Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions

The Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If electronic transmission of reserve material is used for purposes in excess of what constitutes "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.
Cryptomimesis

The Gothic and
Jacques Derrida’s Ghost Writing

JODEY CASTRICANO

McGill-Queen’s University Press
Montreal & Kingston · London · Ithaca
The First Partition:
Without the Door

jonas and ezekial hear me now
steady now i feel your ghost about
i'm not ready for the dead to show its face
whose angel are you anyway?

*Jonas and Ezekial*, The Indigo Girls

"We have put her living in the tomb! ... I ... tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them – many, many days ago ...! I tell you that she now stands without the door!" (Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” 547). Nearly two hundred years ago, Edgar Allan Poe’s obsessive and overwrought Roderick Usher uttered the words that still resonate in the genre that has since come to be known as the American Gothic. Like many Gothic narratives, “The Fall of the House of Usher” concerns itself with haunting and issues of unresolved mourning, while featuring a vengeful return from the tomb. The image of Madeline of Usher’s return from the dead foreshadows the continuing obsession with that trope in contemporary mass culture. Although some critics continue to disavow the Gothic as being subliterary and appealing only to the puerile imagination – Fredric Jameson refers to the Gothic as “that boring and exhausted paradigm” (289) – others, such as Anne Williams, claim that the genre not only remains very much alive but is especially vital in its evocation of the “undead,” an ontologically ambiguous figure which has been the focus of so much critical attention that another critic, Slavoj Žižek, felt compelled to call the return of the living dead “the fundamental fantasy of contemporary mass culture” (22).

The proliferation of works in contemporary mass culture evoking that “fantasy” – including fiction by Stephen King (*Pet Sematary*...
Cryptomimesis

and *Salem’s Lot*, Peter Straub (*Ghost Story*), and Anne Rice (*Interview With a Vampire*), as well as films by George Romero (*Night of the Living Dead, Dawn of the Dead*) and Francis Ford Coppola (*Bram Stoker’s Dracula*) – all bear witness to Žižek’s claim. However, while current critical attention, specifically feminist, psychoanalytic and cultural criticism, has been aimed at the social, sexual, and ideological dimensions of the return of the living-dead, haunting, and mourning, that same critical focus has been limited to the novel, short story, and film. This critical limitation continues despite the fact that many of the familiar Gothic tropes and topoi have appeared not only in works of psychoanalysis, but also in the discourse which has taken up the conditions of truth within Western metaphysics, namely Derridean deconstruction. It is curious that in the last thirty years the living-dead, the revenant, the phantom, and the crypt – along with their effects of haunting and mourning – have been appearing with increasing frequency in the writings of Jacques Derrida; it is even more curious that this inclination has, for the most part, gone unaddressed.

Although Derrida has drawn attention to the way that literary studies are dominated by philosophical assumptions, I have not presumed to read Derrida’s works with the aim of providing philosophical commentary. Instead, I propose the exploration of a certain terrain – a crypt, in fact – with an ear tuned to hearing how, in Derrida’s work, (the) crypt functions as both the model and method (theory) – the structural machine or formal principle of a poetics, let’s say – behind Derrida’s production of “(s)cryptograms.” While the notion of the crypt in this case recalls the psycho-t(r)opography suggested by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in their discussion of the fantasy of incorporation, the concept also consists of what Nicholas Rand refers to as the “deposition of the time-honored distinction between inside and outside” (in Abraham and Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word* lxviii). Although the term “(s)cryptogram” lends itself to a consideration of textuality as a performative theoretical space, I propose the term *cryptomimesis* to describe a writing practice that, like certain Gothic conventions, generates its uncanny effects through the production of what Nicholas Rand might call a “contradictory ‘topography of inside outside’” (*topique des fors*) (lxviii). Moreover, the term cryptomimesis draws attention to a writing predicated upon encryption: the play of revelation and concealment lodged within parts of individual words.
A short digression is necessary here, if only to recall Derrida’s reticence to employ any sign as “a transcendental pass, a password to open all doors, decipher all texts and keep their chains under surveillance” (“Passe-Partout” 12). In short, we must be wary of designating any single word as a “master key” (12). To do so would be “to predestine one’s reading,” which is what Derrida says about “the fearful reader, the reader in a hurry to be determined, decided upon deciding” (“Envois” 4). Specifically, Derrida extends a caveat to the reader who requires a “readable” itinerary, who disavows unpredictability and who, in fearing indeterminacy or undecidability, refuses the “call” of the other. This has to do with the structure of a text, with responding to the text of the other in a performative way.

This “performativity,” says Derrida “calls for ... responsibility on the part of the readers. A reader is not a consumer, a spectator, a visitor, not even a ‘receiver’” (“This strange institution” 51). Although Derrida is mindful that the moment of “transcendence” is “irrepressible,” he is careful to point out that “it can be complicated or folded” (45). This remark directs our attention to the challenges presented by cryptomimesis, a practice of writing that simultaneously encourages and resists transcendent reading and, because it involves the play of phantoms, compels an irreducible plurality. Thus, to dwell upon the word “crypt” is not to designate either the word or the thing as the master key that will unlock the “truth.” Rather it is to use “crypt” as a “positive lever,” (“Positions” 41) which is how Derrida describes a word or term that facilitates a deconstructive reading. In her preface to Of Grammatology, Gayatri Spivak refers to such a positive lever thus:

If in the process of deciphering a text in the traditional way we come across a word that seems to harbor an unresolvable contradiction, and by virtue of being one word is made sometimes to work in one way and sometimes in another and thus is made to point away from the absence of a unified meaning, we shall catch at that word. If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor. We shall follow its adventures through the text and see the text coming undone as a structure of concealment, revealing its self-transgression, its undecidability. (lxxv)

In the case of cryptomimesis, to catch upon the word “crypt” as the “positive lever” is also to crypt upon the word “catch” – the term that alerts us to the cunning questions, the surprises, the
Cryptomimesis deceptions, and the unexpected difficulties encountered in attempting to follow the “adventures” of a word through a text that is “coming undone as a structure of concealment.” It is in the sense of performance, or performativity, therefore, that I understand the workings of the crypt in Derrida’s writing. Keeping these “adventures” in mind, I would argue that because of a certain economy – what I said I would call cryptomimesis – Derrida’s works bear traces of being “ghost-written.” By drawing upon such figures as the crypt, the phantom, and the living-dead, cryptomimesis utilizes and foregrounds the dynamics of haunting and mourning to produce an autobiographical deconstructive writing through the trope of “live burial,” a trope that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as “a structural name for the Gothic salience of ‘within’” (5). Similarly, I want to suggest that cryptomimesis functions in terms of textual mime to produce, in part, what Gregory Ulmer refers to as “paraliterature” (“The Object of Post-Criticism” 94) – which he sees as being “a hybrid of literature and criticism, art and science...” (94) – and also what I prefer to call either “cryptography” or “phantomime,” since these terms draw attention to the uncanny dimensions of a writing practice that takes place as a ghost or crypt-effect of haunting and mourning.

Because this work is exploratory and not to be considered exhaustive, I wish to avoid totalizing and thematizing gestures. I’m trying to do this in what Clint Burnham, in his aesthetics of Marxist theory, calls “a fairly ‘Brutalist’ manner.” Says Burnham, “the watchwords [of such an aesthetics] might be: vulgar, reductive, simplistic and absolutist” (xiv). Because I am reading Derrida’s works where, arguably, they intersect or “fold” into the Gothic in North American popular culture – taking as a premise that each is already inhabited, even haunted by the other, folded within the other – I have assumed, by a sleight of hand, that the works of popular culture, themselves generally considered “vulgar, reductive, simplistic and absolutist,” have something to say about Derrida’s writing. I have in mind Mark Wigley’s claim that “the fissures that divide any text are actually folds that bind them to that which appears to be outside them, and it is precisely these folds that constitute the texts as such, producing the very sense of an inside and an outside that they subvert” (5).

And because I would argue that Derrida’s “poetics of the crypt” exists in a certain relation of correspondence with the Gothic, the
word *speculation* – and all it implies – should serve as a watchword directing our attention to what binds the two. The word *speculate* suggests that it is my task “to pursue an inquiry; to form a theory,” but the word also draws our attention to the working of a certain economy which, on the one hand has always powered the Gothic engine and, on the other, has driven Derrida’s concern with inheritance and legacy. Indeed, to speculate – derived from the Latin *specula*, a watch tower and *specere*, to look – is to engage in a certain financial transaction, one that involves risk of loss. My speculations lead me to consider that in both the so-called Gothic and in Derrida’s work, what is at stake is the performance of a ghostly inheritance and a debt. This multiple performance also extends to the critical reception afforded the two since reading is likewise indebted or drawn into the performance of a phantom-driven debt.

The nature of the debt can best be appreciated in light of the English word *revenant* and the French *revenance*. These words bring to mind the theme of one returned from the dead and all that this implies as well as how that theme is bound to a certain economy: they have affinities with *revenue* and with *revenir* – from the French to come back or to *amount* to and thus to the notion of (financial) “return(s)” (Bass, “Glossary” to *The Post Card* xxviii). What returns, however, is always linked to desire, which is what Derrida means when he says that the crypt is “the *vault of desire*” (“*Fors*” xvii). The (economic) function of a crypt, like a vault, is to keep, to save, to keep safe that which would return from it to act, often in our place. Thus, wherever the theme of the living-dead arises, whether it be in so-called Gothic texts or in Derrida’s works, the topic of revenance and desire cannot be separated from that of “ghostly inheritance,” whether in the sense of what is received by descent or succession or what returns in the form of a phantom to tax the living. Slavoj Žižek’s remark that the dead return from the grave to act as “collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt” (23) likewise draws attention to the element of obligation intrinsic to revenance while alluding also to the uncanniness of its discharge. How do the dead recover a debt? How do the living acquit themselves? Derrida suggests what is at stake in this contract by posing the question, “how to speculate on the debt of another coming back to, amounting to *[a soi revenant] oneself?” (“To speculate” 263).
As usual, Derrida’s question implies another. It leads us to the cutting edge of cryptomimesis. How, unless one speculates in a certain way, can one see “oneself” as amounting to the debt of another? How is such a sum determined? What currency is used as the medium of exchange? What financing supports such an undertaking? How will the debt be settled? What interest is due? Who will pay it? A certain doubling is, after all, implied. Here, the word speculate returns, reminding us of its affinity with specular – a word which in its turn evokes Lacan’s conception of the mirror stage. And Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage as being “formative of the function of the I” (1) shares an uncanny link with the word “spectre.” But if the word specular draws attention to the misrecognition, anticipation, and retroaction of Lacan’s temporal dialectic – its specular determinants – spectre suggests an uncanniness to that dialectic by drawing attention to the spectral nature of the “I” in terms of ghostly inheritance and an unresolved debt or promise. In effect, the very idea of the first-person singular, with all its claims to agency and consciousness, is irrevocably undermined when that pronoun is shown to be plurally determined. What then does it mean to speculate? What phantoms come into play? Especially when one writes? Derrida suggests that “speculation always speculates on some specter, it speculates in the mirror of what it produces, on the spectacle that it gives itself and that it gives itself to see. It believes in what it believes it sees: in representations” (Specters of Marx 146).

In an essay entitled, “The Lost Object – Me,” Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s accounting of the “phantom” gives us insight into the gaps produced in (psycho) analysis by that spectral structure, and also into the workings of the economy of cryptomimesis:

The “shadow of the [love] object” strays endlessly about the crypt, until it is finally reincarnated in the person of the subject. Far from displaying itself, this kind of identification is destined to remain concealed … Clearly, an identifying empathy of this type could not say its name, let alone divulge its aim. Accordingly, it hides behind a mask … The mechanism consists of exchanging one’s own identity for a fantasmic identification with the “life” – beyond the grave – of [a lost] object of love. (141–2)

These remarks regarding the phantom in terms of “reincarnation” – literally “re-fleshing” – can be fruitfully examined through the
The First Partition

economy of the crypt, giving us to understand the nature of cryptomimetic writing.

If to reincarnate is to “bring [the] soul of (a person) into another body after death,” for the purpose of working through “karma,” there is a parallel between reincarnation and the “fatedness” of the “identifying empathy” mentioned by Abraham and Torok. Thus, the phantom – be it understood as either the “shadow of the object” or the “buried speech” of another – returns itself in “the person of the subject” or, for that matter, the text. Through a certain form of inheritance – whether reincarnation or karma, destiny, moira – the phantom takes place through both the “I” and the body, which is “clearly ... [why it] could not say its name, let alone divulge its aim.” So the concept of reincarnation is meaningful to the economy of the crypt since it involves the manifestation, in the flesh, of a tacit “agreement” with the dead.

In the Gothic, as in psychoanalysis, “contracts” with the dead always take the form of a concealed promise to do or not do. Haunting always implies a debt. Whether it’s the ghost of the king in Hamlet or the ghost of Alfonso in The Castle of Otranto, haunting has an economic basis in the sense that the return of the dead from the grave, as Slavoj Žižek suggests, “materializes a certain symbolic debt beyond physical expiration” (23). In the American Gothic, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The House of the Seven Gables also demonstrates the economics of haunting when each heir to the property inherits the great guilt of his ancestor: “To the thoughtful mind there will be no tinge of superstition in what we figuratively express, [says the narrator,] by affirming that the ghost of a dead progenitor – perhaps as a portion of his own punishment – is often doomed to become the Evil Genius of his family” (13).

As this passage demonstrates, haunting implies not only debt but also guilt. Hawthorne’s novel explores both personal and national guilt predicated upon capitalism; it thus forms a bond with Stephen King’s Pet Sematary, a novel that takes up the issue of personal debt in the context of the colonial appropriation of indigenous lands. What both novels demonstrate is the sense of inexorable destiny upon which the Gothic turns to take up the issue of haunting and return. Although such a return does not always depend on literal death, but a return of that which is “buried,” it remains a function of the phantom rising out of the unconscious of another. The work of psychoanalyst Daniel Gunn, who has
Cryptomimesis

explored the role which language and the “I” play in the development of subjectivity, desire, and a sense of the body, has relevance here. Although his discussion focuses on individuals within families, specifically the production of ambivalence, it also draws attention to how the “phantom” manifests itself transgenerationally, institutionally, and thus, textually:

One thing a reading of Kafka or of Shakespearean comedy ... should give is the confidence to contend that parental demands need not necessarily be so self-evidently just or free of the ambivalence with which the child is trying to cope as psychoanalysis has tended to imply. What if parental demands are not inherent and natural, but are rather the recycling of a previous demand which has been inadequately dealt with? (74, emphasis mine)

In Abraham and Torok’s terms, the phantom “reincarnated in the person of the subject” would be an analogue of Gunn’s notion of the “recycling of a previous demand which has been inadequately dealt with.” What Gunn and Abraham and Torok make clear is that both “reincarnation” and “recycling” are the basis of an economy in which return or haunting comes into play, as Gunn suggests, through “the body, and the ‘I’ through which the body attempts to gain access to language and desire” (76). Gunn’s citation of one of psychoanalyst Maud Mannoni’s dialogues with a patient illustrates what is at stake in this phantom economy of desire. The dialogue, says Gunn, “leads directly into the troubled heartland of the pronoun”:

“I’ve got a headache,” said a single child of three. (He had been brought to me [Maud Mannoni] because it was impossible to keep him in infant school where he endlessly complained about his head, and seemed ill, passive and in pain. In addition, he was subject to insomnia, for which his doctor could find no organic cause). With me he went through the same soliloquy.
“Who is saying that?” I asked him.
“I’ve got a headache,” he went on repeating in the same plaintive tone.
“Where? Show me where your head aches.” It was not a question he’d ever been asked.
“There,” he said, pointing to his thigh near the groin.
“And whose head’s that?”
“It’s Mummy’s.” (qtd. in Gunn 77)
The First Partition

What we have is a kind of phantom limb that is not the result of amputation but of what rises up out of the unconscious of another. The “returns” within this economy are clearly uncanny. Yet though they are fundamental to psychoanalysis, returns like this are also crucial to the Gothic where haunting usually takes the contractual form of a ghostly inheritance. Such a ghostly inheritance is also fundamental to Derrida whose thoughts regarding the crypt’s function suggest that cryptomimesis – like the crypt – is itself, “that contract with the dead” (“Fors” xxxviii, emphasis mine).

POETICS OF THE CRYPT

Of course, to some, the desire to juxtapose the name of Jacques Derrida with that of Stephen King, Peter Straub, George Romero, and even Count Dracula might seem monstrous in itself but then, as Donna Haraway suggests, “monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations” (180). There are many wings in the Gothic mansion. Without the door, the structure lies open to speculation. For better or for worse, I have taken on the task of drawing together an unlikely couple, namely Jacques Derrida and the phantoms of popular culture for purposes of theorizing what I have called Derrida’s poetics of the crypt which lends itself to a consideration of both the dynamics of mourning and haunting that characterize Derrida’s compositional mode as well as the way that the “crypt” (and all it implies) is integral to the Gothic genre, delineates the uncanny spatial topography of Derrida’s work. If the familiar elements of Gothic fiction – dreams, crypts, phantoms – are present in Derrida’s work, so much more so are the dynamic and uncanny structural principles of the Gothic: a sense of the unspeakable; a correspondence between dreams, language, and writing; and traces of the theme of live burial, all of which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as fundamentally Gothic (37–96).

Briefly, the works of Derrida to which I shall refer “call” to us with the story of their own plural, fluid, and simultaneous production. Encrypted and encrypting, these works lead us to reflect upon the nature of language and of writing in spatial terms (of the crypt) that, in turn, produce a radical psychological model of the individual and collective “self” configured in spectral terms of phantoms and haunting. In works such as “Fors,” “Cartouches,” Memoires for Paul de Man, Glas, The Ear of the Other, “Living
On," and Specters of Marx, spectral tropes and topoi demonstrate that the logic of haunting and the notion of the return of the living-dead are implied in “individual” being – the so-called subject – as well as in historical, social, and cultural realms. They suggest a certain intersection between the notion of the “subject” and (inter-) textuality in terms of spectral effects. Written from the border between incorporation and introjection, the texts that I will discuss are cryptophoric: by setting free certain shadows, they participate in the staging of the enigma of a generation in the throes of unresolved mourning.

One final caveat. Of course, there are many “Derridas” and one must be careful of ascribing to Derrida (the one who signs) what, in effect, the cultural text “Derrida” accomplishes. I refer specifically to my reading of Derrida’s work in English rather than in French. The “Derrida” to whom I am referring should, therefore, be understood as a textual effect of (an English) translation. As Mark Wigley says, “the very sense of something original is but an effect of translation, the translation actually producing what it appears to simply reproduce” (3). Although my intention is to theorize what I am calling Derrida’s poetics of the crypt, I also have a supplementary goal to call attention to what makes such a project viable, namely the peculiar resonance which occurs between a meeting of two trajectories: “Derrida” in America and (American) Gothic literature.

Although Derrida warns against making the assumption that one knows what is meant or defined by the word “America,” it is clear that he considers the place he provocatively calls “the new Europe” (Specters 40) to be an effect of the Enlightenment’s dream. In this sense, America is the excess or beyond of a Europe that is yet to come. This is what Joseph Riddel means when he describes “‘America’ as … not so much a history of what occurred as a dream to be arrived at. It is a point of arrival infinitely deferred by the act of searching for it” (99). In these terms, America was never discovered but was invented. The same holds true of American literature which Riddel contends is “a futural other, to which the actual literary texts we have and study are kinds of prefaces or notes toward; prologues written both after and before the fact, before the letter” (21). “American” or “America” become not only the name of a certain displacement that is integral to Derrida’s thought but also an allegory of haunting. Riddel points this out, saying
There is a “scene” recalled in one of the autobiographical “Envois” of Jacques Derrida’s *The Post Card* that might remind us of the displacement “literature” effects within contemporary discourse, and the performative role that Poe in particular, but also American literature in general, and even the place and name “America,” are made to play in that discourse. It is a scene and story of place and displacement, an allegory, as it were, of history, discourse, criticism, and of a certain problematics of accounting – of reading and writing the dead. (17)

It is evident that Derrida, like Riddel, perceives “America” in similar terms. In “Mnemosyne” (in *Memoires for Paul De Man*) for example, Derrida refers to the problem of defining “America” and calls the United States that historical space which today, in all its dimensions and through all its power plays, reveals itself as being undeniably the most sensitive, receptive, or responsive space of all to the themes and effects of deconstruction … In the war that rages over the subject of deconstruction, there is no front, there are no fronts. But if there were, they would all pass through the United States … In this fiction of truth, “America” would be the title of a new novel on the history of deconstruction and the deconstruction of history. (18, emphasis mine)

With Derrida’s remarks in mind, it seems appropriate that certain of his works be read as intersecting with the Gothic in “America” since it is this encounter that produces a sense of the uncanny correspondence which, to recall Riddel’s phrase, is a scene “of reading and writing the dead.” Both Riddel’s and Derrida’s remarks suggest that the United States can best be spoken of in terms of “literature,” since “America,” according to Riddel is “always already a text without origin, a translation of a translation” (100). Thus, if America were “the title of a new novel,” that novel would be “in progress” because in this formulation, America would be “the beyond of modernism, a literature burdened with producing a past it never had, except in the figure of revolution, in order to mime that past into a future it lagged behind” (Riddel, 101). Similarly, if America is the dream of Europe, America is also a rebus-text, perhaps a Gothic “novel” based on the dream of “reading and writing the dead.” I hope to draw attention to Derrida’s affinity with the Gothic in America and to suggest ways of reading
Cryptomimesis

his work in terms of its participation in the staging of a cultural imaginary in which the trope of the living-dead and their return from the grave materializes a certain unpaid symbolic debt.

TRANSGENERATIONAL HAUNTING: LIVING ON

The phantom and the revenant are not merely worn-out conventions of the Gothic. Rather, these figures draw attention to an uncanny dimension implicit in Fredric Jameson’s assertion that postmodern culture functions as “a world transformed into sheer images of itself” (18). These “images” also suggest what, on a collective and social level, is at stake in Slavoj Žižek’s remark that “certain state or ideological apparatuses … although they are clearly anachronistic … persist because they do not know [that they are dead]” (44). Žižek and Jameson are describing a phenomenon with which the Gothic has always been concerned – what might best be called transgenerational haunting, that manifestation of the voices of one generation in the unconscious of another – but their assertions also suggest that the works of the Gothic in popular culture might lend themselves to an understanding of how certain of Derrida’s works simultaneously stage, theorize, and thereby participate in another variation of transgenerational haunting.

In a certain sense, to be haunted is to be called upon. According to Walter Benjamin a text “calls” to us for translation. In this way, a text, Derrida would say, “lives on.” It also means that when it is signed by the other, or “translated,” a text “comes back” in a certain way – a phenomenon which always occurs, Derrida says, when “another makes use of [a text] or cites it” (“Roundtable on Translation” 158). But the text that comes back is never the same text; it is, thus, “never an echo … that comes back … or, if there is, it’s always distorted” (158). It’s always “distorted” because, being translated, it has signed itself in the ear of the other – a (textual) structure which is, according to Derrida, both “uncanny” and “double” (“Otobiographies” 33). Thus, when we are called by a certain text, it is perhaps, to recall Cixous, with an ear “attuned” to “a certain music” that the spectral signature comes in/to play (which might be a way of eventually describing my idiosyncratic engagement with “Jacques Derrida” in “America”). A spectral signature can therefore be thought of in terms of what Esther
Rashkin, in *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative*, calls “transtextuality,” a term she proposes for “the specific kind of intertextual relationship at work in narratives organized by phantoms” (45). What is so uncanny about this “relationship” is that it can be seen shimmering in the slippage suggested by the word “by” when it comes to thinking about the organization of such narratives. In other words, we are “called” by certain texts because they are organized by phantoms.

Whenever a text “calls” to us, it is for the purpose of (doing) dreamwork with ghosts, phantoms, spectres, revenants: all those whose return prompts us to remember that dreamwork is also memory work which manifests itself in terms of haunting. Although what haunts us is what we inherit, the legacy is always contradictory. Derrida suggests that it takes the form of a double bind: secrecy and choice. Thus, whenever a text calls to us, we are being asked to confirm an inheritance and to respond to an injunction. We begin by choosing. This “choice” is always double-edged for it takes the form of invitation and resistance. How are we to respond to the call of a text which is also a resistance? Our response is the basis of haunting. Nicholas Royle suggests the uncanniness of reading and interpretation when, in *Telepathy and Literature*, he writes, “What would it mean for a text to be a ghost? Or for a text to have prescience, foresight, foreknowledge” (12). In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida’s remarks illuminate this double-bind:

An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction* to reaffirm by choosing. “One must” means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. If the readability of legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause – natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret–which says “read me, will you ever be able to do so?” (16)

The answer to this question is both yes and no. To be called by a text is to be drawn into the crossroads of secrecy and desire. This paradox is what Shoshana Felman has in mind when she asks “where does it resist? Where does a text ... precisely ... make no
sense, that is, resist interpretation? Where does what I see and what I read resist my understanding? Where is the ignorance – the resistance to knowledge – located? And what can I learn from the locus of that ignorance?” (80).

In other words, the secret best kept is the one from ourselves. As for inheritance, Felman’s remarks can draw attention to one aspect of haunting that remains at work even when it is unconscious or disavowed. Where Felman asks “what can I learn” from those texts that resist “understanding,” Hélène Cixous might respond that these texts “teach us how to die” (Three Steps 22) because, in effect, they show that “each of us, individually and freely, must do the work that consists of rethinking what is your death and my death, which are inseparable” (12). To understand that “your death and my death” are “inseparable” is to perceive that what constitutes the division between “self” and “other” is death. In these terms, a text that “teach[es] us how to die” would also be a text from which we might learn to live. But learning, of course, is always already a question of haunting and inheritance.

In Specters of Marx, Derrida speaks of the spectral dynamics implicit in the call of texts that teach us how to die. More importantly, he asserts that any discussion of “ourselves” – including “you,” “me” “us” and “I” – is spectrally determined, especially when it is unconscious or disavowed: “To learn to live: a strange watchword. Who would learn? From whom? To teach to live, but to whom? Will we ever know? Will we ever know how to live and first of all what ‘to learn to live’ means?” (xvii).

To begin (writing, living) we must have death. We must have death because it is “only from the other and by death” (xviii) says Derrida that we come into the configuration of “ourselves.” To understand this, however, we must “learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship” (xvii).

Derrida’s insistence that we have “to learn to live with ghosts” does not mean merely a being-with but, as he suggests, “this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations” (xix). Written to address today’s disavowal of Marx, these reflections come out of Derrida’s reading of Marx’s “spectropoetics” – Marx’s obsession with ghosts, spectres and spirits – in which Derrida, whose preoccupation with the return of the dead out-gothicizes the Gothic, argues that we are all heirs of Marx and that it is our responsibility
19 The First Partition

to sift through our inheritance: the possible legacies that come to us in the spirit of Marxism(s). To learn to live with ghosts is to rethink ourselves through the dead or, rather, through the return of the dead (in us) and thus through haunting.

How, then, to recall Derrida, are we “to learn to live,” especially when we consider the uncanny implications of Derrida’s questions when asked from the perspective of mourning, inheritance, and haunting?

Derrida’s questions remind us that we ignore the dead at our peril. To ask, Who would learn? and From whom? is to draw attention to phantom structures of subjectivity and to thereby launch an inquest into the undecidability of “identity.” Who would learn, indeed, if the “I” with which one speaks is a “revenant” that is yet to come? By drawing our attention to how, as Esther Schor puts it, “the dead shape the lives we are able to live” (4) the question, “To teach to live, but to whom?” reminds us of a certain ghost story – one which can but feature a return from the dead as a debt, as a promise, and as a translation.

INHERITANCE, LEGACY, GHOSTS, HAUNTING

Derrida’s work can be seen to take up what Anne Williams calls “that quintessentially Gothic issue – legitimate descent and rightful inheritance” (239). In fact, Derrida’s concern with inheritance turns upon the (dissimulation of the) proper name as a site of “haunting” since, as Derrida remarks, “Only the name can inherit, and this is why the name, to be distinguished from the bearer, is always and a priori a dead man’s name, a name of death” (“Otobiographies” 7). In Derrida’s work, however, the “name of death” is not only multiple and “feminine,” it is also autobiographical, giving us to think of “autobiography” as a spectral effect (of writing) that renders sexuality/gender undecidable. Thus, when Derrida writes, “everything I write is terribly autobiographical” (“Roundtable on Autobiography” 72), the emphasis on the “terribly” cannot be underestimated since, as he asserts,

the adverb must be given the meaning that comes directly from its nominative root – “in a manner that inspires terror” (one will have to wonder who or what inspires terror, and in whom) – rather than its more familiar,
banalized meaning, as, for example, when one wants to signify the intensity of one's attachment to someone or something. Yet, notice that even the latter sense implies excess or extreme. (72)

The parenthetical remark – “one will have to wonder who or what inspires terror, and in whom” – makes the link between haunting and autobiography. This link is one reason why Derrida speculates that “one writes not only for those yet to live but for the dead…. I think one writes also for the dead” (“Roundtable on Autobiography” 53). Here, as elsewhere in Derrida’s writing, the preposition stages an undecidability. Firstly, the word for draws attention to its role in “Fors” – Derrida’s foreword to and an elaboration of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s analysis of Freud’s most well-known analysand in The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy – in which Derrida plays upon the word fors. In the French expression le for intérieur, for designates the inner heart: subjective interiority. In the plural, fors – derived from Latin foris – is an archaic preposition meaning “except for, barring, save” (“Translator’s Note to ‘Fors’” xi). Thus, to write “for(s)” the dead is to anticipate our own. Similarly, the word “for” in English suggests that one writes not only as an agent for the dead, but also that the dead write in our place, a notion that is suggested by another of Derrida’s assertions, “departed is the subject” (“Cartouches” 190). That is, in the case of the proper name, which is “not to be confused with the bearer,” one writes as the (still living) dead, in their name or in their memory which is what Derrida implies when he says, “every name is the name of someone dead or, of a living someone whom it can do without” (“Roundtable on Autobiography” 53). Writing, therefore, necessarily draws attention to itself in terms of inheritance, legacy, and haunting.

The proper name is, however, not only multiple; it can, if it is the name of a phantom, also be secret or barred from consciousness. Staging the signature(s), then, becomes a complicated affair since it is no longer only a matter of spacing – wherein it is “the ear of the other that signs” (51) – but rather of inscribing or letting be inscribed (the unspeakable name of) an altogether Other – a phantom, shall we say, or a living-dead – (returning as inheritance) in place of the “subject.” This structure is what Abraham and Torok refer to when they are speaking in terms of the phantom and the analysand: “It takes some time to understand [that the
analysand] speaks and lives someone else’s words and affects” (“The Lost Object – Me” 150). Thus, when Derrida says, “everything I write is terribly autobiographical,” we are left with the question Derrida’s pronoun suggests: whose autobiography are we talking about?

One might argue that Derrida’s concerns intersect or fold into those of the Gothic at the point where each approaches the issue of inheritance, legacy, and haunting precisely through the figure of a ghost, phantom, or revenant who, having returned from the dead, haunts the living with unspeakable secrets – unspeakable because they are unconscious – which were taken to the grave but which return via the agency of the proper name.12 In the case of the Wolf Man, as Gregory Ulmer points out, what is unspeakable is sealed in a psychic vault as a “word thing” which then, says Ulmer, “functions as the Wolf Man’s name, naming the singularity of his desire, dissociated entirely from the names of his fathers, both civil and psychoanalytic” (Applied Grammatology 62). However, as Ulmer points out, even “a word treated as a thing that is unspeakable ... achieves utterance by means of a complex translation process” (62). “To achieve utterance by a complex translation process” is to effect a certain return which, for Derrida, takes the form of a phantom. In his reading and re-reading of Marx, Derrida speculates at great length about the fact that the first noun that appears in The Manifesto of the Communist Party is “specter” (Specters 4). When Derrida finally noticed the word, he was shocked to realize he had just “discovered, in truth ... just remembered what must have been haunting [his] memory” (4). Where his reading of Marx becomes a “complex translation process” it comes in the form of a phantom: “I knew very well there was a ghost waiting there” (4). In Derrida’s work, the notion of the phantom has Gothic affinities in that the return of the dead from the grave and haunting can be understood to demonstrate, for better or for worse, what is at stake when, to recall Ulmer above, “a word treated as a thing that is unspeakable achieves utterance.”

In Gothic fiction and film, what “achieves utterance” is also, generally speaking, that which horrifies. It horrifies because it is unspeakable and it haunts for the same reason. That which is unspeakable can, according to Abraham and Torok in their discussion of the metapsychology of secrets, “determine the fate of an entire family line,” (The Shell and the Kernel 140). This is what is
at stake in Derrida’s reading of Marx in terms of ghosts, haunting, and inheritance. According to Derrida, Marx’s work might be thought of as a virtual space of spectrality which stages “a certain dramaturgy of modern Europe” (5) in terms of haunting. It is “the experience of the specter, [says Derrida,] that is how Marx, along with Engels, will have ... thought, described or diagnosed” this performative comprising the “great unifying projects” of modern Europe (4–5). To have recourse to a certain spirit of Marxism, says Derrida is also to “engender new ghosts” (87) since “one must assume the inheritance of Marxism, assume its most ‘living’ part, which is to say, paradoxically, that which continues to put back on the drawing board the question of life, spirit, or the spectral, of life-death beyond the opposition between life and death” (54). To put the question of life, spirit, and the spectral back on the “drawing board” is to draw attention to the line which is drawn “between life and death” in terms of the signature. As Gregory Ulmer points out in Of Grammatology, “it is never possible to decide who or what signs” (132). Since the signature of the proper name can also conceal another signature, we might call these moments of indecision “ghost writing” because they call attention to what is at stake when Ruth Parkin-Gounelas claims that “Derrida’s text is haunted by Marx, just as Marx’s texts ... are haunted by Max Stirner, whose own texts, Derrida tells us, are haunted by Hegel’s” (127–43). To see how Derrida signs Marx, we must first consider what it means to write with ghosts.

TO WRITE WITH GHOSTS

It would be appropriate at this time to recall Derrida’s contention that “it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept” (Specters 161). On the one hand, the word haunting is, as Mark Wigley points out, “etymologically bound to that of ‘house’” (163). On the other hand, the comment suggests that haunting is to concept as haunting is to house. That is, the notion of haunting involves the “construction” or creation of an inside. This is what Mark Wigley implies when he claims that haunting is “always the haunting of a house,” or of a “space” since, he continues, “space is understood as that which houses” (163). Haunting, then, implies interiority: the necessary construction of an “inside” whether of a house, a text, a thesis, a system of
representation, or a “subject.” This is what Derrida suggests when he says, “haunting [marks] the very existence of Europe. It would open the space and the relation to self of what is called by this name, at least since the Middle Ages” (*Specters* 4). But by what mechanism does an “inside” come about? To the extent that thought, or memory – that we, ourselves – are ineluctable measures of a spacing, we are drawn into a consideration of haunting that necessarily includes mourning since, according to Derrida, “only through [the] experience of the other, and of the other as other who can die, leaving in me or in us this memory of the other,” does the “me” or the “us” arise (“Mnemosyne” 33).

Haunting and all it implies is a trope that is integral to the Gothic genre, but it also functions to link writing with a return from the dead. Where Derrida thinks in terms of haunting, he does so through Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s theory of the “phantom,” and the crypt, both of which are psychic structures of incorporation. When Abraham and Torok speak of the fantasy of incorporation, they draw upon the notion that words of desire can act as phantoms when they are excluded from the preconscious. This is also what Derrida implies when he says, “as for language, it inhabits the crypt in the form of ‘words buried alive’” (“Fors” xxxv) – a remark that makes Derrida sound every bit as “Gothic” as, for example, Edgar Allan Poe whose works consistently evoke similar concerns. As far as psychoanalysis is concerned, however, Derrida is referring to how excluded words “migrate” to the unconscious where, as Abraham and Torok would argue, they work as if they were representations of repressed things. It is their absence in the preconscious which signifies that the trauma never took place. Incorporation occurs when the process of introjection is blocked by conflicting desires. The inaccessible object of desire is then incorporated as a “fantasy” within the body and hidden from the ego in a “crypt” from which it returns to haunt either through other words-that-hide or through somatic symptoms that can be read, as Freud pointed out, as the literalization of a figure of speech.

In Freud’s terms the return of the repressed relies on the concept of latency – that is, behind an expressed emotion lies one which is contrary and thus, repressed. What has been repressed will eventually force its way back into consciousness. According to Abraham and Torok, however, the concepts of the crypt and the phantom give us to understand that, as Nicholas Rand points out, “actual
Cryptomimesis

events are treated as if they had never occurred. Instead of the shifting fortunes of opponents locked in combat ... [as in the Freudian structure of oppositions], what matters is the preservation of a shut-up or excluded reality. This is why [Abraham and Torok] speak of *preservative* repression, or the topography of encrypted secrets, and contrast it with Freud’s concept of *dynamic* repression” *(The Shell and the Kernel 18).* In these terms, the return of the deeply repressed consists of a return of a “phantom,” an entity which might as well be that of an Other. In this context, consider the uncanniness of Abraham and Torok’s “reading” of the Wolf Man in *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word:*

The person in despair who, rendered helpless by depression, consulted Freud in 1910 was not quite the same as the one who lay on his couch a few days later. They appeared to be two separate people in one, without either of them representing the basic identity of the Wolf Man. Although often having the same desires as he, they remained nevertheless distinct from him. As a result, a paradox emerged in which the sexual license loudly claimed by one would only reinforce repression in the other. We suspected the existence of a cohabitation, at the core of the same person, involving his elder sister’s [as well as his father’s] image and his own. Two people in a third one. (3)

Two people in a third one: an uneasy model of subjectivity, to be sure. “What returns to haunt is,” as Esther Rashkin points out in her discussion of Abraham and Torok’s theory of the phantom, “the ‘unsaid’ and the ‘unsayable’ of an other. The silence, gap, or secret in the speech of someone else [is what becomes the phantom who, thus,] ‘speaks’ in the manner of a ventriloquist ... (28).” This notion of ventriloquism is intriguing to keep in mind when considering Derrida’s writing practice, especially where it is described in terms of inscribing or letting be inscribed the altogether other – a feminine interlocutor – by displacing a certain masculinity that situates itself *before* the differentiation of masculine and feminine. This is why Derrida remarks that “each time it is she, it is you who signs the text by receiving it” (“Roundtable on Autobiography” 79). Writing the altogether other, in Derrida’s case, is predicated upon a re-thinking of the subject as a “non-place,” a thought that runs contrary to the traditional notion that the subject takes place (Wigley 176).
While Abraham and Torok’s theory of the phantom calls into question Freud’s notion of the universality of psychic development, it also leaves the door ajar on the question of the so-called subject – a question which Derrida constantly poses – who is assumed to be fully conscious and, hence, fully self-knowable. If the subject is a non-place or a haunted site, analysis becomes an uncanny affair. As Esther Rashkin points out:

Effecting transference in the presence of a phantom is all the more challenging since the playing out or actualization of the internal drama must occur not between the analyst and the patient … but between the analyst and the patient’s ancestor (or whoever else may have originated [a] secret). At stake for the analyst is assuring that the individual “on the couch,” metapsychologically speaking, is the one responsible for the formation of the phantom. Outlandish as this may seem, this often means analyzing, via the mediating presence of the patient, someone who is long since deceased. (Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative 32–3)

This configuration, in which the unspeakable is silently transmitted to someone else, is appropriately called the phantom. According to Torok, the phantom calls into question the notion of the integrity of the “I,” since it “is alien to the subject who harbours it” (“Story of Fear” 181). The so-called subject, therefore, is haunted by the “living-dead knowledge of someone else’s secret” (Abraham “The Intermission of ‘Truth’” 188). This is an especially interesting remark when it is coupled with Stephen King’s assertion that all horror stories deal with “secrets best left untold and things best left unsaid” and yet, he continues, they “all promise to tell us the secret” (Danse Macabre 50). Because a Gothic story is tacitly constituted by the idea that the phantom might be “someone who is long since deceased,” Anne Williams, in Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic, argues that the collected works of Freud are profoundly Gothic in their concerns with the family romance.

One might make a similar argument regarding the works of Nicolas Abraham who, for example, says, “to be sure, all the departed may return, but some are destined to haunt” (“Notes on the Phantom” 171). The argument certainly extends to Jacques Derrida, whose texts often recall the uncanny aspects of certain Gothic tropes. In “Cartouches,” Derrida’s remarks call up the image of Dracula, the paradigmatic figure of the living-dead in
popular culture: “what can one desire of a coffin if not to have it for one’s own, to steal it, to put oneself inside and see oneself in it?” (191). Earlier I said that according to Walter Benjamin, a text calls to us for a translation. If this is the case, how am I to explain what it is that “calls” to me when I “hear” Jacques Derrida say, “the inhabitant of a crypt is always a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep, as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way save as living” (“Fors” xxi)? How am I to account for this discourse other than to consider its summons in light of the Gothic? When Jacques Derrida says “the inhabitant of a crypt is always a living-dead,” he is saying nothing new to an entire generation of North American readers and film-goers whose attraction to the horror genre raises various theoretical questions, not the least of which is posed by Noël Carroll who asks

“Why horror?” ... If horror necessarily has something repulsive about it, how can audiences be attracted to it? Indeed, if horror only caused fear, we might feel justified in demanding an explanation of what could motivate people to seek out the genre. But where fear is compounded with repulsion, the ante is, in a manner of speaking, raised. (158)

Indeed, to speculate upon the connections that might be made between the writing of Jacques Derrida and the works of a genre that has long been associated with attraction and repulsion leads one into some strange territory. Although it might be a misnomer to call Jacques Derrida a Gothic novelist (it’s tempting though), it would also be a mistake to deny his affinity with the genre since the elements of the Gothic are undeniably present in his work. What do the works of popular culture tell us about Jacques Derrida?

Susan Buck-Morss points out that Walter Benjamin took seriously “the debris of mass culture as the source of philosophical truth” (ix). She claims that Benjamin’s goal in the Arcades project was to take materialism so seriously that the historical phenomena themselves were brought to speech. The project was to test “how ‘concrete’ one can be in connection with the history of philosophy.” Corsets, feather dusters, red and green colored combs, old photographs, souvenir replicas of the Venus di Milo, collar buttons to shirts long discarded – these battered historical survivors from the dawn of the industrial culture that appeared
Buck-Morss’s remarks suggest that if these urban objects can draw attention to themselves as a philosophical discourse, then the “objects” of popular culture – arguably the themes, tropes, and topoi of Gothic fiction and film – might give themselves over to being read “as a constellation of concrete, historical referents” that otherwise might be unspeakable.

Thus, when Derrida remarks that “the crypt from which the ghost comes back belongs to someone else” (note to “Fors” 119), we are given to understand (1) that we are being drawn into the unconscious transmission and reception of “living-dead knowledge” (which is thus, nescience); (2) that we are being drawn into close proximity with that which defies verbalization because it is the condition of writing, speaking, and being and is untraceable except through its effects. As far as the crypt is concerned, what can “take place” can do so only by producing concealment – that is, the (crypt) effect of interiority – which is accomplished by “constructing a system of partitions, with their inner and outer surfaces” (“Fors” xiv). Derrida, in fact, is everywhere concerned with a certain “beyond place” “non-place” or “no-place” [non-lieu] which, he tellingly describes as “the other place” (xxi).

Derrida’s remarks on the construction of the “cryptic enclave” not only recapitulate Abraham and Torok’s notion of the crypt in terms of topography but also recall Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s assertions regarding the Gothic. Specifically, the structuring of the cryptic enclave, with its ability “to isolate, to protect, to shelter from … penetration” (“Fors” xiv) evokes Sedgwick’s topographical comments regarding the uncanny and spontaneous production of “strange barriers” which “spring up and multiply” through the formal energy of the Gothic (20). Similarly, Derrida’s assertion that the crypt is “built by violence” (xv) – and that to penetrate it we must use a certain “break-in technique” (xv) which “consists of locating the crack or the lock, choosing the angle of a partition, and forcing entry” (xv) – recalls Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s remarks regarding the “extremes of magic or violence” (20) necessary to breach the strange barriers erected in the Gothic. Sedgwick’s assertions point to the way that the structuring principle of the Gothic consistently evokes the fantasy of incorporation – including the
encryption of libidinal forces. Derrida’s comments regarding the psychic apparatus of incorporation suggest that he has found that fantasy efficacious in terms of deconstructive autobiography. When coupled with Sedgwick’s comments regarding the structuring principle of the Gothic – predicated upon the production of “strange barriers” which “spring up and multiply” – Derrida’s remarks about the crypt suggest the similarities or avenues of correspondence that exist between that principle and the fantasy of incorporation as proposed by Abraham and Torok. It is this correspondence that calls attention to Jacques Derrida’s practice of writing with ghosts that I call cryptomimesis.

What stands out in Derrida’s work is the multiple functioning of the crypt. Firstly, Derrida’s designation of “crypt” as a name (which is not to be confused with any bearer) leads us into thinking of that which signs, or takes place, posthumously. But in order to sign, the name “crypt” needs an equally uncanny structure: the ear of the other. The crypt also designates a place, “a very specific and peculiar place” according to Derrida, who draws our attention to the crypt’s structural properties when he says that the crypt houses “the ghost that comes haunting out of the Unconscious of the other” and that “the crypt from which the ghost comes back belongs to someone else” (“Fors” 119). One could call this return the work of mourning.

Derrida’s concerns with the crypt suggest that the phantom figures as the effect of what, although it is barred from consciousness, returns to “haunt.” Esther Rashkin draws attention to this phenomenon in her discussion of the phantom which, she says, “can ‘peregrinate’ in several directions and inhabit strangers as well as family members” (10). Herein, the phantom is passed on through generations as a secret that is unsayable because it is silenced. Silence figures heavily in the transmission of the unsayable secret as Nicholas Rand suggests:

Whether it characterizes individuals, families, social groups, or entire nations, silence and its varied forms – the untold or unsayable secret, the feeling unfelt, the pain denied, the unsayable and concealed shame of families, the cover-up of political crimes, the collective disregard for painful historical realities – may disrupt our lives. (The Shell and the Kernel 21)

While these remarks draw attention to the phantom as the silent transmission of a secret, they also suggest a relationship among the phantom, haunting, and writing since each, in its own way, posits
The return of the dead enacts an inheritance—a "will," perhaps beyond the grave: a notion that also recalls Derrida’s remarks on writing and iterability beyond the death of the addressee. In other words, writing, textuality, the phantom, and haunting are not only interrelated; they are inseparable. To make this assertion is also to say that writing is phantom-driven and that we all have our ghosts, a thought that renders classical notions of subjectivity more enigmatic than ever. As Derrida puts it in *Specters of Marx*, “everyone reads, acts, writes with *his* or *her* ghosts, even when one goes after the ghosts of the other” (139).

To write with ghosts, however, is to effect a writing practice that admits the unheimlich—the uncanny effect of a certain spacing of which Derrida says, “it feels itself occupied, in the proper secret ... of its inside, by what is most strange, distant, threatening” (144–5). Such a writing would, by necessity, be cryptic because it stands on the border of divulging and hiding, remembering and forgetting, producing a curious fort/da tension that is, as Deleuze and Guattari say of writing that deals with the “secret,” always “becoming” (289). In effect, the crypt is a model and a method of producing concealment or what Heidegger calls aletheia. The crypt, therefore, is not to be thought of merely as a metaphor for the unconscious, “hidden, secret, underground, [or] latent” nor as a “literal meaning” ("Fors" xiii), but rather as a term referring to a writing practice that takes into account a secret, a tomb, a burial, and a return—aspects of what Derrida calls “metaphoricity itself.”

A writing that is always becoming (secret), then, would proceed hieroglyphically, as a rebus does, to acquire its own form. This “form,” therefore, would not be static but “most strange, distant [and] threatening” because it is ceaselessly reconstituted, changing, multiple, fluid, feminine, but without example! According to Deleuze and Guattari,

the more the secret is made into a structuring, organizing form, the thinner and more ubiquitous it becomes, the more its content becomes molecular, at the same time as its form dissolves. It really wasn’t much, as Jocasta says. The secret does not as a result disappear, but it does take on a more feminine status. What was behind ... Schreber’s paranoid secret all along, if not a becoming-feminine, a becoming woman? (289)

Derrida’s experimentation with the rebus technique—which, as Gregory Ulmer puts it, amounts to “the reduction of the phonetic
in favor of the ideographic element in writing” (Applied Grammatology 71) – has had the effect of raising the possibility that the secret or, better yet, secrecy, functions as the structural enigma which inaugurates the scene of writing. That “scene,” in Derrida’s terms, “mobilizes various forces, or if you prefer various agencies or ‘subjects,’ some of which demand the narrative of the other, seek to extort it from him, like a secret-less secret” (“Living On – Border Lines” 260). In this scene, writing comes before language. It produces differentiation – spacing – in an enigmatic way, the model of which might be understood in terms of dream production, wherein the twin processes of condensation and displacement function in secret to cross the phonetic with the ideographic. 30