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THE MAN BEHIND THE IRON MASK:
MARX AND ST. JOHN ON REPETITION,
REVELATION AND REVOLUTION

And another of His disciples said unto Him, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father". But Jesus said unto him, "Follow Me; and let the dead bury their dead".

—Matthew, 8:21-2

The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead in order to realise its own content. There phrase transcended content, here content transcends phrase.

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

THERE IS A CONSTANT CONCERN with the burial of the dead in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*—the dead walk among the living and do not reside in their proper place. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte occupies the throne as the shadow of his namesake—history is thus repeated, but has shifted from high tragedy to low farce.¹ For Marx, the practice of invoking the dead is “borrowing from them their names, marching orders, (and) uniforms, in order to”² legitimate the authority of the living follows a telic logic. This logic is characterized by two types of repetition, which in turn correspond to two distinct phases of the proletarian revolution. In the first or ascending phase the *spirit* of the dead is resurrected to “glorify new struggle” by *fantastically magnifying* the given task.³ Conversely, in the descending phase the *spectre* of the dead is simply reanimated in order to evade a real resolution for the living. The first type of repetition uses invocation to *fantastically magnify* the content of the living; the second simply

¹ Karl Marx. “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.” Translated by Terrell Carver. In *Marx’s ‘Eighteenth Brumaire’: (Post)modern Interpretations*. Edited by Mark Cowling and James Martin. (Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2002), 19.

² *Ibid.*, 19-20.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

reanimates the dead to cover the absence of content in the living.⁴ According to Marx this latter form of repetition—that is, repetition as parody or farce—fundamentally undermines the status of what it repeats. This is illustrated by the events surrounding the *coup d'état* of Louis Bonaparte as he attempts to legitimate his rule by invoking the spectre of Napoleon, and yet the absence of content behind this spectral 'iron death mask' radically contests the legitimacy of all Napoleonic values.⁵ For Marx, Louis Bonaparte is properly speaking only Napoleon's "shadow," a powerless caricature. And yet this farcical repetition holds within it the "embryo" of the true revolution that will bring the true republic.⁶ That is to say, the second or descending phase of historical progression is indicative of the beginning of the end of the revolution; it is its final phase. For the revolution to be complete it must, Marx argues, complete its journey through *purgatory*.⁷ The final stage of this necessary cleansing process is signaled by the revelation of the true face of the specter that poses as an emperor. In other words, once the 'iron death mask of Napoleon' is removed from the 'low and repulsive visage' of Louis Bonaparte, the revolution will begin its final stage.⁸ This final proletarian revolution promises to end repetition, it will borrow no language, invoke no ghosts. It will, in short, set time in joint by exorcizing all ghosts.⁹ The beginning of this final stage is signaled by the appearance of a farcical placeholder as the figure of absolute executive authority. For Marx the transformation of Louis Bonaparte into Napoleon III is the chronological sign that immediately precedes the end of the revolution's journey through purgatory and it is analogous to the sign of the Second Advent in the Johannine Gospels.¹⁰

Marx weaves the tragic-comical spectral procession of ghosts and vampires into the text through a repetition of motifs borrowed from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hegel, and the gospel of St. John. The theme of the illegitimate king or usurper is common in both *Hamlet* and in the Johannine Gospels. This figure that occupies the throne as a "place-holder," a type of *antibasileus*¹¹ or shadow, filling an interregnum, but filling it unlawfully—illicitly as a pretender to the thrown—is both the uncle of the Prince of Denmark and St. John's *antichristos*. This type of character is crucial for the chronological order that Marx develops in the Eighteenth Brumaire as it serves as the final mark of the immanence of the

⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Ibid., 20-2.

¹⁰ Ibid., 40, 98.

¹¹ *Antibasileus* is the Latin term for a substitute King that occupies the throne during an interregnum period. The prefix *anti* can carry connotations of against or opposite and *ante* as in preceding or before.

complete revolution. Through the use of this parodic character Marx is able to re-read the regressive counter revolution of December 2, 1851 as a necessary stage of the revolutionary process and thus offer a type of messianic solution to the problem of historical repetition and tragedy. This solution is affected through an injection of a distinct apocalyptic tone into his reading of the *coup d'état* Louis Bonaparte. This moment in which history repeats itself as travesty—this total inversion in which the living are as shadows without bodies—becomes a radical imperative, a sign of the immanence of a final end in which the dead will bury the dead.¹² For Marx it is the *grey-on-grey* of the historical events surrounding the end of the second republic that indicates that this final end is immanent.¹³ It is the emptiness of the imitative acts of Louis Bonaparte—this spectral assertion of a form without content—that signals the end of “*all Napoleonic ideals*”; the role of philosophy in this moment is to unveil the rationality of the actual.¹⁴ This mirrors the chronology of the apocalypse of St. John through the character of the antichrist—a parodic travesty of Christ—and it is the sign of the immanence of Christ’s final return.

The theme of burial and the specter is present throughout the text and closely parallels the plot of Hamlet and yet Marx manages to avoid Shakespeare’s tragic conclusion. For Marx the solution to the tragic ending of Hamlet is the realization of a total or divine justice—a type of vengeance without return or total exorcism—and it is achieved, through the interjection of an apocalyptic solution that echoes St. John. For Shakespeare’s “Hamlet,” travesty ends in tragedy. For Marx via St. John, travesty ends in salvation, and yet judgment and perdition must precede salvation.

Following this burial of the dead—this final burial—this burial in which the dead bury themselves, one must ask who remains among the living. It is clear that the realization of this final revolution requires both a period of judgment and of purging. Is there a parallel of the Day of Judgment and the Johannine second death?¹⁵ For St. John the question of who is written into the book of life and who is not, is directly linked with the character and role of antichrist.¹⁶ Marx mentions both the Day of Judgment and the Millennial period, both events detailed within St. John’s Revelation, and the question of judgment and division remains central in the Eighteenth Brumaire, but the precise division between the saved and the

¹² Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 22, 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁵ The second death is mentioned in Revelation 20:14-15 King James Version: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

¹⁶ I John 2:22-25, Revelation 17:8-9 KJV.

damned is somewhat vague.¹⁷ The typical division between the bourgeois and proletariat is present, but there are also the small landholding peasants and the flotsam and jetsam of the lumpenproletariat, and it is these residual classes that form the ground that supports the Bonapartist regime.

The *lumpenproletariat* is connected with the small landholding peasants, yet they are not synonymous. For Marx the small landholding peasants are redeemable; they express an archaic mode of production, but this parodic stage of the revolution will dispel their belief in smallholding and they will form the chorus that will accompany the revolutionary song of the urban proletariat.¹⁸ The role of the philosopher is to facilitate the conversion of the small holding peasants. This conversion is effected by exposing the regressive nature of their belief in small land holding and revealing their true savior, the urban proletariat.¹⁹ In contrast, the *lumpenproletariat* are described as “the dregs, refuse and scum of all classes,” a residual flotsam and jetsam that have no place among the living.²⁰ They are a nauseating parody of the living—the polar opposite of the *class with radical chains* that holds the promise of the *total redemption of humanity*, yet they are necessary.²¹ For Marx the idiotic singularity of this contaminated and heterogeneous group reflects the truth face of the man behind the iron mask. They exist as placeholders and like their king they are destined to vanish as the revolution goes through this process of cleansing—this journey through the place of cleansing, through purgatory, will erase them from the book of life.²² Both the *lumpenproletariat* and their king are ciphers—they are non-entities, bodies without souls, but like the commodity they also hold a hieroglyphic mark.²³ Philosophy translates this mark and uncovers the commandment of the specter, the true sign of the time of the apocalypse.

Marx’s obsession with the “final” or apocalyptic nature of the proletarian revolution makes the question of “when” crucial. This question of “when” is the cause of a continual process of displacement and deferral that is at work in Marx’s text, a constant shifting of an excess just beyond the reach of the now. There is no burial, no period of morning, no spirit; the absence of each is sublimated into an ever increasing sense of urgency. This complex interaction of repetition and deferral within a telic chronology is characteristic of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. For Hamlet it is the revelation of the specter that reveals the false-king, and as the specter’s commandment demands a vow of vengeance. During the

¹⁷ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 23, 40.

¹⁸ Ibid., 106.

¹⁹ Ibid., 104, 106.

²⁰ Ibid., 63.

²¹ Karl Marx. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Lawrence H. Simon. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 38.

²² Revelation 20:15 KJV.

²³ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 234.

time between the revelation of the truth of his father's murder and the act of vengeance Hamlet enters a time that is out of joint; that is to say he sees both the truth and the lie masquerading as the truth. Upon hearing the testimony of his spectral father Hamlet strikes all trivial fond records from the tables of his memory leaving the commandment of the specter as its sole content, he confirms this vow by writing.²⁴ In Hamlet, the symbolic act of writing to confirm the vow draws on an analogy between the "tables of memory" and the portable writing table that is used. Memory is described as being recorded within the "book and volume" of the brain. The act of writing the vow on a blank page of the table is a symbolic confirmation of this act of automnemonic obliteration. For Marx writing is both an act of swearing and forgetting; one must let the dead bury the dead, follow the specter, and forget the spirit. Writing is a way both reading and marking the procession of time on the journey through purgatory, yet in the period of delay one is forced—like the Prince of Denmark—to take on an antic²⁵ disposition. Marx parodies the events surrounding the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and through this parodic interpretation he attempts to expose the final truth that is to come, yet this comes at a price.²⁶ To see the truth, the truth of the specter, and to accept its commandment is to forget the grief of loss and to bide time. In effect, by shifting the emphasis from the memory of the spirit to the imperative of the specter Marx attempts to make an absolute break with the past, yet the realization of this total revolution depends on forgetting, it depends on leaving things unburied. Marx quotes Christ when he states that the "revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead in order to realise its own content"²⁷ but what he omits is the plea of the disciple that Christ is answering in that famous verse from the gospel of St. Matthew, it is a request for a time to bury the father, a request for a period of mourning. There is a dispossession of the spirit in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*; this open and abandoned grave reappears in Hamlet. It is the open grave of Ophelia, the grave dug by

²⁴ William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 191.

²⁵ [app. ad. It. *antico*, but used as equivalent to It. *grottesco*, f. *grotta*, "a cauerne or hole vnder grounde" (Florio), orig. applied to fantastic representations of human, animal, and floral forms, incongruously running into one another, found in exhuming some ancient remains (as the Baths of Titus) in Rome, whence extended to anything similarly incongruous or bizarre: see GROTESQUE. Cf. Serlio *Architettura* (Venice 1551) IV. lf. 70a: 'seguitare le uestigie de gli *antiqui* Romani, li quali costumarono di far..diuerse bizzarrie, che si dicono *grottesche*.' Apparently, from this ascription of grotesque work to the ancients, it was in English at first called *antike*, *anticke*, the name *grottesco*, *grotesque*, not being adopted till a century later. *Antic* was thus not developed in Eng. from ANTIQUE, but was a distinct use of the word from its first introduction. Yet in 17th c. it was occas. written *antique*, a spelling proper to the other word.]

²⁶ The use of parody here is defined as both:

1. A period of time; the termination or completion of such a period; *esp.* the end of life; death.
2. *trans.* To compose a parody on (a literary or artistic work, author, or genre); to turn into parody; to produce or constitute a humorously exaggerated imitation of; to ridicule or satirize.

²⁷ Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire," 22.

clowns, that Laertes, son of Polonius and brother of Ophelia, prophetically descends into when he vows vengeance on Hamlet.²⁸ The omission of the remains, the forgetting of mourning in the name of the specter, brings with it its own cycle. For Marx this cycle becomes the revolution's journey through purgatory and the legitimized extermination of the lumpenproletariat; a cleansing of the things that must be forgotten. His solution to the tragic fate of Hamlet is the apocalyptic sign, the sign of the Second Advent, but the price of this sign is high as it necessitates a period of absolute judgment and purging. That is to say, the sign simultaneously requires the creation of both the bodiless spirit (specter) and the spiritless body (lumpenproletariat) and their immediate extermination. These living dead are deprived of all spirit, they are described as a passive rotting mass, scum and refuse and yet despite this they are necessary.²⁹ It is their presence of this "amorphous, jumbled mass of flotsam and jetsam" that exposes the true face of this false-king and it is their extermination that marks the procession of time, they are the sand in the hourglass of the revolution.³⁰ It is specters, this host of displaced spirits, that proliferate in the work of Marx and he requires nothing short of the apocalypse of St. John to put them to rest.

What remains? This question is immediately ironic; it can be read as a rhetorical denial much akin to Cain's infamous answer to God's question, and a question that asks if anything is left, or perhaps more clearly, if anything is left out. A second question is necessary for clarification, where are the silent gaps in this antic disposition that Marx takes on? Where is the unburied spirit, or the open grave? In an effort to find these dispossessed and forgotten remains, the remains that have been left unburied, we will examine a series of parodic tropes that are woven through the text. Our argument is that Marx is able to *fantastically magnify* the specter by avoiding the spirit. Our analysis will be an attempt to trace out the apocalyptic repetitions that allow this sublimation to occur.

²⁸ William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 332.

²⁹ Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire," 63. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Edited by David McLellan. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 14.

³⁰ Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire," 63.

St. John and the Time of the Antichrist

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists whereby we know that it is the last time.

—I John, 2:18

...behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

—Revelation, 17:8

The word antichrist occurs only in the Johannine Epistles, but parallelisms are drawn with a variety of spurious characters throughout the New and Old Testament. The common theme is of an imitator that chronologically precedes the arrival of that which it imitates (namely, Christ) and ontologically is the polar opposite of what it claims to be. In I John the term antichrist is used in both the plural and the singular, there are antichrists and the antichrist. The antichrists are identified by St. John as those who “went out from us, but they were not of us” and thus they are mingled in with the faithful, but “*they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”³¹ This group that exists as an outside that is somehow inside threatens the cohesion of the “us” with their doctrine of blasphemy. This resonates with Marx’s *lumpenproletariat* as the “scum of all classes,” which exists within society and yet is always hovering on the margin of existence as a “passively rotting mass.”³² These paupers, vagrants, criminals, and prostitutes float listlessly from the cities to the countryside and from the countryside to the city with their rags and children contaminating all they touch; they went out from us and they are not of any class.³³

The singular case of the antichrist is identified with a number of names in Revelation; he is the beast, the false prophet, the rider of the first white horse, wormwood, the old serpent, the Devil, Satan, the angel of the bottomless pit, Abaddon, Apolyon, and the dragon.³⁴ References to this character also appear in the book of Daniel under the title ‘little horn’ and in St. Paul’s second letter of the

³¹ I John 2:19 KJV.

³² Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 63, 104. *Marx and Engels, Communist Manifesto*, 14.

³³ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 104.

³⁴ Abaddon is generally translated as “destruction” and Apolyon as “destroyer.” Revelation 6:2, 8:10-11, 9:11, 12, 16:13, 17:8, 19:20-1, 20:2 KJV.

Thessalonians³⁵:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of the Lord is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God. Or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the Temple of God, shewing himself that he is God³⁶

These names are indicative of particular roles played by the Biblical personification of the negative, but it is the role of the deceiver that is our focus here. Each of the roles of the antichrist is an inverted, or perhaps more clearly, a perverted mirror of Christ who appears in Revelation as a lamb, the true prophet, the rider of the true white horse, and the bridegroom of the woman.³⁷ The antichrist comes to seduce and deceive by mimicking Christ, and his arrival is the mark of the return of Christ who comes to “judge and make war.”³⁸ This beast exists as one who *was, is not and yet is*, and as such he is the walking dead—he has been sentenced to death.³⁹ He is a parodic cipher—an absence masquerading as the true presence—and as such he serves as the chronological place-holder for the arrival of the true Christ. The parallel in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* is Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the man behind the iron death mask of Napoleon.⁴⁰ In Marx’s words, “while stripping the halo from the whole machinery of state,” he “profanes it, and makes it loathsome and laughable. He replicates the cult of the holy tunic of Trier in Paris as the cult of the imperial mantle of Napoleon.”⁴¹ The tunic of Trier was a Catholic relic preserved in the cathedral of the city of Trier in Germany and rumored to have been taken from Christ while he was dying on the cross. This self-conscious parodic juxtaposition of a cult that reveres a false relic of Christ as a true relic with the supporters of Louis Bonaparte’s *coup d’etat* effectively presents Napoleon III as a false Christ and thus via the gospels of St. John Marx is able to legitimate his prophetic conclusion: “when this imperial mantle falls onto the shoulders of Louis Bonaparte, the bronze of Napoleon, high on the Place Vendome, will plunge to the ground”⁴² This arch parody—this parody at the center of the power of the state—is described by Marx as a necessary stage of the revolution, and a signal of

³⁵ Daniel 7: 8, 11, 20, 21 KJV.

³⁶ II. Thessalonians 2:1-4 KJV.

³⁷ Revelation 19: 9-16 KJV.

³⁸ Revelation 19:11-13 KJV.

³⁹ Revelation 17:8 KJV.

⁴⁰ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 109.

the conclusion of the journey through purgatory.⁴³ It is the signal of the beginning of the end of death; it is the final signal of the specter. And yet in this event, or rather advent of the ultimate imperative of the specter—the birth of the *monstrous* state machine, the final revelation of the radical chains—there remains some spirit, or spirits and “*one must reckon with them.*”⁴⁴

Spirit, Specter and Shadow: *The Journey of the Revolution as Parody of Purgatory*

Men and events appear as Schlemihls in reverse, as shadows that have lost their bodies.

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

...effective exorcism pretends to declare the death only in order to put to death. As a coroner might do, it certifies the death but here it is in order to inflict it.

—Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

What distinguishes the spirit from the specter? Derrida would remind us that a spirit can also be a specter—that each entity bleeds into the other, each contaminating the other and blurring the divisions between what has transpired and what is yet to come.⁴⁵ The difference between them is “precisely what tends to disappear in the ghost effect,” it is what vanishes between the first and second appearance of the Ghost in Hamlet.⁴⁶ In the first entrance of the apparition it appears “clad in complete armor, with its visor raised, and a truncheon in its hand,” but it does not speak.⁴⁷ This silent apparition exposes the remains of the king, and as a result the kingdom that seemed slightly amiss or out of place is now thrown into doubt by the survival of a trace of guilt, or conversely by the

⁴³ Ibid., 89, 106.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. (New York: Routledge, 1994), xx.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 125-6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁷ William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 145.

trace of the guilt of those who survive. It is this apparition “whose possibility in advance comes to disjoin or dis-adjust the identity to itself of the living present as well as of any effectivity.”⁴⁸ The second apparition is distinct from the first in that it speaks or rather commands vengeance. This specter appears to itself—Hamlet the King appears to Hamlet the Prince—that is to say it is intimately bound with the content of the self, it is less than other and yet more than self. It demands a specific labor from its other self and the bond that is formed between self and specter is a bond that is written twice, sealed in the mind and in the hand by the mark.⁴⁹ Both time and being shift following the revelation of the specter and the vow of vengeance. Hamlet dons the antic disposition precisely because of the disjunction between the world as it is, and the *truth* that he sees through the eyes of the specter. The specter grants him eyes to see and ears to hear, but these eyes are spectral eyes and the voices that he hears are those of the dead. Through this spectral sensorium the Prince of Denmark enters a time that is out of joint and discerns the truth of the shadow that occupies the throne; he thus begins to do the fated work of the dead.⁵⁰

For Marx, the spirit is borrowed from the past. It is an invocation of the dead that provides the living with the “self-deceptions” that they need in order to hide from the truth of historical progress.⁵¹ The invocation is incomplete, yet this borrowed language enables the living to *fantastically magnify* the given task.⁵² This task is the progressive exorcism of the spirit, its progressive externalization. In other words, the task of history is to exorcize the spirit from the body of the living. That is to say, to turn the spirit into the specter. The spirit lingers in the language of the living as a distant nightmare, but it also is the apostle of a new tongue; its nature is embryonic. The shift from the spirit to the specter occurs when the living simply *relaunch the specter* of the past to cover over an absence or evade a real resolution. When this empty repetition occurs, the halo of *fantastic magnification* fades away, leaving only the shadow and the mask. At this point the spirit has been externalized as the specter and tragedy becomes farce. In high tragedy there must be no separation of the mask and the man, the effect of tragedy, relies upon the disappearance of the actor into the role. Comedy, on the other hand, utilizes the division between the mask and the man; it mocks and exaggerates the distance between the two. For those who are gifted with the

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. (New York: Routledge, 1994), xx.

⁴⁹ The mark of the beast in Revelation enables men to buy and sell, without the mark the faithful are excluded from the economy of exchange. Marx receives the mark of the specter and is able to see the mark of the beast. Revelation 13:15-8 KJV.

⁵⁰ The gift of eyes to see and ears to hear is the gift of divine perception, the ability to hear and understand the word of God. For examples see Acts 28:27-8 KJV.

⁵¹ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 20-1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20-1.

spectral sensorium (the eyes to see and ears to hear) the appearance of this farcical empty place-holder at the very center of political authority is indicative of the end of a period of gestation. For Marx the transition from the spirit to the specter, from tragedy to comedy, is analogous to a pregnancy. The parodic division of the actor from the role that occurs with *the Eighteen Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* marks the birth of the monstrous state machine.

The language of gestation and birth play an important role in underscoring the eschatological temporal structure of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*. To gestate is literally to carry with and refers to the period between conception and birth. It thus carries a telic reference and to carry can thus be to carry forward, to bear the other within the self for a given period of time. Marx's use of the imagery of gestation is two fold, both the spirit and the specter are carried forward:

The French bourgeois had long ago resolved the dilemma put by Napoleon: 'In fifty years Europe will either be republican or Cossack.' Their resolution was the 'Cossack republic'. That work of art, the bourgeois republic, has not been deformed by Circe's black magic. That republic has lost nothing but its rhetorical arabesques, the outward decencies, in a word, the appearance of respectability. The France of today {after the *coup d'etat*} was already there within the parliamentary republic. It required only the thrust of the bayonet for the membrane to burst and the monster to spring forth.⁵³

This unnatural birth is announced by the appearance of the specter. The parodic spectacle of the dead imitating the living, this sick perversion of historical repetition, strips the "*rhetorical arabesque*" from the state and reveals the true nature of the monstrous state machine.⁵⁴ This parasitic apparatus that "traps French society like a net and chokes it at every pore" is exposed at this moment precisely because it has given up its ghost.⁵⁵ By conjuring up the spirit of the dead and launching it out as a specter onto the political stage in an attempt to obscure the acts of the living the effect of the *fantastic magnification* of repetition has been reversed. In short, when Louis Bonaparte invokes the name of Napoleon the effect is not the fantastic glorification of a man acting in the spirit of Napoleon but the gross caricature of a specter acting like a man. This inversion strips the "halo from the whole machinery of state, profanes it, and makes it loathsome and laughable."⁵⁶ There is thus a space, or rather, a disjunction between the man and the mask. Through this disjunction the spirit and the body have been separated, just as the state has been separated from its halo. This results in the appearance of the bodiless spirit of the specter and the spiritless

⁵³ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 96, 99.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 109.

body of the *lumpenproletariat* and state machine.

This disjunction is the sign of the final stages of a second pregnancy. The true spirit of the revolution remains in embryo: “Though the overthrow of the parliamentary republic contains the triumph of the proletarian revolution in **embryo** the immediate tangible result was *Bonaparte’s victory over parliament, the executive over the legislature, force without words over the force of words.*”⁵⁷ The arrival of the man and the mask, that unnatural union of the shadow and the specter, announces the final stages of a new birth. This revolutionary gestation is thoroughgoing, and yet “it is still preoccupied with journeying through purgatory.”⁵⁸ Holding true to the Marxist tradition of inversion the materialist Christ goes through purgatory before birth. This promised revolution awaits the unification of the class with *radical chains* and the small holding peasants; the singer awaits the arrival of a chorus, yet it is preoccupied with the process of purgatory:

The believers in universal manhood suffrage naturally do not want to dispense with the miraculous power, which has transformed Bonaparte II into a Napoleon, a Saul into a Paul, and a Simon into a Peter. The spirit of the people speaks to them through the ballot box as the God of the prophet Ezekiel [37:5] spoke to the dry bones: ‘Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones: “Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.”’⁵⁹

The spirit of the people breathes life into the bones of the state. It animates the nightmare that weighs upon its brain and brings it to life beyond the grave. It is the mistaken faith of the small land holding peasants that brings life into this beast and yet it is also the faith of these smallholding peasants that must be dislodged if the proletariat is to gain the chorus they require in order to complete the final purge.⁶⁰ In order for this chorus to sound it must forgo its right to mourning, it must follow its natural leaders (the urban proletariat) and let the dead bury the dead. The chorus is prepared for this final stage by the total separation of spirit and body, or in this case, spirit and state, that occurs in the birth of the monster. This monster or machine reveals the truth of the fantastic magnification of spirit. That truth is the truth of the specter.

In answer to our opening question (what is the distinction between the spirit and the specter) we must answer that each is fissured, each is divided, or rather doubled—there is the true spirit of the people that is to come, that is to say the true, or chosen people of spirit, and there is the tragic spirit of the dead that

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 98 (emphasis added).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

speaks through the living. In the order of the specters, there is the haunting hollow glare of the iron death mask of Napoleon and the distant gaze of the red specter. What of the shadow? Marx argues that “men and events appear as *Schlemihls* in reverse, as shadows that have lost their bodies.”⁶¹ This is a reference to Peter Schlemihl, the protagonist in Adelbert von Chamisso's famous narrative, who sold his shadow to the devil. For Marx, the separation of spirit and flesh, the separation that occurs in the farcical repetition of the events of the Eighteenth Brumaire, reveals both the “*indivisible people*” and the classless shadows.⁶² Here is the saved and the damned of the apocalypse. There is a singer (urban proletariat) the chorus (converted smallholding peasants) and the silence (lumpenproletariat, bourgeoisie) that must be consumed in the song of the revolution. It is here that we are reminded of our epigraph: “effective exorcism pretends to declare the death only in order to put to death. As a coroner might do, it certifies the death but here it is in order to inflict it.”⁶³ Marx's exorcism of the spirit, the revelation of the specter, is the death warrant of the shadows—of those that cannot be killed because they are pronounced dead prior to the actual burial. The aim of the specter—like the aim of the antic Prince of Denmark and for that matter Marx—is set, its trajectory is direct and its path is straight, it must simply await the signal to begin the end of all shadows. The problem remains, or to rephrase the problem, it is the remains that wait. The graves are open, time is disjointed, and the sign has been read, yet all the remains are waiting.

Hamlet and the Mole

Well said, old mole. Canst work i'th'earth so fast? A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends.

— *Hamlet*, Act I:V

And when it has brought the second half of its preparatory work to completion the whole of Europe will jump up and cry: Well grubbed up, old mole!

— Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 40

⁶² *Ibid.*, 48

⁶³ Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 48.

Perhaps if we are looking for the remains that have been left unburied we should look to the creature that is praised for burying itself: the mole. The mole appears in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* as the second half of the preparatory work of the revolution—the second half of its journey through purgatory—is completed. The first half of the preparatory work was completed with the coup of December 2, 1851. That is to say, the first half of this purging of ghosts ended with the overthrow of parliamentary power by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. The second stage is not yet complete, but it is already underway, it is immanent. In this second stage the executive power will be revealed as a farce. The spirit of Napoleon—the spirit that has been invoked to *fantastically magnify* the visage of Napoleon III—returns from the grave to find no-body to *magnify*, only a shadow to hide.⁶⁴

When the content is as empty as the phrase, that is when events appear as *grey-on-grey*, a separation occurs.⁶⁵ This separation of the spirit from the body or the phrase from the content brings the specter in two related senses. The spirit of Napoleon is exhumed and relaunched as a specter that is called to legitimate an illegitimate seizure of power. It is the farcical incongruity between the *coup* of December 2, 1851 and the spirit that it resurrects that results in a separation between the actual events and the spirits that are invoked, or metaphorically speaking, it results in the appearance of a specter and a shadow. The separation between the specter and the shadow is not seen by those that exist as shadows, that is to say, those who have hidden behind the spectral visage of the dead, but it is seen by those fated to set it right. The shadow takes on its role in earnest as the man behind the Napoleonic mask means to represent the real Napoleon, but in this he becomes the “victim of his own world-view, the straight comedian who no longer sees world history as comedy but his own comedy as world history.”⁶⁶ This self deception is also echoed in Hamlet as the third appearance of the ghost illustrates. Hamlet’s mother is impervious to the apparition of her former husband and as such she is impervious to the fate that it heralds.⁶⁷ A further parallel exists in the Gospel of St. John as those who follow the antichrist are described as both deceived and seduced. They are ignorant of both their apostasy and of the mark that they carry “upon their foreheads, or in their hands”; this mark of the beast is the mark of death; as a result of this mark they are not among the living when the Second Advent occurs.⁶⁸ Thus, the first type of specter is the specter as cipher, or place-holder; it is that beast of Revelation

⁶⁴ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 98.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁷ William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 282-3.

⁶⁸ Revelation 20:4-5 KJV.

which was, is not and yet is.⁶⁹

The second type of specter is the specter as herald, as the second appearance of the great ghostly Dane in Hamlet – that is as the specter that speaks, that calls for vengeance. In Hamlet the visitation of this specter and the vow that it demands forecasts the tragic conclusion of the play, yet Marx manages to avoid this ending by altering the second specter. For Marx, this specter that comes without invitation, which rises from the grave on its own accord, is the specter of that which was and that which will be; it is the inner pulse of the rational within the actual.⁷⁰ It is the alpha and the omega of St. John.⁷¹ In other words, Marx's mole, this specter that is haunting Europe, continues its inevitable work of subversion in silence, but it is not a silence without signs.⁷² In order to see the incongruity between the past and the re-presentation of it in the present, which is both the incongruity between the man and the mask in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* and the father and uncle in Hamlet, as the commandment of vengeance, one must have previously conversed with the dead.⁷³ It is only through this previous spectral visitation, that one gains the spectral sensorium that allows one to see through the brightly colored covering and gain access to the inner pulse that continues to beat within the external shapes.⁷⁴ The solution self-consciously echoes Hegel's speculative philosophy, but for Marx it is not philosophy but history that paints *grey-on-grey*; just as it is not the speech but the digging of the mole that is important.⁷⁵

Why would Marx choose to represent or better yet to forecast the reaction of Europe to the arrival of the full revolution in France as the moment in which Hamlet refers to the ghost of his father as a mole? And further, why replace speaking with grubbing? When Hamlet refers to his father as an "*old mole*" he is in the process of swearing Horatio, Barnardo, and Marcellus to silence and thus sealing his covenant of revenge with the ghost. In this scene they swear four times and each time the ghost, hidden beneath the stage, speaks, demanding that they swear. Hamlet's reaction to the voice of the ghost is of interest, as twice he moves in order to avoid its voice and each time it speaks he derides it, he mocks the spirit of his father. The first apparition that is seen is referred to by Horatio,

⁶⁹ Revelation 17: 8 KJV.

⁷⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 20-1.

⁷¹ Revelation 22:12-3 KJV.

⁷² Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 1.

⁷³ William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 163.

⁷⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21.

⁷⁵ Margreta de Grazia, "Teleology, Delay, and the "Old Mole"." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No.3(Autumn, 1999): 253.

Marcellus and Barnardo as an “it.” This “it” appears as the King, but its identity is in doubt and is only recognized by as the spirit of the dead King Hamlet by the son, yet when Hamlet rejoins his friends and asks them to swear he effectively un-names the ghost.⁷⁶ He is no longer referred to as Hamlet, King, father or royal Dane, but as “boy,” “truepenny,” “perturbed spirit,” and “mole.”⁷⁷ In Hamlet the procession of primogeniture, of legitimate repetition, is interrupted by an illegitimate substitution of uncle for father, and thus the son is left out of the process of succession.⁷⁸ It is from this excluded interior that Hamlet speaks his first words in response to his uncle, referring to him as both cousin and son, “A little more than kin, and less than kind.”⁷⁹ The appearance of the “old mole” is a sign that the legitimate line of Denmark has been interrupted and thus the spirit of Hamlet the King does not live on in the body of his son; he is displaced and walks outside of his place of rest. For Marx, Hamlet offers a radical interruption to the process of succession and thus the possibility of a radical end to succession, yet he must avoid the tragic fate of the Prince of Denmark. “Europe will jump up and cry: Well grubbed up old mole!” precisely because of this separation of the “mole” and the body—it is the externalization of the nightmare that weighs upon their brain and with its externalization is both the possibility and necessity of its extermination.⁸⁰

This extermination must be complete and without return; it must be final, but what is to be exterminated? Hamlet uses the word “mole” in reference to both the ghost of his father and a defect or taint in the nature of man.⁸¹ This blemish that lies hidden within the core and is only hinted at on the surface of the actual is synonymous with Marx’s “nightmare” and its exposure is the end of all *fantastic magnification*—in other words, all succession.⁸² In Marx this blemish is given a material form, it is the *lumpenproletariat* and their farce of a king. Both are named as shadows that have traded away their bodies and it is these walking dead that must be exterminated without sympathy or remorse. These are the bodies that require no burial, no grave, no mourning—their very presence is a sign of the impending purge. Marx’s solution to the problem of the tragic fate of

⁷⁶ Peter Stallybrass, “‘Well Grubbed, Old Mole’: Marx, Hamlet, and the (un)fixing of Representation.” *Cultural Studies*, 12-1 (1998): 10-1

⁷⁷ William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 194-6.

⁷⁸ Peter Stallybrass, “‘Well Grubbed, Old Mole’: Marx, Hamlet, and the (un)fixing of Representation.” *Cultural Studies*, 12-1 (1998): 10. William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Edited by G. R. Hibbard. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 181, 193-6.

⁷⁹ Hamlet is giving his own version of the proverb ‘the nearer in kin the less in kindness’ and in this context is effectively saying that the relationship is now closer as it has shifted from uncle to father through this unnatural succession, and Hamlet both dislikes and distrusts this nearness.

⁸⁰ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 98.

⁸¹ Peter Stallybrass, “‘Well Grubbed, Old Mole’: Marx, Hamlet, and the (un)fixing of Representation.” *Cultural Studies*, 12-1 (1998): 11.

⁸² Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 19.

Hamlet is found in his use of apocalyptic imagery. For Marx, Louis Bonaparte is not simply a false king or usurper along the lines of Claudius; he is rather the antichrist of St. John. The key difference between the two characters is their significance in relation to a chronological order. Both reside at the center of executive authority (Claudius as king and antichrist as messiah) and both are the ontological opposite of their appearance (Claudius as murderer and antichrist as Lucifer); but only the latter is the sign of the Second Advent. It is the use of Louis Bonaparte as a sign of the second and final stage of the proletarian revolution's journey through purgatory that enables Marx to promise a radical break with the past. Our concern here is the price of this specific method of historical interpretation, or rather a specific set of consequences. Marx needs a historical sign in order to promise this radical epistemic break, yet in order to constitute a sign he must interpret Louis Bonaparte and his supporters as farcical, that is as a type of repetition that undermines that which it repeats. According to Marx the difference between previous historical repetitions and this final or fatal repetition is an absence of content. In former revolutions "the resurrection of the dead...served to glorify new struggles," and thus by "borrowing" the language of the past it was possible to *fantastically magnify* the given task.⁸³ In this case the past is invoked as a screen to obscure the lack of content, for Marx this lack is not partial, it is absolute. Louis Napoleon and his supporters among the *lumpenproletariat* are deprived of any substance, they are shadows and the purpose of the final stage of the revolution's journey through purgatory is to cleanse them. By displacing the content of this residual, classless scum Marx is able to practice his own form of *fantastic magnification*. Marx borrows the language of St. John's apocalypse, the ultimate language of the promise of the future, in order to invoke the specter. Through this borrowed language the appearance of Napoleon III can be interpreted as the sign of the end of the revolution's journey through purgatory, as the Second Advent. It is the sign of immanence that necessitates the abandoning of the open grave as it is the promise of the apocalypse that circumscribes all mourning:

*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for those former things are passed away.*⁸⁴

The solution that Marx offers is formulated through an apocalyptic or Johannine reading of both Hamlet and Hegel's *Preface to the Philosophy of Right*.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 21

⁸⁴ Revelation 21:4 KJV

Dancing on Graves: *The Promise of the Rose and the Cross*

When philosophy paints its grey in grey, the shape of the world has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.

—G.W.F Hegel, *Preface to the Philosophy of Right*

In the *Eighteenth Brumaire* Marx repeats two key images from Hegel's *Preface to the Philosophy of Right*: the image of the rose and the cross and the image of the grey on grey of philosophical interpretation. This is directly relevant to our concerns as both of these metaphors are reinterpreted by Marx. In this process of reinterpretation Marx is able to alter the imperative of philosophical insight into the nature of the rationality of the actual. For Hegel, the aim of philosophy is to comprehend *what is*, for *what is* is reason and this comprehension brings with it reconciliation with the actual.⁸⁵ For Marx, this comprehension brings with it an imperative, a commandment to actualize the rational, and to purge all of the fetters of abstraction that hinder its final realization. For Marx, the Day of Judgment must precede reconciliation.

Marx contrasts bourgeois and proletarian revolutions and states the following regarding the latter:

proletarian revolutions, such as those of the nineteenth century, engage in perpetual self-criticism, always stopping in their own tracks; they return to what is apparently complete in order to begin it anew, and deride with savage brutality the inadequacies, weak points and pitiful aspects of their first attempts; they seem to strike down their adversary, only to have him draw new powers from the earth and rise against them once more with the strength of a giant; again and again they draw back from the prodigious scope of their own aims, until a situation is created which makes impossible any reversion, and circumstances themselves cry out:

Hic Rhodus, hic salta!
Hier ist die Rose, hier tanze!
 (there is no time like the present!)⁸⁶

The cry that Marx attributes to historical circumstances is a direct reference to Hegel's preface. Hegel draws the first line from Aesop's fable of the Braggart. The

⁸⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 19-21.

⁸⁶ Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire," 23.

braggart in the fable boasts of an athletic feat completed. Rhodes and a member of the audience call for an immediate demonstration. For Hegel, this serves as a direct critique of any philosophy that would describe the state as it ought to be, any idealism that projects itself beyond the core of rationality that persists in the actuality of the now.⁸⁷ The second line is a pun on the first (in Latin *Rhodus* can mean either Rhodes or rose and *salta* can mean either “jump” or “dance”).⁸⁸ The combination of the image of the rose and the cross is a reference to the name and emblem of the “Rosicrucians,” whose proverb “no cross, no crown” emphasizes the absolute necessity of earthly suffering in the pursuit of divine salvation. For Hegel, this suggested that the challenge of philosophy is to find the inner pulse at the core of the rationality of the actual, the comprehension of *what is* in the *here and now* and thus through true philosophy one can find a way of rejoicing in the present.⁸⁹ Hegel’s clarifies his use of the rose and the cross in his lecture notes: “The present appears to reflection, and especially to self-conceit, as a cross (indeed, of necessary) – and philosophy teaches [us] the rose – i.e. reason – in this cross.”⁹⁰

For Marx the image seems to suggest precisely the same thing, as it is the circumstances that call out and philosophy that reveals the immediate inner truth of the rationality of the actual. This truth is necessary if one is, metaphorically speaking, to know when to jump. But there is a difference between Marx and Hegel on this point. For Hegel, the ability to recognize the rationality in the actual (that is to see the rose in the cross) is granted by an “inner call” to comprehend and this comprehension brings about the individual reconciliation with actuality.⁹¹ For Marx, the ability to see the rational in the actual is called for by the historical circumstances and this comprehension brings the commandment of revolution, the need for a day of reckoning. Marx does not claim that this is a distant image of what the world ought to be. He attempts to avoid Hegel’s criticism of utopian idealism by altering the nature of reason’s call. For Marx this call is urgent, immediate, a necessary call to arms: the final proletarian revolution must occur because it has always been occurring.

The second image that Marx borrows from Hegel is the *grey on grey* of philosophy:

If any episode in history has been colored grey on grey, this is the one. Men and events appear as *Schlemihls* in reverse, as shadows that have lost their bodies. The

⁸⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 20-22, 390-1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 391.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

revolution has paralyzed its own proponents and endowed only its enemies with passion and violence. The counter-revolutionaries continually summon, exorcise and banish the 'red specter', and when it finally appears, it is not in the Phrygian cap of anarchy but in the uniform of order, in (the soldiers') red breeches.⁹²

For Hegel, the time in which philosophy paints its *grey-on-grey* recalls the earlier image of the "reheated brew" that (via a reference to St. John's Revelation) reason spews out of its mouth.⁹³ This is this popular superficial thought (embodied in Jacob Friedrich Fries and his brigade of sleepers) mistaken for philosophy and is to be contrasted with the scientific nature of Hegel's speculative philosophy.⁹⁴ The preface as a whole can be seen as an attack on the *grey-on-grey* that passes for philosophy and the predominance of this superficial philosophy, but the predominance of the type of philosophy is also a reflection of its historical circumstances. For Hegel this predominance is a historical marker, a herald of the immanent end of the current shape of the world. Hegel's speculative philosophy seeks to recognize philosophy as the enduring pulse at the core of being. The time of this philosophy is marked by the painting of grey-on-grey. The empty repetition of grey on grey is thus a marker of time; it is the mark that calls for the insight of true philosophy. For Marx it is the grey-on-grey of the historical events surrounding the end of the second republic that indicate that this world has drawn to a close. It is the emptiness of the imitative acts of Louis Bonaparte, this spectral assertion of a form without content, which signals the end of "*all Napoleonic ideals*," the role of philosophy in this moment is to unveil the rationality of the actual. Once again the key difference is that for Marx

⁹² The reference to Phrygia is also interesting. This can refer to both the Phrygian mode (considered the warlike mode in ancient Greek music) and the Gordian knot. The myth of the Gordian knot is of particular interest considering the historical details that Marx is analyzing in the Eighteenth Brumaire: "Alexander the Great, on his arrival at Gordium in Phrygia, found in the acropolis there an ox-cart of which the pole was fastened to the yoke by a knot of cornel-bark. According to legend, in ancient times a Phrygian peasant called Gordius, his wife, and son **Midas** chanced to arrive in this cart at an assembly of the Phrygians, who had just been told by an oracle that a cart would bring them a king to put an end to the civil disturbances. The Phrygians at once made Gordius king, and he dedicated to Zeus in the acropolis at the town subsequently named Gordium his cart and the yoke to which the oxen had been fastened. A further oracle declared that whoever could untie the knot, which had defeated all attempts to undo it, should reign over Asia. Alexander cut the knot with his sword and applied the oracle to himself. 'To cut the Gordian knot thus signifies drastic action to solve a difficulty.'" (*The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. Oxford Reference Online, 2005)

The mythic image of a prophecy in which a man becomes king due entirely to external circumstances immediately recalls election of the posthumous Napoleon and his coup. The figure of Alexander and the cutting of the knot also invokes the image of Marx's riddle that demands a solution, the false king, or king as an empty place holder forecasts the arrival of the true king. Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire," 40.

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?entry=t9.e1299&srn=1&ssid=943580503#FIRSTHIT>>

⁹³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H. B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11, 22-3. Revelation 3:16 KJV

⁹⁴ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 15.

this time marker does not call for an inner revolution, but for philosophy to be wielded as an intellectual weapon in a final revolution.⁹⁵

Let us conclude by reconsidering our thesis: “Marx is able to *fantastically magnify* the specter by avoiding the spirit.” For Marx, the events detailed in the Eighteenth Brumaire are unique precisely because they render any *fantastic magnification* impossible and thus effectively reveal the true face of the state. Louis Bonaparte invokes the spirit of Napoleon to cover over his absence of content and thus a division or unbridgeable contradiction develops between the rationality that is invoked and the actuality that invokes it. In short, Louis Napoleon attempts to use the spirit of Napoleon to legitimate his *coup d’etat*, but due to the absolute nature of the difference between the two he only succeeds in appearing as a caricature of his namesake. This farcical repetition creates a distinction between the man and the mask, and thus they become separable. The effect of fantastic magnification is reversed and thus for Marx the period of gestation ends and the true face of the state is born. With the appearance of the true face of Louis Bonaparte, the figure head of executive authority, the “mole” in man’s nature has exposed itself and must now be cut off. The bourgeois revolution has undermined itself and has now exposed its true nature and it is thus vulnerable precisely because it can no longer sustain its halo. Without its halo it cannot maintain the faith of the small land holding peasants, and in their alienation from the state the “smallholding” peasants will become the chorus that the urban proletariat requires in order to complete the final stage of the revolution.⁹⁶ For Marx, what guides the revolution is not faith but reason alone, yet this revolution, this poetry of the future, also wears a halo. Our question is: what do we see when the halo is stripped from the revolution?

The halo of the final revolution is constructed from a language that is “borrowed” and a spirit that is appropriated. In order for the revolution to complete its journey through purgatory it requires a sign. The construction of this historical sign requires an invocation of specters, these disembodied spirits that bring commandments to the living. This specter is the imperative of the rational within the actual, it is the imperative to find the fetter or abstraction that lies between “reason as self-conscious spirit and reason as present actuality,” and to name it and eradicate it; metaphorically, to tear the mole out from the roots.⁹⁷ This borrowed language grants Marx a rationality that allows him to read the events of the Eighteenth Brumaire as a “low farce” and to identify which actors represent the true rationality and which are merely fetters. With the ontological

⁹⁵ Karl Marx. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Lawrence H. Simon. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 38

⁹⁶ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 106.

⁹⁷ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 22.

divisions in place the revolution gains an impetus from what it promises. The promise of a final end to injustice, an end to mourning, the realization of a revolution in which the dead bury the dead, gains its force by appropriating and circumscribing what cannot be spoken: grief. The spirit that is appropriated is grief for those who have died and for those who must die. For Marx, all the proletarians have to lose in the revolution is their chains; our concern is the transformation of their chains from a “who” into a “what.”⁹⁸ The naked face of the revolution is the open grave; its language is the silent poetry of the purge.

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⁹⁸ *Marx and Engels, Communist Manifesto*, 39.