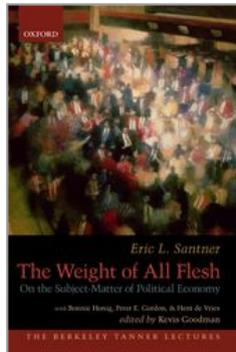


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The Weight of All Flesh: On the Subject-Matter of Political Economy

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The Exercise of Paradoxological Thinking

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Abstract and Keywords

This third and final response resists Santner's underlying premise of secularization and its corollary argument that theological, or formerly theological, energies suffuse contemporary political economy. Taking into account the current state of global religion, the text here asks whether religion, rather than diminishing, might in fact be returning with a vengeance—an open possibility in which it predicts both hope and great danger. The text here also questions the historicity of the “two body” image, noting that Santner's genealogy renders it a generic notion that can travel across time periods in either direction. Lastly, describing paradoxology as an “enigmatic signifier,” the text presses the question of how exactly the exercise of paradoxological thinking explicates the logic of capital, and he wonders why (and if) it is especially fitted to do so.

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Keywords: secularization, global religion, paradoxological thinking, enigmatic signifier, genealogy, historicity

My comments will not rehearse Eric Santner's subtle reasoning, telling examples, and overall claims in the beautifully articulated lectures, whose modified and expanded versions one finds in this volume.¹ Instead I begin *in medias res* and address—so as to eventually also challenge—just a few premises underlying Santner's argument, if we can say so, *as a whole*. That these lectures form an integral part of an even larger body of thought and writing, and one for which I have developed the highest respect, not least because it analyzes problems with which I often felt I was deeply familiar, only to realize that they could be recast in a stunningly original register that forced me to revisit so many of my own long-held assumptions and all too hastily drawn conclusions—all this goes without saying. And so does my appreciation of the unique kind of writing and singular idiom that we have all come to recognize as Santner's signature style across an ever expansive and increasingly influential body of work.

I

What I aim to discuss and question is the guiding thought that organizes these lectures, namely that there is such a thing as an “afterlife of political theology in secular modernity” and one whose distinctive, if not necessarily *metaphysical* or *theological*, features (p.205) we can begin to delineate here, in this most recent installment of Santner's larger project as it moves one step beyond the argument of *The Royal Remains* and, perhaps, already in *On Creaturely Life*, to the vestiges of a “political economy” (in his words, a going about our business more broadly, “somatically” and “normatively”) that has become the hallmark of modern and, increasingly, contemporary life. It is this “political economy” that is now seen as relentlessly secularizing and transforming the fundamental traits of the “political theology” of old—to the point of substituting for it with virtually *no remains left*. What henceforth determines our “forms of life,” whether we realize and appreciate or resist this or not, is a new dispensation, an epochal shift.

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Following Karl Marx rather than Max Weber, Santner observes: “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 ... that keeps us driven even when we are ostensibly ‘idling’ ” (80–81). Indeed, he adds, according to Marx’s well-known analysis in *Das Kapital*, “[i]t is not so much we who continue to engage in metaphysics and theology but, rather, our *busy bodies*” (81). With this, Marx, like Freud, puts his fingers on an “uncanny mode of stress,” identifying the new locus of “ideology” and its technically partial but nonetheless subliminal and “sublime object”; the theologico-political, on this view, is subject to a peculiar “mutation” that diminishes nothing of its original driving and organizing symbolical force, even though the latter should, perhaps, no longer be understood in either all too blatant or elusive mystical and metaphysical terms. As so often in Franz Rosenzweig’s footsteps, in the (live) lecture Santner proposes a “new thinking” that ventures beyond the well-known historical and conceptual controversies between faith and reason, theology and modern science.

Neither the political theologies of old nor the “vibrant matter, actants, and assemblages of the new post-humanist materialisms” (p.206) (81), Santner suggests, truly capture the “surplus of matter” or “spectral materiality”—“*die gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit*,” “vitality,” and “animation,” supposedly “immanent” to what Marx, in *Capital*, calls the “commodity form”—that forms the new “subject-matter” of political economy as it has come to replace the medieval and early-modern conceptions of monarchical sovereignty, embodied in the king’s two bodies. No longer a *corpus mysticum*, the modern body politic has democratized, dispersed, indeed exorcized—naturalized, but not neutralized—what was left of the age-old obsession of political theology, of “the royal remains.” Yet, what takes its hovering place is more terrifying and differently pervasive than the authority it dethrones. The natural and historical immanence that has come to reduce all transcendence—not only the theological and metaphysical dualisms of political Manichaeism and

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Gnosticism but also of the biblical earthly and heavenly kingdom, of this world and the next—incorporates or introjects the very impetus it thus overcomes. Its immanence is itself not enough and requires, if not creates, its own surplus in excess of its apparent—naturalist or, in our context, economist—premise. And, if the theological vocabulary were not too misleading, one might say that, once again, a certain “passion” overtakes the language of “interest,” reintroducing an incalculability that escapes every attempt to suppress and control it. So much for the logic of market and the pursuit of happiness. An invisible hand, but not the one we have come to bank on, keeps us adrift, on the move, whether we like—and know—it or not. Divine providence, double predestination, historicist determination, in ancient, medieval, and modern times, paradoxically, offered more leeway and (if one can say so) freedom than that.

But how, exactly, do we picture the “spectral materiality” or, rather, “objectivity”—the “*gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit*”—that Santner, following the Marxian turn from Hegelian idealism and German ideology in its historicizing critique of theology and anthropology, is after? What, in other words, is the proper “object” (p.207) of a “political economy” no longer restricted by the more general economy (divine *oikonomia*, as we will see)—that is to say, the political theology that in previous centuries, well before the full-blown expansion and exponential growth of industrial and financial Capital and its contradictions emerged on the scene, had relegated conditions of material production to a second-order phenomenon? Marx started his *Critique of Political Economy*, the subtitle of *Capital*, with a study of the commodity in its proper light, in which it revealed itself as a very strange thing, abounding in “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties,” as Santner reminds us (81, citing Marx, 163). Are we certain, after Marx, that such aura and nuance fades out? Or does a dimension of depth, if not transcendence, continue to haunt our every day, perhaps, ever more so? If this were the case, there would be little hope for political *economy* to leave political *theology* forever aside. Put differently, it would be impossible for economy and its theoretical no less than its social, juridical, and financial apparatus to rid itself

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from the older—and, metaphysically, indeed, theologically deeper—sense that this term once carried. And the same may well be true of the object of so-called libidinal economy that Santner’s second main interlocutor here, namely Freud, adds to the equation. Perhaps, the “surplus”—whether immanent or transcendent, the difference matters little—is nothing if not metaphysical, as so-called mystical postulates of human no less than divine authority tend to be: “*that the king reigns without governing*” (52, my emphasis), that his power is valid but no longer has any meaning, as any negative dialectic of the political quickly reveals, is a direct (here, textual) confirmation of this overarching view. Yet, paradoxically, this view is best—that is, most adequately and strategically—described in theologico-political terms.

If there is a beyond (or before) of the theologico-political (*concesso non dato*), then it may not be so easy to delineate where it begins or ends or even what forms it takes. Moreover, there is little, perhaps nothing, that surrounds the theologico-political register (p.208) and idiom, its archive and apparatus, about which this historical tradition with its own peculiar logic, rhetoric, and imagery has not had something to say, or for which it does not hold something *in stock*. And, if this is the case, notions such as reserve, debt, and gift (which are eminently economical terms in their own right) may be more pertinent to the analysis of the theologico-political legacy (including its political economical “afterlife”) than the Marxian insistence on commodification, reification, fetishization, and the like, upon which Santner builds much of his argument. In short, the cultural logic of capital—the more than historical and ontological, but deeply theological, as well as quotidian weight that it imposes on us—is, well, not that of *Capital* in the reading that Santner proposes of its basic tenets and its lasting contribution to understanding our world today: “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties,” citing Santner citing Marx, sit too much in the way.

I am not quite sure how one could develop this more fully or rigorously than Jacques Derrida did in *Specters of Marx* and elsewhere, when he replaced “ontology,” including the guiding presuppositions and methods of historical materialism,

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determinism, and secular humanism of the late and early Marx, with the “haunting” meandering of its concepts and practices with no further *fundamentum in re*. But while Santner points out that Derrida’s conception is subtle and measured, its implications are not always emphasized in every context. In citing *Specters of Marx* and referring to Derrida’s later *Le toucher (On Touching)*, Santner makes this is abundantly clear: “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.”² For reasons that I cannot fully explicate here, such an approach is very different from, say, Richard Rorty’s provocative move that replaces epistemic, normative, and, more broadly, (p.209) ontological claims by so-called cultural politics (to which I return briefly below). For while there is a pragmatist—or, one might say, “pragmatological”—streak to his own considerations, Derrida’s is a pragmatism that reaches as *deep* as it does *further out*, well beyond the historicisms and culturalisms, lingualisms and structuralisms, idealisms and materialisms, old and new, hung up as all are on unquestioned axioms and parameters. Revealed religion, in its most *global* of concepts, including its heterodoxies and mysticisms, knows of such depth and reaches beyond.³

Paradoxically, part of this depth can be seen in the way Derrida portrays the impossible overcoming of previous strata of thought and of action, insisting instead on paleonymy—that is, on the infinite substitution of infinite concepts (and of the Infinite, to begin with). Nothing is left behind, which is precisely why deconstruction is not destructive or, for that matter, why Martin Heidegger came to privilege the Old German *Verwindung* over and against the more supersessionist language of *Überwindung*, whose vain promises are the very disappointments of so many philosophical schools (e.g., phenomenology in its early, scientific aspiration, spearheaded by Edmund Husserl, but also logical empiricism, led by Rudolf Carnap and others).

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With this in mind, I am not convinced that the semblance of a definitive move beyond “hauntology”—the very term and discipline that Derrida substitutes for ontology, old and new—is not exactly the very relapse into yet another “dogmatic image of thought” (as Gilles Deleuze would have called it) that one had hoped to avoid. In other words, another reification, conceptual idolatry, or representationalist naturalism here, in Santner’s lectures, takes the guise of a political economy discarding its theological counterpart (and legacy), even while it is clearly in no better position to support its theoretical claims or practical effect than the “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” of old.

Santner is certainly right when he surmises that the recent turns to “vibrant matter,” perhaps, do not cut it and hardly succeed (p.210) in capturing the spectral objectivity of which we spoke earlier. This would, of course, merit a longer debate than we find in these lectures, with scholars such as Jane Bennett and others receiving a far more generous hearing than they are given here.

Yet, for all my appreciation of Santner’s deeply original project, I am not so sure that the alternative concept or trope he banks his argument on, namely that of “creaturely life,” fares any better in diagnosing the remaining critical impetus in both life and world that our time has lost more and more sight of. What generates general and more restricted forms of “stress”—whether semantic, psychic, societal, or political—is surely not externally imposed on life in its most creative aspects, just as it does not merely hamper the vibrancy of all things material. There is a paradoxicality to life and matter itself that is situated at a much deeper and more disturbing level, and not only defies Freudo-Marxist interpretation (and, *a fortiori*, the language of political economy) but also does not let itself be resolved in any therapeutic or dialectical fashion or in any foreseeable future. But, then, this paradoxicality may be perceived within this tradition as well, whereas the so-called new materialisms tend to forget it—and this is for a simple reason, which is that the former remains steeped in a specific Western theological archive. As Santner notes, “the Marxist project—along with that of psychoanalysis—operates within a Judeo-Christian tradition for which the *creatureliness*

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of human life ... is inseparable from being subject to normative pressures of various kinds the generic source of which is our life with language" (82). Instead of emphasizing the animist or, later, Spinozist tendency of locating, while "dispersing," normativity in presumably "self-perpetuating patterns" of either "organized matter" or beings' *conatus*, Santner takes his lead from a different element in what he calls "the subject-matter of political economy." His claim is that "what is 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 (p.211) emergence and sustenance, under ever-changing historical conditions, of human subjectivity" (43).

Whereas the new materialisms aim to capture the relatively recent "sensitivity to the liveliness and agency of nonhuman animals, things, 'actants,' and environments," together with "the flows, fluxes, and intensities ... of capital in our everyday life" (44), the Freudo-Marxist insistence on Judeo-Christian creatureliness does not lose sight of the subject matter that matters: it names and defends what resists the seemingly irrevocable processes of which these tendencies and intensities are both the driving force and the result.

This said, does any one of these recent approaches—that of the new materialism or vitalism, on the one hand, and that of Santner's own "psychotheology" and political economy, on the other—ultimately succeed in capturing and theorizing the true formal (I am tempted to say, global) nature of the "virtual real" of which these lectures speak here as well? Do they offer a possible answer, perhaps even a political challenge, to the havoc it wreaks? Alternatively, do they sufficiently appreciate and evaluate the potential—and, at once, material and spiritual—emancipatory effects that virtual materiality, accompanied by a whole theologico-political "archive" and "apparatus," may have on offer as well?

Addressing the "metamorphosis of the king's royal flesh into the spectral materiality of the product of human labor, into the substance of value qua congelation of abstract, homogeneous labor" (46), Santner takes Marx's transposition of the political

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theological “two-body doctrine” into the schema of political economy as generative of a profound difficulty for the “theory and practice of revolution” (47). The reason is that Marx, for Santner, so much as acknowledges a simple, incontrovertible truth: “a revolutionary, too [like the advocate of political theology], *must strike something other than what’s there.*” The wording (which is Santner’s, citing Slavoj Žižek citing Jacques Lacan) is well chosen and explains some of the recent (or ongoing) appeal of the messianic and messianicity in the (p.212) wake of Walter Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence” and Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*. It underscores also, Santner suggests, the enduring relevance of the psychoanalytic model and method: “*Striking something other than what is there* would seem to be a task located at the intersection of political and libidinal economy, a zone that very clearly resonates with tensions vital to the messianic tradition of religious thought and action” (47). But this raises two questions already: First, should we assume that “something other than what is there” is, thereby, necessarily or primarily libidinal (or at least to be found “at the intersection” of the libidinal and political—of their economy, that is to say)? And, second, does not the very language of “resonance”—as in “resonates with tensions vital to the messianic tradition of religious thought and action”—imply that we can no longer speak of a one-directional and, hence, irrevocable transition or shift or metamorphosis of political theology into political economy at all? Is there resonance across a temporal divide? Or should we differentiate between the *messianic* part of religious tradition (its thought and action) and this tradition more generally? Does reference to “something other than what is there” and, by extension, to the “messianic,” not immediately conjure the traditional—religious and theological—archive and apparatus *as a whole*? This much one could say (as Santner, in his first lecture, interestingly does): “The famous ‘metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties’ [*voll metaphysischer Spitzfindigkeit und theologischer Mucken*] that Marx discovered in the realm of commodities once belonged to the realm of the king” and thus Kantorowicz’s *King’s Two Bodies* is essentially a study of those very “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” in their sovereign form, in the realm of the political theology of the sovereign (46). The dual-body

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image or metaphor, then, travels forwards and backwards, left and right, with no historical law determining its emergence (it pops up, sometime, somewhere, somehow) and its relevance well in advance of or even after the fact. It is somewhat of a *generic* and *generative* notion that is productive of much beside itself, the ancient and modern political economy no doubt included. (p.213) The sovereign king's "surplus body" and the capitalist commodity "surplus value" both invariably inhabit the logic of the "surplus," no matter what transmutation between the two may have occurred (or still occurs). In such transmutations, however, the "enigmatic jointure of the somatic and the normative that defines human life" (50) is, arguably, just one epochal moment, as the reference to "the human" hardly condenses or limits the logic of surplus. And this is a logical—perhaps, deeply metaphysical—consequence, not the surreptitious reintroduction of the so-called new (de-subjectivized and, in that sense, anti-humanist) materialism per se. By the same token, according to this view, the "generic site" of surplus can hardly be libidinal—that is, sexuated—as Freud and, with him, Santner assume. But then, while the "shift from the political theology of sovereignty to the political economy of the wealth of nations is ... a shift from one 'epochal' mode of shaping our life in the flesh to another" (51), the Freudian conception of flesh qua libido is itself (here Santner reiterates an insight from Jacob Taubes) "already prefigured" in the letters of Paul (*Romans* 7, in particular), in the apostle's "conception of the flesh as an amplification of human sentience" (75)—that is to say, of a paradoxicality not just of sexual desire, but of the will in its broadest, quasi-infinite scope. One is tempted to conclude that if the duality of discourse (of "flesh" and its putative other) is seated this deeply in the history, texture, and, well, body of our Scriptures and literature (from Shakespeare to Kafka and Rilke, at a minimum), then there is little justified in the fear that—in the transformation from the King's Two Bodies to the People's Two Bodies—the latter will end up being "manag[ed] ... by way of political-economic calculations" (55).

II

We all intuit that in the exponential growth of economic markets and new technological media over the last decennia there lurks what (following Dutch Hollywood director Paul Verhoeven's 1990 (p.214) science fiction action movie) one might designate a *total recall*, one that is accompanied by disturbing, dystopian forms of total submission, memory control, and correlative memory loss.⁴ The bleak latter-day apocalyptic and political Marcionites (among whom one might certainly count the later Heidegger and the current Giorgio Agamben) miss out on the former (i.e., the mechanism of recall) while exaggerating the latter (i.e., the mechanization of psychic and social submission). There is little doubt that Santner's diagnosis of, if not remedy for, contemporary existence and culture in the pervasive busy-ness of the capitalist world system has its dystopian—hence, Marcionite—resonances. And only another thinking, close reading, and patient working through of the signs of these times seems to offer any solace, albeit one that deliberately falls short of the redemptive promises of past messianic movements, whether religious, mystical, and theologico-political in their premises and eschatology or naturalist, materialist, and secular in their axioms and teleology. No dialectic—much less paradoxology—of capital and its psycho-social analogies is here invoked.

Yet, one might counter that there is a precise, if peculiar, sense in which the global “culture of make-belief,” as sociologist Manuel Castells aptly puts it, is in the end also one of “belief in the making,” and this not only or primarily because religions react against the onslaughts of modernity and against the contours of the information age and network society, more specifically.⁵ There are intrinsic or structural reasons why what Henri Bergson summarized as “mechanics” and “mysticism” presuppose—and revert into—each other. And that is not always a bad thing to happen. Even the looming perspective of an increasingly “global”—expansive and worldwide, as well as vague and generic—religion *retains*, indeed, *gains*, moments and thereby momentums of “small, nonsensical hope,” just as much as such “global religion” may well be an exponent, if not a sure sign, of further oppressions.

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After all, everything is or can be. Global religion's globality and abstractive vagueness go hand in hand, rendering the worst of its legacies virtually (p.215) innocuous, while mobilizing its very best for the good that can only now be envisioned. This, at least, is a standing possibility—or, paradoxically put, an always possible, if currently often apparent impossibility—which by no means denies or forgets that the conditions of the good, the better, and the best and those of the bad (or worse, evil) are and remain virtually the same.

One should add that there is nothing “partial” about this redemptive “metamorphosis” of “make belief” into “belief in the making” that subjects and societies may or may not undergo. For it is not “some part or aspect” or “partial object” that is surreptitiously salvaged in the “substance of value of commodities” when and where this so happens, but tradition—read: the theologico-political archive and apparatus—*in toto*. Indeed, this is the *total social fact* (to echo Marcel Mauss) that we have barely begun to fathom in its pragmatic depth and widest of reaches.

As a consequence, both more and less than a “shift from one form of fetishism to another, from the fetishism of persons to that of objects of exchange” (45), is at stake in modern capitalism. In fact, much more and much less than the transition from pre-modern to modern sovereignties and subjects keeps us unsettled and “busy” as well. Strictly speaking, then, sovereignty and *its* subjectivation are no longer the issue. For good or for ill, different forms of commonality and selfhood enter the fray, some of them unprecedented, others foreshadowed in the deeper recesses of our imagination (archived and not).

There can, currently, be no point in locating the “immaterial stuff” of sovereignty (royal and other) in some “new, thingly location” that is the one highlighted by the “labor theory of value” (46). Precisely from a theologico-political view—under an infinitizing, eternal aspect, *sub specie aeternitatis*, as it were—all things and locations, like all ideas and movements, souls and bodies, in their possible roles as stepping stones and stumbling blocks, are equally close and distant from their

being salvageable or forlorn, redemptive or destructive, vehicles of peace or of war, plus or minus. And (p.216) whatever remains of the category of metaphysical or ontological “substance” in the reality and understanding of “value,” its abstractive quality is, perhaps, no longer one of “congelation.”

If one says that “the metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” that Marx discovered in the realm of commodities once belonged to the realm of the king—that they are composed, that is, of royal remains, the breakdown products of the political theology of sovereignty—then one is assuming a solidity and divisibility where there may well be none. And, while it is one thing to say that modern or contemporary political formations are *fully describable* in terms of the archive and apparatus of what preceded them, it is quite another to assume that the present is somehow (somewhere, sometimes) *pieced together* with parts—including literal, spiritual, and mystical body parts—of the past.

The latter, genealogical claim is problematic for yet another reason: it relies on a scheme of before and after, cause and effect, of their proportionality, that is to say, of there being no more of, say, substance and sovereignty, subject-matter or surplus-“stuff,” in the last phase than there is in the first—as if substance and sovereignty could only diminish, displace themselves, but never accrue, never return *with a vengeance*.

III

Santner speaks of a “prior displacement, murderous or not, of the *sovereign* of the realm by the *coin* of the realm,” adding that it is, paradoxically, “prefigured by the imprint of the sovereign’s own figure on coins” (48). With reference to Benjamin Franklin’s observation he further notes: “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 the stuff of the king’s ‘surplus body’ has been (p.217) transformed into that of surplus value, the product of a certain mode of human labor.” As so often, then, what comes after, as

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a matter of historical fact and of principle, came before, even though what came before it “prefigured” the ulterior “figure.” In other words, the conditioned conditions what conditions it, thus subverting any logic of transcendentalism, causality, historicity, or of any other linear directionality, as—on second glance—everything co-exists here and is, hence, co-extensive with everything else. So much for any remnants of the secularist assumption, and, without it, the language of “afterlife”—here, the life of political economy’s “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” that presumably follows upon, even if it is not directly caused or occasioned by, the political theologies of old—ceases to lose most of its explanatory or descriptive function.

But the alternative model, if one can still say so (it is a *mobile* of ever-moving elements, rather than “parts,” first of all), is hard to reconcile with the language of “absorption” or even “displacement” (as in “the displacement of royal by popular sovereignty”); it further resists any logic of presupposition, of “transformation” and “transfer” (whether that of secularization, naturalization, or democratization), and, in sum, of metamorphosis, mutation, mediation, and all the rest.

For complex reasons, the story of a different *mediatization*—in Derrida’s “hauntological” terminology, of *dissemination* and *diffusion*, together with the *artificiality* and *actuvirtuality* that come with it—still provides us with a more plausible account of how certain given discourses and dispositions (archives and apparatuses) come to alternate and inhabit—indeed, haunt as well as outdo and outwit, each other. Rethinking and reinventing a “historicity without historicism,” that is to say, a genealogy without teleology, a series or seriality and “seriature” without sequence or consequence, is what is called for. What matters is not whether, provisionally and strategically, one speaks here of “‘messianicity’ without messianism,” or opts for an altogether different, say, (p.218) secular idiom. Indeed, speaking, as Santner does with reference to *The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet*, of the emergence of a *spectral* materiality out of the *spirit* of kingship comes remarkably close to what I am suggesting here. But, then, there is a problem of conflicting metaphors if this

alternative formulation is taken to illuminate what “absorption” and its conceptual and figural analogues fundamentally mean.

IV

If this above, alternative view is correct, then there is something wrong with the *picture of embodiment*, the “fleshly form [*Leibesgestalt*]” of which Santner speaks with reference to Marx’s *Capital*, just as there may well be something fundamentally off in identifying the Hegelian “*Reflexionsbestimmung*, or reflexive determination, as the key to this sort of relational identity” (45). Moreover, there may be something mistaken with the very assumption that there is such a thing as a “sovereign *form*” or, for that matter, “commodity *form*,” just as there may well be no “mediation,” properly speaking, that can be said to organize the “social” in its most fundamental “dimension.” Again, an altogether different *dialectic* seems *at work* between all these concepts and practices, figures and pictures, and it is only through it (mounting the ladder before discarding it, as we will see) that a whole system of divinely and humanly economic relations can be rendered “inoperative,” here and there, for a moment or two. And, perhaps, “dialectics” is not even the term we are in search of here. A more fluid, call it erotico-political, interpretation of subjective and popular desire as it divests monarchical power of its sovereignty, while incurring some fatally attractive power and imagined sovereignty of its own in the process, may be of use in further explicating the restricted and general economies of political—and, I would add, undiminished theological or theologico-political—significance.

(p.219) Already Claude Lefort’s phenomenal essays on the “irreducible” element of the political and in politics, centered on the “permanence of the theologico-political” (with, in his text, a question mark added) and on “the future of immortality,” respectively, undo all too *corporeal* or *corporealistic*—philosophically speaking, all too ontic—determinations (reflexive or not).⁶ They substitute for them an at once more elusive and robust ontological or, rather, phenomenological model. Lefort’s use of the “flesh of the

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world,” indeed, of mere and brute “being”—“*l’être brut*”—enables a very different take on these matters that resonates with several of Santner’s deepest concerns in these lectures.

There may well be an “ultimately enigmatic jointure of the somatic and the normative that defines human life” (50), as Santner suggests. But the Merleau-Pontian motif of the “flesh,” underlying the Lefortian idea of “erotico-politics”—not unlike the Spinozist-Bergsonian-Deleuzian refrain of the “we do not know what the body can do”—strangely *disincarnates* the localized and compartmentalized (“busy”) body and the life that comes with it as much as it gives it fluid forms—should we say, giving its spectral body—a novel and divided place in the general economy of all things material and spiritual.

And, if already in Marx’s conception of the “spectral materiality of the commodity” this apparent immateriality is “the value abstracted from the body of the worker and transferred ... to the product of labor qua commodity”(56), then there is no reason to assume that things—that is to say, the circulation and dislocation of value—will stop right there. Ironically, the “way of all flesh” is “registered” not only—or not even primarily—as “the *weight of all flesh*” (56), as if the value of “value” (“the substance of value”) had the last word in all matters. Paradoxically put, the value of value is not itself, in turn, *a* value (or, perhaps, even *of* value). It has neither “substance” nor “essence,” whether that of common and proper use or that of surplus. Values are variables—they have not just a value; as we say, they have value—in the grander scheme (p.220) (and, who knows, the larger scheming and dialectical ruse) of all things seen and unseen. That’s just how things *are*.

What seems at least just as important as the “*weight of all flesh*,” then, is the apparent *weightlessness* of things circulating in markets and media (the formation and very form or format of information and disinformation, for starters) and the eventful, quasi-miraculous, special effect this takes on all “forms of life” (both human and other). This is how I take the passage Santner cites from Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* that differentiates the “spectral historicity of Europe from other

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histories of the ‘European Spirit’ ” (59–60) and introduces the “dimension of the flesh,” the “paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body,” that materializes itself in “neither soul nor body” or, what comes down to the same, that phenomenizes itself in both. Only thus, things acquire an unmistakable “*phenomenality*,” albeit one that has little in common with the *corps-sujet* about which the existentialist phenomenologists, the early Merleau-Ponty among them, mused for so long.⁷

V

Following and countering the way of all flesh, what can or should be our mode of proceeding, if not our method? In other words—Santner’s own—what, precisely, is “paradoxological thinking,” notably in the “modes of engagement with glory” (120)? Or what, as in Franz Kafka’s case as recalled by Santner, are genuine “exercises in paradoxological thinking”? Are they a thinking in paradox or in paradoxes? But, if so, which one or which ones, exactly?

There is no doubt that Santner’s lectures introduce an “enigmatic signifier” by adopting this terminology of “paradoxology”—and one that, he says, “gets under the skin.” But why and how does paradoxicality, more than any other procedure, experience or experiment, illuminate the very “subject-matter” at hand (p.221) here and, most notably, its fragile ontological status (or, should we say, complete “lack” thereof, as if ascribing even a negative metaphysical or, say, apophatic, mystical theological absence to it were still saying too much)?⁸ Moreover, in what sense, precisely, can paradoxology explicate, indeed, unfold the logic of capital and the apparent ways in which it ushers in a transition—possibly or presumably irreversible—from the theologico-political regime of sovereign monarchical power to the democratized and interiorized “busy-bodiness” of popular sovereignty and its political economy? For one thing, one might have expected the concept and practice (“exercise”) of paradoxology to be *prima facie* more fitting to tackle the “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” of the Divine economies of old, those that Agamben, in Michel Foucault’s footsteps, tracks all the way back to the Church Fathers (suggesting that discursive apparatuses find their origin and justification, if not in

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prehistorical man uttering the first word, then in the biblically inspired theologies of Divine Providence and the Trinitarian logic—of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—that underlies them).

As an apparent contradiction, “paradox” introduces a however slight but essential disjunction between the position or method adopted (e.g., that of the theologico-political archive and apparatus in its “afterlife,” as we saw) and the very same position or method when taken as such, in its historical context and conceptual rigor. As a merely apparent source of true value—that is to say, as a presumably indisputable *arche* or *telos*, principle, or end term of all possible thinking and acting, rather than a merely discursive ladder to be discarded, like Ludwig Wittgenstein’s logic, once one has climbed all the way to the top (or, in any case, high and far enough to see and move well beyond), thus reaching a different (if, in Santner’s sense, still “immanent”) plane—the historical theologico-political construct, call it metaphysics as we know it, must come unhinged. Yet, as we enter this novel terrain, a salutary plane-ness lies also in waiting. It is one that can be stated in the plainest of conceptual and figural terms and thereby, paradoxically, (p.222) offers yet another (and far more profitable) “surplus” of that very immanence than could be imagined or ever hoped for within the language and thinking of old. In Santner’s words, the reversal of perspective that is thus brought about “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” (120).

Interestingly, Santner equates this motif of inversion, which entails nothing short of a conversion, or *Umkehr*, with the Benjaminian figure of the metamorphosis of life into *Schrift*, although the reasons for this identification remain somewhat unclear in the finale of these marvelous lectures.⁹ For is this to say that “everyday life” *only thus* becomes *legible* once again—that is to say, once we awaken from the “dreamless sleep” (to cite Bob Dylan’s album *Time Out of Mind*) into which we were lulled by the Sirens’ songs of prehistorical myth? There is no

doubt that such myth exerted its power in the dubious glory of the Christian-theological “resonance machine”—of religion as capitalism—of which William Connolly (albeit in an altogether un-Benjaminian register, I should add) has spoken compellingly. But is this the only actual or potential working and effect it must or might have on us, here and now?

Needless to say, to associate “*spelling out the spell*” with a turn toward *Schrift*—call it the turn or return to language at its deepest (and that means also at its most plane and poetic rather than purely liturgical or doxological) of levels—opens up a whole field of study, namely the “literary practice and theory of the paradoxology” (120). Such interpretative exercise, Santner seems to intimate, might one day come to supplement, even though it will therefore not necessarily supplant, the Foucauldian-Agambian “archeology of glory,” with its somewhat one-sided obsession with biopolitical and cultic or pastoral “power.”

(p.223) VI

But this is not all: paradox or paradoxology may further signify “near-aporetic”—that is to say, the practice or exercise of espousing two contrasting and alternating viewpoints—to the point of contradiction. Such *coincidentia oppositorum* reminds one of Wittgenstein’s theory of dual aspect seeing, of the duck or rabbit that *now you see, now you don’t*; in other words, it recalls the co-extensiveness of two visions that one may need or want to subscribe to even though one cannot hold them simultaneously, in one single moment, just as one cannot *mediate* or *negotiate* between the two. Paradoxology, thus defined, implies that their very alternation does not yield a metamorphosis, mutation, substitution, translation, transformation, or transfer of one into the other, no matter how often we may be tempted to *take one for the other*, to *reduce the other to the one*. Like the logic of presupposition, that of supplanting one perspective by the other is not *de rigueur*.

But then, paradoxology is not just the speaking in paradoxes; it is also the expression of statements that *seem* self-contradictory, absurd, or false, but at a deeper or more

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factual, as well as speculative, level contain a possible truth. Paradoxology, thus conceived, is speaking truth to the power of “doxology,” the praise that surrounds, announces, and anoints or baptizes sovereign power, whether royal or popular. Besides, like *parapraxis* in Freud’s *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, it does not speak to power directly, but quite literally *changes the subject* and, as it were, “slips” right beyond it (belittling the sovereign lord—*Signorelli*, as Freud keeps forgetting—and who- or whatever takes his place).

VII

To say this has several consequences. If Agamben—and earlier Benjamin, and through him, Kafka as we now understand them—is (p.224) indeed right, as Santner suggests, should we not ask whether the question of “power,” including that of bio-, cultic, and pastoral power, is, perhaps, not the key to the political? After all, it may not offer the first or last word on the theological, either. Rather, it is toward a rethinking of so-called *weak* or even *soft* “power”—in Jean-Luc Marion’s recent terms, of “unpower” (*impouvoir*),¹⁰ by assuming a lack (contingency, fragility, and givenness) at the very foundation of sovereignty, whether royal or popular, reigning or governing—that all these thinkers and, I suspect, Santner himself, must somehow be under way.

Now, if this is indeed the case, this would be yet another lesson that the religious-theologico-political archive and apparatus may continue to teach us, in its enduring “afterlife,” so to speak. The very paradox of the “*doxology of everyday life*” that Santner discusses with reference to Max Weber consists in the fact that even the democratized materialism of busy, self-interested bodies (*pace* Alain Badiou) may thus offer yet another, unexpected testimony *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. Such that even the progressive withholding of divine grace—even though there remains a minimal rather than royal theology in place, free to manifest or reveal itself as an invisible, if often intangible, force *everywhere, at anytime*—still or, in fact, more and more counts as the very proof of what it would seem to negate: the less than empirical and more than ontological haunting of a “hidden God,” whose

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secret workings are not so much providential or predetermined—for good or ill—but, in their worldly or practical effect, nonetheless strangely “economical” (in every historical, broadly ecclesial, and modern, political sense of this term).

Just as on Santner’s reading of Foucault “the subject matter of political economy includes an *un-economic subject matter*,” whose “disruptive force” derives from elsewhere, and whose “theological roots” can be “‘extended and moved back in time’ ” all the way down (or is it up?) to the “semantic field” of divine *oikonomia*, so also Santner’s suggestive analysis of “creaturely life” is “one that (p.225) seems to push thinking in the direction of theology” (84). And, by “theology” we must, at this point, simply mean the assumed, if not observed, “ultimate *lack of foundation* for the historical forms of life in which human life unfolds.”

VIII

Santner’s lectures and much of his published work, then, are what I would like to think of as theoretical or, perhaps, spiritual exercises in (or of) “*ontological vulnerability*” through which a distinctively human “precariousness”—including that of its “biological life”—becomes, as he says, “potentiated, amplified, by way of exposure to ... radical contingency” (84).

How this “anarchic ‘potentiation’ ” of our forms of life and the very “space of meaning” that they constitute—our “natural history,” as Wittgenstein with Benjamin might have said here—can, in turn, be *historical*, as Santner insists, is, however, far from clear. The anarchical, as that which opens up to historical life forms, precisely, by exposing us to them, is radical and ineradicable, ontological and generic, is neither ontic nor empirical, but meta-material and, come to think of it, something spiritual. And, if this is the case, then neither human existence nor language, neither the “somatic” nor the “normative” (nor their inflammatory point of intersection of which Santner makes so much) may be its sole or even privileged locus. This much one would need to grant the *new materialism*. But, as we know, it is also the deepest of theological insights.

What the old and new materialisms no less than the “archeology of glory” (in its Foucauldian-Agambian variety) get wrong is the belief—in Santner’s words, “the small, nonsensical hope” (118)—that one could ultimately avoid and overcome, undo or profanize, the “archaic [or, technically speaking, sacred] sphere in which religious and juridical action and speech [have and will always] become (p.226) indistinguishable” (95). The more important question to be asked, therefore, is not “Why does power—heavenly or earthly—need glory?” but “Why would glory—divine or human—need ‘power’?” Indeed, the “modes,” modalities, and moods of *glory* may well be the *via regia* of everything (every “thing,” the very “thing in itself” or, in the Heideggerian diction, “*das Ding*”) that cannot be “produced,” “circulated,” or “consumed.” Glory may well just *work out*, but there is little in or to it that we can *work toward* in advance, much less *work through* after the fact. Glorious “acts,” if we can say so, reveal what is either *more or less* than the ontological “weight” that, Santner agrees with Kantorowicz’s *Laudes Regiae*, “cannot be measured by legal standards.” They carry a “weight” that is non-criteriological and, hence, not just that of “all flesh”¹¹ (in any conceptual, materialist, psychoanalytic or, for that matter, phenomenological determination of that term).

IX

This brings me to my conclusion. If there is, as Santner writes, “a missing task or *telos* proper to human life”(101), if this is our fundamental vulnerability, exposure, and answerability to the world and everything (everyone) in it—our ontic-ontological lack or “flesh wound,” as he adds—then it must necessarily follow that neither “inoperativity” (the “sabbatical *otium*,” “*what does not work*”) nor even its virtual opposite (for example, Bonnie Honig’s understanding of “Sabbath-power” and its secular functional equivalents) can be it—that is to say, “central to human life,” the aspired opposite of its Freudian *It*.

It seems metaphysically as well as empirically false to claim, as Agamben does (and Santner endorses), that man is “in essence ... completely devoid of work, because he is the

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Sabbatical animal par excellence.” There is good reason why the Bible pairs and contrasts six days of work with one day of Sabbath (and does not, (p.227) like capitalism, “eliminate the distinction between workday and holiday, workday and Sabbath” [119], nor, by contrast, endorse “Sabbatical power”). We are, precisely, not asked to be *either* operative *or* inoperative all the time, as if either one of these two modes, modalities, and moods could, all by itself, be or become the “center of the human,” the “political ‘substance’ of the Occident.”

Paradoxically, this *bipolarity* is *of the essence*—indeed, *off* the essence (and thus much more of a theological than a metaphysical significance, if we define matters strictly, “essence” not being a theological but at best an onto-theological category and hardly among the nonpredicable Divine Names one can pray to).

But then, such dual aspect of our individual and multiple being—the difference matters little—also means that generically, in our species and specific being, we are neither this nor that, whether “in essence” or “par excellence.” This is another way of saying that we may well be deeply *indebted*, such that there is, indeed, a “*sovereignty of debt* over human life and its possibilities” (119), as Heidegger’s language of “thrownness,” “falling,” and “originary guilt” aptly captures. Yet this does not mean that such indebtedness is moral or financial, much less genetic, *per se*.

Emmanuel Levinas once remarked that behind the “weight of Capital” there lies a “weight in Being,” without any further ontic determination or historical determinism. We might call this the very “value of value,” its “self-valorization,” its *conatus essendi*, preceding any distinction or intersection of the “somatic” and “normative” that we can—and, perhaps, must—subsequently introduce in our description and interpretation of things that surround us. And the very concept and meaning of “Being” is certainly one of those later, belated determinations, not to be taken for granted but hard to avoid. From a deep pragmatic standpoint, the late Rorty was absolutely right: ontology is and must be seen or redefined as

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“cultural politics”—that is, in ways and words, without *fundamentum in re*, that are coined, adopted, or otherwise introduced, and (p.228) that we and others with (and after) us must nonetheless somehow own up to and deal with.

X

Paradoxology, in its ongoing engagement with the tradition of political theology or political economy—and, one would hope and expect, much else instead—dispenses with the residual humanism and, if you like, ontological existentialism that, like royal or popular sovereignty, are merely some of the values we find among the *theological remains*. But it does so in the full knowledge that such dispensation *partly* reinstates and reaffirms what it thus—correctly and justly—also sets free and, thereby, loosens up. Santner’s “paradoxologies” are a brilliant exercise in that they bring out this *dialectic*. When all is said and done, “dialectic” is the very term that comes to mind here, especially if taken in its open-ended—that is, negative—understanding and exercise, reminiscent of Theodor W. Adorno’s “metaphysical meditations,” which, lest we forget, were originally conceived as a “theory of spiritual experience (*Theorie der geistigen Erfahrung*).” Yet, strangely enough, it is the very concept in the Hegelian-Marxian archive and apparatus that is largely absent in the lectures presented in this volume.

How such an eminently rhetorical, yet deeply pragmatic, dialectic—which is both abstract and singular, and indeed, movingly personal (“rereading one’s own existence”)—translates into concrete political subject matters (inducing a “general strike,” contributing to “class struggle” or plain reform) remains, I think, an open question in Santner’s overall work. But it is a question for which we are now, thanks to his profound and compelling “exercises in paradoxological thinking,” so much better prepared.

(p.229) Notes

(p.232)

(p.234)

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Notes:

(1.) I would like to thank the members of the Tanner Lectures Committee, Eric Santner, and my two fellow commentators, Bonnie Honig and Peter Gordon, for the wonderful occasion to discuss these exciting lectures with them at Berkeley. My deep appreciation, as always, goes to Martin Jay for his kind words of welcome and introduction during these days. It was an honor to be part of the conversations that ensued and I remain grateful for the provocative thinking to which we were invited to respond with our own thoughts in mind.

(2.) Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 6; Santner, 60.

(3.) Cf. my "Introduction: Why Still 'Religion'?" in Hent de Vries, ed., *Religion—Beyond A Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 1-98.

(4.) The script for Verhoeven's film *Total Recall* was partly based on Philip K. Dick short story "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale," published in the April 1966 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

(5.) For a discussion, see Hent de Vries, "In Media Res: Global Religion, Public Spheres, and the Task of Contemporary Comparative Religious Studies," in *Religion and Media*, ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 3-42.

(6.) Claude Lefort, "La permanence du théologico-politique?," in Lefort, *Essais sur le politique: XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986), 275-329; Claude Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?," trans. David Macey, in Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan eds., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 148-87. See also Claude Lefort, "Mort de l'immortalité?," in *Essais sur le politique*, 330-64; Claude Lefort, "The Death of Immortality?," in Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 256-82.

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See my “ ‘The Miracle of Love’ and the Turn to Democracy,”
CR: The New Centennial Review, vol. 8 (2009), no. 3, 237-290.

(7.) Santner cites the introduction to 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: “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.” Structures of power, it would seem, thus became ever more elusive, weaker, and softer. Yet Santner makes it clear that his own emphasis is less on the often intractable “transformation of social codes” than on the “agitation of the ‘flesh’ ” brought about by this shift, “the nature of the ‘matter’ that accounts for the new ‘political weight’ of every citizen” (Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011], 4-5). While his earlier writings focused on the regulatory practices that Foucault grouped together under the heading of *biopolitics*, his current interest lies elsewhere, centering as it now does on “political economy as a site where this weight begins to be taken into account by, precisely, 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” (31).

Whereas Foucault would tie in the political economical aspect of biopolitics under the rubric of “governmentality,” Santner thinks that it is not so much the mantra of biopolitics but, rather, the clinically based theory of psychoanalysis that offers the necessary conceptual tools for interpreting the changing nature of the king’s and now people’s two bodies. For these are deeply interwoven with the individual and collective fantasies of subjects and citizens, fantasies Santner takes to be the privileged means to negotiate their sense of self and place within the new historical landscape.

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The difference between this psychoanalytic approach and the plethora of so-called new materialisms is precisely that the former is not inclined to “dispense” with the very subject-matter—in Santner’s words, with “the spectral materiality proper to human subjectivity, one with distinctive *‘flesh and phenomenality’*” (61) —that one should keep in view. The “*its*” may “outnumber the *me’s*” and we may well be made up of “*an array of bodies*” (as Jane Bennett, invoked in these lectures, aptly reminds us) but, for Santner, this is no reason to resort to “a kind of multiculturalism at the cellular, or even molecular level” (61). Such proclamations of a “newish self” do not all by themselves inhibit the violence that modern societies still and increasingly have to deal with and that they cannot hope to resolve in any other way than to patiently and systematically *work them through*. Such therapeutic relief, Santner insists, requires facing what Freud called the singular “*It,*” not some fantasmatic multitude of “*its,*” not least because it is so difficult to name.

Yet Santner does find several words to circumscribe this virtual materiality underlying, constituting, and pervading the subject—as its very subject-matter, that is—for example, when he continues by saying that we should think of it as a “complex disorder of the ‘tribe,’” as “a disorder that in one way or another—and psychoanalysis is the effort to understand those ways—congealed as the uncanny cause of ... desire, the ‘un-economic’ dimension of ... libidinal economy” (62).

By contrast, the new, “post-humanist” materialisms that center around “vibrant” and “vital” materiality tend to result, in Santner’s view, in a problematic homogenization of alterity, now undertaken in the name of multiplicity and heterogeneity, a theoretical move in which too much gets lost to warrant the very “moral and political wager” with which such new materialism are proudly advocated.

But, if this is all pertinent, how can Santner nonetheless side with the Marxian verdict that in the commodity form it is “not so much *we* who continue to engage in metaphysics and theology but, rather, our *busy bodies*” (81)? The answer seems to hinge on the assumption that our bodies’ “*busy-ness*” must, first of all, be seen in a *Freudo-Marxian* perspective, namely as

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an “uncanny mode of stress,” one that is strangely coupled with “the afterlife of political theology in secular modernity—essentially its mutation into political economy” (81). But a further presupposition is that such busy-bodyness entertains an intrinsic and intimate relationship with the very subject (indeed, human subjectivity and erotico-material subject-matter) that cannot but matter most to us all. This is what I am tempted to call Santner’s *residual humanism* or *ontological existentialism*, to distinguish it from the new materialists’ anti-humanism, on the one hand, and from the existential phenomenology of similarly subject-oriented thinkers (such as Claude Lefort and, via him, Maurice Merleau-Ponty), on the other.

(8.) By the way, the concept of “subject-matter” is not the only one that merits further discussion here. For what, precisely, is the meaning of “matter” or “mattering” that is “in the wrong place” (43), as Santner suggestively claims? Moreover, what to make of the locution “surplus of immanence,” which recalls Jürgen Habermas’s expression “transcendence in immanence,” which, likewise, is virtually indistinguishable from the “transcendence of transcendence” whose register the theological archive or apparatus masters all by itself, without the assistance of secular or, for that matter, political economical thought? Finally, is it fully clear what Santner means when he explains “animation” in Marx’s sense with what is “ultimately deadening—or rather, *undeading*—for human beings, something that drives them while holding them in place ...” (81)? Confronted with the new materialisms of late, why would such reference to “petrified unrest [*erstarrte Unruhe*]” equal a “deanimation of undeadness” in which we are justified to put critical hopes?

(9.) What “inversion” might mean in these matters, I have tried to analyze in “Inverse versus Dialectical Theology: The Two Faces of Negativity and the Miracle of Faith,” in *Paul and the Philosophers*, ed. Ward Blanton and Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 466–511.

(10.) Jean-Luc Marion, “L’impouvoir,” in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 4, no. 4 (2009): 439–45; Jean-Luc Marion, “Unpower,” in Hent de Vries and Nils F. Schott, eds.,

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Love and Forgiveness For a More Just World (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 36–42.

(11.) There is a further difficulty here. If we follow Santner’s bold interpretation “that what Kantorowicz later elaborated under the heading of the King’s Second Body is a *sublimate* of ... a sonorous mass, a *congelation of its vibrant doxological matter*” (98), then it becomes all the more clear that the body and its flesh comes neither first nor last in the catalogue (archive and apparatus) of theologoumena that the discourse of sovereignty in its monarchical and republican variety continues to draw on, whether it knows it or not. Unless, of course, one takes the “sonorous mass of acclaiming voices,” the language of the angels of which Erik Peterson speaks in his *Theological Tractates* (trans., Michael J. Hollerich [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011]) as somehow itself a body and not just embodied, that is to say, as the underlying “vibrant matter” of the “flesh,” its substantive part, itself.

The timbre and rhythm of jubilant voices, in their very tonality and sonority, would themselves have attained the role of a vibrant, vital, indeed, spectral materiality, namely that of the flesh, without there even being a body—say, a human body—in sight. But would this not simply lead to one further step on the path taken by the new materialists, who altogether jettison the—first and second—human and spiritual body (or *corpus mysticum*) without whose serial incarnation, it is often assumed, no body politic worthy of mentioning could ever be conceived, founded, let alone maintained (or, in Santner’s striking choice of terms in this context, “fleshed out”)?

A further passage confirms this reading. Speaking of the “archeology of glory,” Santner writes: “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*. ... What might at first appear to be a superstructural feature of a ruling state apparatus is, essentially, its *economic base*, one that produces the glorious flesh of the social bond” (98–99). Here, as well, the divine or theological conception of glory conditions, upon second glance, what, at first, seemed to

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condition it in turn. It forms, informs or forms itself in the very matter or mattering of whatever subjects and citizens, as living and working humans, can further be or eventually become. The *subject-matter*, the flesh—tied as it is, for Santner, to the human form, to the eminently and however contingent and forever vulnerable human forms of life, exposed to the “lack” of their world—would thus, again, seem to come second. Crudely put, it is the *explanandum*, not the *explanans* at all. Belated, constituted after the fact, as it were, the human body and *its* flesh could hardly be claimed to play a pivotal role in the general economy of things, the point of departure or return of any analysis that tracks the transition (if, indeed, it is one) from royal to popular sovereignty. Indeed, a critique of sovereignty, across the spectrum of political formations and the forms of life that sustain them, would have to begin and end elsewhere: in the questioning of “power” in its very practice, no doubt, *and* its concept. There are *glorious* examples in the theological archive and in the present day and age that aptly—I would say, *economically*—demonstrate that such inquiry need and must not play the power game of old, nor follow the theoretical fixation on political or bio-, cultic, pastoral, and, now, doxological power per se.

