From Community to the Undercommons
Preindividual – Transindividual – Dividual – Condividual

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In reflecting on new sociabilities and communities, Christoph Brunner and Gerald Raunig ask how individuals "enter into composition with one another in order to form a higher individual, ad infinitum," and how a being "can take another being into its world, but while preserving or respecting the other's own relations and world." They respond with a detailed consideration of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's concept of the undercommons as a micro-political active power.

2015 is set to be a year of intense experiences of struggle for a different Europe, different from the one associated with the North-South divide and excessive austerity. 2015 also marks a year of new parties on the rise, for a change this time not only on the right, but also by way of new kinds of leftist and radical leftist parties. With Syriza and Podemos as the most visible leftist actors, they show us that the idea of the leftist party has not been thrown into the dustbin of history with the decline of socialisms of all sorts. They are not alone, they never were. They come from great social movements as well as a multitude of micropolitical practices moving across different territories, especially in the South. Although a party (if radical enough) can collaborate in the project of provincialising the old Europe and inventing new modes of action, contents cannot descend "from above," from the leaders leading the old institutions under changed names. They will not be born in the vain figure of an empty centre, losing every singularity in the hollow cycle of long election campaigns. They do not grow spontaneously in the minds of a few clever party strategists, who will then list them in a nice, coherent program. These contents, needs and desires, emerge in the transversal, persistent and continuous work of the self-managed health services in Greece or the Plataforma por la Afectados de la Hipoteca [Platform for people affected by mortgages] in Spain, the slow assemblies of the Spanish 15M or Occupy, the multiplicities of social movements in Europe and beyond. And it is here, where the singular micro-practices connect and disconnect, where new forms of potentially new institutions as well as their transnational concatenations come into being.

Yet, which terminology is suitable for this specific form of dis- / association, which insists on the component of the singular as an affirmative mode of dividing *and* the component of the composition? How can this dis- / association elude the sad figures of self-division, separation, sacrifice, debt, diminution? How can dis-/association happen without being degraded into a smoothing lubricant for the transformations of dividual-machinic-capitalist modes of production, without accelerating exploitation, domination and subjugation?

The relational outline we pursue through notions of the dividual, the preindividual and transindividual and the condividual takes on a specific ethical and pragmatic undertone. If

relations are expressive capacities that co-compose events of experience then it matters *how* their mutual resonances actualise these events. Gilles Deleuze is most explicit about this circumstance when he writes in his book on Spinoza: But now it is a question of knowing whether relations (and which ones?) can compound directly to form a new, more "extensive" relation, or whether capacities can compound directly to constitute a more "intense" capacity or power. It is not longer a question of utilizations or captures, but of sociabilities and communities. How do individuals enter into composition with one another in order to form a higher individual, ad infinitum? How can a being take another being into its world, but while preserving or respecting the other's own relations and world?[1]

In the course of this text we want to develop these questions beyond the concept of community and the figure of individuals that form a community as entering into composition with one another. Yet, obviously Deleuze already thinks of a differential and relational constitution of socialities that are always in excess of any synthesis or unification. His question points at the constituent power of an ethics that divides by becoming more not less.

In a non-substantial approach, relation takes on the status of a mode of existence all its own. Philosopher Gilbert Simondon affirms such a relational conception in his overall philosophy of individuation when he conceives of relation as having a *rang d'être* [rank of being]. He writes, "it would be possible to consider every actual relation having a rank of being, and by way of developing in the interior of a new individuation: the relation does not emerge between two terms that are already individuals; it is an aspect of the internal resonance of a system of individuation, it is part of a system's state."[2] Simondon considers individuation as the primordial entry point for the analysis of processes of emergence, stating that the principle of individuation precedes the individual, thus making the individual the result of a process of individuation.[3] The process of individuation derives from an activity, which is the operation of dephasing as a "mode of resolution of an incompatibility initially rich in potential."[4] Relation becomes graspable existentially in the activity of dephasing that marks a shift from a phaseless preindividual (virtual) state into a series of individuations. Dephasing, for Simondon defines a "doubling of being" that moves across a relational field of potentials and their resonances toward a line of actualisation without detaching from this prior phaseless state of the preindividual.[5] The preindivudal defines the excess of potential, the force field that moves with individuation in an infinite line of differentiations.

The question of resonance is key. What Simondon – still using the terminology of thermodynamics – calls system, differs significantly from its cybernetic connotation of a closed set of interconnected calculations, that is, feedback. Internal resonance defines not an interiority of an entity as opposed to an outside.[6] On the contrary, resonances might better be thought of as related to intensity, an intensity that is shared across different phases of individuation while coming from the outside, that is, from the reverberations with the relational field of the preindiviudal. Deleuze hints at the same process when citing Simondon saying that "the living lives at the limit of itself, on its limit." The limit or membrane becomes the double-sided surface of a mode of existence where the outside folds onto the inside of the membrane and the inside depends on its outside haunted by potentials.[7] Internal resonance derives from the affections of a relational field whose capacities of expression double in their becoming while moving across different phases of becoming – this operation provides a first hint at a conception of the process of individuation as dividual constituent power and thus not as a secondary connection between individuals or a totalising composition as community.

The problems of the terms affiliated with *communitas* emerge before and beyond their very resonance with totalitarian communities, also before and beyond the problematic dichotomy of individual and community: on the one hand they cling to identitarian forms of

composition, on the other they remain bound to the mode of reduction, subtraction, diminution. And even where both aspects are dialectically conjoined,[8] they remain on this side of communion. The entire conceptual line of the commune, the community, the common, even communism itself, to the extent that dogma and pressure to confess have been and are practiced in its name, are thus cast in the dubious light of a double genealogy of identitarianism and reduction. [9]

In the tradition of ancient Rome and the etymology of communitas, as well as in the tradition of Christian community between communion and (early) Christian community, there are two repeatedly recurring problematic aspects. One is well known and has often been discussed: the community as a term for an identitarian mode of closure, of protection and of simultaneous exclusion, basis and ground for a heterosexual, patriarchal gender order as well. The other, less illuminated side of communitas relates to the question of the obligatory bond, which binds the singulars to the community.

The first problem can be well summarised with the words of Jean-Luc Nancy, the French philosopher who wrote two small, but highly influential texts for this discourse about the "inoperable" and the "confronted community." In the second text, published in 2001, Nancy notes several sentences critically distancing himself from his first text in 1983 – and critically distancing himself altogether from the use of the term ***communauté***, community – that could hardly be more clear:

Little by little I have preferred replacing it [the word "community"] with the awkward expressions being-together, being-in-common, and finally being-with. [...] I could see from all sides the dangers aroused by the use of the word community: its resonance fully invincible and even bloated with substance and interiority; its reference inevitably Christian (as in spiritual, fraternal, communal community) ; or more broadly religious (as in Jewish community, community of prayers, community of believers, or umma) as it is used to support an array of so-called ethnicities. All this could only be a warning. It was clear that the emphasis placed on this necessary but still insufficiently clarified concept was at least, at this time, on par with the revival of communitarian trends that could be fascistic.[10]

This is the clearly expressed distancing of one of the authors who are still misunderstood as proponents of the philosophy of community.

From here we ask, what the status of the "being" in Nancy's ***being-with*** is, when he claims that it needs to go beyond substance and interiority. Giving it a Simondonian twist along his differentiations of individuation that takes precedence over the individual, we might want to think of dephasing as the crucial moment of a being-with where the only mode of being is becoming. Such becoming divides in becoming more not less. In the dephasing from a phaseless state, individuation marks a sense of the dividual that has to operate as interstice, or, as Simondon calls it, as transindividual, not ***being*** of one or several individuals but an individuation becoming through the individual's individuation, being relationally capacitated in resonance with a preindividual charge.[11] Again we come back to the operation of a resonance that enables the affection of relation as dividual and its (dis) continuous temporal leaps. The being-with as a becoming-with resists the communitarian impetus. The transindividual dimension resists this unifying drive and shifts it toward its temporal composition across different processes of individuation – a veritable "syncristallisation" which composes the heterogeneous temporal texture of the present in a collective individuation across phases of individuation.[12] This time-fold is the in-humane, non-subjective and "pre-vital" relational field of experience which operates immanently in any social formation. [13]

The second question of the obligatory bond that binds the singulars to the community is closely tied to the first problem of communion as identisation, uniformisation, closure. The Latin term ***communitas*** is derived from the prefix con- for "with," "together," and the noun

munus. munus first of all means a gift. In Republican Roman use, however, there are less indications of gifts in the sense of a voluntary exchange, but rather of the moral / economic obligation to sacral duties, personal service (such as in the form of military service) and the payment of financial fees as "tax obligation." Here munus assumes a mainly obligatory meaning. The obligation of rendering the most diverse kinds of services and fees is understood as a debt in both a moral and an economic sense. The munus constitutes the community as co-obligation, and it is the reason for the acceptance of the individual into the community based on a relation of duty and debt. For this reason, in her historical, etymological and political-theoretical analysis of munus and communitas, political theorist Isabell Lorey speaks of a "logic of tribute, levy (*Ab-gabe*)," which in Roman law was by no means based on equality. [14]

So even from an historical and etymological perspective, it could be said that the diminution aspect of the concept of community is an essential component of its use. In this respect, the community can never be understood as surplus, as multiplying division, as alliance and gain. Rather, the logic of debt and obligation results in limiting singularity, in giving over, giving oneself up. Community is grounded on sacrifice and debt, relinquishment, rendering, surrendering. The band, the binding, the bond decreases singular capabilities. In the desire to become more, community implies becoming less. The munus is a minus.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri attempt to argue in *Commonwealth* against this double lineage of communitas as identification and diminution. [15] As the two authors write in the introduction, on the one hand the common is the name for "the common wealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty – which in classical European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole." On the other hand the common encompasses "all those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth." [16] In this second view, the common means the practices of interaction, of care, of living together in a common world. These are practices that do not allow for understanding human beings as separate from nature, neither in the logic of exploitation nor in that of protection. This is where a conceptual tie is found to the line of the commons, which allows for understanding the sharing of the common not as a becoming-less, but rather as an excess. In the course of the book as a whole, alongside the two conventional aspects of the common explained in the introduction, a third aspect is also evident, which addresses the question of the concatenation of singular streams: the common as the self-organisation of social relationships. This instituting of the common implies that it can be understood not as a being-common, but rather only as a becoming-common, as excessive production of the common, as co-emergence of the singularities and the common. Nevertheless, we remain sceptical in this case as well: what is still conceptually missing in the common – as in the entire family of concepts of communitas – is the aspect of the many, of their division and their singularity. To express sharing *and* division, to subvert the identitarian and reductive turn of the community, Hardt and Negri's theoretical tradition is in need of the conceptual composition and connection between "common" and "multitude."

In the multifaceted rising tide of dividualism between new forms of machinic (self-) subjugation and the search for suitable weapons, this problem of concatenating the common and the multitude appears all the more urgent: Which *with* for the *many*? Which form, which "co-formity" can the dis- / association of singularities assume, which being-with that is not binding bond, community, communitas? How can such a kind of co-formity be envisioned, without deriving it from the one or melting it into one, beyond the alternative of whether the many unfold from the one or strive for the one in keeping with the motto *e pluribus unum*, in an eternal bond of the reference of the one to the many and of the many to the one? If the dividual is conceptually determined by dividedness, how does the non-

universal concatenating function of dividuality come about?

For Stefano Harney and Fred Moten the commons is always in danger of becoming overcoded: addressing the concept of the commons as a political term, propels it toward its instrumentation through *politics*. Politics is far from political, it subsumes the commons under a false ideal of democracy of a common-sense of pre-given consensus. In the contemporary state "what's left is politics but even the politics of the commons, of the resistance to enclosure, can only be a politics of ends, a rectitude aimed at the regulatory end of the common." [17] The politics Harney and Moten refuse is a politics of opposition and of giving over to the expert, the critic, the professional. Their conceptual proposal of the *undercommons* describes a mode of dividual individuation through practice. "To enter this space is to inhabit that ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts, the criminal, matricidal, queer, in the cistern, on the stroll of the stolen life, the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back, where the commons give refuge where the refuge gives commons." The undercommons then takes on a form of life beyond the individual activating an atmosphere of dividual individuation. "It's about allowing subjectivity to be unlawfully overcome by others, a radical passion and passivity such that one becomes unfit for subjection, because one does not possess the kind of agency that can hold to the regulatory forces of subjecthood, and one cannot initiate the auto-interpellative torque that biopower subjection requires and rewards." [18] In taking down critique in order of a self-defence and self-preservation requires new forms of living, activating, of composing new subsistential territories to be traversed dividually and new universes of value to inform any mode of organisation.

The undercommons has no common ground other than eschewing the individual as belief in false dialectics of the antagonistic – individual vs. community. It is a commons based on flight. Such a mode of collective individuation requires modes of fugitive planning rather than the classical forms of strategic organisation, their habits and aesthetics of resemblance. The question of fugitive planning relies on the dividual relation and its collective way of subsisting to generate what Harney and Moten call a *hold*. The question of the undercommons is a question of how to make becoming a hold, a force that flees any substantialisation while providing a sufficient grasping for change to be felt in its potential, across bodies and spaces. In resistance to modern capitalist logistics whose attempt is to eradicate any form of subjectivity whatsoever is part and parcel of the fugitive planning of the undercommons. "There is a social capacity to instantiate again and again the exhaustion of the standpoint as undercommon ground that logistics knows as unknowable, calculates as an absence that it cannot have but always longs for, that it cannot, to be or, at least, to be around, to surround." [19] Erupting a logistics of the standpoint that is fully operationally included in capitalist value circulation defines the rise of the dividual that cannot take a standpoint, cannot know and that effectuates through a collectivity "of a presence that is ungraspable in the way that it touches." [20] This kind of constituent power of the undercommons constitutes in becoming, in fugitive planning, a time of the untimely, a multiplication of times that provide holds without turning them into standpoints.

The question of fugitive planning of the undercommons that operate through the collective leaves open the question of planning folding into other modes of planning without becoming a model but rather a metamodelling in resonance of a presence that is felt yet unmediated. Political movements emerge and relate back into their singular concerns. In their con-dividual insertion into different times of a multiplicity of minor practices in situ they constitute a hold. In making this hold a felt intensity of a collective individuation deviates it from becoming its very own essence. At the same time such a collective composition of a hold includes dispersion through abstraction, re-singularisation, and provides zones for similarity beyond a local or temporal mooring. Avoiding the creation of a new transcendentalising truth in the hold means developing techniques of unruly subsistence, of a mutant proliferation of differences that hold internally through resonance.

Affective relaying of different forms of struggle share their mutual capacity of struggle that is always relational in its push toward emergence.

Take the example of the Plataforma por la Afectados de la Hipoteca (PAH), born out of the disaster, depression and radical separation of those affected by the mortgage crisis and the austerity politics in Europe. Fueled by the genealogies of earlier Spanish movements against gentrification and eviction like V de vivienda in the midst of the 2000s, and of course also by the bigger stream of 15M, they began to connect the singular cases of evictions and threats of eviction. In the face of the 2007 economic crisis the threat of eviction became one of the most eradicating practices of the banks backed by the Spanish government. From assembly-based local support networks and practices of resistance against eviction like *escraches*, PAH was widely recognised as a political actor once it launched a national petition (*Iniciativa Legislativa Popular*) for a legislative initiative curtailing the banks' rights to cash in debt, to promote debt reliefs and prevent evictions. There is no hierarchy in relevance between the local planning and the national petition. On the contrary, the micropolitical active power of emergent undercommons weaves through the fabric of the social, legal and political toward new subsistential territories. Becoming a component of that undercommon surround, "the common beyond and beneath – before and before – enclosure," [21] PAH instituted a minor exploration of what it means to dis- / associate today.

"As philosophy of the feel" this minor exploration is neither instantiating a We in the dominant sense nor does it want to proclaim anything that the undercommons is not capable of already. On the contrary the primacy of struggle affords another mode of moving-with. Undercommons then might be less a concept of the common and rather one of the dividual, of a world perpetuated by non-sensuous similarities whose abstractions are real as any mode of relation in experience. The dividual line conjoins what is similar / co-forming in the most diverse single things, but also affirms their separation at the same time. Co-formity is form-multiplicity. It implies the dividual orientation to the specific resonance, but not consonance of the form. Co-formity is, at the same time, multi-formity, orgic form of organisation, fugitive planning, con-dividuality. Leaping, erratic, alinear, and yet nevertheless in the potentiality of concatenation, orgic modes of division permeate the unifying mechanisms of organic participation, and condividuality disturbs the "truly participating." Nothing is related to the whole, multiplicity moves with the singularities. Nothing is partition, limiting and detaching the parts. Dis- / association inheres to condividuality.

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Footnotes

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 1988), 126.
2. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Grenoble: Million, 2005), 28–29 (all quotes are the authors' translations).
3. Ibid., 24.
4. Ibid., 25.
5. Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1958), 159. Muriel Combes explains this process with the example of a plant: a plant relays two orders of magnitude in its emergence, that of a cosmic order (energy of light) and of an inframolecular order (that of mineral salts, oxygen, etc.). In its individuation the plant constantly divides to become more in resonance with its preindividual capacities that are not precast but have to be actualised. Muriel Combes, *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividua*l, trans. Thomas Lamarre (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 4.
6. Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 206.
7. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (London: Continuum, 2004), 119.
8. As in Roberto Esposito, *Communitas*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).
9. In addition to the extensive literature on questions of community in the field of communitarism theories, in the 1980s and 1990s a number of authors from the leftist spectrum of political philosophy have also become interested in the concept of community. The titles of their texts not only contain the terms *communauté*, *communità, communitas* , but also further differentiate these terms with various adjectives. Jean-Luc Nancy (1983, 2001), Maurice Blanchot (1983) or Giorgio Agamben's (1990) minor works on the inoperable, the confronted, the unavowable or the coming community are probably the most well known examples of this tendency.
10. Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Confronted Community," in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication* , ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), 24–25.
11. Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 317.
12. Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 298.
13. Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière*, 303.
14. See the detailed explanations in Isabell Lorey, *Figuren des Immunen* (Zürich / Berlin: Diaphanes, 2011), 181–228.
15. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
16. Ibid., VIII.
17. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 18.
18. Ibid., 28.
19. Ibid., 93.
20. Ibid., 94.
21. Ibid., 17.

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