

Allen gemein. Friedrich Hölderlin in the Franco-Italian Debate on Community

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Beginning in the 1980s, faced with the decline of the political perspectives linked to the communist project, an intense philosophical debate, aimed at rethinking the concept of community, emerged between authors in France and Italy. Drawing on the thought of Georges Bataille, Jean-Luc Nancy initiated this reflection with *The Inoperative Community* (1983), followed in the same year by Maurice Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* and, in 1990, by Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*. At the turn of the millennium, Roberto Esposito's *Communitas* (1998) and, later, Nancy's *The Disavowed Community* (2014) marked a renewed engagement with the topic. Beyond their thematic focus, these works share a recurring – though seemingly marginal – reference to the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin. My essay explores this persistent presence of Hölderlin in the Franco-Italian debate on community, clarifying the use and function of his quotations in relation to the poet's own reflection on the subject. The analysis of Hölderlinian intertextuality in the works of Nancy, Blanchot, Agamben, and Esposito helps to trace the legacy of his thought – mediated by Heidegger – within contemporary philosophy. Moreover, it sheds new light on the relation between aesthetics and politics, and between poetic word and civic action, which the essay also discusses in light of recent theoretical proposals such as Achille Mbembe's *The Earthly Community* (2022).

A partire dagli anni Ottanta, di fronte al tramonto delle prospettive politiche legate al progetto comunista, tra Francia e Italia si è sviluppato un intenso dibattito filosofico volto a ripensare il concetto di comunità. Recuperando il pensiero di Georges Bataille, Jean-Luc Nancy ne avviò la riflessione con *La comunità inoperosa* (1983), cui seguirono nello stesso anno *La comunità inconfessabile* di Maurice Blanchot e, nel 1990, *La comunità che viene* di Giorgio Agamben. Alla soglia del nuovo millennio, *Communitas* (1998) di Roberto Esposito e, più tardi, *La comunità sconfessata* (2014) di Nancy segnano una rinnovata attenzione al tema. Oltre alla scelta tematica, questi testi condividono un riferimento ricorrente, solo in apparenza marginale, al poeta tedesco Friedrich Hölderlin. Il mio saggio intende esplorare questa presenza costante di Hölderlin nel dibattito italo-francese, chiarendo l'uso e la funzione delle sue citazioni in rapporto alla riflessione del poeta sulla comunità. L'analisi dell'intertestualità hölderliniana nei testi di Nancy, Blanchot, Agamben ed Esposito consente di delineare l'eredità del suo pensiero, mediata da Heidegger, nella filosofia contemporanea. Inoltre, getta nuova luce sulla relazione tra estetica e politica, tra parola poetica e azione civile, che il saggio discute anche alla luce di proposte recenti come *La comunità terrestre* (2022) di Achille Mbembe.

KEYWORDS: *Community, French Theory, Italian Theory, Friedrich Hölderlin, Intertextuality*

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1. INTRODUCTION: HÖLDERLIN IN COMMON

Göttliches Feuer auch treibet, bei Tag und bei Nacht,
Aufzubrechen. So komm! daß wir das Offene schauen,
Daß ein Eigenes wir suchen, so weit es auch ist.
Fest bleibt Eins; es sei um Mittag oder es gehe
Bis in die Mitternacht, immer bestehet ein Maas,
Allen gemein, doch jeglichem auch ist eignes beschieden,
Dahin gehet und kommt jeder, wohin er es kann¹.

The epigraph that opens Jean-Luc Nancy's *La communauté désœuvrée* (*The Inoperative Community*) in its most recent French edition (1996)² are the

¹ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Brod und Wein*, in Id., *Sämtliche Werke. Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, Bd. 2.1: *Gedichte nach 1800. Text*, hrsg. v. Friedrich Beißner, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1951, p. 90-95: 91. «Daylong, nightlong we're urged on by a fire that's divine. / Urged to be gone. Let us go, then! Off to see open spaces, / Where we may seek what is ours, distant, remote though it be! / One thing is sure even now: at noon or just before midnight, / Whether it's early or late, always a measure exists, / Common to all, though his own to each one is also allotted, / Each of us makes for the place, reaches the place that he can», Friedrich Hölderlin, *Bread and Wine*, in *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, ed. Eric L. Santner, trans. Michael Hamburger, Continuum, New York 1990, p. 181. For an overview of this elegy's reception and complex publishing history, cf. Wolfram Groddeck, *Philologie*, in Id., *Hölderlins Elegie Brod und Wein oder Die Nacht*, Stroemfeld Verlag, Frankfurt a.M.-Basel 2012, pp. 7-33: 7-11. I shall not enter into the philological debate in the present essay; however, it must be noted that the distichs quoted by Nancy and reproduced below remain unchanged throughout Hölderlin's subsequent reworkings of the elegy. Cf. Wolfram Groddeck, *Dritte Strophe*, *ibid.*, pp. 75-96: 82. Instead, an important change occurs in the preceding distich – reproduced here in the *Reinschrift* version for contextual reasons –, where Hölderlin replaces «ein Eigenes» with «Lebendiges», cf. *ibid.*, p. 81.

² The quote is missing from the English translation: Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1991.

verses above, a quote from the third stanza of Friedrich Hölderlin's renowned elegy *Brod und Wein*. These verses were translated by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, with whom Nancy closely collaborated on several publications³, dealing specifically with the legacy of German thought:

... toujours subsiste une mesure
Commune à tous, bien qu'à
chacun aussi en propre part,
Vers où se rend et va chacun autant qu'il peut.
(trad. de Ph. L.-L.)⁴

This is merely the clearest evidence of Hölderlin's presence within what may be described as the philosophical debate on community that has developed since the 1980s, particularly in France and Italy. Against the backdrop of the failure of the communist project, this current of theoretical reflection refuses to abandon the notion of community altogether⁵. Instead, it seeks to elaborate an understanding of community that is not bound to its operationalisation, whether in national, ethnic, religious or, more generally, totalitarian terms⁶. Conceived neither as

3 Cf., among others, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe – Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philipp Barnard – Cheryl Lester, State University of New York Press, Albany 1988; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe – Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Nazi Myth*, trans. Brian Holmes, in «Critical Inquiry», 16 (1990), pp. 291-312.

4 Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *La communauté désœuvrée*, Christian Bourgois Éditeur, Paris 2004⁴, p. 7. All spelling (capitalisation included) follows the original.

5 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9. «Communism, community: such terms are indeed terms insofar as history, the grandiose miscalculations of history, reveals them to us against a background of disaster that goes much further than mere ruin. [...] No matter what we want, we are linked to them precisely because of their defection», Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris, Station Hill Press, New York 1988, pp. 1-2.

6 «[The] community cannot arise from the domain of work. [...] Community understood as a work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible [...]. Products derived from operations of this kind, however grandiose they might seek to be and sometimes manage to be, have no more communitarian existence than the plaster busts of Marianne», Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 31; «What could be the politics of whatever singularity, that is: of a being whose community is mediated not by any condition of belonging [...] nor by the simple absence of conditions (a negative community, such as that recently proposed in France by Maurice Blanchot), but by belonging itself?», Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1993, p. 85; «[The] community cannot be responsible for the work of life, nor of death, nor of each member, nor of all», Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell,

a precious good that has been lost in the distant past, nor as a goal to be achieved or implemented in the future, community becomes – within this context and with a variety of thematic inflections – the very condition for the possibility of earthly existence⁷. In this way, the French-Italian debate clearly distances itself from the traditional sociological and political analyses developed, particularly in the German-speaking context, around the *Gesellschaft/Gemeinschaft* binary⁸.

This paper provides an outline of Hölderlin's recurring presence and function within this debate, as well as the role it attributes to poetry and figurative thought more generally. Situated at the margins of the text, mentioned chiefly in footnotes, in brackets or in passing⁹, Hölderlin appears at first glance to be a peripheral figure in this debate. This marginality does not, however, make it any less meaningful, especially considering that the authors in question have also published separate works devoted exclusively to Hölderlin's poetry and thought¹⁰.

The constant – often indirect and allusive – references to Hölderlin also serve as a clear signal of a particular stance with respect to Martin Heidegger's thought and his interpretation of Hölderlin's poetry¹¹. This engagement with Heidegger through Hölderlin is im-

Stanford University Press, Stanford 2010, pp. 127-28. The key term, «desœuvrement», introduced into the debate by Nancy (*The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 31) comes from Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003, p. 213. The term was used by Agamben in *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2004. For a detailed discussion of the concept of the «inoperative» (with reference not to Blanchot but to Heidegger) in Nancy, cf. Luca Serafini, *Inoperosità. Heidegger nel dibattito francese contemporaneo*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2013.

7 Cf. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 35. For a more in-depth discussion on Nancy's thinking on community, cf. Ignaas Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, Bloomsbury, London-New Delhi-New York-Sydney 2013.

8 Cf. Esposito, *Introduction: Nothing in Common*, in Id., *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-19; 1-3; Daniel Alvaro, *Le problème de la communauté. Marx, Tönnies, Weber*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2019.

9 This may well be the reason why there is no mention of this line of reception in the *Hölderlin-Handbuch*, which instead includes separate sections on the Jewish reception, on Heidegger's reception and on Benjamin, Adorno and Szondi. Cf. *Hölderlin-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, hrsg. v. Johann Kreuzer, J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart-Weimar 2011, pp. 539-541.

10 Cf. Maurice Blanchot, *The 'Sacred' Speech of Hölderlin*, in Id., *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1995, pp. 111-132; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Poet's Calculation*, in Id., *Expectation: Philosophy, Literature*, trans. Robert Bononno, Fordham University Press, New York 2018, pp. 83-108.; Giorgio Agamben, *Hölderlin's Madness: Chronicle of a Dwelling Life, 1806-1843*, trans. Alta L. Price, Seagull Books, London, New York, Calcutta 2023.

11 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller,

portant because, within the framework of this debate, Heidegger's early thought represents a crucial point of reference. In the works belonging to this current of thought, Heidegger is often recalled for his formulation of *Mitsein* (Being-with) in the «decisive paragraph 26 of *Being and Time*»¹². According to Roberto Esposito, one of the debate's leading Italian figures, «with Heidegger and Bataille twentieth-century thought on community reaches both its greatest point of intensity and its extreme limit»¹³. This is precisely the limit with which the debate in question engages. Among the authors considered in this paper, Esposito – who openly declares himself indebted to Nancy¹⁴ – is also the one who most explicitly addresses the connection between Heidegger and Hölderlin, which he discusses critically over several pages, emphasising the «objectively communitarian arrangement that Heidegger assigns to Hölderlin's poetic experience»¹⁵.

And yet, as I shall argue, following Esposito, this insistent reference to Hölderlin extends beyond Heidegger¹⁶, in a direction exceeding both the limits of his interpretation of Hölderlin and those of the debate itself. Indeed, the references to Hölderlin represent the common thread linking the heterogeneous elements of this debate and make it possible to provide an overall view of it through a specific intertextual lens. To quote his own words, Hölderlin is «allen gemein»¹⁷, the common and shared measure among all the participants in this debate who engage, each in their own way, in a shared writing of/on community.

This point is crucial for Nancy, who underscores the importance of *écriture/writing* as the exposition of the «singular outline of our being-in-common»¹⁸. Nancy defines his own writing as participating

Humanity Books, Amherst (NY) 2000.

12 Esposito, *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, p. 93. Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Of Being-in-Common*, in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. by the Miami Theory Collective, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1991, pp. 1-13; Robert Bernasconi, *On Deconstructing Nostalgia for Community within the West: The Debate between Nancy and Blanchot*, in «Research in Phenomenology», 23 (1993), pp. 3-21: 11; Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, in Id., *Gesamtausgabe*, I. Abt.: *Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-1976*, Bd. 2, hrsg. v. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1977, pp. 157-168; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Harper and Row, New York-Evanston 1962, pp. 153-163.

13 Esposito, *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

14 Cf. Esposito, *Introduction: Nothing in Common*, in Id., *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

15 Esposito, *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

16 Cf. Bernasconi, *On Deconstructing Nostalgia for Community within the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

17 «Common to all», Hölderlin, *Bread and Wine*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

18 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 41. Blanchot (*The Unavowable Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 25) specifies, distancing himself from Nancy: «the community

in the «community of writing, the writing of community»¹⁹. Thus, I am interested in the role attributed to this particular name – Hölderlin – within the community of writing that writes the community.

In more general terms, we should ask whether this debate has now become superfluous, irrelevant, outdated. In the «monde de la grande ambivalence de l'idée du 'commun'»²⁰ in which we live, and «[f]aced with the monstrous outcomes of thought (or of 'ideology')»²¹, we may, indeed, decide to once and for all abandon the problematic and dangerously ambiguous idea of community – a decision that Nancy has admitted to having arrived at as far back as 2001²².

However, this concept can be observed also from a different perspective, which Nancy calls «the community of the world». In an aside, Nancy declares that this question should be explored, leaving it ultimately unanswered («sans réponse»):

(It is not certain that this logic is restricted to man, nor even to living beings. Would not stones, mountains, the bodies of a galaxy be 'together' seen from a certain perspective not ours? It is a question that we will leave here without an answer, the question of the community of the world.)²³.

Esposito moves in a similar direction when, at the end of *Communitas*, he compares Heidegger's thought with that of Georges Bataille, another major thinker on community, concerning the distinction

[...] gives rise to an unshared though necessarily multiple speech in a way that does not let it develop itself in words: always already lost, it has no use, creates no work and does not glorify itself in that loss».

19 «[C]ommunauté de l'écriture, l'écriture de la communauté», Nancy, *La communauté désœuvrée*, *op. cit.*, p. 104. The phrase appears in a note to the first chapter of the book and is not included in the English translation. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are by the author. I thank Yoni David for retrieving the existing translations of the works quoted in this paper.

20 «[W]orld of the great ambivalence of the idea of the 'common'», Nancy, *Préface*, in Alvaro, *Le problème de la communauté*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

21 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Confronted Community*, trans. Amanda Macdonald, in «Postcolonial Studies», 6 (2003), pp. 23-36: 34.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 31-32.

23 Nancy, *Of Being-in-Common*, *op. cit.*, p. 6, (brackets in the original). This interpretation of Nancy's is shared by Frédéric Neyrat in *Le communisme existentiel de Jean-Luc Nancy*, *op. cit.*, p. 23: «Nancy procède à une *extension existentielle*. Celle-ci consiste à faire droit à la singularité de tous les existants dans un même être-au-monde sans tomber dans la mise en équivalence à laquelle conduit l'*object-oriented ontology*» («Nancy undertakes an *existential extension*. This consists in acknowledging the singularity of all existing beings within the same being-in-the-world without falling into the equivalence to which *object-oriented ontology* leads»).

between humans and animals, and concludes that the «proximity of friendship and death refers to that same *communitas* that constitutes us without belonging to us»²⁴. What is, what can *become* «us» at this pivotal junction?²⁵ Perhaps Hölderlin, too, points – beyond and despite philosophical readings from Heidegger to Agamben – in this direction, towards the perspective of a «community of the world» that is not only human, nor merely animal, but offers a completely different understanding of what is human²⁶. I shall return to this point at the end of my paper, after having reconstructed Hölderlin's presence in this profoundly European and Western discourse on community, itself inextricably bound to a specific image of what Europe and the West are²⁷.

2. COMMON TO WHOM? THE DEBATE ON COMMUNITY AND ITS LEADING FIGURES

In 1983, Nancy's essay *La communauté désouvrée* (*The Inoperative Community*)²⁸ launched a debate on the concept and practice of community

24 Esposito, *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

25 «(Or to put it another way, what does 'we' mean, what is the meaning of this pronoun which, in one way or another, must be inscribed in any discourse?)», Nancy, *Of Being-in-Common*, *op. cit.*, p. 6 (brackets in the original).

26 Already Peter Szondi hinted at the overcoming of the human/non-human divide in Hölderlin, underscoring how «[t]he significance of the linking of vine and poetic word» in his discussion of *Wie wenn am Feiertage...* (*As on a Holiday...*): «For the poets stand under 'favourable' skies; they stand – according to a much-cited verse that comes later in the poem – 'bare-headed beneath God's thunderstorms,' as the vine and the trees of the grove stood in the night, out of which the cooling flashes fell to earth. [...] Nature's stormy weather is linked to historical storms, to wars», Peter Szondi, *The Other Arrow: On the Genesis of the Late Hymnic Style*, in Id., *On Textual Understanding, and Other Essays*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1986, pp. 23-42: 27-28; Rochelle Tobias recently opened the field to an eco-critical discussion of Hölderlin's work and thought: «Hölderlin's unique insight was to comprehend that both humans and gods are subordinate to nature insofar as they constitute two sides of the same, i.e. a unity that cannot be expressed except in opposing terms. [...] To capture these opposing pairs in a single, comprehensive image was Hölderlin's consistent ambition and represents his contribution to the natural philosophy of his day and to contemporary environmental thought in an age of 'ecological crisis', Rochelle Tobias, *Introduction*, in *Hölderlin's Philosophy of Nature*, ed. by Rochelle Tobias, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2020, pp. 1-20: 15. Cf. also Id., *The Expanse of the Sky: Nature, History, and Dwelling in Celan and Hölderlin*, in «Aesthetica Preprint», 118 (2021), 137-159.

27 On this point, cf. Bernasconi's criticism of Nancy's Eurocentrism in *On Deconstructing Nostalgia for Community within the West*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-18.

28 Jean-Luc Nancy, *La communauté désouvrée*, in «Aléa», 4 (1983), pp. 11-49.

that, as previously mentioned, was taken up by various philosophers over the course of the following decades. The essay, which offers a frank discussion of Bataille's previous, radical reflections on the same topic, was instantly followed by a positive – at least on its face – response by Maurice Blanchot (a close friend of Bataille's) in his essay *La communauté inavouable* (*The Unavowable Community*)²⁹. Nancy then published a reply to Blanchot, in the form of a series of stand-alone essays in a volume with the same title as the first essay. This volume was published in slightly modified and expanded editions in 1990 and 1996.

Subsequently, this French-speaking debate was taken up in Italy, by Giorgio Agamben with *La comunità che viene* (*The Coming Community*, 1990) and the previously cited Roberto Esposito with *Communitas* (1998, 2006)³⁰. While never specifically referring to its predecessors, the title of Agamben's book appears to draw on an observation made by Nancy at the beginning of the third chapter of *The Inoperative Community*, entitled *Literary Communism*: «Community without community is to come, in the sense that it is always coming, endlessly, at the heart of every collectivity»³¹. The shift that Agamben performs with respect to Nancy within the framework of this apparent homology is made clear from the first, and only, mention, in the body of the text, of the formulation that gives the volume its title: «Tricksters or fakes, assistants or 'toons, they are the exemplars of the coming community»³². In other words, whereas Nancy distances himself from the notion of individuality by speaking of singular being in terms of a finitude shared with other singularities³³, Agamben shifts the reflection on singularity first into

29 Despite the seeming consistencies, Bernasconi detects «a vast difference opening up between Nancy's account and that offered by Blanchot» in the debate on community, in *On Deconstructing Nostalgia for Community within the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 11. Bernasconi also offers a summary of the first part of the editorial history of Nancy's text, *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

30 À propos of this debate, see also the book by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2009), though it was first published in English: «There was, after Blanchot's book and my own, a series of works thematising and defining community; this series continues to grow, but in a context where a 'communitarianism' worthy of further examination has reinvented itself in the United States», Nancy, *The Confronted Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 30. The same point is made by Georges Didi-Huberman, *Multitudes, essais, communautés*, in «esse arts + opinions», 92 (2018), pp. 60-67: 66.

31 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 71 (emphasis in the original).

32 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

33 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28. That Nancy was aware of this shared yet distant reflection is clear from his remark in *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Anne E. O'Byrne and Robert D. Richardson, Stanford University Press,

a strictly linguistic and logical domain and, from there, introduces the figure of ‘whatever being’, for the definition of which a given property is not essential but, rather, exemplary and relative to use³⁴. Esposito, in turn refers to Agamben only to a very limited extent, despite seeing himself as part of the same debate³⁵ and posing the question shared by all its participants: «How are we to break down the wall of the individual while at the same time saving the singular gift that the individual carries?»³⁶.

Later, in October 2001, Nancy wrote the preface to the Italian edition of Blanchot’s *The Unavowable Community* (*La comunità inconfessabile*, SE, Milano 2002), titled *La communauté affrontée* (*The Confronted Community*). Written in the shadow of September 11 and the ensuing war, the text explicitly states:

The history of 1980s philosophical texts about community deserves to be written up with great care, since it is, along with others but moreso than others, a history that is revealing of a profound current of thought in the Europe of that time – a current that is still carrying us along, although in a context that has changed a good deal and where the motif of ‘community’, instead of coming into the light seems to be sinking from view in a kind of obscurity³⁷.

Whereas in *The Confronted Community* Nancy still admitted that he had not offered an adequate response to Maurice Blanchot’s supposed reproach³⁸, in 2014 he published a volume devoted entirely to a reading of Blanchot, *La Communauté désavouée* (*The Disavowed Community*). This latter book is the only text in the series that I discussed above not to cite Hölderlin explicitly. Therefore, although it is part of the debate I have outlined, I have chosen to leave it outside the scope of

Stanford 2000, p. 198: «Basically, this preoccupation travels in the same direction as that undertaken by Giorgio Agamben, on one side, and Alain Badiou, on the other [...]. All of this is to make the point that we are only thinking about the ones *with* the other (by, against, in spite of, close to, far from, in touch with, in avoiding it, in digging through it)».

34 «The passage [...] from the common to the proper, comes about every time as a shuttling in both directions along a line of sparkling alternation on which common nature and singularity [...] change roles and interpenetrate. The being that is engendered on this line is whatever being, and the manner in which it passes from the common to the proper and from the proper to the common is called usage – or rather, ethos», Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

35 Cf. Esposito, *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

36 *Ibid.*, p.19.

37 Nancy, *The Confronted Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

38 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 30.

the present discussion. Instead, I shall survey and weave together the individual occurrences of Hölderlin in Nancy, Blanchot, Agamben and Esposito, in order to draw some conclusions regarding their respective approaches to the reflection on community.

3. THE PART IN COMMON: NANCY WITH LACOUÉ-LABARTHE

As I stated at the outset, *The Inoperative Community* opens with a quotation from Hölderlin's elegy *Bread and Wine* in the French translation by Lacoue-Labarthe. The poem is never taken up again in the book, yet it clearly announces the central motifs addressed by Nancy in different ways throughout the work:

Fest bleibt Eins; es sei um Mittag oder es gehe
Bis in die Mitternacht, immer bestehet ein Maas,
Allen gemein, doch jeglichem auch ist eignes beschieden,
Dahin gehet und kommt jeder, wohin er es kann³⁹.

... toujours subsiste une mesure
Commune à tous, bien qu'à
chacun aussi en propre part,
Vers où se rend et va chacun autant qu'il peut.
(trad. De Ph. L.-L.)⁴⁰

In his 1946 essay *Wozu Dichter?* (*What Are Poets For?*), Heidegger quotes the most famous line of the seventh stanza of Hölderlin's *Bread and Wine*: «Weiß ich nicht und wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?»⁴¹. He then defines the lines quoted by Nancy as «the law that rules over its poets [in a destitute time]»⁴². Heidegger is referring here to the final line of the passage selected by Nancy: «Each of us makes for the place, reaches the place that he can». This «place» also alludes to the limited accomplishment of Rilke's poetry with respect to Hölderlin's

39 Hölderlin, *Brod und Wein*, *op. cit.*, p. 91. «One thing is sure even now: at noon or just before midnight, / Whether it's early or late, always a measure exists, / Common to all, though his own to each one is also allotted, / Each of us makes for the place, reaches the place that he can.» Hölderlin, *Bread and Wine*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

40 Cf. Nancy, *La communauté désœuvrée*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

41 «I don't know, and who wants poets at all in lean years?», Hölderlin, *Bread and Wine*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

42 Martin Heidegger, *What Are Poets For?* (1946), in Id., *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, Perennial Classics, New York 2001, pp. 87-139: 93.

poetic work⁴³. The comparison between the two poets is, in fact, the principal concern of Heidegger's essay⁴⁴. In short, Heidegger reads Hölderlin's elegy as *ars poetica* – which it undoubtedly is – and does not engage with its communal dimension. As we learn from a note on Hölderlin dating from World War II, Heidegger is, instead, interested in what is *un-gemein*, uncommon or non-common, in the poetic experience⁴⁵. This different way of approaching poetry also reveals a divergence between Heidegger and Nancy in the understanding of community and being-in-common⁴⁶.

Some important changes in Lacoue-Labarthe's translation of Hölderlin's poem compared to the German original are relevant both in order to clarify this point and for Nancy's reflection on community more generally. It is significant that Lacoue-Labarthe – who was not in favour of going back to the notion of community⁴⁷ – is mentioned right at the beginning of the book, specifically in relation to Hölderlin. In a work from the same period in which the debate on community began, Lacoue-Labarthe had indeed proposed recognising a «route determined by a completely different reworking of the relation be-

43 «Rilke's poetry does not come up to Holderlin's in its rank and position in the course of the history of Being», *ibid.*, p. 96.

44 «Is Rainer Maria Rilke a poet in a destitute time? How is his poetry related to the destitution of the time? How deeply does it reach into the abyss? Where does the poet get to, assuming he goes where he can go?», *ibid.*, p. 94.

45 «Das *Gesprochene*, in die Sprache Eingegangene und Eingelassene, Habbare, der eingeführten Gewöhnung und Vernutzung im Alltäglichen preisgegeben. // Dagegen *un-gesprochen* und doch nennen, – das wahrende, bergende, sparende Sagen des selben Einzigen, *Edlen, Un-gemeinen*», Martin Heidegger, «Germanien». Das *Ungesprochene*, in Id., *Gesamtausgabe*, III. Abt.: *Unveröffentlichte Abhandlungen – Vorträge – Gedachtes*, hrsg. v. Curt Ochwandt, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2000, Bd. 75: *zu Hölderlin – Griechenlandreisen*, pp. 279-286: 282.

46 In the fourth chapter of the second, 1990 edition of *The Inoperative Community*, first published in 1988, Nancy states this explicitly: «Heidegger's *Mitsein*, and even his *Mit-da-sein*, is not thought out as radically or as decisively as it should be. It would really need to be understood that the 'mit' does not modify the 'sein' (as if being could already sustain itself in some way, as if being *were itself*; that is, as if being *were* or *existed* absolutely); and it would need to be understood that the 'mit' does not even qualify the 'Dasein,' but that it constitutes it essentially. In a baroque German, I would point to a '*seindamit*,' or to the 'with' as itself a modality, both exclusive and originary of 'being-there' or of being-the-there», Nancy, *Of Being-in-Common*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

47 «[...] the word *People*. It's one of the words I use, but you – and you've told me this more than once – you don't even want to use it. Just like the word *community*. The same is true for Philippe, in fact. So from that point of view at least you two are on the same side». Jacques Derrida, *Discussion Between Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Jean-Luc Nancy* (2004), in Id., *For Strasbourg: Conversations of Friendship and Philosophy*, Fordham University Press, New York 2014, pp. 17-30: 19.

tween philosophy, poetry, and politics»⁴⁸ in Hölderlin's work. This is important background from which to consider Lacoue-Labarthe's decision to translate «jeglichem auch ist eignes beschieden» as «à chacun / aussi en propre part» («to each one / in their proper part»). The choice to use «en propre part» rather than simply «propre» (meaning property or characteristic) for «eignes» is significant because the term «part» recurs in a key concept developed by Nancy in his writings on community, namely «partage», sharing. It already appears in what may be considered the prequel to *The Inoperative Community*, *Le partage des voix (Sharing Voices)*⁴⁹, which also ends with a quote from Hölderlin's renowned lines «Seit ein Gespräch wir sind / und hören können voneinander»⁵⁰.

In *The Inoperative Community*, «partage» is discussed both as «sharing» and as «separation, division» (*partager*), with reference to lovers who «expose [...] the exposition of singular beings to one another and the pulse of this exposition»⁵¹. The term is then used to describe the reciprocal relationship between lovers and the community «that presents to them [...] their singularities, their births, and their deaths»⁵². The fact that Nancy quotes Lacoue-Labarthe's translation of Hölderlin's verses, yet does not mention these verses again throughout his book, signals – through a common and shared mode of writing – the shift that he means to introduce with regard to this very issue. Instead of the dialectic of the proper and the improper, of the proper as that which is owned and common⁵³, the translation

48 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry, Philosophy, Politics*, in Id., *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, trans. Jeff Fort, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 2007, pp. 17-37: 28.

49 «The community remains to think according to the sharing of the logos. This surely cannot be a new groundwork for the community. But perhaps it indicates a new task with regards to the community: neither its reunion, nor its division, neither its assumption, nor its dispersion, but its sharing. Perhaps the time has come to withdraw every logical or teleological founder of the community, to withdraw from interpreting our being-together, in order to understand, on the other hand, that this being-together is only, for all that it is, the shared-being of the 'divine logos.'», Jean-Luc Nancy, *Sharing Voices*, trans. Gayle L. Ormiston, in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, eds. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, SUNY Press, Albany 1990, pp. 211-259: 247-248.

50 *Ibid.* Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Versöhnender, der du nimmergeglaubt...* (*Dritte Fassung*), in Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, op. cit., Bd. 2.1, op. cit., pp. 136-137: 137. «Since we have been a discourse and have heard from one another», Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, op. cit., p. 235.

51 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, op. cit., p. 38.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

53 Cf. also Derrida's observations on the question of appropriation and «exappropriation», in *Discussion Between Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Jean-Luc*

foregrounds Nancy's argument in the book. To paraphrase Hölderlin's verses in their French version, every singular being is such – separate, discretely distinct from and yet in contact with others – by virtue of having always already participated in community or, in Nancy's words: «There is community, there is sharing, and there is the exposition of this limit»⁵⁴. Moreover, Lacoue-Labarthe's translation introduces a spatial dimension («part» in the sense of place) that renders the grammatical and logical connection with the following verse, «Dahin gehet und kommt jeder» («Each of us makes for the place, reaches the place»), more immediately intuitive than it is in German, where the connection between «eignes» and a spatial indication appears unusual (a peculiarity that disappears in the French translation and is in itself worthy of attention).

The issue of the relation between the proper and the improper, between what is owned and what is shared, is a recurring theme in debates on community because, as Esposito observes, «it's a problem that is identical with community»⁵⁵. This question re-emerges precisely around Hölderlin – or, conversely, Hölderlin is mentioned whenever the question is raised. Nancy justifies this fact explicitly in a parenthetical remark:

Thus, the thought of community or the desire for it might well be nothing other than a belated invention that tried to respond to the harsh reality of modern experience: namely, that divinity was withdrawing infinitely from immanence, that the god-brother was at bottom *himself* the *deus absconditus* (this was Hölderlin's insight), and that the divine essence of community – or community as the existence of a divine essence – was the impossible itself.⁵⁶

Through the enjambement that breaks up the verse «à chacun / aussi en propre part» differently from the German original, Lacoue-Labarthe not only foregrounds the term «part», but also creates an epistrophe that is absent from the original text through the repetition of «chacun». In German, «chacun» corresponds to two distinct terms, namely «jeglichem» and «jeder», so that the French translation brings into relief both singularity and the coexistence of a *plurality* of singu-

Nancy (2004), *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

54 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 40; «there was this to consider, that the 'common' exists, the 'together' exists, and the 'numerous' exists, and that we no longer knew at all, perhaps, how to think about this order of the real», Nancy, *The Confronted Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

55 Esposito, *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

56 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

larities, in keeping with Nancy's theoretical elaboration. The translation thus becomes part of a process of shared and communal writing whose implications, albeit not explicitly, make up the fabric of the community of writing conjured up by Nancy and enacted within the text itself.

4. WITH JOY, WITHOUT JOY, AT EASE: BLANCHOT/AGAMBEN

Blanchot's only explicit reference to Hölderlin in *The Unavowable Community* also occurs within the context of the relationship between lovers and community, and can be read as a veiled response to Nancy⁵⁷. Among the works discussed here, this constitutes the thinnest mention of Hölderlin, whose name is given in brackets after the term «aorgique»⁵⁸. However, the marginal nature of this reference is not, in my view, a sign of indifference towards the importance that the signifier «Hölderlin» takes on within the debate on community. On the contrary, it makes it possible to gauge the distance between Blanchot and Nancy, as well as a shift in Blanchot's relation both to Hölderlin and to the Heideggerian interpretation of the poet's work. The first indication of this is Blanchot's referencing of Hölderlin's theory of the *aorgisch/organisch* binary. In doing so, Blanchot enters into a dispute with Nancy, since he emphasises, following Bataille, the socially disruptive dimension of what we might call, with Roland Barthes, the «lover's discourse».

The argumentative dimension – which, as has already been noted by Bernasconi – is never presented in a direct or confrontational manner⁵⁹ – becomes clear when we consider that Blanchot had already written on Hölderlin a few decades earlier, in an essay called *La parole 'sacrée' de Hölderlin* (included in *La part du feu*, 1949). In this work, Blanchot not only refers to the same verses used as an epigraph by Nancy in *The Inoperative Community*⁶⁰, but also briefly touches on

57 This did not, of course, escape Nancy's attention, as he subsequently admitted: «But I was also gripped by the fact that Blanchot's response was simultaneously an echo, an amplification and a riposte, a reservation, and, for that matter, in some ways a reproach», Nancy, *The Confronted Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

58 Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 40. Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Über den Unterschied der Dichtarten*, in Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, *op. cit.*, Bd. 4.1: *Der Tod des Empedokles. Aufsätze*, hrsg. v. Friedrich Beißner, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1961, pp. 266-272: 269.

59 «The debate can also be offered as an illustration of the somewhat discreet forms of criticism that often operate between French thinkers», Bernasconi, *On Deconstructing Nostalgia for Community within the West*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

60 Blanchot, *The 'Sacred' Speech of Hölderlin*, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 120-121.

the question of community, when he writes:

But, on his side, the poet, the one who gives voice to the song, can come to the world only if the world is the Universe, reconciled and pacified, capable of surrounding him, embracing him, ‘educating’ him poetically, that is to say, a universe in which the poet, already present, accomplishes his work, *in which men are a community*, in which *the song of this community is gathered* into one alone and in which the gods themselves find their truth and their place among the living⁶¹.

In this essay, Blanchot underscores the luminous, clear side of Hölderlin’s poetic engagement and interprets the verses taken from *Bread and Wine* in the same sense, insisting that: «to seek in this an experience of chaos as such an experience of night might completely distort the poet’s experience»⁶². In *The Unavowable Community*, however, Blanchot introduces Hölderlin into the text in a diametrically opposite way, since the term «aorgique» is presented as a technical term for «the original, precreational chaos, the night without end, the outside, the fundamental unhinging»⁶³.

This reversal in his interpretation of Hölderlin can be understood in light of the role of writing, and especially the writing of amorous experience as a shared participation *in*, *of*, and *with* community. In a way, Nancy provokes a reaction in Blanchot by using the central term of the debate on community previously introduced by the latter when he states: «Lovers expose above all the *unworking* of community»⁶⁴. The key term for reading the discrepancy between Blanchot and Nancy on this point is *joie* (joy). Nancy explains the link between amorous intimacy, community and writing as follows:

Lovers know joy in drowning in the instant of intimacy, but because this foundering is also their sharing and dividing since it is neither death nor communion – but joy – *even this in its turn is a singularity that exposes itself to the outside*. [...] the lovers [...] share each other, and the singularity of their love is exposed to community. Community in turn compears: for example in literary communication⁶⁵.

This statement also indirectly proposes an interpretation of the quote from *Bread and Wine*, within which «communitarian exposition» of the amorous act would likewise be inscribed, and in which «each

61 *Ibid.*, p. 117 (emphasis added).

62 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

63 Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

64 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 40 (emphasis added).

65 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

one» must also be understood as the «lovers». Blanchot chooses to respond to Nancy not by retrieving a common and perhaps overly shared reflection on Hölderlin but, rather, through an exegesis of another literary text, *The Malady of Death* (1982) by Marguerite Duras, which narrates an intimate – even erotic – relationship wherein love and participation are fulfilled only in their absence. In his discussion of Duras's text Blanchot consistently employs forms of negation compared to those employed by Nancy: «The two beings shown us represent, *without joy*, without happiness [...] the hope of singularity which they can share with no one else»⁶⁶; «*Neither joy* nor hatred, a solitary jouissance, solitary tears»⁶⁷. Blanchot is categorical on this point: «It is [...] because of that that they form a community»⁶⁸. He seeks to avoid conceiving community as a work that *can* be realised and that *ought* to be realised, in other words, its transformation into a (foundational) myth reproducing the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion. Nancy returns to this point, repeatedly citing Blanchot, in the second chapter of *The Inoperative Community*, entitled *Myth Interrupted*, by way of an observation in which the echo of Hölderlin in Blanchot's earlier reading is clearly perceptible in the mention of a solitary song: «[the singular voice] is each time the voice of one alone, and to the side, who speaks, who recites, who sometimes sings»⁶⁹.

Similarly to Blanchot, Agamben also quotes Hölderlin almost in passing at the end of *Ease*, the sixth chapter of *The Coming Community*, in which he develops the central category of «essere qualunque» (whatever being) that he proposes in the book to address – and possibly resolve – the issue of the tension between the proper and the common, the individual and the universal: «Whatever is the thing *with all its properties*, none of which, however, constitutes difference.

66 Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 48 (emphasis added). See, in comparison, Blanchot's use of the word *joie* in *The 'Sacred' Speech of Hölderlin*, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130: «Just as he [Hölderlin] was called by the day and not by the night, so it is harmony and joy he seeks».

67 *Ibid.*, p. 49 (emphasis added).

68 *Ibid.*

69 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 67. In a note from *The 'Sacred' Speech of Hölderlin*, p. 130, Blanchot writes: «Such is the other form of opposition that the poet meets, the speech of the people, song of the heart united with the community, whose voice rises to the highest, to infinity, but that as collectivity cannot sing. For song, in order to manifest what is common to all, needs the voice of solitude that alone can open up to the secret [...]. Likewise, the poet is love; it is his love that gradually makes the gods come down toward men, that gives everything to all, but at the same time love makes all mediation impossible, for it attaches itself only to the *Only One* (*The Only One*)».

[...] the particular and the generic become indifferent»⁷⁰. At the end of the chapter, Agamben refers to Provençal poetry and to the word «*aizin*», which in this context is used to «designate[s] [...] love as the experience of taking-place in a whatever singularity»⁷¹. Then, with a sudden shift typical of his style, Agamben adds: «In this sense, ease names perfectly that ‘free use of the proper’ that, according to an expression of Friedrich Hölderlin’s, is ‘the most difficult task’»⁷².

Here too, as we have seen in Nancy and Blanchot, the reference to Hölderlin is not developed any further in the course of the book, and appears alongside a reflection on love as the site where the customary conception of community is overturned in favour of its inversion. Agamben quotes Hölderlin’s famous letter to his friend Ulrich Böhlendorff, written on 4 December 1801, in which he reflects on the task of the modern poet writing in German in relation to the models of Greek antiquity. In short, it is a reflection on the process of individuation on the one hand and on the forming of a community on the other:

Bei uns ists umgekehrt. Deßwegen ists auch so gefährlich sich die Kunstregeln einzig und allein von griechischer Vortreflichkeit zu abstrahiren. Ich habe lange daran laborirt und weiß nun daß außerdem, was bei den Griechen und uns das höchste seyn muß, nemlich dem lebendigen Verhältniß und Geschick, wir nicht wohl etwas gleich mit ihnen haben dürfen.

Aber das eigene muß so gut gelernt seyn, wie das Fremde. Deßwegen sind uns die Griechen unentbehrlich. Nur werden wir ihnen gerade in unserm Eigenen, Nationellen nicht nachkommen, weil, wie gesagt, der freie Gebrauch des Eigenen das schwerste ist⁷³.

With us it is the other way round. That is also why it is so dangerous to derive our aesthetic rules from the sole source of Greek excellence. I have labored at this for a long time and know now that apart from what must be the supreme thing with the Greeks and with us, that is, living craft and proportion, we cannot properly have anything *in common* with them.

70 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 19-20.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 25. The chapter ends with a quote in Provençal ascribed to poet Jaufré Rudel: «*Mout mi semblatz de bel aizin.*’ This is the greeting that [...] the lovers exchange when they meet», *ibid.* Actually, this verse belongs to the poem *Farai un vers, pos mi sonelh*, attributed to Guilhem IX of Aquitaine. Cf. L[eslie] T[homas] Topsfield, *The Burlesque Poetry of Guilhem IX of Aquitaine*, in «Neuphilologische Mitteilungen», 69 (1968), pp. 280-302.

72 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

73 Friedrich Hölderlin to Casimir Ulrich von Böhlendorf, Nürtingen bei Stuttgart, 4. Dec. 1801, in Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, *op. cit.*, Bd. 6.1: *Briefe. Text*, hrsg. v. Friedrich Beißner, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1954, pp. 425-428: 426.

But what is our own has to be learned just as much as what is foreign. For this reason the Greeks are indispensable to us. Only it is precisely in what is proper to us, in the national, that we shall never match them because as I said, the *free* use of what is our *own* is hardest of all⁷⁴.

I have quoted this passage in full in order to highlight how it was used by Agamben. Against the backdrop of the original context in which we find the expression «the free use of the proper», Agamben's own use appears in its *Eigentiimlichkeit*, in its being *eigen* – proper and improper compared to the quoted source. Dislocated from its original whole, the quote settles within a different context that is *eigen*, specific and peculiar, insofar as it is detached from the reflection on national identity and brought back to the meeting of singular beings in a space of love, in which they appear to one another as they are. This agrees with the political dimension addressed by Agamben later in the book, according to which «community is mediated not by any condition of belonging»⁷⁵. Agamben's use of Hölderlin is, like Lacoue-Labarthe's translation, an appropriation of the text in the service of his own argumentation, and, as such, illustrates in a particularly forceful way the tension between proper and improper, proper and common, that it thematises. That this is not the only possible or necessary procedure is demonstrated by the fact that, in his recent monograph, *Hölderlin's Madness*, Agamben discusses the same passage, but this time returning it to the context from whence it comes⁷⁶. This is thus an approach to writing in which even the most fleeting use of textual references and quotes serves to illustrate the maxim that: «The impropriety, which we expose as our proper being, manner, which we *use*, engenders us. It is our second, happier, nature»⁷⁷.

5. ESPOSITO AND THE «COMMUNITY OF THE SEA»

Esposito also refers to this letter from Hölderlin to Böhlendorff in his section on Heidegger and Hölderlin, without, however, explicitly mentioning Agamben's use of it. Unlike Nancy, Blanchot, and Agamben, Esposito comments on the passage in depth, lingering on its cultural

74 Friedrich Hölderlin to Casimir Ulrich von Böhlendorff, Nürtingen, 4. Dec. 1801, in *The Complete Correspondence of Friedrich Hölderlin*, trans. and edited by Charlie Louth, SUNY Press, New York 2025, pp. 504-505.

75 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

76 Giorgio Agamben, *Hölderlin's Madness*, *op. cit.*

77 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

and political dimension⁷⁸. Esposito interprets Hölderlin – in contrast with Heidegger – as an «anti-dialectical» thinker who does not wish to resolve the tension between proper and improper identity, or proper and foreign, within the framework of a communitarian objective⁷⁹.

Like Nancy, Esposito seeks to detach the notion of community both from the past of an original unity and from the future of a community to be realized by summing up its parts⁸⁰, and to that end, draws even more decisively on Hölderlin. He is the only one of the authors discussed thus far to refer to the text «with the intense title» of *Communismus der Geister* (*Communism of Spirits*)⁸¹, whose attribution to Hölderlin is heatedly contested by scholars.

After analysing Hölderlin's letter to Böhlendorff, from which he draws the conclusion that «a land» («la Terra») is «incapable of creating any identity»⁸² Esposito suggests responding to the question of the relation between proper and improper through a collage of Hölderlinian verses that speak of the sea⁸³. For Esposito, the sea is «the site of the improper»⁸⁴, «[the] secret meaning»⁸⁵ of the the earth, and «the very figure of community»⁸⁶. With Hölderlin, Esposito reads the sea in an anti-Hegelian key, and «contrary to every ingenuous apologia for unimpeded navigation»⁸⁷ on which the colonial, expansionist and extractivist project of capitalist modernity is founded. According to this interpretation, writes Esposito, the sea «[m]ore than a victory [...] decrees a shipwreck »⁸⁸. In particular, he quotes the so-called

78 Cf. Esposito, *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

79 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

80 Cf. Esposito, *Introduction: Nothing in Common*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

81 Esposito quotes several passages drawn both from the edition by Friedrich Beißner and from the Italian translation edited and extensively commented on by Domenico Carosso (*Il comunismo degli spiriti. Forma e storia in un frammento di Friedrich Hölderlin*, Donzelli, Roma 1995), thereby implicitly accepting the legitimacy of the attribution to Hölderlin. Beißner prints the text in the section «Zweifelhaftes», without entirely excluding it from the complete edition. Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Communismus der Geister*, in Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, *op. cit.*, Bd. 4.1, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-308; Friedrich Hölderlin, *Communism of Spirits*, trans. Joseph Albernaz and David Brazil, in «The Germanic Review» 97 (2022), 1, pp. 5-6. On the debate surrounding this work, cf. Bruno C. Duarte, *Apocryphal Politics – Hölderlin's Communism of Spirits*, in «Tripwire», 14 (2018), pp. 267-278.

82 Esposito, *Communitas*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

83 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 107-109.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

second version of Hölderlin's hymn *Mnemosyne*, providing both the German original according to the textual constitution established by Friedrich Beißner and the Italian translation by Enzo Mandruzzato:

Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos
Schmerzlos sind wir und haben fast
Die Sprache in der Fremde verloren.
Wenn nemlich über Menschen
Ein Streit ist an dem Himmel und gewaltig
Die Monde gehn, so redet
Das Meer auch und Ströme müssen
Den Pfad sich suchen⁸⁹.

A sign we are, without meaning
Without pain we are and have nearly
Lost our language in foreign lands,
For when the heavens quarrel
Over humans and moons proceed
In force, the sea
Speaks out and rivers must find
Their ways⁹⁰.

While usually only the first three verses of this stanza are quoted, Esposito, in keeping with his line of reasoning, also includes the section that is often omitted. He writes: «Hölderlin's verses constitute the exact reversal of that heroic epic of the sea that Hegel philosophically 'sang' under the mark of the infinite expansion of Europe»⁹¹. In the final lines of his chapter, Esposito states that Europe must «return

89 Hölderlin, *Mnemosyne. Zweite Fassung*, in Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, op. cit., Bd. 2.1, op. cit., p. 193-198: 195 (trad. it. *Mnemosyne. Seconda stesura*, in Id., *Le liriche*, a cura di Enzo Mandruzzato, con testo a fronte, Adelphi, Milano 1977, p. 694-697: 695. At the time when the second, expanded edition of *Communitas* (2006) is published, the critical edition of Hölderlin's works edited by Luigi Reitani, which came out in 2001 offering a translation that is closer to the original, is already available, but Esposito does not refer to it in his book. Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, *La Ninfa*, in Id., *Tutte le liriche*, trans. and ed. by Luigi Reitani, Mondadori, Milano 2001, p. 1107. Concerning the publishing vicissitudes and their hermeneutic implications, cf. the chapter *Mnemosyne: una ninfa?*, in Luigi Reitani, *Geografie dell'altrove. Studi su Hölderlin*, Marsilio, Venezia 2020, and Gunter Martens, *Wie subjektiv darf, wie subjektiv muss eine Edition sein? Probleme der editorischen Deutung von Hölderlins 'letzter Hymne' Die Nympe. / Mnemosyne*, in *Edition und Interpretation moderner Lyrik seit Hölderlin*, hrsg. v. Dieter Burdorf, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2010, pp. 83-102.

90 Hölderlin, *Mnemosyne*, in Id., *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, op. cit., pp. 272-275: 273.

91 Esposito, *Communitas*, op. cit., p. 109.

to that great sea that borders [it] [...] as its fatal truth»⁹² in order to recognize «that community, which land still tries to conceal in the closing of its borders»⁹³.

In light of what Esposito writes at the end of the following chapter of *Communitas*, in which his discussion evolves into a reflection on humanity's relationship with animals⁹⁴, it is surprising that he does not dwell on the verb of «das Meer» (the sea), which is the subject of Hölderlin's: «redet» (speaks). In this section of the *Homburger Folioheft* (307/91), Hölderlin uses the verbs «zürnet» (is angry) and «erkrank[e]t»⁹⁵ (falls ill) as well as «redet» (speaks), without cancelling or preferring any of them. These verbs, which convey and imply relationships, could have opened the debate about community to include more than only the non-human animal. It is this inclusion within a «community of the world» that Nancy hints at in the passage from *The Inoperative Community* quoted above: «Would not stones, mountains, the bodies of a galaxy be 'together' seen from a certain perspective not ours?»⁹⁶

6. CONCLUSION: METAMORPHOSIS AND EARTHLY COMMUNITY

I will conclude with these lines, in which the community of writing that emerges from the sharing of Hölderlin's writing among the various writings on community gives way to «la communauté des habitants de la Terre»⁹⁷ («the community of the inhabitants of the earth»), in

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133-134.

⁹⁵ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke. Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, Bd. 2.2: *Gedichte nach 1800. Lesarten und Erläuterungen*, hrsg. v. Friedrich Beißner, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1951, p. 820

⁹⁶ Nancy (*Préface, op. cit.*, p. 11) subsequently returns to this proposal of reflection: «Pour en venir à une telle aporie, il faut que la relation – peut-être toutes les formes de relation, humaines et non-humaines – ait été portée à l'état de problème. Ce qui revient à faire problème, difficulté et obscurité de ce qui pourtant précède toute individuation, il faut même dire toute individuation de toute espèce de vivant et donc a fortiori de toute hominisation» («To arrive at such an aporia, the relationship – perhaps all forms of relationship, human and non-human – must be elevated to the status of a problem. This amounts to treating as a problem, a difficulty, and an obscurity that which nevertheless precedes all individuation; indeed, one must even say all individuation of every kind of living being and, therefore, a fortiori, all hominization»).

⁹⁷ Achille Mbembe, *La communauté terrestre*, Éditions La Découverte, Paris 2023, p. 18. The phrase is missing from the English translation: Achille Mbembe, *The Earthly Community*, trans. Steven Corcoran, V2_Publishing, Rotterdam 2022, p. 7.

which *l'écriture* is not reduced merely to writing. Beyond and above it, in an age of global crisis, the sea «falls ill», «is angry» yet «speaks» of other possible communities where the proper and the improper are continually part of one another. Along this line, which contemplates the possibility of a metamorphic relationship as conceived within the context of an animist metaphysics⁹⁸, a rereading of Hölderlin becomes possible, as does the continuation of a reflection on community that is not exclusively Eurocentric and anthropocentric. Philosopher Achille Mbembe, who in his recent book *The Earthly Community* does not cite Hölderlin but, instead, draws on African animist thought and on Édouard Glissant's concept of the *Tout-Monde*, has formulated the question that could – or should – accompany such a rereading:

To what extent does the digital density of the contemporary human subject and its relationship with the animal, mineral, and vegetable world, as well as with the rest of the living world, oblige a way of thinking about the Earth that is no longer based on the old separation of subject and object, of the useful and the useless, on that which counts and that which does not?⁹⁹

98 For a general framework, cf. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics. For a post-structural Anthropology*, trans. Peter Skafish, Univocal Publishing, Minneapolis 2014.

99 Mbembe, *The Earthly Community*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.