

*The Weight of All Flesh:
On the Subject-Matter of Political Economy*

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INTRODUCTION

I

In my previous book, I argued that the subject matter that Ernst Kantorowicz elaborated in his famous study of medieval and early modern political theology, *The King's Two Bodies*, never disappeared from the life of the citizen-subjects of modern, constitutional states.¹ My claim was rather that the “stuff” of the king’s glorious body—the virtually real supplement to his empirical, mortal body—was in some sense dispersed into new locations as a spectral materiality—I called it a *surplus of immanence*—that called on the scene new forms and practices of knowledge, power, and administration charged—or rather: *sur-charged*—with coming to terms with and, indeed, cultivating these “royal remains” injected into the life of the People. To use Freud’s locution for the pressure of the drives, these remains now insisted as an uncanny *Arbeitsanforderung* or demand for work. This was, in other words, work in excess of any apparent teleological order, work that kept one busy beyond reason. Among these new forms I counted first and foremost the new modalities of statecraft analyzed by Michel Foucault under the heading of the disciplines and biopower. My claim, however, was that what these new forms of knowledge and control were at least in part “on to,” the subject matter they were tracking without fully being able to conceptualize it, came into view in Freud’s theory and practice as, precisely, *subject-matter*: a peculiar and often unnerving materiality, a seemingly formless or *informe* remainder of processes of subject-formation. I argued that psychoanalysis could itself be understood as the science of “royal remains” insisting—beyond reason—as a quasi-discursive and quasi-somatic pressure in the souls of modern citizen-subjects. The usual genealogy of Freud’s new science—its neurological lineage—was thus to be supplemented by one addressing its emergence out of a displacement and redistribution of “emergency powers” previously concentrated in, *enjoyed* and *embodied* by, the sovereign person, in a word, by a political theological lineage. My further claim was that a variety of modernist aesthetic projects had found their own ways to elaborate and give provisional form to the *informe* surplus of immanence pushing against the skin of “modern man,” to the inflammatory pressure emerging at a newly configured jointure of the somatic and the normative, a new symbolic knotting or suturing of *physis* and *nomos*, of man’s being as animal and his being as locus of initiative in the space of

reasons, commitments, responsibilities. In the following I would like to continue these investigations by extending them into a realm I had heretofore neglected, that of political economy. In a certain sense I will be repeating my previous argument but now with a view to its relation and relevance to Marx's conception of the critique of political economy. This then is very much a *partial* repetition: one concerned with the "partial object" of political economy with respect to which no one ever remains fully impartial.

II

A crucial point of reference in *The Royal Remains* was provided by Jacques-Louis David's famous painting, *The Death of Marat*, which I took to be an emblem of the troubled transition from the representational regime of the King's Two Bodies to that of the People's Two Bodies. My reading took its lead from T. J. Clark who rather boldly proposed that one view the painting as the inaugural work of European visual modernism. For Clark, *Marat* enjoys this status insofar as its particular—and particularly intense—engagement with politics "tells us something about its [modernism—E.L.S.] coming to terms with the world's disenchantment in general."² The public service—we might say: liturgical labor—performed by earlier painters such as Velázquez was, according to Clark, "to transmute the political, to clean it of the dross of contingency, to raise it up to the realm of allegory"; David succeeds—and so becomes modern—precisely by failing to do any such thing, by articulating its impossibility, by allowing his painting to turn—and in some sense to keep turning—"on the impossibility of transcendence" (22). And all of that in the context of a new liturgy meant to consolidate the consistency of the People as uncontested bearer of the principle of sovereignty.³ We might say that what David's painting puts on display is precisely the insistent *remainder* of such efforts at sublimation/allegorization, that it offers them as the new subject matter—and I would add: quasi-carnal *subject-matter*—of painting.

The simultaneously political and painterly form of the impossibility of transcendence or, as we might put it, the political and painterly form of a new surplus of immanence, appears as an abstract materiality that would seem to issue from Marat's mutilated body and fill the upper half of the painting. As Clark puts it, David's treatment of the body "seems to make Marat much the same substance—the same abstract material—as

the empty space above him. The wound is as abstract as the flesh” (36; emphasis added). The flesh that can no longer be figured as the virtually real, glorious body of the king becomes the *abstract material* out of which the painting is largely made. The empty upper half of the painting stands in for a missing and, indeed, impossible representation of the People: “It embodies the concept’s absence, so to speak. It happens upon representation as technique. It sets its seal on Marat’s unsuitability for the work of incarnation” (47). The scumbled surface forming the upper half of the painting thus no longer functions as a simple absence but rather as a positive, even oppressive presence, “something abstract and unmotivated, which occupies a different conceptual space from the bodies below it. This produces,” Clark continues, “a kind of representational deadlock, which is the true source of the *Marat’s* continuing hold on us” (48). This is the “endless, meaningless objectivity produced by paint not quite finding its object, symbolic or otherwise, and therefore making do with its own procedures” (48). This is what Clark means when he speaks of painting “turning” on the impossibility of transcendence. That characterization brings to mind—well, to my mind—a short text by Kafka:

Es wurde ihnen die Wahl gestellt Könige oder der Könige Kuriere zu werden. Nach der Art der Kinder wollten alle Kuriere sein. Deshalb gibt es lauter Kuriere, sie jagen durch die Welt und rufen, da es keine Könige gibt, einander selbst die sinnlos gewordenen Meldungen zu. Gerne würden sie ihrem elenden Leben ein Ende machen, aber sie wagen es nicht wegen des Diensteides.

(They were given the choice to become kings or messengers. Just like children they all chose to be messengers. For this reason there are only messengers; they race through the world and, because there are no kings, they call out to one another proclamations that have become meaningless. They would happily put an end to their miserable life but because of their oath of office they don’t dare.)⁴

We might say that a new form of *business*—of quasi-official busy-ness and busy-body-ness—comes itself to function as the work of incarnation, as the production site of the flesh of the People. For Clark, such agitated racing about is precisely what is *happening* in the upper half of David’s painting, a spectral state of affairs—the messengers have outlived their purpose—that constitutes a kind of *shame* that will forever haunt

modernism. (At some level Clark seems to be saying that *artists* would like to put an end to their miserable life but because of their oath of office they do not dare.) We might even say that the abstract material out of which the upper half of the painting is made just is the ectoplasmic substance of this haunting: “In a sense . . . I . . . am saying that the upper half is a display of technique. But display is too neutral a word: for the point I am making, ultimately, is that technique in modernism is a kind of shame: something that asserts itself as the truth of picturing, but always against picturing’s best and most desperate efforts” (48). In David, this shame emerges precisely at the point and in the space where “‘People’ ought to appear” (*ibid.*). What appears at the missing place of the new sovereign body is rather a kind of dreamwork made painterly flesh in the pure activity of painting; the empty upper half of the image forms not so much a vacancy as the site of an excess of pressure, a signifying stress that opens onto a vision of painting as *Tribschicksal*, as a vicissitude of the drive recalling the seemingly senseless running about—the uncannily busy bodies—of Kafka’s messengers:

And yet the single most extraordinary feature of the picture . . . is its whole upper half being empty. Or rather (here is what is unprecedented), not being empty, exactly, not being a satisfactory representation of nothing or nothing much—of an absence in which whatever the subject is has become present—but something more like a representation of painting, of painting as pure activity. Painting as material, therefore. Aimless. In the end detached from any one representational task. Bodily. Generating (monotonous) orders out of itself, or maybe out of ingrained habit. A kind of automatic writing. (45)

Keeping Kafka’s text in mind, we might characterize this writing as *traumamtliches Schreiben*, a neologism that brings together the meanings: dream, trauma, and *Amt* or office. My argument in the following will be that Marx’s labor theory of value concerns precisely this dimension of the *traumamtlich* as the site at which a surplus of immanence—the royal remains left to the People—comes to be elaborated and managed as the real subject-matter of political economy. His theory concerns, that is, the flesh as a social substance *materially abstracted* from the busy body of labor, a substance he will famously refer to as *gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit*, the spectral objectivity/materiality of value. As will become clear, what is truly at issue in Marx’s labor theory—the nature of this

spectral stuff and its modes of production—spans the distinction between industrial and “office” work.

To return to *The Death of Marat*: that this inaugural moment of modernism is one that already pertains to political economy and to the “busy-ness” matters with which it is concerned is signaled in the painting by way of a small, easily overlooked detail. Clark dedicates considerable attention to the bits of paper visible in the painting, the most legible of which is Charlotte Corday’s own letter of introduction and appeal to Marat’s benevolence. More important for Clark is the barely legible scrap on the orange cart that would appear to be Marat’s own last letter. Apropos of the words just out of sight in the letter and presumed to be “de la patrie,” Clark asks,

But is there a final phrase at all? Of course there looks to be something; but it is so scrappy and vestigial, an extra few words where there really is no room left for anything, that the reader continually double-takes, as if reluctant to accept that writing, of all things, can decline to this state of utter visual elusiveness. Surely if I look again—and look hard enough—the truth will out. For spatially, this is the picture’s starting point. It is closeness incarnate. (40)

Clark adds that these bits of painted writing “become the figure of the picture’s whole imagining of the world and the new shape it is taking. . . . The boundaries between the discursive and the visual are giving way, under *some pressure the painter cannot quite put his finger on, though he gets close*” (42; emphasis added).

But as Clark has so persuasively argued, it is in the swirling, vertiginous void that fills the picture’s upper half that this pressure finds its “proper” place—its *nonresting place*—in the visual field. The spectral materiality of the flesh torn from the body of the king finds its inaugural *modern* figuration in that dense, agitated, painterly writing on the wall. Clark is right, then, to see in the painting the opening onto a new aesthetic dimension and one that has a very precise historical index. What makes modernism modernism is that its basic materials are compelled to engage with and, as it were, model the dimension of the flesh inflamed by the representational deadlock situated at the transition from royal to popular sovereignty. What in historical experience can no longer be elevated—sublimated—by way of codified practices of picture-making to the dignity of religious, moral, or political allegory, introduced into a

realm of institutionally (and, ultimately, transcendently) authorized meanings, now achieves its sublimity in a purely immanent fashion. The vicissitudes of this abstract materiality itself become the *subject-matter* of the arts: what art deals with, the formal and thematic subject matter of its aesthetic negotiations; but also where the subject is inscribed, where it is libidinally implicated and *at work* in the image.

Toward the very end of his chapter on the painting, Clark returns to the remaining bit of paper resting on the crate, an assignat for five livres. This piece of revolutionary currency first issued in 1790 as an emergency measure in response to the flight of gold and coin from the country would come to be guaranteed, at least in principle, by the value of confiscated properties of the Church and aristocracy. The currency lost most of its value in a matter of years and by 1797 this experiment in financial engineering was finally declared to be a failure (as Clark notes, the Terror, by intensifying the force and pace of expropriations, initially led to a temporary increase in the value of the currency). This was the same year that the English Parliament passed a law releasing the Bank of England from the obligation to convert paper currency into coin upon demand.⁵ For Clark, the presence of the assignat in the painting serves as a placeholder for a fundamental uncertainty that must have haunted the revolution as a whole and Jacobins like David in particular, one that concerned the “arbitrariness of the sign”—and so the possible lack of any ultimate reference—under which the revolution was staged: “To believe in oneself as ushering in Nature’s kingdom, and to think there was no time to lose if it was to be secured against its enemies; and yet to know in one’s heart of hearts that what was being built was just another form of artifice, was wayward and unpredictable as the rest. Another arbitrariness. Another law for the lion and the ox” (50). Clark suggests, in other words, that the question haunting the revolution and at some level symbolized by the fragile value of its currency concerned the ultimate source of legitimacy for the displacement and redistribution of the exceptional power and authority previously concentrated in the sovereign person.

What I will be exploring in the following is a more specific question signaled, in my view, by the presence of the assignat in this inaugural painting of modernism, namely, that of the role of political economy in this displacement and redistribution. What the assignat indicates, in my reading, is that the *abstract material* that seems to flow from the body of Marat to the upper half of the painting darkly figures—in a nonfigural manner—what would ultimately provide the substance of

value circulating through the new bourgeois order: the (surplus) value *materially abstracted* from the body of labor, the very “stuff” that would, in Marx’s view, come to form the medium of the social bond in capitalist societies. What David’s painting bears witness to is thus not only the passage from royal to popular sovereignty—and the impasses haunting the representation of the People for postmonarchical societies—but also from the political theology of sovereignty to the political economy of the wealth of nations. What is at issue in this peculiar effluence that comes to fill the upper half of David’s painting is, I am arguing, a shift in the nature of the medium in which our precious subject-matter circulates and in which our fundamental social bonds are sealed. We will, in other words, be tracking in the domain of political economy what I have characterized as a surplus of immanence released into the social body by the ostensible “excarnation” of sovereignty. Marx, as I have noted, analyzed this surplus under the rather remarkable heading of *gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit*, spectral materiality. It is, I will argue, only against this background that we can fully grasp the logic behind Jacques Derrida’s decision to accompany his study of the spectral in Marx’s work by a running commentary on *Hamlet*.

The editors of a volume of essays on the “Republican Body” have put the subject-matter at issue quite succinctly: “With democracy the concept of the nation replaced the monarch and sovereignty was dispersed from the king’s body to all bodies. *Suddenly every body bore political weight*. . . . With the old sartorial and behavioral codes gone, bodies were less legible, and a person’s place in the nation was unclear.”⁶ My interest here is in the nature of the *matter* that accounts for the new political weight and value of every citizen and in political economy as a site in which this weight begins to be taken into account precisely by efforts to weigh it, reckon with it, subject it, as it were, to double-entry bookkeeping without ever really grasping the real nature of the “double” involved. My claim is that the fantasmatic substance once borne by the bearer of the royal office becomes a *traumamtlich* dimension of social life elaborated above all in economic activities and relations. The King’s Two Bodies becomes, as it were, every body’s busy-ness.

III

In a recent book-length essay on the unique temporal ubiquity of contemporary global capitalism with the telling title, *24/7*, Jonathan Crary has argued that sleep represents the last fragile remnant of the human

lifeworld not yet fully colonized by the mad rhythms of production and consumption, the site where our busy bodies can still, if only for ever more brief intervals and often only with the help of medication, withdraw from their “oath of office.”⁷ Building on Marx’s reflections on the “natural barriers” to capital accumulation, Crary implicitly compares the “triumphal installation of a 24/7 world” (17) with an act of *decreation* whereby the most basic distinctions established by the act of creation—those between night and day and darkness and light—have been revoked. “More concretely,” he writes, “it is like a state of emergency, when a bank of floodlights are suddenly switched on in the middle of the night, seemingly as a response to some extreme circumstances, but which never get turned off and become domesticated into a permanent condition. The planet becomes reimagined as a non-stop work site or an always open shopping mall of infinite choices, tasks, selections, and digressions” (17). A prerogative belonging to the sovereign—the decision on the state of emergency/exception—has, in a word, at some level bled into the chronic rhythms of economic life. What Crary is suggesting is that exposure to the exceptional force of law (that can in principle suspend its application) and exposure to the exigencies of an economic machine that now runs 24/7, enter into a zone of indistinction, to use Giorgio Agamben’s favored formulation. To be caught in the glare of such floodlights that would seem to decreate night and day is, paradoxically, to be rendered ever more creaturely, ever more purely enjoined to the mere management of life, however infinite and entertaining the choices it might comprise.⁸ To use Nietzsche’s famous term, the life of “the last man” is, in all its blithe nihilism, an infinitely busy one.

Against this background, one might link the manic state of those creaturely messengers described in Kafka’s short fragment to the moment in *The Castle* when the novel’s protagonist, K., is shocked out of his cognac-induced somnolence by the sudden lighting of the courtyard where he had been resting under blankets in a sleigh, ostensibly waiting for the mysterious castle official Klamm: “At that—just as K. was engaged in taking a long sip—it became bright, the electric light came on, not only inside, on the stairs, in the passage, and in the corridor, but outside above the entrance. Footsteps could be heard descending the stairs, the bottle fell from K.’s hand, cognac spilled onto a fur, K. jumped from the sleigh.”⁹ We might say that both the messengers and K. are addressees of an imperious interpellation that no longer issues from this or that identifiable agent or official but from a lifeworld that has itself come to resemble a

kind of office that never goes dark. In this sense, “24/7” can be viewed as another formula for what I have characterized as the *traumamtlich* dimension of modern life.

Here one will recall that K.’s fundamental dilemma pertains to the question as to whether he was truly “called” to be a land surveyor by the castle, whether he has a proper vocation there, a proper *Berufsarbeit*, to use the term favored by Max Weber in his account of the spirit of capitalism. In a certain sense, K. is demanding of the castle officials that they issue a proper *Arbeitsanforderung* or demand for work. K.’s business at the castle would, at some level, seem to be to reanimate the old spirit of capitalism that calls one to a proper calling. What he encounters instead is a sort of constant chatter that provides no orientation, but only diffuse “excitations” (from *ex-citare*, to call out or summon).¹⁰

This is quite literally the case in the episode early in the novel when K. tries to clarify the nature of his *Berufsarbeit* by calling the castle authorities from the telephone at the inn where he has spent the first night of his sojourn in the village at the foot of the castle hill. Overcoming the general suspicion among the patrons at the inn that his efforts would remain fruitless, K. picks up the phone. What he hears on the other end is something like the acoustic equivalent of the battery of floodlights in Crary’s image of a state of exception that has become the norm of the unworlded world, the decreed creation, of 24/7:

From the mouthpiece came a humming [*aus der Hörmuschel kam ein Summen*], the likes of which K. had never heard on the telephone before. It was as though the humming of countless childlike voices—but it wasn’t humming either, it was singing, the singing of the most distant, of the most utterly distant, voices—as though a single, high-pitched yet utterly strong voice had emerged out of this humming in some quite impossible way and now drummed against one’s ears as if demanding to penetrate more deeply into something other than one’s wretched hearing. K. listened [*horchte*] without telephoning, with his left arm propped on the telephone stand and he listened thus [*horchte so*]. (20)

What Crary ultimately wants to underline with that image of floodlights—and the essay as a whole might be viewed as an unpacking of this basic insight—is the belonging together of the logic of the security state, with its demand for constant vigilance and ubiquitous surveillance,

and that of neoliberal political economy with its demand for constant production, consumption, communication, interconnectedness, interindebtedness, and profit-oriented self-management. The pressure of 24/7 vigilance informs, that is, not only the security apparatus of the state but its political economy as well. The blurring of the boundaries between corporate and state data mining—our most recent “extractive” industry supported, in turn, by the mining of rare earth metals—would then be only one symptom of this convergence of political and economic tendencies in a ubiquitous pressure for productive wakefulness.¹¹ Sleep, as Crary argues, would thus indeed seem to represent something like a final frontier where the exigencies of a 24/7 world—a world at some level unworlded or, as I have put it, decreated—run up against the recalcitrance of human embodiment. The paradox of a 24/7 environment would thus seem to be that only in sleep do we inhabit a truly human world, one not fully adapted to, (de)created for, the inhuman rhythms of 24/7 routines of work, consumption, connectivity, and vigilance.

In his novels, Kafka’s protagonists are everywhere falling asleep at precisely the wrong moment. In one of the final episodes of *The Castle*, for example, we find K. walking the corridors of the *Herrenhof*, the inn where castle officials stay when they have business in the village. He is still searching for ways to reach Klamm, if only by way of further intermediaries. He finally enters a room where he hopes, if only by chance, to find one of those intermediaries, Erlanger, “one of the first secretaries of Klamm” (239). He finds himself in “a small room, more than half of it occupied by a wide bed” (257). The bed’s inhabitant, another secretary named Bürgel, welcomes K. and initiates him into various aspects of his life as a castle official, which, as Bürgel suggests, is the only life one has there since, as he puts it, “we don’t acknowledge any distinction between ordinary time and work time. Such distinctions are alien to us” (262). All life is, in a word, official life, *amtliches Leben*—or more accurately: *traumamtliches Leben*, one in which the distinction between living and dreaming has been officially suspended, where the *Arbeitsanforderung* of one’s office ramifies into the most intimate parts of one’s life. All space thereby becomes a kind of office, and a bed a form of office furniture: “Oh, for anyone who could stretch out and sleep soundly, for any sound sleeper, this bed would be truly delicious. But even for someone like myself, who is always tired but cannot sleep, it does some good, I spend a large part of the day in it, dispatching all my correspondence and questioning the parties” (259). The rest of the chapter is for the most part

taken up by Bürgel's vague and convoluted account of rare contingencies that might in principle allow "a party" to achieve his goals with castle authorities, goals normally impossible to achieve even with "a lifetime of grueling effort," as he puts it (261). The reader gets the very strong sense that Bürgel is effectively hypnotizing K., seducing him into somnolence, by way of a description of the possibilities of the sort of decisive and saving action that K. has been seeking all along, possibilities that are, however, effectively available only there, in the "here and now" of Brügel's own speech. K. is put to sleep by a discourse on the need for vigilance; he sleeps through the moment being described to him as his singular possibility of salvation. In Freudian terms, it is as if K. falls asleep at the precise point of a possible analytic breakthrough in the "here and now" of the transference. Kafka, ever the master of proliferating ambiguities, also hints that this "act" of falling asleep might itself be viewed as the true and heroic triumph K. had been pursuing all along. This and other such hints, however, get immediately taken up into the darker story of constantly—and somehow inevitably—missed chances.

In a 24/7 economy it is clear that one is "chronically" at risk of missing an opportunity, of failing to be vigilant, of failing to be in the know. Crary thus emphasizes the *fantasmatic* aspect of life lived under the pressure of its demands:

Now there are numerous pressures for individuals to reimagine and refigure themselves as being of the same consistency and values as the dematerialized commodities and social connections in which they are immersed so extensively. Reification has proceeded to the point where the individual has to invent a self-understanding that optimizes or facilitates their participation in digital milieus and speeds. Paradoxically, this means impersonating the inert and the inanimate. . . . Because one cannot literally enter any of the electronic mirages that constitute the interlocking marketplaces of global consumerism, one is obliged to construct *fantasmatic compatibilities* between the human and a realm of choices that is fundamentally unlivable. (99–100; emphasis added)

As Kantorowicz has argued, such fantasmatic compatibilities—at least with respect to wakefulness—were in the late middle ages and early modernity conceived as part and parcel of the office of the king. More precisely, they were seen as part of the charge of the king's virtually real

double. The ideal of the *rex exsominis*, the king who has no rest, added the dimension of perpetual vigilance to the other attributes sustained by the king's "second body," those of his ubiquity, his character of *lex animata*, and his infallibility.¹² One might thus view the 24/7 regime of neoliberal capitalism as a sort of popularization/democratization of the ideal of the *rex exsominis* and its diffusion into the broader fabric of social life. Thus 24/7 would be another "name" for the displacement or *Entstellung* of the political theology of sovereignty by the political economy of the wealth of nations, of the metamorphosis of the King's Two Bodies into the People's Two Bodies.¹³ We might say that at this point, the psychopathology of everyday (waking) life and the interpretation of dreams enter into a zone of indistinction.

Michel Foucault has for his part argued that the attribute of perpetual vigilance entered into our general conception of governmental power largely by way of the ideal of "pastoral" care developed in biblical and classical antiquity and further elaborated in Christianity. As Foucault put it in the first of his Tanner Lectures delivered in 1979,

The Greek leader had naturally to make decisions in the interest of all; he would have been a bad leader had he preferred his personal interest. But his duty was a glorious one: even if in war he had to give up his life, such a sacrifice was offset by something extremely precious: immortality. He never lost. By way of contrast, shepherdly kindness is much closer to "devotedness." That's his constant concern. When they sleep, *he* keeps watch.

With respect to the ideal of shepherdly vigilance, Foucault adds, "First, he acts, he works, he puts himself out, for those he nourishes and who are asleep. Second, he watches over them."¹⁴

In the second lecture, in which he takes up the modern elaborations of at least certain strands of pastoral power, Foucault addresses the institution of the police that was, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, understood broadly as public policy or civil administration. Among the areas of concern of police administration we find a return of the dimension of glory—now under the heading of *splendor*—that he had first seen as standing outside the purview of the pastoral paradigm. Drawing on one of the first utopian programs for a fully policed state, Turguet de Mayenne's *Aristo-Democratic Monarchy*—a work that includes the first mention of the term "political economy"—Foucault divides the duties of

the police into two categories: "First, the police has to do with everything providing the city with adornment, form, and splendor. Splendor denotes not only the beauty of a state ordered to perfection; but also its strength, its vigor." The second category, which Turguet brings under the heading of "communication," includes the charge of fostering "working and trading relations between men, as well as aid and mutual help." Summarizing his findings, Foucault suggests that the task of the police—their fundamental charge—was in effect to cultivate a sort of *sur-charge* or *surplus of life* on behalf of the state: "As a form of rational intervention wielding political power over men, the role of the police is to supply them with a *little extra life*; and by so doing, supply the state with a little extra strength."¹⁵ The following reflections will attempt to gather these motifs into a coherent story about the fate of this surplus life, the vicissitudes of this splendid surcharge of animation that became the *subject-matter* of classical political economy and has become an ever more dominant dimension of contemporary capitalism. As we shall see, the story concerns historical dislocations and displacements in the sites, procedures, and fantasies in and through which social bonds are formed in the flesh of embodied subjects, flesh that at a certain moment in our history comes to be weighed in balances that ever more determine our individual and collective destinies.

During the final, proofreading stage of the preparation of this volume, I was alerted to Gil Anidjar's new work on the historical semantics of blood, an element and medium at times opposed to, at times figured as the very life and soul of, the virtual real dimension I address here under the heading of *flesh*.¹⁶ Reading Anidjar at this late date made me feel a bit like Shylock in the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*—a scene I will discuss in detail below—when Portia, in the guise of a young doctor of law, informs him that this bond allows him to cut a pound of flesh from Antonio's body but that he must do so without spilling a drop of the latter's Christian blood. Anidjar's work compellingly insists on the insistence of blood in the story I have tried to tell here, a story about the transformation of social bonds and the fantasies that in large measure sustain them.¹⁷ My own sense is that we are, in the end, both addressing the same dimension—the same *subject-matter*—of social bonds as they have been elaborated in the Christian West but that where I focus on the aspect of *congelation*, Anidjar emphasizes the eternal recurrence, if I might put it that way, of *liquefaction*. We are, that is, addressing different *states* of the subject-matter at issue in the elaboration of social bonds in

the early modern and modern State, in the former within a political theology of sovereignty, in the latter within a political economy of wealth. As we shall see, Marx himself addresses these two aspects or states in his analysis of the commodity form (his example here is so and so much fabricated linen):

Human labor-power in its fluid state, or human labor, creates value, but is not itself value. It becomes value in its coagulated state [*in geronnenem Zustand*], in objective [*gegenständlicher*] form. The value of the linen as a congealed mass of human labor [*als Gallerte menschlicher Arbeit*] can be expressed only as an “objectivity” [*Gegenständlichkeit*], a thing which is materially different from the linen itself and yet common to the linen and all other commodities.¹⁸

It is this objectivity or materiality that our very doings invoke or conjure that Marx characterizes as spectral, as *gespenstisch*, and it is above all this aspect, one that Marx, two paragraphs later, explicitly links to the *Leibgestalt*, the fleshly form, of the sovereign, that is my concern in these pages.

I would like to conclude these preliminary remarks by citing a brief passage from Rainer Maria Rilke’s 1910 novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, a work I discussed in detail in the final chapter of *The Royal Remains*. As I argued there, Rilke’s poetic anthropology of modernity tracks the royal remains into the fabric of everyday life, shows what can happen, that is, once the King’s Two Bodies come to belong to every body, become every body’s busy-ness. The novel’s protagonist, a young and now impoverished Danish aristocrat wandering the streets of Paris and struggling to become a writer, visits, at one point, the psychiatric clinic at Salpêtrière in the hopes of finding relief from agonizing anxieties he is unable to master on his own. While waiting to be seen by these new sorts of masters—in Foucault’s terms, these biopolitical experts—the anxieties begin to take shape—to congeal—as the carnal pressure of a sort of second head pushing against the boundaries of the skin. It is a pressure that Malte first experienced in the steadily decaying manor houses—the *Herrenhäuser*—of his childhood, houses at one time linked, as the novel makes clear, to the Danish royal house. At the center of the experience is the registration of a demand—an *Arbeitsanforderung*—to sustain this uncanny carnality, this “extra life,” with his own blood:

And then . . . for the first time in many, many years, it was there again. What had filled me with my first, deep horror [*Entsetzen*], when I was a child and lay in bed with fever: the Big Thing [*das Große*]. . . . Now it was there. Now it was growing out of me like a tumor, like a second head, and was a part of me, although it certainly couldn't belong to me, because it was so big. It was there like a large dead animal which, while it was alive, used to be my hand or my arm. And my blood flowed through me and through it, as through one and the same body. And my heart had to beat harder to pump blood into the Big Thing: there was barely enough blood. And the blood entered the Big Thing unwillingly and came back sick and tainted. But the Big Thing swelled and grew over my face like a warm bluish boil, and grew over my mouth, and already my last eye was hidden by its shadow.¹⁹

As the novel as a whole makes clear, what Malte experiences here as *Entsetzen* or horror is linked to the historical *Ent-setzen* or deposition of the king and more generally of the form of life organized, at a symbolic and imaginary level, by way of the political theology of sovereignty. The subject matter of Malte's *Entsetzen* is the appearance in the real of his *subject-matter*, a surplus of inflamed and agitated flesh with no proper sociosymbolic resting place. It was, as I will be arguing in the following pages, the genius of capitalism to keep this dimension from going to waste or rather to convert this waste product of political theology—these *Königsreste*—into the treasure of political economy, the fundamental substance of which Marx characterized as *gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit*. Under Marx's gaze, what Rilke still elaborated as a psycho-politico-theology of everyday life thereby comes into focus as a psycho-economico-theology of everyday life, a life whose uncanny surplus—whose subject-matter—becomes the subject matter of political economy.

LECTURE I.
ON THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF
POLITICAL THEOLOGY

I

As I have indicated in the introduction, I am attempting to unpack the ambiguity embedded in the phrase, “the subject matter of political economy.” My claim is that what is generally studied under the heading of political economy—its subject matter in the conventional sense—demands a special sort of materialism, one attuned to the strange matter or materiality generated by the emergence and sustenance, under ever changing historical circumstances, of human subjectivity. If political economy has a proper subject matter, it has to do with an improper “surplus of matter,” a locus of pressure that drives the pursuit of the wealth of nations, that first turns the rational pursuit of ends into a drive. (In the following, when I want to emphasize this second meaning, I will use the hyphenated form: *subject-matter*. The topic or subject matter of this book is, one could say, the modern vicissitudes of *subject-matter*.) No doubt a great deal hangs on the nature of this impropriety, this state of being out of place, un-owned, and unclean, a cluster of meanings that brings to mind the famous definition of dirt as “matter in the wrong place.” Freud, one will recall, cited that definition in an essay in which he showed “primitive accumulation” in the economic realm to be not so much incremental as excremental in nature, to be linked in a fundamental way to the dirty business of *waste*, the work of *waste management*, and the character traits that may be called for in response to its demands.²⁰

Some years ago, Jacques Derrida addressed the “hauntological” dirt of political economy in his sprawling study, *Specters of Marx*.²¹ The question that interests me here is one that Derrida repeatedly invokes—or to use his own favored term: *conjures*—without fully developing. It has to do with the guardian spirit of his study, *Hamlet*, and with the historical transformations that link the crisis of sovereignty staged in Shakespeare’s play to Marx’s elaboration of the spectral objectivity/materiality—Marx calls it *die gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit*—immanent and indeed vital to the commodity form. The nature of this “vitality,” this “animation,” is, in my view, what is ultimately at issue in the spectral analysis of capitalist modernity and links this project to the larger field of contemporary thinking on the concept of life and of so-called *vibrant matter* more

broadly. My hunch is that what is behind the contemporary efflorescence of new materialisms in the humanities is not only a new ethical sensitivity to the liveliness and agency of nonhuman animals, things, “actants,” and environments. In my view, they have emerged in large measure under the pressure that Rainer Maria Rilke—in many ways the canonical poet of vibrant matter—characterized as the “vibration of money,” the flows, fluxes, and intensities—the vibrancies—of capital in our everyday life.²² The new materialisms attempt, however, to dispense with “subject-matter,” the materiality proper to human subjectivity. The modern and postmodern mutations of that subject-matter that function, as I see it, as a hidden object/cause, as the real *Anstoss*, of the new materialist turn, are my concern here.

To return to the frame of Derrida’s study, Hamlet/Marx: What finally links the ghost of a violently deposed king to a central, if fantastic, feature of economic life under capitalism, to what we might call its *virtual real*? To relocate the question I first asked in my previous book, *The Royal Remains*, I want to ask here what remains of the royal in that domain of activity in which, to use Adam Smith’s famous formulation, we seem merely to actualize our basic human capacity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another. What allows for the apparent metamorphosis of at least some part or aspect of the king’s deposed body—some *partial object* of political theological legitimacy—into the substance of value of commodities?²³

At some level the question concerns the shift from one form of fetishism to another, from the fetishism of persons to that of objects of exchange. It is the question of a shift in the locus of the Thing that was with the king, to the (ever more imperious) realm of commodities that thereby come to promise “the real thing.” In *Capital*, Marx makes only a few brief references to the earlier, ostensibly premodern mode of fetishism. In his initial presentation of the relative form of value in his analytical reconstruction of the commodity form, Marx writes, for example: “An individual, A, for instance, cannot be ‘your majesty’ to another individual, B, unless majesty in B’s eyes assumes the fleshly form [*Leibesgestalt*] of A, and, moreover, changes facial features, hair and many other things, with every new ‘father of his people.’” In a later passage, Marx cites Hegel’s notion of a *Reflektionsbestimmung* or reflexive determination as the key to this sort of relational identity: “For instance, one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the other hand, imagine that they are subjects because he is king.”²⁴

The point is that the king acquires his royal flesh, comes to enjoy the second, glorious body that forms the subject matter—in both senses of the term—of Ernst Kantorowicz’s magisterial study, *King’s Two Bodies*, by virtue of his place within a specific set of sociosymbolic relations sustained—or better: *entertained* (in German: *unterhalten*)—by way of the liturgical practices of courtly life beginning with those of anointment, consecration, and ritual acclamation. As Kantorowicz puts it, “the vision of the king as a *persona geminata* is ontological and, as *an effluence of a sacramental and liturgical action* performed at the altar, it is liturgical as well.”²⁵ And as Slavoj Žižek has concisely written apropos of such “effluence,” “What is at stake is . . . not simply the split between the empirical person of the king and his symbolic function. The point is rather that this symbolic function *redoubles his very body*, introducing a split between the visible, material, transient body and another, sublime body, a body made of a special, immaterial stuff.”²⁶ What is crucial here is that a symbolic investiture establishes not simply the jointure of body and office—a new suturing, as it were, of the somatic and the normative—but generates in addition, at—or better: *as*—the locus of that suture, the pressure of a surplus carnality, of an additional bit of flesh, that can be—and historically has been—elaborated and figured as a kind of second, virtually real and, indeed, glorious body.²⁷ It is in this context that Žižek refers to Lacan’s remarks apropos of Hamlet’s inability to slay Claudius: “What stays Hamlet’s arm? It’s not fear—he has nothing but contempt for the guy—it’s because he knows that *he must strike something other than what’s there*.”²⁸ The problem is, in a word, in finding the proper locus of the strike, the locus, that is, of a “special, immaterial stuff” (along with its mode of production). The problem becomes only further exacerbated once the king no longer serves as the principal bearer of sovereignty. New topologies will be needed to orient new kinds of “strikes.”

Marx’s theory of the fetishism of the commodity and the labor theory of value on which it is based is a contribution to just such a new topology; they allow us, precisely, to approach and analyze this immaterial stuff in its new, thingly location. They concern, I am arguing, a kind of metamorphosis of the king’s royal flesh into the spectral materiality of the product of human labor, into the substance of value qua conglomeration of abstract, homogeneous human labor. What Marx characterizes as the dual character of the labor embodied in commodities is, in a word, a two-body doctrine transferred from the political theology of sovereignty to the realm of political economy. The famous “metaphysical subtleties and

theological niceties” [*metaphysische Spitzfindigkeit und theologische Mucken*] that Marx discovered in the realm of commodities once belonged, as Kantorowicz’s study makes abundantly clear, to the realm of the king; they are aspects of what I have characterized as *royal remains*.²⁹ Marx’s point is that these remains will remain a locus of unfreedom until we learn to work through them in their simultaneously ontological and liturgical dimensions or, as Derrida characterized the zone at which these two dimensions converge, in their “hauntological” aspect.

This is, in my view, what generates such difficulties for a Marxist theory and practice of revolution. Marx argues, in effect, that a revolutionary, too, *must strike something other than what’s there*. It is this very difficulty that Walter Benjamin tried to adumbrate in his discussion of the *general strike* in his famous essay, “Critique of Violence,” and that he would continue to elaborate as the properly messianic dimension of human action. This difficulty is no doubt behind so much of our recent preoccupation with messianism, the messianic, and “messianicity,” to use the term Derrida introduces in his Marx book. And as the reference to Lacan also reminds us, this is the very field of action that Freud tried to open as the space of the psychoanalytic clinic. *Striking something other than what’s there* would thus seem to be a task located at the intersection of political and libidinal economy, a zone that resonates with tensions vital to the messianic tradition of religious thought and action.

I will have more to say about Marx’s contributions to the mapping of this zone in the next lecture. The crucial signpost in that mapping is his notion of the fetishism of the commodity, our relation, that is, to its special, immaterial stuff. For now I would like to return to the historical question about the mutations and dislocations of that stuff, to what I have characterized as a metamorphosis of the subject-matter of political theology into that of political economy. We might think of it as a shift from the “sovereign form” to the “commodity form” of social mediation, of those processes, that is, through which people come to be bound to one another, to “subjectivize” their social ties within a historical form of life that thereby comes to matter for them.

II

The metamorphosis we are tracking is registered in its own peculiar way in Benjamin Franklin’s famous advice to a young tradesman, counsel that became one of Max Weber’s central proof-texts for his thesis about the Protestant origins of the “spirit of capitalism.” It is worth noting that in

his famous study, Weber's argument had already blurred the boundaries between spirit and specter. Weber's central claim was that an irrational kernel of cultic doctrine and practice, one condensed in the notion of the vocational call or *Berufung* (along with the activity of laboring in a call, of *Berufsarbeit*), formed the impetus of the economic rationality of modern capitalism. Weber famously characterized the *manic frugality* of this rationality as a paradoxical mode of enjoyment, one he named "worldly asceticism." As Franklin puts it in a passage cited by Weber: "He that kills a breeding-sow, destroys her offspring to the thousandth generation. He that murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds."³⁰ The strangeness of Franklin's formulation derives not only from its elevation (in the first metaphor) of a once decried perversity proper to chrematistics—the art of making money—to the highest virtue; it derives as well from the fact that the metaphor of the murdered crown owes its meaning to a prior displacement, murderous or not, of the *sovereign* of the realm by the *coin* of the realm, one prefigured by the imprint of the sovereign's own figure on coins. We can murder a crown in Franklin's sense—perform *economic regicide*—only if the political theology of sovereignty has already been largely absorbed by and translated into the terms of the political economy of the wealth of nations, only when stuff of the king's "surplus body" has been transformed into that of surplus value, the product of a certain mode of human labor the glorious amplification of which Franklin enjoins the young tradesman to enjoy. My argument will be that such enjoyment constitutes the libidinal core of what I see as the *doxology of everyday life* in modern capitalist societies.

Aristotle provides the canonical account of the "fertility" of money as unnatural, as a perversion of nature, in his efforts in Book I of the *Politics* to clarify the boundary between the management of the household—economy proper—and the art of gaining wealth. The latter is presented as having no natural limit and thus as inherently *masslos*, without proper measure. Freud will of course make the same claim about human sexuality: it is inherently perverse, inherently in excess of teleological function (the reproduction of the family qua basic economic unit). Like the *clina-men* of the ancient atomists, human sexuality emerges on the basis of a constitutive swerve, in this case from a norm that is established only retroactively. In the terms Derrida uses in his discussion of Marx, Aristotle would seem to want to "exorcize" the perverse dimension of chrematistics from the *oikos*, a dimension that, Aristotle suggests, enters human life by

way of coined money, an institution first introduced in Greece only a few centuries earlier. (As with nearly all later standard economic theory, Aristotle assumes that money was introduced to resolve practical and logistical obstacles presented by the practice of barter; as David Graeber and others have suggested, such views might be characterized as “infantile economic theories” concerning the emergence of money and markets, theories on a par with what Freud analyzed under the heading of infantile sexual theories concerning the emergence of babies and the nature of the “exchanges” going on between parents.³¹) That questions of the vitality proper to human flourishing—in contrast to the perversely “vibrant matter” of money—are involved are clear from Aristotle’s claim that those bent upon the accumulation of money without limit “are intent upon *living only*, and not upon *living well*,” something exemplified in the life of our canonical misers from Plautus’s Euclio to Molière’s Harpagon to Balzac’s Gobseck and Dickens’s Scrooge.³² What these misers all show, however, is that such “bare living” can have its own peculiar intensity and jouissance and indeed one that brings it into uncanny proximity with a life of virtue, though one that would perhaps have been unrecognizable to Aristotle.³³ We might call it: compulsive fidelity to the *clinamen*.

The boundary zone between human life and the perverse vitality of money qua symbolic medium of exchange takes center stage in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* in the guise of the pound of flesh around which the action of the play largely orbits. I would like to dwell on the role that this famous “piece of the real” comes to play in the play or, perhaps better, on the *work* it performs in the play’s narrative and dramatic economy. My hunch is that Derrida’s appeal to *Hamlet* to draw out the spectral dimension at issue in Marx’s thought can be made if supplemented—if fleshed out—by reflections on the *Merchant*. In order to grasp the stakes of Shakespeare’s most famous tragedy—especially for modern readers—we need, I am suggesting, the resources of his most problematic comedy. (As a nonspecialist, discussing Shakespeare always feels terribly presumptuous; hopefully one will view this trespass less as tragic hubris and more as a bit of comedic *chutzpadik*.)

There can be little doubt that this work is deeply informed by the Pauline tradition concerning the notion of the flesh and the larger semantic field in which it figures, one articulated as a series of oppositions. Not only flesh and spirit but also: letter and spirit; literal and figural; particular and universal; law and love; and no doubt many more. As I have suggested, what ultimately drives the formation of this series of

oppositions along with the various individual and collective “dramas” associated with them is the ultimately enigmatic jointure of the somatic and the normative that defines human life. What Paul, too, is struggling with in these oppositions is the difficulty of conceptualizing the substance of that jointure, this third element in excess of both the somatic and the normative that both links and leaks into the two domains as the uncanny cause of various inflammatory conditions. Whether such conditions are determined to be “auto-immune” or not will depend, in the end, on how one comes to understand this third element and whether it needs to be cured, managed, quarantined, put to work, put into play. Freud, for his part, staked his own new science on the hypothesis that this element was the very subject-matter of human sexuality—what he called *libido*—and that our “sexuation” comprises the generic site of its turbulent and often traumatic emergence, of our (surplus) life in the flesh.³⁴ The shift from the political theology of sovereignty to the political economy of the wealth of nations is, I am arguing, a shift from one “epochal” mode of shaping our life in the flesh to another.

To begin, it is worth recalling that the first metaphor invoked by Franklin to illustrate the fecundity of capital is used by Shylock in his initial negotiation with Antonio. As a usurer, Shylock embodies the perversion of chrematistics in its purity, a perversion that is of course less visible in the practices of Antonio, the real merchant of the play’s title. The fact that people often think that the title refers to Shylock is echoed in the first question asked by Portia (dressed as Balthazar, a young doctor of law) in the famous trial scene: “Which is the merchant here? And which the Jew?” (4.1.176). According to Aristotle, however, they both belong together as those who pursue a spurious kind of wealth:

There are two sorts of wealth-getting. . . . One is a part of household management, the other is retail trade: the former necessary and honorable, while that which consists in exchange is justly censured; for it is unnatural, and a mode by which men gain from one another. The most hated sort, and with the greatest reason, is usury, which makes a gain out of money itself, and not from the natural object of it. For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term interest [*tokos*, lit. “offspring”], which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the *breeding of money* because the offspring resembles the parent. Wherefore of all modes of getting wealth this is the most unnatural.³⁵

It was W. H. Auden who first noted that Antonio would seem to be guilty of yet another perversion of nature and natural fecundity, namely, homosexuality. And indeed, the various forms of lack that seem to lay at the bottom of his melancholy have encouraged at least one reader to see him not simply as a sinner or *pécheur*—one given over to the life of the flesh—but also as a new incarnation of the *roi-pécheur*, the wounded Fisher King who can no longer fulfill his office as head of the Grail Society—who can perhaps reign but no longer govern—and so has become dependent on new forms of nourishment/enrichment that are material and unnatural rather than spiritual and supernatural.³⁶ As we shall see, for both Foucault and Agamben that the king reigns without governing represents the culmination of the process whereby the political theology of sovereignty is absorbed into the political economy of the nation-state and the modes of management adapted to life in commodity-producing societies. In this context it is worth recalling Hans Jürgen Syberberg's stunning dramaturgical innovation in his film version of Wagner's *Parsifal*. There the status of the *roi-pécheur* as king who reigns but no longer governs—we might say: who is valid but no longer has any meaning, *der gilt, aber bedeutet nicht*—is externalized as a fleshy remnant of the “second body,” as a free-floating bit of *gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit* (perhaps just about a pound's worth), now displayed on a pillow carried by the members of the Grail Society.³⁷ It is a disturbingly apt rendering of the epochal caesura between the no longer viable political theology of sovereignty and the not yet hegemonic political economy of the wealth of nations, a caesura in which the royal remains remain as yet unclaimed. Syberberg's staging emphasizes the aspect of a stalled sacrament, a Eucharist no longer able to establish the communion and community of a *corpus mysticum*.³⁸

The play takes off, of course, from Bassanio's desire to dig out from the mountain of debt in “money and love” he admits to owing Antonio. The pursuit of the beautiful, virtuous, and wildly wealthy Portia is his way of doubling down on those debts, of staking everything on one last gamble. And indeed the entire play is organized around the seemingly inextricable knots tying money and *eros* together, knots tied, in turn, by a series of oaths, contracts, and covenants. Antonio agrees to finance the venture, but lacking liquidity he ends up turning to Shylock, thereby breaking with his custom of generally avoiding the giving or taking of interest on loans.³⁹

In their initial encounter in the play, Shylock appears to justify the taking of “usance” by reference to Jacob's innovative pastoral intervention

that caused Laban's "ewes" to birth the striped lambs that were by prior agreement to be his. When asked by Antonio whether this scriptural reference were "inserted to make interest good," that is, whether his gold and silver were, in essence, so many ewes and rams, Shylock curtly replies: "I cannot tell; I make it breed as fast." In an aside to Bassanio, Antonio characterizes Shylock's brief "midrash" as an example of *hermeneutic* usury, of squeezing out of Scripture a surplus sense that serves one's own advantage. Antonio repeats the metaphor after hearing Shylock's inventory of insults and curses that he, Antonio, had, over the years, heaped upon the Jew: "If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not / As to thy friends, for when did friendship take / A breed for barren metal of his friend? / But lend it rather to thine enemy, / Who, if he break, thou mayst with better face / Exact the penalty" (1.3.143–47). Here Antonio seems to be engaging in his own bit of Biblical exegesis by alluding to the Deuteronomic stipulation that prohibited Jews from lending to their Jewish brethren (this Old Testament passage is thought to be among the first documented *prohibitions* of usury in antiquity).

After listing the insults he has had to endure, Shylock effectively turns the other cheek and offers to Antonio an interest-free loan. He does, of course, insist "in merry sport" on the famous penalty: "let the forfeit / Be nominated for an equal pound / Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken / In what part of your body pleaseth me" (1.3.160–64). That Antonio accepts the offer as a sign that "there is much kindness in the Jew" suggests that Shylock's offer to "take no doit / Of usance" (*ibid.*, 150–52) was read as a sign of quasi-Christian fellowship, as the extension of the narrow, "particularist" sphere of Jewish brotherhood into the universal one of the Church. At this point, a surplus of "usance"—we might say: of *jew-usance*, Jewish enjoyment of usury—is seemingly replaced by a surplus of kindness, one that provisionally serves as a sign of being of the same kind. In the end, of course, all bets are off and this economy of kindness is undone in the most exorbitant ways in large measure, no doubt, because of Shylock's own forced forfeiture of flesh, his daughter Jessica. Keeping with Portia's famous characterization of the quality of mercy, we might say that Shylock is, in the end, mercifully strained to choose Christian "kindness." As Mladen Dolar has argued, the final gift of mercy Shylock is compelled to accept—he is made an offer he cannot refuse, as Don Corleone would have put it—introduces a new level and intensity of indebtedness. We might summarize Dolar's argument by saying that Portia's achievement in this context is to "portially" adjust the logic of the debt

economy ostensibly represented by Shylock in the direction of its infinite *amortization*.⁴⁰

As I have noted, the figure of the “pound of flesh” is profoundly overdetermined in the play. We do not actually know until quite late in the play what part of the body is involved in the penalty added to the contract “in merry sport.” It is not unreasonable to assume that Shylock is invoking the rite of circumcision, that the penalty in question involves a demand that, so to speak, Antonio put some *foreskin* in the game. But not unlike the “anal object” in Freud’s understanding, the figure of the pound of flesh quickly enters into a series of equivalences—consonant with but also exceeding the Pauline field of terms—that extend from money to child to foreskin to phallus to the literal and spiritual flesh of the heart, while the cutting of the flesh oscillates—“vibrates”—in meaning between butchery, circumcision, castration, homicide, and the cruel rigor of the debtor–creditor relation and of contract law more generally. Indeed, the flesh and its cutting seem to mark the very site and action of the opening of the space of possibility of this series of equivalences and the “primary process” of their associative movement, that is, of the very splitting between and various modes of jointure of the literal and figural, the concrete and the abstract, the material and the spiritual. These primary processes are also palpable in the play through the proliferation of punning beginning with Antonio’s offer to Bassanio, upon hearing of his friend’s plan to get clear of debt, to share with him “my purse, my person, my extremest means” (1.1.141). The puns in the play function as sites where, as it were, the word becomes flesh and the flesh becomes word, sites where words themselves come to assume the status of “partial objects.” The pound of flesh finally offers us the figure of a value that can be extracted—or perhaps better: *materially abstracted*—from a living body and weighed in the balances. What is weighed here is, however, no longer that which makes a king a king—the partial object of political theology—but something in or of the body that has been invested not with royal office but with economic value in a mercantile society.

There would seem to be little room for reflection about sovereignty in the play, little concern with the transformation of the King’s Two Bodies into the People’s Two Bodies and the management of the latter by way of political economic calculations. I would suggest, however, that just such a shift in the meaning of what is weighed in the balances is underlined by one of the biblical texts alluded to in the trial scene, the Book of Daniel. At different points in the scene, each party—first Shylock and then, for

the other side, Gratiano—claims to see in Portia their own Daniel, their own learned and upright judge (Daniel means, in Hebrew, “God is my judge”). Portia, for her part, appears in the guise of a young doctor of laws whose name, Balthazar, evokes the name given to Daniel by his Babylonian masters, Beltheshazzar, as well as that of the king himself, Belshazzar. According to Daniel’s interpretation of the writing on the wall of the king’s vision, the sovereign has reached the end of his royal road: “This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingship and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians” (Daniel 6:26–28).

The biblical intertext inscribes into the trial proceedings a crisis of royal sovereignty and therewith the beginnings of the metamorphosis of the subject-matter of political theology into that of political economy, of a partial object of political theological legitimacy—now found to be wanting—into what Marx would identify as the spectral materiality of the commodity, the value materially abstracted from the body of the worker and transferred, as so and so much special, immaterial stuff, as so much flesh, to the product of labor qua commodity. In the Shakespearean figure of the pound of flesh we glimpse, I am arguing, what will be produced when the “Un-Nature” of chrematistics comes to be directly conjoined with the laboring body, when they form a single, wildly fecund matrix producing, of course, not just a pound of flesh but as Franklin put it, “many scores of pounds.” In *The Merchant of Venice*, a play written in the midst of England’s transformation into a mercantile society, the way of all flesh long exemplified by the rise and fall of kings begins to be registered as the *weight of all flesh*, the rise and fall of the value of the substance of value.⁴¹ As the play makes clear, such a transformation was imagined to be, at least on some level, linked to—we might say: haunted by—Jews, Judaism, Jewishness.

III

To return to Derrida, one will recall that he introduces the first chapter of his Marx book with a citation from act 1 of *Hamlet* in which the hero takes on the mandate of his father’s ghost to set right what has been put out of joint by, precisely, the murder of a crown (1.5.187–89). Derrida for his part justifies the recourse to Shakespeare not only by noting Marx’s own tendency to cite the poet but above all by underlining the famous opening line of *The Communist Manifesto*, “Ein Gespenst geht um in

Europa—das Gespenst des Kommunismus”: “As in *Hamlet*, the Prince of a rotten state, *everything begins by the apparition of a specter*” (4; emphasis added). Derrida quickly goes on to propose a *grand récit* of such apparitions, one exhibiting the sort of historicity without historicism that will allow him, later in the book, to posit a “messianicity” without messianism:

Haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not *dated*, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar. Untimely, it does not come to, it does not happen to, it does not befall, one day, Europe, as if the latter, at a certain moment of its history, had begun to suffer from a certain evil, to let itself be *inhabited* in its inside, that is, haunted by a foreign guest. Not that that guest is any less a stranger for having always occupied the domesticity of Europe. But there was no inside, there was nothing inside before it. *The ghostly would displace itself like the movement of this history*. Haunting would mark the very existence of Europe. It would open the space and the relation to self of what is called by this name, at least since the Middle Ages. (4; emphasis added)

Paraphrasing somewhat, the claim is that the European *economy*—its domesticity, its *oikos*—has always been troubled by an alien presence—something *unheimlich*—immanent to its very constitution. Against this background, one is tempted to replace the word, *das Unheimliche*, with *das Unökonomische*, “the Un-Economic.” Both terms point to some excess, some surplus, in the household that both does and does not belong there, that is produced there but ought not to be there, a surplus that is not just too much stuff, too many commodities, but rather something more akin to a disturbing sort of remainder, to “matter in the wrong place.” It is, as Marx was to show, something that generates its share of confusion for the science of political economy. As I have noted, the anxiety pertaining to some excess in the *oikos* was already there in Aristotle’s efforts to keep a certain improper and *un-natural* chrematistic stranger outside the household. What does management of the household—*oikonomia*, economics—mean if it is *sur-charged* with managing spirits?

It is worth recalling that in a remarkable essay on *Hamlet* from 1956, Carl Schmitt rehearses parts of his own earlier *grand récit* of the Eurocentric global order, of what he referred to there as the *Nomos der Erde*.⁴² He proceeds by focusing on what he explicitly refers to as the *Mehrwert* or surplus value that, in his view, served to elevate Shakespeare’s play from

Trauerspiel to genuine tragedy and, indeed, transform it into a “living myth.” Schmitt’s search for the source of the sublime object of the play leads him along various paths of interpretation that need not detain us here. In the context of the present discussion, his crucial insight is that the surplus value circulating in *Hamlet* pertains not only to the turbulence generated for the figure of the sovereign by the religious strife of the period, turbulence that, in his view, came to be embodied in the person of James I. Equally important is the claim that at the core of this turbulence lay another, even greater challenge to the political theology of the sovereign: the emergence of England as a mercantile economy or what Schmitt characterizes as England’s “elemental appropriation of the sea [*dem elementaren Aufbruch zu der grossen Seenahme*]” (59):

Measured in terms of the progress toward civilization that the ideal of continental statehood . . . signifies, Shakespeare’s England still appears to be barbaric, that is, in a pre-state condition. However, measured in terms of the progress toward civilization that the Industrial Revolution . . . signifies, Elizabethan England appears to be involved in a phenomenal departure from a terrestrial to a maritime existence—a departure, which, in its outcome, the Industrial Revolution, caused a much deeper and more fundamental revolution than those on the European continent and which far exceeded the overcoming of the “barbaric Middle Ages” that the continental state achieved. (65)⁴³

What endows *Hamlet* with its surplus value is, in other words, the fact that in it are registered historical currents that would culminate in economies organized around the production of surplus value and a world order in which the political theology of sovereignty will be more or less absorbed into the political economy of nation-states (pushing, for their part, against the limits of their internal and external juridical organization). I am suggesting, then, that *The Merchant of Venice* renders explicit what in *Hamlet* is registered only as a sort of underlying dreamwork summoned forth—or as we might say: *excited*—by structural transformations of the social order. It was Schmitt himself who argued apropos of *Hamlet* that, “even the dreams that the dramatist weaves into his play must be able to become the dreams of the spectators, with all the condensations and displacements of recent events” (36). But as Schmitt also argues, these “recent events” include the opening of a *structural interregnum* that would not fully take shape in the lifetime of the London audience of

Shakespeare's play. *Merchant* helps to identify the key historical forces at issue in this opening along with the semantic and symbolic transformations it brings in its wake. As Ben Nelson has argued, these transformations ultimately push beyond the Pauline encoding of social relations still operative in the play; they push, that is, from the universal brotherhood of Christian society toward the "universal Otherhood" that characterizes the social relations of modern commercial societies.⁴⁴ These are societies organized around the production, circulation, and accumulation of the special, immaterial stuff once retained by the sublime physiology of the king.

For Derrida as well as for me, what ultimately distinguishes the spectral historicity of Europe from other histories of the "European Spirit"—the Hegelian as well as the Schmittian one—comes down to the dimension that I have been calling the *flesh*:

As soon as one no longer distinguishes spirit from specter, the former assumes a body, it incarnates itself as spirit, in the specter. . . . The specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some "thing" that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is *flesh and phenomenality* that give to the spirit its spectral apparition. (6; emphasis added)⁴⁵

And as Derrida emphasizes, this "thing" that remains so difficult to name appears, in the context of *Hamlet* and in medieval and early modern sovereignty more generally, in—or perhaps better: with—*the body of the king*. It is, as I have been arguing, the very thing that leads to the strange doctrine explored by Kantorowicz in his *King's Two Bodies*. But as we have seen in our discussion of *Merchant*, once the political theology of sovereignty begins to give way to new paradigms of governmentality, to use Foucault's term, the flesh comes to be managed at new sites and in new ways; it comes to count—to be counted and weighed—as the subject-matter of political economy.

IV

At this point I would like to make a few further remarks about what distinguishes the matter or materiality I am attempting to track in the transition from the "sovereign form" to the "commodity form" of social mediation from what seems to be at issue in the new materialisms that

have appeared over the past years under a variety of different names. I am thinking here less in terms of right or wrong and more in terms of a difference in subject matter insofar as these new materialisms are intent on dispensing, precisely, with “subject-matter,” the spectral materiality proper to human subjectivity, one with its distinctive “flesh and phenomenality.”

Jane Bennett, for example, presents the notion of flesh according to the perspective of what she calls “vital materiality” this way:

Vital materiality better captures an “alien” quality of our own flesh, and in so doing reminds humans of the very *radical* character of the (fractious) kinship between the human and the nonhuman. My “own” body is material, and yet this vital materiality is not fully or exclusively human. My flesh is populated and constituted by different swarms of foreigners. The crook of my elbow, for example, is “a special ecosystem, a bountiful home to no fewer than six tribes of bacteria” [Nicholas Wade]. . . . The *its* outnumber the *mes*. In a world of vibrant matter, it is not enough to say that we are “embodied.” We are, rather, *an array of bodies*, many different kinds of them in a nested set of microbiomes.⁴⁶

The moral and political wager of this approach is that an awareness of such diverse tribes and populations of “its” and “mes”—a kind of multiculturalism at the cellular, or even molecular level—will inhibit us from producing and consuming “in the same violent and reckless ways” that have characterized modern industrial and postindustrial societies heretofore. As Bennett puts it, being mindful “that the human is not exclusively human, that we are made up of its,” will contribute to the formation of “the newish self that needs to emerge, the self of a new self-interest” (II3). A curious encounter: Adam Smith meets Gilles Deleuze.

The vital materiality that interests me here is one that is, as Freud put it, composed not of multiple, single or multicellular “its” but rather something he called “It” precisely because it remains so difficult to name (recall Derrida’s remarks on the “thing” with the king that remains so difficult to name: “neither soul nor body, and both one and the other”). To put it simply, the “intensities” that occupied—or better: *preoccupied*—the crook of the elbow, among other body parts, of Freud’s hysterics were not caused by tribes of bacteria but rather by a complex disorder of the “tribe” to which these hysterics belonged, a disorder that in one way or another—and psychoanalysis is the effort to understand those ways—congealed as

the uncanny cause of their desire, the “un-economic” dimension of their libidinal economy.

Bennett’s reading of Kafka’s famous story about the creature named “Odradek” (the title of the story is “Die Sorge des Hausvaters”⁴⁷) offers an example of what can get lost in the homogenization of alterity performed in the name of multiplicity and heterogeneity, something that is stated almost explicitly at the conclusion of her reading of the text: “Odradek exposes this continuity of watery life and rocks; he/it brings to the fore the becoming of things” (8). For Bennett, Odradek is Kafka’s name for self-organizing matter, for spontaneous structural generation in the interstices between inorganic and organic vitality: “Wooden yet lively, verbal yet vegetal, alive yet inert, Odradek is ontologically multiple. He/it is a vital materiality and exhibits what Gilles Deleuze has described as the persistent ‘hint of the animate in plants, and of the vegetable in animals’” (8). I have already discussed this text in detail in the first “volume” of my study of the afterlife of political theology so I will not go into great detail here.⁴⁸ But it is crucial to underline what gets lost if one ignores that afterlife—its specific forms of “vital materiality”—with respect to a text written in the midst of the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a “swarm” of independent and at times tribally conceived nation-states (the text was published in 1919).

As many scholars have noted, the word *Odradek*, which Kafka’s narrator suggests might have Germanic and/or Slavic roots, seems to signify, on the basis of family resemblances with words from these and other linguistic “households,” a figure of radical rootlessness and nonbelonging—*Od-radix*, *Od-adresa*. The meanings scholars have adduced for this word that, as the narrator indicates, may not have a meaning at all, include: deserter from one’s kind; apostate; degenerate; a small creature whose business is to dissuade; a creature that dwells outside of any kind, rank, series, order, class, line, or use; a creature beyond discourse or *Rede*; waste or dirt—*Unrat*—and so, once again, “matter in the wrong place.” All this suggests, I think, that Odradek’s *ontological* statelessness—this is what Bennett emphasizes—cannot be separated from the sense of *political* statelessness evoked by the linguistic and historical overdetermination of its name (if it even is a proper name). It was precisely through the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that the state of statelessness came to be, as Hannah Arendt argued, the political symptom par excellence of modern Europe. And it was the particular “tribe” to which Kafka, along with Freud and Shylock, belonged—a tribe associated, of course, with a

peculiar hybrid language between Germanic and Slavic—that came to embody a kind of foreignness that had no natural fit within any state. This was a tribe whose members could never be fully “naturalized,” absorbed without remainder, and indeed thought by many of its own members to be, at its core, *passionately detached* from any historical nation-state. One might think of it as a tribe whose very form of life in some sense *mattered in the wrong place*.⁴⁹ It is, then, not so much a “newish self” forged on the basis of a vital materiality and new sense of self-interest that Kafka’s text helps us to envision but rather the uncanny dimension of the “Jewish self” that he himself no doubt experienced as profoundly linked to a series of other dilemmas. Perhaps the most important of these was the dilemma of a writerly existence, an existence lived in passionate detachment from other social bonds and one apparently incompatible with being a *Hausvater*, the head of a household or *oikos*. We might say that Odradek is, among other things, a figure of *Un-economic* man par excellence, a paradoxical “busy-body” serving no apparent use and yet not ever quite going to waste.

In the short fragment already cited in the preface, Kafka linked the “busy-ness” of such bodies, their form of life, to that of manic bureaucrats whose official duties and writings, whose “office work” has been cut loose from its erstwhile source of purpose and legitimation:

They were given the choice to become kings or messengers. Just like children they all chose to be messengers. For this reason there are only messengers; they race through the world and, because there are no kings, they call out to one another proclamations that have become meaningless. They would happily put an end to their miserable life but because of their oath of office they don’t dare.⁵⁰

Against this background and remembering Kafka’s own “office writings” as an insurance official busy with issues of workmen’s compensation—compensation for the damaged flesh of laboring bodies—Kafka’s own literary writings become legible as the very paradigm of what I have referred to as *traumamtliche Schriften*—the traumatic dream protocols of officious busy bodies. It is a genre that is, I am suggesting, especially attuned to the subject-matter of political economy. My hunch is that it is above all by assuming our responsibility for *this* subject-matter and for the ways in which we serve to sustain its current configurations, that we

can begin to become truly responsive to the multiple forms of vibrant matter that border on and move through the human.

V

I would like to return once more to Shylock and the nature of the “Jewish labor” to which he is assigned and that takes place with reference to him in the economy of *The Merchant of Venice*. In his magisterial study of “Anti-Judaism”—not so much *in* as *as* the Western Tradition—David Nirenberg argues that the figure of the Jew in the West is essentially the figure—or perhaps better: the occasion—of a certain kind of work. This is the work that societies are in some way or another compelled to engage in to make sense of the world in the face of fundamental impasses and antagonisms generated by the logic of their own social organization. We might call this heavy lifting the *work of the real*, work no doubt correlated to the sense that the Jews, excluded from participation in most occupations and forms of labor, don’t do *real work*. For Nirenberg, the Jews are not so much the subject or agent of the work at issue as its *Anstoss*, its uncanny cause and object.

“Why,” Nirenberg asks, “did so many diverse cultures—even many cultures with no Jews living among them—think so much about Judaism? *What work* did thinking about Judaism do for them in their efforts to make sense of their world?”⁵¹ Nirenberg uses Marx’s disturbing reflections on the “Jewish Question” to point the direction for his own efforts to answer these questions:

Marx’s fundamental insight . . . was that the “Jewish Question” is as much about the basic tools and concepts through which individuals in society relate to the world and to each other, as it is about the presence of “real” Judaism and living Jews in that society. He understood that some of these basic tools—such as money and property—were thought of in Christian culture as “Jewish,” and that these tools therefore could potentially produce the “Jewishness” of those who used them, whether those users were Jewish or not. “Judaism,” then, is not only the religion of specific people with specific beliefs, but also a category, a set of ideas and attributes with which non-Jews can make sense of and criticize their world. Nor is “anti-Judaism” simply an attitude toward Jews and their religion, but a way of critically engaging the world. (3)

For Marx, then, the critique of political economy was inseparable from an engagement with the “Jewish Question,” one that, as Nirenberg underlines, must inevitably fall short if it simply puts fears and habits of thought about Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness “to a *new kind of work*: that of planning a world without private property or wage labor” (4; my emphasis).

Nirenberg’s own project proposes to show how, from ancient Egypt to the present day, “different peoples put old ideas about Judaism to *new kinds of work* in thinking about the world; to show how this work engaged the past and transformed it; and to ask how that work reshaped the possibilities for thought in the future” (5; emphasis added). As Nirenberg tells it, Western anti-Judaism is ultimately the story of the transmission of the demands of this peculiar sort of labor, of a fundamental, even foundational, *Arbeitsanforderung*, to use the word Freud favored in his efforts to characterize the nature of the drives. The story comes very close to repeating Derrida’s brief sketch of European history as a compulsively repeated series of displacements of a spectral substance that no amount of conjuration, necromancy, and exorcism manages to fully elaborate and master. The specters of Marx have, for Nirenberg, too, a long history but it is one that cannot be separated from the history of anti-Judaism in the West. And as is well-known, at least since the time of Paul’s canonical formulations, at the heart of that history is the preoccupation with the matter of the flesh in its divergence—its *clinamen*—from and threat to the spirit. Not surprisingly, then, Nirenberg also turns to Shakespeare, in this case not to *Hamlet* and the spectral dimension of political theology but to *The Merchant of Venice* where, as I have argued, the *haunting grounds* of the King’s Two Bodies begins to yield to those of the marketplace.

Once again, what is at issue is the nature of the “Jewish labor” performed within the economy of the play, which for Nirenberg is, ultimately, that of working out a response to the fundamental question made urgent by the rise of a mercantile economy: “How can a society built on ‘Jewish’ foundations of commerce, contract, property, and law consider itself Christian?” (274). What is at issue is, thus, a kind of meta-work or *pre-occupation*, work done to facilitate a set of responses to a new organization of work, to the emergence of new relations of production. In psychoanalytic terms, this would be work “beyond the pleasure principle,” a form of work done in advance of the work governed by the pleasure and

reality principles, work that in some sense helps to install and sustain those principles. (As Lacan might say, though this work brings no pleasure it is not without its own form of *jouissance*.) The play lays out a field of signifiers—a network of facilitations or *Bahnungen*, to use Freud's word—along which a surplus or surcharge of semiotic pressure, a *signifying stress* generated at least in part by these new relations of production, can move and be discharged, a movement that will culminate in a fateful charge against Shylock, which threatens to bring the comedy to the edge of the tragic. Paradoxically, the play pulls back from that edge by way of the cruel irony of placing the Jewish usurer in the position of becoming, finally, a Christian merchant of Venice.

As Nirenberg emphasizes—much as Schmitt did with respect to *Hamlet*—the anxieties and confusions associated with the increasing importance of contractual relations in the emerging mercantile economy of England helped to generate this pressure in the first place and to initiate its “Jewish” dreamwork. But what are we then to make of the fact that Shylock seems, at least with respect to his loan to Antonio, to be singularly uninterested in profit, in the amplification of his wealth? Why does he refuse the offer of receiving, in lieu of his bond, many times the sum of his principle? Why the insistence on the pound of flesh, on having his bond?

To begin, one might say that with respect to Antonio, this bit of business is, for Shylock, both personal and historical. It was never about the money; it concerned, rather vengeance for the injustice—we might say the radical and brutal *unkindness*—that Shylock and his kind have had to suffer—since time immemorial—from the likes of Antonio and his kind, injustice amplified by the loss of his daughter to the fleshpots of the aristocratic, Catholic world (Shylock at times comes across as a puritan reformer, one suspicious of music, masques, and other “Catholic” frivolities). That Shylock proposes a pound of Antonio's *fair flesh* as penalty for non-payment of the loan suggests that what was at issue all along here was *fairness* and indeed of a kind that exceeds that of economic calculation, that of a “fair deal.” Shylock seeks vengeance for the fundamental unfairness of being posited as a being ontologically lacking in all the fair qualities, a lack that allows the Christian world to treat and refer to him—this happens repeatedly in the play—as a dog (historically, the beautiful Jewess is always the possible exception). It is in other words clear that up to now—up to the beginning of the action of the play—Shylock has figured

for the community as representative embodiment of *jew-usance*, as what is perceived to be the perverse libidinal economy demanded by an emerging mercantile economy. Shylock is ultimately seen—is *classified*, we might say—not so much as belonging to a different cultural and religious kind but rather as a figure of the *unkind*, one who unsettles the logic of kinds—Kafka’s name for such a figure was, as have seen, Odradek—and this in large measure because he is seen as embodying what is fundamentally unsettling in the social transformations the larger society is undergoing. There is certain self-reflexivity at work here. We might say that Shylock’s rage pertains to *the way he is represented in the play*, to the role to which he is assigned in it as representative of the social disorder attending to the emergence of a mercantile economy, an economy in which the global merchant Antonio is really the key player, the truly representative figure. One can almost understand Shylock wanting a piece of this guy. The self-reflexivity I have noted suggests that at least to a certain extent, Shakespeare understood this.

But I also want to suggest that Shylock’s insistence on the (pound of) flesh—an insistence that clearly exceeds any sense of economic rationality—should also be understood as an insistence *of* the flesh as the dimension in which social bonds are sealed.

At the most basic level, the source of anxiety and confusion that haunts the play concerns the nature of social bonds, what it is that binds friends, couples, communities, confessions, nations, peoples together at a moment of profound social, political, and economic transformation. As Shylock seems to know, social bonds always involve the dimension of the flesh. We might say that they are, ultimately, written in and with the flesh, that “part” of us inflamed by the normative pressure of the bonds at issue. They always imply, that is, *a becoming-flesh of the given word*. Shylock’s insistence on having his bond could be understood, then, as an explicit insistence on and of this truth, one otherwise dispersed in the play into a series of slighter transactions, most notably the final comedy of errors pertaining to the rings and the pledges they signify.⁵² But the play also shows that when the nature of social bonds and the forms of normativity associated with them change—in this case, we are moving from political theological normativity to a space of meaning governed by the normative pressures of political economy—so do the locations, actors, and scenes of that writing, of the relevant *Aufschreibesystem*, to use Friedrich Kittler’s term. This is the system of social inscription—Foucault would call it a *dispositif*, Agamben, perhaps with Kafka’s *Penal Colony* in

mind, a *machine*—through which a signifier comes to represent the subject for other signifiers, an operation that always leaves a remainder of inflamed flesh that, like Shylock himself, insists, in and through those signifiers, on getting a fair hearing or at the very least—Beckett might say: *unnullable least*—on making its presence felt.⁵³

VI

In her own reading of *Merchant*, Julia Lupton highlights, among other things, the tense transitional space between the two key “systems” at work in the play, the political theology of sovereignty and the political economy of an emerging commercial society that already prefigures, in her view, fundamental features of modern liberalism.⁵⁴ The tension between the two systems comes to a head in the trial scene in which, by means of a legal ploy, Portia/Balthazar shifts the juridical coordinates by which Shylock’s petition is to be adjudicated, a ploy that Nirenberg, among others, has characterized as “outjewling the Jew.” One will recall that she initially acknowledges the force of Shylock’s claim and does so in words that closely mirror his own earlier appeal to the sanctity of contract on which the commercial life of Venice depends: “There is no power in Venice / Can alter a decree established; / ’Twill be recorded for a precedent / And many an error by the same example / Will rush into the state. It cannot be” (4.1.226–29). It is precisely at this point that Shylock first characterizes Portia/Balthazar as “A Daniel come to judgment!” (4.1.230).⁵⁵ Within moments, however, Portia/Balthazar comes up with her surprising and surprisingly literal reading of the contract—this is where she ostensibly outjews the Jew—according to which Shylock must not only extract *exactly* one pound of flesh but must do so without shedding a drop of blood: “The bond doth give thee here no jot of blood. / Take thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh; / But in the cutting it, if thou dost shed / One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods / Are by the laws of Venice confiscate / Unto the state of Venice” (4.1.314–20; it is Gratiano who now claims Portia/Balthazar as an upright judge and second Daniel). As Lupton points out, this novel—and rather questionable—legal argument marks a shift from commercial to criminal law, one that promises to give Shylock, as Portia/Balthazar puts it, something like a surplus of justice: “justice more than thou desir’st” (4.2.330). This surplus marks a return of the political theology of sovereignty at the very point at which political economic reckoning was poised to win the day:

Whereas Venetian civil law had protected the “commodity of strangers”—international commercial transactions—in the minimal public sphere constituted by the economic contract, criminal law in this instance shields the rights of citizens, over against the “aliens” in their midst. The open port of Venice now retreats into its interior islands, reasserting the lines dividing the citizen and the noncitizen. Finally, the power of judgment and mercy, the sacral attribute of kings, is now forcibly taken from the civil litigant-turned-defendant and delivered to the Duke who shifts from being . . . nominal figurehead . . . to empowered monarch. (95–96)

In a word, the duke shifts from being a sovereign who reigns but does not govern to one who reigns in excess of governing.⁵⁶ I am thus tempted to say that what would appear to be merely a clever legal tactic on the part of Portia/Balthazar, her claim, that is, that Shylock is allowed to cut a pound of flesh but drop no “jot” of (Christian) blood, alludes to the *virtual reality* of the element at issue, to the flesh as the special, immaterial stuff that now goes into the composition of the king’s body, now into the substance of value.

Standing before this resurgent sovereign, Shylock now acquires the attributes of creaturely life; he

suddenly stands before the law as mere life or bare life, the life of the creature over against the civic life incarnated by Antonio Shylock, reduced to a mere “jot” and bare “Iewe,” stands shorn of the multiple covenants, laws, and promises, the material and spiritual bequests, that had bound him *as alien* to the civic life and history of Venice through the city’s corporate structure and political theology. (96)

But as Lupton sees it, Shylock’s status, if we might still call it that, as “un-nullable least” is strictly correlative to his partial reintegration, one that comes by way of the duke’s act of mercy, the benevolent aspect of the sovereign exception. Though he remains a “Jewish *iota* . . . that both dots and blots—completes and de-completes—the Christian-civic synthesis embraced by his daughter,” Shylock embodies, for Lupton precisely the sort of “discontented contentment” that accompanies the “provisional and procedural inscription in the polity” that would be institutionalized in

liberalism. For Lupton such a mode of inscription is opposed to “a mystical or ecstatic union sealed by imaginary forms of national identification” (100). It is, thus, Shylock who thereby “emerges as the strongest forerunner of modern citizenship at the close of act 4” (100). What is staged in Shylock’s fate, according to Lupton, is the “death into citizenship” that will eventually be demanded of all members of liberal societies, a mortification that in some sense never ceases. For Lupton, the spectral presence of Shylock at the end of the play exercises its own sort of ethical force, functions as the embodiment of the regulative idea of modern liberalism:

Shylock’s legal and psychological condition at the end of the play demonstrates the extent to which naturalization in a diverse polity not only can but should remain structurally incomplete, maintaining memories of suspended modes of affiliation that never dissolve completely into a new identity. In my reading Shylock undergoes not so much a forced conversion as a nominal or procedural one; his reluctant consent is measured and limited, like the rule of law itself. It is worth asserting that however ambivalent we may feel about Shylock’s conversion, there is *nothing tragic* in his destiny. (100–101)

As compelling as I find Lupton’s reading, I am not, in the end, persuaded by her claim concerning liberal society’s ostensible evacuation of the imaginary forms of identification proper to medieval and early modern corporate societies, forms that depend, as Marx insisted, on the fetishism of persons grounded in the logic of reflexive determinations. Indeed, my argument is that modern liberal societies largely relocate and restage that dimension in a variety of other scenes and according to new sets of dramaturgical—or better: *liturgical practices*. And this is, as I understand it, what Marx ultimately meant by proposing that the key to the critique of political economy lay in grasping the displacement of the fetishism of persons by the fetishism of the commodity. The practices and social relations through which the production, exchange, and consumption of commodities would come to be organized—the ostensible subject matter of classical political economy—become the site in which, precisely, new “mystical and ecstatic” unions are sealed. This is what Marx meant with his infamous remarks about the theological, mystical, necromantic, and animistic aspects of life under modern capitalism.

In the next chapter I will try to say more about these liturgical practices that mediate the transition from the glorification/valorization of sovereigns—the modes of production of the king’s sublime body—to the self-valorization of capital, that is, the shift to new forms of the production of glory, splendor, and valor.

In the end, the question will be what to make—or rather, *what liberal, civil society will make*—of the “unnullable least” that remains of Shylock along his path toward citizenship under the protection of what remains of sovereign power and authority. How much, we might ask, does Shylock’s own creaturely flesh now weigh in the balances? Can it be evaluated, reckoned with? How will it be put to work? These are, I think, the questions that Marx will take on in his efforts to understand the secret of the commodity form, a form that required, in his view, the prior emancipation of workers from all traditional affiliations and bonds. What remains of Shylock is, I am suggesting, related to what will become for Marx the *gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit* that emerges at the threshold of the transition from the fetishism of persons—above all of sovereigns and their sublime, virtually real bodies—to the fetishism of things, a transition marking the reconstitution and organization of the flesh of the social bond.

NOTES

1. Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
2. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 15. Subsequent references are made in the text. See chapter 4 of Santner, *Royal Remains* for a more in-depth discussion of the painting.
3. Clark notes that as one of the Museum section’s important Jacobins, David very likely took part in producing the *Ordre de la Marche* for the highly stage-managed activities in the context of which his painting was presented to the public, activities that followed the execution of Marie Antoinette. See Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 15ff.
4. Franz Kafka, *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer und andere Schriften aus dem Nachlaß* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1992), 235–36. Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine.
5. For a discussion of these two events in the context of the “spectral” history of financial instruments in modern capitalism, see Joseph Vogl, *Das Gespenst des Kapitals* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2010).
6. Sara Melzer and Kathryn Norberg, eds., *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 10–11; emphasis added.

7. Jonathan Crary, *24/7* (London: Verso, 2013). Subsequent references are made in the text. As Crary notes, his essay can be understood as a continuation and updating of Anson Rabinbach's groundbreaking study of the modern preoccupation with fatigue as a threat to both political and economic survival. See Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
8. For a fuller discussion of this paradox, see Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
9. Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, translated by Mark Harman (New York: Schocken, 1998), 103–4. Kafka's novel is a crucial point of reference for Crary as well.
10. Kafka thereby already provides us with a sense of the libidinal economy of what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have called the "new spirit of capitalism." See their *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2007).
11. One is tempted to say that when, in the wake of the 9/11 disaster, New York City's mayor Rudolf Giuliani appealed to the citizens of the city to go shopping as a sign of a return to normality, he was at some level reminding them of their duty or "oath of office" in a regime of 24/7 business, a duty linked, in turn, to the series of states of exception—suspensions of law in the name of security—invoked in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks.
12. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: An Essay in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 143n167, 496.
13. Alexei Penzin has made this argument in *Rex Exsomnia: Sleep and Subjectivity in Capitalist Modernity*, in *DOCUMENTA* (13): 100 Notes—100 Thoughts (Osfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012). I am grateful to Penzin for sharing material from his work-in-progress on a critical cultural history of sleep.
14. Michel Foucault, *Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of "Political Reason,"* Tanner Lectures on Human Values, delivered at Stanford University, October 10 and 16, 1979, <http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.omnesetsingulatim.en.html>, 229–30.
15. *Ibid.*, 246.
16. See Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). I am grateful to Marcia Klotz for alerting me to Anidjar's work.
17. As Anidjar phrases the fundamental question of his study, "Does blood 'itself' insist, then? And if so, what is the nature of this insistence?" (*ibid.*, 22)
18. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, translated by Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 142. The German text is taken from Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Erster Band* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2008), 65–66.
19. Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, translated by Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1990), 61–62.
20. See Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Eroticism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1981), 9: 169–75.

21. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Deb, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). Subsequent references are made in the text.
22. Rilke uses the formulation in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé of March 1, 1912. See *Rainer Maria Rilke / Lou Andreas-Salomé: Briefwechsel*, edited by Ernst Pfeiffer (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1989), 266.
23. See Santner *Royal Remains*.
24. Marx, *Capital*, 143, 149 (translation modified). The German text is taken from Marx, *Das Kapital*.
25. Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 59 (emphasis added).
26. Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 255.
27. As I have suggested in the preface to these lectures, I understand this surplus carnality in relation to the “little extra life” that, as Foucault argued, is administered by the police—that guardian of the state’s splendor—in early modern societies. See once more, Foucault, *Ommes et Singulatim*, 229–30.
28. Cited in Žižek, *For They Know Not*, 256 (emphasis added). The citation is from Lacan’s seminar, “Death and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” from 1959. Žižek is above all interested in the mutation of the king’s two bodies into what he refers to as “Lenin’s two bodies,” that is, how the people come to be conscripted in the liturgical production of the special stuff of the totalitarian leader and party who—thanks to the logic of reflexive determinations—can offer themselves as the incarnation of objective reason of history. “In so far as the stuff they are made of is ultimately their body, this body again undergoes a kind of transubstantiation; it changes into a bearer of *another* body within the transient material envelopment” (258).
29. See Marx, *Capital*, 163; *Kapital*, 85.
30. Cited in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), 15.
31. See David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011).
32. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1, 9: 1257–58, translated by Benjamin Jowett, in Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 1139.
33. Much of my thinking about avarice developed in the course of a team-taught seminar with Mladen Dolar on the topic at the University of Chicago, autumn 2013. I am deeply grateful to Mladen and to the seminar participants for numerous insights regarding this strangely virtuous sin.
34. The Freudian view is already prefigured in Paul’s conception of the flesh as an amplification of human sentience by what he calls, in Romans 7, “another law . . . which dwells in my members”: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do

the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but the sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members." *The Writings of Saint Paul*, edited by Wayne A. Meeks (New York: Norton, 1972), 79–80.

35. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 10: 1255–70; emphasis added.
36. See Marc Shell, *Money, Language, Thought: Literary and Philosophic Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 47. I am grateful to Mar Rosàs Tosas for pointing out the minimal diacritical difference between the two words.
37. The thought of validity without meaning, *Geltung ohne Bedeutung*, is elaborated by Gershom Scholem in his epistolary exchange with his friend, Walter Benjamin, on the meaning of revelation in the works and world of Franz Kafka. I will return to this exchange of letters at the conclusion of the next lecture. *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem: 1932–1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem, translated by Gary Smith and André Lefèvre (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
38. The historical and conceptual complexity of this concept, so central to our understanding of the way in which human bodies enter into normative “corporations,” is explored in detail in a work to which Kantorowicz noted his own considerable indebtedness, Henri Cardinal de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, translated by Gemma Simmonds, Richard Price, and Christopher Stephens (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).
39. That Antonio initially uses the word “excess” rather than “interest” could perhaps allude to the 1571 definition of usury as interest beyond an acceptable rate, generally pegged at 10 percent. It should also be noted that among the complaints lodged against usury was that it represented, so to speak, a first instance of a 24/7 economy: interest-bearing capital never sleeps.
40. In a recent essay on the play, Mladen Dolar has argued that in the end the Christian offer of mercy effectively outbids the ostensibly Jewish insistence on the letter of the law (in this case, contract law) by infinitizing the debt of the recipient of mercy. As Dolar writes, “the crux of the matter is that mercy, behind the cloak of its generosity . . . hinges on a surplus and extortion. Justice is equivalence, the just punishment and reward . . . according to the letter. Mercy is the surplus over the letter, over law and justice, not as coerced taking, but as voluntary giving. But the gift indebts, all the more since its terms are not specified, and if they were to be specified this would cease to be mercy. Hence it opens an unspecified debt, a debt with no limits, an infinite debt. One is never worthy of mercy and however much one gives in return, as a response, it is never enough, it can never measure up to the free gift which has no equivalent, not in what one possesses. Hence one has to give what one doesn’t possess, which is the Lacanian definition of love—mercy demands its equivalent only

in love. Mercy is a usurer which, by not demanding a circumscribed surplus [I am tempted to add: *circumcised* surplus—ELS] opens an absolute debt. It demands not ‘an equal pound of flesh’, but ‘an equal pound of soul’—this is why Shylock is granted mercy only on condition that he gives up his creed and converts to Christianity, the religion of love.” Mladen Dolar, “The Quality of Mercy Is Not Strained,” unpublished manuscript. I am grateful to Dolar for sharing his text with me.

41. A more fully “fleshed out” reading of *Merchant* would, of course, have to take into account the other storyline in the play concerning life, love, and precious metals, namely, that of the three caskets. Portia, who, in the guise of Balthazar, “legally” forces Shylock to choose Christian love and mercy over the ostensibly Jewish letter of the law of contract, was herself bound by the letter of an “old testament” with respect to her choice of a husband. According to Freud’s reading of the motif of the three caskets, Bassanio’s victorious choice of the lead casket—a choice that wins him not only love but also considerable amounts of silver and gold—itself masks a deeper truth concerning wishful disavowals of forced choices. See Sigmund Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” in *The Standard Edition*, 12:289–302. What he characterizes as Bassanio’s unpersuasive—and seemingly forced, *gezwungen*—“glorification of lead”—represents, for Freud, an acknowledgment of the ineluctability of death. We will return to the subject matter (both with and without hyphen) of glory and glorification in the second lecture.
42. Carl Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba: The Intrusion of the Time into the Play*, translated by David Pan and Jennifer Rust (New York: Telos, 2009). Subsequent references are made in the text. Derrida strangely omits this work from his reflections on the hauntological nexus linking Shakespeare and Marx.
43. Against this background, figures such as the Earl of Essex and Walter Raleigh—two examples of what Schmitt sees as a new elite of *adventure capitalists*—might be seen as typologically related to the figure of Antonio in *Merchant*.
44. See Ben Nelson, *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). *Hamlet* and *Merchant* are each in their own way caught up in the turbulence of this “conversion.” In this context, see also Dietrich Schwanitz, *Das Shylock-Syndrom: Oder Die Dramaturgie der Barberei* (Frankfurt a. M.: Eichborn, 1997).
45. Here Derrida seems to be endorsing what he elsewhere calls into question, namely, the translation of the German word *Leib* as flesh—*chair*—or at the very least as the uncanny combination of flesh and phenomenality. See, for example, his *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, translated by Christine Irizarry (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
46. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 112–13. Subsequent references are made in the text.
47. Stanley Corngold translates the title as “The Worry of the Father of the Family,” in his edition of *Kafka’s Selected Stories* (New York: Norton, 2007), 72–73.
48. See Santner, *Royal Remains*, 83–86.

49. Franz Rosenzweig's account of Jewish singularity in *The Star of Redemption* more or less turns into positive—though uncanny—features the negative attributes that Richard Wagner attributes to Jews in his famous essay, "Judaism and Music." I discuss these matters in my *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
50. Kafka, *Beim Bau der chinesischen*, 235–36.
51. David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013), 2 (emphasis added). Subsequent references are made in the text.
52. As Portia says to Gratiano, who admits to having given his ring to Balthazar's clerk, "You were to blame, I must be plain with you, / To part so slightly with your wife's first gift, / A thing stuck on with oaths upon your finger, / And so riveted with faith unto your flesh" (5.1.179–82). Gratiano, for his part, had just begrudgingly expressed his regret to Nerissa for breaking his oath by means of further sworn testimony that links the "hoop of gold" to the flesh of the genitals and the heart: "By yonder moon I swear you do me wrong! / In faith, I gave it to the judge's clerk. / Would he were gelt that had it, for my part, / Since you do take it, love, so much to heart" (5.1.155–59).
53. See Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 106. Kittler borrowed the term *Aufschreibesystem* from the memoirs of Daniel Paul Schreber, a text on the basis of which Freud wrote one of his five case studies and to which Jacques Lacan dedicated a year-long seminar. My own study of the case, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), lays much of the groundwork for the current project. Its focus is Schreber's experience of investiture crisis, of the failure of the symbolic processes of social inscription that then return in delusions that literalize and concretize those processes as the operations of actual machinery in and on the body, operations that seem to transform Schreber into a creature of intensified flesh marked as both feminine and Jewish.
54. Julia Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Subsequent references are made in the text.
55. In his own earlier appeal to the binding force of contracts, Shylock rubs the duke's nose in the darker side of Venetian commercial society:

What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?
 You have among you many a purchased slave,
 Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,
 You use in abject and slavish parts
 Because you bought them. Shall I say to you
 "Let them be free! Marry them to your heirs!
 Why sweat they under burdens? Let their beds
 Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates
 Be seasoned with such viands"? You will answer
 "The slaves are ours!" So do I answer you:

The pound of flesh which I demand of him
Is dearly bought: 'tis mine and I will have it.
If you deny me, fie upon your law:
There is no force in the decrees of Venice.
I stand for judgment. (4.1.90–104)

56. Dolar offers a concise formulation of this excess: "Sovereignty is based on exception, the sovereign can suspend the law, and mercy is precisely the exception to the law, it is beyond law, beyond the contract, the reciprocal bond, as a surplus depending on the caprice of the sovereign, who can freely grant it or not beyond any obligation. Mercy is the state of exception at its purest." Dolar, "The Quality of Mercy Is Not Strained."

LECTURE II. PARADOXOLOGIES

I

The shift from the fetishism of persons—above all that of the singularly representative person, the *Staatsperson* or sovereign—to that of things takes place in the context of a long process of secularization that ostensibly drains the shared institutions of the public sphere of transcendental resources of legitimation; it is a process that, so the story goes, disenchantments the world more generally, evacuates from all aspects of life the last vestiges of otherworldly, animating spirits, be they divine or demonic. The critical thrust of Marx's theory of the fetishism of the commodity has been to demonstrate just how wrong this story is. Max Weber, who first introduced the concept of the disenchantment of the world, formulated his own critical skepticism on this matter with the concept of the *spirit*—indeed, we might say *specter*—of capitalism. For Weber, the Reformation contributed to the disenchantment of the world—think of the devaluation of priestly sacraments—at the price of injecting into it a proliferation of harassing voices that never cease to remind the faithful to keep busy, essentially, never to cease to economize, and all *for the greater glory of God*. As we shall see, Weber's argument will be that the Protestant ethic effectively transforms work itself into a sort of obsessive-compulsive *doxology*, the liturgical praise or glorification of God.

It is, I would suggest, Marx's labor theory of value that first opens the horizon within which Weber's argument unfolds. For Marx, however, it is not that secular society remains secretly bound to transcendence but rather that our ostensibly disenchanted world vibrates with a *surplus of immanence* that profoundly informs our dealings in the world, makes us into "busy-bodies" trying to discharge an excess of demand—an excessive *Arbeitsanforderung*, to use Freud's locution for the pressure of the drives—that keeps us driven even when we are ostensibly "idling," keeps us *negotiating* even in the midst of *otium*. Recalling T. J. Clark's characterization of modernism as "turning on the impossibility of transcendence," we might say that moderns keep obsessively *turning* or *spinning* in one fashion or another and do so ever more according to the rhythm of "24/7." This is what Marx means when he claims that although the commodity "appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing," if looked at in the right way it shows itself to be "a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties (*ein sehr vertracktes Ding . . . voll*

metaphysischer Spitzfindigkeit und theologischer Mucken).¹ But it is not so much *we* who continue to engage in metaphysics and theology but rather our *busy bodies*. For Marx, it is commodity and so value-producing labor—rather than labor as such or a religiously inflected work ethic—that is fundamentally doxological. Both the Marxist critique of political economy and the Freudian engagement with libidinal economy are, although at rather different levels, ultimately in the business of intervening into precisely this *busy-ness*, this uncanny mode of stress. The Freud-Marxist concept of stress I am developing here is no doubt continuous with other approaches to ideology and efforts to isolate its “sublime object.”² I hope, though, that by focusing on the afterlife of political theology in secular modernity—essentially, its mutation into political economy—it will be possible to shed new light on these matters.

As I have already noted, this surplus of immanence “at work” in the commodity is of a radically different nature than the vibrant matter, actants, and assemblages of the new posthumanist materialisms. The “animation” at issue for Marx is something that is ultimately deadening—or rather: *undeading*—for human beings, something that drives them while holding them in place, a condition Walter Benjamin once referred to as “petrified unrest,” *erstarrte Unruhe*.³ For the new materialists, by contrast, “vibrant matter” is the very promise of a new sense of aliveness for a “newish self.” Marx’s critical intervention aims at a deanimation of this undeadingness while the new materialisms seek to open human life to the “agency” of nonhuman material assemblages. What both approaches share, of course, is the very question as to the nature of human flourishing and the sense of urgency of this question. The fundamental difference may just be that the Marxist project—along with that of psychoanalysis—operates within a Judeo-Christian tradition for which the *creatureliness* of human life—I will have more to say about this term—is inseparable from being subject to normative pressures of various kinds, the generic source of which is our life with language. Life lived under normative pressure is a life suffused by questions of responsibility, answerability, and obligation. Such questions would, in turn, seem to draw us inevitably into the orbit of the semantic field of *debt*, of what we owe to others, to society, and to oneself. The new materialisms, for their part, take up more “animist” traditions and habits of thought that aim to disperse the normativity proper to human orders of meaning into self-perpetuating patterns of organized matter (we are back, perhaps, at the difference between the Jewish and the “newish”). It is no doubt for this reason that the figure

that keeps emerging as a key point of contestation in these debates is Spinoza, the great Jewish thinker of self-perpetuating being or *conatus* grasped under the heading of an *Ethics*. But that is a story that takes us beyond the scope of the present inquiry. I would simply note that in his final book, *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud tried to give an account of what he took to be the obsessive-compulsive *conatus* of Judaism itself.⁴

II

Before we can say more about the mutation of fetishism in the transition from political theology to political economy, we need to get clear about the nature of the disavowal—of the “unknown knowns”—at work in the first form, the fetishism of persons. What is it that is both affirmed and denied in the fetishistic activity, above all in the liturgical labor that, so to speak, congeals in the virtual reality of the king’s second, sublime body? It is not, I think, simply the knowledge that the sovereign is really, after all, just another mortal being and that his kingship is just a fiction or social construction; it is not, that is, the knowledge of the “trick” of the *Reflexivbestimmung* noted by Marx, that is, that the king is a king because his subjects treat him as a king (and not because he is already king). Bringing together the political theological problematic of the state of exception and the psychoanalytic concept of the partial object, Slavoj Žižek offers a concise formulation of what, I think, is really at stake in the fantasmatic physiology of the royal personage:

The emergence of this sublime body is . . . linked to the illegal violence that founds the reign of law: once the reign of law is established, it rotates in its vicious circle, “posits its presuppositions,” by means of foreclosing its origins; yet for the synchronous order of law to function, *it must be supported by some “little piece of the real” which, within the space of law, holds the place of its founding / foreclosed violence*—the sublime body is precisely this “little piece of the real” which “stops up” and thus conceals the void of the law’s vicious circle.⁵

For Žižek, the “little piece of the real”—what Lacan famously called the *objet a*—holds the place of the *anarchic* dimension of the space of juridico-political normativity. To put it in terms I have used in earlier work, what I am calling the “flesh”—the stuff out of which the sovereign’s sublime body is composed—emerges out of the entanglement of the somatic and normative pressures that constitute creaturely life. By

“creaturely” I do not simply mean nature, living things, sentient beings, or even what the religiously minded would think of as the entirety of the “vibrant matter” of God’s creation—*deus sive natura*—but rather a dimension specific to human existence, albeit one that seems to push thinking in the direction of theology. It signifies a mode of *exposure* that distinguishes human being from other kinds of life: not simply to the elements or to the fragility, vulnerability, and precariousness of our mortal, finite lives, but rather to an ultimate *lack of foundation* for the historical forms of life in which human life unfolds. This is what Žižek means when he speaks of the law’s rotation in a vicious circle; it is a rotation around a gap that opens at the jointure of the somatic and the normative, life and forms of life. This gap, this crucial *missing piece of the world*, to which we are ultimately and intimately exposed as social beings of language, is one that we thus first *acquire* by way of our initiation—Heidegger would say *thrownness*—into these forms of life, not one already there in the bare fact of our biological being. We could say that the vulnerability of biological life becomes potentiated, amplified, by way of exposure to the radical contingency of the forms of life that constitute the space of meaning within which human life unfolds, and that it is only through such an-archic “potentiation” that we take on the flesh of creaturely life.

Creatureliness is thus a dimension not so much of biological as *ontological vulnerability*, a vulnerability that permeates human being as that being whose essence it is to exist in forms of life that are, in turn, contingent, contested, susceptible to breakdown, in a word, *historical*.⁶ The normative pressure that suffuses human life always includes an excess, a “too much” of pressure that indexes the contingency of the norms in question. We are not simply answerable to one another according to the relevant norms of our social being, that is, as recognized bearers of normative statuses; we are also always subject to surplus or supplementary “negotiations” that, to use Žižek’s terms, orbit around the void of the law’s vicious circle, the lack of any ultimate grounding or authorization of those normative statuses. It is these surplus negotiations that *give flesh* to a form of life, infuse the bindingness of its norms with a dimension of psychosomatic passion. To put it somewhat differently, what “covers” the dimension of risk proper to our ontological vulnerability is the subject-matter elaborated by individual and social fantasy as *formations of the flesh*. Our investiture with normative statuses—this is what Lacan meant by entering the “symbolic”—always involves a dimension of libidinal investment

of the subject and by the subject. We never simply just have an entitlement or “office”; whether we like it not, we *enjoy it*, and this enjoyment is the stuff that dreams are made of.

It would be more accurate to say that the gap at the jointure of the somatic and the normative is always multiple and layered. It concerns the lack of ultimate foundations of the normative order, its lack of anchorage in, its nondeducibility from, the great chain of being. But it also concerns the jointure itself: the *missing link* between the somatic and the normative, a sort of blind spot at the point at which the latter “emerges,” as one now tends to put it, from the former. Finally there is the gap immanent to biological life itself, the point at which, at least in human being, it reaches a limit that requires supplementation by cultural prosthetics. The overlapping of these multiple gaps provides the site of the fleshly surplus enjoyed by humans as distinct from other living things.⁷

The political theology of sovereignty implies, among other things, that the sovereign incarnates and so represents this vulnerability for his subjects, and thereby allows them in some sense to avoid the void. It is the “business” of the sovereign, that is, to *cover the void* in two fundamental senses: to veil it with his or her glorious body; but also, on the basis of that very glory, to stand surety for it as for a primordial debt. The royal flesh—and this is the essence of the fetishism of persons—marks a kind of wound or tear in the fabric of being by covering it in these two senses, which means that the royal virtues always, at some level, serve to sustain the virtual reality of the sublime, royal flesh. My concern continues to be the ways in which what had been, to a large extent, localizable in early modernity, invested within the sphere and “physiology” of the traditional master or sovereign, disperses into the texture of the social space at large—into the life of the People—and so into the very soul of the modern citizen-subject. Marx’s theory of the fetishism of the commodity is, I am suggesting, above all a contribution to an understanding of that process of dispersion. For Marx it is above all political economy that, as it were, *inherits the royal remains*, the dispersed and now “popularized” flesh of the king’s sublime body in its function as glorious guarantor covering the missing link at the “anthropogenetic” knotting of the somatic and the normative. Political economy circumscribes the domain in which the production process not only of the wealth of the nation but also of the People’s Two Bodies is managed, kept in business / busy-ness. The theory of the fetishism of the commodity serves as a kind of warning not

to lose site of the *gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit* of the People's second, sublime body, the virtually real product of commodity-producing labor. The labor theory of value is, I am suggesting, ultimately a theory of the production of the spectral flesh of the sovereign People, a process that depends, we might say, on the exchange of a (decapitated) head for an invisible hand in ceaseless motion. This motion—the imperative of capital accumulation—is, I am arguing, the political economic version of what Žižek characterized as the law's vicious circle, its rotation around an anarchic kernel, a foreclosed origin. Another way of putting it would be to say that political economy converts the fundamental dynamic of the drive into a *debt drive*, a ceaseless effort to redeem or indemnify a lack at the origin of the normative order to which we are, so to speak, joined at the hip.⁸

III

We can think of the king's sublime body as the congelation of a certain kind of labor, as the substance of the "royal value" produced by that labor. The elaboration of this value takes place above all by way of the liturgical practices—*liturgy* (from *laos*, people, and *ergon*, work) just means "public work"—in and through which the sovereign is acclaimed and sustained as sovereign. Such practices performatively enact the *Reflexivbestimmung* of sovereignty noted by Marx. By, as it were, *fleshing out* the conceptual operation of that reflexive determination, this work produces a virtual real *that can take on a life of its own*. This is why insight into the conceptual operation—the structure of a reflexive determination—fails to produce the critical effects one might expect. This was, at bottom, Freud's insight with respect to the therapeutic effects of insight into the logic of an analysand's symptoms by way of interpretation and analytic construction; for the most part, these effects simply fail to materialize. They fail, that is, as interventions into the relevant materiality, the subject-matter at issue. The "business" of a neurosis—the specific mode of *busy-body-ness* that constitutes it—requires an intervention into the labor process itself along with the quasi-somatic, quasi-normative pressures informing it, something that Freud for good reason called *working through*.

Over the past decades there has been a resurgence of interest in the concept of liturgy; not so long ago, a special issue of the journal *Telos* even proposed the notion of a new "liturgical turn" in political and social theory.⁹ A good deal of this new work has concerned itself with ways to reanimate liturgical practices heretofore relegated to the religious sphere, to

find in liturgical traditions resources of resistance against the flatness of a secular life artificially pumped up by what are characterized as the pseudo-liturgies of capitalist modernity. Among the more recent contributions to this literature, Giorgio Agamben's *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, stands out for a number of reasons. First, he avoids the simple and, I think, too facile opposition between ostensibly genuine and patently fake liturgical practices by focusing on a dimension that both attempt to cultivate, namely, *glory*. He furthermore situates his investigation against the background of what he, like so many other contemporary thinkers, sees as the global, neoliberal absorption of political thought and action by forms of economic rationality and behavior. What Agamben develops under the heading of the "archaeology of glory" turns out to be a rich resource for the analysis of this development. Finally and more generally, the "liturgical turn" allows us to revisit various questions previously explored under the heading of ideology. Ideology is a concept that, I think, still remains too attached to the ideational, to thought and image, to the ways in which people make sense of the world, while the concept of liturgy focuses our attention on the practices in and through which they form and consolidate the value—and so, at some level, the valor, the glory, the splendor—of their social being.

The concern with the fate of politics in modernity is not new. Weber, Schmitt, Arendt, Adorno, even Heidegger argued that forms of the economic-technical administration and management of life were becoming hegemonic in the modern world, that *homo economicus* was coming to fully displace or absorb *homo politicus*. Some of the names of this hegemony—names signaling an ostensibly postpolitical age—are familiar: Hannah Arendt called it "the social"; Theodor Adorno spoke of "the administered world"; Martin Heidegger used a nearly untranslatable word, *das Gestell* (sometimes translated as "enframing"); more recently, Alain Badiou has coined the term "democratic materialism." Agamben, for his part, follows Michel Foucault's lead by framing his investigation as one pertaining to the forms of "governmentality" that ostensibly supplant the juridico-political field of sovereignty in modernity.

Foucault formulated this transformation in a number of different ways, most notably as the displacement of sovereign forms of power by a series of institutions and practices that did not so much reign or rule juridical subjects as manage and administer the lives of individuals and populations. At least for a time, Foucault grouped these practices under

two headings: the “anatomy-politics of the human body” and the “biopolitics of the population.”¹⁰ Regarding the former, Foucault speaks of a disciplinary physics of power that supplants what had once been thought of as the magical effects of the king’s touch:

The *body of the king*, with its strange material and physical presence, with the force that he himself deploys or transmits to some few others, is at the opposite extreme of this new physics of power . . . : a physics of a relational and multiple power, which has its maximum intensity not in the person of the king, but in the bodies that can be individualized by these relations.¹¹

With respect to the biopolitical administration of populations, the body of the king figures equally as Foucault’s key point of departure. In his lectures at the Collège de France in 1975–76, for example, he opens his account of the postrevolutionary “embourgeoisement” of the nation-state (and so the emergence of the defining sphere of modern political economy, civil or bourgeois society) with remarks that could have been taken from Kantorowicz’s *King’s Two Bodies*. What makes a nation, he writes, is the fact that its members “all have a certain individual relationship—both juridical and physical—with the real, living, and bodily person of the king. It is the body of the king, in his *physical-juridical* relationship with each of his subjects, that creates the body of the nation.”¹² It is precisely the dispersal and reorganization of this “physical-juridical relationship”—of this paradigmatic yet still exceptional jointure of the somatic and the normative—that is of interest to Foucault.

What is crucial to keep in mind here—and I think that this is what Foucault often fails to do—is that this hyphenation of the physical and the juridical “secretes” a new element or dimension, that of the flesh.¹³ Foucault is, in a word, touching here on what I have characterized as a metamorphosis of the King’s Two Bodies into the People’s Two Bodies and the emergence of new forms of power adapted to the management of the latter, of what is *more* than the body in the bodies of its citizen-subjects. Foucault’s investigations lead us to conclude that the threshold of modernity is marked by the “massification” of the physical-juridical flesh of the king, its dispersion into populations that for that very reason must be placed in the care of biopolitical administration. What this means is that whenever Foucault speaks about the object of biopolitics—man-as-species, populations—he is also, although never explicitly and

perhaps never even intentionally, addressing the fate in modernity of the royal remains of political theology, the dimension of the flesh in its new, modern form: *masses of busy bodies*. Biopolitics is always mass politics in the sense of dealing with the massive presence of a sublime object—the virtual reality of a fleshy mass—now circulating in and agitating the life of the People, which means, in turn, that political economy, the domain that Foucault came to see as a central site of biopolitical administration, acquires a certain sacramental dimension, the aspect of a “mass.” It is no surprise, then, that Marx would discover “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” in the midst of our life with commodities.

In another series of lectures concerned with the shift from classical sovereignty to biopolitical forms of administration—from *reigning* to *governing*—Foucault writes:

When it became possible not only to introduce population into the field of economic theory, but also into economic practice, when it became possible to introduce into the analysis of wealth this new subject, this new *subject-object*, with its demographic aspects, but also with the aspect of the specific role of producers and consumers, owners and non-owners, those who create profit and those who take it, when the entry of this *subject-object*, of population, became possible within the analysis of wealth, with all its disruptive effects in the field of economic reflection and practice, then I think the result was *that one ceased analyzing wealth and a new domain of knowledge, political economy, was opened up*.¹⁴

Again, what Foucault is saying here is, I am suggesting, that the subject matter of political economy includes an *un-economic subject-matter* the disruptive force of which derives, precisely, from its uncanny, spectral materiality, its status as *gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit*.

There is another passage in this same series of lectures that helps to clarify a crucial aspect of Foucault’s engagement with the subject-matter of political economy or what he refers to as its “subject-object.” Addressing the semantic history of the institution “police,” Foucault recalls that beginning in the seventeenth century it refers broadly “to the set of means by which the state’s forces can be increased while preserving the state in good order” (313), that is, to the array of matters we would today group under the heading of public policy. He goes on to note the use, in various sources, of a “rather strange word for describing the object of the police,”

namely, *splendor*: “What is splendor? It is both the visible beauty of the order and the brilliant, radiating manifestation of a force. Police therefore is in actual fact the *art of the state’s splendor* as visible order and manifest force” (314; emphasis added). One might say that the fundamental charge—or better: *sur-charge*—of police/policy and the science it would become—in German, *Polizeiwissenschaft*—was the protection and administration not so much of the *Herrschaft* of the state as its *Herrlichkeit*, not so much its rule as its glory. Police, public policy, and, finally, political economy, were charged, that is, with securing and managing the substance of the social bond in its newfound glory as—or rather, as an immanent surplus to—the wealth of nations.

IV

Before turning to Agamben, I would like to mention very briefly the important work done by Joseph Vogl in addressing the historical shifts of concern here. In an essay on the modern desire for/of the state, “Staatsbegehren: Zur Epoche der Policy,” Vogl for the most part cleaves closely to Foucault’s conceptual frame in tracking the shift in German political discourse from the early modern sovereign reign over juridical subjects to the modern governmental project of “policing” the lives of individuals and populations.¹⁵ He borrows from Kantorowicz’s work to characterize the split introduced into the populations of modern states as one between two bodies: a juridical one that remains within the discursive orbit of law and rights, and an ostensibly empirical one that becomes increasingly the subject matter of a political anthropology whose forms of knowledge emerge out of the administrative practices of *Policy*.

Alongside questions of natural right and reason, alongside the representation and limitation of sovereign power and the abstract body of the State-Person [*Staatsperson*], there emerged a materiality and reality of the state that was put together from the directions of diverse forces and an aggregation of self-interested individuals; [this new materiality] could not simply be systematized by way of juridical principles and laws: over against the force of law and the sovereign personage there emerged a physics of the state’s forces. (611–12)

This Foucauldian assessment is, I think, all perfectly right up to a point. What is finally missed is, I think, a dimension that escapes the

conceptual grasp of both juridical rationality and the new anthropology, of both law and “physics.” It is the dimension that Foucault himself points to with the notion of *splendor*, namely, something in the empirical body that is *more* than the body, a surplus that, though it emerges on the basis of a symbolic investiture, of an “official” inscription in a symbolic order, cannot be simply equated with the symbolic fiction of office let alone with the empirical body of its incumbent. What this account misses is the impossible dimension of public policy and risk management, the demand to cover what I have characterized as the ontological vulnerability proper to creaturely life. What ultimately comes to cover that dimension of risk is, as we have seen, a special, immaterial stuff elaborated by individual and social fantasy as formations of the flesh. These formations are to a very large extent sustained by the liturgical dimension—the “public work”—enacted in what otherwise appears as the policing of empirical bodies and forces. The “public work” in the *Policey* aims, that is, at what is in the body that is *more* than the body. This dual aspect of “police work” will, I am arguing, find its crucial modern form in the dual aspect of labor articulated in Marx’s labor theory of value.

Vogl however goes a long way to recuperate this loss by emphasizing the role played by aesthetic theory and practice—his main point of reference is Schiller—in, as it were, covering or filling “the gap between sovereign representation and empirical state body” (613), in securing the jointure of norms and living bodies at a moment of profound social reorganization. In Vogl’s view, around 1800 *Policey* and aesthetics—along with an emergent political economy—ultimately join hands in trying to come to grips with the “abstract material” that, as we have seen with respect to David’s *Death of Marat*, began to come into view as a quasi-autonomous dimension in the visual field of an incipient modernism. If, as Vogl suggests, Schiller’s aesthetic theory and practice are born “aus dem Geist der Policey” (618), it is crucial to emphasize that what infuses—what *sur-charges*—the *Geist* or spirit of police work with its particular passion is the spectral aspect of its object and the need to extract from it the splendor of the state. If there is indeed a form of empiricism at work here it is a peculiar one: call it the empiricism of the flesh as the virtual-real dimension—as the fundamental *subject-matter*—of public policy. This still basically Foucauldian account of the emergence of *Policey* corresponds, in the terms of Jacques Lacan’s discourses, to a displacement of the “discourse of the Master” by that of the “discourse of the University.”¹⁶ In

the discourse of the Master, the subject-matter of the social bond serves to sustain/entertain the Master in his sovereign glory, nourish the king's sublime metabolism—his two bodies—while in the discourse of the University it becomes the “subject-object” of an administrative-managerial paradigm charged with optimizing its potential (one might recall, in this context, Malte Laurids Brigge's visit to the Salpêtrière). Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Policey* effectively yields to the regime of political economy as the primary locus of the production of splendor.

v

Agamben's research aims at providing what the subtitle of his study refers to as a “theological genealogy of economy and government.”¹⁷ Foucault rightly grasped that what characterized the modern period was the supplementation and partial supplanting of sovereignty by forms of what he called “governmentality” central to which was, as we have seen, political economy. What he failed to see, however, was just how deep the theological roots of the semantic field of *oikonomia* go:

the fact that . . . the Foucauldian genealogy of governmentality can be extended and moved back in time, right up to the point at which are able to identify in God himself, through the elaboration of the Trinitarian paradigm, the origin of the notion of an economical government of men and the world, does not discredit his hypotheses, but rather confirms their historical core to the very extent to which it details and corrects their historico-chronological exposition. (111)

It is not first in the early modern period that the sovereign begins to *reign* as the provider of general, universal, and simple laws rather than *govern* in the pastoral sense of providing for the individual and special needs of the people—tasks assumed by new forms and agents of knowledge-power; this difference between what in the theological tradition is referred to as *general* and *special providence* is, Agamben claims, the very signature of the Christian dispensation from the start and forms the basis for what he refers to as the “bipolar machine” of power in the West. Among the terms of that bipolarity whose constantly changing articulations he sees as constitutive of the history of politics in the West, Agamben lists: Sovereignty / Administration-Management; Law / Order-Police; Constituent Power / Constituted Power; Legitimacy / Legality.

Much of the book is dedicated to reconstructing (in at times overwhelming detail) efforts by the Church Fathers to elaborate the Trinitarian paradigm of this machine, to conceptually guarantee the unity in difference of the Father qua transcendent substance or Being of God, on the one hand, and the Son understood as the *visible hand* of God's redemptive action in the world, on the other. The details of these efforts, along with those of the Monarchist, Arian, and various Gnostic challenges they were meant to overcome, need not detain us here.¹⁸ They largely serve to prepare the reader for Agamben's most significant insight, namely, that the pole of the machine associated with governing, managing, "economizing," has, as Foucault said of the police at the beginning of the seventeenth century, largely been dedicated to the cultivation of splendor, glory, *Herrlichkeit*.

Over the course of his "archaeology of glory," Agamben draws on the work of several twentieth-century scholars all of whom to a greater or lesser extent home in on the intimate relation of liturgical doxologies—the ritual praise and glorification of God that constitutes so much of the cultic activity of the Church—and the acclamations that have historically accompanied the investiture of rulers, whether ancient emperors, Christian kings, or, closer to the historical experience of some of those same scholars, the German *Führer*. (As Agamben reminds us, Nazi Germany produced some of the most famous acclamations in the modern period, most notably *Heil Hitler* and *Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Führer*.) Among them: Carl Schmitt, Erik Peterson, Ernst Kantorowicz. What this archaeology turns up is, as Agamben puts it, an archaic sphere in which religious and juridical action and speech become indistinguishable, a sphere he had explored up to this point with respect to the semantic field of the sacred. "If we now," he writes, "call 'glory' the uncertain zone in which acclamations, ceremonies, liturgies, and insignia operate, we will see a field of research open before us that is equally relevant and, at least in part, as yet unexplored" (188). This field is framed by two fundamental questions: First: Why does power—heavenly or earthly—need glory? And second: What are the historical modes and relations of the production, circulation, and consumption of glory?

Perhaps the most important source in Agamben's efforts to get this new field off the ground is Erik Peterson's 1935 book, *The Book of Angels: Their Place and Meaning in the Liturgy*.¹⁹ Peterson argues that the liturgy—the people's work—that makes up the holy mass is best understood as the Church's striving to participate in the hymnic glorification of God—the doxologies—that, for Peterson, constitute the very being of

the angels, or at least the ones that truly matter for the mass (all angelologies articulate a complex division of labor that need not detain us here):

Their authentic being is not grounded in their immobility but in their movement, which they manage with the beating of those wings that Isaiah first describes with an unmatched power of perception. To this beating of wings . . . there corresponds a distinctive gushing forth in word, in call, in song, of the Holy, Holy, Holy. In other words, the authentic being of these angels is grounded in this overflow into word and song, in this phenomenon. (137–38)

It is for this reason that knowledge of God—*theology*—culminates in praise of God, that is, in liturgical doxology. “For of what use,” he continues, “are all the virtues of the angels, if their praise of God, their most authentic life, that for which alone they exist, *that through which their innermost form of being is set to vibrating* [*das, wodurch ihre innere Seinsform in Schwingungen gerät*], is not attainable by human beings?” (138; emphasis added).²⁰ What Peterson above all emphasizes is the public and, so, fundamentally political character of the cultic activity—of the doxological labor—aimed at reproducing the frequencies that constitute the “vibrant matter” of angelic being.

Peterson will ultimately want to claim that the peculiar theopolitical dimension of the liturgy elevates the Church above all political theology by, precisely, appropriating the core political dimension of doxologies, their resemblance to acclamations of rulers. By taking part in a heavenly worship—one sustained by angelic doxologies—the earthly Church converts political theological acclamation—Peterson personally witnessed the new efflorescence of such acclamations in Nazi Germany—into theopolitical glorification:

Characteristic for this worship in heaven is the way in which political and religious symbolic expressions are thoroughly intermingled, which is shown most clearly in the resemblance of the doxologies to acclamations. That the heavenly worship described in Revelation has an original relationship to the political sphere is explained by the fact that the apostles left the earthly Jerusalem, which was both a political and a cultic center, in order to turn toward the heavenly Jerusalem, which is

both a city and royal court, and yet also a temple and cult site. With this is connected the further point: that the Church's anthem transcends national anthems, as the Church's language transcends all other languages. . . . Finally, it is to be noted that this eschatological transcending has as its ultimate result the fact that the entire cosmos is incorporated into its praise. (116)²¹

Ernst Kantorowicz published his own study of ritual acclamations immediately after the war and some ten years before the publication of *The King's Two Bodies*. The study, *Laudes Regiae: A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Medieval Ruler Worship*, focuses on the history of a particular acclamation—it begins with the phrase, *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat*—central to Carolingian political theology. As Agamben's discussion of this earlier study strongly suggests, it could be seen as a first attempt to grasp the nature of the labor that would congeal into the sublime flesh of the king's royal physiology. This comes across above all in the treatment of the coronation of Charlemagne in Rome. Regarding this rite of royal investiture, Kantorowicz argues that the *laudes* are essentially constative utterances lacking in performative force *and yet somehow crucial*:

The *laudes* acclamation, representing the recognition of the king's legitimacy, was an accessory manifestation, impressive by its festal and solemn character, *but not indispensable*; for legally the liturgical acclaim *added no new element of material power* which the king had not already received earlier by his election and coronation. . . . By means of this chant, the Church professed and publically espoused the king in a solemn form. However, *the weight of this profession or espousal cannot be measured by legal standards*. (*Laudes*, 83; cited in Agamben, 191; emphasis added)

As I have been suggesting, the *weight* at issue is that of the flesh, this virtual real element that enters into the composition of the king's sublime body. The *laudes*, then, are king-creating powers of a special sort, those that, to paraphrase Marx once more, flesh out the reflexive determination of the being of the king and thereby "cover" it, gloriously secure it or, to use more recent economic terminology, *securitize* it. Kantorowicz seems to suggest that the vibrant matter of this flesh is ultimately composed of,

or at least transferred to the king, by way of the sonorous mass of acclaiming voices: “The shouts of the Romans and the laudes, as they then followed one after the other without a break, seem to have formed one single tumultuous outburst of voices in which it is idle to seek the particular cry which was ‘constitutive’ and legally effective” (*Laudes*, 84; cited in Agamben, 192). We might say, then, that what Kantorowicz later elaborated under the heading of the king’s second body is a *sublimate* of just such a sonorous mass, a *congelation of its vibrant doxological matter*.²²

VI

Agamben’s insight is that there is no political theology of sovereignty without a theological economy of glory, no constitution of *Herrschaft* without the doxological production of *Herrlichkeit*—no *Herrschaft* that is not, at some level, “entertained,” *unterhalten*, by *Herrlichkeit*. Agamben argues, in effect, that what might at first appear to be a superstructural feature of a ruling state apparatus is, essentially, its *libidinal economic base*, one that produces and shapes the glorious flesh of the social bond. It involves, as we have seen, a mode of production organized according to the circular logic of reflexive determinations. To put it in terms of what we might characterize, by way of an allusion to Freud, as *the economic problem of Christianity*, we could say: We glorify God because he is glorious; the glory that God’s creatures owe to God and produce through cultic praise is already an essential attribute of God; the earth is full of the glory that the faithful must return to God by way of doxologies. This work would thus appear to be a mode of God’s own self-glorification, a peculiar sort of divine auto-affection that makes use of creaturely life as its instrument or tool. Paraphrasing Karl Barth’s efforts to capture the paradoxical logic of doxological labor, Agamben writes, “The circularity of glory here attains its ontological formulation: becoming free for the glorification of God means to understand oneself as constituted, in one’s very being, by the glory with which we celebrate the glory that allows us to celebrate it” (215). One begins to sense the obsessional pattern and rhythm here, doxology’s resemblance to what Freud characterized as the self-amplifying dynamic of the superego (the key, for Freud, to the economic problem of masochism). At least in the context of an obsessional neurosis, the ego is, in some sense, under constant pressure to live for the greater glory of the superego, to “fatten” its status as *Über-ich*, which might indeed be better translated as *surplus-ego*. Agamben summarizes the dynamic as an embedded series of paradoxes:

Glory is the exclusive property of God for eternity, and will remain eternally identical in him, such that nothing and no one can increase or diminish it; and yet, glory is glorification, which is to say, something that all creatures always incessantly owe to God and that he demands of them. From this paradox follows another one, which theology pretends to present as the resolution of the former: glory, the hymn of praise that creatures owe to God, in reality derives from the very glory of God; it is nothing but the necessary response, almost the echo that the glory of God awakens in them. That is (and this is the third formulation of the paradox): everything that God accomplishes, the works of creation and the economy of redemption, he accomplishes only for his glory. However, for this, creatures owe him gratitude and glory. (216)

The superegoic dimension of the paradox of glory fully emerges in the motto of the Ignatius Loyola, *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*, which Agamben reads as the driving force of Jesuit labor:

One thing that is clear is that he takes the paradox of glory to its extreme, since the human activity of glorification now consists in an impossible task: the continual increase of the glory of God that can in no way be increased. More precisely . . . the impossibility of increasing the inner glory of God translates into an unlimited expansion of the activity of external glorification by men, particularly by the members of the Society of Jesus. (216)

Readers of Weber will recognize here the core argument of his study of the “spirit/specter of capitalism.” As Weber shows, what we have been calling the paradox of glory converges with the logic of predestination in Calvinism according to which not only the dispensation of grace but also its withholding serve as manifestations of divine glory, which, in turn, calls on us to respond with acts of thanksgiving and glorification. As Weber puts it, “All creation, including of course the fact, as it undoubtedly was for Calvin, that only a small proportion of men are chosen for eternal grace, *can have any meaning only as means to the glory and majesty of God*” (59–60; emphasis added). There is nothing that does not testify to the glory of God and for that very reason we must dedicate our lives to the further glorification of God. For the reformers, a Christian life was dedicated to God’s glory, to live and work *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. As Weber

argues, work itself thereby becomes a form of what we might call *the doxology of everyday life*. It must be performed as liturgical practice, as a mode of production of glory. To use Peterson's terms, our work must ceaselessly resonate, as a response to a calling, with the vibrating being of the order of angels.

Against this background, Agamben's own philosophical and political project—and they would seem to be inseparable for him—emerges as a fundamentally *paradoxological* one. It consists of various attempts to strike at—or perhaps better: to induce a “general strike” in—the doxological apparatus, our *glory-producing labor*. Agamben sees that labor as the striving to capture in a separate sphere—religion, economics, politics, culture—a fundamental inoperativity, a sabbatical *otium*, marking the absence of a purpose and destination proper to human life. It is a matter of suspending our incessant *neg-otiations*, of unplugging from what keeps us in the business of being busy-bodies—of vibrating—in the sense I have been elaborating here. What is at stake in the doxologies and ceremonials that seem merely to accompany power is, he suggests, a fetishistic disavowal of *what does not work* in human life; they present so many manic attempts to capture, incorporate, inscribe in a separate sphere “the inoperativity that is central to human life.” The “flesh wound” that cannot be countenanced is not, as Freud would have it, at the place of the missing maternal phallus, but rather of a missing task or *telos* proper to human life:

The *oikonomia* of power places firmly at its heart, in the form of festival and glory, what appears to its eyes as the inoperativity of man and God, *which cannot be looked at*. Human life is inoperative and without purpose, but precisely this *argia* and this absence of aim make the incomparable operativity [*operosità*] of the human species possible. Man has dedicated himself to production and labor [*lavoro*], because in his essence he is completely devoid of work [*opera*], because he is the Sabbatical animal par excellence. (245–46; emphasis added)²³

What is here translated as “operativity” might better be rendered as *business* or even *busy-body-ness*, a neologism that also, I think, captures much of what Heidegger is after in his phenomenology of everyday *Dasein* and its existential mode of “falling,” of living within a diffuse and generalized mode of *Geschäftigkeit*.

What I have been calling the flesh covers, for Agamben, what the tradition has thought under the heading of *zoe aionios*, eternal life, which, he suggests, is “the name of this inoperative center of the human, of this political ‘substance’ of the Occident that the machine of the economy and of glory ceaselessly attempts to capture within itself” (251). Recalling Žižek’s formulation concerning the reign of law, glory, we could say, is one of the names of the “substance” that, as he put it, “‘stops up’ and thus conceals the law’s vicious circle.” What Žižek calls the “illegal violence that founds the reign of law” is for Agamben a manifestation of the struggle to capture “the inoperative center of the human.” What Agamben is after with the notion of “inoperativity” is, I am suggesting, much the same thing that Žižek—among other Lacanians—often attempts to name with formulations such as “the big Other doesn’t exist.” For Agamben as well as for Žižek, what is at issue is the transferential dynamic at work in the reflexive determination of the Other underlined by Marx. The subject *works* at sustaining/entertaining the *Instanz* or agency—feeding it with the splendor of surplus value—that, in turn, entitles the subject to enjoy its entitlements, its being in the Other. Against this background, a properly Marxist view of class struggle and revolutionary action would ultimately involve some form of intervention into these transferential relations, transactions, negotiations. This brings us to what we earlier referred to as a certain messianic dimension of the Marxist tradition and the need to strike something other than what is there. It would seem to involve the call for a strike on the liturgical labor in and through which the transferential dynamic is enacted, labor that, as Weber powerfully argued, is itself always already a response to a call. This struggle of call and counter-call, doxology and paradoxology, will thus always be at least one aspect of what it means to engage in class struggle.

VII

Among the more confusing parts of Marx’s labor theory of value are those where he refers to its core subject matter as abstract, undifferentiated, homogeneous human labor and appears to equate that with the purely physiological expenditure of energy, muscle, nerves, and so on, in the labor process.²⁴ The confusion runs the risks of losing sight of the relevant *subject-matter* in the so-conceived subject matter. Recall that Marx posits the notion of abstract labor on the basis of what he sees as the *real abstraction* operative in the circulation of commodities. In *The*

Wealth of Nations, Adam Smith had himself already apologized for the “obscurity [that] may still appear to remain upon a subject *in its own nature extremely abstracted*.”²⁵ As soon as commodities are exchanged in denominations of a general equivalent of value—so and so much money—the specific, concrete labor that goes into them—tailoring rather than weaving—becomes in some sense a matter of indifference. Of significance, instead, is only the quantity of *value-producing* labor. Tailoring produces not only shirts but also and more importantly so and so much value, value that appears, in turn, as the exchange value of those shirts. That value may be equal to that of so and so much cotton, wheat, iron, or whatever commodity. Homogeneous labor is the labor that has, as Marx likes to say, *congealed* as value rather than taken phenomenal *shape* as this or that particular commodity. It is the labor that produces the value of, precisely, *whatever commodity*, labor that is thus at some level—the level that counts, that gets counted—commanded with utter indifference as to its specific nature.²⁶ It is not we who are indifferent when we command the labor of others by purchasing this or that commodity; it is our money that is indifferent and it is the money that does the talking here, issues the commands, speaks in imperatives, takes the other to (his or her) task.

What is produced in response to such commands—*Arbeitsanforderungen* structurally indifferent to the specific form of labor at issue—is precisely what Marx characterized as the spectral materiality of the commodity: “Let us now look at the residue of the products of labor. There is nothing left of them in each case but the same spectral materiality [*gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit*]; they are merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labor [*Gallerte unterschiedsloser menschlicher Arbeit*], that is, of human labor-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure.”²⁷ Marx’s own language has led readers to conclude that what he means with such formulations is simply a certain amount of physiological effort or output of energy.²⁸ They have understood what Marx calls the “dual character of the labor embodied in commodities” (131) as referring to the specific shape and nature of a particular, concrete form of labor, on the one hand—tailoring, weaving, baking—and the purely physiological expenditure of tissue and energy—I am tempted to call it an expenditure of “biopower”—on the other. Among the passages often cited to support this view we find the following:

If we leave aside the determinate quality of productive activity, what remains is its quality of being an expenditure of human labor-power.

Tailoring and weaving, although they are qualitatively different productive activities, are both a productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc., and in this sense both human labor. Of course, human labor-power must itself have attained a certain level of development before it can be expended in this or that form. But the value of a commodity represents human labor pure and simple, the expenditure of human labor in general. (134)

The remarks that immediately follow this passage suggest, however, that the very perspective or gaze that makes the double character of labor appear in this apparently straightforward and natural way must itself be seen as the object of Marx's critique of political economy. What remains of productive labor once we abstract from its qualitative dimension is, precisely, an *abstract materiality* generated by the historical relations of production *to which this gaze belongs*. What appears to be physiological expenditure pure and simple—so and so much biopower—is, at a different level, the substance of the social bond at the point at which political economy assumes its hegemonic place in the (self)governmental machine. As Moishe Postone has put it, “*die Materie* in Marx's ‘materialist’ critique is . . . social—the forms of social relations.”²⁹ What is at issue is, in a word, not a pound of brains, muscles, nerves, hands, and so on, but rather of *flesh*. In Foucauldian terms, we might say that what appears on the face of it as “biopower” in the sense of measurable physiological expenditure is part of a larger matrix of biopower or biopolitical operations that, as Marx puts it, go on behind the backs of those involved: “And just as, in civil society, a general or a banker plays a great part but man as such plays a very mean part, so, here too, the same is true of human labor. It is the expenditure of simple labor-power, i.e. of the labor-power possessed in his bodily organism by every ordinary man, on the average, without being developed in any special way” (135). It is in his anticipation of questions concerning this notion of simple labor-power that Marx shows his hand:

Simple average labor, it is true, varies in character in different countries and at different cultural epochs, but in a particular society it is given. More complex labor counts only as *intensified*, or rather *multiplied* simple labor, so that a smaller quantity of complex labor is considered equal to a larger quantity of simple labor. *Experience shows that this reduction is constantly being made* [emphasis added]. A commodity

may be the outcome of the most complicated labor, but through its *value* it is *posited* as equal to [the verb is *gleichsetzen*] the product of simple labor, hence it represents only a specific quantity of simple labor. The various proportions in which different kinds of labor are reduced to simple labor as their unit of measurement are *established* [*festgesetzt*] by a social process that goes on behind the backs of the producers [emphasis added]. (135)

As Postone summarizes these and similar remarks in *Capital*, “the appearance of labor’s mediational character in capitalism as physiological labor is the fundamental core of the fetish of capitalism.”³⁰ What disappears from view, what is disavowed in the fetishism of the commodity, is precisely the process of “reduction” that produces the *Gallerte*, the gelatinous mass in and through which our sociality is constituted as a kind of quasi-religious, quasi-secular mass in the liturgical service of the self-valorization of Value.

With the shift from the “sovereign form” to the “commodity form” of social mediation, labor becomes the new locus for the production of the flesh of the social bond. Commodity-producing labor is charged, that is, not only with the production of goods to satisfy the needs and wants of a rapidly expanding *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* or civil society; it is *sur-charged* with a task of social mediation that had earlier belonged to hierarchically arranged symbolic statuses or “estates” revolving, at least since the late middle ages and early modernity, around a central locus of sovereign power and authority.³¹ For Marx, *value* is now the locus of this surcharge and the labor theory of value concerns itself with its production and circulation. We could add that however one might choose to cultivate (or deconstruct) one’s ethnic, religious, sexual, or cultural identity, political economy continues to lay claim to the *vital subject-matter* around which our lives now revolve and with respect to which we are for the most part measured and governed. This is what is at issue in the shift from the fetishism of persons to the fetishism of things; the political theology of the king’s two bodies yields to political economy as the domain surcharged with the management—the *oikonomia*—of the subject-matter, the flesh of the social bond.

It should thus come as no surprise that when he introduces the immanent dynamic of capital as the self-valorization of Value—the quasi-autonomous life of this *surcharge* of our vibrant and vital matter—Marx will resort to the original Trinitarian terms of economic theology:

It [value] differentiates itself as original value from itself as surplus-value, just as God the Father differentiates himself from himself as God the Son, although both are of the same age and form, in fact one single person; for only by the surplus-value of £10 does the £100 originally advanced become capital, and as soon as this has happened, as soon as the son has been created and, through the son, the father, their difference vanishes again and both become one, £110. (256)

We might add: *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

VIII

That value is related to valor, glory, radiance, splendor, and that its substance results from the “change of state” that bodily expenditure undergoes under the pressure of real abstraction or “reduction”—call it the *alchemy of capitalism*—has long been in plain sight in the choice of objects historically used to incarnate this substance in the sphere of exchange relations: precious metals and, above all, gold. Gold is where the flesh of abstract, homogeneous human labor is, so to speak, directly deposited; this substance extracted from the earth serves as the glorious garment in which the spectral materiality extracted/abstracted from laboring bodies shines forth as the very substance of splendor.³²

What is “cast” in the role of the general equivalent of value must be at some level superfluous to human needs, must be something that one can do without. It must, in a word, embody the ambiguous virtues of *waste* in the sense of pure superfluity, of what exceeds the needs of the maintenance of life but serves, rather, to “entertain” it. It is no doubt for these reasons that psychoanalysis has so often posited a link between excrement and money. Something emerging from one’s own body, something the child in some sense works at producing as its own precious substance, is cast by his caregivers as, precisely, *matter in the wrong place*, the sort of superfluity that demands to be quickly evacuated and made to disappear: our first experience of waste management. For Freud, Ferenczi, and others, the anal jouissance attached to evacuation—a jouissance that includes the complex negotiations with those caregivers concerning the value and meaning of these first gifts—comes to be sublimated as the positive sense of superfluity attached to what will be extracted from the bowels of the earth and cast into or, rather *as*, the light—the *lux*—of luxury.³³ This sublimity manifests itself in the aesthetic dimension of precious metals.

Citing passages from Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Jean-Joseph Goux, whose work on the homologues linking diverse forms of symbolic economies has deeply informed my own thinking on these matters, concisely summarizes the aesthetic features that, as it were, help *to make gold gold*, namely,

Those qualities "that make them the natural material of luxury, ornamentation, splendor, festive occasions, in short, the positive form of abundance and wealth. They [gold and silver] appear, in a way, as spontaneous light brought out from the underground world"; gold dazzles the eyes with its orange rays, or reflects "only the color of highest intensity, viz. red light." It is in these "values people take out on holidays," in these products representing "pure and simple superabundance," that what Marx elsewhere calls the world of "profane commodities" converges as if toward the universal form that gives them their value. In short, society "acclaims gold, its Holy Grail, as the glittering incarnation of its inmost vital principle."³⁴

Among the more famous lines in German literature concerning the status of gold in human life, not surprisingly, are from Goethe's *Faust*, a play preoccupied with the "impossible" jointure of the somatic and the normative, the sensuous and the spiritual, the demonic and the angelic. After finding a casket containing jewelry placed in her closet by Mephistopheles, Gretchen puts them on and admires herself in a mirror:

Were these fine ear-bobs mine alone!
 They give one quite another air.
 What use are simple looks and youth?
 Oh, they are well and good in truth;
 That's all folk mean, though—pretty, fair.
 The praise you get is half good-natured fuss.
 For gold contend,
 On gold depend
 All things and men. . . . Poor us!³⁵

The last lines read in the original: "Nach Golde drängt, / Am Golde hängt / Doch alles. Ach wir Armen." The verbs *drängen* and *hängen* convey the sense, missing from the translation, of an impersonal passion or drive that seizes on human life. And "wir Armen" can signify not only

“poor us” but also “we poor folk.” I say this because Gretchen’s class status is underlined from her very first encounter with Faust when he addresses her on the street as *schönes Fräulein*, as “fair young lady” (2605ff.). Her response is: “I’m neither fair nor lady” (2607). In later conversations she emphasizes in considerable detail the harshness and hardships of her home life, in a word, just how much domestic labor she must do and the toll it has taken on her. The characterization of her room as a “kleines reinliches Zimmer” evokes not only a sense of Gretchen’s *Reinheit* or purity—this is what, for example, Kierkegaard emphasizes about her—but also of the work invested here in home economics, something conveyed in the translation with the pedestrian formulation, “a clean little room.”

Furthermore, what is translated above as “What use are simple looks and youth,” reads, in German, “Was hilft euch Schönheit, junges Blut?” The phrase *junges Blut* signifies much more than youth; it conveys the sense of *young flesh*.³⁶ And indeed, after his first encounter with Gretchen, Faust threatens to part from Mephistopheles if he fails to procure her for him. In Walter Arndt’s translation: “Let me be plain, and hear me right, / Unless I have that sweet delight / Nestling in my embrace, tonight, / The selfsame midnight hour will part us” (2635–38). The original reads: “Und das sag’ ich ihm kurz und gut, / Wenn nicht das süße junge Blut / Heut’ Nacht in meinen Armen ruht; / So sind wir um Mitternacht geschieden.” Faust is addressing Mephistopheles as a sort of pimp and indeed puts it almost explicitly so in his initial imperative, “Hör, du mußt mir die Dirne schaffen!” (2618), a command rendered in English as “Here, get me that young wench—for certain!” The tragic love story of Faust and Gretchen begins, thus, not only as a story of seduction but also as one of prostitution based on the equivalence of young flesh and gold. What is furthermore clear is that what must happen for this story to proceed is that Gretchen must be torn from the form of traditional if difficult life in which she is embedded. She must become “modern” and does so by entering into the system of exchange relations—relations in which flesh is directly exchangeable with gold—on the “ground floor,” as it were.

Against this background it makes good sense that Mephistopheles first presents himself to Faust by way of the famous lines that at some level capture the paradoxical logic of commercial economics as theorized by Adam Smith more or less contemporaneously with the composition of the early drafts of the play. When Mephistopheles introduces himself as “Part of that force which would / Do ever evil, and does ever good” (*Ein*

Theil von jener Kraft, / Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft; 1335–36), it is hard not to hear the resonances of Smith's famous characterization of the logic of the market whereby the greater good is produced precisely by way of what at the very least looks like an abandonment of Christian moral teachings:

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favor and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. . . . It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love."³⁷

The logic of the "oldest profession," the exchange of gold for flesh, is, like Faust, rejuvenated—finds new blood—by way of the Mephistophelian dynamic placed at the heart of political economy, a dynamic that, in the second part of the play, is potentiated, taken to a new level, by way of Faust's introduction of paper money into the financially drained empire. Among the precedents for this Faustian feat of financial engineering were, as we have noted, the introduction of paper currency—the assignat—by the revolutionary government in France the brief viability of which was sustained by an infusion of wealth—not so much *junges as altes Blut*—seized from Church and aristocracy under the bloody regime of the Terror.

IX

As I have been arguing, the inner movement of capital can be grasped as a form of the dynamic logic of doxology the paradigm of which is, as Agamben has compellingly argued, the Trinitarian *oikonomia*. The labor theory of value is, in other words, a theory of the fundamentally doxological nature of capitalism. The English translation of one of Marx's key concepts is actually helpful in this context. Just before introducing the Trinitarian allegory of the transformation of money into capital, Marx lays out in more explicitly Hegelian terms the logic at work in the elaboration of the subject-matter of political economy, of what in political economy is *not only substance but also subject*. The passage, though well-known, is worth quoting at length:

The independent form, i.e. the monetary form, which the value of commodities assumes in simple circulation, does nothing but mediate the exchange of commodities, and it vanishes in the final result of the movement. [At this point, that is, value does not yet function as a medium of social relations—ELS.] On the other hand, in the circulation M-C-M both the money and the commodity function only as different modes of existence of value itself, the money as its general mode of existence, the commodity as its particular or, so to speak, disguised mode. It is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject. If we pin down the specific forms of appearance assumed in turn by *self-valorizing value* [*der sich verwertende Wert*] in the course of its life, we reach the following elucidation: capital is money, capital is commodities. In truth, however, value is here the subject of a process which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself considered as original value [*sich als Mehrwert von sich selbst als ursprünglichem Wert abstößt*], and thus *valorizes itself* independently. For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, *its valorization is therefore self-valorization* [*seine Verwertung also Selbstverwertung*]. By virtue of being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring, or at least lays golden eggs.³⁸

The word *valor* nicely brings out the semantic field we have been exploring: glory, splendor, hymnic praise, and so forth. The paradoxes of glory elaborated by Agamben are the very ones that Marx lays out here with respect to value. Value-producing labor—this is what he characterizes as abstract homogeneous human labor—figures for Marx as the tool or instrumental cause of value's own self-valorization just as the faithful, liturgically joining in the angelic doxologies, serve the process of God's self-glorification. This is what is ultimately meant by religious *service*, by *Gottesdienst*.³⁹ Marx's abbreviation for the self-valorization of value—M-C-M—could thus be understood as the basic doxological formula of capitalism, its underlying *Sancta, Sancta, Sancta*, one that, as Peterson argued with respect to angelic being, goes on 24/7. Once the political theology of sovereignty disperses into the political economy of the wealth of nations, the doxological acclamations that once congealed in the king's

sublime body metamorphose into the less theatrical but no less liturgical productivity that congeals in the commodity as the substance of its value.

Against this background one can now better see what Hannah Arendt gets wrong about Marx's understanding of labor. In *The Human Condition*, she argues that Marx shares in a modern tendency to posit labor as the hegemonic form of the *vita activa* to the detriment of the work of fabrication or making, on the one hand, and, more important, the kinds of action that constitute the space of politics proper, on the other (action that must, in turn, be nourished by labor and sheltered by fabrication). She sees Marx's standpoint as one that more or less cedes the space of making and acting to that of what she calls "the social," a domain that emerges once the mode of activity proper to the *oikos* expands out and absorbs the activities that once fabricated the stage for and animated the public sphere. From a purely social viewpoint, which, she writes, "is the viewpoint of the whole modern age but which received its most coherent and greatest expression in Marx's work,"

all laboring is "productive." . . . The social viewpoint is identical . . . with an interpretation that takes nothing into account but the life process of mankind, and within its frame of reference all things become objects of consumption. Within a completely "socialized mankind," whose sole purpose would be *the entertaining of the life process*—and this is the unfortunately quite unutopian ideal that guides Marx's theories . . . all work would have become labor because all things would be understood, not in their worldly, objective quality, but as results of living labor power and the functions of the life process.⁴⁰

For Arendt, what is above all lost in "socialized mankind" is what distinguishes, to use the Aristotelian terms cited earlier and that inform her thinking on these matters, *living well* from *mere living*. For Arendt, the emergence of "socialized mankind"—really another name for what Foucault grasped as the regime of biopolitics—signals the collapse of human life into the *conatus* ostensibly common to all "vibrant matter." The virtues that define what it means to live well are those exhibited above all on the stage of politics and involve, though doubtlessly in a quite different sense than in Christianity, the dimension of splendor, glory, greatness, radiance. Commenting on Pericles's Funeral Oration as reported by Thucydides, Arendt writes that there as in Homer "the innermost

meaning of the acted deed and the spoken word is independent of victory and defeat. . . . Unlike human *behavior* . . . *action* can be judged only by the criterion of *greatness* because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary” (205; emphasis added). Pericles (or Thucydides), “knew full well,” she continues, “that he had broken with the normal standards for everyday behavior when he found the *glory* of Athens in having left behind ‘everywhere everlasting remembrance of their good and their evil deeds.’ The art of politics teaches men how to bring forth *what is great and radiant*” (206; emphasis added).⁴¹ But as I have tried to show, Marx’s fundamental point is that capitalism is a social formation organized precisely around splendor and glory; the labor theory of value is fundamentally a theory of the production of glory, of the liturgical dimension of labor performed in the service of the greater valor, glory, splendor, of Value.⁴²

The conclusion to be drawn from all of this is that the critique of political economy is always an engagement with the dimension of glory and the liturgical labor that we are all, at some level, called to perform as citizen-subjects of capitalist modernity. The critique of political economy is, in a word, always at some level *paradoxological*: a working through of the doxological dimension of work. The urgency of this critique has only intensified with the most recent developments of capitalist modernity into ever more radical versions of what Guy Debord called the society of the spectacle. There, what Arendt characterizes as the “entertaining of the life process,” actually becomes something like *entertainment* in the everyday sense of the word. In the society of the spectacle the management of life is, so to speak, just another day in the entertainment business or what Adorno called the culture industry. This also turns out to be Agamben’s position at the end of his own archaeology of glory. Bringing together Debord’s analysis and Carl Schmitt’s view that what we now refer to as “public opinion” assumes the function of acclamations in modern democratic societies, Agamben writes:

What is in question is nothing less than a new and unheard of concentration, multiplication, and dissemination of the function of glory as the center of the political system. What was once confined to the spheres of liturgy and ceremonials has become concentrated in the media and, at the same time, through them it spreads and penetrates at each moment into every area of society, both public and private. Contemporary democracy is a democracy that is entirely founded

upon glory, that is, on the efficacy of acclamation, multiplied and disseminated by the media beyond all imagination. (256)⁴³

One thinks here perhaps of “news” organizations such as Fox News in which the production of *doxa qua opinion* is understood as the production of a certain mode of ostensibly patriotic *doxa qua glory* (in such contexts it also becomes clear that the delivery of news and information has become another branch of the entertainment industry). The ancient Greek word for common opinion or belief that first takes on religious meaning when used in the Septuagint to translate *kavod*, the Hebrew word for glory, retains its sacral aura in occult, though in some sense intensified, form at the very point at which it seems to return to its purely “secular,” everyday social meaning.

It is no doubt in this context that we should also situate contemporary discussions about the pros and cons of social media and the effects of being constantly “wired,” “plugged in,” “online.” We know by now that social media function by monetizing our sociality, by, for example, converting our own everyday “acclamations”—our likes and dislikes—into commodities. Our participation in social media thus tends to blur the boundaries between production and consumption (the phrase, being “online,” suggests participation in a virtual assembly or production line). Our consumption of the services provided by social media is so often free because it is part of the production process of data commodities, the raw materials of marketing strategies designed to display the splendor of commodities calling us to further consumption (perhaps even of more social media). In and through our participation in social media our labor as medium of social relations becomes so fully transparent that it in some sense disappears, ceases to be identifiable as labor. At this point, life as a whole becomes business, busy-ness, the life of a busy-body whose flesh vibrates with bits of digital sociality.

X

I would like to conclude by turning—or in my case, returning—to the famous debate between Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem concerning the status of “revelation” in Kafka’s writings, a debate that we can now see as one concerned with the paradoxes of glory and the status of Kafka’s writings as exercises in paradoxological thinking.⁴⁴ The central point of contention between the two friends concerns the status of theological trace elements in Kafka’s work. Scholem insists that Kafka’s work

is suffused with the radiance of revelation, but a revelation, as he puts it, “seen from the perspective in which it is returned to its own nothingness” (letter of July 7, 1934). Scholem will later characterize this “nothingness of revelation” as “a state in which revelation appears to be without meaning, in which it still asserts itself, in which it has validity but no significance [*in dem sie gilt, aber nicht bedeutet*],” a revelation “reduced to the zero point of its own content, so to speak” (letter of September 20, 1934).⁴⁵ These remarks are meant to counter his friend’s claim, made in his now well-known essay on Kafka, concerning the status of *Studium*, of learning and study, in Kafka’s writings: “The gate to justice is study. Yet Kafka doesn’t dare attach to this study the promises which tradition has attached to the study of the Torah. His assistants are sextons who have lost their house of prayer; his students are pupils who have lost the Holy Writ [*Schrift*].”⁴⁶ For Scholem this represents, as he puts it to his friend, “one of the greatest mistakes you could have made.” For Scholem it remains absolutely crucial that the pupils of whom his friend speaks “are not so much those who have lost the Scriptures but rather those students who cannot decipher it” (letter of July 7, 1934). In a further attempt to clarify his position, Benjamin writes, “you take the ‘nothingness of revelation’ as your point of departure, the salvific-historical perspective of the established proceedings of the trial. I take as my starting point the small, nonsensical hope, as well as the creatures for whom this hope is intended and yet who on the other hand are also the creatures in which this absurdity is mirrored” (letter of August 11, 1934). It is in this context, he continues, “that the problem of Scripture [*Schrift*] poses itself”:

Whether the pupils have lost it or whether they are unable to decipher it comes down to the same thing, because, without the key that belongs to it, the Scripture is not Scripture, but life. Life as it is lived in the village at the foot of the hill on which the castle is built. It is in the attempt to metamorphize life [*in dem Versuch der Verwandlung des Lebens*] into Scripture that I perceive the meaning of “reversal” [*Umkehr*], which so many of Kafka’s parables endeavor to bring about. . . . Sancho Panza’s existence is exemplary because it actually consists in rereading one’s own existence—however buffoonish and quixotic.⁴⁷

For Scholem, then, Kafka’s works are suffused with a barely visible effluence or radiance—a radiance composed out of the validity-without-meaning, the *Geltung-ohne-Bedeutung*, of tradition. It is a light that

continues to transmit, to bear the trace of the sacred—we might say: the bare life of the sacred—while for Benjamin the energy of this light has been fully absorbed, fully converted into the “vibrations” of the busy-bodies—this strange order of angels—barely living at the foot of the Castle hill. This is, I would argue, the sort of “bare life” that Benjamin had, in an early fragment, characterized as life caught in the cult of “capitalism as religion.”

In this highly abbreviated text, Benjamin proposes to radicalize Weber’s thesis on the spirit of capitalism by arguing that modern capitalism was not only deeply informed in its beginnings by religious fervor, but had itself mutated into a fully fledged and all-absorbing religious form of life which, as he puts it, “serves to allay the same anxieties, torments, and disturbances to which the so-called religions offered answers.”⁴⁸ Benjamin goes on to identify three basic aspects of what he refers to as “the religious structure of capitalism”: “In the first place, capitalism is a purely cultic religion, perhaps the most extreme that ever existed. In capitalism, things have a meaning only in their relationship to the cult; capitalism has no specific body of dogma, no theology. It is from this point of view that utilitarianism acquires its religious overtones” (288). There is considerable room for disagreement here. Indeed one could argue that the classical theories of the self-regulation of the market from Smith’s “invisible hand” to contemporary mathematical modeling of market dynamics form precisely this body of dogma.⁴⁹ The second feature Benjamin identifies is “the permanence of the cult.” This concerns precisely what I have referred to as the *doxology of everyday life*, an organization of time that serves to eliminate the distinction between workday and holiday, workday and Sabbath: “Capitalism is the celebration of a cult *sans trêve et sans merci*. There are no ‘weekdays.’ There is no day that is not a feast day, in the terrible sense that all its sacred pomp is unfolded before us; each day commands the utter fealty of each worshiper” (288).⁵⁰

Finally, and perhaps closest to the spirit of Kafka’s universe, Benjamin locates the third aspect of “capitalism as religion” as its tendency to universalize the condition of indebtedness and consciousness of guilt, to make it absolute and so without the possibility of absolution. “Capitalism,” Benjamin writes, “is probably the first instance of a cult that creates guilt, not atonement [*der erste Fall eines nicht entschuldigenden sondern verschuldenden Kultus*]. . . . A vast sense of guilt that is unable to find relief seizes on the cult, not to atone for this guilt but to make it universal” (288). What Benjamin anticipates here is the phenomenon of *sovereign*

debt by which I mean not simply the debt owed by nation-states but the *sovereignty of debt* over human life and its possibilities more generally.

Against this background, what Benjamin, in his letters to Scholem, refers to as *Umkehr* or reversal can, I think, be seen as pertaining to those modes of engagement with glory that I have called *paradoxological*. It involves an effort to reach into the doxological machine—the machine that sustains the religious structure of capitalism—and pull its plug, if even for a fleeting moment of Sabbatical inoperativity in which, perhaps, something new might be spelled out by, precisely, *spelling out the spell* cast by the doxology of everyday life. The repetition of such moments, their stringing together into a constellation, constitutes something on the order of what Freud called *working through*, a process that involves, as we have seen, an effort to strike something other than what's there. What Benjamin's preoccupation with Kafka in particular and literary language more generally suggests—Benjamin, one will recall, saw himself, above all, as a kind of literary critic—is that the “spelling” at issue here may ultimately fall within the purview of literature. A second field thus opens up next to the “archaeology of glory,” the literary practice and theory of paradoxology. My hope is that my reflections here have helped to provide some provisional indications as to what the relevant sort of *fieldwork* might look like.

NOTES

1. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, translated by Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 163. German from *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2008), 85.
2. My thinking on such matters continues to be inspired and informed by Slavoj Žižek's work on the mutations of ideology in modernity, though it has become ever more difficult to keep up with his writings.
3. Benjamin takes the phrase from a poem by Gottfried Keller. See Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 81, for a discussion of Benjamin's formulation.
4. I have discussed Freud's *Moses* at considerable length in “Freud's *Moses* and the Ethics of Nomotropic Desire,” in *Sexuation*, edited by Renata Salecl, 57–105 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
5. Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 260.
6. Jonathan Lear has developed the notion of ontological vulnerability in *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
7. It makes sense that in his effort to capture the point at which dreams reach into a dark zone of illegibility—one that also marks the ultimate object-cause

of dreams—Freud invokes the figure of the *navel* (of the dream), a bodily site that appears now as a hole, now as an uncanny excess of knotted flesh.

8. Pursuing a line of thought first laid out by Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), David Graeber has compellingly argued that the emergence of markets is always at some level grounded in violence, a violence that gets “covered” by the surplus value embodied by its victims, whether as flesh left on the ground in war or, more important, as the spectral materiality—a term he does not use himself—generated by enslavement, by *tearing* the vanquished from the fabric of their social being. The enslaved embody the ontological vulnerability of human life by converting it into a surplus of glory for the victor. Referencing the work of Orlando Paterson, Graeber describes the way in which the degradation of the vanquished gets converted into what he calls the *surplus dignity*—honor, magnificence, greatness, splendor—of the victor: “this ability to strip others of their dignity becomes, for the master, the foundation of his honor. . . . One might say: honor is surplus dignity. It is that heightened consciousness of power and its dangers, that comes from having stripped away the power and dignity of others; or at the very least, from the knowledge that one is capable of doing so. At its simplest, honor is that *excess dignity* that must be defended with the knife or sword.” Graeber underlines the fact that the use-value of the enslaved can be irrelevant in such politico-symbolic operations, that is, that their value lies largely in their role in the production of glory, magnificence, *Herrlichkeit*, rather than in any purposeful project. They are, at some level, deployed as displays not of useful but rather of *wasted life*. See David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011), 170.
9. *Telos*, no. 113 (Fall 1998), edited by Russell Berman and Paul Piccone.
10. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 139.
11. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 208; emphasis added.
12. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, translated by David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 217; emphasis added.
13. Recall, once more, Žižek’s concise formulation cited in the first lecture: “What is at stake is . . . not simply the split between the empirical person of the king and his symbolic function. The point is rather that this symbolic function *redoubles his very body*, introducing a split between the visible, material, transient body and another, sublime body, a body made of a special, immaterial stuff.” Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, 255.
14. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 76–77; emphasis added. Subsequent references are made in the text.
15. Joseph Vogl, “Staatsbegehren: Zur Epoche der Policey,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 74 (2000): 600–626. Subsequent references are made in the text.

16. These are Lacan's attempt to map the minimal structure of social bonds, the logic of the social mediation/circulation of subject-matter across historical change. Lacan presents his theory of discourses in Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Seminar XVII*, translated by Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).
17. Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, translated by Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011). Subsequent references are made in the text.
18. Agamben summarizes the task of the Church Fathers this way: "At the end of classical civilization, when the unity of the ancient cosmos is broken, and being and acting, ontology and praxis, seem to part ways irreversibly, we see a complex doctrine developing in Christian theology, one in which Judaic and pagan elements merge. Such a doctrine attempts to interpret—and, at the same time, recompose—this fracture through a managerial and non-epistemic paradigm: the *oikonomia*. According to this paradigm, the divine praxis, from creation to redemption, does not have a foundation in God's being, and differs from it to the extent that it realizes itself in a separate person, the *Logos*, or Son. However, this anarchic and unfounded praxis must be reconciled with the unity of the substance. Through the idea of a free and voluntary action—which associates creation and redemption—this paradigm had to overcome both the Gnostic antithesis between a God foreign to the world and a demiurge who is creator and Lord of the world, and the pagan identity of being and acting, which made the very idea of creation unconvincing. The challenge that Christian theology thus presents to Gnosis is to succeed in reconciling God's transcendence with the creation of the world, as well as his noninvolvement in it with the Stoic and Judaic idea of a God who takes care of the world and governs it providentially. In the face of this aporetic task, the *oikonomia*—given its managerial and administrative root—offered a ductile tool, which presented itself, at the same time, as a *logos*, a rationality removed from any external constraint, and a praxis unanchored to any ontological necessity or preestablished norm" (65–66).
19. The *Book of Angels* appears in Erik Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, translated by Michael Hollerich (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 106–42. Subsequent references are made in the text. German text cited from the German translation of *The Kingdom and the Glory: Herrschaft und Herrlichkeit: Zur theologischen Genealogie von Ökonomie und Regierung*, translated by Andreas Hiepko (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2010).
20. Throughout his study, Peterson takes pains to distinguish Christian from Jewish doxology. He notes, for example, "that the Christian liturgy was not satisfied just to repeat the simple expression of the prophet, according to which the seraphim 'cry and say': 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts.' . . . In contrast to Isaiah, the *eternal duration* of the cry of the 'Holy' is . . . emphasized. . . . This stress on the *unceasing praise* of God by the angels is unknown in Judaism" (119; emphasis added). We might say that Peterson, a convert to Catholicism, emphasizes the Protestant work ethic of the angels. Or to recall our discussion

of the “quality of mercy” in *The Merchant of Venice*, Christian doxology, as Peterson understands it, is the liturgical form of what I earlier characterized as a “portially” reformed debt economy, one that introduces into life the demands of its *infinite amourtization*.

21. Samuel Brody’s fine dissertation on Martin Buber argues that the Jewish philosopher developed his own profoundly anarchic theopolitical perspective, one that also took aim at the resurgence of political theology in fascist movements. See “This Pathless Hour: Messianism, Anarchism, Zionism, and Martin Buber’s Theopolitics Reconsidered” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013).
22. As I have noted, Kantorowicz himself experienced firsthand the revival of this “archaic sphere” of doxological performativity. In the tumultuous mass politics of the early years of the Weimar Republic he belonged to the militant—and violent—far-right wing of the political spectrum; as a Jew, he would be forced to flee a homeland whose maniacally anti-Semitic regime had put into operation a vast doxological machine to sustain the bonds of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, to synchronize the frequencies at which its members “vibrated.” He himself thus brought a finely tuned ear to the revival of interest in the *laudes* among theologians and musicologists in the 1920s as well as for their appropriation in fascist liturgies of power. In my book, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), I explore in detail Hans Jürgen Syberberg’s often brilliant cinematic investigation into fascist doxology (and the place of cinema in it). The major critiques of Syberberg over the years could be summarized in the claim that his films succumbed to the spell they were spelling out, that they were insufficiently *para-doxological*. I will turn to this concept below.
23. In his Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Jonathan Lear argued that Aristotle’s perverse achievement in his *Ethics* was, in effect, to establish just such a dimension of inoperativity in human life and to do so under the sign of happiness as the ostensible telos of human life. See his *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). “All the rest of animal nature,” Lear writes, “is basically able to fulfill its nature unproblematically. There will be occasional mutants and occasions when the environment doesn’t cooperate, but for the most part each species is able to flourish in its distinctive way. It is only humans who have a characteristic problem of failing to thrive. For humans, happiness *is* human flourishing, yet happiness by and large eludes them. Thus by injecting ‘happiness’ as the organizing goal of human teleology Aristotle manages to disrupt the teleological structure itself” (56).
24. The following section is deeply indebted to Moishe Postone’s brilliant study, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and to numerous works by Slavoj Žižek.
25. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 32 (emphasis added).

26. Smith characterizes the purchase of a commodity as a form of command that passes through the network of commodity producers; market economies are thus at some level decentralized “command economies”: “After the division of labor has once thoroughly taken place, it is but a very small part of these [necessaries, conveniences, and amusements of human life] with which a man’s own labor can supply him. The far greater part of them he must derive from the labor of other people, and he must be rich or poor according to the quantity of that labor *which he can command* or which he can afford to purchase. The value of any commodity, therefore, to the person who possesses it, and who means not to use or consume it himself, but to exchange it for other commodities, is equal to the quantity of labor which it *enables him to purchase or command*” (*Wealth of Nations*, 33; emphasis added).
27. Marx, *Capital*, 128 (translation modified); Marx, *Kapital*, 52. Subsequent references are made in the text.
28. This is similar to what readers have at times thought with respect to Freud’s understanding of libido, of the sexual “labor power” that is, as Freud repeatedly emphasized, *perversely indifferent to its object*, only loosely “soldered” to it in the pursuit of its aim: more pleasure, pleasure in excess of any possible “use-value.” Recent efforts to demonstrate the ways in which sex is beneficial to health should be seen, then, as attempts to “repurpose” sexuality, to demonstrate that it in no way swerves from teleological function, that it is in no way *wasteful*—that it is a materialism without *clinamen*.
29. Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 171.
30. *Ibid.*, 170.
31. Recall Foucault’s formulation about the king as the *physical-juridical* quilting point of social mediation in the ancien régime. What makes a nation, he writes, is the fact that its members “all have a certain individual relationship—both juridical and physical—with the real, living, and bodily person of the king. It is the body of the king, in his physical-juridical relationship with each of his subjects, that creates the body of the nation.” Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 217.
32. As I have indicated in the preface, it would appear as if in contemporary “cognitive capitalism” *data mining* has become the dominant extractive industry, data the value directly extracted/abstracted from “cognitively” laboring bodies.
33. Aside from Freud’s writings on anal eroticism, of particular interest is Sandor Ferenczi’s “The Ontogenesis of the Interest in Money,” in *The Psychoanalysis of Money*, edited by Ernest Borneman, 81–90 (New York: Urizon, 1976). There Ferenczi suggests that feces undergo, under pedagogic pressure, a metamorphosis (by way of degrees of “dehydration”) into mud, sand, pebbles, marbles, and, finally, gold.
34. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, translated by Jennifer Curtiss Gage (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 28. Georges Bataille’s *The Accursed Share* is in its entirety a meditation on the laws of the “general economy” according to which living systems, whether organisms or societies, rid themselves of surplus energy that can serve no practical

- purpose, are of no use. If this “excess cannot be completely absorbed in its [a system’s] growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, *gloriously or catastrophically*.” Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, vol. 1: Consumption*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 21.
35. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, translated by Walter Arndt (New York: Norton, 2001), 76 (lines 2796–804). German text cited from *Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Faust-Dichtungen*, edited by Ulrich Gaier (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2010). In winter 2014, I sat in on a seminar on *Faust* conducted by my colleague, David Wellbery. My views on the play have been strongly informed by the seminar discussions. This casket containing gold will, of course, turn out to have the mortal consequences that Freud linked to the base metal, lead, in his reading of the three caskets in *The Merchant of Venice*.
 36. This would be a productive site for exploring alternative readings in the spirit of Gil Anidjar’s *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
 37. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 15. For a wonderfully lucid discussion of the Mephistophelian dimension of classical political economy, of its commitment to an “oikodicy,” see Joseph Vogl, *Das Gespenst des Kapitals* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2010).
 38. Marx, *Capital*, 255; *Kapital*, 168–69. For Marx, only in modern capitalism do Aristotle’s anxious insights about chrematistics find their truth.
 39. Agamben develops the concept of “instrumental cause” in the sequel to *The Kingdom and the Glory, Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty*, translated by Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). Agamben’s key point of reference is Aquinas, for whom the priest functions as “instrumental cause of an act whose primary agent is Christ himself” (22).
 40. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998), 89; emphasis added. Subsequent references are made in the text.
 41. Against this background one might say that for the Greeks, glory is linked to *immortality* sustained by literary and civic remembrance while in the Christian tradition it is linked to *eternity* sustained by faith embodied in cultic action. Arendt’s concern with the fate of glory—and so of what is distinctive about the forms of action that constitute politics proper—is echoed in Alain Badiou’s understanding of the “evental” opening of a “truth procedure” in the domain of the political. In *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010), he writes: “The non-factual element in a truth is a function of its orientation, and this will be termed subjective. We will also say that the material ‘body’ of a truth, in so far as it is subjectively oriented, is an exceptional body. Making unabashed use of a religious metaphor, I will say that the body-of-truth, as concerns what cannot be reduced to facts within it, can be called *a glorious body*. With respect to this body, which is that of a new collective Subject in politics, of an organization composed of individual multiples, we will say that it shares in the creation of a political truth” (244–45; emphasis added).

42. As readers of *The Communist Manifesto* well know, large portions of that text read as quasi-hymnic, quasi-ironic praise—glorification—of the accomplishments achieved under the regime of the self-valorization of Value, above all, the destruction of much of what had heretofore been the object of doxological praise in European civilization.
43. Walter Benjamin's writings on nineteenth-century Paris including, above all, his unfinished *Arcades Project*, represent one of the landmark bodies of work in the field that Agamben, no doubt deeply influenced by Benjamin, called the "archaeology of glory." Agamben's reflections on the doxological dimension of modern democratic societies are largely prefigured there. Writing, for example, about what he sees as the deep affinity between world exhibitions and Grandville's work, Benjamin writes, "World exhibitions glorify [*verklären*] the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which its use value recedes into the background. They open a phantasmagoria in which a person enters in order to be distracted. The entertainment industry [*Vergnügungsindustrie*] makes this easier by elevating the person to the level of the commodity. He surrenders to its manipulation while enjoying his alienation from himself and others.—*The enthronement of the commodity, with its luster of distraction*, is the secret theme of Grandville's art. This is consistent with the split between utopian and cynical elements in his work. Its ingenuity in representing inanimate objects corresponds to what Marx calls the 'theological niceties' of the commodity." Walter Benjamin, *Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Howard Eiland, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1935–1938*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 37.
44. See *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem: 1932–1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem, translated by Gary Smith and André Lefèvre (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). The letters, along with other relevant texts, are collected in *Benjamin über Kafka: Texte, Briefzeugnisse, Aufzeichnungen*, edited by Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1981). If my preoccupation with this debate has the quality of a repetition compulsion—I refer to it in several books—it is, I think, because the stakes of the debate concern the dimension of human experience that Freud located beyond the pleasure principle and that seems to involve the demand for repetition.
45. As I have suggested earlier, we might hear this formulation as standing in relation to the figure of the king who reigns but no longer governs.
46. Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death," translated by Harry Zohn, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934*, edited by Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 815.
47. The village in question is, of course, the setting of Kafka's novel, *The Castle*. I would argue that in Robert Walser's novel, *Jakob von Gunten*, the Institute Benjamenta belongs to the same universe as this village and that Jakob counts

among those creatures in whom, precisely on the basis of his uncannily “vibrant” being, the absurdity of the hope mentioned by Benjamin is mirrored. And indeed, at the end of the novel Jakob becomes a kind of Sancho Panzo to Herr Benjamenta’s Quixote.

48. Walter Benjamin, “Capitalism as Religion,” translated by Rodney Livingstone, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 288. Subsequent references are made in the text. The German text is found in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften. Band VI: Fragmente vermischten Inhalts*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Sheppenhäuser (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 100–103.
49. See once more Vogl, *Das Gespenst des Kapitals*, for his compelling reading of the various forms of “oikodicy” that inform political economic doctrine. One could add to this Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2007). There the authors analyze, among other things, the quasi-theological literature on *management* that informs this new spirit.
50. What is rendered here as “utter fealty” is, in the original, [*die*] *äußerste Anspannung des Verebrenden*. The word *Anspannung* conveys the sense of stress, tension states, and, perhaps, the condition of *undeadness* that Benjamin referred to as *erstarrte Unruhe* or petrified unrest.