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Occult transmutations: a creative experiment in fictionalised scholarship

Nicholls, Marcus ORCID logo [ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6047-108X](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6047-108X) (2026) Occult transmutations: a creative experiment in fictionalised scholarship. *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*. pp. 99-139. ISSN 1753-6421

https://doi.org/10.1386/jafp_00157_7

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Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance
Volume 19 Number 1

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Published Online August 2026

PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES

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Occult transmutations: A creative experiment in fictionalized scholarship

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the relationship between a neglected strand of western esotericism – Laeveticism – and practices of experimental creative adaptation. The article first summarizes the Laevetic tradition and its adaptive resonances, before discussing a series of historical adaptations. Many of these exist only as traces in other works, but they establish a tradition of Laevetic adaptation extending from Ancient Rome to Modernism. The second half of the article focuses on twenty-first-century manifestations of Laevetic adaptation, analysing case studies ranging from architectural installations to VR games. By tracing this thread through experimental adaptive practice, Laeveticism is proposed as a greater influence on creative practice than is often acknowledged. Similarly, it is argued that there exists an inherent correspondence between concepts and practices of Laevetic philosophy and those of avant-garde adaptation. Laevetic adaptation is therefore established as a contemporary practice of intertextual mysticism which draws on a broadly unacknowledged tradition.

KEYWORDS

adaptation
mysticism
fictocriticism
intertextuality
experimental
hermetic

PREFACE: CREATIVE PRACTICE RESEARCH

This article is a study of various historical and modern works which adapt prior texts using a methodology conceptually conversant with a minor esoteric tradition called Laeveticism, an offshoot of Hermeticism.

Laeveticism is an invention, as are most of the research materials I cite to unpack its history and ideas. The adaptations which are discussed and analysed through the piece are also ficto-critical inventions, though they are often tied to real historical figures or source texts. The references in these sections mix real critical sources with invented ones. This is therefore a piece of creative practice research; creative writing masquerading as traditional scholarship. It seeks conventional insights via alternative routes.

Throughout, the article attempts to set up a number of key correspondences in order to explore its areas of interest through productive analogies: research/practice; conventional scholarship/creative practice research; real texts/fictional adaptations; existing scholarship/invented scholarship; Laeveticism/adaptation. In constructing these correspondences and inventing/investigating analogies, it attempts to creatively explore the resonances between adaptation and aspects of mystical aesthetics explored in my previous work on Joris-Karl Huysmans. Structurally, it also attempts to embody the collection-text adaptation which I discuss here and elsewhere; the fragmentary adaptation (here from notional sources) which curates selections from a broader heterocosm. In addition, an echo is created with the form of the Baudelairean sonnet 'Correspondences'; an initial description of analogical theory, followed by the more impressionist descriptions of the theory in practice.

In analysing fictional adaptations of (mostly) real sources through a combination of real and fictional scholarship, I have attempted to adapt my former research into creative practice, while exploring notions of experimental adaptive forms, mystical resemblances in adaptive structures and the idea of 'notional adaptation'. Through fictive freedom, avant-garde adaptations can be explored as thought experiments to test the border zones of adaptation. In this, inspiration is taken from O'Sullivan and Burrows' *Fictioning* (2019), whose use of strange loops, other temporalities, invented pasts, liminal spaces and intermingling of real/fictional and actual/virtual, is a methodological forebear of the imaginings attempted here.

Further to this, the article attempts other levels of adaptation and correspondence, not least in constructing its own Hermes Trismegistus; a pseudo-historical fiction of origin created from hermetic fragments. As an endeavour of ludic scholarship inspired by Danielewski, Borges, Clarke and Bolaño, the extended case study of *House* which ends the article also represents the attempts to practice a form of adaptation couched within its own analysis.

Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) is a multiply annotated scholarly ekphrasis and analysis of a non-existent film which depicts a strange house. This article's penultimate section is a scholarly ekphrasis and analysis of a non-existent installation (itself adapting *House of Leaves*) which features a strange house. This is therefore a notional ekphrasis of a notional adaptation which, with the surrounding notional scholarship, becomes an overarching adaptation of the novel (echoing its structure), while also evoking or revealing a set of ideas around Laevetic adaptation, which gesture towards a broader mystical engagement with aspects of adaptation.

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The article represents an experiment in creative practice research, drawing on existing traditions of notional ekphrasis, xenogenetic writing and ficto-criticism to expand prior research into new areas. In exploring critical ideas through creative writing, it seeks to combine the theory of adaptation with its practice, analysing adaptation through its world-building-inflected performance in a playful yet rigorous contribution to the field.

OCCULT TRANSMUTATIONS: ADAPTATION AS A PRACTICE OF TEXTUAL MYSTICISM, OR A SELECTION OF LAEVETIC ADAPTATIONS FROM GILGAMESH TO MINECRAFT

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1. Much of Nicholls's scholarship implies a preoccupation with Laeveticism, yet he fails to acknowledge the tradition directly (with no citation of key Laevetic texts). Unfortunately, Nicholls refuses my standing invitation to interview him and will not engage with me at conferences.

INTRODUCTION: HUYSMANS

The inspiration for this article is drawn from the work of Joris-Karl Huysmans, the *fin-de-siècle* Parisian writer so closely allied to the Decadent literary 'movement'. In his work, and notably in relevant scholarship by both Allegra Zaniolo (2010) and Marcus Nicholls (2018), a particular aspect of Huysmans's use of adaptation is suggested as representative of a broader tradition meriting further exploration. It is Nicholls's contention that the novelist's most famously Decadent novels – *À rebours*, *Là-bas*, *En rade* – represented an experimentation with the potential for what Ruth Antosh (1986) has called 'aesthetic mysticism', to which varying arguable modes of adaptation represented a significant route.

As part of Huysmans's spiritual teleology, which ended with conversion to a mystical Catholicism, it is argued by Zaniolo and Nicholls that a spectrum of intertextuality which included many forms of adaptation was a way in which Huysmans tested the potential of Decadent/Symbolist aesthetics as a mystical salvation (one which proved hollow and led him back to religion). This attempted transmutation of the embodied self in the crucible of a sacred aesthetics is presented as an engagement with a longer tradition which aligns forms of adaptation with ideas linked to strains of mysticism such as Hermeticism and its more obscure sibling, Laeveticism.¹ This article seeks to trace some further manifestations of this latter relationship.

As in Zaniolo and Nicholls's analyses of Huysmans's narratives, of particular interest here are those border zones of adaptation and other forms of intertextuality; the experimental, unconventional and arguable texts which test our ideas of what constitutes an adaptation (or a text). Frequently, these involve texts of installation and performance in interactive modes. As such, it will attempt to add to studies like William Verrone's (2011) excellent *Adaptation and the Avant-Garde*, whilst going beyond the cinematic focus of that work. In pursuing these forms, the article will outline some historical precursors which, due to their nature, only exist through traces left in other writings – Laevetic adaptations which are themselves occulted, hidden. After discussing these lacunae via their traces, a number of recent examples which imply a new flourishing of this tradition are themselves examined via – in some cases – a partial process of adaptation. By representing the texts ekphrastically within this article, they are adapted into this curatorial text by a method which emphasizes the experiential vagaries of experimental Laevetic adaptations.

LAEVETICISM

Initially, then, a sense of Laeveticism itself is needed. Generally, it begins with Hermeticism, the fictional figure of Hermes Trismegistus, and his apocryphal writings in Ancient Egypt. The foundational texts of the Hermetica are broadly accepted to be the seventeen books of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (circa 100–300 CE), although other texts have since been discovered (e.g. *The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*). This group, and the tradition which draws on them directly, are sometimes designated as Hermetist, rather than Hermeticist, to retain their historical and philosophical specificity. The influential scholars Antoine Faivre and Karen-Claire Voss (1995) use this designation, while also acknowledging the place of Hermetism within the more nebulous and diffuse Hermeticist tradition, with its many branches of alchemical and esoteric writings.

As explored extensively in Laura James's *Hermetic Heresies* (1981), the Laevetica are a collection of treatises which variously plagiarise, rewrite and expand upon selections from the group of works known as the Hermetica, or the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Only one has been posited as predating the *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius* – the famous *Lapis Tablet*, which is written in Coptic. Some of the texts are written in Greek, and most were probably originally Greek, though many survive only in Latin, Coptic and Armenian translations. The Laevetica have provided a controversial and shadowed double, offshoot or subset of the Hermetica since the late Roman and early Christian period.

So why examine adaptation in relation to the Laevetic rather than the Hermetic tradition? Initially, a sense of limitation with regard to scope is key. As noted by all scholars of Hermeticism, the tradition is hugely diffuse and sprawling – Paxton's (2003) work is particularly illustrative of this. Laeveticism, by virtue of its more obscure status, has retained a degree of consistency and boundedness which allows for its core ideas to be extracted with more confidence. Philippakis wryly notes that Laeveticism is more hermetically sealed than Hermeticism, calling its boundaries 'more agreed upon and less permeable' (1979: 4) than its more popular familial tradition. As we will see, Laeveticism also has a more centralized transmutational tradition within the actual writings. This has prompted an interesting re-engagement with the ideas in some recent examples of avant-garde adaptation.

While there is much evidence (e.g. Radu 1953) linking the Laevetic texts to strands of the early Hermeticist movement, as well as various Graeco-Roman mystery cults in southern Europe and Roman North Africa, their separation from Hermeticism and binding into the collection known as the Laevetica comes with Marcus Valerius Laevinus in the fifth-century. Laevinus, discussed first in Theodore's *Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium*, is the first recorded owner of the *Lapis Tablet*. Chwast's extensively researched, yet unavoidably sketchy biography of Laevinus (1934), has him born in Carthage as the youngest son of a general. Theodore (in Chwast's translation) describes how Laevinus was a follower of Hermeticism and owner of a rare text which had been translated from hieroglyphs. Laevinus declared this *Lapis Tablet* a new foundational text of Hermeticism, superseding the authority of those works currently venerated and in circulation.

The young Roman gathered followers and travelled to Rome, collecting (and perhaps writing) other texts along the way which were claimed as the true Hermetica, causing a schism and much internecine conflict within that

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movement. While Theodoret's account has been followed not only by the influential Chwast, but scores of later scholars wishing to write on Laeveticism and its enigmatic founder, there are also many – such as Mossfegh (1972) and Porter (1991) – who have judged this account as much an apocryphal weaving as the mythological Hermes Trismegistus. James, though, makes a strong case for Chwast's evidence, which collects and analyses oblique references from many Gnostic texts and fragmentary late Roman histories.

The *Lapis Tablet* achieves passing mention as a text of Thoth in Manetho's *Aegyptiaca*, later adapted (with an expanded section on the cult of Laevinus) by the Byzantine monk Syncellus. It is here that a split occurs, which was to later become central for Laeveticism. Syncellus describes how, in Manetho's annals, Thoth inscribed the sacred texts onto the *stelae*, and these were copied into books by the second Hermes, Trismegistus (Copenhaver's introduction to his *Hermetica* translation relates this [1992]). However, Syncellus also says that in Manetho's writing there is the record of a tablet of lapis lazuli carved by Thoth himself. The tablet was then to be given to twelve high priests of Thoth (the Dodeca), who would expand an idea from the tablet into their own written text. This origin story is repeated elsewhere (as traced by Laura James and Bernhard [1895]) and is the likely reason for compiling just thirteen key texts by the Byzantine chroniclers who edited and combined the texts in the eighth and ninth centuries (Sahin has examined this under-researched section of the timeline [1964]).

As with the *Hermetica*, the *Laevetica* itself is composed in one-half of religio-philosophical writings, and in the other with the 'technical' works of astrology, alchemy, pharmacology and magic (James 1981: 10). Laeveticists believed in the primacy of their various treatises over those venerated by the Hermeticists, attempting to claim a more direct relationship to the Egyptian god Thoth as author, in order to bypass the claims of the followers of Hermes Trismegistus. Indeed, James (1981: 48–52) explores the frequently reiterated claim by early Roman and Gnostic scholars that the *Lapis Tablet* had been written in Khumunu by Thoth himself, simplifying the complex amalgamation of Egyptian, Greek and Roman gods which constitute Hermes Trismegistus. This represents an interesting heresy, for it is a unique breaking of a cultural pantheon in order to annexe a foreign deity, as opposed to the usual Hermetic appropriation seen in Thoth > Hermes > Mercury > Hermes Trismegistus.

The re-engagement with Egyptian culture in the late Roman period was tied to the mystery of hieroglyphs, which encapsulated the obsession with hidden knowledge known to the Egyptians and mythically given only to the highest Greek philosophers. Thoth re-emerged from this desire within Hermeticism as an opposition to Christianity, and to a less successful but more obvious degree, within Laeveticism. The same Neoplatonic and Christian Gnostic influences shaped both, as did the processes of plagiarism and adaptation which rewrote many selections from Hermeticism to form the basis of the *Laevetica*.

As with the *Hermetica*, the dates of the various Laevetic texts vary wildly and are highly disputed. The *Lapis Tablet* – in its earliest Coptic scroll translation – does appear to be older than the Hermetic texts (also distinct from them in that it does not mention Hermes). It has been dated by Hussain (2007) to the third-century BCE. However, according to both James (1981) and Dalby (2010) the majority of the other twelve core Laevetic texts appear to have been produced between the first and third centuries CE.

The popularity of Laeveticism has always been inherently tied to Hermeticism. When a renewed interest in Hermetic ideas emerges, the Laevetic follows in more minor and underground forms. In *Hermetism and Its Diffusion*, Camille Paxton (2003) has traced the way in which, after the schism and popularity of Laeveticism in the fifth and sixth centuries, its influence gradually waned as its texts were incorporated into the accreting Hermetica. Much of the specificity was lost as the reading of Hermetic texts retreated into the monasteries of Europe.

The true Hermetic revival, and consequently the Laevetic revival, came in the Renaissance. As with each of its manifestations, Laeveticism was secondary in its re-emergence. Paxton (2003) and Basama (1977) have both shown that, after the popularity of Ficino and Lazzarelli's translation of the Hermetic texts, Cosimo de' Medici sent further emissaries to scour religious collections for related texts. Neither scholar is able to fix locations for the recovery of the Laevetica, though both agree (as does Laura James) that the texts arrived in Florence and were translated by Lazzarelli between 1475 and 1480, being printed in 1482 as the *Corpus Laeveticum*. All thirteen texts were present in this edition, along with a preface linking them to the *Corpus Hermeticum* printed in 1471.

Porter (1991) has suggested that the Laevetica as a coherent set of linked treatises is a retrospective assemblage created by Lazzarelli, which never existed in this form in the late Roman period. While Theoderet's notes, and the work of Chwast, seem to provide ample evidence against this thesis, it is notable that a consistent list of titles for the early texts is absent. They differ in each account, though thirteen (including the *Lapis Tablet*) is a number reiterated frequently (though not exclusively). James and Paxton both agree that it is impossible to determine whether the collection which Lazzarelli derived and translated from the stacks of texts retrieved by Cosimo's emissaries was the same as that collated by Laevinus and his followers. It is, however, likely to be consistent with the collection compiled by the Byzantine intermediaries; Sahin shows their indexing of Greek and other manuscripts to be based on Stobaeus's *Anthology* from circa 500 CE, which Ficino also referenced in correspondence to Lazzarelli during the translations of the Hermetica.

Despite the uncertainty as to the identity of the thirteen Laevetic texts, since the work of Ficino and Lazzarelli in the fifteenth century, a consistent version of the core Hermetica and Laevetica has been established. For the Laevetica, it is significantly more straightforward than the sprawling Hermetica. As noted previously, their marginal status as an offshoot of a major tradition allows for greater specificity and consistency.

The texts of the *Corpus Laeveticum* in Lazzarelli's version, here translated by Holmes (2000), were:

1. The Lapis Tablet: The Monad
2. Thoth to the First Hierophant: Nothing is Destroyed
3. Thoth to the Second Hierophant: Everything is Change
4. Thoth to the Third Hierophant: The Mind of Creation
5. Thoth to the Fourth Hierophant: The Infinite Numinous
6. Thoth to the Fifth Hierophant: Under and Between All Things
7. Thoth to the Sixth Hierophant: As Above, So Below
8. Thoth to the Seventh Hierophant: The Two Sides of Similitude
9. Thoth to the Eighth Hierophant: On Becoming
10. Thoth to the Ninth Hierophant: On Transmuting

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11. Thoth to the Tenth Hierophant: The Keys to the Monad
12. Thoth to the Eleventh Hierophant: The Adept
13. Thoth to the Twelfth Hierophant: The Migration of Souls.

While the majority of engagements with the esoteric during the Renaissance were interactions with the expanding constellation of the Hermetica, the occulted chapel of Laeveticism also had its followers. James shows that Paracelsus rejected the Laevetica, seeing it as unapplicable to the new medicine, but Frances Yates (1991) has proved that others, such as Giovanni Pico de Mirandella, saw the Laevetica as a misguided yet important branch of Hermeticism. De Mirandella included ideas from the Laevetica in his infamous *900 Theses*, thereby embedding its doctrines within the Hermetic Reformation of the Renaissance, whilst also drawing Vatican attention to its texts (a connection which would prove particularly deleterious for Giordano Bruno a century later).

The Renaissance cemented Hermeticism within western philosophy, with Laeveticism following unobtrusively in its wake. From the Lazzarelli translation onwards, the ideas of the thirteen Laevetica have emerged in texts as disparate as the notebooks of Newton, the *Red Book* of Jung, and Yeats's *A Vision*. While usually an addendum to examinations of the Hermetica, there have been excellent direct studies undertaken which complement those examinations of Laeveticism cited thus far. Hwang's (1996) analysis of the role of Laevetic ideas within occult traditions of the eighteenth century is particularly notable for its bolstering of Yates's (2001) claims around the role of alchemy in Enlightenment science.

Additionally, the magisterial *History of the Rosy Cross* by Henri de Duve (1932) takes in many significant developments and implementations of Laevetic ideas across the nineteenth century. This period saw the second great Laevetic revival, following in the train of the Hermetic, the ideas of the latter being omnipresent in the nineteenth century according to Moffitt (2012: 28, 42). Lewis has called the nineteenth century 'the most Laevetically-influenced period since that of Ficino and Lazzarelli' (1954: 23), an influence particularly strong in Paris due to the influence of Swedenborg, then the aesthetic embeddings of Wagner (Murray and Hall 2013: 9), Baudelaire (Walker 2014: 175) and the Symbolists via Joséphin Péladan (Bramble 2015). With the crossover of this latter movement with Decadence and other proto-Modernisms, this represents a key juncture for the embedding of Laevetic concepts within aesthetic productions, laying the foundations for further experimentation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Baudelaire presents a brief but illustrative case study of the Laevetic/aesthetic conjunction. His poems 'Correspondances' and 'Alchimie de la Douleur' are synecdoches for the deeper reworkings of Laevetic ideas across his oeuvre, derived from readings of Swedenborg ([1857] 1987). Swedenborg's ([1749] 1936) ideas were a complex personal metaphysics derived from readings of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and related works, including the *Corpus Laeveticum*. In a very broad sense, they are anchored by the correspondences, a systematized network for 'as above, so below', with likely inspiration in Giordano Bruno's dials. In Swedenborg, the correspondences are a system of analogies linking the earthly to the heavenly, the minds of humanity to the Word of God. Two planes of reality are, in Swedenborg, connected by correspondences. Every aspect on one level has its corresponding analogue in the

other, its transmuted form adapted to the phenomenological corporeality of its existential level.

The aforementioned poems by Baudelaire describe the perception of Swedenborgian correspondences from two perspectives. In the eponymous verse, the correspondences reveal to the poet a network of inherency within nature, an interconnectedness of synaesthetic analogies which suggest an infinite, syncretic reality beyond the material. For Leahey, this is Baudelaire redeeming the *spleen* of the natural with poetic imagination, where creative analogy allows the poet to glimpse the *ideal*.

Those glorious hours, festal moments of the brain, when the sky breaks through in an improbably transparent blue to infinite depths, when sounds take on the ring of music, colours begin to speak and scents tell of the world of ideas.

(Baudelaire 1992: 285)

Conversely, in *Alchimie de la douleur*, the speaker addresses an 'unknown Hermes' – a reference to Thoth as the occulted figure behind Hermes Trismegistus – and sees himself as Midas, 'saddest of all alchemists', transmuting nature and heaven under the Hermetic/Laevetic aegis into images of suffering and depression. Here, the correspondences of Swedenborg are approached *à rebours*, becoming a *via negativa* working from the corrupting mind of the poet, spreading from the microcosm of self through the correspondences to transmute nature and the spiritual world into vast images of mourning. A backwash of corruption has spread from the psyche, into nature and thence into the spiritual plane. Rather than redeeming nature and reality by allowing access to the forest of symbols and the infinite unity of which they whisper, instead the correspondences have allowed the poet's mind to inadvertently corrupt the above from below.

In the eponymous poem, and in Baudelaire's work more generally, the correspondences deal with a conceptualization of poetic perception, where imagination perceives analogical links between disparate areas of reality, signifying a divine unity beneath the world's surface, creating a chain or network which gestures beyond the sum of its parts towards a real unfragmented by representations (Leahey 1969: 181). The Hermetic/Laevetic transmutations of nature into either the suffering mind or the infinite are based on perceiving a series of analogies on one level, which suggests more mystical analogies between that level (nature) and another level (the infinite).

This begins to suggest the ways in which analogies perceived in the palimpsestic readings and oscillations of aesthetic perception might lead to more mystical ideas derived by their correspondence to these forms – the simultaneity or palimpsestuousness (to use the term popularized by Linda Hutcheon [2006]) of textuality suggesting analogous metaphysical ideas. What is required for the Laevetic adapter, and inculcated within the Laevetic audience, is the poetic ability to see these correspondences.

While so far this study has undertaken a brief sketch of some aspects of the genesis and establishment of a Laevetic tradition in Europe, at this stage – rather than continuing with an in-depth chronology – it may be more productive to state some of the major principles of the *Corpus Laeveticum*. These summaries are derived from my own readings of these texts, as well as an attempted distillation of the many excellent exegeses and discussions of these ideas found in the studies cited thus far. In addition, the ever-illuminating

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Writings of Thoth: Laevetic Philosophy from the Gnostics to Jung, by Anastasia Philippakis (1979), has proved invaluable for its clarity of thought in drawing distinctions between Laevetic ideas and those of Hermeticism or other esoteric, gnostic or Neoplatonist traditions.

A summary of some key principles of Laevetic thought:

1. An infinite reality – the Numinous – exists outside of our perceptions.
2. The reality we perceive is a coded, transmuted version of the Numinous.
3. The two are connected by sacred analogies.
4. Similarly, everything within our perceived reality only seems separate. In fact, it is a totality emanating from a single thinking creative force.
5. This totality can be understood by considering the connections between aspects of the world – the analogical connections which are themselves analogies for the Numinous.
6. It is possible for the adept – through alchemy and other transmutations – to perceive these horizontal and vertical analogies, the secret knowledge of infinite unity.
7. This is done through the realization that all forms are mutable.
8. By effecting transmutations (which require a perception of analogies), this mutability is perceived.
9. However, this perception can be a double-edged sword for those who fail to grasp the true significance of the interconnections. They may become trapped in an endless cycle of purely material analogies.
10. If this is avoided, then the transmutations (based on horizontal analogies) will allow a perception of the spaces between forms – where mutability and unity reside.
11. This understanding opens up the field of vertical, spiritual analogies, connecting the Adept to the Numinous.
12. The Adept becomes part of transmutation, mutability, unity – they become an analogue for the Numinous.
13. They see a way that through reincarnation and metempsychosis the self is alchemically refined into the Numinous, thereby being blessed with the true knowledge of Thoth.

These ideas are present to varying degrees and variously stated or allegorized throughout the texts of the Laevetica. They have been reiterated or interpreted in many different ways across the centuries. This overview of Laeveticism has sought to provide some basic grounding for the subsequent examination of these ideas in applied forms. The ability of adaptations and other modes of intertextuality to resonate with Laevetic ideas means that these aspects of creativity are particularly interesting to examine for their purposeful engagement with textual experiences which embody aspects of mysticism. The spaces created when texts are drawn together are places where time is collapsed into simultaneity, occupying areas of the perceiver's mind where an intertextual macrocosm is revealed in oscillating microcosm. As in Eco's analysis of the archetypes in *Casablanca*, textual devices might allow us 'to catch a glimpse of the Sublime' (1986: 209).

Notions of immediate surfaces suggesting nebulous, infinite networks, of hidden palimpsestuous writings, or of macro-languages where, beyond the veil of the present experience, a larger, occulted unity is glimpsed – all of these create echoes of the Laevetic in descriptions of the adaptational. Then, there is the idea of the Great Work of alchemical and spiritual transmutation,

the practice of refinement through metamorphosis which reveals a syncretic language of totality via the worked alteration of one form into another.

In revealing some of the ways in which adaptation has been utilized as a route to what might be called Laevetic creative practice research, this article aims to suggest the ways in which these textual modes have been aligned with preoccupations which show a desire to find the mystical in the aesthetic. As for J.-K. Huysmans, the occult transmutations found in forms of adaptation represent for many adapters a route to an experiential textual dimension (for creators and audiences) which returns the ritual mysticism of aura to an aesthetics re-sacralized. In tracing some of the ways in which these ideas have been approached in unusual textual forms, a foundation can be built for understanding some dynamic modern forms of textual esotericism. Of particular interest here are the installation works *House* by Erzebet V (2012), *Begetting* by the h0ll0 art collective (2018) and *A Hideous and Uneasy Animation*, the augmented reality (AR) experience designed by Harry North (2021). By first examining the tradition through some lesser-known and often lost Laevetic adaptations across European history, before discussing these recent installations alongside some other experimental modern forms, the intention is to trace a Laevetic ancestry through avant-garde adaptation.

PRECURSORS

In terms of historical versions of Laevetic avant-garde adaptations, we can find prototypical forms prior to the production of the twelve Laevetic texts, but potentially conversant with some form of the Lapis Tablet. We might even look further back, long before the *Corpus Laeveticum*, to the city of Ur, the architectural ur-text whose underarching sweep is a ghostly web beneath each modern conurbation, a deep-memory whisper in their palimpsests. *Gilgamesh*, a tale of heroism across sighing dunes, beneath lowering deeps, high in the cloud-cedars, was once claimed to be an adaptation. It was Rilke whose archaeological gaze first glimpsed the transformation of another text in the structure of the tale excised from the crumbled pillars of Nineveh. He writes of it as one story mourning another, an elegy for a text. Everywhere in the gigantic fragments is a sense of alteration and evocation, a doubled text half-hidden, waiting for a reader who would glimpse its mysteries. Rilke's diaries contain an obsessively allusive half-description of the way he mined the text for its double, retracing transmutations to find a formula which would describe a predecessor.

It is in the letters of the poet's friend Ernst Laurids that we gain a vague sense of what was in Rilke's infamous lost diary, referred to obliquely as *Diary 27: The Book That Was a Valley*. Laurids (1975: 82–85) says that in this volume, the Austrian poet reconstructed a form of *Gilgamesh*'s primary intertext – though he debates whether this is just Rilke's own, strangely framed, adaptation of *Gilgamesh*. It is clear, though, that Rilke himself believed that this was a true textual summoning through creative criticism; in his deathbed writings, he talks obsessively of his 'backwards glance' and refers to himself only as Endor. Here we have an instability – is there an adaptation of *Gilgamesh* present in Rilke's lost diary? Or was the poet an intertextual scholar who reverse-engineered an intertext out of a text? Finally, how would we draw a line between these two roles?

In a marginally less speculative mode, an early account of a process of experimental adaptation being undertaken within an esoteric ontological framework can be found in an unlikely source; Julius Caesar's account of the

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Gallic Wars (1982). Within these, Caesar mentions his general Marcus Litorius multiple times for his endurance in resisting attacks on Roman encampments within the Hercynian Forest (1982: 441, 449, 501). In a largely matter-of-fact war dispatch, one of these references is notable for its figurative language, describing Litorius as a ‘forest artist’ (Fry’s translation, 1982: 449). This is the same Litorius who is later mentioned by Tacitus (2010: 213–14) in relation to the suppression of the druids, a passage which gives us further insight into this elusive figure. Tacitus says that the general had many discussions with the druid elders and attended their rituals. Most notably though, there is a description of a series of objects created by Litorius.

Tacitus claims that Marcus Litorius was a sculptor in wood, as well as a renowned general. The way that the historian refers to the creations themselves is particularly interesting for the way that they are seemingly reversionings of druidic creations:

Marcus Litorius shaped figures from knotted boughs and set them beneath the trees, rehearsing in secret the ceremonies he had once observed in the forest clearings. He fashioned also slight amulets of leaf, fibre, and twig – objects which he declared to the soldiers to be protections against the Gauls, remnants of their ancient fables now given rude and tangible form.

(Tacitus, 2010: 213–14)

Tacitus goes on to mention a speech from Litorius later in his life, within which he described a process of conceptual distillation from the oral theology of the druid elders into the compacted, primitive sculptures he made by the firelight, which were then arranged into tableaux which were used against the Gallic forces as a kind of battlefield set-design within the forest. Cain has interestingly connected the terminology used by Tacitus in the paraphrasing of Litorius’ speech to his descriptions of Roman rituals of augury, suggesting that these creative remakings were interpreted as producing futural knowledge (1983). This link becomes particularly evocative when we note the way that Yates discusses Fludd’s view of his own creative process as alchemical ([1966] 2007), alongside Otto’s discussions of the earlier Dionysian cult as locating oracular sight in the movement between forms (1995). There are suggestions here of a cross-cultural adaptation (from myth to *mise en scène* on tracks of ritual) generating an esoteric knowledge which, in its own transmutation back into the corporeal in the form of impacting military strategy, becomes a tactical advantage on the battlefield – if only due to the psychological impact of the knowledge of its existence on both sides. Many of the threads which would later become more fully realized in the rise of Laeveticism are present in miniature in this intriguing fragment from the Hercynian Forest – immersive, participatory, ritualized texts which remake a prior form, deriving broader insight from the transmutational process.

In the first centuries of the accreting Dodeca, nascent versions of Laeveticist adaptive forms might be found in the occultations of the *disciplina arcani* tradition in early Christianity, particularly in the elaborate catacomb murals discussed by Grieseson and Donats (2004). Davies’s work on the history of grimoires in the subsequent early medieval period notes Laevetic references in the circulating forgeries purporting to be authored by figures such as Virgil and Ptolemy, denounced by the Franciscan friar Roger Bacon (1998). Relatedly, Glasby’s tracing of the lineage of *The Sworn Book of Honorius* finds Laevetic

influence in ninth-century fragments which eventually found their way into the grimoire's composite versions (1962).

However, the Christian domination of European imaginations across the Middle Ages meant that experimental Laeveticist adaptations remained rare during this period. The translation and circulation of some Hermetic and Laevetic texts in the twelfth century allowed for a few instances to emerge, building towards the Renaissance flourishing. Margery Kempe's 'dragges', forms of digestives brewed from a variety of plants, present a particularly interesting instance of Laevetic-influenced adaptation from the fourteenth century. As recorded in her dictated *Book*, and mentioned by contemporaries such as Thomas Arundel, Kempe created these tinctures as both versions of spiritual texts (read to her by an unnamed priest with clear mystical interests) or visions, and as what Lochrie has termed 'translations of the flesh' (1991). There is an interesting sense of sublimation here, as noted by Gaskill (2006), where 'base' desires are transformed into purified theological knowledge through the transubstantiation of spiritual vision into a consumable potion-text. An oppositional movement across a dyad occurs simultaneously, as on the bodily level the physical becomes the spiritual, while on the artefact level it is vice versa. One encourages the other, a version of *as above so below*, where adaptation brings enlightenment through the transubstantiation of forms.

Kempe's work also contains some real interest in a structural sense. When giving the recipe for one tincture which she names 'Exorcism Dragge' (Kempe 1996: 84), Kempe instructs her reader to inhale the smoke from henbane seeds whilst boiling water, speaking a confession into the liquid as it bubbles. Into this is dropped a 'herd' of lardons, which are to be boiled with fennel seed, nutmeg, cinnamon and ginger. After cooling and sieving, this is to be imbibed in one draught while the drinking hand holds a crucifix. This combination of magical ritual, cookery and prayer is also clearly an adaptation of the Biblical story where Jesus drives demons into a herd of swine, and thence over a cliff. Kempe has adapted this into a performance artefact which draws threads from the combination of esotericism and pharmacology which many called witchcraft, as well as the oracular knowledge-seeking of previously discussed adaptations. The whole distils a Biblical story into a personalized production which seeks spiritual enlightenment through a symbolic reversioning of stories, all structured on seeking analogies in different forms.

RENAISSANCE

Like St. Teresa's *Interior Castle*, the theatre of Robert Fludd shows a notable example of adapting from the architectural to the memorial, with the *ars memoria* being a form of curatorial adaptation where (as in filmmaking) fictional buildings are created from spliced together rooms and corridors from many different locations. Most importantly, Frances Yates ([1966] 2007: 330–54) traces in detail the way that Fludd based his interior theatre on the Globe. The *ars memoria* is a form of adaptation as symbolic condensation based on intuitive analogies between forms, and Yates is the perfect scholar to show how these 'adaptations' – which are then recorded partially through image and text (adapted back to corporeality) – are bound up with esoteric notions of spiritual knowledge, of perceiving the macrocosm and encoding it within a personal microcosm.

Giordano Bruno is the figure best associated with the art of memory, but it is not only this form of creativity which shows the evidence of a Laevetic

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adaptive methodology. Bruno's use of interconnected wheels as mnemonic devices did not only remain on the page, but also seemingly led him to the horologists of his era. Buried within his extensive bibliography is a section (in *Sigillus Sigillorum* [Bruno 2016: 138]) which outlines a project that he claims is being negotiated with John Dee during Bruno's stay in England. The passage suggests that Dee is employing various engineers of clockwork to create a cosmological clock combining Bruno's various 'seals' and Dee's own Enochian seal. By adapting these motifs into a mechanized, three-dimensional form, Bruno describes the creation of an artefact whose patterns of turning will reveal to the enlightened reader something akin to the underlying code of reality (an idea startlingly similar to a more recent text of Hermetic and Laevetic allusions – *The Matrix*). It is uncertain whether the two polymaths were able to complete their project, and no drawn illustration of it exists, but it remains a striking conception of ambition in collaborative adaptation.

Dee's extensive marginalia² (itself creating palimpsestuous adaptations through additions) contains ideas for other experimental adaptations aimed at utilizing texts to lift the veil and reveal the Numinous. In one (within his 1559 copy of *Astrologiae Iudiciariae Ysagogica*, 87–88), Dee posits that over-writing words with analogical linkages in the *Transitus Fluvii*, Enochian, Coelestis and Malachim languages might create composite glyphs capable of more transcendental forms of communicative power (recalling Mallarmé's ideas around shades of meaning, or Scriabin's mystic chord). Similarly, some of the plans for his Mortlake library, which appeared as notations in the endpapers of his copy of *Voarchadumia Contra Alchimiam*, included installations somewhere between artworks and magical devices. In one, he makes plans for the tip from a pyramid capstone (though there is no evidence of him owning such an item) to be crushed into powder and mixed with mercury and ash, then spread around the borders of certain carefully chosen pages within specific books.

These books were then to be distributed across the shelves of the library to create a two-dimensional glyph for the illuminated observer. He notes that 'perspective', or three-dimensionality is brought by using pages within the books rather than just the spines, while a further 'arc' is brought through time as a fourth dimension via the carefully chosen editions from specific dates, all the way back to the capstone material which draws the lines together. In this sense, Dee's library is a collection-text like Walter Benjamin's, while the glyph drawn by the connections makes a metatextual narrative within, a four-dimensional microcosm symbolizing the larger pattern of Dee's knowledge. The books as artefact-synecdoches representing his memory of their content are adapted into a narrative microtext within the larger text of his library. The library becomes a runestone where the runes are intertextual links made physical by an esoteric artwork of correspondence.

FIN-DE-SIÈCLE

The efflorescence of Laevetic ideas in the nineteenth century, as traced through Baudelaire's aesthetics and the Decadent applications of Huysmans in the aforementioned scholarship by Nicholls and Zaniolo, can also be noted in more formally experimental examples from the period.

Two figures who are often associated with the Decadent and Symbolist appellations are worth considering. Firstly, Odilon Redon, revered by Huysmans and his character Des Esseintes, is interesting not only for the adaptation of his lithograph series into Huysmans's prose poem 'Cauchemar' (1885), but also

2. Many thanks to the Royal College of Physicians, London, for granting access to these texts.

for the adaptation of his works into a phantasmagoria show. Redon's work, ranging from surrealist typhoid nightmares in dense chiaroscuro charcoals, to seraphic blazes of colour in shimmering pastels, is nearly always described as 'visionary', and Michael Wilson sees much of it as 'entirely consistent with the mystical ideas of the Rosicrucian group' (1978: 48).

This mystical aspect, which touched on Laevetic ideas, was drawn out and – interestingly – allied with popular notions of science within a performative mode. The phantasmagoria, which was described by Max Beerbohm in an 1898 edition of *The Yellow Book*, consisted initially of an actor styled to look like Edgar Allen Poe delivering the opening sections of his derided *Eureka* lecture. Beerbohm says that the actor 'looked as comically morose as the portraits of Poe', and delivered the monologue in a 'dreadful, dreary monotone' at first, before building into 'frenzied excitement' (1898: 78). During this lecture, the darkened auditorium glowed with a variety of shimmering lights, mainly greens and blues, while the sound of a great wind could be heard. As the actor built into a more frenetic mode, smoke poured from behind him, and a magic lantern projected a strange pattern across its pale clouds. Beerbohm calls it a 'lattice of cells', using the language of Robert Hooke.

Within these cells appeared what Beerbohm says are 'dark eggs' (1898: 78), which were replicated in balls rolled towards the audience from the wings. The sound of cracking was heard, and the dark circles in the projection disappeared, to be replaced by images – simplified versions of some of Odilon Redon's stranger creatures (recognized by Beerbohm). He notes 'much agitation' among the audience, and a series of new smoke clouds which drifted above their heads (Beerbohm 1898: 79). The Redon creatures (he only mentions the spider specifically) were then projected above the audience, to much 'terror', while the sounds of a storm accompanied the Poe figure reciting passages to do with the teeming of tiny creatures across the bodies of humanity (Beerbohm 1898: 79). The performance ended with 'a strange poem on alchemy', which Beerbohm describes as focusing on the invisible world as a 'a single thought vibrating through everything', a unifying substrate which includes the tiny horrors within as much as visible beings, and which is constantly refining the material of existence through births 'away from nightmare and towards the true dream' (Beerbohm 1898: 80).

Beerbohm certainly found it an impactful, strange show. Emilie Vézère, in her study of phantasmagoria, mentions that this one only played twice, being deemed too controversial for a full run (2002: 148). The performance is an interesting combination of parts, not least in its intermediality. The fact that it adapts Poe and Redon alongside a melange of half-scientific ideas which look back towards the discovery of micro-organisms and forward to the 'vibrations' of string theory, with a passing teleological nod to an alchemical framing of evolution, makes it a strikingly original work. That this is also a non-narrative, multimedia performance, places it within a fascinating area of experimental, performative, immersive productions. The tying of these ideas to Laevetic alchemical allusions is perhaps a product of its attempts to engage scientific notions for media affects – an interaction with the scientific-esoteric tradition explored in such depth by Frances Yates (2001). The Neoplatonic sense of a world beyond the veil is found in both the Rosicrucians and Symbolists in this period, but this performance seems to fall outside of their Ideal, and Beerbohm's account mentions the Poe character holding 'a blue stone tablet' linking it to Laeveticism (1898: 79).

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The Laevetic ideas of refining, of discovering a syncretic substrate for reality or knowledge, are here connected to half-scientific concepts made evocatively vague, being played out through an experimental horror performance which adapts from, or perhaps merely cites, Poe and Redon. As Vézère says, 'it is a great shame that no other account survives, and that there are no details of the creative contributors' (2002: 149). Whether this is really adaptation, or merely an intertextual melange, is certainly debatable. However, Beerbohm suggests that it is a parodic engagement with Péladan's ill-fated second exhibition of *Mystical Symbolism: The Salon de la Rose + Croix in Paris, 1897–1898*, and that its advertising framed it as such – an interesting acknowledgement, if true.

Another figure from this period who merits inclusion is the mysterious Comte de Lautréamont, Isidore Ducasse. When trying to conceive the mirroring companion piece to the infamous *Chants de Maldoror*, Ducasse wrote: 'plagiarism is necessary. It is implied in the idea of progress. It clasps the author's sentence tight, uses his expressions, eliminates a false idea, replaces it with the right idea' (1994: 240). This sense of replication with modification as a textual ecology, an evolution of language and ideas, is in line with adaptation – particularly fragmentary adaptation from multiple sources, on the margins (or perhaps not) of adaptation 'proper'. Where this is particularly interesting with regard to Lautréamont is in the self-plagiarism which he included in the writing of the fragment of that second book of chants, which was to be the good to Maldoror's evil. Scholars of Lautréamont such as Paquin (1985), and indeed the poet in his own letters, view this companion work, which never reached fruition due to his untimely death, as a kind of inversion of *Maldoror*.

Kamilla Elliott has used looking glass analogies extensively in her work on interart inherencies, and Lautréamont's project has a similar framing in its relationship to its precursor text (2003). The two works form a diptych mirror, each a reflecting reversal of the philosophical notions of the other, where the perceiver is caught in a *mise en abyme* of bizarre style and compounding reversals. Thematic analogies and stylistic affinities structure the relationship as one of similarity with dynamic opposition. Each is an analogy for the other, a correspondence between an evil nightmare below reality and a beatific dream above it. The works express in adaptive form a Laevetic structure where adaptation becomes a process of constructing a correspondence which, in the manner of a medieval triptych, reveals heaven, hell and the mediating saviour between (which has the potential to be the Laevetic adept). For Lautréamont, that central figure is indeed the human; the writer, the reader, for 'Elohim is made in the image of man' (Ducasse 1994: 244). Between the diptych mirrors, looking into infinity, the adept may see themselves within that endless, timeless space.

The construction of an analogical dyad, a Laevetic correspondence of self-adaptation, has an interesting structural echo in one of Lautréamont's passions: mathematics. There is the balancing of the equation in this approach, the conversion as both alchemical transmutation and logical solving, an elegant reduction distilling a verbose complexity which can be accessed via the precisely arranged symbols. The equal sign might stand in for the concept of the correspondence in Laeveticism, and in this sense we see in Lautréamont's unrealized self-adaptation a logical modern translation of Laevetic echoes into a literary analogue for mathematical structure.

Nicholls has examined the idea of the city as a source text (or collection of source texts), a mosaic of textual fragments which overlays the 'real'

conurbation (2015). As an example, he discusses Georges Rodenbach's ([1892] 2007) 'adaptations' of Bruges in *Bruges-la-Morte* and *Le Carillonneur*, where in order to explore the mystical life of objects, to see 'what the stones are dreaming', Rodenbach represents Bruges through an Expressionist filter, making it a personal intertext which he adapts throughout his oeuvre. While this may seem to be outside of the remit of adaptation, it might be argued that architectural constructions are just as much texts as any other medium. While they are mostly non-narrative (though many are arguably structured as narratives, particularly religious structures or Modernist buildings which rigorously control the way that an embodied spectator experiences the building through mediated light and guided movement), they are artistic constructions, works and texts.

An adapter may work in the medium of architecture – Hogle (2012: 497) identifies neo-Gothic buildings such as Strawberry Hill or Fonthill as having their inspiration in texts rather than 'authentic' realities. They might also adapt from architecture as a source text, aligning with Clüver's definition of *ekphrasis*, which allows for architecture as a potential source, including fictional architecture for notional *ekphrasis*, in addition to objects and non-representational works (2017: 466).

La cathédrale ([1898] 2011) by J.-K. Huysmans is a sustained and obsessive novelistic adaptation of Chartres cathedral, an extended *ekphrasis* resulting in record sales for Huysmans. Despite this, it is a work where the sense of the building and novel's wholeness is lost due to the incredible multiplicity of densely described detail (fulfilling – ironically in Huysmans's most Catholic novel – Bourget's mereological definition of Decadence). The result of the adaptation of a building that relied on such a vast compendium of parts was that many of the pages were reduced 'to little more than a dry list of names and facts' (Baldick [1955] 2006: 348), with Huysmans himself admitting that it made for arid and penitential reading (Daoust 1950: 134).

Conversely, in the work of Rodenbach we find an adaptation of Bruges as an architectural whole which includes enough alteration – through the correspondences which unite the city as an integrated text, as well as those which stitch it via analogies to the mind of the mourning character – to distort it as an impactful, memorable adaptation. The adaptations of Bruges undertaken by Rodenbach are highly Laevetic in their use of the Baudelairean correspondences as a crucible for the broader transmutations of world and self into an undifferentiated alloy. Sensory aspects of the world (bells, weather, light on water) synaesthetically intermingle into a whole which corresponds from the external to an internal aspect of the perceiver (mourning). This then suggests a true reality of infinite ideas which unite all of these aspects in one metaphysical language – the idea, perceived still cloaked in materiality, symbolizes the eternal, unified existence. Symbolism 'adapted' Hermetic and Laevetic ideas from Baudelaire, and we can see in Rodenbach's Bruges a text adapted *via* these concepts.

Symbolist artists like Rodenbach and Khnopff used mystical ideas to create a hermetic (i.e. occulted, sealed except to initiates) language of symbols which showed that material forms were analogies for ideas. Their adaptation was Laevetic in the way that it too encoded existing texts – often objects, architecture or mythic texts – within oblique symbolic registers connected by analogies of atmosphere, and ultimately connecting the material, the subjective and the objective, to a deeper infinite existence of ideas.

Of course, the term 'hermetic' is both connected to Hermeticism (and Laeveticism by association) and separate at the same time, much like an

adaptation and its source(s). While the aspect of sealing is often at the forefront of the term's usage, there are other interesting aspects which echo or provide analogies for, or similarities to, aspects of adaptation. These might again suggest a kinship of forms which allows adaptation to easily take on aspects of Hermeticism/Laeveticism. In her writing on Symbolist artists and language, Natasha Staller says that 'hermetic languages use language to conceal a hidden language: their secrets can be deciphered only by someone who has the key' (1994: 334). In this sense, we can see adaptations – as an intertextual meta-language – as hermetic. An adaptation conceals a hidden dialogue between it and its source(s).

While we might agree with Hutcheon that an adaptation foregrounds rather than conceals its underlayer, its secondary language, it is still the case that only the adept who understands the relationship with the prior text has access to this language. Adaptations are therefore hermetic texts remarkably generous with their keys, yet still requiring the knowledge which marks an adept (= an intertextually aware) reader. Adaptations are democratic hermetic texts; their structure is similar to a hermetic language, yet the motivations for their creation are largely different.

A challenge to the definitions of the adaptation as overt could be posited, looking at extended intertextual engagements forming a textual identity which is not acknowledged, in order to find a more fitting version of the adaptation as a hermetic text. However, the point here is the structural similarity of the language/text which conceals another language/text within its surface form, the understanding of which requires an initiated reader possessing both a key and the knowledge required for the reading of that which is unlocked.

MODERNISM

Laeveticism is a hermetic philosophy as much as Hermeticism is. The secret or hidden nature of the hermetic points interestingly to an aspect of recovery by the reader. Dario Gamboni has written not only on the aforementioned Symbolist artist Odilon Redon (whose work is defined by its hermetic mysteriousness), but also on the aspect of modern art which concerns itself with ambiguity and indeterminacy – with occultation. Gamboni sees 'hermeticism, occultation, [and] visual irritation' as techniques for implicating the audience 'in a process analogous to the creation of the art work' (2002: 136), opening up the process and creating a simultaneous space for creators and audiences – a version of the *becoming* mentioned throughout the Laevetic texts.

By considering the ways in which adaptation and intertextuality might create analogous ideas of syncretic perception – of an intertextual network – to those of the Laevetic correspondences, we get closer to the mystical prosumer experience which drives Laevetic adaptations. The language of curation is relevant here, and Nicholls has previously argued for a model of specific approaches to adaptation which might be characterized as curatorial (2018, 2021), a mode particularly *en vogue* currently with Hollywood's propensity to adapt multiple sources from a disparate heterocosm. Here, the connections between adaptation and a particular strand of Modernist curation, as analysed in Marcia Brennan's *Curating Consciousness* (2010), are particularly useful for providing further versions of secondary creation framed by Laevetic ideas.

There is potentially a mystical dimension to the creation and reception of adaptations and curations within a framework of spiritualized aesthetics (as encouraged by correspondences), with both relying on what Brennan calls

the perception of ‘deeply interwoven relations’ between ‘seemingly oppositional categories’ such as presence and absence (2010: 3). Adaptation requires the awareness of unconventional modes of creation, with its focus on how an absent text might be made spectrally present within a new version via the oscillation or doubleness of curatorial collage and palimpsestuous reading. Marjorie Perloff has explored the ways in which the ‘oscillation and doubleness’ of collage and its modes of reading was central to Modernist art (1998: 384), and much of this language applies similarly to adaptation and other modes of intertextuality.

A certain strain of Modernist curation practice exemplified by those such as James Johnson Sweeney and later Harald Szeemann shows a continuation of the centralization of analogy that can be traced through Baudelaire and subsequent writers like Huysmans, ‘an aesthetically oriented, Modernist version of the Doctrine of Correspondences’ (Brennan 2010: 7) that adapts Hermetic and Laevetic metaphysics to aesthetic practice. This has been called spiritual Modernism, a phenomenon emerging at the confluence of ‘modern art, architecture and the esoteric between [the] 1890–1920s’ (Cain 2016: 2) that saw a re-inscription of a kind of secular mysticism within aesthetics (Bürger [1974] 1984: 22, 27), where the mystic artist is ‘the true modern’ (Cheney 1982: 172).

One example of a formalized version of this might be found in Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1914), and there are certainly interesting parallels in the influence of Swedenborg on both Baudelaire and Kandinsky (see Walker 2014). The resurgence of this theme could be seen as secular cultic practice, an aesthetic metaphysics that grounds transcendent experience in artworks, in the face of the devaluations of both religious and auratic art objects by modernity’s consumerism. This supports readings of adaptation and curation – artistic processes predicated on intuited connections revealing larger structures of meaning (the curated collection as a single network-text, like Rodenbach’s Bruges) – as routes through which secular aesthetics retain aura and take on some of the significations of religious ritual.

These ideas are revealed most potently *between* artworks, hence adaptations and curations as particularly effective routes. Adaptation, as a textual manifestation of the *correspondences*, can be a mystical revelator, guiding an esoteric hermeneutics of the unseen through the seen. One of the primary mystical facets of aesthetics for *fin-de-siècle* adapters and Modernist curators is the ability to promote ‘the viewer’s symbolic ability to occupy multiple temporal and spatial locations simultaneously’ (Brennan 2010: 6). This recalls Mallarmé’s spatial poetry in ‘Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard’ ([1897] 2006), where the distribution of words creates a simultaneity between pages, a ‘defamiliarising juxtaposition’ within ‘ambiguously complicated networks of metaphoric association’ (Butler 1994: 5).

The reader/viewer is challenged to engage with a reading-between which stimulates conceptual engagement and suggests visionary perspectives of simultaneity, the auratic reception which leads to a different temporality of textuality. Simultaneous perception via the work of art was indeed an important instance of Hermetic/Laevetic aesthetics in the Modernist avant-gardes. Like Mallarmé, Robert Delaunay’s work introduced a ‘mystical’ aim into form, where colours were utilized in an inseparable way so that all had to be perceived simultaneously, the result being an absorption in pictorial simultaneity that prompted revelations of the simultaneity of existence (Spate 1979: 197).

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Adaptations might be seen to perform this function better than many more singular textual identities due to their constant prompting of the audience into oscillations between texts, places and time periods, and where these spaces overlap to create simultaneity. This drawing together is a kind of transcendence to an omniscient position outside of imagined diegesis, outside of singular textuality. The mystical approach to Modernist curation has this same desire to pursue 'the artwork's capacity to engender visionary perspectives' (Brennan 2010: 7). Here, the spectator will come to inhabit a creative hermeneutic sphere where they will perceive the analogies and the work as process. It is a desacralization of immersive illusion in favour of a kind of esoteric distantiation. Laevetic adaptation, as a mystical aesthetic framework, seeks to deliver the perceiver of its system of analogies to a space outside of time, the Numinous where the unified truth resides, which is elsewhere only represented metaphorically by a reality which hides its interconnections.

The Modernist curator's application of mysticism to aesthetics suggests some interesting concepts for thinking about Laevetic adaptations. One potentially applicable idea from Modernist mysticism that is relevant here is that of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, a concept that seeks to reconcile the tensions of affirmation and negation in various strains of mystical thinking (Voss 1998: 158). This applies particularly to a core project of Laeveticism, which is that naming of the unnameable, where radical paradoxes are created by striving 'to name a subject that lies beyond words', becoming linguistically manifest in 'corresponding patterns of speaking and unsaying, appearance and disappearance' (Brennan 2010: 23).

The *coincidentia oppositorum* might perhaps be a way of thinking about those simultaneous negations and affirmations of sources in adaptation, and the liminal space occupied by the reflexive adaptation audience who hold the tension in their minds. An adaptation is *apophatic* in an aesthetic version of the mystical concept, with *apophasis* being an 'unsaying' (Sebastian 2016: 148) or: 'a creative negation that collapses the categorical boundaries distinguishing presence and absence, subjectivism and objectivism, while promoting a movement toward a kind of radical transcendence' (Brennan 2010: 24).

Similarly, an adaptation speaks of its source through an acknowledgement of its absence, a creative negation collapsing boundaries between texts, creators and audiences through active reading. The radical transcendence in this sense is that critical reception, the palimpsestuous oscillation which makes the text a *tremplin* (Huysmans's term for artefacts which were springboards launching the individual into reverie), whose auratic reception opens up a different temporality. Donato, in her work on Huysmans, calls this secular, auratic temporality 'aesthetic time'.

Two conflicting modernities in the nineteenth century have been characterized temporally: bourgeois modernity and aesthetic modernity. These were described by Calinescu (1977: 41) and adapted by Donato (2004: 3). The former is the emergence of new Capitalist modes of measured and marketable time, allied to changing production industries and technological progress. The latter represents the experience of Baudelaire seeing the infinite, and the mystical artist more generally. It is defined by its rejection of bourgeois time in favour of an individual *durée* which is imaginative and creative, a sacred aesthetic time.

Sacred time 'can be homologised to eternity' (Eliade 1959: 70), a representation of the heavenly macrocosm in an earthly microcosm, and a mysticism of time that breaks the bourgeois. Aura, as a sacralization of aesthetics, is

harnessed as a producer of this, knitted together as an effect of adaptation as a whole: textual reception in aesthetic time, where texts and their interconnections are *tremplins* projecting the subject beyond the material world into the distances of reverie and memory: 'seeing through [objects] into their distant past' (Benjamin [1955] 1968: 61). Aesthetic time might therefore provide a model for Baudelaire's infinite, and for the Laevetic Numinous, a state hinted at by analogy in the Laevetic adaptational experience for both creator and audience.

The influence of Schopenhauer can clearly be felt: the aesthetic experience frees the subject from the universal Will which expresses itself through corporeal embodiment. The subject and the object are then able to exist – temporarily – in an aesthetic sphere where they reflect each other as ideals (Schopenhauer 1988: 265–71). This is the mystical zone of aesthetic time produced by the Laevetic experience of reading the adaptation – dwelling in the space between texts as creator and spectator. In aesthetic time, the audience is brought into the creative sphere, part of the process of textuality, active within the text and aware of its construction process. This is adaptation as a mode of enacting mystical correspondences within the aesthetic sphere, the textual macrocosm through the microcosm of acknowledgement. There are also interesting parallels here between a Laevetic aesthetic temporality and models such as Deleuze's 'third synthesis' of time and McTaggart's 'C-series'.

Apophysis seems to effectively summarize the palimpsestic blurrings inherent to adaptations. Just as Brennan says that the 'curatorial arena' and its space of display is a 'generative void' (2010: 136), so are the micro-spaces between adaptations and their sources (Nicholls's previous work on adaptive decay has examined this [2021]). Both curatorial and adaptive spaces are responsive to these ideas as sites of simultaneity, of tensions held, of oppositional forces of saying and unsaying. This is what makes them ripe for mystical aesthetics; they engage beyond the materiality of single forms and texts, operating within the interstitial networks between people and things, between the layers of past and present. Since the reception of processes of adaptation and curation depends upon the audience intuiting some of the connections that were part of the creation, it is possible that they may suggest equally transcendent ideas to the observer as to the artist.

Before moving on to twenty-first-century examples, a final approach which returns us to experimental media/texts is useful to touch on from the Laevetic adaptations of Modernism. In 1934, Kathe Kollwitz, the German artist of harrowing Expressionism, produced an experimental sculpture which – while called *Cube 1* – has been acknowledged by scholars such as Greta Schulz (1978) and Pernille Svensson (2009) as an adaptation of Malevich's *Black Square*.

Köllwitz's artwork is a hollow cube of black marble a metre squared. The lines are roughly cut, with a sense of movement in their slight irregular curvatures. The vertical faces, cut out from the stone, are replaced by a series of veils made of black lace. Each side has nine of these hanging veils, weighted by small spheres of polished black marble. Looking down into the cube, the spectator sees a minor landscape in black, just discernible. With pooled lakes of black ink between pocked hills of powdered charcoal, the image is inescapably the scorched earth of a war-torn land. Svensson calls it a landscape of pure loss and a 'requiem for the earth' (2009: 231) while Schulz has focused on the emptiness it summons forth.

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In terms of Laevetic adaptation, here we have an excellent example of an apophysis, an unsaying. Without overtly acknowledging the relationship to the source, its black square form within a gallery setting is an intertextual evocation which cannot be avoided, particularly at the time of its original exhibition. It speaks obliquely of its intertext, making it a present absence in its adaptational as well as its literal, content sense.

To stay with the theme of absence, *Cube 1* transposes the lack which becomes a metastasis of potential meaning in Malevich's work, removing some of the hermetically sealed nature of *Black Square* to make an open cube with a more accessible interpretation – form and content align in an expansive, clarifying adaptation which reduces a proliferation of meaning down to a particular theme. This adaptation works in relation to Malevich's work like the measuring of an electron. Where in the source, meaning is a field of potential, in Kollwitz's version a measurement has been taken, a reading extracted which reduces the potential to a specificity. Reading the work as an adaptation, we oscillate between the open and the closed in terms of hermeneutics, even if we have the opposite in terms of the form of the square/cube. We stand between polyvalence and valence.

In Malevich's work, the two-dimensional perception of ungraspable meaning makes us like the flatlander on the sphere trying to perceive space; meaning is infinitely curved in a way we cannot understand, forever disappearing over a horizon line. In Kollwitz's adaptation, our perspective shifts and we see a third dimension. We understand meaning as a closed loop whose curvature is neatly smooth. What we also get in the shift to more appreciable content, through space, texture and light, is the fourth dimension. Kollwitz introduces time to the black box, locating it squarely within a post-war or wartime context of loss, of post-traumatic mourning. It becomes a recording device, as it would for aircraft travel.

Malevich's work is more classically Laevetic in its sealed nature and its prompting of ideas of the infinite. However, the spectator looking through Kollwitz's work back towards that of Malevich experiences a distinct oscillation. This moves between the specificity of a moment symbolically rendered in analogies between self and materiality (like Rodenbach and Baudelaire, here grief fuses the spectator to the landscape), and a work which has been analogically transmuted to become a correspondence suggesting infinite perspectives (and linked to auratic/ritual perception in its gallery placement). Between these two we oscillate with a Laevetic perception part depersonalized abyss of ideas, part depersoned, razed field of material loss. The Laevetic perspective, where the infinite is evoked by the analogies of reality, where the spiritual is anchored in a debased corporeality, is heavily apparent.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: BEGETTING

Video games and forms of new digital media like virtual reality (VR) and mixed or alternate reality (MR/AR) present exciting new opportunities for Laevetic adaptations. In particular, they offer new potentialities for immersive experiences and participatory spectatorship, as well as audience collaborations and bottom-up fan adaptation. The affordability of technology, access to instant worldwide distribution online and the rise of strands of digital literacy around coding have opened up vistas of production whose experimental peripheries dwarf anything seen previously.

One example can be found in *Minecraft*, which offers near-infinite scope for architectural and topological adaptation. Famous *Minecraft* adaptations include the rendering of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural creation 'Fallingwater', as well as the continent of Westeros, complete with the 3000-building city of King's Landing (all unique and with interiors) from the books of George R. R. Martin and their HBO adaptation (Peckham 2013). However, these tend towards the goals of remediation and remaking (though with the shift to a participatory/exploratory mode of audience engagement) and offer little to a selection of Laevetic adaptations.

A clear example of a *Minecraft* construction which does engage with the latter conjunction is the 'Sephiroth Project', described on Reddit by its creator u/kadmylos as a castle adapted from the Hermetic Kabbalah (2014). This is an architectural adaptation of sacred geometry, though here the adaptation is virtual and digital. Where projects like Erzebet V's *House* (2012) (examined in detail later in this article) is embodied and corporeal in its experiential dimension, the Sephiroth Project adapts into the disembodied infinity of *Minecraft*'s phenomenology. As discussed in the excellent book by Ben Godfrey, this represents a sublimation of materiality, where the user steps beyond their body into a hidden world of unique metamorphic possibilities (2015: 222).

Another example of an intensely embodied confluence of adaptation, new media and Laevetic ideas comes in the VR 'game' which re-versions Edmund Elias Merhige's experimental horror film *Begotten* (Merhige 1990) as *Begetting* (h0ll0 2018). Merhige himself has discussed his allegiance to Laevetic thought in many interviews (e.g. *Ultraculture* 2021), and his library of 2400 rare editions of Hermetic and Laevetic texts is famous (Riefe 2021). It includes a first edition set of Jakob Böhme's works, as well as notable additional esoterica such as a hand-painted tarot once owned by Madame Blavatsky. While Merhige's own work is derived directly from his personal interpretations of various mystical and esoteric canons, we only see the ways in which this combines with adaptation when examining those who have engaged with his work creatively.

Begetting was produced by the Lisbon-based art collective h0ll0, previously known for their highly controversial immersive theatre piece *Cannibal Mosaic* (2015), and the vertigo-inducing AR experience *Pascal's Hand* (2017). h0ll0 have been experimenting with various forms of interactivity for some time, collaborating with experimental theatre companies and game designers. As a collective, they are seen as both 'pioneering' and 'problematic' in equal measure (Chiriches 2018), and their use of adaptation is both consistent and fascinating.

In previous work (Cromlech 2017), I have examined h0ll0's 2016 performance of tableaux-vivants (and an interlinking procession) which adapt Santiago Caruso's 2009 illustrations to Alejandra Pizarnik's *La Condesa Sangrienta* (1966). These were performed within the ruins of Elizabeth's Báthory's castle Čachtice, much to the chagrin of the nearby village's residents, who eventually had the performances closed down by the Slovakian government (Temple 2016). The performances, bizarre and disturbing though their tableaux were, managed to effect an unforgettable sense of historical palimpsestuousness through multi-sensory engagement and startling practical effects. The trooping of the windswept procession of Bosch-like horrors, under the silhouetted remnants of the tower wherein Bathory was walled up, to the sound of an all-female choir singing adapted versions of the English band Cradle of Filth's Báthory concept album *Cruelty and the Beast* (1998), was certainly a striking adaptive assemblage.

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Begetting is on the other side of their work, being a digital rather than theatrical performance – however, like the Čachtice piece, it uses quotations from the Laevetica at key junctures. The ‘game’ remixes the imagery of Merhige’s film within a virtual space to present the participant with a disturbing immersive experience which is not for the faint of heart, being described by Joao Mendes (2019) as achieving a more ‘profoundly shattering’ affect of horror than anything possible in cinema. The work was only accessible as a gallery playthrough within the h0ll0 studio between 2018 and 2020.

The ‘game’ begins in darkness, waiting for the participant to use their hands to attempt to alter the blankness around them. In doing this, a line of light appears off to the right of our vision. Further investigation allows a door to be pushed open, and we are blinking in the brightness of a field surrounded by forest. The whole scene is framed in an angular oblong – stepping outside and turning to look behind us, it is revealed that we have emerged from a coffin standing on its end. The world around us twitches, blinks and pulses with the flickering of Merhige’s strange visuals, a hallucinatory materiality transferred from film which brings a weight and texture which is so often lacking in VR. A pregnant woman in a mask steps from behind the open coffin, stroking her stomach. She reaches a hand towards us, before a fissure opens in the ground, swallowing her silently. A network of paths leads away from us, traversing the waist-high grass of the field.

One of the most notable achievements of *Begetting* is the way that in the adaptation from film to VR ‘game’, the text completely restructures the linearity of cinema, spatializing the world of *Begotten* as a networked map of events which still conform to a single timeline. Merhige’s narrative control is deconstructed in favour of the open-world network structure of video games – though rather than events only occurring when triggered by the proximity of the player, here the narrative plays out like a tabletop role-playing game, where the user exists in a world which progresses whether they interact with it or not. Strangely, this actually brings a more anxiogenic sense of lacking control than the experience of the film. The intensely oneiric sense of moving through a world of spectacle, of vignettes where you are acknowledged but powerless to intervene meaningfully, recalls in its greyscale the moments in Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *Vampyr* (1932) where the protagonist finds himself a ghost.

Begetting’s set pieces are largely drawn from *Begotten*, though there are additions which add depth to the world. The forest through which Son of Earth is dragged features not only the house where, for the first section of the narrative, God Killing Himself spasms and spatters beneath the clock, but also a stone well surrounded by yew trees and a tower of an eternal winding stair, where eventually one may encounter The Scribe. The rock flats are traversed by multiple bands of The Tribe, though only one contains the hierophants who murder Son of Earth and rape Mother Earth. The meadow is the last sequenced event, its dark flowers growing from the field just as a broad sun crests the horizon and the game fades to black.

The avatar used by the audience in *Begetting* is of particular interest. VR games and experiences often struggle with the representation of the user’s body (as explored by Creswick [2017]), but if designed effectively, the generation of a strong proprioceptive response creates an extremely immersive sense of embodiment. In h0ll0’s design notes, the user’s avatar is designated as The Martyr, which is an interesting choice for its dual meaning of witness and sufferer. The movement of the avatar is certainly at the high end of

responsiveness in comparison to other games, which is especially impressive given *h0ll0's* budget when seen against the gaming industry more generally. The fact that the avatar figure itself – or ourself – also has a full body, when we look down, is also notable. Frequently in VR productions, only the hands are animated, and their ghostly floating ahead of us is a limitation on our identification with the avatar (Lamb 2011: 43).

The disconcerting nature of our character in *Begetting* comes from the choice to represent this figure as potentially even more monstrous than those characters we encounter. The elongation of the body, limbs and digits is faintly unsettling, but a more shocking aspect comes through the accuracy of the representation of burned flesh. We cannot help but think of ourselves as the victim of some horrendous torture of rack and flames, yet this is never acknowledged or narrativized. As noted by Xiu (2019: 217), it gives us the faint echo of trauma with a missing source, adding an uncanny shade to the rest of the experience. This is exacerbated for any user who decides to climb down into the well within the yew trees.

Inside the well, metal rungs are set into the stone wall, creating a ladder which we descend into darkness as the circle of sky above us contracts. At around the twentieth rung down there is a sudden flood of the grey light which permeates the whole experience (the film's monochrome retained). We see that the rungs end in black water just below us, and if we peer down, we see a darkened reflection of ourselves hanging over this mirror. The face that looks back is as charred as the skin of the avatar's body, with the lower jaw horrifyingly torn away. The more disturbing aspect of this experience, though, is the use of the facial recognition and scanning technology which replicates our own face in the ravaged features of the avatar. Xiu calls this the most 'fearful becoming' of the game (2019: 218), in language which echoes that of the *Laevetica*. The ritualized world which we become part of does indeed have a sense of changing us into something else as we progress through it – there is a self-transformation here which pressures the user to identify with the game world.

In exploring, witnessing and experiencing the various events which progress in the world of *Begetting*, we are engaging with a VR horror game which manages to work as an independent text. It is a mythic, poetic gaming experience of startling, haunting, immersive visuals. However, when experienced as an adaptation it also achieves that sense of submerging the user within the living world of *Begotten*. The archaeological sense of discovering an artefact, a 'cinematic dead sea scroll' (Merhige's term to describe the film) is lost in comparison with the film, but the sense of becoming other within not just a text, but a world, is dramatically heightened. The shift into an interactive mode brings a marked sense of *being* within a myth, rather than just viewing one. The begetting here is not just the turning of the singular into a potentially generative series, but also the begetting of a new selfhood for the user, whose identification with the world through the avatar is so concentratedly experiential rather than cerebral. Experienced as a world-building adaptation, with knowledge of the cinematic text, there is an impression not of playing an interlinked game, but of having fallen back into the living materiality of that artefact.

Merhige's personal interest in Hermeticism and Laeveticism does underpin his film. *Begotten* is intended to be 'a remnant of a culture with customs and rites that no longer apply to this culture, yet are somewhere underneath it, under the surface of what we call "reality"' (MacDonald 1998: 288). The

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symbolic texture of the film, which eschews character, narrative and dramatic conventions in favour of a visceral morality play where intensely embodied archetypes enact stylized, violent tableaux, is retained in the game. What is added is the sense of immersion and interactivity, a becoming-one with this strange reality, a begetting of a new self born into this stark, disturbing, poetic world. When experienced as an adaptation, we read our translation into this world as the begetting of the spiritual reality, where the film was its condensed analogy. The simultaneity of the film/artefact in our memory and the immediate nature of the game creates that oscillation between artefact and existence, a simultaneity which, when allied to the form and content of *Begotten/Begetting*, evokes an atemporality like Baudelaire's infinite, like the Laevetic Numinous. The audience experience here is one of living a creation myth as one of its protagonists, where an artefact version has enveloped us and our reality to show us the true forms.

A hideous and uneasy animation

A related avant-garde approach to adaptation in new media, and one which carries particularly interesting combinations of creative research, Laevetic citations and horror metaphysics, can be found in the AR/MR adaptation of Marc Olivier's video essay *Wallpaper + Horror* (2020). The video essay itself is a compilation film of a huge number of short scenes from horror interiors which notably include wallpaper in the *mise en scène*. There is no real exposition or exegesis through voice-over or text, and as with many essays in Barthes's 'poetic' mode, interpretations are gestured towards through montage, juxtaposition, intertextuality and repeated motifs. A narrative or argumentative arc does come in the movement from the wallpaper as background to characters engaging with wallpaper – usually by ripping it away to discover some revelation beneath. The article is comprehensive, evocative and extremely adept in its compilation of these various intertextual pieces into a new text. It is an adaptation of fragments, united as a single collection-text source defined by genre and motif, into a new curation-adaptation. However, it is the subsequent adaptation of this video essay into an AR experience, which draws out the Laevetic aspect.

The adaptation created by the experimental game designer Harry North and entitled *A Hideous and Uneasy Animation (AHaUA)* – the title is from Poe's descriptions of the moving wall tapestries in *Ligeia* – can be viewed on a mobile device, though it is designed for a headset. As with most AR/MR, rather than replacing reality, it adapts it as a source text. We view the world around us in an altered form, under and alongside the veil of the text. We oscillate between materiality and virtuality, between the real and the fictional. The form that this approach takes in *AHaUA* is the overlaying of the walls of the spectator's home – or any other space, though this is best experienced in the home – with a succession of different wallpapers from horror cinema, as collected in the video essay source.

Wearing the headset, the user can walk around their house, with each wall becoming overlaid with the wallpaper from a horror scene when the surface is faced directly. The software not only recognizes the edges of walls and the angles of corners, but also maps around furniture and pictures, screens and other decorations. The lighting gradients which are toggled at setup also mean that, at least to some degree, the room's current lighting plays over the wallpaper to naturalistically embed it further within the space. The edges are

smoothed by the lighting filter being applied uniformly in the viewer's field of vision – hence the more effective working of the project in the headset form.

The experience is not merely an aesthetic curiosity helpfully collated by the source text. Instead, narrative aspects of the video essay are emphasized and expanded upon, creating a combination of mystical ideas with a particular horror metaphysics which is drawn in through further intertextual nodes. The AR experience has, at the time of writing, received little scholarly attention in the year it has been available. It is my contention, however, that this unusual adaptation – interesting not least for the unconventional media utilized and adapted from – marks an engagement with Laevetic traditions which merges these ideas with the 'cosmic pessimism' of Ligotti, Thacker, Brassier and Benatar. This combination is found in other works of the last few years: the novella *Chaos at Feast* (2020) by the poet and visual artist Lazare Taillefer; the contributors to the cryptic accelerationist substack NEPHILIM09; and the experimental filmmaker John Paul Grimes, with his 'abyssal plain' horror fantasy series of murky, neolithic sea-bed cultures (2021). All are united by an interweaving of Laevetic principles with a revelation of horror which draws together a Lovecraftian pessimism and a deconstruction of meaning and self-hood through a philosophy of nothingness, a *via negativa* leading to *Śūnyatā*.

In *AHaUA*, this trajectory commences with sound. The user in this text is focused on the visual, examining the patterns of the different wallpapers with an intertextual eye, attempting to place their designs within their cinematic contexts. However, early on within the experience, which lasts around ten minutes, we begin to hear sounds which prompt the answers to these enquiries of origin. They begin very faintly, and subtly. In the far distance, while looking at the heavily patterned bright red wallpaper, we hear the tinkling repetitions of the *Suspiria* score. On a different wall, a light tapping comes through, as if Oskar from *Let the Right One In* were sitting against the opposite side, sending a Morse code message. Turning again, we may hear the muted screams of Mark in *Possession*, the chanting from next door in *Rosemary's Baby*, the gong from the twins' corridor appearance in *The Shining*, the nursery conversation from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, the whispered rhyme from *Possum*, the sound of Frank's revenant body squelching in *Hellraiser*. These all stay muffled, as if on the other side of our walls.

In the second half of the experience, we get a visual shift. The walls begin to distend slightly, rippling or bulging subtly. At one point, a hand menacingly presses the wall as if it were a membrane, quoting *Nightmare on Elm Street*. We then begin to note peeling edges, turned-down corners, tears. Behind these are glimpses of scored walls, holes in plaster, writing, stains. Walking forward to engage with these, we are able to reach out and slowly strip away the wallpaper, peeling and scratching at it on the various walls of our home (though of course there is a haptic lack). Beneath, we find mould, cockroaches, vast russet bloodstains and also images and texts. In the style of the many films which feature this motif in the video essay, we find burned-on depictions of twisted trees, murder scenes, apocalypse scenarios, Lovecraftian monstrosities. We also find writing, which here deviates from the compilation film content of the video essay, and instead lifts its lines from a repeated chant in the Thomas Ligotti short story 'Nethescurial':

In the rooms of houses and beyond their walls – beneath dark waters
and across moonlit skies – below earth mound and above mountain
peak – in northern leaf and southern flower – inside each star and the

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voids between them – within blood and bone, through all souls and spirits – among the watchful winds of this and the several worlds – behind the faces of the living and the dead.

(2015: 319)

The lines of the quotation are fragmented, found in order under different wall-papers which can be stripped away. Once each line is revealed, small holes tunnel into the walls and begin to seep blood. A low chorus also begins, chanting the lines, adding each one as it is revealed and growing in volume each time. As the last line is read and the chant works through its full version, each wall dripping blood, a change begins to come over each of the walls towards which the user turns. They begin to decay, growing mould and mottling, greying and taking on the texture of flesh as they fall apart, rotting and crumbling. Each wall grows a black doorway as the chant drops to silence. As soon as the user takes a step towards the doorway, their vision goes completely dark and the 'game' ends.

The Laevetic experience in *A Hideous and Uneasy Animation* is built on both palimpsestuousness and extractability (Henry Jenkins's term). At the centre of the work is the concept which unites the Laevetic aspect with the horrific; a conflation of diegeses. Where *Peeping Tom* and *Ringu* did this with cameras and televisions respectively, while *Blair Witch* relied on guerrilla paratextuality and *Scream* employed self-reflexivity, the horrific collapse of the boundary between the diegetic and non-diegetic here is more akin to another avant-garde horror experience – *Decasia* (Morrison 2002).

Decasia is a horror film due to its function as a *vanitas*. Its symphony of entropy is a *memento mori*, as the decay of its film fragments is a mirror held up to the audience. It is also interesting to note the similarity of adaptive structure between *Decasia* and *Wallpaper + Horror*, with the former's 'curation-text adapting a collection-text of fragments' just having the added aspect of disintegration. Indeed, these two 'films' are an excellent comparison for tracing the thin, permeable line between audio-visual scholarship and experimental film, where creative practice research (Batty and Kerrigan's [2018] phrase) sits squarely in the blur. Betancourt has written on the conceptual pervasiveness of corruption in *Decasia*, saying that 'what is frightening about *Decasia* is not only the destruction of these old films, but the implication and reminder that this destruction is not contained (safely) within the art object' (2015: n.pag.). The decay we see reflects the decay we are a part of, combining with the atmosphere generated by the imagery and sound of the film, to produce an affect of existential horror.

AHaUA works on similar principles, though with an encapsulating metaphor of a veil rather than a mirror. This connects back to a more Laevetic identification of the horror affect, where the overlaying of textual veils through adaptation, other forms of intertextuality and the capacities of AR tech generates a narrative that exposes the everyday as an intricate superficial language which, if learned, uncovers and communicates deeper realities. The choice of wallpaper as subject, which is so often densely patterned, and whose patterns the concentrated form of the video essay prompts us to attempt to read hermeneutically, apophenially, further emphasizes the sense of an occulting surface, an ornate veil which might be lifted to reveal a hidden truth.

Tearing away the wallpaper to expose a horrific reality beneath, when transferred to the walls of our own house, suggests a Laevetic pessimism which is not contained within the text. It reveals a world like that of Thomas

Ligotti's pervasive literary ontology, where the reality we inhabit is a thin, brittle, damascened veneer over the abhorrent gnosis of true existence. Laevetic horror, the Ligottian, Lovecraftian universe, is communicated brilliantly in the immersive, interactive storytelling of the AR adaptation of the *Wallpaper + Horror* audio-visual essay. It is the classic 'as above, so below' revelation of horror cinema – your mind, as horror spectator, is a traumatized, horrific microcosm for the mirroring world, psychological damage writ large across an Expressionist canvas.

Interesting VR/AR examples for future examination through the lens of Laevetic adaptation can be found in two projects currently in development. The Discovery Tour mode within the most recent *Assassin's Creed* games, where players enter a VR reconstruction of Ancient Egypt or Greece, has potential for Laevetic ideas. Similarly, the immersive experiences of Punchdrunk Theatre, particularly now that they are collaborating with Niantic (makers of *Pokémon Go*), suggest a dynamic, participatory AR spectatorship. Mia Kopik has already revealed an upcoming collaboration with Ubisoft's former designer Patrick Barnes on a virtual museum of death beds, featuring the last visions of Yeats, Crowley, Huxley and Saint Lydwine, which immediately evokes Laevetic ideas. Similarly, Punchdrunk/Niantic are strongly rumoured to be working on an occult-based AR game set within and between the British Library and British Museum. Whether these are adaptations or just experimental texts combining Laevetic associations with challenging, immersive experiences remains to be seen.

House

In a 2011 article, Andrei Kurkov (2011) catalogued some of the ways in which Mark Danielewski's labyrinthine novel *House of Leaves* has been adapted. While fascinating in themselves, adaptations such as Julia Banks's modelling of 5000 copies of the book into a sculptural representation of Yggdrasil, or Didier Babacar's infinite-loop compilation film of endless stairways which folds the book's Navidson Record back into the visuality of its Piranesian roots, are not particularly Laevetic in their deep syntax. The adaptation which *does* engage clearly with Laevetic theosophy is the architectural/experiential triumph of Erzebet V's *House* (2012). This is the final example to be examined in this article, and it merits a different style of engagement.

The mysterious and often provocative Hungarian installation artist has created something which 'adapts two sources into a breathing palimpsest' (Catling 2010: 102), becoming a work which singularly absorbs the corporeality of its spectator. The manner of this correspondence seems to engage the observer effect of quantum mechanics for an aesthetics which makes the human body an extension of the artefact in a reverse posthumanism. It evokes the adept's becoming and the sublimation of the body. Defying summarization, the work can only be effectively described via a walkthrough from the perspective of a spectator, an ekphrasis from within.

House is held in a warehouse on the outskirts of Budapest and is viewable (or able to be experienced) by only one spectator at a time, for one hour each. This has created the legendary waiting lists which Sigurdsdottir has called an 'artwork of cultural experimentation in their own right' (2013: 133), particularly for the levelling quality of having no fees and no preferential treatment or discrimination against any applicant. It is well known that more Hungarian

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rough sleepers have experienced the artwork than famous international icons of culture.

Upon entering the warehouse door, the spectator passes through a short tunnel of coade stone worked on all sides to represent a detailing somewhere between knotted muscle and the fine bark striations of holm oak saplings, and hung with constantly blowing black draperies of brocade, velvet and lace (Richten [2020: 74–76] has discussed the resemblance of this effect to the Jean Epstein adaptation of *The Fall of the House of Usher*). Sound and scent are also controlled throughout the installation, and in this section the sound of stone grinding against stone can be heard far away, while a kind of ash-lime scent is very faintly evoked. Pushing through the final series of veils, the participant emerges into the *griswald*. Stylized trees carved from silcrete into Expressionist clusters of block, jag and spike recall both Anselm Kiefer, in the lead leaves attached to the frozen convulsions of the branches, and Canto XIII of the *Inferno* in the dark blood which drips down the trunks. Ash falls all around like snow. Outside of the corridor, there is no breeze, only stillness.

A sensor and speaker hidden in each tree mean that each time one is approached, a doubled voice – a loud, close whisper and a faint, seemingly far away scream – speaks, saying in English: ‘where there is no Echo there is no description of space or love’. The idea of the space being infinite, as per the Ash Tree House of the novel, is obviously evoked by this quotation, but the fact that the words are actually spoken by a kind of simultaneous echo is an interesting one. It suggests the ability of the adaptation’s doubled voice to speak of the spaces between, where the audience’s oscillation allows a perception of the intertextual echo. For the Laevetic adaptation, this echo produces a knowledge of atemporal (therefore aspatial) existences where aesthetic mysticism seeks adaptations as aligned doorways to be moved through into strange houses.

Looking around the space of the *griswald* is a disorientating experience. Erzebet V, always a purposefully mysterious artist, has managed to retain an unusual degree of restriction regarding the blueprints and construction of the installation. The time period allowed inside, and the waiting lists, also means that analysis is difficult, due to the general disorientation produced, and the desire to experience the artefact as a spectator (rather than trying to peek behind the curtain) when one may not get another opportunity. However, the conjecture of Retz and Druyan is that the whole space is encircled by curved false walls painted in the vastly expensive Vantablack (2015: 352). The effect is a dislocation from space, a sense of an abyssal expanse beyond and above the trees and the small fires which hang in the spaces above (an open box of mirrors is the likely source of their inverted appearance). Many spectators have described the nausea invoked by looking into this anxiogenic, artificial non-space – an agoraphobia stimulated by simulation.

Passing through the trees, the participant discovers occasional small clearings. A certain trick of the light is manifested within these, likely through the use of drones fitted with projectors, where the clearing seems to swirl and cycle once stepped within. The impression given is of being within a sluggish whirlpool or hurricane, which generates a centrifugal pull on the attention, a perception-gravity. At the centre of these clearings are rectangular doorways set into the flat stone paving slabs of the ground. These doorways are an obvious nod to ‘The Five and a Half Minute Hallway’, but they also suggest a sepulchral aspect. Within each horizontal doorway is a stone staircase sloping steeply downwards. At around the tenth stair, there is pure sucking darkness.

Again, a Vantablack or nanoblack surface seems likely, though the musician Carl Vathek alleged in an interview (Ukigbo 2014) that he descended one of the staircases and placed his hand into a cold liquid.

The disorientation produced by the *griswald* means that its size is very difficult to determine. Many have found the House itself only after wandering for some time among the lacerated trees and swirling clearings. All have the same experience of encountering the House though – it appears suddenly, out of nothing. Koga has speculated that the House is covered by further nanotechnology similar to the IDF's Kit 300, though the accessibility and expense of this make it unlikely (2019). One of Erzebet V's previous installations – *Draugr* (2010) – utilized clear, layered lenticular lenses to create visual dead spots, so it is more likely that a very large sheet of this material (plus strategic lighting) is covering the house until it is removed suddenly.

The reveal itself appears to be different for each individual. For some, it flashes into being in the distance not long after they exit the tunnel. For others it jumps up in their peripheries while they investigate a clearing. For a few, it appears barely 2 m from them (my own experience), a particularly disturbing way to encounter a massive, strange structure, akin to the way that rocks loom suddenly into proximity for the swimmer in murky water. In the introduction to their collection of interviews with participants – *Exploration A* – Akhtar and Benson (2017: 6) propose that each explorer had the House appear when they were at a heightened degree of unease. Their hypothesis is that the dropping or raising of the cloaking material is calibrated to the heart rate of the observer, occurring when a specific threshold is reached.

Beyond its startling emergence, the House in the *griswald* is a looming, bizarre entity. It begins three storeys above with its widest point, attached to a huge, rippled mirror facing downwards. Its proliferation of chunks and angles recalls a kind of Brutalist metastasis, a crosshatching of hallways producing sharp, bubbling protuberances of concavities and recesses of convexity. It tapers down from its sprawling upper floor, leaving a single door and attached corridor at ground level. In a highly theatrical move, which many who have not experienced *House* have called unsubtle and jarringly stereotypical, a version of György Ligeti's *Kyrie* section from the *Requiem* begins to play across the installation as soon as the House appears.

The composer Alethea Blake has written of the impact of this version of the piece upon her as she approached the House – horripilations and an instantly dry mouth, with a steadily rising heartbeat – and reflected on the way that the piece has been performed. Blake says that there is a subtle 'rawness' to the performance that 'sounds as if the choir are finding the singing itself harrowing', allowing an emotion to take physical effect and break through the polish of professional performance (Mitchell 2016). In a moment of pure speculation, the Erzebet V scholar László Nagy has opined that he would not be surprised if the artist had organized for the performance to be sung by choristers selected due to their status as terminal cancer patients, in order to inject a degree of authenticity and an unsettling edge to the music (2017: 43). This is entirely unsubstantiated.

New scents also circulate once the House appears. A creeping smell of rotten meat begins to pervade the forest, adding to the unsettling effect. However, once the participant touches the glass knob of the plain white door at ground level, the music stops and the scent of rot begins to dissipate. Inside is the Five-and-a-Half-Minute-Hallways, a featureless corridor of grey stone stretching towards blank darkness. The space inside has, according to Retz and

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Druyan (2015: 359), been calibrated to skin temperature. It feels oppressively warm, but once the participant steps inside this warmth begins to feel more enveloping than uncomfortable. There is a sense of body boundaries becoming porous, of being subsumed within the living House. Mendy (2012) has discussed the womb symbolism of many of Erzebet V's works, and there is certainly a sense of uncanny womb-space about the hallway below the House. It recalls, for Mendy, Barbara Creed's work on *Alien* in *The Monstrous Feminine* (2012: 138).

Progressing down the hallway, the sense of corporeality and internality is increased by the gradual movement of the walls, which begins subtly on first entry and builds as the corridor is traversed. The walls begin to breathe, and it generally takes the spectator a few seconds to realize that the corridor is breathing in time with their own inhalations. Koga (2019: 67) has posited that the hallway is installed with Vital-Radio, the experimental technology for smart homes which monitors heart rates and breathing from distances up to 8 m. If it is present, the technology is well hidden within the drab blankness of the walls, ceiling and floor. The only light comes through a kind of faintly luminous greyish paint on the door behind, which closes once the participant is a few steps into the corridor. As they walk, the walls breathe in time with them, the air settles to a close warmth and many have described a feeling of being dissolved within the hallway, a sense of becoming spectral or becoming part of the House (Akhtar and Benson 2017: 63–64).

At the end of the corridor is a weighted, Vantablack curtain. Approaching its absence is again an unsettling experience, and its heavy folds do not reveal themselves until the participant touches the fabric. Beyond are the steep spiral stairs which ascend to the first floor. They are of the same appearance and experiential design as the hallway, though here it is the steps themselves which emit a faint, grey luminosity like wan, clouded moonlight. A trick of projection is again achieved through hidden cameras which film the participant from behind while simultaneously projecting a live stream of this image onto the stairs ahead. The effect evokes De Quincey's description of his memory of Coleridge's description of Piranesi's work, the palimpsestuous versions growing like the carceral architecture of his dreams, where the authorial figure sees versions of themselves replicated in series, forever ascending ahead just out of reach (quoted in Wilson 2016: 155). In the final turn the double slips away, and the participant passes through a narrow ogival doorway into the small first storey.

The impression given off by this space is of a low chantry chapel, or a ritual chamber. A vast tangle of roots cascade from the ceiling to hang motionless throughout the room. Aside from these startling extrusions, what strikes observers most dramatically on emergence from the staircase is the sudden appearance of colour, after so much darkness and monochrome gradation. The floor here is of brass, while the chamber is lit by four tall candelabra. The deep amber of the floor is burnished by the faintly flickering light of the candles. Engraved into the floor is John Dee's *Sigillum Dei Aemeth*. The points of the outer star indicate six doorways within the chamber in addition to the doorway from which the observer emerges. Here, sound and scent become an intense combination; the aroma has been described by László Nagy as a 'funereal layering of myrrh and flint dust' (2013: 22).

The sound is similarly double-layered, incorporating an extremely low, constant bass growl with a rhythmic scraping which horror scholar Amy Levi (2012: 199) has compared to the signature sound of the videotape in *Ringu*.

3. Three of the four major health incidents among spectators have occurred here, with two lawsuits still ongoing in relation to these. Many have suggested that the lack of an emergency exit is reckless and illegal.

Many participants have noted an intensification of embodied effects here, beginning to sweat and feeling a building claustrophobia.³ Nagy calls this the 'purification chamber' (2013: 29). The walls, doors and ceiling here are of a dark wood, probably ebony or an artificial substitute, polished to a reflecting sheen. The heptagonal shape of the room creates a complex, fragmented *mise en abyme* in each of these dark mirrors, giving a sense of depth that many have found vertiginous, and showing a seemingly endless labyrinth of chambers like Borges's hexagonal library rooms, each featuring a doppelganger imprisoned.

Whichever door is opened here, all lead to a narrow corridor which ends in the same spiral staircase. Again, this repeats the form of the previous ascent. Once the door closes behind the participant, the sounds and scents of the purifying chamber are closed off and quickly dissipate. The circuitous route ends in a copy of the ground level door; turning its glass handle, the user steps into the primary space of the House, the second floor, and the penultimate stage of the experience.

The upper floor of Erzebet V's House adapts a second text intratextually within its broader adaptation of Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. It can be argued that the first floor purification chamber does something similar with Dee's Enochian sigil, but while that is a recontextualization of the symbol, it is less transformative in its use and perhaps suggests curation or wholesale quotation of that text. It was the Dutch architect Lisbet Rijks who, after sketching her memory of the layout of this upper floor on a napkin after leaving *House*, realized that it corresponded to an existing sketch (see post 3 April 2014).

The complex system of almost-rooms utilizes the plan drawn by Newton of Solomon's Temple, from the painstaking measurements he derived from ancient sources, due to his belief in its encapsulation of the universe's broadest patterns. Scaled down significantly, the space would be confusing and claustrophobic again, were it not for Erzebet V's decision to have each interior wall be only a crumbling ruin of varying heights between two and five feet high. Each wall is of dolomitic stone crawled by ivy, while below are flagstones strewn with autumnal leaves and torn pages from Danielewski's book, with a glass or hardened plastic floor a few inches above. The external walls and high ceiling are of the same polished wood substance as the room below, creating a further *mise en abyme* effect.

The light here comes from the floor, a bluish glow which emanates from the flagstones like moonlight. A very faint dry-ice mist drifts through the space. The experience is theatrical, but within the context of the rest of the work it remains atmospheric, never quite straying into Hammer Horror camp. At the centre of the work, where the Holy of Holies would be in Newton's plan of the temple, there is a tree. This ash tree manifests in adaptation the implicit tree, accessible only through hermeneutically tracing its hints and vestiges, within *House of Leaves*. It places something jarringly living at the centre of this work which, like Baudelaire's 'Paris Dream', is otherwise a topos of lambent artifice. It also recalls Baudelaire's 'Correspondences', standing as synecdoche for the forest of symbols. However, it does not take on the anti-nature of Baudelaire. Instead, it returns us to nature, placing the natural in the ultimate metaphysical place, and back to the Norse intertext within the book's use of the Yggdrasil motif.

The tree is simple and unadorned, incredibly grounding after the strangeness of the rest of the installation. As has been mentioned by many in *Exploration A*; it feels like a homecoming. Standing before the great ash

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is again a trigger. The *mise en abyme* walls sink, replaced by a detailed and convincing three-dimensional projection of Escher-like staircases. The mirroring of the ceiling is replaced by a seamless projection which continues the staircases of the walls, which recede into infinity above, again recalling De Quincey's recollections of Coleridge's Piranesi descriptions. The staircases stay for a few minutes, before fading into blackness. The lights in the floor go out, and the darkness is total. There is silence for perhaps a minute, before a cracking sound, and a doorway appears, visible via the grey light which shines around its edges. This leads to another warm, grey hallway, a short turning/ following stair and finally the door which opens onto the warehouse roof.

I have decided to represent Erzebet V's *House* in such detail to give a sense of not only the uniqueness of the installation, but also the strange lostness the participant feels within the work. For many, as noted in *Exploration A*, it is the most memorable artistic experience they have had. It is, then, one of the most notable works created by a Laevetic-leaning artist, and one which – unlike many of the historical examples – still exists, rather than only haunting us in fragments of description.

Erzebet V's primary biographer, László Nagy, has discussed her interest in esoteric and occult traditions at length. There are multiple references to Laeveticism within his study of her influences, *Atopy/Atopos/Atropos* (Nagy 2020), which show her familiarity with the core texts as well as an interesting preference for Laevetic ideas over those of the Hermetica. Similarly, his examination of her mystical philosophy in *Via Negativa* (Nagy 2013) reveals the core role which readings of the Laevetica play within her aesthetic metaphysics. In previous work (Cromlech 2020), I have analysed the use of demonological texts and *ars goetia* sigils in her underwater cave art, but *House* is the most notable of Erzebet V's works in terms of its Laevetic influence.

Like the control of direction and sight in museums or Modernist architecture, in Erzebet's installation we complete a highly stylized ritual of sensory engagement, imagination and self-reflection as we are led through the exhibit. What is particularly interesting here is that while Nagy has investigated Erzebet's engagement with Laevetic theosophy, in *House* we have a very clear use of the 'technical' Laevetica. This installation is both esoteric ritual and occult science mapped onto the self as material, where the space is the crucible or alembic.

As noted previously, each of the Laevetic books of Thoth has its technical half to accompany its philosophical dialogues, the majority of which are later medieval interlineations. These are the texts which spurred alchemists like Agrippa, inspired Dee and Kelley, fuelled the obsessive-compulsive paranoia of Strindberg's *Occult Diary*. The technical Laevetica are often dismissed, like alchemy itself, as the magical thinking which has accrued pseudoscientific trappings over the centuries – empty rituals based on ignorance. It is certainly easier to entertain the ideas of the Thoth dialogues, rather than the dense and often bizarre instructions of the technical 'experiments'.

However, what Erzebet V shows in *House*, which continues the thread we have traced in Dee and Kempe in particular, is that the technical Laevetica might be more productive if used as blueprints for artistic enterprises, rather than scientific studies. Immersive, interactive and participatory versions of installation and performance, modes which are culturally centralized in the twenty-first century due to the influence of gaming, can be analogous to the rituals found in the Laevetica and other occult texts. The technical Laevetica are scripts for physical philosophy, where the spectator and creator fuse to

perform within an interactive space altered by the performance, encoding the conceptual backdrop of the Thoth dialogues (or other ideational texts in different traditions).

Erzebet V's *House* is an instantiation of the technical Laevetica, an incarnational adaptation which focuses on an amalgamation of embodiment and metaphysics within an interactive installation-space which demands performative, immersive engagement. The adaptation of *House of Leaves* is a sleight of hand, an acknowledgement of one aspect of *House's* intertextuality which shrouds another. It is the occulted, hermetic text within the palimpsest – the *Corpus Laeveticum* – which is primary. This is an apophatic adaptation, an unsaying reworking. The acknowledged surface adaptation of *House of Leaves* is the above which corresponds to the below, the latter being the unifying text explaining the 'reality' which we ritualistically inhabit, performing on its stage like Ligotti's puppets.

Erzebet V's adaptation is incarnational in its removing of the technical Laevetica from their imprisonment in the page, their dead status as pale shades of their living forms. They are rituals to be enacted and immersed within, and the *House* re-embodies them. Similarly, the philosophical Laevetica are grounded, removed from pure abstraction to become materialized ideas encountered through performance within an interactive sensorium. They become ascending conceptual structures to be climbed via the supporting struts of ritual and the ritualized space.

House is a Laevetic adaptation because it adapts *House of Leaves* using Laevetic principles. It also adapts the *Corpus Laeveticum* as an occulted secondary collection-text. The Laevetic nature of the adaptation itself can be traced by mapping its aspects to the main principles which summarize the books of the Dodeca. Occultation and indeterminacy are constantly in play within *House*, where the physical occultation of space via various devices corresponds to the concealment of meaning. The two hidden aspects unify to correspond with the hermetic Numinous, whose absence is here brought to the fore and made spectrally present through its analogues.

The oscillation we undertake between *House* and Danielewski's book keys us into the correspondence relationships between the two, the coding of one form within another via analogies. The memory of Danielewski's book is conjured as a present absence, a *coincidentia oppositorum*, an analogy for the Numinous itself. The two works fuse in our present experience, their palimpsest becoming a unified totality emanating from a single creative force – us, the intertextually aware audience, becoming creators, immersed, interactive and participating in the creative process. Due to the ritualistic, mystical atmosphere of *House*, these aspects of the aesthetic experience of the adaptation become evocative, or invocational – they become analogies for more metaphysical concepts.

The interconnections of the *House* text and its occultations, then the correspondences between the *House* text and *House of Leaves*, are horizontal analogies in space (*House*) and time (*House/House of Leaves*) which fuse to become a syncretic space-time of aesthetic logic. The audience is drawn into the creative process in a ritualised participation, determining meaning within and across artworks.

For those who become aware of the interconnections, a larger whole is created, a horizontally unified form across individual aesthetic works, connected by tone, mood, theme, reception, symbolism. This totality, like synaesthetic perception, suggests an occulted, hermetic unity which itself

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becomes a vertical analogy for the Numinous, a reversal of that original transmutation (from metaphysical > physical), now effected by a ritualised collaboration between artist and audience in the space of the artwork.

Perception of these intertextual and aesthetic analogies becomes a window onto a governing mutability; the indeterminacy between forms, the field of probability between the measurements of reception. Here, the aesthetic alchemy of adaptation, as a process of metamorphic transmutations, corresponds to a broader and more infinite becoming, a metempsychosis beyond individual embodiments. Turning like a Möbius strip, the participant performs the ritual, as the ritual produces the Adept.

House is then an adaptation of *House of Leaves*, an 'unsaying' adaptation of the *Laevetica*, and a series of micro-adaptations of texts such as Newton's blueprint of Solomon's temple, John Dee's *Sigillum Dei*, Canto XIII of the *Inferno* and many other intertexts. Like its primary source text *House of Leaves*, which is structured on the Gothic tradition of the found text – here apophatic in its existence only as fragmentary ekphrasis/exegesis in *mise en abyme* – it places the spectator in a space of indeterminate diegeses. In *House*, this is done through the ritualized participatory engagement created by the installation text, which uses the technical *Laevetica* as a script for an intensely embodied, interactive and immersive work. The participant is offered a route to becoming the *Laevetic Adept*, glimpsing through *Laevetic* adaptation an analogue for the Numinous and an intimation of metamorphosis.

CONCLUSIONS

In presenting a selection of avant-garde adaptations, some lost, others contested, this research has attempted to evoke a line of experiments with adaptation which suggest that the process and its products can be an aesthetic manifestation of *Laevetic* thought. In discussing modern examples of experimental adaptations which continue the historical tradition, notably through a form of ekphrasis which itself attempts to further adapt them into compressed literary forms, this article sought to show that this approach is not historically sealed, but is a vibrant and dynamic part of adaptation on the margins.

Laevetic ideas give an insight not only into the motivations and creative processes of adapters, long disavowed by poststructuralist theory, but also to use the focus on the reader brought by those same approaches to think about the secular, aesthetic mysticism which the occult transformations wrought in esoteric adaptations provide for the user. Experimental and avant-garde approaches to creativity often deploy the language of the mystical. *Laevetic* framings for adaptation locate these terms within a contributing tradition, and lead to new considerations of the aims and experiences of these textual encounters. From *Gilgamesh* to *Minecraft*, adapters have used modes of textual transmutation to provide audiences with the ritual space of aura which is so often occulted by a hermetically sealed materiality. Reading beyond these forests of symbols, the dark mirror of aesthetic simulation suggests broader vistas.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

This article was researched and written to the standards of Intellect's Ethical Guidelines: <https://www.intellectbooks.com/ethical-guidelines>. No approvals or subject consent were required.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

FUNDING

The authors received no specific grant from any public, commercial or not-for-profit agency to aid in the research or writing of this article.

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