The Crime of Indistinction?
The Undead and the Politics of Redemption
from an Agambenian Perspective

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Abstract
The undead is a crime against the religious and the sacred; it always troubles our received topologies and distinctions between body and soul, life and death, culture and nature, the human and the nonhuman, animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic, etc. It has always been preoccupying, or haunting, writers and thinkers in the fields of philosophy, ethics, theology, and literature. Especially in contemporary biopolitical discourse, where the conditions and essence of life are fervently debated, problematized, and rethought, the undead comes to the fore and calls for our critical attention. This paper begins with a brief critical review of Hannah Arendt’s contribution to biopolitical discourse. By way of some psychoanalytic perspectives, I explicate how the “strange logic of the undead” works in such signature Agambenian categories as the “threshold” and “zone of indistinction,” and in the context of the saturation of life in the political field. Then, I turn to the homo sacer and the Muselmann who, as figures of the undead, inhabit the threshold of political life and bare life, and embody the zero degree of humanity as beings that have been deprived of human communitarian and identitarian registers, while opening a site where new ethical material might appear. The last part of this paper carries the logic of the undead a step further in order to address Agamben’s intervention in contemporary theological theories, and his contribution to the politics of emancipation and redemption through his revitalization of Paul and messianic thinking.

Keywords
Bartleby, biopolitics, homo sacer, messianism, Muselmann, theology, the undead

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