

Hauntings: Spirit and Matter in Contemporary Critical Theory

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[A Course]

“A spectre is haunting Europe,” Marx famously proclaimed in the opening of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), but the spectre with which he was concerned was no vaporous phantom beckoning from the beyond, but the altogether more tangible presence of communism, a social and political movement dedicated to a materialist understanding of history. For Marx, writing in the aftermath of Hegel, it was as if it were matter which had returned from some crypt to haunt the philosophy of spirit. No ghost in the machine, communism in this text appears as a living body that has come to announce its revenge on idealism itself. This course explores just such tangled relations between matter and spirit in contemporary critical theory, and the ways in which this relationship has been so often cast in notably gothic terms, as forms of haunting, possession, exorcism, conjuration, divination, and the return from the dead. It begins with a consideration of Hegel’s concept of *geist*, the “world spirit” which directs and moves through history, and proceeds to a consideration of the ways in which this animating force has continued to trouble the work of thinkers from Marx and Freud to Adorno, Benjamin, Derrida, Kristeva, Butler, Edelman, Dean, Malabou, and Žižek. The topics to be studied include the world spirit, the commodity fetish, the death drive, the uncanniness of the other, the horrors of abjection, the work of mourning, the cryptic influence of the archive, the gothic nature of the network, and the plasticity of the mind. Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) will serve as a touchstone for classroom debates and discussions—no experience with the paranormal is required.

Rationale

This course will allow students to read across a number of major fields in theory (Phenomenology, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction, Queer Theory, and Object Theory), while providing a historical context for a consideration of the prevalence of gothic tropes in contemporary thought and popular culture.

Texts - TBA

Assignments

Participation: 10%

Presentation (ten-twelve minutes): 15%

Seminar (twenty minutes) and Seminar Report (2,500 words): 30%

Research essay (5000 words): 45%