



The coming community: The singular time of the subject

María Belén Campero
Universidad de Rosario
Argentina

Introduction

We observe that the ideas of community and time in Agamben are strongly linked. At the moment of thinking the community we consider inevitable its interaction with the idea of time, in fact we see that such a correspondence is implicit in the thought of community.

Nevertheless it is necessary to demonstrate the nucleus of this correlation, given that it is not possible to talk about the community without referring to the time of the subject. The subject is who does experiment the time and who is able to perceive the own time and to assume it, and for whom to self recognize into the time is possible as well as to experiment (it), to occupy (it) and to live (it) in common is.

In the present analysis we will see that the time, as a place for the experience, is itself in the community. In fact, it becomes evident that the community is continuously disclosing¹ within the time in which it is. Moreover, the community produces an idea of time that neither is related to a destiny nor is linked with an eventual delimited future.

In this context the time is not only a subjective condition of the subject but it deals with a practice both subjective and intersubjective. Because, at the moment of the time experience, simultaneously occurs that the subject appropriates and communicates it. By this way the community be-comes in the experience of the subject and belongs to the now time of the occurring, where the singular be being and the common future are conjugated.

The community becoming

Agamben stresses that the coming being is a *whatever being*. With this affirmation. On one hand, Agamben highlights the value of *whatever*; and on the other hand, brings out the place of the adjective *quodlibet* used by the Scholastic tradition in the enumeration of the transcendentals, which Agamben translates as “the being that, whatever it be, matters” (Agamben 1990 3): “*quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum seu perfectum*, qualsivoglia ente è uno, vero, buono o perfetto” (3). Agamben begins from affirming that *whatever* is the term that in spite of lying itself unthought conditions the meaning of all the others. By putting the accent in *whatever* and pointing it as a condition for everything beyond it, Agamben achieves a significant inversion in the meaning.

Certainly, there exists a core issue that we will not specifically unravel here which is the discussion between universals and particulars; we only mention that it is possible to notice a correspondence between its translation and dialectic category. The most usual sense of *quodlibet* adheres to the universal –see below– whilst “the being that, whatever it is, matters” affects directly a particularity (singularity).

Regarding the choice of drawing under the usage of *quodlibet* as “indistinct, no matter which”, we observe that the key point assigning a different character to this term likely is the meaning of matter. Hence we wonder about the consequence for a thing of being important. Maybe the importance supposes that one thing is more transcendent or has a different value than other? Or perhaps indicates the reflection of some quality? Neither the first nor the second, because the importance of something is not a

consequence of a comparison with another: it matters *per se*, because of being as it is (Agamben 1990 3).

In fact, something matters, that is something is of importance. However, it is striking that, as adjective, important is mostly used in a comparison. The importance of something generally possesses more relevance according to overcome (the level/s of) the others instead of what is the important thing itself. In addition, considering the ordinary usage of *whatever* as a totality, as all-the-equally members of some species or collection, the importance there indicates no importance of any each one. Say for example that we are looking for a particular letter in a file drawer that contains hundreds of similar letters and documents. Everything here seems the same. Whatever may be the unique letter that we seek, we must open one by one each of the envelopes to find it. What we try to illustrate is that assuming the existence of infinitely many similar things, only one and not the other is what we need. So then, such a *whatever* (regardless which) matters because it is this absolutely singular and no other.

Therefore we can conclude that *whatever* no matter which and *whatever* matters definitively means different things. *Whatever being* is *per se* different from *whatever* all of them; *whatever being* means, first of all, as Agamben says, *whatever* singularity, and this is which makes it important itself (1990 3). Each of *whatever beings* matters, the totality of *whatever beings*, insofar as *whatever* singulars. And this is what we must keep in mind. Hence, we understand that the importance of *whatever being* depends on being *whatever* singular.

Whatever being is, in consequence, the picture of the pure singularity (Agamben 1990 45) Being this or that does not refer to a common property, neither it possess identity nor is determined by any concept. Being such in-with does not take the singularity from its indifference but obtains its singularity only by being how it is (Agamben 1990 3).

That said, we particularly want to think not only about singularity *per se* but also about the appealing idea that it is in the whole originality of such (whatever) singular being where its form finds the predicate. We consider that this singularity is, without any doubts, a subject which constitutes itself in common, lives, and hence it is

inseparable from its surrounding (Campero, Favre 2011). In addition, we notice an ontological dimension in the singular aspect of this whatever being where both the self and the non-self appear equally (i.e. with the same intensity) resignified. In other words, just focused in the importance of the singular being we can highlight the meaning and transcendence of the other as such. More importantly, now self and non-self are not independent but are specifically and clearly differentiable.

Life is always in relation, it is in the vinculum and from the vinculum the way as subject is. In this sense, Agamben's whatever being is, in fact, the singularity of living processes. Interestingly, *quodlibet* also means "who lives" or "who is living" (Restrepo 2009)². Even when we will not analyze here the concept of life which in turn is a key point in Agamben's philosophy, we must mark that life is natural for subject (Lisciani Petrini 149-151), since subjective developments are at same time living processes. Moreover, dynamics of life configures subject's form, the being of the subject. Then, we can glimpse that in Agamben's singularity, i.e. "whatever being matters", appear together revalorized the subject's own, the not subject's own and what is living in both of them. As a consequence, and as a result of the equation between self and non-self in relation, emerges the own experience. In fact, the subject recognizes and affirms the self in relation to the non-self (Varela 541).

So then, we can now say that the subjective experience occurs in the life but it is necessary to understand that a play, a special relation between the part and the whole exists, that is, between life and subject. Life conforms itself simultaneously as totality from singularity, life is intrinsic to subject but subject is able to exclude from the whole and distinguish itself. In fact, a living subject can know itself as a living being, and, at the same time, as a part of life (Morin 232).

In the same way Agamben explains the logic of belonging. Agamben supports that singularity is a part of a whole, however he makes clear that this belonging is not a representation of a real circumstance but it represents that the singularity is only in relation with an empty, undetermined totality (Agamben 1990 45). This indetermination is, in other words, the field of all the possibilities to whom the subject is exposed to.

Therefore, there is not a general rule or collective identity but singularity, like living subject, may be itself a reflection of the whole which it belongs. As clearly explains Plonowska Ziarek (2011), singularity is then located in the area of potentiality that it has multiple modes of indefinite existence.

Thus we can see the merge of two concepts: the idea of a subject exposed from itself to the other, and, at the same time, the notion of a shift in the essence of singularity from what one is to what could be (Plonowska Ziarek). We now propose to combine both ideas and talk from here on a *whatever subject* that is in-relation-to and to which all life is intrinsic.

Continuing the analysis proposed we consider that for understanding which the community that we are talking about is, it is significant to pay attention to the connection between common and singular and essence and singularity. In this regard Agamben elaborates on Spinoza's argument (see below) about the irreconcilability in what is common with what constitutes the essence of a singular thing, and he affirms the emergency of an idea of unessential community: "*Tutti i corpi, (Eth., 11, lemma II), convengono in ciò, che essi esprimono l'attributo divino dell'estensione. Tuttavia (per la prop. 37 ibzd.) ciò che è comune non può in nessun caso costituire l'essenza di una cosa singolare. Decisiva è, qui, l'idea di una comunità inessenziale, di un convenire che non concerne in alcun modo un'essenza.*" (Agamben 1990 14)³

Historically community has been thought as a close and definite totality. In fact, community has been conceived as a structure in accordance with some particularities that distinguished it. From this point of view being in common is nothing but being included under certain special properties, which also happens due to homogeneity exists from the beginning through the proper rules of the logic of community.

In Agamben we can see a deconstruction of the meaning of community and because of this we observe that it transcends the balance of the norm by getting the belonging off the positive and identitarian basis of community. In fact, Agamben defines common as which is unidentified as such (1990 15)⁴.

Community comes to break into the projected work, there is no previous structure. The coming community announces without patience a place prior to form and con-forms in the threshold of individuation, it is what is being while communicating.

Therefore we arrive to the idea that common and community are simultaneously, they occur at the same time in the full occurrence of relations. Common and community appear in the indifference to the attribute and rise from which is in continuous potency. So, we are convinced to say that being is then an experience that takes place in the empty space outside the essence where common is exposed.

Transforming time: the coming community

For opening this section we want to mention that in order to think community without determinisms imposed by any structures, we must necessarily think it out of a progressive lineal time. Thinking community as a becoming, the former will be neither functional nor consequent to the dynamics of the law of cause and effect. So then it is appealing to think about the proper time of community.

As we have recently seen, community is a singular-plural conformation in which the (*whatever*) subject is mirrored (it can see itself there and outside community), as a result what it is necessary is a time that could be transformed and be able to conformed itself within the experience of the subject that is.

First of all, we try to briefly survey Agamben's elaboration on time in *Time and History: Critique of the Instant and the Continuum*⁵. In the mentioned work Agamben depicts a critique of traditional (conservative) idea of history familiar with the ordinary representation of time as punctual homogeneous *continuum*, and he highlights the necessity of a thorough re-elaboration of the notion of time accompanying the goal of changing and transforming the world (Agamben 1993 91-92).

In this connection he considers that circular continue time of Greco-Roman Antiquity indicates perpetuity and recurrence. This conception of time with its circular movements ensures repetition and continuous return. So we agree in that it is impossible

for *whatever subject* to dominate time, on the contrary becomes a victim trying to conquer it and watching it go by (Agamben 1993 92-93).

In turn, Christianity represents time as a straight line. Besides, for Christianity the word is created in the time and must finish in the time, which it is impossible to occur in a circular conception lack of all kind of beginning. The created world of Christianity is then finite and limited, and it draws its history from the beginning until its end on the basis of the existence of God, sovereign producer of all time.

The modern conception of time constitutes the secularization of Christian time rectilinear and irreversible. Modernity get out all reference to end and circumscribes time to a structural process where the concepts of before and after are now represented (Agamben 1993 96). This is how occurrence is converted in facts or events which happen only once and irreplaceably. Time is periodized and by choosing a common frame history is divided in selectively key moments which are distinguishable from others that will never be known.

Finally Agamben claims the Gnostic notion of time that suggests it as incoherent and not homogeneous (1993 101). He definitively supports the possibility of experiencing this kind of time.

In conclusion we now feel compelled to say that the experiencing of time is the concrete opportunity for *whatever subject* of linking life and action. Such experience put time into the event of the self and makes visible the self in the proper time. Recognition of one self in the time leads *whatever subject* to occupy it.

A common time: of the *whatever subject*

As we have been seeing here and in agreement with studies by other authors (Whyte 2010), Agamben makes possible a community of pure singularity by canceling substantive identities. That is, in other words, a community consisting of

identification-free singularities which remain open to the unlimited possibilities of being in common (Ten Bos 2005 20).

This is very important and indispensable when thinking about the subject's time. And it is because, as we said before, community is no longer the basis of subject. In other terms, since there is no constraint belonging, i.e. a totality suppressing the one, the experience of the subject takes place. Due to this inversion and having erased the borders of origin and finality, the *whatever subject* gets the ability to recognize itself, and, as well, to know itself in, which it is possible by making use of time. Living subject employs time for itself, understanding and appropriating it. So bearing in mind that the experience is the result of the one in relation to the other, the time of the subject and its use is also the spontaneous representation of the time of common. At this point in our analysis, we find especially important to note that time and community are constructible and transformable, i.e. community and time of community emerge from this subject that is being again and again. It is also appealing to consider that such notion of use is associated to the idea of appropriation in that the possibility of subject to retain, in the transit to common, what belongs to itself.

Albeit it can be clear, when we mention the transit we do not mean before and after but we consider that it is always about a present moment which is constructed and experienced. Therefore time specifically belongs to neither *whatever subject* nor community but it is the product and exclusive consequence of communion between both, and this is what the coming community is.

This transformation in the sense of temporality transpires community as a reflection of the merely possible. We understand that community, free of anticipatory marks and committed to common experience is the unnamed footprint of singularity. In this regard, we cannot ignore that this idea of common time in which subject and time are consubstantial brings us to some concepts proposed by Nancy in another paramount work about community: The proper community, Nancy says, is nothing but being-in-common that only occurs (Nancy 1990 238).

In sum, we observe that *whatever subject*, by experientially using of time, leads common and community to occur together from the subjective practice of being. Living

subject, that in-relation-to, get out of itself –but knowing itself–, is multiplied indefinitely (and indefinably) and becomes community. Community is then the integrity of self distinguishable and undifferentiable in the common time in which is composed. In other words, subject is only in community and community is nothing but the way of being of the subject. The living subject appropriates time in its experience of being and forms and conforms the community which concurrently gives sense to its being alive.

This ontological view shows its extent when we can differentiate between subjects that remain outside the community and subjects that, in the experience of being living subjects, build the community. It is necessary to note that when subject is only what bounds community misses the possibility of making a dialectic process of subjective identification. Community imposes identity to subject; then, subject lays implicitly subsumed under time and norms of community, without the ability of developing its own individuality. In these circumstances, the subject requires to arrange or fit in a pattern in order to be socially included-excluded. The subject is, in this perspective, excluded (simultaneously) from its own life and the whole work of being living is absolutely consumed by this tension subject-community. Relations depend on the current structure of power, and power controls *members* of the community.⁶

That said, we can observe that when community is equivalent, in its conformation, to singular experiences of subjects, when the proper individual subjective forms construct what it is common, hence, things change and subject –that abandons outside urges– goes through all disjunctive tensions. Conversely, subject, owner of the proper experience of living, gets an identity of itself, not under power norms but instead from subjective relations, in the scenario of the difference and the commonness.⁷

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Notas

¹ This means to uncover it, which is there, not completely hidden but invisible and which becomes visible suddenly.

² (The translation is ours).

³ Original translation of Spinoza by Agamben.

⁴ “Whatever is constituted not by the indifference of common nature with respect to singularities, but by the indifference of the common and the proper, of the genus and the species, of the essential and the accidental. Whatever is the thing with all its properties, none of which, however, constitutes difference. In-difference with respect to properties is what individuates and disseminates singularities, makes them lovable (*quodlibetabile*). Just as the right human word is neither the appropriation of what is common (language) nor the communication of what is proper, so too the human face is neither the individuation of a generic facies nor the universalization of singular traits: It is whatever face, in which what belongs to common nature and what is proper are absolutely indifferent” (Agamben 1990 15). [Translated by Hardt, Michel. 2007, 18-19].

⁵ In *Infancy and History. The destruction of experience*.

⁶ As a sake of example, Judith Butler during an interview by Beatriz Preciado answers regarding the question of sexual identity and the idea of gender that she has always been interested in studying how one acts in response to gender restrictive norms which presuppose what a human being is. In fact, Butler argues that the first question when a baby is born is ¿boy or girl? Butler establishes that we cannot be understood as human beings unless that we first been understood as gender beings. Therefore, the norm of gender becomes a requisite of human intelligibility (Soley-Beltran, Preciado 225). As Preciado says, Butler has well defined gender as a system of rules, conventions, social norms, and institutional practices that produce *performatively* the subject that want to describe. Gender (femininity/masculinity), stresses Preciado, who intensively work on this topic, is not a concept, nor an ideology, nor a *performance*: it consist of an ecological politics... Gender works as an operative program by which sensitive perceptions are produced taking form of affects, wills, actions, believings, identities (Preciado 98).

⁷ So then, occurs that there is not male and female gender except of being in front of people, that is, as a somato-discursive construction with collective attributes, in front of (scientific) community (Preciado 100).

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