

# The Conflict Between Philosophy and Design: The Dilemma of Artistic Independence

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## Abstract

**This study conducts an in-depth exploration of the limitations associated with applying Alain Badiou's "inaesthetic" artistic perspective to modern product design. Firstly, it reviews the current state of research on Badiou and his "inaesthetic" both domestically and internationally, noting that domestic research remains relatively limited while foreign studies are more in-depth and extensive. Then, the paper outlines the philosophical underpinnings of Badiou's "inaesthetic" artistic view, positing that artistic truth emerges from artistic events, which serve to reveal and communicate truth. Art should be independent of market forces and economic interests, thereby preserving its autonomy and critical capacity. Subsequently, the paper discusses modern product design from an aesthetic standpoint, emphasizing that product design must prioritize the balance between form and function, visual allure and artistic sensibility, as well as the ability to resonate with users' emotions. Finally, this paper identifies the limitations of "inaesthetic" in modern product design, including internal theoretical inconsistencies, contradictions between abstract concepts and practical implementation, conflicts between user-centered design and subjective agency, and tensions between commercial demands and artistic independence.**

## Keywords

**Badiou; inaesthetic; product design; limitations.**

## 1. Research Background

Alain Badiou (Alain Badiou) is a contemporary French philosopher. His "inaesthetic" artistic perspective challenges traditional aesthetic theories, seeking to uncover truths concealed beneath appearances and restore to art an independent voice and significance<sup>[1]</sup>. Against the backdrop of globalization and commercialization, modern product design must not only fulfill practical needs but also integrate aesthetic considerations and user experience. Badiou's "inaesthetic" theory emphasizes art's independence and critical function, opposing the commercialization of art and marketization, while asserting the crucial viewpoint that art should preserve its autonomy<sup>[2]</sup>. However, this theory encounters numerous challenges in practical application, including its inherent abstractness, tensions with user-centered design principles, and conflicts arising from commercial demands. This paper aims to conduct an in-depth exploration of the limitations of Badiou's "inaesthetic" artistic perspective in modern product design, analyze its theoretical underpinnings and practical application dilemmas, and review the current state of research. Through this research, new perspectives and theoretical support are intended to be provided for modern product design, while potential issues of the

"inaesthetic" theory in practical implementation are revealed, offering references for relevant academic research and professional practice.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Domestic Research Status

#### 2.1.1. CNKI Document Retrieval

Published academic papers were selected as the research objects through the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) retrieval platform. The literature screening process involved the following steps: first, the literature type was set to academic journals; second, themed searches were conducted using keywords such as "Badiou" without restricting publication years (as of May 25, 2024); third, documents were manually reviewed and screened to exclude irrelevant content, resulting in 254 relevant papers; finally, 13 missing highly cited and highly downloaded papers were supplemented, totaling 267 papers for analysis. Based on these data, this study's analytical process included the following steps: the main information of the 267 papers was imported into the bibliometric tool CiteSpace (6.2.R6) for processing; fields including disciplines, keywords, and subject terms were extracted from the collected data and analyzed chronologically; CiteSpace software was used to count high-frequency keywords, analyze keyword frequencies, and interpret the results, as shown in Table 1. Annual publication summaries are presented in Figure 1, and the distribution of subject disciplines is shown in Figure 2.

Table 1: Contentstatistical Analysis of High-Frequency Keywords

Number	Keywords	Frequency	Centrality
1	Badiou	118	0.78
2	Event	58	0.28
3	Truth	49	0.2
4	Communism	29	0.09
5	Alain Badiou	22	0.14
6	Main Body	21	0.05
7	Qi Zeke	15	0.07
8	Politics	14	0.07
9	Philosophy of Events	14	0.04
10	Non-Aesthetics	11	0.08
11	Mathematical Ontology	11	0.04
12	Marx	9	0
13	Ontology	7	0.02
14	Art	7	0.02

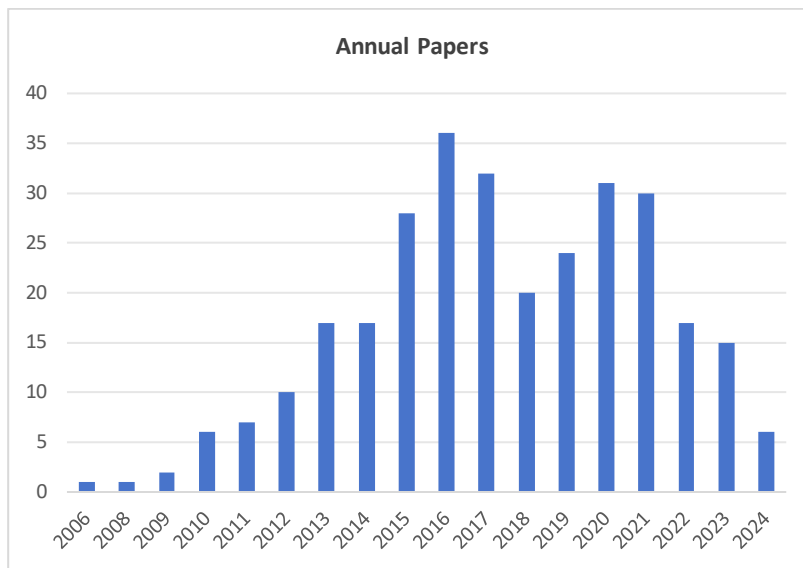


Figure 1: Annual publications

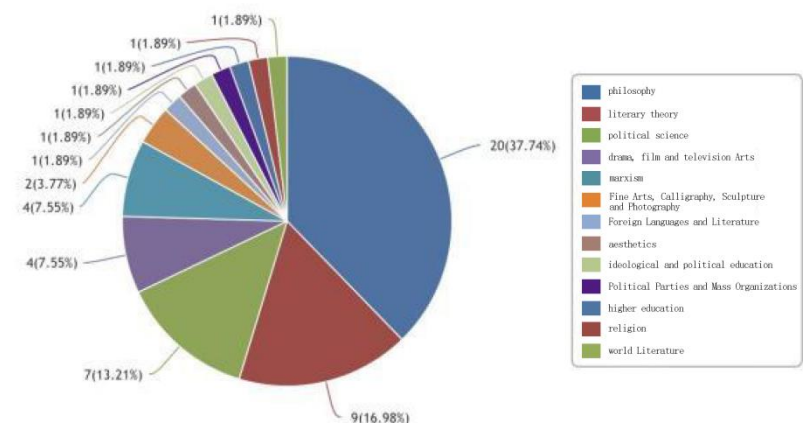


Figure 2: Distribution of Subject Areas

**2.1.2. Related Academic Research**

Compared to international research, domestic studies on Badiou are still in their initial stage with relatively weak research strength<sup>[3]</sup>. The interpretation of Badiou's major philosophical and aesthetic works, such as "Logics of Worlds" "Infinite Thought", remains insufficient, which poses a significant challenge and limitation to Badiou studies.

Overall, there are few monographs, while although the number of papers is relatively large, most of these studies still remain at the introductory stage, mainly focusing on the following three aspects: review and promotion, commentary on works, and the fields of political sociology and artistic aesthetics<sup>[4]</sup>. Generally speaking, Lü Qingping and Cai Daping first mentioned Badiou's concept of "inaesthetic" in "A Review of Western Academic Research on Badiou's Thought"; Du Shengfeng's "The New Foundation of Philosophical Thinking" mainly concentrates on the interpretation of Badiou's philosophical theories, such as concepts like subject, ontology, and truth.

In the field of Badiou's "inaesthetic" research, Bi Risheng's two seminal papers—"The 'inaesthetic' Conception of the Quarrel Between Poetry and Philosophy: A Preliminary Exploration of Alain Badiou's Literary and Artistic Thought" and "A Preliminary Study of Alain Badiou's 'Inaesthetic' Thought"—are recognized as groundbreaking contributions, marked by their avant-garde and pioneering significance. However, the theoretical analysis and

development of "inaesthetic" remain comparatively underdeveloped. While the author positions "inaesthetic" as a fourth aesthetic modality to reconcile the poetry-philosophy debate, insufficient attention is given to its philosophical underpinnings, historical milieu, theoretical ramifications, or artistic applications. On the intersection of aesthetics and mathematics, Ma Yuanlong's "inaesthetic, Badiou's Aesthetics" not only delineates the theoretical framework of "inaesthetic" but also offers a compelling comparative analysis of the affinities between poetry and mathematics. While these studies have provided a foundation for discussing the "inaesthetic" theory, more in-depth research is still required.

## 2.2. Current Situation of Foreign Research

### 2.2.1. Overall Research

The study primarily undertakes a systematic examination and interpretation of Alain Badiou's aesthetic theories, encompassing both independent explications and comparative analyses. In the realm of critical scholarship, Nicolas Alvarado's "The Poetics and Philosophy of Alain Badiou" emerges as a seminal work, while Benjamin Noys's "Grand Construction": Badiou and the Politics of Aesthetics partially reveals Badiou's aesthetic ambitions through its conceptual framework. The latter's notion of "grand construction" is strategically deployed to challenge postmodernism's deconstructive tendencies. Andrew Gibson's "Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency" effectively synthesizes Badiou's artistic principles with his philosophical trajectory, providing a lucid yet penetrating analysis of fundamental concepts including being, event, subject, and truth. Gibson meticulously traces the theoretical lineage of Badiou's philosophy, conducting thorough examinations from Plato through Lacan, Heidegger, to Althusser, thereby revealing the profound intellectual foundations and developmental trajectory of Badiou's philosophical system.

### 2.2.2. Specific Research

A layered analysis is conducted on specific art forms including film, theater, dance, music, poetry, and prose, with particular emphasis placed on film and theater as the primary subjects of discussion<sup>[5]</sup>. Artistic texts are typically analyzed and reflected upon by scholars through the lens of the "inaesthetic" theory, which facilitates both focused investigations into these distinct art forms and systematic examinations within the theoretical framework. Alex Ling's "Badiou and Cinema" offers a comprehensive exploration of the connections between Badiou's philosophy and artistic expression (notably cinema), delving into characteristics such as impurity, truthfulness, and timelessness. The work demonstrates exceptional depth in vertical analysis and breadth in horizontal expansion, serving as an invaluable resource that has informed numerous Chinese scholars in their subsequent research. Furthermore, in related scholarly works, Denis Levy's "Badiou, Art, and Cinema" and Martin Puchner's "Badiou's Theater" offer comprehensive examinations of cinema and theater respectively.

## 3. An Overview of Badiou's "inaesthetic" Artistic Concept

### 3.1. The Philosophical Foundation of Non - Aesthetic Artistic View

The philosophical foundation of artistic truth is grounded in the philosophy of the event. According to Badiou, truth is generated through events, with artistic truth specifically emerging from artistic events<sup>[6]</sup>. This conception not only directly engages with art but also forms the theoretical bedrock of "inaesthetic." Badiou contends that coherent epistemic sequences—exemplified by schools like Wittgensteinian thought—produce illusory knowledge, whereas truth manifests as a rupture and transcendence of such coherence, thereby constituting an event. The understanding of events necessitates a return to the language of set theory, an approach Badiou consistently adopts in articulating his philosophical ideas<sup>[7]</sup>. Sets, in their philosophical essence, possess the unique ability to unveil and generate new truths. By

employing the concept of sets, Badiou delves into the profound interplay between mathematics and philosophy, aiming to construct a groundbreaking theoretical framework that surpasses conventional boundaries in both disciplines. Building upon this foundation, Badiou identifies four truth procedures—art, mathematics, politics, and love—and further demonstrates how truth procedures (exemplified by artistic truth) relate to truth itself.

### **3.2. The Concept of Artistic Truth of "Non-Aesthetics"**

Badiou's "inaesthetic" conception of artistic truth is grounded in the principle that art's primary function extends beyond aesthetic creation to the revelation and communication of truth. He contends that art constitutes a singular truth procedure, enabling artists to transcend conventional paradigms and disclose novel modes of being and cognition<sup>[8]</sup>. Rather than being reductively interpreted as mere beauty, art should be recognized as a medium capable of reflecting profound realities. Badiou resists the commercialization of art and its market-driven tendencies, maintaining that such developments undermine art's autonomy and its capacity to convey truth. Artistic practice must be safeguarded from market imperatives and economic considerations to maintain its self-determination and critical potential.

Moreover, Badiou underscores art's distinctive nature and autonomy, characterizing it as a unique form of practice governed by its own intrinsic logic and principles. He contends that art, through its distinctive modes of expression, generates novel forms of existence and perception, thereby offering fresh experiences and insights to human thought and sensibility. The autonomy of art allows reality to be critically examined and reflected upon in a unique way, uncovering truths hidden beneath the surface of daily life. In summary, Badiou's non-aesthetic conception of artistic truth asserts that the genuine value of art resides in its ability to disclose truth, rather than in the pursuit of sensory gratification or commercial worth.

## **4. Modern Product Design from an Aesthetic Perspective**

From an aesthetic perspective, product design emphasizes the balance between form and function, with a focus on visual appeal and artistic expression. To enhance a product's market competitiveness and user experience, designers must harmonize shape, color, texture, and proportion. Aesthetic design not only addresses visual appearance but also prioritizes emotional resonance with users, conveying sentiments through design details and overall style to foster an enjoyable usage experience. The integration of culture and style is equally critical; unique aesthetic value is created when designers incorporate diverse cultural elements<sup>[9]</sup>. Innovation and distinctiveness are particularly vital in aesthetic design. By continuously exploring new concepts, breaking free from traditional frameworks, and pursuing exquisite craftsmanship and meticulous detailing, designers elevate the overall aesthetic quality of products.

In addition, the three-level emotional design concept proposed by American scholar Norman—encompassing the instinctive, behavioral, and reflective levels—plays an increasingly important role in today's design field<sup>[10]</sup>. The instinctive level focuses on a product's appearance and tactile qualities, triggering users' intuitive responses; the behavioral level emphasizes usability and functionality, enhancing user satisfaction with operations; and the reflective level engages users' deep-seated emotions and cognition, fostering long-term brand loyalty and personal significance. Through these three levels, designers can more comprehensively understand and address users' emotional needs, thereby improving a product's overall user experience. Based on this theory, the aesthetic value of products can be divided into three dimensions, with the specific structure illustrated in Figure 3.

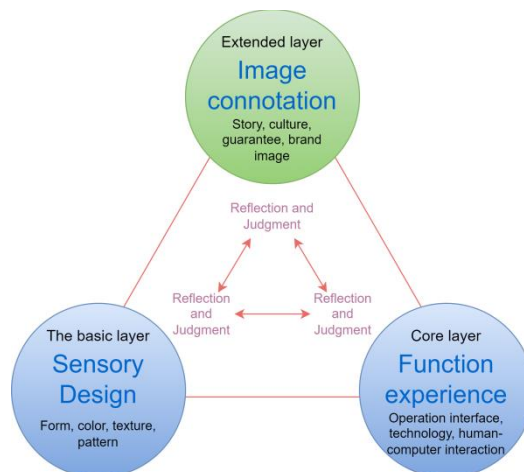


Figure 3: Two or more references

In specific product design, Figure 4—6 showcases headphones featuring decorative patterns inspired by lacquerware unearthed from the tomb of Marquis Haihun of the Han Dynasty. These patterns are skillfully adapted from Han Dynasty geometric motifs, delivering striking decorative effects while aligning with modern aesthetic preferences. They enhance visual appeal, evoke Oriental charm, and embody a distinct "Chinese style." In addition, the Swiss watch brand Jean Dunand draws inspiration from Chinese lacquerware, as exemplified by the model in Figure 5. This watch design employs the iconic red and black hues characteristic of Chinese lacquerware, complemented by tasteful openwork carving. This approach not only intensifies the product's visual impact but also perpetuates its traditional heritage.



Figure 4: Geometric pattern drawing



Figure 5: Headphone products



Figure 6: Jean Dunand wristwatch

## 5. The Limitations of the "inaesthetic" Artistic Concept in Modern Product Design

### 5.1. The Theoretical Limitations of the "inaesthetic" Artistic Concept

#### 5.1.1. Self-Contradictions Within the Theory

In Badiou's philosophical system, the four truth procedures—science, art, politics, and love—are regarded as immanent and singular, implying that truth emerges as an internal outcome of these procedures<sup>[11]</sup>. By emphasizing the singularity and immanence of truth, Badiou does not elaborate on the potential mutual influences among these four truth procedures. While he provides in-depth interpretations of each individual truth procedure, he offers no detailed account of how they might interact with one another. For Badiou, philosophy operates on the foundation of these four truth procedures, with its task being to demonstrate their harmonious coexistence. How, then, can these four truth procedures exist in complete independence while maintaining such purity? The connections and intersections between them are obviously inevitable. Badiou was not unaware of this blind spot in his theory; he recognized the problem but failed to propose a concrete solution. Even in "Logics of Worlds", these four truth procedures are still treated as mutually independent.

Although Badiou has continuously revised his views on art, from "Theory of the Subject" in 1988 to the present, he has maintained that despite their mutual permeation and interrelation, art and politics remain independent procedural systems. He endeavors to avoid suturing the four truth procedures together, such as the fusion of art and politics.

In summary, while Badiou acknowledges the potential connections among the four truth procedures, he insists on their independence and has not put forward a clear solution to account for the interactions between these procedures.

#### 5.1.2. The Limitation and Selectivity of the "inaesthetic" Artistic Concept

The "inaesthetic" proposed by Alain Badiou is not a fixed concept; it cannot encompass all types of art, thus exhibiting selectivity and limitations in the choice of artistic forms<sup>[12]</sup>. His theory tends to favor philosophical interpretation, which imposes certain constraints on the practical application of "inaesthetic". Badiou argues that "inaesthetic" constitutes a passive philosophical modality, awaiting art's autonomous discovery of truth. Nevertheless, he struggles to fully and openly permit the unrestricted inclusion of all artistic forms, maintaining specific evaluative criteria for the significance and quality of art. Badiou's conservative stance toward art is evident and pervasive; he has consistently maintained that the sole and paramount value of rock music lies in entertaining the masses. Rancière's criticism that Badiou's "inaesthetic" merely selects appropriate artistic forms rather than encompassing all artistic categories is indeed grounded in fact. "inaesthetic" does focus exclusively on artistic truths that satisfy singularity and immanence. In other words, Badiou does not treat artistic truth as an object; instead, he evaluates its fidelity to various artistic events, departing from the conventions of traditional philosophy.

Furthermore, Badiou argues that "inaesthetic" art constitutes a specific truth procedure that satisfies both immanence and uniqueness. This conception of artistic truth repudiates the traditional subject-object relationship between the artwork and the author. It is neither a specific artistic form or style, nor an "objectified" period in art history, nor a technical game.

### 5.2. The Limitations of "Inaesthetic" in Modern Product Design

#### 5.2.1. Contradiction Between Abstraction and Concrete Operation

The operability of Badiou's abstract philosophical concepts in practical design is clearly problematic. While Badiou's theories—such as event theory and truth procedures—offer profound intellectual inspiration, they lack concrete methodological guidance for practical

application. When translating these highly abstract concepts into specific design strategies, designers often feel confused and directionless. Philosophical theories demand prolonged contemplation and in-depth theoretical inquiry<sup>[13]</sup>, whereas design practice requires rapid responsiveness and concrete operational steps, creating an obvious contradiction between their respective rhythms and requirements. Furthermore, designers generally lack thorough understanding of complex philosophical theories, which further limits the application of Badiou's philosophy in design. Therefore, while Badiou's philosophy offers rich intellectual resources for design, the tension between its abstract nature and the practical operational demands of design practice hinders its widespread application in actual design.

### **5.2.2. Conflict Between User-Centric Design and Subjectivity**

Badiou's concept of subjectivity stands in clear contradiction to modern user-centered design principles. He emphasizes the significance of subjectivity, asserting that the uniqueness and agency of the individual are crucial and indispensable elements in the creative process<sup>[14]</sup>. However, modern user-centered design philosophy prioritizes driving the design process through user feedback and needs to ensure product usability and market acceptance. This user-centric approach may overlook designers' own creativity and subjectivity, resulting in designs that tend toward mediocrity and homogeneity. The subjectivity in Badiou's philosophy underscores the designer's dominant role in creation, conflicting with the primacy placed on user needs and feedback within user-centered design idea. How to balance designers' subjectivity with user needs and feedback remains a critical issue requiring resolution. This contradiction limits the application of Badiou's theory of subjectivity in user-centered design methodologies.

### **5.2.3. The Contradiction between Commercial Demands and Artistic Autonomy**

There is an obvious conflict between Badiou's stance against consumer culture and the commercial demands of modern product design. Badiou's philosophy emphasizes the independence and purity of art, opposing the instrumentalization and commercialization of both art and design. However, modern product design often must cater to market demands and commercial interests to achieve economic viability. This commercial imperative stands in opposition to the artistic independence Badiou advocates. While pursuing creativity and artistic expression, designers must consider market and consumer needs, potentially requiring them to compromise and adjust their design philosophies. Badiou's opposition to consumer culture renders his philosophy difficult to fully implement within commercial product design. How to maintain the independence and artistic value of design while meeting commercial needs remains an ongoing challenge. This tension limits the application of Badiou's philosophy in commercial product design, hindering its ability to fully play a role in practical design.

## **6. Conclusion**

Badiou's "inaesthetic" artistic perspective challenges traditional aesthetics by revealing truths hidden beneath appearances, enabling art to reclaim an independent voice and meaning, thus breaking free from philosophical constraints. Furthermore, the "inaesthetic" viewpoint offers significant reference value for China's artistic discourse, which has long been influenced by Western deconstructionism and postmodernism. Notably, Badiou's distinctive interpretations of artistic forms such as poetry, film, drama, and dance provide new perspectives, foster the diversified development of artistic concepts, and offer guiding significance for aesthetic interpretations of artistic creation. While "inaesthetic" as a theory has injected fresh vitality into aesthetics, it still exhibits numerous imperfections. For example, contradictions exist within this theory, which also fails to encompass all art forms and leans more toward

philosophical art. Furthermore, as a theory opposing postmodernism, "inaesthetic" is sometimes not examined from a fully objective and dialectical perspective.

The application of Badiou's philosophy in practical design faces three major challenges: its abstract nature conflicts with the specific operational requirements of design practice, making it difficult for designers to translate highly abstract concepts into concrete strategies; its concept of subjectivity clashes with user-centered design principles, as Badiou's emphasis on the designer's dominant role contradicts modern, user demand -driven methodologies; and its opposition to consumer culture stands in tension with commercial needs, forcing designers to compromise with market demands while pursuing creative and artistic expression. These contradictions have restricted the widespread application of Badiou's philosophy in modern product design.

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