

NECESSITY AFTER TIME: CONTRADICTION, RETROACTIVE DETERMINATION, AND THE NON- TOTALIZING LOGIC OF MODALITY

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Abstract: The dominant metaphysical orientation toward necessity – whether Aristotelian, Leibnizian, or formalized in modern modal logic – presuppose atemporality, closure, and non-contradiction. Necessity is conceived as a primordial modal status – what must be the case independently of temporal becoming, historical contingency, or subjective mediation. This paper challenges that assumption by advancing a temporal and non-totalizing conception of necessity, according to which necessity is not given in advance but is retroactively constituted through processes marked by contradiction. Drawing on Kant, Hegel, Lacan, and Badiou, the paper argues that necessity emerges *after time* – as the outcome of temporal articulation rather than its precondition. Kant’s schematism already discloses the dependence of necessity on temporal synthesis, even as it strives to preserve modal closure. Hegel radicalizes this insight by reconceiving necessity as the result of contradictory becoming, not its negation. Lacan introduces a non-totalizing logic in which necessity appears as a retroactive inscription within the symbolic order. Finally, Badiou reformulates necessity in terms of eventual fidelity, where what “must have been” is established only through a contingent break within a situation. Across these trajectories, necessity is understood as a belated effect of temporal and subjective processes rather than a foundational modal given.

Keywords: necessity; temporality; modality; contradiction; retroactivity; non-totalization.

I. Introduction

The dominant philosophical image of necessity is atemporal: necessity is what *cannot be otherwise*, what holds irrespective of becoming, history, or subjective mediation. In its metaphysical forms (from Aristotelian modalities to Leibnizian compossibility) and in its modern formalization (possible-worlds semantics), necessity is treated as a modal status whose validity is independent of time – indeed, time is typically treated as one more dimension *inside* what is already modally fixed. But the moment necessity is applied to domains in which temporality is not

merely an external parameter but an internal condition – subjectivity, historical transformation, political rupture, psychoanalytic causality, dialectical development – the very meaning of “must” becomes unstable. A necessity that appears only *through* time begins to look less like a primordial modal bedrock and more like something that becomes legible as necessary only after the fact.

In the dominant metaphysical orientation toward necessity, it is predominantly conceived as atemporal, objective, and independent of becoming, functioning as a modal marker of what cannot be otherwise given the structure of reality or reason itself. While Aristotelian and scholastic accounts already integrate necessity with potentiality, causation, and conditional relations, these frameworks nonetheless preserve a fundamental orientation toward necessity as grounded in stable natures, essences, or eternal orders rather than as retroactively constituted through temporal disruption.¹ In Aristotle, necessity (*anankē*) is primarily associated with essence, form, and causal explanation. What is necessary is what follows from the nature (*to ti ēn einai*) of a thing or from the requirements of demonstrative knowledge (*epistēmē*), where scientific explanation proceeds from necessary principles to necessary conclusions (Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.2; *Metaphysics* V.5). Medieval scholasticism grounds necessity in divine intellect and eternal law, distinguishing between absolute and hypothetical necessity while preserving the idea that necessity is anchored in a timeless metaphysical order (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Pars, Q. 19, Art. 3). For Leibniz (in early modern rationalism), necessary truths are those true in all possible worlds by virtue of the principle of non-contradiction, whereas contingent truths depend on God’s free choice and are governed by the principle of sufficient reason (Leibniz, 1989, pp. 321 – 324). This rationalist inheritance culminates in the modern modal framework, where necessity is formalized as invariance across a fixed space of possibilities, presupposing closure, non-contradiction, and a standpoint of total modal survey (Kripke, 1980). Across these traditions, necessity is consistently understood as prior to time, immune to historical transformation, and opposed to contingency as its logical and metaphysical counterpart – a conception that will be fundamentally challenged by post-Kantian view of temporality, contradiction, and subjectivity.

The thesis of the paper is not simply that necessity is “discovered” late, but that necessity is retroactively constituted – stabilized as necessary by processes of temporal articulation that are themselves structured by contradiction, non-closure, and interruption. This claim contests the assumption that modal necessity is a pre-given measure of reality and argues instead that necessity is an outcome of the way a temporal field becomes organized, narrated, symbolized, and rationally constrained. The contribution of this paper lies not in offering a new formal system of modal theory, but in reconstructing a non-totalizing logic of necessity that emerges when temporality is treated as logically transformative rather than merely parametric. By reading Kant, Hegel, Lacan, and Badiou along this axis, the paper shows how necessity can be binding without being pre-given, closed, or atemporal.

The Metaphysical Orientation Towards Necessity

In a canonical modern formulation, modal necessity is expressed as the claim that **p** is true in all possible worlds. The force of this formalism is its clarity – necessity appears as invariance under variation. But that clarity depends on an image of modality as already *complete* – the space of possible worlds is fixed, the accessibility relation is given, and the evaluation of truth is defined relative to a total field (Kripke, 1980). On this model, time can be accommodated (as tense logic, branching time, or temporal indices), but the modal operator retains its structural meaning – what is necessary is what cannot be otherwise across the relevant field. Evgeni Latinov (2012) analyses logical validity in temporal logics and argues that temporal modal logic should not be formulated as modal logic, but rather as formal theory of time. Although contemporary modal logic includes temporal and branching-time formalisms, these approaches typically preserve a fixed modal framework within which temporal variation is modeled, rather than allowing time to retroactively transform the modal space itself.² Even when necessity is relativized (logical, metaphysical, nomological, epistemic), the prevailing intuition remains: necessity is what holds regardless of temporal unfolding (Williamson, 2013, pp. 1 – 22). This metaphysical picture is not simply “formal”. It inherits a fixed, static and unavoidable in this tradition commitments such as closure, non-contradiction, a position of exhaustive overview and more.

The Disruption of Temporality

The disruption occurs when temporality is no longer a mere succession of moments *within* a stable world, but a condition that transforms the very field in which modalities are evaluated. In historical life, possibilities are not simply “there” awaiting selection – they are opened and closed by decisions, institutions, crises, and symbolic reorganizations. In subjective life, a later signification can change what an earlier event *was*. In dialectical development, contradiction does not merely violate a rule, it generates new determinations. In other words: *what becomes necessary was not fully determinate as necessary prior to the temporal process that constituted it*. Here the paradox can be stated sharply: necessity, classically, must be atemporal (otherwise it seems contingent), but necessity, in lived rationality, appears only through time – often as a retrospective stabilization (“it had to happen”).

The paper argues that this paradox is not accidental but structural. It indicates that necessity in these domains is not a primordial modal property but a *temporal product*: the output of syntheses, conflicts, symbolizations, and fidelities that reorganize the space of reasons and possibilities.³

II. Kant – Modal Schematism and the Temporal Condition of Necessity

Kant is the unavoidable starting point for any attempt to rethink necessity in relation to time, because he is the first to insist – systematically and explicitly – that modality is not a determination of objects as such but a determination of their

relation to cognition. This shift already destabilizes the classical metaphysical image of necessity as a property inhering timelessly in things. Kant simultaneously attempts to secure the universality and necessity of knowledge by grounding modality in transcendental structures that are themselves meant to be invariant. The result is a productive tension – necessity is conditioned by time, but time is not allowed to threaten modal closure. The shift from Cartesian certainty to Kantian necessity must be understood through Kant’s understanding of necessity as ‘in accord to a rule’. The most urgent question for Kant is how to understand the validity of concept. It is this normative character that he calls *Notwendigkeit* (necessity) (Brandom, 1994, p. 10). However, Andonov (2010) problematizes Kantian apriorism, pointing out the impossibility of the necessary being valid for experience but not valid for the thing in itself. This leads to the difficult-to-sustain position that we can know philosophically, but we cannot know anything truly. It is important to distinguish, within Kant’s account, between epistemic, transcendental, and metaphysical registers of necessity. Kant rigorously restricts necessity to the first two registers and explicitly resists metaphysical extension “[...] *the principles of modality are also nothing further than definitions of the concepts of possibility, actuality, and necessity in their empirical use*” (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, A219/B266). Nevertheless, transcendental necessity can only become operative through temporal schematization, since the categories, including the modal categories, require time-determinations in order to be applied to sensible intuition.

Necessity in the *Critique of Pure Reason*

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously distinguishes the categories of modality – *possibility, actuality, and necessity* – from the other categories by denying them constitutive content. Unlike quantity, quality, or relation:

“The categories of modality have this peculiarity: as a determination of the object they do not augment the concept to which they are ascribed in the least, but rather express only the relation’ to the faculty of cognition” (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, A219/B266).

Necessity, in particular, does not add a predicate to an object but expresses the manner in which a judgment is warranted as unavoidable given the conditions of experience. Necessity is no longer a metaphysical stamp impressed upon reality from outside time – it is a function of how judgments are justified within a structured field of possible experience. Kant thus rejects the rationalist idea that necessity can be read directly off concepts (as in Leibnizian analytic containment), while also rejecting empiricism’s reduction of necessity to habit or psychological expectation (as in Hume). Instead, necessity is grounded in the a priori conditions of experience, which make certain judgments unavoidable *for any possible subject of experience*.

Therefore, if necessity expresses the invariance of the conditions of experience, how can it apply to empirical judgments that are themselves temporal, contingent, and revisable?

Kant's answer is that necessity is not empirical but transcendental: it concerns not what happens, but what must be presupposed for anything to happen *as experience*. However, this answer remains incomplete unless one explains how transcendental necessity is actually connected to temporal intuition. That connection is provided by schematism.

The Schema of Necessity

The doctrine of schematism introduces time as the “third thing” that mediates between pure concepts and sensible intuition “[...] *it is clear that there must be a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other; and makes possible the application of the former to the latter. This mediating representation must be pure (without anything empirical) and yet intellectual on the one hand and sensible on the other. Such a representation is the transcendental schema.*” (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, A138/B177).

Every category has a schema, and every schema is a temporal determination. The schema of necessity is especially revealing. Kant defines it as “*the existence of an object at all times*” (A145/B184)⁴. On a first reading, this seems to restore atemporality under another name. But a closer examination shows that necessity here is not timeless presence but temporal rule-governed persistence. What matters is not that an object exists outside time, but that its existence is determined according to a rule that holds *through* time. Necessity thus depends on the form of temporal synthesis – repetition, regularity, and lawful succession. As Béatrice Longuenesse has emphasized, schematism does not merely “apply” concepts to intuition – it articulates the temporal activity by which understanding and sensibility are unified (Longuenesse, 1998, pp. 211 – 230).

This has two important consequences. First, necessity is not given independently of temporal organization; it presupposes a stable temporal horizon within which rules can be recognized as binding. Second, necessity is inseparable from *retention* – what counts as necessary is what must be reproducible across temporal moments according to a rule. In this sense, Kant could be already read as gesturing toward a proto-retroactive structure: necessity is not simply read off from an isolated intuition but emerges from the way intuitions are ordered and retained as lawful.²

The Kantian Tension: Conditioning Without Destabilization

Despite these temporal commitments, Kant is careful to prevent time from undermining the universality of necessity. The temporal synthesis that grounds schemata is itself governed by the understanding, whose forms are fixed and a priori. Time conditions necessity, but time is not allowed to *transform* the categories themselves. This is the critical limit of Kant's position.

Henry Allison has described this as the distinction between *epistemic conditioning* and *ontological dependence*. Necessity depends on our mode of cognition, but this dependence is not meant to introduce contingency into necessity itself (Allison, 2004, pp. 202 – 229). Kant wants necessity to be conditioned *for*

us without being conditional *in itself*. The categories are timeless, even if their schematization is temporal. Allison goes deeper in his analysis of the relationship between the categories, time and space by stating “[...] *the necessity of the category stems not from any conceptual requirement concerning the conditions of judgment but from the conditions imposed on the figurative synthesis by the singularity and homogeneity of space*” (Allison, 2004, p. 211). Precisely here the fault line appears. If necessity can only be instantiated through temporal schemata, then necessity is never encountered as a pure, timeless form, but always as something that has become stabilized within time.

Kant resists this implication by appealing to the invariance of transcendental structures, but the price is a lingering ambiguity: is necessity grounded in time, or merely exhibited through time?

Michael Friedman has argued that Kant’s conception of necessity cannot be separated from historically evolving frameworks of scientific cognition, even if Kant himself did not fully draw that conclusion (Friedman, 1992, pp. 93 – 115). On such a reading, the schematism opens the door to a historicization of necessity that Kant himself only partially acknowledges.⁵

Kant as Opening the Problem of Retroactivity

What Kant ultimately provides shows that necessity is neither a brute metaphysical given nor a mere psychological habit. It is the product of lawful temporal synthesis under universal conditions. This already breaks with the metaphysical idea that necessity precedes time.

From the perspective of the present paper, Kant can therefore be read as the philosopher who first shows that necessity must pass through time, even if he does not allow time to fully transform necessity. The schema of necessity reveals that “must” is inseparable from repetition, retention, and rule-governed temporal order. But where Kant treats contradiction as a threat to necessity, Hegel will treat contradiction as the engine through which necessity emerges. Where Kant seeks to secure necessity against time, Hegel will reconceive necessity *as* the outcome of temporal becoming. Kant thus marks the threshold - the point at which necessity can no longer be thought without time, even if its full temporalization remains to be accomplished. The claim is therefore not that Kant endorses retroactive determination, but that his account generates a structural ambiguity in which necessity can only be articulated after temporal synthesis, even though Kant himself seeks to neutralize the philosophical consequences of this fact.⁶

III. Hegel – Necessity as the Result of Contradictory Becoming

Hegel’s speculative logic marks the decisive transformation of the modal problematic opened by Kant. If Kant shows that necessity cannot be articulated without time, he still seeks to protect it from temporal contingency by anchoring it in invariant transcendental structures. Hegel radicalizes this insight by abandoning

the very idea that necessity precedes becoming. Necessity, for Hegel, is not a pre-given modal status but the rational form that emerges through the temporal unfolding of contradiction. This shift entails not merely a redefinition of necessity, but a fundamental reconfiguration of the relation between modality, time, and intelligibility. In Hegel's *Science of Logic*, necessity is no longer opposed to contingency, nor is it defined as invariance across a space of possibilities. Instead, it is the name for the intelligibility that arises when the contingent course of events is grasped as internally mediated. Necessity is therefore retrospective, immanent, and non-formalizable in advance.⁷ As Alexander Gungov shows, the Absolute Idea simultaneously represents the result of the speculative unfolding of the entire logical system, but at the same time is contained as telos in each of the preceding categories of the Doctrine of Being, The Doctrine of Essence and The Doctrine of the Concept. That is why Hegel uses the principles of "circularity" and "teleology" as a structure-determining principle in his logic – a principle in which the circle ends where it begins, and in which the whole is present in each of its parts (Gungov, 2023, pp. 35 – 39). In this sense, the end is already on the way to reaching it, i.e., the telos is not something beyond immanent self-realization, through which each category reveals the necessity of its next one (Pippin, 2018).

From Contingency to Necessity in the *Science of Logic*

Hegel's systematic treatment of necessity unfolds in the "Doctrine of Essence," particularly in the dialectic of possibility, actuality, and necessity (Hegel, 1812 – 1816/2010, Book Two, "Actuality"). Against both rationalist and empiricist accounts, Hegel insists that necessity cannot be understood as either analytic containment or empirical regularity. Instead, necessity is the unity of contingency and mediation. Hegel famously distinguishes between formal, relative and absolute necessity:

"Real necessity is determinate necessity; formal necessity does not yet have any content and determinateness in it. The determinateness of necessity consists in its having its, negation, contingency, within it. This is how it has shown itself to be" (Hegel, 1812 – 1816/2010, p. 485).

Pure contingency – what simply happens – appears at first as the negation of necessity. Yet this opposition rests on a false abstraction. Contingency is not the absence of reason; it is reason not yet grasped in its mediations. Hegel explicitly states the relation between real necessity and contingency in opposition to their "empty" abstract forms:

"[...] real necessity, although something necessary according to form, is still something limited according to content, and drives its contingency through the latter" (Hegel, 1812 – 1816/2010, p. 485).

Therefore, necessity is "blind" only so long as it is not comprehended. Once comprehended, necessity is revealed not as an external force that compels events, but as the intelligible articulation of the relations through which events come to be.

This view of necessity and contingency, not merely as abstract oppositions, but as real dialectically interconnected moments, allow for the further development of *actuality* (*Wirklichkeit*).

Necessity is not what excludes contingency; it is what includes contingency within a mediated structure. This directly undermines the classical model in which necessity is defined by the exclusion of alternatives. For Hegel, the path taken could indeed have been otherwise, yet once taken, it becomes intelligible as necessary. Necessity is thus not predictive but retrospective. Pippin (1989) explicitly shows how real necessity goes beyond the static “pre-given” reading of the concepts by stating, that “*necessity stems not from metaphysical commitments but from what other thoughts are possible or impossible*” (Pippin, 1989, p. 189). Pinkard (1994) also allow us to think about a “proto-retroactive” reading of Hegel’s speculative logic by arguing, that “*the necessity to be found in dialectical history of self-consciousness therefore is not a causal necessity but something more like the necessity to be found in a line of argument*” (Pinkard, 1994, p. 12). This shows us that necessity is not something pre-given in the premises of an argument, but it is rather the argument itself, which “creates” its own necessity.

Contradiction and Determinate Negation

The engine of this retrospective intelligibility is contradiction. For Hegel, contradiction is not a defect of reasoning but the dynamic through which finite determinations reveal their limits. Every determination is what it is by excluding what it is not. This exclusion, however, is internal to the determination itself. As such, finite determinations are inherently unstable. Hegel formalizes this instability through the concept of determinate negation (*bestimmte Negation*). Negation does not merely abolish a determination; it preserves it in transformed form. The negated moment is *aufgehoben* – cancelled, preserved, and elevated simultaneously – a determination becomes what it is only by passing through its own negation (Hegel, 1812 – 1816/2010, Book One, “Quality”).

From a modal perspective, this means that necessity is generated through contradiction rather than threatened by it. A determination becomes necessary not because it is free of contradiction, but because contradiction forces its transformation into a more comprehensive determination. As Houlgate has argued, Hegel’s logic does not violate the law of non-contradiction at the level of propositional inference; rather, it shows that static consistency is insufficient to account for conceptual development (Houlgate, 2006, pp. 31 – 35)⁸. The modal space is not fixed in advance - it is transformed through the very process it is meant to govern. Possibilities are opened and closed through development, and what counts as necessary shifts accordingly. Necessity is thus time-mediated without being relative in a trivial sense.

Hegel’s necessity is not grounded in a pre-existing total order; it is grounded in the ongoing articulation of a whole that exists only through its parts. As Pinkard

puts it, Hegel's rationality is "the result of the historical insufficiencies of preceeding account" (Pinkard, 1994, p. 22).

Hegel completes the Kantian insight that necessity must pass through time, but he does so by identifying necessity with the rational structure of temporal becoming itself. However, Hegel also retains a commitment to reconciliation – contradiction is ultimately aufgehoben within the whole. It is precisely this commitment that Lacan and Badiou will contest. They will accept Hegel's retroactive reading of necessity while rejecting the idea that the whole can ever fully reconcile itself. In this way, Hegel provides both the culmination of one trajectory and the point of departure for a more radically non-totalizing logic of modality. Dafov (2018) argues that the category of "whenness" is the immediate (organic) reference to temporality, while time is already a concept (i.e., mediated) (pp. 146 – 157). This gives rise to consciousness along with space, quality, quantity, etc. Before consciousness arises, the preconscious is only the categorical "when", "where", "how much" etc. (Dafov, 2012, pp. 75 – 79).

IV. Lacan – Lack, Retroactivity, and the Non-Totalizing Logic of Necessity

If Hegel radicalizes Kant by temporalizing necessity through contradiction, Lacan forces a rethinking of what modal claims can mean when symbolic closure fails. Where Hegel still aims at speculative totality, Lacan insists on a constitutive remainder: a structural impossibility that prevents closure. Lacan does not develop a theory of modality in the strict philosophical sense; rather, his psychoanalytic formalizations place pressure on classical modal categories by exposing the non-totalizability of the symbolic order within which necessity, possibility, and impossibility are articulated. In Lacan's work, necessity does not disappear, but it is decisively transformed. It becomes non-totalizing and retroactive, rather than a self-reconciling rational whole. The result is a logic in which necessity is not the endpoint of dialectical development, but a belated effect of symbolic inscription structured by lack.⁹

The Symbolic Order and the Impossibility of Closure

At the core of Lacan's theoretical intervention lies the thesis that the symbolic order is structurally incomplete. Language, law, and meaning form a system of differences, but this system cannot totalize itself. There is no final meta-language capable of guaranteeing its consistency or completeness. Lacan formalizes this thesis in multiple ways across his work: the barred Other ($\mathcal{A}$), the impossibility of the metalanguage, and the primacy of the signifier over meaning (Lacan, 1966/2006, pp. 688 – 690). This incompleteness has direct modal consequences. If there is no complete symbolic order, then necessity cannot be grounded in total intelligibility. There is no "all possible signifying worlds" against which what must be can be evaluated. Necessity, for Lacan, is therefore never the closure of a system; it is a constraint that emerges within a system that cannot close.

Joan Copjec has emphasized that Lacan's logic is not relativistic or arbitrary; it is rigorous precisely because it takes impossibility seriously as a structural feature of rationality (Copjec, 1994, pp. 15 – 37). The Real is not what lies outside language, but what marks the internal limit of symbolization. Necessity arises at this limit—not as a law deduced from completeness, but as a compulsion generated by incompleteness.

Logical Time and Retroaction (*après-coup*)

In *Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: A New Sophism*, Lacan offers neither a psychological account of decision nor a formal solution to a logical puzzle, but rather a minimal model of how necessity emerges through temporally structured intersubjective reasoning (Lacan, 1945/2006).

The decisive innovation of Lacan's analysis lies in the claim that certainty does not precede assertion, but is instead produced retroactively by the act of assertion itself. This reverses the classical modal hierarchy in which necessity grounds judgment, replacing it with a temporal logic in which necessity appears only *after* a decisive intervention. In this sense, Lacan's text provides a crucial missing link between transcendental modality and dialectical necessity: necessity is neither given a priori nor deduced from totality, but asserted in advance of its full justification and recognized as necessary only afterward.

Logical Time as a Temporal Operator of Necessity

Lacan's sophism articulates three moments of logical time: the *instant of the glance*, the *time for understanding*, and the *moment of concluding* (Lacan, 1945/2006, pp. 161 – 175). These moments do not correspond to chronological succession, but to distinct logical functions through which certainty becomes possible. The *time for understanding* is especially decisive. Here, subjects do not accumulate information but interpret the delay of others' action as meaningful. The absence of conclusion becomes itself a positive logical indicator. In this way, logical time operates not as a neutral medium but as an operator that transforms indeterminacy into necessity. The reasoning subject is forced to incorporate the temporal structure of others' hesitation into its own inference, producing a situation in which certainty can no longer be deduced but must be *anticipated*.

This anticipatory structure introduces a fundamental asymmetry into modal reasoning. Classical necessity presupposes closure and completeness; Lacanian necessity emerges precisely where closure is lacking. The subject concludes not because all alternatives have been eliminated, but because waiting longer would itself negate the conditions under which certainty can arise. Necessity thus appears as a temporal threshold, not as a logical endpoint.

Lacan names this structure anticipated certainty (*certitude anticipée*), a certainty that is asserted before its necessity can be demonstrated, yet which becomes necessary because it has been asserted (Lacan, 1945/2006, p. 174). This logic directly subverts the classical modal schema in which necessity precedes

assertion. Instead, necessity is revealed as a retroactive effect of a temporal act. This structure can be formalized in terms of *futur antérieur*: the subject acts in such a way that its assertion *will have been necessary*. The necessity of the conclusion is not contemporaneous with the decision, but is recognized only after the act has reorganized the logical field. What appears as contingent at the moment of decision is retrospectively reinscribed as necessary once the act has taken place.

Necessity no longer functions as an objective constraint imposed on the subject from outside, but as a retroactive effect of subjective commitment under temporal pressure. The subject becomes the site where contingency is converted into necessity – not through deduction, but through decision. Lacan’s logical time articulates a non-totalizing necessity: a necessity that does not close the field of possibilities in advance, but that emerges only through a risky intervention within that field. This logic resonates strongly with Hegel’s account of necessity as the truth of contingency, while simultaneously breaking with any conception of dialectical closure.

Lacan formalizes this in his later work through the distinction between the possible, the contingent, the necessary, and the impossible (Seminar XI, 1964/1998, pp. 164 – 157). The impossible – the Real – is what structures necessity from within, without being assimilable to it. Consequently, we can distinguish between the accidental and “accidental” (Vidiniski, 2016, p. 92). Vidiniski demonstrates this by examining the concepts of τύχη (*tykhe*) and αὐτόματον (*automaton*) in Lacan’s theory. *Tykhe* emphasizes the unconscious as a cause, while *automaton* emphasizes the manifestation of the unconscious in the chain of signifiers.

V. Badiou — Event, Fidelity, and Post-Evental Necessity

Badiou offers the most radical reformulation of necessity in the trajectory traced by this paper by breaking decisively with any attempt to ground necessity in being, structure, or law. Badiou is explicit that the event cannot be grasped through modal categories such as possibility or necessity. The event is not merely contingent rather than necessary, but withdraws from modal evaluation altogether. Alain Badiou does not reject the concept of modality entirely, but he strictly subordinates it to mathematical ontology (set theory) and logical appearing (category theory). He rejects the classical “metaphysical” modality found in analytic philosophy – specifically the Leibnizian model of “possible worlds” (Badiou, 2009, pp. 328 – 329). Instead, Badiou replaces standard modality with two internal structures – modality as intensity of appearing (degrees of existence) and modality as “evental possibility” by distinguishing between potentiality (what is already allowed by the current laws of a situation) and the possibility opened by an Event.

The originality of Badiou’s position lies in the strict separation he enforces between ontology and truth. Ontology (as set theory) describes what there is; truth procedures describe what comes to be necessary *for a subject* without being

derivable from what there is. This separation allows Badiou to articulate a notion of necessity that is absolute without being totalizing, binding without being grounded in a complete order.

Situation, Multiplicity, and the Impossibility of Totality

Badiou's ontological starting point is the thesis that **being qua being is pure multiplicity**, formalized through axiomatic set theory. There is no One that grounds multiplicity; unity appears only as an effect of structuration, what Badiou calls the *count-as-one* (Badiou, 1988/2005, Meditation 1, pp. 23 – 30). Every situation is a structured presentation of multiplicities, but this structuring operation never exhausts being. This has decisive modal consequences. Because there is no “set of all sets”, there is no ontological totality that could function as a complete space of possibilities. Modal closure – the presupposition that all possibilities can, in principle, be surveyed – is therefore impossible at the level of being itself. Necessity cannot be grounded in the structure of being, because being is fundamentally inconsistent (in the technical sense that it lacks a totalizing One). Badiou does not argue that we *cannot know* the totality – he argues that there is no totality to be known. As Hallward emphasizes, Badiou's ontology “the claims of truth always exceed our ability to demonstrate their necessity” (Hallward, 2003, p. 155). If being itself is non-totalizable, then necessity cannot be defined as truth in all possible worlds, because the space of possible worlds cannot be completed.

The Event as Ontological Rupture and Modal Impossibility

The event is Badiou's name for what happens at the limit of a situation's capacity to present and count. An event is not simply a rare occurrence or an improbable fact; it is undecidable according to the axioms and rules governing the situation (Badiou, 1988/2005, Meditation 17, pp. 179 – 184). From a modal perspective, the event occupies a paradoxical position. It is not merely contingent in the sense of being one option among others. Rather, it is *unassignable within the situation's modal space*. One cannot say, prior to the event, that it was possible, necessary, or impossible according to the situation's rules. The event ruptures the very framework within which such modal predicates make sense. This is why Badiou insists that the event cannot be necessary. To claim that an event was necessary would be to reinsert it into the logic of the situation and thereby annul its eventual status¹⁰. As Badiou writes, “there cannot exist y regulated and necessary procedure which is adapted to the decision concerning the eventness of a multiple” (Badiou, 1988/2005, p. 201). The event is therefore radically contingent – but not arbitrary. Its contingency names the absence of ontological grounding, not the presence of randomness.

Fidelity, Subjectivation, and the Temporal Construction of Necessity

Necessity enters Badiou's philosophy not at the level of being or the event, but at the level of fidelity. Fidelity is the process by which a subject commits to an event and works out its consequences within the situation. This process is neither descriptive nor contemplative – it is performative and constructive. Through fidelity,

a truth-procedure unfolds. Statements that were previously undecidable become decided, connections that were previously unthinkable become binding. Over time, this procedure generates a new regime of intelligibility. It is only within this regime that necessity appears. What becomes necessary is not the event itself, but the consequences that fidelity draws from it (Badiou, 1988/2005, Meditation 23, pp. 232 – 237). This necessity is therefore retroactive. From the standpoint of fidelity, certain consequences appear as unavoidable – *this had to follow*. But this “had to” does not refer backward to a logical law – it refers inward to the consistency of the truth-procedure itself. As Toscano puts it, Badiou offers a logic of consequence without preordination (Toscano, 2006, pp. 187 – 195). Badiou situates necessity entirely within a truth-procedure that is explicitly finite, localized, and subtractive from being. There is no final reconciliation and no symbolic closure—only the ongoing labor of fidelity.

Badiou sometimes captures this structure through formulations that explicitly invoke retroactive temporality. A truth is what “will have been” necessary once it is fully articulated, even though nothing necessitated its emergence (Badiou, 2009, pp. 391 – 394). This *futur antérieur* is not historical inevitability, but logical retroaction internal to a procedure. There is no necessity inscribed in the order of being, no hidden teleology driving events, and no total horizon in which all truths could be reconciled. Necessity exists, but only as the internal constraint of a truth that depends entirely on a contingent break. The necessity at stake here is therefore not a modal determination of the event itself, but a post-evental constraint produced within a truth-procedure once the event has already displaced the modal framework of the situation.

VI. Conclusion – Necessity Without Totality

This paper has argued that necessity must be thought after time, not before it. Against the metaphysical overview of necessity as atemporal, closed, and independent of becoming, the analyses of Kant, Hegel, Lacan, and Badiou converge on a different thesis – necessity is retroactively constituted, internally fractured, and inseparable from temporal processes structured by contradiction and non-totalization.

Across all these trajectories, a consistent logical pattern emerges. Necessity is not what constrains time from outside, it is what crystallizes within time as a result of processes that reorganize the space of possibility itself. What becomes necessary was genuinely contingent, what binds was not pre-inscribed. This does not weaken necessity, but transforms its meaning. Necessity becomes stronger precisely because it is not grounded in a total order – it binds without relying on closure, foundation, or pre-established harmony. In this sense, the concept of necessity without totality names a distinctive form of rationality – one that is binding without being predestined, universal without being closed, and necessary without being timeless.

NOTES

1. The claim here is not that pre-modern theories ignore time altogether, but that they do not treat temporality as logically transformative of necessity itself.
2. The present argument does not contest the formal sophistication of temporal modal logics, but targets the metaphysical assumption that the space of possibilities remains stable across time.
3. There is a family resemblance here to inferentialist and pragmatist reconceptions of necessity—necessity as what follows from rules of use or social practices of justification—though the present paper will keep its center of gravity on post-Kantian temporality, contradiction, and non-totalization rather than on purely semantic conventionalism.
4. This point is often overlooked because Kant's formulation "existence at all times" invites a metaphysical reading. However, within the framework of schematism, "all times" refers to the rule-governed synthesis of temporal intuition, not to an atemporal mode of being. The necessity in question is thus inseparable from the structure of temporal judgment.
5. Friedman's reading does not collapse Kant into historicism, but it does suggest that the conditions of necessity are not as immune to temporal transformation as Kant hoped.
6. The present argument therefore does not ascribe a doctrine of retroactivity to Kant himself, rejecting the academic debate around this question. Rather, it identifies and uses this particular **structural tension** within Kant's system – although transcendental necessity is a priori and invariant, it can become operative only through **temporal schematization**, which introduces an unavoidable dependence on time for the application of modal categories. It is this unresolved tension—between transcendental necessity and its temporal conditions of application—that later thinkers radicalize in explicitly retroactive directions.
7. It should be noted that Hegel's conception of necessity remains a matter of ongoing scholarly debate, particularly with respect to whether necessity ultimately serves reconciliation and systematic closure or whether it is better understood as emerging retrospectively through mediation and contradiction. The present article does not seek to resolve this debate. Rather, it deliberately emphasizes those dimensions of Hegel's logic in which necessity is **not presupposed in advance**, but becomes intelligible only through the temporal development of a process. This emphasis is methodologically motivated by the broader aim of the paper: to trace a conception of necessity that is binding without being pre-given, and that therefore resists being grounded in a completed or fully transparent totality. Therefore, the debate is significant "as such" (as existing) for the further development of the current paper, but it is not required to fully accept either of the two sides for the scope of the current argument.
8. This point is often misunderstood as an endorsement of logical inconsistency. Hegel's claim is not that contradictions are true in the same sense, but that conceptual determination is inherently self-undermining and therefore temporally unstable. Stephen Houlgate puts explicit emphasis on the fact that

- "[...] Hegel does not have it in mind deliberately to reject any of the traditional laws of thought. In fact, he is himself extremely critical of what he perceives to be the "*crude rejection of all method*" in the work of Romantics" (Houlgate, 2006, p. 31).
9. The claim here is not that Lacan explicitly theorizes modality, but that his account of lack, impossibility, and retroactive determination provides structural resources for a philosophical reconstruction of necessity once symbolic closure is abandoned.
10. This inversion of cause and effect resonates with Freud's own remarks on deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*), but Lacan formalizes it logically rather than psychologically. The necessity at stake is not developmental determinism but structural compulsion generated by symbolic inscription.

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