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Spatial Rape: Globalization and the Tourist-Vagabond Relationship in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*

Tracy Stephens

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At the center of Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* is the narrative of The *Navidson Record*, the story of Will Navidson’s struggle to understand and conquer the mystery of his labyrinthine house — a mystery that is profoundly connected to Navidson’s guilt over Delial, a dead Sudanese girl whose photo made Navidson famous. Navidson’s preoccupation with Delial shapes the house, lending it the characteristics of globalized space as it would have been experienced by Delial and others in her socioeconomic circumstances (whom Zygmunt Bauman has named vagabonds), in contrast to the experience of tourists such as Navidson. The vagabonds’ experience of globalization, specifically with regard to space and their ability to occupy it comfortably, aids us in understanding the behavior of the house, and the exploitative relationship between tourists and vagabonds further explains both Navidson’s obsession with the house and the lesson he learns inside that allows him to escape.
Many thanks to my committee for their help and for their time, with special thanks to Dr. Kurt Bullock for his invaluable feedback and his guidance through the thesis process. Thanks also to Dr. David Ihrman for assigning *House of Leaves*, and Dr. Michael Ott and Dr. Brian Phillips for assigning the texts on globalization of which I make the most use herein. Finally, thanks to my mom, for making me a bookworm, a bleeding-heart liberal, and a horror geek, all of which contributed greatly to my ability to conceive this project.
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Mark Z. Danielewski’s novel *House of Leaves* is a multi-layered and genre-bending work that defies easy explication. At its heart is the intrusion of an unexplainable spatial anomaly into the home and lives of photojournalist Will Navidson and his family, just as Navidson is beginning to let go of his old lifestyle of continual travel so that he may reconnect with his partner Karen and his children, Chad and Daisy. The aberration, which his friend insists on calling a “goddammed spatial rape” (55), is a hallway that appears while the family is on vacation, a dark corridor that leads into an enormous, ever-changing, endlessly barren labyrinth. Navidson documents his attempts to understand and explore his new house, eventually creating a film, *The Navidson Record*, that serves as the audience’s window into Navidson’s story; the bulk of the novel is not a narrative of the house and the Navidsons, but rather analyzes, explicates, and critiques the film. Navidson’s story is thus told to us through the filter of narrator Zampano’s critical exegesis, a parody of academic writing complete with footnotes. That perspective is further mediated by the arrangement of Zampano’s work by Johnny Truant, which he intermingles with his commentary and personal narrative. Finally, Truant’s work is added to and corrected by a team of editors. Multiple layers of narrative, then, stand between the audience and Navidson, as does Johnny’s admission that the film, the house, and Navidson himself are all figments of Zampano’s imagination, and that Zampano, being blind, could never have seen the film even if it were real. In spite of this mediation and the disruption of the audience’s suspension of disbelief, the mystery of the house and of its relationship to Navidson nonetheless remains at the center of the novel at every layer of the narrative. The house’s significance and its effects are profoundly personal to Navidson and yet radiate from him to Zampano, then to Johnny, and, finally, to the reader.
The house is an outgrowth of a crisis of identity and sense of dislocation provoked for Navidson by Delial, a dying Sudanese girl whose photo won Navidson the Pulitzer Prize; Delial’s death inspires in Navidson a sense of being someone other than the person he had always imagined himself to be, and Johnny warns the readers in his introduction not to continue lest they suffer a similar fate. The presence of this warning and the explicit connection of Navidson’s identity crisis to his guilt over his exploitation of Delial serve to put Delial at the center of Navidson’s story, and Navidson’s relationship to her at the center of the mystery of the house. The literal extent of that relationship ends with Delial dying in Navidson’s arms after he had taken his award-winning photograph, but their encounter provides deeper insight when we consider how they stand in relationship to one another within a broader context figured by the house. Given the differences between their material circumstances, the economic roots of the crisis in Sudan that predicated Delial’s death, and the exploitative nature of Navidson’s interaction with her, the context that most elucidates their relationship is that of the disparate conditions of global power and resource distribution under globalization. The relevance of such real-world socioeconomic conditions to the novel is supported by the fact that the house exhibits various behaviors and characteristics – its labyrinthine structure, its instability, and its complete and permanent blankness, as well as the feelings of unhomeliness it inspires – that parallel the material and psychic effects of globalization as it is experienced by the unfortunate class of people Zygmunt Bauman refers to in Globalization: The Human Consequences as “vagabonds,” in contrast to the more fortunate class, the “tourists.” In reality these two classes do not stand in stable opposition to one another; one is a tourist or a vagabond at any given moment depending upon one’s ability to participate freely in the market as a consumer and traveler. Nevertheless, the terms describe two different lifestyles, two different positions within the structure of the global economic system, that are represented accurately in the novel by Navidson and Delial; he
is a tourist, and she is a vagabond, and their relationship matches the new class dynamic that
Bauman articulates.

Readers may interpret the events of *The Navidson Record*, then, as the house confronting
Navidson with the vagabond’s experience of globalization, so that he may come to terms with the
role he may have played in Delial’s death and in the suffering of countless others who have been
reduced to vagabondage. The novel carries its audience along on this journey, exposing us to the
house’s uncanniness through its multiple levels of diegesis, its aporias, its unusual textual layout,
and other techniques that trap the readers in the house alongside Navidson. For this reason, much
of the existing criticism of the text tends to focus on the symbolic connection of the house and
the novel, either taking a more formalist and meta-textual approach – such as Mark B. N.
Hansen’s discussion of the novel’s unusual wedding of form and content through typographical
innovation – or else taking the shape of more philosophical discussions of the various facets of
postmodernism manifested within both the house and the novel, as in the work of Will Slocombe
(who traces out nihilistic ideas in the text) and N. Katherine Hayles (who compares the novel to
postmodern theory in general as it concerns the role of the subject). These readings pay too little
attention, however, to the exposure of our true selves of which Johnny warns us, as well as to the
self-assessment that the novel informs us is the motivation for Navidson’s engagement with the
house’s mystery. Navidson confesses his guilt over Delial’s death to Karen and to the audience
just before entering the house one final time. His confession implicates the whole “god awful
world” in her death as well as establishing her as the cause of his crisis of identity, thus also
implicating the readers and making Delial the cause of the exposure of our own true selves, the
selves who are culpable for Delial’s suffering and demise. But the novel does not leave Navidson
or the readers trapped within the labyrinth forever, and the purpose of the confrontation is not
punishment, but rather understanding. Navidson returns to the house in order to assess the value
of his life and his art and to come to some conclusion about how best to cope with and address his recognition of his exploitation of others; upon reaching that conclusion, the house dissolves. The novel, then, is best explained as an exploration of the tourist's responsibility for the conditions to which globalization consigns its vagabonds, and of how to accept that responsibility and move forward.

I. Delial

Given the focus on Navidson and Delial's relationship as an articulation of the tourist/vagabond dynamic, establishing Delial's centrality to the text is of highest priority. Her significance may not be obvious upon first examination because she appears to have so little presence in the novel until the point when her identity is finally explained – first when it is revealed that the name Delial is written on the back of Navidson's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph (368), and then more fully by Navidson in his letter to Karen (391). However, the mystery surrounding Delial itself indicates her significance to the story. Within the text, “Delial” is, to use the convenient terminology of the TVTropes.org Wiki, an “arc word,” which is defined as “An enigmatic word or phrase that occurs, unexplained and without context, here and there throughout an arc, and (with luck) is explained at or near the climax” (“Arc Words”). Although the word Delial is largely absent between page 17 and page 368 (there is one other mention, on page 102, that leaves the name as yet mysterious), the introduction of it so long before it is explained, as is typical of an arc word, means that the mystery of its meaning is a preoccupation as one progresses through the novel. Even without reminders, the question is continually present. The same cannot be said of the photograph with which the name, we eventually learn, is associated. The photograph is first mentioned on page six, in the initial introduction of Will Navidson: “eventually a number of photographers in the news community did recognize the author as none other than Will Navidson, the prize-winning photojournalist who won the Pulitzer
for his picture of a dying girl in Sudan” (6). It is interesting that Navidson is identified by the photograph, and introduced to us with the detail of his having taken it; the picture’s significance is indicated by the fact that Navidson’s authorship of it is the first thing that we learn about him, and in the same sentence that names him as the author of *The Navidson Record*. The film and the photograph are thus connected if not laid parallel to each other in Navidson’s introduction. But although there are many references to Navidson’s skill and his success, which recall the Delial photograph for those on a second (or even later) reading, the photograph itself disappears from the book even more completely than the name until it is placed in front of us again on page 368.¹ There is not even an air of mystery surrounding it to keep it present in our minds. If Delial is an arc word, the photograph is what TVTropes.org names a “Chekhov’s Gun,” a seemingly insignificant or irrelevant detail that will, later on, have an enormous impact on the plot (“Chekhov’s Gun”). Yet, the way it is first introduced implies, though with more subtlety than Delial’s introduction, a future significance that the novel bears out.

The first appearance of the name Delial indicates much more directly than the introduction of the photograph just how deeply she is embedded in Navidson’s story. The novel tells us that Navidson is plagued by “alienating and intensely private obsessions” but that the first sign of his “dark broodings” comes from Karen (117), when she, while complaining about Navidson saying the name in his sleep, introduces us to Delial. Karen, we are told, does not know to whom the name refers, though she seems confident that the word is a name, and a female one: “I’ve warned him,” she says, “if he’s not going to tell me who she is he better damn not bring her up” (17). Her certainty indicates – in part because Delial seems not to exist as a name at all or to have any meaning outside of this work – that Navidson has spoken of her in

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¹ At this point the “editors” tell us the real-life story of photojournalist Kevin Carter, on whose work and later suicide the story of Delial and her picture are based; see the Appendix for the real-life photograph.
human terms even if he has not revealed her identity, a fact that is confirmed when the text states that one of Navidson’s stock responses to questions about Delial is that she was someone “close to [him]” (394). Navidson’s regard for Delial as a person, not as a symbol, will become important as this discussion goes forward.

The secrecy surrounding Delial’s identity is discussed twice – once in the beginning, and once after the reveal. In both of these discussions, Delial is compared to Coleridge’s albatross: “No one had any idea who she was or why it was she haunted his thoughts and conversation like some albatross” (17); “Delial is to Navidson what the albatross is to Coleridge’s mariner. In both cases, both men shot their mark only to be haunted by the accomplishment” (394). The recurring use of this metaphor is relevant in two ways. The first, and more obvious, is the implication that taking Delial’s photograph has, as in Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” somehow cursed Navidson and that it is specifically she that is haunting him. The second recalls that, as Serenity’s Captain Malcolm Reynolds so succinctly puts it, “Way I remember it, albatross was a ship’s good luck, ‘til some idiot killed it” (Serenity). In other words, the metaphor also indicates that some connection between Delial and Navidson existed before he took her picture, some connection that was beneficial to him. This will prove to be relevant in two ways; the first relates to the exploitative relationship between tourists and vagabonds that Bauman describes, and the second to the potential of subject-subject relationships in spite of that exploitation.

Delial is not merely a presence in the novel, however, but a primary motivating force for Navidson’s engagement with the house. The chapter (XVII) in which Navidson directly explains who she is is titled, according to Appendix A, “Reasons” (540). It is an attempt to answer, very specifically, a question that appears in large and bold font on page 385: “Why Did Navidson Go Back To the House?” In this chapter we find Navidson’s letter to Karen, which is (appropriately, as it is his attempt to explain himself to her) the focus of one of the major attempts to understand
Navidson’s motivations. The letter states that he “can’t get Delial out of [his] head.” Although he tells Karen that “that’s all she is... just the photo,” he continues to say that it is not the photo (“that photo, that thing”) that is haunting him, but the little girl she was before he took her picture. Said haunting is causing him not just guilt, or some intellectual uncertainty about whether he had done the right thing, but outright anguish: “i miss miss miss but i didn’t miss i got her along with the vulture in the background when the real vulture was the guy with the camera preying on her for his fuck pulitzer prize.” The expression of anguish continues: “i wish i were dead right now i wish i were dead that poor little baby this god god awful world im sorry i cant stop thinking of her never have never will” (391-3). Navidson mentions missing Karen and his children, as well as Wax, Jed, and Holloway, his fellow soldiers in the battle to conquer his house, and a number of men with whom he served in another conflict (391), and he says outright that it might be his brother Tom (who dies in the house) whom he is actually going back to find. Nonetheless, Delial has a place in his letter of much greater significance than anyone else; two and a half of its four pages are nothing but his confession, her story. The letter suggests that his guilt, his outright self-loathing, at having paused to take her picture while she was dying and then benefiting so greatly from it is the overwhelming driving force of his return. Thus, we are told after the letter that “She is all he needs to find” (394). Even what Navidson writes about looking for Tom is colored by the juxtaposition of Tom having saved Daisy while Navidson failed to save Delial: “no tom there, i was no tom there” (393). And most significantly, what Navidson has experienced post-Delial is the alienation of himself, a lack of certainty about his identity and his value: “i miss the man i thought i was before i met her the man who would have saved her who would have done something who would have been tom” (393). The exposure of Navidson’s perceived self, the man he thought he was, as a fiction is vital both to Navidson’s motives and to this discussion.
Although “Reasons” introduces to us three different explanations for Navidson’s return to the house, only the second two are treated as having validity. The first, “The Kellogg-Antwerp Claim,” which theorizes that Navidson returns out of some need to “territorialize and thus preside over that virtually unfathomable space,” is dismissed (386), though perhaps too quickly. The second is the “Bister-Frieden-Josephson [or BFJ] Criteria,” which focuses on Navidson’s emotional state, with the letter as the primary point of discussion, and as a result pays the most attention of the three to Delial. The most interesting part of the discussion, however, is the way in which it insists that Delial’s significance has been inflated, and that his dwelling on Delial is in actuality a method of coping with his grief at losing Tom. The narrator makes a point to mention that this interpretation has been controversial: “To this day the treatment of Delial by the Bister-Frieden-Josephson Criteria is still considered harsh and particularly insensate toward international tragedy.” This claim is not “backed up” by quotes from any “outside sources” critical of the BFJ Criteria, however; instead, the paragraph only goes on to offer evidence for the validity of the criticism, by way of a quote illustrating the BFJ Criteria’s belief that Delial “soon exceeded the meaning of her own existence”: “Memory, experience, and time turned her bones into a trope for everything Navidson had ever lost” (395). What this introduction of an undocumented controversy suggests is that the criticism comes from the author – to whomever of the four (Danielewski, the mysterious editors, Johnny, or Zampanó) we wish to attribute it. Following from that, the statement is not an attempt to present both the strengths and weaknesses of the Criteria so that we may assess its value for ourselves, as is ostensibly the goal of the kind of writing the novel imitates, but rather a deliberate attempt to instill some skepticism if not even disgust at the BFJ Criteria’s treatment of Delial.

In fairness to Bister, Frieden, and Josephson, however, the Haven-Slocum Theory (the third of the possible “reasons”) is no less dismissive of Delial:
The desire to save Delial must partly be attributed to a projection of Navidson’s own desire to be cradled by his mother. Therefore his grief fuses his sense of self with his understanding of the other, causing him not only to mourn for the tiny child but for himself as well. (397)

However, the objective suggested by the theory (and the dreams on which it is based) is much more compatible with Navidson’s preoccupation with Delial than the analysis admits. Both his dream of the way station and his dream of the snail end with Navidson puzzling over a decision (whether to leap, whether to continue exploring) and not being able to choose. In the first dream, the decision depends explicitly upon a reckoning with himself and his past to determine whether he has led a “good” or an “inappropriate” life. The second also depends, though more subtly, upon an assessment of the value of his life, in that he must decide either to go on exploring the snail shell, continuing along the soon-to-be dark and increasingly narrow passageway, or else to turn back and join the others who have already turned back, returning to the world and his life in it (399). Haven and Slocum offer this interpretation of the first dream, which also applies to the second: “The dream seems to suggest that in order for Navidson to properly escape the house he must first reach an understanding about his own life” (399). They offer no explanation for the cause of Navidson’s confusion about his life, however; their focus is on the house and its effects, and their ultimate explanation for Navidson’s return is rooted in its results (“the house became a house again” (406)), which is, in a sense, not an explanation of Navidson’s “reasons” at all.

However, the need for Navidson to reach an understanding about his life is congruent with what actually happens to him while he is inside, and, more importantly, fits with his sense of having lost sight of who he is as a man, having lost the conception he had had of himself before meeting Delial as a man who would try to do the right thing and succeed, “the man who would have saved her” (393). Navidson’s problem is that he is not the person he believed he once was, and
that is because of Delial.

That last sentence deliberately echoes one from Johnny Truant’s introductory chapter, wherein Johnny offers the readers his aforementioned warning about what will happen to them (as happened to him) if they proceed with reading the book, a warning that makes very deliberate allusions to the house on Ash Tree Lane itself. He warns of “slow and subtle shifts,” of struggling to keep the “darkness” “at bay,” of the intrusion of a “great complexity”; more importantly, he warns: “you’ll discover you no longer trust the very walls you always took for granted. Even the hallways you’ve walked a hundred times will feel longer, much longer, and the shadows, any shadow at all, will suddenly seem deeper, much, much deeper” (xxiii). These allusions are important because they help to establish the parallels between Johnny’s story and the events of *The Navidson Record*. The most significant of those parallels, however, lies in the sentence on which I have modeled the one above: “For some reason, you will no longer be the person you believed you once were” (xxii). This is an idea that recurs throughout Johnny’s story, most often in the form of the phrase “Known some call is air am,” which is the phonetic spelling of the Latin sentence “Non sum qualis cram,” meaning, Johnny tells us, “I am not what I used to be” (72).

One of the consequences of reading the novel, then, is to experience exactly what Navidson experiences after Delial dies; readers, like Navidson, end up “missing the people they thought they were before they met her.” Based solely on that one sentence, that conclusion is a bit tenuous, but more of Johnny’s warnings recall Navidson’s lack of understanding about his life. He tells the reader, “you’ll watch yourself dismantle every assurance you ever lived by”; he says that “a great complexity” will rip apart, “piece by piece, all of your carefully conceived denials, whether deliberate or unconscious”; much more importantly, he warns the readers of having to face “the thing you most dread, what is now, what will be, what has always come
before, the creature you truly are, the creature we all are” (xxiii). The selves we believed ourselves to be will be exposed as lies, and some new awareness of forgotten origin will allow us to see, even as we try to avoid it, the people we really are. This realization is the thrust of Johnny’s entire warning; at the heart of the experience of reading *The Navidson Record* is the exposure of ourselves to ourselves as people very different from the ones we wish we were. The parallel suggests, further, that said exposure is also at the heart of *The Navidson Record* itself.

Navidson’s confession about Delial and how it destroyed his sense of self is thus central to the work. Furthermore, Johnny says that this creature that we all are is “buried in the nameless black of a name” (xxiii). While one obvious interpretation of Johnny’s statement is that the name in question is our own, there is also the possibility that it is Delia’s. The mystery surrounding her identity arguably offers her name more significance than anyone else’s and recalls the idea of names and naming most clearly. Moreover, that the name is also “nameless” further recalls that the name’s meaning remains secret for so much of the novel. If that premise is allowed, then what Johnny is telling us fits with the overall argument, that the experience of being inside the house, of assembling *The Navidson Record*, and of reading the book – the hugely unhappy recognition of our true selves – is rooted in the witnessing of Delial’s circumstances and her death, thus placing her at the center of not just *The Navidson Record* but the entire text.

II. Globalization: Tourists and Vagabonds

Of course, the most compelling evidence of Delial’s centrality to the text is that Delial and her suffering, and what they mean to Navidson and the readers, are manifested in the house itself, through the house’s replication of the material and psychic conditions of globalization for the vagabond. The terminology to be used herein requires some attention before moving forward, as globalization is, according to Bauman, a “fad word” whose meaning has become clouded: “the more experiences [vogue words] pretend to make transparent, the more they themselves become
opaque” (1). In other words, the term “globalization” has come to be used to describe or explain so much of modern experience that it is no longer clear to what processes or conditions or deliberate projects it actually applies. Within this discussion, then, globalization will be used as shorthand for both “the globalization project” and “neoliberal globalization.” The former is the term preferred by Philip McMichael because, he writes, “To call it a project emphasizes the politics of globalization” and exposes that it is not “natural” (149). The latter defines globalization specifically as the deliberate global spread – by the influence and intervention of the governments and corporations of the richest nations, the Bretton Woods institutions (The International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) – of the neoliberal or free market form of capitalism. It should be noted that this definition requires using the term somewhat differently from Bauman, who states that the term “refers primarily to the global effects, notoriously unintended and unanticipated, rather than to global initiatives and undertakings” (60). However, Bauman’s approach to globalization is to treat it almost as a social pathology, focusing on its symptoms, many of which are not widely known or understood, while McMichael is providing a history of the institutionalization of a neoliberal global economy through deliberate acts of policy, the consequences of which are no less real and were no less inevitable regardless of their intentionality.

The two positions are thus not truly in conflict with one another: certainly the effects Bauman notes were not the purpose of the political action McMichael documents, but those actions are still their cause. McMichael’s term is preferable for the purposes of this argument because the political realities underlying globalization will be important to remember, as they explain why globalization is not, as Bauman suggests we tend to believe, “a process that affects us in the same measure and in the same way” (1). Rather, globalization is a highly (and intentionally) stratifying form of global economic organization, offering prosperity for the few
and economic and social hardships for the rest. McMichael lists some of these hardships: "poverty, displacement, job and food insecurity, health crises (AIDS), and a widening-band of informal activity as people make do in lieu of stable jobs, government supports, and sustainable habitats" (192). The enormous disparity in socioeconomic conditions is, first and foremost, where the material realities of globalization begin to resonate within *House of Leaves*.

It would be a mistake to assume that the stratification created by globalization emerges because some are "left behind" while others prosper. As will become important as I begin to connect these social trends with the behavior of the house, there is, as far as we on the inside of it are concerned, no "outside" to the globalization project. McMichael writes of the importance of "compliance" within the globalization project, a condition that is assured through the development of consensus – created by convincing governments and citizens of the fairness and efficiency of the free market – and coercion – made possible by the institutionalization, both internationally and locally, of laissez faire economic policies (154). According to McMichael, the central mechanism of the globalization project is liberalization, a broad term for the economic protocols adopted and imposed by such "global managers" as IMF, World Bank, and WTO officials, members of G-20 governments, and the CEOs and directors of transnational corporations or global banks (157). They are "imposed" in the sense that liberalization – which opens the nation to foreign investment, limits state powers, and in general emphasizes participation in global trade over the social objectives of national development (157-8) – is the prerequisite for being deemed creditworthy by the rest of the world. The downgrading of social goals is a built-in part of the ideology of neoliberalism, which involves the cutting of social welfare and entitlement programs, the privatization of necessary public services (including but not limited to health care, utilities, and even education or emergency response), and the elimination of the hindrances on free enterprise represented by financial, environmental, worker
safety, or consumer protection regulation (160). The dissolution of whatever social safety net may have existed in the developing world, as well as the lack of natural resource management and environmental protection, results in what is popularly known as the “race to the bottom.” And this says nothing about the phenomena of displacement and recolonization, or the social hardships listed previously. But for poor nations, unable either to sustain themselves without trade or to compete in the global market on their own terms, the procurement of loans and/or foreign investment is a short-term necessity, no matter the long-term costs.

Sudan, Delial’s homeland, was no different. During the 1980s, when Navidson must have taken her picture (*The Navidson Record* was filmed, the novel tells us, beginning in April of 1990 (8)), Sudan’s long second civil war was already being waged, having begun in 1983 (PGA 1). While most humanitarian attention to Sudan during that time was focused on the war, the influx of foreign refugees during the same years, and the famine the war helped to create (Sudan.net), one does not have to stretch far back into the country’s history to connect its situation with its place in the global economy. Even without considering the most obvious historical roots of the poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, market forces played a role in creating the political conditions that created the backdrop for the Delial photograph: five years before the civil war began, in 1978, oil was discovered in the southern part of the country, and the north and south began to fight for control over it (Rone 60). A 2000 Amnesty International study titled “Oil in Sudan Deteriorating Human Rights” indicates that the genocidal tactics of displacement and depopulation characterizing the civil war have been practiced in part for the sake of honoring contracts with foreign investors – including Chevron (Rone 62) – in the Sudanese oil fields: “as early as...the 1980s, the local population was permanently displaced from the areas of the Unity and Heglig oil fields..., which at the time were operated by the French oil company Total” (PGA 1). Moreover, Sudan and other poor African nations’ GDPs were largely dependent on the
exportation of a small number of primary commodities – that is, commodities that need little to no processing before they are ready for use (2). Globalization – which promotes the idea of "comparative advantage," the specialization of economic activity according to the country’s resource base, as a nation’s greatest opportunity for prosperity (McMichael 159) – encourages such primary commodity exportation. This practice is dangerous in that it fosters dependence over self-reliance, encourages the unsustainable use of resources, and requires the country to part with commodities that are desperately needed by their own people, such as food or, in Sudan’s case, fuel oil (PGA 1). Sudan’s resources were then through the 1980s and beyond further depleted by the war, fought in part for the sake of gaining comparative advantage as a petroleum-exporting country, leading to the famine conditions depicted in Navidson’s photograph. Delial’s death may have predated the WTO and the most aggressive global institutionalization of neoliberalism, but the conditions in Sudan at the time of Navidson’s visit have everything to do with the stratifying effects of the unfair conditions of global trade.

Certainly, Navidson stands in relationship to Delial in a way that illustrates that stratification. Navidson, in comparison to Delial, is in a position of privilege so great it is absurd. "Navidson works out every day, devours volumes of esoteric criticism," we are told (32). He is successful in his profession, enough that he is given “the Guggenheim Fellowship and the NEA Media Arts Grant” to fund his documentary (8). With the grants, savings, equity, and credit, Navidson is worth about a million dollars (148). He can afford to buy a home, provide for Karen and his children, and support Tom when he needs it. He has famous friends (63), "is respected by thousands" in his own right (247), and has a wide social network allowing him to be in touch with explorers and scientists when demanded by his curiosity about his house. He is a world-traveler. The Navidson Record praises him for his “courage” in going to Sudan and walking “the violent, disease-infested streets” and for “contend[ing] with the infinite number of ways he could
photograph [Delial]” (419-20). The novel does not credit Delial, who walked those same streets as long as she still had the strength, with the same courage. She has not the luxury of such high regard. Nor does she have the luxury of a supportive social network or connections to people with influence or needed skills. She certainly lacks the luxury of grants, exercise, art, and criticism. As she exists to us, she has no name beyond the one Navidson gave her, no family, no home. Navidson finds her squatting in the dirt, a likely-scavenged bone the only food available to her, “her lips a crawl of insects, her eyes swollen with sand” (420). And, of course, at the time of *The Navidson Record*, she no longer has her life.

At the same time, Navidson is not one of the super-rich, not a member of the capitalist or ruling class. If the different positions Delial and Navidson occupied were simply those of poverty and wealth, he would need to be richer; if, alternately, the contrast rested on Navidson’s being simply a typical privileged American, he would need to be poorer or at least less famous. The contrast between Navidson and Delial is not, then, as simple as a statement about social class inequality within the global economy or about the obliviousness of citizens of industrialized nations to the reality of absolute poverty and hunger in much of the rest of the world. Not being rich, not being powerful, and not being oblivious to suffering, the luxury enjoyed by those who benefit from global economic stratification (and denied to those who are harmed by it) that is most embodied in Navidson’s lifestyle is, in fact, mobility, which Bauman identifies as the “main stratifying factor of our late-modern or postmodern times” (2). For Bauman, mobility, the lack of it, and the effect of either on space, are central to the experience of globalization, and it is with regard to mobility that Navidson and Delial are most representative of the disparity in lifestyles and quality of life created by globalization. For Bauman, globalization gives birth to a new class model, in which people, depending on their mobility and how effectively they act as consumers, may occupy the position of “tourist” or “vagabond”; Navidson is solidly one of the former,
Bauman justifies rooting his class divisions on mobility by detailing the effects that globalization has had on mobility (and therefore space) for both tourists and vagabonds, effects that we see clearly reflected in the material conditions of Navidson and Delial. Bauman argues that the primary results of globalization are "spatial segregation, separation and exclusion" (3), and these results come primarily from globalization's effects on space and time, creating what he calls the "time/space compression" of globalization (2). "Time/space compression" refers to the conquering of distance by technologies that allow the global elites to travel either physically (by plane, for instance) or virtually (over the Internet) with sufficient speed that they are essentially free from the constraints of either time or space. He explains:

[L]ittle in the elite’s life experience now implies a difference between ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, ‘close by’ and ‘far away’. With time of communication imploding and shrinking to the no-size of the instant, space and spatial markers cease to matter. (13)

Compression of space and time is not merely the experience of the elite, however, but the ideal on which global capitalism is modeled and a goal which it has very actively pursued in what Bauman calls "the Great War of Independence from Space" (8). The liberalization of capital has been the key to this independence, since corporations are now free to move elsewhere if localities attempt to enforce regulations, impose taxes, or otherwise place any responsibility for the care of the community into the hands of the corporation – all actions that are, to use the dangerous phrasing of Chapter 11, Article 10 of the NAFTA accord, "tantamount to expropriation" and therefore in violation of the rules of global trade (Pavey and Williams). The justification for this is simple: the corporation’s obligation is to its shareholders, and since the
shareholders are beholden to no particular locality, because they are geographically dispersed, the corporation is thus also beholden to no particular locality.

Independence from spatial constraints defines not just the conditions of trade, however, but also the real, lived experience of globalization for the tourist. Tourists, Bauman writes, “stay or move at their hearts’ desire” because “they find the world within their (global) reach irresistibly attractive” (92); in short, tourists move because it is what they want to do, whether they are compelled by some horror at the idea of standing still – manifested, as will be discussed later, in the horror of and rejection of the vagabond – or by a more optimistic desire to acquire the new experiences and sensations for sale in the global consumer society (92). And certainly this freedom to move characterizes Navidson; “[T]aking off at a moment’s notice to shoot Alaskan fishing boats” or to Sudan to photograph a humanitarian crisis or to India to “capture the clamor of industry outside Hyderabad” (37) or to Cambodia or Thailand or Israel or Angola (367) or wherever else his attention was drawn was a normal part of life for Navidson (17), his career continually carrying away from home (10). The attractions offered by his mobility are nearly impossible for him to resist; he acquiesces to Karen’s demands that he give up his globetrotting lifestyle with reluctance, and ultimately cannot resist the opportunity to explore the house, to treat it as a new adventure; we are told that he “finds himself constantly itching to leave his family for that place” (82). More than any desire to simply solve the mystery of the house, he wants to walk through it and see and experience whatever is to be found inside. But although he moves because he wishes to, he also has the luxury of settling down in one place, to move into a place “and start to inhabit it. Settle in, maybe put down some roots” (9). He has the chance to create for himself “an outpost set against the transience of the world” (23). Of course, the house in which he has chosen to live hardly serves that purpose for him, but the point remains that, especially in his life before the house on Ash Tree Lane, Navidson moves, or does not, according
to his own will. Moreover, in his work and in his settling down for Karen and the kids rather than for himself, he suffers the hardships of the tourist’s lifestyle, as Bauman describes them: “the impossibility of slowing down, uncertainty wrapping every choice, risks attached to every decision” (98). In the house, of course, Navidson faces different hardships, but the possibility that the house renders Navidson a vagabond does not come into play until very late into *The Navidson Record*. Throughout the bulk of the text, that role belongs to Delial.

The conditions of the vagabond are nowhere near as pleasant as those of the tourist: “If the new extraterritoriality of the elite feels like intoxicating freedom,” writes Bauman, “the territoriality of the rest feels less like home ground, and ever more like prison” (23). One should not take that to mean, however, that the vagabond’s experience is characterized by a lack of movement, as such immobility is impossible in the globalized world, as Bauman also notes: “One cannot ‘stay put’ in moving sands. Neither can one stay put in this late-modern or postmodern world of ours – a world with reference points on wheels” (78). Rather, the vagabond lacks the ability to move according to his or her own will; vagabonds move when and where they are made to by forces outside their control. Vagabonds, then, cannot occupy any space comfortably, cannot settle in anywhere and put down roots, cannot travel in order to consume the (generally manufactured, in order to ensure their pleasantness) experiences and sensations of unfamiliar places. They are displaced because they are in the way, they are welcome nowhere, and they “are allowed neither to stay put...nor search for a better place to be” (92-3). This kind of forced migration has been common throughout history, from the Trail of Tears to the slaughter of the U’wa in Colombia (Hougland 1) to the previously-mentioned displacement from the southern Sudan oil fields, but the real absurdity of the vagabond’s position, of being forced to move but having nowhere to go, is probably more effectively illustrated through examples of the house’s behavior in the novel under examination here: the house dragging Tom two steps back for every
for every step he tries to take toward the window during the family’s escape (346), for instance, or Navidson’s being rolled downhill on his bike regardless of which direction he faces during his final exploration (425). The vagabond’s situation is one of futility of surreal, tragicomic proportions, and certainly futility characterizes what we know of Delial’s life, and of Navidson’s final attempt to help her, picking her up and running with her to nowhere. Of course, knowing as little as we do about Delial, there is not much direct evidence that can be used to argue for her status as a vagabond before Navidson found her; however, we can state with some certainty that she was in a locality over whose terrible circumstances she had no control, and that she had no chance at a better life somewhere else. She did not have a place to set down roots: for one, Sudan was experiencing the chaos of civil war; for two, Navidson found her “twelve miles from nowhere” (393). Even disregarding her extreme youth, she was helpless and without any control over the space in which she existed.

III. Space, Mapping, and Exteriority

Much of Bauman’s discussion of the tourist/vagabond dynamic is centered on the idea of being or feeling “at home,” a concept of huge importance to which I will return. However, this feeling is dependent, as noted, upon a sense of control over space and/or one’s relationship to it, an idea that becomes more striking in relationship to the behavior of the house, and which therefore needs more attention. Contained within this question of control are issues of alterations to space, of perception of space and its mapping, and of the meaning, value, or historicity of space inhabited by people, as they pertain both to vagabonds and to those within the house. Because of the novel’s aggressive postmodernism, though, and the connection of the house’s structure to the trope of the labyrinth in other preceding postmodern works, as explored by Natalie Hamilton, the discussion of the behavior of the house will require an effort to explore the house’s connection to conceptions of “postmodern space” and make a case for those connections
having their roots in economic circumstances, namely the globalization project.

The most important characteristic of the house’s behavior as it relates to one’s control over the space one occupies is its instability. Navidson discovers during Exploration A, his first entrance into the new hallway that has appeared suddenly in his living room, that the walls shift and distances grow and shrink. During Exploration #4, it takes Holloway and his team almost four days to finish descending the spiral staircase, but Navidson and Reston, going in to rescue them, reach the bottom in a matter of minutes (164). Alterations of that kind are the most obvious of the parallels between the behavior of the house and the experience of globalization for the vagabonds; it is the experience of having no control over alterations to the space they occupy. One cause of this lack of control is that liberalization gives corporations enormous freedom to exploit resources, relocate populations, alter the landscape (through mining, for instance, or by cutting down trees or damming rivers), greatly diminish environmental quality, build or destroy infrastructure to suit the demands of production, and, finally, make themselves the only source of income in the locality through all these actions and then move production elsewhere at a moment’s notice. The WTO and other free trade agreements implement policies to limit or even eliminate the rights of the government and citizens to put a stop to policies that they see as doing them harm.² The control over the localities has been wrested from the local decision-making centers and put in the hands of corporations and institutions like the WTO. The people still living in those localities suffer the lot of having to watch what was once their home shift around them, according to the dictates of some outside will or force.

The reordering of a space from outside is about more than the literal alteration of the space, however. It also has much to do with imposing a certain perception of the space; in other

²Two WTO protocols in particular, the TRIPs and the GATS, have resulted in the subversion of democracy and in real damage to the public well-being in many cases. See McMichael, Chapter 6.
words, it is an issue of mapping, which is also crucial in describing the operation of space within the house. After Navidson and Reston’s discovery of the much-contracted spiral staircase, the novel provides a discussion of the subjective nature of mapping, introducing the idea of the “psychological dimensions of space” or the “sensation of space” (175), as well as the assertion that space is “subjectively defined and perceived” and that “distances and directions are fixed relative to man” (169). Bauman shares this understanding of space as subjectively defined, and discusses how the idea of mapping emerged in part to counter or control the subjectivity of spatial perception. His argument is that the purpose of mapping as such was to impose an objective understanding of the ordering of space from “a unique reference point as would be capable of accomplishing the miracle, of rising above, and overcoming, its own endemic relativity” (32). In other words, it would be a view from outside of the space itself, not limited to a single subjective perspective within the space. Maps thus provide a view from outside that creates transparency for those foreign to the locality, including tax collectors and other bureaucrats. The question of subjective mapping versus mapping from an objective and exterior position becomes complicated in relationship to the house, and the novel’s discussion of it is ambiguous and self-contradictory: the space may possibly respond to the influence of subjective perception and knowledge, yet it refuses to carry any evidence of human presence or history (which are negated by external mapping and even redesign). Meanwhile, its only possible logic exists from an outside perspective, but the possibility of such exteriority is in question.

The theory that the shifts in the house are a response to the viewer comes by way of the introduction of a few theorists on architecture who debate the existence of architectural space “independently of the casual observer,” a debate that we are told becomes blurry in relationship to the house on Ash Tree Lane. The novel asks directly the question of how to interpret the relationship of the house’s structure to its occupants: “Is it possible to think of that place as
‘unshaped’ by human perceptions? Especially since everyone entering there finds a vision almost completely...different from anyone else’s?” (174). The novel makes some attempt to answer the question, as well. Earlier, the novel cites critics who assert that the distances contract so greatly for Navidson and Reston relative to what Holloway, Wax, and Jed experienced because “Knowledge of the terrain on a second visit dramatically contracts the sense of distance”; in other words, “knowledge is hot water on wool. It shrinks time and space” (167). This is in accord with the earlier reflection, during Exploration #2, that “It is almost as if continued use...preserves the path they walk” (85). These observations would seem to suggest that the house is a place where “who” is still the center of spatial gravity, that the house is a place of subjective mapping in the extreme, with certain elements that are undeniably there, but others that change based on the person looking at them. Moreover, Nele Bemong suggests, citing Anthony Vidler, that Navidson’s exploration of the house was intended as a way of gaining control over that space; he quotes Vidler as saying that “Techniques of spatial occupation, of territorial mapping, of invasion and surveillance are seen as the instruments of social and individual control” (1). If he or whoever else enters the house truly is imposing his perspective upon the space, then, as the concept of mapping always implies, he has control over it. If the reality of how the shifts worked were that simple, of course, the comparison to space under globalization would be invalid, as it would indicate a relationship between space and its occupants that is the exact opposite of the operation of space under globalization. Neither the house nor the discussion of it, however, is that logical. During Exploration #4, it is suggested that the shifts happen not because they are inspired by the occupants, but because the space is unoccupied, and “unoccupied space will never cease to change simply because nothing forbids it to do so” (120). The house, this idea then suggests, does what it does according its own will, or to some natural process beyond our understanding. By itself, the fact that this assertion is present in the novel does not negate the
alternative reading of the house’s behavior. However, when put in conjunction with the fact that much of the house’s shifts are not and likely cannot be explained in relationship to the perspective of a single person, and that the novel settles the question only by stating that “speculation will continue for a long time over what force alters and orders the dimensions of that place” (178), the reading of the house as “some kind of absurd interactive Rorschach test” need not be seen as the final word on the subject (178). Moreover, Rorschach tests involve interpretation by an outside party, and such might also be the case with the house; it may, then, be altering itself according to its reading of the individual – alterations that may be harmful or helpful, and readings that may or may not be accurate or relevant to the perception of space.

Such an interpretation of the alterations parallels how localities are reordered from outside, done less with a lack of awareness about the logic of the structure as experienced from inside, and more in a deliberate attempt to replace that logic with another for the purposes of the outsider, who might even have an interest in erasing the history or destroying the culture of those on the inside. The logic of re-mapping under globalization is congruent with the behavior of the house, where it is, Navidson tells us, “impossible to leave a lasting trace” (162). The “blankness of that place, ‘the utter and perfect blankness’,,” is one of the house’s most striking features (387). With good reason, the novel cites the blankness as one reason why the space is uninhabitable: “Nothing there provides a reason to linger” it says at one point (119); later, a footnote tells us that “In those endlessly repetitive hallways and stairs, there is nothing for us to connect with. That permanently foreign place does not excite us. It bores us” (167). The house is what Bauman, citing Steven Flusty, calls an “interdictory space” – that is, a space “designed to

3There is, for instance, no easy explanation for why the staircase grows again just in time to prevent Navidson’s escape (289), or why it suddenly becomes malicious and reaches out into what had seemed to be outside of itself in devouring Tom, or how it can be presumed that continued use or knowledge solidifies the house’s structure when it’s only because the “occupant” has any knowledge of the structure that shifts can be observed, or how it is that groups of people experience the house in the same way at the same time.
intercept and repel or filter would-be users” (20); in other words, an interdictory space is one that conveys the message, so familiar to readers of *House of Leaves*, that “This is not for you.” Bauman lists a few of the types of interdictory spaces named by Flusty, including “slippery space,” which “cannot be reached, due to contorted, protracted, or missing paths of approach”; “prickly space,” which “cannot be comfortably occupied”; and “jittery space,” which “cannot be utilized unobserved due to active monitoring” (20). The house may qualify as all three: its labyrinthine structure and constant shifts close off certain parts of it to any explorers; the blankness, darkness, and cold, as well as the threat of whatever beast may lurk there, make it uncomfortable to occupy; and the possible existence of the beast, the sense of the house having a will of its own, and the implications of the presence of some God in (or as) the house make it hard to claim with any certainty that the space can be used unobserved.

The purpose of establishing such interdictory spaces in real life is, according to Bauman, “to re-forge the social extraterritoriality of the new supra-local elite into the material, bodily isolation from locality.” He continues:

> They also put a final touch on the disintegration of locally grounded forms of togetherness and shared, communal living. The extraterritoriality of elites is assured in the most material fashion – their physical inaccessibility to anyone not issued with an entry permit. (20-1)

In other words, these spaces exist to control the movements of those still bounded to the localities, to reinforce the boundaries between the two classes, and to preclude the creation of community or any communal experience within the space. This, too, recalls the house. “While some portions of the house, like the Great Hall for instance, seem to offer a communal experience,” we are told, “many inter-communicating passageways encountered by individual members, even with only a glance, will never be re-encountered by anyone else again” (118).
The house does not foster the kind of shared experience of and in a space that could lend it a
cohesive meaning.

Even the notion of the house as an interdictory space, however, still cannot speak to the
most terrible aspect of its utter blankness: its determination to remain that way. The house, the
novel tells us, has “a powerful ability to exorcise all things from its midst” (122). Wax says that
“It’s kind of scary...Like you stop thinking about something and it vanishes. You forget you have
pocket-zippers and pow they’re gone.” Then he warns Jed, “Don’t take nothing for granted here”
(126). This destruction of detail runs counter to how the occupation of space is generally
understood to function. When speaking of the un-supernatural parts of the house, for instance,
the novel tells us that Navidson’s film reveals “how each room is occupied” and “how everyone
has helped apply his or her personal texture” (9). There is no personal texture in the rest of the
house. Moreover, Wax’s sense that things cease to exist within the house after he stops to think
about them is another parallel to how a sense of order imposed from outside a place destroys its
culture; after a while, the only traces of it left are in the minds of the citizens, and if they forget
it, it disappears. The novel discusses the importance of being able to maintain the particular
within the space we occupy. At one point, the text cites Sir Joshua Reynolds, who in his 1771
*Discourses on Art* “argued against the importance of the particular,” preferring instead a “global
appraisal” (119). At another point, however, the novel cites Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of the City*
to argue that “emotional cognition of all environment was rooted in history, or at least personal
history,” and “the memory of past experience” (176). In other words, our comprehension of
space depends upon our having some connection to it, some way to associate it with the social
experiences that make up our history. A space that destroys the particular and the communal is
one that cannot be comprehended. Some sense of continuity would be necessary for a space to be
inhabitable, then. The novel tells us at one point, speaking of the film as well as the house, that
the “constant destruction of continuity” has the effect of “prohibiting any sort of accurate mapmaking” (109) – which, as discussed, is exactly the point when it comes to real-world localities, to interrupt the mapmaking done inside for the sake of maintaining transparency from the outside.

This brings us back to the question of exteriority in the house. The novel makes it very clear that if there is an outside to the house, there is no way for the viewers of The Navidson Record to access it. The difference in perspectives of the labyrinth by those inside of it or outside of it, so significant to the discussion of local spaces under globalization, is noted explicitly in the novel through a citation from Penelope Reed Doob’s The Idea of the Labyrinth: from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages:

[M]aze-treaders, whose vision ahead and behind is severely constricted and fragmented, suffer confusion, whereas maze-viewers, who see the pattern of the whole, from above or in a diagram, are dazzled by its complex artistry. What you see depends on where you stand, and thus...labyrinths...simultaneously incorporate order and disorder. (113-4)

“Unfortunately,” we are told immediately after, “the dichotomy between those who participate inside and those who view from the outside breaks down” with regard to the house, because “no one ever sees that labyrinth in its entirety.” Moreover, we are told that “anyone lost within must recognize that no one, not even a god or an Other, comprehends the entire maze and so therefore can never offer a definitive answer” (115). This implication of the impossibility of exteriority in the house has caught the attention of several critics and become an important premise in their work. Mark B. N. Hansen, for example, takes the assertion that “All solutions then are necessarily personal” in the labyrinth of the house (115) as part of the basis for his discussion of orthography, mediation, and the singularity of each reading experience (627), and Natalie
Hamilton also seizes upon the question of exteriority in her discussion of the literary labyrinths upon which the novel is built.

Hamilton questions whether the implied impossibility of a solution disqualifies both the house and novel from being categorized as labyrinths because of the lack of an objective solution offered through exteriority (11). Although Hamilton does not attempt to explicitly answer her own question, she points out the lack of certainty in the novel’s assertion that there can be no one who comprehends the entire maze. The novel cites Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* upon introducing the idea that a labyrinth’s “complexity may exceed the imagination of even the designer.” The trouble is, the quoted passage (“So Daedalus made those innumerable winding passages, and was himself scarce able to find his way back to the place of entry, so deceptive was the enclosure he had built”) indicates that Daedalus *did* know the solution to the labyrinth, even if he struggled with it (115), and Hamilton, though she states that “Daedalus’s Cretan labyrinth was so complicated that even its architect could not find his way out,” emphasizes that the labyrinth nonetheless had a solution (11). So, though the novel tells us that “Navidson’s house *seems* a perfect example” of an unsolvable labyrinth (italics added), the example it cites is not of an unsolvable labyrinth, and in fact Hamilton suggests that being unsolvable makes a structure something other than a labyrinth, anyway (11). The seriousness with which the house’s seeming lack of exteriority has been taken may, thus, be going too far.

Though we are told that Holloway is desperate to find “some kind of indication of an outsideness to that place,” suggesting that such an indication is impossible to find, we are also told on the same page that all the walls are “potentially hiding and thus hinting at a possible exterior” (119). What all this comes down to, then, is that the idea of an outside view of the labyrinth is not actually refuted in any concrete way. Instead, the problem is that from inside, where we always are, there is no way to know; the outside may be ontologically real, but it is
never actually seen. All the same, our inability to encounter it does not make speaking about the transparency of the house from outside impossible. In fact, it only reinforces the idea that the boundary between the territorial and the extraterritorial is, by design, impenetrable. When the elite divorce themselves from a locality, Bauman notes, public spaces—“agoras and forums in their various manifestations, places where agendas are set, private affairs are made public, opinions are formed, tested and confirmed, judgments are put together and verdicts are passed”—all followed with them (24). There is no basis inside the locality by which the people may even understand that an external order is being imposed upon them. The “outside” from which decisions about such issues as “right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, proper and improper, useful and useless” are offered are “never to be penetrated by any but a most inquisitive eye” (25-6). Hansen hints at this lack of transparency in his discussion of exteriority in the house: “the impossibility of an external, first-order observation of the entire system functions to ennoble second-order observations that take this very impossibility...as their content” (627). In other words, the house is only understood as a collection of observations from the inside that are informed by the impossibility of any external understanding. Although, as mentioned, Hansen takes the “impossibility of external, first order observation” literally, his statement speaks just as clearly to the limited perception of those on the inside, and how the lack of transparency creates the illusion that there is no exteriority. There is transparency from the outside in; from the inside out, one cannot even see for sure if there is an out.

IV. Postmodern Space: Theory and Trope

The confusion over exteriority in the house recalls certain ideas of postmodern space as articulated by Fredric Jameson, namely in his observations of the hiding of entrances and exits and the tendency of postmodern buildings to replicate or even to house spaces or structures that exist in the outside world (39-45). Of course, it would have been difficult to leave a discussion of
the operation of space in such an exuberantly postmodern work as *House of Leaves* without accounting for the relationship of space in the novel to these notions of postmodern space, and also determining the relationship of "postmodern space" to "globalized space" – not only because the connection between economics and space is explicit in Jameson's work, but also because it would not do to appear to fail to address such an obvious interpretation of the novel. For the purposes of this discussion, the "postmodern" in "postmodern space" will refer, as Jameson intended, to the logic of "consumer or multinational capitalism" (1974). Jameson's definition of the term is useful because this discussion addresses itself to the relationship of space to economics, in the form of neoliberal globalization, also known as multinational capitalism. The connection of Jameson to Bauman to the house on Ash Tree Lane furthers the argument concerning the connection of globalization to the house and solidifies that the use of space in the novel has significance beyond its relatedness to postmodern fictional tropes involving space, including the use of the labyrinth.

Russell Daylight writes that the "enduring thesis of Jameson's *Postmodernism* is that any experience of urban or architectural disorientation is profoundly related to the inability to map oneself within the world space of transnational capitalism" (1). Certainly that is, at this point, a familiar concept, and one that is also vital to Bauman's discussion of space as it relates to the tourist-vagabond relationship; however, Bauman writes much less specifically about the types of spaces to which his ideas apply, focusing as he does more on the type of people who occupy them. In his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson connects the disorientation of the postmodern period metaphorically to the labyrinth – specifically the aforementioned Daedalus's: "Postmodern theory...has the wit...to hold to its Ariadne's thread on its way through what may not turn out to be a labyrinth at all, but a gulag or perhaps a shopping mall" (xi). Jameson draws for us, then, the connection between postmodern space and the
labyrinth, and thus, if we can take the extra step on our own, the house. Jameson also makes a point of defining the new social order as one determined in part by a marked difference in the "interrelatedness between time and space" (154), which refers for Jameson to "the displacement of time, the spatialization of the temporal" (156). In other words, Jameson is concerned with the transformation of time into an eternal present that exists not as a moment in time but as a moment in space (27), resulting in the loss of the sense of "deep memory" and history that was so important to earlier social paradigms, now replaced with expressions of nostalgia that exist only in the present and thus can only be enacted in space and not time (154-6). This analysis of the relationship of space and time in the postmodern era is much different on the surface from Bauman's concept of the Great War of Independence from Space – that is, the shrinking of distances through the shrinking of the time needed to conquer them – but both authors are documenting the same phenomenon. If the world has indeed become one where time has been spatialized, then the prominence of mobility in determining class position for Bauman makes sense; within a world made only of space and not of time, having control over your position in space becomes of utmost importance, replacing older ideas of community or history that depend upon a sense of time that is capable of extending into the past. And despite Bauman's complication of his ideas of space and time with talk of how tourists live in time and vagabonds live in space (88), the spatialization of the temporal accounts for both experiences, both the sense of "going through a succession of episodes hygienically insulated from their past as well as their future" as a result of the "shrinking of space" having "abolished the flow of time" on the one hand, and the sense of time being "void" and "tied down" by the "heavy, resilient, untouchable" reality of unconquerable space on the other (88). The relationship of space to time is consistent for both groups; it is only the relationship of space and time to the people that differs.
But of course Jameson’s work is not focused on some abstract relationship between space and time but rather the very concrete, lived experience of certain spaces within the world of multinational capitalism. As for Bauman, this experience begins with the destruction of the order which existed in the space before: “this new multinational downtown effectively abolished the older ruined city fabric which is violently replaced” (14). More important, however – once again, just as for Bauman – is the way the new spatial order is perceived by those inside of it: “this strange new surface in its own peremptory way renders our older systems of perception of the city somehow archaic and aimless, without offering another in their place” (14). In other words, there is no way for us to comprehend the postmodern space from inside of it, just as with labyrinths in general and the house in particular. Jameson’s analysis comes from his own personal experience of being inside the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles. Daylight writes, “Jameson walks through (or in fact, is moved through) a physical structure, and becomes disoriented among its people-moving devices, reduced scale landscape and semantic depthlessness” (1). Jameson writes that this new space represented by the Bonaventure, a kind of “postmodern hyperspace,” surpasses the ability of human beings to locate or orient themselves within their environment (44), necessitating “the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping” (54) – in other words, a mapping from outside of the new postmodern space, which has come to encompass the entire world. Jameson is concerned, as are Hansen and Hamilton with regard to the house, of the impossibility in this new space of any exteriority; he sees postmodernism as having dissolved distinctions between inside and outside, leaving us incapable of occupying any position outside of the system from which we may look upon the whole and understand or critique it (98, 48). As with discussions of exteriority in the novel, however, this inability to access any outside should not be taken as evidence that no outside exists, nor certainly – for it is exactly Jameson’s point that this space is created by the capitalist system, that
“what we have been calling postmodern...space...has genuine historical (and socioeconomic) reality as a third great expansion of capitalism around the globe” (49) – that we can see the changes in space as being provoked naturally from the inside rather than deliberately from the outside. Jameson is, in fact, critiquing the narrative of postmodernism for making it seem as if there can be no outside, and thus disguising structural forces as natural ones. Across all the discussions, it remains the same that those inside have no way of looking out, but that that does not mean that there is no outside toward which to look.

It should be noted that Daylight is critical of Jameson’s discussion of postmodern space, claiming that its conclusions are “impatient” and the actual connection between the space and the system is not clearly drawn (1):

The question of exactly how physical disorientation is conjoined to political, or even moral disorientation, is not fully developed by Jameson. Do physical structures follow political structures, or is it the other way around? Are both produced simultaneously by a third force? Or is the relation merely metaphorical? (2)

Daylight’s purpose is not to refute Jameson’s claims, however, but to make a more accurate connection, to state more clearly whether postmodern space (such as the Bonaventure Hotel) can be most accurately said to be produced by, to resemble, or to be an example of transnational space (4-5). To do so, Daylight replicates Jameson’s tour of a postmodern space, replacing the Bonaventure with the Penrith Plaza shopping center in Sydney (8). Putting less emphasis on the feeling of disorientation than Jameson, Daylight makes observations that correspond both to the characteristics of postmodern space as Jameson describes it and, more importantly, to the behavior of Navidson’s house.

For instance, Daylight writes that “In the ‘space’ of Penrith Plaza, notions of centre and
periphery are obliterated” (9-10). The novel, meanwhile, dedicates a number of footnotes to the discussion of the confused role of the “center” in the house, following a passage relating Holloway, Jed, and Wax’s inability to find a “purpose” to the house. The footnotes, including a citation from Derrida’s *Writing and Structure* and a passage from Christian Norberg-Schulz’s *Existence, Space & Architecture* that reaffirms the importance of “subjectively centered” space and subjective mapping, remind us that “the notion of a structure without a center represents the unthinkable itself” (112-3). The house (and the film, and the novel), like Penrith Plaza, subverts the role of the center: “From the outset of *The Navidson Record*, we are involved in a labyrinth, meandering from one celluloid cell to the next...in hopes of finding a solution, a centre, a sense of whole” (114). And this confusion of the center is not even the most striking of the parallels that can be observed in Daylight’s article. Perhaps most interesting is his statement that “the visual surfaces within Penrith Plaza refuse to convey any meaning with a historical dimension” (10). This of course recalls the house’s utter blankness and refusal to bear evidence of human occupation, and also serves as a reminder of the question of time and space as discussed by both Jameson and Bauman. Citing Meaghan Morris, Daylight notes that the landscape of shopping centers is one of “constant renovation and renewal” (another striking parallel to the house) that gives them a sense of “what Morris calls ‘the perpetual present of consumption’”; he goes on to say that “the distinctly depressed feeling I experienced at Penrith Plaza might not have been the loss of spatial but of historical orientation” (10). In other words, he experiences the postmodern world as one of spatialized time, a world where time has stopped and only space, and the freedom to move within it, still exist.

Daylight’s observations are also better suited than Jameson’s for drawing connections between his experiences of the architecture of postmodern space and the globalized space of localities as discussed by Bauman, as Daylight chooses to focus on the mall as representative of
the “massive transfer of commerce from High Street small businesses to transnational corporations” (11). Echoing Bauman’s concerns about localities being left vacant of political activity and decision-making power in the wake of the migration of the elite, Daylight writes:

When one...considers the outright interdiction of political activities...in such centres, it is clear that the ‘malling of Australia’ enacts a shift from more public forms of citizenship towards a consumerist culture of safety, conformity, and exclusion. (11)

Daylight’s less metaphorical explanation of the influence of transnational corporations on his particular piece of postmodern space might appear to complicate the connection being drawn in this project between globalization and the house on Ash Tree Lane, given that the house cannot be understood as having literally been ordered from outside of itself by literal transnational corporations or global financial institutions. However, in helping to concretize the connection between the characteristics of postmodern space and the economic forces that shape them, Daylight’s argument not only bolsters Bauman’s, but helps to reinforce that the sense of disorientation created by globalization is not at issue. Instead, the rendering of the vast majority of the world’s people as mere spectators to political, economic, environmental, and, yes, geographic changes to the localities they once called home is of primary concern. The question of having a say regarding one’s relationship to space divides Navidson and Delial and informs this discussion of the novel.

Having located this discussion relative to other and more famous discourses on postmodern space and accounted for the influence they may have had, it is also important to address the possible influence on the novel of existing tropes in postmodern fiction that relate to space. Doing so justifies finding a socioeconomic basis for what could more easily be perceived as simply following in the footsteps of and commenting on other postmodern works. This is
especially important because of Hamilton’s work, which she claims is intended to “provide partial blueprints for this house by examining the foundations on which it is built” (3). The intent here is not to argue that the connection to past literary works does not exist, as to attempt such an argument would be to disregard the actual text. Nor will it serve to argue that the prominence of labyrinths within postmodern fiction is also a reflection of the economic forces of global neoliberal capitalism, as supporting that claim would require reaching far beyond the limits of this particular project. There is no way to properly address here whether the reading of the house as reflecting literary history is in competition or congruence with the reading of the house as reflecting material history. I only suggest that a reading emphasizing the literary “foundation” on which the house has been built cannot account for as much of the novel as a reading that puts more emphasis on the relationship of the house to the particulars of Navidson’s circumstances.

Introducing her focus on the novel’s literary antecedents, Hamilton writes:

Despite the unheimlich quality of the novel, its roots can be traced back to familiar themes and important literary predecessors, most notably Jorge Luis Borges. Danielewski’s use of the labyrinth as a theme, symbol, and form, and the mise-en-abyme structure of the text within a text within a text, as well as direct allusions, underscore his debt to the work of Borges. (3)

In fleshing out this parallel with Borges, Hamilton places emphasis on Chapter Nine of the text (“Labyrinth”), as well as on the multiple layers of diegesis within the novel, though largely only to the extent that they help to create the sense of the work as its own labyrinth. In turn, she deemphasizes the novel’s pervading sense of unhomeliness or uncanniness. The labyrinth – a concept that should indeed be central to any discussion of the nature and structure of the house – is thus given primary attention in her analysis. There is no denying the maze-like nature of the actual house – even when the disorientation is the result of its size, which Hamilton notes is a
variation on the labyrinth that is found in Borges as well (10) – nor that the house serves to some degree as a metaphor for “self-exploration” (5). Moreover, the ideas of inside and outside as they pertain to the labyrinth are, as has been discussed, of great relevance. However, certain striking facets of the house’s behavior are not accounted for by the idea of the labyrinth itself: its existence as a “spatial anomaly” (11); its transformation of the un-supernatural part of Navidson’s house in what appears to be a deliberate attempt to murder the family (successful in the case of Tom); the “absence” of the minotaur; and, most importantly, as suggested by the attention paid here to the concept of spatialized (and thus ahistorical) time, its erasure (or consumption) of everything inside of it. Moreover, the concept of the labyrinth is only given prominence in Chapter Nine. Although Hamilton is not wrong to suggest that it remains important throughout the rest of The Navidson Record and throughout all the levels of narrative, the “form” of the labyrinth is only imitated within that one chapter, so as to leave the typography capable of imitating other forms and actions during the rest of the novel. Despite the intertwining of the different narratives, the path from beginning to end is clear. Although there are, as Hamilton notes, multiple pathways,⁴ outside of Chapter Nine – where the footnotes all end up leading back to the X (code for “unable to proceed” (582)) on the first page of the chapter (107), thus forcing the readers into an endless loop – the rest of the novel is not marked by, in Hamilton’s words, “the danger of following a chosen path and becoming lost in the convolutions” (12). In short, certainly the concept of the labyrinth, inherited from his literary predecessors, is important in Danielewski’s novel. It does not, however, define the novel, and the idea of the labyrinth is hardly sufficient to account for the house itself, let alone the text, and many of those elements for which it does not account are those that are most significant to the

⁴The choice of when to read Appendices II-D and II-E – which the reader is offered the choice to turn to on 172 based on whether s/he “wishes to interpret Mr. Truant on his or her own” or thinks “they would profit from a better understanding of his past” – is the most significant of these alternative pathways.
parallels between the house and the human consequences of globalization.

V. Meaning and Unhomeliness

In particular, the house’s blankness is not given sufficient attention in Hamilton’s discussion of the house as a labyrinth, despite the foregrounding of that knowledge within Chapter Nine. One of the most striking of the typographic innovations in the novel and in that chapter specifically is the “window” that first appears on page 119 that contains the text of footnote 144. This text contains nothing more than a long list of the housing fixtures that are not present in the house; it is nearly exhaustive in its detail, and it serves to reinforce the startling and disturbing nature of the nothingness contained within the house. “Picture that. In your dreams,” the struck-out final line of the footnote reads (141), emphasizing the house’s blankness as a source of horror and recalling the “nightmares” of the novel’s first line (xi). The nothingness of the house seemingly became the most striking feature for Navidson as well, as he warns off anyone curious enough to go looking for the house that “There’s nothing there. Beware” (4). And although connections have already been made between the house’s blankness and propensity for erasing any evidence of human presence and sense of history and what happens to localities under globalization, it is something we must return to once again, more deeply, because of one important aspect of Bauman’s argument: when control over the locality is usurped by external forces, when the very space itself can be reordered according to the will of some transnational corporation or global financial institution which is not accountable to and in fact will never even meet the citizens of that locality, the result is the destruction of old systems of meaning and of the ability of the populace to generate meaning for themselves at all. The result is anomie, normlessness in the most literal sense of the word. Those inside their localities have their homes transformed into something akin to the house on Ash Tree Lane, void of meaning and history and all personal texture.
Bauman’s discussion of this condition is contained within his larger discussion of the imposing of order on space from outside for the sake of transparency. Echoing Jameson's observation that the “new multinational downtown effectively abolished the older ruined city fabric which is violently replaced” (14), Bauman argues that the makers of these new cities, designed from abstract utopian visions, wished to replace the existing reality with one of their own design, and notes that, of course, “The ‘small print’ of every project of a city yet to be created ab nihilo implied the destruction of a city already in existence” (37). Like Jameson, Bauman is concerned about the realities of lives lived within these new cities and observes the problems they face – problems which recall Navidson’s house and his struggles inside of it. Bauman notes that the residents of the new cities “faced an almost insoluble identity problem” because they cannot locate themselves within the new, blank, ahistorical space (46); they have, in a sense, been displaced despite having been allowed to stay put. There are connections in this notion to Navidson’s inability to assess his life and his overall sense that he is no longer the person he once was (or thought he was), and further to the way that problem radiates from him to Johnny and the reader, but more important at the moment is this sense of dislocation within one’s own home.

This concept is introduced in the novel early on by way of a passage from Martin Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit or Being and Time, which provides us a first connection between the house and the term “unheimlichkeit” or “uncanniness” (25). The translation of the passage offered tells us that the uncanny – which may be a term that is more familiar as a Freudian concept also commonly referred to as the “return of the repressed” – may also be taken to mean “not-being-at-home” (25). In other words, the uncanny is a sense of unfamiliarity or unsettledness in a place or situation that should be familiar; Julian Wolfreys writes, “[T]he uncanny is the uncanny precisely to the extent that the sensation comes about in places where
one should feel most secure, or with which one is most familiar" (240). It is a feeling of alienation within the least alien of spaces or circumstances, of not being at home within one’s own house. “That which is uncanny or unheimlich,” the novel tells us, “is neither homey nor protective, nor comforting nor familiar” (28). Certainly that describes the house, which resists occupation, causes death, creates anxiety, and is endlessly alien. The connection between the house and the uncanny is so obvious that it comes up in Karen’s discussion with a fictionalized Harold Bloom; asked to describe the house, Bloom responds, “Unheimlich – of course” (364), and he discusses the concept more in depth earlier, quoting his own work, The Anxiety of Influence, in order to provide the Freudian definition of the term and emphasize that the feeling of unfamiliarity is actually caused by the return of something which is familiar but has been “estranged” through “the process of repression.” For him, the house is not alien in its blankness but “endlessly familiar” (259). This introduction of both Freud’s and Heidegger’s use of the term within the novel itself emphasizes the need to clarify how exactly the term is being used in this analysis, and what interpretation of the relationship of the concept to the house is being accepted as the premise for the rest of this discussion.

Of course, there is not necessarily a contradiction inherent in the deployment of both definitions of the uncanny, especially as we can see each in operation in both the house and in globalized space as Bauman describes it. It is true that the house is something alien, representing as it does a “spatial violation” and a mathematical impossibility as well as “an intrusion” (24). There is no way to feel at home in a place that cannot exist. The sense of unfamiliarity is added to by the geographical shifts and by the sense of danger. Where the difficulty comes in is in assessing whether the utter and perfect blankness of the house is something we may read as, as Bloom suggests, endless familiarity or as, as it was suggested previously, one of the house’s most alienating and horrifying characteristics. Of course, Freud’s definition allows that it is both,
which is in fact Bloom’s point, but accepting Bloom’s interpretation nonetheless complicates the parallel between the house and globalization even while furthering the central argument of this project. Bloom’s discussion of the uncanny helps to suggest that the house is “endlessly familiar” to Navidson, that his feeling of unhomeliness inside of it arises because of the return of the repressed, which, Wolfreys writes, “comes to light in the most familiar places” (241). Following from this, the house is uncanny for Navidson because it brings forth old sources of anxiety and discontentment, namely his guilt over Delial. The house may, by this reading, in fact only exist because Navidson’s attempt to create a new home, an “outpost set against the transience of the world” (23), calls forward his repressed feelings about Delial and uncertainty about himself and his own life and worth. That the house takes the specific form it does reflects the specificity of Delial’s situation and her relationship to space. But although the drawing of this connection between Navidson’s psyche and the house is valuable, it is complicated in itself (as will be explored) by other elements of the house’s history, and it also elides the connection already suggested between the vagabonds’ experience of globalization and the uncanny. Worse, it would seem to require a psychological explanation for the feeling of unhomeliness within the new space of globalization that accounts for the repressed and estranged feelings or knowledge of each individual. It would be easy, valid, and helpful to argue that globalized space is also, in its own blankness and homogeneity, just as “endlessly familiar” to those who occupy it as the house, and thus, in the same way, endlessly uncanny and horrifying. However, the question of the repressed, of what exactly is being called forward by the space’s endless familiarity, creates an obstacle for the argument, given that the feeling of uncanniness under globalization is widely (though maybe not universally) shared by those without power to control the changes to their world. What is it that has been repressed for these people? Is it shared only in the sense that we all have unconscious and therefore repressed feelings, capable of surfacing, or is the content of the
repressed in this case also somehow shared, part of some collective memory and identity that once made the locality a community? And what, exactly, in the changes made to their spaces calls forward the repressed?

Ultimately, the problem for the Freudian definition of the uncanny is that it, as invoked by Bloom, confuses cause and effect and creates a tautology. The description of the house as “endlessly familiar” is not actually as clear and obvious as it first seems. The fictional Bloom justifies the use of “familiar” because the house is “endlessly repetitive. Hallways, corridors, rooms, over and over again” (359). Thus, it is “familiar” in the sense that it is homogenized. Any previously unseen part recalls parts already explored. This sense of familiarity is a fundamental characteristic of the structure of the house that has nothing to do with the psychology of anyone entering it. The house is not familiar because it is uncanny, in the sense that it causes anxiety connected to the return of the repressed; it is familiar simply in the sense that it looks like itself, and looking like itself is, in turn, one of the causes of the sense of dislocation and horror that we associated with the uncanny. Bloom, intent on seeing the house as a representation instead of an actual place, insists on seeing its structure as having been determined by its meaning, making the house’s structure endlessly repetitive so that it may serve as a symbol of familiarity and, thus, the uncanny; uncanniness becomes, in this argument, the reason for the house, instead of the house being the reason for the feelings of uncanniness. If we were to take his invocation of Freud as the basis for our own interpretation of the house, then, which is rooted in treating it as an actual space, we would end up with a circular argument – that the house invokes such feelings of uncanniness because it is a symbol for the uncanny. This is a useless argument even to explain the house itself, let alone to explain the parallels between the house and globalized space, not least because the alterations to space under globalization are conducted for logical material reasons (namely, efficiency and profit), the consequence and not the purpose of which is the
displacement of people (even those who never have to move). For the purposes of this argument, we must recognize uncanniness as the result of and not the logic behind the arrangement of space, including the space’s endless familiarity.

Of course, Bloom is not the only one to apply the Freudian concept of the uncanny to the house, or to the novel as a whole. Nele Bemong’s entire analysis of the novel is an exploration of the role played by the uncanny, and his emphasis is on the psychological implications of the term. Of course, as discussed earlier, Bemong also pays attention to what he and Vidler before him call the “spatial uncanny” – that is, according to Vidler, “one no longer entirely dependent on the temporal dislocations of suppression and return, or the invisible slippages between a sense of the homely and the unhomely, but displayed in the abyssal repetitions of the imaginary void” (1). This statement would at first appear to give us a definition of the uncanny that moves us away from unanswerable questions about the role of the repressed and toward a grounding of the discussion in the actual structure of the house itself, until it becomes clear that Bemong is, like Bloom, addressing the house as a representation instead of a concrete thing against which people react. This tension between the house-as-symbol and the house-as-place still acts as a sticking point in the parallels between the house and globalized space, because of course the house is both a symbol and an outgrowth as well as a cause of anxiety. In treating the house as a consequence of Navidson and Karen’s psychological problems, though, rather than as an abstraction, Bemong’s argument helps to further connect the house with Navidson’s psyche. For instance, Bemong observes:

According to Heidegger, the post-war human being explicitly experiences the world as a homeless place. That is precisely the reason why we so obstinately try to create a safe home. As a war photographer, Navidson had had a similar experience of fundamental "unsettledness", and it was precisely for this reason
that he wanted to set up an 'outpost' against the hostile and transitory world. (1).

Of course, Navidson’s experience of “unsettledness” in his career is not simply his observation of the chaos of the various unstable regions to which he traveled; that interpretation would, in fact, require we ignore that Navidson loved his career and the excitement it offered, did not feel unsettled because of it, and did not want to give it up; in fact, without Karen’s ultimatum, he likely would not have done so. His experience of being unsettled, rather, was the “almost insoluble identity problem” that he experienced after Delial’s death, a sense of a lack of orientation or awareness of his place in the world. This sense of dislocation recalls both how Bauman describes the experience of globalization and how Ernst Jentsch, whom Bemong also cites (by way of Vidler), defines the uncanny, describing it as “a fundamental insecurity brought about by ‘a lack of orientation,’ a sense of something new, foreign, and hostile invading an old, familiar, customary world” (1). For Bemong it is Jentsch and Freud, rather than Heidegger and Freud, whose competing definitions of the uncanny flesh out the novel, with the question being whether the uncanny is something new (Jentsch) or something old (Freud).

When framed in this way, it is hard to disagree with the value of Freud’s definition, as otherwise the house would have nothing to do with Delial, or with Navidson at all other than how it affects him and makes him feel not-at-home. There is far too much of the novel itself dedicated to exploring Navidson’s back-story and emotional baggage – and his preoccupation with Delial in particular is too explicitly stated – to make such a reading particularly compelling. Bemong agrees, and states that he sees the novel as beginning with Jentsch’s idea that the uncanny results from the intellectual uncertainty created by the intrusion of the house upon Navidson’s life, and progresses, as we get to know Navidson, toward the Freudian understanding of the uncanny in the connections drawn between Navidson’s past and the house (1). This is probably the simplest and most concise articulation of the operation of the uncanny within the
text, but it still leaves us with what might be a contradiction or at least a coincidence for which we must account: the house is both born out of and inspires the feeling of *unheimlichkeit*, leaving cause and effect still tangled. Of course, it stands to reason that a structure that exists to embody uncanniness would thus also be uncanny, but we may do better than that in sorting out this complication by finally and firmly establishing the extent to which the house is and is not dependent on Navidson for its existence within *The Navidson Record*.

The un-supernatural part of Navidson’s house was of course there before Navidson and his family moved in; the house was “supposedly built back in 1720” and had been occupied by “approximately .37 owners every year” (21). The real question is whether anyone else encountered the strangeness experienced by Navidson, his family, his friends, and anyone else who entered the place while the Navidsons lived there. There are some implications that they may have: “most” of the house’s occupants “were traumatized in some way” (21). Some previous owners sold the place in search of something “a little smaller” (29). Another “said the place was too roomy” and yet another “called it ‘unstable’” (409). Maybe most significant of all, a diary from January of 1610 reveals the discovery of stairs in the area where the house now sits, and thus “may offer some proof that Navidson’s extraordinary property existed almost four hundred years ago,” though it cannot explain “why that particular location proved so significant” (414). Although the novel then goes on to say that what mattered is not the particular location but that any one single place, wherever it was, should prove so significant (414), this existence of the house before Navidson is still troubling. Even after we embrace the novel’s simple declaration that “Navidson’s psychology profoundly influenced the nature of those rooms and hallways” but is not likely to have “conjured up that place,” which allows us to consider the house both as a thing unto itself and as a manifestation of Navidson’s issues at the same time, there is no way in this analysis to answer the question of why the place exists or why Navidson, with his particular
psychological baggage, moved in there. We do not have to, however, if we take the novel’s declaration at face value, and if we remember that we have no actual details as to what the house was like or how it behaved before Navidson moved in besides that there was something “otherly” about it. We are told early into The Navidson Record not to use knowledge of what happens later in the film to read subtext or foreshadowing into what happens earlier, in the discussion of Chad’s confession that the quiet of his new environment makes him anxious: “Too often his response has been misread by those aware of the film’s ending” (9). The same principle can be applied to the statements by other owners of the house being too large; it is a connection we draw with our knowledge of Navidson’s experience, not from any real knowledge of theirs. The only insight we gain into the house’s behavior comes from The Navidson Record, which means that there is not actually any evidence to suggest that the house cannot be said to be responding to Navidson’s psyche. However, as discussed earlier in the exploration of the subjective ordering of space, there is also no evidence to suggest that the house reacts differently to everyone who enters it during the filming of The Navidson Record. As we must note a certain level of stability before we can emphasize Navidson’s experiences over, for instance, Holloway’s, or Reston’s, this lack of evidence is significant. There is still no explicit statement to the effect that the house has within The Navidson Record shaped itself according to Navidson’s psychological baggage and his alone, but it is suggested.

Besides the fact that we can (as demonstrated) connect the behavior of the house specifically to the experiences of vagabonds such as Delial, and Navidson’s engagement with the house very specifically to his guilt over her death, we can see Navidson as the dominating if not exactly stabilizing force for two reasons. The first is his role as the owner of the house, the patriarch of the family, the initiator of the entire Ash Tree Lane experiment. The other is his role as the filmmaker, in control of what the audience sees even when he is not the one filming. With
regard to the first: as mentioned previously, some attention is paid to the Navidson’s ownership of the house in chapter XVII (“Reasons”) during the examination of the Kellog-Antwerk Claim. Jennifer Kellog and Isabelle Antwerk argue that Navidson was driven, in his return to the house, by some need to assert ownership of it. There is a good case made to dismiss that interpretation, citing examples of actions Navidson might have taken to assert his ownership that he did not take, such as buying Karen’s half or presenting himself to the media as the house’s proprietor. What the narrator of *The Navidson Record* fails to consider, however, is that Navidson may not have sensed the need to do any of those things to feel as though he owned it, which fits with what Kellog and Antwerk actually point out: “even though Navidson and Karen own the house together (both their names appear on the mortgage), Navidson frequently implies that he is the sole proprietor” (385). Much more important, the novel makes the same implication; it often refers to the house as “Navidson’s house,” as for instance in the section on De La Warr’s diary that calls it “Navidson’s extraordinary property” (414). Navidson claims ownership of the house, he defends his claim on it (for instance, in attempting to assert authority over Holloway and his crew), neither Karen nor the children, who also occupy the house, make their own explicit claims of ownership, and the novel is perfectly willing to offer him the right to his claim in the language used within it. As far as *The Navidson Record* is concerned, the house as we witness it is Navidson’s house, and what it means to us is thus what it means to Navidson.

This sense of Navidson as the dominant figure in the house is only added to by his role as the “author” of *The Navidson Record* and the two shorts that preceded it (6). Much time is spent early in the novel establishing Navidson’s talents as a filmmaker, praising his editing choices, and demonstrating, ultimately, the control he had over *The Navidson Record*. It is his vision that we see. Therefore, Zampanó is right to conclude that “Considering his own history, talent and emotional background, only Navidson could have gone as deep as he did and still have
successfully brought that vision back” (23). It may create yet another cause-and-effect difficulty to assert that because Navidson determines what we see of the house, Navidson also determines what there is to see of the house, and it would not serve to become confused about whether this discussion is treating the house as something that exists within *The Navidson Record* independent from its being filmed or written about. Thus, to clarify: if the house orders itself according to whoever is inside it, whoever is exploring it, that person can be said, in a sense, to always be Navidson. No one enters the house unaccompanied by his actual person except upon his direction, and they always carry with them one of his video cameras. The camera is an extension of Navidson’s sight, his way of seeing without being physically present. Every instance of Navidson’s observing moments on film for which he was absent in reality, such as Karen kissing Wax (96), reminds us that filming is a way of expanding his vision, and that is most true with regard to the exploration of the house. The house’s other explorers filming whatever there is to be filmed, and thus letting Navidson see whatever there is to be seen, is one of the primary purposes of the expedition; it allows Navidson to be the one to solve the house’s mystery even when he himself is absent. If the house does truly respond in some way to those within it, as suggested, then Navidson’s role as the filmmaker allows him to be central to how the house orders itself, and thus determine what there is to be seen as well as what we see.

What has been established, then, is that the house exists as some sort of unexplainable anomaly without Navidson’s presence, but that its particular structure has much to do with Navidson’s history and psychological issues. The notion of the house as a kind of strangeness that intrudes upon Navidson and his family, and anyone else occupying that particular property as least as far back as 1610, speaks of an uncanniness that has little to do with Navidson, a disruption of familiarity and homeliness by, in part, the intellectual uncertainty of which Jentsch speaks. Meanwhile, that the house confronts Navidson with his guilt over Delial and his
uncertainty about himself and forces him to face some of his demons is an example of the uncanny in the more Freudian sense. If that were where the application of the term stopped, the whole discussion would be much simpler. However, Navidson’s confusion about himself, a sense of dislocation or disorientation within his own life, is also an example of unhomeliness. Finally, and more important within the novel and within this discussion, the house as Navidson encounters it – the impossibility of its size, its instability, its utter and perfect blankness – is also uncanny in a way that has nothing to do with Navidson’s specific psychological issues except in the sense that it replicates the kind of ordering of space, and the psychological effects of that ordering, that occurs as part of the globalization project as experienced by a vagabond like Delial. In that way, then, the house is both uncanny and familiar (that is, rooted in Navidson’s repressed emotions), but not, for the purposes of this discussion, uncanny because it is familiar. That ordering of space is uncanny with or without Navidson’s history; its uncanniness is simply more significant and explainable in light of the connection that can be drawn between the way the space is ordered and Navidson’s dominant site of anxiety: Delial.

The loss of meaning-negotiating capacity, to use Bauman’s term, in newly-globalized localities has the effect of rendering those localities unhomely for the occupants. If one thinks of globalization in terms of an extension of colonialism – and certainly such a definition is fair, especially in light of the high levels of primary commodity exportation in countries such as Sudan, which puts poorer countries in the position of sending off all their natural resources for use by consumers in richer countries as under colonialism –, it makes sense to then consider globalization’s vagabonds as being postcolonial people. This is a helpful connection to draw because there is precedent for the discussion of unhomeliness in relationship to the experiences of postcolonial peoples; for instance, one of the seminal texts on postcolonial theory, *The Empire Writes Back*, includes in the 2002 updated edition the following: “For certainly the
unheimlichkeit, the ‘unhousedness’ or ‘uncanniness’ which characterizes much colonial displacement, is a primary force of disruption in post-colonial life” (218). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, the authors of The Empire Writes Back, go on to wonder whether this sense of unhomeliness or even homelessness can be a source of liberation, which is also an idea put forth by Homi Bhabha in his advocacy of hybridity or syncretism in postcolonial theory and life. Bhabha, in his The Location of Culture, connects the feeling of unhomeliness, which he calls “the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations,” to the clearly and rigidly drawn divisions of Western thought between the “private and public spheres,” resulting in the kind of “fixity and fetishism of identities” that postcolonial peoples, especially, cannot afford, given the impossibility and counter-productivity of returning to some ‘pure,’ ‘authentic’ pre-colonial identity or culture (13). For Bhabha, it is the colonial concern with boundaries, including the fear of invasion or intrusion and the creation of the private, domestic sphere that (and here he quotes from Freud’s definition of the uncanny) “ought to have remained...secret and hidden” that gives rise to the unhomely. Wolfeys as well makes the point that “the sense of being ‘not-at-home’ or ‘unhomely’ arises from within the very idea of the home,” thus advancing Bhabha’s claim that the concept of unhomeliness depends upon the representations of homeliness offered by the “homed” colonizing power (14).

What Bhabha suggests is that instead of seeing the unhomeliness of postcolonial life as dysfunctional or deficient in light of the images of homeliness offered by colonial literature, we recognize the tension of the unhomely in the idea of the homely itself. The result is that we may expose the homely/unhomely binary as resulting from the colonizer’s own struggle to maintain a fixed and stable sense of home. Once that recognition is made, Bhabha suggests that postcolonial peoples should deploy the concept of unhomeliness as a new basis for a kind of world literature that embraces the reality of syncretism. He writes:
Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions – may be the terrains of world literature. The centre of such a study would neither be the ‘sovereignty’ of national cultures, nor the universalism of human culture, but a focus on those ‘freak social and cultural displacements’ that characterize...‘unhomely’ fictions. (17)

Bhabha’s reframing of unhomeliness as a paradigm to be embraced for the sake of a new postcolonial reality is certainly worthwhile in light of the fact that most of the changes wrought by globalization cannot simply be undone,⁵ and those in the localities must find a way to process and speak of their experiences. It is even more valuable for the sake of this discussion, however, in that the notion that the unhomely emerges from with the idea of the home, that the feeling of unhomeliness is a consequence of standing deficient before the ideal of the home, describes a significant facet of the tourist-vagabond relationship. Bauman argues that the sight of the tourists’ enjoyment of their mobility compounds the vagabond’s suffering; the deficiency of their circumstances in comparison to new concept of the home in which the tourists live provokes the sense of being unhomed.

Tourists and vagabonds can be distinguished from one another by their ability, or lack thereof, to feel at home in the new space of globalization. The tourists, in control of their occupation of space, whether that means moving or standing still, are able to enjoy the feeling of being “at ease” wherever they happen to be. The “Virtuality of space” actually achieves for them

⁵“Undone” might mean, for example, a company, upon being found guilty of using sweatshop labor, closing down the factories in question; because these factories have a detrimental effect on other local industries or businesses and tend to become the primary or even sole source of income for the people in the locality, closing down the sweatshop is likely to cause serious problems. Thus, although the people would almost certainly have been better off had the corporation never set up production locally, “undoing” that decision by closing down production is not a solution.
something less like “homedness” and more like the kind of freedom from the constraints of the idea of the home that Bhabha writes about: “it helps to dissolve whatever constraints a real home may impose – to dematerialize space without exposing [the tourist] to the discomforts and anxieties of homelessness.” The tourist, then, “has no home – but neither does she feel homeless” (91), which gives the tourists’ life an attraction for vagabonds that make their own existence that much more painful, and that much more unhomely. The vagabonds’ prison, Bauman writes, is “all the more humiliating for the obtrusive sight of the others’ freedom to move” (23). Globalized space is inherently, for vagabonds such as Delial, unhomely. It is this unhomeliness, more than any other kind or any other conception of the term, that is operating in Navidson’s house, which essentially offers Navidson the chance to experience globalization from Delial’s side. It is an unhomeliness that is rooted in the connection and the difference between the lifestyles of the tourists and the vagabonds.

VI. The Tourist-Vagabond Relationship

That the tourists make life worse for the vagabonds hints at a deeper relationship between the two groups than simply setting them in opposition to each other has illustrated. Tourists and vagabonds exist, according to Bauman, in a relationship of mutual-dependency that is characterized in each group’s actual experience by envy (on the part of the vagabonds toward the tourists) and rejection and horror (on the part of the tourists towards the vagabonds) (96-7). According to Bauman, “the vagabond is the tourist’s worst nightmare” because the vagabond represents what the tourist could become. Since the vagabond is simply a “flawed consumer,” someone without the means to live like a tourist, a tourist could thus slip into vagabondage at a moment’s notice. The relationship between the tourist and the vagabond is actually, then, much

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6It should be remembered that the tourists’ lifestyle being characterized by having no home does not mean that they lack the freedom to create a home, to “Settle in, maybe put down roots,” as Navidson wishes to do (9). In fact, having that freedom is another point of difference between tourists and vagabonds, as such an option is available to (and only to) those who may, like tourists, “stay or move at their hearts’ desire” (92).
more complicated than a simple binary. Remember that the vagabond’s “societies are shaped as
profoundly by the global market place as ours,” as McMichael puts it, despite their own inability
to participate in the market as consumers (13). Bauman quotes Jeremy Seabrook on the same
point:

The poor do not inhabit a separate culture from the rich...they must live in the
same world that has been contrived for the benefit of those with money. And their
poverty is aggravated by economic growth, just as it is intensified by recession
and non-growth. (95)

Because, then, the dividing line between tourists and vagabonds depends upon the tourists
having the resources necessary to enact their desires as consumers and citizens where the
vagabonds do not, especially with regard to the occupation of space, the line between them is
blurry and permeable, making their circumstances, Bauman writes, “two sides of the same coin”
(96). The vast body of the human population Bauman thus identifies as half-tourists/half-

vagabonds because “there is a large part...of the society of consumers/travelers, who cannot be
quite sure where do they stand at the moment and even less can be sure that their present
standing will see the light of the next day” (98, 97):

After all, most jobs are temporary, shares may go down as well as up, skills keep
being devalued and superseded by new and improved skills, the assets one is
proud of and cherishes now become obsolete in no time, exquisite neighborhoods
become shoddy and vulgar, partnerships are formed merely until further notice,7
values worth pursuing and ends worth investing come and go. (97)

As a result, all members of the global consumer society are tied together by the insecurity (in the
tourist’s position) or the unattainability (in the vagabond’s) of the ideal consumer/traveler’s

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7Navidson and Karen, for instance, lack a binding commitment to one another.
lifestyle. Significantly, for the tourist, having his life thus intertwined with that of the vagabond both results in and grows out of a wholesale and cruel rejection of the vagabond. "A world without vagabonds," Bauman writes, "is the utopia of the society of the tourists" (97).

Most of the policies of law and order put in place to deal with the vagabonds (policies known also as the criminalization of poverty) – especially those policies that confine them to certain areas or otherwise police and limit their movements – exist to keep them out of the tourists’ sight.⁸ In this sense, then, Navidson clearly does not conform to the tourist’s approach of avoiding the vagabond, since he seeks out circumstances where he can see them, and even pays a certain respect to their resilience and strength. This may be, in its way, just another kind of tourism, in the same vein as, for instance, the Chicago Ghetto Bus Tours: a way to examine “how the other half lives,” with the intent of inspiring tourists to help improve the “ghetto”-dwellers’ living conditions, that nonetheless treats real people like animals on safari, a source of entertainment for the privileged (Child, 1). Nonetheless, Navidson’s attachment to Delial complicates his role as tourist. He can hardly be said to reject her, holding onto her memory as he does, keeping her his own closely-guarded secret. And to an extent, this unusual orientation toward the world’s vagabonds is reflected in Navidson’s approach to his other subjects. His dedication to his work is framed in terms of an interest in people, “and usually people caught in terrible circumstances,” that casts him in something of a romantic – we are told that the “world around only mattered to him because people lived there and sometimes, in spite of the pain, tragedy, and degradation, even managed to triumph there” (367) – or even heroic light (422). His off-center framing of Delial in the photo, leaving an empty space on the right side that Navidson himself, and any viewer of the photo, seems to occupy, is said to represent his “challenging the

⁸Jamaica's tourism industry is a particularly striking example of the way in which a country's people and their real problems are erased from view for the sake of the comfort and enjoyment of tourists. Paul Kingsbury's "Jamaican Tourism and the Politics of Enjoyment" addresses this in detail. *GeoForum* 36 (2005): 113-32
predator for a helpless prize epitomized by the flightless wings of a dying child's shoulder blades" (421), serving thus as a representation of his acute desire to save her and a sense of real involvement in her circumstances. And, of course, though he does not save Delial, and though in the case of the real and not symbolic girl the idea of him challenging the vulture for her is absurd because he makes no attempt to do so until after he has gotten his picture, the photo does inspire a "large outpouring of public support and the creation of several relief programs" (420). It is fair then to see Navidson not simply as a tourist, consuming the experience of being in war-torn, famine-stricken Sudan, but a real humanitarian; the earlier statement in the novel, quoted from Hector Llosa, is relevant to Navidson's circumstances: "Photojournalists especially should not underestimate the power and influence of their images. You may be thinking, I've done nothing in this moment except take a photo (true) but realize you have also done an enormous amount for society at large (also true!)" (394). Leaving aside, however, that international aid has been insufficient to solve Sudan's problems or prevent the equally terrible deaths of many other Delials, and may actually be creating several problems of its own, Navidson's concern is not with the world, but the people in it. Thus, none of the social consequences incited by his photo can erase for him the fact that an actual little girl died in his arms, and that all he was able to do for her was to take her photo, and that he took it before he had tried to do anything else.

Navidson's insistence on seeing Delial as specific and real and human is a genuine point of departure from the tourist model, and an important one.

Navidson more clearly falls into the tourist trap, however, in his dependence upon the subjects of his work, as dependence, even more than rejection, characterizes the tourist's relationship to the vagabond. Without ever explicitly connecting his ideas to the notion of

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9Consider, for instance, John Vidal's recent article in the Guardian detailing how development in southern Sudan has been "hindered" by the World Bank, due to the delay in providing promised aid, a lack of awareness of the country's priorities, and the importation of labor and resources, leading to unemployment and a higher cost of living: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/18/southern-sudan-development-world-bank.
othering as a form of self-definition, Bauman notes that the sight of the vagabond as the horrible alternative to their own way of life helps the tourist to enjoy his or her existence. In fact, he writes that the tourist has a vested interest in making the vagabond’s life as miserable as possible in comparison to the tourist’s own, because the “worse is the plight of the vagabonds, the better it feels to be a tourist” (98). And it is with regard to this indirect enjoyment of the vagabond’s suffering that Navidson is most guilty of the sins of the tourist. In addition to the framing of Navidson’s work as reflecting an investment in people, the book also insists on another framing, which is of Navidson being driven to try to capture an image of death, which he always approaches with someone else standing between it and him (422) – an “other” that presumably protects him from death by being in its way. To be as uncharitable to Navidson as he is to himself, the interposing of this other between him and real danger is akin to the tourist maintaining (or even worsening) the vagabond’s position in order that their own position seems more stable and less dangerous. Bauman writes that “Were there no vagabonds, the tourists would feel the need to invent them” (98). Navidson’s career, similarly, depends upon the existence of some person in “terrible circumstances,” circumstances from which he is separate, and that other person is always interposed between him and the horror he is photographing. No matter his interest, no matter his compassion, Navidson’s life as a tourist is rooted in consuming, through photography, the specter of those suffering in ways he, as a tourist, will not. It is this sin, the novel suggests, that Navidson is looking to rectify by entering the house, as the house would serve as “a place that would threaten no one else’s existence but his own” (422).

Navidson’s experiences upon his return to the house, then, are important largely because they serve as his penance for his very specific crime: that his entire lifestyle and career have been dependent upon the suffering of others, with Delial being simply the most striking and tragic example. Navidson goes into the house to exorcise Delial, both as the ghost that is haunting him
and as the avatar of his dependence, as a tourist, on the suffering of the vagabonds. The implication of this, that Navidson is somehow trying to transform himself from a tourist to a position where there is less potential (or even demand) to exploit others, raises an interesting question: within the walls of his house, is Navidson a tourist or a vagabond? To an extent he approaches the problem of the house as a tourist, especially in the earlier explorations: he insists that the space should be transparent to him, that he should have ownership of it, and that he should be able to occupy it and move within it according to his own will. Even his return, which he makes in part because “going after something like this is who [he is]” (389), is as much an outgrowth of his old way of being in the world as it is also, paradoxically, an attempt to humble himself before the house and relocate himself in relationship to the people in the world living in “terrible circumstances.” Fittingly, then, especially because in the real world one hardly chooses to be a tourist, vagabond, or something in between, the bigger part of the question of Navidson’s status is not about how he chooses to behave but how the house forces him to behave. In the face of his conflicting will, then, does the house render Navidson a vagabond or allow him to remain a tourist?

It would be hard to argue that Navidson has any of the luxuries of the tourist within the house. The ceiling descends or rises, walls disappear and reappear, and Navidson seems to be headed downhill no matter which direction he faces, until he feels he is on “an infinitely large billiard table” and finds that “direction no longer matters” (426-33). Not only is the space not stable or transparent for Navidson, but he can’t even control his place within it while on his bike, since the decline of the passageway sends him rolling at high speeds. In no way, then, can Navidson be a tourist in that space. At one point, the text reads, “Having little choice, Navidson continues on” (434). This echoes quite strikingly Bauman’s statement about the vagabond being forced to move because every place they might have stood still is inhospitable; Navidson cannot
settle down within the house, so he must move, even though there is nowhere to go. He must continue though he is injured after crashing his bike, though he is exhausted, though his resources begin to dwindle. He reaches a point eventually where he is floating or falling, with nothing to do but wait (472).

That Navidson’s condition within the house comes to resemble the conditions of a vagabond mean means less, however, than how Navidson himself changes, especially since this reading is predicated on the notion that the house and what it reveals to Navidson are intimately connected to his psychological issues. It should probably be noted that a simpler argument connecting the tourist/vagabond class model to the house but ignoring Delial and Navidson’s personal journey is possible. Putting priority on the anxiety of the tourist because of the tenuous line between the tourist and the vagabond, this reading would suggest that the disruption/intrusion of the house is representative of the changes a tourist experiences when he or she begins to slip, for reasons ever beyond their control, into vagabondage. This would account for all the same characteristics of the house’s behavior as well as the way that anxiety extends beyond the house to Johnny and to the reader; the transition into vagabondage is one that makes people no longer who they were or thought they were, makes them unsure of their place in the world, steals the security and immutability of their space, renders old ideas and values obsolete. In that way the novel, *The Navidson Record*, and Delial would serve, as the Delials/vagabonds of the world always have, as the warning to we tourists of the unstable ground on which every “assurance [we] ever lived by” has been built (xxiii). This reading, however, sells Navidson short as a character, and does not account for the fact that, ultimately, he escapes. That he does, and how he does, is what makes an alternative reading much more viable. The anxiety we feel as the tourist is something we experience every day, and it does not alter our worldview or way of life; thus, it makes more sense to consider Navidson’s guilt as central and not peripheral to the
disruption he experiences. The upheaval of his life is rooted not in the knowledge that such upheaval is always possible, even for those like him who have been immune for so long and have experienced the best of the tourist lifestyle; instead, it is rooted in his realization of his dependence on the suffering of the world’s Delials. Guilt and not simple insecurity is what intrudes on Navidson’s life, his guilt is what he faces in the house (and therefore what shapes the house after the kind of terrible circumstances others have been forced into to allow Navidson his career and lifestyle), and the resolution he comes to within the house about that guilt and about himself is what allows him to escape.

VII. Escape

Navidson’s serious self-assessment begins after he starts floating/falling: “Soon...he grows less concerned about where he is and more consumed by who he once was” (473). He “begins rambling on about people he has known and loved: Tom...Delial, his children, and more and more frequently Karen” (474). Navidson, as he anticipates death, becomes focused on what is important to him: people, as has ever been the case with him, made specific and real by his regard for them. This awareness of his connections with other people is reflected in other of his final moments in the house. When he momentarily “los[es] sight of the question of his own past, derailed by some tune now wedged in his head,” the lyrics that spring to his mind are “Now I find I changed my mind, and opened up the door” (476) which is a line from The Beatles’ “Help”:

> When I was younger, so much younger than today,
> I never needed anybody’s help in any way.
> But now these days are gone, I’m not so self assured,
> Now I find I’ve changed my mind and opened up the door. (AskLyrics.com)

The line, thus, reflects Navidson’s focus on intimate, caring relationships. And “caring” may be
the operative word; Navidson’s final word before The Navidson Record ends is “Care” (488). The novel’s definitive statement on the subject seems to be Sophia Blynn’s argument that “Care” was in fact the beginning of “Karen,” and that Navidson found his salvation in the love of his partner (523). Certainly that is a possibility, and one that hardly contradicts the idea that Navidson’s lesson is to care; it is only after his reunion with Karen that the house dissolves, after all, and it is her love for him that gives her the certainty that she will find him. But although he and Karen finally marry in the aftermath of the events in the house, and although they and the children and their pets make what seems more or less to be a safe, comfortable, and stable life together, the novel does not seem to be offering a retreat into the comforts of home, comforts available only to the tourists, as any kind of answer to the questions/problems posed by the house. The Navidsons “will never be able to leave the memory of that place,” and Navidson himself “has never stopped wrestling with the meaning of his experience,” which the book connects one final time to “the responsibilities of his art” (526-7). Moreover, the chapter is entitled “Passion” (540), and it is not with regard to Navidson’s marriage or family that the word is used and defined for us, but with regard to his work. “It is not about feeling good,” Daphne Kaplan tells us of passion; “It is about endurance” (527). Navidson resigns himself to suffering for his art, suffering from the caring it entails, and continues to do it. His lesson is not that he has no responsibility for Delial, then, but that his suffering for it was necessary, and good, an outgrowth of the same passion, the same caring, that saved his life.

If the Navidson-Delial parallel is meant to convey to the audience their own culpability for the suffering and death of the world’s Delials, if the text makes us journey with Navidson toward the realization that Navidson eventually reaches, then there remains a need to demonstrate how Navidson’s lesson radiates through the rest of the novel and the experience of the readers, as well as how it relates to the real-life relationship between tourists and vagabonds.
Here I must emphasize, more pointedly than before, the specificity of Delial in Navidson’s mind, her existence for him as an actual person, whom he associates in his letter with his daughter, and not the symbol which was used to inspire the action that may or may not have alleviated the suffering of her fellows in Sudan. Continuing to see her and all the subjects of his photography as real in such a way represents a determination to see other people as subjects and not as objects. The importance, then, of subject-subject (I-Thou) relationships over subject-object (I-It) relationships as they concern tourists and vagabonds cannot be overstated with regard to Navidson’s solution.

The difference between the I-Thou and the I-It, how that difference is made manifest in the actual treatment of other people, and, in general, the destructive and self-destructive power of a world over-reliant on the I-It relationship, is important to critical theory, most specifically in the work of Erich Fromm, but also in Marx’s humanism, on which critical theory is grounded; Herbert Marcuse writes for instance of Marx’s notion of human appropriation of the object world, or “the establishment of human relationships with nature, the humanization of things,” that such appropriation allows that “the object would be experienced as subject to the degree to which the subject, man, makes the object world into a humane world.” This experience of objects as subjects may also be explained as “the experience that things, without losing their use value, exist in their own right, their own form, that they are sensitive” (132). Fromm’s discussion of subjectivity bears striking similarities to points made by Derrick Jensen in his *The Culture of Make Believe* – a book that attempts to explore the individual’s culpability for international tragedies like Delial’s through a discussion of hate as something we do rather than something we feel. The ability to care, as Navidson does, is for Jensen and Fromm dependent on overcoming any tendency to view another person as an object, from outside of them. Fromm introduces the idea of the I-Thou relationship, and states that “this relatedness...is not from the ‘I’ to the ‘thou’
but one which is characterized by the phrase: I am thou” (79). In discussing the value of this experience, he quotes Goethe, who says that “each object truly recognized opens up a new organ within ourselves” (79).

This is a point that Jensen advances in his own discussion of the I-Thou relationship, contrasting the I-Thou or I-You with the I-It, the objectification that is essential to his thesis, since, he writes, “The movement toward depriving others of their subjectivity is the central movement of our culture” (38). Jensen states, quoting Martin Buber’s I and Thou, that “I-You can only be spoken with one’s whole being,’ while the opposite is true of I-It, which can never be spoken with one’s whole being...[T]o objectify another is to only partially exist oneself” (221).

Applied to Navidson’s circumstances, Buber’s theory would seem to imply that “meeting” Delial does not provoke but merely reveals a crisis of identity that existed as a result of his position as a tourist. This conclusion is consistent with the language used to describe the crisis, which implies the falseness of the identity to which he held before Delial and to which we readers (according to Johnny) held before reading the novel. Furthermore, Fromm implies that having an identity at all is dependent on having the subject-subject relationships that allow us to be whole and to be subjects in our own right. Identity allows for the experience of oneself as “I,” a subject who is, “‘I’ as an organizing active center of the structure of all my actual or potential activities,” as opposed to a “me,” an object that one has (82-3); this sets up the contrast between being and having that is so vital to Fromm’s work, which can be understood as the contrast between a person who experiences him or herself and others as subjects and one who experiences the same as objects. Tourists, consumers and sensation seekers that we are, are taught to have and not to be; Navidson, in his decision to care, to insist upon Delial’s personhood after taking her picture and continue to worry about the moral implications and human consequences of his actions even after his preoccupation with Delial has allowed her to haunt him in the form of his house, rejects
that lifestyle, and is saved by doing so.

Much different from the treatise on nihilism that Will Slocombe proposes, then, *House of Leaves* is a novel about negotiating the tension surrounding the culpability of tourists for the material, spatial, and psychological conditions of the vagabonds. So long as our lives as tourists depend upon not just the fact but the sight of the vagabonds’ suffering, then our ability to objectify, to not see (which Jensen argues is the primary mechanism that allows our system of exploitation to continue$^{10}$), is always interrupted, and the vagabonds’ reality and their subjectivity can thus shine through, provoking empathy and, when possible, and ideally with that empathy as its grounding motive, positive action. Then, although we have to be aware of and live within the complications of our attempts to help and the ways in which they might, like Navidson’s “consuming” his subjects, be part and parcel of that same system of exploitation, our answer is to continue to care, to continue to try, to wrestle continuously with the uncertainty of our role and forever be assessing and reassessing the value of our contributions, and to endure. The novel can thus be appreciated as an exploration of our social responsibility within a system that creates Delials as a matter of course and that seems, dishearteningly, to have no “outside.” The conclusions to that exploration that the novel offers, while they provide no place for us to settle down comfortably, do remind us of several significant truths about our relationship to the world’s vagabonds. The first is that they matter, that they have subjectivity and live real lives and are neither an abstraction nor an undifferentiated mob. The second is that, despite the exploitative relationship between us and them, we are capable of both being aware of and changing the way we see them, and of acting to alter either their immediate circumstances or the system in which we are all involved. “Meeting” Delial as the little girl she was instead of the

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$^{10}$“The best way to guarantee you won’t be in a relationship with something is to not see it. The best way to make certain you won’t see something is to destroy it. And, completing this awful circle, it is easiest to destroy something you refuse to see. This, in a nutshell, is the key to our civilization’s ability to work its will on the world and on other cultures: Our power (individually and socially) derives from our steadfast refusal to enter into meaningful and mutual relationships” (303).
image she became may leave us disoriented, may cause us to lose our old understanding of
ourselves and the world, but caring and acting can help us to relocate ourselves in the world
again.
Appendix

The real Delial, via Flatrock.org.nz. Photograph by Kevin Carter.
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