

Where Marx is closest to the spirit of deconstruction is, arguably, in these formulaic gestures towards a society that had so far transcended existing actuality that its conditions of realization could no longer be conceptualized. Marx is spectral Marx in his refusal to envision communism in his envisaging of it, in his anti-utopian utopianism.

Now, I am not deploring this vision. A world that no longer aspires to any such political sublime is an impoverished world. What I am saying, however, is that ontological voids can offer themselves as hostages to fortune; that Marx's refusal to think through the politics of communism created a number of such voids; and that in so far as these came to be filled by 'actual existing socialism' they have played a role in the demise of Marxism itself. Or, to put it otherwise: one doesn't

necessarily avoid the horrors of a messianic totalitarianism by refusing to ontologize. One might even be leaving more space for them. Certainly we should be very wary of all those who know how to change the world, and how it ought to look when they have done so. But, since the world will change anyway, there are also dangers in too narrowly confining oneself to the task of 'critical criticism': to a perpetual critique of the out-of-jointness of all times, of the eternal failure of the actual to measure up to a rationality that will never arrive. Derrida abhors the politics of the 'full presence', whether it takes the form of a celebration of the end of history or an absolute knowledge of how it should end. I agree. But it is not, I think, by leaving ontological vacuums that we best guard against these types of plenitude.

**Kate Soper**

## Marx the uncanny?

### Ghosts and their relation to the mode of production

I want to pose some of the problems that are raised by Derrida's postponed and long-awaited encounter with what in an interview of 1971 he calls 'the Marxist text'.<sup>1</sup> I will do this by setting up a different, but for Derrida equally postponed, encounter, that with Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' (1919). This will lead me to consider the place of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Derrida's argument as a kind of un-text of the spectral and his privileging of it as a way in to Marx's texts with their ghosts and spectres.

Freud's paradox of the *heimlich/unheimlich* is invoked and alluded to in Derrida's writings over the years, often in passing and with a claim for its crucial importance, followed by a disclaimer of any intention to undertake the necessary and, we are given to understand, necessarily lengthy, deconstructive reading that its importance would call for.<sup>2</sup> Mark Wigley observes of Derrida's relation to the uncanny:

Like the figure of the house to which it is bound, it is a theme that can be traced throughout Derrida's work without it ever becoming a discrete subject, as if it is itself repressed, returning only occasionally to surface in very isolated and what seem, at first, to be very minor points. But precisely for this reason it can be argued that its effects actually pervade all the texts that are unable or unwilling to speak about it.<sup>3</sup>

The uncanny in Derrida's texts seems to play the role of a nagging but deferred element, one that is welcomed as

congenial but never integrated into the texts that cite it, something that remains beckoning but peripheral to the trajectory of the argument. The page or two it gets in *Specters of Marx* is the fullest attention Derrida has given it so far. Significantly, I will argue, of the two points from it that Derrida focuses on, he gets one wrong, which he gives a partial reading of the other, in which a key element of Freud's concept is lost.

The occasion of Derrida's citation of the uncanny is the repetition in Freud's essay of a German idiom that appears in Marx's interminable critique of Max Stirner in *The German Ideology*, and which also resonates for Derrida in his equally repetitive and seemingly interminable paraphrase and commentary on Marx's obsessive battling and entanglement with Stirner. The German idiom in question is *es spukt*: it spooks. The phrase is, Derrida notes, translated into English and French in such a way as to lose its force. In Freud's essay, *es spukt* appears when Freud comments on the lack in other languages of a word that has the same connotations as the German *unheimlich*. Freud says, in the English of Strachey's Standard Edition, 'Some languages in use today can only render the German expression "an *unheimlich* house" as "a haunted house".' The French translation of the equivalent is *une maison hantée*. What these translations lose is Freud's German idiom, when he says in Derrida's translation: 'Some languages in use today can only render the German expression *ein heimliches Haus* [an uncanny house] by a house in which

*es spukt*.' Freud's German is 'ein Haus in dem es spukt' (*Specters*, p. 195). This idiom, as Derrida rightly stresses, is a verbal form which does not say that there are spectres, ghosts or apparitions, but that 'it spooks' – 'it ghosts', 'it spectres'. It is both verbal and impersonal.

The same idiom appears in a statement by Max Stirner, who criticizes the other Young Hegelian philosophers of the 1840s, especially Feuerbach, for bowing down and worshipping the abstraction 'Man', which they put in the place of God, as part of a regime of humanist abstractions that merely extends the reign of the Sacred and the Holy rather than replacing it with the practice of real men from whom the abstractions proceed. Addressing his contemporaries, Stirner exclaims: 'Mensch, es spukt in deinem Kopf!', of which the standard translation is 'Man, there are spectres in your head', or, as Derrida would have it, 'Man, it ghosts/spectres in your head'. Stirner's strategy of 'egoism' is to reclaim and absorb abstractions such as 'Man' back into his own ego whence it was alienated as an autonomous idea that had forgotten its origin and become a tyrannical spectre. However, the ego thus produced, Marx argues, is not a real concrete living being, as Stirner thinks, but simply a confluence of abstractions, a construction and gathering of mental spectres. So Marx addresses Stirner in turn (whom he christens St Max because he sees holy abstractions exercising power everywhere): 'Es spukt in deinem Kopf', that is, 'it spooks in your head'. Derrida is not impressed by Marx's readdressing of Stirner's reproach to Feuerbach and others back to Stirner himself. Derrida wants to give a value to Stirner's formulation *es spukt*: 'it ghosts' or 'it spectres'. I will return to this in a moment.

Marx relentlessly pursues Stirner through 336 pages of *The German Ideology*, tracking down and spelling out the contradictions of Stirner's egological reduction and incorporation of abstractions, contending that this but proliferates and internalizes spectres so as to render subjectivity itself spectral and unreal. Derrida argues that Marx in doing this was pursuing, while refusing to recognize, aspects of himself and his own project. Now Derrida does acknowledge that Marx's critique of Stirner refuses the false immediacy of a direct assimilation of religious and ideological abstractions back into the single ego, and that by contrast Marx insists on tracing them back to the material conditions of practice and labour that give rise to these mystifications. Nevertheless, he wants to claim that Marx shares with Stirner an unremitting hostility to the ghost, a desire to exorcise the spectral finally and for good, and that such an attempt produces the further proliferation of ghostly and spectral effects in Marx just as Marx claims it does in Stirner.

From *The German Ideology* to the spectre of communism haunting Europe in *The Communist Manifesto*, to the nightmares, spectres and phantoms of *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, to the fetishism of the commodity-form and the money-form, the autonomy of exchange value and the abstract human labour of *Capital*, Marx never ceases to speak of vampires, ghosts, spectres of the living dead, of autonomized and automatized idealities and abstractions generated within the material and economic processes he analyses. Because of this haunting in Marx's texts, Derrida remarks, the alternative title to his book might have been 'Marx – das Unheimliche': 'Marx – the Uncanny'.

### **'It spooks': a generalized structure of haunting**

Derrida's repetitive and laborious pursuit of Marx in Marx's obsessional line-by-line pursuit of Stirner interpellates Derrida into the primal scene of historical materialism, the psycho-theoretical dramas, the mirrorings, doublings and oppositions played out between the Young Hegelian heirs of Hegel to the German philosophical world of the 1840s. For, in response to Marx's enraged but fascinated reading of Stirner, Derrida performs what comes increasingly to look like a reverse Stirnerian rereading of Marx. David McLellan has argued that Stirner's attack on Feuerbach's humanist critique of religion speeded up Marx and Engels's own break from and critique of Feuerbachian humanism.<sup>4</sup> Derrida seems drawn to, if not identified with, Stirner, and the Stirnerian–Derridean criticism of Marx in effect returns Marx to the position of Feuerbach. It accuses him of a humanist ontology of the living being and a metaphysics of presence, which are the pre-suppositions, Derrida claims, of Marx's critique of religion, ideology and the spectral.

Derrida's criticism all turns on *es spukt*: the 'it spooks'. Derrida seems drawn to Stirner's proliferation of spectres in which the ego, as the site of their internalization, itself assumes spectral form. His attraction is not to Stirner's solipsistic egoism as a philosophical position, but as a delirious phenomenological description of living in a spectralized world. It is as if Stirner's delirium bears witness to a generalized structure of haunting, of the ghost-in-general, as Derrida calls it, going on to propose with facetious solemnity not an ontology but a hauntology:

What is a ghost? what is the effectivity or the presence of a spectre, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial to a simulacrum? ... Let us call it a *hauntology*. This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and

more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being. ... It would harbour within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. (*Specters*, p. 10)

He later says:

it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very structure of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would call here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration. (p. 161)

Ontology as the metaphysics of presence, of the moment as presence to itself, attempts to conjure away, to exorcize, the irreducible structure of haunting that both founds and undoes it. We are on fairly familiar territory here, in which the positions of Derrida's texts of the 1960s are being repeated in a change of register. Where grammatology – that now somewhat neglected postulation of a 'new science' of the *gramme* or trace – was to oppose the metaphysical privileging of speech over writing, and to bear witness to the movement of *différance* as an arche-writing that is the condition of possibility for speech, so now hauntology as a new thinking of spectrality, the ghost in general that is the condition for any ontology, translates *différance* from the master trope of writing and inscription to the new Gothic trope of haunting, a trope that opposes the hierarchy of *geist* or spirit (spiritualization, sublimation, ideality, mind) over the merely phenomenal or corporeal form of the spectre of *Spuk*. It leads to a number of sweeping assertions of the uncanny structure of haunting as a transcendental *a priori*, made in passing in the interstices of Derrida's textual *cogito* and 'the very phenomenality of the phenomenon' (p. 189): 'The essential mode of self-presence of the *cogito* would be the haunting obsession of this *es spukt*...' (p. 133).

This generalized structure of haunting and logic of the spectre is invoked to cover a bewildering range of local or regional relations: the relation to the dead and to the past; to the stranger or the foreigner as other; to the future and the unborn, which Derrida conceives under the rubric of the messianic without messianism; the whole classical Marxist problematic of the ideological, the fetishisms of the commodity-form and money-forms, the mystifications and reifications of capitalist economic relations; and, for good measure, the phantom structure of the tele-technologies of the mass-communication media and the Baudrillardian regime of the simulacrum and the image – 'When the very *first* perception of an image is linked to a structure of reproduction, then we

are dealing with the realm of phantoms.'<sup>5</sup> What gives some consistency to this array of concerns is as ever the deconstruction of the living present conceived of as self-contained, and adequate to or coincident with itself. The insistence on the spectrality of the present as always, in the idiom of *Hamlet*, a time out of joint, as possessed by the dead and open to the future, then becomes the basis for a reproach to Marx as an enemy of the ghostly.

Furthermore, because of Derrida's transcendental *a priori* of haunting, under which he includes not just Marx's critique of political economy, but the relation to the other as such (whether the other is the living, the dead or the unborn), he is led to claim that all the effects of fetishism and mystification that Marx locates as the result of the social form of labour under capitalist production are really the effect of production as such. This extraordinary sleight of hand turns on an invocation of the other, in that use-value is said to presuppose exchange-value, and hence all the spectral effects of exchange-value, because production of use-values is production for-the-other. Even more sketchily, this haunting of use-value by exchange-value comes to be identified with the Freudian work of mourning, presumably because both Freud's mourning and Derrida's haunted production turn on the loss of the object, although this is never spelled out. The historically specific effects of capitalist production are collapsed into sociality as such. As a result, the Marxist project of eliminating the ghost-effects of bourgeois political economy and its categories through working to eliminate capitalism as a mode of production – with all its brutal and unprecedented effects of mass immiseration that Derrida so eloquently deplores – comes under the suspicion and the accusation of seeking to eliminate the other, historicity, and the relation to the future themselves. Where André Glucksmann, the repentant Stalinist, and other *nouveaux philosophes* saw the Stalinist labour camps of the Gulag as inscribed in the very logic of Marx's *Capital*, Derrida, who has always kept his distance from them and indeed prides himself on never having been anti-Marxist, sees what he calls Marxist totalitarianism as the result of Marxist ontology, its metaphysical fear of the ghost and its attempt to eradicate spectrality. One might call this extraordinary claim a truly Stirnerian theory of Stalinism.

## Modernity and the Uncanny

I claimed earlier that of the two points from Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' that Derrida focuses on, he misconstrues one, while a crucial element drops out of the other. The first is Derrida's remark on the striking and for him puzzling, if not discomforting, fact that Freud explicitly

cites *Hamlet* and the ghost in *Hamlet* as *not* uncanny.

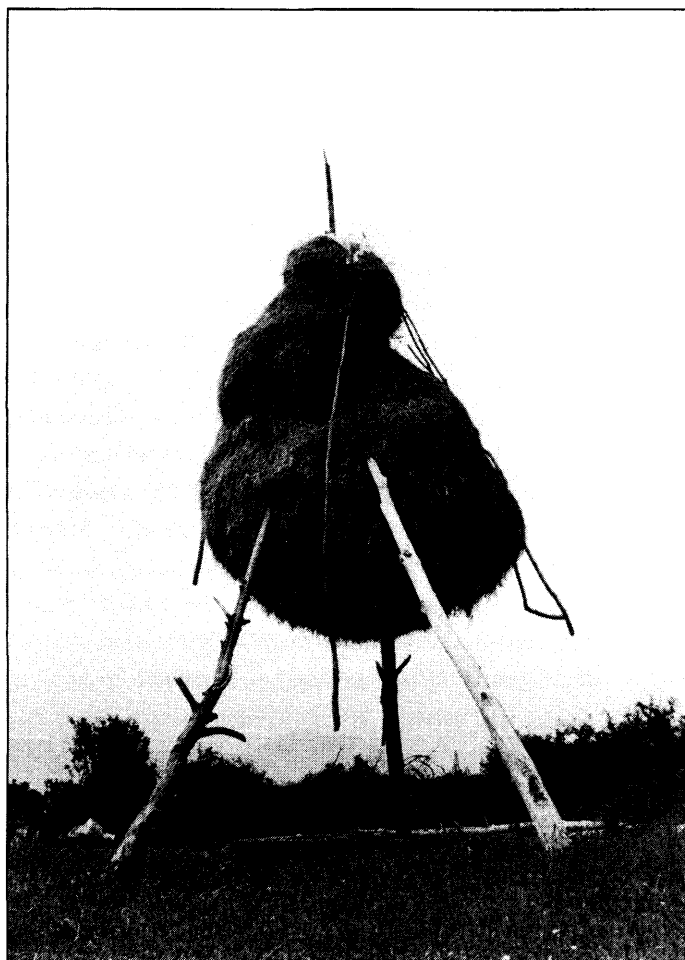
Explanation: literature, theatrical fiction. According to Freud, we adapt our judgements to the conditions of *fictive* reality, such as they are established by the poet, and treat 'souls, spirits and spectres' like grounded, normal, legitimate existences. ... A remark that is all the more surprising in that all the examples of *Unheimlichkeit* in this essay are borrowed from literature! (p. 196)

Derrida presents Freud's judgement as if it were a contradiction or *non sequitur*: all Freud's examples of the uncanny come from literature (which is not true) and yet he claims that the ghost in *Hamlet* is not uncanny because it is literature. But this is not quite what Freud says. Freud is not just making a point about the fictive or about literature in general. For if as readers we just adapted to whatever we found in a literary text – ghosts, spectres, and so on – then not only would the uncanny not occur in *Hamlet*; it would be unable to occur in literature or art at all. Freud is in fact making a point about genres. Miracles in the New Testament, the marvellous in fairy tales, the gods in Homer, souls in Dante's *Inferno* and ghosts in *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* are not uncanny, Freud argues, because they

involve no conflict of judgement as to whether they are possible, whether such things can be. Rather, they are in conformity with the generic world of the text and its generically specific connections of verisimilitude. Consequently, Shakespeare's ghosts are terrible or gloomy, Freud says, but not uncanny. This is so because the supernatural is in place in a Renaissance tragedy. 'The situation is altered', Freud continues, 'as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality.' Then ghosts and other fantastic events assume the quality of uncanniness under the conditions operating 'in real life' – that is, under the conventions of realism and naturalism. This involves what Freud calls 'a conflict of judgement as to whether things which ... are regarded as incredible may not, after all, be possible'. Freud attaches the uncanny in literature as in ordinary experience to events that are in conflict with 'presuppositions on which the world ... is based'.<sup>6</sup> In literature the uncanny involves a rupture of the generic presumptions of the world of the text.

The second point concerns Derrida's invocation of the haunted house in which 'it spooks'. He comments on Freud's self-criticism that this motif is the most striking instance of the uncanny and that he ought perhaps to have begun his investigation with it. However, what interests Derrida is the impersonal action of the *es spukt* 'it spooks' which he generalizes into an *a priori* structure of haunting. Derrida ignores the question of the house, all the more striking in that it is inscribed in the linguistic formation of the word, the *Heim* in the *Unheimlich*. Furthermore, Freud draws our attention to this derivation at great length. Consequently, the relation of haunting, the *es spukt*, to the house, is all over the opening pages of Freud's essay. In rendering the *es spukt* ubiquitous, Derrida takes it outdoors and forgets the house, the haunted house which is the *mise en scène* of the spectre.

Now the same thing is at stake both in the question of genre as Freud poses it and in the question of the house. This is something that Freud's essay nowhere renders explicit or submits to theoretical reflection as such, but which is everywhere presupposed by his account. It is, or should be, a caveat against any too easy or too rapid assimilation of the Freudian uncanny to an *a priori* structure of haunting under the flag of Heidegger. The untheorized presumption whose logic is at work in both the question of genre and the question of the house is the presumption and the question of modernity. For Freud, the uncanny presupposes the setting in



place of modernity and cannot occur by definition in the realm of the premodern or the traditional, even though its material is often the very stuff of premodernity and tradition that returns to haunt modernity from within.

The uncanny thus has for Freud a temporal as well as a spatial structure. It is what was once known of old and long familiar, and it comes in two forms. They might be labelled the personal and the social uncanny. The personal uncanny is what Freud calls 'something familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression' (p. 241). He gives as analogies the repetition of what was once loved or desired in the form of phobic objects or the persecutory figures of paranoia. The social uncanny is what Freud describes as the return of animistic or magical modes of thought that have been historically surpassed but persist within us. They produce the sense of the uncanny when something actually happens which seems to confirm 'the old discarded beliefs' (p. 247). Freud is aware, however, of a definitional problem which he cannot solve. For, while the uncanny may be what is secretly familiar and has undergone suppression, not everything that reminds us of repressed complexes or surmounted beliefs is experienced as uncanny. However, what Freud lacks in his definitional specification of the uncanny is, nevertheless, present in his descriptions of it, and that is the question of the house and its relation to modernity.

Freud's analysis of the linguistic shifts in the German terms *heimlich/unheimlich* traces the reversal whereby *heimlich*, originally meaning familiar, cosy and domestic, comes to mean withdrawn from the public gaze, private, secretive, sinister, and in doing so comes to coincide with its opposite, *unheimlich*. This registers the emergence of the closed, exclusive world of the 'nuclear' family of modern bourgeois society from the older forms of the family. The uncanny or *unheimlich* in this sense, as Freud observes, is a subspecies of the *heimlich* and breaks out from within it. Freud cites Schelling's definition: '*Unheimlich* is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light' (p. 224). The subject of the uncanny is in the house but no longer at home. The whole space of the house, the structure of the domestic and the familial, is experienced as an archaic enclave, an encysted or – to use a Derridean metaphor – an 'invaginated' space that is a site of a haunting and return that ruptures the presuppositions of modernity, variously



understood as secularization, the newly private and the rationally explicable. The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies has defined the modern as one who feels free to forget the dead.<sup>7</sup>

## Hamlet and history

The *unheimlich*/uncanny house in which 'it spooks', I am arguing, is not the insistence of an *a priori* structure of haunting, but of a historically specific structure of experience. This is the experience of a breach with tradition and a failure of the relation to the dead and to the ancestral, or their modernizing repudiation. It gives rise to the fantasy – a fear, and behind that a wish – that the dead will not have forgotten us. The literary elaboration of this fantasy constitutes the tradition of the Gothic, and the structure of the Freudian uncanny gives us the generic structure of the Gothic, turning as it does on the haunted Gothic house in which is materialized in Chris Baldick's succinct and suggestive formulation 'a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space'.<sup>8</sup>

Now, the return of the dead in premodern cultures and texts has a place. It does not breach the continuity of historical time, as the breach of that breach, as the rupture and reversal of the time of the modern. In *Hamlet*,

Horatio responds to the ghost, 'It harrows me with fear and wonder', but its appearance does not entail an ontological scandal. This is why Freud is right to claim that the ghosts in Shakespearean tragedy may be dreadful but they are not uncanny, and why *Hamlet* and works of Jacobean drama, despite their themes and motifs being endlessly recycled in the early generations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic novels, are not themselves Gothic or uncanny texts. Within premodern cultures and texts, the ghost is a sign, not unambiguous, that can be read, and various kinds of action taken accordingly.

Derrida's treatment of *Hamlet* as an urtext of the spectral, which he privileges in his attempted deconstruction of Marx, assimilates Shakespeare and Marx and Freud (with the promise of Heidegger to come) to his hauntological *a priori*. As a result Derrida tends to back-project various modern assumptions onto the play. His reading cannot think the play's relation to its premodern, northern European dramatic world and its out-of-place proto-modern protagonist. For example, he interprets Marcellus's frightened plea – 'Thou art a scholar. Speak to it, Horatio' – as an appeal to Horatio, as Derrida puts it, as an intellectual and a man of culture. This leads him to remark that, as an intellectual, Horatio is least equipped to address the spectral, given the intellectual's invariable commitment to the metaphysics of presence and its ontological assumptions, which are hostile to a proper recognition of spectrality. Derrida goes on to speculate in an undecidable mixture of irony and conceit, that

Marcellus was perhaps anticipating the coming, one day, one night, several centuries later, or another 'scholar' ... capable, beyond the opposition of presence or non-presence ... of thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility. (p. 12)

Messiah by day, spectre by night, Derrida modestly steps forward as the embodiment of Marcellus's utopian hope.

However, as a student lately come from Luther's Wittenberg, the international centre of Reformation theology, Horatio might to the mind of a simple soldier like Marcellus be thought, as a university-educated clerk rather than a modern man of culture, to know the right forms of exorcism for interrogating ghosts. The ghost significantly is a pre-Reformation Catholic ghost who comes, he tells us, from Purgatory. This is Shakespeare's solution to the problem of validating the ghost by giving him a theological status that wins him dramatic credibility. If he was from heaven he would be a messenger from God and not the bearer of the traditional non-Christian code of Revenge; if he was from hell he

would be an emissary of the devil and his call for revenge would be clearly sinful. Location in Purgatory saves him from damnation and discredit and gives him the dramatic space to embody the call for ancestral obligation and for Hamlet to act his filial duty.

Derrida's remarks that we don't know whose sins the ghost is suffering for, and that he comes from the ground, soil, humus mould etc., suggest that he doesn't grasp the medieval Catholic doctrine of Purgatory or its dramatic significance in this historically transitional and hybrid play. Consequently Hamlet's exclamation, 'The time is out of joint / O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right', to which Derrida devotes pages of deconstructive exegesis, is not a statement of the necessarily spectral unhinging of the present moment's presence to itself, for it is *not* the ghost's appearance that has put the time out of joint, but rather what he bears witness to: the King-Father's secret murder and the disjoining of legitimacy and dynastic succession by the usurpation of Queen and Crown. Hamlet is born to set it right because he is the murdered King's son. His failure to do so and his paralysis and apparent forgetfulness of the ghost's urgency – the ghost returns to rebuke him for his failure to act – might be read as the premonitory signs of that failure of the relation to the dead, and the intermittent and guilty attempt to retrieve it, that characterize the transition to modernity, and the ambiguous position within it of the student-prince from Wittenberg as a proto-modern figure of the Renaissance court-humanist intellectual with his sceptical soliloquies out of Montaigne. The historically transitional character of the prince in a solidly premodern world is perhaps marked by the anomaly of his reference to death – and this by a son who has been visited by his murdered father's ghost calling for revenge – as 'the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns'. There is no Gothic uncanniness here.

The world of *Hamlet* and its ghost seems untouched by the structure of the uncanny. It shows only premonitory signs of that breach between modernity and tradition of which the uncanny is itself the rupture – the rupture of a breach. My conclusion is thus not merely that the ghost in *Hamlet* is different from the tropes of spectrality in Marx, but that this difference dramatizes issues of the epochal and the historical that are foreclosed and misrecognized by Derrida's transcendental hauntology. After all, the unaddressed question of modernity determines Derrida's very choice of *Hamlet*, taken as it is from the essay by Valéry where Hamlet is positioned as the very figure of a melancholic European *geist*. Valéry's essay is a virulent polemic against modernity, as the miscegenation and dispersion of the

mind/*geist* of Europe by its cultural others and inferiors. Derrida's fascination is with Hamlet-as-*geist* haunted by the corporeal form of the ghost, as a trope for the irreducible spectral implication of spirit and spook. However, this Valéryian reading of Hamlet forecloses his distinctive relation to the premodern, conscripting his melancholic Renaissance proto-modernity into a latter-day battle with the developed forms of modernity in the moment of European high modernism.

The question of modernity is as insistent in the text of Marx as in the texts of Freud and in *Hamlet*, though differently. Marx's use of Gothic tropes, however, does not usually reference the uncanny's punctual rupture of modernity's breach with tradition. Derrida's misreading of the *Manifesto*'s famous citation of the Spectre of Communism implausibly aligns Marx as fearful exorcist with the reactionary powers of old Europe. However, Marx is staging not an uncanny encounter of *geist* with ghost, but a clash of two forms of narrative, of the traditional nursery tale of the spectre with the party manifesto that calls for the realization of a future possibility. The Classical anachronism of the French revolutionaries in *The 18th Brumaire*, the mystificatory, vampiric and spectralized effects of *Capital*, are seen as the production of the internally riven and self-contradictory character of the economic and political forms of capitalist modernity. What this then poses is the question of the uncanny *Nachträglichkeit*, the deferred action or afterwardsness, of the premodern within

modernity (conceptualized within Marxism as the overdetermination of different temporalities, or uneven and combined development) and its relation to modernity's self-haunting or auto-spectrality. Derrida's spectral *a priori* or ghost-in-general, in its conflation of these effects, precludes such a questioning.

## Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (1972), trans. Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981.
2. In a footnote in *Dissemination*, where the theme of undecidability is related to the uncanny, Derrida remarks that 'we find ourselves constantly being drawn back to that text' (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, p. 220). In a still partial invocation in the closing moment of *Specters*, he remarks that, 'One should read also for itself ... all the rest of the text (we will try to do so elsewhere), while crossing this reading with that of numerous other texts in Heidegger' (p. 174).
3. Mark Wigley, *Derrida's Haunt: the Architecture of Deconstruction*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1993.
4. David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, Macmillan, London, 1969.
5. Interview with Jacques Derrida, 'The Ghost Dance', *Public*, no. 2, 1989.
6. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. J. Strachey, Vol. 17, The Hogarth Press, London, 1955, pp. 245–52.
7. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Custom: An Essay on Social Codes*, trans. A. F. Borenstein, Gateway Books, Chicago, 1961.
8. *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, edited by Chris Baldick, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, p. xii.

John Fletcher

# Messianic ruminations

## Derrida, Stirner and Marx

Much of the response to Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* has concentrated on the significance it might have for his thought. No doubt this is an interesting and important subject, but it is not my principal concern here. I am interested in *Specters of Marx* as a Marxist, and therefore not for what it reveals of Derrida and of the alleged 'ethical turn' of deconstruction, but for what it says about Marx and Marxism, and about 'What is to be Done?', here and now in the 'New World Order'.<sup>1</sup>

There have been other Marxist responses to *Specters*, notably those by Aijaz Ahmad and Fredric Jameson.<sup>2</sup> Both are highly characteristic of the writers' respective intellectual styles. Thus Jameson's main thrust seems to be recuperative, as he seeks to weave Derrida's themes into the dialectical totality forming, he believes, the horizon of all human thought and activity. Ahmad's comments on *Specters* are, by contrast, sharper, more

polemical, more concerned to identify the lines of opposition still dividing Derrida from Marxism. These differences in approach are, of course, symptomatic of their more general stances towards poststructuralism.

My own sympathies are more with Ahmad's approach than with Jameson's. Thus Ahmad highlights the apparent contradiction between Derrida's current rallying to Marx and his past stance towards the Marxist tradition, which is summed up by Derrida's remark that he 'opposed, to be sure, *de facto*, "Marxism" or "communism" (the Soviet Union, the International of Communist Parties, and everything that resulted from them...)' (p. 14). Ahmad comments: 'That word, *everything*, is so definitive, ... that one does not know why the collapse of those socialisms [that is, the no longer existing socialisms of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union] should have sent him into mourning.'<sup>3</sup>