

**Introduction:****Political Theology and the Question of the Border**

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The journal *Konturen* opens with a special issue on “Political Theology: the Border in Question.” It does so not only because the challenge to the border between politics and religion in our historical moment is a globally pressing concern, nor merely because the academic polemics that treat this challenge in terms of the question of political theology in the works of Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben and others are currently intensely lively, interesting, and unresolved.<sup>1</sup> Nor is the line between politics and religion just one interesting theoretical and historical frontier among others. Beyond all of these reasons, we open with this topic because the political-theological division is the border whose modern determination has arguably led us by a—not necessarily “progressive”—dialectical movement to the problem of the border or limit in general as it presents itself today. The problem of the political-religious or political-theological border today is of a piece with the problem of the border, limit, threshold, or determining framework as such. And this is not only because we tend to manage our problems with the lack or excessive presence of limits in other domains—ethical, aesthetic, epistemological, ontological, physical, cultural, and so on—either by recourse to politicized religion (or theological politics), or by the opposite course, i.e. the attempt to depoliticize religion (or detheologize politics). More important in both historical and structural terms is the converse: an irresolution within the political-religious border, as it is established in modernity, leads to a crisis of borders or limits in general, an uncertainty about their presence or absence. This crisis can be felt today all the way from the never-ending Middle East conflict and the Iraq War to the mediatic and political discussions about public religion within the US to the academic discussions about method in the humanities over the past half century or so, including discussions that may have seemed to have little to do with the political-theological problematic. After sketching the origins and structure of the crisis and showing how it manifests itself in recent method-debates, I will introduce the essays in this special issue, suggesting how they relate to the framework I have first established.

**From the Absolute to the Relative (as Absolute)**

While no historical origin is pure and without preceding anticipations, the current difficulty—by which I mean the crisis of limits as a crisis of Western liberal modernity—can be said to begin with the division of the Christian Church in the Reformation, which constitutes a disruption of sovereignty, in the medieval sense of sovereignty as the unity of political and religious leadership, where religion is taken to hold sway over the political, i.e. an asymmetrical unity whereby each state is authorized by the one Church. The Reformation settles into a relatively stable religiopolitical arrangement only with the end of the Thirty Years War, i.e. with the Treaty of Westphalia, whose determining principle, *cuius regio, eius religio*, subordinates Church to State. This reversal of the Church-State hierarchy puts an end to religious warfare in Europe by providing the stability of State-determined Churches. Further, it seems to reinstate sovereignty securely in the form of absolutism. Yet the mere fact of the subordination of religion to political decision, in conjunction with the internal multiplication of Christianity, creates a rift within the sovereign unity of the divine monarch, because it renders questionable the absoluteness of a transcendent term dependent on an earthly ruler's potentially capricious or arbitrary faith.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, it appears as if the most important aspect of Walter Benjamin's study of the Baroque mourning-play is his decision to push modernity back from liberal Enlightenment into the absolutist aftermath of the Reformation, and to examine the unsettlement of sovereignty in this pre-Enlightenment context, the double appearance of sovereign as tyrant and martyr.<sup>3</sup>

Due in part to the discontinuity introduced between political and religious sovereignty by the post-1648 arrangement, the religious intolerance practiced by absolutist states appears increasingly in the eighteenth century as precisely that, "intolerance," leading to the formulation of the Enlightenment ideal of *separation* of Church and State as private and public value spheres.<sup>4</sup> Each individual is to become autonomous or "sovereign" now in the sense of having a right to determine his or her own faith-commitments (and ethical and aesthetic principles), but at the cost of making religion a private, individual matter. The privatization of religion, however, entails its relativization. What had hitherto appeared to be the most objective values—absolute values—are now subjective. What was once absolute is now relative.

Yet a relativized, privatized, and subjectivized absolute remains, despite its particularity, a kind of absolute. After all, everyone has a right to their own opinion (sic)! That is, subjectivity

itself takes on, by a dialectical turn, the status of the absolute that was aligned with objectivity. Goethe's Werther knew this well, and so does every modern ego, all the way up (or down) to Bush-style unilateralism, the "what I say goes" mentality of the gut feeling as absolute foundation. But as the subjective or subjectivist absolute—the absolute of privatization—is still aware of its merely relative status, it has to disavow this awareness in order to maintain its residual sense of its own absoluteness. This disavowal tends to go by way of aggressive self-assertion and self-insistence, the religion of bravado. Which leads to the re-politicization of hitherto privatized religion, its insistence on its right to an objective existence in the world. (If you were only in touch with your feelings you'd know what I mean—and you'd see that I'm right!)

### **Limitless Limitation**

What, then, is the precise relationship between the question of borders, limits in general, and this repoliticization of privatized religion that always completes the movement of the privatization itself? On the one hand, with the separation of church and state, which entails the death of God or the loss of the sovereign Other (as the secularization of the state leads to a more general secularization of experience), the human finds itself abandoned to its radical finitude. One is confronted with limits everywhere, the limits of one's beliefs, knowledge, capacities, body, and of one's life itself in the face of a death without recourse. To this degree, it should not be surprising that the demand for freedom and the claim to the public legitimacy of religion so often go hand in hand in our own age, even though this conjunction shocks our Enlightenment consciousness, which associates freedom with secularization.

On the other hand, to the degree that one is able to dictate one's own beliefs, one finds oneself absolutely unlimited—a "prosthetic god," as Freud put it, but a god nonetheless. Everything is permitted, nothing absolutely forbidden.<sup>5</sup> But the limitlessness here is not just ethical. For not only is my opinion sacrosanct, but my potential knowledge is endless, as is my power (and its enjoyment), as enabled by technology. Hence, my limitlessness is epistemological and aestheticopolitical, as well. In sum, the modern subject is at once endlessly limited and entirely unlimited. The limits that are *everywhere* are at the same time *nowhere*: one is lost in a void of indeterminate constraints, and at the same time one finds oneself free as a body is free for endless heteronomy.<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault formulates the situation strikingly in his essay on

Georges Bataille, although without emphasizing that it results from the separation of church and state, the attempt to heal the rift within each that becomes manifest through the Reformation and its aftermath:

By denying us the limit of the Limitless, the death of God leads to an experience in which nothing may again announce the exteriority of being, and consequently to an experience that is *interior* and *sovereign*. But such an experience, for which the death of God is an explosive reality, discloses as its own secret and clarification, its intrinsic finitude, the *limitless reign of the Limit*, and the emptiness of those excesses in which it spends itself and where it is found wanting. In this sense, the inner experience is throughout an experience of the impossible.<sup>7</sup>

If the idea of God provided us with a limit that was also a doorway into our own unlimitedness (“the limit of the Limitless” as objective genitive), i.e. our totalized infinity, then the death of God leaves us with nothing but an infinite series of doorways, each one placing us before another door, none of which we are required to pass through. The establishment of a border between religion and politics, then, leads to a paradoxical situation at once radically borderless and comprised entirely of borders, a situation in which borders seem to transgress themselves and maintain themselves everywhere at once.<sup>8</sup>

The current push to break down the religiopolitical border, and to reestablish a political theology of the sovereign—as a politically directed religion and/or as a religiously directed politics—should be seen as an attempt to undo this situation. But this impulse to break down the religiopolitical border itself belongs as a consequence to the very construction of the border between religion and politics that constitutes liberal modernity. The Enlightenment project—which undertakes on the one hand the privatization of the absolute as a personal and so only *relatively* valuable choice, and on the other hand its depersonalization as public reason—nonetheless gives rise in a second dialectical step to the demand to see one’s own specific interiority realized in the external world. (Expressionism was one earlier form of this demand, a form Benjamin saw as rooted already in the Baroque, which in this sense anticipates Enlightenment developments.<sup>9</sup>) The privatized ego demands its un-limitation, the absolutization of its personal choices and feelings—“the personal is the political,” we say, incontrovertibly—from at least the *Sturm und Drang* or Counter-Enlightenment forward.

The contradictory situation of the modern subject, then, insisting on the repoliticization of private religion as a paradoxical consequence of the separation of church and state, is aptly characterized by Foucault here, following Bataille, as “impossible.”<sup>10</sup> It leaves the subject absolutely disoriented or distracted (even if expanded or inflated into the void of absolute values) and at the same time radically fixed in place, self-identical to the point of tautological paralysis. Not surprisingly, the two most mediatically bemoaned mental disorders of our day appear to be attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism, limitless distraction and absolutely self-limiting self-absorption, registered by an individualistic psychology as pathologies of the sole subject.

But Foucault’s formulation of this infinite finitude as “impossible” is further suggestive in its specifically ontological-modal dimension. If, as Agamben asserts, the state of exception is one in which law and fact become undecidable, possibility and reality indistinct, then perhaps this “limitless reign of the Limit” would comprise such a state of exception (where sovereignty and its absence coincide), or even its core. The infinite *possibility* of limitlessness here coincides with the infinite *reality* of the limit itself, the brute factuality of the self-identical, which is (onto)logically “impossible.” Because such a limitless limitation partakes at once entirely of reality and entirely of possibility, there can be no question of reducing its analysis to a strictly historical or a strictly theoretical sphere or method. The political theological problematic thus leads us to a reconsideration of the methodological manifestations of the problem of the border to which it gives rise. Moreover, since the methodological influences on the contributions to this special issue range from Lacanian psychoanalysis to Frankfurt School social theory to Levinasian ethics to new history and postcolonial cultural and gender studies—since therefore they cover a range of tendencies from the more “theoretical” to the more “historical”—before introducing the individual contributions themselves it will be useful to discuss how recent method-debates relate to the political-theological question. More specifically, I will show, in the case of the humanities-debate around “new historicism” which gave rise to “cultural studies” (still the dominant humanities research paradigm today), that the way in which the question of borders presents itself today is understandable in terms of the history of secularization as a question of the proper balance between politics and religion, or state and church. One consequence will be that the methodology question cannot decisively

solve or determine the political theological question, because it is another version of that question itself.

### **Cultural Studies Between the Church of Theory and the State of History**

To be sure, the method debates of the seventies through the nineties played themselves out in a state of near-oblivion with respect to the theme of the political-theological border, always in the relatively untroubled terms of a liberal modernity. The two main recent nonliberal points of reference for this debate were fascism and communism, as the two large movements of the last century that attempted to overcome the private-public split, and in conjunction with that, the religiopolitical split. But these points of reference were rarely brought into connection with the question of the separation of church and state by those who considered themselves unproblematically secular intellectuals. Nonetheless, these debates were played out in terms that, in retrospect, appear to belong to the problematic of the relationship between church and state. The current debate on political theology (in Agamben, Žižek, Badiou, de Vries, etc.) prolongs what was already at stake in the earlier debates and puts them in a new light, the twilight of a modernity whose future and past have become uncertain in new ways in the face of politicized religion in the global “marketplace” of ideas and practices, beyond the limits of the West as well as within those limits.<sup>11</sup> How is this the case?

The position of new historicism, and then cultural studies, between history and theory arises as an attempt, on the part of humanities (and some social science) work, to do justice to the situation of the modern subject, which I am characterizing here as the subject of limitless limitation. The method discussion turns around an opposition between history and theory (or in displacements that remain analogous: history and philosophy, or politics and aesthetics) that tends to be schematized in terms of that between limitation and limitlessness, as follows.<sup>12</sup> Historicisms try to describe a *reality* that is at any moment comprised of a set of determinable *limits*, structures of institutions, conventions, and so on, within which people live.<sup>13</sup> The past presents itself as reality from which possibility has been removed. It has no choice now, so to speak, to be other than it is, or rather was. Hence, it is the realm of the self-identical, the self-same, however complex the description of this identity may be. Historicism in this sense is secular or godless. In contrast, theoreticisms, or “high theory,” stand most commonly in recent discussion for a kind of felt *limitlessness*. They are thought to move in the realm of the *possible*,

the thinkable, and this is regarded (implicitly or explicitly) as either a flaw—irresponsibility, denial—or a strength—imagining what could be, critically reflecting upon the conditions of meaning, and so on. Theory defines the space of difference, because it multiplies what exists by its manifold potential significations and so on. When textuality is emphasized as an equivalent to “theory,” which frequently occurs from the 70s to today, this emphasis implies a self-deferral and proliferation of signification through which the same becomes different from itself, remaining always unstable and marked by its own virtuality. Since signification is deferred and referential reality placed in brackets for the time of reflection, theory appears to allow, like a private religion, for a space in which the subject can reign supreme in its own convictions. The determinacy of history thus faces the indeterminacy of theory, the former answering to our experience of limits, while the latter answers to our sense of limitlessness, freedom, the capacity to posit absolutely or to posit our own absolutes in a speculative void (which some celebrate, while others bemoan its referential emptiness).

What complicates this opposition and reverses its polarities, however, is that historicism cannot avoid a certain denial of the *relativity* of our positions because it seeks in one way or another a factual *absolute*, the universal and absolutely valid rationality of a determined reality in the past. (In this sense, historicism is always haunted by Hegel.) Symmetrically, theory tendentially denies its *absoluteness*, i.e. it acknowledges arbitrariness, at least in the (post)structuralist forms most relevant here, even if in the hopes of mastering it, by granting the *relativity* of a view of things to a paradigm, frame of reference, or language that is always subject to further discussion as to its possible universality. The privatized religion of theory is not simply opposed to, and separated from, the public and secular state of history. Rather—simultaneously—history aspires zealously to supplant or supplement religion in turn, insisting on an infinite freedom to know, in the telos of its striving to give an account of the past; and theory acknowledges limitation everywhere, for example as the conditions of the possibility of experience, as the conceptual constituents of Western metaphysics, or as language itself. Theory tends to question any possible knowledge of the thing itself, or the Real, whereas history pursues that thing as if it could become an object of knowledge (even when a given historical discourse explicitly grants that this is not possible in any finite account).

Cultural studies, the currently dominant paradigm of the humanities, which arose out of the new historicism of the 1980s, is situated at the meeting point of these two binary extremes,

and at the crossing point of their reversals into one another. New historicism arose as a return to history in the attempt to correct what were regarded as the excesses of deconstruction and other (post)structuralist formalisms then in vogue. New historicism attempted to renew an insistence on the historicity of cultural artifacts while retaining the post-structuralist insight that history is always a “text,” thus combining history with theory. Yet it was often contested from one of two sides for so doing (and with some justification on both counts, but only because of the reversibility of the polarities of limitation and unlimitation in association with history and theory). As viewed by its critics, new historicism was sometimes too historicist—leaving no room for the subject, i.e. for the absolute value of relative value-positions—and sometimes too theoretician/poststructuralist—and so irresponsibly ignoring the fixed realities of history, whether as class struggle, or as Foucaultian “discourses,” or as coherent structures that went beyond the “anecdotal,” etc.<sup>14</sup> And this double uncertainty continues to trouble cultural studies, for example in its postcolonial manifestations, as the question of whether the “postcolonial” is a historical or a theoretical concept, and whether its pursuit is sufficiently “secular,” and so on.<sup>15</sup> Method finds itself undecidably caught between the embrace of a godless secularism and the public self-assertion of an essentially private religion or conviction.

Methodological debates and disciplinary tensions, then, have prolonged, or served as extensions of, an ongoing debate about the proper interrelations between, and proper relative priorities of, politics and religion, public and private, state and church, within a “secularized” modernity. This is because these method-debates try to define the relationship between the relativity and the absoluteness of human values. In turn, the recent re-emergence of the religiopolitical question prolongs or extends in different (and in some ways more traditional) terms the methodological-disciplinary debates. As Western modernity encounters what may be its limits, in the increasing confrontation and communication of the West with non-Western cultures as a consequence of the process of technical and economic globalization, the terms of its methodological debates are being understandably retranslated into the early modern equivalents out of which these methodological debates slowly arose. For their rise was accompanied by a forgetting or repression of their political-theological roots, in connection with what may have been a certain overconfidence about the progress of rationalization, as thinkers as widely divergent as Adorno and Horkheimer, Foucault, and Derrida, for example, are still helping us to see today.



On the basis of this reconstruction of the political-theological overdeterminations of contemporary method-debates, we can see that the “high-theory” vs. “history” opposition is as unmanageable as it is difficult to avoid. In this first special issue of *Konturen* we *therefore* (and also *nonetheless*) divide the contributions into “theory” and “history.” Our purpose in so doing is *both* to indicate how the essays will superficially tend to appear and be categorized, *and* to ironize the categories that create this appearance, categories which recapitulate the problematic ones of “theology” and “politics,” or “knowledge” and “power,” with which “theory” and “history” are commonly implicitly associated.

### **The Contributions—Between Theory and History**

In the “theoretical” section, we include three essays that critically question Carl Schmitt’s antimodern theory of modernity from diverse perspectives.

Tracy McNulty’s essay on “The Gap in the Law and the Border-Breaching Function of the Exception” examines Schmitt’s theory of the “exception” in terms of the genealogical and conceptual affinities its logic shares with Paul’s theory of the “fulfillment of the law.” McNulty then develops the contrast between the logic invoked by Schmitt’s and Paul’s figurations of the ontological border, on the one hand, and the very different theory of the border as Symbolic law elaborated by Jacques Lacan, on the other hand. She shows the latter to have close textual and conceptual connections with the Hebraic notion of the law. From a Lacanian point of view, Pauline fulfillment and Schmittian sovereignty occur on the register of the Imaginary. Whereas the Symbolic law introduces a gap between the subject and the Real, the Imaginary one attempts to fill this gap, so as to establish a seamless mediation between the subject and its own immediate and excessive experience. Arguing that a Symbolic concept of the law importantly tends toward the interruption of violence, McNulty proposes that we elaborate a theory of the act of the signifier as commandment rather than affirm, as does Schmitt, the overcoming (and “founding”) of the law in an explosive and annihilating act qua violent upsurge of the Real. In terms of the Foucaultian distinction mentioned above between “the limit of the Limitless” and the “limitless reign of the Limit,” Schmitt’s Imaginary figure of the sovereign exception aims to restore the former, whereas Lacan’s Symbolic law would entail an affirmation of the latter condition.

The second “theoretical” contribution is Peter Hohendahl’s essay, “Political Theology Revisited: Carl Schmitt’s Postwar Reassessment.” Hohendahl differentiates and concretizes further our understanding of Schmitt’s relationship to the Christian theological tradition, which turns out to draw upon a complex combination of Catholic, Calvinist, and Gnostic elements. Hohendahl thus details the theological grounds of Schmitt’s theory of modernity, whose most condensed expression is contained in his famous claim that all modern political categories are secularized theological ones. Hohendahl’s examination proceeds by way of a detailed analysis of the later writings, especially *Politische Theologie II*, Schmitt’s self-defense against two critics, Erik Peterson and Hans Blumenberg, who wanted to hold apart sacred and secular. Hohendahl usefully reconstructs the discussion (from Karl Löwith to Hans Blumenberg) about the discontinuity or continuity of modernity with premodernity, showing that the debate between Blumenberg and Schmitt ultimately turns around the question of whether theological terms within modern political discourse are to be taken merely metaphorically (Blumenberg’s claim) or literally (Schmitt). The question of rhetoric emerges as of some importance, then, within the larger question at stake here: the philosophy of history, or the necessity of some decision about whether revelation is a manifestation of history, or the converse, history a mere manifestation of revelation. What neither Blumenberg nor Schmitt seems to consider is the possibility that an undecidability of literal and figural might require us to maintain both a continuity and a discontinuity between premodern and modern epochs. At any rate, by consciously bringing the focus of the Schmitt debates back to the question of the possibility of sharing Schmitt’s faith commitments and their entailed philosophy of history, and by retracing in outline the complexities of these faith commitments (as well as the political engagements they guided or accompanied), Hohendahl questions the adequacy of any discussion of Schmitt that would treat him as a purely rational or secularly scientific political thinker. The ideological character of Schmitt’s faith commitments confronts in Hohendahl the modern refusal to take (ultimately private or merely rhetorical-performative) assertions of a personalistic faith to function as legitimate bases for argument about the direction of the society within a public arena of individual subjects striving for a common rationality, i.e. a commonly agreed upon set of rules, norms, and laws.

The third “theoretical” essay here, Leonard Feldman’s “Schmitt, Locke, and the Limits of Liberalism” approaches Schmitt in terms of contemporary theoretical debates in political

science. Feldman questions some of the main conceptual bases of Schmitt's political theory by interrogating his hasty dismissal of Locke as an "exemplar of liberal legalism" (Feldman). Whereas Hohendahl exposed the details of Schmitt's antimodern faith, Feldman probes Schmitt's account of liberalism by enabling early modern liberal theory to answer, so to speak, on its own behalf. Feldman argues that Locke provides a more subtle and positive theory of sovereignty than does Schmitt himself. It is specifically Locke's theory of "prerogative power"—which Schmitt never treats in detail—that Feldman mobilizes to indicate the inadequacies of Schmitt's reductively binary approach to the theory of sovereignty. As Feldman argues, prerogative power escapes both the binary opposition between commissarial and sovereign dictatorship and that between legislative and executive power. Concerning the latter, whereas Schmitt collapses the people into the instance of sovereignty and regards them in Imaginary terms, as a single identified will, Locke establishes the people as an instance of judgment mediating between the executive and the legislative instances. The natural-law basis of the people's opposition to tyranny provides, finally, a theological point of reference that contrasts starkly, on Feldman's account, with Schmitt's recourse to the miracle as model for sovereign decision.

To turn now to the "historical" contributions to this special issue: we include two essays on the Baroque prelude to Enlightenment modernity and two on the postmodern/postcolonial moment where liberal modernity seems to find itself placed in question. The first two of these four essays deal with the theological-political dimension of the Baroque both in the cultural artifacts and production processes of the musical and visual arts, and in their socio-political settings.

The essay by David Yearsley, "Princes of Peace and War and their Most Humble, Most Obedient Court Composer," reads the religious politics of music in Bach, more specifically arguing "Bach's Christmas music is the music of absolutism par excellence." Yearsley shows how Bach attempts, following Luther's example, to neutralize the politically subversive implications of Christmas, where "kings kneel before a helpless baby; the powerful pay tribute to the seemingly powerless." Indeed, Yearsley suggests one could see the miracle of Christmas as a kind of "permanent state of exception, which ushered in individual control over belief and thus presented a fundamental challenge not only to theology but to the social order itself." (One might add that, individual control over belief constituting an essential component of the

modern condition, modernity itself could appear as a state of emergency when seen from the standpoint of an investment in absolutist sovereignty.) In Bach's case, Yearsley traces two complementary movements with unusually acute attention to the dialectical contradictions they involve. On the one hand, Bach reuses secular music, originally composed for the glorification of earthly rulers' splendor and power, for the sake of glorifying Christ in opposition to earthly values. On the other hand, he uses sacred music for celebrations of the princely power with which he means to ingratiate himself. Both of these transfers, however, are much more fraught with internal tension than is generally noted. Political and religious sovereignty are unified in this apotheosis of the Baroque, but anything but seamlessly, in that the glorification of the powerless always threatens to contest the power of the glorified, thus requiring an ever more powerful glorification, a new exacerbation of the contradiction.

The next essay, Steven Shankman's "Eruptions of the Ethical Baroque," shows the flip side of this suppression of the self-subversive potential of Baroque absolutism. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas's ethical thought and Walter Benjamin's theory of the Baroque mourning play as eschewing eschatological fulfillment, Shankman demonstrates that an ethical moment disrupts the political religion of the Baroque—the attempt to rearticulate a sovereign political-theological totality—in several works of the period, reversing the friend-enemy opposition on which Schmitt founded the political. In Monteverdi's *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (a setting of stanzas from Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*), the Christian designation of the Muslim as enemy gives way to a recognition of the humanity of the Muslim Other and of the subject's responsibility for that Other. Similarly, Shankman finds in Rembrandt's painting of the *Sacrifice of Isaac* an interruption of the violence of being in the face of Isaac as the face of the Other. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and François Couperin's *Leçons de ténèbres*, as reread in Paul Celan's poem, "Tenebrae," provide Shankman with his remaining illustrations of the way in which an ethical moment can emerge in Baroque art to question the absolutist context in which such art nonetheless remained, in many ways, inscribed.

The final two main essays of this special issue examine the "post-modern" and "post-colonial" situation that is our own. Ülker Gökberk's text, "Beyond Secularism: Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* and the Contestation of 'Turkish Identity' in the Borderland," examines the contemporary Turkish-German relationship—and more broadly the East-West, Islamic-Christian, and premodern-modern relationships—primarily through a close-reading of an internationally

prominent work of contemporary Turkish literature, Orhan Pamuk's novel, *Snow*. Through a detailed reading of the novel in context, she shows Pamuk's novel to present a dizzyingly multidimensional vision of the dissolution of clarity about the secular-sacred split in contemporary Turkey. Pamuk exposes the dialectics of tradition and modernity in their often-bewildering complexities and reversals. In particular, Gökberk shows how the headscarf—which until the recent past functioned to mark the difference between traditional and modern, rural and urban—now contributes to the blurring of these oppositions. The instability of liberal modernity appears in tangible detail in Gökberk's analysis of Pamuk's novel, even as the necessary persistence of the attempt to make sense out of our experience in modern terms remains.

Claudia Breger addresses in terms of postcolonial and gender studies recent German responses to the Turkish-German cultural presence in "Religious Turns: Immigration, Islam, and Christianity in 21<sup>st</sup> Century German Cultural Politics." The essay focuses largely on the recent (and ongoing) German headscarf controversy as an example of the anti-Islamist discursive practices that emerged after 9/11. Breger shows how Christianity functions still or again—in mediatic, literary, and academic discussions, as well as in the legislative environment—in contemporary Germany as a publicly sanctioned religious culture of sorts. Taking a critical view of this functioning, and defending the broader tradition of secular liberal modernity, Breger takes her distance also from the notion that we live in a 'post-secular' age. Finally, Breger compares and contrasts the German debates usefully with the rather different context of French laicism.

In these last two essays, then, we confront the partial dissolution or the potential voiding of the barrier between modern and premodern, and also of the border between East and West, in the postmodern, postcolonial, and "globalizing" moment. Simultaneously, we confront various defenses of these lines of division, whether in the conservative German legislative defenses of Western Christianity as a German cultural foundation, or—on the other end of the political spectrum (and of course the difference counts)—in the progressivist defense of the project of modernity in the work of Breger. As these essays show, the modern West encounters its other simultaneously from without and from within, in encountering the Muslim edge of Europe in Turkey and in encountering the pre-modern Christian edge of modern, secular Europe at its legislative and ideological centers. The religious reassertion or

the repoliticization of religion that is inscribed as a potentiality in the modern separation of religion from politics, as private from public, discovers a variant of itself in the politicization of non-“Western” religions as a mode of resistance to, or rejection of, Western hegemony. For these non-“Western” religions are rejecting the *same* relativization of the “subjective”—at the hands of secular and universalizing rationality—as the “Western” fundamentalisms (whether as Christian or Jewish politicizations). In each case, an intolerable simultaneous lack and ubiquity of limits occurs. Perhaps, then, it is this lack and ubiquity of limits that must become the object of a new, unheard of mode of toleration?

The special issue closes with Julia R. Lupton’s review-essay of Hannah Arendt’s *Jewish Writings*. The review-essay provides an elegant brief overview of the achievements and limitations of Arendt’s wrestlings with the question of Jewish identity in the modern world. The main limitation Lupton notes is Arendt’s failure to develop any significant conceptual appreciation of the “covenantal foundations” of the Jewish people, and this for two reasons: Arendt takes “human action, not law,” to be “the essence of politics”; and the particularist and orthodox connotations of the covenantal are at odds with her universalist rationalism. This suggestion that law, rather than action, could be taken as crucial to politics connects significantly both with McNulty’s critical reading of Schmittian sovereignty as based on act rather than law, and also with Shankman’s Levinasian reading of the ethical interruption of the Baroque. Given Schmitt’s hostility to law and legalism—as the *Kronjurist* of the Nazi regime, he donated his services (by an apparent paradox) to a regime that was (legalistically) anti-legalistic in the extreme—it is perhaps not inappropriate that this special issue on “Political Theology: the Border in Question” should end with a note on the potential social value of legislative speech-acts.

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<sup>1</sup> For an important overview of these debates, see Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, eds. *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham UP, 2006). For recent essays on Giorgio Agamben’s redeployment of the political theology of Carl Schmitt, see Andrew Norris, *Politics, Metaphysics, and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben’s Homo Sacer* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*, ed. David Martyn (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2001), 32-5.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I,1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Scheppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 242ff. For an incisive reading of Benjamin’s displacement of Carl Schmitt’s notion of sovereignty in the *Trauerspiel* book, see Samuel Weber, “Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt,” *Diacritics* 22.3-4 (Autumn-Winter 1992): 5-18.

<sup>4</sup> For contemporary philosophical interpretations of the tradition of Enlightenment “tolerance,” see Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> This is the situation Giorgio Agamben sees realized in the concentration camps qua state of exception become the rule (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen [Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998], 170), but from the point of view I am developing, the camps would appear to be attempts to realize the unlimited and immediate character of modern subjectivity for the German race while sacrificing above all the Jews (but also the gypsies, homosexuals, communists, and other figures of mediation and representation) to rid itself symbolically of the radical limitation and mediation that is the other ineluctable aspect of modernity.

<sup>6</sup> The plight of K in Kafka’s *Trial* can be seen as illustrating this situation, as his arrest, the subjection to extreme limitation, nonetheless leaves him suspended in a void without limiting orientation. Cf. Giorgio Agamben’s different reading of the Kafkan view of law, and his critique of the readings given by Scholem and Derrida, in *Homo Sacer*, 49-62, and my critique of Agamben’s reading in “From the Sacrifice of the Letter to the Voice of Testimony: Giorgio Agamben’s Fulfillment of Metaphysics,” *Diacritics* 37.2-3: 11-33.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin’s portrait of the sovereign as tyrant-martyr double in the *Trauerspiel* book anticipates this condition, for example where Caesar loses himself in the *jouissance* of power: “er fällt als Opfer eines Mißverhältnisses der unbeschränkten hierarchischen Würde, mit welcher Gott ihn investiert, zum Stande seines armen Menschenwesens” (250).

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 234-7. The riven tension between a “Kunstwollen”—a will to art—and an “Ausfall geltender Produkte in dem Schrifttum”—absence of objectively valid products of writing—corresponds to the incompatibility between an inner absolute and an absent objective absolute I have been describing with reference to Foucault’s summary of Bataille’s universe.

<sup>10</sup> Bataille himself traces the historical development of this situation from the Reformation onward in *The Accursed Share*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. I, part 4 (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 113-42, as part of the derivation of his interesting theory of sovereignty as self-abandonment, which contrasts radically with that of Carl Schmitt.

<sup>11</sup> See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: the Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 2000) for a judicious overview of the forms of religious violence recently asserting themselves globally.

<sup>12</sup> For a useful reminder of the terms of the debate around the inception of new historicism, see H. Aram Veenser, ed., *The New Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> Hayden White writes in “New Historicism: A Comment” (in *The New Historicism*): “Historical events, whatever else they may be, are events which really happened or are believed really to have happened. . .” (297). Edward Said’s emphasis on the worldliness of texts and on the necessity of a historical approach also confirms this (obvious) point, for example when he writes that the “realities of power and authority. . . are the realities that make texts possible. . . I propose that these realities are what should be taken account of by criticism and the critical consciousness” (“Secular Criticism” in *The Edward Said Reader*, ed. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin (New York: Vintage, 2000), 223).

<sup>14</sup> Frank Lentricchia’s polemic in “Foucault’s Legacy: A New Historicism?” (*The New Historicism*, 231-42) argues that new historicism is too deterministic, because it adopts the Foucaultian hypostasis of power, and thus fails to take the subject into account. It is all reality and no possibility, so to speak. Lentricchia’s essay is thus one example of the “too historicist” accusation. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese’s essay in the same collection, “Literary Criticism and the Politics of the New Historicism” (213-24) argues against the poststructuralist textualism of the new historicism, providing an example of the “not historicist enough” accusation. Whereas Lentricchia sees new historicism as overemphasizing the structured character of the world of power, Fox-Genovese sees it as underemphasizing that character in favor of a textual model that effaces boundaries by derealizing them and seeing them as shifting. The essays by Vincent Pecora, and Jane Marcus in the same collection take a similar position.

<sup>15</sup> The tension appears in the difference, for example, between Homi Bhabha’s attempt to reconcile poststructuralist theory with postcolonialist historicism, on the one hand, and Edward Said’s more resolutely anti-poststructuralist model for postcolonial cultural studies.