Out of the Biopolitical Double Bind: Universal Singularity, Singular Inversion, and Subtractive Unworking*

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Abstract
Agamben’s theorization of biopolitics highlights the immanent structure of modern political power. Politics no longer maintains an external position of transcendence over life; rather, what emerges is an immanent double bind in which life and politics interpenetrate each other. Following his account and enlisting Žižek and Badiou, this essay aims to clarify how Agamben’s ontopolitical “unworking” (désœuvrement) can deactivate this biopolitical power. The first part of this essay delineates the structure of this double bind and emphatically depicts the subject’s identificatory participation in bringing biopolitics into existence. The second part elucidates the two sides of “universal singularity” and centers on Agamben’s elaboration of Benjamin’s concepts of “singular inversion” and “real state of exception.” In light of Žižek’s criticism of Agamben’s lack of a theory of the subjective act, the last part attempts to find the contour of such theory in him. Agamben’s concepts of the “non-non-Jew” and “unworking” are expounded and brought into connection with Žižek’s conceptualization of “parallax” and “subtraction.” Furthermore, this part seeks to show how unworking or “sabbatism” can induce a singular mode of subjectification, how the sabbatical praxis of no-exception can untie the double bind between life and power, and how life beyond this biopolitical aporia can be envisaged.

Keywords
Agamben, biopolitics, exception, universal singularity, singular inversion, subtraction, unworking

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