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## Jacques Derrida, “Wears and Tears (Tableau of an Ageless World),” in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006), 96-117

Origin of work was a two session lecture given on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, 1993 at the University of California, Riverside. Conference title was “Whither Marxism?” French title of work is *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*

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### 96

- “*The time is out of joint*” - quotation from Hamlet that pervades the entire book
- A time against time where “What is happening is happening to age itself”

### 97

- The wearing in expansion of the world (*mondialisation*) cannot be seen as a phase of development
- Proposes to paint a black scene on a blackboard
  - Entitled “What is going so badly today in the world”
- “Kojevian”
  - Refers to Alexandre Kojève
    - A Russian-born French philosopher with influential readings of Hegel and Marx
      - Posits that the end of history, in Hegelian sense, has been reached and violent conflict is no longer necessary
  - Derrida calls this stance one of “optimism” already “tainted by cynicism”
- “But what is one to think today of the imperturbable thoughtlessness that consists in singing the triumph of capitalism or of economic and political liberalism”

### 98

- Untenable stance
- Falls back to the “outdated opposition between civil war and international war”

- Schmitt
- “Under the heading of civil war, is it still necessary to point out that liberal democracy of the parliamentary form has never been so much in the minority and so isolated in the world?”
  - Internal forces (“socio-economic” and “techno-tele-media”) are disrupting its operation
    - “the new structure of the event and of its spectrality”
      - The production of this spectrality consists in both inventing and bringing up to date
        - It is created, but also already existed
- The concept of government has changed
- The topology of the public space (“*res publica*”) and public opinion had already been upset following WW1 owing to “technical, scientific, and economic transformations”

## 98-99

- Also problematises “the presumption that there was a *place*”

## 99

- “and thus an identifiable and stabilized body for public speech, the public thing, or the public cause”
- These transformations are being amplified today
  - But not amplification in the sense of “homogeneous and continuous growth”
  - An immeasurable distance between the pre-televisual powers of 1920s media
    - Which, even then, was already “dangerously [...] weakening the authority and the representativity of elected officials”
- Disrespect for politicians is no longer “because of some personal insufficiency, or because of some scandal”
  - “Rather, it is because politicians become more and more, or even solely characters in the media's representation at the very moment when the transformation of the public space, precisely by the media, causes them to lose the essential part of the power and even of the competence they were granted before by the structures of parliamentary representation”
    - They are “*structurally incompetent*”
    - This is the civil war analogy

## 100

- “Under the heading of international or civil-international war, is it still necessary to point out the economic wars, national wars, wars among minorities, the unleashing of racisms and xenophobias, ethnic conflicts, conflicts of culture and religion that are tearing apart so-called democratic Europe and the world today?”
- “The question posed too briefly would not even be that of the analysis with which one would then have to proceed in all directions, but of the *double interpretation*, the concurrent readings that the picture seems to call for and to oblige us to associate.”

- Will name ten “plagues” of the “new world order”
  - 1.) “Unemployment”

## 101

- Unemployment is “entering into a new era” which “calls for another politics” amid a “new set of givens that perturbs both the methods of traditional calculation and the conceptual opposition between work and non-work”
- See Underemployment
- 2.) “The massive exclusion of homeless citizens from any participation in the democratic life of States”
- 3.) “The ruthless economic war among the countries of the European Community themselves, between them and the Eastern European countries, between Europe and the United States, and between Europe, the United States and Japan”
  - “This war controls everything”
    - “because it controls the practical interpretation and an inconsistent [...] application of international law”
- 4.) “The inability to master the contradictions in the concept, norms, and reality of the free market”
  - Social advantage vs. individual interest

## 102

- 5.) “The aggravation of the foreign debt and other connected mechanisms are starving or driving to despair a large portion of humanity”
  - Who are then excluded from the market that relies on their debt
- 6.) “The arm industry and trade [...] are inscribed in the normal regulation of the scientific research, economy, and socialization of labor in Western democracies”
- 7.) “The spread (“dissemination”) of nuclear weapons”
- 8.) “Inter-ethnic wars [...] are proliferating, driven by an *archaic* phantasm and concept, by a *primitive conceptual phantasm* of community, the nation-State, sovereignty, borders, native soil and blood”

## 103

- “All national rootedness, for example, is rooted first of all in the memory or the anxiety of a displaced – or displaceable – population”
- 9.) “the growing and undelimitable, that is, worldwide power of [...] the mafia and drug cartels on every continent”
  - Shows how mafia have a history entwined with democratic Europe
    - Harassed by Mussolini, so aligned with Allies and the reconstruction of Italy post-WW2

## 104

- 10.) “international law”
  - “their techno-economic and military power prepares and applies in other words, *carries* the decision”
    - Footnote queries financial independence of UN

## 105

- Subtitle, “the New International” “refers to a profound transformation [...] of international law”
- Suggests limits on the sovereignty of statehood
  - Not necessarily “anti-statist”
    - “in given and limited conditions, the super-State, which might be an international institution, may always be able to limit the appropriations and the violence of certain private socio-economic forces.”
- Without subscribing to Marxist doctrine on the end of the state, or Leninist withering away “one may still find inspiration in the Marxist “spirit” to criticize the presumed autonomy of the juridical”

## 106

- Inadequacy of current discourse on this:
  - “never have so many men, women, and children been subjugated, starved, or exterminated on the earth”
    - “And provisionally [...] we must leave aside here the [...] question of what is becoming of so-called “animal” life”

## 107

- “The name of new International is given here to what calls to the friendship of an alliance without institution among those who, even if they no longer believe or never believed in the socialist-Marxist International, in the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the messiano-eschatological role of the universal union of the proletarians of all lands, continue to be inspired by at least of of the spirits of Marx or of Marxism [...] in the (theoretical and practical) critique of the state of international law, the concepts of State and nation”
- Two interpretations of the aforementioned blackboard scheme
  - 1.) “all that is *going badly* in the world today is but a measure of the gap between an empirical reality and a regulating ideal”

## 108

- Here, the Marxist critique is used to “reduce the gap” between reality and ideal
- 2.) Questions the “very concept of the said ideal”
  - “It would also extend, in the quasi-total of these concepts, to the concept of the human (therefore of the divine and the animal) and to a *determined* concept of the democratic

that supposes it (let us not say of *all* democracy or, precisely [*justment*], of democracy to come)”

- Adherence to a Marxist *spirit* is a duty
- To recap: it's either to narrow the gap between reality and idea, or to question the ideal itself

## 109

- Displeasure of Marxists at the fragmentation of this reading (multiple spirits of Marxism)
  - There will have to be some sort of hierarchy of multiple spirits
  - Not just a belated call to Marxism

## 110

- Queries who can say they are a Marxist
- “To continue to take inspiration from a certain spirit of Marxism would be to keep faith with what has always made of Marxism in principle and first of all a *radical* critique, namely a procedure ready to undertake its self-critique. This critique *wants itself* to be in principle and explicitly open to its own transformation, re-evaluation, self-reinterpretation.”
- “This latter spirit is [...] heir to a spirit of the Enlightenment which must not be renounced”
- Spirit distinct from dialectical materialism

## 111

- “For, let us speak as “good Marxists,” the deconstruction of Marxist ontology does not go after only a theoretico-speculative layer of the Marxist corpus but everything that articulates this corpus with the most concrete history of the apparatuses and strategies of the worldwide labor movement.”
- “this deconstruction is not [...] a methodical or theoretical procedure”
- How did Marx treat the ghost?
- “It is even more a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*.”

## 112

- In opposition to two “dominant tendencies”:
  - 1.) those “who believed they must instead try to dissociate Marxism from any teleology or from any messianic eschatology”
  - 2.) “anti-Marxist interpretations that determine their own emancipatory eschatology by giving it a metaphysical or onto-theological content that is always deconstructable.”
- “A deconstructive thinking, the one that matters to me here, has always pointed out the irreducibility of affirmation and therefore the promise, as well as the undeconstructibility of a certain idea of justice (dissociated here from law)”
- “This critique belongs to the movement of an experience open to the absolute future of what is

coming, that is to say, a necessarily indeterminate, abstract, desert-like experience that is confided, exposed, given up to its waiting for the other and for the event.”

- Has a “messianic spirit”
- “*exappropriation* [...] does not justify any bondage”
  - Concepts of free subjectivity – the self that does not belong to the self etc.
  - “Servitude binds (itself) to appropriation”
  - This document tries to exappropriate, rather than appropriate Marx
    - To take it in, but let it remain different
    - Not to bend it to a purpose

## 113

- This fidelity to spirit of Marxism is a responsibility “incumbent in principle [...] on anyone”
- Responsibility most imperative upon those who “have insisted on conceiving and on practicing this resistance without showing any leniency toward reactionary, conservative or neoconservative, anti-scientific or obscurantist temptations, to those who, on the contrary, have ceaselessly proceeded in a hyper-critical fashion, I will dare to say in a deconstructive fashion, in the name of a new Enlightenment for the century to come.”
  - There might be a hint of hypocrisy here!
- “all men and women, all over the earth, are today to a certain extent the heirs of Marx and Marxism”
- Heirs to a promise

## 114

- This is, apparently, the first time “in the whole history of the world” where there exists “a discourse in the philosophico-scientific form claiming to break with myth, religion, and the nationalist “mystique” and it is irrevocably “bound” “to worldwide forms of social organization”
  - This is the promise to which all are heirs of Marxism
  - “A messianic promise”
- Yet: “whether we like it or not, whatever consciousness we have of it, we cannot be its heirs”
  - “There is no inheritance without a call to responsibility”
  - “An inheritance is always the reaffirmation of a debt, but a critical, selective, and filtering reaffirmation”

## 115

- “Deconstruction has never had any sense or interest, in my view at least, except as a radicalization, which is to say also *in the tradition* of a certain Marxism, in a certain *spirit of Marxism*.”
  - “would have been impossible and unthinkable in a pre-Marxist space”
  - “There has been, then, this attempted radicalization of Marxism called deconstruction (and in which, as some have noted, a certain economic concept of the differential economy and of

expropriation, or even of the gift, plays an organizing role, as does the concept of work tied to difference and to the work of mourning in general”

- This had not been explicit because “the appellation Marx, the legitimation by way of Marx had been in a way too solidly *taken over* [arraisonnées].”
  - “welded to orthodoxy”

## 116

- “But a radicalization is always indebted to the very thing it radicalizes”
- Cannot determine the present “state of a debt” [to Marx]
  - “One makes oneself accountable by an engagement that selects, interprets and orients”
  - Quotes ghost in Hamlet

## 117

- Democracy and “the universal discourse on human rights [...] will not be treated without at least the spirit of the Marxist critique”
- Re-iterates importance of the critique of the sovereignty of the state.

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