

THE RELATIONS OF BIOPOLITICS

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I do not know when, how, or why, but one fine day I discovered that at home one ate – impartially speaking – quite properly and this should be said with an apology. But that I discovered somewhat later, when I was grown up already... Anyway, it was a discovery worth mentioning. It was the first impression I had about the significance of those families – as institutions – which could afford to go to the marketplace with a certain amount of phantasy and a feeling of reality.

Josep Pla, El quadern gris

Blanchot states more than once in L'Entretien infini that when another human approaches you - when the measureless remoteness of the unknown, the unreachableness of the Other, comes up close to you - you face one bleak choice, either speak or kill: do what you cannot do, do it without any ability to do it, or else go right to the extreme farthest limit of what you can do.

Ann Smock, What is There to Say?

i. Our reflections are getting never enough and always too much of the "community", "common", and "communing". There is never enough and always too much consideration, speculation, and divination about what the "community", its life, and its death might be. But such a statement implicitly ignores all differentiation between the "community" and the "society", in which (insofar as we are always – in "our" reflections – actually seeking or denying the "community") the "society" would be that positive pole in the dichotomy, a sort of *deus ex machina* that would once and for all liberate us from the bonds and burdens of "community" – both the concept and the praxis of "communing".

So what can be easier and more comfortable than such a dichotomy, in which the stakes are clearly defined, in which the before and after can be determined clearly and with historical reliability? The "community" equals the archaic and the classical, the "society" – the modern and the civilized. The teleological structure appears unquestionable, analyzing the "political body"¹ into organically higher and lower stages in development.

However, in our region the "community" is always more and always less than just "community" – it is at the same time a political structure deprived of its proper name (that is, the crossed-out "community", merely ~~community~~) and a hyper-community, constituted and persisting in its own excess and abundance.

Briefly, in our reflections the "community" is "we". What a tautology! Is "we" not always some sort of community? And is it not that the "community" always presupposes some "we", without which we could not even speak of a "community"?

Indeed – and that is what all communities count with, but we are speaking here of our "we" (of our specific, imperial "we") – of a/some "we" of a community that has brought "community" and "we" to the final overlapping and to the dissolution of the possibility that the "community" might even exist outside of an/some "we", and vice versa. The "community" equals "we" equals "Imperium".

Our "we" – so that is the absolute community of the imperial "we", the community that has realized the entire potential of commonality, thus terminating all possibility of a future community. The perfect community at the end of all commonality.

In other words: our "community" is the final and absolute community of all communities because it is a community that, in the totality of articulation of its own/collective "we", does not presuppose a/some essence of commonality, but rather, in its constitution, exclusively presupposes and at the same time erases the relation between the "community" and "we".
"Community" = "we" and "community" ≠ "we"!

¹ For the deconstruction of the concept of "political body", cf. Adriana Cavarero, *Corpo in figure*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1995. – This text would be unthinkable without the continuing dialogue with Ugo Vlaisavljević, personally and in various texts, as well as with Alex Garcia-Düttmann.

The imperial community is therefore no longer a community in which essences are invested, but rather a community of relationality (a community of the relationship between the "community" and that "we"), realized and at the same time terminated, therefore absolute. To say it differently, in a second try: the imperial community is, as an absolute community, always far more and far less than a community. In a special way, that community is consequentially inevitable, inescapable, unsurpassable, and impossible. An unavoidable, necessary disaster. A disaster of political relations, not of essences or bodies.

But – is there any space for politics beyond (political) relations?

In order not to relate, and to break with the "logic of sovereignty" as well as with the bad infinity of iterability, of a perpetual, always renewed and always frustrated relating, one must maintain oneself in the relating of the relation. As a consequence, to speak of Auschwitz as a remainder does not just mean to relate to it through testimony. It means to become testimony and to stop testifying to something - to Auschwitz.

Alexander Garcia-Düttmann

ii. The punctum of biopolitical philosophy is that of religion as the privileged modus of relating. The relation between god and man is the final and the highest possible relation – both systemically and historically – before thinking fully realizes its having come into existence. At least that is what Hegel is saying. The highest and the final relation – at the same time just a step away from what really matters. But – and that includes the entire enigma of philosophical thinking since Hegel – is the realization of philosophy possible without the realization of religion as the total, mondial system? ... In terms of system, it may be thinkable, but in terms of history? Especially since Hegel, in his late lectures on the philosophy of religion, states nothing else than an absolutely historical fiasco of the absolutely revealed religion. And consequently, of relationality as such. He is left with no choice but to conclude that it brings us back to the epoch of late (Roman) imperialism.

The sovereign relation, as described by Agamben, describes an identical case: an absolutely immanent-relational world, in which the absolute, that is,

the essential missing of truth – falsity – is still possible. Insofar the sovereign relation is still a remainder of transcendence in immanence, that is, a force that violently evicts life from the world (as relating). In that sense, Auschwitz is a (personal) name for suspending all relations, but an absolutely false one.

Tout se résume dans l'Esthétique et l'Économie politique
Stéphane Mallarmé

iii. In his lectures from the late 70s, Michel Foucault described in great detail what it meant to live in a community at the end of all communities. By doing this, Foucault brought about a revolution – even more than it was evident during his lifetime – in contemporary political philosophy. Not so much by means of an inconceivable innovation, but rather by compressing and recapitulating a number of theoretical motifs from the treasury of modernist thought on politics. Therefore the name/title of Foucault's late thought, namely "biopolitics", has remained rather ambivalent in his writings, thus provoking various interpretations without a definite consensus about what "biopolitics" should actually mean. Nevertheless, I have taken that vagueness as an advantage, so that in this text "biopolitics" in the Foucaultian sense primarily denotes "our community", i.e. the Imperium.

Life that has turned into its own law, its own measure and aim, that is the subject of politics in such a "community". However, and that is crucial, the "law" of life in the realized and permanently unstable common state (the Imperium) is no longer the law in terms of a juridical and political system, but an act that has (only) the force of law. Therefore, in such a state of commonality, the political act *par excellence* of regulating life is the edict, an act that has the force of law, although it is not law in itself.

The logic of sovereignty, which has in its radicalization brought about the overlapping of the factual and the normative, as well as the parallel liquidation of the political in the circumstances of unstable and exceptional political situation, becomes, according to Foucault, the logic of governmentality, i.e. the logic of the no-longer political acting and of deciding about the limits of commonality. Politics is here nothing else than the police, in the strictest sense of the term.

If, as I have said, the police life in the state of imperium, regulated by edicts, represents the apocalypse of the political, namely its impossible and utopian realization, then it may be concluded that politics and the thought of the political as we know it has reached its end and its goal.

Oblivion, disappearance, or death of politics is therefore not only, or not rather a destructive end of all things, insofar as the political modus of deciding is substituted by another, more efficient and more democratic mode of deciding, that of the police.

Life that has turned into the law in its totality is at the same time life that is its own absolute legitimization. Life that lives its own utopia has no problem with the lack of legitimization, but with its excess.

But what I find really interesting here is the way Foucault distinguishes between territory and population, which is the basis of his central distinction between sovereignty and governmentality. With Foucault, that distinction blends together with further differentiations, which makes it impossible to say unambiguously what is the exact relationship between the logic of sovereignty and that of governmentality: is governmentality a continuation and extension of the field of sovereignty or do they exclude each other? Is sovereignty classical and governmentality modern?

Sovereignty rules over the territory, governmentality over the population – which does not correspond to the distinction between the physical and mental space as one might conclude at first sight. Sovereignty rules over both bodies and souls, and also over categorizations into bodies and souls, whereas the rule of governmentality is far more precarious and unstable, since governmentality rules beyond all bodies and souls, as well as beyond their categorizations. And if the syntagm "nominalistic materialism", which is often used to describe Foucault's thought, makes any sense at all, one must necessarily establish by consequence that governmentality rules over what Marx has termed "general intellect".

It is the intellect, or the fundamental production force of life beyond all thinkable relations of body and soul, territory and population. Therefore, intellect understood that way surpasses (by realizing and leaving behind) the physical/territorial spaces of sovereignty, as well as the mental/population spaces of governmentality. Or, as I have said before – it is politics turned

police, i.e. politics that has no space left for politics.

Therefore, it is interesting to observe how Foucault, in his manner of "new positivism", tries to describe the dynamics of such community structure, determined by the intellect as the primary driving force of social production. If "nationalism" is the concept that describes the structure of including/excluding national sovereignty, in case of governmentality that is "racism" – thus Foucault. But it is a very strange sort of racism, namely racism with no race/races that could be included or excluded from the "community" because of some mental or physical quality. In other words, it is intellectual racism.²

Intellectual racism, as the driving force of governmentality, is all-encompassing and does not allow for anything external. It is a *nunc stans* community, which no longer accepts any appeals and leaves no possibility of escape.

iv. The thought of Jean-Luc Nancy, in all its peculiar meanders, is striking for its specific emphasis on the issue of "community". It is probably for this reason that Nancy is the contemporary philosopher that has, in my opinion, experienced most profoundly the problem of community limits and violence related to them. This refers primarily to a community that has passed through its own "in-operation", i.e. the basic crisis of community creation and creation in community.

It is certainly methodologically interesting that Nancy still conceives "community" in the category of sovereignty, but on a closer look such sovereignty has nothing whatsoever to do with the classical definitions. Thus, Nancy says about the sovereignty: "The principle of deprivation rather than imposition or establishment."³ Or: "The empty space of sovereignty 'as such'. "⁴ I will allow myself here to rewrite this sovereignty of Nancy's in terms of Foucault's governmentality, with all possible qualifications and reserves that such identification imposes.

However, the central motif linked with the issue of "community" that

² Intellectual racism is here another term for what Hardt and Negri have called "Imperium".

³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *La création du monde ou la mondialisation*, transl. into Croatian as: *Stvaranje svijeta ili mondijalizacija*, Jesenski & Turk, Zagreb, 2004, p. 165.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

Nancy has lately emphasized is that of creation, in the sense of *creatio ex nihilo*. Political exodus has thus become a question of the possibility of radical creation, which not only questions all that is given, but also sets itself up primarily and primordially in that "nothing" of sovereign relation. It is an attempt to conceive, simultaneously and together, the creation from nothing and the finality of community (that is, finality as an impossibility of the existence of a transcendent and totalizing establishing of commonality). Thus, it seems to be an impossible mission!

Let me go back to the starting point once more: Nancy is a thinker of the crossed-out community, the ~~community~~ – as just that type of community whose "nothing" is exposed, whose "nothing" is being created. The "nothing" of sovereign relation rather than the "nothing" of essence. It seems to me that, in his lesson, Nancy is rather striving to show that a de-essentialization of the concept and praxis of "community" remains too short if it is perfectly possible to conceive a community without essence, which is still governed by an equally compulsory and determining imperative of (political) relating.

Nothing coming into existence from nothing – that is the zero formula of community (creation) according to Nancy. Coming into existence seems to be the only driving force of the community, which opens up space beyond space (space beyond imperative relating) for the possibility of transformation. Otherwise it would barely be something that could surpass the *horror vacui* of the community's empty space and the hollow imperative of being-with.

Nancy's bare and void sovereignty has approached the issue of spatiality in community and the possibility of exit/separatism almost ascetically, minimally. Leaving us with a difficult, almost unanswerable question: "And what if the people's uprising would be sovereignty?" (*La création du monde*, p. 166)

v. "Homo sacer" begins, or at least that is how Giorgio Agamben wants to present it in his turn of thought, where Nancy's exploration of the limits of commonality has ended or given up. In any case, immediately at the beginning of the figure of separation and non-acquiescence!

Without wishing to retell here in what way Agamben understands the "inoperative community", I would like to draw attention to something that I

consider appropriate for the context of "Imperium". As for Agamben, it is a concept that he himself has not entirely clarified – at least not yet – that of *disbando*. The breaking of bonds or radical separation. The most elaborate definition of *disbando* was offered in Agamben's study "L'aperto", but for the political philosophy more precious insights can be found in his study on the state of emergency. Only that even there it is not conceptually quite clear where Agamben is heading, since he determines the *disbando* by the theological pair of *pleroma/kenosis*.

Similarly to Nancy, Agamben supposes that the "nothing" of political relation, although empty and bare, is actually pregnant with meaning, that is, that from that "nothing" a community will come into existence (be created). However, somewhat further Agamben will claim that "nothing" is divided – into the politically qualified and disqualified life, into *bios* and *zoe*. The dividedness of that "nothing", as a community that is phenomenologically determined, consists in a (mutually) asymmetric relation or communication between the two poles. Regardless of whether the void imperative of community remains in the register of perception (as with voice, gaze, touch, etc.) or is imperceptible, the asymmetry of imperative is always guaranteed by the asymmetry of relation. The empty imperative of community (of political relating) without exception "always already is" or "is just to become," which means that it is clearly defined in terms of time. Thus, the imperative of the common, although void, is discriminative in the mode of temporality, i.e. as an imperative of temporal irreversibility.

Intellectual racism, which totally divides life into qualified and disqualified forms (which are by no means absolute, but rather temporally and historically relative) is racism without races, but as such it is – notwithstanding the void of its own lawfulness – still a relation, and a temporal one of "before" and "after". Therefore, the nothing of Nancy's sovereignty is for Agamben still insufficient in order to describe the political space beyond (common) relating.

The great project of 20th-century philosophy (at least that of the Heideggerian type) was the discovery of new spatiality by means of thinking of a different temporality. Heidegger's challenge to thinking consisted precisely in his attempt to conceive of a non-discriminatory temporality, deprived of the punctual moments of now (like that before and that after). However, with Heidegger the spatial arrangement of being has remained, in the final instance, bound to the irreversibility (finality) of historical events.

In other words: nothing comes from nothing, irreversibly.

Agamben's intuition is of an entirely different kind, thoroughly inspired by Benjamin's theses on history, which precisely in the light of the fascist threat to Europe strove for a new and heterodox, Marxist concept of history. Fascism – for Benjamin it is primarily a threat to the irreversibility of history, since fascist victory would turn it – perhaps finally and forever – into the history of the winner.

Insofar, the *disbanda*, the dissolution of bonds, is basically the destruction of all temporal relation and a defense of the reversibility of history.

In the Biblical story of Exodus, abandoning the land of slavery (Egypt) and reaching the space of freedom (Israel) are circumscribed by an "empty"-creative time interval of 40 years spent in the desert. There, transforming space in a way implies abandoning time, or at least discharging it, so that it is prompted to begin anew or at all, once and forever, creating simultaneously and absolutely the new space of freedom.

The separatism of *disbanda* dissolves the time relation that is the basis of the racist division of life. Such exit does not mean abandoning space or time for the sake of some new space or time, which would irreversibly strive to liberate life from the slavery into the aimed freedom of salvation.

Intellectual or communicative racism – although without a prototype of race – discriminates, even absolutely, on the basis of irreversibility and the void of political and historical creation (of nothing from nothing).

The possibility of democratic and anti-racist separatism is contained in the promise and the possibility of a community without relating, a “we” without division.