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# Experiencing Nothing: Anxiety and the Philosophy of Alain Badiou

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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EXPERIENCING NOTHING: ANXIETY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALAIN  
BADIOU

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## Abstract

This thesis proposes to supplement the philosophy of Alain Badiou with an existentialist account of anxiety. After identifying a “phenomenological deficit” in Badiou’s thought, I argue that Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre provide the conceptual resources for theorizing the affective emergence of subjectivity from within the confines of a determinant situation. My contention is that anxiety is the rare and unsettling experience of *nothing* that makes apparent the underlying contingency of all situations, thereby prompting new modes of subjective behavior. To this extent, I treat anxiety as the in-situation *experience* of an event that may occasion the transition from a determined-individual to a determining-subject.

## Keywords

Badiou, Anxiety, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Gillespie, Lacan

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I dedicate this text to my parents, for every reason under the sun.

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## Abbreviations of Works Frequently Cited

### **Alain Badiou**

- TS    *Theory of the Subject*  
BE    *Being and Event*  
E     *Ethics*  
LW    *Logics of Worlds*

### **Søren Kierkegaard**

- CA    *The Concept of Anxiety*  
SD    *The Sickness unto Death*  
FT    *Fear and Trembling*

### **Martin Heidegger**

- BT    *Being and Time*  
BW    *Basic Writings*

### **Jean-Paul Sartre**

- BN    *Being and Nothingness*  
SM    *Search for a Method*

### **Jacques Lacan**

- SVII  *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*  
SX    *Seminar X: Anxiety*

### **Sam Gillespie**

- MN    *The Mathematics of Novelty*

All other citations follow standard MLA guidelines, noting year and page number where appropriate.

We would rather be ruined than changed.  
We would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the moment and let our illusions  
die.

W.H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety*







## Introduction

In 1967, Alain Badiou, then only thirty years old, joined the editorial board of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, a student-led journal housed at the *École normale supérieure* that privileged the “scientific” analysis of objective structures over and against those theories based on the categories of lived or individual experience.<sup>1</sup> Against the phenomenological-humanism that then dominated the French intellectual landscape (e.g., the work of Sartre, Camus, Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, Fanon, and Lefebvre—all of whom, in one way or another, maintained a tenuous theoretical connection to the experiential philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger), the members of the *Cahiers* turned instead to an Althusserian- and Lacanian-inspired understanding of *science* as that which could penetrate the ideological illusions that govern human reality. To their mind, phenomenological experience was invariably determined by a pre-existent structure that circumscribed its limits in such a way as to ensure the reproduction of the *status quo*—in other words, that human experience *was* ideology. Therefore, they believed, only science, i.e., the objective analysis of formal structures stripped of all reference to individual/ideological experience, offered any hope of positively transforming their contemporary political situation. Consequently, in order to “redefine a genuinely emancipatory politics,” Badiou and the young men of the *Cahiers*’ project believed it was imperative to remove the illusive category of experience from theoretical analysis all together (E 6-7).<sup>2</sup> This was the essential ambition of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*: to develop a comprehensive theory of structural transformation without any reference to the supposedly deluded psychology of an individual, relying, in its place, on the strictly *formal* interplay of structure and subject as theorized by Althusser and Lacan.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following brief gloss of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, relies in large part on the comprehensive history of the journal provided by Knox Peden and Peter Hallward in their two-volume collection, *Concept and Form* (2012).

<sup>2</sup> In his 1955 memoir, Claude Levi-Strauss, himself an important forerunner of the *Cahiers*, stresses the need to finally reject the “continuity between reality and experience” assumed by phenomenology and “fulfilled by existentialism,” and instead to “repudiate experience” which constitutes the “illusions of subjectivity” (62). Badiou’s mature turn to set theory, arguably, is precisely this construction of an ontology without any recourse to experience.

<sup>3</sup> The basic contention drawn from Althusser and Lacan is that, formally, every structure must contain some imaginary and therefore fragile point capable of being grasped and transformed by an immanently *included* subjectivity. This position is explicitly developed by Jacques-Alain Miller in his definitive *Cahiers*’ text, “*Action de la Structure*” (1968/2012).

In a retrospective testament to the concept of fidelity as it would later be elaborated in his mature philosophical system, Badiou has remained committed to this original ambition throughout his entire philosophical career. To this extent, Peter Hallward argues that of all the founding members of *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, “only Badiou has remained faithful to the original Althusserian-Lacanian project” (2012: 36).<sup>4</sup> And, similarly, Badiou himself, in his 1993 text, *Ethics*, repeatedly defends his longstanding commitment to the theoretical anti-humanism of Althusser, Lacan, and Foucault (E 6-7). It should come as no surprise, then, that the same theoretical difficulties engendered by the novel philosophical insights proposed in the *Cahiers* continue to haunt Badiou’s work today. Generally, this means that in barring the category of experience from his philosophy, Badiou opens himself to accusations of undue theoreticism and abstraction. More specifically, this means that Badiou’s philosophy is unable to account for the phenomenological *emergence* of a transformative subjectivity from *within* the rigid confines of a determinant situation. His philosophy, at least as it currently exists, cannot provide any intermediate psychological *relation* that would connect the determined-individual to the determining-subject; or, put differently, his system lacks any concrete understanding of the individual’s in-situation experience of an event’s intrusion. There is thus what I would call a phenomenological deficit in Badiou’s thought that must be supplemented if his system is to maintain its internal force and coherence. The creation of just such a supplement is the aim of this thesis.

While I am by no means the first to draw attention to this deficiency in Badiou’s philosophy, there exists relatively little scholarship on Badiou’s philosophical relationship to the category of experience. We can, however, divide those few who do address this issue into two main sets. In the first, the absence of experience as a valid analytic category is subsumed into larger criticisms of Badiou’s philosophy as a whole. Included in this set are those such as Peter Hallward and Adrian Johnston, who treat this absence as part and parcel of what they claim to be the absolutely non-relational orientation of Badiou’s philosophy. For Hallward (2003), Badiou’s steadfast resistance to any dialectically mediated relation between a situation and its void (or, for that matter, being and event), “automatically blocks any

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<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Peter Osborne attests to this fidelity in his treatment of *Being and Event* as the culmination of the definitively structuralist work initiated by Badiou in the late-sixties (2007: 27).

productive exploration of relationality, that is, an exploration that is able to conceive of relations in terms more nuanced than those of inclusion or subtraction” (2003: 274).<sup>5</sup> Hallward condemns Badiou for being an eminently singular or absolutist philosopher, one who is unable to provide any subtle explanation of how truth is unequivocally subtracted from the objective mediation of a situation (2003: 287). For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that Hallward’s criticisms draw attention to the absence of *any relation whatsoever* (affective, psychological, or otherwise) between post-evental “immortality,” which is guided by truth, and the pre-evental mortality or finitude of situated individuals. In a similar fashion, Adrian Johnston (2009) understands the non-dialectical bifurcation of Badiou’s philosophy as potentially foreclosing agency in the paralysis of a pre-evental situation.<sup>6</sup> In particular, Johnston takes issue with Badiou’s general refusal to develop a theory of pre-evental affectivity or experience that could potentially “force” the occurrence of an event. As a corrective, he proposes to supplement Badiou’s philosophy with a “Leninist-type bravery buttressing the confidence to bet on change before it comes” (105). Taking his cue from the early-Badiou who, in turn, was drawing as much on Mao as Mallarmé and Lacan, Johnston proceeds to argue that this pre-evental “courage” might be the precise resource needed for individuals to “push” events into existence.

Unfortunately, although both Hallward and Johnston recognize a significant defect in Badiou’s thought (i.e. the absence of any in-situation experience or affect that would account for the transition from individual to subject), they each fail, at least to my mind, to effectively address this concern. Hallward simply avoids the issue, treating Badiou as irrecoverably anti-relational,<sup>7</sup> and Johnston’s pre-evental supplement, insofar as it presupposes the existence of

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<sup>5</sup> To his credit, Bruno Bosteels has argued tirelessly—against Hallward—for an explicitly dialectical interpretation of Badiou (see, e.g., Bosteels “On the Subject of the Dialectic,” in Hallward (2004)). To my mind however, Bosteels’ primary reliance on Badiou’s early, political work (in particular *Theory of the Subject*) and his insistence on reading Badiou through the explicitly Marxist categories of historical and dialectical materialism creates a “Badiou” that, while compelling, bears little resemblance to Badiou himself.

<sup>6</sup> The most forceful charge leveled against Badiou of an ostensibly transcendental dichotomy between being and event that leaves no pre-evental option others than political quietism or fatalism is made by Daniel Bensaïd in his “Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event” in Hallward (2004).

<sup>7</sup> Although Hallward’s name is likely the one most frequently associated with Badiou’s English-language reception (he is, Badiou writes, “my most well-versed and ardent interpreter and critic (LW 543)), he nonetheless seems sometimes to go so far as to suggest that Badiou has very little, if anything, to offer in terms of analyzing the present political conjuncture. For example, in his 2008 review of *Logics of Worlds*, Hallward writes that escaping the (neoliberal) strictures of our contemporary situation “will require a thoroughly

subjectivity before the interruption of an event (or worse, the transformation of an event into a subjective production, instead of the obverse), risks mutating Badiou's thought in such a way as to make it almost unrecognizable.<sup>8</sup>

Against both Hallward and Johnston, then, I seek to maintain a certain irreducible dichotomy in Badiou's philosophy (in particular, between individual and subject), while at the same time arguing for the existence of a mediating relation that would link these otherwise incongruent categories. So, whereas Hallward argues that, ultimately, nothing can ever come to relate individuals and subjects, (or being and event, knowledge and truth, etc.), to which Johnston responds by suggesting a kind of "flattening" or further-immantentizing of Badiou's system that would do away with these purportedly non-relational bifurcations altogether, in Chapter Three of this thesis, I argue for an understanding of anxiety as the necessary relational compliment to Badiou's philosophy that can tie together these often inflexible divisions.

But, as mentioned above, there is also a second set of Badiou scholarship that takes as its explicit focus Badiou's reluctance to incorporate affect/experience into his theory of subjectivation. To this set belong, among others: Alberto Toscano (2004), who puts Badiou's thought in relation to the contemporary experience of the radical unbinding made possible by the deterritorializing expansion of global capital; Nina Power (2006), who demonstrates Badiou's need for a philosophical anthropology of infinitude that passes through the phenomenology of the finitude of human experience (*à la* Kant) by way of Ludwig Feuerbach; Slavoj Žižek (1999), who, faithful to his Heideggerian origins, insists, against Badiou, that "only to a finite/mortal being does the act (or Event) appear as a traumatic incursion of the Real," arguing, therefore, that "Badiou remains blind to how the very space for the specific 'immortality' in which human-beings can participate is opened up by man's

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relational ontology. It will require us to privilege history rather than logic as the most fundamental dimension of a world, and to defend a theory of the subject equipped not only with truth and body but with determination and political will," all are categories, he notes, which are strikingly absent in Badiou's philosophy (121).

<sup>8</sup> In fact, as Colin Wright (2013) has recently argued, "Johnston's argument largely allows Badiou's ontological restrictions on the event, and the event itself, in a certain fashion, to fall by the wayside" (174).

relation to his finitude and the possibility of death” (163-164); and, arguably the most important antecedent with regards to the work undertaken in the present thesis, Sam Gillespie (2008), who demands Badiou answer “the question of affect as a principle of the subject” (MN 116).

Gillespie takes Badiou to task for failing to provide “a phenomenology of what it is that occurs when subjects recognize (or do not recognize) events,” and, consequently, the importance of establishing “a certain supplementary framework through which to discuss how it is that events occur and the manner in which they grip subjects” (MN 96). As I hope to have made clear, Gillespie’s formulations bear a striking resemblance to my own criticisms of Badiou as they have been laid out thus far. This is no accident. Indeed, Gillespie is the first (and most persuasive) of Badiou’s critics to outline the importance of supplementing his philosophy with a theory of individual evental-experience.<sup>9</sup> Certainly then, the following investigation finds itself very much in debt to Gillespie. In fact, I agree entirely with his decision to supplement Badiou’s philosophy with a “minimal” phenomenology centered on the concept of anxiety;<sup>10</sup> it is, in fact, the central objective of this thesis. But, putting aside my particular differences with Gillespie for the time being (they are discussed at length in Chapter 3), suffice it to note here that our approaches to constructing this supplement diverge considerably from one another. In particular, I am skeptical of his use of Lacan and believe instead that an existentialist understanding of anxiety—one that proceeds in its own way through Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre—is a more productive avenue of theoretical inquiry.

The distance that separates the existentialist understanding of anxiety employed in this thesis and Gillespie’s psychoanalytical variant concerns the objective status of an event. Whereas the philosophical lineage composed of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, treats anxiety as strictly object-less, in that *nothing* begets anxiety, Lacan famously declares (in his

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<sup>9</sup> In his brilliant, *The Mathematics of Novelty*, Gillespie proposes to construct this supplement *via* reference to Lacan in which the event is treated semi-analogously to the *objet petit a*, the incursion of this object-event is experienced by the individual/subject as anxiety, and fidelity to the consequences of this instantiation of the object (a) is explained by the psychoanalytic theory of the drive.

<sup>10</sup> Presumably, Gillespie’s choice to focus on anxiety has to do with the fact that, of all the philosophical “affects” anxiety is the only one given any consistent consideration by Badiou. Curiously, however, Gillespie makes no mention of Badiou’s not inconsiderable writing on the concept.

characteristically distorted syntax) that anxiety “is not without an object” (SX 89). However, if we take the occurrence of an event to be constitutive of anxiety (a point made throughout this thesis), in order not to rob the event of what Badiou believes is its rigidly undecidable ontological status, this manifestation of an event, at least from any perspective internal to a situation, must be treated as, strictly speaking, nothing. That is, it cannot be reduced to the occurrence of an object. Accordingly, it is only as a chance experience of nothing, I argue, that anxiety can offer certain emancipatory and transformative possibilities.

However, before proceeding any further with my own understanding of anxiety, it is worthwhile here to return to Badiou himself in order to delimit more precisely the role played by affect and experience in his philosophical system. Although it might seem that the abstract formalism of Badiou’s ontology would leave his philosophy ineluctably “cold,” there nevertheless persist moments of impassioned warmth and zeal in his writing that belie his penchant for the sterility of mathematics. These fervent moments occur most often in his wistful recollections of his *experience* of May 1968. For example, in a personal quotation contained in his short book, *Ethics*, Badiou recalls, “As for what then took place, yes, we were the genuine actors, but actors absolutely *seized*<sup>11</sup> by what was happening to them, as by something extraordinary, something properly incalculable” (E 124; emphasis mine). As I understand it, then, it is no mere coincidence that Badiou’s most in-depth engagement with the affective dimension of (political) subjectivation occurs in his earliest attempts to register the consequences of *les événements de ’68*. Significantly for the purposes of this thesis, a lecture from April of 1977 contained in Badiou’s *Theory of the Subject* (1982) marks the first appearance of the phenomenon of anxiety as “the active failure of the whole apparatus of symbolic support” (TS 146).

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<sup>11</sup> Badiou’s use of the word “seize,” here, is interesting, as it seems to suggest the wholly passive and external incorporation of an individual into the subject-body of a truth. (Žižek (1998) first put forward this passive interpretation of Badiouian subjectivation as a process he likens to Althusser’s understanding of ideological interpellation.) However, this subjective passivity is directly at odds with both Badiou’s own personal history, in which he actively intervened and participated in the events of May ’68, and his theoretical understanding of subjectivation as an internal choice or decision. There is thus an ambiguity in Badiou’s theory of subjectivation that oscillates between passive incorporation and active or voluntarist/decisive intervention. In order to, at least partially, address this ambiguity, the understanding of anxiety suggested in this thesis might be characterized as comprising a dialectic of passivity and activity, external and internal subjectivation, of disruption and decision.



In *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou elaborates a complex topology of four interrelated affects (anxiety-superego-courage-justice) that describe the possible “style” of a (collective) subject’s existence (Pluth, 2010: 130). Affects, in this early sense, describe *how* an already occurring (political) process might assert itself against the structural system of placement from which it emerged. What is essential to recognize, here, is that, for the early Badiou, these four affects: “refer neither to subjective experiences nor to parts of the subject but rather to [...] processes whose combination defines that region of practical materiality that we would do better to call the subject-effect,” or, put differently, these four descriptors are “neither virtues nor abilities: better yet they are not even experiences [...] they are only names for certain processes, nothing else” (TS 154, 291). Thus, these “affects-without-experience”<sup>12</sup> have no relation to the psychological existence of individuals in a given situation prior to the event of their subjectivation. They are, in no way, dimensions of human consciousness. They are, rather, ways of describing how certain (collective and political) subjects might consist (i.e., exist) in a given situation. As such, they are exclusively descriptive properties of *already existing* subjects and can offer little (if anything) to our investigation into the individual *experience* of eventual-subjectivation. Nonetheless, because my own elaboration of anxiety relies in part on the one provided by Badiou in *Theory of the Subject* (and because a loosely related understanding of the concept will also appear in each of Badiou’s subsequent *magnum opera*), it is valuable to sketch its outlines here. And, although Badiou has, at least in some sense, discussed the category of affect/experience in each of this three major works, it is important to note that in none of these instances does he ever consider the experience of an event, which depending on the text can be either the moment immediately prior to or of subjectivation *qua* intervention from the perspective of an individual internal to a structured situation.

So, for example, with an understanding clearly inflected by Lacan, in *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou presents anxiety as a vanishing eruption of the real *qua* mass-revolt into an otherwise stable network of symbolic support (TS 146). In that text, anxiety is an evanescent outburst

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<sup>12</sup> I borrow this phrase from Colin Wright (2012). In his recent book on Badiou and Jamaica, Wright succinctly describe how, at least for the Badiou of *Theory of the Subject*, these affects are “in no way *transitive* to individuals with passions and interests. They therefore shed no light on the latter’s incorporation into a subject. [...] These affects in no way cause subjects. They are secondary consequences of the existence of subjects” (172).

of inconsistency that disrupts and destabilizes the consistency of state-sanctioned order.<sup>13</sup> In doing so, a subject that has anxiety as its style would be one that puerilely breaks with the law without providing any means through which this break might be made to persist or continue. Invariably, then, unless they, in some way, “connect” with the related “affects” of superego, courage, and justice, anxious subjects dissipate as soon as they appear.<sup>14</sup> While the understanding of anxiety I develop in this thesis is a far cry from the non-experiential Lacano-Maoist variant put forward by Badiou in *Theory of the Subject*, its function as an immanent disruption, one that, moreover, has some relation to an absent dimension of inconsistency, will be retained throughout much of the following discussion.

In *Being and Event* (2005), interestingly, anxiety is treated rather differently. In Meditation 8 of that text, for example, Badiou refers to the “situational anxiety of the void” as the “warding off of the void” (BE 93). As I will explain in some detail in Chapter 1, any situation’s encounter with its void —*via* its evocation by an event— amounts to the unbinding of the consistency that structures that situation. Given this, in *Being and Event*, anxiety comes to refer not to the destruction of presented-consistency, but to the *fear*<sup>15</sup> of this destruction’s occurrence. Badiou thus reverses the formulation of anxiety as it was presented in *Theory of the Subject*. Whereas it previously described the post-evental destitution of symbolic consistency, it now describes the pre-evental resistance to that which would bring about this undoing (namely, the void). Employing the language developed in *Ethics*, we might say that anxiety is here the preeminent “principle of interest” that binds individuals to the static comforts provided by their given situations (E 53). *Being and Event* thus marks Badiou’s most dismal consideration of affect. In that text, it would seem that experience of any kind (but anxiety in particular) is structurally opposed to the advent of “disinterested interests” brought about by an event (E 53). Against this understanding, in what follows, I

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<sup>13</sup> Throughout *Theory of the Subject*, with regards to anxiety, disruption/destruction is a consistent rhetorical motif employed by Badiou; e.g., anxiety: “is the excess-of-the-real (excess of force) over what can be symbolized (placed) thereof in a certain order;” is a “form of interruption;” “the destruction of meaning as chaos;” the “death of destruction itself, the destruction of destruction;” the moment when “the real kills the symbolic;” etc. (TS 155, 291).

<sup>14</sup> Badiou treats the “mute and suicidal riots of 1848” as typical of this anxious subject-effect (TS 291).

<sup>15</sup> As I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, Badiou’s “situational anxiety of the void” and *fear*, as it is theorized by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, are essentially identical experiences.

will argue that anxiety is, in fact, the specific experience that can account for the transition from a (self-) interested individual tethered to material comforts, to a disinterested subject, propelled by truth.

Finally, in *Logics of Worlds* (2006), anxiety is given yet another valence of meaning. Its new signification is a part of a larger shift in the way Badiou understands the role of affects. In a partial return to their presentation in *Theory of the Subject*, one that moreover restores some positive dimension to affective experience, Badiou comes to consider affects as the post-evental indication(s) through which “a human animal recognizes that it participates [...] in some subject of truth” (LW 480). Affects are thus treated as the embodied (but again, post-evental) signals that suggest to an individual (now Subject) that he or she may be involved in an already ongoing truth-procedure. Anxiety is, in this case (along with courage, justice, and terror) a kind of experiential condition for the post-evental emergence of a subject-body in the wake of an event. For the Badiou of *Logics of Worlds*, affects, in which anxiety is immanently included, arise exclusively in the aftermath of an event’s intrusion as the means through which an individual might come to be incorporated in the subject-body of a truth; the experience of the event itself, however, still remains somewhat vague. Despite his more extended considerations of experience and affect in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou has so far been unable (or, perhaps, unwilling) to detail, from the perspective of a situated-individual, how exactly an event is experienced.

This is the theoretical context into which this thesis intervenes. My argument is that anxiety is the embodied, in-situation (i.e., individual) experience of the nothingness constitutive of and evoked by an event and, as the phenomenological relation to this no-thingness, anxiety provides an affective bridge over which to relate the situationally determined individual with the post-evental subject of truth. As an experience of a certain nothingness that immanently persists despite the ontic-ontological strictures of the situational count-as-one, evental-anxiety reveals an underlying contingency that opens the possibility for the subjective transformation of a given situation. Anxiety, therefore, as the unnerving and unforeseen occurrence of nothing, denaturalizes the contemporary order by exposing the absence of any underlying determining structure. In doing so, I argue, it reveals distinctly new possibilities that prior to the experience of anxiety appeared wholly foreclosed by the extant order of structuration. It is in this sense that anxiety is treated as the affective relation that explains the

evental-transition from individual to subject. Simply, *anxiety is the experience of an event that occasions subjectivity*. Furthermore, I believe the most compelling elaboration of anxiety, in this regard, is not to be found in Lacan, as Badiou and certain of his commentators argue, but in an “existentialist” genealogy that proceeds through Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. Because each of these three philosophers treats anxiety as the experience of a paradoxically present absence or immanent nothingness, I argue that they provide the necessary conceptual resources for thinking through the event’s ontological undecidability. Moreover, unlike the subjugated determinism of Lacanian psychoanalytic structuralism and its concomitant understanding of anxiety, each of their emphases on an irreducible dimension of human freedom align nicely with Badiou’s recent injunction “to recompose for our time a thought of truth that is articulated on the void without passing through the figure of the master” (2004: 87) The final aim of this thesis, therefore, is to employ these theorists in such a way as to erect a phenomenological supplement to Badiou’s philosophy that highlights the immanently relational and liberatory dimension of anxiety’s access to nothing. With this in mind, the remainder of this thesis is organized as follows:

In Chapter 1, I provide what I have chosen to call a *strategic representation* of Badiou’s philosophy focusing chiefly on his understanding of the void. To this end, I briefly sketch his set-theoretical categories in such a way as to make apparent the in-experiencable nature of the void’s paradoxical inclusion/exclusion in every situation. This chapter thus serves as an extended discussion of the deficiencies in Badiou’s philosophy outlined above. In Chapter 2, I move away from Badiou in order to discuss more fully the theories of anxiety provided by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre.<sup>16</sup> Undergirding much of this second chapter is an implicit (and occasionally, explicit) critique of Hegel’s philosophical holism. This criticism of Hegel—a variant of which is put forward by Badiou in *Logics of Worlds*—treats the closed totality of Hegel’s system as constitutively excluding the category of possibility. Against this understanding, following Kierkegaard’s historical proposals, I treat anxiety as a

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<sup>16</sup> The careful reader will notice the relative absence of a sustained critical dimension to this discussion. The aim of this thesis is not to critically evaluate the particular coherence of anxiety as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre theorize it, or on a different note, to claim that they are without fault. Instead, I aim merely to suggest that Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre provide certain conceptual resources that can be used to construct a phenomenological supplement to Badiou’s philosophy.

kind of window or gap through which possibility may disrupt the rigid confines of actuality. Finally, in Chapter 3, I advance the actual supplementation of Badiou's philosophy with phenomenological framework glossed in Chapter 2. Initially, against Gillespie, I argue for the advantage of my existentialist addition over his own psychoanalytically informed proposals. This disagreement has two main components. The first concerns the objective status of an event; the second, in a similar vein, concerns what I believe is the incompatibility of the Lacanian and Badiouian understandings of subjectivity vis-à-vis the subject's relation to its symbolic/situation. After fully distinguishing my position from Gillespie's/Lacan's, I consider the exact mechanisms through which we might tether Badiou's philosophy to the understanding of anxiety as I have presented it. Chapter 3 closes with some suggestions regarding a potential theory of ideology that might correspond to my supplementation of Badiou's philosophy with an existentialist understanding of anxiety. To conclude, drawing in part on *Logics of Worlds*' closing exhortation, in which Badiou asks, "What is it to live?" I briefly discuss how the supplement proposed in this thesis might, in turn, require further supplementation by the related experience of courage.

## Chapter 1

God made everything out of nothing, but the nothingness shows through.

-Paul Valéry, *Mauvaises Pensées et Autres*

### 1 Ontology and the Phantom of Inconsistency

The aim of this chapter is to survey of the philosophy of Alain Badiou. This survey, however, has no intent of being exhaustive: to do justice to the full force of Badiou's philosophical project would, in the space allotted here, be an impossible and foolhardy task. Moreover, given the sizeable, and ever-growing, body of scholarly literature published on (and by) Badiou over the last decade-and-a-half,<sup>17</sup> any attempt on my part to address comprehensively Badiou's *œuvre* would be, at best, redundant or, at worst, strikingly deficient. Instead, this chapter aims to provide what I have chosen to call a *strategic re-presentation*<sup>18</sup> of Badiou's philosophy, focusing principally on his understanding of the void. To this end, I present Badiou's (set-) theoretical categories not strictly as they operate in-themselves, but always in their relation to the void—that unlocalizable point that sutures every situation to its inconsistent being. Though focused but by no means exhaustive,<sup>19</sup> in my presentation, I will demonstrate that it is only through an interrogation of the void and its conceptual relations to Badiou's other philosophical categories that a phenomenological supplement to his philosophy can be constructed.

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<sup>17</sup> The “best” introductions to Badiou's philosophy are, in my opinion: Hallward (2003), a now-canonical tome, noteworthy for its exceptional scope and depth; and Gillespie (2008), equally noteworthy for the force and strength of its compression. The diligent reader might also consult Barker (2002), Feltham (2008), Johnston (2009), Pluth (2010), and Bosteels (2011).

<sup>18</sup> For Badiou, representation is a necessary redoubling of an initial presentation that, in its very nature, excludes certain elements.

<sup>19</sup> In particular, readers familiar with Badiou's most recent work will likely notice that the following discussion devotes comparably little attention to Badiou's development, over the past several years, of a logic of appearance –i.e., the transcendental indexation of a world that assigns varying degrees/intensities of appearance to the beings existing therein. The omission of this logic results from the fact that the void is what necessarily *in*-appears in a given world.

## 1.1 Multiplicity and the Count-as-One: Emerging From the Void

Badiou's set-theoretical ontology presumes the originality of a pure multiplicity that is subtracted from any and every operation of unicity, what he terms the "count-as-one" of a situation. If ontology, classically understood, has concerned itself perennially with the question of the one or the multiple, Badiou's ontology circumvents this question by employing a set-theoretically<sup>20</sup> informed understanding of being as (infinitely<sup>21</sup>) multiple *from which* a one is produced as a result. For Badiou, any perceived one-ness of being is merely an effect, the outcome of a conceptual operation that counts a prior multiplicity *as one*.<sup>22</sup> So, although the "the one is not" (*what* exists is a retroactively discernible multiplicity without identity or unity), there necessarily comes to be a one-ness, or, someone, through the operation(s) of a count (BE 23; emphasis in original).<sup>23</sup>

Badiou's declaration "the one is not," therefore, does not announce the abandonment of unity *tout court*, but rather its scission. In Badiou's philosophy, the axiomatic positing of an originary multiplicity prior to any subsequent one-ification:

Is not a question of abandoning the principle Lacan assigned to the symbolic; that *there is* [some] One[ness] [*il y a de l'Un*]. Everything turns on mastering the gap between the presupposition (that must be rejected) of a being of the one and the thesis of its 'there is'. What has to be declared is

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<sup>20</sup> Set theory, Badiou explains, "sheds light on the fecund frontier between the whole/parts relation and the one/multiple relation; because, at its base, it suppresses them both" in favor of void-based ontology. (BE 81).

<sup>21</sup> Badiou's understands multiplicity as neither the unity of multiples nor as the units of (a) multiple. Rather, "what comes to ontological thought is the multiple without reference to any other predicate than its multiplicity. Without any other concept than itself, without anything to guarantee its consistency" (BE 36). In this way, Badiou's understands multiplicity as a ceaseless proliferation/multiplication of immanent differences without limit, halted only by the axiomatic positing of the empty set ( $\emptyset$ ).

<sup>22</sup> Important to note is that although, in a sense, multiplicity "comes before" its counting-as-one, it can only be understood as such retroactively from the position of an already counted oneness: "the multiple is the inertia which can be retroactively discerned starting from the fact that the operation of the count-as-one must effectively operate in order for there to be Oneness" (BE 25). The existence of inconsistent multiplicity is deduced from within the parameters of an already-counted One; it is never presented in-itself.

<sup>23</sup> "My entire discourse," Badiou writes, "originates in an axiomatic decision: that of the non-being of the one" (BE 31). Instead, after Plato who in his *Parmenides* declared, "The One is not," Badiou endeavors "to think inconsistent multiplicity, which is to say, pure presentation, anterior to any one-effect, or to any structure" (BE 33).

that the one, which is not, solely exists as *operation*. In other words, there is no one, only its count-as-one. (23-24; translation modified; emphasis in original).

We can see how, in this way, Badiou separates the unifying procedure, which produces a One, from its “origin” in multiplicity. For him, unity is never the necessary effect of the coherence of intrinsic characteristics. Rather, any unity such that it is is only ever the result of an extrinsic procedure that counts it as such.<sup>24</sup>

The effect of this counting procedure, or structuration, is to split the originary multiple in two: into “consistency,” which is the regime of the one, or the multiple counted-as-one, and “inconsistency,” which is “the inertia of the [originary] domain,” or the implicative remainder of the multiplicity upon which the operation of the count was performed.<sup>25</sup> (BE 52).

This counted one, or consistent multiple is, in Badiou’s terminology, known as a situation. A situation is any multiple that is counted as a single unit. Important to note here, is that although Badiou presumes the radical originality of an uncounted multiple, his ontology effectively forecloses any experience of this multiple-without-one.<sup>26</sup> In fact,

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<sup>24</sup> As Peter Hallward explains in his gloss of Badiou’s use of set theory, “the unity or oneness of an element [is] considered not as an intrinsic attribute of that element but a result, the result of its belonging to a particular state” (2003: 84). In set theory this relates to the axiom of extensionality, which assigns logical priority to a set over the particularity of its individual elements. A set is thus defined by the belonging of its elements independently of any common characteristics they might possess. This privileging of set over elements, of course, is problematic for those (i.e., post-Hegelian) thinkers such as Catherine Malabou, whose thought depends instead on the intrinsic (e.g., biological) grouping/development of elements. Indeed, Hallward continues, “there is good reason to suppose, for example, that biological (let alone social, psychological, or cultural) systems are irreducible, in their most *elementary* materiality to the basic principles of set theory—in particular the principle of extensionality. In what precise sense is the being of even the most rudimentary organism (or cell, or organelle) abstractable from its environment and relations with other organisms?” (2003: 277).

<sup>25</sup> “Inconsistency,” Badiou writes, “is solely the presupposition that prior to the count the one is not” (BE 52).

<sup>26</sup> In a move at least somewhat reminiscent of Kant (see, in this regard, Johnston (2008a)), Badiou seems to suggest that, insofar as inconsistent multiplicity is necessarily excluded from any and all presentation, the structuring of multiplicity into a consistent situation becomes the condition of possibility for any phenomenological experience. Indeed, Badiou states that “all thought supposes a situation of the thinkable, which is to say a structure, a count-as-one in which the presented multiple is consistent and numerable” (BE 34). Throughout this thesis, I will contest Badiou’s assertion that there can be no phenomenological access to, or experience of, what is inconsistent –or void– in a given situation. To the contrary, anxiety, I argue, is precisely the means by which an uncounted void can be experienced as such.



all that is ever presented from the standpoint of a/the situation are units that count as one for that situation. The necessity of presentation, then, reverses the chronology of Badiou's ontology as I have so far presented it. Although any one-ness or one-ification is only ever the derivative result of an operation performed upon an anterior multiplicity, because this multiplicity is in-itself barred from presentation, it is impossible to begin with an experience of this multiplicity *an sich*. Instead, philosophy (and human experience more generally) begins with the structured presentation of the one (i.e., physical/psychical encounters with single entities), or, the consistency of a situation and the existents counted therein in order to retroactively (*via* a logical process of deduction) presume its origins in multiplicity—that is, inconsistency or void. From the perspective of the situation, then, to play with a line from Wittgenstein—one of Badiou's favored anti-philosophical interlocutors—that which is counted-as-one is all that is the case. Thus, Badiou writes:

Inside the situation there is no graspable consistency which would be subtracted from the count and thus a-structured. Any situation, seized in its immanence, thus reverses the inaugural axiom of our entire procedure. It states that the one is, and that the pure multiple –inconsistency– is not (BE 52).

In any given situation, then, all that can be presented (and therefore experienced<sup>27</sup>) is what that situation delineates as one. In Badiou's rigorously immanent ontology there is no *outside* of a situation:

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<sup>27</sup> Badiou's set-theoretical ontology (particularly as it is outlined in *Being and Event*), simply put, is radically anti-phenomenological. Unlike, say, Heidegger, whose philosophical project “involves the renewal of means whereby we might cultivate the fragile *experience* of being as other-than-one” Badiou's treats pure inconsistent multiplicity—prior to its being-counted—as that “which can never figure as the object of experience” (Hallward 2005, 8; emphasis mine). Instead, for Badiou, multiplicity exists solely *within* the situation, as the *deductive implication* that there must have been some prior “stuff” upon which the count was performed. Thus, “inaccessible to any procedure that might discern or identify it, multiple being *is* only insofar as its being is implied” (Hallward, 2005 9). (It is in this sense that Ray Brassier refers to the uncounted presentation of being as an *anti-phenomenon* (2006: 60).) It would seem, then, that Badiou's ontology re-instates a kind of Kantian dichotomy between noumenal inconsistency and phenomenal consistency. This is a point made recently by Adrian Johnston who, after his mentor, Žižek, criticizes Badiou for failing to fully integrate Hegel's critique of Kantian dualism into his own philosophy. Specifically, Johnston sees the operation of Badiou's count-as-one [*compter-pour-un*] as problematically akin to Kant's own understanding of the *a priori* conditions of possibility laid out in his “Transcendental Deduction” (2008a: 356). Johnston's position, while often compelling, misses two crucial points about Badiou's ontology. The first is that Badiou's ontology is immanent through and through: it expressly forbids the institution of any transcendental bifurcation of consistent and inconsistent multiplicity. (For this reason, in his book on “post-continental philosophy,” John Mullarkey distinguishes Badiou from Deleuze

Once the entirety of a situation is subject to the law of the one and consistency, it is necessary from the standpoint of the immanence of the situation, that the pure multiple, absolutely unrepresentable according to the law of the count, be *nothing* (BE 53).

Subsequent to the presentation of a situation, which in a kind of Heideggerian reversal has always-already been counted as such, the inconsistent multiplicity upon which the count took place is, strictly speaking, nothing; *it is not* (BE 53).<sup>28</sup> What Badiou means is this: Oneness, or unity, is only ever the result of a counting-operation. Therefore, everything that is discernibly presented, every *single* object of experience, is subject to the law of the count. In a certain sense, then, to be (*a one, a thing*), for Badiou, is to be counted.<sup>29</sup> And, insofar as every (one) thing has been counted, it follows that whatever is not counted is no-thing. Beyond consistency, there is not even *a nothing*: to refer to it as such (i.e., unified in/by its nothingness) would be to subsume it to the law of the count.<sup>30</sup>

by stressing Badiou's refusal to give any measure of being to virtuality—for Badiou, there is only actuality (2006: 94). Moreover, and as I will demonstrate further in Chapter 3, the immanence of Badiou's ontology is what separates him from his predecessor, Lacan, who seems to give some measure of transcendence to an absent structuring lack.) Strictly speaking, then, for Badiou, *there is no inconsistent multiplicity*: there is only the counted-situation from within which the (non-) existence of inconsistency is posited as the result of a logical deduction. Second, this posited inconsistency bears little resemblance to the Kantian thing-in-itself insofar as, through the operations of set theory, it is thoroughly knowable. To this extent, Badiou writes, "it does not follow, as in Kant, that being-in-itself is unknowable. On the contrary it is absolutely knowable, or even known (historically-existing mathematics)" (LW 102). Badiou does remain somewhat close to Kant insofar as, inconsistency can never be *experienced* as such. It remains to be seen, then, if Badiou's rigid delineation of experience from knowledge is tenable.

<sup>28</sup> Inconsistent multiplicity *is not* "if by being we understand the limited order of presentation and in particular what is natural of such order" (BE 75). Or, as Peter Hallward explains, "inconsistency is the very being of being—on condition that strictly *nothing* can be presented or conceived of such being" (2008: 101).

<sup>29</sup> In more traditional phenomenological terms, we can say that all that is ever presented to consciousness is the unified perception of an object or that thought and experience are always directed toward objects. Anxiety, as a non-directional experience of nothing, obviously problematizes this basic phenomenological precept.

<sup>30</sup> In Badiou's ontology, "every situation implies nothing of its all. But the nothing is neither a place nor a term of the situation. For if the nothing were a term that could only mean one thing: that it had been counted as one [...] nothing is presentable in a situation otherwise than under the effect of structure, that is, under the form of the one and its composition in consistent multiplicities" (BE 52-54).

For Badiou, absent from the presented consistency of a situation, “there is ‘nothing’” (BE 54-55).<sup>31</sup>

Now, and this is the crucial point to be grasped in my brief exegesis of Badiou’s ontology, even though that which is excluded from a given situation is expressly *nothing* (because it has not been counted as one and is therefore no-thing), Badiou, through his employment of set theory,<sup>32</sup> is able to give this nothingness a kind of minimal existence within the situation *as the retroactively discernible implication that prior to the count its oneness was not*.<sup>33</sup> Badiou names this immanently persistent nothingness—this “phantom of inconsistency” that attests to any situation’s secondary existence as the mere result-of-an-operation and exists therein only in the form of its proper name ( $\emptyset$ <sup>34</sup>)—the void (BE 53).

## 1.2 The Inexistence of the Void

In Badiou’s philosophy, the void has two distinct but overlapping functions. Its first role is that of an indicator or nomination: “the void” is nothing other than the persistent “name

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<sup>31</sup> This is an important point to keep in mind throughout this thesis, as the absolute immanence of all situations is what, to a large extent, separates Badiou from Lacan, who understands all consistent symbolic structuration as founded on a constitutive lack or transcendental exclusion. Against this, for Badiou, *the situation lacks nothing*. An event, consequently, as the ephemeral evocation of the void must itself be nothing.

<sup>32</sup> I am thinking here specifically of Badiou’s recourse to set theory’s sole existential axiom, the axiom of the empty set which, simply put, asserts the existence of a set that has no elements. As Sam Gillespie explains, “for axiomatic set theory, there is one axiom alone that posits existence, that makes an inaugural claim to existence [...] set theory is established through the positing of the empty set to which zero, as a number, can be assigned” (BE 51). Later in this Chapter, I will further develop the nature of the empty set’s *inclusion* in every well-founded set.

<sup>33</sup> It is perhaps helpful here to quote Badiou at length:

By itself, the nothing is no more than the name of the unpresentation in presentation. Its status of being results from the following: one has to admit that if the one results, then ‘something’—which is not an in-situation term, and which is thus nothing—has not been counted, this ‘something’ being that it was necessary that the operation of the count as one operate. Thus it comes down to exactly the same thing to say that the nothing is the operation of the count, which as source of the one, is not itself counted –and to say that the nothing is the pure multiple upon which the count operates –which in-itself, as not counted (BE 55).

<sup>34</sup> In his recent book on the logic of intermittency as *the* structuring thread of contemporary French philosophy, Andrew Gibson explains that the line that “bars” the zero of the symbol,  $\emptyset$ , indicates “that ours is a world of meaning in which we are ‘barred’ from immediate and unmediated access to the void” (2011: 28).

of unpresentation in presentation” (BE 55). Recall that within the immanence of a situation there can be no experience or presentation of inconsistency as it exists in-itself. But, insofar as the consistency of any given situation is merely the result of its counting-as-one, it follows logically that the situation, in a sense, “emerged” from a multiplicity that preceded it. The void, then, quite literally inscribed in the ontological situation by its mark ( $\emptyset$ ), is the *letter* that affirms this existential truth, i.e., that the one is not. “Void as proper name,”<sup>35</sup> explains Badiou, “attests to the existence of inexistence” (BE 69). The void, which internal to a situation can persist solely in and through its axiomatic nomination, “indicates the failure of the one, the not-one” (BE 56).<sup>36</sup> In naming within the situation that which is precluded from being named in/by the situation, the void “sutures” a situation to its inconsistent being: it maintains an essential connection between the presented consistency of a situation and the inconsistency from which it arose.<sup>37</sup> This brings us now to the void’s second function: its immanent yet inaccessible dispersion in and throughout every situation.

To describe the voids persistent in-existence in a situation, Badiou uses an appropriately spectral metaphor. He refers to the void as a “phantom of inconsistency” that “haunts”

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<sup>35</sup> The part played by the void as the proper name of being can be further explained with reference to Badiou’s recent more-explicitly political writing. In fact, the role of proper names has remained surprisingly consistent throughout Badiou’s philosophical development. Over two decades after the publication of *Being and Event*, in his now-ubiquitous “The Idea of Communism”, Badiou explains that the “glorious pantheon” of “Spartacus, Thomas Münzer, Robespierre, Toussaint-L’Ouverture, Blanqui, Marx, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Mao, Che Guevara and so many others [...] symbolize historically — in the guise of an individual, of a pure singularity of body and thought — the rare and precious network of ephemeral sequences of politics as truth. The elusive formalism of bodies-of-truth is legible here as empirical existence. [...] The anonymous action of millions of militants, rebels, fighters, *unrepresentable* as such, is combined and counted as one in the simple, powerful symbol of the proper name (2009:13; emphasis mine). Proper names, for Badiou, are the historically-inscribed and symbolically-mediated (i.e., internal-to-the-situation) attestations to the existence of a generic being currently foreclosed by the situation.

<sup>36</sup> This specific function of the void will be important moving forward. As I will subsequently demonstrate, any encounter with the void reveals possibilities currently foreclosed by the count.

<sup>37</sup> As I mentioned previously (cf. n.11), it is the void’s *immanence* in every situation that prevents Badiou from lapsing into a kind of Kantian dualism in which inconsistent multiplicity would exist as a transcendental or a-historical realm wholly inaccessible to and separate from the consistency of a situation. Because the void is the very existence (in a situation) of that which must necessarily inexist to guarantee that situation’s consistency it can not be thought of as residing outside of that situation. This is what, Badiou believes, ensures the resolute atheism of his project. But, asks Peter Hallward, “Is there anymore ‘divine’ a power [than that of the void] to create consistency out of a pure inconsistency—through a mechanism that can be referred to only as pure proper name?” (2003: 93).

every consistent situation. For Badiou, the void is an ethereal reminder of any structured presentation's origins in inconsistency. Like a ghost, the void "wanders" throughout the whole of presentation "neither local nor global, but scattered all-over, nowhere and everywhere: it is such that no encounter would authorize it to be held as presentable" (BE 55).<sup>38</sup> In other words, although the void is, in a sense, *present* throughout the situation, it is never *presented* as such.

Interestingly, Badiou has recently turned to Jacques Derrida as the preeminent thinker of the void's contradictory presence/absence in a situation. The whole of Derrida's project, Badiou believes,<sup>39</sup> is centered on a kind of teasing out of this gap that endures between non-being and non-existence, typified by the infinitely elusive being-there [*être-la*] of the void. Put a different way, Badiou suggests that Derrida's primary philosophical task,<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> It is quite difficult to provide any concrete example of the void, as it is not something that can ever be identified in a situation. As Peter Hallward explains, the void—as nothing—"cannot be described or defined" (2003: 65). Another way of saying this, one that Badiou sometimes flirts with, is to treat the void as a pure signifier that has no corresponding referent internal to the situation. This noted, Badiou does sometimes treat certain in-situation elements as having an analogous function to the void. The most obvious example, in this regard is the proletariat-as-excluded class. For Badiou, the proletariat qua their exclusion embody a certain universality that, if encountered, threatens to undermine the consistency of the political situation that excludes them. So, as Hallward again explains, "in the situation of capitalism, a situation that counts only profits and property, what counts for nothing would be a proletarian humanity" (2008: 102). Žižek has recently pointed out the similarities of Badiou's proletariat-as-void and Jacques Rancière's theorization of a part-of-no-part [*les comptes des incomptés*]. In this respect, I think Žižek is certainly correct. This evidence of this theoretical affinity between Badiou and Rancière perhaps most apparent in a short but powerful piece by Rancière's titled, "Ten Theses on Politics," in which Rancière employs language almost identical to Badiou's. In that article, Rancière explains, the contemporary political subject is "not the collection of members in a community, or the laboring classes of a population. It is the supplementary part, in relation to any counting of parts of the population that make it possible to identify that 'part of those who have no part' with the whole of the community [...] it is the supplement that disconnects the population from itself by suspending the various logics of legitimate domination" (Rancière 2001: 4).

<sup>39</sup> Whether this somewhat violent reduction is fair, or not, is not the concern of this thesis. For more on the relationship between Derrida, Badiou and their mutual distaste for the oppressive sovereignty of the One, see Calcagno (2007).

<sup>40</sup> Extrapolating slightly from Badiou's perspective, one can imagine a through-line that connects the related Derridean concepts of *différance*, the trace, and hauntology [*hantologie*] by treating them each as references to the ways in which nothingness might enjoy some kind of positive existence. In his recent book, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (2008), Martin Hägglund makes a similar point by arguing that Derrida's philosophical project concerns the formulation of a "general hauntology" in which a non-self-present/identical figure of spectral virtuality marks a temporal "relation to what is no longer or not yet" (82). To my mind, this figure of absent or spectral causality, which enjoys a kind of agency precisely in its paradoxical or contradictory ontological status, operates in much the same way as Badiou's immanent nothingness or void.

best exemplified in his text, *Le toucher: Jean-Luc Nancy* (2000), is investigating how nothing (for Badiou, this would be the void) can continue to exist within a situation and, just as importantly, how we might come to encounter this thing- which-is-not:

The non-existent [i.e., the void] is *nothing*. But being nothing is by no means the same as not-being. To be nothing is to non- exist in a way specific to a determinate world or place. The alternating slippages characteristic of Derrida's prose thus become clear. The slippage between 'if you say that the non-existent *is*, you naturally fail to see this: that it does not exist', and 'if you simply say that it does not exist, you fail to see this: that it *is*. And therefore, no stable opposition can really succeed in describing the precise status of the non-existent in terms of a binary opposition. Because you always slip from being to non-existence, and then from non- existence to being (Badiou, 2009: 149).

After Derrida, Badiou understands the void as an immanent point of flight [*point de fuite*] that “escapes” the rules of structuration imposed by the count (LW 545). Like an invisible and immaterial thread of inconsistency woven into in the very fabric of consistent presentation, the void simultaneously is and is not, always “being-out-of-place in-the-place” (LW 545). In using this textile metaphor, though, we must be careful not to reduce the void to *one*-thread among others. If this were the case, the void would have been counted (as one) and would be no different than any of the other consistent unites of presentation. Although the void is present in every situation, it must necessarily remain unlocalizable/unidentifiable. Under the law of the count that structures a given situation, the void can never appear: to do so would undermine the structuring principles that count that situation as-one.<sup>41</sup> Or as Badiou writes, again in reference to Derrida, the in-existent void, as that which “gently evades us is what makes us think otherwise than here” (LW 545).<sup>42</sup> Given, then, that the void, while immanently present in every situation must itself be foreclosed by that situation in order for it to sustain itself, there must be some secondary operation that strives to definitively (yet futilely) exclude the void from structured presentation. This operation is a kind of subsequent count—a count-of-the-count—that re-presents all the elements that belong to a given situation.

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<sup>41</sup> In order for the void to appear/instantiate itself in a situation, due to the unbending strictures of Badiou’s ontology it would have to be counted-as-one, which would be impossible/contradictory given its status as void.

<sup>42</sup> Thus every world contains some *inexistent* object, which is the intra-worldly “realization” of the void. This is the “thesis of the rational contingency of the worlds” that attests to the reserve of being subtracted from any given constellation of appearance (LW 302).

### 1.3 Anti-Void: The State of the Situation

Recall that, for Badiou, the void is included in every situation. Insofar as all situations, in a sense, “emerge” from the void, the void comes to have an omnipresent in-existence that inheres in every particular instance of counting-as-one. This is why, Badiou declares, the void “sutures” situations to their origins in the pure inconsistency of a will-have-been-counted multiplicity. This pervasive inclusion of the void, moreover, makes every situation susceptible to its emergence, which threatens to subvert the limited consistency effectuated by the structuring operation of the count. In every situation, therefore, “it is necessary to prohibit that catastrophe of presentation which would be its encounter with its own void, the presentational occurrence of inconsistency as such, or the ruin of the One” (BE 93). And, as a result, “in order for the void to be prohibited from presentation, *it is necessary that structure be structured* [...] that all structure be *doubled* by a metastructure which secures the former against any fixation of the void” (BE 93-94; emphasis in original). In other words, because the void-as-inconsistency threatens the stability of any consistent presentation with the possibility of the new/otherwise-than-this, every counted situation is counted a second time<sup>43</sup> so as to ensure the absolute foreclosure of the void.<sup>44</sup> This second count, “thus ensures that there is no possibility of that disaster of presentation ever occurring which would be the presentational occurrence, in torsion of the structure’s own void” (BE 94). With what Peter Osborne rightfully identifies as a “rather wearing pun,” Badiou terms this warding off of the void by a metastructuring operation,<sup>45</sup> the state of the situation (2007: 26).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The chronological order of counts is a bit vague, here. Although it would seem that the second count would necessarily follow the first, in actuality, it occurs simultaneously with the initial count. Every count immediately implies a count-of-the-count. Important to note, however, is that although the count and the count-of-the-count occur simultaneously, they are entirely distinct, irreducibly separate from one another.

<sup>44</sup> As Badiou explains in his short book on politics, “the central idea of my ontology is that what the state seeks to foreclose through its power of counting is the void of the situation” (2005: 119).

<sup>45</sup> As Badiou further explains, “the state of the situation proposes a clause of closure and security through the situations consists according to the one [...] it is by means of the state that structured presentation is furnished with a fictional *being*; the latter banishes, or so it appears, the peril of the void, and establishes the reign, since completeness is numbered, of the universal security of the one” (BE 98).

<sup>46</sup> Badiou uses the term “state” in both its political sense (i.e., the historically existing State-Form) and as that which connotes the “*status quo*”. So, for example, we might say that the state of our contemporary

There are several important points to be grasped regarding the state's anti-void function. The first and perhaps most important perhaps concerns the relationship between belonging and inclusion. As Ray Brassier succinctly explains:

Badiou establishes the ontological necessity of the count of the count, or metastructure, on the basis of the power-set axiom and the theorem of the point of excess. The power-set axiom states that for every set  $\alpha$  there is a set  $\beta$  comprising all the subsets of  $\alpha$ .  $\beta$  counts-as-one everything that is included in  $\alpha$  without belonging to  $\alpha$ . The theorem of the point of excess demonstrates that the power-set  $\beta$  is invariably greater than  $\alpha$  by at least one element [...] Since the counting of elements (sets) unwittingly includes uncounted parts (subsets), metastructure, or the count-of-the-count, is necessary because the consistency of presentation is compromised by the latent inconsistency of that which is included in it without belonging to it (2006: 64).

Put differently, because the immeasurable excess of inclusion over belonging provides a potential site for the emergence of the void, the role of the state is (to attempt) to guarantee a fictional isomorphy between those parts of a situation counted or represented by the state (inclusion) and those elements counted by its original structure (belonging). But, and this is the second point, because there is always a greater number of parts than elements, it is not possible for there to be a stable equilibrium between belonging and inclusion: the consistency assuring role played by the state *necessarily fails*; there is always something that escapes—or is subtracted from—representation by the state.<sup>47</sup> As is perhaps apparent at this point, what escapes the meta-structuring operation of the state is none other than the void. In a paradox immanent to the functioning of state-power, by attempting to foreclose the void, the state ensures its occurrence. Although the void can

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political situation is those strictures and prohibitions imposed by the intertwinement of global neoliberalism and parliamentary democracy. (I will show in further detail in Chapter 3 some specific ways in which the state can be understood to prohibit any (experiential) encounter with its situated void. Importantly, Badiou's use of state should bring to mind "stasis", or rest. Prior to the interjection of an event, ontologically speaking, there is no movement or time or, as Badiou likes to say in reference to Mallarmé, within the situation, "nothing will have taken place but the place" (BE 182). As Peter Osborne explains, in *Being and Event*, "time is reduced to two dimensions —synchrony and diachrony—and diachrony is no more than a serial ordering of synchronically defined situations" (2007: 25). This is of course a problem for those who instead subscribe to the immanent flux of becoming characteristic of most vitalist ontologies (e.g., Deleuze, Henry).

<sup>47</sup> This is another point at which certain readers might perceive Badiou to lapse into a Kantian-type dichotomy, at least insofar as the void's withdrawal from statist numeration appears to parallel noumenal inaccessibility. However, as mentioned (cf. n.25), the void should not be treated as equivalent to the Kantian thing-in-itself.



never belong as an element in a given situation, since to do so would contradict its status as void, it can be (and is) always included as an “inexistent” part or subset of the situation. In doubling the count, re-presentation by the state opens an incalculable surfeit wherein the void resides. In a striking reversal, “the immeasurable excess of state power” that seeks to exclude the void from consistency is in fact the guarantor of the void’s continued persistence in a situation.

As I mentioned previously, Badiou firmly holds that, because the void can never belong to a situation and, as a result, can never be presented or unified, there can be no experience of the void as such, that is, the individual elements belonging to a situation can never encounter the void of their situation. Badiou does admit, however, that in the wake of an exceptional event that breaks with the re-presented structure of a situation “we have an opportunity to *think* and hold true to the inconsistency of what there is” (Hallward, 2005: 100; emphasis in original). While this argument has weight—indeed, many authors after Badiou have relied on his radically anti-phenomenological orientation in their own work<sup>48</sup>—my assertion is that Badiou must also account for the anterior experience of the event itself that occasions this interventionist thinking. In other words, I believe that there can be and, in fact, is a phenomenological experience of the nothingness constitutive of the void, namely, anxiety. A more in-depth phenomenological supplement to Badiou’s philosophy centered on the concept of anxiety will be developed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Until then, suffice it to note that in the absence of a phenomenological relation to the event-as-void-occurrence/evocation, certain parts of Badiou’s philosophy will remain largely underdeveloped. I am thinking specifically in this instance, of how, in Badiou’s philosophy, the particular operations by which the state structures a situation in dominance remain entirely abstract,<sup>49</sup> if not contradictory. It is

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Hallward (2005) and Brassier (2006).

<sup>49</sup> Regarding this, in a 2008 review of *Logics of Worlds*, Peter Hallward claims that “the model of power that seems tacitly to inform Badiou’s recent work [...] still appears to pre-date Foucault, if not Gramsci” (118). Hallward’s point is part and parcel of a more general criticism of Badiou—namely, that his system fails to effectively account for specific functioning of the state of the situation. In his recent, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (2009), Slavoj Žižek responded to Hallward’s claim, writing, “in this choice of Badiou vs. Foucault, one should nonetheless insist on this dimension ignored by the Foucauldian approach a dimension on which Badiou’s notion on invisibility focuses. That is to say, in the Foucauldian notion of

my contention, therefore, that by introducing the experience of anxiety into Badiou's system it is possible to elaborate more concretely the means by which a state manages its situation's relation to its void and, consequently, disruptive events. So before advancing any further with our exposition of Badiou's philosophy, it is worthwhile to pause briefly here in order to demonstrate how we might initially come to incorporate anxiety into his system.

I have maintained throughout the preceding discussion that, for Badiou, there can be no experience of the void itself. I have also maintained that, for Badiou, the role of the state is to structure the situation in such a way as to try and preclude any encounter of the situation with its own void. It would seem, then, that Badiou's philosophy presents us with a contradiction or, rather, a redundancy: If the void can never be encountered in-itself, why is a second operation required to prevent that which, ontologically, can never occur? In other words, insofar as the void remains forever outside the conditions of possible experience for the inhabitants of a situation, then the state would seem to be entirely excessive, that is, *it manages a relation* (between the void and those internal to the situation) *that does not exist*. However, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, there is a particular philosophical genealogy that understands anxiety as precisely this disruptive individual relationship to the nothingness of the void that inheres in every situation. And, if we accept this possible existence of an individual-void experience (i.e., anxiety), it becomes possible to provide some specific content to the otherwise

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productive power, a power which works not in an exclusionary way, but in an enabling/regulatory way, there is no room for Badiou's notion of the point of inconsistency of a situation for which there is no proper place with(in) a situation" (101). While I believe Žižek is correct to draw attention to "the point of inconsistency" (i.e., the in-existence of the void) in Badiou's philosophy, I think he is wrong to assume that the function of the state can be reduced to the simple maintenance of the opposition between included and excluded. Moreover, as Badiou's longtime colleague and friend, Yves Duroux, stated in a recent, "He [Badiou] doesn't understand him [Foucault] at all" (2012: 169). What Badiou, at least as read through Žižek, misses in Foucault is the fact that the state is not concerned merely with the "classification of encyclopedias" but with how its structured field of established rules can resist those moments of "saturation" or "transition" (e.g. Sade, Cervantes) that liberate individuals from their historically authorized identities (2012: 169). Although it is not the aim of this essay, I believe there is a possible rapprochement available between Badiou and Foucault on precisely this point.

ambiguous role played by the state. Specifically, we can now understand the state as ordering the given elements of a situation in such a way as to minimize their experience of anxiety because that specific experience, by revealing certain foreclosed possibilities can, potentially, inaugurate a disruptive process of subjectivity. Put differently, we can say that the state does not seek to foreclose the void *per se*, which as I have shown above would be impossible, but instead manages its inhabitants in such a way as to deny them any *experience* of the void that undergirds their situation.

In his recent *Logics of Worlds* (2009), Badiou has taken some steps to address the problem of the in-existence of the void in what he now refers to as worlds of appearance. While he still holds that the void can never appear as such, he now admits that in any given world, there exists some element or being that, given its “proximity” to the void, has a “minimal” appearance in that world.<sup>50</sup> The void no longer simply in-exists, it now minimally appears as some being in a given world. Important to note, however, is that whatever this being may be, its appearance is “nil according to the transcendental of this world” (LW 124). In other words, for whatever being “instantiates” the void, its degree of appearing (i.e., nil) will, relative to the other beings of that world, be zero. Thus, “with regard to that which [in]appears in a given world, all that we can hope is to be able transcendently to evaluate a *minimal intensity*. Obviously, for one inhabiting this world, such a minimum will equal zero because no intensity is known which is inferior to this minimum” (LW 160). As we can see, then, this theoretical concession is really nothing of the sort. That is, while it would seem that Badiou now gives the void some degree of intra-situational (i.e., worldly) consistency, thereby circumventing certain criticisms regarding experience and relation, he in fact continues to treat it as an inexperienceable no-thing. Given that the void (or in-existent void-element) cannot appear in whatever world it exists, if the state is to be provided with some role that is not entirely abstract and empty, Badiou’s system still requires the development of an in-situation/world

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<sup>50</sup> In *Logics of Worlds*, these minimally appearing elements play much the same role played by evental sites in *Being and Event*. Badiou’s favored examples of these elements-without-appearance/sites are undocumented French workers, the *sans-papiers*, These non-citizens, given their illegal residency status, appear as *nothing* (they do not appear/are not counted) in the French Situation.

experience of that which necessarily remains invisible to the other elements of that situation/world.<sup>51</sup> In other words, if it is the very being of this void-element to have a zero-degree of appearing then it would again be redundant for the state to act as guarantor of its invisibility; it already *is* invisible. My proposal, conversely, is to understand the role played by the state as the administration of the relationship that can come to exist between beings-in-a-world and that which necessarily appears as nothing in that world. As I will show in the next section of this chapter, this administration is immediately concerned with what, in Badiou's philosophy are known as evental sites.

## 1.4 Events and Evental Sites: Balancing on the Edge of the Void

In certain situations,<sup>52</sup> Badiou explains, there are "singular" multiplicities that are presented and not re-presented. These exceptional elements have in some way escaped the restructuring effect of the state and can therefore be said to belong to the situation without being included in it, that is, they are present (they appear united-as-themselves) but none of the individual elements which compose these multiples are ever presented as such. In Meditation Sixteen of *Being and Event*, Badiou uses the example of a furtive family to expand upon these *evental sites*:

It would be a case of a concrete family, *all* of whose members were clandestine or non-declared, and which presents itself (manifests itself publicly) *uniquely* in the group form of family outings. In short, such a multiple is solely presented as the multiple-that-it-is. None of its terms are counted as one; only the multiple of these terms forms a one [...] it is such that it belongs to the situation whilst what belongs to it in turn does not (BE 175).

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<sup>51</sup> If, as Peter Hallward argues in a critical review of *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou's motto can now be stated as, "trust only in what you cannot see," Badiou has yet to develop an understanding of the intermediary psychological *relation* that might come to exist between an individual, immersed as he or she is in the everyday order of appearances, and that invisible being which minimally founds the transcendental indexation of these appearances (2008: 121). In other words, Badiou has yet to provide an account of how an individual might "see" the invisible.

<sup>52</sup> Sam Gillespie correctly identifies an inconsistency in Badiou's philosophy regarding the possibility of evental sites, writing: It would "seem that every situation contains the possibility for an event insofar as an event 'names' the void of a situation. On the other hand, as we saw, Badiou firmly maintains the distinction between historic and natural situations in which events cannot (and do not) occur" (2012: 40). The distinction between historical and neutral situations is discussed further in Chapter 3.

From the perspective of the state of the situation, then, these elements are non-decomposable, i.e., they cannot be broken down further into their composite parts so as to become subject to the regulative practices of the meta-structuring state. As such, evental sites “contain” elements that, from the standpoint of the state-of-the-situation—lack any existential visibility. For this reason, Badiou says that these evental sites are simultaneously *foundational* and located “on the edge of the void” (BE 175).<sup>53</sup> By foundational, Badiou means that insofar as these elements cannot be dissolved any further they act as a founding atom of the situation to which they belong.<sup>54</sup> And, by residing on the edge of the void, Badiou means that insofar as these elements are composed of *nothing* but themselves, they have a certain proximity to the inconsistency excluded from the situation (i.e., void). Another way of saying this is that the void is given a kind of material foothold in the situation in the form of an evental site. The elusive dispersion of the void is concretized by the specificity of an evental site, which although itself is not void, provides a point from which the void might come to interrupt the situation in the guise of an event. Thus, their marginal position relative to other elements in the situation grants these evental sites a privileged status as the locus of an event’s intrusion. Evental sites, because nothing separates them from the void of inconsistency, create specific places within the situation from which the consequences of an event can be drawn.<sup>55</sup> We can turn now, finally to what is likely the most well known aspect of Badiou’s philosophy, namely, the event.

An event, simply put, reveals the void of a situation; it is “the arrival in being of non-being, the arrival amidst the visible of the invisible” (BE 181). (Though how exactly this

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<sup>53</sup> “I will term *evental site* an entirely abnormal multiple; that is, a multiple such that none of its elements are presented in a situation. The site itself is presented, but ‘beneath it’ nothing of which it is composed is presented. As such, the site is not part of the situation. I will also say of such a multiple that it is *on the edge of the void* or *foundational*” (BE 175).

<sup>54</sup> As Badiou explains, “the evental sites block the infinite regression of the combination of multiples. As they are on the edge of the void, we cannot think what is beneath their being presented. It is thus legitimate to say that the sites found the situation since they are its absolutely primary terms” (BE 175).

<sup>55</sup> Peter Hallward treats evental sites as the invisible and “fragile link[s] between this situation and the general inconsistency of human be-ing as such” (2003: 119). Again, however, Badiou has yet to fully explain how an individual might encounter an invisible evental-site.

revelation occurs, as yet, remains entirely abstract.) An event is thus an unprecedented happening or occurrence caused by the breakdown of the count that makes apparent the foundational inconsistency of a situation, its void. Resulting from a “dysfunction” of the operation that counts a situation as one (thereby barring the void from presentation), an event “is this ultra-one of a hazard, on the basis of which the void of a situation is retroactively discernible” (BE 56). In this sense, an event can be understood as the ephemeral occurrence of inconsistency in consistency that exposes that situation’s origins in a pure multiplicity founded only on the void. This revelation subsequently comes to mandate the potential reorganization of the situation in terms compatible with generic being of inconsistency made apparent by the event’s arrival. Badiou names this process of re-making the situation on the basis of the void-as-latent-genericity revealed by an event, “truth,” and he names the operator of this faithful process, “subject.” For Badiou, if “the event reveals the void of a situation ... it is from this void that the subject constitutes himself as fragment of a truth-process. It is this void that separates him from the situation or the place, inscribing him in a trajectory without precedent ... [T]he subject is he who chooses to persevere in this distance from himself inspired by the revelation of the void –the void, which is the very being of the place” (2005: 55).

For readers less familiar with the specificities of Badiou’s ontology, the following summary can provide a framework with which to consider the preceding remarks.

- 1.) There is always a remainder of inconsistency that can never be exhausted by the operation of the count-as-one that structures a given situation as consistent;
- 2.) Badiou names this remainder void;
- 3.) The void, which is not counted-as-one, nonetheless has a minimal/spectral (in)existence in every situation from which it is necessarily excluded;
- 4.) The state of the situation strives to prevent this ghostly remainder from presenting itself as such, as its appearance would subvert the legal-consistency of that situation;
- 5.) Despite this effort on the part of the state, the void can and does appear, localized in the specificity of its eventual site, which lies on the edge of the void;
- 6.) This rare, ephemeral, and contingent revelation of the void is known as an event;
- 7.) In the wake of an event, individuals may come to develop the generic consequences of the void’s intrusion into the situation;

- 8.) Badiou names the individuals who chose to do so, subjects, and the process of this faithful development, he names, truth.

There are, despite the seeming tidiness of Badiou's philosophy as I have presented it here, certain criticisms—particularly those regarding the role of phenomenological experience and affect—that still need to be addressed. Specifically, although it would seem that the primary normative or political aim of Badiou's philosophy is the extraction of a subject from its determination by the representational censures of the state, he fails to provide a nuanced phenomenology of this extraction. That is, unlike say, Heidegger or Sartre, who share the same basic philosophical concern (e.g., Dasein's individuation out of its thrownness in the They), Badiou's philosophy, at least as it currently exists, is unable (and indeed unwilling) to provide any affective account of this subjective withdrawal from the existing conditions of objectivity that determine its being. That is, he cannot account for the occurrence of an event, from the perspective of an in-situation individual in such a way as to explain what would compel that individual to decisively intervene on behalf of that event. So, in the following chapter, I move away from Badiou and turn instead to the development of a concept of anxiety by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre; it concerns itself with precisely a psychological dimension absent in Badiou, namely, the intrasituational *experience* of the nothingness of the void that reveals subjective possibilities hitherto foreclosed by the state of the situation, thereby compelling new modes of explicitly subjective action. The name for this experience is anxiety.

## Chapter 2

I looked anxiously around me: the present, nothing but the present. Furniture light and solid rooted in its present. A table, a bed, a closet with a mirror —and me. The true nature of the present revealed itself. It was all that exists and all that was not.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

### 2 Three Valences of Anguish: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre

Anxiety, it would seem, is suddenly everywhere.<sup>56</sup> Rollo May, defines the condition, in a broad yet still helpful way, as “the apprehension cued off by a threat to some value which the individual holds essential to his existence as a self” (1950: 72). In this sense, anxiety “arises from the changed perception the subject has of him- or herself and their position in society” (Salecl, 2004: 3). Emerging as it does from the inextricable relation between an individual and the situation/world in which he or she exists, anxiety unites different sets of (psychical-) phenomena. Such opposed concepts as absence and presence, isolation and relation, and, in particular, fear and courage, are all brought together under the common heading of anxiety. Obsessive-compulsive disorder; post-traumatic stress disorder; social anxiety; maternal anxiety; shopper’s anxiety and buyer’s remorse; generalized anxiety disorder: this list, which is by no means comprehensive, names only the most prevalent of those phenomenal dispositions designated by the term. Indeed, it seems that with each passing day some new variant of subjective discomfort is categorized in this way. This ubiquity has led author and New York Times commentator, Daniel Smith, to affirm that the “Age of Anxiety,” first christened as such by W.H. Auden in 1947, is as appropriate a title today, if not more so, as it was then (Smith, 2013).<sup>57</sup> For Smith, anxiety is *the* psychical category of interpretation through which to understand subjectivity in the Industrial West at the outset of the twenty-first century.

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<sup>56</sup> A recent study published in the “Archives of General Psychiatry” reports that 18.1% (*ca* 40 million) of the U.S. adult population suffers from anxiety and anxiety-related disorders (Kessler *et. al.*, 2005).

<sup>57</sup> Anxiety, Smith writes, characterizes “the consciousness of our era, the awareness of everything perilous about the modern world” (2013).



This understanding, I believe, is a needlessly broad use of the concept that robs it of its rich and precise philosophical history, reducing anxiety to some vague catchall-term for any contemporary unease. Moreover, by treating it as a merely individual response to some loosely defined societal problematic, such usage pathologizes anxiety, thereby reducing it to a static cycle of symptomal emergence and (pharmacological) eradication.<sup>58</sup> Despite offering a certain way to think about the now all too familiar experiences of nervousness or trepidation, the specific phenomenon of anxiety should not be treated as a blanket term for every moment of individual disquiet. That is, anxiety is not simply synonymous with such everyday feelings as “fretfulness,” “apprehension,” or “worry.” And while anxiety might, in some sense, include each of these, it refers to a far more specific experience.

Consequently, in the following chapter, I treat anxiety as a specifically *philosophical/phenomenological*<sup>59</sup> concept that emerges at least as early as Hegel (if not already in Spinoza and Pascal) and proceeds in its own overlapping way through Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. Contrary to the usual clinical understanding that treats anxiety as some personal defect or shortcoming that can and, in fact, should be overcome, the philosophical approach developed in this chapter understands anxiety as an affective site of individual conversion—an unexpected rupture with the static routines of everyday life—through which individuals might separate themselves from their immediate

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<sup>58</sup> This state-pathologization of anxiety is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>59</sup> Freud, Lacan, and their followers have additionally pursued the concept of anxiety, albeit in explicitly psychoanalytic terms. The differences between the phenomenological and psychoanalytical understanding of anxiety are too vast to explain here. Suffice it to note that whereas Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre each conceive of anxiety as a subject’s lived-experiential relation to an anterior ontological freedom, Lacan, after Freud, begins instead with an overdetermined and *subjugated* subject, inexorably bound to/by a constitutive network of signification. This is not to say, however, that the phenomenological and psychoanalytical approaches are entirely incompatible. Today there exists a subset of Lacanians, mostly in Slovenia, who are trying to develop a theory of freedom by working through Lacan by way of Hegel (For more on the Lacano-Hegelian philosophy developed by the “Slovenian School,” see, LW 536-537. In their understanding, the imminent encounter with the *object petit a* (the Lacanian understanding of anxiety) partially dislocates the subject from its placement in/by a socio-symbolic network of determination, which would then allow for some dimension of subjective self-determination. I am skeptical of this approach, as it seems that the product of this dislocation is only ever the subject’s reabsorption into the symbolic order. As Badiou has recently written, “we have to recompose for our time a thought of truth that is articulated on the void without passing through the figure of the master” (2004: 87). A further discussion of these competing concepts of anxiety is undertaken in Chapter 3.

surroundings in a positive and transformative manner. As I will demonstrate, what unites the three following philosophers' theories of anxiety is their treatment of it as *a relation to an underlying and originary nothingness* that undermines what often seem to be the fully determinant force of objective situations and structures. Put simply, anxiety, as an experience of nothing, reveals the possibility of things being otherwise and, moreover, the ineluctable human capacity to realize this otherwise. This understanding, therefore, has the great benefit of treating anxiety as a liberating and positive phenomenon, one worthy not of suppression (or medical removal), but of solicitude and care. In short, drawing on this philosophically progressive lineage of thought, this chapter suggests that a world without anxiety would be a stale and oppressive place, wholly bereft of new possibilities.

## 2.1 Kierkegaard

For Kierkegaard, the concept of anxiety is inseparable from the category of possibility. Indeed, Kierkegaard is perhaps best read as *the* preeminent theorist<sup>60</sup> of possibility (and contingency) over and against any Hegelian<sup>61</sup> emphasis on actuality (and necessity). For Kierkegaard, unlike Hegel, what matters first is not the logical and determinate (i.e., objective-teleological) movement of spirit/history as such, but the transcendental capacity of subjective freedom by which actual transformation(s) is (are) made to occur. In his *A*

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<sup>60</sup> I use the word “theorist” here so as to circumvent the often-tedious debates surrounding Kierkegaard’s philosophical status. To my mind, the ultimate classification of Kierkegaard as either a literary figure, psychologist, ironist, theologian, or, as Badiou prefers, an “anti-philosopher,” have little bearing on his overall contribution to the history of thought. For a discussion of this taxonomy of nomination in Kierkegaard scholarship *cf.* Pinkard (2002: 345-348) and Pattison (2005:1-11).

<sup>61</sup> There are some lingering concerns on the degree to which the “Hegel” so frequently (and viscosly) targeted in Kierkegaard’s writing actually resembles the great 19<sup>th</sup> century idealist. Terry Pinkard points out that Kierkegaard’s “Hegel”—the preeminent thinker of a closed and abstract system that privileges thoughts and words over reality—is more immediately comparable to the “Hegel” presented by Schelling in his 1841-1842 lectures, which Kierkegaard (along with Engels) is known to have attended (2002: 347), than the actual German Idealist. Furthermore, the “Hegel” to which Kierkegaard so often refers is a far cry from the reading of Hegel recently popularized by Slavoj Žižek (and his Lacanian cohort, *e.g.*, Adrian Johnston) in which Hegel is first and foremost a philosopher of contingent breaks and ruptures made compatible with a (Lacanian-Badiouian) theory of subjectivity; *cf.* Žižek (2012). Interestingly, Žižek’s Hegel, at least as I understand it, is not entirely incompatible with Kierkegaard’s own understanding of subjective freedom and the “qualitative leap.”

*Hegel Dictionary* (1992), Michael Inwood helpfully outlines the objective-idealist logic that Kierkegaard sought so tirelessly to refute. Inwood writes:

The objectification of reason and understanding are essential to Hegel's *idealism*: The processes and ontological hierarchies of nature and spirit are conceived as governed by an immanent understanding and reason that is analogous, in its development, to the understanding and reason of the human mind. Genuine rationality consists in the submission and conformity of *our* reason to the reason inherent in things: In *cognition* we should follow the immanent dialectic of concepts, objects and processes. In practical life, we should conform to the intrinsic rationality of our society, of the *actual*. Apparently irrational features of the natural or social worlds are in reality essential elements in an overarching rationality, just as error is not only an essential step on the way to *truth*, but an essential ingredient in it (244: emphasis in original).

Against this understanding, in which subjectivity is reduced to aligning itself with the necessary movement of actuality's dialectical development, Kierkegaard, drawing on his studies of Friedrich Trendelenburg and Wilhelm Tennemann, proposes a non- (or anti-) dialectical<sup>62</sup> theory of change in which the radically possible, i.e., that which has no necessary relationship to the historical development of actuality, is actualized by an act of subjective freedom or decision, what Kierkegaard in his treatises on anxiety and despair will call a "qualitative leap". As Reidar Thomte explains in his annotations of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard refuses to submit actuality (i.e., the *contingent* actualization of possibility) to any overarching or systemic logic: "Kierkegaard maintains that if actuality is treated as part of logic, both actuality and logic are confused. For Kierkegaard, actuality comprises the accidental whereas Hegel maintains that it pertains to necessity. Kierkegaard's position allows for freedom, which belongs in the realm of actuality" (CA 224).<sup>63</sup> Kierkegaard effectively frees reality from any underlying metaphysical order. Because everything that has come into existence (actuality) has done

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<sup>62</sup> In *Being and Event*, Badiou echoes Kierkegaard's frustrations. He treats the Hegelian "isomorphy between the dialectic of spirit and the dialectic of nature" as "still-born" (BE 4). Similarly, In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou argues that Hegel's emphasis on philosophical holism reduces the category of possibility to that of necessity (LW 143). To an extent, then, for Kierkegaard (and, as I want to argue, Badiou), the existence of anxiety attests to the ultimate failure of the actual/count-as-one to fully constitute itself as such. In other words, as outlined in the previous chapter, because the void necessarily (in-)exists in every situation, the existing confines of actuality/the situation are always susceptible to the emergence of new and disruptive possibilities.

<sup>63</sup> To this effect, Kierkegaard writes, "neither logic nor actuality is served by placing actuality in the *Logic*. Actuality is not served thereby for contingency, which is an essential part of the actual, cannot be admitted within the realm of logic" (CA 10).

so *freely* and without any recourse to a predetermined historical trajectory, it is nonsensical to refer to actual developments as the necessary outcome of a logical process.<sup>64</sup>

It is in this respect that Kierkegaard's many disagreements with Hegel can ultimately be boiled down to a question concerning *immanence*, or the totalizing nature of the "whole".<sup>65</sup> For Hegel (at least in Kierkegaard's understanding), reality is subordinate to a logical or metaphysical whole propelled by an immanent movement of internal self-negation. Kierkegaard believes that this movement's necessary and immanent character serves to effectively foreclose any genuine transformation. "Every movement [in Hegel's Logic]," explains Kierkegaard, "is an immanent movement, which in a profound sense is no movement at all [...] the negative, then, is immanent in the movement, is something vanishing, is that which is annulled. If everything comes about in this manner nothing comes about at all [...] nothing comes into being, everything is." (CA 13). At best, Kierkegaard concludes, Hegel's totalizing philosophical system merely explains how what *is* must somehow always-already *have been*; it remains silent regarding what might/could come to be. In disagreement with this closed immanence of Hegelian logic, Kierkegaard proposes an understanding of reality as a contingent process in-becoming, whereby the actual transitions into the possible without any recourse to the necessary/determinate movement of the whole. For Kierkegaard, human reality is inherently *open* and radically non-determined.<sup>66</sup> Kierkegaard's is a philosophy of

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<sup>64</sup> Resultantly, as Michael Burns has recently explained, to Kierkegaard's mind, any totalized metaphysical system or Logic (*à la* Hegel) does "little more than point out the comic figure of the philosophy professor who has managed to step outside of existence and view objective reality as a totalized and logical whole" (332). In a similar sense, Terry Pinkard (2002) draws attention to a quip made by Kierkegaard in one of his journals regarding Hegel: "If Hegel had written the whole of his logic and then said, in the preface that it was merely an experiment in thought in which he had even begged the question in many places, then he would certainly have been the greatest thinker who ever lived. As it is he is merely comic" (Kierkegaard 1959: remark 497; quoted in Pinkard 346).

<sup>65</sup> Those who have ears to hear it will catch echoes of these same questions surrounding an immanent conception of an ontological whole, or "one-all," sounding over a century later in Badiou's extended polemic against Deleuze; *cf.* Badiou (2000).

<sup>66</sup> Drawing on this line of thinking in Kierkegaard, Michael O'Neil Burns has suggested that, for Kierkegaard, God is nothing more than "possibility itself, because 'God is this—that all things are possible'" (Kierkegaard, 1980: 40, quoted in Burns, 2010: 336). Žižek too, in his recent text, *The Parallax*

subjective *freedom* in which the future is ours to decide and create.<sup>67</sup>

Given his understanding of reality as an unfinished process of becoming, it follows that one of Kierkegaard's principal philosophical concerns is an explication of the intermediary term through which possibility may contingently pass over into actuality. As we will see, for Kierkegaard, this intermediate term is none other than the subjective experience of anxiety, the individual-affective response to the freedom characteristic of all humanity.

In his 1844 text, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard, writing under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis, provides an extended discussion of anxiety within the overarching context of original sin. He takes as his point of departure the “fantastic presupposition” of Adam's initial state of guiltlessness in the Garden of Eden and his subsequent expulsion therefrom as a consequence of the “first sin” (Adam's consumption of the God-prohibited fruit) (CA 25). Kierkegaard begins by presenting this initial state as one of “innocence” or “ignorance,” in which spirit (which, here is more or less isomorphic with human-freedom) is “asleep” or “dreaming,” qualified as it is by “an immediate unity with its natural condition” (CA 25.). The possibility of a break with this “immediate unity” is an additional means by which Kierkegaard can be further distinguished from Hegel.<sup>68</sup> As

*View* (2006) has presented Kierkegaard in this way, writing: “Kierkegaard's God is strictly correlative to the ontological openness of reality, to our relating to reality as unfinished ‘in-becoming’. God is the absolute other through which we can measure the thorough contingency of reality” (75).

<sup>67</sup> Kierkegaard, like the early Marx, is writing against what he perceives to be an essential determinism inherent in Hegelian Logic. And, like Marx, against Hegel, he develops a philosophy in which individuals take and retain their place as the “authors and actors of their own drama” (Marx, 1966: 109)

<sup>68</sup> Perhaps unsurprising at this point is the fact that Kierkegaard's understanding of anxiety is fundamentally different from Hegel's. In the preface to his *Phenomenology of Spirit* after outlining the movement of consciousness qua *Notion* as (a) determinate negation, Hegel describes a scenario in which consciousness feels a self-inflicted “violence” that disrupts its state of “unthinking inertia” thereby propelling forward its (self-) development. Hegel goes on to explain that the anxiety this violence can induce—far from being an experience of freedom by which transformations of the actual can occur (as in Kierkegaard)—is in fact consciousness's *resistance* to a potential future possibility. For Hegel, anxiety compels consciousness to “retreat from the truth” and “to hold on to what it is in danger of losing” (1977: 51). This is quite similar, to my mind, to the “situational anxiety of the void” discussed by Badiou in *Being and Event*, and fear as it will be discussed by Heidegger in the following section.

mentioned, Kierkegaard understands Hegel's philosophical system to treat actuality as the *necessary* consequence of an immanent logical development, which forecloses the possibility of any subjective decision interrupting history's determinate unfolding. Consequently, for Kierkegaard's Hegel, individuals are merely the supports of an anterior process of objective determination and, as such, they remain forever bound to an already-determined trajectory of becoming.<sup>69</sup>

In contradistinction to this position, Kierkegaard asserts that because Adam *is able to*, through a "qualitative leap" (i.e., an assertion of subjective freedom without recourse to any already-existing predicative support<sup>70</sup>), defy the divine prohibition and break with this initial unity, what must be understood as primarily determinate is not the logical movement of history, but an always-anterior subjective freedom—a primary-ontological capacity for self-determination that trumps any necessary conception of actuality's historical development. Indeed, for Kierkegaard, God's prohibition itself testifies to the existence of this subjective capacity, in as much it is only necessary given Adam's essential ability to disobey/disregard it.<sup>71</sup> God's injunction awakens in Adam "freedom's possibility;" it forces in him the realization that *nothing*, even the weight of a divine

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<sup>69</sup> To this effect, many years later and in a much different context, Frantz Fanon will argue that Hegel's "negro knows nothing of freedom, for he has not fought for it" (2008: 172). To a large extent this is the crucial difference that separates Fanon from his contemporary, Albert Memmi, who, unlike Fanon will stress the historical/dialectical *inevitability* of anti-colonial revolt: (cf. Memmi, 1991: 120-127.) Contrary to Memmi's position, Fanon believes that Hegel fails to describe the means by which a slave might come to emancipate *himself* without recourse to any external causality. This is not to say, by any means, that Hegel has nothing to contribute to a theory of freedom. In fact, quite the contrary: Hegel is absolutely a philosopher of freedom. It is just that his understanding of freedom relies not on the radicality of individual choice, but on the "transcendental objectivities" of spirit's becoming absolute (Badiou LW 422). It is in this sense, against Hegel, that Badiou makes a veiled reference to Fanon in his recent, *Logics of Worlds*, writing, "the fate of the wretched of the earth is never a law of nature" (LW 53).

<sup>70</sup> Although Badiou has relatively little to say regarding Kierkegaard, whenever he discusses the Dane he does so almost exclusively with regards to Kierkegaard's understanding of existential choice as constituting the qualitative leap. For example, in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou's quick gloss of Kierkegaard centers on an understanding of "points" which comprise "an absolute choice, the alternative, disjunction without remainder" (LW 425). Indeed, for Badiou, "Kierkegaard remains an unsurpassable master when it comes to choice, anxiety, repetition, and the infinite" (LW 557).

<sup>71</sup> To this extent, Kierkegaard writes, "it was the prohibition itself not to eat of the tree of knowledge that gave birth the sin of Adam [...] The prohibition presupposes that which bursts forth in Adam's qualitative leap" (CA 39).

command, ultimately determines the course of his action (CA 44). This paradigmatic<sup>72</sup> *experience* in Adam of the nothingness that both makes possible and attests to freedom's possibility is anxiety.<sup>73</sup> Thus, for Kierkegaard, "*anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility:*" it is the individual experience of radical non-determination through which possibility may come to pass over into actuality. Anxiety brings about the movement from innocence/ignorance to self-conscious and self-directing freedom; it "awakens my possibilities for existing as a self-conscious agent" (Pattison 51). Accordingly, as George Pattison explains in his admirable survey of Kierkegaard's thought, anxiety is best understood "in terms of the transition from the preconscious life of the animal or child to awakened self-consciousness and freedom" (CA 56).<sup>74</sup> Given that, for Kierkegaard, nothing is ultimately determinate of subjective freedom, anxiety is the means through which an individual can come to relate negatively to, and, as a result, exceed his or her individual determinateness by actualizing the distinct range of their possibilities.<sup>75</sup>

In the course of developing his concept of anxiety, Kierkegaard proceeds to distinguish it from a related subjective experience, fear. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is a unique phenomenon in that it has no direct relation to a concrete or worldly object. As such, nothing is responsible for a subject's anxious experience; "it is only a nothing that can bring about anxiety" (CA 42). In fact, as I have suggested above, anxiety is perhaps best understood as an experience of the *a priori* nothingness that guarantees subjective freedom. Precisely because *nothing* determines my actions, possibility as such remains

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<sup>72</sup> As Claire Carlisle explains, "Adam's experience of sinning reveals the universal situation of freedom and the universal response of anxiety" (2006, 99).

<sup>73</sup> In this sense, Kierkegaard writes, "This is the actuality that is preceded by freedom's possibility... the possibility *to be able*. In a logical system it is convenient to say that possibility passes over into actuality. However, in actuality it is not so convenient and an intermediate term is required. The intermediate term is anxiety" (CA 49).

<sup>74</sup> For this reason, among others, in the following chapter, I suggest that anxiety is the particular experience that occasions that transition from individual to subject, in Badiou's philosophy.

<sup>75</sup> Of particular note is anxiety's ability to reveal possibilities that would seem to lie outside an individual's natural or given condition; this will be a considerable factor in the State-prohibition of anxiety discussed in the next chapter.

possible.<sup>76</sup> It follows, then, that the object of anxiety is nothingness:

It remains true that the object of anxiety is a nothing. If the object of anxiety is such a something that when viewed essentially, i.e., in the direction of freedom, it signifies something, then we do not have a leap but a quantitative transition that confuses every concept [...] If we ask more particularly what the object of anxiety is, then the answer, here as elsewhere, must be that it is nothing. Anxiety and nothing always correspond to each other. As soon as the actuality of freedom and of spirit is posited, anxiety is cancelled (CA 77).

In referring to no-thing, Kierkegaard points out, “anxiety is altogether different from fear and other concepts that refer to something definite” (CA 96). Whereas anxiety comes about in relation to a fundamental nothingness, fear and its related ilk (terror, surprise, alarm, horror, etc.) all refer to some actually existing object.<sup>77</sup>

As I will demonstrate in the following section, Heidegger, in the phenomenological project of *Being and Time* (2010), relies in large part on Kierkegaard’s delineation of anxiety from fear in his own development of anxiety [*Angst*] as a fundamental attunement of Dasein’s (self-) disclosure.<sup>78</sup> In what follows, I discuss in detail Heidegger’s understanding of anxiety as it is laid out in *Being and Time*, paying particular to its differentiation from fear and the individualizing role it plays in Dasein’s relation to the

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<sup>76</sup> “Therefore,” Kierkegaard writes, “freedom’s possibility announces itself in anxiety [...] freedom shows itself for itself in the anxiety of possibility, or in the nothing of possibility, or in the nothing of anxiety” (CA 74, 77).

<sup>77</sup> For several reasons, this distinction is important moving forward. Primarily, it is anxiety’s, as opposed to fear’s, relation to nothingness that will allow us to grant it a privileged status as the experience of an event. Because *nothing* is the cause of anxiety, it alone is able to evoke the non-existence of the void.

<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Heidegger will work to overcome certain theoretical issues that affect Kierkegaard’s understanding of anxiety, namely, Kierkegaard’s abstract and formal emphasis on an ahistorical and indeterminate nothingness as the ground of subjective freedom cannot account for the specificity of that freedom’s existence in a given situation. To what degree can we honestly say, with Kierkegaard, that absolutely nothing ultimately determines our subjective possibilities? Are we not living and sexed beings, endowed with material bodies, enmeshed in the concrete circumstances of our present world? And if we admit as much, can we really argue that, even in the absence of some overarching metaphysical system, nothing effectively circumscribes the domain of possibility. This is, surprisingly, a deeply Hegelian criticism of Kierkegaard that accuses him of, in a Kantian fashion, unduly separating the otherwise indissoluble spheres of actuality and possibility. Although this transcendental bifurcation should perhaps be unsurprising given Kierkegaard’s deeply religious deportment, it is nonetheless the case that his refusal to grant *anything* a degree of subjective determination threatens to reduce his thought to a naïve idealism in which pure possibility exists outside of any mediating relation to actuality. After Kierkegaard, then, it will be Heidegger’s task to, while still retaining an understanding of anxiety as the phenomenological relation to nothingness, provide that understanding with some dimension of material actuality.



They. Additionally, in a brief excursus on Heidegger's subsequent investigation into the phenomenon of anxiety in his later text, "What is Metaphysics," I tease out further Dasein's relation to the no-thingness of its very own possibility to be. The section concludes briefly with an elaboration of Heidegger's advance over Kierkegaard in his elaboration of anxiety as revealing *embodied possibility*.

## 2.2 Heidegger

One of the most persuasive aspects of *Being and Time* is Heidegger's attempt to provide a phenomenology of attunement [*Befindlichkeit*<sup>79</sup>] and mood [*Stimmung*].<sup>80</sup> Drawing heavily on Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*,<sup>81</sup> Heidegger develops a detailed description of Dasein's affective being-in-the world that holds a central place in his larger project of fundamental ontology.<sup>82</sup> For Heidegger, through their attuned-being, humans gain access to their world and the objects therein. "In attunement," he writes, "lies existentially a disclosive submission to a world out of which things that matter to us can be encountered" (BT 34/138).<sup>83</sup> Simply, mood is how the world is revealed/disclosed to Dasein. In *Being and Time*, two contrasting modes of this disclosure are discussed at length: fear [*Furcht*] and anxiety [*Angst*].

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<sup>79</sup> *Befindlichkeit* is a notoriously difficult word to translate. As Hubert Dreyfus explains, *Befindlichkeit* "is not a word in ordinary German, but is constructed from an everyday greeting, 'Wie Befinden Sie Sich' which literally asks, 'How do you find yourself'—something like the English, 'How are you doing?'" (Dreyfus, 1991:168). The Stambaugh translation (2010) renders it as attunement; Macquarrie and Robinson (1962) prefer state of mind or disposition; Dreyfus himself chooses affectedness; and William J. Richardson (1963) translates *Befindlichkeit* as already-having-found-oneself-there-ness. What each of these various renderings are trying to get at is the fact that Dasein has always already assumed an affective stance or perspective toward the world in which it has come to exist.

<sup>80</sup> "Arguably," writes Sharon N. Elkholy, "Heidegger's most important contribution to the history of philosophy, in addition to entrenching the subject in its world and thereby overcoming the subject-object dualism, is the primacy that he accords to mood in his analysis of human existence" (2008:4).

<sup>81</sup> In a footnote in *Being and Time*, Heidegger admits his debt to Kierkegaard, writing, "S. Kierkegaard got furthest of all in the analysis of the phenomenon of anxiety" (BT 184/190 n.4). On the relationship between Heidegger and Kierkegaard, see Dreyfus and Rubin (1991), pp.284-340.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Inwood goes so far as to suggest that *Angst* in "detaching the philosopher from his worldly concerns" is the very thing "that makes philosophy possible" (1992: 17).

<sup>83</sup> In this section, all *Being and Time* citations refer to the second edition of the Stambaugh translation (2010). Page numbers preceding the forward-slash are specific to that volume; page numbers after the forward-slash indicate the standard German pagination.

Through fear, Heidegger demonstrates how a specific attunement (namely, fear, but also attunement more generally) affects Dasein's intentional relations to objects encountered in its surrounding world. From this demonstration of the eminently relational dimension of (fearful) attunement Heidegger proceeds with a discussion of anxiety as an exceptional and privileged way in which Dasein is disclosed. Unlike fear, anxiety is unrelated to any (intra-) worldly object(s) and, as such, it is uniquely able to reveal the total structure of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Given this important function, anxiety appears throughout *Being and Time* in connection with its numerous concepts.<sup>84</sup>

### 2.2.1 Fear and Anxiety in *Being and Time*

In Chapter Five (“Being-in as Such”) of *Being and Time*, after first sketching the ontic-ontological way in which “attunement [*Befindlichkeit*] discloses the way in which Dasein is its there,” Heidegger provides a descriptive analysis of fear as a mode of attunement that contrasts with anxiety in the following chapter. To this end, he provides three aspects of fear to be considered: “What we are afraid of, fearing [as such], and that about which we are afraid” (BT 136/140). “These aspects,” he writes, “are not accidental; they belong together. With them, the structure of attunement in general comes to the fore” (BT 136/140). Consequently, fear is revealed to be an “essential attunement of Dasein in general,” one that makes possible numerous variations of fear—e.g., alarm, horror, terror, etc. (BT 136/140). Before moving on with a discussion of anxiety in *Being and Time*, which as I hope to demonstrate, differs in certain fundamental ways from fear, it is worth briefly discussing these three dimensions of fear provided by Heidegger.

1.) In the attunement of fear, *what we are afraid of* (i.e., *the before which we are afraid* [*wovor*]) is always a fearsome object, encountered in the world, approaching from some specified place and distance. In this sense, fear is always spatial and relational; it is inextricably tied to the eminent approach, toward Dasein, of a threatening object in the world. 2.) *Fearing itself*, or *fearing as such*, allows Dasein to understand the threatening object as fearsome: it is the mode of disclosure that allows a world to be understood as

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<sup>84</sup> Conscience, care, call, guilt, the they, (in)authenticity, resoluteness, being-toward-death, to name only the most prominent, are all traceable, in one way or another, back to Heidegger's discussion of *Angst*.

(potentially) containing threatening/fearsome objects; or, put differently, fear is a “dormant possibility of attuned being-in-the-world” that discloses the world in such a way as to allow for the emergence of threatening objects toward which Dasein can be afraid (BT 136/141). Thus, fear, as an existential mode of disclosure, precedes the specific identification and cognizance of a fearsome object or being. Any secondary circumspection that “clarifies” the threatening character of an object operates only on the basis of this prior attunement of Dasein (i.e., fear). 3) Finally, *that about which* [worum] *we are afraid*, or that for which we fear, is Dasein itself. What, in fear, is understood to be threatened is the being of Dasein. And, insofar as Dasein “initially and for the most part, [...] is in terms of *what* it takes care of,” fear makes possible both an understanding of inner-worldly objects as threatening *as well as* threatened (BT 136/141). In doing so, the attunement of fear essentially discloses the there of Dasein in a private and relational fashion: it makes apparent Dasein’s *own relation* to inner-worldly beings by allowing it to distinguish between those that are threatening (toward which it is afraid) and those that are threatened (toward which it cares/is concerned).<sup>85</sup>

Unlike fear, the attunement of anxiety has no relation to objects encountered by Dasein in the world. “What anxiety is about,” Heidegger writes, “is not an inner-worldly being” (BT 180/186). Therefore, he continues:

It cannot have any relevance. The threat does not have the character of a definite harmfulness which concerns what is threatened with a definite regard to a particular factual potentiality of being. What anxiety is about is completely indefinite [...] Nothing which is at hand and present within the world functions as that which anxiety is anxious about [...] In anxiety we do not encounter this or that thing which, as threatening, could be relevant. (180/186.).

That anxiety emerges outside any relation to beings encountered in the world<sup>86</sup> is not to say, however, that anxiety is entirely without an object. On the contrary, the absence of

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<sup>85</sup> In this sense, Heidegger writes, “fear is occasioned by objects taken care of in the surrounding world” (BW 329/344).

<sup>86</sup> Anxiety is further distinguished from fear by the absence of any spatial relation between Dasein and objects existing in the world. In this sense, Heidegger explains how in anxiety, Dasein does not “‘see’ a definite ‘there’ and ‘over here’ from which what is threatening approaches. The fact that what is threatening is *nowhere* characterizes what anxiety is about” (BW 329/344; emphasis in original). Anxiety therefore has no approach; it is an immanent seizing of Dasein in a moment of unfamiliarity of uncanniness.

an inner-worldly object toward which Dasein could be anxious reveals “*that about which one has anxiety is being-in-the-world as such*” (BT 180/186; emphasis in original). In anxiety, Dasein experiences an uncanny [*unheimlich*] feeling that cannot be explained with reference to any beings in the world; therefore in anxiety, inner-worldly beings are experienced as *insignificant*<sup>87</sup> (BT 327/343). The insignificance of these inner-worldly beings reveals to Dasein that “what anxiety is about is the world as such,” shorn of all its contingent-historical actualizations (BT 181/187). Thus, in anxiety, in comprehending the world as world, Dasein is faced with its *potential*—its own open-possibilities—for being-in-the-world. Because anxiety arises from Dasein’s own being-in-the-world, Heidegger writes, “the fundamental possibilities of Dasein, which are always my own, show themselves in anxiety as they are undisguised [*unverstellt*] by inner-worldly beings to which Dasein, initially and for the most part clings” (BT 184/191). Contrasted with fear—which, founded on Dasein’s relation to a specific object *in* the world, fails to individualize Dasein apart from those objects—*anxiety*, in disclosing the world as such, reveals to Dasein its potential for being otherwise than its initial objective entanglement. In anxiety, Dasein “loses its usual concerns and is individualized down to its naked self, its bare ability-to-be, its ‘freedom of choosing itself’” (Inwood, 2000: 17). Heidegger, like Kierkegaard, therefore characterizes anxiety as *individualizing*: it pulls Dasein out of its immersion in the public existence of the they and reveals “authenticity and inauthenticity as possible modes of its being” (BT 184/191.).

### 2.2.2 The They [*Das Man*]

“Initially and for the most part,”<sup>88</sup> the specific mode of Dasein’s average everyday being with others in the world is its entanglement or absorption in the publicness of the “they” [*das Man*]. The they, for Heidegger, are the unspecified and generic others *with* and *as*

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<sup>87</sup> To this effect, Heidegger writes, “the utter insignificance that makes itself known in the nothing and nowhere [characteristic of anxiety] does not signify the absence of the world, but means that inner-worldly beings in themselves are so unimportant that on the basis of this insignificance of what is inner-worldly, the world in its worldliness is all that obtrudes itself” (BT 181/186-187).

<sup>88</sup> This phrase is used by Heidegger throughout *Being and Time* to indicate the *near-total* but always incomplete entanglement of Dasein in the They. To my mind, this is not altogether dissimilar from the failure of the count discussed in Chapter 1.

which Dasein exists in the world. This relationship, between Dasein and the They, functions in such a way so as to immerse Dasein almost entirely in the public being of the they.<sup>89</sup> In the they's public world, Dasein loses<sup>90</sup> its authentic and individual self, and is dispersed, caught, and de-individualized by the they's average everyday being. To this effect, Heidegger goes so far as to proclaim a "dictatorship" of the they that wholly determines the usual being of Dasein. He writes:

We have fun and enjoy ourselves the way *they* enjoy themselves. We read, see and judge art and literature the way *they* see and judge. But we also withdraw from the "great mass" the way *they* withdraw. We find "shocking" what *they* find shocking. The they which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness (BT 123/126-127; emphasis in original).

In this sense, even the conscious or willful efforts of Dasein to extricate itself from its absorption in the they remain circumscribed by the prescriptions of the de-individualized they-self.<sup>91</sup>

Heidegger's recourse to the all-encompassing nature of Dasein's immersion in the anonymous being of the they is the individualizing potential of anxiety. For Heidegger, Dasein's "falling prey" is understood as a flight from its authentic potentiality of being.

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<sup>89</sup>Heidegger writes, "the self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*" (BT 125/129; emphasis in original). There are two principle characteristics of the they-self worth noting here. First, the they exists in an *existentiell* avoidance of the "truth" of death: "*Lostness in the they and in world history revealed itself earlier as a flight from death*" (BT 371/390; emphasis mine). Second, the they "levels down" the possibilities of Dasein in its treatment of Being as mere "objective presence": "*The leveling down of possibilities* [in the they] is results in the phasing out of the possible as such" (BT 188/195). In the following chapter, Badiou's atonal worlds will be characterized in much the same way.

<sup>90</sup> Although for the sake of clarity, I have chosen to use the verb "(to) lose" in this specific instance, it is not quite accurate. For Heidegger, there is not a first, authentic and worldless being of Dasein subsequently dropped into the inauthentic being of the they: Dasein is always already being-in-the world and, consequently, marked by its being in the they. Thus, Heidegger writes, "*Initially*, factual Dasein is in the with-world discovered in an average way. *Initially*, "I" "am" not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the they" (BT 125/129). It is therefore difficult to conceptualize the relationship existing between Dasein and the they –at least insofar as the concept "relationship" implies an anterior discreteness from which the two terms under consideration (i.e. Dasein and They) could come to enter into an ensuing relation. Rather, Dasein's everyday being-in-the-world with others *is* the very being of the They.

<sup>91</sup> Very much like Badiou's understanding of the transition from individual to subject, Dasein's individualization requires some external condition: for Badiou it is the occurrence of an event, for Heidegger, the seizing of Dasein in a moment of anxiety. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate that these are, in fact, one in the same phenomena.

Its public entanglement is a “turning toward” inner-worldly beings<sup>92</sup> so as to avoid genuinely engaging with its ownmost possibility of being (i.e., non-being, or, death). Dasein’s absorption in the they is its way of addressing/avoiding the anxiety that accompanies its factual thrownness into the world. “Entangled flight *into* the being-at-home of publicness,” he writes, “is flight *from* not-being-at-home, that is from the uncanniness which lies in Dasein as thrown, as being in the world” (BT 183/189). Anxiety, therefore, is an anterior and more primordial phenomenon that *undergirds*<sup>93</sup> Dasein’s falling prey. Very occasionally<sup>94</sup> this anxiety bursts forth and grasps Dasein in a moment of uncanniness (i.e., without reference to an inner-worldly object toward which Dasein could feel “at home” through care or concern) that pulls it out of its “tranquilized, familiar being-in-the world” (BT 183/189.). In anxiety, “things at hand in the surrounding world sink away, and so do inner-worldly beings in general. The ‘world’ can offer nothing more, nor can the Dasein-with of others. Thus anxiety takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself, falling prey in terms of the ‘world’ and the public way of being interpreted” (BT 181/187). Through anxiety, Dasein is revealed to be fundamentally not at home in its everyday familiar being in the world (BT 327/342).

Although anxiety individualizes Dasein out of its immersion in the they, and “thus discloses Dasein as *solus ipse*” it does not remove Dasein from its being-in-the-world as such (BT 327/342.); rather:

This existential ‘solipsism,’ far from transposing an isolated subject thing into the harmless vacuum of a worldless occurrence that it brings Dasein in an extreme sense before its world as world, and thus itself before itself as being-in-the-world [...] Dasein is individualized but *as* being-in-the-world. (BT182-183/188-189).

Anxiety opens to Dasein its possibilities for being-in-the-world *outside* those prescribed by its being as/in the they-self. Indeed, in anxiety, for the first time, Dasein is presented

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<sup>92</sup> Insofar as the They-self is predominantly concerned with objects encountered in the surrounding world, it is characterized by fear. Indeed, for Heidegger, insofar as anxiety is a prior attunement that subsequently makes fear possible, it is precisely because “the they does not permit the courage to have anxiety about death” that our everyday existence can be characterized as fearful. (BT 244/255).

<sup>93</sup> For Heidegger, “the physiological triggering of anxiety is possible only because Dasein is anxious in the very ground of its being” (BT183/189).

<sup>94</sup> “Real angst,” Heidegger writes, is “*rare*” (BT 183/190; emphasis in original).

with the possibility of being *its own self*. Working from his discussion of anxiety, in Division II of *Being and Time*, Heidegger develops this possibility for authentic selfhood through the interrelated concepts of conscience, care, call and guilt. Ultimately, he provides an understanding of this resolute individuation as an existentiell modification of Dasein's (anxious) being-toward-death in which Dasein projects itself onto its ownmost (guilty) possibility.

### 2.2.3 Anxiety in "What is Metaphysics?" (1929)

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes anxiety as the mood that reveals to Dasein its thrownness into the world, bringing it "*face to face* with the nothingness of the possible impossibility of its own existence" (BT 254/266; emphasis in original). He goes on to claim that this elusive nothingness that brings about anxiety "unveils the nullity that determines Dasein in its ground" (BT 295/309). Although this mysterious nothingness is discussed at some length in *Being and Time*, the explicitly metaphysical connotations of the concept (here implied by his use of the word "ground") are not discussed in full until two years later in his inaugural lecture given to the Freiburg University Faculty titled, "What is Metaphysics?" In this short talk, Heidegger sets himself the task of asking: "How is it with the nothing?" or, put differently, how is it possible to inquire into the existence of nothingness insofar as it is not a (single) thing that can be grasped as such (BW 96). Following the phenomenological methodology developed in *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that it is only through a particular attunement of Dasein—a certain disclosive way in which Dasein finds itself—that nothingness can be encountered without transforming it into some existent being or object. Unsurprisingly, Heidegger finds this corresponding mode of attunement that directly "reveals the nothing" in anxiety (BW 101). Indeed, in anxiety, "the nothing itself—as such—[is] there" (BW 101).

Crucially, although nothingness is encountered, through anxiety, *among* beings, it is not itself revealed as *a* being. Thus, "anxiety is no kind of *grasping* of a nothing," it is instead, nothing's occurrence, pure and simple (BW 102). So, while nothingness occurs in anxiety "at one with beings," that is, immanent to the existence of beings as a whole, it does so in such a way as to reveal nothingness's inextricable intertwinement with and in beings. Therefore, "the nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of beings but

reveals itself as belonging to the Being of beings” (BW 108). This is significant as it allows anxiety to disclose:

Beings in their full but heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other —with respect to the nothing. In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are being —and not nothing (BW 103).

This double negation —the not-nothing of the existence of being— makes apparent an essential quality of the Being of beings, namely, their existence as “the nihilation of the nothing” (BW 105). This distinctively Heideggerian formulation (the Being of beings as the occurrence of the nihilation of the nothing) should immediately bring to mind the Badiouian presentation of ontology (the subtraction of consistency from inconsistent multiplicity, which is itself nothing) given in Chapter One. For each thinker, some remainder or rather, reminder, of the possibility of beings’ not-being —nothingness— persists in the plenitude of beings themselves. But, whereas Badiou will draw out what are irrefutably infinite prescriptions from this ontological principle, Heidegger’s conclusions are resoundingly finite. What unites these two otherwise divergent strands of thought, however, is the atheistic affirmation of human freedom grounded, ultimately, in nothing. That is, insofar as no single being (i.e., God) guarantees the specific emergence of beings from nothingness, there is, ultimately, a special status granted to that being (Dasein) who is able to, in a sense, *relate* in a meaningful way to this originary nothingness. Thus, for Heidegger (and Badiou as well, I believe), “without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom” (BW 103). For Heidegger, the existential possibility of not-being, or the immanent finitude of all beings is thus the necessary precondition for transforming the relation between beings. Anxiety is brought about by an encounter with the nothingness that, in a fashion, all beings are; and, in encountering this truth, the destiny of being is placed in our hands.

#### 2.2.4 The Basic Structure of Heideggerian Anxiety

Up to this point, I have provided a more-or-less exegetical account anxiety’s operation in *Being and Time* and the subsequent lecture, “What is Metaphysics.” I would like now to shift focus somewhat and reframe this discussion of Heideggerian anxiety more in terms of interruption and possibility so as to establish a firmer link between it and the above



discussion of Kierkegaard. My basic contention is this: anxiety, for Heidegger, is best understood as the rare attunement that can *interrupt* Dasein's everyday being-in-the-world, proscribed as it is by the "dictatorship" of the They, which works as a kind of double concealment of both Dasein's thrownness and the pure origin of beings in nothingness. In the rare attunement of anxiety, wherein Dasein comes to encounter an immanent nothingness among other beings, the passive existence of Dasein (which, after Kierkegaard, we might characterize as an "immediate unity" of Dasein and its world) is interrupted by the "slipping-away" of intra-worldly beings. This slipping-away leaves Dasein, if only for an incomprehensible instant, hovering in the nothing, faced with the overwhelming fact of its (Dasein's) existence. This interruption, however, is not merely a negation that individuates Dasein or paralyzes it in wonderment of the fact that there is something and not nothing; it is, rather, an initial *withdrawal* that brings Dasein back to its *possibilities* for being-in-the-world in new (authentic) ways. Anxiety individuates Dasein, thereby freeing it from its usual ontic preoccupations, compelling it to embrace its authentic potential. In doing so, I want to suggest, anxiety (re)introduces genuine possibility into the heart of Dasein's existence. And it is in this particular sense, that Heidegger's relationship to Kierkegaard becomes clear. Recall that, for Kierkegaard, "anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility" (CA 42). It is the initial possibility that reveals and consequently makes possible Dasein's "taking-up" of its otherwise foreclosed possibilities. Thus, as this "possibility of possibility" anxiety reveals Dasein's existential freedom:

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or in each instance, already grown up in them. Existence is *decided* only by each Dasein itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities (*Ibid.* p.11/12; emphasis mine).

Initially and for the most part, Dasein forgets the nature of its being as fundamentally dependent upon its own choosing, taken along as it is by the inauthentic nature of the they. Working against this existential neglect, anxiety "reveals in Dasein its *being-toward* its ownmost potentiality of being, that is, *being free* for the freedom of choosing and grasping itself" (BT 182/188). Anxiety withdraws Dasein from its entanglement in the they, discloses the world as such and in general, and, consequently, the being of Dasein

as being toward-death (i.e., its ownmost potentiality, freedom); this disclosure, in sum, makes apparent the possibility of Dasein *effecting its own authentic possibilities*.<sup>95</sup>

Heidegger writes:

When Dasein thus brings itself back from the they [via anxiety] the they-self is modified in an existentiell manner so that it becomes *authentic* being-one's-self. This must be accomplished by *making up for not choosing*. But making up for not choosing signifies *choosing to make this choice* –deciding for a potentiality-of-being, and making this decision from one's own self. In choosing to make this choice, Dasein *makes possible*, for the first time, its authentic potentiality of being (BW 258/269; emphasis in original).

Thus, the fundamental attunement of anxiety exposes an ontological dimension of freedom. It is this understanding of a profound existential voluntarism that Sartre will take up and expand in his own work on the subject.

## 2.3 Sartre

Obvious theological differences aside, like Kierkegaard and Heidegger before him, Sartre inextricably binds his understanding of anxiety [fr.: *l'angoisse*] to the categories of freedom and possibility. Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to treat Sartre's understanding of existential anguish as a kind of synthesis or, culmination, of the theories of anxiety provided by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. To this effect, at the outset of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre writes:

Kierkegaard describing anguish in the face of what one lacks characterizes it as anguish in the face of freedom. But Heidegger, whom we know to have been greatly influenced by Kierkegaard considers anguish instead as the apprehension of nothingness. These two descriptions of anguish do appear to us contradictory; on the contrary, one implies the other (BN 65).

Thus, after Kierkegaard and, necessarily against some version of Hegel, Sartre emphasizes the contingent “tragedy” of lived experience over and against its “absorption by the System as a relatively abstract determination which must be mediated as a passage toward the Absolute” (SM 9). To Sartre's mind, Kierkegaard was correct to “champion the cause of pure unique subjectivity against the objective universality of essence,” and “the narrow, passionate intransigence of immediate life against the tranquil mediation of

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<sup>95</sup> Heidegger continues: anxiety “takes Dasein back from its ‘worldly’ possibilities, but at the same time gives it the possibility of an authentic potentiality of being” (BW: 328/323).

all reality” (SM 11). In doing so, Sartre believes Kierkegaard realizes “some progress over Hegel by affirming the *reality* of the lived” (SM 16). What Sartre ultimately takes from Kierkegaard in the development of his own understanding of anxiety, is the prioritization of subjective freedom over an unfolding objective determinism. In the wake of Kierkegaard’s polemic against Hegel, Sartre comes to treat anxiety as a kind of window onto pure possibility that punctures the necessary unfolding of a logical metaphysical system.

After Heidegger, Sartre will employ a/the phenomenological method in which “being will be disclosed to us by some immediate access—boredom, nausea, *etc.*,” (i.e., attunement) (SM 25). And, as with Heidegger, the attunement that provides immediate access to an understanding of Dasein’s existential relation to an impersonal structural nullity by which individuals are determined—nothingness—is anxiety: “For Dasein there is even a possibility of finding oneself ‘face to face’ with nothingness and discovering it as a phenomenon: this possibility is anguish” (BN 50). From Heidegger, Sartre will develop a principally ontological understanding of anxiety eminently concerned with the Self’s relation to nothingness. Importantly, this nothingness, for both Heidegger and Sartre, reveals our personal onto-temporal predicament,<sup>96</sup> thereby forcing individuals to decide their own existence. In sum, then, by synthesizing the roles played by anxiety in Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Sartre is able to provide a theory of anxiety in which the Self, nothingness, possibility, and freedom coalesce into an organic conceptual whole. The further elaboration of this whole is the concern of what follows.

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<sup>96</sup> For Heidegger, anxiety can be temporally understood as a primordial relation to the “having-been” from which a future and a present “temporalize themselves” (BT 328/344). That is, anxiety reveals both Dasein’s inauthentic thrownness “as possibly to be repeated” *and/or* the future “possibility of an authentic potentiality-of-being” (*ibid.*). It thus forces Dasein to decide its own existence. A comparison can easily be drawn here between Heidegger’s understanding and Kierkegaard’s concept of anxiety in which “the past about which I am supposed to be anxious must stand in a relation of possibility to me. If I am anxious about a past misfortune, then this is not because it is in the past, but because it may be repeated, i.e., become future” (CA 92). Correspondingly, Sartre understands anxiety as “the reflective apprehension of the self as freedom,” or “the realization that a nothingness slips in between my Self and my past and my future so that nothing relieves me from the necessity of continually choosing myself” (BN 800).

### 2.3.1 Anguish in *Being and Nothingness*

Arguably Sartre's masterwork, *Being and Nothingness*, can be interpreted as a phenomenology of freedom or an elaboration of "what it is like to experience life as one who must choose" (McCulloch, 1994: 39). Important to note is that Sartre does not argue the case for ontological freedom; rather, he assumes it.<sup>97</sup> His work, then, necessarily concerns the ways in which a conscious agent can come to effectuate a kind of "nihilitating withdraw" from the "causal order of the world," which, at least initially, seems to be determined by metaphysical forces entirely exterior to that agent (BN 58). In other words, much like Kierkegaard and Heidegger before him, Sartre can be read as trying to provide a theory of the *transition* from a passive mode of (reflective) existence in which "I [seem to] undergo a modification of which I am not the origin; that is, neither the source nor the creator," to an active mode wherein "my own possibilities are substituted for the transcendent probabilities where human action has no place" (BN 67). At the same time, Sartre seeks to explicate how self-consciousness ("the transcending for-itself") can introduce/actualize a "nothingness" that breaks with and transforms the already constituted existence of facticity. For Sartre, it is by "bringing nothingness into the world that the for-itself [i.e., man] can stand out from Being [objective/logical development/continuity]" (BN 59, 800). There is, thus, a homology in Sartre between the transition from passive to active subjectivity (i.e., the consciousness of consciousness, freedom) and the introduction<sup>98</sup> by consciousness of non-being into the order of Being. It follows, therefore, that Sartre must explain the experiential nature of the *relationship* that man (as freedom/consciousness) has to the nothingness from which negation/non-being/destruction can come into the world. As perhaps should be clear at this point, this human relationship to nothingness is experienced as anguish.

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<sup>97</sup> A characteristic and oft-quoted expression of Sartre's is that "we are condemned to be free" (BN 439). Indeed, after Bergson, Sartre will equate the being of man with freedom: "Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the being of a man and his being free" (BN 60).

<sup>98</sup> "Introduction" is a bit misleading, here: For Sartre, non-being does not emerge from some non-place external to being ("being is *that* and outside of that, *nothing*" (BN 36)) instead non-being is Being's subsequently immanent contradiction that "lies coiled at the heart of being –like a worm" (BN 56).

In elaborating his conception of anguish, Sartre returns to the (Kierkegaardian) example of a man standing on the edge of a precipice. Sartre goes on to explain that this vertiginous situation can be (subjectively) understood through two different “facets” (BN 66).<sup>99</sup> In the first, the man can reflexively recoil from the edge, afraid as he is of slipping on a stone and falling into the abyss. In this scenario, the man comes to comprehend himself as a *thing*, that is, as merely an effect or instrument of external/metaphysical/universal determinism. At this moment of recoil, Sartre, explains “*fear* appears, which in terms of the situation is the apprehension of myself as a destructible transcendent in the midst of transcendents, as an object that does not contain within itself the origin of its future disappearance” (BN 66). Put differently, the fearful response to the nothingness that the precipice represents is an abdication of the self-responsibility to (negatively) determine one’s own future in favor of the necessary outcome of an already determined trajectory of being. In fear, one seeks to deny the existence of the nothingness that slips between an individual and his/her past and future, and prevents any (objective) determination of the present by the past or the future by the present. Plainly, fear, as Sartre understands it, consists in recoiling from the necessity of groundless self-determination in favor of my ‘thing-ification’ by an external system of causality.

The second facet Sartre provides is an anguished comprehension of the situation. In this second scenario, the man may also recoil from the cliff, but he does so not out of fear that he might slip and fall in, but instead because *he is aware that it is entirely possible that he throw himself over the ledge*.<sup>100</sup> Anguish, for Sartre, is thus posed as our consciousness of extreme freedom; it is the experiential relationship man has to the nothingness through which he can exempt himself from a metaphysical or universal determinism and come to comprehend his possibilities *as his own possibilities* (BN 71).

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<sup>99</sup> The situation may be “apprehended through a feeling of fear or of anguish according to whether we envisage the situation as acting on the man or the man as acting on the situation” (BN 66).

<sup>100</sup> Sartre: “Vertigo is anguish to the extent that I am afraid of not of falling over the precipice but of throwing myself over. A situation provokes fear if there is a possibility of my life being changed from without; my being provokes anguish to the extent that I distrust myself and my own reactions to the situation” (BN 65).

Anguish, in Sartrean parlance, “is precisely my consciousness of being my own future, in the mode of not-being;” it is a (dreadful) comprehension of the nothingness that provides a foundation for (individual) freedom against any determination by the past (BN 68). To this effect, Sartre writes:

In freedom the human being *is* his own past (as also his own future) in the form of nihilation. If our analysis has not led us astray there out to exist for the human being, a certain mode of standing opposite his past and his future., as being both this past and this future and not being them [...] it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself (BN 65).

In other words, anguish is comprehension of “the permanent rupture in determinism,” of the transcendent-in-immanence “nothingness” which ensures my freedom. In fact, for Sartre, radical subjective freedom *is* nothing, an objective nothingness (*néant*), that determines and creates its (ongoing) existence in each moment *ex nihilo*. Anguish thus acts as a kind of interior “access” to this nothing that allows the always free-individual to transcend the limits of his or her given facticity.

## 2.4 Existential Anxiety: Counting Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre as One

I have thus far readily followed the phenomenological-existential tradition, as the most refined and extended meditation on anxiety. Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, each provide a detailed theory of anxiety that weaves together the inextricable concepts of nothingness, freedom, and possibility. In what remains of this chapter, I aim to propose a quasi-comprehensive theory of anxiety that draws, in part, from each of the three theorists discussed above, taking into account, of course, certain criticisms that must be addressed if we are to retain the privileged position so far accorded to this philosophical genealogy.

The basic principle of this “comprehensive” theory of anxiety is that anxiety is best understood as the individual-affective insight into the absolute non-necessity of the world as it currently exists. Anxiety, as an experience of nothing, is also an experience of contingency. And, moreover, it is this principle of contingency that serves effectively to unite the forgoing discussion(s) of anxiety. So, for Kierkegaard, *contra* Hegel, because

there is no metaphysical order underlying reality, there is no necessary logic determining the development of actuality; *nothing* determines that the world unfold in any particular fashion. Accordingly, in Kierkegaard's thought, anxiety is the psychological-disposition endemic to the human condition that manifests itself in the open possibilities of existence, that is, in the ineradicable experience of always and forever *being able* (CA 44). Likewise, for Heidegger, despite Dasein always-already having been thrown into the rigid and anonymous confines of the They, the individuating potential of anxiety holds open the possibility of a different, authentic existence outside of the norms governed by bourgeois mass society. By facing-up to one's own mortality as the inevitable possibility of non-possibility, Heidegger believes, the relative contingency of always-already proposed interpretations and meanings reveal themselves as such. Similarly, but perhaps more profoundly, the nothingness encountered in anxiety exposes the contingency of being itself. Insofar as anxiety, in some sense, makes apparent the Being of beings as nothing, a deep ontological "otherwise" —an heretofore hidden secret— is divulged: *beings could not be*. Finally, in Sartre, the contingency disclosed by anxiety reaches its singular apex. For Sartre, anguish can appear in almost every moment of individual existence as the realization that a nothingness slips between the past and the present, which, while guaranteeing ontological freedom, simultaneously mandates an existential decision for constant self-(re)creation.

Taken together, it is now possible to propose a comprehensive axiom of anxiety: Anxiety is an individual's affective-experiential encounter with an immanent nothingness that, by suspending the everyday interpretations of intra-worldly objects, provokes an insight into the absolute mutability of the world as it currently exists, occasioning new modes of subjective action. Anxiety, as the unnerving occurrence of nothing, denaturalizes the contemporary order by exposing the absence of any underlying determining structure, thereby opening new possibilities of subjective transformation. Resultantly, this understanding partially separates anxiety from its Latin etymology in the verb *angere*, which means to choke. While anxiety, as I have presented it thus far, is certainly unsettling—in fact, profoundly so—it should no longer straightforwardly connote the paralysis and terror of strangulation. Instead, anxiety is better thought of as an opportunity for action, as an ultimately compelling phenomenon that makes possible new

variants of subjective behavior. Anxiety, simply, is the experience that occasions the transition from determined-individual to a determining-subject.

Despite the outward simplicity of this basic formulation, however, there are still certain criticisms of this anxious tradition—specifically, regarding the relationship between anxiety and individuality—that need to be addressed before “attaching” the above presentation to Badiou’s philosophy.

Problematically, anxiety, at least as it has been detailed thus far, is an unavoidably anti-social phenomenon, that is, although anxiety offers profound transformative potential it seems to do so at the risk of entirely separating the individual from their constitutive social milieu. So, while Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, each link the experience of anxiety to non-determination/freedom, it often seems that, for them, the exercise of this freedom comes at the expense of sociality *tout court*. It is in this sense that the above tradition so often also links anxiety to the possible actualization of an individual’s *ownmost* possibility, outside or beyond the given facticity of any situation. (For Kierkegaard, the possibility of individual guilt before God; for Heidegger, an authentic or non-relational and insuperable comportment towards one’s own mortality; for Sartre, the singular, existential constitution of the *pour-soi*, etc.<sup>101</sup>) Bluntly, anxiety individualizes. It “pulls” (albeit not in a physical, material, or spatial fashion) individuals out of their given-social context, directing their attention inward to the contingent construction of their subjective interiority. And while I do not think that this withdrawal does not, at least in some sense, also include a reapplication of the individual onto the world from which they were “unglued” (for each of these authors, any kind of wholly-unmoored or free-

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<sup>101</sup> I do not intend to assert here that these three philosophers are inherently/entirely anti-relational or anti-social theorists. In fact, I believe that, all things considered, they each provide rather rich considerations on the relationship between individuals and society. To cite only the most obvious example, Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is an extended discussion of historical sociality. Additionally, J. Michael Tilly (2008) and Irene McMullin (2014) have recently mounted convincing defenses of social relation in Kierkegaard and Heidegger, respectively. My point here is only to note that the specific concept of anxiety has a ineluctably individualizing function. It is also worth noting, that his individualist or even solipsistic dimension to the proceeding discussion of anxiety is given further credence by certain personal statements made by the aforementioned authors. Most notably, Kierkegaard (“Leave me alone in my wretchedness” (CA 137)) and Sartre (“Hell is other people” (1989: 45)).



floating subjectivity is a thoroughly nonsensical proposition) it does ultimately amount to a kind of rigid ossification of particular individual boundaries that I believe works against the construction of a *generic* subjectivity or body. In other words, in the preceding elaboration, anxiety effectuates a movement toward individual particularity. As we will see in the next chapter, this is directly at odds with Badiou's understanding of the *universal* nature of subjective truth-procedures. Resultantly, our modification of Badiou's philosophy by way of anxiety will require, in turn, a modification of anxiety itself.

## Chapter 3

The first real terror, which made my hair stand on end and made shivers run all over me, was caused by a trivial but strange phenomenon...

—Anton Chekhov, *Panic Fears*

### 3 Anxious Subjects

In the introduction to this thesis, I argued that there exists a phenomenological deficit in Badiou's philosophy and, as a result, he was unable to account for the individual *experience* of an event. My point was (and is), simply, that he fails to sufficiently explain how it is that a human-individual might affectively respond to an evocation of the void constitutive of an event. Or, put differently, that he (Badiou) problematically separates the external and internal dimensions of subjectivation. Although his theory of the event can at least loosely account for the external conditions of subjective emergence (an event must occur), it does not provide a satisfactory explanation of the internal (i.e., individual-experiential) conditions of this same phenomenon. There is thus a manifest tension or, rather, division, in Badiou's thought between the formal/external/conceptual and phenomenological/internal/affective dimensions of the event-subject dynamic. As a corrective, I have maintained throughout this thesis that this tension/division can be overcome by supplementing Badiou's philosophy with a minimal phenomenological framework centered on the concept of anxiety as it is developed by the existentialist tradition of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre.

To this extent, in Chapter One, I provided a re-presentation of Badiou's philosophy focused on his understanding of the void. For Badiou, the void is an immanently included nothing(ness) that "haunts" any given situation, threatening to reveal its origins in inconsistency. Any disruptive evocation of the void is, in Badiou's terminology, known as an event. These events occasionally and unexpectedly erupt into existence and potentially create subjects who, in the wake of events, strive to draw out the consequences of their eruptions. After outlining the contours of Badiou's philosophy, in Chapter Two, I offered an existential theory of anxiety, understood as the rare and

unsettling experience of nothing that makes apparent the underlying contingency of all situations, thereby prompting new modes of subjective behavior. By revealing that, at least ontologically, nothing ultimately determines the final range of individual possibilities, anxiety makes apparent the indelible human capacity to challenge the ossified/sedimented structures of objectivity so as to freely/subjectively transform those very structures.

At this point, the main thrust of my argument should be clear: *the phenomenological experience of anxiety, as theorized by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, is none other than the experience of the event itself.* Anxiety is the individual experience, or interior subjectivizing affect, through which an individual might relate to the chance and ephemeral occurrence of an event and through which he or she may come to exist as a subject (in Badiou's strict sense of the term). Anxiety is the singular experience that can compel individuals to intervene in their situations on behalf of an event, affectively "linking" a situated individual to the moment of decisive intervention that initiates an ongoing subjective process.

In what remains of this thesis, I elaborate precisely the means by which anxiety is to be thought of as this individual-affective experience of an event. This elaboration has two primary dimensions, which we might term conceptual and socio-political, respectively. Additionally, the first dimension of the following elaboration involves a disagreement, while the second, in turn, involves a proposal.

My contention remains that the existentialist tradition discussed in Chapter Two provides the necessary conceptual resources for theorizing anxiety as the individual yet relational experience of an immanent nothing that disrupts individuals' day-to-day understanding of both themselves and, relatedly, the social milieu in which they exist. The disagreement that arises at this point is with Sam Gillespie. Like me, Gillespie recognizes the need to supplement Badiou's philosophy with an account of an individual's in-situation experience of the event. And Gillespie's proposals, similar to my own, also concern the phenomenon of anxiety. We disagree, however, on the theoretical tradition from which to draw in the construction of this affective-supplement. Whereas I rely on a version of

anxiety proposed by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, Gillespie relies on a version offered by the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. Given our simultaneous distance from, and proximity to, one another, in the first section of this chapter I return to Badiou's understanding of events and subjects in order to demonstrate that, despite Badiou's longstanding theoretical commitments to the Lacanian project, his own philosophy is, in fact, more compatible with the existentialist genealogy outlined above. As I will demonstrate, the specific nature of this disagreement concerns the function of Lacan's now (in)famous *objet petit a* and its relation to subjective desire. Although there are certain rather substantial disagreements between Gillespie's project and my own, I do not intend to dismiss his proposals wholesale. Through an engagement with Gillespie's position, I hope to argue that certain aspects of his Lacanian theorization of anxiety can, in fact, serve an important corrective function with regard to the sometimes-undue individualization effectuated in the existentialist variant. After working through Gillespie's proposals, in the second section of this chapter, I develop some of the practical that is, statist/ideological, consequences of supplementing Badiou's philosophy with a theory of anxiety. Ultimately, what I aim to propose is a novel theory of ideology formulated on an understanding of the State (of the situation) as that which manages an individual's relation to his or her own anxiety.

### 3.1 Two Variants of a Single Phenomenon: Anxiety without Lacan

In order to effectively distinguish Gillespie's position from my own, it is necessary here to return in brief to Badiou's own conception of events and subjects. Recall that for Badiou, an event is something that *happens unexpectedly*. An event "is purely haphazard [*hasardeux*] and cannot be inferred from the situation" (BE 193). Because an event has no *necessary* relation to the present configuration of a given situation—rather, it concerns generic being as such and is therefore indifferent to a situation's perspectival interests—its chance emergence fundamentally disrupts the structure of that situation. As the paradoxical "intrusion" of inconsistency into the consistent domain of structured presentation, events open up a kind of conceptual space, or occasion, wherein individuals

can pursue the egalitarian consequences of that event's occurrence. This pursuit, which Badiou terms subjectivity, has two basic components: intervention and fidelity.

Intervention is the straightforward decision, by an individual, that an event has, in fact, occurred and that its consequences ought to belong to the situation. Simply, intervention “is the procedure by which a [previously unknown] multiple is recognized as an event” (BE 202). A decision in the affirmative for the existence of an event inaugurates a process of investigations, or inquiries, that strives to discern the (dis)connection between elements of a given situation and that which will have occurred under the subjectively-assigned proper name of an event. These investigations, over time, work to produce what Badiou calls, taking his lead from the American mathematician, Paul Cohen, a “generic subset.” Given its egalitarian nature with respect to the event, this generic subset will be indiscernible and unrecognizable from the dominant perspective of the situation. Subsequently, through a process of “forcing” this generic subset can be made to belong to situation—to appear within it—thereby transforming the extant parameters of that situation. Fidelity, then, can be thought of as the commitment or discipline needed to continue, often in the face of situational adversity, these procedures by which an event's implications come to be inscribed in a situation.

Subjectivity, finally, is the knot that ties these two dimension (intervention and fidelity) together: “I will call subject,” Badiou declares, “the process itself of liaison between the event (and thus intervention) and the procedure of fidelity” (BE 239). In his early, *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou's roughly equivalent terms for intervention and fidelity are subjectivization and subject-process.<sup>102</sup> What is at stake in that text, as well as his later works, is a thinking of subjectivity as necessarily two-sided, as the *cleaving* together/apart of a moment of induction and a process of commitment. (It would not be at all incorrect here to think of the religious analogues of conversion and faith.) A subject, for Badiou, is that which “designates the *junction* of an intervention and a rule of faithful

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<sup>102</sup> In *Being and Event*, Badiou writes, “One can actually recognize, in what I then termed *subjectivization*, the group of concepts attached to intervention, and, in what I named *subjective process*, the concepts attached to fidelity” (BE 239).

connection” (BE 239; emphasis in original). To this extent, then, in order to maintain its conceptual consistency, Badiou’s dual-composition of subjectivity must account for *both* the phenomenological/affective transition from individual-someone to intervening-subject, as well as whatever assortment of subjective forces might allow an individual-qua-subject to maintain his or her fidelity to the procedural consequences occasioned by an event.

As quickly noted in the introduction to this thesis, Badiou has, to a large degree, satisfactorily fulfilled the latter of these two obligations. In *Being and Event*, for example, he develops a theory of what he refers to as *confidence*, or the “knowing belief,” that the always difficult work of inquiring into the possible connections between existing multiples and the event is not (and will not be) in vain (BE 397). For Badiou, confidence is a kind of faith or subjective fortitude that supports the process of fidelity by holding open the future advent of a truth as a deferred, yet necessary, “to-come” (BE 397). In a similar fashion, in his *Ethics*, affirming the Lacanian maxim to not to give up on one’s desire [*ne pas céder sur son désir*], Badiou develops an ethics of perseverance that implores those in the service of truth to “Continue!” or “Keep Going!” and to remain unaffected by the dominant (and discouraging) principles of nihilism and self interest that presently structure the contemporary world (E 47). Most recently, in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou provides a new understanding of the four affects produced in and by “the becoming of a truth” (LW 76). They are: for the political subject, enthusiasm; for the artistic subject, pleasure; for the amorous subject, happiness; and for the scientific subject, joy (LW 76). Each of these affects, in their own particular way, signal the ongoing existence of a truth-procedure and, in doing so, create a kind of positive feedback loop (in the sense that the work of happiness begets more happiness, joy begets joy, etc.) that “authorizes the continuation of the [truth] process” (LW 88).

What is at play in each of these three examples is the treatment of affects (i.e., categories of anthropological experience) exclusively as the aftereffects of post-evental processes. Recall, however, that Badiou’s subject is the middle term that links an evental-intervention to the faithful procedures by which the consequences of an event are inscribed in a given situation. Given, then, that Badiou’s discussions of experience/affect

refer primarily to those dimensions of the subject that concern fidelity, it would seem that he has neglected to fully develop one half of his own theory of subjectivity. That is, he has yet to account for the moment of intervention—of evental-conversion—from the affective perspective of an individual experiencing an event. While this is a criticism I have maintained throughout this thesis, it was made somewhat differently several years earlier (and with much perspicacity) by Sam Gillespie. In his short yet influential book, *The Mathematics of Novelty* (2008), Gillespie set out to “establish a certain supplementary framework through which to discuss how it is that events occur and the manner in which they grip subjects” (MN 96). In a similar fashion to the one I have outlined above, Gillespie recognized the need for Badiou to account for what it is that occurs in the moment an individual is potentially seized by an event. But, as mentioned, whereas I look toward a certain variant of existentialism for this supplementary framework, Gillespie turned to the post-Freudian psychoanalysis of Lacan.<sup>103</sup> Gillespie argues that he finds in Lacan a minimal theory of affect that can account for what it is in an event that can induce an individual into intervening on its behalf. His stated aim is thus to provide Badiou with “some category of affect” that is capable of explaining “the conditions that seize and grip subjects in the constitution of events” (MN 104). He claims that Lacan provides just such a category in “his relation of the subject to its own indiscernible being, its own real” via the *object petit a* (MN 104).<sup>104</sup> As such, Gillespie’s most original and forceful proposal is to treat Lacan’s object (a) as having a corresponding structure to Badiou’s event, and the subject’s relation to that event/object (a) as anxiety. It is important to note that Gillespie is not arguing for an analogical treatment of the event as object (a), but rather the straightforward equivalence of the two terms. For Gillespie, “the event *is* object (a)” (MN 121; emphasis mine).<sup>105</sup> To this

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<sup>103</sup> “I believe,” Gillespie argues, “it is Lacan who may provide the framework for speaking of a subject’s relation to the inconsistent presentation of an event” (MN 101).

<sup>104</sup> In what follows, following Gillespie’s own stylistic preference, *object petit a* will be written as ‘object (a)’.

<sup>105</sup> Another way of saying this is that “the elementary relation of a subject to its enjoyment (that is, a speaking subject to its unsaid being) is constitutive of the relations between Badiou’s subject and the event” (MN 117).

extent, Gillespie argues that, “like Badiou’s event, the object (a) is the appearance of something that is anterior to presentation; at the same time it is subtracted from what is subtracted”<sup>106</sup> (MN 110). Following Lacan,<sup>107</sup> Gillespie understands the object (a) as a non-phenomenal supplement, an instance of the too much of the real, that makes itself apparent at the level of the symbolic. This ephemeral instantiation of the real as object (a) produces anxiety. In doing so, Gillespie believes, it can act as a kind of lynchpin through which the indeterminate real is given positive determination in the symbolic order. In a conceptual move that calls to mind Kierkegaard’s (rather than, say, Lacan’s) understanding of anxiety as the contingent means by which possibility may come to pass into actuality, Gillespie’s objects (a)/events function as points of transition, felt as subjective anxiety, wherein that which is subtracted from presentation (the void-as-inconsistency, the real) enters into the realm of consistent presentation (the symbolic) through the production of truths by subjects. Gillespie understands this transition as the move from the static repetition of symbolic desire (“which always hinges upon the imminent failure of some impossible object”) —by means of anxiety—to the creative productions of a sublimating drive (in which form and determination are given to “the empty ground of subjective causality”) (MN 117). Put differently, Gillespie understands

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<sup>106</sup> Subtracted from subtraction is a phrase Gillespie attributes to Ray Brassier. It is meant to connote the existence of the event as itself subtracted from the (already) subtracted domain of inconsistent multiplicity (MN 8). This expression is indicative of a misunderstanding, I think, on Gillespie’s part. For Badiou, inconsistency is not subtracted from consistent presentation; it is, in fact, the other way around. Consistent presentation is subtracted from the void, which, retroactively, is deductively *understood* as inconsistent multiplicity.

<sup>107</sup> Gillespie’s proposed framework follows a relatively orthodox Lacanian reading of anxiety and its relation to the object (a) and lack. For Lacan, the Symbolic is the order of differential signification wherein a signifier substitutes the subject for another signifier (SX 151). The stable functioning of this signifying network depends on a constitutive exclusion that makes possible the metonymic/metaphoric movement of signifiers in place of the subject as void point. The symbolic is thus founded on an irreducible structural lack. There exists within the symbolic, however, a remainder of this exclusion, which Lacan terms the object (a). Occasionally, the subject encounters the object (a) and, the lack that usually structures is itself made to lack. This constitutes a breakdown in symbolic functioning that produces anxiety in the subject. It is in this context that Lacan provides his two famous dictums concerning anxiety: 1.) In anxiety, “the lack is lacking;” 2.) “Anxiety is not without an object” (SX 35, 89). Each of these maxims are meant to stress the distance Lacan places between himself and a certain (noetic) existential tradition that treats anxiety as the specific affect *that has no object*. Instead, for Lacan, because stable signification is correlative to a lack or absence, it is, in fact, plenitude and presence (of an object) that beget anxiety.



the object (a)/event as a non-phenomenal something through which the excluded real/inconsistency is given minimal existence in the situation/symbolic. Confronted with this something, Gillespie argues, the subject is faced with the absent ground of its being and is thereby dislocated, suspended from its routine placement in the symbolic order. (Again, to me, the reference here would seem to be more to Heidegger or Sartre, than Lacan.) And, because this displacement is constituted by a subject's relation to an anterior or unconscious dimension of being, it robs the subject of its usual predicative support in a representative network of signification. This suspension produces anxiety, which, Gillespie suggests, can serve as an incentive for new subjective types of action. For Gillespie, the development of these novel subjective behaviors, which again, he characterizes as the move from desire to drive-as-productive-sublimation, "typifies a subject's fidelity to an event" (MN 121).

In Gillespie's argument, the event is the object (a) and the experience that relates the subject to that object (a)/event is anxiety. Anxiety effectuates a movement from desire to drive that is isomorphic with the movement from individual to faithful subject, in that the sublimating acts constitutive of drive, which he likens to Badiou's truth-procedures, instantiate "forms of indiscernible being that can be met with recognition from other subjects" (MN 121).<sup>108</sup> While much of Gillespie's position is compelling (it is, certainly, argues Christopher Norris, "strikingly original"), I believe it is largely untenable. Unfortunately, it seems to me that his conflation of Badiou's event and Lacan's object (a) relies on certain crucial misunderstandings of both Badiou and Lacan: Gillespie fails to recognize the eminently undecidable ontological status of the event and, relatedly, he mischaracterizes the role played by anxiety regarding Lacan's understanding of desire. In this regard, before proceeding any further with my specific criticisms of Gillespie I think, parenthetically, it is important to register here my general skepticism regarding *any*

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<sup>108</sup> Basically, Gillespie is transposing a Lacan's understanding of subjectivity onto Badiou's ontology. Lacan's theory of the subject, explains Badiou, "is the coupling of the void and the *objet petit a*" (2005: 69), that is, the linking of a gap in the symbolic order to an absent object of desire.

attempt to employ Lacan in the development of a theory of experience or affect,<sup>109</sup> particularly as it would relate to Badiou. Gillespie, Adrian Johnston (2009), and Badiou's erstwhile student-*cum*-antagonist, Medhi Belhaj Kacem (2004), have each tried in different ways to supplement what they perceive to be subjective deficiencies in Badiou's thought concerning the category of experience with explicitly Lacanian concepts. This appears, to me, particularly odd given that, in the 1960s, it was Lacan (and, to an extent, Althusser) to whom Badiou turned in order to escape a French philosophical landscape dominated by the experiential phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, among others. Indeed, in an essay from 1997, "Philosophy as Biography," in which Badiou reflects on his philosophical "masters," he affirms as much, writing:

Lacan taught me the connection, the necessary link between a theory of subjects and a theory of forms. He taught me how and why the very thinking of subjects, which had so often been opposed to the theory of forms, was in reality intelligible only within the framework of this theory. He taught me that the subject is a question that is not at all of a psychological character, but is an axiomatic and formal question" (2008).

In a similar vein, in *Logics of Worlds*, in a section titled simply, "Lacan," Badiou "unhesitatingly" affirms the reductive Lacanian understanding of a body as that which is exclusively affected by structure, a mere receptacle for registering the signifying effects of the Other (LW 480). As such, (for Badiou, after Lacan) phenomenological experiences and affects are merely the "sign[s]" of the Other's structural investment in a body (LW 479). Indeed, Lacan's anti-psychological and anti-phenomenological structuralism is well documented.<sup>110</sup> Lacan himself, in Chapter 8 of Seminar VII ("The Object and the Thing"), stresses "the confused nature of the recourse to affectivity," which "always leads us to an impasse" (SVII 102). This is all to note, in a general but not insignificant fashion,

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<sup>109</sup> This perhaps seems odd, given that Badiou's understanding of Love as one of the four generic truth procedures draws, in large part, from Lacan. For Badiou, however, love is not an affect, but a subjective-production. (In fact, the affect associated with love is happiness.) Love is something that is *created*, not necessarily experienced, in the wake of an event.

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Laplanche (1999): "In Lacanianism, unfortunately, this dissociation [between representation and affect] leads to the rejection of one of the two terms, and to an absolute priority being accorded to representation, to the primacy of the 'signifier', adopting the term used by Lacan. You do not need to read many Lacanian texts to be convinced that the Freudian distinction between affect and representation has become—in Lacanianism—a real rejection, sometimes scornful, of the affective and of lived experience, which moreover, are usually *affected* by signs of irony or inverted commas" (18). In a similar vein, Lacan himself, in Seminar X, notes that "anthropology is in our eyes the one that contains the most hazardous presuppositions" (SX 20).

what I see as the peculiarity of Gillespie's (and others') decision to engage with Lacan in the work of developing a supplemental theory of experience/affect. In any case, Lacan's most sustained (but still limited) engagement with the topic of affect occurs in his tenth seminar, on anxiety. In that seminar, his discussion of anxiety serves primarily as a means to further develop his concept of the object (a) first introduced in Seminar VII (1959) as *das Ding*<sup>111</sup> (SX 43).

In order to fully understand the functioning of the object (a) and its relation to anxiety, it is necessary first to gloss quickly Lacan's theory of desire. For Lacan, famously, desire is always the desire of the Other. The Other, as always-already constituted network of signification, comes before and makes possible the desiring subject.<sup>112</sup> As a result of this precedence of the Other, the subject's desire(s) depend entirely on the constitution of this symbolic externality. Thus, Lacan writes:

This is why for me there is no, not simply access to my desire, but not even any possible means of sustaining my desire that would have any reference to any object whatsoever if not through coupling it, through tying it in, with this, the \$, which designates the subjects necessary dependence on the Other as such (SX 23).

Important to note is that for Lacan the Other, or symbolic, itself is lacking; it is founded on a constitutive exclusion of what Lacan calls "the real".<sup>113</sup> The subject, therefore, desires what the Other lacks. Consequently, that which supports desire (an experience of some external lack) is entirely on the side of the Other, removed entirely from any subjective internal determination. Simply, the lack in the Other backs subjective desire. As such, in order for desire to sustain itself, a certain void or absence in the Other must always be maintained (SX 65). In Lacan's understanding, "anxiety arises when this void is totally filled in" (SX 65). What is it exactly that might come to fill in this void, thereby disrupting the Other's constitutive lack and producing anxiety? It is none other than the

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<sup>111</sup> In Seminar VII, Lacan treats *das Ding* as that which is "the beyond of the signified" (SVII 54).

<sup>112</sup> To this extent, Lacan writes, "we have to maintain the incidence of the signifier as standing prior to his [the subject's] constitution" (SX 87).

<sup>113</sup> Tom Eyers, in his excellent, *Lacan and the Concept of the Real* (2012), defines the real as "the absent subject of the unconscious and the intimated outside to signification" (79).

object (a). Here, Lacan presents us with two intimately interrelated phenomena: object (a) and anxiety.

Anxiety is felt as an absence of lack in the Other. It is a signal that something has appeared in place of the Other's lack and that the support for desire has failed, has been, in some way, "filled-in". Anxiety, for Lacan, is the experience of an object occupying the necessarily excluded place in the Other. Again, the object that occupies the otherwise unoccupied place in the Other is the object (a).

The object (a), generally, can be thought of as a kind of inter-symbolic remainder or trace of the dimension of the Other excluded in its constitution. Specifically, Lacan conceives the object (a) as the *presence* of the void, that "fills in"<sup>114</sup> the gap inaugurated by an already existing division in the Other. It is thus the occurrence, or return, of that which was initially foreclosed.<sup>115</sup> It should be clear, then, the deep imbrication of (Lacanian) anxiety and the object (a): For Lacan, anxiety is experienced as an occurrence of the object (a) filling-in the lack in the Other.<sup>116</sup> It is on this particular point that my first disagreement with Gillespie arises: despite their initial similarities, because Lacan's symbolic Other and Badiou's situation are not structurally isomorphic, Lacan's object (a) does not share the same ontological status as Badiou's event. In other words, whereas Lacan's Other is founded on a constitutive lack, Badiou's immanent situations *lack*

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<sup>114</sup> "The object cause of desire is both that which fills the void of the absent subject of the unconscious and the cause of that division itself insofar as it manifests itself as a *positive* instantiation of the negativity of the Real" (Eyers, 2012: 132; emphasis mine). In a similar sense, Lacan also speaks of the object (a) in terms of its unconscious coincidence with the symbolic ego (the speaking "I"): "Right where you say *I* —that is where, at the level of the unconscious, the *a* properly speaking, is located...you are *a*, the object" (SX 103). I have largely placed this dimension of the object (a) to the side, as Gillespie does not explicitly mention it in the course of his argument. It is important to recognize, however, that for Badiou there is never any (nor can there be) any coincidence of subject and event. So, for Lacan, where in at least some sense, the subject itself is that which is excluded in the Other's constitution, in Badiou's understanding, the subject is not a structural absence. To this extent, Badiou explains "the subject is not a void point either. The proper name of being, the void, is inhuman and a-subjective. It is an ontological concept" (BE 391).

<sup>115</sup> In this sense, Tom Eyers describes the object (a) as "the instantiation of the real at the level of *post-Oedipal* Symbolic desire" (2012: 83; emphasis mine).

<sup>116</sup> In Chapter 7 of Seminar X ("Not Without Having It"), Lacan writes, "the most striking manifestation of the object *a*, the signal that it is intervening, is anxiety [... object (a)] only functions in correlation with anxiety" (SX 86).

*nothing*.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, there is an irreducible dimension of presence in Lacan's object (a) that is absent in Badiou's event.

In his tenth Seminar, in the course of developing his concept of the object (a), Lacan is careful to note that "under the term *a* is precisely an object that is external to any possible definition of objectivity" (SX 86). Almost immediately following this declaration, however, he famously notes that anxiety "is not without an object" (SX 89). Recall, the object of anxiety is the object (a). How, then, is it possible to think the non-objective status of this object that produces anxiety? I take Lacan's extra-objective characterization of the object (a) to mean that it corresponds to no particular empirical object or its corresponding signifier. Rather, the object (a) is correlative to that dimension of the Other excluded in its constitution: it is the positive dimension of an absent negativity. What the Other excludes returns/remains as object (a). So, while there may be no specific signifier to which the object (a) corresponds, there can be no question as to whether the object (a) *exists* or not. It certainly does. And, moreover, it is only as an existence that it is capable of somehow occupying the lack in the Other. The object (a) is the void made present, given form. Thus, Lacan's syntactically-curious "not without having" is meant to connote the simultaneous existence of the object (a) while at the same time depicting it as "obscure," "elsewhere," and "unseen" (SX 89). In other words, although we may not be able to explicitly uncover the object of anxiety, it nonetheless *is*. Quite different from Lacan's object (a), Badiou's event is strictly undecidable.

Before parsing out just what exactly Badiou means by "undecidable" it worth noting the explicitly non-ontological status of the event. In Badiou's mathematical ontology, "the event is forbidden, ontology rejects it as 'that-which-is-not-being-qua-being'" (BE 184). The event is the first concept explicitly *outside* Badiou's otherwise all-encompassing ontological framework. "Ontology," at least in Badiou's particular mathematical understanding, "has nothing to say about the event" (BE 190). But, despite its non-ontological status, the event is necessarily something that happens. This happening is

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<sup>117</sup> See n.11, n.25.

precisely what gives the event its character of undecidability. In other words, *the event is the paradoxical happening of nothing*. Thus, by undecidability, Badiou means that, given the event's non-ontological status, from the standpoint of any situation, the belonging to it (or not) of an event is entirely unknowable. There is no empirical way of verifying whether or not an event has occurred because, from any perspective internal to a situation, *nothing*, in fact, has occurred. Plainly, then, with regards to an event, "nothing is the name of what happens" (BN 196). However, "that 'nothing' has taken place," Badiou explains "means solely that nothing *decidable* within the situation could figure the event as such" (BN 197; emphasis mine). Thus, unlike Lacan's object (a), which exists internal to the symbolic Other as positive instantiation of its void or lack, Badiou's event is a dysfunction of the statist operations that count a situation and its elements as one.<sup>118</sup> This dysfunction is what allows for the occurrence of an uncounted nothingness that *evokes* the void. For Badiou, an event is never the presentation of the void as such.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, the presentation of the void qua void is strictly impossible. Since the void is that which is not-counted-as-one and ontology requires that every instance of presentation be counted-as-one,<sup>120</sup> the void can never be presented; to do so would contradict its status as void. Indeed, in the event, "something unpresented is at work" (BN 208).<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> As Peter Hallward explains, any "access to the void must be exceptional and non-demonstrable: the void will be indicated only by something that violates a situation's normal way of counting or recognizing its elements, and the actual existence of this something [this event] must depend on a decision rather than a perception or demonstration" (2003: 91)

<sup>119</sup> In fact, the event institutes itself between its site and the void, barring any possible occurrence of the void as such. *The event is not the void given form.*

<sup>120</sup> This is how Badiou, unlike Lacan, maintains strict situational immanence.

<sup>121</sup> Another way to think of the event as an evocative occurrence of nothing is to think of it as the evocative and implicative addition of zero—that is, the supernumerary supplement of a multiple that presents nothing. Take, for example, the French Revolution (a kind of ur-Event in Badiou's canon). There are, first, the elements present in the French Situation between the years ~1789-1799 (e.g., the guillotine, the bourgeoisie, the Third Estate, St. Just, Robespierre, the Jacobin Club, King Louis XVI, etc.). These elements qua elements do not in-themselves constitute an event; they are a multiplicity (of multiples) just like any other. An event is required for a proper name to emerge so as to unite these disparate elements in such a way as to inaugurate a political procedure that would unify and explore their consequences *as one*. In other words, there must be some occurrence of nothing, a pure supernumerary addition that occasions the proper name, "French Revolution". As Sam Gillespie explains, "the event takes these elements and adds something more that exceeds direct presentation. But this something more, insofar as it is not presented, cannot be accounted for as something. Insofar as it escapes presentation [the event] is undecidable" (MN 111).

Crucially, the event's undecidability is what potentially links it to a subjective intervention. Because one can never "know" if an event has or has not occurred (as it is a specular *nothing*), any intervention on its behalf—that is, any decision that designates it *as* having occurred—takes the form of a wager. One can only know an event has taken place to the extent that one "bets upon its truth" (BN 192). Any intervention on the part of an individual in the name of the truth an event presents must wager on an absolute discontinuity with the present. As such, this wager will be (and must remain) strictly illegitimate from the perspective of the situation. Thus, an event's presentation of nothing is an unavoidably disruptive phenomenon. This is the second point at which I think Gillespie's argument falters. Unlike the event, the object (a) is, ultimately, in the service of symbolic stability. And, unlike the subject faced with occurrence of a disruptive nothingness—one that evokes an impossible void—who is compelled to intervene on its behalf, the Lacanian subject faced with its object (a) is passive, fully imbricated in its symbolic *milieu*.

In *Metapolitics* (2005), in the course of distinguishing Althusser from Lacan, Badiou describes the Lacanian subject as the "coupling of the void and the 'objet petit a'" (59). Badiou's formulation makes clear the Lacanian subject as the linking—by means of subjective desire—the lack in the Other and the object (a), that is, the Other's desire, (what it lacks, its absent part) and the inter-symbolic instantiation of the Other's lost object coalesce in the form of the (Lacanian) subject. Somewhat similar to Badiou's subject, then, Lacan's has two dimensions. Its first, the Other's desire-as-absence, manifests itself as an internalization, by the subject, of the Other's external desire. Thus, subjective desire is always, in fact, the desire of the Other. Desire is constituted anterior and external to its embodiment in a subject. In a similar sense, the second dimension of Lacanian subjectivity, the object (a), is also "outside" the subject. Recall, the object (a) is a kind of paradoxical instantiation of the lack in the Other. As such, it functions as a reminder (or remainder<sup>122</sup>) of what the Other lacks and, therefore, desires. For this

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<sup>122</sup> "The remainder, the ultimate other, this irrational entity, this proof and sole guarantee of the Other's otherness," Lacan states, "is the *a*" (SX 27).

reason, Lacan treats the object (a) as the *support* of desire. The object (a) is an ephemeral punctuation of the symbolic—absent and withdrawn—that in its very absence sustains the movement of desire and signification. What, then, is the role of anxiety in the Lacanian understanding of subjectivity? Lacan’s answer is simple: “anxiety is the specific manifestation of the desire of the Other” (SX 152). If the Other’s desire is instantiated in the form of the object (a), then the subject’s relation to this object is anxiety. Anxiety, therefore, is an experience of dissatisfaction, a feeling corresponding to the unfulfilled desire of the Other. As Alenka Zupančič helpfully explains:

The *objet petit a* designates nothing but the absence, the lack of the object, the void around which desire turns. After a need is satisfied, and the subject gets the demanded object, desire continues on its own it is not ‘extinguished’ by the satisfaction of a need. The moment the subject attains the object she demands, the *objet petit a* appears as a marker of that which the subject still has not got—or does not have (2000: 18).

Lacan’s anxiety is an anxiety of not-having, of the “not-this!” and “not-yet!” felt whenever a contingent need is met, yet the subject is left wanting more. Anxiety, as a relation to the object (a), *is what keeps the subject desiring*. The subject comes to know the Other’s desire through the object (a) as anxiety. It is a signal of the subject’s capitulation to inexhaustible desires of the Other by which it is ceaselessly incorporated into the extant economy of libido qua signification. Consequently, unlike the understanding of anxiety developed in the existential tradition, which indelibly binds anxiety to the category of possibility, for Lacan, “it is not the possible [...] that makes for anxiety” (SX 162). Rather, as Tom Evers explains, the object (a) is the “condensed remainder of a process of *perpetual*, conceptual displacement” (2012: p. 86; emphasis mine). Anxiety, for Lacan, is not a disruptive experience by and through which a subject may come to separate itself from an anterior determining structure, but one that ultimately serves to further tether the subject to this very structure.<sup>123</sup> Against Gillespie’s argument in which anxiety serves as a point of transition from objective determination/signification to subjective production, then, anxiety, for Lacan, does little

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<sup>123</sup>Indeed, in Lacan’s understanding “there is only a subject by virtue of [an external] signifier” (SX 151).



more than signal a subject's explicitly heteronomous and external constitution, its continued and inexhaustible reliance on a structure that is always-already there.

My position, simply, is that this understanding is incompatible with Badiou's. Unlike Lacan's, in which the subject is wholly determined by its relation to an external Other (and anxiety is the affective means of this determination); Badiou's subject is radically autonomous and self-determining.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, whereas Lacan's object (a) is fully on the side of the other, and therefore the Law,<sup>125</sup> Badiou's event is unequivocally extra- or il-legal.<sup>126</sup> Thus, contrary to Lacan's theory, in which anxiety serves merely to incorporate the subject into an already existing structure, I believe, the existentialist understanding of anxiety treats anxiety as an experience of nothing that occasions the possible movement *out* of the objective confines of structure. That is, anxiety makes possible a transition from heteronomous objectivity to subjective autonomy, from determined individual to determining subject. Indeed, if Lacan's subject is constituted in and by its *relation* to the Other (via object (a)/anxiety) Badiou's subject, as Peter Hallward, albeit critically, explains, is conditioned by the elimination of *any* relation to *any* kind of preexistent objectivity (2003: p.10). Thus, like his mentor, Sartre:

Badiou defends an idea of the subject as fundamentally isolated, as *délié* —a subject that becomes 'authentically' subject to the degree that it shakes off the forces that objectify and compromise. Like Sartre's subjects, each of Badiou's must begin its life in a solitary decision, made in the absence of any established criteria. Every true subjectivation, every genuine freedom from objective determination or re-presentation must proceed, very literally, '*ex nihilo*' (2003:10-11).

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<sup>124</sup> The real difference, here, between Lacan and Badiou, I believe, is between a subject that is fundamentally unconscious (i.e., shaped and determined by forces wholly exterior to its constitution, as in Lacan) and one that is conscious (propelled by the self-determining and *intentional* moments of decision and fidelity, as in Badiou). As regards anxiety, it is possible here to note that, basically, any understanding that treats anxiety as the product of some unconscious determinant is incompatible with one that would treat anxiety as the existential awareness of an always-anterior ontological freedom. A further examination of this relation between Lacan and Badiou (and Badiou's existentialist influences), while valuable in its own right, is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present thesis.

<sup>125</sup> For Lacan, desire is identical to the law; they mutually implicate and support each other in such a way as to be indistinguishable. Bluntly, "desire is law" (SX 150).

<sup>126</sup> In Badiou's understanding, any choice/intervention occasioned by the nothingness of an event is, from the dominant structuring perspective of a situation, *illegal*. For more on the illegality of evental-choice see Meditation 20 of *Being and Event* (BE 201-211).

Given this conception of subjectivity, if anxiety is to be treated as the experience of an event that precedes and makes possible subjectivation-qua-intervention then it must be conceptualized as an explicit relation to/with nothingness. Nothing in or relating to the Other/structure allows for the emergence of subjectivity. In other words, we must take seriously the *creatio ex nihilo* that is, in Badiou's understanding, the inauguration of a subject. This is the crux of my entire argument: the specific affective phenomenon that allows one to "experience" nothing is anxiety. This experience, moreover, because it has no relation whatsoever to any existent object, allows for a pure decision, an intervention from nowhere, that can begin a genuine process of subjectivity. Plainly, the nothingness of an event is experienced as anxiety; this anxiety reveals a contingency/mutability—a new possibility— inherent to the situation that occasions a genuine decision; this decision, which declares that an event has, in fact, occurred is what Badiou terms an intervention; this intervention begins the processes which comprise subjectivity.

There is, however, a problem that remains with this formulation. In the conclusion to the previous chapter, I noted that for Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, although anxiety is a potentially transformative experience, it is also radically individualizing and serves primarily to withdraw an individual out of his or her existing social relations. And while this is not in and of itself a problem (there is, of course, a time and place for theorizing individuation) it does pose a certain obstacle to attaching this specific phenomenon to Badiou's theory of evental-subjectivity, namely, subjectivity, for Badiou, produces truths that are universal and generic. Events allow for the transition from individual particularity to the universal truth of generic being as such.<sup>127</sup> Given this, if we are to attach an understanding of anxiety to Badiou's philosophy, it is problematic to conceive of anxiety (as do Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre) as effectuating a movement from social anonymity to the radical singularity of an individual. It must, in some sense, be the other way around. For this reason, it is necessary to slightly modify the existentialist understanding of anxiety employed up to this point. Despite my hesitations registered

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<sup>127</sup> Badiou: "All truth is universal, in a radical sense, the anonymous equalitarian for-all, the pure for-all, constitutes it in its being, this will be its genericity" (2008).

above, I believe the resources for such a modification can be located in Lacan's seminar on anxiety.

In a lecture from December of 1962, Lacan, after discussing briefly his understanding of the psychoanalytic frame (SX 72-76), makes an interesting statement concerning the veracity of signification: "The signifier begets a world," he says, "the world of the subject who speaks, whose essential characteristic is that therein it is possible to deceive" (SX 76). Basically, for Lacan, signification makes possible deception. Anxiety, however, "is that which deceives not" (SX 76.). Recall Lacan's qualification that anxiety is, "not without an object" is meant to connote the absence of a signifier that would correspond to the experience of anxiety. Thus, lacking a signifier, anxiety has access to the true. Anxiety is an opening or window through which a truth outside of signification can be grasped. To this extent the analytic value of anxiety lies in "the cut that [it] opens up, affording a view of what now you can hear better, the unexpected, the visit, the piece of news, that which is so well expressed in the term *pressentiment*" (SX 76.). He continues, "if there is one true dimension wherein we have to search for the true function, the true weight, the sense behind the keeping up of the function of the cause, then it lies in the direction of the opening that anxiety affords" (SX 76.). Although, for Lacan, the absence of an anxiety-signifier is ultimately in the service of signification itself,<sup>128</sup> he nonetheless grants it a privileged access to a dimension of truth outside the deceptive particularities of the signifier. And, while Lacan's understanding of truth is not the exactly the same as Badiou's (a point Gillespie makes well (see MN 115)), I want to modify my existentialist understanding of anxiety with Lacan's *language* concerning anxiety's access to extra-symbolic truth, that is, I want to call the underlying contingency/possibility/freedom that Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre claim anxiety accesses, truth. This adjustment of signification, though, is not merely semantic. Truth denotes universality. Consequently, naming the absent ground of non-determination grasped in anxiety, "truth," mandates that any decision occasioned by anxiety moves one not toward their singular individuality, but

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<sup>128</sup> To this extent, Lacan explains, "anxiety is this cut —this clean cut without which the presence of the signifier, its functioning, its furrow in the real is unthinkable" (SX 76).

toward universality as such. Hence, my final formulation of anxiety: *Anxiety is an experience of the event (or, as in Badiou's recent work, the empty traces an event leaves behind), which, from any perspective internal to a situation is an experience of nothing; this nothing reveals a degree of contingency inherent to this situation, that is, it makes possible the realization of hitherto unknown possibilities; in doing so, this contingency, as an evocation of that situation's void, is true; thus, as privileged access to truth, anxiety occasions a decision that must decide the universal implications of the event for that situation, thereby inaugurating the subjective processes of a truth-procedure.*

It is possible to further clarify this formulation with a reference to one of Badiou's favored examples: Spartacus and the slave revolt of 73 BCE. First, Badiou explains, there is the event itself: Spartacus and a small group of gladiator-slaves rise up against their Roman masters. Next, a subject body faithful to this event emerges, organized around the "trace" of the event, its impetus, which is the declaration, "We slaves, we want to return home" (LW 53). What connects the event and its subject body? My answer, simply, is anxiety. To both those internal to the event (Spartacus *et al.*) and its external spectators qua subjects (those slaves who, faithful to the event and its traces, come to be incorporated into its subject-body) the event is experienced as anxiety. This understanding, however, requires a subtle shift in Badiou's conception of the event-revolt. If the experience of an event is anxiety, then the revolt and the event should not be treated as equivalent. (Presumable anxiety is not the single experience that corresponds to the range of affects produced in and by an insurrection.) Rather, the event is some intangible occurrence, a fleeting moment of nothingness, immanent to the revolution itself in which the extant parameters of possibility suddenly shift. This moment, in which the impetus for the revolt ("We slaves, we want to return home") appears to transition into the subjective declaration ("We slaves, we want to *and can* return home") is the moment of the event, and it is experienced as anxiety. This anxiety occasions a decision: to affirm the implications of the event, to decide that it has, in fact, occurred and thereby exposed a genuine possibility that can be pursued and, ultimately, realized; or to deny its occurrence, rejecting its possibilities as false and not worth following. Understood in this way, the subjects of the revolt-event can be conceptualized as the agents of "a realization in the present of a hitherto unknown possibility" revealed in anxiety (LW 52). An event

reveals a new possibility, which produces anxiety; and subjects are those who, subsequent to and propelled by this experience, pursue the realization of the possibility that was revealed. With this understanding of evental anxiety in mind, it is now possible to turn to the final component of this thesis, a renewed notion of ideology formulated precisely on the understanding of anxiety outlined above and Badiou's theory of the void provided in Chapter One. Ultimately, what I aim to propose is a modification of Badiou's conception of the state of the situation that takes into account the function of anxiety qua evental-void experience as that which provides a fundamental insight into currently foreclosed possibilities.

### 3.2 Ideology and Anxiety

In Chapter One, I pointed out an inconsistency in Badiou's understanding of the state of the situation. I noted that, as it currently stands, Badiou's state has an entirely redundant, or excessive, function. If, for Badiou, the void can never be experienced as such, then the State's role of barring any individual encounter with the void would appear to be wholly unnecessary. However, if we admit that the void can be experienced in and through anxiety (a point I have made throughout this thesis), then the specific role of the state becomes much clearer: *the State seeks to manage and control the disruptive anxiety of its members*. In order to fully understand this proposal, it is helpful to turn briefly to the theory of ideology developed by Badiou's contemporary, Slavoj Žižek. As Peter Hallward explains, for Žižek, the ideology of a situation concerns the ways in which its State organizes its parts in such a fashion as to ensure the foreclosure of "that part which has no recognizable place in the situation—that part which, having no discernible members of its own is effectively 'void' in the situation" (2003: 89). In other words, for Žižek, following Lacan, ideology is that which "serves as a screen against the direct intrusion of the real" (1997: 81). I have already noted that, in Badiou's ontology, the void (which, Žižek is all too happy to treat analogously yet, I believe, erroneously, to the Lacanian real) can never intrude as such. I have also noted, however, that something akin to this intrusion—i.e., a breakdown of the count-as-one that allows for the paradoxical occurrence of nothing—can be experienced as anxiety. Given this intrusion, it becomes possible to modify Žižek's theory of ideology in the following way: ideology is not that

which “serves as a screen against the direct intrusion of the real,” but rather that which serves as a screen against any experience (anxiety) of an anterior inconsistency (void) revealed in and by the dysfunction of a structuring count (event). Plainly, because anxiety exposes certain possibilities barred by the structuring principles of the state, statist ideology strives to prevent any *experience* of anxiety.

Herein lies the essential difference between the Lacanian-Žižekian understanding of ideology and the one I am proposing. Whereas for Žižek (and to a similar extent, his exegete, Adrian Johnston (2009: 29)), ideology can be conceived as the means by which a state seeks to prevent the chance happening of an event, in my understanding, ideology does not so much seek to prevent events *per se*, but rather seeks to prohibit any affirmative experience of their occurrence (and/or subsequent intervention on their behalf). This distinction is important as it clarifies a lingering ambiguity in Badiou’s philosophy.

In *Being and Event*, Badiou distinguishes natural from historical situations.<sup>129</sup> Historical situations are those situations that contain an evental site and thus allow for the possibility of an event, while natural situations are those that do not contain such a site (BE 188-189). At the same time however, Badiou also maintains that, “at the heart of *every* situation, as the foundation of its being, there is a ‘situated’ void [*vide*] around which is organized the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question” (E 68; emphasis mine). As a consequence of this second ontological presupposition, it would seem that because *every* situation is organized around some excluded void, then *every* situation should allow for the possibility of an event. (Recall, events are merely disruptive evocations of the void). What, then, to make of Badiou’s rigid distinction between historical and natural situations? Badiou offers a tenuous suggestion for overcoming this distinction in his recent discussion of points in *Logics of Worlds*.

Points, for Badiou, are intra-situational *loci* wherein the complexity of a given world’s objective structuration (what he, in his “objective phenomenology,” now terms the

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<sup>129</sup> See n.52.

“transcendental regime of appearance”) condenses into an either/or decision that confronts the subjective-body of a truth.<sup>130</sup> As such, these points serve as the preconditions for the emergence of subjectivity and its subsequent function as an agent of truth (LW 420). The presence of a point in a world, thus serves much the same function as evental-sites in historical situations did in *Being and Event*. (Although, whereas evental-sites were pre-evental, points—as that which confronts a subject-body—would instead appear to be post-evental.) There are certain worlds, however, which, Badiou designates “atonic” that appear to be entirely devoid of points. These atonic worlds, perhaps obviously, would seem to correspond to the natural situations outlined by Badiou in *Being and Event*. This similarity noted, in his discussion of atonic worlds, Badiou makes a subtle political suggestion that is absent in the strictly formal propositions of his earlier text:

The declaration of the atony of a world may be simply *ideological*. Under the cover of a programme of familial happiness devoid of history, of unreserved consumption and easy-listening euthanasia it may mask—or even fight against—those tensions that reveal, within appearing, numerous points worthy of being held to (LW 422; emphasis mine).

In other words, as Adrian Johnston explains, natural “states of situations and transcendental regimes of worlds proclaim that their present is without points (i.e., atonal)—they attempt to mask intra-systemic nodes of volatile tension— so as to cultivate their appearance of possessing an enduring monolithic solidity invulnerable to disruption and subversion” (2009: 73). What Badiou’s suggestion and Johnston’s clarifying explanation make clear, at least to my mind, is the status of *every* situation/world as historical/tensed;<sup>131</sup> any appearance to the contrary, must necessarily be the result of some ideological operation. As such, the role of the state/regime is not to prevent events (indeed, it would seem that they are entirely unable to do so) but to prevent any experience an individual might have that would allow him or her to

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<sup>130</sup> A point, Badiou explains, “is that which the transcendental of a world imposes on a subject-body, as the test on which depends the continuation in the world of the truth-process that transits through that body” (LW 400).

<sup>131</sup> Tensed is Badiou’s term for point-saturated worlds opposed to point-less, atonic worlds (LW 422).

affirmatively relate to the chance evocation of the void *qua* event, namely, anxiety.<sup>132</sup> To return to the conceptual language utilized in Chapter One, the ideological function of the state of the situation is to manage an intra-situational individual's experiential relation to his or her situation's inexistent structuring void. Because anxiety is that which allows an individual to experience that element supposedly excluded by the situation in its constitution, it is by, in a sense, prohibiting anxiety that the state seeks to exorcise the phantom persistence of the void. Plainly, the (Democratic-Materialist) State disseminates an ideology that strictly forbids any genuine experience of anxiety.

There is, still, another dimension of this statist-ideology beside that of its straightforward (psycho-pharmacological) injunction against anxiety: namely, the denial of its eventual, subjectivizing status.

Throughout this thesis, emphasis has been placed on two interrelated features of the phenomenon of anxiety. The first, principally expressed by Heidegger, is its experiential access to nothing. In this regard, as stated above, it is in the interest of the state ideology to bar this anxiety from occurring in that it affords individuals privileged phenomenological access to the otherwise inexperiencable/invisible void, the appearance of which would undermine the stability of the situation's consistent presentation. The second feature of anxiety is its function as a kind of fulcrum or lynchpin through which an individual can transition from an objectively imposed determinism to an autonomous/subjective self-determination. To this extent, Kierkegaard treats anxiety as that which, by "awakening," spirit allows one to break with their "immediate unity" with his or her "natural condition;" Heidegger treats it as that which allows one to extricate

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<sup>132</sup> One does not need to look far to find empirical verification of this assertion. According to a 2010 study conducted by Medco Health Solutions, 11.1% of women ages 45-64 were on some type of anti-anxiety medications (usually some form benzodiazepine, the most common of which are: Xanax (alprazolam), Klonopin (clonazepam), Valium (diazepam), and Ativan (lorazepam) as were 5.7% of their male counterparts (Medco, 2010). The study additionally showed that, from 2001 to 2010, the use of anti-anxiety medication among all children ages 10-19, increased by almost 50%; for adults ages 20-44, 31%; and for adults ages 45-64, 7% (2010). Furthermore, Paxil and Zoloft ranked 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> in the top-ten prescribed medications in the US, respectively (Medco.) Although it is not central to the aims of the present thesis, it is worth noting, in this regard, that the primary means by which the prohibition of anxiety is carried out is by its pathologization and subsequent psycho-pharmacological address.



oneself from the compulsory predilections of the They; and Sartre treats it as the means by which one might withdraw from the objective, causal order of the world. In each of these cases, what is at stake *affectively* is a move from personal anhedonia or lassitude (in which the world imposes itself onto an individual) to a kind of volitional solicitude (in which the individual imposes him or herself onto the world). Interestingly, the former is conveyed with essentially the same language used by Badiou to describe the ideological construction of atonal worlds. Accordingly, these atonal-ideological configurations are “adequate to [the] maxims of happiness through asthenia (and euthanasia, the perennial demand of those who hanker for a ‘pointless’ existence, who want to ‘manage their death in the same muffled style as the life;’ they are “quiescent and homogenous, [...] banal,” etc. (LW 422-423). These semantic resemblances reveal the second function of ideology as I understand it: Because anxiety effectuates the movement from a fundamentally passive individual to an active subject, or from an atonal to a tensed world, it is in the obvious interest of the state to deny it this function. As already mentioned (*cf* n.125), on the one hand, this involves the management (if not straightforward prohibition) of anxiety (its medical treatment, stigmatization, etc.). We might term these ideological measures post-evental in that they seek to curb the aftereffects of an experience of anxiety *qua* event. They aim to return things to “business as usual,” to get individuals back to the obsequious normalcy of their lives before anxiety’s intrusion. On the other hand, there are also the pre-evental efforts on the part of the state, which order its members in such a way so as to prevent the eruption of anxiety in the first place. We might consider these efforts comforting and, thus, pacifying. And so, although *nothing* is ultimately responsible for an outburst of anxiety, the state nonetheless promulgates an ideology in which the maintenance of individual comfort is valued over its interruption.

## Conclusion

### 4 What is it to Live Anxiously?

At the outset of this thesis's second chapter, I argued that our current age should not be characterized as anxious and that, to the contrary, anxiety is an uncommon experience that has the specific function of *interrupting* individuals' usual affective dispositions. Until now, however, I have more-or-less left unresolved the question of what precisely is being interrupted by anxiety? That is, if not as anxious, then how are we to describe our contemporary situation, defined as it is by pervasive paranoia, "hedonic (and anhedonic) lassitude,"<sup>133</sup> apprehension, and worry? Or, to employ Badiou's conceptual language, what is the primary experience that corresponds to the socio-political strictures of Democratic Materialism? My response to all of the above is that fear—not anxiety—best expresses the affective conditions of the present. Indeed today, Jacqueline Rose opines, "fear is in the air" (2003).

Jacques Rancière has recently written that contemporary democracy, operating under an oppressive logic of the "police" as opposed to genuinely democratic politics, relies on the manipulation of a fearful *ochlos*—"the frightening rally of frightened men" (2007: 32). Similarly, Peter Hallward has suggested, with particular reference to Rancière, that modern "police consolidation promises security through a stable distribution of places and roles, through the fearful exclusion of threats and outsiders" (2005: 786). What both Rancière and Hallward aim to express, here, is the political invocation of fear as the means by which the present order and all its dominant perspectival interests are maintained. Fear is the experiential correlate of political stasis, the inherently reactionary feeling that justifies the indefinite continuation of the status quo in the name of some promised, yet deferred, security that is forever "to-come."<sup>134</sup> As such, fear is always the

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<sup>133</sup> (An)hedonic lassitude is a phrase coined by Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism*, to (brutally) connote today's pervasive "soft narcosis, the comfort food oblivion of PlayStation, all-night TV and marijuana" (2009: 9). All of this, I think, is also captured by Badiou's treatment of democratic materialism as that which issues the injunction to "live without an idea" (LW 511).

<sup>134</sup> See, in this regard, Jacqueline Rose's Guardian editorial, "We are all afraid, but of what?" (2003).

fear of structural disorder, of the loss of stability, of the intrusion of the utterly unfamiliar; fear is, simply, the fear of anxiety.

In this sense, we might treat the ideology discussed briefly at the close of the previous chapter—an ideology that prioritizes pre-evental comfort and constancy over its eventual-disruption—as an ideology of fear. It is not, then, the loss of (material) comfort and its concomitant routines that individuals fear *per se* (although I do believe that fear and materiality are intrinsically linked), but the anxiety that this loss may occasion. This is a point made with considerable acuity by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, each of whom is keenly aware of fear's resistance to anxiety. Kierkegaard recognizes the intrinsic difficulty of anguished faith and the preference of individuals to turn away from freedom's limitless possibility toward something definite in the world; Heidegger bemoans the mass of anonymous humanity that ceaselessly forfeits the individuated perspective afforded by anxiety, entangled as they are in and by the transient predilections of the They; and Sartre warns tirelessly against the allures of bad faith, the cathartic failure to realize that freedom is always and exclusively freedom before myself, not some-*thing* I may encounter. Indeed, each one of these positions seems to (correctly) suggest that, for the most part, individuals live a fearful existence, avoiding the novel and aleatory possibilities opened up by the eruption of anxiety. This is no accident. As stated, it is in the interests of the State to sponsor an ideology of fear as a means to contest the subjectivizing role of anxiety. Despite this, and as counter-intuitive as may sound, anxiety is that which is able to oppose and interrupt the ideological preponderance of fear. (In this sense, it would not be entirely incorrect to, in my opinion, re-write *Being and Event* as *Fear and Anxiety*.) There is a manifest tension between state-sanctioned fear and eventual anxiety. This tension, moreover, invites the question: given the State's institutional resistance to anxiety, on what affective resource can an individual draw as the support for his or her own anxiety? In other words, is there some other affect/experience that might embolden the subject to pursue the new possibilities revealed in anxiety? Although it is beyond the scope of this present work, I would like to suggest, in closing, that *courage* is the related affect that supports the emancipatory potential of anxiety: *Against the state-sponsored ideology of fear, one must have the courage to be anxious.*

Courage, in this sense, is not of the usual heroic variety. Rather, by courage, I mean here a kind of openness, a willingness to, upon the advent of anxiety, follow the possibilities it reveals and accept the change of perspective it affords. Courage is thus a kind of fortitudinous expectation or preparatory strength that allows an individual to be both seized by and seize for themselves the transformative potential of event. Courage, plainly, is the strength one must have to expect and endure the disruptive unmooring of anxiety.

In the closing pages of *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou asks, “What is it to live?” He responds that, to live is to resist the oppressive confines of democratic materialism, “the stagnant immobility of the present, its sterile agitation, the violent atonicity of the world” (LW 510). To live is to live for an Idea, to incorporate oneself into the body of an eternal truth, always in-becoming, through the creation of a new present that proceeds from the aleatory grace of an event (LW 509-511). As always though, it seems that, for Badiou, life is an exclusively post-evental category; those who live, live solely in relation to the *consequences* of an event. Inversely, I would like to ask: what is it to live prior to and during an event? That is, what is it to live anxiously?

To live anxiously is to live with the knowledge of contingency, with an insight into the fundamental mutability of the world. To live anxiously, therefore, is to recognize the transience of the present and to modify your outlook and relations accordingly. To live anxiously is to acknowledge the impermanence of things and to revel in the possibility of the otherwise and its occurrence. To live anxiously is to be changed and to proceed after this change where previously there was only impossibility. To live anxiously is to know that, ultimately, *nothing* supports your decision and, for that reason, it is all the more powerful. To live anxiously, then, is to become a subject that lives in the service of an egalitarian and eternal Idea, always striving toward its actualization, regardless of whatever opposition you may encounter. To live anxiously, finally, is to have the courage not to be afraid.

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