Chapter 10
Geography and the Coming Community

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Abstract The chapter focuses on the fortune of the concept of community in contemporary geography. In particular, we argue that the community debate is currently unproblematized. "Community" is assumed to be a positive, emancipatory concept, both at the national and the local scale. The reactionary and repressive dimension of communitarianism is hence relinquished as marginal or residual, as the failure of a concept that is intrinsically positive. To deconstruct these assumptions, we turn to a critical understanding of the community that involves philosophers Roberto Esposito, Maurice Blanchot, and Giorgio Agamben. In this philosophical journey, we envisage a new possibility for geography to engage with an affirmative community. Only a geography that accepts a void, empty space at the inner core of the community can escape the exclusionary outcome of communitarianism.

Keywords Biopolitics · Community · Empty space · Threshold

Introduction

> 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. It isn't that the philosophies expressly addressed to thinking community were or are lacking. On the contrary, they tend to constitute one of the most dominant themes debated

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> internationally. Yet not only do they remain well within this *unthinkability of community*, but they constitute its most symptomatic expression (Esposito 2010, p. 1, italics added).

The concept of Community in the past two decades has been at the core of important debates in political philosophy, with Italian and French thinkers playing a crucial role in determining the terms under which community has been dissected, deconstructed, reconsidered, and reconceptualized. Roberto Esposito, with his path-breaking *Communitas*, has contributed in a decisive way to these philosophical conversations on community; however, important interventions on this topic were provided by a faction of other prominent philosophers, including Blanchot (1988), Nancy (2003, 2004, 2016), Virno (2004) and Agamben (2005), (for an overview, see Bird 2016). Despite some of these scholars having exercised a significant influence in rethinking the political and some of its categories in the social sciences, and in geography in particular, we would like to argue that, with few exceptions, the concept of community has remained fundamentally unproblematized within mainstream geographical literature (see, among others, Shannon et al. 2020). In the most recent exchanges between geography and philosophy (the focus of this volume), the debate on community developed by the aforementioned political philosophers has for some reason been overlooked, if not even ignored, by the many lines of research developed even by critical human geographers. This neglect is especially notable given that these geographers are normally those more inclined to engage with ideas and concepts coming from the bodies of work often described, respectively, as *French Theory* and *Italian Thought* (Gentili 2018).

This is why we believe it is important to problematize community by drawing from philosophers who have been interrogating this concept and connecting their critical reflections to some of the ways in which this concept has been adopted in geography. This chapter will engage in particular with some of the writings on community penned by Roberto Esposito, Giorgio Agamben, and Maurice Blanchot, since we consider their contributions key to appreciate how community has been largely unquestioned in the work of geographers and partially continues to be so. Due to the space available for this chapter, we obviously cannot engage with the whole discipline of geography and its complicated and articulated histories. Therefore, we will focus on two disciplinary spaces or 'moments' that we have examined in detail in previous work in which the question of community has played a particularly significant role: first, the emergence of what Italian geographers Dematteis (1985) and Farinelli (1992, 2003) have named a European bourgeois geography, closely linked to the consolidation of the modern nation-state and the production of 'scientific' knowledge aimed at normalizing such geographical formations (Minca 2006); second, the most recent use of community in the growing field of camp studies in geography, a field which is in close dialogue with existing debates in political philosophy, but which is nonetheless reluctant to problematize community as a taken for granted concept and social formation (Carter-White and Minca 2020). While it is not our intention to claim any generalization by referring to these two 'windows of reflection' concerning geography, at the same time, we consider these two examples useful in reflecting on some of the ways in which community has established itself as an unquestioned concept in the work of

geographers. The overall aim of this chapter is, therefore, to solicit further critical reflection in geography on the use of community as a key concept and scale of analysis by learning more from existing debates in political philosophy, as it has happened with other concepts and perspectives in the past decade or so.

The chapter will thus start with a section dedicated to the relationship between geography and community inspired by Agamben's speculations on the biopolitical foundations of the nation-state and by our own reflection on the role of community in contemporary camp studies, followed by a section in which the concept is critically examined using Esposito's analytical lenses. The third and fourth sections, largely draw from Blanchot's and Agamben's ideas, discuss how different understandings of a 'coming community' might help geographers to rethink their use of this concept, but also how geographical perspectives may help in 'grounding' such millenarian ideas about social formations that might still be (cautiously) referred to as 'community'.

Geography and Community

> Whatever singularities cannot form a societas because they do not possess any identity to vindicate nor any bond of belonging for which to seek recognition. In the final instance the State can recognize any claim for identity – even that of a State identity within the State (the recent history of relations between the State and terrorism is an eloquent confirmation of this fact). What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that *the singularities form a community without affirming an identity*, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition).
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> The State, as Alain Badiou has shown, is not founded on a social bond, of which it would be the expression, but rather on the dissolution, the unbinding it prohibits. For the State, therefore, what is important is never the singularity as such, but only its inclusion in some identity, whatever identity (but the possibility of the whatever itself being taken up without an identity is a threat the State cannot come to terms with) (Agamben 2005, p. 86.7; italics added).

In a 2006 article focused on Giorgio Agamben's spatialization of the ban, the first author dedicated an entire section to reflect on how the Italian political philosopher has read the advent of modern geography in relation to the emergence of a biopolitical nation-state and some of its aberrations (Minca 2006). The following paragraphs are largely reliant on that analysis. For Agamben, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789 critically sanctioned the political passage of sovereignty to the nation-state since, in his understanding, with the Declaration, the principle of all sovereignty came to reside in the nation "precisely because it has already inscribed this element of birth [*nascita*] in the very heart of the political community" (Agamben 1998, p. 128; in Minca 2006, p. 393). The *nazione* (nation)—Agamben famously claimed—derives etymologically from *nascere* (to be born) and thus completes the circle opened by the *nascita* (birth). Birth itself, in this regime, thus marks *our entry into the nation* and our subjection to its sovereign power. Bare life is thus inscribed within the nation's politicization of the *corpus* of its citizens (Agamben 1998), a corpus that would be identified from that moment on as the national community.

The primacy of the nation-state, for Agamben, thus transformed the question 'what is French (Italian, English…)' into an essential *political* question; a question that, with Nazism, would come to coincide "immediately with the highest political task" (Agamben 1998, p. 130).

According to Farinelli (1992, 2003), in its ascent to power the 'modern bourgeois subject' that replaced the European *ancient regime* identified in the emerging forms of geography a crucial tool to legitimize the nation-state as a natural spatial formation populated by a specific community. The coincidence (or lack thereof) between a specifically mapped and confined territory and a national community thus became not only a key scale of reference for the work of the most prominent schools of thought in geography, but also the *raison d'etre* of the institutionalization of geographical knowledge in the educational systems of each and every European nation-state (see Capel 2012). Studying the geography of the nation, and its place in the world, implied the incorporation of related 'communities' as a taken for granted element in the spatialization of the nation-state (see, among many others, Scott 1998). Such mystique of the nation, once spatialized, legitimized direct biopolitical intervention into its population, since this entity was conceived as an organic whole that comprised the very body of the state (Minca 2006). The resulting image of the nation-state was thus that of a mythical biopolitical assemblage of nature and culture, with the realization and recognition of a national territorialized community as its key and unquestioned political horizon; and here, again, the conceptual tools of geography played an instrumental role. What was argued in that article, largely inspired by Farinelli's work, was that the circumstances needed for the creation of a relation of indistinction between life and politics were already in an embryonic form in the geographical notion of the bourgeois nation-state (Minca 2006; see, also, Farinelli 1992, 2003).

There has been much discussion around how bourgeois geography—within its function as *state* geography—assumed a geometric concept of geographical space in order to reduce the complexity of the world to the measure of its own language, and to profess the innocence of its representations (see, among others, Farinelli 2003; Minca and Bialasiewicz 2004; Pickles 2004). Following the First World War, the negotiation between this cartographical reasoning and the additional importance of individual rights would impose—with the support of 'normalized' positivist geography (see, Dematteis 1985; also, Fall and Minca 2013)—the translation of national populations into a presumably coherent and identifiable set of communities to count, classify and govern (Minca 2006). Therefore, the realization and reproduction of the 'biological body of the nation'—which was at the same time also an inescapably *geographical* body that rendered the national territory and the individuals that inhabited it inseparable—became the supreme task of the state (Agamben 1998). The biopolitical orientation in traditions of political geographical thought, fundamentally mediated by the concept of community, can be identified in some of its foundational moments.

In *The Open* (2004), Agamben references the work of Jakob von Uexkull, one of the founders of modern ecology, who was shortly followed by what he defines as the 'revolutionary work of Vidal de la Blache (1903)'—who researched the relationships between populations and their environment—and by the work of Ratzel (1897,

1907, 1914) on the concept of *lebensraum* (often translated as living/lived space) (see Abrahamsson 2013). Agamben notes that the research of Vidal and Ratzel "profoundly revolutionise[d] the discipline of human geography" (Agamben 2004, p. 48), and fundamentally aided in the transformation of the ways in which the relationship between populations and their environmental-world was conceived by geographers. Agamben's mention of these fundamental turning points within human geography conveys his belief that there exists a direct relationship between the evolution of geographical thought and the rise of the biopolitical state (Minca 2006). Core to this relationship is the contention that any biopolitical state relies by definition on the existence of a presumed national community, upon which it may exercise its biopower (see Genel 2006). For this biopolitical state to exist, the concept of a national community to be managed, protected, and endlessly perfected must never be questioned since it represents one of the foundations of all nation-state ontologies.

Conventional readings of the history of modern geography have commonly stressed the impact of a certain strand of Social Darwinism on Ratzel's theory of the state (see, among others, Antonsich et al. 2001). These readings particularly highlighted Ratzel's notion of survival of the fittest, which was strongly marked by evolutionary biological theories prevalent at that point in history: a notion of the state as an organism which, like all organisms, struggles to survive, and in which the national community was a vital component (see Minca 2015). While the implementation of an ecological-evolutionary perspective led Ratzel (1897) to confirm the 'temporary' nature of all state boundaries, given the ongoing struggle for space between competing state actors, at the same time, the very idea of a community, of an organic assemblage of territorialized human beings identifying as a unified national entity was never put into question, a legacy that will travel almost unchallenged across the century that followed. We have discussed elsewhere how the concept of living/lived space might be necessarily connected to that of national (and racial) community (Giaccaria and Minca 2016). For the sake of our argument here, it is enough to recall how for Agamben the biopolitical foundations of the nation-state may also be linked to Ratzel's initial theorization of the state's *lebensraum* and how this concept would controversially find its place in Nazi geopolitics (largely via the work of Haushofer: see, among others, Bassin 1987a, b), but also arguably in the Vidalian project, which the Italian political philosopher envisions as the first formalization of a specific understanding of the relations between environment and society, an understanding that, according to Agamben, was to furnish a specific, 'ecological' vision of life that would be entirely incorporated and normalized by state politics (Minca 2006).

Drawing again from Farinelli's (2003) argument, we might argue that the emergence and consolidation of positivist approaches to things geographical and their incorporation in the practices of the nation-state contributed to the departure from our political horizon of any memory of the original separation between *nascita* and *nazione*, between our experience of social life and a cartographic understanding of community. Vidal de la Blache's novel *Géographie Humaine* (1903,1922) in France (and eventually the rest of Europe) and Passarge's *Landschaftskunde* project (1919) in Germany in fact crucially contributed to the ultimate legitimation of the (notion

of) territory as a sheer vessel of objects and people/communities. Community, in these geographical accounts, was to be studied as 'a thing', an unquestionable and natural human consortium, the essential way in which space is translated into place and may be mapped accordingly. The idea of community-as-a-thing will then travel essentially unquestioned along the twentieth century and the sequence of paradigms that have shaped Western geographical practices (including, implicitly, the Christallerian and post-Christallerian modelings—see, for example, Christaller 1966; for a critique, Barnes, and Minca 2013). What is more, while the cultural turn and the poststructural approaches in the social sciences and human geography of the past three decades or so have significantly put into question the validity of such positivist geographies—by advancing a rich and enticing array of new critical approaches to concepts like landscape, place, mobility, and by dissecting and deconstructing the epistemological foundations of the nation-state and its spatial practices—at the same time, the concept of community has remained largely unproblematized. While we are clearly not in the position to generalize such a claim, we nonetheless believe that it possible to argue that some critical geographical approaches, in searching for the valorization and the emphasis of more just geographies-from-below, have often advocated a return to a community-based analysis of geographical processes and formations (for a recent call see, again, Shannon et al. 2020). Community has thus become a key term in many lines of research in critical geography to indicate a sort of local, normally positive (not positivist!) set of spatial practices; that is, community has been intended as the 'natural' scale of 'people's' daily interactions and the site for new political identities and social activism to emerge and be recognized. Again, while we are fully aware of the risks implied by our criticism, especially when faced with the long and articulated (and nationally specific) history of the discipline, at the same time, in the context of this book, we would like to provocatively propose a call for community to be deconstructed and put under close scrutiny. And in this respect, the debates mentioned at the outset of this chapter may be helpful.

By way of concrete illustration, our most recent investigation of this question has concerned the field of camp studies, and in particular, camp geographies (Carter-White and Minca 2020). In an article entitled *The camp and the question of community*, we explain how community has emerged, once again, as an important concept in recent geographical debates focused on camp spatialities:

> In a break from the perceived tendency of research in camp studies to underplay the political agency of camp residents and inmates, particularly research inspired by the philosophical writings of Agamben (1998), recent literature has looked to different forms of community organization in order to develop more complex accounts of camp structure, governance and spatiality. Insights offered by this body of work include the varied social space of the camp, whereby distinctive communities are differentially exposed to sovereign violence (Debrix 2015; Maestri 2017; Oesch 2017), and the capacity of community relations to undermine the boundaries of the camp and restore to camp dwellers the possibility of political agency and even resistance (Rykiel 2011; Sigona 2015; Woroniecka-Krzyzanoska 2017). (Carter-White and Minca 2020, p. 1).

Our review of the relevant literature has revealed that community is, again, often put forward as a romanticized political space within varied political discourses: from

populist, conservative movements drawing on nationalist communitarian imaginaries and inward-looking, nostalgic forms of local politics, to progressive movements that interpret community organizing as a humanized scale of empowerment able to resist governing authorities (Carter-White and Minca 2020, p. 1). While the concept of community can align with varying political ideologies and practices, it is nevertheless 'always presented and understood as a good thing' (DeFilippis et al. 2010, p. 13). Despite this valorization being periodically questioned in geography (see Smith 1999; Panelli and Welch 2005; Staeheli 2008; Botterill 2018), on that occasion we argued that there is particular relevance in reevaluating the term 'community' in relation to the camp, for the reason that all communities bring their own politics of power and manifestations of 'inclusive exclusion' (Carter-White and Minca 2020, p. 2; Agamben 1998); even those that may on the surface appear to be inherently 'positive' and empowering.

Recent camp studies literature within geography has implicitly and explicitly argued that community is the central space of social organization, in which refugee agency is established and articulated (Sanyal 2017). For example, scholars have interpreted the collaborative resourcefulness of refugees in the creation of makeshift housing as the transformation of spaces of containment, or in some cases detention, into spaces of new imagined political communities and subjectivities (Rygiel 2011). Alternatively, other scholars have found that the unique makings of the camp are variously embraced and undermined by resident communities, whether these communities utilize them as a harbor from social marginalization outside the camp (Ramadan 2010) or as a location for amplifying their political visibility (Sanyal 2011; Sigona 2015; Katz 2017; Guegen-Teil and Katz 2018; Katz et al. 2018; Perera 2018).

An important element that unites these various interventions into camp geographies is that the concept of 'community' is frequently used to refer generally to camp inmates or residents, suggesting that community as a concept is a natural and authentic scale of social organization within the camp setting, in a similar fashion to how it is perceived within broader society. Scholars emphasizing refugee agency frequently portray the making of 'community' as a political end in itself, with cooperation within the social divisions enforced by camp staff described as innately political acts (Rygiel 2011; Sigona 2015; Agier 2018; also Carter-White 2018). Community is also presented as a substance that is absent from or sought-after by camp residents due to camp conditions, as represented in Darling's description of 'fragile forms of community and political activism' in refugee camps (Darling 2017, p. 179; also, Davies et al. 2017), or Feldman's argument that '[t]he challenges of earning a living [in the camp] go along with a loss of space and privacy and, people's biggest lament, a felt loss of community relationships' (Feldman 2015, p. 250). This illustrates that the conceptualization of community in the camp geographies literature is powerfully associated with connotations of belonging, security, authenticity, and empowerment.

While the recent history of camp geographies is a very specific moment within the broader tradition of human geography, we see this analysis as an indication of the need for further theoretical investigation into what we consider to be the larger question of the politics of community. Given the importance that is so often attributed to the concept and rhetoric of community, both within and beyond geography, and

academia more generally, we believe it is imperative to avoid presuming that community is a neutral or 'natural' scale for the assemblage of cultural and political identity. It is instead crucial to reflect on its long-term legacy in our discipline and on how it has impacted different strands of human geography over a century after it was embedded into the practice of modern state geography. While we fully appreciate that the scale of the local community is different from the essentialized understanding of national community as formulated by some of the most influential classics in the discipline, we believe nonetheless that the concept should be problematized and critically analyzed in its spatializations. In particular, we are keen to explore the philosophical underpinnings of this concept. While the meaning of community is frequently assumed and unquestioned in contemporary geographical literature, a number of key intellectual influences can be identified that have indirectly informed its modern usage. These include the German *Gemeinschaft* tradition, commencing with German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), which envisaged an ideal type of social organization inspired by the centrality of tradition and social rules in rural German peasant societies. Even more relevant perhaps has been anthropologist Victor Turner's influential reading of *communitas* which emphasized the intense feelings of togetherness and joy experienced when individuals join together through shared or common experiences (Turner 1969). Despite the divergent conceptualizations and intellectual trajectories of these two approaches, it is possible to identify a consistent association of community with notions of rootedness, authenticity and affinity, but also fullness, intimacy, and redemption, which often remain (at the very least) implicit in social science invocations of the term. In order to problematize these entrenched connotations, we believe it is helpful to deliberately depart from this conventional epistemological lineage and look instead to a very different set of ideas around community that have emerged from French and Italian political philosophy. This is why we now turn to the work of Roberto Esposito, and his analysis of the *unthinkability of community*.

Esposito and the Unthinkable Community

> …community cannot be thought of as a body, as a corporation […] in which individuals are founded in a larger individual. Neither is community to be interpreted as a mutual, intersubjective 'recognition' in which individuals are reflected in each other so as to conform their initial identity; as a collective bond that comes at a certain point to connect individuals that before were separate. The community isn't a mode of being, much less a 'making' of the individual subject" (Esposito 2010, p. 7).

As noted at the outset of the chapter, the concept of community has been the subject of critical analysis from diverse philosophical perspectives, mostly related to the desire to think community in innovative and imaginative ways that would avoid the oppressive tradition of western communitarian thinking. Roberto Esposito's work on the origin and workings of community, in particular, is a key source for reconsidering community in critical terms, especially when it comes to challenging the notion of

community as a form of essential shared identity. For Bird and Short, Esposito's analysis "excavates and examines in a singularly powerful way how the dominant Western philosophical-political idealization of an immunized and proper community is becoming increasingly untenable in our current geo-political circumstances" (Bird and Short 2013, p. 2).

Esposito (2010, p. 1) inaugurates his pathbreaking essay on *Communitas* by putting under close scrutiny all interpretations of community based on communitarian ontologies. More specifically, he is critical of the ways in which mainstream political and philosophical narratives have traditionally presented community as a 'wider subjectivity' (Esposito 2010, p. 2), that is, as a greater Self constituted by the presumed sharing of ethnic, cultural, or territorial qualities and often legitimized by a mythological common origin:

> Despite the obvious historical, conceptual, and lexical differences, from this perspective the organicistic sociology of *Gemeinschaft*, American neo-communitarianism, and the various ethics of communication (and the communist tradition as well, despite quite a different categorical profile) lie beyond the same line that keeps them within the unthinkability of community. For all these philosophies, in fact, it is a 'fullness' or a 'whole' […] It is also, using a seemingly different terminology, a good, a value, an essence, which depending on the case in question, can be lost and then refound as something that once belonged to us and that therefore can once again belong to us; an origin to be mourned or a destiny foreshadowed based on the perfect symmetry that links *arche* and *telos* (Esposito 2010, p. 2).

The persistence of community as a key unquestioned and all too celebrated reference in many political discourses today, including populist and radical communitarianism on both sides of the political spectrum, is thus attributed by Esposito to the search for idealized forms of coming together typical of a long-standing tradition in Western political philosophy, and the related inclination toward the identification and the celebration of social consortia aimed at promising a brighter future while being founded on deep historical roots. Supporting this understanding of community as a shared property or 'substance' is, for Esposito, a widespread popular rhetoric of loss: a sense of betrayal and need for protection from the nihilism and alienation that pervades modern societies (Esposito 2010, p. 134). However, according to his analysis,

> Community isn't translatable into a political-philosophical lexicon except by completely distorting (or indeed perverting) it, as we saw occur so tragically in the last century. This appears to contradict the tendency of a certain kind of political philosophy to see in the question of community its very same object. It is this reduction to 'object' of a political-philosophical discourse that forces community into a conceptual language that radically alters it, while at the same time attempts to name it: that of the individual and totality; of identity and the particular; of the origin and the end; or more simply of the subject, with its most unassailable metaphysical connotations of unity, absoluteness, and interiority (Esposito 2010, p. 1).

For Esposito, what most modern communitarian ideologies propose is thus "the unacknowledged assumption that community is a 'property' belonging to subjects that join together" (Esposito 2010, p. 2), in this way endorsing an approach to community intended 'in a substantialist, subjective sense' that imagines a totality of individuals united by a common *property* or *quality*. This is a belief based also upon a

nostalgia for a mythological past which can be actualized through the exclusion of individuals who do not possess such presumed originary property (Carter-White and Minca 2020).

Community is thus often presented by most communitarian ideologies as "a national, ethno-cultural property belonging to a political community" (Bird and Short 2013, p. 6). Regardless of whether such presumed property is an ethnic element or a set of shared cultural practices, this understanding of community is for Esposito eminently conservative and even potentially authoritarian. Bird and Short, in their overall engagement with the existing philosophical debates on community, describe the most conventional ways of thinking community on the part of many existing political philosophies as the source of inspiration for the realization of actual political communities "united against the 'ever-present threat of alien appropriation'" (Bird and Short 2013, p. 7). The operationalization of this idea of community as an organic whole united by a common property thus often translates into a geography of "small, micro-communities, opposed by definition to each other by ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities" (Esposito 2010, pp. 54–55), with micro-communities constantly busy in protecting their own real-and-imagined borders and in restating the exclusionary principles on which they base their very foundations as a community.

These conceptualizations of community are, for Esposito, fundamentally based on notions of the 'common' and of the 'proper' that ought to be problematized: "the most paradoxical aspect of the question is that the 'common' is defined exactly through its most obvious antonym: what is common is that which unites the ethnic, territorial, and spiritual property of every one of its members. They have in common what is most properly their own; they are the owners of what is common to them all." (Esposito 2010, p. 3) Esposito's investigation thus departs from this quasi-ontological interpretation of community and, by resorting to an etymological analysis of the term *communitas*, he famously argues that "as dictionaries show, the first meaning of the noun *communitas* and of its corresponding adjective, *communis*, is what becomes meaningful from the opposition to what is proper. In all neo-Latin languages (though not only), 'common' (*commun, comun, kommuri*) is what is *not* proper [*proprio*], that begins where what is proper ends" (Esposito 2010, p. 4).

In other words, the original meaning of communitas, insists Esposito, has nothing to do with common ownership or even identity—as normally implied by the essentialist readings of community he criticizes—but quite the contrary. By taking this argument further, he then explains that the term originally incorporates the notion of *munus*, of gift, of what some commentators of Esposito's work have recognized as *a specific sense of giving*. According to the Italian political philosopher, in fact, *munus* here "indicates only the gift that one gives, not what one receives. All of the *munus* is projected onto the transitive act of giving […] It is a 'pledge' or a 'tribute' that one pays in an obligatory form. The *munus* is the obligation that is contracted with respect to the other and that invites a suitable release from the obligation" (Esposito 2010, p. 5).

This is why present-day conservative communitarian ideologies, but also some of the academic appeals to-think-with-community or to recuperate community as a

fundamental democratic and inclusive space, are doomed to fail or to encounter unmanageable contradictions. This is also why, in presenting community as an unquestioned positive 'human scale' for social and cultural interaction, many contemporary geographies tend to overlook the original biopolitical inspiration of *all community thinking* and its unavoidable structures of power. Community intended as a whole organic social consortium—suggests Esposito—can in fact only be defined in negative terms, via the definition of what it is not, or of what it excludes in order to preserve its own presumed identity. This is why, again, conservative communitarian ideologies normally respond to this challenge by returning to a mythical origin, to some sort of magic foundational shared past, while the response of the most progressive thinking around community is simply to take community for granted, as a positive (and often local) coalition of individuals linked by something they have in common, something that allows members to identify themselves as part of a greater Self.

However, Esposito's argument shows that "the munus that the communitas shares isn't a property or a possession […] on the contrary, is a debt, a pledge, a gift to be given […]. The subjects of community are united by an 'obligation' […]. This is what […] expropriates them of their initial property (in part or completely), of the most proper property, namely, their very subjectivity." (Esposito 2010, pp. 6–7). According to this perspective, each and every community is founded on an experience of expropriation, of loss; as such,

> What the members of a community share […] is rather an expropriation of their own essence, which isn't limited to their 'having' but one that involves and affects their own 'being subjects.' […] the community isn't joined to an addition but to a subtraction of subjectivity, […] its members are no longer identical with themselves but are constitutively exposed to a propensity that forces them to open their own individual boundaries in order to appear as what is 'outside' themselves (Esposito 2010, p. 138).

This is why the idea of community as a 'whole' that may be lost and therefore found or founded (again) is flawed. In fact, according to the originary valence of this term, "community isn't an entity, nor is it a collective subject, nor a totality of subjects, but rather is the relation that makes them no longer individual subjects because it closes them off from their identity with a line, which traversing them, alters them: it is the 'with,' the 'between,' and the threshold where they meet in a point of contact that brings them into relation with others to the degree to which it separates them from themselves" (Esposito 2010, p. 139).

This explains Esposito's insistence on the distinction between what he describes as the 'loss of the proper'—from which all communities originate—and the nostalgic rhetoric feeding into many communitarian ideologies, which implicates the idea of a lost origin and, at the same time, of a utopian and organic totality of individuals, a totality which is still, we would like to argue, at the foundations of the ways in which the work of many geographers incorporate ideas of community and its analysis. For Esposito, such conceptualizations of community necessarily end up being confronted with the inherent contradiction of the assumptions from which they draw their own foundations. In other words, community expressed in those terms is simply unthinkable, for two main reasons: first, for "those 'philosophies of decline' advocating

some sort of return to the origins" community is unthinkable because they "ultimately seek to historicize what is an a-historical condition" (Esposito 2010, pp.140, 148); second, for those progressive understandings of community as a positive/local scale of human interaction and as organic wholes based on defined properties of their members, because, rather than the sharing of a common identity, these communities are the result of a *communal event of subtraction*, a relinquishment of subjectivity. The loss of the proper is in fact the constitutive element of *communitas* (see, also, Devisch 2013). The unreciprocated structure of giving entailed by the *munus* means that it "takes me outside the bounds of my proper subjectivity and leads me through a series of alterations, rendering me otherwise than a coherent and bounded self" (Hole 2013, p. 111; also, Carter-White and Minca 2020, p. 4). This means that, according to Esposito's reading, community can never "be thought of as a body […] in which individuals are founded in a larger individual. Neither is community to be interpreted as a mutual, intersubjective 'recognition' in which individuals are reflected in each other so as to confirm their initial identity as a collective bond that comes at a certain point to connect individuals that before were separate. […] It isn't the subject's expansion or multiplication but its exposure to what interrupts the closing and turns it inside out: a dizziness, a syncope, a spasm in the continuity of the subject." (Esposito 2010, p. 7).

Accepting Esposito's critical perspective on the origin and the foundations of community thinking has, we would like to suggest, two main implications for the work of geographers incorporating this concept at the most diverse scales and in the most diverse contexts. First, we believe that Esposito's speculations offer a solid analytical framework in order to reflect on the deeper reason for geography having failed to problematize the concept of community and its origins, something that we do not have the possibility to take further in this essay but is a task that remains nonetheless urgent. Second, the existing debates on community in political philosophy may represent an opportunity to engage with different, alternative, ways to think community, for critical geographers and other scholars in the social sciences. This is why we now move to the work of two key figures in the contemporary attempts to theorize what might be the 'coming' community, Blanchot and Agamben; a community exempt from the untenable myth of the origins and hopefully freed from the inherently exclusionary practice related to present understandings of community.

Blanchot and the Non-experience of Community

> I can no longer bear my presence next to you (Blanchot 1999, p. 49).

The overarching trajectory of Blanchot's conceptualization of community significantly overlaps with (and played some role in inspiring) that of Esposito, and indeed, it is doubly illustrative that Blanchot's rendering of community can only be understood through his exchanges, debts, and disagreements with a number of other theorists, most prominently Levinas and Nancy, but also Bataille, Sartre, Heidegger,

and Derrida. On the one hand, it is from within a veritable community of thinkers, united by their efforts to reimagine this fundamental and fraught concept, that Blanchot's thinking of community takes shape. And yet to make this assertion is to miss Blanchot's distinctive contribution to this debate since it is precisely *any* such understanding of community as the unification of discrete individuals under the common property of a value or project, as diagnosed by Esposito's work, that his thought undermines completely.

To illustrate this point, we can turn to Blanchot's most sustained reflection on the concept of community, *The Unavowable Community* (1988 [1983]), which was published as a response to Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (2004 [1983]) and was itself the subject of response in Nancy's subsequent reflections on community (2003, 2016). The imperative that galvanized this exchange was, once again, how to think community without reinscribing a totalizing logic of fullness, shared identity or substance, and with it the potential for radical violence exhibited by the politicized communities of the twentieth century; whether, in other words, community might be thought otherwise than as a 'contemporaneity of presences' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, quoted in Gaon 2005, p. 389). In the case of both Blanchot and Nancy, community is ultimately recast not as a unifying property that is shared between atomized and discrete individuals, but instead as an exposure to alterity and finitude that preexists the individual. But whereas Nancy arrives at his conception of 'being-with' partly through his engagement with Heidegger's *Mitsein* (James 2010), Blanchot looks to Levinas and his explicit rejection of ontology and Heideggerian thinking in order to arrive at this point. It is therefore through a brief examination of Levinas's thought that we can get a clearer sense of Blanchot's divergence from Nancy and the distinctiveness of his unrepresentable and impossible community.

Levinas identifies in the phenomenological tradition an inherent violence towards alterity, whereby all otherness is unavoidably reduced to the perceiving consciousness of the subject. "The other is always illuminated for the subject through her own understanding of the world. Even difference is understood relationally. Therefore, the other is always integrated into a totality within which alterity is negated in the service of reiterating the Same" (Hole 2013, p. 105; within geography, see Barnett 2005; Harrison 2008). As such, any social relation based on the possibility of recognition and reciprocity "is never anything other than a matter of the relation of the Same with the Same" (Madou 1998, p.61), and thus the elimination of alterity. For Levinas, then, ethical experience necessarily lies in a primordial relation with an other that is *infinitely* other: an exposure to transcendent exteriority that precedes, disrupts, and is fundamentally anterior to ontology, which Levinas locates in the face-to-face encounter of individuals (Levinas 2001). The absolute dissymmetry of this relation makes it unrepresentable to the conscious experience and comprehension of the subject, thus breaking from the reductive, totalizing frames of ontology and undermining the sovereignty of the subject.

The profound influence of Levinas's thought is evident in Blanchot's own reiteration of the ethical relation as based not on the mutual recognition of sovereign subjects, but as an abandonment to infinite exteriority:

> An ethics is possible only when – with ontology (which always reduces the Other to the Same) taking the backseat – an anterior relation can affirm itself, a relation such that the self is not content with recognizing the Other, with recognizing itself in it, but feels that the Other always puts it into question to the point of being able to respond to it only through a responsibility that cannot limit itself and that exceeds itself without exhausting itself (Blanchot 1988, p. 43).

From a Levinasian perspective, this unmasterable relation with an infinite, transcendent exteriority is what constitutes 'community', with the latter conceptualized not as an identifiable, bounded entity from which individuals can be variously included or excluded, but as an exposure to the finitude of one's own subjectivity; a (non)experience of being taken out of oneself. The question that remains regarding Levinas's framework, however, is whether the dyadic, isolated structure of the ethical relation can translate and extend into a more plural community (Hole 2013); a question, therefore, of the passage from ethics to politics (Bernasconi 1999). Here is where the distinctiveness of Blanchot's conception of sociality starts to become apparent, since as Iyer (2003) notes Blanchot implements a series of subtle changes to Levinas's lexicon which enable him both to secularize the religious connotations of Levinas's ethical relation but also, crucially, to *multiply* it:

> What is crucial for Blanchot is the fact that the Other is another human being who will likewise respond to the Other. Even as I am exposed and obliged in my relation to you, you can be exposed and obliged by me. This is not a reciprocal relation […], since the relation in question is dissymmetrical and unilateral; it is, rather, a criss-crossing of relations. The thought of community in Blanchot is linked with the attempt to think what he calls this 'redoubling of irreciprocity', a 'double dissymmetry', a 'double discontinuity' and a 'double-signed infinity (Iyer 2003, p. 230).

This subtle shift removes the duality and thus the religious sense of verticality from Levinas's framework, enabling exteriority to indeterminately spill out in all directions.

> The question that is always to be questioned: 'Does the multiple amount, finally, to just two?' One answer: whoever says two, only *repeats* One (or dual unity), unless the second term – inasmuch as it is the Other – is infinitely multiple (Blanchot 1995, p. 134).
>
> Radical non-empirical experience is not at all that of a transcendent Being; it is 'immediate' presence or presence as Outside. […] impossibility is relation with the Outside (Blanchot 1993, p. 46).

With this Levinasian legacy in mind, it becomes easier to understand the disagreement between Nancy and Blanchot, and thus the specificity of the latter's thought. Both conceptualize community as an opening of absence, emptiness or nothing, an interpretation mutually inspired by Bataille's affirmation of sacrificial community as an exemplary sharing of finitude (James 2010). Yet Blanchot critiques Nancy's ambivalent reading of Bataille as resulting in the affirmation or avowal of a community of (shared) nothing, through the ontological language of Being-with, while Blanchot himself explicitly rejects ontology to conceptualize community as always and only exposure to the Outside: a non-experience of absence and withdrawal, beyond all existence and representation (ibid.). For Blanchot, it is not enough to affirm a community that is 'inoperative', in Nancy's terms; if it is to avoid the totalizing

logic of substance and presence, community must be unrepresentable, unspeakable, unavowable.

Having come this far, where community seems to be the very antithesis of that natural and authentic entity assumed in so much geographical literature, we reach a point where it becomes difficult to use words to describe this exteriority which precedes ontology and lies anterior to the logic of representation. It is nonetheless to language that we turn in order to glimpse those limit experiences that constitute, if not the entity, then the *instant* that Blanchot names community; the instant of the subject's unravelling. Blanchot follows Sartre in looking to language as a model for community: for Sartre, literature is necessarily oriented towards the truthful representation of reality, and the interpersonal bond between author and reader that underpins this project enables an understanding of community based on the freedom and mutual recognition of its constituent subjects (Stoekl 2006). For Blanchot, however, it is the annihilatory force of language that illuminates the question of community:

> Language, then, is inseparable from death […] in that in the very act of naming, of giving being, the word takes it away, annihilates it. My name means I am present, but only given the possibility, the very necessity of my absence. 'I' am fundamentally double, absent from myself, in death. And so is the other: as soon as I indicate the name Blanchot, for example, Blanchot is separable, he can be absent; he is now inseparable from the word that indicates him, but only in his absence […]. The word takes away the necessity of his flesh and blood; it continues to work, to refer to him, in his death. It is the simultaneous establishment of his presence (it characterizes his uniqueness, his 'identity') and his radical absence, his death (Stoekl 2006, p. 42).

If in everyday communication the annihilatory trajectory of language is all too easily neglected, Blanchot's literary analyses reveal literature as nothing but the indeterminacy and impersonality through which alterity in language irrupts (Large 2006; in geography, see Romanillos 2008). Language, and particularly literary language, is thus central to Blanchot's thinking on community because it constitutes a relation with the Outside that precedes and determines the subject while remaining beyond its grasp; a relation without relation (see Blanchot 1989, 2001, 2004). This is crucial for understanding how Blanchot is able to derive an interpretation of community from what is, for him, the ultimate encounter with alterity: the death of the Other (Bernasconi 1993).

> What puts me radically in question? Not my relation to myself as finite or as conscious of being towards or for death, but my presence to the Other as the one who absents themselves in dying. Maintaining myself present in the proximity of the Other who distances themselves definitively in dying, taking upon myself the death of the Other as the only death which concerns me, this is what places me outside of myself and it is the only separation which can open me, in its impossibility, to the Opening of a community (Blanchot, quoted in Large 2006, p. 5).

The death of the Other utterly escapes the subject's possession or understanding; it constitutes an exposure to exteriority through which the sovereign subject is utterly dispossessed, taken out of itself. In this sense, it is the very encapsulation of Blanchot's community. Yet the exteriority of death, while beyond all subjective representation and identification is nonetheless inscribed in the indeterminacy of language, as

revealed in Blanchot's literary analyses and his own fiction narratives (eg. Blanchot 1999). It is therefore through death in language, a dying to which the living subject is perpetually exposed, that the subject is always-already entwined with alterity. The solitude of death marks the impossibility of community, but due to the annihilatory exteriority of language this solitude is, from Blanchot's perspective, the only thing that can be, and is incessantly, shared.

Blanchot's community thus appears, in one sense, as a radical refusal (Stoekl 2006): a refusal to countenance any communal relation that can be identified, represented or avowed as such. But it is precisely in the perpetual refusal of community, most profoundly in the shared exposure to death that undermines the sovereignty of the subject, that a certain communality is affirmed. Community understood not as an entity but as a limit experience of withdrawal, exemplified for Blanchot in the anonymous murmur of literature but witnessed wherever an empty space is opened that troubles the sovereign boundaries of the subject and thus allows the Other to be greeted as Other (Iyer 2003). Human geography is increasingly turning its attention to instances of vulnerability, incapacity, withdrawal, and other phenomena that cannot be claimed by or attributed to an intentioning subject (see among others Philo 2017; Simpson 2017; Bissell and Gorman-Murray 2019; Beljaars 2020); the question posed by Blanchot's thought, and the entirely different vision of communality that he presents, is how these non-experiences might be imagined as a form of community.

Agamben's Coming (Affirmative) Community

> No vision inspires the destructive character. He has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace that has been destroyed. First of all, for a moment at least, empty space, the place where the thing stood or the victim lived. Someone is sure to be found who needs this space without its being filled (Benjamin 1978, pp. 301–302).

As noted in the previous sections, "community" is a dispositive which establishes a relationship between Inside and Outside. Likewise, the political decision about what is proper and what is alien is also a *spatial decision* about the Inside and Outside. Such a decision is always exclusionary and can turn into sectarian violence—as it actually did in the Twentieth Century and afterward—even when community is preached as a positive fundament for mutual understanding and aid. Hence the need for the critical deconstruction of this notion that we have conducted via Esposito's and Blanchot's understandings of community. Spatializing their thoughts, we might claim that Esposito succeeded in deconstructing the *inverted* (Inside-centered) nature of community, by highlighting the paradox of identity and property in the common sense of community, while Blanchot *everted* the idea of community via Levinas, by exposing and de-scribing the deep meaning of community to the Outside rather than to the Inside, to Absence rather than to Presence. In other words, Esposito worked more on the Inside, Blanchot more on the Outside. Yet, these foundations seem to be still inadequate to set the conditions of possibility for an affirmative community. In

Esposito, the community of the munus is impossible to attain and in Blanchot it is perhaps possible but only in absence rather in presence, in death rather than in life.

We thus turn again to Giorgio Agamben to try to push further our deconstruction of community, and investigate the nature of the subject who can enter the communitarian bond of munus, of reciprocal indebtment and ethical dissymmetry without being either included/entrapped or excluded/banned in the dispositive of the proper (Bird 2016). The question of the subject is fundamental here if we want "to trace the initial features of a biopolitics that is finally affirmative. No longer over life but of life" (Esposito 2008, p. 157, see also McVeigh 2013; Tiernay 2016), and hence to imagine an *affirmative community* that relinquishes the obsession with identity and propriety, with belonging and authenticity. In a sense, no philosopher could be as distant from this affirmative vision of biopolitics as Agamben and his account of biopolitics as thanatopolitics (Murray 2008); indeed, Agamben's work is probably closer to Blanchot's "radical passivity" (Wall 1999) rather than to Esposito's quest for an affirmative biopolitics. In Agamben's account, biopolitics and biopower are such pervasive forces that little room is left for any active reaction and resistance: absence, withdrawal, inoperativity, indifference, impotentiality are the only possible answers to a biopolitics that make Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener an archetypical character in Agamben's writings (Whyte 2009).

Yet, we would like to argue that Agamben may offer an intriguing stance on the question of the subject who inhabits a hypothetical affirmative community. In doing so, we suggest returning to his book *The Coming Community*, originally published in Italy in 1990 and soon translated into English (Agamben 1993). Organized as a sequence of short chapters (2–3 pages each), apparently disconnected from each other, the book structure is somewhat paradoxical, as the very idea of community is only evoked in the title but not actually discussed in the manuscript. As Bird observes: "perhaps most surprisingly given the title of this book, it is hard to find a genuinely relational dimension in his ontological ethos of being-thus. At most, he describes the conditions that render ontological relations possible" (Bird 2016, p. 118). The "coming community" is, tautologically, yet to come as an affirmative community and we do not find in Agamben's book a political *vademecum* to realize it. What we find, instead, is a useful insight on the subject that inhabits the coming (affirmative) community. Deliberately, in the first lines of the introductive chapter (entitled: "Whatever") Agamben defiantly brings into focus his subject, stating that "the coming being is whatever being" (Agamben 1993, p. 1). However, this is not a case for political apathy. Quite the contrary:

> In the Scholastic enumeration of transcendentals (*quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum seu perfectum*-what-ever entity is one, true, good, or perfect), the term that, remaining un-thought in each, conditions the meaning of all the others is the adjective quodlibet. The common translation of this term as "whatever" in the sense of "it does not matter which, indifferently" is certainly correct, but in its form the Latin says exactly the opposite: Quodlibet ens is not "being, it does not matter which," but rather "being such that it always matters" (Agamben 1993, p. 1).

As a consequence, the concept of *quodlibet* opens the possibility of escaping the dichotomy of the proper and the universal that entraps most current debates on community, as we discussed in the first section:

> Such-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims)-and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its being-such, for belonging itself. […] Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an 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* only insofar as it is *such* (Agamben 1993, pp. 1–2).

In the third chapter ("The example") he further emphasizes the concept:

> One concept that escapes the antinomy of the universal and the particular has long been familiar to us: the example. […] Neither particular nor universal, the example is a singular object that presents itself as such, that shows its singularity (Agamben 1993, p. 9).

In the same chapter, Agamben for the first time spatializes the subject of the coming community, the being-as-such, claiming that "the *proper place* of the example is always beside itself, in the *empty space* in which its undefinable and unforgettable life unfolds" (Agamben 1993, p.10, italics added). Such an empty space is where the properties of the community are exposed to their opposite:

> Truth is revealed only by giving space or giving a place to non-truth-that is, as a taking-place of the false, as an exposure of its own innermost impropriety. […] As long as the authentic and the good had a separate place among humans (they took part), life on earth was certainly infinitely more beautiful (still today we know people who took part in the authentic); and yet the appropriation of the improper, of that which does not belong, was in itself impossible, because every affirmation of the authentic had the effect of pushing the inauthentic to another place, where morality would once again raise its barriers. The conquest of the good thus necessarily implied a growth of the evil that had been repelled; every consolidation of the walls of paradise was matched by a deepening of the infernal abyss (Agamben 1993, pp. 13–14).

Read in geographical terms, this means that the topographical/cartographic separation of the authentic from the inauthentic, of the proper from the alien, of the truth from the fake cannot but produce hell on earth, embodied in such forms as the concentration camp and other spatial manifestations of sovereign power (Giaccaria and Minca 2011a). When the dispositive of the proper is fully displaced, when all place is taken, *then community can be nothing but exclusionary and no affirmative biopolitics is possible.* This is the topos that Agamben develops in the subsequent *Homo Sacer* trilogy (*Homo Sacer*, *State of Exception* and *Remnants of Auschwitz*). From our perspective, and reminiscent of Blanchot's thought of the Outside, the void, the *unoccupied space that comes* entails the possibility for the coming community to be affirmative.

It is useful to match the metaphor of empty space with that of the "threshold", possibly the most powerful spatial metaphor that Agamben proposes in his work. Agamben draws the notion of threshold from Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* (English edition of *The Arcade Project*, 2002):

> The simple topographical opposition (inside/outside) implicit in these theories seems insufficient to account for the phenomenon that it should explain. […] In truth, the state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other (Agamben 1993, p. 23).

In Agamben's *Homo Sacer* trilogy, the threshold is thus a *spatial metaphor* that he uses to visualize the ambivalence of modern biopower, and its capability to suspend the bare life of *homo sacer* between a certain belonging to and 'ban' by the community. More importantly the threshold is also *a spatial model* that structures contingent, material, specific sites, such as the Auschwitz camp or the Belarus wild forest (for a geographical analysis of these spatialities in the Nazi project see Giaccaria and Minca 2011a, b). Even in such extreme situations, communitarian practices emerged both in Auschwitz (Carter-White 2013; Carter-White and Minca 2020) and in Jewish partisans' camps in the Belarus forests (Steane 2018). Yet, Agamben's account of the threshold is mainly negative as it is the site where sovereign power resides and determines the borders between life and death and from where it designs territories and spaces according to its sovereign decision. Given this negativity, the question remains open as to whether and how we can root an idea of affirmative community in Agamben's spatiality of the threshold. On what conditions might the dispositive of the threshold itself be turned into an affirmative one, outlining a spatiality where Inside and Outside are not topographically separated and opposed to each other, but are mutually weaved, where both/and outweighs either/or dialectics, where we can be both inside and outside, proper and alien, present and absent?

In the chapter "Outside", Agamben establishes a linkage between the empty space of the being-as-such, the Whatever, and the spatiality of the threshold:

> Whatever is the figure of pure singularity. Whatever singularity has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an idea, that is, to the totality of its possibilities. Through this relation, as Kant said, singularity borders all possibility and thus receives its omnimoda determination not from its participation in a determinate concept or some actual property (being red, Italian, Communist), but only by means of this bordering. It belongs to a whole, but without this belonging's being able to be represented by a real condition: Belonging, being-such, is here only the relation to an empty and indeterminate totality.
>
> In Kantian terms, this means that what is in question in this bordering is not a limit (*Schranke*) that knows no exteriority, but a threshold (*Grenze*), that is, a point of contact with an external space that must remain empty.
>
> Whatever adds to singularity only an emptiness, only a threshold: Whatever is a singularity plus an empty space, a singularity that is finite and, nonetheless, indeterminable according to a concept. But a singularity plus an empty space can only be a pure exteriority, a pure exposure. Whatever, in this sense, is the event of an outside (Agamben 1993, p. 67).

In a previous chapter, entitled "Ease" (*Agio* in Italian), Agamben evokes French Arabist Louis Massignon's conversion to Catholicism and the foundation of the Badaliya (an Arab term meaning substitution). In this community, the members took a vow to substitute themselves as Christians for someone else.

> According to Massignon, in fact, substituting oneself for another does not mean compensating for what the other lacks, nor correcting his or her errors, but exiling oneself to the other

> as he or she is in order to offer Christ hospitality in the other's own soul, in the other's own taking-place. This substitution no longer knows a place of its own, but the taking-place of every single being is always already common-an empty space offered to the one, irrevocable hospitality (Agamben 1993, p. 24).

Hence, the Outside where the Whatever is exposed is not topologically separated by a border, by a topographical limit. It is within the inside of community and it takes the form of a threshold, of an empty space that is kept available to the coming being. "Ease (agio) is the proper name of this unrepresentable space. […] the space adjacent (ad-jacens, adjacentia), the empty place where each can move freely" (Agamben 1993, p. 24). As a consequence, at the very inner of the coming (affirmative?) community there is an empty space. This empty space exists as a threshold because it is where the Outside and the Inside are mutually assumed in a relation that is topological and not topographical/cartographical. This is the place where the members of a community are exposed to the Other, to the Outside, because they leave this space empty, available to Whatever, to *quidlibet ens* might need it or desire it and feel at ease in it. When this empty space is filled with the proper of the community, when there is no more room for the being-as-such but only for those subjects that share some proprieties, then the community become exclusionary, a border replaces the threshold, and the alien, the fake, the inauthentic is illusionarily pushed outside the community boundaries. This is the moment in which biopolitics turns into thanatopolitics and the threshold into a space of exception, and the Whatever, the *quodlibet ens*, the being-as-such is banned and reduced to bare life, to Homo Sacer.

Benjamin's quote at the beginning of this section precisely points to a possible direction toward the coming geographies of an affirmative community, challenging geography to dwell in and about an empty space that has not to be filled. Before this empty space is filled with identities and properties, we would like to argue, a chance is given for an affirmative community that gives room to the Whatever—migrant, fool, sick, child, freak, non-human animal—that is usually excluded and exposed to the violence of biopower.

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