

## From Spectres of Marx

# What is Ideology?

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What is ideology? Can one translate with regard to it the logic of *surviving* that we have just glimpsed with regard to the *patrimony of the idol*, and what would be the interest of such an operation?

The treatment of the phantomatic in *The German Ideology* announces or confirms the absolute privilege that Marx always grants to religion, to ideology as religion, mysticism, or theology, in his analysis of ideology in general. If the ghost gives its form, that is to say, its body, to the ideologue, then it is the essential feature [*le propre*], so to speak, of the religious, according to Marx, that is missed when one effaces the semantics or the lexicon of the spectre, as translations often do, with values deemed to be more or less equivalent (fantasmagorical, hallucinatory, fantastic, imaginary, and so on). The mystical character of the fetish, in the mark it leaves on the experience of the religious, is first of all a ghostly character. Well beyond a convenient mode of presentation in Marx's rhetoric or pedagogy, what seems to be at stake is, *on the one hand*, the irreducibly specific character of the spectre. The latter cannot be derived from a psychology of the imagination or from a psychoanalysis of the imaginary, no more than from an onto- or me-ontology, even though Marx seems to inscribe it within a socioeconomic genealogy or a philosophy of labour and production: all these deductions suppose the

possibility of spectral survival. *On the other hand and* by the same token, at stake is the irreducibility of the religious model in the construction of the concept of ideology. When Marx evokes spectres at the moment he analyses, for example, the mystical character or the becoming-fetish of the commodity, we should therefore not see in that only effects of rhetoric, turns of phrase that are contingent or merely apt to convince by striking the imagination. If that were the case, moreover, one would still have to explain their effectiveness in this respect. One would still have to reckon with the invincible force and the original power of the “ghost” effect. One would have to say why it frightens or strikes the imagination, and what fear, imagination, their subject, the life of their subject, and so forth, are.

Let us situate ourselves for a moment in that place where the values of *value* (between use-value and exchange-value), *secret*, *mystique*, *enigma*, *fetish*, and the *ideological* form a chain in Marx's text, singularly in *Capital*, and let us try at least to indicate (it will be only an indicator) the *spectral* movement of this chain. The movement is staged there where it is a question, precisely, of forming the concept of what the stage, any stage, withdraws from our blind eyes at the moment we open them. Now, this concept is indeed constructed with reference to a certain haunting.

It is a great moment at the beginning of *Capital* as everyone recalls: Marx is wondering in effect how to describe the sudden looming up of the mystical character of the commodity, the mystification of the thing itself — and of the money-form of which the commodity's simple form is the “germ.” He wants to analyse the equivalent whose *enigma* and mystical character only strike the bourgeois economist in the finished form of money, gold or silver. It is the moment in which Marx means to demonstrate that the mystical character owes nothing to a use-value.

Is it just chance that he illustrates the principle of his explanation by causing a table to turn? Or rather by recalling the apparition of a turning

table? This table is familiar, too familiar; it is found at the opening of the chapter on the fetishism of the commodity and its secret (*Geheimnis*). This table has been worn down, exploited, over-exploited, or else set aside, no longer in use, in antique shops or auction rooms. The thing is at once set aside and beside itself. Beside itself because, as we will soon be surprised to see, the said table is a little mad, weird, unsettled, “out of joint.” One no longer knows, beneath the hermeneutic patina, what this piece of wood, whose example suddenly looms up, is good for and what it is worth.

Will that which is going to loom up be a mere example? Yes, but the example of a thing, the table, that seems to loom up of itself and to stand all at once on its paws. It is the example of an apparition.

Let us take the chance, then, after so many glosses, of an ingenuous reading. Let us try to see what happens. But is this not right away impossible? Marx warns us with the first words. The point is right away to go beyond, in one fell swoop, the first glance and thus to see there where this glance is blind, to open one's eyes wide there where one does not see what one sees. One must see, at first sight, what does not let itself be seen. And this is invisibility itself. For what first sight misses is the invisible. The flaw, the error of first sight is to see, and not to notice the invisible. If one does not give oneself up to this invisibility, then the table-commodity, immediately perceived, remains what it is not, a simple thing deemed to be trivial and too obvious. This trivial thing seems to comprehend itself (*ein selbst verständliches, triviales Ding*): the thing itself in the phenomenality, of its phenomenon, a quite simple wooden table. So as to prepare us to see this invisibility, to see without seeing, thus to think the body without body of this invisible visibility — the ghost is already taking shape — Marx declares that the thing in question, namely, the commodity, *is not so simple* (a warning that will elicit snickers from all the imbeciles, until the end of time, who never believe anything, of course, because they are so sure that they see what is seen, everything that is seen, only what is

seen). The commodity is even very complicated; it is blurred, tangled, paralysing, aporetic, perhaps undecidable (*ein sehr vertracktes Ding*). It is so disconcerting, this commodity-thing, that one has to approach it with “metaphysical” subtlety and “theological” niceties. Precisely in order to analyse the metaphysical and the theological that constructed the phenomenological good sense of the thing itself, of the immediately visible commodity, in flesh and blood: as what it is “at first sight” (*auf den ersten Blick*). This phenomenological good sense may perhaps be valid for use-value. It is perhaps even meant to be valid only for use-value, as if the correlation of these concepts answered to this function: phenomenology as the discourse of use-value *so as not* to think the market or in view of making oneself blind to exchange-value. Perhaps. And it is for this reason that phenomenological good sense or phenomenology of perception (also at work in Marx when he believes he can speak of a *pure and simple* use-value) can claim to foster Enlightenment since use-value has nothing at all “mysterious” about it (*nicht Mysteriöses an ihr*). If one keeps to use-value, the *properties* (*Eigenschaften*) of the thing (and it is going to be a question of property) are always very human, at bottom, reassuring for this very reason. They always relate to what is proper to man, to the properties of man: either they respond to men's needs, and that is precisely their use-value, or else they are the product of a human activity that seems to intend them for those needs.

For example — and here is where the table comes on stage — the wood remains wooden when it is made into a table: it is then “an ordinary, sensuous thing [*ein ordindäres, sinnliches Ding*]”. It is quite different when it becomes a commodity, when the curtain goes up on the market and the table plays actor and character at the same time, when the commodity-table, says Marx, comes on stage (*auftritt*), begins to walk around and to put itself forward as a market value. *Coup de theatre*: the ordinary, sensuous thing is transfigured (*verwandelt sich*), it becomes

someone, it assumes a figure. This woody and headstrong denseness is metamorphosed into a supernatural thing, a *sensuous non-sensuous* thing, sensuous but non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible (*verwandelt er sich in ein sinnlich übersinnliches Ding*). The ghostly schema now appears indispensable. The commodity is a “thing” without phenomenon, a thing in flight that surpasses the senses (it is invisible, intangible, inaudible, and odourless); but this transcendence is not altogether spiritual, it retains that bodiless body which we have recognised as making the difference between spectre and spirit. What surpasses the senses still passes before us in the silhouette of the sensuous body that it nevertheless lacks or that remains inaccessible to us. Marx does not say sensuous and non-sensuous, or sensuous but non-sensuous.' he says: sensuous non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible. Transcendence, the movement of *super-*, the step beyond (*über, epekeina*), is made sensuous in that very excess. It renders the non-sensuous sensuous. One touches there on what one does not touch, one feels there where one does not feel, one even suffers there where suffering does not take place, when at least it does not take place where one suffers (which is also, let us not forget, what is said about phantom limbs, that phenomenon marked with an X for any phenomenology of perception). The commodity thus haunts the thing, its spectre is at work in use-value. This haunting displaces itself like an anonymous silhouette or the figure of an extra [*figurante*] who might be the principal or capital character. It changes places, one no longer knows exactly where it is, it turns, it invades the stage with its *moves*: there is a step there [*il ya là un pas*] and its allure belongs only to this mutant. Marx must have recourse to theatrical language and must describe the apparition of the commodity as a stage entrance (*auftritt*). And he must describe the table become commodity as a table that turns, to be sure, during a spiritualist séance, but also as a ghostly silhouette, the figuration of an actor or a dancer. Theo-anthropological figure of indeterminate sex (*Tisch*, table, is a masculine noun), the table has feet, the table has a head,

its body comes alive, it erects its whole self like an institution, it stands up and addresses itself to others, first of all to other commodities, its fellow beings in phantomality, it faces them or opposes them, For the spectre is social, it is even engaged in competition or in a war as soon as it makes its first apparition. Otherwise neither *socius*, nor conflict, nor desire, nor love, nor peace would be tenable.

One would have to put this table on the auction block, subject it to co-occurrence or concurrency, make it speak with so many other tables in our patrimony, so many that we have lost count of them, In philosophy, rhetoric, poetics, from Plato to Heidegger, from Kant to Ponge, and so many others. With all of them, the same ceremony: a séance of the table.

Marx, then, has just announced its entrance on stage and its transmutation into a sensuously supersensible thing, and now here it is standing up, not only holding itself up but rising, getting up and lifting itself, lifting its head, redressing itself and addressing itself. Facing the others, and first of all other commodities, yes, it lifts its head. Let us paraphrase a few lines as literally as possible before citing the translation. It is not enough for this wooden table to stand up (*Er steht nick nur*), its feet on the ground, it also stands (*sondern er stellt sich* — and Marx does not add “so to speak” as certain French translators had made him concede, frightened as they were by the literal audacity of the description) — It also stands on its head, a wooden head, for it has become a kind of headstrong, big-headed, obstinate animal that, standing, faces other commodities (*er stellt sich allen andren Waren gegenüber auf den Kopf*). Facing up to the others, before the others, its fellows, here then is the apparition of a strange creature: at the same time Life, Thing, Beast, Object, Commodity, Automaton — in a word, spectre. This Thing, which is no longer altogether a thing, here it goes and unfolds (*entwickelt*), it unfolds *itself*, it develops what it engenders through a quasi-spontaneous generation (parthenogenesis and indeterminate sexuality: the animal Thing, the

animated-inanimated Thing, the dead-living Thing is a Father-Mother), it gives birth through its head, it extracts *from* its wooden head a whole lineage of fantastic or prodigious creatures, whims, chimera (*Grille*), non-ligneous character parts, that is, the lineage of a progeniture that no longer resembles it, inventions far more bizarre or marvellous (*viel wunderlicher*) than if this mad, capricious, and untenable table, its head beginning to spin, started to dance on its own initiative (*desonpropre chef, aus freien Stucken*). Whoever understands Greek and philosophy could say of this genealogy, which transfigures the ligneous into the non-ligneous, that it also gives a tableau of the becoming-immaterial of matter, As one knows, *bullë* matter, is first of all wood. And since this becoming-immaterial of matter seems to take no time and to operate its transmutation in the magic of an instant, in a single glance, through the omnipotence of a thought, we might also be tempted to describe it as the projection of an animism or a spiritism. The wood comes alive and is peopled with spirits: credulity, occultism, obscurantism, lack of maturity before Enlightenment, childish or primitive humanity. But what would Enlightenment be without the market? And who will ever make progress without exchange-value?

*Capital* contradiction. At the very origin of capital. Immediately or in the end, through so many differential relays, it will not fall to induce the “pragmatic” double constraint of all injunctions. Moving about freely (*aus freien Stucken*), *on its own head* [de son propre chef], with a movement of its head but that controls its whole body, from head to toe, ligneous and dematerialised, the Table-Thing appears to be at the principle, at the beginning, and at he controls of itself. It emancipates itself on its own initiative: all alone, autonomous and automaton, its fantastic silhouette moves on its own, free and without attachment. It goes into trances, it levitates, it appears relieved of its body, like all ghosts, a little mad and unsettled as well, upset, “out of joint,” delirious, capricious, and unpredictable. It appears to put itself spontaneously into motion, but it

also puts others into motion, yes, it puts everything around it into motion, as though “*pour encourager les autres*” (to encourage the others), Marx specifies in French in a note about this ghost dance: “One may recall that China and the tables began to dance when the rest of the world appeared to be standing still — *pour encourager les autres*.”

The capital contradiction does not have to do simply with the incredible conjunction of the sensuous and the supersensible in the same Thing; it is the contradiction of *automatic autonomy*, mechanical freedom, technical life. Like every thing, from the moment it comes onto the stage of a market, the table resembles a prosthesis of itself. Autonomy *and* automatism, *but* automatism of this wooden table that spontaneously puts itself into motion, to be sure, and seems thus to animate, animalise, spiritualise, *spiritise* itself, but while remaining an artifactual body, a sort of automaton, a puppet, a stiff and mechanical doll whose dance obeys the technical rigidity of a program. Two genres, two generations of movement intersect with each other in it, and that is why it figures the apparition of a spectre. It accumulates undecidably, in its uncanniness, their contradictory predicates: the inert thing appears suddenly *inspired*, it is all at once transfixed by a *pneuma* or a *psyche*. Become like a living being, the table resembles a prophetic dog that gets up on its four paws, ready to face up to its fellow dogs: an idol would like to make the law. But, inversely, the spirit, soul, or life that animates it remains caught in the opaque and heavy thingness of the *bule*, in the inert thickness of its ligneous body, and autonomy is no more than the mask of automatism. A mask, indeed a visor that may always be hiding no living gaze beneath the helmet. The automaton mimes the living. The Thing is neither dead nor alive, it is dead and alive at the same time. It survives. At once cunning, inventive, and machine-like, ingenious and unpredictable, this war machine is a theatrical machine, a *mekhane*. What one has just seen cross the stage is



an apparition, a quasi-divinity — fallen from the sky or come out of the earth. But the vision also *survives*. Its hyperlucidity insists.

Challenge or invitation, “encouragement,” seduction countering seduction, desire or war, love or hate, provocation of other ghosts: Marx insists on this a lot for there is *a multiple* of this sociality (there is always more than one commodity, more than one spirit, and even more spectres) and *number belongs to* the movement itself, to the non-finite process of spectralisation (Baudelaire invoked number very well in the anthill-city of modern capitalism — ghost, crowd, money, prostitution — and Benjamin likewise in his wake). For if no use-value can *in itself produce* this mysticality or this spectral effect of the commodity, and if the secret is at the same time profound and superficial, opaque and transparent, a secret that is all the more secret in that no substantial essence hides behind it, it is because the effect is born of a *relation* (*ferance*, difference, reference, and *diffarence*), as double relation, one should say as double social bond.

This double *socius* binds *on the one hand men* to each other. It associates them insofar as they have been for all times interested in time, Marx notes right away, the time or the duration of labour, and this in all cultures and at all stages of techno-economic development. This *socius*, then, binds “men” who are first of all experiences of time, existences determined by this relation to time which itself would not be possible without surviving and returning, without that living present and being “out of joint” that dislocates the self-presence of the living present and installs thereby the relation to the other. The same *socius*, the same “social form” of the relation binds, on the other hand, commodity-things to each other. *On the other hand*, but how? And how is what takes place *on the one hand* among men, in their apprehension of time, explained by what takes place *on the other hand* among those spectres that are commodities? How do those whom one calls “men,” living men, temporal and finite existences,

become subjected, in their social relations, to these spectres that are relations, *equally social relations* among commodities?

[Since temporality appears to be essential here to the process of capitalisation and to the *socius* in which an exchange-value is merchandised while spectralising itself, since the existence of the men and women inscribed in this process is determined first of all, in *Capital*, as *temporal*, let us indicate quickly, in passing, the possibility of an inheritance or a filiation that would deserve a more sustained analysis. In question is *the formula* that, at the opening of *Capital*, defines exchange-value and determines the table as “non-sensuous sensuous” thing, sensuously supersensible. This formula literally recalls (and this literality cannot be taken as fortuitous or external) the definition of time — of time as well as of space — in Hegel's *Encyclopedia (Philosophy of Nature, Mechanics)*. Hegel subjects the Kantian definition to a dialectical interpretation, that is, to the *Aufhebung*. He analyses time as that which is first of all abstract or ideal (*ein Ideelles*) since it is the negative unity of being-outside-self (like space of which it is the truth). (This ideality of time is obviously the condition of any idealisation and consequently of any ideologisation and any fetishisation, whatever difference one must respect between these two processes.) Now, it is in order to make explicit the movement of *Aufhebung* as temporalisation of abstract and ideal time that Hegel adds this remark: “As space, time is a pure form of sensibility or of the act of intuition, the non-sensuous sensuous [*das unsinnliche Sinnliche*] ...” (§258; I proposed a reading of this passage in *Margins — of Philosophy*). ]

The commodity table, the headstrong dog, the wooden head faces up, we recall, *to all other commodities*. The market is a front, a front among fronts, a confrontation. Commodities have business with other commodities, these hard-headed spectres have commerce among themselves. And not only in *tête-à-tête*. That is what makes them dance.

So it appears. But if the “mystical character” of the commodity, if the “enigmatic character” of the product of labour *as commodity's* born of “the social form” of labour, one must still analyse what is mysterious or secret about this process, and what the secret of the commodity form is (*das Geheimnisvolle der Warenform*). This secret has to do with a “*quid pro quo*.” The term is Marx's. It takes us back once again to some theatrical intrigue: mechanical ruse (*mekhane*) or mistaking a person, repetition upon the perverse intervention of a prompter [*souffleur*], *parole soufflée*, substitution of actors or characters. Here the theatrical *quid pro quo* stems from an abnormal play of mirrors. There is a mirror, and the commodity form is also this mirror, but since all of a sudden it no longer plays its role, since it does not reflect back the expected image, those who are looking for themselves can no longer find themselves in it. Men no longer recognise in it the *social* character of their *own* labour. It is as if they were becoming ghosts in their turn. The “Proper” feature of spectres, like vampires, is that they are deprived of a specular image, of the true, right specular image (but who is not so deprived?). How do you recognise a ghost? By the fact that it does not recognise itself in a mirror. Now that is what happens with the *commerce* of the commodities *among themselves*. These ghosts that are commodities transform human producers into ghosts. And this whole theatrical process (visual, theoretical, but also optical, *optician*) sets off the effect of a mysterious mirror: if the latter does not return the right reflection, if, then, it phantomalises, this is first of all because it naturalises. The “mysteriousness” of the commodity-form as presumed reflection of the social form is the incredible manner in which this mirror sends back the image (*zuruckspiegelt*) when one thinks it is reflecting for men the image of the “social characteristics of men's own labour”: such an “image” objectivises by naturalising. Thereby, this is its truth, it shows by hiding, it reflects these “objective” (*gegenstandliche*) characteristics as inscribed right on the product of labour, as the “socio-natural properties of these

things” (*als gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften dieser Dinge*). Therefore, and here the commerce among commodities does not wait, the returned (deformed, objectified, naturalised) image becomes that of a social relation among commodities, among these inspired, autonomous, and automatic “objects” that are séance tables. The specular becomes the spectral at the threshold of this objectifying naturalisation: “it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution [*quid pro quo*], the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supersensible or social” (pp. 16 65).

For the thing as well as for the worker in his relation to time, socialisation or the becoming-social passes by way of this spectralisation. The “phantasmagoria” that Marx is working here to describe, the one that is going to open up the question of fetishism and the religious, is the very element of this social *and* spectral becoming: at the same time, by the same token. While pursuing his optical analogy, Marx concedes that, in the same way, of course, the luminous impression left by a thing on the optic nerve also presents itself as objective form before the eye and outside of it, not as an excitation of the optic nerve itself. But there, in visual perception, there is really (*wirklich*), he says, a light that goes from one thing, the external object, to another, the eye: “physical relation between physical things.” But the commodity-form and the relation of value between products of labour in which it presents itself have nothing to do either with its “physical nature” or with the “thingly (material) relations” (*dingliche Beziehungen*) that arise from it. “It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form [*dies phantasmagorische Form*] of a relation between things” (p. 165). As we have just observed, this phantasmagoria of a commerce between market things, on the *mercatus* or the *agora*,

when a piece of merchandise (*merx*) seems to enter into a relation, to converse, speak (*agoreuein*), and negotiate with another, corresponds *at the same time* to a naturalisation of the human *socius*, of labour objectified in things, and to a denaturing, a denaturalisation, and a dematerialisation of the thing become commodity, of the wooden table when it comes on stage as exchange-value and no longer as use-value. For commodities as Marx is going to point out, do not walk by themselves, they do not go to market on their own in order to meet other commodities. This commerce among things stems from the phantasmagoria. The autonomy lent to commodities corresponds to an anthropomorphic projection. The latter *inspires* the commodities, it breathes the spirit into them, a human spirit, the spirit of a *speech* and the spirit of a *will*.

**A.** Of a *speech* first of all, but what would this speech say? What would this *persona*, actor, or character say? “If commodities could speak, they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value. Our own intercourse [ *Unser eignere Verkehr*] as commodities proves it. We relate to each other [ *Wir beziehn uns*] merely as exchange-values” (pp. 176-77). This rhetorical artifice is abyssal. Marx is going to claim right away that the economist naively, reflects or reproduces this fictive or spectral speech of the commodity and lets himself be in some way ventriloquised by it: he “speaks” from the depths of the soul of commodities (*aus den Warensseele heraus*). But in saying “if commodities could *speak*” (*Könnten die Waren sprechen*), Marx implies that they cannot speak. He makes them speak (like the economist he is accusing) but in order to make them say, paradoxically, that inasmuch as they are exchange-values, they speak, and that they speak or maintain a commerce among themselves only insofar as they speak. That to them, in any case, one can at least lend speech. To speak, to adopt or borrow speech, and to be exchange-value is here the same thing. It is use-values that do not speak

and that, for this reason, are not concerned with and do not interest commodities — judging by what they seem to say. With this movement of a fiction of speech, but of speech that sells itself by saying, “Me, the commodity, I am speaking,” Marx wants to give a lesson to economists who believe (but is he not doing the same thing?) that it suffices for a commodity to say “Me, I am speaking” for it to be true and for it to have a soul, a profound soul, and one which is proper to it. We are touching here on that place where, between speaking and saying “I am speaking,” the difference of the simulacrum is no longer operative. Much ado about nothing? Marx cites right after this the Shakespeare play while making a rather tortuous use of the opposition between fortune (chance or destiny) and nature (law, necessity, history, culture): “To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune, but to write and read comes by nature” (Ibid.).

**B.** Of the will next. Since commodities do not walk in order to take themselves willingly, spontaneously, to market, their “guardians” and “possessors” pretend to inhabit these things. Their “will” begins to “Inhabit” (*bausen*) commodities. The difference between *inhabit* and *haunt* becomes here more ungraspable than ever. Persons are personified by letting themselves be haunted by the very effect of objective haunting, so to speak, that they produce by inhabiting the thing. Persons (guardians or possessors of the thing) are haunted in return, and constitutively, by the haunting they produce in the thing by lodging there their speech and their will like inhabitants. The discourse of *Capital* on the “exchange process” opens like a discourse on haunting — and on the laws of its reflection:

Commodities cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right.... [T]heir guardians must place themselves in relation to one another as persons whose will [ *Willen*] resides [*haust*] in those objects, and must behave in such a way that each does not appropriate the commodity of the other, and alienate his own, except through an act to which both parties consent. (P. 178)

From this Marx deduces a whole theory of the juridical form of the pact, the pledge, the contract, and the “economic masks” with which persons cover themselves — and which figure but “the personifications of economic relations.”

This description of the phantasmopoetic or phantasmagoric process is going to constitute the premise of the discourse on fetishism, in the analogy with the “religious world.”

But before we get to that, let us take a few steps backward and formulate a few questions. At least two.

*First of all:* If what *Capital* is analysing here is not only the phantomalisation of the commodity-form but the phantomalisation of the social bond, its spectralisation in return, by means of a perturbed reflection, then what is one to think (still retrospectively) of the stinging irony with which Marx treated Stirner when the latter dared to speak of a becoming-ghost of man himself, *and for himself?* Of a man who became frightened of his own ghost, a constitutive fear of the concept that he formed of himself, and thus of his whole history as a man? Of a *make-oneself-fear* by which he made himself, frightening himself with the very fear that he inspires in himself? His history as the history and work of his mourning, of the mourning for himself, of the mourning he wears right on the surface of what is proper to man? And when he describes the phantomalisation of the wooden table, the ghost that engenders ghosts and gives birth to them *from its bead in its bead*, outside of it inside of it, beginning with itself, *departing from itself* [*partir d'elle-même*], what kind of reflection causes Marx to reproduce the literal language of Stirner, which he himself cited in *The German Ideology* and turned back, in some way, against its author, that is to say, against an accuser who is then charged with the indictment count he had himself elaborated (“After the world has confronted the *fantasy-making* [*phantasierenden*] youth (of

page 20) as a world of his 'feverish fantasies' [*Fieberphantasien*], as a world of ghosts [*als Gespensterwelt*], 'the off-springs of his own head' [*eigenen Gerburten seines Kopfs*] inside his head begin to dominate him")?

This question could be developed endlessly. We will interrupt its course and follow one of its other relays.

*Secondly.* To say that the same thing, the wooden table for example, *comes on stage* as commodity after having been but an ordinary thing in its use-value is to grant an origin to the ghostly moment. Its use-value, Marx seems to imply, was intact. It was what it was, use-value, identical to itself. The phantasmagoria, like capital, would begin with exchange-value and the commodity-form. It is only then that the ghost "comes on stage." Before this, according to Marx, it was not there. Not even in order to haunt use-value. But whence comes the certainty concerning the previous phase, that of this supposed use-value, precisely, a use-value purified of everything that makes for exchange-value and the commodity-form? What secures this distinction for us? It is not a matter here of negating a use-value or the necessity of referring to it. But of doubting its strict purity. If this purity is not guaranteed, then one would have to say that the phantasmagoria began before the said exchange-value, at the threshold of the value of value in general, or that the commodity-form began before the commodity-form, itself before itself. The said use-value of the said ordinary sensuous thing, simple *bule*, the wood of the wooden table concerning which Marx supposes that it has not yet begun to "dance," its very form, the form that informs its bull, must indeed have at least promised it to iterability, to substitution, to exchange, to value; it must have made a start, however minimal it may have been, on an idealisation that permits one to identify it as the same throughout possible repetitions, and so forth. Just as there is no pure use, there is no *use-value* which the possibility of exchange and commerce (by whatever name one calls it, meaning itself, value, culture, spirit [!], signification, the world,



the relation to the other, and first of all the simple form and trace of the other) has not in advance inscribed in an *out-of-use* — an excessive signification that cannot be reduced to the useless. A culture began before culture — and humanity. Capitalisation also. Which is as much as to say that, for this very reason, it is destined to survive them. (One could say as much, moreover, if we were venturing into another context, for exchange-value: it is likewise inscribed and exceeded by a promise of gift beyond exchange. In a certain way, market equivalence arrests or mechanises the dance that it seemed to initiate. Only beyond value itself, use-value and exchange-value, the value of technics and of the market, is grace promised, if not given, but never *rendered or* given back to the dance.)

Without disappearing, use-value becomes, then, a sort of limit, the correlative of a limit-concept, of a pure beginning to which no object can or *should* correspond, and which therefore must be complicated in a general (in any case more general) theory of capital. We will draw from this only one consequence here, among all the many other possible ones: if it itself retains some use-value (namely, of permitting one to *orient* an analysis of the “phantasmagoric process beginning at an origin that is itself fictive or ideal, thus already purified by a certain fantastics), this limit-concept of use-value is in advance contaminated, that is, preoccupied, inhabited, haunted by its other, namely, what will be born from the wooden head of the table, the commodity-form, and its ghost dance. The commodity-form, to be sure, *is not* use-value, we must grant this to Marx and take account of the analytic power this distinction gives us. But if the commodity-form is *not, presently*, use-value, and even if it is not *actually present*, it affects *in advance* the use-value of the wooden table. It affects and bereaves it In advance, like the ghost it will become, but this is precisely where haunting begins. And its time, and the untimeliness of its present, of its being “out of joint.” To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very

construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration.

The “mystical character” of the commodity is inscribed before being inscribed, traced before being written out letter for letter on the forehead or the screen of the commodity. Everything begins before it begins. Marx wants *to know and make known where at what precise moment at what instant* the ghost comes on stage, and this is a manner of exorcism, a way of keeping it at bay: before this limit, it was not there, it was powerless. We are suggesting on the contrary that, before the *coup de theatre* of this instant, before the “as soon as it comes on stage as commodity, it changes into a sensuous supersensible thing,” the ghost had made its apparition, without appearing in person, of course and by definition, but having already hollowed out in use-value, in the hard-headed wood of the headstrong table, the repetition (therefore substitution, exchangeability, iterability, the loss of singularity as the experience of singularity itself, the possibility of capital) without which a use could never even be determined. This haunting is not an empirical hypothesis. Without it, one could not even form the concept either of use-value, or of value in general, or inform any matter whatsoever, or determine any table, whether a wooden table-useful or saleable — or a table of categories. Or any Tablet of commandments. One could not even complicate, divide, or fracture sufficiently the concept of use-value by pointing out, as Marx does for example, this obvious fact: for its first presumed owner, the man who takes it to market as use-value *meant for others*, the first use-value is an exchange-value.

“Hence commodities must be realised as values before they can be realised as use-values” (p. 179). And vice versa, which makes the diachrony *circular* and transforms the distinction into a complication. “On

the other hand, [commodities] must stand the test as use-values before they can be realised as values.” Even if the transformation of one commodity into use-value and some other into money marks an independent stopping point, a stasis in circulation, the latter remains an infinite process. If the total circulation C-M-C is a series without beginning or end,” as the *Critique of Political Economy* constantly insists, it is because the metamorphosis is possible in all directions between the use-value, the commodity, and money. Not to mention that the use-value of the money-commodity (*Geldware*) is also itself “dual”: natural teeth can be replaced by gold prostheses, but this use-value is different from the one Marx calls “formal use-value” which arises out of the specific social function of money.

Since any use-value is marked by this possibility of being used *by the other* or being used *another time*, this alterity or iterability projects it *a priori* onto the market of equivalences (which are always equivalences between non-equivalents, of course, and which suppose the double *socius* we were talking about above). In its originary iterability, a use-value is in advance promised, promised to exchange and beyond exchange. It is in advance thrown onto the market of equivalences. This is not simply a bad thing, even if the use-value is always *at risk* of losing its soul in the commodity. The commodity is a *born* “cynic” because it effaces differences, but although it is congenitally levelling, although it is “a born leveller and cynic” (*Geborner Leveller und Zyniker*) (p. 179), this original cynicism *was already being prepared* in use-value, in the wooden head of that dog standing, like a table, on its four paws. One can say of the table what Marx says of the commodity. Like the commodity that it will become, that it is in advance, the cynic already prostitutes itself, “it is always ready to exchange not only soul, but body, with each and every other commodity, be it more repulsive than Maritornes herself” (Ibid.). It is in thinking of this original prostitution that, as we recall, Marx liked to

cite Timon of Athens and his prophetic imprecation. But one must say that if the commodity corrupts (art, philosophy, religion, morality, law, when their works become market values), it is because the becoming-commodity already attested to the value it puts in danger. For example: if a work of art can become a commodity, and if this process seems fated to occur, it is also because the commodity began by putting to work, in one way or another, the principle of an art.

This was not a critical question, but rather a deconstruction of the critical limits, the reassuring limits that guarantee the necessary and legitimate exercise of critical questioning. Such a deconstruction is not a critique of critique, according to the typical duplication of post-Kantian German ideology. And most of all it does not necessarily entail a general phantasmagorisation in which everything would indifferently become commodity, in an equivalence of prices. All the more so in that, as we have suggested here and there, the concept of commodity-form or of exchange-value sees itself affected by the same overflowing contamination. If capitalisation has no rigorous limit, it is also because it comes itself to be exceeded. But once the limits of phantasmagorisation can no longer be controlled or fixed by the simple opposition of presence and absence, actuality and inactuality, sensuous and supersensible, another approach to differences must structure (“conceptually” and “really”) the field that has thus been re-opened. Far from effacing differences and analytic determinations, this other logic calls for other concepts. One may hope it will allow for a more refined and more rigorous restructuration. It alone in any case can call for this constant restructuration, as elsewhere for the very progress of the critique. And this de-limitation will also affect discourse on religion, ideology, and fetishism. But one has to realise that the ghost is there, be it in the opening of the promise or the expectation, *before its first apparition*: the latter had announced itself, from the first it will have come second. *Two times at the*

*same time*, originary iterability, irreducible virtuality of this space and this time. That is why one must think otherwise the “time” or the date of an event. Again: “ha's this thing appear'd againe tonight?”

Would there be then some exorcism at the opening of *Capital*? When the curtain rises on the raising of a curtain? From the first chapter of its first book? However potential it may appear, and however preparatory, however virtual, would this premise of exorcism have developed enough power to sign and seal the whole logic of this great work? Would a conjuration ceremony have scanned the unfolding of an immense critical discourse? Would it have accompanied that discourse, followed or preceded it like its shadow, in secret, like an indispensable and — if one can still put it this way — vital surviving, required in advance? A surviving inherited at the origin, but at every instant afterwards? And is not this surviving conjuration a part, ineffaceably, of the revolutionary promise? Of the injunction or oath that puts *Capital* in motion?

Let us not forget that everything we have just read there was Marx's point of view on a *finite delirium*. It was his discourse on a madness destined, according to him, to come to an end, on a general incorporation of abstract human labour that is still translated, but for a finite time, into the language of madness, into a delirium (*Verückheit*) of expression (p. 169). *We will have to*, Marx declares, and *we will be able to*, *we will have to be able to* put an end to what appears in “this absurd form” (*in dieser verrückten Form*). *We will see* (translate: *we will see come*) the end of this delirium and of these ghosts, Marx obviously thinks. It is necessary, because these ghosts are bound to the categories of bourgeois economy.

This madness here? Those ghosts there? Or spectrality in general? This is more or less our whole question — and our circumspection. We do not know if Marx thought to be done with the ghost in general, or even if he really wanted that, when he declares unequivocally that this ghost here,

this *Spuk* which *Capital* takes as its object, is only the effect of the market economy. And that, as such, it ought to, it will have to disappear with other forms of production.

The categories of bourgeois economics consist precisely of forms of this kind [i.e., delirious, Marx has just said]. They are forms of thought which are socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of social production, i.e. commodity production. The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour on the basis of commodity production, vanishes therefore as soon as we come to [escape to: *flüchten*] other forms of production [*Aller Mystizismus der warenwelt, all der Zäuber und Spuk, welcher arbeitsprodukte auf Grundlage der Warenproduktion umnehelt, verschwindet daber sofort, sobald wir zu andre Produktionsformen flüchten*] (Ibid.)

This translation, like so many others, manages to efface the literal reference to the ghost (*Spuk*). One must also underscore the instant immediacy with which, as Marx would like at least to believe or make us believe, mysticism, magic, and the ghost would disappear: they *will vanish* (Indicative), they will dissipate in truth, according to him, as if by magic, as they had come, at the very second in which one will (would) see the end of market production. Assuming even, along with Marx, that the latter will ever have a possible end. Marx does indeed say: “as soon as,” *sobald*, and as always he is speaking of a disappearance to come of the ghost, the fetish, and religion as cloudy apparitions. Everything is veiled in mist, everything is enveloped in clouds (*umnehelt*), beginning with truth. Clouds on a cold night, landscape or setting of *Hamlet* upon the apparition of the ghost (“it is past midnight, bitterly cold, and dark except for the faint light of the stars”).

Even if *Capital* had thus opened with a great scene of exorcism, with a bid to raise the stakes of conjuration, this critical phase would not be at all

destroyed, it would not be discredited. At least it would not annul everything about its event and its inaugurality. For we are wagering here that thinking never has done with the conjuring impulse. It would instead be born of that impulse. To swear or to conjure, is that not the chance of thinking and its destiny, no less than its limit? The gift of its finitude? Does it ever have any other choice except among several conjurations? We know that the question itself — and it is the most ontological and the most critical and the most risky of all questions — still protects itself. Its *very formulation* throws up barricades or digs trenches, surrounds itself with barriers, increases the fortifications. It rarely advances headlong, at total risk to life add limb [*à corps perdu*]. In a magical, ritual, obsessional fashion, *its formalisation uses formulas* which are sometimes incantatory procedures. It marks off its territory by setting out there strategies and sentinels under the protection of apotropaic shields. Problematization itself is careful to disavow and thus to conjure away (we repeat, *problema* is a shield, an armour, a rampart as much as it is a task for the inquiry to come). Critical problematization continues to do battle against ghosts. It fears them as it does itself.

These questions posed, or rather suspended, we can perhaps return to what *Capital* seems to want to say about the fetish, in the same passage and following the same logic. The point is also, let us not forget, to show that the enigma of the “money” fetish is reducible to that of the “commodity” fetish once the latter has become visible (*sichtbar*) — but, adds Marx just as enigmatically, *visible or evident* to the point of blinding dazzlement: the French translation to which I am referring here says the enigma of the commodity fetish “*crève les yeux*,” literally, puts out one’s eyes (*die Augenblendende Rätsel des Warenfetischs*).

Now, as we know, only the reference to the religious world allows one to explain the autonomy of the ideological, and thus its proper efficacy, its incorporation in apparatuses that are endowed not only with an apparent

autonomy but a sort of automaticity that not fortuitously recalls the headstrongness of the wooden table. By rendering an account of the “mystical” character and the secret (*das Geheimnisvolle*) of the commodity-form, we have been introduced into fetishism and the ideological. Without being reducible one to the other, they share a common condition. Now, says *Capital*, only the religious analogy, only the “misty realm of religion” (*die Nebelregion der religiösen Welt*) can allow one to understand the production and fetishising autonomisation of this form. The necessity of turning toward this analogy is presented by Marx as a consequence of the “phantasmagoric form” whose genesis he has just analysed. If the objective relation between things (which we have called *commerce between commodities*) is indeed a phantasmagoric form of the social relation between men, *then* we must have recourse to the *only analogy possible*, that of religion: “It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.” Consequence: “*In order therefore, to find an analogy* [my emphasis: *Um daher eine Analogie zu finden*], we must take flight [*flüchten* again or already] into the misty realm of religion” (p. 165).

Needless to say, the stakes are enormous in the relation of fetishism to the ideological and the religious. In the statements that immediately follow, the deduction of fetishism is also applied to the ideological, to its autonomisation as well as to its automatisations:

There [in the religious world] the products of the human brain [of the head, once again, of men: *des menschlichen Kopfes*, analogous to the wooden head of the table capable of engendering chimera — in its head, outside of its head — once, that is, *as soon as*, its form can become commodity-form] appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race.... I call this the fetishism which attaches itself [*anklebt*] to the products of labour as soon as they are produced



as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

As the foregoing analysis has already demonstrated, this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them. (Ibid.)

In other words, as soon as there is production, there is fetishism: idealisation, autonomisation and automatisisation, dematerialisation and spectral incorporation, mourning work coextensive with all work, and so forth. Marx believes he must limit this co-extensivity to commodity production. In our view, this is a gesture of exorcism, which we spoke of earlier and regarding which we leave here once again our question suspended.

The religious is thus not just one ideological phenomenon or phantomatic production among others. On the one hand, it gives to the production of the ghost or of the ideological phantasm its originary form or its paradigm of reference, its first “analogy.” On the other hand (and first of all, and no doubt for the same reason), the religious also informs, along with the messianic and the eschatological, be it in the necessarily undetermined, empty, abstract, and dry form that we are privileging here, that “spirit” of emancipatory Marxism whose injunction we are reaffirming here, however secret and contradictory it appears.

We cannot get involved here in this general question of fetishisation. In work to come, it will no doubt be necessary to link it to the question of phantomatic spectrality. Despite the infinite opening of all these borders, one might perhaps attempt to define what is at stake here from at least *three points of view*:

1. Fetishist phantomaticity in general and its place in *Capital*. Even before commodity value makes its stage entrance and before the

choreography of the wooden table, Marx had defined the residual product of labour as a phantomatic objectivity (*gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit*).

**2.** The place of this theoretical moment in Marx's corpus. Does he or does he not break with what is said about the ghost and the ideological in *The German Ideology*? One may have one's doubts. The relation is probably neither one of break nor of homogeneity.

**3.** Beyond these dimensions, which are not only those of an exegesis of Marx, at stake is doubtless everything which *today* links Religion and Technics in a singular configuration.

**A.** At stake first of all is that which takes the original form of a return of the religious, whether fundamentalist or not, and which overdetermines all questions of nation, State, international law, human rights, Bill of rights — in short, everything that concentrates its habitat in the at least symptomatic figure of Jerusalem or, here and there, of its reappropriation and of the system of alliances that are ordered around it. How to relate, but also how to dissociate the two messianic spaces we are talking about here under the same name? If the messianic appeal belongs properly to a universal structure, to that irreducible movement of the historical opening to the future, therefore to experience itself and to its language (expectation, promise, commitment to the event of what is coming, imminence, urgency, demand for salvation and for justice beyond law, pledge given to the other inasmuch as he or she is not present, presently present or living, and so forth), how is one to *think it with* the figures of Abrahamic messianism? Does it figure abstract desertification or originary condition? Was not Abrahamic messianism but an exemplary prefiguration, the pre-name [*prénom*] given against the background of the possibility that we are attempting to name here? But then why keep the name, or at least the adjective (we prefer to say *messianic* rather than *messianism*, so as to designate a structure of experience rather than a

religion), there where no figure of the *arrivant*, even as he or she is heralded, should be predetermined, prefigured, or even pre-named? Of these two deserts, which one, first of all, will have signalled toward the other? Can one conceive an atheological heritage of the messianic? Is there one, on the contrary, that is more consistent? heritage is never natural, one may inherit more than once, in different places and at different times, one may choose to wait for the most appropriate time, which may be the most untimely — write about it according to different *lineages*, and sign thus more than one *import*. These questions and these hypotheses do not exclude each other. At least for us and for the moment. Asceticism strips the messianic hope of all biblical forms, and even all determinable figures of the wait or expectation; it thus denudes itself in view of responding to that which must be absolute hospitality, the “yes” to the *arrivant(e)*, the “come” to the future that cannot be anticipated — which must not be the “anything whatsoever” that harbours behind it those too familiar ghosts, the very ones we must practice recognising. Open, waiting for the event *as* justice, this hospitality is absolute only if it keeps watch over its own universality. The messianic, including its revolutionary forms (and the messianic is always revolutionary, it has to be), would be urgency, imminence but, irreducible paradox, a waiting without horizon of expectation. One may always take the quasi-atheistic dryness of the messianic to be the condition of the religions of the Book, a desert that was not even theirs (but the earth is always borrowed, on loan from God, it is never possessed by the occupier, says precisely [*justement*] the Old Testament whose injunction one would also have to hear); one may always recognise there the arid soil in which grew, and passed away, the living figures of all the messiahs, whether they were announced, recognised, or still awaited.

One may also consider this compulsive growth, and the furtiveness of this passage, to be the only events on the basis of which we approach and

first of all name the messianic in general, that other ghost which we cannot and ought not do without. One may deem strange, strangely familiar and inhospitable at the same time (*unheimlich*, uncanny), this figure of absolute hospitality whose promise one would choose to entrust to an experience that is so impossible, so unsure in its indigence, to a quasi-“messianism” so anxious, fragile, and impoverished, to an always presupposed “messianism,” to a quasi-transcendental “messianism” that also has such an obstinate interest in a materialism without substance: a materialism of the *khôra* for a despairing “messianism.” But without this latter despair and if one could *count on* what is coming, hope would be but the calculation of a program. One would have the prospect but one would no longer wait for anything or anyone. Law without justice. One would no longer invite, either body or soul, no longer receive any visits, no longer even think to see. To see coming. Some, and I do not exclude myself, will find this despairing “messianism” has a curious taste, a taste of death. It is true that this taste is above all a taste, a foretaste, and in essence it is curious. Curious of the very thing that it conjures — and that leaves something to be desired.

**B.** But also at stake, indissociably, is the differential deployment of *tekkne-*, of techno-science or tele-technology. It obliges us more than ever to think the virtualisation of space and time, the possibility of virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us more than ever (more and otherwise than ever, for this is not absolutely and thoroughly new) from opposing presence to its representation, “real time” to “deferred time,” effectivity to its simulacrum, the living to the non-living, in short, the living to the living-dead of its ghosts. It obliges us to think, from there, another space for democracy. For democracy-to-come and thus for justice. We have suggested that the event we are prowling around here hesitates between the singular “who” of the ghost and the general “what” of the simulacrum. In the virtual space of all the teletechnosciences, in the

general dis-location to which our time is destined — as are from now on the places of lovers, families, nations — the messianic trembles on the edge of this event itself. It is this hesitation, it has no other vibration, it does not “live” otherwise, but it would no longer be messianic if it stopped hesitating: how to give rise and to give place [*donner lieu*], still, to render it, this place, to render it habitable, but without killing the future in the name of old frontiers? Like those of the blood, nationalisms of native soil not only sow hatred, not only commit crimes, they have no future, they promise nothing even if, like stupidity or the unconscious, they hold fast to life. This messianic hesitation does not paralyse any decision, any affirmation, any responsibility. On the contrary, it grants them their elementary condition. It is their very experience.

As we must hasten the conclusion, let us schematise things. If something seems not to have shifted between *The German Ideology and Capital*, it is two axioms whose inheritance is equally important for us. But it is the inheritance of a double bind which, moreover, signals toward the double bind of any inheritance and thus of any responsible decision. Contradiction and secret inhabit the injunction (the spirit of the father, if one prefers). On the one hand, Marx insists on respecting the originality and the proper efficacy, the autonomisation and automatisisation of ideality as finite-infinite processes of difference (phantomatic, fantastic, fetishistic, or ideological) — and of the simulacrum which is not simply imaginary in it. It is an artifactual body, a technical body, and it takes labour to constitute or deconstitute it. This movement will remain valuable, no doubt irreplaceable, provided that it is adjusted, as it will be by any “good Marxism,” to novel structures and situations. But, on the other hand, even as he remains one of the first thinkers of technics, or even, by far and from afar, of the tele-technology that it will always have been, from near or from far, Marx continues to want to ground his critique or his exorcism of the spectral simulacrum in an ontology. It is a —

critical but predeconstructive — ontology of presence as actual reality and as objectivity. This critical ontology means to deploy the possibility of dissipating the phantom, let us venture to say again of conjuring it away as representative consciousness of a subject, and of bringing this representation back to the world of labour, production, and exchange, so as to reduce it to its conditions. Pre-deconstructive here does not mean false, unnecessary, or illusory. Rather it characterises a relatively stabilised knowledge that calls for questions more radical than the critique itself and than the ontology that grounds the critique. These questions are not destabilising as the effect of some theoretico-speculative subversion. They are not even, in the final analysis, questions but seismic events. *Practical* events, where thought *becomes act* [*se fait agir*], and body and manual experience (thought as *Handeln*, says Heidegger somewhere), labour but always divisible labour — and shareable, beyond the old schemas of the division of labour (even beyond the one on whose basis Marx constructed so many things, in particular his discourse on ideological hegemony: the division between intellectual labour and manual labour whose pertinence has certainly not disappeared, but appears more limited than ever). These seismic events come from the future, they are given from out of the unstable, chaotic, and dislocated ground of the times. A disjointed or dis-adjusted time without which there would be neither history, nor event, nor promise of justice.

The fact that the ontological and the critical are here pre-deconstructive has political consequences which are perhaps not negligible. And they are doubtless not negligible, to go too quickly here, with regards to the concept of the political, as concerns the political itself.

To indicate just one example among so many others, let us evoke once again in conclusion a passage from *The German Ideology*. It puts to work a schema that *Capital* seems to have constantly confirmed. In it, Marx advances that belief in the religious spectre, thus in the ghost in general,

consists in autonomising a representation (*Vorstellung*) and in forgetting its genesis as well as its real grounding (*reale Grundlage*). To dissipate the factitious autonomy thus engendered in history, one must again take into account the modes of production and techno-economic exchange:

In religion people make their empirical world into an entity that is only conceived, imagined [*zu einem nur gedachten, vorgestellten Wesen*], that confronts them as something foreign [*das ihnen fremd gegenübertritt*]. This again is by no means to be explained from other concepts, from “selfconsciousness” and similar nonsense, but from the entire hitherto existing mode of production and intercourse, which is just as independent [*unabhängig*] of the pure concept as the invention of the self-acting mule [in English in the text] and the use of railways are independent of Hegelian philosophy. If he wants to speak of an “essence” of religion, i.e., of a material basis of this inessentiality, [*ab. von einer materiellen Grundlage dieses Unwesens*], then he should look for it neither in the “essence of man” [*im “Wesen des Menschen”*], nor in the predicates of God, but in the material world which each stage of religious development finds in existence (cf above *Feuerbach*). All the “spectres” which have filed before us [*die wir Revue passieren liessen*] were representations [*Vorstellungen*]. These representations — leaving aside their real basis [*abgesehen von ihrer realem Grundlage*] (which Stirner in any case leaves aside) — understood as representations internal to consciousness, as thoughts in people's heads, transferred from their objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*] back into the subject [*in das Subjekt zurückgenommen*], elevated from substance into self-consciousness, are obsessions [*der Sparren*] or *fixed ideas*.. (P. 160-61)

If one follows the letter of the text, the critique of the ghost or of spirits would thus be the critique of a subjective representation and an abstraction, of what happens *in the head*, of what comes only out of the head, that is, of what stays there, in the head, even as it has come out of

there, out of the head, and *survives outside the head*. But nothing would be possible, beginning with the critique, without the surviving, without the possible survival of this autonomy and this automatism outside the head. One may say that this is where the spirit of the Marxist critique situates itself, not the spirit that one would oppose to its letter, but the one which supposes the very movement of its letter. Like the ghost, it is neither in the head nor outside the head. Marx knows this, but he proceeds as if he did not want to know it. In *The German Ideology*, the following chapter will be devoted to this obsession that made Stirner say: "*Mensch, es spukt in deinem Kopfe!*" commonly translated as "Man, there are spectres in your head!" Marx thinks it is enough to turn the apostrophe back against Saint Max (p. 160).

*Es spukt*. difficult to translate, as we have been saying. It is a question of ghost and haunting, to be sure, but what else? The German idiom seems to name the ghostly return but it names it in a verbal form. The latter does not say that there is some *revenant*, spectre, or ghost; it does not say that there is some apparition, *der Spuk*, nor even that it appears, but that "it ghosts," "it apparitions." *It is a matter [Il s'agit]*, in the neutrality of this altogether impersonal verbal form, of something or someone, neither someone nor something, of a "one" that does not act. *It is a matter* rather of the passive movement of an apprehension, of an apprehensive movement ready to welcome, but where? In the head? What is the head before this apprehension that it cannot even contain? And what if the head, which is neither the subject, nor consciousness, nor the ego, nor the brain, were defined first of all by the possibility of such an experience, and by the very thing that it can neither contain, nor delimit, by the indefiniteness of the "*es spukt*"? To welcome, we were saying then, but even while apprehending, with anxiety and the desire to exclude the stranger, to invite the stranger without accepting him or her, domestic hospitality that welcomes without welcoming the stranger, but a stranger



who is a] ready found within (*das Heimliche-Unheimliche*), more intimate with one than one is oneself, the absolute proximity of a stranger whose power is singular and anonymous (*es spukt*), an unnameable and neutral power, that is, undecidable, neither active nor passive, an an — identity that, *without doing anything*, invisibly occupies places belonging finally neither to us nor to it. Now, *all this*, *this* about which we have failed to say anything whatsoever that is logically determinable, *this* that comes with so much difficulty to language, *this* that seems not to mean anything, *this* that puts to rout our meaning-to-say, making us speak regularly from the place where we want to say nothing, where we know clearly what we do not want to say but do not know what we would like to say, as *if this* were no longer either of the order of knowledge or will or will-to-say, well, *this* comes back, *this returns*, *this* insists in urgency, and *this* gives one to think, but *this*, which is each time irresistible enough, singular enough to engender as much anguish as do the future and death, *this* stems less from a “repetition automatism” (of the automatons that have been turning before us for such a long time) than it gives us to think all *this*, *altogether other*, *every other*, from which the repetition compulsion arises: that every other is altogether other. The impersonal ghostly returning of the “*es spukt*” produces an automatism of repetition, no less than it finds its principle of reason there. In an incredible paragraph of “*Das Unheimliche*,” Freud moreover recognises that he should have begun his research (on the *Unheimliche*, the death drive, the repetition compulsion, the beyond of the pleasure principle, and so forth) with what says the “*es spukt*.” He sees there an *example with* which it would have been necessary to begin the search. He goes so far as to consider it the *strongest example of Unheimlichkeit* (“*Wir hätten eigentlich unsere Untersuchung mit diesem, vielleicht stärksten Beispiel von Unheimlichkeit beginnen können*,” “We could, properly speaking, have begun our inquiry with this example of uncanniness, which is perhaps the strongest”). But one may wonder whether what he calls the strongest example lets itself be reduced

to an example merely to the strongest example, in a series of examples. And what if it were the Thing itself, the cause of the very thing one is seeking and that makes one seek? The cause of the knowledge and the search, the motive of history or of the *episteme*? If it is from there that it drew its exemplary force? On the other hand, one must pay attention to the conjuring mechanism that Freud then puts forward to justify himself for not having thought that he ought to begin from where he *could have* begun, from where he *ought to* have begun, nevertheless, *him* for example (you understand well what I mean: Marx, him too).

Freud explains this to us in the serene tone of epistemological, methodological, rhetorical, in truth psychagogical caution: if he had to begin not where he could have or should have begun, it is because with the thing in question (the strongest example of *Unheimlichkeit*, the “*es spukt*,” ghosts, and apparitions), one scares oneself too much [one makes oneself fear too much: *on se fait trop peur*]. One confuses what is *heimliche-unheimliche*, in a contradictory, undecidable fashion, with the terrible or the frightful (*mit dem Grauenhaften*). Now, fear is not good for the serenity of research and the analytic distinction of concepts. One should read also for itself and from this point of view all the rest of the text (we will try to do so elsewhere), while crossing this reading with that of numerous other texts of Heidegger. We think that the frequent, decisive, and organising recourse that the latter has to the value of *Unheimlichkeit*, in *Being and Time* and elsewhere, remains generally unnoticed or neglected. In both discourses, that of Freud and that of Heidegger, this recourse makes possible fundamental projects or trajectories. But it is so while destabilising permanently, and in a more or less subterranean fashion, the order of conceptual distinctions that are put to work. It should disturb both the ethics and the politics that follow implicitly or explicitly from that order.

Our hypothesis is that the same is true for Marx's spectrology. Is this not our own great problematic constellation of haunting? It has no certain border, but it blinks and sparkles behind the proper names of Marx, Freud, and Heidegger: Heidegger who misjudged Freud who misjudged Marx. This is no doubt not aleatory. Marx has not yet been received. The subtitle of this address could thus have been: "*Marx — das Unheimliche.*" Marx remains an immigrant *chez nous*, a glorious, sacred, accursed but still a clandestine immigrant as he was all his life. He belongs to a time of disjunction, to that "time out of joint" in which is inaugurated, laboriously, painfully, tragically, a new thinking of borders, a new experience of the house, the home, and the economy. Between earth and sky. One should not rush to make of the clandestine immigrant an illegal alien or, what always risks coming down to the same thing, to domesticate him. To neutralise him through naturalisation. To assimilate him so as to stop frightening oneself (making oneself fear) with him. He is not part of the family, but one should not send him back, once again, him too, to the border.

However alive, healthy, critical, and still necessary his burst of laughter may remain, and first of all in the face of the capital or paternal ghost, the *Hauptgespenst* that is the general essence of Man, Marx, *das Unheimliche*, perhaps should not have chased away so many ghosts too quickly. Not all of them at once or not so simply on the pretext that they did not exist (of course they do not exist, so what?) — or that all this was or ought to remain past ("Let the dead bury their dead," and so forth). All the more so in that he also knew how to let them go free, emancipate them even, in the movement in which he analyses the (relative) autonomy of exchange-value, the ideologem, or the fetish. Even if one wanted to, one could not let the dead bury the dead: that has no sense, that is *impossible*. Only mortals, only the living who are not living gods can bury the dead. Only mortals can watch over them, and can watch, period. Ghosts can do

so as well, they are everywhere where there is watching; the dead *cannot do so* — It is impossible and they must not do so.

That the without-ground of this impossible can nevertheless *take place* is on the contrary the ruin or the absolute ashes, the threat that must be *thought*, and, why not, exorcised yet again. To exorcise not in order to chase away the ghosts, but this time to grant them the right, if it means making them come back alive, as *Tenants* who would no longer be *Tenants*, but as other *arrivants* to whom a hospitable memory or promise must offer welcome without certainty, ever, that they present themselves as such. Not in order to grant them the right in this sense but out of a concern *for justice*. Present existence or essence has never been the condition, object, or the *thing* [chose] of justice. One must constantly remember that the impossible ("to let the dead bury their dead") is, alas, always possible. One must constantly remember that this absolute evil (which is, is it not, absolute life, fully present life, the one that does not know death and does not want to hear about it) can take place. One must constantly remember that it is even on the basis of the terrible possibility of this impossible that justice is desirable: *through* but also *beyond* right and law.

If Marx, like Freud, like Heidegger, like everybody, did not begin where he ought to have "been able to begin" (*beginnen können*), namely with haunting, before life *as such*, before death *as suck*, it is doubtless not his fault. The fault, in any case, by definition, is repeated, we inherit it, we must watch over it. It always comes at a great price — and for humanity precisely. What costs humanity very dearly is doubtless to believe that one can have done in history with a general essence of Man, on the pretext that it represents only a *Hauptgespenst*, arch-ghost, but also, what comes down to the same thing — at *bottom* — to still believe, no doubt, in this capital ghost. To believe in it as do the credulous or the dogmatic. Between the two beliefs, as always, the way remains narrow.

In order for there to be any sense in asking oneself about the terrible price to pay, in order to watch over the future, everything would have to be begun again. But in memory, this time, of that impure “impure impure history of ghosts.”

Can one, in order to question it, address oneself to a ghost? To whom? To him? To *it*, as Marcellus says once again and so prudently? “Thou art a Scholler; speake to it Horatio.... Question it.”

The question deserves perhaps to be put the other way: Could one *address oneself in general* if already some ghost did not come back? If he loves justice at least, the “scholar” of the future, the “Intellectual” of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let thus speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always *there*, spectres, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet. They give us to rethink the “there” as soon as we open our mouths, even at a colloquium and especially when one speaks there in a foreign language:

*Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.*