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## Community in Question. Failure of Communitarianism, Misery of Individualisms and Community of Existence

*Abstract:* The main task of the present paper is to rethink the very idea of community, in comparison with other terms that describe the human collectivity such as—people, society, population, free association, group, collective or aggregate. After analyzing three basic ways of thinking about community—the liberal one, communitarianist and the biopolitical paradigm, the author reconstructs the contemporary concepts of community, such as the “unavowable community” (Maurice Blanchot), “the inoperative community” (Jean-Luc Nancy), “community in question” (Jacques Derrida), “the coming community” (Giorgio Agamben), “a collective” (Bruno Latour), and *communitas* (Roberto Esposito). As the result of his analyzes the author infers the general conclusion, that what is at stake in philosophical discourse about communities is “conjuring up” or “designing” alternative ways of being, alternative ontologies of the social world.

*Keywords:* collective, dispositive of the person, free association, the coming community, unavowable community

### 1.

Roberto Esposito in his book *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* powerfully stated that:

Nothing seems more appropriate today than thinking community; nothing more necessary, demanded, and heralded by a situation that joins in a unique epochal knot the failure of all communisms with the misery of new individualisms. Nevertheless, nothing is further from view; nothing so remote, repressed, and put off until later, to a distant and indecipherable horizon (Esposito 2010: 2).

Frankly speaking, I share Esposito’s scepticism on the prospects of establishing community today on par with his reservations towards re-inventing a new form of community. In fact, I am compelled to say that to me no idea is more worrying, unsettling, problematic and doubtful than that of community. In fact, it is in particular the question of a political community and even more so the calls to establish one that concern me most in political discourse. I am equally puzzled and caught unaware when I am told that I purportedly belong to a community and that I should express genuine commitment to it to be part thereof. When in a public discourse someone calls for rebuilding a lost community by resorting to a historical narration, a foundation myth, our sense of kinship, or anything of that sort—we should apply double caution and we should already start being afraid.

It is for good reason that the idea of community seems a dangerous concept. When the near coming of a community is announced we almost by default withdraw and anticipate

coming horrors. Yet, interpellation into a community deserves our most careful consideration. Who makes an inquiry into the possibility of establishing a community in fact makes an inquiry into our real desires. Since we are entitled to passively and actively demand our desires to be fulfilled we also have the right and even the duty to inquire about what sort of community we might wish to ascribe to and belong to. It is in particular true nowadays when all the traditional forms of association have already been exhausted. This is why, I claim that contemporary man is, in a sense, a paradoxical being. On the one hand a contemporary man is refused a community, and yet on the other we are persistently encouraged to join numerous communities or wooed to accept membership requests from and for all sorts of even phantasmatic communities.

We somehow need to overcome this difficult situation we are in, where on the one hand we are well aware of the risk embedded in the discourse about community and often fear its coming in political life, yet at the same time we simply cannot give up our innate or latent desire to seek the possibility of establishing community here on the Earth, a community we would truly belong to. Hence, it seems to me that when speaking of community we should always append a question mark. And in doing so we need to be cautioned that there is no safe discourse about community. Granted, we have already been cautioned that there can be only “community in question” and this cautionary measure will hopefully keep things at bay and serve a safety valve function should a community arrive. There is no stronger call than call for community, a call for establishing a political form of life different than the state, society, a free association, an aggregate of human bodies, a company, a corporation, a nation, a phantom of political body, an organization and perhaps a commonwealth. One should, as a precautionary measure, before embarking on this community journey solemnly confess that there have never been nor will be community. History teaches us that community has never taken place along the lines of our projections or, in other words, when community came, it was under guise, misinformed of our intentions and misled as to our desires. Perhaps all to-day known communities have in fact been “mistaken communities,” “faulty communities,” communities fatefully uninformed of our intentions and true desires.

Having made the above caveat, let us honestly confess to nostalgia for community, which we have either lost or broken. Community is exemplified in paradigms that play on our nostalgia for this lost age. Since the time of Tönnies, who distinguished between two types of social groupings, we feel nostalgia for *Gemeinschaft*—sometimes translated as “community” but now often as “civil society” or left untranslated (Tönnies 1887/2001)—which refers to groupings based on feelings of togetherness and on mutual bonds, which are felt as a goal to be kept up, their members being means for this goal. We live, however, in *Gesellschaft*—translated as society—which refers to groups that are sustained by it being instrumental for their members individual aims and goals. While the examples are plenty a keen observer will notice that one trait permeates throughout: the origin of community is in the times when community was woven of tight and it was harmonious. Such were the times of the Athenian polis. Such was the awe of the Roman Republic and it likewise pertains to the first Christian community. On top of that there are numerous historical corporations, communes, or brotherhoods the memories of which play in the same tune. What spoils the aura, however, is the fact that all lost communities are always played back with the help of their institutions, rituals, or symbols. That way, their institutionalized represen-

tation constantly reinvents the primeval “organic unity” which community offers to uphold. Please note, that the way the idea of community is played back is fundamentally different from the way “society” or “empire” are played back. The former is in essence distinct from community as it is a simple association and division of forces and needs, while empire literally dissolves community by submitting its peoples to its arms and to its glory. Taken as a construct and idea, community is special for its organic communion and taken-for-granted intimate communication between its members.

Needless to say, the feeling and the identity of the lost community is by definition retrospective and as such it is always in question. This is the primary reason why we should stay calm and be persistently cautious when approaching such a community, for at any time its beliefs may turn hostile and its mythologies dangerous. Such a community is never bothered about whether what it conceives to be the bond of community is only retrospectively constructed nor that it is merely reconstructing images of its past for the sake of community’s ideal apparition. One more reason why we are well advised to stay suspicious of community consciousness is that it has accompanied the violent history of the Western world from the very onset. In fact, at each and every moment in our history, the West gives over to the nostalgia for a more archaic community that has disappeared. Here let me only repeat one more time that our society was not built on the ruins of a community.

Why should we be afraid of the community? Why do I recognize the category of community intellectual as well as politically dangerous? Simply because it promotes an “identity model”. According to the model one becomes an individual subject only by virtue of recognizing, and being recognized by, another subject. Recognition from others is thus essential to the development of a sense of self. Proponents of the “identity model” contend that to belong to a group that is devalued by the dominant culture is to be misrecognized, to suffer a distortion in one’s relation to one’s self. The identity politics model tends also to reify identity. Stressing the need to elaborate and display an authentic, self-affirming and self-generated collective identity, it puts moral pressure on individual members to conform to a given group culture. Cultural dissidence and experimentation are accordingly discouraged, when they are not simply equated with disloyalty. As a result the “identity model” serves as a vehicle for misrecognition: in reifying group identity, it ends by obscuring the politics of cultural identification, the struggles within the group for the authority—and the power—to represent it. By shielding such struggles from view, this approach masks the power of dominant fractions and reinforces intragroup domination. The “identity model” thus lends itself all too easily to repressive forms of communitarianism, promoting conformism, intolerance and patriarchalism (Fraser 2003; Fraser 2009).

Aristotle was perhaps the first Western philosopher to worry about repressive unity. He thought of the city as a *synoikismos*, a coming together of people from diverse family tribes—each *oikos* having its own history, allegiances, property, family gods. For the sake of trade and mutual support during war, a city is composed of different kinds of men; similar people cannot bring a city into existence. The city thus obliges people to think about and deal with others who have different loyalties. Obviously mutual aggression cannot hold a city together, but Aristotle made this precept more subtle. Tribalism, he said, involves thinking you know what other people are like without knowing them; lacking direct experience of others, you fall back on fearful fantasies (Aristotle 1968: 310).

On the one hand Robert Putnam has found that first-hand experience of diversity in fact leads people to withdraw from these neighbours. Conversely, people who live in homogeneous local communities appear more sociably inclined towards and curious about others in the larger world. The giant study on which he bases these propositions profiles attitudes more than actual behaviour. In everyday life, people may simply have to put such attitudes aside; we are constantly obliged to deal with people we fear, dislike or simply don't understand. Putnam's idea is that, confronted with these challenges, people are initially inclined to withdraw, or, as he puts it, to "hibernate" (Putnam 2000: 56). It has been noticed recently by Richard Sennett that a distinctive character type is emerging in modern society, the person who can't manage demanding, complex forms of social engagement, and so withdraws. He or she loses the desire to cooperate with others. This person becomes an "uncooperative self" (Sennett 2012: 180).

As Jean-Luc Nancy noted in his *The Inoperative Community* (*La communauté désœuvrée*): "the most painful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer, is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community" (Nancy 1991: 45). The same statement and nostalgia one can find even in Zygmunt Bauman who wrote:

Community can only be numb—or dead. Once it starts to praise its unique valour, wax lyrical about its pristine beauty and stick on nearby fences wordy manifestoes calling its members to appreciate its wonders and telling all the others to admire them or shut up—one can be sure that the community is no more (or not yet, as the case may be). 'Spoken of' community (more exactly: a community speaking of itself) is a contradiction in terms (Bauman 2001: 13).

I wish to remind that the term "conflagration" means "an extensive fire that destroys a great deal of land or property." Perhaps the most serious challenge to the future sociology is how to rethink community without recourse to the promise of organic communion, organic unity and fully transparent communication. As stated above, the only plausible way to talk about community is with recourse to the enigmatic term: *community in question*. We need to always ask how to avoid the dangers embedded in talking about community as the community of perfect communication or perfect unity of the body (organism or organization)? I am honestly considering the possibility that we should once and for all abandon the very concept of "community" in favour of a less politically burdened semantic concept.

## 2.

To my generation, two books of John Rawls are the paradigmatic exposition in the philosophy of politics, namely: *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971) and *Political liberalism* (Rawls 1993). For Rawls, a well-ordered society is neither a community nor an association. For Rawls there are two differences between a society and an association. The first is that a society is a complete and closed social system. It is complete in that it is self-sufficient and in that it reserves space to keep all the main purposes of human life. For Rawls, society is a total concept exhausting all human actions and absorbing all people's goals. Yet, it is also a closed concept in that entry into society is only by birth and exit from it is only by death.

Rawls rather surprisingly relates the idea of society to birth and death. Is it really true that “we mortals” belong to society, and not to community nor association? Perhaps a reverse hypothesis is more plausible: a genuine community of mortal beings establishes their impossible union, or perhaps—communion. Rawls suggests that we have no prior identity before being in society. What is meant here is not that we all come from somewhere else than society but rather that we find ourselves growing up in society or in this or that social position, altogether with its advantages and disadvantages, good or ill fortunes. We do not enter society upon maturity as it is the case of association, but we are born into society and thereupon we lead a complete life. Perhaps all of the above is true, but the truth of a human society which, after all, is the only society available to us should compel us to reconsider this life and death relationship by juxtaposing it with the fact that we are among others. This in turn would require us to rethink the very formula “we the mortals.”

However, what does the idea of “community” mean to such a liberal thinker as Rawls? Community for Rawls is a special kind of association, united by a comprehensive doctrine. Members of other associations have shared ends of this doctrine. For Rawls, a continuing and shared understanding of one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of power. If we think of political society as a community united in affirming one and the same doctrine—Rawls wrote—then the oppressive use of power is necessary for political community. The Inquisition, for Rawls, was not by accident. Its suppression of heresy was needed to preserve the shared religious belief. The same holds, Rawls believes, for any reasonable comprehensive philosophical and moral doctrine, whether religious or nonreligious. A society united on a reasonable form of utilitarianism, or on the liberalism of Kant or Mill would likewise require the sanctions of power, coercion, pressure or oppression. Rawls calls this: “the fact of oppression.”

Therefore arises the question: is it possible to establish any community without violence, force or coercion? Perhaps violence is a prerequisite to all community life? And the fascination with violence in such thinkers as Georges Bataille only betrays “the fact of oppression,” likewise, it perhaps betrays a close relation between community life and the necessity of use violence (Bataille 1986). In my opinion, it is truly significant that Jacques Derrida first started talking about community in such a way in his famous essay, *Violence and metaphysics* (Derrida 1978) which is by the way dedicated to Emmanuel Lévinas. Perhaps in this way he wanted to pose a question whether community beyond violence is at all possible—be it physical or purely symbolic community (Derrida 1978: 79–153).

Thus, appreciating the conceptual distinction made by Rawls and taking into account all differences between society, community and association, we should immediately add that political liberalism actually invalidates all our hopes to establish a political community. Rawls’ political liberalism deals us a bitter lesson that anxiety is part of political community and teaches us to always keep political community—so to say—in brackets.

### 3.

We know that the fear of community and the liberal cancellation of any community have been utilized in the socio-political movement known as “communitarianism.” Community

in communitarian thinking would thus appear as a nostalgic wish to find a solution to the perplexities of the solitude of self, which is condemned to search for the meaning in a fragmented world which is by all means resistant to adopting any stable sense. Community here is invoked to serve as a possible antidote to the loneliness and isolation of the individuals which in turn is blamed on the “liberal mass society” and political liberalism broadly speaking. People like Michael J. Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Robert Bellah, Amitai Etzioni all, at least partially, derive their philosophical strength from attacking the idea of a liberal society.

In this perspective there is a moral field binding persons into long-lasting relations. It is a space of emotional relationships through which individual identities are constructed from their bonds to micro-cultures of values and meanings. “Community—says Amitai Etzioni in his *From Empire to Community* (Etzioni 2004)—is defined by two characteristics: first, a web of affect-laden relationships among a group of individuals, relationships that often criss-cross and reinforce one another and second, a measure of commitment to a set of shared values, norms, meanings, and a shared history and identity—in short, to a particular culture” (Etzioni 2004: 23). In his famous book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert Putnam documented the decline of “social capital” and stressed the importance of “bridging social capital” in which bonds of connection are formed across diverse social groups (Putnam 2000).

However, I wish to ask here whether community or communities which communitarians speak of can ignite our hopes and trigger excitement? Do not communitarians deliver this dangerous discourse based on a strong belief that our societies arose and emerged in the historical process which brought ancient communities to ruins? Do not communitarians produce exactly the kind of a nostalgic discourse we have just been cautioned of and which I called “dangerous”? I am inclined to opine that in fact no *Gesellschaft* has come to help the State and meanwhile capital has dissolved the prior *Gemeinschaft*. It would be more accurate to say that *Gesellschaft* (society)—the dissociating association of forces, needs, and signs—has taken the place of something for which we have no name nor a concept. Putnam suggests that passive participation now marks civil society; people may belong to many organizations but few ordinary members become active. This passivity he finds true in European and American trade unions and charities, and in European churches, though the great exception in his scheme to declining participation is church-going in America.

Communitarians clearly recommend to us what liberals forbid us to even dream of and what seems to serve as a diagnosis, remedy and therapy combined. Let us now take the effort to check the design (structure) of the very concept of community in communitarian thinking and in communitarian practice. After all, is not the communitarian concept of community too simplistic? Does the same apply to the “affective,” “face to face” relations? Is simply the call of community’s participants to adopt well-defined set of values a sufficient and necessary condition for constituting a community that is worth fighting for? Is recognition of such a community the new ultimate horizon of socialization and individuation of its members? Or rather, it is a form of conformism, collectivism, and a comeback to what Rawls called the naked “fact of oppression”? Granted, this time it would be silent oppression, oppression that would not resort to naked violence, but would quietly and tacitly eliminate deviants who do not share community’s values and try to evade direct affective

relationship with the rest of community. I ask, therefore, do communitarians think about communities in terms of closed and local groups with clearly defined boundaries, non-communicative with respect to the rest of the world? Do such groups still exist in our world?

#### 4.

All the above questions seem even the more in place when we realize that, as Niklas Rose (Rose 1999) demonstrates, community in the last decades has become something other than just hope for closeness and brotherhood. According to Rose we have reasons to believe ours is the epoch of “government through community.” Niklas Rose, an astute reader of Michel Foucault’s work is of course well familiar with the key Foucault’s concept—that of “governmentality.” While the term is thought to have come into existence by linking words for governing (*gouverner*) and modes of thought (*mentalité*) it is in fact coined from *gouvernement* with suffixes for adjective and abstract noun. Hence, *gouvernementalité* refers to—in a nutshell—organized practices such as rationalities and techniques through which subjects are governed (Rose 1999: 87).

Rose points out that community is not a simple case of colonization of a space of freedom by control practices. In its contemporary form, community is instituted merely as a sector for government and “governmentality.” Likewise, community of welfare reformers of the 1960s and 1970s was nothing else but a network of professional institutions and services for social citizens that invaded the territory of their everyday lives. In turn, third sector community and the third way of governing—first sector being that of the state and the second being that of the family, is not in essence a geographical space nor it is a social space, as it does not belong to a sociological space nor a space of services.

Present “communities of governmentality” are subject of community studies, zones that are thoroughly investigated and mapped, classified and documented, that are being constantly interpreted, and their vectors illuminated to serve purposes of numerous enlightened professionals. While it would be too strong a statement to say that in the process communities get fabricated they are nonetheless “created” according to market needs and the logic of governmentality. It surely impacts description. In just what ways medical market serves an appropriate description? Authors have no problem funding communities of diabetics or addictive alcoholics, schizophrenia has its communities and likewise autism and Alzheimer’s patients altogether with a plethora of all other possible disabilities take their share in defining the world of communities we live in. We also speak of “sports communities” which customarily in Europe are grouped around football clubs, or we speak of “music communities” associated with bands or music festivals. Community has in fact constituted itself as a new understanding of government: it is heterogeneous and plural as it is linking individuals and families into contesting to-date cultural assemblies of identities and known allegiances.

Rose also suggests that individuals no longer inhabit a single “public sphere.” It is rather that citizenship is multiplied and noncumulative: it appears to “inhere in” and “derive from” active engagement with each of a number of specific zones of identity—lifestyle sectors, neighbourhoods, ethnic groups—some private, some corporate, some quasi-public. The

political problem of citizenship is no longer a question of national character but of the way in which multiple identities receive equal recognition in a single constitutional form. So in this way we invite again the “politics of identity” and we come back to the thesis I put forward at the beginning of this paper. Modern man does not know the taste of community and at the same time one is tempted to ascribe to multiple offers of communities—sporting, dietetic, housing, socializing, gender, ethnic, religious, philosophical and sometimes even political. Can there be any solution to the dilemma: as much as we lack community we have excess of available communities?

Certainly, community holds a promise of a relation less “remote” and more “direct,” existing within matrices of affinity that appear more natural than the “artificial” political space of society. Hence, like so many other similar places of allegiance—class, civil society, ethnicity—arguments about community employ a Janus-faced logic; the premise of each assertion of community is that it refers itself to something that already exists and as such has a claim on us, while at the same time our allegiance to each of these particular communities is still something that professionals have to make us aware of—be it educators, activists, or manipulators of symbols. We thus enter into the narratives and adopt identities of gay men, people of colour, proud or infamous residents of city districts or suburbs, etc. The premise of the agenda seems to be the recognition that we still need to achieve community, yet in all the above-mentioned examples in order to achieve community one needs to follow birth-to-presence route of a form of being which pre-exists. Each of these communities exists before we are born and yet we are told that it has been crafted almost exclusively for us so that we can appreciate and indulge in our singularity and uniqueness. I recall at this point Rawls’ argument that society is a group we enter by the fact of birth and leave upon death. This is why I persistently ask: what is community if not a community of “governmentality”?

## 5.

Having outlined three lessons on community—the liberal, the communitarian and the “engineered” one based on being managed by “governmentality” we may now proceed further. At this point there emerges a new scene, a scene of a new theatre for community play. Various tensions open this window of opportunity for new actors to enter the scene without resorting to our fear of community, actors who seemingly have no compulsive desire to re-establish community and refuse to use communities instrumentally for the purpose of human resource management. Instead, new actors treat communities aporetically. That is exactly what we should be hoping for, with me personally finding in this world nothing more wanted and more needed than a new language to talk about communities, yet a more subtle language, more sophisticated, more incorruptible, language not contaminated with ideology. The quest for such a language is in fact top priority on my agenda and the main premise of this paper.

All new philosophers of community—Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Bruno Latour, Roberto Esposito, Jacques Rancière—are fully aware of the fact that the concept of community is in fact under threat today. This is perhaps why all of the above mentioned authors desperately seek to conjure up new, different

or transformed concept of community and seek a new name for community. All the above mentioned new philosophers of community recognize two basic challenges that modern political thought needs to address: (1) to liberate language of community from communitarian appropriation, which means *inter alia* to think of community in categories of difference and multiplicity, instead of the language of identity and belonging, and (2) to liberate the dictionary of “freedom” from the liberal language, which means rethinking the category of freedom in such way that it is no longer at disposal to own and dominate (community of freeholders) nor it is perceived as a privilege of the few (who are exempt from the common duties and who claim to have the privilege of immunity), but—etymologically—in terms of *eleutheria*, that is the power of uniting the community of free passion (affects).

It was Derrida who first questioned the role of immunity, autoimmunity and community in what he referred to as *com-mon auto-immunity*. Likewise, Derrida is the first to claim that life has absolute value only if it is worth more than life. Here Derrida asks whether community is indeed only possible on condition that it cultivates its own auto-immunity and whether community is only possible when employing the principle of sacrificial self-destruction which by itself is at odds with the principle of self-protection which allows to maintain self-integrity intact. Does a self-contesting attestation keep the auto-immune community alive, or in other words, open to something other and more than itself—the other, the future, death, freedom, or the love of the other (Derrida 2002: 101)?

Conditions outlined by Derrida lead Esposito to draw ultimate consequences: if the subject of community is no longer the “same,” it is by necessity one “other”; yet it is not another subject but a chain of alterations that no new identity will rectify. Esposito here employs a somewhat enigmatic term—“no-thing-in-common” with the emphasis on “in-common” to indicate that “no-thing” corresponds to and belongs to community. The “no-thing” of *communitas* is not thought of as what community still cannot be, nor is it to be interpreted as the process of concealment. If it was what it cannot be or if it was concealed from sight then, in fact, the no-thing of *communitas* will not remain the “no-thing of the thing” but would be transformed into something other, something that it would relate to either as teleology or as presupposition. “No-thing” is not the condition or the result of community, namely, the presupposition that frees community from its one true possibility, but it is rather community’s only mode of being. Community is not incapacitated, obscured, or hidden by “no-thing” but instead it is what constitutes it. This simply means that community is not an entity, nor it is a collective subject, nor a totality of subjects, but rather that it is the relation that no longer makes subjects individual because it separates them from their identity. It is traversing this line what alters them (Esposito 2010: 13).

From this, there follows heroic efforts in the field of linguistic invention towards the search for a new formula for thinking community. From this there stem ideas of Maurice Blanchot and specifically his conceptual framework of “the unavowable community”—the “negative community,” the “episodic community” and the “acephale community” all at once, Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of the “inoperative community,” Jacques Derrida’s “community of lovence,” “strange friends,” “free spirits,” “community as corporation of fools,” Giorgio Agamben’s “the coming community,” Bruno Latour’s claim that community is neither anti-natural society, nor pre-political association, nor organic city-state, but rather a collectivity or collective (*collectif*), and, in particular, Roberto Esposito’s ideas accord-

ing to which the paradigm of *immunitas* should be replaced by the paradigm of *communitas* and unprotected community, all authors try to find and discuss the concept of “desynchronized community”—not covered by common time and not reduced to a sociological category called a “generation,” a community lacking the prerequisite of belonging, community distributed and diffusing “ad infinitum,” community based in neither being the part of governments, nor based on the territorial framework, nor language, nor fantasies concerning the common origin or a common goal, that is—the types of sources for a community supporting communism without the determination of class, gender or race.

Perhaps this is also the reason why community—as Maurice Blanchot pointed out—cannot come within the province of the work [*Voevre*]. People do not produce community, people only experience community as they experience their own finitude. The community as work, or community through works would presuppose that the common being is objectifiable and producible in places, persons, edifices, discourses, institutions, symbols and even in language. The claim that community is the effect of our work and the only work before us is the work of building a community according to the project—is but an overstatement. Perhaps such a claim is the premise and the prerequisite of every totalitarian discourse. The community takes place rather in the course of what Blanchot in his *La Communauté Inavouable* [*The Unavowable Community*] has referred to as unworking [*desoeuvrement*]. Blanchot suggests that before or beyond work, community is that which withdraws from work, that which no longer has to deal with production, nor with completion, but which encounters interruption and suspension. The community is made of the interruption of singularities (Blanchot 1988). Community is what takes place always through others and for others. It is not the space of the egos-subjects and substances that are in principle immortal—but of the *I*'s, who are always *others*. Community is not a communion that fuses the *egos* into a big *Ego*—*Superego* or a higher *We*. It is rather community of multiple *others*, and that not of the “Other,” written with the capital letter “O.”

Here arises the need to discern traditional community from elective community. The first is imposed on us without us having the liberty of choice in the matter: it is *de facto* sociality, or the glorification of the earth, of blood, or even of race. But what about the other? One calls it “elective” in the sense that it exists only through a decision that gathers its members around a choice without which it cannot take place; but is that choice free? or, at least, does this kind of freedom suffice to express and to affirm the sharing that is the truth of such a community?

## 6.

Now on our strictly philosophical scene we need to address new set of questions. What do we think about these new formulas of community? How to assess their credibility? How to assess their status? How to identify and define their meaning? What is on the stake in this new discourse on communalism or even on communism? From there on, I will ask even further. Does this new discourse on the new forms of communities have the status of a discourse on “imagined communities,” to paraphrase the famous formula of Benedict Anderson (Anderson 1991)? Is the language of community always a language emanating from the

imaginary register (order)? What could at all be a discourse about communities that wishes to be the discourse of the “Real” in Jacques Lacan’s sense of the term?<sup>1</sup> Is pure materialist discourse about community possible at all? And if so, how do we envisage the material conditions for communities’ establishment? Is the discourse about community always the discourse of the Other, supervising community from the outside? Is community a form of being which is able to produce not only its own organization but also its articulation?

Two essential traits emerge at this stage of our reflection: (1) community is not a restricted form of society, no more than it tends towards communitarian fusion; (2) it differs from a social cell in that it does not allow itself to create a work and has no production value as the aim. What purpose does it serve? Maurice Blanchot once remarked that communism is a form of communal life that excludes every community which is at the time already constituted. It is worth rethinking this complex Blanchot’s formula. Certainly the word “communism” stands as the emblem of desire to discover or rediscover a place of community beyond social divisions and beyond subordination to techno-political dominion, and thereby beyond such wasting of liberty, of speech, or of simple happiness as comes whenever we become subjugated to the order of privatization. Certainly one of the important aims of a new community philosopher is to rethink the notion of communism. Of course, communism is here construed in a more general sense since what politics of continuous interruption presupposes is not a perfect society but the principle of a transparent humanity which is being essentially produced by itself and all alone, in other words; an “immanent” humanity.

What we have at the stake here is the articulation of community. What it means is laying down its foundation, its meaningful constitution. It would thus not be an exaggeration to say that “community to come” and “the coming community” shall take the form of a “literary community” or at least a community opened up to the prospect of being such a community. It is thus a community of articulation, and not only of organization. Perhaps what Nancy calls “literary communism” has nothing to do with the idea of “communism” or with the idea of “literature.” The idea of “literary community,” that is, of a community between writers and readers, seems to take into account the fact that in our modern society we speak of a community of people who have never met each other, and who enter into this community without being mutually present to one another. It is rather that the author, when writing, addresses all and nobody in particular. “Literary communism”—Nancy writes—is named that way only to serve as a provocative gesture” (Nancy 1991). Calling “literary communism” a “provocative gesture” is however insufficient, especially if we want to see the requirement of materialism fulfilled. For the same reason Jacques Rancière called democracy the “regime of writing,” the regime in which the perversion of a letter is the law of community. “It is instituted by the spaces of writing whose overpopulated voids and overly loquacious muteness rends the living tissue of the communal ethos” (Rancière 2011). Perhaps we should rethink how to detach discourse about communities from the symbolic and the imaginary register at the material register level, if not at the Real.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, I refer here to Lacan’s theory of the three registers comprising the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. The latter is commonly applied to material being(s) *an sich* bearing resemblance to Kant’s things-in-themselves. As such the Real is roughly about things that are found either beyond or beneath phenomenal appearances (Lacan 1987).

It is perhaps for this reason that Ian James refers to Jean-Luc Nancy's position a transcendental materialism. This kind of materiality is, first and foremost that belonging to bodies which perceive the world through the senses—generally speaking a world of sensory experience. Nancy is interested in the way the spatiality of worldly existence reveals itself in a situated and embodied being. In this context his ontology of sense serves as ontology of bodies. Sense and bodies are co-articulated in a fundamental way which discloses the world to us as existing (James 2012: 123). Nancy's "singular-plural ontology," his take on finitude, shared finite existence, sense and world, the use of philosophical terms and figures which would be placed under erasure or arise a high degree of suspicion if seen from a deconstructive perspective include terms such as "being," "presence," "experience," "existence," "truth," "touch" and even, more recently, theological terms such as "incarnation" and the "divine."

## 7.

To Giorgio Agamben the tricksters, fakes and assistants from Kafka novels are the best exemplars of possible members of "the coming community." The reason for this is that they are dispossessed of any identity. Agamben suggests that if humans were not immersed in this or that particular biography but instead were only pure singularities, e.g. their singular exteriority and their face, then they would, for the first time, enter into a "community without presuppositions" and "without subjects." Whatever is the figure of pure singularity and whether or not singularity has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither it is simply indeterminate; it is rather determinable in its relation to an *idea*, that is, to the totality of its possibilities. Belonging, *being-such*, is here only the relation to an empty and indeterminate totality.

The question, however, remains: what is the politics of "whatever singularity"? What could be the politics of "whatever being"? Is this "the coming community" a community not mediated by any condition of belonging—being red, being Italian, being a Communist, nor in the sheer absence of conditions—a negative community. But how is it like to be part of a community constituted by an imprecise ("fuzzy") property such as that of membership function ( $\mu$ ) in fuzzy logic or ( $\epsilon$ )—bare membership function in Agamben's work? In my opinion, we will never arrive at reliable answer to this question. Likewise, we do not know what the politics of "whatever being" is or what it could be.

Furthermore, Agamben claims that the novelty of the "coming politics" is that it will no longer be a struggle for conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity). However, for the same reason "whatever singularities" are barred from forming a *societas* because they do not possess any identity to vindicate, nor any bond of belonging for which to seek recognition. Politics of "whatever being" is not and cannot be "politics of identity" (Agamben 1993). Perhaps, as Agamben argues, the State cannot in any way tolerate singularities forming a community without at the same time affirming identity, or it is that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging. I therefore ask again whether those deprived of identity, the "whatever singularities," are not perhaps too easily cast here as the opponent for the State, an opponent devoid of real

political power? What would the possible efficacy and agency of “whatever singularities” be? One final ensuing question which I will briefly address is this: what does it exactly mean, this magic and enigmatic formula—“humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging”?

For one, Agamben asserts that the “coming being” is “whatever being.” Here however Agamben thinks of “whatever” contrary to the meaning “it does not matter which, indifferent.” To Agamben “whatever” means exactly opposite: “being such that it always matters.” Thereon, Agamben argues that a reference to “whatever being” it is equivalent to referencing will and desire. “The singularity exposed as such is whatever you *want*, that is, lovable” (Agamben 1993: 9). This is because love is never directed towards this or that property of the loved one—be it being blond, being small, being tender, being lame, but it neither neglects the properties in favour of some insipid generality (universal love). “The lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is. The lover desires the *as*—an imprecise property in membership function—only insofar as it is *such-this* is the lover’s particular fetishism. Thus, whatever singularity (the Lovable) is never the intelligence of some thing, of this or that quality or essence, but only the intelligence of an intelligibility” (Agamben 1993: 9). Since “the *as*” remains unknown to us we may only and very roughly guess that it is an imprecise property in membership function. Moreover, still valid is the question how to make sure that “whatever being” is “being that it always matters” and not “being such that it never matters.” How to explain the relationship between “whatever being,” “love” and “will,” as the leading affective category which characterizes “whatever being” as the category “irreparable” which means that there is literally no shelter possible, that in their being—thus “whatever being” is absolutely exposed, absolutely abandoned, “incorruptible fallenness.”

Agamben’s position is far from being universal nor he attempts to lay a foundation for universality. In his commentary on Saint Paul’s *Letter to the Romans* Agamben claims that for Paul it is not a matter of “tolerating” or getting past differences whereby sameness or a universal is achieved. The universal is not a transcendent principle through which differences may be perceived. Granted, such a perspective on transcendence is not even available to Paul. Such a “transcendental” would likely involve operational “division of divisions” of the law which would in turn render the law inoperative, without slightest hope to reach an end. No universal man and no Christian can be found in the souls of a Jew or a Greek, neither as a principle nor as an end; all that is left is “a remnant” and the impossibility of a Jew or a Greek to coincide with him or herself. The messianic vocation separates every *klesis* from itself: engendering a tension within itself: without ever providing it with some other identity; hence, Jew as a non-Jew, Greek as a non-Greek (Agamben 2005).

Therefore, Agamben argues that the key political category is the category of “the remnant.” “The remnant” is neither the “all,” nor a part of the “all,” but the impossibility for the “part” and the “all” to coincide. At a decisive instant, the elected people, in fact everyone will necessarily situate themselves as remnant, as “not-*all*.” “Remnant” is the figure, or the substantiality assumed by a people at a decisive moment, and as such it is the only real political subject. This is how, in the book just referred to, Alain Badiou errs as to Paul’s universalism being “benevolence with regard to customs and opinions” or as an “indifference that tolerates differences,” which then becomes “that which must be traversed in order for

universality itself to be constructed” (Badiou 2003: 98–99). Saint Paul’s greatest invention is not the foundation of universality but the invention of “the remnant”—the main “subject” being the measure of “simple logic of belonging.”

But perhaps the most surprising and scandalous conclusion Agamben derives is his assertion that “the planetary petty bourgeoisie is probably the form in which humanity is moving toward its own destruction. But this also means that the petty bourgeoisie represents an opportunity unheard of in the history of humanity that it must at all costs not let slip away” (Agamben 2005: 70). I consider it scandalous enough to recognize in bourgeoisie the “last figure of humanity” while at the same time make of its nihilism the “last condition of humanity.” What is at the core of the scandal is not simply the acceptance of nihilism nor even the diagnosis that bourgeoisie is the last figure of humanity, but the implied assumption we need to make that bourgeoisie, and perhaps “the middle class,” is in fact immortal for it is the form in which humanity survived nihilism: commodified.

## 8.

Here we come again to a pivotal place, again related to the question of society, community and association and to their interrelations. Bruno Latour in his book *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* tries to redefine the notion of social by going back to its original meaning and enabling us to trace connections again. The etymology of the word “social” is instructive in this regard. Latour points out that the root for “social” is *seq-, sequi-* and the first meaning is “to follow,” “go or come after,” “move or travel behind,” “come after in time or order” but also “act according to an instruction or precept.” The Latin *socius* denotes a companion, an associate. From the different languages, the historical genealogy of the word “social” is construed first as following someone, then enrolling and allying, and, lastly, having something in common. Let us bear in mind that another meaning of social is “to have a share in a commercial undertaking” (Latour 2005: 17).

Latour, contrary to Agamben, notes that “having something in common” is not the primary meaning of “social.” Latour calls for “de-construction” and “de-assembling” of our social world—all our false communities and for “re-construction” (“re-assembling”) of our social world anew. Is that what arises a form of community? We need to ask whether in dis-mantling the social world and its mantling (re-assembly) we do in fact learn anything about community. Yet a separate question is whether we could—thanks to the effort—build a new community?

According to Latour, society is 19<sup>th</sup> century invention and an odd transitional figure mixing up the Leviathan of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and the collective of the 21<sup>st</sup>. Contrary to what Plato said in his *Republic*, Latour suggests there are at least three “Big Animals” instead of just one: there is the Body Politic (Leviathan), there is the Society and there is the Collective. Leviathan stands for the body politic fusing many into one and making one obeyed by many. In this vision, it is only political action that may trace virtual and total assembly of multitude and which is otherwise always in danger of disappearing altogether. Leviathan is the Phantom of Public Realm. From the myth of the social contract going onward, the body politic has always been a problem, it has been like a phantom—always

at the risk of complete dissolution. Never was it supposed to become a substance, a being, a realm that will exist beneath, behind, and beyond our actions. Would this untold condition of commonwealth, that is—the multitude—be another name for community that we are looking for, a community that yet has to come, namely “the coming community”?

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Negri, Hardt 2009) answer this question positively. Hardt and Negri distinguish multitude at a conceptual level from other notions of social subjects, such as people, masses, and the working class. The people has traditionally been a unitary conception (Negri, Hardt 2009). Population is characterized by all kinds of differences, but the people formula reduces that diversity to a unity and makes of the population a single identity. “The people” is one. Multitude, in contrast, is many. It is composed of innumerable differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity. Multitude is a multiplicity of all singular differences. Masses are also contrasted with the people because they too cannot be reduced to a unity or an identity. Masses are composed of all types and all sorts, but in fact one should not conceive that different social subjects make up masses. The essence of masses is indifference: all differences get submerged and drown in the mass as do all colours of the population—they fade into grey. It is only in multitude where social differences remain different.

Finally, Hardt and Negri distinguish multitude from the working class. The concept of the working class has come to be used as an exclusive concept, not only distinguishing the workers from the owners who do not need to work to support themselves, but also separating the working class from others who work “in other way.” In its most narrow usage the concept is employed to refer only to industrial workers, separating them from workers in agriculture, services, and other sectors. Working class refers to all waged workers, separating them from the poor, unpaid domestic labourers, and all others who do not receive a wage. Multitude, in contrast, is an open, inclusive concept. It tries to capture the importance of the recent shifts of the global economy: on the one hand, the industrial working class no longer plays a hegemonic role in the global economy; and on the other hand, production today has to be conceived not merely in economic terms but more generally as social production—not only the production of material goods but also the production of communications, relationships, and forms of life.

Multitude is thus composed potentially of all the diverse figures of social production. Latour does not share Hardt and Negri’s hope to reactivate the force of multitude. Latour calls for something stronger and more radical, i.e. building “a new political creature”: the collective. Latour suggest that society displaces the mode of existence of the public to that of a social. Moreover, when we try to save the immense and contradictory task of composing political body through new social means, its problematic fragility vanishes. The body politic transformed into a society is supposed to hold up under its own force even in the absence of any political activity. This false substitution of society in the place of body politic has to be unmasked. As society has replaced the body politic, the collective must replace society.

Latour uses the word “collective” in reference to the associations between human and non-human actors. It stands in contrast to society and thus designates only one part of our collectives, the divide invented by the social sciences. For Latour collectives are Real as

Nature, narrated as Discourse, collective as Society and existential as Being (Latour 1993). The word “group,” for Latour, is empty since it sets neither the size nor the content. It could be applied to a planet as well as to an individual; to Microsoft as well as to a family; to plants as well as to baboons. Collective is never an empty concept. Latour asks: is “community” always a community of people? A community presupposed as having to be one of *human beings* presupposes that it effects, or that it must effect, as such and integrally, its own essence, which is itself the accomplishment of the essence of humanness.

Community means that there is no singular being without another singular being, and that there is, therefore, what might be called in a rather inappropriate idiom, an ordinary or ontological “sociality” that in its principle extends far beyond the simple theme of man as a social being—the *zoon politikon* is secondary to this community. For, on the one hand, it is not obvious that the community of singularities is limited to “man” and excludes, for example, the “animal.” Even in the case of “man” it is not *a fortiori* certain that this community concerns only “man” and not also the “inhuman” or the “superhuman,” or, “woman.” On the other hand, if “social being” is always posited as a predicate of man, community would signify on the contrary the basis for thinking only something like “man” (Nancy 1991: 54).

What is the philosophical significance of Latour’s work? It comes from the fact that he commands us to rethink the most important categories and inflicts categorical questions such as: who or what belongs to community. It is in his works where we find other key questions such as: what “social” means. Why are some activities said to possess a “social dimension”? How can one demonstrate the presence of “social factors” at work? When is a study of society, or other social aggregates, a good study? How can the path of a society be altered? We need to reflect on the usefulness of the new anti-sociology of Latour and usefulness of his main concept of the collective. Perhaps the appeal of Latour’s position is also due to the fact that it promises to fulfil the requirement of materiality in building new forms of collective life.

## 9.

If the foregoing considerations seem explicitly inconclusive and purely rhetorical, let us now derive certain conclusions about community and elucidate the main approaches in philosophical thinking about community.

The first conclusion may seem rather obvious as it stems from the very narrative on community. It is about how philosophical discourse on communities is set and how it relates significance to community. Allow me to make a caveat here that conclusions which I intend to derive are not negative only. Surely the liberal paradigm is exhausted and so is the communitarian and the biopolitical (governmentality). No wonder then that philosophers seek community “outside this world.” Thinking hastily, one could perhaps say that it is the philosophical paradigm of “imagined communities” that is exhausted today. What I maintain, however, is not that the “philos communitarian optical theatre” has reached the frontiers of imagination in “inventing” alternative communities but that the discourse on communities so versed and advanced today that we perhaps have reached a certain limit

of how far we can go on thinking about community. We ought to bear in mind that when speaking about community today and inventing community anew one needs to look back on the famous debate of Blanchot and Nancy on the significance of “unavowable community,” on the famous debate of Agamben and Badiou on “a divided community” beyond the requirements of universalism, on the famous debate of Derrida and Esposito on how to move beyond the paradigm *immunitas* towards “absolute hospitality,” and finally a discussion between Latour versus Negri and Hardt on the possibility of community to be liberated from the “dispositif of the person.” These discussions are frontiers of thinking community today and they constitute “upper limits of” all thinking about community.

Certainly, all of the above mentioned debates have made us realize how troublesome the notion of “community” is and how strongly this notion is fraught with past meanings. Above all however, the discussions proved to be much more of substance and gravity for yet one more reason. Namely, they encouraged us to question the meaning and the role of philosophical discourse about communities. I would not hesitate to say that these discussions have given us necessary boldness and courage. Here philosophy claimed the impossible. In contrast to the slogans of 1968, which demanded *imagination from* the authorities I would claim that imagination has always been *with* philosophy. The only question philosophy needs to address is what kind of community is philosophy after. After all, it does not compete with sociology since in speaking of communities it does not refer to “real communities” such as national, sports, medical, or musical. It neither competes with political science and does not advance the narrative of the institutional conditions of the existence of a political community. What is then at the stake in philosophical discourse about communities if not “conjuring up” or “designing” alternative ways of being, alternative ontologies?

Personally, I find nothing inappropriate in inventing “alternative communities.” The fact that such a philosophical paradigm is founded encourages us and stimulates our imagination not only as far as recreational and often dystopic “alternative histories” are concerned but also “alternative ways of social life.” Intellectual exercises within the framework this paradigm provides contribute in their own way to answering the question about the possibility of the unthinkable self-establishing society, a society not founded not on order or principle of coercion external to the world, yet binding individuals in community, a community which exercises full control over itself. Is the existence of communities within society not a proof that society itself is not a community? Is the rejection of the proposed place in society not the kind of condemnation, i.e. sentencing the subject to “solitude of choice”? Is it not, by the way, a defeat of society when it is no longer able to provide the mechanisms of socialization so “attractive” to encourage individuals to participate in social life? The dream of a “community of choice” has been developed not so much by reason but a philosophical imagination. This dream creates a new basis of social imagery that may allow the subjects to return to society. This social imagery tells us what we could be and how we could live. In other words, philosophical discourse informs us about the limits of our political imagination.

The second conclusion is less clear, and it concerns the very structure of society. I would claim that the prerequisite of the existence of any “social fact” is “collective consciousness” and “collective imagination” being the highest instance in combining all members of society into a single community. In fact, in their functioning all communities depend on various

systems of “collective imagination” which legitimize social order. Further, I maintain that there are no other communities than “imagined communities.” We may, of course, follow Karl Marx in emphasising the *origin* of social perception—in particular ideology—and the functions it performs in class conflicts; we may follow Émile Durkheim and emphasize the *correlation* between social structures and collective perception and thus trace back the social bonds it enables; or we may follow Max Weber in emphasising the *function* ascribed to imagination in making sense of activities of individuals and social groups undertake (See: [Baczko 1978](#)). No matter if we talk about the origin, correlation, or function in “perception of community,” we always engage in the type of discourse where the imagined order prevails the official language of “existing communities” based on the symbolic legitimacy. Is this not the main point on the agenda of Blanchot and Nancy, Agamben and Badiou, Derrida and Esposito? If so, the main point is to re-establish community by shunning the symbolic privilege of society over the imaginary community.

Our third conclusion is of methodological nature. In the social sciences we have long ago witnessed decay of conceptual framework constituting a single object of knowledge. Such was the course of history in anthropology, sociology, or philosophy where terms such as “man,” “society,” or “political order” have lost their original appeal. We now accept that the social sciences are not about “man” but about “people,” they are not about “society,” but “societies,” they are not about “culture” but about “cultures,” they are not about “community,” but infinitely diverse human communities. Surely, no culture and no society in its historical evolution are the uniform and privileged models of social life. Does this “discovery of plurality” by the social sciences really condemn us to naive relativism or authoritarian anti-relativism, whereby we consent to the recognition that our own social order is in fact contingent? I do not think so. I am convinced that the situation is much more complex than the apologists of “politics of difference” and the proponents of deconstruction of identity suppose it is. At the echelon of power, in fact at the very heart thereof we come across aporia. For one, within power there are no divisions and distinctions that could possibly be made, yet, the same power generates distinctions and produces individual identities. In other words, the message we read is that “the difference does not guarantee liberation.” As a matter of fact, politics of deconstruction guarantees it nether. If so, wherein to look for such guarantee? I wish I could help change life management into real political action for the sake of community. Here, unfortunately, I lose confidence, I simply have no answer to this conundrum.

The most uncertain, however, is the fourth conclusion. I claim that modern man who is subject to the multiplicity of new media and lives in the milieu of multiple and inconsistent images of the world is hungry for general and unifying representations. Perhaps the idea of an alternative community is such an image able to satisfy our hunger for consistency. However, man of late modernity needs in particular to merge two “images” into one: “political image” or otherwise “the image of the republic,” in which people exercise sovereign right to freedom of expression, and the “linguistic image” providing members of the social community with unobstructed communication. Here I claim that the dream of a “free community” or “the coming community” that is not based on any sort of violence is in fact a synthesis of these two images. The symbolic order of unobstructed language and language undisturbed by ideology requires us to imagine language free from representation and free

from deception. It is in Marx where we find this dream image of “the coming community.” Marx juxtaposes the French Revolution with proletarian revolution; only in the former actors disguise in antique costumes. Actors of proletarian revolution are free and need not be masked. Yet, in “the coming community” people are not naked, they still need costumes and still fantasise about “unavowable community.”

## 10.

At the very end let me go back to the problematic title of my paper and reveal its origin. The phrase “community in question” is, of course, the quotation from Derrida. It is in Derrida’s paper *Violence and metaphysics. An essay on the thought of Emmanuel Lévinas* (from *Writing and Difference*) where the nebulous notion that we find in the title emerged for the first time in reference the meaning of philosophical community. Let me quote long passage from Derrida, in which there appears this expression.

A community of the question, therefore, within that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already and fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question. A community of decision, of initiative, of absolute initiality, but also a threatened community, in which the question has not yet found the language it has decided to seek, is not yet sure of its own possibility within the community. A community of the question about the possibility of the question. This is very little—almost nothing—but within it, today, is sheltered and encapsulated an unbreachable dignity and duty of decision (Derrida 1978: 98).

In another place in the same paper Derrida yet wrote about:

A community of nonpresence, and therefore of nonphenomenality. Not a community without light, not a blindfolded synagogue, but a community anterior to Platonic light. The strange community of the silent question of which we spoke above (Derrida 1978: 112).

We have here an accumulation of concepts such as: “a community of the question,” “a community of decision,” “a threatened community,” “a community of nonpresence,” “a community of nonphenomenality.” In *Politics of Friendship* Derrida adds to the list new terms: “brotherhood in friendship,” a “community without community,” a “brotherhood without brotherhood,” “community of hostile-hospitality,” “community of those without community,” “community of the friends of solitude,” “living community,” “community of social disaggregation,” “community of confusion not fusion,” “community of singulars share what cannot be shared: solitude,” “teleiopoetic community” (Derrida 1997).

Perhaps “a community of the question,” and therefore the community of philosophers who ask free questions that do not know the answer, is for Derrida the only one community which can also ask question “what is community?,” and therefore put community before the question, and establish a form of “community in question.” As we know Derrida in *Violence and metaphysics* challenges Lévinas’ idea that only face-to-face interaction is ethical. Whereas Lévinas sees written communication as dead and unresponsive, Derrida argues that writing can be just as valuable a space for ethical encounter. By showing, for example, that writing can assist itself, for it has time and freedom, escaping better than speech from empirical urgencies. Perhaps writing in this way Derrida anticipates something

what I called earlier, quoting Blanchot and Nancy, “literary communism” and at the same time Derrida was building ethical justification for this communism.

At the end I return to his question from the beginning of this essay: what is then the “un-avowable community”? And whether the idea of “unavowable community” is a response to the perplexity and dilemmas of liberalism, communitarianism and communism? Is the idea of “unavowable community” a commentary on the failure of communitarianism, misery of individualisms and as a result it offers us some form of community of existence? Does “unavowable” mean that it does not acknowledge, accept or admit itself, that it is embarrassing, perplexing, inconvenient, uneasy, shameful community or that it is such that no avowal, confession, admission, testimony nor recognition may reveal it and in the sense it is unsayable, unspeakable, untold, inexpressible, incommunicable community. Blanchot asks:

Would it have been better to have remained silent? Would it be better to live it in what makes it contemporary to a past which it has never been possible to live? Wittgenstein’s precept, “Whereof one cannot speak, there one must be silent” does indicate that in the final analysis one has to talk in order to remain silent. But with what kinds of words (Blanchot 1988: 56)?

In what sense of the words could we speak about this unspeakable community? An answer to this question would perhaps be Esposito’s suggestion that it is time and there is the need to break from “dispositif of the person,” based on the assumed, continuously recurring separation between person as an artificial entity and the human as a natural being, whom the status of person may or may not benefit. Certainly, the ancient Roman separation between *homo* and *persona* penetrates like a deep wedge into the philosophical, legal, and political conceptions of the modern era (Esposito 2012). Perhaps “human-as-person” emerges negatively out of that of the “human-as-thing.” The third person is not actually another person—with respect to the first and second—but rather something that extends out of the logic of the person, in favour of a different regime of meaning. When Maurice Blanchot identifies the third person with the enigmatic figure of the neuter, or neutral, he is seeking to remove it, preventively, from any undue personalization. The only force able to stand up to it, says Blanchot, is writing. In writing—where talk *of* the neutral gives place to talking *in* the neutral or giving voice *to* the neutral—neither the author nor the character has the chance of saying *I* (and therefore *you*); thus they inscribe themselves in the impersonal regime of ‘one’. Community is not a collective of “common things” or things, but rather the result of “subtracting things from things”: no-thing subtracted from things. Contrary to the claims of Jean-Luc Nancy, what we share is not being or existence, but the non-existence, non-being. Only the “non-existence” we are able to share, and being divided is impossible. The community is a community of not-being and not-things. Perhaps being is common, but only non-entity is jointly shared.

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