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## Interval and Event: The Present as In-between Time in Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou

### Keywords

time, event, present, contemporary, politics, Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze

### Abstract

Are we living in an “in-between time”? If so, what does it mean to be the “contemporary” of such a time? Starting from its consistent recurrence over different times, this article investigates the temporal-philosophical operation related to the designation of “in-between times.” It examines the function this operation assumes in thinking about time, i.e. the specific construction of time it establishes. By focusing on the functioning of *intervalle* in Alain Badiou and *entre-temps* in Gilles Deleuze, two contradictory relations to the present conveyed in the concept of “in-between time” are discussed. The article demonstrates that for both philosophers, in-betweenness occupies a key position in their philosophical construction of time—yet, in reverse form in each case. The discussion of this contrasting mode then leads to the final question of whether there is such a thing as a fundamental in-between character that manifests itself through all times, belonging to time as such.

## Interval in dogodek: sedanjost kot vmesni čas pri Gillesu Deleuzu in Alainu Badiouju

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### Ključne besede

čas, dogodek, sedanjost, sodobnik, politika, Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze

### Povzetek

Ali živimo v »vmesnem času«? Če je tako, kaj pomeni biti »sodobnik« takega časa? Članek raziskuje časovno-filozofsko operacijo, povezano s poimenovanjem »vmesnega časa«, izhajajoč iz njenega doslednega pojavljanja v različnih obdobjih. Preučuje funk-

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cijo, ki jo ta operacija prevzema pri mišljenju časa, oz. specifično konstrukcijo časa, ki jo vzpostavlja. S poudarkom na delovanju *intervalle* pri Alainu Badiouju in *entre-temps* pri Gillesu Deleuzu obravnavamo dva nasprotujoča si odnosa do sedanjosti, ki ju izraža pojem »vmesnega časa«. Članek pokaže, da pri obeh filozofih vmesnost zavzema ključno mesto v njuni filozofski konstrukciji časa – vendar v obratni obliki. Razprava o tem kontrastnem načinu nato pripelje do končnega vprašanja, ali obstaja nekaj takega kot temeljna vmesnost, ki se kaže skozi vse čase in pripada času kot takemu.



Is it true that we are living in an “in-between time,” as is sometimes claimed today in light of numerous overlapping crises that our weakened politics seems merely to administer reactively? How plausible is this diagnosis of the present? What phenomena, what developments allow or suggest such a diagnosis, and what conclusions could be drawn from it? And what about the history of this diagnosis itself, its strangely consistent recurrence over different times? Based on these questions, I would like to turn to the specific temporality of in-between times. What concerns me here is not so much a sociological examination or historical characterization of “our” present, but the temporal-philosophical operation related to this designation. The focus will therefore be on the function this operation assumes in thinking about time, that is, on the specific construction of time it establishes. Within this context, I am particularly interested in two contradictory relations to the present conveyed in the concept of in-between time. There is a specific twofold appearance of the present that will be examined by focusing on the functioning of *intervalle* and *entre-temps* in Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze. For both philosophers, in-betweenness occupies a key position in their philosophical construction of time—yet, as we will see, in reverse form in each case. The discussion of this contrasting mode of operation will finally bring me back to the question of whether there is such a thing as a fundamental in-between character that manifests itself through all times, belonging to time as such.

### Interim, Interval, and In-between Times

If we first consider the historical meanings of the phrase “in-between time,” we understand it as a time of transition. In-between time as an interim is a time of the temporary and provisional, a period between two heterogeneous orders. An

interim period always occurs when an old order is suspended without a new one having taken its place. Such times have a minimal, fading, and bracketed being that follows an end without indicating a new beginning, a being-in-suspension that emerges from dissolution or disintegration. Since the formation of the new is still pending, the interim period is relativized. Only in retrospect, that is, in the perspective of its overcoming—once the period in between is over—will it become possible to identify its beginning and end. From the internal perspective, however, the experience of the in-between—which is itself structured in an intervening or intermitting manner—lacks a fixed frame or determination; its end is never in sight, but always impending or looming. Antonio Gramsci famously called this time the “interregnum,” a time in which “the old is dying and the new cannot be born.”<sup>1</sup> Those who live in an interregnum find themselves in a space between the law of the old and a fragile, ambiguous new that is obstructed.

The crux is that for the one who inhabits this space the distinction between the old and the new, the traditional and the novel, becomes obscure. The in-between status challenges the ability of its contemporaries to distinguish and orient themselves in time. The sign of such times is that dynamics and statics, tension and relaxation, mobility and immobility tend to become indistinguishable. It is symptomatic for intervening periods that social phenomena circulate conspicuously with opposing, mutually exclusive valuations. Even before all symptoms of decay, this crisis of discernment is probably the most conspicuous of the “great variety of morbid symptoms” that, according to Gramsci, appears in such times. Where appearances are obscured, judgment and reasoning become precarious, and, above all, the experience of temporality itself becomes diffuse. Living through in-between times therefore means waiting for the sign of a new order at every moment. The interim is the *topos* of desire, of longing. But often the state of endless waiting cannot be distinguished from nonstop action; time stretches and shrinks ambiguously. Where nothing is given, confusion can reach such an extent that it is impossible to say whether the time is standing still and nothing is happening, or whether it is accelerating and constantly bringing something new. The complicated relationship between past, present, and future is shaken in the in-between time; the very fabric of time is subject to fundamental disorientation. In other words, in such periods, not only has a particular his-

<sup>1</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 276.

torical present disintegrated, but the order of time itself is at stake; the construction and intelligibility of time become problematic.

On the other hand, thinking that emphatically determines its own time as a transition, and tries to *establish* its own contemporaneity precisely on this in-between state, finds itself in a Nietzschean trajectory: when thinking is concerned with an “unfashionable effect,” and assigns to itself the task of “work[ing] against time and thereby hav[ing] an effect upon it, hopefully for the benefit of a future time,”<sup>2</sup> it declares the present to be a phenomenon of transition. Both downfall and birth, this transition becomes a radical tension that thinking imposes on itself. The interim period is then no longer simply an external process that one suffers; instead, the one who determines the transition takes on an active role and helps to bring forth its in-betweenness in the first place. We conceive our present as a time bracketed between a past that is both outdated and oppressive and a glorious future whose arrival we help to *prepare*.

In his “Comforting words for those despairing of progress” (“Trostrede eines desparaten Fortschritts”), from *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche diagnoses: “Our age gives the impression of an interim state; the old worldviews, the old cultures, still exist in part, the new ones are not yet secure and habitual and hence lack decisiveness and consistency. It appears as if everything were becoming chaotic, the old being lost, the new worth nothing and becoming ever feebler.” People who think “unfashionably” or “untimely” are identified with soldierly bravery directed against fear resulting from uncertainty. They react to the crisis of world views and habits with a kind of mechanical courage, which enables them to overcome the ambiguity of time: “But so it is for the soldier who is learning to march; for a time he is more uncertain and awkward than ever because the muscles are being moved now according to the old system, now ac-

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life,” in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 87. The “unfashionable effect” is connected with praise of humankind as a bridging figure, a figure of transition, preparing a new being: “Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous crossing, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shuddering and standing still. What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over* and a *going under*.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7.

cording to the new one, and neither has yet decisively claimed victory. We stagger, but it is necessary not to let this frighten us and possibly make us surrender what we have newly achieved.<sup>3</sup> The interim period appears here as something to be endured only “for a while” until the new, which must be supported by us, has established itself.

But if we include another fragment by Nietzsche, this determination of a particular historical present with an in-between structure is extended to a characteristic of *all* times; it becomes the characteristic of historical time in general:

An age of transition: this is what everyone calls *our time*, and everyone is right. However, not in the sense that this word belongs to our age more than to any other. Wherever we find a foothold in history, we find fermentation, the old concepts battling with new ones; and those with a keen scent—who were formerly called prophets, but who only felt and saw what was happening to them—knew it and were usually very much afraid. If it goes on like this, everything falls to pieces; well, the world must perish. But it did not perish. The old trunks of the forest broke, but a new forest always grew again, and at any *time* there was a decaying and a becoming world.<sup>4</sup>

Here, too, fear is countered by a promise that relies on the becoming of the new within the constant process of disintegration; contemporaries try to read a remarkable persistence into this. Interestingly, the state of “fermentation,” determined as the essential characteristic of history, requires the perception and discovery of a specific vision, a particular “scent.” However, this historical sensibility to the present’s inconsistency, to its contradictory forces, potentially renders every time an in-between time; every time becomes an “interregnum” in which the old concepts battle with new ones and a decaying world and a becoming world coexist. The in-between status is then no longer our temporary malady of disorientation but something that belongs to every time and needs to be discovered by the prophetic thinker.—At one time the intervening present is a transi-

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human, I: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 169, § 248.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente, 1880–1882*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 154; my translation.

tion that must be endured and overcome; at another it is the hidden refuge of the forces of becoming that a “keen scent” must uncover.

### Living Finitely and the Endless Present

The critique of temporality grounded in the present—that is, of all conceptions of time that proceed from the intertwinement of present/presence—is a central motif of twentieth-century philosophy opened up by Nietzsche. If we take into account the various complications of the concept of the present in this century, it becomes clear that “our” present stands in the shadow of a scientific, technological, and philosophical century which, to put it in a nutshell, has to be termed a century of the *critique of the present*. Critique in this sense, however, does not refer to a specific present; it is not restricted to a specific *historical* formation with its respective social, political, and cultural conditions. If we think of significant philosophical works by Heidegger, Adorno, and Derrida, for example, then “critique of the present” targets above all the metaphysical, phantasmatic, or ideological sediments and residuals that the present or any present-based conception of time contains; it is always firstly about the paradoxes and contradictions of the temporality of the present itself.

At the same time, however, the twentieth century is equally characterized by a tendency towards the *liberation* or *intensification* of the present, which it accomplishes *within and against* its horrific history. Experiencing the contraction and escalation, the depletion and exhaustion of ideas, and remembering their destructive power and biopolitical ramifications, sheds light on the inherent right of the *living* present, which comes increasingly to the fore as affirmed finitude. *To live finitely!*—perhaps this can be identified as the ambivalent slogan that simultaneously closes and opens this century. It means, first of all, liberating oneself from the burdens of the past—which have always obliged the present to continue a tradition, to take over a heritage, or to pay off a debt—but also liberating oneself from the overwhelming demands of projective constructions, which always seem to postpone the fulfillment of a promise to a future still to come, and thus to sacrifice the living present.

This emergence of the present is reflected in the paradigm shift from the modern to the contemporary with its different historical genealogies, each related to significant ruptures of the century (1945, the 1960s, 1989). While for the mod-



ern, it is said, time was essentially oriented towards the future, and the present was primarily understood as something to be overcome because it obstructed and delayed the realization of future projects, the present came to the fore precisely at the moment when modernist projects, goals, and hopes were being questioned, contested, and reformulated. Therefore, the temporality of the contemporary does not appear only as liberation; it is essentially manifested, as Boris Groys has argued, as doubt, hesitation, insecurity, and indecision.<sup>5</sup> It is as if the living present that tries to liberate itself from past and future—time that intensifies itself as a finite present—were caught up in the horror of its own *endlessness*: the liberation of the present is turned into the jail of the now. And at the same time we sense that the cruel permutations of twentieth-century biopolitics have not ceased to be effective in the economic and technological regime of the present.

In the case of Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou, we are confronted with two major philosophies of the event that deal with this contrasting character of the present, and for which the “critique of the present” is primarily connected with a *different* kind of intensification of the present. Remarkably, in each of them the concept of the present appears *twice*; their thinking is marked by a double emergence of the concept of the present as the fundamental problem of the philosophy of time. This problem can especially be elucidated with reference to “in-between time.” In doing so, Badiou uses the concept of *intervalle* to characterize our present as a time of disorientation, a “non-world” suspended between a past world and a new one yet to come. Deleuze, in turn, uses the concept of *entre-temps* to think of the event’s structure as an infinite becoming that opens up an in-between in the midst of the world and time itself. In what follows I would like to elaborate on this opposition, which not only appears between both event philosophies but also traverses each of them on its own terms. Starting from the contrast in the concept of in-between time, I am interested in what it means for both philosophers to determine time as an “interval” or “meanwhile” and, consequently, what they see as the particular task of thinking in interim periods.

<sup>5</sup> Boris Groys, “Comrades of Time,” in *E-flux Journal: What is Contemporary Art?*, ed. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 25.

## Intervals without Event: The Amnesia of the Present

In his book *The Century* (2005), Badiou attempts to comprehend the twentieth century by employing the thinking that it produced (or that produced it).<sup>6</sup> He focuses on what he terms the “passion for the real”<sup>7</sup> as the century’s key feature, mostly apparent in its entanglements of art and politics. At the same time, the book diagnoses a characteristic loss of a creative force in the contemporary situation, at the beginning of the twentieth-first century. Badiou thus confronts the intensification of the present (which we have defined as its *liberation*) with *another* intensification of the present (which could be defined, as we will see, as its *presentation*). In a certain sense, he actualizes the present of the twentieth century against the “presentism” of our contemporary situation. Or, to put it differently, he emphasizes the *creation* of the present, the present *as creation*, as a key feature within modernism’s futural imperative, and positions it against the temporality of the contemporary: the creation of the present as infinite is mobilized against the liberation of the finite present.

The problem of the contemporary situation is that it ultimately indicates a non-time. Badiou writes that the contemporaries of the twenty-first century have entered “a period of atemporality and instantaneity” characterized by the absence of any thinking of time. Their time, he argues, must therefore be understood as *time without time*: the day after tomorrow has become “abstract,” and the day before yesterday “incomprehensible.” Characteristic of this sort of time, which does not produce its own construction of time and therefore knows only pure passing, is a peculiar “marriage of frenzy and total rest,” the indistinguishability of permanent renewal and immobility. This kind of time, Badiou claims, is “an inaccessible amalgam of agitation and sterility, the paradox of a stagnant feverishness.” Ultimately—and this is the crucial point of his line of thought—it is a time “upon which the will, whether collective or individual, has no grip.”<sup>8</sup> Because of the lack of a proper construction of time, from the standpoint of thought it is actually the case that the twenty-first century *has not even begun*

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<sup>6</sup> The century as a “philosophical object” does not simply coincide with the empirical fact of the century or a historical unit of measurement. To be able to *think* the century, “to constitute it as an object for thought,” one has to “construct” it in the first place. See Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Badiou, 32.

<sup>8</sup> Badiou, 105–6.



yet. But what characterizes a contemporary situation if one locates it after some end and before its own beginning?

Badiou qualifies this atemporal, instantaneous time as a transitional time or “in-between.” For him, in-between periods have eliminated the possibility of events, and thus their ability to incorporate a subject. Lingering in an atemporal, instantaneous time does not mark the advent of the new, but is an expression of a deficient and disoriented subjectivity of transition that has not yet found a new formation. Badiou’s diagnosis of the present is that contemporaries are in a phase of transition between two worlds, which at the same time is a transition between two temporalities. This period is characterized by uncertainty and disorientation because the laws of the old world have been suspended, but new ones have not yet taken their place. In the lecture series *Images of the Present Time* (*L’Image du temps présent*), which he delivered from 2001 to 2004, after delivering the series the book *The Century* is based on, Badiou describes the in-between period as a kind of transition “between a worn-out, deteriorating, exhausted world and a world that is not yet either calculable or foreseeable.”<sup>9</sup> In the original French version, the reader often finds the term *intervalle*, which, unfortunately, is not preserved in the English translation. The moment of the interval in which one lingers extends further and further, and peculiarly perpetuates itself. It is as if the transition that has become permanent is forming a formless non-world in which the contemporaries of the twenty-first century dwell. Their past and future become increasingly distant as incomprehensible and incommensurable images or phantasies. In the non-world, interval, or in-between time, the only thing that remains is a phantasmagorical reflection of the past and future, which is appropriated and applied as definite proof of the backwardness of both the past and the past’s future.

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It is this intervening character of time—a time without time, a void caught between two times—that, for Badiou, favors a *supremacy* of the present. In atemporal, instantaneous time, there results, as it were, in an almost natural way, a “unilateral promotion of the present”<sup>10</sup>—although not of the present as real, bearing witness to the interruption of an event, but of the present as given, corrupted,

<sup>9</sup> Alain Badiou, *Images of the Present Time, 2001–2004*, trans. Susan Spitzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 59.

<sup>10</sup> Badiou, 67.

and bereft of events. By focusing solely on this continuous present, on the endless now, temporality is reduced to an empty measure that registers only the ever-identical passing of time. Atemporal, instantaneous time knows no other form than continuous passing, in which it appears only as an allegory of decreasing possibilities, an indicator of diminishing strength, and an insignia of a hope that has already faded. In the in-between time of the present epoch, time appears solely “as flight, as passage [. . .], as consumption or as consummation.”<sup>11</sup> Time is ultimately nothing but the neutral measure of continuous annihilation. This reduction of time to the finite dimension of decay, of consumption, is problematic since it is not capable of any novelty, of any creation, precisely because nothing can persist in it. Everything that could happen in it is nipped in the bud, exposed to destruction in advance, and consigned to death and oblivion.

Jelica Šumič Riha has coined the apt term “anticipated amnesia” for this act of preliminary annulment of every moment of potential rupture, of sealing against potential discontinuity and potential novelty. She describes it as “a readiness to forget in advance”: “Hence, for us, something is doomed to be forgotten even before it has actually taken place. This anticipated, programmed amnesia is the ability not only to wipe out what has happened but to annihilate the very idea of the possibility for something to happen, in short, the ability to erase the possibility of the possible.”<sup>12</sup> “Anticipated amnesia” is thus a severe form of amnesia, because it consigns something that has happened to oblivion along with the possibility of any future. We must conclude that *the future is forgotten*—and not in the sense of an abstract and indeterminate image of the future, but precisely the future *possibilities* produced by a real present:

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The amnesia of the beginning, or, rather, of its possibility, is namely a subjectivation of time that denies the event as a clear-cut interruption by inscribing it back into history as one of those things that simply happen. By denying the discontinuity in which the eventness of the event consists, the amnesia of the amnesia not only annihilates the past, but also the future. Not, of course, some abstract future, but the future of the very present, the future of its proper present. It is therefore not enough to say that for an amnesic subject nothing has happened,

<sup>11</sup> Badiou, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Jelica Šumič Riha, “Contemporary Thought and the Crisis of Negation,” *Crisis and Critique* 1, no. 3 (July 2014): 79.

that the past event is but an illusion. It would be more appropriate to say that for him nothing can happen. And it is only in this sense that it could be said that for an amnestic subject there is no such thing as a beginning or an event.<sup>13</sup>

The amnestic subject, who abides in the present of the interval, thus annuls the present insofar as it signifies the possibility of intervening in the course of things actively, of taking part in a real change. This subject sacrifices the real present—the present of discontinuity that only enables the incorporation of a new world—and suffers a kind of premature forgetting. Premature forgetting is the crucial political instrument of contemporary domination because, as Badiou points out as well, power today is less concerned with the consolidation of what exists alone but primarily with the regulation of possibilities: “It’s an operation that restricts, limits, cuts, whittles away at, redefines, and formats possibilities.”<sup>14</sup> Following Badiou’s critique of the “democratic emblem” and its aggressive regulation of the realm of the possible, Jan Völker has similarly argued that democratic subjectivity is characterized by a fundamental “corruption of time,” which is the result of a suppression and subsequent reification of the split between subjectivity and the reality of things that ultimately runs through the subject itself. While the suppressed non-temporal appears and reappears again and again in the world, it is itself never just an objective fact, however, but dependent on a subjective stance that perceives and acknowledges it as a non-temporal: “That which both interrupts and generates time, happens continuously, if it has not already been subordinated again to the temporal pulse that always inserts it into the course of the world.”<sup>15</sup>

In Badiou’s diagnosis of the present, the concept of the present assumes a double function. It is in play in two distinct ways. The series of lectures mentioned above, *Images of the Present Time*, illustrates this double emergence of the concept of the present very well because, later in the series, a transition is made from a denunciation of transitional or “in-between” time to a more complex construction that Badiou calls “declaration.” Notably, both figures revolve around the concept of the present. On the one hand there is an in-between time—held together by the

<sup>13</sup> Šumič Riha, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Badiou, *Images*, 113.

<sup>15</sup> Jan Völker, “Das demokratische Subjekt und die Korruption der Zeit,” in *Absolute Gegenwart*, ed. Marcus Quent (Berlin: Merve, 2016), 48.

“democratic emblem” and the “youthful imaginary”<sup>16</sup>—that masks the absence of a world. It is a time “concentrated or focused entirely on itself,”<sup>17</sup> a conception that thinks of time as immediacy and thus “unilaterally” promotes the present. Because it valorizes the present one-sidedly, it cannot maintain or hold anything in place. It is a “time without retention” in which a futureless everydayness combines with the succession of interchangeable moments to generate a furious “movement in place.”<sup>18</sup> For Badiou, the present of our contemporary democracy is therefore essentially a “temporal flight,” a “substitutable, empty, and deferred present”; the prevailing temporality is founded on a “vanishing present.”<sup>19</sup>

But on the other hand, Badiou speaks of a “present of the present” that functions without an emblem and imaginary, a present that is radically *imageless* and turns against power as an actively *dis-imaging* force.<sup>20</sup> If the present is accentuated in the sense of this dis-imaging force of the real, then it is nothing given, no flow of time that can always be presupposed; then, on the contrary, it is uncertain whether there is such a thing as a present in a “contemporary” situation. The question of the present then initially requires an *examination*, which may lead to the disappointing conclusion that “there may be no present”<sup>21</sup> at all. It is not certain that there is such a thing as a present at any time, in any situation.

While the “vanishing present” is based on a conception of time “without retention,”<sup>22</sup> in which the present is “unilaterally” promoted as the immediacy of consumption, the present as this dis-imaging force of the real hinges on a conception of time that constructs a bringing forth of the present as a “conflictual interaction of repetition and projection.”<sup>23</sup> The “present of the present” emerges through a *torsion*, in which a repetitive element of the past is combined with a projective element of the future in a “declaration.” The present—in the sense of the “present of the present” or of the imageless force of the real—which turns against the emblem of power, is constituted in a creative declaration of the mass

<sup>16</sup> Badiou, *Images*, 68.

<sup>17</sup> Badiou, 59.

<sup>18</sup> Badiou, 69, 70.

<sup>19</sup> Badiou, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Badiou, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Badiou, 134.

<sup>22</sup> Badiou, 72.

<sup>23</sup> Badiou, 141.

or the *crowd*: “The present contained in the declaration, in what the Crowd declares, is something that raises repetition to the level of projection. It’s not simply replacing the one with the other. [. . .] The declaration [. . .] is the ‘swept up’ coexistence of repetition and projection.”<sup>24</sup> The “real” present then, the present “of” the real, has to do with a specific *configuration* of past and future; it is the construction of a torsion of a past element through a projective force:

To sum up regarding the complexity of the present, we could say that the complexity of the present is the declaration—that is, the overlapping of repetition and projection—the declaration insofar as it exerts a torsion on repetition in order to hook it up or connect it to projection. This is an electrification that is different from tradition: a different current will be made to flow. It’s something other than destroying it for the sake of an absolute beginning, of a new world.<sup>25</sup>

The act of declaration and the operation of torsion are essential features of the incorporation of a faithful subject, which Badiou then further discusses and formalizes in *Logics of Worlds* (2006). In Book I of the second of three volumes of his opus magnum *Being and Event*, he famously introduces a formal theory of the subject, laying the conceptual ground for the appearance of a truth in a world. In this context, the “subject” is understood neither as a register of experience, a category of morality, or an ideological fiction, but essentially as a “system of forms and operations”<sup>26</sup> that denotes nothing other than the conjunction between the body and the trace of an eventful rupture. The notion of the present famously plays a crucial role in distinguishing the formal types of subjects introduced. For Badiou, there are three fundamental relations to a present, which is itself nothing other than a “set of consequences of the evental trace”:<sup>27</sup> While the *faithful* subject *produces* the present, the *reactive* subject is characterized by the *denial* of the produced present, and the *obscure* subject, in turn, by the full *occultation* of the relation to the present.<sup>28</sup> What is decisive for Badiou, of course, is the faithful subject, which involves a “realization in the present of a hitherto

<sup>24</sup> Badiou, 143, 144.

<sup>25</sup> Badiou, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 47.

<sup>27</sup> Badiou, 52.

<sup>28</sup> Badiou, 62.

unknown possibility.”<sup>29</sup> The faithful subject produces the consequences of an eventful rupture, the trace of an event within a situation—*and thereby produces the present itself in the first place*. Thus the present is neither the point-totality of all that merely exists, nor the punctual experience of an ecstatic presence, but the present of an event-conditioned truth that is in itself universal and eternal. Therefore, the complement of this subjective production of the present (or of the production of the present *as* subject) is that of *incorporation*: “The only real relation to the present,” Badiou sums up in the last pages of *Logic of Worlds*, “is that of incorporation,”<sup>30</sup> which is conceived as a continuous process. Contemporary ideology, labeled as “democratic materialism” by Badiou, famously denies precisely the possibility of this real relation to the present: “For democratic materialism, the present is never created. Democratic materialism affirms, in an entirely explicit manner, that it is important to maintain the present within the confines of an atonic reality.”<sup>31</sup>

To summarize, an examination of how Badiou thinks of “in-between” time must be undertaken in the particular context of a diagnosis of the present, in which the concept of the present is involved in a twofold way. Badiou’s diagnosis of the present not only expresses an evaluation of the contemporary historical present but also states, above all, the loss of the creative power of the new in contrast to the temporal constellation that precedes it. At the same time, as part of this contemporary diagnosis, *another* present emerges within the present, or, one could say, is *presented*, resulting from a conflictual construction of past and future dimensions. In the intervening present or the interval’s time, another in-between emerges that is embedded in the sequence of events it highlights. This diagnosis is linked to a task, a kind of ethos of thinking: “A world that’s between two things requires a particular discipline of thought because you’re not supported by any structure. Since you’re in an in-between space, a gap, you are your only reference point.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Badiou, 52.

<sup>30</sup> Badiou, 508.

<sup>31</sup> Badiou, 509.

<sup>32</sup> Badiou, *Images*, 38.



## Virtual In-between Time: Event without Present

Deleuze's challenging contributions to the philosophy of time are directed against the present. Not just against any given present—that is, for example, a particular historical shape or a determinate political constitution of the present—but against the primacy of the present in thinking about time itself, against it limiting and reducing our understanding of time. Reading the various texts in which he develops his fundamental reflections on a philosophy of time—the difficult sections on the three syntheses of time in *Difference and Repetition*, the remarks on the two regimes of time scattered throughout the various series in *The Logic of Sense*, or, regarding his later work, the thoughts on the “time-image” developed with Bergson in the second volume of *Cinema* and the short but dense passages on the concept of *entre-temps* in *What is Philosophy?*—it is striking that Deleuze is always concerned with confronting a conception of time dominated by the present with a fundamentally different way of thinking about time. He challenges the understanding of time that conceives of the past, the present, and the future as three single dimensions of a unified present, thus establishing temporality based on the living present. Instead, this new way of thinking about time assumes an irrevocable *split* in the consciousness of time, whereby the living present dissolves. Proceeding from Kant's discovery of transcendental consciousness and Bergson's concept of memory and duration, the conception of both a past *in itself* and a future *in itself* become decisive features of Deleuze's thought. The dimensions of past and future acquire, as it were, autonomy and independence from the living present.

First, Deleuze's fundamental intervention in the thinking of time consists, roughly speaking, in supplementing chronological time by an *a-chronicle* time that is alien to it. The time of present realization and actualization is contrasted with a non-present time stratum of the virtual that should be regarded as the real site of the event. Time, Deleuze argues, following the Stoics, “must be grasped twice, in two complementary though mutually exclusive fashions.” These are two incompatible ways of looking at time that nevertheless overlap in thought: “First, it must be grasped entirely as the living present in bodies which act and are acted upon. Second, it must be grasped entirely as an entity infinitely divisible into past and future, and into the incorporeal effects which

result from bodies, their actions and their passions.”<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, there is a realm of bodies and things; its time is the present in which all bodies are causes of one another. On the other hand, there is a realm of events that are incorporeal effects; its time is said to be the past-future. “Only the present exists in time and gathers together or absorbs the past and future. But only the past and future inhere in time and divide each present infinitely.”<sup>34</sup>

The dominant conception of time as a continuous flow within which three successive constitutive dimensions—past, present, and future—permanently merge into one another is radically reconfigured into two simultaneous but incompatible “readings of time,” one being the *chronological*, dominated by the present, and the other the *aionic*, being infinitely dividable into past and future. Past, present, and future no longer denote historically locatable points in the flow of time. Instead they are conceived as non-linear, non-successive, coexisting *strata of time* overlapping one another.<sup>35</sup> Instead of a single chronological time, which encompasses three constitutive dimensions merging into one, Deleuze’s fundamental intervention into the thinking of temporality consists in presenting two fundamentally different and mutually exclusive “readings of time,” in each of which the relationship of the temporal dimensions to one another is conceived in a completely different way: the time of the Chronos and the time of the Aion. For Deleuze, the common chronological understanding of time is entirely dominated by the present—although the present is effective in different ways in each case. The chronological account of time sets the present as absolute in all forms and instances. The aionic understanding of time, which he contrasts with it, accepts the present only in the form of a *moment without extension*, dividing the past and

<sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>34</sup> Deleuze, 5.

<sup>35</sup> In his book on Deleuze’s philosophy of time, James Williams accentuates this destruction of the one-dimensionality of linear time: “We must therefore speak of many presents with their own ways of taking the past and the future as dimensions. We must also avoid any general spatial representation of time as something pre-existent that things can be placed on or in. There is no general line of time and no space–time continuum. Instead, singular processes make their own times within the limits set by some wider formal principles, such as asymmetry.” James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze’s Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 4.

the future infinitely, being only an infinitesimal abstract “limit value.” In aionic time, past and future are set autonomously as eternally coexisting strata.<sup>36</sup>

In *What is Philosophy?* the idea of a *virtual in-between time* is developed, which in this late work written together with Félix Guattari, varies and expands the notion of the aionic past-future from Deleuze’s early work and inscribes it into the framework of a Bergsonian terminology.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Badiou, the concept of “in-between” appears here precisely where the eventful dimension of time is specified. On the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari argue, there is a time of facts, bodies and objects, and experience. This is the present time of actualization, which passes between moments. In contrast, there is the time of the event, which they call virtual “in-between time” for which the English translators have chosen the equivalent temporal adverb “meanwhile.” Unfortunately the English language cannot reproduce the subtle double meaning of the French *entre-temps*, which Deleuze and Guattari spell with a hyphen that perfectly indicates the split of time the term is intended to describe.<sup>38</sup> The *entre-temps* is without beginning or passing; in a sense it is extra-temporal or atemporal. Its in-betweenness opens up the time of the event but no longer serves as a real agent of mediation. It no longer mediates states and bodies but forms a space of its own—a midpoint that has renounced its borders. “It is no longer time that exists between two instants; it is the event that is a meanwhile [*entre-temps*]: the meanwhile is not part of

<sup>36</sup> “Chronos is the present which alone exists. It makes of the past and future its two oriented dimensions, so that one goes always from the past to the future—but only to the degree that presents follow one another inside partial worlds or partial systems. Aion is the past-future, which in an infinite subdivision of the abstract moment endlessly decomposes itself in both directions at once and forever sidesteps the present.” Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 77.

<sup>37</sup> Deleuze contrasts the pair of the *possible* and the *real* with the pair of the *virtual* and the *actual* to carry out an intervention in ontological thinking on the basis of this four-fold constellation. For the philosophical background in the context of the discussion with Bergson, see Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1–25.

<sup>38</sup> The translators themselves address this problem of terminology in a footnote: “We have followed the usual translation of *entre-temps* as signifying ‘meanwhile’ or ‘meantime,’ although the English loses something of the literal meaning of the French as that which happens in the interval between moments of time or actions.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 158n.

the eternal, but neither is it part of time—it belongs to becoming.”<sup>39</sup> Becoming is no longer conceived on the basis of a living present that at the same time is always a transient and never graspable movement that couples two interconnecting states of the body or of experience. It is understood instead as a *permanent* and *infinite* movement that reveals an incorporeal being independent of the body and its states.

Ultimately and enigmatically, philosophy itself is identified with this in-between time of the *entre-temps*.<sup>40</sup> Philosophical thinking has to be understood as the unique practice of this in-between, following the extensionless present as the “limit value.” The different reference to the event, to the virtual, and to becoming is thus unfolded as a distinguishing criterion of science and philosophy: while scientific thinking derives *functions* from the virtual, philosophical thought extracts *concepts* from it. Science descends from virtual to actual states of affairs, while philosophy ascends from actual states of affairs to the virtual.<sup>41</sup> It is their opposite progression that makes it possible to distinguish science and philosophy: the one descends from the virtual; the other ascends to it.

On the descending path from the virtual to actualization—the path of science—we always grasp the time passing between two or more moments, according to Deleuze and Guattari, and thus obtain the image of successive time. On the ascending path—the path of philosophy—where we abstract from realized and actualized forms to give consistency to the “infinite movement” of the virtual, we find ourselves in an “empty” and “dead” “meanwhile” that is measureless and withdrawn from the sphere of power of the present. Through philosophy, we therefore obtain the image of overlapping in-between times that coexist. Now, importantly, what we call an “event” in everyday life is not the same in both regimes of time: from the viewpoint of passing time, the event ultimately always occurs as an accident or ambush. It is an unforeseen exception to the regular temporal course, which nevertheless still confirms it. It is a short incision, and disappears in its subsequent effects. In the *entre-temps*, however, the event lasts as bodiless and extra-temporal.

<sup>39</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 158.

<sup>40</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 159.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 160.

The meanwhile (*entre-temps*), the event, is always a dead time; it is there where nothing takes place, an infinite awaiting that is already infinitely past, awaiting and reserve. This dead time does not come after what happens; it coexists with the instant or time of the accident, but as the immensity of the empty time in which we see it as still to come and as having already happened, in the strange indifference of an intellectual intuition.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the in-between of time in Deleuze is something like an empty and infinite middle that has emancipated itself from the bodies and objects enclosing it and remains perpetually withdrawn from the present as an absolute in-between. For Deleuze, *entre-temps* indicates the time of the event that can be infinitely divided and decomposed into past and future. It can never be grasped in any other way than in the strange sensation of something that has only just happened and will happen straight away. The pure event “is always and at the same time something which has just happened and something about to happen; never something which is happening.”<sup>43</sup> From the perspective of time, of the temporal course, an event becomes comprehensible only in its realized and actualized parts. The decisive thing in the event, however, is just what escapes the actualization, evades it, and exceeds it.

Each component of the event is *actualized or effectuated* in an instant, and the event in the time that passes between these instants; but nothing happens within *the virtuality* that has only meanwhiles as components and an event as composite becoming. Nothing happens there, but everything becomes, so that the event has the privilege of beginning again when time is past. Nothing happens, and yet everything changes, because becoming continues to pass through its components again and to restore the event that is actualized elsewhere, at a different moment. When time passes and takes the instant away, there is always a meanwhile to restore the event.<sup>44</sup>

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The force mobilized in event-thinking here is based on asserting a “shadowy and hidden part,” a “pure reserve,” which pervades or manages reality with-

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 158. *Instant* and *chance* are the images of the event in chronological time, while *waiting*, *reserve*, and *dead* or *indefinitely past time* are images of the event in aionian time.

<sup>43</sup> Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 63.

<sup>44</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 158.

out being able to be appropriated or made accessible. The “pure reserve” of the event, its “intangible” part, is more “real” than reality, without depending on a beyond, without establishing a transcendent realm. The event thus always marks the *inconsistency point* of reality without being merely unreal.

I would argue that the work of art for Deleuze is ultimately situated at the intersection of these two regimes of time, the passing time of actualization and the lasting time of *counter-effectuation*. By capturing invisible forces and opening itself up to deformation, it is able to incarnate the pure time of the event, that is, *to inscribe the virtual in-between time into the living present*. Art—which would then have to be called contemporary art in a strong sense—confronts us with the present as a split of time *and* an intersection of time. Within the work of art, which in *What is Philosophy?* is conceived as a monument (of becoming, not of memory), the rift or crack of time appears.<sup>45</sup> The present permanently evades itself, incorporating into its monument the endlessly divisible past-future, which is experienced, as Deleuze shows in relation to Francis Bacon’s work, as a present slip or *fall*: the non-present sensation inscribes itself into the flesh, transfers the particular present of an intensity—and manifests itself as a fall.

### In Between Two Forms of Timelessness

Considering the steps we have accomplished so far, in-between time entails, as it were, two mutually exclusive perspectives. For Alain Badiou, “in-between time” or “interval” denotes an empty period during which a corrupted, weakened present expands endlessly so that time appears only in the image of con-

<sup>45</sup> It cannot be discussed in detail here whether and to what extent this model remains subject to the *dispositif* of the expression of being. I am thinking here of Rok Benčin, who, in relation to aesthetics and the work of art, has argued instead for concentrating on the “surplus representation,” enabled by what is excluded from representation, which he develops in strict opposition to the idea of the expression of being as some kind of hidden truth behind the veil of representation. So, against Heideggerian *unconcealment* and Deleuzian *becoming*, we should follow Badiou and Rancière in rethinking the complexity of representation: their subtraction of being, or the reconfiguration of the division of the sensible. Whether Deleuze’s approach is ultimately doomed to this proximity to a concept of truth that relies on a presupposed *concealment* should be discussed elsewhere. See Rok Benčin, “Rethinking Representation in Ontology and Aesthetics via Badiou and Rancière,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 36, no. 5 (September 2019): 95–112, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418806573>.



sumption, exhaustion, and self-destruction. This intervening time is one that lies between two events, a time of the absence of an event in which past, present, and future tend to become incomprehensible. The task of thought, then, is to recover a *discipline* of time capable of tracing sequences of truth-events. For Gilles Deleuze, on the other hand, “in-between time” or the “meanwhile” indicates something like an empty and infinite middle that has emancipated itself from every kind of body and object enclosing it and, as an absolute in-between, is perpetually withdrawn from the present. This in-between is the event itself, which presupposes supplementing the regime of chronological time with a second “reading of time.” The task of thinking then lies in a *counter-effectuation*, which distances itself from actuality—the sphere of existing reality—to approach virtuals that *subsist* in reality.

Thus, while the time of the meanwhile (*entre-temps*) denotes the opening up of time to its hidden and shadowy event dimension, the time of the intervening period (*intervalle*) is the name for a time that, on the contrary, has split off its event dimension, its capacity to incorporate a subject. On the one hand, with Badiou, we have the formalization after a disruption resulting from the presentation of the real that overcomes a dull intervening period. On the other hand, with Deleuze, we are confronted with a timeless subsisting sphere that opens up any given moment in time, and can be detected in each present as something that evades it. The interval calls for the incorporation or subjectivization of the real that will ultimately end it, whereas the meanwhile is the de-subjectivizing effect of the endless real.

Here we face the ambiguous figure or conundrum of the present, its uncanny circle: the present becomes both the name for a problematic, uneventful interval and the term for the moment of its eventful disruption, which is brought into position against it. It indicates the continuum of an incurious actuality, as well as the lucid *counter-effectuation* that is supposed to break through this continuum—or create it in the first place as the present. The “present” circulates as both empty and fulfilled time, as both elapsing and enduring time. It is conceived as a time of unreserved consumption from which the urgency of a “discipline” is deduced, and as a vicious moving moment representing the event that permanently divides time into past and future, thus demanding a different mode of actualization. But how can the present simultaneously be a sealed continuum and a discontinuous incision in the same continuum?

There is a well-known dispute between Badiou and Deleuze, or the “Badiouian” and “Deleuzian” approaches, which not only arises due to complex questions in terms of ontology and the constitution of the event and its relation to truth, but noticeably also based on the question of how to delineate, determine, and construct what we call “politics.” Is politics, for example, as Badiou contends, in the end completely absent in Deleuze? Or, on the contrary, is Badiou’s concept of politics, seemingly purged of all biophysical dimensions, insensitive to the necessary “impure” affective dimensions of politics itself? At this point, within our framework, we can neither decide this matter nor do justice to the complex discussion of its argumentation on both sides.<sup>46</sup>

But as I have indicated above, the uncanny circle of the present is not only effective if we relate and compare Badiou’s and Deleuze’s different concepts of time and the real, but, more importantly, it also traverses both of them precisely in their different denunciations of the regime of the present. The in-between time as a double signifier—once attacked in the critique of the *interval*, and once highlighted in the affirmation of the *meanwhile*—is ultimately effective in each philosopher in the respective other dimension: it appears elsewhere. What is contrasted here in the discussion of their use of the term “in-between time” already appears in their own conceptions of the temporality of the event, even if in each case from a different starting point. For example, in Badiou, the event itself is developed as a figure of the Two, circulating between an eventful interruption and an intervention pertaining to this interruption: the interval of the (non-)world is thus juxtaposed by another kind of in-between-time. In Deleuze, in turn, the meanwhile of the event is contrasted with the pure passing of time between two moments, which is capitalized by the historical logic he opposes.

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With Badiou and Deleuze, we are confronted twice—in two separate and mutually incompatible ways—with a timelessness, a *time without time*. Ultimately, the ambiguous figure or vicious circle of the present pushes us towards the conflict between *two timelessnesses*: the interval of in-between time, the corrupted

<sup>46</sup> For this comparative discussion, for example, although with a clear swing in the direction of Deleuze, see Katja Diefenbach, “Über das Un/Sinnliche. Ereignis- und Zeitbegriffe in Deleuzes und Badiou’s Ontologien unendlicher Mannigfaltigkeit,” in “Sensibilität der Gegenwart. Wahrnehmung, Ethik und politische Sensibilisierung im Kontext westlicher Gewaltgeschichte,” ed. Burkhard Liebsch, special issue, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 17 (2018): 151–76.

present, is the timelessness of mere temporal passing; the becoming of in-between time, the virtual dimension, is likewise a timelessness, but that of the event itself. In any resistant thinking of time *the present always meets us two-fold*, double in form, critical, and affirmative.<sup>47</sup> This observation neither implies mediation or relativization nor indicates negligent thinking. It is rather that resistance to the timelessness of passing time, whose inexorable consumption produces an empty duration that regresses to a point, is not feasible if historical time is thought of as the intact *totality* of time. The force of *another timelessness* is required, a timelessness that originates from an unconnected discontinuity: the inner times, the processes of becoming, the events in art and politics.

To somewhat speed up our train of thought here, we must keep in mind that every strong construction of time is ultimately an *intersection and conversion of two timelessnesses*. Historical positivism always tries to fight within passing time, within reality, against its peculiar timelessness. The historian can cure the baleful amnesia of the present only by sketching its prehistory, attempting to develop a memory that deepens, fathoms, and underpins the present. Historical thinking, however, is necessarily blind to that second timelessness that comes from *elsewhere*. This peculiar timelessness, which opens itself up to a living, becoming, subjective duration, is itself an *origin of history* that sets in motion its own construction of time—not as the origin of a supratemporal being but as an unthinkable division or split that marks the event of time itself. Time is not the measurement of a homogeneous course; it does not coincide with continuous-discontinuous history, but is a necessary initial construction that operates in the space between two timelessnesses and evades any history given in advance. Time and history exist only as subsisting counter-stories, due to *becoming*, in the form of retroactive *sequences* or *nodes* that unfold their own logic.

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What, then, is the peculiar opportunity of so-called “in-between times,” and how should they be understood? The answer, in the context of the temporal-philosophical operation in question, must at this point be a short one, nevertheless having complex implications: in-between times allow us to develop a sense, firstly, for a *possible split* of a (historical) present, and, secondly, for *the principle split* of *the present* as such. The task of thinking about time lies in a construction that

<sup>47</sup> I have developed this argument in detail in Marcus Quent, *Gegenwartskunst: Konstruktionen der Zeit* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2021).

starts from a double splitting of the present, which itself can never be presupposed as given. We can thus learn from Deleuze and Badiou, without repressing their incompatibilities, that thinking about time always consists in juxtaposing two timelessnesses. Time only becomes possible at their intersection. Resistance to a present regime in any case requires the meeting of both.

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