The Emergence of the Real in Modernist and Postmodernist Art: Torus Versus Rhizome

Author: Julia D'Errico

THE EMERGENCE OF THE REAL IN MODERNIST AND POSTMODERNIST ART: TORUS VERSUS RHIZOME

***Several Circles*, Wassily Kandinsky (1926)**

By Julia D'Errico
Advisor: Professor Frances Restuccia
English Department Honors Thesis
Boston College
April 8, 2020

DEDICATION

For Professor Frances Restuccia, whom I can never quite repay for her patient advising of this project, encouragement to pursue my own ideas, compassionate guidance these past four years, and for challenging the horizon of my perspective.

For Professor Thomas Epstein, who opened my eyes in Paris by modeling a lifestyle of intellectualism and enjoyment, and by introducing me to much of the art that inspired this project and enriched my life.

A special, heartfelt thank you to both professors for their invaluable mentorship.

What qualifies a work as distinctly modernist or postmodernist? Moving beyond the idea that modernism and postmodernism are primarily distinguishable on a temporal basis, D'Errico instead argues that the key difference between these two movements lies on a theoretical level. Grounded in a framework of contemporary theory put forth by Žižek, Lacan, Deleuze, and Badiou, D'Errico proposes that the Real-Symbolic relation manifests differently in modernist and postmodernist works; the structural paradigms of the torus and rhizome are helpful to illuminate this fundamental theoretical difference. Expanding on Žižek's definitions of modernism and postmodernism (from *Looking Awry*), D'Errico posits that a torus-shaped Real-Symbolic relation accords with modernism and that a rhizomatic Real-Symbolic relation accords with postmodernism. This interdisciplinary analysis of twentieth-century art mainly focuses on literature, but also invokes poetry, visual art, theatre, and film. Overall, D'Errico dissects the theoretical structures of *The Sun Also Rises*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Trial*, *White Noise*, and *Caché* to qualify the alignment of each with either the modernist or postmodernist canon.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE CENTURY'S ART AND CULTURE

Notoriously tumultuous and revolutionary, the twentieth-century's politics, economics, and science set the foundation for the Western world as it is experienced today. The century's iconic events—including Albert Einstein's theorization of relativity, the first and second World Wars, Great Depression, Holocaust, decolonization, Civil and Women's Rights Liberation movements, Space Race, popularization of contraceptives, Vietnam War, global telecommunication revolution, AIDS crisis, proliferation of nuclear weaponry and power, and Edwin Hubble's discovery that the Milky Way is just one of countless galaxies in an expanding universe—all radically and permanently transformed society.

Meanwhile, twentieth-century philosophical thought consistently unraveled established "truths" that, thus far, were assumed to be infallible. Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (1886), for instance, de-centers morality as the locus of truth and even challenges the vain pursuit of finding a supposed truth, effectively launching the century's nihilistic attitude. He locates traditional morality "on the order of astrology and alchemy—but in any case something that must be overcome," and in summary argues: "why insist on the truth?" (Nietzsche 235, 214). Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation" (1919) undermines the Enlightenment's belief in the scientific method's ability to yield absolute truth. Insofar as science is a continual work-in-progress, and by definition "*asks* to be 'surpassed' and outdated," the currently-accepted theories are neither complete nor infallible (Weber

138). In the realm of psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan proposes that Sigmund Freud's discovery of the unconscious—summarized by the statement, "*I is an other*"—produced a disorientation tantamount to that during the transition from a Ptolemaic geocentric solar system to a heliocentric model: "the Freudian discovery has exactly the same implication of decentring as that brought about by the Copernican discovery" (Lacan Seminar II 7).

Evolving contemporaneously, the twentieth-century's artistic culture was similarly turbulent and shocking. Broadly, artists abandoned conventional notions associated with various mediums in favor of the "extreme stance of promoting everything previously considered ugly," mirroring the world flipping upside-down around them (Badiou 132). In *The Century*, Alain Badiou specifically outlines twentieth-century artists' vehement rejection of "tonality in music, the figure in painting, humanism in sculpture, [and] the immediate intelligibility of syntax in poetry" (Badiou 133). Igor Stravingsky's atonal "Rite of Spring" (1913) composition, Hilma af Klint's early abstract painting sequence *The Ten Largest* (1907), Vladimir Tatlin's *Corner Counter-Relief* (1914), and dadaist Hugo Ball's gibberish poem "Karawane" (1917) each exemplifies Badiou's idea of the avant-garde in their respective mediums.[1]

Overall, twentieth-century culture is broadly categorized into two movements: modernism and postmodernism, which are roughly associated with the first and second halves of the century. Whereas modernism involves depth, alienation, interiority, angst, paranoia, despair, absurdism, apocalysm, incomprehensibility, disillusionment, and disenchantment with rational expectations, postmodernism deals with flatness,

[1] See Appendix Figures 1-3.

spontaneity, simultaneity, chance, pastiche, paradox, irony, anxiety, hybridization, collage, anarchy, play, kitsch, plurality, perspectivism, and celebration of the illogical.[2] Yet, the methodology of tracing similarities among works creates a murky classification system at best; modernist works can certainly feature paradox, and postmodernist works can feature an alienated, angst-ridden protagonist. Therefore, beyond these formal and thematic trends, which may more or less appear in a work, what, exactly, are the *defining* criteria that distinguish a work as modernist or postmodernist? Are these two movements truly distinct ideological categories? Do they stand in opposition to each other, or is one a modification or intensification of the other?

Rather than focusing on similar characteristics among items in a set—characteristics that may extend to items outside of this set—this project strives to explore the qualities that dictate which items are inside a set and which are not. In other words, this project explores the question of modernism versus postmodernism through universal definitions, not characteristics that link particulars. Privileging Slavoj Žižek's conceptual distinction between modernism and postmodernism, but also invoking theory put forth by Jacques Lacan, Alain Badiou, Gilles Delueze, and Pierre-Félix Guattari, this project applies the criteria that defines a work as modernist or postmodernist to a variety of artistic mediums—mainly literature, but also poetry, theatre, visual art, and film.

In one of his earliest works, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (1991), Žižek observes that "all culture is ultimately nothing but a compromise formation, a reaction to some terrifying, radically inhuman dimension proper to the human condition itself"—namely, the dimension of the Lacanian Real,

---

[2] See Appendix Figure 4. Ihab Hassan's table is featured in Jim Powell's *Postmodernism for Beginners* (1998).

which this thesis will discuss in detail (Žižek 37). In “Is There a Postmodern Sociology?” (1988), Zygmunt Bauman states that the concepts of modernism and postmodernism are necessarily “in relation to the way that intellectuals perceive their social location, task and strategy” (Bauman 227). This thesis posits that modernist and postmodernist works differ in their portrayals of the Real-Symbolic tension, and how people “perceive their social location, task and strategy” in relation to this tension.

Crucially, this interdisciplinary cultural analysis departs from the faulty notion that modernism and postmodernism are predominantly distinguished on a temporal basis, or that they form a clear, linear chronology of thought. Rather, the two movements must be properly understood as different modes of thought and representation; they demonstrate fundamentally different ways of grappling with the human condition, particularly in relation to the Real and Symbolic orders. By illuminating how a work typically associated with a particular movement may actually be more fitting in another category—based on its theoretical structure, whose importance transcends its publication date—this project advocates for greater flexibility regarding the classification of twentieth-century artworks.

Žižek presents the following theoretical criteria to define and distinguish the two canons: **“The lesson of modernism is that the structure, the intersubjective machine, works as well if the Thing is lacking, if the machine revolves around an emptiness; the postmodernist reversal shows *the Thing itself as the incarnated, materialized emptiness*”** (Žižek 145). While modernist works display lack, postmodernist works display fullness, even to the point of surplus. In this way, Lacan’s ostensibly paradoxical teachings that the Real is lack and the lack of lack show two

sides of viewing the Real, with modernism and postmodernism each emphasizing a different side. Notably, neither lack nor surplus seems to be a state of a comfortable equilibrium, perhaps indicating the inevitability of a Real-Symbolic tension.

The hallmark of this thesis is the distinction between two structural paradigms—the torus and the rhizome—and their alignment with modernism and postmodernism, respectively.[3] First providing the pertinent background on contemporary theory, the rest of this introduction defines these structures, dives into the nuances of their spatiality, and explains how they serve as lenses through which one can grapple with the differences between these two canons.

Several key concepts from contemporary cultural and literary theory are integral to this Žižekian analysis of twentieth-century works: namely, Lacan's three-registers theory of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary, as well as Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome. Foremost, throughout his seminars, Lacan developed his tripartite register theory; this analysis will focus exclusively on the Symbolic and Real registers. The Symbolic "refers to the customs, institutions, laws, mores, norms, practices, rituals, rules, traditions, and so on of cultures and societies (with these things being entwined in various ways with language)" (Johnston). In this way, the Symbolic correlates to "reality." Meanwhile, the Lacanian Real is "whatever is beyond, behind, or beneath phenomenal appearances accessible to the direct experiences of first-person awareness" (Johnston). The overwhelming Real threatens engulfment, and, despite being the register of the unsignifiable, is where abstractions such as love, death, and

[3] See Appendix Figures 5-6.

God might be located. Lacan's championed Borromean knot form illustrates the interconnectedness of these registers (Johnston).

In *Lacan and the Concept of the 'Real'* (2012), Tom Eyers asserts that since "the very beginning of his teaching… Lacan 'spatialized' his theory of the registers" (Eyers 62). In Seminar XXII, for example, Lacan discusses the "topology" of the registers, positing that the "organization of life," which correlates to the Symbolic, seems to be in "a sort of torsion… in order to lodge itself in [R]eal space" (Lacan Seminar XXII 262). Torsion, by mathematical definition, involves curvature beyond a singular plane dimension, thereby implying depth. While the Symbolic field is positioned in such Real space, the spatiality between the two registers cannot be reduced to a "simple 'inside/outside' relation" (Eyers 61). Almost exactly in parallel, Charles Shepherdson's *Lacan and the Limits of Language* (2008) insists that "the relation between the [S]ymbolic and the [R]eal cannot be approached if one begins with a dichotomy between inside and outside" (Shepherdson 3). Lacan himself explains that the distinction between "externality and internality… makes no sense at all at the level of the [R]eal" (Lacan Seminar II 97).

Instead, the "Real is simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' the Symbolic" (Eyers 62). Shepherdson explains that the Real is an "absent center" and a "lack that arises within the [S]ymbolic order," and that at the same time, the Real is "beyond" the Symbolic (Shepherdson 15, 18, 14). In effect, there is a "constitutive interpenetration of the Symbolic and the Real" (Eyers 37). The idea of a "porous" Symbolic further portrays the idea of an all-surrounding, encroaching Real that seeps into the reality; the Real is the central void at the heart of the Symbolic (Žižek 33).

Capturing this spatial complexity is the torus structure—a donut shape. This project argues that the torus form accords with modernism, and is theoretically evident in modernist works. The defining qualities of the torus are 1) its incompleteness from a central hole, which constitutes a "void within the structure," and 2) the void surrounding the exterior of the donut shape as well (Shepherdson 3). Together, these essential features produce the torus's defining quality of ***extimité*** [extimacy]—an excluded interiority or, alternatively, an included exteriority.

Two particular examples that Žižek analyzes in *Looking Awry* convey the torus-model relationship between the Real and Symbolic. First, Žižek focuses on a scene from Robert A. Heinlein's *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag* (1942) in which a couple, thoroughly frightened upon seeing a vast "grey and formless mist, pulsing slowly as if with inchoate life" while driving, hastily roll up their car window to shut it out (Žižek 14). Here, Žižek reads the grey mist as the "pulsing of the pre[S]ymbolic substance"—a visual representation of the nebulous nothingness of the Real, a disgusting exteriority incessantly trying to push its way into the Symbolic field (Žižek 14).[4] In addition, Žižek interprets the tennis game scene from Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* as emblematic of modernist works. The fact that the players continue to play the tennis game without a tangible tennis ball demonstrates a typically-modernist functioning around a central lack: "the game works without an object" (Žižek 143). In this example, the work emphasizes the void at the center of the system.

The torus's structure illustrates the stability and instability produced by the exterior Real's constant threat to swallow the donut-shaped Symbolic order, while

[4] Notably, this amorphous mist shares qualities with a Heideggerian-type "unformed matter" that is "nonbeing," as discussed in "What is Metaphysics?" (Heidegger 107).

simultaneously supporting it insofar as the donut-shape derives from its very lack of center. Žižek highlights this paradoxical relation: “the role of the Lacanian real” is two-sided, as it “derail[s] the balance of our daily lives, but it serves at the same time as a support of this very balance” (Žižek 29). In parallel, “the Real simultaneously supports and threatens the Symbolic from within” (Eyers 45).

The torus shape shows the fragile barrier between the Real and Symbolic orders, with an interpenetration occurring in the form of a central void. The surrounding Real threatens to engulf from outside; the internal Real threatens to suck the Symbolic into its black hole. In this way, the torus paradigm also captures Badiou’s ideas about threshold preservation in *The Century*. Specifically, Badiou posits that a “contempt for… an installation” and preservation of a the “threshold… without a crossing” are characteristic of twentieth-century poetry (Badiou 24). What Badiou attributes to the entire century, here, this thesis applies to modernist works in general; postmodernist works, on the other hand, display an acceleration toward the threshold and even a destruction of the threshold-barrier.

Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome structure presented in the introductory chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) is helpful to visualize the postmodernist Real-Symbolic relation, one that involves a destruction of any barrier between the inside and outside, instead favoring imbrication. Essentially, the rhizome is an infinite network of outgrowths; it is “ramified surface extension in all directions” (Deleuze & Guattari 7). Deleuze and Guattari explicate how “the rhizome is made of plateaus” and is limitless sans borders (Deleuze & Guattari 21). Whereas the torus structure involves depth, the rhizome demonstrates pure flatness: the Real and Symbolic registers are embroidered

into a flat, impregnated plane. Rhizomatic flatness is such that it “never has available a supplementary dimension” and, again, that there is “the impossibility of a supplementary dimension” (Deleuze & Guattari 9). Rhizomes each “fill or occupy all of their dimensions,” in accordance with the postmodernist idea of fullness (Deleuze & Guattari 9). Rhizomatic pervasiveness connects to the “ubiquitous and invasive nature of postmodernity” (Francese 6).

Additionally, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that within the rhizome, “there are no points or positions… only lines” (Deleuze & Guattari 8). Herein lies a fundamental difference with the modernist torus paradigm, which clearly features a central void that everything revolves around. The modernist structure displays being surrounded by the Real on all sides and penetrated in the center; the rhizomatic postmodernist structure, on the other hand, “has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills,” and “it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*” (Deleuze & Guattari 21, 25). This quality of omnipresent milieu is the reverse of modernism, which “plots a point”—the point of central lack—and “fixes an order” of the barrier-separated inside and outside, although the torus’s extimate structure undermines the legitimacy of this distinction (Deleuze & Guattari 7).

This project proposes a synthesis of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome with that of Žižek’s postmodernist Real. Conceptualizing the Real as rhizomatic in structure is advantageous to comprehend the invasive nature of the Real, and its planar imbrication with the Symbolic in postmodernist works. The two concepts can be linked in the several ways. Deleuze and Guattari connect the rhizome to a weed, asserting that “the weed is the Nemesis of human endeavor…. Eventually the weed gets the upper hand.

The weed exists only to fill the waste spaces left by cultivated areas. *It grows between*, among other things" (Deleuze & Guattari 19). The rhizome grows in-between just as the Real fills the crevasses of the Symbolic order. Postmodernism views the Real as lodging itself in Symbolic space rhizomatically. It is critical to note that the Real examined in this project is rhizomatic in structure, filling in the cracks of the Symbolic—the rhizome, as a shape, is not the equivalent of the Real, for Lacan says that the Real "is absolutely without fissure" (Lacan Seminar II 97). This proposition to connect the Deleuzian rhizome with the Lacanian Real is also compatible with Badiou's treatment of the Real as gap in *The Century*, insofar as the rhizomatic Real occupies the cracks within the Symbolic (Badiou 56).

In sum: this project posits a distinction between a structure centered on absence and a structure absent any centricity—and that this distinction, captured by the torus and rhizome paradigms—is key to understand the conceptual divide between modernist and postmodernist thought. The following chapters proceed by dissecting the theoretical structure of multiple works. As *The Sun Also Rises* and *Waiting for Godot* exemplify a torus-structured Real-Symbolic relation, they align with modernism; as *The Trial*, *White Noise*, and *Caché* feature a rhizomatic Real-Symbolic relation, they align with postmodernism.

CHAPTER I

MODERNISM'S EXTIMATE VOID OF THE REAL

The Sun Also Rises

Ernest Hemingway, 1926

Set in post-World War I France and Spain, Hemingway's novel depicts a cohort of friends who, restless and unfulfilled, spend their days incessantly drinking and traveling in efforts to distract themselves from the *nada*—the irrepressible, all-powerful lurking nothingness threatening to swallow them. In essence, *nada* is "the strange, unknowable, impending threat of nihilation" (Stolzfus 212).[5] Aligned with the Lacanian Real insofar as it is utter nothingness, Hemingway's *nada* "connotes the absence of transcendent authority and the absence of a priori values. It emphasizes meaninglessness, the contingency of life, and the impossibility of deliverance from any of these ontological states" (Stolzfus 212).

The Sun Also Rises shows how the paranoid characters strive to fend off the menacing, encroaching *nada* (or Real) by busying themselves with superficial Symbolic-order festivities. Their desperate attempts to fortify the barrier between the Symbolic and the Real—between life in society and the vacuity of death—exemplify a Badiouian "maintenance" and "guarding of the threshold" without a crossing (Badiou 22, 24).[6] Despite the characters' attempts to repel the *nada*, or in other words, preserve an

[5] Stolzfus attributes this definition of *nada* to John Killinger.
[6] As mentioned earlier, this project applies Badiou's theory about twentieth-century poetry's fixation on preserving the threshold, namely the "contempt for everything that represents an installation," including the ultimate installation of death, to modernist works in particular (Badiou 24).

inside/outside distinction, some integral "extimate kernel" of the Real is already lodged at "the very heart of the [S]ymbolic"; it is what "the [S]ymbolic field is… structured around" (Žižek 33). The Real as lack occupies this privileged central position in *The Sun Also Rises* and modernist works in general, superseding any previously-perceived "infallible" center on which society is organized: examples include religion, logic, and the scientific method. Whereas cultural history could previously be understood as "a series of substitutions of center for center," Jacques Derrida proposes that in the early twentieth century, "it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center" (Odin 62). "No center" in modernism corresponds to the jarring discovery of a gaping lack at the core of society—the empty "widening gyre" in William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1920). In postmodernism, "no center" corresponds to the complete unraveling of the gyre structure. The central position no longer exists, the locus once believed to yield some kind of truth value is obsolete—or, more extremely, the faith that there once was a center is lost. The postmodernist take on "no center" effectively translates to: everywhere is *milieu*. Here lies the nuanced difference between a structure centered on absence and a structure absent any centricity.

To return to the text at hand, considering Hemingway's characters' desire to keep the *nada* as far away or "exterior" as possible, in conjunction with their grappling with a central absence instead of any *a priori* morality or meaning, reveals a definitive torus structure, clearly positioning *The Sun Also Rises* in the modernist canon on a theoretical basis. The rest of this section dives into the intricacies of the *extimité* that Hemingway portrays.

The characters develop several strategies to distance and distract themselves from the *nada*/Real, including: 1) the evasion of sleeping alone or in darkness, an act associated with death, 2) a "running away" lifestyle that involves traveling, rampant alcoholism, and fiesta celebrations, and 3) the compulsion to hunt, an attempt to conquer death. Foremost, protagonist Jake Barnes admits that "for six months [he] never slept with the electric light off," because in the dark, he can only "lay awake thinking and [with his] mind jumping around" (Hemingway 136, 35). In comparison, characters fall asleep relatively easily when taking naps in the afternoon daylight (Hemingway 116). While struggling to fall asleep, Jake tries to convince himself that "there is no reason why because it is dark you should look at things differently from when it is light" (Hemingway 136). Regardless of whether or not the characters acknowledge it, their paranoia of falling asleep alone in darkness likely derives from how this experience previews death and being swallowed by the Real. Aside from daylight, sounds belonging to Symbolic-order operations, such as the monotonous clicking of the typewriter or the "heavy trams go[ing] by and way down the street," also facilitate the characters' ability to sleep because, grounded in reality, they dissociate the act of sleeping with the Real of death (Hemingway 19, 35).

Additionally, the characters' partying lifestyle and constant travels are attempts to mentally and physically escape the abhorrent Real. Jake notes how his daily life involves "much wine, an ignored tension, and a feeling of things coming that you could not prevent happening," understanding well that, "under the wine [he] los[es] the disgusted feeling and [is] happy" (Hemingway 135). Most of all, Hemingway highlights the characters' paranoid avoidance of the *nada* through their obsession with the fiesta.

For seven days, the characters immerse themselves in a stimulus-overload of religious processions and other Symbolic-order rituals: “The dancing kept up, the drinking kept up, the noise went on” (Hemingway 142). Gravitating toward the cognitive sensory overload it offers, Jake explains how: “Everything became quite unreal finally and it seemed as though nothing could have any consequences. It seemed out of place to think of consequences during the fiestas,” alluding to the ultimate consequence of death (Hemingway 142). Evidently, the excitement and incessant chatter surrounding the fiesta provide an attractive opportunity for characters to barricade the Real outside the comforts of the Symbolic.

Third, bull-fighting offers a false sense of triumph over the Real; the spectacle of conquering animals’ lives and narrowly evading decimation by the bull gives characters an unwarranted confidence about escaping the threatening grasp of the Real. Since the powerful bull has the potential to annihilate Matador Romero at any moment, yet he still temporarily “dominate[s] the bull by making him realize he was unattainable,” he, and all those watching, feel as though it is impossible for the *nada* to swallow them (Hemingway 153-154). Later, Romero gifts the bull’s ear as a tangible token of his purported victory to his love interest (Hemingway 179).

In *The Sun Also Rises*, the characters’ evasion of sleeping alone, incessant partying, and obsession with bull-fighting are essentially efforts to maintain a distinct barrier between Real and Symbolic realms. Therefore, just as the petrified couple from Heinlein’s *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag* that Žižek analyzes in *Looking Awry* tries to “roll up the [car] window” and shut out the “grey and formless mist” of the

Real, so does this cohort of alcoholics strive to do the same, primarily through the three aforementioned strategies (Žižek 14).

Critical to the torus paradigm is the notion *extimité*, which entails the Real embedded at the core of the system, "the central impossibility around which every signifying network is structured" (Žižek 143). *The Sun Also Rises* portrays *extimité* most obviously through the lack of a value system, a lack around which all the characters' actions swirl superficially: the modernist "machine revolves around an emptiness" (Žižek 145). In addition to the nihilistic atheism ushered in by Friedrich Nietzsche's 1882 proclamation that "God is dead," George Simmel's 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" contributes to an explanation of why morality's obsoleteness is characteristic of modernism. Simmel discusses how rapid industrialization led the city-dwelling factory worker to become "a single cog... against the vast overwhelming organization of things and forces which gradually take out of his hands everything connected with progress, spirituality and value" (Simmel 337). Especially in the post-Great War context, at the forefront of people's minds was a horror of a Badiouian "absolute violence of the [R]eal" associated with the introduction of new scientific warfare innovations, such as mustard gas, and remorse for an absent God—a necessary condition for the atrocities of war to have happened (Badiou 52). Badiou elaborates, "Violence is legitimized by the creation of a new man. Needless to say, this theme only makes sense within the horizon of the death of God. A godless humanity must be recreated, so as to replace the humanity that was subject to the gods" (Badiou 32). He associates violence with the "horror of the [R]eal" (Badiou 19). The prevalence of the violent Real, especially exposed during wartime, made clear to society that its

prerequisite had been realized: the death of God, and accordingly, of traditional morality.

One of Hemingway's short stories, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (1933), very clearly shows the modernist recognition of indifferent nothingness at the place where comforting religion once was, specifically through the repetitious substitution of the word *nada* into The Lord's Prayer:

> Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee ("A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" 150).

Hemingway demonstrates this same absence of morality in *The Sun Also Rises* through the blatant disrespect for life, both animal and human, which are abused for personal gain. For example, the massacring of innocent bulls is unanimously accepted: "All for sport. All for pleasure" (Hemingway 178). Hemingway further conveys this reckless indifference to life when a man slips by the arena's entrance only to be mercilessly disregarded and killed by greedy bull-fighting spectators: "The man who had been gored lay face down in the trampled mud" (Hemingway 177-178).

Conversation at a dinner party explicitly addresses the lack of morality, as a guest casually quips, "You haven't any values. You're dead, that's all," and mockingly notes that "Food had an excellent place in the count's values. So did wine" (Hemingway 62). Peering "into the abyss of *nada*" consequently prompts the characters to try to fill "meaninglessness with a new essence" (Stolzfus 209, 206). In other words, the

characters create and propose their own value systems to live by—this act implies the void of a relevant ethical system. For instance, Jake devises his own exchange-based moral ideology, positing:

> You gave up something and got something else. Or you worked for something….. Either you paid by learning about them, or by experience, or by taking chances, or by money. Enjoying living was learning to get your money's worth and knowing when you had it…. It seemed like a fine philosophy. In five years, [he] thought, it will seem just as silly as all the other fine philosophies [he's] had… [he] did not care what it was all about (Hemingway 137).

Thereafter, acting upon his transactional religion, Jake asserts that, "If you want people to like you you have only to spend a little money. I spent a little money and the waiter liked me. He appreciated my valuable qualities…. It would be a sincere liking because it would have a sound basis" (Hemingway 210). Here, Jake demonstrates Simmel's theory of the twentieth-century's new "money economy," which involved "transforming the world into an arithmetic problem… fixing every one of its parts in a mathematical formula" and the "quantitative relationships of the metropolis" (Simmel 327, 338). Additionally, Hemingway's depiction of Jake's quantitative value system is the very type of modernist portrayal that György Lukács criticizes in his essay, "The Ideology of Modernism" (1962). Prioritizing transactional convenience over genuine empathy or care, Jake's philosophy reduces the "human condition" to "a solitary being, incapable of meaningful relationships"—which Lukács despises (Lukács 24).

Jake's love interest, Brett, also creates her own value system, suggesting that "deciding not to be a bitch" is "sort of what we have instead of God" (Hemingway 220-

221). Insofar as the characters put forward their own philosophies and debate how one should act, *The Sun Also Rises* implies a lack of pre-existing morality at the heart of their Symbolic order. At best, their frail ideologies superficially patch over the gaping void of morality—they do not abolish the void. Jake sums up the complete ambivalence about how to act when he notes, “That was morality; things made you disgusted afterward. No, that must be immorality” (Hemingway 137). The conflation of these two opposites effectively cancels out the concept of morality and suggests its utter absence. This void of morality at the center of the characters’ existence, along with the *nada* that they struggle to guard their reality against by partying and bull-fighting, suggests that Hemingway’s portrayal of the Real is simultaneously within and outside the Symbolic, illustrating the very *extimité* that defines the modernist torus structure.

Waiting for Godot

Samuel Beckett, 1954

The vain, unanswerable plea, “What are we doing here, *that* is the question,” expresses both frustration with an inexplicable Heideggerian *geworfenheit* [thrownness] and meta realization of *Waiting for Godot*’s radical plotless-ness (Beckett 70). Lacking any conventional plot progression whatsoever, the main characters Estragon (Gogo) and Vladimir (Didi) instead face the overarching task of avoiding the Real while trapped in a desolate, enclosed mono-setting. Compared to Hemingway’s characters, Gogo and Didi face starkly fewer opportunities to distract themselves from the Real—far from the stimulus overload of the week-long fiesta in Western Europe, Beckett’s setting merely involves a road and a tree (Beckett 1). On the verge of absolute nothingness, Gogo and

Didi desperately strive to grip onto their minimalist Symbolic reality, the singular self-proclaimed purpose of waiting for the indistinct Godot, and any indicators that legitimize their existence in attempt to prevent the Real from completely taking over.

Despite their attempts to shield against this encroaching unsignifiable nothingness, it actually is already lodged at the center of their existence; it is the "widening gyre" that the entire play revolves around (Yeats). In this way, the Real "derail[s] the balance of [their] daily lives, but it serves at the same time as a support of this very balance" (Žižek 29). Insofar as nothingness already gapes at the once-privileged core of morality, logic, and meaning—while Didi and Gogo attempt to barricade themselves against a looming Real of death—*Waiting for Godot* exemplifies the *extimité* that defines the modernist torus paradigm.

Before fully jumping into a Žižekian analysis of Beckett's play, it is helpful to understand Žižek's interpretation of Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist paintings, particularly *Black Square* (1915).[7] In *Looking* Awry, he reads the "simple black square on a white background" as the central void of the Real threatening to swallow the surrounding Symbolic field (Žižek 19). *Black Square* is the:

> [manifestation] of a struggle to save the barrier separating the [R]eal from reality, that is, to prevent the [R]eal (the central black square) from overflowing the entire field, to preserve the distance between the square and what must at any cost whatsoever remain its background (Žižek 19).

Žižek's emphasis on upholding the barrier in modernist works, which Badiou also emphasizes in *The Century*, is exactly what *Waiting for Godot* demonstrates. Although

---

[7] See Appendix Figure 7.

Beckett's characters, stuck in their bleak environment, are significantly closer to being swallowed by the "central black square" than Hemingway's characters are, they still strive to uphold the barrier between the fields in a characteristically modernist way.

Even more extreme than Jake's acknowledgment of "things coming that you could not prevent happening"—with "things" as euphemistic of death—in *The Sun Also Rises*, Beckett's characters are very aware of their eventual fate of irreversibly falling into the abyss of the Real (Hemingway 135). Gogo and Didi's sneers about the slave Lucky's "slobber" and eyes "goggling out of his head" as he whimpers, paired with their solemn repetition, "It's inevitable," point to a disgust with the human form's fate of decay and disfigurement (Beckett 18). In parallel, given that Pozzo (the blind, abusive passer-byer) represents "all humanity," the unanimous aversion to his helpless writhing on the road reveals mortal angst (Beckett 74). Vladimir's vehement declarations, such as, "Let us do something, while we have the chance!" and "Let us make the most of it, before it is too late!," show his awareness of the impending threat of the Real and desire to distract himself (Beckett 70).

Yet Vladimir and Estragon's existences are already precarious: at the beginning of the play, Estragon poses, "Am I?," an initial and fundamental question of which the answer remains unclear (Beckett 1). Teetering on the brink of the abyss, Vladimir and Estragon desperately attempt to confirm their existence by 1) questioning the mysterious little boy, 2) not vocalizing their nighttime dreams, and 3) postponing the possibility of suicide—all of which are essentially efforts to delay the "installation," and guard "the threshold… without a crossing" (Badiou 24). For instance, Vladimir implores the young boy who briefly passes through their setting, "You did see us, didn't you?," to

which the boy responds “Yes”; however, a parallel scene in the second and final act undermines this confidence (Beckett 43). When Vladimir similarly desperately beseeches, “You’re sure you saw me, you won’t come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me,” the boy runs away without confirming Vladimir’s existence (Beckett 82-83).

Additionally, as is evident from Vladimir and Estragon’s discussion of the act of thinking, Beckett completely punctures a hole in traditional Cartesian logic:

Vladimir: What is terrible is to *have* thought.

Estragon: But did that ever happen to us? (Beckett 54).

By questioning the possibility of human thought, Estragon’s statement unravels the formula of *Cogito, ergo sum* [I think, therefore I am], and destabilizes their status as alive and outside of the Real. Later, in Estragon’s statement, “We always find something… to give us the impression we exist,” the diction of “impression” conveys a frighteningly dubious attitude about one’s own existence (Beckett 59).

The motif of dreams further demonstrates characters’ attempts to distance themselves from the Real. Vladimir’s emphatic resistance to Estragon explaining his dream—he repeatedly shouts “DON’T TELL ME!”—suggests the prospect that the dream might match their current experience, that their entire lives are only a dream (Beckett 8). By questioning, “Sometimes I wonder if I’m not still asleep,” and “Am I sleeping now?,” the characters position themselves in a liminal space between life and being swallowed by the void (Beckett 77, 81).

However, ultimately, the threshold is preserved, rendering *Waiting for Godot* a modernist work. While they initially entertain the possibility of hanging themselves, they

never realize this proposition, and by the end of the play, declare “We’ll hang ourselves tomorrow,” which, circularly, could have been what they promised yesterday (Beckett 9, 84). This modernist delay of the threshold-crossing is reminiscent of a moment in Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* (1912): Aschenbach’s ride in a coffin-resembling gondola. Although the relaxation of death might be alluring, Aschenbach insists that “he must not relax too completely” (Mann 40). Postmodernist works, on the other hand (as this project explores in detail later), feature an acceleration toward the threshold and a breakdown of barriers, such as when Josef K. accelerates toward his death at the end of *The Trial*. In addition to the preservation of a threshold that marks an inside/outside relation, there is some “external” void of the Real at the heart of Beckett’s universe. The rest of this section explores this play’s dimension of *extimité*.

Waiting for Godot features the obvious central absence of Godot’s arrival. The void of the Godot figure represents the newly-realized void at the center of society—a realization spurred by the nihilistic rejection (and newfound obsoleteness) of ethics, logic, and purpose, all of which were taken for granted as infallible during the pre-modernist era.

First, just as in *The Sun Also Rises*, Beckett’s play portrays the obsoleteness of traditional morality and religion. Shockingly, when discussing the Bible, Estragon blatantly disregards Scriptural content in favor of the supplementary maps; when Vladimir asks about the Gospels, Estragon effectively denies their importance by responding about images of the Dead Sea. Estragon says, “I remember the maps of the Holy Land…. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty” (Beckett 4). In the absence of guidelines on how to behave, characters develop their

own value systems. For example, Estragon proposes, “That’s the idea, let’s abuse each other,” which alludes to the lack of humanistic morals during the two World Wars and Holocaust (Beckett 65). In another instance, the characters flirt with the idea of a Simmelian exchange-based value system, similar to Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*: Gogo and Didi do not care about Pozzo as he shouts for help, struggling to get up from the ground. The unbothered characters only start to demonstrate interest when Pozzo offers money, beseeching, “Help! I’ll pay you!” (Beckett 71). The fact that they entertain different value systems to live by highlights the central lack of morality to begin with. Similar to in *The Sun Also Rises*, their flimsy ethical system substitutions fail to adequately plug the void.

Second, the early to mid-twentieth century saw a modernist recognition of both science’s failure to lead to absolute truth and rationalism’s failure to lead to progress. In “Science as a Vocation,” Weber dispels the notion that the scientific method has successfully yielded absolute truth; he instead argues that science is a continual process, a succession of discoveries that supersede previous ones. Science, by definition, “*asks* to be ‘surpassed’ and outdated,” and what is learned and “accomplished will be antiquated in ten, twenty, fifty years” (Weber 138). Beckett conveys the emerging disillusionment with the idea of science and rationalism’s infallibility through the lack of consistent logic in *Waiting for Godot*.

Specifically, the disorientation derived from the failure of logic to translate to scientific truth and societal progress manifests in *Waiting for Godot*’s motif of nonsensical surroundings—the characters flounder helplessly in a constantly shifting and unpredictable landscape of which they cannot make sense. For instance, Vladimir

believes he has a carrot and then is surprised and befuddled upon pulling a turnip out of his pocket (Beckett 12). Later, the characters cannot decide on the color of Estragon's boots; they seem to be chameleonic. Vladimir asks, "You're sure yours were black?" to which Estragon replies, "Well they were a kind of grey…. Well they're a kind of green" (Beckett 58). Within such an unsettlingly malleable environment, the characters try to grip onto any physical constants in order to validate their supposed sanity and reason:

> Estragon: The sun. The moon. Do you not remember?
>
> Vladimir: They must have been there, as usual (Beckett 57).

Except, similar to Josef K.'s experience in Kafka's *The Trial*, nothing is constant; the inability to discern—not to mention comprehend—their immediate environment reveals their powerlessness. In a final example of the void of reason showcased in this play, the stage directions that highlight the abruptness of nightfall, "*The light suddenly fails. In a moment, it is night,*" blatantly contradict Pozzo's elaborate explanation of the gradual process of dusk: "tirelessly torrents of red and white light it begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale… pale, ever a little paler, a little paler until" it becomes dark (Beckett 43, 29). Evidently, through Gogo and Didi's metamorphosing tempo-spatial reality, Beckett illustrates the alarming realization that what was believed to be the infallible core of society is actually null.

Furthermore, the recognition of rationalism's inability to illuminate truth about the purpose of human existence contributed to the modernist experience of Heideggerian *geworfenheit*—a sense of being thrown into the world sans explanation. José Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* (1929) discusses this feeling of irreconcilable thrown-ness, stating that "life does not choose its own world, it finds itself,

to start with, in a world" (Ortega 47). Here, the diction of "finds itself" accentuates passivity and randomness. Weber discusses how disenchantment with the idea of an infallible science relates to *geworfenheit*, citing Leo Tolstoy: "Science is meaningless because it gives us no answer to our question, the only question important for us: 'What shall we do and how shall we live?'" (Weber 143).

Completely inverting the Enlightenment's championing of the efficacy of rationality and the scientific method to comprehensively learn about an orderly cosmos, *Waiting for Godot* exposes logic's inability to explain human purpose. When Estragon says to use intelligence, Vladimir replies with "I remain in the dark," emblematic of how humanity futilely gropes for inaccessible information in an entropic cosmos (Beckett 9). More directly: "People are bloody ignorant apes" (Beckett 5). Beckett further demonstrates this idea when the newly-blind Pozzo asks Vladmir where they are, and Vladimir, who can ostensibly "see," nevertheless admits, "I couldn't tell you," suggesting humans' relatively powerless status in regard to answering the big questions (Beckett 77). Tormented by an existential *ennui*, Estragon implores Vladimir, "Tell me what to do," to which Vladimir replies, "There's nothing to do"—it is vain to try and decipher humanity's purpose (Beckett 64). Accordingly, the slave Lucky's name is only partially ironic: while he is reduced to a subhuman status, he is lucky insofar as he has clear delineated instructions from Pozzo and a task of carrying the bags to complete. The overwhelming unknown of what to do with limited time before the imminent unknown of death creates modernist paranoia.

Inherently tied to the void of logic is the void of meaning: logic's utter inability to discern humanity's purpose suggests the idea of humanity's purposelessness. Weber

posits that it cannot "be proved that the existence of the world which these sciences describe is worth while [*sic*], that is has any 'meaning,' or that it makes sense to live in such a world…. Whether life is worth while living and when—this question is not asked by medicine" (Weber 144). Heidegger similarly asserts that "science wishes to know nothing of the nothing" (Heidegger 96). Moreover, Lukács's idea that "every human action is based on a presupposition of its inherent meaningfulness… [the] absence of meaning makes a mockery of action" explains the reduction of *Waiting for Godot*'s plot to buffoonery (Lukács 36). Beckett shows this meaninglessness not only through the futility of the characters' efforts to understand and improve their situation, but also through the ineffectiveness of language.

Notably, *Waiting for Godot* reveals a startling failure of language to correspond to a stable meaning, breaking down the chain of signification proper to the Symbolic. The prevalence of non-sequiturs and non-linear dialogue creates disjointures that effectively cancel the meaning of what was said immediately prior. For instance, Estragon asks, "Why doesn't he put down his bags?" to which Pozzo replies, addressing a completely different topic, "I too would be happy to meet him" (Beckett 21). Then, Pozzo quips about his slave, "he doesn't put down his bags, as you call them," a statement that opens up the possibility for the signifier "bags" to not correlate with the signified objects. Vladimir even encourages the non-correlation between dialogue and reality, asking Estragon to "say you are [happy], even if it's not true" (Beckett 21, 50). When Pozzo asks Estragon what his name is, Estragon bluntly and unproblematically declares, "Adam," which accentuates this discord (Beckett 28).

More extremely, language devolves throughout the play to become phonetic blobs, such as “You waagerrim?” for “You want to get rid of him?” (Beckett 23). Nonsensical gibberish sounds replace words backed by meaning: Lucky blabs, “Oh tray bong, tray tray tray bong,” and “quaquaquaqua” (Beckett 29, 33). The theatrical medium provides an interesting avenue for exposing the meaninglessness of words through the juxtaposition of stage directions with dialogue. Examples of stage directions and dialogue glaringly contradicting each other include: “[without gesture] Over there,” or “Yes let’s go. [They do not move]” (Beckett 2, 45).

Overall, this play involves a circular search for meaning: characters turn to each other, to a Nietzschean non-existent God, to the audience; the audience scours the nihilistic scenes for symbols and themes, with all movement swirling around the central void. There is no meaning. The threatening hole—opened up by the absence of meaning, morality, rationalism—is Godot. The singular name captures all of these absences, around which the entire play revolves. The modernist “machine revolves around an emptiness” that it verges on collapsing into (Žižek 145). As a result of the emptiness or “gyre” located at the heart of their reality, “Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (Yeats). Estragon demonstrates this chaos by questioning, “But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? [Pause.] Or Monday? [Pause.] Or Friday?” (Beckett 7).

Clearly, rather than substituting a certain doctrine as the central tenet of society, Beckett exposes the absent center. Coupling this decentering with the upholding of the Real-Symbolic barrier, which is evidenced by the characters’ attempts to busy

themselves, confirm their existence, and delay suicide, illustrates a structure of *extimité* and thereby qualifies *Waiting for Godot* as modernist.

CHAPTER II

POSTMODERNISM'S RHIZOMATIC REAL

The Trial

Franz Kafka, 1925

A self-proclaimed rational man in an irrational universe, banking officer Josef K. wakes up to his own arrest based on an undisclosed charge about which no one gives him any information, despite his extreme confusion. Josef K. becomes increasingly entangled in a ridiculous mess of bureaucratic proceedings; the hyperbolically absurd legal system plagues every aspect of his life. Kafka's novel shows the plight of the logical individual who struggles to grapple with his inexplicable situation, and whose logical mindset alienates him from the world insofar as he cannot decipher the law that everyone else appears to intuitively understand (or at least accept).

Adding to the absurdity of K.'s experience is his startling inability to accurately perceive his immediate environment. Similar to *Waiting for Godot*'s characters' inability to accurately discern their surroundings—evident from the carrot/turnip and chameleonic boots examples—K.'s discernment repeatedly fails. For instance, in the Cathedral scene, K. initially admires a painting of a "tall knight in armor," but upon a closer look, abruptly realizes it is actually a "conventional depiction of the entombment of Christ" (Kafka 207). Here, time moves both forward and backward, demonstrating the qualities of "morbid eccentricity" and "distortion" that dominate K.'s nightmare landscape, as well as the landscape of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Potsdamer Platz* (1914),

for instance—both of which Lukács would consider inherently modernist (Lukács 31, 33).[8]

K.'s helplessness against a predetermined destiny, despite the illusion of agency, constitutes another dimension of absurdity in *The Trial*. For example, the painter Titorelli offers K. legal advice, presenting and explaining several ostensible acquittal options (Kafka 152). Yet actual acquittal never happens; apparent acquittal and protraction turn out to be life-consuming ways that delay final conviction but further entangle him in court formalities. Apparently, K. does not have a choice and his agony is lifelong. For K., the nonsensical legal "options" fly in the face of his rational expectations, which are similar to those that Ortega y Gasset outlines in *The Revolt of the Masses*, particularly the expectations of having a "horizon of possibilities" regarding how to live and the ability "to exercise [one's] *liberty*, to decide what [one] is going to be in this world" (Ortega 47-48). Lukács summarizes how the "mood of total impotence, of paralysis in the face of the unintelligible power of circumstances, informs all [of Kafka's] work" (Lukács 36).

Everything discussed thus far—absurdism, alienation, despair over the world's irrationality, hopelessness—is traditionally associated with modernism. In spite of Kafka's novel's notable modernist tendencies and early twentieth-century publication date, Žižek posits that the theoretical structure of *The Trial* renders it a fundamentally postmodernist work. Agreeing with Žižek's assertion that K.'s universe features fullness rather than absence, this thesis adds that in *The Trial*, the Real operates rhizomatically—the defining quality of a postmodernist work.

---

[8] See Appendix Figure 8.

Foremost, *The Trial* does not feature the central lack evident in the works examined in the previous chapter. Whereas, for example, *Waiting for Godot* portrays a void of logic, K.'s world still operates according to some logic—it is just unfamiliar and opaque to K. The Parable of the Law is a notable example. When the prison chaplain walks through several (what he believes to be) sound interpretations of the parable, K. finds them each contradictory and absurd (Kafka 217-223). K. cannot follow the chaplain's "logic" when arguing that the doorkeeper—whom K. believes is deceitful—is rather compassionate and the victim of deception himself, or that the statement "that he can't grant him admittance now" necessarily implies that "this entrance was meant solely for [him]" (Kafka 219-220, 217). Meanwhile, the idea of a void of morality, as discussed in relation to *The Sun Also Rises* and *Waiting for Godot*, does not adequately fit *The Trial* either. Dismissing Lukács's interpretation that emphasizes "the hidden, non-existent God of Kafka's world," Žižek proposes that "the formula of the 'absent God' in Kafka does not work at all: for Kafka's problem is, on the contrary, that in this universe God is *too present*, in the guise of various obscene, nauseous phenomena" (Lukács 44, Žižek 146). Modernist works revolve around a central emptiness; Žižek emphasizes that in *The Trial*, what would be the "empty place… is always already filled out by an inert, obscene, revolting *presence*" (Žižek 146).

In order for Žižek's analysis to hold, *The Trial*'s oppressive bureaucratic legal structure, which is normally assumed to be part of the Symbolic order, needs to instead align with the Real. Given the boldness of this assertion, this section discusses the various ways in which the absurd legal system actually functions as the Real within this text before exploring how it is particularly a rhizomatic (and thus, postmodernist) Real.

Overall, the nonsensical legal mechanism in *The Trial* aligns with the Real through its incomprehensibility, obscenity, and inescapability. The rhizomatic legal structure demolishes and floods past any Real-Symbolic barrier that modernist works strive to uphold—thereby producing a Žižekian-Lacanian anxiety.

The court system accords with the Real through its utter incomprehensibility. K. notes the guard's "incomprehensible" look during his initial arrest, as well as the sexton's "incomprehensible" behavior during the penultimate scene at the Cathedral, demonstrating how, over the course of the text, clarification never occurs (Kafka 8, 208). Moreover, the Real of the law's incomprehensibility often manifests as a type of inaccessibility, such as the "officially secret" legal documents that the lawyer prevents K. from accessing (Kafka 112-113). Incomprehensibility also manifests as linguistic obscurity: K. admits that he "scarcely kn[ows] what they [are] talking about," fails to comprehend the Italian's speech, and shamefully realizes that although others are "speaking to him… he [cannot] understand them; he hear[s] only the noise that filled everything" (Kafka 103, 202, 78).

The law's obscenity further connects it to the Real. Sexual obscenity is directly tied to the law: K. opens law books with the minimal logical expectation of finding legal information, but instead the pages reveal "an indecent picture" of a couple "sitting naked on a divan" (Kafka 57). Sexual obscenity later explodes in the courtroom during K.'s trial in the form of a "public act of sexual intercourse" (Žižek 149). Kafka portrays women connected to the court as especially licentious. Leni, the lawyer's caretaker and mistress, also seduces K. (Kafka 108). The young girls—"thirteen at most"—outside Titorelli's atelier who "belong to the court" convey a strange blend of childishness and

developed sexuality by “painting [their] lips red,” and “lifting [their] little skirt[s], which [were] extremely short to begin with” (Kafka 141, 150, 143, 141).

Similar to Žižek’s reading of pornography in *Looking Awry*, *The Trial*’s legal system is obscene in the sense that it “*goes too far*” and insists on showing “the [Real] thing itself” against K.’s will (Žižek 110). When touring the court offices, K. weakly entreats, “‘Well, I’ve seen what things look like here, and I’m ready to leave.’ ‘You haven’t seen everything yet,’ said the court usher, completely without guile. ‘I don’t want to see everything… I want to leave, where’s the exit?’” (Kafka 71-72). Sickened by his exposure to the Real during his tour, he wants above all “to avoid... being led farther on, for the farther he went, the worse things would get”—a clear instance of being repelled by the Real, that at other times, fascinates him (Kafka 74). Another figure of the court acknowledges that they have been “telling [K.] all [their] intimate secrets, or more accurately, forcing them upon him, [when] he has no interest in knowing them,” illustrating how from K.’s perspective, too much has been shown (Kafka 76).

Since Žižek hypothesizes that the Real “simultaneously attracts and repels us,” locating the court as the Real makes sense of K.’s confusing oscillation between a 1) repulsion from the law, as discussed above, and 2) curiosity about the law (Žižek 133). Striving to learn more about the legal process, K. expresses his desire to investigate the “depository places,” which is where “an arrested man’s property is taken” (Kafka 50). It is important, however, to acknowledge that his desire to learn more about the intricacies of the law is not merely a fascination with the Real, but also likely to some degree for the purpose of ascertaining knowledge that is advantageous to overcome his situation. The flogging and Cathedral scenes more clearly expose his curiosity about the Real.

Upon hearing groans in the closet—perhaps expecting a covert sexual act—K. is "seized by such an uncontrollable curiosity that he practically [tears] the door open," finding instead a flogger and two victims (Kafka 80-81). In the Cathedral, K. takes "rapid strides toward the pulpit—out of curiosity as well" (Kafka 212). Yet, reciprocally, K. frequently rushes to find the "exit," disgusted, such as during the initial hearing (Kafka 52). K.'s act of reaching over to "snatch the notebook from the magistrate's hands and lift it to his fingertips by a single center page, as if he were repelled by it," declaring that he could "barely stand to touch it with the tips of two fingers," perfectly captures his desire to get closer to the Real of the law that also repulses him (Kafka 46).

Furthermore, taking the entire legal mechanism in *The Trial* as the Real helps elucidate the bizarre enjoyment K. derives from participating in the ludicrous court formalities: K. demonstrates a Žižekian "idiotic enjoyment" of the "heinous" and "disgusting" Real (Žižek 129). K. believes that "lawyers… all seem so disgusting and useless," and that the guards' faces are nauseating (Kafka 179, 227). Yet at the same time, he receives some level of enjoyment from interacting with them. The fact that he disapproves of "being treated with strange carelessness or indifference" implies his desire to receive more personal attention from them (Kafka 39). Additionally, K. explains that "the arrest itself makes [him] laugh," and he even ends up joining in the booming laughter of the crowd that mocks him (Kafka 47, 44). Upon making time to focus on his trial amid his banking work, K. appears pleased, as he is "almost happy to be able to devote himself totally to his case for a while" (Kafka 139). The fact that K. even "mention[s] the trial to a few acquaintances with a certain inexplicable feeling of self-satisfaction," exposes a type of enjoyment from the nonsensical attention directed at

him (Kafka 125). In the final scene, K. willingly submits to the guards leading him to his death, admitting that “part of the pleasure he gave the men by doing so was transmitted back to him” (Kafka 227). Orson Welles’s film version of *The Trial* (1963) emphasizes the climax of K.’s sickly enjoyment: standing beside the dynamite block, seconds before his death, K. hysterically laughs—indicating his derailment to insanity—only cut off by his obliteration in the explosion (Welles 1:56:28). Evidently, K.’s universe features the law as a “heterogeneous, inconsistent, *bricolage* penetrated with enjoyment” (Žižek 149).

Having substantiated the notion of the court’s alignment with the Real rather than the Symbolic register, it is now appropriate to shift to exploring how the Real of the Law is rhizomatic in structure. Rather than modernist angst of an impending doom, of delaying an evental collapse of the Real-Symbolic threshold, as seen in *Sun Also Rises* and *Waiting for Godot*, *The Trial* illustrates an acceleration toward and trespassing of the threshold. *The Trial* opens with an intrusion across the threshold of privacy: “There was an immediate knock at the door and a man he’d never seen before in these lodgings entered” (Kafka 3). Here, there is no indication that K. has given permission for the guards to come in. In another example, K. refers to the entrance of Titorelli’s atelier as a “threshold” (Kafka 142). Titorelli’s frustrating struggle to guard his atelier against the young girls who “tr[y] to push their way in… against his will” and entropically “mak[e] a mess in every corner of the room” signifies a failure to prevent the Real from pervading and ravaging everyday reality (Kafka 142-143). The fact that the girls—whose obscenity ties them to the Real of the law—poke through the “cracks between the boards” illustrates how the rhizome “*grows between*,” filling out the cracks in the

Symbolic order (Kafka 144, Deleuze & Guattari 19). In the flogging scene, K. similarly describes the office closet's door as a "threshold," and, in a characteristically postmodernist way, gravitates toward it, "practically [tearing] the door open" (Kafka 80-81). Given the graphic description of how the victim "claw[s] convulsively about his hands… the rod f[inds] him on the floor as well, as he writhe[s] beneath it, its tip sw[ings] up and down steadily," this punishment's brutality clearly exemplifies a Badiouian "absolute violence of the Real" that is exposed by trespassing the threshold (Kafka 84, Badiou 52). In contrast to the modernist "contempt for everything that represents an installation," at the end of *The Trial*, K. voluntarily accelerates toward the installation of his murder (Badiou 24). When the guards physically restraining him pause on their journey, K. asserts, "I didn't really want to stop" (Kafka 228). He even "pull[s] the men forward forcibly…. K. start[s] to run and the men ha[ve] to run with him, although they were gasping for breath," proving his initiative in crossing the threshold of his own death (Kafka 229). Welles's film version of *The Trial* supports this interpretation as well, as K. visibly leads the pack and yanks the guards on either side of him farther along (Welles 1:52:07-1:53:20). *The Trial* repeatedly demonstrates "the trespassing of the frontier that separates the vital domain from the judicial domain," such as during the act of sexual intercourse in the courthouse (Žižek 147).[9]

Piet Mondrian's painting *Composition* (1921) verges on postmodernism, illustrating a similar disrespect for the barrier: the stark red square in the upper right trespasses the black line threshold, almost flowing off the edge of the canvas.[10] The blood red color appropriately conveys the concomitant anxiety at this moment of

[9] An idea that Žižek attributes to Reiner Stach.
[10] See Appendix Figure 9.

flooding the threshold. As some of the black lines do not fully extend to the canvas perimeter, *Composition* highlights the inefficacy of the barrier, which postmodernist works ultimately dissolve.

In Kafka's novel, the pervasive haze functions to further undermine any distinction between inside and outside, instead blending these two, such that everything is milieu, "*intermezzo*" (Deleuze & Guattari 25). As such, the haze's function is crucially different from that of the amorphous blob substance in *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag* that Žižek analyzes as a modernist Real (Žižek 14). While the couple in Heinlein's story can roll up their window and keep driving, K.'s efforts are not nearly as successful. Although Kafka initially associates haze with the "inside" of legal spaces, as K. notes that the "foglike haze in the [court]room was extremely annoying," Kafka later attributes this same "semidarkness, haze, and dust" to the outside (Kafka 49, 43). For instance, K.'s efforts to seek solace by windows and doorways fail as "fog mingled with smoke [blows] in through the window from top to bottom and fill[s] the room," and the dusty air from the atelier makes K. willing to "inhale even the [outside] fog with an open mouth" (Kafka 133, 155). The haze is everywhere; it thereby blurs and destroys the possibility of the traditional inside/outside binarism.[11]

K.'s attempts to escape or "get outside" of his trial—which constitutes an interesting inversion from modernist works, where characters often at least strive to keep the Real outside the comforts of their Symbolic—are futile. In postmodernist works, the inside/outside distinction does not exist. K.'s repeated declaration that he is

[11] Interestingly, Kafka's haze functions similarly to the dog in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979). By meandering through both the Zone and everyday reality, the dog blurs the distinction between the two realms, suggesting: everywhere is the Zone.

"completely detached from this whole affair" is in vain as he cannot separate his Symbolic-order daily life from the Real of the law; they interweave and operate on the same plane (Kafka 49). The inability to exit climaxes at the Cathedral as K. debates walking out the doors but decides to turn around, recognizing the futility of trying to run away: "there was no escaping it" (Kafka 211). Clearly, K.'s overarching project of learning how to "break out of it… how to live outside the trial," is impossible in a postmodernist universe (Kafka 214).

Žižek explains how the annihilation of the barrier and flooding of the Real throughout reality—characteristic of postmodernist works—produces anxiety, which K. clearly demonstrates. In *Looking Awry*, Žižek explains how postmodernist works destroy "the barrier separating the [R]eal from reality," which is "the very condition of a minimum of 'normalcy': 'madness' (psychosis) sets in when this barrier is torn down, when the [R]eal overflows the reality" (Žižek 20). Consequently, "what provokes anxiety is… [the] *proximity*" of the horrific Real (Žižek 146). Žižek's argument that "the danger of… getting too close to the object" in effect "gives rise to anxiety," is a clear extension of Lacanian thought: Lacan proposes that "anxiety then is the signal of the [R]eal" (Žižek 8, Lacan Seminar XIII 4). Accordingly, since the "various obscene, nauseous phenomena" associated with the Real of the Law have "gotten too close to" K., his universe is therefore a "universe of anxiety" (Žižek 146).

K. demonstrates several physical ramifications (such as his "seasickness") of his proximity to the Real of the law that indicate his experience of intense anxiety (Kafka 78). For instance, K.'s dizziness correlates to the proximity of an unnamed legal figure; he becomes dizzy as "her face… [draws] quite near" (Kafka 73). Upon touring the court

offices, he proclaims: “I’m dizzy, and I feel sick when I stand on my own,” but that once he is “led… out of the law offices”—distancing himself from the Real—he will consequently “feel better” (Kafka 75). Kafka cites a lawyer’s hampering “illness” from working so closely with the law (Kafka 102). K.’s constant anxiety results in extreme fatigue, as he proceeds through life “tired from what he had already gone through, and tiredly awaiting what was yet to come” (Kafka 128). Although the hazy air often functions as an easy scapegoat for his sickness, K.’s anxiety clearly arises from the proximity and ubiquity of the rhizomatic legal machine overtaking his universe.

White Noise

Don DeLillo, 1985

White Noise depicts mass consumerism and relentless mortal dread in 1980s American suburbia. Protagonist Professor Jack Gladney, the inventor of Hitler studies, and his fourth wife Babette, a posture instructor for the elderly, navigate a society of surface, immediacy, and materialist gratification; they are visibly debilitated by the threatening Real of death that fills out the cracks of their splintered Symbolic order. Characters Babette and Jack demonstrate some stereotypically modernist tendencies—such as striving to fill absence by searching for meaning or morality, trying to distract from the Real and keep it at a distance—yet the text as a whole insists on presence (rather than absence) and a rhizomatic Real that is impossible to barricade against, making *White Noise* lean postmodernist overall. Concisely, Jack and Babette are “modernist[s] displaced in a postmodern world” (Wilcox 348).

Jack admits that “Watching children sleep makes [him] feel devout, part of a spiritual system. It is the closest [he] can come to God” (DeLillo 147). His strategy of

watching children sleep implies his otherwise lack of a spiritual system, in the same way that Brett's statement does in *The Sun Also Rises*: "deciding not to be a bitch" is "sort of what we have instead of God" (Hemingway 220-221). Perceiving the labyrinthine simulacra of his society as devoid of authentic meaning, Jack also acknowledges that he is "ready to search anywhere for signs and hints, intimations of odd comfort" (DeLillo 154). Although Jack tries to plug the ethical lack that he registers, DeLillo's text persistently propagates a new universal value system, one that champions materialistic abundance and dependence on technology.

Babette and Jack incessantly worry about their ultimate fate of being swallowed by the Real; they develop strategies in efforts to control the Real, just as characters do in *The Sun Also Rises* and *Waiting for Godot*. By professing about Hitler and the "horror of the [R]eal" that "fascinated the militants of the twentieth century" and perversely motivated genocide, Jack attempts to gain control over the Real of death: "Death was strictly a professional matter here. [He] was comfortable with it, [he] was on top of it" (Badiou 19, DeLillo 74). Babette's job, too, tries to assert dominance over the eventual decay and deformation of the body, as people "seem to believe it is possible to ward off death by following rules of good grooming"—grooming in this example specifically refers to posture (DeLillo 27). Meanwhile, Jack's friend Murray believes the taking others' lives is a way of asserting control over mortality, proposing that "the killer… attempts to defeat his own death by killing others"—a strategy that resembles matador Romero's evasion of decimation by the bull, instead killing it himself in *The Sun Also Rises* (DeLillo 291, Hemingway 153-154). Another similar chord between these two texts is the characters' substance abuse as a strategy to forget the inevitable Real. In

Hemingway's text, protagonist Jake drinks to shake off the "feeling of things coming that you could not prevent happening. Under the wine [he] lost the disgusted feeling and was happy"; Babette turns to a drug that, much more frankly, "interacts with neurotransmitters that are related to the fear of death" (Hemingway 135, DeLillo 200).

While DeLillo's characters try to distance themselves from the repulsive Real, they also gravitate toward it; such oscillatory behavior is in accordance with Žižek's idea that the Real "simultaneously attracts and repels" (Žižek 133). In particular, scenes of violent destruction on television fascinate the characters. They attentively watch "houses slide into the ocean, whole villages crackle and ignite in a mass of advancing lava. Every disaster [makes them] wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping," alluding to the unsignifiable Real (DeLillo 64). Jack's friend coins the terminology "brain fade" as the reason for people's inclination to rubberneck, in a sense; in a Debordian society of the spectacle or Baudrillardian hyperreality, the characters cling to a Real "occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information…. Only a catastrophe gets [their] attention. [They] want them, [they] need them, [they] depend on them" (DeLillo 66).[12] Then, during the penultimate scene at the motel where Jack nearly murders Mink, the scientist behind the drug Babette takes to forget, Jack advances toward the Real of death, mesmerized by the grotesqueness of Mink's bleeding body, peering closer to become "nearer to death, nearer to second sight…. [He] advanced two steps" (DeLillo 309). While characters take Mink's pills to distract from death, in this scene the pills ironically function to propel Mink closer toward his fate of irreversible annihilation: Mink desperately "ingest[s] more pills, throwing them

[12] These concepts are discussed in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981).

in his face, sucking them like sweets" and "grab[s] more tablets from his pocket, hurl[ing] them toward his open mouth," in an acceleration toward the Real of death that verges on suicide (DeLillo 308, 312).

Although modernists Jack and Babette register death negatively as lack, discussing how the event punctures "a hole in space and time" and creates "a great yawning gulf," *White Noise* as a whole undermines this idea, instead registering death as a proximate, inescapable presence (DeLillo 101). In *Looking Awry*, Žižek explains how postmodernist works show "*the Thing itself as the incarnated, materialized emptiness*"; presence necessarily fills out emptiness (Žižek 145). To understand this concept of the presence of emptiness, so to speak, it is helpful to explore an early textual example: the most photographed barn in America (DeLillo 12). Counterintuitively, "no one sees the barn"—it is effectively an empty lot (DeLillo 12). The main activity of this tourist attraction, rather than taking pictures of the barn, becomes: "taking pictures of taking pictures" (DeLillo 13). There is a transposition between the audience regarding the lack of the event and the audience becoming the presence of the event. Beyond *White Noise*, in the musical domain, John Cage's experimental piano composition *4:33* (1952) serves as another example of presence occupying the place of ostensible lack. Outwardly a complete lack of performance, a three-movement performance of silence, in which the pianist sits without touching the keys, the composition actually depends on (and redirects focus toward) the unintentional spontaneity and background noises of a present audience. The audience collectively adopts the role of musician.

The above examples help to grapple with how *White Noise* insists on death as a haunting presence, in opposition to the characters' understanding that death leaves "holes, abysses and gaps" (DeLillo 101). In a bizarre nighttime encounter, Jake believes he sees death incarnate, in the form of "a white-haired man sitting erect in the old wicker chair," and ponders, "was the white hair purely emblematic, part of his allegorical force?... He would be Death" (DeLillo 242-243). Although the unexpected visitor humorously turns out to be his father-in-law, this scene clearly illustrates Žižek's idea of "*incarnated, materialized emptiness*," and parallels his postmodernist reading of *Waiting for Godot*, which he theorizes would incorporate "Godot himself on stage… by chance at the place of the Thing; he would be the incarnation of the Thing whose arrival was awaited" (Žižek 145). Broadly, throughout *White Noise*, the "dead have a presence" (DeLillo 98).

The presence of the Real of death here is distinctly rhizomatic in structure; the planar imbrication of Real and Symbolic forces in *White Noise* ultimately renders it postmodernist. The Real repeatedly cracks into characters' thoughts and conversations: DeLillo often evenly incorporates death and superficial Symbolic details in the same sentence. For instance, Jack's friend imagines how a man "dies suddenly, after a short illness, in his own bed, with a comforter and matching pillows, on a rainy Wednesday afternoon, feverish, a little congested in the sinuses and chest, thinking about his dry cleaning" (DeLillo 39). Here, there is a strikingly equivalent emphasis on the man's death and his linens—down to the trivial, irrelevant details of how they comprise a matching bedding set or are in the wash. In another example, Jack imagines a woman "in a soup commercial taking off her oilskin hat as she entered the cheerful kitchen

where her husband stood over a pot of smoky lobster bisque, a smallish man with six weeks to live" (DeLillo 22). By slipping mortality into the end of this sentence, DeLillo shows how the Real cracks into even the cozy, cherished, and "safe" domestic space. Additionally, Jack's description of his Advanced Nazism course—"parades, rallies and uniforms, three credits, written reports"—jumbles the secondary education system's Symbolic formalities (i.e., credits, reports) with manifestations of an abhorrent Real (parades, rallies, uniforms) (DeLillo 25). The fact that Jack teaches Hitler studies, largely centering on themes of death and Badiouian violence, demonstrates a persistent Real-Symbolic imbrication in his daily life. Later, Babette listens to Jack's friend Murray rant about Tibetan death rituals as she grocery shops (DeLillo 37-38). As they roam the supermarket aisles, tossing some yogurt into their cart, Murray discusses how "Tibetans try to see death for what it is…. Dying is an art in Tibet," a scene that clearly exemplifies the planar imbrication of the gravity of the Real and triviality of the Symbolic (DeLillo 38).

Moreover, the "airborne toxic event"—whose lethality ties it to death—reiterates the rhizomatic nature of the Real in this text (DeLillo 117). In this chapter, a chemical spillage produces "a heavy black mass hanging in the air beyond the river, more or less shapeless" (DeLillo 110). Characteristically postmodernist, the Real oozes past its designated threshold—in cannot be contained. Jack describes how this confrontation with the noxious "enormous dark mass… was a terrible thing to see, so close, so low"; he recognizes "the thing that threatens [his] life… see[ing] it as a cosmic force, so much larger than [him]self, more powerful" (DeLillo 127). This amorphous "dark black breathing thing" mirrors the vast "grey and formless mist, pulsing slowly as if with

inchoate life" that Žižek analyzes from *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag*, yet they remain fundamentally different in certain respects (DeLillo 111, Žižek 14). Namely, the couple in Heinlein's novella can successfully keep out the mist by rolling up their car window; Jack and Babette, however, cannot do the same in the context of the postmodernist Real's ubiquitous network. Death in *White Noise* "continues to grow, acquire breadth and scope, new outlets, new passages… the dead are closer to [them] than ever" (DeLillo 150). Jack emphasizes the cloud of death's inescapability: it is "so close to [him], so surely upon [him]" (DeLillo 118). Rather than being blocked by a window pane, the chemical cloud becomes infinitely proximate to the characters as the miniscule particles lodge inside their lungs, connecting victims rhizomatically. Jack notes how the "little breath of Nyodene has planted a death in [his] body"; it grows within his body to form "a nebulous mass" that "has no definite shape, form or limits" in a typically Deleuzian way (DeLillo 280, 150). Heinlein's modernist depiction of the cloud as a void, which characters can shut out, fundamentally differs from DeLillo's postmodernist portrayal of the cloud as a lethal presence that is already inside the characters' bodies (Žižek 14).

Caché [Hidden]

Michael Haneke, 2005

The sudden onset of a series of unsolicited VHS cassette recordings and graphic drawings from an anonymous stalker destabilizes the otherwise superficial operations of the upper-middle class Laurent family. Georges Laurent believes the unnerving deliveries are a form of revenge by Majid—an orphan whom Georges's parents take in

until Georges construes lies to convince them to put him up for adoption. Majid's parents likely died in the October 17, 1961 massacre, along with over two hundred other innocent French-Algerians drowned in the Seine that day. While Haneke's psychological thriller explores this haunting historical event, this project does not analyze the work primarily in relation to postcolonial theory, but focuses on its postmodernist theoretical structure, specifically dissecting how the Real functions within the work.

Whereas in *The Trial*, the bureaucratic legal system functions as the Real—evident from its incomprehensibility, obscenity, ubiquity, unparalleled ability to provoke debilitating anxiety, etc.—in *Caché*, the unsolicited videos and drawings serve as disturbing intrusions of the Real into *la vie quotidienne*. In *Žižek's Dialectics, Critique of Ideology and Emancipatory Politics in Michael Haneke's film* Caché (2016), Murdoch Jennings reads the "smooth-functioning domesticity and social edifice" of the Laurent's family's "bourgeois space [as] homologous" to Žižek's big Other, which makes sense as the home is the locus of family rituals and the classic faux comforts of the Symbolic (Jennings 4). Visually, the domestic and work spheres for both Georges and his wife Anne brim with an excess of stacked books, marking these spaces as grounded in the Symbolic, just as language is; the content of the bombarding deliveries of the Real, then, are appropriately devoid of language.[13] The repeated "intrusion signals that something foreign has suddenly entered this self-enclosed space," causing not only "inconsistency and confusion," but profound Žižekian-Lacanian anxiety (Jennings 4). The couple's anxiety is obvious, such as when Georges wakes up from his nightmare about Majid, panting, drenched in sweat (Haneke 0:38:54).

---

[13] Save trivialities such as the postcards' written addresses.

Additionally, Haneke's film depicts both Žižekian obscenity and Badiouian "horror of the [R]eal" (Badiou 19). In "Figures of Disgust," Christa Blümlinger analyzes "the slaughter of a rooster as an enigmatic pulsing blot, as something too close and disgusting, [which] prefigures the later suicide" of Majid, clearly drawing on Žižekian language about the "pulsing of the pre[S]ymbolic substance," the "nonsensical 'blot,'" and being "too close to *das Ding*" (Blümlinger 155, Žižek 15, 95, 146). In contrast to *Waiting for Godot*'s frustrating lack of an event, *Caché* bluntly shows the event of Majid slicing his throat, which also slices through the film in an explosion of Badiouian "absolute violence of the [R]eal" (Badiou 52). Not only is too much shown to Georges in this moment, similar to when the court usher introduces K. to the prisoners and continues the tour against his will; too much is shown to the viewer, who is often uncomfortably situated at the point of voyeur (Kafka 71-73).

Importantly, the Real rhizomatically fills out the cracks of the superficial Symbolic order in *Caché*, thereby rendering the work postmodernist. As the rhizome extends infinitely such that everywhere becomes *milieu*, there is no true distinction between inside and outside—mandating its inescapable, anxiety-inducing proximate status. Mirroring *The Trial*'s God who is "*too present*, in the guise of various obscene, nauseous phenomena" associated with the law, *Caché*'s "ubiquitous, omniscient, omnipresent God of the tapes" is "at once remote and 'outside,' yet totally 'inside' as well" (Žižek 146, Elsaesser 67). Although the tapes are left outside the house, they always make their way inside, also invading Pierrot's school (Haneke 0:19:55) and Georges's office (01:05:25). Via the news channel, the Real repeatedly cracks into their cherished domestic space, first showing a hospitalization scene (0:14:55) and then

anarchic Middle-Eastern conflict (1:12:10). The Real's simultaneous inside and outside status—like Kafka's haze—once again destroys the possibility of a barrier. In this way, the hallway's set of three doors separating the outside from the domestic sphere is ironically ineffective, representing the faux barrier between Real and Symbolic orders. The "Kafka[esque] architecture" of the Laurent's house, specifically the ostensible non-correlation between the spacious, labyrinthine interior and modest exterior, in which there is "more of it 'inside' than appears possible to the outside view," further supports this idea of an ever-present *milieu*: Žižek suggests that such a "disproportion can be abolished only by demolishing the barrier, by letting the outside swallow the inside" (Žižek 15-16). The "exterior" Real rhizomatically permeates the inside space and the entire Symbolic order. Thus, Georges statement, "I'm going to leave now," parallels K.'s: "I'm ready to leave" (Haneke 0:53:16, Kafka 71). Both expressions are futile as it is impossible to exit from the proximate Real in postmodernist works.

POSTFACE

Since “all culture is ultimately nothing but a compromise formation, a reaction to some terrifying, radically inhuman dimension proper to the human condition itself,” as Žižek writes, the fundamental difference between modernist and postmodernist thought boils down to the way that the Real emerges in their universe—which is the origin of the work’s derivative formal and thematic characteristics (Žižek 37). This project has endeavored not to delineate a rigid, inflexible classification system, but rather to propose and substantiate a theory-based approach to grapple with the ideas of modernism and postmodernism. Overall, I hope to have shown that the paradigms of the extimate modernist torus and ubiquitous, proximate postmodernist rhizome take us far in illuminating the distinction between the form of the Real-Symbolic relation as it manifests in the artworks of the century.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Hilma af Klint, *The Ten Largest*, 1907, showing panels 1-7

Figure 2: Vladimir Tatlin, *Corner Counter-Relief*, 1914

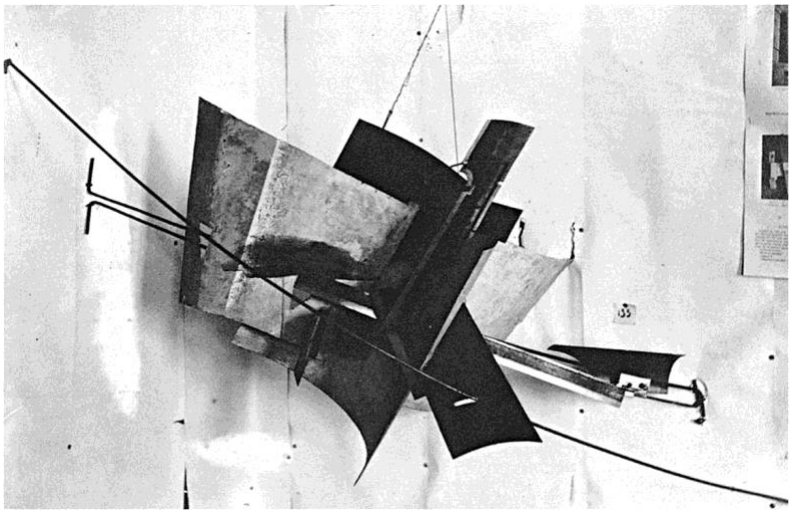


Figure 3: Hugo Ball, "Karawane," 1917

KARAWANE

jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla
grossiga m'pfa habla horem
égiga goramen
higo bloiko russula huju
hollaka hollala
anlogo bung
blago bung
blago bung
bosso fataka
ü üü ü
schampa wulla wussa ólobo
hej tatta gôrem
eschige zunbada
wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu
tumba ba- umf
kusagauma
ba - umf

Figure 4: Ihab Hassan, Table, 1982, taken from Jim Powell's *Postmodernism For Beginners*, 1998

Modernism		Postmodernism
Form (conjunctive/closed)	◄·····►	Antiform (disjunctive/open)
Purpose	◄·····►	Play
Design	◄·····►	Chance
Hierarchy	◄·····►	Anarchy
Art Object/Finished Work	◄·····►	Process/Performance/ Happening
Presence	◄·····►	Absence
Centering	◄·····►	Dispersal
Genre/Boundary	◄·····►	Text/Intertext
Root/Depth	◄·····►	Rhizome/Surface

(TPL 267–8)

Figure 5: The Torus ("Simple Torus")

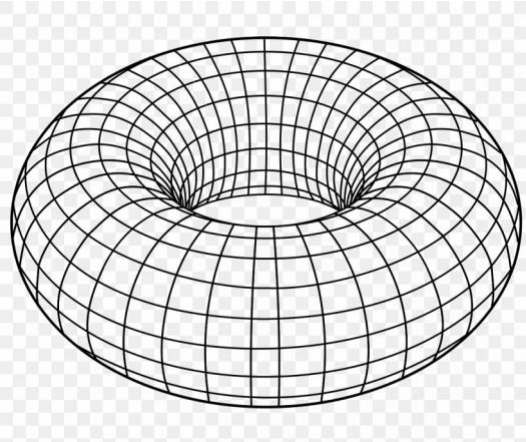


Figure 6: The Rhizome ("The Cosmic Web")

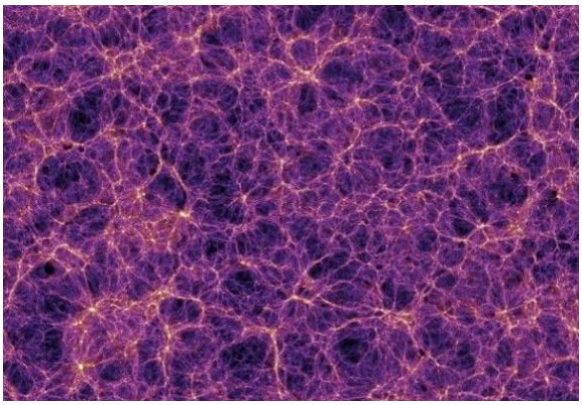


Figure 7: Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915

Figure 8: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Potsdamer Platz*, 1914

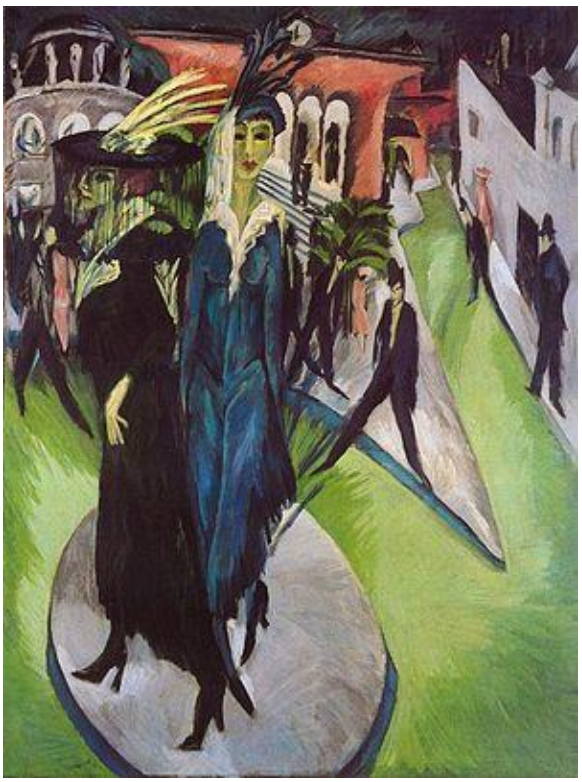
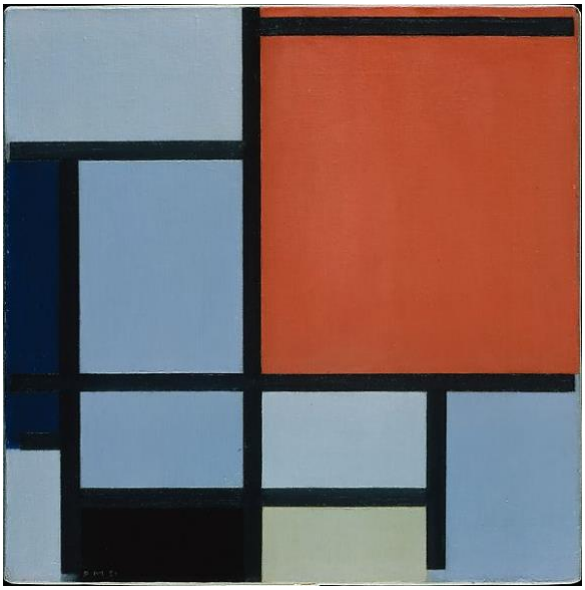


Figure 9: Piet Mondrian, *Composition*, 1921



WORKS CITED

Badiou, Alain. *The Century*. Translated by Alberto Toscano, Polity, 2007.

Ball, Hugo. “Karawane.” *Dada Almanach*, Erich Reiss Verlag, 1917.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation.* Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, University of Michigan, 1994.

Bauman, Zygmunt. “Is There a Postmodern Sociology?” *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 5, 1988, pp. 217–237.

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. Grove, 1954.

Blümlinger, Christa. “Figures of Disgust.” *A Companion to Michael Haneke*, edited by Roy Grundmann, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 147–160.

Cage, John. “4:33.” Premiered 29 Aug. 1952, Woodstock, NY.

“The Cosmic Web.” *Wikimedia Commons*, 13 Dec. 2019, commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_cosmic_web.jpg.

Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Ken Knabb, AK, 2005.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Pierre-Félix Guattari. “Introduction: Rhizome.” *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota, 1987, pp. 3–25.

DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*. Penguin, 1985.

Elsaesser, Thomas. “Performative Self-Contradictions: Michael Haneke’s Mind Games.” *A Companion to Michael Haneke*, edited by Roy Grundmann, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 53–74.

Eyers, Tom. *Lacan and the Concept of the 'Real'*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Francese, Joseph. *Narrating Postmodern Space and Time*. State University of New York, 1997.

Haneke, Michael, director. *Caché*. Les Films Du Losange, 2005.

Hassan, Ihab. “Postface 1982: Toward a Concept of Postmodernism.” *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, 2nd ed., University of Wisconsin, 1982, pp. 259–271.

Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell, 2nd ed., Harper, 1993.

Hemingway, Ernest. “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.” *Scribner's Magazine*, Mar. 1933, pp. 149–150.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. Scribner, 1996.

Jennings, Murdoch. “Žižek’s Dialectics, Critique of Ideology and Emancipatory Politics in Michael Haneke’s Film Caché (2005).” *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2016.

Johnston, Adrian. “Jacques Lacan.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edited by Edward N. Zalta, Metaphysics Research Lab, 10 July 2018, plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan/.

Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. Translated by Breon Mitchell, Schocken, 1998.

Kandinsky, Wassily. *Several Circles*. 1926, Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Kirchner, Ernst Ludwig. *Potsdamer Platz*. 1914, Museum Berggruen, Berlin.

Klint, Hilma af. *The Ten Largest*. 1907, Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Sylvana Tomaselli, Norton, 1988.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XIII The Object of Psychoanalysis 1965-1966*. Unpublished translation by Cormac Miller.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XXII R.S.I. 1974-1975*. Unpublished translation by Cormac Miller.

Lukács, György. “The Ideology of Modernism.” *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, translated by John Mander and Necke Mander, Merlin, 1962, pp. 17–46.

Malevich, Kazimir. *Black Square*. 1915, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice*. Edited by Naomi Ritter, Bedford, 1998.

Mondrian, Piet. *Composition*. 1921, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books-Penguin Random House, 1989.

Odin, Stephen. “Derrida and the Decentered Universe of Chan/Zen Buddhism.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 17, no. 1, Mar. 1990, pp. 61–86.

Ortega y Gasset, José. *The Revolt of the Masses*. Norton, 1964.

Powell, Jim. *Postmodernism for Beginners*. For Beginners, 1998.

Shepherdson, Charles. *Lacan and the Limits of Language*. Fordham University, 2008.

Simmel, Georg. “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” *On Invidуality and Social Forms*, edited by Donald N. Levine, University of Chicago, 1971, pp. 324–339.

Stolzfus, Ben. “Sartre, Nada, and Hemingway's African Stories.” *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2005, pp. 205–228. *Project Muse*.

Stravinsky, Igor, and Gustavo Dudamel. “The Rite of Spring.” 6 Apr. 2019, Boston, Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Tarkovsky, Andrei, director. *Stalker*. USSR State Committee for Cinematography, 1979.

Tatlin, Vladimir. *Corner Counter-Relief*. 1914, State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Weber, Max. “Science as a Vocation.” *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Edited by C. Wright Mills, H. H. Gerth, Routledge, 1991, pp. 129–156.

Welles, Orson, director. *The Trial*. Astor Pictures Corporation, 1963.

Wilcox, Leonard. “Baudrillard, DeLillo's ‘White Noise," and the End of Heroic Narrative.” *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1991, pp. 346–365.

YassineMrabet. “Simple Torus.” *Wikimedia Commons*, 23 Nov. 2007, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simple_Torus.svg.

Yeats, William Butler. “The Second Coming.” *The Dial*, 1920.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. MIT, 1992.