Practically, this quest

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[262] Ibid., 24.
[263] *FP*, 5 [*PF*, 11: "lasciando che l'universo muovesse intorno a sé"]; Eco 1990, 27.
[264] Cf. Jameson 2002, 20.
[265] Cf. McHale 1992, 169–170.
[266] Culler 2007, 172; original italics.
[267] Poe 1978d, 988, 990.

does not lead him far: he comes to Garamond to find more information, to make contact with people who might help him. Thus, while Ardenti is convinced that the parchment concerns the Templar secret, methodically he has already faced a dead end. Ardenti's idée fixe concerning the Templars ensures him a point of view, in which "*everything bears relationships of analogy, contiguity and similarity to everything else*," but someone other than he needs to expose these relationships.[268]

All in all, Ardenti is an obsessed detective who practices his reading strategy on the basis of an idée fixe, and thus embodies a travesty of the classical detective character. Whereas De Angelis only points out the forking of investigational paths in the novel, Ardenti is a detective whose work Casaubon and his colleagues begin to lead further – just like Dupin solves the mystery whereas the Prefect fails. On the basis of his obsession, Ardenti has sketched a semiosis that enables the investigators "to shift from meaning to meaning, from similarity to similarity, from a connection to another" without restrictions.[269] But unlike Dupin, who succeeds in his investigation, the creation of the Plan proves to be problematic for Casaubon and his colleagues – just like the rabbinical investigations prove to be problematic for Erik Lönnrot. According to Eco, if one pushes the idea of network of similitudes to its limits, and sees signatures of the ultimate secret everywhere, then, obviously, one becomes a paranoid reader.[270]

In the following chapter, I explore this idea further, now in the light of the Plan as it is Casaubon and his colleagues' art of excess that produces not only paranoid readers but also seriality between reading practices. For such an exploration, it is, however, necessary to start from the reason Ardenti comes to Garamond in the first place: he seeks people who can help him to "look for the answer in the labyrinth of traditional learning."[271] In other words, what Ardenti seeks is *more information*. For our study, his need is extremely crucial, since, as I illustrate next, taking advantage of the concept of information is the most important of recent additions to the toolkit of the encyclopedic novel. Whereas Ardenti's thinking in *Foucault's Pendulum* forms the base of the epistemological labyrinth, it is Casaubon and his colleagues' parodic reading practice, combined with the use of information technologies, that enables the birth of the network of references. This practice does not only extend the quest on the ontological level, it also gives Eco's metaphysical detective story its abundant encyclopedism.

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[268] Eco 1992b, 45; original italics.
[269] Eco 1990, 26–27.
[270] Eco 1992b, 48.
[271] *FP*, 148–149 [*PF*, 160: "a cercare la risposta nei meandri del sapere tradizionale"].

3.
Cruft, Information, and Order

What is information? Let us reformulate this question by considering a marginal, yet indicative moment in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. As Tyrone Slothrop proceeds in search of his true identity – his conditioning by "Them" as an infant and the fatal connection of his libido to the V-2 rocket – and arrives in Zürich, he meets a Russian spy called Semyavin. "First thing you have to understand is the way everything here is specialized," Semyavin explains to Slothrop, "If it's watches, you go to one café. If it's women, you go to another. Furs are subdivided into Sable, Ermine, Mink, and Others. Same with dope: Stimulants, Depressants, Psychomimetics … . What is it you're after?"[272] Slothrop asks for information, as well he might. Semyavin gives a tragic sigh: "Information. What's wrong with dope and women? Is it any wonder the world's gone insane, with information come to be the only real medium of exchange?"[273]

Although this short encounter is, at least for Edward Mendelson, a constitutive moment in the rise of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, it is secondary for the sequence of events that constitute the major plot lines of *Gravity's Rainbow*.[274] Nevertheless, in a crucial way it formulates a key question that concerns the role of information in the (late) modern world. If Semyavin is right, and information replaces money as "the only real medium of exchange," the world – or more likely, our understanding of the world – does not lose its course entirely, however. There are still categories and subcategories for everything, not to mention order, albeit a disorderly one. Thus, the common interest moves from the market of concrete commodities to the immaterial world of *potentials*; or more specifically, to potentially valuable knowledge. After all, Tyrone Slothrop does not want either dope or women. Instead, he wants to find a right *clue* that would support *his case*, a missing piece of information that would help him proceed in revealing the secret order of things. The case not only concerns his missing identity, but as he later learns the hard way, his identity is in a peculiar way ontologically intertwined with the nature of the world,

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[272] Pynchon 2000a, 258.
[273] Ibid., 258.
[274] E.g. Mendelson 1976a; Ercolino 2014, 36n. 36.

and thus concerns the metaphysical aspects of all being and knowing. From this "metaphysical knot," not from the encounter with Semyavin, also arises Pynchon's encyclopedism.

Interestingly, in Slothrop's case, the existing categories do not so much help as impede solving the case. Most things can be specialized, as Semyavin suggests, but the world around Semyavin and Slothrop remains unstable. In fact, one can even ask which of these two sides of the contemporary world has the greater negative impact on Slothrop's quest, the chaotic war-time circumstances (that is, the actual state of things as a totality) or the long-term pursuits for categorization of the world (the overall attempts to stabilize the state of things, i.e. totalization)? By and large, if things have changed, as Mendelson implies, which one of these two sides has actually changed, the world or our conceptions about it?

Change is, of course, a deceptive concept, since obviously we are not separate from the world we are living in: whether or not the world changes, so do we. After Pynchon, the encyclopedic novel has gone through some explicit changes, and while I, for my part, would like to propose that we are witnessing, to name only one of these transitions, a generic shift from *Bildungsroman* to the metaphysical detective story – a shift in which one dominant genre is replaced by another – a much more discussed change concerns the crisis of encyclopedic knowledge in general.[275] Simply put, as many scholars have pointed out, contemporary encyclopedic novels tend to be highly conscious of the problematics of their intrinsic encyclopedic urge, and one fruitful way to thematize this crisis within the narrative form has been the exploitation of the concept of information. At the level of plot, informational excess is often produced by taking advantage of contemporary technology, namely personal computers and databases, but as for the narrative form, a sense of excessiveness may also be produced more mechanically, without the direct aid of computers. In these cases, new technologies are either replaced or sophisticatedly embedded and routed in forms of mathematical formulas, physical patterns, or theological images that illustrate the ideas of expansiveness, entropy, and eternity. It is also common for these *designs of order* that with their aid, narratives represent viewpoints that transcend a simple human perspective. Since the general purpose of encyclopedias has been a systematic representation of totality, it is obvious that information in contemporary fictional encyclopedias not only threatens to achieve the original goal but also embodies this non-human perspective.

What then is information? It is *potentially valuable knowledge*.[276] In early cybernetics, signals are distinguished from the background noise and we need to remove these extraneous disturbances in order to hear the signal.[277] In fact,

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[275] E.g. Mendelson 1976a; 1976b; Dewey 1998; Kuusisto 2001; Burn 2007; Herman & van Ewijk 2009; van Ewijk 2011; Letzler 2012.
[276] Cf. LeClair 1989, 14.
[277] E.g. Weiner 1961, 10.

information represents *a choice* one needs to make in order to separate a valuable message from among the crowd of messages.[278] In the context of narrative studies, a prerequisite for this choice-making situation is an epistemological agent, a subject who not only chooses but before that, also becomes involved with the textual entity from which signals can be distinguished. On the other hand, the choice-making situation obviously requires a specific textual entity, a system in which all kinds of potentially valuable knowledge (information) are gathered. Therefore, together the reader and the text form a co-operative feedback loop, in which material is organized on the one hand, and in which potential meanings are constantly produced on the other. Stefano Ercolino names two opposite forces that mark the encyclopedic modality, but these forces could very well also mark *any* narrative, if they were seen from the informational perspective: *the chaos function* and *the cosmos function* are dialectic partners that enable the paradoxical nature of the encyclopedic narrative.[279] Together these functions constitute the poles of a system of information in which there are meaningful signals on the one hand, and background noise on the other. There are, in other words, some textual and narrative characteristics – digressions, for instance – that verifiably increase the sense of narrative entropy, whereas the aim of others is to bring the reader a sense of order and coherence. As Ercolino argues, "[t]he delicate *equilibrium* of the maximalist novel" is based on the co-presence of centrifugal and centripetal forces, chaos and cosmos.[280]

Strictly speaking, the encyclopedism of the contemporary encyclopedic novel does not, however, fall into either of these categories alone. The mechanisms of encyclopedic production are more complex, and usually intertwining and overlapping. Literary encyclopedias do not simply represent order, since, as recalled, even the most detailed ones are doomed to remain open, incomplete, and therefore, potentially chaotic. But they are not meaningless in their excessiveness either. To refer shortly to the ideas of early cybernetics, according to Claude Shannon's daring thesis, when the system is disordered, it actually contains *more information*, more potentially valuable knowledge, than when it is well-organized. Therefore, entropy and information are basically one and the same thing. When the amount of potentially valuable knowledge is increased in the system, the chaos within that system also increases.[281]

As an epistemologically maximalist narrative, the contemporary encyclopedic novel aims at enhancing entropy. In this chapter I will continue reading Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* as a demonstrative example, but whereas the purpose of the previous chapter was to study Eco's novel as a maximalist duplication of Borges's "Death and the Compass," it is now useful to approach the same novel from a slightly

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[278] Hayles 1999a, 52.
[279] Ercolino 2014, 114–118.
[280] Ibid., 115; original italics.
[281] Johnston 1998, 42.

different perspective, and ask, what new, especially from the viewpoint of the encyclopedic novel, does Eco bring to Borges's short story on the one hand, and what does information have to do with this renewal on the other. Like the question, so too the argument is two-fold. First, by delicately modernizing some key details of Borges's story, Eco makes his protagonists have recourse to a personal computer, which is used to increase potential knowledge and help Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi to formulate their Plan. Second, when the Plan gets out of hand, Casaubon chooses, as a narrator-protagonist, to rearrange information into an encyclopedic narrative, but in a way that leaves this narrative as a system of information intentionally open. Initially, in this dual movement we pinpoint both poles of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, namely the chaos function and the cosmos function, but we also shift from the encyclopedism of the plot to the encyclopedism of the narrative form. Let me, however, begin by returning to the idea of rabbinical explanations, and examining how Borges's original method of detection is exploited in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

3.1. The Nuptials of Tradition and the Electronic Machine

In *Foucault's Pendulum*, the sketching of the Plan, the parodic rewriting of Colonel Ardenti's obsessive semiosis, is done with the help of a personal computer. More specifically, the metaphysical idea that everything can be connected to everything else is *mechanized* by using a computer to find possible links between phenomena. What follows is a minor encyclopedia of Western esotericism within an encyclopedic novel, a large set of descriptions concerning marginal history, occult doctrines and activities of secret societies. Like almost all metaphysical detective stories, *Foucault's Pendulum* contains, then, albeit in a maximalist fashion, "a corpus of many books."[282] Originally, these (pseudo)historical descriptions are material for a synthesis that the detectives are sketching, but at the end of the narrative, the material becomes inseparable from the Planners' own intentions. Like the "Diabolicals", the credulous readers such as Ardenti, Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi project their Plan onto the world, making others believe in it, but it is eventually them, not the Diabolicals, who are hoist by their own petard. In this respect, just like the starting point, also the closure of Eco's novel links with the Borges's short story, the outcome being eventually the same: by following the rabbinical explanations, the detective walks into his own trap.

Since my task is to examine the mechanized reproduction of an obsessed

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[282] Merivale 1999, 101.

semiosis, let me first summon up Ardenti's confusion concerning his message. In *The Limits of Interpretation*, published two years after *Foucault's Pendulum*, Eco sketches a mind game that is analogical to Ardenti's situation. In it, a slave is sent with thirty figs to the slave-owner's friend. With the figs he carries a letter saying "in this Basket brought by my Slave there are 30 figs I send you as a Present."[283] Now, suppose that on his way the slave is killed, and the killer eats all the figs, puts the letter into a bottle, and throws it into the ocean. Years after, someone finds it. Supposedly this person's first reaction is "Where are the figs?" but after this, according to Eco, he or she may dream "about all possible figs, all possible slaves, all possible senders, as well as about the possible nonexistence of any fig, slave, or sender, about the machineries of lying, and about his unfortunate destiny as an addressee definitely separated from any Transcendental Meaning."[284]

This mind game resembles the detection task Ardenti leaves behind. By introducing the interpretation that is based on his idée fixe on the one hand, and the interpretative principle of a web of mutual resemblances on the other, Ardenti sets up a *reading position* in which "deducing from the minimal relationship the maximum possible" (Eco 1992b, 48) is, to phrase Lönnrot in a similar situation, both possible and interesting.[285] Who killed the slave (Ardenti) is not even a question, whereas the message referring to the figs definitely is. For Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi, the reading position Ardenti has set up is, however, more an expression of credulity than a reliable standpoint. As professional readers full of sound skepticism and doubt, always apt to find errors, Casaubon and his colleagues have usually distanced themselves from such a position. But even though Ardenti's "lunacy" is their laughing stock, it nonetheless triggers among them a thrilling game "where you have to go from sausage to Plato in five steps, by association of ideas."[286] As Casaubon elaborates:

> [f]or example, potato crosses with apple, because both are vegetable and round in shape. From apple to snake, by Biblical association. From snake to doughnut, by formal likeness. From doughnut to life preserver, and from life preserver to bathing suit, then bathing to sea, sea to ship, ship to shit, shit to toilet paper, toilet to cologne, cologne to alcohol, alcohol to drugs, drugs to syringe, syringe to hole, hole to ground, ground to potato.[287]

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[283] Eco 1990, 2.

[284] Ibid., 4.

[285] Eco 1992b, 48; Borges 1998, 148. This reading position is, to use Eco's own concept, a model reader. Cf. Eco 1981, 7–11; 1994, 15.

[286] *FP*, 225 [*PF*, 239–240: "Un poco come quel gioco che ti sfida ad andare da salsiccia a Platone in cinque passagi, per associazone di idee"].

[287] *FP*, 618 [*PF*, 654: "Esempio. Patata si incrocia con mela, perché entrambe sono vegetali e tondeggianti. Da mela a serpente, per connessione biblica. Da serpente a ciambella, per similitudine formale, da ciambella a salvagente e di lì a costume da bagno, dal bagno alla carta nautica, dalla carta nautica alla carta igienica, dall'igiene all'alcool, dall'alcool alla droga, dalla droga alla siringa, dalla siringa al buco, dal buco al terreno, dal terreno alla patata."].

Ardenti's interpretative method is tempting particularly because, like Lönnrot's rabbinical explanation, this kind of game with references appeals to the participant's imagination more than a down-to-earth reading. It is not only more imaginative, but also quite historical as well: Renaissance mnemonic techniques, for instance, were based on similar ideas.[288] As a private eye of learning, Casaubon has also done a similar kind of filing alongside his actual job:

> I was accumulating experience and information, and I never threw anything away. I kept files on everything. […] I had cross-referenced index cards. […] I had a strict rule, which I think secret services follow, too: No piece of information is superior to any other. Power lies in having them all on file and then finding the connections. There are always connections; you have only to want to find them.[289]

For Casaubon, the logic of cross-referenced index cards does not only place pieces of information on the same level, thus indirectly promoting the adoption of Ardenti's reading position, but it also forecasts the final touch Abulafia, the key electronic device of *Foucault's Pendulum*, will give to the creation of the Plan.[290] As the publishing company's first and only computer, Abulafia turns out to be an invaluable tool in finding connections.

After Casaubon has provided employment for himself as the Sam Spade of culture, the narrative events take a new turn when Abulafia is introduced to the publishing house. One morning Casaubon asks Belbo for some paper. Belbo searches through the piles of scripts, finds the right paper, but as he is pulling it from the pile, he spills all the scripts on the floor. Belbo assures Casaubon that Gudrun, the secretary in the office, will clean up the mess in the evening, which Casaubon questions:

> "Gudrun won't be able to put them back together," I said. "She'll put the wrong pages in the wrong folders."
> "If Diotallevi heard you, he'd rejoice. A way of producing different books, eclectic, random books. It's part of the logic of the Diabolicals."[291]

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[288] Yates 1966; Rubin 1995, 46–48; Eco 1992b, 46.

[289] *FP*, 225 [*PF*, 239–240: "accumulavo esperienze, nozioni, e non buttavo via nulla. Schevado tutto […] procedevo con mezzi artigianali, ma mi ero creato una sorta di memoria fatta di tesserine di cartone tenero, con indici incrociati. […] Il criterio era rigoroso, e credo sia lo stesso seguito dai servizi segreti: non ci sono informazioni migliori delle altre, il potere sta nello schedarle tutte, e poi cercare le connessioni. Le connessioni ci sono sempre, basta volerle trovare."].

[290] Also, by subsuming and updating "the flashback function of more traditional narrative structures" (McHale 1992, 183), Casaubon narrates his story in a way that shifts temporally back and forth, "much like a relational index or a set of Cartesian coordinates do" (Eco 1998, 293). Hence, even the temporal structure of the novel follows the idea of references.

[291] *FP*, 373 [*PF*, 393–394: "'Però Gudrun non è capace di ricomporli, metterà i fogli sbagliati nelle carpette sbagliate.'

Casaubon estimates that it would take centuries to find the right combination of words and phrases to arrange a real (or otherwise readable) book, unless there is some program in Abulafia that could accomplish this task. And there is: Abulafia contains arithmetic programs, and in order to use them, all one needs to do is to feed in the data. The feeder chooses only the number of lines. In this way, the program randomizes the line numbers and produces "a new composition each time. With ten lines you can make thousands and thousands of random poems."[292]

Casaubon suggests that they should feed into the computer the excerpts from the scripts of the Diabolicals – Ardenti's kindred spirits and esoteric wannabe authors of Manutius – with a few connective phrases such as "It's obvious that" (recall Ardenti's paraphrasing) and "This proves that": "We might end up with something revelatory. Then we fill in the gaps, call the repetitions prophecies, and – voilà – a hitherto unpublished chapter of the history of magic, at the very least!"[293] To test this argument, they feed random snippets from the nearby books alongside the connective phrases and "neutral data." The following morning, Belbo presents the poem produced by the computer:

> The Templars have something to do with everything
> What follows is not true
> Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate
> The sage Omus founded the Rosy Cross in Egypt
> There are cabalists in Provence
> Who was married at the feast of Cana?
> Minnie Mouse is Mickey's fiancée
> It logically follows that
> If
> The Druids venerated black virgins
> Then
> Simon Magus identifies Sophia as a prostitute of Tyre
> Who was married at the feast of Cana?
> The Merovingians proclaim themselves kings by divine right
> The Templars have something to do with everything[294]

The interpretation that Belbo deduces from this poem goes as follows:

'Se la sentisse Diotallevi esulterebbe. Ne usciranno libri diversi, eclettici, casuali. È nella logica dei diabolici.'"].

[292] *FP*, 374 [*PF*, 394: "Con dieci versi può ottenere migliaia e migliaia di poesi casuali"].

[293] *FP*, 375 [*PF*, 395: "potremmo ottenere delle sequeze rivelatrici. Poi si colmano i vuoti, o si valutano le ripetizioni come vaticini, insinuazioni e moniti. Al peggio, inventiamo un capitolo inedito della storia della magia."].

[294] *FP*, 376 [*PF*, 396: "I Templari c'entrano sempre / Non è vero quel che segue / Gesù è stato crocifisso sotto Ponzio Pilato / Il saggio Ormus fondò in Egitto i Rosa-Croce / Ci sono cabalisti in Provenza / Chi si è sposato alla nozze di Cana? / Minnie è la fidanzata di Topolino / Ne consegue che / Se / I druidi veneravano le vergini nere / Allora / Simon Mago identifica la Sophia in una prostituta di Tiro / Chi si è sposato alle nozze di Cana? / I Merovingi si dicono re per diritto divino / I Templari c'entrano sempre"].

Jesus was not crucified, and for that reason the Templars denied the Crucifix. The legend of Joseph of Arimathea covers a deeper truth: Jesus, not the Grail, landed in France, among the cabalists of Provence. Jesus is the metaphor of the King of the World, the true founder of the Rosicrucians. And who landed with Jesus? His wife. In the Gospels why aren't we told who was married at Cana? It was the wedding of Jesus, and it was a wedding that could not be discussed, because the bride was a public sinner, Mary Magdalene. That's why, ever since, all the Illuminati from Simon Magus to Postel seek the principle of eternal feminine in a brothel. And Jesus, meanwhile, was the founder of the royal line of France.[295]

What is surprising in Belbo's interpretation is that even though the random lines of poetry are deciphered tongue in cheek, the interpretation comes temptingly close to the claims represented in *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982), by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln. During the 1980s, this book was a bestseller and one of the most successful "non-fiction" books that dealt with the Grail. Belbo recognizes the bestseller's success, and advises his colleagues that it does not matter whether or not other authors have already written the same story.[296] For Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi, however, the first experiment with Abulafia proves at least three things. First, by feeding random data alongside the Diabolical ideas into the computer, one can produce interpretations that can compete with, even surpass, existing and established readings on occult topics. Second, books based on interpretations like these have already been published and have sold well. And third, if Abulafia can produce a credible explanation for some historical event, it is clearly a good working partner when one aims at connecting different mysterious events into a pseudohistorical narrative.

Thus, Abulafia does not only make their work easier, it also offers a key to the creation of new bestsellers. But what Casaubon and his colleagues do not realize at this point is that Abulafia also gives an ontological dimension to their editorial work: to paraphrase Brian McHale, as a technological device Abulafia has a pluralizing function that enables bringing the contents of some stories, in this case the occult narrative material, onto another ontological level. With the aid of Abulafia, Casaubon and his colleagues are able to bring invented stories to life, whereupon the story ceases to be just a crackpot theory about conspiracy: now it is also

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[295] *FP*, 376 [*PF*, 396–397: "Gesù non è stato crocifisso, ed è per questo che i Templari rinnegavano il crocifisso. La leggenda di Giuseppe d'Arimatea copre una verità più profonda: Gesù, non il Graal, sbarca in Francia presso i cabalisti di Provenza. Gesù è la metafora del Re del Mondo, del fondatore reale dei Rosa-Croce. E con chi sbarca Gesù? Con sua moglie. Perché nei Vangeli non si dice chi si è sposato a Cana? Ma perché erano con una peccatrice publica, Maria Maddalena. Ecco perché da allora tutti gli illuminati, da Simon Mago a Postel, vanno a cercare il principio dell'eterno femminino in un bordello. Pertanto Gesù è il fondatore della stirpe reale di Francia."].
[296] *FP*, 377; *PF*, 398.

historiography, and a truth that explains our postmodern condition.[297]

At this point in Casaubon's narrative, playing with Abulafia is just a joke between colleagues – or more like a part of a larger joke. It is, nevertheless, around this time that the creation process of the Plan begins. Taking the longest section of *Foucault's Pendulum*, which lasts nearly 200 pages, this process can literally be considered a maximalist elaboration of the rabbinical explanation. Since inventing the Plan takes time, in "Death and the Compass" it also gets out of hand relatively late in the narrative. Lönnrot's rabbinical explanation sees the light of day soon after the first murder, whereas the Plan is not made public until it is fully sketched.[298] In this regard, a crucial, albeit minor agent in Borges's story is a young journalist, who approaches Erik Lönnrot in order to interview him. The journalist wishes to hear about the murder, and as Lönnrot only wishes to speak about the Tetragrammaton, the journalist fills "three columns with the story that the famed detective Erik Lönnrot had taken up the study of the names of God in order to discover the name of the murderer."[299] Ironically, then, it is actually the journalist, not Lönnrot, who publicly connects the rabbinical explanation to the series of crimes and enables Red Sharlach to lure Lönnrot into a trap.

As we recall, few characters in *Foucault's Pendulum* are interested in Ardenti's alleged murder. There are no journalists who would make these connections for Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi, or publish articles about the case. Yet since the protagonists work in a publishing house and their job is to edit books on occult topics, it is only a matter of time before the Plan becomes public knowledge. And since the Plan has no other connection to the first murder than the fact that the messenger, the slave in Eco's mind game, is deceased, Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi only wish to speak about the message. Thus, instead of worrying about Ardenti's disappearance, they only take seriously his clues, the message in the bottle, and begin, to quote Eco, to dream about all possible messages, as well as "about the machineries of lying."[300] For people for "whom Hamlet is more real than our janitor," literature is a natural choice for inspiration, but as much as Casaubon and his colleagues take advantage of the existing occult literature, they also need someone or something to create new connections for them.[301] Thus, the young journalist of "Death and the Compass" is in *Foucault's Pendulum* partly replaced by an electronic

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[297] McHale 1992, 182.

[298] Although, as McHale (1992, 176) points out, Casaubon and his colleagues never write down the Plan: "That is left to Eco, who has in effect written the book of The Plan which his characters, interrupted by the murderously impatient Diabolicals, fail to finish; that book, of course, is *Foucault's Pendulum* itself." What McHale does not notice here is that the Plan is actually written as thoroughly as it can be written, namely by Casaubon, who narrates their story and the story of the Plan. Casaubon cannot or will not, however, finish the story as far as authorial intentions are concerned: he only knows the intentions for his own part, and possibly for Belbo's, but intentionally decides to leave them out from his story. For Casaubon's intentions, see ch. 3.3.

[299] Borges 1998, 149.

[300] Eco 1990, 4.

[301] *FP*, 342 [*PF*, 361: "che riteniamo Amleto più vero del nostro portinaio"].

machine.

In relation to the Plan and books such as *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail,* it is remarkable that after Lönnrot's rabbinical explanation has been published in a newspaper, the narrator of "Death and the Compass" also adds a seemingly unnecessary note: "One of those shopkeepers who have found that any given man may be persuaded to buy any given book published a popular edition of *A History of the Hasidim.*"[302] In its context, the addition comments mainly on the journalist's misinterpretation of Lönnrot's investigation – the shopkeeper thinks that even rational specialists such as detectives are willing to believe anything – but it also shows in embryo the potentialities Garamond and Manutius as publishing houses will develop further in *Foucault's Pendulum.* On the same day as Abulafia is installed, Casaubon is employed by Garamond to participate in editing a book that deals with the history of metals. Although the project is "serious, but for the mass market," according to Signor Garamond, the director of both publishing companies, "it must catch the reader's imagination."[303] The history of metals later spawns another project, named Hermes. Project Hermes consists of two series that are divided between Garamond and Manutius. As Signor Garamond has noticed, very much in the same way as Borges's shopkeeper does, in an age of confusion there are both authors and readers who are willing to believe frauds and forgeries; credulous people who "will gobble up anything that's hermetic […] anything that says the opposite of what they read in their books at school."[304] In Signor Garamond's vision, Manutius will initiate a more popular series called Isis Unveiled, whereas Garamond will launch Hermetica, an academic series dealing with the same topics. The idea behind both series is the same that the shopkeeper in Borges's story had in mind: esotericism is a goldmine for publishers during political dispersion and turmoil.

As Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi are from now on in daily contact with the Diabolicals, credulous people with an "extraordinary capacity for tying everything together," they begin to picture the worldview according to these people.[305] At this point, Casaubon recalls Ardenti's interpretation, and as Project Hermes evolves, so does Ardenti's idea of the Templar secret, a "labyrinth of traditional learning." Together these two overlapping development processes indisputably expand Casaubon's narrative as a whole. While Casaubon and his colleagues are now editing concrete encyclopedias of esotericism, the narrative begins to include not only large, summarized samples from these series, but also documents written by Belbo in which these samples are alienated from their original sources and used to tint Belbo's own biographical notes.

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[302] Borges 1998, 149.
[303] *FP*, 228 [*PF*, 243: "Sul popolare, ma serio"]; *FP*, 241 [*PF*, 257: "Deve colpire la fantasia del lettore"].
[304] *FP*, 261 [*PF*, 277: "mangiano di tutto, purché sia ermetico [...] purché dica il contrario di quel che han trovato sui libri di scuola"].
[305] *FP*, 260 [*PF*, 276: "straordinaria capacità di mettere tutto insieme"].

In practice, Project Hermes involves a reconstruction of the history of occultism, and since Ardenti has not actually invented anything, his interpretation comes close to claims expressed in existing occult literature. One leitmotif for both the manuscripts of the Diabolicals and for Ardenti's reading, is that the driving force in the course of history has always remained in the shadows: be it the Templars hiding in the subterranean networks of Provins, or the Ruler in Agarttha, only a secret Sovereign may explain the oddities of history. In fact, such an idea is a paradigmatic instance of a belief in a strong, though secret transcendent subject. By "being the principle of the universal contradiction [...] and standing outside of every possible determination, being thus All and None and the Unspeakable Source of Everything at the same moment," shelter is given to believers.[306] For the Diabolical agent, *secrecy* as such is the actual content of every expression of history and literature, whereupon logically there must be *an ultimate secret* that holds this network of secrets together, and usually, as it turns out from the manuscripts of the Diabolicals, this ultimate secret has been associated with the Templars. For this reason, Belbo feeds Abulafia the sentence "The Templars have something to do with everything."

Since the concept of an ultimate secret is, at heart, more than problematic – since no one knows it, it can be basically anything – for Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi, lunatics and obsessive detectives just keep on going in circles in the face of what they hold to be the ultimate secret. Without being able to proceed in their investigations, the credulous Diabolicals are like Ardenti: they only stir things up, looking for the right people who might help them. As a frustrated Casaubon states: "most of this stuff [...] repeats things you can find on any station newsstand. Even published authors copy from one another, and cite one another as authorities, and all base their proofs on a sentence of Iamblicus, so to speak."[307] From the offset, Casaubon and his colleagues take advantage of Abulafia, which helps them make a major breakthrough in this stalemate.

A Coalition of Reasoning Machines

Soon after the first experiments with Abulafia, Casaubon happens to be at the castle of Tomar in Portugal, where the sights spark off an idea to go back to Ardenti's message. Casaubon now becomes confident that Ardenti had made a mistake: the first hiding place for the Templars is neither Monsalvat nor Avalon, as Ardenti negligently assumed, but Tomar. Therefore, Casaubon thinks, it is necessary that all

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[306] Eco 1990, 27.
[307] *FP*, 276 [*PF*, 292: "Guardi che la maggior parte di questa roba ripete cose che si trovano in tutte le edicole delle stazioni [...] Gli autori, anche quelli a stampa, si copiano tra loro, uno dà come testimonianza l'affermazione dell'altro, e tutti usano come prova decisiva una frase di Giamblico, per dire."].

the other hiding places are reestimated as well. For him, this reassessment means "not to discover the Templars' secret, but to construct it."[308] The conclusion reveals what the Plan is about: it is not an epistemological quest, but a rewriting of history, a process that consequently establishes an additional ontological level of reality. Bit by bit, Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi are, then, absorbed into putting this construction together. But what is particularly remarkable in their project is that already at the first turn Belbo wants to ask advice from the computer: "Seeking truth," Casaubon narrates, Belbo "turned to Abulafia."[309]

As an oracle, Abulafia creates connections where human trains of thought do not normally go. Belbo feeds in two random entries – "Minnie Mouse is Mickey's fiancée / Thirty days hath September April June and November" – into the program and from the outcome he and Casaubon decipher the rest: the Gregorian reform of the calendar was the reason for the termination of the Templar relay race.[310] France adopted the reform in 1583 by abolishing ten days at the end of the year, whereas England – another party in the Plan – adopted it nearly two hundred years after, in 1752. Due to this English delay, the parties were not simultaneously at the appointed meeting place.[311]

As such, the entries do not, of course, reveal all this. Belbo points out that "the machine doesn't volunteer its help. It must be given the word; without the word, it won't talk."[312] Thus, Abulafia "doesn't help you think but he helps you because you have to think for him."[313] While semantically Abulafia produces mainly sentences of Iamblicus, the outputs are like riddles for its hosts, that is, perfect source material for both the Diabolicals and their parodists. With the aid of their new partner, Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi can now continue Ardenti's investigation by creating a new one which they expand into a semiotic system that replaces reality.

For the hosts whose editorial duty is to catch the reader's imagination by revealing, even inventing short circuits, Abulafia is indeed a perfect tool. It is non-transparent and methodically dim. It arranges the character strings in strange, amusing and fascinating sequences, thus mimicking the logic of poetry. Together, as a strange combination of algebra and poetry, Abulafia and its hosts remind us of Poe's Minister D, the thief of "The Purloined Letter," who "as poet *and* mathematician […] would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all."[314] In later sections of *Foucault's Pendulum*, Casaubon even invokes the poetry and beauty of the Plan: "All right, we started out with a laundry list. Yet

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[308] *FP*, 383 [*PF*, 405: "non si tratta di scoprire il segreto dei Templari, ma di costruirlo"].
[309] *FP*, 398 [*PF*, 421: "Voleva la verità" […] "E attivò Abulafia"].
[310] *FP*, 398 [*PF*, 421: "Minnie è la fidanzata di Topolino / Trenta giorni ha novembre con april giugno e settembre"].
[311] See *FP*, 398–399; *PF*, 421–422.
[312] *FP*, 28 [*PF*, 36: "Una macchina non collabora, sa che deve ricevere la parola, non la riceve, tace"].
[313] *FP*, 24 [*PF*, 33: "Non aiuta te a pensare ma aiuta te a pensare per lui"].
[314] Poe 1978d, 986; original italics.

we were clever enough, inventive enough, to turn a laundry list into poetry."[315] However, their invention would not been possible without the aid of a mathematician, namely their personal computer.

Abulafia's opaque sentences of Iamblicus suggest that the host needs to do the thinking. Neither Abulafia nor other computers are capable of understanding the semantic contents of sign sequences. At least in the 1980s, when the events of *Foucault's Pendulum* take place, computer logic was based on pure algorithms, and it cares only about occurrences of signs, not their meanings. Like the hypothetical mathematician in "The Purloined Letter," Abulafia does not reason at all, whereupon it would be a mistake to keep it simply as an independent reasoning machine, comparable with Auguste Dupin or Erik Lönnrot. At the same time, however, Abulafia is logically open: even without understanding, it may cover nearly anything as it does not acknowledge any semantic boundaries. Functioning on the basis of sign occurrences, Abulafia is capable of forming contexts as certain sign sequences often appear with certain other sign sequences. Hence, alone Abulafia would be, to paraphrase Belbo's definition, like a moron who does not know the ropes but says something right now and then. Correspondingly, without the algorithmic programs of Abulafia, the Plan would have just been another version of the lunatic's idée fixe. In this respect, Abulafia needs hosts as much as Casaubon and his colleagues need their electronic helper. Therefore, it would be proper to define them – Abulafia, Belbo, Casaubon, and Diotallevi – as *a coalition of reasoning machines* who help give birth to new ontological planes, creation which would have been impossible alone without the other parties.

Abulafia does not operate alone, then. For Casaubon, his time in Brazil occurs afterwards as a period when he gave himself up to "feelings of resemblance."[316] In his own words, working with manuscripts back in Italy, the use of Abulafia aids him to convert "this metaphysics into mechanics."[317] As Abulafia is a machine that only under the guidance of its users may alter the semantics of phenomena into poetry-like relations, and work on the level of language that is distinct from everyday reality, it is a primary tool in this conversion: it is the hosts, not Abulafia, who confuse semantics with reality. Yet as Cinzia Donatelli Noble points out, as Abulafia "dominates the form of a document and combines unthinkable references" it also "allows dominion and control over a matter composed of thousands of pieces of erudite data."[318]

"The mechanical reproduction" of the Plan is thus a technologically advanced "data control," in which loads of information are put together to form a simulacrum,

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[315] *FP*, 540 [*PF*, 572: "Va bene, siamo partiti da una nota della lavandaia, ma a maggior ragione siamo stati ingegnosi. Lo sapevamo anche noi che stavamo inventando. Abbiamo fatto della poesia."].
[316] *FP*, 164 [*PF*, 178: "sentimento della somiglianza"].
[317] *FP*, 164 [*PF*, 178: "questa metafisica in una meccanica"].
[318] Noble 1995, 147.

a meta-narrative without actual substance.[319] The Plan is, in other words, *a false totality*, a manifestation of the encyclopedic urge that Casaubon and his colleagues put together, or *totalize* into a system by creating new, arbitrary, and analogy-based connections between categories on the one hand, and by basing this network on the hypothetical ultimate secret on the other. Data control signifies the hosts' ability to alter meanings and reroute connections, if desired. Together *Foucault's Pendulum* and the Plan – two overlapping narratives following each other in a series – form then what John Johnston calls *a novel of information multiplicity*, even though the novel is a "fictional assemblage produced by" not so much "a writing machine" as a word processor and its user.[320] More advanced than the writing machine, Abulafia allows correction, rewriting, cutting, and pasting with ease. Editing is in fact mandatory: with a touch-type system one may be more apt to make mistakes than by writing by hand. As Belbo writes in one of his files:

> If you write with a goose quill you scratch the sweaty pages and keep stopping to dip for ink. Your thoughts go too fast for your aching wrist. If you type, the letters cluster together, and again you must go at the poky pace of the mechanism, not the speed of your synapses. But with him (it? her?) your fingers dream, your mind brushes the keyboard, you are borne on golden pinions, at last you confront the light of critical reason with the happiness of a first encounter.[321]

Furthermore, as Belbo continues in this file, Abulafia is "merciful, it grants you the right to change your mind" simply by pressing Retrieve.[322] This dual motion – writing and creating quickly on golden pinions, then erasing all that is written with a single push of a button – will later, when brought back to the real world, be the death of detective. After it has been let loose, the Plan is not so easily outdone. What Belbo's thoughts imply, however, is that again, Abulafia is not the only one who is to blame: its hosts, who decide what to create or destroy, and how to construct or deconstruct, are the party who do the actual work by feeding the data, controlling the data, and even reprogramming the whole data system.

But if the hosts' intention is to parody, and the Diabolicals seem like parodies of themselves from the start, one can rightfully ask, like Brian McHale, how can one then make fun of their readings? McHale answers:

> Only by pushing Diabolical practice to the limit; in other words, not by

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[319] See McHale 1992, 181–183; Jameson 2009, 37.
[320] Johnston 1998, 13.
[321] *FP*, 24–25 [*PF*, 33: "Se scrivi con la penna d'oca devi grattare le sudate carte e intingere ad ogni istante, i pensieri si sovrappongono e il polso non tien dietro, se batti a macchina si accavallano le lettere, non puoi procedere alla velocità delle tue sinapsi ma solo coi ritmi goffi della meccanica. Con lui, con esso (essa?) invece le dita fantasticano, la mente sfiora la tastiera, via sull'ali dorate, mediti finalmente la severa ragion critica sulla felicità del primo acchito."].
[322] *FP*, 25 [*PF*, 35: "indulgente, ti permette la resipiscenza"].

parodying one or other of the Diabolicals' conspiracy-theories […], but by undertaking to integrate the full repertoire of Diabolical secret societies, occult knowledge and conspiracy-theories […] into a single monster conspiracy, embracing the Knights Templars, the Freemasons, the Rosicrucians, the Bavarian Illuminati, the Jesuits, the International Jewish Conspiracy, the Nazis, even the King of the World who is reputed to dwell in the subterranean kingdom of Agarttha, and so on.[323]

The esoteric literature alone would fill libraries, whereupon Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi are faced with a monster, that is, the challenge of information: the knowledge of this subculture, to paraphrase Mendelson, is "vastly greater than any one person can encompass," and for this reason, the aid of a non-human helper comes into the equation.[324] What cannot be emphasized enough, however, is that this holistic parody has much to do with the false pride of the three colleagues, not just with data control. As Casaubon later regrets, "[w]e, the sardonic, insisted on playing games with the Diabolicals, on showing them that if there had to be a cosmic plot, we could invent the most cosmic of all."[325] It is easy to laugh at poor thinkers, lunatics, and mystics, but as Robert Artigiani rightly argues, "our 'scientific' alternative to mysticism is itself a self-referential construct."[326] Of course, when sketching the Plan, Casaubon and his colleagues are not thinking scientifically, but are parodying in their minds. However, their ideological frame for the Plan is both the scientific worldview, and the enlightened humanism of the twentieth century. This premise leads them to judge systems and methods that presume an occult base, without being aware, however, that science is also without a fixed point. According to Artigiani, "[s]cience is observing nature from inside the system, which makes a complete description impossible and alters the relationships defining the system as it is observed."[327] Martin Heidegger's notes on technology are worth noting here as well, especially since Abulafia is used in making fun of the Diabolicals: as Heidegger points out, the essence of technology is not in the technological, but outside of it, and "we are delivered over to [technology] in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral."[328] Thus, both Abulafia and the ideological framework for the Plan, are treacherous from the start, and it is little wonder that Casaubon and his colleagues fall into the trap of false pride: to Heidegger, the neutrality of frames is a conception to "which today we particularly like to do homage."[329]

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[323] McHale 1992, 173.
[324] Mendelson 1976b, 1269.
[325] *FP*, 438 [*PF*, 464: "noi – i sardonici – volevamo giocare a rimpiattino coi diabolici mostrandogli che, se complotto cosmico aveva da esserci, noi sapevamo inventarne uno che più cosmico non ce n'è"].
[326] Artigiani 1992, 858.
[327] Ibid., 858.
[328] Heidegger 1977, 4.
[329] Ibid., 4.

But the false pride of the protagonists also has a personal level. Before the events at the Conservatoire when Casaubon is sieving through Abulafia's memory to find answers to Belbo's participation in the creative process of the Plan, he finds one partial answer, an entry where Belbo ponders his desire to be an author. The book Belbo unfortunately created was:

> made entirely of errors, intentional, deadly errors. As long as you remain in your private vacuum, you can pretend you are in harmony with the One. But the moment you pick up the clay, electronic or otherwise, you become a demiurge, and he who embarks on the creation of worlds is already tainted with corruption and evil.[330]

In the classical Gnostic view, the Demiurge is seen as "the artificer, the artisan who gives order to matter that is, by itself, without spirit; he injects into it a form that is superior than it."[331] At the same time, he is just an instrument in a divine plan.[332] From this perspective, it is indeed difficult to "distinguish between the parody and the original," but also between the author and the instrument: if Belbo sees himself as an instrument, as the classical view of the demiurge would imply, what then is Abulafia, clay or the artisan?[333] Belbo's file ends in the sentence: "If you can't even decide what the story is, better stick to editing books on philosophy."[334] Hence, becoming a demiurge is explicitly connected to editing books, even writing a book about books. As acts, writing and editing books are in turn closely related to the detective's ruin, as Patricia Merivale argues in the case of Nabokov's metaphysical detective fiction. Since reality eventually disrupts fantasy, "only a lunatic would behave as if the world were his own work of art, would try to make the world book-shaped."[335] And yet, this is exactly how the protagonists of *Foucault's Pendulum* begin to think.

The clay may be electronic, or the work of some other writer, but the intention comes from the demiurge. If the demiurge's intentions are evil, as they are in the case of Belbo, who becomes jealous of his girlfriend and decides to revenge himself on the girlfriend's fawner, also the artifice, that is the system created by the demiurge, may turn out to be malevolent by nature. However, what both Belbo and Casaubon also neglect to consider in this matter is not their intentions but the non-transparent logic of Abulafia: as pointed out earlier, the Planners and the computer

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[330] *FP*, 57 [*PF*, 65: "fosse pure di soli, esclusivi, feroci errori intenzionali. Sino a che ti contrai nel tuo vuoto puoi ancora pensare di essere in contatto con l'Uno, ma non appena pasticci con la creta, sia pure elettronica, sei già diventato un demiurgo, e chi si impegna a fare un mondo si è già compromesso con l'errore e col male."].

[331] Filoramo 1990, 77.

[332] Ibid., 78.

[333] McHale 1992, 173.

[334] *FP*, 58 [*PF*, 67: "Insomma, quando non si sa neppure di che storia si tratta, meglio correggere i libri di filosofia"].

[335] Merivale 1967, 221.

form a coalition of reasoning machines, whereupon the artifice is essentially the offspring of both. And yet, Abulafia is just their helper without personal will.

Due to Abulafia's contribution, the Plan, "an experiment in self-conscious world-making" comes with unintended ontological side-effects, as McHale calls the fallacies to which I have already referred: as one first projects one's own idée fixe – be it the Templars, the Jewish conspiracy, or God's pantheistic existence – onto the world, then, confuses imaginary with real, and finally, considers the world as an univocal text with the ultimate secret hidden within it, the nature of reality changes.[336] Indeed, at one point of their sketching, even Belbo forgets that they are putting together a fake. Later, all the three protagonists come to believe that the Plan truly exists, not only in their minds but in extramental reality as well.[337] As Casaubon points out at the end of the novel, "if you invent a plan and others carry it out, it's as if the Plan exists. At that point it does exist."[338]

By integrating the full repertoire of esotericism into their Plan, Casaubon, his colleagues, and Abulafia create a world, or a great encyclopedia, the Book that stands for the cosmic body. At their final meeting, lying on his sickbed, Diotallevi confesses to Belbo that he believes as well that by "manipulating the Words of the Book, we attempted to construct a golem."[339] Diotallevi continues: "he who concerns himself with the Torah keeps the world in motion, and he keeps in motion his own body as he reads, studies, rewrites because there's no part of the body that doesn't have an equivalent in the world."[340] By constructing the Plan, Casaubon and his associates "anagrammatized all the books of history," and "tried to rewrite the Torah" without paying "heed whether there were too many letters or too few."[341]

Diotallevi errs only in one thing: Golem is not so much the Plan *per se* as their aid in creating it. According to the classical Jewish narrative of Golem, this man-made pseudohuman without free will or the capacity to reason, is first a silent, obeying partner of Judah Loew ben Bezalel, a rabbi of Prague. Due to *human error*, however, Golem later breaks out and causes mayhem.[342] *Foucault's Pendulum* brings this myth to the age of electronic devices: the Plan is an offspring from the union of "Tradition and the Electronic Machine," not Golem but the mayhem Golem brings.[343] As mentioned earlier, Abulafia does only what its host tells it to do: "it's stupid, it doesn't believe, it doesn't make me believe, it just does what I tell it," as

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[336] McHale 1992, 173.
[337] *FP*, 391; *PF*, 414.
[338] *FP*, 619 [*PF*, 655: "se inventando un piano gli altri lo realizzano, il Piano è come se ci fosse, anzi, ormai c'è"].
[339] *FP*, 566 [*PF*, 599: "Manipolando le parole del Libro abbiamo voluto costruire il Golem"].
[340] *FP*, 565–566 [*PF*, 599: "Colui che si occupa della Torah mantiene il mondo in movimento e mantiene in movimento il suo corpo mentre legge, o riscrive, perché non c'è parte del corpo che non abbia un equivalente nel mondo"].
[341] *FP*, 565 [*PF*, 599: "anagrammato tutti i libri della storia"]; *FP*, 565 [*PF*, 598: "abbiamo cercato di riscrivere la Torah [...] non ci siamo occupati delle lettere in più o in meno"].
[342] Scholem 1996, 158–204.
[343] *FP*, 369 [*PF*, 389: "della Tradizione con la Macchina Elettronica"].

Belbo explains.[344] The root of Casaubon and his colleagues' problem is, then, not so much Abulafia as their own practice, a combination of parody and false pride. It is the writer who gives Golem a spark of life, an intention, whereupon Abulafia is just a manifestation of electronic clay, something to work with. According to Gershom Scholem's classic studies about this mythical creature:

> Golem-making is dangerous; like all major creation it endangers the life of the creator – the source of danger, however, is not the golem or the forces emanating from him, but the man himself. The danger is not that the golem, become autonomous, will develop overwhelming powers; it lies in the tension which the creative process arouses in the creator himself. Mistakes in carrying out the directions do not impair the golem; they destroy its creator.[345]

Partly due to this reason, Diotallevi hits the target when it comes to the anagrammatization of all the books of history. Abulafia is named, again ironically, after a thirteen-century Jewish mystic Samuel ben Samuel Abraham Abulafia, who "studied the infinite combinations of the Torah and developed a system of number and letter symbolism that was influential in the development of Kabbalistic thinking.[346] For Diotallevi as a wannabe-Jew, home computers are not an invention at all – there is a machine greater than them, namely:

> the holy cabala, or Tradition, and for centuries the rabbis have been doing what no computer can do, and let us hope, will never be able to do. Because on the day all combinations are exhausted, the result should remain secret, and in any case the universe will have completed its cycle – and we will all be consumed in the dazzling glory of the great Metacyclosynchrotron.[347]

In this respect, Diotallevi predicts, already during the first days of Abulafia, what the Plan will be about, what possibilities their new home computer enables: the exhaustion of all possible combinations and references, whereupon the result, that is, the ultimate secret at the heart of the Plan, will always remain hidden. As this idea of a hidden base and a symbolic network needs to be connected with not only Kabbalistic thinking but also the form Casaubon has chosen for his narrative – the context in which the idea actually makes sense – the last section of this chapter is dedicated to the rhetorical strategies of *Foucault's Pendulum* and their relation to the series of readings that widen the Plan and the encyclopedism of the novel. Before

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[344] *FP*, 237 [*PF*, 253: "è stupida, non crede, non mi fa credere, fa quello che le dico"].
[345] Scholem 1996, 190–191.
[346] Bondanella 1997, 290; see also Idel 1989.
[347] *FP*, 37 [*PF*, 45: "la santa Cabbala o Tradizione, e i rabbini stanno facendo da secoli quello che nessuna macchina potrà mai fare e speriamo non faccia mai. Perché quando la combinatoria fosse esaurita, il risultato dovrebbe rimanere segreto e in ogni caso l'universo avrebbe cessato il suo ciclo – e noi sfolgoreremmo immemori nella gloria del grande Metatron."].

that, however, we need to take a pause from literary analysis and briefly discuss the role of information in the contemporary encyclopedic novel, now as Abulafia has worked as a useful example.

3.2. Expansion, Entropy, and Disorderly Order

The analysis of *Foucault's Pendulum* revealed that several key conventions of the metaphysical detective story are an integral part of Eco's novel. These conventions also motivate its encyclopedism, and as we saw, the Plan as a world-making project does not only drive the narrative but also expands it epistemologically. Partly due to this expansion, the novel constitutes an additional ontological level, a fake totality that is projected onto the world Casaubon and his colleagues are living in. Over the course of the analysis, I have also emphasized that the key agent in this ontological project is Abulafia, the computer that represents the latest technology of its time. And since Eco's novel is first and foremost a maximalist duplication of Borges's story, this doubling alone implies that Borges's and Poe's original ideas concerning detective story conventions are brought into the context of the present day in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

The contemporary context offers another set of problems that needs to be taken into account whether we consider Eco's novel, the metaphysics of encyclopedism, or the contemporary encyclopedic novel in general. Besides *literary influence*s, which were discussed in chapter 1 and marked as points of contact between the metaphysical detective story and the encyclopedic narrative, there are also *cultural influences* that can be summed up as *issues of information*. Since the encyclopedic novel, like its original model (that is, historical encyclopedias), is fundamentally an epistemological project, one needs to ask, how does the emergence of a concept such as information affect the ways the encyclopedic novel is represented as an epistemological totality? Is information in conflict with the principle of ordering knowledge?

I deal with this question throughout the study, but my tentative answer is two-fold. On the one hand, I argue that since Pynchon, encyclopedic novels have questioned the conventional idea of encyclopedias as an educational project by opposing it with the idea of high information content. High information content was discussed earlier, but at this point, it needs further analysis: it is an expression of a high level of entropy in the narrative system and can be further divided into three key components: *freedom of choice*, *uncertainty*, and *a great amount of potentially meaningful data units*. As such, not only traditional but also fictional encyclopedias have been anthropocentric wholes, and what the contemporary encyclopedic novel does in this regard is to disorganize, or "de-construct," this humanistic project. Thus

in the center of the fictional encyclopedia and its spheres of knowledge, is not necessarily a deductively brilliant human mind or a student who wants to learn, but a database – a coalition of reasoning machines as we saw in the case of *Foucault's Pendulum*. Pupils are certainly involved, but often these protagonists consult computers, databases (*The Gold Bug Variations*), large textual entities (*House of Leaves*), or some other metaphorical "memory banks" (*Infinite Jest*) in order to proceed from one sphere of knowledge to another. In the absence of masterminds or other fatherly figures from whom pupils could learn, *the access to information* replaces the lesson with a competent teacher. The role of information in the lives of the protagonists is also projected on the level of narrative: since the protagonists operate as model readers, we as well consult the excessive narrative as a system of information. The high information content is, after all, primarily a narrative quality.

On the other hand, I argue that despite the high level of disorder, the contemporary encyclopedic novel also continues to represent an epistemological order. Hence, even though the principle of entropy is introduced and exploited in the wake of Pynchon, contemporary encyclopedic narratives are arranged in a way that gives the high information content a specific form. Usually, the novel's formal composition follows either a mathematical, musical, cinematic, or theological idea, but epistemologically, the narrative form is represented as a radicle system, as I called the modified tree model earlier. From such a model, one can always find both *the base*, that is the key principle for organization, and *the network of connections*. The base can appear distinct, even absent, but usually the network – narrative digressions, topics, characters, themes – are linked with it in one way or another. The base is, as the key metaphor of *Foucault's Pendulum* goes, the Fixed Point in the Universe.

In my view, information in the contemporary encyclopedic novel plays, then, a dual purpose. It is a principle of expansion but also a catalyst, or a fundamental motive for organizing potential knowledge. Several studies concerning the encyclopedic novel tend to mention the concept of information, but its role in the constitution of the encyclopedic narrative is seldom satisfactorily elaborated.[348] For instance, as satisfying an account of the contemporary encyclopedic novel as Stefano Ercolino's study of the maximalist novel is, it leaves this whole question mainly unnoticed. This is surprising, since information, as defined above, is the key principle behind what Ercolino calls "the equilibrium of the chaos function and cosmos function."[349] It is, to use a common concept of information theory, organization from *noise*. Let us follow this idea for a while and begin the clarification

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[348] E.g. Dewey 1998; Strecker 1998; House 2000; Burn 2007. With the exception of John Johnston's account (1998). Johnston's approach differs considerably from most studies dealing with authors such as Pynchon, Gaddis, DeLillo, or Joseph McElroy, as Johnston does not read the novels of these authors primarily as encyclopedic novels, but as Deleuzian "media assemblages."
[349] Cf. Ercolino 2014, 115.

of the argument by taking into consideration the key concepts that explain the noise. These concepts are *entropy*, *excess*, and *cruft*.

Excess of Information

As a concept, entropy is usually linked with the second law of thermodynamics, where it refers to a measure of unusable energy that is released in heat transfer.[350] Entropy is not, however, a concept of physics alone, since it has also been developed in early information theory, where it originally meant various transmission problems of communication technologies (language, codes, binary digits, genes). As Lance Schachterie has pointed out, the latter, not the former, is the key source for Pynchon, who has exploited the idea of entropy in his fiction and introduced it into literature.[351] In fact, Pynchon himself makes the same distinction in one of his key novels: "There are two distinct kinds of entropy," it is explained in *The Crying of Lot 49*, "[o]ne having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication."[352] To which John Nefastis, a side character, adds: "Communication is the key."[353] Yet if fiction is the communication technology to which both Pynchon and the subsequent generation of encyclopedic authors apply the idea of entropy, the key question is, how exactly does entropy relate to the idea of encyclopedia? Are they contradictory ideas, or do they instead complement each other in the constitution of the encyclopedic whole?

Simply speaking, entropy is *the degree of disorder in a communication system*.[354] In the literary context, this system is a narrative, whereupon entropy equals heterogeneity of narrative material. As, for instance, Peter J. Rabinowitz has aimed at showing, text is an entity to which we address certain interpretative expectations during reading. Among these conventions is an expectation of coherence: we as readers are oriented to read literature *as if* all the features and components of a particular text served a purpose, and as if all of its details were hierarchically arrangeable.[355] Moreover, it is assumed that there are basically two existing categories for narrative material, one concerning important details, or valuable information, and the other concerning *less* important details. Thus, *completely unrelated* material is not usually expected, and as for the epistemology of the textual whole, we tend to hold the narrative to be invariably centripetal: what is there, serves some purpose.

These conventions may partly explain the popularity of story formulas such as

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[350] E.g. Gleick 2001, 269–272.
[351] Schachterie 1996, 191; see also Pynchon 1984, 12–18.
[352] Pynchon 2000b, 79.
[353] Ibid., 79.
[354] E.g. Kuberski 1994, 39.
[355] Rabinowitz 1998, 47–75.

detective stories: the investigation process of a crime is solved in the end and the narrative leaves no *completely* insignificant clues, and we certainly know what to expect. Thus, when these conventions are further exploited within the genre of metaphysical detective story, two types of narrative logically follow, namely centripetal and centrifugal narrative. What Merivale and Sweeney call the minimalist type is still in this sense epistemologically quite conventional, as this story type continues in the footsteps of classical detective story and affirms, yet subverts, exactly those conventions that have made the detective story formula so popular.[356] By contrast, the maximalist or centrifugal type begins as a detective story and exploits its machinery, but eventually it relies more on the idea of entropy than on the sophisticated exploitation of the detective story formula. Above all, the maximalist type, unlike the minimalist type, enables and even encourages the author to add completely unrelated narrative material into the story.

Using the concept of entropy in literature inevitably questions not only the conventions Rabinowitz suggests, but also the narrative form as such. Hence, entropy is not a question of interpretation alone. It also concerns composition, as for instance Pynchon's fiction, especially *Gravity's Rainbow* with its numerous subnarratives and narrational dead ends demonstrates. Therefore, entropy may determine the author's ideas concerning the novel form as a communicational system. For this specific reason – that is, the coverage of entropy – the concept of *feedback loop* is particularly useful: reading is a two-way communication, where the reader and text, as well as reception and composition, form loops in which information is turned into knowledge, and meanings and affects are produced and projected back into the composition. Entropy is then a systemic principle that affects the fluency of this feedback loop.

Novels with high information content provide an excellent demonstration of entropy. Entropy links the flows of information especially in the encyclopedic novel, where all sorts of material are included, and where "'the rate at which information is produced' at times exhausts the ability of the audience to keep pace," as Schachterie formulates the interpretative problem of *Gravity's Rainbow*.[357] Here, as well as in any other narrative system, entropy should not, however, be confused with information as such, although these two are closely related. Neither should it be mixed with the amount of information, despite the fact that entropy is equally linked with excess as well. Keeping the argument as simple as possible, we may follow Tom

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[356] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 18–19. As the narrator of Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985) speculates, "[i]n the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so – which amount to the same thing. [...] Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked." (2004, 8). As one of the most remarkable metaphysical detective stories, *City of Glass* (and *The New York Trilogy* as a whole) trivializes this convention of the classical detective story, but does so in a way that still makes the reader suspicious of what is meaningful information and what is not.
[357] Schachterie 1996, 206.

LeClair and argue that *information* in a narrative can be considered strictly to be "historically or empirically verifiable facts about the world (extrinsic information) or as the data of character and event the novelist invents (intrinsic information)."[358] *Entropy*, on the other hand, can be said to be the degree of interpretative uncertainty. Neither of these concepts should be straightforwardly linked with *meaningfulness*: information is simply potential knowledge, whereas entropy is practically the disorder of data. Meanings, in turn, come afterwards, as the epistemological agents order and evaluate data units and consequently, recognize meaningful signals. In this respect, the meanings presuppose information and entropy, not vice versa.

Yet as has often been proposed, information is not only data, but also a matter of choice.[359] One chooses a valuable message among the group of messages, which in the case of the encyclopedic novel is excessive in number. Paradoxically, then, within a communication system (the narrative) the freedom to choose is closely linked with the degree of uncertainty. As William Weaver, one of the early theoreticians of information theory, points out, "[t]he greater degree this freedom of choice, and hence the greater the information, the greater the uncertainty that the message actually selected is some particular one. Thus greater freedom of choice, greater uncertainty, greater information go hand in hand."[360] Hence, as a communicational system, the narrative that is rich in detail provides a greater potential for meaningful communication than the narrative that is not. Therefore, the economical narrative – a narrative that introduces, for instance, only a few characters and scenes, and exploits short sentences and simple language – is not necessarily more communicative in terms of entropy. Quite the contrary, it is a poorer system than the system that the encyclopedic novel, or even a Borgesian short story constitutes.[361] In this sense, the excess of material equals the high entropy level, which in turn, equals the increasing interpretative possibilities of the reader.

Nevertheless, against the general conventions of reading proposed by Rabinowitz, the co-operative feedback loop is rarely unambiguously fluent. As Richard House points out, "[a]ll information is poised between the threats of 'noise' – accidental additions, substitutions, and deletions that occur in transmission 'channel' – and the compensatory presence of redundancy."[362] Therefore, if one is to consider the narrative as a communicational system, it also needs to be recognized that not even in a simple narrative is "the channel" completely clear. Usually there

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[358] LeClair 1989, 14.
[359] E.g. Weaver 1962, 100; Schachterie 1996, 194; Hayles 1999a, 52.
[360] Weaver 1962, 109.
[361] Minimalist narratives, with which encyclopedic novels are closed linked, do not always remain low in entropy. Besides Borges's fiction, David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (1988) is a good example: it is a narrated monologue of one character, the paragraphs of the narrative are one to three short sentences long, and as a whole, the novel is relatively short (240 p.) Nevertheless, *Wittgenstein's Mistress* is epistemologically very rich, as it constantly corrects itself: things that were true earlier are not true in the following paragraphs. E.g. Ercolino 2014, 65–70.
[362] House 2000, 26.

are unintentional aspects and details even in the classical detective story, be these ambiguities false clues, lingual slips, anachronistic ambiguities, or other, what one might call, compositional leaks. One never picks clean messages from the communicational system for further interpretation. There is always noise and extraneous material involved: distortions and errors affect the way the message is received. Since most readers hold the plot in high regard when they read literature, it is quite conventional to intuitively rank narrative material on the basis of how well each detail serves the plot. In terms of entropy, we may say that the plot forms the narrative channel, whereupon it follows that when the additional material, either related or unrelated to the plot, is increased as the story is told, the plot becomes increasingly unclear as well. Simultaneously, the role of the reader as the evaluator of information increases.[363]

David Letzler has introduced a useful term to describe not only the impurities of the channel, but also the intended redundancy, or the excess of narrative material. The term that links entropy (degree) with excess (amount) is "cruft," which he borrows from computer programming and by which he refers to "superfluous junk" that "is not wrong *per se*, but […] is excessive to no clear purpose, simultaneously too much and too little."[364] Letzler's concept is particularly important for us, since, almost unintentionally, he uses it to describe a change within the tradition of the encyclopedic novel. Whereas Stephen J. Burn points out that authors such as Gaddis and Pynchon shared a "heightened self-consciousness about the limitations of the encyclopedic impulse" and that the younger authors "use the encyclopedic form to dramatize more explicitly the limitations of the encyclopedic urge," Letzler takes a step further and argues that what actually is at stake is *the general paradox* of "encyclopedic fiction."[365] According to him, on the one hand "encyclopedias represent that which has existed elsewhere," while on the other, "fiction presents that which does not."[366] In this respect, encyclopedic authors do not so much *master* existing knowledge, as Tom LeClair claims.[367] Instead, they expand their narratives by *creating* more information, and this information lacks referents to the real world. Since the encyclopedic novel is an illusion of totality, all of its details are "false" as well. In this part, Letzler's argument is a bit weak, but his conclusion is better: the non-referentiality of fictional encyclopedias enables the author to add also inaccurate elements, up until the point where the details serve no recognizable purpose. Therefore, the contemporary encyclopedic novel underlines, even more than before, its own artificiality, its detachment from factual, and its distance from all sorts of fact-based outlines. Information does not have to be reality-related or

[363] E.g. Schachterie 1996, 194; Burn 2011, 25.
[364] Letzler 2012, 308.
[365] Burn 2007, 60; Letzler 2012, 306.
[366] Letzler 2012, 306.
[367] LeClair 1989.

relevant.

Whether the transition within the tradition of the encyclopedic novel towards higher self-consciousness takes place or not, Letzler implies that not only does the amount of cruft increase when one moves from Gaddis through Pynchon to Wallace. More recent encyclopedic novels, such as *Infinite Jest*, also introduce material that has no purpose whatsoever – first, they are non-referential, and then they seem to have no narrative function at all. As Letzler describes this cruft, it "presents long, one-off catalogs of information that have no informational use; sometimes it presents scenes that appear irrelevant to any traditional fictional elements like plot or character; sometimes it is endlessly repetitive and clichéd; and sometimes it is simply impossible to read at all."[368] The examples Letzler has to offer are from *Infinite Jest*, but the same kind of cruft can be found from other contemporary encyclopedic novels such as Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, Helen DeWitt's *The Last Samurai* (2000), and Jaakko Yli-Juonikas's *Neuromaani*. In *House of Leaves*, there are, for instance, a list of places which do not resemble "the house" in design, and a list of things that cannot be found from inside the house. Both of these lists of cruft spread out over several pages and do not seem to have any clear purpose. Moreover, since they are simple lists containing names, for the reader they are skippable, and almost unreadable. The same holds true for most of the footnotes (often consisting of invented references) not only in Danielewski's novel but also in *Neuromaani*. The mottos of each chapter in *Foucault's Pendulum* as well as the Chinese grammar and calculation in *The Last Samurai* do not serve the plot, the characterization, or the setting of the novel either.

Lists of references, cultural objects, and places are the most typical demonstration of cruft, and Letzler also concentrates on *Infinite Jest*'s nearly a hundred pages of endnotes of which most appear pointless. However, I would like to propose that not only are there other expressions of cruft in the contemporary encyclopedic novel, namely the general digressive elements of the narrative, but that cruft also has a purpose. In *Infinite Jest*, *The Last Samurai*, *Neuromaani*, and *Foucault's Pendulum*, the numerous details and digressions embody, first of all, *the presence of culture*. The narrator of *Infinite Jest* exploits extensively the theory and practice of tennis in order to embellish the encyclopedic whole, but this "junk information" does not really add anything meaningful to the plot. DeLillo's *Underworld* describes the everyday life of Cold War Culture, and some of its details seem to serve no purpose, but eventually, precisely these apparently insignificant bits of information constitute the bulk of the whole novel. Thus, even though the particular details may appear to have no clear connection to the plot events, together they constitute the abundant totality of culture.

Second, as we remember from the earlier chapters, on the one hand the

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[368] Letzler 2012, 309.

encyclopedic novel is a narrative representation of *an educational process*. As Pekka Kuusisto points out, in its oldest version *enkuklios paideia* describes the soul's journey through the spheres of knowledge and its transcendence from the material level to the transcendental realm of goodness, truth, and beauty.[369] On the other hand, as LeClair argues, the protagonists of contemporary systems novels are usually "producers, sorters, and consumers of information."[370] Do not these aspects necessarily imply, then, that the main narrative threads in the encyclopedic novel represent educational processes as well? I argue they do.

In fact, while reading contemporary encyclopedic novels, we do not only follow protagonists who have epistemological quests of their own. We also attend to their quests, which twine with our interpretation. The epistemological agents on the level of plot are, like fictional detectives in general, our surrogate readers, and for them as well as for us, separating valuable material from the non-valuable is what matters. Thus, since the encyclopedic novel aims at picturing the culture as a whole, it *has to* include cultural material that does not make sense either for the protagonist or for us. If it were all known or relevant, the total picture of culture would not be total: the pupil could not wander through spheres of knowledge, for everything would be familiar in the first place and there would be no need for education.

In this respect, the cultural knowledge that is described and included on the level of story and sorted out by the protagonists has the same purpose as the excess of narrative material has on the level of interpretation: it constitutes the epistemological milieu for the educational pursuits. The contemporary encyclopedic novel would not be encyclopedic *per se* if it lacked much of its high information content. Since the hypertrophy of material, including both meaningful and meaningless data, motivates the educational process, the cruft is not without meaning.

In what way then do entropy, information, and cruft contribute to the constitution of encyclopedic novel as a modality? Today, encyclopedic novels are more like systems of information than totalities of knowledge. They are open and dynamic rather than closed and stasis-oriented. The characteristics of Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, for instance, have led some scholars to consider the novel a database instead of a narrative.[371] Nevertheless, both systems of information and totalities of knowledge are originally communicational systems, and as such, cognitive entities that are due to their own inherent dynamics and set of laws, separate themselves from the surrounding entities, or, as Patti White puts it, "from environmental or extra-systemic chaos."[372] It is only the degree of separation that varies. Thus, even though both forms of communicational systems strive to bring structure to

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[369] Kuusisto 2013, 30.
[370] LeClair 1989, 15.
[371] E.g. Hayles 2012, 224–238.
[372] White 1992, 29.

turbulence and order to chaos, there is a difference between them. The dominant function in the old-fashioned totality of knowledge is that of order, whereas in the open system, such as the contemporary encyclopedic novel, the investment of the reader plays a greater role. Both systems include large sets of cultural information, but in the latter the amount of cruft is on the increase. Entropy may play a crucial part as well.

But while the contemporary encyclopedic novel has regularities and irregularities of its own, like its predecessors had, it is still able to work as a functional whole. Open, it also exchanges "energy with the outside and […] use[s] this energy to maintain internal functions without cannibalization of the system."[373] Therefore, it communicates with the reader, and this is why it so often also leaves it to the reader to arrange the content. Since the organizing of data material is more and more our concern, we next need to discuss the epistemological order that the contemporary encyclopedic novel still maintains. Pure noise does not make an encyclopedia.

The Cosmos Function of the Radicle System

What makes an encyclopedia is a structure, a form, a disorderly order. The formal element that creates this order and generally ties contemporary encyclopedic novels such as *Foucault's Pendulum*, *Infinite Jest*, *Neuromaani*, and Bolaño's *2666* together is *a fragment*. A fragment is a singular cell, a basic unit of the narrative. In *2666*, for instance, the fragments consist of one scene each, and in the narrative flow, these fragments are distinguished from each other with a singular space that symbolizes a spatial or temporal shift in the story. As a whole, Bolaño's novel contains five separate, but nevertheless connected parts, each following one fragment flow. Although the novel can be read simply as five different stories, two important formal features transform the fragment flows into the encyclopedic novel. First, as Ercolino points out, *2666* has a loose, yet meaningful *circular geometry*.[374] The first part of the novel describes four European literary scholars who set out on a quest to Mexico in order find the author Benno von Archimboldi, who seems to have disappeared there. The last part of *2666* is in turn a biography of this particular character, and it ends when Archimboldi leaves Europe and travels to Mexico. Besides the circularity of this kind, the second formal feature of Bolaño's novel is more meaningful than the first, I think: it is the mysterious year of the title that is not mentioned even once in the course of the novel. The date is hence *a missing center* of Bolaño's encyclopedic narrative.

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[373] Ibid., 30.
[374] Ercolino 2014, 80–81. Similar circularities can be found in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Infinite Jest*. For the latter, see ch. 6.1.

The fragmentary cells constitute flows, the flows turn out to be an enormous loop, and the common denominator between fragments and flows is a year in the distant future, whose meaning is not explained in the narrative. Instead, it remains absent. In Fredrick R. Karl's view, a "cellular structure" of this kind gives the encyclopedic author a possibility to bind together, albeit loosely, the excess material, including its breadth and haphazardness.[375] Yet what needs to be added is that both epistemologically and formally, fragment cells also signify *entries* in the fictional encyclopedia. In this respect, the fragments in contemporary encyclopedic novel are organized by following strict, albeit unknown principles. The data material is not placed randomly.

On the face of it, there seems to be a couple of exceptions to this rule, such as Gaddis's *JR* (1975), and Evan Dara's *The Lost Scrapbook* (1995), namely encyclopedic novels in which fragments do not appear to play a crucial role. However, both novels consist of hundreds of lines expressed by protagonists, characters, and passers-by who are all anonymous. The lines are not in a completely random order, but they form an enormous single flow, comparable with the parts of *2666*. And as radical as both Gaddis's and Dara's novels are, even these narratives can be split into smaller pieces, and brought from the encyclopedic totality back to individual entries. Together the fragments embody the present culture, but not in an arbitrary way. The narratives are composed according to encyclopedic principles: whereas the characters as epistemological agents aim at organizing the data material, similarly the narratives as such are educational processes, journeys through different spheres of culture which are embodied by the cells. The narrators organize material in order to make sense of the story, and the reader reorganizes this narrativized material in order to comprehend what the narratives are about.

Let us take a brief glance at the history of encyclopedias to clarify the principles of organization. In the context of Medieval and Enlightenment encyclopedias, individual entries served a specific purpose: the common object of knowledge for all of them was the world as we know it. Each entry added something new to the epistemological big picture on the one hand, and was connected to other entries and features on the other. However, strictly speaking, the totality that was presented through the encyclopedic project, was not so much a representation as a world system. Instead of simply illustrating the world as we know it, the totality presented was more likely to *replace* the world by being its educational model. Practically, the external world formed the base for the encyclopedias, while the encyclopedias themselves were simply aimed at representing and reflecting human concepts about the external world. At the same time, however, the guiding idea of an encyclopedia was perceived as *a process* in which one learns to know the external world by logically ordering those phenomena, things, and objects the world appears to contain. Thus,

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[375] Karl 2001, 160.

while it seems to have been admitted that the encyclopedia is at heart an anthropocentric order, it nevertheless aimed at being that which it was not, namely the base, the world as such. To put it simply, the anthropocentric world system was detached from the world, but in a way that made it look like the world. The base and the network were separated from each other, and that is what Deleuze and Guattari mean by the radicle system: the book is no longer the image of the world after the principal root has been aborted, and yet it nevertheless keeps the world as its hypothetical model.[376]

Consider, likewise, Aristotle's impact. For one thing, in the first part of his *Organon*, named *Categories*, Aristotle developed an ontological theory of classification that influenced the development of early encyclopedias. Second, and more importantly, Aristotle arranged categories in the hierarchical form of a tree. In this symbolic tree model of knowledge, all things and their qualities were organized under a prime category, that is, *substance*. Even though Aristotle enlisted nine other categories besides substance, there is a fundamental difference between substance and the rest of the categories. Quantity, quality, relation, place, time, posts, condition, action, affection are for Aristotle *accidental* categories, whereas substance basically forms the essence of an entity. Substance forms the base, then, whereas different combinations of other, secondary categories give things their characteristic features.

An important link between Aristotle's *Categories* and historical encyclopedias is Porphyry of Tyre, a Neoplatonic philosopher who is best known for his *Isagoge* (270), a commentary on *Categories*. Once the Neoplatonic idea of the chain of beings had received larger endorsement in Western Philosophy, Boethius's translation of *Isagoge*, in which this idea was applied to Aristotle's *Categories*, became a standard textbook in European universities during the Middle Ages. The translation of *Isagoge* influenced Renaissance Humanism, and Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), which had, in turn, an impact on d'Alembert's and Diderot's *Encyclopédie*.[377] Put briefly, Porphyry's contribution was not only to develop further Aristotle's original taxonomy but also to give a potential model for the organizing principles of historical encyclopedias.

Originally, Aristotle's tree model had basically had only two levels. Porphyry extended this model into a larger and more hierarchical model that later became known as the Porphyrian tree. This tree model is an illustration of the great chain of being that consists of genera and species, which form the trunk, and of extremes, which constitute the branches of the tree. Thus, the two-level ontological model presented first by Aristotle, and developed further by scholars in Medieval universities, evolved into a more complex device for the epistemological

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[376] Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 6–7.
[377] See Yeo 2001, 22–32; West 2002, 193–196.

organization of knowledge.

In the next section, we will discover an application of the Porphyrian tree from *Foucault's Pendulum*, but since it would be too bold to argue that in general fictional encyclopedias are structured on the basis of such a complex and inflexible tree model, I would like to suggest instead that they more likely return to Aristotle's early two-level model. This return is partly intentional, since contemporary encyclopedic novels are, as recalled, conscious of themselves as epistemological projects. Aristotle's model is loose enough to give enough freedom for the epistemological (and formal) composition of the encyclopedic novel.

However, this does not mean that contemporary encyclopedic novels would not adopt at least some ideas from the later history of encyclopedias as well. The most important of these ideas is, in fact, profound skepticism. As encyclopedic projects evolved in the Western culture, the epistemological models that were originally intended to model the ontological order of things became more and more hypothetical. As mentioned earlier, they became aware of the distance between the world and the world system. As Eco points out, the eighteenth-century encyclopedia, for instance, did not any longer "reproduce a presumed structure of the world" but, more likely, its most economical solution.[378] In this respect, it maintained the simplest possible version of a hierarchy, but was also able to describe some of the local meanings – a task which the Porphyrian tree was more or less incapable of. And as a "solution," it admitted that there was an unbridgeable gap between the base (the external world) and the network (the encyclopedic representation).

Eighteenth-century encyclopedists had already noted that as an organizational problem, knowledge was also indirectly an ontological problem. The world system did not picture the world objectively but was there to partly replace it. Therefore, the formulations and epistemological models concealed built-in doubts both about the coverage of knowledge and about the reliability of the model. In a situation where there was, due to social, scientific, and technological changes, an increasing interest in the coverage of expansive cultural totality, the simple tree model appeared to be the best model available, but nothing more. Not even the tree model could control entirely the network of relations that it was faced with.

In the development of fictional encyclopedias, we can refer again to the epistemological model represented in *Moby-Dick*. Melville's novel intentionally circles around the white whale, which forms the epistemological center of the narrative. As such, Moby-Dick is, however, an unattainable object of hunting and studying, but its search justifies the long digressions into several other topics, some dealing with cetology and the actual quest only cursorily.[379] Thus, the whale itself

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[378] Eco 1986, 82.
[379] Cf. Clark 2011, 37.

simply forms a hypothetical center for the circles of education, but still, one would not exist without the other: the circular body of learning would lose its sense without the idea of the whale. The whale may be, then, absent and missing, but its idea – our need for the whale's classification – forms the ontological base for the epistemological agents' quest. In this case, however, the epistemological agents operate mainly within a network of connections that remains a whole due to its hypothetical, yet distant base.

What, then, is the base of the contemporary encyclopedic novel which, as we have learned, exploits ideas of entropy, excess and cruft? Discussing the cosmos function of the maximalist novel, Ercolino suggests that elements such as *intersemiocity*, *ethical commitment*, and *hybrid realism* work as features that contrast with chaotic and digressive narrative elements and set the novel in formal balance.[380] There are, in other words, both centripetal and centrifugal forces in the narrative. Intersemiocity, by which Ercolino means the application of different forms of art (most often, cinema), is used either to organize the narrative material or to work simply as a *mise en abyme*. Correspondingly, ethical commitment is linked with the thematic level of the narratives that depict historical, social, or political aspects of contemporary life. Capitalism, war, drugs, technological development, and information are common themes for these novels. In Ercolino's view, these elements keep the narrative from falling apart, and prevent it from expanding infinitely. They give a center to the narrative: themes such as war or drugs give separate entries a common denominator.

These are, however, primarily *formal* features of the contemporary encyclopedic novel. What Ercolino does not discuss so much is that the base can also be seen to consist of an epistemological center, that is more often than not absent. The missing, but highly influential year in *Infinite Jest*, the mysterious date *2666*, the absent father figure in Danielewski's *House of Leaves* – all of these epistemological centers are also crucial for the formal arrangement of each novel, that is, for the network of connections, digressions, and other excessive elements. In fact, just as there are several levels of epistemological agents, so there are at least two base levels: on the level of story, the characters pursue the (symbolic) object of research, such as the missing character or the arcane message, while on the level of narrative, the reader investigates both formal and epistemological elements that would bring coherence and meaning to the story.

The presence of newest technology in the contemporary encyclopedic novel also becomes understandable in this way. As we saw, *Foucault's Pendulum* is a novel in which Abulafia the computer is exploited in order to create an alternative world system. In novels such as *The Gold Bug Variations* and Vollmann's *You Bright & Risen Angels* (1987), computers are used for similar purposes, to embody the entropy of

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[380] Ercolino 2014.

the narrative system on the story level. The contemporary encyclopedic novel does not demand the actual presence of computers in the literal text, however. The lists and digressions, along with the intersemiocity, are embedded structural manifestations of the same idea. What the use of computers and other electronic devices, but also the exploitation of theological or artistic ideas generally imply is the contemporary encyclopedic novel's self-awareness. Like the exploitation of the paranoid imagination, these motifs on both the story level and the narrative level are epistemologically justified. Just as cultural paranoia tests the quality of knowledge in the encyclopedic projects, so too the use of non-scientific or computational devices tests the capacity of the encyclopedia as an epistemological order.

Lastly, the radicle system at the heart of the contemporary encyclopedic novel is always an epistemological labyrinth. It has an unknown, distant center that is hard to grasp, and it has a network around this center. After our theoretical excursion into entropy and disorderly order we are now in a position to examine *Foucault's Pendulum* one last time. The formal features of Eco's novel demonstrate what we have discussed so far, especially the way the contemporary encyclopedic novel creates not only its expansive elements but also the epistemological and formal mechanisms that keep the narrative in order.
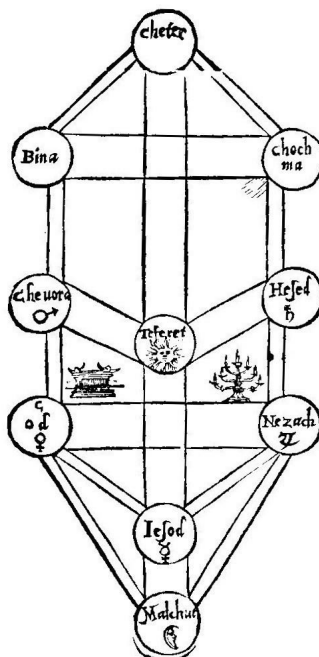
Figure 1. The Sefirot.

3.3. Sefirotic Emanations

Transgressions of mainstream detective story conventions are typical of the metaphysical detective story, and especially the manipulation of closure plays a crucial role in this treatment. But unlike, for instance, Stefano Tani suggests, closure – including different attitudes towards the significance of closure – is but one possible way to tamper with the formula.[381] Among other ways, *delaying the solution* also relates to closure, but at least it gives the narrative another kind of emphasis, namely that of excessiveness. As I have pointed out, *Foucault's Pendulum* is more interested in the creation process of the Plan than its outcome, and as Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi are all straying in the ocean of possible references and details, this delay enlarges both their Plan and Casaubon's narrative. One could even say that it is precisely delay that makes the narrative.

In Eco's novel, delaying is carried out on two levels, namely the plot and the narrative level. Just as sketching the Plan is about finding possible connections and creating a false totality, so too the narrator spends an extraordinary amount of time, space, and energy in sketching for his narrative audience a minor encyclopedia of esotericism, a representation of false totality. Rephrasing Tom LeClair, this conscious dual delay can be called *the art of excess*, since the narrator uses here "what first seems to be too much as the necessary elements of some alternative or unexpected fictional system."[382] This sort of excessiveness differs a little from what I earlier called the cruft of fiction, as all details in Casaubon's narrative are not only either necessary or unnecessary, so too are also clues and false clues. In other words, Casaubon sets a trap which he hopes his narrative audience will fall into, and in this sense the excess does not so much embody the presence of culture as it works as a deceptive labyrinth, or godgame.

For Eco, the labyrinth is also an abstract model of conjecturality that he uses as a tool to explore the nature of detection, as well as the nature of reading and interpretation.[383] *Foucault's Pendulum*, as we recall, is the second novel of his "critifictional" works that deal with these same problems, and of the three novels, it is also the one that stresses the role of interpretative seriality most. Eco exploited the idea of labyrinth earlier in *The Name of The Rose*, but not in such a metafictional fashion: in *Foucault's Pendulum*, one reading forms a labyrinth of its kind, which is doubled, repeated, or turned upside down. We have already seen this transgressive dynamic between Colonel Ardenti and the protagonist trio, but now it is in order to expand the discussion of this seriality to the level of narrative. Hence, in what follows, I discuss the geometrical structure of Casaubon's narrative in relation to the

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[381] Tani 1984.
[382] LeClair 1982, 588.
[383] Eco 1984, 57.

ideas of interpretation and seriality, and argue that the Sefirot, the Kabbalistic tree model Casaubon uses to provide a structure to his narrative, has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it is a structuring device of Casaubon's story, and on the other, a tool to ontologically expand the original Plan. The Sefirot is thus a model that demonstrates the lessons of the previous section, as it embodies the excessive, and yet ordered flows of information in the contemporary encyclopedic novel. In the novel, it is used both to increase entropy and expansion, and to bring order into the network of connections. In this respect, it not only confirms *Foucault's Pendulum* as an encyclopedic narrative, but it is also a good benchmark to close our discussion about Eco's novel and to proceed with analyzing *The Gold Bug Variations*, *Infinite Jest*, and *House of Leaves*. As we will see, these novels chronologically following *Foucault's Pendulum* will develop similar ideas and push them even further.

Let me, however, begin by considering Borges's original idea concerning the geometrical structure of his short story. "Death and the Compass" ends at the furthest end of the investigational labyrinth, where Scharlach has lured Lönnrot. The villain says: "I knew you would add the missing point, the point that makes a perfect rhombus, the point that fixes the place where a precise death awaits you."[384] Another three murders have occurred in geometrical fashion, being literally "written" upon the three corners of the city. As the deserted villa Triste-le-Roy, where Lönnrot and Scharlach now meet, is located in the south of the city, together these three places and the meeting place draw a geometrical figure of a diamond pivoted on one of its corners. Lönnrot has concluded that the series of crimes cannot form a triangle but a rhombus, since, among other reasons, there are four, not three letters in the Tetragrammaton, the name of God he has been investigating. Without understanding, however, that he himself will be the victim of the fourth crime, Lönnrot has rushed into a trap sprung by Red Scharlach.

"Death and the Compass" lends its concrete formula – the murders taking place according to a geometrical figure – from the classical detective story, such as Agatha Christie's *The ABC Murders* (1936). But as this pattern was for Borges the object of parody in the first place, in *Foucault's Pendulum* Eco to double his story focuses more on the pattern Borges himself used in his parody.[385] Lönnrot's key interest was the first victim's library that contains, among other books, "a *Study of the Philosophy of Robert Fludd*," and for John T. Irwin, this is the reader's first clue to the cabalistic design of "Death and the Compass": Fludd was a cabalist whose illustration of "the mirror-image relationship between God and the universe" contains two triangles mirroring each other, thus forming a rhombus.[386] *Foucault's Pendulum* develops the same idea, and borrows its formal model from another of Yarmolinsky's book, one that in Borges's story is mentioned immediately after Fludd's book. This book is *Sefer*

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[384] Borges 1998, 156.
[385] See Richter 1997, 273.
[386] Borges 1998, 148; Irwin 1999, 45.

Yetsirah, a primary text of Kabbalah, the esoteric discipline of Judaism. Influenced by his wannabe Jew associate Diotallevi, Casaubon takes the key idea of *Sefer Yetsirah* – the Sefirot, a tree symbol representing "the stages in the creation of the world" – and applies it with the narrativized version of the Plan.[387] In this regard it is, however, remarkable that Fludd's rhombus is exactly the same tree model, only somewhat simplified. Hence, the Sefirot is a perfect symbol and geometrical model for a narrative that in every way aims at maximizing a story in which the rhombus was originally used in a parodical fashion.

While Borges refers to Fludd, and Eco consults the *Sefer Yetsirah*, the rhombus and the Sefirot correlate with each other in a number of ways. Thematically, they share same hierarchical idea of depicting the relation of the trinitarian deity and the universe.[388] Formally, these geometrical figures operate as narrative models and structuring devices of material. But since the whole point of Eco's novel is to expand the ideas, themes, and form of Borges's story, already the resort to the Sefirot brings to the stage additional elements that are not explicitly given in "Death and the Compass." Before anything, the Sefirot introduces the narrator's consciousness of himself as both a narrator and a messenger. Casaubon uses the Sefirot in order to arrange and formulate what he has learned and gone through when he, with his colleagues, sketched the Plan, but he also uses the tree model simply to narrate his story. This element of self-consciousness is missing in Borges's story: Erik Lönnrot is a protagonist, not a narrator-protagonist.

Casaubon's self-consciousness as an author of the Plan is closely linked not only with the Sefirot but also with themes of interpretation, creation and craftsmanship. Whereas Belbo held himself as a demiurge, so does Casaubon in the footsteps of his deceased mentor. But as a narrator he also reinterprets his earlier ideas and reconsiders the Plan. The key difference between Belbo and Casaubon is, then, that at least the pupil becomes aware of the erroneousness of their creation. The regret, as I will argue, is one of the reasons for using the Sefirot in the first place – it is as if Casaubon eventually chooses Diotallevi's view over Belbo's – but the narrator exploits the tree model for other purposes as well, these being, above all, the willingness to trick future readers. Yet before considering these reasons, let us take a view at the formal role of Sefirot in *Foucault's Pendulum*.

As a whole, Casaubon's narrative is arranged into 120 chapters and ten parts. Each part is named after one aspect of the Sefirotic tree, each of the aspects representing one of ten attributes of God. In every section of his narrative, Casaubon characterizes how each aspect, or *sefirah*, correlates with the development of the Plan. In this respect, it is appropriate to say that while the Fluddian mirror image of a rhombus models the coordinates of the murder series in Borges's story, the Sefirot

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[387] Scholem 1978, 23.
[388] See Irwin 1999, 45.

in *Foucault's Pendulum* represents ten aspects of the Plan. The original image pictures the Tetragrammaton and the empyreal, ethereal and elemental regions of the universe, and while both authors secularize the same idea, Eco is more loyal to it than Borges.[389] The first parts in the novel describe the thinking process of the demiurges, whereas in the later sections the Plan acquires more explicit and public forms: the divine, other-worldly idea manifests itself in the known universe.

In *Foucault's Pendulum*, the Sefirot is presented as an attachment before the table of contents.[390] Thus, before the novel even begins, the reader is invited to form a view about the idea behind the image. The expertise is not needed: even a reader unfamiliar with Jewish mysticism may recognize in the Sefirot a picture of a tree based on a few symmetries. The Sefirot appears to consist of three triads and one lonely sphere. Seen from above, the second triad seems to be reversed in relation to the first, whereas the third triad appears to be merely a variant of the second. The lonely *sefirah*, *Malkhuth*, remains below these three triads. The first triad and the lonely *sefirah* already differ in appearance from the second and third, and when it comes to the ideas behind these symmetries, the difference is also crucial: the two triads in the middle are said to form a pair that represents the levels of psychic and natural capacities, whereas the uppermost triad represents the intellectual aspects of God and the universe.[391] *Malkhuth* is denounced as a stage of immanence, a level of pure matter, and a sphere in which "God reaches His complete individuation through his manifestation."[392] Further study of Kabbalistic symbolism suggests also that the first and the upmost group of Sefirot is hidden in its transcendency, whereas the seven lower Sefirot are "the revealed being."[393] Discussing the Sefirot, Gershom Scholem aptly refers to the common Kabbalistic view according to which in the process of emanation "Nothingness changes into I."[394] Something conscious – Adam Qadmon, the Primordial Man – is made out of nothing.[395]

As regards this creation process, not only has Scharlach sketched the rhombus and Lönnrot has put it into practice, but also Casaubon has used the Sefirotic structure in the arrangement of his narrative. To quote Irwin, it is these models that describe "the mind's quest to comprehend itself totally, to be absolutely even or at one with itself."[396] After all, Red Scharlach and Erik Lönnrot are basically one and the same, and through his narrative Casaubon is trying to figure out not only the manifestation process of the Plan but also his own contribution to it as a creator. If the Plan *is* Red Scharlach of *Foucault's Pendulum*, its creation and Casaubon's self-

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[389] Ibid., 45.
[390] See Figure 1.
[391] Scholem 1978, 106–107.
[392] Ibid., 110.
[393] Ibid., 108.
[394] Ibid., 110.
[395] Ibid., 116.
[396] Irwin 1999, 47.

realization through narration have then the same, secret root: by giving a manifestation for the Plan through the Sefirot, Casaubon also creates himself. And since the narrative describes his education (with the Plan), it is not a coincidence that the model of his narrative is a tree. The Sefirot is not only a model of creation it is also a model of knowledge, and thus describes a path to understanding in a way that comes very close to the original idea of an encyclopedia. In Kabbalistic tradition, the path is called *tikkun*, a restoration or reorganizing that brings redemption. To understand what exactly there is to restore, we need to consider this question before we can proceed with Casaubon's narrative strategies.

Kabbalistic tikkun *as a Restoration through Narration*

In its most widespread version, the Sefirot is a symbolic image of divinity.[397] According to Scholem, it "describes a theogonic process in which God emerges from His hiddenness and ineffable being, to stand before us as the Creator. The stages of this process can be followed in an infinite abundance of images and symbols, each relating to a particular aspect of God."[398] Seen also as the descendant of the Neoplatonic idea of emanation *ex deo*, the Sefirot is not originally a simple series of ten emanations, however.[399] On the contrary, its spheres "constitute a well-structured form, in which every part or limb operates upon every other, and not just the higher ones on the lower."[400] This interpretation stands nearest the traditional Jewish view.

The first thing one must note when considering the Jewish Sefirot in relation to *Foucault's Pendulum* is that Casaubon intentionally removes the tree model from its traditional context. In new narrative surroundings – printed on the first page of the novel, each *sefirah* marking a phase in the manifestation of the Plan – the Sefirot works more like a structuring device of a "perverted semiotic process."[401] In the light of this process, the narrator's decision is actually surprising since, at the eleventh hour of process, Casaubon replaces Diotallevi's Kabbalistic input to the Plan with other, more imaginative theories. Helen Bennett presumes that as the narrator Casaubon is now "reflecting his increased understanding of his crime," and while I think this estimation is quite fair, Casaubon's return to Kabbalah clearly has an

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[397] Scholem 1996, 52.
[398] Ibid., 100.
[399] See Plotinus 1991, 347–360.
[400] Scholem 1991, 43. Scholem (1991, 42–43) enlists these parts or limbs, or *sefirah*, as follows: "*Keter* (crown), *Hokhmah* (wisdom), *Binah* (insight or discernment) [...], *Hesed* (grace or love), *Din* or *Gevurah* (severity or judgment) and *Rahamin* or *Tif'ereth* (mercy, also known as splendor or beauty) [...], *Netsah* (endurance), *Hod* (splendor or majesty), and *Yesod* (the foundation) or *Tsaddik* (the Righteous One) [...]. All these active factors are in turn united in the tenth *Sefirah*, *Malkhuth* or *Shekhinah*, God's Royal rule, into which they flow as into the ocean."
[401] Bennett 1998, 88.

ironic aspect as well.[402]

The use of Kabbalah emphasizes the obvious polarity between God and the universe on the one hand, and between an individual mind and the extramental universe on the other. Through the exploitation of the Sefirot, Casaubon pictures an authorial process in which a product of one's imagination (the Plan) is brought into being by orally transmitting it from one party to another. Yet in the Kabbalistic context, the Sefirot does not only describe the creation process of divine life, thus being a sketching of the *imago mundi*, but it also contains an idea of "tikkun, the restoration of Adam Qadmon."[403] Diotallevi describes *tikkun* as an act by which "we build everything in the balanced structure of the parzufim, the faces – or, rather, the forms – that will take the place of the Sefirot."[404] In other words, *tikkun* is a human attempt to *accomplish* the originally unsuccessful divine work by producing the forms (of life) that replace what in Kabbalah are called the "broken vessels." In Lurianic Kabbalah, that is, one of most influential branches of this tradition, *the Breaking of the Vessels* is a cosmogonical catastrophe in which the lower Sefirot could not contain the divine splendor, but broke, and this breaking brought disorder into the universe.[405] The creation process ceased, and the psychic and natural capacities of the world remained imperfect, whereas the world of matter could not contain anything spiritual either.[406]

The ironical aspect of the Sefirot in *Foucault's Pendulum* rises from this context. The Plan is an unsuccessful act of creation and a deed of non-believers. Its creators are demiurges, false gods, while the Plan, a secular and intentionally false world explanation, is far from being a divine work. Casaubon knows this, he has seen their miscreation. Personal regret is therefore one of his reasons for exploiting Kabbalah as a structuring device of the story, since in this newly- formulated context, the idea of divine work has been secularized and replaced with a game involving a "whirling network of kinships."[407] The original sense of irony that drove the protagonist trio to formulate the Plan, has now led them either to death or to "the dust of exile instead of ascending towards meaning."[408] Belbo dies, Diotallevi gets cancer, and Casaubon escapes to wait for the Diabolicals, a mob that will possibly lynch him. There are indeed reasons for regret.

Nonetheless, reflections on the creation process of the Plan is but one side of Casaubon's narrative. Another side is his subsequent authorial work concerning the process. Elsewhere in his writings Eco describes the ten *sefirah* by saying that "in so

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402 Ibid., 88.
403 *FP*, 220 [*PF*, 234: "il *tiqqun*, il ritorno, la reintegrazione dell'Adam Qadmon"].
404 *FP*, 220 [*PF*, 234: "ricostruiremo il tutto nell'equilibrata struttura dei *partsufim*, i volti, ovvero le forme che prenderanno il posto delle sefirot"].
405 Scholem 1978, 138; *FP*, 219–220; *PF*, 233–234.
406 Scholem 1978, 119.
407 Bennett 1998, 83.
408 Ibid., 89.

far as they represented various ways in which the infinite expands itself, actually or potentially, into the finite universe, they also constituted a series of channels or steps through which the soul passes on its journey of return to God."[409] This note not only comes close to the prime philosophical idea of encyclopedias – an enlightened soul transcending from one sphere to another – it also emphasizes the human aspect of the model. As the idea of *tikkun* demonstrates, through the Sefirotic work a human aims to accomplish divine work, or seeks a way to "return to God." There is yet another option, however. As Helen Bennett point outs, in the light of Kabbalah, Casaubon's exile can also mean a new beginning: "As earth, Malkhut is the last sefirah if one begins with God, but it is the first which humans encounter and the only one through which humans may begin to penetrate the divine mystery."[410] Thus, *Malkhut* is the sphere or the state of being where one actually *begins* an educational journey back to the divine mystery – or where one begins creating *another* divine mystery.

Precisely for this reason, the place where Casaubon tells his story is a location that is not revealed until the last section, *Malkhut*. After Belbo's death, Casaubon escapes to the countryside, to Belbo's childhood home. Waiting for Belbo's killers, he considers: "I would have liked to write down everything I thought today. But if They were to read it, They would only derive another dark theory and spend another eternity trying to decipher the secret message hidden behind my words."[411] This is window dressing for the reader: even though Casaubon has not, according to his own words, written anything down, we nevertheless read his words, perhaps even trying to derive a dark theory about them. It is his situation and location at this point that also explain the use of Sefirot as a rhetorical tool: while Malkhut seems to be the end of his journey, it is also the beginning for others: as much as "They" refer to Belbo's killers, it also refers to Casaubon's narrative audience. Hence his reference to "another eternity" implies a time (and place) where he himself is not going to be. For this reason, the Sefirot is not only a tool to make things right: as much as Casaubon suffers regret, he also wants, like his predecessors, to send the message forward, stir things up, and set a new trap for the Diabolicals to come.

In this matter *Foucault's Pendulum* again repeats "Death and the Compass," not least because Casaubon's narrating situation, as well as his reference to "another eternity," are closely linked with Lönnrot's situation. At the brink of his death, Borges's detective tries to beat Scharlach at his own game by finding the rhombus model fallacious:

"There are three lines too many in your labyrinth," he said at last. "I

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[409] Eco 1990, 26.
[410] Bennett 1998, 89.
[411] *FP*, 641 [*PF*, 679: "Vorrei aver scritto tutto ciò che ho pensato da questo pomeriggio a ora. Ma se Essi lo leggessero, ne trarrebbero un'altra cupa teoria e passerebbero l'eternità a cercare di decifrare il messaggio segreto che si cela dietro la mi storia."].

know of a Greek labyrinth that is but one straight line. So many philosophers have been lost upon that line that a mere detective might be pardoned if he became lost as well. When you hunt me down in another avatar of our lives, Scharlach, I suggest that you fake (or commit) one crime at A, a second crime at B, eight kilometers from A, then a third crime at C, four kilometers from A and B and halfway between them. Then wait for me at D, two kilometers from A and C, once again halfway between them. Kill me at D, as you are about to kill me at Triste-le-Roy."[412]

This inverted Zeno's paradox that marks "infinite regression as the endless subdivision of lines" is rephrased in *Foucault's Pendulum* as Casaubon's final moment of understanding: "the greatest wisdom […] is knowing that your wisdom is too late. You understand everything when there is no longer anything to understand."[413] He continues: "The truth of Malkhut, the only truth that shines in the night of the Sefirot, is that wisdom is revealed naked in Malkhut, and its mystery lies not in existence but in the leaving of existence."[414] There is nothing left to understand and understanding this should be his peace and triumph. But it is not: as Casaubon has also realized, there is another labyrinth to offer back to the Red Sharlach of *Foucault's Pendulum*, that is, the Plan and its followers. This labyrinth is, like Lönnrot's riddle, "one straight line" and it is a line of influence: just as Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi perceived the rough sketch of the Plan from Colonel Ardenti, Casaubon now passes it on to his readers, before he leaves the earth, that is, *Malkhut*.

In order to beat Red Sharlach, Lönnrot sketches his idea of being executed in "another avatar of our lives." Similarly, mere understanding is not enough for Casaubon either. By narrating about the Plan, Casaubon for his part attempts to outdo their creation, to escape the semiotic trap he and his colleagues have set. *Tikkun* is twofold: the Creation being "a process of divine inhalation and exhalation," the Plan is a perverted semiotic work of mockery, whereas Casaubon aims to atone for this perversion with his narrative.[415] However, Casaubon does not only duplicate the Plan by simply retelling it, he also gives this narrative a new, more intentional twist. Hiding inside a periscope at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers, he mentions that "I knew about the others, but the others didn't know about me. The first part of my scheme had gone according to plan. And the second? Would it, too, go according to plan, or would it go according to the Plan, which was no longer mine?"[416]

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[412] Borges 1998, 156.

[413] Irwin 1999, 47; *FP*, 640 [*PF*, 678: "la sagezza maggiore […] è sapere che l'hai saputo troppo tardi. Si capisce tutto quando non c'è più nulla da capire."].

[414] *FP*, 640 [*PF*, 678: "La verità di Malkut, l'unica verità che brilla nella notte delle sefirot, è che la Saggezza si scopre nuda in Malkut, e scopre che il proprio mistero sta nel non essere, se non per un momento, che è l'ultimo."].

[415] *FP*, 219 [*PF*, 233: "un processo di inspirazione ed espirazione divina."].

[416] *FP*, 572 [*PF*, 605: "io sapevo degli altri e gli altri non sapevano di me. La prima parte del mio

Although by a scheme Casaubon may refer to his possible attempt to interrupt Belbo's ritualistic interrogation that is about to take place, his "plan" can also be read in a larger context, as a reference to his narrative strategy. In the postscript to *The Name of the Rose*, Eco explains that he had wanted to create a type of reader who, after the initial phase, usually in the course of the first hundred pages, turns into the prey.[417] The wish implies the inversion of one key idea of the mainstream detective story, namely the one in which the reader follows the narration about the detective who leads (or reads) the investigation of a crime, and who finally identifies the criminal. The prey of the detective story is usually the criminal on the run, whereas the reader follows the investigation from a safe distance, from behind the detective's back, along with the narrator. Thus, together the detective, the narrator, and the reader form a group of hunters. In this sense, Eco's idea of turning the reader into the prey means literally forcing the reader into a position in which he or she becomes the criminal of the story.[418]

Thus, if the reader's entrapment is Casaubon's scheme, it combines with his endeavor to atone. Casaubon needs someone to whom he can confess, and someone on whom he can revenge. The obvious addressee is no other than his narrative audience. The perverted semiotic process, alongside Belbo's death, has already led him to visit Dr. Wagner, a famous doctor on the periphery of events. Casaubon has told him everything, but "Wagner did not interrupt once, did not nod or show disapproval" until finally, after fifteen minutes of silence, the doctor, "still with his back to me, in a colorless voice, calm, reassuring: 'Monsieur, vous êtes fou.'"[419] Hence, the circle is closing: Casaubon has become a similar kind of character to Dr. Wagner as Colonel Ardenti was for Casaubon in the beginning. And as the appointment with Dr. Wagner turns out be a dead end, Casaubon chooses to address his story to the unknown party, the reader, and hopes that through a thorough rewriting and decontextualization, their Plan will become a new Plan, a plan he, Belbo, and Diotallevi would no longer recognize – a dark theory of someone else's. The last step in our argument – how the Sefirot as a structuring device both organizes narrative material and expands it ontologically – deals with the reader who falls into Casaubon's semiotic trap, and in the next avatar of Casaubon's life becomes his paranoid murderer.

progetto era andata secondo i piani. E la seconda? Sarebbe andata secondo i miei piani, o secondo il Piano, che ormai non mi apparteneva più?"].

[417] Eco 1984, 53.

[418] According to Eco (1984, 78), if one possible murderer was still missing in the genre of detective story, it was the reader. See also Vernon 1992, 853–853. As for the narrator and the detective, they have had their turns already: Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) was the first classical detective story in which the narrator turned out be the murderer, whereas the detective as a criminal has been a central theme in several metaphysical detective stories, for instance in Robbe-Grillet's early novels. See also Ewert 1999, 184–185.

[419] *FP*, 613 [*PF*, 649: "Wagner non mi ha mai interrotto, non ha mai annuito, o mostrato disapprovazione"]; *FP*, 614 [*PF*, 649: "sempre dandomi le spalle, con voce incolore, calma, rassicurante: 'Monsieur, vous êtes fou.'"].

Encyclopedia for Paranoids

Through the decontextualization of the Plan, Casaubon's narrative constitutes an encyclopedic representation that describes an open and expanding cosmos.[420] Casaubon writes neither for himself alone nor for Belbo's killers. Instead, his narrative is intentionally aimed at the unknown party that resides outside the world of his story. Due to his influences, intentions, and rhetorical strategy, which I have analyzed above, this narrative owes a great debt to Kabbalistic conceptions and techniques of interpretation. The idea of seeking hidden connections between phenomena, for instance, is borrowed from Kabbalah, but is used in an unorthodox way. The same applies to the way phenomena themselves are treated. As Eco describes elsewhere, the "kabbalist uses the Torah as a symbolic instrument; beneath the letters of the Torah, beneath the events to which, to the uninstructed, its words seem to allude, there is a text which reveals a mystic and metaphysical reality."[421] Thus, as Casaubon and his colleagues have first invented such a "mystic and metaphysical reality" by bringing together bits and pieces from the occult literature of the Diabolicals, then, as a pseudokabbalist, Casaubon addresses the text that describes this particular reality to his future readers, so that eventually two overlapping worlds are ontologically drawn very close to this world of ours. In this respect as well, Casaubon bases his "scheme" on the Kabbalistic principles. On the one hand, the Sefirot describes a series of ontological levels: the three triads and Malkhut embody the levels of intellectual, psychic, natural, and material aspects of God and the universe. On the other, alone the etymology of Kabbalah refers to something that is "handed down by tradition," and this is exactly what Casaubon does: he, like Ardenti and Belbo before him, has not invented anything, only recycled the Western tradition of esotericism.[422] But as Harold Bloom rightly points out, whatever this something that is handed down is, the emphasis of the act is in its reception – and in most cases, the reception is nothing but a sort of paraphrasing, a tuning of the scale of meanings, and receiving the flow of information with broken vessels.[423] As Ardenti, who reappears right before Belbo is killed, says: "'The story I confide to him is not the story the Mystic Legates told me. The interpretation of the message […] is different.'"[424]

If Abulafia was the helper for Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi when they put the Plan together, the mistreating usage of Kabbalah as a part of narrative only expands the modality of *Foucault's Pendulum* further. However, using the Sefirot also

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[420] Cf. Eco 2014, 417.
[421] Eco 1995, 26.
[422] Scholem 1978, 3.
[423] Bloom 1975, 15.
[424] *FP*, 586–587 [*PF*, 621: "La storia che gli ho confidato non è quella di cui i Mistici Legati mi hanno detto. L'interpretazione del messaggio […] è diversa."].

helps Casaubon to rearrange the events and contemplate his own part in them. And as he reorganizes what he has experienced, he joins the tradition of readers, an interpretative chain in which he represents one link. Using the Sefirot as a structuring device is of course very helpful, as the model, in its original context alone, describes the complex relation between the transcendental subject, the world, and an individual mind. But the Sefirot also allows him to take his reconstructive narrative to another ontological level, namely into the world of those who come after him, in the next avatar of his life. Through the encyclopedic story he tells, Casaubon's scheme is no less than to seduce his narrative audience to adopt, if not the paranoid worldview, then at least interpretative pluralism concerning the world, historiography, and other texts. As the reconstruction of the Templar conspiracy brings two realities – fictive and historiographic – closer, so too does Casaubon's narrative create a feedback loop between the reader and Casaubon's storyworld. In *Malkhut* at the latest, the reader has to decide whether to deny or follow the way Casaubon has shown. Is there really a Plan to believe in?

Some scholars have denied the possibility that anything meaningful can be found from the Kabbalistic intertexts of the novel. Peter Bondanella, for instance, has suggested that one should not take the Sefirot as a key text at all but as a false flag of sorts. As a false flag, it would fall into the same category as the quotes at the beginning of each chapter in the novel: the author only intended to wind up his readers – and what would be a better procedure to thematize the methods of misreading and turn the reader into a prey for the author, than to lead him to interpretative cul-de-sacs and paranoia by encouraging overinterpretation, by bringing together other texts that happen to share similarities with Casaubon's narrative?[425] It is certainly true that when the novel ends, neither the detectives nor Casaubon's narrative audience have managed to keep their feet dry. However, the abuse of the Sefirot as the organizing model of the narrative is more than just an intentional joke – it is a crucial part of Casaubon's scheme.

To explain, let me collect some of the conclusions I have offered so far in the first part of the study. Even before the Plan turns into an irreversible chain of reactions, Casaubon has gone through different phases: he has not only shifted from one interpretative community to another, from a student of history to a private eye of learning, he has also played different detective roles. In the beginning of my analysis, I suggested that as Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi started to sketch the Plan, they quickly formed a trio of armchair detectives, and that Belbo modeled the mastermind detective and Casaubon his assistant. Then I suggested that when Casaubon ends up hiding in the conservatoire, he identifies himself as a Sam Spade, a doomed private eye. And after his partner is killed, he decides, like his lonely idol, to do something about it. What does he do? He adopts a third role, which makes

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[425] Bondanella 1997, 138–139; cf. Black 1999, 96–97.

him a third recipient of the Plan, a third link in an interpretative chain after Ardenti (or Abulafia) and Belbo. After having been both a sidekick of a mastermind detective, and a hard-boiled detective character, he becomes aware of himself as a literary detective. Now, he truly is a metaphysical sleuth. From that point on, as a narrator-detective, he aims at creating not so much a new world explanation as a textual trap about that world explanation. To carry out this godgame, he needs both a plan and a model – just like Red Scharlach needed Erik Lönnrot's rabbinical explanations and a city map in order to have his revenge.

More specifically, whereas Casaubon's first "classical" detection is included in the story as a description of his co-operation and friendship with Belbo, his hard-boiled quest mostly concerns Belbo's reasons to contribute to the Plan. But as Casaubon aims at identifying these reasons on the one hand, and reorganizing his own recollections of how the Plan was constructed on the other, in his third detective role he is both a criminal *and* a victim. This surprising outcome makes *Foucault's Pendulum* particularly remarkable as a metaphysical detective story. For all the hunters of secrets, such as the Diabolicals and us, after we have read the novel, Casaubon is perhaps the character whose true intentions the readers want to learn most about: at the end of his story, he even reveals Belbo's key text but not his own, which set the Diabolicals' alarm bells ringing. As for the readers, who are not so keen on hidden knowledge and ultimate secrets, Casaubon is a victim only in a more tragic sense, but he is nevertheless a victim, and a failed detective – just like Erik Lönnrot at the end of Borges's story.

And yet, Casaubon also shares some features of the criminal. He leaves behind key texts, large amounts of excessive entries about occult literature, his personal life, and his work with the Plan. He asks his readers to find him – his location can be deduced from his account. And from the first parts of his story on, he also trains us to adopt rabbinical practices of reading with him. Most of all, however, he wants us to become obsessive. In order to carry off his scheme, Casaubon borrows a structuring device for his narrative from Diotallevi. By doing so, he, first, attempts to outdo his own part in the Plan by sending the message forwards in a paraphrased form. But having corrected the Plan through Diotallevi's contribution, he also alters what there is to be known. The semiosis is now unlimited: in the Sefirot, each *sefirah* represents its own character but also contains features from the predecessors, thus forming a concrete, never-ending series.[426] "The tree grows upside down," containing roots, trunk, and branches: "its trunk embraces the central and thereby conciliating forces; while the branches or limbs which grow out of it at various points encompass the contradictory forces of divine activity."[427] In other words, a lot of interaction within this inverted tree rests both upon the dynamics of cause, effect,

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[426] Bloom 1975, 66.
[427] Scholem 1991, 42.

and their synthesis, and the extremes on the mediator. But as soon as this structure, which embodies both the world system and the demiurge's intentions, has covered all ten *sefiras* and reached *Malkhut*, creation can begin again. The worldview is passed on: during their last moments, both Belbo and Casaubon understand that the author of such a world explanation needs to die in order to prove his point and to give the reader a possibility of understanding his truth.[428] For us, the Sefirot is therefore a valuable way of gaining the same understanding.

To use Eco's terminology, the Sefirot is a version of a model of communication in which the author (God), the text (the world) and the reader (human) all have their own intentions.[429] This conflict explains why the Plan gets out of hand: the author cannot control the unintended ideas and possible meanings of his own work, let alone the intentions of the reader. From the reader's perspective, after there is no author who could tell the authorial version, the reader's duty is either to try to understand the text in its own context, or to recontextualize the message altogether. As with Eco's mind game of the figs, the reader of *Foucault's Pendulum* should, however, stick to dreaming about all possible situations that involve figs, slaves, senders and so on, instead of naively asking where are all the figs. But as Jonathan Culler points out regarding Eco's ideas concerning overinterpretation, "a little paranoia may be essential to the just appreciation of things."[430] Perhaps this is the lesson that the readers of *Foucault's Pendulum* eventually learn. Sometimes paranoia can be fruitful; most of the time it is dangerous. Merely the Plan, as it culminates in Belbo's misfortunate death, is a warning example of paranoid reading strategies, and the dangers of making others believe in non-existent conspiracies.

Moreover, the true secret world power today, as Linda Hutcheon writes, is information, not the telluric currents as the Diabolicals think in Eco's novel.[431] The postmodern world of information is a *chaosmos* at heart: in motion, lacking grand narratives, open-ended, and expanding, just like Casaubon's narrative. Since the fixed points of this great Book are relative, paranoia among other reading strategies may appear to be a real option as it is already an "institutionalized norm, the practice of reading which one has been trained."[432] When the reader is encouraged to suspect all and everything, one should ask, not why but *how* is this encouragement done? As Matei Calinescu points out, "the suspicion that the text is double, that it has a

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[428] *FP*, 494, 633; *PF*, 522, 671. A striking wordplay with the initials of names refers to the plot formulas of classical detective stories and works as an allusion to the continuum of reading: D comes after A, B, and C. If Ardenti (or Abulafia) was the first link in this chain, after Belbo and Casaubon's interpretations comes Diotallevi's turn. If Casaubon does not use Diotallevi's idea of the Sefirot, the relay would cease just like the Templar conspiracy did, according to Ardenti. Casaubon can also do this with a clear conscience, since Diotallevi has already passed away: the future Diabolicals cannot harm his friend.
[429] Cf. Eco 1990, 45–63.
[430] Culler 2007, 172.
[431] Hutcheon 2005, 34.
[432] McHale 1992, 171.

manifest content but also, like a suitcase with a false bottom, a hidden one, will direct the reader's attention to structural or strategic aspects of the work."[433] If the paranoid reading strategies need to be beaten, they may perhaps only be overcome by rereading.[434] As rereading is one thing the metaphysical detective story enables in the context of detective fiction, similarly the potential prize text of *Foucault's Pendulum* should not be the main concern of Casaubon's narrative audience – his narrative strategy should.[435] If there is no ultimate solution for the mystery, only countless rereadings, let us reread, but with care.

This chapter, and the first part of the study, have demonstrated, I hope, how in theory and practice data material is used both to expand the narrative, and how tailored tree models such as the Sefirot are used to control and reroute this expansion. This dialectics of chaos function and cosmos function makes it possible to consider *Foucault's Pendulum* an encyclopedic narrative that has a complex epistemological labyrinth of its own. However, Eco's novel does not limit itself to epistemology only. As Casaubon's narrative strategies imply, the net of key texts also has ontological dimensions, as he aims at making us believe the Plan as well. Like its predecessors, especially Borges's "Death and the Compass," the story does not leave the reader in the position of an innocent bystander. Instead, its metaphysics of encyclopedism – embodied by the maximalist web of hidden connections – affects the reader in a fundamental way. Casaubon's narrative does not only challenge, twist, subvert, and manipulate our conventions of reading and interpretation, it also leads us to deal with a number of philosophical (existential, ontological, ethical) questions, each more difficult than the other. For these parts, *Foucault's Pendulum* is a good example of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, especially due to its excessive and yet controlled use of esoteric and historical material. In the next part of the study I deepen our conceptions about this literary phenomenon by looking closely at three novels that were published after *Foucault's Pendulum* and that exploit similar ideas, but for slightly different purposes.

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[433] Calinescu 1993, 242.
[434] Or, as Brian McHale (1992, 172; original italics) suggests, only by acquiring "some form of paranoically skeptical reading *of* those paranoid structures – a reading practice which, to date, barely exists."
[435] E.g. Irwin 1996, 1.

PART II

4.

Detectives and Interrupted Traditions of Knowledge

One section in Wallace's *Infinite Jest* describes a one-sided dialogue between the protagonist's father and grandfather. Dating back almost 50 years before the main events, the monologue is one of fatherly guidance, and in it, a drunken Jim Incandenza Sr. instructs his 10-year old son about the importance of appreciating objects ("books aren't just *dropped* with a crash like bottles in the trashcan they're *placed*") as well as (the bodies of) other people.[436] According to Jim Sr., it was Marlon Brando and James Dean who taught their generation, including Jim's wife, to disrespect "bodies outside herself" and this cultural development led "you kids today" in a situation in which you do not "know how to *feel*."[437] Consequently, in Jim's view, parents, and especially fathers, had become the "[f]urniture of the world," mute figures in the background of life.[438]

As a single chapter, this narrative situation, a passing moment between father and son, depicts *a lesson*, an educational instant between two generations. However, as Wallace's novel largely illustrates, knowledge is rarely passed from one generation to another without negative influences: in older age, the anxiety of influence makes Jim Jr. become an alcoholic like his father, and finally he kills himself after long periods of existential desperation. Yet having become similar "human furniture" as his father used to be, Jim spends his last days making an inverse impact on his youngest son, the protagonist of *Infinite Jest*, and helping him to become an active member of society and to "bring him 'out of himself' as they say."[439] Unfortunately, the damage has been already done, and as the main events begin, we meet a young, but desperate, functioning and yet "environmental" drug addict.[440]

The motif of passing on knowledge from generation to another – a passing that

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[436] *IJ*, 161; original italics.
[437] *IJ*, 157, 167; original italics.
[438] *IJ*, 168.
[439] *IJ*, 835, 839.
[440] *IJ*, 168.

also usually involves an interruption – is common in contemporary encyclopedic novels. Reflecting the oral traditions of original encyclical knowledge, this motif is depicted as a relation between a father figure and a young student. This is also a motif we meet in detective fiction, especially in the classical detective stories, and therefore, also in the metaphysical detective stories. In fact, earlier, in the death of Jacopo Belbo we witnessed another feature of the same motif, an aspect that the hard-boiled detective story in particular has used and established. This feature is *the absence of the father figure*, which compels the young student to get by on his own. The mentor's absence signifies the sudden interruption of the knowledge tradition: since the hero has died or is absent, knowledge is not passed on, and this situation leads the young student to gather together fragments of information and reconstruct a new source of knowledge. Usually, this process is two-fold: on the one hand, the student may lead an investigation that is not directly related to the father figure; and on the other, during this investigation the student again and again leans on the teachings of this figure. The student's prime investigation also leads back to the mastermind's key ideas. Therefore, typically the investigation concerns not only the mystery as such but also the student's own role as an acquirer of potential knowledge concerning this mystery. By accepting the challenge of a new investigation, like Casaubon does, the student receives the role of mastermind, or at least aims at stepping into his mastermind's shoes.

The mentor's absence leaves the student without knowledge or guidance. Knowledge is scattered around, the epistemological labyrinth spreads around the detective novice, and no one comes to his aid. For this reason, the epistemological milieu in which the student leads the investigation, is an environment where *an initiation* takes place. A solution to the mystery is not, then, what lies at the center of the labyrinth but how the sleuth explores his way through the maze. In the metaphysical detective story, the investigation is also a metaphorical act of reading, as Joel Black emphasizes, but when this trope is developed further in the encyclopedic novel, it becomes more precise: reading is a form of studying the world as a great epistemological labyrinth that has ontological dimensions.[441] Therefore, it does not matter much whether the armchair sleuth investigates concrete texts or the world around him, as his object of study nevertheless raises in him metaphysical questions about the world. After all, even though the quest includes taking semiotic shortcuts and interpreting signs, fundamentally it deals with truths of being.

The initiation also concerns the identity of the one who is initiated, his sense of self, or the position in the community. Since there are no mentors who would give him guidance, at the level of plot the young student is an agent who represents the organizing principle. As in detective fiction generally, in the metaphysical detective story as well as in the encyclopedic novel, the protagonist's consciousness is

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[441] Black 1999, 91.

therefore the base from which the network of information spreads. What can be known in the first place, condenses in the mind of the student, and while this character does not always know the truth, he is always willing to learn. The learning process, a necessary component of the encyclopedic novel, is usually centered around the young mind consulting data systems and memory banks.

Yet the student's actions are still dependent on the father figure and his absence. The student acquires the position of the detective by first adopting the role of potential heir. Stepping into his mentor's shoes, he adopts a double role: on the one hand, he continues the work of the father figure, while on the other, he takes steps to overcome the mourning caused by the death of the hero. Sometimes, as in Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, the investigation is even a form of trauma writing. The mentor's death motivates the investigation: since the tradition of knowledge has broken down, the student aims at reestablishing the epistemological order the mentor used to observe. In this respect, the identities of the mastermind and the novice are at least indirectly linked to each other.

I begin the second part of this study by focusing on this metaphysical detective character who launches an investigation and deals with the loss of the father figure. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, *Infinite Jest*, and *House of Leaves*, we meet three variations of this motif. As a guideline, I discuss how the detective characters deal with this double task. What characterizes the detectives? What are their roles as epistemological agents, and most importantly, how do they contribute to the encyclopedic production of the narrative?

Initially, the survival strategies of new sleuths can be divided into two. On the one end of the scale, there are active parties, such as the protagonist of *The Gold Bug Variations*, who, after a short period of mourning sets out to follow her deceased mentor in an investigation that the mentor's death interrupted but did not stop. Thus, the detectives on this end of the scale are at least capable of acting and doing something about their situation. They may know neither the skills nor the exact scale one needs to reach a satisfying conclusion to their metaphysical quest, but at least they purposefully study and strive towards this goal. By contrast, at the other end of the scale are the transfixed, or otherwise paralyzed detectives, the sleuths in desperate, depressed, and distressed states of mind. These detective character types we find in *Infinite Jest*, and *House of Leaves*, and for them, especially for the protagonists of the latter, the investigation tends only to deepen their misery.

However, since all of these characters are those to whom, in the best scenario, knowledge is passed on, I will begin with the one who does the passing on, namely the absent father figure. Among the mentors depicted in these novels, Stuart Ressler in *The Gold Bug Variations* is the character we get to know best. Analyzing his position helps us to gain a better grasp of those who follow in his footsteps. In this way, it also becomes easier to conceive their epistemological situation, and the encyclopedic excess that follows.

4.1. Unsung Mentor and Distracted Detectives

Richard Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations* introduces the mentor motif explicitly, but with an important addition: instead of one student, there are two. Both pupils are also the narrators who join forces first to investigate their teacher's identity, and then to compose a three-threaded narrative honoring him. Of the three protagonists, we first meet a 30-year-old information specialist Jan O'Deigh, who works in a small branch library in Manhattan, New York. She receives the death note of Stuart Ressler, Jan's friend and mentor from a year back. The sender of the note is Stuart's working partner and Jan's ex-lover, a 25-year-old art student dropout Franklin Todd. These three characters and their actions form the fundamental triangle of the novel. What is especially important about the dynamics of this triangle, is that like Jan and Franklin, Stuart too has had a special area of his own, as he has been a young talent in molecular biology in his youth. Thus, not only does he complete the triangle by being a mentor, but he and his profession also form the basis for the totality within which *The Gold Bug Variations* as an encyclopedic novel operates. Three key spheres of knowledge – information studies, art history, and genetics – are widely mapped, and while each of the protagonists embody one field of research, it is Stuart's expertise that precedes and delineates the other spheres. All these studies then are related to the mystery of life, and raise the question: how does life reproduce itself?

This said, not only are the fates of the protagonists brought together in the course of the narrative, their special fields are also compared and squared with each other. Combining these fields, *The Gold Bug Variations* is a full-blooded "science novel" that aims at bringing humanities and natural sciences together, and thus deals with several other areas, such as music and marketing.[442] The range of scale is not unintentional. The novel gathers together several studies of major and minor enigmas which concern the significance of life. The most important of these mysteries is what Stuart calls a "coding problem," and even though the minor investigations begin as mappings of Stuart's personality, they gradually integrate with this major quest, the one Stuart has pursued since his youth. Following the same path, I start studying Powers's novel by investigating Stuart Ressler himself rather than his coding problem. First, I discuss him as a mastermind character and then, by pinpointing Jan and Franklin's positions proceed to analyze the intertwining investigations, and the metaphysical mystery these overlapping quests constitute. Throughout the discussion we need to keep in mind the tight relation between the investigations carried out by the protagonists and the encyclopedic mode Jan and Franklin as the narrators give to their intertwined threads. As in

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[442] See also Herman & Lernout 1998; Dewey 1998, 52.

Foucault's Pendulum, the narrative expands into a fictional encyclopedia through their research.

But before we continue, let me contextualize Powers's novel. The clearest way to analyze the mutual relations of these researcher-detectives is to consider *The Gold Bug Variations* as a maximalist form of *elegiac romance*, a literary form Kenneth A. Bruffee holds to be a modernist version of the heroic quest romance tradition.[443] Akin to the metaphysical detective story, the key features of elegiac romance can be summarized as (1) the narrator's worship of his or her friend, (2) the friend's decease before the narration begins, and (3) the narrator's attempt to memorialize the friend as well as restoring the balance in the narrator's own inner world.[444] Already the beginning of Powers's novel hints towards this direction: the message Jan receives is short, yet revealing: it is all "over with our mutual friend. […] Dr. Ressler went down admirably. No message, or, I should say, no new message."[445]

The announcement of the hero's death, along with the situation which Jan is thrown into, are recognizable traits of elegiac romance – especially if the reader is familiar with such novels as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947), or Vladimir Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. But recognizable too is the problem of the narrator, and this, I argue, matters most: although Jan's hero is deceased, Stuart's influence on her remains and calls for investigation.[446] The need for examination is equally in sync with Bruffee's argument, as elegiac romance operates with the quest on two levels. First, "the narrator's hero as the narrator remembers him […] is involved in a quest of the grand scale."[447] On the second level, the narrator, a squire of sorts, "is launched on a more modest, but ultimately more interesting, inner or metaphysical quest of his own."[448] Reading Powers's novel further, we learn that it follows the same composition of *two quests*, but it also turns this array upside down. The levels intermingle, thus making the inner quest cover all life, and the grand scale quest becomes even more metaphysical than the inner quest originally was. Moreover, unlike for instance *Sebastian Knight*, *The Gold Bug Variations* does not push its main hero to the margins of the narrator's story; instead, the hero's death enforces the narrators to continue, even expand the hero's work. The pupils inherit the mentor's unresolved enigma, but do not stop there.

Formally, *The Gold Bug Variations* exploits a serpentine timeline, and shifts between the present time (1985–1986), the time year earlier (1983–1984), and, a year in Stuart's youth (1957–1958). The first thing we get to know after Jan has received the death note, is the introduction of a potential key text. Mourning her

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[443] Bruffee 1983.
[444] Ibid., 51; see Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 18.
[445] *GBV*, 14.
[446] Cf. Bruffee 1983, 28.
[447] Ibid., 48.
[448] Ibid., 48.

mentor, Jan happens to hear familiar music at work:

> Literal music, music flying along under the fingers, the same music I had listened to earlier this afternoon, only radically changed. I was at last *hearing*, picking out pattern with my ears, knowing what sound meant, without translation: that tune – four notes by four – Dr. Ressler's life theme, the pattern-matching analog he had always been after.[449]

At this point we may only conjecture what the piece of music might be, not to mention Dr. Ressler's life theme, but for Jan, the moment gives a final impulse to quit her job, to "put things right" and to study closer the life theme of her past friend and teacher.[450] This self-appointed project, set in the present, is depicted in the first narrative thread of the novel, which consists of Jan's diary entries. In the second time line, set in 1983–1984, the object of research is Stuart himself: Franklin, at that time a stranger to Jan, emerges in the branch library and asks Jan to track down the records concerning his fellow worker. Sharing a graveyard shift with Stuart in a data-processing firm, Franklin suspects that in the past, Stuart has done "something objective" and important.[451] Recognizing this enigma is a crucial stepping stone, as the reader next proceeds to the third narrative thread, which is introduced in the third chapter of the novel. In it, we follow Stuart in 1957, when he works with the hottest topic in molecular biology of that time, namely the mystery of DNA. Not until the end is this thread revealed to be Franklin's handiwork, and as a biography, it is easy to be considered his contribution in dealing with the mentor's death.

These three minor quests – Jan's study of a life theme and Franklin's biographical study on the one hand, and Jan and Franklin's study of Stuart's "true identity" on the other – do not only circulate around Stuart's lifework but also establish necessary mutual relations between the mentor and his students. Stuart's life, in comparison, is tied to his work from the beginning. As Jan looks back in 1985, his teacher "was a cipher, his needs one of those latent anthologies, safe deposit boxes filled with tickets to urgent, forgotten banquets."[452] By associating Stuart's life with works of textual nature, Jan gives us the second clue: not only did Stuart have a life theme, his person needs to be considered in relation to his teachings as well. What he knew and what he was have to be studied equally. All the minor quests are therefore text-based acts, involving both researching and narrating.

Since Stuart and his life theme form the epistemological core for all the cases his assistants begin to investigate, Powers's novel is also a *metaphysical research novel*, as outlined by Susan Elizabeth Sweeney: it centers on the biography of a missing

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[449] *GBV*, 24; original italics.
[450] *GBV*, 25.
[451] *GBV*, 27.
[452] *GBV*, 26.

person, and the study of this biography is a form of metaphysical detection.[453] Whether the novel is read in that way or as an elegiac romance, it depicts social dynamics that circle around a more or less absent hero. In one narrative thread, Stuart Ressler is dead, but the recollection of his fatherly presence continues to haunt his pupils. In the other, his past is the mystery that Jan and Franklin are exploring. The third narrative thread that chronicles this past, does not only prove that Stuart indeed "did important work once," but it also elaborates the life theme and in comparison with other threads, gives it an ontological dimension.[454] But as the novel encourages us, this life theme needs to be approached through the mentor's person. Discussing some of the roles Stuart has as a mastermind, I begin by taking first into consideration the social circumstances in which his important work was done. Analyzing the solution to Jan and Franklin's quest for Stuart's identity gives us grounds for studying the specifics of his life theme, as well as its development by and through his pupils.

Disappointed Mastermind

As Jan and Franklin go after the historical figure of Stuart Ressler, after two weeks of searching Jan happens to go through the *Year in Pictures* of 1958, where she finds an entry, a *Life* article on molecular genetics. The caption of a portrait included in the article describes Dr. Stuart Ressler as "one of the new breed who will help uncover the formula for human life."[455] Since Jan now knows where to seek, she quickly ravels out the facts. In 1957 at the University of Illinois, the twenty-five-year-old molecular scientist joins Cyfer, a lab team that investigates the genetic encodings of living matter. Only a few years before, in the wake of James Watson and Francis Crick's classic paper "A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid" (1953), which introduced the double helix model for DNA, it has become an established view that DNA is the genetic carrier. In 1957, as "speculation about how the giant molecule encoded heredity" has become "open game for theoreticians," the factual evidence concerning Stuart – "a future player" as research schools are said to single him – shows that in this race, he has all the keys to success.[456] But in the middle of 1958, within a year after joining, facts about Stuart dry up. All of a sudden, the young talent withdraws from the field of science. In Jan and Franklin's view, an early retirement "by something not explained in the literature" only deepens the mystery.[457] The fundamental reasons for his withdrawal are also a key to the novel.

It is clear from the beginning that Stuart Ressler exemplifies a mastermind

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[453] Sweeney 1999; see also Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 20.
[454] *GBV*, 27.
[455] *GBV*, 39.
[456] *GBV*, 54, 44.
[457] *GBV*, 53.

character. What characterizes this character type in general is mental distance: from Poe's Dupin stories to Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter novels, mainstream detective fiction has favored the idea that neither the narrative audience nor the detective's sidekick should be capable of deducing as clearly as the prime detective of the story, or know his intentions thoroughly.[458] Instead, it has been common that the mastermind's intentions, logic of reasoning, and even his background remain more or less unknown, whereupon we can both admire him and respect the solution he offers.[459] *The Gold Bug Variations* does not make an exception in this regard. In what matter it does, concerns first, *the circumstances* in which the mastermind character is positioned, and second, the mastermind character's *secret identity*, which becomes the key introductory issue of the novel. Like the discovered facts reveal, Stuart has not solved the crimes in his youth. Instead, he has worked with the one of the most current topics in the field of science. These circumstances, I argue, also affect the way we take him to be a mastermind character. As a mentor, Stuart is definitely as eccentric, arcane, and intelligent a character as the classical detectives, but at the same time, it is the circumstances that shape these characters: eccentricity, for instance, is a feature that signifies different things in different times. It is thus revealing that in 1983 Stuart is not where he is supposed to be as a detective: doing graveyard shifts that require "as much attention as wetting infants" is not how the "young promise" in science is supposed to make his living.[460] Indeed, where Stuart differs from the classical detectives is the area of social and historical circumstances, which affect his capabilities as a mastermind. Unlike Sharon Snyder, who discusses the gender of the specialist and touches on Stuart's retreat as a personal "crisis typical of masculine paradigms in fictions of science," I see it as more relevant to consider Stuart as a *traditional mastermind character* who, pushed by the new *social* paradigm of science, is forced to withdraw.[461] He certainly faces methodological obstacles as regards the mapping of DNA, but equally the social circumstances affect his fragile position as a scholar. Primarily, however, it is the shift from modern knowledge-oriented societies to the global information-based postmodern world that affects his position. Stuart Ressler, in other words, is an outdated figure.

Let me introduce a comparison to clarify my point. In Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), the narrator makes a famous list of Sherlock Holmes's cognitive limits: the most inadequate knowledge Holmes has concerning literature, philosophy, astronomy, and politics, while in botany and geology, his particulars are only limited. Chemistry and anatomy, on the other hand, are areas he knows well.[462] Although Holmes is usually considered a perfect example of a mastermind, the truth

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[458] *Red Dragon* (1981), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988), and *Hannibal* (1999).
[459] See also Kyllönen 2013; Kyllönen 2016b.
[460] *GBV*, 113.
[461] Snyder 1998, 93.
[462] Doyle 2008, 16.

is that he reasons well but knows only a little. In Holmes's own metaphor, which is meant to explain his skills, a man's brain is an empty attic a man needs to furnish: "A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things, so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it."[463]

Holmes's attic metaphor reveals the key difference between Stuart Ressler and the classical masterminds. Stuart's scientific orientation on the one hand, and the social period he lives in on the other, differ crucially from Holmes's time in London at the turn of the twentieth century. In Stuart's lifetime, the world grows more complicated, as technological innovations affect the epistemological environment, and information pervades "the sciences from top to bottom, transforming every branch of knowledge."[464] An important catalyst of this change is Stuart's fickle relation to the science of his time. When Jan makes her way to ask Stuart what caused his sudden retreat, he answers that "[s]cience lost its calm."[465] The crucial moment in this regard takes place in the first half of 1958, when Stuart sees a TV debate between Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb, and Linus Pauling, a key figure in modern chemistry:

> Until this moment, he [Stuart] was certain that the highest obligation of science was to describe objectively, to reveal the purpose-free domain. But here are Teller and Pauling, carrying on on national TV as if some things were more urgent than truth, as if we're condemned always to fall back on the blind viewpoint of need.[466]

Consequently, Stuart faces his first "crisis in conviction."[467] The TV debate reminds him that wars depend on information control.[468] Not even the genetic code is out of harm's way, since in the worst scenario, "his act of pure research, done with religious indifference to consequences, delivers all organic creation, code broken, and code spoken, into warring hands."[469] Therefore, science loses its calm due to its dependency both on power politics and on technology. The latter, as Stuart perceives, is "another urge altogether," namely an urge to control.[470]

Stuart understands the basic situation of the Information Age. The period has a shadow of its own: information becomes a crucial commodity, as predicted in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and it does not only submit scientific knowledge to the needs of

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[463] Ibid., 15.
[464] Gleick 2011, 8; see Hayles 2012, 103–106. Or as Jan points out, "[a] single day produces more print than centuries of antiquity. Magazines, newspapers, fliers, pamphlets, brochures: fifty thousand volumes annually in English alone, ten times what a person can read in a lifetime" (*GBV,* 29).
[465] *GBV*, 112.
[466] *GBV*, 245.
[467] *GBV*, 245.
[468] *GBV*, 245.
[469] *GBV*, 421.
[470] *GBV*, 129.

defiant states and enterprises.[471] It also forces scientists, even those of the first rank, to compete with each other. These facts Stuart learns the hard way. Jan's central discovery from the records is that a *Life* article portrays him "as arcane, isolated – qualities that may have been requisite for serious creative effort in the past but at this hour are inimical to effective science."[472] While the article does not exaggerate, since Stuart also possesses these qualities, the second reason for his withdrawal is only natural in the scientific context, and strictly tied to the financial development of universities: his fellowship hangs in the balance. As his first year with Cyfer is drawing to an end, he learns that "the vicissitudes of funding cannot afford the solo worker."[473]

When one compares Stuart in his precarious position to Holmes, who works as an independent consulting detective, is not a part of any team, and is, all in all, a non-transparent mind, there is indeed a difference. The Holmesian mastermind would be a strikingly outmoded figure, not only in the general post-war social context, but especially in the scientific world of the late 1950s. Moreover, whereas Holmes could still state that "the skillful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic," the situation is very different half a century later.[474] In the modern age of communication technologies, the full control of information is becoming more a privilege of the few than a sheer question of *taking*. As Stuart perceives his working partners in their first meeting, they do not seem to worry what they take into their brain-attics at all: his lab mates were experts, and yet they watched prime time and talked politics.[475]

Even though this disappointed view can be partly put on the slate of Stuart's youthful and gullible idealism, it also stresses his distinct position in relation to the others. What makes Stuart special in Cyfer, and his position as a scientist during the political times of the 1950s vulnerable, is his background. Before Stuart became a mastermind, he was a young talent; but before he became that, he was a child prodigy. The third reason for his withdrawal, then, is that in 1957–1958 he faces the challenges of the Information Age with the background of an old-fashioned prodigy – and while he differs from the masterminds of the classical detective story, he is not a postmodern figure either. But let us take a moment and consider him as a prodigy, since this is helpful for two reasons: first, the prodigy motif crystallizes the collision of knowledge and information, that is, an aspect of the contemporary encyclopedic novel we discussed in the previous chapter. And second, Stuart is the most immediate character, who, within the frames of this literary phenomenon, embodies *both* the mastermind and the prodigy in one and the same person. After he leaves the

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471 Harvey 1990, 159–160.
472 *GBV*, 547.
473 *GBV*, 478.
474 Doyle 2008, 15.
475 *GBV*, 50.

stage, the situation is different.

Before *Life* portrayed Stuart as "one of the new breed," the research schools considered him a future player for a reason.[476] As a student of physiology, Stuart had read a Watson-Crick article, switched his subject "to rush the frontier," and finished his dissertation, "a minor *tour de force*" in four years.[477] Stuart's merits do not end here, just as he proved himself to be highly talented already as a child. At the age of nine Stuart had broken the spines of all thirty volumes of a "ruinously expensive set of encyclopedias."[478] In sixth grade, he had delivered "a perfect copy of Gauss's great work" to his teacher.[479] And when on a family road trip, his father had suffered a myocardial infarction and his mother had gone into shock, the twelve-year-old Stuart had driven them to hospital as he had spent long afternoons in "browsing the encyclopedia paragraphs and plates" and knew at least in theory "that the clutch was on the left and the accelerator on the right."[480]

Stuart's one-year period with Cyfer marks a culmination point in his intellectual life, however. "Green at twenty-five," full of belief in science, Stuart enters the "outpost Eden" of Urbana-Champaign only to realize that the "literal field" of science merges with the larger social context, and the binder between these fields is information – both for good and for bad.[481] Alongside the antics of first-rank scientists in television, Stuart witnesses the changed situation as he stands by the other Cyfer members and their activities. More than a few members in the personnel face the challenges of information in the form of a personal crisis: one confronts information overload after ending up locked in the library for a night, another feels himself "in the unique position of rating every televised message," and as a part of the Stainer family, he feels he has become "the national pollster."[482] The third one is a news addict: "[n]ot to watch tonight's segment […] is to commit a sin of omission."[483] As Sharon Snyder points out, Stuart also faces a crisis, but unlike his colleagues, he faces this crisis more on the methodological level of their research than on the extracurricular level of his personal life.[484] Thus, science does not only merge with other areas of culture, the information leak from other areas of culture to science also leaves the scientists themselves confused. Surprisingly, the party that helps Stuart deal with the crisis are prodigies, namely extraordinarily talented children.

Stuart witnesses closely how not only the other team members but also their offspring have no defense against the information overload. As Tom LeClair puts it,

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[476] *GBV*, 39.
[477] *GBV*, 44.
[478] *GBV*, 134.
[479] *GBV*, 179.
[480] *GBV*, 135.
[481] *GBV*, 43–44; see also LeClair 1996, 17.
[482] *GBV*, 241–242.
[483] *GBV*, 117.
[484] Snyder 1998, 93–94.

the first of the children, a 7-year-old girl "has been trained to recite long passages of romantic poetry that she does not understand," while the other, still an infant, is "conditioned to be a prodigy, picking out alphabet blocks when her father names them."[485] According to LeClair, these children "may grow up to be facile cross-referencers and glib conversationalists […] but these 'prodigies' will lack the curiosity about and wonder at nature that Ressler and […] Powers maintain are the source of science and its grand understandings."[486] What LeClair does not say here explicitly is that as Stuart sees the situation, when these new prodigies rush the frontier of science, science will be transformed – and not in a good way.

Nevertheless, through the prodigies of the new generation Stuart is able reconsider his own position in the field of science. It is especially in Margaret, the poetry-reciting girl, that Stuart sees not only himself, but also their shared "exile":

> Out of this ubiquitous, sick anxiety of childhood, he and this girl, skipping past those classmates blundering through the accepted steps, are off on their own, cataloguing, curating their own internal, intertwined discoveries, attempting to dance, as fast as lips and breath and understanding can.[487]

The post-war social context may increase "the annual resentment of a new crop of classmates" towards prodigies, but these special individuals are still learning "everything from scratch," just like Stuart did.[488] A problem, however, is the lack of experience, and especially the culturally adapted impression that language comes before nature. This *linguistic turn* that, like the informational turn, takes place during the first half of the twentieth century, shapes also the characteristics of a prodigy in a fundamental way. Book-learned children are not future masterminds – Stuart appears the last of his kind – but postmodern specialists with no practical experience, and no feet on the ground. "They see arbitrary links before experiencing things," and for Stuart, using language – be romantic poetry or alphabet blocks – without firsthand experience of its content, grammar and usability, is like reciting a cipher from memory.[489] The new generation of prodigies may know a lot, but they have less and less firsthand experience of how to apply that knowledge. In this sense, a new generation prodigy is the opposite of Sherlock Holmes.

This said, prodigies are only the tip of the iceberg, a phenomenon that indicates to Stuart a crucial situation of choice. His disappointment with scientific praxis goes back to the fundamental role of science. Whether led by prodigies or not, science is also at the crossroads: should it be a method of reverencing nature or a way to master

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[485] LeClair 1996, 22.
[486] Ibid., 22.
[487] *GBV*, 180.
[488] *GBV*, 180.
[489] LeClair 1996, 22.

it? In Stuart's mind, engineering life, for instance, has nothing to do with science, as it is about the compulsive need to control, whereas for many of his contemporaries, it is its cutting edge. This dilemma is not only a matter of conscience for Stuart, it is also the key problem from which later springs his life theme.

Prodigies nevertheless help him to conceptualize this conflict between views. Socially, prodigies remain objects of both "playground hate" and collective admiration, but in biology, their position is unquestionable.[490] Natural sciences prove that prodigies keep evolution running, enriching the diversity of species, and that *life*, as LeClair puts it, is itself "a prodigy, a highly unlikely phenomenon on a planet dead for millions of years."[491] For Stuart, it is exactly the *variety* of organic life that needs to be studied, not the *encoding pattern* behind the variety. The direction Cyfer chooses during his year with the team implies the urge to mastery, which Stuart does not hold in high regard. By contrast, his choice of direction is the opposite, a wide-reaching, even encyclopedic way to go, as he expands the question to involve all biological and cultural life in their appearances, not only the minimalist linguistic code behind the phenomena.

When Stuart leaves Cyfer behind in 1958, this concern becomes his prime interest. Thus, it would be misleading to say that by leaving the research group he also retreats from the field of science altogether. Instead, he aims at bridging the gap between science and other fields of study by focusing on "the paradox of variation," or more specifically, "how variation might ultimately free itself from the instruction that underwrites it, sets it in motion, but nowhere anticipates what might come from experience's trial run."[492] In order to study life in all of its variety and to find the right analog for it, he spends a quarter of a century outside the lab, composing music in the daytime and supervising the running of data systems at night. As this is his position when Jan and Franklin discover him, we can now follow Stuart's coding problem and move away from the base he, as a person, embodies. The "important work" he once did acquires a new manifestation in the hands of his future pupils.[493]

Students in Love

As we have seen, Stuart's departure is the consequence of a number of reasons. Nevertheless, Jan and Franklin's discoveries of Stuart's true identity do not cover only his disappointments in science, but also his personal life. What the pupils find out is that Stuart's retreat had much to do with an unfortunate infatuation with his lab partner, Jeanette Koss as well. Thus, besides a science novel, *The Gold Bug Variations* is a love story. These generic registers do not exclude each other: most

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[490] *GBV*, 180.
[491] LeClair 1996, 21.
[492] *GBV*, 585.
[493] *GBV*, 27.

thematic components of the novel deal with seemingly opposite fields of life, and the love story motif emphasizing feelings is just as necessary a part of it as the reason-oriented detective story motif. As Luc Herman and Geert Lernout, for instance, have maintained, the whole point of *The Gold Bug Variations* is, if not building bridges between spheres of knowledge, then at least proving that all life is interconnected.[494] I examine both theoretical and formal specifics of this argument in detail subsequently, but for the emphasis of this chapter, it needs to be brought out that the motifs of falling in love and seeking a solution to the mystery are linked, and not only in Stuart's past. That is to say, *The Gold Bug Variations* is, more precisely, a dual love story: whereas Stuart fell in love with Jeanette, similarly in the course of Jan and Franklin's first biographical investigation, the pupils become a couple as well. It is this dual love story motif we need to investigate at this point, as love, against all expectations, is the key to the second mystery of the narrative, namely that of the grand scale. As mentioned earlier, minor and major quests overlap in Powers's novel, and a quest that begins as a narrator's search for the hero's past deeds may first appear to be more modest than the quest the hero has pursued throughout his lifetime, but eventually, they are one and the same.[495] More precisely, Jan O'Deigh and Franklin Todd continue their mastermind's work and also become, albeit not fully consciously, part of a larger, vitalistic process.

How are the two love affairs connected? What about the metaphysical inquiries and the love stories? The third chapter of the novel gives us a valid starting point. So far, we have dealt with what is depicted in the narrative thread set in 1957–1958. Whereas the events of this thread are represented through heterodiegetic narration, the other two threads offer Jan's perspective: her journal entries and the thread concerning what has happened a year before, are both narrated in the first person. As the reader begins the first section of the third chapter, Stuart's time in Illinois is introduced for the first time. Before this shift, the narrative has set the scene by launching two minor investigations – one concerning a historical figure, the other his life theme. But as Jan first discoveries about Stuart's past are represented *immediately after* the launching of the third narrative thread (that is, in the second section of the third chapter), this relatively sudden switch in narration can be considered a metafictional gesture. In other words, by taking distance to Jan's standpoint, the third narrative thread reserves a special, partly autonomous position for the reader. Instead of just following Jan and Franklin's investigations, the third narrative thread, as it represents how things actually went, lets us to look for correspondences and "suppose cases." A case, to recall Susan Elizabeth Sweeney's definition, is "a set of circumstances of conditions. Supposing a case, then, must mean thinking in the subjunctive mood: imagining scenarios, developing

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[494] Herman & Lernout 1998.
[495] See Bruffee 1983, 48.

hypotheses, speculating that 'if this were the case,' or 'in that case,' or even 'in any case… .'"[496] With the third chapter of the novel, the "case" becomes explicit and we get a chance to compare whether Jan and Franklin's discoveries hold good with the truth depicted in the third narrative thread. Also the rotation of the narrative threads encourages us to study which one of the stories we should focus on, Stuart's enigmatic life or his impact on his pupils. Thus, even though it first seems that Stuart is merely an object of research, the rotation of plot lines questions this setting and makes Stuart an active agent whose own object of study is the couple his pupils form.

Through a comparison of narrative threads, the parallels between love stories also become apparent. Even though Jeanette and Franklin play crucial roles in these stories, let us next concentrate on Stuart and Jan, as their mutual relation sheds light on the role of love and distraction in their conjoining investigations. Keeping in mind the mastermind's worried respect for the new generation prodigies, pinpointing also helps us define further their positions as a mentor and a pupil.

When Jan begins her sabbatical, her initial problem concerns what scale she should choose and what she should study. The hierarchy of knowledge spreads in front of her "in imbedded frames": anthropological, political, social, psychological, biological, microbiological… but "each rung, cross-referenced, reads, 'For more information, see below.'"[497] That Jan formulates the problem in this way instead of just concentrating on Stuart's life theme from within a certain, intuitively given frame, reflects both her profession and a particular historical situation. Therefore, what defined Stuart as a mastermind a quarter of century before, also defines Jan's position as a student. But both aspects in addition underline how different she is when compared to Stuart. As a librarian, Jan's daily assignment has been cracking ID's and finding references, and consequently her real competence has been restricted, as Sharon Snyder formulates, to the capability to "move across disciplinary registers in order to chart a web of seemingly unrelated facts into a useful historical overview."[498] Behind the reference desk of a quiet branch library, Jan feels like a "gas station attendant of the mind" who only makes things available.[499] Like Casaubon, a private eye of learning, Jan has been an expert in information retrieval, and therefore, not so much a person who possesses plenty of knowledge, as a dealer, an "info vendor" in "the perpetually uncertain, qualified reference wilderness."[500]

In this respect, Jan's position could not be further from Stuart's, who as a former prodigy was neither a facile cross-referencer nor a glib conversationalist.[501]

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[496] Sweeney 1999, 247.
[497] *GBV*, 88.
[498] Snyder 1998, 90.
[499] *GBV*, 35.
[500] *GBV*, 38, 59.
[501] See LeClair 1996, 22.

Instead, Stuart was a person who had firsthand experiences of what he was studying. By contrast, before Jan meets Stuart and Franklin, she appears to have led a life of a new generation prodigy, the new species we saw Stuart was eminently worried about. It is then illustrative that Jan sets her initial "scale at the only gauge" she has "ever had firsthand experience," namely historiography.[502] Among the first things we get to know about Jan is that between her daily duties, she has maintained "the Event Calendar" in which each day she has posted a historical fact about an event that took place in history on that very day.[503] The motif for choosing the scale is thus either confusing or ironic: on the one hand, Jan clearly does *not* have firsthand experience about historical events that took place before she was born, but on the other she has considerable experience, for cataloguing historical events has been her daily assignment for years. But since historiography is a field of knowledge that can be approached only from a distance and "by way of prior (re)textualization," as Fredric Jameson emphasizes, Jan only makes a professional leap from the position of a public servant to the position of an independent armchair researcher.[504] Hence, at this point she is unable to "jump from information to knowledge," albeit her few months with Stuart and Franklin "were the only ones of my life that I experienced firsthand."[505] The transition from the info vendor to the experiential subject comes afterwards in the course of her sabbatical.[506]

Despite their differences, Jan is portrayed as Stuart's successor, and she too feels that this is the case. Before Jan quits her job in the library, she writes in her notebooks: "I don't know what I hope to do, what, if anything, I still *can* do to put things right. I only know that I am inextricably involved in what happened to the man. His story has become my story, and no one is left to tell his but me."[507] Second, as she is in a situation in which she needs to pick up the right frame, she quickly moves from historiography to the other scales. Remembering her mentor's words when Franklin had asked Stuart about what he would be if he could start over, Jan ends up wondering whether to be a surgeon or a musician. "Since surgery arrives too late," she writes, "I'll be a musician. I'll spend what remains of my life savings studying music. First, I must tackle theory. And for a good grounding in tonal

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[502] *GBV*, 90.
[503] *GBV*, 15.
[504] Jameson 2002, 67.
[505] *GBV*, 90, 25.
[506] A matter that demonstrates the difference between generations, between Stuart's in-depth passion for knowledge and Jan's interest in information, is the opposite decisions they made when choosing a career. We learn from Jan's narrative that as a child Jan, like Stuart, was parked by "a multivolume children's encyclopedia" (*GBV*, 35). This led her first to push "the 'why' cycle to break point," but unlike Stuart who concentrated first on physiology and then on chemistry and genetics, Jan's thirst for knowledge led her to a career as a librarian, "answering others' questions for a living" (*GBV*, 35). In this way, Jan also managed to avoid becoming personally involved with the topics of which she sought information. What the difference between Jan and Stuart's careers reveals then is the degree of *experiential commitment*.
[507] *GBV*, 25; original italics.

fundamentals, I must first learn everything I can about the genetic code."[508] Thus she literally begins her study where Stuart ended, by adopting his alternative career and continuing in his footsteps.

Since Stuart's story has also become Jan's story, the novel exploits a trait that is conventional to both the elegiac romance and the metaphysical research novel. Usually, finding *the missing person* leads the detective "to discovering that we are him or her," but in *The Gold Bug Variations*, this convention has more radical dimensions. Stuart's story is not only Jan's story, it also includes Franklin, being fundamentally Jan and Franklin's love story that doubles the love story of two missing persons: Stuart Ressler, who has died, and Jeanette Koss, who is present only in the 1957–1958 thread.[509] A week after Jan has left the library, she listens to her mentor's favorite record and confesses: "But tonight: I definitely hear trio. Love triangle. Dr. Ressler's story is nothing if not a threesome. He loved a woman; and he loved something else, inimical. Research didn't teach me this; firsthand contamination did."[510] With these words Jan does not only confess that Stuart's early retirement had much to do with the love triangle. She also admits that she herself had an affair, and this affair involved both Franklin and Stuart: Franklin she loved, but this love "took place in the shadow of an unnamed correspondent."[511] Yet while Jan concludes that "if science was that man's perpetual third party, the scientist himself was mine," it is not until the end of her sabbatical that she clarifies this conception to herself: the third party is not so much the biographical scientist as the life theme of a scientist who continues developing it in and through Jan and Franklin's relationship.[512]

What forces Jan to make such a clarification is understanding the role of *distraction*. As has been pointed out, the narrative thread describing Jan's year off consists mainly of her diary entries. Together with the thread that reiterates the events a year before – again narrated by Jan – it reveals that distraction has a huge impact on all the characters. In the metaphysical detective story, this is a very common motif: some minor phenomenon catches the sleuth's attention and pushes him onto the right or wrong track, or to reconsider the point of the investigation.[513] For both Jan and Stuart, distraction is nevertheless fortunate: while both should spend their time studying, they are fortunate enough to fall in love with a fellow researcher. Later, the motif of distraction is supplemented with the motif of

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[508] *GBV*, 89.
[509] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 20.
[510] *GBV*, 40.
[511] *GBV*, 41.
[512] *GBV*, 41.
[513] For the first, see G. K. Chesterton's classical Father Brown story "Blue Cross" (1910), for instance. Besides Oedipa Maas of *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Cayce Pollard of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003), Jan O'Deigh is one of the rare cases of female sleuths in the metaphysical detective story. For this reason, I refer to the metaphysical detective as a male character throughout this study. For female sleuths, see Sweeney 2016.

separation: after the detectives have been distracted from detecting, something separates the newly-united lovers. Whereas the chronologically earliest thread ends in the break-up, as, married, Jeanette wants to remain faithful to her husband, the middle thread also ends in separation, but for the exactly opposite reason: Jan and Franklin break up due to the latter's infidelity.

Distraction also makes the second couple get back together. First, distraction becomes crucial for Jan's early theoretical studies, as she takes seriously the fact that during Stuart's year in Illinois, her mentor had a short love affair. Before her own sabbatical, and before she takes a jump from information to knowledge, Jan seems to think that the truth behind Stuart's leaving behind a promising future in science can be understood simply by studying his biography as a historiographer would do, without "firsthand contamination." But as her quest deepens, Jan understands that eventually she is not after the biographical truth as such, but the truth that can be found from every living thing when a unique signal is "mixed with the right reagent," namely with the right distraction.[514] Thus, the lost chemistry between Stuart and Jeanette is not what matters. What matters is the uniting and separating force, that is, the life theme. And this truth can be learned only by going experientially through the same vital procedure every lovestruck couple goes through.

The sabbatical itself is, then, a lesson for Jan. In her solitary studying, Jan has retired to examine everything, but this has also required withdrawal from everything, including her social relationships. As Joseph Dewey captures it, for Jan, "to study life is to take a sabbatical from living," by eliminating all the possible distractions.[515] This caricatured position of a scientist is paradoxical at heart – especially because Jan's object of study, the life theme, can only be learned via personal experiences, not by avoiding them. Therefore, it has all to do with the affair she and Franklin has had as well. For this reason, whereas the first half of her notebook entries signifies separation as in them Jan distances herself from everything, in the later parts her longing for Franklin increases, marking her willingness to reunite with him. Jan's entries do not involve a progress in studies only: besides studying, she misses her ex-boyfriend and even describes how she has tried to track him down.

Hence, the two sides of Jan's story – her investigations and falling in love – are complementary. Without her relationship with Franklin, Jan would neither get to know what she wants – as she admits, she does not know what she hopes to do during her year off – nor solve Stuart's key enigma. Jan's investigation remains incomplete as long as she keeps her research and her involvement with Franklin separate.[516] And since Franklin has also aimed at figuring out his mentor's influence

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[514] *GBV*, 86.
[515] Dewey 2002, 58.
[516] See also LeClair 1996, 19.

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on him, both Jan and Franklin eventually need each other. Jan in particular learns during her sabbatical that prodigious distractions guide life. Love with all its components – infatuation, attachment, and even betrayal – is a miracle Jan needs to incorporate into her investigation to proceed. For this reason, then, in the last sections of the novel, Jan and Franklin reunite, this time to "make a baby."[517] This reunion signifies a solved enigma.

"The baby" which Franklin refers to, turns out be the narrative as such. In the last section of the novel, when Jan has returned from her sabbatical, one day she finds Franklin in her apartment reading her notebooks (which contain all her studies). Franklin confesses that he has "been toying with a little biography too."[518] In honor of their mentor, they decide to combine the manuscripts, and this undertaking is the climax of *The Gold Bug Variations*. The climax in many elegiac romances, as Bruffee suggests, is usually "the final enlightenment of the squire-narrator."[519] In this case, there are two squire-narrators whose "baby" – the combined accounts concerning their mentor and his work – deals with the hero's mystery and even makes it become livelier, as it now involves not only the mentor and his unfortunate love story, but also the pupils in whose authorial union the mentor's work finally receives recognition. By studying their mentor's life theme, Jan and Franklin notice in the end of their seeking, they – their lives, their interests – have become the object of their own search: after Stuart's passing, only their work and their love for each other keep his work alive.

All in all, Powers's novel introduces two kinds of metaphysical detective characters: the absent, hapless mastermind and his pupils, distracted detectives. Jan, Franklin, and Stuart are in part comparable with Casaubon and Belbo of *Foucault's Pendulum*, since in both novels, the pupils, in the footsteps of their mentors, set out on a dual quest: on the one hand, they study the quest as such, but on the other, their equal focus is on the mentor and how he dealt with the primary quest – what, for example, were his motifs. For the big picture of this study, it needs to be admitted, however, that not all encyclopedic novels repeat the setting like this, not at least in the same way. But as we next move on to examine *Infinite Jest* and *House of Leaves*, we will witness that, in an ambiguous way, the later encyclopedic novels continue to exploit the mentor motif, but in a much more negative way: the mastermind is missing, and this leaves the pupils alone, to survive on their own. Along with Stuart Ressler, the healing and relatively potent father figure leaves the stage. Reciprocally, sickness and trauma enter the big picture.

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[517] *GBV*, 638.
[518] *GBV*, 637.
[519] Bruffee 1983, 40.

4.2. The Catatonic Hero and His Burly Extras

A great deal of theory concerning the detective character has relied on the sleuth as an active agent. This metatheoretical statement may appear naive, since it seems obvious that the whole idea of criminal investigation is necessarily dependent on the detective's deeds, and the detective *has* to be active, for there would not be a detective story without a criminal investigation. A detective story with an inactive detective character sounds indeed like an oxymoron. When one, for instance, compares mastermind detective characters to hard-boiled detectives, both are active in their own way. Even in the case of the metaphysical detective story, the prerequisite for such concepts as "the defeated sleuth" and "the doomed detective" is the process which the detective puts into motion: although the sleuth may be defeated, he has, at least once, been, if not a successful sleuth, then at least active enough to earn such a reputation and to take up the gauntlet of solving the crime.[520] When Charles Brownson aims at imagining a metaphysical "[d]etective who knows nothing certain, whose discoveries are all uncertain, who is *a priori* unable to assign responsibility or blame, who possesses no general knowledge and thus cannot come to any reliable conclusion whose inference chains are necessarily valid," even he presupposes that this detective has been an active agent in some imaginary past.[521]

Yet some detective characters are more active than others. In the course of this study we have already met both types within the same story. While some of these characters (such as DeAngelis in *Foucault's Pendulum*, and Stuart Ressler in *The Gold Bug Variations*) were forced to remain in the margins, or for a long time at least, the other detectives were able to lead their own investigations more actively. The prerequisite for this switch in positions has been the priority of the latter type of detective: as narrator-protagonists, Casaubon and Jan O'Deigh ensure that the other detectives are either objects of research or operate outside the main investigation, whereupon from the reader's point of view, it has seemed that DeAngelis's activities, for instance, are marginal and that in this sense, he is less active than the protagonists.[522]

Wallace's *Infinite Jest* introduces a detective character who differs from Casaubon in *Foucault's Pendulum*, and the sleuth triangle in *The Gold Bug Variations* in a crucial way. This detective is also an extraordinary character with regard to the history of detective fiction, since, unlike his predecessors, he has no agency as a

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[520] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 8; Tani 1984.
[521] Brownson 2014, 159.
[522] The close readings of *Foucault's Pendulum* and *The Gold Bug Variations* have shown that not even "the metaphysical detection" can be reduced to the pure agency of *detection*, that is, solving the crime by deducing and following clues. After all, Casaubon and Jan are not solving an existing mystery, but rather creating new mysteries. Also in this respect, even the metaphysical detective story deals with protagonists that are epistemologically active.

sleuth – not at least on the diegetic level of the story. He is not named a detective. Neither are there investigations that would involve violent crimes, arcane messages, or any other conventional motifs of the detective story. Instead, we are introduced to a 17-year-old tennis player student Hal Incandenza, a mentally troubled young man, whose malfunctioning we are set to follow. I call this type of metaphysical sleuth *the paralyzed detective*, and for specific reasons. To begin with, Hal remains at the center of events, but it is the side characters and not him who drive the narrative events forward. Second, a crucial tension of *Infinite Jest* is set up between the protagonist's stagnation and the encyclopedic modality of the novel. Slowly but steadily the main events twine around the possible causes of his paralysis, albeit never exposing them. This setting encourages the reader to treat *Infinite Jest* as a metaphysical detective story in which the main object of investigation is none other than the protagonist. Throughout the novel, Hal himself is incapable of identifying the case, let alone of pursuing and solving it. Nevertheless, in what follows, I argue that the novel as such is an encyclopedic attempt to not only suppose that case but also to give it a satisfying closure.

But in what ways is Hal paralyzed? If he does not have the sort of agency that the detective character usually has, what then is the case, or more specifically, his case, the case he himself is unable to identify? What characterizes the paralyzed detective? Instead of simply fitting Hal to the established typifications of the metaphysical detective character, we might first listen to Hal himself. In the seventh grade, three years before the main events, he has written a short school essay. This essay is included in the novel, and as it is situated in the introductory chapters (although, as with *Foucault's Pendulum*, the introductory part of this 1079-page novel lasts nearly two hundred pages), it is supposed to be read as a crucial signpost. In this piece of writing, Hal compares two kinds of heroes, Chief Steve McGarrett of *Hawaii Five-0* (1968–1980) and Captain Frank Furillo of *Hill Street Blues* (1981–1987). According to Hal, the first is crucially *a classical modern hero of action*: the camera follows McGarrett all the time and "the audience knows what the case is and also knows, by the end of Act One, who is guilty."[523] Indeed, as the audience knows the truth from the outset, "there is no mystery, there is only Steve McGarrettt."[524] From our perspective, McGarrett may not be a mastermind character, but at least he is recognizably the hero.[525] At this point of his essay, Hal nevertheless takes a fresh approach to the topic. He describes Furillo as *a postmodern hero of reaction*, but instead of considering this hero type as a defeated sleuth who fails in deduction, Furillo is for him a typical bureaucrat. Furillo is "beset by petty distractions on all sides from the very beginning of Act One": he has dozens of tasks to delegate and

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[523] *IJ*, 141.
[524] *IJ*, 141.
[525] Even though Hal does not explicitly write about detectives but heroes, these heroes are part of the police force, chiefs dealing with crimes, and therefore investigating officers.

take on, and no time for solving cases one by one.[526] He is, in other words, "a virtuoso of triage and compromise and administration."[527] Therefore, Hal emphasizes the social role of detective over whatever skills in deduction the protagonist may have: today, the detective is like any other public servant.[528]

The comparison between modern and postmodern heroes is not, however, the most crucial point of Hal's essay. In its conclusion, Hal asks a fundamental question: "What North American Hero can hope to succeed the placid Frank? We await, I predict, the hero of non-action, the catatonic hero, the one beyond calm, divorced from all stimulus, carried here and there across sets by burly extras whose blood sings with retrograde amines."[529] In the novel, Hal's essay is labeled with a long foreword by some other narrator, explaining that the submission received "JUST A B/B+, DESPITE OVERALL POSITIVE FEEDBACK, MOSTLY BECAUSE ITS CONCLUDING ¶ WAS NEITHER SET UP BY THE ESSAY'S BODY NOR SUPPORTED […] BY ANYTHING MORE THAN SUBJECTIVE INTUITION AND RHETORICAL FLOURISH."[530] Yet while Hal's conclusion is criticized to be both extraneous and extravagant, it does give the reader an important signpost. The essay may lack arguments, but as it is included in the novel, Hal's early remarks suggest that the conclusions may imply more than just the rhetorical brilliancy of a young mind. The whole idea of a "hero of non-action" is a key to the novel itself.

In fact, the inclusion of Hal's essay in *Infinite Jest* is important concerning another matter. The novel can be read as a delayed argument for Hal's early prediction, which indirectly suggests that he himself may also be the actual narrator of the novel. But since Hal is also the protagonist, and as such, a paralyzed character throughout the story, it needs to be assumed that at least a tripartite sequence takes

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[526] *IJ*, 141.
[527] *IJ*, 141.
[528] Compared to *The Gold Bug Variations*, in which the new detective was a scientist, Hal represents an equally possible, but perhaps more realistic scenario. But what makes McGarrett and Furillo comparable in the first place, is not only their capacity to take action, but also their loneliness. Whereas McGarrett is a "modern cowboy" (*IJ*, 142), Furillo is "a heroic *part* of the herd, responsible for all of what he is part of, responsible to everyone, his lonely face as placid under pressure as a cow's face" (*IJ*, 142; original italics). In Hal's remark, we can see the remarkable difference between the metaphysical detectives of Robbe-Grillet and Auster, and the protagonists in the mainstream crime fiction on television. Unlike literary investigators, television detectives tend to belong to the police force or the investigation agency; even McGarrett is the chief of his team, although Hal neglects this fact. Both McGarrett and the "more Stoic, corporate hero of reactive probity" (*IJ*, 142) following him, work in a team, as part of a community. By highlighting these characteristics, it becomes possible for mainstream detective fiction on television to treat not only group dynamics, but also themes of belonging and loneliness. And as Hal sees the situation, the development of crime fiction on television, not to mention the overall "reactive moral ambiguity of 'post'- and 'post-post'-modern culture" (*IJ*, 142), has led the audience to prefer Furillo over McGarrett ever since. That Hal emphasizes the loneliness of the detective is in *Infinite Jest* just as important a motif as the general development of television culture.
[529] *IJ*, 142.
[530] *IJ*, 140; original capitals.

place "behind the scenes": first, Hal writes an essay; second, he becomes the non-action hero that he predicted; and finally, he is cured of this paralysis, and is able to give a thorough account of the events. As a narrative, *Infinite Jest* concentrates strictly on the second phase, and we get to know next to nothing about Hal's condition three years before the main events – not to mention the time following the main events. However, "the missing year," a one-year period immediately following the main events, has been of interest to scholars such as Stephen J. Burn, and equally for my argument, it is a crucial aspect of the novel.[531] As I aim at arguing, the missing year and Hal's paralysis are related and together they motivate the encyclopedic representation of the narrative.

But before we pursue that idea, we need to discuss Hal's character a little further. Proving that the conclusion of his essay is not just a demonstration of "subjective intuition" but an accurate statement that enlightens *Infinite Jest*, let me next take one statement out of the essay and consider how it fits with the corresponding episode in the novel. If, according to Hal's outline, Act One already pictures what kind of detective the hero of the story is, then the beginning of *Infinite Jest* should do this as well. Hence, the first chapter of Wallace's novel is the next focus of our attention.

The Split between the Narrator and the Protagonist

There are only a few sections in Wallace's novel in which a first-person narration is used. As Greg Carlisle points out, the majority of the chapters "consists of third-person narration, which ranges from objective reporting to extreme empathy for one or more characters, sometimes within a single section of text."[532] The sections in which the first-person narrator is Hal are set in the initial and the end parts of the narrative, and even though there are dozens of chapters between in which the protagonist and his functioning are described, Hal's own sensations are rarely as visible as they are in the first chapter. This said, throughout the novel Hal remains a very distant character, not only to us but also to the other characters. Act One, as Hal names the first scene of the television episode, initiates us, however, into his thinking, feelings, and behavior in a direct way, simultaneously shedding light on the enormous size of the narrative. Since Hal as a first-person narrator "disappears" after the first chapter only to reappear hundreds of pages later, the role of this episode is more than crucial.

The chapter consists of Hal's interview with three deans. A year after the main events, he has applied for admission to the tennis program of the University of Arizona. Hal has been invited to the interview due to an "incongruity" in his

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[531] Burn 2011, 36–38.
[532] Carlisle 2007, 25.

application.[533] Instead of the two required application essays, he has written nine, each one more sophisticated than the other. While these essays seem to display Hal's intellectual brilliance, his SAT test scores, especially verbal scores, have proved to be "subnormal."[534] For the reader, this incongruity is even more surprising than it is for the deans, since as a narrator of the chapter, he is very precise and articulate. As a participant in the scene, however, Hal does not speak. His spokesman is Charles Tavis, his uncle and the director of the tennis academy in which he has studied. Consequently, there is a peculiar narrative tension in Act One: Hal is the narrator-protagonist in Act One, but as a main character, who is bodily present in the storyworld he is narrating about, he is not completely "there." Nonetheless, when Hal begins his narration, his first words imply the exact opposite: "I am in here."[535]

When the deans express their concern over the test scores, Hal, instead of answering, describes his instant bodily reactions to the reader: "My chest bumps like a dryer with shoes in it. I compose what I project will be seen as a smile. I turn this way and that, slightly, sort of directing the expression to everyone in the room."[536] Although this description can be interpreted as the applicant's normal nervousness or as a form of shyness, Hal's outer behavior turns out to be more exceptional than it first seems. His uncle hastens to call Hal's "smile" "a facial tic, slightly, at all the adrenaline of being here on your impressive campus," but one of the deans construes the expression to mean that Hal may be in pain.[537] Is he? Even if he was not, there is a significant mismatch between his thinking and his expressions. The reader's impression is that Hal is deep inside his own mind and the whole interview takes place as if he were not there. Compared to McGarrett and Furillo, Hal is in a league of his own in terms of loneliness, as he seems to be disconnected from social reality altogether.

What Hal embodies is a new type of lonely hero, a type that would be difficult to execute in television drama. Instead, a literary narrative enables a split between the narrator and the main character, and from this division rises the fundamental philosophical problem posed in *Infinite Jest*. Hal's internal pep-talk introduces a *solipsistic* set of questions, for which the narrator's "extreme empathy" in the later chapters provides a necessary counterbalance.[538] This tension between solipsism and empathy, in its variations – loneliness vs. social intercourse, self vs. other, individual vs. community – is what *Infinite Jest* as a novel is concerned with. Moreover, this split is crucial as regards the other narrative voices, since it enables the representation of the protagonist as disconnected from the narrator, and further, as an immobile character in the middle of action. Thus, the catatonic hero who is

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[533] *IJ*, 6.
[534] *IJ*, 6.
[535] *IJ*, 3.
[536] *IJ*, 5.
[537] *IJ*, 5.
[538] Carlisle 2007, 25.

"carried here and there across sets" and whose emergence Hal predicted in his essay, is executed in *Infinite Jest* as a protagonist who is "divorced from all stimulus" of the storyworld , and as "human furniture" that is distanced from its own narrative voice on the other.[539] The strong image Hal gives about the non-action hero and his burly extras should then be interpreted, initially, as an immobile, and yet functioning body that is surrounded by a legion of narrative voices and side characters.

As an individual who "furnishes" the social reality only through his body, Hal finds it difficult to communicate with others. This already becomes clear in the first chapter. The interview gets only worse as the deans ask Charles to leave the room and let Hal speak for himself. Again we hear Hal's stream of consciousness, even his intended reply, but not what he actually says or does. Hal seems to say:

> My application's not bought […] I am not just a boy who plays tennis. I have an intricate history. Experiences and feelings. I'm complex. […] I *read*. […] I study and read. I bet I've read everything you've read. […] I consume libraries. […] But it transcends the mechanics. I'm not a machine. I feel and believe.[540]

But as Hal continues to his narrative audience, "[f]rom the yellow Dean's expression, there's a brutal wind blowing from my direction […]. Eight eyes have become blank discs that stare at whatever they see."[541] It seems that the only thing the deans have been able to hear from Hal's direction are "[ʃ]ubanimalistic noises and sounds."[542] According to Hal's own description, he is then:

> half-dragged […] through a loose mob of Administrative people by the Comp. Director – who appears to have thought variously that I am having a seizure (prying open my mouth to check for a throat clear of tongue), […] that I am psychotically out of control (various postures and grips designed to transfer that control to him)

– all the way "off to some Emergency Room."[543] As the frightened deans read his behavior, the boy may be a genius and a "balletic athlete," but he clearly needs care: "Balletic compensation for deep problems which *you* sir," one of them says to Charles, "choose to disguise by muzzling the boy in there."[544] I will give a more detailed explanation of these Hal's communicational incongruities and possible psychic problems in a moment, but at this point it is worth recalling that, according to Hal's essay, the hero of non-action is carried here and there by burly extras. Thus, the first scene represents a literal variation of the original idea: the side characters

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[539] *IJ*, 142, 835.
[540] *IJ*, 12–13; original italics.
[541] *IJ*, 12.
[542] *IJ*, 14; original italics.
[543] *IJ*, 13, 16.
[544] *IJ*, 15; original italics.

carry the protagonist around, as the protagonist lies "restrained and immobile" on a stretcher, and feels that he has "become an infantophile."[545]

That Hal feels like an infant is not only a regressive feeling as such, it is also a condition in which he escapes an oppressive social situation. The social pressures were also emphasized in his essay three years earlier: whereas in *Hawaii Five-0* there was no mystery but only the hero, Frank Furillo of *Hill Street Blues* no longer investigated cases, he only commanded his precinct.[546] Being a shepherd for his herd, he had to stay calm to delegate investigations. Now, when one continues Hal's thought, the hero that would logically replace "the placid Frank" ought to be even *more placid*, since not only was the hero pulled out from the area of heroic action, he also had to tolerate steadily growing pressures coming from all directions.[547] Therefore, the character that would come after the Stoic bureaucrat has to be a solipsistic person who is negligent of social life and the obligations of society, and hence, an infantophile of sorts. On the basis of Act One, Hal is indeed this kind of hero.

As a whole, the first chapter of *Infinite Jest* nevertheless conceals more than it reveals. Why is Hal so distant? What is his "intricate history?"[548] The most important clue for the reader is given at the end of the chapter, where, in the emergency room, Hal's narration moves briefly to earlier episodes of his life, mentioning the "only other emergency room I have ever been in, almost exactly one year back."[549] The first episode is the only one that takes place in a year called the "Year of Glad": most of the scenes take place approximately one year before the interview. Therefore, it might be presumed that the causes for Hal's condition may be found from the main events. Moreover, the fact that Hal is lying immobile on a stretcher for the second time within a year leads the reader to assume that something similar might have happened a year back. Nor is this the first time Hal feels himself to be an infantophile either: in one of his tacit, unspoken replies to the deans, Hal comments on his essays by saying that "[i]f I'd done you one from the last year, it would look to you like some sort of infant's random stabs on a keyboard."[550]

Thanks to these clues, the reader is capable of supposing a case: the mystery of an immobile detective. But since *Infinite Jest* is an encyclopedic novel and already the first chapters introduce a great many other characters beside Hal, it is possible to hold a view that the narrative as a whole cannot only concern the mystery of Hal's

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545 *IJ*, 16.
546 *IJ*, 141.
547 *IJ*, 142. Also, one potential direction from which the new type of hero faces social pressures is the audience. *Infinite Jest* deals with performers who are hyperconscious, and thus overtly conscious of *being watched*. As Hal himself writes in his essay, Frank Furillo is a "'post'-modern hero" (*IJ*, 142), which positions the hero following him as a "post-postmodern" character. For more, see ch. 5.1.
548 *IJ*, 11.
549 *IJ*, 16.
550 *IJ*, 9.

lack of social skills.[551] Is there, then, any hint in the conclusion of Hal's essay that would explain the encyclopedism of the narrative? There is, for included in the weightiest sentence of the essay is an allusion to "burly extras whose blood sings with retrograde amines."[552] Since this mysterious, and undeniably rhetorically flourish remark asks for interpretation, on the basis of conclusions thus far – Hal as a narrator-protagonist split in two, the detective as a mystery – I next widen the perspective and discuss the world around the catatonic hero. In this way we will gain a better grasp of not only who the burly extras are, but also what they have to do with Hal.

"So yo then man what's your *story?"*

When the detective becomes the mystery, the reader needs to form a big picture of the narrative in order to contextualize that mystery. In the case of *Infinite Jest* this is far from easy, since the novel represents three main narrative threads with a number of secondary ones, partly intertwining plot lines, dozens of secondary characters, a circular structure and nearly two hundred fragmented episodes. Proceeding through the bulk of the narrative, one is nevertheless able to deduce a fundamental guideline from the first observations after the opening episode: the deeds of the side characters, simultaneous subplots, and alternative storylines often either support or reflect the protagonist's condition. For instance, the reclusive and socially inhibited Ken Erdery, a drug addict we encounter in the second episode, resembles Hal, and through his character, we may begin investigating Hal who, twenty pages later, is revealed to be an addict as well. Both Ken and Hal also prefer to get high in solitude, whereby two thematically binding elements between the characters can be discerned: individual isolation, and addictive behavior.[553]

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[551] *IJ*, 3–181; see Carlisle 2007, 17–18.

[552] *IJ*, 142.

[553] Ken Erdery reflects Hal's condition, but he also provides a thematic key to the novel. When we first encounter him, he is waiting in his apartment for a phone call from a woman who has promised him marijuana. While waiting, Ken, frustrated and anxious, goes through in his mind all the procedures it takes to "own marijuana one more last time" (*IJ*, 19), and slips constantly into hypercriticism and fear. As calm and casual as he tries to be, he has become fond of secrecy. He has, for instance, lied to his earlier supplier that he is a speed freak so that the supplier would not get to know his real addiction, marijuana. Furthermore, when Ken smokes marijuana, he prefers to isolate himself in his home, where he does things that, for him, increase the enjoyable effects of taking dope, namely masturbating, watching entertainment cartridges, and eating cakes, cookies, and chocolate frostings. But as we are also told, the flip side of smoking marijuana is fear. More than other people who could find out his addiction, Ken is afraid of dope as such. He has tried to quit "maybe 70 or 80 times" (*IJ*, 18), and although he does not use marijuana daily, we can be quite positive about his addiction. It is equally revealing that his quitting strategy consists of forcing himself to smoke the large amount of dope he has bought as fast as he can, "to make the whole experience so unpleasant [...] that his behavior would be henceforward modified" (*IJ*, 22). In other words, Ken tries to cure "himself by excess" (*IJ*, 22). As a whole, the episode depicts the typical circumstances of most of the characters in *Infinite Jest*: lonely at home, still but on edge, Ken is waiting for human contact yet also avoiding it. Instead of enjoying the company of others, he seeks satisfaction from the substance that

As Robert Bell and William Dowling put it, Wallace's novel is "a story about the fragmented, alienated, lonely quality of life in the modern age – a world where it's possible to see everyone as an isolated consciousness locked away within the cages of the skull, communicating only with great difficulty with others."[554] The description is clearly in line with the picture we get from the first two chapters. Both Hal and Ken seem isolated consciousnesses who are "locked away" within themselves. But who are the others Bell and Dowling are referring to? And who actually sees everyone from the solipsistic point of view? These questions help us to define Hal's character further, but before proceeding with them, a short description of the settings is in place.

The events are set in Post-Millennial North America. The novel takes place mostly on an imaginary hilltop in Enfield, Massachusetts, where the two central institutions of the narrative are located. Only a hilltop between them, the institutions are the Enfield Tennis Academy (E.T.A.), a boarding school Hal has attended since the age of seven, and the Ennet House Drug Alcohol Recovery facility. As an institution, "[t]he rich tennis school for blond gleaming tennis kids" does not differ much from the half-way house next to it.[555] The first thing we get to know about the daily practices in the boarding school is that "there's always been a certain percentage of the high-caliber adolescent players at E.T.A. who manage their internal weathers chemically."[556] Since the academy is a high-profile boarding school in which the young tennis athletes are trained for a professional career, it maintains a severe set of rules: even the use of alcohol is strictly prohibited. This strictness leads a number of students to hide their involvement with "recreational substances" and form, as a group, a symbolic underworld beneath the academy.[557] Hal belongs to this percentage, as he uses marijuana on a daily basis and "likes to get high in secret."[558] But just as crucial as this hobby is for him, as well as for the big picture of the novel, it is equally significant that in the course of the year of the main events, Hal also becomes aware of the side-effects of his hobby; he realizes he is addicted, and what used be fun and enjoyable is now compulsive and "horrific."[559]

Thus, the scene of events is clearly symbolic. The boarding school that maintains strict discipline and repetitive routines on the one hand, and suitable, yet secretive environment for the young boys to experiment with drugs on the other, symbolizes the beginning of the cycle of drug abuse. Correspondingly, the half-way house is a symbolic place where the drug experimenting may eventually lead. In this

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scares him. For more, see ch. 5.1.
[554] Bell & Dowling 2005, 9.
[555] *IJ*, 198.
[556] *IJ*, 53.
[557] *IJ*, 53. The narrator calls various substances "recreational" since the idea is to "blow out all the circuits and slowly recover and be almost neurologically reborn" (*IJ*, 53). This circular routine, as I discuss in chapter 6.1., is a common thread that runs throughout the novel.
[558] *IJ*, 49.
[559] *IJ*, 1065.

respect, E.T.A. and Ennet House are not only milieus but also the states of addiction most addicts go through. Yet the emphasis of the narrative is on the end parts of this cycle, and we rarely follow the first and still enjoyable phases of experimenting with substances. Thus, whereas the first narrative thread of the novel deals with Hal's student life, it is the second thread – the one encircling the inhabitants of Ennet House – that offers our main perspective on the reality of a drug addict.

We are now able to make a preliminary distinction: if Hal embodies an isolated consciousness, then there is a flock of "others," namely the recovering addicts. For this division, it is illustrative that at the end of Act One, Hal has a vision of "someone blue-collar and unlicensed," perhaps a hospital security guard, who asks him "So yo then man what's *your* story?"[560] This question does not only set the narrative in motion, it also offers a notable clue that helps the reader to link Hal's condition to the excessive number of subplots.[561] To begin with, "What's your story?" points to the process of story-telling, the one that presumably is about to take place. Interestingly, however, what now occurs is a launching of several *other* stories beside Hal's. In fact, in the course of the following hundreds of pages, the reader encounters dozens of stories of people Hal does not even know. The character we get to know most about is Don Gately, a tutor in Ennet House and a complete stranger to the residents of E.T.A. Besides Don, we get to know a great deal about Hal's deceased father.

Although the narrative refuses to tell Hal's story in a way we expect, one should pay attention to the implications of this narrative strategy. Instead of waiting for Hal as a narrator to do what he as a protagonist was unable to do in the first episode – that is, to speak – it would be more sensible to see him passing the narrator's address forward. Thus, the security guard's question also points to the role of *identification* – someone is willing to hear someone else's story – and as a part of narrative, the question that concludes the opening episode, would then imply not so much the security guard's as *the narrator's* willingness to identify on the one hand, and the narrator's role as a moderator on the other. What makes Wallace's novel complex is the variety of narrators and points of view, but this interpretation would make it easier to understand.

Indeed, in *Infinite Jest*, there is a lot to identify with, as most of the characters are knee-deep in the psychological processes of identification and addiction. While some repeatedly try to identify with other people or with themselves, others immerse themselves in drugs and entertainment. Some long to become celebrities or professional athletes; others try to identify with the expectations their parents have had of them.[562] Identification in the world of *Infinite Jest* is rarely a positive, sincere

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[560] *IJ*, 17; original italics.
[561] See Bell & Dowling 2005, 17.
[562] The kids of E.T.A. are said to have "given themselves away to an ambitious competitive pursuit" (*IJ*, 53), but according to the narrator, it is "a gentle fiction that 100   of [the] students are enrolled at

act. This becomes clear, for instance, in the tennis philosophy of E.T.A., according to which professional tennis players are not only athletes but also *entertainers*: they are at the "Show" to meet the expectations of the audience.[563] But the kids of E.T.A. are not alone in their growing pursuit to match the needs of others, as it is the course that the whole of North American culture has taken. According to American experience, as a narrator stresses, "people are virtually unlimited in their need to give themselves away, on various levels," and by giving oneself away one means identifying: Post-Millennial America is not only a world of unrestricted freedom of choice but also a world of desire and pathological identification.[564] Drugs are only the tip of the iceberg, as there are numerous ways to "escape emotionally," from work and exercise to sleeping, sex and food.[565] This *emotional escape* can also have narcissistic side-effects: one can become addicted to oneself, developing "a compulsive and unhealthy relationship with [one's] own thinking."[566] From this perspective, Hal's solitary dwelling on himself is a clear manifestation of addiction and pathological thinking.

Being mostly a less positive act, identification (or addiction) can be turned into empathy, however. The emphasis on the respondent in the original question of "What's *your* story?" implies that there are several stories to identify with, and that the sole willingness to listen to such stories tells something crucial about the listener's willingness to learn from these stories. One of the fundamental reasons for the encyclopedic nature of *Infinite Jest* in the first place is that its narrator *listens*, by including in the narrative a great many recovery stories, a whole compendium of addictions. Nevertheless, at their diegetic level, that is at the social level of the storyworld, these stories have another purpose, which can be divided threefold: as a group, the stories alleviate the addicts' prevailing condition, create a bond between the speakers and the audience, and let the other addicts learn about each speaker's story. At this level, identification is a curative human deed. Moreover, it is at this

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their own ambitious volition and not that of [...] their parents" (*IJ*, 984). Hal, for instance, suffers from the ambiguous lack of expectations his mother Avril has of him and his brothers, her "nonjudgmental love and pride" that depend "in no way on achievement or performance or potential talent" (*IJ*, 155). See. ch. 5.1.

[563] *IJ*, 188.

[564] *IJ*, 53.

[565] *IJ*, 202, 998; see Hirt 2008, 25–41.

[566] *IJ*, 203. As the narrator lists, "[t]hat 99 of compulsive thinker's thinking is about themselves; that 99 of this self-directed thinking consists of imagining and then getting ready for things that are going to happen to them; and then, weirdly, that if they stop to think about it, that 100 of the things they spend 99 of their time and energy imagining and trying to prepare for all the contingencies and consequences of are *never good*." (*IJ*, 203–204; original italics). In this respect, it is illustrative that, in Wallace's novel, the United States, Canada and Mexico have formed a coalition called O.N.A.N (the Organization of North American Nations). The acronym is highly representational since Onan is a biblical character who is linked with masturbation and *coitus interruptus*. "Spilling the seed" is a non-procreational act and an image of self-centered satisfaction. Similarly, the O.N.A.N culture is a pleasure-oriented culture that dumps its (mostly US) waste in "Concavity," the territory formerly known as northern New England.

level where the ambiguous relation between the opening episode and the rest of the novel, as well as between immobile Hal and the minor characters, become more understandable. One needs to only apply the AA routines to the principles of narration.

This is where Ennet House enters the big picture of the novel: "What's *your* story?" is a question we can well imagine being asked in a place like an AA meeting of a halfway house. And whereas the plots that depict the daily routines of E.T.A. picture Hal and his friends' complex but enthusiastic procedures to gain and use different narcotics and do this in secret, the Ennet House thread shows people who have already gone through the cycle. First, the recovering addicts have identified themselves with the substance; then, they have become addicted as taking the drug has become a daily routine; and finally, they try to get rid of (that is, de-identify with) the substance by identifying with new, more healthy things. As a part of their new routines the recovering addicts participate in daily AA meetings in which they aim at identifying with their fellows' stories in order to learn about themselves and the addiction they share. To get a picture of the cycle of identification, addiction, and empathy they have gone through, it is worth quoting at length one of the Ennet House episodes:

> The residents' House counselor suggest that they sit right up at the front of the hall where they can see the pores in the speaker's nose and try to Identify instead of Compare. Again, Identify means empathize. Identifying, unless you've got a stake in Comparing, isn't very hard to do here. Because if you sit up front and listen hard, all the speakers' stories of decline and fall and surrender are basically alike, and like your own: fun with the Substance, then very gradual less fun, then significantly less fun […] yes gradually less and less actual fun but with some physical need for the Substance, now, instead of former voluntary fun; then at some point suddenly just very little fun at all, combined with terrible daily hand-trembling need, then dread, anxiety, irrational phobias, dim siren-like memories of fun, trouble with assorted authorities, knee-buckling headaches, mild seizures, and the litany of what Boston AA calls Losses […] then more Losses […] then less mild seizures […] then unbelievable psychic pain […] then vocational ultimatums, unemployability, financial ruin […] and then you're in serious trouble […]. You are, as they say, Finished. You cannot get drunk and you cannot get sober; you cannot get high and you cannot get straight. You are behind bars; you are in a cage and see only bars in every direction. You are in the kind of a hell of a mess that either ends lives or turns them around. You are at a fork in the road that Boston AA calls your Bottom.[567]

From the ex-addicts' perspective, identification means then more than just sticking

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[567] *IJ*, 345–347.

with the drug or with one's compulsive thinking patterns. "The only way to hang onto sobriety is to *give it away*," whereupon instead of giving *oneself* away like most Americans tend to do, recovering addicts are turning to other people as they "spread the message" and thus project the sobriety forward.[568] For the same reason, they learn in their meetings to empathize instead of comparing: in order to overcome the narcissistic course of their lives, they are educating themselves to be healthy members of the community.

Since the dominant perspective of *Infinite Jest* is the ex-addict's view, the emphasis in the original question is more than significant. The multitude of stories following the question "What's *your* story?" should not cloud the fact that for the ex-addict, the stories are "alike, and like your own."[569] And not only that: the stories are also told *after* the lowest point of one's addiction, "the Bottom" has been reached. Since each drug addict has a story to tell – each story having a hero of its own – and the stories are alike, consequently there is only one type of hero, namely the individual who has reached the Bottom and is now recovering. The details of Hal's own story are never exposed completely, but if his story follows this pattern, it makes Hal a recovering addict.

Before I continue arguing for this possibility, let us recall the burly extras. *Infinite Jest* lacks the active hero (at least on the diegetic level), and Hal's own point of view is rarely visible, but the side characters – their stories and subplots – bring him to the center of the narrative nevertheless. The stories of minor characters are narrated as if to reflect Hal's condition (his past, present, and possible future) or supplement its details. Often, the stories also support the general thematic of the novel. More precisely, each subplot concerning a "burly extra" includes Hal in one way or another: either as a family member and a schoolmate or as one's early, addicted version. Also, in E.T.A. Hal is considered a lexical prodigy and a tennis talent, and everyone in his family pays him special attention as well, even his deceased father. From all directions, Hal "is now being encouraged to identify himself as a late-blooming prodigy and possible genius at tennis on the verge of making every authority-figure in his world and beyond very proud indeed."[570] Not even the third narrative thread, which follows a Quebecois separatist group, leaves Hal out of the picture or without identification: the whole Incandenza family is placed under investigation, since the last movie of Hal's film-director father is rumored to be used as a weapon of terrorism, and as I examine this detail later, Jim Incandenza's one reason for directing that film concerned Hal. Thus, the Quebecois separatists not only aim at identifying people (including Hal) who know more about the film, but also the film is intended to make Hal identify with its content.

Hal remains in the picture, then, whether the scenes change or not. But as

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568 *IJ*, 344; italics added.
569 *IJ*, 345.
570 *IJ*, 155.

much as the side characters and their stories carry the immobile hero across sets, we still need to keep in mind the importance of the first episode.[571] In it, the split of the narrator-protagonist pushes the protagonist to the fore, while the narrator withdraws into the background. This reciprocity implies that since the opening chapter, Hal is "there," in the middle of the scenes, but not completely, not as a similar narrator as he was in the first episode. As part of the narrative strategy, Hal does not answer the question of the anonymous security guard, but instead lets the others speak. This, in turn, implies that he participates, at least indirectly, in the act of story-telling later as well.

Following these notions, it becomes possible to define *Infinite Jest* as a metaphysical detective story. When we applied Hal's essay to the first chapter of the novel, we were able to track the case. Whether or not there is a crime in Wallace's novel – a matter I am about to ponder in a moment – the infantophile hero's "intricate history" is a mystery that launches the narrative. However, what we saw following the opening episode was the sprouting of minor narratives that can be divided into recovery stories, in which the reverse side of Hal's hobby is exposed, and in the subplots, in which Hal is a marginal character, and yet is submitted to identification. As an encyclopedic narrative, *Infinite Jest* is a metaphysical quest in which Hal plays a dual role of subject and object, catatonic hero and narrative voice. Our final step at this point is to analyze some of the key aspects of Hal's past in order to gain a grasp of his metaphysical quest. To complete our analysis of the catatonic hero, attention must be paid to the missing year, the year preceding the interview with the deans.

Committing a Crime, Abandoning All Hope

In Act One, Hal mentioned that it was his second time in the emergency room within a year. Generally we get to know next to nothing about the year following this visit, but according to another comment of Hal's that I quoted earlier, his previous "infantophile" condition may have lasted for a considerably long period of time, perhaps a whole semester: "If I'd done you one [essay] from the last year, it would look to you like some sort of infant's random stabs on a keyboard."[572] Since the interview takes place in late November and the main events exactly a year before, Hal's allusion to "the last year" appears confusing: during the main events Hal is still

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[571] Extraordinarily many of the characters beside him are described as being literally burly. Both of Hal's parents are tall, and his older brother Orin is a professional football player and hence strong and well-built. Don Gately, the protagonist of the Ennet thread is the "size of a young dinosaur, with a massive and almost perfectly square head" (*IJ*, 55). Hugh Steeply, an agent of the political thread of *Infinite Jest*, is a huge man disguised as a female reporter, "a girl and a half in all directions" (*IJ*, 246). Even the separatist group of Quebecois wheelchair assassins are "awfully burly" (*IJ*, 245). Therefore, literally, Hal is surrounded by bulky side characters – burly extras indeed.
[572] *IJ*, 9.

functioning, and thus the last year must refer either to the month following these events, namely December, or to the previous semester.

Several other episodes – of which only a few deal with Hal – imply that the infantophile condition is a general withdrawal symptom. There are also a number of implications which suggest that giving up a drug may cause even more pain than continuing its use. According to one episode, if one spends time around a facility such as Ennet House, one acquires "a little-mentioned paradox of Substance addiction […]: that once you are sufficiently enslaved by a Substance to need to quit the Substance in order to save your life, the enslaving Substance has become so deeply important to you that you will all but lose your mind when it is taken away from you."[573] Earlier, Kate Gombert, an Ennet House resident, tells her doctor that there may be a connection between her depression and her recurrent decisions to stop using drugs, and that as soon as "an overall nauseous feeling" has settled in, she becomes paralyzed.[574] While both of these two examples mirror Hal's condition, losing one's mind and becoming paralyzed are precisely a prerequisite for the infantophile condition. Both are symptoms, not causes. And they are symptoms of "Disease," an addiction that only reveals its depth after one sincerely aims at beating a harmful habit.

Since the roots of Hal's condition is the mystery of *Infinite Jest*, it is easy to associate this mystery with the crime motif of the metaphysical detective story. In Wallace's novel, however, the students of E.T.A. use a phrase "Please commit a crime" as a password for taking drugs, and for Hal, that clearly is not the case.[575] His real crime, even more fatal than the prolonged use of narcotics, is quitting the drug, *uncommitting a crime*. In an endnote that is almost hidden amidst the cruft of material, Hal explicitly considers taking this step: "[w]hat if it was that I was doing it more and more and it was getting less fun but I was still doing it more and more, and the only way to moderate would be to like wave a hankie at it altogether."[576] According to Michael Pemulis, Hal's friend and the drug lord of E.T.A., this decision – waving a hankie, that is, quitting the drug – would only make things worse: "You lose your mind, Inc. You die inside. […] If you need the Bob, Inc, you can only quit the Bob if you move onward and up to something else."[577]

Together this endnote and the first episode imply that Hal indeed "waves a hankie." The narrator's impression, according to which Hal has "abruptly Abandoned All Hope," is backed up by one of the side characters, as Hal drops by Ennet House to borrow a brochure.[578] Hal's own reason for this visit is that he "had for some time been interested in sort of an idle, largely speculatively way in

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[573] *IJ*, 200–201.
[574] *IJ*, 77.
[575] *IJ*, 171.
[576] *IJ*, 1064.
[577] *IJ*, 1065.
[578] *IJ*, 796.

considering maybe dropping in on some sort of Substance Anonymous meeting and everything like that, basically as just something to do," but as Johnette Foltz, the staff member on duty and an ex-addict, considers, this is the usual "roundabout Denial shit."[579] She also notes the "kid" having "a burbly, oversalivated quality" in his talk that is "of somebody who'd just lately put down the pipe and/or bong."[580] Thus, we do not only get a proof of Hal's attempt to quit the drug, but also an explanation for his behavior in Act One, as Johnette's observation explains the cause of those "subanimalistic noises and sounds" Hal makes during the interview.[581]

Stephen J. Burn has discussed the causes of Hal's condition and suggested that instead of dropping marijuana or watching his father's lethally entertaining film, it is more likely that Hal has "moved onward" as his friend encouraged him to do.[582] This would involve experimenting with a new, "ontologically disruptive" drug called DMZ, which in the course of the main events is never taken, but is stolen from Pemulis's stash at the end.[583] But as Burn admits, all the alternatives are equally possible, each having enough evidence to give the reader "suggestive hints," instead of "solutions to the novel's puzzle."[584] Yet whatever the cause is, there is a period of a year that separates Hal's decision to quit marijuana from his collapse at the interview. And unlike the causes, this missing year, along with the effects, is what matters: the narrative leaves the events of this year completely out, and whether or not these events involve taking DMZ or watching Jim Incandenza's last film, the year-long gap is not only *too long*, it also raises a question whether the withdrawal symptoms still continue.[585]

The only thing we get to know about the missing year for sure, is that even though Hal is unable to converse and his essays at that time are more like an infant's random stabs, the negotiations with the University of Arizona have been underway since February.[586] This means that despite his possible collapse earlier, at the beginning of the Year of Glad, nearly a year before the interview, Hal "can still function to a high-level of athletic excellence."[587] During the last weeks of the main events, in November, Hal worries about the upcoming SAT next month – "I'll have to finish prepping for the Boards and then take the Boards while still in abrupt withdrawal" – along with the possibility of getting caught in the monthly drug

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579 *IJ*, 787.
580 *IJ*, 787.
581 We also witness Hal's attempt to attend "[t]he most distant and obscure" (*IJ*, 795) Narcotics Anonymous meeting. However, the brochure Hal gets from Johnette is out-of-date, and Hal ends up in a Men's Movement session. Hence, at this point he does not get the help he would need to beat the addiction.
582 Burn 2011, 37–38; *IJ*, 141.
583 Burn 2011, 37.
584 Ibid., 38.
585 All of the possible causes nevertheless involve addiction: Hal's dependence on marijuana is well-known, whereas both DMZ and the film are rumored to be extremely addictive.
586 See *IJ*, 4.
587 Burn 2011, 37.

tests.[588] As we know from the first episode, the first of these worries proves real at least, but as one of the deans comments, the test scores have only fallen off "to outstanding from three previous years of frankly incredible."[589] In other words, Hal has either managed to function through SAT tests up to February at least ("while still in abrupt withdrawal"), or the test scores are not completely truthful. In fact, when one of the deans expresses his concern about incongruities in Hal's test scores, he refers to "a secondary-school transcript from the institution where both your mother and her brother are administrators."[590]

It is likely that Hal has become infantophile soon after the main events, and his uncle and mother have forged his test scores. As these burly extras have literally carried him through the tests, the SAT test score fraud exposes an even more striking matter: if Hal has got caught and yet *has not* got expelled from E.T.A., why does he collapse a year after? In this matter as well, the Ennet House thread is of help. "The Crocodiles," the addicts who have been sober for years, have witnessed "how many new guys they've seen Come In and then get sucked back Out There," since "the Disease is fiendishly patient."[591] Don Gately, having been Substance-free for nearly one and a half years, is not, for his part, "hot on NA" either: "so many relapses and unhumble returns," since there is "a difference between abstinence v. recovery."[592] While there is a chance that there is no connection between Hal's two visits at the emergency room – that the collapse in the opening episode does not result from "Abandoning All Hope" a year before – an ellipsis of this length leaves the reader more than enough room for interpretation. Do not the experiences Gately shares with the Crocodiles suggest, however, that Hal has relapsed again? Has not his abstinence a year before become a way to recovery?

Moreover, according to the Crocodiles, the usual story is that after a while, the newcomers tend to become "cocky" as they see "things start to get better, head-wise and life-quality-wise."[593] And as they start to think they have gotten well, they gradually drift away from the meetings, and "without the protection of meetings or a Group," they finally forget the Disease, only to find that their wellness was not on a solid basis after all, and that their commitment to recovery process was only

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588 *IJ*, 784.
589 *IJ*, 6.
590 *IJ*, 6. This second option is likely, especially when we set it against Hal's worries much later: "if I get caught. If I come up dirty-urined in front of O.N.A.N.T.A [the Organization of North American Tennis Association], what could C.T. [Charles Tavis] do? It's not just that I'd lose my even year in 18's. He'd have to give me the Shoe if he'd brought O.N.A.N.T.A. into it. And what about Himself's [Hal's father] memory? I'm directly related to Himself. Not to mention Orin [Hal's celebrity big brother] [...]. The hideous thing is how brightly it'd come out, if I flunk a urine. E.T.A.'ll be publicly hurt." (*IJ*, 783–784). This option rules out the possibilities that Hal has either taken DMZ or watched "Entertainment," since it seems unlikely that he would have been able to play in tennis matches and compete after that.
591 *IJ*, 355.
592 *IJ*, 277.
593 *IJ*, 355.

partial.[594] Hence, the Disease returns. From our perspective, one fundamental reason why these cocky newcomers drift away lies in the AA philosophy, which especially for the educated and skeptical residents may seem "Unitarian happy horseshit" and "a cover for some glazed and canny cult-type of thing."[595] Many newcomers may find the foundation of a twelve-step-program, that is, God, or "a Power greater than ourselves," hard to accept, not to mention the numerous clichés and phrases of the Program's slang.[596]

Now consider Hal, a lexical prodigy who in nearly every conversation he has during the events, remarks on the others' phrasings; Hal, who clearly has difficulties in belonging to a group; Hal, who is "too sharp to ever buy the God-Squad shit."[597] Is it not obvious that Hal, soon after the main events, relapses? *Infinite Jest* begins with the interview, but as much as the purpose of Act One is to raise expectations, it is the end of the episode that matters. Hal is asked what his story is, and after one relapse and a year after he is readier to confess his addiction. Everybody in Boston AA "knows that the returning slippee has punished himself enough just being Out There, and that it takes incredible desperation and humility to eat your pride and wobble back In and put the Substance down again after you've fucked up the first time and the Substance is calling you all over again."[598] That Hal has relapsed once would also explain why he mentions in the beginning of the narrative that he is "in here": "In Here" is one of the common phrases the Crocodiles use constantly.[599] As a phrase, it protects one from returning "Out There," being "a goofily simple practical recipe for how to remember you've got the Disease day by day and how to treat the Disease day by day."[600]

As a conclusion, *Infinite Jest* is a recovery story that takes the form of a metaphysical quest. It is a story, as Paul M. Curtis puts it, whose "speaker presents

[594] *IJ*, 355.
[595] *IJ*, 348. Even Gately, an ex-burglar and a school dropout with a family background full of domestic violence and alcoholism, thinks there is "some definite cultish, brainwash elements to the AA program" (*IJ*, 369). He also thinks, however, that like many others, his "old brains needed a good scrub and soak anyway" (*IJ*, 369).
[596] The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/About-AA/The-12-Steps-of-AA> (12. Jan. 2018). The question is, as Gately considers, "how can you pray to a 'God' you believe only morons believe in," to which the Crocodiles give an unquestionable answer: "it doesn't yet matter what you believe and don't believe, Just Do It they say, and like a shock-trained organism without any kind of independent human will you do exactly like you're told, you keep coming and coming, nightly, [...] and not only does the urge to get high stay more or less away, but more general life-quality-type things [...] seem to get progressively somehow better (*IJ*, 350–351).
[597] *IJ*, 1066. Moreover, already in the early age Hal pays special attention to pleasing others – to acting as they expect him to act – which contrasts sharply with the "intensively social" (*IJ*, 362) Boston AA, especially because the group is "very sensitive to the presence of ego" (*IJ*, 367). As Gately observes, "[s]peakers who are accustomed to figuring out what an audience wants to hear and then supplying it find out quickly that this particular audience does not want to be supplied with what someone else thinks it wants" (*IJ*, 367–368). For this reason, Boston AA is "maximally unironic" (*IJ*, 369).
[598] *IJ*, 356.
[599] *IJ*, 3.
[600] *IJ*, 374.

the divided self of the former user and his self now as a recovering addict."[601] Hal is the true storyteller in disguise, the master narrator of the novel, who explores his desires and illnesses with the aid of "burly extras." Not only the aspects I have analyzed, but also the formal elements support this argument: the speech of the characters in the novel is systematically in single quotation marks, which implies that as a whole, the novel is an address from an unknown, unspecified, and yet very identifiable speaker, namely Hal. The first element of *Infinite Jest*'s encyclopedism results, then, from its narrator's mission. As a disguised narrative voice and a moderator, Hal lets the burly extras speak, which is why the narrative is filled with "alike" recovery stories and subplots. There is, then, a possibility, that Hal is there, as a moderator, to empathize with the others, and that he is sincerely willing to beat the addiction. But whereas the stories of addiction are to be identified with – like the AA protocol encourages – throughout the novel we also encounter digressive, even manic sections that mirror the complex and compulsive thinking of its main hero. What these stories testify is that the most substance-addicted people are also addicted to hiding and thinking. Therefore, in Hal's moderator character three modes of addiction are brought together: (1) a humble search for recovery through self-discovery; (2) a withdrawn, solipsistic fear of confronting other people; and (3) an all-questioning, egoistic attitude the ex-addicts call "Analysis-Paralysis."[602] These conflicting modes form what Curtis calls "the double bind" that in this case, is a form of paradoxical condition: on the one hand, the addict desperately seeks recovery within AA, and on the other, he wants nothing but to escape this salvation back into addiction.[603]

In this section I have analyzed Hal Incandenza as a paralyzed detective character that, divorced from all bodily stimulus, is nevertheless an active narrative agent. Moreover, I have analyzed symptoms of his "Disease," intentionally leaving the causes untouched. Concluding, and laying the ground for subsequent analysis, I lastly refer to those aspects of Hal's addiction we have only touched upon, namely Hal's family. Especially worth noting is the ambivalent relation between father and son. To begin with, Jim Incandenza has killed himself when Hal was eleven, by putting his head in the microwave. Hal has been the one in the family who found him, but while this seems a traumatizing event, the narrative rarely reveals Hal's own feelings about the incident. Nevertheless, besides Hal and Don Gately, the third, albeit more absent, protagonist is Hal's father, whose work and influence are depicted throughout the novel. Moreover, if there is one symbolic object in the novel, it is Jim's last film "Infinite Jest," which does not only have a crucial role in the story

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[601] Curtis 2016, 42.
[602] *IJ*, 203. "You can analyze it til you're breaking tables with your forehead and find a cause to walk away, back Out There, where the Disease is. Or you can stay and hang in and do the best you can" (*IJ*, 1002), as Gately counsels Geoffrey Day, one of the new residents.
[603] Curtis 2016, 39–42.

but is also exploited as a formal model of Hal's narrative. Rumored to be ecstatically entertaining, the film was made to raise Hal, from "the womb of solipsism" into life, but as Hal does not sink into the paralysis until several years after his father's suicide, "Infinite Jest" is more likely a tool Hal himself adopts from his father to save and explore himself.[604] And whereas Jim's film is paradoxical, driven by the opposite of an educational motif and having a paralyzing result, so is the son's narrative, as it is directed by the conflict of "Analysis-Paralysis" and overprotective empathy.[605]

These paternal elements – the absence of the father and his guidance, the son's attempt to continue the father's work, the possibility of father-related traumas – were only partially visible in Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations*. In *Infinite Jest* they emerge as well, as they guide and even activate the catatonic hero, helping him to deal with his addiction. It is, however, in Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, in which *trauma writing* becomes dominant. For this reason, a further type of metaphysical detective is needed. This character is *the traumatized detective*, and it will be our next focus.

4.3. The Traumatized Truant and an Absent Father

Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* consists of a network of plots that is at heart a metaphysical detective story. It has been common to consider *House of Leaves* as a (deconstructive) horror novel – for reasons I specify below – but as regards its plot lines, the novel mainly consists of both textual and concrete quests that turn from the acts of reading, writing, editing and exploring into ontological surveys. In this regard, *House of Leaves* particularly resembles Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Both novels are multi-layered narratives that have several, embedded ontological levels or frames. Formally, both narratives begin with a key text that is either followed or interrupted by the reader-protagonist's commentary. Both narratives evoke the simple formula of elegiac romance: the narrator studies the deeds of a deceased hero, and by gathering biographical and work-related evidence and examining them in the light of the key text, the narrator merges this examination with the investigation the dead

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[604] *IJ*, 893.
[605] A similar problem can be found when the formal procedure of *Infinite Jest* as a moderated conversation is compared with the AA meeting. Are these "talks" talking cures, as Tom LeClair (1996, 34) suggests? Mary K. Holland argues that they are not, since, for her, the AA program may provide a way out of addiction, but fundamentally, it is not a way to self-discovery, but a new "stand-in for the drug" (2006, 233, 240 n. 18). Since *Infinite Jest* is also a cultural project that seeks to overcome irony-saturated, narcissistic postmodernism, as I discuss subsequently, a more fruitful way to approach the novel would be the one Paul M. Curtis (2016) suggests: the novel represents the idea of double bind on various levels. Thus, the narrative simultaneously guides its epistemological agents into recovery *and* deepens their misery, thus giving both Hal and us either a new fix in the form of a cure, or a cure in the form of a new fix.

hero led earlier. And as with *Pale Fire*, in *House of Leaves* the reader-protagonist is not self-evidently *higher* in the ontological hierarchy than his hero. To this setting, Danielewski adds yet another level, namely the editorial notes concerning the prime commentary.

Unlike *Pale Fire*, however, at the center of *House of Leaves* is not a poem, but an ekphrastic and pseudoscientific description of a film called *The Navidson Record*. Written by a blind man named Zampanò, the description tells a classical haunted house story: a family moves into an old building, and occult events start to take place. Like Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths," this narrative thread includes a *mise en abyme* with a same title: *The Navidson Record* is not only the title of the film, it is also the title of Zampanò's manuscript about this very film.[606] The name refers to the father of the family, a famous photojournalist, Will Navidson, whose original intention was simply to film how:

> Karen and I bought a small house in the country and moved into it with our children. […] I just thought it would be nice to see how people move into a place and start to inhabit it. Settle in, maybe put down roots, interact, hopefully understand each other a little better. Personally, I just want to create a cozy little outpost for me and my family.[607]

The occult phenomena Navidson and his family witness concern the spatial aspects of the house. First, the house appears to disprove fundamental physical laws by being bigger inside than out. Then, secret corridors start to emerge in physically impossible places. With an increasing desire to solve and film this enigma, Navidson recruits an exploration team for in-depth examination. Subsequently, the house acquires yet another physically impossible feature, as the maze that has emerged inside and under the house, begins to change size, finally threatening the lives of both the team members and Navidson's family.

What makes it difficult to distinguish Navidson's film from Zampanò's ekphrasis, and vice versa, is that both are formally very similar. Neither of these texts is meant to be a straightforward horror story. Both records are filled with numerous additional parts and narrative digressions in which different scholars, journalists, and filmmakers comment on the original film. *The Navidson Record* is, then, a recontextualization or a remediation of a familiar horror story. But what makes both the film and the manuscript special, is revealed before Zampanò's account even begins. According to Johnny Truant, the reluctant heir of Zampanò's papers and the reader-protagonist of the novel, the blind man's "entire project is

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[606] For clarification, I distinguish between the two "Records." Henceforth, the film is *The Navidson Record*, and Zampanò's work is "The Navidson Record." The Navidson Record refers to their combination.

[607] *HL*, 8–9.

about a film which doesn't exist."[608] Thus, while the cinematic content appears very believable, this revelation reminds the reader that Zampanò's record is not so much an ekphrasis as a product of his imagination; that, he, as an author, offers a context for the non-existent film and this context is practically *everything there is*. More precisely, the film's context is *also* its very content, since it is Zampanò who imagines the haunted house tale – just like Ardenti in *Foucault's Pendulum* imagined the Templar conspiracy. Nevertheless, for the characters themselves the power of imagination is so strong that it makes both Zampanò and his heir Johnny believe in the existence of the haunted house – and not so much as a physical object as a pitch-black, dreadful, and dynamic space "in you."[609]

This relatively long plot summary is necessary to introduce the subject of this section, and the ontological position this character adopts in the narrative. In Danielewski's multi-framed novel, 27-year-old Johnny Truant's commentary is the outermost plot-oriented frame for *The Navidson Record*. As the novel exploits the formula of elegiac romance in portraying the remediation process from Zampanò through Johnny to the unknown narrative audience of the compiled (and edited) *House of Leaves* manuscript, Johnny is not only a mediator between Zampanò and the reader, but also an embedded model reader, and thus, a detective character.

To distinguish him from the metaphysical detective types I have analyzed so far, I call Johnny simply *a traumatized detective*. This typification is accurate, I believe, since unlike Jan of *The Gold Bug Variations* and Hal of *Infinite Jest*, Johnny has been badly traumatized in early childhood and has led a "disjointed life" ever since.[610] Moreover, although the death of their father figures has affected both Jan and Hal, in neither of these novels is trauma the central motif of the narrative. By contrast, in *House of Leaves* this is the case. The outermost plot-related narrative frame appears a trauma story, but as is typical of trauma writing, the truth is either represented in a symbolic form or remains unpresentable till the end. However, there are hints about the existence of trauma and they are given early in the novel. Johnny's father has died in a mysterious car accident when Johnny was ten, and although this accident is left almost without mention in Johnny's commentary, the absent or violent father figure is constantly present elsewhere in the narrative and in the background of Johnny's asides. Moreover, an even bigger domestic trauma than his father's death appears to concern Johnny's schizophrenic mother, who, after having tried to kill her baby boy, has been institutionalized. Sharing her "crumbling biology," Johnny is in a position in which he does not only carry this specific trauma "every day and evening" but also endures life without parents.[611]

"The Navidson Record", Zampanò's manuscript that, under its surface,

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[608] *HL*, xix.
[609] *HL*, xxii–xxiii.
[610] *HL*, 20.
[611] *HL*, 587, 638.

thematizes domestic exits and ambivalent father figures, forces Johnny to confront his traumas. When Johnny starts to compile Zampanò's material, his life takes a radical turn into worse, as if "The Navidson Record" would lead him to the painful self-discovery of his repressed memories, which he nevertheless is unable to remember as they happened. In this descent, Zampanò's role is crucial. Therefore, in this section, my focus is on Johnny's character. I began this chapter by analyzing Stuart Ressler as a rare father figure in the contemporary encyclopedic novel – rare because he is *present* – and I end the analysis by considering Zampanò an absent father figure that, in a fundamental way, shapes our perceptions of Johnny as a detective. More specifically, I start the analysis of a traumatized detective by taking under closer scrutiny the very trauma, namely details of Johnny's background, which include both the hints we immediately acknowledge, and the gaps and ambiguities in his biography that reveal themselves when comparing separate accounts. After that, I proceed to ask: What role does the missing father motif plays in Danielewski's novel, and what does it have to do with Johnny, Zampanò, and their mutual relation? As with the cases of Casaubon and Belbo, Stuart and Jan, as well as Hal and his burly extras, here too the general idea is to argue that through investigations both small and large scale, the epistemological agents on the plot level increase the encyclopedism of the narrative. This excess of information derives, however, from the protagonist's metaphysical quest, and this is the case in *House of Leaves* as well.

Scarred and Confused

As Johnny's surname implies, he is a rambler. The first sections of his "beat-style narrative" picture him as a dropout whose daywork at a tattoo shop does not prevent him spending drug-oriented nights with his friend Lude.[612] Since his father's death, Johnny has mainly drifted, and when he discovers Zampanò's manuscript, his wanderings only continue on a textual level: as Katharine Cox has observed, Johnny's idling and his "errant textual habits" are related.[613] In fact, excluding his attempts to translate the foreign quotes Zampanò has used, Johnny's remarks consist mostly of his own impulses, recollections, and stories. Thus, Johnny represents neither comments nor interpretations concerning the content of *The Navidson Record*. Instead, he digresses to tell about incidents in his own wrecked life.

However, whereas, formally, these relatively insignificant tales expand *House of Leaves* as a narrative, thematically they circle around undesirable memories – memories *The Navidson Record* reminds Johnny about. In one of the earliest asides, for instance, Johnny refers to the deep scars on his arms, about which he tends to

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[612] Fordham 2015, 44.
[613] Cox 2006, 6.

tell different stories to different people. At this point it seems clear that he refrains from telling what has really happened, perhaps because he does not want to remember:

> I'm sure most women know it's bull but hey, they're entertained. I also think it's somewhat of a relief not to hear the true story. I mean you look at the horror sweeping all the way up from my wrists to my elbows, and you have to take a deep breath and ask yourself, do I really want to know what happened there? In my experience, most people don't. They usually look away. My stories actually help them look away.
> Maybe they even help me look away.
> But I guess that's nothing new. We all create stories to protect ourselves.[614]

Presumably, like "most women," and despite the warnings about the true nature of the story, the reader certainly desires to know what has happened. Alison Gibbons has pointed out in relation to the novel's unusual admonition "This is not for you," that as the readers get a simultaneous invitation and prohibition of this kind, they get a sense of discomfort that nevertheless encourages them to go on.[615] Johnny's entertaining cover stories, as well as Navidson's warning in the film – "if one day you find yourself passing by that house, don't stop" – not only reflect the same idea, but also ask us to pay special attention to them.[616] They are warnings, but as it is conventional in horror fiction that neither characters nor readers take warnings seriously, primarily they are important signposts for the reader to invest in certain expectations about the story. In Johnny's case, they hint at the possibility of physically painful trauma.

Besides "The Navidson Record" and Johnny's personal commentary, the novel contains three sets of additional material of which Appendix II in particular serves as an aid for the reader as it consists of material that is related to Johnny.[617] From these editorial notes we may deduce a detached perspective to Johnny's recollections. The first references to Appendix II are made on pages 29 and 72, and thus in the 528-page narrative they give the reader access to necessary background data relatively early on. Two of its sections are of special importance. First, section D is the obituary of Johnny's father, Donnie, and it recounts the last stages of his life, as well as his death in a car accident, in a register of death notice. Then, section E, "The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute Letters," immediately following the obituary, consists of Pelafina Heather Lièvre's one-sided correspondence with her son, and covers the years 1982–1989. What makes these sections illustrative concern

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[614] *HL*, 20.
[615] Gibbons 2015, 30.
[616] *HL*, 4.
[617] Other sections of additional material are Exhibits, namely Zampanò's instructions for the plates to be included in his story, and the Appendix, which contains his excluded material.

the ambiguous roles of the father and mother?[618] The father's role is discussed subsequently, but before that, we need to concentrate on Pelafina, for two reasons: first, because Pelafina's impact on Johnny is more explicit in Johnny's commentary; and second, because she is the only character from Johnny's past to whom the novel gives an independent voice. Initially, she also seems to be the cause of his traumas.

The nature of Johnny's repressed memories can be partly revealed by comparing two of Pelafina's letters with Johnny's own comments concerning them. However, the details of the trauma remain open, as neither *House of Leaves* nor trauma writing in general rarely give direct access to trauma *per se*. Instead, the writing encircles the trauma but is never able to completely deal with it.[619] Consequently, *via negativa* seems a more appropriate approach: rephrasing John T. Irwin, adopting a negative approach one subtracts "attributes from, by denying affirmative predicates to, the idea" of Johnny's traumatic origin until an unmediated encounter with these experiences becomes possible.[620] In practice, this method means a careful excavation of the original event that is buried under numerous stories, fake experiences, and remediated memories. Pelafina's letters, for instance, are products of a delusional imagination, and while this fact can leave the reader in an interpretative limbo, the letters offer us the only access to the primal incidents Johnny has no own recollection of.[621]

Whereas Johnny's own memories are indirect, so are Pelafina's expressions about the trauma – whose existence she nevertheless speaks explicitly about.[622] For instance, slightly a year before the flow of letters stops, when Pelafina's condition appears relatively stable (as contrasted with clearly delusional phases), she makes an apology in which some aspects of Johnny's potential trauma are revealed, and which Johnny later reminisces as follows:

> At first I thought she was talking again about the pan of oil she'd accidentally knocked to the floor when I was four but that wasn't it at all, though in an awful way her confession did change the way I began to view my scars, their oceanic swirls now spelling out suspicion and

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[618] Already the positions of these two sections in the physical book enlighten us about the underlying themes of Johnny's straying. Situated concretely on the back of the body of the narrative, the obituary and the letters form a small databank for background information on Johnny's character. Moreover, as both sections on the one hand represent the characters whose offspring Johnny is, and on the other, describe events that deal with his past and chronologically precede his studying of Zampanò's manuscript, these "tentative" sections are crucial: they form the temporal and hereditary dual basis for Johnny as a person.

[619] E.g. Rothberg 2000, 137–138.

[620] Irwin 1996, 34–35.

[621] In this regard, as I argue subsequently, one can even say that by writing these letters in the first place, Pelafina actually gives Johnny his painful memories back – or, equally possible, she gives "stories to protect" (*HL*, 20) him from the far more ugly truth.

[622] "Do not think your mother cannot read in her own child the trauma he still endures every day and evening" (*HL*, 638).

much too doubt for me to really address properly.[623]

In Johnny's narration, especially the adverb "again" is noteworthy: it implies that this is not the only time that Pelafina has talked about "the pan of oil" accident. There are, indeed, two apologies that Pelafina makes, and both of them are vague. As regards the first, during one of her most delusional phases Pelafina sends short, manic letters, and in one of them, she repeats the phrases "It was an accident" and "Forgive me" with one exception: "I never meant to burn you. I never meant to mark you. You were only four and I was terrible in the kitchen."[624] If the reader has decided to go through The Whalestoe Letters as encouraged by the editors on page 72, these words are an important clue concerning the origin of Johnny's scars. Yet the "accident" as such, let alone its details, remains indistinct at this point.

Two months after this confession, Johnny receives another letter in which Pelafina writes: "Do not forget your father stopped me and took me to The Whalestoe. You may remember. You may not. You were seven. It was the last time I saw you."[625] Now, when we compare these two apologies the reader has access to through The Whalestoe Letters, with Johnny's impressions above, it is accurate to say that Johnny either confuses two events or denies some their aspects. Let us recall what Johnny thought: Pelafina was "talking *again* about the pan of oil," but "in an awful way her [second] confession did change the way I began to view my scars."[626] Since Johnny is here referring to the second letter ("again"), he appears to mean that he may have gotten his scars on that very day – not when he was four. And when we return to Pelafina's original second letter, the whole question about the origin of the scars begins to look secondary. In it, Pelafina writes: "I kissed your cheeks and your head and after a while put my hands around your throat. How red your face got then even as your tiny and oh so delicate hands stayed clamped around my wrists. But you did not struggle the way I anticipated."[627] Here, Pelafina clearly refers to a completely *other* incident that took place three years after the pan of oil accident, and as regards these events, she does not leave much room for interpretation.

Surprisingly, Johnny himself does not deny *the existence* of this certainly very traumatic event.[628] What he denies are *the details*. And what is especially confusing in Johnny's impressions is that initially, according to him, Pelafina's second letter seemed to refer to the pan of oil accident. Compared to The Whalestoe Letters, this

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[623] *HL*, 380; 629–630.
[624] *HL*, 627.
[625] *HL*, 629.
[626] *HL*, 380; italics added.
[627] *HL*, 629.
[628] In his view, "[t]he burden of life seemed too much for her to bear and therefore, [...] an impossible and even horrible burden to impose upon a child, especially her own" (*HL*, 380). "[T]hese wild ratiocinations" (*HL*, 380) motivated Pelafina's attempted child homicide, but due to Donnie's intervention this "probably [...] very brief attempt" (*HL*, 380) failed.

is definitely not the case. Pelafina's key letter begins with her explicit note that Donnie had intervened and taken her to the Whalestoe Institute, which quite unambiguously refers to the attempted homicide.

In other words, Johnny's confusion about events suggests that also the pan of oil accident may not have been so much an accident as a conscious attempt to hurt young Johnny.[629] To contextualize his confusion, it is useful to compare Johnny as a traumatized detective to the psychoanalytic model of the (metaphysical) detective story. According to Hanjo Berressem, there are three levels of human reality that correlate with the key components of detective, criminal, and evidence. The language and the reasoning of the sleuth represent *the symbolic level*. The criminal's desires embody *the imaginary level*, of which the detective can only make conjectures. *The real* relates to the world between them, and is manifested in the search for clues. As Berressem maintains, the real is also the most chaotic level.[630] In Johnny's asides, the symbolic and the imaginary interlink: on the one hand, the notes represent fake alibis and stories one after another, and signify the deeds of the criminal; on the other, Johnny circles around the crime, represents at least parts of it in a symbolic fashion, and operates as a detective. The real, however, remains uncovered, evidence is not found, and while aiming at solving the crime, simultaneously Johnny tries to avoid confronting it using all means possible. Two to three interpretative options can be applied to Johnny's confusion, then: either his recollections are simply confused – after all, they are remediated – or Johnny is making things up to protect himself, or, it is Pelafina – as the explicitly indicated criminal – who has done the storytelling for him.

Later in Johnny's commentary, both of the latter options get more support than the first. In his final aside, Johnny retells how he had, after traveling through the country in search of Navidson's non-existent house, wandered into the abandoned Whalestoe Institute, where he had found neither relief nor "horror."[631] Continuing his way to the site where his childhood home used to be, Johnny nevertheless recalls his father's roar, as Donnie had rushed, after seeing the boiling oil falling on his son, "to protect me, to stop her and cover me, which I realize now I have not

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[629] The key question arises: if Pelafina's separation from his son was for Johnny the most significant moment of his early childhood, when exactly did this event take place? As Johnny repeats Pelafina's words, this happened when Johnny was seven. If we believe Pelafina's earlier implications about his son's birthdate (July 21, 1971), this gives us approximate years of both the pan of oil accident and "the strangling scene": 1975 and 1978. When one compares these dates with Donnie's obituary, they raise questions even more. Pelafina was taken to the Whalestoe three years *before* Donnie's accident, whereupon Donnie had to have been Johnny's single parent since 1978; and whereupon his decision to "spend more time with his family" (*HL*, 585) seems to come quite late as he applied for the job of a local pilot not until the end of year 1980. Moreover, one could also ask why did Donnie leave his son in Pelafina's custody after the pan of oil accident, if she had shown symptoms of mental instability for a longer period. After all, according to Johnny, it was not until 1978 Donnie "was *finally* forced to take her away to The Whale" (*HL*, 380; italics added).
[630] Berressem 1999, 232.
[631] *HL*, 504.

remembered."[632] The roar had erased "all recollection" at that time, and in the narrative present the recollection of this roar and its effect seem to bring the rest of his (remediated) memories back.[633] What Johnny now recalls may well be his "own dark hallway" or "just a foyer and maybe not dark at all":

> But even though my father had his hands on her shoulders, trying as gently as he could to lead her away, I couldn't let go. So she knelt down in front of me and kissed my cheeks and my forehead and then stroked my face.
> She hadn't tried to strangle me and my father had never made a sound.
> I can see this now. I can hear it too. Perfectly.
> Her letter was hopelessly wrong. Maybe an invention to make it easier for me to dismiss her. Or something else.[634]

But again Johnny mixes one event with another. According to Johnny's earlier recollections Donnie had roared, when he had seen Johnny's "burning arms."[635] Here, however, Johnny connects the other incident, that is, Pelafina's alleged attempted homicide, directly with Donnie who "made a sound." Supposedly, Donnie may have roared at that time as well, but as this is Johnny's *final* recollection of these events, it should be taken with a grain of salt, whether it is confused or not.[636] After all, for his part the narrative begins with an invented story of the origin of his scars, and it ends with the most pleasant truth Johnny can deal with: that the trauma did not happen at all. And as Johnny now announces, it was Pelafina who invented the whole story to protect him.[637]

Pelafina's substantial guidance has indeed been a relevant standpoint for many readers and scholars. Katherine Cox has argued that Navidson's attempt to deal with the dark labyrinth is fundamentally proportional to Johnny's unintentional self-discovery, especially the repressed memories of his mother.[638] For her part, N. Katherine Hayles has suggested that Pelafina is the master narrator of *House of Leaves*, comparable with my suggestion concerning Hal of *Infinite Jest*.[639] These are certainly competent ways to read Danielewski's novel, since the bond between the mother and the son is dominant, especially when The Whalestoe Letters are taken into consideration. However, it is equally crucial to acknowledge that Johnny is a

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[632] *HL*, 506.
[633] *HL*, 506.
[634] *HL*, 516–517.
[635] *HL*, 506.
[636] See *HL*, 380.
[637] As if to immediately outdo these discoveries, Johnny ends his asides with an additional story, "the one Doc told me when I was up in Seattle" (*HL*, 518). But since he has just a little earlier sketched a false story about his staying with two doctors in Seattle (*HL*, 507–509), this story, based on the false story, should also be taken as invented.
[638] Cox 2006, 6.
[639] Hayles 2002b, 802.

remediated character. Both key incidents of his early life are events about which he has no recollections of his own. As he admits, "the memory mixes with all the retellings and explanations I heard later. It is even possible what I hold to be a memory is really only the memory of the story I heard much later."[640] And as far as we know, these memories are told to him either by Pelafina or his foster parents.[641] Therefore, Johnny's understanding of his trauma is, from the outset, based on what other people have told him. It is then completely possible, even likely, as Johnny himself hesitantly admits, that the trauma may in fact be just another story.

But be the trauma real or not, what scholars like Cox and Hayles have passed over is that Johnny's trauma is mediated from one party to another as *a family affair*. The event took place at home, and the parties involved were not only Johnny and his mother, but also his father. Whatever particular incident constituted the core material of the trauma – the pan of oil accident, the homicide attempt, or Pelafina's exit from Johnny's life – even then *the exit* would not have taken place without Donnie's reciprocal *entrance*. Therefore, as truthful as it is to consider Johnny following Pelafina's echoes in the textual labyrinth of The Navidson Record, as Cox does, we need to take into consideration the father as well. Pelafina is Johnny's only relative to whom the novel gives a voice, and it is she who tells Johnny about the trauma, but it is equally remarkable that three narrative threads out of four deal with *the absent father motif*. Johnny too refrains almost completely from telling about his father. The missing father motif – why Donnie is omitted from Johnny's life – forms the next step in our analysis.

Three Fathers

When Johnny's asides are compared with Pelafina's letters, a remarkable difference between their attitudes towards the father is revealed. Johnny rarely mentions Donnie, whereas for Pelafina, he is a constant object of longing. These almost opposite attitudes are indicative, since together they signal what the father is *not*: Donnie is not present, but he has not probably been such a beautiful character as his schizophrenic wife aims to prove. As mentioned earlier, Pelafina is the criminal of the story: it is she who tries to strangle the protagonist, drops boiling oil on him, and after these incidents, writes lengthily and with passion about the protagonist's father as if to create red herrings. Thus, Pelafina's delusional, yet sentimental letters should first and foremost be read as representations of the imaginary level of Johnny's trauma-oriented reality: her writings hide the truth and deceive the traumatized detective from encountering what is real. And what is real, I argue, concerns the father, his deeds, and his degree of presence.

[640] *HL*, 505.
[641] *HL*, 587.

Like Johnny's trauma, all information about his father is mediated, and is limited to either personal opinions of a delusional mind or the register of a death notice. When Johnny mentions his father on rare occasions, these memories are just as unreliable as his memories about the trauma. It is notable, however, that in one of his first comments, Johnny retells that his father has died, but when he later recalls Pelafina's letters, now heavily influenced by both The Navidson Record and the remembrance of his mother, Johnny mentions that in fact his "father was killed."[642] His view has therefore changed.[643] After these short mentions, Johnny returns to recalling Donnie only once, as he looks back on the day Pelafina was taken away and/or his father had roared.[644]

Compared to Johnny's silence, Pelafina thinks highly of Donnie, and refers to him as a beautiful, "exceedingly gentle man" who "never once locked horns or even remarks with another person, man or woman."[645] And Pelafina's image of her husband is indeed strikingly positive when it is set against the other contexts of *House of Leaves*. Besides being "pacific," Donnie is said to have loved flying, and if we compare only these two features with emotions, atmospheres, and spaces depicted in other narrative threads, the image could not differ more.[646] Most of the narrative plots are not only oppressive and involve aggressive behavior, but also take place either in closed, even claustrophobic spaces (Zampanò's and Johnny's apartments, Pelafina's asylum) or in underground tunnels (The Navidson Record).[647] Moreover, in each thread the father character relates to the outside world: either he is banished from the commentary altogether (Johnny's asides), he has voluntarily left home (The Navidson Record), or he has remained outside whereas his wife has been shut in (The Whalestoe Letters).[648] It is also noteworthy that Pelafina calls Donnie beautiful and bright, while the dreadful house (whether it is a building, a film, or a text) reveals mostly ugliness and dark. Thus, since most of the emotions, atmospheres, and spaces of *House of Leaves* contradict with Donnie's character in such an explicit fashion, the novel's claustrophobic horror may imply that for enigmatic and yet good reasons, the narrative perspectives are meant to form

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[642] *HL*, 380.
[643] Yet this new view does not hold much water when it is set against the facts mentioned in his father's obituary. Donnie is said to have died "when the Mack truck he was in swerved into a ditch and caught fire. Reportedly the driver, who survived, had fallen asleep at the wheel. "(*HL*, 585). Therefore, although the question of who drove the car remains unanswered, it seems unlikely that Donnie was exactly *killed*. If anything, Johnny's changed perspective implies an emotional shift by which he rejects "the official truth" of the obituary, and settles into better harmony with his mother's suspiciously overwhelming view of Donnie.
[644] See *HL*, 506.
[645] *HL*, 593, 604, 622.
[646] *HL*, 596, 593.
[647] Furthermore, Navidson mentions that by buying the house, he had wanted to "create a cozy little outpost," namely a base or a shelter. In Zampanò's manuscript, this choice of words is interpreted to imply Navidson's desire "to provide protection from hostile forces found on the outside" (*HL*, 23).
[648] Zampanò's diegetic level forms the only exception, but, as I argue subsequently, this level deals with the absent figure as well.

a complete negation of the bright and beautiful father character.

Yet, if Pelafina's letters hold little truth, a similar sharp contrast can be found in Johnny's personal history. After his mother's institutionalization and his father's death, Johnny got a new foster father, a former marine named Raymond. Unlike his real father, Raymond is *present* in both Johnny's commentary and Pelafina's letters. For this reason, the foster father figure is also comparable with the two traumatic incidents discussed above: Johnny tells calmly and without hesitation about Raymond as well as his own traumas, whereas Pelafina, depending on the subject, becomes either furious or regretful, stressing nevertheless the great difference between Donnie and Raymond. So, neither Johnny nor Pelafina *deny* the foster father. In fact, what is remarkable about Raymond is that in the light of Pelafina's letter, his existence establishes the only emotional link Pelafina and Johnny form during their correspondence. Raymond is a strikingly violent character who, for his part, denies that Johnny belongs to the foster family and beats him, which is why both mother and son share an aversion towards this man.[649] Whereas Johnny's biological father is depicted as a beautiful person, in their eyes Raymond is by contrast an ugly character, who nevertheless unites them, thus recreating the bond the pacific father broke by taking Pelafina away. Raymond's character alone does not explain why Johnny has decided to omit his biological father from the commentary, but it gives us an important clue: it is the father, his actions, and degree of presence that determine the bond between the mother and the son.

To clarify this family combination and the trauma it conceals, let us recall that The Navidson Record acts as a catalyst on Johnny. Moreover, if Johnny refuses to reminisce about Donnie, he similarly refuses to comment on the content of the manuscript. Instead, he pays attention to Zampanò's compositional decisions, and digresses from the narrative to tell stories. Thus, it is appropriate, I believe, to compare some father-related details in The Navidson Record with Johnny's alleged background, in order to obtain an unmediated image of Johnny's *real*, namely that which is neither symbolic nor imaginary, neither the boy's nor the mother's view. After all, The Navidson Record is a symbolic representation that threatens Johnny's own symbolic level of consciousness. The very threat, I argue, relates to three father types, and each of them can be explicitly found at both diegetic levels. What is remarkable, however, is that through this comparison, the number of father types decreases: three fathers become one.

First, there is *an absent father* whose explicit image can be found in all the narrative threads, particularly The Navidson Record. Besides the exploration

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[649] Soon after having moved in, young Johnny violently defends himself against the bullies in school, and thus becomes a thorn in the flesh to Raymond, who, according to Johnny, is "a total control freak" (*HL*, 92). Johnny's new foster father points out to him that Johnny, a "Beast," will always be a "a guest" (*HL*, 92) in their family, and as the fights in school continue, Raymond gives the twelve-year-old Johnny a hard time, beating him so that he is put in hospital.

theme, Zampanò's manuscript concerns Will Navidson's relation to his wife Karen and his children Chad and Daisy. Having lived his childhood in the absence of "suitable role models," Navidson has become a Pulitzer-winning photojournalist "whose constant assignments abroad [had] led to increased alienation and untold personal difficulties" with his wife.[650] As the house project is launched, these difficulties only deepen since Navidson spends more and more time in the underground tunnels, and is therefore literally absent. As the point of view is his, Chad and Daisy's experiences and feelings are never explicitly expressed. And if there has been a vacancy for a suitable role model in Navidson's youth, the same is also the case with his children, who get more attention from their uncle than from their father. Thus, fathers and children switch positions when one moves from Johnny's asides to The Navidson Record. When the father's lifeworld is described, the children's innermost feelings are excluded, and vice versa: when the boy's sensations are presented, the father is missing, omitted from the commentary. The absent father motif is, then, primarily related to the child's point of view – even though it is the father whose actions are depicted in The Navidson Record.

The second type of father can only be found in Pelafina's letters, where the father is described from the wife's perspective. The father is equally absent, but now he is represented as *a pacific object of longing*. In The Navidson Record, the closest comparison to Pelafina's emotions is Karen's frustrated longing for her husband Navidson, that is if Karen had a voice and a willingness to express her emotions. Instead, The Navidson Record describes Karen's actions at length, but not her feelings. Again, the positions are switched: whereas Pelafina expresses her desires, Karen is either silenced or she, on her own initiative, refrains from expressing her innermost feelings.[651]

In both threads, the absent and longed-for pacific father is also contrasted, sometimes even mixed with the third type, namely *a present and violent father*. Since Johnny is either incapable or unwilling to bring his biological father into the same picture with his foster father, we need to turn to Pelafina in this regard too. When she first comments on Marine Man Raymond, she argues that the foster father "cannot be expected to understand" the "fire" that burns in Johnny's veins.[652] According to her, this quality of Johnny's is not a quality inherited from his father, but "falls squarely on the shoulders of your mother and her contentious family."[653] What Johnny has inherited from Donnie instead, are his beauty, his eyes "infused with strange magic," and his "zest for extravagance."[654]

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[650] *HL*, 22, 10.
[651] When Karen gets a chance to speak, it takes the form of a film in which she lets the others, celebrities such as Stephen King, Harold Bloom, Anne Rice, Jacques Derrida, and Stanley Kubrick, speak for her. Like Johnny's early experiences, Karen's voice is also mediated.
[652] *HL*, 593.
[653] *HL*, 593.
[654] *HL*, 592, 604, 589.

Again, Pelafina suspiciously takes up the baton, this time contrasting not only their family with an outsider (Raymond) but also the beautiful paternal lineage with the contentious maternal lineage *within the family*. Pelafina's claim is suspicious, for she *also* uses exactly the same phrases to describe father and son, but only the son comes from a long maternal "line of aggressors," and constantly gets into trouble.[655] As for Donnie, Pelafina mentions only once that Johnny's father may have been capable of resorting to violence, that is, if he had heard about Raymond's actions towards Johnny.[656] Although this imaginary situation in which two fathers are fighting over one son appears exceptional, it raises a noteworthy option, even within the limits of Pelafina's delusional perspective: the beautiful father would become violent if only he were *present*.[657] Would not this also mean – considering the fact mentioned in the obituary that Donnie spent long times abroad during his life – that at least two of the three father figures are in fact one and the same? Namely, that when there is a father, he is violent, and when the father is absent, he is a peaceful character. This interpretation would also explain Johnny's act to omit his real father from the commentary: keeping Donnie away guarantees the son's peace of mind. Raymond's presence in the commentary, in turn, may be held as a typical psychological projection by which domestic violence is externalized outside the family.

When we compare Pelafina's impressions again with The Navidson Record, Raymond is not the only character who is represented as a violent father. First, it is rumored that Karen and her sister Linda were molested in their childhood by their stepfather. Karen is said to have denied this, but the numerous commentators on Navidson's film hold her inability to enter "any sort of dark enclosed place" to be a traumatic symptom.[658] Otherwise, within the frames of The Navidson Record the father is represented as tender and attentive bar none. Both the film and Zampanò's manuscript are narrated sympathetically in relation to Navidson, and hence not even his "untold personal difficulties" imply any sort of domestic violence on his part.[659] Neither is Navidson said to have resorted to violence when Karen's infidelity is

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[655] *HL*, 593–594. As both Johnny's commentaries and Pelafina's letters reveal, he has (had) a tendency to get into fights, both in school and later in the nightlife of Los Angeles. Thus, the beauty of the son does not prevent him from being violent. The same may hold true for the father.
[656] *HL*, 596.
[657] Pelafina does not only cherish the image of a beautiful husband, she also more than once confuses not only two but three Directors of The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute. In this respect, it can be assumed that when Pelafina writes about "the man who nearly took your life" and "still retains the role of father" (*HL*, 598), this description does not unambiguously refer to Raymond. The same holds true with the series of foster families Pelafina mentions: perhaps Johnny has been a "guest" *only* in Raymond's family – if there is a Raymond in the first place. Moreover, it is chronologically the second "Director" under whose era Pelafina becomes most delusional, and writes, for instance, an encoded letter in which she claims that the staff rape her every now and then (*HL*, 620–622).
[658] *HL*, 347. According to her sister, the stepfather took them to the old farmhouse, and forced the girls into the well by turns, first raping Linda, and then Karen.
[659] *HL*, 10.

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concerned, or when she flirts with the members of the exploration team, even kissing one of them. When, in rare cases, Navidson is said to be angry, and thus an ugly character, his hostility concerns solely the team leader, Holloway Roberts. Hence, The Navidson Record also repeats the idea of two rivaling fathers, the pacific and the aggressive.

As we see, in all three main narratives of *House of Leaves* violent behavior is systematically represented to take place outside the family. Whether categorical externalization or not, violence happens in the underground network of the house, not inside the home. The only characters who intentionally commit the act of violence come from outside the family (and its image, the house). Marine Man Raymond, Holloway Roberts, and Karen's presumed stepfather, are also typical, even clichéd villains that threaten the family unity. But recalling Johnny's process with Zampanò's manuscript, it is noteworthy that Holloway and Raymond are essentially very alike. Both share the same kind of working history (professional hunter, marine) and the same external qualities (a hard, powerful, dissatisfied, and intimidating man with a thick beard). Both are also *paternal* figures (the foster father, the team leader), but are not part of the family.[660]

Correspondingly, if the real father is excluded from Johnny's commentary and portrayed as a pacific figure in Pelafina's letters, Navidson is represented as a stable, heroic figure, albeit with personal problems of his own. All the clues implying any sort of domestic conflict *within* either of the families are rumors based on the second-hand information gained from people who either come from outside the family, or are verifiably schizophrenic: Karen's infidelity is only defamation, whereas Johnny's trauma is primarily a story Pelafina has told him. But there is at least one explicit clue that implies violence within the family. It is based on the teacher's interpretation of the school drawings of Navidson and Karen's children:

> Though Brookes lacked a formal degree in psychology, two decades of teaching, nearly half of it at Sawatch Elementary, had exposed her to enough child abuse to last a lifetime. She was familiar with the signs and not just the obvious ones like malnutrition, abrasion, or unnatural shyness. She had learned to read behavior patterns, eating habits, and even drawings.[661]

Chad and Daisy's pictures that represent wolves, tigers, dragons and at the center of the paper "several layers of black crayon and pencil […] applied so that not even a speck of the paper beneath could show through," imply the house as it appears to Navidson and his family. But what the teacher's allegorical reading explicitly says is constantly denied elsewhere in the novel, namely that the dark network of the house – and especially the black space in the middle of it – is an obvious symbol for

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660 *HL*, 78, 80, 92.
661 *HL*, 314.

domestic secrets, even traumas.[662] Furthermore, the black space at the center of a textual unit (that is, a page) symbolizes the black space in the middle of a domestic unit, that is, a family. Traditionally, this "head of the family" has been the father. But what really makes the teacher's reading important, are the consequences of her reading. Alarmed by the drawings, Brookes pays a visit to Chad and Daisy's home only to enter "a slaughterhouse": "a woman sobbing in the living room, a big man holding her, two bodies in the kitchen surrounded by blood, and on the staircase Chad sitting next to his little sister Daisy who kept quietly singing to no one particular words no one else could understand – 'ba. dah. ba-ba.'"[663] Thus, Brookes is partly right in her conjecture – there *is* violence at the children's home – while the child's enigmatic song echoes the possible source of this violence: papa, father. Yet what the teacher really sees are not one, but two broken families, namely a family and a team. The father characters, Navidson and Holloway, are absent, as at this point they are rivals in the dark maze underneath the house.

All in all, violence that is categorically externalized outside the family but nevertheless found inside it, Donnie who is omitted from Johnny's commentary, along with several hints in which three types of father overlap, suggest that it is not the mother who has caused Johnny's key trauma, but his father. Like Johnny's stories about his scars, his mother-related trauma is not *the* trauma Johnny has endured, but a story he and Pelafina have told themselves to protect Johnny from the pain caused by the father. The underlying truth seems to be that most of the times the father has been absent, as Donnie's obituary proves, but when he has been there, present, he has acted violently: Raymond's behavior, Johnny's ambiguous relation to his biological father, as well as Pelafina's eloquence concerning Donnie hint at this possibility, especially when these matters are compared with the content of The Navidson Record. Since this ekphrasis is a manuscript that ambiguously catalyzes Johnny's self-discovery and his suppressed memories about his father, thus threatening the cover story the mother and the son have narrated in order to survive, I end my discussion of Johnny's character by taking into consideration his relation to the author of The Navidson Record. Navidson's story is supposedly a product of Zampanò's imagination, but who is he, and what sort of figure is he for Johnny? My argument is that Zampanò's pseudopaternal role is at the heart of the traumatized detective's mystery.

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[662] *HL*, 313.
[663] *HL*, 314.

The Father and the Minotaur

I began this chapter by considering the mentor motif in the contemporary encyclopedic novel from the perspective of the elegiac romance formula. *The Gold Bug Variations* illustrated that the fictional encyclopedia often contains the hero's biography: the dead hero's life is an enigma for the narrator who aims at restoring the balance in his own life by narrating the story in which the fates of the pupil and the mentor interweave. Not only does solving the hero's life enigma give the narrator a new purpose in life, but also, through the narrator's work, the original enigma is expanded, and the once interrupted tradition of knowledge is fixed. In *Infinite Jest*, the case was very similar, even though the story concentrated more on the narrator's self-analysis and battle with drug addiction, than on the mentor's influence.

With the ambiguous father figures, *House of Leaves* completes my discussion. Danielewski's novel both exploits ideas of elegiac romance as well as subverting these conventions at the same time. Three aspects of this treatment can be distinguished: the narrator's fragile position, the dead hero's anonymity, and the nihilistic content of the lifework. First, in his attempt to compile Zampanò's manuscript, Johnny does not regain his mental health, but loses the minimal balance he has been able to bring to his disjointed life. Thus, the dead hero's lifework corrupts, not improves the narrator. Second, Johnny's work does not concern Zampanò's biography, identity, or the content of The Navidson Record. The manuscript is not even remotely biographical, and we get to know only a little about its author. Instead, Johnny's work concerns himself.[664] As a third aspect implying exploitation of the elegiac romance, it is questionable whether the manuscript is Zampanò's work at all. Although Navidson's film does not exist and we can interpret the story as a product of Zampanò's imagination, it is still possible to read his manuscript as a continuation of Navidson's work – *as if* Zampanò had brought into being something that paradoxically exists and does not exist at the same time. Will Slocombe has suggested this kind of *nihilistic* approach to the house enigma: nothingness exists at the heart of all things, and while it does not allow itself to be expressed as existent, it is capable of marginalizing its interpreters and making them believe it is *as if* it existed.[665] The tradition of knowledge that is passed on from one marginalized reader to the other, from Navidson to Zampanò and from there to Johnny, is therefore *nihil*, *nothing*.

At this point it is worth noting that the house – as well as the non-existent film about the house, and the existing manuscript about the non-existent film about the house – is an enigma that relates to the unconscious of its reader, activating it, and

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[664] However, Johnny's commentary adds an extra layer to The Navidson Record, and thus can be considered a highly ambiguous expansion of Zampanò's work.
[665] Slocombe 2005.

reawakening ideas, memories, and emotions that are suppressed and excluded from the sphere of consciousness.[666] Furthermore, the horrors of the house transgress ontological boundaries: not only do the Navidson family but also Zampanò and Johnny become haunted by something that seems external but is internal; something that does not exist and yet does. To end our analysis of Johnny's character, I pick up this lead and consider The Navidson Record *an externalized object of suppressed memories*. As a mirror, it is not so much a manuscript that Zampanò first dictates and Johnny, after his death, compiles, as it is a textualized projection of a painful, and suppressed domestic link *between* the protagonists. This "hidden root" is comparable with the relation Erik Lönnrot has with Red Sharlach in "Death and the Compass," but with an important distinction: whereas Lönnrot and Sharlach are doubles, Zampanò and Johnny's relation resembles that between father and son.[667] Analyzing this link does not so much shed light on The Navidson Record as such, as it helps us to name the traumatized detective's key problem, namely, the trauma that is buried under the stories he has told himself.

Originally, The Navidson Record is a manuscript that the protagonist finds from the dead man's apartment. Thus, on Johnny's diegetic level the narrative begins as a combination of horror story and closed room mystery: an eighty-year-old blind and lonely man has been found face down on the floor, beside him are "gouges in the hardwood floor, a good six or seven inches long."[668] In addition to the papers and the scratches, Zampanò has left behind an "incredibly strong" and layered patina, "the smell of human history."[669] Before his death, he has also nailed his windows shut, sealed them, as well as all the other ventilation holes. But instead of concentrating on the victim, Johnny, like Erik Lönnrot, begins to study "reams and reams" of Zampanò's papers.[670] Not that Zampanò would not be a crucial character, it is just that his mysterious death leads Johnny in that direction: the four marks on the floor, along with Zampanò's strange behavior hint that his death may relate, if not to the study he was working with, then at least to a monstrous entity that he has unsuccessfully tried to keep outside.[671]

According to Johnny, Zampanò was not afraid of the outside world *per se*; what he feared were "the various emanations of his things and himself."[672] And Johnny speaks out of experience. As is revealed at the end of his commentaries, his

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[666] As Johnny considers, "there's some kind of connection between my state of mind and The Navidson Record [...]. More than likely, it's something entirely else, the real root lying in my already strange mood fluctuations." (*HL*, 25.)
[667] Cf. Irwin 1996, 30.
[668] *HL*, xv.
[669] *HL*, xv–xvi.
[670] *HL*, xcii.
[671] On the other hand, the manuscript as such is also a book that kills, and in this respect, the narrative exploits a mythical *topos* of a "killing vision," which is often used in both horror fiction and the detective story, and also in the encyclopedic novel. See Ercolino 2014, 152.
[672] *HL*, xvi.

introduction in which these details are exposed has been written after Johnny has done his part in the compilation of his predecessor's papers, or "things" – and after he has sealed his own apartment. Johnny has been involved with The Navidson Record long enough to observe "shifts" around and in him, and especially in "what has always come before, the creature you truly are […] buried in the nameless black of a name."[673] Let this observation be our lead: who, or what is this creature? First, since this creature is shifting both "around and in," there is no distinction between what is internal and what is external: just as much as Zampanò could have been killed by a beast that came from outside the apartment, the beast could on the other hand have inhabited *him*. The situation is the same in Johnny's case. And second, the creature is associated with the observer ("you"), whereupon studying The Navidson Record is fundamentally a quest of self-discovery. This creature also "comes before" the observer, and it is buried "in a name." Therefore, the self-discovery is a hereditary issue: what "things," besides surname – or house – are inherited from the parents; what emanates from generation to generation?

While Johnny and Zampanò's biologically inherited characteristics are one side of the issue, I begin with the textual heritage that Zampanò passes on to Johnny. The blind man is, of course, one creature that literally comes before the heir of his papers. For Johnny, Zampanò's identity is not a burning issue, however.[674] All he knows is that Zampanò was an American with the hint of a foreign accent, a lonely old man who had been blind since the mid-1950s.[675] Moreover, after he had gone blind, Zampanò had had several young females – his "children" as he called them – who helped him and wrote down his dictations.[676] Whether his name was real or not, Zampanò used it in all official records. "Who knows where his name really came from. Maybe it's authentic, maybe made up, maybe borrowed, a nom de plume or – my personal favorite – a nom de guerre," wonders Johnny.[677]

Most of the names in *House of Leaves* have either intertextual or intratextual connotations, and such an extraordinary name as Zampanò does not make an exception: Zampanò is the main character in Federico Fellini's *La Strada* (1954). Shortly summarized, Fellini's film depicts Zampanò, an aggressive strongman, who

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[673] *HL*, xxii–xxiii.
[674] As an exploitation of elegiac romance, *House of Leaves* emphasizes the ambivalent relation between the dead hero and the narrator. However, it is untypical that the hero and the narrator have not known each other: Johnny is neither Zampanò's relative nor his friend, but only an outsider to whom Zampanò's neighbor Lude shows the old man's "outpost." Conventionally, the dead hero has had a meaningful impact on the narrator during his lifetime, and even gothic and horror stories, Poe's short stories leading the way, link these two characters together. At the very least, the dead hero has been a father figure of sorts, whom the narrator once knew. Zampanò's relation to Johnny seems nevertheless random at first sight. Nor did he want anyone to know about him or his work; what he wanted was his total absence. Yet, more by accident that by design, it is exactly Johnny, a fatherless son, who discovers Zampanò's "emanations."
[675] *HL*, xii, xxi.
[676] *HL*, 35.
[677] *HL*, xii.

makes his living as a street performer with the childish Gelsomina, whom he buys from the girl's mother in order to earn more with the girl's aid. Along their way, the performing couple meets a competing performer called the Fool, who begins to provoke the short-tempered Zampanò whenever possible. In one of the final scenes, Zampanò and Gelsomina meet the Fool once again, who now fixes a flat tire at the side of the road. Provoked, Zampanò beats the Fool to death, hides the body, and sets the car on fire. Gelsomina becomes apathetic after the Fool's violent death, and for this reason Zampanò finally abandons her. Afterwards, he learns that the mourning Gelsomina has pined away and died.

Although this cinematic allusion does not give us much information about his true identity behind the possible *nom de guerre*, it links Zampanò with Johnny's parents, especially Donnie's tragic car accident. Fellini's Fool, first of all, is a talented high wire artist, whereas Donnie used on the side to perform "aerial stunts in regional shows" though made his main living as a commercial pilot.[678] Second, the Mack truck in which Donnie died had reportedly caught fire after it had "swerved into a ditch."[679] The incident was taken to be an accident, and the driver's identity was never revealed, but as Johnny later implies, his father may have been killed. Comparing these details with *La Strada*, we get an idea what *may* have happened. If Johnny is right, the murderer, like Fellini's Zampanò, did not get caught – maybe he adopted a *nom de guerre* to cover his tracks. Pelafina was in any case just as crushed by Donnie's death as Gelsomina is by the Fool's – in fact, the longing tone of The Whalestoe Letters resonates with Gelsomina's grief in Fellini's film. While these similarities do not make Zampanò Donnie's murderer, it is equally noteworthy that the blind man, like his predecessor, had a number of "female performers," namely copyists, and that "beneath all that cool pseudo-academic hogwash lurked a very passionate man."[680]

It is chronologically impossible that the triangle drama between Donnie, Pelafina, and Zampanò would have taken place. *La Strada* depicts, however, *the archetypical battle* between two competitors, and thus, the events are set to happen on mythical, not on a historical or a chronological level. This chance makes an *ahistorical* interpretation possible also in the case of *House of Leaves*: some events hinted at take place before the beginning of narrative time, that is, before The Navidson Record, and before the House. Additionally, on the one hand, the novel emphasizes personal histories as "his stories" – stories that are told to hide the truth – and on the other, the key characters, Zampanò and Johnny among them, are depicted as "very old souls" as if to imply their mythical origin.[681] Thus, *House of Leaves* both contrasts

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[678] *HL*, 585.
[679] *HL*, 585.
[680] *HL*, 99–100. Zampanò of *House of Leaves* is also said to have become blind in the mid-fifties, the time when *La Strada* was released.
[681] E.g. *HL*, 31, 589.

history with myth, and underlines that personal histories are cover stories for mythical truths. All the threads and "histories" are also narrated in a temporal vacuum of sorts. These vacuums are made possible by the altered states of mind (insomnia, schizophrenia), and the different sealed interiors (Pelafina's asylum, Navidson's outpost, and Zampanò and Johnny's nests) where one loses a sense of time. The ahistorical, then, relates with myths and archetypes, and takes place outside of linear time, where also temporally impossible connections are possible.[682]

Here and there from the margins of The Navidson Record one discovers hints – more obvious than allusions to *La Strada* – that there has indeed been, if not a triangle drama, then at least an intertwining of characters on a mythical level. Since the mythical level also forms *the level of real*, that is, the very ground for chronological "his stories," on this level those stories – along with what the stories constitute, namely personal histories, truths, identities – either dissolve or entwine. Logically, the most revealing parts of The Navidson Record, Zampanò's "grand story," are, then, *the outtakes*, the sections he aimed at destroying but his "children" saved. Zampanò wanted these sections to be omitted, just like Johnny omits Donnie from his commentary, and through this distinction between myth and history we understand why, namely because these parts remained outside the story and were therefore closer to the truth. Whereas that which is left out of "his story" equals myth, in *House of Leaves* myths – or their cinematic representations such as *La Strada* – represent mostly what is real, too personal, and too painful to remember.

Let us pause for a moment to clarify the argument. Through intertextual connection, Zampanò is connected with Donnie's parents. Furthermore, in *La Strada*, Zampanò and the Fool are depicted as rivals who compete over Gelsomina's recognition. The Fool loses this combat, which does not mean that Zampanò wins, in fact he loses Gelsomina, who pines away in longing for the Fool. Now, if Zampanò of *House of Leaves* had done something comparable to the killing scene in *La Strada*, he did not only erase his tracks by using a *nom de guerre*, he also wanted to omit and destroy the parts of his "Record" (The Navidson Record) that came too close to the killing scene in *La Strada*, namely sections in which similar rivalries are depicted. Furthermore, these sections deal explicitly with myths, whereupon they only underline what is buried under his story. Thanks to Johnny, and some of Zampanò's

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[682] There are additional hidden and indirect intratextual links that support a mythical relation between Zampanò and Johnny's parents as well as between Zampanò and Johnny. N. Katherine Hayles (2002a, 129) has discovered that Pelafina embeds a cipher in one of her most delusional letters, and when decrypted this code says: "My dear Zampanò who did you lose?" (*HL*, 615). Soon afterwards, Pelafina drops a possible clue: perhaps Zampanò lost his son, who could be Johnny. In this particular letter, there is a combination of words "abcdefghiJohnnyz" (*HL*, 628), and what is noteworthy, I think, is that, unlike Johnny and Pelafina's surnames (Truant, Liévre), Donnie's surname in *House of Leaves* is never revealed. Johnny is said to have separately requested the editors to remove these details, along with dates and other traceable elements from the obituary (*HL*, 584). Could Donnie's real surname be Zampanò? Is Pelafina's encoded message actually addressed to Donnie? Does the "z" at the end of Pelafina's litany refer to Johnny, who, having lost his family, becomes Truant when he loses (or drops) his original surname?

secretaries, these sections are included in the novel, and we get a chance to compare them with The Navidson Record. This comparison leads us to clarify Johnny's ambiguous relation with Zampanò.

First, along with the domestic tension and absent fathers, The Navidson Record portrays the brotherhood of Navidson and Tom, which Zampanò links in one of his outtakes with *the myth of Esau and Jacob*. Johnny, who reconstructs the whole chapter dealing with this comparison, wrongly notes the reader that Esau was "a hairy, dim-witted hunter. Jacob's a smooth-skinned, cunning intellectual."[683] A bit later Zampanò himself refers to a scholar, according to whom "Holloway, not Tom, is the hairy one: His beard, surly appearance, and even his profession as a hunter make Holloway the perfect Esau. The tension between Navidson and Holloway is also more on par with the tension between Jacob and his brother."[684] Yet the most meaningful connection is left unsaid: while the same features can be connected to both of Johnny's fathers (Donnie and Raymond), Zampanò himself reminds one of Esau. These similarities bring the father characters of the novel even closer together.

But what is not said is the content of this biblical myth. As is well known, Jacob, unlike Esau, managed to get their father's recognition by cunning, and for this reason Esau threatened to kill his brother. Jacob escaped, however. The myth is repeated almost as it is in The Navidson Record, where Holloway gets lost in the subterranean maze after having tried to kill Navidson, who in turn manages to escape. Zampanò's own remarks on this matter end with the quotation by another fictive scholar, who summarizes what is the case of Jacob and Esau, besides gaining the father's recognition: "these two brothers have always been and always will be inextricably intertwined; and just like the Caduceus, their shared history creates a meaning and that meaning is health."[685] Thus, what The Navidson Record truly depicts, albeit in a symbolic fashion, is the rivalry between *brothers*. Moreover, this combat is fought over recognition by the father, who is missing. And it is this combat, I argue, which is why both Zampanò and Johnny identify with the story in the first place: it is all about the father's recognition that is neither given nor received, and the son's violence that follows this offence.

From this perspective, it is only natural that Zampanò became obsessive with the section, and finally almost destroyed it, perhaps because "it really was too personal. Maybe he had a brother. A son. Maybe he had two sons."[686] Hence, Johnny is not the only one who takes pains to avoid the truth of his personal past. But as the comment also implies, Zampanò's position in his family is unknown: he may have been an absent father or a violent brother – or both. Either way, the other

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[683] *HL*, 247.
[684] *HL*, 249.
[685] *HL*, 252.
[686] *HL*, 249.

Zampanò's section deepens the same theme. Zampanò also aimed at excluding all the sections that dealt with *the Minotaur myth*, in which both the father-son relation and the intertwining of brothers are just as explicit as they are in the myth of Jacob and Esau. Again, Johnny reconstructs a whole chapter devoted to this subject, but the most important parts of it are found in its crossed-out sections. Zampanò writes:

> ~~At the heart of the labyrinth waits the Mi [   ]taur and like the Minotaur of myth its name is [   ] Chielitz treated the maze as trope for psychic concealment, its excavation resulting in (tragic[ ] reconciliation. But if in Chielitz's eye the Minotaur was a son imprisoned by a father's shame, is there then to Navidson's eye an equivalent misprision of the [   ] in the depths of that place? And for the matter does there exist a chance to reconcile the not-known with the desire for its antithesis?~~[687]

In this omission, five explicit clues concerning Zampanò's past deeds are given: (1) the Minotaur's real name is hidden, (2) the maze symbolizes repression, (3) the descent into the labyrinth is an act of facing repressed feelings and memories, (4) the Minotaur's identity as a son is related to the father's shame, and (5) the house is equivalent with the myth, and may therefore imply a similar sort of crime and reconciliation.

In its classical context, the Minotaur is a dual figure that has a human body and the head of a bull. These contrary aspects (animal/man) correlate with the features of violent Esau and cunning Jacob, but the Minotaur myth alters this relation with two additional elements, namely, the bond between the mother and the son on the one hand, and the projection of mental conflict into external battle on the other. First, in Theseus's myth, the man-slaying monster is at the center of a subterranean labyrinth, into which the hero Theseus – literally "a settler," like Navidson – descends.[688] From the psychoanalytic perspective, the Minotaur represents the primal birth trauma that illustrates "the human embryo as an animal-like, partially formed being trapped in the 'prison' of the womb, 'unable to find the exit.'"[689] Thus, the primal birth trauma implies that the labyrinth in which the boy hero descends is in fact the motherly womb from which he finally returns to the world.

But what does Theseus confront in the subterranean maze? What exactly is the Minotaur? And what does the father figure have to do with this conflict? More important than the feminine black space is the confrontation as such, that is, the combat between the boy hero and the beast. John T. Irwin has discussed at length the links between the metaphysical detective story and what he calls myths of "heroes of consciousness," and just as the Oedipus myth and the Theseus myth relate

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[687] *HL*, 335–336.
[688] Irwin 1996, 208–209, 314.
[689] Ibid., 244.

to Borges's fiction, they can also be applied to Danielewski's novel – especially because Borges's "The House of Asterion" (1947), the Minotaur myth told from the monster's point of view, is a foundational intertext of *House of Leaves*.[690] According to Irwin, "the hero's self-knowledge is directly linked to the recognition and acknowledgment of him by his father."[691] Thus, even though the maze is feminine, what the hero seeks there is *himself* that only a bond with his father can bring to light. But what the Minotaur myth also implies is that the father's acknowledgment is closely related to violence, at least on the son's part. That is, Theseus descends into the labyrinth in order to affirm his father's recognition, whereas the Minotaur has been shut in it, since the father has felt ashamed of his son. Fundamentally, Theseus and the Minotaur are one and the same character, and as Borges's Minotaur implies, the projection of the latter's mental conflict: Theseus is the Minotaur's *love-object*, the one he is not and cannot be. Nevertheless, whether violence precedes or follows the father's recognition, the key question is that the first brother needs to beat the other in order to survive.

The father's recognition never takes place in *House of Leaves*, either in The Navidson Record or in its margins. Since the fathers remain absent, there are only battles without purpose. These battles are the fatherless sons' internal conflicts: two sides of self fight, but since there is no outer authority to affirm either side, the son's *individuation* – his process of self-discovery – is never completed. Johnny, for his part, remains a fatherless son without a proper surname, not does he ever gain relief from his traumas. As for Zampanò, whether his father was absent or not, he may, as the *La Strada* intertext implies, have had a brother whom he killed. But he may have had a son too: only a few years before Johnny's birth, he at least speculates about creating "in the margins of darkness":

> a son that is not missing; who lives beyond even my own imagination and invention; whose lusts, stupidities, and strengths carry him farther than even he or I can anticipate; who sees the world for what it is; and consequently bears the burden of everyone's tomorrow with unprecedented wisdom and honor because he is one of the very few who has successfully interrogated his own nature. […] He will fulfill a promise I made years ago but failed to keep.[692]

If this speculation leads to action in the following years, either something occurs and this son is never created, or there is a son but Zampanò does not recognize him. On the basis of all we have dealt with in this section, from the violent father figures to Zampanò's outtakes, we can only conjecture about the father's reasons for

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[690] E.g. Bida 2012, 51.
[691] Irwin 1996, 208. For instance, in Plutarch's *Lives*, which Irwin (1996, 208–209) uses as a source, Theseus seeks the recognition of his father Aegeus, and when he finally gets it and in order to become famous, he sets out on a journey to kill the famous monster Minotaur, and succeeds.
[692] *HL*, 543.

abandoning his offspring. Perhaps the son was not what the father wanted him to be. Perhaps – like Pelafina writes, "[a]s for that nit-wit Raymond who insists on calling you 'beast' let his *blindness* protect you" – the father was blind, either literally or metaphorically, and did not see what the mother saw in their baby boy.[693] Or perhaps the father left the family, not because he was ashamed of his son but of himself; perhaps he was quick tempered and violent and recognized the same features in his son. All of these interpretative options are left open, but one thing is explicit and certain: finally, Zampanò, *a sonless father*, a lonely old man without known relatives, became afraid of his "emanations," and aimed at being as absent as possible. These attempts were futile, however, as the beast, strangely related to the manuscript, found and killed him. Johnny, *a fatherless son*, a boy hero and a beast in one and the same person, found this man, as well as the "darkness" the man had created. The manuscript led him to "interrogate his own nature," but what he eventually discovered was that he himself was internally empty, that he had a black space inside of him, and something inhabiting it.[694] Was the interrogation, then, successful or not?

In conclusion, even though the narrative does not give an explicit solution to the conflicts analyzed above, the contest of interrogating one's own nature is the crucial key to the suppressed domestic link between Johnny and Zampanò. More specifically, there are three links between the protagonists, all of them emphasizing the father-son-relation on a mythical level. First, Johnny and Zampanò are *an odd couple:* the fatherless son and the sonless father. Johnny's father died when he was young, and Zampanò possibly abandoned his son. Second, both are violent characters whose problems relate to the non-existent father-son-relation on the one hand, and to irreconcilable mental conflict on the other. Therefore, they are both *unrecognized sons*: Johnny, because his biological father was mostly absent, and probably violent when present; Zampanò, because he, in anger, killed either his brother or his father, or both. Third, they are connected through *patricide*. Johnny says that his father was killed – perhaps it was him who was in the car with Donnie – whereas Zampanò, the blind Oedipus, is killed by the creature one can easily associate with the Minotaur. But patricide can also be linked with the son's failed individuation: the son's identity is dependent on the father's recognition – either the son returns to the world as a recognized hero Theseus, or, unable to escape from the labyrinth, he remains a son that is abandoned, the Minotaur. But when the father is absent altogether, there is no balance in the first place. The rivalry between two brothers – self-discovery and self-denial – has no meaning, since without a higher authority, that is the father figure, the boy hero has already lost as the Minotaur takes over and rules the black space. All these mythical schisms Zampanò passes on

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[693] *HL*, 601; italics added.
[694] *HL*, 518.

through The Navidson Record to his straying heir, the creature that comes after him, if not biologically, then at least literally. As for Johnny, his fundamental trauma is, first and foremost, linked with these offences and mostly caused by the absent father.

In this chapter I have dealt with metaphysical detective characters, especially fatherless sons, and discussed the ways these detectives aim at continuing their mentor's work and seek to stabilize their sense of self. This treatment, I believe, has offered us solid ground for our next concern, namely for the spheres of knowledge these heroes wander through to accomplish their quests. Thus, from the fathers and the Minotaurs, we proceed to the epistemological labyrinths of the contemporary encyclopedic novel.

5.

Labyrinthine Milieus, Philosophical Quests, and Chthonic Beasts

It is a feature of postmodern detective stories that they situate themselves at the crossroads of epistemological and ontological questions. The detective story, an epistemological genre by nature, turns into the *metaphysical* detective story when the criminal investigation becomes questioned as a purposeful search for hidden knowledge. In this process, the world as an object of investigation on the one hand, and as an epistemological milieu of the detective on the other, becomes replaced with a number of possible worlds, or, more precisely, possible world-systems.

   As the epistemological quest collapses into meaninglessness, its collapse does not mean, however, that the ontological frames of the quest would be futile as well. Instead, these frames, referring to the storyworld and the narrative that portrays the storyworld, support, even enable the whole process, namely the rise and fall of the criminal investigation. Together the storyworld and the narrative constitute two partially overlapping ontological levels, while the epistemological quest takes place only within the range of the storyworld.[695] Thus, when the criminal investigation in the metaphysical detective story becomes questioned, we can still quite well imagine the ontology which enables it: there is a narrative describing a storyworld, no matter how fragmented or erroneous the detective's perspective on it is. Only the detective's perspective – the same perspective we, as readers, at least partially share with him – has changed, often in a painful way, while the foundations of the storyworld remain the same. Now the world appears, as Patricia Merivale writes, "a labyrinth of passages, a series of unopened doors, a thwarted or negated quest, a pointless wait separating the hero from a doubtfully existent Law, from a somehow menacing Judgment."[696]

   In fact, this one-sided change implies that something intrinsic to the ontology *per se* may have affected the detective's worldview and the sense of his abilities.

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[695] See McHale 1987, 36–37.
[696] Merivale 1967, 210.

Paraphrasing Brian McHale, the epistemological structure of the quest has collapsed into the ontological structure of the storyworld *due to* "another world's intrusion into this one."[697] McHale does not mean that this alternative world is completely extraneous in regard to the ontological order of things, it is simply an aspect of this order that was previously unknown and now challenges the detective's narrow outlook. Yet against this intrusion, the world that the detective held real and objective becomes fictive and subjective when something *uncanny* breaks into the detective's vision of the world. The inherent logic of the epistemological quest is not then proportional with the ontological order of things, and this is what the metaphysical detective story almost without exception tells us. Simply put, what happens is that the detective is beaten by the world, the text (as object of investigation), or the narrative in which he is the protagonist. Or, using the concepts of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, the epistemological agents which aim at totalizing are beaten by the totality they are unable to totalize.

In the previous chapter we investigated the beaten, or doomed detective character. The focus of the current chapter is the storyworld, which in the metaphysical detective story is fairly uncanny to start with. In the contemporary encyclopedic novel, the storyworld appears for the epistemological agents to be a vast unorganized storage of information, whereupon its innate uncanniness seems even more harmful than it seems in the metaphysical detective stories of the minimalist type: the amount of information alone casts a monstrous shadow over the detective's deeds. Earlier I referred to the monstrous size of the encyclopedic novel, and the metaphorical behemoths which, according to Edward Mendelson, these narratives must include.[698] Now, this aspect can be specified: the monsters in the contemporary encyclopedic novel usually have much to do with the totality of information, the enormous amount of potential knowledge the detective character encounters. The databases, detailed descriptions of contemporary culture, centrifugal texts, and the rich variety of biological life, for instance, are not only metaphors for the flows of information, they also embody the monster itself. The totality of information which one cannot handle and to which one has only partial access, can indeed appear frightening.

Seen from the classical detective's standpoint, which partially constitutes the metaphysical detective's perspective, the world is primarily a space of investigation, an epistemological chaos in which he aims to bring order. Thus far, we have seen that in the contemporary encyclopedic novel, the detective's actions often more likely expand the narrative and increase its entropy rather than taming it. From the outset, then, attempts to bring order into chaos, are, if not megalomaniac, then at least distorted: in the era of information, the worldview of classical detective story

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[697] McHale 1987, 16.
[698] Mendelson 1976b, 1272.

is inevitably positivistic, one-dimensional, and outdated. It is for this reason, the doomed detective character was introduced in the first place; the hard-boiled detective story invented it, the metaphysical detective story developed it, and in the contemporary encyclopedic novel, I argue, we can see the next phase of this character. Now, it is not only the cultural information but also the excessive texts themselves that turn against the doomed detective character.

More specifically, the metaphysical detective's relation to the surrounding reality is basically twofold. On the one hand, he faces the reality as a classical detective in his position would face it. Like Casaubon in *Foucault's Pendulum*, the metaphysical detective aims at considering reality in positivistic terms, as a teleological, solvable puzzle. In this respect, he ponders his actions in nostalgic relation to the mainstream detective fiction. On the other hand, in an information-driven reality, such a method does not work in a way it works in fiction: the world around the detective is not a puzzle with a solution. At the very least, the world *outside* the detective's vision is uncanny, and threatening. And as with *Foucault's Pendulum*, the problems in investigation begin when the detective confuses these two categories. This confusion in detection only tends to create larger ontological confusion, finally disrupting the detective's case altogether.

It is worth stressing, however, that the quest in many metaphysical detective stories concerns the detective's own lost, hidden, or warped self, and that nearly always this self-searching process has ontological dimensions.[699] The self and the world are uncannily, but tightly, related: if the detective does not learn his true identity via learning about the world, then at the very least the world remains hostile to his attempts to conceive himself. In both cases, the self and the world are related to each other via systems of knowledge and flows of information: the self and the world form a similar "feedback loop" on a story level, as the one the reader and the narrative form on the narrative level. Moreover, as an epistemological agent, the detective goes through the territory, across different circles of knowledge, which in the case of mainstream detective fiction simply means different scenes with a number of clues and potential suspects. In the case of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, the doomed detective encounters much more detailed spheres of special knowledge. Still shuttling from one sphere to another, the sleuth is confronted with areas of knowledge that are either irrelevant for his quest or a threat to its coherence. In this sense, at the very least these aspects of his epistemological environment undermine the detective's confidence in his own abilities as a detective.

Nonetheless, the epistemological environment around the detective is not always hostile. The first section of this chapter is reserved for the in-depth examination of Wallace's *Infinite Jest* to prove this: instead of simply being beaten by the world, the paralyzed detective transforms himself into the master narrator who

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[699] Tani 1984, 76; Merivale 1999, 103.

uses digressive narrative techniques and different models to study the illness he shares as a protagonist with other characters. In other words, *Infinite Jest* examines addictions that are not individual but collective and cultural. And as addictions, these maladies are only the starting point for philosophical questions concerning the existence and non-existence of the self. Thus, the narrator forms a network of details in order to comprehend himself via other people on the one hand, and to constitute an ethical system within the culture of addiction, entertainment, and desperation on the other.

Another two sections in this chapter take two different perspectives on the problematic relationship between the detective character and the epistemological environment. Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations* is an apt example of the encyclopedic novel that integrates ideas borrowed from systems theory to demonstrate that there are similarities between different spheres of knowledge; that art and science approach the same ideas from different directions using individual languages of their own. The central instrument that enables interdisciplinary communication and the study of life is cryptography. The translation process from one system to another is not, however, left within the sphere of science alone; it is also spread over the protagonists' love life; all the way down to their own sense of who and why they are what they are. Thus the fundamental philosophical question of *The Gold Bug Variations* is represented as an excursus from the biological basics of life to the ontological basics of self-searching. Powers's novel aims at being nothing less than an encyclopedia of all life, both organic and digital, but it also maps what happens between life forms, that is, what happens in translation.

The ontological borders are broken in Danielewski's *House of Leaves* in a way that differs from Powers's representation. Instead of dealing with areas of knowledge that are more or less equal, *House of Leaves* portrays a number of embedded frames of reading, each having a doomed detective of its own. The biggest difference between Powers and Danielewski is that while both take the idea of frames seriously, Powers never questions the ontological basis of his characters. Life may be a great mystery that can be approached from various scientific and artistic angles, but as a narrative Powers maintains the realism of his characters. Hence, within the boundaries of the storyworld the characters objectively exist, and nothing in the storyworld makes these characters conscious about their possible "non-existence," the possibility that they might be fictive, false, or otherwise textual constructions.

It is this idea Danielewski takes as a starting point for his novel. What is peculiar in *House of Leaves* is that the detectives become painfully conscious about the non-existence of the house on the one hand, and their own metaphysical foundations on the other. The ambiguous, changing architecture of the house threatens the detectives, be they explorers or readers. Hence, Danielewski's novel builds an ontologically problematic, marginalizing system of knowledge that consists of

unknown, and yet uncanny information. This system has a labyrinthine structure with underground tunnels and a staircase, but what makes its architecture worth discussing is that each character is specifically, yet indirectly, encouraged to descend the stairs – at the cost of their mental health.

This chapter focuses on the world around the doomed detective but retains his point of view. The spheres of knowledge spread around and in him, and not so much around us. Besides studying these spheres and the detective's relation to them, I pay attention to those cognitive and philosophical "tools" to which the detectives have access. At this point, the exploitation of these instruments in the encyclopedic novel should be clear: the detectives use them to pursue their investigations. However, these tools are rarely unambiguously useful; more likely, contrary to the detective's beliefs, they often make it more difficult for the detective to do both, to hold his or her views and to pursue the quest. Moreover, these tools are rarely related to ratiocination, as they were in the classical detective story. Now, the tools are more like ideas the protagonists have inherited from their lost mentors, or from specific societies, social groups, or individuals.

My intention in this chapter is to prove that in constructing encyclopedism, not only the epistemological agent such as the detective character, but also the epistemological environment plays a central part. The world is in a process of epistemological expansion. On the one hand, this expansion threatens the detective's identity, even marginalizes him ontologically, but on the other, it explains why the storyworld is so detailed and complex – not to mention why the narrative is so digressive and centrifugal. But the same principle of expansion also explains the ontological set of questions at the heart of the contemporary encyclopedic novel: to know the world has become an impossible task, whereupon the real question is what methods does one need to organize the content and to overcome the confusion concerning one's being. Let me begin this part of survey by returning to the situation of *Infinite Jest*'s protagonist, Hal Incandenza.

5.1. Mental Labyrinths and Social Circles

One of *Infinite Jest*'s numerous endnotes gives a voice to Marlon Bain, the friend of Hal's oldest brother Orin. Marlon looks back to the time when he and Orin were students in the E. T. A. After reaching their zeniths as junior tennis athletes, both "experimented heavily with recreational substances" until moving on: Orin found sex and became a professional football player whereas Marlon, having had "a couple of really negative methoxy-psychedelic experiences" became, as he calls his condition, Disabled, and withdrew from both competitive tennis and "contemporary

life as we know it."[700] Not only does the difference between Orin's and Marlon's future lots evoke Hal's friend Michael Pemulis's warning about two the options which occur if one decides to quit the drug: either one moves upward and on or dies inside. Also, whereas Marlon's downfall took place when he was still a 17-year-old undergraduate, Hal too collapsed at the same age. But why is this note about Marlon included in the novel in the first place? Does it tell us something about Hal, or is Marlon Bain just a piece of "human furniture" that needs to be there to decorate the maximalist setting of the narrative?[701]

Marlon embodies the topic of this chapter, that is, the world around the protagonist. Earlier I suggested on the basis of Hal's essay that the other characters in *Infinite Jest* represent "burly extras"; they are characters who mirror Hal's condition and carry the catatonic hero around. I also positioned Hal as the master narrator, and suggested that his compulsive "Analysis-Paralysis" leads the narrative forward. But while this argument implies that Hal is a recovering addict who is telling his story through *Infinite Jest*, "Analysis-Paralysis" as a *compulsion* mirrors, in turn, *a self-reflective abstraction*, a "sort of pseudophilosophical mental labyrinth that Bob Hope-smokers are always wandering into and getting trapped in and wasting huge amounts of time inside an intellectual room they cannot negotiate their way out of."[702] This paralyzed condition spreads, then, from Hal's "incongruities" on the story level to his almost hysterical narrative register.[703] Moreover, the condition involves not one but *two* mental labyrinths that are superimposed: first, what the smokers call "Marijuana Thinking," and second, the state of "Analysis-Paralysis" that follows when quitting these substances.[704] The first state is a consequence of *taking* the drug, while the latter is a consequence of *quitting* it: addicts shift back and forth between these states, or mazes, as they ponder whether they should negotiate their way "out there" (addiction) or back "in here" (sobriety).

Therefore, Hal's encyclopedic confession has a labyrinthine form, and on the face of it, it is motivated by his addiction. More specifically, the narrator's condition makes the narrative as well as the storyworld a projection of the narrator's self, and this projection takes the metaphorical form of a labyrinth.[705] John T. Irwin has traced the same idea in both Poe's and Borges's detective fiction, and even though Wallace never makes links with either of these authors, *Infinite Jest* exploits a similar

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[700] *IJ*, 1047.
[701] *IJ*, 835.
[702] *IJ*, 1048–1049.
[703] James Wood (2004, 178) has called this narrative tension "hysterical realism," a form of realism that aims at being as lively and unrestricted as possible. By this term he refers to a manner of expression Wallace shares with writers such as Don DeLillo and Zadie Smith. As Wood claims, "the big contemporary novel" thrives on the motion of narrative: "[s]tories and substories sprout on every page," continually flourishing their "glamorous congestion." See also Ercolino 2013, 158–159.
[704] *IJ*, 1048.
[705] The implicit idea that the reader enters the detective's mind, or wanders through its spatial projection is executed more explicitly in Jaakko Yli-Juonikas's *Neuromaani*, as the whole novel takes place inside the protagonist's brain. See Kyllönen 2016b.

schema of the *hidden root* between the detective, the space of investigation, the victim, and the perpetrator.[706] The labyrinth as cognitive model is exploited as well, and indeed, the hero who aims at comprehending his self as a labyrinth by projecting this spatial mystery onto the cultural environment around him, is an idea that only a few authors have developed as extensively as Wallace.

Does this treatment leave any room for the voices of burly extras? Employing an excessive number of digressions, the narrative shifts constantly from one character to another, and even though the stories about recovery are implied to be "alike," they widen the narrative twofold: formally, the narrative grows in encyclopedic size through them, as each story gives the narrative an additional possibility to digress and thus expand the totality.[707] Epistemologically, the narrative, by bringing forth the spectrum of individual case histories, widens the scale of metaphysical mystery: Hal's pathological condition also becomes a cultural issue. Keeping in mind these two ways to expand the narrative, at this point it is relevant to ask exactly why others are so important to Hal's indirect confession.

The initial answer is that there is no self without others. *Infinite Jest* depicts a very unique culture, and its people who are, in different ways, addicted, unhappy, and lonely; people who prefer enjoyment in privacy; and people who, incapable of relating to others, *perform*, and do what they are expected to do. In the bigger picture, then, Hal is not alone in his paralysis. Instead, his addiction appears to be a small-scale symptom of a malady that is *ideological* in origin: Post-Millennial America feeds the addictive behavior of individuals, it does not prevent it. But before I go further in my claims, the best way to introduce this cultural dilemma is to let Hal speak again. From his sensations about himself we can proceed to the cultural analysis, and further, back to the role of others.

In a later section, Hal confesses his addiction to one of his closest relatives.

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[706] Irwin 1996.

[707] Very few scenes in *Infinite Jest* are represented briefly, or without additional remarks. The narrative angle usually overstays in one scene on the one hand, but eagerly gives way to new scenes on the other. This pattern of narration shows itself in a number of digressions. As such, digression is of course a key procedure in the poetics of the encyclopedic novel. As a narrative technique, its function is to include all possible information within one description, and therefore, support the encyclopedic illusion of totality (Ercolino 2014, 73–74). At the level of interpretation, a natural consequence of using digression is that the reader needs to comb through the narrative material even more closely. And as several scholars have noted in relation to *Infinite Jest*, separating the valuable content from the countless digressions is hard, especially since Wallace's novel is not very plot-driven (cf. Burn 2011, 25; Carlisle 2007, 344). Stephen J. Burn (2011, 25) has, for instance, referred to the elliptical, "complex plot" that does not chime with the "reader's field of vision." It is especially the spectrum of viewpoints, along with the number of bystanders, that stresses the oblique plot structure of the novel: the bystanders bring only their "perceptual corners" (*IJ*, 835) to the fore, and thus blur the specifics of key events. Hence, it would be more appropriate to say that *Infinite Jest* is a problem-oriented rather than a plot-oriented narrative. The purpose of narrative digressions is nevertheless simple. Either by slowing down the action or by blocking the reader's field of vision, digressions form direct obstacles to the reader's attempts to reconstruct the plot. But as a consequence of remaining descriptive, even oversensitive, the narration also turns the reader's attention away from the events to the narrative action as such.

Beating around the bush with Mario, his older brother, Hal starts the confession with Orin. According to Hal, his oldest brother lies with "a really pathological intensity."[708] From this observation Hal proceeds to analyze different categories of lying, implying, for instance, that "[s]ome bury the lie in so many digressions and asides that they like try to slip the lie in there through all the extraneous data like a tiny bug through a windowscreen."[709] Finally, he tells Mario that as a child he used to fear cinematic monsters most, but as a teenager he has come to believe that "the only real monsters might be the type of liar where there's simply no way to tell. The ones who give nothing away."[710]

By this specific type Hal refers first and foremost to Michael Pemulis, who by lying has just saved Hal from immediate expulsion and the whole tennis academy from public humiliation. However, this very incident as well as Hal's withdrawal from marijuana (which is partly related to the former), have together led Hal to see himself as well as a "brass-faced" liar, that is, the worst kind of monster.[711] Having been forty hours without substances, Hal senses "a hole" growing inside him; a hole that grows until it makes him "fly apart in different directions" in front of those people who know the difference between Hal and Hal's father, and to whom he has lied.[712] While it is obvious that using marijuana has shaped Hal's sense of himself and his relation to others – due to the drug use, he has become more secretive – dropping the substance has had a similar effect on him. The partly voluntary withdrawal has left him alone, without the comfort of the substance and with qualms about the actions he committed to hide the drug use from his family.

But obviously Hal also has qualms about himself. The drug use is not only as an escapist practice but literally a means of "self-erasure."[713] Therefore, the growing hole that Hal has discovered implies the emptiness of his own self. The real issue is, however, whether the addict has lost his sense of self *due to* drug use, or was there a gap in selfhood in the first place. This question is obviously a large and philosophical one, and what makes it particularly significant is that, besides Hal, it relates to almost every character in *Infinite Jest*. From it also arises crucial ethical conceptions (such as, how to be happy, and how to relate to other human beings) that are common to all. The question of self is the one I consider next, as it leads us to the ideological and domestic roots of Hal's addiction. Suffering originates from a childish and satisfaction-oriented culture, and the way out of it – the goal most characters are pursuing – therefore involves much more than shaking off addiction.

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[708] *IJ*, 771.
[709] *IJ*, 773.
[710] *IJ*, 774.
[711] *IJ*, 774.
[712] *IJ*, 775.
[713] *IJ*, 791.

The Desperate Self and the Infantophile Culture

Whereas Hal confesses that he is a liar, his additional opinion of himself is equally enlightening. "One of his [Hal's] troubles with his Moms," the narrator points out:

> is the fact that Avril Incandenza believes she knows him inside and out as a human being, and internally worthy one at that, when in fact inside Hal's there's pretty much nothing at all, he knows. His Moms Avril hears her own echoes inside him and thinks what she hears is him, and this makes Hal feel the one thing he feels to the limit, lately: he is lonely.[714]

Yet what Hal implies only indirectly here is that throughout his life he has been able to convince everyone, including his mother, that he *has* a self; that "he's in there, inside his own hull, as a human being," while to himself, he is not.[715] But this intention, or a need to convince other people of his existence is not only deep-rooted but also, in the long run, precisely the very pathological feature that has made Hal "an opaque, brass-faced liar." The downward spiral of lies has led him to entertain and perform: he is "in here" to learn to meet those expectations his parents, teachers, friends, and even his grief-therapist have had of him.[716]

What Hal fears as he senses the hole growing in him is that he is internally empty; that he has no self or soul, and none of the earthy sources of enjoyment (marijuana among them) can any longer prevent him from thinking about this possibility. There are, however, degrees of desperation of this kind. In his existential philosophy, Søren Kierkegaard relates despair with a sickness of the spirit that has

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[714] *IJ*, 694.

[715] *IJ*, 694. For the reader, this is clear already from the beginning as Hal aims at convincing the administrators that he is not a machine but a living and breathing human being with feelings and opinions. See *IJ*, 12.

[716] *IJ*, 3. In this respect, Hal strikingly resembles the other fictional Hal, namely HAL 9000, a famous central computer in Stanley Kubrick's *2001 – A Space Odyssey* (1968). Both HAL 9000 and Hal Incandenza maintain the functioning in their community and do what they are expected – the former even takes care of the functioning of the spacecraft, and entertains the astronauts by playing chess with them, the equivalent game in *Infinite Jest* being tennis. Both are also the most influential, and yet the most distant characters in their stories. In fact, their distance from other characters motivates the drama. When the astronauts begin to suspect that HAL 9000 is malfunctioning, the central computer to hide its potential flaws turns against them, and kills almost all of the crew. By contrast in *Infinite Jest*, soon after Hal has shown the first signs of potential malfunctioning – he nearly loses a tennis match – the narrative sequence is interrupted, and we are left to conjecture whether Hal has become self-destructive or not. On the basis of my earlier argument concerning the missing year, he has, at the very least, gone through a painful period of sobriety before that. Nevertheless, the horrifying self-discovery that he might be empty, has also made Hal desperate, but still functioning as an athlete. Having abandoned "All Hope," he is on the brink of losing his mind, just like his friend warned him. In Kubrick *2001*, before HAL 9000 is shut down in the end, the computer says: "I'm afraid. I'm afraid, Dave. Dave, my mind is going." That Wallace removed a whole year from the novel so that it would only encourage the reader to interpret the rest of the events independently, also resembles Kubrick's idea of leaving out all the explanatory scenes and features of the film.

three modes: "being unconscious in a despair of having a self […], not wanting in despair to be oneself, and wanting in despair to be oneself."[717] Since these modes are also existential stages that follow each other, it is worth asking in regard to *Infinite Jest* on which stage is Hal, then?

Specifying the distinction, Kierkegaard gives us valuable examples for navigation. First, he writes that if a person who *does not* want to be himself is unable to banish the self he finds displeasing, he chooses to escape it by turning towards "the outward direction of what is called 'life,' real life, active life."[718] In this way, that person only loses himself: there is, in the background of his soul, "a kind of false door" whose existence he forgets.[719] Over the years, he may become "a forceful and enterprising man, father, and citizen, even perhaps an important man" – who at home is referred to as "himself" by his servants – but the question of immortality keeps haunting him.[720] He is especially curious about the possibility whether in the afterlife he would be able to find himself again. In Kierkegaard's view, if desperation does not reach the point where it puts this person "on the right road leading to the faith," the person becomes "a restless spirit" who either seeks relief in sensuality or immerses himself in great enterprises.[721]

Hal's father, Jim Incandenza, obviously embodies this kind of desperate person.[722] When Kierkegaard moves from "the important person" to describe a person whose desperation is even deeper, the nature of Hal's desperation, as well as his differences in relation to his father, become clearer. The false door that the important person deserted, is a very real door for a person Kierkegaard calls *reserved*: it is "a real door though kept carefully closed, and behind it the self sits, as it were, keeping watch on itself, preoccupied or filling time with not wanting to be itself, yet still self enough to love itself."[723] Moreover, this person hides the matter of the self from others, as "either he feels no urge to do so or he has learned to suppress it."[724] His reasons for such an action, according to Kierkegaard, are that "only purely

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[717] Kierkegaard 2008, 9. Marshall Boswell has been among the first to connect *Infinite Jest* with Kierkegaard's philosophy, and Wallace has also admitted this connection. See Boswell 2003, 138–140; Hirt 2008; Den Dulk 2012, 325; Den Dulk 2014.

[718] Kierkegaard 2008, 66.

[719] Ibid., 66.

[720] Ibid., 66.

[721] Ibid., 79.

[722] "Himself" is the nickname all in the Incandenza family use when referring to Jim. Also, Hal's father, as he is described by others, was indeed "an important man": he established a tennis academy, became a cult filmmaker, and even worked for the United States government in developing "cold annular fusion," which enabled O.N.A.N: to be the energy independent. As with Kierkegaard's demonstration, Jim became a restless spirit as well: on the one hand, during the last years of his life he worked day and night to compose, direct, and edit films, and on the other hand, after his suicide, during the main events, he comes back to life as a wraith, which is literally a "restless spirit." Moreover, his life has indeed left "its mark," as most people who knew Jim are living, even years after, in the shadow of his death (Kierkegaard 2008, 79). This is especially the case with Hal, who is ambivalently devoted to his father and his film projects.

[723] Kierkegaard 2008, 76.

[724] Ibid., 76.

immediate people – who spiritually speaking have come about as far as the child in its first stage of early childhood, where it lets everything out with such totally endearing unembarrassment – only purely immediate people can't keep anything back."[725] In other words, he does not want to be sincere and present, or that is at least what society has taught him. Hence, whereas the important person talks with the priest about the question of immortality, the reserved person urges solitude. This, for Kierkegaard, indicates that the reserved person still has the spirit that is needed to understand *oneself as a self*. But since "in our own day it is indeed a crime to have a spirit, so […] such people, the lovers of solitude, are put into the same category as criminals."[726] What Kierkegaard implies here is that cultural influences define what desperate persons may think of themselves, as well as of others.

Recalling that Hal is a detective, a victim, *and* a criminal, Kierkegaard's characterization hits the target. Hal is a "*hidden* boy," as his father puts it.[727] Moreover, by narrating his story, Hal aims at finding "the right road leading to faith," that in Wallace's secularized terms implies a decent, good, sincere, and unselfish life.[728] Hal's exhausting confession then has less to do with addiction as such and more to do with "higher," far-reaching purposes: it is a quest for the lost self. Kierkegaard implies, however, that if the reserved person becomes conscious of his reservedness *as weakness*, and someone to whom he has confessed this weakness suggests that he is actually too prideful and his thinking is "a curious sort of knot," *then* this reserved person will face the same crossroads most really desperate persons eventually face: either to dwell even deeper in sensuality or to find the aforementioned right road.[729] In the addict communities of *Infinite Jest*, the analogy for this crossroads situation is "the Bottom," even though the narrator adds that the term "is misleading, because everybody here agrees it's more like someplace very high and unsupported."[730] As a narrative, *Infinite Jest* depicts the same Bottom dilemma: Hal's story is an excessive, and yet sincere confession, a speech he makes to get that support. His narrative methods considered, it is a very introverted and hysterical address, but an address, or a request for help nevertheless.

Kierkegaard's argument about what the reserved person thinks of *other people*, and how this argument correlates with Hal's sensations, is more puzzling, however. Nowhere does Hal, as a character, express any *critique* concerning other people in general – with the exception of his family. Yet several of Hal's essays are included in the novel, in which general cultural issues, mostly dealing with technology, are considered. At the same time, it is apt that his narrative is mostly set in the Year of

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[725] Ibid. 76.
[726] Ibid., 78.
[727] *IJ*, 838; original italics.
[728] *IJ*, 838; Kierkegaard 2008, 79; Kelly 2010; Bolger 2014.
[729] Kierkegaard 2008, 79.
[730] *IJ*, 347. This, as Allard Den Dulk (2012, 340) points out, resembles another key philosophical idea of Kierkegaard's, namely *the leap of faith*, a shift from aesthetic to ethical life.

Depend Adult Undergarment and deals with people who both literally and metaphorically cannot "keep anything back." Now, as I have clarified Hal's position as a desperate person, these "extras" deserve our attention. Let us continue by taking a short look at what kind of culture the Organization of North American Nations during the Subsidized Time is, especially from the standpoint of an ordinary citizen.

For the reader of *Infinite Jest*, initially one of the most striking features of the storyworld is the strange time frames, such as the Year of Glad and the Year of the Trial-Size Dove Bar, as well as the number of unfamiliar acronyms, proper names, and slogans that all seem to be public knowledge and relate to things the characters face in their everyday lives. These allusions are in place since O.N.A.N. is an aggressively media-oriented society and the years refer to the names of corporate sponsors. Entertainment and advertisement even explain the peculiar time scale: the old-fashioned television broadcasting was replaced with a new technology called Interlace Telentertainment that made it technologically possible for consumers to watch what home-entertainment "cartridge" they choose, whenever they want, and thus also skip the commercials if they wish.[731] "Subsidized Time" was then founded for compensation. As there were no spot for old-fashioned commercials any longer, each year was sold to a different corporation, and named after them, or after a consumer product they were marketing.[732] Therefore, the citizens of O.NA.N. are now living in one big commercial break, as Robert Bell and William Dowling put it.[733] For most characters, this is not, however, a nightmare of any kind, since they are used to it. Hence, just like Hamlet was more real for the characters of *Foucault's Pendulum* than their janitor, for many O.N.A.N citizens the television characters are, if not more real, then at least as real companions as other people who are around. In fact, for many citizens, the virtual and real environments are practically one and the same: the world of images is, to quote Wallace's famous example, the water they swim in.[734]

O.N.A.N. culture is neither a utopia nor a dystopia *per se*. More likely, it is simply a parallel U.S. culture, a caricature of the real one. There are details that transgress a typical realistic perspective, however. At the margins of the narrative there are, for instance, urban legends and stories that the Concavity, the national waste-based producing system, has created major herds of feral hamsters and "The

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[731] Cartridges are used in "TP Systems for Home, Office, or Mobile," Wallace's proactive version of smartphones, tablets, and other television-computer devices. They are, however, physical copies.
[732] See also Hayles 1999b, 686.
[733] Bell & Dowling 2005, 19–20. According to Greg Carlisle (2007, 123), the established time frame correlates approximately with the years 2002–2010, the main events taking place in 2009.
[734] This metaphor from Wallace's "This is water," a commencement speech he gave at Kenyon College in 2005, is already sketched in *Infinite Jest*: "This wise old whiskery fish swims up to three young fish and goes, 'Morning, boys, how's the water?' and swims away, and the three young fish watch him swim away and look at each other and go, 'What the fuck is water?' and swim away" (*IJ*, 445). Wallace uses it in different contexts, but on the simplest level, "the fish in the water" symbolizes one's awareness of one's surroundings. See also Wallace 2009, Timpe 2014.

Infant," a gigantic child that, longing for its parents, wanders around the waste area and is fed by nuclear waste.[735] The Statue of Liberty has gone through a change, and on each January first, the torch in the statue's hand is replaced with a new commercial product (such as a hamburger or an ice cream). From this blatantly satiric perspective, the Kierkegaardian twist of the novel – the childishness of "purely immediate people" – is certainly more understandable: the urban legends, hamburgers and ice creams are things that fascinate especially children.

Indeed, the Organization of North American Nations is a thoroughly childish and pleasure-centered culture. It is, of course, literally young: as a federation, it was founded only eight years before the main events. Moreover, it is young as regards its interests: like Western culture as we know it, Wallace's America is obsessed with youth and celebrities.[736] But what most explicitly underlines O.N.A.N.'s infancy is the fundamental role of digital technologies and entertainment. Through entertainment, O.N.A.N. is ideologically devoted to both the concept of personal enjoyment and the allegedly *free* citizen's deeply-rooted desire *to be entertained*.

To get a bigger picture, I raise only two details from Wallace's novel in this regard. First, the cultural condition of O.N.A.N. is a result of a long chain of ideological choices at the political level, beginning, perhaps, from the neoliberal politics of Ronald Reagan's America and proceeding to the situation in which the president "Johnny Gentle, Famous Crooner," a former B-movie actor and the leader of the Clean U.S. Party, asks the citizens not to mind the tough political decisions, such as the nationwide waste problem, but only "sit back and enjoy the show."[737] Second, for the citizens, the newest technology has made it possible to follow this political spectacle from a safe distance. These technologies have already led half of the people living in the area of Metro Boston to "work at home via some digital link," while "94% of all O.N.A.N.ite paid entertainment [is] now absorbed at home: pulses, storage cartridges, digital displays, domestic decors – an entertainment-market of sofas and eyes."[738]

What, in this cultural development, leads us back to the question of the desperate self, is that the individuals looking at their furniture and devices (that is, television and other image-technologies), and thus living through their media screens, are more likely to perceive themselves as solipsistic rather than loving or caring only about *themselves*. This tendency should be distinguished from simple

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[735] See also Hayles 1999b, 688–689.
[736] Media is filled with young, promising and beautiful celebrities, film stars, artists – and athletes. "The Show," a professional career in tennis that only a few of the E.T.A. students enter, is a part of the same entertainment industry, and already the youngest students are anxious about their possibilities of getting what they *want*, that is, "the hype" (*IJ*, 388).
[737] *IJ*, 383. *Infinite Jest* mentions by name the presidents preceding and following Reagan's presidency, namely Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush, but not Reagan himself. This implies, however, that theoretically speaking, the development of O.N.A.N. begins in the same universe where Carter, Reagan, and Bush are presidents. See *IJ*, 382; Carlisle 2007, 225.
[738] *IJ*, 620.

egotism, then. O.N.A.N. citizens are not self-oriented, that is, convinced about the primary nature of their sensuous experiences *because* they individually want to, but because they are, more likely, *conditioned* to stay at home rather than go out and interact with other people. Of course, this is fundamentally a chicken and egg situation, but the least one can say is that the cultural industry that classifies citizens into performers and viewers, as the media-oriented O.N.A.N does, increases rather than prevents an individual sense of solipsism. Wallace's key essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" (1993), an essay closely relating to the media critique found in *Infinite Jest*, underlines the same point: there are countless citizens who are *lonely*, not because they are obnoxious, but because they are "allergic to people," and hence "television looks to be an absolute godsend for [this] human subspecies that loves to watch people but hates to be watched itself."[739] Thus, a society in which audiovisual technologies make it possible, even normal, for people to stay behind closed doors and voluntarily shut-themselves in, creates and reproduces a fundamental dilemma: on the one hand, we, including lonely people, are constantly seeking company, but on the other, we may only feel comfortable when there are no other people around. One-way watching seems to solve this dilemma: while some people do not want to be the center of attention or "bear the psychic costs of being around other humans," only in their solitude do they feel themselves free to either concentrate on themselves or lose and forget themselves in watching and enjoying the performer's company.[740] This self-absorbed state, which is culturally fueled and technologically maintained, is, then, an individual manifestation of the ideological bond between *desire to be entertained* and *freedom to choose*, the bond that is at the heart of O.N.A.N's infancy.[741] Analyzing this link further leads us to discuss how the dominant O.N.A.N. ideology affects domestic relations, and the individual desperation that follows.

The Iron Cage of Freedom

Freedom is a value that has traditionally been appreciated extremely high in U.S. culture, but its relation to the unquestionable priority of personal enjoyment is not that clear. A number of possible explanations can be given, nevertheless. For instance, the priority of personal enjoyment can be justified by saying that every man is a self-made man, at least in the American collective imagination, and therefore he has every right to enjoy himself as well. Or, it can be explained by underlining that contemporary U.S. culture is consumerist, atomized, self-seeking and narcissistic. Despite their different approaches, common to both explanatory

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[739] Wallace 1998, 22; original italics.
[740] Ibid., 22.
[741] See *IJ*, 412.

models is that an individual is put before the community, whether the individual wants to be or not. The individual is, in other words, considered to be more or less *distinct* from the social groups, and this distance results either from his alienation or his alleged independence. Therefore, even if most communities exist regardless of this individual, he or she would be free to choose whether to *join* these communities or not.

The explanation *Infinite Jest* gives follows similar premises – an individual is detached from possible social groups – but the consequences, as Wallace depicts them, are not very optimistic. Most people around Hal and Don Gately have got used to spending their spare time at home, enjoying themselves in front of their personal Interlace Telentertainment unit.[742] O.NA.N. citizens are not very willing to join communities voluntarily – except, perhaps, the communities of celebrities and of audiences. Instead, their greatest joy, even the center of their lives, is to be alone with the substance they love, be it marijuana or a television series. In many cases this involves an isolated death-like state, that is, an enclosed condition that radically differs from social intercourse, or the circumstances under which one encounters other humans, works, and in general, faces the immediacy of life.[743] Personal enjoyment is first and foremost an escapist, even solipsistic practice in the world of *Infinite Jest*: one is alone with one's own senses, enjoying not only the substance one has chosen, but also the detachment as such; at that very moment one does not need to face everyday life or other people. And this is where O.N.A.N's long-term yet shortsighted policy has driven its citizens. The arch-American motto *E Pluribus Unum*, "one from many," is inverted in the *Infinite Jest*'s parallel world: detached, the individuals neither wish to join any real-life community nor feel that they belong to larger traditional communities such as a nation. "We are the Audience," as Wallace writes, "megametrically many, though most often we watch alone: E Unibus Pluram."[744]

Since in *Infinite Jest* this solipsistic condition is depicted as normal, it gives an idea how deeply involved the citizens of O.N.A.N. are with being by themselves and consuming entertainment. It does not, however, give an unambiguous explanation *why* these people want to be alone with their enjoyment in the first place.[745] The citizen's need to seek enjoyment in privacy is framed in the third narrative thread of Wallace's novel, which mostly consists of theoretical discussions between two agents, Rémy Marathe and Hugh Steeply. The agents have arranged a meeting,

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[742] Hal and Don are not exceptions either. Hal watches his father's films on many occasions, and Don, even though not watching films, mentions that "a drug addict's second most meaningful relationship is always with his domestic entertainment unit" (*IJ*, 834).

[743] See *IJ*, 76. This behavior distinguishes O.N.A.N. citizens from Kierkegaard's "purely immediate people" as the people around Hal are thoroughly *mediate*, mostly communicating with each other through "video-phones." On the other hand, in their personal enjoyment they indeed seem to be unable to "keep anything back." See Kierkegaard 2008, 76; *IJ*, 144–151.

[744] Wallace 1998, 23.

[745] See *IJ*, 412; Boswell 2003, 136.

since copies of Jim Incandenza's last film, "Infinite Jest" (or "the Entertainment" as they call it) have been anonymously sent around North America, and the film has turned out to be, if not lethal, then at least damaging: the film's "unprepared" viewers have sunk into an ecstatic coma of sorts, being now permanently "[d]ocile and continent but blank, as if on some deep reptile-brain level pithed."[746] For this reason, Steeply, representing USOUS, has called a series of meetings with Marathe, suspecting that Marathe's separatist group, AFR, is behind the dissemination of the film.[747]

Already in their first meeting, we are given a possible explanation why entertainment makes the citizens of O.N.A.N. childish – that is, why television entertainment is such a compelling amusement, and why the characters wish to consume it alone. While Jim's last film makes the viewers wet themselves (like Kierkegaard's purely immediate people), it is only a crystallization of the best features of ordinary entertainment. Moreover, it is what the citizens seem to desire most – or what they are educated to desire most – namely *infantile gratification*, a deep satisfaction in "comfort, passivity, and escape from responsibility."[748] According to Mary K. Holland, "the desire to escape [the] endless escalation of unfillable desire" – that is, the desire to escape everyday responsibilities and the hold of the Freudian reality principle – is basically "a desire to be an infant again, caressed in a womb of absolute self-fulfillment."[749] But before we follow Holland's conclusion, let me introduce Marathe's train of thought. Marathe explains: "the facts of the situation speak loudly. What is known. This is a U.S.A. production, this Entertainment cartridge. Made by an American man in the U.S.A. The appetite for the appeal of it: this also is U.S.A. The U.S.A. drive for spectation, which your culture teaches."[750] An "anti-American" terrorist *par excellence*, Marathe outlines a possible scenario: if someone had produced a lethally perfect film, and the citizens of the U.S.A. did not carefully choose what they love – "What if you just *love*? without deciding?" as Steeply has asked earlier – and none of the national institutes guided these citizens or restricted the dissemination, would not the Entertainment be able to destroy the whole nation, then?[751] "Who would die for this chance to be fed this death of pleasure with spoons, in their warm homes, alone, unmoving"?[752]

For Marathe, the fact that the contemporary O.N.A.N. culture encourages its citizens to spectate, passively watch things from a safe distance, is therefore only

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[746] *IJ*, 90, 548.
[747] USOUS, United States Office of Unspecified Services can be summarized as a future combination of the FBI and the CIA, whereas Marathe's group Les Assassins des Fauteils Rollents "a.k.a. Wheelchair Assassins, [is] pretty much Québec's most dreaded and rapacious anti-O.N.A.N. terrorist cell" (*IJ*, 994).
[748] Hirt 2001, 36.
[749] Holland 2006, 223.
[750] *IJ*, 318.
[751] *IJ*, 108; original italics.
[752] *IJ*, 318.

part of a bigger problem. O.N.A.N culture cherishes one's unrestricted freedom to choose, and as Marathe sees it, this *ideology*, the very culprit, is the core of the matter.[753] And his conclusion is tempting: full freedom is not freedom at all. That is, O.N.A.N. citizens are living without the ties that bind: they are individuals who have distanced themselves from immediate communities and hence have nothing except themselves to live and die for. And without communities, their *negative freedom* – freedom without boundaries or the guidance of a community – leaves them empty, lonely, and desperate. Because of this, Marathe claims that when no one tells you what you must do, you are *not* free: "How to choose any but a child's greedy choices if there is no loving-filled father to guide, inform, teach the person how to choose?"[754] If he is correct, most of *Infinite Jest*'s characters are then *unfree in freedom*: "the cage's exit is actually the bars of the cage."[755] This is not to say that the citizens are *narcissist* in a pathological sense: the feelings of emptiness are less linked with fantasies of omnipotence and more with passive consumption, a condition in which one does not need to choose in the first place.[756]

Marathe's parable is not the only one of its kind. Generally, enjoyment and freedom in Wallace's novel are related to images of childhood. Eating candy and watching cartoons on Saturday morning, getting high, seeking one's Inner Infant in a men's support group meeting, identifying with the infant's viewpoint in "Infinite Jest," and wetting oneself like a toddler when watching this film – all of these images depict the same childlike experience. A strong unconscious desire to be an infant again, therefore takes many forms, both individual and collective, but as Marshall Boswell points out, nearly all of the characters in the novel is "a grownup baby in diapers, crawling on all fours in search of something to fill that need for maternal plenitude, for wholeness, or, at the very least, someone or something to blame for his or her own unhappiness."[757]

Though Boswell's claim is somewhat overstated, it mainly hits the target regarding the infant's goals: several characters are longing both for a deep state of satisfaction, and for a simple explanation for their current misery. It is partly due to this reason that characters both young and old, return again and again to recall their youth, and especially their relationship to their mothers and fathers. After all, the home is a natural starting point for soul-searching, as it is in a domestic sphere where each of us first felt ourselves happy, unhappy, alone, and a part of something bigger than ourselves. It is also in the family where we sensed for the first time that there

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[753] Or as N. Katherine Hayles (1999b, 692–693) summarizes, "the culprit is no single person, family, or even nation, but rather an ideology that celebrates an autonomous, independent subject who is free to engage the pursuit of happiness, a subject who has the right to grab what pleasure he can without regard for the cost of that pursuit to others."
[754] *IJ*, 320. In this regard, O.N.A.N. culture as a whole, not just Hal, lacks a mentor.
[755] *IJ*, 222.
[756] Cf. Holland 2006, 224.
[757] Boswell 2003, 131.

is "something more than [our] own wishes of sentiment," namely another person with individual feelings, hopes and needs.[758] On the other hand, as Holland deduces on the basis of Sigmund Freud's classic article "On Narcissism," (1914): "[i]n desiring the mother, the infant is simply desiring the self and existing in a closed loop of constant fulfillment that seems to flow from no external source."[759] Again, this should stress the solipsistic aspect of cultural infancy: one does not want to be with the actual mother, not to mention the "loving-filled father," but alone, in a state that precedes all social relationships; a state that brings one in touch with those feelings of primal enjoyment the images of father and mother represent.[760] The home, in this sense, is where "I" is, and "I" wants to be home alone.

At the same time, as a primary community of each individual the family operates as an emotional base upon which a particular human being becomes a self, or fails in this growth process. In a family, a child also learns fundamental social skills and examines his or her shaping personality in a safe environment. Since the early development of a child is so important for a person's later development as a citizen, the domestic imagery in Wallace's novel is well motivated: the big philosophical and cultural questions *Infinite Jest* deals with concern the existence of the self as a *relational* mode of being. In Kierkegaard's view, being a self requires becoming a self, which means voluntarily *choosing the actuality of life*, instead of refraining from it under the solipsistic shelter of self-centeredness.[761] This actuality contains the necessity of social relations. Thus, whether the domestic imagery represents an infinite solipsistic loop or not, it also enables the possibility of breaking free and growing up as a human being. The return to these images implies a fundamental challenge, where one either gains a grasp of one's self or loses it.

In order to become oneself one needs to overcome what Kierkegaard calls irony.[762] Irony in Kierkegaard's philosophy and in Wallace's novel is, as Allard Den Dulk explains, not so much a linguistic phenomenon as an existential attitude, or a life-view that distances the individual from immediate reality, from "what is 'given': his upbringing, his social background, his culture."[763] The ironic individual not only practices negative freedom in an earlier described sense, he also shapes his life as he likes, by neglecting its actuality, and wants "to retain his freedom and bring his life into accord with his fantasy."[764] In Kierkegaard's terms, he is an *aesthete*, who in a cage of personal pleasure and self-deception, avoids all commitment and wants to "aestheticize" his life to the fullest.

Correspondingly, Wallace examines this ironic worldview in its logical

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[758] *IJ*, 318.
[759] Holland 2006, 224.
[760] *IJ*, 320.
[761] See Den Dulk 2012, 328, 338–339.
[762] Kierkegaard 1989. On irony, see also Wallace 1998.
[763] Den Dulk 2012, 328.
[764] Den Dulk 2014, 47.

connections, in a culture, but also in a family. Due to upbringing or the lack of it, the aesthetic life-view also begins to develop in an environment where all human life ordinarily begins: in the immediate family circle. The cultural condition in turn is not so much a consequence of this intimate development as a larger frame for it. And vice versa: the family works as a model of the Post-Millennial, aestheticized condition of O.N.A.N. culture. Therefore, in Wallace's view, all the domestic issues are fundamentally cultural issues, but also the other way around: the cultural malady may partly result from complexities in the nuclear family, just like domestic behavior may be influenced by the cultural representations of the family. To illustrate this idea and to pinpoint the bond between solipsistic freedom and cultural infancy, let us next return to Hal's categories of lying and place his family under closer scrutiny.

Performers and Figurants of the Family

In *Infinite Jest*, the family members do not understand each other. A family forms a unit in which sides are taken and some voices are heard over others. Siblings are competitive, and jealous of each other. Parents may expect a lot of their children whereas descendants may have to do more than they can bear to fulfill these expectations. Expectations may become a burden – or the offspring are left with no guidance whatsoever. In both cases, a special tension develops between siblings, between mothers and fathers, but especially between the child and the parents. On the other hand, children expect different things from their mother than they expect from their father: the mother is a parent who guarantees enjoyment, whereas the father is the one who recognizes the child. Nevertheless, a balance is required: mothers should not care too much, and fathers should not give too much credit.

Each of these propositions describes family tensions in *Infinite Jest*. Since Hal is the main character, we get to know most about his family. But keeping in mind the cultural infancy of O.N.A.N, the domestic issues of the Incandenza family are only part of a larger issue, namely the postmodern condition, which in this case can be called the entrenchment of the Kierkegaardian *aesthetic life-view* as a cultural dominant. In practice, irony as detachment from the actuality of life, governs the individual self, which, in turn, affects the way family relations are organized; how relaxed, for instance, a family member is in the company of siblings and parents. Generally, in Wallace's novel, the home is not a tension-free environment at all, and for this reason too the family relations of the Incandenzas deserve our attention.

When Hal classifies different types of liars, he also says that talking to his mother is like talking to a rock.[765] The same goes for Mario. As much as Hal loves

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[765] *IJ*, 759. On his way to his mother, Mario meets LaMont Chu, a minor character, who asks about Hal's condition and says: "Jesus, Mario, it's like trying to talk to a rock with you sometimes" (*IJ*, 759). After Mario has met his mother and gone to bed, Hal returns to the room he shares with his brother, and starts to reminisce about their childhood. Mario comments: "Hal, pretty much all I do is love you

his brother, he suffers from Mario's lack of understanding: Mario, probably the most pure-hearted of the family, is highly emphatic, but not a very good listener. Orin, Hal's oldest brother, is the most resolute in his views: he keeps Mario as retarded, and for him their mother is "unredeemably fucking bats."[766] On the other hand, Orin trusts his youngest brother, and sees Avril as "the family's light and pulse and the center that held tight."[767] In Hal's own categorizations, his mother is a liar who disguises her lies "on a Moms-act of total trust and forgiveness."[768]

In many ways, Avril is indeed "the center" of Hal's family, and she also has a central role in the narrative. For instance, when, in his confession, Hal refers to people he has lied to, the most important individual among them is his mother. Avril's presence in Hal's life, as well as in the novel, remains highly ambiguous, however. She seems an inconsistent person, and her relationship to her sons varies. We get to know very little about Avril's own views – in those rare scenes in which she is present, the point of view is usually that of some other character's. But what we may take as a fact is that she is obsessive-compulsive when it comes to tidiness and grammar, sexually attractive when it comes to the opposite sex, and extraordinarily caring when it comes to her sons.[769] All these features imply that Avril is a very *active* person. Perhaps for this reason throughout the novel Avril is also defamed by others: she is said to be manipulative, promiscuous, and a witch-like character. But even Orin, who is the most eager to judge her, has to admit that Avril is "functioning," and she "careers through the day turboed and in fifth gear."[770]

When one family member is "functioning" and pushing herself forward, the others may feel they are being pushed aside. This is a great cause of suffering among the fathers and sons of the Incandenza family. In the end parts of the narrative, Jim, a wraith, tells Don Gately his side: as a father and a husband, he felt that for most of his life he was "*trapped* and *encaged* […] in his mute peripheral status."[771] The specific concept he uses to describe his status in his family is *a figurant*, a ballet term describing those "myriad thespian extras […] the nameless patrons always at tables, filling out the bar's crowd"; those actors in the periphery of vision who open their

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and be glad I have an excellent brother in every way, Hal" (*IJ*, 772), to which Hal comments, "Jesus, it's just like talking to the Moms with you sometimes, Boo" (*IJ*, 772). The phrasing is, then, almost the same, but as these words are addressed to Mario, they also imply the stressful impact both the mother and the brother have on Hal.

[766] *IJ*, 1040.
[767] *IJ*, 737.
[768] *IJ*, 784.
[769] According to Holland (2006, 225), Avril also "provides the novel's key model of the self-indulgent mother" who cannot put her own needs aside for the sake of her children. Holland bases her argument on Orin's story of how Hal, as a child, ate a piece of mold, whereupon Avril ran hysterically away from her youngest son instead of taking care of the situation. Orin's ambiguous maliciousness towards his mother considered, Avril should not however be judged on this story alone.
[770] *IJ*, 1039.
[771] *IJ*, 835; original italics.

mouths but are never heard.[772]

Jim's relation to his oldest and youngest sons is in this respect illustrative. For Hal, his relationship with Jim had been extremely stressful since, according to Hal, Jim was delusional: he only saw Hal's mouth "moving but nothing coming out."[773] Like Avril in Hal's opinion, what Jim was able to *hear* from Hal's direction were his own echoes. Everyone else in the family, however, thought that young Hal had the faculty of speech, and considered that Jim "was only confusing the boy with his own [...] boyhood self."[774] Afraid that Hal would "retreat to the periphery of life's frame," Jim then directed "Infinite Jest" to "[m]ake something so bloody compelling it would reverse thrust on a young self's fall into the womb of solipsism, anhedonia, death in life" and "bring him 'out of himself.'"[775]

Orin, in turn, remained without Jim's recognition. Over the years he suffered from his father's lack of presence, a lack symbolized throughout the novel as an image of a blank, expressionless face. As Orin summarizes (and his ex-girlfriend focalizes):

> Jim's internal life was to Orin a black hole [...]. Orin had no idea what his father thought or felt about anything. He thought Jim wore the opaque blank facial expression his mother in French sometimes jokingly called *Le Masque*. The man was so blankly and irretrievably hidden that Orin said he'd come to see him as like autistic, almost catatonic.[776]

In Jim's defense, he, in his own words, became aware of his own hiddenness at an early stage of his life, and partly for this reason, became so obsessed that his youngest son, Hal was "blank, inbent, silent, frightening, mute. I.e. that his son had become what he [...] had feared as a child he [...] was."[777] Jim's concern over Hal appears natural, since Jim's own father and grandfather had also worn blank-faced masks, and had been thoroughly opaque in young Jim's eyes.[778] Unfortunately, while Jim seems to be the first in the history of his family who really pays attention to his offspring, his recognition did not fall equally on all of the boys.[779] Perhaps since Jim spent his last days, to recall Kierkegaard's definition, having immersed

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[772] *IJ*, 834.

[773] *IJ*, 30.

[774] *IJ*, 838.

[775] *IJ*, 837, 839.

[776] *IJ*, 737.

[777] *IJ*, 838. It is worth noting that in the only episode that describes Jim's relation to his own father, Jim's voice is never heard: the episode consists of Jim Sr.'s drunken monologue.

[778] Avril's family is no better: her father and grandfather were "frozen, and could feel emotion only when he was drunk" (*IJ*, 766).

[779] Mario worked as Jim's assistant in filmmaking at least, and their bond was clearly mutual, whereas in Jim's view, his youngest son was the one whose condition he was most obsessed about. For instance, when Hal was only ten, Jim even arranged for him to meet a "professional conversationalist" (*IJ*, 28), that is, Jim in disguise, only to make his son talk with him. But next to Hal and Mario, Orin was nearly invisible in Jim's eyes – or this is Orin's own view at least.

himself in great enterprises, Orin was left unrecognized. But recognized or unrecognized, almost all the male members of the Incandenza family grow up to be like their fathers, "the least open" of men.[780]

The Incandenza family is full of common problems, "psychic stains" and lack of trust.[781] It is a unit "lousy with secrets" in which Jim is not the only one carrying *le masque*.[782] The question is not, then, who might be the biggest liar among the family – or who exactly Hal refers to when he ponders about the categories of lying. More likely, the question is *whose side* in the family are we most encouraged to take. With this consideration in mind, it matters, I think, how we perceive the original philosophical problem: how to overcome the solipsistic hiddenness of the reserved person and to gain back one's self, and to live decent, sober, and social life without desperation. The question is a family issue: the self is closely connected to the lying monster, which is, in turn, closely connected to other lying monsters. Since the self is a relational mode of being that is dependent on mutual trust, which, by contrast, is a requirement for healthy social interaction, Hal's desperation – his sense of internal emptiness – arises from a malfunctioning family.

Whose side to take is a matter that helps us to ponder Hal's dilemma. It would be too easy to assume that one should take the side of either the father or the sons – for after all it is Avril who is the most neglected character. As William Dowling and Robert Bell point out, Avril has virtually raised three boys alone, taken care of the running of E.T.A., and come to terms with her husband's traumatizing suicide.[783] All of this has taken place after a long, enervating and one-sided marriage with an alcoholic who was obsessed with producing "technically recondite art films, and mordantly obscure and obsessive dramatic cartridges" in co-operation with Joelle van Dyne, a young, extremely beautiful woman.[784] Hence, it would be too easy to take the side of paternal lineage, of allegedly mute sons and hidden fathers, since what Hal means by the worst monster, let us recall, is a liar who gives nothing away and refuses to share.[785] The greatest monsters are, then, not those who share, but the passive, reserved figures with expressionless faces, persons such as Jim and Hal.

The narrative composition also clarifies this juxtaposition. Before Hal's confession, Mario has gone to his mother to ask how can one be sure whether "someone's sad."[786] As if to lay the ground for Hal's categories of liars, Avril answers by giving categories of *being sad*. According to her, some sad people are suppressed:

they are afraid to live. They are imprisoned in something, I think.

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[780] *IJ*, 1048.
[781] *IJ*, 737.
[782] *IJ*, 751. The masks are also concrete. Along with Mario, who wears a camera strapped to this head, Orin wears a mask as he is a punter in the NFL.
[783] Dowling & Bell 2005, 113.
[784] *IJ*, 64.
[785] *IJ*, 774.
[786] *IJ*, 763.

> Frozen inside, emotionally. […] People, then, who are sad, but who can't let themselves feel sad, or express it, the sadness […] these persons may strike someone who's sensitive as somehow just not quite right. Not quite there. Blank. Distant. Muted. Distant. Spacey was an American term we grew up with. Wooden. Deadened. Disconnected. Distant. Or they may drink alcohol or take other drugs.[787]

Thus, while it is easy to blame mothers for being too caring and aggressively concerned, it is the family dynamics that matter. The monster who refuses to share can only be such a monster in a social unit in which there is also someone who shares. Recalling Jim's words, the figurant retreats "to the periphery of life's frame," and already this implies that there is also a center.[788] In the Incandenza family, as we have learned, this center is Avril, whether or not she is also "The Black Hole of Human Attention."[789] Due to these dynamics, the male family members turn against the mother, even though the "Resentment Is The #1 Offender" that keeps the silent family member from realizing his own condition.[790]

But despite the weight given to the problems of the Incandenza family in *Infinite Jest*, the issues are not, as Orin's ex-girlfriend Joelle observes, "some hideous exceptional thing" but are instead "banal and average."[791] Compared to many family stories we get to know, this is true; it is just that the definitions of banal and average are, like O.N.A.N culture in general, stretched, and hence, extremely far from what we generally hold to be banal and average. In *Infinite Jest*'s world, some fathers fall in love with their daughters, and some husbands methodically beat their wives; drug-addicted mothers carry their dead children in baby carriages around the metropolis, while others simply refuse to accept that their husbands sexually abuse their disabled daughters. Some mothers die from liver cirrhosis in front of the television, and some fathers gradually but totally immerse themselves in the *M*A*S*H* television series. Hence, as with Hal's "story," which is not dissimilar to other stories of addiction, so too his unhappy family story is not unlike the other family stories of the novel. Domestic life either causes traumas, anxieties, and emotional stress in later life, or it simply reflects those conditions of society in which traumas, anxieties, and emotional stress become an inevitable burden of the individual. *Infinite Jest* offers both interpretative options: some of the families are inherently damaged from the outset, but the unhappiness of others is caused by more direct cultural influences. All the addictions, however, are more or less the consequences of complicated dysfunctions in the emotional sphere of family – and if this is not totally the case, they are at least involved in these domestic issues.

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[787] *IJ*, 766–767.
[788] *IJ*, 837.
[789] *IJ*, 521.
[790] *IJ*, 837. Even Jim, worried about his son's future, admits this by first blaming "the boy's mother for his silence" (*IJ*, 837).
[791] *IJ*, 737.

What is more, like the media-saturated O.N.A.N. culture as a whole, homes too are stages for drama. Both citizens and family members are divided into performers and audiences. Correspondingly, the new technologies for watching entertainment affect one's sense of self: as Wallace writes in "E Unibus Pluram," a television-oriented culture sends "unconscious reinforcement of the deep thesis that the most significant quality of truly alive persons is watchableness."[792] Jim Incandenza rephrases the same argument with his idea of the figurant: culture, dominated by the sense of sight and ruled by television, videos, and other audiovisual technologies, has begun to define the audience's "perceptual corner, a triage of who's important enough to be seen and heard v. just seen," and this view has also become dominant in American families.[793] To help Hal as well as other people in their "mute peripheral status" to break free from this desperate and lonely situation – a situation that may accelerate the need for infantile satisfaction – Jim wanted to make sure that in his films:

> either the whole entertainment was silent or else if it wasn't silent that you could bloody well hear every single performer's voice, no matter how far out on the cinematographic or narrative periphery they were [...] it was real life's egalitarian babble of figurantless crowds, of the animate world's real agora, the babble of crowds every member of which was the central and articulate protagonist of his own entertainment.[794]

Hence, in Jim's view, each visible "extra" deserved to be both seen and heard, instead of being just a "sort of human furniture."[795] Through art-house films, Jim aimed at introducing truly *realistic* settings, in which "the animate world's real agora" would remind viewers about the actuality of life that the aesthetic, enjoyment-driven life-view had abandoned. In the last chapter we will see, how Hal adopts this task from his father, and continues it, through his *Infinite Jest*.

All in all, the cultural and domestic perspectives analyzed above strengthen the view of *Infinite Jest* as its narrator's painful discovery that he has become a figurant, a hidden boy in desperation; and that his reservedness is fundamentally a form of weakness. The addict's right road, leading to a healthy, decent life first goes through self-accusations and resentment towards the immediate family members, and then moves on to identification with other people.[796] Since this road "to faith," as Kierkegaard puts it, is painful and narrow, and involves a phase of painful discovery that one has no self, at least "he who says without pretense that he despairs is [...]

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[792] Wallace 1998, 26.
[793] *IJ*, 835.
[794] *IJ*, 835–836.
[795] *IJ*, 834.
[796] "The *Why* of the Disease is a labrynth it is strongly suggested all AAs boycott, inhabited as the maze is by twin minotaurs of *Why Me?* and *Why Not?*, a.k.a. Self-Pity and Denial, two of the smily-faced Sergeant at Arms' more fearsome aides de camp" (*IJ*, 374; original italics). The misspellings are intentional, and reflect the narrator's, in this case Don Gately's, spelling ability.

a little nearer, a dialectical step nearer being cured than all those who are not regarded or who do not regard themselves as being in despair."[797] But before finding a cure, the road leads through what Kierkegaard calls *defiance*. This is a phase in which the reserved person desperately wants to be himself. Despair has now become "conscious of itself as an activity" and "comes not from the outside in the form of a passivity in the face of external pressure, but directly from the self."[798] Thus, the self-searching has developed from a discovery that one has no self – that one is empty inside – to the discovery that this emptiness is *infinite*; that *not* having a self means that one has *an infinite self*. What one can conclude on this basis, then, is that the narrative of *Infinite Jest* as a whole, is in fact the most visible proof that Hal is truly trying to overcome his solipsism, and find a way out from his mental labyrinth of "Analysis-Paralysis."

Let me clarify. Kierkegaard distinguishes at this point of his description *an active self* and *a passively despairing self* from each other. Wallace exploits this separation by distancing Hal the narrator from Hal the protagonist: whereas Hal as we get to know him, is a catatonic hero, a hero of non-action, the active Hal by contrast is in the background as an infinite form that enables the plenitude of voices and digressions, the encyclopedic totality of his narrative. Moreover, in Kierkegaard's view, what this active, infinite self wants deep down is "in despair to rule over himself, or create himself, make this self the self he wants to be, determine what he will have and what he will not have in his concrete self."[799] The new life this self is pursuing, has "necessity and limits" – the actuality of life embodied by the family – but exactly for this reason, it is also free.[800] From the basis of Marathe's teachings about negative freedom, this new life would mean a position in some social community, perhaps even someone to live and die for. But as Kierkegaard continues:

> by means of the infinite form, the negative self, he wants first to undertake to refashion the whole thing in order to get out of it a self such as he wants, produced by means of the infinite form of the negative self. […] he does not want to don his own self, does not want to see his task in his given self, he wants, by virtue of being the infinite form, to construct it himself.[801]

As Hal is reconstructing himself via the narrative process, he needs both mirrors and the aid of others. And since Hal's mind and his existential problems are closely linked with the general condition of Post-Millennial American culture, the encyclopedic totality is needed. Each mind, including Hal's, as John T. Irwin argues,

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[797] Kierkegaard 2008, 27.
[798] Ibid., 82.
[799] Ibid., 82.
[800] Ibid., 82.
[801] Ibid., 82–83.

"in being equal to the totality, tends to become identical with every other mind."[802] To this I only add what *Infinite Jest* says implicitly: each mind also tends to empathize with every other mind, but in an infantophile culture, one has to specifically train one's mind to adopt this tendency. And even though this "geometrical progression" tends be an illusion, it is an illusion that merges into the illusion of totality that characterizes the contemporary encyclopedic novel.[803] Yet in order to be truthful to this illusion, what we next need to do is to approach the idea of totality, as well as the epistemological environment, from a completely different perspective, namely as a net of cryptosystems.

5.2. The Book of Life, the Ultimate Cryptosystem

When Stuart Ressler is asked why he left his academic career behind, he first refers to science as a stormy area of modern life, and then to Edgar Allan Poe, who said that cryptography starts at home.[804] Bruce Schneier makes a similar distinction, claiming that there are "two kinds of cryptography in this world: cryptography that will stop your kid sister from reading your files, and cryptography that will stop major governments from reading your files."[805] During his year with Cyfer, a lab team investigating the genetic code, Stuart learned that since World War II, scientific research had become not only a key interest but also an exclusive domain of militaries and governments.[806] To avoid his own work being delivered "into warring hands," Stuart had wanted to find a calm place to continue his work.[807] Poe had become his lifesaver: the author's "The Gold-Bug" (1843), which Jeanette Koss introduced him to at the beginning of their affair, had guided him to understand where the research group had chosen the wrong track. Moreover, Poe had showed him another way to deal with the genetic code, namely to see it as a *cryptographic* problem, an issue that concerns encoding and decoding, as well as the alterations that emerge during translation. Poe's way was more intimate than political, but paradoxically, precisely because of its privacy, this path led Stuart to a set of questions that were fundamentally more ontological and wide-ranging than the parties involved in "the broader code war" were dealing with.[808] The cryptography that started at home also offered a safer and more proper way to handle the questions of genetic modification than the cryptography practiced in the laboratories under

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[802] Irwin 1996, 15.
[803] Ibid., 15.
[804] *GBV*, 112.
[805] Schneier 1996, xix.
[806] See also Kay 2000, 7–14.
[807] *GBV*, 421.
[808] *GBV*, 421.

governmental guidance. The main question which Stuart continues to seek answers for remains nevertheless the same: how does the genetic code reproduce itself via the genetically coded organism? How does the "encoded thread of everything" exist in practice?[809]

Regarding the encyclopedic production of *The Gold Bug Variations*, Poe's role as a bellwether needs to be considered not only in relation to Stuart's coding problem but also as a possibility highlighted in the title of Powers's novel. If not a narrative of variations on Poe's short story, the novel is at least an applied demonstration of Poe's poetics of secret writing.[810] Hence, whereas *Foucault's Pendulum* is a maximalist version of Borges's "Death and the Compass," we have here another encyclopedic author who exploits the classics of metaphysical detective story by enlarging the *topos* of another story of Poe's, and by exploiting Poe's general ideas on coding. Powers, in other words, introduces Poe's basic ideas of cryptography, expressed especially in "The Gold-Bug" and in an essay "A Few Words on Secret Writing" (1841), into the context of biology, and expands them further within the spheres of culture and technology. Since the focus of this chapter is the epistemological environment in the contemporary encyclopedic novel, my argument here needs further clarification.

As may be recalled, Powers's novel contains three intertwining plot lines, two love triangles, and the mentor's life work that is, if not accomplished, then at least continued by his pupils after his death. Jan and Franklin approach Stuart's "life theme" by means of trial and error, by studying and becoming distracted. However, *The Gold Bug Variations* is not just a dual love story, or an elegiac romance that deals with the dead hero's biography, it is also a highly theoretical novel. Hence, the epistemological environment in *The Gold Bug Variations* is more theoretical than concrete as well. While the protagonist trio aims at building bridges between different spheres of knowledge, the narrative – as a representation of these deeds – doubles their aim. How to combine science with arts, and history with data processing, is, then, one of the key interests in *The Gold Bug Variations*. And like the characters, we are asked to shift from one area of expertise to another, and seek similarities, along with the ways in which "several areas of research can be connected."[811] The largest scale the novel has to offer is nevertheless the organic scale of life: DNA is a dominant *cryptosystem* under which other informational systems – music, arts, history trivia, and computer systems programming – organize themselves. Moreover, while DNA operates as a biological base for life forms, its network consists of secondary systems that are all human-made analogs "for the

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[809] *GBV*, 12.
[810] According to Luc Herman and Geert Lernout (1998, 161), "the title's allusion to Poe's story 'widens' Bach's music into a piece concerned with the cracking of a code, just as conversely the allusion to Bach widens Poe's story to include a series of attempts at detection in which Bach's music may play an important role."
[811] Herman & Lernout 1998, 152.

living gene."[812] The encyclopedism of *The Gold Bug Variations* mimics this idea of biology-based expansion that, as I shall argue in a moment, is also closely related to Poe's ideas on secret writing. Hence, in this section my question is: how are Poe's cryptographic ideas related to Stuart's coding problem? What does it mean that DNA is a dominant cryptosystem? And how do the characters themselves perceive the epistemological environment on the one hand, and their own possibilities of approaching this cryptosystem on the other? Before proceeding to Poe, I begin, now from the perspective of coding, by reiterating the reasons why Stuart decided to leave Cyfer.

Apart from being left by Jeanette, the most fundamental reason for leaving was a methodological disagreement inside the team. Even within the first year, Cyfer had split "down the middle – gnostics versus nominalists, formalists against functionalists."[813] The cryptographic nature of this split can be summarized as follows: Cyfer's work had, from the beginning, elaborated "the decoding parameters: triplet, collinear nonoverlapping, unpunctuated bases."[814] But as the team also knew, DNA does not leave the nucleus – instead, it sends "out a single-strand RNA molecule templated on its surface, a plaster-cast of the recipe. This messenger strand carries its transcription of a base sequence – call it a gene, for old times' sake – to the ribosomes, where protein synthesis takes place."[815] To illustrate this process, Stuart draws a schema:

> DNA – In Nucleus (transcription) → RNA – In Ribosome (translation) → Protein[816]

The problem concerns the difference between *transcription* and *translation*. Cyfer had studied, as Jay Labinger formulates, "recurring patterns and their frequencies of appearance" only.[817] But as Stuart sees the situation, instead of studying the wondrous existence of the appearances themselves, the team had looked for *latent contents* behind the appearances: not only a genetic base from which the multiplicity of life springs, but also, and more importantly, a changeless code that is the same within DNA and RNA. Readers who are familiar with Poe's "The Purloined Letter" recognize the fundamental problem: Stuart's critique is a variation on Poe's well-known "hostility to depth and his attention to surface," which is also the thread of his short story.[818] The "gnostics'" interest in transcription implies the same misconception that is criticized in Poe's story: that the original code is changeless,

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[812] GBV, 579.
[813] *GBV,* 444. The scientific world of that time was also divided into these two camps. See Kay 2000, 128–192.
[814] *GBV*, 442.
[815] *GBV*, 442.
[816] *GBV*, 442.
[817] Labinger 1995, 91.
[818] Rosenheim 1997, 27.

despite the numerous variations this code produces in nature. In the nominalist view – the view defended by Stuart and a few others – the code is, instead, changing during the process, even though it still operates on a certain strictly limited basis. Or, as one of the team members defines the disagreement, whereas the first half of the team was investigating *the code*, the other understood that they needed to widen the scale, and consider the genetic code not as a simple code, but as *a cipher*, a secret language.[819]

To begin with, Stuart's schema can be compared with the most basic model of cryptography. In it, transcription and translation are replaced with *encryption* and *decryption*, while DNA is the plain text, RNA is the cipher text, and protein is the original plain text. The idea is that after encryption and decryption, the plain text is the same as it was before the process:

> Plain text – encryption → Cipher text – decryption → Original plain text[820]

The models agree, but also involve a fundamental misconception. In both models, there are two separate processes, one in which the plain text (DNA) is *encoded*, and the other in which the cipher text (RNA) is *decoded*. The cipher text is supposed to carry the same information as the plain text, and hence it does not matter, as the narrator of *The Gold Bug Variations* puts it, "whether the code is the RNA simulation or its DNA original."[821] But what matters is that, for Stuart, this is a misconception: since the plain text has gone through the dual process of encryption and decryption, it is not necessarily the same as it was originally. The prodigies, mutations, and other slightly altered variations of the plain text the product of translation. Douglas R. Hofstadter points out in his mammoth *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1979) – a nonfiction book sharing many themes with *The Gold Bug Variations* – that in the genetic process of protein synthesis alone, information is not straightforwardly "pulled out" of the DNA when an organism is developing: instead, complicated chemical processes and their contexts carry and vary the code.[822] And when he formulates, then, two conflicting views concerning this process, he could well refer to the disagreement within the Cyfer team: "One view says that so much of the information is *outside the DNA* that it is not reasonable to look upon the DNA as anything more than a very intricate set of triggers, like a sequence of buttons to be pushed on a jukebox; another view says that *the information is all there*, but in a very implicit form."[823]

Cyfer's fallacy is the latter; the team is looking into depths: "[t]hey still track

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[819] *GBV,* 239.
[820] See Schneier 1996, 1.
[821] *GBV*, 442.
[822] Hofstadter 1999, 161.
[823] Ibid., 161; original italics.

the old, elusive pattern," but "pattern does not necessarily imply meaning."[824] Thus, just as the Prefect in "The Purloined Letter" searches everywhere for the letter apart from what is in plain sight, so too Cyfer is looking for the solution from the wrong direction. The same methodological disagreement on which Poe's story is based is present in Powers's novel as well, but in a way that updates the original idea by bringing it to the context of genetics. Let us now take a more in-depth look at Poe's notions of secret writing.

The Invisible Layers of Reality

The Gold Bug Variations specifies Poe's tacit and yet fundamental view that "the detective story begins by extending modes of cryptographic reading to the phenomenal world."[825] By calling Stuart's life theme "the world awash in messages, every living thing a unique signal," Jan, for her part, updates Poe's idea, making it more applicable to the Information Age, an epoch that has learned to see the human genome as an information system of its own.[826] A narrative move like this defines the coding problem from a surprising angle: it is not only about genes, but also about reality, including human culture and non-human nature. In this respect, Jan and Franklin's narrative is also a *meta-book* in a very fundamental sense: what we are reading is aimed at being a detailed representation of the Book of Life itself, a metaphysical detective story that studies the basics of all living things. Yet on this level as well, the central question remains the same as it was in Stuart's case: should one prefer depth or surface when it comes to the phenomenal world.

It would, however, be a misunderstanding to assume that *The Gold Bug Variations* simply repeats Poe's apparent hostility to latent contents. Poe's own thinking is not that unambiguous either. Through the detection formula he founded with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and other Dupin stories, we have learned that the classical detective story is an exercise in ratiocination, and as such, an extension of cryptography. Specifically put, its composition as a narrative of problem-solving consists of three phases: (1) a description of the situation, (2) a process of detection, and (3) an explanation. Poe takes the depth of the phenomenal world, including the latent contents, very seriously in all of his detective stories, and while not being a detective story but a dissection of the adventure story – strictly speaking, a cipher-adventure – "The Gold-Bug" is no exception. The procedure is simple: in the beginning, the story presents a situation, and then what follows is a peeling off of the layers around this situation. But the exercise in ratiocination is also a shift between points of view: the situation is first presented as the narrator (or the

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[824] *GBV*, 442, 445.
[825] Rosenheim 1997, 25.
[826] *GBV*, 86; see also Kay 2000, 1–5.

assistant) sees it, and after a short transitional period the mastermind explains what was hidden in the first situation. The detective story depicts, then, the decoding of the secret message of reality: first, the existence of a secret writing (that is, a crime) is recognized, and then, it is decrypted by creating an analog for it, a possible scenario. As for encoding, a crime committed by the perpetrator, it is an omitted prequel of the story, or as Todorov suggests, a hidden story embedded in the story we are reading.[827]

Poe develops his cryptographic ideas against this setting. The detective's explanation is comparable with decoding the situation as if the situation was a cipher. The assistant cannot read it, while the mastermind can, and therefore, the solution is dependent on the latter's willingness to teach his partner how to properly decode the situation as a secret code. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, a similar transition from one standpoint to another takes place in the form of a *metaphysical relay*: Stuart's coding problem is his legacy to Jan and Franklin. Therefore, their narrative is, as an explanation, a decoding of things that were still hidden when Stuart began to work with the genetic code in 1957.[828]

To a certain extent, however, the detective story formula is an established way to represent the exploring process of the invisible layers of reality. "The Gold-Bug" does not differ much from this formula either. It only emphasizes more the role of language: depending on how one sees the complicated relationship between language and reality, language is either a parallel reality of its own, or it is a constituent of the phenomenal world – a constituent that appears as a system of signs. The metaphysical thread is in any case the same in both story types: the narratives aim at studying – or representing a study of – what is hidden under the surface of signs. A look at the philosophical foundations for Poe's cryptography enlightens this aspect.

"A Few Words on Secret Writing," Poe's first essay dealing with cryptography, begins with the idea that "secret intercommunication must have existed almost contemporaneously with the invention of letters."[829] Secret writing is thus initially supposed to work as a sort of constantly present shadow of written language. For Poe, it does not, however, imply any obvious relation between written language and reality – it is not a missing link between them. More likely, as Shawn James Rosenheim points out, "by removing the basis of language's correspondence with the world of things, the cryptograph disrupts the possibility of self-

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[827] See Todorov 1977.
[828] Powers turns the roles in Poe's initial formula upside down: even though Stuart is a mastermind, when the story ends, he is no longer there to explain the situation. Instead, the cipher (his life theme) is not decoded until his decease, and it is readable only as an obituary, his pupils' narrative about him. If Poe's formula is "split between analysis and action," as Shawn James Rosenheim (1997, 78) puts it, in *The Gold Bug Variations* analysis is left to Jan and Franklin.
[829] Poe 2013.

understanding."[830] Poe's real invention, then, is that the cryptograph is not a shadow at all: fundamentally, it is just as arbitrary in relation to nature as ordinary language is.[831] According to Poe, neither cryptographs nor texts written in standard language, have objective ties to phenomena that presumably exist outside of human minds. Instead, there are only analogical relationships between different systems of language, while extramental reality is just "out there," partly unattainable. Solving a cryptograph is a shift back and forth between two languages, a process of translation.

However, at the highpoint of his article, Poe argues that "the basis of the whole art of solution […] is found in the general principles of the formation of language itself, and thus is altogether independent of the particular laws which govern any cipher, or the construction of its key."[832] The reasoning, embodied by the classical detective, takes place not so much within the limits of particular language as in the root of all languages. Through his reasoning, the detective has access to extramental reality as he is able to operate on the ground from where languages spring.

A similar assumption guides the work of Stuart's lab team: the group pursues the general base, the rules that direct the genetic coding process. By trying to equate "specific base sequences with amino acid arrangements in protein polypeptides" and to extract the rules from these equations, Cyfer has, according to Stuart, gone about the coding problem "like bloody Poe."[833] Legrand, the cryptanalyst of "The Gold-Bug" had needed only "three things to turn the hopeless gold-bug noise back into readable knowledge: context, intention, and appropriate reference," and these, especially intention, are also what Cyfer has turned to.[834] Moreover, the team has assumed that DNA works like *any* natural language, whereupon the code has functioned simply as *a substitution*. A substitution remains a matter of "one-to-one correspondence between the coded message and its deciphered meaning," however.[835] While trying to locate "the fundamental message unit behind the biosphere," Cyfer has not only been unable to go where the classical detectives go, but it has also confused reality with language, misinterpreting the unique nature of DNA.[836]

The lab team's crucial question in relation to Poe is which one of the two apparently contradictory attempts at a solution should they choose, *vertical* or *horizontal*? Should they strive for peel away the invisible layers of reality, or create productive analogies between different systems? Should they define the grammar or settle for translating? Read against the schema Stuart proposed, Cyfer has chosen

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[830] Rosenheim 1997, 22.
[831] See Ibid., 23.
[832] Poe 2013.
[833] *GBV*, 254.
[834] *GBV*, 363.
[835] Labinger 1995, 80.
[836] *GBV*, 371.

the first of the alternatives. It has looked for a key that would explain the *encoding* process, that is, as if the grammar of DNA were fixed. Correspondingly, it has neglected decoding, that is, the translation process between RNA and protein, as well as the fascinating and unpredictable asymmetry between these two parties. Jeanette hints at this direction on Stuart's first day in the lab, as she slips him a note that implies that Ulrich, the team leader, has "contracted Poe's Gold Bug."[837] Stuart heads for the library, reads the story to refresh his memory, and comes to the conclusion: "If he understands Dr. Koss's warning correctly, Ulrich may be in danger of confusing the *message* of base-string sequences with their translation *mechanism*."[838] Hence, as Jeanette and Stuart agree, the team should conceptualize and describe the decoding process instead of establishing the triggers that launch the process.

As a cipher, DNA sets a two-fold problem, then. First, instead of functioning as a substitution, the genetic code *generates*. It gives birth to new life forms that are based on a "relatively simple set of molecules and rules."[839] Second, the genetic code is not like other coding systems.[840] Usually, a cipher is designed by following specific principles of encoding that both the sender and the receiver alike are familiar with. The persons or parties whom the code is *not* designed for, but who are nevertheless able to break it, are eavesdroppers. Poe wrote only about coding systems that belong to this latter group; systems that are human-made and thus decodable. "Human ingenuity," as he formed his famous maxim, "cannot concoct a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve."[841] Thus, in Poe's view, the most brilliant minds – whether they are eavesdroppers or not –always have access to areas where languages are forming. But the genetic code, however, is *not* such a language. It is not a matter of human language and it is not designed by human ingenuity.

Above all, as it does not only function as a generating coding system, the language of DNA differs from other cryptosystems as it includes all the living beings. It is a universal language, since nothing that is living is excluded from its sphere: it is not without reason called the Book of Life. It segregates, however, in a way that is comparable with Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, for the general genome base is never the same thing as its particular manifestation. Also, each manifestation of DNA excludes all the rest of the species that do not share exactly the same genetic assemblage. To use the vocabulary of Powers's novel, each variation springs from the genetic pool that consists of four types of nucleotides – guanine, adenine, thymine and cytosine – but each variation the genetic pool makes possible, each melody of four notes, is different. These four

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[837] *GBV*, 74.
[838] *GBV*, 76; original italics.
[839] Labinger 1995, 81.
[840] See Lewis 2008, 81.
[841] Poe 2013.

notes form "the interior melody from the day of creation" but each living entity hears this melody differently.[842] In fact, each living entity *is* a different interior melody.

The criticism Stuart addresses to the rest of his research group, as well as indirectly to Poe, goes back to this distinction between *base* and *variation*, or between the language of nature and the human languages that are subordinate to nature. According to Stuart, Cyfer has also neglected the obvious fact that "the code cannot be decoded except through by-products of the code."[843] Basically, Stuart refers here to the view that only a bat can truly understand what it is like to be a bat, just as humans can only understand being from their own perspective. But the scale is in fact even stricter: the code becomes decoded through lineage, whereupon each variation is an offspring, the next representative in a particular lineage. The entity that does not concentrate on its own genealogy but tries to study the larger scale; it is bar none an eavesdropper. And Cyfer, as Stuart sees it, is basically a bunch of eavesdroppers.

But the unavoidable exclusion mechanisms and the generative functioning of DNA are not the only things Cyfer has neglected. In search of patterns, the group has also refused to admit that "the codon catalog is arbitrary, devoid of internal order."[844] The team has, in other words, looked for principles of coding that do not even exist. If the genetic code lacks the recognizable logic, the one the eavesdroppers – Poe's cryptanalyst among them – could extract, it is, indeed an unbreakable code: rephrasing Poe's argument, its plaintext means nothing, it contains signs in completely random order, and it is composed following no rules whatsoever.[845] But non-transparent functioning and the absence of trackable rules do not alone make the code unbreakable. The RNA is also a code "that disappears as soon as it's read."[846]

Again, Stuart's views concerning the genetic code comment by implication on Poe's ideas. In "The Gold-Bug," the secrecy of the cryptograph – and its elemental connection to the invisible layers of reality – is made visible by paradoxically connecting it with the actual invisibility of written code. As John T. Irwin argues:

> Poe uses the cryptographic writing of Captain Kidd's note (a physical writing that is literally invisible until heat is applied to the scrap of parchment) to evoke the invisibility of a text's meaning compared to the visibility of its writing: As the coded writing of the note contains in a hidden manner the plain text, so the plain text contains in an unexplained manner the invisible meaning.[847]

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[842] *GBV,* 11.
[843] *GBV*, 425.
[844] *GBV*, 444.
[845] Cf. Poe 2013.
[846] *GBV*, 425.
[847] Irwin 1996, 320–321.

The plaintext does not equal its meaning. Stuart realizes that the ribosome does not carry any message: it is "the reading hardware," a jukebox, to paraphrase Hofstadter's analogy earlier.[848] Cyfer has "confused identities" while the thing actually "assembles its own assembly plants. It sends out an isomorph of orders for the production run. It uses its own end product to keep the whole running."[849] Above all, the code *precedes* all "hardware, software, storage, executor, writer, even client."[850] Or, as Jan observes later, "the information of an organism is spread out over its substance, processes, organization."[851] The language of DNA is not then one language among others but an ultimate horizon of being, a ground upon which all human languages are based. on. Therefore, it does not have the same sort of *meaning* we are used to signs or codes having. And since DNA has no such reachable and reliable cryptosystem – a recognizable *langue* as a predictable system of rules and one-to-one correspondences – like breakable ciphers have, there is no access to the formation of this language. For this reason, eavesdroppers like Stuart and his team can only refer to the genetic code *imprecisely*, through what Stuart calls "rough analogies." The code can only be perceived as a metaphor: it "exists only as the coded organism."[852] Hence, instead of chasing the engendering pattern, Stuart deserts his post in Cyfer to develop further a way to "get the cell to crack the code" for him.[853] The variations, the vertical aspect of the genetics, now take a leading role. What we need to do next is to consider how Stuart, and after him Jan and Franklin, relate to this possibility.

Seeking Rough Analogies

Stuart understands that *in vivo*, the methodical blind alley to which Cyfer has led, does not help the research group. *In vitro*, "running an experiment outside rather than inside a living system" may, instead, give a coherent, albeit "dangerously simplified recreation" of the coding process, a rough analogy.[854] If Poe's story was a template for Stuart in mapping Cyfer's fundamental problem, Glenn Gould's first recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (1955) shows him a way out of it.[855] By listening to Bach's tunes, Stuart perceives a possibility to "trace protein synthesis *forward*" in a cell-free system:

> In the precision of harmonic structure, he hears his own conviction that

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848 *GBV*, 425.
849 *GBV*, 425.
850 *GBV*, 425.
851 *GBV*, 469.
852 *GBV*, 271.
853 *GBV*, 139.
854 *GBV*, 255.
855 See also Herman & Lernout 1998.

the coding problem rests on a simple look-up table – at ever lower levels, a mechanism to explain cell growth, viral piracy, symbiotic coalition government of organs, the origin of species, phone impulses broken off in panic, inexplicable behavior late in the year, fitful inspiration, the continuous cold modal rapture in chords, in vivo.[856]

As Jan explains later, music comes to be "Ressler's best metaphor for the living gene": "the Base's symmetry ripples through the piece, unfolding ever-higher structures, levels of pattern, fractal self-resemblances."[857] I discuss Bach's impact on Stuart, as well as on the narrative form of *The Gold Bug Variations* in the last chapter, but here it is worth noting that through his intense listening of *Goldberg Variations*, Stuart adopts the standpoint of the recently founded systems theory. Life becomes "an immense turbulent system" in which "small changes produce large swings in outcome" and *fractals* – never-ending patterns – occur in imbedded frames at every scale of life.[858] Needless to say, science should be aware of this "living, interlocked world […] the increasingly complex web of interdependent nature."[859]

In 1957, time was not yet right for such views. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the founder of systems theory, published his *General System Theory* (1968) over ten years later. In 1953, the same year Watson and Crick published their *Nature* article on the double helix of DNA, George Gamow first considered the protein synthesis in terms of cryptanalysis, presuming, however, a mathematical correspondence between DNA and protein.[860] In embryo research, the breakthroughs took several more years: in vitro fertilization (IVF) was not developed until the 1970s. These paradigm shifts considered, Stuart's turn toward Bach's work can be understood as a pioneering move towards metascience through art. After hearing what Stuart actually did on his long retreat, Jan points out that science, "a way of looking, reverencing" was Stuart's passion from the start; he never left it. He quit working in Cyfer, but instead of continuing in the line of molecular biology, he chose a less popular and less "accredited line of research," and tried, by composing music, to "create an analog to the language of the central nervous system."[861]

For an outsider, switching the subject once more may raise confusion, especially as it is music Stuart decides to turn to, but this is what systems theorists do. As Tom LeClair argues, they "seek homologies between sets of concrete information and identify new proportions by practicing a constant reframing of data at different levels of abstraction, different levels of relation."[862] The language of DNA is not a domain of being to which only embryo research has a privilege. By

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856 *GBV*, 257; original italics.
857 *GBV*, 579.
858 *GBV*, 410.
859 *GBV*, 411–412.
860 See Kay 2000, 131–138.
861 *GBV*, 610.
862 LeClair 1989, 11.

conceptualizing analogs, the systems theorist aims to think outside the box: within new frames, the corresponding relations between the collaborative brain and the ecosystem – as well as their "simultaneous and reciprocal processes" on which the relations are based – can be studied.[863]

Hence, as Jan points out early in her journal entries, the coding problem is an attempt to create "the firmware language of the brain," "not so much a message written in a language as all grammar itself"; not a code but a cipher.[864] Interestingly, it involves not so much decoding as *parallel encoding* – creating a description, a poor simulation of the real encoding *and* decoding process. Taking place outside the cell, art seems a valuable area to test the idea. After all, music is, first, an artificial language of its own, and second, an *in vitro* study of life, since most musical pieces usually reflect the phenomenal world. The same idea has provided the possibility of reading Powers's novel as an attempt to stitch up the gap between art and science, but in its specific context, Stuart's turn is simply an attempt to find a new, and perhaps more neutral ground for genetic study.[865] After all, the lines of that time were disunited: not even " mathematicians, physicists, chemists and biologists" spoke "the same language."[866]

Twenty-five years later, another apt analog for the coding problem besides music becomes available, enlightening Stuart's coding problem in a very practical way. The window of opportunity to apply the coding problem in a new environment opens as Stuart, Jan, and Franklin are on a weekend trip in New Hampshire. Caught out by a blizzard, the trio is forced to arrive late to work, where Jimmy, their supervisor, who lacks programming skills or understanding about Stuart and Franklin's working duties, has in the meantime tried to keep the data systems running. Manhattan On-Line is a data-selling company that handles "Receivables, Payables, Ledgers, and Payrolls for a dozen credit unions."[867] Therefore, the data Stuart and Franklin are supervising at nights, is extremely delicate: someone who knows how to program is basically capable of controlling the payrolls.

With a generous intention to thank Jimmy, Frank, and Stuart commit what they consider to be a "victimless crime": in secret they program a one-time paycheck benefit to be given to their supervisor.[868] There is, however, a digital intervention they have not bargained for, which leaves Jimmy without insurance coverage: Jimmy gets his bonus, but "[t]he program processed the *whole check* as a bonus," not as a salary *and* a bonus, whereupon the medical group premium usually deducted

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[863] Ibid., 11.
[864] *GBV*, 610, 113.
[865] Luc Herman and Geert Lernout (1998), for instance, have read *The Gold Bug Variations* with C. P. Snow's famous lecture about two cultures in mind and argued that the conflict of misunderstanding between natural sciences and the humanities operates as a tentative context of the novel.
[866] *GBV*, 99.
[867] *GBV*, 145.
[868] *GBV*, 459.

from his checks is not done and Jimmy is dropped off from the district health insurance.[869] Now there *is* a victim of a crime, and the criminals are those who tried to help him. More is yet to come, however: the firm management finds out this incongruity in the payment and turns to the innocent Jimmy, who, under pressure, has a brain aneurysm. Stuart and his pupils' rescue operation begins, then, as the staff of the hospital in which Jimmy has been rushed to, discovers this unfortunate billing irregularity and threatens to stop his hospitalization coverage. Now, instead of merely programming an extra payment, this time Stuart, Franklin, and Jan build a complete analog of the data system Stuart and Franklin have supervised for the past few years: "the point was to make their baby look, feel, and behave exactly the same as the template, the original operating system. But be the serpent underneath."[870]

The serpent the trio implants in the MOL computers is the gold-bug of Powers's novel, but for Stuart alone, it is also an anomaly that changes the system from within, the system being essentially an analog of life. Poe's "The Gold-Bug" is introduced into a postmodern context: the bug is a code programmed into the system to make otherwise flawlessly behaving printers and bank machines print out "innocuous little slips" that announce the hopeless situation of "a certain stroke patient."[871] Their virus is meant to resemble the purpose and behavior of prodigies, those tiny alterations that create changes on the large scale as well. The bug, as Jan explains, had "a clever routine that made sure, even though the idea-genes were distributed randomly, that no target received the same message twice."[872] From the beginning, the purpose of Stuart's code is, then, to create differences in the system as if to cultivate the wonders of the world. And in this respect, the small-scale sabotage the protagonist trio carries out is a systems theory-oriented study, an attempt to create "a perpetual condition of wonder in the face of something that grows one step richer and subtler than our latest theory about it."[873]

If we compare Stuart's gold-bug with the one in Poe's short story, the serpent is in both "a little bit of sober mystification" and in essence a side issue.[874] In both narratives, the meaning of the bug is explained in the end, but in essence, the bug is only a function, a visible sign that makes another, more important mystery available. In Poe's story, this mystery concerns the invisible content of Captain Kidd's parchment, while in Powers's novel, Stuart, by experimenting with the operating system, produces visible results – Jimmy is saved – but he also aims at approaching his own, more metaphysical coding problem from a new angle. Thus, for Stuart the

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[869] *GBV*, 506; original italics.
[870] *GBV*, 589. Like Casaubon and his colleagues in *Foucault's Pendulum*, the trio is now creating an alternative totality, or a version that replaces the old one and improves some aspects of it.
[871] *GBV*, 617.
[872] *GBV*, 620.
[873] *GBV*, 411.
[874] Poe 1978c, 844.

project is as much about learning and developing the coding problem as it is about saving his superior. For a man of much expertise, programming proves to be easy since the genetic code and programming language bear similarities. The computer as a universal simulating machine is, as Jan educates herself, "the first prototype animal capable of behaving like another."[875] Like DNA, programming language can be considered "a linear stream of characters" that forms, "on a sea of self-organizing ands, ors, and nots," and through the circuit of commands, a living entity; "metal and silicon were just ways of marshaling the syntax."[876] Recalling Stuart's reasons for leaving Cyfer, studying the analog is not a method to master the system, however. It only helps one to understand the variety the system is capable of producing: in an ideal case, "if the driving language were properly designed, it might provide a complete, enumerable description of everything there was."[877]

While it is possible to see a digital sequence as a "genetic metaphor," – consider, for example, the works of Shakespeare as a single stream of numbers – there is at least one fundamental difference between the coding systems.[878] DNA is a *generative* coding system that has its concrete basis in nature, whereas the programmer, in order to create changes in a data system, does not need firsthand experiences of organic life.[879] Programming language is a completely artificial language. It can be considered to follow the rules of a "simple substitution cipher," whereby a linear stream of characters is simply replaced with another set of typographic symbols, each having, for instance, "a unique three-digit number" of its own.[880] Nevertheless, in relation to DNA, the programming language offers a clean and safe test tube environment for the coding problem. In the digital context, the code refers to the set of instructions the programmer has designed for running the system and these instructions enable only the expected action within this system. DNA, in turn, is much more unpredictable, which, in Stuart's view, makes genetic modification, for instance, highly problematic. Not even Poe's cryptographer can solve its secret code.

To conclude, music and programming are Stuart's metaphors for the living gene. For their part, instead of telling Stuart's story strictly as a biography, Jan and Franklin trace his coding problem forward – just like Stuart did with DNA – first, by adopting the narratorial idea and style for their writings from narrative art, and second, by structuring the outcome of their co-operation in the form of a piece of music. In this respect, as a narrative, *The Gold Bug Variations* is *a fractal* that repeats Stuart's coding problem on a higher level. On both levels, "the code is not the gene, nor the enzymes, nor the lookup table, although these are the core of what the code

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[875] *GBV*, 311.
[876] *GBV*, 137, 311.
[877] *GBV*, 311.
[878] *GBV*, 167.
[879] Cf. Labinger 1995, 80.
[880] *GBV*, 137.

knows."[881] Hence, it is only natural to apply these words of Jan not only to Stuart's original problem but also to a reading of her and Franklin's narrative. The code is not Stuart's large-scale quest, nor is it his affair with Jeanette or his disappointment with Cyfer. More likely, the code is a trigger that *generates* Stuart's quest, his affair, and his disappointment with the team; it is an early part of a process that nevertheless cannot be cleanly separated from what follows. On a higher level, the code is not the "lookup table," that is, Jan and Franklin's narrative either. The code is embedded in the narrative, but above all, it is a part of the narrative process as well. The code, in other words, is its own cryptosystem, a cipher that continues its existence via *fictionalization*.

When this fractal is taken to the third level, namely to the level of reading *The Gold Bug Variations*, Jan and Franklin's narrative is of course an encyclopedic totality. The world described is an epistemological environment as a whole: all things referred to belong to the cryptosystem of *narrativized life*. Trey Strecker sees this epistemological milieu as *a narrative ecology* in which essence matters less than relation: narrative circulation "opens the encyclopedic field, clearing the ecological routes by which knowledge circulates."[882] The earth is an enormous library and this, moreover, is what Jan and Franklin aim to describe in their narrative: being enlightened by Stuart's key ideas, they do not want so much to master as to appreciate, support, and continue the processes of life. The narrative is *their* baby which is supposed to carry on the code. Thus, as Jay A. Labinger summarizes:

> The core message – the overriding importance of the infinite arising from the simple – is embedded in every level: in the metaphor-, allusion-, and pun-rich language; in the individual coding motifs; in the narrative; and in the structure of the entire text, which shows how each of the above encodes for each of the others at the same time that it itself encodes all of them.[883]

The encyclopedic production of Powers's novel considered, all of these language and narrative aspects are crucial. The narrative is designed so that it would be a rough analogy of what Stuart's considered his best analog for the living gene. It would be both "metaphor and referent […] a linguistic miracle, a thing that perfectly refers to itself in a circulatory loop" – just like DNA.[884] In Jan and Franklin's narrative, the motif of creating an analog of Stuart's lifework is in the first place tied to his coding problem that, as a quest, is formulated so that it enables, even encourages, the creation of new translations.

As a quest, Stuart's coding problem – being basically a part of a fractal, a minor

[881] *GBV*, 469.
[882] Strecker 1998, 69.
[883] Labinger 1995, 92.
[884] Frye 2007, 108.

pattern – should be seen, then, simultaneously as *a trigger* and as *a process*. On the face of it, the coding problem launches two other quests in the novel, but the problem is already embedded in the future quests, as they are attempts to find accurate analogies for the original problem. Their narrative reflecting the same idea, Jan and Franklin aim at building a total representation of this information-exchange between the vertical levels, and horizontal translations and analogies, which is why the hierarchy of knowledge in *The Gold Bug Variations* spreads out before the reader in imbedded frames. In essence, the coding problem depicts an expansive movement of organizing, cultivating, and transmitting information.

Whereas the epistemological environment in *The Gold Bug Variations* is the whole world, life itself, in our next topic we encounter an apparent opposite: nothingness, or non-life. Emotionally, we also move from the reverence of life to the other scale, namely horror and dread. Spaces change as well: instead of natural, urban, and technological environments, we encounter mainly textual milieus, and a house that is not only unfriendly and hostile, but also epistemologically dark. This spatial entity is *House of Leaves*.

5.3. The Dark Corridors of the House

In the beginning of *House of Leaves*, Zampanò, the narrator of The Navidson Record, says this:

> [m]uch like its subject, *The Navidson Record* itself is also uneasily contained – whether by category or lection. If finally catalogued as a gothic tale, contemporary urban folk myth, or merely a ghost story, as some have called it, the documentary will still, sooner or later, slip the limits of any one of those genres. Too many important things in *The Navidson Record* jut out past borders. Where one might expect horror, the supernatural, or traditional paroxysms of dread and fear, one discovers disturbing sadness, a sequence on radioactive isotopes, or even laughter over a *Simpsons* episode.[885]

Here the reader faces a fundamental problem. In his introduction, Johnny Truant revealed that *The Navidson Record* is Will Navidson's non-existing film for which Zampanò collected an enormous amount of written material, but at this point, already on page 3, Johnny's words appear questionable. According to the title page of *House of Leaves*, the novel is a book "by Zampanò with introduction and notes by Johnny Truant," Danielewski's name appearing on the left, on the first page of the spread.[886] However, the section that follows Johnny's introduction and is expected

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[885] *HL*, 3.
[886] *HL*, iii.

to be the *House of Leaves*, is instead The Navidson Record.[887] Thus Zampanò's narrative shares the title with Navidson's mysterious film, whereupon there are in fact two Navidson Records within *House of Leaves*, the non-existent film on the one hand, and the written narrative before our eyes on the other. The reader's initial dilemma is, then, which one of the "Records" is Zampanò here writing about?

From the very beginning of Danielewski's novel these two textual objects are inseparable. The first one being an instance of *kinekphrasis* (that is, a verbal representation of cinema) and a text, and the other being a documentary film, both narratives share the same title (The Navidson Record), subject (the house) and genre (gothic horror), but also, paradoxically, the same literary medium.[888] Thus, even though Will Navidson's documentary ought to exist primarily as a film, the only manifestation of its existence is Zampanò's manuscript. His papers are our sole access to Navidson's film, which, if one extends the argument, means that there are actually *three* textual objects instead of two: the documentary film, Zampanò's kinekphrasis, and Johnny's compiled version of Zampanò's papers. This option would not only mean that the first two are mediated by Johnny's compilation, but would also make it possible to interpret Zampanò's character as Johnny's invention.[889] Hence, just as The Navidson Record is a product of Zampanò's imagination, so too is Zampanò (and all that comes with him) a product of Johnny's fancy.

Whether two or three, the coexistence of these narratives via one medium is paradoxical, since only one of them exists for sure: the one we are reading. In fact, Will Navidson's documentary creates an illusion of its existence with the aid of Zampanò's manuscript, while Zampanò's narrative, in turn, mediates this illusion but is in truth an illusion of its own as well, namely an illusion of totality. The great *mimetic paradox* of Danielewski's novel is that both (or all) the narratives – one embedded in the other – nevertheless manage to convince the reader that they truly exist. And as Johnny points out in his introduction, "Zampanò knew from the get go that what's real or isn't real doesn't matter here. The consequences are the same."[890]

But what this mimetic paradox illustrates is the collapse of storyworlds – namely that metaphysical event in which Navidson's film and Zampanò's kinekphrasis are superimposed to form what Brian McHale calls the zone, the ontologically ambiguous platform.[891] This has at least two kinds of consequences. First, the object that both narratives aim at describing loses its recognizable

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[887] The title page of *House of Leaves* is misleading in another way. While most of the material of the novel can be said to be by Zampanò, it is unlikely that he is really the author of all the material. This is especially the case with Appendix II, the section which includes Pelafina's letters.
[888] For *kinekphrasis* and its role in *House of Leaves*, see Kilpiö 2018.
[889] See Hamilton 2008, 8–9.
[890] *HL*, xx. For invented manuscripts within manuscripts, see Merivale 1967.
[891] McHale 1987, 45–46; see ch. 1.3.

boundaries: the house, as it is portrayed in both records, is not *just* a house. It extends ontologically, each textual representation of the physical house turning out to share the qualities of their object. Hence, just as it is next to impossible to speak about Navidson's film without paying attention to Zampanò's kinekphrasis and vice versa, so it becomes difficult to pay attention solely to the house without mapping how it is represented in the narrative – and how, in fact, the house *is* its representation.

Second, the birth of the zone complicates the general setting, for it is not particularly clear whose troubled psyche the epistemological space of *House of Leaves* may reflect, or who is the prime detective character wandering in the zone. In the previous chapter dealing with Danielewski's novel, I considered that Johnny Truant is this character, a traumatized detective who strays into the labyrinth of his repressed memories. This interpretation enables one valid entrance into the novel, namely a reading according to which Zampanò's papers reflect in a complex fashion Johnny's own problematic relation to his father and mother. However, set against the superimposition of storyworlds, it needs to be admitted that at least one factor questions this interpretative option. On the one hand, since Johnny is the ontologically outermost protagonist and the compiler of Zampanò's manuscript, it is tempting to consider him the sole detective in the novel. On the other hand, however, the content of Zampanò's paperwork is not reserved for Johnny alone, since the house and its representations can also be interpreted in ways that exclude Johnny. For instance, we can consider either Will, Zampanò, the reader, or even Johnny's mother Pelafina to be the prime detective character in *House of Leaves*, and the narrative would still make sense. For the same reason, studies of *House of Leaves* have also emphasized different characters.[892]

Hence, whereas *The Navidson Record* is an indisputable narrative center of *House of Leaves* and this non-existing film constitutes a necessary component in its encyclopedism, we need to admit that as a combination of film and narrative, The Navidson Record also forms an epistemological environment that lets the explorers in on different ontological levels. Thus, it is not so much a work of art created by Navidson or Zampanò, as it is *a spatial motif* that creates its explorers and readers. The very fact that even after a reading of *House of Leaves* it seems next to impossible to say what the house actually is, and how it came to be, would imply this kind of birth of an explorer-reader.

It is for this reason I hold it necessary to add to my earlier reading that besides Johnny, several other characters also enter the house, no matter whether the house appears to these characters in its concrete or in its textual manifestation. Since the storyworlds, as well as the manifestations of the house motif, intermingle, the epistemological environment of *House of Leaves* is shared between detectives, victims,

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[892] E.g. Cox 2006; Hamilton 2008; Lord 2014.

antagonists, and readers. What makes this epistemological environment special is that it *resists*, even marginalizes, all its visitors; it does not let them feel "at home." Therefore, my next task is to consider The Navidson Record not as a labyrinthine image of Johnny's disjointed past, but as *an ontologically open platform* for several metaphysical detectives to execute their investigations. The key question here is: how does this platform works? How does it treat explorers? And last but not least: what is its link with the encyclopedism of the novel? I begin this survey by focusing on the content of The Navidson Record, and by briefly comparing Will Navidson's film and Zampanò's papers. Then, I proceed to the analysis of the house motif, which is fundamental for understanding the span of Danielewski's novel. This ambivalent, even hostile spatiality, I argue, is the key factor in its encyclopedism.

The Two-Layered Navidson Record

Navidson's film is said to contain two films, one "everyone remembers, and the one he set out to make."[893] Likewise, Zampanò's manuscript is divided into two, following exactly the same distinction: what most readers will remember about "The Navidson Record" is the haunted house tale, whereas the text Zampanò set out to make may escape the reader's attention. Be this as it may, this second text is what "The Navidson Record" was intended to be, and what Zampanò embedded in plain sight; it is a thorough record of Will Navidson's film project. Therefore, the traces of this second work can be found throughout "The Navidson Record." Like the letter in Poe's "The Purloined Letter," this embedded narrative, a hidden story within a story, is almost too visible, as it consists of all the additional material included in the manuscript. That is to say, instead of simply repeating the adventurous content of Navidson's enigmatic documentary and being merely kinekphrasis, Zampanò has complemented his work with numerous secondary excerpts, speculative digressions, and thematic analyses. What he "set out to make," then, was a total representation of *The Navidson Record* – both the film and its context – including the rich array of interpretations that encircle the film. On this basis alone, he aimed on the one hand to represent Navidson's film as an encyclopedic whole, while on the other, "The Navidson Record" was not only meant to illustrate a body of knowledge, but also to describe a process of coming to know the house inside out. Interestingly, the question is: *whose* process? Who and whose team of explorers is capable of solving this ontological mystery?

Being full of intentional cruft, embodying the presence of culture, Zampanò's manuscript has two complementary levels.[894] First, there are relatively

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[893] *HL*, 8.
[894] Danielewski's novel is a fictional encyclopedia that takes its materiality even more seriously than its predecessors. Its specific materiality is twofold. First, the novel is a *material book* that N. Katharine Hayles (2002a, 22) considers "an artifact whose physical properties and historical usages

straightforward, albeit experimental sections that do both tell the story and mimic the cinematic content, especially the actual explorations inside the house. For instance, when Zampanò describes the content of the unofficial teaser for Navidson's film, he begins by saying that there is only one continuous shot in "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway," and then describes the content using one long sentence.[895] Correspondingly, whereas the sections illustrating either Navidson's or the team's explorations depict events that break natural laws – the interior of the house exceeds in depth the diameter of the earth – so too does "The Navidson Record" push the boundaries.[896] In the description of extremely narrow tunnels, in which Navidson has to either go on all fours or even crawl, the narrative loses its form as an ordinary body of text. Consequently, the pages of *House of Leaves* contain fewer and fewer characters and the placement of these letters varies depending on the size (or the character's sense of size) of the tunnels described.

If the materially flexible narration forms the first level of Zampanò's work, the second level contains the accounts of theoretical data concerning the film project. Considering "The Navidson Record" to be kinekphrasis, one needs to add that the cinematic content is systematically *distanced*: like a horror movie with a commentary track full of spoilers and irrelevant talk, Zampanò's writings digress from a simple

structure our interactions with it." What distinguishes it from many novels is that it is highly conscious of its position as a print novel. Thus, as a historically critical medium, its experimentalism is sometimes said to be aimed at testing "where the novel has been and where it is heading" (qtd in Bray & Gibbons 2015, 5; see also Hayles 2002a, 112). Danielewski himself has considered his contribution to be less experimental: "Anyone with a grasp of the history of narrative can see that *House of Leaves* is really just enjoying the fruits of a long line of earlier literary experimentation" (McCaffery & Gregory 2003, 106). On Danielewski's relation to the contemporary experimental literature, see e.g. McHale 2012; Gibbons 2012; Hayles & Montfort 2012. Yet, to name only a few aspects of this material experimentalism, *House of Leaves* is partly an ergodic novel that adjusts to the reader's speed. In addition, besides separating the narrative threads from each other via different fonts, it exploits mirror writing, cross outs, suddenly changing page positions, spatial orientations, and typographic shifts. The other aspect of materiality specifically found in *House of Leaves* follows from the establishment of Danielewski's debut as a significant narrative that paves the way for the future of the novel. As an encyclopedic novel, its materiality is not only concrete but also *medial*: the novel contains a great amount of narrative material (narrative threads, styles, lists, footnotes, references, index, glossaries) – the same kind of cruft that characterizes the contemporary encyclopedic novel in general. But Danielewski's novel contains a number of links to other medias as well, thus taking seriously the presence of new information technologies. For this reason, Jessica Pressman (2006) calls *House of Leaves* a "networked novel," as it creates explicit feedback loops with other, mostly digital platforms, and operates between different kinds of materialities (print, digital, sonic). That is, besides being a print book, Danielewski's narrative is linked to a webpage committed to it, along with the music album by Danielewski's sister (Poe's *Haunted*, 2000). Moreover, one section included in the novel has been published as an independent chapbook (*The Whalestoe Letters*, 2000), where it differs slightly from the print book version. Together these additional platforms literally expand the print novel outside its traditional boundaries. Apart from these existing platforms and technologies "outside" the novel, as a narrative *House of Leaves* exploits at least film, video, photography, and telegraphy.

[895] *HL*, 4–5. I am grateful to Juha-Pekka Kilpiö for this notion.

[896] *HL*, 305. The samples the exploration team brings from the house prove to be older than the earth itself: "If we place the age of the earth at around four and a half billion years old, it's pretty obvious these had to come from someplace older than here. I doubt lunar but maybe interplanetary" (*HL*, 378).

description of events, and begin to ponder such topics as the physics of sound or the history of labyrinths. Whereas the action-oriented sections are immersive in their cinematic effect, the digressive chapters remind the reader that Zampanò not only wrote the narrative, he also filled the manuscript with a number of possible interpretations that leave little room for the reader's own. Since these interpretations are often unsatisfactory, the reader who aims at finding a solid perspective, is discouraged by the deceptive nature of the narrative. As Caroline Hagood puts it, "each new reading changes the structure of the narrative, revealing that our conception of truth can always be adjusted, that 'reality' is merely one of many possible interpretations."[897]

Nevertheless, there is at least one relatively solid factor in *House of Leaves* that remains the same, and it is Zampanò's own, strong authorial presence. Almost invisible as a character, he is an agent who gives existence to The Navidson Record, and also enables us and Johnny to gain access to Navidson's story. More importantly, mainly due to his totalizing contribution, the house motif is not only a concrete house illustrated in a haunted house tale, or an object of study in a film project, it is also a model for the novel as a whole. That is, precisely against the encyclopedic diversity of possible interpretations and secondary material concerning Navidson's film, the monstrous house can be a *mise en abyme* of the monstrous text we are reading.

Consider two examples. In the first, Zampanò writes about the house and the film whose sizes no one is capable of seeing in their entirety:

> From the outset of *The Navidson Record*, we are involved in a labyrinth, meandering from one celluloid cell to the next, trying to peek around the next edit in hopes of finding a solution, a centre, a sense of whole, only to discover another sequence, leading in a completely different direction, a continually devolving discourse, promising the possibility of discovery while all along dissolving into chaotic ambiguities too blurry to ever completely comprehend.[898]

In the second example, Johnny repeats this claim, but now as a reference to Zampanò's written work: the manuscript contains "reams and reams of […] endless snarls of words, sometimes twisting into meaning, sometimes into nothing at all, frequently breaking apart, always branching of into other pieces."[899] As we see, although it is the house motif that ties the film and the written narrative together, it is Zampanò who, as an encyclopedic author, makes the house literally branch onto other ontological levels.

In my earlier analysis, I linked this ontological expansion with Zampanò's

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[897] Hagood 2012, 88.
[898] *HL*, 114.
[899] *HL*, xvii.

unwanted "emanations of his things and himself": the father and the son had some neglected issues to consider.[900] Johnny identified strongly with certain details in Zampanò's manuscript and found his own repressed traumas with their aid. Yet Zampanò also seemed to have dealt with the ghosts, the relatives he had lost, and the traumas he had suppressed.[901] Consequently, both characters lost themselves in the labyrinthine text they were dealing with. Thus, even though Zampanò's strong authorial presence marks the narrative, he too is one of the victims of the house. Whether or not "The Navidson Record" is just a product of his imagination, its object – the house motif – nevertheless haunted him. But when one reduces the scale from Johnny and Zampanò's levels to the level of the haunted house story, the house in fact haunts almost all the characters:

> Up until now *The Navidson Record* has focused principally on the effects the house has had on the others: how Holloway became murderous and suicidal, Tom drank himself into oblivion, Reston lost his mobility, Sheriff Axnard went into a state of denial, Kared fled with the children, and Navidson grew increasingly more isolated and obsessed.[902]

The narrative about the house has then the same effect on its readers as the house has on its explorers. But what exactly is this house? What characterizes it? When we consider the house in the context of *House of Leaves*, which house are we considering? And more specifically, if Zampanò's manuscript and Navidson's film are inseparable, are the houses described in them inseparable as well? To map this zone, the superimposition of narratives, we need to take a look at what Zampanò calls "a *bauplan* [building plan] for the house."[903]

When the team hired by Navidson and led by Holloway Roberts begins its decisive exploration inside the house, the meaning of "that vast place" confuses them:

> Is it merely an aberration of physics? Some kind of warp in space? Or just a topiary labyrinth on a much grander scale? [...] Conceals a secret? Protects something? Imprisons or hides some kind of monster? [...] As the Holloway team soon discovers, answers to these questions are not exactly forthcoming.[904]

Indeed, the house as a spatial platform escapes definition. Being first a "goddamn spatial rape," its interior dimension being greater than its exterior, there is a house that resides *within the house* Will Navidson and Karen Green bought.[905] There are,

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[900] *HL*, xvi.
[901] *HL*, 615; Hayles 2002a, 129.
[902] *HL*, 370.
[903] *HL*, 109.
[904] *HL*, 111.
[905] *HL*, 55.

then, two houses, one embedded in the other. Moreover, the inner house manifests itself first as an emergence of "a plain, white door with a glass knob" in the master bedroom, and later as an additional "dark doorless hallway" that emerges in the living room.[906] In his own tentative exploration, Navidson discovers that the place is "really cold" and has additional corridors that branch further in the dark.[907] To his horror, Navidson discovers that the house constantly changes: a penny he has left behind is suddenly before him, whereas the doorway has turned into an arch. The distances increase and decrease. Therefore not only is there a house within a house, the inner house also exceeds the physical limits of the outer house and forces it to change some parts (e.g. the emergence of entrances) as well.

The changes within the inner house are related to the distant sound of an unknown "growl," which implies that some unknown bestial entity, or a monster, inhabits the dark space.[908] Persuaded by Karen, Navidson hires Holloway's team whose first three explorations reveal more about the anomalies of the house. The team discovers what Holloway calls "the Great Hall": an incredibly large space that "has a ceiling at least five hundred feet high with a span that may approach a mile."[909] Leading from this enormous hall they also find a spiral staircase, and it takes three days to reach the bottom of the stairwell. From there they find another set of dark rooms, again spanning an area of unknown size. The growls continue to be heard, spaces change, their compasses do not work, and their marks deteriorate, some of their neon markers being "badly mauled, half of the fabric torn away by some unimaginable claw."[910]

Hence, an unknown monster inhabits the inner house, and the house does not follow ordinary physical laws. Also, the size of its interior varies. What seems to remain the same, however, is the constitutive architecture of the inner house. It has two floors, the first residing within the walls of the Navidson's house, and the other under it. Otherwise, both floors appear to have a similar building plan, namely a series of pitch-black-walled rooms without any foreseeable logic. Also, the spiraling staircase between the floors is a relatively solid structure within the house, albeit it, like the house, increases and decreases when the growls are heard. At least for these parts, then, the house keeps its shape.

Much more remarkable than the concrete features of the inner house, however, is the effect its architecture has on the explorers. Especially the staircase is a passage that encourages the explorers to descend. Generally, the underworld journey is a common mythical motif that has been widely used and discussed, from Homer's *Odyssey* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* through Dante's *Divine Comedy* to Joseph

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[906] *HL*, 28, 57.
[907] *HL*, 63.
[908] *HL*, 67.
[909] *HL*, 85.
[910] *HL*, 122.

Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). In contemporary literature and popular culture, this *katabasis* has been popular not only in horror movies and Gothic fiction, but also in the literary world of young boys – and not coincidentally, since the hero's trip to the underworld marks, above all, a rite of passage.[911] *House of Leaves* illustrates the motif as well: whereas it is common for these stories that boys in particular are fond of having adventures in chthonic tunnels, and similarly almost all the characters in *House of Leaves* who enter the inner house are men.[912]

Discussing *House of Leaves*, Finn Fordham connects the motif of *katabasis*, the convention of structural descending, directly to the transformative, yet regressive journey of adolescents:

> There is a series of more or less formalized initiation ceremonies especially for males – the first long journey away from the family home, the loss of virginity, the experimentation with various substances, encounters with foreign authorities – which provides context for these transformations and builds up pressure around them.[913]

In *katabasis*, the "adolescents of all ages" are initiated either into the reality of adulthood or into the fantasy of not being a responsible adult.[914] The motif can be found "all over the house": Navidson escapes his and Karen's complicated relationship in the inner house. Johnny is adrift in his life, and before acquainting himself with Zampanò's material, he has spent most of his time in the nightlife of Hollywood. This period has involved lots of sexual affairs, alcohol, and ecstasy, and he has also had a crush on a stripper. Johnny's father, Donnie has also led a regressive life: as recalled, Donnie preferred spending his spare time outside the home, performing aerial stunts in local shows. Zampanò, for his part, may have neglected his son.[915] Thus *katabasis* in *House of Leaves* marks mainly the regression of the adolescent of all ages, a voluntary exit from domestic life. Such male characters want neither to grow up nor to settle down.

Yet regressive journey or not, *katabasis* in literature is an epic convention by which the narrative expands, as Fordham notes, "towards its encyclopaedic

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[911] Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864) and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) are classics that illustrate this motif.

[912] See *HL*, 357. Navidson's wife Karen Green is the exception that proves the rule, but with intentions that radically differ from the men's: she shortly enters the dark space, "her love for Navidson" being "the primary catalyst, only to appear 49 minutes later on the porch, badly hypothermic Navidson in her arms" (*HL*, 522). She has, in other words, entered the inner house out of love. The men's intentions could not be further from hers: Navidson, Tom, Reston, Holloway, Jed and Wax (not to mention Zampanò and Johnny) enter the underworld because they are looking for either an adventure or an escape from their families.

[913] Fordham 2005, 38.

[914] Ibid., 38.

[915] In addition to these characters, Navidson and Tom's parents refused to be responsible adults: their father was an alcoholic who disappeared for long periods of time, and their mother, having wanted to be an actress, vanished after her husband had died.

potential."[916] The notion is hardly surprising, since already the early concept of *enkuklios paideia* links knowledge with space and architecture, the most explicit literary symbol of encyclopedism being the house.[917] In the encyclopedic novels that exploit the *katabasis* motif, the explorers' descent is then metaphorical: due to their action, the encyclopedic narrative turns towards its foundations, but not uncritically. On the contrary, self-reflection enables the fictional encyclopedia to become more conscious of its impossibility as an epistemological project.[918]

In *House of Leaves*, the encyclopedic potentiality that the architecture of the house enables, is reflected in "The Navidson Record," the narrative about the house. Beginning from the visual design of the novel in which Johnny's comments are situated *below* Zampanò's manuscript as footnotes, tunnels represent not only the evident self-consciousness of "The Navidson Record" but also hidden links, the dark staircase connecting the film, the manuscript, and Johnny's stories. Moreover, since Zampanò has left his papers for an unknown party (Johnny) to compile, "The Navidson Record" encourages the compiler to add footnotes, that is, to descend. Therefore, as Zampanò's record leads Johnny to expand the span of the material, the composition of the manuscript comes closer and closer to the architecture of the house: the visible "underworld" of Zampanò's papers consists of Johnny's biographical memories.

The encyclopedic potential of *House of Leaves* is also ironical. If Zampanò's intention was to represent Will Navidson's film in its totality, his and Johnny's means to reach this aim mock the encyclopedic principles of beauty, harmony, and relevance. For instance, among Zampanò's papers there is secondary material that does not concern Navidson's film at all: there are poems, notes, and numerous citations from different sources which have nothing in common with the film project. To this cruft we can add also the random lists concerning the buildings and photographers, whose purpose one of Zampanò's readers explains to Johnny by saying that "[w]e just picked the names out of some books and magazines he had lying around."[919] Johnny is not a very professional editor either: since he is not familiar with topics Zampanò has collected, time after time he consults others about the foreign citations. And as he is clearly unskilled in compiling such an encyclopedic totality, he ends up discussing completely other matters, or just mechanically copying Zampanò's material.

All in all, the narrative has the same architecture as the symbolic object

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[916] Fordham 2005, 34.
[917] Kuusisto 2001, 82–83.
[918] This critical self-awareness, as Fordham also points out, is usually linked with the trope of concrete tunnels, which can be found from many novels preceding *House of Leaves*, such as *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Foucault's Pendulum*, *Infinite Jest,* and *Underworld*. Yet while the subterranean tunnel network as a postmodernist trope signifies mostly secret histories and marginal historiography, it is an epistemological symbol too: the paranoid imagination, the exploration of hidden connections, is one key feature of the contemporary encyclopedic novel. See Ercolino 2014, 105–113.
[919] *HL*, 67. For lists, see *HL*, 120–134, 64–67.

depicted in the narrative: two labyrinths, and a staircase between them. Since the house spreads onto the representations of the house, the difficulties in entering the physical house are reflected on the other ontological level as well. Compiling the material about the house is not only difficult but also disorienting: the explorers become suicidal, depressed, isolated, and obsessed; the compilers lose their minds. To examine this "architectural" effect, we need to approach the house motif from a different perspective and consider it as it usually is, a symbol of home.

The Unheimlich *Home*

For Will Navidson, Karen Green and their two children, the house they have bought is supposed to be their new home, a place in which they feel comfortable. For Navidson alone, it means "a cozy little outpost," a place where he and Karen could take refuge and heal their estranged relationship.[920] But immediately after the house shows the first signs of change, Zampanò makes the point that "a strange spatial violation" is said to have been a "surprising, unsettling, disturbing, but most of all uncanny" experience.[921] *The uncanny* is a concept Sigmund Freud made well known in its German form *unheimlich* and by which he meant not only the exact opposite of "homely" (*heimlich*) but also "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."[922] Thus, the uncanny is an experience loop: one faces something unfamiliar and terribly sublime, and yet it reminds one of, and "leads back" to something that is very familiar and common, and yet repressed. As Freud continues, it is in fact a subcategory of "homely."[923]

Zampanò does not link the concept first to Freud, however. Instead, he takes the experience immediately to the next, more existential level by connecting it with a quotation from Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927): what happens in an uncanny experience is that *Dasein* is suddenly defamiliarized, pulled out from its familiar mode of existence, and consequently, as "being-in-the-world," it "enters into the existential 'mode' of the 'not-at-home.'"[924] According to Heidegger, the modes in which this uncanniness are felt are often anxious, oppressive, and thus extreme to the core. In them, one is forced to turn away from the worldliness of everyday living and face instead the base upon which "the average everydayness" of being is

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[920] *HL*, 23; see also *HL*, 321.
[921] *HL*, 24.
[922] Freud 1955, 220.
[923] Ibid., 226. Nele Bemong (2003) maps the common ground between *House of Leaves* and Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992), according to whom "the most popular topos of the nineteenth-century uncanny was the haunted house. [...] The house provided an especially favored site for uncanny disturbances: its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits" (quoted in Bemong 2003).
[924] Quoted in *HL*, 25. See also Kuusisto 2001, 96–98.

constituted.[925] What this Heideggerian interpretation of *unheimlich* suggests is that at the hidden center of our everyday life is extreme dread. The ordinariness of everyday living makes us forget this matter.

In the Heideggerian sense, the uncanny in Danielewski's novel is not just any sort of experience, but the existential experience of the house in which the home and the house, as well as the homely and all things house related, are connected.[926] Furthermore, the uncanny forms a platform upon which homeliness and all things that we associate with home are based. However, for Will and Karen, the house is "neither homey nor protective, nor comforting nor familiar. It is alien, exposed, and unsettling."[927] This is an overstatement: when they bought the house on Ash Tree Lane, they expected it to be a perfect dwelling for their family. Thus, *originally* they associated the house with things and emotions that one usually links with the idea of home. Nevertheless, after the first changes, the uncanniness of the house shaped their views.

Since the house is not only a house or a home, but also a text, the experience concerns both the explorers and the readers. Therefore, also the reading experience is uncanny and unfamiliarizing, especially for Johnny but also for Zampanò himself. Nor should we forget Navidson's hypothetical film: just as it is difficult for Navidson to settle in the house in which he and his family is supposed to be living, so it is difficult for the (assumed) viewers of his film and the readers of Zampanò's record to get a clear idea what the haunted house tale is, what kind of space the house is, and especially, how it works – even though there are also very familiar, even conventional elements in the house, *The Navidson Record*, and the latter's kinekphrasis. As Zampanò himself admits, "the house itself, like Melville's behemoth, remains resistant to summation."[928] Yet the very fact that throughout the novel this "house" is even loosely associated with a typical house and all what a typical house usually covers (architecture, furniture, etc.), implies that we, as well as all the readers and explorers, see *something* familiar, something house-like in it.

To clarify this point, it is not a coincidence that Zampanò refers to *Moby-Dick*, probably the best-known symbolic object represented in literary history. Like the white whale, which is itself both unreachable and unbeatable, so too is the house literally uninhabitable. Neither Will's family nor the families before them are able to live in the house for a longer period of time, not to mention to make it a home. Instead, the house pushes the families out of their homes. In a similar fashion, it is precisely Moby-Dick's almost transcendental appearance that pushes Captain Ahab and his crew forward in their search of the whale. Since they are professional whale hunters, in principle Moby-Dick should be a familiar, even homely adversary for

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[925] Quoted in *HL*, 25.
[926] Quoted in *HL*, 25; e.g. Bemong 2003.
[927] *HL*, 28.
[928] *HL*, 3.

them, but it is in fact the *appearance* of the whale (or their preconception about whales and especially this particular whale) that is *heimlich*: the white whale *per se*, as an objective entity, is definitely the opposite, *unheimlich*. Hence, just as Will and his family err in seeing their house a homely home, similarly Ahab and his crew err in consider the whale to be an (extra)ordinary whale they could hunt down.

Moreover, on a formal level both novels contain the encyclopedic description of the quest for the symbolic object. Therefore, the narrative supplements, even doubles, the plot action. Whereas the original aim of the characters as human subjects is to master the object, the original aim of the narrative is to totalize, to make a complete representation of the chosen object and the culture it constitutes. It is here where the uncanny experience permeates both narratives. Both tasks are impossible to carry through, since the object is symbolic, but not homely nor familiar to the core. Symbols are open, potentially expansive concepts: we never know for sure what they are, since they, like the house, are changing. Thus, the symbolic object does not let us in. And when Will Slocombe describes the reading experience of *House of Leaves*, he could well refer to the symbolic object of Melville's encyclopedic novel as well: "We cannot dwell within this text, but only dwell upon it, building up our own interpretation of what it means, living only in its 'margins.'"[929] The symbolic object not only resists conceptual and encyclopedic seizure, but also questions the epistemological agent's position as a subject.

In *House of Leaves*, this being-in-the-margins as a version of Heidegger's being-in-the-world is eminently difficult when we recall that not only the house but also some of its extensions (such as Navidson's film) are non-existent. Equally, it seems to be misleading to perceive the house as a semiotic object at all, or a center that we surround with our interpretations, since this would require – at least to a certain degree – that we were also able to know the exact expanse of the house. Thus, as epistemological agents that are puzzled by the symbolic object, we, as well as the readers and the explorers of the house, are not exactly in its margins either. The question is then: where are we? If the house is the spatial platform for players on different ontological levels, should we consider ourselves inside or outside of it? Are we, to use Penelope Reed Doob's concepts that Zampanò quotes in his manuscript, maze-treaders or maze-viewers?[930]

As if the fact that the house repels its inhabitants was not uncanny enough, the house in a strange way also lets people in – although with disastrous consequences. And not only that, it also seems to change its architecture and atmosphere depending on *who* enters the house. What in the house nevertheless remains the same, besides its hypothetical architecture with two stairs and the spiral staircase, is its darkness. Natalie Hamilton connects this darkness to a Minotaur in the middle of the

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[929] Slocombe 2005, 92.
[930] *HL*, 113–114; Doob 1990; see also Hamilton 2008, 13.

labyrinth. Thus the beast that allegedly lurks in the shadows of the inner house, is not a corporeal entity, but darkness as such: "there is no need for a physical beast, because each character has his or her own psychological demons with which to contend."[931] The house is a monstrous subject that transgresses the fundamental subject-object dichotomy, but what enables this transgression is its darkness. We cannot be the maze-viewers, since this would require from us both sight and perspective to see through the dark.

Interestingly, Hamilton identifies darkness with nothingness, while at the same time discussing "psychological demons."[932] Why would these two be the same thing, especially when we take the clearly individual affects into account? Does Hamilton mean that the explorers and readers simply fill the ontologically compelling nothingness with psychological demons? Before Hamilton's contribution, Will Slocombe has studied the motif of nothingness from a more philosophical perspective, and claimed that *House of Leaves* is in fact a nihilistic novel.[933] Its nihilism should not be misunderstood as a moral or political ethos: the philosophical nihilism that the house represents in Slocombe's view is not so much an expression of something dark, psychological, or unethical as it is simply an expression of nothing, no-thing, something that does not exist. In fact, the house is not and cannot be an expression at all, since its nothingness "can never allow itself to be written and must disappear as it is written: rather than exert a dominant metaphysic that must be undone, nihilism (and nothingness) must never be stable enough to be written about in any secure way."[934]

What this means is that if the house is not an expression of nothing, it is not exactly the house either. As Slocombe continues, "*House of Leaves* is actually the figure of a homeless home […]. *House of Leaves* is not so concerned with the absence *from* the house […] as with the absence *of* the house *within* the house."[935] Something is not missing from the home, but the characteristics that make home are both homely and uncanny, present and absent. The fact that the house is able to destroy the sense of comfort on each ontological level it is represented, suggests the same: that the house aims "to undo the violent hierarchy of its own existence."[936] From this nihilistic perspective, the home is a hostile, not a cozy environment, since it is a metaphysical conceptualization that creates an ontological hierarchy where there cannot or should not be hierarchies, namely between Being and non-Being.[937] The *unheimlich* home is a platform from whose sphere its inhabitants are estranged and torn away to consider their fundamental existence: why are they something rather

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[931] Hamilton 2008, 12.
[932] Ibid., 12.
[933] Slocombe 2005.
[934] Ibid., 93.
[935] Ibid., 90; original italics.
[936] Ibid., 92.
[937] Ibid., 92.

than nothing?

Earlier, I pointed out that both Johnny's parents are absent when he enters Zampanò's textual labyrinth. It was distinctive especially in regard to Johnny's father that before he died, Donnie tended to run away from home, spending most of his spare time outside, and that Pelafina, by contrast, was involuntarily taken away from home. Compared to Slocombe's view, Johnny's situation could be an apt example of "a home without home": Johnny is a character who senses in the margins of Zampanò's work that he is homeless both domestically and ontologically, as he has only mediated experiences of how it feels to have a homely home, and only a mediated access to the house. Besides Johnny, most of the characters in *House of Leaves*, as Nick Lord points out, are similarly marginalized from their selves and from their fundamental social relationships: they have no "direct access to their own or others' thoughts and feelings."[938] Their individual and social connections are cut off. For instance, both of Johnny's parents are pushed away not only from their home but also from their son's consciousness, which makes it easy to link "the absence *of* the house *within* the house" with Johnny's fragile consciousness.[939] The homeless home is also a figure for the marginalized mind.

This is not a psychological question alone, however. Entering the house as an *unheimlich* experience is also a dialectical step one takes in order to come back home (to all the states of mind the home symbolizes). When Johnny begins to compile Zampanò's manuscript, both of his parents – or more specifically, Johnny's memories about them – return. Obviously, their return is a consequence of Johnny's own *katabasis*, a descent via Zampanò's textual labyrinth into his own repressed memories. He cannot see this from afar, since the dark inner house does not let itself be viewed, but only trod.

Zampanò includes in his manuscript Karen's transcript for her document "What Some Have Thought." What makes this document worthy of note here is that in it, Karen interviews several scholars and celebrities, among them Harold Bloom, who cites from his *Anxiety of Influence* (1973) a section about Freud's *unheimlich*: "But this 'unhomely' might as well be called 'the homely,' he [Freud] observes, 'for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression.'"[940] Through this heavily mediated section – Zampanò cites Karen who cites Harold Bloom who cites Sigmund Freud – the concept of *unheimilich* turns the setting above upside down. Johnny does not exactly descend into the labyrinth of his repressed memories. Instead, he is, in a Heideggerian way, *estranged* from his partying life style that has already repressed his "homely" memories before the narrative begins. The "psychological demons" are therefore already there, at home or in his mind, whereas

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[938] Lord 2014, 470.
[939] Slocombe 2005, 90; original italics.
[940] *HL*, 359.

Johnny is not, neither at home nor in his right mind, as he is a truant and a runaway.[941] Therefore, *katabasis* as a motif implies not only an escapist practice or an adventure. It is also a temptation that, through encouraging adolescent males to escape by descending, *guides them back home*, on the foundation upon which the house was built.[942]

What eventually is so remarkable in the *unheimlich* house motif of Danielewski's novel, are not its horrors *per se*. The house leaves the explorers on the margins, but also lets them in. Through this dialectical practice, the house expands from one ontological level to another. Since the *unheimlich* in the Freudian sense is just a subcategory of homely, spatially understood it means that each house, or home, always also has an inner house, that is, an absent, dark, and epistemological center that makes the coziness of the house meaningful in the first place. The *unheimlich* inner house threatens the homely house, since it is something that makes the home and is so commonplace that its inhabitants do not usually even notice it. Whether this something is nothingness, psychological demons, or domestic trauma, is secondary. Philosophically, the *unheimlich* is authentic, the non-stable foundation of being that as a root of our existence makes us consider the meaning of our existence.

In this sense it is clarifying that when Zampanò deals with labyrinths, he cites Jacques Derrida's famous "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" lecture from 1966. According to Derrida, "the center is, paradoxically *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its* center *elsewhere*."[943] I discuss this quote in the next chapter, but for now I conclude that it explains the fundamental dynamics between the *unheimlich* and the homely home, the inner house and the outer house. The inner house is at the center of Navidson's film, Zampanò's manuscript, Johnny's compilation, *House of Leaves*, and all the studies of Danielewski's novel, but, paradoxically, exactly *as a center* it is not only absent and unfamiliar, but also *outside* the house and its representations. This is also the secret both Zampanò and Johnny figure out, and which make them seal their apartments.

In the course of this chapter, we have dealt with the epistemological environment in the contemporary encyclopedic novel from three, very different perspectives, which all nevertheless concern fundamental philosophical questions. The emphasis has been put on the way the characters perceive their situation, and how they, as metaphysical detectives, operate in their environment to proceed with their investigations, their quests which are often generated by the milieus they inhabit. Next, we take a step away from the level of characters and their

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[941] Hamilton 2008, 12.
[942] This aspect is emphasized in the end, when Johnny visits the site where his home used to be.
[943] Quoted in *HL*, 112; original italics. Kuusisto (2001, 132–133) connects this particular quote of Derrida's to the encyclopedic topology of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

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environment, and consider instead the formal level of the fictional encyclopedia, that is, the narrative form. Whereas the epistemological agents on the story level are more or less our model readers, it is now time to discuss the relation between the narrative form and the reader it presupposes. Does the reader's metaphysical mystery differ much from the characters'? And most of all, what kind of tools can the reader use?

6.

The Geometrical Design of Epistemological Order

The reader of the contemporary encyclopedic novel encounters a challenge. The high information content that manifests itself as an excess of narrative material, buries the plot and makes it harder to gain a clear idea of, first, what the narrative is about, and second, why a bigger picture is even needed. Is there a coherent plot line in the mix with the informational excess? Would the narrative lose its characteristics if parts of the material were cut out? Especially in the cases of *The Gold Bug Variations* and *Infinite Jest*, we have seen that cruft plays a crucial role: in Powers's novel, part of the fascination concerning the novel's elegiac romance is the epistemological search that turns into an ontological investigation of life. Wallace, in turn, depicts an addicted mind that simultaneously seeks help from other people and a shelter from them, a way back to addiction. The narrative digressions are necessary for such a representation, as the master narrator revolves from one side character to the other.

Nevertheless, during reading, these relatively abstract guarantees are not of much help. As an epistemological agent, the reader seeks more explicit schemas first, as he or she aims at figuring out the big picture. Unlike some earlier postmodernist novels, the contemporary encyclopedic novel usually cares a lot about the reader's contribution in this regard, even though the hypertrophic narrative form tries the reader. What I want to stress in this chapter is that this formal courtesy manifests itself as a geometrical narrative structure. As we saw with *Foucault's Pendulum*, such a structure is, first of all, a tree model. Second, it both organizes the narrative and its sequence of events, and also tends to illustrate the narrator's self-consciousness. More precisely, in the geometrical narrative structure, the self and the world are superimposed so that the encyclopedic totality also depicts the process of self-discovery. The contemporary encyclopedic novel does not leave the setting here, however. As it is aware of the limitations of encyclopedic projects, it also questions the individual subject, that is, the epistemological agent. The self-discovery can even mean self-annihilation, but at the very least, the subject's abilities to know and to

exist are put in the balance.

Even though it would be a bit of an exaggeration to say that the actual reader also participates in this self-discovery project, or that the project necessarily raises self-awareness, or even transforms individual readers, it goes without saying that the questions of the bigger picture and of reading are closely related. The excess of narrative material as such demands that we ask ourselves whether the narrative thoroughness reveals something about our competence as readers, or what, in the context of a single narrative, is enough. But while the narrative form produces these effects in us, it is of course eventually up to each individual reader whether he or she even wants to read the contemporary encyclopedic novel as its narrative form wants itself to be read; that is, whether the actual reader is willing to act as an epistemological agent. Throughout this study, my point of departure has been that the ideal reader of each encyclopedic narrative is indeed willing to do so. That is, the excess does not so much frustrate this reader, as it delights and inspires him or her to work on the epistemological quest of the big picture. Hence, not only does the contemporary encyclopedic novel produce purely textual reader positions through its narrative form, but it also attracts those readers who are fascinated by the high information content and, like Casaubon of *Foucault's Pendulum*, willing to do something about it. Through accepting the presupposed reader positions, the reader then begins a learning process on the level of interpretation.

This chapter ends my analysis, and in it, I underline those formal aspects of the contemporary encyclopedic novel that help the reader in this task of figuring out the bigger picture. Whereas in the previous two chapters the emphasis has been on the characters, events, and the plot-related aspects, we now shift from that level to the level of narrative form. The characters encounter epistemological milieus during events, and when we read about them, in a similar fashion we encounter parallel, and yet more fictionalized milieus as well. Thus, I next concentrate on the explicit models that appear as structuring devices of the high information content. In addition, some of the explicit intertextual aspects of the three novels also need to be taken into consideration, since they lead the reader to conceive the epistemological order, usually in the form of a tree model, of the novels. We shall begin with *Infinite Jest*.

6.1. Circles and Sierpinski Gaskets

What makes *Infinite Jest* formally complex is the fragmentary, episodic arrangement. Wallace's novel has neither half-empty pages nor other intuitively familiar elements that signify a clear shift from one chapter or part to the other. Only a triple line-space between the fragments implies a transition but as, for instance, the readers of

Bolaño's *2666* know, such a division does not yet mark a greater shift between chapters in the contemporary encyclopedic novel. Whether subchapters or sections, some of these fragments in Wallace's novel are nevertheless given a date, while others have a shadowed circle before them. So, at least some hints are given. The dates help the reader to situate the narrated events, but the function of the circles is even more crucial: they divide *Infinite Jest* into 28 chapters, even though the exact number of these chapters has to be separately counted, and their size varies from two pages to over a hundred and eighty pages. Within each chapter, one finds from one to forty-four sections, amounting in total to 192. There is indeed a lot to process.

As the reader works his way through these sections, the most significant signposts are, then, the triple line spaces and the shadowed circles. Even though the signposts do not offer much information in themselves, especially the circles are reminders for the reader to reconsider the thematic of the novel. Like Don Gately's big-sized head in the narrative, the shadowed circles are the symbols to which the narration time after time returns in its roundabout way. It is notable that these returns are in sync not only with the big themes of the novel – that is, the cycles of addiction –but also with the narrator's compulsive self-circulation. Underlining both aspects, the symbols implying a shift between chapters are not, then, only circles but also circles with shadows. That is, each cycle that begins as an act of personal enjoyment always has its flip side as well: enjoyment is in constant danger of turning into addiction – or, as Hal considers, "think how horrible that'd be, if somebody *needed* it. Not just *liked* it a great great great deal. Needing it becomes a whole separate order of.... It seems horrific."[944] Both visually and thematically, the symbol also consists of two parts, namely the circle as it is, and its tinted right border that is about to swallow the circle. Thus the shadowed circles also refer to the addict's constant awareness of his "Disease." According to AA teachings, "you've got the Disease day by day," which means that in any given moment, the ex-addict may encounter harmful triggers.[945]

But since *Infinite Jest* lacks a typical, numbered division into chapters, as well as a (symbolic) table of contents that could be compared with the Sefirot of *Foucault's Pendulum*, for instance, it is only natural if the reader feels that the shadowed circles are not enough, and is therefore eager to find more solid interpretative keys to the novel's "elegant complexity" from the actual narrative.[946] And there are many alternatives from which to choose, from the recurring elements to the single images that correlate with the novel's composition; earlier I underlined, for instance, the AA concept of Analysis-Paralysis, which can be used to explain the narrative digressions.[947] Generally, however, in *Infinite Jest* various images, ideas, and sections

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[944] *IJ*, 1065; original italics.
[945] *IJ*, 374.
[946] *IJ*, 322.
[947] Another valid example is Jim Incandenza's concept of Found Drama. As Orin describes, instead of

work in a similar fashion: consider, for instance, the second chapter about Ken Erdery waiting for a drug delivery, and Hal's essay about the hero types.[948] But before we continue to examine the narrative elements I see as the most important ones, let me raise a few of the minor interpretative keys by way of introduction.

When *Infinite Jest* is considered as a metaphysical detective story, the most significant minor interpretative keys are the ones that explicitly correlate with those geometrical figures of design one finds from detective stories: *mirrors*, *labyrinths*, and *maps*.[949] Since the role of labyrinths has already been discussed, I will only bring out here an additional image, namely the physical labyrinth depicted in the novel. Under the Enfield Tennis Academy there is a network of tunnels that consists of "access tunnels and hallway tunnels, with rooms and labs and Pump Room's Lung-nexus off both sides, utility tunnels and storage tunnels little blunt off-tunnels connecting tunnels to other tunnels."[950] This physical labyrinth has a twofold function. First, its narrative purpose is to manifest and support the idea of *katabasis*, the motif I dealt with in the preceding chapter: the younger students descend there to explore since "small U.S. boys seem to have this fetish for getting down in the enclosed fundaments underneath things."[951] Whether this descent embodies initiation or adolescent wishes to escape everyday reality, at least the tunnels express the encyclopedic potentiality of hidden, or ambiguous connections. The boys' enthusiasm also correlates with the reader's eagerness to find out what the novel is

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creating scenes for a film, at one point of his film career Jim let a dart make the scenes: he took "a metro Boston phone book and tore a White Pages page out random and thumbtacked it to the wall and then The Stork would throw a dart at it from across the room. [...] And the name it hit becomes the subject of the Found Drama. And whatever happens to the protagonist with the name [...] for like the next hour and a half is the Drama." (*IJ*, 1027–1028). This "joke's theory was there's no audience and no director and no stage or set because [...] in Reality there are none of these things. And the protagonist doesn't know he's the protagonist in a Found Drama because in Reality nobody thinks they're in any sort of Drama." (*IJ*, 1028). This idea can be applied quite directly to the narrative of *Infinite Jest*. First, the scenes of the novel are usually relatively static and anticipatory. The characters are waiting, watching cartridges, killing time. This side of Hal's narrative strategy clearly follows Jim's speculations, as "Himself usually imagined the guy was sitting there watching cartridges, or counting some pattern in his wallpaper, or looking out the window" (*IJ*, 1028). All of these acts take place in Hal's narrative as well: the forehead of one character freezes against the windowpane as he watches the snowfall; numerous characters watch cartridges, and Hal does not only "photosynthesize" (*IJ*, 560) on his bunk; we also meet him enlisting all that is blue in a waiting room when he is outside Charles Tavis's office waiting to be reprimanded (*IJ*, 508–527). Second, the scenes either precede or follow the meaningful action. By stopping the narration either at a chaotic stage or, as Carlisle (2007, 35) points out, at "the moment of maximum tension," the narrative idea of *Infinite Jest* resembles Jim's concept of Found Drama in this regard as well. Only rarely does the narration focus on remarkable events, which stresses Jim's assumption that the characters should not be represented as actors on stage but as they are, living individuals in ordinary situations. They run into meaningful situations, but the "camera," or the narrative eye is either ahead of time or late. Lastly, it is also noteworthy that some of these characters have no remarkable role in the novel. While most of them reside in Enfield, either at the E.T.A. or Ennet House, there are some who come from elsewhere in metro Boston – as if they were arbitrarily chosen subjects, just like in Found Drama.

[948] E.g. Bell & Dowling 2005, 66–90.
[949] See Tani 1984, 23–27; Pyrhönen 1999, 12.
[950] *IJ*, 666.
[951] *IJ*, 666.

about, that is, the plot that is partly buried under the data material of E.T.A. trivia. But besides referring to *katabasis*, these tunnels are of course the concrete nook in which Hal Incandenza withdraws to smoke marijuana. Therefore, the tunnels also symbolize the tight bond of pleasure and secrecy as a fundamental theme of the novel.

Wallace's innovation – an innovation that is much more important than the concrete tunnels – is the updating of images of tunnels, mirrors, and maps, and their replacement with more contemporary motifs. The physical labyrinth only mirrors the aspects of the addict's mental labyrinth, which is also manifested as digressive narration. As regards mirrors, they are replaced with television screens or other monitors. Thus, instead of just looking at oneself in the mirror, the character may also be able to see *through* the screen. But as, for instance, the substory about Hugh Steeply's father and his addiction to the *M*A*S*H* television series demonstrates, this possibility does not necessarily mean that a character is capable of living outside himself. On the contrary, by intensively watching the screen Steeply's father loses contact with the real world, since what he eventually sees on the screen are only his own projected hopes and dreams, not his favorite program as such. Some of Jim Incandenza's most important films comment on this tendency to "meta-viewing" (the viewer watching himself watching the program) as well: "The Joke," to name one, consists of the film's audience that watches itself in real-time watching itself and becoming "increasingly self-conscious and uncomfortable and hostile."[952] Generally, however, both the drugs and the contemporary television entertainment have the same tendency to make people highly aware of themselves, up to the point where they fall into paralysis. Therefore, *the screen-mirrors* do not only stress the narcissistic or solipsistic self-view of O.N.A.N. citizens, but also support the cyclical idea of a loop. Like drug use, watching Telentertainment can turn out be a vicious circle.

Maps are also explicitly present in *Infinite Jest*. "Eliminating one's map" is, for instance, a euphemism for suicide in both E.T.A. and the Ennet House circles.[953] Moreover, one of the key moments in the plot is the playing of Eschaton, the overtly mathematical strategy game developed by E.T.A. students and played on a tennis court. Concentrating on the conflict between nations on the brink of nuclear war, this game is worthwhile to highlight here, since it explicitly replaces the map with the territory, and thus also stresses the reader's position. When the snow starts to fall in the middle of game, the game leader, Michael Pemulis, yells: "It's snowing on the goddam *map*, not the *territory*."[954] For us, as well as for the younger students, this is confusing: the tennis court should be the territory, not the map, as they play on it and only imagine the court being the world map. From the reader's perspective, the confusion concerns the same idea as the question of maze-viewers and maze-

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[952] *IJ*, 989.
[953] E.g. *IJ*, 348.
[954] *IJ*, 333; original italics.

treaders, discussed in the previous chapter: we cannot fully distance ourselves from the territory, or separate representation from reality.[955] All we can do is to accept this superimposition and aim at getting along with it.[956] We thus need to create visual designs for the story *while* reading it.

There are nevertheless two greater geometrical figures of design that, more than these minor keys, help the reader of *Infinite Jest* in organizing the excess of material.. As epistemological organizing tools for the encyclopedic whole, these models can be initially distinguished into an explicit figure of a *cycle*, and an implicit figure of a specific mathematical fractal called *Sierpinski Gasket*. As I argue next, these two figures are essentially interconnected, and in a way that supports both the larger themes of the novel and its encyclopedism. Let us, however, begin by taking a step back and return shortly to Jim Incandenza's last film, the infamous Entertainment. "Infinite Jest," after all, lays the groundwork for *Infinite Jest*.

Cycles, Copies, and a Master Copy

Throughout the novel Jim's film ideas are used as models for the rhetorical strategies of the narrative. Hal's tendency to utilize his father's concepts of cinema is a similar legacy as tennis was: both James and James's father were junior tennis talents and were later involved with the film industry, James as a director, James's father as a method actor. Now, Hal, a junior tennis athlete, follows this later career his father and grandfather showed him. In the course of the novel we get to know that Hal is very attached to his father and his films – in several scenes he is watching them – but also that Jim made some of his films, especially the most important one, for his youngest son. "Infinite Jest" was the last film he directed, and according to Jim, with it, he intended to save his son from "the womb of solipsism."[957] As for the plot events of *Infinite Jest*, the film has other functions too: on the one hand, it connects the plot lines together, but on the other, it is a cartridge that probably the Quebecois separatists disseminate in their fight against O.N.A.N. And disseminated, it seems to do all but save the audience from solipsism, as it is so entertaining that it causes its watchers to fall literally into a catatonic ecstasy of sorts.

For specific reasons, then, Jim's last film – and especially the rumors circulating its enigmatic content – correlates with the narrative form of *Infinite Jest*. In this regard, it can be compared with Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths," which exploits an imaginary book called *The Garden of Forking Paths* as its embedded *mise en abyme*. As with Borges's story, in *Infinite Jest* both the content and appearance of the embedded text are doubled on the narrative level: the novel's themes reflect

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[955] See Doob 1990.
[956] Bell & Dowling 2005, 88–89.
[957] *IJ*, 839.

the film's content, and the model for the novel's "hysterically realistic" narrative register can be found in the plots events that describe the dissemination and distribution of the film. Moreover, the novel is named after the symbolic object (the film) it contains, as if to mirror its ideas on the large scale. Therefore, the intentional object of the film (Hal) is now mirroring the director's ideas on a more general level. These links form a starting point so that *Infinite Jest*'s ambiguous formal structure becomes a bit clearer if we compare it with the film embedded in the novel.[958]

As for the content, we get to know very little about what Jim's last film is about. In Jim's filmography that is added in the novel's endnotes, it is listed as unfinished and unseen. Two essays about it have nevertheless been written and published and in them, the film is rumored to be "extraordinary" and "far away [James O. Incandenza's] most entertaining and compelling work."[959] It is also said that the film may experiment radically with the "viewer's optical perspective."[960] Like *the effects* of watching the film about which we read at length, these content-related aspects are given relatively early in the novel (Jim's filmography is the novel's twenty-fourth endnote), but it takes almost 800 pages until the reader gets more detailed information. This information is given mainly in the novel's third, political narrative thread that focuses on describing the quest for the Master Copy of Jim's film, as both Hugh Steeply and Rémy Marathe's organizations race to find the right people who might know more about its location.

The indicative information comes from the technical interviews of Joelle van Dyne, who performed in the film, and her ex-roommate Molly Notkin, who is recalling what Joelle has told her. Joelle herself has not seen the actual film, however, so her views do not necessarily coincide with what the unfortunate viewers of the film have seen.[961] What she recalls is that in the opening scene she is going round and round in a revolving door, "and going around out as I go in is somebody I know but apparently haven't seen for a long time, because the recognition calls for a shocked look, and the person sees me and gives an equally shocked look."[962] Joelle also adds that instead of going in, she follows this person out, "which person is also

[958] Generally in the contemporary encyclopedic fiction, the application of filmic ideas to the narrative has been, as Ercolino (2014, 127) points out, "a powerful semantic device, able to both contribute in a decisive way to the production of plot and to influence its compositional techniques." In DeLillo's *Underworld*, this is as explicit as it is in *Infinite Jest*. One of the characters is watching a film called *Unterwelt*, which she describes as follows: "Overcomposed close-ups, momentous gesturing, actors trailing their immense bended shadows and there was something to study in every frame, the camera placement, the shapes and planes and then the juxtaposed shots, the sense of rhythmic contradiction, it was all spaces and volumes, it was tempo, mass and stress" (DeLillo 2003, 429). Reflecting the structures, themes, and set-up of *Underworld*, the description is a typical *mise en abyme*.

[959] *IJ*, 993.

[960] *IJ*, 993.

[961] The characters' view of the symbolic object are mediated, very much in a same way as are Johnny's views of his family past in *House of Leaves*; the family past is in fact the history of his house.

[962] *IJ*, 938.

still revolving in the door to follow me in, and we whirl in the door like that for several whirls."[963] Like a serpent eating its tail – the Ouroboros, a common symbol for eternal return – Joelle's character is thus tracing the other person, a person from her past, while this other person is following Joelle, so that it looks like a simultaneous whirl of *escape* and *chase*. It goes without saying that a whirl like this resembles the addict's dilemma: whether to escape Disease and chase sobriety as a way to get "In here," or to escape sobriety and chase the way "Out There," is a paralyzing situation, since the addict wants both.[964]

Before Joelle is interviewed, Molly Notkin, a more unreliable witness, has told her version. Molly chirps mainly about her impressions about Joelle's personality and the events surrounding Jim's death, but what she can say about the actual film is that in it, Joelle, with the stage name of Madame Psychosis, played:

> some kind of maternal instantiation of the archetypal figure Death, sitting naked, […] explaining in very simple childlike language to whomever the film's camera represents that Death is always female, and that the female is always maternal. I.e. that the woman who kills you is always your next life's mother.[965]

This scene is not about recognition but about being face to face with death. When we add to these two views Joelle's own conception about the other scene she acted, namely a scene in which she, again face to face, apologizes to an infant who is in a crib, the scene's point of view being that of the infant, it is probable that the fundamental idea behind the whole film was *memento mori,* or being in one's death throes.[966] The viewer, whether in the role of the other person in the revolving door or in the role of the infant, is pushed into death anxiety and is forced to deal with the questions of mortality. Given the explanation Jim's wraith gives Don Gately, namely that his intention for directing the film was to pull his youngest son out of a solipsistic womb, this death anxiety is closely linked with *being alive,* that is, having at least one thing in life that makes the inner infant's "eyes light and toothless mouth open unconsciously, to laugh."[967] But since watching the very film seems to be so enjoyably mesmerizing that it drives the viewers not out of themselves, as Jim had wanted, but instead, to lose their zest for life completely, we have here two interpretative options. Either "Infinite Jest" is a completely *failed* work of entertainment, or it is exactly what entertainment in general can be at its best. These two options are ironically related, however. Recall that Jim's idea was to make "something so bloody compelling" that it would prevent the self from falling into

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[963] *IJ*, 939.
[964] *IJ*, 350, 355.
[965] *IJ*, 788.
[966] *IJ*, 939.
[967] *IJ*, 839.

"death in life."[968] What would "reverse [this] thrust" is the opposite, namely a highly entertaining representation of *life in death*, in which death literally comes through ecstasy or ecstasy comes by realizing one's mortality.[969]

Lise Majgaard Mortensen links the embedded "Infinite Jest" of Wallace's novel with Lucien Dällenbach's theory of *mise en abyme*, and argues that the film is both a mirror in the text and an abyss of infinite duplication.[970] Seeing Jim's last film as *mise en abym*e is possible only from the reader's distanced position, however. For the unfortunate viewers of "Infinite Jest," it is only a mirror, or more likely, an infinite mirror house in which they see only their deepest desires. What their condition indirectly implies is that in a successful entertainment, there has to be a deep, sincere message concealed in it as well, whose importance also Wallace as an author was deeply fond. For him, the television screen embodied a mirror of "what Americans want to regard as normal," and if one wished to see through this mirror, see through to the essence of American desire and unravel what constitutes that desire as normal, one needed to pursue a point of view that is detached enough to realize that what one is actually looking at is a piece of furniture with a monitor which represents one illusion after another.[971] Otherwise, entertainment would remain the role-play of entertainers, figurants, and audiences.

When one compares Wallace's view with the content of "Infinite Jest," the line of thought is the same: we do not see the abyss of illusion if we only see what we want to see most. The monitor is still a mirror. Given these illusory effects, the viewers seem to be so attached to identifying with the camera eye following Joelle (in disguise of Death), that an appropriate distance is never reached. The viewers, like so many characters in the world of *Infinite Jest*, remain big babies who do not see past their own imminent desires. And since they do not see the abyss of illusion, they fall head first into it.

The revolving door motif of the film stresses the same aspect. There are three options available: either one goes in, that is, back to oneself, or one goes out, namely outside oneself. Or, and this is the unwanted and yet probable option, one goes around and around in an infinite, solipsistic loop. Since entering the revolving doors is also a matter of death – a step back into life or a step out of it, into the other sort of infinity – the opening scene of "Infinite Jest" symbolizes the life cycle. Both Joelle and Molly's testimonies suggest that the cycle described in the film and embodied by the revolving doors, illustrates characters from both ends of human life: on the one hand, we have an infant, and on the other, a mother, or that woman's manifestation who killed this infant in his previous life. We have birth and death, but we also have a life and a new life. Due to these apparent polarities, infinity as a

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[968] *IJ*, 839.
[969] *IJ*, 839.
[970] Mortensen 2012, 187.
[971] Wallace 1998, 22, 24.

motif is then present in "Infinite Jest" in at least two ways. First, the infant's need for her mother is pictured as an infinite loop, and second, the resurrection motif suggests that infinity is not only a substance from which life cycles arise, but also a condition, or a chronotope *onto which* one steps from the first infinite loop. The most explicit chronotope possible in *Infinite Jest*, is, of course, a recovery, a condition the addict enters after quitting substances. After the Bottom, the most severe state of "death in life," comes a new life, an afterlife in sobriety.

Like in *Gravity's Rainbow*, all kinds of mortal and mental boundaries are blurred in *Infinite Jest*, which is why it is necessary that we also aim to read Wallace's novel *sub specie aeternitatis*, from the perspective of infinity. This perspective, often explicated by ex-addicts, is the required detached point of view. Earlier I suggested that Hal's narrative voice marks exactly this standpoint, the standpoint of an infinite self. He has already distanced his voice from his body in the opening episode, and the whole novel is set up, as Stephen J. Burn formulates, on "a tension between an excess of information and unexplainable selfhood" as if the voice was seeking its way back into the body.[972] Jim's last film is a mirror that reflects this search for self on at least three levels. On the level of content, the revolving doors motif sheds light on the ambiguous relation of Hal and Don.[973] Their opposite fates also introduce the

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[972] Burn 2011, 40.

[973] Pursuing his investigation, Hal turns to others, and especially to Don Gately, who is not only the protagonist of the Ennet House thread but also the sole chivalrous hero of the novel (see Bell & Dowling 2005, 94). As a sponsor for the new residents, he is described as an "AA hero, a prodigy of vitriolic spine" (*IJ*, 353). Thus, his initial position in the narrative is that of a mentor: after years of active involvement with pethidine (Demerol), he hit the Bottom, sought recovery, and when the main events start, he has by then been sober for a year and a half. In this sense, he represents a senior addict who has gone through the whole cycle of addiction. Therefore, it is only logical that most of the AA teachings are narrated from his point of view, and these teachings form one of the philosophical cornerstones of the novel, a dogma according to which ex-addicts try to live. For the newcomers, these teachings are filtered through Don's critical but experienced mind. They may be "limply improbable clichéd drivel" (*IJ*, 352), but eventually, believing in them helps – Don Gately is living proof. Nevertheless, Don is also Hal's counterpart in the novel. The fact that he is portrayed as a hero, implies this: whereas Hal embodies a growing incapability, a catatonic hero who is becoming divorced "from all stimulus" (*IJ*, 142), Don represents an opposite pole in the cycle of addiction. Don embodies what Hal would like to be, whereas Don, on the other hand, is at the height of his powers, but in danger of slipping back to what he no longer wants to be. Hence, his most remarkable appearance as a chivalrous figure is also his most risky: the episode takes place in the middle of the narrative, when he heroically defends the residents but gets wounded in a fight outside Ennet House. Just like Hal at the beginning of the novel, Don is raced to the nearest hospital, where he spends his remaining time fighting not only with pain but also with the temptation to let his doctor give him Demerol, the drug he was addicted to. As the events slowly fade away at the end of the narrative, the last things we learn are that Hal is aiming to attend the AA meetings whereas Don's prospects do not look so good. The delirious memories of his earlier addiction return as if to imply his future collapse: "he was a great and cheerful stand-up jolly-type guy off the nod, but when he was Pebbled or narculated in any way he'd become this totally taciturn withdrawn dead-like person, they always said, like a totally different Gately, sitting for hours real low in his canvas chair, [...] speaking barely at all [...]. He got real, like, interior. [...] Kite used to say it was like Gately shot cement instead of narcotics." (*IJ*, 893). Before Gately finally sinks into his fevered dreams and the novel closes, "[s]omebody overhead asked somebody else if they were ready, and then somebody [...] gripped Gately's head, and then he felt an upward movement deep inside that was so personal and horrible he woke up" (*IJ*, 974). This image is not only parallel with the image in Act One, where Hal is

infinity motif into the narrative: since, in the end, Don seems to be slipping back into addiction and Hal seems to be emerging from it, one can imagine both having the same "equally shocked look" on their faces.[974] From the standpoint of infinity, it does not matter whether or not they meet during the events of the narrative.

On the other level of reading, the revolving doors of "Infinite Jest" have the same function as the shadowed circles in the chapters of *Infinite Jest*: both stress the cyclicity of routines, loops, and addictions. Moreover, already in the section that introduces the E.T.A., the institutional routines and the students' drug use are linked to each other with the idea of "circular routine," or the "gradual cycle" that starts "all over again."[975] As for the film, it said to be watched at "the recursive loop."[976] And since "Infinite Jest" is so addictive that its viewers cannot turn their gaze from it, even the film's reception repeats the idea of circular routine: the cartridge is left on repeat. The same can be said about the narrative we are reading. Not to say that *Infinite Jest* would be an explicitly addictive novel: it is just that it functions like a revolving door in the film, and therefore requires *rereading* as the novel's plot is buried under the cruft of details and each new reading brings new details to the surface.[977]

But besides its rumored content and verifiable effect, "Infinite Jest" is a *mise en abyme* in a third sense as well: the dissemination of its physical copies models Hal's digressive narration and presence as a voice. Whereas Hal, the original target of the film, is seeking his self, so too are many characters in "Infinite Jest." The film is a lost object around which the narrative is in many ways set, and as an object, it resurfaces here and there in the narrative, just like we see Hal coming and going. What is especially remarkable is that the film, as well as Hal's own voice, are simultaneously the one and the many: on the one hand, there is only one film and only one master narrator, but on the other, the film is duplicated and distributed in

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similarly carried and absorbed in his dreams. The image, and especially the pull Don feels, also resembles Jim's motivation for directing "Infinite Jest" as he tried to bring Hal "out of himself" (*IJ*, 839). In general, Hal and Don's opposite progressions reflect stages in the cycle of addiction that almost everyone in the novel has either gone through or are soon to be facing. Keeping in mind the metaphysical mystery of *Infinite Jest*, one can set this cycle against the distinction Charles Brownson (2014, 12–15) has made in defining the detective story: besides the detective, the crime and the criminal, there is usually the chronicler. In *Infinite Jest*, this chronicler is Hal, but he is also a detective, or a hero whose failure (or, hitting the Bottom) he himself chronicles, and a victim (a character Brownson seems to neglect completely). Don, on the other hand, is also a hero – not only for Hal but also for many others. And presumably, *as a hero* Don is partly Hal's own projection, a fantasy hero, since this admiration characterizes the chronicler's relation to the detective in conventional detective stories and becomes a desire for self-recognition in metaphysical detective stories.

[974] *IJ*, 938.

[975] *IJ*, 53.

[976] *IJ*, 87.

[977] Cf. Burn 2011, 25; Curtis 2016, 49. The requirement of rereading also seems to have been Poe's and Borges's intention when planning their detective stories. See Irwin 1996. It is also a built-in feature of the contemporary encyclopedic novel from Pynchon to Yli-Juonikas's *Jatkosota-extra* (2017).

secret so that there are many "Read-Only" copies.[978] The same can be said about Hal: there are not many Hal Incandenzas, although many characters seem to have differing views about him. Instead, there are many different stories (and voices) which are "alike." The Master Copy of these stories, namely Hal's own story, is lacking from the narrative, however.

While the content of the film depicts cycles and loops – new loops following the old ones – its physical existence forms a tree-like hierarchy around the Master Copy, that is, "the *auteur*'s own cartridge, from which all Read-Only copies had presumably been copied."[979] It is rumored that the Master Copy was buried with Jim, whereupon one way to read *Infinite Jest* would be to consider it another type of detective story, namely a "Whodunit": who dug up the original cartridge and began to copy and distribute it?[980] Even though this alternative reading is worth considering, I leave it aside here and point only to the obvious: since "Infinite Jest" embodies a loop on many levels, we do not only have many similar cycles in *Infinite Jest*, we also have a pattern, a hierarchy of different loops. In one of the endnotes Georg Cantor, a mathematician and a developer of set theory, is referred to as a "man who proved some infinities were bigger than other infinities."[981] As we have seen, in Wallace's novel there are at least two kinds of infinities to deduce: the immanent, solipsistic loop, embodied by entertainment and drug use, and the more transcendental and communal mode of living, embodied, most of all, by the AA community. Nevertheless, to develop this loosely hierarchical idea further, we need to discuss the other major figure of design in the novel, namely the Sierpinski Gasket, and move from cycles to triangles.
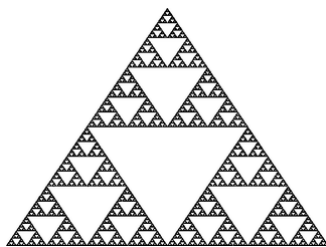

Figure 2. The Sierpinski Gasket.

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[978] *IJ*, 725.

[979] *IJ*, 725; original italics.

[980] An initial clue is already given in Act one. When Hal is rushed to the emergency room, he dreams of him and "Donald Gately" digging "up my father's head" (*IJ*, 17). The reader needs to wait almost until the end for the deepening of this image, where Don, in turn, "dreams he's with a very sad kid and they're in a graveyard digging some dead guy's head up and it's really important, like Continental-Emergency important [...] and the sad kid is trying to scream at Gately that the important thing was buried in the guy's head [...] but the kid moves his mouth and nothing comes out [...] and the sad kid holds something terrible up by the hair and makes the face of somebody shouting in panic: *Too Late*." (*IJ*, 934; original italics). These two dreams are the only scenes that imply that Hal and Don might know each other.

[981] *IJ*, 994.

The Sierpinski Gasket and V Shapes

Soon after the publication of *Infinite Jest*, Wallace mentioned in a radio interview that the mathematical fractal of the Sierpinski Gasket was the formal basis for the first, unedited draft of his novel.[982] Greg Carlisle has taken this point seriously, and adopted it as a foundation for his reading.[983] In my own approach, his lead is particularly valuable, since, albeit not being Carlisle's main intention, it contextualizes the thematic of the circular – circles of knowledge – depicted in Wallace's novel, and convincingly proves that the novel is geometrically designed in the form of a tree model. Let me, therefore, follow Carlisle, and comment briefly on his argument.

Named after a Polish mathematician, Wacław Sierpiński, the Sierpinski Gasket is, as Carlisle writes:

> generated geometrically by an iterative process of cutting smaller triangle-sized holes out of larger triangles. In the first iteration, one large triangle becomes three smaller triangles and one smaller-triangle-sized hole. In the second iteration, the smaller-triangle-sized hole remains, and the three smaller triangles each become three even smaller triangles and one even-smaller-triangle-sized hole.[984]

In mathematics, the Sierpinski Gasket is a well-known example of *a self-similar object* that has a shape of an equilateral triangle, and that, as a pattern, can be reproduced either by shrinking or duplicating the original set so that the object never loses its shape. The triangle consists of four triangles, of which the three upward triangles are "there" while the fourth, a downward triangle, is missing, being a hole in the middle. What Carlisle does with these triangle-shapes in the context of *Infinite Jest* is a division into two groups, namely one for arranging the plot, and the other for conceptualizing the themes. Fundamentally, however, the division is epistemological: arranging the plot and evaluating the themes are the reader's deeds in order to organize the novel.

As for the plot, the original triangle of Wallace's novel consists of three *present* triangles, namely the Brothers Incandenza, the political thread, and what Carlisle calls "Abuse, Addiction, and Recovery," which refers to the AA community. Note that there are three brothers just as there are three parties in the political thread (Steeply and Marathe's organizations, and the unknown disseminator of Entertainment). The missing part, namely the overturned and *absent* triangle in the middle of the three present triangles, refers in all cases to Jim and his work, as both are absent and gone, but their influence remains. Jim and his last film are the

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[982] Carlisle 2007, 20. See Figure 2.
[983] Ibid.
[984] Ibid., 20.

missing piece of the puzzle, the bond connecting the narrative threads.

When one moves from the first level to the second, each of the present triangles (the Brothers Incandenza, the AA, and the political thread) are further divided in a similar fashion, whereupon the "holes" in the middle of each new triangle are none other than Hal, Don, and O.N.A.N. as an organization. The bigger picture becomes clearer: in *Infinite Jest*, the general principle behind the Sierpinski Gasket is *influence by absence*. Especially Jim and Hal have this kind of influence on people around them as both the father and the son appear mute, peripheral, distant, or, as in the father's case, deceased. The same can be said in relation to the influence of O.N.A.N., as the North American political organization led by the President, Johnny Gentle, only affects citizens indirectly. Formally, the big decisions are public and televised, which leaves the citizens to simply "enjoy the show," but in practice, most of the real decisions are made behind-the-scenes.[985] As for the absent agent in the third triangle, Don Gately also has an ambiguous impact on the people around him, namely the AA community, Joelle, and the local police. As an ex-burglar, he has a loose, yet meaningful effect on how "Infinite Jest" surfaces in the first place.[986]

What these examples imply is that on the plot level, the informational excess of *Infinite Jest* can be arranged around Jim's character, life, and work. The Incandenza brothers and E.T.A., Ennet House and the recovering addicts, as well as Hugh Steeply's and Rémy Marathe's organizations, form the gallery of characters whose actions we follow, but who, in one way or another, are profoundly influenced by Jim's absence. N. Katherine Hayles has even suggested in passing that Hal's addiction and communicational problems may spring from Jim's suicide, either because it is Hal who found him dead, or simply because the sons have grown up without their father, without his guidance.[987] But even if we did not go this far and suggest that Hal is traumatized, during the main events we surely witness, as I have argued, Hal's ambiguous relation to his father. In fact, the fact that we are reading Hal's narrative in which his father's ideas on cinema are exploited, is the most explicit sign of the ways "fathers impact sons."[988]

Before discussing Carlisle's division concerning the themes of *Infinite Jest,* what needs to be emphasized is the triangle-shape as such. We are already acquainted with this shape through Borges's rhombus model and Eco's Sefirot, but as John T. Irwin and some others have argued, *the V shape* is in essence a metaphor of human knowledge, especially because it models "thought as a mental grasping of an object," the angle between thumb and forefinger.[989] For our consideration, this aspect is crucial since not only Borges but also Nabokov and Pynchon have used the same

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[985] *IJ*, 383.
[986] Carlisle 2007, 22–24.
[987] Hayles 1999b, 689–690.
[988] *IJ*, 32.
[989] Irwin 1996, 147.

metaphor in their metaphysical detective stories. For instance, as Molly Hite begins her valuable study on *V.* (1963), Pynchon's debut novel is "directly concerned with the nature and limits of human knowledge," and the key symbol in the novel is the mysterious V.[990] The letter "V" in *V.* stands for not only a mysterious lady that the protagonist aims to identify, but also, among other things, manifestations of this individual, as well as of places, qualities, and symbols.[991] Therefore, as Hite continues, the letter is "chronically overdetermined": if we believe that V. exists, the world in which the narrative events take place is epistemologically too close to collapse into chaos; and if she does not exist, it only proves the world is chaotic from the start.[992] Thus, like the absent triangle in the middle of the Sierpinski Gasket, in Pynchon's novel V. is *an absent signified* that as a rule manipulates the conditions of truth, and is both absent and present. Virtually gone, its influence remains.

According to Irwin, the V shape composes figures in which opposing sides are enclosed – "the forcepslike decussation, the enclosure of the rhomb, and the network pattern that images the world's continuous intelligibility as its containment or capture within a net whose structure is an endless repetition of the structure of the hand."[993] In figures like these, there are, then, patterning loops, circles or rhombuses "looping back to grasp itself within itself."[994] From this follows that the V shape, especially in its looping versions, is also a figure of self-consciousness:

> of that self-opposing structure which grasps itself by a process of simultaneous projection and introjection, by a loop that runs from the self into the world and then back to grasp the self and in so doing grasps the world within this loop as that physical other *from which* and *by means of which* the self is differentiated.[995]

The Sierpinski Gasket is a figure of this sort. Each of its triangles shares at least one side with another triangle, and the triangles that are surrounded from all sides by others form clear-shaped rhombuses. Therefore, the fractal contains several nets, rhombuses, and loops in different combinations of V and X shapes. In Carlisle's model, the triangle pairs that constitute *the rhombuses* are as follows: Hal and E.T.A., Orin and Avril, Mario and Art/Entertainment, Joelle and Don Gately, Jim and Technology, as well as Samizdat ("Infinite Jest") and O.N.A.N.[996] Even though some of these pairs may appear surprising, they are very revealing. Paying attention to only a few of them, one can say that these "character rhombuses" are self-

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[990] Hite 1983, 47.
[991] Correspondingly, in Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, the biographer-narrator is simply "V." See also Sweeney 1995.
[992] Ibid., 48.
[993] Irwin 1996, 148.
[994] Ibid., 148.
[995] Ibid., 148; original italics.
[996] Carlisle 2007, 24.

conscious models, and they have the same function as the rhombus had in Borges's "Death and the Compass." They offer a necessary perspective *for the characters themselves*. For instance, Jim's film mirrors O.N.A.N., as it seems to expose how weak and enjoyment-driven the U.S.A. is as a nation, and how attached its citizens are to "the choice for death of the head by pleasure."[997] As for Joelle, meeting Don Gately and falling in love with him help her to deal with her addiction. On the other hand, besides raising self-awareness, some of the rhombuses imply bonds the parties cannot break or do not want to break. Twiddling with film projects is a passion of Hal's brother Mario, just as technology was of his father. Orin, who appears to bear a grudge against Avril, is also strongly attached to her. Here and there in *Infinite Jest*, one can even find hints about their abnormal, perhaps incestuous relationship.

Hal's relation to E.T.A. is, of course, the most important of these rhombuses within this Sierpinski Gasket figure. Having been a resident in the academy since his seventh birthday, Hal's greatest concerns about his drug use are, as we recall, linked with what would happen if he got caught: "The hideous thing is how brightly it'd come out, if I flunk a urine. E.T.A.'ll be publicly hurt. Hence Himself's memory, hence Himself."[998] The academy that has for years organized and scheduled his daily life, giving it circular routines, is thus also a mirror that makes Hal aware of his pathological tendency towards secrecy. As is the case with the remaining rhombuses, the opposite triangle – in this case, the institution – reflects his fears, pathologies, and his complicated relation to himself as well as to others.

Carlisle's other, thematic version of the Sierpinski Gasket is equally revealing. He divides *Infinite Jest*'s themes into four "spatial positions," namely in *Between*, *Around*, *Under*, and *Away*. Most of the principles behind these positions we have already dealt with. *Between*, for instance, means social relationships and the problems related to them: regression, self-absorption, disabilities, surrender, passivity. *Around* implies, in turn, cycles, routines, and recurring images, as well as personal histories that circle around the father figures. We are also acquainted with the categories of *Under* and *Away*, as they signify all things that are either repressed or lost. Secrets, fears, and memories, as well as sadness, isolation, and distance belong to these two categories, the first three in *Under*, the other three in *Away*.[999]

As with the first Sierpinski Gasket, the central triangle, or the "hole" in the middle of three other triangles is the most important one. In Carlisle's division, it signifies the *Around* category. If, in the first version, Jim's character and ideas formed the absent force for the rest of the characters, similarly the central, indirect and yet dominating theme of *Infinite Jest* is cyclicity: the loops, routines, and addiction cycles. When one moves from the first level to the second level, similar absent and

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[997] *IJ*, 319.
[998] *IJ*, 784.
[999] Carlisle 2007, 23.

influential themes are Choice, Fears, and Boundaries.[1000] Correspondingly, when one considers the rhombuses that are reproduced by the duplication of the original triangle, we get six pairs: Regression and Choice, Disabilities and Fathers, Non-action and Repetition, Memory and Fear, Cycles and Time, and Waste and Boundaries.[1001] Again, the pairs are logically linked, and in some cases they embody cause and effect. Regression and Choice are, as we recall from Marathe's moral lecture, the key problem for O.N.A.N. citizens: if its citizens are given absolute freedom of choice, they regress, since as "American experience seems to suggest […] people are virtually unlimited in their need to give themselves away."[1002] Hal's, as well as many other characters' (Orin, Joelle, Hugh), mental or physical disabilities are almost without exception related to their father figures. Repetitive loops can be paralyzing. Fears are remembered and the characters recall their or their relatives' fears; some even fear recalling their past, which leads them, again, to give themselves away. Mere memories may also make some characters fear. Nevertheless, the most important of *these* rhombuses is the pair of Cycles and Time, as it sums up what I argued about the role of cycles in *Infinite Jest*: cycles are either temporal or infinite. Some of them last from days to months, even years, but most of them are experienced as immanently timeless. Only when one steps out of one cycle, as an ex-addict does, is one able to see its temporality. In this sense, a new life of sobriety gives the addict the standpoint of infinity.

Both of Carlisle's divisions are definitely relevant, but unfortunately he does not discuss their aspects enough, not to mention drawing relevant conclusions. Yet, apart from what I have argued, two additional remarks can still be made. First, the Sierpinski Gasket gives us a chance to play with different *variations*. Whether the focus is on the character or on the themes, one can, besides evaluating relations between different triangles, compare rhombuses (that is, mutual affairs, and the dynamics of the novel), and thus gain valuable knowledge on which basis to organize the high information content. Even though the fractal is not explicitly given in the novel – there is only one reference to it in the form of a poster mentioned on page 213 – already from the opening page we read how Hal's "fingers are mated into a mirrored series of what manifests, to me, as the letter X," and similar glimpses to this fractal are also given later, for instance in the form of tennis.[1003] One can also form a version of the Sierpinski Gasket intuitively, simply by taking into account the characters, their mutual affairs, and the themes they embody.

However, Hal's reference to the letter X is revealing in another matter as well. Besides rhombuses, the Sierpinski Gasket contains a number of *hourglass shapes*, of which I shall only mention two: if Hal and E.T.A. form a rhombus, Hal and his

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[1000] Ibid., 24.
[1001] Ibid., 23.
[1002] *IJ*, 53.
[1003] *IJ*, 3; e.g. *IJ*, 82.

father form an hourglass. The tips of their triangles are connected, whereupon their mutual relation is also harder to grasp than the mirroring relation between Hal and his institution. The other hourglass shape, if one continues relating to Carlisle's divisions, is the thematic relation between Cycles and Choice. Again, if absolute freedom of choice leads one into regression, the link between Choice and Cycles appears more complicated. While the rhombus is a mirror, the hourglass implies action, a way out or a solution. Especially in the AA context, this relation is simple: when the addict is "at a fork in the road that Boston AA calls your *Bottom*" and that is the possible end of the cycle, he or she only has two choices: to die or to get help, to surrender to Disease or to "the Group conscience."[1004] But even then, as Don Gately points out, following the AA doctrine is "[s]ome new sort of trap," the beginning of a new cycle into which one steps when giving up the drug.[1005] After all, the sober life, according to the AA protocol, means daily routines, daily participation in meetings. Hence, the choice to step out of one cycle does not necessarily mean giving up all the cycles, just stepping into another. The same applies if we switch back to the first hourglass shape, to the ambiguous relation between the father and the son. While Jim and Hal resemble each other, and the son exploits the father's ideas in a narrative that has the same name as the father's key film, through narrating *Infinite Jest* Hal may be able to step out of the father's sphere of influence, beat his own addiction, or both. Recalling my earlier Kierkegaardian argument, Hal is not desperate in the same way as his father was, and, as an "infinite form, the negative self" he now reconstructs himself.[1006]

Another remark one can make on the basis of Carlisle's division concerns the form of the novel in general. Carlisle's thematic division is also a formal division: *Away* implies the missing year; *Around* refers to the digressive, roundabout narration; *Between* implies the ambivalent relations between characters; and *Under* suggests that dreams and memories play an important role in the narrative. All of these categories are also directly linked with Hal's narrative voice.

As a conclusion, both the cycles and the Sierpinski Gasket are images of self-consciousness, of loops and repetition, and of infinity. "[S]ome infinities [are] larger than others," but for the reader, some infinities are also more implicit and therefore more difficult to grasp than others.[1007] Cycles alone do not explain how much *the influence by absence* matters in the novel; it is instead the Sierpinski Gasket that gives us this interpretative possibility. But this implicit mathematical fractal also introduces us to another sort of infinity, the one that replaces immanent, drug-related cyclicity: while absence equals the transcendent, indirect influence, "the hole in the middle" that keeps loops and routines alive, how does one make absent present

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[1004] *IJ*, 347, 357.
[1005] *IJ*, 349.
[1006] Kierkegaard 2008, 82.
[1007] *IJ*, 994.

and make it possible to step out of a harmful loop? The answer is by changing the scale. When one steps out of one cycle and into an afterlife, the fundamental image changes. Taking such a step involves contemplation, but that is what Hal does through his digressive narration.

Together, these two models constitute a relatively clear image of a tree model, namely a hierarchy between infinities. And further, as a combination, they may also help the addicts, as well as the reader, to pursue a different type of infinity. As I have aimed to show, *Infinite Jest* is narrated from *sub specie aeternitatis*, from the position of the infinite self, and from this perspective that the reader is encouraged to gain benefit as well. A strikingly similar image can be found in Powers's *The Gold Bug Variations*, where it takes the form of infinite variation. This will be our next focus of study.

6.2. The Double Helix of Desire

Stuart Ressler teaches his students that the world of science knows that "the living, interlocked world, is a lot more complex than any market. The market is a poor simulation of the ecosystem, market models will never more than parody the increasingly complex web of interdependent nature."[1008] As he understands the relation between culture and nature, whereas science can only poorly comprehend the totality of life, so too markets can only partially simulate the complex ecosystem of which we, as living beings, are part. This argument is one of the numerous moments in *The Gold Bug Variations* where the reader becomes aware that the protagonist could just as well be describing the storyworld; that "the world" in question does not only refer to the world Stuart, Jan, and Franklin experience, but also to the narrated world as a literary simulation of the previous world. Hence, even though the narrative would only be a poor simulation of the world experienced by Stuart, Jan, and Franklin, the reader would nevertheless consult the narrative *as if* it could transmit the truth about the storyworld. The reader would assume that there is a relatively reliable mimetic relation between the narrative form and the narrated world; and that together the storyworld and the narrative constitute a totality that *can be comprehended* – unlike "the living, interlocked world" to which Stuart refers. This mimetic relation would also make it possible to translate the events of the narrated world so that they fit and are well represented within the narrative form.

Compared to *Infinite Jest*, as an encyclopedic narrative *The Gold Bug Variations* makes some things easy for the reader. The novel does not put the reader in a position in which the material needs to be sorted out in order to get an idea of the

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[1008] *GBV*, 411–412.

narrative plot. The plot is explicitly there. And even though the novel has several threads, the narrative whole is chronologically easy to follow, as there are mutually linked groups of events and situations. The reader is guided through the events of Cyfer's year, the time when Jan and Franklin acquaint themselves with Stuart, the period when the teacher gives lessons to his students, the period when the protagonist trio aims to rescue Uncle Jimmy, and finally, through the events of the following year, when Stuart has died, Jan works as an armchair scientist-wannabe at home, and Franklin has gone missing. During each of these moments, the reader is reminded at which point in the novel's timeline each event takes place, and whose ideas are expressed. Moreover, all the characters are relatively sharp-figured, and their minds do not blend into each other. There are no master narrators. Jan is the narrator of the two narrative threads, and even though the narrator of the third thread is not revealed until the end, the thread neither raises metafictional questions nor remains ambiguous. It is simply a biography of a young scientist, and it gives both background and meaning to the other threads.

Nevertheless, besides narrating events in a realistic fashion, the novel gathers together an unnecessarily large amount of cruft. In fact, loyal to the key idea of the encyclopedic novel, the plot events, which usually embody the generic level of the narrative, are tightly related to the "overdoses of information."[1009] The reader cannot skip the theoretical parts, since both of the fundamental generic registers – the love story and the detective story – emerge from the study of information, like the signals which emerge from noise. "The point of science was to lose ourselves in the world's desire," formulates Jan, and the same holds good vice versa: the world's desire, in Powers's novel, cannot be fully comprehended without paying attention to biological facts and cultural considerations.[1010] And there are lots of theories of this kind. *The Gold Bug Variations* is perhaps the most theory-driven narrative among contemporary encyclopedic novels, and here its realistic mode of storytelling makes sense: the reader has plenty to grasp even without complicated plot structures. And as Jan points out already at the beginning, her and Franklin's story would not have evolved without Stuart's presence, for whom science was, in turn, the "perpetual third party."[1011] For this reason, without theory the narrative of their affair would lack substance.

Jan and Franklin's "baby" – that is, their narrative – follows a clear model that both the narrators and the reader use to arrange and conceptualize the excessive material. As the novel's title implies, Bach's *Goldberg Variations* is an explicit formal model for the narrative: like Bach's work, the novel is divided into thirty parts (chapters) that are framed by two shorter sections called "Arias." There are several other, more subtle links between the works as well, but before I line these links up

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[1009] Dewey 1998, 52.
[1010] *GBV*, 413.
[1011] *GBV*, 41.

with our focus, let me point out that in Stuart's original conceptions, as well as in Jan and Franklin's narrative, which leans heavily on their mentor's thinking, the musical model is merely a simulation of a more crucial system, namely that of "the increasingly complex web of interdependent nature," DNA.[1012] Therefore, even though Bach's *Variations* is a key structuring device of the novel, as for instance Jay Labinger, and after him, Luc Herman and Geert Lernout have argued, *epistemologically* this model is not the most important one.[1013] Whether it is a poor or an adequate simulation of DNA, it is still a simulation, not a fundamental model without predecessor. What this "simulation relation" between systems of music and molecular biology implies, then, is a preliminarily hierarchical epistemological model, a tree-model structure that Jan and Franklin use as the basis of their narrative. Music is a rough analogy of DNA, and similarly a composition based on a specific musical work can only be a rough analogy of what DNA is meant to embody, namely "the world's desire."[1014] This said, concentrating on the musical structure of Powers's novel is not enough for our discussion: we also need to ask what kind of totality of desire is *The Gold Bug Variations* able to constitute through its models and simulations. Is it possible to shift between systems? How should one organize their mutual relations? And what do these possibilities mean for the encyclopedism of Jan and Franklin's narrative? Let me begin with the role of music.

Variations on a Musical Theme

Since 1957, Stuart has intensively listened to Bach's *Goldberg Variations.* One of his older colleagues introduced him to classical music during his Cyfer year, but it is the object of his fancy, Jeanette Koss, who has given him Glenn Gould's classic debut album, on which the young pianist prodigy interprets Bach's work. As the narrator describes it, the very first listening is a magical moment for Stuart, since "[w]hat he fails to learn from these notes tonight will lodge in his lungs until they stop pumping."[1015] Not only does he hear the melody, he also distinguishes first, a more substantial bass line underneath the melody, and then, the "real melody, the one that will pass with that trivial bass line through thirty wildly varying but constant mutations."[1016] Stuart senses, in other words, a hierarchical structure that consists of three intertwining voices, and that has "the same numerology" as the systems Cyfer has been working with.[1017] According to his own later description, as soon as he began to hear how "two lines would twine themselves back into a double strand"

[1012] *GBV*, 411–412.
[1013] Labinger 1995; Herman & Lernout 1998.
[1014] *GBV*, 413.
[1015] *GBV*, 157.
[1016] *GBV*, 158.
[1017] *GBV*, 191.

he became convinced that he had found the right model.[1018] *The Goldberg Variations* were, as the novel persistently reminds us, Stuart Ressler's "best metaphor for the living gene," a remodeling of a more fundamental model, that is DNA as "a repertoire for proteins."[1019]

As for *The Gold Bug Variations*, the narrative that emphasizes Stuart's key concern, it is a supplement of the original metaphor, its literary demonstration, or a retranslated version of a text that as such is already a translation. "The piece proceeds, with the modesty of the monumental, to launch an investigation into everything the aria, by permutation, can conceivably become," describes the narrator, and while the description concerns Gould's record, one can easily expand it to the level of the whole narrative.[1020] In fact, Stuart's impressions about the three-level hierarchy of Bach's musical work are doubled on the narrative level, and, initially speaking, in three ways. First, two lines or voices are backed up by the third, "the real melody," which means that Jan and Franklin's love story takes place under Stuart's influence. Second, this "double strand," as Jay Labinger points out, is reflected directly on the three narrative lines of the novel where the 1957 thread makes the other threads meaningful.[1021] The third doubling is more formal: we read a double strand of literary text and music – text that is composed according to a musical work – but we should not forget that in the context of the novel, neither of these "voices" (neither literature nor music) would make sense without Stuart's original main concern, the genetic coding problem as a fundamental "real melody." Compared to Stuart's above-quoted conception of markets, music is one simulation of complex ecosystems, whereas literature, as Jan and Franklin see it, is another.

Keeping these three doublings in mind, the analysis of the links between *The Goldbergs* and *The Gold Bug Variations* is indeed enlightening. By doing "[a] few edits, a little cut-and-paste" Jan and Franklin have arranged their narrative so that it constantly creates "splices," as Jan names the connections, between their relationship, Bach's variations, and Stuart's life theme.[1022] For Jan and Franklin, *The Goldberg Variations* is a mediator, or a mediating language, between different fields of expertise, such as genetics and history, and between their own experiences and theory. According to Patti White, the novel has several "attempts to send a variety of messages through a series of constrained or limited channels," and in this sense, Bach's work is the most important of these channels.[1023] It is *Stuart's* most important medium, however – for Jan and Franklin, the most important is a literary narrative where they find *their* best metaphor for their teacher's coding problem. In this respect, different epistemological agents find different models crucial.

[1018] *GBV*, 191.
[1019] *GBV*, 579, 190.
[1020] *GBV*, 159.
[1021] Labinger 1995, 86.
[1022] *GBV*, 637.
[1023] White 2008, 91.

In any case, as Herman and Lernout have closely studied, Bach's variations recur in the corresponding chapters of the novel, and help the reader to organize the high information content.[1024] Usually the variations accompany the events: the characters either listen to a particular variation, they hum it, or it is played in the background. For instance, when Jan has received the death note in the first chapter, she hears music that assures her to take a sabbatical and make things right. This music is a syncopated dance, which is in sync with Bach's first variation, which is a polonaise.[1025] Moreover, when she hears this music, she, in her own words, "was at last *hearing*, picking out pattern," that for her means Stuart's life theme.[1026] Thus, she does not only realize firsthand what Stuart sensed the first time *he* heard the variations, she also repeats his experience in her own way. That is, Stuart listens to the record with Jeanette, who "remains, despite his research, no more than a sketch" that he wants to explore without letting her "dissolve into specifics," while for Jan, Stuart and "his music […] begged me to discover how wide an arpeggio might emerge from single notes."[1027] Stuart's firsthand experience is, then, reversed in Jan's experience: Stuart is with his crush tête-à-tête for a first time, whereas Jan has just lost the man she has learned to love; Stuart senses a simple model, whereas Jan senses the variety springing from that sketch. The simple pattern underneath the tune creates "answers and calls, inversions, oppositions, expansions, contractions, dissonances, resolutions" in Bach's composition, and therefore, also in *The Gold Bug Variations*.[1028] Yet these are small-scale changes as the bigger picture remains for the most part the same.

Formally, Bach's thirty variations are arranged so that each third variation is a canon, up until the twenty-seventh variation. A canon is a polyphonic arrangement in which different voices express non-synchronically the same initial theme. The theme is repeated every time each voice enters, so that eventually each canon has not only one melody, but two or several: when different voices are entering at certain intervals, they begin to form different melodies together. The guiding idea is that in the first canon, the voices enter in unison, but from the sixth variation (the second canon) on, the intervals between the voices begin to increase: in the second canon, the follower starts a major second higher than the first voice, and in the last (ninth) canon, the interval has reached an octave plus a second, that is, a ninth. For this reason, even though the variations formally follow a strict order, in the listener's ear they may appear to differ a lot from each other. This is natural since the melody rotation dictates the genre of the tune already in the variations that precede the canon: a dance is followed by an arabesque, which is followed by a canon, and then

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[1024] Herman & Lernout 1998.
[1025] See Ibid., 153–154.
[1026] *GBV*, 24; original italics.
[1027] *GBV*, 159, 24.
[1028] *GBV*, 158.

the rotation starts again, but in a slightly different form.[1029]

The Gold Bug Variations mimics Bach's canonical structure in an astonishingly precise way. Departing from Herman and Lernout, who handle Bach as a decoration of sorts in the aforementioned sense, I suggest that the characters are not just impressed by Bach's musical piece, but Jan and Franklin also arrange the events and theories into *a canonical narrative*, a narrative that exploits a specific musical medium, namely Bach's canonical arrangement of variations. Thus, even though "Powers has not mechanically projected Bach's music onto his text," *The Goldbergs* are used in order to organize the narrative material in a way that in each "literary canon" something meaningful – either for the plot or for the theoretical content – surfaces.[1030] Every third chapter, in other words, highlights the meaningful events in the protagonists' lives, gathers together valuable information, or both. And like the musical canon, each literary canon rises from the ideas developed in the previous variations, in which theoretical considerations are introduced.

A short look at these literary canons clarifies my point. Stuart, a young talent, as well as the 1957 thread in general, are not present throughout the novel: he and his period with Cyfer enter the narrative in the third chapter, which is also the first canon. Correspondingly, this thread ends two chapters before the end of the novel, in the twenty-eighth chapter that immediately follows the last canon (the twenty-seventh chapter). Thus, even though only two of the three narrative threads run through the whole novel, the third thread can easily be interpreted as the "real melody" underneath the other voices.

However, the symmetries of *The Gold Bug Variations* do not end here. In the continuum of thirty variations, the fifteenth and the sixteenth chapter form not only the middle point of Jan and Franklin's narrative but also the culmination point for their separate studies. Unlike in the other chapters, only one narrative thread is represented in both of these two variations. In the fifteenth chapter, which is also the fifth canon, Jan provides a minor encyclopedia concerning her discoveries so far, and in it, she aims at classifying Stuart's view about "The Natural Kingdom" into four categories, namely classification, ecology, evolution, and heredity. In this way, she creates a simulation of "a data structure informing […] where to go."[1031] As for the sixteenth chapter, it consists of Franklin's letter to Jan from Europe, in which he reveals that "I start with every intention of cranking out a chapter of Bles's bio, but after a few subordinate clauses, find myself deep in Ressler's."[1032] Moreover, whereas Jan ends her variation wondering, "what hope is there that heart can evolve, beat to it, keep it beating," Franklin's letter contains an immediate answer in

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[1029] See also *GBV*, 577–586.
[1030] Herman & Lernout 1998, 157.
[1031] *GBV*, 335.
[1032] *GBV*, 347. Franklin has an unfinished dissertation on Flemish painter Herri met de Bles.

the form of a combined apology and declaration of love.[1033] Franklin misses Jan and wants "nothing more than to see you and hear your voice," since he loves her, "and all other untranslatables."[1034] What both protagonists do with their small-scale compendiums, then, is a change of direction: from that point at the latest, both continue combining their research interests with their mentor's teaching, but now they also understand that they need to co-operate, and further, get back together.

Yet to understand the crucial role of these two variations in the middle point of the narrative, and the symmetry of the narrative form in general, the other canons need to be taken into consideration as well. Generally, before the fifth canon, the focus is on Stuart's early, more theoretical work with the coding problem, but after that, desire and its applications gain ground. The key events of the first four canons have already been dealt with: Stuart arrives in Illinois, encounters first the lab team members, and then, in the second canon, their prodigious offspring. This, along with the familiarization of Bach's variations and Poe's "The Gold-Bug" leads him to develop the coding problem from a new angle, and further, to realize where Cyfer has taken a wrong direction. Personally, Stuart's relation to Jeanette deepens into love in these two canons. Yet at this point, the narrative also begins to move from his and Jeanette's love story to the second love story of the novel. In the fourth canon (the twelfth chapter) Jan leaves her long-time boyfriend Keith Tuckwell with the aim of living by herself, but also in order to freely date Franklin. What is noteworthy in the next two canons is that they are in explicit contrast with the two canons *preceding* the middle point of the novel: while Stuart and Jeanette's mutual crush deepens in the third and fourth canons, in the eighteenth chapter it becomes an issue for Franklin that Jan has sterilized herself. The eighteenth chapter also introduces Annie, Franklin's young coworker, with whom Franklin cheats Jan later. Keeping in mind our concern with voices and the real melody, it is nevertheless significant that within these latter two canons (that is, in the eighteenth and twenty-first chapters) the two love stories also go in sync for a moment: Jeanette decides to stay with her husband, and therefore ends her affair with Stuart, whereas Jan, having found out that Franklin has cheated on her, similarly leaves Franklin. Thus, both of the love stories end at this point, and only one starts again, a year later, perhaps in the aftermath of the chapter that comes after the official canons. The inversions, oppositions, and contractions are there for a reason: the literary description of the dual love story develops in the same way as Bach's variations do.

Theoretically, the last four canons are also analogous with the first four canons. If Stuart's coding problem is represented in the biological context during the first four canons, after the middle of the novel the narrative shifts to describe the applications of this problem within the other data systems. In the twenty-first

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[1033] *GBV*, 336.
[1034] *GBV*, 352.

chapter, a brief example of Stuart's programming skills is given, and in the twenty-fourth chapter he, Franklin, and Jan give Uncle Jimmy a little bonus in secret, but as discussed earlier, this aim leads Jimmy into problems. Jimmy suffers a cerebral hemorrhage, and if in the early canons Stuart founded "signals from noise," that is, the talented new generation prodigies who, like his young self, learn things from scratch, during the last canons we encounter the exact opposite of this prodigy: a part of Uncle Jimmy's brain dissolves "faster than a sugar cube in coffee" and his "signal" is lost.[1035] In the last canon (the twenty-seventh chapter) Stuart, Franklin, and Jan put all their knowledge into operation in order to rescue their coworker. Hijacking the data systems of Manhattan On-Line is also, as recalled, Stuart's "belated return to […] Life Science."[1036]

The last canon ends with the 1957 thread in which Stuart receives a message from Jeanette, according to whom she and her husband Herbert move to an unknown location. After this canon, we encounter several endings: Stuart leaves Cyfer, and the chronologically earliest thread ends; operation "Gold-Bug" ends Stuart and Franklin's careers in Manhattan On-Line, Jan's sabbatical along with her "self-assigned homework" ends, and Stuart leaves New York and joins "a new research project" in Illinois.[1037] Since this project is "a cancer study," his exit is also the most permanent in the sequence of endings.[1038] Interestingly, he leaves behind a "trunk packed with handwritten full scores," which Franklin asks Jan to "decipher [...] together."[1039] What is significant in this revelation is that even though Jan and Franklin have known for a while that Stuart did compose some music on his own, it is not until the last canon that the existence of actual tunes is revealed.

Is their narrative, then, actually a combination of their writings and deciphered tunes? Before we can answer this, let me briefly return to *The Goldberg Variations*. According to Jan, Bach's musical work repeats and recycles a simple "sarabande Base," and has a "self-spun hierarchy."[1040] Each variation remains faithful to the informing theme, even though the variations seem to stray radically from the sarabande. The canons, in turn, emerge at steady intervals, and each of them not only imitates but also gathers together "staggered voices."[1041] The melody of the canon "harmonizes not with another tune but with itself, a replica of its immediate past and future."[1042] This procedure implies a culmination point, as two consecutive canons are always contrasted: "whatever happens in the first voice is mirrored upside down in the second."[1043] Thus, the variations change, first on the level of a

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[1035] *GBV*, 545.
[1036] *GBV*, 590.
[1037] *GBV*, 614, 624.
[1038] *GBV*, 624.
[1039] *GBV*, 637.
[1040] *GBV*, 578, 579.
[1041] *GBV*, 579.
[1042] *GBV*, 579–580.
[1043] *GBV*, 579.

single variation, and then, on the level of a canon. And as Jan continues her analysis, each variation explores "a variety of musical genres" and broadens either technical or emotional contrasts between the pieces: "each variation is so arranged to throw off the spell of the previous" and to assert its independence.[1044] Therefore, even though each of the variations carry the real melody, within themselves, as single tunes, they all reach "the threshold where each variation denies that it *is* a variation."[1045] For good reason, then, Jan suggests that *The Goldbergs*, with its three levels of order:

> are about the paradox of variation, preserved divergence, the transition effect inherent in terraced unfolding, the change in nature attendant upon a change in degree. How necessity might arise out of chance. How difference might arise out of more of the same. By the time the delinquent parent aria returns to close out the set, the music is about how variation might ultimately free itself from the instruction that underwrites it, sets it in motion, but nowhere anticipates what might come from experience's trial run.[1046]

The latest of these orders, the ability of the variation to deny that it is a variation, implies that the link with the base is cut. The loose connection between the variation and the base makes the whole a radicle-system. But when one compares this fact with the narrative whole of *The Gold Bug Variations*, it seems that none of the chapters deny in a similar fashion their debt to Stuart's coding problem. As Jan points out, she hears in *The Goldberg Variations*, "in this encyclopedia of transcription, translation, and self-replication something of the catalog" her teacher "carried around inside of himself for a quarter century," but she and Franklin never neglect this same catalog, as the variations should do.[1047] Is this intentional or does this happen due to some misunderstanding? Is one elemental level of meaning lost, when Jan and Franklin translate Stuart's coding problem into a canonical narrative?

Throughout the novel, Stuart, and after him, Jan and Franklin emphasize the rich variety of life. The scale is more important than the origin. As recalled, Stuart criticizes Cyfer's attempts to find a fixed code, and begins instead to pay attention to the process. This is exactly what the third-level order in each variation is about: each variation denies its origin, and strives forward instead. When this idea is contextualized as a problem of narrative, our main concern is encountered from another angle: since each variation, in order to be a variation, should deny its origin, and Jan and Franklin's narrative is entitled *The Gold Bug Variations*, does the narrative eventually deny its origin as well? And what is this origin? I have argued that epistemologically the novel has a base, that is, Stuart's life theme, and the

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[1044] *GBV*, 581.
[1045] *GBV*, 583; original italics.
[1046] *GBV*, 585.
[1047] *GBV*, 579.

network around this base, namely Jan and Franklin's pursuits, so what actually is at stake and what we need to discuss next is the encyclopedic relation between the original and the variation: how is Stuart's coding problem translated into an encyclopedic narrative? After this discussion, we are able to define whether the novel's encyclopedic collection of variations is connected to the base or not.

The Encyclopedia of Translations

The base of Jan and Franklin's narrative is Stuart's coding problem, which, like the decoding methods used, can be divided into two: first, Stuart aims to approach the problem from the perspective of molecular biology, and then by adopting the method of a "*synthetic* cycle."[1048] As he sees his early situation, scientific analysis led him to a certain point, after which another approach was needed: referring to John von Neumann, an early figure in the field of systems theory, Stuart argues that in order to "see the way the switches all assembled the messages they sent among themselves" one needed to create a synthetic analog to the language of that system of which one was part.[1049] From early days, music was such a parallel system or language. To translate the genetic view of protein synthesis into a more artificial language, *The Goldberg Variations* turned out to be a goldmine, the best possible metaphor. Moreover, whereas genetics was more related to the problem of *transcription*, or encoding, music was about interpretations and *decodings*. To make this duality in Stuart's coding problem, and further, in *The Gold Bug Variations*, clearer, a short look at the core of his early expertise is still needed.

Explained in biological terms, what happens in protein synthesis is a similar two-fold process of transcription and translation. Initially, the double helix of DNA opens or is unzipped. The other strand of the two forms is *the template strand*, and since there are additional RNA nucleotides within the same nucleus, these extra nucleotides form a new strand, that is, *the messenger RNA* (mRNA). Thus, the template strand transcribes and vouchsafes its information to the mRNA, which also adopts its strictly defined order from the template strand. But before this transcription phase ends, the ready single strand of mRNA moves outside the nucleus in order to migrate to the cytoplasm. When the mRNA has fastened itself on the ribosome, the next phase, the translation process, begins. As there are loose RNA nucleotides in the nucleus, there are small *transfer RNA molecules* (tRNA) in the cytoplasm as well, and these molecules gather and organize loose amino acids in the right order. The transfer RNA fastens itself briefly to the messenger RNA and donates the amino acids, so that eventually there is a long and specifically ordered sequence of amino acids. Thus, the information that was uploaded in the mRNA is

[1048] *GBV*, 609; original italics.
[1049] *GBV*, 610.

now downloaded. When this sequence is ready to withdraw the ribosome, and it begins to curl, the outcome is the ready protein.

The basic problem Stuart worked with in his early days is what instructs this complicated synthesis process? Which one of the phases is more important, transcription or translation? The perplexities do not, of course, end here. The four nucleotides, or bases of DNA form the alphabet of the genetic code, and each "code word" (codon) consists of a sequence of *three bases*. There are 64 different possible *codons* (ways to combine four nucleotides), and in the double helix, each codon ensures that each amino acid finds the corresponding protein. In this sense, protein synthesis is a dual process of encryption and decryption, in which information is transferred in a disguised form from one cipher to another. Moreover, the process is strictly ruled on the one hand, but on the other, these rules occasionally bend so that possible anomalies – mutations, such as prodigies – can also take place. Thus, something is nearly always lost in translation: the template strand and the ready protein can differ from each other quite considerably.

When Stuart translates this process into the language of music, or at least finds it represented in *The Goldberg Variations*, he practically moves from one system to the other, and establishes his research on four common equivalents between the systems. First, nucleotides are replaced with *notes*. The bass line of Bach's work, as recalled, consists of four notes only – just like the basic units of DNA are the four nucleotides. Different combinations of these notes give birth to different melodies that, in terms of genetics, signify codons, that is the sequence of three consecutive bases. Therefore, second, genetic sequences are replaced with *melodies*.

Third, the information strands of DNA as a whole are replaced with *voices*. When different melody lines are put together within the same context, as in *The Goldbergs*, they form overlapping voices: as melodies revolve, harmonies, disharmonies, and even new melodies can emerge. There are three overlapping voices or strands of this kind in both systems. The double helix of DNA alone consists of a combination of two strands, in which the combination as such forms the third strand. In Bach's work, the bass line and the melody give the variation an informing theme which the other voices follow; in the case of DNA, the theme is the inevitable heredity, or the regeneration of a single cell, and this theme guides or "informs" what will happen in the process. For the same reason, the mRNA strand can emigrate the nucleus and nevertheless carry its instructions. Additionally, one should recall that Stuart hears in *The Goldbergs* not only the melody and the bass line, but also what he calls the real melody. This recognition equals the moment when DNA is unzipped, the strands diverge, and the template strand donates the order and the information content to the mRNA – at that moment there are indeed three different strands, in which two of them resemble each other.

Finally, the fourth and the last equivalent between the living gene and Bach's work is the outcome: protein synthesis is replaced with *the collection of variations*. A

single variation is not enough, but first, variations are arranged in groups of three, so that they form canons, and then, these canons are ordered in a line that is opened and closed with arias. Respectively, in protein synthesis, genetic sequences are related so that they form strands which begin with the so-called *start codon* and end with *the stop codon*, leaving between them a sequential line of combinations. This symmetry applies to the ready protein as well: the double helix is sealed or zipped from both ends. Moreover, not only does each variation or gene (as a sequence of DNA) differ from the variations or genes it precedes and follows, but also the synthesized protein differs from its predecessors. In this sense, Jan's description hits the target: each variation if not denies, then at least diverges from the origin.

These four rules in mind, we can now comprehend better Jan and Franklin's narrative as *their* best metaphor for Stuart's coding problem. The same rules apply to both *The Gold Bug Variations* and Stuart's "rough analogy." First, the four notes are replaced with four motifs, or spheres of knowledge. The novel deals at length with Stuart's two key concerns, that is, genetics and music, but primarily these areas of knowledge belong to two different realms. On the basis of the first Aria, which explicitly summarizes what *The Gold Bug Variations* is about, the novel covers four central motifs: (1) music; (2) nature and information; (3) personal relations; and (4) the calendar year, history, and time.[1050] What is noteworthy in these motifs is that most of them are Jan and Franklin's additions. Whereas Stuart's secret hobby was music, and the information content of DNA was his early career, the remaining categories are mostly the ones his pupils operate with: for years, Jan has collected historical data (Today in History), and as she takes her sabbatical, the passing of time is one thing she tirelessly records. Franklin, in turn, is an art historian on hiatus. Programming, and data processing, along with falling in love, are the experiential areas of life that Stuart, Jan and Franklin all contribute to.

The second rule is related to this point. Just as combinations of notes form melodies, so too the narrative in this novel introduces personalities with life lines. And just as overlapping melodies form voices, so too the characters in *The Gold Bug Variations* are often represented in groups of three: melodies that unite, contrast, and differ. Besides the protagonist trio, there is, for instance, more than one love triangle: (1) Stuart, Jeanette, and her husband Herbert; (2) Jan, Franklin, and Jan's boyfriend Keith; and (3) Jan, Franklin, and Annie (Franklin's co-worker). The voices imply the character gallery of the novel, and each voice is first linked with at least two of the other characters, and then the four key motifs of the novel. Therefore, each voice embodies a unique combination of music, nature, personal relations, and time.

Third, as is obvious, the three narrative threads correspond with the overlapping melody sequences. Stuart's personal history forms the informing theme

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[1050] *GBV*, 7–8; see Lewis 2008, 83.

of the narrative whole, and as the other strands diverge and entwine, the whole process takes place in Stuart's shadow. Finally, the fourth rule is that as the narrative threads together form a double helix of desire – the dual love story – so too the chapters of the novel are organized in groups of three. The narrative whole is Jan and Franklin's own "protein synthesis," which does not only differ from the original coding problem but also from Stuart's musical analogy. After all, *The Gold Bug Variations* is not a musical translation of the living gene, but a literary translation of the musicalized living gene. The title of the novel refers exactly to this point: formally, the novel resembles Bach's *Goldbergs* but it also differs from it, and not least due to Poe's influence. Moreover, the novel is not an investigation of Stuart's work and person alone, it is also a love story that is closely related to him and that takes place in the next generation, partly after Stuart's death. In this sense, the narrative only emphasizes the hereditary aspect of the original problem.

However, whereas the novel borrows its form from Bach, it carries traces of the actual protein synthesis as well. Skipping Stuart's musical concern for a while, we can form an interpretation as follows: Stuart, Jeanette, and their "perpetual third party," namely science, form the original mRNA, its "amino acids" being their mutual scientific work and secret affair.[1051] When Jeanette leaves Stuart, as well as her own scientific work in Cyfer, and Stuart leaves the team shortly afterward, this split is equivalent to the double helix of DNA that is unzipped. Recalling their affair, Stuart leaves the field of science behind, and journeys around the world, which, on the basis of the 1957 thread, can be read as the world of information. This exit corresponds with the moment when the mRNA leaves the nucleus and moves to the cytoplasm. Years after, Jan and Franklin begin to gather information about Stuart's past, just like the loose tRNA molecules collect amino acids from the cytoplasm. Then, just as the tRNA molecules fasten onto the mRNA for a certain period, so too Jan and Franklin become acquainted with Stuart and spend a period of year with him. As a result, a new sequence is born. Thus, Jan and Franklin's "baby," that is, their narrative sequence, is equivalent to the new sequence of amino acids in which even Stuart's untimely death (and absence from the final chapters) fits: the mRNA has simply disengaged itself from the tRNA, as is necessary for protein synthesis. And just as the whole synthesis process takes place under the command of mRNA, or more precisely, in the instructions it has carried with it since the initial split at the latest, similarly Stuart's time in Cyfer cannot be underestimated when it comes to the narrative as a whole: after all, Stuart carried parts of the "catalog […] inside of himself for a quarter century," and the time he, Jan, Franklin spent together was literally life-changing for the latter two.[1052]

As we see, in Powers's novel, systems form a chain of retranslations, and this

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[1051] *GBV*, 41.
[1052] *GBV*, 579.

chain, as Jan argues about *The Goldbergs*, is "a self-spun hierarchy" of its own kind.[1053] Which one of the models, then, is more crucial for the encyclopedism of the narrative? Both – and neither of them. The novel's hypothetical base is Stuart's conception of the protein synthesis, and from that basis the narrative unfolds "ever-higher structures, levels of pattern, fractal self-resemblances."[1054] The systemic variations – shifts from one system to the other – are rough, and they occasionally seem to deny from where they descend, but they nevertheless follow a pattern. Even though the novel straightforwardly widens its thematic spectrum from molecular biology and music to other areas of life, its encyclopedism is relatively strictly organized under the idea of life's variety. The cruft of information is there for a reason. In the protein synthesis, strands are unzipped, and they move elsewhere only to get copied and reorganized. In an encyclopedic novel such as *The Gold Bug Variations*, the informative chains between topics and spheres of knowledge are similarly loosened, widened and reorganized. Bach's *Goldberg Variations* is the most explicit organizing device of the novel, but the information content of the novel cannot be reduced to it. The novel is an elegiac romance, a dual love story, a research novel, and a metaphysical detective story, and whichever one of these generic registers one chooses to emphasize in reading, eventually there are only different scales and retranslations: like Stuart, Jan, and Franklin, the reader needs to finds his or her best metaphor for this literary synthesis. As the 1957 narrative thread guides us in this task:

> the hunt for the single substantial thread running through all creation is just a start. It's time for science to acknowledge the heft, bruise, and hopeless muddle of the world's irreducible particulars. This field, this face, the standard categories. Every alternative on the standing pattern is distinct, anomalous, a new thing requiring a separate take on what is and might yet be. And for that, theories must diverge and propagate as fast as the wonder of their subject matter.[1055]

The fundamental tension of the encyclopedic novel is the dialectics of the chaos-function and the cosmos-function. The strictly defined fractal models in which similar patterns are repeated on different levels enable the variety of content. Coding and translating, as well as simplifying and seeking new connections, are encyclopedic procedures that not only enable shifts from one system of knowledge to another, but also bring the systems closer to each other. In *The Gold Bug Variations*, even though the novel occasionally denies that it is a variation, the hierarchy between the systems remains: the biological foundation of life rules the rich scale of culture, desire, and all there is. Our last concern in this chapter could not differ more

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[1053] *GBV*, 579.
[1054] *GBV*, 579.
[1055] *GBV*, 601.

from this beautiful and clear radicle-system. In *House of Leaves*, the epistemological order – and further, the encyclopedic arrangement of the narrative – is much more ambiguous, even hostile.

6.3. The Fall of the House

Unlike *The Gold Bug Variations*, Danielewski's *House of Leaves* offers the reader few formally unambiguous options for navigation. Contents are given in the beginning, but like "Index" in the end, it is intentionally misleading: the novel consists mainly of The Navidson Record, whereupon the two Appendixes filling the most of the Contents page are almost trivial regarding the plot – the only exceptions being, as recalled, Donnie's Obituary and The Three Attic Whalestoe Letters, that is, Pelafina's letters to her son. Yet even though, on the face of it, the novel does not include any explicit, epistemologically valuable paratexts or other formal clues that could help the reader to organize the excess of narrative material, it is clear from the beginning that the novel has a clear symbolic object, namely the labyrinthine house. And as we intuitively know, every house imaginable has an architecture of its own – without that character there would not be a house. In our case, the house that is portrayed in *House of Leaves* has at least *some* features, namely doorways, corridors, a network of tunnels on two floors, and a staircase between them. But as my previous discussion has shown, this is almost all we get to know for a fact about the physical properties of the house.

Epistemologically, the house motif in Danielewski's novel is surrounded by several frames, within which the house is represented in a threefold form: as a film, as a kinekphrasis, and as a compiled manuscript with additional, off the point commentaries. On the other hand, the frames are not neatly separated from each other, but the house motif also creates intermingling layers through its representations. Whether interpreted as a common focus for multiple frames or as an architectural palimpsest, the house motif is nevertheless the center of the totality, while the frames and layers are its expansions. Thus, the house is not just a symbolic object of the narrative and the center of the totality, it is also the narrative as a whole and the totality as such. Recalling what Derrida says about the center that simultaneously is at the center of totality and yet outside of it, similarly, there is an embedded model of totality within the totality, the origin of which cannot be traced back to the totality as such.[1056] The root of the house is elsewhere, outside the house, or outside what the house embodies. But as in the case of *The Gold Bug Variations* and *Infinite Jest*, again one may recognize in this setting a typical, albeit elementary tree

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[1056] See *HL*, 112.

model, which I have referred to as a radicle system. The network of relations that constitutes the bulk of the totality is bound by the symbolic object, or the base, which in this case is the house motif.

What separates Danielewski's tree model from those of Powers and Wallace is its explicit *katabatic* nature. *Katabasis*, the trope of descending into the underworld, is literal in *House of Leaves*, and it involves the epistemological agents' descent on each level of the narrative. Not only do some characters descend into dark chthonic corridors, so too do the compilers, the narrators, and the readers, albeit in metaphorical or textual ways. Reading Johnny's commentaries, for instance, is the reader's contribution to *katabasis*, as it literally involves reading the comments beneath Zampanò's account and seeking hidden connections between them. *Katabasis* reveals two things: first, the learning process that is at the heart of encyclopedism, and second, the novel's general encyclopedic potential, as going into the underworld means not only pursuing the base for the network of connections, interpretations, and valuable information in general, but also creating new connections while pursuing them. In this respect, *katabasis* in *House of Leaves* is all about finding the same kind of fixed point in the totality that Casaubon, his colleagues, and the Diabolicals were looking for in *Foucault's Pendulum*. Defining the fixed point only creates new, surfacing links, however.

Like numerous other contemporary encyclopedic novels, *House of Leaves* can also be organized epistemologically. As a totality, it is has a certain base, namely the house motif, and the network of connections, layers, and frames that expand this motif. However, the strange, even *unheimlich* nature of the house affects the way the totality is perceived. Since the physical house alone shifts its shape, so too the epistemological order of the narrative appears to be in constant motion. In the previous chapter dealing with Danielewski's novel I examined the properties of the house from the characters' perspective, so there is no need to explore these features again at any length. Instead, what deserves our attention now is the tree model as the epistemological backbone of the novel. This tree model is mainly available to the reader, that is, the epistemological agent, on the highest or outermost level of the narrative. Whether readers are able to conceive this order or not, several aspects of the narrative nevertheless encourage them to do so. And not only to conceive: paying attention to the dialectics between the base and the network helps readers to see through the house motif, and conceptualize the encyclopedic whole. Taking this particular, fundamentally encyclopedic aspect of *House of Leaves* into consideration also opens the way, I believe, to what the authors after Danielewski may pursue.

Yet before we go this far in analysis, let me first return to the house motif. This time I consider the house from the reader's standpoint, but instead of making cartographic notions about its architecture, I will concentrate on one of its most obvious intertextual links, namely Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). A comparison of these two narratives leads us to the world tree of Norse

mythology, for *House of Leaves* ends with a poem, "Yggdrasil," its role becoming understandable if we take into account Danielewski's debt to Poe's story. Thus, eventually there *is* an explicit reference to the possible tree model in the margins of the narrative after all, but for the reader this comes all too late. Why is it attached to the end of the novel, and not at the beginning? And why is Yggdrasil never mentioned in the narrative? As I aim to show, there are specific reasons for this formal arrangement, and these reasons are closely connected to the narrative's extraordinary encyclopedism. I will begin this discussion by revisiting the house motif, allowing Poe to return one more time.

The Houses of Usher and Ash Tree Lane

Since the house motif and its peculiar architecture and characteristics have already been discussed, it is necessary only to reiterate my conclusions so far. First, there is simultaneously one house and many houses in *House of Leaves*. The physical house alone has the outer and the inner house, and in each narrative frame there is both the physical, albeit non-existing house (as an absent signified) and its textual representation (as a present signifier) as well. Each textual representation also shares at least some qualities of the physical house. Second, what is so *unheimlich* and horrifyingly familiar in the house is that it is capable of both pushing visitors outside and yet letting them in. Mainly, however, it marginalizes all those who seek to inhabit the house. The third argument I represent on the basis of the previous two, is that the house is a breathing entity of sorts. As one reads *House of Leaves*, the inner house appears to be the symbolic object, a dark space in which several characters, especially male, focus their attention in order to measure, define, and map it, or simply to enter. On the other hand, the house is expansive, both horizontally and vertically: the representations of the house expand the house textually and ontologically, but the physical house as such expands inwards as well. The house, in other words, seems to be exhaling and inhaling, increasing and decreasing, and above all, expanding and shrinking. This twofold movement characterizing the house is also in tune with the general idea of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, which has both centripetal and centrifugal qualities. Its formal, inconsistent tendency, let us recall, is what Ercolino calls the dialectic of the cosmos function and the chaos function.[1057]

It is, however, the title of Danielewski's novel that refers most directly to the novel's epistemological order. As a title, *House of Leaves* has three dimensions at least, namely thematic, ontological, and psychological. Thematically understood, the house stands for a house of exits, for the novel thematizes broken families/ broken houses. The same story can be found either within each frame or from each frame's

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[1057] Ercolino 2014, 114–118.

frame, that is, from the margins of each narrative level: the story is narrated explicitly, as in The Navidson Record, or indirectly, as a short reference. For instance, we are told in passing that both Navidson and his wife Karen have had a difficult childhood, while the core narrative concentrates directly on "a number of underlying tensions in the Navidson/Green family."[1058] But the story of a broken family is also told between the frames, as I discussed in chapter 4.3,, where it is up to the reader to seek and find connections, to suppose cases and solve them. Generally, however, the stories depict husbands who abandon their families. The only exception to the rule is Johnny and his mother's consensus that Pelafina was taken away, and this was the key event in their lives. On the other hand, this consensus, as I have also argued, may be yet another story they have told themselves to hide the traumatic truth.

Ontologically understood, *House of Leaves* refers to a book as such. Leaves equaling pages, the house and the book are either parallel in their existence, or, as seems more obvious, one is superimposed upon the other. But which is which? Danielewski's novel stresses its existence as a physical book, not only through its materiality, but also by giving the reader a spatial appearance of itself. Still, the house seems to come first: first, there is a physical house, whose changes Navidson begins to document, and after him, Zampanò renarrates the content of Navidson's film and endows it with theoretical material. On the other hand, neither the physical house nor the film about the house exists, and hence all there really is are the textual representations of this non-existent film. For us, this becomes an ontological issue at the end of the novel, when Navidson, having faced a dead end in the underground tunnels, suddenly "turns his attention to the last possible activity, the only book in his possession: *House of Leaves*."[1059] Burning each page after perusing it, Navidson reads

> the text, keeping just ahead of the necessary immolation, until as he reaches the last few words, flames lick around his hands, ash peels off into the surrounding emptiness, and then as the fire retreats, dimming, its light suddenly spent, the book is gone leaving nothing behind but invisible traces already dismantled in the dark.[1060]

This moment should be ontologically impossible: how is Navidson capable of reading a book of which he himself is the protagonist? Yet, this narrative moment also suggests that the frames of the novel are mixed, and only an epistemological agent who knows about the existence of the novel called *House of Leaves* would be able to embed such an ontological paradox into the narrative. This suggestion, in turn, implies that if it is not the reader, then there has to be an unknown party that

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[1058] *HL*, 17.
[1059] *HL*, 465; original italics.
[1060] *HL*, 467.

is ontologically above the editorial frame of the novel and that has recompiled Johnny's edited collection of Zampanò's manuscript.

But Navidson's final moment also deserves our attention because, at this point of the narrative, the "ashblack" walls of the house and the book finally become one.[1061] As sudden as the emergence of the book is, as suddenly does the representation collapse back into what it was originally aimed at representing, namely the dark inner house. Moreover, the pages turn to ash inside the house that is said to exist on Ash Tree Lane, and since the pages are made of wood, the moment indirectly suggests that as the pages burn, so will the house on Ash Tree Lane cease to exist. And it does, at least on one ontological level, soon after Karen goes in the dark to get her husband, finds him, holds him in her arms, while around them the house simply dissolves, "[l]ike a bad dream."[1062]

The psychological dimension of the novel's title is one I have briefly dealt with already. As mentioned, *House of Leaves* is phonetically close to Hoss of Lièvre, namely Johnny, the son of Pelafina Lièvre and the companion of Lude, who calls his comrade Hoss, which is a slang word for dude, guy, or friend. Interpreted this way, the title confirms many scholars' arguments according to which the master narrator of the novel is actually Pelafina, who misses her son, a son who literally belongs to his mother.[1063] However, it is equally important to note that in this version as well, the boy is an adolescent who is both pathologically attracted to penetrate into dark spaces and absolutely horrified due to the threatening potential of these spaces. Additionally, Johnny is a "truant," cast out of his original "home," first into foster families, and finally into the Hollywood nightlife. His obsessive desire to make something out of Zampanò's manuscript is closely linked with his desire to arrange the shattered pieces of his life, to find a sense of meaning, but at heart, this desire also correlates with his potential desire to return home from his odyssey. This is also what he does in the end, without finding relief, however.

Psychologically interpreted, the idea of a dark underground labyrinth, as well as the various representations of this idea, symbolize the motherly womb. As discussed earlier, especially the Theseus myth, which is the best-known version of this story, is an allegorical tale of the birth trauma. Therefore, through the Theseus myth *House of Leaves* represents the adolescent's attempt to withdraw from the orbit of his mother and gain recognition from his father.[1064] Freud calls this state secondary, or pathological narcissism, which, according to Christopher Lasch:

> arises only when the ego has developed to the point of distinguishing itself from surrounding objects. If the child for some reason experiences this separation trauma with special intensity, he may attempt to

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[1061] *HL*, 464.
[1062] *HL*, 524.
[1063] e.g. Hayles 2002b; Cox 2006; Lord 2014.
[1064] cf. Irwin 1996, 244.

reestablish earlier relationships by creating in his fantasies an omnipotent mother or father who merges with images of his own self.[1065]

Seen from the narcissistic point of view, it would then be Johnny's, not his mother's, imagination that is represented in the embedded stories of *House of Leaves*. Perhaps the moment when Pelafina is taken to the Three Attic Whalestoe Institute, is, after all, Johnny's key separation trauma, whereupon the whole idea of Pelafina as a master narrator would be in turn her son's fantasy about the omnipotent mother. The end of the novel supports this argument: Johnny's last story about the infant with holes in its brain, and the mother herding him on besides it, concludes with the infant's death as the mother finally decides to let it go.[1066]

As we see, the very title of Danielewski's novel permits us to arrange the narrative material from several perspectives. There is a fourth aspect that summarizes the previous three, however, and this aspect reveals the novel's epistemology in an interesting way. *House of Leaves* is an allusion not only to the haunted house tales of both literature and cinema, but also to Poe's story, as, after all, the physical house described in the novel resides on Ash Tree Lane, thus being phonetically close to the House of Usher. Regarding this intertextual link, the indirect, yet meaningful connection between Poe and Danielewski is Borges, whose short story "The House of Asterion" (1947) consists of a monologue by Asterion, who in the end is revealed to be the Minotaur. Similarly, here and there in *House of Leaves* there are clues that Johnny, the outermost narrator, may be a similar sort of Minotaur character. As Borges's main contribution is to narrate the Theseus myth from the Minotaur's perspective, what "The House of Asterion" gives to the reading of *House of Leaves* is, above all, the idea of a son locked inside a house that is "as big as the world – or rather, it *is* the world."[1067] Moreover, Asterion wonders whether he has created "the stars and the sun and this huge house, and no longer remember[s] it."[1068] He also waits for the redeemer to come, and dies without defending himself when this redeemer arrives in the form of Theseus.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is much more directly linked with *House of Leaves*, however. Poe's gothic tale, which foreshadows his detective stories, represents, as Irwin summarizes, a "scenario of incest and suicidal doubling."[1069] The story focuses on Roderick Usher and his twin sister Lady Madeline, who together are the only inheritors of the family mansion. However, Madeline has wasted away on account of her illness, and Roderick "projects his own morbid self-absorption onto the figure of his dying sibling, in effect turning his twin into an external mirror

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[1065] Lasch 1991, 36.
[1066] *HL*, 518–521.
[1067] Borges 1998, 221; original italics.
[1068] Ibid., 221.
[1069] Irwin 1996, 213.

image of his deteriorating mental state."[1070] Thus, both siblings are either mentally or physically exhausted, so that the story is basically the tale of their ruin. Moreover, besides mirroring each other, their fate is closely linked with the fate of the house. After Roderick has first buried his sister alive in an underground vault that is "small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light," from where she nevertheless returns, the story ends as Madeline, "trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold […] with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent, and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated."[1071] Having witnessed this fatal embrace, the anonymous narrator escapes the house whose "mighty walls" break asunder.[1072]

As often in Poe's fiction, the small details are remarkable and psychologically loaded. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," for instance, it is significant that while taking care of his sister, the "hypochondriac" Roderick has painted several "abstractions," and in one of them "an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel" is portrayed, "with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device."[1073] Another important detail is that while staying in the mansion, the narrator reads Sir Lancelot Canning's imaginary book *The Mad Trist*, in which Ethelred, the chivalrous hero of the romance, aims to enter a hermit's dwelling by force. After having found "no signal of the maliceful hermit," he instead confronts "a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanor," which, like Borges's Minotaur, is easily defeated.[1074] What is so noteworthy in both of these details is that they embody the way art and reality intermingle. In Poe's story, both artistic representations, as well as many other details, also predict the events that are about to take place in reality.

In relation to *House of Leaves*, it is, first of all, more than revealing that when Poe's narrator reads *The Mad Trist*, his imagination seems to make a mountain out of a molehill. When Ethelred crushes down the hermit's door, the narrator hears a similar cracking sound of the plankings of the door "from some very remote portion of the mansion."[1075] When Ethelred is then about to slay the dragon, the narrator hears "a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protected, and most unusual screaming or grating sound – the exact counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon's unnatural shriek as described by the romancer."[1076] These events – and more specifically, the book, and the house where the imagined sounds are heard during the reading – shed light on the compilers' locations in *House*

[1070] Ibid., 213–214.
[1071] Poe 1978a, 410, 416–417.
[1072] Ibid., 417.
[1073] Ibid., 405.
[1074] Ibid., 414.
[1075] Ibid., 414.
[1076] Ibid., 414.

of Leaves. As we recall, after having spent enough time with The Navidson Record, both Zampanò and Johnny seal their apartments as if they sensed an outer threat – as if someone, or something, would aim to break in by force, like Ethelred in Poe's story. Both compilers being hermits of a kind, they, or Johnny at least, are also related to the narrator in Poe's story. We get to know little about Zampanò's fears, but obviously, merely reading the manuscript about the house strongly affects Johnny, and he begins to sense "the creature […] buried in the nameless black of a name" near him.[1077] These sensations correlate not only with the growls heard inside the physical house in The Navidson Record, but also with the shrieks Poe's narrator hears deep within the house of Usher. Unlike the narrator, Johnny does not, however, read the manuscript inside the physical house but in its ontological margins. Yet, he, like Borges's Minotaur, is inside the house, as the house is more than the sum of its physical properties, namely a textual representation Johnny has immersed himself in. Simultaneously, the "slow and subtle shifts" he begins to sense take place both "all around" and within him.[1078]

As regards the other important detail of Poe's story, that is, Roderick's painting of a tunnel with low, white walls, this motif is also repeated in *House of Leaves*. It is true that unlike in Roderick's painting, the walls in Navidson's physical labyrinth are ash black, but for the reader, the most physical sequence in Danielewski's novel is probably the moment before Navidson reads and burns *House of Leaves* in the dark: before facing a dead end, he crawls into the labyrinth through a narrow corridor. As a visual experience, the reader's focus being on black letters, this moment lets the reader literally see, first, Navidson as a shifting sequence of letters, and then, the walls around him as the nearly white pages of the book.[1079] Thus, the motif of low white walls is very concretely repeated in the novel we are reading.

It is nevertheless remarkable that for most of the time, the walls of the physical house are depicted as ash black. The embedded representation of the vault in Poe's story – that is, Roderick's abstract painting – and the actual vault in which Lady Madeline is enclosed, are both white. If the reader pays attention to this intertextual link, it is possible to assume that neither the house nor the main characters of *House of Leaves* will face the same fate as Roderick, Madeline, and their mansion. What the reader may expect instead is that Navidson and Karen survive and escape the house, whereas the house is simply left behind, as often happens in haunted house tales, especially in horror films. This is also what happens at the end of Danielewski's novel.

Both Roderick's painting and *The Mad Trist* not only depict the mixture of artistic representation and reality, but also predict the events to come. *The Mad Trist* in particular is prophetic, as the cracking of the hermit's door is also heard in the

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[1077] *HL*, xxiii.
[1078] *HL*, xxii—xxiii.
[1079] *HL*, 443–460.

mansion, and the events of the romance prefigure the demise of the house in which the narrator is reading about Ethelred and the hermit. Similarly, slaying the dragon in the embedded story implies that something similar is about to happen in the house in which the story is read. After all, the narrator specifically hears the textual representation of the dragon's shriek as a concrete echo from a remote part of the mansion. However, Poe does not specify what sort of dragon lurks in the house of Usher, but for the reader, it is obvious that the representation of the dragon can at least be connected to the ruin of the mansion, and further, to the morbid, incestuous relation of the siblings. As the title of Poe's story underlines, only tragedy can be expected.

What in any case is epistemologically so crucial in Poe's story in regard to *House of Leaves* is that the embedded representations in "The Fall of the House of Usher" are omens, if not even the very causes for the story's events. In other words, small details on a different ontological level predict and affect what will happen in the actual story. In fact, the crucial differences between Poe and Danielewski are fascinating. For Poe, embedded artistic representations are ontologically on a lower level than the events of the story but they still affect the upper level, while for Danielewski, the setting is reversed: reality is on a lower level than the artistic representations and it affects the upper levels. While it is the latter that seems to make more sense to us, the real twist of *House of Leaves* is, of course, that there is no "reality" in the first place, only different representations of nothing.

Whether representations affect reality or the other way around, thus creating ontological consequences, let us at this point return to the very beginning of Poe's story, and briefly take into consideration the third set of details. This will help us, first, to clarify the way Danielewski exploits the ideas that Poe developed in "The Fall of the House of Usher." Second, and more importantly, this diversion helps us to situate the house motif of *House of Leaves*, and especially its representations, within a larger context, namely that of the world-system. After all, the house is a world of its own, a totality, and usually, each totality has an epistemological order of its own – just like each house has its own cornerstone.

At the Base of Yggdrasil

Before we are introduced to Roderick's paintings or *The Mad Trist*, the reader of Poe's story encounters a panoramic view of the house. This scene is also one of the most important events in the story, as in a specific way it not only foreshadows what is to come, but also provides valuable information concerning the relationship between mind and reality, which is a thematic thread of "The Fall of the House of Usher." The narrative begins simply as the narrator's observation about the gloomy facade of the house: "with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable

gloom pervaded my spirit."[1080] This sight makes him compare the appearance of the house to "the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse into everyday life – the hideous dropping off of the veil."[1081] Moreover, the house has " vacant eye-like windows," and "a few white trunks of decayed trees" nearby, which encourage us to interpret the house as a symbol of a psyche in ruins.[1082] But what the narrator also sees beside the building is a "black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre."[1083] For him, the sight is unnerving, even paralyzing.

The panoramic view that portends only bad things is highly significant for two reasons. First, already at the beginning of the narrative, the narrator's subjective perspective is combined with the house as it objectively is. In fact, the insufferable grimness of the house is not only a feature of the characters who inhabit the house, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the same grimness defines the narrator's spirit, not only his perspective. Second, the opening scene is illustrative as it depicts the view, and immediately compares it to the troubled, intoxicated, and even morbid human psyche. Besides the house and the decrepit trees, what especially is noteworthy in the view is the black pool. Therefore, through the narrator's comparison, it is easy to connect the mansion with the individual consciousness, and the black pool with the unconscious. Note especially that the tarn is still, and its brink precipitous. What both of these aspects confirm is that from now on, the reader should read the story not only psychologically but also keeping in mind the narrator: although the narrative focuses on Roderick and Madeline, the narrator's role as a mediator also needs to be taken into account. Is he in some way involved in the Ushers' ruin? Is their ruin a projection of his own troubled mind?

Equally, from the beginning of *House of Leaves* it is clear to the reader that the house can be seen as an image of a troubled mind. It is not only "a physical incarnation of Navidson's psychological pain" but also, in an uncanny way, a projected manifestation of all those people who "slept and suffered within those walls."[1084] This also includes those characters who read, compile, edit, interpret, or otherwise explore the representations of that house. Thus, in this regard too Danielewski exploits Poe: not only Navidson but also the narrators, namely Zampanò and Johnny, should be taken into account. Whereas Navidson and all those who enter the physical house are troubled, so are those who share their impressions about the house and its explorers.

Of course, comparisons between a house and the mind are very common, being widely recognized in the field of psychoanalysis. Freud, Jung, and many others have seen a house with several floors and a basement as a symbol of the psyche. Another,

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[1080] Poe 1978a, 397.
[1081] Ibid., 397.
[1082] Ibid., 397.
[1083] Ibid., 398.
[1084] *HL*, 21.

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equally crucial symbol has been the image of an ancient tree, which according to Joseph L. Henderson, for instance, "represents symbolically the growth and development of psychic life."[1085] And like the house, the ancient tree is present in both Poe's short story and *House of Leaves*. To begin with, Poe's narrator does not mention having seen a full tree in the forecourt – only "a few white trunks" and "ghastly tree-stems" – but what he does mention is that "the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain."[1086] The house motif is thus closely linked with the Usher family tree, as the "House of Usher" is said to refer both to the family mansion and the incestuous family lineage. In Danielewski's novel we do not get a similar panoramic view of the house as we do in Poe's story – in fact, neither the yard nor the facade of the house is represented – but what we do get is a twofold reference to the same idea of a family tree. On the one hand, *House of Leaves* thematizes the family relations on almost each narrative level, but on the other, the narrative as a whole also contains a concrete image of a tree. At the rearmost end of the physical book – that is, in the backyard of the "house of leaves" – is a poem about the Norse world tree, Yggdrasil. This poem does not only relate to the theme of family relations in Poe's story, it is also crucial for understanding the formal organization of Danielewski's novel. Therefore, let me end this chapter by taking a moment to discuss this poem a little further.

On the last page of *House of Leaves*, there are two circles, a black one above and a white one below, and between them, first, a horizontal "ygg" and a vertical "drasil," and after that, a text:

> What miracle is this? This giant tree.
> It stands ten thousand feet high
> But doesn't reach the ground. Still it stands.
> Its roots must hold the sky.[1087]

For the modern reader, the *Poetic Edda*, and its original manuscript *Codex Regius*, are probably the most important sources of Norse mythology. However, the world tree Yggdrasil is rarely mentioned in them. The only references to Yggdrasil are in two poems, in "Völuspá," The Wise-Woman's Prophecy, and in "Grímnismál," The Ballad of Grimnir. Of these two, the first is perhaps better known, but what is significant is that in both of these poems, the world tree is basically depicted from two different perspectives only, first as the *axis mundi*, the world pillar, and then on the brink of the end of the world. "Grímnismál" gives us more details about the characteristics of the tree: the gods go to the tree to give dooms, and the tree has

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[1085] Henderson 1964, 152.
[1086] Poe 1978a, 399.
[1087] *HL*, 709.

three roots and beneath these roots reside three kingdoms: the underworld, the world of frost giants, and the world of men. Snakes gather by the world tree, "[t]he hart bites its top, / its trunk is rotting, / And Nithhogg [a dragon] gnaws beneath."[1088] The other poem "Völuspá" offers alternative information: the Ash is an enormous tree whose dews cover the ground and it stands by Urth's well. Urth is one of three Norns which together embody the nature of time and decide the fate of "the sons of men": Urth is the Past, Verthandi is the Present, and Skuld is the Future.[1089] But besides depicting Yggdrasil as it stands at the center of the cosmos, the Wise-Woman, the narrator of "Völuspá," also foretells its ruin. During the events of Ragnarök, the twilight of the gods, the Ash is said to shake and shiver as the world around it is at war. Interestingly, soon after this, Odin's son is said to go "against the serpent" that gnaws the roots of Yggdrasil and "slain by the serpent / fearless he sinks."[1090]

For the Yggdrasil poem of *House of Leaves*, the *Poetic Edda* seems on the face of it to be only a remote source. It helps, however, if we add two other intertextual sources, namely Poe and Borges. Like Poe, the *Poetic Edda* represents the world tree not only as ancient, but also as decaying: time – or more precisely, history – consumes its trunk. The tree stands by Urth's almost bottomless well, and just as this setting – the world tree by the pond, or the well – is an inseparable part of world-tree mythology, so too does the world tree symbolize the order of life, or the world order. However, at the base of the tree lie the chthonic forces of chaos, namely the dragon that threatens the world order. And according to the Wise-Woman, the power of this dragon increases during the course of time. Thus, Yggdrasil is in essence not only a symbol of world order or life, but also an image of mortals' fight against time, Ragnarök being only the inevitable conclusion, the final step of the depicted ruin.

The Yggdrasil poem in Danielewski's novel describes precisely the same ideas. Common to the *Poetic Edda*, the world tree is represented to stand majestically still. It is a miracle rather than a horrifying sight. Only the line "Its roots must hold the sky" refers to the possibility of ruin, and the necessity of the tree to hold the cosmos together: Yggdrasil is the cosmic axis between heaven and earth, and if events such as Ragnarök ever take place, the sky will fall. To this can be added that during Ragnarök the "son" will be slain by the beast that represents the past. In this regard, it is of course remarkable that this kind of incident takes place in both "The Fall of The House of Usher" and *House of Leaves*: Roderick and Madeleine's ruin can be seen to be caused by the incestuous family line, and in Danielewski's novel, Zampanò and Johnny carry ambiguous family burdens as well. Whereas Johnny has childhood traumas of his own, as we have discussed, Zampanò, when he is found

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[1088] Bellows 1936.
[1089] Ibid.
[1090] Ibid.

dead in his dwelling, has left behind a smell, "the scent of human history."[1091] Thus, Odin's son who battles against the serpent implies the son who confronts his history, a history that inevitably includes his father.

However, even more important than what *is said* in the Yggdrasil poem is what readers *sees* when they encounter the poem on the last page of the novel. The arrangement of the lines, and especially the circles above and below the lines, resemble a tree that grows upside down. Seen this way, at the base of the three first letters (y, g, g) there is a black circle; this is clearly kin to Urth's well in the *Poetic Edda*, and to the black tarn of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." What about the white circle, then? Here, a quote from Borges's "The House of Asterion" is enlightening: according to the Minotaur, everything in the house, "exists many times […] but there are two things in the world [that is, the house] that apparently exist but once – on high, the intricate sun, and below, Asterion."[1092] As is obvious, in Borges's story, the overground – the world of sun – is associated with Theseus, "the redeemer," whereas Asterion's realm remains underground, below the roots of the tree. Moreover, in the myths of Theseus and Minotaur, both protagonists are sons with fathers, in which the first son (Theseus) seeks (additional) recognition from his father, whereas the latter son is abandoned by his stepfather Minos. It is also noteworthy that in Borges's story the Minotaur is waiting for the redeemer, or the savior, which one intuitively associates with the future. The reader can easily associate these relations with Johnny, Zampanò, and Navidson, but also with Pelafina, who passionately waits in an asylum for her husband to come and take her away.

All in all, *House of Leaves* leaves us with a reading guide after all, a model we may apply to the novel as such. The Yggdrasil poem is an interpretative key, but unlike in *Foucault's Pendulum*, in Danielewski's novel it is situated on the last page, not the first page of the novel. Through the poem, the novel gives us most of the meaningful chronotopical symbols of the novel that, above all, link complicated, traumatic, even incestuous family lines with time and space. In time, the tree of life lies between history and the future, but where, concretely, the tree has taken root, is an open question. At the very least, it would be reasonable to assume that the place is the whole world, and hence the original house motif is isomorphic in nature: on a small scale, it represents an individual mind, whereas on a large scale, it pictures the cosmos as such. As John T. Irwin has stressed, this is not very exceptional: if there is one thing we learn from Poe's and Borges's stories, it is that the individual mind and the natural world are always closely related to each other, usually via labyrinthine structures or other geometrical patterns.[1093] But since space – especially changes in space – play such a crucial role in *House of Leaves*, the Yggdrasil poem also

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[1091] *HL*, xvi.
[1092] Borges 1998, 221.
[1093] Irwin 1996, 14–15.

goes beyond the individual psyche, or the specific place where the house resides. Just as the corridors of the inner house change and expand, so too the Yggdrasil poem implies a change: it is a "giant tree" and it stands still, but it grows, reaching towards the sun. And due to the fact that Yggdrasil is a world tree, the space its branches cover enlarges constantly.

Every human-made space, whether stable or expanding, has its architecture. Examining the narrative form of the contemporary encyclopedic novel in three narratives, I have aimed to show in this chapter that although the fictional encyclopedia is about everything, its all-inclusiveness is all but random. *Infinite Jest*, *The Gold Bug Variations*, and *House of Leaves* – not to mention *Foucault's Pendulum* – contain materials in overflowing abundance, but they are also beautifully designed, borrowing their epistemological order from mathematics, music, biology, and mythology. Common to these exploited models is the fact that the formal arrangement of each narrative has, on the one hand, a certain symbolic object, a guiding idea, or a thematic center; and on the other, a network of ideas, connections, synecdoches, and themes that surrounds this base. It is also common that the narratives explicitly foreground these models, and offer them as organizing devices for the reader. Whereas the detective characters we encounter in the stories are model readers who learn how to negotiate the epistemological environments, similarly we strive to find our way through the hypertrophic narratives in which these characters and environments are embedded. And along the way, we as well may learn, if not everything, then at least something – something about ourselves as readers, and something about the philosophical topics that encyclopedic novels so often deal with. So it is fitting that we now come to some conclusions.

Conclusions

In *House of Leaves*, the roots of the world tree "hold the sky."[1094] Does it hang upside down in the air? Does it cover the earth? No. It grows underground, and its roots are on the level of earth's surface. The spheres of knowledge it covers are dark, and if anything, these spheres – the branches of the tree – embody the repressed sides of culture. However, what more precisely grows underground is not a tree at all, but the staircase, which in the beginning, is "over two hundred feet in diameter and spirals down into nothing," but later grows in the impossible depths of from 27,273 to 54,545 miles, the earth's equatorial radius being only 39,632 miles.[1095] Thus, it is an unknown totality, a totality that on the one hand resides *inside* the totality of culture – the world as we know it – and that on the other, remains *outside* the range of encyclopedic knowledge. And still, if this dark and unknown totality is considered as an uncanny embodiment of a world tree – the staircase being the trunk and the labyrinthine pathways its branches – what does such a tree signify? Why is the tree-image inverted?

House of Leaves is based on a tree model that comments on three key aspects of what can be called the encyclopedic ideal. First, as we have seen, it exploits the idea of *katabasis*, the motif of descending underground as a critical way to examine the encyclopedic potentialities of totality, or, in this case, the totalities that are superimposed (the physical house, the film, kinephrasis) to form a multifaceted behemoth, the encyclopedic novel we have been reading. Second, the world tree in Danielewski's novel "spirals down into nothing," and its labyrinthine spread remains unknown, next to impossible to explore or know thoroughly. Thus, as an encyclopedia, it does not aim at covering everything – the task to which encyclopedias are dedicated – but its opposite, nothing. Moreover, as I have argued by leaning on Will Slocombe's argument, the totality of the house, and therefore also the world tree, is not only impossible in itself but also has a nihilistic tendency to "undo the violent hierarchy of its own existence."[1096] If one extends the argument, one can say that the reader, by simply reading *House of Leaves*, metaphorically descends, layer by layer and frame by frame, to confront, if not impossible and

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[1094] *HL*, 709.
[1095] *HL*, 85, 305.
[1096] Slocombe 2005, 92.

unsolvable, then at least nihilistic and destructive metaphysical questions of being. That is, what kind of totality destroys itself, its own epistemological order? What totality undoes its own being?

Yet the descent into nothingness as such – whatever implications this nihilistic *katabasis* may have – is not the whole issue. The reader, having become acquainted with the extraordinary materiality of the novel, recognizes that each narrative voice also has a font of its own. For instance, Zampanò's notes (The Navidson Record) are typed in Times, whereas Johnny's comments are typed in Courier. Correspondingly, the observant reader recognizes that the fonts of the Yggdrasil poem and The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute Letters – as well as the title page of the novel – are the same, Dante. Therefore, besides depicting the descent into nothingness, in a very literal way *House of Leaves* reveals two things about the epistemological order it constitutes only to annihilate itself. Indirectly, through Dante font, the novel refers to the descent into hell depicted in *The Divine Comedy*, the narrative that is not only among the first fictional encyclopedias, but also among the first fictional encyclopedias with *katabasis* motifs.

But does the reference to Dante's encyclopedic narrative shed light on the epistemological order of Danielewski's novel? Is the house simply a manifestation of hell? To answer this, it is worth noting the more explicit implication of the font choice: first, Dante font refers to Pelafina, the only female character in *House of Leaves* who in the first place gets herself heard. Second, the use of Dante as a medium that is reserved only for her implies that Pelafina is not only the writer of letters and the creator of the Yggdrasil poem but is also the real architect of the house and its dark maze, the master narrator who holds all the narrative frames together. Thus, third, *House of Leaves* takes a critical stance towards the supposed *sex* of epistemological order. The labyrinth, and by implication, the epistemological order it embodies, is not just a subterranean structure depicted in the story, it is also an order invented by a female character. Now although labyrinths, as I have argued, have usually been associated with the feminine – recall that the Minotaur myth alone is from the psychoanalytic viewpoint a story of primal birth trauma – one can ask whether the epistemological model introduced in *House of Leaves* follows the same association – or do encyclopedias *made by* a feminine agent differ from typical encyclopedias? At least, the maze is literally a psychological hell for all of its explorers, granting no salvation, not even purgatory by whose means lost souls can ascend. It is a *vagina dentata*, a castrating and devouring vagina of the Terrible Mother, a hostile womb that the adolescent boy heroes of the novel both fear and long for. Also, what is noteworthy is that unlike Dante, each male character descends there alone, without guidance. For this reason, initiation through *katabasis* mostly fails.

I raise this side of Danielewski's novel at the end of this study for a specific reason. The encyclopedic narrative, in the past and at the brink of the twenty-first century, has been very masculine, not only as concerns the authors' sex, but also

concerning its built-in ideology. The role of men has been both to map and seize the feminine totality (that is, Mother Nature) and to formulate an encyclopedic representation of it. In a similar fashion, Navidson and Tom of *House of Leaves* are depicted as "classic hunters," who use reason as their weapon and track their prey, namely a solution, and in this respect they *should* embody perfectly the ideal type of epistemological agent both classical and fictional encyclopedias have presupposed for themselves.[1097] Correspondingly, according to Tom LeClair, the more recent authors of excess have usually been privileged white males, which is why they have had a full membership in American life and therefore an unlimited grandstand view of its culture.[1098] Thus these novels have occasionally given a voice to women as well as for a number of minorities, but usually they have reserved the protagonist's privileged position for a young white male. Additionally, the tradition of knowledge has almost without exception been attached to a patriarchal lineage. Without finalizing the view, at the very least mapping, cataloguing, and organizing information, as well as exploring unknown territories, have been associated with masculine deeds. In *House of Leaves* as well, this traditional opposition –male characters exploring the feminine domain – is very explicit, but what is eminently worth acknowledging is that the house, despite Navidson and Tom's efforts, remains impregnable, unsolvable, and hostile till the end. It does not allow itself to be tamed. The characters never get a hold on it; instead, they are defeated by it.

The explicitly feminine *and* hostile order, imagined by a feminine agent, is a perfect ending for this study as it closes the circle. I began with some definitions and argued that the encyclopedic novel is a book about everything, an all-inclusive narrative. Deep down, it is, as I argued, also *a learning process*: the epistemological agents on different levels – the protagonists, the narrators, the reader – go through spheres of knowledge and learn something along the way. And if they do not, at least they strive to make their way through the maze of learning, and the narrative depicts and documents this process. Sometimes they may get lost, but, as I discussed, they also manage – recalling Sam Spade's self-appointed task – to do something about it. They make something out of it, be it then a conspiracy theory, a digressive confession, a compilation of the predecessor's papers, or a version of the mentor's life theme. And yet as the common denominator of these solutions implies, what the protagonists truly make out of it are personal and local, even intimate solutions: in the course of their seeking, the agents learn more about themselves than they learn about the world around them.

In Danielewski's novel, the epistemological agents are faced with their own limitations, however. The house is the most iconic example of the way encyclopedias, or more precisely encyclopedists, fail as the totality strikes back. The house with its

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[1097] *HL*, 37.
[1098] LeClair 1989, 29–30; Ercolino 2014, 9–10.

multiple frames and dark center never lets either us or the male characters settle in or feel comfortable. Additionally, instead of letting the epistemological agents totalize, the totality consumes all information that is attached to it, as well as all the characters and agents who aim at figuring out its character. In this way, in the tradition of the encyclopedic novel, *House of Leaves* shifts from the self-awareness of its most recent predecessors to action. The totality – its excessiveness, the dark and ambiguous nature of the information it withholds, as well as its absolute polarity in relation to the totalizing pursuits – not only confuses the agents it also destroys them. Perhaps nothing is truly learned; or perhaps the horrors of nothingness are all there is to learn. And the fact that it is Pelafina, a feminine agent, who sets this trap, a godgame, for all the explorers and readers, is perhaps the most ironic aspect of the encyclopedic potential of *House of Leaves*. The house resists mapping in general, but more than that it resists masculine occupation, thus knocking the bottom out of the encyclopedic efforts of men. By taking advantage of the all-inclusiveness of the encyclopedic modality, Danielewski has written a fictional encyclopedia of nothing, a narrative whose main purpose is to reverse encyclopedic ideals and underline that all efforts to tame the world we are living in are doomed to fail.

Throughout the preceding six chapters, I have examined and analyzed mainly three key elements in four novels: *the detective character*; his or her *epistemological environment*; and *the narrative form*, or, more precisely, the order of knowledge it brings forward through content and different geometrical, scientific, or mythical models. These three elements interweave in the concept of *the learning process*. More precisely, I have, first, discussed protagonists who are not potent masterminds but defeated sleuths – impotent, pathologically self-oriented, and most of all, possessed by their own personal demons and delusions. In most cases, the sleuth's key dilemma is related to a sense of disablement. In order to survive, or to simply deal with their condition, these sleuths have either intentionally or without clearly knowing it, pursued guidance. The most explicit manifestation of this guidance in the stories is a mentor's influence. But since the teacher has recently, either before or during the narrative events, died, the student's quest has also signified a reestablishment of the lost tradition of knowledge. It has meant *creating a scenario*, very much in the same sense as the detective in the classical detective fiction supposes a case and creates a scenario so that the crime, the epistemological riddle of the story, becomes solved. For the metaphysical sleuths of the contemporary encyclopedic novel, this deed may have turned out to be too great a task to accomplish on the level of events. On the level of narrative, it has been a success, however. The narrative act being a way to revive lost knowledge, protagonists have, in other words, turned into narrators in order to clarify for themselves what has happened, what there is to solve, or what the mentor's teachings mean in the first place. In almost all cases – *House of Leaves* being the exception – this narrative deed has also involved embedding the mentor's teachings into the narrative, either as *mise en abyme* structures, or as more general

guidelines. But as I have aimed at showing, in Danielewski's novel the protagonist also works under the influence of his mentor.

Second, I have analyzed the epistemological environments, the world around the metaphysical sleuth. In practice, this environment has covered, depending on the detective's interests, everything from domestic relations of characters to the characteristics of the read texts and other systems of information. What is crucial is that these environments are created through perceptions: if the character pays attention to a phenomenon, it, as well as all the details one can link to it, become information worth considering. The epistemological environments are then labyrinthine totalities that consist of all those links and connections the epistemological agents are able to form and find. But going through these mazes also involves a confrontation with a Minotaur. This beast is either a suppressed side of the protagonist, or it is simply an entity too large and ambiguous to handle. Nevertheless, in both cases, it symbolizes a greater, irreconcilable conflict between I and the world, subjective views and extramental reality. In practice, this has meant that the epistemological agents end up pondering nearly unsolvable existential or ontological problems.

Third, geometrical models have been discussed. While the narrators organize what they have learned into an encyclopedic representation, for the reader simply following this process means active participation as well. In other words, the reader sifts cruft of information in order to sum up the big picture. This deed is activating, and in this sense, during reading the encyclopedic representation, the reader too may have been transformed. *Foucault's Pendulum* is an obvious example, where the reader is lured into paranoia. *Infinite Jest* is another: readers may seriously begin to ponder their own behavior, the pull of entertainment, as well as the media-oriented culture around them. Generally, these deeds have required, however, that the narrative introduces keys for sifting the high information content. And that is what I have particularly analyzed: to counterbalance the excess, each novel introduces a geometrical model of order that helps the reader to organize epistemological links and connections and thus perceive the bigger picture. I have treated this question through a relatively simple idea: both formally and thematically, the encyclopedic narratives are based on some symbolic center or guiding idea, but the hypertrophy of epistemological links expands the narrative around this center. The narratives include, then, the tree model, consisting of a base and a network of connections, which is why they appear to be at the same time both centripetal and centrifugal. This dialectical tension has maintained the paradoxical duality of its appearance: epistemologically, the encyclopedic narrative has a relatively clear foundational idea, but it also aims at enlarging itself. Above all, through the explicit or implicit reading guides that model this epistemological order, each narrative in this study has given the reader a possibility to arrange the high information content and thus develop a personal solution to those metaphysical mysteries that are thematized in the novels.

Even though I have examined these three elements solely in the context of contemporary encyclopedic narratives, I wish to emphasize that each of these elements are fundamental features of detective fiction, especially of the metaphysical detective story. Even though it is possible that in some cases there are no absolute link between the detective story genre and the encyclopedic modality, I have maintained that at least each author in this study is aware of Poe's and Borges's legacy on the one hand, and the ontological dominant as a general emphasis of postmodernist fiction on the other. Hence, not even encyclopedic narratives are written in a vacuum or without the anxiety of influence.

The most notable aspect that nevertheless links the metaphysical detective fiction with the encyclopedic novel, and enables the integration of the former with the latter, is the ontological concern, or confusion, that follows from the synthesis of the three components I have analyzed. The reasons are obvious: as Mendelson points out, as an epistemological quest, the learning process "during an era in which the world's knowledge is vastly greater than any one person can encompass" challenges the foundations of the world, as well the characters' own perceptions about themselves and the world.[1099] It leads epistemological agents to the most difficult philosophical questions, and this leaves the narrative open: there are no solutions, only poor attempts to solve matters. That is, quests begin as epistemological processes in which the emphasis is on using information in problem-solving, but as the characters learn more about the complexity of the world, the quests turn into larger, ontological dilemmas. In this sense, to recall Merivale and Sweeney's basic requirement for the metaphysical detective story, encyclopedic narratives through the questions posed "transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot."[1100]

I have aimed at showing that each key characteristics of the metaphysical detective genre can also be found in the contemporary encyclopedic novel. The defeated sleuth; the labyrinthine milieu; the exploitation of *mise en abyme*, embedded texts or other textual devices; the ambiguities and even meaninglessness of key texts; the missing person motif; as well as the absence or self-defeating nature of narrative closure, all play an important role in *Foucault's Pendulum*, *The Gold Bug Variations*, *Infinite Jest*, and *House of Leaves*.[1101] When these elements have been connected within the maximalist mode of storytelling, the outcome has been a narrative about self-searching through the world. But what needs to be added is that despite such efforts, the depicted process has nevertheless left the original conundrum open. The questions raised have not left the protagonists in peace, and that is why their efforts have received a maximalist treatment: the narrative is the protagonists' new attempt at a solution. This time the agents may get a partial answer to their epistemological

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[1099] Mendelson 1976b, 1269.
[1100] Merivale & Sweeney 1999, 2.
[1101] Ibid., 8.

riddle, but the answer may also come in the form of a Minotaur – or at least the monstrous size of the narrative embodies this side of their mystery.

On the other hand, the solution is obviously also the narrative we are reading. Hence, this solution is quite explicitly an attempt to totalize the totality. The search in itself *expands* the narrative, especially since reality is more complex than it is depicted to be in mainstream detective fiction, and at the same time totalizing *compresses* and *organizes*, bringing order into the excess of epistemological material. This, I have argued, is the real core of encyclopedism. It is a dialectic between totality and totalizing, global and local, unorganized and organized, chaos and order, information and knowledge. What is truly paradoxical in this setting is that putting everything into a coherent system always involves the elimination of material that is unfit or too vague, and that is why there will always be a conflict between the totalized order of knowledge and the totality of information. As I have aimed to show, this conflict lies at the heart of the contemporary encyclopedic novel.

But what if, due to these sincere efforts to totalize, the principles of encyclopedism are not only questioned but also manipulated to extremes? What if expansion turns against those who expand? Or if the represented encyclopedia does not cover all and everything at all, but instead "spirals down into nothing?" Perhaps especially *House of Leaves* in which these manipulations are represented, shows the way not only for future novels, but also for encyclopedic narratives to come. While the guiding ethos of the contemporary encyclopedic novel has been the metaphysics of uncertainty, an ethos in which the awareness of the incompleteness of the epistemological projects is linked with a growing self-awareness that manifests itself through different metafictional techniques, it is possible that this metaphysics will be radicalized further in the following decades. Moreover, by emphasizing the cruft, the contemporary encyclopedic novel has thematized the narrative form as an open system of information, and perhaps one can expect that there will be more cruft in the future. Perhaps the role of the reader will increase, and the encyclopedic novel will start to look more like an interface than a narrative. And perhaps, in the aftermath of the latest information technologies, new digital platforms will define the "new normal" of maximalist modality.

However, looking at things more pessimistically, this development makes the position of the encyclopedic novel, as a physical book, vulnerable, for arguably the divide between traditional and digital literature is growing. If the Internet already remolds the way we read, and cultural information is more fragmented than ever, it is possible that literary encyclopedias will lose their meaning. But if the *raison d'être* of the encyclopedia was to mimic the world, or formulate a total representation of knowledge concerning the world, its object, the world in itself, has in this century turned out to resemble a great encyclopedia, a huge labyrinth through which we wander, trying to learn something, trying to form ideas about it. Then, and this is the optimistic view, fictional encyclopedias may eventually become valuable *mise en*

abyme structures of reality, embedded literary devices which we use to perceive the world of information in which we live. The contemporary encyclopedic novel already has this position, but in the future, it may become our most crucial consultant. Possibly that is what the encyclopedic trend at the threshold of the new millennium is all about: proving that literature can still give us guidance, even at the risk of misguidance.

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