



The Auto-Destructive Community: The Torsion of the Common in Local Sites of Antagonism

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abstract

The text considers some issues arising through an experience of local activism contesting gentrification, and relates this to some formulations in Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben and Karl Marx on the politics and ontology of 'community' as an articulation of common being, or the impossibility thereof. There may be a correlation between Marx's precept of the proletariat as the class that exists both to annihilate itself and class society as such in the social relations engendered by communism, and Nancy and Agamben's variously 'political' and 'post-political' iterations of 'community' as a horizon of being-in-common that is sundered from the contingencies that create communal identity (nation, religion, ethnicity) and that proposes an unfounded community based on contingency and a common experience of dispossession and fragmentation in social life, the 'such'-ness of singularities not individuals. These axes collide and diverge incessantly, and the text embarks on an initial encounter with their implications for a 'potential politics' that is neither tied nor divorced from history and the created facticity of social life in capital, and also declines to naturalise a structurally-derived political agency, in an analysis which also departs from some of the more aporetic moments of Paolo Virno's attempt to theorise multitude or immaterial labour as a site of negative as well as revolutionary potential.

Introduction

Invocations of community – spectral, tactical, conservative – have inhabited countless attempts to articulate collective subjects of resistance ('the Palestinian community') or ethnic belonging in nationalist discourses. It also often comes up as an uncontroversial abstract referent ('the programmer community', 'the business community', 'the academic community', 'community art'). The referent of 'community' has also played a pivotal role in the articulation of communitarianism by 'Third Way' sociologists, consultants and ideologues of every stripe in the Anglo-American context of the last decade or so. The Blairite discourse of 'rights and responsibilities' blooms in the rich topsoil of communitarian platitudes to deliver such prize vegetables as the indiscriminate use of ASBOs (Anti-Social Behaviour Orders) and delineate its social vision of self-policing 'communities' that work and consume in an orderly fashion.

The use of 'community' for aggregates of people, whether in everyday speech or in sociological analysis, in the West, both underlines and espouses a notion of society as a collection of individuals contingently bound together either by lifestyle, professional status or geographical locale, in the case of the average subject of media scrutiny, or immutable cultural ties, in the case of 'ethnic communities'. The iteration of 'community' would now appear to have become so universally administered and vague, beholden both to what is received as outmoded identity politics on the left and communitarian sophism on the centre-right, as to downgrade it from any utility at all, prompting many activists to turn to less monolithic arbiters such as 'affinity groups', 'networks', 'multitude', and a host of other context-driven designations. Moreover, this problematic has been recognized and negotiated at different levels for a couple of decades now, ever since 'community' came to prominence as a widespread signifier, one that marked the obsolescence of 'class' as a category of sociological and economic analysis *pace* a notional neoliberal consensus.

On an ecumenical level of generality, 'community' is a way to subsume alterity and conflict, a way of managing and mediating social contradictions in the register of the collective. But even at this level of generality, distinctions obtrude. Depending on the stakes and the actors, it is an ideology dissembling the absence of anything like this evoked co-presence in an atomized and consumption-oriented present, or an oppositional claim on its revival. The spurious use of community in the communitarian rhetoric of policy-makers and think-tanks or in the marketing of residential developments has important asymmetries, while occluding key commonalities, with the concept of community at work in yesterday's 'utopian' and today's 'intentional communities' with their paradoxical principles of retreat and collective engagement, and the diversity of social, religious, cultural and political profiles across, if not within, such formations. The community of happenstance, of attachment to *habitus* or shared daily experience, is different of course from the community of volition, which may depart from principles of dissatisfaction and exit from, rather than attachment to, the status quo. And again a community incited by shared lifestyle and economic status to be found in a 'gated community' is a very different affair from an anarchist or a religious commune, although both exhibit a comparable response to the politics of fear in contemporary society.

For all its complex genealogy, the notion of 'community', without being juxtaposed with the previously-cited 'network' or 'multitude' experiences of organization and action, seems to still offer a salient category for looking at the composition of local movements around local issues that are immediately systemic and global. The dimension of 'place' and 'habitus', as well as the immediately problematic character of organization among diverse and at times incompatible agendas is present in even the most perfunctory instance, or analysis, of 'community activism'. A local focus often provides the most concrete illustrations of the confluence of class, race, property and power relations obtaining in an area that spurs certain campaigns, and guards against the benign abstractions of 'multitude'-style theorizing and the insularity of 'activist' culture, as well as developing a specificity that can subsequently inform broad-based resistances of reinventions.

Here what has been referred to as the ‘movement of movements’ can be deemed an instance, but not a definitive form. Similarly, ‘networked’ organizing need not be fetishized beyond the modes of communication and the complex and variable political articulations it makes possible, lest it become a spectacularized and insurgent example of the organization theorist’s pet paradigm of ‘the strength of weak ties’.¹ ‘Community’ is such a refractory term because of the unsustainable number of contradictions it is called upon to manage, and it is these internal differences that lend a hectic and a mobile aspect to what at first seems to indicate a static, habitual state. It can function as a limit of possibility and a point of capture. It can emerge as a tangible hub for praxis that would otherwise be defeated by the immensity and complexity of the issues, even after critical analysis has done the preliminary ground work of exposing connections and continuities. It can also be an act of pacification that divides up restive local populations into the ‘community’ and its ‘others’, into subjects of regeneration and objects of policing.

‘Community’ in Urban Social Movements: The Return of the Site-Specific

What has so far been termed ‘community activism’ should first be located decisively on the terrain of ‘urban social movements’ – a claim on the city. Such a claim proceeds by countering not only the global logic of capital in its address to the specifics of place, but in reacting against the close and abrasive inequities generated in specific place by specific actors and identifiable tendencies. Such inequities are propagated in cities where ‘international competitiveness’ is honed by the withdrawal of even the equivocal social rights of the welfare state era, leading to active displacement of low-income populations by middle-classes in the state and privately-subsidized pursuit of higher land values and more uniform exploitation. Resistance to these tendencies, and the creation of other subjective and social possibilities, is the aim of those who organize and take action in their own backyards. Such struggles for local self-determination may fall under the heading of ‘community politics’ that become articulated as urban social movements. We can refer to the concise definition of ‘urban social movements’ found in Stephen Lanz’s (2006) ‘Capillaries of Emancipation: Substitute economies and urban movements in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires’: “urban social movements are collective actors organized in an urban territory and independent of political parties struggling for fair collective consumption and the utility value of their city, for cultural autonomy and neighbourly life.... A reaction, namely, to the logic of capitalism that transforms cities into commodities, to the logic of an authoritarian etatism that prevents cities from becoming democratic communities, and to the logic of a standardized mass culture directed against the cultural autonomy of individual groups of the population”. Lanz concludes, however, that the prospects for such popular mobilization at present seem more viable in the South American cities where the social movements discussed in the article have been underway and have made remarkable (and, for Western

1 A recent and very cogent discussion of the myriad inflections of the ‘network’ is the Geert Lovink call for the New Network Theory conference to be held in Amsterdam in June, 2007.

commentators, easily romanticized) inroads into the social and political structures of the general population and the acutely impoverished alike.

However, in this case, it is the experience of collective self-organization in Western European urban milieus that seems to pose the most open questions, compromised as it is both by illusory affiliation with an increasingly phantom social guarantees of the welfare state and the concomitant mediating organs of centre-leftist parties and unions, and the resignation produced by approximately 30 years of defeat for progressive or radical politics across the board, not to mention the growing severity of the exigencies of daily survival that has been one of its results. There is also the experience of institutionalization and bureaucratization of what were once grassroots campaigns without the emergence of viable popular alternatives, leading to unedifying face-offs between the co-opted and 'reasonable' rhetoric of inclusion used by 'community partnerships' and the critique of anti-capitalist factions, where the only common ground is the alienation of broad swathes of the people affected from the terms of the argument that is supposedly taking place in their name. Even this level of antagonism is largely cosmetic, as local social movements, for example in London, are too marginal to command the level of support that would be required to seriously contest the operative logic of profit in city management, now catalysed by the impending Olympics. Also, local issues are only sporadically of concern to them.

With the 'creative destruction' of the lower-income neighbourhoods operating on a scale of impunity that requires only defeat and distraction for its semblance of consensus, if any, what is the lookout for modes of organization that would have some purchase on the yawning divides not solely among anti-capitalist activists, liberals, and 'normal people' but precisely on those 'normal people' presumed to lack political agency because too deeply enmeshed to the problematics of survival? Widespread bitterness but pragmatic quiescence becomes the order of the day in those neighbourhoods which have experienced rapid and cumulative defeats – not solidarity and not combativeness, at least not in the majority of situations here in London. Is a politics that "emphas[izes] the circumstances of power – the circumstances of property – the circumstances of violence" just one extra unneeded worry for those thus demoralized, even and especially when such a politics is unbearably urgent?²

The fragmented and inauspicious terrain described so far admits of other considerations, considerations vital to extracting any sense of possibility from the self-fulfilling prophecies of capital. This may be that a fragile and difficult alterity, the plurality and opacity of social relations in today's 'deprived' urban area, can itself be a ground for action. The common experience of work, of poverty, of submission, compulsion and frustration is the banality that fixes the horizons for most, and this common horizon may be a catalyst, however ephemeral and awkward, for alliances that do not cement an identity but are produced in struggle. The struggle may be against specific circumstances, specific abuses, a range of political experiences or none may be brought to bear, but this common horizon, of difference and dispossession, of splintered and tenuous constellations, may be one way of thinking 'community' beyond either the

2 Ulrike Meinhof, quoted in *Ça sera beau (From Beyrouth with Love)*, a 2005 short film by Waël Nouredine about illicit life in Beirut.

bromides of ‘communitarianism’ or the oppositional ‘strategic essentialism’ posited by Spivak. The thought of such a provisionality needs to be articulated with an older idea of a ‘circulation of struggles’, in order to find out how struggle located in specificity and locality is instantly communicable due to its ubiquity as a phenomenon; for example, culture-led regeneration in Western metropolises. Each situated struggle, moreover, is already transversal, as a critique of urban re-structuring takes in a critique of authoritarian power structures, privatization, racism, ecological damage and deliberate blight, to name just a few.

The intention here of invoking ‘community’ as a term of analysis is its proximity to de-politicization, and the conceptual potential to re-define politics. A thinking of ‘community’ with and beyond its current instrumentalities can help formulate a notion of struggle rooted in mundane and proximate issues that can afford to be more rigorous than the ‘social factory’ as a way to re-situate struggle from the workplace to the whole of social production in all its particularity. These reflections arise from a period of engagement (ongoing) with a local campaign that organized around the ‘regeneration’ of a poor, ethnically mixed, socially polarized but increasingly gentrified borough of East London, and what such market-driven policies have meant for housing and social services provision to the mass of lower-income and migrant populations who are being ‘class-cleansed’ from an area where survival is increasingly beyond their reach. The campaign succeeded in highlighting these processes through a focus on two long-term local resources – an Italian cafe proprietor and a Caribbean groceries merchant – who had been evicted or were under threat of eviction due to local and central government’s support of real-estate speculation, which frequently entailed mysterious fires and the abandonment of whole city blocks to rot until a higher bidder came along.

The tactics of the campaign were fairly unequivocal, including occupation of contested spaces like the evicted cafe and boisterous neighbourhood assemblies, which prompted much attention and documentation from all levels of the media. But the political direction was not always so clear, with a liberal and populist rhetoric eventually coming to define the campaign’s communications and long-term planning, if not its aims and inspirations. This was less than surprising, considering the incredibly diverse and ad hoc composition of the campaign. Political experience ranged from local party politics to none, with the resulting divergencies in ideological commitments. This also drew on and contributed to the concertedly pragmatic tone of the mobilization, which never acquired the reflexive dimension that would have allowed it to adapt and expand to changing circumstances. Rather it dwindled to purely instrumental and/or de-politicized goals, i.e. fundraising for a remaining leaseholder’s legal campaign and writing incessant indignant letters to local councillors, on the part of one campaign member.

It was through this involvement that notions began to coalesce around the effect and affect of differences in instances of political activism that would initially seem to feed off the unity of the local or take the ‘community’ as a referent. This seemed to have further ramifications in the sense of whether differences could be most fruitfully interpreted as productive in theorizations of social change that pivot on the dialectic, e.g. Marx. Or whether capital can be retained as an axiomatic in the potentially more open-ended and destabilizing ontological vectors exemplified by post-Heideggerian writers of political philosophy like Giorgio Agamben and Jean-Luc Nancy – vectors

that however, especially in Nancy's case, still seem to have some contiguity with the frictional productivity of a dialectic, with his discussion of 'non-relation' as key to the limit-praxis of 'the inoperative community'. There is also a register in which we can speak of 'disappearance' as integral to both such an intricate re-/unworking of community as a form of co-existence and belonging and Marx's articulation of the proletariat as the class that realizes itself via the abolition of class society. Both seem to imply the movement of radical self-questioning or dissolution in order to bring about a future – a future that is immanent in the conditions and practices of the present.

With such provisional co-ordinates, using premises ever open to revision, I set out on the following course, making no premature claim to a definitive encounter with any of the thinker's deployment of 'community' but hoping to insert what I have managed to gather into an immanent critique-in-progress of a specific political experience.

All That Is Communal Melts Into Air

The task of reformulating a concept of 'community' that would extend this affective and critical precision and at the same time vitiate the reification of historically contingent relations implicit in the thought of community as a given and ahistorical entity, one that would project it as a site of resistance and production of forms of life, is an interesting one for contemporary political theory. It entails an investigation into community as a type of praxis whose principle is its own dissolution, and its existence at all as a facticity to be mediated, altered and perhaps undone. This seems to instigate a fertile junction with Marx's thesis that a fully human existence will only develop on the condition that the working class eliminate itself as a working class, triggering the disappearance of class society as a whole, and the economic delimitation of people's lives that such arrangements enforce.³ A community constituted by its separation from the means of production (the proletariat) has to eliminate its own conditions for existence – private property – before existence as such can be generalized.

This very Hegelian movement of sublation, preserving-by-overcoming, can appear schematic and totalizing, especially for the contemporary topology of marginal, incremental and largely reactive contestations of political or corporate will. But even without due care to dialectics, antagonism is plainly the basis of grassroots political activity. Groups coalesce with the agenda of negating a set of circumstances. The moment of constitution precedes formalization – over its duration, an informal group may link to others in circulation and escalation of the struggle, or it may turn into a more structured organization. Both imply going beyond the original set of circumstances that the group came together over the desire to negate, whether it's in organizational logistics or scope of action. But the constitutive moment of antagonism,

3 See Marx (1845): "The proletariat, on the contrary, is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat. It is the *negative* side of the antithesis, its restlessness within its very self, dissolved and self-dissolving private property". See also Holstein (1979): "The worker must destroy him or herself as a wage-earner in order to become a producer".

however subsumed in pragmatic adjustments or simple entropy, is the motor that drives the operation of the group and keeps it in oscillation between tight accord and unravelling, as objectives, results and perspectives shift. The 'community' in this instance becomes a double movement between eradication and preservation: the eradication of the bases of its coming-together and a preservation of the being-in-common that has been produced. Further, this movement clarifies the provisional, frail and quotidian structures of being-in-common, with the lack of a telos precisely its most radical premise:

Community . . . is ordinary being-together, without any assumption of a common identity, without any strong intensity, but exposed to banality, to the 'common' of existence: it is egalitarian in the sense that our existences are all equivalent, thus making the existing inequalities even more salient. (Nancy, 2005)

This appropriation of banality and facticity as the 'common' of existence seems to reverse the earlier-cited ubiquity of 'community' as a neutral(izing) designation for situated persons and interests – a community oriented to the 'common' is neither in thrall to an external set of determinants that forces a collaboration to happen as a means to other ends, as workplace teamwork might exemplify, nor the weekly convocation of a local football team, but a converging over the conditions of daily existence, held together *by* the conditions of daily existence – this might be the genesis of a political community. Nancy's speculation holds just as true, evidently, for a non-political community; the political consequences would consist in inhabiting this banality as open to intervention, the materialist approach signalled in the awareness that the 'common' is at stake. What is materialist about it is the erosion of the boundary between subjectivity and necessity, the self-cancelling shuttling between 'external' compulsion and 'inner' freedom that characterizes everyday life. The participants in a 'community of resistance' can briefly find the possibility of short-circuiting this dialectic (through direct action and other types of mobilization) while remaining circumscribed by it. The 'ordinary being-together', 'without any strong intensity' carries on as before, albeit charged with the experience that banality and politics happen in the same place, and are made of the same ingredients.

The constitutive experience of banality as the ground for a reformulation of 'community' could also draw an analogy with Marx's elaboration of the shift from in-itself to the for-itself of the proletariat in the revolutionary context. It also solicits a close parallel with Paolo Virno's (2004: 42) discussion of the 'right of resistance' in *A Grammar of the Multitude*, where it is defined as a practice belonging to a community assembled to defend either certain elements in common or its existence as such from attack by a centralized power. The 'right of resistance' here, as elsewhere in theorizations of the 'multitude', is structural rather than ideological: a 'right of resistance' may be deployed by the workers of a recuperated factory or by a Christian fundamentalist cult, for instance, as both could legitimately assert their defence of 'practices already rooted in society', marking the 'ambivalence' of the multitude that Virno also writes about. But those practices, because so inscribed, are deemed banal and nondescript until the point when they are threatened, and the threat conjures forth a community that was formerly content in the 'low-intensity' being in common – it is the threat which conjures forth a collective subject of resistance, the subject did not pre-exist the threat. If the community arises as part of a campaign to protect or preserve

practices or institutions, to expand possibilities of life for those marginalized by urban 'revitalization' or to maintain autonomy *per se*, then its existence as a community is predicated on negation – the elimination of the threat would in the same stroke eliminate the community. That is, unless, retaining Nancy's hypothesis, the sheer facticity of 'equivalent' (albeit situated and drastically unlike) existences is revealed as the only possible, if utterly vulnerable, means whereby community can not only come into existence but can only exist at the perpetual risk of dissolution.⁵

The 'being-in-common' of a community is defined by antagonism not merely to the pretexts of its coming together, but to the privatization of social experience. The community produces itself (it cannot be produced) as antagonistic in its collectivity, in its posing of another measure, yet it does not produce communal being, a substantive ground for being-together. Its togetherness is an excess, a byproduct of its antagonism. The relations that traverse it are embedded in banality, but not simply generated by proximity or contingency – they suspend proximity as found and imposed and craft relation out of non-relation and in reverse, just as all communication implies a gap, and the mode of the political is the production of what does not yet exist (Hedditch, 2004).⁶

Such an iteration of community, with its problematic connection to the notions of 'autonomy' or 'self-sufficiency' often considered attributes of communal formations, seems at this stage to be avoiding questions of organization. The movement of antagonistic constitution, the fluctuation between cohesion and dissolution marking the equivocal unity premised on antagonism, does not yet provide insight into how a community, even a community of non-relation, is organized or how the mode of organization affects its praxis – although the mode of organization can also be considered praxis. The implication of a community conceived and experienced in its absences, disjunctures and the mundanity of 'equivalent existences' without a notion of organization is that it is presented with a couple of routes to entropy: either accelerating internal divergences resulting in fissure or a crystallization that necessarily sets aside or erases the haphazard nature of its (antagonistic) moment, eventually ossifying and becoming irrelevant. The splintering of entropy is something different again from the 'rupture with proximity' spurring the moment of antagonism – it is a rupture with the 'non-relation' relations precariously established after this rupture, in the praxis of the community, a return to things as they were as other options start to seem untenable.

'Community' becomes a possibility that rests on a certain relationship to banality, fragmentation and powerlessness; the relationship is one of cognizance of these deficiencies *as* the 'common' – to be inhabited, mediated and worked upon to produce other forms of life. But this is a possibility that can always crumble. It can disappear back into the 'common', this time as indifference, or be channelled into institutional parleying and procedure that unmoors and exhaust the tentative articulation of community as a practical critique of the relationships that sustain it, a positive critique

5 "The structure has no other existence besides the movement of its own loss, and each term of the contradiction reflects this transitory mode of existence by its division in its being-for-the structure and its being-for-the-dissolution-of-the-structure" (Badiou, 1975, 'Theorie de Contradiction', cited in Bosteels, 2005).

6 On the gap implied in all communication, see Nancy (2005).

in antagonism. For a community to gain 'inclusion' could describe a 'vertical' factor gaining an advantage in this transversality of relations that unbalances the tendency to diffuse and expand, an influence of constriction and consolidation that marks the ceaseless operation of power relations.

Such a thinking of community as the production and alliance of singularities that do not lend themselves to representation can prefigure a 'potential politics' that stem from an engagement with immanence, with dailiness, as a striated and situated 'common' that produces singular beings and the relations/non-relation between them. This 'common' is also, to a large extent, an anomic condition that is the pretext of community formation – as a spur to antagonism, and the limit that it is perpetually facing. The 'being such' enlarges the potential field of communication and action, as it does not imply a preliminary ideological sifting in order to accede to community membership; it establishes difference as not simply the object of tolerance, but as a material condition of action and mobilization that does not subsist to be incorporated into the 'pluralist' homogeneity attendant on representational politics beholden to the market. The power of this irreducibility also signals a limit to a mobilized community, which, while appropriating its own 'being thus' is nonetheless planning to be effective in some particular context, which entails a broad commitment to a set of normative or strategic objectives that usually does, minimally, result in subsumption of difference to an overriding goal or framework of goals. Here the community can abolish itself by default, as it defers thematizing those relations until they dissolve in individual agendas or are displaced into the techniques of representation. With a view towards contemporary anti-capitalist campaigns and skirmishes, these are for the most part enacting the 'right of resistance' and/or a pure transformative impulse towards the intolerable. However, the political terrain is heterogeneous to the extreme, and the actual margin of change so small that numerous 'communities of action' are defeated by the temporal scope and reticence of wider support for their activities and dissolve back into the anomie that produced them. They may seek to abolish themselves (in the sense of abolishing the circumstances that bring them together), but without a strong local infrastructure of support and collaboration, or an appropriate political situation more broadly, the circumstances can take the initiative in the end.

Contort Yourself

Here is also a question of production. What is the community of singularities, the 'whatever' community, capable of producing? It is only capable of producing itself as a mobilization of its own anomic conditions so long before it lapses back into reproducing that anomie passively, either in dispersion or representation. It is acknowledged that Marx's call to the working class to abolish themselves as a working class, thereby laying the foundation for the first emergence of humanity, was a universal call. Each member of the category 'working-class', each 'working-class' group or circle has limited resources and cannot make the revolution on their own. In today's conjuncture, the thoroughly networked and communicative collective subjects of resistance can only make the smallest intervention in the state of things globally, albeit there are more significant transitions locally. Yet the self-abolition of the working class

seems more remote than ever, not counting its eradication in the formulae of immaterial labour theorists. There is no contemporary usage of this term that is not problematic. The 'working class' is a category that, at baseline, simply includes all those who are compelled to exchange their labour for survival. And yet from the start the degree of autonomy in the terms of the exchange, and the measure of surplus value produced, inscribes a lot of analytical and practical complexity in the contemporary use of this term. There is also the discussion of debt and credit that prevails to exert discipline over and maintain the contours of the working-class once it's been shorn of any political or cultural connotations, which is explored well in see Loren Goldner's writing on 'fictitious capital'. For our purposes here, however, the problematic status of 'working-class' may point to transformations in capital, and in the constitution of struggles against it, but it does not point to its obsolescence.

What sort of collectivity, and what sort of temporality, is envisioned or assumed in working class self-abolition? Does it include the cognizance of anomic 'being-in-common' as the working-class condition, the salient condition that needs to be appropriated in the drive to refuse work, refuse value and create other relations, or, a different 'being-in-common' that can only be projected by utopia until it becomes praxis? Inasmuch as this 'being-in-common' does not accede to any extraneous or natural determinants, it also presents itself as socially and culturally produced, and as such, always political, and always the ground of contestation.

The 'common' is a ground of potential politics, while the community in relation to this ground cannot guarantee, or exist towards, a politics – its constitution is simply a movement of appropriation of this 'common' in all its unpredictability and occasional futility. The self-abolition of the working-class is a determinate objective realized through working-class self-activity. Yet the self-activity of a community mediated by the facticity of what Giorgio Agamben calls 'whatever being' is also performing a movement of dissolution, but along a different axis, a movement of dissolution oscillating between the 'not-yet' and 'never-was' of its anomic circumstance. Just as the horizon of self-abolition is the existence of a 'truly human community' (this at a level of abstraction of course which is rhetorical, hence cannot account for the internal differentiation of the movement of change or the instigators of it), the premise of a 'truly human community' impels the formation of a 'whatever community' internally, a premise that sustains internal variation and drift even as it pits itself as a conflictual unity against something in particular.

However, the precept of self-abolition and the auto-destructive tendencies of the 'inoperative community' in action (such an understanding of community applied to groupings in other situations may yield other analyses) may seem to be incompatible. Whereas the former presupposes an operative unification at the level of class interests and an agreement on the necessary preconditions to make a revolution in order to render those interests obsolete, the latter can only generate ephemeral agreements in the oscillation between mobilization and acquiescence to its anomic state. The contradictions of a community based on the incommensurability of 'being thus' can be incredibly productive, but can likewise act to thwart a reflexivity in response to questions of organization and the exercise of power, as well as triggering a reverse momentum that can either dissolve the community or overdetermine it vis-à-vis

established political channels. It also enacts the limitations implicit in the clarion call of Marx's discussion of self-abolition: the eradication of the grounds of unity (exploitation) does not necessarily prompt a negative dialectic of unity, particularly when this unity is seen sceptically in the first place.

It is difficult, at least in the present day, to imagine a group organizing around the elimination of the conditions of its existence, i.e. capital; they could, more plausibly, organize around certain objectionable facets of those conditions, and perhaps, in this way, acquire enough momentum to start interrogating the structural supports of those conditions more profoundly. That this rarely happens without shifting the whole endeavour to a level of abstraction that is simply ineffectual has been observed regularly. But it could also be argued that this is a risk that the systematic and broad level of contestation that any approach towards 'self-abolition' must assume, an escalation in the face of impossibility and irrelevance. It may be the crucial difference between a slow and emergent movement that de-legitimizes local power structures while gradually inventing modes of co-operation less mediated by money/the state and an isolated minority holding local power structures to a democratic standard those structures themselves have long de facto abandoned.

But the apparent incompatibility may have different implications in practice. The Marxian dialectics of 'self-abolition' offers the grounding political dimension of 'circumstances of power – circumstances of property' earlier cited to the very nuanced and generative level of abstraction where Nancy and Agamben operate, and to mitigate their more aporetic tendencies in the elaboration of a 'potential politics'. Working in this intersection could develop a materialist account capable of encompassing both struggle and the banality and vulnerability-in-common of an 'inoperative community'; how it is powerful, how it is weak; how it may be resistant and how it may be reactionary. It would also examine the economic and social circumstances that block the possibility of catalyzing forms of social production relying neither on identity nor the ambiguous resistance of being-in-common. This is perhaps the secret thought of the 'self-abolishing' community.

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