Managing the Unmanageable: Agamben’s

_The Kingdom and the Glory_ and the

Dance of Political Economy

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**Abstract**

While _The Kingdom and the Glory_ addresses the specifically economic dimension of modern biopolitical forms of governmentality, it goes even farther than earlier volumes of _Homo Sacer_ in obscuring the specific dynamic of modern capitalism. Rather than simply challenging Giorgio Agamben’s conclusions from an external perspective, the following paper proposes an immanent, “deconstructive” critique, showing that Agamben’s neglect of the problem of “economic value,” and of its close filiation to the circular movement of glory, is intimately related to his attempt, through the signature, to effectively neutralize the Derridean play of the signifier. While Agamben introduces the signature alongside the example as a second, economic-theological rather than political-theological paradigm for understanding paradigmicity as such, he seeks to stabilize the relation between the two. Contesting such stabilization, this paper develops a logic of suplementarity, positing the impossibility of keeping the “play of the signature” from disrupting the ideality of semantic value. Special attention will be given to Agamben’s tendency, neglecting the relation between _oikonomia_ and dance, to identify the “acclamatory” aspect of glory with song alone. Thus he seeks to understand the economy as ordering into unison, rather than as a more complex, differential relation of singularities. This goes hand in hand with the failure to address the graphic, chrematistic dimension of modern capitalism. But it is ultimately when, turning to Hölderlin, he stresses the “national” essence of poetry, that the full consequences of his suppression of dance emerge. Attending to the role of dance in Hölderlin will nevertheless suggest another way to think the glorious economy.

**Keywords**

Derrida, Agamben, Hölderlin, dance, economy
Introduction: That Dangerous Surplement

Given Giorgio Agamben’s Faustian ambition to draw together so many disparate discursive threads into a theoretical coincidence of opposites, it is not surprising that his critics pay so much attention to those things of which he does not speak. For readers of the first volumes of the still-unfinished *Homo Sacer* project, one lacuna is especially striking: Agamben has almost nothing to say about capitalism and its appurtenances—exchange-value, the commodity form, global flows of capital, colonial exploitation, factory discipline, consumer society—as modern forms of biopolitics. *The Kingdom and the Glory*, published in Italian in 2007 and in English translation in 2011, could be seen to respond to such criticisms, playing a role in Agamben’s *oeuvre* somewhat analogous to *Specters of Marx* in Jacques Derrida’s. Providing a richer and more complex genealogy of modern biopolitics, Agamben shows that economy, both as a theoretical construct and as the locus of governmental praxis, has a theological provenance. If the economy seems to have emerged as an autonomous or indeed hegemonic sphere, even undermining the integrity of the traditional nation-state, the very concept of the independence of the economy as a matrix of self-organizing, fully immanent causality must itself be situated within a Patristic theological discourse that seeks to conceive of the trinity in terms of a divine *oikonomia*. Through a careful exposition of early Christian theology, Agamben demonstrates that modern economic thought, rather than marking a decisive break with the past, involves a secularization of the Christian concept of the Trinitarian “divine economy.” This culminates in a breathtaking analysis of modern liberalism and consensus democracy as a closeted Christian doxology, with the circular economy of glory finding radical expression in both the political rituals of acclamation and the diffuse mechanisms of public opinion.

Yet while Agamben’s *The Kingdom and the Glory* does address the problem of economy far more explicitly than before, he fails to satisfy the concerns of his critics, and especially those approaching Agamben’s work from a more traditional, if undogmatic, Marxist perspective. Thus, in a critique of *The Kingdom and the Glory* published in *Angelaki*, Alberto Toscano argues that Agamben’s misguided left-Heideggerianism leads him to impose a “reductive idealism” that is the mirror-image of dogmatic Marxist materialism (Toscano 128; emphasis in original). Rejecting the most radical tendencies of Michel Foucault and Friedrich Nietzsche’s genealogy, Agamben imposes a false semblance of continuity on historical phenomena. The result is a “historical substantialism”: the modern concept of economy is regarded as the mere unfolding of a timeless, quasi-metaphysical theological essence (Toscano
Moreover, even were one to credence Agamben’s archeological method, its application is flawed: he fails to recognize that the anarchy of modern capitalism is, to use Aristotle’s terminology, chrematistic rather than economic—that it involves a “bad infinity” of infinite accumulation, made possible through the abstraction of the monetary sign, rather than stable organization (Toscano 131). Ignoring this chrematistic dimension, Agamben ends up seeing capitalism in the rosy light of bourgeois economics, and thus his theological genealogy of modern political economy cannot help but reinforce the very ideology that it seeks to call into question. While one might still claim that “management” has a theological heritage, the very notion that capitalism is being “managed,” or is in any way “manageable,” or indeed that (à la Hayek) it will automatically manage itself through the mechanisms of self-organization, is the very essence of a capitalist ideology that Agamben, failing to take Marxist materialism seriously and indeed “trying to perpetuate the tired idea of Marx’s thought as a ‘secularisation’ of some cloaked and damning theological content,” cannot but fail to engage with (Toscano 131-32). As Toscano puts it: “The restlessness of money as capital within the ‘spiral’ of accumulation, means, echoing Aristotle’s fears, that neither limit nor measure are capable of giving it a stable shape” (Toscano 131).

Toscano’s critique originates from a theoretical perspective so different from Agamben’s that it is not likely to convince his more sympathetic readers. While the radical unmanageability of the economy suggests a challenge at the level of a recalcitrant materiality to Agamben’s attempt to situate the economy within his account of sovereignty, Agamben can always argue that this very materiality, in its chaotic resistance, is an effect of a logic of sovereignty. It might then be tempting, following Adam Kotsko, to dismiss the substance of Toscano’s critique. Yet while this critique is articulated within a Marxist framework, sometimes presenting itself as an attack on “Left-Heideggerianism” as such, his most central claim also resonates with a challenge to Agamben that comes from a very different angle—the radical “Left-Heideggerianism” of Derridean deconstruction. Perhaps the problem with Agamben’s theological genealogy of the economy is not that it refuses the totalizing perspective of a Marxist materialism, but rather that it seeks to contain the economy within a totalizing theoretical framework, identifying the economy with the Trinity as a kind of totality-machine through which the plane of immanence is wrapped back up without residue into a transcendental principle. Whereas for Derrida, Marxism is a haunting, spectral residue that the philosophy of today must come to terms with—the ghostly visitation by our revenant intellectual father—for Agamben it is merely another manifestation of the theological household in which Father, Son, and Holy
Ghost are always already as one and at one despite their differences.

Precisely such a “deconstructive” approach to *The Kingdom and the Glory* allows one to develop the Marxist critique without relinquishing Agamben’s insights into the nature of sovereignty or falling back into a theoretically naive materialism. It is a matter of completing and filling out Agamben’s genealogy of political theology and theological economy, though not by referring to yet another theoretical complex—racism, slavery, colonial relations, labor, and so forth—that would offer itself as the missing piece of the puzzle of modern politics that Agamben, for either accidental or essential reasons, had overlooked. But rather: by adding precisely that figure that, repressed in his own analysis, involves a tendency for surplus that completes his analysis only by flowing beyond its limits. We could think of this surplus, indeed, as the mirror image of the Derridean supplement: whereas the supplement is the excluded interior, the surplus is that which exceeds from within every structure, apparatus, or ordering that, according to its own inner logic, claims for itself closure, totality, or purity. It is, one might say, the unruly, haunting, spectral remnant of transcendence that cannot be reconciled with immanence. Let us call it: the surplement.

The following paper seeks to develop a critical reading of Agamben’s *The Kingdom and the Glory* along these lines, focusing on a specific figure of “surplementarity” whose implications for Agamben’s theorization of *oikonomia* far surpass the scant attention he pays it in *The Kingdom and the Glory*: the dance. The dance, I will argue, brings into view an aspect of the economy that, exceeding the theological discourse of the economy, becomes the basis of the economy’s theoretical potency in modernity. It is a latent chrematistic tendency that is immanent, rather than exterior to, the *oikonomia*.

The path of my argument will appear, like dance itself—and indeed like Agamben’s *oeuvre*—rather circuitous. I will begin (“The Circulation of Glory”) by arguing that the “doxological” paradigm of economic theology, rather than merely presenting an alternative and perhaps improved way of understanding the genealogy of power in the West, offers a new paradigm for the paradigm itself, with the signature, whose essence consists in displacement, taking the place of the example. Agamben’s argument, I further argue, depends on stabilizing the relation between these two paradigms. The next section (“From Doxology to Axiology”) will attempt to challenge precisely this stability by calling attention to the close connection, suppressed by Agamben, between glory and value. The neglect of the problem of value—of the filiation of doxology and axiology—is linked to another suppression: for Agamben, the economy cannot have anything to do with the “science of
writing”—with grammatology and *différance*—since inscribing writing into the economy jeopardizes its systematic closure. Precisely this, I argue (“Acclamation and the Dance of the Economy”), explains why Agamben will seek to suture the problem of glory to vocal rites of acclamation, suppressing the intimate relation between economy and dance. For indeed, as the final section (“Choreographies of Power”) will argue, when Agamben does mention choreography he not only subordinates it to acclamation, but casts it in a very sinister light. The full implications of this emerge when, turning to Friedrich Hölderlin’s hymns at a critical point in the argument, he disregards both their complex choreographic impulse, and Hölderlin’s own explicit engagement with the question of economy and glory.

The Circulation of Glory

*The Kingdom and the Glory* begins by proposing a thesis that, on the surface at least, marks a startling departure from earlier installments of *Homo Sacer*. His earlier investigations into the nature of power in the West had operated within a framework that, taking its departure from Carl Schmitt’s analysis of sovereignty, remained essentially within the horizon of political theology, with biopolitics, as the threshold where the constitutive political distinctions collapse into indistinction, itself understood as a limit phenomena of political theology that, as the exception proving the rule, exposes its innermost logic (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 122-23). Now, however, Agamben will claim that there are in fact “two broadly speaking political paradigms,” both derived from Christian theology, that, being “antinomical but functionally related to one another,” have come to characterize the political discourse of the West (*Kingdom* 1). Whereas “political philosophy” stems from “political theology,” “which founds the transcendence of sovereign power on the single God,” modern biopolitics, encompassing the “current triumph of economy and government over every other aspect of social life,” issues from an “economic theology” in which an *oikonomia*, “an immanent ordering,” domestic rather than political, “of both divine and human life,” takes the place of the transcendence of the one God (*Kingdom* 1).

The paradigm of economic theology not only stands beside political theology, but seems to take its place. In providing a genealogy of the triumph of economy and government over all forms of contemporary life, *The Kingdom and the Glory* seems to itself perform the triumph of economic theology as interpretive paradigm. The “apparatus of the Trinitarian *oikonomia,*” the preface explains, “constitute[s] a privileged laboratory for the observation of the working and articulation . . . of the governmental machine,” since within it “the elements . . . that articulate the machine
appear, as it were, in their paradigmatic form” (xi). Indeed the preface, which seems to present the perspective gained as the result of Agamben’s investigation, shows few traces of an opposition, let alone antagonism or functional relation, between the two paradigms. Only economic theology remains. Political theology has been either abandoned or subsumed within it.

But if the preface seems to suppose that political theology has already been displaced, the beginning of the first chapter presents the relation in essentially political-theological terms as a static, structural opposition of transcendence and immanence. This suggests the enormous and peculiar task that Agamben confronts in The Kingdom and the Glory, though without fully coming to terms with the challenges that it will entail: namely, to think the relation between the two paradigms in its proper dynamic and historical unfolding, or in other words, to situate thinking between the two paradigms. It is precisely in response to this task that Agamben introduces a technical term borrowed from Foucault: the signature. The signature is “something that in a sign or concept marks and exceeds such a sign or concept referring it back to a determinate interpretation or field, without for this reason leaving the semiotic to constitute a new meaning or a new concept” (4; emphasis in original).\footnote{\textsuperscript{1}} It is thus a kind of surplus value, going beyond the meaning—the ordinary semiotic value—of the sign, that refers it to a certain field of application. Signatures thus become the site of the continual conceptual displacements that, “run[ning] parallel to the history of ideas and concepts,” form a kind of supplement. For if we cannot “perceive signatures and follow the displacements and movements they operate in the tradition of ideas, the mere history of concepts can, at times, end up being entirely insufficient” (4; emphasis in original).

The first chapter of The Kingdom and the Glory focuses on one particular signature: secularization. Yet there are, I propose, a trinity of signatures that, working together, constitute the deep structure of Agamben’s genealogy of economic theology: depoliticization, deontologization, and detheologicization (secularization). The first of these can claim a certain priority. While Agamben introduces economic theology as a “broadly speaking” political paradigm, it is, more strictly, the paradigm by which to understand the effacement of the political that is itself the destiny of Western politics. Even in its original pre-theological use, oikonomia is opposed to the political, not only because it involves house and family rather than politician and king, but, perhaps more fundamentally, because it is “administrative” (gestionale) rather than

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\footnote{\textsuperscript{1} When citing from the sections of The Kingdom and the Glory following an aleph, where Agamben inverts the conventional use of italic and roman typeface, I will preserve Agamben's italicization.}
“epistemic,” concerning an “activity that is not bound to a system of rules, and does not constitute a science in the proper sense” (17). *Oikonomia* is thus what cannot be reduced to principles; a praxis that cannot be theorized. Rather: it “implies decisions and orders that cope with problems that are each time specific and concern the functional order (*taxis*) of the different parts of the *oikos*” (17-18; emphasis in original). Whereas political theology involves the fundamentally epistemic act of subsuming the individual under the general rule, economy has its roots in what we might call a pure parataxis.

In the economic theology that emerges in Patristic literature, the *oikonomia* assumes the canonic form that will determine the political history of the West. Tasked with preserving the doctrine of the Trinity without fracturing monotheism and reintroducing a plurality of divinities, the Church fathers happen upon a remarkable solution: God will remain ontologically one; his triplicity will be located at the level of *oikonomia*—in a place that is not so much beyond as beside the realms of philosophy, science, and politics (53). This in turn suggests the second displacement: the deontologization of ontology. By distinguishing between divine substance and economy, Agamben explains, “[t]he caesura that had to be averted at all costs on the level of being reemerges, . . . as a fracture between God and his action, between ontology and praxis” (53). What *oikonomia* introduces into Christianity, moreover, is not simply the displacement of the very essence of its doctrine outside the sphere of ontology, and hence outside the sphere of essence itself, but a self-destructive tendency toward de-Christianization and secularizing detheologization. “This,” Agamben adds, “is the secret dualism that the doctrine of *oikonomia* has introduced into Christianity, something like an original Gnostic germ, which does not concern the caesura between two divine figures, but rather that between God and his government of the world” (53).

*The Kingdom and the Glory* follows out this parallel history of signatures in exquisite detail. Modern biopolitics with all its appurtenances will reveal itself as the most radical issue of these three displacements. The triumph of political economy, the emergence of biopolitics in Foucault’s sense, merely realizes a theological paradigm for which the government of the world “occurs neither by means of the tyrannical imposition of an external general will, nor by accident, but through the knowing anticipation of the collateral effects that arise from the very nature of things and remain absolutely contingent in their singularity” (*Kingdom* 118-19). The triumph of the economy, moreover, brings with it a transformation in political theory and praxis, leading to modern liberalism, democracy, and the doctrine of the balance of powers. For Agamben, the modern state, assuming both aspects of the “theological
machine” of world governance, has a double structure: if on the one hand it “legislates in a transcendent and universal way” while “let[ting] the creatures it looks after be free,” it at the same time “carries out in detail the providential dictates and confines the reluctant individuals within the implacable connection between the immanent causes and between the effects that their very nature has contributed to determining” (Kingdom 142). It is, however, with the inquiry into glory, and the glorious nature of modern politics, that Agamben’s investigation reaches its most striking conclusions, leaving the paradigm of political theology farthest behind. Christian economic theology, Agamben argues, conceives of the problem of government in terms of an angelic hierarchy, where hierarchy, far from indicating a logical principle of subjection or subordination, is the essential activity of government as a purely “administrative” or “managerial” ordering (Kingdom 154). Yet angels have a dual function: they are not only active ministers, but contemplative assistants, and indeed their mediating function consists in the interplay of these two roles—descending to humankind in the first capacity, and rising to God in the second (149).

In Christian theology, this double role has an eschatological significance. After the last judgment, the “angelic ministries” will be vacated—the only exception will be the “prison system” of eternal damnation—and angels, ceasing to minister, will have no other role than to glorify God. The spectacular anarchy of liberal democracy, in turn, presents a kind of secular travesty of the theological eschatos. This suggests the urgency of an “archaeology of glory,” a new science “dedicated to the history of the ceremonial aspects of power and right” (Agamben, Kingdom 168). Taking the first steps in this direction, Agamben traces out the complex interactions between Christian liturgical forms, pagan political rites, and Roman law, showing that the liturgical—the political, public character of Christian celebrations—depends on acclamations as its juridical foundation (168). Glory, moreover, is not merely the theological basis of the society of the spectacle, but emerges as the link holding together theology and politics, and indeed as the innermost heart of economic theology, the “economy of economies.” It is indeed the means through which theology attempts to reconcile the various oppositions—“between immanent trinity and economic trinity, theologia and oikonomia, being and praxis, God in himself and God for us”—that structure it (Kingdom 208). Glory thus takes the place of all that philosophy had understood under the name logos. Yet glory is not a structure, not a static relation between opposed terms, but a kind of mobile ordering. It exists, this is to say, as the glorious economy, the movement of reciprocal glorification, in which, through a vicious circularity, the glorification of God by man is due to a glory that itself derives from glorification. Yet if the operation of glory seeks to reconcile the
fractures of theology through the “pleromatic figure of the trinity,” it can only achieve this “by continuously dividing what it must conjoin and each time reconjoining what must remain separated” (Agamben, Kingdom 211). The circularity of the dialectic of glory thus reveals the emptiness that resides at the core of the theological machine:

Government glorifies the Kingdom, and the Kingdom glorifies Government. But the center of the machine is empty, and glory is nothing but the splendor that emanates from this emptiness, the inexhaustible kabhod that at once reveals and veils the central vacuity of the machine. (Agamben, Kingdom 211)

This glorious radiance emanating from a hollow center, I propose, is nothing else than pure displacement. Glory, as it were, is the displacement of emptiness outside of its emptiness. Or in other words: it is a signature that, as a surplus value beyond the ordinary value of the concept or sign, supplements its original in-significance by referring it to a field—a sphere of beings—to which it could have application. If glory is the economy of the economies, it is because the economy is itself the signature of signatures: the purely paratactic ordering of displacements.

This suggests what is ultimately at stake when, in the first chapter, Agamben juxtaposes political theology and economic theology. It is not so much a matter of two different paradigms, two different exemplary figures by which to illuminate the nature of power, but rather two different, radically opposed, accounts of what the paradigm itself is. Political theology understands the paradigm in terms of a logic of the example, articulated through set theory, that is perfectly analogous to the political logic of inclusion-exclusion characterizing the relation of sovereignty to bare life: the example, the mirror image of the exception, is the member that at once belongs and does not belong to the set that it exemplifies, included and excluded at one and the same time (Agamben, Homo Sacer 21-25; Coming Community 9-12). Economic theology, in contrast, regards the paradigm not as the set-theoretical, essentially vertical relation of belonging and non-belonging or inclusion and exclusion, but rather as a lateral movement of displacement. The signature, as it were, thus takes the place of the example as the privileged paradigm for the paradigm itself.2 One cannot

2 While the Italian words translated as “dislocate” and “displace”—spostare and dislocare—also appear in the first volume of Homo Sacer, though somewhat less frequently, the nominative form spostamento appears seven times in The Kingdom and Glory but only once in Homo Sacer I, suggesting that in the former Agamben seeks to treat thematically a term that itself plays a crucial, but as yet not fully recognized role in Homo Sacer. What is even more striking, though, is that the term segnatura appears not even once in Homo Sacer I.
but sense that the relation between these two paradigms, each of which, as paradigm, can claim to make sense of—to paradigmatize—the other, must open onto an abyss of complexity. Yet rather than thinking this complexity, Agamben will try to stabilize their relation. It is this stabilization, this correlation and coordination, that will mark the unthought limit of Agamben’s work. If Agamben does succeed in performing a thinking that occupies the place _between_ the two paradigms—as it were alongside the alongside—he does so only by imparting a kind of specious coherence to their relation.

In the preface, Agamben points to the conclusion of the eighth chapter as the work’s “hidden center” (xii). The passage to which he seems to be referring argues that, within the Western philosophical tradition, the _vita contemplativa_ and inoperativity play the role of a kind of sabbatism. By rendering the functions of living inoperative, they open these functions up to their possibility. Far from being mere inactivity, contemplation and inoperativity thus constitute the proper human praxis, and indeed are the “metaphysical operators of anthropogenesis.” Assigning man “to that indefinable dimension that we are accustomed to call ‘politics,’” liberating him from biological or social destiny, they allow him to become truly human. Inoperativity thus assumes a radically ambiguous status: as the dimension of the political, indeed of genuine human freedom, it is also precisely that which “the machine of the economy and of glory” “ceaselessly attempts to capture within itself” (251).

This passage, no doubt, marks the destination and limit of the argument of _The Kingdom and the Glory_. Yet we might still wonder if a hidden center that is so manifestly unhidden, that indeed announces itself in the preface in no uncertain terms and not without a certain rhetorical fanfare, might not itself offer a kind of decoy, calling our attention away from something else at stake. One might argue, of course, that Agamben’s point is precisely to _profane_ what is hidden. Thus the hidden cannot actually be hidden. Yet profanation is itself a sort of signatory gesture, and precisely what seems to be no longer in question in the above paragraph—what appears as a kind of _fait accompli_—is that thinking, without reserve and without exception, could take the form of pure displacement; or in a word, that thinking consists only in signatures and not concepts. For what is most striking here is that philosophy and politics no longer have anything to do with either being (as the traditional object of contemplation) or praxis, but only with the displacement of a praxis that is already itself the displacement of being. The only question that remains is whether the inoperativity that issues from this double replacement will be reincorporated into the ordering of the _oikonomia_ or whether it will be freed from this economic capture. It
is a question, in other words, of whether the pure displacements, radiating from nothingness, into which thinking and political life has dissolved, will remain ordered by an economic ordering. Just this question, though, conceals another: whether the two manners of paradigm can ever appear in their purity; whether there is any order or logic that could keep them separate, preventing each from compromising the “showing” of the other.

It is precisely such a purity that Agamben seems to already presuppose, and thus at the same time surreptitiously establish, in the definition of the signature that we already considered. The signature is not only understood as the signature of a sign or a concept, but is indeed the very existence of the signature as a moment of excess granting a certain “free play” to the sign or concept through the continual displacement of its field of application, while nevertheless allowing the meaning of the sign or concept as such to remain exactly as it was, preserving the absolute ideality of a meaning that remains always identical to itself. What the signature achieves, in this way, is a kind of neutralization of the problematic of the free play of the signifier, sign, or concept. The play of the signature, as it were, evacuates *différance* from the semantic and conceptual realm.

Whereas Agamben engages explicitly with Derrida in earlier texts, he is mentioned only once in *The Kingdom and the Glory*: “Foucault’s archeology and Nietzsche’s genealogy (and, in a different sense, even Derrida’s deconstruction and Benjamin’s theory of dialectical images) are sciences of signatures, . . .” (4; emphasis in original). This strikes a softer note than the first volume of *Homo Sacer*, which, developing the critique of Derrida initiated in *Language and Death*, understands deconstruction as a kind of blocked or thwarted messianism that, by neutralizing the significance of the tradition while continuing to allow it to remain in force, exposes thinking to the danger that it will either lose itself in infinite negotiations while stammering at the threshold of the messianic, or, even worse, take upon itself the task of “sheltering,” rather than “profaning,” the Nothing at the center of the Western tradition, thus enforcing against itself the very force that holds it back (*Homo Sacer* 54; *Language and Death* 39). *The Kingdom and the Glory*, in proposing the “empty throne” as the essential symbol of Western power, seems to take this critique as far as it can go. Yet by identifying deconstruction (if not without an unexplained qualification) as “a science of signatures,” Agamben obscures the violence of the gesture by which Derridean semantic and conceptual play is neutralized in favor of a very different kind of free play that, having always already been displaced outside of politics, ontology, and theology, could never contaminate the order of concepts, meaning, and ideality. Perhaps the more truly hidden center, which the other “hidden
center” turns our gaze from, is precisely the explicit confrontation with Derrida that Agamben, through this remarkable conceptual subterfuge, has rendered impossible.

From Doxology to Axiology

The last section has shown how The Kingdom and the Glory rigorously justifies a method of investigation that, strictly speaking, can no longer be called philosophical. That an investigation of doxology proceeds almost purely through doxography—through a meticulous history of often obscure dogma—is a testament to this rigor. Yet the abandonment of philosophy poses great challenges to a deconstructive reading. It can no longer be a question of exposing a system of concepts to a textual play that thwarts closure. It is not enough to destabilize the semantic or conceptual, since Agamben can always claim this destabilization is only a consequence of a displacement of the conceptual outside itself that leaves the conceptual itself intact even as it constitutes the very possibility of a history of signatures. What is needed, rather, is to call into question the very stability of the opposition between the sign/concept and the signature. This is precisely the point of introducing our odd neologism. The surplement, as the excess in the sign or concept, is in some sense nothing else than the signature. Yet precisely in so far as it also becomes, in its excess to the sign, a supplement of the sign, it cannot leave the sign untroubled, but calls the very stability of signification into question.

When Agamben returns, in the seventh chapter, to the signature, he offers a hint of what we are after. The performative utterance, he notes, is “not a sign but a signature [segnatura], one that marks the dictum in order to suspend its value and displace it into a new nondenotative sphere that takes the place of the former” (Kingdom 181; emphasis in original).3 Here the suspension of value is precisely what preserves it intact. Agamben suggests, moreover, that the performative gestures and signs of power constituting the sphere of glory must be understood precisely in terms of this signatory suspension and preservation. In this way, we could even understand The Kingdom and the Glory as itself a kind of performance that seeks, by performing “power” as such, to render power inoperative, impotent. Yet such a strategy of performance is rendered problematic if glory were itself bound up with value in such a way that the performance of glory could not but become implicated in the question of the value of value, and hence call into question the perfect preservation of individual semantic values in a sphere of perfect ideality.

3 The dictum in the above passage refers to the dependent sentence clause following a performative formula such as “I swear.”
The close connection between economy and glory suggests that just this is the case. It is striking, indeed, that while Agamben tries to explain so many aspects of the modern triumph of the economy and the society of the spectacle in terms of glory, he has almost nothing to say about the relation between glory and value: between *doxology* and *axiology*. The possibility of a relation is explicitly broached at only one point, only to be deflected. In the appendix on Physiocracy, he writes: “Despite the fact that Le Trosne is the first of the *économistes* to develop a theory of value that overcomes the limits of Physiocracy, his system rests upon unequivocally theological foundations” (281). The strangeness of this evasion is already almost immediately evident: while the theory of value itself exceeds the limits of Physiocracy, Physiocracy itself, understood by Agamben as a science of order rather than of value, will remain paradigmatic for economy even in the modern sense. This is so strange, not least of all, since so much would indicate that it is precisely as a theory of value rather than order—conceiving the ordering of human social life and the metabolism with nature in terms of the production, exchange, and consumption of value—that the most radical secularization of the theological paradigm of the *oikonomia* is to be understood. This, moreover, suggests that in a certain complex sense that remains to be scrutinized, the modern concept of economic (and perhaps also linguistic) value is itself the secularization of glory. It is significant in this regard, first of all, that the opposition of use-value and exchange-value itself seems to have to do with operativity. So far as it is rooted in the putatively natural, fundamentally finite needs of human beings and promises to refer valuation back to a real basis, use-value is derived from operativity. A commodity can only have use-value if, following Aristotle, it serves to realize some function of human nature, and thus ultimately refers to something good in itself: the *telos* of human life. Exchange-value, in contrast, is an inoperative value: a value that has nothing to do with the *work* (*ergon*) proper to man, but, as Marx recognized with such acuity, celebrates the commodity as what is truly alive (Marx and Engels 85–86). Moreover, though, the inoperativity of exchange-value is almost unthinkable but in relation to opinion, appearance, seeming rather than reality, and hence is even more directly implicated in the question of *doxa*, given the sense of the original Greek word. Exchange-value is not the value that the thing actually has in its real relation to real human needs, but the value it is deemed to have, that it seems to have. It rests entirely on an opinion formed through the reciprocal relations of a multitude of economic agents: an opinion about opinion that refers back to the real, if at all, only indirectly. Not surprisingly, exchange-value and the commodity form play a key role in Guy Debord’s analysis of the society of the spectacle (Debord 25-34).
Nowhere does Agamben come so tantalizingly close to explicitly theorizing the filiation between glory and value as when he remarks that the paradox of glory, of its viciously circular production, “culminates in post-Tridentine and Baroque theology,” imploding in Ignatius of Loyola’s motto: “Ad maiorem Dei gloriam” (Kingdom 216). With this motto, “the human activity of glorification now consists in an impossible task: the continual increase of the glory of God that can in no way be increased” (216). The glory of God and the glorification of men remain tied together, and yet the emphasis is put on the latter rather than the former: “glorification begins to react on glory, and the idea begins to form that the action of men can start to influence divine glory and increase it” (217). The project of modern governmentality, culminating in political economy and the emergence of biopolitics, is at root the quest to increase what cannot be increased. Thus it is precisely when the sovereign state assumes the task of the “government of men” that the Church, “setting aside its eschatological preoccupations, increasingly identifies its own mission with the planetary government of souls, not so much for their salvation, as for the ‘increased glory of God’” (218). Here we can hardly fail to sense an analogy between the Baroque quest to increase God’s glory and the fanatical pursuit of economic growth—of the continual increase in economic value—as the only legitimate goal that remains for politics, despite human, social, and environmental costs that are nowhere more evident than at present.

Agamben’s failure to think the connection between axiology and doxology is no mere omission. Because the filiation between value and glory is profoundly threatening and unsettling for the method and results of his investigation, it must be actively hidden and suppressed—indeed banished from view. For were such a filiation admitted, it would suggest the intimate connection that exists between linguistic value and economic value, and hence between linguistic value and doxology. Both economics and linguistics, as Saussure reminds us, are sciences of value, and indeed the connection between linguistic signification and exchange-value is a guiding preoccupation of the “poststructuralist” reception of Marxism, as is clear above all in Derrida’s Specters of Marx (Saussure 79). Yet to grant this would be to question the gesture of suspension by which the sphere of value is preserved intact in the very moment that the realm of the signature, and hence of doxology, is constituted. It would suggest, in other words, that the “play of the signature,” constituting itself as a moment of excess in the sign while giving rise to the signature, still infects and contaminates the sign itself, and can never simply leave the sign, or the realm of semantic value, intact. This may also be understood in more specifically economic terms. It is striking, indeed, that the concept of “surplus,” so central to the Marxist
theorization of capital, appears not even once in *The Kingdom and The Glory*. One must wonder if the problem of surplus, and specifically of surplus value, can simply be seamlessly integrated into Agamben’s theological understanding of economics as a system of ordering, or whether rather surplus is perhaps nothing else than the disordering, extravagant agitation that inhabits modern political economy. If the economy arises as the depoliticizing, deontologizing, and detheologizing tendency that introduced itself into the Western political tradition, perhaps the economy itself is always also de-economizing.

There is one especially telling symptom of the suppression of the filiation of axiology and doxology. Were Agamben to think through this filiation, he would have to confront the question of the relation between doxology, economy, and Derrida’s grammatology: the science of writing. It would seem altogether plausible to assume that money, as a universal sign of exchange-value, inscribes within the economy, as its original and constitutive possibility, a graphic logic, a logic of *différance*, that sunders the economy from within and renders impossible the realization of a perfect order, exposing every economy to a risk of inflation, a hyperbolic movement of excess (Derrida 6). Yet, for Agamben, the economy seems to exist essentially without money and, as Toscano notes, without a chrematistic dimension, as if the archeological method demanded the return to the utopian conceit of an economy in which exchange was not yet mediated by a sign of value but was organized purely by a despotic power.

What makes this suppression especially suggestive is not only its patent absurdity—even leaving aside Derrida’s “transcendental” arguments for the priority of writing, we may ask whether there could be any economy, however simple, that does not avail itself of some kind of token—but the fact that it cannot achieve itself silently, but only by bringing the economy to a kind of vocalization, almost as if *mere silence*, like the spaces, periods, and commas in the text, would necessarily expose the place of writing. It is this need to make the glorious economy *sing*—to perform *oikonomía* by bringing a chorus of angels onto the stage of theory—that will betray the most vulnerable point in Agamben’s investigations.

**Acclamation and the Dance of the Economy**

Acclamation, though also assuming noisier forms, is of essence song: the pure, disembodied, angelic voice. It is through praiseful songs glorifying God that the angels’ contemplative function becomes manifest. Drawing on Erik Peterson, Agamben will indeed claim that it is precisely these songs that constitute the
“political,” as opposed to “governmental,” character of angels and of the Christian *ekklesia*, and also define the political vocation of man, which is nothing else than to imitate “the angels and participat[e] with them in the song of praise and glorification” (*Kingdom* 147). This establishes the privilege accorded to the *phonē* over the *grammē* in an understanding of economy in which money plays no role. For if the economic circulation of glory introduces into the voice a rhythm of articulation and disarticulation, this will never challenge the phonocentric logic of self-presence, of the voice that listens to itself in solitary conversation, but only replaces a monotheistic onto-theology with a Trinitarian economic theology containing an ontological void at its center. Presence is preserved as a doxological rather than ontological principle, while nothingness and absence emerge as the hidden ground of the Western tradition.

It is most suggestive then that, introducing the economy, Agamben will invoke a different, earlier paradigm—one that stands in the most intimate relation to acclamation and yet is utterly irreducible to it. In a passage cited from the *Oikonomikos* of Xenophon, Ischomachus, after likening the house to an army and a ship, compares a well-“economized” house to a dance: “All the utensils seem to give rise to a choir [coro], and the space between them is beautiful to see, for each thing stands aside, just as a choir that dances in a circle is a beautiful spectacle in itself, and even the free space looks beautiful and unencumbered” (*Kingdom* 18; *Regno* 32).

Commenting on this passage, Agamben merely notes that “[o]ikonomia is presented here as a functional organization, an administrative activity that is bound only to the rules of the ordered functioning of the house (or of the company in question)” (*Kingdom* 18). Yet the sense of economy that emerges in this comparison would seem to exceed the previously-invoked martial and nautical images emphasizing the utility and convenience of economic order. The army’s order allows it to realize its proper end, and, with a ship, *oikonomia* involves the various tools and implements being laid out in such a way as to be ready at hand the moment they are needed. Yet by comparing the well-economized house to a dance, Socrates’s interlocutor calls attention not just to the convenient placement of the utensils—the ready-to-handedness of the ready-to-hand, as it were—but to the beautiful appearance that presents itself through their orderly “economical” arrangement (Xenophon 8: 2-3).4 Here it is not just a matter of aesthetics, but of phenomenality. It is not the individual utensil (*skeuos*), or even the ensemble, that shows itself as a dance, but *hekasta*—a peculiar neutral plural of *hekastos* (each) that implies at once all the

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4 Ischomachus, in a slightly earlier passage, recalls having remarked to his wife that “there is nothing for human beings that is as convenient [*euchrēston*] or so good [*kalon*] as order [*taxis*].” This suggests two fundamentally different ways of understanding the virtue of economy.
utensils considered together and each considered separately, or as Liddel and Scott’s lexicon puts it, “all and each severally” (499-500). Or in the language of Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time: the individual equipment (Zeug) in its ready-to-handness and also the circumspective vision of the entire equipmental context. Indeed, if the oikonomia shows itself as a dance, it is precisely as a grouping in which the whole appears not as the effacement of the individual, but as an ensemble of singularities. Moreover, what shows itself to be beautiful (kalon), thus showing itself as the essence of that by which it can show itself—we can understand the beautiful as that which shows itself in a particularly emphatic way—is not the well-arranged utensils separately or together, but to meson. This word, which Agamben rightly translates as spazio in mezzo, but which, obscuring the more literal sense of the Greek, is rendered in English as “free space” rather than “space in the middle” or “middle space,” has a range of meanings germane to this context (Kingdom 18; Regno 32). It can identify the “intervening space” between two things, and hence the “difference” as such a spacing, but also the “middle state,” and what is “mediocre,” “middling,” “moderate” (Liddell, Scott, et al. 1107). If the well-ordered domestic arrangement is like a dance, this suggests, it is because it allows the spacing between things that holds them together in an orderly way—allowing them to appear in both their togetherness and their individuality and reciprocal differences—to itself appear, and indeed to appear as a kind of measure that cannot be dictated from above, but emerges only from the immanent reciprocal relations of an ensemble. Oikonomia, as dance, thus seems to have everything to do with a movement of temporizing and spacing—of différance—that constitutes an immanent measure. From the beginning it will thus seem impossible to exclude from oikonomia the problem of writing, of the grammē. To think oikonomia as dance is to choreograph economy: to conceive of the oikonomia as an order that can only be constituted choreographically, and precisely because dance is itself of essence a dance-writing. The beauty of the economy, a beauty that has everything to do with the way things are laid out in space, is a beauty that, quite unlike the beauty that presents itself immediately through the integral appearance of the human body or the sensuous caress of the voice, could only be choreographed. To compare the oikonomia with a dance is not to capture in words the trace of a past radiance, but to constitute in writing the very possibility of appearance.

It is telling, in this regard, that Agamben translates choros as coro (chorus, choir). While the rendering in the English translation of coro as “choir” seems true to Agamben’s intentions, it nevertheless conflates the Ancient Greek choros with the choir in the more modern sense, obscuring the fact that whereas the choros refers first of all to dance—and it is clearly in this sense that Xenophon employs it—the
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liturgical choir of the Christian church would come to exclude dancing, replacing the dancing and singing choristers of Greek tragedy with an ensemble of disembodied angelic voices. What thus escapes from view is a fundamental and decisive transformation that effects the meaning of oikonomia—and not just its signature—as it is displaced into theology. At once disembodied and un-scripted, subtracted both from the sphere of corporality and writing, oikonomia will cease to involve a phenomenality—an opening onto truth—exhibiting itself through the graphic play of difference opening out as a “measure” of empty space that holds the one to the many and the whole in a reciprocal commerce and community. Instead: its phenomenality or “politicity” will consist in the convergence of voices into the unison of acclamation. Whereas the dancing chorus is constantly “spacing out,” the acclamatory choir, as if always preaching to itself, seeks to gather its voices into a single voice that, hearing itself, would become present to itself without reserve.

We have already seen that Agamben, by calling attention to the Trinitarian logic of economic theology, stresses the necessary correlation between unity and multiplicity, transcendence and immanence. Yet this correlation remains, by his own account, dialectical. Indeed, for Agamben, Trinitarian economy is the arch-logic—or a-logic—of German idealism. While unity is always related to multiplicity, the former necessarily presents itself as the overcoming of the latter, even if nevertheless the latter remains still preserved in the former. The Trinitarian economy of economic theology resembles a choir rather than a dance precisely because it is only disembodied voices, and not dancing bodies, that could join into the unity of a unison in which all difference is harmonized and effaced. Dance, in this sense, reveals itself as the suplement of the oikonomia. It would be wrong, however, to think of this, as Toscano does, as a chrematistic tendency exterior to the oikonomia. The dance, as graphic trace irreducible to vocal unison, is the latent chrematistic tendency within the oikonomia that always already carries it outside itself. Telling, in this regard, is the contrasting role that dance assumes in Adam Smith and Marx. While Smith, writing of the imitative arts, relates dance and music to a graceful sociality, Marx compares the spectral life of the commodity to a kind of dance (Smith 192, 210-11; Marx and Engels 85). Dance becomes the figure for the uncanniness of exchange-value itself.

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5 Regarding the Roman Catholic Church’s hostility to dancing, Kirstein notes: “As we know from acquaintance with Augustine and Alcuin, dancing is the Devil’s business. Appropriately enough, the Devil is the first-dancer of the middle ages” (77).
Choreographies of Power

In *The Kingdom and the Glory* Agamben never returns to consider dance as such in its relation to economy. Yet he does speak of the “gigantic choreography of power [uesta gigantesca coreografia del potere]” that Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus documents in the *Book of Ceremonies*, or of colossal rites of acclamation that took place in imperial Rome: “an extraordinary piece of choreography [un’impressionante coreografia] that traversed and animated the mass of spectators like a wave of color” (*Kingdom* 184, 187; *Regno* 204, 207). Or of “the complicated choreography [la complicazione coreografica], the economic expense, and the imposing symbolic apparatus that were mobilized as much in Byzantium in the ninth century as in Berlin in the twentieth” (*Kingdom* 195; *Regno* 217). Effacing the last vestige of difference between *choros* and choir, Agamben uses choreography strictly to refer to the arrangement of mass rituals of acclamation in which a huge mass of the population is brought together into a single body joined in the celebration of power. But precisely such a political choreography, having dispensed altogether with the spacing and differentiating play of the written mark and the singularity of the bodies of the multitude—only the body of the powerful (the object of acclamation, the leader or celebrity) remains distinct—is furthest from choreography in a more radical sense. It is not really choreography at all, but “choiristry.”

It is striking in this regard that he even omits consideration of those instances, of such importance for the origins of the ballet, where dance also plays a role in celebrations of power, such as the Italian *Trionfi* or the court spectacle of Louis XIV.

Despite an interest in dance attested to in other writings, Agamben does not further develop the concept of choreography or its relation to economy. Yet he does approach it indirectly by way of poetry, a long-standing concern in his work. The connection between metrical and choric forms has long been recognized, and one need not resurrect the Romantic myth of a sung and danced *Ursprache* to discover the rhythms of dance in metrical forms. In this light we may gauge the importance of the pages devoted to Hölderlin in an italicized section in the eighth and final chapter.

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6 In the afterword of *Measures of Wisdom*, James Miller writes of Procopius’s description of the cosmic dance depicted in the Hagia Sophia: “The dance has literally retreated into the architecture of the Byzantine vision of celestial permanence and static hierarchical order, and the wise dancers who once leapt with the choragus of the fire-breathing stars and whirled with the Horae from birth to death live on as immortal columns in the monument—if lifeless things can be called immortal” (531).

7 David Kishik, taking a detour through the history of ballet in his book on Agamben, argues that “ballet dancers were always conceived of as secret symbols of the body politic” (29).
In the immediately preceding section, Agamben had observed that the poetic hymn originally derives from a ritual acclamation shouted out during a wedding, thus exemplifying the belief, central to Western poetics, that “the ultimate purpose of the word is to celebrate” (234). Yet beginning with the Homeric hymns, it comes to refer specifically to a song honoring the gods (234-35). While modern poetry inclines toward elegy rather than hymn, Rilke is “a case apart”: “dress[ing] up an indubitably hymnological intention in the garb of elegy and lament,” he not only engages in a “spurious attempt to grasp a dead poetic form,” but, by dedicating poetry to the hymnic praise of a content that has elegiacaIly withdrawn, realizes the “most profound intention of every doxology” (235-36). For indeed, as Agamben explains, what Rilke’s Elegies at once lament and celebrate “is precisely the incurable absence of the content of the hymn, the turning in the void of language as the supreme form of glorification.” For “the hymn,” he notes, “is the radical deactivation of signifying language, the word rendered completely inoperative and, nevertheless, retained as such in the form of liturgy” (237).

Rilke serves as a foil for the discussion of the late hymns Hölderlin composed between 1800-1805. These are indeed, Agamben notes in the italicized section that immediately follows, precise and symmetrical inversion of Rilke’s elegies. Whereas “the latter are hymns dressed up as elegies, Hölderlin writes elegies in the form of hymns” (237; emphasis in original). Drawing on the work of Norbert von Hellingrath, the editor of the first philologically rigorous edition of Hölderlin’s work, Agamben explains that this “sober inversion” is marked by the metrical interruption of the poetic rhythm: the poem becomes fragmented, and syntactic continuity is torn apart, through a hard (hart) rather than smooth (glatt) articulation—an articolazione dura rather than an articolazione piana—that, rather than allowing “the images and syntactic context” to “subordinate and link together a number of words” (237-38; emphasis in original), tears the word from its context, emphasizing the “word itself” (238). Instead of fulfilling the doxological impulse of the hymn, Hölderlin thus brings it to a point of rupture. No longer merely reaffirming the complicity between economy itself and the liturgical inoperativity that the economy orbits around as its empty center, he breaks with the theological paradigm itself. “Breaking the hymn, Hölderlin shatters the divine names and, at the same time, dismisses the gods” (238; translation slightly modified).

It cannot escape us that Agamben, by following Hellingrath’s opposition between harmonia austera and harmonia glaphyra, tends to reduce poetry to

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8 The translators render glatt as “flat,” which seems justified neither by Hölderlin’s German nor Agamben’s Italian.
rhythmic gestures—or more precisely the opposition of rhythm and counter-rhythm—that find their purest, schematic articulation in dancing. Xenophon’s plural neutral *ekasta*—meaning at once both each thing taken individually and the ensembles that they join into—would already contain the full mystery of the “field of tensions” that constitutes poetry. But it is above all in the choreographic practices of the ballet that this tension between flowing enchainments and interruptive caesuras—the *fantasmata* of Renaissance dance and the poses sustained in the midst of movement—comes into its own. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Agamben will discover in Mallarmé “the most extreme result [esito] of the hymnical isolation of the word,” “disarticul[ing] and break[ing] the metrical structure of the poem to such an extent that it literally explodes in a handful of names without links [slegati], disseminated across the page” (*Kingdom* 238; *Regno* 261-62; translation slightly modified), and thus constituting modern lyric poetry as an “a-theological (or rather, theo-logical) liturgy, in comparison with which the celebratory intention of Rilke’s elegy seems decidedly belated” (*Regno* 261; translation slightly modified). Yet despite the deep filiation that Mallarmé will establish between poetry and dance, and despite the irreducibly graphic quality of his poetry, dance is never mentioned explicitly, nor does Agamben call attention to the essentially written character of a poetry that gives itself over to an “unrecitable doxology.” There is, in other words, no explicit recognition of a choreographic moment in poetry prior to its acclamatory impulse. This silence about the dance is nowhere so strange or so telling as when, slightly further down, Agamben returns to the question of poetry. The poem, he claims, is the “model of [the] operation that consists in making all human and divine works inoperative,” and is, as such, decisively and radically ambiguous: at once the perfect realization of a doxology that organizes the economy, and the possibility of a rupture with the “machine of the economy and of glory” (*Kingdom* 251; emphasis in original). Precisely this inoperativity involves a two-fold purity. On the one hand, it will be tied to a certain linguistic nationalism: poetic language is the contemplation (and hence rendering inoperative) of National language or ethno-linguistic identity; the great poetic works—Dante’s *La Vita Nuova*, Arnaud Daniel’s sestina, Hölderlin’s hymns—are the “contemplation” of the language in which they were written (252; emphasis in original). Yet on the other hand, he depoliticizes and dephilosophizes poetry by placing poetry into an analogical relation to politics and philosophy that presupposes the exclusion of all lateral contamination and mixing of jurisdictions. In this way—one recalls Johann Gottfried Herder’s *spirit of the people*—the acclamatory voice becomes nationalized and disembodied in the same measure. While at certain moments, above all the untranslatable “amen,” liturgical practice
itself breaks free from this nationalism, vernacular poetry recalls acclamation and
doxology to a nationalistic fragmentation that leaves even the angelic hosts, despite
their perfect hierarchical organization, divided against themselves and incapable of
communicating between them the glory upon which the greater glory of God depends.

It now becomes clearer why Agamben must remain silent about dance in *The
Kingdom and the Glory*: silent about a silence that is not merely the gag through
which a pure sayability reveals itself in the refusal of every saying.\(^9\) If we find
choreography—a dance in writing and writing of dance—in the rhythms and
counterrhythms that traverse and constitute poetry, it is because poetry, refusing this
double purity, is what shows us what a body can do; a new, possible use—or rather,
a new truth and new openness or liturgy—that is also not altogether new, but inhabits
the order of the given as the movement of surplus, the surplement, that cannot be
contained within it. Choreography is nothing else than the slippage that undermines
the neat, quasi-Trinitarian trilogue between poetry, philosophy, and the political that
Agamben will substitute for the Heideggerian dialogue of *Dichten* (poeticizing) and
*Denken* (thinking).\(^10\) Or indeed: it is the unstable and unquiet, ever mobile, place
between paradigms—never just poetry, or just national, but, as if always in excess of
everything merely poetic, always between poetry, philosophy, and politics; and
always between nations. It is quite telling, in this regard, that Agamben, despite
invoking Hellingrath’s reference to the commentaries accompanying the translations
of Pindar, overlooks the multifaceted nature of Hölderlin’s *oeuvre*, thus confirming a
reading of Hölderlin, challenged from every angle by more recent scholarship, that
attributes only ancillary importance to his poetological fragments, non-lyric writings
(including *Hyperion* and *Empedocles*), and translations. Were one to consider these,
and indeed read his poems rather than merely abstracting their rhythmic gesture, it
will become clear that his poetry’s gesture cannot be sundered from the theoretical
constellations that this very gesture gathers around itself, and that, as we have seen,
call attention to the intimate proximity of economy and choreography, pointing
explicitly toward a political dimension that is itself bound up with the economic and

\(^9\) In his short essay on Max Kommerell reproduced in *Potentialities* (and also in “Notes on Gesture” in *Means without End*), Agamben does treat dance quite explicitly, conceiving of dance and gesture as the exhibition of a pure mediality and bringing it into relation to the “pure gestures” that “exhibit only a gigantic lack of memory, only a ‘gag’ destined to hide an incurable speechlessness” (*Potentialities* 80).

\(^10\) Immediately after this passage, in the final section before the final threshold of the last chapter, Agamben turns to Heidegger, whose *Ge-stell* he will understand as a translation of *oikonomía*. This becomes the Latin *dispositio*, suggesting in turn the French *dispositif*. Heidegger, he notes, “cannot resolve the problem of technology because he was unable to restore it to its political *locus*” (253).
not simply opposed to it.

Two examples from these poetological writings will suffice to show how much an explicit theorization of the problem of economic theology and doxology is already at play. On the one hand, the theory of tonal alternation, read in conjunction with “Becoming in Passing Away” ("Das Werden im Vergehen"), suggests, as the organizing principle of his poetry, a vicarious structure of representation motivated by the impossibility of the pleromatic presence of being in its unicity and sovereign power (138). On the other hand, if we understand the opposition of administration and acclamatory assistance as the difference between descent and ascent on the ladder that stretches between heaven and earth, then we might discover in the “Seven Maxims,” which imagines the poet passing up and down different levels of enthusiasm without losing his balance, nothing less than an attempt to undo the disembodiment of the angelic poet by restoring a certain physicality, a gravitas that resists the upward pull of enthusiasm, thus making him akin to a dancer, while at the same time stressing that administration and celebration can never be fully separated. It is not a matter of accomplishing inoperativity, but of a poetic labor transfigured from within; a labor that becomes, in the words of Yeats, “blossoming or dancing.” Precisely this suggests a different sense of the parataxis that characterizes the style of Hölderlin’s late poetry. While invoking Theodor W. Adorno’s famous essay, Agamben interprets it, by way of the detour through Hellingrath that we considered above, in an utterly one-sided, “undialectical” fashion as the mere dissolution of the poem that allows the word itself to stand forth in a kind of atomic isolation. This obscures the filiation that binds a poetics of parataxis to the taxis of the administrative or managerial (gestionale), and as it were “gestural,” ordering of the oikonomia. Poetic inoperativity cannot be kept separate from the administrative ordering that is always involved in all language, insofar as all language, and poetic language most of all, orders and arranges in a manner that can never be reduced to scientific principles.

Here we might recall a passage from Diotima’s letter in the novel Hyperion, the rhetorical climax of her attempt to direct Hyperion toward a new way of thinking of the political:

Look up into the world! Is it not like a wandering triumphal parade, where nature celebrates the eternal victory over all corruption? And doesn’t life, for the sake of [its] glorification, lead death along with itself, in golden chains, just as the general once led the captured kings? And we, we are like the virgins and youths, who, with dance and song, in alternating figures and tones, escort the majestic parade. (Hölderlin 11:
With dance and song, as a chorus in a more original sense irreducible to the disembodied choir, we accompany the triumphant progression in which nature celebrates the eternal victory over decay. Life conducts death with itself for the sake of its glorification. Here a different sense of politicity, of liturgy, and indeed of the openness toward truth, emerges: almost infinitely close, and yet irreducible to, Agamben’s doxology. Politics is a choreographic openness to nature as surplus, as surplement, in its glorious movement between life and death. The people, rather than giving itself over to a limitless praise of the sovereign power through an ethereal, bodiless yet nationalized voice, dances in the train of a sovereign who, not simply absent, withdraws at every turn, moving between presence and absence, and who, indeed, does not simply “rule over,” or “over rule,” but whose rule is always “over,” at once done with and beyond itself. Dance and poetry, bound up with each other as they are, would not involve infinite negotiations that keep us banished to the threshold, but very concrete negotiations between bodies and words in a singularity that cannot appear in itself but only in relation to others. Through these negotiations they enter into relation to a disordering, inoperative—even, we could say, messianic—moment that cannot be placed beyond order, but is always at play in it.

But coming back down to earth, let us venture a more practical conclusion in the spirit of Derrida’s political interventions. Perhaps what Hölderlin seeks with this recondite formulation, and what we dare to call a “choreographic politics,” is nothing else than a political economy that, never contenting itself with mere management, seeks neither to deny the chrematistic, accumulatory dimension of the economy, as if the economy were “manageable,” nor to overcome its chrematistic aspect by banishing the spectral operations of exchange-value. Perhaps it is always a question of “managing the unmanageable,” and indeed without reducing it to the merely manageable, insofar as whatever is merely manageable—for which a “managerial norm” already exists—has already been absorbed into a technocratic regime, whose ideal model will always be the Trinitarian “providence machine.” Politics, and political praxis, begins where “mere management” ends. Yet such praxis, which can never be contained in a managerial class or directed through an absolute sovereign, is not beyond management, administration, government, or economy, but rather the management of the unmanageable beyond.
Works Cited


About the Author
Anthony Curtis Adler is an associate professor of German and Comparative literature at Yonsei University’s Underwood International College, where he has been teaching since 2006. He has published a number of book chapters and journal articles on such topics as Kant, Arendt, Hölderlin, Agamben, Fichte, H. C. Andersen, Goethe, Plato, and Kafka, and is also the author of a translation, with interpretive essay, of Fichte’s The Closed Commercial State, and a small volume, published by Punctum Books, titled The Afterlife of Genre: Remnants of the ‘Trauerspiel’ in Buffy the Vampire Slayer. He is presently completing two book projects: a monograph on dance and politics in Hölderlin’s Hyperion, and a philosophical study of the concept of celebrity.

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