



THE ROYAL REMAINS

*The People's Two Bodies and the
Endgames of Sovereignty*

Eric L. Santner

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For Marcia Adler, in loving memory

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Preface

I

Some years ago I wrote a small book about the famous case of Daniel Paul Schreber, the Saxon jurist whose autobiographical account of mental illness and psychiatric confinement provided Freud with crucial material for elaborating a theory of paranoia and psychotic formations more generally.¹ There I suggested—all too casually—that Schreber’s delusional system, which was largely organized around the religious and political meanings of a series of spectacular somatic symptoms, could be understood as a uniquely modern and even modernist mutation of the political theological tradition of the “king’s two bodies,” a tradition elaborated in extraordinary detail by Ernst Kantorowicz in his famous study on the subject.² I also suggested that one ultimately needed to insert the “body of the analyst” within that same tradition, to discern in the agency, figure, and corporeal presence of this new kind of healer a countervailing remnant of that very tradition. The present study represents an attempt to “flesh out” these intuitions with regard to the modern afterlives of the king’s body, the ways in which something of the royal remains. As I will argue, one can do so only by way of a theory of “the flesh” as the sublime substance that the various rituals, legal and theological doctrines, and literary and social fantasies surrounding

1. Eric Santner, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

2. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

the monarch's singular physiology (the arcana that fill the pages of Kantorowicz's now-canonical study) originally attempted to shape and manage.

One might, in this context, recall that at one of the key moments in Schreber's account of his own experience of divine election, his delusional mutation into God's concubine, he reports that on a particular day one of the divine voices that at various times spoke to and through him (and to which he refers by way of the Zoroastrian names of God's dual aspects) used a special term of address that produced in him (or, at the very least, was correlated with) a series of special effects to which his body was subject. Among other things, the word, a cross between a curse and a title that functions as a kind of debased *laudes regiae*, seemed to posit Schreber as the abject bearer of rotting flesh, as if the official identity he was unable to inhabit (he had been invested with the office of president of the Sachsen Supreme Court) had melted down into so much putrescence:

I believe I may say that at that time and at that time *only*, I saw God's omnipotence in its complete purity. During the night . . . the lower God (Ariman) appeared. The radiant picture of his rays became visible to my inner eye . . . that is to say he was reflected on my inner nervous system. Simultaneously I heard his voice; but it was not a soft whisper—as the talk of the voices always was before and after that time—it resounded in a mighty bass as if directly in front of my bedroom window. The impression was intense, so that anybody not hardened to terrifying miraculous impressions as I was, would have been shaken to the core. Also *what* was spoken did not sound friendly by any means: everything seemed calculated to instil fright and terror into me and the word "wretch" [*Luder*] was frequently heard—an expression quite common in the basic language to denote a human being destined to be destroyed by God and to feel God's power and wrath.³

The word singled out by Schreber, "Luder," has especially rich connotations in the context of the judge's torments. It can indeed mean wretch, in the sense of a lost and pathetic figure, but can also signify a cunning swindler or scoundrel; a whore, tart, or slut; and finally, the dead, rotting flesh of an animal, especially in the sense of carrion used as bait in hunting.⁴ The last two significations capture Schreber's fear of being

3. Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, trans. Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 124.

4. Jacques Lacan, in his seminar on the Schreber case, notes that the French translation of this word is *charogne*, which also happens to be the title of one of Baudelaire's most famous poems. In this context one might also recall that critics responded to the initial display of Manet's *Olympia* as if confronted by a *Luder* in all the meanings conveyed by the word. T. J. Clark summarizes some

turned over to others for the purposes of sexual exploitation as well as his delusions, which would seem to flow from such abuse, about putrefaction, about having been abandoned and left to rot or waste away. These delusions merge at times with a preoccupation about being sick with the plague, leprosy, or syphilis. What I want to emphasize here is that the transformation of Schreber's body—its decomposition and feminization—is at least in part precipitated by the “revelation” of a word that itself signifies the effects that its forceful accusative utterance seems directly to provoke in Schreber's body. We are faced here with a radical concretization or materialization of the operations of a performative utterance. It is as if the meeting of this “acclamation” *Luder!* with this body had produced or deposited at its point of contact the nervously agitated flesh Schreber was enjoined to bear and even *to enjoy*.⁵

Over the course of this study, I track the vicissitudes of the flesh in a series of readings of literature, philosophy, painting, and political thought. I focus on works produced, for the most part, in the twentieth century, works that are representative of or profoundly engaged with that sweep of cultural history referred to as “modernism.” The premise of these readings is that one will get hold of what distinguishes this chapter of cultural history only if one grasps the ways it has labored under what could be characterized as the *biopolitical pressures* generated by the transition from royal to popular sovereignty in the wake of the French Revolution and the long struggle to reconstitute the “physiology” of the body politic over the course of the nineteenth century. To put it in a formula, my thesis is that crucial features of modernity can be grasped by following the transformation of the complex tensions belonging to the political theology of royal sovereignty into the biopolitical pressures of popular sovereignty. My claim is that biopolitics assumes its particular urgency and expansiveness in modernity because what is at issue in it is not simply the biological life or health of populations but the “sublime” life-substance of the

of the critics' responses: “There was something about *Olympia* which eluded their normal frame of reference, and writers were almost fond of admitting they had no words for what they saw. *Olympia* was ‘informe,’ ‘inconceivable,’ ‘inqualifiable,’ ‘indéchiffrable.’ . . . ‘The least handsome of women has bones, muscles, skin, form, and some kind of color,’ whereas *Olympia* had none; she was ‘neither true nor living nor beautiful.’” T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 92. Various critics explicitly underlined the cadaverous aspect of her body. One Victor de Jankovitz wrote, “The expression of her face is that of being prematurely aged and vicious; her body, of a putrefying colour, recalls the horror of the morgue” (cited *ibid.*, 96).

5. Schreber famously insisted that “God demands *constant enjoyment*. . . . It is my duty to provide Him with it in the form of highly developed soul-voluptuousness, as far as this is possible in circumstances contrary to the Order of the World.” He then added that in his “relation to God . . . voluptuousness has become ‘God-fearing.’” Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, 208–9, 210.

People, who, at least in principle, become the bearers of sovereignty, assume the dignity of the *prince*. Indeed, I think the case of Daniel Paul Schreber, whose delusions capture what I have referred to as a “secret history of modernity,” have become such a lure—such *Luder*—for thinkers of modernity such as Freud, Benjamin, Canetti, Deleuze, Foucault, Certau, Lacan, and Kittler, among many others, because Schreber himself appeared to grasp these pressures and their “fleshly” materiality as the basis for a rethinking of the political theological (or perhaps better, the *biocratic*) constitution of modern life. These pressures pertain not only to questions concerning the foundation and constitution of political authority but also more generally to those concerning the patterns and procedures whereby human beings come to be vested with the authority of the various “offices” they occupy and the ways in which such procedures of investiture, such transferences of symbolic authority, are ultimately legitimated. Schreber’s difficulties in metabolizing such pressures (in my study of the case I characterized these difficulties as a chronic “crisis of investiture”) can be measured by his fundamental uncertainty as to the proper addressee or audience for his memoirs. It was, in a word, unclear whether they concerned medical science, the law, the world of religious thought and experience, the realm of politics, or some new sort of science or mode of knowledge yet to come. As we shall see, such uncertainty belongs to the phenomena at issue.

It should be noted that the concept “political theology” is itself already highly overdetermined, the bearer of multiple and at times conflicting semantic and ideological values. At one level, the notion of political theology conveys the expansion of the reach of religious meanings and values into the sphere of political life, the investment of political institutions and actors with the trappings and charisma of sacred authority. But it thereby also signifies a contraction of the domain of religious life and practices into what eventually became the “private sphere” of citizens. Political theology can thus be seen to function as an operator of secularization—the displacement of religion by politics as the central organizing force of sociality and collective identifications—but only insofar as this “elevation” of politics above the confessional affiliations and practices of subjects is itself sustained by theological values and concepts. As we shall see, the further shift from the political theology of royal sovereignty to ostensibly de-theologized, fully secularized political theories of popular sovereignty (and the forms of life framed by them) brings such complexities and ambiguities ever more to the fore, though in new guises and modalities.

II

The following reflections orbit to a very large extent around a single question that first emerged for me in the context of my engagement with the Schreber material but that has at some level persisted throughout all my subsequent work. It is a version of the great question concerning the relation between mind and brain, the space of meaning and the chemistry and machinery of neurological functioning. As I understand it, the question Schreber himself raises is this: How is it that a disturbance in *the space of representation*—the space in which we engage with one another by way of offices, titles, symbolic roles and mandates, generic predicates of all kinds—can generate (or more cautiously, be correlated to) *a nervous disorder*? In other words, what is the relation between *representations* (in Lacan’s terms, the signifiers subjects are compelled to contract or take on as “members” of a symbolic order to represent them to other signifiers) and *nerves*? That fundamental relation was the focus of Freud’s famous *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, a work that, however, remained fragmentary. And no doubt part of what makes Lacan’s “return to Freud” so compelling is that he in some sense tried to read all of Freud as so many attempts to return to and elaborate the intuitions of that early project. This book represents yet a further effort in the same direction, though I try to approach it from a new perspective. Perhaps the most provocative way of introducing this perspective—one I will elaborate in some detail—would be to claim that Foucault’s investigation of the proliferation of new kinds of political power and authority in modernity (what he ultimately characterized as the birth of biopolitics) should itself be understood as a crucial contribution to the original Freudian research paradigm concerning the relation between representations and nerves. In a sense, I am putting Freud and Foucault on the same team (over the course of this study I recruit other perhaps equally surprising team members). Both are concerned with the ways in which a certain “intensification” of the body can be correlated with disorders or shifts in the resources of representation available to subjects and in the capacities of subjects to use those resources, to discharge the normative pressures they introduce into the life of subjects.⁶

6. The psychoanalytic dimension of “normative pressure,” a concept largely used in the social sciences to identify various forms of the pressure to conform, has been nicely developed by Candace Vogler and Jonathan Lear in the context of seminar presentations at the University of Chicago in recent years. In my study of Schreber I characterized this pressure as the *drive dimension of signification*, as the *signifying stress* that supplements every act of symbolic investiture, of being invested with

What Schreber discovered was that an inability to inhabit and to feel *libidinally implicated* in the space of representations had the effect of transforming his entire being into a bundle of excitable flesh that had then to be entrusted to the care of psychiatry, one of the key institutions of the biopolitical regime investigated by Foucault and one that was already committed to a largely neurological understanding of mental disease.⁷ We are very fortunate that Schreber was smart enough and aware enough to grasp that his condition and fate were *denkwürdig*, “worthy of thought” (his memoir was entitled *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*). That is, he grasped that his “metamorphosis” into an agitated *Luder* had something to do with larger social transformations pertaining, above all, to the realms of *politics and religion*, and that it was these transformations that attenuated his capacity to cathect to—to inhabit, occupy, erotically invest in—the signifiers representing him in the world, the ways he had been “vested” in “the field of the Other.” That is, he grasped that his metamorphosis was connected to the history of political theology and its link to what Freud theorized as the libidinal economy of human mindedness. What is at issue here is, as I have suggested, not simply the question of the sources of legitimate political rule but, more profoundly, our capacity to feel represented in the social field, to experience those representations as *viable facilitations of our vitality*. The Schreber case demonstrates that the more attenuated this capacity becomes, the more such vitality comes to be registered as an invasive excitation of nerves. For Schreber, the normative pressures injected into human life by way of one’s inscription into a symbolic order are imagined to return as real bodily impingements and violations. Schreber, for his part, attempted to grasp this state as a sort of neurotheological revelation, to discover traces of transcendence in the radical immanence of agitated nerve tissue. It is just such a collapse or contraction of the space of representation into that of the overstimulated flesh that generates the ultimate lure or *Luder* for the biopolitical operations of modernity. As it turns out, the more one becomes the object of such operations, the more attenuated, the more (un)deadening the space of representation becomes.

some sort of social status that places one in relation to the normative authority regulating the enjoyment of the incumbency of that “office.” Vogler and Lear above all emphasize the potential for anxiety in normative pressure, *the threat of being found wanting* with respect to some representative of normative authority. My argument here is that at the core of *this* anxiety is the far more terrifying one of *not being found at all*, that is, of being reduced to a state in which one does not even get to experience the first form of anxiety.

7. Schreber’s psychiatrist, Paul Flechsig, had famously declared that the age of the brain had finally displaced that of the *soul* (see my discussion of Flechsig in *My Own Private Germany*).

III

The space of representation has always been one in which the dimension of the flesh has been implicated. Indeed, I will argue that the crucial thought at the heart of the doctrine of the King's Two Bodies is that within the framework of the political theology of sovereignty, the signifiers that represent the subject for other signifiers are, so to speak, "backed" or "underwritten" by the sublime flesh, the sacral soma, of the monarch. With the demise of the political theology of kingship, this "personal" source of libidinal credit disappears. Postmonarchical societies are then faced with the problem of *securing the flesh* of the new bearer of the principle of sovereignty, the People. Biopolitics—and its near relative disciplinary power—can be grasped as the strategies deployed by modern societies to secure this new underwriting arrangement, this new backing for the signs and values circulating across new kinds of networks and relays. It is against this background that we should read Foucault's characterization of the transition from classical sovereignty to the forms of power and governmentality that emerge at the threshold of modernity: "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.*"⁸ But here we need to add that insofar as the agents of this new physics imagine themselves to be addressing the care and discipline of living bodies and the biological life and health of populations rather than securing the strange materiality of the "flesh"—the bit of the real that underwrites the circulation of signs and values—they do not and cannot fully grasp the urgency of their tasks. In a word, *they know not what they do.*

In my study of the Schreber case, I cited the work of an author who, although her immediate concerns were far from mine, helped me to find my initial orientation in the material. I would like to cite, once more, several brief passages that have taken on further resonance in light of the considerable work that has been done over the intervening years—above all, by Giorgio Agamben—on the concept of the state of exception and its relation to biopolitics, a connection that also plays a significant role in the following chapters. The passages in question pertain precisely to the

8. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 208; my emphasis.

status of the flesh in the constitution of viable resources of representation. They are addressed to the "gap" in knowledge to which I have just alluded, to just what it is that the agents of biopolitical operations are *really doing*.

In her groundbreaking book *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry explored the ways in which, above all in the practices of torture and war, human pain (what she so poignantly characterized as the "obscenely . . . alive tissue" of the human body) is enlisted as a source of verification and substantiation of the symbolic authority of institutions and the social facts they sponsor.⁹ This bottoming out of symbolic function on what I am calling the flesh becomes urgent, Scarry argues, when there is a crisis of belief or legitimation in a society: "At particular moments when there is within society a crisis of belief—that is, when some central idea or ideology or cultural construct has ceased to elicit a population's belief either because it is manifestly fictitious or because it has for some reason been divested of ordinary forms of substantiation—the sheer material factuality of the human body will be borrowed to lend that cultural construct the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty'" (14). Speaking more specifically of the structure of war, Scarry argues that "injuring is relied on as a form of legitimation because, though it lacks interior connections to the issues, wounding is able to open up a source of reality that can give the issue force and holding power. That is, the outcome of war has its substantiation not in an absolute inability of the defeated to contest the outcome but in a process of perception that allows extreme attributes of the body to be translated into another language, to be broken away from the body and relocated elsewhere at the very moment that the body itself is disowned" (124). This conception of the injured body as an unspeakable piece of the real that provides the ultimate support or backing of a symbolic order, that (unconsciously) helps to make the social facts constituted within the space of representation feel real rather than fictional, allows Scarry, in effect, to recast the psychoanalytic concept of *transference* in more social and political terms. It comes to signify, for Scarry, the "intricacies of the process of transfer that make it possible for the *incontestable reality of the physical body to now become an attribute of an issue that at that moment has no independent reality of its own*" (124–25). What becomes painfully manifest in both war and torture "is the process by which a made world of culture acquires the characteristics of 'reality,' the process of percep-

9. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 31. Subsequent references are made in the text.

tion that allows invented ideas, beliefs, and made objects to be accepted and entered into as though they had the same ontological status as the naturally given world" (125).

IV

The following chapters represent a further attempt to fill in the "gap" in knowledge that haunts the practices—and theorizations—of biopolitics, to get clear about what is "really" going on there. I have divided the project into two parts, the first addressing theoretical and historical concerns pertaining to the notion and vicissitudes of the flesh at the point of its reorganization in the transition from royal to popular sovereignty. Chapter 1 attempts to locate the topic of the flesh in current theories of biopolitics and to suggest ways in which it can be brought more productively into view. My primary "interlocutor" in this discussion is Roberto Esposito, who, next to Agamben, has provided what I consider to be the most comprehensive and original elaboration of biopolitics after Foucault. In chapter 2 I engage directly with the work of Ernst Kantorowicz, whose groundbreaking book *The King's Two Bodies* provides us with an opportunity to articulate more precisely the ways in which the topic of biopolitics can be traced to issues that already animate the complex history of the political theology of sovereignty in Europe. From there one comes, I think, to a far better grasp and appreciation of the work done by both Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben on how issues of sovereign power and authority persist even within more directly biopolitical modes of modern governmentality. In chapter 3 I turn to the work of Freud, Lacan, and other psychoanalytic thinkers to develop a more general theory of what I am calling the flesh precisely by acknowledging the historical pressures under which this new and strange science emerged. The strange self-reflexivity at work here is that only with psychoanalytic theory can one truly grasp the nature of the historical context in which that theoretical paradigm emerged.

In part 2 I turn to the ways in which the biopolitical pressures that constitute the flesh make themselves felt in the field of aesthetic experience. In chapter 4 I focus on the vicissitudes of the flesh in visual modernism. Here I engage above all with the work of a series of art historians, critics, and philosophers who, in their efforts to grasp the specificity of modernist aesthetic practices, have placed issues of embodiment and corporeality at the center of their analyses. Chapter 5 is something

of a hybrid. It begins with a discussion of Carl Schmitt's provocative essay on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In this essay Schmitt gives us a feel as to how his profoundly influential views on sovereignty (views discussed at some length in my first three chapters) extend into and borrow from the realm of aesthetic experience. Schmitt's essay also turns out to be an extremely helpful introduction to the work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the great Austrian writer who first (quite sympathetically) characterized the cultural movement now inextricably linked to Carl Schmitt's name as a "conservative revolution." Chapter 6 offers a comprehensive reading of Rainer Maria Rilke's great modernist novel *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. Here I argue that this groundbreaking work achieves its force and legibility only against the background of the right understanding of the vicissitudes of the flesh, of the epochal shift from the King's Two Bodies to the People's Two Bodies. In the epilogue I try to point the way toward further avenues of research on the legacies of the "royal remains" in modernity.

There is, of course, a considerable degree of contingency at work in the choice of examples for the elaboration of an argument such as the one I am putting forth in this study. I would say, however, that for me the examples taken above all from art and literature represent not simply ideal cases for the presentation of my claims (there are no doubt many other works of art that could function just as well); they have served not so much as testing grounds for a freestanding theory but rather as the objects that caused me to undertake this labor of theory-building in the first place. They are works that got "under my skin" in such a way that they allowed me to grasp just what that expression really means, what *it* is, exactly, that lies beneath the skin and how it is that words and images can lodge themselves there. This is most emphatically the case with the work I discuss at greatest length, Rainer Maria Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, a novel I read for the first time more than thirty years ago and one to which I found myself returning again and again. At some level this entire project represents an effort to understand better just why Rilke's work has haunted me, why it has stuck with and to me for so long. Over the course of this project I have, I think, finally learned how to enjoy the enjoyment embedded in this particular "symptom."

My own history with *Malte* has not been without influence on the rest of the project. What I have come to realize is that my own use of historical figures, documents, and events in the construction of my argument (an argument that serves, in the end, to frame a reading of Rilke's novel) was to some degree reenacting Rilke's own idiosyncratic mode of engagement with history. Rilke tried to explain his "historical methodol-

ogy" in a letter to the Polish translator of his novel, Witold Hulewicz. In his response to Hulewicz's series of queries concerning various historical references and allusions in the novel, Rilke underlined the value such references had *for Malte* in the context of the protagonist's existential crisis and sense of psychic endangerment (Rilke speaks of the *Notzeit*, the time of distress, even emergency, of his protagonist). In the novel, Rilke writes, "There can be no question of specifying and detaching [*zu präzisieren und zu verselbstständigen*] the manifold evocations. The reader should not be in communication with their historical or imaginary reality, but through them with Malte's experience: who is himself involved with them only as, on the street, one might let a passer-by, might let a neighbor, say, impress one. The connection," Rilke continues, "lies in the circumstance that the particular characters conjured up *register the same vibration-rate of vital intensity* [*Schwingungszahl der Lebensintensität*] *that vibrates in Malte's own nature.*"¹⁰ What I have attempted to do in this study is also, in some sense, to bring together texts and figures that exhibit similar "frequencies" of vital intensity, with the aim, however, of clarifying just *what it is* that is vibrating, just *what sort of vital intensity* is at issue. This no doubt leads, in some instances, to a certain loss of specificity with regard to the more local historical settings of the texts and figures in question, and I apologize to the reader in advance for this sacrifice.

Another way I would characterize Rilke's method in *Malte* as well as my own mode of engagement with historical texts, figures, and events in this study would be in terms proposed by Walter Benjamin in his reflections on the "mimetic faculty" and the "doctrine of similarities."¹¹ For Benjamin, too, the task of reading, of the critical engagement with history and with cultural texts of any kind, involves the seizing of a moment in which a constellation of what he refers to as "nonsensuous similarities" comes into focus, or, to use Rilke's acoustic figure, a moment in which the frequencies of vital intensity dispersed across historical epochs become synchronized. For Benjamin, it is, in the end, language itself that provides what he refers to as "the most perfect archive of nonsensuous similarity."¹² Benjamin goes on to characterize language as "the highest application of the mimetic faculty—a medium into which the earlier perceptual capacity for recognizing the similar had, without residue, entered

10. Letter of November 10, 1925, in *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, 1910–1925*, trans. Jane Bannard Greene and M. D. Ilerter Norton (New York: Norton, 1972), 371; my emphasis.

11. Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar" and "On the Mimetic Faculty," both in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 1927–1934, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

12. Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," 697.

to such an extent that language now represents the medium in which objects encounter and come into relation with one another. No longer directly, as they once did in the mind of the augur or priest, but in their essences, *in their most transient and delicate substances.*"¹³ In the following I argue—or better, try to *demonstrate*—that what Benjamin has in mind here is that language provides the archive and resonance chamber for the vibrations and twitches of that most transient and delicate substance that I have been calling the flesh.¹⁴ The task of bringing off such a demonstration imposes its own forms of using and, perhaps, abusing history.

V

In concluding this preface, I will quickly summarize the core argument of the book and what I take to be its implications for understanding crucial aspects of modernity and modernism. *The Royal Remains* develops a kind of philosophical anthropology that locates what animates, deadens, and “undeakens” human life in the vicissitudes of the normative pressures that human beings take on by virtue of being subjects of symbolic systems. Because for human beings the enjoyment of life and goods is always intertwined with processes and procedures of symbolic entitlement or investiture, the very value of human life—what makes life worth living, what causes it to matter—is subject to enormous fluctuation. Sigmund Freud first elaborated the laws of such fluctuation by means of the concepts of libido and libidinal economy, suggesting, ultimately, that being a human subject just *is* to be subject to such fluctuations. *The Royal Remains* argues that Freud’s crucial insight needs to be placed within a larger history of the ways in which early modern and modern societies have attempted to organize, manage, and administer such fluctuations by means of the logic of sovereignty, according to which, to use Lacan’s (distinctly Hobbesian) formulation once more, a master “signifier” comes to represent the subject for all other signifiers, all other bearers of symbolic value.

13. *Ibid.*, 697–98; my emphasis. To put it in terms introduced into psychoanalytic theory and practice by Melanie Klein, we might say that all human projects are not only haunted by but also to some extent sustained by the persistence of archaic forms of projective identification that are now transmitted in and through language.

14. I think this is also what Benjamin had in mind when, in his essay on surrealism several years earlier, he spoke of the “innervations” that gather in the “body and image space” [*Leib und Bildraum*] of collectives, charging them with potentially revolutionary energy. Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” in *Selected Writings*, 2:217.

Because this logic of representation can never absolve itself of its own ultimate groundlessness—its lack of an anchoring point in the real—the normative pressures it generates for its members, the pressures to be recognized as *fit* and *fitting* for the symbolic system in question, are always in excess of what could ever be satisfied. Among the crucial tasks of the *figure* of the sovereign is to take up not the “slack” but rather this excess of pressure produced by the very logic of sovereignty. It is this excess that, I argue, constitutes the “flesh” of the king’s sublime body, that curious physiological entity that was the topic of Kantorowicz’s famous study of the political theology of medieval and early modern Europe, *The King’s Two Bodies*.¹⁵

In the following chapters I attempt to track the remainders of this figure in the symbolic space opened by the shift from royal to popular sovereignty. The project aims, in effect, to track the remainders of a figure who already served as the imaginary site of a remainder or surplus produced by the logic of sovereign representation. With this shift, however, a figure whose sacral soma was seen to embody a “vertical” link to a locus of transcendence—to divine authorization—comes to be dispersed “horizontally” among the “people,” who now come to be both blessed and plagued by a *surplus of immanence*. The new bearers of the principle of sovereignty are in some sense stuck with an excess of flesh that their own bodies cannot fully close in upon and that must be “managed” in new ways.

I try to elaborate this intuition by exploring three intersecting developments and domains associated with modernity. The first area of investigation concerns the emergence of biopolitics as the new site for the administration of what was previously concentrated and localized in the strange material presence of the king, one that precisely called forth the peculiar doctrine of the King’s Two Bodies. The second domain is made up of modernist aesthetic practices in the visual and literary arts that gather at the unstable boundaries between figuration and abstraction. The third large area of investigation concerns Freud’s own efforts to

15. In a personal communication, Kenneth Reinhard has suggested—and I think he is right—that the book’s argument could be fruitfully mapped onto the mutations of the concept of *will* in political and social thought. The story would take us from classical notions of sovereign will, to Rousseau’s concept of the general will, to Schopenhauer’s metaphysical understanding of will (in contrast to representation), to Nietzsche’s notion of will to power, and, finally, to the ways in which Foucault’s work assumes and transforms Nietzsche’s legacy in his own analyses of power. In my view, one would have to execute this remapping in light of the complexity introduced into the concept of the will by the psychoanalytic theory of desire, the drives, and sexual difference (recall Freud’s famous perplexity as to the question *Was will das Weib?*). The work done in this volume could thus be seen as the necessary groundwork for any attempt to tell the history of political thought in the West in light of shifts in the semantic field of the concept “will.”

invent a new science, one that attempts, precisely, to *separate out* the element of the flesh as the virtual yet unnervingly visceral substance of the fantasies that both constrain and amplify the lives of modern subjects. Psychoanalysis is thereby shown to offer the general concepts that allow us to grasp its own historicity, its place, that is, among the endgames of the political theology of sovereignty.¹⁶

16. Unless otherwise noted, translations cited in this volume are my own.

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