The Chase: Rivalry and Conjuration

Kas Saghafi

It’s not that I’m afraid of any danger. If a man were to come into the room I would kill him without turning a hair.

I’m not afraid of ghosts, and I don’t believe in the supernatural. I’m not afraid of the dead –

I believe they are completely annihilated when they leave the earth.

‘Well then!’ you’ll say.

Yes. I know... Well... I’m afraid of myself [J’ai peur de moi]!

Maupassant

I hunt you down. I chase you. I pursue you, because I am pursued. I am pursued – by myself. I am afraid – of myself. I scare myself. I am haunted (by myself), so I obsessively chase you. I chase you away, I exclude you, I banish you – because I am haunted. It’s as if I am after my own ghost.

What Derrida in Specters of Marx refers to as the ‘logic and topology of the paradoxical hunt (whose figure, beginning before Plato, will have traversed the whole history of philosophy, more precisely of the ontological inquest or inquisition)’ shall be my concern here. Concentrating on one of the significations of conjuration in French that is not current in English (‘to conspire against’) and one of its meanings in English ‘to exorcise, allay, quiet’ (its usage dating back to 1862), I would like to venture some hypotheses on the relationship of rivalry in general. One could go as far as saying that rivalry is conjuration: rivalry takes place because of a desperate need to conjure away a rival. One is hunted (haunted), so one hunts down (haunts) the other.

In Specters of Marx, Derrida associates haunting and hunting calling this affiliation ‘the very experience of conjuration’. The ‘two great hunters’ in question in this text are Marx and Max Stirner, who are both in principle ‘sworn to the same conjuration’. Marx accuses Stirner of betraying and serving the adversary, while at the same time resenting him for having been ‘first’ with the spectre, for getting to the spectre first, for giving the spectre the pride of place in his thought (‘at the centre of his system, his logic, and his rhetoric’). Marx begrudges Stirner, ‘he wants not to want the same thing as him’ – the ghost – yet they are both obsessed with the same thing, about which they cannot stop talking.

While the English verb ‘to conjure’ has significations of ‘to charge or entreat earnestly or solemnly’, ‘to beseech, to implore’, it also means ‘to affect, effect, produce, bring out,'
convey away, by the arts of the conjurer or juggler’ (1535); ‘to bring, get, move, convey, as by magic’; and ‘to affect or effect by or as if by magic [often used with up]’. As Derrida notes in Specters of Marx, the French noun conjuration has the further benefit of combining and articulating not only the meanings of two English words but also two German ones Verschwörung and Beschwörung:

(1) Conjuration is the conspiracy (Verschwörung) of those who promise solemnly by swearing together an oath to struggle against a superior power. To conjure is ‘to swear together’ (from Latin conjurare, cum + jurare to swear), to make a compact by an oath. Though the verb ‘to conjure’ in English is no longer used to mean ‘to plan by conspiracy, to conspire’ (the OED refers to this usage as dating from the fifteenth century), the French still retains this meaning. Derrida writes:

A conjuration is first of all an alliance, sometimes a political alliance, more or less secret, if not tacit, a plot or a conspiracy. In the occult society of those who have sworn together [les conjurés], certain subjects ... ally themselves together in the name of common interests to combat a dreaded political adversary, that is, also to conjure it away. For conjure means also to exorcise: to attempt both to destroy and to disavow a malignant, demonized, diabolized force.

(2) As well as the significations mentioned above, conjuration also signifies the magical incantation destined to evoke, to convoke a charm or a spirit. Thus, conjuration means ‘conjurement’: ‘the magical exorcism that tends to expel the evil spirit which would have been called up or convoked’,8 (my emphasis). Specters of Marx also takes into account another essential meaning of conjuration: ‘the act that consists in swearing, taking an oath, therefore promising, deciding, taking a responsibility ... committing oneself in a performative fashion’.9 What interests me here is the English expression ‘to conjure away’. Who does one conjure away and how and why is this done? Both Marx and Stirner want to conjure away the return of the ghost, while Marx wishes to conjure away Stirner.10 A rival or an adversary is someone one conjures away, but who exactly is ‘the rival’?

In the Western tradition several figures have been identified with the rival: one’s fellow human being, the other, the neighbour, the competitor, the enemy, the brother, the father, etc. have all been considered as adversaries par excellence. While Derrida almost never speaks about the rival as such, the relation of two figures involved in a conjuration as described in Specters of Marx would allow for a discussion of rejection, exclusion, persecution, and rivalry – of what, as we shall see, ultimately amounts to a relation to self. Rather than singling out any of the particular figures that have taken the place of the rival mentioned above and tracing a history of such a figure, I would like to dwell on the relation of rivalry itself.11

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According to René Girard, whose early work explored notions of mimetic desire and rivalry [rivalité], rivalry is not caused, as it has been traditionally thought, by two protagonists’ desire for the same object. Rather, as he writes in an early work, desire is ‘a
desire according to, following the Other [un désir selon l’Autre]. It is desire according to the other that shapes one’s desire and ultimately creates a situation of rivalry. The mimetic double imitates the other’s desire. As Girard writes in ‘From Mimetic Desire to the Monstrous Double’ in Violence and the Sacred, ‘the subject desires the object because the rival himself desires it. In desiring an object, the rival indicates [désigne] it to the subject as desirable.’ Girard provides the following explanation: ‘Man desires intensely, though he does not know exactly what, because it is being [l’être] that he desires, a being [un être] of which he feels deprived and which somebody else, it seems to him, is endowed with [pourvu]. The subject waits for this other [autre] to tell him what he should desire in order to acquire that being.’ In Girard’s account, since the two desires are identical, this invariably leads to rivalry and eventually to violence. In fact, conflict in general, for Girard, arises because there is almost no difference between the adversaries – for, they are ‘doubles’. ‘Mimetic antagonists’ are doubles in the sense that the intensification of rivalry has led to the elimination of characteristics that previously distinguished them.

Now, this would not be the place to point out the problems with Girard’s approach to the question of rivalry – his definition of mimesis simply as ‘imitation’, his deployment of a metaphysical notion of the subject with its reliance on the language of subject and object (even though in later works such as Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World he shifts from using this terminology to employing the language of an ‘individuality’ that is not antecedent to, but a product of, ‘mimetic desire’), his commitment to a notion of primal violence, his ‘primitivism’ (human instincts and behaviour are akin to animal behaviour), his humanism and his anthropological, ethnological and (anti-Freudian) psychological methodology, which despite his denials, betray an entirely classical manner of reading novels as the enactment of psychological dramas – but it would be worth remarking that his texts are symptomatic of the way doubles and doubling have been and continue to be treated.

As is well known, the notion of the double came into prominence in Western literature in the fantastic tales of the nineteenth century, with E.T.A. Hoffmann, Adelbert von Chamisso, Edgar Allan Poe, and Théophile Gautier being considered its major exponents. The term Doppelgänger itself was coined by Jean Paul in his book Siebenkäs (1796). Freud’s well-recognized analysis of Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman’ in his essay ‘The Uncanny’ and Otto Rank’s The Double provided influential theoretical and psychoanalytic assessments of the double, isolating several motifs associated with the double such as death, narcissism, identification, paranoia, and persecution, etc.

The psychoanalytic approach to the double establishes a close link between death and narcissism. Freud in ‘The Uncanny’ and Otto Rank in The Double both cite primary narcissism as animating the motif of the Doppelgänger. The sighting of the double may be associated with an infatuation with one’s own image. The appearance of the double bespeaks a denial of the power of death and an insurance against the destruction of the ego. Yet this narcissism may be ambivalent. The flip side of the narcissistic fixation on the ego is a desire to escape from oneself, the double serving here as an indication of the self as a burden and as a source of identification with the other. The fear of and revulsion toward one’s own image or the loss of the shadow-image (Verlust des Schatten – oder Spiegelbildes) may both
function as a defence against narcissism. Paradoxically, these both lead to the further strengthening of narcissism.20

Narcissism is also linked to paranoid ideas of being pursued: ‘pursuit by the double, the self [der Verfolgung durch den Doppelganger, das eigene Ich].21 According to Rank, literary representations that describe ‘the persecution complex [Verfolgungswahn]’ confirm Freud’s concept of ‘narcissistic disposition in paranoia {narzissischen Disposition zur Paranoia}’22. For example, in Dostoevsky, ‘the hero is prey to paranoid ideas of pursuit [paranorische Verfolgungs] as a result of his double’.23 Persecution and pursuit (die Verfolgung) are etymologically linked in German (the verb verfolgen means to pursue, hunt, or track; der/die Verfolgte is a victim of persecution, and one can use the verb verfolgen to describe being haunted such as in the phrase ‘the thought of something haunted him [der Gedanke daran verfolgte ihm]’).24 In The Schreber Case (1911) Freud explains the mechanism of symptom formation (Symptombildung) in paranoia, by showing that in paranoia feeling (Gefühl) is transformed from an inner perception (innere Wahrnehmung) to perception from without.25 Thus in the ‘delusion of persecution [Verfolgungswahn]’ the thought ‘I hate him [Ich hasse ihn ja]’ is transformed by projection [Projektion] into ‘He hates (persecutes) me [Er hasst (verfolgt) mich], which will entitle me to hate him’.26 In this transformation of affect, what should have been felt internally is perceived as its opposite from without.

What is worth noting about Freud’s examination of projection as a feature of symptom formation in paranoia is that he seems to have no difficulty distinguishing what is internal from the external and what is conscious from that which is unconscious. He writes that ‘an internal perception is suppressed [unterdrückt] and, by way of substitute, its content having undergone a degree of distortion [Entstellung], is consciously registered as an external perception.’27

In all of his analyses of paranoia28 Freud detects a strong connection between paranoid projection and homosexuality.29 The intensification of the homosexual bond, Freud concludes, leads the paranoiac to project onto others what he does not wish to recognize in himself. In The Schreber Case Freud observes that ‘homosexual wishful fantasy [Wunschphantasie]’ is at the core of the conflict in ‘male paranoia [Paranoia des Mannes]’30. The enmity that the persecuted paranoiac sees in others is a reflection of his own hostile impulses against them. The delusion of persecution thus transforms the one longed for into the persecutor.

In a further discussion of ‘paranoid pursuit [paranoiischen Verfolgung]’ Rank devotes his attention to literary texts, in many of which the pursuer and the pursued are in a relation of rivalry. The double is, as Rank writes, ‘the rival [der Rivale] of his prototype [Urbildes] in everything’.31 He mentions that the double is often identified with the brother and discusses the ‘fraternal attitude of rivalry [brüderlichen Rivalitätseinstellung]’ toward the hated competitor [Nebenbuhler; rival] in relation to the love for the mother.32 Rank is not persuaded, however, that the double is merely created by ‘mental conflict [der seelische Zwiespalt]’, which is supposed to correspond to ‘a projection of inner turmoil [Projektion der inneren Zerrissenheit]’.33 Referring to Emil Lucka’s saying that ‘fear [die Furcht] shapes [gestaltet] from the ego-complex [Ichkomplex] the terrifying phantom [Screckgespenst] of the double’, Rank emphasizes that his own interest is in
understanding ‘the psychological situation and the attitude \[\textit{Einstellung}\] which together create such an inner division \[\textit{innere Spaltung}\] and projection \[\textit{Projektion}\].’\(^{34}\)

The figure of the double also retains its originary relation to death. An aspect of the relation to death noted by Rank is the significance of the double as an embodiment of the soul. The development of a notion of the soul in the West, bound up with changing attitudes toward life, death, and the status of the living body, goes hand in hand with a thought of the double and doubling. The figures of the dead, whether the phantom of the deceased, a shadow, a wisp of smoke, a dream image, a mobile wooden idol, the \textit{xoanon}, or an upright, immobile stone replacement for the corpse, the \textit{colossos}, philosophically and religiously give way to a notion of a soul within the living person. In the expression made popular by Montaigne regarding the relation of two friends, ‘one soul in two bodies (\textit{un âme en deux corps})’, whose origin may be traced back to Aristotle, the friends even come to inhabit one soul.

According to the Ciceronian model of friendship, the friend is at once the \textit{exemplar}, the portrait, the type or the model, and also the \textit{exemplum}, the exact copy or reproduction of the self. If one projects or recognizes in the true friend one’s ‘own ideal image \[\textit{propre image ideale}\],’ then the rival could also be said to be a double, an \textit{exemplum}, an exact copy or reproduction.\(^{35}\) In this latter relation, hauntingly depicted in Poe’s story ‘William Wilson’, the two rivals, who have the same namesake and the same birthday, are fused. This fusion of identities is precisely what Carl Schmitt vehemently opposes, whose concern is not so much rivalry but enmity and hostility. For Schmitt, the enemy has to be identifiable. The political necessitates, and is dependent upon, an oppositional structure in which the enemy can be identified. In fact, the principal enemy, the ‘structuring’ adversary, makes the realm of the political possible. What Schmitt shares with Heidegger, Derrida writes, is ‘credit given to opposition \[\ldots\] to oppositionality itself, ontological adversity, that which holds adversaries together \[\textit{maintient ensemble les adversaires}\], gathering them \[\textit{les rassemble}\] in logos as ontological polemos’.\(^{36}\) When the adversary ‘ceases to be identifiable and thus reliable \[\textit{fiable}\],’ Derrida glosses Schmitt’s position, ‘the same \textit{phobia} \[\textit{phobie}\] projects a mobile multiplicity of potential, substitutable, metonymic enemies, in secret alliance with each other: conjuration \[\textit{la conjuration}\].’\(^{37}\)

Hostility, Schmitt argues, belongs to the public domain. Hostility toward the friend is what occurs in public (I can like him in private), even though it is a hostility without affect, a purely philosophical hostility. Schmitt, who with Freud belongs to what Derrida calls ‘the Empedoclean tradition’, and whose ‘two fundamental principles’, \textit{philia} and \textit{neikos}, Freud in \textit{Analysis Terminable Interminable} equated with his own Eros and Destruction, does not appeal to death or nihilation as the source for this hostility.\(^{38}\) The source of ‘the deadly drive of the friend/enemy \[\textit{pulsion mortifière de l’ami/ennemi}\]’ is not death; this drive proceeds from life itself.\(^{39}\) For Schmitt, it is a movement of life against life.

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In the various treatments of the double in literature or folklore, Rank adds, there is evidence of a ‘tremendous thanatophobia \[\textit{Todesfurcht}\]’, where the most prominent
characteristic is ‘fear [die Angst]’ (of an image [Ebenbild], of its loss [Verlust], or of pursuit [Verfolgung]). What arouses the most fear though, Heidegger famously remarks in Being and Time, is Dasein: ‘The about which [Worum] fear is afraid is the fearful being itself [das fürchtende Seiende], Dasein’.41 In addition to being referred to as the fearful being itself by Heidegger, the human being is also called the most uncanny. In Introduction to Metaphysics [1935], quoting and translating from the Antigone choral ode of Sophocles, Heidegger writes that the human being is to deinotaton, the uncanniest, ‘the most uncanny of the uncanny’.42 Citing the first few lines of the choral ode, he translates to deinon as ‘unheimlich’ rendering polla ta deina kouden anthropou deinoteron pelei as ‘nichts doch über den Menschen hinaus Unheimlicheres ragend sich regt’ [‘nothing more uncanny looms or stirs beyond the human being’]. The deinon, Heidegger adds, is what induces ‘panicked fear, true anxiety [panischen Schreken, die wahre Angst]’.43 Man (Der Mensch) is deinon because he is ‘violence-doing [gewalt-tätig]’.44 But the uncanny is not a particular property of the human, nor is it to be understood ‘in the sense of an impression [Eindrucks] made on our emotional states [Gefühlzustände]’.45 In his commentary on Antigone in the 1942 lecture course Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister” Heidegger repeats his remark that nothing is more uncanny than the human being, emphasizing that uncanniness is a fundamental essence belonging to humans.

Man is the most uncanny. ‘Man makes (himself) fear, makes (himself) fright [L’homme se fait peur]’.46 The human being institutes itself as fear. The self (le soi) or the ipse in general, as Derrida writes in Politics of Friendship, ‘frightens itself, itself becoming fear and does violence to itself, itself becoming violence [se fait peur et se fait violence], transforms itself into frightened violence [se transfigure en violence apeurée] in guarding itself from the other, for it keeps itself from the other, keeps some other [à se garder de l’autre, car il se garde de l’autre].47 In keeping and guarding itself, in protecting itself from the other, the ipse transforms itself. According to what Derrida calls ‘the logic of this fear of oneself [la logique de cette peur de soi]’,48 this self-becoming-fright, this ‘terrified hostility’49 or ‘frightened violence’ is how the ipseity of the self is constituted.

The self (le soi) frightens itself, for ‘those who inspire fear [font peur] frighten themselves [se font peur à eux-mêmes]’.50 Man ‘makes himself into the fear that he inspires [devient la peur qu’il inspire]’.51 This fear of oneself leads to a ‘chase [chasse]’ – the pursuit of the double.52 To chase or to pursue (poursuivre) is also to ‘exclude, banish’.53 Describing the relationship between Marx and Stirner, Derrida writes, ‘Marx scares himself [se fait peur], he himself pursues relentlessly [il s’acharne lui-même] someone who almost resembles him… whom he would like to distance, distinguish: to oppose [s’opposer]’.54 Why this restless, fierce, determined, and relentless pursuit (acharnement), Derrida asks? The self or the ipse becomes obsessed with something ‘in order to chase it away, exclude it, exercise it’.55 So begins an endless chase or pursuit, whose goal appears to be the prolongation of the pursuit:

One chases after in order to chase away [on chasse pour chasser], one pursues [on poursuit], sets off in pursuit of someone to make him flee, but one makes him flee, distances him, expulses him so as to go after him again [pour le chasser encore] and remain in pursuit.56
The self is held captive by ‘its prey’ (sa proie), ‘bound to [se lie à]’ it in a ‘troubling fashion [façon troublante]’, as the rivals are ‘in principle sworn to the same conjuration [les conjurés d’une même conjuration]’.

What is striking about Derrida’s brief but extremely illuminating description of the relation between Marx and Stirner in *Specters of Marx* is that it does not allow a distinction to be maintained between an exterior, phenomenal double and an inner, ‘psychological’ one, an opposition itself inaugurated in Western thought with Plato’s introduction of two ontological realms, those of being and seeming. This contrast, initially proposed to counter the profusion of double-figures in Homer and the tragedians, has surreptitiously dominated the classification of doubles forcing a choice between an ‘objective’ dimension and a ‘subjective’ realm of feelings or affects, a choice between ‘real’ events or imaginary, hallucinatory occurrences.

In terms of rivalry we could say that one is either dealing with an actual rival, an antagonist exterior to the subject or with visions and projections regarding an imaginary rival with whom one is obsessed. Derrida’s description of the relation between Marx and Stirner defies such a demarcation or opposition, resisting a differentiation between an imaginary representation and the appearance of the rival in person.

Enmity or, in this case, rivalry is thus friendship deferred, delayed, friendship as it differs from itself. The relation to the rival/friend, the friend/rival (for each notion bears the ghost of the other) then becomes that of both swearing and abjuring, ‘welcoming and chasing, convoking and conjuring’, where my rival is also my closest companion, whom I love like myself, like the rivalry of the enemy brothers, Dupin and D--- in Poe’s ‘The Purloined Letter’, who have a ‘pitiless [impitoyable] sympathy’ for each other.

A certain ‘anxiety [angoisse]’ characterizes conjuration – an anxiety before, in front of (devant), the rival – since conjuration is anxiety. ‘Someone’ in oneself frightens one. One feels ‘haunted, harassed, besieged, obsessed’ by the rival, this figure that one bears inside; for, the haunted and the possessed harbour feelings of paranoia, feelings of being pursued and being persecuted. Freud, it may be recalled, had defined paranoia as a neurosis of defense, its chief mechanism being projection. As was noted, paranoia is also related to narcissism: the paranoid individual suffers from delusions of persecution, grandeur and jealousy.

One bears this ‘someone’ inside ‘in order to repulse him’ outside. But one also spends one’s life, an entire lifetime, coming close to him and keeping him close by. In this ‘specular circle’ that is rivalry

one chases someone away [On chasse quelqu’un] . . . excludes him . . . in order to chase after him, seduce him, reach him, and thus keep him close at hand [garder à sa portée]. One sends him far away, puts distance between them, so as to spend one’s life, and for as long a time as possible [le plus longtemps possible], coming close to him again [à s’en rapprocher].
This ‘long time [longtemps]’ spent coming closer is what Derrida calls the time of the ‘distance hunt [chasse à l’éloignement]’, the time taken to hound and chase after the rival, the better to keep this ‘someone’ close by.\footnote{Guy de Maupassant, “Lui?” in Apparition et autres contes d’angoisse, edited by Antonia Fonyi (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), translated by Arnold Kellett as “He?” in The Dark Side: Tales of Terror and the Supernatural (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1989), p.137, translation modified.}

Notes

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3 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx,, p.140.

4 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx., p.141.

5 See Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.141: ‘He befriends him [Il lui en vaut’].


7 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.147.

8 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.47.

9 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.51.

10 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.96.


14 René Girard, La violence et le sacré, p.146.


19 Otto Rank, The Double, p.73.


22 Otto Rank, The Double, p.74.


24 In English ‘persecute’ has the following etymology: ME persecuten, fr. MF persecuteur, fr. persecuteur, persecuteur, fr. LL persecutor, fr. persecutus, pp. of persequi to persecute, fr. L. to pursue, fr. per-sen through + sequi to follow (15c).


26 Sigmund Freud, The Schreber Case, p.53.

27 Sigmund Freud, The Schreber Case, p.56.

28 In addition to The Schreber Case, Freud mentions the importance of homosexuality in a number of his studies on paranoia. See, in particular, ‘Mitteilung eines der psychoanalytischen Theorie widersprechenden Falles von Paranoia’ [A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytical Theory of the Disease] (1915) and ‘Über einige neurotische Mechanismen bei Eifersucht, Paranoia und Homosexualität’ [Certain Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia, and Homosexuality] (1922).

29 One cannot overlook the unmistakably virile homosexuality, homofraternity, and fratriarchy that, as in friendship, undergirds the Western conception of rivalry.
30 Sigmund Freud, The Schreber Case, p.53.
31 Otto Rank, The Double, p.75.
32 Otto Rank, The Double, p.76.
33 Otto Rank, The Double, p.76.
34 Otto Rank, The Double, p.76.
36 Jacques Derrida, Politics of Friendship, p.249.
37 Jacques Derrida, Politics of Friendship, p.84.
38 Derrida’s epigraph beginning the fifth chapter of Politics of Friendship is from Freud’s Analysis Terminable and Interminable where the latter notes that the two fundamental principles of Empedocles – philia and neikos - are in name and function the same as his Eros and Destruction (p.112). Also worthy of attention are Freud’s references to Heraclitean polemos.
40 Otto Rank, The Double, p.77.
42 See Martin Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1953). This text also appears as volume 40 of the Gesamtausgabe which reproduces in the margins the page numbers of the original: Einführung in die Metaphysik (GA 40), ed. Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983); translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt as Introduction to Metaphysics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p.159.
43 Martin Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, p.159.
44 Martin Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, p.160.
46 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.145.
47 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.145.
48 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.47.
50 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.145.
51 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.142.
54 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.139.
55 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.130.
56 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.140.
57 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.139.
58 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.140.
60 Jacques Derrida, Politics of Friendship, p.266.
63 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.106.
64 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.140.
65 Jacques Derrida, Spectres de Marx, p.140.

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