

GESCHICHTEN UND FIGURATIONEN DER SÄKULARISIERUNG

Eric L. Santner (University of Chicago/ IFK Wien)

Schreber's Two Bodies: A Study in Modern Political Theology

When, some fifteen years ago, I wrote a small book about Daniel Paul Schreber, I suggested—all too casually—that the delusional system he elaborated in his famous memoirs (*Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*), a system 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 explored in extraordinary detail by Ernst Kantorowicz in his famous study on the subject. I also suggested that one ultimately needed to insert the “body of the psychoanalyst” within that same tradition, to discern in the agency, voice, and corporeal presence of this new kind of healer a countervailing remnant of that very tradition. In this lecture, I attempt to “flesh out” these intuitions apropos of the modern after-lives of the king’s body, of the ways in which *something of the royal remains* in the era of popular sovereignty. I argue, moreover, that one can only do so by way of a theory of “the flesh” as the sublime substance that the various rituals, legal and theological doctrines, literary and social fantasies surrounding the monarch’s singular physiology—the arcana that fill the pages of Kantorowicz’s now canonical study—originally attempted to shape and manage. The case of Daniel Paul Schreber serves as my point of departure for this investigation into the peculiar persistence of political theology into the ostensibly disenchanted realms of secular societies.