

# Biocommunism or Beyond the Biopolitical Paradigm

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Biopolitics is often understood as a form of power that is exercised over a population, not over people. Within this paradigm, population is understood objectively as wealth, manpower, labour capacity, but also demographically as the object of statistical analysis. If biocommunism is to gain any political significance, if it is to become not only the result of the birth of biopower, but also an active and actual agent of new political devices, then it must face the problem of “population empowerment”. In this process of empowerment, “power over life” is to be transformed into “the power of life itself”. Biocommunism would therefore be a “community of life” which is intended to overcome immunological barriers. Within biocommunism life is the only “value” that should be shared. In this article I develop the thesis, according to which the “immune” is not simply different from the “common” but is its opposite.

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## Communism Desire

In order to understand the idea of communism, at the starting point I would like to apply the formula of Kantian transcendentalism. For Kant the whole interest of humane reason, whether speculative or practical, is concentrated in the three following questions: (1) What can I know? (2) What ought I do? (3) What may I hope? For Kant, these three questions sum up in one question: What is man (Heidegger, ([1929]1990)? Following this path, in my speech, I will try to answer three symmetrical questions, namely; (1) Who is a communist? — or, better, in the plural form: Who *are* communists? (2) What does a communist want? What are his/her hopes?—or better yet: What are communists hoping for? In stronger terms: what do they desire? And last but not least question: (3) what is the anticipated effect of political and intellectual engagement of a communist? This is idea of applying the Kantian model of the three transcendental questions, albeit in a non-classical order. I will try to reformulate these three questions and possible answers to them in the context of biopolitics and biopower.

One of the key problems I would like to think about is the insight of the following form: if the communists desire to change the world in order to become a transformed oneself, then, on what conditions would such a global change of the world, and at the same time forms of living, the total transformation the world of life and life itself, be possible? What does this change mean to life at all? What kind of life is a communist striving for? What life does a communist want at all?

At the beginning I contrast the concept of biocommunism with two other communist positions. On the one hand, I oppose biocommunism with “hermeneutic communism” of Gianni Vattimo, but on the other, with

“idealistic communism” of Alain Badiou.

Gianni Vattimo adopted an anti-foundationalist stance drawn from the hermeneutic thought of Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty. Hermeneutic communism leaves aside the ideal of development and the general call for revolution; it relies on interpretation rather than truth (Vattimo & Zabala, 2011). At the same time hermeneutic communism still motivates a resistance to capitalism’s inequalities yet intervenes against violence and authoritarianism by emphasizing the interpretative nature of truth. I have no conviction for communism understood in this way. Communism without ontological legitimacy, without revolutionary intentions is not communism at all. Instead, hermeneutic communism is simply the acceptance of the capitalist *status quo*. In the first chapter of the famous book of György Lukács from 1923 entitled *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Lukács, [1923] 1967), we find a chapter dedicated to the question: what orthodox Marxism consists of? An important answer we find in the book is still valid: to preserve the revolutionary intentions of Marx. This answer still remains actual to us. “Weak thought” is trying to respond to a new ontology after the desubstantialization of the world. However, it is not effective in this endeavour. “Weak thought” not only does not answer the question of how to be a post-metaphysical thinker who does not use the old metaphysical dictionary. It does much more: it leads to a situation in which postmodernism, postmetaphysics, and postpolicy become synonymous here. In my view, communism not only needs a moment of foundation, it creates new foundations.

From these reasons perhaps we should agree with Jodi Dean, who claims that some on the Left today dismiss the communist horizon as a lost horizon (Dean, 2012). Jodi Dean says explicitly: there is a general assumption shared by leftists who embrace a generic post-capitalism but avoid a more militant anti-capitalism. The power of the return of communism stands or falls on its capacity to inspire large-scale organized collective struggle toward a political goal. For over thirty years, the Left has avoided such an anti-capitalist impulse, accepting instead liberal notions of goals and free choices that are strictly a part of individual lifestyle and social-democratic claims that history already solved basic problems of distribution with the compromise of regulated markets and welfare states. The Left failed to defend a vision of a better world, an egalitarian world of common production by and for the collective people. Instead submitting to the temptations of individualism, consumerism, competition, privilege, and proceeding as if there really were no alternatives to state that rule in the interests of markets.

As far as the communism of ideas is concerned, things get more complicated. I assume that the central proposition belonging to what Alain Badiou calls the “communist hypothesis” is the primacy of the relationship between idea and subjectivity, and the intrinsically idealistic character of the communist identity (Badiou, 2010). The key question is: what makes a communist a subject different from others? A simple answer would suggest that a communist subject is established by his or her commitment to a certain idea or truth. The ideal object of the communist desire is not something that is part of the existing state of affairs. On the contrary, communism is the real movement overcoming the existing state of affairs. But what this truth really means for idealistically oriented communist? Well, it means that the idea of communism becomes meaningless if its significance is the same as the idea of Property, or the idea of the Pure Market, which are nevertheless ideas in the same ontological sense.

Badiou certainly has a tendency to suggest that communism is the only Idea in the true sense of the term. This idea reveals its true character only to a subject who desires its realization. Let me repeat this again—the

communists' desire is to change the whole world. What means above all to change the social and historical form of world, the ensemble of social practices of communication. A new communist man's life will emerge, inasmuch as this life is nothing other than the immanent result of its own conditions or relations. But to change the world is uninteresting if it does not lead to new practices of life in which the human becomes different, reversing the characteristics of life under capitalism.

Well, what is the problem with this idealistic position? The basic problem is related to some performative contradiction. We do not know what is the premise and what is the consequence (effect) in this process of self-emancipation of life. The emergence of the "new humane or post-humane life" is possible only if the world is changed, but the world can be changed only if the subjects are extracting themselves, emancipating themselves from the determinations of the existing world and existing practices, or at least engaged in a process of self-emancipation.

### Communism of the Bare Life

Let us assume, at this stage of our considerations, the initial hypothesis is that communist subjects commit themselves in the critique of their individualistic self, their desire for power, domination, inequality, in order to become the agent of a collective transformation of the world whose immanent result will be a change of their own lives and practices. What does that mean for our attempt at reformulating communism to biocommunism? In what sense biocommunism would likely avoid the pitfall of being caught by liberal paralysis so characteristic to hermeneutic communism, and the pitfall of being caught by platonic elevation of idea so characteristic to idealistic communism?

I would begin by saying that biocommunism reverses the liberal blackmail revealing itself in the formula "there is no alternative" which makes of communism a "red threat" associated with the risk of violence and the attack on liberal democracy. Biocommunism says that there is no alternative to community of living. From the biocommunism point of view, life is never owned, instead, life is shared with others. Privatisation of life, and the more so its subsumption to capital would be the greatest crime against life itself. In this sense, biocommunism would be gaining ontological foundation and, at the same time, would be faithful to the earthly life and would not be seeking platonic justification.

How can we reformulate the main idea (and desire) of communism in the world of biopolitics? I think it can be made as follows. If we referred to the known distinction of Giorgio Agamben between two meanings of the word "life", that is *zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group, we would have to say that biocommunism has no other desire except persisting on the position of *zoē* (bare life), without the need to transform into *bios*. It would thus entail, that biocommunism is de facto *zoē*-communism defending bare life, common life, simple life—from transforming into *bios* which in turn, is a life aspiring to be more than life (Agamben, 1998).

In other words, still within the Agamben's vocabulary, if politics were the place in which life had to transform itself into a good life, bare life recognizes the value in itself without this transformation. Agamben suggests, that "There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion" (Agamben, 1998, p. 8). *Zoē*-communism would suggest an opposing formula, whereby there is politics because any living being does not seclude itself in a separate form of life added to bare life. For

*zoē*-communist *bios* was never the object of desire.

Let's look at this problem in a different way. Agamben adds, that Foucauldian thesis about domination of biopolitics in modernity, will have to be corrected or, at least, completed, in the sense that what characterizes modern politics is not so much the inclusion of *zoē* in the *polis*, but it is the elevation of *zoē* to the level of *bios*. For Agamben, if anything characterizes modernity, it is that modern subject presents itself, from the beginning, as a vindication of *zoē*, and that it is constantly trying to transform its own "bare life" into a way of life and to find, so to speak, the *bios* of *zoē* (Agamben, 1998, p. 11). It is not strange, therefore, that the opposing tendency, strictly bio-communist, related to seeking *bios* in *zoē*, is considered a threat.

Agamben reminds us that in contrasting the "beautiful day" (*euēmeria*) of simple life with the "great difficulty" of political *bios*, Aristotle may well have given the most impressive formulation to the aporia that lies at the foundation of Western politics. It is, however, not as aporetic for biocommunism as it is a challenge: to never turn away from the "beautiful day" of bare life in order to trade it for a form of great difficulty of political *bios*. Perhaps, every society sets limits; every society decides what the bare life is. It is even possible that this limit has done nothing but extend itself in the history of the West and has now—in the new biopolitical horizon—moved inside every human life and every citizen. However, contrary to many Agamben's exemplifications, we need demonstrative examples for "life that does always deserve to live". In the simplest interpretation: biocommunist engages in justification of the thesis that the concept of "life devoid of value" (or "life unworthy of being lived") could never happen.

One important remark at the end of this part of the discussion. Well, biocommunism as I understand it here is no suggestion to return to the "state of nature" or praise natural life. On the contrary, it is an encouragement to transcend the opposition and division into *bios* and *zoē* and to go beyond the understanding of life as a "biological fact" or the subjective feeling (experience) of life. Certainly, the constant attitude in our culture is in which life is never defined as such but is articulated and divided into *bios* and *zoē*, politically qualified life and bare life, public life and private life, vegetative life and a life of relation. What means that each of the partitions is determinable only in its relation to the others (Agamben, 2015, p. 20).

What does this permanent division in our culture mean? The conventional notion of life—not "a life," but "life" in general—is perceived as a "scientific fact", which has no relationship with the experience of the singular living person. It is something anonymous and generic, which can designate at times—an organism, collection of cells, a person, a bear, an embryo. It is this "scientific fact". "Life" today has more to do with survival than with the vitality or form of life of the individual or pseudo-use of life in every-day-living. On the other hand, each of us is the subject of the experience of his/her own intimate life, understood not so much as a raw fact, but as a "travel vehicle" enabling the creation of biography and individual experience. Thanks to this vehicle—bare life, we observe our life in its most intimate events such as nutrition, digestion, urination, defecation, sleep, sexuality. One understanding of life is here against the other understanding or one's life becomes a supplement of the second, i.e. its rest.

The life as understood in biocommunism is not reducible to either of the opposed terms, neither to the idiocy of private life nor to the uncertain prestige of public life, and it indeed calls into question the very possibility of distinguishing them. Biocommunism does not carry the promise of a new ontological opening, it is rather a return to the old philosophical problem that persecutes human thought from Aristotle to Heidegger, namely: what does it mean "to existence"? Existence—that concept that is in every sense fundamental for the philosophy of the West—perhaps has to do constitutively with life. "To be—we read in Aristotle—for the

living means to live” (Aristotle, 1984). On the threshold of the modern world, Nietzsche specifies: “Being: we have no other representation of it than the fact of living. How could that which is dead have being” (Nietzsche, 1883/1968, p. 7). Finally, in a world that knows not only artificial intelligence but also artificial life, Robert Nozick comes up with an “experience machine” that would give us any experience we desired. This machine has to force us to imagine a man who would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to his brain. Nozick asks us a simple question: Should we plug into this machine for life, preprogramming our life’s experiences? Nozick already knows that “experience machine” could not live our lives for us. The author of *Anarchy, State and Utopia* writes openly: “Perhaps what we desire is to live (an active verb) ourselves, in contact with reality. (And this, machines cannot do for us.)” (Nozick, [1974] 2013, p. 60).

Biocommunism only emphasizes this fundamental fact: life is revealing one’s existence to others. Biocommunism talks about a bare life that is intercourse: sharing life in the community of many lives that exhibit (reveal) each other. Biocommunism merely articulates the interweaving of being and living. In essence, it states that the rethinking of this connection is certainly the main task of thought and of politics today (Agamben, 2015).

### Communism of Population

Let us inspect the very same problem from Foucault’s perspective. Let us consider the very same problem of biocommunism not from the perspective of bare life but from the position of the central for the concept of biopower category of population. Foucault believes that one of the basic phenomena of the nineteenth century was what might be called “power’s hold over life” (Foucault, 2003, pp. 239-265). What Foucault means by that is that the acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being, is that “the biological” came under State control. There was a certain tendency that leads to what might be termed “state control of the biological”. Unlike discipline, which is addressed to bodies, the new non-disciplinary power is applied not to “man-as-body” but to the “living man”, to “man-as-having-being”, to “man-as-species”. To be more specific, Foucault would say that discipline tries to rule “a multiplicity of men”.

After a first capturing of power over the body in “an individualizing mode”, we have a second capturing of power that is not individualizing but massifying, that is directed not at “man-as-body” but at “man-as-species”. Simultaneously to the anatomo-politics of the human body established in the course of the eighteenth century, we have, at the end of that century, the emergence of something that is no longer an anatomo-politics of the human body, but what Foucault would call a “biopolitics” of the human race. With all the risk of using this term “race”, Foucault, in his analytical approach adds that at the end of the eighteenth century, it was not epidemics that were the issue, but something else—what might broadly be called endemics, or in other words, the form, nature, extension, duration, and intensity of the illnesses prevalent in a population or race (Foucault, 2003, pp. 254-257).

All the above history of the birth of biopolitics means that one of the great innovations in the techniques of power in the eighteenth century was the emergence of “population” as an economic and political problem. But what does the term “population” mean? Well, population means many things at the same time. There is population as wealth, population as manpower or labour capacity, or population balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded. In simplest interpretation, new power regimes perceived that they were not dealing with subjects, or even with a “people”, but with a “population”, “man-as-species”, with its specific phenomena and its peculiar variables: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health,

frequency of illnesses, patterns of diet and habitation (Foucault, 1978, pp. 25-54). Finally, Foucault in lectures from the series *Security, Territory, Population*, bonds the birth of modernity with thinking in terms of population, writing quite openly: “Population is undoubtedly an idea and a reality that is absolutely modern in relation to the functioning of political power, but also in relation to knowledge and political theory, prior to the eighteenth century” (Foucault, 2007, p. 11).

What does this relationship between population and modernity mean? Well, it means that the population as a new collective subject is foreign to the juridical and political thought of earlier centuries. Foucault insightfully adds that the population covers the old notion of people, but in such a way that in comparison with that notion the phenomena are spread out, some levels being retained while others are not, or are considered differently. Hunger and poverty are no longer a moral or personal phenomenon, but a purely economic phenomenon related to the business cycles of grain and grain prices. Is there a group of people in society who don't want to accept this new liberal order, liberal governmentality? Yes, these people exist and will become a new source of revolt in the future. The people comprises those who conduct themselves in relation to the management of the population, at the level of the population, as if they were not part of the population as a collective subject-object, as if they put themselves outside of it, and consequently the people is those who, refusing to be the population, disrupt the system.

What final conclusion should we derive from situating population at the centre of politics? It is perhaps a sad, or at least melancholic conclusion, namely, that population in this interpretation is never the subject but always the object of regulations. It is never a power of life but it is power over life. Biocommunity, even if it is implicated by the new strategy of power, it is more so as the effect, or even a “by-product” of the new forms of management rather than its prerequisite. Foucault connects, in open way, the birth of liberalism with the birth of biopolitics, writing explicitly that it is only when we understand what is at stake in the regime of liberalism—as opposed to *Laraison d'État*, only when we learn what liberalism was, we will be able to grasp what biopolitics is (Foucault, 2008, pp. 1-25).

What means this surprisingly process of reducing political categories to “raw facts” and seeing them as a new field of political regulation? Is biopolitics a naturalized policy, i.e. politics in nature, or, on the contrary, is it politicized nature, nature in politics, nature raised to the level of “institutional facts”? Well, for now, let's just note that to say that population is a natural phenomenon that cannot be changed by decree does not mean, however, that it is an inaccessible and impenetrable nature, quite the contrary—in that the naturalness identified in the fact of population is constantly accessible to agents and techniques of transformation.

The question that arises here is: why study biopolitics as the main instrument of liberalism in the relation to population? The simplest of Foucault's answers would be that the essential issue in the establishment of the liberal “art of government” is the introduction of economy into political practice. To govern a state will therefore mean to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of supervision and control as attentive as that of ancient head of a family over his household and goods. The word “economy”, which in the sixteenth century signified a form of government, comes in the eighteenth century to designate a level of reality, a field of intervention, through a series of complex processes that Foucault regards as fundamental to history (Foucault, [1979] 2000, pp. 298-325).

The final fragments of Foucault's lectures *Security, Territory, Population* announce the arrival of the day of revolution, the day when the strict “rights of the people” will collide with the calculated “law of the

population”. Foucault leaves us no illusions about the necessary coming of a day of revolution:

There must be a moment when, breaking all the bonds of obedience, the population will really have the right, not in juridical terms, but in terms of essential and fundamental rights, to break any bonds of obedience it has with the state and, rising up against it, to say: My law, the law of my own requirements, the law of my very nature as population, the law of my basic needs, must replace the rules of obedience. Consequently, there is an eschatology that will take the form of the absolute right to revolt, to insurrection, and to breaking all the bonds of obedience: the right to revolution itself. (Foucault, 2007, p. 356)

It is a revolution of life itself, which no longer wants to be raw material for further political regulation!

Let me try to summarise this part. Biopolitics, in Foucauldian terms, is understood as a form of power that is exercised over a population, “man-as-having-being”, “man-as-species”, not over people. Within this paradigm, population is understood objectively as wealth, labour capacity, but also demographically as the object of statistical analysis, with specific phenomena and its peculiar variables. At this point, my thesis is as follows: if biocommunism is to gain any political significance, if it is to become not only the result of the birth of biopower, but also an active and actual agent of new political devices, then it must face the problem of “population empowerment”. In this process of empowerment, “power over life” is to be transformed into “the power of life itself”. If we understand biopower by strategies of regulating life, and biopolitics as tactics of resistance to these operations, biocommunism would be a policy of life directed against bio-power.

What else does that mean? I claim that the stake of bio-communism is not humanity and reactivation of neo-humanism, but life and reactivation of open communist vitalism. For a communist, life is power and knowledge is a force that tries to regulate that power. Knowledge always assumes life and has its own interest in preserving life, which every being wants to store in its own existence. Communism, or, the “expected biocommunism”, is the communism that would have to become a significant reaction to the doctrine of life serving as machinery for its constant control and transformation into non-life, i.e. the form of death. I oppose biocommunism with thanatopolitics or necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003, pp. 11-40). Perhaps this communism would take a form that would no longer be the communism of the intellect (common collective reason, common sense), nor the communism of the will or idea, nor the communism of abstract equality, nor even the communism of the common commodity, communism of common property, but rather communism of shared common life.

### **From Geontopower to Eco-communism**

Rosi Braidotti concludes that “bio-power and necro-politics are two sides of the same coin” (Braidotti, 2007, p. 122). Elizabeth A. Povinelli says something even more ambiguous that current social formations seem to indicate a return to sovereign power (Povinelli, 2016). But these manifestations of a new hard sovereign power are deeply insinuated in operations of biopower. According to Povinelli, this fact blurs a great divide that separates the current regime of biopolitics from the ancient order of sovereignty. What does it mean? Well, it means that sovereignty does not dialectically unfold into disciplinary power and disciplinary power into biopolitics. Rather, all three formations of power are always co-present, although how they are arranged and expressed relative to each other vary across social time and space.

That is why she proposes to replace the concept of biopower by the term—geontological power, or geontopower. The simplest way of sketching the difference between geontopower and biopower is that the former does not operate through the governance of life and the tactics of death but is rather a set of discourse,

affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife. Povinelli emphasizes that she decided to retain the term “gerontology” and its cognates, such as geontopower, because she wanted to “intensify the contrasting components of nonlife (*geos*) and being (ontology) currently in play in the late liberal governance of difference and markets” (Povinelli, 2016, p. 18).

The main problem with biopower is that all three formations of Foucault’s analysis—sovereign power, disciplinary power, and biopower—work as long as we continue to conceptualize humans as “living things” and as long as humans “continue to exist”. According to Povinelli, however, we are in a completely different situation today, an apocalyptic situation that forces us to think about “life after warming”, and to face the concept of the “uninhabitable Earth”, i.e. “life after Anthropocene” and the real possibility of the destruction of the all Globe. Povinelli insists that a new drama, not the drama of life and death, but “a form of death that begins and ends in Nonlife—namely the extinction of humans, biological life, and, as it is often put, the planet itself—which takes us to a time before the life and death of individuals and species, a time of the *geos*, of soullessness (Povinelli, 2016, p. 22). For Povinelli, the main equation that rules no longer within biopolitics but geontopower is the formula: Life (Life{birth, growth, reproduction}v. Death) *versus* Nonlife.

To speak openly, I do not share these apocalyptic and thanatological beliefs. I will say more: this is not a strategy appropriate for biocommunism, which is the main commitment is to go beyond the apocalyptic image. The task of the biocommunism is to rethink the current position on apocalyptic discourse. Since Hegel, the idea of “the end” in philosophy has made a career. “The end of history” became a condition for obtaining complete knowledge, and death became a condition of truth. After Hegel, philosophy only conquered stakes; philosophers were looking for the final scenario of the end. The differences in diagnosis concerned the proper territory of the end—economics, time, history, life, humanity, nature. Biocommunism is such a thinking platform that allows you to answer the question how we can talk about various visions of the “end” today. Is it possible the discourse about the end beyond “apocalyptic fever” and “eschatological indifference”? Is there any other narrative about biocapital, less focused on exploitation and productivity, and more on sustainability approach?

Kohei Saito notices that for quite a long time, the term “Marx’s ecology” was regarded as oxymoronic (Saito, 2016; Saito, 2019, pp. 11-21). Not just critics of Marx but even many self-proclaimed Marxists believed that Marx presupposed unlimited economic and technological developments as a natural law of history and propagated the absolute mastery of nature. In this vein, John Passmore went so far as to write that “nothing could be more ecologically damaging than the Hegelian-Marxist doctrine” (Passmore, 1981, p. 185). In last decades years, the critique against Marx’s “Prometheanism”, or “hyperindustrialism”, according to which unlimited technological development under capitalism allows humans to arbitrarily manipulate external nature, became a part of common sense. Marx historical materialism, it was said, uncritically praised the progress of technology and productive forces under capitalism and anticipated, based on this premise, that communism would solve every negative aspect of modern industry simply because it would realize the full potential of productive forces through the radical social appropriation of the means of production that were monopolized by the capitalist class.

Perhaps it’s time to change this interpretation, the narrative. Perhaps it’s time to recognise in the Nature, in the “raw material” world, a place of resistance against capital, where the contradictions of capitalism are manifested most clearly. Perhaps it’s time for “new reading of Marx”, “less productive” and “more ecological”



Marx, for whom, ecology not only constitutes an immanent element for his economic system. The critique of bio-economics, in this “new reading”, would be critique of the degradation of the natural environment as a manifestation of the contradictions of capitalism. In this “new reading” critique of the degradation of the natural environment is only the open manifestation of the contradictions of capital. Bio-economical critique at the same time would reveal destruction of nature under capitalism as a manifestation of the discrepancy arising from the capitalist formal transformation of nature. The “material” (*Stoff*), bare-life, no-humane factors would be here a central category in critical project and its principal aim would conceive the role of “material” in its relation to economic “pure forms”.

### Beyond Bio-capital

Let me begin just again by stating the obvious. Biopower was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism which would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. In biopolitical regimes of capitalism we are approaching a logical synthesis of biology and economy. Politics will more and more have to be capable of achieving this synthesis, which may only be in its first stages today, but which still allows one to recognize the interdependence of the forces of biology and economy as an inevitable fact.

By the same time allow me to make a contradictory comment. All known analyses of capitalism from Karl Marx to accelerationist manifestos drifted between recognition of capitalism as a power releasing excitation and production and recognition in it the machinery for extermination. Even in the Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* the bourgeoisie alone has the power of agency (Marx & Engels, [1848] 2008). We still remember the words:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.[...] All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. (Marx & Engels, [1848] 2008, p. 10)

The bourgeoisie is the agent of a civilization of the universal whose cities, factories, railroads, ships, and telegraphs are breaking down all barriers of caste and nation and wiping from the earth all traces of primitive savagery and peasant backwardness. It is also the agent of its own destruction, too imbued with its own tragic power to evade the destiny that compels it to keep revolutionizing the instruments of production and unchain the forces that are to drag it down into the abyss. In effect the Marx’s *Manifesto* is—to quote a known formula—“an act of faith in the suicide of the bourgeoisie” (Rancière, 2004, p. 124).

What does this mean for the cause of communism? If the *Communist Manifesto* displays an optimism out of proportion to the communist experience of its authors, it is precisely because the possibility of communism is founded in the text not on the power of a proletariat still absent from the scene, but on the power of the bourgeoisie. It shifts the whole force of development and contradiction to bourgeois action and passion. As Jacques Rancière argues convincingly, “it should be said that the power that invents the communist spectre is the same power that invented the railroads” (Rancière, 2004, p. 123). The bourgeoisie is afraid because it recognizes the proletariat more or less confusedly as its own double, the other side of the pact it sealed with the god—or devil—of the productive forces. Its fear is still another manifestation of its power. If bourgeois passion sustains the existence of communism, this is because bourgeois action sustains the existence of the proletariat.

The bourgeoisie is revolutionary not just because it created large-scale industry but also because it is

already the movement dissolving all classes—all fixed, ossified determinations. It is already the class that is a non-class, the tragic identity of production and destruction. Simply the double or reverse side of the bourgeois revolution, the proletariat merely sanctions this identity of life and death. Its action is not dialectical but simply materialist. The gravedigger sanctions the completion of the bourgeois revolution.

What this advantage of bourgeois over proletariat means for biocommunism? According to Marx, communism is “only” the real movement that abolishes the present state of things. And these proletarians who “have nothing to lose but their chains” will simply be transforming their own condition into a general social condition when they eliminate property. Proletariat, which is equipped only in the power of its own body is here yet another name for what we have called bare life, “population”, “living man”, “man-as-having-being”, “man-as-species”. The question, therefore, is whether this proletariat can only wait for revaluation of all values and all forces and economic factors in such a way that all of them finally allow biocommunism to reveal itself? Yet another question is whether today’s affective capitalism, cognitive capitalism, or communicative capitalism allow for such a revelation? These are, of course, the question that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri are asking us in magnificent tetralogy about the exodus, of the multitude from the empire (Negri & Hardt, 2000; 2004; 2009; 2017).

Negri and Hardt writes openly that the transformation of constituent power into a plural, continuous process has been deepened through its immersion in biopolitics: the content of constituent power tends to become life itself. Protesters and activists not only demand increased income and enhanced welfare services but also shine a light on the fact that all life is subject to threat and exploitation (Negri & Hardt, 2017). Let us assume that it is so, i.e. that instead of constitutive power we introduce the concept of multiplicity. But still, the question remains, what makes this concept so attractive? Why first methodological principle of political realism, remains imperative: begins with the multitude? The simplest answer to this question is: multitude, understood as a political project, is the hinge between the plural social ontology and the possibility of a real democracy. The uniqueness of this concept of multitudes results from the fact that it is an intermediary between ontology and politics.

The question we now need to ask is, whether empowerment of population is possible at all? What conditions cease the population to be a passive mass of life, biocapital, and becomes an active agent and subject of politics, claiming biocommunism as its natural environment for growth. The question to be asked is also: is the central category of Negri and Hardt—a multitude, really a category we can trust to build future biocommunism? Does multitude differ qualitatively from other categories that surround them such as—mass, mob, population, plebs?

Communism is still the major question and the principal experience and it will be so as long as we do not stop recognizing ourselves in the belief in the possibility of another society and another life. What is this faith? What is this another life like? What is this another society like? Well, it is society in which bare life does not have to play the role of a biocapital. It is also the faith in population that needs to be controlled by no bioeconomic apparatus. Certainly, the history of capitalism is the history of the world’s population being transformed into proletariat. But with the recent integration of post-communist countries and the rise of China and India, the global proletariat has seen a “great doubling”, with 1.5 billion more people now reliant upon waged work for survival. What does it mean? Well, that means that with the emergence of the proletariat, there also comes a new form of unemployment. In fact, unemployment as we understand it today was an invention of capitalism. Perhaps there are reasons to speak that for the first time in history a new “surplus population” emerges that is unable to find waged work. But what is this “surplus population”? Is it the future, tomorrow

face of biocommunist multitude?

The sequence Marx envisaged in connection with the surplus population was like this: (1) competition forces mechanisation and automation; (2) automation depresses the average rate of profit, because businesses extract surplus value from humans not machines; (3) restoration of the rate of profit requires an increasingly large reserve army of the unemployed or redundant (surplus) population. Thus, Marx was able to write that mechanisation threw labourers on the pavement. Marxist unemployment is essentially technologically-caused unemployment. The reserve army of the unemployed is temporarily absorbed in bursts of high prosperity, but its longer-term effect is to produce ever rising levels of pauperisation. Thus, for Marx, the sequence was exactly opposite to the classical story: mechanisation might create a febrile prosperity in short-run, but it would be at the expense of long-run degradation. Marx denied that any compensatory processes were at work, either in the short-run or the long run. The story Marx told has no happy ending for the workers. Under the spur of competition, individual companies are compelled to invest as much of their profits as possible in labour saving—that is, cost-cutting—equipment. But increased mechanisation doesn't benefit capitalists as a class. There is a temporary advantage for the first mover: rushing down on declining average cost curves and annihilating the weaker firms on the way. But competition rapidly eliminates any temporary super-profit by diffusing the new technology. So the problem of keeping up the profit rate is not solved, only postponed (Skidelsky, 2018).

The problem of how to define the “surplus population” is one which is often assumed away in the literature. If the surplus is defined in terms of waged versus non-waged, then are working prison populations not part of the surplus? What about the vast amounts of informal labour that works for a wage and produces for a market? Other problems arise if one defines the surplus in terms of productive and unproductive labour. In particular, one is led to the conclusion Negri and Hardt draw that since socially productive labour exists everywhere under conditions of post-Fordism, the term “surplus population” no longer has meaning (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 131). Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams reject that conclusion and attempt to demonstrate here that the concept still has important analytical and explanatory utility. They believe that the “surplus population” can be defined as those who are outside of waged labour under capitalist conditions of production. The latter qualification means that most informal labour, not under capitalist conditions of production, is included in the category (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p. 91). It is regrettable to say that larger surpluses of labour are beneficial to capitalist interests because capital requires a particular type of surplus population: cheap, docile and pliable. These are the reasons behind a gradual drive to incorporate the world's population into a global labour force.

In a new situation of “surplus population” the extended working class comprises all those having routine jobs, including lower-white-collar and service workers as well as the blue-collar working class. Beverly J. Silver argues that a single homogeneous world working class with similar conditions of work and life is in the process of formation. In the words current transnational processes are resulting in the accelerated division of the world into a global bourgeoisie or transnational capitalist class and a global proletariat. This transnational capitalist class is increasingly both a “class-in-itself” and “for itself” pursuing a class project of capitalist globalization. The “transnational working class”, while “not yet a class-for-itself”, is increasingly “a class-in-itself”, thus providing the objective basis for labor internationalism (Silver, 2003). I am not sure to what extent this “global proletariat” is growing into a real political force? To what extent is it the effect and “material” supplying capitalism machinery, and to what extent is it an active force that can change it?

### Biocommunism of Being-in-common

Is it then possible to create a biopolitical community that will come, coming community? To answer this question, let us begin with a few remarks made by Roberto Esposito. According to him there is one line of reasoning according to which biopolitics of liberalism and totalitarian biopolitics are oppositional only in appearance (Esposito, 2010). For the liberal view the body is owned by the person who dwells inside it. This aspect alone underscores the radical distance and fundamental difference of liberalism from Nazi biocracy: while the latter works on the human species as a whole, the former pertains only to the individual. While Nazism assigned ownership of the body to state sovereignty, the liberal conception assigned ownership to the person implanted inside the body. But this basic heterogeneity also provides a measure of the trait of symmetry, defined, for both, by a productivist view of life—a life made to serve in one case the superior destiny of the chosen race and, in the other, the maximum expansion of individual freedom (Esposito, 2010). Biopolitical corporealization of the person and spiritualistic personalization of the body are inscribed inside the same theoretical circle.

Is there, therefore, a line of thinking about body and life which would not fall into the trap of such a complex relation between Nazism and liberalism? Roberto Esposito claims that it isn't accidental that the beginning of liberal assumptions is entangled with a supposition that community is a "wider subjectivity". On the other hand, according to totalitarian politics, subject is only "reduced community". The truth is that these conceptions are united by the assumption that community is a "property" belonging to subjects that joins them together: an attribute, a definition, a predicate that qualifies them as belonging to the same totality, or as a "substance" that is produced by their union. Esposito claims, that the community remains doubly tied to the semantics of *proprium*. As dictionaries show, the first meaning of the noun *communitas*, is what becomes meaningful from the opposition to what is proper. In all neo-Latin languages, "common" (*commun*, *comun*, *kommuri*) is what is not proper. It is what belongs to more than one, to many or to everyone, and therefore is that which is "collective" in contrast to "individual" (Esposito, 2008). On the other hand, there is yet compelling etymology of old latin *moenus*, meaning "service, duty, burden", from Proto-Italic *moini-*, *moinos-* what means "duty, obligation, task", from Proto Indo-European root *mei-* "to change, go, move", with derivatives referring to the exchange of goods and functions or obligations within a society as regulated by custom or law. What predominates in the *munusis*, in other words, reciprocity or "mutuality" (*munus-mutuus*) of giving that assigns the one to the other in an obligation.

Roberto Esposito claims from this etymology emerges that *communitas* is entity united not by a "property" but precisely by an obligation; not by an "addition" but by a "subtraction": by a lack, a limit that is configured as an onus, or even as a defective modality for one who is "affected", influenced or touched by an external factor, unlike for one who is instead "exempt" or "exempted". As a result, the common is not characterized by what is proper but by what is improper, or even more drastically, by the other; by a voiding of property into its negative; by removing what is properly one's own that invests and decenters the proprietary subject, forcing him to take leave of himself, to alter himself. Therefore the 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 confirm 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,

2008). If we assume that the meaning of the term “immune” (*immunis*) is tied with a situation of “being freed or exempted from the charges, the service, the taxes, the obligations (*munus*, root of the common of the community)”, then we must conclude that biocommunity is a community without immunity, without auto-immunity, without immunization process, without exception, without dealing of certain people as very important persons. Biocommunity is the only form of life that goes beyond the paradigm of immunization, the paradigm of immunity.

The only way to resolve the question of “society” without losing any of the terms—community and communism—we have to bring together the content of these two terms in a unitary thought, seeing in the realization of biocommunity not an impossible obstacle to community but instead the occasion for a new way of thinking about it. Obviously, this doesn’t mean that community and biocommunity emerge as the same or even as only symmetrical, or that they are to be situated on the same level or along the same trajectory. Rather, it means that they cross each other at a point that neither can do without another because such a point emerges as constitutive of both biocommunity and community. As a result, Esposito claims that this point, which goes unnoticed, can be denoted as “no-thing” [*niente*]. No-thing is what community and communism have in common (Esposito, 2008).

Perhaps all these considerations about the community lead to the conclusion that the term biocommunity means exactly what Jean-Luc Nancy calls “the active restlessness of the same word communism” (Nancy, 1991, p. 31), suggesting that the word “communism” stands as an emblem of the desire to discover a place of community at once beyond social divisions and beyond subordination to techno-political dominion, and thereby beyond such wasting away of liberty, of speech, or of simple happiness as comes about whenever these become subjugated to the exclusive order of privatization. Moreover, perhaps the term biocommunity produces exactly what Maurice Blanchot attributed to the meaning of communism which excludes every society already constituted and excludes itself from it (Blanchot, 1988). In this sense, “biocommunity” names a relation that can be thought as a subsistent ground or common measure for a “being-in-common”, “being singular plural”, “being a living man”, “being a man-as-having-being”, “being a man-as-species”, being bare life, *zoē*.

### Communism as De-organization

Finally, I would like to articulate one uncertainty, motivated by some basic clarity. There are strong evidences to say that communism is again becoming a discourse and vocabulary for the expression of universal, egalitarian, and revolutionary ideals. The three volumes of *The Idea of Communism* edited by Costas Douzinas, Alex Taek-Gwang Lee and Slavoj Žižek bring together the interventions of communism idea from the conferences in London in 2009, Berlin in 2010 and Seoul in 2012 (Douzinas & Žižek, 2010; Žižek, 2013; Taek-Gwang Lee & Žižek, 2016). Communism is retrofitting as attraction of political energy because it is and has been the alternative to capitalism. The question, however, is what kind of an alternative to capitalism is biocommunity? What kind of a conclusion would we wish to draw from the story connecting future fortunes of biocommunity and bare life, population, biocapital, and *communitas*? Is biocommunity a dissolution of politics, an attempt to abolish politics, a sort of “politics beyond politics”, or on the contrary—it is the most extreme intensification of the political?

Perhaps the key problem is the issue of organization. Where Balibar, Negri and Badiou reject the Party and the State, Žižek and Jodi Dean retain a certain fidelity to Lenin. “The key ‘Leninist’ lesson today,” writes Žižek, is that “politics without the organizational form of the Party is politics without politics” (Žižek, 2002, p.

297). According to Žižek, Dean and Bosteels conceptualizing the party of communists is and must be an ongoing project. They argue, that “party” does not name an instrument for carrying out the iron laws of history but the flexible organization of a fidelity to events in the midst of unforeseeable circumstances.

I am not so optimistic about it. Rather, party policy seems to me be closely linked to the current liberal policy model, where parties compete with each other for people’s votes. It is simply a political model focused on universal electoral suffrage, i.e. the illusion of free human decision. It seems to me that the aspirations of biocommunism go much further. These aspirations determine the strength of communism, but also its weakness. What kind of weaknesses I am thinking about?

I would say that we can learn what “biocommunists” really want to do and what is their Real object of desire when they are confronted not only with their pure intention, but with existing social conditions and already given political alternatives, which is always the case in practice. Biopolitics in this sense would be the politics of discomfort as it would always act at the risk of departing from its intentions. I am not saying here nothing original. I only just again raise praxis over theory and over the very division into theory and practice. If Marx many years ago was not concerned to specify the way in which the relationship between structure and superstructure is to be construed, and has no fear of being occasionally considered “vulgar”, it is because an interpretation of this relationship in a causal sense is not even conceivable in Marxist terms. All causal interpretations are in fact consistent with Western metaphysics, and presuppose the sundering of reality into two different ontological levels. A ontological splitting can be excluded by the Marxist concept of praxis as a concrete and unitary source reality. If man finds his humanity in *praxis*, this is not because, in addition to carrying out productive work, he also transposes and develops these activities within a superstructure; if man is human—if he is a *Gattungswesen*, bare life, a being whose essence is generic—his humanity and his species-being must be integrally present within the way in which he produces his material life—that is, within *praxis*. In the sense, Marx abolishes the metaphysical distinction between animal and ratio, between nature and culture, between matter and form, in order to state that within *praxis* “animality is humanity”, “nature is culture”, “matter is form”. “If this is true, the relationship between structure and superstructure can neither be one of causal determination nor one of dialectical mediation, but one of direct correspondence” (Agamben, 1993, pp. 117-119).

The tentative conclusion I draw from this “short story” is a radicalization of the idea that the communists “do not form a specific party”. The communists as such are certainly participating in organizations, and in the organization of movements, campaigns, or struggles, because there is no effective politics without organizations, depending on the concrete objectives. But they are not building any organization of their own, not even an invisible one—they are, rather—as Etienne Balibar suggests—“de-organizing the existing organizations, the very organizations in which they participate” (Balibar, 2013, p. 34). Certainly, in this strategy of “de-organizing the existing organizations” we recognize the logic and work of the Marxist mole, who paraphrased Shakespeare’s Hamlet, writing: “Well burrowed, old mole!”, meaning that—“The revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still traveling through purgatory. It does its work methodically” (Marx [1852] 1995, p. 61). The new imperative of biocommunism is not Marx’s postulate “Proletarians of all countries unite” but, rather, its opposition: “All proletarians divide and never give up sharing bare life”.

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