Excrescence, Errancy, and Dis-Ease in Badiou's Being and Event Trilogy

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Abstract: Excrescence carries with it a sense of abnormality, describing a diseased outgrowth of tissue. In Badiou's *Being and Event* I, excrescence is not pathological or anomalous; rather, its excess is ontologically authorized by the axiom of the power set, the theorem of the point of excess, and Cantor's Theorem. This account of excrescence is one of the dialectical transformations Badiou's thought invokes in the passage away from classical Marxism and to a more contemporary conception of its theoretical and practical commitments.

This ontological authorization does not protect against pathological or dis-eased formations, however. The errancy of meta-structural formations affirmed in Easton's Theorem brings ontology to its limit and thus invites what Badiou calls a "conceptless choice" concerning the naming – and thus, the management – of excess from excrescence. I discuss two examples of pathological excess, what I call here "dis-ease," in the *Being and Event* project: the practices of covering-over in *The Immanence of Truths: Being and Event III*; and the operations of an obscure subject in *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*. Unlike the parasite or the gangrenous appendage, these pathological instances require sensitivity – the practice of "keeping watch" – to their operations capable to interrupt or redirect the effects of dis-ease.

Keywords: Badiou, dialectic, excrescence, errancy, Easton's Theorem, Marxism

Excrescence carries with it a sense of abnormality, describing a diseased outgrowth of tissue sufficient to "disrupt the normal functioning of the (animal) organism."[1] Marx refers to the Second Empire as "a parasitic excrescence" on the nation of France, despite the government's claims to be the best representative of and most capable of forging national unity in the face of Prussian threats.[2] Engels suggests that amputation is the best course of action in response to state excrescence.[3] Michael Marder's novel proposal is to argue that excrescence is no abnormality but is in fact *the* logic of growth with "two distinct dimensions: both the actual going-outside-itself of a living being and what virtually overflows the strict confines of the concept."[4] Marder acknowledges, however, the prospect for *anomalous* growth (inward) that may become pathological: "just think," he says, of the pain caused by ingrown nails."[5]

Excrescence in Badiou's *Being and Event* project is – as in the classical Marxist analysis – intertwined with notions of the *State*. Where the latter is an excess marked by errancy, the former effectively defines excess in both set-theoretic ontology and in the so-called "historico-social situation" developed especially in Meditation 9 of *Being and Event I.* Here, excrescence is not itself pathological or anomalous; in fact, its excess is ontologically authorized by the axiom of the power set and the theorem of the point of excess.

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Pathological or anomalous characteristics are effects of what Badiou calls "a conceptless choice" concerning how this excess should be named or managed, a choice invoked at the limit of ontology prescribed in Cantor's and Easton's theorems and assessed in Meditation 26 of *Being and Event*.[6] Two examples of pathological excess, what I call here "dis-ease," appear in the *Being and Event* project: the practices of covering-over in *The Immanence of Truths: Being and Event III*; and the operations of an obscure subject in *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*. Unlike the parasite or the gangrenous appendage, these pathological instances require sensitivity – what Badiou calls in *Being and Event I* the practice of "keeping watch" – to their operations, sensitivity that is capable to interrupt or redirect the effects of this pathology.

1

Excrescence is introduced in Meditations 8 and 9 of *Being and Event I* (2005) to establish a conceptual symmetry with the singular situation that produces an event. Where a singular situation has elements in it that are presented but not represented - and these presented elements are candidates for the disruption of that situation – the excrescent situation has represented elements that are not presented in the original situation. The excrescent situation maintains representation in excess of presentation, inclusion in excess of belonging.

Getting at excrescence invites a refresher on Badiou's use of *terms* and *parts* in his set-theoretic ontology. Terms are the elements counted in any set; parts describe the sub-multiples or subsets formed from these elements. In Meditation 8, Badiou explains that individual *terms* may be excrescent when they are "represented in a situation but not presented."[7] Excrescent terms are ontologically authorized, first by the axiom of the power set, which affirms the subsets of any set to be counted as a set, and second by theorem of the point of excess. This theorem holds "that given a presented multiple, the one-multiple composed from its subsets, whose existence is guaranteed by the Axiom of the Power Set, is essentially 'larger' than the initial multiple."[8] Relative to situations – the most primitive ontological formations possible – the theorem of the point of excess makes space for sub-multiples or parts always in excess of what is presented therein; while the terms presented in the situation exist, the excess parts formed from these do not. That is, the parts are re-aggregations of existing terms.

Consider this rudimentary example, in which the subsets {(Ø), (*B*), (*N*), (*T*), (*B, N, T*), (*N, T*), (*B, N*), (*B, T*)} are each normal representations of the set with elements (*B, N, T*). Each of the subsets can be counted as sets, and the subsets themselves can be counted together as a set (per the axiom of the power set). This combination of subsets is, per the theorem of the point of excess, quantitatively larger than the original set.

In this case, there is nothing excrescent about the subsets (the parts of the original situation), nor are there excrescent elements in the set (the terms of the original situation).

Excrescence can apply to individual elements or terms, but it also describes the structure applied to a situation. "An excrescence," Badiou explains, "is a one of the state that is not a one of the native structure, an existent of the state which in-exists in the situation of which the state is the state."[9] When I describe the original set (*B, N, T*) as "*Becky's nephew and nieces*," the description is accurate, but the descriptor is neither presented in, nor is it represented in the original structure. There may have been, at one time, excrescent terms – where each term was represented but not yet presented (that is, where one of my nieces or nephews was expected or planned hadn't arrived) – but as each term 'presented,' the situation tended toward normalization.

The further – still accurate! – descriptors, "*K's Kids*" or "*E's Kids*," or organizing principles like "*male-presenting*," "*female-presenting*," "*twenty-somethings*" or "*teenagers*" are each ones of "the state," or resulting from the imposition of *metastructure.* This metastructure deploys a shorthand for each of the subsets. Badiou describes this metastructure as the State of the situation, and it "solely exercises its domination according to a law destined to form-one out of the *parts* of a situation."[10] It is more expedient, I suppose, to refer to my nephews and nieces by parentage in familiar conversation, using *K's Kids*, for example. Even though the included subset (*B, N, T*) organizes these elements according to parentage, that excess descriptor *K's Kids* may apply. The excess descriptor guarantees "a uniformity of effect," and the State is "the law that guarantees that there is Oneness, not in the immediacy of society – that is always provided for by a non-state structure – but amongst the set of its subsets."[11] *K's Kids* encompasses all the relevant parts and their possible modes of organization, or the various modes of having been counted-as-one: {(Ø), (*B*), (*N*), (*T*), (*B, N, T*), (*N, T*), (*B, N*), (*B, T*)}; but it does not (and cannot) apply to the original set (*B, N, T*).

These secondary structures are applied by the State of the situation. Its "role ... is to qualify, one by one, each of the *compositions of compositions of multiples* whose general consistency, in respect of *terms*, is secured by the situation."[12] In other words, the State re-counts that which has been counted. Alberto Toscano explains that the theorem of the point of excess "means that there is always something in the representative operation of the State that stands in a 'relation' of *excrescence* to the situation."[13] It adds an additional layer to an already-consistent, already-stable organization of situations according to principles of terms (elements) and parts (sets, subsets). The quantitative expansion is also clear – and also theorematically authorized – the application of metastructure adds to the available combinations of represented elements, and both are in excess of the original presentation.

This accounting establishes the position of an excrescence relative to both situations and the terms these organize. A secondary structure does not come from "the immediacy of society" in the historico-social situation; it is not immanent to the subsets or parts of the situation in the ontological situation. Instead, it functions at a remove, establishing a gap between the State and its operations on one hand, and the individuals or elements presented in a set, a situation, a world on the other.

2

In Meditation 8 of *Being and* Event, the discussion of excrescence and State meta-structure develop an ontological map.[14] Badiou's historical and social analysis of excrescence in Meditation 9 allows him to distinguish his dialectical vector from that of classical Marxism. Because, for the classical Marxist, the "state is always the state of the ruling class," the eclipse of the bourgeoisie is also the eclipse of the state; this orientation keeps dialectical tensions between the bourgeois and proletariat classes. For Badiou, however, both the excess the State counts *and* the State itself are ontologically prescribed since these are consistent with the axiom of the power set and the theorem of the point of excess; as such, the State maintains a *permanence* relative to both the ontological situation and the historico-social situation.

This analysis begins with Badiou acknowledging what Marx and Engels got right about the state, particularly their "having understood that the State, in essence, does not entertain any relationship with individuals."[15] Marx's (1871) and Engels's (1891) respective reflections on the Paris Commune bring forward these elements of State "distance" operation and structure that Badiou affirms in his own reading.

Marx presents the Commune as the antithesis to the excesses of the Second Empire, including its total corruption and "shameless display of gorgeous, meretricious and debased luxury."[16] At the same time, the Empire presented itself as a "Party of Order" situated at the head of a political coalition that included Thiers' bourgeois republicans. It posited itself as the solution to all the populace's problems, at the same time it was riven by scandal, corruption, and its own internal rot; as Marx notes, the Empire "professed to unite all classes by reviving for all the chimera of national glory."[17] The unity the Second Empire claimed is the ground over which Marx describes this government as excrescent. With its material excesses and disregard for the conditions of the working class, the government still somehow "claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to the nation itself from which it was but a parasitic excrescence."[18] The wish to inspire national glory as a substitute for governing and pointing to itself as the true embodiment of France, while at the same time accumulating to itself corruption, scandal, and riches at the expense of those who would be governed express

the pathological valence of excrescence. The Second Empire is an opportunistic parasite drawing from a captive host.

While Marx's insights recognize the capacities of the State to exploit the gap between itself and the individuals it would govern, Engels's 1891 remarks on the Commune's 20th anniversary identify the *durability* of the State. Indeed, Engels notes says that in the two decades since the Commune – and with the benefit of time and information to learn more about the innerworkings of the Second Empire, Thiers' government, and the Commune itself – it doesn't matter whether the State in question is a monarchy or a republic. Neither mode will transform society in service of the proletariat, since "the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another."[19] In assessing this claim and others like it, in which Engels notes the true aim of the State as an aid to class-based oppression, Badiou elaborates two functions that contribute to the State's durability: bureaucracy and coercion.

The administrative and managerial functions of the state – its bureaucratic function – are, according to Badiou, "far more structural and permanent than the coercive function."[20] The State's concern with what becomes "the gigantic, infinite network" of subsets in its purview means that its operations never reach the individual as such and, as a result are more difficult to disrupt or challenge. In 'The Factory as Event Site,' Badiou's essay concerning the status of the worker in contemporary Marxist politics, he gives the *company* as an example of an excrescence at work. The company "is a special name" used "to designate this singleton of the worker-multiple that is the factory."[21] The factory is presented as the worker-multiple and then represented as the workers' place – the workers are never presented in this context, and the *company* is applied to the factory as "a pure re-presentation, a terms of the state."[22] *Company* is an additional layer against recognizing workers, a generalization 'twice removed' from those on the factory floor. By establishing the *company* referent, the workers are never counted or acknowledged as workers and can be shifted inside and outside the structure (promoted, fired, reassigned, etc.) without any effect on the company as a managing structure.

Coercion can be traced to "the immediate structuring of terms according to a law which 'comes from elsewhere'" and "forms the very mode in which one can be reinforced in the count of parts."[23] *Company* or *unionism* (a second example of excrescence Badiou identifies in 'The Factory as Event Site') each offer ways of referring to the group of laborers doing work on the factory floor; these names are relevant to that group, but they also have the outcome of assigning a principle of unicity to something removed from the workers. Indeed, *company* and *union* fail to recognize any of the workers themselves and as workers. This is a failure of accounting – an indifference to presentation that has as its counterweight a constant and intensive concern for representation. This

indifference breaks the integral relations between situation, structure, and metastructure that might otherwise secure stability.

Engels's recognition of bureaucracy and coercion as evidence of State excrescence allow Badiou to identify an "ambivalence" in the classical position, "concentrated in one point: thinking - since it is solely from the standpoint of the State that there are excrescences - that the State itself is an excrescence."[24] Inquiring after the origins of this ambivalence, Badiou notes that the State's emergence is appended to the antagonism holding between classes, and not immanent to the classes themselves. As such, the State is separate, invested with arms and the means to carry out "structured violence" and to intervene in the antagonisms between bourgeois and proletariat classes to avoid "a permanent state of civil war" on account of their competing interests.[25] Put another way, Badiou explains that the classical Marxist position holds that the State is required because "singular and normal terms maintain a sort of antagonistic non-liaison between themselves, or a state of unbinding."[26] The State "solves" this non-liaison, which Badiou attributes to (using language of his account, again) differences in presentation; for the bourgeoisie, everything that is presented is represented, while for the proletariat, there is a gap between presentation and representation that favors presentation and makes space for transformation of the existing order. Classical Marxism holds that the modification of these differences - that is, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie - also relieves the need for the State to manage the antagonism. Engels's reflections on the Commune and state power suggest an amputation is required, something that an eventually victorious proletariat "cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible."[27] If "the State is always the State of the ruling class," as the slogan goes, then the collapse of the ruling class will carry the State apparatus with it.

Badiou acknowledges that these early insights on excrescence carry "a profound idea: the State is not founded upon the social bond, which it would express, but rather upon unbinding, which it prohibits."[28] This insight gives the *reason* for the State - its ensuring stability underwrites any defensive and dominating activity that would preserve the order it underwrites. However, the classical Marxist relation between State, parts, and terms, is incompatible with "the unpresentable errancy of the void, and the irredeemable excess of belonging over inclusion - which necessitates the re-securing of the one and the securing of structure."[29] Classical Marxism keeps void and excess together as features of presentation, posits the proletariat as non-representable, which is different than the unpresented assessment of the void in Badiou's account, and the count as the "non-universal of bourgeois interests."[30] The State can function as an excrescence - a surmountable excess - because, according to Badiou, Engels "did not understand that the excess which it (the State) treats is ineluctable, for it is a theorem of being."[31]

For Badiou, and the Leninist-Maoist trajectory he sees himself as having inherited, "the State as such - which is to say the re-securing of the one over the multiple of parts (or parties) - cannot be so easily attacked or destroyed."[32] He cites Lenin's "despair over the 'obscene permanence' of the State," and Mao's observation following the Cultural Revolution "that not much had changed after all."[33] Indeed, and for Badiou, the State's persistence is an axiomatic matter, authorized first by the axiom of the power set and second by the theorem of the point of excess. As such, the State and its functions cannot be suppressed or eliminated. The State is an excrescence insofar as it exceeds that which is presented in the original situation. It is *indifferent* to the ways the gap the metastructure creates is exploited; put another way, the way in which the State comes to generate dis-ease is appended to *errancy* and not to its *excess*.

3

In the historical and social analysis Badiou develops in Meditation 9, it is clear that State excess can become a problem. Its *errancy* is such that the State's bureaucratic or coercive operations can far exceed that which it organizes. The State can operate in a predatory fashion; it treats the subset as an object for its management (at best) and/or its domination (at worst). Badiou puts a finer point on this transformation by the State, saying,

> ... despite the protestations and declarations to the contrary, it is always evident that in the end, when it is a matter of people's *lives* – which is to say, of the multiple whose one they have received – the State is not concerned. Such is the ultimate and ineluctable depth of its separation.[34]

Badiou's assessment here produces a trajectory that confirms the State's work of coercion or domination. The gap and possible errancy established by the State do are untroubled by the true matters of people's lives and may – by all accounts – operate *in spite of these lives*.

Being and Event posits an ontological account of how this gap and errancy emerge. The axiom of the power set and theorem of the point of excess manage a *local* "relation between a situation and its state," which establishes the consequence that "the state is *different* from the situation whose state it is."[35] Put directly, the state is different because it is larger than the original situation. This is obvious in the case of finite sets: for a set with three elements (*B, N, T*), its powerset has eight sets {(Ø), (*B*), (*N*), (*T*), (*B, N, T*), (*N, T*), (*B, N*), (*B, T*)}. Tzuchien Tho explains that this reflects a basic mathematical rule about succession. He says, "The basic reckoning here is that the powerset will have a cardinality of 2^n, where n is the cardinality of the original set," or the number of elements that original set contains.[36]

Cantor's Theorem, which holds that *for any set A the set of all subsets of A (known as the power set of A) has a strictly greater cardinality than A itself*, installs this difference between state and situation globally, at the scale of alephs, or transfinite cardinals.[37] As Tho notes, the same procedure for succession and cardinality applies here: the powerset of a transfinite cardinal ω_0 is $2^{\omega 0}$.[38] This is a rule-governed activity that – uncontroversially, perhaps – applies to numbers both finite and infinite. However, a problem emerges in the consequences of this application. For finite sets, 2^n yields a quantity that is recognizable larger and by a degree that can be evaluated: *eight* is larger than *three* by *five* units, etc. Greater-than and less-than have a sense in this context, and this is a procedure (in Badiou's words) of *localization*. However, while the powerset of ω_0 is legible according to this same rule, we cannot know how much larger $2^{\omega 0}$ is in relation to ω_0. We do not have the same resources to localize this result.[39]

Easton's theorem is proffered to address this as a way of moving forward mathematically. Badiou explains:

> given a cardinal λ, which is either ω_0 or a successor cardinal, it is coherent with the Ideas of the multiple to choose, as the value of $p|\lambda|$ (the powerset of that cardinal) ... any cardinal π, provided that it is superior to λ and that it is a successor cardinal.[40]

When we cannot pin down the value of an infinite number, Easton's theorem suggests that it is acceptable to *decide* any value that meets the requirements of superiority or succession. Perhaps it is ω_1 or "ω_{347} or $\omega_{(\omega 0 +18)}$, or whatever other cardinal as immense as you like, provided it is a successor."[41] In this choosing, the state of the situation becomes subject to "un-measure."[42] In fact, it is an *impasse of ontology* that produces this un-measure; that which we would use to measure is, at the level of cardinality, no measure at all. The procedural gap between the State and the situation whose parts it manages – what Badiou calls a "chasm" opening "between the structure in which the immediacy of belonging is delivered, and the metastructure which counts as one the parts and regulates the inclusions" – cannot be managed *except arbitrarily.*[43] Arbitrariness requires a decision to break the deadlock, and a decision is the source of possible errancy.

4

The consequence of Easton's theorem for Badiou's project is this introduction of "un-measure" at the level of structure tasked with measure, the "introduction of errancy in quantity on the part of the very instance from which we expected – precisely – the guarantee and fixity of the situation."[44] This insight marks the ontological moment at which the *anomalous* operations of structure emerge, some of which generate pathological

phenomenological or onto-logical effects – what I call *dis-ease*. I briefly address two examples in the broader *Being and Event* project: the procedure of *covering-over*, described in *The Immanence of Truths*; and the operations of an *obscure subject*, articulated in *Logics of Worlds*.

Errant Procedure: Covering-Over

Badiou defines covering-over as "...superimposing a kind of mosaic of finitude over the potential infinity of a situation."[45] Using the occasion of remarks at the Théâtre de la Commune in early 2016 intended to consider "the gradual reconstitution of the Idea of communism and its consequences," Badiou presented a parodic New Year's address and one fitted to "the world in question," which is the world following the terrorist attacks of November 2015 that included the Stade de France and Bataclan among its targets.[46] Badiou presents himself as doing the work of covering-over, installing instances of finitude as slogans like "security is the essence of freedom" and "the police are the essence of freedom," statements which themselves indicate a basic contradiction in prioritizing mechanisms of domination as the "essence" of freedom.[47]

In Badiou's parodic characterization, he uses the state mobilization of police as the mechanism for "covering-over," for mitigating "risks," or perceived threats to state security, through tactics like "preventive detention, the restriction of the right of freedom of movement, house arrest, the deprivation of nationality, the expansion of the right of the police to shoot anything that moves," and increased and unchecked search and surveillance practices.[48] To protect the state (and those under its watch), the police "cast an extremely finite prison-like shadow over anyone who can be suspected of infinite tendencies and thus to re-educate them by the most republican methods."[49] Speaking, again, in his parodic mode Badiou describes these as "the finite methods of the police infinity," and insists that these methods will root out the root of infinity, "deradicalize anything that moves and to tear out all the roots of radical thought" through the exercise of violence masked as "security," or "the essence of freedom."[50]

The tactics named in this parody includes actions taken against people classified as "Roma," nativist attitudes masquerading as 'true' republican values, the expulsion of foreigners to "Elsewhere, in any case," and the orientation toward alternative facts confers relations of suspicion on perceived homophones (e.g., Commune, whose members "were almost real communists" and thus worthy of the finitization and de-radicalization in the form of assassination and death visited on 23,000 French citizens).[51] The speaker evades accountability related to the strategic litany and its outcome: "I have no idea contrary to the ideas they have," this leader (speaking through Badiou as their cipher) says, "except the idea of not having any ideas, which is not an idea but an opinion that

I don't want to impose on anyone, even if I'm imposing it on myself."[52] That *domination* and its tactics could come to stand in some way for *freedom* is an instance of precisely the errancy Easton's Theorem makes possible. The official in Badiou's parody recognizes this, of course, and is themselves reduced to speaking in a toothless, nonsensical relativism.[53]

Badiou explains that the aim of these covering-over operations, presenting a finite set of actions as positive and necessary to curb the prospect of disruption, "is to stifle possibilities inasmuch as they are risks and to assume identities without justifying them other than by their established existence."[54] That is, from the perspective of the body capitalizing on errancy, all threats are the same and are treated as such. These are tactics of propaganda designed to re-casts infinite potential as a risk to the status quo, and as a threat to the dominant social and political order. This effort, Badiou explains, is "unfortunately" successful "in convincing many militants of the emerging, fledgling truth that what they thought was new was very old, and what they thought was right was criminal."[55] For those militants, the *dis-ease* that covering-over produces is a form of temporal dislocation relative to their political efforts, a sense of being out-of-step, or out-of-time with what 'freedom' seems to mean.

Errant Operator: Obscure Subject

A second example of errancy at work is the *obscure subject* described in *Logics of Worlds*. In a post-evental world, in which the present is assembling itself anew in the event's wake, the obscure subject emerges as an operator capable of occulting the creative power capable of this new organization.

This operator is discussed in the character of the Roman patrician, alarmed by the slave revolt unfolding under the sign "Spartacus." The obscure subject is not the reactionary subject - not the New Philosopher who has recanted their revolutionary activities as the woeful missteps of youth, the "renegade rallying to consensus" described in Badiou's meditation on the Thermidorean reaction.[56] Rather, the obscure subject demands, as Badiou explains, "an abolition" of the post-evental present, "as the effect of a sovereign action, invoked by the subject in his prayers, lamentations, or curses," accomplished by engineering "the descent of this present into the night of non-exposition."[57] This is not simply a reinstallation of the previous order, but it is the return to this order by its occultation, its "enclosure" of the unbinding produced in the evental occurrence. In other words, it reinstalls the previous order in full view of those testifying to an evental occurrence and in spite of its unfolding. It is not an ostrich ducking its head; rather, the obscure subject is the bulldozing of the new, done in the open.

Badiou insists that the obscure subject "crucially calls on an atemporal fetish: the incorruptible and indivisible over-body, be it City,

God, or Race."[58] This fetish disarticulates or dislocates emancipatory statements from the militant subjects that identify these. Where the reactive subject "conserves the form of the faithful subject as its articulated unconscious," the New Philosopher is always over-writing their former activist self, the obscure subject understands the transforming present as "its unconscious, its *lethal disturbance.*"[59] The obscure subject carries with it that which is "directly linked to the past, even if the becoming of the obscure subject crushes this past in the name of the sacrifice of the present."[60] The procedure by which the obscure subject does its work is something like the following: first, identify the vision of the present that is making headway after the event; second, identify an instrument; third, posit an abstraction to which that instrument is in service; fourth, use the abstraction and instrument together to subordinate the vision the transforming present wishes to realize.

Consider the abstraction "woke" that came to describe portions of the American social and political consciousness following the highly public police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020. The vision of transformation these events catalyzed was one of accountability for police actions, on the way to some semblance of reckoning with the racist and colonialist structures at work in the United States even prior to its founding. The resonances of these events and the present they inspired became cluttered by nationalist and nativist talking points that characterized "woke" as a weakness and betrayal expressed in diversity, equity, and inclusion practices adopted in relation to the consciousness-raising protests and refusals following the Floyd murder (in particular). The phrase "DEI" or "DEI Hire" became a racist dog whistle - an instrument - with staying power: with the re-election of Trump in 2024, the combination of this instrument and its abstraction drove calls for accountability and structural justice out of the conversation.

The obscure subject's appeal to a transcendent anchor (in this case, something like a pure Race or pure Nation) is intended to fully deny the trace of any evental transformation and silence those who would testify to its unfolding. [61] As a consequence, this anchor produces a double annihilation: both the evental trace at work organizing the present and the faithful subject carrying the trace forward are denied. Together, these efforts serve to obscure or occult the present that – without its intervention – might otherwise re-organize according to the intervention of faithful subjects and the pursuit of post-evental truths. Badiou identifies the efforts of annihilation with propaganda or with police action, both designed to accomplish the "occultation of [the event's trace] as truth."[62]

What has emerged in the wake of this so-called "war on woke" is a militarized police force roaming the streets of major American cities, hunting, arresting, and detaining those this police force deems to be "alien," without concerns for due process and under the sign of immigration enforcement. The over-written and over-ridden present

the obscure subject – what Badiou describes as a de-articulation "in appearing the formal data of fidelity" – accomplishes is that which enables all manner of racist, sexist, homophobic, and ableist oversteps that clog our media feeds. More perniciously, the operations of the obscure subject are behind those who drive unmarked SUVs through the streets targeting perceived "illegal aliens" on another.[63]

> *"Just think,"* we might say, *"of the pain inflicted by family separation."*

> *"Just think,"* we might say, *"of the pain inflicted by warrantless arrest and deportation."*

5

Alain Badiou explains to the reader of *The Immanence of Truths* that his attention to the *infinite-finite* relation is, in fact attention to the relation between *non-domination* and *domination* – what he calls the "logic of the problem of emancipation.[64]" This positive logic concerns the articulation of conditions in which a creative and emancipatory infinity can escape its being trapped by finite structures. Resistant, non-dominating logics require a departure from the classical Marxist framing of oppression an outcome of the oppositions between classes. Badiou says, "we are no longer treating (classical Marxism's) concrete sequences directly as an explicit contradiction between disjoint and separate terms."[65] That is, conflict is not assigned to the old divisions of *proletariat* and *bourgeoisie,* which an analysis of excrescence and the State of the situation in *Being and Event* revealed. Instead, the terms of *domination* and *non-domination* come to the fore. Badiou is clear that understanding domination requires understanding the use of oppression as its primary tool. Oppression "is driven by the fear, the risk, the possibility that something might emerge that has the potential to be radically in excess over the society of which the current rulers ... are the guardians."[66] In authoritarian and neo-fascist contexts, especially those emergent in the tenuously democratic west, the logic of emancipation takes on a new urgency; the task, for those of us living in these contexts, is to develop a sensitivity to these instances in which the conditions productive of emancipation are quelled by State interventions. Our task, then, is minimally the recognition of errancy and the dis-ease it purposefully (and effectively) manufactures.

Badiou challenges the sturdiness of the maxim, "wherever there is oppression, there is resistance," saying that this maxim is "unfortunately not entirely true, not automatically true."[67] He insists that oppression is *not* the default social setting, because if this were true, then "resistance, which is an intermittent subjective figure, would not make any sense."[68] The existing order, the system dominating social life, will take additional

– and ever-enlarging – steps to ensure its mechanisms remain hidden. The general order, that which would not be disrupted, is a closed order with the following characteristics. First, its aim is to perpetuate itself and to preserve its closed status; second, it requires the prevention of and foreclosure against "at all costs something qualitatively foreign to this closure from appearing"; and, third, this order is appropriately characterized as "the preservation of a certain type of finitude."[69] Resistance is the tactic that reveals oppression as the structure overwriting the conditions of social life.

Badiou's phenomenological account of covering-over concludes by identifying "the imperative of our time," which is "to assert everywhere that truths only exist to the extent that we are indifferent to their constant concealment by the ruses of covering-over."[70] He insists that "somewhere in the world, there must still remain evidence of the fact that covering-over occurred, and support for inspiring, in oneself and others, a necessary uncovering operation."[71] Despite the saturation of propagandistic covering-over, strategies that layer the appearance of State power over the real common social and political bonds that unite communities, or the operations of the obscure subject that work to crush opposition to its dominance, Badiou reminds his reader that the task is one Samuel Beckett would recognize: "I must go on," he notes, preparing the reader for a discussion of Beckett as the exemplar for the resistance he prescribes.

Such a task informs the orientation of a figure Badiou introduces at the end of *Being and Event*'s Meditation 9 - the political activist, who is "a patient watchman of the void instructed by the event," and is not "a warrior beneath the walls of the State."[72] The activist knows their task is not and can never be the ruin of the State, since the 20th and 21st Centuries have demonstrated its durability, but rather to go on, to inspire an uncovering operation, to assert the existence of truths, and to do so patiently, attentively, and with the sturdiest of commitments to non-domination.

1 Marder 2019, pp. 63-64.
2 Marx and Engels 1977, p. 633.
3 Marx and Engels 1977, p. 629.
4 Marder 2019, p. 63.
5 Marder 2019, p. 63.
6 Badiou 2005, p. 280.
7 Badiou 2005, p. 99.
8 Badiou 2005, p. 84.
9 Badiou 2005, p. 100.
10 Badiou 2005, p. 105.
11 Badiou 2005, p. 105.
12 Badiou 2005, p. 105.
13 Toscano 2004, p. 209.
14 I have argued elsewhere that this is the appropriate register in which to understand Badiou's ontological framework, his use of mathematics, in the *Being and Event* project (see, e.g., Vartabedian 2018a: 140-147, 152-154; Vartabedian 2018b: 221-222). Briefly, I suggest a "subtractive" reading of Badiou's work, recognizing that the ontology, "though presented first in the system, offers a retrospective mapping" of any world and its ontological framework (Vartabedian 2018a: 161). As subtractive, this reading follows the suggestion of A.J. Bartlett and Alex Ling, who describe subtraction as a "divestment procedure," or a reading 'down' such that any world-as-situation is ultimately linked to the void set, Ø (Vartabedian 2018a: 137; quoting Bartlett and Ling 2014: 3).This reading is intended to address critiques of Badiou's work concerning the origin of the State, especially as these have been proffered by Adrian Johnston and Geoff Pfeifer, including questions like who counts? and where from? (See, e.g., Vartabedian 2018a: 152).
15 Badiou 2005, p. 104.
16 Marx and Engels 1977, p. 631.
17 Marx and Engels 1977, p. 630.
18 Marx and Engels 1977, p. 633.
19 Marx and Engels 1977, p. 627.
20 Badiou 2005, p. 106.
21 Badiou 2006a, p. 173.
22 Badiou 2006a, p. 173
23 Badiou 2005, p. 107.
24 Badiou 2005, p. 108.
25 Badiou 2005, p. 108.
26 Badiou 2005, p. 109.
27 Marx and Engels 1977, p. 629.
28 Badiou 2005, p. 109.
29 Badiou 2005, p. 110.
30 Badiou 2005, p. 110.
31 Badiou 2005, p. 110.
32 Badiou 2005, p. 110.
33 Badiou 2005, p. 110.
34 Badiou 2005, pp. 107-108.
35 Badiou 2005, p. 275.
36 Tho 2020, p. 160.
37 Badiou 2005, p. 275.
38 Tho 2020, p. 160.
39 Badiou 2005, p. 278.
40 Badiou 2005, p. 279.
41 Badiou 2005, p. 280.
42 Badiou 2005, p. 278.
43 Badiou 2005, p. 280.
44 Badiou 2005, p. 280.
45 Badiou 2022, p. 193.
46 Badiou 2022, p. 193.
47 Badiou 2022, pp. 193, 194.
48 Badiou 2022, pp. 194.
49 Badiou 2022, p. 194.
50 Badiou 2022, p. 194.
51 Badiou 2022, pp. 194-196.
52 Badiou 2022, p. 197.
53 Badiou imagines this relativism by modeling Christian Duteil's satirical greetings. Badiou follows the strong security-and-policing language with claims like "I even think it's only right that everyone, given the principle of security and finitude, should think that their own customs are right just because they're their own" (IT 197).
54 Badiou 2022, p. 198.
55 Badiou 2022, p. 200.
56 Badiou 2006b, p. 123.
57 Badiou 2009, p. 59
58 Badiou 2009: 60.
59 Badiou 2009: 61.
60 Badiou 2009: 61.
61 Badiou 2009, pp. 59-60.
62 Badiou 2009, p. 60.
63 Badiou 2009, p. 61.
64 Badiou 2022, p. 199.
65 Badiou 2022, p. 199.
66 Badiou 2022, p. 199.
67 Badiou 2022, p. 199.
68 Badiou 2022, p. 199.
69 Badiou 2022, p. 199.
70 Badiou 2022, p. 203.
71 Badiou 2022, p. 203.
72 Badiou 2005, p. 111.

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