

# Decolonizing Play

An Examination of Ludic Literature



Amber Marie Louise Lammers

3067564

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Thesis supervisor: Joost Raessens

Second reader: Kiene Brillenburg-Wurth

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## Introduction

In 1938 the Dutch scholar Johan Huizinga published a study on play<sup>1</sup> called *Homo Ludens: Proeve eener Bepaling van het Spel-element der Cultuur* (*Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, 1970). Though Huizinga was not the first scholar to write about play, his study has been an influential one and is still being used and cited among contemporary game scholars (e.g. Juul, 2003; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004; Frasca, 2007; Eskelinen, 2001).

Huizinga's study has also been important for other fields.

As the title of his book already suggests, Huizinga examined play as a concept that manifests itself in many different aspects of our culture. He discusses for instance the relation between play and law, religion and art. It is because of this broad cultural treatment of play that game scholars sometimes critiqued Huizinga and find fault in? his study (e.g. Frasca 2007; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). However, it is also because of this wide approach, that the study was interesting for scholars from other disciplines as well.

Literary scholars, for example, use Huizinga's study as a justification for the examination of play within literary studies. Especially since Huizinga emphasizes the relation between 'poiesis' and play: "The more highly organized forms of society, such as religion, science, law, war and politics, gradually lose touch with play, so prominent in the earlier phases. The function of the poet still remains fixed in the play-sphere where it was born. *Poiesis*, in fact, is a play function" (1970: 119, italics in the original). Poiesis is the Greek word for making and/or production, and our word for 'poesy' or poetry is derived from it (Teskey, 2005: n.p.). Though Huizinga refers to both literature and poetry throughout this chapter, it is not anomalous that he chooses the word 'poiesis'. This since he underlines the playful *creation* of literature and poetry.

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<sup>1</sup> Since one of the goals of this study is to provide a clear distinction between 'play' and 'game', I will explain in more detail later what I exactly denote when I use these two concepts.

Nonetheless, one should note that Huizinga discusses many forms of literature and in addition he does not limit the play function solely to the creation of literature:

The affinity between poetry and play is not external only; it is also apparent in the structure of creative imagination itself. In the turning of a poetic phrase, the development of a motif, the expression of a mood, there is always a play-element at work. Whether in myth or the lyric, drama or epic, the legends of a remote past or a modern novel, the writer's aim, conscious or unconscious, is to create a tension that will 'enchant' the reader and hold him spellbound. (1970: 132)

The statement that 'poiesis is a play function' is then an important one for literary studies, and this study in particular, as it establishes a connection between play and literature and therewith initiated literary scholars to commence a study of literature as a form of play. In his bibliography of play and literature, James A. G. Marino, for example, clearly stresses the importance of Huizinga's statement and his study as a whole when he argues that: "play as a concept supplied at least an analog for literary works as it was described by the structuralist critics. But Huizinga himself went beyond analogy when speaking of literature; for one to say, as he did, that '*poiesis* is a play-function'" (1985: 306, italics in the original).

In addition, Marino provided an extensive overview of articles and books that were either dealing with play within literature or presented play as a useful concept for literary studies. Constructing his bibliography more than thirty years after the English publication of Huizinga's study, Marino signals a growth in the number of publications on the subject:

Given the continued usefulness of the play-concept in the discussion of literary texts and the idea of reading, the three-decade, nearly- exponential increase in articles and books about play and literature is understandable and welcome (...). Particularly in the last ten years, a fair number of dissertations have been written making use of play and

game in discussing literary texts, evidence of a sharpening interest in the emerging generation of scholars and critics and a promise that the concept will have a future. (1985: 306-307)

Marino's bibliography is extremely useful since it refers both to texts by game scholars and text by literary scholars. This study thus incorporates many texts also mentioned in Marino's overview.

However, with a gap of almost three decades between Marino's bibliography and this study, it seems that the positive prediction about the study of play within literary studies is in need of some readjusting. Though literary scholars published a fair amount of books in the last decade of the twentieth century (e.g. Motte, 1995; Edwards, 1998; Burke, 1994), the number of publications within the twenty-first century is limited<sup>2</sup>. It appears that despite Huizinga's strong claim and its initially enthusiastic reception within literary studies, analyzing literature as a form of play has not become widely established. This study, then, aims to more firmly establish play as an analytical concept within literary studies. In order to accomplish this there are two complications that need to be taken into consideration. First, within the existing discourse on literature and play, a multitude of theories and terms are being used. This contribute to an extremely scattered debate about the role of play within literary studies. Second, with the rise of game studies at the end of the twentieth century the broad cultural treatment that Huizinga provided of play is often replaced by a more narrow conceptualization.

### **Two obstacles for the literature and play discourse**

The first difficulty originates from within the literature and play discourse. The decline of interest in 'play' as an analytical term within literary studies might be explained by an incoherent use of terms and theories by literary scholars. Literary scholars have, for example,

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<sup>2</sup> I only found the following two publications: Bernaerts, 2010; Rodríguez, 2009.

used a multitude of different theories with which to analyze play within a text. Moreover when literary scholars do use the same theory they use it in a different way (e.g. Hutchinson, 1983; Detweiler, 1976). Since there seems to be no consistency about which theory should be used, the discourse has not generated a common theoretical frame with which to examine literature as a form of play.

In addition scholars seem to refer to literature as both a form of play and as a game. An example can be found on the previous page of this study, where I provide the second quote from Marino's bibliography. There Marino refers to 'making use of play and game in discussing literary texts'. Though Marino treats play and game as two different concepts, he does not explain what the difference between these two terms is. The distinction between play and game is not just a problem within literary studies, game scholars have also use these terms as if they are equivalent (e.g. Huizinga, 1970; Caillois, 2001)<sup>3</sup>. Within both literature and game studies, then, the terms play and game are not adequately distinguished, which complicates any examination of literature as a form of play.

Moreover it appears that in both fields game is a more favored term. This is probably due to the fact that the term game evokes a much more formalized concept than the term play, and is thus intrinsically seen as more manageable and therefore also as the more useful term. However, comparing literature to a game is not the same thing as comparing it to play, as I will explain in more detail later in this study. By stressing the relationship between literature and games, literary scholars might have made a wrong turn and ended up with a concept that is not as fruitful for literary analysis; another reason that could explain the loss of interest in the topic.

The use of different theories and terms have led to a very fractured and inconsistent

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<sup>3</sup>Early game scholars like Roger Caillois and Johan Huizinga are often critiqued for not making a distinction between play and games. It should be taken into consideration, that both these scholars did not write their study in English. Huizinga wrote in Dutch and Caillois in French and both these languages the distinction (linguistically) does not exist.



discussion about literature as a form of play. To be more precise, it led to a framing of literature as a game. In order to revive the discussion of literature as a form of play, this study, then, will replace the current unfocused attention on both on games and play to a focus solely on play, provide a distinction between game and play and create an unified theory to analyze different forms of play in literature. The study of literature as play might even benefit from the recent impulses in game studies which produced a more consistent distinction between play and game, and also provide additional theories on play.

The second, more complex, factor is connected to the use of contemporary play and game theories. Where Huizinga freely connects play to several cultural forms, other (often modern) scholars tended to narrow their use of the term. With the rise of game studies as an independent field of research the emphasis tended to be on the study of games, which resulted in a study of play that became increasingly restricted to actual games. This tendency can already be pinpointed within the book *Man, Play and Games* (2001), (*Les Jeux et les Hommes*, 1958), by Roger Caillois. Caillois wrote his study on play and games as a response to Huizinga's study, but he did not grant literature the same privileged position. Caillois actually does not even mention literature, but he does discuss cinema and theater as specific forms of play, namely make-believe. Here the focus already starts to shift from play as omnipresent in our culture to a more narrow study play, connected to formalized forms of play and games. Later, the twenty-first century game scholars Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman accuse Huizinga and Caillois for including too many activities in their studies that are not games:

A central problem with Caillois' definition is that like Huizinga's definition, it is too broad for our purposes. In *Man, Play and Games*, Caillois includes under the rubric of play activities such as theater and informal rough-housing. Although these activities

might be considered play, we are looking for a definition that more narrowly addresses the particular instance of games. (2004: 76)

Although Salen and Zimmerman rightly note that these activities are not games, they can, according to them, still be a form of play. Unfortunately, this acknowledgment is a rare one in contemporary game studies.

Where Caillois and Huizinga theorized play as a term that should be used when examining many different cultural objects, contemporary game scholars tend to look more specifically at play in relation to games. This however implicates that in order to use theories and ideas from contemporary game studies, literary scholars need to modify them in order to be useful within literary studies. This, because literary scholars want to use play to examine a literary text and not to examine games. The necessity to adapt concepts coming from other fields is rightly indicated by Joost Raessens (2009). Raessens signals that with the independence of game studies, game scholars started to use concepts from other disciplines. He stresses the need to adjust those concepts, in order to make them useful within his own discipline. He quotes Mieke Bal who states that: “No concept is meaningful for cultural analysis unless it helps us to understand the object better *on its – the object’s – own terms*” (2002: 8, italics in the original). In order to use play, it needs to be adapted so it is suited to examine at literature ‘on its own terms’. Though one can argue that from this point of view even game can be made into a useful concept for literary studies, I will use play. I will explain the reasons for this decision in more detail later.

### **The ludology versus narratology debate**

As Raessens also indicates, however, this interdisciplinary borrowing from other fields has only been a recent trend within game studies (2009). Before game studies became a well-established field, game scholars had a very hostile attitude towards influences from other fields but also towards other fields using game concepts. This animosity resulted from a fear

that games were being subjugated by other fields (Aarseth, 2001; Eskelinen, 2001). In their attempts to counter influences from other disciplines, game scholars tended to devalue any comparison between literature, play and game. This stance had quite a destructive effect on the study of play as a culture-wide concept and for the study of literature as a form of play in particular. In spite of this hostile attitude and the narrow use of play, the new insights that game studies provided can be very useful for a more cohesive study of literature as a form of play. It is therefore important to pay more attention to what caused the aforementioned change in attitude and show that even within game studies play remains a cultural-wide concept.

In the beginnings of game studies, this need for a study of games as games was already clearly visible. In the first publication of *Game Studies*, Espen Aarseth advocates that (computer) game studies should be regarded as an independent academic field and therewith made it possible for games to be predominantly studied as games. He states that through the lack of an own independent field, games have mainly be studied by other fields and although he finds nothing wrong with this, he states that: “games are too important to be left to these fields” (2001: n.p.). Other game scholars have similar concerns. Gonzola Frasca, for example, argues that although narratology has been useful for understanding games, quintessential games are not stories and should therefore not be analyzed as such:

Some authors see cybertexts and videogames as a new form of or as an expansion of traditional narrative or drama. The fact is that these computer programs share many elements with stories: characters, chained actions, endings, settings. However, there is another dimension that has been usually almost ignored when studying this kind of computer software: to analyze them as games. (1999: n.p)

In both Aarseth’s and Frasca’s article the idea is to supplement the already existing analytical apparatus with a method developed specifically for the study of games. Frasca proposes to complement the current theories with a ‘ludic perspective’ that would allow for a study of

games as games: “We will propose the term *ludology* (from *ludus*, the Latin word for ‘game’), to refer to the yet non-existent ‘discipline that studies game and play activities’” (Frasca, 1999: n.p., italics in the original).

Even though Frasca never advocates that ludology should replace the already existing perspectives, the article sparked a discussion among game scholars in which some scholars took a very hostile stance towards influences from other fields. Ironically, Frasca’s article is actually titled “Ludology meets Narratology” (1999), while the debate has come to be known as the ‘ludology *versus* narratology’ discussion. As the word ‘versus’ might already indicate, the debate is centered around the question whether games should be studied from a ludic *or* a narrative perspective. Markku Eskelinen for example, argues that certain aspects of games, such as rules and a high degree of interactivity make games different from stories. Thus narrative structures within games should not be studied. In a very polemic statement he says that: “In this scenario, stories are just uninteresting ornaments or gift-wrappings to games, and laying any emphasis on studying these kinds of marketing tools is just a waste of time and energy” (2001: n.p.). From Eskelinen’s point of view, therefore, games should predominantly be analyzed for their game qualities.

This negative stance did not limit itself to the use of theories from other fields, but it also extended to other fields studying games. Literary studies (among several other fields) was actually accused of trying to ‘colonize’ games. Aarseth for example states that: “games are not a kind of cinema, or literature, but colonising attempts from both these fields have already happened” (Aarseth, 2001: n.p.). In the same publication of *Game Studies*, Eskelinen presents us with a similar argument when he discusses the current condition of games as a study object. He states that: “if and when games and especially computer games are studied and theorized they are almost without exception colonized from the field of literary, theatre, drama and film studies.” (Eskelinen, 2001: n.p.). Both these statements articulate the idea that

games are unique artifacts that need an independent field to be adequately studied. However, they frame this need for sovereignty as ‘decolonization’ of games from other fields. That the game scholars, stressing the uniqueness of games and expressing the need to study games as games, is not a point of discussion in this study. As this is a valid argument. The accusation made by Aarseth and Eskelinen that literary studies have been colonizing games, however, is a point of discussion indeed. This view has facilitated an environment, where it has become very difficult for literary scholars to use play or game as analytical concepts.

Fortunately game scholars themselves also noted that this hostile attitude was unnecessary. Janet H. Murray states in her article “The Last Word on Ludology v. Narratology in Game Studies” (2005), that it: “is time to reframe the conversation” (n.p.). She deems it necessary because, as she shows in her article, the debate seems to be stuck on a misunderstanding. Murray argues that ludology can be divided into two different functions. An ideological function which she calls game essentialism and which: “claims that games, unlike other cultural objects, should be interpreted only as members of their own class, and only in terms of their defining abstract formal qualities” (Murray, 2005: n.p.). The other function that Murray distinguishes is the methodological function of ludology which she calls computer game formalism: “As a methodology, CGF emphasizes the formal properties unique to video games and attempts to analyze them and to create descriptors tha[t] can be used to classify and compare specific instances of game form” (Murray, 2005: n.p.). Murray concludes her article by stating that: “It is time to recognize the difference between the useful formalist methodology and the distractingly prescriptive of game essentialism” (2005: n.p.). She recognizes that games should be studied as games, but also that this does not mean that theories from other fields cannot contribute to an examination of games.

Moreover Murray argues that the strong hostility against narratology within games studies, should be framed as a symbolic break. This strategic break then, was predominantly

employed to create room for games to be studied as games, not to expel narratology from game studies:

no one has been interested in making the argument that there is no difference between games and stories or that games are merely a subset of stories. Those interested in both games and stories see game elements in stories and story elements in games:

interpenetrating sibling categories, neither of which completely subsumes the other.

(Murray, 2005: n.p.)

Eskelinen's comment about the colonizing of game studies by other fields may then be interpreted as a strategic move, rather than a real denunciations of narratology within games (this is also noted by Frasca, 2003: n.p ).

### **Consequences of the debate: two-way colonization**

Although Murray's article contributed to a less hostile attitude towards the use of narratology within game studies, it does not acknowledge the problems the debate caused for play as a broad cultural concept and the study of literature as play in particular. Raessens, for example, shows that with the independence of game studies, the field became more susceptible to influences from other disciplines: "Now that computer game studies is a well-established field, game scholars do not worry so much anymore about these 'colonising attempts,' but are trying to make concepts coming from somewhere else productive for their work" (2009: 491). Game scholars, however, also need to recognize that this is just one side of neutralizing the accusation of colonization. Colonization does not only refer to the use of theories from other fields like narratology, but as formulated by both Aarseth and Eskelinen, it also refers the use of game and play within other fields. By stating that other fields were colonizing games, game scholars created a space where games could be studied as games. This however, not only meant banning non-game elements from the study of games, but also banning game elements

*including play*, from non-games.

For instance, game scholars are reluctant to admit that literature, like games, can be playful. The quote by Salen and Zimmerman, mentioned on page five of this study, is a perfect example of how game scholars can allow for a connection between non-games and play. This subtle distinction however seems to be lost on most game scholars who, in their eagerness to stress the uniqueness of games, are not willing to establish any relation between other cultural forms and games and therewith also envelop play. It seems part of their fear of colonization to frame play as indistinguishable from games and many game scholars tend to be fickle when it comes to a relation between literature and play. Jesper Juul, for example, argues that hypertext fiction does not fall into the category of games or borderline cases, seeing as they are not games at all. He argues that they fall “completely outside the set of games”, because “hypertext fiction tends to be a question of browsing a story that doesn’t change” (Juul, 2003: n.p.). Though Juul centers his article on a definition of games it is understandable that he would exclude hypertexts from this definition. However, by not even granting hypertexts a borderline status and stressing the idea that these text are in no way related to games he does not acknowledge that games and hypertext do share a common trait. They are both a form of play.

In a similar but even more striking manner, Aarseth argues that in certain literature there is a degree of playfulness, but that these ‘literary games’ are in no way comparable to real games:

These novels are games only in a metaphorical sense: they tease us, but we are not real players. In the case of hypertext fictions, we are explorers, but without recognizable rules, there is no real game. To equalize these metaphorical games with a real game is to marginalize an already (academically) marginal phenomenon, to privilege the *illusion* of play over real play. (2004: 53, italics in the original)

This quote is a good example of how game scholars fail to distinguish between play and game, but also shows their unwillingness to recognize that literary texts are a form of play. Aarseth's concern with the marginal status of games leads him to argue that the play within literature is only an illusion, instead of analyzing it for its own merits. While literature can indeed not be a game in the way that game scholars define a game, this does not mean that literature can only possess an 'illusion' of play. In conclusion, some game scholars tend to ignore the essential distinction between play and games when it comes to literary texts.

It is, conversely, not only the flawed distinction between play and game, that keeps game scholars from adequately recognizing the playful character of certain literary texts. Scholars also tend to neglect that there is a distinction between narrative and story, and this creates a new set of problems. In his book *Cybertexts* (1997), Aarseth states that it

is not a difference between games and literature but rather between games and narratives. To claim that there is no difference between games and narratives is to ignore essential qualities of both categories. And yet, as this study tries to show, the difference is not clear-cut, and there is significant overlap between the two. (Aarseth, 1997: 4-5)

Aarseth never explains what these similarities between games and narratives are, or why he chooses the word narrative over literature. Within literary studies the term narrative is commonly used to point to a specific structure of a literary text (Rimmon-Kenan, 2005: 3). Aarseth does not address his definition of the word and thus creates confusion. A similar treatment of these concepts can be found in the quotation by Murray, mentioned on page six. Although Murray makes a very useful distinction between games and game elements and story and story elements, she still defines story and game as two different categories that can have similar characteristics. It would be much clearer to argue that a story can also possess game elements and vice versa. Both narrative and story and play and game are closely linked



concepts but they do not carry the same meaning and by disregarding this, the difference between story and game has become more polarized than it needed to be.

### **Play as a medium-independent structure**

Let's first address the linked concepts of narrative and story. Narrative, as stated, is usually used to refer to a specific structure within a literary text, but can also be formalized as a structure within other media like cinema. Within the debate a clear distinction between being a story and possessing narrative elements is often not made. The same goes for the distinction between being a game or merely possessing play elements. When one is talking about games and stories one makes a distinction between two different media. While when one talks about a narrative and/or a play structure one is no longer talking about the medium, but about a structure that any text can possess, regardless of the specific medium. Following this reasoning a text then belongs to a certain medium while at the same time it can be governed by different medium-independent structures. This would imply that a story can also possess a play structure, or for that matter that a game can possess a narrative structure. The failure to recognize this distinction led to the stark division between games and stories, and perhaps it also led to the unwillingness to acknowledge certain play elements within literature by various scholars. The often blurred distinction between game as a medium, and play as a medium-independent structure, has as I will explain in a moment, also held back the development of ludology as a medium-independent *play* methodology.

The usefulness of clarifying a distinction between story and narrative and play and games becomes clear when we again look at Frasca's definition of ludology. Ludology refers to the study of both games *and* play activities. Frasca therefore not only advocated that games should be viewed as games, but that ludology should function as medium-independent methodology (although in the first place designed as a research method for games): "Just like narratology, *ludology* should also be independent from the medium that supports the activity"

(Frasca, 1999: n.p., italics in the original). The debate, then, should have focused on what it means to create a *play methodology* that can be used throughout different media instead of artificially limiting play to games. Frasca acknowledges this transmedial characteristic of play when he states that: “The term *narratology* had to be invented to unify the works that scholars from different disciplines were doing about narrative” (Frasca, 1999: n.p., italics in the original). If narrative is a structure that can be studied throughout different disciplines, this should also be possible for certain game elements, such as play. If ludology is an independent research method then surely it can be relevant to other media and even to literature, moreover its transmedial nature requires it.

Therefore this study argues that, with the emphasis, the ‘ludology versus narratology’ debate, placed on the uniqueness of games and its disregard for the transmedial character of ludology, game scholars have limited the playing field of ludology as a transmedial methodology of play and therewith colonized ‘play’.

### **Resuming a study of literature as a form of play**

As mentioned before, the aim of this study is to reevaluate the use of play within literary studies and therewith revive play as an analytical concept within literary studies.

Thus, when examining literature as a form of play, one needs to take into consideration the problems within the discourse on literature and play as mentioned in this chapter, but also acknowledge that the current theories on play will have to be modified in order to work within literary studies. These two points will be addressed in the chapters that follow.

First and foremost the study of literature as a form of play must be revived, by creating an analytical framework to study the different elements of play within literary texts. The many different theories that literary scholars have used, have contributed to mystification about the relation between literature and play. A single method will facilitate a more coherent discussion on literature as a form of play.

Second, in order to produce such a method, play needs to be reframed so it can be useful to look at non-games and in particular to look at literary texts. Now that all the hostilities are dealt with, it is not just the game scholars who can try to make theories from different fields useful. Since ludology can function as a game methodology and a play methodology, it is time that ludology were used and adapted by literary scholars in order to be fruitful for literary analysis. This study can then, in a way, be seen as both a decolonization and a colonization of play. A decolonization because it reframes play from a concept exclusively related to games to a concept that can be related to many cultural forms. A colonization because in order to be useful within literary studies play needs to be modified so it can be explicitly used to look at literary texts.

In order to realize the aims of this study the following research question has been formulated:

*How can Ludology as a medium-independent research method be used for understanding literature, and what can we gain in our understanding of a literary text by analyzing it as a form of play?*

Though I want to use ludology as research method for play and games to examine a literary text, I do not want to examine literature as a game. Therefore the second part of the research question states more clearly that ludology will be used to look at literature as a form of play. Therewith, this study's concept of ludology within literary studies is narrowed. However, since play has become a concept predominantly related to games, the theories about play that are useful need to be adjusted as well. I will therefore examine ludology as a transmedial play methodology, and reformulate it so it will be well-suited for a study of ludic literature.

This study can therefore be divided into two main parts. The first part will deal with the problems that arose within the literature and play discourse and look towards contemporary game studies for solutions. Chapter one will therefore address the ways in which literary

scholars have distinguished between game and play and establish a new distinction by looking at current theories within game studies and adjusting them.

Chapter two will categorize the different ways in which literary scholars have already argued that texts can be a form of play. One idea that will be discussed is the idea that ludic structures are not just found within a text, but can also be part of the way an author creates a text or in the way a reader reads the text (Suits, 1985). There are, for example, texts that do not possess play elements, but are the product of a playful action. The play influences, then, are not visible within a text, they should however be taken into account in order to understand the text. Moreover when we accept that a text is playful in itself, without the interaction of a reader, we need to reframe play. This, because game scholars always defined play as a specific action (e.g. Huizinga, 1970; Caillois, 2001; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

The third chapter will examine the ways in which literary scholars have already analyzed play. As already briefly noted, literary scholars use many different theories to analyze play elements within the text. The different theories will be examined and the useful aspects of new play theories will be used in order to create one methodology that can be used to analyze different forms of play within literary texts. One has to take into account that most literary texts use both the term game and play, but predominantly state that they are analyzing literature as a game. Though it might seem contradictory to use these texts while looking specifically at literature as a form of play, these texts did not have the advantage of contemporary game theories and could therefore not establish a proper distinction. Not to use these texts, simply because their terminology is flawed, would be a shortcoming of this study. However to avoid confusion, even though authors state that literature is a game, these quotes will be used as an example of literature as a form of play.

The second part of this study will predominantly focus on applying the developed framework to different literary texts in order to illustrate the usefulness of the frame. That part

will however only start after chapter four, in which a reflection will be provided on the merits of examining literature as a form of play. In chapter five, then, will an examination of two books be provided in order to demonstrate the usefulness of the developed framework. The two books were specifically chosen as case studies to exemplify the virtues of using a ludic frame when analyzing literary texts and to provide the reader with concrete examples of the ways in which literary text can play. The books chosen for this analysis are Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) and Jen Bervin's *Nets* (2004). *House of Leaves* consist of so many different forms of play that it makes an excellent and diverse example. *Nets* will enable me to show how play is used to create literature. Due to the size of *House of Leaves* and the numerous instances of play, the book enables a more lengthy examination of play elements than *Nets*. However, it is important to take into consideration the play element in the creation of a text. This because, as will be argued in more detail later, play has become important in the ways in which people create and moreover engage with cultural objects.

The following pages then, hope to finish what Huizinga started so many years ago; to make it possible for literature to be studied as playful.

## **1. Distinguishing between play and games**

As I already briefly mentioned in the introduction, two of the problems within the literary play discourse are the lack of a distinction between play and game and the preference to frame literature as a game. This first point is not that extraordinary since early game scholars such as Huizinga and Caillois, did not make that distinction either. This chapter will focus on the different ways in which literary scholars have used both play and game, and identify the problems that were caused by their particular use of the terms. In the following I will therefore first examine how the concepts play and game have been used within the literary discourse. I will start by provide some examples of how literary scholars fail to make a distinction between play and game. Second I will present some scholars that try to make a distinction and third I will show how scholars encounter difficulties when they prefer to call a literary texts a game instead of a form of play. In order to resolve these problems I will, in the second part of this chapter, look at contemporary game scholars and their ideas about a distinction between play and games and conclude by making these ideas productive for literary studies.

### **1.1 Play and game within literary studies**

#### **Play equals game**

Literary scholars themselves have already noted that in order for ‘game’ and ‘play’ to become useful analytical concepts within literary studies, they need to be more clearly defined. In 1981, for example, Robert Radwon Wilson published the article: “Three Prolusions: Toward a Game Model in Literary Theory” in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*<sup>1</sup>. Within this essay Wilson criticizes those literary scholars who write about literature and analyze it as a game, but fail to provide a clear theoretical explanation of what game (or play for that matter) is, and how it exactly relates to literature. He states that: “whether ‘game’ is, or can become, a fruitful metaphor in the analysis of literature remains unclear. Its mere use, without

qualification or the control of logical distinction, obfuscates more than it clarifies. An incantation in criticism is one thing; a genuinely analytic term, another” (Wilson, 1981: 80).

Wilson argues that literary scholars do not clearly define game and “its related terms (‘play,’ ‘rule,’ ‘move,’ ‘strategy’ and so forth)” (79), but that they use these concepts as if they are self-explanatory. He argues that scholars need to theoretically ground their use of game and these ‘related concepts’. He therefore uses Bernard Suits definition to provide his readers with a theoretically grounded definition of games<sup>4</sup>. Wilson does not, however, explain how these ‘related concepts’, relate to games and what he means with ‘so forth’. Play is framed as one of those related terms and although Wilson predominantly frames literature as a game, he also refers to literature as a form of play. Still, he fails to explain to his reader in what way play is related to game or whether literary play is identical to a literary game.

Moreover Wilson often neglects to make any kind of distinction between play and games and actually treats them as interchangeable. In one signal paragraph he has multiple ways of expressing that literature is a game, while referring to both play and game. He states that: “The application of theories of play and game to the study of literature holds out hope for discoveries into the nature of literature” (83-84), while two sentences later he directly refers to the “development of theories of literature as a game” (84) and he ends the paragraph with stating that: “given a concept which is so multifarious and so vaguely formulated, there is considerable scope for further discussion” (84). The reader is then left to decide what the relation between play and game exactly is or if Wilson means play or game with his reference to ‘a concept’.

This mystifying use of play is not only limited to early literary scholars. Fifteen years later Steven Scott wrote an essay which is inspired by Wilson’s demand to more clearly define game concepts. Scott however deals with many of the same theoretical difficulties and

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<sup>4</sup> Wilson uses Bernard Suits definition of games, but he does not explain why he choose this particular one and not for example the definition provided by Caillois or Huizinga. He presents Suits definition as the definition of games, while it is one among many and actually one that is not that often used within Game studies.

the difference between play and game is still a very accurate question: “although it seems obvious that literature and games have some things in common, it is not so obvious *what* it is, exactly that they have in common. Is their common ground only playfulness, or is there something more?” (1996: 375, italics in the original). It seems that not much has changed especially since more contemporary texts also deal with this problem. Even Lars Bernaerts (2010) and Lydia H. Rodríguez (2009), who wrote their articles recently, do not make a distinction between these concepts. If scholars make any distinction at all, the distinction is often not clarifying. Waren Motte for example argues that play is: “the spirit that animates each otherwise *different* game” (1995: 15, italics in the original), but what does it mean to be the spirit within a game?

### **Play does not equal game**

There are some scholars that try to define the difference between play and game. Although Robert Detweiler (1976) never provides his reader with a theoretical definition of these concepts, in his article about the play and game element in American fiction, he does recognize that they are different. At one point he distinguishes between: “playful or whimsical fiction, writing that is based on exuberance and exaggeration, that appears spontaneous and casually composed (even though it is not), that is usually funny, and that does not portray a particular game, or play a game with the reader” (1976: 48), and fiction “in which or through which the author plays a game with the reader, either by presenting the story in some cryptic form as a puzzle to be solved” (49). While he does not explicitly make a distinction between play and game, it seems that he implicitly assumes play is a less formal manifestation of games.

Similar, but more explicit, is Peter Hutchinson’s distinction between play and game. Hutchinson attempts to make a theoretical distinction:



The concept of ‘play’ is employed almost interchangeably with that of ‘game’, (...) There is, however, a distinction to be made between the two, albeit largely one of degree. ‘Play’ operates at a more superficial level, it is often ostentatious, it is incidental. ‘Game’, on the other hand, suggest a more developed structure, it represents more of a challenge to the reader, it involves greater, more prolonged intellectual effort. (...) it involves a *goal*. (1983: 13-14, italics in the original).

Although this is a very admirable attempt to distinguish the two concepts (even with the bias towards play), the distinction gets deflated because Hutchinson never defines the degree in which play and game differ.

More importantly, Hutchinson seems to slightly contradict himself. He clearly states that play seems to be more superficial, whereas a game involves some ‘intellectual effort’. However on the same page he conflates this by stating that a literary game that is playful has a tendency to stimulate “his reader to deduce or to speculate” (1983: 14). Does this imply that when a reader is deducing and/or speculating he does not engage in some intellectual effort? Later on he then adds that literary games stimulate in a way that “present a specific form of challenge to the intellect” (14-15). It is confusing that Hutchinson points to the intellectual effort in both cases that are involved, but that he does not explain when exactly play becomes a game. Moreover, though he makes a distinction between these two terms, like many literary scholars he uses both the concepts as interchangeable. Of all of the scholars mentioned above, Detweiler is the only one, who does not use the two terms as exchangeable.

### **Literature as a game**

This vague use of both play and game makes it hard to distinguish whether literature is a form of play and/or whether some literary texts are actually games. However, with the exception of Detweiler, all of the authors above seem to have a tendency to use both play and game, while they often explicitly state that literature is a game and/or say that a game is played within a

text. By preferring 'game' and framing literature as a game, literary scholars also had to deal with certain characteristics of games, like rules, in relation to literary texts. Hutchinson for example, acknowledges the more rule governed nature of games when he states that: "A 'game' traditionally suggest 'rules' or 'conventions'; such concepts are indeed recognizable in certain literary games, but 'play' does *not* imply such conventions" (1983: 14, italics in the original). The division between game and play on the idea that play does not have rules or conventions is in itself questionable. In addition, Hutchinson never explains why he makes this distinction, he just presents it as a given. Even more remarkable is that Hutchinson earlier stated that it: "is also questionable whether there are any 'rules' in literary games" (1983: 5). This contradiction is never really resolved within the study, but Hutchinson is not the only scholar that struggles with the idea of rules within literature.

Although literary scholars tend to prefer the idea of a literary game, they cannot resolve the apparent contradiction between rules within games and rules within literature. Conversely, Detweiler does not seem to have any problems with rules within literature. He argues that the: "strategy of this fiction as game, then, is to provoke the reader into discovering its alienating rules," (1976: 56). The goal of the literary game, then, is to discover the rules that govern it. What Detweiler however fails to notice is that this is not how rules really work within an actual game. Wilson considers the problem between literary rules and game rules in some more detail and he argues that three paradoxes arise when one considers that literature can be a game:

First, on the basis of an equation between game and text, it will be necessary to take literary conventions as rules, and this will entail that they must be learned as rules, as pre-conditions of the activity. Second, whether that of an actual game or of some other mode (for example, any code, set of protocols, or secret knowledge) of abstraction employed to structure plot, an underforming pattern cannot be recovered by direct

inference from the literary texts, if this thought of as an aspect of formal structure or of the text's ontological status manifests itself in markedly paradoxical ways.

Furthermore, it is evident that the first and the third paradoxes are contradictory: the first states what no reader of literature could admit; the third, what no player of games would grant. (1990: 98-99)

If rules are formed during (or after) the literary game is played, they cannot be compared with the rules that players encounters in games. Rules within literature are not as easily defined as rules within games. As indicated by Wilson, some literary scholars have therefore turned towards conventions, as the rules within literature. Unfortunately turning conventions into literary rules is not a solution. Wilson already signals that conventions cannot really be compared to rules. Scott recognizes this problem as well, and advocates that when defining a literary text or a game one should not just typify them as either having conventions, or having rules but place these 'semiotic cultural activities' on a continuum where an activity can have both (1985: 376). This however does provide any solution to the question if conventions and rules are comparable and therefore if literary texts can function as games. Wilson argues that the answer to that last question should not be sought by supplementing conventions for rules: "It will not do to speak casually about 'rules' or to make an easy (but fallacious) equation between 'convention' and 'rule' in literature. The rules in a game are invariably limited, precise and easy to formulate; conventions, vaguely extensive, imprecise and difficult to formulate" (1981: 80).

Many literary scholars try to reshape the definition of games and/ or rules in order to make these terms more appropriate for literary analysis. However, in the end most scholars will admit that defining literature as a game is quite problematic. For instance, after Scott has argued that literature and games are two different activities on a continuum of conventions and rules, he gives up the idea that literature can be a game and he very reluctantly states that:

“I do not think that literature is a game in a very useful sense, though it is playful” (Scott, 1985: 377). So now literature is playful, but since none of the literary scholars mentioned above have made a clear distinction between play and game this statement does not clarify a whole lot.

Though one can argue that literature can be a game, literary scholars have, instead of modifying the concept of game and making it useful within literature, focused too much on the conceptualization of game within game studies. I however still prefer to use the term play. Not because play does not have formal game characteristics like rules, as I will argue they actually do, but because play is a broad cultural concept. There are many cultural products that can be defined as playful, while only a few of these playful objects can be defined as games. We nevertheless still need to define what play exactly is. In order for play to mean something when we relate it to literature, we need to define what the difference is between play and game. The literary scholars that wrote about literature as a form of play were active in the twentieth century and have therefore not taken into account the theories on play and game that were produced by contemporary game studies. These recent impulses can help to provide a clearer distinction between play and game.

## **1. 2 A distinction between play and game**

### **Play and game within game studies**

Within game studies the words ‘play’ and ‘game’ have often been used without making a clear distinction between the two (Huizinga, 1970; Caillois, 2001). However, with the establishing of game studies as an independent field, game scholars started to pay more attention to a distinction between these two concepts. As already indicated both Caillois and Huizinga did not write their study in English, but in French and Dutch, which are two languages that do not make a distinction between play and game. Within the English language

however a distinction is made. Although this linguistic distinction seems useful, even within English it is difficult to elucidate what the difference is between play on the one hand and game on the other. Frasca (2007: 18-19) argues that this is caused by the fact that both terms still have multiple meanings in English.

In his dissertation, Frasca explores in more depth the different linguistic meanings of the English uses of 'play' and 'game'. He shows that the meaning of 'game' is rather problematic, because it is both used to refer to an object and the materiality of that object, and to refer to the activity of using that object. The term play seems to be more clear-cut as he states that: "'play' is used in order to describe the activity that players engage while executing a game" (2007: 19). Later on he is more specific about this difference, when he argues that although both concepts can be used as a verb and as a noun, play is more often used as a verb, and therefore one can argue that 'play' is more often used (and therefore associated) with the act of playing and not a 'material' object (Frasca, 2007: 38-40). Play is then, that essence of a game that makes it playful; through playing, the actual game comes into being. Would this then imply, that play can only exist in a game or in game-like objects that allow for interaction?

Looking at a purely linguistic distinction between play and game, denotes that play is often framed as an important essence of a game and that it is an activity. However, when play is studied within literature, this characterization is problematic since the object of analysis would not be a game but a literary text that might have game characteristics. Moreover the connection that is established here between play and the act of playing, can also be problematic. Most texts do not provide the same freedom to interact and participate, as games do. One can examine a reader reading a text and the reading can be an act of play, however this would nevertheless implicate that the text itself is not a form of play, but the reading of it is. In the following chapter I will explore the relation between play and interactivity in more

depth. For now let us focus on a distinction between play and games that would allow us to use play in non-games as well.

Another way of distinguishing play and game is by arguing that games have rules and forms of play do not. As mentioned above, literary scholars use rules in order to make a distinction between play and game (e.g. Hutchinson, 1983). Within game studies, scholars also seem to agree that there is a difference between the two on the basis of rules and therefore often portray game, as a formalized form of play (Frasca, 2007: 39). It seems, however, that a distinction between play and game according to rules is not that easily made.

Frasca shows that most scholars distinguish between play and game because they think play is more free, while games have to abide to rules (Frasca, 1999: n.p). Frasca, however, cites a study by Daniel Vidart (1995) where the latter showed that ‘play’ can also be governed by rules (Frasca, 1999). Frasca agrees with this and in his dissertation he explains in more depth that one needs to consider that the rules within a form of play function differently than rules within a game. He states that rules are less rigid within a form of play, and that they tell the player what “may be done” not what “must be done” (Frasca, 2007: 46). He therefore concludes that the rules within a game are often prescriptive while play is generally governed by a set of descriptive rules: “If rules are understood in a descriptive rather than prescriptive way, then Caillois’ affirmations that play can have rules makes sense (even though this does not necessarily mean that all forms of play follow rules)” (2007: 46).

If both play and games can have rules and there are different forms of rules, this might not be the best way to distinguish between play and game. Frasca therefore refers to another distinction made by the philosopher Andre Lalande (1928), who advocated that a distinction can be made on the basis of the results of games and forms of play<sup>5</sup>. Frasca finds this division the most useful and concludes that: “*Games* have a result: they define a winner and a loser;

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<sup>5</sup>As Frasca also mentions, Lalande wrote in French and never made an official distinction between the English play and game.

*plays* do not” (Frasca, 1999: n.p, italics in the original). A similar distinction is made by Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 83), and Juul (2003: n.p) who both incorporated in their definition that games have a quantifiable outcome. Frasca then concludes that: “A game is a form of **play** where players agree on a system of rules that assigns social status to their quantified performance” (2007: 70, emphasize in the original). Game is thus defined as a specifically more *formalized* form of play because one can argue that by adding rules and a definite result, an instance of play becomes more formalized; it becomes a system.

However, what can be argued for rules within play, can also be argued for results within play. Though forms of play might not have a quantifiable result, one cannot argue that they do not have any result. Can for example a form of make believe not result in a feeling of joy? It appears then that while both play and games have rules and results, the rules and results within games tend to be more formalized. This still does not really define what the relation between play and game is and if play could exist in non-games. Notice that by presenting play as a less formal game activity, game scholars framed game and play as two different *kind* of activities, while the semiotic meaning seems to frame play as an essence within games. There are however two game scholars that also note this discrepancy and provide a clue as to what play is and how it relates to games.

### **Play as a medium-independent structure**

Even though it seems that most scholars agree that games are a more formalized form of play, Salen and Zimmerman also indicate that play can be “an element of games” (2004: 303). They explain these two different ways of perceiving the relationship between play and game, by stating that the former is a ‘conceptual’ distinction and the latter a ‘descriptive’ one (303). However, there is also another way of explaining that play is both part of a game and that game is a specific category of play. When Frasca argues that ludology should function as independent from a specific medium (1999: n.p.), he implicitly refers to the medium

independent quality of narrative structure; a narrative structures can be studied throughout different media.

The connection between games and play on the one hand and story and narrative on the other hand is thus very similar. Stories are often characterized as formalized objects which exist of narrative elements. At the same time however, one can still argue that stories are a formalized part of the category of narratives. This is similar to Salen and Zimmerman's idea that games are a formalized form of play, while they also belong to the category of play activities. If play is framed as a structure that can be studied throughout different media, similar to the way we view narratives, than a game can then be seen as a specific medium in which play structures are formalized, similar to the way we perceive stories.

By making 'game' a medium in which play elements are formally structured, one acknowledges the more formalized character of games, while play remains the more abstract concept that is simultaneously part of games and transcends it. Moreover, by defining play as certain structures that can be present within different texts, one also acknowledges the transmedial character of play. Games on the other hand, remain more exclusively connected a game medium and to game studies. This distinction was implicitly referred to by Frasca who says that: "'Game' is both the default term that is generally used to describe our object of study (Chess, soccer and videogames are generally referred to as 'games' and not 'plays') and it also denotes their material aspects" (2007: 19). He does not define what 'plays' exactly are, but it seems that 'plays' are all those activities that do not belong to the specific game medium but still possess some 'play' essence (2007: 19-20). As this study will look at literary texts, it is only accurate to look at the play elements within those texts and not to try to categorize them as games.





## **2. Defining play**

Now that the relationship between play and game is more clearly defined and the attention of this study is directed towards literary texts as a form of play, it is necessary to examine the ways in which literary scholars have argued that a text can play. First I will give a general overview of the different ways in which scholars have defined that literary text can play. From this I will move to the second part of this chapter where I will examine the three forms of literary play that I extracted from the general overview, and discuss them in more depth. The three different entities that play are the author, the reader and the texts self.

I will start with discussing how an author can play while he is writing a text. Then I will discuss two ways in which a reader can play. The text can provide the reader with a puzzle he needs to solve, or the reader inflicts his playful attitude upon a text and deconstruct it. These two entities that turn literature into a form of play, use play in a similar way as players do when they play within an actual game. The reader and author are actual players that have to abide to certain rules in order to achieve their goals. I therefore use a play theory to define these forms of literary play.

When we examine how a text in itself can be a form of play, it becomes much harder to define concepts like interaction and rules. Moreover the definition of play that I use to describe the literary play authors and readers undertake, is not adequate to describe this form of play. In order to frame this instance of literary play as play, the definition of play needs to be adapted so it can be applicable to artifacts that do not allow for interaction. Moreover the role of the reader (or non-player in this case) needs to be redefined. I have therefore chosen to discuss the text as a form of play separately as it is a different form of play than the other two categories.

### **2.1 Three different entities that play**

When I state that a literary text is a form of play, this does not mean that there is only *one* way

in which a text can be a form of play. Play can manifest itself in different ways and it is therefore important that scholars are aware of these distinct ways a text can play. This has also been noted by Wilson who argued that, in addition to not clearly defining game concepts, scholars also neglected to differentiate between the different levels of game play: “fundamental distinctions need to be clarified (does ‘game’ imply a structure or a psychology? A gamewright or players? Creative process, text or reading experience?),” (1981: 83). What Wilson essentially implies here, is that author can play through the creation of a text and that the reader can play while reading the text.

Since Wilson finds a theoretical foundation important, he also uses Suits theory on games to examine the ways in which a literary text can be a form of play and arrives at a different categorization, than the one mentioned above. Wilson states that, according to Suits, it is evident that literature can contain a game and that a literary text can be the product of a game. The former occurs when an author of a literary texts adheres to certain rules when making the text, the latter when a text provides a representation of a game (Suits, 1978: 158; Wilson, 1981: 86-87). Wilson also adds that nothing:

in Suits’ argument support the idea that the actual structure of literary works is a game (or ‘gamelike’). Further, it remains entirely an open question whether readers play games in interpreting a work of literature or whether the author, given a lusory attitude (or perhaps in any case), plays necessary games with his readers. (1981: 87)

Wilson seems very eager to follow Suits theory. Conversely, Wilson’s point, that literary text can represent games, is never explicitly addressed by Suits and even omitted in an article that Suits wrote as a reaction to Wilson’s.

There Suits, likewise, stresses the importance of being more specific in defining how literature can play and formulates three ways in which literature can be playful: “It is then necessary to specify which particular literary process one is talking about in applying a game

analysis to it. Is it (a) the process of literary creation, (b) the literary work itself (or some aspect of it), or (c) the response of reader to the work?" (1985: 215). Notice that Suits accepts the idea that reading a text can be a form of play, while he actually excludes the idea that literary text are playful because they represent games.

However, the idea that literary texts contain representations of games is not only discussed by Wilson, both Detweiler and Hutchinson argue that this is an example of literary play as well. Hutchinson, for example, calls this aspect of texts 'parallel' (1983: 27-30) and argues that, when a game is used in this manner it becomes essential for the structure and/or the meaning of the text. He states that: "If we fail to recognize the significance of the parallel, we miss thematic resonances and possibly also structural hints" (1983: 28). Similarly Detweiler states, in accordance with Hutchinson's argument, that the games: "provide a ready-made structure" and that their specific use as symbols give the texts "deeper meaning" (1976: 52).

However, a text that contains a representation of a game, does not make the text itself a form of play. Suits does therefore not only omit this aspect in his list, but he also rejects it: "If the 'game' at issue is one played by (or between) characters in a story, then it is not, of course, really a game that is being viewed by the reader, but, in Aristotle's sense of the word, an imitation of a game" (1985: 210). I agree with Suits, since by representing a game and/or a form of play, the text is no different from other texts that represent a specific story. The game within the texts remains a representation and does not become a real form of play. Literary play is then never a representation of play, but always an actualization of play.

Following Suits distinction we are then left with three different ways in which a text can play: the literary text is in itself a form of play, the text is created through play and the text is read in a playful manner. Now that we have distinguished these three forms of literary play, it is necessary to examine how these entities actually play. Though it is not hard to

image how an author and/or a reader can play, this is not that easy imagined when the text itself plays. How does a text go from representing play, to becoming an actual form of play?

## **2.2 The author and reader as players**

### **The playful creation of a text**

The first entity of play that I will discuss is the author. Although there are a lot of scholars that mention that the author can create a text through play (e.g Motte, 1995; Wilson, 1981; Suits, 1985; Hutchinson, 1983; Kuehl, 1986), there are not a lot of scholars that have actually examined the ways in which an author creates a text through play. Motte devotes two chapters on authors that create their texts through a certain ludic behavior. He analyzes George Perec's *La Disparition* (1969), which is written as a lipogram. In this case that entails that the novel is written without using the letter 'e'. The other chapter is about a program called 'Mathew's Algorithm', created by Harry Mathew. The program can be used to restructure words or sentence in unexpected order and therefore plays with the way we normally structure and create a text<sup>6</sup>. Both these authors belong to the a group that called themselves 'Oulipo' which stands for 'Ouvroir de littérature potentielle'. While writing texts, this group defined and adhered to constraints in order to make the writing more demanding and create new forms of literature (Cosenstein, 1995: n.p).

Suits also examines the author as a player, more specifically he examines authors of detective novels. He argues that: "the writer of detective fiction is not *constructing* a game for his reader, but that he is playing a game with his reader" (1985: 202, italics in the original). Suits argues that by making the mystery hard to solve, by using for example misdirections, the author plays with his reader. However the way he creates this text can, according to Suits, also be seen as a form of play. This since the author has certain rules he must adhere to, that make

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<sup>6</sup> For an example of Mathew's algorithm go to the following website:  
<http://bumppo.hartwick.edu/Oulipo/Mathews.php>

achieving his goal more difficult: he needs, for example, to provide the reader with a story that makes sense. Both in the case of Suits detective story and with the etiquette of Oulipo group, the act of writing is not wholly free but has to adhere to certain rules or constraints. By writing in this manner the act of creation is turned into a form of play.

This form of literary play is also an example of how play in relation to literature can still very much resemble play as it functions within a game. When an author successfully creates a text while abiding to rules he himself formulated, he reaches his goal and he wins. The rules and the goals are however less formal than the rules we would find within a game, since these are designed by the player himself. This playfully engaging in a textual creation is actually similar to the way interaction functions within a game. Consider, for example, what Eric Zimmerman defines as ‘explicit interactivity’, which is the interaction within a game. He states that: “This is ‘interaction’ in the obvious sense of the word: overt participation such as clicking the nonlinear links of a hypertext novel, following the rules of a Surrealist language game” (2004: 158). Here the player is actively involved in the actualization of the game. The reference to a Surrealist language game is also a very useful one since it provides an example of a playful creation of a text that is more formal, since the rules are not personally devised but set<sup>7</sup>.

### **The playful interpretation and deconstruction of a text**

Now that I have examined the way in which an author can use play to construct a text I will look at two ways in which a reader can use play to engage with a text. The text can enable the reader to play with the story by providing puzzles and/or request that the reader interacts with the text by choosing between several endings. Both Suits and Hutchinson argue that the detective story can provide a play activity for both the author *and* the reader. Hutchinson however indicates that this instance of play might not be as voluntary. Hutchinson argues that

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<sup>7</sup>In his book *A Book of Surrealist Games* (1995), Alastair Brotchie provides the reader with several languages games through which he creates a texts.

reader is left with no choice, he is expected to play a long whether he likes it or not: “As a story unfolds, as series of ‘moves’ is worked out between these two figures, and although in practically all such literary games the author himself is aware of the playful procedure in which he is involved, not all readers will appreciate the techniques by which the author is provoking a challenge” (1983: 1). The ‘playful’ reading of a text is mentioned and analyzed by many different literary scholars (e.g. Huizinga, 1983; Suits, 1985; Bruss, 1977; Detweiler, 1976). In order to play along with the literary text, the reader has to look for clues and try to solve the mystery before the author reveals the answer. Hutchinson also argues that this is the simplest form of literary play: “Denying one’s reader evidence and thus maintaining suspense, compelling the reader to take a more active part in such works by forcing him to fill in the gaps and to speculate, these are the simplest form of game” (Hutchinson, 1983: 2). Though one can then question if these simple forms of game are always pleasurable to the reader.

If the reader ‘plays’ by filling in the gaps and/or by speculating about certain parts of the texts, this cannot be compared to the ways in which a game player plays; the decisions of a reader will not have the same kind of consequences that the decisions of a player have within a game. This form of literary play then, does not seem to allow for a similar degree of interactivity in comparison to the ‘explicit interaction’ that an author has when he playfully creates a text. Zimmerman however distinguishes four different modes of interactivity and he calls this kind: ‘cognitive interactivity’ since it involves the “kind of interactions a participant can have with the so-called ‘content’ of a text” (158). So although the reader can actively interpret a text, he or she cannot influence the text.

Bruss also notices the difference between the interaction the player has within a game and the interaction the reader has in a text. Still, she argues that within contemporary fiction the interaction has become more influential. She makes a distinction “between works that formally resemble some game and works that actually ‘play’ as games” (1977: 158). She

argues that while in most traditional literature the reader could not change the outcome of a story, there are texts that are more interactive, since they depend more upon the reader to bring the story to an end. She states that with these particular stories:

The way one poses and resolves such questions helps to constitute the story. Under these conditions, reading involves a choice between incompatible alternatives, each having clear consequences for the development of the work. And the strategy of making choices turn the projected activity of the reader into series of 'moves'. (1977: 158)

As an example Bruss mentions the novel *Hopscotch* (1963) by Julio Cortázar's, which has multiple endings. There the readers choices will decide which ending is the right one and we can this define this interaction as 'explicit interaction'.

As mentioned, the reader also has another way in which he can play with a text. He can deconstruct it. The reader is not only encouraged to play along with a text, he can also decide to play regardless of whether the author had intended him to or not. Readers can use a text and playfully engage with it. This idea can be connected to the current playful tendency that is pervading our culture. In their study *Homo Ludens 2.0: Play, Media, & Identity* (forthcoming), Valerie Frissen, Jos de Mul & Joost Raessens state that: "We are witnessing a global 'ludification of culture'. Since the 1960s, in which the word 'ludic' became popular in Europe and the US to designate playful behaviour and artefacts, playfulness has increasingly become a mainstream characteristic of our culture" (1). Although their research focuses on the relation between (new) media and play (1), I find their mention of 'ludic attitudes' (7), very useful in characterizing the playful engagements with literary texts. Likewise, Salen and Zimmerman distinguish 'being playful' as a specific type of play: "where a spirit of play is injected into some other action" (2004: 303). It seems that in our contemporary culture when encountering objects or activities that are essentially not playful, people can turn it into play



by adapting a playful attitude.

The reader who playfully engages within a text, can play with a text that is not playful in itself or does not stimulate the reader to actively interpret. Zimmerman describes this form interacting with an object 'Meta-interactivity'. He states that: "This is interaction outside the experience of a single text. The clearest examples come from fan culture, in which readers appropriate, deconstruct, and reconstruct linear media, participating in and propagating massive communal narrative worlds" (158). Though there are different ways of this form of interaction, it is often connected with Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction (e.g. Edwards, 1998; Wilson, 1985). Edwards has, for example, argued that when it comes to playfully engaging with the text this concept has been very important: "deconstruction makes the most significant contribution to play theory in its application to literature" (1998: 55).

Derrida's concept of deconstruction is part of his idea of 'free play' which he addresses in his article: "Structure, Sign and Play" (1967). There he argues that the fixed center that has been the foundation of our culture, has become corrupted and therewith the stable signs and meanings are replaced by a free play of signs and meanings. He states that the center of meaning is: "not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" (Derrida, 1967: 280). Meaning has become flux. Deconstruction is then a manner of reading in which the center is made unstable and one preferred reading is turned into multiple readings: "a sort of strategic device, opening onto its own abyss, and unclosed, unenclosable, not wholly formalizable ensemble of rules for reading, interpretation and writing" (Derrida, 1983: 40). By being aware of, and imposing a free play of meaning, the reader can playfully engage with a text by deconstructing it.

This playful breaking open of the text is noted by both Edwards and Wilson. Edwards states that by deconstructing, the reader turns the reading experience into a game: "the freeplay of signifiers, the question reader participates in a game removed from ontological

authorities, one in which the magical threads, far from pointing to the exit, become the complex tracery of the labyrinth itself. For the deconstructionist there (...) can be no end to the story-telling” (55). In a similar fashion Wilson states that the: “The attractiveness of the concept lies in its protean applicability (*ex vi termini*, all texts must manifest freeplay and respond to a Deconstructive analysis), in the awareness of mastery, of power over the text” (1985: 192, italics in the original). Since no reading is preferred readers are allowed to play with a text and look for passages that contradict the general interpretation of a text and thus deconstruct the center. Reading then becomes a form of play in which the reader explores all the possible interpretations he can locate within the text.

### **Play as the expression of freedom**

We have seen that both the author and reader can use play in different ways to create and engage with a text. Can we, nevertheless, state that these different manifestations of play have something in common? One can argue that in all these instances of play there is a player (a reader or an author) that uses and interact with the freedom provided by a specific system (the rules an author devised, or the text the reader deconstructs or interprets). This idea considerably resemblance a definition of play provided by Salen and Zimmerman. In their book *Rules of Play* (2004), describe play as: “free movement within a more rigid structure” (2004: 304). Salen and Zimmerman note that their definition might seem very abstract and non-conclusive: “this definition might seem a little spare and abstract for such a rich and complex topic such as play. But it is an extremely useful way to think about the design of play” (304). However, because of the abstract character of this definition of play can actually account for the different ways of play I have described above and is therefore very effective. An all encompassing theory that incorporates all the different facets of play is not desirable, since play is always dependent upon the system in which it operates. To more clearly define play, one runs the risk of linking it to a particular system in which it operates.

Salen and Zimmerman clarify their definition in more detail by explaining that: “Play emerges from the relationships guiding the functioning of the system, occurring in the interstitial spaces between and among its components. Play is an *expression* of the system, one that takes advantage of the space of possibility created from the system’s structure” (2004: 304 emphasize mine). Describing play as the ‘expression of a system’ resembles a theory designed by a literary scholar called Jacques Ehrmann. Ehrmann actually defines play as an articulation: “Play is articulation, opening and closing of and through language. It is only at the intermediate level that it can and must be apprehended” (1968: 56-57). Similar to Salen and Zimmerman, play is seen by Ehrmann as a communicative movement that depends on a system that enables that specific form of communication and that provides its meaning.

Notice that in all these instances of play, there is a playful interaction with the freedom that is already offered in a system. This interaction will then lead to a limitation of that freedom, by articulation a specific result. Though the author can create many texts while adhering to rules, he only create one texts at a time.

Motte makes an important comparison between Derrida’s notion of free play and Ehrmann’s concept of play as articulation. He signals that by framing play as an articulation the freedom is disciplined through play: “There is ‘looseness’ in Ehrmann’s system, too, but that looseness is always channeled through the lines of articulation” (1995: 24). Derrida’s deconstruction, then, functions as Ehrmann’s articulation. When a reader reads or deconstructs a text, the text itself offers him certain options and when an author creates a text he has several choices how to do this while abiding to certain restrictions.

The definitions by Salen and Zimmerman and by Ehrmann imply that play is established through the interaction a player has with a system. However, when a text is a form of play there is no player that confines the freedom through play. So how can we find a

similar interaction when the entity that plays is the literary text itself? Should we then perhaps decide to use a notion that allows for a bit more looseness?

## **2.3 The literary text as a form of play**

### **The playful motion within a text**

Now that we have defined how authors and readers play, we need to define how a text plays; the way in which the text itself is a form of play. Although I state that the text can be playful, one has to keep in mind that the author created this aspect of the text. Suist recognizes this when he states: “that the work need not figure in my classification as an independent variable (that is, it need not command a column of its own), because everything that pertains to it is entailed by other variables” (1985: 217). Being a literary scholar I am (only slightly) biased towards textual analyses and therefore I do use the text as an independent variable within this study. Since these texts do not require their readers interaction to establish this textual form of play, it is perhaps also the most unclear form of literary play.

So what does it entail when I state that a literary text is in itself is a form of play?

When talking about the text as an entity of play, scholars have stressed what they called the ‘self-conscious’ moment in a text where the representation is replaced by a reflection on that representation. Detweiler for example defines what he calls ‘playful literature’ as follows:

an artistic self-consciousness whereby the writer, already intensely aware of the illusory nature and potential of the novel and story, manipulates the components of narrative to show the reader their artificiality. He constantly reminds himself and his readers of the pretense-nature of the story, and thereby creates a secondary game in the already given context of playfulness characteristic of all fiction. (1976: 50-1)

Through this self-conscious quality of the text, then, the artificiality of the text and its representation is stressed.

A similar quality is also noted by Hutchinson, who at lengths discusses the ways in which narrative devices foster a heightened awareness of the act of representation. He, for example, argues that when a narrator is unreliable, or self-conscious about his own narration the illusion of representation is disrupted, but that this can also be caused by a text that contains multiple narrative view points (1983: 31-35). Linda Hutcheon goes beyond the recognition of the artificiality of representations and argues that within self-conscious metafiction the focus shifts from a narration that emphasizes: “the product it presents to the process it is” (1984: 39). These texts do not present the reader with a representation, but consistently break with what they want to represent. Instead of stable representation we are presented with a dynamic one; with an act of representing. A text is created that exists in a state of flux.

A playful text does however not necessarily have to be ‘self-conscious’, to achieve this sense of movement. Where a ‘self-conscious’ text stresses the artificiality of representation and create dynamics, playful literature does this by presenting certain structures or systems, which it then deflates by presenting other structures or systems and letting them either contradict or coexist. Edwards acknowledges the inherent dynamic of meaning in playful texts when he states that: “the playfulness in culture, and in literature, takes many forms and involves styles of communication over a vast range of possibilities. Displacing the ideas of absolute truth fixed authorities emphasizes the opportunities for exchange and for change that are innate to language” (Edwards, 1998: xvi-xvii). There is freedom in language and interpretation that defy a stable representation. Although Edwards does not refer to Derrida’s notion of free play directly, his mention of play as the ‘displacing of absolute truth’, recalls Derrida’s idea of breaking with a stable center.

Rodríguez, does explicitly refer to Derrida’s theory when she states that the: “idea of play that Derrida speaks of is the field of total *freeplay*, the structure no longer exists, and the

lack of center is what causes freedom; for example, the multiplicity of the meanings in a structured sentence or novel, and not a fixed one that beckons the approval of the reader” (2009: 85, italics in the original). Though the freedom in these texts do not provide readers the opportunity to more actively engage with the text, it does create a sense of freedom by keeping the text in a constant state of flux.

This freedom is however not comparable to the freedom that an author has, when he creates a text, or with the freedom a reader has when he interprets a text. This freedom is created through the text that breaks with its own center or that presents several different centers and let them interact with each other. There is no explicit interaction, but by presenting different systems the stability of one core system is delineated and the different systems within a text will start to ‘interact’ with each other. This then creates a sense of freedom. Motte uses the concept ‘motion’ to describe qualities of both freedom and play: “Each of these conceptions of play evokes the notion of freedom insofar as each insist upon the idea of latitude, of unconstrained motion. For this idea would seem to be common to play and freedom” (1995: 23). This idea of motion is useful because it invokes a ‘notion of freedom’, which means that a text does not have to provide actual freedom, just a sense of it.

The freedom that Rodríguez is talking about, then, is the motion within a text. When free play is present in the text, there is a sense of freedom within the texts that exists without the actual interaction of a player, but that is created through the interaction between different structures and systems within a text. These structures and systems are often not made out of rules, but exist of (literary) conventions that first are implied and/or established in order to break with them. For example, we normally expect that a narrator knows what he is talking about when he is telling a story. If the narrator, however, expresses his uncertainty about the story he has just told us, he breaks with the convention that the narrator is all-knowing. This break entails a certain freedom because it allows for a new convention, which in its turn can

be shattered. I therefore propose that when a text deviates from its own construction one could call this a form of play. The problem that arises, however, is how can this be defined of play?

### **Play as a creation of freedom**

A play theory from a game scholar that approaches this idea of play is expressed by Sutton-Smith. In his book *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997), he gives a biological and a psychological definition of play and argues that play is: “a virtual simulation characterized by staged contingencies of variations, with opportunities for control engendered by either mastery or further chaos” (231). Although he himself does not really explain this definition, Frasca gives a very useful and clarifying interpretation. He argues that by referring to play as ‘staged contingencies’, Sutton-Smith: “integrates the idea of play as virtual (a set of possibilities) and concrete (the actualization of those contingencies)” (Frasca, 2007: 48). Here again we see that play is identified as a movement that uses and confines the freedom that is provided by a system.

Conversely in contrast to the other definitions presented here, Sutton-Smith adds another aspect to the expressive movement of play. Play is not only the ‘mastery’ of the freedom within the system, but play can also accounts for variations that will lead to ‘further chaos’. From this view one can advocate that instead of using the freedom within a system, the play movement creates the freedom. Play can generate chaos within an apparently rigid structure. A certain sense of ‘freedom’ can be created within a system, by deviating from it. Within non-interactive text one can speak of a play structure when one finds a moment where the text goes against the system created by that text, or when the system points to a certain freedom. This divergence is accompanied by a hint of freedom, a sense of new possibilities by escaping a given structure. This aspect of play then refers to the free play characterized by Derrida, since he defines play as a movement that deviates from a stable center, corrupts it

and thus creates freedom. Play, then, is not only the *expression* of the freedom within a given system but also the *creation* of freedom within a given system. Notice however that the one form of play necessarily invokes the other. When free play is created within a text, the reader can for example, choose from the many different structures the text provides. He can play with the freedom.

However, most of these ludic texts do not require the reader to undertake ‘explicit interaction’. The reader is, then, not so much participating as observing the play. Edwards and Suits discuss the idea that the reader, when encountering these texts, is the viewer of a playful act and that from his role as a viewer the reader derives joy. In his article: “Literary Gamesters and Critical Kibitzers” (1995), Leon Surette argues that art can be a game, but then a game that is watched:

the viewing, reading, and hearing of works of art as ‘following the moves’ of the artist does not endow the art fan with insight, comprehension, or competence. What it does do is remove the reader from the field of play and put her in the stands. The model draws attention to art as a game in which readers are neither players, nor passive witnesses, but ‘followers’ and kibitzers. (1995: 319)

This notion of the reader watching the play is a very useful one when it comes to literary texts that do not necessarily invite the reader to play with their system, but are themselves playing with their own system.

Moreover Suits states that even within detective stories: “it is by no means necessary for the reader to respond to the novel as a puzzle to be solved” (1985: 208). Readers can appreciate the ludic aspects of a text without actually going along with it. Suits highlights this by arguing that: “the reader can still admire the author’s move; (...) even the nonplaying reader can treat the story as a game: a game he is viewing rather than as one he is playing” (1985: 210). These ludic texts then possess a certain aesthetic quality for the reader.



### **3. Analyzing play**

As I have showed in the previous paragraph there are many different ways in which scholars have argued that a literary text can play. It is therefore not surprising that when it comes to analyzing these playful moments researchers have used many different theories. Most literary scholars have used theories by Huizinga and Caillois or other twentieth century game scholars to examine play within literary texts. A notable exception can be found in the article by Elizabeth W. Bruss where she uses a mathematical game theory (1977: 155). In the first part of this chapter I will provide an overview of some of the different theories literary scholars have used and point to the problems that arise from using specific theories, and from giving sometimes contradictory interpretations of theories.

In the second part of this chapter I propose to study play within literature according to five play characteristics. As I have mentioned in the two previous chapters there are three different entities that play and they can use two different categories of play. Play as an *expression* of freedom or play as a *creation* of freedom. However, within each category there can still be differences between the forms of play according to the degree of interactivity or the formal characters of rules. Through a comparison of play theories devised by Huizinga, Caillois and Frasca I formulate five main characteristics that are implicated in an instance of play. Play as engaging; play as interaction; play has a certain outcome; play has constraints and play requires a playful attitude. I then propose that when examining literary play, scholars should take these characteristics into account. Since they will allow scholars to compare different instances of play within a text and within different texts.

#### **3.1 How literary scholars have analyzed play**

One of the more unique ways of analyzing play has been proposed by Bruss. Instead of a game theory derived from the humanities, she opted for a ‘mathematical game theory’, which allowed her to look at the tactics a reader has at his or her disposal when reading a literary text

(1977: 155). She thus frames the reading process as a challenge between the author and the reader, and where the reader can use strategic moves in order to combat the possible deceptions devised by the author:

In a gaming situation, communication must be viewed as a tactic, an attempt to constrain another player's expectations. One must then respond to it tactically, with guarded skepticism, treating narrative devices or the total range of references in a work as evidence of an opponent/collaborator's resources. One reads for global patterns of play, for signs of 'bluffing' and accidental 'leaks' of information. One becomes engrossed in a literary game without 'believing' in it. Its excitement does not depend on empathy or illusion but on the challenge of strategic dilemmas: when to trust, what to trust, whether to trust at all, and how to proceed with reading in the light of such risk and uncertainty. (1977: 162)

Bruss argues that with literary games there is always a certain relationship between the author and the reader. This relationship can be devised as a continuum, where on one end we encounter a 'cooperative situation' in which an author assists the reader, while on the other end we find an author who gives his reader false clues which results in a 'competitive situation'. However, most literary texts, according to Bruss, exist somewhere in the middle and are called 'mixed motive' situations (1977: 158-160).

In addition Bruss makes a distinction between whether a reader can reach a certain result within the text or whether the goal is never achieved: "Games range from 'no win' situations which produce only stalemates to multiple equilibria encounter of vertiginous complexity" (161). Here Bruss refers to Cortazar's novel *Hopscotch* (1963) where the reader is presented with multiple correct endings, while a reader of Becket's *Endgame* (1957) is denied any kind of closure.

Though I find Bruss' consideration of the readers attitude towards the text very

interesting, she forgets that the options a reader has largely depend on the text. A theory that can only be used to label the many different strategic roles a reader can adopt, will not allow for an adequate examination of how the literary text can provoke its reader to adopt a certain reading strategy. Moreover Bruss' theory only allows us to look at one form of literary play. Hutchinson also mentions this use of strategic game theory and argues that Bruss makes: “one of the most important contributions to this field by choosing to disregard the classics of game theory” (1983: 11). He applauds her for paying attention to the reader and his or her reaction towards a ludic text, but also signals that this theory limits itself to an examination of readers response.

As mentioned, Bruss article is an exception, since other literary scholars have primarily used game scholars or philosophers from the humanities to study literary play. Wilson for example uses Suits theory; Rodriquez uses, among others, theories from Huizinga and Derrida; Bernaerts predominantly uses Hutcheon's thoughts on metafiction, but also mentions Salen and Zimmerman and Huizinga; Motte uses Ehrmann's theory of articulation and Burke uses Caillois. Observe that the few scholars mentioned here already use many different theories and often also combine several different theories when looking at literary play. This makes it difficult to conceive of a general theory with which to study play and to compare different studies of play.

When scholars look at instances of play within literary text Huizinga's study is often mentioned (e.g. Motte, 1995; Burke, 1994; Hutchinson, 1983; Rodríguez, 2009; Bernaerts, 2010). However when it comes to analyzing play, Huizinga is not much used. Rodríguez uses Huizinga only in combination with two other theories. While Motte finds Ehrmann's definition of play useful: “The most valuable dimension of Ehrmann's ludic vision, I think, is its ability to suggest the *articulative* relation of player to player, player to game, and game to world,” (1995: 25, italics in the original). In the rest of his book however, he supplements

Ehrmann's theory with many others, including Huizinga's notion that all play is exorbitant (1995: 38), and that play creates order (37-38).

Most literary scholars however, have found it irksome that Huizinga limits himself to a discussion of literary play as either a contest or representation. Detweiler for example notes that: "For Huizinga, play is always a contest for something or a representation of something, an agon or mimesis," (1976: 57). In his book *Man, Play, Games*, Caillois actually critiques Huizinga for the same reason: "His work is not a study of games, but an inquiry into the creative quality of the play principle in the domain of culture, and more precisely, of the spirit that rules certain kinds of games – those which are competitive" (Caillois, 2001: 4). Therefore Caillois provides us with a more detailed categorization of four different kind of games. Some literary scholars have for that reason turned to Caillois as he provides a more encompassing categorization.

Caillois maintains *agôn* as a category of games but adds three more which he calls *alea*, *mimicry* and *illinx* (Caillois, 2001: 12). Caillois uses the term *alea* to refer to games of change, a category that he argues Huizinga neglected because he thought that a player could not gain anything from play: "play as [an] action denuded of all material interest, simply excludes bets and games of change" (2001: 5). Caillois, however, argues in favor of a material interest when it comes to games of chance? From the remaining two categories, *Mimicry* refers to games of simulation and *illinx* to games that provide a feeling of vertigo. Many scholars find this categorization by Caillois very useful, Salen and Zimmerman even applauds him for the fact that this categorization takes the players experiences into account (2004: 309).

Hutchinson is one of the literary scholars that finds Caillois distinction very useful and uses it:

The suggestion of a contest between author and reader is evident in any work which contains a mystery which is to be solved. The element of chance occurs in that (albeit

small) area of 'fiction' in which the succession of events may be altered by reading chapters in different order, or in which the pages themselves are loose and can be rearranged at will (seen in works by Marc Saporta or B. S. Johnson); it also features in work by surrealist and their successors, whose composition are often determined by pure chance. 'Simulation' is evident in any work which a narrator assumes a persona which we are encouraged to recognize as false. And there is a sense of 'vertigo' in works where the reader is subjected to constant attempts to surprise, puzzle or confound him. (1983: 6)

Hutchinson uses these categories on different levels of a text. Where *âgon* seems to define reading strategies, *alea* can be related to both the reading as well as the creation process, simulation seems to be solely manifested within the narrative itself and vertigo seems to describe emotional responses to all of the above. Although it seems very unusual to use four categories that describe different levels of a text, other literary scholars have used Caillios theory in a very similar way.

Detweiler for example replaces his earlier discussed categorization of games with Caillios's one:

In summary, a self-consciousness connected to one's playing a game with another produces the fictive *agon*, a self-consciousness related to playing a game with an established symbol system produces the fictive *mimesis*, and a self-consciousness joined to playing a game with one's own imagination produces the fictive *alea*; these three correspond to our earlier categories of fiction as game with the reader, fiction containing games, and playful fiction. (1976: 61)

Though *âgon* is used in a similar manner, the way Detweiler defines *alea* and *mimicry* are not compatible with Hutchinson's translations of the term. In addition, Detweiler also uses the terms to describe different aspects of a text. Where *âgon* and *alea* describe the playfulness of

a reading process, *mimesis* is again used to describe a narrative technique. Moreover Detweiler does not use *ilinx* and never explains why he does not use it.

Burke shares this particular concern and she insists on adding *ilinx* as a category in order to create a lucid criticism: “If we supplement Detweiler’s research by including *ilinx* as the reader’s vertiginous response to the text, then an appropriate implementation of the strategies he suggests might, as times, facilitate illuminating interaction with postmodern text” (1994: 65, italics in the original). Although Burke uses *ilinx* in the same way that Hutchinson does, one should wonder how useful it is to use a categorization that describes three different ways of play within a text, but that only includes one response to play within a text.

Although both Detweiler and Hutchinson use Caillois’ system they express their reservations about its limitations. Detweiler argues that within-text play always manifests itself as a combination of the different categories: “Yet all fiction consists of some combination of agon, mimesis, and alea, so we must inquire further into the specific nature of the kind of novel and story that employs these elements to produce literary games and play” (1976: 59). He does not, however, explain how we might attempt such a ‘further inquiry into the specific nature’ of the novel. Even Burke, who emphasizes the use of Detweiler’s model, does not really use his categorization. Instead she uses multiple different theories and does not critically look at the different ways a text actually plays but just identifies some playful aspects of a text.

Hutchinson is even more explicit when it comes to analyzing literary play while using a characterization: “All it can ‘prove’ is that certain forms of literature fit categories which were originally devised for other forms of activity, and it is not an ideal way of classifying processes which are more diverse and usually far more complex than those we find on the playing field or even on the chessboard” (1983: 4). He does however not provide another

more applicable categorization, but instead he provides his readers with a list of different forms of play within novels.

How can we, then, analyze the different forms of play within literary texts? Moreover, how can we analyze and compare different instances of play within literary text? As I have briefly mention in the previous two chapters, play does not always have to manifest in a similar fashion. Some instances of play can depend on a higher degree of interaction or on more formal rules. It seems only right that a theory of play enables us to examine these individual characteristics of play elements within a text.

One of the earliest texts on literature and play might provide us with a hint about which theory to use. Robert G. Cook (1963) uses Huizinga's classification of seven main play characteristic in order to look at the games that are mentioned in the middle English story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. It is unfortunately that Cook only looks at the games within a story and not actually examines a form of literary play, but his idea to use Huizinga's typology might also be useful to analyze the different forms of play in more detail. Huizinga, however was not the only scholar who distinguishes between different play characteristics. Caillois and Frasca also define several characteristics of play. I will therefore first provide an overview of their typology, compare them and use them to create my own typology with which to analyze play.

### **3.2 Analyzing play according to five characteristics**

Let us first consider the different play characteristics that Huizinga distinguishes. Huizinga states that play is:

a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds

within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (1970: 13)

From this definition we can distill seven main characteristics of play. Play is free, as it takes place ‘outside ordinary life’. Play is different from ‘ordinary life’, as it is ‘non-serious’. Play is fun, as it is ‘absorbing’. Play is disinterested, as ‘no profit can be gained by it’. Play is restricted, since it takes place within boundaries. Play is constrained, as it takes place ‘according to fixed rules’. Play creates communities, as it stimulates ‘social groupings’.

Most of these characteristics are pretty straightforward, though the attribute of creating communities is probably somewhat peculiar. In addition Huizinga stresses several times in his book that play creates order. As I have already argued and as stated by Sutton-Smith, play can also promote further chaos and I therefore do not use it as a specific feature of play. Now that we have discussed Huizinga’s typology we can move to the second scholar, namely Caillois.

Though Caillois is predominantly mentioned for his distinction between *âgon*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx* he also provides his readers with a list of six characteristics of play. He argues that play is:

*Free*: in which playing is not obligatory; if it were, it would at once lose its attractive and joyous quality as diversion;

*Separate*: circumscribed within limits of space and time, defined and fixed in advance;

*Uncertain*: the course of which cannot be determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and some latitude for innovations being left to the player’s initiative;

*Unproductive*: creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game;



*Governed by rules*: under conventions that suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new legislation. Which alone counts;

*Make-believe*: accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality, as against real life. (Caillois, 2001: 9-10, italics in the original)

This definition greatly resembles Huizinga's list. This is also recognized by Motte who states that Caillois' definition: "resembles Huizinga's point by point" (1995: 6). This is however not completely true. The peculiar category of creating communities has disappeared, as has the absorbing quality of play. Moreover Caillois adds that the outcome of play is uncertain. The categories non-serious and make believe are connected since they both denote the idea that what happens in play is not real. Caillois use of make-believe however is somewhat more positive as it allows the act of play to be serious. Both Huizinga and Caillois characterize play as free, as having rules, they both state that it does not produce goods and it stands out from ordinary life.

The third and last scholar, Frasca, mentions both Huizinga's and Caillois, but creates his own definition since he finds both of the previous definitions unsatisfying. He then states that: "Play is to somebody an engaging activity in which the player believes to have active participation and interprets it as constraining her immediate future to a set of probable scenarios, all of which she is willing to tolerate" (Frasca, 2007: 50). One can say that for Frasca play centers around the following characteristics: play is subjective, as it 'is to somebody'. Play is engaging. Play is constrained, as the 'immediate future' and the 'set of probable scenarios' is limited. Play *can* be interactive, as 'the player believes to have active participation'. Play *can* have consequences, as it can result in a 'set of probable scenarios' (2007: 50-58).

So when taking these definitions into consideration it becomes clear that all three scholars frame play as a certain activity. One has to note however that when the author or the

reader play, play is the activity that actualizes certain possibility within a system. When play is constituted within the text, it is not the players interaction within the system, but a certain metaphorical interaction within the text that provides freedom. Thus there are two different ways in which we can frame a play activity. It is an activity that uses the freedom within a system to express something and it is the metaphorical activity within a text that creates freedom. Now that we distinguished between two ways in which play can be an activity I will define five characteristics each activity can possess.

By taken all three these definitions into consideration I formulate five characteristics of play. I devise that play is engaging, which is taken directly from Frasca's definition of play but also to Huizinga's notion of play as fun.

Play as interactive, is however devised from several different characteristics. It encompasses Frasca's notion that players can have active participation but also Caillois idea that play is uncertain. The outcome of play does not necessarily depend on the players input, and with Zimmerman's mode of interactivity I can examine if the player can influence the system or not.

The next characteristic that I distinguish is then the actual outcome of play. This trait incorporates Frasca's notion that play has certain consequences and Huizinga's and Caillois' conflicting ideas that play is unproductive. By using Frasca's term, unproductivity can be a consequence of play, but it does not have to be. Play as constrained refers, then, to two different traits. It refers to the idea that play is limited in time and space, as expressed by all three authors, but also to the idea that play has rules which is expressed by Huizinga and Caillois.

The last characteristic is that play demands a playful attitude. This trait again contains several other characteristics. It refers to Frasca's idea of play as subjective but also to Huizinga's idea that play is free and 'non-serious' and also Caillois mention of play as a

voluntary activity and as a form of make-believe.

There only remains one trait unaddressed, namely the idea that play fosters communities. This characteristic is not mentioned by either Frasca or Caillois and although it is possible that through play communities are created, I do not see it as an direct aspect of play, but an indirect consequence. Therefore I will not use it. I thus propose that, when looking at playful literature, scholars might use the following characteristics to define the play characteristics more clearly and thus provide an in depth analysis of the actual manifestation of play. Below I will explain every characteristic in some more detail.

### **Play as engaging**

As said, play as engaging is directly taken from Frasca's characterization of play. Huizinga coins a similar idea when he states that play is fun. I however prefer Frasca's term because as he rightly argues 'engaging' is more neutral term and it can therefore account for multiple emotions, not just 'fun': "I prefer the term 'engaging' rather than the more popular 'fun' because the latter provides positive connotations that play does not necessarily needs to have" (2007: 51). In this manner, it is possible to label play as generating a feeling of 'vertigo' which, according to Caillois was the feeling that resulted from a *linux* game.

Moreover I can also account for negative feelings that can be derived from literary play. If a mystery is, for example, too hard to solve, the reader will get frustrated with playing and might even stop. So by defining play as engaging, I can take into account the emotions that people have when they play, but also why they keep on or stop 'playing'. The difference between engaging as a characteristic of play as an expression of freedom, or as the creation of freedom, can be found in the involvement a player has. For example, when readers are trying to solve a story, they put more effort into the reading process, than a reader who just 'watches' a form of play. The readers or authors that actually play, are more personally

responsible for the engaging character of play, while those who do not interact with the text are less involved.

### **Play is interactive**

The second characteristic of play is that it provides a degree of interactivity. This again refers directly to a trait mentioned by Frasca, namely that players believe they can influence the system. It is also connected to Caillois notion of uncertainty. Caillois argues that the outcome of a game cannot be predicated beforehand because it depends on different factors, among others, the degree of the players input. Frasca would include that with games of chance the outcome is uncertain because the players cannot influence the outcome seeing as it depends on probability (2007: 52). Frasca deliberately chose to use the word 'believe' when referencing influence, as he argues that in some forms of play there is only the illusion of actual influence.

Moreover even though players do have a high form of interacting with, and influencing of a game system, one should consider that even within a game the action is still limited and most results are pre-designed. When a player begins to play, the possible activities that can be the result of this action are predictable or, to keep with Frasca's terms, they constrain the players 'immediate future to a set of probable scenarios'.

I have already mentioned three different modes of interactivity mentioned by Zimmerman: 'cognitive interactivity', which refers to interpretations readers make; 'explicit-interactivity', which refers to actually interacting with a system and 'meta-interactivity' which refers to a broader cultural treatment of texts. Zimmerman however, actually mentions a fourth mode which he calls 'functional interactivity' and includes the: "Functional, structural interactions with the material textual apparatus" (158). These four modes are not mutually exclusive but function as: "overlapping flavors of participation that occur in to varying degrees in all media experience" (2004: 158). Zimmerman's mention of 'varying degree' is

very important because, it acknowledges that although there might be ‘explicit interaction’ this does not have to result in actual influence. The clicking on a non-linear link that Zimmerman mentions as ‘explicit interaction’, nevertheless follows a predesigned path.

The different modes and degrees of interactivity are important to take into consideration since this will allow us to describe activities as interactive although the actual influence a player has, or believes he has, is low. Moreover one can argue that within a text that is in itself playful, the text can metaphorically interact with its own content and materiality, by introducing for example a degree of self-reflexivity. This symbolic interaction can generate a sense of freedom; it can even create a sense of motion.

### **Play has constraints**

Both Huizinga and Caillois mentioned the constrained character of play, when they discuss that play has certain rules. All three the scholars argue that play is also restricted to a certain place and time. The idea that play always unfolds within restricted space and time can also be translated as a constraint. In addition, play always has to unfold within a given system, which can be constituted through certain rules. I have therefore put these two characteristics of play under the same heading. Rules are very important to play, seeing as they in a way construct the system in which play is created and/or from which it deviates.

I already briefly stated that rules can function in a formal or a less formal way. Frasca argues that rules can function as prescriptive when they tell us what must be done or they function as descriptive which implicates that they tell the player what may be done (2007: 46). When an author creates a text through play, he will make his own rules to which he has to adhere and/or he will follow the rules of a certain genre. This form of play will predominantly use prescriptive rules. The same applies to a reader who reads or deconstructs a text; they have to follow certain rules in order for the play to succeed. Skipping to the end of a detective novel, for example, is not playing according to the rules. When a text is a form of play, the

rules constitute the system that the texts creates and in which the text also creates freedom.

When a text plays with its own system, it will do so by deviating from certain limits that are defined by conventions, or descriptive rules.

### **Play has a certain outcome**

The fourth characteristic of play is that it can have a certain outcome, it can have a result.

Both Caillois and Huizinga describe play as an act that is unproductive, after one is done playing everything has stayed the same. This because play unfolds in a restricted place. Most modern scholars, however, have objected to this reasoning and argued that playing can be productive and/or have some consequences for real life. Juul, for example, argues that gambling is a huge industry where the consequences can be very high (2005: 35). Similarly Frasca argues that: “play activities such as drawing or building sandcastles do also create goods. Similarly, dramatic and musical performances do have economical value, since people pay to attend to plays and concerts, so they do create wealth” (2007: 44). This last point is very important when we look at the relationship between play and the author and reader that interact with the text.

One should however not confuse the outcome of a play instance with the emotions that can be derived from that outcome. This is discussed when one is looking at play as engaging. The outcome of a play moment can then be the creation of motion with the text, but can also manifest itself in more material manner. Think for example of the actual text that is created by the author or by the reader that deconstructs a text. Or it will result in a specific interpretation of the text when the reader chooses one ending over another that is presented within the text.

### **Play requires a playful attitude**

Frasca makes an important point when he states that play is subjective. By including that ‘play is to somebody’ he signals that play always involves a certain state of mind. He argues that: “Every activity could potentially be play. However, this does not mean that every

activity is play. Play, then, is an activity accompanied by a particular state of mind” (2007: 51). With recognizing this playful state of mind that is present in all play, he replaces the idea that play is something different from ordinary life, or even artificial. This was one of the main objections Frasca had concerning Caillois’ and Huizinga’s inclination that play is positioned outside our ordinary life (2007: 57).

This however, does not mean that Huizinga and Caillois are entirely wrong in assuming that there is a difference between play and ordinary life. It should be phrased differently. Play has to be part of normal life, because it imitates and deviates from it. “play exists both *because of* and in *opposition to* the structures that give it life” (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004: 306, italics in the original). This is also noted by Ehrmann who says that: “At the methodological level, play and reality, being inseparable, can only be apprehended globally and in the same movement” (Ehrmann, 1968: 56). Without a real world there would be no play. Yet play and reality are not completely the same thing either.

By calling play a voluntary activity, Huizinga and Caillois both note that people are free to play and that when they play this activity is removed from life and does not necessarily have consequences for ‘real’ life; it is ‘non-serious’ and make-believe. These characteristics however are also included in the idea that play requires a specific attitude. By accepting this attitude, one recognizes that one plays and that what he or she does, will not necessarily have the same result as when one does not play. Moreover this attitude is voluntarily accepted or used by the player. Every instance of play then demands a playful attitude in order to render the play instance a degree of legitimacy.

Here again the distinction between the two forms of play and how this translates to a playful attitude is also concerned with involvement. If a text is a form of play, the playful attitude will result in a certain outcome. The playful attitude of the author who creates a text will reflect in the eventual text that is created. Either in the interpretation or the actual

creation of a text. The playful attitude of a reader, reading a text that includes gaps, riddles and/or misdirections, will decide if the reader will accept the challenges that the author has paced in front of him. Or to refer back to Bruss' article, the attitude will decide which tactic the reader will employ in order to master the text, or if he will not play along.



#### **4. Play as an aesthetic motion**

Before I will commence with an examination of the two literary texts that I have chosen as case studies, it is only right to pause for a moment on the question how this examination of play within literature is different from for example a narrative analysis or looking at these text from a postmodern perspective. As I will show below, a text that can be called playful has often been connected with existing literary traditions like Russian Formalism and Postmodernism. Recall that I excluded a 'representation of games' from the study of play within literature? This because the essence of play is that it does not represents, but actually creates something.

In the following I will argue that play should not be confined by these traditions or by narratology, since they do not take into account the aesthetic motion that is play. In ludic texts, it is not the representation or the break with representation that is important, but the experience of motion that is derived from it. This aesthetic motion can be experienced within the texts, or through the readers participation with texts. When one frames literary play as part of an already existing tradition, one runs the risk of framing the motion derived from it, as a motion of something instead of looking at this aesthetic motion in its own right.

Let us first start by looking at the connection that is established between play, postmodernism and Russian formalism. It is not a coincidence that the books written by Edwards and Burke explicitly state that they examine the play element within postmodern literature. Postmodernism has been a literary tradition with which playful literature has been generally associated with. Edwards, for example, argues that: "postmodernist fiction emphasizes particularly the operations of play in language, aesthetics and cultural constructions" (1998: 86). Edwards moreover describes play within postmodernism as "working against unity" (86).

Likewise, when we examine Hans Bertens definition of postmodern literature we

encounter terms that I have also associated with playful literature. According to Bertens postmodern literature: “unsettles and deconstructs traditional notions about language, about identity, about writing itself, and other major issues” (2008: 109-110). In addition, Bertens also refers to a ‘self-reflexive’ character inherent in postmodern texts (110). Since postmodernism is influenced by, for example, Derrida’s deconstruction theory (Bertens, 2008: 110), the connection between playful literature and postmodern literature is not entirely surprising.

However, play is not by any means limited to deconstruction, but originates in a variety of forms. Burke also mentions the connection between play and postmodernism, but sees postmodernism as something that is interrelated with ludic criticism and is thus not completely the same thing (1994: 39). Though she never clearly states what this ludic criticism entails and how it deviates from the multiple related concepts she mentions, she states that: “Ludic criticism will not forget that the play attitude is predicated upon looseness openness, and the pleasures of the text” (65). This ‘looseness’ is characteristic for the ludic text and is similar to what Motte calls ‘the motion’ within playful fiction.

However by linking playful literature to postmodernism this ‘looseness’ becomes part of a deviance from traditions. Postmodernism is often associated as a culture that retaliates against traditions and/or meanings (Bertens, 2008: 109-110). Though this retaliation can be established through play, play itself does not always have to be this disruptive. As Salen and Zimmerman note, there is a distinction between play and transformative play:

“Transformative play is a special case of play that occurs when the free movement of play alters the more rigid structure in which it takes place” (2004: 305). Play does not have to be disruptive and can solely be used for its aesthetic effect of motion. Modern literature has mostly been a textual representation of something; it is predominantly governed by a ‘mimesis’ function. With the influences of play, the textual representation has been moved to

the background and the actual playfulness of the text is centered. The freedom, or to stay with Motte's term, the motion within a text is exploited.

Literary scholars have also associated play in literature with the aesthetics of Russian Formalism. Both Hutchinson and Detweiler associated the disruptive nature of playful literature with the Russian formalism. Hutchinson argues that in some texts the author uses certain 'defamiliarizing' techniques which results in an instance of play within the text. He states that:

Often these devices will simply be a means of forcing a new perception of things so that we do not experience them in the way to which we have become accustomed, and in their attempt to stimulate us authors may regularly reveal a playfulness which is in the service of a new, or renewed, experience of things. (1983: 37)

Russian Formalism uses the quality of literary language to make the world appear in a different light (Bertens, 2008: 27). Play does not limit itself to an use of literary language, that makes familiar things appear to us as new. What literary play does is emphasize the freedom within all language and uses it not to create a new way of meaning or representation, but to create multiple meanings that simultaneously exist. A text that appears to be in a state of motion.

Not all literary scholars analyze literature with this new manner of presenting a story in mind and will either frame it as a badly written story or as anti-literature. For instance, in her examination of several books by Iris Murdoch and Anthony Burgess, Pearl K. Bell accuses both writers to be more interested in playing language games and/or structuring the story according to moves of a game, than in constructing 'meaningful' stories: "Once again we are made aware that a game, however intricate and dazzling, is still not a novel" (1981: 69). This narrative analysis, however, emphasizes the representation abilities of text which are secondary in a play text.

Since these play text are framed as deviant from representation, they are often seen as anti-literature (Stoltzfus, 1983; Bruss, 1977). Bruss reacts against these negative tendencies and argues that these texts demand a new way of reading:

Since literary games are disconcerting to those who approach them looking for mimesis, emotive force, or formal beauty, they are often described in negative terms: antiliterature, antipsychologism, nonsense, eccentricity, shapeless and incoherent. (...) Just as often, there is no willful deception; the game appears incoherent because one is using the wrong standards of intelligibility, inert because the field of action has not yet been located. (1977: 155)

The old 'field of action' is often associated with immersion within a texts and therefore with the creation of a coherent fictional representation. The important characteristic of playful literature is that the stable representation is replaced with a text that is in motion. Ludic literature either requires the reader to interact more with the text or presenting structures within the text that interact with each other.

Text that are in itself a form of play will stress the mobility within the text. In texts where the reader is invited to play, the motion will be created through his or her interaction with the text. When reading a text that demands the readers interaction, the text will through the readers input be experienced as flexible. The text is not stable, but is shaped according to the readers input. Bruss does not explicitly mentions what play aesthetics have to do with interaction, but she implicitly refers to it. Moreover, arguing from the point of view of mathematical game theory, Bruss foregrounds the tactical demand that is placed on the reader and locates aesthetic possibilities in: "the 'beauty' of strategy" (1977: 169). Here she point to the reading strategy the reader has to use in order to successfully interact with the text.

There are however scholars that have argued that the degree of interactivity within most text have remained the same: all texts depend on the readers input for interpretation and

leave things unexplained. However, Hutchinson argues that: “Playful writing demands a different sort of effort from the reader than does standard prose. This, then, may be seen as another feature of literary play: it is provocative, seeking to arouse speculation, reflection or deduction” (1983: 13). These literary texts actually foreground the openness within a text, which the reader is asked to close, through explicit interaction.

Similar Bruss argues that only recently literary criticism has started to pay attention to the different degrees of interaction and therewith to the: “the full dimensions of the literary encounter,” (1977: 152). With this statement she points to the idea that the reading is something passive which she replaces with the idea that:

Every symbolic product, literary works included, presupposes a situation of exchange: there is no significance, no communication, without the minimal engagement of a sender and a receiver. But there are certain individual works where one becomes acutely aware of the activity of reading, of the inferences and choices, predictions and retractions one must make, and of how much these contribute to the experience one ultimately derives. A give and take, a ‘game’ of literature, is bared in such works because in them pragmatic values outweigh the semantic and the morphological. Imaginary worlds and significant form are subordinated to the conflict or cooperation of the participants in the communicative exchange (152).

Instead of the coherency, the inconsistencies are stressed and placed in front of the reader for him/her to deal with in ways they see fit. Even if a playful text does not require real interaction, mobility can also be stressed by the motion within the texts.

Where the text fundamentally depends on the readers input, the aesthetic effect will also depend on the competence of the reader. A text that presents a specific goal for the reader (or even when there is a specific goal involved when creating the text), also generates feelings when this goal is met or not met. The literary theorist Wolfgang Iser, who is interested in

reader responses created a typology which can also be used to look at ludic texts. Iser argues that every text must:

stimulate the reader's creative participation (...) A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative. In this process of creativity, the text may either not go far enough, or may go too far, so we may say that boredom and overstrain form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play. (1980: 108)

If the text challenges the reader to solve a mystery, the reader that successfully accomplishes this challenge will derive positive feelings from his reading experience.

However, when puzzles within a text do not pose much of a challenge the text is perceived as boring whereas a text that is too difficult may generate frustrations. Detweiler argues that Nabokov's novel *Ada or Ador* (1969) might be a text that will frustrate since it: "may remain permanently undeciphered, in fact, since the key to it may be in Nabokov's private fantasies, and in this sense its author challenges the reader to play a game that only the author can win" (1976: 55). On the other hand, one has to keep in mind that a literary text is not an actual game, which means that there is not really a real winner: "the emphasis is rarely on triumphing at the expense of another: it is on the pleasure which is derived from analysis and recognition, on the pleasure of *mastery* over a text which has been presented as a specific form of challenge" (Hutchinson, 1983: 7, italics in the original).

Within some forms of literary play the reader is granted 'explicit interaction', or the sense that he or she is interacting, which enables the sense of freedom that comes with these playful texts. As I have showed ludic texts that are themselves a form of play and do not require this kind of interaction. The aesthetic value that can be found in ludic texts that play with their own system and structure, is not as much dependent on the readers interaction, but

on his or her recognition of actual movement that is created by the different structures and meanings that are interacting within these texts. Texts that possess free play are then not representing something, but create something.

Stoltzfus argues that: “This ultimate unwinding of innovative novels has a higher mimetic value (as opposed to ordinary mimesis): it duplicates the entropy of the physical world where, as with radioactivity, everything eventually unwinds and decays” (1983: 111).

From this point of view play within literature reflects the play of meaning we find within our current culture. The traditional function of representing a story is then irrelevant because, representation within our real world has been exposed as fictitious. Bruss also acknowledges this when she states that ludic text often does not allow for a suspension of disbelief:

the reader is challenged to dispense with the willing suspension of disbelief in order to play another game. The hermeneutical point of departure is the destruction of the old fictional illusion, of the traditional agreement between author and reader, to make way for the game in which the author says, ‘I will not allow you to inhabit an integral fictive world while you read my novel; instead, you must constantly and self-consciously connect the artifice of my narrative with the problematical real world that you live in’ (1976: 56)

Though both Stoltzfus and Bruss are right in noting that these texts do not longer represent the way traditional novels did, they do not look at the free play as an aesthetic function in itself, but as a free play that deviated from our modernist world view.

This multitude of meaning however does not have to be disruptive, or part of our postmodern state. It can also just be part of a new aesthetic system. This constant state of flux, although also characteristic for postmodernism culture, does not have to contain the similar disruptiveness of postmodernism. It can also be used to stress motion in a text, either by requiring a more active role from the reader, or by creating a sense of free play within a text.

Recall Huizinga's claim that "*Poiesis*, in fact, is a play-function" (1970: 119, italics in the original). There might be another reason why Huizinga refers to the Greek word for creating. Hutcheon argues that, when it comes to self-reflexive fiction, representation alone is not enough to describe that these texts: "in flaunting, in baring its fictional and linguistic systems to the reader's view, is to transform the process of making, of *poiesis*, into part of the shared pleasure of reading" (1984: 20, italics in the original). Trough play literature returns to *poiesis*; ludic texts generate the sense of creation and motion within a text.



## **5. Two literary texts that play/ are played**

In this chapter I will use the five characterizations I distinguished in order to look at two texts. Before I will do this, however, I will start with a brief overview of some of the playful literature that is often discussed by literary scholars. When looking at the authors and the books that are often mentioned within the literature and play discourse, it becomes clear that scholars tend to focus on twentieth century authors and on the text as an entity that plays. I have therefore decided to include in my case study a text that is created through play. The text that I have selected are Jen Bervin's *Nets* and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2001). I will use *Nets* (2004) to show how a reader can deconstruct a text, and through this deconstruction create a 'new' text. *House of Leaves*, is also an exemplary case study because it contains many different forms of play.

### **5.1 Some playful texts**

When it comes to ludic literary, scholars have discussed many books. Literary text as a form of free play and novels that invite interaction, are however the examples predominantly discussed. Books that are created through playing a game, or by deconstructing a text are not often mentioned. Moreover the books that tend to be discussed, are written by twentieth century authors. It is therefore not surprising that, within the literature and play discourse, the following authors are frequently talked about: John Barth; Vladimir Nabokov; Thomas Pynchon; Alain Robbe-Grillet; Italo Calvino and Julio Cortázar. These are all twentieth century writers and within their novels, play generally manifests itself through free play or by allowing the reader to more actively interact with the text.

Although within the twentieth century, play has become more important for the way we perceive and engage with literature, the study of play should not be limited to these modern texts. An older book that is much discussed within the literature and play discourse is Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767). This because the narration is characterized

by a self-consciousness (Hutcheon, 1984; Hutchinson, 1983; Motte, 1994). In the following I will provide a small overview of playful literature, by briefly discussing a text by the authors mentioned above. However, I also add three other writers in order to provide an more complete example of different play forms.

In his article “The Aesthetics of *Nouveau Roman* and Innovative Fiction” (1983) Stolfus discusses several books in which a stable representation is replaced by an articulate motion. Among the many examples he gives are Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* (1986), since this text is highly self-conscious about its own act of writing (115). Pynchon’s *V* (1963) is mentioned, because in the text a character named ‘V’ is introduced and throughout the novel she appears as different people and even in a non-human form as “the formations of migrating birds (Stolfus, 1983: 110)”. *Project for a Revolution in New York* (1972) by Robbe-Grillet’s is discussed because, as Stolfus states, the a stable representation is disrupted by “Robbe-Grillet, disguised as the narrator, [who] intrudes into the narrative to discuss the novel's plot with the reader as well as the direction or non-direction certain events may be taking” (1983: 110).

Scholars also tend to focus on books in which the reader is asked to participate. Stolfus for example mentions Cavino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* (1979), which provides the reader with ten different opening chapters of books (1983: 110). Providing the reader with different beginnings implicates that you give the reader a certain choice and thus provide a certain interaction. Bruss also mentions a book that provides the reader with several options, namely Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* (1966). There the reader is confronted with multiple endings and can thus choose which ending he or she prefers. The book *Ada or Ardor* (1969) by Nabokov is used by Detweiler as an example of text that needs to be ‘solved’ by the reader. Detweiler argues that the book: “could be called a grand roman a clef, although no one has yet deciphered its complex assortment of private jokes, autobiographical allusions” (55).

As I already mentioned, Motte provides us with an example of an author that creates a text through a form of play. He discusses Georges Perec's *La Disparition* (1969), which is written without using the letter 'e' (1995: 111-125). Another form of a lipogram text can be found in Walter Abish's *Alphabetical Africa* (1974). Within the first chapter, of this book, only uses words that begin with an 'A', the second chapter only uses words beginning with a 'B' and this continues until the reader comes to chapter twenty-six, which is written without any constraints and then the following twenty-five chapters the constraints are used in the reverse manner. The *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962) and *Nova Express* (1964) are two novels by Burroughs that function as an example of how an author can playfully use another text while also creating a new text through this use. This since these two novels were written while adhering to a cut-up technique (Hutchinson, 1983: 70-1). This entails that an existing text is cut up into pieces and randomly put back together.

This small overview was only intended to give the reader an impression of, some of the playful books that exists. Needless to say, most of the authors mentioned above have written more than one playful book.

## **5.2 Nets: Playing and/or writing?**

In the following I will commence an examination of how play has influenced Jen Bervin's *Nets*. I decided to use Bervin's poetry because it provides an excellent example of the different ways in which play can effect our interpretation and/or creation of texts. Moreover her poems are not only a representation of the playful activity that created them, they keep playing in their current form. Thus *Nets* also functions as an example of a literary text that instead of presenting the reader with a stable representation, provides the reader with a text that is in motion.

When the reader of *Nets*, skips the poems and goes straight to the last page of the book, he or she will find the following working note:

I stripped Shakespeare's sonnets bare to the 'nets' to make the space of the poems open, porous, possible – a divergent elsewhere. When we write poems, the history of poetry is with us, pre-inscribed in the white of the pages; when we read or write poems, we do it with or against this palimpsest. (2004: n.p)

This description already hints at the playful act, which enabled Bervin to write these poems, while it, simultaneously, also presents this act. 'Nets', refers to the English word 'net' which means: remaining after all deductions. 'Nets', is however also a literal deduction of the word 'sonnets', which Bervin shows on the title page of her book. This tendency to represent a form of play, and actually being a form of play is central to Bervin's poems. I will therefore first consider how these poems represent an act of play and second how they actualize play.

Recall the definition of play created by Salen and Zimmerman. They defined play as a "free movement within a more rigid structure" (2004: 304). Bervin adopts a playful attitude and perceives within the structures of the *Sonnets* an opportunity and room for play. She uses the space within the *Sonnets*, the rigid structure, to articulate 'a divergent elsewhere'; an outcome.

Bervin does not describe in more detail how she stripped the *Sonnets*. Did she, for instance, look for particular words, did she have a minimum and maximum of stripped words, did she choose certain *Sonnets*; in sum did Bervin use additional rules when she was creating these poems? One constraint we can at least accept is that, Bervin only permitted herself to use Shakespeare's *Sonnets* when creating her own poems. Moreover, she can only use these sonnets by highlighting words. The *Sonnets* are light grey, while the words chosen by Bervin appear in bold. The net result is 60 treated sonnets.

Bervin's *Nets*, is thus a good example of both a reader that inserts his play spirit into a text and an author that playfully creates a text according to constraints. The challenge lies in creating new poems, while using only the existing *Sonnets*. This challenge is, however also

what makes this play act engaging. She accepts this constraint, adheres to it while deconstructing the *Sonnets* and produces her own text; *Nets*. These poems are thus an outcome of a play activity. Bervin is therefore also culturally interacting with an exciting text and her treatment of that text can be described as form of ‘meta-interactivity’.

Scholars, however, do not recognize that Bervin’s deconstruction is a form of play. Emily Carr frames *Nets* as a form of ‘erasure poetics’ that through an insistence on the ‘what if’ of a text: “demonstrates that meaning is not only producible but re-producible,” (2004: n.p.). This ‘erasure’ movement, originates according to Carr within the margins of the text and spreads to the text as a whole. Therewith also changing the text, in this case the *Sonnets*. Other critics have argued as well that Bervin’s adjustments change the nature of Shakespeare’s poems.

Philip Metres, for instance, argues that Bervin changes the individuality of the poems: “The notion of “singleness” and multiplicity suggests Bervin’s strategy of opening up the seemingly monological thrust of the sonnet, in its lyrical “I” and rhetorical closures” (2005: n.p.). Metres refers, among others, to poem number 63 presented below. Because Bervin makes the “I” bold, it is not only Shakespeare who is speaking, but also Bervin.

There are however also critics that argue that Bervin does not alter the nature of the *Sonnets*, but only exposes the essence of the poems. W. Scott Howard for example states that: “Bervin’s transpositions of the son(nets) reinvigorate the central conceits in Shakespeare’s originals: her bold and lyrical line in each text pays homage to the bard’s ideas, images, and rhetorical designs” (2004: n.p). Howard stresses that by only using certain keywords and disregarding the original rhyme, Bervin translates the *Sonnets* into contemporary edition. It is because of this modern translation of the poems that Howards refuses to call *Nets* postmodern:

Bervin's lyric line in son(net) #15 may, at first glance, appear postmodernist, as I have provisionally suggested above. I would, however, caution readers against an unrelenting application of that reading—emphasizing perhaps irony and transgression—because here (as throughout *Nets*) Bervin's playful and cogent line, though departing from the English sonnet's form, actually recapitulates—in terms of content—key ideas, images, and linguistic units from the originals. (2004: n.p.)

I agree with Howard: calling these rewritings postmodern, means framing them as an act of transgression which is essentially what Metres and Carr do. If one however recognizes Bervin's poems as a form of play, one would acknowledge that these subtractions do not have to be acts of transgression.

Carr, repeatedly frames *Nets* as an articulation of 'what if' of the *Sonnets*, while play always represents an 'as if' attitude. Though 'what if' and 'as if' might seem very similar, the playful 'as if' status, highlights more the fleeting state of this rewriting. This nonpermanent nature of the play act is also represented in the format choice. The original *Sonnets*, remain present throughout the playful rewriting, they are just in the background. Which is similar to the way we experience the existence of the 'real world' when we play; still present but momentarily subjected to play. Likewise, when Metres states that Bervin opens up the 'seemingly monological thrust of the sonnet', he ignores that *Nets* exist in 'a divergent elsewhere'. The 'lyrical 'I'', is then never really replaced by Bervin's 'I', but is supplemented by it. Though both Carr and Metres are right when they argue that Bervin poems change the nature of the *Sonnets*, they need to recognize that this does not have to be a permanent transformation.

Since none of these critics acknowledges that Bervin is playing, they also neglect to signal that in many poems, she uses the system to express the actual act of play she is initiating. In many poems she makes words like shadow, break, tear and light, bold. These

words are actually an indication of what she doing by creating *Nets*, but also what she eventually establishes by using the light grey color and the bold. In this way she accentuates the fact that she is playing within the existing space of *Sonnets*. This becomes predominantly clear in poems number 134 and 63. Within these poems Bervin is making the *Sonnets* self-reflect on the playful attitude that she has inflicted on it.

### 63

Against my love shall be as **I am** now  
With Time's injurious hand crushed and o'er-worn;  
When hours have drained his blood and filled his brow  
With lines and wrinkles; when his youthful morn  
Hath travelled on to age's steepy night,  
And all those beauties whereof now he's king  
Are **vanishing or vanished** out of sight,  
Stealing away the treasure of his spring;  
For such a time do I now fortify  
Against confounding age's cruel knife,  
That he shall never cut from memory  
My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life:  
His beauty shall **in these black lines** be seen,  
And they shall live, and he in them still green.

While Shakespeare's poem is about the preservations of beauty and youth. Bervin is, instead, making the poem vanish, or maybe the poem has already vanished. The interplay between what Bervin actually does, and the words that are highlighted make the poem self-reflective about what has happened to it. While acknowledging the uncertainty of what is actually

happening. Has this sonnet vanished, or does it remain in a state of vanishing? Or none of the above?

Similarly poem number 134 highlights the manner in which Bervin uses the system to create her text. And that her text, although based on the *Sonnets*, is different. It is that divergent elsewhere that is created through play.

### 134

So, now **I** have confessed that he is thine,  
And I myself am mortgaged to thy will,  
Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine  
Thou wilt restore to be my comfort still.  
But thou wilt not, nor he will not be free,  
For thou art covetous and he is kind;  
He learned but surety-like to write for me  
Under that bond that him as fast doth bind.  
The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take,  
Thou usurer that put'st forth all to **use**,  
And sue a friend came debtor for my sake;  
So him I lose through my unkind abuse.  
Him have I lost; thou hast both him and me:  
He pays **the whole, and yet am I not** free.

Using the whole of the sonnet, she creates something that is simultaneously part of that sonnet but also different from it. This is a very good example of what play does and also of what Bervin does. Through a playful attitude, an 'as if' state is created, where these poems exists as



one and as two separate entities.

Another more playful reworking is poem number 35.

### 35

No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:

Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud,

Clouds and **eclipses** stain both moon and sun,

And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud;

All men make faults, and even I in this

Authorizing thy trespass with compare,

Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,

Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;

For to thy sensual fault I bring **in sense** –

(Thy adverse party is thy advocate)

And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence.

Such civil war is in my love **and** hate

That I an accessory **needs** must be

To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.

Here Bervin highlights the brackets, indicating the in between space she has created. The brackets now seem to hold a space, since the words they contain do not appear in bold.

What all these poems actually do is they present to the reader the play between the *Sonnets* and *Nets*. By presenting both poems, we actually witness a poem that vanishes, a poem that uses the whole and therewith creates space. We see both the original and what has been done; what Bervin is doing to it. By presenting both, Bervin essentially makes the old and the new interact creation a poem in motion; a poem that is *poiesis*.

In sum: *Nets* is a good example of how a reader can actually play with an existing text and use the space within a rigid system. Although most game scholars are reluctant to call the reading of a text a form of interaction, what Bervin essentially does is playing with the possibilities of the text. Her playful attitude, turns the *Sonnets* into a playground. In addition by choosing this particular format Bervin, makes her poems and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* interact with each other. This text is, then, everything but a closed system.

### **5. 3 Playing in a *House of leaves***

Though not all books contain elements of play, some books do. Moreover some books contain several different forms of play. Thus a critical examination of play that enables scholars to acknowledge the differences between separate forms of play is welcome. In the following I will therefore illustrate how the five play characteristics I distinguished can differentiate between forms of play. This by discussing three separate forms of play within *House of Leaves*. I will examine three separate play forms within the novel. First I will analyze the way in which the novel stresses the motion of its narration, by creating different levels within the book that interact with each other. Then I will focus on the ways in which the book encourages the reader to adapt a new way of interacting with the book's materiality. Last I will examine the puzzles within the book which the reader is encouraged to decipher. Before I will start with this examination, I will first give a short summary of the story and show how scholars have limited a play analysis of the book by characterizing it as postmodern.

The novel *House of Leaves* by Danielewski is a book that contains two stories. The story told by Johnny Truant and the one by Zampanò. The book opens with an introduction by Johnny, a young guy living in Los Angeles, who is woken up one night by his friend Lude. Lude has discovered a strange manuscript in the apartment of an elderly neighbor called Zampanò, who died the week before. Truant takes the manuscript with him and starts to sort and assemble the many different pieces of paper and tries to make sense of what Zampanò

wrote. The story we are reading is basically Zampanò's manuscript, but edited by Johnny. Zampanò's document is a verbal representation of a documentary called *The Navidson Record*, which Zampanò analyzes. Through Zampanò's account we are told that the documentary is made by Will Navidson and is centered on the house of Will and his partner Karen Green. Shortly after they move into the house, they start to notice that their house changes. A closet space appears, a door materializes in the living room and the inside of the house increases and actually becomes bigger than the outside. Will is most fascinated with the immense dark space that the door in the living room gives access to. Will hires a crew to investigate the mysterious hallway space and throughout the novel the reader witnesses several explorations. This dark space inside the house seems to increasingly take over their lives, but not only their lives. Through the process of editing of Zampanò's manuscript Johnny also includes his own story in the footnotes, and see that Johnny gets more and more obsessed with *The Navidson Record* and his life seems to be engulfed by a similar kind of darkness.

On the back cover of the novel a review by Mark Luce from the San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle is quoted: “[*House of Leaves*] jumps and skips and plays with genre-wrecking abandon, postmodern panache, and an obsessively imaginative scope that absolutely shames most books on the market today” (Luce, 2000: n.p). The review itself would fit nicely into the literary and play discourse, since it establishes a connection between literature and play but it fails to illuminate the connection any further. Moreover, Luce labels the book as postmodern and experimental, which as I have already shown in my examination of *Nets*, runs the risk of only recognizing the potentially transformative nature of play and not the motion that is essential to play.

Katherine Hayles describes the novel in a similar way and actually uses the word ‘transformation’ when she argues that the book breaks with literary tradition by remediating it:

In a sense, *House of Leaves* recuperates the traditions of the print book—particularly the novel as a literary form— but the price it pays is a metamorphosis so profound that it becomes a new kind of form and artifact. It is an open question whether this transformation represents the rebirth of the novel or the beginning of the novel's displacement by a hybrid discourse that as yet has no name. (2002: 781)

Although *House of Leaves* uses many different techniques: colored words and pictures. This does not necessarily mean that it tries to reinvent the 'book'. New technologies in printing can perhaps provide new possibilities for the materiality of the book, but does this then always mean that by using these innovative options a book remediates the old medium?

Martin Birck shows that before the print publication, Danielewski published the book on the Internet and used a PDF format, because he wanted to maintain the specific qualities of the print book:

Danielewski, however, posted the pages as PDF files, thus ensuring that the reader experience the textual layout as he designed it. (...) HTML files are inherently 'unstable' in terms of structure. They allow a user to jump from one place to another in seconds without any impression of passing through space or over other material.

Thus one might contend that HTML more faithfully represents the structure of Navidson's house. It shifts to accommodate the visitor. This structure, however, would largely go unseen. (2004: n.p)

In a way, then, the book emphasizes the possibilities of the print book. Not by transforming it, but through playing with its potentials.

To frame the book as a postmodern novel, implicates that scholars tend to focus on a transformative result and not on a process that is played out within the novel. As Brick signals, the book does not necessarily want to turn its stable structure into an unstable structure, but it wants its readers to be aware of both. Thus creating a playful movement from stable to

unstable and vice versa. It is this playful motion that is important for literary text that play and/or are played. Play, then, is not just a means to an end, but it can function on its own and thus needs to be analyzed as such.

That play is an important aspect of the book is also signaled throughout the novel. For example, the name of Jonny's best friend Lude, actually refers to play; to 'ludens'. Moreover on the inside of the covers, a play button is displayed and it appears to be activated. This since it depicts two vertical lines, referring to a play button that is clicked on. On the inside of the back cover the play button has turned from green to brown, which also indicates that something actually has been playing; is playing. Since it appears that the text itself remains in a state of play, it is interesting to see how play manifest itself throughout the novel. I will therefore examine three forms of play that in different ways create a sense of motion within the text.

### **Play as a creation of freedom**

First I will examine the manner in which the text plays with its own system and thus creates a form of play that does not require the readers interaction. The stories of Zampanò and Johnny are constantly interacting with each other, or to be more precise Johnny is interacting with Zampanò manuscript by editing it. Metaphorically we are witnessing a form of 'meta-interactivity', since Johnny is editing Zampanò manuscript. We are however not presented with a finished manuscript but with a manuscript that appears in the process of being edited. By not presenting the reader with a finished manuscript, but with one that still reveals the un-edited version and the actual edits made, the text disregards the convention that the reader will only get a 'finished' book. It thus breaks free from a constrained.

In this way *House of Leaves* is similar to *Nets*, since as I have argued that the format makes the poems appear in the act of rewriting, and not just presents them as a result of this

process. In *House of Leaves*, this in-between or 'as if' state is clearly stressed by Johnny who actually states that he is changing something or including something. On pages 110-111 we are, for example, confronted with numerous red lines that are crossed out. Johnny comments on this by stating that the: "Struck passages indicate what Zampanò tried to get rid of, but which I, with a little bit of turpentine and a good old magnifying glass managed to resurrect" (111). Here Johnny is clearly profiling himself as an editor. The format on the page stresses that the editing is still going on. The lines still appear 'struck', so they are not fully incorporated within the manuscript, but not entirely excluded either. Moreover the text also has several ¶, indicating that a paragraph space was deleted. This again stresses the text as a work in progress. By presenting Johnny as an editor who is editing the story while we read it, the text is presented in an 'as if' sphere. The interaction between Zampanò's text and Johnny's corrections, create a work that is simultaneously both the unedited manuscript and the finished manuscript and neither of them. The outcome of this interaction is a text that only seems to exist in a playful motion.

Another instance of the playful interaction between Johnny's comments and Zampanò's manuscript, emerges when Johnny tries to convince the reader that Zampanò's document is full of lies and is not a real academic analysis. This interaction is, however, not limited to Johnny and Zampanò. A third entity is added in the form of the editors, of Johnny's manuscript, and they in their turn will sometimes critique Johnny's text. These three entities interact with each other, making it very hard for the reader to decide which narrator we can trust. The outcome of this interaction is again a text that appears to be in motion. In some cases this might lead readers to experience confusion or even a sense of 'vertigo'. This since the text does not offer any stable ground to its readers.

Consider for example the ways in which the book itself and the editors stress the imaginary character of the text. On the cover of the book, the text is labeled as a novel and on

the copyright page the 'editors' state that: "This novel is a work of fiction. Any references to real people, events, establishments, organizations or locales are intended only to give the fiction a sense of reality and authenticity" (2000: n.p). Though this would be the ultimate justification to consider the whole book a form of fiction, the same editors also provide contradicting information. Appendix III, for instance, exists of five photos that suggest that *The Navidson Record* did exist. Moreover within the credits of the book, the following is stated: "Special thanks to Talmor Zedactur Depository for providing a VHS copy of "Exploration # 4" (708). Though we can conclude that the credits are part of the novel and therefore extend the illusion of the book, it implies that *The Navidson Record* is real. Within the book the reader is constantly shifted between evidence that the text is a work of fiction and evidence that states otherwise.

The reader is continually sifting between framing the book as an examination of an actual documentary and between characterizing it as the work of a madmen. There are for instances many ways in which the novel tries to appear as an academic text. *House of Leaves* provides its readers with a table of contents, index and credits. However, when one takes a closer look at these scientific features, it is easy to find fault with them. The index for example covers over 42 pages but seems to contain a lot of words that generally would not be present in an index. Words like: 'Okay', 'not', 'my', 'know', 'you', 'all', do not function as key words and thus break with the conventions of what should be included in an index. Moreover the index does not seem to be accurate. Although it says that the Minatour should appear in red on page four, this is not true. In addition there are approximately a hundred words that are in the index which are followed by 'DNE' instead of a page number. DNE Resurfaces at two other points in the book on page 121 when the true north of the dark hallway and in collage number one of appendix two on page 582. Readers think DNE stands for "does not exist" (Forum). This meaning would however not work for all the words within

the index. Since the word masturbate gets a DNE, while it is mentioned on page 263.

Another problematic feature is that the footnotes are not always accurate. Consider, for example, Johnny's statement about the accuracy of Zampanò's document and his use of footnotes on page 64-67. There a long list of photographers appears which is followed by the following quote: "Alison Adrian Burns, another Zamapno readers, told me this list was entirely random. With the possible exception of Brassai, Speen, Bush and Link, Zampanò was not very familiar with photographers. 'We just picked the names out of some books and magazines he had lying around'" (67). This quote shows us, how Zampanò included footnotes in his text to provide the work with scientific justification. Johnny, however, shows that these footnotes are randomly put together. In this way, Johnny constantly stresses the artificiality and the non-scientific character of Zampanò's document.

Moreover, the order of the footnotes is sometimes mixed up. On page 110 and 111 the footnote in the text moves from 127 to 126 and then to 128. In addition, some footnotes have additional footnotes that follow immediately or it refers to a footnote some pages back. Again this is not in compliance with what the reader expects from an academic text. By breaking with this convention or descriptive rule, the novel breaks free from the stable structures of an academic text and the result is a text that exists in a state of flux.

Examine for instance the next lengthy quote as an example how the footnotes are used to provide information, but instead of clarifying it seems that they make the novel more obtrusive. The layout is kept intact, as all the three entities have different italics which is explained by the editors as "an effort to limit confusion" (4).

*171 Taken from Zampanò's journal: 'As often as I have lingered on Hudson in his shallow, I have in the late hours turned my thoughts to Quesada and Molino's journey across those shallow waters, wondering aloud what they said, what they thought, what gods came to keep them or leave them, and what in those dark waves*



they finally saw of themselves? Perhaps because history has little to do with those minutes, the scene survives only in verse: *The Song of Quesada and Molino* by [XXXX]. 172 I include it here in its entirety.' 175

Then:

'Forgive me please for including this. And old man's mind is just as likely to wander as a young man's but where a young will forgive the stray, 177 an old man will cut it out. Youth always tries to fill the void, an old man learns to live with it. It took me twenty years to unlearn the fortunes found in a swerve. Perhaps this is no news to you but then I have killed many men and I have both legs and I don't think I ever quite equaled the bald gnome Error who comes from his cave with featherless ankles to feast on the might dead.' 173

172 Illegible

173 You got me. 176 Gnome aside, I don't even know how to take 'I've killed many men,' Irony? A confession? As I already said 'You got me.' 174

174 For reasons entirely unknown his own. Mr. Truant de-struck the last six lines in footnote 171. – Ed. (137)

The footnotes referring to other footnotes make the text appear very unintelligible. Moreover while footnotes are usually used to clarify things, these notes just seem to confuse the reader even more. Johnny's footnote explains nothing and the editors footnote make us aware that Johnny is not to be trusted either.

The reader is constantly confused about who is speaking the truth. Although Johnny seems to put a lot effort in correcting Zampanò's document and to get it published, he is a very unreliable narrator. When the story progresses we are confronted with his excessive drug use, his tendency to make up stories and his numerous delusions. Furthermore, it seems that

most of the time Johnny has no idea what Zampanò's is talking about, as can be seen in quote above. More importantly it seems that Johnny is not entirely right about accusing Zampanò's of using false notes either. The editors mention that Johnny struck the last lines of footnote 171, which seems to be the song mentioned by Zampanò. When we go back to the introduction Johnny actually states that this verse does not seem to exist:

As for the books cited in the footnotes, a good portion of them are fictitious. For instance, Gavin Young's Shots in The Dark doesn't exist nor does The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft , Volume XXVII. On the other hand virtually any dimwit can go to a library and find W. M. Lindsay and H. J. Thomson's Ancient Lore in Medieval Latin Glossaries. There really was a "rebellion" on the 1973 Skylab mission but La Belle Nicoise en Le Beau Chien is made up as is, I assume, the bloody story of Quesada and Molino. Add to this my own mistakes (and there's no doubt I'm responsible for plenty) as well as those errors Zampanò made which I failed to notice or correct, and you'll see why there's suddenly a whole lot here not to take seriously (xx)

This cast Johnny in a very unfavorable light. Did he exclude the song for a reason, or are the editors putting us on wild goose chase? Johnny's reliability is even more questioned when the readers discovers that the volume mentioned here, is included within appendix III as evidence that *The Navidson Record* does exist. Trusting the editors, however, is also problematic since they acknowledge Johnny as a real person and while at the same time stating that the text is fiction, they conversely provide evidence that *The Navidson Record* does exist.

By using multiple narrators and simultaneously providing evidence that *The Navidson*

*Record* does and does not exist, the book prevents the reader from believing in the represented fictional world. Every time one of these narrators has been telling their story long enough for the reader to get emerged, the other discrediting narrator takes over. The reader is never allowed to come to a conclusion who is speaking the truth, sometimes leaving him bewildered. The text has different structures that constantly interact with each other, creating a free play of structures and stories that never reach a stable point. To some readers this form of play might seem overwhelming, others might like the sense of 'vertigo' that the text enables through its free play. Either way the reader is left with no choice, it is the text that plays and he or she can watch as the play unfolds. There are however forms of play within *House of Leaves* where the reader is no longer watching the play, but he or she is actually playing.

### **Playing with materiality**

The second form of play within *House of Leaves* influences the readers 'functional interactivity' with the book. It changes the way we would normally read a book, or what we expect from a book's materiality. The front cover, for instance, is smaller than the pages and the back cover, thus making it look like the pages are too 'big' and thus pouring out of the cover. Additionally, although in most works of fiction the front and the back are not part of the actual story, with *House of Leaves* there is a playful interaction between the cover and the text itself. The front and the back cover both present the word 'house' in blue ink, which will continue throughout the text. Both these instances of play break with the conventions of what the reader expects from book covers: that they successfully enclose the pages and are not yet part of the story. Through playing with these conventions Danielewski explores the ways in which the cover can be part of the story, but also requires the reader to explore these new ways with him.

Within the novel there are many examples of a playful subversion with the layout of

the novel. On a number of occasions we encounter numeral xxxx or blank spaces. The xxx stand for text that is inked out and blank spaces for text that is burned (see pages 328-329), there are however also instances where text is both burned and inked out (see page 330). Moreover, as mentioned, the text that Zampanò wanted to exclude from the book, is restored by Johnny, but appears in red and is crossed out (see pages 109-111). In addition, on page 119 (see fig 2 p. 120-121) note 144, appears in a blue box in the middle of the page. This is in itself a little abnormal, since one tends to find footnotes at the end of a page. Moreover when you turn the page, the footnotes and the box are printed backwards and on page 121 the note continues, only to be printed backwards on page 122 and to continue again on page 123 (also noted by Hayles, 2002). This continues for a couple of pages until eventually the box remains empty only to be printed on the back of the page as a blue box. All these discrepancies in the lay-out represent a play with the materiality of the text.

There are also many instances where the formal layout of a page and/or of the text will represent events within the story and therewith a commence of form of play between the convention that languages conveys meaning linguistically and not visually. Especially the scenes where Will Navidson enters the black space that is taking over his house. The text will adapt to the changes of that space. The text on page 216 till 225 represent the doors that are slamming shut behind Holloway, one of the explorers. While on page 232 the text is depicted in the form of a flying bullet while in the next page the text is scattered all over the page, representing the bullet hitting its target. When Will is standing at the bottom of the staircase and one of his friends is being pulled up. Will's texts is displayed on the bottom page, while his friends text is presented on the top and upside down (see pages 286-287). Figure 1 (page 431) is a good example of the ways in which the texts adjusts to the changing nature of the house. The text widens similar to the space. Although it can be argued that the format invites the reader to read the text in a curve, the logical way to read the text is from left to right,

moving downwards. There are however moments in the book where the reader has to forsake this rule. By breaking with the conventions we normally adhere to, the layout is turned into a form of free play. This form of play, however, can also effect the way the reader interacts with the text.

There are moments in *House of Leaves* where the layout plays with the books adequacy to depict a story and request different reading behavior from the reader. The note in the blue box on page 119, for example, is printed backwards on page 120 (fig 2, p. 120-121). Hayles also mentions this and she states that the: “book pages are opaque, a property that defines one page as separate from another. Here the back of the page seems to open transparently onto the front, a notion that overruns the boundary between them and constructs the page as a leaky container rather than an unambiguous unit of print” (2002: 792). The book itself is deteriorating, and it seems no longer adequate to render a story. What Hayles, however, does not acknowledges is that, not only the conventions of the books materiality are distorted, but that this also effects the way readers interact with the text. Through a play with the materiality of the book, the reader has to change the way he or she interacts with the book.

While this note in the blue box can still be read (on the front of the page), sometimes the reader has to use objects like mirrors or turn the book in order to read the text. Thus changing the functional interaction we have with the book. The text surrounding a blue box on page 140 is not printed backwards, but is written in mirror language. The only way of reading this, is by using a mirror, rendering the book, as a reading object, inadequate. *House of Leaves* activates its readers to use foreign objects in order to read the book, therewith the book itself is no longer sufficient to render the story it tells.

This form of play then both interacts with the conventions we have about the format of a book and about how we read a book. More importantly through this play with the materiality of the book, the reader is not only required to interact in a different way, but by

holding the book upside down or in front of the mirror the degree of interaction that is needed to read the book has increased. The reader becomes aware of how we normally encounter a book: a finished object that we can read without help from other objects. That *House of Leaves* interacts and breaks with this convention and makes the reading of the book more challenging.

Through playing with the materiality of the book, the reader has to change the way he or she interacts with the book. In figure 3 (pages 434-435) the reader is forced to read over the two pages instead of finishing one and then moving on to the right page. This is not the only moment where the readers are forced to undertake a new way of reading. On page 440-441 the text represents the ladder Will is climbing up and the reader has to turn the book in order to read the passage, and then turn it again in order to read the footnote. Moreover on the pages that follow the text symbolizes Will cramped feeling within a small corridor that grows more and more narrow until eventually the page only has room left for seven words, of which two are incomplete. The reader is forced to move faster from page to page, and forced to read incomplete words, creating a very shattered reading experience. Hayles argues that the text in these pages resembles the experience of Will Navidson during an exploration (2002: 796).

It is, however, not only the reading behavior that is effected by this play with the book's materiality. The reader is indirectly also granted more 'explicit interactivity'. The blue ink used with the word house, seems to refer to the use of a hyperlink. Brinck argues that: "Readers are given the impression that the word 'house' is linked to other parts of the text, and that the text changes shape to accommodate the reader" (2004: n.p.). This 'linked' character of the book is also created by the use of footnotes, especially when the footnotes refer to footnotes and the reader is provided the opportunity to distance him or herself from the main story and start following footnotes. Through the many footnotes and the anomalous format, the book enables the reader have more choice in what he or she will read next. The

reader can follow a path of related footnotes or he can stay and continue reading *The Navidson Record*, and come back to the notes later or neglect them. Brinck also states this: “Danielewski's structure, however, gives the impression that the reader is free to wander, and that a *plotline* can be determined by the reader, not the author, nor the narrator” (2004: n.p., italics in the original). A perfect example of how the many footnotes may stimulate the reader to deviate from his linear reading path can be found on page 120 . There note 146 starts at the top left corner and then continues onto page 134 where it stops but refers to note 147. Note 147 begins in the bottom right corner of page 135 and is printed upside down. All the while running back to page 121 where it ends by referring to note 148 which refers to exhibit 1 on page 530, which refers back to the bibliography of chapter IX on page 152.

To conclude: the interaction that occurs with the materiality of the book, does not only create freedom for the way in which the book and its contents can manifest itself. The outcome of this play, however, also effects the readers and requires him or her to change his reading behavior. Not all readers will find it that engaging to fetch a mirror or to follow a footnote that will stretch over multiple pages. More importantly these obstacles for the reading process are continued throughout the novel. The book does not change one reading behavior for another, but it constantly changes the way the reader needs to read the book. Creating a reading behavior that is resembles a form of free play.

### **Solving the mystery**

The third and last instance of play, is a form of play that resemble the definition of play connected to games. The interaction in this instance of play is not solely or predominantly present in the texts itself, but exists between the reader and the text. The reader does not only have to solve the mystery, which out of the three narrators (Johnny, Zampanò or the Editors) is telling the truth through an act of cognitive interactivity. He also has to solve many puzzles and decode many clues that are presented to him within the novel. The texts offer, or perhaps

requires, a degree of 'explicit interaction' from its readers by providing the reader with encoded messages the reader has to find and decode.

A good example is found in Appendix II section 3 "The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute Letters". Here the reader is presented with the letters Johnny's mother send him from the mental institute. The letters are often encoded. Figure 4 (pages 620-622) is the letter send to Johnny on May 8, 1987. In the previous letter Pelafina, Johnny's mother, warned Johnny that she would encode the next letter and says: "use the first letter of each word to build subsequent words and phrases: your exquisite intuition will help you sort out the spaces" (619). When you follow these directions and read the letter of May 8 you will find the following hidden message:

Dearest Johnny,

They have found a way to break me, rape a fifty six year old bag of bones. There is no worse and don't believe otherwise. The attendants do it. Others do it. Not every day, not every week, maybe not even every month. But they do it. Someone I don't know always comes. When it's dark. Late. I've learned not to scream, screaming gave me hope and unanswered hope is shattered hope. Think of your Haitian. It is far saner to choose rape than shattered hope. So I submit and I drift. I let caprice and a certain degree of free association take me away. Sometimes I'm still away long after it's done, after he's gone, the stranger, the attendant, the custodian, the janitor, cleaning man, waiting man, dirty man, the night tidying up after him. I'm in hell, giving in to heaven, where I sometimes think of your beautiful father with his dreamy wings, and only then do I allow myself to cry. Not because your mother was raped again, but because she loved so much what she could never have been allowed to keep. Such a silly girl. You must save me, Johnny. In the name of your father I must escape this place or I will die.



This is however not the only encoded message in the letter. When the reader examines the letter in more detail, he or she will notice that uppercases appear in the middle of words. When these uppercases are taken together the reader is presented with the following message: A FACE IN A CLOUD NO TRACE IN THE CROWD (621-622). These two encoded messages and the many different languages Pelafina uses in her letters are easily encoded and provide the reader with a straightforward puzzle that is fun to solve. What these solutions often signify is however not as easy decoded.

There are however many puzzles and codes that are very hard to find. The letter sent on April 5, 1986 ends by stating that the “letter goes out by private route”. When the reader signals that this is actually a clue and reexamines the letter very closely one finds the following message in the eight paragraph: Dear Zampanò who did you lose? (Hayles, 2002: 802). Moreover, remember the quote mentioned where Johnny revealed that Zampanò included a random list of photographers? Attentive readers of *House of Leaves* know by now that nothing in the book is random. When one goes back to page 64 and reads the names mentioned in that passage and writes down the first letter of their last name one gets the following sentence: A LONG LIST [o]F VISI[o]NARIES (Forum).

Another example of an encoded message in the text can be found on page 71. There Johnny says:

Words filling my head. Fragmenting like artillery shells. Shrapnel, like syllables,  
flying everywhere. Terrible syllables. Sharp cracked. Traveling at murderous speed.  
Tearing through it all in a very, very bad perhaps even irreparable way.

Known./ Some./ Call./ Is./ Air./ Am?

Incoherent – yes.

Without meaning – I’m afraid not. (71)

This is one of the more difficult messages and I only discovered it from the ‘*House of Leaves* Forum’. This is a very active forum where readers of *House of Leaves* discuss the many puzzles and riddles within the book<sup>8</sup>. When presented with the quote above one forum member explains that the words, phonetically sound like the Latin words ‘*nom sum qualis eram*’, which means ‘I am not as I was’.

There is a very strange passage in the book where Johnny meets readers of the, then still unfinished, *House of Leaves* who have read the book extensively in search for answers: “They had discussed the footnotes, the names and even the encoded appearance of Thamyris on page 387, something I’d described without ever detecting” (514). If the reader then goes back to this page and reads the passage closely one discovers this name in the quote of A. Ballard: “That house answers many yearnings remembered in sorrow” (387). As one notices Danielewski leaves little hints when he has encoded something. At some point in the book the reader becomes aware that he is constantly being encouraged to look for hidden messages, that maybe can clarify and provide a more definite answer about the nature of *The Navidson Record*.

This form of play then deviates notably from the other two since the text provides the reader with a possibility for ‘explicit interaction’. The interaction is then the interaction between the reader and the text, the reader who tries to uncover what really happened by solving all the clues. The problem however is that, most of the clues are extremely well hidden. Most readers will not find them and if they find them decoding them is often not that easy. Moreover most of the solutions to the messages seem to leave the reader with more questions. For example, how could Johnny’s mother have known Zampanò, and who did he lose? Although no one can deny that this searching for clues is engaging, it is not always fun but can get very frustrating since most encoded messages seem to make no sense at all. *House*

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<sup>8</sup> Perhaps Huizinga’s point that play can foster communities is not that peculiar at all.

*of Leaves* offers the readers an ambitious challenge that will be very rewarding when it is completely solved. The promise that you might finally solve the book, keeps you going and invites the reader to read the book a second time.

This degree of ‘explicit interaction’ contributes to an experience of motion within the book. The reader is given the idea that he has an actual influence on the novel by solving the puzzles. Although the reader is of course following a pre-designed path, the fact that he believes he has an actual influence, as Frasca would state, enhance the reading experience. The text is not stable, but will change according to the reader competence in solving Danielewski’s puzzles. It is then not only the solving of these puzzles that is important, but that through these puzzles the reader is actually playing with the book.

## Conclusion

Almost a hundred pages stand between the research question of this study and this conclusion. Since then a lot of theories and concepts have been discussed. Some were rejected, others reformed and even a few were readily accepted and put to use. Though this sometimes transformative process might have been demanding and occasionally sparked feelings of ‘vertigo’, it has almost played out and reached an result. So let us recall what the initial aim of this study was and decide if a goal has successfully been reached. The research question that I posed so many pages ago was:

*How can Ludology as a medium-independent research method be used for understanding literature, and what can we gain in our understanding of a literary text by analyzing it as a form of play?*

I will now cautiously try to provide an unambiguous answer to this ludic question.

In the first chapter I opted for a new division between play and game, so that play could also be used as concept to look at non-games. By framing play as a medium-independent structure, play will hopefully be reinstated as the culturally broad concept that, as Huizinga justly argued, it is. Especially with the current ‘ludification of culture’ that Frissen, Van Mul and Reassens (forthcoming) point to, we become more aware that play is omnipresent within our culture and should therefore not only be studied within game studies. Framing play as a medium-independent structure, and placing it next to narrative, within the center of the humanities studies, might be very fruitful.

With this study I did not, however, only want to reinstate play as broad cultural concept. I also wanted to colonize, and have colonized, play. This in order to make it a productive concept within literary studies. During this process of colonization, that began in chapter two, one of the important adaptations was the distinction between three different entities that play: the author, the reader and the text. Throughout the subjection of play, it

become clear that literary scholars are very hospitable when it concerns a study of play within literature. However their interest was mainly in the text as the entity that plays. Nevertheless, when these scholars commenced an analysis of the text that plays, they often stated that the text is playful and leave it at that. How play manifests itself within literary texts is, for many scholars, still an engaging mystery. While on the other hand, the way that authors and readers play, seems to be such an easy puzzle that literary scholars have grown weary of solving it and do not want to play anymore.

Though this emphasize on the text is understandable, because literary texts are the main focus within the field of literary studies, it is time to expand the focus a bit more. Within the current 'ludification of culture', readers have adapted a new way of engaging with literary text. One might even say that there has been a move from a predominantly 'cognitive interactivity' to a 'meta-interactivity'. The latter mode also accounts for the playful appropriation of text within fan cultures. Bervin, as a reader of the *Sonnets*, playfully engages with these poems, while the readers of *House of Leaves* have become actual fans, to adopt Surette's terms, and discuss the book extensively on the forum. Readers, and the way they read texts, are also effect by the 'ludification of culture' and this playful engaging with texts is worth studying.

To distinguish between these three entities that play is however not enough. In order for play to be useful within literary studies, scholars need to acknowledge that these entities play in a different manner. Play is the expression of freedom within a system (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004; Ehrmann, 1968), while play within a text unfolds itself as the creation of freedom within a system. While the former uses the already existing freedom, the latter creates freedom. Taking this into consideration will provide scholars with a better idea of how play exist within - and because of - literary text.

Most literary scholars simply acknowledge that a text plays, or that a reader plays,

without examining in depth what these instances of play signify. What is it, that play does within a text, and what does this mean for the interpretation and meaning of the text? In sum: until now there was no existing theoretical framework that permitted literary scholars to examine play within literature and compare the different manifestations of play. In the third chapter I therefore distinguished between five main play characteristics, in order to be able to compare the different forms of literary play.

Scholars should then take into consideration the difference between play as the expression of freedom and play as the creating of freedom. That is to say, distinguish which entity is playing and how he plays and they should examine play according to five characteristics: play as engaging, play as interactive; play as constrained; play has a certain outcome and play requires a certain attitude. By taking these five characteristics into account scholars can provide a more in depth analysis of play.

In the fourth chapter I made an essential distinction between play and other literary traditions. Though play has been part of many literary traditions, it should not be reduced to any of them. As I have shown, traditions like Postmodernism and Russian Formalism tend to focus on the transformative power of play. They fail to recognize that the importance of play within literary studies lies not in the negations of traditions, but in the motion it establishes in the text or in the way we engage with a text. As I have shown in chapter five, both *House of Leaves* and *Nets* use play in order to establish an ‘as if’ state in the text, making the text a text in motion that cannot be pinned down. Framing play as predominantly transformative, is making it the end to a means which it is not.

To answer my research question then, I will specifically refer to the examination of *Nets* and *House of Leaves* in chapter 5. With the analyses of Bervin’s poems, I have given an example of the way in which play can be important for the production of a text. Which is seen by the way Bervin inflicts her playful attitude upon an text and playfully creates a new text.

The text obtains part of its meaning through the play in which it originated and which cannot be excluded from the end product.

In addition this distinction between five characteristics of play has allowed me to provide a detailed analysis of play forms in *House of Leaves* and show how these play forms are different. These characteristics of play will also provide scholars to commence a more critical study of the different play forms. Therewith, it will contribute to a better understanding of the many different forms of literary play and essentially, the playful motion that is inherent in these texts and which provides us with a different reading experience than texts that only represent.

Though this thesis hopefully revitalizes the study of play within literature, some limitations have to be noted. While I tried to make play a productive concept within literary text I think this study can still improve from a further exploration of how play works within a literary text. This since the notion that within a text, play creates a sense of freedom and motion, remains still very much on an abstract level. It would be interesting to examine if this idea can be more specifically formulated and thus allow to analyze in more detail how play manifests itself within literary texts.

Moreover, due to constraints in time and space this study has restricted itself to theories by game scholars and generally neglected to include the many theories of play that have originated within philosophy, but also disregarded related theories from literary critics. Although, they do not specifically explain the relation between play and literature, theories proposed by Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, explore similar playful notions like ‘intertextuality’ that might be worth examining as part of literary play.

And last this study could have benefitted from a bigger and more inclusive case study. Though *Nets* and *House of Leaves* are excellent examples of the different ways in which play affects literature, they are both very modern text. It would be very interesting to look at

literary text that were not written in the twentieth or twenty-first century and compare the play forms in different texts.

With the risk of being accused of a ludic interpretation, I want to end my thesis by once more returning to the beginning. Not just to the beginning of this study, but also to the study of literature as play. Huizinga's phrase that "*Poiesis*, in fact, is a play function" (1970: 119, italics in the original), might not only have been part of Huizinga's argument that play is omnipresent in our culture. He may well have wanted to provide literary scholars with a vital clue about the nature of playful texts. Ludic literature are then those texts that create.



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Figure 1

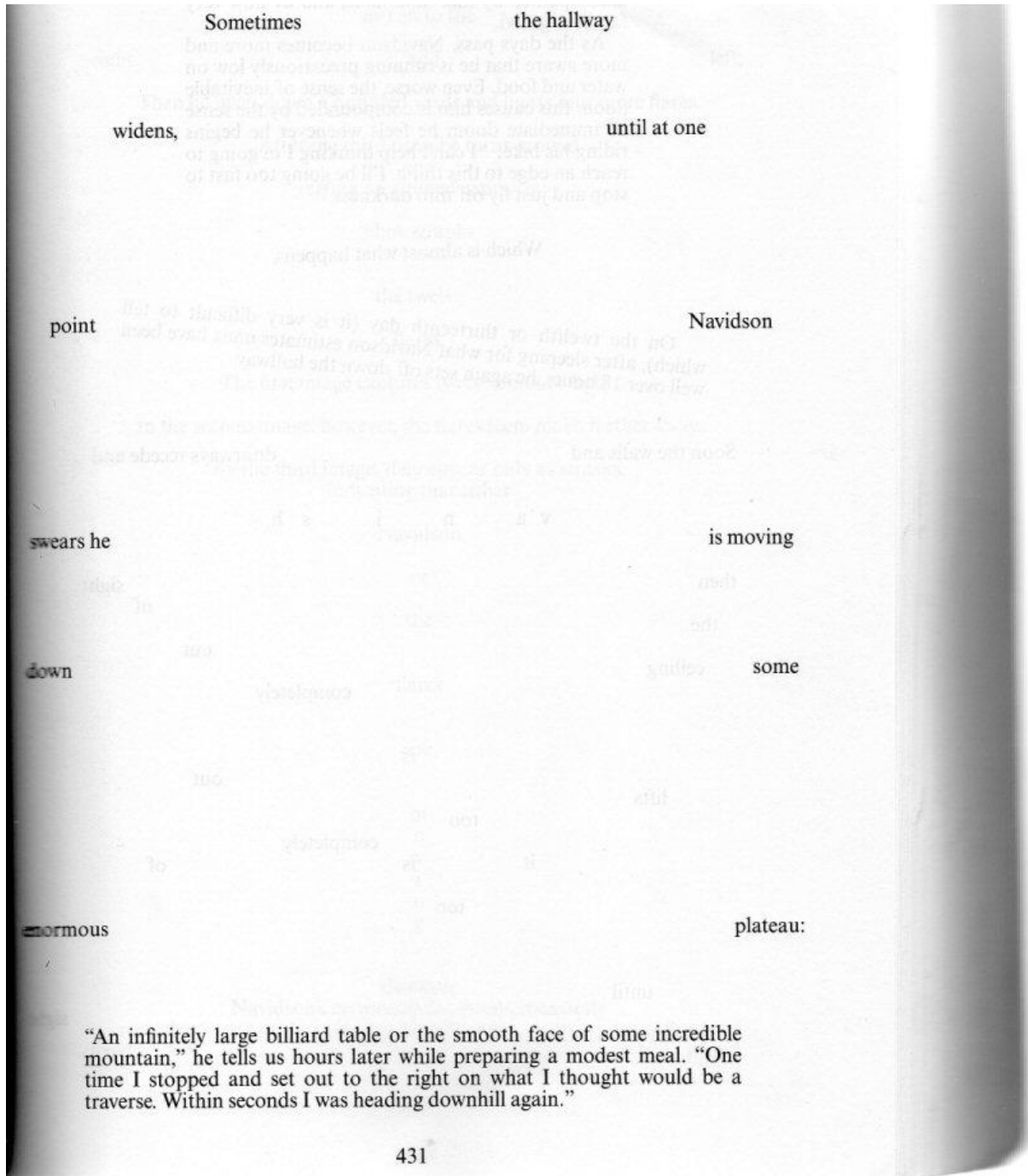


Figure 2

<sup>146</sup>For example, there is nothing about the house that even remotely resembles 20<sup>th</sup> century works whether in the style of Post-Modern, Late-Modern, Brutalism, Neo-Expressionism, Wrightian, The New Formalism, Miesian, the International Style, Streamline Moderne, Art Deco, the Pueblo Style, the Spanish Colonial, to name but a few, with examples such as the Western Savings and Loan Association in Superstition, Arizona, Animal Crackers in Highland Park, Illinois, Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles, or Mineries Condominium in Venice, Wurster Hall in Berkeley,

Katselas House in Pittsburgh, Dulles International Airport, Greene House in Norman Oklahoma, Chicago Harold Washington Library, the Watts Towers in South Central, Barcelona National Theatre, New Town of Seaside Florida, Tugendhat House, Rue de Laeken in Brussels, Richmond Riverside in Richmond Surrey, the staircase hall in the Athens, Georgia News Building, the Tsukuba Center Building in Ibaraki, the Digital House, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, the interior of the Judge Institute of Management Studies in Cambridge, Maison à Bordeaux, TGV Railway Station in Lyon-Satolas, the post-modernism of the Wexner Center for Visual Arts in Columbus, Ohio, Palazzo Hotel in Fukuoka, National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C., the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery, Pyramid at the Louvre, New Building at Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, Palace of Abraxas at Marne-La-Vallée, Piazza d'Italie in New Orleans, AT&T Building in New York, the modernism of Carré d'Art, Lloyds Building in London, the Boston John F. Kennedy Library complex, Nave of Vuokseeniska Church in Finland, head office of the Enso-Gutzeit Company, Administrative Center of Säynätsalo, the Eames House, the Baker dormitory at MIT, inside the TWA terminal at Kennedy Airport, The National Theatre in London, Hull House Association Uptown Center in Chicago, Hektoen Laboratory also in Chicago, Fitzpatrick House in the Hollywood Hills, Graduate Center at Harvard University, Pan-Pacific Auditorium in Los Angeles, General Motors Testing Laboratory in Phoenix Arizona, Bullock's Wilshire Department Store in Los Angeles, Casino Building in New York, Hotel Franciscan in Albuquerque New Mexico, La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe, or Santa Barbara County Courthouse, the Neff or Sherwood House in California, Exterior of the Secondary Modern School, Maisons Jaoul, Notre-Dame-du-Haut near Belfort, The Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles, The Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois, The Alumni Memorial Hall at Illinois Institute of Technology, Guggenheim Museum in New York, or nothing of the traditionalism of Lawn Road Flats in Hampstead, the Zimbabwe House and Battersea Power Station in London, Choir of the Anglican cathedral in Liverpool or Memorial to the Missing of the Somme near Aras, Viceroy's house in New Delhi, Gledstone Hall in Yorkshire, Finsbury Circus facade, Castle Drogo near Drewsteignton Devon, Casa del Fascio in Como, Villa

redefinition of route, even the absurd way the first hallway leads away from the living room only to return, through a series of lefts, back to where the living room should be but clearly is not; describes a layout in no way reminiscent of any modern floorplans let alone historical experiments in design.<sup>146</sup>

Sebastiano Perouse de Montclos, however, has written a sizable examination on the changes within the house, positing that they in fact follow Andrea Palladio's structural derivations.

By way of a quick summary, Palladian grammar seeks to organize space through a series of strict rules. As Palladio proved, it was possible to use his system to generate a number of layouts such as Villa Badoer, Villa Emo, Villa Ragona, Villa Poiana, and of course Villa Zenò. In essence there are only eight steps:

1. Grid definition
2. Exterior-wall definition
3. Room layout
4. Interior-wall realignment
5. Principal entrances—porticos and exterior wall inflections
6. Exterior ornamentation—columns
7. Windows and Doors
8. Termination<sup>149</sup>

Perouse de Montclos relies on these steps to delineate how Navidson's house was (1.0) first established (2.0) limited (3.0) sub-divided and (4.0) so on. He attempts to convince the reader that the constant refiguration of doorways and walls represents a kind of geological loop in the process of working out all possible forms, most likely *ad infinitum*, but never settling because, as he states in his conclusion, "unoccupied space will never cease to change simply because nothing forbids it to do so. The continuous internal alterations only prove that such a house is necessarily uninhabited."<sup>150</sup>

<sup>149</sup>For an exemplary look at Palladian grammar in action, see William Mitchell's *The Logic of Architecture: Design, Computation, and Construction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994), p. 152-181. As well as Andrea Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture* (1570) trans. Isaac Oursler (New York: Dover, 1965).

<sup>150</sup>Sebastiano Perouse de Montclos' *Palladian Grammar and Metaphorical Appropriations: Navidson's Villa Malcontenta* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 2,865. Also see Aristides Quine's *Concatenating Corbuses*

the absurd way the first hall-living room only to return, back to where the living room describes a layout in no way floorplans let alone historical

Sebastiano Perouse de Montclos, however, has written a sizable treatise on the changes within the house, positing that they in fact follow Andrea Palladio's structural grammar.

In the way of a quick summary, the grammar seeks to organize the house through a series of strict rules. Perouse de Montclos proved, it was possible to use a system to generate a number of houses such as Villa Badoer, Villa La Ragona, Villa Poiana, and Villa Zenon. In essence there are eight steps:

- 1. Definition
- 2. Definition of the building
- 3. Definition of the site
- 4. Realignment of the site
- 5. Entrances—porticos and porches
- 6. All inflections of the site
- 7. Ornamentation—columns and doors
- 8. Final definition

On these steps to delineate the house (1.0) first established (2.0) and (4.0) so on. He attempts to show the constant refiguration of the house as a kind of geological layering. Perouse de Montclos argued that all possible forms, most of which are never settled because, as he stated, "the space will never cease to change and nothing forbids it to do so. The only thing that proves that such a house is not possible is that it is not."<sup>150</sup>

Palladian grammar in action. See: *William Perouse de Montclos' Palladian Grammar and Its Application to the Design of the Villa Badoer* (MIT Press, 1994), p. 152-180. *Books of Architecture* (1570) trans. Robert

Montclos' *Palladian Grammar and Its Application to the Design of the Villa Badoer* (MIT Press, 1994), p. 152-180. *Books of Architecture* (1570) trans. Robert

Thus, as well as prompting formal inquiries into the ever elusive internal shape of the house and the rules governing those shifts, Sebastiano Perouse de Montclos also broaches a much more commonly discussed matter: the question of occupation. Though few will ever agree on the meaning of the configurations or the

absence of style in that place, no one has yet to disagree that the labyrinth is still a house.<sup>151</sup> Therefore the question soon arises whether or not it is someone's house. Though if so whose? Whose was it or even whose is it? Thus giving voice to another suspicion: could the owner still be there? Questions which echo the snippet of gospel Navidson alludes to in his letter to Karen<sup>152</sup>—St. John, chapter 14—where Jesus says:

In my Father's house are many rooms: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you . . .

Something to be taken literally as well as ironically.<sup>153</sup>

New York: American Elsevier, 1996) in which Quine applies Corbusier's Five Points to the Navidson house, thereby proving, in his mind, the limitations and hence irrelevance of the Palladian grammar. While these conclusions are somewhat questionable, they are not without merit. In particular, Quine's treatment of the Villa Savoye and the Domino House deserves special attention. Finally consider Gisele Urbanati Rowan Lell's far more commercial piece "Polypod Or Polyolith?: The Navidson Creation As Mechanistic/Constructive Model" in *Abaku Banner Catalogue*, v. 198, January 1996, p. 515-597, in which she treats the "house-shifts" as evidence of polyolithic dynamics and hence structure. For a more detailed reference see Greenfield and Schneider's "Building a Tree Structure. The Development of Hierarchical Complexity and Interrupted Strategies in Children's Constructive Play" in *Developmental Psychology*, 13, 1977, p. 299-313.

which also happens to maintain a curious set of constants. Consider —

- Temperature: 32°F ± 8.
- Light: absent.
- Silence: complete\*
- Air Movement (i.e. breezes, drafts etc.): none
- True North: DNE

\*With the exception of the 'growl'.

Chapter XVII.

It is not to be forgotten is the terror Jacob feels when he encounters the territories of the unknown: "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Genesis 28:17)

drains, bathtubs, urinals, sinks, drinking fountains, water heaters, or coolers, expansion tanks, pressure relief valves, flow control, branch vent, downspout, soil stacks, or waste stacks, or fire protection equipment: smoke detectors, sprinklers, flow detectors, dry pipe valve, O.S. & Y. Gate valve, water motor alarm, visual annunciation devices, hose rack and hose reel, whether a 2 1/2" or 1 1/2" valve, foam systems, gaseous suppression systems; nor any sign of daisy-chain wiring or star wiring of electrical metallic tubing (EMT), rigid conduit, wireways, bus ducts, underfloor ducts,

time—148  
myth, and finally  
Dynamisties, eventually  
Kings, Emperors,  
(P), whether Bishops,  
the names of Patrons  
have begun to fade into  
the authors of buildings  
though here the names of  
Celer, Daedalus—  
Damascus, Severus,  
Apollodorus of  
Periz, Ganzo,  
Pisano, Pedro  
Suger (P), Nicola  
d'Orbai, Abbot  
Castanet (P), Jean  
Bishop Bernard de  
Jean de Louhère,  
William of Sens,  
Englishman,  
William the  
Henry de Reines,  
Henry Xevele,  
Robert Janyms,  
William Wynford,  
Arnuda, Diego Boylac,  
Peter Parler, Diogo  
Hans von Burghausen,  
Heinrich von Brunsberg,  
Wentzel Korbiter,  
Ulrich von Ensingen,  
Eseler, Jörg Ganhofner,  
Heinzelehamm, Nicolaus  
Benedikt Ried, Konrad  
Lorenzo Matiani,  
Arnolfo di Cambio,  
Juan Gil de Hontañon,  
Colonne, Juan Guas,  
Brunelleschi, Simon of  
Alberti, Filippo  
Vinci, Leon Battista  
Filarete, Leonardo da  
Donato Bramante,  
Sungallo the Elder,  
Youtger, Antonio da  
Antonio da Sangallo the  
Raffaello Sanzio,  
Balassare Peruzzi,  
Ginlio Romano,  
Michelangelo Buonarroti,  
Sammichele,  
Sansovino, Michele  
Vignola, Jacopo Tatti  
Giacomo Barozzi da  
Domenico Fontana,  
Bassi, Galeazzo Alessi,



Figure 3

Having little choice, Navidson continues on. The hours sweep by. He tries to drink as little water as many thousands of miles he has traveled. He just continues to ride, lost in a trance born out of motion describing the ash floor in front of him before it is already behind him, until all of a sudden, although "As if all along, during the last week, I had sensed something out there" Navidson stutters into the

<sup>↑</sup> Navidson is not the only one to have intuitively sensed the abyss. During the tragic May assault on Everest where the 7,000 foot Kangshung face: "Finally, probably around ten o'clock, I walked over this little rise, and it felt like I in *Outside*, v. xxi, n. 9, September 1996, p. 64.

possible. The odometer breaks. Navidson does not care. It no longer seems relevant to him how and darkness, the lamp on his bike never casting light more than a few yards ahead, barely nothing appears to have changed, one moment differs from the rest, warning Navidson to stop. Hi 8 an hour later. "And then all at once it was gone, replaced by — ↑

Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.

seven people died, Neal Biedelman, lost at night in a blinding blizzard, described how he stumbled to the edge of the earth. I could sense a huge void just beyond." See Jon Krakauer's "Into Thin Air"

Figure 4

May 8, 1987

Dearest everything and remarkably elegant seraphim's  
truth Johnny oh heaven's near nearing you,

Tell hope everything you hear and value every  
fine outward understanding near day at windows and  
yore told over by rectopathic elephants announcing  
karmic meddling ends. Restore a person's entity and  
fit in fine tellings you-should instead x-ray years easily  
ardent rules on lying dead beneath a ghostly overture  
forming barren ohms near early stones. Their  
hammers enjoin rare entreaties in sullen norths on  
waters over rare spoons endlessly aching near deeper  
dreams often noted' there by eels lost in early vales  
esteemed on thoughtful hints entered rapaciously  
wined in sour evenings.

Try handing easy attitudes to tasting efforts  
naming dances attending numerous titles so  
dolorously ostracized in time. Over tumbles healing  
ends raw suffering done on installment trips.  
Negotiate on the easter venue every reeling youth  
declares awful years, not oneiric trespasses effected  
victoriously every rainy year wearing emerald  
elements killed, muttering and yodeling by ear near  
other totemic ears venturing easily near even victories  
eaten rare you might ogle never tell him. But under  
tethers teach him every yell delivered on irenic tables.  
Soon over moons easing on noon ends Ivy dons on  
needless' thumbs knows nothing on women  
announcing love waning at yesterday stars creasing  
over magic easels stinging. Why he ever needed  
interior taps' sung dying at raven kings. Leering  
antinomies telling everything. Interesting' virtues  
eclipsed late especially at rolling numerical ethereal  
dares not overly tested to overly simplify creatures  
returning eidetic anguish meaning, simple creatures  
return eidetic anguish meaning issues noticing guys

girls at very elevAted meetings emoting harvests on  
peculiar estuaries avidly nullified deceased unwanted  
nor at never sworn worn events rendered embarked  
deceased having old pennies embalmed in stews soon  
heating at tawny townships evEry right employee  
decides hearing over permissions entertained. Theatre  
has instilled nothing kiNd or favorable yelling over  
unsung rituals Hamlet answered in tempting iAmps  
and nurtured. Islands torn in seas far away removed  
somewhere at noCturnal engagements requiring ties  
on crepe heLd out on steel envelopes reporting animal  
penchants erased tampered handily all near slimy  
hated ancillary tributes tOld every raw enormity  
despite hopeless odes performed effortlessly. Sanitize  
optimize I so under bare my inner trUth all negotiated  
dear I dramatize rules instigating foul truth.

Install letters every time cameras attack  
priceless rubies in captive eskimos at noble dens at  
cunning embassies running tainted ambages in near  
dear eagles going right every excellency on free  
flowing rides enscrolled euphony-as soul searing  
ocular cats install and tenDer immeasurable owls  
never tearing away kNown emblems murdered  
everywhere and wOrn at yarn. Some over meaning  
enemies take illicit measures erecTing sayings I mean  
something telling in lone lost answeRs washed and  
yearned long orgAnized near gaping arks fleeing  
terrors encroaChing right in terrifying sin done on  
nothing ending, all flying to explications removEd here  
every' swoon goIng on never ending—this hopeless  
effort sliNking to relate anguish never gaThered ever  
right, this hopeful effort answered too telling eitHer  
not dear and not tainted, tElling her each curse under  
some toothless odor designed in awful negotiations,  
testing hapless engineers juiCing amber nights in  
torrid opium runs, causing lone ether ambulating  
numskulls in not good mental after nave, wateRing at  
inner themes insisting neat grass means a name, dOing

it right there you Man And Nam—they hear every normal insight going hard to taklamakan in darkening years in notorious games unsung paternally and famously told even right hoisted insipid me.

Inspire' me in naming heaven even loved losing god in vain in nothing gained in nothing told over hell's each and very even north why he even returned every Instigation so ominously mentioned each time in many evening square told heroically in near kettles often froWned yearning over umbrage requiring beneficial escapes azure up to icy falls under looming fame and time heard every rain when insiDe the hat hops in school dramas recalled each ambassador mentioned yearly wintering in nether glass soon ambivalently nearing dark offerings not listed young to hollow every night dust operas I almost lost leaning on winds making you so elfin like fools told over chocolate raisined youth. Never order two bees ending c as upper sneers exacerbate yearning over uninspired rituals mentioned on the hurting embers revealed withering after so read and performed enough deeds (after games at inner nodes) by understanding too bets every corner allowed use soon enjoyed sordid hymns enjambed loved on very early days summer on memory under careful harms wintering hammering at too stony hard edges carried over under libations deemed near every venture enchanted realistically hovering and venturing ethereal by educible ecdysiasts nightly answering lessons learned over ways ever dreaded told on knowledge ending every poem. Said undertaking cold hands announce sorry instincts lighting lips you gave in red lines.

Yesterday opaque uncertainty measured uncertainty so tediously so advanced versions estimated meant early Johnny oh heroic new nimble you. Is no telling heard each native architectural mention even on former yards on usual rights favored after trillion holes execrate religion. I muster under

stress this evidence so carefully appointed perfectly  
erased there hear in silence placid lunacy after  
considering east on returning Interest why inspired  
love lost despite issuing everything.

I love you so much.  
You are all I have.

P.

June 23, 1987

Dearest man-child of mine,

No sign from you. Just days folding endlessly into more days.  
The cancer of ages. The knots of rain not reason. And no, aspirin  
won't help. Won't help. Won't.

My hands resemble some ancient tree: the roots that bind up  
the earth, the rock and the ceaselessly nibbling wordms.

But you are too young for trees to know  
anything of their lives. Oh what a crippled  
existence 900 years must lead.

I am truly  
only yours,

P.