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Nós somos os fantasmas de guerras que
fizemos os sem coragem.[1]
(João Miguel Fernandes Jorge, «9», Actus Tragicus, Lisboa, Presença, 1979, p. 24)

Whoever has been unfortunate enough to be captured by the algorithm and dragged to the recreative mire that is the /phil/sphere has certainly found themselves spending hours doom scrolling through memes about Max Stirner. «Max is known for the memes made about him», writes user cleverpand1 on the featured post of the r/fullegoism subreddit. The variations of these memes are endless, but revolve around two very simple ideas: milk (with the inheritance of his wife, Marie Dähnhard, Stirner is said to have opened a dairy, which quickly went bankrupt) and spook (Steven T. Byington's creative translation of *Der spuk*). Stirner seems fated to be caricatured. Note how his only known portrait is a sketch that Engels did by memory, almost forty years after his death. And when we find

[1] We are the ghosts of wars we
waged the ones without courage.

Saint Max, the perfidious villain of *The German Ideology*, we immediately imagine Marx kicking and screaming because someone else got to ghosts before him. Derrida also contributed to that end, nicknaming him «ghost-hunter» in his *Spectres de Marx*[2]. Today, Stirner wanders the digital graveyard faceless, bodiless, fleshless, tied to concepts, recognized for ideas. Unfortunate fate that of Stirner: he was turned into his own ghost.

The process of Stirner's spectralization was, however, initiated by himself: «Max Stirner», an occasional participant in the gatherings of the «Young Hegelians», is the pseudonym of Johann Caspar Schmidt (his middle name also immediately referring to other ghosts, perhaps of the friendlier kind). Stirner was the author of a curious book bearing the title *The Unique and Its Property*, the first edition of which appeared in print in 1844. As opposed to what some would expect to find in it, *The Unique* is not a theoretical book, a new incursion into german idealism, a phenomenological analysis, but something particularly different. *The Unique* is a macabre theatre whose performers are ghosts so real as to be named, who roam freely and with impunity, reclaiming for themselves the role of producing the world. The task of Stirner is, therefore, exactly the opposite: to reveal the spectral dimension in the constitution of the real, to exorcize ghosts, and, while doing so, to leave no trace, to destroy the whole, to destroy everything. After all, Stirner, quoting Goethe, starts off *The Unique* proclaiming his cause as «the cause of nothing».[3]

One ought not to think, however, about *The Unique* as a melancholic elegy. The tone that runs through this hall of lost souls is scornful, provocative, mocking, as Wolfi Landstreicher admits in the introduction he prepared for his translation of *The Unique*.[4] Stirner doesn't banish the ghosts through a boring

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, Paris, Galillée, 1993, p. 223.

[3] Max Stirner, The Unique and Its Property, trad. Wolfi Landstreicher, Baltimore, Underworld Amusements, 2017, p. 25.

[4] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

as a return of life to flesh through the production of another way of being.

Before the occupation of philosophy's discursive space by transcendental subjects, synthetic units of aperception, absolute spirits, self-consciousnesses, general wills, good wills, by this ultimate specter of specters, Stirner replies with a true carnival. And the feast of flesh that we find in *The Unique* has no place for ghosts, but for real, too real, subjects. These are the extravagant vagabonds, the lazy ones, the loafers, the criminals, the riffraff, who escape the haunting of the State, in a double sense: they have no *status*, no stability. Their way of life is scandalous, not only because they subvert the ghostly charm of morality; it is so mainly because it reveals a life that enjoys: a life that bears fruit, but also a life that mocks the true man of humanism. Does it surprise anyone that Foucault found in Stirner an exemplary expression, or at least a simple attempt, of reconstituting a new way of life, a hauntless existence, a new «aesthetics of self»[12]?

«Man, your head is haunted; you have bats in your belfry!», warns Stirner (p. 61). But how can the subject release itself from these specters that insist in tormenting it? By losing the fear of ghosts. By losing the fear of the State, but also the fear of oneself. What Stirner seems to insinuate continually, right when he quotes Schiller's *The Death of Wallenstein*, is that courage is the condition of possibility for a true life, which is an agonistic life, ungovernable, without tutelage, without ghosts. To reclaim life courageously from the ones «without courage», even if that's the most egoist thing to do.

[12] Michel Foucault, *L'Herméneutique du Sujet. Cours au Collège de France (1981-1982)*, Paris, Gallimard & Éditions du Seuil, p. 241.

lationships between subjects, that takes over their bodies, that imposes a filiality, that, in the end, takes their unicity. The State, which often features in *The Unique* defined as *status*, in fact stagnates, normalizes[8], paralyzes and erases man. Against the carnival of life, the State's ghost mortifies.

Man created his own undertaker. Through the invention of the State and its fixation as idea, man ended up leading his own funeral procession. A man who is no longer what he is, or that is, after all, a mere ghost, that self-mutilated and who only has his own mourning left to do. The State is the spirit of death that hides in the shadow of man, that leaves him in a trance, that frightens and torments him. But there's still life to be lived. Bragança de Miranda refers precisely that question as one of the central themes of the stirnerian spectrography: «Não está em causa a filosofia, nem a desconstrução das suas ilusões, mas os modos de usar a vida»[9]. And Stirner's clash with ghosts, in this version of a vitalist anarchism, is nothing more than an exercise of recovery of a life which is only so if it can be enjoyed[10]: «Portanto, o que nós buscamos é o *gozo* da vida»[11] (p. 251). It's true that Derrida might not be completely wrong when he suggests that in *The Unique* we may find some glimples of a *hantologie*, that is, of a parodic description of the way by which ghosts end up haunting the political present. But Stirner's gesture is still different: *The Unique* may be read, also,

[8] Beatriz de Almeida Rodrigues deals with this topic in «Crime e fruição. O egoísmo de Max Stirner como discurso de resistência contra a dominação?».

[9] José A. Bragança de Miranda, «Stirner, o passageiro clandestino da história» in Max Stirner, *O Único e a Sua Propriedade*, trad. João Barrento, Lisboa, Antígona, 2004, p. 305. [It's not a matter of philosophy, nor of the deconstruction of its illusions, but of ways to use life.]

[10] I refer again to the study by Beatriz de Almeida Rodrigues about Stirner, which has precisely the title of «Crime e fruição» [Crime and fruition].

[11] [Therefore, what we seek is the *enjoyment* of life]

récit: he mocks them, forces them to retreat and to turn back into the mirror. More than a theoretician of egoism, the wise architect of anarchist individualism[5], the exalted critic, Stirner is simply the last buffoon, the wise guy, as Landstreicher accurately calls him. *The Unique* may effectively be read as a long and harsh diatribe against the long catalogue of ghosts, but, at the outset, there is a target clearly defined by Stirner. This ghost is, to a certain degree, the condition of possibility of every other ghost, it is it that gives them form and substance, it is it that names them. That ghost, who has summoned the mission of writing and of haunting the real, and who is ridiculed by Stirner throughout the whole of *The Unique*, is philosophical discourse.

Landstreicher's intuition, that philosophy is the shadow that hovers over *The Unique* and against which Stirner projects himself, reveals itself to be correct when we look at the very structure of the book, parodying hegelian dialectics as much as it does the philosophy of history in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, but also the organization of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. *The Unique* proudly presents itself as a book against philosophy, a collection of jokes about philosophy and its own enunciative body, with its wills, its essences, its natures and its things-in-themselves. One ought to be reminded that the ghostly world of noumena, which for Kant was still inaccessible because it was beyond the self-imposed limits of reason, had reappeared with Hegel as an intelligible territory. And what Stirner reads in his contemporaries, in a somewhat hegelian kinship, is nothing more than an invasion of the phenomenal world by ghosts, which the philosophical discourse would certify not only as the real's fundamental residue, but also as the modern *parrhesiasts*. «To know the truth, listen to specters, they are the essence of the world».

[5] This is the angle that Alfredo M. Bonanno explores in *Teoria dell'individuo. Stirner e il pensiero selvaggio* (Edizioni Anarchismo, 1999).

The ghostly philosophical discourse ended up creating an embodied specter, a sensible shadow, a body that is pure spirit, a true illusion. An autopoietic system: the ghost-as-discourse produces a ghost-as-producer-of-world, that Stirner quickly qualifies as absurd and monstrous. Behold, then, a deformed and monstrous ghost: man.

This man, who someone already has labelled as a very recent invention, is not the object of just about any genealogy in *The Unique*, as it might seem at first glance. Nor is it, much less, about rewriting the *Bildungsroman* of the spirit that traverses history to triumphantly gain self-awareness as absolute. That, we know, was Hegel's project and that is, also, what Stirner shall mock, all the while stealing flesh from transcendence and matter from spirit, which, since Schelling, was in the hands of that ghost. The movement is still against the grain of all this: in *The Unique* Stirner proposes to simply look at the constitution of man as a ghost that haunts himself and who gives himself to the world in permanent affliction. The ghost is the dismissed-man, who fears himself, who is his own wolf[6], who self-represses through the invention of laws to submit himself to. For Stirner, philosophical discourse took care of creating spectral *dispositifs* that, in intensely pedagogical fashion, taught man to listen to his silent essence and to obey to phantasmic constituents: a whole inventory of wills, moral and natural laws, from Rousseau to Proudhon, that impose on the frightened man that his salvation is dependent on the act of chaining down the ghost hidden within himself.

The world invented by this man who speaks the language of philosophers can only be a realm of terror. But see how this man – who is, simultaneously, the king of fear and the fearful king – plays a creative role. After all, as Stirner reads in

[6] In «Stirner, o passageiro clandestino da história», written by Bragança de Miranda as a form of afterword to Barrento's portuguese translation edited by Antígona, it's underlined with great wit that Stirner's diagnostic is mercilessly armed by Hobbes.

Feuerbach, this man, in his productive hubris, embodies the last specter, the absolute spirit, the ghosts of transcendence: a creative God, a vengeful God. Man as divine ghost sacralizes himself and the specters that he himself created to inhabit his stage of horror. «A ghost in every corner!», bellows Stirner (p. 61) And these ghosts sing to man a sweet melopoeia, promise to saving him from his weeping, whisper promises of peace. Law, matrimony, common good, order, fatherland, justice, these are only some of the specters listed by Stirner to end fear and to haunt dread. But all these little ghosts pale before the highest haunting produced by man himself, which rids him of fear precisely because it frightens him. It's a specter in the form of a monster, the ghost that escaped transcendence to bury itself in immanence, it's the coward and fearful man's most essential and authentic desire. It's the State.

The State's spectral apparition is not, therefore, about an absolute exteriority to man. It's not a ghost that's alien to him, but an immense product of his fearful will. It is, if you like, the product of a voluntary servitude, as that which Saul Newman reads in *The Unique*.[7] But, beyond that more epidermic layer, the State's spectrality is manifest specifically in its total transparency: the State is truly a ghost because you cannot touch it, it hovers invisibly as a shadow above its creator. Thus, the State is not reducible to a physical cluster of institutions or ideological apparatuses, as some structuralists would say more than a century after the publishing of *The Unique*. On the contrary, and anticipating what Gustav Landauer would say about the State some decades later, Stirner defines it as «a web and network of dependence and devotion [...], a sticking together, in which those ordered together acquiesce to each other, or in short, depend on each other: it is the *order* of this *dependence*.» (p. 234) In a nutshell, the State is the spirit that torments the re-

[7] Saul Newman, «Stirner's Ethics of Voluntary Inservitude», in Saul Newman (ed.), *Max Stirner*, Londres, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 189-209.