

“Everybody Must Get Stoned: Calculating the Death Penalty with Derrida”

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From the political theology of the king’s two bodies to talionic law, calculation—as a principle of countable exchange and, etymologically, a reckoning by means of little stones—appears at the heart of both sovereignty and capital punishment. In the second volume of his *Death Penalty* seminar, Derrida suggests that the unconscious may itself act as a relentless and unforgiving calculator: a machine whose hardness or harshness cannot be countered with forgiveness. This paper makes a case study of the stone kings from the façade of Notre Dame Cathedral, which were decapitated and lost during the French Revolution only to resurface during the twilight of the death penalty in France in the 1970s. I ask what these revenant statues have to tell us about the hard calculations of sovereignty, the endurance of capital punishment, and the regime of the unconscious—a regime whose cruelty cannot be overcome but may, perhaps, be softened or decalcified with a flexibility that is, for Derrida, “incalculable.”