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INTRODUCTION

In *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 2011, Eric Santner continues the project he launched in his ground-breaking books, *My Own Private Germany* (1997), *The Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (2001), and *On Creaturely Life* (2006). Each of these books operates by conjoining psychoanalysis with social theory and religious thought, not by “scaling up” individual psychology as a model of mass formations, but rather by locating the social nucleus of psychoanalytic thinking and linking those insights to sea changes in the theological and juridical structures of the *ancien regime* as they pass into the life forms of liberalism, capitalism, secularism, and totalitarianism.

The Royal Remains charts the transition from personal to popular sovereignty, which is also the movement from the subject to the citizen. The King's Two Bodies is the doctrine of medieval and Renaissance monarchy that preserved the continuity, unity, and legitimacy of sovereignty via the mystical body of the King. With the traumatic decapitation of kingship itself in the English and French revolutions, sacral sovereignty migrated to the popular bodies of the new nation-state, composed of both “the People” as an incorporated national group (“body politic”) and the multitude that found itself increasingly disenfranchised and unrepresented in the mass displacements caused by industrial capitalism, racism, and world war. In this argument, *political theology* (sacral kingship and its founding metaphors) dies into *biopolitics* (the management of life as the administrative project of the modern state), but not without remainders that mutate and manifest in the border phenomena of modern politics as well as the dream work of literature and art. Unlike other confabulators of this transition, such as Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, Santner insists on a third interlocutor: psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis neighbors on political theology and biopower but differs from them in so far as it directly addresses itself to the excessive and ecstatic character of post-monarchic flesh as it makes its progress through the institutions, social scenes, somatic disturbances, and ways of desiring that characterize modernity.

The tendency against which Santner works most assiduously is the one that would associate the new surplus immanence of the flesh with a biological

substratum, a “bare life” that precedes its encounter with the order of signification. Thus according to Santner, Arendt discloses the features of the stateless person in the gap opened up between Man and Citizen in the French Revolution, but allows the phenomenon of statelessness to disappear too quickly into the ground of an undifferentiated life world. Similarly, Bataille and the art critics who follow him identify many of the features of the flesh left over by the passing of kings, but embrace a vitalism without lack. Finally, Deleuze “flattens” the creature into the animal in his account of meat in the paintings of Francis Bacon.

In this richly readerly book, works of art and literature provide both evidence and moments of enacted analysis that bring the fantasy of the royal remains into the artificial light of our biotechnocratic day. Using quotation to enact its own form of “immanent transcendence,” the book unfolds in a firm but gentle aggregative movement, section lapping up against section, cresting at points into moments of high argument. The result is a cumulative picture of the royal remains, composed out of what Santner calls “bits of the kingdom”: provocative passages culled from political theology and its literature. Santner’s readings gain their sense of differentiation and nuance precisely from this exegetical procedure: the problem of the flesh looks, feels, and smells a little different in Arendt, in Bataille, and in Esposito, leading Santner to reframe and rephrase his project from different angles that tease out new features of the royal remains in modernity. Francis Bacon leads us inevitably to meat; Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, on the other hand, brings us to milk. Whether the meat putrefies or the milk turns black, the table set by Santner invariably stimulates and provokes in the act of repelling.

Ranging across art, literature, and theory as well as modern and early modern periods, the varied character of the Santner corpus led us to convene this round table in order to give a range of younger scholars from several disciplines, including English studies, German studies, art history, and political science, an opportunity to read *The Royal Remains* from the location of their own projects. In the spirit of Santner, we have divided these responses into two bodies: the first body addresses the book’s fundamental concepts, and the second body tests the encounters between aesthetic and theoretical works staged by Santner with such distinctive energy and courage.

Political theology, biopolitics, psychoanalysis: our first group of respondents subject these three key terms to further analysis in relation to their own distinctive sets of concerns. Jennifer Rust, a scholar of early modern literature, addresses political theology in order to consider theological forms as social forms; she counters the monarchical figure of the king’s two bodies with the communal figure of the *corpus mysticum*. Nichole Miller, also working in Renaissance literature, develops the Pauline elements in political theology in order to consider their implications for gender and sexuality. Anna Kornbluh, an attentive reader of both psychoanalysis and Marxism, looks carefully at the

Foucault-Freud couple in Santner's work in order to assert the extent to which psychoanalysis is not fully reconcilable with biopower. She also asks after the status of enjoyment in a book that focuses on anxiety. Finally, Alex Schulman, a political scientist, takes up biopolitics in order to offer an alternative genealogy for the current state of encampment in the United States.

Our second group of responses tests the kinds of encounter between art and thought that distinguishes Santner's exegetical project from the work of theorists like Esposito or Agamben. Although tragedy, especially *Hamlet* and *Richard II*, rules the political-theological canon, Santner puts forward comedy as the genre that keeps in play "the surplus of immanence" plaguing the post-theological body. Erica Weitzman, a scholar of German literature, returns to Santner's readings of Kafka in order to further consider the structure of the comic in modernity. Mia McIver, working in English literature, chooses to stage a new conjunction, between political theology and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*. Like Jennifer Rust, McIver also takes up the figure of the physician as "the perplexed and ill-equipped heir to sovereign power" in the biopolitical state. Finally, Jennifer Nelson, an art historian, challenges Santner's largely mediated reading of the paintings of Francis Bacon in order to consider the figurative tradition in modernism and to argue for more direct engagement with the visuality of art. Like Weitzman, Nelson is also concerned with the status of humor in Santner's work. Arguing against both the avant gardism and the melancholia of Santner's artistic canon, Nelson suggests that we supplement the "doctrine of despondency" associated with avant garde art and its criticism with the often neglected tragicomedy of the figurative tradition in modern art.

This double corpus of responses demonstrates the breadth and originality of Santner's project, the quality and character of the questions his work raises, and the areas for further inquiry that his book opens up, some of which are adumbrated in Eric Santner's generous and thoughtful response to the round table collection. Replying to Jennifer Rust but also to Erica Weitzman, Eric turns our attention to Kantorowicz's understudied monograph on the *laudes regiae* (praises of the king) as a score that orchestrates the soundscapes of both early modern and contemporary biopolitical life. In response to Nichole Miller, Santner reasserts the Jewish as well as the proto-immunological character of the flesh in the Pauline tradition, and he turns to Arendt on natality in order to map her reckoning with the daemon revealed in the contingency of human action onto the appearance of the same figure in Franz Rosenzweig's account of the meta-ethical self. According to Santner, for both Arendt and Rosenzweig the daemon produces the self not as a socially constructed identity but as a "tear in the web of relations."

Responding to Anna Kornbluh, Santner also helpfully restates the relationship between psychoanalysis and its others, including biopolitics and political theology, in all of his work. Whereas Santner's project has always distinguished itself by insisting on submitting social theory to psychoanalytic accounting, his

thinking also proceeds by disclosing in psychoanalysis its affinities with more politically and historically oriented discourses — hence the couple Freud-Foucault that in many ways organizes the other conjunctions assembled in *The Royal Remains*, whether it is Kantorowicz with Arendt, or Francis Bacon (the painter) with Richard II (the player-king). The power for us of such conjunctions is the way in which they lead directly and without apology to genuine insights into the ways we live, and fail to live, now —and how we might live better. At once scholarly and poetic, historical and speculative, theoretical and applied, Santner is one of a very few critics able to handle deeply complex texts with a sense of remarkable lucidity and timeliness. This gift allows him to speak both to *the few* (other scholars invested in an interlocking set of theoretical texts and questions) and *the many* (a broad range of artists, art critics, poets, and intellectuals). By aiming at the real of fantasy as well as the openings cultivated by religion, Santner manages to practice criticism as a kind of therapy. We leave his books not only educated, but also just a little bit transformed.

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