

Before the *Specters*

The Memory of a Promise (from the Archives)

To cite this essay:

MERCIER, Thomas Clément, “Before the *Specters*: The Memory of a Promise (from the Archives),” *Contexto Internacional: Journal of Global Connections*, Vol. 42/1, 2020.

Abstract:

This text was prompted by a forum discussing the legacy of Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, twenty-five years after its publication. In this short essay, I explore the book’s influence on the fields of Marxism, post-Marxism, and beyond. With the problematic of heritage and legacy in mind, I raise the questions of sexual difference and dissemination as that which comes to interrupt the genealogical logic of inheritance understood as filiation and reproduction. I show that Derrida’s book, besides questioning reception and influence, yet remains to be read, especially in light of ongoing archival research on Derrida’s numerous engagements with Marx and Marxist thought in a series of unpublished seminars from the 1970s. This is done specifically through the reading of an unpublished seminar from 1974-1975, dealing with the Marxian concepts of ideology and division of labor – which Derrida interrogates more particularly in relation to sex, sexuality, and sexual differences.

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What imparts itself in the promise must therefore go beyond all forms of transcendental subjectivity and their politico-economic institutions, it must go beyond capital and the labor which it determines, and from this *exceedence* it must transform all its figures in advance, transform them by promising them and shifting them into the ‘trans’ of every form. From its very inception, it must be beyond everything posited in any way, a monster at the limit of appearance, of visibility and representability. It must be, however so gently, an ex-positing.

Werner Hamacher (in SPRINKER 2008: 193)

Russian dolls: Derrida & Sons (& Daughters &...)

I come forward on this forum, tasked with assessing the legacy of a 1993 book by Jacques Derrida – a book in which Derrida assessed the legacy of Marx, himself assessing the legacy of Hegel and a few others, and so on, and so forth. Or, as Valéry would perhaps put it in reverse order: *Kant qui genuit Hegel qui genuit Marx qui genuit Derrida*. The list will go on.

Are we simply Russian dolls, captive to this consecutive chain of generations? Perhaps, but with each new doll, a death had to take place. And with each new doll, the spectres accumulate and already challenge the stability of the nesting structure which supposedly supports the ensemble. In the 1975–1976 seminar *La vie la mort* – a seminar in which, incidentally, Derrida had quite a lot to say about Marx’s concepts of production and reproduction¹ – Derrida analysed François Jacob’s use of the Russian dolls metaphor in his book *La logique du vivant*. It led to the following remark, in

¹ On this subject, see my essay ‘Re/pro/ductions: *Ça déborde*’, forthcoming in *Poetics Today* (MERCIER 2020c).

which Derrida interrogates the monstrosity of a generative process that can be reduced neither to pure reproduction nor to pure creation. I will let Derrida's remark hang here as a second epigraph:

Note that a Russian doll that would 'emerge', as [François Jacob] says, is already itself quite new and quite monstrous compared to what we know. He wants that the doll comes out of a box in which it is enclosed according to a nested structure that remains overall predictable, but also that it *emerges*, discontinuously, that is to say, that it comes out suddenly, all at once, but from the sea [*de la mer*].

(DERRIDA 2019a: 180, my translation and emphasis)

After the *Specters* (+25): Disseminating fluid mechanics

Before I start, I would like to confess something: I will not do justice to the task that I volunteered to take on – that is, to assess the theoretical legacy and political impact (or lack thereof) of Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, 25 years after its publication in English in Peggy Kamuf's translation. This is due to the contextual limitations of the present essay, of course, to my overall lack of competence and knowledge, certainly, but also to structural reasons that deserve a short development here. How does one evaluate the legacy and impact of a book whose main argument was precisely to deconstruct the notion of 'legacy', to exorbitantly pluralise the forms, contents, and traces of inheritance, and to challenge the possibility of determining 'influences' in the language of being? 'Influence': against the traditional metaphor of the flux, against the ontological claim that the history of being or becoming manifests itself as confluence of sources, fluids, rivers, or water streams, Derrida proposes the haunting of spectrality – that is, the impossibility to determine once and for all the presence or absence of such or such 'influence' in a given work. While *Specters* is arguably a book on the inescapability of inheritance – '*To be... means... to inherit*' (DERRIDA 1994: 67) – Derrida also argues that we should think inheritance before and beyond the capture of ontology and phenomenology. The spectral other

need not be present to be influential. The trace of haunting might be silent, perhaps invisible – it is, at the very least, never fully present *as such*, never fully alive in self-presence. It might be at work through the most disdainful of denegations, through the most vociferous of critiques, or through the most opaque of silences. For these reasons, the scope, the wingspan of haunting does not let itself be measured: ‘haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not dated, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar’ (DERRIDA 1994: 3).

Yet we are before the *Specters*. Unless they be before us. All that which Derrida says about Marx and Marxism in *Specters of Marx*, we might also say it about that book (and about deconstruction in general), in such a way that evaluating its legacy ten, twenty-five, or a thousand years after its publication constitutes and will constitute a very difficult task. This difficulty is literally staged and desired by the book itself. The task is all the more daunting because the book in question does not let itself be summarised into a series of philosophical theses, ontological claims, or political diagnoses. Without taking away from the force and necessity of Derrida’s critical depiction of the ‘new world order’ in 1993, it seems to me that reducing the book to the ‘picture’ or ‘telegram’ of the ‘ten plagues’ (DERRIDA 1994: 100-104), for instance, would certainly be, well, picturesque, telegraphic, and reductive.² In many ways, the *work* that *Specters* accomplishes results from its non-thetic structure, from its essential heterogeneity or self-inadequacy,

² Derrida’s ‘ten plagues’ telegram is easy to mock, and many have derided its pseudo-prophetic tone and apparent simplicity (see for example SPIVAK 1995, and RANCIÈRE 2009). On the contrary, Étienne Balibar’s analysis is more nuanced and more attentive to what Derrida’s text attempts to perform: ‘there are other messianic statements of politics and its end. Some passages of Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* describing the “ten plagues” of the current world that as a whole constitute the economic horror of our “out of joint” time are clearly oriented in this direction, although we should never lose sight of the ironic element in Derrida’s writing, which constantly plays with the contemporary return of archetypes’ (BALIBAR 2004: 107).

from its non-identity to itself and to its ‘own’ moment – a non-identity which it performs and exhibits with a quasi-perverse relish.³

Now, as a matter of fact, the spectre has become a commonplace in literary and cultural studies, media, film and art theory, and has completely transformed traditional questions attached to interculturality and intertextuality.⁴ For all these reasons, today it is impossible to write an article like this one, supposed to evaluate the legacy or influence of a book, in the same way as before the *Specters*. This would be, perhaps, one of the most powerful and obvious effects of Derrida’s book: it works in challenging our genealogical drive; it complicates to the extreme the search for influences and the establishment of a hydrographic survey of sources or seminal fluids, as well as the position of a periodic table of elements or origins. The law of spectrality destabilises in advance all paternity claims. It challenges the order of filiation. This is not nothing. Certainly, one would be hard-pressed to designate this type of ‘work’ done by the book as ‘political’ in the narrow sense of the term – but it might point to a politiccity or politicality of the concept and of the text, a sort of spectral-ideological force of dissemination, a ‘work’ that remains undecidable but which ‘overdetermines’ (to speak like Louis Althusser) traditional politics, and possibly contributes to transforming it: a work of deconstruction, if you like. This sort of troubling force or disseminating ‘work’ might also participate, for example, in what Geoffrey Bennington calls ‘the politics of politics’, or in what Alberto Moreiras designates under the name ‘infrapolitics’ (see BENNINGTON 2016; and GRAFF ZIVIN 2018).

But if we indeed want to assess the book’s influence on ‘real’ politics – politics in the narrow, ‘proper’ sense of the term, supposing that we can

³ I analysed Derrida’s politics of disjunction and *contretemps* in MERCIER 2019 and 2020a.

⁴ See for instance the texts collected in *The Spectralities Reader* (DEL PILAR BLANCO & PEEREN 2013).

agree on that ‘proper sense’, which is dubious to say the least – things get much more uncertain. To my knowledge, no political movement has come forward brandishing *Specters of Marx* in book form or on a tablet as their manifesto. Nevertheless, let me recall that in 2004 Derrida hypothesised a direct line of – of what? Influence? Anticipation? Concomitance? Perhaps simply a chance of haunting? – between the ‘new international’ promised in *Specters of Marx* and the alter-globalisation movements of the early 2000s:

At the time – this was in 1993 – what was at issue was a ‘new international,’ the subtitle and a central theme of the book. Beyond ‘cosmopolitanism,’ beyond the notion of a ‘world citizen,’ beyond a new world nation-state, even beyond the logic, in the final analysis, of political ‘parties’, this book anticipates all the ‘alter-globalist’ imperatives in which I believe and which appear more clearly today (though still insufficiently, in a chaotic and unthought way). What I called at that time a ‘new international’ would require, I argued back in 1993, a large number of mutations in international law and in all the organizations that establish world order (IMF, WTO, the G8, and especially the United Nations and its Security Council, whose charter would have to be changed for starters, along with its autonomous forces of intervention, its composition, and first of all its location – as far away as possible from New York City...).

(DERRIDA 2007: 22–23)

Of course, we do not have to believe Derrida when he speaks about the structure of political ‘anticipation’ featured in *Specters*. Nevertheless, if one indeed wanted to try and map the legacy and impact of *Specters* on political theory and more particularly on Marxist studies, on a so-called ‘return to Marx’ in the late 1990s and the 2000s, as well as on the political practices possibly inspired by these theoretical works, one would have to evoke the names of Marxist or post-Marxist authors such as Daniel Bensaïd, Jean-Luc Nancy, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Étienne Balibar, whose readings of Marx have explicitly been influenced by Derrida’s. In turn, some of these authors have been named as influences by European left-wing movements such as Podemos, La France Insoumise, and by a multiplicity of

proto-Marxist, Gramscist, and Trotskyist movements in Latin America and in the world. Chantal Mouffe's political theory has also been influential on the work of thinkers associated with the 'decolonial turn', such as the great Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (2010). It would also be necessary to mention Derrida's influence on Marxist-feminist thinker Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (even though it is well known that *Specters of Marx* is not her favourite book – more on this below), and on postcolonial and cultural studies more generally – as well as on the cultural and institutional transformations to which these studies have contributed, in the academia and (perhaps) beyond. Here I would also like to invoke the great work on post-hegemony, infrapolitics, and spectral marranism that is currently done in several departments of comparative literature, Hispanic and Caribbean Studies – see for instance the texts collected in *The Marrano Specter* (GRAFF ZIVIN 2018).

In the work of these many authors, in these various theoretical ventures and the political movements and institutional transformations they supposedly inspired, or will perhaps inspire, the influence of *Specters* is sometimes direct and explicit, oftentimes indirect, most times rare and scattered. So, far be it from me to try and turn *Specters of Marx* into a generational book, or to suggest that it is the Book of Our Times – and to do so here and now, twenty-five years after its publication. In each case, with each reading, *Specters* went through a process of transformative translation – a translation that is each time unique, with effects and implications which are at once or in turn theoretical, ideological, political, strategic, institutional, disciplinary, and so on. In fact, the law of spectrality comes and perturbs the modalities of the type of translation we are talking about here, usually conceived as coming from the intellectual (ideological) field to the material (practical) field, or vice versa depending on the strategic moment or on the type of interpretative model one wishes to use in such or such situation. These strategic effects of translation, transformation and potential betrayal are always overdetermined, and always singular. So that the question of how

Specters of Marx was translated in the fields of Marxist and post-Marxist theory, postcolonial and decolonial thought, but also feminist thought, gender studies and queer theory, political science, international studies, and so on, would deserve each time singular and specific analyses, texts in hand.⁵ Because, certainly, what is *left* of *Specters* in the work of aforementioned authors or disciplines (and many others), as well as in the analyses and practices of the political movements they possibly influenced, remains to be clarified. The ‘rest’ of a spectre, once again, is a difficult thing to evaluate, and I will not venture into trying to do this here, for all the aforementioned reasons and – I realise now – certainly for lack of courage, too. But ignoring this ‘rest’ purely and simply would not be helpful either. This disseminated and disseminating ‘rest’ might also be uncannily active and generative in and through the work of Marxist or neo-Marxist authors who explicitly and violently criticised *Specters* (see for instance the essays collected in *Ghostly Demarcations*, edited by Michael Sprinker), and even through the work of those who claim to have nothing to do with deconstruction, to have never read Derrida, and who seem to be set on never reading his work nor the work of those who work on Derrida. The ‘Russian dolls’ effect is always more perverse, more surprising, more resourceful, and somewhat more monstrous than it seems to be at first glance.

One last thing, before I finish this long introduction: it seems to me that all these problems related to the evaluation of the reception and impact of *Specters of Marx* are made all the more difficult because of the apparently unique status of the book in Derrida’s enormous oeuvre. On the one hand, *Specters* cannot in any meaningful way be isolated from Derrida’s overall

⁵ For a good overview of Derrida’s small but growing influence in the field of International Relations and political science, see HIRST 2019: 10–12. Here again, a patient work is required in order to analyse the ways in which Derridean concepts such as ‘hospitality’ or ‘autoimmunity’ have been modified and translated so as to accommodate disciplinary requirements specific to political science or International Relations, sometimes contributing to deconstruct the methodological presuppositions of these disciplines in either discreet or spectacular fashion.

work of deconstruction of the Western canon, and, more particularly, from texts such as ‘Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation” of Authority’ and *The Politics of Friendship* (with which it arguably forms a sort of triptych). But, on the other hand, *Specters* is often considered, not without reasons, as Derrida’s Magnum Opus on Marx, which seems to confer a specific status to the book, at least institutionally and circumstantially, as a commodified object, precisely – something which Derrida pointed out in 1997:

But does one ever know how a book is ‘received’? By whom, first? buyers or readers? at what rhythm? for how long? When it comes to books, too, it is sometimes necessary to account for a just anachrony. The time of the book can be a *contretemps*, a time ‘out of joint’, as Hamlet says. A book is never contemporary with itself, with its appearance [*apparition*] and with its publication [*parution*]. I can only say this, which is an ‘objective’ fact: for reasons that remain to be analysed, and compared to most of my other books, this one [*Specters of Marx*] was, let’s put it this way, distributed, bought, and translated faster and more widely. I didn’t say ‘read’. I suppose this means something.

(DERRIDA 1997: 53–54, my translation)

Without wanting to simply erase the singular status of *Specters* (it is often the first and sometimes the only book by Derrida ‘read’ by Marxist thinkers and by political theorists at large), I would like to make a bet, here: the notion that *Specters* is a unique and exceptional object in Derrida’s corpus will be somewhat challenged in the future. Indeed, while it is commonly considered that *Specters* constituted Derrida’s first *real* incursion into Marx’s thought (give or take a few passing references in earlier texts and interviews), archival research reveals that it is not the case at all, and that Derrida already proposed very lengthy and detailed readings of Marx and Marxist texts as early as some twenty-five years earlier. During the late 1960s and (perhaps more significantly) the early 1970s – a very important and prolific period for French and international Marxist thought – Derrida wrote and taught extensively about Marx and Marxist authors (including Engels, Gramsci, Lenin, Benjamin, Kojève, Althusser, Balibar, Buci-Glucksmann, and many

others), but none of this work was ever published.⁶ The fact that Derrida did not proceed to publish these texts earlier, preferring to defer his public engagement with Marx and Marxism until the fall of the USSR (which more or less coincided with the death of his friend and colleague Louis Althusser, in 1990) raises a multiplicity of questions, of course, which I cannot even touch upon here. In particular, the fact that Derrida reserved the vast majority of his early analyses of Marx and Marxist texts to the semi-public, semi-private pedagogic scene of the seminar deserves in itself long developments – concerning, notably, Derrida’s complex relationship with the institution of philosophy, and his critical outlook on the educational system to which he belonged.⁷ As a matter of fact, contrary to many seminar sections that were extracted from their pedagogic context, revised and published in one form or another, Derrida’s long and detailed analyses of Marx and Marxism from the 1960s and 1970s seminars – before the *Specters*, then – remained unpublished all his life.

⁶ These texts are the object of a research I currently conduct at CEFRES (CNRS)/Charles University Prague, in the context of the research group ‘Archives and Interculturality’, which focuses on archives and manuscripts of philosophy and theory. The seminars that make up my corpus notably include: ‘Théorie du discours philosophique: la métaphore dans le texte philosophique’ (1969–1970); ‘Théorie du discours philosophique. La forme du texte philosophique : les conditions d’inscription du texte de philosophie politique (l’exemple du matérialisme)’ (1970–1971); ‘La famille de Hegel’ (1971–1972); ‘Religion et philosophie’ (1972–1973); ‘GREPH. Le concept de l’idéologie chez les idéologues français’ (1974–1975); ‘La vie la mort’ (1975–1976); ‘Walter Benjamin’ (year uncertain: probably between 1973 and 1976); ‘Théorie et pratique’ (1976–1977); ‘Séminaire au GREPH sur Gramsci’ (1976–1977), and many others seminar notes, archival texts and documents. The seminar ‘Théorie et pratique’ (1976–1977) was published in 2017 and recently translated into English by David Wills (Derrida 2019b). The seminar ‘La vie la mort’ (1975–1976) was published in 2019 (Derrida 2019a). See Mercier 2019, 2020a, and 2020c for more details on this corpus.

⁷ On this subject, see my essays ‘Pas de course’, forthcoming in *Philosophiques* (MERCIER 2020b), and ‘Re/pro/ductions’, forthcoming in *Poetics Today* (MERCIER 2020c).

Nevertheless, there is something unique and fascinating about these texts. In these early seminar notes, Derrida provoked the collision between Marxist-materialist concepts and deconstructive notions still in phase of elaboration: writing and speech, of course, but also the question of the animal and anthropocentrism, sexual difference and phallogocentrism, ideology and fetishism, imperialism and Eurocentrism, economy and violence, psychoanalysis and the ‘uncanny’, metaphor and the text, ideality and materiality, technicity and capitalism, promise and messianicity, the ‘Jewish question’, and so forth. In the seminars, Derrida strives to think ‘Marxism’ non-monolithically, that is, as a heterogeneous convergence of scattered influences and textual traces, with constant attention to matters of text and textuality, language, translation, reading, teaching, and transmission. Although Derrida constantly emphasises the importance and originality of Marx’s philosophy and the necessity of reading Marx as a philosopher, he also rejects the notion that Marx’s texts should be considered as a perfectly systematic ensemble of coherent philosophical theses, reducible to a series of ontological claims. On the contrary, Derrida wishes to highlight the exorbitant plurality and heterogeneity of the Marxian text – to which he refers, in the 1974–1975 seminar, as ‘the text-Marx’.

The discovery of these unpublished materials on Marxist theory (approximately 1000 pages altogether) will shed new light on Derrida’s engagement with Marx, Marxism, and materialism before *Specters of Marx*, but also on the ethical and political implications of deconstruction – much earlier than Derrida’s so-called ‘ethical-political turn’ (usually dated, with much bad faith, in the late 1980s or early 1990s). For all these reasons, even though I said above that I do not feel quite competent to evaluate the legacy and political impact of *Specters of Marx*, I am much more confident about this other aspect of the question: Derrida’s 1993 book remains to be read, and its reception will certainly become completely transformed as Derrida’s writings on Marx and Marxist thought in his seminars from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s progressively emerge and lend themselves to critical

readings. The emergence of these texts will completely change current perspectives on the relationship between deconstruction and Marxism, and will contribute to produce new readings of *Specters of Marx* itself. Considering the crucial importance of the archive in Derrida's corpus, one can bet that these effects of *contretemps* were, if not calculated, at least somewhat desired, maybe subconsciously and perhaps perversely, by Derrida himself. Everything happens as if the book were itself haunted by other texts, as if it carried the barely visible traces of former seminars which were never published in Derrida's life, but which nevertheless announced themselves silently from the archive, in view of propelling future readings, grafts, and cross-pollinations. If that is true, *Specters* remains to be birthed through the memory of a promise: the promise of a future that comes from the archive, as if from beyond death, to dislocate the canonical timeline – a sort of insemination and a labour which is nothing short of monstrous. Now, I would like to give one example of this type of retrospective reappraisal driven by archival research. There is a lot to be said, of course, but here I will limit myself to one motif: the 'question' of sex and sexual difference in the 1974–1975 unpublished seminar 'GREPH. Le concept de l'idéologie chez les idéologues français'. As we will see, this motif of sexual difference is not without connection to the dissemination of heritage and to the scattering of influences which I have described above as chief effects of the law of spectrality.

Who/what reproduces whom/what? (Sex in the archives)

In her 2005 'Notes toward a Tribute to Jacques Derrida', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote the following lines:

Derrida was always mindful of sexual difference. The project of sexual difference can now be summarized as: catch the mother. I, the son, am the mother's trace and the father's sign. Mindful of sexual difference, Derrida was also mindful of what kind of seeker or investigator he could be. I now understand why the

daughter's quest could not be staged by him. Although the books on democracy (*Politics of Friendship, Rogues*) are full of worries about women, the book on Marx (*Specters of Marx*) is without a trace of what one would recognize as feminism [...].

(SPIVAK 2005: 102)

Much could be said about Spivak's playful and provocative statement, in particular her claim that *Specters of Marx* is 'without a trace' of feminism. For starters, Spivak knows very well that the trace is not a presentational structure, so this 'without a trace', the claim of the 'without', the determination of the trace's presence and/or absence, all this depends on future readings and requires a patient work of textual deciphering. For example, there is an argument to be made that Derrida's long discussion of *Hamlet*, of the King, the Father, and the spectre in *Specters of Marx* is entirely oriented towards a deconstruction of phallogocentric filiation and heteropatriarchal hegemony, as well as their ambiguous reliance on the spectral.⁸ Many other such traces could still be spotted, followed, revived, reanimated. But let's admit with Spivak that the question of sexual difference is not all that central or explicit in *Specters of Marx*, particularly compared to many other works by Derrida, for example *Glas* (which, by the way, includes more than passing references to Marx and Marxist concepts). In contrast, in the 1970s seminars, Derrida makes of sexual difference and 'the woman' a central and prominent aspect of his analyses of Marx and Marxism – notably in relation to the production of ideology, to the socio-economic reproduction of capital and sexual reproduction, and to gender and body politics. Let me just give one example of how this is done in the 1974–1975 unpublished seminar 'GREPH. Le concept de l'idéologie chez les idéologues français'.⁹

⁸ In fact, Derrida makes this very clear in 'Marx & Sons' (in SPRINKER 2008).

⁹ For an extended and more detailed analysis of Derrida's work on Marx and sexual differences in the 1970s seminars, see MERCIER 2019, 2020a, and 2020c.

In the seminar, Derrida analyses at length the Marxist logic of socio-economic reproduction and the conceptual matrix of production/reproduction which undergirds it. Through intricate readings of Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology* and Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses, Derrida demonstrates that the Marxist logic of 'reproduction' tends to ignore the question of sexual and biological reproduction, thus obfuscating problems related to sex, sexuality, gender and sexual differences in the analysis of the reproductive system of the *socius*.¹⁰ Nevertheless, in the last two sessions of the seminar, which are largely dedicated to Marx and Engels's critique of ideology, Derrida proceeds to complicate the question of sexual reproduction and its articulation to socio-economic reproduction. He does so by zooming in on a short passage of *The German Ideology* in which Marx and Engels define sex and sexuality as *labour*, and more particularly as the 'originary' division of labour. In his reading of *The German Ideology*, Derrida highlights the fact that the concepts of division of labour, class divisions, and ideology (which are inseparable in the Marxian text) presuppose *another* division of labour, presented as more 'originary' and 'natural': this originary division is called by Marx and Engels 'the division of labour in the sexual act' (*die Teilung der Arbeit im Geschlechtsakt*). In Marx and Engels's description, this 'originary' division of labour seems to be predicated on sexual difference, and on the familial and tribal structures which allow the reproduction of the species. The sexual division of labour, because it is defined as natural and originary, is therefore presented by Marx and Engels as pre-ideological and pre-political; it already supposes dynamic relations between forces, tensions and antagonisms, but it precedes the class division strictly speaking, that is to say the *later* class division which will result from the division between material and intellectual labour, division in which the production of ideology

¹⁰ These aspects are further developed in the seminar of the following year, *La vie la mort (1975–1976)* (DERRIDA 2019a).

originates. According to Derrida, this Marxian description of sexual difference thus presupposes a certain naturalness of the hetero-patriarchal structures of society, conceived as preceding the class struggle properly speaking and the production of ideology as such – as if this originary division of labour, indexed on sexual difference and on the ‘sexual act’, were purely natural and weren’t in itself ideological. Derrida shows that this presentation tends to espouse classical Hegelian schemes by reproducing traditional oppositions such as nature/culture, animality/humanity, sexuality/politics, private/public, and family/society.

However, against the tendency to reduce Marx to a critical continuator or to a transgressive reproducer of Hegel, Derrida proceeds in the last (9th) session of the seminar to read Marx in a non-teleological, non-dialectical way. He explains that Marx and Engels, in *The German Ideology*, do not seem to draw all implications from the incredible realisation that sexual division is the *originary division of labour* (or, conversely, that the originary division of labour is indeed *sexual*). Derrida wants to show that the presupposition of this originary sexual division, which is in itself very hard to delimit and to stabilise – Is it simply natural or already cultural-ideological? Is it biological or socio-political? Is it even *human*, strictly speaking? Is it reducible to the traditional duality of sexes? and so on and so forth – tends to wreak havoc on the whole Marxian system and in the theory of the class struggle (or at least in what remains overly Hegelian, metaphysical, and dialectical-ontological in it). Particularly interesting is the way in which Derrida articulates this Marxian account of sexual difference (conceived as the originary division of labour) to the problem of ideology and its critique. I cannot do justice to Derrida’s whole analysis here, which is really quite stunning. It consists in showing that since the originary division of labour (the sexual) is required and necessarily reproduced in and through the secondary division of labour (class division in the strict sense of the term, starting with the division between intellectual and manual labour, which in turn produces ideology), then this must also signify that all class divisions

and the production of ideology are always already sexual, sexualised or sexualizing, that they are marked sexually. It follows that concepts such as ‘division of labour’, ‘production/reproduction’, ‘class domination’, ‘class divisions’, ‘class struggle’, or ‘ideology’ must be understood as immediately sexual, as always already affected by sexual difference, which is their origin. This dissemination of sexual difference immensely interests Derrida, as it supposes the impossibility to fully contain and locate the ‘question’ of sexual difference: all ‘labour’, all work, whatever its shape and form, becomes originarily affected by a sexual division that always-already precedes it, as well as any discourse that could be formed on the subject. In this sense, sexual difference, because it is the labour and the division in which all other labour originates, becomes the origin of both manual and intellectual labour, of both material and ideological production. It follows that sexual difference cannot simply be stabilised or captured by the discourse of philosophy, precisely because this discourse is itself the (ideological) product of the socio-economic-sexual divisions identified by Marx. In fact, the philosophical discourse has always strived to contain and obfuscate sexual differences and the divisions of labour they suppose because these divisions betray philosophy’s originary reliance on agonistic structures and relations of forces. In sum, Derrida explains that, if we take it seriously, Marx and Engels’s postulation of the originary (sexual) division of labour should lead us to the realisation that *all labour* (manual and/or intellectual) is always already marked sexually, and that it is therefore never neutral from this point of view. All labour is marked by the antagonisms and relations of forces carried in and through sexual and class divisions, and repeating each time material or ideological limits and differences that remain to be read, deciphered, and deconstructed.

In order to think all these aspects together, Derrida postulates what he calls an originary and irreducible ‘agonistic différance’, a multiplicity of sexual-material-textual differential forces affecting and traversing all the concepts at play here, and challenging the stabilisation of ‘politics’, ‘economy’,

‘sexuality’, or ‘ideology’ into ontological categories. This supposes the inseparability and co-implication between sexual, cultural-ideological, and economic-material differences – thus suggesting a distinctly deconstructive interpretation of ‘intersectionality’. Derrida calls this general structure the ‘ideological-sexual organisation’ of the *socius*. In this way, Derrida proceeds to articulate the Marxist discourse on class struggle and ideology with the psychoanalytic questions of sexuality, the unconscious, the phantasm, the economy of the drives, repression, the uncanny, and so on. The 1974–1975 seminar thus paves the way for a conjoined deconstructive reading of both politics and psychoanalysis by bringing together Marx’s critique of ideology and fetishism and Freud’s analytics of the unconscious. Regarding more particularly the Marxist critique of ideology, Derrida’s pre-ontological ‘agonistic *différance*’ implies, first, that the structure of the ideological is itself non-homogeneous, that it exists in *différance*, as a heterogeneous system of sexual, economic, cultural, and textual traces; and, second, that the ideological cannot be abolished once and for all but that its structure remains to be translated, transformed, and deconstructed. This also implies considering Derrida’s deconstruction of the sexual politics of ontology (through the notion of *dissemination*, for example, understood as *that which does not return to the Father*) as a continuation and radicalisation of the Marxian critique of ideology – an aspect which is several times highlighted by Derrida in the early seminars. Deconstruction always targets a seminal father figure, be it the logos, the state, the capital, or the ontological authority of philosophy, which performs its own sovereignty by positing itself as ontological discourse on the truth of being. Deconstruction is always concerned with challenging the sovereign determination of an origin, as well as the genealogical order of filiation that comes with it.

In many ways, the socio-political-sexual collision between the economies of Freud and Marx – deconstructing Marx through Freud, deconstructing Freud through Marx – provoked by Derrida in the mid-1970s could be interpreted as a deconstructive response to Althusser’s reading of Lacan, or

to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze is in fact mentioned in several handwritten notes on the 1974–1975 seminar's typescript). Unfortunately, I cannot go much further here, but from this short introduction, it will readily appear that the type of analysis put forward by Derrida in the early seminars is very different in style and in content from what will later be developed in *Specters of Marx*. As usual with Derrida, there is still an astonishing sense of coherence in the whole oeuvre, but the seminars of the 1960s and 1970s constitute without a doubt another scene, another genre, one that deserves to be explored, read, and compared with Derrida's later texts. I hope to have shown in these schematic remarks the type of work that remains to be done, with and around *Specters of Marx*, and how this work of transformative translation can and will benefit from the study of Derrida's unpublished seminars. In particular, I want to emphasise the fact that *Specters* remain to be read, translated, written and rewritten, and perhaps betrayed, in order to continue the type of deconstructive work that Derrida invited us to pursue, in view of liberating the emancipatory potentialities inscribed in what Derrida calls 'the text-Marx' — to which *Specters* now pertains, within/without. The *Specters* are *before* us because they are *behind* us; but because they are *behind* us, we are *before* them, before the *Specters* and before their law, and as such they remain to come. They are both before and behind us, in and through a structure in which we find ourselves undecidably active *and* passive. This complex structure of being before-after, before-behind, is commanded by the law of spectrality. Now, let's be very clear: the sexual connotations of this apparently impossible corporeal and topological structure — I'm tempted to call it 'queer' — cannot and should not be ignored. This labour of transformative deconstruction is through and through marked sexually, but it radically disrupts the sexual politics of metaphysics and ontology. We are before the *Specters* because they are before us, inside/outside, and yet to come — *encore*.

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