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# Alain Badiou's Twisted Contemporaneity: Inaesthetics and the Contemporary

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
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## **Declaration:**

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

The thesis makes reference to a thesis previously submitted for a Masters by Research degree at the University of Adelaide – this reference has been quoted and cited appropriately.

Angus Love

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## **Abstract:**

This thesis interrogates Alain Badiou's philosophical project from the standpoint of theories of the contemporary and contemporary art, via an engagement with the spectatorship of installation art and the installation practice of Ilya Kabakov. Badiou's major works *Being and Event* (1988) and *Logics of Worlds* (2006) construct a philosophical account of truth based on a mathematical ontology and militant account of the subject. For Badiou, art is one of four 'conditions' through which philosophy seizes contemporary truths in order to demonstrate their 'compossibility' or co-temporality in thought. Despite Badiou's assertion of the contemporaneity of his philosophical project, his philosophy is marked by a failure to encounter contemporary art. This is evident in the modernist elitism of his artistic canon, the neo-classicism of his philosophical discourse, and what Jacques Rancière has termed the 'twisted modernism' of his 'inaesthetic' framework of art.

This thesis assesses Badiou's project as articulating a 'twisted' relation to the contemporary, defined by Peter Osborne as the "disjunctive unity of present times". I argue that the potential contemporaneity of Badiou's concept of 'compossibility' is limited by the nature of his presentation of philosophical discourse. However, I demonstrate that his account of the present and concept of 'saturation' can be productively read alongside critiques of the 'reduction to the present' in the contemporary and postmodern. In my critique of Badiou's 'inaesthetic' framework of art I argue that Badiou excludes audience relation in favour of a purified philosophical 'seizure' of the work of art. Finally, I consider the implications for Badiou's project of the installation practice of former Soviet artist Ilya Kabakov, which I argue offers a means of de-purifying Badiou's distinction between knowledge and truth. By expanding Badiou's account of spectatorship beyond the theatre through an engagement with installation art, the thesis both identifies the limits of his project and its potential expansion via an encounter with the contemporary.



## Notes on Abbreviations:

### Works by Badiou:

AP = *The Age of Poets*

BE = *Being and Event*

C = *Conditions*

C2 = *Conditions* (French original).

HI = *Handbook of Inaesthetics*

LW = *Logics of Worlds*

M = *Metapolitics*

MP = *Manifesto for Philosophy*

MP2 = *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*

PM = *Philosophy for Militants*

PT = *In Praise of Theatre*

RT = *Rhapsody for the Theatre*

TS = *Theory of the Subject*

TW = *Theoretical Writings*.

### Other Works:

ANA = Osborne, Peter. *Anywhere or Not At All*

PC = Osborne, Peter. *The Postconceptual Condition*.

## Introduction: Alain Badiou's Twisted Contemporaneity

This thesis interrogates the philosophical project of French philosopher Alain Badiou from the standpoint of theories of the contemporary and contemporary art. I do so by engaging Badiou's core philosophical account of being, event, and subject, as outlined in *Being and Event* ([1988] 2005) and *Logics of Worlds* ([2006] 2009), his writing on theatre and spectatorship in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* ([1990] 2013), and his writing on art in *The Century* ([2005] 2007) and *Handbook of Inaesthetics* ([1998] 2005)<sup>1</sup>. Badiou's project can be characterized as an attempt to think the lasting emergence of radical novelty in response to an event – a contingent occurrence that remains in exception to what exists. For Badiou this is achieved by linking a mathematical account of being to a militant figure of the subject whose fidelity to an event establishes its consequences as 'true' for a situation. Badiou's work is notable for its strongly systematic nature, combining engagements with post-Cantorian axiomatic set theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis, post-Maoist politics, and the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé in order to construct an account of truth as the creative universality of the new. One of Badiou's central contentions is that Georg Cantor's mathematical discoveries regarding the infinite open up a new path within thought allowing for the 'return' of philosophy, based on the radical assertion that mathematics is ontology (BE 4). As this thesis argues, Badiou's project articulates a latent understanding of the contemporary – one, however, that is distorted by the nature of his modernist and neo-classical commitments.

This thesis investigates Badiou's relation to the contemporary in several key areas: his articulation of philosophical discourse on the basis of 'compossibility'; his account of the present as the temporality of subjective fidelity, his inaesthetic account of art, and his distinction between knowledge and truth. In *Conditions* ([1992] 2008), Badiou defines his philosophical discourse as 'subtractive': philosophy constructs an "empty" category of Truth, through which it declares the 'compossibility' of a plurality of heterogeneous truths – both plural and unified in thought (C 11). Inasmuch as compossibility designates a relation of co-temporality of truths, each with its own singular temporality or 'present' – Badiou's account of philosophical discourse invites consideration in relation to the contemporary, conceived in Peter Osborne's terms as the "*disjunctive unity of present times*" (ANA, 17). For Badiou, the present is the lived

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<sup>1</sup> First references to Badiou's key works will include the date of French publication in square brackets, followed by the publication date of the referenced English translation.

modality of a subject's fidelity to a truth – as such, his project argues against 'presentist' accounts of the present as the homogeneous or empty 'now'.

However, and for reasons that I will return to below, Badiou's project and 'inaesthetic' writing on art demonstrate tendencies that Jacques Rancière terms "twisted modernism" ("Badiou: Aesthetics, Inaesthetics, Anti-Aesthetics" 222). A key contribution of this thesis is to argue that the latent articulation of contemporaneity within Badiou's framework is 'twisted' inasmuch as it is distorted by the demands of his philosophical system, his failure to encounter contemporary art, and the modernist conservatism of his aesthetics. Unpicking Badiou's project will require an un-burdening of his project of the domineering presence of the philosopher. In addition to demonstrating Badiou's contemporaneity and its limits, this thesis aims to 'twist' Badiou in turn via an engagement with contemporary art. This is achieved by expanding his account of temporality and the present beyond the theatre via an engagement with the spectatorship of installation art, and via an engagement with the installation practice of Ilya Kabakov. As I will show, Kabakov's installation works allow for a re-articulation of Badiou's account of knowledge and truth in order to de-purify the conception of the event as miraculous 'rupture'; the outcome will be to demonstrate the possibility of re-conditioning Badiou's project via an encounter with contemporary art.

### **Badiou's 'Twisted' Contemporaneity:**

Before proceeding to my chapter outline, a broad overview of Badiou's work is essential for grounding some of the terminology to be discussed in the thesis, and for establishing the 'twisted' nature of Badiou's relation to the contemporary. In what follows, I outline the modernist and neo-classical nature of Badiou's framework, introduce Badiou's concept of 'subtraction' and his account of the subject, and outline the 'dramatism' of his philosophical discourse. Doing so frames the key motivations and questions of this thesis; I will turn to a more detailed overview of critical accounts of the contemporary and contemporary art in the first section of Chapter One.

Born in 1937, Badiou's oeuvre encompasses a daunting array of works, ranging from novels, a '*romanopéra*', a number of plays including a tragedy and several comedies, political pamphlets, engagements with theoretical mathematics and theory of number, and meditations on art and politics.<sup>2</sup> The key philosophical works which form the basis of his system comprise of *Theory of*

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<sup>2</sup> The novels are *Almagestes* (1964), *Portulans* (1967), *Calme bloc ici-bas* (1997) and the *romanopéra* is *L'Écarpe rouge* (1979). The plays include the tragedy *The Incident at Antioch*, written between 1982 and

*the Subject* ([1982] 2009), and the three major works of his mature ‘system’, beginning with *Being and Event* and its philosophical ‘sequels’ *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II* and the recently published but as yet untranslated *L’Immanence des vérités: l’être et l’événement*, 3 (2018). Graduating from the École normale supérieure in 1960, Badiou taught at University of Reims, and later University Paris VIII. Here he became heavily influenced by Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan, contributing to the journal *Cahiers pour l’Analyse*, which combined mathematical logic with psychoanalysis and structuralism. Badiou was also intensely involved in left politics, forming the Maoist organization *L’Union des communistes de France marxiste-léniniste* (UCFML) with several others in 1969 in response to the student and worker uprisings of May 1968.<sup>3</sup>

The experience of May 1968 profoundly shaped Badiou’s thought, appearing as a formative ‘event’ in itself. As he states in an interview:

[M]y fundamental question is a very simple one, quite small. The question is: what exactly is something new? What is novelty? What is creation? This is biographical because it is for me fundamentally the consequence of my experience in France of May 68, and its consequences. It’s not an abstract question as I really underwent the experiment of a complete change of life and experienced the conditions of an event. (Badiou and Critchley, “Ours is Not a Terrible Situation”)

As he expands, the experience of the uprisings was akin to the experience of “the birth of a new subject”, hence “I go to the concept of an event by thinking that when something really new happens you always have a real rupture. You have the creation of a new subject and you have the process of continuation of the subject as such”. The outcome of May 1968 – in which student protests and occupations quickly spread to a general strike and the momentary paralysis of the French state – serves as a useful illustrative example of the ephemeral and incalculable nature of the Badiouian event. As an eruption of the new which breaks with the structure of a situation – for example, the French state – an event is the momentary appearance of the ‘void’, or the pure multiplicity of being. Yet as an ephemeral excess, an event depends on the formation of a subject – exemplified by worker movements and political organizations, for example – whose fidelity to the event re-organizes the situation according to the event’s occurrence,

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1989, first published in translation in 2013, and the ‘Ahmed tetralogy’ of comedies centred upon the character Ahmed, an Algerian migrant in France, of which *Ahmed the Philosopher: 34 Short Plays for Children and Everyone Else* (first performed 1995) has been translated into English.

<sup>3</sup> In 1985 Badiou and others – including Sylvain Lazarus and Natacha Michel – formed *L’Organisation politique* following the disbanding of the UCFML.

operating such that the event ‘will have been’ true. In linking its fidelity to the incalculable errancy of the event, the subject’s fidelity breaks with – or is ‘indiscernible’ to – the structure of the situation; it is the sustained yet precarious emergence of the new as universal for a situation that Badiou designates as ‘truth’. As this thesis explores, subjective fidelity functions as the inauguration of a new time, running ‘diagonal’ to the situation and forming what Badiou terms the ‘present’.

A defining feature of Badiou’s work is his deep engagement with mathematics and theory of number – a rationalism which puts him at odds with the majority of post-Kantian continental philosophy. Badiou’s engagement with mathematics begins with his first work of philosophy, *The Concept of Model* ([1969] 2007), in which he outlines a Marxist materialist epistemology of science that divorces science from its appropriation by bourgeois ideologies of empiricism and idealism (Brassier “Science” 65). While he further turns to mathematics in *Theory of the Subject*, it is in *Being and Event* that mathematics becomes foundational with the statement “mathematics is ontology” (BE 4). Proceeding from this founding axiomatic statement, *Being and Event* develops its framework by pursuing the consequences of an ‘event’ in modern mathematics: Georg Cantor’s creation of set theory and theorization of the infinite in the 1870s. The crux of Cantor’s discovery was to show the uncountability of the set of real numbers – its inability to be put in a one-to-one correspondence with the set of natural numbers – which not only demonstrates there to be no Whole, but shows there to be infinite infinities of different sizes (Bhattacharyya “Cantor” 40). For Badiou, the implications of Cantor’s discovery amount to a de-sacralization of the infinite: where previously the infinite was typically identified in theological terms as divine and wholly other, “Cantor’s conception, in contrast, places the infinite on a rigorous and scientific basis, bringing it down to earth and stripping it of its divine associations” (Bhattacharyya “Cantor” 38). In other words, if the infinite is just another number (among many other infinities), then God is truly dead.

Cantor’s development of the ‘continuum hypothesis’ sought to mitigate the effects of his own discoveries by reducing the unknowable excess of the set of real numbers over the natural numbers. What Badiou finds significant about set theory is not simply the rupture of Cantor’s discoveries, but the long process of invention and formalization of its axiomatic system, including the Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatic system, with the axiom of Choice (ZFC). Most significant for *Being and Event* is Paul Cohen’s discovery in 1963 of the independence of CH from the main axioms of ZFC. The consequence is that, from within the rigorously determined framework of ZFC, the decision to accept the CH or its negation is *subjective*, opening up

distinct paths within thought. For Badiou, it is the historicized unfolding of set theory following the ‘Cantor event’ that provides a series of consequences of the infinite *for* modernity. As such, it is not the Cantor event by itself that is significant for Badiou but its ‘subject’: the progressive development and axiomatization of set theory, which imposes its own temporal ‘present’ in the world of mathematics.

Badiou uses theatre as a means of developing his account of the temporality of the event-subject connection. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, he undertakes a sustained meditation on theatre as a “material, corporeal, machinic assemblage” (RT 6) read in terms of the framework of *Being and Event*.<sup>4</sup> For Badiou, theatrical performance “makes an encounter, in the moment, of that which the text holds in eternal”, serving for the spectator “an elucidation of the present”, which functions as “an *instant of thought*” (RT 77). In other words, the material assemblage of theatre links eternity to the instant of performance, which operates as a ‘cut’ in time – a relation which serves as a demonstration of the temporality of truth procedures. As he writes elsewhere, theatre “*makes a truth out of the different possible forms of the collective relation to truths . . . it arranges the figures of the contemporary subject who falls prey to the truths of its time*” (“Theatre and Philosophy” 104). Theatre’s demonstration of the duration of performance as a ‘cut’ in time is therefore a site for thinking the ‘present’ of a subject’s fidelity to an event.

A key original contribution of this thesis is to expand Badiou’s articulation of the present beyond the apparatus of theatre through an engagement with spectatorship in the paradigmatically ‘contemporary’ art form of installation art. Boris Groys argues installation art to be the exemplary contemporary art form due to its topological determination: the material support of installation art is the space of installation itself (“The Topology of Contemporary Art” 76). This means that “an installation is by definition present, contemporary. An installation is a presentation of the present, a decision that takes place here and now” (77). For Fredric Jameson, the installation form is paradigmatic of contemporary art due to its mirroring of the art museum’s form of display (“The Aesthetics of Singularity” 109). As I examine in Chapter Two, for Jameson the temporal form of installation art is symptomatic of the ‘reduction to the present’ of postmodernity (106) as a result of installation art’s production of evental singularity (111).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this thesis, my reference to *Rhapsody for the Theatre* will be to its titular essay “Rhapsody for the Theatre” which forms its first chapter, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>5</sup> While this thesis is concerned with the contemporary rather than the postmodern, in Chapter Two I draw on Jameson in the context of wider discussions of anxieties of the present. In this thesis I follow Osborne’s argument for the contemporary as a displacement of the postmodern such that “if modernity is the temporal culture of capital (as Jameson discerned), within its current form, contemporaneity is the temporal structure that articulates the unity of global modernity” (PC 11).

My examination of the installation art practice of Ilya Kabakov in Chapter Four explores the implications for Badiou's framework of Kabakov's work, which I argue to articulate an 'anxiety' of the contemporary. I argue that Kabakov offers a means of re-thinking the separation between knowledge and truth in Badiou's framework and de-purifying his conception of the event.

In affirming truth as a category, Badiou simultaneously reasserts the relevance of philosophy for contemporary thought. Against discourses proclaiming the 'end' of philosophy alongside the end of 'grand narratives', Badiou proclaims philosophy's continuation in the form of "taking *one more step*" (MP 32). This is achieved by de-suturing philosophy from its 'conditions' of love, science, politics, and art: truths are produced in these conditions and both prior and external to philosophy. As Badiou puts it, "By itself the philosophical category of Truth is *empty*. It operates but presents nothing. Philosophy is not a production of truth, but an operation carried out on the basis of truths, one that disposes the 'there is' of truths and their epochal compossibility" (C 11). To rephrase this relation, we could say that philosophy *stages* truths and declares their contemporaneity. A key concern of this thesis is to trace the nature of a theatrical engagement throughout Badiou's thought; as I argue, his demarcation of philosophical discourse is linked to an essential 'dramatism', the nature of which I will introduce below. First, however, I will expand on the 'twisted' nature of Badiou's contemporaneity.

### **The Contemporary, the Modern, and the (Neo) Neo-Classical**

Exploring Badiou's relation to the contemporary appears incongruous in a number of ways. The foremost is the idiosyncratic nature of his definition of the contemporary. In a 2014 lecture on contemporary art, Badiou defines contemporary art as "the result – an immanent rupture – inside modernity itself. [A] rupture which sometimes constitutes an event at the very beginning of modernity" ("Contemporary Art: Considered Philosophically"). Badiou identifies modernity in painting as beginning with Monet and impressionism, and culminating in Cézanne; the contemporary sequence begins with constructivism, abstraction, and Duchamp's critique of the art/non-art boundary – hence the contemporary is an exploration of new possibilities of modernity. As he further states, "contemporaneity is a sort of creative exception inside a free and large definition of modernity". In the lecture Badiou discusses negative and affirmative modes of the contemporary, the materiality of installation art, and the bodily immediacy of performance, before proposing a politics of contemporary art as "a proposition for awaiting the future". Yet the illustrative example proposed is James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939), in which Joyce's use of language displaces English grammar and opens the possibility for a post-

national form of language, “like a beautiful waiting room for the political return of true internationalism”. Badiou rarely discusses contemporary art, and when he does so it is in abstraction; even in a lecture discussing installation art and performance, he ultimately retreats to a modernist literary canon.

This tendency is further evident in the polemical ‘Affirmationist Manifesto’ for art ([2003/2004] 2006) in which he denounces what he argues to be the “twin” artistic gestures of Western “empire”: a form of *l’art pompier*, and the “multiform desolation of vast sections of contemporary art”, which he characterizes as “romantic formalism” (“Third Sketch of a Manifesto” 138). The manifesto contains a number of maxims for forging a new understanding of art for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which ends with the stark proclamations: “We must be relentless in acting as our own censors” and “It is better to do nothing than to work formally toward making visible what the West declares to exist” (148). It is significant that a manifesto calling for the artistic affirmation of “monumental construction, projects, the creative force of the weak, the overthrow of established powers” ends in a censorious gesture (133). Affirmationism is evident in the “great” artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who aimed “to free art from the hold of romantic expressiveness and to endow it with its necessary *coldness*” (140). Badiou proposes to name the affirmationists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “who by themselves, by their acts, opened out entire configurations, in their principle as well as in their implementation” (141). What follows is a rhapsodic list of great – dead – “affirmationist” artists – a list which is almost entirely white, male, Euro-centric and modernist.<sup>6</sup> The ‘immanent split’ of contemporary art for Badiou appears to be primarily an attempt to overcome Romanticism from within modernism.

Badiou’s writing on art demonstrates what Peter Osborne has observed to be philosophy’s failure to engage with contemporary art. Despite continental philosophy’s revival of questions linking art and politics, it “has as yet failed to achieve a convincing critical-theoretical purchase on *contemporary art*”; while philosophical engagements with art have interrogated art’s subjective, ontological or aesthetic dimensions, these discourses remain confined largely within the field of “the art of the past” (*Anywhere or Not At All*, 8). As a result, “There has been an inability to grasp contemporary art in its contemporaneity and hence its decisive difference from art of the past” due to both “a continuing conflation of ‘art’ and ‘aesthetic’” and “an inability to think the concept of art at once philosophically and historically with any kind of futurity” (8).

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<sup>6</sup> The list is: Pessoa, Picasso, Schönberg, Brecht, Zadkine, Chaplin, Faulkner, Cunningham, Stevens, Mandelstam, Celan, Berg, Bartok, Messiaen, Webern, Malevitch, Mondrian, Kupka, Rothko, Kadinsky, Pollock, Pirandello, Claudel, Richier, Moore, Brancusi, Woolf, Mansfield, Beckett, Malraux, Murnau, Welles (“Third Sketch...” 141-142).



Hence where Badiou's philosophy proclaims to think the contemporary truth-procedures of its conditions, his project is marked by a *failed encounter* with contemporary art. One of the outcomes of this thesis is to chart the possible consequences of such an encounter for Badiou's project. I do so by reading Badiou in light of the contemporary, by expanding his account of the present via an engagement with installation art, and through my in-depth examination of the installation works of Ilya Kabakov. I demonstrate that a re-conditioning of Badiou's project via contemporary art offers the possibility of de-purifying his articulation of truth and the hierarchical privileging of philosophy in his work.

As I will explore in Chapter Three, the incongruity of Badiou's relation to the contemporary is furthermore the result of his 'inaesthetic' framework of philosophy's relation to art, as outlined in *Handbook of Inaesthetics* ([1998] 2005). By opting for the prefix 'in' of *inaesthetics*, Badiou seeks to distinguish his approach from aesthetics – as he writes in *Metapolitics* ([1998] 2005), this is the result of an attempt to de-objectify philosophy's relation to its conditions. Rather than aesthetics as 'philosophy of art', or political philosophy as 'philosophy of politics' Badiou proposes 'inaesthetics' and 'metapolitics' respectively "in order to indicate the twisted relation of the condition/evaluation pairing" and "deny oneself the temptation to rely on the reflection/object relation" (M xxxiii). Hence 'inaesthetics' designates a relation between philosophy and art that attempts to think the "intra-philosophical effects" of truths immanently produced within art (HI epigraph). As we will see, Badiou's attempt at de-objectifying the relation between philosophy and its conditions arguably results in a re-inscription of the dominance of philosophical discourse whereby philosophy takes from art only what it is capable of 'subtracting'.

In a major essay critiquing Badiou's inaesthetic framework, Jacques Rancière places Badiou within an anti-aesthetic consensus that curtails the political capacity of art's aesthetic dimension. For Rancière, Badiou's 'system' of the arts, which privileges poetry and theatre, and his essentializing demarcation of the arts, reproduces a form of Greenbergian medium specificity which polices the boundary between art and non-art. As Rancière writes, "Badiou's undoubted modernism is a twisted modernism. The supposedly unitary and modern essence of art 'as it is in itself' is twisted, and even twisted twice over by Badiou's core philosophical project, by what could be called his Ultra-Platonism, as encapsulated in the notion of a Platonism of the multiple" ("Badiou: Aesthetics, Inaesthetics, Anti-Aesthetics 222). That is, Badiou demarcates the arts not according to the specificity of medium – as we will see, he is starkly indifferent to the materiality of the work – but rather a specificity of the *Idea*. Rancière's characterization of

Badiou's 'twisted' modernism is a key motivation of this thesis, which aims to push this relation further via a consideration of the paradoxes and limits of his framework via the contemporary. The nature of Badiou's relation to the contemporary is therefore 'twisted' by his twisted modernism, *and* the nature of his neo-classicism, as I explore below.

The question of Badiou's modernism demands further consideration. In *A Singular Modernity*, Jameson lists a series of broad features of the modern that postmodernity sought to overturn: asceticism; phallogentrism; authoritarianism; the aesthetic teleology of the new; the preference for the minimal; the foregrounding of genius, and the disdain for audience pleasure or entertainment (1). Most of these features could be identified both in Badiou's writing and in his self-styling as a 'great' philosopher. Yet Jameson identifies Deleuze, alongside Lyotard, as a "quintessential modernist, passionately committed to the eruption of the genuinely, the radically, and, dare one even say, the authentically New" (4). For Jean-Jacques Lecercle, Jameson's silence on Badiou here is because Badiou is "emphatically not a modernist philosopher" due to, primarily, his stark indifference to language but also his avoidance of self-reflexivity, his preference for philosophical system over conceptual montage, his indifference to ambiguity, and his assertion of the centrality of the subject as opposed to the subject's disintegration (*Badiou and Deleuze Read Literature* 129-130). Beyond style, however, Badiou can be identified as a modernist in the sense of what Jameson terms the 'ideology' of modernism, characterized by the primacy of the autonomy of the aesthetic (*A Singular Modernity* 161). As Jameson argues, the autonomy of the aesthetic is not secured by a distinction of the aesthetic from life, but by a distinction *within* the aesthetic between art and culture inasmuch as culture identifies the aesthetic with daily life (176-177). The result is that "High literature and high art mean aesthetic minus culture, the aesthetic field radically cleansed and purified of culture (which mainly stands for mass culture)" (179). It is this distinction which gains expression in the idea of the 'canon' – a key and perhaps defining feature of Badiou's artistic (as well as political and mathematical) engagements, as evidenced by his list of 'affirmationist' artists above. As we will see, Badiou's distinction between art and culture is an outcome of his process of 'subtracting' art from its relationality – a consequence of which is the subtraction of the spectator.

A key frame through which I consider Badiou's 'twisted' modernism – and consider the possibility of his twisted contemporaneity – is Osborne's identification of *philosophical* modernism as the time-determination of the new. As Osborne argues, modernism is rarely treated as a philosophical concept in itself, instead typically being engaged as a concept produced within art criticism ("Modernism and Philosophy" 388). As an historical concept the

modern is encapsulated as “a temporal structure of negation (negation of the past within the present by the new), which, in splitting the present from within (into the ‘old’ and the ‘new’) makes ‘modern’ an inherently subjective, value-laden and critical term” (390). In splitting the present by attending to the new, the modern simultaneously antiquates the old, coming to “negate the latter’s claim to be a part of the ‘living’ present itself” (390). The modern is therefore tied to the subject as the agency tasked with the splitting of the present.

Modernism, furthermore, draws upon the logic of the new as the negation of the old, linking the German sense of *Neuzeit*, or “new time” – “the *self-transcending* temporality of an investment in the new that opposes itself to tradition in general” – and Baudelaire’s articulation of *modernité* in a phenomenological sense as the affirmation of the fleetingly new (“Modernism and Philosophy” 391).<sup>7</sup> This means that modernism is “a *collective affirmation of the modern as such*”, which is to say “an affirmation of the *temporality* of the modern: an affirmation of a specific temporal negation, *the time-determination of the new*” (391).<sup>8</sup> The time-determination of the new is evident in both a transcendental sense as “the performative temporal logic of negation that constitutes the structure of modernism in general” (393), and in an empirical historical sense “of having been the modernism of its day” (393). Beyond the *empirical* question of Badiou’s modernist canon – leaving aside Jameson’s observations of the inherent modernism of the canon as such – considerations of Badiou’s modernism (or contemporaneity) must attend to the manner by which his work draws on the time-determination of the new and temporal negation.

Despite Badiou’s emphasis on the new as resulting from the absolute rupture of the event, enacted by the intervention of a subject, there are important ways in which his framework complicates a straightforward identification with modernism’s affirmation of the time-determination of the new. The first reason is Badiou’s lack of a generalized concept of Time: as I discuss in Chapter Two, time for Badiou is secondary and singular to the unfolding of the consequences of an event. A further consequence of this is that Badiou’s framework necessarily articulates a notion of temporal multiplicity – a plurality of ‘presents’ specific to heterogenous truth procedures – which places him alongside considerations of temporal multiplicity within the

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<sup>7</sup> As Baudelaire defines it, modernity is in a sense undefinable and effervescent, emerging as “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent” expressed in the art or fashion of a period (“The Painter of Modern Life” 403).

<sup>8</sup> Jameson’s own proposal for a working definition of modernity and modernism is: “modernity [i]s the new historical situation, modernization [i]s the process whereby we get there, and modernism [i]s a reaction to that situation and that process alike, a reaction that can be aesthetic and philosophico-ideological” (*A Singular Modernity* 99).

contemporary, as Chapter One discusses. Rather than the time-determination of the new, Badiou's framework articulates a curious inversion that could be expressed as the subjective determination of time, inasmuch as time for Badiou is indexed to the subject's process of fidelity, in turn topologically indexed to worlds of appearance; time is an outcome of a subject's encounter with the topology of a world. In Chapter Two I argue, via Badiou's concept of saturation, that this results in a means of thinking the 'temporal consistency' of a present in terms of the subject-body.

The second key feature of Badiou's departure from the temporal logic of the modern is his attempt to move beyond the two broad traditions of modernism that Osborne identifies in philosophy: the Hegelian tradition of the new as dialectical negation, and the Nietzschean tradition of the new as the affirmation of being (398). Badiou poses subtraction against these traditions as I outline more fully below – in *The Century*, Badiou distinguishes subtraction from the destructive 'passion for the real' within 20<sup>th</sup> century forms of thought, which aims to found the new as negation of the old within an absolute beginning. Furthermore, as I outline in Chapter Four, Badiou's concepts of forcing and the generic hold the new to be suspended *alongside* – and therefore *co-present* with – the old within the present as a 'generic extension', thereby reflecting the contemporary as a regulative division "between the present and the past (the 'non-contemporaneous') within the present" (Osborne PC 37). Rather than an absolute split between the old and the new – or epistemologically, knowledge and truth – rendered by the interruption of the event, I argue that Kabakov's installation practice allows for a thinking of the relation between these registers in spatial terms of displacement. Rather than splitting the present, the subject's fidelity undertakes a process of investigation on the basis of the ineliminable indistinction between truth and knowledge mediated via a retroactive fiction of the event.

Rancière's designation of Badiou's twisted modernism takes his Platonism as the source of the distortion – hence Badiou's modernism is twisted by a form of classicism. For Peter Osborne, Badiou – alongside Deleuze – enacts a "*neo-classical* modernism" inasmuch as both philosophers avoid the question of the self-sufficiency of philosophical discourse ("Modernism and Philosophy" 409). As he argues in a review of *Being and Event*, Badiou's project can be termed "*hyper-philosophical*" in that it "reinvests the field of Theory with the idea of philosophy" ("Neo-Classic" 20). It is Badiou's avoidance of a Marxist critique of philosophy that means *Being and Event* "is a return to a classical conception of philosophy, with a vengeance" (20). Osborne argues *Being and Event* to be "a work – perhaps *the* great work – of philosophical neoclassicism. As such, at the level of philosophical form, it surpasses its

ambivalent predecessor, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, in the rigour of its reactionary modernism" (19). As I will cover in more detail in Chapter One, a key part of Osborne's criticisms centres upon the perceived authoritarian nature of Badiou's use of mathematics, and the apparent absolute novelty of the event. It is primarily Badiou's use of mathematics that is the source of his classicism: "it is precisely the idea that *philosophy* is to be pursued, systematically, through a thinking of mathematics that is Badiou's philosophy's primary classical, rationalist, and idealist trait – its return to Plato, however modern the maths" (27). Furthermore, Badiou's own definition of neo-classicism as a form of 'academicization' fails to grasp neo-classicism's reaction against *modernity* – a reaction *against* the new, rather than a simple return to the past.<sup>9</sup> This means that "in historicist terms, Badiou's neo-classicism is a neo-neo classicism, a *return* to neo-classicism, or neo-classicism squared" (27).<sup>10</sup> Not only is Badiou a twisted modernist, but his neo-neo classicism is, similarly, a twisted neo-classicism.

### **Subtraction:**

Badiou's use of mathematics to construct his ontological framework results in what he terms a 'subtractive' ontology. Subtraction is at once one of the most central concepts of Badiou's framework and one of the most elusive: not only does subtraction refer to Badiou's ontology, but it also refers to philosophy's relation to its conditions and the key features of the subjective process. As such, subtraction is present at all levels of Badiou's thought. As Peter Hallward outlines, Badiou's subtractive ontology is contrasted to ontologies of presence, "as something present and substantial, something accessible to a sort of direct experience or articulation (as it is, in different ways, for the pre-Socratics, Aristotle, Leibniz or Deleuze, for instance)" (Hallward, "Introduction: Consequences of Abstraction" *Think Again* 4). This means that "ontology does not speak being or participate in its revelation; it articulates, on the basis of a conceptual framework indifferent to poetry or intuition, the precise way in which being is withdrawn or subtracted from articulation" (5). Put simply, what mathematics provides for Badiou is a thinking of being as non-presented. As Hallward notes, this is because for set theory,

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<sup>9</sup> This point misreads Badiou's identification of neo-classicism or 'academicization' as a reactionary subjective process, which proceeds specifically within and *against* the new: "In order to resist the call of the new, it is still necessary to create arguments of resistance appropriate to the novelty itself. . . every reactive disposition is a contemporary of the present to which it reacts" (LW 54). However, this is complicated by Badiou's use of the term 'neo-classicism' elsewhere as a description of the 'resurrective' form of the faithful subject (LW 78). The result is that there are specifically reactive neo-classicisms and 'faithful' neo-classicisms.

<sup>10</sup> Badiou's neo-neo classicism is perhaps most literally demonstrated in his dramatic practice: his comedy *Ahmed le subtil*, for example, is based on a transposition of Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* to the setting of contemporary France, thus 'making new' a neoclassical comedy.

“any consideration of something as one thing, must be thought as the *result* of an operation, the operation that treats or counts something as one” (Badiou and Hallward “Beyond Formalisation” 112-113). Set theory therefore encodes a degree of self-referentiality: it thinks its own performance in thought. This is encapsulated by the ‘empty’ or ‘void’ set, which is a fundamental feature of set theory appearing in every set as a subset. Written  $\{\emptyset\}$ , the empty set – which contains no elements – presents pure inconsistent multiplicity.

Moreover, for Badiou, ‘subtraction’ is also a mode of relating to the new in contrast to forms of dialectical negation. In *The Century* ([2005] 2007), Badiou distinguishes between ‘destructive’ and ‘subtractive’ modes of what he terms the “passion for the real”, evident in forms of thought throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century that conceived the real as an absolute beginning (TC 32).<sup>11</sup> The ‘destructive’ mode attempts to grasp the real through destruction of appearance, exemplified by the violence of political Terror; the subtractive mode instead conceives the real as a *relation* between ground and form, exemplified by Malevich’s supremacist painting *White on White* (1918), or Mallarmé’s poetry (TC 55-56). Subtraction is in this instance “the staging of a minimal, albeit absolute, difference; the difference between the place and what takes place in the place, the difference between place and taking-place” (TC 56). In both instances (destruction and subtraction), the passion for the real “is always the passion for the new” (56). For the destructive mode, the new is the negation of the old via “a new act, a ‘new birth’”, while subtraction is instead the act of “invent[ing] content at the very place of the minimal difference, where there is almost nothing” (57). Subtraction invents the new as a difference between place and taking-place, enabled by the excess of the void.

Subtraction is therefore an attempt to think the new beyond the dialectical, or beyond what Osborne term’s the modern’s self-absolutizing tendency of the “valorization of the present *as new* over the past, thereby splitting the present itself from within and *antiquating* those aspects of the present that are not new” (PC 29).<sup>12</sup> As Badiou states in an interview,

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<sup>11</sup> Published in French as *Le Siècle*, *The Century* is developed from a series of seminars presented by Badiou from 1998-2000. It therefore is developed in close succession to other key works published in this period: *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (1998); *Metapolitics* (1998) and *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology* (1998). It is during this period that Badiou begins working toward *Logics of Worlds* (2006).

<sup>12</sup> This tendency is self-absolutizing for Osborne inasmuch as it generalizes the process of antiquation: the repetition of the transcending of the old institutes the new as its own tradition, hence “instituting a new temporal structure of differentiated repetition” (29). For Badiou, it is precisely this tendency of repetition that leads to the violence of the passion for the real as a desire for an *absolute* beginning: “If it really is a matter of founding a new world, then the price paid by the old world, even in the number of deaths or the quantity of suffering, becomes a relatively secondary question” (“Beyond Formalisation” 115).

I call ‘subtraction’ that which, from within the previous sequence itself, as early as the start of the twentieth century, presents itself as a possible alternative path that differs from the dominant [i.e., destructive] one. It’s not just an idea that comes ‘after’ antagonism and revolution. It’s an idea that is dialectically articulated with those of antagonism, of the simplifying formalisation, of the absolute advent of the new, etc. (“Beyond Formalisation” 119)

In this sense, subtraction is the ‘immanent rupture’ within modernity that Badiou identifies as the contemporary, providing an account of the new beyond the logic of negation. As I argue in Chapter Three, what Badiou terms ‘materialist formalization’ in *The Century* is an account of the *duration* of the new, or its subjective unfolding – a precursor to what he terms the ‘materialist dialectic’ in *Logics of Worlds*. Materialist formalization is therefore the counterpart of subtraction, articulated not via Mallarmé or Malevich, but through a short discussion of the infinite and contemporary (post-1960s) art’s linking of the ‘act’ to form within installation art and happenings. Hence where *Being and Event* articulates subtraction against a loosely ‘modernist’ frame of reference via set theory and Mallarmé, in *Logics of Worlds* subtraction as the materialist dialectic becomes ‘contemporary’, articulated in opposition to the postmodern and through an engagement with category theory mathematics. That is, where Badiou’s account of subtraction appears as a twisted modernism, his account of the materialist dialectic is, in part, a form of twisted contemporaneity. An important contribution of this thesis is to explicate and examine Badiou’s account of subtraction in light of the contemporary.

### **The Subject:**

As formalised in *Being and Event*, for Badiou “A subject is not a substance” (391). This is because “If the word substance has any meaning it is that of designating a multiple counted as one in a situation” (391), therefore providing no means of the break from a situation. As Besana puts it, “Against any materialist reduction, a subject cannot be identified with the human animal. And against sociological reduction, it cannot be identified with the ‘social individual’, with an individual component of organization of the collectivity (e.g. the subject of the state, or the subject to power)” (“Subject” 38). As Badiou states in an interview, “I name the subject not the individual but what the individual is capable of” (“A Discussion” 4). This means that the subject “is identified not by the *place* that it occupies in the situation (as for an object) *vis-à-vis* the determinations of its state, but by a set of *actions* that it performs, and that depend strictly upon something that *happens*, that is in excess over the situation” (Besana “Subject” 40). This means that the subject is a *formal* process – it “is not a result – any more than it is an origin. It is the

*local* status of a procedure, a configuration in excess of the situation” (BE 392). The subject, then, is an unfolding of form.

In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou writes of defending the category of the subject from attacks by both the right and the left. On the right the subject is incorporated into Heideggerian “metaphysical nihilism”, while on the left, through Althusser, the subject is reduced to “mere ideological operator” through structural interpellation (LW 522). Badiou sees Lacan’s ‘antiphilosophical’ account of the subject as the means to rescue the subject from both attacks (LW 523). Where *Being and Event* outlines a minimalist account of the ontological *possibility* of the subject, in *Logics of Worlds* the subject is a process by which truths *appear* in a world. Within the framework of *Logics of Worlds*, which I cover in Chapter One, the subject is the “active (or corporeal, or organic) bearer of the dialectical overcoming of simple materialism” (LW 45). Thus the ‘materialist dialectic’ Badiou develops in *Logics of Worlds* is an account of the manner by which the subject *exceeds* a purely materialist identification with substance, while at the same time resisting transcendence. As I outline in Chapter Three, the articulation of materialist formalism and the materialist dialectic is fundamentally informed by Badiou’s ‘inaesthetic’ discussion of the triplet of dance, theatre and cinema.

The ‘objectless’ subject Badiou proposes is contrasted to what he presents as the three main discourses of the subject. These are the phenomenological subject as “a register of experience” (LW 47), the neo-Kantian moral constitution of the subject as bound to the imperative of recognition of the other, and the Marxist or Althusserian subject as interpellated by the State (LW 48). These determinations fall short of the requirements of the subject: “in the phenomenological case, the subject is too immediate; in the ethical case, it is too corporeal (or ‘biopolitical’); and in the ideological case, it is too formal” (48). We can see, therefore, that the key to the subjective process is that it breaks with what exists, that it opens a ‘hole’ in knowledge and does so through the fragile process of subtraction. It is through this process of subtraction that the subject inaugurates its own ‘diagonal’ temporality.

### **Theatre, Theatricality, Dramatism:**

Badiou’s engagement with the theatre is a key thread throughout my examination of his relation to the contemporary. As outlined above, in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou outlines the temporality of truths through the metaphor of theatrical performance. A further element of his theatrical engagement of significance for this thesis is his framing of the relation between theatre and philosophical discourse. As we have seen, for Osborne the source of Badiou’s troubling



neo-classicism is the nature of his revival of philosophy on the basis of a classical use of mathematics. A key finding of Chapter One will be to identify the theatrical or *dramatic* nature of Badiou's presentation of philosophical discourse, and the relation between this dramatization and the mathematical axiom. Hence philosophy's 'subtractive' relation to contemporary truths amounts to staging truths in thought: the fictive unity philosophy articulates is fundamentally conditioned by theatre.

Badiou's theatrical engagement is extensive and has received considerable scholarly attention. Martin Puchner locates Badiou's theatrical engagement within two paradigms of philosophical appropriation of theatre: the use of theatre as a model for thinking representation, such as in Plato's metaphor of the cave in the *Republic*; and philosophical *dramatism* in which philosophy itself is theatrical as subjective mobilization or 'act', embodied in Plato's Socratic dialogues ("The Theatre of Alain Badiou" 256-257). Badiou's use of theatre-as-model is evident in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, in which Badiou uses the 'assemblage' of the theatre – encompassing the stage, text, director, actors, décor, costumes and audience (RT 11) – as a means of illustrating the conceptual framework developed in *Being and Event* such that "Theatre is the proof, for any real and present state, of the link between being and truth" (RT 87). Badiou's 'dramatism' is evident not only in his own use of dialogues between "The Empiricist" and "Me" within *Rhapsody*, but at a more fundamental level in his framing of philosophical discourse. Writing of Deleuze and Guattari's own discussion of 'conceptual personae' in *What is Philosophy*, Badiou states "For me, philosophical theatricality designates that the essence of philosophy (the seizing 'in Truth') is an act" (C 292). As Puchner observes, for Badiou, "Since philosophical truth has the character of the event, it is theatre, the most eventful of the arts, that plays a central role in its formulation" (263). In a further twist of this relation, one of Badiou's own comedies, *Ahmed the Philosopher: Thirty-Four Short Plays for Children & Everyone Else* (written between 1994-1996), features as its titular character an Algerian migrant to the French *banlieues* who 'philosophizes' short scenes on concepts from 'The Event' to 'Mathematics'.

For Fred Dalmaso, Badiou's engagement with the theatre results in a theory of collective political subjectivity built on the anonymity of (theatrical and political) crowds. For Dalmaso, "Against a theatre of presence, Badiou advocates a Theatre of disappearance where performers withdraw rather than present themselves to mark the possibility of the passage of a disappeared truth" ("Badiou's Spectator-Subject" 82). Theatrical spectatorship, in this sense, consists of an experience of incorporation into an anonymous subjective body constituted by the theatrical event (83). As Simon Bayly observes, Badiou's use of theatre as a model of political

subjectivization places him alongside Jacques Rancière and Paolo Virno such that all three thinkers use theatre as a means of thinking political subjectivity as multitude beyond communitarian notions of a ‘public’. What matters for both Rancière and Badiou is theatre’s power of distancing, chance, effervescence and collective anonymity which disrupts thinking of the public as immediate or self-identical (“Theatre and the Public” 22). Yet while for Badiou theatre serves as a means of thinking the becoming-subject of spectators, his elitist canon of playwrights and directors leaves his framework “curiously cauterized by a desire for continuity with the familiarity of an institutionalized Parisian theatrical tradition and an orthodox notion of aesthetic subjectivization” (24). From a theatre-studies perspective, Janelle Reinelt argues Badiou’s account of theatrical performance as the construction of an effervescent collective present offers the means of thinking the political efficacy of theatre beyond communitarian framings (“Theatre and Politics” 90). Nonetheless, she similarly points to Badiou’s restrictive canon of ‘great’ works and his language of the purity of the event, which overlooks “the body, the impure, the always concrete gestures of performers *en situ* [sic]. The theatre is always particular, always for the moment, always embodied, always corrupt” (“Theatre and Politics” 88). Hence where Badiou considers theatre to demonstrate the “putting-into-bodies of the Idea” (RT 73), his focus nonetheless remains overly purified.

This thesis takes Badiou’s theatrical engagement in two directions. In Chapter One I connect Badiou’s account of philosophical discourse in light of the ‘dramatism’ identified by Puchner. Not only is philosophy an ‘act’, but Badiou’s characterization of philosophy in dialectical relation to both sophistry and poetry functions to dramatize the ‘figures’ of the ‘Philosopher’, the ‘Sophist’, and the ‘Poet’. I suggest that the fourth, unannounced term connecting all three personae is that of the Spectator. In Chapter Three I develop the account of the ‘figure’ of the Spectator through a discussion of relational aesthetics and Rancière’s linking of spectatorship to pedagogy. I use the ‘figure’ of the Spectator as a framework to think audience relation in general via Michael Fried’s account of theatricality in “Art and Objecthood”. I argue that Badiou’s inaesthetic seizure of art operates via a systematic exclusion of the Spectator, also understood as a ‘student’ or non-philosopher. An important contribution of this thesis is to demonstrate the significance of the figure of the Spectator as a site for responding to the overbearing presence of the ‘Philosopher’ in Badiou’s framework.

My second treatment of Badiou’s theatrical engagement proceeds from his use of theatre as a ‘model’ of the temporality of the present, or the subjective relation to truths. A further original contribution of this thesis is to expand Badiou’s account of the present beyond the theatre

through a consideration of the spectatorship of installation art. Badiou's account of theatre links the present to the subjective form of the 'Crowd', or the anonymous power of the gathered audience. In my consideration of installation art, I investigate the viewership of the installation form within the art museum under the term 'multitude'. As Osborne notes, the geopolitically disjunctive nature of the contemporary leads to a transformation of the subject of modernity: "The subject of modernity (and there is ultimately a singular one) has a 'collective' dialectical unity; the equally speculative, but differently unitary, subject of the contemporary has a 'distributive' unity" (ANA 25). Exploring the audience relations of installation art therefore offers a means of thinking Badiou's framework beyond the 'collective unity' of the theatre audience and in light of contemporary forms of distributed subjectivity.

## **Overview of Chapters**

In Chapter One I frame the core features of Badiou's systematic project in light of discourses of the contemporary and contemporary art. I argue that Badiou's own definition of contemporary art is at odds with key periodizations of the contemporary, demonstrating a failure to meaningfully encounter contemporary art in its post-1960s periodization – referred to by Osborne as its 'postconceptual' lineage. I identify within discourses of the contemporary accounts which frame the present in terms of temporal homogeneity or the 'empiricism of now', resulting in what commentators have called the 'crisis of futurity'. I loosely group these accounts under the term 'presentism', which I return to in the second chapter. Against 'presentist' accounts of the contemporary, several critics have sought to reconsider the contemporary in terms of temporal multiplicity in order to challenge implicitly neoliberal assumptions regarding the depoliticization of the present. In my overview of Badiou's project, I argue that his concept of 'compossibility' can be read in light of the contemporary, operating as a space in thought for thinking a plurality of contemporary truths. Moreover, my overview of *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* argues for a shift in Badiou's work toward a more contemporary frame of reference, encapsulated by Badiou's turn to category theory in the latter work, and his diagnosis of 'democratic materialism'. Finally, I examine the nature of Badiou's presentation of philosophical discourse in relation to its conditions. Functioning as the 'outside' of philosophy, the conditions 'call forth' philosophy which acts as a void or subtracted space of their unity. I argue this relation should be read in terms of his 'dramatism', encapsulated in the identification of philosophy with the 'act'. I argue that a key element of his dramatism is the presentation of philosophical discourse in terms of the 'figures' of the 'Philosopher', the 'Poet', and the 'Sophist' – I further argue for the silent presence of a fourth figure, the 'Spectator'.

Attention to Badiou's dramatism reveals philosophical discourse to be a form of 'meta-theatre', undoing the apparent domination of mathematics within his project.

In Chapter Two, I consider Badiou's articulation of the present as the temporality of subjective fidelity against accounts of 'presentism' and the 'reduction to the present'. A key contribution of this chapter is to demonstrate the significance of Badiou's under-considered concept of 'saturation' for these debates. I begin with an analysis of immersive installation works by Anish Kapoor and Olafur Eliasson which produce effects of sensory disorientation and overload in viewers, linking them to Jameson's analysis of installation art as the production of evental singularity severed from relation to universalizable form. For Jameson, the installation form therefore reflects a reduction to the present or reduction to the body emblematic of postmodernity. Other commentators such as Rosalind Krauss argue that the viewing experience of installation art within the art institution is reflective of an experience of subjective fragmentation and de-realization. My articulation of Badiou's account of the present begins with his discussion of temporality and theatrical performance in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. Badiou links the theatrical present to the 'Crowd', or the real of the audience as an anonymous gathering. I argue that the theatrical present for Badiou therefore demonstrates the lived temporality of a subject's fidelity.

Taking Badiou's discussion of the present beyond the theatre, I examine the dispersed viewership of the art museum, considered in terms of 'multitude'. Hito Steyerl and Boris Groys argue that the attentional demands of art museum viewership opens the possibility of the 'betrayal' of the installation. I argue that this offers the means of thinking the subjective present in terms of the possibility of the 'betrayal' of a fidelity. I illustrate Badiou's critique of the 'destructive' passion for the real in *The Century*, which conceives of the present as a pure or absolute beginning, via a short discussion of the avant-garde immersive theatre practice of The Living Theatre. Finally, I detail Badiou's conception of 'saturation' and the distinction between 'tensed' and 'atonic' worlds. As an under-examined concept in Badiou's framework, saturation designates the closure of a subjective process in terms of subjective exhaustion or impasse. I detail Badiou's 'theory of points' through discussion of a participatory theatre performance work by British artist Jamal Harewood, arguing that Badiou's distinction between 'atonic' and 'tensed' worlds offers a topological framework for thinking both the homogeneity and reduction to the body of 'presentism', and the 'thickened present'. In light of the framework outlined in the chapter, I argue for an understanding of saturation as a topological means of thinking the temporal consistency of a present.

In Chapter Three, I examine Badiou's 'inaesthetic' framework of art in light of criticisms concerning its modernist conservatism. I do so from the perspective of spectatorship and the 'figure' of the Spectator, first raised in Chapter One. I first develop an account of the 'Spectator' via a detour into critical debates concerning the spectatorship of participatory and 'relational' artforms. The critical framing of participatory art locates the artwork's political or social efficacy in the immediate production of spectator relations to ethical or collaborative ends. Critics such as Bishop and Rancière argue that the overdetermination of audience effect by the works erases the spectator's capacity for aesthetic sense-making. I place Rancière's account of the politics of spectatorship – which Rancière anchors in 'dissensus', or the conflict between sense and sense – in relation to Badiou's own account of spectatorship in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. While there are a number of similarities between the two frameworks, Badiou's account of spectatorship takes the 'Spectator' in a more passive vein to be a double of the philosopher. I further develop my account of the Spectator via a discussion of Michael Fried's account of theatricality and minimalist art in "Art and Objecthood", and Brian O'Doherty's discussion of the disembodied 'Eye' and the embodied 'Spectator' as alternative modes of viewership interpellated by the art gallery space.

With these distinctions in mind, I outline Badiou's *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. I argue that Badiou's 'inaesthetic' mode of philosophical reception of the artwork displaces the embodied 'Spectator' in favour of the philosophical 'Eye'. Badiou's inaesthetics designates a philosophical seizure of the artwork which 'freezes' the work from its reception, as evident in his philosophical 'translation' of poetry into prose in order to 'fix' the poem's singular meaning. However, I suggest that despite Badiou's apparent wish to subtract the spectator and audience reception from the work of art, his reading of Mallarmé's "A Throw of The Dice" in *Being and Event* reads the poem as essentially dramatic. As a result, the Spectator remains as an un-subtractable presence forming an implicit source of the 'undecideable' onto which philosophical decision intervenes. Finally, I examine the nature of Badiou's inaesthetic linking of dance, theatre, and cinema. I argue that rather than a strictly essentializing demarcation of the art forms, Badiou's account instead forms a dialectical account of theatre as 'between' dance and cinema. This is evident in Badiou's development of 'materialist formalization' in *The Century*, which prefigures the materialist dialectic of *Logics of Worlds*. Here Badiou extracts an account of the artwork's link to form via a discussion of contemporary art and Hegel. The account therefore demonstrates a thinking of 'subtractive' theatricality as a dialectical mediation of the immanence of performance and transcendence of the image.

In Chapter Four I stage an encounter between Badiou and the installation art of former Moscow Conceptualist artist Ilya Kabakov, which I argue provides a means of re-articulating the division between knowledge and truth in Badiou's framework. In distinguishing between knowledge and truth Badiou affirms the role of the subject's fidelity in subtracting truth from the 'constructivist' domination of knowledge; the subject's fidelity proceeds in a manner 'indiscernible' to knowledge and the state. I examine this framework from the perspective of education. Despite his deep Platonic engagement, Badiou has relatively little to say concerning education; in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, he states that "the only education is an education *by* truths" (HI 14). I argue that in order to avoid a miraculous conception of the event and a voluntarist gap between non-committed observer and committed subject of truth, it is vital that an account of education be separated from simple identification *with* the subjective process. I argue that examining Badiou's concepts of forcing, the generic, and future anterior can offer a framework for thinking education as a 'pre-subjective' labour undertaken in the absence of an event. Attention to these concepts addresses the disjunction between truth and knowledge in Badiou's framework, revealing truth to be *dispersed within* knowledge; rather than emerging from the overturning of a situation, the new is therefore co-temporal with the past within the present.

I argue that Kabakov's 'total' installation practice offers a means of thinking Badiou's framework by providing an articulation of the contemporary as 'displacement'. Kabakov's art is profoundly shaped by his status as an 'unofficial' artist within the Soviet Union prior to his move to the US. His works, such as *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment* (1985), *Three Nights* (1989), and *Labyrinth (My Mother's Album)* (1990) stage miraculous occurrences within the everyday, often featuring Soviet communal apartments. I argue that Kabakov's juxtaposition of the mundane and the miraculous, and his meditation on garbage, junk, and waste, offers a means of rethinking the relation between the event and knowledge in Badiou's framework by demonstrating the slippage between multiple epistemological registers. Osborne argues that Kabakov's work retroactively fictionalizes Soviet history and thereby subsumes it within the contemporary (PC). I argue that Kabakov's practice demonstrates an 'anxiety' of the contemporary encapsulated in the fear of art-objects being reduced to 'junk' by the reception of the future. Hence Kabakov's work allows for a thinking of the 'displacement' of multiple frames of knowledge within Badiou's framework, and thereby offers a site for the further development of a Badiouian account of education.

The general logic and scope of the thesis is therefore to articulate Badiou's framework in light of the contemporary (Chapter One), expand Badiou's account of the present in relation to

presentism and installation art (Chapter Two), critique the limits of his inaesthetics in light of his twisted modernism (Chapter Three), and to explore the consequences of an encounter between Badiou and contemporary art via the installation art of Ilya Kabakov (Chapter Four). The outcome of this thesis will be to chart the possibility of a Badiou ‘made contemporary’, and to probe the implications this might have for Badiou’s framework. I show that not only is an encounter between Badiou and contemporary art possible, but that such an encounter might help to transform some of the limits and difficulties of his project – most importantly, the neoclassical domination of the figure of the ‘Philosopher’ throughout. Hence the key contribution of this thesis is not only to read Badiou in light of the contemporary, but to suggest avenues for re-modelling his project *by* the contemporary.

As evident from this introduction, the scope of this thesis is largely interdisciplinary, spanning (to different degrees) Badiou scholarship, philosophy, art criticism, critical theory, and theatre and performance studies. Yet given the broad range of scope it is also important to note the limitations. The motivation of this research originated in an attempt to place Badiou’s writing on theatre in relation to critical debates concerning immersive and participatory spectatorship in theatre and visual art. In the course of the research, it became clear that the depth and breadth of Badiou’s project, combined with the relation between his ‘peripheral’ and ‘core’ works frustrated attempts to apply his framework; the weight of his philosophical discourse resisted application as ‘theory’. As I address in particular in Chapter Three, there is a sense in which his writings speak both *through* and *for* his system, most evident in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. It became increasingly clear that a deeper engagement with Badiou’s work which simultaneously worked from within his system but challenged it on the basis of external discourses and debates would be productive.

The daunting nature of both *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* has limited deeper critical engagements with Badiou’s work from non-philosophical contexts with the result that the majority of engagements do so on the basis of his peripheral works, essays, and other writings. While the systematic nature of Badiou’s project lends a degree of conceptual clarity, such engagements are often limited by the manner in which Badiou speaks to his own system. The process of research has led to what I hope to be a productive inter-disciplinary approach that interrogates Badiou’s philosophical project from within the expanded field of English and comparative literature, while simultaneously approaching debates within the field of art criticism from a theatre and performance influenced perspective. The case studies used in Chapter Two and Three are used predominantly for the purposes of illustrating the conceptual frameworks

being discussed. My examination of Ilya Kabakov's installation works, however, aims to open up and invent new conceptual resources within Badiou's philosophy and demonstrate the possibility of re-conditioning Badiou via the contemporary. As I argue in my conclusion, such a re-conditioning offers the possibility of fundamentally reshaping Badiou's project, thereby displacing the figure of the Philosopher.



# Chapter One

## Compossibility and Condition

In this chapter I read Badiou's systematic framework, developed in *Being and Event* (1988) and *Logics of Worlds* (2006), in light of critical discourses of the contemporary and contemporaneity. My aim in doing so is to consider in what ways Badiou's notion of philosophy as a space of thinking the 'compossibility' of contemporary truths can be thought alongside critical articulations of the contemporary as a "*disjunctive unity of present times*" (Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All* 17). The chapter demonstrates that Badiou's articulation of philosophy's relation to its conditions must be understood in light of the essential 'dramatism' and theatrical engagement of his philosophy. I argue that inasmuch as 'compossibility' can be thought in relation to the contemporary, it is because philosophy as a space of thought operates as a 'staging' of truths. This is because theatre functions as an essential site for thinking subtraction within Badiou's work: philosophy is theatrical because the stage subtracts.

The chapter begins with an overview of critical discussions of the contemporary and contemporary art. A repeated concern within these frameworks is the opposition between immediacy and disjunction. This is evident, on the one hand, in the immediacy of 'presentism', which takes the contemporary to be defined as an empty or homogenous present, and on the other hand in frameworks that think the contemporary in terms of temporal multiplicity. The tendencies grouped loosely under the term 'presentism' – immediacy, de-historicization and subjective disorientation, and the 'reduction to the body' – will be the focus of deeper discussion in my next chapter under the term 'saturation'. As this chapter's overview of the contemporary shows, several commentators argue temporal multiplicity to be a key counterpoint to presentist readings of the contemporary which embody neoliberal understandings of the end of history (Brouillette, Nilges, and Sauri xvi-xvii). An important contribution of this thesis is to consider Badiou's account of the present in terms of temporal multiplicity – this will be a central aim of the next chapter.

Having surveyed critical frameworks of the contemporary, I then turn to Badiou's project, outlining Badiou's concepts of compossibility and democratic materialism, and providing overviews of *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*. Both works are framed as interventions into contemporary moments of 'obscurity' or 'disorientation'; the former work intervenes in a *philosophical* moment, while the latter work intervenes on a *cultural* moment (Clemens, "Had

We But Worlds Enough” 279). While *Being and Event*’s declared ‘contemporaneity’ nevertheless draws on modernist frames of reference – including Cantor in mathematics and Mallarmé in poetry – *Logics of Worlds* instead draws on a more contemporary frame of reference, including the contemporary mathematical field of category theory. Badiou’s demarcation of the contemporary ideology of democratic materialism in the latter work touches on presentist concerns of the homogeneity of the present as the horizonless ‘now’. By contrast, what Badiou terms the materialist dialectic attempts to create a framework for thinking subjects beyond the confines of presentism.

Yet Badiou’s framing of philosophy’s contemporaneity raises the further question of philosophical discourse itself. This chapter argues that Badiou’s articulation of philosophy’s relation to its conditions must be understood in terms of the ‘dramatism’ of Badiou’s theatrical engagement. I argue that this is evident, firstly, in a linking of theatricality and mathematics via the *decision* within Badiou’s work. The nature of the decision for Badiou is evident in the foundational claim of *Being and Event*, “mathematics is ontology” (BE 4), which critics argue to enact an authoritarian domination of the axiom (Osborne, “Neo-Classic” 19; Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou* 37; Cull, “Equalizing Theatre and Philosophy” 740-741). However, I argue that these objections overlook the essentially performative nature of the axiom as a decision in and for thought assessed immanently by its consequences. I further argue that philosophy is a discourse which stages the (figure of) the Philosopher alongside the Sophist and the Poet. As we will see in Chapter Three’s discussion of inaesthetics, Badiou’s dramatic ensemble of Philosopher, Sophist, and Poet maintains a silence on a mysterious fourth ‘figure’ which unites and cuts across all three: the Spectator.

## **1.1 The Contemporary**

As an art-historical term, the contemporary has emerged as a successor to the postmodern.<sup>13</sup> As Terry Smith puts it in *What is Contemporary Art?*, “In the aftermath of modernity, art has indeed only one option: to be contemporary” (1). What marks contemporary art for Smith is its “interrogation into the ontology of the present” (2), encapsulated by three core meanings of the contemporary: “the immediate, contemporaneous, cotemporal” (3-4). Where the immediate refers to the empirical givenness of that which is current, the contemporaneous suggests the

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<sup>13</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 17; *The Postconceptual Condition*, 4-11.

relational question of “coming into being at the same time as other beings, including other art” (3). Finally, the coterporal refers to the “coexistence of distinct temporalities, of different ways of *being* in relation to time, experienced in the midst of a growing sense that many kinds of time are running out” (3-4). Across these three meanings, contemporaneity itself functions as the “condition of the material status of global relations”, characterized by globalization, inequality, and information exchange (5). Smith’s identification of the immediate, the contemporaneous, and the coterporal as core features of the contemporary can be characterized as articulating poles of *immediacy* and *disjunction* – that is, a dichotomy between what is ‘given’ by the present, and the multiplicity of temporalities and forms of being designated by that present. As this overview of the contemporary will show, the dichotomy of immediacy and disjunction is a key feature of critical discourses of the contemporary; notions of ‘presentism’ can be read in terms of the immediacy of the homogeneous ‘now’, while commentators proposing a project of the contemporary that takes into account temporal multiplicity attend to the disjunction of the present.

Peter Osborne identifies three major periodizations of contemporary art that distinguish it from modern art. The first emerged after 1945 as a result of Soviet opposition to modernism in Eastern Europe, motivated by ideological struggles over the characterization of the “modern” (ANA 18). This definition, broadly construed as “postwar”, was accompanied by the growing hegemony of US art institutions and the incorporation of pre-war avant-gardes, feeding into the positioning of US abstract art “as the authentic continuation of this project, and thereby of the ‘Western’ artistic tradition as a whole” (ANA 19). The second periodization identifies contemporary art as emerging in the wake of debates throughout the 1960s concerning objecthood and medium-specificity, and centred upon art movements such as minimalism, conceptualism or performance. This periodization is marked by ontological transformations immanent to the artwork itself. Despite the US-centric development of representative movements such as minimalism or conceptualism and accompanying critical debates, this periodization is “more geopolitically expansive” than the post-war. The final major periodization of contemporary art sees it as post-1989 art, demarcated by the fall of the Soviet Union. Here, contemporary art marks “the apparent closure of the historical horizon of the avant-garde; a qualitative deepening of the integration of autonomous art into the culture industry; and a globalization and transnationalization of the biennale as an exhibition form” (ANA 21). Rather than forming distinct definitions of contemporary art, Osborne characterizes the three periodizations as “different intensities of contemporaneity, [and] different interpenetrating historical strata” (ANA 22). The periodization of contemporary art is therefore

divided between the first two expansive accounts, and the post-1989 account which tends to identify the contemporary with ‘end of history’ narratives.

Osborne’s own critical framework of the contemporary – which I return to below – is underpinned by a claim that contemporary art is “historically determined as a *postconceptual art*” (ANA 10). Osborne reads 1960s art critical debates surrounding Michael Fried, Clement Greenberg, and the emergence of minimalist art as instituting a fundamental change in the ontology of the artwork, severing the work from its purely aesthetic constitution (ANA 37). To read contemporary art as post-conceptual art is therefore to acknowledge the “fundamental mutation” of the artwork’s “historical ontology” (ANA 48). Among several features of this mutation are the artwork’s *necessarily* conceptual dimension, combined with its “ineliminable – but radically insufficient – aesthetic dimension” (ANA 48).<sup>14</sup> In other words, conceptualism’s desire to anchor the artwork in idea rather than medium demonstrated that the aesthetic framing of art “mistakes one of art’s many conditions for the whole” (ANA 49). Yet in the process of anti-aesthetic experimentation, conceptualism also demonstrated the *ineliminable* nature of the aesthetic to the work of art. Post-conceptualism therefore demonstrates the insufficiency of aesthetic frameworks for thinking art.

From this perspective, Badiou’s ‘failed encounter’ with contemporary art is primarily a failed encounter with the artwork’s *transformed ontology* in its post-conceptual lineage. As Osborne notes, while Badiou’s inaesthetic framework seeks to distance itself from aesthetics, Badiou nonetheless fundamentally sees art as emerging from the sensible. This is evident, for example, in Badiou’s discussion of the artistic subject in *Logics of Worlds* in terms of “a singular form of tension between the intensity of the sensible and the tranquillity of form” (LW 73). As I examine in Chapter Three, Badiou’s inaesthetic framework appears to enact a form of Friedian anti-theatricality (in severing the artwork from audience relations) and Greenbergian medium-specificity (in demarcating the arts according to their essences). Thus Badiou’s inaesthetic framework appears to reject the fundamental transformations of the ontology of the artwork in its post-conceptual condition.

Badiou’s own definition of contemporary art is at odds with the broad periodizations outlined by Osborne. As discussed in the thesis introduction, Badiou defines contemporary art as “the result [of] an immanent rupture inside modernity itself. [A] rupture which sometimes constitutes an

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<sup>14</sup> Other tendencies noted by Osborne are “The critical necessity of an anti-aestheticist use of aesthetic materials”; the expansion of art’s material form, and the radically distributive unity of the work (ANA 48).

event at the very beginning of modernity” (Badiou “Contemporary Art”). Building on this definition, Badiou outlines two broad tendencies: a *destructive* or critical tendency which attempts to negate traditional artforms through an encounter with non-art, and an *affirmative* tendency in which “A work of art is a creation of a new real”, through the exploration of new material forms (installation art) or capacities of the body (performance). In contrast to destruction and affirmation, Badiou poses his own concepts of *subtraction* and *formalization* – that is, subtraction is posed as an alternative to negation, while formalization is conceived as an alternative mode of the relation between artwork and form.

The linking of subtraction and formalization is evident in *The Century*, in which Badiou contrasts the subtractive and destructive modes of the ‘passion for the real’ (as outlined in the thesis introduction) and articulates what he terms *materialist formalization*, an outcome of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s attempt to overcome Romanticism in art (TC 156). I will return to and expand upon these concepts in Chapter Two’s discussion of the ‘destructive’ passion for the real, and in Chapter Three’s discussion of ‘materialist formalization’ and inaesthetics. For now, however, it is important to note that materialist formalization is key to Badiou’s development of what he terms the ‘materialist dialectic’ in *Logics of Worlds*. Where subtraction is central to the general framework of *Being and Event*, and is drawn largely from his use of both set theory and Mallarmé, formalization is instead developed via a discussion of “generalized theatricality” in art, including installation art and happenings (TC, 156). That is, it appears that it is precisely contemporary art in its post-1960s periodization which serves for Badiou as a thinking of a post-Romantic or “non-religious” art, inscribed “between dance and cinema” (TC 160).<sup>15</sup> Inasmuch as contemporary art is for Badiou the result of an immanent split within modernity, it is for Badiou predicated on a substitution of negation by subtraction, and of affirmation by formalization. Put otherwise, Badiou’s concept of subtraction is framed loosely as an alternative logic to the modern’s time-determination of the new; formalization by contrast is framed partially within a contemporary frame of reference.

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<sup>15</sup> Badiou’s own definition of Romanticism refers broadly to a suture of philosophy to art that disjoins philosophy from mathematics (C 94-96). Furthermore, Romanticism in its German philosophical form is for Badiou a particular relation between the finite and infinite embodied in “the idea that the genuine infinite only manifests itself as a horizontal structure *for the historicity of the finitude of existence*” (C 97). For Badiou, the Romantic relation between the infinite and finite is essentially a *theological* relation: “In the deployment of its Romantic figure, the infinite becomes the Open for the temporalization of finitude and, because it is in thrall to History, it remains in thrall to the One. So long as the finite remains the ultimate determination of being-there, God remains” (C 99). Badiou’s specific critique of Romanticism is not a focus of this thesis, however a deeper consideration of Badiou’s anti-Romanticism is clearly warranted.

Beyond art periodization, the contemporary can be articulated in terms of a critical relation to the present. In his essay “What is the Contemporary?” (2008), Giorgio Agamben demarcates the contemporary via Nietzsche’s notion of ‘untimeliness’. For Agamben the essential condition for thinking and grasping one’s time – to be contemporary to it – is to exist precisely in a “disconnection and out-of-jointness” (*What is an Apparatus?* 40). That is, rather than a simple “co-habitation” in time, the contemporary thinker is one who exists in “dyschrony” or “a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it [. . .] it is *that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism*” (41). The contemporary subject is one whose disjunction allows them to discern the “darkness” of their time, rather than its light (44). Disjunction and anachronism serve therefore as a basis for an ethics of the contemporary subject capable of discerning the shadows projected by an epoch.

Pushing the metaphor of light and dark further, Agamben notes that just as the light of stars take millions of years to reach earth – during which time the stars themselves have moved further away – so too the ‘light’ of the present only reaches us after its passing. This means that to be contemporary is to “perceive, in the darkness of the present, this light that strives to reach us but cannot”, meaning that to be contemporary is rare (46). Further, “Our time, the present, is in fact not only the most distant: it cannot in any way reach us” (47). In Agamben’s account, contemporaneity is not only a *disjunctive* relation; the present’s ‘distance’ is an effect of time itself. What emerges from this assessment is the problem of immediacy: to be *too close* to one’s present – that is, to be immersed in or inhabit it – is precisely what prevents its critical and therefore (for Agamben) ethical apprehension. In the next chapter I argue that the ‘excess’ of immediacy – as illustrated by the phenomenological immersion within installation works – can be thought in terms of ‘saturation’; that is, the saturation of affect produced by immersive spectatorship offers a means of thinking the saturation of the present. In Badiou’s usage, saturation refers to the closure of a present, or the exhaustion of subjective fidelity. For Badiou, drawing on the work of Sylvain Lazarus, it is only when a truth-procedure has become saturated that it can be encountered by philosophy – as he writes in *Philosophy for Militants*, philosophy “always comes in the second place . . . it always arrives *après-coup*, or in the aftermath of nonphilosophical innovations” (PM 3). Philosophy’s ‘compossibility’, which I turn to in the next section, is therefore an anachronistic action which attempts to make past presents ‘contemporary’.

Agamben's account of the contemporary in terms of a distanced or disjunctive relation to the present can be contrasted to conceptions of the present as break from the past within modernity. Agamben's discussion implicitly draws upon Foucault's essay "What is Enlightenment?", itself a response to Kant's essay of the same name. Here Foucault attends to Kant's definition of the Enlightenment as mankind's "self-incurred immaturity" (Kant, *Towards a Perpetual Peace* 17). For Foucault, Kant's grasping of the enlightenment as break has the effect of inaugurating an understanding of the present as "the question of contemporary reality alone", or the question "What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?" ("What is Enlightenment?" 305). The understanding of the present in terms of its difference from the past is emblematic of what Foucault terms the "attitude of modernity" (309), or "a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task" (310). Modernity therefore enacts a particular ontology of the present.

Drawing on Baudelaire's famous description of modernity as "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" (Baudelaire 403), Foucault typifies the attitude of modernity as "a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, a vertigo in the face of the passing moment" (Foucault 310). In contrast to fashion's fetishizing of the moment, modernity "makes it possible to grasp the 'heroic' aspect of the present moment. Modernity is not a phenomenon of sensitivity to the fleeting present; it is the will to 'heroize' the present" (310). Heroization, then, aims at the overcoming of the present, to "transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is" (311). Thus the modern subject "is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels him to face the task of producing himself" (312). The ontology of the present as passing novelty constructs subjects as subjects of invention.

Against the heroism of modernity, Foucault proposes an "historical ontology of ourselves", which draws on the "philosophical ethos" of the Enlightenment distilled as "a permanent critique of our historical era" (312). This is effected by the renewed historicizing of the present through a "limit-attitude" (315) that eschews the universal in favour of the contingent – opening onto the freedom which conditions the present. This mode of critique for Foucault seeks to question the historical limits and contingencies "that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying" (315). Hence Foucault's 'historical ontology of ourselves' eschews projects that "escape from the system of contemporary reality" in favour of "a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings" (316). The historical

ontology of ourselves therefore aims to locate in the present the means by subjects are formed as subjects of knowledge.

In contrast to Foucault, Badiou is resolutely opposed to narratives of limit and finitude, embodied in his neo-rationalist conception of the universal given by the generic nature of truths. Rather than investigating the present in terms of limits and contingencies, Badiou articulates the present as an affirmative opening in thought, experienced as the Idea, writing in the conclusion to *Logics of Worlds* that “‘to live’ and ‘to live for an Idea’ are one and the same thing” (LW 510). In the conclusion Badiou furthermore defends the heroic as an affirmative mode of subjective fidelity: rather than an “epic” heroism of sacrifice, he proposes a “mathematical” heroism which aims to create subjects “point by point” (LW 514). However, as we will see in the next chapter, Badiou’s articulation of the present is complicated by his lack of a generalized concept of Time; temporality is specific to the singularity of a plurality of truth procedures.

As I will outline in this chapter’s overview of *Being and Event*, the emergence of the new for Badiou follows the radical contingency of an event, operating in undecidable excess to a situation. Yet despite the apparently ‘miraculous’ nature of the event in Badiou’s work in which it appears as pure *rupture*, it is nonetheless localised by what Badiou terms the ‘evental site’ such that the event occurs for – or is symptomatic of – a situation. A major claim of Chapter Four’s examination of the event and subject is that rather than pure, miraculous ‘rupture’ which splits the present through the introduction of the new, truth is linked to knowledge by way of that which is ‘displaced’ in a situation. Through examination of Ilya Kabakov’s installation practice I argue that displacement is a register of temporal multiplicity; to think the contemporary would therefore proceed by way of investigation of the impure ‘waste’ of a situation. In other words, rather than the heroization of the new as absolute rupture, the ‘mathematical’ heroism of subjective fidelity attends to the contingency of relation between the new and what is non-contemporaneous for a situation; Badiou’s concept of ‘forcing’ articulates a relation to futurity that is contingent or speculative but not a limit to thought.

### **The Immediacy of the Present:**

A consequence of the contemporary’s departure from the ‘heroism’ of the present is the severing of the present from horizons of futurity. As Terry Smith notes, the senses of ‘contemporary’ as defined in the OED are predominantly relational, with only one sense meaning “current” or modern (“Introduction” *Antinomies of Art and Culture* 7-8). Hence the contemporary differs from the modern in “its immediacy, its presentness, its instantaneity, its prioritizing of the



moment over the time, the instant over the epoch, of direct experience of multiplicitous complexity over the singular simplicity of distanced reflection. It is the pregnant present of the original meaning of ‘modern,’ but without its subsequent contract with the future” (8). The changing relation to the future within the contemporary reflects what critics term the ‘crisis of futurity’, resulting in an empty or homogeneous conception of the present-without-future (Nilges, 179). As Osborne argues, “If modernity projects a present of permanent transition, forever reaching beyond itself, the contemporary fixes or enfolds such transitoriness within the duration of a conjuncture, or at its most extreme, the stasis of a present moment” (ANA 24). The severance from the modern’s logic of futurity is one key element of the contemporary’s departure from the time-determination of the new.

Hence the effects of the crisis of futurity are felt as a totalization of the present, analogous to Mark Fisher’s description of the ideological effects of capitalist realism, in which neoliberalised capitalism “seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable” (*Capitalist Realism* 8), or what he describes elsewhere as the ‘slow cancellation of the future’ (*Ghosts of My Life*). As Virilio writes, the temporal effects of globalised capitalism are such that “Past, present and future contract in the omnipresent instant, just as the expanse of the terrestrial globe does these days in the excessive speed of the constant acceleration of our travels and telecommunications” (*The Futurism of the Instant* 71). As the next chapter examines, this reflects a conception of the present as the “empiricism of now”, (Aranda, Wood and Vidolke, 6), “presentism” (Hartog, xv), or the “reduction to the present” (Jameson, “Aesthetics” 106). Common to these accounts is an implied sense of subjective disorientation; the homogeneity of the present, coupled with the crisis of futurity, appears to rob subjects of the resources for political action. For the sake of brevity, I will group these notions under the broad term of ‘presentism’, which I take to include but not be identical to François Hartog’s coinage of ‘presentism’, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Yet there are important objections to the characterization of the contemporary in terms of temporal homogeneity. For Smith, the contemporary as stasis of the present is in part an effect of the art world’s projection and usage of contemporary as periodisation. Part of this tendency saw the contemporary as emerging within the ‘posthistorical’ period of the 1990s, characterized by the failure of any clear style to emerge in the wake of movements such as minimalism or conceptualism. The crisis of style led to the fear that the contemporary “could well come to mean periodlessness, being perpetually out of time, or at least not subject to historical

unfolding” (*What Is Contemporary Art?* 245).<sup>16</sup> As Smith observes, in contrast to modernity’s periodizing impulse, “the word ‘contemporary’ comes . . . to mean not ‘to be with time’ but ‘to be out of time,’ to be suspended in a state after or beyond history, a condition of being always and only in a present that is without either past or future” (245). As Smith notes, the post-historical account of the contemporary is misguided and in fact amounts to a face-value acceptance of the contemporary as defined by the art world, in turn demonstrating the necessity for the re-conceptualisation of the contemporary attendant to temporal multiplicity.

### **Disjunction and Temporal Multiplicity:**

The conceptualisation of temporal multiplicity is one way of moving beyond the problematic of the ‘presentist’ articulation of the contemporary and its underlying notion of temporal homogeneity. One key finding of this thesis is to read Badiou’s framework in terms of temporal multiplicity – as I argue in the next chapter, Badiou’s distinction between ‘tensed’ and ‘atonic’ worlds in *Logics of Worlds* can be understood as a framework for distinguishing between temporal homogeneity and multiplicity. In their introduction to *Literature and the Global Contemporary*, Brouillette, Nilges and Sauri argue for a thinking of the contemporary in terms of a “synchronic, multi-faceted and multi-temporal history” as a substitution for “theories of an omnipresent ‘end of history’” (xvi). This is because “To assume a homogenous and frozen contemporary moment is to deny the possibility of real social transformation, such that it appears to be impossible to be anything but contemporary” (xvi-xvii). As the authors assert, “We do not, in fact, live in the end times, and perpetuating the dominant notion of an eternal present means nothing more than replicating neoliberalism’s perspective” (xvii). As Nilges argues, articulations of the homogenous present in fact overlook *temporal segregation*, or the “strategic exclusion from the contemporary” as an outcome of colonial production of temporal unevenness (Nilges 180). Writing on Okey Ndibe’s *Foreign Gods Inc.* – in which the Nigerian-born, well-educated protagonist is forced to find under-qualified work as a taxi-driver in New York – Nilges argues that “Racialization means temporalization” due to global capitalism’s dependence on “temporal exclusion of subjects and entire areas of the globe from the contemporary” (180). As I detail in Chapter Four, the installation work of Ilya Kabakov is underpinned by an *anxiety of exclusion* from the contemporary. As a former ‘unofficial’ Soviet artist, Kabakov’s works dramatize temporal disjunction through a foregrounding of waste,

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<sup>16</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*, which I discuss in Chapter Four, is itself response to this fear: in the absence of the formation of a clear style, Bourriaud instead characterizes the trend of 1990s art by the production of new ‘relational’ audience relations.

garbage, and junk objects; what I term Kabakov's 'anxiety' of the contemporary is a fear of exclusion from the contemporary – that to be included *within* the contemporary opens up the possibility of a later exclusion, in which an artist's works become mere junk.

An important articulation of temporal multiplicity in relation to the contemporary is Harry Harootunian's development of *non-contemporaneous contemporaneity*. Harootunian draws on Ernst Bloch's notion of "non-contemporaneous synchronisms" in which "past and present are not necessarily successive, but simultaneously produced, or coexist as uneven temporalities" ("Some Thoughts on Comparability" 47). This reflects capitalist expansion throughout modernity; where this expansion has been determined in spatial terms, "its success has been based upon its capacity to generate vast temporal unevenness along its route, not just between societies but within them" (49). Harootunian's development of non-contemporaneous contemporaneity furthermore means an understanding of the present not as the homogenous *now*, but rather as "thick with different practices from other modes of production, mixed temporal regimes declaring their affiliation with different times now passed but still retained with their corresponding political demands" ("Remembering the Historical Present" 477). Harootunian's notion of the 'thickened' present will be key to my discussion of presentism and saturation in the next chapter, and is analogous to Badiou's notion of 'tensed' worlds containing multiple topological 'points'.

For Peter Osborne, the central challenge of the contemporary is that of thinking temporal multiplicity within a unified framework. That is, the major obstacle to the contemporary "is the common-sense belief that the phrase 'contemporary art' has no *critically* meaningful referent; that it designates no more than the radically heterogeneous empirical totality of artworks produced within the duration of a particular present" (ANA 2). Osborne emphasizes temporal plurality, in which the present is conceived as "a coming together of *different but equally 'present'* temporalities or 'times'" thus constituting a "*disjunctive unity of present times*" (ANA 17). This, moreover, reflects the fragmented nature of global capitalism, in which there is no unified subject-position from which a lived, shared experience of the global present could be perceived, yet the contemporary "functions *as if* there is" (23). Hence the contemporary can be thought in its "fictive" nature, functioning as an "*operative fiction*" to unify temporal disjunction (ANA 23) or a "*geopolitical fiction*" regulating spatial disjunction (ANA 25). Put simply, this means that the contemporary operates to produce a 'fiction' of a unified present from a multiplicity of otherwise disjunctive temporalities. Thus understood, the contemporary becomes a difficult but necessary regulative term for thinking the "*single temporal matrix of a living*

*present* – a common, albeit internally disjunctive ‘living’ historical present” (PC 36). The contemporary therefore offers the means for thinking the *global* present in its disjunctive multiplicity.

The frameworks of the contemporary as outlined thus far touch on a number of points of significance for my consideration of Badiou. Firstly, throughout critical frameworks discussed an opposition between the poles of immediacy and disjunction is evident, encapsulated by the homogeneity of the now on the one hand and the fragmentation of temporal multiplicity on the other. The next chapter will explore the problem of presentism and the immediacy of the now in relation to Badiou’s framework of the present and his concept of ‘saturation’. As Agamben outlines, a key problem of the contemporary is that of a *critically distanced* relation to the present, which can only be enacted via a mode of disjunction and anachronism. As we will see, the opposition of immediacy and disjunction is also specific to the audience relations of installation art, which Claire Bishop argues to be underpinned by an opposition of the embodied viewer and the fragmented viewing subject interpellated by the artwork (*Installation Art* 133). The underlying problem of the contemporary is therefore one of presenting temporal disjunction within a unified framework.

The rest of this chapter will investigate the core of Badiou’s project from the standpoint of the contemporary, including overviews of *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*. In addition to setting up some of the terminology to be further discussed throughout this thesis, I will show two key ways in which Badiou’s project can be considered in relation to the contemporary. Firstly, Badiou’s concept of ‘compossibility’, or philosophy’s seizure of a plurality of truths as unified in thought encodes an understanding of philosophy as itself a ‘disjunctive unity’ of contemporary truths. This is evident in Badiou’s framing of *Being and Event* as an intervention into a contemporary philosophical moment. Secondly, *Logics of Worlds* is framed by way of an intervention into the contemporary *ideological* moment of ‘democratic materialism’, which embodies key elements of the presentist ‘immediacy of the now’. Badiou’s shift between the two works is therefore from an abstracted philosophical intervention to an intervention on the cultural present. In the final section of this chapter I turn to Badiou’s account of philosophical discourse, suggesting that inasmuch as philosophy provides a ‘disjunctive unity’ for thinking the compossibility of contemporary truths, it does so as ‘fiction’ that is essentially theatrical.

## **1.2 Being and Event and Logics of Worlds**

### **Compossibility:**

As I have argued, Badiou's engagement with contemporary art is at best idiosyncratic and at worst marks a wider failed encounter with the fundamental transformations of art's post-conceptual ontology. Both *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, however, are framed by way of intervention into contemporary impasses of philosophical and subjective disorientation respectively.<sup>17</sup> *Being and Event* is founded on a claim to philosophical contemporaneity, enacted as an intervention into a contemporary philosophical impasse. In the work's introduction this impasse is framed as a matter of philosophical exhaustion formed by a 'triplet' of Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics, analytic philosophy's restrictive use of logic and language, and Lacan's 'antiphilosophical' deconstruction of the subject.<sup>18</sup> The triplet marks "the closure of an entire epoch of thought and its concerns", thus operating as a limit (BE 1). By contrast, Badiou aims to construct a "trajectory of thought" which forms a "diagonal" through the impasse by encountering and re-shaping each term (BE 2). That is, rather than a wholesale rejection of the impasse itself, Badiou aims to cut across it by proceeding from its void point. Thus philosophy must proceed from the Heideggerian question of ontology, traverse the "mathematico-logical revolution" of Frege and Cantor, and be informed by the modern (post-Lacanian) account of the subject (2). The renewal of philosophy is therefore achieved by an intervention which grasps the terms of the impasse by their limit-points.

As a result of the impasse, the philosophical moment is a "complex, indeed confused, epoch" of "ruptures and continuities" – a "disjointed temporal multiple" (BE 3). The "epoch" is defined in terms of contemporaneity to three moments in science, subjectivity, and truth, which circulate and are conditioned by the contemporary complex of "the history of 'Western' thought, post-Cantorian mathematics, psychoanalysis, contemporary art and politics" (3-4). Within this moment, the role of philosophy is to "propose a conceptual framework in which the *contemporary compossibility* of these conditions can be grasped" (BE 4; emphasis added).

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<sup>17</sup> The third and final instalment of *Being and Event*, *L'Immanence des vérités* (2018) similarly is framed as an intervention into the contemporary ideology of 'finitude' (*L'Immanence des vérités*, 14).

<sup>18</sup> Badiou's identification of 'triplets' is a repeated feature throughout his work. It forms a process whereby Badiou identifies disparate figures of thought and attempts to grasp a 'fourth term' which unites and therefore cuts across all three – for example, in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou outlines the didactic, the classical, and the Romantic schemata linking art and truth, against which he proposes the 'inaesthetic' schema (HI 5). In the conclusion to this chapter, I identify the 'triplet' in Badiou's dramatism of the Philosopher, the Sophist and the Poet; I propose that the 'Spectator' – understood in pedagogical terms – is the unannounced 'fourth term' that provides the means of diagonalizing the three.

Badiou's intervention thus aims to overcome philosophy's "malaise" or "delocalisation" in which "it no longer knows if it has a proper place" (C 3). Philosophy, in this sense, clarifies the obscurity of the present by declaring the *possibility* of compossibility: creating a space in which contemporary conditions can be held together in thought. As I discuss below, *Logics of Worlds* aims to intervene in a contemporary moment of *subjective* disorientation, termed 'democratic materialism'; the emphasis of this work is primarily on creating a framework for thinking the appearance of contemporary subjects.

Philosophy's return is therefore enabled by divesting it of the power of truth – as we have seen, rather than producing truth, philosophy instead receives the truths of its conditions. This means that philosophy "operates but presents nothing. Philosophy is not a production of truth, but an operation carried out on the basis of truths, one that disposes the 'there is' of truths and their epochal compossibility" (C 11). As Jan Voelker notes, by seeking to think truths alongside each other, compossibility "involves both a spatial and temporal determination: spatial through the creation of a *space of seizure*, and temporal in thinking the truths *of the time*" ('Compossibility' *The Badiou Dictionary* 66). Compossibility is furthermore subject to a tension: it is a "space in thought", a "structure of fiction" enabling the thinking of truths, yet at the same time is dependent on their *external* production (66). As such, "In times when truth procedures are hindered by obscure or reactive subjects, it thus falls to philosophy to work on questions about how a truth procedure can be continued" (67). Philosophy, in constructing a space of compossibility, thinks a (fictive) *space for the co-presence* of contemporary truths. Furthermore, by clarifying the contemporary moment philosophy aims to re-orient and chart the possibility of contemporary subjects.

*Being and Event* is thus predicated on its own claim to contemporaneity by intervening on an impasse to be resolved on the basis of forms of thought given outside of philosophy. As Badiou writes, "The categories that this book deploys, from the pure multiple to the subject, constitute the general order of a thought which is such that it can be practised across the entirety of the contemporary system of reference" (BE 4). This is at the same time a response to events within mathematics, most centrally Paul Cohen's 1963 discoveries concerning the continuum hypothesis in set theory.<sup>19</sup> As Badiou puts it, *Being and Event* aims "to broadcast an intellectual revolution that took place at the beginning of the sixties, whose vector was mathematics, yet whose repercussions extend throughout the entirety of possible thought: this revolution proposes

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Cohen, "The Independence of the Continuum Hypothesis, I" (1963); "The Independence of the Continuum Hypothesis, II" (1964).

completely new tasks to philosophy” (BE 16). *Being and Event* therefore aims to diagnose not simply the ‘Cantor event’, but what subsequent mathematical innovations retroactively *make possible* within the historical unfolding of set theory. It is therefore the retroaction of Cohen’s discoveries that ‘make contemporary’ Cantor’s discoveries.

### ***Being and Event: Overview***

The most general outcome of *Being and Event* is to link an account of being – thought by way of mathematics – to a militant account of the subject via the errancy of an event. In simple terms, an event – an undecidable and evanescent occurrence – exposes the inherent excess of any structured presentation of being. For Badiou, the structure of presentation is secured by the ‘state’, which establishes the fixity of knowledge. In exposing the excess of the state-structure, an event reveals the ‘void’ of a situation, or the unrepresentable real of its structure resulting from the pure multiplicity of being. An event is incalculable from within the state’s regime of knowledge, and thus requires the intervention of a subject which decides for the event’s having-happened. Acting in fidelity to the event, the subject re-assembles the terms of the structure in the temporal mode of the future-anterior in such a way that the event (and its consequences) will have been true. Lacking predication from within the situation, the unfolding of a truth is therefore universal. Truth, for Badiou, is ‘subtracted’ from knowledge inasmuch as it is: *undecidable* (the event’s illegal rupture of a situation); *indiscernible* (the subject’s path of fidelity is indifferent to the regime of knowledge structured by the state); *generic* (infinite, anonymous and therefore universal); and *unnameable* (local and untotalizable).

The foundation upon which Badiou builds his framework is the axiomatic decision that *mathematics is ontology*. This does not take being *as* mathematical, but rather means that “mathematics, throughout the entirety of its historical becoming, pronounces what is expressible of being qua being” (BE 8). In other words, “if it is correct that the philosophers have formulated the question of being, then it is not themselves but the mathematicians who have come up with the answer to that question” (BE 8). Mathematicians are therefore unconscious “ontologists” unfolding the “historicity of the discourse on being qua being” (BE 13). Philosophy’s role, then, is meta-ontological: it is philosophy which grasps mathematics and *makes it known* as ontology. As Osborne notes, philosophy’s meta-ontological role in *designating* mathematics as ontology reveals philosophy’s privileged discursive status: “although philosophy is not ontology, it nonetheless still governs the ontological meaning of mathematics (it is philosophy as meta-ontology that asks the ontological question), and in this way remains the ‘queen of the sciences’”(‘Neo-Classic: Alain Badiou’s *Being and Event* 23).

Hence philosophy, despite Badiou's claims, maintains its privilege as discourse – I will return to Osborne's observations in the final section of this chapter.

It is post-Cantorian set theory in its historical formation as the Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatic system, with the added Axiom of Choice (or ZFC) which supplies Badiou with a formalization of multiplicity. Importantly, this formulation allows an intervention into the classical Parmenidean ontological opposition of the one (being as unity) and the many (being as multiplicity) by deciding on the non-being of the one (BE 31). In contrast to the Parmenidean statement *if the one is not, nothing is*, Badiou reformulates: if the one is not *the* nothing is (BE 35-36). Being is pure, *inconsistent* (i.e., 'random' rather than structured) multiplicity. As Badiou states, "'If the one is not (the) nothing is' also means that it is only in completely thinking through the non-being of the one that the name of the void emerges as the unique conceivable presentation of what supports, as unpresentable and as pure multiplicity, any plural presentation, that is, any one-effect" (BE 36). As invented by Cantor and subsequently axiomatized through the work of Zermelo, Fraenkel, von Neumann and Gödel, set theory *enacts* the non-being of the one (BE 42).

A key term in Badiou's ontology is "situation", which refers to any presented multiplicity which has been 'counted as one' according to a structure. Having no other property than being a collection of multiples, a situation can be any presented entity – a nation-state, a song, a university, a political ideology. Inasmuch as it is counted-as-one, a situation exists as a *result* – its consistency is an operation on the inconsistency of being. It is this respect which introduces errancy: "Insofar as the one is a result, by necessity 'something' of the multiple does not absolutely coincide with the result" (BE 53). This 'something' is a register of *the* nothing, or the real of the operation of counting, which indicates the having-been-counted-as-one of the situation. As Badiou puts it, "The nothing names that undecidable of presentation which is its unpresentable, distributed between the pure inertia of the domain of the multiple, and the pure transparency of the operations thanks to which there is oneness" (BE 55). The nothing, or 'void' is therefore the unpresented "gap between the result-one of presentation and that 'on the basis 'of which' there is presentation" (BE 55). The void is the 'suture' of a situation to its being (BE 55), and hence is itself a mark of inconsistency. As Alex Ling puts it, "Inconsistency is therefore the real of presentation, the precise point at which thought butts against its own limit. Which is why Badiou's initial embrace of the multiple (and concurrent assertion that 'the one *is not*') is a *pure* decision: the actual status of inconsistent multiplicity is itself properly undecidable" ("Ontology" 50). As I argue later in this chapter, the nature of the decision for Badiou can be



understood as a fusion of the theatrical *act* and mathematical *axiom*: self-grounding and assessed immanently via the consequences it unfolds in thought.

In addition to the count-as-one which structures a situation is a secondary ‘count’ or meta-structure. This is what Badiou terms the ‘state’ or the ‘state of the situation’, “Due to a metaphorical affinity with politics” (BE 95). The state fixes the situation against the “danger” of the void which persists within presentation, “haunting” it (BE 94). In other words, the persistence of the void requires that presentation be fixed and its structure redoubled by meta-structure; all presented situations are therefore *re-presented* by the state. As Badiou puts it, “The structure of the structure is responsible for establishing, in danger of the void, that it is universally attested that, in the situation, the one is” (BE 94). In re-presenting the structure of the situation, the state of the situation “is what discerns, names, classifies, and orders the parts of a situation” (Hallward *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* 96). For Badiou, key developments in set theory in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrate the inherent excess of the state over the situation.<sup>20</sup>

What Badiou terms the ‘evental site’ is the linking of the situation to the possibility of an event’s occurrence. Its importance is in *localising* the event to the situation itself. Evental sites are parts of a situation which partly evade the structured ordering of the state because of their location at the ‘edge’ of presentation. As Badiou states, an evental site “is presented, but ‘beneath’ it nothing from which it is composed is presented. As such, the site is not a part of the situation. I will also say of such a multiple that it is *on the edge of the void*, or *foundational*” (BE 175). From the perspective of the situation an evental site has nothing ‘beneath’ it, which means that “A site is therefore the *minimal* effect of structure which can be conceived; it is such that it belongs to the situation, whilst what belongs to it in turn does not” (BE 175). While the evental site *founds* the situation, at the same time it introduces the possibility of the void, localizing the event to a symptomatic point in the situation’s structure. The consequence is that all events are localised to situations such that “The idea of an overturning whose origin would be a state of

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<sup>20</sup> The specifics of the mathematical theory exceed the scope of this thesis. What is key however is that it is the *historicized unfolding* of set theory concerning the problem of the continuum hypothesis (CH) that is significant for Badiou. In simple terms the CH, proposed by Cantor, states that the ‘gap’ of cardinality between the set of real numbers and set of integers is knowable, thus limiting the possibility of ‘excess’. Work by Kurt Gödel showed that the CH is consistent with the axioms of ZFC; Paul Cohen’s innovations via ‘forcing’ demonstrated the *independence* of the CH from ZFC. Thus, within the world of ZFC set theory it is equally ‘consistent’ to work *with* or *without* CH, resulting in a subjective choice between the two ‘universes’, which unfold their own consequences for thought. What is key to Badiou’s use of set theory is not the ‘Cantor event’ itself, but rather what Cohen’s discoveries retroactively *seize* in Cantor’s theoretical innovations. Cohen therefore operates within the ‘present’ of the Cantor-event, co-temporalizing its consequences.

totality is imaginary. Every radical transformational action originates *in a point*, which, inside a situation, is an evental site” (BE 176). This means that an event, for Badiou, is not a ‘miraculous’ occurrence, completely transcending the situation in which it emerges. Rather, events are only possible to the extent that there are sites ‘on the edge of the void’.

As established, the event is marked above all by its undecideable and therefore incalculable nature. This means that the event cannot be articulated via the mathematical formalization underlying Badiou’s ontology. As he puts it, “ontology has nothing to say about the event”; rather “ontology demonstrates that the event is not” (BE 190). In order to furnish his account of the event, Badiou turns to a poem by Stéphane Mallarmé, “A Throw of the Dice” [“*Un coup de dés*”]. Over 11 folio pages the poem narrates the scene of a shipwreck on a deserted ocean, and the image of the casting of dice by a ‘master’ – or the ship’s captain. The poem’s innovative use of negative space and typography of varied, precise, sizing offers multiple paths through the poem’s syntax: the reader can follow linearly, move from verso to recto across each folio, or follow the path suggested by the font size of the typography in which syntax is assembled across multiple folio pages. As Weinfield observes, the result is a strong emphasis on the poem’s material form such that the paper itself “intervenes” (“Commentary” 265). In Chapter Three I will discuss the nature of Badiou’s strong reading of poetry which aims at ‘fixing’ a single meaning, to the exclusion of reader-response theory, which is symptomatic of Badiou’s wider exclusion of the spectator. For now, however, it is important to note Badiou’s indifference to the material form of Mallarmé’s poem, even while he implicitly ‘reads across’ the poem’s multiple syntactical paths.<sup>21</sup>

The key motif of “*Un coup de dés*” is the linking of chance to necessity, symbolised by the dice throw, at the threat of its disappearance within the ocean. This for Badiou provides a thinking of the event in its undecideable form. That is, “If there exists an event, *its belonging to the situation of its site is undecideable from the standpoint of the situation itself*” (BE 181). This is why poetry figures as the naming of the event: “Poetry is the stellar assumption of that pure undecideable, against a background of nothingness, that is an action of which one can only *know* whether it has taken place inasmuch as one *bets* upon its truth” (BE 192). The event’s taking-

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<sup>21</sup> On occasion, Badiou refers to reading across the linear path of the poem, e.g., when he states “To the ‘nothing’ of the previous page responds...” (BE 196-197). Moreover, the central ‘axiomatic’ statements Badiou distils, “A throw of the dice / will never / abolish / chance” and “nothing / will have taken place / but the place / except / perhaps / a constellation” are themselves both composed by following the poem typographically across multiple pages, rather than linearly (Mallarmé, “A Throw of the Dice”). That is, Badiou’s reading of the poem, prompted by Mallarmé’s typology, is an intervention that is performed upon an implicitly ‘open’ work.

place can only be confirmed retroactively through the fidelity of the subject. Hence any decision on the event is also an intervention. The event convokes the void already bordered on by the site itself (BE 292).

The master's dice-throw "symbolizes the event in general; that is, that which is purely hazardous, and which cannot be inferred from the situation, yet which is nevertheless a fixed multiple, a number, that nothing can modify once it has laid out the sum..." (BE 193). This is because "A cast of the dice joins the emblem of chance to that of necessity, the erratic multiple of the event to the legible retroaction of the count" (BE 193). Key however is the annulment of the throw, or the equivalence of gesture and non-gesture in which the master, in the act of casting the dice, "hesitates / corpse by the arm / separated from the secret it withholds" (Mallarmé "A Throw of the Dice" 130). This encapsulates the undecideable tension between the event's taking-place and its failure. To ignore the event would mean that "nothing will have taken place but the place" (BE 193). In this case, when there is nothing but pure structure of the situation, or the 'place', the event is illegal and nothing occurs: "That 'nothing' has taken place therefore means that nothing *decidable within the situation* could figure the event as such. . . . As an un-founded multiple, as self-belonging, undivided signature of itself, the event can only be indicated beyond the situation, despite it being necessary to wager that it has manifested itself therein" (BE 197). The wager on the event's belonging to the situation is therefore precisely an *intervention* on the event itself, a declaration that fixes chance as necessity. The subject, in declaring the event's having-happened, wagers upon its taking-place.

The event, then, exceeds being and must therefore be formalised via poetry. The subjective process as such begins with intervention, which is a wager at the point of the undecideable based on the recognition of an event (BE 202). Given the event's ephemeral nature, the subject's intervention operates as an *imposition* of time – without intervention, the void nature of the event would cancel its existence (BE 209). Once imposed, intervention proceeds in 'diagonal' to the situation (BE 210); evental time therefore begins with an intervention on the undecideable. As I explore in the next chapter, it is the specific temporality inaugurated by intervention and sustained by subjective fidelity that Badiou terms the 'present'.

In summary, the key aim of *Being and Event* is to demarcate a theory of the new via subtraction. This involves a seizure of set theory in its own immanent historicity to furnish an ontology of the multiple, combined with Badiou's use of Mallarmé to articulate the theory of the event. Central to Badiou's framework is linking the inherent excess of the 'state', based on the problem of the continuum hypothesis, to the possibility of the event as undecideable which is constructed

through Badiou's reading of "A Throw of the Dice". For Badiou the poem stages the event inasmuch as it presents a meditation on the existence of an event – the shipwreck – at the point of its erasure. It does so *negatively*, rather than by way of the presence of language – "A Throw of the Dice" is an *operation*. Yet it is significant that Badiou's use of Mallarmé is *dramatic*: Mallarmé is for Badiou "a thinker of the event-drama" (BE 191). This is key to the 'dramatism' of Badiou's philosophical discourse, as I examine later in this chapter. Furthermore, in Chapter 3's discussion of Badiou's inaesthetics and poetics, I note Badiou's apparent dismissal of reception theory in his assertion of the *singular* meaning of the artwork. I argue this has an effect of excluding the 'Spectator' – as a figure of reception in general – from the work of art. However, I further argue that Badiou's dramatic reading of "A Throw of the Dice" nonetheless preserves the plurality of meaning as the undecideable ground *upon which* the philosophical reading intervenes – hence, the Spectator remains as a ghostly figure.

### **Democratic Materialism:**

*Logics of Worlds* is framed as an intervention into the contemporary cultural or ideological moment of 'democratic materialism', against which Badiou develops the 'materialist dialectic'. Democratic materialism for Badiou is marked by a form of temporal homogeneity characteristic of presentism. Put simply, democratic materialism is an ideological form in which there is no place for an event to take place; the materialist dialectic by contrast attempts to provide an account of subjectivity adequate to the contemporary moment. The difference in Badiou's framework, however, is that the 'presentism' of democratic materialism is marked by the lack of an effective present.

In a 2005 lecture on art and subjectivity that foregrounds the concerns of *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou argues that the moment "of our world today" is marked by a "war" between two paradigms of subjectivity (Badiou "The Subject of Art"). The first, "Western" paradigm is materialist, identifying the subject with the body. This paradigm dwells on the body's finitude and suffering, expressed through enjoyment of "the experimentation of death in life [and] experimentation with the limits of the body", and is exemplified in performance art. The second paradigm by contrast holds the subject to be transcendently separated from the body in a theological or metaphysical vein. By desiring transcendence, this paradigm is configured around sacrifice, or "the subjective experience of life in death". Both paradigms are therefore oriented toward death and finitude. The subjective model Badiou proposes is one in which the subject is neither immanently reduced nor transcendently separated from the body. Rather, it is a model of "immanent difference" such that the subject is immanent to the body and yet not *identical* with it

(Badiou, “The Subject of Art”). Immanent difference is therefore the mode of subtraction specific to the subject.

Art’s pedagogical function in this context is the clarification of the ideological impasse. The “responsibility” of contemporary art is to forge a new subjective paradigm beyond democratic materialism in order to “clarify” the “obscure” contemporary political moment (“The Subject of Art”).<sup>22</sup> That is, rather than *directly* educating subjects, art educates via a meta-subjective role in charting new possibilities of subjective formation – a kind of subjective catharsis. Clarification, furthermore, is a key element Badiou identifies in theatre, the aim of which is to “clarify our situation, to orient us in history and life” (HI 72); theatre “separates what is mixed and confused” (HI 73). As I return to in the next chapter, part of theatre’s clarifying function is temporal: theatre *orients time*, “telling us *where* we are in history” (RT 79). Theatre therefore serves as a generalized form of subjective orientation – philosophy, as a form of *meta*-theatre, aims to dramatize truths and re-orient subjects.

The opposition between *immanence* and *transcendence*, which Badiou contrasts with *immanent difference* is key to his inaesthetic writing on the triplet of dance, theatre and cinema as Chapter Three examines. In this relation dance stands in for the immanence of performance, while cinema stands for the transcendence of the image; theatre, as ‘between’ and constituted *by* dance and cinema, thinks the ‘immanent difference’ that is key to the development of the materialist dialectic. Hence, *Logics of Worlds* is framed as an intervention into a contemporary moment that draws its central logic from a thinking of theatre as conditioned *between* dance and cinema. Theatre therefore ‘clarifies’ the moment for Badiou inasmuch as it provides an account of what Badiou variously terms ‘formalisation’, ‘materialist formalisation’, or ‘immanent difference’, all of which shape the materialist dialectic of *Logics of Worlds*.

The contradiction between immanence and transcendence is therefore constitutive of democratic materialism – the contemporary ideology of global capitalism, encapsulated by the statement “*There are only bodies and languages*” (LW 1). That is, within the coordinates of democratic materialism subjectivity is identified as either wholly immanent – reduced to the body – *or* wholly transcendent. By contrast, the major aim of *Logics of Worlds* is to demonstrate the “materialist dialectic”, in which “*There are only bodies and languages, except that there are*

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<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere Badiou characterizes the contemporary moment as “disoriented” in its lack of a figure of heroism (“The Contemporary Figure of the Soldier”); in *The Meaning of Sarkozy* he characterizes “disorientation” as the subjective feature of contemporary French democracy in which voting imposes a false or “disoriented” choice (19).

*truths*” (LW 4). In other words, in order to avoid the opposition by which the only alternative to the relativism of bodies and languages is a form of transcendence, the universality of truths must be thought in terms of an ‘exception’ to what exists. As Stephen Corcoran puts it, in formulating the materialist dialectic “Badiou does not claim that the unfolding present of truths are made of anything other than bodies and languages, but that their consisting in transworldly effects – ‘acquired once and for all’ – attests to the emergence of a dimension beyond the perishable existences that form their material supports” (“History/Historicity” 152). By contrast, democratic materialism “merely describes a world without present: the finitude of bodies and languages simply perishes. There is no other materiality that would exceed them, that would subtract itself from the present order of things” (152). As Slavoj Žižek notes, by posing the materialist dialectic against democratic materialism, Badiou effectively declares a principal contradiction within materialism itself: “since materialism *is* the hegemonic ideology today, the struggle is *within* materialism: (‘Preface’ *For Badiou*, xv). Badiou’s aim is therefore to pursue a primary contradiction which supplants the democratic materialist opposition in which materialism produces its own ‘bad’ idealist double, experienced politically in the form of Western democracy versus fundamentalist terror.”<sup>23</sup>

Democratic materialism is for Badiou a diagnosis of contemporary forms of finitude, as evidenced in contemporary art in which “the most inventive artists – choreographers, painters, video makers – track the manifestness of bodies, of their desiring and machinic life, their intimacy and their nudity, their embraces and their ordeals” – a fascination matched by aesthetic theory itself (LW 1-2). Hence democratic materialism is above all a *reduction to the body*, reflective of what Jameson diagnoses as the ‘reduction to the body’ or ‘reduction to the present’ in postmodernity, as I examine in the next chapter (“Aesthetics of Singularity”). As Badiou writes of democratic materialism:

In democratic materialism, the life of language-bodies is the conservative succession of the instants of the atonic world. It follows that the past is charged with the task of endowing these instants with a fictive horizon, with a cultural density. This also explains why the fetishism of history is accompanied by an unrelenting discourse on novelty, perpetual change and the imperative of modernization. The past of cultural

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<sup>23</sup> In “Remembering the Historical Present” Harootunian argues the post-9/11 perpetual ‘war on terror’ to be a key feature driving claims of ‘presentism’ (474). As Harootunian writes, proponents of presentism overlook how the war on terror enacted a “collision of temporalities” or a “new imperialization of time” in which the modernity of global capitalism supplanted temporalities made archaic (474). Within this relation, fundamentalisms appear as a register of temporal multiplicity, as the archaic operating *on* the present (472).

depths is matched by a dispersive present, an agitation which is itself devoid of any depth whatsoever. There are monuments to visit and devastated instants to inhabit. Everything changes at every instant, which is why one is left to contemplate the majestic horizon of what does not change. (LW 509-510)

Democratic materialism is therefore a form of presentism embodied by a false or ‘dispersive’ present. In *Being and Event*, Badiou terms ‘constructivism’ the ideology according to which “there is no place for an event to take place” (BE 289). In *Logics of Worlds*, the ideology of democratic materialism effectively provides no account of subjective form to lend *duration* to the occurrence of an event, thereby establishing a present. As we will see in the next chapter, Jameson’s account of the ‘reduction to the present’ is reflective of Badiou’s ‘democratic materialism’. As I discuss, Jameson reads installation art as symptomatic of the reduction to the present: in their production of eventfulness, installations effectively *singularize* form. Badiou’s account of ‘materialist formalisation’ in *The Century* answers this problem by offering an account of form that is linked to the real of the artistic gesture. The materialist dialectic in *Logics of Worlds*, therefore, aims to provide an alternative to accounts of ‘presentism’ widely construed.

### ***Logics of Worlds: Overview***

The aim of *Logics of Worlds* (alongside the recently published *L’Immanence des vérités*) is to expand and complete the framework advanced in *Being and Event*. As Clements notes, the work’s status as ‘sequel’ however marks a curious paradox for a supposedly systematic philosopher: the presence of a ‘sequel’ to a systematic work marks the system itself as somehow incomplete, thereby challenging the grounding of the system itself (“Had We But Worlds Enough” 280-281). Where *Being and Event* aims to demonstrate the ontological *possibility* of truths by the linkage of being/event/subject, *Logics of Worlds* instead is concerned with the phenomenological *appearance* of truths *specific* to worlds, and as such is concerned with the indexing of truths to worlds via the subject-body. In *Logics of Worlds* Badiou also expands beyond his earlier engagement of set theory, turning to category theory, including topos-theory and theory of sheaves. Badiou’s navigation between set theory and category theory – commonly taken to be two ‘rival’ foundations of mathematics – is significant for the nature of his philosophical system: rather than forming a totalized or complete foundation, the two domains of mathematics offer alternative consequences for thought.

The shift in mathematical register is furthermore of significance for assessing the contemporaneity of Badiou's project. Where set theory is predicated solely on rules of *belonging* and *inclusion*, category theory is instead a framework for thinking the logic of *relation*. As first developed by Samuel Eilenberg and Saunders Mac Lane between 1942-1945, category theory functions by abstracting mathematical concepts into structures composed of *objects* and *arrows*. As Badiou puts it, "Category theory is entirely relativist, it shows a plurality of possible universes (called Topoi). Set theory contrarily presents ontology in the unfolding of a unified intelligible world" (*Mathematics of the Transcendental* 15). Importantly, it is possible to abstract and re-present many diverse fields of mathematics – even set theory – within the operations of category theory. As J.L. Bell notes, category theory emerged from a series of mathematical questions in the 1930s "strikingly reminiscent of the operational structuralism associated with linguistics and psychology" ("Category Theory and the Foundations of Mathematics", 350). Category theory, in functioning as an abstract logic for 'translating' between various fields of mathematics through the composition of objects of relation, operates as a thoroughly contemporary field of mathematics. That is, category theory thinks the *global relation* between singular mathematical objects and fields by re-composing them in terms of logical operations of 'arrows'.

In accordance with the shift from being to appearance, the terminology advanced in *Logics of Worlds* shifts somewhat from *Being and Event*: in place of presentation, situation, and state, the broadly analogous terminology is *existence*, *world*, and *transcendental*. In order to outline his account of the appearance of truths, Badiou constructs a 'Greater Logic', or a transcendental logic of appearing including an account of the 'subjectless object'. The transcendental operates by ascribing degrees of intensity to objects in a world, as assessed between the poles of minimal and maximal appearance. That which appears maximally in the world appears implacably *there* in the world – the maximum degree of existence 'is a worldly principle of stability' which "distributes, unto the beings indexed to it, the calm and equitable certainty of their worldliness" (LW 139). That which appears minimally in a world is said to 'inexist' – its appearance relative to other objects in that world is ascribed a minimum degree of intensity. However, that which does not appear within a world is still *thinkable*: it is a case of inexistence rather than non-being (LW 124). The inexistent is therefore the non-contemporaneous within a world: that which belongs to a world but does not appear as such. Within the framework of *Logics of Worlds*, an event – which itself is expanded via a 'typology' of four forms of change – is brought about by a change from minimal to maximal intensity of appearance. That is, an event is the irruption into maximal intensity of that which previously 'inexisted' within a world.



One of the major developments in *Logics of Worlds* is Badiou's expansion of the subject beyond its 'faithful' form in *Being and Event*. In the ontological framework of *Being and Event*, one is either a faithful subject or no subject at all; in *Logics of Worlds*' framework Badiou introduces the 'obscure' and 'reactive' figures of the subject, as well as a second type of faithful subject which 'resurrects' an extinguished or forgotten truth. The three subjective forms (faithful, reactive, obscure) are defined by their relation to the present. The faithful subject creates or resurrects a present, defined as the active consequences of the trace of an event. The reactionary subject denies the occurrence of the event: for such a subject, nothing took place but the place. The result is that the reactive subject builds what Badiou terms an "extinguished" or "confused" present – the reactive subject is situated within the consequences of an event, while nonetheless denying its taking-place (LW 55; 56). The obscure subject, however, aims to destroy the present in the name of "a full and pure transcendent Body, an ahistorical or anti-evental body (City, God, Race...) . . . the essential Body has the power to reduce to silence that which affirms the event, thus forbidding the real body from existing" (LW 58-59). In essence, Badiou's expanded account of the subject via a typology results in an ethics of subjective relation to the present: the faithful production of the present, the reactive denial of the present, and the obscure occultation of the present (LW 67).

However, all three subjective forms move within the novelty of the present itself: rather than simply resisting the creative novelty of the faithful subject, the reactive and obscure forms produce their own novelties. On this point, Badiou specifies his departure from Mao's interpretation of contradiction in terms of the division of the new and the old (LW 54). Hence the subjective forms depart from the logic of the modern: rather than splitting the present into the new and old, the subjects act *upon* the present *as new*. The subjective forms can be read as articulating an ethics of the present, recalling Agamben's description of the contemporary as an ethical relation to the present. The subject, moreover, is not a collective formation: as Badiou accounts, the subject as a formal process is not demarcated by pronouns "I" or "we", but should rather be understood as "the 'aside from', the 'except that', the 'but for' through which the fragile scintillation of what has no place to be makes its incision in the unbroken phrasing of a world" (LW 45; italics added). The subject, anchored in a body, "prescribes the effects of this body and their consequences by introducing a cut and a tension into the organization of places" (LW 45). In other words, the key operation of the subject in *Logics of Worlds* is that of *displacement*, or the introduction of torsion into the topological relations of appearance. That is, the subject operates via a spatial rather than temporal determination.

As a continuation and expansion of *Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds* bears closer relation to the contemporary. Where the former work aims at a *philosophical* contemporaneity, the latter turns to the contemporary itself, distinguishing the materialist dialectic from the postmodern, conceived as democratic materialism. The key feature of this turn is Badiou's use of category theory – a framework which allows for thinking the *global relations* between disparate mathematical fields and objects. As I discuss further in Chapter Three, the formation of the materialist dialectic is furthermore predicated on a consideration of generalized theatricality – in which theatre forms the 'between' of dance and cinema – in order to account for the subtractive process specific to the subject. Moreover, the transcendental framework of *Logics of Worlds* aims to provide a means of thinking the singularity of appearance within 'worlds' while avoiding the totality of the 'whole' or 'universe' (LW 109-111). This reflects Osborne's observations of the distinction within globalization of the 'globe' and the "'worlding' of the planet as a globe" (PC 14). As Osborne notes, the globe/world distinction is evident in the tension between the 'objective' development of globalized integration and its 'subjective' experience "through which these practices and processes of 'integration' are lived as a part of a transformation of 'the world'" (PC 14). Hence *Logics of Worlds* is concerned with thinking the possibility of a 'global' relation between the infinite multiplicity of disjunctive worlds *in the absence of totality* or the Whole.

### **1.3 Conditions: Philosophical Dramatism**

As we have seen, within Badiou's framework philosophy – in subtraction – operates as a space of 'compossibility' for the seizure of a plurality of truths in their co-temporality. This appears to encode a relation of contemporaneity, understood as a unified – and fictive – operation for the presentation of the multiplicity of present. This however leaves open an important question concerning the *discursive* nature of philosophy in the operation of compossibility. That is, what *kind* of space in thought does philosophical compossibility provide? As addressed in the thesis introduction, for Osborne Badiou's use of modern mathematics to revive a specifically classical – i.e., Platonist – conception of philosophy makes *Being and Event* "a work – perhaps *the* great work – of philosophical neoclassicism" ("Neo-Classical" 19). For Osborne this is primarily a result of Badiou's 'authoritarian' axiomatics, combined with "the mysticism of his conception of the event" (19).<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to Heidegger's account of Dasein, Badiou lacks an

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<sup>24</sup> Osborne's objections to the nature of the event are misplaced. Osborne states of Badiou's event: "the change that it represents is understood to have *no relation* to the situation in which it occurs. It is conceived not as a link in a narrative change, but as absolute novelty, a pure beginning, which is literally

account of philosophy's *ontic* orientation: that is, an account of what *prompts* philosophy's investigation of the ontological question (21). Philosophy's meta-ontological designation of mathematics *as* ontology "appears to act prior to its own constitution": philosophy designates mathematics as ontology, but only inasmuch as mathematics provides philosophy with the ground for doing so (22). That is, while Badiou asserts that mathematics is (unconsciously) ontology, it "is nonetheless so discursively, not immanently, that is, only from the meta-ontological standpoint of philosophy" (23). Hence, the problem therefore concerns the constitution of philosophy as discourse capable of *designating* truths.

In Badiou's own articulation, philosophy emerges in ancient Greece not – as for Heidegger – in the pre-Socratic poem, but in Plato's inauguration of an encounter between poetry and mathematics. In this encounter, mathematics constitutes an "interruption of the [poem's] sacral exercise of validation by narrative", effectively *cutting across* the poem through the power of deductive argument and proof (C37).<sup>25</sup> Within the Platonic framework, the poem must be censored because it is opposed to *dianoia*, or deductive argument: "The poem itself is an affirmation and declaration – it does not traverse, it dwells on the threshold. The poem is not a rule-bound crossing, but rather an offering, a lawless proposition" (HI 17). While Badiou distinguishes his own subtractive approach to poetry in contrast to Plato's subordination of the poem to the *matheme*, Badiou's philosophy nonetheless appears to privilege mathematics *as* ontology over the other conditions, as observed by several critics.<sup>26</sup>

For Badiou, philosophy is constituted and authorized by its conditions. As Clemens observes, Badiou's account of the conditions holds that it is the conditions which *call forth* philosophy,

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'unnameable' in the language of the situation" (25). Further: "Badiou separates truth from knowledge, absolutely. (A distinction between truths and knowledge is a condition of philosophy; their *absolute* separation, on the other hand, is the path to mysticism" (26). These – understandable – objections have been addressed by various commentators (Oliver Feltham, *Live Theory*; Hollis Phelps, "Between Rupture and Repetition"; Quentin Meillassoux, "History and Event in Alain Badiou"; Bosteels "Logics of Antagonism"). In Chapter 4's discussion of Ilya Kabakov, I respond directly to the problem of the truth/knowledge distinction through discussion of Badiou's concepts of *forcing*, the *generic*, and the *future anterior*.

<sup>25</sup> The notion of the 'cut', 'interruption' or – in the language of *Theory of the Subject* – 'scission' is key for Badiou (TS 3-21). It is expressed in his motif of the diagonal – both a feature of Socrates' dialogue with the slave in *Meno* (115-123), and a key element of Cantor's 'diagonalization method' of proof of the existence of infinite sets of larger 'size' than the set of real numbers.

<sup>26</sup> Writing on theatre and performance, Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca argues that Badiou's privileging of mathematics in his ontology operates as a form of gatekeeping by which philosophy authorizes and polices thought ("Equalizing Theatre and Philosophy" 741). For Alex Ling, Badiou's inability to think cinema results from his preference for the literal arts; his privileging of artforms of the letter results in a conception of art "inseparable from its mathematization" ("Can Cinema Be Thought?" 271). I engage with both of these arguments more fully in Chapter Three.

hence philosophy's taking-place is enabled by its "outside" (Clemens, "Conditions" 68). As we have seen, philosophy, prompted by its conditions, constructs a general category of Truth – itself empty – which declares the "there is [*il y a*] of truths" in their plurality and compossibility (C 11; C2 65). As Clemens notes, Badiou's account of the conditions must be read in the context of Lacan, for whom "psychoanalysis comes into being only because there is something in the world that demands a hearing, and because as yet there is nothing adequate to that demand. That demand is the hysterical symptom" ("The Conditions" 28). That is, psychoanalysis is a response to an historically determined symptom whose consequences are nonetheless universal (29). Philosophy, in this account, is called forth by the particular consequences in thought of modern mathematics, psychoanalysis, politics, and art which *demand* an articulation in thought.

Once called forth, philosophy remains disciplined and committed in thought to those particular conditions which form its foundation. This means that in encountering new forms of thought, Badiou "always does so *on the basis of this fundamental* [original] *conditioning*" (Clemens "Conditions" 71). This gives rise to the necessarily limited nature of Badiou's project, which continues to speak *through* its conditions, even when discussing wider forms of thought. This is most clear in the case of art, where Badiou writes of works and art-forms via his fundamental conditioning by Mallarmé. For example, *Rhapsody for the Theatre* begins with Mallarmé's discussion of theatre and the Crowd in *Divagations* and ends with a quotation from Mallarmé's unfinished poem *Igitur* (RT 5; 87). In *Handbook of Inaesthetics* the chapter on dance distils six 'theses' on dance taken from Mallarmé's poems "Ballets" and "Another Dance Study". The frequency of Badiou's reference to Mallarmé in his discussion of diverse art forms often leaves the impression that Badiou writes *only* of Mallarmé.

Philosophy's disciplined self-restriction to its conditions is furthermore a consequence of its non-totalization. As Clemens puts it, "if there is no 'whole' to think, there are also irreparable *divisions* within the parts of immanence available to philosophy that it cannot reconcile without falling into inconsistency" (Clemens "Conditions" 71). A consequence of this is Badiou's 'inaesthetic' practice which aims to avoid 'aesthetics' as an account of artistic reception *as such*; rather, there are only local encounters which must be pursued in thought. Considered in terms of the contemporary, we can see a similar logic at work in the demands of conceptualising the *global* nature of contemporary capitalism. Given that there is no unified subject-position of the experience of globalization (Osborne PC 12), one must proceed instead from the "necessary plurality of interconnecting 'worlds', each of which speaks as though on behalf of all" (PC 14). Refusing totality – there being no Whole – means proceeding from the demands of specific

forms of thought. The difficulty, however, is that the strength of Badiou's *original* conditioning prevents him from adequately re-conditioning his philosophy in the period between *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*. Rather than stemming from a totalizing conception of classical metaphysics, the systematic nature of Badiou's framework is therefore an effect of a discipline in thought. The difficulty is the way in which the disciplined seizure of Badiou's personal canon deforms or prevents his reception of new conditions. In other words, the fidelity to a modernist canon prevents his reception of contemporary art.

For Badiou, then, philosophical discourse is called forth by its conditions, which it remains committed to in a discipline of thought. However, philosophical discourse can furthermore be viewed in light of Badiou's dramatism. As outlined in the thesis introduction, for Puchner Badiou's dramatism is evident in his account of philosophy as itself a theatrical 'act' ("The Theatre of Alain Badiou" 256-257). This is evident in Badiou's account of philosophy's 'rivalry' with the competing discourses of sophistry and poetry, which philosophy imitates. Philosophy borrows the power of argument and detour from sophistry, and from poetry it borrows the use of metaphor, imagery and rhetoric. Doing so allows for the construction of "pincers" for seizing truths (C 13). In the act of seizing or 'pinching' truths, philosophy declares itself to be empty: "At its core is a lack, a hole; is the fact that the category of Truth and its escort in time, that is, eternity, do not refer to anything in presentation" (C 13). The result is that philosophy "constructs the superposition of a fiction of knowledge [sophistry] and a fiction of art. It constructs an apparatus to seize truths, which is to say: to state that there are truths and to let itself be seized by the 'there are' – and thus to affirm the unity of thought" (14). Importantly, however, "this process is polarized by a specific adversary, namely, the sophist" (14). Hence philosophy's space of compossibility for 'declaring' truths emerges in antagonistic rivalry with its competing discourses: sophistry and poetry.

The antagonism, however, must be sustained: in relating to its conditions, it is vital that philosophy preserve the 'open' hole at its centre. This is because it is faced with a "chronic temptation" to take *itself* as a truth procedure (C 15). This would amount to filling in the void at the heart of philosophy, resulting in philosophical *disaster* or *terror* (C 16). This disaster is the result of a desire to rid thought of sophistry, resulting in a form of dogmatism: "Nothing is more philosophically useful to us than contemporary sophistry" (C 18). This is because:

The figure of the sophist is at all times required if philosophy is to maintain to its ethics. Because the sophist is the one that reminds us of the emptiness of the category of Truth. The sophist only does so, of course, in order to deny truths, for which he must be

combated. But the combat must occur within the ethical norm that regulates it. Philosophical extremism, as the figure of disaster in thought, desires the sophist's annihilation. But it in fact contributes to and participates in his triumph. (C 19)

It is in philosophy's relation to its conditions, and in its essential rivalry with the sophist that the 'dramatism' of Badiou's philosophy comes to the fore. Philosophy is animated by the 'figures' of the poet and the sophist, from whom it draws its powers and to whom it remains intimately bound. Inasmuch as the subtractive relation of philosophy is *held open* by the Sophist and given persuasive force by the Poet, we might say that the Philosopher (as a 'figure') is *sustained* by her rivals.

As Badiou further states, philosophy is an "act" of separation from its "double" such that "Philosophy is always the breaking of a mirror. This mirror is the surface of language, onto which the sophist reduces all the things that philosophy treats in its act. If the philosopher sets his gaze solely on this surface, his double, the sophist, will emerge, and he may take himself to be one" (C 25). We could therefore characterize philosophy's 'seizure' of truths as a *staging* of its conditions, a drama in which the Philosopher, speaking in the voice of the Poet, undertakes a perpetual quarrel with the Philosopher's "implacable twin" (C 5), the Sophist. If the Philosopher is to gain the upper hand, it is only through recourse to a discourse alien to the Sophist: the discourse of the Mathematician.

We can therefore see that while mathematics is enshrined in Badiou's project at the level of ontology – and therefore as an authorizing discourse of thought – there are important ways in which Badiou's 'dramatism' undoes this hierarchy at the level of philosophy's 'act'. This is evident in the fact that the foundational statement of Badiou's ontological framework in *Being and Event* – that mathematics is ontology – is a *decision* taken in and for thought. Highlighting this fact reveals a crucial point where mathematics and theatre – rather than poetry – converge in Badiou's framework: the decision as both *act* and *axiom*. Here it is vital that 'axiom' be understood as "a starting point for logical reasoning" which "marks a decision for thought to proceed in one direction and not another" (Bhattacharyya "Axiom" 21). As a starting point, an axiom is evaluated immanently according to the consequences it unfolds in thought. That is, while the formula 'mathematics is ontology' is an axiomatic and founding decision, it is drama – Mallarmé's *event-drama* – that forms the ground of decision itself as *act*.

Furthermore, where philosophy begins (for Plato) with the mathematical interruption of the poem, in the framework of *Being and Event* it is the poem – Mallarmé's "A Throw of The Dice"

– that ‘interrupts’ the unfolding of mathematical ontology and authorizes a discourse on the event, and therefore enables the possibility of a subject. Yet the poem does so *as drama*: “the poem’s structure is *dramatic*. The extreme condensation of figures – a few objects – aims at isolating, upon a severely restricted stage, and such that nothing is hidden from the interpreter (the reader), a system of clues . . . Mallarmé is a thinker of the event-drama” (BE 191). Hence we could say that within Badiou’s framework philosophy grasps mathematics and its other conditions as a *dramatization in thought*. This would recall Badiou’s statement, quoted in the thesis introduction: “For me, philosophical theatricality designates that the essence of philosophy (the seizing ‘in Truth’) is an act” (C 292). Philosophy, *called forth* by its conditions, dramatizes them by re-presenting their compossibility, or the possibility of their co-temporality. Philosophy, in this account, operates as meta-theatre, aiming to orient contemporary subjects in time.

As this chapter has outlined, the contemporary centres upon the problem of thinking the unified presentation in thought of temporal multiplicity – or the plurality of present times. This, as Osborne argues, functions as an “*operative fiction*” of the presentation of temporal disjunction (ANA 23). As I have outlined, Badiou’s framework centres upon philosophy’s construction of a space of ‘compossibility’ in thought for thinking a plurality of truths, encoding a logic of the contemporary. Furthermore, within Badiou’s project the turn from *Being and Event* to *Logics of Worlds* clearly marks a turn toward the contemporary, in which Badiou responds to the ‘presentist’ homogeneity of democratic materialism. This turn is furthermore underpinned by Badiou’s partial re-conditioning between his two major works, incorporating the contemporary field of category theory. As the next chapter will examine in further detail, Badiou’s account of the present and atonic and tensed worlds in *Logics of Worlds* can be read in terms of temporal multiplicity. As the last section of this chapter demonstrated, the ‘fiction’ of philosophical discourse encodes an essential dramatism, drawing on Badiou’s extensive theatrical engagement.

The ‘space’ of compossibility philosophy provides is therefore constituted theatrically by dramatization. Philosophy is meta-theatre for Badiou because the stage – as a space of a taking-place – *subtracts*. The question of undoing philosophy’s hierarchical privilege as the “queen of the sciences” (Osborne “Neo-Classic” 23) is furthermore a theatrical one: where philosophy assembles a cast of the Philosopher in battle against the Sophist and the Poet, the silent and unnamed ‘figure’ which ‘diagonalizes’ all three is that of the Spectator-student. As we will see,

the Spectator – standing more generally for the non-philosophical reception of truths – is therefore the void-point of Badiou's inaesthetics.



## Chapter Two

### Saturation: The Present and the Subject

In the last chapter I outlined Badiou's framework of compossibility and condition in relation to theories of the contemporary and noted the problem of 'presentism', broadly defined in terms of temporal homogeneity, the immediacy of the present, and the crisis of futurity. I also noted that in contrast to the homogenous 'now' of presentism, commentators have asserted understandings of temporal multiplicity as a means to re-politicize the present. This chapter focuses on Badiou's own account of the present as the temporality of subjective fidelity, framed within the context of presentism and Jameson's discussion of the 'reduction to the present' within postmodernity.<sup>27</sup> Through reference to immersive installation art and participatory theatre, I argue for reconsidering these debates by way of Badiou's notion of 'saturation' – an under-examined term in his work referring to the exhaustion of a truth procedure. I also argue that Badiou's distinction between 'atonic' and 'tensed' worlds in *Logics of Worlds* offers a useful means for thinking both the temporal homogeneity of presentism, and accounts of temporal multiplicity such as Harootunian's notion of the 'thickened present'. In doing so I develop an understanding of 'saturation' as a means of thinking the temporal consistency of a present, considered from the viewpoint of the subject.

The chapter begins by detailing two immersive installation works characterized by their production of sensory disorientation in viewers. Jameson argues installation art to be emblematic of the postmodern 'reduction to the present' due to the installation artwork's production of evental singularity; rather than an established relation to universalized form, installation works invent singular form which is 'consumed' in the act of viewing. I examine Jameson's framework in relation to wider discussions of presentism within the contemporary, which take the present as what Aranda, Wood and Vidolke term the "empiricism of now" (6). I characterize these concerns – tying installation viewership, the reduction to the present, and subjective fragmentation – as the *saturation* of the present, indicating the present's immediacy

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<sup>27</sup> Although Jameson distinguishes the 'reduction to the present' from Hartog's 'presentism' ("Aesthetics of Singularity" 103), I use 'presentism' as a broad term referring to the problematic of the present within debates of the contemporary and postmodern.

or over-abundance. While not intended as an exhaustive term, saturation usefully characterizes a sense of the excess of the ‘now’ and an accompanying sense of subjective disorientation.<sup>28</sup>

I then outline Badiou’s own understanding of the present as outlined in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. Here Badiou reads theatre as an assemblage demonstrating the temporality of truth procedures: theatre links the eternity of a text to the ephemeral ‘instant’ of performance, inaugurating a present as a ‘cut’ in time. The duration of the present is established by the linking of performance to the ‘real’ of the audience as the anonymous ‘Crowd’. Taking this framework outside of the theatre, I consider Badiou’s present in terms of the dispersed viewership of installation and art museum, which Groys and Steyerl characterize in terms of the ‘multitude’. With reference to video art installations, I argue that a key difference for Badiou’s framework within the context of the attentional demands of museum viewership is the possibility of the *betrayal* of a work’s duration. As I argue, what the Crowd of installation art viewership demonstrates for Badiou’s framework is that *to be a subject is to hold open the possibility of the betrayal of a present*.

Finally, I turn to Badiou’s account of saturation, and his ‘theory of points’ from *Logics of Worlds*. A brief summary of some of the key terms is useful here. In *Logics of Worlds*, the present is defined as the active consequences of an event borne by the body of a subject.<sup>29</sup> The subject-body is composed of ‘organs’, which are those material elements of a body that positively encounter topological ‘points’ of a world: in political sequences such as “May ‘68” various organs might be the protesting students, the various political groupings, and the striking workers and unions.<sup>30</sup> A ‘point’ for Badiou is a topological feature of a world which forces a decision on the subject in its path of fidelity: to strike or not, for example. Points therefore *orient*

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<sup>28</sup> Other uses of ‘saturation’ are also helpful here. In *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche writes of the danger of the “oversaturation of an age with history” (83). Alluding to Nietzsche, Mark Fisher writes of Derrida’s ‘hauntology’ as an alternative to the linear temporality of postmodernism in which “We live in a time when the past is present, and the present is saturated with the past” (“The Metaphysics of Crackle” 49). Saturation is also suggestive of *market* saturation. Art critic Gregory Shoellette argues that an oversupply of practicing artists has resulted in macroeconomic frameworks being applied to artists themselves, with commentators calling for a reduction in art-school places in order to alleviate the oversupply of practicing artists. The result of market saturation is what Sholette terms “bare art”, fully subsumed within capitalist production (*Delirium and Resistance* 57).

<sup>29</sup> “A present is the set of consequences in a world of an evental trace. These consequences only unfold to the extent that a body is capable of holding some points” (LW 592). As outlined in my overview of Badiou’s framework, the subject is a formal process; this means that the subject-body is composed of the material consequences of the subject.

<sup>30</sup> Badiou here explicitly differentiates himself from Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘body without organs’ as “the field of immanence of desire” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 154). Badiou wrote two polemical critiques of Deleuze and Guattari’s works, “The Flux and the Party: In the Margins of *Anti-Oedipus*” (1977), and “The Fascism of the Potato” (1976).

subjects to the transcendental indexes of worlds of appearance. The central aspect of this framework for the context of the chapter is that it provides a means of thinking the ‘texture’ of a present in relation to a subject based on a *topological determination*. We can therefore summarize Badiou’s present as *the living temporality of a subject’s fidelity*.<sup>31</sup> Taken from the work of his close collaborator Sylvain Lazarus, ‘saturation’ for Badiou refers to an exhaustion of subjective fidelity: in the terms of *Logics of Worlds*, it means that a subject is no longer able to encounter and ‘hold’ points in the world. Saturation is an under-examined and under-developed concept in Badiou’s work. This chapter therefore makes a vital contribution to Badiouian scholarship by developing the concept in relation to the present and the contemporary. Saturation, as I develop it, registers the *incapacity of a subject to bear the time of a present*.

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<sup>31</sup> There is thus a similarity between my reading of the present as the ‘lived duration’ of a subject’s fidelity and Henri Bergson’s notion of ‘pure duration’ as an “intensive magnitude”, opposed to quantitative or numerical time (*Time and Free Will*, 105). While this thesis does not engage with Bergson, this points to an avenue for further research.

## 2.1 Presentism and the Empiricism of Now



Figure 1. Installation view, showing underside. Anish Kapoor, *At The Edge Of The World II* (1998).

Two installation works serve to illustrate the linking of spatiality, immersion and disorientation that I will examine in this section under the term ‘saturation’. Both works, *At The Edge of the World II* (1998) by Anish Kapoor (fig.1), and *Your Double-Lighthouse Projection* (2004) by Olafur Eliasson (fig.2), are immersive and disorienting, robbing the viewer of visual reference-point. Kapoor’s work, a large grey dish resembling a flying-saucer or diving-bell suspended from the gallery ceiling, invites viewers to walk underneath its concave underside, painted a deep scarlet. As displayed at the *Everything At Once* (2017) exhibition at The Store Gallery, London, the work almost completely filled the gallery room, eclipsing the gallery down-lights and casting a shadow underneath. On the underside, the entirely uniform and matte nature of the

red pigment, combined with the absence of light, produces a blank absence – the vibrant red colour of the rim slowly gradating into a dark red void. The result is a groundless interiority produced by the visual and acoustic deadening.

A radical effect of Kapoor's work is to render a division between interior and exterior space while refusing any clearly defined boundary. In its installation at The Store, the work's size almost completely filled the small gallery room such that a 'complete' viewing was impossible; seen (partially) from a distance through the doorway, the work appears monumental. From its exterior the work gives the appearance of cast-iron, suggesting the work to be dangerously heavy for the thin cables supporting it. From underneath the work its monumental presence is transformed into interior bodily affect. The peculiar acoustic properties of the dome combine with the matte pigment to form a 'dead' space without stable reference-point. Immersed in this sense 'within' the work, the resulting bodily disorientation produces a striking sense of unease, to the point of slight dizziness or motion-sickness. The consequence is an affect of *vertigo*, produced by a void *above* rather than below – an ungraspable blankness of solid colour. Thus the exterior monumentality of the object's domination of and presentation within the gallery room is coupled by a radical immersion; the only localising reference for the viewer is interiority itself.

Eliasson's installation *Your Double-Lighthouse Projection* produces an alternative disorienting effect produced by the saturation of light. The work consists of two large vertical cylinders, open-topped and over three metres tall, installed within a dark gallery space – in this case, the cavernous 'Tanks' space of the Blavatnik Building of the Tate Modern. Both cylindrical rooms are constructed from light panels which entirely immerse their inner space with intense light that slowly moves through a random range of colour. Lacking ceilings, the luminous glow from each room emanates into the gallery space above, and also from the thin entrances permitting small groups of viewers into the enclosed space. Once inside the first room, the nearly 360-degree

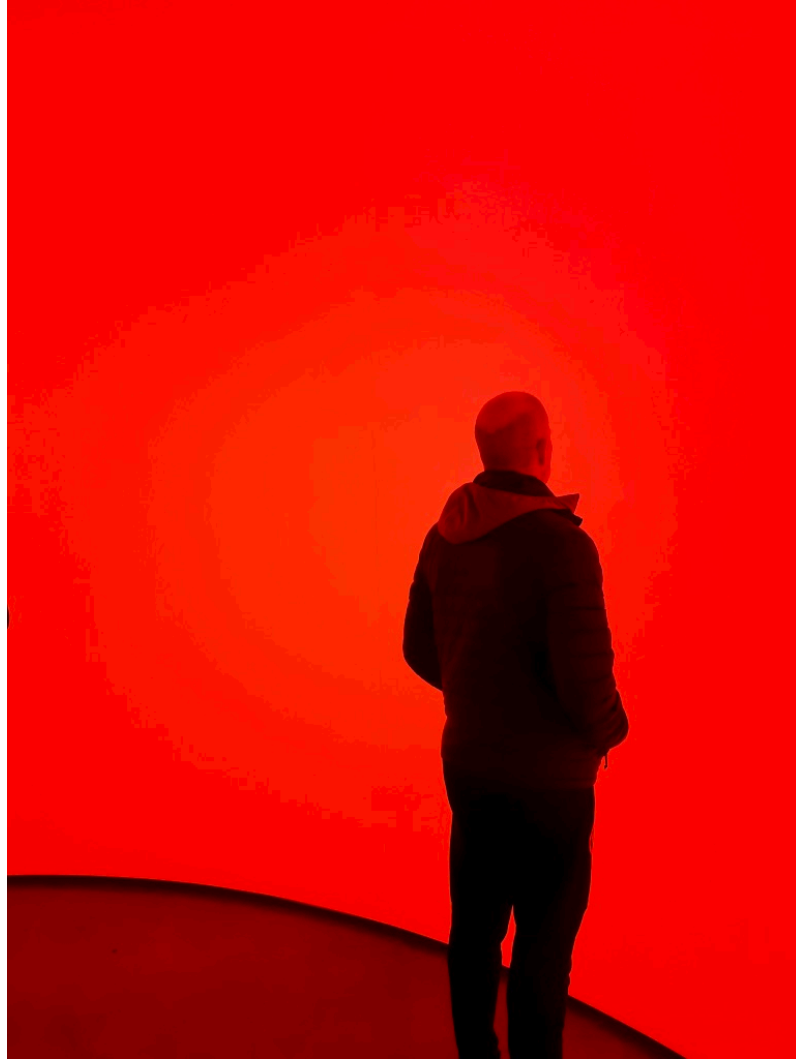


Figure 2. Interior view showing light panel. Olafur Eliasson, *Your Double-Lighthouse Projection*. (2004). Tate Modern

wall of intense light produces a sensation of being entirely immersed in colour – the seamless panels further this by appearing as a solid block of light. The effect, as with *At The Edge of the World*, is a form of disorientation. The height of the cylinders and their curvature entirely fill the viewer's field of vision when approached. The result is an experience of pure, saturated colour that with time appears to bypass vision and locate itself *inside* the viewer, while all points of orientation are removed apart from the gallery floor. Furthermore the intensity of light produces a visual after-image by the overloading of the retina, distorting the viewer's colour-perception after leaving the enclosure. The second, smaller cylinder aims to reverse this process: here the light panels move through a mute greyscale palette, effectively soothing and resetting the viewer's vision.

Thought together, *At The Edge of the World, II* and *Your Double-Lighthouse Projection* illustrate a linking of ‘saturation’ and disorientation that I will examine throughout this chapter. Both works destabilize the viewer’s reference-points: the former work achieving this by producing a disquieting sense of unease, while the latter work produces a euphoria of pure, intense colour. They achieve this through contrasting presentations of light: Kapoor’s work functions passively through the restriction of gallery lighting and use of pigment, while Eliasson’s operates in reverse through the extreme addition of light in the dark gallery room.<sup>32</sup> Where Kapoor’s work stages the gallery space by dominating the gallery room, Eliasson’s work stands out in the empty and dark gallery space – as the ‘lighthouse’ description suggests – as a *space of experience*. As we will see, the works also illustrate the undifferentiated smoothness of what Badiou terms ‘atonic’ worlds.

The installation works appear to characterize what Jameson, in his 2015 essay “The Aesthetics of Singularity” terms the “reduction to the present” or “the reduction to the body” (106). For Jameson, installation art has come to exemplify postmodern art in the wake of the dissolution of artistic medium. Installation art’s uniqueness lies for Jameson in its “collage” effect, in which the work juxtaposes multiple semiotic frames to be grasped as a whole; for example, the artwork’s title takes on a heightened significance, coming to be “embedded” within the work itself (108).<sup>33</sup> Divorced from its objecthood, the artwork is thus the result of the presentation in space of multiple elements to be read together, thus reduplicating the curatorial operation of the art institution itself (109). Yet by subsuming works within its depersonalized structure, the art museum, in turn, embodies the ungraspable scale of globalized financial capitalism in which transnational institutions transcend human lived experience. It is in this sense that installations, for Jameson, are de-objectified:

[T]hey [installation works] are not objects, because they are in fact *events*. The installation and its kindred productions are made, not for posterity, nor even for the permanent collection, but rather for the *now* and for a temporality that may be rather different from the old modernist kind. This is indeed why it has become appropriate to

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<sup>32</sup> The material attention to pigment is a common feature of Kapoor’s works, including his controversial exclusive license to use the trademarked Vantablack – the ‘blackest’ black man-made material. The pigment is composed of carbon nanotubes capable of absorbing 99.965% of light, with the effect of rendering three dimensional objects effectively two-dimensional.

<sup>33</sup> Jameson uses the example of Damien Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), famously consisting of a shark suspended in a formaldehyde tank. For Jameson, the work is an assembly of multiple levels or frames (the shark, the tank itself, the title) in which the title comes to be semiotically located *inside* the work (108). It is arguable that *At the Edge of the World, II* and *Your Double-Lighthouse Projection* take this a step further, locating the titles ‘inside’ viewers.

speaking of it not as a work or a style, nor even as the expression of something deeper, but rather as a strategy (or a recipe)—a strategy for producing an event, a recipe for events. (“Aesthetics of Singularity” 111)

For Jameson the installation work demonstrates the shrinking of temporality to a singularity of ‘now’. This is the result of the work’s folding-back of its form to become part of its content such that we consume the *idea* of the work rather than the work itself (113-114). The artwork is therefore a *singularity*, opposed to generalized aesthetic experience “insofar as each of these artefacts reinvents the very idea of art in a new and non-universalizable form” (114). That is, the installation work’s eventfulness means that it is a singular idea, inventing (and therefore consuming) its own formalization of art: lacking a relation to universalized form, the duration of the artwork shrinks to the ‘now’ of immediate experience.

Jameson’s argument is underpinned by his analysis of the singularity of the financial derivative, which plays a central role in the financialization of global capital by allowing multiple corporations across national boundaries and currencies to do business. Derivatives form unique financial packages which effectively set exchange rate parameters. Each package is crafted for its specific purpose after which it expires, making it “more like a unique event than a contract – something with a stable structure and juridical status” (118). Key however is the *unknown* nature of the derivative itself; “it can only be inspected and analysed after the fact, such that, for knowledge, this ‘event’ exists only in the past” (118). Derivatives are “ephemeral” futures, or “one-time effects” in their eventual but ghostly durations (121). Hence for Jameson the point is “not that each derivative is a new beginning, but that each derivative is a new present of time. It produces no future out of itself, only another and a different present. The world of finance capital is that perpetual present – but it is not a continuity; it is a series of singularity-events” (112). The problem for Jameson is therefore that of linking the duration of the present to a wider continuity of form.

Jameson’s claims concerning the artwork’s present as duration recall Michael Fried’s discussion of instantaneity and modernist art. For Fried, the experience of the modernist work lacks duration because “*at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest*”; this is a “continuous and entire *presentness*, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of *instantaneousness*” (“Art and Objecthood” 167). Modernist art must aim towards “a continuous and perpetual *present*”, through which it can defeat the *duration* of the theatricality which Fried ascribes to minimalist art (167). The modernist artwork for Fried secures its perpetual present via its relation to form, while for Jameson the installation has an *ephemeral*



duration: an event which consumes its own singular form, akin to the one-time nature of the financial derivative. Hence the key problem is that of the linking of the ephemerality of an event to a sustained duration of form.

While Jameson's frame is the postmodern rather than the contemporary, his analysis pinpoints the articulation of the present that I am concerned with. As Jameson argues, the eventual form of the postmodern work, presented within the art institution which it mirrors, is a singularity in the sense of "*a pure present without past or future*" ("Aesthetics of Singularity" 113; emphasis added). Here he draws on his earlier (2003) description of the postmodern as the "dramatic and alarming shrinkage of existential time and the reduction to a present that hardly qualifies as such any longer, given the virtual effacement of that past and future that can alone define a present in the first place" ("The End of Temporality" 708). The reduction to the present, moreover, is a reduction to the *body*, since "when you have nothing left but your own temporal present, it follows that you also have nothing left but your own body" (712). The reduction to the present therefore severs the subject from historicity.

In his influential essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984) Jameson draws a connection between the present and subjective disorientation which helps to furnish the sense of 'saturation' I seek to develop in this chapter. Here Jameson writes of the crisis of historicity stemming from the subject's capacity to "organize its past and future into coherent experience", resulting in an experience akin to schizophrenia ("Postmodernism" 71). In Lacanian terms, schizophrenia is characterized as a breakdown of the chain of signification such that experience is reduced to pure material Signifiers or "pure and unrelated presents in time" (72). For Jameson this suggests that:

[T]he breakdown of temporality suddenly releases this present of time from all the activities and the intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis; thereby isolated, that present suddenly engulfs the subject with undescribable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material – or better still, the literal – Signifier in isolation. This present of the world or material signifier comes before the subject with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect, here described in the negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality, but which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria, the high, the intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity. (73)

What is significant in the above passage is the identification of the ‘pure’ present as evacuated of the resources that might ground subjective action. The present in this sense is *frictionless*, formed as a series of presentations of intensity. The subject of phenomenal experience is therefore *saturated* with affect, all the more overwhelming for the breakdown of signification. Historicity orients the present such that its gradual loss is experienced as an untethering, a flooding of the ‘now’ with the intensity and fullness of the instant.

Jameson’s description of the reduction to the present therefore reflects Badiou’s own description of democratic materialism in *Logics of Worlds*, characterized by a reduction to bodies and languages, or the opposition of immanence and transcendence. The difference for Badiou is that this reduction effectively *occludes* the present; above all democratic materialism is characterized by the absence of events and subjects – lacking a concept of *immanent difference*, within the ideological bounds of democratic materialism there is no place for an event to take place. As we will see later in this chapter the present is for Badiou the temporality specific to the subjective duration of a truth.

From the perspective of Jameson’s framework, Kapoor’s and Eliasson’s works appear to exemplify the reduction to the present. Both works appear as evental singularity, projecting their presence within the gallery space. Both, furthermore, dramatize their ‘idea’ with their titles forming conceptual guides framing the experience as if ‘embedded’ in the works. As we have seen, installation art for Jameson is symptomatic of a problem of form; installation works demonstrate the reduction to the present inasmuch as they encode an *evental singularity* of form that is ‘used up’, - or ‘consumed’, in Jameson’s culinary metaphor – in the experience of the artwork itself. Like the financial derivative which is unmeasurable by knowledge except in retrospect, after which it ‘dissolves’, installation works produce singular and ephemeral presents inasmuch as they lack a relation to universalizable form. As installed within the museum, complete with queues and a *staging* of the gallery space around them, *At the Edge of the World, II* and *Your Double-Lighthouse Projection* are therefore ‘recipes for events’, in Jameson’s phrasing.

As we will see in the next chapter, however, this precise concern – the linking of the singular ephemeral event to universalized form – is addressed by Badiou in his discussion of ‘materialist formalization’ in *The Century*. Here Badiou argues that contemporary forms of installation art and other artforms demonstrating “generalized theatricality” reconfigure the relation of work to form (TC 156). That is, rather than a classical understanding of form as the manifestation of a work’s materiality, materialist formalization sees form “*as what the artistic act authorizes by*

*way of new thinking*” (TC 159). That is, “in ‘formalization’, the word ‘form’ is not opposed to ‘matter’ or ‘content’, but is instead coupled to the real of the act” (TC 160). Rather than an evental singularity of form that is confined to the duration of viewership, as in Jameson’s account, materialist formalization re-temporalizes the present beyond presentism by articulating form as an authorization in thought. The passage from taking-place of a present to its having-taken-place in thought is what Badiou accounts for in his concept of saturation, as this chapter will explore.

### **The Installation and the Museum:**

Installation art provides a useful site for thinking the relation of the present to viewing body because of its defining mode of operation – what Claire Bishop identifies as its direct address to the viewer as “a literal presence in the space” (*Installation Art* 6). That is, the viewer is projected as an embodied, sensory viewer rather than a disembodied gaze (6). Installation art foregrounds the viewer through its own projection of spatial immediacy: “Instead of *representing* texture, space, light and so on, installation art *presents* these elements directly for us to experience. This introduces an emphasis on sensory immediacy, on physical participation (the viewer must walk into and around the work), and on a heightened awareness of other visitors who become part of the piece” (11). Installation art therefore *presents* a bodily present by subjecting the viewer to the heightened embodied experience of viewing. As I discuss in the next chapter, this is what Brian O’Doherty refers to as the emergence of the Spectator in succession to the disembodied ‘Eye’ (*Inside the White Cube*).

Within the range of modes of spectatorship modelled by installation art, Bishop identifies two key critical impulses: spectatorship as activation of audience, and spectatorship as the decentring of the subject (128). What is significant for Bishop is the conflict between the critical framing of installation art, often posed in poststructuralist terms as ‘decentring’ the viewing subject, with its mode of address to the embodied viewer. That is, installation art demonstrates a conflict between the fragmented “model subject” of theory and the embodied subject “capable of recognizing its own fragmentation” (131). Hence installation art “insists upon the viewer’s physical presence *precisely in order to subject it to an experience of decentring*” (133). The present that the installation work stages is therefore productive of a tension between embodied unicity and subjective fragmentation.

Such fragmentation is also, in Rosalind Krauss’ account, a product of the art museum itself. In her 1990 essay “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum”, Krauss draws on Jameson

to argue that the art museum's enmeshment within the art market has transformed it into a space of experience. Central to Krauss' argument is her contestation that Minimalism's radical innovations – the staging of phenomenal relations to the viewing subject, emphasis on serialism, and the use of cheap, reproducible industrial materials – have become institutionalized within the very museum spaces that Minimalism sought to critique. As a consequence, Minimalism's utopian referencing of the phenomenologically-determined bodily experience of the viewing subject “unballasted by past knowledge and coalescing in the very moment of its encounter with the object” (12) in fact prepares the ground for the “utterly fragmented, postmodern subject of contemporary mass culture” (12). Krauss cites the experience of a Minimalist exhibition at the *Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris* and the effect of standing at a point between two gallery spaces containing Dan Flavin light sculptures. Rather than directly perceiving the works themselves, what is apparent is the effect of the “disembodied glow” of the works which “announce a space-beyond” while foregrounding the gallery space itself (4). A similar effect is produced by the works of James Turrell, whose immersive works project colour onto space while simultaneously masking the source of light, creating the illusion “that it is the very object facing one that is doing the perceiving *for* one” (12).

This, for Krauss, produces a *derealized subject* in a space “no longer masterable by the subject” (12). This is an outcome of the industrialized art museum's desire for the “technologized subject” of intensities, “who experiences its fragmentation as euphoria, the subject whose field of experience is no longer history, but space itself: that hyperspace which a revisionist understanding of Minimalism will use it to unlock” (17). The predominance of free-floating sensation that Krauss diagnoses in the art museum touches on Jameson's observations on affect as “global waves of generalized sensations” (*Antinomies*, 28). Affect, for Jameson, resists language, or “named emotion” (29), and “seems to have no context, but to float above experience without the structural relationship to its cognate entities which the emotions have with one another” (35-36). We can thus characterize these effects – of the installation work, and of the art museum – as a type of saturation of sensation, disorienting in its excess.

Krauss' discussion of the light-based art of Dan Flavin and James Turrell therefore highlights the museum space as producing subjective disorientation and fragmentation. Yet the extent to which such works present ‘free-floating’ affect is questionable. In the case of Flavin's well-known use of simple, industrially-produced fluorescent light tubes, it is the gallery space itself which *completes* the work. Flavin's use of coloured lights – often spaced vertically along walls, or sometimes spanning across corners – is such that the work's specific colour is the *result* of

the combined colour as projected onto the gallery space. In this sense, rather than the ‘disembodied glow’ as noted by Krauss, Flavin’s light sculptures are instead *embodied* – given body – by the gallery space itself. Hence it is the museum space which lends duration to the works through the gallery’s production of an eternity of display. As we will see in Chapter Four, Ilya Kabakov’s installation practice eschews the sensory practice of Flavin and Turrell, as well as Kapoor and Eliasson. Instead of projecting *into* the gallery space, Kabakov ‘seizes’ it – his ‘total’ installation practice aims for a form of attentional arrest, in which the viewer is also a reader, piecing together the narrative of each work via the fragments of exhibition text.

### **Presentism:**

In the discussion so far, the focus has been on the postmodern ‘reduction’ to the present and its accompanying sense of subjective disorientation. This reduction is taken by Jameson to be a reduction to the body “inasmuch as the body is all that remains in any tendential reduction of experience to the present as such” (*Antinomies of Realism* 28). However, a second sense of the ‘saturation’ of the present that I wish to characterize is less focused on bodily or subjective fragmentation of the ‘singularity’ of the present and instead constructed through an understanding of the present as an empty container of the ‘now’. This sense is typified as ‘presentism’, as coined French historian François Hartog (*‘le présentisme’*) in *Regimes of Historicity* (2003).<sup>34</sup> For Hartog, presentism is conceived as a kind of opposition or succession to futurism, as an “increasingly distended and ‘bloated “now”” (*Regimes of Historicity* 113). Presentism points to an erasure of futurity: “We cannot see beyond it. Since it has neither a past nor a future, this present daily fabricates the past and future it requires, while privileging the immediate” (*Regimes of Historicity* 113). It is, then, a “disoriented” time (196).

The underlying spatial metaphors of presentism – bloating, disorientation, immediacy – are also evident in criticisms of the contemporary. For some critics, the contemporary in its deployment by the art-world is a “watery signifier”, making it difficult to define – rather than designating a critical project, it is “simultaneously *there*, saying nothing” (Aranda, Wood, and Vidolke 7). The slipperiness and undefined nature of the contemporary therefore provides perfect ideological cover, as typified by the “Frank Gehry walls” of global contemporary art museums: “their suggestion of formless flexibility, their celebration of the informal, is frozen in some of the heaviest, most expensive, and burdensome institutional public sculpture around” (7). The

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<sup>34</sup> Jameson conceives of his own ‘reduction to the present’ as distinct from the concerns of presentism (“Aesthetics of Singularity” 103).

contemporary, in this understanding, is demarcated as a *container* of time, as a “glass ceiling, an invisible barrier that seals us together precisely by its very invisibility” (9). What these criticisms underline is an understanding of the contemporary as somehow ungraspable, articulated in spatialized metaphors of formlessness.

As outlined in the previous chapter, several commentators on the contemporary have sought to define the contemporary beyond the temporal homogeneity and in terms of temporal multiplicity. Critics have similarly attempted to move beyond the confines of presentism. For Boris Groys, presentism takes the contemporary to be that which is *authentically* of the present, or “captures and expresses the presence of the present” (“Comrades of Time” 23). As Groys observes, this position fails to consider the present’s corruption by and interlacing with its past and future, as theorists such as Derrida have shown.<sup>35</sup> For Groys, to be contemporary needs to be understood in terms of a “comrade” of time, understood as “collaborating with time, helping time when it has problems, when it has difficulties” (32). Extending on Groys, Bishop proposes “dialectical contemporaneity” as an anti-hegemonic strategy of museum curatorship in opposition to presentist understandings of the contemporary. For Bishop, the dialectical contemporary “seeks to navigate multiple temporalities within a more political horizon. Rather than simply claim that many or all times are present in each historical object, we need to ask *why* certain temporalities appear in particular works of art at *specific* historical moments” (*Radical Museology* 23). Such a strategy would utilize the historical collections of art museums in order to undo the “auratic” privileging of works by staging an interplay between visiting exhibitions and the museum’s own permanent collections. This would allow an “anachronic action that seeks to reboot the future through the unexpected appearance of a relevant past” (61). As we will see in Chapter Four, Ilya Kabakov’s meditation on art and waste objects internalizes Bishop’s proposed dialectical contemporaneity into the installation form.

Temporal multiplicity is therefore an important counterweight to conceptions of the present as a formless or homogenous ‘empiricism of now’. An important articulation of the present from the perspective of temporal multiplicity is what Harootunian, drawing on Edmund Husserl, terms the “thickened present”, or “a present filled with traces of different moments and temporalities, weighted with sediments” (“Remembering the Historical Present” 476). Harootunian here builds on his articulation of the non-contemporaneous contemporary, discussed in the previous chapter, which registers capitalist production of temporal unevenness, conceived as rhythms of the

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<sup>35</sup> “The past and the future are always determined as past presents or as future presents” (Derrida *Margins of Philosophy* 34).

everyday (“Some Thoughts” 52). This framework allows for the dispensation of the empty or endless present in favour of a “present thick with different practices from other modes of production, mixed temporal regimes declaring their affiliation with different times now passed but still retained with their corresponding political demands” (“Remembering The Present” 477). From the perspective of the temporal multiplicity of the non-contemporaneous contemporary, the present, far from being empty or flat, is instead ‘thick’ and composed of sedimented temporal registers.

Taken together, the varied critiques of the present within the postmodern and contemporary portray it as, variously, a singularity that deprives or assaults the body (implied in the ‘reduction’ to the body), or a container or place-holder of the *now* untethered from past and future. Both tendencies can be usefully thought as the ‘saturation’ of the present – both as the body’s saturation with *affect*, and the present’s saturation with the *now*. As we will see, Badiou’s own specific articulation of saturation can be characterized as the *exhaustion* of a present thought from the perspective of its subjective body. That is, the subject of a truth lacks the resources for the continuation of fidelity. Yet rather than effecting a *reduction* to the present in the sense diagnosed by Jameson – in which singular presents are reduced to the perishable instant – saturation marks a continuation of the present *in thought*. As I will further discuss, Badiou’s theory of points in logics of worlds can be usefully thought alongside debates of presentism and temporal multiplicity. That is, ‘presentism’ as the empty or formless present expresses what Badiou terms ‘atonic’ worlds: smooth, shapeless and lacking in contradiction. By contrast, the temporal multiplicity embodied in Harootunian’s description of the ‘thickened present’ embody what Badiou terms ‘tensed’ worlds, whose topological forms are graspable and navigable by the subject. As I argue, these terms offer a means of considering the present in terms of *both* the temporal homogeneity of presentism, *and* accounts of temporal multiplicity.

## **2.2 Badiou: Present, Subject, Crowd**

### **Theatre and the Crowd**

For Badiou the present is the living mode of a subjective fidelity to the traces of an event, sustained to the extent that the subject-body is capable of grasping and encountering a world (LW 592). As such, the present is the sustained duration of a subject’s imposition of time onto the instant of the event. In what follows, I first outline Badiou’s articulation of subjective

temporality as he develops it in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. I then turn to Badiou's discussion of the subjective relation to the real in *The Century*, in which he poses the subjective mode of subtraction against 'destructive' modes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's experience of modernity in which the present is to be grasped as a violent purification. Finally, I turn to Badiou's development of the concept of 'saturation', taken from his close collaborator Sylvain Lazarus as a description and mode of investigation of the closure of subjective procedures. Doing so will elaborate Badiou's understanding of the present in terms of its formation, its mode, and its exhaustion. A short discussion of the antagonistic participatory practice of avant-garde theatre company The Living Theatre serves to illustrate the discussion.

Badiou's account of the present divorces its temporality from a generalized account of time, reflecting the marked absence of Time as a category within his work. As Bartlett, Clemens and Roffe observe, not only is Badiou uninterested in time, but within his work it does not even appear *as* a concept (*Lacan, Deleuze, Badiou* 91). The dispensation with time as a category is a consequence of his treatment of infinity; by taking the concept of Time as a placeholder of the infinite, philosophical treatments of time subsume a (singular) infinite within the One. This fails to grasp the radical nature of the Cantorian discovery of the plurality of *infinite* infinities. In other words, for these philosophies, "Time becomes the transcendental for all thinking of the infinite" (*Lacan, Deleuze, Badiou* 91). What matters for Badiou is therefore the temporal plurality of presents *specific* to subjective procedures.

Badiou outlines the subjective temporality of the present in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* via a meditation on theatre as a knotting of "eternity, the instant, and time" (RT 79). Here theatre demonstrates the link between the timelessness of truths – their persistence, subtracted from the particularity of worlds – and the specific, localised duration of their subjectivation. That is, the apparatus of the theatre serves to think truths in their actualisation, as "the putting-into-bodies of the Idea" (73). Key to Badiou's use of the theatre is its linking of contingency and consequence. Theatre, tied to the state (its materiality), depends on the presence of a Spectator, who functions as "the point of the real by which a spectacle comes into being" (RT 5).<sup>36</sup> Its temporality is a mediation between the eternity of the dramatic text (its ability to be repeated and performed), the instant of the theatrical performance which encounters this eternity, and finally time itself, in

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<sup>36</sup> Badiou's use of 'State' here carries with it the same double-sense as in *Being and Event*, both referring ontologically to the meta-structure that fixes presentation – the state of a situation – and (metaphorically) the state as a political formation. As outlined in the overview to *Being and Event* in the last chapter, ontologically the state is the re-presentation of a structure of presentation. Theatre, for Badiou, is characterized by the fact that it represents the state; that is, it "*represents the representation*, not the presentation" (RT 37).



which the performance introduces a “cut” in time’s “obscure thickness” (RT 79). The instant of performance “makes an encounter, in the moment, of that which the text holds in the eternal” (77). This encounter “functions for the spectator as an elucidation of the present”, perceived as “an *instant of thought*” (77). The present therefore links instantaneity and the ephemerality of an event to eternity.

Hence the presence of the spectator constitutes the ‘real’ which founds a particular ‘cut’ of time: the Spectator is “*that which interrupts the rehearsals*” in the encounter of the opening night (RT 6). By interrupting the repetition of rehearsals through an encounter with the real, the presence of the Spectator founds time itself. As Badiou writes in *Being and Event* of subjective intervention: “Time – if not coextensive with structure, if not the *sensible form of the Law* – is intervention itself” (BE 210). Time is therefore an imposition of the subject.

Badiou’s framework therefore corresponds to what Susan Bennet, in her seminal work *Theatre Audiences* (1990) observes to be a central feature of the audience’s role in the semiotics of the theatre. For Bennett, “the audience of even the most ‘culinary’ theatre is involved in a reciprocal relationship which can change the quality and success of a performance. No two theatrical performances can ever be the same precisely because of this audience involvement” (*Theatre Audiences* 21). Furthermore, as I expand on in Chapter Three, for Fried it is theatre’s existence *for* an audience that defines theatricality and undermines the modernist artwork (“Art and Objecthood” 163). In the case of the literalist (i.e., minimalist) art Fried objects to, the viewer’s individualised reception of the artwork “means that there is an important sense in which the work in question exists for him alone” (163). As a result, “inasmuch as the literalist [i.e., minimalist] work depends on the beholder, is incomplete without him, it *has* been waiting for him” (163). As such, the literalist work’s constitution by the spectator introduces a troubling form of temporality which interferes with the immediacy of the modernist work’s presence. Likewise, Badiou’s inaesthetic reading of the work of art excludes reception and the reader or spectator; the philosopher’s declaration of the artwork under the eternity of truth requires the exclusion of the troubling duration of the Spectator.

It is this specific element of contingency constructed by the real of the spectator which, for Badiou, marks the separation of theatre from cinema: “if cinema is everywhere, it is no doubt because it requires no spectator, only the walls separating a viewing public. Let’s say that a spectator is real, whereas a viewing public is merely a reality” (RT 2). This means that “Cinema counts the viewers, whereas theatre *counts on* the spectator” (RT 2; emphasis added). Lacking the reciprocally-determined relationship to the spectator, cinema is a “private spectacle”; one

cannot *intervene* on a cinematic representation.<sup>37</sup> The result is that “theatre alone is tied to the State, cinema belongs only to Capital. The former oversees the Crowd, the latter disperses individuals” (RT 4). It is this aspect of cinema – its indifference to audience – that constitutes its ‘transcendent’ nature. By contrast, theatre’s reliance upon the real of the spectator introduces a point of excess into its representation of the state.

The temporality of theatrical performance is therefore a mediation between the eternity of the “open and incomplete” text, and the instant of its multiple performances which may span vast historical or cultural differences (RT 75). The instant is a “false time” (76), the encounter of which operates as the “elucidation of the present”, perceived as “an *instant of thought*” (77). The result is that theatre orients time or “*clarifies the moment*” (RT 77). In addition to theatre’s libidinal or pedagogical effect, “the real function of theatre consists in *orienting us in time*, in telling us *where* we are in history. Theatre as a machine for answering the question “where?”, a localizing machine, a machine for a topological relation to time” (79). By providing the possibility of an encounter with the instant, theatre operates to found a new temporal trajectory as a ‘cut’, tied to the real of spectatorship. The topological function of theatre is therefore one of *subjective orientation* through the creation of a present.

As outlined in the previous chapter, it is this element of theatre – its orienting capacity – which philosophy appropriates, constituting itself as meta-theatre. Where theatre represents the representation (the state), philosophy represents *subjects*, or the specific temporalities of truths by declaring their contemporaneity. However, philosophy can only do so from the standpoint of the having-happened of truths: it always arrives late. That is, as we will see, philosophy only declares the existence of truths from the standpoint of their saturation.

The present, therefore, is the temporality specific to the link between an event and a subject. Yet the present’s constitution depends upon the universal or generic nature of the subjective process. At the beginning of *Rhapsody*, Badiou proposes two “axioms” of the theatre drawn from Mallarmé: “There is no such thing as a present, for lack of a Crowd’s declaring itself”, and “Action does not go beyond the Theatre”, to which he adds a further proposition: “within him, the Spectator, resides the self-declared Crowd and the untranscendable Action. To him

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<sup>37</sup> This reflects what Lura Mulvey describes in her influential 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” as the experience of cinema: “a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy” (434). The result of the darkened auditorium and the brightness of the projected image “give[s] the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world” (434-435).

everything is devoted” (RT 5).<sup>38</sup> What these cryptic statements, taken from Mallarmé’s prose-poem “Restricted Action”, propose is the dependence of the present on chance and the summoning of an anonymous subject; the Crowd as the collective power of the generic, the theatre as the concentrated action of a subject, and the Spectator as the real from which theatre unfolds.<sup>39</sup>

Badiou’s discussion of Mallarmé and the Crowd in *Theory of the Subject* helps to shed light on the cryptic nature of his linking of the present to the Crowd. Mallarmé, according to Badiou, “wanted nothing less than to empower the City with a book and a theatre in which the infinite and mute capacity of the masses – which he names the crowd – would finally find what it takes to produce, by withdrawing from it, its complete emblem” (TS 66). Badiou quotes a short excerpt from Mallarmé describing a mass of spectators watching fireworks commemorating *la Fête nationale*: “a multitude under the night sky does not constitute the spectacle, but in front of it, suddenly, there rises the multiple and illuminating spray, in mid-air, which in a considerable emblem represents its gold, its annual wealth and the harvest of its grains, and leads the explosions of the gaze to normal heights” (Mallarmé “Conference on Villiers”, qtd. in Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* 66). The power of the fireworks – which are taken to also be the power of poetry or theatre – is grounded in transforming a mass of spectators *into* a crowd; the fireworks are thus an ‘emblem’ of the capacity of the masses, displaced and reflected back. It is the crowd that constitutes the multiplicity of the fireworks as a unified emblem, the contemplation of which summons, at a distance, the collective power of the masses as an historical force. In the form of the riot, the crowd as a “vanishing term” can “cause the spectacular restructuring of time itself” (TS 67). Hence it is the Crowd’s summoning in its vanishing capacity which is key for Badiou.

The Crowd therefore represents a collective power of the anonymous, referring to the masses within politics, or the audience within theatre. It is therefore the emblem of the *generic* as “that which does not allow itself to be discerned”, which functions as “the foundation of all knowledge to come” (BE 327). As Dalmasso observes, “For Badiou, theatre does not create an audience; on the contrary it is the gathering of an audience that induces theatre. More precisely, it is the thinking in common that names the audience as a collective subjectivable body

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<sup>38</sup> Badiou’s use of Mallarmé here is taken from Mallarmé’s prose-poem “Restricted Action” in *Divagations*.

<sup>39</sup> In what follows throughout the thesis I will write “Spectator” and the “Crowd” with capitalization to refer to this Badiouian sense, in addition to my usage of “Spectator” to refer to the ‘figure’ of the spectator.

confronted with the theatre-idea and accepting to think it through” (“Badiou’s Spectator-Subject” 78). Hence it is the anonymous but collective power of the crowd that constitutes the present, lending it a causal power that evades representation.

### **The Museum and the Multitude:**

As outlined, Badiou uses theatre’s assemblage of state, performance and audience/crowd in order to develop his account of the temporality of the present. In what follows, I extend his account of the present beyond the theatre through a consideration of the viewership of installation art and the art museum. In doing so, I show that the spectatorship of the museum – understood by commentators to be a viewership of *multitude* – offers a possibility of thinking the Badiouian present in terms of the possibility of a ‘betrayal’ of fidelity. That is, the attentional requirements of museum viewership, combined with the embodied nature of the spectator, mean that the duration of the installation is opened up to the possibility of its betrayal. This allows for a consideration of the exhaustion of a present which constitutes Badiou’s concept of ‘saturation’.

Like theatre, installation art is an ‘affair of the State’.<sup>40</sup> For Boris Groys, the politics of installation art is located in the artist’s usurpation of the role of the curator, and the installation’s production of the public as multitude. Given that “contemporary art can primarily be understood as exhibition practice”, the ontological distinction between making and displaying art has collapsed (“Politics of Installation” 1). In conventional exhibition, the viewer’s body is *external* to the artwork, meaning that “the exhibition space is understood here to be an empty, neutral, public space – a symbolic property of the public” (2). The curator’s role is therefore to *administer* the exhibition, making-public the works; the curator “cures the powerlessness of the image, its inability to show itself by itself” (2). The installation artist, in seizing the gallery space, “transforms the empty, neutral, public space into an individual artwork” (3). As Groys argues, standard exhibitions are largely individuating experiences constituted by the viewer’s relation to separate art-objects, which elides the experience of the exhibition space itself. However,

An artistic installation, on the contrary, builds a community of spectators precisely because of the holistic, unifying character of the installation space. The true visitor to the art installation is not an isolated individual, but a collective of visitors. The art space

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<sup>40</sup> Badiou’s linkage of theatre to the state – as a representation of a representation – offers a useful means of thinking the relation between the exhibition and the art institution itself. Within the major art-institutions, contemporaneity is *conferred* by the institution through a mixture of state and private funding.

can only be perceived by a mass of visitors – a multitude, if you like – with this multitude becoming part of the exhibition for each individual visitor, and vice versa. (5)

That is, it is precisely the *embodied experience* of the viewer within the installation as a seizure gallery space which confers the possibility of the viewing public as spectating ‘multitude’. For Groys, “The contemporary art space is one in which multitudes can view themselves and celebrate themselves”, conferring on them “an aura of the here and now” (5). In this sense, the installation reverses Benjamin’s observations on the loss of the artwork’s aura under the condition of reproduction in that it “takes a copy out of an unmarked, open space of anonymous circulation and places it – if only temporarily – within a fixed, stable, closed context of the topologically well-defined “here and now” (5). Inasmuch as the installation localises art within the *here and now*, it constitutes its own present tied to real of the materiality of the site.

Approaching the question of the museum space from the perspective of cinematic duration serves to usefully highlight the nature of the Crowd in relation to installation. Hito Steyerl, drawing on Groys, argues that the predominance of cinema or video art within the museum space frustrates the sovereign, individualised viewing subject, instead realizing a spectatorship of multitude (“Is the Museum a Factory? 8). Steyerl considers the museum alongside the factory in order to highlight the nature of temporal discipline of crowds. In its classical or traditional formation, cinema space resembles the industrial Fordist factory, as both “are organized as locations of confinement, arrest, and temporal control . . . As the traditional factory arrests its workers, the cinema arrests the spectator” (5). The temporal disciplining of cinema is however altered upon being transformed into the “black boxes” of darkened projection spaces placed within the “white cubes” of contemporary art galleries (1). Cinema within the museum becomes subject to a post-Fordist organization of bodies via the fragmented attention of multi-channel displays, productive of the crowd as *multitude* rather than *mass*. Hence, “The museum doesn’t organize a coherent crowd of people. People are dispersed in time and space – a silent crowd, immersed and atomized, struggling between passivity and overstimulation” (5). By light of its *installation* within the museum space, then, cinema’s disciplining nature is opened to the production of multitude.

For Steyerl, the production of multitude is a result of the undermining of cinema’s disciplining of audience attention:

What would be seen as an act of betrayal in a cinema – leaving the projection while it lasts – becomes standard behaviour in any spatial installation situation. In the

installation space of the museum, spectators indeed become traitors – traitors of cinematic duration itself. In circulating through the space, spectators are actively montaging, zapping, combining fragments – effectively co-curating the show. (5)

Placing cinema and video art within the gallery space invites betrayal of cinematic duration due to the looping of content, excessive length, the presence (or lack of) seating, and the attentional requirements of the wider exhibition and its competing works. The result is the formation of a dispersed and multiple spectatorship, a “multiple gaze, which is no longer collective, but common, which is incomplete, but in process” (9). Installing cinema in the black boxes of gallery space subjects it to the multitude, whose embodied spectating demands continually threaten to betray the work.

A useful means of linking the betrayal of duration and bodily exhaustion characteristic of saturation is Marina Abramović’s series of performance works *Freeing the Voice* (1975), *Freeing the Body* (1975), and *Freeing the Memory* (1976). The works feature Abramović undertaking different tasks of endurance: in *Freeing the Voice* Abramović lays with her head tilted back and screams until she loses her voice; in *Freeing the Body* she dances naked to African drumming until collapsing from exhaustion, while in *Freeing the Mind* she recites every word in Croatian that she can remember. Shown in a ‘black box’ video installation at The Store gallery London, the recordings of the works were presented in a loop one after another for a combined running time of 140 minutes. In each case, the length of the recording is a reduced version of the performance it depicts; *Freeing the Body* itself is excerpted from a performance lasting six hours. The duration of the looped works, coupled with Abramović’s focus on sustained, repetitive bodily tasks transforms the act of spectating into a feat of attentional endurance. Within the gallery space the likelihood of viewers sitting through the full 140 minutes is low; Abramović’s long and strained vocal screams make for increasingly uncomfortable viewing. Abramović’s performances maintain fidelity to the durational task of performance while her body tires – in *Freeing the Body*, her body movements begin to lag and slow even while the rapid drumming continues, until she collapses from exhaustion. Faced with her fidelity, viewers inevitably ‘betray’ the duration of the work, moving in and out of the darkened viewing room.

For Osborne, the attentional demands of contemporary art are evident in a dialectic of *boredom* and *distraction*, in place of more traditional notions of the viewership as immersive contemplation (ANA 176). This is because within the contemporary demands of the attention

economy, art must distract viewers from distraction itself (178). As Osborne argues, despite the contemporary museum's status as a place of distraction,

The ideology of 'contemplative immersion' in, or 'absorption' by, the artwork continues to regulate its reception, but distraction is itself deeply implicated in the demand for this special kind of attention. We go to the gallery, in part, to be distracted from the cares and worries of the world. To be so distracted, we must attend to the artworks on display. Yet, once there, the kind of attention demanded by the works (demanded of you by the institution when in front of the works) – contemplative immersion – can produce an anxiety that generates a need for distractions; either because the work does not seem able to sustain such attention – does not help the viewer maintain such attention – or, perhaps, because of the disciplinary character of the demand itself (ANA 186).

Hence the reception of contemporary art occurs within a generalized *anxiety* of distraction, in which to attend to a work is to be distracted from distraction, and to be distracted is to attend to competing works (186). In this sense, we can read the anxiety of distraction as an *anxiety of betrayal* – an anxiety of betraying the work's specific attentional duration, which the museum presents to us as a demand.

From this perspective, the Badiouian 'Crowd' of the museum space is marked by its status as dispersed multitude rather than gathered collective. The Crowd, for Badiou, is the power of the generic: a convocation of the void as the open and anonymous universal. Where the theatre organizes the Crowd as collective audience, the museum space organizes the Crowd as the dispersed multitude. Following Steyerl's argument, placing cinema within the museum space opens it to the possibility of betrayal. Spectatorship in this sense is configured around the possibility of the betrayal of fidelity; where, for Fried, the modernist painting is fully-present in the 'grace' of the instant, the *duration* inaugurated by the installation submits the work to the embodied concerns of the Spectator, free to roam or be distracted. The installation finds itself amongst *other* installations and attractions, not least of which is the museum space itself. What the museum Crowd therefore demonstrates is the problem of the *multiplicity* of dispersed presents and of their competing demands for attention, as opposed to the singular and collective Crowd of the theatre. Abramović's endurance works demonstrate a means of thinking the body's progressive incapacity to bear the trace of a fidelity – a key aspect of 'saturation', as I will turn to later in this chapter.

## The Present and the Real:

As outlined so far, the present for Badiou is the lived temporal mode of the subject's fidelity, formed as a 'cut' in time accompanied by the generic, or the 'Crowd'. As I now turn to, in *The Century* he distinguishes between the destructive and subtractive orientations of the present which designate alternate modes of the present's relation to the real. The destructive tendency is a mode of negation, which results in attempts to found the present as an absolute beginning, requiring the purification of semblance. The distinction between destruction and subtraction is furthermore a mark of the development in Badiou's own thought between *Theory of the Subject* and *Being and Event* (TC 54-55). In the former work, Badiou conceives negation in terms of the creation of the new by way of destruction of the old, whereas the subtractive framework of *Being and Event*, as we have seen, conceives the new as a *subtractive* negation.<sup>41</sup> Hence *The Century* charts an alternate path within modernity – linking subtraction to formalisation – which does away with the present's determination by negation or affirmation.

In questioning the artistic, political, and theoretical thought of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Badiou's method is one of "maximal interiority" which aims "not to judge the century as an objective datum, but rather to ask how it has come to be subjectivated" (*The Century* 5). Read in this manner, the century's experience of modernity is marked by an "essential violence" justified by the desire to remake mankind (CT 31). This desire is formed by the discovery of mankind as subject to historicity: "The nineteenth century announced, dreamed, and promised; the twentieth century declared it would make man, here and now" (TC 32). This demonstrates what Badiou terms the "*passion for the real*" in which "[t]here is a conviction, laden with pathos, that we are being summoned to the real of a beginning" (TC 32). The violence of this desire is evident in the century's experience of "total" war, in which the violence of destruction is taken to possess an innate creativity: "The new man is the destruction of the old man. Perpetual peace is achieved through the destruction of the old wars by total war" (TC 36). The passion for the real, then, is located in the desire to *finally have begun* the present. As he states in an interview:

What is this passion? It is the will to arrive – at all costs – at a real validation of one's hypotheses or programmes. This passion for the real is a voluntarism. It marks a break with the idea that history carries within it, in its own movement, the realisation of a certain number of promises, prophecies, or programmes. Rather, a real will is needed to

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<sup>41</sup> As Badiou writes in *Theory of the Subject*, "Marxist politics must know how to entrench, how to put the old order at fault in order to truly create that which did not exist. It seems that this requires destruction, which is more than lack – which is to lack what force is to place" (TS 87).



*arrive* at the realisation of this promise or that programme. (Badiou “Beyond Formalisation: An Interview” 115)

Thought in its destructive mode, the real is grasped in the purification of semblance – in political form it is witnessed in the logic of terror such as the Stalinist show-trials. The paradox of the show-trials, however, was the excessively theatrical nature of the elaborately staged confessions. This, for Badiou, demonstrates the *necessity* of semblance in the logic of purification: “the real, conceived in its contingent absoluteness, is never real enough not to be suspected of semblance. The passion for the real is also, of necessity, suspicion. Nothing can attest that the real is the real, nothing but the system of fictions wherein it plays the role of the real” (TC 52). In its destructive mode, the passion for the real attempts to purify appearance, operating as a form of death-drive. Rather than purifying, the subtractive mode by contrast stages the difference between ground and appearance.

Within the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the desire for the real of a pure beginning is evidenced in the avant-gardes.<sup>42</sup> The avant-gardes “only think of art in the present and want to force the recognition of this present” (TC 134). Artistic modernity, as expressed by the avant-gardes, holds that

Art is no longer essentially a production of eternity, the creation of a work to be judged by the future. The avant-gardes want there to be a pure present for art. There is no time to wait. There is no posterity, only artistic struggle against sclerosis and death; victory must be achieved, here and now. And since the present is constantly threatened by the past, since it is fragile, it’s necessary to impose the provocative intervention of the group, which alone ensures the salvation of the instant and the ephemeral against the established and the instituted. (TC 134)

Hence the avant-garde artist desires the sacrifice of art itself in the name of the real, or the sacrifice of the “image so that the real may finally arise in the artistic gesture” (131). The artist in this sense “is neither heir nor imitator, but rather the one who violently declares the present of art” (135). That is, the avant-gardes for Badiou ground the present *as new* by the pure negation of the past, which is necessarily also an attempt to negate or critique art itself.

The Living Theatre’s avant-garde theatre practice serves as a useful illustration of the destructive passion for the real. Formed by Judith Malina and Julian Beck in New York in 1947,

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<sup>42</sup> Badiou here refers to the avant-gardes in a broad sense, ranging from the Russian avant-garde to the Situationist International and the work of Guy Debord.

their ritualistic work *Paradise Now* (1968) sought to induce a cathartic state in audiences through radical immersion and confrontation with the aim of achieving “The Beautiful Non-Violent Anarchist Revolution” (Malina and Beck, *Paradise Now*, 5). The performance – lasting up to four hours long – consisted of a series of eight acts designed to cumulatively lead the audience toward revolutionary consciousness. To do so, performers cultivated a form of progressively escalating confrontation with the audience; from a relatively calm beginning, the performance would escalate to increasing nudity, ritualistic dancing, and an infamous ‘love pile’ in which actors would form a pile of naked, moving bodies while inviting the audience to join. *Paradise Now* therefore constructs its political aims around the audience’s bodily surrender to the performance’s ritualised power. The result of the group’s practice is a destructive violence *turned inward* into the duration of performance itself.

The Living Theatre’s practice was heavily influenced by Antonin Artaud’s “Theatre of Cruelty”, outlined in *The Theater and its Double* (1938). Here Artaud places the body at the centre of the theatre in an attempt to do away with the semblance of representation: “the images of poetry in the theater are a spiritual force that begins its trajectory in the senses and does without reality altogether” (Artaud 25). Theatre’s effect on its audience is physical, seizing the body “like the plague”, a communicative *delirium* (Artaud 25-27). Furthermore, “In order to effect a social change, the old values must be replaced or destroyed and either new values set up or an open space of no values created for the wind to blow through. This destruction of old values is The Revolution of Cultures” (27). To this end, each act of the play featured a short scene of lines which aimed to stimulate or “challenge” the audience as “a call to action” with the aim of overcoming audience passivity (*Paradise Now* 22). Hence the action of the play aims to rouse spectators into an action beyond the auditorium.

*Paradise Now* therefore demonstrates the passion for the real in its attempt to engender a radical politics via the ‘pure present’ of commencement: “Stop the fear. / Stop the repression. / Stop the punishment. / Make it real. / Do it now. / Come up on stage. / *Begin*” (*Paradise Now* 63). Importantly, this desire equates the durational present of the artwork to the absolute founding of a politics beyond the theatre achieved by the cathartic purification of the bodies of spectators. As Baz Kershaw notes, despite The Living Theatre’s strongly-held pacifist politics aiming for a non-violent revolution, *Paradise Now* effected a “totalitarian suppression of difference in the name of ‘love’, ‘peace’ and ‘freedom’” (*The Radical in Performance* 198). That is, “in predicating that everyone *should have to participate in much the same way* in order to achieve a state of ‘revolutionary consciousness’ through sexual liberation, it denied access in principle to

the kinds of reflexivity needed to recognize when a principle – or an assumption of a boundary – had been established’ (198). The darkly violent underside to *Paradise Now* therefore views the audience as *to be subjected* to the founding of a present – all the more violent because of the aim to make this present penetrate beyond the fiction of performance and into the everyday beyond the theatrical space.

The destructive passion for the real is therefore a mode that identifies the foundation of the new as the negation of the old, requiring the purification of semblance. What stands out in Badiou’s analysis is his anti-historicist account, identifying the passion for the real in subjective rather than historical terms. As we have seen, a feature of Badiou’s project is that time is a secondary concern to the relation of the subjective present. The destructive passion for the real therefore attempts to fashion a new and ‘real’ time: in the case of *Paradise Now*, the violence of the play’s antagonism is taken as necessary to found the new time of the work’s efficacy; the play itself engenders political efficacy *in the now*. The play, in other words, attempts to establish a *total* present in which the work’s ‘duration’ extends beyond the theatre.

### **2.3 Saturation and the Thickened Present:**

In the last sections I have outlined Badiou’s conception of the present in its formation as a ‘cut’ in time, its relation to the spectator (including the possibility of its ‘betrayal’), and the requirement for moving beyond the ‘destructive’ form of negation in which the present is founded as a *total* or *pure* present. As I now turn to, Badiou’s concept of ‘saturation’ is an account of the end of a subjective procedure of truth – for example, a political sequence or art movement – thought from an immanent standpoint. Simply put, saturation refers to the *bodily exhaustion* of a subjective process – its loss of capacity to treat the world. As I argue, saturation therefore marks the incapacity of a subject to bear the time of the present.

Badiou’s use of the term ‘saturation’ is taken from the work of his close political collaborator Sylvain Lazarus whose major work *Anthropology of the Name* ([1996] 2015) aims to think political sequences subjectively.<sup>43</sup> Badiou’s use of saturation is scattered but without clear development or definition, not being elevated to the status of ‘official’ Badiouian concept by inclusion in the dictionary of key terms in *Logics of Worlds*. Inasmuch as saturation investigates procedures of thought from an immanent and de-objectified standpoint, it allows Badiou a

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<sup>43</sup> Lazarus worked alongside Badiou in the French Maoist organization *L’Union des communistes de France marxiste-léniniste* (UCF-ML), as well as helping to form its successor *L’Organisation politique* in 1985.

means of thinking the singularity of truths in their subjective formations. As we have seen, *The Century* proceeds from the standpoint of thinking the 20<sup>th</sup> century in ‘maximal interiority’, while *Logics of Worlds* aims to account for the singular appearance of subjects as indexed to worlds. In *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou writes of the ‘saturation’ of three broad paradigms linking art and truth (HI 8), while the definition of ‘inaesthetics’ itself is predicated as a means of de-objectifying art’s relation to philosophy (HI epigraph). As such, saturation is a significant but under-examined concept for Badiou in the period leading up to *Logics of Worlds*.

*Anthropology of the Name* is motivated by the task of thinking politics immanently, or “in interiority” (*Anthropology of the Name* 3). Building from the starting propositions “*People think*” and “*Thought is a relation of the real*”, Lazarus aims to de-link political sequences from categories such as the state and instead proposes that (a) politics is “identified by the *relation to its thought*” (xiii). Lazarus names “mode” a specific identification of a political formation; each mode is “unnameable” or untotalizable, preventing the subordination of a form of politics to the thought that it thinks (24). In Lazarus’ framework, saturation is a method for the investigation of modes of politics from the standpoint of their closure. As he states, “The method of saturation allows us to constitute the intellectuality of a closed form of politics on the basis of its foundational categories, that is to say, by studying what the thought of the sequence was and by taking its singular historicity into account. It is in this sense that ‘historical’ is to be understood in the expression ‘historical mode of politics’” (xxii). Saturation therefore acknowledges the closure of a political sequence in its *historicity*, but not in its *thought*: the intellectuality of a politics refers to the “having-taken-place” of its mode (30). It distinguishes between “what is thought in the thought at the moment the thought took place” and “what was thought in the thought, once the mode is closed” (30). Having *taken place*, the thought of a mode remains. In other words, Lazarus’ framework allows for a thinking of the *taking place* of a present, and its ‘afterlife’ or persistence as trace in thought.

Where Lazarus is concerned with political sequences, for Badiou saturation marks the process whereby a truth-procedure exhausts its subjective capacity for novelty. In *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou uses the example of Greek tragedy which reaches saturation as an artistic “configuration” in the work of Euripides (HI 13). This however does not mean that the configuration has reached its limit: “Nothing from within the configuration itself either delimits it or exposes the principle of its end” (HI 13). Rather than demarcating the finitude of the subject, saturation merely designates the progressive difficulty of subjective fidelity. As Frank Ruda highlights, the concept “is needed to conceive of what has been thought and what has been

bequeathed to those who want to think what has been thought” (*For Badiou* 124). That is, saturation demarcates the intellectuality of a sequence: “only saturation makes a sequence into a sequence” (125). In this sense, saturation provides the distance required to think the subjective present of a truth as *having-happened*, recalling Agamben’s definition of contemporaneity as a necessarily *distanced* relation to the present, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In an interview, Badiou defines saturation as a way of demarcating between different forms of fidelity:

I think a fidelity does not really finish, but sometimes it is saturated; that is my term for it. There is a saturation; you cannot find anything new in the field of your first fidelity. Many people, when this is the case, just say, “It’s finished”. And really, a political sequence has a beginning and an end, too, an end in the form of saturation. Saturation is not a brutal rupture, but it becomes progressively more difficult to find something new in the field of fidelity. Since the mid-80s, more and more, there has been something like a saturation of revolutionary politics in its conventional framework: class struggle, party, dictatorship of the proletariat, and so on. So we have to find something like a fidelity to the fidelity. Not a simple fidelity. (‘The Saturated Generic Identity of the Working Class – Interview with Diana George & Nic Veroli’)

Saturation, then, demarcates a kind of confusion or disorientation: the path of a fidelity is blocked, and so what remains is a secondary ‘fidelity to fidelity’, which amounts to a faith in the having-taken-place of an event, even in the exhaustion of its present. However, it also designates a mode of anachronism, or the passing of a taking-place into a having-happened for thought.

Thinking through saturation as the end of the active temporality of a present allows comparison to the forms of ‘presentism’, broadly conceived, outlined at the start of this chapter. For Jameson, the ‘reduction to the present’ or ‘reduction to the body’ is symptomatically evident in the predominance of the ephemeral event-as-singularity in installation art. As quoted in the first section of this chapter, installation works for Jameson are recipes for events, effectively lacking futurity because of their singular and once-off nature (“Aesthetics of Singularity”). From the framework of Badiou’s account of the present discussed so far, the broader perspective of presentism – a loss of historicity, a formless and endless horizon of the ‘now’, a general pervasiveness of neoliberal narratives of the ‘end of history’ – appears not as the reduction *to* the body, but the exhaustion of the body’s capacity to bear the time of the present. Abramović’s three works *Freeing the Voice*, *Freeing the Body*, and *Freeing the Mind* serve as a useful

reference-point here, depicting via performance a mode of bodily exhaustion. Rather than simply testing the limits of her body, Abramović instead could be said to *explore the consistency of a present*, indexed by the vigour of her dancing or the growing hoarseness of her voice. Presented in video form, the works pose to viewers an inevitable ‘betrayal’; to sit through the entire recording is only a fragment of the original performance time. As installed within the museum space as ‘black boxes’, the recordings present the problem of fidelity to fidelity.

The distributed spectatorship of the museum offers the challenge of thinking the passage between the present and its trace, or Lazarus’ terms, what is thought in the taking-place of a thought, and what *was* thought in the thought from the standpoint of the present’s saturation. As Ruda observes, inasmuch as saturation marks the “failure to renew and invent new means for the continuation of a procedure of fidelity”, it also demarcates a task (Ruda, *For Badiou* 125). To push Ruda’s observation further, we could say that the task of inventing ‘new means’ is that of investigating new capacities of the subject-body, inaugurating new rhythms within the present.

### **The Theory of Points: Atonic and Tensed Worlds**

In the last sections I examined how for Badiou the present is the lived modality of a subject’s fidelity, operating as a ‘cut’ in time inaugurated by an event. The present is therefore marked by its dependence on the subject, in particular its ‘generic’ or anonymous capacity – its appearance as the ‘Crowd’. I argued that, in the context of the installation and art museum, the embodied viewership of the art gallery visitor opens up the possibility of a ‘betrayal’ of duration. Furthermore, Badiou’s elaboration of the destructive passion for the real aims to separate the present from modernist determinations by negation of the old. The totalizing spectatorship of *Paradise Now* demonstrates a desire to equate the present with an *absolute* beginning in which the present is equated to the artwork’s act: rousing its audience into action. The outcome of this mode of spectatorship is a violence directed at the body, which must be ‘overcome’ in the desire for the purification of passivity.

Saturation, as an account of the collapse of subjective procedures, offers a means of thinking the temporal difficulties faced by a present in terms of subjective ‘bodily’ exhaustion, as well as linking the taking-place of a present to a continuation within thought. That is, it offers a means of thinking the duration of a present in terms of the active capacity of a body to ‘bear’ its time; in the case of Abramović’s endurance works, we can conceive of her performance as testing the consistency of a duration or bodily present. As I now turn to, Badiou’s ‘theory of points’ in *Logics of Worlds*, and his distinction between atonic and tensed worlds, provides a framework

for thinking the consistency or *texture* of a present. That is, it offers an account of both the temporal homogeneity of presentism, and the temporal multiplicity of the ‘thickened’ present identified by Harootunian, rendered in topological rather than temporal terms.

Badiou’s distinction between *atonic* and *tensed* worlds refers to the topological complexity of a world as encountered by a subject in its fidelity to an event, according to the lack or abundance of what Badiou terms ‘points’. A point is a forced decision imposed upon a subject by a world – the outcome of which places the entirety of the truth at stake. What matters is not the content of the choice, but that the point ‘filters’ the multiplicity of a world into an encounter with the Two. As Badiou puts it, “a point, as the reduction of infinite multiplicity to the Two, localizes the action of that truth to which an event has given the chance to appear in a world” (LW 401). In order to continue its fidelity – and thus to sustain the present of a truth – the subject is forced to make a decision imposed by the world “in the same sense that we could say it finds itself with its back to the wall” (LW 400). Examples here would be a choice of tactics by political organizers in response to changing conditions, or a quarrel between lovers resulting in an ultimatum, or an artist’s decision to abandon a medium and explore new means of creation. Inasmuch as the decision forced by a point places the entirety of the truth – and hence the subject’s own present – at stake, the theory of points can be read as a *repetition* of the event. It is in this sense that points form a topological ‘rhythm’ of the present.

Because no points appear in atonic worlds, they appear as homogenous and smooth, providing no means of subjective orientation – here we can recall the installation works by Kapoor and Eliasson which disoriented viewers through pure affect. Atonic worlds are therefore suited to the placidity of democratic materialism in which “nothing happens . . . Everything is organized and everything is guaranteed” (LW 420). Lacking points, there is no means by which to sustain a present. Tensed worlds, by contrast, provide a texture to the present – points “are like fibres of the present” (LW 508). Points, then, provide a means of analysing a world in terms of its capacity for sustaining a subject – that is, a form of analysis independent of the occurrence of an event. As Hallward observes, the theory of points therefore offers a means of thinking pre-evental hegemonic practice for Badiou (“Order and Event” 107). Inasmuch as points are for Badiou a “filtering” of the infinite through an encounter with the Two of a decision (LW 400), the theory of points is essentially theatrical. That is, theatre, for Badiou, offers the possibility of the infinite by way of its essential handling of contradiction: “Theater is an experiment – simultaneously textual and material – in simplification. Theatre separates what is mixed and confused” (HI 73). It is in this sense that theatre provides a topological relation to time.

The participatory performance work *The Privileged* (2015), written and performed by Jamal Harewood, a black British artist, serves as a useful illustration of the theory of points, as well as demonstrating its linkage to saturation and fidelity. *The Privileged* takes place in an intimate studio setting in which the audience play the role of zoo-keepers tasked with tending to a polar bear named ‘Cuddles’, played by Jamal himself in a polar-bear costume complete with bear mask. Upon entering the space, the audience take their place on chairs arranged in a large inward-facing rectangle to resemble a cage, the space scattered with pieces of fried chicken, while Cuddles sleeps in the centre. As the performance blurb states:

Have you ever seen a polar bear in the flesh? Been close enough to notice just how white these magnificent mammals are? Here is your chance to get up close and personal – remove your shoes, coats and bags, as you are about to encounter the Arctic’s whitest predator, with black skin. Join a well-trained member of staff as we enter the polar bear’s natural habitat and experience this animal like never before. Be one of the privileged few to say they have pet, played with, and fed a polar bear as if you were one of the Arctic keepers. (“The Privileged – Jamal Harewood” *Jamal Harewood*)

A series of numbered envelopes are placed on seats around the circle; in order for the performance to begin, audience members must open the envelopes to read and follow the instructions inside, completing the task before proceeding to the next. To begin with, the instructions are trivial: the audience must nominate a member to wake Cuddles, fetch him water, and play a hide-and-seek game of ‘predator and prey’. Initially, Cuddles gently interacts with the audience but increasingly misbehaves, stealing items of clothing or refusing instructions. The growing resistance of Cuddles introduces a form of antagonism: for example, after being instructed to feed him chicken, the audience are then instructed to take his food away to prevent him from over-eating. Attempts to do so are met with increasing aggression from the bear, forcing participants to go beyond their comfort zones in order to complete the assigned task.

This introduction of antagonism into the performance pushed it into challenging territory. The play’s explicit framing around race – the tag line of ‘white fur, black skin’ foregrounding Harewood’s own presence underneath the polar bear costume – immediately posed a number of difficult questions for participants, the majority of whom (in its performance at the Warwick Arts Centre in 2016) were white. Harewood’s resistant and provocative behaviour as ‘Cuddles’ pushed the audience into the uncomfortable position of needing to be increasingly coercive or physically forceful in order to accomplish the instructions. One task asked the audience to



remove Cuddles' shoes; after it became clear that gentle approaches would not work, participants were forced to wrestle with the confrontational bear.

The difficulty of the play therefore stemmed from the confrontation with the multiple ethical frames staged by the work. The questions raised ranged from the nature of group cooperation, leadership and complicity in violence; ethical concerns about the human treatment of animals; the ever-present concerns about race, including 'feeding' a black performer fried chicken; questions about the nature of 'following instructions' and authority; and finally, questions about the ethics of the performance and the possibility that Jamal himself might be harmed. The efficacy of the play stemmed from *forcing* a confrontation with these questions, which pushed the tasks beyond a safe realm of 'thought experiments'. In order to complete – and therefore to be 'faithful' to – the play's 'text' of the numbered envelopes, participants are placed in a relation to coercive violence. In other words, the play posed the problem of its own completion, asking how far participants were willing to go in order to unfold its duration.

From the perspective of the framework of the present, saturation, and theory of points outlined in this chapter, *The Privileged* provides a useful demonstration of Badiou's articulation of 'tensed' worlds, as well as the notions of subjective exhaustion and the 'betrayal' of fidelity that I have developed throughout. Inasmuch as each envelope presented a task for the audience to complete in order to advance the play, the envelopes can be considered as 'points': forced decisions through which participants encountered the demands of the performance, orienting the path of a fidelity. Furthermore, each point placed the performance as a whole at stake: a refusal to engage is simultaneously a refusal to confront the deliberately provocative ethical framing advanced by Harewood. In this sense, the play sets up a *forced betrayal* to its own 'duration' by coercively probing how far participants are willing to go in following the play's instructions. The progression of the instructions of the numbered envelopes make it clear that seeing the play to completion would eventually mean stripping Harewood naked, revealing the 'black skin' underneath the 'white fur' of the bear suit.

In its performance at the Warwick Arts Centre, the tension provoked by these questions caused escalating debates and arguments amongst the audience. Responses varied from those who sought to find a less antagonistic means of completing the tasks, those who wished to see through the play to its end, and those who rejected being made complicit in the play's premises. These disagreements reached a climax with the instruction to remove the polar bear mask from Cuddles and thus expose Harewood himself. At this point the play broke down into heated arguments among the audience and walk-outs – some participants left in frustration, some left

reluctantly, while others remained debating. While in one sense a ‘failure’ – leaving a number of envelopes unopened and tasks incomplete – this moment of breakdown itself became intensely poignant, staging a fragile tension between the multiple ethical and semiotic frames and spaces. Despite the open studio doors and the audience gradually leaving, Harewood remained in character as Cuddles, roaming the disordered ‘zoo enclosure’ of the studio space. The performance, then, reached a point of *saturation* through the collapse of participants’ willingness to encounter the ‘points’ of the play. Importantly, rather than constructing a *totalized* present in which its act is joined to an absolute beginning, the work’s unfolding via points *retroactively* produced its ‘act’.

As this chapter has shown, Badiou’s articulation of the present as the lived temporality of the present can be productively read in the context of ‘presentist’ debates concerning the reduction to the present, or the contemporary as the ‘empiricism of now’. As we have seen, Badiou divorces his account of the present from a generalized concept of Time, instead holding time to be a secondary result of subjective intervention upon the event. In place of a logic of temporal negation characteristic of the destructive passion for the real, Badiou poses subtraction as a logic of the difference between place and taking-place. In his discussion in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, the present is furthermore linked to the ‘real’ of the Crowd – the anonymous power of the generic. Considering this logic within the context of the dispersed viewership of the art museum provides a means of thinking the ‘betrayal’ of fidelity. A deeper exploration of Badiou’s framework in terms of the art institution – in which the museum functions as an instance of the ‘state’ – would be a productive direction for further research.

This chapter has shown the significance of Badiou’s under-examined concept of saturation as a means of interrogating the closure of a subjective procedure. As outlined, ‘saturation’ names a problem of impasse, but also a mode of de-objectified investigation that attempts to think sequences *in interiority* in their own subjective terms. In my development of the term, I argue that saturation designates the *incapacity of a subjective body to bear the time of a present*. In doing so, it also presents a task, demonstrating that the invention of new bodily capacities of contemporary subjects is also the invention of new forms of time. The theory of points therefore offers a means of thinking the *topological determination* of the temporality of a present.

Finally, in contrast to the destructive foundation of the present evident in *Paradise Now* – which attempts to fuse the violent gesture of the work to a totalised and absolute present – *The Privileged* demonstrates a means of thinking the ‘act’ of the work as *retroactively produced* by the progressive encounter with points. In Badiouian terms, it demonstrates a means of thinking

the event beyond a totalizing occurrence that authorizes a present as a pure beginning – rather, the event is *retroactively forced* via a subject’s progressive treatment of points. As my fourth chapter will explore, the work of Ilya Kabakov provides a further means of considering the retroaction of an event.

## Chapter 3

### Subtraction: Inaesthetics and Twisted Modernism

So far the thesis has explored Badiou's project in relation to the contemporary in general, and to articulations of the present in the context of presentism and the embodied duration of the work of art. This chapter assesses Badiou's inaesthetic framework of art in relation to critics' observations of its twisted modernism. I do so from the perspective of spectatorship and the question of audience or reader reception. In Chapter One's discussion of the relation between philosophy and its conditions, I argued that Badiou's account of philosophical discourse amounted to a form of dramatism involving the figures of the Philosopher, the Poet, and the Sophist. I also argued for the implicit presence within Badiou's framework of the 'Spectator', operating as a fourth term which unites and diagonalizes all three. In this chapter I argue that Badiou's inaesthetics, as a mode of philosophical concept-production via the 'seizure' of art, displaces audience reception and relation in the act of the *philosophical* reception of art.

The chapter begins by developing an account of the 'figure' of the Spectator. I do so via a detour into critical debates surrounding the efficacy of spectatorship in participatory and relational art, and by assessing Badiou's account of the political nature of spectatorship against Rancière's concepts of 'dissensus' and emancipated spectatorship. Rancière's framework demonstrates a number of important similarities with Badiou, with the key difference that 'dissensus' for Rancière is a relation *within* sense, while for Badiou truth is subtracted from sense. Rancière's linking of spectatorship to intellectual equality moreover serves to establish the figure of the Spectator in pedagogical terms. Badiou's own account of the politics of spectatorship bears some similarity to Rancière, and holds spectatorship to consist of an undecideable relation between desire and the summoning of the spectator unconsciously to the position of the philosopher. I proceed to further develop the figure of the Spectator through Fried's characterization of theatricality as the artwork's relational address to the viewer, and O'Doherty's account of ideological framing of spectatorship in the 'white cube' gallery, which produces a distinction between the disembodied Eye and the embodied Spectator.

Turning to the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* I argue Badiou's philosophical seizure of art excludes the 'Spectator' in favour of the philosophical 'Eye'. In the work, Badiou proposes what he terms an 'inaesthetic' relation of philosophy to art, which "maintaining that art itself is a producer of truths, makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy. Against aesthetic speculation,

inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art” (*HI* epigraph). As one of his most developed engagements with art as a condition, the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* appears to promise a systematic account of Badiou’s ‘aesthetics’. However, as prefix ‘in’ of *inaesthetics* indicates, Badiou distinguishes his approach from ‘aesthetics’ more broadly conceived – rather than an account of art in general, the *Handbook* instead diagnoses the ‘effects’ of *some* works of art *for* his project.<sup>44</sup> The result is an abstract and purifying relation to the work of art that attempts to ‘freeze’ the artwork by severing it from audience relation and reception. Badiou’s essentializing demarcations of the arts, combined with his formalist conception of artistic ‘configurations’ has led critics to characterize his framework as inscribing a conservative modernist notion of the artwork. As Benjamin Noys suggests, Badiou’s steadfastly modernist frame of artistic reference raises the question of whether he is a “paleo-modernist” (‘Monumental Construction’ 383). I argue that Badiou’s attempts to sever the artwork from spectator relations is unsuccessful, and that the figure of the Spectator continues to ‘haunt’ Badiou’s reading of art as evident in his dramatic reading of Mallarmé’s “A Throw of the Dice”. Finally, I turn to his discussion of dance, theatre, and cinema, arguing that they form an essential ‘triplet’ in his work which form a key part of the development of the materialist dialectic.

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<sup>44</sup> In this regard, inaesthetics can be compared to what Badiou terms ‘metapolitics’. The epigraph to *Metapolitics*, published in French in the same year as the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, states: “By ‘metapolitics’ I mean whatever consequences a philosophy is capable of drawing, both in and for itself, from real instances of politics as thought. Metapolitics is opposed to political philosophy, which claims that since no such politics exists, it falls to philosophers to think ‘the’ political” (M; epigraph).

### 3.1 The Figure of the Spectator:

#### Participation and Relational Aesthetics



Figure 3. Installation view, showing swings. SUPERFLEX Collective, *One Two Three Swing!* (2017). Tate Modern Turbine Hall.

In 2017 the work *One Two Three Swing!* (fig. 3) by Danish art collective SUPERFLEX was commissioned to appear in the Tate Modern Turbine Hall as for of the annual Hyundai Commission.<sup>45</sup> The work emphasized a “playfully subversive” (“Hyundai Commission: Superflex”) take on the Turbine Hall space by filling it with a series of playground swings, connected by a winding trail of steel frames, accented in the group’s signature bright orange. The swings each provided room for three people in reference to the group’s trio of artists, while

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<sup>45</sup> The Turbine Hall commissions were formerly sponsored by Unilever from 2000-2012.

also – ostensibly – inviting interaction with strangers. Manufactured in a fabrication facility at the rear end of the Turbine Hall, the swing seats were gradually added to the metal frame, which extended outside of the hall and onto the paved areas surrounding the museum. The work thus connected the seriality of industrial manufacturing to the ‘blurring’ of boundaries between the museum and its outside. Inside the hall the long, sloped floor leading from the main entrance was covered in a striped carpet above which a massive chrome pendulum swung, suspended from the ceiling of the hall many stories above. As such, the installation was divided between a ‘passive’ area of hypnotic contemplation and an ‘active’ area of playground swings.

The exhibition blurb framed the work by drawing attention to the Tate Modern’s origins as a power station for the City of London. According to the blurb, the connected swings link “production, collaborative action and shared use beyond the gallery, into the city’s public spaces and around the world” (“Exhibition Material: Hyundai Commission 2017”). Furthermore:

Swinging with two other people has greater potential than swinging alone and *One Two Three Swing!* invites us to realise this potential together. Swinging as a three, our collective energy resists gravity and challenges the laws of nature. Count, hold, let go of the floor and soar. SUPERFLEX asks if we all swing at the same time, can we change the way the Earth spins? Suspended above a carpet made in the colours of British banknotes, a pendulum swings hypnotically with the movement of the Earth. SUPERFLEX think of this as a space to contemplate the forces at work in our everyday lives. They imagine people might want to gather here to think about whether it is the weight of gravity or the economy that pulls us down. (“Exhibition Material: Hyundai Commission 2017”)

The exhibition was therefore framed by linking site-specificity of the Turbine Hall’s own origins to a form of participatory spectatorship, by way of the seriality of the connected swings. Electrical power generation becomes collective power generation, produced as an outcome of viewer collaboration.

The following Turbine Hall Hyundai Commission (October 2018-February 2019) was a work by Cuban activist-artist Tania Bruguera, titled *10,148,451*. The work’s title, continually updated throughout the commission, referred to the rolling total of the number of global migrants, combined with the number of recorded migrant deaths. Developed collaboratively with residents from the area surrounding the Tate Modern, the work was minimalist in comparison to *One Two Three Swing!* The Hall’s floor was coated with black vinyl panels, onto which a large portrait of

a Syrian migrant to London, Yousef, was painted in an ash-grey at the far end of the hall. The image, however, was covered in heat-sensitive pigment; in order to ‘reveal’ Yousef’s portrait, visitors had to work together using their body heat by rubbing or laying on the floor. Powerful speakers surrounding the portrait area emitted a low frequency rumbling bass which filled the hall and created a sense of unease. To the side of the hall area was a small, brightly-lit room: upon entering, viewers would be stamped with the current ‘number’ of the work. The air inside was filled with an organic compound which induced tears – or “forced empathy” – in viewers (“Hyundai Commission - Tania Bruguera”).

Both installations foreground forms of active and passive spectatorship. In *One Two Three Swing!*, the playground-like activity of swinging is contrasted to the contemplative component of the swinging pendulum. The work therefore produces a distinction between the energetic production of movement by participants and the reflective observation of a swinging movement produced by the earth itself. Bruguera’s work introduced collaborative participation from nearby residents – Tate ‘neighbours’ – in addition to the viewer cooperation invited by the heat-sensitive floor in order to reveal the underlying image of Yousef. In contrast to such participation, the side-room of Bruguera’s work *subjected* viewers to a coerced bodily affect, inducing tears which are divorced from underlying emotional state. The critical framings of both works therefore appear to be grounded in understandings of ‘social’, ‘relational’ or ‘participatory’ art which have been subject to a series of critical interventions. According to such understandings, the work’s efficacy is grounded in the ethical gesture of the work, or the activation of audiences from a state of supposed passivity. As such they offer an illustrative opening into a critical debate through which to arrive at a notion of the ‘figure’ of the Spectator. Furthermore, the critical framing of both works, anchored in art’s sociability and production of audience relations, serve as a stark contrast to Badiou’s attempt to subtract art from all relations of sense.

In her polemical essays “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” (2004) and “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents” (2006), and her monograph *Artificial Hells* (2012) Claire Bishop critiques ‘relational’ and ‘social’ art for the means by which the works subordinate their aesthetic dimension to their political or social gesture, thus becoming instrumentalized towards a politics of social amelioration. One of the key tendencies of participatory art is largely its oppositional framing in which it is taken to negate the tendencies it critiques. In such art,

the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable,



commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*. (*Artificial Hells* 2)

That is, participatory art is conceived most generally as a negation of “its mythic counterpart, passive spectatorial consumption” (275). Moreover, participation’s activation of the audience aims “to emancipate it from a state of alienation induced by the dominant ideological order . . . . Beginning from this premise, participatory art aims to restore and realise a communal, collective space of shared social engagement” (275). As we will see, Badiou’s inaesthetics is entirely unconcerned with relationality of the artwork. What matters for inaesthetics is the *philosophical* relation to the work of art; specifically, the artwork reassuringly emptied of all spectators.

The political efficacy of participatory art is therefore taken to be grounded in the amelioration of social alienation. One version of these tendencies is evident in what French art curator Nicolas Bourriaud terms ‘relational art’ in his work *Relational Aesthetics* ([1998] 2002). Here Bourriaud proceeds from the problem of the “essentially unreadable” nature of 1990s contemporary art – its inability to be theoretically grasped by the coordinates of “yesterday’s concerns” (*Relational Aesthetics* 7). In listing a diversity of artistic practices, which cannot be grouped by medium, movement, or periodisation, Bourriaud points to relationality and interactivity as the key concept that binds these works together (8). Relational art, for Bourriaud, is that which stages and takes as its content the relations produced between viewers, which in turn interrogate wider social relations. Relational *aesthetics* is therefore “Aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce, or prompt” (112). Relational aesthetics therefore subordinates the works’ aesthetic content to the experience of its reception.

Building on Debord’s critique of spectacle, Bourriaud defines relational art as an antidote to the commodification of social relations, particularly in the realm of digital media and communication in which “The social bond has turned into a standardised artefact” (9). Against such commodification, art’s role is to produce new relationships, which in turn serve to inform the work’s content. This is possible through the privileged space of the artwork itself, which gathers viewers together in space and time; the artwork “*tightens the space of relations*, unlike TV and literature which refer each individual person to his or her space of private consumption, and also unlike theatre and cinema which bring small groups together before specific, unmistakable images” (15-16). What counts is specifically the *physical immediacy* produced by these works, in which the exhibition space produces “the possibility of an immediate discussion”

such that “I see and perceive, I comment, and I evolve in a unique space and time. Art is the place that produces a specific sociability” (16). The sociability produced by the work is demarcated by its suspension of social relations – what Bourriaud terms the ‘interstice’, drawing on Marx’s discussion of communities that fall outside the law of profit.<sup>46</sup> This means that the contemporary art exhibition “creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the “communication zones” that are imposed upon us” (16). Hence the artwork forms an ontological space of shelter, demarcated by its production of *new temporalities*; art produces a space for the creation of mixed temporalities beyond the flow of communication and capitalist production. The ‘present’ of the work is inaugurated by its summoning of the multitude.

A frequently cited example of relational art is Rirkrit Tiravanija’s 1992 conceptual work *Untitled (Free)*, originally installed at 303 Gallery New York. For the work, Tiravanija took over a gallery room and converted it into a makeshift cooking space in which the artist would cook and serve green curry to visitors for free, which they could consume within the space at makeshift tables. Lacking definite content, the work depended for its conceptual purchase on the human relations produced within its space. Bourriaud outlines the politics of relational art as situated in the “slipstream of historical modernity”, while divorced from its teleological idealism (13). Rather, the contemporary artists he is concerned with are motivated by “*learning to inhabit the world in a better way*, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution. Otherwise put, the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist” (13). Hence relational aesthetics is reflective of presentism’s severance of art from futurity; the artwork’s ‘act’ is to found a space for investigating the actuality of now, enacted via the power of the audience’s constitution within and by the space of the work.

By defining art in terms of audience relations, relational art attempts to define art beyond movement or style (44). Instead of the modernity of the New Man, “These days, utopia is being lived on a subjective, everyday basis, in the real time of concrete and intentionally fragmentary experiments” meaning that “It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows” (45). Hence relational aesthetics defines art in the *real* of the present, in the double sense of the present of the work’s duration (it production of audience relations) and the present in the sense of the *now* of contemporaneity. As

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<sup>46</sup> (Marx, *Grundrisse* 471-479).

Bourriaud puts it, “Social utopias and revolutionary hopes have given way to everyday micro-topias” (31). Art’s ameliorative task emerges from its ability to heal: “Through little services rendered, the artists fill in the cracks of the social bond” (36). In this sense, relational aesthetics reflects Jameson’s diagnosis of the aesthetics of singularity, producing singular micro-topias severed from the universalizable form of movement or style; the artwork’s present *is* its act or gesture.

As Simon Bayly argues, a key tendency within the critical framing of relational or social art is the desire “to *make things public*”, in the double-sense of both *display* – making visible – but also of forming *a* public from the anonymous individuality of audience-members (“Theatre and the Public” 21). This means that

art’s paradoxically perverse task then becomes the modelling of localized forms and places of collective subjectivity – association, gathering, meeting, encounter, congregation – that use theatrical means to overcome theatre as a separating power, one that is essentially allied to the encysted and reactionary forms of social organization. This task is not pursued solely through a Brechtian-style representational critique but in the transformations of the terms of the encounter itself. (21)

Yet the outcome of this logic is the inscription of a ‘communitarian’ vision of the public as *capable* of being represented within the space of the work. As Bishop observes, accounts of Tiravanija’s work revealed that the space of relations provided by the work was ultimately reduced to a site for networking between art dealers and like-minded art lovers (“Antagonism” 67). That is, by grounding the work’s act in ‘making-public’, such works leave suspended the question of the *kind* of public produced by the museum institution. In Badiou’s terms, such gestures potentially undo the generic or anonymous capacity of the theatre Crowd.

A similar slippage is evident in social or collaborative art, the critical underpinning of which judges efficacy on the artist’s embedding within a community and undoing of the authority of ‘artist’. As Bishop argues, the aims of social amelioration in such art “has led to a situation in which such collaborative practices are automatically perceived to be equally important *artistic* gestures of resistance: There can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond” (‘The Social Turn’ 180). Accompanying such art is an ‘ethical’ turn in criticism in which works

are judged in terms of the efficacy of their gestures.<sup>47</sup> For Bishop, then, the limit of both relational or social/collaborative art is the erosion of criteria by which works are judged to be successful; the normative criteria of such art is the *efficacy of the gesture*, in which good art is that which produces ‘good’ social relationships.

The above criticisms of relational aesthetics as a critical frame attend to the way in which such art practices attempt to fuse the work’s gesture to the immediate temporality of the work’s duration: fostering micro-utopias or forming publics *within* the space and temporality of the work. Jacques Rancière’s writing on art and politics has been an important reference-point in critiques of social, relational, or collaborative art, and his short essay “The Emancipated Spectator” ([2008] 2009) has become a key text in debates concerning participatory spectatorship. Rancière’s articulation of the aesthetic constitution of politics sets up a useful counterpoint to Badiou’s ‘*in*’-aesthetic account of art – as I turn to in my discussion of inaeesthetics, Rancière argues Badiou’s framework to ‘police’ the political dimension of art inasmuch as aesthetics is excluded in preference for a medium-specific division of the arts. Moreover, Rancière’s identification of the ‘emancipated’ spectator – emerging from his critique of philosophy’s hierarchical attitude to education – is key for developing an understanding of the ‘figure of the Spectator’ in a pedagogical relation that I wish to deploy against Badiou’s framework. That is, Rancière provides an account of the Spectator as also a Student, whose assertion of intellectual equality undermines the privileged role of the Philosopher in Badiou’s framework.

For Rancière, the political capacity of art in modernity is located in the tension between aesthetic autonomy and heteronomy – between “art of the beautiful and art of the living” – the critical origin of which he locates in Schiller’s writing on aesthetics (*Dissensus* 116). It is vital, however, that the tension between autonomy and heteronomy is sustained rather than collapsed. Writing on contemporary ‘critical’ or political art, Rancière notes the underlying assumption “that art compels us to revolt when it shows us revolting things, that it mobilizes when it itself is taken outside of the workshop or museum and that it incites us to oppose the system of domination by denouncing its own participation in that system” (*Dissensus* 135). For Rancière, these positions essentially reproduce outmoded understandings of aesthetic efficacy.

Rancière identifies two underlying logics of artistic pedagogy, typified as “*representational mediation*” versus “*ethical immediacy*” (*Dissensus* 137). Representational mediation operates as

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<sup>47</sup> Examples are Lucy R Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (1997) and Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

a traditional pedagogy of the artwork which “posits that what the viewer sees – on a stage no less than in a photographic exhibition or an installation – is a set of signs formed according to an artist’s intention” (135). The spectator’s recognition of these signs offers lessons on the non-aesthetic world. Hence:

We may no longer believe that exhibiting virtues and vices on stage can improve human behaviour, but we continue to act as if reproducing a commercial idol in resin will engender resistance against the “spectacle”, and as if a series of photographs about the way colonizers represent the colonized will work to undermine the fallacies of mainstream representations of identities. (*Dissensus* 136)

The representational logic is therefore predicated on art as essentially mimetic, which invests the artwork with “the power of the effects that it is supposed to elicit on the behaviour of spectators” (136). By contrast, the logic of ethical immediacy seeks to undo the representational distancing of mimesis in which the artwork is afforded its own ontological space; instead of representation this model seeks “to have all living bodies directly embody the sense of the common” (*Dissensus* 137). Here art’s efficacy is an outcome of its heteronomy: its capacity to model (or re-model) an organization of bodies coextensive with life.

Viewed in these terms, the Turbine Hall installations demonstrate both pedagogies of representational distancing and ethical immediacy. SUPERFLEX’s *One Two Three Swing* institutes the immediate through the invitation to active enjoyment with strangers – the implication being that harmonized ‘swinging’ fosters human relations between participants. Bruguera’s work draws on and entwines both logics: the shared (immediate) participation of spectators’ movements combine to reveal the (representational) image of Yousef, while similarly the (immediate) ‘forced empathy’ of the produced tears is coupled with the (representational) numbered-stamp tracking refugee deaths. As we will see, however, Badiou’s ‘inaesthetic’ framework shows little concern for assessments of audience relation; the inaesthetic seizure of art’s production of truth functions by subtracting the work from its reception.

### **Ranci re And Badiou: The Figure of the Spectator**

Ranci re contrasts the representational and ethical regimes of pedagogy to what he terms the ‘aesthetic’ model. For the aesthetic model, art’s political efficacy is built on its capacity for *dissensus*, which he defines as “a conflict between *sense* and *sense*. Dissensus is a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory

regimes and/or “bodies” (139). Dissensus links art and politics because politics, for Rancière, “breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the ‘natural’ order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or being ruled, assigning them to private or public lives, pinning them down to a certain time and space, to specific ‘bodies’, that is to specific ways of being, seeing, and saying” (*Dissensus* 139). Politics, then, involves an ‘aesthetic’ arrangement of bodies to places – what Rancière terms the ‘distribution of the sensible’.<sup>48</sup> The political capacity of art is enabled when works “neither give any lessons nor have any destination” (140). That is, ‘no direct cause-effect relationship is determinable between the intention realized in an art performance and a capacity for political subjectivation’ (140-141). For Rancière, art’s aesthetic constitution allows it to introduce dissensus regardless of the specific critical intentions of the artist.

The issue of the predestination of art’s effect is the focus of Rancière’s intervention into the politics of spectatorship in his essay “The Emancipated Spectator”. Here he attends to the implicit assumption within Western theatrical discourses in which the figure of the spectator is held to be in a position of ignorance and passivity (*The Emancipated Spectator* 3). The result is a desire to overcome the effects of theatre from within the theatre itself – a desire “a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs” (4). This is achieved through spectator models of pedagogy and immediacy: critical spectatorship posed against the effects of spectacle, or active spectatorship posed against the alienating effects of the image. These two models Rancière attributes to Brecht and Artaud’s dramaturgies respectively.

Yet the underlying assumptions of the desire to educate or activate audiences are for Rancière predicated on a fundamental relationship of intellectual inequality. The desire is a “logic of a stultifying pedagogue, the logic of a straight, uniform transmission [...] What the pupil must *learn* is what the schoolmaster must *teach* her. What the spectator *must see* is what the director *makes her see*” (14). Rather than an ill to be ‘cured’, spectatorship is a normal relation predicated on an axiom of intellectual equality: “The human animal learns everything in the same way as it initially learnt its mother tongue, as it learnt to venture into the forest of signs of things...” (10). Thus emancipated spectatorship, for Rancière, involves affording proper status to estranged viewership: “The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects,

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<sup>48</sup> The *distribution of the sensible* is “a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the places and the stakes of politics as a form of experience” (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 13).

compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place” (13). Rancière’s articulation of the emancipated spectator – free from the hierarchy of intellectual ‘stultification’ – serves as a key identification of the Spectator as a philosophical figure intimately linked to the question of pedagogy. That is, the Spectator is also a Student.

As we will see, the limitation of Badiou’s inaesthetic framework is that it is predominantly concerned with establishing a framework for the *philosophical* seizure of art – a seizure in which the work is ‘frozen’ from audience relation. The effect is to deploy a distinction between philosophical and non-philosophical encounters with art: the spectator, mired in sense, must be subtracted in order to deliver the artwork to eternity. This is compounded by Badiou’s under-developed account of education, leaving his description of the pedagogy of spectatorship remarkably abstract. As he writes in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, “the only education is an education *by* truths. The entire, insistent problem is that there be truths, without which the philosophical category of truth is entirely empty and the philosophical act nothing but an academic quibble” (HI 14-15). It therefore falls to philosophy to declare the *existence* of truths: the question of truths “points to a coresponsibility of art, which produces truths, and philosophy, which, under the condition that there are truths, is duty-bound *to make them manifest* (a very difficult task indeed)” (HI 15; emphasis added). In other words, philosophy makes truths *appear* as such – the inaesthetic seizure of art is required such that the Spectator-Student may be educated *by* them. This means that philosophy as meta-theatre educates contemporary subjects by declaring the *possibility* of truths. Philosophy thereby appropriates the theatre’s capacity of clarification.

Where Rancière locates art’s efficacy in dissensus as a conflict of sense and sense, Badiou frames education as the task of “piercing a hole” in knowledge (HI 9). The result is that for Rancière dissensus occurs *within* sense, while for Badiou inaesthetic education locates truth as an *exception* to sense. Lacking an account of the Spectator-as-Student, Badiou’s framework relies upon the Philosopher’s superior capacity for discerning and declaring the existence of truths, while the non-philosopher is condemned to produce truth *unconsciously*.

Hence for Rancière spectatorship is political inasmuch as spectating itself is a sense-making and sense-disrupting procedure; predicated on intellectual equality, spectatorship is grounded in the spectator’s already-given capacity to intervene in the structured world of sense: spectating is an *active* operation within the ‘distribution of the sensible’. For Badiou, by contrast, spectatorship at its core is the linking of the generic power of the Crowd to the (inherently excessive) visibility

of the State via the theatrical apparatus. Spectatorship is primarily an encounter in thought: “The public comes to the theater to be *struck*. Struck by theater-ideas. It does not leave the theater cultivated, but stunned, fatigued (thought is tiring), pensive” (HI 77). However, as I turn to later in this chapter, the difficulty in unpacking Badiou’s writing on spectatorship – as with his inaesthetic writing on art – is the manner by which he deploys theatre and the arts as *metaphors of thought*. That is, his writing predominantly involves assessing the consequences of theatre, or poetry, or other art forms *for* the framework of his philosophical project.

For Badiou, spectating is ‘political’ inasmuch as theatre is inherently political. This is because theatre is an art form of the State. In broad terms, Badiou’s usage of the State equates to Rancière’s ‘distribution of the sensible’. As I outlined in the overview of Badiou’s terminology, the State refers to the ontological meta-structure that re-presents or *fixes* presentation, playing on a “metaphorical affinity with politics” (BE 95). In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou reads theatre as a “figurative reknitting of politics” (RT 13) based on an “isomorphism” (9) between the two. This is because theatre and politics are both *affairs of the State*. Theatre’s materiality and relation to the real of an audience mean that it is invariably a *public* concern, frequently submitted to the surveillance of state censors while furthermore dependent on forms of state funding. As Badiou puts it, “Whatever is said in theatre, even in a schoolyard illuminated by two small lamps, is said *with majesty*. If it is scandalous, it is because the State does not keep watch over itself enough: it does not keep watch over its own words” (RT 30). As discussed in the previous chapter, theatre is tied to the ‘real’ of its audience – represented as the figure of the Crowd – by which it is contrasted to cinema.<sup>49</sup>

Theatre is therefore a declaration in public that simultaneously displays itself as an affair of the State. Likewise, politics originates in the “visible event of the State’s being given the final notice for proving its legitimacy once more” (RT 9). This means that theatre is political not in *content* but in its depiction of the State: theatre is an “art of the *declaration of the state* (of affairs)” (RT 37). Throughout, Badiou plays upon the double-sense of the term State in his work: as both an ontological structuring that secures ‘oneness’ – akin to Rancière’s distribution of the sensible – and the sense of political ‘state’. If theatre *makes visible* the State, this is because theatre “represents: it *represents the representation*, not the presentation. The State, not the emergence of its place. . . It authorizes itself by representing representations. Thus, by the Idea (in Plato’s sense). All theatre is a theatre of Ideas” (RT 37). Moreover, theatre’s operation

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<sup>49</sup> As Badiou observes, the idea of a “national cinema” in the manner of a ‘national theatre’ appears absurd (RT 34).



is specific and localized. Just as “Politics *takes place*, from time to time. It begins, it ends”, so does theatre: “Representation *takes place*. It is a circumscribed event. There can be no permanent theatre” (11). The demand of localization means for Badiou that there is no generalized or totalized politics or theatre; rather, procedures are *specific* to forms of thought. To summarize Badiou’s linking of theatre and politics, we can say that theatre for Badiou is a *local affair of the State* (being public), and *stages the local State* (of affairs).

As such, the political efficacy of theatre stems not from the content of a play, nor – as in Brechtian dramaturgy – from a form of critical didactics. Rather, theatre’s political efficacy results from its inherent representation and distancing of the State, introducing a troubling point of excess as a result of the void. This is at the heart of Badiou’s normative distinction between good and bad theatre, or Theatre and ‘theatre’ respectively. Where Theatre introduces the void, “there is a ‘theatre’ that is fulfilling, a ‘theatre’ of established meanings, a ‘theatre’ from which nothing is lacking and which, abolishing chance, induces a convivial satisfaction in those who hate truth” (21). Where ‘theatre’ is addressed to an ‘identitarian’ marked audience, the audience of Theatre is generic, “an indiscernible and atypical subtraction from what Mallarmé calls the Crowd. Only a Crowd can make a Spectator . . . that is, someone who exposes him or herself, in the distance of a representation, to the torment of a truth’ (21).<sup>50</sup> Constituted by a generic audience, true Theatre “makes it known to you that you will not be able innocently to remain *in your place*” (RT 23). Spectatorship is in this sense a case of displacement, an *unsettling* of relations, even under the watchful eye of the State. That is, rather than necessarily being an effect of subversion, the political effect of theatre stems from theatre’s material ‘authorization’ by the State.

The pedagogy of spectatorship for Badiou is caught in a circulation between desire and the Idea. As he writes, “*Either* theatre is a capturing machine of desiring identifications”, making it broadly psychoanalytic in effect, “*Or* theatre is a perfected pedagogical apparatus”, making it philosophical in address (70). Crucially, the opposition remains undecideable from the standpoint of the spectator. That is, the spectator “either transfers onto the simulacra of the stage whatever insists in his or her desire, or else he or she occupies, with regard to the Idea latent in the golden and scarlet appearances, the *universal position of the philosopher without even knowing it*’ (71; emphasis added). This key point results from the essential entwining of philosophy and desire such that theatre is “philosophy seized by debauchery”; “Theatre: the

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<sup>50</sup> As he writes in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, the generic audience is posed “against any conception of the public that would depict it as a community, a substance, or a consistent set” (HI 74).

putting-into-bodies of the Idea. From the point of desire, it is its life; from the point of the Idea, it is its tomb. . . Theatre as bastard philosophy, or philosophical bastardry” (RT 73). Yet what is missing here is an account of *relation*: that is, by what means does the putting-into-bodies of the Idea shape the Idea itself? This question, as we will see, is related to Badiou’s apparent sidestepping of the question of the artwork’s reception: the work harbours a relation to the eternity of truth, available to the Philosopher but only unconsciously felt by the Spectator.

For Rancière, the figure of the Spectator is based on an already ‘active’ capacity – an extension of intellectual equality enacted by the Student. For Badiou, however, the Spectator is essentially a non-figure: absolutely anonymous and sheltered by the generic capacity of the Crowd. Caught in an undecidable tension between desire and thought, the spectator is a possibility that demonstrates the link between the ephemerality of the event and the sustained duration of subjective fidelity. Summoned as a flash by the chance of Theatre, the Spectator – elevated unconsciously to the role of Philosopher – is submitted to the demand: *think*. Where Rancière’s Spectator takes the form of the self-educating student, Badiou’s Spectator is ultimately a shadowy double of the Philosopher. As I will outline, Badiou’s inaesthetics subordinates reception – and the Spectator – to the act of philosophical capture of the work: philosophical reception displaces audience reception. Before doing so, however, I will briefly outline a further articulation of the spectator in the context of Michael Fried’s discussion of objecthood and theatricality.

### **Objecthood – From Viewer to Spectator**

Fried’s essay “Art and Objecthood”, published in *Artforum* in 1967, is a useful reference-point for thinking audience relation and theatricality. In the essay Fried defends modernist art from the projection of ‘objecthood’ evident in literalist – now termed ‘minimalist’ – art, evident in the sculptural works of Donald Judd and Robert Morris. The best known of Judd’s works, termed ‘Specific Objects’, comprise of a series of ladder-like rectangles protruding from the gallery wall, stacked vertically and evenly so that their spacing matches their thickness. The works emphasize seriality, building verticality through the repetition of horizontal planes. Morris’ works, such as *Seven Plywood Structures Painted Grey*, emphasize shape in a more confrontational sense. Comprised of large rectangles and ‘L-Beam’ objects painted neutral grey, the shapes appear anthropomorphic – exceeding human scale and forcing viewers to navigate their dimensions. Such works for Fried collapse into a singularity of shape, producing a sense of hollowness (151). It is the works’ reference to their own shape as a minimal difference distinguishing them from non-art that constitutes their ‘objecthood’. Moreover, the mounting of

such works on the gallery floor or wall – forgoing the use of pedestal – serve to emphasize the gallery space itself.

For Fried, the projection of objecthood is a form of theatricality, referencing the “actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters the literalist work”, which in literalist art extends to a “*situation* – one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*” (153). By including the viewer, literalist art produces a “stage presence” or “complicity” with the viewer: the literalist work “demands that the beholder take it into account, that he take it seriously” so that “the beholder knows himself to stand in an indeterminate, open-ended – and unextracting – relation as *subject* to the impassive object on the wall or floor” (155). The presence of the literalist artwork is likened to the presence of “another *person*” (155), producing a distancing effect in which the viewer is constructed as a subject. The stage presence of the work erodes its own autonomy, reducing it an objecthood which addresses the viewer *as subject* to a spatial-temporal relation.

Theatricality in this sense is the work’s relation to the audience. For Fried, theatre “has an audience – it exists for one – in a way that the other arts do not; in fact, this more than anything else is what modernist sensibility finds intolerable in theater generally” (163). In literalist art, moreover, the viewer is “confronted” by the work “within a situation that he experiences as his”, meaning that “the work in question exists for him alone, even if he is not actually alone with the work at the time” (163). The artwork addresses and, further, “refuses to stop confronting” the viewer (163). Hence it is the temporality of the work’s address that makes it theatrical; by incessantly confronting the viewer, the literalist work demonstrates its preoccupation with time as “the *duration of the experience*” drawing on theatre’s “sense of temporality, of both time passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*” (166-167). Modernist art is characterized as such by its ability to *overcome* or *defeat* theatre. In opposition to the duration of experience, Fried poses modernist instantaneity or presentness, as if “a single brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it” (167). Faced with the ubiquity of objecthood, “Presentness is grace” (168). Badiou’s inaesthetic seizure of the artwork demonstrates a similar mode of reception: the work itself is wholly transparent to the Philosopher’s gaze. As such, it is above all the *poem* which Badiou turns to, despite his overwhelming interest in theatre.

What emerges from the ‘theatricality’ Fried outlines is the linking of the artwork to the real of its display – the ‘actual circumstances’ of viewership – as constituted by its relation to the viewing *subject*. The Spectator, confronted by the work’s address, enters into a relationship of

duration. In this sense, theatricality presents a troubling condition precisely because of its ubiquity – as Fried states, “*What lies between the arts is theater*” (164). Akin to Badiou’s description of the theatrical present called forth by the ‘real’ of its audience (as discussed in the last chapter), theatricality is therefore a product of the foregrounding of the viewing relation itself.

If the minimalist artwork’s projection of objecthood can be understood in terms of theatrical duration, then the duration of experience can also be a feature of the gallery space itself, producing a particular interpellation of the gallery viewer. This question is addressed by Brian O’Doherty’s essays appearing in *Artforum* in 1976 under the title ‘Inside the White Cube’. Here O’Doherty attends to modernism’s framing of the ‘white cube’ gallery space as ideologically neutral, a framing predicated on a disembodied perceiving ‘eye’ of the viewer. The white cube gallery, with its blank white walls and meticulous lighting “subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is ‘art.’ The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values” (*Inside the White Cube* 14). Thus the white cube becomes a purified space, conferring its power on the art-objects contained within:

Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics [sic]. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study. Their ungrubby surfaces are untouched by time and its vicissitudes. Art exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of “period” (late modern), there is no time. This eternity gives the gallery a limbolike status; one has to have died already to be there. Indeed the presence of that odd piece of furniture, your own body, seems superfluous, an intrusion. The space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space-occupying bodies are not – or are tolerated only as kinaesthetic mannequins for further study. This Cartesian paradox is reinforced by one of the icons of our visual culture: the installation shot, *sans* figures. Here at last the spectator, oneself, is eliminated. (O’Doherty, 15)

Thus the white cube gallery subtracts embodied duration from the artwork, leaving instead a space of the ‘eternity of display’, in which works – separated from each other in their individualized display – are given in an eternal timelessness. As we will see, Badiou’s inaesthetics mimics the white cube, ‘subtracting’ from the artwork (ideally, the poem) all that might interfere with the Philosopher’s eternal gaze. The aim of inaesthetics is precisely that of delivering the eternity of the work into the creation of the philosophical concept. While theatre

is the artform demonstrating the embodied duration of truth (as the putting-into-bodies of the Idea), it is precisely this feature which shelters the theatre from his philosophical grasp. While clearly above all a philosopher of the theatre, Badiou writes of theatre as an *apparatus*: drama is not submitted to sustained analysis in his work.

O'Doherty focuses on the emergence of the gallery wall as an ideologically and semiotically charged space, from the traditional Salon wall covered by easel paintings, to the emergence in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century of the question of curatorial 'hanging'. As he writes, "Now a participant in, rather than a passive support for the art, the wall became the locus of contending ideologies; and every new development had to come equipped with an attitude toward it" (29). Placing pressure on the demands of hanging, the wall "had become rich in a content it subtly donated to the art" (29). Further, the disruption of the picture plane by the emergence of collage in synthetic cubism – placing newspaper, wallpaper, and other media on the canvas – meant that "the multiple vanishing points of the Analytic Cubist picture shower out into the room with the spectator" (38). The consequence is a specific transformation of space: "Space is not just where things happen; things make space happen" (39). Consequently, modernism summons the "wandering phantom" of the Spectator: "It has no face, is mostly a back. It stoops and peers, is slightly clumsy. Its attitude is inquiring, its puzzlement discreet" (39). That is, the modernist Spectator is mostly a Viewer – called into being and simultaneously dismissed.

The modernist Spectator exists as a phantom, overlooked in favour of the discriminating Eye: "The eye can be trained in a way that the Spectator cannot. It is a finely tuned, even noble organ, esthetically [sic] and socially superior to the Spectator" (41). The opposition between Eye and Spectator is not merely characterized by the opposition of experience and judgement: minimalism, for O'Doherty, stages a *relation* between the two senses in which the Eye apprehends the work, to be checked by the body (52). Hence the Eye "urges the body around it to provide it with information – the body becomes a data-gatherer. There is heavy traffic in both directions on this sensory highway – between sensation conceptualized and concept actualized" (52). The distinction between Eye and Spectator is a distinction *called forth* by the artwork itself; the Eye prefers art of the picture-plane: "The eye maintains the seamless gallery space [...] Everything else – all things impure, including collage – favours the Spectator" (42). Read in O'Doherty's terms, we can view Fried's polemic as directed at the Spectator's intrusion into the pristine gallery space of the Eye, dragging with it the problematic contingencies of duration. Minimalist artworks, scattered on the gallery floor or clinging to its walls, transform the gallery space into a place where things *happen*.

Fried's and O'Doherty's accounts of viewership demonstrate both the emergence of an idea of 'theatricality' as the *relational address* of the artwork, and the separation between a 'timeless' apprehension of the work produced by the ideological framing of the gallery space – the 'white cube' – and a durational time of embodied experience. In particular, these accounts demonstrate an idea of the Spectator as a *problematic* – 'ghostly' – figure from the standpoint of the disembodied 'Eye'. As I will now turn to, Badiou's inaesthetic framework is marked by the overbearing presence of the (philosophical) Eye. While this is the declared aim of inaesthetics – as an attempt at philosophical concept-production – the result is to leave unexamined the question of the pedagogical relationship of art's immanent truth-production. This also raises the prospect of the 'ghostly' figure of the Spectator in Badiou's framework as the double of the Philosopher.

### **3.2 Twisted Modernism: Badiou's Inaesthetics**

#### **The Inaesthetic Schema:**

Badiou's 'inaesthetic' framework, outlined in *The Handbook of Inaesthetics*, seeks to reframe the relationship between philosophy and art. That is, "inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art" (*HI* epigraph). In doing so, it enacts a series of modernist tendencies – primarily, a Greenbergian notion of medium-specificity via an essentializing demarcation of the arts, and a wider Friedian exclusion of spectator-relations. As I argue, these tendencies emerge from the status of inaesthetics as a philosophical seizure of the artwork *for* the production of philosophical concepts. In effect, the philosopher's 'Eye' excludes the troubling presence of the embodied Spectator.

The *Handbook* is framed by the opening chapters in which Badiou outlines his inaesthetic account of the relationship of art to truth, and an engagement with the Platonic division between poem and matheme. Here Badiou identifies three 'schemata' of the link between art and truth: the *didactic*, the *classical* and the *romantic* schemata, against which inaesthetics is proposed as an intervention. The didactic schema holds art to be incapable of producing truth, but instead mimics the "pure *charm* of truth" (*HI* 2). In Badiou's reading, the Platonic censorship of art is not due to the corruptive effects of mimesis – art's imitation of appearance – but rather art's imitation of the *effect* of truth (*HI* 17-18). The consequence is the condemnation and censorship

of art, or its instrumentalization through the “strict surveillance of its effects”, as in Brecht’s dramatic practice (HI 2). Thus while art can be directed toward the pursuit of truth – such as dialectical materialism for Brecht – it is a truth that is external to art, requiring the strict monitoring of the work. In the didactic schema, art is judged by its “public effect” through an educational norm of the “didactics of the senses” (HI 3).

The classical schema severs art’s link with truth. Anchored in Aristotelian poetics, it presents art within a mimetic framework which neutralizes the threat art poses to philosophy as a competing discourse of truth. Art’s effect is therapeutic, being concerned with “the treatment of the affections of the soul” (HI 4). To that end, the concern within the classical schema is spectator identification with the artwork; “[a]rt must be liked because ‘liking’ signals the effectiveness of catharsis, the real grip exerted by the artistic therapy of the passions” (4). Hence the key determiner for the classical schema is verisimilitude, or the “imaginarization” (4) of truth in order to better move the spectator. Art is innocent before philosophy, judged merely by its “public service” (5). In its modern guise the classical schema is instantiated in psychoanalytic conceptions of art by which the artwork demonstrates the “blockage of the symbolic by the Real”, producing an effect within the bounds of the imaginary (7). Robbed of any relation to truth, art remains a mere ‘service’.

Finally, the Romantic schema holds that “art *alone* is capable of truth” and “accomplishes what philosophy itself can only point toward” (4). Here it is “art itself that educates, because it teaches the power of infinity held within the tormented cohesion of the form. Art delivers us from the subjective barrenness of a form. Art is the absolute as subject – it is *incarnation*” (4). Anchored in German Romanticism, the schema in its modern form is expressed in the lineage of Heideggerian hermeneutics:

By all appearances it [hermeneutics] exposes an indiscernible entanglement between the saying of the poet and the thought of the thinker. Nevertheless, the advantage is still with the poet, because the thinker is nothing but the announcement of a reversal, the promise of the advent of the gods at the height of our distress, and the retroactive elucidation of the historicity of being. While the poet, in the flesh of language, maintains the effaced guarding of the Open. (HI 6)

The inverse of Nietzsche’s philosopher-artist, Heidegger’s poet-thinker demonstrates that “between philosophy and art *it is the same truth that circulates* [...] Interpretation is in the end nothing but the *delivery* of the poem over to the trembling of finitude in which thought strives to endure the retreat of being as clearing” (7). Within the Romantic schema, art’s pedagogical

relation is configured as the revelation – through the act of interpretation – of the poem’s safeguarding of being.

In articulating three broad modes of linking art and truth rooted in Western philosophy, Badiou’s schemata bear striking resemblance to Rancière’s own identification of three ‘regimes’ linking art and politics. The similarity between the two thinkers is useful for highlighting their points of difference. Rancière’s ethical regime, like Badiou’s didactic schema, is grounded in Platonism. This regime equates art to image, submitted to the question of ontological origin and ethical effect, as exemplified by the Platonic censorship of art in the *Republic* (Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics* 20). Art lacks its own ontological space, intruding as image amongst other “ways of doing and making” and judged as problematic excess within the order of the city (21). Rancière’s ‘representative’ regime, like the classical schema, is anchored in Aristotle’s identification of art with mimesis in the *Poetics*. Here the artwork is judged not in relation to a model, but according to rules of decorum and composition determined by subject-matter. The representative regime identifies the arts through regimes of visibility linking art’s autonomy “to a general order of occupations and ways of doing and making” (22). Hence for the representative regime, art cultivates.

Thus Badiou and Rancière are in broad agreement concerning the Platonic and Aristotelian paradigms of art. Where they part ways is telling: while Badiou is concerned with the lineage of German romanticism and hermeneutics (the Romantic schema), Rancière instead turns to the lineage of German aesthetics via Kant, Schiller and Schelling in what he terms the aesthetic regime of art (*Politics of Aesthetics* 22-23). As discussed in the previous section, for Rancière art’s political capacity is conceived via dissensus, or the “demonstration [...] of a gap in the sensible itself” (*Dissensus* 38). Artistic modernity, for Rancière, is effectively the re-discovery of the political capacity of art – its intervention in ways of doing and seeing – that leads Plato to call for its banishment in the *Republic*. For Badiou, philosophy’s relation to its conditions – art, for example – is steadfastly anti-hermeneutical and subtracted from the interpretation of sense (*Conditions* 43). The impulse towards interpretation sutures philosophy to knowledge – in the guise of aesthetics or political science – and results in the Lacanian University discourse. By contrast, philosophy’s role is to demonstrate how and why a truth operates as a “hole in sense” (*Conditions* 43). Despite differences in framework, the meeting point for Badiou and Rancière is therefore that of the ‘gap’ or ‘hole’ in sense, and philosophy’s role in its declaration.

For Badiou, the three schemata are saturated and inadequate for the contemporary demands of thinking art (HI 7). Inaesthetics therefore functions as a means of breaking the declared impasse.



What is at stake is immanence and singularity as it pertains to the artistic production of truth: where the didactic and classical models divorce art from the production of truth, the Romantic framework takes art to produce truth immanently, yet it is a truth that is coextensive with philosophy. Inaesthetics therefore refers to a relation by which art produces its own truths, immanently to its own subjective procedures such that

Art *itself* is a truth procedure. Or again: The philosophical identification of art falls under the category of truth. Art is a thought in which artworks are the Real (and not the effect). And this thought, or rather the truths that it activates, are irreducible to other truths-be they scientific, political, or amorous. This also means that art, as a singular regime of thought, is irreducible to philosophy. Immanence: Art is rigorously coextensive with the truths that it generates. Singularity: These truths are given nowhere else than in art. (HI 9)

Rather than an articulation of ‘art’, inaesthetics refers instead to the *relationship* between art and philosophy, such that the ‘intrap philosophical effects’ of local art processes can be investigated.

Badiou names the subject of an artistic truth-procedure a ‘configuration’, composed of a body of works. This means that artistic truth is not internal to a particular work – as in Heidegger’s articulation of the poem as the ‘open’ of being – but instead is dispersed amongst a potentially infinite body or configuration of works.<sup>51</sup> An artistic configuration is formed in response to an evental rupture, which exposes new lines of formal artistic innovation – for example, Greek tragedy, or Schönberg’s atonalism. Within a configuration, the artwork functions as a “subject-point” of the truth procedure, or “a situated *inquiry* about the truth that it locally actualizes or of which it is a finite fragment” (HI 12). Thus while a work remains finite, a configuration – a body of any number of works assembled via chance connections between the works – is infinite. As Badiou summarizes, “[i]n the end, a truth is an artistic configuration initiated by an event (in general, an event is a group of works, a singular multiple of works) and unfolded through chance in the form of the works that serve as its subject points” (12). Artistic truth, then, is immanent to art’s own procedures. In line with Badiou’s rejection of the whole, inaesthetics does not advance a generalized articulation of Art as such, but instead a description of local effects “produced by the independent existence of some works of art” (HI epigraph). Inaesthetics therefore attempts to de-objectify this relation such that philosophy not treat art as an object, but instead respond, within philosophy, to art’s immanent production of truth.

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<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”.

A ‘configuration’ is therefore a mode of the subjective unfolding of artistic truth. Rather than requiring philosophy to reveal the content or significance of configurations – to authorize it as thought – a configuration “*thinks itself in the works that compose it*” (HI 14). This means that there is no generalised philosophical reception of art, but rather “art – as the configuration ‘in truth’ of works – is in each and every one of its points the thinking of the thought that it itself is” (HI 14). Thereby secondary to art’s production of truth, philosophy instead “seizes truths, shows them, exposes them, announces that they exist” (HI 14). The consequence, however, is that the inaesthetic capture of art’s production of truth excludes spectator relation and the materiality of reception from the intelligibility of the thought that works think. This is because the artwork is finite:

A work of art is essentially finite. It is trebly finite. First of all, it exposes itself as finite objectivity in space and/or in time. Second, it is always regulated by a Greek principle of completion: It moves within the fulfilment of its own limit. It signals its display of all the perfection of which it is capable. Finally, and most importantly, it sets itself up as an inquiry into the question of its own finality. It is the persuasive procedure of its own finitude. (HI 10-11)

That is, the thought that art thinks is an infinite relation between finite works; the Spectator may, by chance, be ‘struck’ by this thought, but the *real* of audience relation and encounter – what Fried describes as the theatrical projection of objecthood – remains external to the work’s participation in truth. Badiou’s aim here is ostensibly to ward off the Romantic schema’s anchoring of truth in the act of interpretation of the work. Yet the result is that the Spectator becomes a rival to the Philosopher: the Philosopher *declares* the truths that the Spectator (unconsciously) receives.

### **The Philosophical Eye:**

Badiou’s indifference to reception is evident in his poetics, which often results in austere and remarkably literal readings of poetry. An example is seen in *Theory of the Subject*, in which he discusses Mallarmé’s sonnet “*A la nue accablante tu...*” (“Stilled beneath the oppressive cloud...”), which he ‘reads’ by first transcribing the verse into a distilled prose form. As he claims, “Let us proclaim that Mallarmé’s poetic machine, though opaque when looked at from the outside, nevertheless possesses only a single meaning” (TS, 74). The same poem and reading are re-presented in *Conditions*, where he specifies that “In appropriating the Mallarméan poem at a philosophical level, which presupposes that the absence be restituted (i.e., the thinking,

under the sign of Truth, of the operations of a thought), I shall always begin with a ‘translation’, a sort of ‘review from scratch’, or punctuation, of the poem’s syntactic unfolding” (C 49). In *Theory of the Subject*, the prose transcription is followed by a series of diagrams unpacking the syntactic paths through the poem according to separate “metonymic chains” (TS 78). As Jean-Jacques Lecercle observes of Badiou’s philosophical ‘translation’, “It would appear that Badiou can only deal with poetry by getting rid of the poetry (he says: only provisionally), as if poetry were an outer garment, easily discarded when the weather gets too hot” (99). Yet rather than merely revealing an authoritarian tendency toward the work, Badiou’s poetics also demonstrates a peculiar *impotence* of the philosophical Eye. Anchored in the resources of the *matheme*, the Philosopher’s role is to pronounce the continuation of philosophy by the declaration of the existence of truths. This can only be achieved, however, by overcoming the allure of the Poet through wrenching the poem from its capacity for subjective movement. Rather than Platonic censorship, Badiou proclaims the link between art and truth; yet he does so by placing the Philosopher between the Poet and the Spectator.

Badiou’s poetics and definition of the work as finite appears to separate or ‘freeze’ the artwork from its reception, in a rejection of reader-response theory. In his influential 1962 essay, Umberto Eco defines the ‘open work’ in terms of the semiotics of reception. On the basis of recent forms of musical composition Eco typifies ‘open’ works as those which, while ‘closed’ or complete in their composition, are ‘open’ to their specific iterations of reception such that “every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself” (4). Eco reads such trends in art – such as the ‘mobile’ sculptures of Alexander Calder, or Mallarmé’s unfinished work *Le Livre* – as reflecting a fundamental feature of art such that “*Every* work of art, even though it is produced by following an explicit or implicit poetics of necessity, is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal *performance*” (21). In this sense, reception is performance, re-establishing the work in a new relational context. The artwork, then, becomes ‘theatrical’.

Badiou’s description of the theatre text in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* largely agrees with Eco’s identification of reception and performance. Here the theatre text is the “not-all, the incomplete, the suspended” (RT 46). That is, “there must be a certain intrinsic imperfection to the theatre text, a porosity, a plasticity. Something *simple*, too simple to articulate the whole of a world” (47). Moreover, it is the fact that the theatre text is “open and incomplete” that enables its

repetition in performance (RT 75). As we have seen, it is this element which allows theatrical performance to institute a new ‘cut’ in time.

It is furthermore significant that the key poetic text of Badiou’s system from which he constructs his account of the event, Mallarmé’s “A Throw of the Dice”, itself exemplifies the ‘open’ text. It is precisely Mallarmé’s innovative use of spatial typography that renders the work essentially *dramatic* for Badiou (BE 191). In his development of the event via Mallarmé, Badiou foregoes his philosophical ‘transcription’ of the poem and instead reads it as an “event-drama” (BE 191). Hence, the closer the artwork approaches the Philosophical Eye of Badiou’s inaesthetics, the more it ‘freezes’. The poem, then, is ‘finite’ when Badiou attempts his ‘transcription’. Drama, however, rescues the work by preserving the possibility of the Spectator, which is to say the essential ‘openness’ of the text upon which philosophical intervention *decides*. Furthermore, it is precisely this linking of chance – the *undecideable* – to necessity which forms the crux of Badiou’s development of the event. As Badiou writes of “A Throw of the Dice”:

The extreme condensation of figures – a few objects – aims at isolating, upon a severely restricted stage, and such that nothing is hidden from the interpreter (the reader), a system of clues whose placement can be unified by one hypothesis alone as to what has happened, and, of which, one sole consequence authorizes the announcement of how the event, despite being abolished, will *fix* its décor in the eternity of a “pure notion”. Mallarmé is a thinker of the event-drama, in the double sense of the staging of its appearance-disappearance . . . and of its interpretation which gives it the status of an “acquisition forever”. (BE 191)

At the centre of Badiou’s system, and the point at which he turns from mathematics-as-ontology in order to formalize the *excess* of the event, we therefore find the ghostly figure of the Spectator (the “interpreter” or “reader”) whose hypothetical gaze preserves the undecideable upon which the Philosopher’s decision intervenes. As Badiou writes, “Poetry is the stellar assumption of that pure undecideable, against a background of nothingness, that is an action of which one can only *know* whether it has taken place inasmuch as one *bets* upon its truth” (BE 192). It is therefore the implicit presence of the Spectator which constitutes the *undecideable* – the plurality of decision – upon which a decision is wagered. The ghost of the Spectator, in other words, constitutes a void-point in Badiou’s artistic engagement.

## Twisted Modernism and Anti-Aesthetics:

In addition to his abstract and purifying poetics, Badiou's inaesthetic engagement with dance, theatre, and cinema in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* features a number of essentializing claims that police the boundaries of the art-forms while instituting an implicit hierarchy of the arts. Badiou's discussion of dance, theatre and cinema affords a privileged status to theatre; as I will argue, this is due to Badiou's identification of theatre as 'between' dance and cinema, which is constitutive of his articulation of materialist formalization. First, however, I will provide an overview of Badiou's inaesthetic treatment of dance, theatre and cinema, and discuss the nature of his 'twisted' modernism.

In the essay "Dance as a Metaphor for Thought", Badiou, through engagement with Nietzsche, argues that "Dance visibly transmits the Idea of thought as an immanent intensification" (HI 59). Further, "Dance would provide the metaphor for the fact that every genuine thought depends upon an event"; dance points "toward thought as event, but *before this event has received a name*" (HI 61). Articulating six principles of dance – via Mallarmé – leads Badiou to conclude that the "*positive* opposite" of dance is theatre such that there is "an essential clash between dance and theater" (HI 68). As a result, "Dance is not an art, because it is the sign of the possibility of art as inscribed in the body" (HI 69). Rather, "As the bodily presentation of the fore-name of truths, dance incessantly renames the earth" (HI 71). Badiou defines dance in terms of the "essential clash between dance and theater" (69); in thinking that which *precedes* truths, it is the "reverse" of theatre (71). Dance therefore thinks the production of thought *before* it is differentiated as thought.

Theatre, as we have seen, is for Badiou an "assemblage", which thinks "*theater-ideas*" through performance (HI 72). It illuminates the complex and "separates what is mixed and confused" through the demands of its art-form (73). Through tragedy and comedy (Badiou privileges comedy) theatre "thinks, in the space opened between life and death, the knot that binds together desire and politics" (73). Theatre texts are incomplete and therefore performance operates as a "possible completion" of the theatre-idea (73), linking and preserving the ephemerality of chance (74). While theatre is tied to the state, it is an "artistic datum", subtracted from culture (76). It is this relation to audience is what distinguishes theatre from cinema: the audience *encounters* the idea in the theatre, while cinema charts the passing of the idea as "phantom" (77). Theatre's operation is to distinguish and 'filter' thought as such.

Cinema, finally, is formed around the image as “cut” in the visible such that it “is an art of the perpetual past” (78) which allows “the Idea to visit the sensible” as a “passage” (80). As a visitation, the idea in cinema is also bound to the sensible, making it essentially impure. In its incorporation of the other arts (music, theatre, the novel) it is “the ‘plus-one’ of the arts, both parasitic and inconsistent” (83). Contaminated, impure and parasitic, cinema frustrates evaluative or qualitative judgement; rather, it must be judged axiomatically by “examining the consequences of the proper mode in which an Idea is treated thus by *this* particular film” (Hi 85). Cinema is essentially *impure*, offering a thinking of the “impurification” of truth (88). As we have seen, in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, Badiou separates theatre and cinema on the basis of spectatorship: cinema “requires no spectator, only the walls surrounding a viewing public” (RT 2). Because it activates no spectator, cinema has no link to the public, rather “the time of projection is that of an inconsistent gathering, a serial collection. Cinema, disconnected from the State, proposes no collective signification” (RT 4). Cinema therefore appears to stand for the power of the image as such, but also in Badiou’s double-speak operates as a metaphor for thinking the impurity and transmission of the Idea.

As outlined in the thesis introduction, Rancière argues that Badiou’s inaesthetics enacts a “twisted” modernism (“Aesthetics, Inaesthetics, Anti-Aesthetics” 232). Rancière reads Badiou’s framework as falling within a contemporary anti-aesthetic consensus, characterized by the attempt to sever art from aesthetic “denaturation”, in order to maintain a univocal concept of art “effectuated in the autonomous singularity of works and encountered in specific experience” (218). Rancière’s critique is motivated by his own anchoring of art’s political efficacy in the aesthetic regime – as discussed in the previous section – which rests on an indistinction between art and non-art. For Rancière, the autonomy and medium-specificity characteristic of modernist criticism prises art from its constitution by and in the sensible. Articulations of medium-specificity, such as Greenberg’s notion of art’s immanent self-critique of its separate mediums, work to identify an operation specific to art, thus producing a global border between art and non-art.<sup>52</sup> That is, medium-specificity becomes a means of denying the aesthetic itself. For

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<sup>52</sup> Greenberg’s articulation of medium-specificity bears resemblance to Badiou’s notion of the immanent process of artistic configurations. Greenberg anchors modernism in a self-critical tendency traced to Kant which demonstrates what is “unique and irreducible in each particular art” allowing each to “determine, through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself” (“Modernist Painting” 308). Each art thinks the category of art through the tools and limits furnished by its own practice, in turn purifying each art from a generalized field of art: “The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered ‘pure’, and in its ‘purity’ find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence” (309).

Rancière, “Contemporary ‘anti-aesthetics’ thereby proves to be the final, defensive phase of modernism, stubbornly trying to tear what it identifies as art’s ‘propriety’ away from its inclusion in that aesthetic regime of art which allows art to exist only at the cost of disappropriating it” (222). Anti-aesthetics therefore *policies* the sensible.

Badiou therefore twists modernist medium-specificity “twice over” through his Platonist distinction between the arts via the Idea, rather than medium (222). The need to mark the passage of the infinite within sensible form results in an anti-aestheticism which aims to separate art and life, and the arts from each other by affirming “something proper to art or the poem, which modernity has finally uncovered in its purity” (224). Furthermore, his focus on the subtraction of the idea and the naming of the event in his writing on art means that “ultimately only two arts are required in Badiou’s system of the arts: the poem as affirmation, as inscription of a disappearance, and theatre as the site wherein this affirmation turns into mobilization” (225). Hence Badiou’s considerable effort to bend Mallarmé’s poetry – against, for example, the material composition of typography – to his purposes. That is, what is demonstrated in the poem, placed at the summit of the arts, is the thought of the event, meaning that the poem is now “comparable with every other poem which allows itself to be bent to the same demonstration, to be assigned the same task of speaking twice, to say the same event of the Idea twice: the first time as a maxim, the second time as an enigma” (227). Ultimately this means that “The poem only says what philosophy needs it to say and which it pretends to discover in the surprise of the poem” (228). The weight of Badiou’s system is such that, conditioned via his reading of Mallarmé, his encounters of new works inevitably replicate his reading of “A Throw of the Dice”.

The result is that Badiou’s readings of poetry always turn upon locating or furnishing elements of his own system. As Lecercle argues, Badiou’s reading of literary texts “appears to exploit the text, treat it as a pretext for philosophy. Badiou seems to find something in the text only because he sought it, and what he finds is always philosophical propositions, and always the propositions of his own philosophy. The strength of such reading is the strength of the bulldozer” (138).

However, despite the strength of such readings, “The bulldozing of the text uncovers archaeological treasures”; in the context of Badiou’s reading of Beckett, Lecercle suggests that “Perhaps, when Badiou reads Beckett and finds in his work rudiments of his philosophy, it is also Beckett that reads Badiou” (139). The difficulty, then, is the means by which Badiou’s philosophy, in its aim to be fundamentally *conditioned* by ‘some works of art’, reads these works of art from the standpoint of concepts it has already found.

This curious relationship is evident throughout the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* – and his wider writings on art – where his readings of works or discussions of art-forms appear to ventriloquize these works *via* his own conceptual framework. For example, Mallarmé’s poetry demonstrates that “Because the poem is an operation, it is also an event. The poem takes place” (HI 29). Paul Celan, by contrast, demonstrates “that a direction for the thinking of our epoch cannot come from an open space, from a grasp of the Whole” (HI 32). Fernando Pessoa, furthermore, demonstrates a thinking subtracted from both Platonism and anti-Platonism (HI 38); in contrast to Mallarmé’s dialectical negation, Pessoa’s poetry articulates a “*floating negation*”, which subverts both the classical logical principles of non-contradiction and the excluded middle, effectively creating a non-classical logic (39-40). Read independently and at face value – as the title ‘Handbook’ appears to suggest, Badiou’s proclamations appear cryptic. Read from the perspective of *Logics of Worlds*, however, we can clearly see within these discussions the development of substantial conceptual elements of the sequel to *Being and Event*. For example, the discussion of Celan pre-empts Book II of *Logics of Worlds*, where Badiou’s discussion of a transcendental logic of appearance begins with a demonstration of the inexistence of the Whole, in which “the Whole has no being” (LW 110). The description of Pessoa in terms of ‘floating negation’ prefigures Book II’s discussion of classical logic, encompassing the law of the excluded middle and law of non-contradiction, which provides a distinction between classical and non-classical worlds (LW 183-190). The situation of *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (1998) between *Being and Event* (1988) and *Logics of Worlds* (2006), at a time in which Badiou is effectively extending his system from ontology to appearance, means that the ‘intrap philosophical effects’ Badiou identifies are internal to the development of his project. The problem, then, is precisely that inaesthetics remains entirely philosophical in its ‘translation’ of artistic encounters; what is lacking is an account of artistic encounter not bent toward philosophical construction: an encounter of the non-philosopher. In ‘staging’ its conditions, philosophy grasps them from an already committed framework.

The effect of Badiou’s poetics and wider inaesthetics is that the work of art is rendered fully transparent to the philosophical ‘Eye’. This is partly due to Badiou’s conception of the inherently philosophical nature of the poetry which conditions his philosophy, which he designates via the notion of the ‘age of poets’. The ‘age of poets’ for Badiou refers to the suture of philosophy to poetry, evident in the work of Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, Georg Trakl, Osip Mandelstam, Paul Celan, and Fernando Pessoa. Rather than referring to a *poetic* formation, the ‘age of poets’ is instead a philosophical designation evident from the perspective of philosophy itself: “I call ‘age of the poets’ the moment proper to the history of philosophy in which the



latter is sutured – that is to say, delegated or subjected to a single one of its conditions” (*The Age of Poets* 4). For Badiou, the age of poets designates a period in which philosophy is otherwise sutured to its conditions of science or politics. Under this condition, “certain poets, or rather certain poems, come to occupy the place where ordinarily the properly philosophical strategies of thought are declared” (AP 5). In other words, philosophy’s suturing to its other conditions means that questions within philosophical thought are effectively displaced onto poetry. The consequence is that “the poems of the age of the poets are those in which the poetic saying not only constitutes a form of thought and instructs a truth, but also finds itself constrained to *think this thought*” (AP 5). Hence poetry concerns itself with the question of thought itself, offering “*maxims of thought*” which are plural but nonetheless offer themselves as conditions for philosophy (AP 5). In this relation “The poem . . . finds itself unwillingly – I mean without this position stemming from a calculation or a rivalry – in a kind of breach, which is also an overlap, with philosophy” (AP 5). The ‘age of poets’, then, designates a period in which poetry *is philosophy*, given philosophy’s own suture to science.

The consequence is that Badiou’s philosophy is conditioned by poetry that is *already grasped as philosophy* – the age of poets amounting to a kind of pursuit of philosophy by other means. Thus, while it is clear that Badiou’s framework is deeply conditioned by these poets, it is arguable that the inaesthetic seizure locates in Mallarmé a form of thought all too readily amenable to philosophy. That is, only a brief philosophical ‘translation’ is required in order to uncover the philosophical concept. Writing on the transparency of the poem in Badiou’s poetics, Tom Evers observes that

[I]n order for [Badiou’s] thinking of literature to truly resonate in the contemporary moment, it must become *scuffed around the edges*; literature, that is to say, must be allowed its measure of resistance to the sometimes suffocating purity of the philosopher’s vision, even as one must insist also on the tracing of those other agonistic pressures that come from the global if highly uneven subsumption of art as commodity. (“Badiou Among the Poets” 159)

Badiou’s inaesthetics, while attempting a de-objectified seizure of the artwork by philosophy, curiously re-draws the boundary of philosophical thought by its inability to grasp the work of art the further it departs from the poem. Hence the problem turns out to be one of a surprising impotency on behalf of philosophy: an inability to subtract truth from those art forms too impure. As Roberts argues, “Badiou’s high modernism stretches the sociability of art to breaking point, allowing little room for the debased and ‘fallen’ materials of commodity culture

to enter the symbolic and affective space of art” (“On the Limits of Negation” 277). Philosophy subtracts, but only on the basis of forms of thought already visible to the philosopher’s Eye; it lacks the capacity to subtract truths from the impure. As Badiou writes of the age of poets elsewhere, “the poetry and poets we are speaking of are neither all the poetry nor all the poets, but rather those whose work is *immediately recognizable* as a work of thought” (MP 69; emphasis added). The problem of inaesthetics is therefore that philosophy is only capable of declaring truths it can recognize.

### **3.3 Dance, Theatre, Cinema: Theatricality and Materialist**

#### **Formalization**

As we have seen, in Badiou’s framework cinema is an ‘impure’ artform demonstrating the impurity of the Idea. In his critique of inaesthetics, Rancière locates in Badiou’s characterization of cinema’s ‘impurity’ an implicit acknowledgement of the aesthetic as the border between art and non-art. The ‘parasitic’ role Badiou ascribes to cinema as the ‘plus-one’ of the arts means that cinema functions to police the boundary of the division of arts as “a sort of doorman/bouncer/filter”, effectively quarantining the purity of the artistic idea (229). Cinema therefore functions within inaesthetics as a placeholder for the indistinction of the aesthetic, an acknowledgement that requires it to be placed on the boundary or art, sealing the arts from the impure. Cinema emerges as a site of tension within Badiou’s system of the arts that demonstrates the potential re-knotting of inaesthetics to aesthetics (231). Yet in what follows, I argue that it is not cinema but *theatricality* which forms the ‘between’ of the arts in Badiou’s framework. Badiou’s articulation of theatricality stems from an understanding of the dance/theatre/cinema triplet in which theatre operates essentially ‘between’ dance and cinema. Furthermore, it is this triplet which forms the basis of the development of the materialist dialectic.

In addition to the critics’ observations of the abstract and purifying nature of Badiou’s inaesthetics, commentators have taken issue with his accounts of dance, theatre, and cinema. Three critics – Jonathan Owen Clark, Laura Cull Ó Maoilearcra, and Alex Ling – take issue in separate essays with Badiou’s inaesthetic policing of the arts. Combined, their observations serve to illustrate in negative my argument concerning the dance/theatre/cinema triplet: rather than writing *on* the arts themselves, Badiou is instead articulating a dialectical understanding of

theatricality as ‘mediating’ between the immanence of dance and the transcendence of cinema. For Ling, Badiou’s writing on cinema falls victim to the “hegemony of the letter” in his work, exemplified in his preference for poetry such that the artwork “would seem to be ultimately inseparable from its mathematization” (271). Badiou’s reduction of cinema to “nothing but takes and editing” (Badiou HI 86) divests cinema of its own relation to the idea, with the result that “whilst Badiou may think the cinema his considerations do not themselves allow finally for cinema to be thought” (274). That is, while cinema may be conceptually productive for Badiou’s framework, Badiou’s writing on cinema provides no means of grasping cinema itself.

Similarly, Laura Cull Ó Maoilearcra takes issue with Badiou’s privileging of mathematics in his writing on theatre. Writing from the newly-expanding field of performance philosophy, and within an immanentist framework drawn from the writing of François Laruelle, Cull critiques Badiou’s position as philosopher-gatekeeper “authorized to determine the criteria for the identification of practices as theatre or not, to distinguish theatre from other art-forms and from non-art, and to judge which practices are better or worse, more or less representative examples of theatre in its true sense” (“Equalizing Theatre and Philosophy” 731). Despite Badiou’s supposed benevolent deference of philosophy to its conditions, Cull argues his stance to mask a “*philosophical* authoritarianism” inasmuch as he nonetheless designates true thought from non-thought (732). This is evident in Badiou’s distinction of Theatre from ‘theatre’: as Cull argues, “for Badiou, any so-called ‘theatre’ that fails to think according to his model of thought is one that is unworthy of the name” (744). In other words, by distinguishing between Theatre and ‘theatre’, Badiou reasserts the philosopher’s position of authority, legislating on thought itself.

Jonathan Owen Clark takes issue with Badiou’s chapter “Dance as a Metaphor for Thought” in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Clark notes that Badiou’s articulation of dance – as not an art, but demonstrating the body’s possibility of art – coincides with longstanding hierarchies in aesthetic thought in which “Dance seems to occupy a place of perennial exception, problem, or special case” (“Dance and Subtraction” 51). In particular, Clark rejects Badiou’s assertion of dance as demonstrating “thought as event, but *before this thought has received a name*” (HI 61). Yet Clark misreads the nature of Badiou’s use of dance as a *metaphor*: that is, Badiou metaphorically uses dance as a means of *philosophically* working through Nietzsche – or, more specifically, *Deleuze’s* Nietzsche – which in turn informs Badiou’s discussion of vitalism, the event, and change in *Logics of Worlds*.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> This is evident in Badiou’s discussion of Nietzsche’s articulation of dance as movement which “finds its essence *in what has not taken place*, in what has remained ineffective or restrained within movement

Rather than articulating accounts *of* dance, theatre, or cinema, Badiou's writing instead aims to extract from the artforms a general thought of subtraction specific to the subject which prefigures the materialist dialectic in *Logics of Worlds*. The presentation of the triplet effectively bookends or buttresses theatre, affording it a privileged status. As he states in an interview,

Dance is *the immanence of the body*, that is to say a body which appears from the interior of its own movement. The image is, on the contrary, a sort of *luminous transcendence*, an exteriority, which exercises its power on the body. . . I would readily situate theatre between dance and the image, or between dance and cinema, if by "cinema" one understands the maximal power of the contemporary image. I want to maintain the "between," which signifies that the theatre interacts with the two dance-music and image-text – but is not to be confused with either of them. (*In Praise of Theatre* 48)

Theatre's mediating status 'between' dance and cinema means that it is "the most complete of the arts" (PT 62).<sup>54</sup> This is because "it treats immanence and transcendence *in the immediate*. The theatre unavoidably takes the form of an event: it takes place, it happens" (62-63). Theatre therefore functions as the demonstration of an assemblage that links immanence, transcendence and the chance of the subtractive passage of the idea: "theatre is the site of the idea's living appearance" (PT 63). Badiou's privileging of theatre is such that his writing on both dance and cinema is effectively derived from the perspective of theatre. The outcome is a generalized theatricality of *subtraction*.

Badiou crystallizes this framework into what he terms 'materialist formalization' in his discussion of the 'Romantic' and 'contemporary' modes of the infinite in *The Century*, through a dialogue with Hegel. The question is of interrogating the link between the artwork, form, and politics in the art of the century. In Badiou's reading, the avant-gardes identify politics with the rupture of form, resulting in the passion for the real in which politics "names the desire of beginning, the desire that some fragment of the real will finally be exhibited without either fear or law, through the sole effect of human invention – artistic or erotic invention, for example" (CT 150). Moreover, the art of the century sought to break from Romanticism, conceived as "the

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itself" (HI 60). Dance therefore thinks becoming, which is key to Deleuze's development of virtuality and the event, from which Badiou distinguishes his own concept of the event (LW "The Event According to Deleuze" 381-387).

<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere, Badiou situates theatre between dance and *reading*: "The exhibition of the body alone we will name 'dance' and of language alone 'reading', even if no written text pre-exists. Theater is the intersection of the two" (Badiou and During "A Theatre of Operations" 22).

descent of the infinity of the Ideal into the finitude of the work. The artist, elevated by genius, is the sacrificial medium of this descent” (153-154). Overcoming Romanticism is primarily a matter of identifying a contemporary form of the infinite.

The crux of the argument is to identify within contemporary art an alternative articulation of the relation between the finitude of the work and the infinite, located in linking the *act* of the work to formalization *in thought*. Hence, the contemporary infinite amounts to conceiving the infinite as proceeding *from* the finite “once the latter is conceived not in its objective finitude, but in the act from whence it arises”. That is, “The infinite is not captured *in* form; it *transits through* form. If it is an event – if it is *what happens* – finite form can be equivalent to an infinite opening” (TC 155). The finite/infinite is thereby reconfigured by linking the act to the formalization of thought.

While not explicitly framed in these terms, Badiou’s articulation of materialist formalization links theatricality, the immanence of dance and performance, and the transcendence of the image. From theatre, the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century establishes a thinking of chance and openness:

Installations, events, happenings, improvisations: everything conspires to orient artistic research towards a sort of generalized theatricality, inasmuch as theatre has always assumed its own status as a precarious art, a craft tied to innumerable public contingencies. That, once its form has been partially but rigorously decided, the infinite could emerge from scenic happenstance – this is the century’s ideal, the directive through which it arduously sought to extricate itself from romanticism. It is the idea of a *materialist formalization*. According to this ideal, the infinite proceeds *directly* from the finite. (*The Century* 156)

That is, the art forms borrow from theatre an essential openness that ties the work to the real of its encounter, or ‘scenic happenstance’. Materialist formalization is furthermore tied to the Hegelian problem of the ‘good’ and ‘spurious’ infinite in *The Science of Logic*: where the ‘bad’ or ‘spurious’ infinite sees repetition as the succession of the Same, which grasps the infinite in terms of its *result* – the truly infinite by contrast conceives of the infinite in its ‘act’, producing a distinction between “the act and the result” or in the context of contemporary art “the gesture and the work” (TC 158).<sup>55</sup> For Badiou, this concern is evident in the frequent concern with repetition in the art of the century, located for example in Benjamin’s writing on the artwork’s status in the age of mechanical reproduction. Embracing seriality, non-art, or the repetition of

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<sup>55</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic* 110-125.

the image, “Many of the century’s artistic projects attempt to make perceivable, in an instance of repetition, the power of the act of repetition itself” which in Hegelian terms “*is the visibility of the power of the finite*” (158). The transcendence of the image – which Badiou thinks under the term ‘cinema’ elsewhere – demonstrates the emergence of the infinite from the finitude of the work, conceived as *act*.

Dance, finally, poses the problem of the *transmission* – or the “trace” of the act (159). Dance, as the “paradigm of a vanishing art” offers a means of thinking the transmission of the act beyond mere repetition inasmuch as dance offers problems for the strict reproduction of the work (159). In order to properly link the act to its trace – that is, singularity of performance to the repeatability of form – a new articulation of ‘form’ itself is needed:

The first, traditional (or Aristotelian) sense is on the side of the formation of a material, of the organic appearance of a work, of its manifestation as a totality. The second sense, which belongs to the century, sees form as *what the artistic act authorizes by a way of new thinking*. Form is therefore an Idea as given in its material index, a singularity that can only be activated in the real grip of an act. Form is the *eidos* – this time in a Platonic sense – of an artistic act; it must be understood *from the side of formalization*. (159-160)

Materialist formalization therefore conceives the act in its pure singularity – represented by dance – in terms of an authorization in thought. Rather than a traditional distinction of content and form, form is attached to *gesture* itself as something that *takes place in thought*. Badiou’s account of the contemporary infinite is bounded on either side by the immanence of the act and the transcendence of the image; materialist formalization emerges from a theatricality dialectically suspended between dance and cinema. In an abstract confrontation with ‘contemporary’ art and Hegel, Badiou forms the basis of the materialist dialectic as an account of the act and the trace that charts an alternative to the ‘reduction to the present’ identified by Jameson in the installation form.

In examining inaesthetics, this chapter has shown the limits to Badiou’s engagement with art, produced by the nature of his philosophical framework. In attempting to re-fashion a relation between philosophy and artistic truth – in which truth is both immanent and singular to art – inaesthetics has the effect of displacing non-philosophical receptions of art in the act of the philosophical ‘seizure’ of the work. Inasmuch as inaesthetics aims to think the ‘intraphilosophical effects’ of art *for* philosophy – that is, for a framework developed in response to a particular set of conditions – the difficulty posed is that philosophy seizes from art

what it can already *discern*. This problem is most evident in Badiou's conditioning by poetry, in which the 'age of poets' forming his personal poetic canon – Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Mandelstam, Pessoa and others – designates poetry that is *already* philosophical. Hence what in aesthetics discovers in art is philosophy itself, displaced and reflected back.

Examining these problems via the 'Spectator' has furthermore revealed the way in which the philosophical seizure encodes a hierarchy of reception. Where the Philosopher is tasked with the *declaration* of truths, the Spectator is relegated to *unconsciously* participating in them. Truths *subtract*, while philosophy *subtracts the subtraction*. It is in this sense that philosophy forms a meta-theatre, dramatizing truths by staging them and thereby cultivating within contemporary subjects the ability to recognize and participate in truths. As I argue in the thesis conclusion, it is here that Badiou's meta-theatre is revealed to be a neo-classical meta-theatre in modified Aristotelian form. Where Aristotle rescues poetry from Plato's censorship by severing art's relation to truth, Badiou re-affirms art's relation to truth by severing art as such from reception, relation, and the aesthetic. Where Badiou effectively rescues the Poet from Plato's expulsion, he does so at the price of the Spectator. Yet as I have also argued, the 'ghost' of the Spectator persists within Badiou's framework, evident in his 'dramatic' reading of Mallarmé in *Being and Event*. While the dance/theatre/cinema triplet articulates the materialist dialectic in nascent form, there appears to be no account of the relation of spectatorship to materialist formalization considered as an authorization in thought. In order to explore an account of education that expands beyond the meta-theatre of philosophy's staging of truths, the next chapter will examine the relation between truth and knowledge in Badiou's framework, via a dialogue with the installation practice of Ilya Kabakov.

## Chapter Four

### Displacement: Ilya Kabakov and the Anxiety of the

### Contemporary

In the last chapter I examined the limitations of Badiou's inaesthetics, focusing on the manner by which the philosophical 'seizure' of the artwork excluded audience reception. In this chapter I stage an encounter between Badiou and the 'total' installation art of ex-Soviet conceptual artist Ilya Kabakov in order to explore the possibilities for a re-conditioning of Badiou's framework via the contemporary. I do so by examining Badiou's distinction between knowledge and truth from the perspective of education. I suggest that Kabakov's installation practice, characterized by his use of junk, garbage and everyday objects to dramatize the relation between the miraculous and the mundane, demonstrates a destabilization of epistemological registers of the fictive and the historical, which Osborne observes to be a key feature of the constitution of the contemporary (PC 37). I term this destabilization a mode of 'displacement'. Considered in terms of Badiou's framework, Kabakov's work offers a means of de-purifying the distinction between knowledge and truth, and of mitigating the apparently miraculous status of the event.

Despite Badiou's deep Platonic engagement, his work is marked by a relative silence on the theme of education. In the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, he argues that to educate is "to arrange forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them" (HI 9). Yet a wider account of education for Badiou remains mostly obscure, compounded by the apparent disjunction in his work between the categories of truth and knowledge, separated by the rupture of an event. Speaking of this opposition in an interview, Badiou emphasizes the importance of the conjunction 'and' in 'being *and* event', rather than an opposition of being or situation *to* event. Hence, the fundamental question of his framework is:

What can we derive or infer from this from the point of view of the situation itself?  
Ultimately, it is the situation that interests me. I don't think that we can grasp completely what a trajectory of truth is in a situation without the hypothesis of the absolute, or radical, arrival of an event. I agree. But in the end what interests me is the situational unfolding of the event, not the transcendence or entrenchment of the event itself. Thus, in my eyes, the fundamental categories are those of genericity and forcing. Genericity can be understood as the trajectory of aleatory consequences, which are all



suspended from whatever trace of the event is in the situation; and forcing consists in the equally extremely complex and hypothetical way in which truths, including political truths, influence and displace the general system of our encyclopaedias, and thus, of knowledge. (“Can Change Be Thought?” 306)

In exploring the link between truth and knowledge, this chapter will consider the relationship of the subject to knowledge and state in Badiou’s framework, including the concepts of forcing and the generic. While derived from some of the more complex mathematical engagements of *Being and Event*, these concepts are vital for illustrating truth as *suspended within* and therefore ‘displacing’ knowledge. That is, rather than ‘overturning’ the situation via the rupture of the event, the new is *distributed within* the situation *alongside* the ‘old’. This relation can be considered alongside what Osborne terms the “fictional ‘co-presentness’ of the contemporary” which is distinguished from the “self-surpassing” tendencies of the modern (PC 38). In other words, the new is for Badiou co-temporal with the ‘old’ within the present, rather than the result of the destruction of the old.

The difficulty, however, is that Badiou’s framework offers no clear account of what might be termed *pre-evental* subjective labour. In other words, the account of education I am concerned with attends to the question of fidelity in the absence of an event’s appearance. That is, rather than simply identifying education *with* the subjective process, I am interested in questioning what ‘education’ might mean from the standpoint of knowledge: by what means can forms of knowledge be arranged in anticipation of the ‘hole’ of truth, while avoiding an ethics of infinite wait encapsulated by the Derridian notion of the messianic? (*Specters of Marx* 81).

My reading of Kabakov responds to the Badiouian knowledge/truth problematic under the term ‘displacement’. In doing so, my use of Kabakov’s works departs from my largely illustrative use of artworks and case studies in the thesis so far. Kabakov’s works, such as *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment* (1985) combine installation art with a novelistic use of narrative, frequently narrating the stories of the lives of residents of Soviet communal apartments or the occurrence of the strange within the everyday. Kabakov’s linking of ‘garbage’ objects to the miraculous offers a thinking of the event as the displacement of the terms of knowledge. Put differently, rather than conceiving of the event as a ‘miraculous’ intervention that redeems a situation, the event is that which is posthumously constructed by the retroactive fictionalization of objects on the *basis* of their ‘garbage’ or un-placed excess. The non-contemporaneity of waste allows a process of *fictionalization* which connects and disconnects

forms of knowledge; 'education' therefore involves an active mode of enquiry which can proceed despite the inexistence of an event.

This mode of fictionalization is moreover a practice of the contemporary. In an essay on what he terms the 'Kabakov effect', Peter Osborne argues that Kabakov's art practice retroactively installs contemporary art within the Soviet genealogy of conceptual art. Kabakov's status within both Moscow Conceptualism and the development of installation art in the West following his move to the US means that he "retrospectively overdetermines the meaning of 'Moscow Conceptualism' as a privileged moment in the transition from 'conceptual art' to 'contemporary art', and hence as a *signifier of the conceptual character of contemporary art itself...*" (PC 171). The result is that "rather than being a carrier of Soviet history, [Kabakov's] fictionalization of the Soviet erases the hinge between history and fiction, leaving history engulfed by fiction; or, to put it another way, leaving Soviet history engulfed by Western art. 'Moscow', shed of its weight, is no match for the term 'contemporary art'. This is the Kabakov effect" (181). In this sense, the 'Kabakov effect' embodies an element of the Badiouian future anterior that I will explore in this chapter: Kabakov's art practice, and status as the bearer of temporal multiplicity across the 'made waste' Soviet experience, subsumed into the 'present' of contemporary art is such that the Soviet experience, through Kabakov's practice, *will have been made contemporary*. In addition, it is this feature that I suggest demonstrates a pervasive 'anxiety' of the contemporary within Kabakov's work, underpinned by the fear that an artist or body of art, upon being 'made contemporary', might as easily be 'made waste'. Hence the 'Kabakov effect' is demonstrative of a form of temporal and ontological displacement that is constitutive of the contemporary itself.

#### 4.1 Truth, Knowledge, Education



Figure 4. External installation view showing partition. Ilya Kabakov, *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment*. (1985) Tate Modern.

*The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment* (1985) (shown in external view in fig.4, and in internal view in figures 5 and 6 below) dramatizes the relation between an event and its remains. The work, one of Kabakov's first 'total' installations, operates through the juxtaposition of the mundane and the miraculous. First assembled and displayed in the artist's Moscow apartment before his emigration from the Soviet Union, the work was displayed at the Tate Modern retrospective of Ilya's and his wife Emilia's works, titled *Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future* (October 2017-January 2018). The retrospective occurred alongside other exhibitions throughout London in 2017 marking 100 years since the Bolshevik Revolution, such

as the Royal Academy of Art's blockbuster exhibition *Revolution: Russian Art 1917-1932*.<sup>56</sup> The work is notable for its withdrawal from gallery 'space', presented as a boarded-up door in a Soviet communal apartment. From the outset, as with many of Kabakov's works, the overwhelming effect is of a mystical occurrence within the everyday, involving the inhabitants of communal apartments – an effect given novelistic qualities by accompanying exhibition text. The text of *The Man Who Flew*, which I will return to in the next section, narrates the story of an inhabitant of the apartment who launches himself into space via a makeshift catapult, told from the perspective of his neighbours. The work stages an acceleration of time – a launching forward – which is further reinforced by the exhibition title, itself taken from another of Kabakov's works. Throughout his works, the protagonists are conspicuously absent, narrated instead in their disappearance. By connecting the occurrence of an apparently 'mystical' event to an assembly of waste or junk materials, the work serves as a means of thinking Badiou's relation between an event and its situation, or truth and knowledge. The works do so via a form of withheld spectatorship, in which viewers are distanced from the 'event' and must assemble its occurrence via fragments of text and the work's clues.

Born in the USSR in 1933 in what is now Ukraine, Kabakov's artistic practice was profoundly shaped by his status as an 'unofficial' artist prior to his emigration in 1987. Educated at the Art School of Moscow and then at the V. I. Surikov Art Institute, Kabakov specialized in graphic design and book illustration. Upon graduating in 1959 during the thaw years following Stalin's death, Kabakov did not apply to become a state-sanctioned artist but instead found work as an illustrator of children's books. Lacking sanction, he worked as an 'unofficial' artist within the underground art movement while supporting himself through illustration work. An exhibition of some of his works in Italy resulted in some of his works being deemed anti-Soviet, leading to him being banned as an illustrator for four years. Nonetheless, he continued to exhibit his works for a small circle of other underground artists, often displayed in private studios and apartments under constant threat of KGB surveillance. The difficulties of public exhibition forced Kabakov to retreat into the underground art circle – a tension that is evident in his works' narratives of characters set in darkly antagonistic relation to their social contexts.

During the early 1970s Kabakov created a work titled *Ten Characters*, consisting of a series of illustrated 'albums' narrating the lives of fictional characters through the use of escapist themes.

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<sup>56</sup> This exhibition proceeded in largely chronological manner, beginning in the immediate post-revolutionary period, encompassing the avant-garde innovations of Constructivism and Suprematism, and ending in Socialist Realism under the consolidation of Stalin's power.

Drawing on Kabakov's practice as an illustrator of children's books, the work foregrounds the artist's frequent use of strange and obscure protagonists. His first official installation exhibition in New York, 1988 – also titled *Ten Characters* – comprised of two gallery rooms fitted out like a Soviet communal apartment. The 'apartment' consisted of a number of rooms featuring individual installations with titles such as: *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment*; *The Man Who Flew Into His Picture*; *The Man Who Collected the Opinions of Others*; *The Untalented Artist*; *The Man Who Describes His Life Through Other Characters*; and *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away (The Garbage Man)*. The rooms, each annexed off the 'corridor' of the constructed apartment, serve to fictionalize the inhabitants through the combination of scraps of narrative and the junk remnants of their lives. The titles of the works gesture to children's stories or parables, while the characters themselves – often revealed to be strange outcasts – are conspicuously absent from the works. As a result, the narrative fragments become equal to the remnant objects that fill the characters' apartments. These objects, such as in *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, are often rubbish or junk, yet their place within the installation and narrative imbues them with a significance beyond their materiality. The objects serve to testify to the characters' existence within an obscure world which transforms the objects' materiality.

Hence within Kabakov's work there is a profound mediation between the narrative of the 'event' staged by the work and the testimony of junk objects. Furthermore, the characters themselves are often involved in their own 'investigation' of garbage, while art-objects are fictionalized, and transformed into surfaces upon which the miraculous occurs, or relegated from art objects to junk objects. The result is a mirroring of the process of the installation form itself in which non-art objects are installed *as* art. As I will return to in my analysis of Kabakov's works – primarily *The Man Who Flew*, *Objects of His Life*, *Three Nights*, and *Labyrinth (My Mother's Album)* – Kabakov's practice demonstrates an 'anxiety' of the contemporary, characterized by the slippage between multiple epistemological registers of the miraculous and the mundane, and ontologically between art and junk. That is, the fluidity between registers opens the possibility of being 'made-waste' by the contemporary: that what is deemed to be contemporary may in the future become junk. Before turning to examine Kabakov in greater detail, I will first outline the nature of the distinction between truth and knowledge in Badiou's framework via the wider concern of education and the subject.

## Knowledge and the State:

Articulating Badiou's framework for the relation between knowledge, state, and the subject is vital for arriving at the link between knowledge and truth. As we have seen, the state for Badiou is the ontological meta-structure which fixes the presentation of a situation as one. While there nonetheless remains an essential errancy or excess of the state over a situation, the state orders its parts according to relations of inclusion. Knowledge for Badiou is what is verifiable within a situation through a language secured by the state. As he writes, "The state is programmed to solely recognize as a part, whose count it ensures, what the situation's resources themselves allow to be *distinguished*. Whatever is not distinguishable by a well-made language is not" (BE 283). As such, the resources of language are insufficient for thinking real change inasmuch as it reproduces the state's ordering of parts. Attempts to identify thought with knowledge Badiou diagnoses as the ontological orientation of *constructivism*; for constructivism, what exists is that which the language of a situation can be shown to distinguish, meaning that "the state legislates on existence" (BE 288). Drawn from the work of Kurt Gödel, constructivism secures the domination of the state by eliminating its errancy, admitting "as existent those parts of a situation which are explicitly nameable" (BE 504).<sup>57</sup> In effect, within constructivism language dominates being as the sole means of discerning what exists; by warding off that which is *indiscernible* as inexistent constructivism renders being such that "*there is no place for an event to take place*" (BE 289). Constructivism conceives change as entirely immanent to the resources of language: the 'new' is that which is anchored in the infinity of language, and therefore constructed on the basis of what is knowable to the state (BE 290). As Badiou argues, "the orientation of constructivist thought subsumes the relation to being *within the dimension of knowledge*. The principle of indiscernibles, which is its central axiom, comes down to the following: that which is not susceptible to being classified within a knowledge is not" (BE 293). Constructivism therefore only recognizes as existent that which can be constructed from within the language of the situation, validated by the state.

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<sup>57</sup> Gödel's theorem of the 'constructible universe' within Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory effectively functions to limit the excessive nature of the continuum hypothesis. In general terms, this deploys internal functions (a language) of a given set to *construct* an ordering of its parts. In the terms of Badiou's ontology, the consequence is that "*the state succeeds the situation*" (BE 309). That is, rather than the state's *unknowable* excess, constructivism effectively holds the state's excess to be *knowable*. Crucially, language is the resource for this move: that which cannot be discerned by language does not exist, since to demonstrate its existence would be to expose it to the discernment of language.

What Badiou names ‘constructivist thought’ is an ontological extension of the treatment of language and excess, and can be read as a prefiguration of ‘democratic materialism’ in *Logics of Worlds*. Constructivism is an ontological orientation that privileges knowledge as the bounds of thought and in doing so excludes or polices the errancy of the event. As Badiou puts it, “Knowledge, with its moderated rule, its policed immanence to situations and its transmissibility, is the ordinary regime of the relation to being under circumstances in which it is not *time for a new temporal foundation*, and in which the diagonals of fidelity have somewhat deteriorated for lack of complete belief in the event they prophesize” (BE 294; emphasis added). In other words, knowledge as a category refers to the normal stability of being. Constructivism privileges knowledge to the exclusion of the opening of evental time; that there is no place for an event to take place means that there is no foundation for the diagonal of evental time.

At this point we can begin to see the conceptual requirements for thinking education within Badiou’s framework. Knowledge, as a traditional preserve of education (particularly within neoliberal ideologies of education as servicing ‘knowledge economies’) fails to escape the domination of the state, both in the sense of political state-structure, and in the wider ontological sense that Badiou deploys the term. Education must somehow subtract itself from domination by knowledge.

Here a comparison with Althusser’s account of education and the subject’s interpellation by ideology is useful: one of the key sites of the reproduction of the relations of capitalist production for Althusser is the education system. It is here that the subject is educated *as a subject*: “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject” (*Lenin and Philosophy* 117). Key to Althusser’s analysis is that there is always a subject to be hailed – “*individuals are already subjects*” (119). The role of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) is to shape subjects according to the demands of capitalist production. For this reason, the primary ISA under capitalism is the school, superseding the function of the Church under feudalism. Furthermore, the efficacy of the ISA is precisely the projection of State domination onto nominally free or private spheres – these spheres are moreover maintained by divisions of public/private that are ultimately grounded in the State itself (97). The ISA of the schooling system, according to Althusser, operates as a form of cultivation; seizing children at a young age, it “drums into them, whether it uses old or new methods, a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology. . . or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state” (104). The result is the production of a *cultivated* subject – worker, manager, or bureaucrat – shaped according to the demands of production.

Hence Badiou's account of the subject attempts to escape from the interpellation of the state. As Bruno Bosteels puts it, within the Althusserian framework, "Even if the dominant role is allowed to shift from one structural instance to another, there is no place in this overall picture for a contradictory transformation of the structure itself" ("Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics" 597). That is, the subject as interpellated by the ideological demands of the state structure can provide no basis for the immanent reshaping of the structure itself. As Žižek suggests, Badiou's opposition of 'knowledge' and 'truth' can be read as an inversion of Althusser's opposition of science and ideology whereby knowledge is the 'given' of what is, and truth is the 'exception' from which a politics can be created (*The Ticklish Subject* 167-168). Thinking education for Badiou must therefore avoid the constructivist domination of knowledge and engage with knowledge's rupture through truth-process. The agency tasked with linking knowledge and truth – or, more precisely, the stable regime of being and the event's errant encounter with the real of the void – is precisely the subject, as articulated via the process of subtraction.

The difficulty, however, is that for Badiou the subject is formed in response to and *recognition* of an event and is therefore *already committed*. One way of illuminating this problem is through consideration of the difficulties of causality within the realm of politics. As Nick Hewlett identifies, the event's antecedence to the formation of a subject poses problems for political practice: if a subject is formed in *response* to an event (itself unpredictable in advance), how can one organise *for* an event's occurrence? As Hewlett puts it, "the Bolsheviks surely did not wait for the 1917 Revolution before behaving in a revolutionary manner and becoming agents of change, and one does not necessarily fall into a teleological trap if one believes otherwise" ("Politics as Thought" 378). In effect, the event's causal primacy in the formation of the subject appears to negate the difficult labour that might *bring about* rupture – what could be termed hegemonic practice *within* the state. As Hewlett puts it if "events, including political events, are mysterious, completely unpredictable and random, then why organise, if only to make marginal difference, to make very small changes that can be eroded and in particular can be adapted to suit the needs of capitalism?" (378). The problem here lies in Badiou's conception of the subject as "retrospective and indissociably linked with an event of the past" (378). Reliance on the event's occurrence, coupled with its rarity, risks instituting it as a miraculous occurrence for which no form of action can adequately prepare. The result risks being little more than an ultra-leftist politics of pure distance *from* the state in the name of total insurrection.

A Badiouian response to this problem is that Bolshevik organisation prior to the October Revolution occurs as the continuation of subjective fidelity in response to earlier events – in



particular the 1871 Paris Commune (Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* 180-183). To pre-empt the terms that I expand on below, the October revolution is ‘forced’ into being through fidelity to the Commune-event, while incorporating the lessons of the failed 1905 revolution and the 1917 February revolution. In this sense, the October Revolution is the result of the forcing of a truth such that an event – the Paris Commune – *will have been true*. Hence Bolshevik organization is ‘educated’ *by* the preceding event of the Commune. Here we can see the temporal effects of linkages between event-subject-truth, with the re-seizing of events linking points in historical time – the evental ‘time’ of the Paris commune operates diagonally to linear historical time.

Yet while the above offers a preliminary response to Hewlett’s concerns, it presents an insufficient account of what could be considered pre-evental subjective labour. Badiou’s privileging of the event and its ‘naming’, at least in *Being and Event*, unduly emphasizes a focus on the event’s *redemption* of a situation. What is lacking is a consideration of the possibility of productive labour when events and their defined subjects are distant, dim, or exhausted. In terms of the framework outlined in Chapter Two, the question is one of bridging the divide between empty, homogeneous, atonic worlds, and tensed worlds of temporal multiplicity.

This problem can be seen as a consequence of Badiou’s distinction between knowledge and truth. By holding that a truth is distinct from knowledge, while knowledge is ultimately an affair of the state, Badiou appears to dismiss all affairs of knowledge as ultimately ‘compromised’. Politically, this results in a danger of ultra-leftist refusal to work hegemonically within the state in the name of a purely insurrectionary event-to-come. Artistically, one might view such a tendency as a refusal to work with or alongside the dispersed resources of mass culture. The key problem here is that of meaningful engagements within knowledge at times when no event *appears*. To pose the problem in terms of the framework discussed in Chapter Two: given the *saturation* of truth procedures and the domination of constructivism or democratic materialism such that there is no place for an event to take place, by what means can subjective labour be undertaken, if not fundamentally anchored in knowledge or ‘sense’?

As I argue, an account of education in Badiou’s framework must involve a process of investigation *prior* to or in the absence of the event’s appearance – or in Badiou’s language from *Logics of Worlds*, the event’s ‘inexistence’. Articulating a Badiouian account of education is complicated by the relative absence of its discussion throughout his work. One of the few direct discussions occurs in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, where he writes:

Art is pedagogical for the simple reason that it produces truths and because “education” (save in its oppressive or perverted expressions) has never meant anything but this: to arrange forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them. What art educates for us is nothing apart from its own existence. The only question is of *encountering* this existence, that is, of thinking through a form of thought. (HI 9)

This is followed by the further assertion – briefly mentioned in the previous chapter – that “the only education is an education *by* truths. The entire, insistent problem is that there be truths, without which the philosophical category of truth is entirely empty and the philosophical act nothing but an academic quibble” (HI 14-15). The brevity of this discussion results in a tight conceptual compression, in which we can deduce education to involve: 1) the arrangement of knowledge; 2) the exception or ‘hole’ in knowledge rendered by a truth; 3) the immanence of this truth to art; 4) the demand of encountering art as a form of thought; 5) that education takes place directly *by* truths. In regard to the question of the encounter, philosophy is “duty-bound” to make truths “manifest” (HI 15) – in other words, it is the philosopher’s role to *declare* truths for the education of contemporary subjects.

### **Forcing and the Future-Anterior:**

While Badiou’s remarks on education are somewhat obscure, what is significant for my present argument is his grounding of education in terms of knowledge – the arrangement of forms of knowledge – in order that the ‘hole’ of truth might become apparent. Put differently, the task of education is that of *creating a place* for an event to *take place*; or, again: to open a gap wherein a *new time* may come to emerge. As I will now discuss, the nature of the relation between knowledge and truth for Badiou is underpinned by the subtractive process, of which *forcing* and the *future-anterior* are key elements. Put simply, these concepts establish the link between knowledge (as secured by the state) and the irruptive and incalculable nature of a truth such that truth both *escapes* the structuring of state surveillance while remaining immanent to the situation. As such, the concepts are vital for avoiding the disjunction between truth and knowledge, and therefore form the basis of my articulation of education in this chapter.

As outlined in Chapter One, the Badiouan subject subtracts itself from the state through the four processes Badiou terms the *undecidable*, the *indiscernible*, the *generic*, and the *unnameable*. To recap, the undecidable refers to the incalculable nature of an event which cannot be inferred from a situation. The subject’s investigation of the event is therefore indiscernible to the state:

separated from knowledge by the event, the subject's fidelity proceeds in a manner indifferent to the knowledge of the situation. Rather than being directed by the language of the situation (or the 'encyclopaedia'), the subject forges its own subject-language – lacking predication in established forms of knowledge, the subject-language is generic and the subject's enquiry remains open 'for all'. Finally, this process remains unnameable inasmuch as it cannot be subsumed under a totalising representation of the truth it unfolds. In the following discussion, the concepts of the indiscernible and generic will be key.

Subtraction is therefore the process by which a subject produces truth in exception to knowledge. Despite being the agent of a truth's emergence, the subject – as local support of the truth's infinite resources – remains *ignorant* of the totality truth it supports. This point is key for overcoming the positivist orientations of constructivism: rather than 'knowing' truth, the subject's fidelity proceeds through a "knowing belief" or "*confidence*" (BE 397). The subject's knowing belief is what guides its composition of the subject-language – a language assembled through the connection of the terms of a situation to the occurrence of the event. What distinguishes the subject-language is that it has no referential content in the situation itself, being connected solely to the future situation in which the event *will have been* true – a temporal mode of the future anterior (BE 398). In effect, the subject-language is suspended from the real of the event and supported through belief fashioned in the future anterior.

Yet, as indiscernible to the situation and lacking referent, the subject-language appears to lack any real content from the point of view of knowledge. As Badiou puts it, for the witness external to the subject, "any revolutionary politics is considered to maintain a utopian (or non-realistic) discourse; a scientific revolution is received with scepticism, or held to be an abstraction without base in experiments; and lovers' babble is dismissed as infantile foolishness by the wise" (BE 398). It is possible to see here a similarity to what Rancière terms 'dissensus', or 'wrong' – the relation by which a subject's political claims to equality violate the distribution of the sensible and thus appear as non-sense (Rancière *Disagreement*). In other words, the subject's path of fidelity appears non-sensical from an external (i.e., non-committed) point of view.

This however leads to an obstacle: if, from the viewpoint of the situation, the event does not exist and thus the subject's fidelity appears incoherent, by what means can the gap between knowledge and truth be bridged? As Žižek observes, the effect of the knowledge/truth distinction is to produce a disjunction between the "engaged" subject and "disengaged" observer such that there is "no neutral gaze of knowledge that could discern the Event in its effects: a Decision is always-already here" (*Ticklish Subject* 156). For example, "[a] neutral historicist

gaze will never see in the French Revolution a series of traces of the Event called the ‘French Revolution’, merely a multitude of occurrences caught in the network of social determinations; to an external gaze, Love is merely a succession of psychic and physiological states” (157). With reference to Žižek’s observations, Hallward describes the disjunction as one between *subjects* and *spectators*, such that a “truth is only true for its subjects, not for its spectators” (Badiou 128). However, using the active and ‘emancipated’ sense of spectatorship developed in the last chapter, I instead argue this distinction to be one between *observers* and *spectators*. That is, the Spectator, understood in terms of a capacity for self-education, mediates *between* the non-committed ‘external’ viewpoint (the observer) for which no event has taken place and the committed, internal viewpoint (the subject) for which the event occurred. It is in this precise sense that the spectator is also a student.

As Žižek observes, the question of commitment has implications for the temporal causality of the event. Rather than the event’s undecidable nature prompting the need for decision, “it is only the Decision itself that reveals the previous State as ‘undecidable’” (*Ticklish Subject* 159). In doing so,

Badiou is clearly opposed to the Derridean ethics of openness to the Event in its unpredictable alterity: such an emphasis on unpredictable alterity as the ultimate horizon remains within the confines of Situation, and serves only to defer or block the Decision – it involves us in the ‘postmodernist’ indefinite oscillation of ‘how do we know this truly is the Event, not just another semblance of the Event?’ (159).

Hence it is decision that confirms the event as undecidable. Rather than an indefinite openness to an event-to-come, the committed decision of the subject is confirmed by the subject’s labour of fidelity in the future-anterior such that the event *will have been* true. Decision therefore amounts to a committed construction of a future in which the event *will have been* decided.

Before turning to the intricacies of Badiou’s concept of forcing, it is worth putting this abstract framework in more concrete terms via the work of Ilya Kabakov. As I will argue, Kabakov’s works – particularly *The Man Who Flew* – serve as a means of thinking the undecidable relation between the two epistemological frames of knowledge and the subject-language evident in the juxtaposition of the mundane world of communal apartment life and the sacred or extraordinary world of a mystical occurrence. The simultaneous presentation of the two frames results in a displacement of the everyday, most sharply evident in Kabakov’s repeated concerns with junk, garbage, or waste objects. These objects, rendered excess or remnant by their

everyday situations, are often afforded special status by the absent protagonist characters as evidence of the miraculous. The new emerges in and *alongside* the old, and on the basis not of negation of the old but its non-contemporaneity. Education, in this sense, involves the process of fictionalization and investigation that mediates between the two frames.

Forcing, for Badiou, is the “*fundamental law of the subject*” (BE 401). In simple terms, forcing serves as a bridge connecting the knowledge of a situation to the subject-language as deployed by the subject’s fidelity. The key of forcing is that it allows the path of a truth to both *break* from a situation while not descending into ineffability of pure alterity. The intricacy of forcing does, however, require careful explication. As Olivia Lucca Fraser points out, Badiou’s initial development of forcing emerges in his writing for the Althusserian-Lacanian journal *Les Cahiers pour l’Analyse* in the late 60s; the key problem is that of transforming a structure from the standpoint of an ‘empty’ place or ‘blind spot’ which Badiou develops through the mathematical theory of Abraham Robinson’s non-standard analysis. As developed more fully in *Being and Event*, forcing incorporates the work of mathematician Paul Cohen. As Lucca Fraser puts it,

[W]hat Badiou calls forcing is in each case a radical and systematic transformation of a situation by a series of actions acting upon, or proceeding from, the real of the situation – that which, prior to the activity of forcing, subsists in the situation as an invisible, unoccupiable, or “impossible” site, occluded by knowledge and cloaked by (the dominant) ideology. (“Forcing” 136; emphasis modified)

That is, forcing allows for the transformation of a structure by proceeding from its unrepresentable ‘real’, yet without undoing the structure or rendering it inconsistent (138). Between knowledge as the structured representation of a situation, and the aleatory construction of a truth that is *indiscernible* by knowledge, forcing provides a minimum of guidance to the subject’s fidelity.

Forcing does so by connecting the terms of a situation to statements in the hypothetical situation-to-come in which a truth emerges. If, in the situation to come, a statement in the subject-language *will have been* verified, “this is because *a* term of the situation exists which both belongs to that truth (belongs to the generic part which *is* that truth) and maintains a particular relation with the names at stake in the statement” (BE 401). It means that “one can *know*, in a situation in which a post-evental truth is being deployed, whether a statement of the subject-language has a chance of being veridical in the situation which adds to the initial

situation a truth of the latter” (BE 401). While conceptually intricate, the significance of forcing is to connect a situation to a future in which *real change has occurred*, without collapsing into either the reproduction of the situations’ structure, or absolute alterity in which the future is ineffable. What forcing amounts to is therefore a guide for subjective fidelity determined *within* knowledge, while at the same time escaping its structure. As Badiou puts it, “A term forces a statement if its positive connection to the event forces the statement to be veridical in the new situation (the situation supplemented by an indiscernible truth). Forcing is a relation *verifiable by knowledge*” (BE 403). Forcing amounts to the fact that it is possible, within knowledge, to determine which hypotheses of investigation *have a chance* of verifying a statement in the subject language; in such cases, certain terms of a situation *force* the subject-statement as having a stake in the process of investigation. Put otherwise, forcing holds that the possibility of the new is dispersed within the structure of the present.

Moreover, for Badiou forcing is undertaken through the temporal condition of the *future anterior*, which anchors the subject’s ‘knowing belief’. As Badiou puts it, “With the resources of the situation, with its multiples, its language, the subject generates names whose referent is in the future anterior: this is what supports belief. Such names ‘will have been’ assigned a referent, or a signification, when the situation will have appeared in which the indiscernible . . . is finally presented as a truth of the first situation” (BE 398). The future-anterior preserves the chance of a subject’s fidelity while acting as a guide for its investigations. The future anterior for Badiou therefore encapsulates a degree of risk in the chance development of fidelity, which only gains coherence and symbolic verification retrospectively.

Forcing therefore dictates the relation of a present to the future of a subjective process, holding this future to be thinkable yet, as subject to chance, not calculable. The significance of this can be illustrated by comparison to Benjamin’s now-time and Derrida’s notion of the ‘messianic’ – both involve a de-linearization of historical time in relation to a to-come of futurity. In his essay on the philosophy of history, Benjamin distinguishes materialist time from historicist time such that “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]” (*Illuminations* 261). The ‘now’ in this sense, is the possibility within the present of redemption from the violence of history amassed in the name of progress. Against naïve historicism that regards history as the linear causal relation of facts, Benjamin proposes a structure of history in which a fact becomes “historical posthumously . . . through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years” (263). In this way, the historical materialist practices “a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ which is shot

through with chips of Messianic time” (263). Messianic time, for Benjamin, is a time tethered to the possibility of redemption: rather than projecting homogenous or empty time onto the future, “every second of time [is] the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter” (264). Hence now-time is time indexed to a form of the future anterior in which the Messiah *will have* arrived.

Badiou’s own concept of history is also opposed to the linearity of what Benjamin designates as historicist time. As we have seen, Badiou’s temporality of the present is non-linear: a present is the living temporality of a subjective fidelity to an event. As the *historicity* of an event, a present proceeds diagonally across linear time. In *Being and Event*, Badiou distinguishes between ‘natural’ and ‘historical’ situations: a natural situation is marked by ontological stability, while an historical situation contains an evental site. As outlined in Chapter One, the evental site is marked by being ‘on the edge of the void’ for a situation, while at the same time being foundational for the situation itself (BE 174-175). Historical situations are therefore marked by the existence of the void, designated by the site.

In *Theory of the Subject* Badiou writes “history does not exist (it would be a figure of the whole). Only historical periods or historicizations . . . exist” (TS 92). In *Being and Event* Badiou reworks the claim: “We can think the *historicity* of certain multiples, but we cannot think *a* History . . . The idea of an overturning whose origin would be a state of totality is imaginary. Every radical transformational action originates *in a point*, which, inside a situation, is an evental site” (BE 176). Hence the historicity of a situation emerges from its site as symptomatic void-point. In this understanding the historical is *separated* from stable ontology and as such is not bound to the linear temporality of causality – such as the historicism Benjamin denounces as “telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary” (*Illuminations* 263). As Badiou puts it, breaking with democratic materialism’s privileging of historicism “means restoring the past as the amplitude of the present” (LW 509). That is, “History does not exist. There are only disparate presents whose radiance is measured by their power to unfold a past worthy of them” (LW 509). That is, for Badiou what matters is the plurality of presents.

Badiou’s concepts of forcing and future-anterior distinguish him from the Derridean rendering of the Messianic as alterity demanding an infinite wait, as outlined Derrida’s reworking of Benjamin in *Specters of Marx*. For Knox Peden, Badiou’s move from his earlier more dialectical concept of history to its subtractive rendering in *Being and Event* is a move “from a logic of redemption to a logic of tenacity” (45). The Messianic (or the “messianic without messianism”) as developed by Derrida focuses on the ‘gap’ in the present with which to maintain an openness to the future as infinite alterity (*Specters of Marx* 74). This is evident in Derrida’s notion of

*democracy-to-come* which is ‘spectral’ in ordering “one to summon the very thing that will never present itself in the form of full presence” (81). Hence the ‘to-come’ in democracy-to-come is the *gap* between “infinite promise” as “the infinite respect of the singularity *and* infinite alterity of the other” and the “determined, necessary, but also necessarily inadequate forms of what has to be measured against this promise” (*Specters of Marx* 81). Hence the messianic is a relation of alterity, an “eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated” (81). As *other*, the messianic demands an infinite wait, a “hospitality without reserve”, in acknowledgement that the to-come may be unrecognizable (81). Hence for Derrida the present must be determined by an indefinite wait for an unrecognizable event, whereas, for Badiou, while the event itself is undecideable *from* the situation, its consequences via forcing are not ineffable. Via the future-anterior the consequences of an event are retroactively deployed within a situation *as true*; the concept of forcing determines those consequences to be suspended *within* the present and available to subjective labour. Hence to arrange forms of knowledge in order that the ‘hole’ of a truth may appear need not resort to an ethics of infinite wait.

For A. J. Bartlett, forcing and the future-anterior are crucial for the construction of a Badiouian account of education. In contrast to the model of education as ISA critiqued by Althusser, in which the subject’s interests become those of the state, the Badiouian subject by contrast, “is a subject at once *of* and *to* truth. Of this we can say that a subject is that which at each stage ‘will have been educated’” (“Conditional Notes”60). Through the operation of fidelity, then, a subject self-educates. What forcing provides is an absolutely essential means by which to prevent the self-education collapsing into “anarchic wandering” (60). Guided via forcing, the subject works *within* knowledge to test those terms that can only be verified retrospectively. Yet once subtracted, the truth supported by a subject remains sustained as a generic ‘extension’ within the situation. As Bartlett puts it, the generic extension is “the extension by eventual rupture of what which was represented as nothing – precisely the ‘truth of the situation’” meaning that the subject is “this figure of, or rather *in*, extension” (63). As Badiou writes, “ontological fidelity, however inventive it may be, cannot, in evaluating connections, *break* with the count-as-one and turn itself into an exception to structure. In respect of the latter, it is rather a diagonal, an extreme loosening, an unrecognizable abbreviation” (BE 245). The generic extension articulates the way in which fidelity proceeds *within* a situation based on a ‘diagonalization’; truth is suspended within the knowledge of a situation. Put differently, the new is *dispersed* within the present alongside the old, based on a logic of dis-placement.



## Displacement: Torsion and Scission

As we have seen, forcing, via the temporal modality of the future anterior, serves as the bridge linking knowledge and truth within the subjective process. This process is ‘diagonal’ and suspended as a generic extension within the situation. The difficulty, however, is that identifying education *with* the subjective process of the production of truth appears to confine education to the already-committed, and to situations in which an event appears. Yet there remains the difficult question of the eventual causality: if the subject is formed *in response* to an event, by what means is a pre-evental or hegemonic labour possible? As Badiou writes of knowledge and constructivism, “Even for those who wander on the borders of eventual sites, staking their lives upon the occurrence and the swiftness of intervention, it is, after all, appropriate to be knowledgeable” (BE 294). In other words, what *kinds* of knowledge are conducive to the formation of truth?

By articulating the importance of the ‘torsion’ and ‘scission’ of the situation by light of the eventual site, Bosteels helps to bridge the disjunction between knowledge and truth in a manner that avoids the former being projected as *merely* or *only* ‘ideological’ and therefore without interest. Rather than knowledge and truth being disjoined spheres, “from the point of view of subjective intervention, they stand as extremes of an ongoing process of detachment and scission” (“Logics of Antagonism” 103). That is, rather than “the absolute purity of truth as a voluntaristic and self-constituent decision”, the knowledge/truth distinction “hinge[s] on the rare contingency of a process, an intervention, a labor” (103). For Bosteels, the concept of the eventual site is thus indispensable for articulating the way in which every element of a situation “is internally marked by the structure of assigned spaces in which this multiple is placed” (104). As he continues:

Otherwise, without the logic of scission and torsion, the ontological discourse risks leading us back to a false structural or ultra-leftist scheme, insofar as the event would constitute a pure vanishing insurrection of the void which counts the structure of being and which merely stands revealed in the immeasurable excess of the state of a situation over this situation itself. An event, however, is not pure novelty, revolt, and insurrection, but is *tributary* to a situation by virtue of its specific site. (104; emphasis added)

Rather than an absolute separation of knowledge and truth, subjective forcing and the evental site prompt consideration of the inter-mingling of these domains such that it is the subject's active fidelity which attests to the antagonism from which a truth emerges.

Bosteels' observations of the inter-linking of being and event, or truth and knowledge, via 'torsion' provides an alternative site for considering the grounds of education within Badiou's framework. Rather than being identified with the subject's process of post-evental fidelity, otherwise dependent on a voluntarist leap of commitment, education can be considered as taking place 'within' knowledge, on the basis of an investigation that breaks with the constructivist domination *by* knowledge. Where constructivism declares there to be no place for an event to take place – or that it is not time for the foundation of a new time (BE 294) – such form investigation would dedicate itself to the exploration of new forms of time within the present. Put in terms of Chapter Two's discussion of atonic and tensed worlds, to 'arrange forms of knowledge' would consist of moving beyond the apparently empty and homogenous temporality of atonic worlds by investigating the appearance of points from which a fidelity may be retroactively assembled. Doing so necessarily demands thinking the non-contemporaneous within the contemporary – or in Badiou's terms, the evental site. Such a pedagogy would therefore be constructed around a mode of displacement – the reciprocal dis-placing of forms of knowledge – such that an event may emerge as a retroactive fiction. As I will now turn to, the installation practice of Ilya Kabakov models displacement by thinking imbrication of multiple epistemological registers, articulated through his presentation of waste, garbage and temporal excess.

## **4.2 Ilya Kabakov: Installation as Displacement**

Kabakov's relation to the genealogical temporality of art history is curiously out-of-joint. As the artist states, his position as an unofficial artist produced an anxiety of alienation: his dream of belonging to European culture was prompted by a Soviet feeling of "inadequacy, the feeling that somewhere beyond the border, there existed a real, more authentic life" ("Interview – Davis A Ross in Conversation with Ilya Kabakov" 8). This tension between inner and outer frames was found in a professed awareness from early childhood of a "feeling that the outside is not co-ordinated with, or is not adequate to, what's taking place inside" (11). Such was the cultural isolation imposed during Soviet Realism that Kabakov spent his formative years as an art student unaware of the work of the major figures of the post-revolutionary Soviet avant-garde –

his first encounter with famous artists such as Malevich, Tatlin and Kadinsky was in the early 1970s when he was almost 40 years old (“Interview” *Ilya Kabakov* 13).

As the title of the Tate Modern exhibition, *Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future*, suggests, alienation from the linear progression of history is a clear theme throughout Kabakov’s work. Speaking in an interview, his wife and artistic collaborator Emilia Kabakov states that “All artists wonder if they are worthy of being included in the history of art. Even if they reject the museum system, they still dream about being in the museum collection” (Juliet Bingham, “Introduction” 17). Ilya himself confirms this, speaking elsewhere of his desire “to belong to European culture, a dream that was practically unattainable during most of my life” (Kabakov “Interview” 8). As Matthew Jesse Jackson argues, the Kabakovs inhabit a unique art-historical temporality within the contemporary art-world; their formal artistic training was “grounded in a worldview that pre-dated the eruption of the avant-garde into the cultural sphere”, instilling them with a “traditionalist sensibility” at odds with the avant-garde’s aesthetics of shock (“The Elimination of Utopianism” 27). As Jackson continues, “As such, the Kabakovs are among the very few contemporary artists who can look at a painting like Raphael’s *La belle jardinière* (1507) and see such as work not as a quaint relic from a disappeared art historical past, but as something vital, something even magical; as a source of otherworldly aesthetic energies” (27). In this sense, the Kabakovs would be “no doubt comfortable producing their work from inside an art historical time machine” (27). Ilya’s artistic life within the restriction of the underground art circle led to what could be called an anxiety of reception prompted by the isolation from the Western art world. As Groys argues, “From the *Albums* onwards, Kabakov has dealt with this mixture of hope and fear with which an artist and, generally speaking, an author must wait for an unknown viewer, the future context, the reception by a stranger” (“The Moveable Cave” 41). The anxiety of registering within the canon of ‘Western’ art is evident in a psychological mood inhabiting Kabakov’s works, as seen in his frequent juxtaposition of multiple – and often competing – epistemological frames.

Yet it is precisely his isolation from the Western art world prior to emigrating that lends Kabakov’s work a conceptual genealogy at odds with the Western emergence of installation art. As Groys notes, rather than developing within the lineage of post-minimalism or site-specific art, Ilya’s ‘total’ installations originate in “narrative literature” and the “novelistic tradition” (“The Moveable Cave” 54). Kabakov’s installation works function through narrative absorption focused on “an isolated figure in an uncomfortable, menacing environment. The relationship with their surroundings is shown as an agonistic one: the character makes ironic his

environment, and the environment reciprocates” (54). In contrast to the brightly-lit spaces of Western installation art, Kabakov’s works are “dark, obscure” (54). This darkness

[D]eliberately obstructs the viewer’s gaze, and makes it difficult for us to see. These are baroque installations, programmatically distinct from the “white cube” of Minimalist-Conceptualist installations, staging the play of light and shadow and thus emphasizing the difficulties involved in looking into a private world, in surveying the intimate garbage of an unknown life – and asking why, looking voyeuristically into their dark, hidden, intimate spaces is so intriguing. (60)

Rather than placing his installations into the pre-defined space of the white cube gallery, Kabakov *constructs* space, making it his own environment and thus establishing a unique psychological world (66-68). Hence Kabakov “disrupts the homogenous, evenly-lit, ‘viewer-friendly’ museum, where everything presents itself equally calmly and ‘ideally’ to the viewer, if not to destroy it, at least to call it into question” (63). As Jesse Jackson argues, the Kabakovs’ work “always exists problematically within the tidy, well-managed venues of the international art world. . . their art tends to distort and disrupt the neutral framing of the gallery and museum beyond all recognition” (30-31). In disrupting the gallery space, Kabakov’s total works not only disrupt the idealized mode of viewership that O’Doherty identifies with the white-cube gallery space (the Eye), but also the ‘embodied’ Spectator of post-minimalist lineage.

Thus the mode of spectatorship produced by Kabakov’s works is simultaneously one of restriction and immersion. To a large extent, the spectator is simultaneously a reader of the text fragments accompanying each work – the fragments themselves frequently provide only partial clues taken from testimonies of apartment residents. As Kabakov explains of his own works, which he terms ‘total’ installations, the viewer “finds himself controlled by the installation when he is near one, in a certain sense, he is its ‘victim’. But he is simultaneously both a ‘victim’ and a viewer, who on the one hand surveys and evaluates the installation, and on the other, follows those associations, recollections which arise in him, he is overcome by the intense atmosphere of the total installation” (*Über die "totale" Installation* 245). Unlike painting or sculpture, which permit free movement, the restricted nature of Kabakov’s works make them ‘closed’ such that “The viewer is simultaneously the master and the captive of the installation” (266). The result is a high degree of psychological immersion – for Kabakov, “Losing the attention of the viewer is the end of the installation” (276). Hence Kabakov’s works function via a form of attentional arrest; his displaced location within the Western genealogy of contemporary art therefore places his form of spectatorship at odds with the conventional modes encoded by the contemporary art

museum. The ‘Kabakov effect’ identified by Osborne – the retroactive fictionalization of the Soviet experience – is also at the same time an antagonistic seizure and fictionalization of gallery space.

**The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment (1985):**



Figure 5. Internal view, showing catapault. Ilya Kabakov, *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment* (1985). Tate Modern.

*The Man Who Flew* centres upon the circumstances surrounding a communal apartment resident who becomes obsessed with dreams of escaping into space. As the text accompanying the installation relates:

The entire cosmos, according to the thoughts of the inhabitant of this room, was permeated by streams of energy leading upward somewhere. His project was conceived

in an effort to hook up with the streams and fly away with them. A catapult, hung from the corners of his room, would give this new “astronaut”, who was sealed in a plastic sack, his initial velocity. Further up, at a height of 40-50 metres, he would land in a stream of energy through which the Earth was passing at that moment as it moved along its orbit. The astronaut had to pass through the ceiling and attic of the building. With this goal in mind, he installed powder charges and at the moment of take-off from the catapult, the ceiling and roof would be wiped out by an explosion, and he would be carried away into a wide-open space. (*Large Print Guide - Ilya & Emilia Kabakov* 43)

The installation consists of a small room sparsely furnished with the man’s meagre possessions and covered wall to wall with Soviet posters (Fig. 5). A makeshift catapult hangs in the centre of the room, rigged from bedsprings and straps anchored to each corner; beneath the seat of the catapult is a ramshackle bench serving as a launching-pad. A hole through which the man was launched gapes open in the ceiling above the catapult, surrounded by tattered plaster hanging from the explosion. Dust, debris, and rubbish cover the floor, which is punctuated by two shoes. The main lighting source of the installation is situated above the hole and therefore ‘beyond’ the installation, emphasising the upward trajectory of the man’s flight.

The effect of *The Man Who Flew* is amplified by the external view of the room (fig. 4); the wall painted in the style of the communal apartment, combined with the hanging coats and dim light cultivate a shabby normalcy in contrast to the miraculous effect of the work’s internal view. The installation text includes small narratives from the man’s neighbours detailing fragments of the man’s life, his plans to travel into space, and the shock and surprise when the explosion happened. Each of these is, in turn, defined as a ‘story’. According to one (“Golosov’s Story”), a police search found no trace of the of the man in the surrounding area, following which: “The repairmen from the ZhEK (housing maintenance committee) nailed boards over the door so that no one could enter or touch anything. But curious outsiders continually came by, moving the boards and peeking between the cracks... And the model on the table still stands, as it was,

under the lamp, just like it did when he was still here..." (*Large Print Guide* 51). Hence the work stages a form of viewership as investigation.



Figure 6. Internal view, showing tableau. Ilya Kabakov, *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment* (1985). Tate Modern.

Despite the room's visual detail, the view is highly restricted; viewers must peer through gaps in the boarded-up 'door' (fig. 4), located off-centre and (in the Tate Modern exhibition) positioned behind a small partition that accommodates at most two or three people at a time. Even then, viewers must crane forward to peer into the room through the gaps such that the boards remain an ever-present obstacle barring a 'complete' view. The combination of posters, worn furniture, rubbish, and debris produce an excess of detail that calls for prolonged viewing and engagement, yet the limited view permitted by the boards, combined with the physical restriction and time pressures produced by other viewers frustrates a more considered viewing. What remains is

instead a tension between the curiosity of wanting to see what is offered but withheld from view, and the anxiety of an incomplete viewing, exacerbated by the partially confined viewing position. From ‘outside’ of the installation, viewers are offered the spectacle of watching other people gazing in.

A further complication of this dynamic is the presence of a small tableau to the immediate right hand side of the viewing space (fig.6); so close is it to the fourth wall of the installation that it can only be properly seen by extending one’s head through the gap in the door and into the ‘room’. The tableau models the communal apartment complex and surrounding suburb, with a thin wire positioned upwards depicting the path of the man’s projected flight. The offer of a ‘totalising’ view of the apartment complex is met by distortions of scale and perspective: the model is a *model*, giving a depersonalised (and itself ‘fictional’) account of the man’s environment. Yet it is at the same time withheld from the installation viewer, tucked in the corner within a room displaying the messy evidence of the man’s life but from which he is conspicuously absent. The small lamp lighting the tableau competes with, but also foreshadows, the main source of installation lighting through the hole in the ceiling. Hence the model offers a secondary dramatization of the spatial and temporal suggestions of the catapult. The acceleration the man requires to reach the ‘petals’ of energy can be viewed as the expansion of spatial movement within a compressed temporal moment. As we will see, this relation between temporality and spatiality is further twisted in the installation *Labyrinth (My Mother’s Album)*.

## **16 Ropes (1984) and Objects of His Life (2005)**

The work shown in (fig. 7), as displayed at the Tate Modern exhibition, comprises an amalgamation of two works by Kabakov: *16 Ropes* (1984), and *Objects of His Life* (2005), itself a reworked version of the earlier work *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away (Garbage Man)* (1988). Both works feature the arrangement of garbage, junk, and everyday objects in a





Figure 7. Ilya Kabakov, *16 Ropes* (1984) and *Objects of His Life* (2005). Tate Modern.

form of catalogued order. A series of strings from the *16 Ropes* work are suspended across the room, from which items of junk are hung, each with a small piece of paper and text attached. The text fragments narrate snippets of overheard – or ‘waste’ – conversation: “I had some boiling water here, if he had said something about Valentina, I would have given it to him...”; “... I hear a noise, everybody runs – and I haven’t got the nerves – I didn’t even dare come out...”; “They’re going to KILL him!” (*Large Print Guide*, 57). Underneath the strings are a series of display cases containing objects neatly arranged and labelled, and a wooden table on which a mess of unsorted objects is piled – the remnants of the so-called ‘Garbage Man’. In the accompanying text (taken from the original version *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*) the narrator describes how the inhabitant of the room (in the installation’s original iteration) never threw a single item away:

He could not part with any of these things because each was tied to a memory, an impression, someone's likeness. To part with any of these things, he imagined, would mean to part with their memories, to loosen his ties to the past, and together with that, all one's life. His memory tells him, that in past life, each remembrance is full of meaning, it is impossible to count one event as meaningful and another not, rather each is an equivalent part of life itself. Therefore the only thing left to do with these items and memories, is to catalogue them, to make rows and columns, give them numbers and enter them into a ledger in a strict, exacting order. (*Large Print Guide* 54)

Reading both works together demonstrates two meditations on junk and rubbish – one in which 'junk' conversation is captured and attached to junk objects, and another in which the man's garbage is itself catalogued and itemised in the display cabinets. Yet the very process of cataloguing robs the items of their significance – the central table on which the collection of trash is spread is transformed into banality within the cabinets; in one case a number of pencils have been arranged neatly side-by-side, captured as 'mere' objects. In this instance the doubled power of the objects – as both junk and as dramatized 'trace' of the Garbage Man's life – is rendered inert. The act of cataloguing therefore transforms the objects into a different kind of junk.

### **Three Nights (1989):**

Kabakov's 1989 work *Three Nights* (fig. 8) continues the artist's preoccupation with the juxtaposition of the mundane and miraculous. The work consists of three large paintings with nocturnal themes mounted on the walls of the gallery room, breaking with the Soviet apartment settings of his other works. A wooden partition is erected in front of the paintings, in which small windows are cut allowing only a partial view. In turn, a monocular telescope is placed in front of each window and focused on a small area of each painting as visible through the partition. Upon looking through the telescopes, 'little white men' – featured in several of



Figure 8. Exhibition view showing partition and paintings “Night No.1” and “Night No.2”. Ilya Kabakov. *Three Nights* (1989), Tate Modern.

Kabakov’s works – are revealed to be inhabiting the surface of the paintings. These figures are featureless paper cut-outs – almost impossible to see without the aid of the telescopes.

In common with Kabakov’s use of fictionalized narrative, the accompanying text recounts the tale of the three paintings’ provenance:

In 1978 in the Voronezh Picture Gallery during an examination of one of the paintings by the common name *Three Nights* (the paintings arrived in the Museum in 1938, and it has been impossible to establish either the name of the artist or the genuine title of the works; the title *Three Nights* was given conditionally), details were accidentally discovered in its upper part that until that time had not attracted attention to themselves. These were figures of small white people, no larger than one centimetre in size. It was

suggested that such creatures might also turn out to be on the other two paintings. In fact, a thorough examination of the paintings Night No. 2 and Night No. 3 affirmed this, which was recorded by a photograph at that time, in the autumn of 1978. (*Large Print Guide* 88)

Akin to *The Man Who Flew*, the text presents the installation as the evidence of a mysterious occurrence. Importantly, the narrative fictionalizes the paintings as *art objects* – a strategy Kabakov employs elsewhere, as in the series of paintings *On Holiday* (1987). In this series, a number of paintings of idyllic Socialist Realist scenes are abandoned by a fictional artist and placed in storage. Upon later rediscovering them, the artist proceeds to re-touch them by gluing sweet wrappers across the surface of the paintings, making them ironic as ‘tat’. Hence art-objects themselves are fictionalized and provided with their own histories. Yet the act of fictionalization renders the art-objects into forms of junk, discarded and retrieved before being redecorated with rubbish. Upon being severed from their historical context the artworks are reduced to the ontological level of *material* – an indifferent surface for the addition of glued-on rubbish.

As Kabakov relates, *Three Nights* is concerned with the miraculous as presented within two spaces: the “distant, closed world there, in the depths of the nocturnal paintings” and the external space of the viewers in which the little white men appear on the works (*Ilya/Emilia Kabakov: The Utopian City* 390). As he states, “only having separated these spaces was it then possible to establish a connection between the two ‘mysteries’ – there and here – and to explain the appearance of strange little white people by something which occurred, is occurring, in the depths of the three nocturnal worlds” (390). The work, for Kabakov, is prompted by the problem of the contrast between everyday knowledge and knowledge which is miraculous, arriving suddenly and inexplicably. Such miraculous knowledge:

[I]s of a completely different sort, of a different “composition.” It cannot be analyzed in the usual way, broken down into parts, comprehended logically. In essence, it is also impossible to use it in this life. Its appearance is just like its meaning – a completely unsolvable mystery. What, strictly speaking, should be done with it? You can – and must – live with the first kind of knowledge. But it is absolutely unclear what to do with the second kind. It remains a sign, a reminder of something about something. But of what and about what? (*Ilya/Emilia Kabakov: The Utopian City* 390)

Key here is the relation between two overlapping epistemological spaces to be investigated via their incompatibility – the difficulty then becomes one of grasping both frames together without collapsing one into the other. The paintings that the work fictionally historicizes are thereby reduced to ‘mere’ art objects which support the occurrence of the ‘miraculous’ – that is, as throughout Kabakov’s works, the miraculous occurs on the basis of the ontological demotion of objects. It is this ‘demotion’ – from art object to material surface – that demonstrates the ‘anxiety’ of the contemporary in Kabakov’s work, driven by the fear that what is determined to be art may be made waste in the eyes of future viewers.

### **Labyrinth (My Mother’s Album) (1990)**

*Labyrinth (My Mother’s Album)* (1990) (fig.9) breaks with Kabakov’s use of fictionalized characters by being one of his most clearly self-referential works. Rather than telling his own story, however, the work presents an autobiographical account written by Ilya’s mother Bertha Urievna Solodukhina, written in 1982 when she was 80. The installation is a linear series of dark corridors built in a double-spiral formation. Viewers enter the corridor from the exhibition space through a drab-looking doorway and can proceed in only one direction, winding inwards to the centre of the installation before winding outwards again to the exit. Along the wall of the corridor – painted in the familiar Soviet apartment style of Kabakov’s other works – are picture frames featuring fragments of the narrative from Ilya’s mother. These fragments are combined with apparently unrelated photos of everyday Soviet life taken by Ilya’s uncle. There are 76 frames in total, resulting in a substantial amount of text. The narrative is written in a simple and

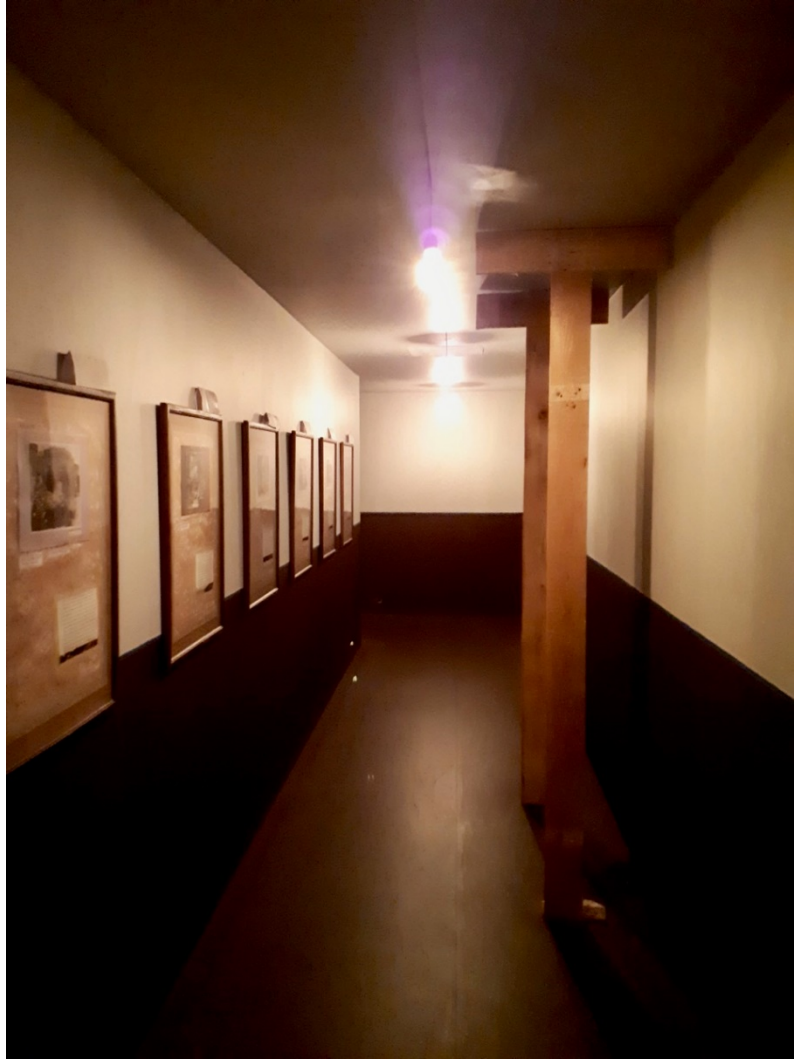


Figure 9. Internal view showing corridor, picture frames and wooden pillars. Ilya Kabakov. *Labyrinth (My Mother's Album)*. 1990. Tate Modern.

direct language that recounts in a meandering way the – sometimes mundane – details of Bertha's childhood and life in poverty and frequent homelessness against the backdrop of civil war:

Dear Son! You asked me to write down the story of my life. I have decided to grant your request. I am beginning on 21.1.1982. I am 80 years old. Before I talk about myself I must first talk about my family. I kept my father's certificates and papers for a long time, where it is noted that he is a native of the small town of Trab of the Otopyansky region of the Vilensky province, he was a petty bourgeois. I don't remember any documents about my mother. My parents were orphans when they were taken in by a childless old couple. I also kept photographs of these old folks for a long time – they were foster relatives. (Ilya Kabakov, *Installations 1983-2000* 230).

As viewers move through the corridor, a faint sound of singing can be heard – a recording of Ilya singing and humming Russian folk songs. Projected from the centre of the installation, the singing becomes gradually louder as the viewer winds towards the centre of the spiral formation. Yet despite the suggestion of ‘revelation’, the centre of the installation is anti-climactically empty; viewers encounter a small room the size of a broom closet filled with junk, rubbish and detritus (wood, plaster, plastic, wallpaper fragments) and a further closed door. Upon reaching the centre, viewers continue on through the corridors with further text-fragments leading outwards, during which the singing gets fainter until exiting the installation and returning to the art gallery space.

In contrast to the works examined so far, *Labyrinth* is formed by the construction of an entirely enclosed space in which the viewers are fully immersed – the clearest example of Ilya’s ‘total’ installation practice. In discussions on his installation practice, Kabakov specifies precise measurements for installation ceilings to have an “oppressive” effect, as well as the symbolic value of a constructed floor (*On The Total Installation*, 257). The effect is that the narrow, cramped corridors (emphasised by the occasional wooden ‘support’ and the dim lighting) become claustrophobic and suggestive of a progressive interiority of the work. From the moment of entering the work the gallery space is cut off, while the spiral configuration stages the work’s own immersive depth as viewers slowly proceed towards the centre. This inward movement is itself subjected to a temporal demand given the substantial amount of text provided by Bertha’s narrative. The lack of decorative features means that there is little to do but read the narrative – viewing the work, like Kabakov’s *Ten Characters* albums, is therefore fundamentally an act of reading. The spacing of the framed texts, combined with the act of reading, lends a contemplative pacing to the work as viewers move from frame to frame. This pace of reading therefore has the effect of slowing and stalling viewers within the featureless corridors – an effect that quickly becomes claustrophobic. Given the significant amount of text on the 76 frames, reading the entire narrative is arguably beyond the attentional time constraints of many viewers, further emphasizing the overbearing monotony of the space.

This, however, contrasts to what could be called the ‘spatial’ temporality of the installation. As Kabakov puts it, in the spatial effect of winding and unwinding it is “as though there was an inhalation and exhalation, which the viewer easily feels” (qtd. in Fowle “On *Labyrinth*” 50). Where the spatial coordinates of the work produce the inward and outward movement, emphasised by the recording of the singing, Bertha’s narrative itself remains stubbornly linear, and abundant with mundane detail:



My mother devoted all of her affection to me. She dressed me like a picture, even beyond her means. My father was a sickly man. He had a bad stomach, and mother cooked for him separately. He often vomited after eating. He never went to the doctor. Mother protected him from bad food when she could. When I was three I remember myself in the city of Donetsk (formerly Yuzovka), where my parents moved. They were in Yuzovka during the pogrom of 1905, but since they were living in the house of the police chief, they escaped the beatings. I remember Yuzovka covered with soot... (Ilya Kabakov, *Installations 1983-2000* 230)

Bertha's narrative demonstrates a collapse between the mundane (her father's upset stomach) and the 'historical' (the anti-Jewish pogrom), with no distinction between the two registers. The linear time of Bertha's narrative compresses temporalities through its lack of structure and abundance of detail; the construction of the installation, meanwhile, compresses space via its double-spiral structure.

The work therefore stages a double temporality of linear narrative time and the topological 'temporality' suggested by the spatialized movement of winding/unwinding. Yet the work's centre ironizes and deflates the suggestion of wider causal significance: rather than a revelation of Ilya's life, the small room contains rubbish. Significantly, however, the rubbish (plastic sheeting, wood, wallpaper) is suggested to be left over from the construction of the *installation* itself. Thus the rubbish is of a different status to Kabakov's other works: rather than junk objects which have been used and discarded, the rubbish is unused excess material. Located within the centre of the installation alongside the recording of Ilya's singing, the rubbish thus refuses narrative denouement. The banality of the installation operates through the reduction to surface: it is made quite clear to viewers that the corridors will consist of nothing but the framed text fragments, which is reduced to an aimless procedural description.

### **4.3 Kabakov and the Anxiety of the Contemporary:**

Ilya Kabakov's installation practice demonstrates an 'anxiety' of the contemporary, manifest as a pervasive uncertainty resulting from the collapse of ontological divisions between artwork and junk or garbage. Moreover, the ontological destabilization results in an *epistemological* uncertainty as a consequence of the production of multiple forms of 'knowledge' – the miraculous and the everyday – which *co-exist* in a relation of reciprocal displacement. In doing so, Kabakov enacts the "indifference between historical and fictional narrative" Osborne notes to be a key epistemological feature of the contemporary (PC 37). In doing so, Kabakov's



practice offers a means of re-articulating the relation between knowledge and truth in Badiou's framework, thus providing a foundation for a Badiouian account of pedagogy beyond the fidelity of the subject. In other words, in order to avoid a miraculous conception of the event and the gap of a voluntarist leap between non-committed observer and already-committed subject, it is vital that there be an account of what might be termed pre-subjective labour in the absence or obscurity of the event. While operating within knowledge, such a concept of education must avoid the constructivist domination *by* knowledge, which, as we have seen, declares that it is "not time for a new temporal foundation" (BE 294). In this sense, education would amount to an investigation of the resources of new forms of time given within knowledge.

From a Badiouian perspective, Kabakov's installations can be read as variations on the relation between event and knowledge. The installations function as dramatizations, enabled by Kabakov's substantial use of textual narrative. Read in Badiouian terms, *The Man Who Flew* bears striking similarity to Mallarmé's "A Throw of the Dice" – the poem's symbol of the shipwreck is to be 'assembled' from the evidence of the text's fragments. As Badiou writes:

A poem by Mallarmé always fixes the place of an aleatory event; an event to be interpreted on the basis of the traces it leaves behind. Poetry is no longer submitted to action, since the meaning (univocal) of the text depends on what is declared to have happened therein. There is a certain element of the detective novel in the Mallarméan enigma: an empty salon, a vase, a dark sea – what crime, what catastrophe, what enormous misadventure is indicated by these clues? (BE 191)

As discussed in the previous chapter, for Badiou Mallarmé's practice demonstrates that "Poetry is the stellar assumption of that pure undecidable, against a background of nothingness, that is an action of which one can only *know* whether it has taken place inasmuch as one *bets* upon its truth" (192). Yet rather than staging a wager on the event's univocal declaration, *The Man Who Flew* articulates an *obscurity* of the event's occurrence and disappearance: it questions the uncertainty of the event's construction based on the junk nature of the traces left behind. In this sense, the Spectator becomes witness yet is distanced as a 'reader' of the work – immersed psychologically rather than as an embodied presence.

A common theme throughout the works surveyed above is an ironized relation between multiple epistemological frames which, when held together, enact a form of reciprocal displacement. Evident throughout Kabakov's works is a pervasive anxiety about the eventfulness of the miraculous. This results from the ontological and epistemological levelling throughout, in which

distinctions between waste and object, mundane and miraculous, and fiction and history are erased or re-drawn. This is evident in *The Man Who Flew*, which turns junk into a machine of temporal acceleration, or in the ‘Garbage Man’, whose cataloguing and indexing of garbage renders an ontological flatness to the objects and their attached memories. Bertha’s narrative in *Labyrinth* moreover collapses the distinction between the everyday and ‘historical’, while ‘artworks’ themselves – such as in *Three Nights* or *On Holiday*, transform the flatness of canvas to a *material site* for the occurrence of the miraculous (the white men), or the banal (glued-on sweet wrappers). The levelling and fluidity between registers is furthermore compounded by the metaphysical typology of garbage throughout Kabakov’s works: rather than uniform ‘waste’, each work affords garbage a particular status: junk (*The Man Who Flew*); garbage (*Objects of His Life*); forgotten remnant (*Three Nights*); and *excess* or *remains* (*Labyrinth*).<sup>58</sup>

Kabakov’s use of junk objects throughout his works therefore functions as a staging of the installation form itself. As he states,

As a rule, the total installation "works" with "low", profane, everyday materials, with "low" social environments, often that are very distant from any kind of "culture." And therefore it is precisely such a surrounding of the pre-existing sacred environment of the museum or kunsthalle that is particularly important for the assimilation of such material. In such a situation the "mechanism of dialectics" begins to function very well: having been built into the temple of culture, the "ordinary, everyday space" of the installation acquires new, unexpected overtones of meaning. This law, known as the "law of the ready-made", is famous and illustrated vividly in Duchamp's "urinal." (*Über die "totale" Installation* 274)

The status of garbage demonstrates the installation form’s function as the “topological inscription” allowing the “reauratization” of the artwork that Groys observes to be central to the installation’s contemporaneity (“The Topology of Contemporary Art” 74). As Groys states elsewhere of this relation, “the work of art and the piece of garbage are equally useless, non-functional, superfluous things, peripheral to the universal traffic in commodities. While the artwork stays in the museum, where it is stored, catalogued and annotated, the piece of garbage

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<sup>58</sup> This is evidently a site of further research: rather than deploying a single category of ‘garbage’ or ‘waste’, Kabakov’s works enact multiple categories *within* ‘waste’ (junk, garbage, scrap, remnant, etc.), often determined by the specificity of the works themselves. While I have attempted to reflect this by my usage of multiple terms throughout this chapter, their use is only approximate.

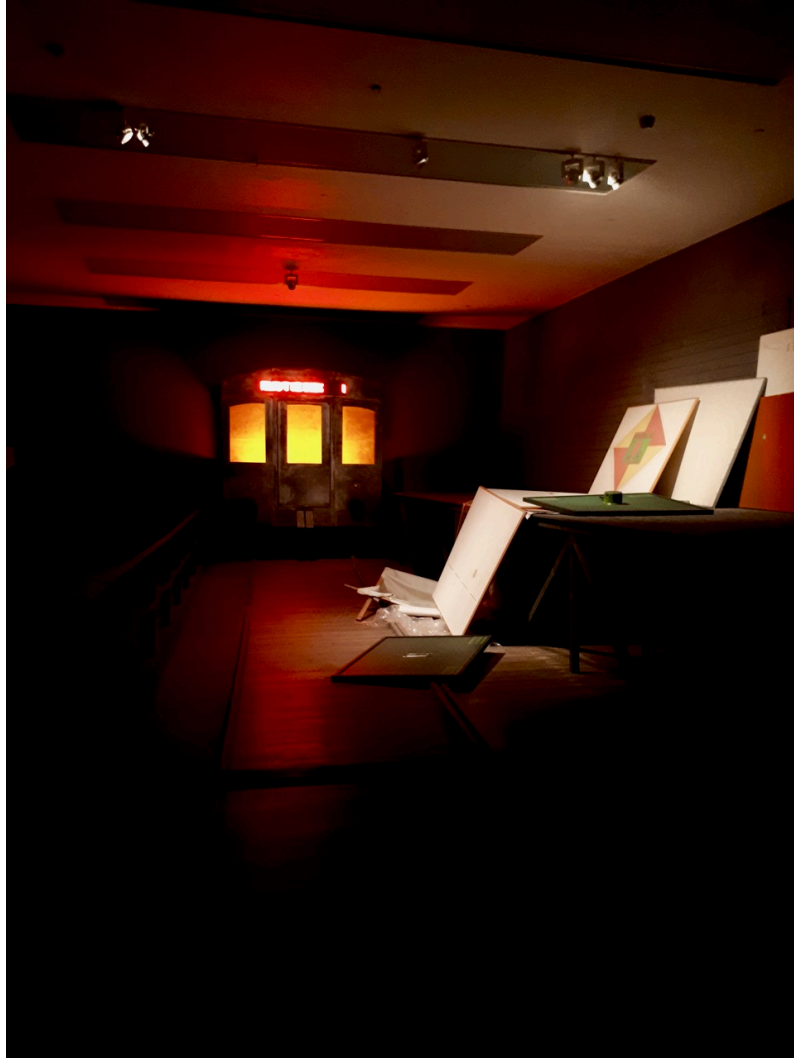


Figure 10. Installation view, showing platform, artworks, and train. Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into The Future* (2001). Tate Modern.

is thrown away and disappears somewhere ‘outside’, away from our cultural living space” (Groys, “The Moveable Cave” 50). That is, the cataloguing, documenting and narrativizing present in Kabakov’s works mirrors the curatorial operations of the art museum itself. The ‘total’ nature of Kabakov’s installations – their domination and capture of the gallery space and the viewers themselves – effectively appropriates the museum’s power of making-contemporary of objects. Yet at the same time the cataloguing of objects can also proliferate the mundane and perpetuate its obscurity, as in the Garbage Man’s obsessive labelling, or the wearying abundance of details in Bertha’s narrative. This emerges as a limit of the contemporary, an inability – or unwillingness – to distinguish between what should be made contemporary and what is instead garbage. The contemporary moreover contains its own wearying excess – the proliferation of

galleries, biennales, and ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions – which, by presenting everything at once results in its own *saturation* or ‘waste’.

It is the indistinction of the contemporary which is productive of an ‘anxiety’, embodied in the possibility of being relegated to rubbish. This is embodied in the titular installation of the Tate Modern exhibition, *Not Everyone Will Be Taken Into the Future* (Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, 2001; fig. 10). The work features a train departing from a dimly-lit station; scattered across the platform and onto the tracks are a number of paintings and canvasses in the Supremacist style of Kazimir Malevich. In the statement accompanying the installation, Ilya and Emilia write:

This installation is dedicated to the problem that is very topical for the situation in the contemporary art world today: What will happen to artists and their works in the very near, and not so near future? How will they be accepted and understood by the new viewer of the future, the new art critic, the new collector, the new curator? In our mind, this problem today is masked by the dominant reality, the demand to be ‘contemporary’ no matter what! The demand ‘to exist today’ overwhelms the question: What will happen to these works tomorrow? (*Ilya & Emilia Kabakov ... Large Print Guide* 95)

Hence, for the Kabakovs, to be contemporary is not only an aspiration (such as the desire to enter into the canon of the Western art world) but also a threat. This threat is located in the possibility of not only becoming subject to the reception of the future, but also to *become its material*. This making-material is evident in the operation of the Kabakov-effect, in which the experience of Soviet history is *made contemporary* by the retroaction and expansion of global contemporaneity, subsuming the Soviet experience. To become contemporary for the Kabakovs therefore masks a question of the future anterior – a question concerning whether an artist or body of art *will have been* made ‘historical’, or instead made ‘waste’. Yet throughout Ilya’s work these two registers are collapsed and indistinguishable – and it is precisely the collapse that provides the ‘gap’ for the miraculous.

Kabakov’s use of garbage and trash therefore designates an anxiety of the contemporary. In the text accompanying *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away (Garbage Man)*, the narrator relates the life of the reclusive ‘Garbage Man’ who loses the ability to distinguish trash from useful objects: “A completely different correlation arises in his consciousness: should everything, without exception, that is before his eyes in the form of an enormous paper sea be considered valuable or garbage, and then, should it all be saved or thrown away?” (Kabakov, *Installations 1983-1993* 177-78). Residents discover a manuscript written by the Garbage Man,

which relates: “The whole world, everything which surrounds me here, appears to me a boundless dump with no ends or borders, an inexhaustible diverse sea of garbage. In this refuse of an enormous city one can feel the powerful breathing of its entire past” (178). Within the sea of garbage, however, there arises the question of the new:

How does a construction site differ from a garbage dump? . . . A dump not only devours everything, preserving it forever, but one might say that it also continually generates something: this is where new growths appear, new projects, ideas, a certain unique enthusiasm arises, hopes for the rebirth of something, though everyone knows that all of this will just be covered over with new layers of garbage. (*Installations 1983-1993* 179)

A Badiouian pedagogy, formed around the self-education of a subject in the absence or obscurity of an event, must therefore proceed by the investigation of the impure. As a process that dis-places forms of knowledge in the present by the retroactive fictionalization of waste of waste, indexed to the undecidable chance of the future-anterior – in which objects *will have been* made waste, or *will have been* the material surface for the obscurity of the miraculous – Kabakov’s account of contemporaneity provides the foundation of a pedagogy which offers the means of de-purifying Badiou’s framework from the austere coldness of the poem.

As this chapter has shown, pursuing the question of education within Badiou’s framework leads to a framework of pedagogy as given within the bounds of knowledge, yet distinct from the constructivist domination by knowledge. In order that education be distinct from simple identification *with* subjective fidelity to an event – which, as we have seen, presents problems of the event’s causality – I have argued that education instead pertains to a form of pre-evental fidelity, or subjective labour in the event’s absence or obscurity. As we have seen, Badiou’s concepts of forcing, future anterior and the generic demonstrate the inter-twining of truth and knowledge such that truth is *dispersed within* the situation as generic extension. Hence a pedagogical practice of ‘arranging forms of knowledge’ need not collapse into a Derridean ethics of the event as Messianic alterity; the event, rather, emerges as a retroactive fiction authorized by the investigation of the present. An encounter between Badiou’s framework and Kabakov’s installation practice therefore offers a means of de-purifying Badiou’s articulation of truth. In turn, it demonstrates that a practice of the contemporary predicated on the lived temporality of presents in the terms of saturation outlined in Chapter Two – of the temporal consistency of presents, based on their topological determination – and thought together as the arrangement of forms of knowledge by thinking their co-presentness. To be made contemporary is therefore a wager depending on a retroactive fiction; thinking Badiou alongside Kabakov’s

pedagogy of displacement provides an articulation of contemporaneity as a practice which arranges disjunctive forms of knowledge in order that the retroactive fiction of new temporal forms can come to pierce holes in the present.

## Conclusion:

This thesis set out to interrogate Badiou's project from the standpoint of theories of the contemporary and contemporary art. In doing so I have charted a number of ways in which his framework touches on the contemporary – albeit in a twisted or distorted manner – while also demonstrating the capacity for his project to be modified in turn by a closer engagement with contemporary art. As such, the central contribution this thesis makes is to demonstrate the nature of a 'latent' philosophical contemporaneity within Badiou's project, which is limited by two key points: firstly, the twisted modernism of his inaesthetic engagement with art, including his restrictive modernist frame of reference and philosophical seizure of the work of art, and secondly the question of the neo-classicism of his articulation of philosophical discourse. A key question this thesis has raised is whether Badiou's twisted contemporaneity is capable of being twisted in turn such that it is relieved of the oppressive weight of the Philosopher. In expanding Badiou's framework through consideration of installation art I have suggested the possibility of properly emphasizing the role of saturation in Badiou's framework as a means of conceptualizing the temporal 'consistency' of presents. Furthermore, my reading of Ilya Kabakov has demonstrated the possibility of re-articulating the link between knowledge and truth in Badiou's framework in order to open up a pre-evental pedagogical practice of displacement which de-purifies the event and the subject's relation to truth. In doing so, the thesis raises important questions of a deeper encounter between Badiou and the contemporary in which contemporary art might re-condition his project and relieve his system of the presence of the Philosopher. In other words, re-conditioning Badiou's framework via contemporary art offers the possibility of transforming his project beyond 'Badiou'.

In what follows, I will briefly recap the findings of each chapter, before turning to wider implications. In Chapter One I situated Badiou's project including *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* within the context of critical accounts of the contemporary and contemporary art. I argued that these accounts can be characterized within the broad binaries of immediacy and disjunction, encapsulated in Terry Smith's summary of the contemporary as "the immediate, [the] contemporaneous, [and the] coterporal" (*What is Contemporary Art?* 4). I also argued that Badiou's failure to encounter contemporary art amounts to a failure to engage with art's *transformed ontology* evident in Osborne's identification of the postconceptual condition of contemporary art (ANA 10). I suggested that Badiou's concept of compossibility can be read in

light of the contemporary, as a unified space in thought for thinking a plurality of contemporary truths. I also noted a shift in Badiou's project between *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* towards a more contemporary frame of reference, encapsulated by the turn to category theory as a contemporary form of mathematics that provides an account of global relations between distinct mathematical fields. The nature of this shift is significant for the way in which it also marks a failure on Badiou's part to fundamentally *re-condition* his framework, as I expand upon below. Chapter One finished by suggesting that Badiou's philosophical discourse be read in light of his dramatism, such that philosophy 'stages' truths in rivalry to the competing discourses of sophistry and poetry. As I argued, not only is the act and axiom combined in the notion of the philosophical decision for Badiou, but his project encodes the 'figures' of the Philosopher, Sophist and Poet, leaving the Spectator as an implied presence.

In Chapter Two, I placed Badiou's account of the present in relation to debates widely grouped under 'presentism'. For Jameson, postmodernity's 'reduction to the present' or 'reduction to the body' is evident in the production of evental singularity in installation art, accompanied by a sense of subjective disorientation or fragmentation. Other accounts of presentism take the present to be reduced to an empty, homogeneous 'now'. I argued that both aspects of presentism can be usefully re-conceptualized through Badiou's account of the present, including the concepts of saturation, and atonic and tensed worlds. As I demonstrated in my discussion of Badiou's account of the present and the subject, a consequence of Badiou's framework is his redefinition of the present beyond time-determination: the present is the *lived duration* of a subject's fidelity. The chapter expanded Badiou's framework beyond the theatre via a discussion of the viewership of installation art and the art museum. As I argued, the dispersed viewership of the art museum raises a question of the 'betrayal' of fidelity, conceived as the exhaustion of the subjective resources of a present. My discussion of Badiou's account of saturation expanded upon an under-discussed concept in Badiou's framework which conceives the closure of a present beyond finitude. Finally, in outlining Badiou's theory of points and atonic and tensed worlds, I turned to the participatory theatre performance *The Privileged*. I argued that the play demonstrates Badiou's theory of points as a topological determination of the temporal consistency of a present. The outcome of Chapter Two is therefore to demonstrate an expanded account of saturation as the *incapacity of a subjective body to bear the time of a present*; saturation therefore offers a mode of analysis of presents from the standpoint of subjective capacity.



In Chapter Three I turned to Badiou's inaesthetic framework of art, critiqued from the perspective of audience relation, articulated via the 'figure' of the Spectator. The chapter began with a detour into debates on the efficacy of relational or participatory art, including discussion of Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics', and Rancière's concept of 'dissensus'. These debates allowed me to contrast Badiou's account of the politics of spectatorship with Rancière's articulation of the 'emancipated' spectator. As I argued, where Rancière's account emphasizes intellectual equality, Badiou's account of spectatorship is predominantly hierarchical, in which the Spectator forms a shadowy double of the Philosopher. I expanded my discussion of the Spectator through consideration of Fried's account of theatricality and objecthood, and O'Doherty's distinction of the Eye and the Spectator.

This detour allowed me to critique the *Handbook of Inaesthetics* from the standpoint of Badiou's philosophical reception of art. As I argued, inaesthetics excludes audience relation in favour of the philosophical 'seizure' of the work of art, in which the work is frozen in its transparent philosophical meaning. I demonstrated how this is evident in Badiou's philosophical 'translation' of Mallarmé. However, I also argued that reception – represented by the Spectator – persists in Badiou's key reading of Mallarmé in *Being and Event*. Here, Badiou reads "A Throw of the Dice" as essentially dramatic; hence, the openness of the work in its implied reception persists as the 'undecidable' into which the philosophical decision intervenes. Furthermore, I raised the problem of Badiou's account of philosophical seizure only being able to grasp artistic truths discernible to the philosopher. I finished the chapter by highlighting the manner in which Badiou's discussion of dance, theatre, and cinema form a dialectical triplet that provide a subtractive account of theatricality as essentially 'between' dance and cinema. This is evident in Badiou's discussion of 'materialist formalization' in *The Century*, which provides the basis for the materialist dialectic in *Logics of Worlds*.

Finally, in Chapter Four I staged an encounter between Badiou and contemporary art through a reading of the installation art of Ilya Kabakov, which I argued provides a means of re-thinking the relation between knowledge and truth in Badiou's framework. I examined the problem of Badiou's distinction between knowledge and truth from the perspective of education, observing the difficulties posed by the causality of the event. In distinguishing between knowledge and truth according to the rupture of the event, Badiou's framework appears to offer no account of subjective fidelity *preceding* the appearance of an event, running the risk of a miraculous conception of the event as pre 'rupture'. I suggested that examination of Badiou's concepts of forcing, the generic, and the future anterior demonstrated the inter-linking between the registers

of truth and knowledge. I further argued that education, as the arranging of forms of knowledge, be considered as a form of pre-evental subjective fidelity that avoids the constructivist domination *by* knowledge. I argued that this would amount to a pedagogy of displacement, or a mode of investigation in which the event emerges as a retroactive fiction. By linking truth and knowledge within Badiou's framework, this chapter demonstrates a further aspect of his twisted contemporaneity, evident in the dispersed presence of the new (truth) alongside the old (knowledge) within the present.

The chapter then turned to the installation practice of Ilya Kabakov. Not only is Kabakov's own artistic genealogy out-of-joint within art history, but his 'total' installation practice antagonizes the art museum by seizing its space for the restrictive immersion of viewers. I argued that his installations, such as *The Man Who Flew* and *Three Nights* demonstrate an inter-twining of the miraculous and the mundane which dramatizes the displacement of multiple epistemological registers. I argued that Kabakov's meditation on junk, garbage, and rubbish alongside the fictionalization of art objects demonstrates an 'anxiety' of the contemporary in which art is subjected to an undecidable relation to future reception such that to be contemporary includes the possibility of also being made waste. The chapter therefore demonstrated the possibility of re-articulating Badiou's project on the basis of an engagement with Kabakov's practice of the contemporary.

This thesis has therefore highlighted a number of ways in which Badiou's project touches on the contemporary, which are: his development of subtraction in opposition to negation; his development of the materialist dialectic in opposition to the presentism of democratic materialism; his articulation of philosophy on the basis of the subtracted compossibility of its conditions, forming a fictional unity of contemporary truths; the shift in the frame of reference between *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*, including the contemporary mathematical field of category theory; his departure from a unified concept of History alongside his dispensation with totality; his articulation of the present as the lived temporality of a subject; and the inter-relation of truth and knowledge on the basis of forcing and the generic such that the new is *dispersed alongside* and essentially inter-twined with the non-contemporaneous within the present. As I have argued, the major limits that distort, twist, or frustrate reading Badiou as a philosopher of the contemporary are the twisted modernism of his inaesthetics – combined with his failure to encounter contemporary art in its transformed ontology – and the neo-classicism of his philosophical framework, which in my reading centres upon the 'figure' of the Philosopher.

Yet inasmuch as these are limits, they also offer tasks which demonstrate the possibility and fruitfulness of further research. This is primarily evident in the question of re-conditioning Badiou's framework from the standpoint of a deeper engagement with contemporary art as *condition* – in other words, this thesis raises the possibility of *making Badiou contemporary*. The key tension in Badiou's project is located between the demands of his system, and the question of encountering external forms of thought. Between *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* Badiou attempts a re-alignment of his project based on the demands of inventing new conceptual resources to address the limits of the former work – as I have outlined, in doing so Badiou moves to a more contemporary frame of reference, including category theory and an abstract discussion of contemporary art evident in his development materialist formalization. Yet to treat these new fields as *conditions* – that is, to be conditioned *by* them – would threaten the internal coherency of his project as developed in the former work.

Hence from *Being and Event* onwards, Badiou's identification and treatment of conditions is subordinated to the demands of the system developed by the former work – while there are shifts and developments in his thinking, these are developed within the disciplining of those initial conditions. This tension can be usefully highlighted through Badiou's mathematical engagement: the category theory used in *Logics of Worlds* remains tightly constrained to specific categories (topoi and theory of sheaves) closely related to set theory.<sup>59</sup> As Vladimir Tasic observes, Badiou's use of mathematics is selective: "Mathematics can say more, and has said more, than he allows it to say" (41); "There is a surplus in mathematics that is at once its great mystery and the source of philosophy's 'horror'" (42). This is to say that Badiou's engagements with mathematics are *interested* and *partial* from the standpoint of the simultaneous demands of the wider conditions: Badiou's deployment of category theory is therefore subordinated to or encountered from the perspective of the ZFC axiomatic system of set theory. In the case of art, Badiou's treatment of works subordinates them to what they can be *made to say* from the perspective of the Mallarméan poem. Hence the difficulty of inaesthetics is its own "twisted relation of the condition/evaluation pairing" (M xxxiii).

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<sup>59</sup> As Veilahati argues, Badiou's limited use of category theory "turns out to be confined only to a limited, set-theoretically bounded branch of locales" (0; abstract). Likewise, in a review of *Mathematics of the Transcendental* (which lays out the category theory framework of *Logics of Worlds*), Bauer questions Badiou's restriction to toposes rather than other types of categories (1071). Colin McClarty also raises a similar point ("Alain Badiou: *Mathematics of the Transcendental* – Review").

This raises the question of what a re-conditioning of Badiou via contemporary art might entail, beyond the preliminary encounter with Ilya Kabakov I have undertaken in Chapter Four. As I have argued, a key consequence of Badiou's failure to engage with contemporary art is his failure to encounter art's transformed ontology, characterized by Osborne as the 'postconceptual condition' of contemporary art. As discussed in Chapter One, the postconceptual condition for Osborne denotes a "fundamental mutation . . . constituted at the level of the historical ontology of the artwork", which designates a distinct periodization beyond Greenbergian modernism (ANA 48). Among the key features Osborne identifies in the postconceptual condition is the "radically distributive – that is, irreducibly relational – unity of the individual artwork across the totality of its multiple material instantiations, at any particular time" (ANA 48). Emerging from the practice of artists such as Robert Smithson and Dan Graham, the distributive nature of postconceptual art is evident in "a fluid multiplicity of *forms of materializations* of works that produces a form of artistic spatiality beyond, yet nonetheless still tied to, 'objects': a spatiality defined by relations between practices, materials and forms – an 'ideal' space in relation to which the multiplication of materializations of an individual art-idea is in principle unlimited" (ANA 142-143). The outcome is the blurring of the borders of the artwork across the plurality of its possible manifestations, thereby "breaking the identification of the work with any particular material instantiation" (ANA 145). For example, Osborne cites Dan Graham's *Homes For America*, a photographic work which existed in multiple instantiations between 1966 and 1970 – the 'work' is distributed across the totality of these instances, without being reduced to any of them.

Hence the distributive unity of the postconceptual work noted by Osborne pinpoints an aspect overlooked by Badiou's inaesthetic account of art (among other overlooked features), which as discussed in Chapter Three holds the artwork to be a "finite objectivity in space and/or time" (HI 11). To recondition Badiou's project via a deeper encounter with contemporary art would therefore fundamentally reconfigure Badiou's inaesthetic framework. Such an engagement would clearly be of significance for *Logics of Worlds* itself, which aims to construct a framework for thinking the trans-worldly appearance of truths *across* the specific singularities of worlds, in addition to providing an account of the subject disjoined from object (LW 47). Thus re-conditioning Badiou via contemporary art offers possibilities for re-conceptualizing and expanding his accounts of subject and world.

Running alongside my concern with Badiou and the contemporary throughout this thesis is the question of philosophical discourse in Badiou's framework. A key argument, encapsulated by

my identification of the figure of the Spectator, has been to identify the manner by which philosophy's role in constructing the compossibility of contemporary truths encodes within the Philosopher the capacity for *discerning truths*. As argued in Chapter Three, the Philosopher's discernment and declaration of truths for the education of subjects configures philosophy as a form of meta-theatre, effectively appropriating the theatre's power of clarification. This, then, raises the question of what *kind* of theatre Badiou's philosophical meta-theatre is. Given philosophy discerns and stages truths – makes them “manifest” (HI 15) – with the aim of cultivating in subjects the capacity to ‘recognize’ truths in the world around them, Badiou's philosophical meta-theatre turns out to be an *Aristotelian* theatre – an outcome that is surprising for an overwhelmingly Platonist philosopher. Badiou's Aristotelian meta-theatre therefore demonstrates what Rancière terms the ‘representative regime’ of art, grounded in Aristotle's description of tragedy in the *Poetics* (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 21). As I have argued elsewhere, the representative regime in its Aristotelian frame operates by the implicit separation of audience capacity between those who merely ‘look’ unknowingly and those whose gaze *sees* – grounded in hierarchical capacities for thought (Love, *Looking Without Knowing* 147). A challenge of breaking Badiou from the neoclassicism of his philosophical discourse is therefore to consider how and to what effect the Spectator may come to occupy the “universal position of the philosopher” (RT 71) *consciously*. A wider and deeper consideration of contemporary forms of spectatorship, expanding on this thesis' preliminary extension of Badiou into the art museum, offers the possibility of doing so.

If Badiou's contemporaneity is limited by his twisted modernism and neo-classicism, what is the significance Badiou for the contemporary? In traversing the complexities of Badiou's core works, an implicit assertion of this thesis is the importance of Badiou's mathematical engagement to the internal coherence of his work, and for its wider relevance. Given contemporary art's postconceptual condition is conditioned, in turn, by global finance capital, viewer numbers, private investment, the art market, competition for public funding, and the proliferation of practicing artists, it is arguable that contemporary art has an integral relation to number. A key assertion of Badiou's project from *Concept of Model* onwards is to pursue the question of ideology within the domain of science. As he puts it in *Number and Numbers*, “we live in the era of number's despotism; thought yields to the law of denumerable multiplicities; and yet (unless perhaps this very default, this failing, is only the obscure obverse of a conceptless submission) we have at our disposal no recent, active idea of what number is” (NN 1). As he continues, “We know very well what numbers are for: they serve, strictly speaking, for everything, they provide a norm for All. But we still don't know what they are” (1). Not only is

number instrumentalized in financial products and transactions – as Jameson’s analysis of financial derivatives articulates – but within democracies it serves to shape or validate trajectories of the state. As Badiou argues, “Every ‘political’ convocation, whether general or local, in polling-booth or parliament, municipal or international, is settled with a count. . . What counts – in the sense of what is valued – is what is counted” (2). We might also say that contemporary art is conditioned by number, inasmuch as number’s transparent and invisible operation forms the ideological material *par excellence* of financial capitalism and accompanying neoliberal governance.

*The Way The Earthly Things are Going* (2017) by Nigerian-born artist Emeka Ogboh illustrates this point. Originally displayed at Documenta 14 and installed in The Tanks wing of the Tate Modern, the work consisted of a large LED stock-ticker display and multichannel sound recording. Real-time stock indexes were shown on the display, hung on the back wall of the cavernous and darkened concrete room, while choir music played – a Greek lamentation song “When I Forget, I Am Glad”, which meditates on the pain of forced migration. In its original presentation in Athens the work referenced the pain of the Greek financial crisis – the human consequences of financial calculations –emphasized by the sonorous and melancholic qualities of the choir. While the stock quotes updated in real time – tracking instantaneous financial transactions – the procession of their numbers across the display were slowed dramatically, matching the music. The work therefore captured and transformed the speed of financial time, giving it body and spatiality within the art museum, itself at the heart of European finance. As such, the work demonstrates a temporal disjunction emerging from the use of number itself: the ungraspable speed of financial transaction and the lived temporality of its subjective consequences as the result of neoliberal austerity policies.

As Badiou writes in *Number and Numbers*, “Number informs our souls. What is it to exist, if not to give a *favourable account* of oneself?” yet “we don’t know what a number is, so we don’t know what we are” (3). A larger question this thesis opens up onto is whether Badiou might be made contemporary *because* rather than despite his mathematics. In order for this to occur, a fundamental re-conditioning of Badiou’s project on the basis of contemporary art would be required. The contemporary encountered, a new, different and distorted Badiou might come into view; making Badiou contemporary would therefore offer the possibility of splitting him from within.

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