

Alain Badiou and the Dialectic of the Present

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Abstract: This article will explore Alain Badiou's philosophy of time to show what role time plays in his philosophy of subjectivity, event and truth. As against the critical consensus that Badiou either denies temporality a valuable presence in his system of thought or the position that Badiou loses time in eternity, the article will argue that Badiou's late work, especially his 2001-2004 seminar, *Images of the Present Time* (2014, 2023) and the third and final instalment of the being and event project, *The Immanence of Truths* (2018, 2022) foregrounds the political temporality of the event as commitment and construction. In this this dialectical thesis on time, the political task of philosophy is to construct a dialectical present from a preset-less and world-less time. Badiou's temporal dialectic consists of pushing the present away from the repetition of the past and toward a projection that endears it to the future. As this article demonstrates, 'permeability' and 'inter-temporality' emerge as key takeaway concepts from Badiou's dialectical thinking on time that treats eventual subjective truths as both temporal and eternal, thus revealing eternity to be an extension and not a negation of temporality. In the process, the article also addresses the crucial question about locating Badiou's idea of the event in historical time or better still a time that must be constructed at a distance from history.

Keywords: Alain Badiou; Philosophy of Time; Present; Event; Subjectivity; Truth; Politics

1. Introduction: Alain Badiou and Philosophy of Time

Does Alain Badiou have a philosophy of time? We begin from this basic question and go on to argue that time not only has a function in Badiou's system but also emerges as a crucial dialectical concept for his theory of event, subjectivity and truth. Our inquiry will address the temporal address of events and reflect on the relation between time and eternity in Badiou's philosophy. The present analysis will demonstrate how Badiou activates time in a political-dialectical logic of *construction* whereby events happen in a *new time* created by political commitment and at a distance from the grand narrative of historical temporality. His dialectic of time encourages us to subtract the present from the repetition of the past and push it toward a projection that approximates the present to the future. As we shall see, *permeability* and *inter-temporal movement* thus emerge as pivotal aspects of Badiou's temporal dialectic in which events must be animated and recalled across vast temporal periods for true political change to take place.

Time is treated in a piecemeal way across Badiou's corpus and unlike event, subject and truth, it is not a fundamental concept, associated with the French philosopher. For example, *The Badiou Dictionary* does not have an entry on time (2015). Antonio Calcagno on the other hand

has written an entire book, comparing and contrasting Badiou and Derrida's use of time (2007). He shows how time in Badiou emerges as a "diagonal" that separates one event from another and once the event happens, subjective intervention constructs political time: "Badiou identifies time with an intervention."¹ In *Theory of the Subject* (1982, 2009), Badiou discusses Jacques Lacan's idea of 'logical time' and its inter-subjective possibilities but goes on to announce that space is superior to time in the process of subjectivisation.² The event forms a spatial site but does it mean that there is no temporality to the event? Badiou is aware of this question. He calls the time of insurrection, "algebraic" and "topological." A revolutionary event makes something disappear but it is this disappeared term that designates its impact. The event warps time and produces a topological cut.³ Badiou resists historicizing the event. He provocatively formulates that there is no grand narrative of history in the continuous sense except a *sequence* or *periodization* of time triggered by the event.⁴ The event can lead to a rebirth of history and the latter is born only in its rebirth. The event is not located in history in the strict sense but it initiates a historical sequence by constructing time via intervention.

In *The Rebirth of History* (2011, 2012), Badiou theorises evental time as a construction on top of historical time. The post-evental organization of truth entails an invention of time outside of historical time:

In this sense organization is, in the subjective latency where the Idea holds itself, the transformation of evental power into temporality. It is *the invention of a time* whose particular characteristics are taken from the event, a time that in a sense unfolds its beginning. This time can then be regarded as *outside time*, in the sense that organization is not amenable to being inscribed in the order of time dictated by the previous world. We have here what might be called *the outside-time of the Subject, as Subject of the exception*.⁵

The time of the event is not historical time but an "outside-time in time" that creates a collective form of subjectivity. At another point in the same book, Badiou calls it a "collective time" that needs to be organised by the event.⁶ Historical time is statist while evental time is both disruptive and inaugural: "the time of organization, the time of construction of an empirical duration of the Idea in its post-riot stage, is crucial. Otherwise, we end up thinking that the state must endlessly retain a monopoly on the definition of political time."⁷ Evental time as organisation takes political time away from the clutches of the state. It is a revolutionary disruption of historical *chronos*—a communist idea of time as political organisation. The event may inaugurate a new historical sequence but it does not happen *in* history. The event happens outside historical time which is a slave of the dominant ideology of the state. In its aftermath, it invents and organises a collective time of political engagement.

Badiou's resistance to historicizing the event has led to James Williams' accusation that his philosophy suffers from a complex denial of time, leading to a subtle support for political violence. Williams argues that Badiou's interventionist construction of time through the event falls on the side of eternity and not on the side of time.⁸ The eternal truths appearing in the wake of the event are independent of durational time. According to Williams, Badiou locks time into eternity in *Being and Event* (1988, 2005) in the name of fidelity to the event and in *Logics of Worlds* (2006, 2009), the denial of time takes the shape of an extension of the present into eternity. In what follows, through a reading of Badiou's 2001-2004 seminar, *Images of the Present Time* (2014, 2023) and the third and final instalment of the being and event project, *The Immanence of Truths* (2018, 2022) I will show how Williams' argument is problematized by Badiou's theorizing of time's relation with eternity and his fresh negotiation with truths that are historically immanent and yet eternal and absolute. His point about political violence lies beyond my scope; I am more interested in recasting Badiou's philosophy of event, subject and truth qua temporality.

2. *Images of the Present Time: From One Present to Another*

What is Alain Badiou's position on the dialectical temporality of the present? How does the 'materialist dialectic' that poses truth as an exception to the totality of bodies and languages (as proposed by Badiou's 'democratic materialism') play out in relation to time? Let me respond to these questions and highlight how time is of essence in Badiou's evental philosophy of subjectivity. Time's relation to eternity and history will be glimpsed as we proceed. In *Images of the Present Time* (*Images* hereafter), a seminar given between 2001 and 2004, Badiou addresses how philosophy can become contemporary in its own time. Time is dialecticised not because this present is present but due to its absence. Hence his invocation of Stéphane Mallarmé's maxim: "a present is lacking."⁹ Philosophy's task is to go against what Badiou terms the "contemporary nihilism" of the present's absence. It must construct a present to make a "projection toward the future" that "preserves, in torsion, something of the repetitive dimension of the past."¹⁰

In the first session, Badiou wonders if philosophy is not an affair of the "after"? Does it always appear after the present, searching for lost time with nostalgia? Can it truly be contemporary with the present? If philosophy misses the mark of the present, how can it come back to reconstruct it? These questions take Badiou to Lacan's reading of Jean Genet's play *The Balcony* in *Seminar V*. As Badiou reports, in the session dated March 5, 1958, Lacan refers to Genet's play from 1956. These timelines in France are dominated by the Algerian war. Lacan reads the play months before the military coup d'état in Algiers, leading to General De Gaulle's return to power. In 2001 when Badiou delivers his seminar,

Algerian war is making a return through “remembrance.” A historicity of temporal returns is at work in these references, as Badiou notes.¹¹ The present speaks its truth when it has become a past and returns via history. Badiou observes: “the present doesn’t present itself as present. The present is shrouded in the obscurity of its presence, at least when it’s a live, enigmatic present, a question-filled present.”¹²

Badiou uses Genet to set up the idea of a present of images, represented by the brothel in the play. For him, truth can only come from the outside of this present and this truth will break the law of images.¹³ A detailed analysis of Badiou’s reading of Lacan’s reading of Genet is beyond my scope and intention but I want to use the reference to dwell on the retroactive logic of historical time in Badiou that he shares with Lacan and Freud. This is the *nachträglichkeit* (afterness) of unconscious temporality. In the session of October 9, 2002, Badiou refers to the psychoanalytic term *après-coup* to mark philosophy’s lagging function qua time. To philosophically construct a present in 2001, Badiou must go back to the past—the 1956 play’s 1958 reading. He re-reads the past in the present.

The lack of presentness in the present matures into Badiou’s critique of Globalization as the absence of a world in the 2nd session of *Images*. There is a global flow of capital, situations and emblematic images of democracy in the present but no ‘world’ as such. He understands contemporary nihilism either in terms of a meaningless world or a world that lacks being.¹⁴ Either the nihilism of the present is existential (there is a world but it is without meaning) or it is ontological (there is no world or no being of the world). For Badiou, a world is not an *ontological* “category of the meaning of being” but a *logical* “category of the contingent arrangement of being-there.”¹⁵ The present does not allow the possibility for beings to appear in a contingent arrangement. It fails to make a world appear.

What then is the link between temporality and the world? Is the present incapable of making a world whereas the past and the future can constitute one? Let us not be too quick here. Badiou’s present is not a universal idea of the present as much as it is the present as 2001. He indicates this by observing how there existed a world before Globalization up to 1970s. As he holds, it may have been a horrible world but there was a world, which was killed by economic globalization and liberalism. Badiou elaborates on this epochal shift:

In the old days—about thirty years ago; we age fast— there was a world, in the sense that any worker or peasant farmer had a potential political name, an inscription in class and national liberation struggles, and so on. Nobody lacked a potential name. This world gave out the names and inscribed them in different camps. There were names and a distribution of names. What I call a world is, in a way, when, however remote from any figure of power someone

may be, they are nevertheless not precluded from receiving a name. This name creates a future for them—which may be said to be false or illusory—but having a future, even a fragile or illusory one, is not the same thing as not having one at all. But we are in an in-between period when a huge number of people have no names. That’s what democracy is in its emblematic sense: it’s the acceptance of non-naming. There’s no need for names since we’re all equal before commodities! Most people have no name other than being excluded from the advantages of the false world. “Excluded” is the name of those who have no name. No name, no future. Nowadays, a peasant farmer has no name.¹⁶

Badiou’s critique of the parliamentary democratic structure as global capitalism in the above passage boils down to “the acceptance of non-naming” whereby an enormous populace is deprived of names. In the older world, a worker or a peasant had a political name but in the present-without-world, post 1970s and 1980s, they have no name. Without a name they become disconnected from a “historical process.”¹⁷ Since these commoners, farthest from power, are rendered nameless, the globalised present remains without a world. Not any present but the *globalised* present fails to form a world. This present is disconnected from the past and cannot form a future. For Badiou, the nameless have no future. I would argue that when time is evacuated into the present with neither a past nor a future, it lacks the logical possibility of a world formation. Time must always already be *inter-temporal*. There should be bi-directional passages from the present back into the ruses of the past and forward into the future but not necessarily in a linear fashion. The present does not have to be the centre for past and future on both sides but from the perspective of the present, time can permeate the past and the future. When time loses this inter-temporal permeability, it gets reduced to the present and cannot create a world.

Badiou does not count out that the world-less present may go on to produce a world in future but for that we must construct the lacking present.¹⁸ His detour through Plato’s ideas on democracy from the Book 8 of *Republic* suggests that the democratic world is a nonworld of enjoyment. In the so-called democratic world, there is no “equality” but only an “equivalence” of things through “monetary presentation” of capitalism. In *The Immanence of Truths*, following Marx, Badiou calls it the Money-Commodity-Money (M-C-M) formalization.¹⁹ There is equivalence between money that produces commodity and commodity that produces money. The endless repetition of this M-C-M loop is an equivalent structure but it cannot produce equality. To return to *Images*, Badiou derives from Plato the axiom of contemporary nihilism: “we have nihilism because we have a conception of time as immediacy, as the unilateral promotion of the present.”²⁰ Democratic nihilism reduces all time to the

present and we cannot see beyond its figure of immediacy. This present is diagnosed as the time of modernity: “This time retains nothing, no shaping of the future but not the past either, since the past, by definition, isn’t modern. The prescribed time is the time of nihilism itself, a time that lets no time remain.”²¹ The modern temporality of the present destroys time itself insofar as there is no true time without retention of the past and anticipation of the future.

What is philosophy’s task then? Badiou maintains that philosophy must de-fetishize the present without any nostalgia for the past. Past need not be “overvalued”; it is instead a matter of determining the future.²² Time’s reduction to the present is characterised by extreme speed. Philosophy must slow it down but not in an artificial way that leads to stupor. Badiou advocates a “creative slowness” that chip away at the “hectic present.”²³ He returns to Plato’s definition of philosophy as a “long detour.”²⁴ To sum up, using Badiou’s own words from the 5th session:

The nonworld of contemporary democracy is a temporal flight [...] an instance of planetary time as a substitutable, empty, and deferred present. It is substitutable because every moment is equal to every other one, none being declared strategic or decisive, and it is empty because these moments aren’t incorporated into a representation of the future. They comprise a sort of vanishing present, which constitutes the dominant temporality.²⁵

This summative passage adds the idea of substitutability, restaging the notion of equivalence without equality. Every moment in this empty, deferred present can be substituted by any other moment because there is no eventual or subjective decision that chooses one over the other for strategic reasons. It is emphasised again that this is a vacuous time, abandoned to the present that vanishes without the aid of past or future. This is not the time of the event but a weak present without discipline or commitment.

In the 2nd year of the seminar, on October 9, 2002, when Badiou returns to his central question about the erasure of the present and world, his first hypothesis is that the present is negated by the overwhelmingness of the past. The past consumes the present in the name of tradition that turns the present into a shadow of the past. This is not only an auto-repeating past but also a change in its “constant restlessness” that can negate or erase the present.²⁶ If the past exhausts the present in this scenario, in the second hypothesis, Badiou presents the possibility of future exhausting the present. In this case, “the future is the absolute meaning of the present.”²⁷ He uses “repetition” for the first hypothesis and “projection” for the second.²⁸ Repetition or projection in isolation negates the present but a dialogue between the two will revive the present by relating it to the past as well as the future: “The present, our present,

requires the conflictual interaction of repetition and projection. I'm not saying that the present exists as soon as there's such an interaction, but in any case, it doesn't exist if that interaction isn't there."²⁹ Following Mallarmé's declaration of the present in lack from 1895, Badiou argues that the present must overlap and interpenetrate the past and the future. To construct a present, a past and a future must be constructed as well.³⁰

Badiou's point is the following: "the complexity of the present is the declaration—that is, the overlapping of repetition and projection—the declaration insofar as it exerts a torsion on repetition in order to hook it up or connect it to projection."³¹ To construct the present, we need to push repetition with projection. To exert a torsion on repetition by way of projection is to dialecticise the present with the past and the future. Badiou champions an "indifference to anything that separates repetition and projection."³² Repetition and projection must to be interconnected. This interconnection makes the future and the past permeable with the present. This is Badiou's dialectic of the present, constructed through making it permeable with the past and the present via retention and anticipation, by repetition and projection.

In the 2nd year of the seminar, Badiou pushes the problem of temporal construction toward place:

The place is what denotes, even if in a sporadic, transient, ephemeral way, the construction of a different time. It is what reveals the possible novelty, the possibility of a new possibility, but reveals it as duration, through a sort of stability of its local foundation. The crystallization of the present as creation is also the problem of the place, of the establishment of a place.³³

Badiou focuses on a logic of exception to construct a present where there may be none. Exception refers to "what is declared as a novelty of the present."³⁴ True temporality lies in the mutual *entanglement* of present, past and future. Repetition must be forced with projection. Exception as an eventual possibility enters as the third term: "Declaring is situated in the nongap between repetition and projection, hence always in a position of exception in relation to the false present."³⁵ If repetition and projection talk to one another, in their non-gap enters a declaration—a decision that functions from a place of exception qua the false, world-less present. This "creative" exception produces the possibility of a new world. A present must be declared even if there is none.

Badiou insists on this non-gap between repetition and projection for the construction of a present: "the present had to be conceived of as the nexus between a repetition and a projection, with no gap between them. The present should not be the gap between the repetition of the past and the projection of the future."³⁶ Let me re-mark Badiou's departure from his own thought since he himself marks it:

the present isn't simply a cessation of repetition, something new that's absolutely separate from what persists. We're parting company here with the twentieth century, which almost always conceived of the present as an absolute beginning, the beginning of the "new man," the fraternal participant in a completely new world. I spoke at length about this in my seminar, for three years in a row. And the conclusion from all of that was that the present needs to be conceived of otherwise than in the figure of a radical beginning. Something of projection has to absorb repetition and subject it to itself, of course, but also reorient and deploy it. In other words, the present must be an incorporation of the past into the future. Not of the whole past, but at least of something of the past.³⁷

Badiou is referencing his seminars from 1998 to 2001 that produced his book titled *The Century* (2005, 2007). There he had remarked about the 20th century's desire to interrupt repetition:

The first, typical of the century's prophetic stance towards the real, is that thought must interrupt repetition. There must be, and there will be, a new act, a 'new birth' which it is the century's task to invent. It is a question of responding, once and for all, to the imperative: 'Erase the bygone days.'³⁸

Instead of erasing the past altogether, the point is to both break with the past and to internalise it into the present. Badiou's thesis on temporality in *The Century* is not all that different from *Images*:

It is very striking to see that today we are practically bereft of any thinking of time. For just about everyone, the day after tomorrow is abstract and the day before yesterday incomprehensible. We have entered a period of a-temporality and instantaneity; this shows the extent to which, far from being a shared individual experience, time is a construction, and even, we might argue, a political construction.³⁹

We see the similarity in his thought about the contraction of temporality to the immediacy of the present, rendering the past and the future blurry and absurd. This present lacks true temporality as a political and eventual construction. Paris Commune is Badiou's instance of this political construction of time.

Unlike his characteristic interruptive logic, in *Images* Badiou outlines a tempered idea of projection that does not entirely break with repetition but absorbs it. The present is constructed when the past is incorporated into the future. The declaration of exception comes between the past and the future where the false present is lodged. It destroys the gap between

repetition and projection, created by the false present of the market and “commodity circulation.”⁴⁰ Temporal division and permeability does not mean that the present is just a “consequence” of the past. It is a “projective torsion of the past.”⁴¹ The past is not completely negated but as Badiou reflects, the present involves a disruption of past repetition: “The present with its intensity, therefore the true present, is always the disruption of a repetition and the possibility of a projection.”⁴²

In the session of March 12, 2003, Badiou, alongside François Regnault, approaches theatre as a way of arriving at the present in the present. Unlike cinema, theatre is always in the present. The text-performance pairing connects theatre’s present to a past but the past does not outweigh the present:

what is meant by staging or contemporary theater is a special form of the problem of the treatment of the present, because the weight of the past is negated, lightened, or even done away with, as you suggested, in the time of the performance, which is itself a present. That would mean that there’s something in theater that’s like the relationship between two presents. There would thus be a splitting of the word “present” [...] the contemporary construction of the present involves both the incorporation of the past and a present figuration of the present. This indeed implies that there are two meanings of the word “present,” that there’s a kind of presentification in the present, namely the performance, which is the time of the quasi-empirical, fragile, given present.⁴³

This passage suggests a division of the present. There are two presents in theatrical performance: one produced by the incorporation of the past and the other, configured in the present. This temporal split produces a double present. It is dialectically rich and points to an artistic construction of time. Unlike the false present of wars, discussed in the previous session (Feb 26, 2003), theatre offers Badiou a way to think the dialectics of the present with an internal division that makes two presents and forms a light but present relation with the past.

In the 3rd year of the seminar, on October 22, 2003, Badiou’s philosophical question shifts to the nature of true life, probing the relation between time and eternity. Among dominant images of the present, Badiou lists democratic materialism that gives existence to bodies and languages without truths and the absence of eternity. Is eternity timeless or is it a function of temporality? The contemporary image of there being no eternity returns us to a lacking present or its failure to make a world. It declares that there are only “relevancies” and a time without eternity.⁴⁴ Badiou harks back to Plato here and fleshes out eternity as the “separability of forms”:

And “eternity,” to the extent that it means anything at all, always more or less means the separability of the forms. If the forms aren’t separable, if they’re inseparable, they remain the prisoners of relevancies, of bodies, since they are trapped in the temporalities specific to relevancies. If you want eternity, there has to be a minimum separability of the forms. That was Plato’s basic intuition, and he was right. [...] You can, of course, get along without it, and, ultimately, democratic materialism gets along very well without it. For democratic materialism, there’s the relevancy of the forms; there is neither any separability of them nor any eternity.⁴⁵

If forms cannot be separated from their epochal relevancies, they do not become eternal. Platonic eternity is this separability of forms. If there is no eternity, we are left with the present alone that cannot produce true time or world. For true temporality, eternity is required. Eternal forms are temporal. According to Badiou, it is crucial to accommodate eternity to time:

It’s important to understand that eternity is a structure of time itself and not the Other of time. The immortality of the soul, perhaps, is the Other of time. Eternity, as such, is not the Other of time. It’s a certain vision of time, specifically the one that combines the existence of time with a minimum separability of the forms. The introduction to the theory of eternity is when a certain separability of the forms is created within time itself.⁴⁶

To see eternity as part of time is to exit the false present and activate the past and the future via repetition and projection respectively. Eternalization is a function of time, allowing for truths that are historically located and eternal at the same time. Badiou’s example is mathematical. That there is an infinite number of prime numbers is a mathematical truth. It appeared at a specific point in time when Greek mathematicians established it but it has become an eternal truth:

It was, to be sure, Greek mathematicians, in a specific historical context, who produced, with specific words and in the Greek language, the proof of this. So it was clearly connected to a relevancy, but it was, to some extent, separable from it. That’s what eternity means. And you can clearly see that if you don’t have that at all, then time will gradually contract, because eternity is what keeps it open. A time that is not open is a succession, a time in which the moments are successive.⁴⁷

A truth that is historically, culturally and linguistically specific can become eternal when its form is separated from particular historical relevancy. The

other significant thesis in the passage above is Badiou's argument that eternity makes time vast and complex in its *permeability*. If eternity is not recognised as a function of temporality, time will close down and contract into a tiny point. Such a closed time is nothing but a false present without a past or future. It is only an empty succession of moments. Because certain truth-forms are separable from their immediate milieu, we have access to a time vaster than our own. A time that reaches out of itself is capable of yielding an *inter-temporal* world. This is the time philosophy makes available for us. It is a time that transcends the immediate gratification of "contemporary hedonism" and connects us as subjects with deeper knots embedded in a greater scale of time.

Badiou's true life is an eventual extraction of time as commitment, discipline and fidelity. It is no religious afterlife but an immanent conception of true life in this world. It must negotiate with death without the fantasy of an after-world post death and recalibrate life from the limit of death as a subjective foundation of time. When the individual becomes a subject via the event, they become an "immortal" of their situation. The subject can change the situation. They can outlive it by constructing a novelty that substitutes the situation. The immortal subject faces death but thinks life from the futural limit of death, relieving the present of its isolation:

It is the concept of life itself only if it faces death rather than shrinking from it. Hegel would surely have thought that we are not living the true life because we don't face death. We think life is the purpose of life, that life can face itself, that it can deal with itself alone. Hegel would probably answer the question "What does it mean to live?" by saying that to live, in the final analysis, is to face death, but to face it truly, not just as the outside or the negation of life. No, to face it as that in which the power of life maintains itself even in this confrontation.⁴⁸

Badiou clarifies with reference to Hegel that true life must gather its agency from death and face it:

As regards death, I mentioned the famous statement in the introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where Hegel says that the true life is the life that does not fear death, the life that maintains itself even in death. Hegel's thesis is not that the true life is beyond death but that it is what endures death, what is capable of facing death. There's also the idea in Hegel that, when it comes to death, there are two stances of life. There is the life that gives in to death, the life that doesn't face death directly, and there is the life that staunchly endures the existence of death and maintains its permanence in it. (325).

Badiou does not explicitly engage with time here but the Hegelian encounter with death as part of life's continuum opens a complex time vaster than the individualist and liberalist present of global capitalism. To confront death is to go beyond the life of the individual and move toward a deeper and larger corpus of collective time. True life comprises this disposition to death whereby the living subject maintains their permanence in death. The immanent construction of true life is co-constitutive of the evental seizing and construction of time as a historical sequentialization or periodisation of fidelity.

Though the discussion on the present time takes a back-seat in the 3rd and final year of the seminar, Badiou's focus on true life as a subjective emergence through the event indicates how his philosophy of evental subjectivity is not without a philosophy of time. The event may not be located in historical time but it constructs a new collective time and inaugurates a historical sequence or period in its wake. As Badiou defines it on November 27, 2003 during his analysis of a Paul Valéry poem ("*Le Cimetière marin*"), the event accords maximal existence to that which did not exist in the world: "It's when something that was nothing begins to exist maximally. The event [...] makes it possible for the particular inexistent of a place to come into existence in this same world, whose logic will be changed as a result."⁴⁹ I would argue that this change in the logic of the world that makes the inexistent exist is among other things a *temporal* creation of a dialectical present that closes the gap between repetition (past) and projection (future) by forging a decisive declaration in that interval. The exceptional declaration of a decision constructs a new time and a new world with its new logic.

The time of bodies and languages is the time of democratic materialism—a present that is bereft of time and world. The time of truth as an exception to the bodies and languages is an evental construction of subjective and collective time. This is the time of Badiou's materialist dialectic that produces a new collective subject-body of truth. Truth is not one but many. It is a category that functions as exception to the categories of bodies and languages. If truth is plural, so are these constructed temporalities of evental subjectivity. We are talking about as many times as there are truths marked by events. As Badiou clarifies, there is no totalization of truths qua bodies and languages.⁵⁰ Truth breaks into totalities of bodies and languages as exception. In this logic of exception lies its generative capacity for a new time and a new world.

To continue with my temporal translation of Badiou's philosophy of the event in *Images*, what breaks the false present of "there is" (there is language and there is body) is the "there will happen" of evental truth. He underlines that truth's exception to bodies and languages is retroactive:

I said that there had to be a retroaction of the exception on the materialist given of bodies and languages. Therefore, and this is the

key to it all, there will be a transformation of the concept of body. Because if we are really materialists, we must necessarily think that this happens in connection with a split in the concept of body, in connection with the possibility of the emergence of a different body, a new body.⁵¹

Truth will retroactively impact the body and produce a new subject-body. It will also have a retroactive impact on language and produce a new language that Badiou calls “subject-language.”⁵² This language is associated with subjective emergence—a language that does not merely communicate but acts to produce a new subject via event.

Badiou’s true life consists of participating in a new subject-body and subject-language. Almost at the end of the seminar, he briefly comes back to the dialectic of present time:

to live is to be incorporated in the present. And to be incorporated in the present can be understood in two different ways. Either as a temporal reference, that is, the incorporation takes place in the present, here and now; it’s not a pre-given, preformed, etc. incorporation. But to be incorporated into the present can also mean to enter into the body of the present. To be incorporated into the present is something urgent: it’s the present that matters; the incorporation needs to happen *now*. But it’s also the fact that, since this body itself is a body in the present, it is into this present that one must be incorporated, in that it offers the possibility of a new body.⁵³

The above passage splices the philosophy of event and true life with the philosophy of time by clarifying that to live is to be incorporated in the present. Life is a bodily act of entering the present or intervening in it. If this incorporation is not “pre-given” or “preformed,” it is an affair of pure present. Incorporation is an emanation in the here and now. Alternatively this incorporation could be the result of an evental process that enters into the body of the present like an urgent incision of the past (the event as a vanishing supplement from recent past) that offers a future possibility, i.e., a new subject-body. Badiou adds (pursuing Valéry’s poem) that when the in-existent is brought into existence through the event, it constructs a new “postevental present.”⁵⁴ This present is a temporal construction that refers back to its evental past by being “postevental.” It also generates a future by incorporating the possibility of a new body into the present.

As readers of *Being and Event* will remember, Badiou calls this future of the subject, a “future anterior.”⁵⁵ Truth belongs to this particular future of the “will have been.”⁵⁶ The tense of “subject-language” produced after the event is future anterior.⁵⁷ Future anterior or perfect enacts a grammatical suture of future (will), present (have) and past (been). It combines all three times of *chronos* and makes them mutually *permeable*.

It is therefore the best tense for a subjective construction of time. According to James Williams whose critique of Badiou's denial of time was my starting point, future anterior does not save Badiou as it becomes a treatment of eternity and not that of time.⁵⁸ But, as we have seen, eternity for Badiou is not outside time. Eternity makes time truly temporal. It makes time *inter-temporal*. There is no time without this inter-temporal movement.

3. *The Immanence of Truths:*

Toward the Infinite, the Eternal and the Absolute

In *The Immanence of Truths* (*Immanence* hereafter), Badiou consolidates his philosophy of time in which truths are “eternal while at the same time resulting from a process that begins in a determinate world, as an event of that world, and therefore belongs to the time of that world.”⁵⁹ Truths are both temporal and eternal. For Badiou, “every truth is an immanent production within a particular world” and yet “a truth is also an exception to the world in which it is created, quite simply because it has a universal value.”⁶⁰ This double status of truth is a thesis on time that includes eternity. He observes that the time of revolution cannot be a “finite time”; it must “leave the future open.”⁶¹ This idea of infinite time is implicit but significant in *Immanence*. Badiou writes about the present becoming future in this infinitizing movement of time:

reviving the infinite means living and acting in the real world in such a way that the present is so intense that there is no need for tomorrow to be “waited for,” in the messianic sense. As Brecht puts it, as soon as we are dealing with a political truth, “‘never’ becomes ‘today’.” Tomorrow must *be here*. Activating the present in such a way that tomorrow is always-already-here has nothing to do with prophesy.⁶²

The infinite and the eternal are not the same but they are on the same side. Once an event happens and upholds its truth, the truth creates its own present. But there is no need to wait for a future in that created present. The created present must make the future present. Activating the future is its ethico-political imperative (“must”). This is not prophesy but commitment to revolutionary time.

In *Immanence*, “the modern operation of subjectivation of finitude” is named “covering over” [*recouvrement*]: “Its objective is to cover over, by means of finite mechanisms taken from the alienated present, anything that could give rise to a new infinity making possible works that are themselves modern but independent from Capital.”⁶³ That which is potentially infinite is covered over with finite mechanisms, obtained from what Badiou calls an “alienated present.” This alienated present is like the

false present in *Images*. It needs to be changed into a new temporality. A political time of infinity must be constructed to work against the covering over that tames eventual truth into the convention of routine. Badiou calls such tamed work “archive.”⁶⁴ It is covered over by finitude and becomes a period document after enjoying their brief moment in the light. On the other hand, we have works of truth that become infinite with time as they are absolutized. Badiou notes that this kind of work’s “real infinity is permanently protected from any finite closure, it exists absolutely. And this absoluteness exempts it from being reduced to the status of an archive: what it bears witness to—in this case after the specific time period—is that truths exist.”⁶⁵ Though Badiou has a set-theoretical idea of the absolute marked in space (indexed by V), space and time cannot be divorced from each other. Truth’s existence as absolute is temporally validated and inter-temporally re-activated. In this *inter-temporal* reactivation it becomes a work of truth.

A work of truth is born in a finite temporal situation but it is constructed into something that ceases to be finite:

if we count [...] the dynamic belonging to the post-evental procedure—the work ceases to be finite. This means that no constructible subset of the world can then cover the work. [...] A constructible set necessarily knows nothing of the active present of a procedure, since all its elements are already defined “before” its own existence. A constructible set belongs to the realm of results [...]. It can therefore not grasp, follow, let alone exceed, what in the work marks its belonging to a dynamic procedure whose “result,” the generic subset, far from being given, is always to come.⁶⁶

As Badiou suggests, the post-evental procedure makes a truth infinite. Truth does not know its present. It resists the covering over of constructible sets and reaches the generic subset whose temporality is “always to come.” In the post-evental process truth becomes generic by leaning on the future. This is how the work of truth ceases to be finite.

The post-evental work is finite but with time it becomes infinite. It is finite insofar as it germinates with finite materials in a determinate world. It becomes infinite when it assumes a generic potential of being re-animated in multiple worlds:

Every work is universal in that, owing to its eventual origins, it is a partial exception to the laws of the world in which it appears. This universality is attested to ontologically by the fact that the multiple that constitutes the being of a work is a generic multiple. It is attested to phenomenologically by the fact that a work, inasmuch as it is universal, can come back to life in worlds other than the one in which it was created.⁶⁷

When a work returns to life in worlds other than the one in which it was created, it forms an *inter-temporal* appeal to the universal. This universality has a temporal dimension as it opens the possibility of return in a new world. This is what Badiou evoked in *Images* as the gap between repetition and projection that needs to be closed by a decision. When a work comes back in a new world, it is repetition that gets projected in an inter-temporal permeability. Badiou continues in *Immanence*: “Every work, finally, is absolute, in that the finite multiplicity that it is comes into contact, through the interaction of several different infinities, with an attribute of the absolute.”⁶⁸ This interaction with several different infinities happens when a work is re-animated across multiple periods or sequences or worlds. It is in this chain of differential and projective repetitions that it becomes absolute. Absoluteness is attained via interaction with different kinds of infinities.

Eternity, infinity and absolute—these three terms align with each other to frame a new time of the event. This new time must be constructed with an inclination toward the future, incorporated into the body of the present, following Badiou’s discussion of ‘incorporation’ in *Images*. To give a political example of this inter-temporal permeability from *Immanence*, Badiou zooms in on the proper name as a marker of how the past travels into the present in search of a future. He mentions how the German Communist Party launched a Spartacist uprising in 1919 Berlin. The proper name ‘Spartacus’ as an “absolute symbol” of anti-imperial revolt came back after two thousand years.⁶⁹ Badiou’s emphasis on the *inter-temporal* return of an old evental name and the interaction of multiple evental truths contradicts Antonio Calcagno’s point that Badiou does not consider the “pre-political” influence of *Kairos* as a time of “pre-intervention.”⁷⁰ Badiou’s late work crosses out the possibility that the past has no purchase on evental time. Spartacus’ return in Berlin uprising is testimony to the folding of the so-called “pre-political” *kairos* within the political sequence of organized time.

The inter-temporal return of the evental proper name of the subject launches a new period of post-evental work. This is how truths become absolute across multiple timelines: “the proper name can be said to be the combined index of a finite time—the one in which the work exists—and the eternity of its value, which can be constantly reactualized in different time periods.”⁷¹ The reactualization of the political work creates eternity, absoluteness and infinity for the returning truth. Here is the key formalization of the index or the proper name:

We call the index of a political work one or two proper names, rarely more, that have the property of denoting simultaneously: a) the fulfilment of the universal conditions of a work, mainly the continuous immanence of the guiding intellectuals to a mass movement opposed to the dominant order; and b) the local

*singularity of the creation of the work involved. Because of this simultaneity, these proper names can henceforth be evoked in any movement of the same kind as the one of which they are the index, thus transcending differences in time and place and affirming the virtual infinity and absoluteness of the work, beyond its circumstantial finitude.*⁷²

The indexical proper name facilitates the travel of a political truth across historical periods and worlds. It is by being re-activated in a new world that the work of truth becomes infinite and absolute.

Badiou's key goal in *Immanence* is to establish the absoluteness of truth. What is absolute can also be immanent. The absolute does not have to be transcendental. Though Badiou's reference frame for the absolute is quasi-Hegelian, quasi-Spinozist and quasi-mathematical (set-theoretical), what is relevant for our purposes is that the becoming-absolute of truth must traverse time. In a discussion of Edmund Husserl on mathematics (like politics, science or mathematics is one of Badiou's four truth processes), Badiou writes: "the index of absoluteness of a scientific work is indeed the immanence of the future in the form of what will give new meaning to the past, and therefore the overcoming of the inevitable finitude of a work by its real inscription in the infinity of a truth procedure."⁷³ As highlighted here, the becoming-absolute of truth is a temporal process. A truth that traverses multiple times and gets re-activated, re-signified and re-inscribed in *inter-temporal* motion becomes infinite by resisting the covering-over by finitude. This infinite work of truth is absolute.

4. Toward a Conclusion: Inter-temporality and the Permeable

Badiou formulates in *Greece and the Reinvention of Politics* (2016, 2018) that "the real time of political truth is the present."⁷⁴ It is this organised, invented and collective creation of a political present that I have foregrounded in this article. And yet Badiou echoes Marx in *A New Dawn for Politics* (2021, 2022) to maintain that the true present can only be thought from the future.⁷⁵ If the communist idea is a hypothesis, it can only be tested in an *inter-temporal* way across multiple timelines. Badiou declares in *The Communist Hypothesis* (2008, 2010) that we are still contemporaries of May 1968 because despite the historical situation changing, the political problem has not substantively changed. May 1968 becomes a political index of the event that makes it travel to other worlds where it can (re-)open a new historical sequence. A chronological temporal marker like May 1968 thus becomes *permeable*. Discussing Jacques Rancière in *Metapolitics* (1998, 2005), Badiou emphasises his break with historical time: "with my thought of politics as a truth process, [...] singularity is determined in its being (this is its generic reality) and

has no relation as such to historical time, for it constitutes its own time through and through.”⁷⁶ The political truth as singularity can only exist after the event as it constitutes its own time outside historical time.

In *The Communist Hypothesis*, Badiou insists that the practical failure of communism does not necessitate its abandonment as a hypothesis. There are many mathematical hypotheses that were left without a proof for hundreds of years until they were proved. We have to keep testing the communist hypothesis to orient our times, cutting across a longer duration of future.⁷⁷ This temporal testing of the hypothesis opens a politics of *permeable time* in which the past reactivates itself in the present and constructs a present that in its turn is faced toward the future. When historical time transforms into a non-linear, permeable time, we arrive at evental temporality. The idea of *permeability* emerges as a strong claim from Badiou’s philosophy of time. Let us look at a passage from *The Communist Hypothesis* in which temporal permeability becomes dynamic in a reversal of linear time:

within a given type of truth [...] the historical inscription encompasses an interplay between types of truth that are different from one another and are therefore situated at different points in human time in general. In particular, there are retroactive effects of one truth on other truths that were created before it. All this requires a transtemporal availability of truths.⁷⁸

The point about retroactivity is notable here. A truth interacts with other truths across a vast stretch of time and the past informs, triggers and ushers in a present that leans on a future. But this linear movement (past-present-future) can be reversed in a retroactive motion whereby a new truth can impact older truths it interacts with. The truths are available to each other on a ‘transtemporal’ plain and their dialogue is not unidirectional. This idea of *retroactive transtemporality* strengthens my argument about *permeable time*. *Chronos* melts away in this *permeability* of future, configuring the past from its construction in the present.

To conclude, this article established the dialectical temporality of event in Alain Badiou’s philosophy. As we witnessed, Badiou’s system dynamically constructs time from a subjective and post-evental orientation of truth, interacting across multiple timelines, building on without being reduced to historical time. Evental time is collective, constructed through subjective fidelity and commitment. It creates a new present, that takes a leaf from the past but also breaks with its repetition to establish a novelty and project toward the future. Evental time is capable of producing a retroactive effect on past evental truths as they co-invoke each other. Reversibility, permeability and inter-temporal movement are hallmarks of this *plastic* temporality of political action. To modify T. S. Eliot’s opening lines from ‘Burnt Norton’:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past
If all time is eternally present
All time is 'changeable.'

Permeable temporality that goes against *chronos* does not make time 'unredeemable' (Eliot's original qualifier for 'all time' in the final line). When an eternal present makes all time mutually traversable, it becomes changeable. Badiou's philosophy remains faithful to a time of change.

- 1 Calcagno 2007, p.73.
- 2 Badiou 2009, p. 308.
- 3 Badiou 2009, pp. 243-244.
- 4 Badiou 2010, p.241.
- 5 Badiou 2012, p. 70; emphases original.
- 6 Ibid, p. 89.
- 7 Ibid, p. 90.
- 8 Williams 2012, p. 125.
- 9 Mallarmé qtd in Badiou 2023, p. xxxvii.
- 10 Ibid., p. xxxvii.
- 11 Ibid., p.7.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 7-8.
- 13 Ibid., p. 20.
- 14 Ibid., p.54.
- 15 Ibid., p.55.
- 16 Ibid., p.57.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid., p. 60.
- 19 Badiou 2022, p. 124.
- 20 Badiou 2023, p. 67-68.
- 21 Ibid., p. 70.
- 22 Ibid., p. 73.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., p. 74.
- 25 Ibid., p. 75.
- 26 Ibid., p.135.
- 27 Ibid., p.138.
- 28 Ibid., p.140.
- 29 Ibid., p.141.
- 30 Ibid., p.142.
- 31 Ibid., p.145.
- 32 Ibid., p.150.
- 33 Ibid., pp.151-152.
- 34 Ibid., p. 156.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid., p. 152.
- 37 Ibid., p. 153.
- 38 Badiou 2007, p. 57.
- 39 Badiou 2023, p. 105.
- 40 Ibid., p. 156.
- 41 Ibid., p. 257.
- 42 Ibid., p. 286.
- 43 Ibid., p. 223.
- 44 Ibid., p. 303.
- 45 Ibid., p. 304.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid., p. 316.
- 49 Ibid., p. 348.
- 50 Ibid., p. 378.
- 51 Ibid., p. 389.
- 52 Ibid., p. 353.
- 53 Ibid., p. 390.
- 54 Ibid., p. 391.
- 55 Badiou 2005, p. 398.
- 56 Ibid., p. 399.
- 57 Ibid., p. 523.
- 58 Williams 2012, p. 126.
- 59 Badiou 2022, p. 19.
- 60 Ibid., p. 27.
- 61 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
- 62 Ibid., p. 86.
- 63 Ibid., p. 104.
- 64 Ibid., p. 458.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid., pp. 456-457.
- 67 Ibid., p. 448.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid., p. 563.
- 70 Calcagno 2007, p. 108.
- 71 Badiou 2022, p. 563.
- 72 Ibid., p. 565; emphases original.
- 73 Ibid., p. 520.
- 74 Badiou 2018, p. 7.
- 75 Badiou 2022a, pp. 92-93.
- 76 Badiou 2005a, p. 117.
- 77 Badiou 2010, p. 7.
- 78 Ibid., p. 233.

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