

Lingua Amissa:  
The Messianism of  
Commodity-Language and  
Derrida's *Specters of Marx*

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—Cloth speaks. It is Marx who says that cloth speaks. And in saying that, he speaks the language of cloth, he speaks 'from its soul' as surely, in his assertion, as do the bourgeois economists he criticizes. Marx's language is the language of cloth when he says 'Cloth speaks.' But in the language of Marx, this language of the cloth is at the same time translated into the analytical – and ironic – language of the critique of the very same political economy which defines the categories of cloth-language. Marx then speaks, one must presume, two languages: the language in which the cloth expresses itself, weaves itself and joins with comparable fabrics, and another language which speaks *about* and *beyond* that cloth-language, loosens its weave, analyzes its relation to other, loosened weavings, entangling it in another categorial warp. But is it truly a question of two languages, two different linguistic structures, or merely of a doubling of one and the same? Does the critique of political economy speak *another* language, a *new* language, or merely a dialect of the cloth-language? Doesn't the doubling of a language perhaps belong to the structure of this language itself – doesn't the critique of political economy remain under the spell of this very economy? If Marx is indeed to speak a second, other language, then this new Marxian or Marxist language must fulfill at least one condition which cannot be filled by the language of cloth: it must disclose at least one category which as yet has no place in that political economy, a category which might betray itself in that language, might even bear

witness to itself, but which cannot itself belong to the repertoire, to the matrix or patrix of that language. This other, this *allocategory* could – and even must – have an altogether peculiar form incommensurable with the categories of political economy, perhaps not even a form. It would not be the language ‘of’ the cloth, but instead, for example, a language in which a cloth and ‘its’ language first come into existence. Not, perhaps, a talking thing, perhaps a thing which does not – or does not simply – speak, something which, still unspeaking, *nonetheless* promises itself a language in advance of itself—

I am speaking – if I simply ‘speak’ – of cloth for two or three reasons: because, in the chapter which opens *Capital*, in the first volume ‘The Production Process of Capital’ under the title ‘Commodities’, in the section ‘The Form of Value or Exchange Value’, Marx speaks of it, claiming that the cloth itself speaks; because Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* speaks of something like a cloth, an ‘écran’, as a projection surface for phantoms,<sup>1</sup> and because both references to the cloth sustain an uneasy relationship to one of the most powerful metaphors of the philosophical tradition: the metaphor of covering, veiling, mystification and fetish. And thus also of the fetish-table [*Fetisch-Tisch*] which in the chapter on ‘The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof’ not only sets itself on its legs and on its head but also dances, and from whose ‘whims’ Derrida draws far-reaching consequences. These consequences concern the structure of the messianic as a dimension – an immeasurable dimension, to be sure – of the commodity and its language, be it table or cloth, screen or fantasy; they concern the commodity’s messianic promise and consequently both the language of the commodity and the messianic of capital announcing itself in its commodities. The messianic that Derrida speaks of, the ‘messianic without messianism’, is for him – though he does with respect to Marx grant the religious a special status amongst ideological phenomena – not just a religious phenomenon, but one which arises from the structure of phenomenality itself – from its spectrality – and which therefore must betray itself in the dominating archi-phenomenon of the economic world: the commodity. Developed commodity-analysis – thus one could delineate one of the guiding ideas of Derrida’s reading of Marx – must be an analysis of its spectrality – and this means both of the phenomenality of the commodity and of the excess beyond this phenomenality, its paraphenomenal spirituality and spectrality. This means as well – and indeed beyond traditional phenomenologies and Marxisms – that this expanded commodity and capital analysis must contain an analysis of its messianic power or (and here I am thinking of Benjamin’s famous formulation) of its messianic *weakness*, and in no

way as an appendix, not as an 'ideological' or 'propagandistic' ornament, not as a proclamation or as good tidings to be presented beyond this analysis of the commodity-world, but as an integral and indeed 'grounding' element of this analysis itself. The commodity cloth not only speaks, it promises (itself) something else, and it is its promise of something else: as a phenomenon it is, like every phenomenon and every possible and real world, spectrally and henceforth messianically constituted.

Cloth, then speaks. This is what Marx writes. 'We see, then,' the section dedicated to 'The Relative Form of Value' reads,

everything our analysis of the value of commodities previously told us is repeated to us by the cloth itself, as soon as it enters into association with another commodity, the coat. Only it betrays its thoughts in a language with which alone it is familiar, the commodity-language. In order to tell us that labor creates its own value in its abstract quality of being human labor, it says that the coat, in so far as it is worth as much as the cloth, and therefore is value, consists of the same labor as it does itself.<sup>2</sup>

The commodity-language translated – cited – by the language of Marx's analysis, this commodity-language 'betrays' something and indeed 'betrays' what one would not commonly expect of commodities, would not expect, for example, of cloth: 'thoughts'. The cloth not only speaks, it also thinks. But it speaks and thinks exclusively in the exchange with other commodities, with its own kind, with regard to them and to the possibility of finding in them its echo or its reflex. The cloth is *pragma* or even *zoon logon echon* only insofar as it is also a *zoon politikon*. But its politics, commodity politics, is subordinate to the strict injunction of equality amongst abstract concepts. Commodity-exchange-language is accordingly restricted to a grammatical-syntactic minimum in which only propositions of equality can be formed. Such propositions regularly purport that a particular quantum of one thing is equal to a particular quantum of another thing, regardless of whether this thing presently exists or not. Hence the statements of commodity-language are not propositions of existence but arithmetical propositions of relation which can claim validity even if the existence of one of their members is not assured. They can thus at any time contain a suggestion never made good by a reality or which can never be made good. Yet the claim of universal validity of this arithmetical communication amongst equals means that commodity-language is structured as a functional suggestion of equality, and that its propositions of equivalence – and it knows no propositions which cannot be reduced to propositions of equivalence – only speak, in principle, by feigning the equivalence of their elements. In speaking with one another, commod-

ities *promise* one another their exchangeability: the sole medium in which they can exchange with and change into one another. In speaking, commodities thus promise one another commodity-language as the language of their universal communication. Their propositions, however arithmetical and reduced they might sound, are thus not constative without being at the same time simulations, projections, announcements or claims. They seem to have, to take up a popular and suggestive word, a performative character.

If the grammar of propositions in commodity-language is restricted by the horizon of equivalence, if the pragmatics of these propositions is essentially that of a fiction, i.e., of the performance of a logical claim or a historical announcement, then their semantics is also circumscribed by an economically narrow horizon: they are all propositions about value. In Marx's example, the cloth comes to an understanding with the coat not about its lovelife or the weather, but solely about the relation which the cloth maintains to it and, by way of it, to itself as exchange-value. In its semantics, as in its grammar and its pragmatics, commodity-language is an abstract and speculative language: it disregards all 'natural' determinations and relies exclusively upon those formal determinants pertinent to its abstract relation of symmetry. And for this reason it is not only a language of exchange but also a language of turning, of reversal, of specular inversion. In it, every single commodity is abstracted from its individuality and presents itself as a representative, an expression or equation, as the *quid pro quo* or metaphor of a general substance, of labor. 'In order to tell us,' Marx says,

that labor creates its own value in its abstract quality of being human labour, it [the cloth] says that the coat, in so far as it is worth as much as the cloth, and therefore is value, consists of the same labor as it does itself. In order to inform us that its sublime objectivity as value differs from its stiff and starchy existence as a body, it says that value has the appearance of a coat, and therefore in so far as the cloth is itself an object of value, it and the coat are as like as two peas.<sup>9</sup>

In order to state the difference – the very difference of its value from its body – the commodity states its equality with something else. It makes itself, it produces itself as value and transforms itself into a value-thing only by disregarding itself as a thing, positing itself as value through its abstract and speculative equation with another. When a thing – the cloth, for example – socializes with another thing in the form of equality, equivalence, symmetry and reversability, it – this cloth – gives itself what it formerly lacked, it gives itself a value and thus appears for the first time in the world of commodity-society, appears for the first time in the world and *appears* for the first time. Its turn

into the other of itself is thus the very bringing forth of the cloth, rendering it an object of exchange and, by means of that exchange, also one of use. In turning itself, as the logic of its language commands, in standing itself, as Marx says, 'on its head', it sets itself first of all on itself, on its 'own' feet: it becomes an object only by disappearing as an object and submitting itself to the abstract, the speculative, the 'super-sensual', 'the sublime objectivity as value'. Use-value is hereafter 'the material through which its own value is expressed';<sup>4</sup> it is indeed a material only by the grace of exchange-value and this means, as commodity-language decrees, it is only *as value*. And this value, as it presents itself in the 'simple value-form', in the original figure of commodity-language, for its part never exists otherwise than as such, as its 'embodiment' in the material of use-value. The coat, Marx writes, is the "carrier of value," although this property never shows through, even when the coat is at its most threadbare. . . . Despite its buttoned-up appearance, the cloth recognizes in it a splendid kindred commodity-soul.<sup>5</sup> What can be recognized of one commodity in another only in a non-sensuous way, since it never shows through as a 'natural' aspect, this 'commodity-soul' is nevertheless incarnated: even the cloth which 'as value' is the same as the coat and thus 'has the appearance of a coat'<sup>6</sup> such that they are 'as like as two peas'.<sup>7</sup>

The actuality of general and abstract value – an actuality conferred upon it by what Marx calls the language and soul of the commodity – is from its very inception reversed, inverted into what Marx calls its natural form: the exchange language of commodities is a language of the inversion [*Vertauschung*] of language and the reality of commodities – an inversion which seems that much more unavoidable as there seems to be no other language and no other reality than that of commodities.

The cloth, the commodity, speaks in man as well. According to the logic of commodity-language, 'As he neither enters into the world in possession of a mirror, nor as a Fichtean philosopher who can say "I am I,"' Peter must 'see and recognize' himself as a human being in Paul and win his 'form of appearance' as Peter only by identifying himself as the incarnation of his generalizing reflection.<sup>8</sup> Only in the speculative medium of commodity-language, only in commodity-language as a mirror-language do Peter and Paul come to themselves, come to be selves as specimens of the 'genus homo' and come to this genus at all. Commodity-language is thus the pattern of humanization which raises everyone who avails himself of it to the apostles Peter and Paul of general humanity and equality. Hence 'man', though Marx explicitly disputes it, does come into the world with a mirror, for before there is a specular other and the I appears as its incarnation or reincarnation, he does not exist as 'man'. The mirror-I creates the I

just as the value-mirror creates the commodity. The speculative dialectic of self-constitution thus follows the speculative pattern of commodity and capital production. And similarly, self-constitution is only possible as the turn [*Verkehrung*] of the pre-human shape of the 'I' into the representative of its non-human, absolutely formal abstraction. I, man, thing and commodity appear only by appearing as elements of the value-form and as formed by the value-form. Their language is solely a form-positing, value-positing, equalizing one – a commodity-language in which they are constituted and conserved as commodities.

Their language forms them – the 'humans' as well as the 'things' – into commodities. Commodity-language, then, does not mean that there are commodities which, in addition, are endowed with a particular language; it means that they are commodities only by virtue of this language and that this language alone qualifies them as commodities, identifies and forms them. Commodity-language appoints them commodities, syntagmatizing them as commodities and performing them as commodities. Both in *Capital* and in his earlier writings, Marx constantly stresses that the universal commodification prevalent with the development of capitalism presents the result of a complex history of technological, economic and political developments, and indicates an irreversible progress in the freeing up of the forces of production as well as in the liberation from slavery, servitude, inequality and poverty. Commodity-language is not only a historical – that is, finite – language, it is also, as his footnote on the speculative genesis of the 'genus homo' shows, a language of equalization, socialization and autonomization and hence of the promise of further liberations from the burdens, on the one hand, of isolation and on the other, of hierarchical organization – even of the liberation from concepts of freedom determined by commodity-language. This involves above all the messianic promise of liberation made by Judeo-Christianity. Religion does this, Marx insists in all of his writings, within the boundaries of the speculative proposition of commodity-language. The '*Wertsein*', the 'being worth', of the cloth, he writes (in the same section about the relative form of value), 'is manifested in its equality with the coat, just as the sheep-like nature of the Christian is shown in his resemblance to the Lamb of God.'<sup>9</sup> Christianity celebrates the 'cult of abstract man'<sup>10</sup> just as commodity-language celebrates the cult of abstract human labor. The sheep's nature and the abstraction of God are reconciled in the lamb as the incarnation of formal equivalence: they appear as equal because equality itself appears in them. Commodity-language is thus not only a language of the bourgeois economy, it is not merely the language of the constitution of the abstract bourgeois subject and hence the language of the ontology of subjectivity, it is at the same time the language of

theology, of ontotheology and especially, Marx adds, 'in its bourgeois development, in Protestantism, Deism, etc.'<sup>11</sup> The messianism of Christianity is, in a word, the messianism of commodity-language, its promise of redemption the promise of commodities: they embody a general, constant and transhistorical value. It is in this sense that the following comment from Marx is to be understood:

Let us remark, incidentally, that the language of commodities also has, apart from Hebrew, plenty of other more or less correct dialects. The German 'Wertsein,' 'to be worth,' 'to be valuable,' for instance, brings out less strikingly than the Romance verbs 'valere,' 'valer,' 'valoir,' that the equating of commodity B with commodity A is the expression of value proper to commodity A. *Paris vaut bien une messe!*<sup>12</sup>

Marx sees languages, including Hebrew, the holy language and language of the tradesman, as dialects of the universal commodity-language. The Romance verb 'valere' articulates its political and theo-economic message most precisely in Henri IV's utterance uniting the conversion to Catholicism with the convertibility of value which is to reside in French capital and its political functions. *Paris vaut bien une messe*. This is the formula of theo-economic transubstantiation, the formula of the messianism of the commodity-language.

The cloth, then, the commodity, speaks. It speaks a historical language which claims to be universal and transhistorical. It speaks an abstract language limited to a single statement, value, and a single grammatical structure, equation, yet claims nonetheless to be valid for an unrestricted variety of singularities. It is a language of exchange [*Verkehr*], but only as a process of turning [*Verkehrung*]. Marx accomplishes three massive transformations in the following sentences: Use-value becomes the form of appearance of its opposite, value.<sup>13</sup> 'Concrete labor becomes the form of appearance of its opposite, abstract human labor.' And, thirdly: 'Private labor takes the form of its opposite, namely, its directly social form.'<sup>14</sup> These exchanges and transformations can nonetheless only be effected in the medium of commodity-language because its individual elements all refer to a common substratum, to a commodity which belongs to the series of all other commodities and simultaneously, in order to guarantee the consistency of this series, as the only one which must remain excluded from it, its general equivalent, the money-commodity. Money is the transcendental of commodity-language, that form which vouchsafes all other forms their commensurability, appearing as a copula in all the statements and postulates of commodity-language. This copula, which only apparently has a completely formal character, does indeed refer to a historical referent and is itself both historical and historicizing: it

refers, namely, to the 'common substance'<sup>15</sup> at work in all elements of commodity-language, refers to what is common and – by virtue of its formalization – equal to all: it refers to human labor. Commodity-language is thus – and this would be its more complete if still insufficient characterization – a transcendental schematizing language of the social substance 'labor' in a particular historical epoch; it is the transcendental ergologic and ergo-onto-theo-logic of capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

This characterization of commodity-language is not yet complete; amongst the missing determinants, I name at this point only the most important and apparently most perverse: that it is a language at all. When confronted by the curious double term 'commodity-language', every rhetorician or semiotician worth his salt would be immediately tempted to speak of a metaphor or personification or, more precisely, of a prosopopoeia. That would not be wrong, but still less would it be right. Not wrong because commodities 'normally' and 'naturally' do not speak. Yet commodities are not natural; rather, as Marx correctly says, they are things with a 'supernatural quality', their value 'something purely social'.<sup>17</sup> Only – and this follows from the analysis of the simple value-form – this 'supernatural quality', this being a value-thing (*Wertding*), is of such a kind that it does not remain supernatural but becomes an objective quality, quickly dons a 'natural skin',<sup>18</sup> becomes 'sensuously supra-sensuous',<sup>19</sup> that is, supra-sensuous in a sensuous way, and begins to speak as a relatively independent thing. Marx thus does not use a metaphor or a prosopopoeia, but the commodity of which he speaks is itself structured as a prosopopoeia. The cloth does not speak figuratively but, because it is a commodity and hence a figure, it actually speaks. A language devolves to it – and indeed the only language dominant in the commodity-world – because language is both abstract and material, i.e., the incarnated form of man's expression and the form of organization of his labor. That commodities – and moreover everything affected by them – speak a language, and perhaps *the* language, is what Marx calls their fetish character. Commodity fetish – that means commodity-language. What is the secret thereof?

What is it that the cloth veils when it veils itself and speaks? What can't the cloth say? What alone can it *not* say? What, when speaking, does it keep secret? 'Whence,' Marx asks in the chapter 'The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof', 'whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labor, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity?' And his answer is: 'Clearly, it arises from this form itself.'<sup>20</sup> It is this value-form, he explains – that is, commodity-language as *objective* form – which imprints human labor with the objective character of products, imprints the time of that labor with



the character of value, and imprints the relations amongst producers with the character of relations between products. Production becomes a product, time an object, man a thing. The 'enigmatic character', the 'phantasmagoric form', the 'mystical character' of the commodity as a 'twisted thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological whims', this 'deranged form', its fetish character, is not something detachable from the product in order to unveil its real, authentic, true character and, as an object, thereby to clear up the self-misunderstanding of worker, labor and time. Derangement, twistedness, and enigma belong for Marx to the irreducible, constitutive 'categories' of bourgeois – that is, to date the most advanced – economy: 'They are thought-forms 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.'<sup>21</sup> And he continues: 'The belated scientific discovery [of this fetish character of commodity-form as an objective thought-form] by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social character of labor.'<sup>22</sup> If Marx thus notes that '[p]eople are not aware of this, nevertheless they do it,'<sup>23</sup> he adds just as quickly that they also must do it *when* they are aware of it. Forms of knowledge, insofar as they are forms and insofar as they are those of knowledge, can for their part be none other than those of commodity-language and thus must a priori be 'deranged', 'phantasmagoric', 'mystical' and 'fetishistic'. Commodity-language itself 'objectively veils' social relations 'instead of revealing them plainly'.<sup>24</sup> 'Objectively veil' means: objects themselves are the veil which commodity-language spreads over their substance, the social conditions of production; the objectivity of objects is the fetish; the objectivity of materials, of representations and forms, is the covering which presents itself in commodity-language as irreducible. The cloth veils the cloth. The object 'cloth' must be the veil over the actual *cloth* which is woven by historical social life. But precisely this weaving of social life results – in deed as in knowledge – in commodity-exchange as in the forms of its recognition in an object – in the object 'cloth', and thus is a process of a self-veiling, a self-mystification, self-fetishization. The object named by commodity-language is the fetish by which the conditions of production are not so much veiled as transformed. When the cloth speaks, the cloth, alas, speaks no more. Cloth now speaks only and exclusively in this way: the cloth 'itself' no longer speaks, it already speaks in the categories, the words and the grammar of commodity-language. Only the deranged cloth 'abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' can speak. Commodity-language itself speaks only as the commodity 'language', exchanging itself for equivalent commodities or languages and serving the profi-

teering of capital. And that is its capital secret: that it can conceal none. It does not veil something behind or underneath it, it does not conceal some *thing* at all; as mere categorical form it veils this very form, itself, and with it its formation: the generative structure preceding its transcendental fetishistic frame. What it says, it is, here and now, in objective, material form.

Although he calls it a 'derangement', Marx makes no secret of the fact that commodity-language is correct and that this is what produces its dominating authority. It does not speak a language other than historical reality; it is this reality in the forms of language – in 'objective thought-forms', in 'categories'. He writes, once again in the chapter on the fetish character of the commodity: 'If I say the coat, the boots, etc., relate to the cloth as the general embodiment of abstract human labor, the derangement of this expression is obvious. But if the producers of the coat, the boots, etc., relate these commodities to the cloth – or to gold or silver, it makes no difference – as a general equivalent, the relation of their private labor to social collective labor appears to them precisely in this deranged form.' The derangement of the commodity-language-form lies then in the transcendental function appended to the general equivalent – to the cloth, to gold or social collective labor – for as a transcendental, it has the structure of a universal measure which simultaneously and *despite* its universality is to be incarnated in a particular, either material or abstract form. The cloth as a *general* equivalent veils or inverts the cloth, a historically determined *single* product. As transcendental form, the cloth must efface the singularity of everything it encompasses and paralyze that history into objects: commodity-language is therefore mystifying and fetishistic, a ghost because it cannot express the producedness of products but only their stable form, not the historicity of products but only their perpetual objectivity, not the singularity of labors but only their abstract function. Commodity-language is the language of static categories denying past and future. The task falls to historical analysis to prove them historical and historicizing categories, and to disclose for them another future. Marx writes:

The categories of bourgeois economics consist precisely of forms of this kind [the deranged forms of the general equivalent, of gold, of cloth]. They are thought-forms which are socially valid, and therefore objective [thought-forms which have sedimented in objects], 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 labor on the basis of commodity production, vanishes therefore as soon as we escape to other forms of production.<sup>25</sup>

The escape into other forms of production is an escape from a prison of immobile 'objective thought-forms' of the categories of commodity and capital, the escape to a freedom which only historicizing, singularizing, non-transcendentalizing language can achieve. (And achieve, perhaps, only at the cost of being persecuted on this flight by the ghost of commodity-language.)

The cloth – and through it capital – thus speaks not only in the transcendental forms of ergontology, it speaks not only in the pure forms of measure and equivalence or of controlled surplus and regulated asymmetry, it also exhibits these forms in an objective form, as objective reality, as material cloth. It is a language not only of abstract formalism but also of the deranged material incarnation of this formalism, that is, a deranged transcendental-historical concretism, a *formaterialism*. Abstract value, labor and time have woven themselves into the warp of cloth and now speak – how else might they speak? – only through it and as it.

—The cloth, the web, speaks, that is: the specter speaks. It speaks – it haunts. Commodity-language, the fetish, is a specter: the material incorporation of universal abstractions, neither flesh nor blood, but materially appearing form, a morphantom.—

The 'critique of political economy' is understood as the critique of this spectral incarnationism. It bids the table, which, 'in relation to all other commodities, stands on its head' and has thereby become a fetish,<sup>26</sup> to stand again on its four legs, just as it tries to invert the Hegelian dialectic in order to discover 'the rational kernel in the mystical shell'. For, as Marx says in the afterword to the second edition of *Capital*: 'With him it is standing on its head.'<sup>27</sup> Marx here presupposes that those legs exist without a head, that there is a rational kernel without a covering and that there could be a social form of production unaffected by the value-form. Marx does believe in a language other than the transcendental one of formaterialism. He believes in a true language [*eine wahre Sprache*] which remains undisguised by commodity-language [*Waresprache*], but at the same time offers numerous arguments for the view that this other language, too, is caught in the net of commodity and value categories. He insists that historical-individual labor, with its specific time, is the true, actual substance and the secret of social appearance; but at the same time he leaves no doubt that this substance has until now never appeared other than in the mystifying and theologizing veil of the value-form. He propagates an ontology of production but objects that it has heretofore been possible only as an ontology of products and hence only as a pseudology or spectrology: 'The belated scientific discovery that the products

of labor, in so far as they are values, are merely the material expressions of the human labor expended in them, marks an epoch in the history of mankind's development, but by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social character of labor.<sup>28</sup>

In chapter 48 in the third volume of *Capital*, 'The Trinitarian Formula', an often-cited passage opens the prospect of a form of production which is no longer capitalistic. The end of labor, more precisely, of forced and commodity-producing labor, is pledged. Marx writes:

In fact the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus, in the very nature of things, it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. . . . Beyond it [the realm of necessity] begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with the realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the work day is its basic prerequisite.<sup>29</sup>

What Marx promises here – and he *promises* it even if he states it under the form of a scientifically-grounded announcement – and what he hears as the promise of capitalism's production and circulation processes is not so much the liberation *from* labor as the liberation *to* it. That is, to labor itself, to labor as 'an end in itself', to labor as the true self of man realized solely in itself and no longer in objective forms, thus no longer incarnating itself, no longer hiding a secret – not even the secret that it has no secret – and no longer cultivating theological whims. Only performance, auto-performance (the promise says), speaks in the substantial labor-language of a future society and defines the 'realm of freedom' as a realm of completed ergocracy. But doesn't this promise necessarily remain the promise of capital, of self-capitalizing and abstract labor, the promise that labor itself is capital, a self-producing and self-reproducing substance? The 'realm of freedom', Marx states expressly, can 'blossom forth only with the realm of necessity as its basis'. The future would then be only a prolonged present of capital, there would be, as in every substantialism, no future at all, but only, once again, a present, only an eternal return of the specter which already claims to be the so-called present now. Communism, then, would only be the ideology of capitalism declaring that its further development would culminate in the true unveiling of its theo-economic secrets – of the sacrament of labor. I leave it at this question, for labor or the development of human capacity as its own end could in its innermost structure, even if Marx takes care not to speak of it in programmatic concepts, also indicate something else: a severing of labor from production, from the generation of the means of subsistence, finally from itself as a substance which shows itself in objects and

embodies itself in man; this structure could, in short, indicate an internal disjunction of labor and its autoteleology and thereby its liberation not only from need but from itself as unquestioned necessity. In this sense *The German Ideology* explains that 'in all revolutions up till now the mode of activity always remained unscathed and it was only a question of . . . a new distribution of labor to other persons, whereas the communist revolution is directed against the preceding *mode* of activity, does away with *labor* . . .'<sup>30</sup> The 'automatic system' of 'big industry', he writes in the same connection, 'makes for the worker not only the relation to the capitalist, but labor itself, unbearable'.<sup>31</sup> With respect to ideology and the practical terror of labor which reigns in all totalitarian regimes (including those which have called on the legacy of Marx), and also under the 'liberal' welfare capitalism of Western democracies, it is not the last question which one should direct towards Marx. It is the first. The liberation from labor is the object of the Marxist promise, the aim of the world-historical development of the capitalistic form of production, the vanishing-point of the communist revolution.

There will be no more labor: this is the promise of commodity-language. And this promise no longer simply belongs to the 'categories' or 'objective thought-forms' of a transcendental commodity-language and the ergontology articulated therein; it no longer simply belongs to its syntax of equivalents and quid pro quos, it does not belong to the de-historicizing rhetoric of statements of what is and what is incarnated in commodity relations; this promise says that a language other than commodity-language is possible, and insofar as it is possible it is necessary; it says that categories other than those of commodity-language and that something other than a categorial language will be invented. This promise is itself already no longer a category; it indicates something structurally different; it is, one could say, an allocategory which speaks beyond – but also in – all 'objective thought-forms' of commodity-language, opening up its syntactic arrangement and its meaning to something else beyond any conceivable form.

It is, once again, a question of the language of the commodity-world and what it promises. A question of commodity-language and its promise. It is this promise, deciphered by Marx in the framing of the commodity-world, which Jacques Derrida makes one of the centers of his book on Marx. I have developed the question of commodity-language, which plays no role there, in some detail in order to gain easier access to the questions this book has prompted for me. They concern the formalism of the messianic promise, the structure of the performative, the status of labor and the conjunction which Derrida's book establishes between these and the appearance of the spectral. My

remarks – even if it is not ‘written on their face’ – have the character of questions in progress; they are not entirely tied to the hope of passing into effective questions or determinations; they do not mean to be immediately productive, nor aim at achieving predetermined theoretical or practical aims. All of these terms are very much implicitly or explicitly up for discussion and, if at times in another way, are already under discussion in the texts by Derrida and Marx to which I refer here.

Cloth speaks. Derrida translates: the specter – or perhaps the spirit – speaks. And he immediately begins to differentiate, to specify, to classify: there is not only one specter but several, always more than one and this ‘more than one’ or ‘no more one’ already makes out the constitutive structure, the structure of destitution, of the spectral. The specters are irreducibly plural – for Marx in the texts he cites by way of exorcism or conjuration, for Marxists and anti-Marxists, the persecutors and doomsdayers of Marxism and also for those who never believed that Marxist-inspired states existed – Derrida enumerates them, analyzes them and writes their spectrology. And this spectrology, in turn, is haunted by the specters of Marx, Freud and Nicolas Abraham, Husserl and Valéry, Benjamin, Heidegger and Blanchot. One might enumerate a few more, but their number is in principle not to be fixed; they are transnumeral. Specters, parting from the departed and on the brink of becoming independent, consist of splits, live in fissures and joints, in intermundia, as Marx, a familiar of Democritus’ and Epicurus’ systems, says of Epicurus’ gods:<sup>32</sup> they are monsters of difference. The spectral exists, despite this irreducible disparity, if only in the disquieting or self-complacent question of whether it *actually* exists. In the spectral, something past, itself provoked by something to come, something outstanding and as of yet still in arrears, demands its rights here and now. The spectral is, one might therefore say, that which is most present amongst the things which can be experienced because it appears precisely in the open joint between future and past – or more exactly, where its apparently tight connection is out of joint. What appears as spectral is always the future and the future of the past as well, that which is not yet and will never be present. If one can speak of a temporalization of time, as Heidegger and after him Derrida do, then time is temporalized by the future. ‘The truly temporal in time is the future’ – so Schelling claimed in his ‘Aphorisms on Natural Philosophy’ and added, by way of explanation: ‘It is the clear product of sheer imagination.’<sup>33</sup> But productive imagination, from which time and its various dimensions arise, is neither for Heidegger nor for Derrida the decisive originating instance, the *exstance* of temporalization. It is not the productive *Einbildung* and unifying imagination (*In-*

*Eins-Bildungskraft*), it is much more the *damagination* or image-weakness, the abstinence from images and their retreat which releases time from itself and temporalizes. Marx, who was never far from placing a ban on images of the future and preferred – but surely any preference can be nothing but paradoxical – reading the future only in the strains and asynchronicities of the ‘present’, speaks of the future only in the mode of proclamations, conjurations and announcements. Why, then, is the representation of a specter tied to the future?

For Derrida, the specter answers the question of the future. ‘What of the future?’ he asks, and his answer is: ‘The future can only be for the ghosts’ (37; Fr. 69). The phantom is also the answer to the question of the ‘messianic extremity’ which Derrida – in one of the most important terminological decisions of his book – gives the name ‘*eschaton*’. ‘Is there not a messianic extremity, an *eskhaton* whose ultimate event (immediate rupture, unheard-of interruption, untimeliness of the infinite surprise, heterogeneity without accomplishment) can exceed, *at each moment*, the final term of a *phusis*, such as work, the production, and the *telos* of any history?’ (37; Fr. 68). This messianic extremity, which goes beyond every *telos* and every labor; this extremity without which no future can be thought because thinking itself is indebted only to it; this extremity, unthinkable in advance, which can be neither an object of knowledge nor of perception, and only precisely because it evades the controls of both perception and knowledge, keeps the possibility of the future open – this *openness* of the future could only attest to itself in the sheerest abstraction beyond form or, if related to forms, only in their irreparable disintegration. Derrida’s repeated challenge to distinguish between eschatology and teleology (37; Fr. 68) seems to insist on precisely this difference between a form determined by *telos* as its border and the extremity which in the border, or at it, traverses the border and, being external and *exformal*, can no longer fall under the category of form, of categorial thought-form or perception-form. But if the future is an allocategory of the transformative and exformative, if it ‘a priori’ diverges from the categorial framework of forms of thought, perception and intuition, then it must be without appearance, aphenomenal, and can only attest to itself in the disappearance of all phenomenal figures, in the continued dissociation of its phantasmagorias. The future ‘is’, if it is at all, that which shows itself insofar as it effaces the signs it permits. It presents itself only in the retraction of its signs. It is aphanisis<sup>34</sup> antecedent and subsequent to every possible phenomenon. How, then, can it belong to phantoms? What can the sentence mean: ‘At bottom, the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back . . . [*Au fond, le spectre, c’est l’avenir, il est toujours à*

*venir, il ne se présente que comme ce qui pourrait venir ou revenir . . .]*' (39; Fr. 71).

The questions sketched in the background of Derrida's Marx book – at least *some* of its questions – can presumably be paraphrased as follows. How can the future bear witness to itself? And how, as the future, can it attest to its futurity? How is it possible that the sheer possibility (under whose aspect alone actuality exists at all) does not appear as a void of the actual but rather as the way of its arrival – as a path of actualization remaining open to other arrivals? The figure which comes closest to answering these questions, the figure of figuration, is the specter in all its disparity – as phantom, spirit, ghost, appearance and spectrum. It is that 'figure' which massively and under the most disparate names haunts Marx's texts – whether as phantasmagoria or enigma, as fetish or ideology, as theological whim or objective veil – and which is the phenomenon, or phenomenon of phenomenality, for which the walls and cloths between fields as various as literature and philosophy, psychoanalysis, economics, theology and politics are permeable. The most disparate types of discourse are haunted by the specter because the specter is what differs from all of them – and from itself. In it transpires something between material and spirit, apparition and disappearance, foreclosing both from the outset. But as complex as this figure of figuration and defiguration, this archi-figure of difference, might be, it still remains a figure. Derrida's concern is not to conjure it but to analyze the visitations and persecutions, to analyze the rites and formulas of exorcism in which it keeps recurring: a large part of his book on Marx is dedicated to the reduction of the dominant spectral figures to what is irreducibly spectral in them. I will name only three or four of those figures of the figure.

There is first of all the specter of the father, whose '*patrimonial* logic' (107; Fr. 173) unfolds, as it also does for Hamlet and the ghost of his father, between Marx and his father-in-law Ludwig von Westphalen and, more massively, in the metaphorical scenarios of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Derrida introduces the relevant remarks with the ambiguous formulation, used here for the first time, of the *persécution de Marx*: the ghost is what *persecutes Marx* – what he was persecuted by and what he himself persecuted. Derrida, who in *Glas* speaks of a *mère sécutrice*,<sup>35</sup> would not have set the word into this scene of confrontation with the father without deliberation. The *persécution de Marx*, wherever it threatens, is experienced as a *pèrèsécution*. Testifying to this are the myriad sarcastic remarks aimed at the Pope, the 'father of the people', God the Father, at all religious and political authorities and institutions which Derrida, in a cadenced rhythm, does not fail to call by name. Even today the history of Marxism is inseparable from



the history of this *pèresécution*: it is a history of the persecution of Marxism by presumptive paternal authorities and a history of the persecution which Marxism itself as such an authority must meet with. It is a history of the rivalry for paternity and thus of a doubling of the father, of being a double, of the duplicity of origin and future, of the double gait, of the *double pas*, of the *pas-pas*. In his early texts – most elaborately in 'Pas' in 1976 – Derrida developed this peculiar structure of the unavoidable and simultaneously deconstitutive doubling of originary instances, the structure of deorigination and disorientation, a bi- and destructure, in all its complexities; for our purposes here it should be recalled that this duplication first of all splits and de-posit – that it exposes this authority to a movement which, prior to authority, is more powerful than every authority and therefore can no longer be measured against the standard of authority; this duplication of the father and of *pèresécution* also entails a bifurcation of succession, of the persecution, sequence and logic of sequentiality; it thus tears apart the logic of both consequence and genealogy, of both temporal linearity and familial homogeneity; and this duplication also opens the logic of performance – if this is understood as the logic of an originary, inaugurative speech act and therefore as paternalistic, as the logic of *pèreformance* – onto that field in which one father turns against another, a *pas* turns against a *pas* – against its 'self': in which it becomes a logic of *pas-pas-formance*, and consequently no longer of an originary positing, but of a disoriginary one, an ex-positing. Derrida does not make explicit this turn from the logic of performance to the allologic of its internal antagonism and hence to the aporia of performance, but it can be read in his text.

There is, secondly, and not at all far removed from the father in Derrida's text, the mother in the form of the 'mother tongue'. She is an indispensable prerequisite for the assumption of the paternal inheritance, but it is equally indispensable that she be forgotten. Derrida writes: 'This revolutionary inheritance supposes, to be sure, the one that ends up forgetting the specter, that of the primitive or the mother tongue. In order to forget not what one inherits but to forget the pre-inheritance on the basis of which one inherits' (110; Fr. 180–81). This 'forgetting of the maternal' (*l'oubli du maternel*) is necessary 'to bring the spirit in itself to life', but it makes life itself into a 'life of forgetting', into 'life as forgetting' of the maternal specter (109; Fr. 180). The life of the Marxist spirit – or of its specter – consequently remains as infinitely bound to the specter of the mother as to this forgetting. The figure of the mother survives solely in its limitless disappearance.

Derrida dedicates his most detailed analysis to the third specter in this familial phantom story, to that of the brother: it is the specter of

Stirner and his gallery of ghosts. According to Derrida, Stirner for Marx is the 'bad brother' (122; Fr. 198) because he is the 'bad son of Hegel' (ibid.). After Derrida has spoken of his own feelings ('*mon sentiment*': 139; Fr. 221–2), he continues, in the only passage which strikes an explicitly autobiographical tone: 'My feeling, then, is that Marx scares himself, he himself pursues relentlessly someone who almost resembles him to the point that we could mistake one for the other: a brother, a double, thus a diabolical image. A kind of ghost of himself. [*Une sorte de fantôme de lui-même.*]' (139; Fr. 222).<sup>36</sup> Marx has no end of this brother, the double and specter of himself, because he recognizes in him his own jealous identification with Hegel, the father, and sees that he is himself not this father, that he is thus not himself, that he is his own, that is, not his *own* reflection. For him as for Stirner, the proposition of the indubitable ascertainment of self and existence must assume the dubious form 'Ego=ghost' (133; Fr. 212)<sup>37</sup> or 'I = my bad brother.' The I has a priori given itself over to another, to its specter. Its haunting, Derrida says, is 'an operation without action, without a real subject or real object' – whereby (which he does not say) the indispensable premise of every speech act theory to date disappears: that performatives are *acts* of real *subjects*. Every political action consequently threatens to become an automatic farce in a spectropolitical theater. Since Marx least of all can tolerate that, he must separate himself from his Stirnerian specter, from his self and his property, in an endless chain of distancing maneuvers – but precisely for this reason he must incessantly conjure it up, let it return and keep it close at hand. He must promise both himself and the subject of political action a future different from Stirner's specter-future – yet must let this very promise be repeatedly haunted by the threat of its merely phantasmatic character. The *persécution de Marx* does not cease to be his *frèresécution* and his *mèresécution*, for the very reason that it was, from the very beginning, a *pèresécution*. 'For the singular ghost, the ghost that generated this incalculable multiplicity, the arch-specter, is a father or else it is capital' (137; Fr. 221).

It is not difficult to find in Derrida's remarks the assumption that Marx, precisely because he took up a permanent hunt for father and capital, wanted to attain and maintain this capital in order to attain and maintain himself in it. Regardless of whether under the sign of a world-historical law or under the sign of self-preservation, whoever ventures on the persecution of another always intends in this other himself, his own prerogative or his claim on a power equal in principle and, just for that reason, under dispute. He must persecute in another the likeness of himself – but since he pursues only an alienated and estranged figure of himself, his persecution occurs from the very

beginning under a doubled and doubly contradictory sign: he cannot be himself without having seized the other, but as this other he can no longer be himself, being merely his alienated, unfamiliar and false figure, a phantom of himself. From this aporia of self-persecution it perforce follows that a self is only possible as a persecuted and phantasmatic self; that the chance for self-preservation now lies in keeping itself apart from itself; and that the structure of the subject – of the egological, world-historical subject in class struggle – is ultimately determined as an irrecoverable but permanently persecuted head-start: as project and projection, as a persecuted project and as the project of the persecution of projection. I, as the formula of the Marxist, agonistic, class subject is rendered by Derrida, I is not only an other, I is the irrecoverable other which the I persecutes, the phantom of a future I and an I still virtualizing its past figures out of its futurity, of a phantasmal father and of virtual capital. I can only be a future I, and must therefore be an unattainable I – I must be phantom-I. The I is only as a promise, and this promise in which the I speaks beyond every given language in advance of itself and can, from this 'advance', first speak to itself at all – this promise must always also be an announcement and a threat, always the threat and what is threatened, the virtual subject and *sujet*, the project of the persecution in the temporal cleft between an irrecoverable 'in advance' and an unrepeatable 'beforehand'.

—The I does not speak, it is always the cloth that speaks: the projection onto the cloth and the cloth as projection. What speaks is the project which the I holds and withholds, veils and presents for the I. What speaks – and promises and threatens – is the fetish: of the I, of the father, of capital. Language exists only as the language of the capital fetish, labor fetish, substance fetish – not, however, as this substance, essence, labor, not as language *itself*: unless its *self* be its absolute advance, its pre-language, its promise.

—Cloth speaks. But cloth only speaks in order to *attain* the cloth – in order to obtain it, to appropriate it to itself, to pull it to itself and don it, hold it fast and dissolve into its ideal. That the cloth speaks means that a promise alone speaks. And it means that a double threat also always speaks in this promise: it might fulfill its promise – and thereby make an end of language – and it might never fulfill its promise – and thereby degenerate into the infinite simulation of simulations.

—The cloth – promise, project, ideal, capital and fetish of the I – is always also a religious linen, Veronica's veil, with the impression of

abstract man announcing his return, his resurrection and reincarnation; the linen in which capital speaks and this capital, *Monsieur le capital* as Marx called it, promises only itself, promises only a specter, promises only, once again, the cloth. Capital is an infinite project – a project of its advent, its return, its revenues and its revolution.—

Derrida reconstructs the individual shapes and dramas of this family history of specters, and conjectures 'that the figure of the ghost is not just one figure among others. It is perhaps,' he offers for consideration, 'the hidden figure of all figures.' I quote:

And the fantastic panoply, while it furnishes the rhetoric or the polemic with images or phantasms, perhaps gives one to think that the figure of the ghost is not just one figure among others. It is perhaps the hidden figure of all figures. For this reason, it would perhaps no longer figure as one tropological weapon among others. There would be no metarhetoric of the ghost. (119–20; Fr. 194)

But the original figure, the archi-specter – as the preceding commentary has shown and as the following will – is the specter of the father and thus the promise that he will be the father, that he will rise again as the son and lead abstract man to real man and to salvation. *La figure cachée de toutes les figures* is certainly not a figure amongst others, but it is always and above all a figure. It is the figure of figuration itself, the transcendental or quasi-transcendental figure of generation – that which is also figured as a transcendental in the Marxist value-formula and in the commodity-language he deciphers, that which he figured as historical and historicizing, quasi-transcendental, that is: as money (or, in the function of the general equivalent, as cloth) and further as capital. However invisible and hidden amongst other figures it might be, this figure is not anonymous, nor particularly uncanny or unfamiliar; it bears a name and a familial one; it is called for Marx, as Derrida reads him, the phantom of the father. The archi-figure of this ghost bears the name of one of the figures which conceals it. In it, in the name of the father, the meta-figure – one is strangely enough to assume it is maternal, a mater-figure – becomes a phenomenal figure of generative, paternal phenomenality. The transcendental becomes empirical; phenomenality becomes phenomenal and nominal. The promise of the specter in its paternity, in its spectrality, dictates the drama of the *pèresécution de Marx*, because the promise of the father, the promise which the father makes to himself, precedes his reality and remains after his disappearance, and thus there remains as well the promise of universal capitalization, of the presence of the father, of *pèresense*. In the promise, he is ahead of himself, he is his own grandfather and his own grandson, is himself, both momentarily

and invisibly, his own ghost, the promise of the father is his *own* messianic, promessianic operation and *aupèreation*.

And at the same time, not his own, never his own. For in the promise of the father, ahead of himself, he must at the same time asynchronically and anachronically fall behind himself; he can only promise, not realize, his own paternity, and hence can never promise himself *as* father. The *promise* of the father – this belongs to its aporetic structure, to its irremovable covering – will have never been the promise of the *father*. The father is only promised – and always by something other than the father. The promise does not promise. Its privileged figure, identifiable with what is *called* father, with what is *promised* under the name of father, is entrusted to something other than the father; it is a liminal figure, hidden amongst all figures, a figure without figure – and consequently a figure which does not satisfy the determinations of figurality and can only by virtue of this insufficiency permit what is called 'figure'. One could thus say of the 'figure hidden beneath all figures' what Derrida does not say, or does not say this way: a finite figure, a figure without figure, it is the disclosure and opening of all figures, it is what *in* all figures is irreducible to a single figure and thus the event of an *adfiguration*, an a-figuration, an *affiguration*.

—The cloth speaks and in it, capital. But the cloth, capital, speaks neither in propositional statements nor in categories or objective thought-forms; rather, the cloth speaks in promising itself capital. Thus they do not speak, neither capital nor the cloth, nor commodity-language; instead, they disclose the possibility of speaking which cannot be reduced to their 'real abstractions', that is, to the politico-economic grammar and rhetoric of the categories of commodity-language – whose figures, in turn, exist solely in the mode of the promise. Neither capital nor labor is the agent of its project; both are only the historical protagonists of a structure which does not resolve into any grammatical, rhetorical or pragmatic figure – and therefore also not in the figure of the performative as it is traditionally determined. The promise is not a figure but the promise of a figure. An infinite and always deficient promise, it is the pre-figure (Husserl would perhaps say *archi-figure*) of all possible figures which is never fulfilled and closed off in a figure, the unpromissable affiguration of labor, capital and cloth. Arising from this infinitely generous and generative promise which always keeps coming, but precisely therefore keeps not arriving and not coming, arising from this ungenerous and ungenerative promise, capital, labor and cloth never exist *as such*. Always promised and withheld in the promise, neither language nor the promise speaks. Or: language is nothing but this unfulfillable, unrealizable promise of language. (And

since it is unfulfillable and unrealizable, it is impossible to ascertain whether it will ever have been a *promise* of language or a promise of *language*. 'It' can always also have been something other than a 'promise', and always something other than 'language'.)—

The promise, once again, cannot be a statement, a description or an assertion. It must play itself out in a mode of saying which corresponds to nothing given, nothing present, nothing extant and therefore can in no way be placed under the logic of representation, imitation or mimesis. It is neither some kind of conventional sign – for the future is no future if it corresponds to conventions and can be indicated by means of a conventional code – nor is it the promise of a sign at all – for at least a representable or ideal signified would have to correspond to it: but this is, for its part, only a promised correspondence. Every promise, foremost, only *promises* to be a promise and to correspond to its concept and, moreover, to its content. The correspondence is therefore not the horizon of the promise; the promise is the horizon of the correspondence. Since this horizon can only be infinite, all adequation and consensus concepts of truth fail to offer a sufficient determination of the promise and of all other future-oriented and future-disclosing speech forms. But not of these alone. For if language and the cognition possible in it is always an imparting, then its statements must without exception have the character of assurances or truth claims whose verification can in principle only be expected from future correspondences. Language is only language at all in view of a future language. Even if they are not solely and explicitly offered in the form of the promise, all statements, including those usually termed *thetic* or *constative*, are structurally *asseverations* or *announcements* whose conditions of verification remain, in principle, unfulfilled.<sup>38</sup>

In order to account for non-constative speech forms, and furthermore for the prospective structure of language in general, a discourse of action developed with Hobbes in late rationalism, in skeptical empiricism with Hume, in Kant's transcendental philosophy, and then, with Fichte, culminated in a discourse of an originary act (*Thathandlung*), understood either as a contractual promise, as the leading imperative of all linguistic utterances or as the autothesis of the transcendental I. Language was thus no longer thought of as the correspondence of a statement of a pre-existing object but as the autonomous or autonomizing act of a social or individual subject positing itself. It is this theory of the speech act of an empirical, transcendental and ultimately absolute subject which, by way of labyrinthine detours and transformations, has since then led to what is known as 'speech act theory'. Here the promise is one amongst the possible

so-called performative speech acts which must be conducted within certain conventions to be 'successful'. Indeed the very choice of the concept 'performative' resonates with the assumption of a pre-existing rule, of a law or an agreement: the pre-established formal rule is 'realized', 'executed', or 'fulfilled' by a particular performative. Classical speech act theory does not inquire after the conditions under which conventions can be linguistically prepared and established – and precisely for this reason, it cannot account for the performativity of its performatives. Since it does not inquire after the constitution of conventions and their subjects, it typically proceeds from self-governed, intentional subjects who merely reproduce themselves in their linguistic conventions, thereby deviating from its only productive methodological principle of not recurring to instances independent of language to explain linguistic events.

Since 'Signature Événement Contexte', Derrida has repeatedly, critically and productively concerned himself with the limits of Austin's and Searle's theories, particularly with their conventionalist and presentistic premises, using – as he does again in *Specters of Marx* – the concept of the performative. In the figure of conjuration and conjurement – that is, the figure of exorcism and sworn assurance, like the conspiratorial association of persecutors, which is itself exposed to persecution – he emphasizes the significance of an 'act', 'that consists in swearing, taking an oath, therefore promising, deciding, taking a responsibility, in short, committing oneself in a performative fashion' (50; Fr. 89); and Derrida speaks of a 'performative interpretation . . . that transforms what it interprets'. He continues: 'An interpretation that transforms what it interprets is a definition of the performative as unorthodox with regard to speech act theory as it is with regard to the 11th Thesis on Feuerbach ("The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it")' (51; Fr. 89). He writes about the future discussed in *The Communist Manifesto* as 'the real presence of the specter' of communism: 'This future is not described, it is not foreseen in the constative mode; it is announced, promised, called for in a performative mode' (103; Fr. 186). In, as he continues, the 'performative form of the call' (ibid.), this future tries to establish itself in the Communist Party. In the *Manifesto*, as this 'manifesto' itself proclaims, the party manifests itself and thereby the future. Its promise, its performative act, is thus staged in Marx's text as the instantaneous positing of what is not yet – and perhaps never will be – present. Derrida diagnoses: 'Parousia of the manifestation of the manifest' (103; Fr. 169). This 'absolute manifestation of self' (104; Fr. 170) can only take place by asserting the actuality of a real, incontestable institution for its future; it can only take place on the double terrain of the not-

yet-real and actualization and must therefore be both: unreal and real, *spectral*. Derrida therefore speaks of 'the singular spectrality of this performative utterance' (104; Fr. 170). He thus emphasizes in performatives the character of parousia, of manifestation, of absolute self-positing; but he does not do so without binding this self-positing to an auto-phantomization. Every speech act which inaugurates something new, calling to life a subject, a contract or the Communist Party, posits something under the conditions of reality which has heretofore not existed: it therefore calls to life a thaumaton, a monster or a specter. Performatives, one could translate Derrida's thoughts, spectralize – and are themselves, if like *The Communist Manifesto* they institute a novelty, *spectralities*.

Events, and principally the event of the promise, perform, and to be sure they spectralize in performing; they are phantom-parousias first and foremost because they move in the medium of language and thus of the appresentation of what is never immediately present. The border between the 'immediate present' and the future, between the familiar and unfamiliar, is a priori and without exception porous because it, along with the terrain separated by it, is defined only by language, by both discursive and non-discursive language, as their common medium. 'And if this important frontier is being displaced,' Derrida writes, 'it is because the medium in which it is instituted, namely, the medium of the media themselves (news, the press, tele-communications, techno-tele-discursivity, techno-tele-iconicity, that which in general assures and determines the *spacing* of public space, the very possibility of the *res publica* and the phenomenality of the political), this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes' (50–51; Fr. 89). It spectralizes, in other words, because it speaks. And because it promises. All language, whether explicitly oriented toward the future or not, whether explicitly acting or appearing under the screen of neutral statements, promises to communicate something, promises itself the conditions for the preservation and fulfillment of its promise, and promises itself an addressee in whom its statements can achieve their aim. When speaking and promising occur, indissoluble combinations of actuality and suggestion form, combinations of the living and dead, of the present and absent, because in this language, this 'medium of media', no oppositions but only co-implications exist. For this reason whatever appears – and it is only in this medium that something can appear at all – necessarily escapes the opposition being and non-being, life and death, and the ontological categories of presence and absence. 'It requires, then, what we call . . . *hauntology*,' Derrida writes. 'We will take this category to be irreducible, and first of



all to everything it makes possible: ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology' (51; Fr. 89).

Every logic of capital and labor, every logic of commodity-language, of the form of equivalence, of exchange, and therefore every logic of controlled planning, technological development and politico-economic prognosis must accordingly be founded in this hauntology of a (as Derrida has it) fundamentally irreducible spectrality of medial language, of the language of the promise, of the futural and performative, the futuro-formative language of an unsecurable project. Labor is no more a given fact than capital; it is not a transcendental form of value determination or essence of anthropo-technological systems without first being a project, a credit, an advance *on* and a head start *into* a future which can in no way be determined as fact, transcendental or substance. What follows from the idea of 'hauntology' is, first of all, that language does not belong to the system of capital, nor to that of labor, that language does not define itself as commodity-language; that it only assumes the character of productive or reproductive labor when the equivalence form is generalized and has repressed the credit-character of capital as well as the project-character of labor; that language does not have under all conditions (and hence not essentially) the character of a communicative exchange operation, of a propositional adequation or a positional act; and that, even if it can still be characterized as 'performative', the concept of performativity must submit to drastic transformations – transformations which detach it both from the instances of conventionality and positivity, from communicability and continuity with its tradition.

Derrida does think here of language, the medium of media, as a performative engagement, but as one which first of all, essentially and irreducibly, is an engagement *with* others, *against* other others and *for* a future, which has never been actualized in this performative engagement but possesses, instead, the amphibious virtuality or 'spectreality' which alone is adequate to the medial character of language. Language is the medium of futurity. Whatever enters into it, or simply comes into contact with it, is already pulled into a space where the characters of reality are founded precisely upon the not-yet of this reality – and are unfounded in that conventions are, and remain, only in anticipation, positings exist only in process and are hence exposed, continuities are suspended, communications and their rules are not fulfilled but announced, attempted and promised. If, as Derrida does here – like Benjamin (who seems to have left an impression on *Specters of Marx* hardly to be overestimated) – one thinks of the mediality of language from its relationship to the future; if one thinks of it from its promise – much like Heidegger (whose traces are equally unmistakable and

numerous in *Specters of Marx*) – then the futurity of language, its inherent promising capacity, is the ground – but a ground with no solidity whatever – for all present and past experiences, meanings and figures which could communicate themselves in it. Language is a medium insofar as it opens the place of arrival, opens the gate to what is to come, the entrance of an unpredictable and topographically indeterminate other: the topos of the U-topic. Neither what is to come ‘itself’ nor the purely present and yet both ‘at once’, language is, in the form of the promise and the announcement, the field of interference where what is to come transforms the meaning of every present figure, rendering it legible *sub specie futurae*. If language did not open itself to future possibilities, if it did not promise itself as something else whose verification is still pending and can only be awaited from the position of another, then it would have no possible meaning, it would be nothing but the superfluous replica of what is already known and could never, in its singularity, impart itself to another. Communication – and therewith every being-with-another, every being – is a promise. Since the other which is to come, which is announced or promised, can never be the object of a theoretical determination within the categorial frame of assured epistemological means, but can only be the project of a practical execution which itself must be determined by this project – and therewith by what is fundamentally indeterminate – this praxis can no longer merely be thought of as the ‘act’ of a constitutive and self-constitutive subject, no longer as a ‘performance’ within a framework of conventions, but only as an event which with every occurrence discloses other rules, discloses other conventions, other subject forms and other performances, alterformances, alterjects, allo-praxes. If language is a promise, it is always the other who speaks. And this other cannot be an alter ego, but only the alteration – and *alteralteration* – of every possible ego. 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.

If I understand it correctly – and as understanding is also always a ‘performative’ enterprise and therefore an alteration, here too the ‘correct’ understanding does not move along without displacements, transformations and perhaps distortions – this is nothing other than what Derrida means with the expression ‘the singular spectrality of this

performative utterance' (of *The Communist Manifesto*). It is the spectrality and more precisely the spectreality of a project which, prepared from far off, announced for the first time in the history of European societies, in philosophical and scientific form, universal unlimited freedom. 'The form of this promise or of this project,' Derrida emphasizes, 'remains absolutely unique. Its event is at once singular, total, and uneffaceable – uneffaceable differently than by a denegation and in the course of a work of mourning that can only displace, without effacing, the effect of a trauma.' And Derrida continues:

There is no precedent whatsoever for such an event. In the whole history of humanity, in the whole history of the world and of the earth, in all that to which one can give the name history in general, such an event (let us repeat, the event of a discourse in the philosophico-scientific form claiming to break with myth, religion, and the nationalist 'mystique') has been bound, for the first time and inseparably, to worldwide forms of social organization (a party with a universal vocation, a labor movement, a confederation of states, and so forth). All of this while proposing a new concept of the human, of society, economy, nation, several concepts of the State and of its disappearance (91; Fr. 149–50)

The event of the Marxist promise – whose singularity, once again, lies in its boundless and yet organized universality – precisely because it is an absolute novelty in this determined, universal, organizational form and cannot be reduced to any social, religious or philosophical conventions which might have anticipated it, is therefore a *trauma*: a traumatizing injury of the politico-economic and social-psychological corpus, of the religious, linguistic, technical and scientific corpus of all traditions, a traumatic promise which tears apart a techno- and eco-onto-logical topology and its mechanisms of displacement and which cannot be healed by any traditional form of social, psychic or scientific labor, by any 'labor of mourning'. The Marxist promise which pledges the abolition of labor cannot be recovered by any labor. It marks an absolute limit of ergontology.<sup>39</sup>

—Cloth speaks – but with Marx it speaks for the first time in the form of a universal and infinite promise. No longer as a promise already indicated in the cloth's 'indigenous' woven structure and finally, in the mid-nineteenth century, grasped in clear words with teleological resolution, but instead as a promise which unprogrammatically tears its previous weave and its tendencies and, in this traumatization, promises for the first time the cloth in its absolute, universal actuality: beyond every labor, beyond every handiwork and every fabrication, pure mesh. A peculiar mesh, one which is a tear; universal because singular; singular because redeemable in repetitions; in need of repetition

because unrepeatable, infinite and therefore irrecoverably and unrealizably finite.—

The promise in question here must consequently first of all be thought of as the 'medium of all media' and as the projection into a future which is not the teleologically predetermined goal of a past history, and thirdly – and therefore – as a traumatic experience in which the form of experience itself suffers a tear and is put to a halt. The medium of all possible media is a tear and an opening, a *rendering possible* of all media, opening the empty place which alone gives room to a spectral actuality, to an actuality only as a specter and which itself can only appear as a space of spectrality. The promise, the traumatic opening of another time – or, indeed, of something other than time – of another future – or something other than the future perhaps; the promise, which does not continue conventions and does not fulfill the rules of its performance but breaks through conventions and inaugurates other rules – and perhaps something other than rules – the promise does not perpetuate history, it starts and makes history possible; this unique promise of something itself unique and new will, according to Derrida, as 'a messianic promise . . . have imprinted an inaugural and unique mark on history' (91; Fr. 150). This marking of history, which in actuality is its opening and nothing less than the *historizing* of history, is regularly and explicitly characterized by Derrida as its spectralization. He writes of the democratic and the communist promise, of those 'infinite promises' which do not govern their own conditions of fulfillment: '*just opening . . . messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited as such, or recognized in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place [laisser une place vide] – and this is the very place of spectrality*' (65; Fr. 111). And: 'At bottom, the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come again' (39; Fr. 71). And:

In this regard [that is, with regard to its untimeliness and the untimeliness of the future], communism has always been and will remain spectral: it is always still to come and is distinguished, like democracy itself, from every living present understood as plenitude of a presence-to-itself, as totality of presence effectively identical to itself. Capitalist societies can always heave a sigh of relief and say to themselves: communism is finished since the collapse of the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century and not only is it finished, but it did not take place, it was only a ghost. They do no more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back [*il reste toujours à venir et à revenir*]. (99; Fr. 163)

The specter haunting Europe and beyond is a promise of democracy and communism which traumatically opens up a new world history, a history for the first time neither mythical nor limited, a world history of liberation, justice and equality. It must announce the most general and most formal form of a future society and at the same time must promise the unpromissable: its absolute singularity and incommensurability with every generalization. The democratic and furthermore communist promise thus announces, in absolute formality and absolute singularity, performatively – *biformatively* – two futures irreducible and irreconcilable to one another: an unlimited universal rule and a singularity free of every imaginable rule. It is the promise of a coming democracy only by being this double and aporetic promise; a performative only by being this *biformative*. But this singular universal promise is aporetic in yet another respect. As the promise of a future which is universal, it must be the promise of a just future of all pasts; but it cannot be the promise of the future of *all* pasts without also being a restrictive promise from a particular generation of *limited* pasts and hence without being itself merely a past promise, a wraith and an echo, the revenant of promise, broken over and over or betrayed or fatal. Pluriformative and reformative, the revolutionary performative of the absolute messianic promise is also a *perverperformative* that turns against itself and in each of its traits tends to erase itself – and not for any empirical or contingent reason which might have been avoided or eliminated, but from a structural necessity which not a single promise can escape, in particular not the promise of singularity.<sup>40</sup>

—The language of the cloth is always also an echolalia. Things said resound in it once more, every shred and tatter of word and phrase pursue the speaker into a future of semblance and echo, into an echo chamber, a tomb: a specter monologue in diverse voices. But this necrophilic language of the nymph Echo is still a language of *philia*, keeping the dead alive and preserving it for other times – or something other than time.—

*Specters of Marx* is not about this multiplication in the performative structure of the promise, but indeed about the multiplication, the dissociations and the antagonisms of specters, spirits, phantoms, ghosts and fetishes – and since it is the promise and the future disclosed in it which Derrida characterizes as the phantom par excellence, his text is, in a mediated way, also about the dissociation and original perversion of the performative. It is about the difference *within* the performative and how this difference can haunt in no other 'figure' than that of the monstrous figure of a specter. I cite here three passages which address precisely this problem. 'There are several times of the specter. It is a

proper characteristic of the specter, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the *revenant* may already mark the promised return of the specter of living being. Once again, untimeliness and disadjustment of the contemporary' (99; Fr. 162). The specter can come from the past as well as from the future; its spectral quality is its double allegiance, which can in no way be decided upon by means of theoretical cognition, since every cognition of that kind must already be related to the spectral and, in turn, can do nothing but 'performatively' send out its own specters. There is a time fissure through the spectral which distributes it across two times that are heterogeneous to one another, distributes it into a double chronicity and an asynchronicity, an achrony which lets the past appear in what is to come and what is to come in what is past. But no matter how even the distribution of times may be, Derrida's formulation suggests with sufficient precision that there is no symmetry between what is past and what is to come: specters of the past can only appear when conjured by the promise of another future. In the final footnote of the book, this theme of an asymmetrical, future-inclined asynchronicity is taken up once again when Derrida writes: 'Given that a revenant is always called upon to come and to come back, the thinking of the specter, contrary to what good sense leads us to believe, signals toward the future. It is a thinking of the past, a legacy that can come only from that which has not yet arrived – from the arrivant itself' (196; Fr. 276). The future delivers specters and even in the specters of the past, however lethal they might be, launches the promise of another future for this same past. The promise of an absolutely other future testifies to hope in even the bloodiest pasts. To make other futures possible, they must undergo the risk of their pairing with dangerous futures and confront their own effacement. The performative of the promise, directed toward other possibilities of the past and future, is thus unavoidably linked to a threat to this promise itself and thereby to the effacement of this performative. There is no rendering possible of possibilities which might not also make this rendering itself impossible. No promise in which the possibility of its breach was not also voiced, no act into which its annulment does not intervene.

—No cloth which could not be taken apart thread by thread; no weave which would not end in an open seam, would not consist of such seams, were not woven from its unraveling, from its runs. The cloth, a Penelope of itself.—

In principle every performative is an aporetic agonistic biformative – or, to write the word for French ears and eyes, a *biformative*: What it

inaugurates includes the possibility of its erasure (its *biffure*), and only with the inclusion of this possibility does it have the chance to begin. The performative does not perform – unless it still ‘performs’ the possibility of the ‘not’ of its performing and is in-formed by this ‘not’; it is, in French once again, a *pas-formative*. It is the start of a speech act in which an egologically structured subject should constitute itself, a start which is close to being this act itself, hence an *adformative*; but since it can be nothing but the start and *opening* of this practical and therein self-sufficient act, an opening in which its possibility is knitted into the possibility of the impossibility of succeeding, it can itself never assume the definitive form of the performative, will never finally be accomplished and remains, the event of the threshold before every act, parapractical, an act without act before every possible act, *aformative*. The structure of language is *afformative* – both *adformative* and *aformative* – and it is only its onto-ego-logical speech-activist interpretation which is recorded in the concept of performatives, therein maintaining the suggestion that logos has incarnated itself, that it is ‘accomplished’.<sup>41</sup>

The promise, and in particular the Marxist promise, the first and only to announce and prepare the universal actualization of freedom and individuality, opens possibilities; but it opens them with all the dangers and threats linked to this disclosure. These dangers include the repetition of the familial, national and religious myths which it claims to rid itself of. Here belongs as well the danger – of activating the performative of the promise according to the schema of the jealous persecution of the father. Performatives of *pèresécution* must always be able to also be *pèreformatives* and thus formatives of the father – and of the kind in which, in the first and last instance, the father and his son and his holy spirit promises and forms itself. And if not a father, then nearby to him a mother in a *mèreformative* of the mother tongue or, perhaps even closer to the father, a rivalrous brother in a *frèreformative*. What else could promise, manifest and form itself here but the least uncanny and the most familiar specter: the Holy Family beneath its head, capital? Or – as the past eighty years have demonstrated; it amounts to the same thing – the Communist Party, this other Holy Family beneath its head, the capital of labor?

What, once again, would be the difference between specter and spirit, between the phantom of all failed or missed pasts and that spirit of the future in which they would be redeemed from their silence, their distortion and falseness? Derrida expressly poses this question in connection to a passage from *The German Ideology* in which Marx sneeringly states as Stirner’s ventriloquist, ‘that you yourself are a ghost which “awaits salvation, that is, a spirit”’ (136; Fr. 217). The difference

between specter and spirit, in Derrida's commentary on Marx's citation of Stirner, is *différance*.

The specter is not only the carnal apparition of the spirit, its phenomenal body, its fallen and guilty body, it is also the impatient and nostalgic waiting for a redemption, namely, once again, for a spirit. The ghost would be the deferred spirit [*l'esprit différé*], the promise or calculation of an expiation. What is this *différance*? All or nothing. One must reckon with it but it upsets all calculations, interests, and capital. (136; Fr. 217)

If the specter is the holding back and avoidance [*Hinhaltung und Hintanhaltung*] of the spirit, it is the unending longing for the spirit as well. The messianic promise haunts in the shattered and criminal forms of social and linguistic life as a specter and links even its most mythical forms, its terroristic performatives, its familial obsessions, to the expectation of their redemption. A life ruined retains the longing for the just one – and thus, and *only* thus, in a kind of minimal-ontodicy, is itself 'justified'. For what would redemption be if all pasts were not redeemed along with all their disappointments, tortures and disgrace? What would freedom be if the dead were not also liberated, at least those who live on in us – and are there others? Even the conditions of capital and labor are subjected to *other* conditions: those of their change, those of their possible other future. Nor would the ontologization of the affirmative to the performative, and furthermore into the *pèrformative*, be possible without the affirmative, the future-oriented structure of the promise, which vows the transformation of that structure into a predictably and programmatically untamable other language – and perhaps something other than language – into another form of action – perhaps even something other than form and than action. And, perhaps, something other than the future.

For what would the future be if it could not be something other than the future?

The point is not to conjecture it, design plans, formulate intentions or suggest precautions for it. Nor is it to speculate about the future or speculate with it. It is a matter of unfolding all the implications of futurity and the only way of access to it, speculation, and thereby to make more audible the language of this futurity and its spectreality, the language of the promise. For the sake of futurity, it must first of all concern its formal structure alone and therefore practice a suspension of all contents which might combine with it. What is offered and what Derrida repeatedly shows in *Specters of Marx* is an ultra-transcendental *epokhè*, almost without comparison in political theory up to now, of the objects and contents of a future politics and their rigorous reduction to the sheer form of futurity. Accordingly he distinguishes between the



'Marxist ontology grounding the project of Marxist science or critique' and a 'messianic eschatology' which as the unrealized promise of justice and democracy goes beyond every critical ontology of what is present at hand and of what is predictably or programmatically graspable. The contents of the future's determinations aside, the *essential* difference between the Marxist critique and the religions, ideologies and theologemes it criticizes (and which criticize it) dissolves. Their solidarity, notoriously dismissed by both, consists in what neither can think as the content of its doctrines or object of its concepts, but what both are caught up in as the implication of those concepts and doctrines. Derrida writes:

While it is common to both of them, with the exception of the content (but none of them can accept, of course, this *épokhi* of the content, whereas we hold it here to be essential to the messianic in general, as thinking of the other and of the event to come), it is also the case that its formal structure of promise exceeds them or precedes them. Well, what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as indeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice. . . . (59; Fr. 102)

This suspension of contents with which the messianic structure of the promise – one could say: the structure of the *promessianic* – is exposed must not be misunderstood as indifference toward future or present institutions: it is the only form under which such institutions first become possible. 'This indifference to the content here is not an indifference,' Derrida emphasizes, 'it is not an *attitude* of indifference, on the contrary. Marking any opening to the event and to the future as such, it therefore conditions the interest in and not the indifference to anything whatsoever, to all content in general. Without it, there would be neither intention, nor need, nor desire, and so on' (73; Fr. 123–4). What Derrida calls 'the messianic without messianism' is thus what in every promise, in every imperative and every wish – and altogether in language – reveals 'the necessarily pure and purely necessary form of the future as such' (ibid.). It is, one could say, the necessary possibility which precedes everything actual, everything necessarily actual and everything possible. It is the historicity of history itself: a futurity always open and thus open to something else. Marxism – and, since there are several competing Marxisms, amongst them nationalistic, totalitarian, and terrorist, one must specify: that Marxism which pursues a politics of emancipatory universalism – is the instance of the articulation of this messianic promise; it is the instance of this articulation even when, and

perhaps only when, the messianic does not assume the organizational form of one party but of several, even if, and perhaps only if, it is not bound to the sufferings and hopes of a single class and thus not to the traditional conception of the proletariat, and only if the messianic and its Marxism is not corrupted by a program, if it is corrupted neither by its alliance with labor nor by a temporal and historical schema of succession, a development or linear sequence.

The spirit of Marxism – or the one inheritable specter haunting for one hundred and fifty years – is thus first and foremost the absolutely abstract formality of the promise: the opening of a future which would not be the continuation of pasts but for the first time exposes the claim of these pasts, the opening of another time – a time other than the time of labor and capital – the opening of a history which in fact gives all previous history its room for maneuver [*Spielraum*]. The spirit of Marxism is, in short, the promise, the absolute 'in advance' of speaking; it is the pre-structure, the structure of possibility of every experience – and is thus essentially temporalization and historization. But as such it commands an eschatological movement which cannot be halted by any representational content or foreseeable purposes. The messianic eschatology underlying every fundamentally critical thought, every longing and every one of the simplest statements, and underlying in particular the Marxist project urging justice beyond internationalism, democracy and all positive legal forms, must, for the sake of the historicity and futurity of these absolutely formal and universal imperatives, be distinguished from classical teleology. Derrida insists upon 'distinguishing . . . any teleology from any messianic eschatology' (90; Fr. 147).<sup>42</sup> There is no pre-established telos for 'the messianic without messianism' which could be recognizable now, programmatically striven for and ultimately achieved in some particular organization of social life. As the universal structure of experience, it cannot be presided over by any guiding figures whose design was not already obliged to that structure and therefore was not already surpassed, in every one of their positions, by it. Messianic hope is thus divested of all determined and all determinable religious, metaphysical or technical figures of expectation; this continued divestment itself opens every past history to a new future one, and can therefore be nothing other than an 'expectation without a horizon of expectation' (65, 192; Fr. 111, 267). From this decisive determination of the messianic which is repeatedly marked in Derrida's text – that it must remain indeterminate, that it is messianic without a horizon – it follows for the promise, and the structure of its performativity when the messianic tendency first arises, that this promise too must *stricto sensu* be open and that it must be a performative without a horizon. Only with this characterization is the ground cleared for the

messianic movement, for the Marxist project and a politics of emancipation: it is *performing without a performative horizon*, the *perforation* of every horizon, transcendental – and, more exactly, atranscendental – kenosis of all linguistic and non-discursive forms of action. But what does that mean?

Derrida does not pursue the structure of a horizonless performativity further in *Specters of Marx*. For him, this structure is marked by its mediality – as the ‘medium of all media’ – by its openness and hence by its illimitable futurity. The way in which these three traits join together in the spectrality or spectreality of the Marxist project and affect the structure of the performative is given no closer investigation. There is, however, a hint, repeated several times, and commented upon in two of Derrida’s more recent texts, ‘Foi et savoir’ and ‘Avances’. In his *Marx* book Derrida concedes – and it is important that it occurs in the form of a concession – that the unconditional hospitality which the horizonless promise accords to the other, the future, justice and freedom, could be ‘the impossible itself’, and he adds: ‘Nothing and no one would arrive otherwise, a hypothesis that one can never exclude, of course’ (65; Fr. 111–12). One can thus not exclude, but rather must concede and admit that the promise of an arrival *also* promises *no* arrival, that it promises something not arriving and thus promises precisely what can in no way be promised. But it is clear that this non-advent does not overtake the promise – every promise – like an accident from the outside (perhaps from that other who was promised but who, due to his volition, power or impotence, does not come); rather, this non-arriving belongs to the very structure of the elementary promise: insofar as it is a promise, it must be open to something which denies itself knowledge, evidence, consciousness and the calculability of a program, and thus always and in every single case cannot arrive. The promise would not be a promise if it were a statement of fact or the prognosis for a causal chain of development. It lacks the egologically anchored certainty which should belong to epistemic calculability. Regardless of what is promised, the promise as such already concedes that it may not be kept, that it may be broken and can only be given in consideration of its possible breach. A promise is given only under the premises of the possible retraction of its offering. Since the promise is altogether the initiating act of language (and hence is language ‘itself’), the opening of both selfhood and relation to the other, of sociability, history and politics, its structural unrealizability cannot help but suspend them all and, in them, their constitutive relation to the future. Insofar as the future exists, the promise offers it only under the proviso of the future’s possible non-advent. And this reserve, this absolute discretion of a possibly impossible future, is inscribed into the

promise and with it into the opening of the future; it is inscribed into the very futurity of the future.

The tie between the performativity of attestation (*performativité testimoniale*) and the techno-scientific performance discussed in 'Foi et savoir' is linked by a 'performative of the promise', which Derrida emphasizes is at work even in lies and perjuries, and without which an address, a turn to the other would be impossible. He writes: 'Without the performative experience [*expérience performative*] of this elementary act of faith, there would be neither a "social relation" nor an address to the other, nor any kind of performativity of productive performance joining, from the very beginning, the knowledge of the scientific community to practice, science to technology.'<sup>43</sup> Since this elementary promise – and that also means: the promise as the medium of all discursive and non-discursive institutions – is for its part bound to the iterability of markings, it follows that there can be:

[n]o future without inheritance and without the possibility of *repeating*. No future without *iterability*, at least in the form of a relation to itself and of the *confirmation* of an originary Yes. No future without messianic memory and the messianic promise, without a messianicity older than all religions, more original than all messianisms. No speech, no address to the other without the possibility of an elementary promise. Perjury and a broken promise lay claim to the *same* possibility.<sup>44</sup>

Everything, in short, begins with the possibility – with the possibility of projecting possibilities in the promise and of confirming these possibilities, repeating and transferring them. The possibility of the promise is already the possibility of its repetition. But were this repetition merely to result from the automatism of the perpetually selfsame, the promise would become program and evidence, prophecy and providence. If the opening of the future ushered in by the iterability of the promise – one could say: if *futuration* were the act of a knowing consciousness – then the future itself would be something entirely knowable and technically executable and would thus be, instead of the future, its annulment. The iterability coextensive with the promise thus has two sides: it opens the future as a field of possible confirmations and even fulfillments, and it discloses it as a future which can block every future. The possibilities of the future always include the possibility that there is no future. The possibilities of iteration always include the possibility that it is not a transformation but rigid fixation; the possibilities of the promise always include the possibility that it is not only unfulfillable but also unperformable: every promise, in principle, necessarily can be interrupted by accident or coincidence. These two possibilities, irreducible because equally original, turn every futuration

into *affuturation*: into the opening of a future which, because it must always be able to be a future without future, an annulment of the future, can irrevocably disavow this very opening. Not *the* future is opened, instead – iteration is immediate pluralization – multiple futures are opened; but to these futures always belongs at least one which no longer permits talk of a future or *in* one. At least this one, this annulled and null-future, necessitates the experience of future possibilities always at the foundation of their possible impossibility, futures at the foundation of their future non-advent. There is no relation to the future not undone by the irrelation to its inherently possible absence at every point – thus a relation to irrelation – an irrelation itself – and hence not a relation to the future at all. *A-futurizing*, we speak and act at the future, on the *threshold* to it, not *in* it, not in the open but in the opening – and in an opening which (otherwise it were none) can always be the opening to an end, to a conclusion or obstruction.

The possibilities disclosed in the messianic opening of the promise relate to this promise not as external addenda following a logic other than that of the promise. They are possibilities only insofar as they are possibilities disclosed by the promise. If for Derrida the promise is messianic, this does not mean that it is the promise of a messianic lying outside it, still less the promise of a messiah, but simply this: that the grounding structure of the promise itself is the announcement and expectation of another, a just life and another, a true language. Consequently – and therefore alone – the irreducible possibilities imparted in the structure of every promise also necessarily include the possibility that it is the promise of a god or a messiah. The messiah of a promise, he is nothing but this promise that the promise is real and in truth a promise; he is nothing but the promise to say the truth about the promise and to keep this promise as it was made. God himself would be the promise that the promise is a promise: the one who testifies to its truth as its highest guarantor. In order to be able to promise something, the promise itself must first of all secure its own status and to this end project an absolute – and therefore ungeneratable – instance of its attestation. To be a promise at all, every promise, even the most profane, must produce a god. 'Without god, no absolute witness. No absolute witness who could bear witness to the attestation itself.'<sup>45</sup> What the promise takes as the witness to its truth must be absolute, must be a god and *one* god – but must also *not* be god, not an absolute and not a witness, for if the promise were certified by an absolute witness then it would no longer be a promise, no longer directed toward the future and no longer the precarious opening of a possibility; it would be the statement of an absolutely certain actuality.

The one absolute witness must be able to be none – no god – he can be a god only in that he can also not be one, he must remain able to let his potency go, beyond all capacities – and can only attest to the promise as this one and none. 'Without god, no absolute witness [*point de témoin absolu*]. No absolute witness who could bear witness to the attestation itself.' The necessary possibility of a god, posited by the structure of the promise itself, is by the same necessity ex-posed to the necessary impossibility of god. If the messiah is heralded, summoned and called into life by the messianic structure of finite language, then he must be held back by the same structure, withheld, always overdue and longed for. No god, no messiah, who would not be missing. None who was not still absent in his presence. None who was not promised and promised away by language: spoken away and removed, removed and re-moved. None who would speak. The messiah cannot be promised – but can *only* be promised, and thus only promised as the unpromissable which breaks every promise.

What makes the messianic structure of language and experience not into a theological, but an anatheological and atheological structure is precisely what the titles 'messianic' and 'the messianic' still mask. As the messianic, like the title 'god' for a theology (whether positive or negative), is only valid as the name for an absolute entity if an element from the structure of the promise is isolated, semanticized and ontologized, so the carefully chosen, purely formal title 'the messianic without messianism' could still arouse the misunderstanding that it indicates a stable transcendental structure of projective actions directly aimed at an open future, disclosing the future. That would not only lead to a messianization and theologization of the future (Derrida cites Lévinas' 'Dieu est l'avenir'<sup>46</sup>), it would not only mean the ontologization of an isolated element from the structure of the promise, but it would also be contrary to precisely those aspects which Derrida stresses in his analyses of the promise and to his question of what could be a more consistent inheritance than an 'atheological inheritance of the messianic' (191; Fr. 266). The messianic is always what longs for, discloses and promises an unanticipatable, unprefigurable other; but exactly because it is not prefigurable, because it is an other, the messianic must by necessity refuse to promise it, must thwart its promise to retain its promissability and instead of pledging a future, appresents, in its exposition, futurity. Only the *amessianic* is messianic: that which opens the messianic tendency and concedes at the 'same' time the possibility of its discontinuance, *hic et nunc*. As there must be a possibility of no future so that there can be a future, so must the messianic always be open to its lapse, if it is to be messianic at all. It – every it – must also possibly not exist so that it might exist: the law of that law issued by the

promise, the law of the exposing of the law 'itself,' an atranscendental movement which precedes every transcendental of hope, belief, wish, and every ontologization or semanticization. This movement precedes every being as something in which every 'pre' is given up. 'Messianic promise' – that means the anasemiosis even of the 'pre' of every promise in a possibility potent to the extent that it is impotent; a possibility which can only mean by pre-ceding non-meaningfully every meaning and every bidding. 'The messianic', like 'the future', is a misnomer; its gap cannot be filled by the misnomer 'amessianic' but only made more precise and commented upon.

'Advances', Derrida's preface to *Le Tombeau du dieu artisan* by Serge Margel, is a study on the aporetic structure of every promise. It argues the connection between doing [*Machen*] and lack [*Mangel*], performance and finitude. Promises are only possible under the conditions of their possible breach. They are the most exposed forms of linguistic and consequently existential fragility. 'In order to be a promise,' Derrida writes, 'a promise *must be capable* of being broken and therefore capable of *not* being a promise (for a breakable promise is no promise).'<sup>47</sup> Though Derrida does not pursue it in this way, the consequence for the structure of performativity is clear: since this structure cannot grant the certainty that it is really the structure of *performativity*, since it *must not* grant this certainty if the structure is to have a chance to correspond to it, the *form* of the performative in its performance must itself be suspended. The performative is what exposes its form, the horizon of its determination, *ex-poses* itself as an act – a doing not lacking something else but lacking this doing 'itself' – a completion from which both the plenitude and the carrying through 'itself' immediately slips away – and whose 'self' can lie in nothing other than permitting this exposing and slipping away. An *actus ex-actus*. A performative which must be structured, distructured as *afformative* in order to be able to operate, open or posit: as open *toward* the form of an act, but for this reason *divested* of the form of this act; an amorphic or anamorphic event over which no figure rules and from which no final figure results because it is essentially *affigurative*; moreover it is, each time, a singular, non-iterable – and therefore *errable* – occurrence because the conditions of its repetition must also always be the conditions of its unrepeatability. Therefore Derrida's reference to the 'perversion' of the promise into a threat<sup>48</sup> can only be misleading: every promissive, every promessianic performance, without changing its character, is by necessity itself already the threat not only of not being kept, but of *not being one* at all.

If, once again, a future can be, it can only be so as one which can also *not* be. This possibility is not an alternative articulable in the

disjunction 'either a future or none', for only insofar as there is a future, is there none; only insofar as there are open possibilities, is there also the possibility that none will be preserved *as a possibility*. But if what is called presence or actuality is always determined by the opening towards the future and *as this opening*, then presence *appresentating* (in a sense other than a Husserlian one) is always that in which every future is pending. This opening which is the present, must, *hic et nunc*, be something other than future, more than *a future*: pluralities of futures, but also more than futures, a pluperfect-future; not only another time and other times, but what would no longer be time. The promise would be the place where this other time and this other than time occur. It is the place – the atopic place – where possibilities are indeed opened, but only those constitutively lacking the conditions of their verification and actualization. Whatever might *become* a promise without ever indeed being so, belongs to at least two 'times': a time of a future which can come and of a future which cannot come; a time which renders possible and one which renders impossible this very rendering. The promise is thus the place of the aporia of temporalization; hence the place of an *attemporalization* which must precede every possible time, every possible future, every possible possibility and with which, here and now – for this too is a promise – not only other times occur but also an other than time.

—A cloth before time and before temporally determined speech – a cloth of promises, a pre-discursive material which promises 'itself': the cloth is originally twofold, the cloth of the promise, and another (which is not there) of the confirmation that it is a promise. They do not exchange with one another, do not communicate with each other under a common discursive ideal and yet, in their absolute disjunction, they are a community – a possible-impossible community before every equivalence, before capital and before the labor and its time measured by capital. And because before labor, also beyond it: atranscendental material. Now.—

As a promise exposed to the uncertain possibilities of the future, every act risks not being one. Each act, however closely determined it might otherwise be, must *a priori leave open* at least one extreme possibility – and leaving open means risking and risking failure – the possibility of no longer falling under the regime of an intentional subject and thereby no longer qualifying as an act. The open place of this extreme possibility which (in)determines the field of any and every action is no longer a place of doing but of *letting*. Every performative must contain the structural concession that its horizon is not its own, that it is not altogether the horizon of performativity – of positing, of



productive imagination, of labor – that it is instead open to other horizons and, at the limit, ahorizontal, open to possibilities not given by it but given to it, ceded, imparted or left. Performatives, speech acts positing facts or opening possibilities, exist only when they are conceded room for maneuver and when they give themselves over to this maneuvering: when, even before they can be performatives, they are admitted into a field which one can provisionally call that of *admissives* or *amissives*. These ad- or amissives cannot be thought of as fundamental speech acts, for they involve neither acting nor executing; they are, rather, admitted and conceded, granted and left, and in such a manner, a manner unregulatable and unique each time, that an admission or cession can at the same time be a letting go and discarding, an abandonment and a loss.<sup>49</sup> To say 'I promise' I must also say 'I admit my promise' and 'I admit it in view of its admission by the other to whom it is addressed.' But to *admit* a promise means unavoidably to concede its potential failure, its potential breach and even its potential inadmissibility; hence, to treat its admission not as an assured fact but as a rendering possible which does not exclude its rendering impossible as well – the possibility of the impossibility of this rendering possible. 'I promise' therefore always also means: 'This promise is admitted on the condition of its unreliability and its possible inadmissibility.' All performatives are therefore (even if, in programming, semanticizing, ontologizing the field of their projects, they deny it) structured as *admissives*, all *admissives* structured as *amissives*: they admit, concede and leave themselves to a field over whose determination they have so little defining power that they cannot even grant it being, not even an unlimited, secure, solid possible being, an actual or necessary being. They admit and leave themselves to what is not projected with them: they are *amissives* insofar as they risk their own loss, their impossibility. *Admissive*, *amissive*: the Marxist promise is the opening of a world, of a society, of a language, which – *lingua missa*, *lingua amissa* – aims at a just life in every trait, and for this very reason, in every trait, must be open to another and still another – and also to none. But if the opening onto another life and another language still follows the temporality of a rendering possible, then this never excludable – and, for the sake of the opening itself, indispensable – opening onto another life which would be none, and onto a language which would be no language, this opening onto the occlusion of the opening follows at the same time the temporality of the rendering impossible; and the promise of language knits itself – for the sake of this promise – into the promise of the prohibition not only of a particular language but of every language. A promise, above all the most relinquished, the

most admitted of promises, exists not in a language, but in the cleft of language.

The promise, the messianic, ammessianic promise, opens itself as a time cleft. And indeed as the time cleft of a world, as a world cleft. Marxism is historically the first promise which made a claim on unlimited universality in freedom and justice, the first and only not biased by racisms, nationalisms, cultisms or class ideologies, but promising instead a world common to all and to each his own.<sup>50</sup> This world must be promised, demanded, desired and made possible before it can exist. But if it is ever to exist, it will be a world under the conditions of this promise, of this longing and this rendering possible; it will therefore be an aporetic world whose idea lies in infinite conflict with its every singular actualization and in conflict with its always possible annulment. This conflict is as unavoidable as the promise from which it arises. What can never be conclusively avoided but, to be sure, can be opposed – what *must* be opposed – is the possibility contained within the tendency of the promise of not being a promise but instead a totalitarian program, an immutable prescription, plan or, quite simply, of not being at all. What must be opposed is the organization of the future; and what fights against it is the longing that the future might be otherwise, other than other, not merely *a* future and not merely *future*. This is the rift in the world which the world has opened up with the Marxist promise of a *world*. It has become no longer necessarily a cleft between different classes – but it is still this class antagonism as well; it is first of all a rift between a future which opens other futures and not merely futures, and a future which would be the end of all futures, the end of history in the automatized terror of private interests, in the tortures of exploitation and self-exploitation, in the vacuous self-sufficiency and ritualized mutilation of others and of the other possibilities of history. What must be opposed is the mutilation of past history – but how past? – and future history – but future beyond every arrival – and thus the destruction of that present which opens itself to the entrance of history. What *must* be opposed is the death of the promise in theoretical certainty and practical complacency – of the promise which precedes both, declaring that neither is sufficient, that both must let themselves be opposed, and that this ‘must’ and this ‘let’ must be able to exist beyond certainty and complacency, beyond this death.

The promise, *affirmatively*, Derrida makes clear, is a desert, formal, *afformal*, in its infinite abstraction and limitless expanse, an insurrection against the suggestions of fulfillment and of successful culturation, a landscape of fury and longing for all that is absent. This insurrection and this fury and this longing of the promise could be the beginning,

the perhaps unconscious and unpractical, surely inconsolate beginning both of language – of another language – and of politics – of another politics and of something other than politics. They speak, askew and 'deranged', spectral and compromised, in commodity-language as well. The point is to articulate it more clearly, and not merely to articulate it.

— Cloth of sand. 'Language, too, is desert, this voice that the desert needs . . .', Blanchot writes.<sup>51</sup>

The desert, not yet time and not yet space, but space without site and time without generation. . . . When everything is impossible, when the future, given over to fire, burns . . . then the prophetic word announcing the impossible future still says the 'nevertheless' which breaks the impossible and restores time. 'Truly, I will give this city and this land into the hands of the Chaldeans; they will invade it, burn and raze it, and *nevertheless* I will lead back the inhabitants of this city and this land from every region whither I have cast them away. They will be my people, and I will be their god. Nevertheless! *Laken!*'<sup>52</sup>

*Translated by Kelly Barry*

## Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 165. The corresponding passages cited here are from the English translation, occasionally modified (*Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf [New York and London: Routledge, 1994], pp. 100–1 [SM]). 'The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects – on an imaginary screen [*écran*] where there is nothing to see. Not even the screen sometimes, and a screen always has, at bottom [*au fond qu'il est*] a structure of disappearing apparition [*de l'apparition disparaissant*].' Two pages earlier is written: 'All phantasms are projected onto the screen [*écran*] of this ghost (that is, on something absent, for the screen itself is phantomatic, as in the television of the figure . . .)' (99; Fr. 163). The screen, the cloth is the ground-figure which appears only in disappearing and in which disappearing appears, thus the abyss as ground and the figure as none. (SM page numbers are indicated in the text from here on. The second number refers to the French text. My citations refer generally to the available translation but deviate from it where required by the French text.)

2. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 143. The translation has been slightly modified where necessary. Hereafter indicated as *Capital* with the page number.

3. *Capital*, pp. 143–4.

4. *Capital*, p. 144.

5. *Capital*, p. 143.

6. *Capital*, p. 144.

7. *Ibid.*

8. In a footnote to the observation that the body of a commodity is the value-mirror of the other commodity, its body being the reflection of something disembodied and thus the incarnation of something general in an impossible simulacrum, Marx explains: 'In a certain sense, a man is in the same situation as a commodity. As he neither enters the world in possession of a mirror, nor as a Fichtean philosopher who can say "I am I,"

a man first sees and recognizes himself in another man. Peter relates to himself as a man through his relation to another man, Paul, in whom he recognizes his likeness. With this, however, Paul also becomes from head to toe, in his physical form as Paul, the form of appearance of the genus homo for Peter' (p. 144).

9. *Capital*, p. 143.

10. *Capital*, p. 172.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Capital*, p. 144.

13. *Capital*, p. 148.

14. *Capital*, pp. 150–1.

15. *Capital*, p. 151.

16. Marx makes the historicity of this ergontology clear in a note on the failure of the 'great investigator' Aristotle in the face of the value-form: he was not yet able to recognize 'human labor' as the 'common substance' of different commodities because the 'concept of human equality' did not yet have the 'permanence of a fixed popular opinion' (*Capital*, pp. 151–2). This also means that human labor in its function as a standard and value-substance has since then become not the truth of political economy, but that this function has become a 'popular opinion' supporting the historical truth of capitalist economy.

17. *Capital*, p. 149.

18. *Capital*, p. 148.

19. *Capital*, p. 165.

20. *Capital*, p. 164.

21. *Capital*, p. 169.

22. *Capital*, p. 167.

23. *Capital*, pp. 166–7.

24. *Capital*, p. 169.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Capital*, p. 163. [The pun, in Marx and Hamacher, on 'Tisch' and 'Fetisch' is lost in translation. – Translator's note.]

27. *Capital*, p. 103.

28. *Capital*, p. 167.

29. Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 3, quoted from *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 319–20.

30. *The German Ideology*, in *ibid.*, p. 157. Hereafter indicated as *GI* with the page number.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 149–50.

32. *Capital*, p. 172.

33. Aphorism CCXIV in Schelling's *Sämtliche Werke*, part 1, vol. 7 (Stuttgart and Augsburg: Cotta, 1860), p. 238.

34. ['Aphanisis' refers to withdrawal from phenomenality; its provenance ultimately derives from Ernest Jones and was taken up by Lacan in relation to castration. – Editor's note.]

35. *Glas* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1974), p. 134b.

36. And again a little later: 'a kind of double or brother [*une sorte de double ou de frère*]' (141; Fr. 224). Here Derrida takes up again a theme of great importance in his reading of Lacan ('Le Facteur de la vérité' in *La Carte postale* [Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1980]).

37. 'I am,' Derrida continues, 'would then mean "I am haunted": I am haunted by myself who am (haunted by myself who am haunted by myself who am . . . and so forth). Wherever there is Ego, *es spukt*, "it spooks" . . . The essential mode of self-presence of the *cogito* would be the haunting obsession of this "es spukt"' (133; Fr. 212).

38. In various attempts since 1983, I have developed in more detail what is sketched here and in what follows, first in 'Das Versprechen der Auslegung' (in the *Festschrift* for Jacob Taubes, *Spiegel und Gleichnis*, ed. N. Bolz/W. Hübener [Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1983]; now in *Premises – Essays on Philosophy and Literature from Kant to Celan* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1996], then in 'Lectio' and in 'Affirmative, Strike' (in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, ed. A. Benjamin/P. Osborne [London: Routledge, 1994]), etc. It always remains astonishing to me that the theme of the promise which I – prompted by

Heidegger's analyses of the pre-structure of being there – first observed in Kant and Nietzsche has become one of the points of convergence between Derrida's work and my own.

39. On the concept of 'ergontology' used here several times already, I refer to my 'Working Through Working', in *Modernism/Modernity*, 3:1 (Jan. 1996), pp. 23–55.

40. Derrida uses the word 'perverperformative' in *La Carte postale*.

41. In inventing the word – or pre-word – 'afformative' (for the first time in 'Afformative, Strike') or 'biformative' I allow myself the same license which Austin used in introducing the concept 'performative'. (See W. Hamacher, 'Afformative, Strike', trans. Dana Hollander, *Cardozo Law Review* 13, 4 [December 1997].) I recall, not to soften the peculiarity of these concepts but to emphasize the peculiarity of concepts codified and conventionalized since then, that Austin did not leave it at 'performatives' but also speaks of 'illocutives' and 'perlocutives', of 'verdictives', 'exercitives', 'commissives', 'behabitives' and 'expositives' (see *How to Do Things with Words* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962], pp. 153–64).

42. As far as I can see, the only author besides Ernst Bloch in the tradition of 'messianic' Marxism who prepared this important difference was Walter Benjamin in his 'Theological-Political Fragment'. The first sentences read: 'Only the Messiah himself completes each historical event, and indeed in the sense that he himself first redeems, completes, creates its relation to the messianic. That is why the Kingdom of God is not the telos of historical *dynamis*; it cannot be made an objective. Seen historically, it is not an objective but an end' (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II/1 [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977], p. 203 [my translation – K.B.]). 'The messianic' for Benjamin is end and not aim, eschaton and not telos – and is in fact even 'a messianic' without a messiah, for he alone could complete and create the very reference to the messianic. Derrida's proximity to Benjamin is unmistakable at this point. The – minimal – distance is marked by the fact that for Benjamin there can be only the absolute paradox of a 'messianic without the messianic', for the messianic cannot be a category of history. But, conversely, he also writes: 'The profane [the historical] is thus not a category of the Kingdom, but a category, and indeed one of the most decisive, of his gentlest approach' (p. 204). It is only in this sense that Benjamin can write: 'The relation of this order [of the profane] to the messianic is one of the most essential lessons of historical philosophy' (p. 203).

43. 'Foi et savoir – Les deux sources de la "religion" aux limites de la simple raison' in *La Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Paris: Seuil, 1996), p. 59 [my translation – K.B.].

44. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

47. Paris: Minuit, 1995, p. 26. [The translation is mine – K.B.]

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–3.

49. Both words are modifications of *mittere* – throw, fling, send, dispatch, release – and both mean 'let go, permit, give up, admit', *admittere* with an additional accent on 'permit and let happen' and *amittere* with the accent on 'give up, discard, lose, forfeit'. Hence *fidem amittere* means 'to break one's word' and *amissio* 'loss (by death)'. In the phrase *res publica amissa*, the meaning of admission has also been completely eclipsed by that of the loss of the republic.

50. 'It [big industry], Marx writes, 'produced world history for the first time, insofar as it made all civilized nations and every individual member of them dependent for the satisfaction of their wants on the whole world, thus destroying the former natural exclusiveness of separate nations' (*Gl*, p. 149). This industrially produced 'whole world' is still torn into classes under capitalist conditions of production; only the communist revolution could make of it a 'world'. Therefore we do not *know* what a world is.

51. Maurice Blanchot, 'La Parole prophétique', in *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959) pp. 118–20 [trans. Kelly Barry].

52. [The Hebrew 'Laken' would be the parophone of the German 'Laken', which also means 'cloth'. – Translator's note.]