

Phantasms

For the only P

Abstract:

Taking into consideration the philosophical and psychoanalytic history of the term phantasm, Derrida in his late work supplies deconstruction with a novel definition of the «phantasm». Thinking the phantasm, Derrida argues, requires «a new logic» beyond *logos*. This paper attends especially to late use of the term phantasm in Derrida's work – the phantasm of «living death» and the phantasm of «almightiness» – to tap into resources unexplored by the tradition and to demonstrate that the phantasm need not necessarily be attached to sovereignty or have a negative valence.

Keywords: Blanchot, Deconstruction, Derrida, Event, Phantasm

Je ne sais pas si cet usage du mot *fantasme* est congru ou compatible avec aucun concept philosophique du *fantasma*, de la fantaisie ou de l'imagination fantastique, non plus qu'avec un concept psychanalytique du fantasme, à supposer ce qui je ne crois pas, qu'il y en ait, qu'il n'y en ait qu'un, et qui soit clair, univoque, localisable BSII, p. 218¹.

«Phantasm-word to be determined»

If the phantasm is not one, if it has many significations throughout different periods of Derrida's writing (some, at times, seemingly contradictory) which have not so far been fully taken account of, we will have to resist a unitary definition of the phantasm and delve into how Derrida has used this term throughout his writings. By taking a schematic look at the usage of the term «phantasm» throughout Derrida's corpus and by focusing on *Glas* and two late texts – *Geneses*, *Genealogies*, *Genres*, and *Genius*, and *Maurice Blanchot est mort*, where the expression «*the phantasm of the event*» (as it graphically appears, in italics with «of» in bold or underlined), drawn in part from a reading of Blanchot, occurs – I will demonstrate that Derrida, who was dissatisfied with all the existing definitions of the phantasm, in his last works put forward an *other* notion of the phantasm. In the late texts mentioned above and others, urging us «to think the phantasm [*penser le fantasme*]»² but beyond *logos* and arguing that it needs to be thought differently, Derrida also suggested a «new logic [*nouvelle logique*] of the phantasm»³.

Thinking the phantasm with the event, we are compelled to ask: What does it mean for something to happen or to take place and how does it take place? Derrida puts into question not only the happening or taking place of the event, but also at the same time probes the status of the phantasm – for, the phantasm shares with the event a certain mode of appearing. According to Derrida, appearing and appearance are, in comparison with the Platonic tradition of philosophy, indissociable and inextricable from the

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¹ It is important to point out that Derrida uses both *fantasme* and *phantasme* without making any distinctions. What is at issue is how they are to be interpreted. I have greatly benefited from the new translation of *Glas*, by Geoffrey Bennington and David Wills, published in English as *Clang* (2021).

² I have modified the translations throughout. Par, p. 293.

³ Reference to «la logique du fantasme» in Par, pp. 292, 616 and to «a new logic of the phantasm and of the event» H.C., p. 73 and BSII, pp. 262-263.

phantasm. The decisive clause or expression «*the phantasm of the event*», with its various permutations of meaning, affects the description and conceptualization of both terms as well as having implications for their status⁴. What is queried is «the event of the phantasm», as well as «the phantasm of the event». This rethinking of the status of the phantasm also calls into question the metaphysical distinctions between truth/untruth, real/unreal and a whole host of other interrelated concepts. Furthermore, thinking the event will lead to a different thinking of «reality», of what is real, and of virtuality. By thinking a «phantasmatic virtuality» Derrida shows that «reality» is made possible by (what, in different contexts, he calls) spectrality, the fantastic, the fable, revenance, and spectral virtuality, and so on.

Finally, I will briefly examine the significant role and use of the term *fantasme* – reintroduced to French psychoanalytic language by the translations of Freud to render *Phantasie* – to see in what way Derrida's employment of this term is in stark contrast with its use in psychoanalysis.

The tradition has bestowed on us several definitions of the word phantasm by which we normally understand a product of fantasy, a delusive appearance or illusion, a figment of the imagination, or a mental representation of a real object. Derrida's notion of the phantasm does not obey any of the already existing definitions. What interests him is not necessarily the «concept» of the phantasm, already over-laden by various metaphysical values, or its ontological status, but the word itself. As early as *Glas* in 1974 we discover that Derrida is not satisfied with the common definitions of phantasm⁵. In an interview, *Between Brackets I* (1976), conducted shortly after the publication of *Glas* he reveals his discontent by wondering «if one can still be satisfied here with the common definitions of phantasm [*phantasme*], either in the increasingly common and confused sense in which they are used»⁶. By tracing the occurrence of the term phantasm throughout Derrida's writings one can not only get a better sense of how it is being used but also one can put into perspective its usage in *Glas* (the purported test-case for the interpretation of this term)⁷.

In a remarkable passage – with far-reaching consequences for a reading of Derrida and for a reading of Derrida on Hegel – in the “a” column toward the end of *Glas*, which we will closely follow (with my intercalations placed inside curly brackets), Derrida writes of the topic of sexual difference *as opposition*: «And if it {*sexual difference as opposition*} sublates [*relève*] difference, opposition, then conceptuality itself is homosexual. It begins to be so when sexual differences [*les différences*] (in the plural) are erased and determined as difference [*la différence*] (in the singular)» (GL, p. 249a).

Derrida claims that the determination of sexual difference as opposition has not only a crucial and irreducible relation to the Immaculate Conception but also to the speculative dialectic.

«This determination of sexual difference as opposition, engaged in the process of opposition», of objectivity, and of representation, entertains «an essential historical and systematic relation with the Immaculate Conception [*Immaculée Conception*]: if not with the dogma concerning the birth of Mary, at least with its premise or its conclusion – the virginity of the mother». {The mother has no need for another}. Derrida contends that this is not only «indispensable to Hegel's argumentation», but also to the speculative dialectic

⁴ The phrase is in italics and «de» is in bold.

⁵ «Si l'on disposait d'une bonne définition du phantasme, peut-être pourrait-on dire si cette écriture est d'un phantasme. En langue courante, on dirait un rêve» (GL, p. 71b). And again referring to «une pensée de la *mimesis*: sans imitation» he writes of «Logique d'une inquiétante stricture, ses simulacres et ses phantasmes défont les termes de toute analyse» (GL, p. 169bi).

⁶ Po, p. 30.

⁷ Interestingly most references to phantasm in *Glas* are in the Genet column, e.g., GL, p. 71b and GL, p. 222a.

and to absolute idealism. «It rules over», he maintains, «Sa's [Absolute Knowing, *Savoir absolu*] approach» (GL, p. 250a).

«As soon as difference is determined as opposition, one can no longer avoid the phantasm (word to be determined) of the IC [Immaculate Conception]: that is to say, a phantasm of infinite mastery over the two sides of the oppositional relation. {*The current concept of the phantasm – illusion, fantasy, or false appearance – is determined by opposition, which keeps the two sides as autonomous and independent of one another*}. The virgin-mother does without the actual father both in order to come [jouir] and in order to conceive. The father in himself, the real author, the subject of the conception, and even of the annunciation, passes over the woman, passes over that which he only passes [de cela en quoi] without touching her». {*Woman has been made unnecessary*}.

«All oppositions that are linked around the latter [autour de celle-là] {around difference as opposition} (active/passive, reason/heart, beyond/here-below, and so on) have for cause and effect the immaculate maintenance of each of the terms, their independence, and consequently their absolute mastery» (GL, p. 250a).

Derrida then asks: «Can the current concept of “phantasm” {delusive appearance}, dominate this [philosophical] discourse in a relevant way»? (GL, p. 250a). «In fact it is», Derrida claims, «determined by» and «starts from» that discourse. «For example, the phantasmatic would be the effect of mastery produced by the determination of difference as opposition (and up to the value of mastery itself), of sexual difference as sexual opposition in such a desire of return to self in which each term would secure itself the domination and absolute autonomy in the IC. [...] The failure [l'échec] of such a desire for a return to self, on the circle of double virginity {of Mary and Jesus}, would be the limit of the phantasm, it determines the phantasm as such, at the end of the phenomenology of spirit {a discourse of appearance, of phenomena}. The phantasm is the phenomenon» {*It is an appearance, not a false appearance*} (GL, p. 250a).

If the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a description, a genetic account, of the experience, movement, shapes, and configurations that consciousness undergoes, if any given «form of consciousness» turns out to be indeterminate, if the *Phenomenology* is the study of appearances [Erscheinungen] of spirit, then this is how Derrida can say that the phenomenon is an appearance, which turns out to be illusory. It is in this sense that the phantasm is a phenomenon.

What is the phantasm measured against? In what way, before what, has the phantasm of the IC failed? If it is in the face of «reality», Derrida finds «this notion «confusedly empirical [empirique]» (GL, p. 251a). «Who would dare to say that the phantasm of the IC has not succeeded»? Two thousand years of European history – «the imperialism and colonialisms and neocolonialisms of the IC» – would suggest otherwise (GL, p. 251a).

If the IC were to be determined as phantasm, would we say that the IC is «not true? [...] that it is only a myth»? That would be truly puerile. The greater logic «impeccably» demonstrates that «not only is this myth true [...] but that gives the measure of truth itself», Derrida writes, «the revelation of truth, the truth of truth». This will then lead Derrida to surmise that «the (absolute) phantasm of IC as (absolute) phantasm is the (absolute) truth. Truth is the phantasm itself». The IC «would be the general equivalence of the truth and the phantasm. Homosexual enanthiosis [enantiose homosexuelle]» (GL, p. 251a)⁸. {The opposition of two that are the same}.

⁸ For a more detailed elaboration, see the extended version of this article that considers the use of the phantasm and its variants in the tragedies, Plato, and Aristotle. Noun, in French *enantiose*, from the Greek *enantios*, opposite. *Dictionnaire de Littré* (1880) provides a definition of *enantiose* as a philosophical term regarding two oppositions. For the Pythagoreans, each of a set of 10 oppositions was the source of everything.

At this juncture in *Glas* Derrida poses several penetrating questions regarding the relation between Absolute Knowing and the phantasm: «Does *Sa* not permit [...] to see the phantasm in its truth [*en sa vérité*]? Is not *Sa* the resolution of absolute difference, the reconciliation of the in-itself and the for-itself [...] the very [*même du*] *Sa* of the phantasm?» (GL, p. 251a).

Derrida responds in the affirmative, and in a series of compact statements (that require an explication, which space limitations do not permit here) simply and unjustly summarized: «*Sa* is the final accomplishment of the phantasm [...]. The Absolute phantasm: *Sa*. [...] the phantasm, the truth of truth is still only [*n'est encore que*] phantasmatic».

«(Absolute) Knowledge, truth (of the) phantasm (of) philosophy – absolute religion, this proposition draws no limit, is the infinite proposition of hetero-tautological speculative dialectic. [...] What can there be outside an absolute phantasm? [...] Why and how could one desire to get out of it [*en sortir*]?» (GL, p. 252a).

From the *Glas* passages above we can draw several conclusions: the phantasm is a philosophical concept through and through, but it need not be interpreted metaphysically; the contemporary notion of «reality» is insufficient for the phantasm to be judged against; and if difference were not to be judged as opposition, it would free up a notion of the phantasm hitherto unexplored.

We get a further elucidation of Derrida's view of the phantasm in an early interview *Between Brackets I*, published in two parts in *Digraphe* 8 (1976): the first interview conducted in September 1975 and the second at the end of October and published in the next issue⁹. In the interview where Derrida wonders whether one could be satisfied with the customary definitions of phantasm, he states that he finds the term or concept «even according to the psychoanalytic definitions [...] anything but clear and unambiguous»¹⁰. For him «a possible entry» into the question of phantasm would be «at the point where philosophical discourse is not only governed by the phantasmatic [*phantasmatique*] (originary or derived)» but where «one can no longer be assured of possessing a philosophical concept of the phantasm», – as, philosophy is a knowledge that would «control what is at issue in this word»¹¹. He refers to his own analysis in *Glas* at the very point where the phantasm eludes philosophical grasp, where it is no longer a term in a conceptual opposition that arises from philosophy. (What Derrida is referring to as the philosophical concept of the phantasm is, of course, a semblance or an appearance.) In *Glas*, as we have seen above, Derrida wonders what would happen if the absolute phantasm were coextensive with absolute knowledge? «It should be possible to demonstrate» philosophically, claims Derrida in *Between Brackets I*, that «the philosophic is the phantasmatic»¹².

An invocation of the phantasm is accompanied by a hint at a relation with «reality» in *Telepathy*, a text written at the same time as the writing of *Post Card* but published separately in a journal in 1981 as fragments of letters left off that book¹³. In a passage following a treatment of the subject of «telepathic dreams», Derrida notes that he himself has often experienced the presentiment of distant events. These premonitory signs are not themselves realized. He notes that he is attempting to render *Eintreffen*, which he prefers to translate as «to happen [*arriver*]», «to be 'accomplished' [*s'accomplir*]», {etc., without referring to reality [*réalité*], especially (but not only) to that reality which we so easily assimilate to external-reality»¹⁴. Derrida here goes on to separate an event from

⁹ Derrida (1976), pp. 97-114. *Entre crochets: Entretien avec Jacques Derrida, première partie, Digraphe* 8; collected in Po, pp. 13-36.

¹⁰ Po, p. 30.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Derrida (1981), pp. 5-41. *Télépathie, Furor* 2, pp. 5-41; collected in *Psy2*: pp. 237-270.

¹⁴ *Psy2*, p. 258

reality since «something can happen without for all that being realized»¹⁵. In other words, it is quite possible for an event to «take place [*avoir lieu*] which is not real [*réel*]»¹⁶. He concedes that his customary distinction between internal and external reality may not be sufficient here. His conception of the event «signals toward some event [*de l'événement*] that no idea of “reality” helps us think»¹⁷.

The phantasm's relation to «reality» is raised again a few years later in *No Apocalypse, Not Now* (1984), an article that hypothesizes the thought of a «nonlocalizable nuclear war» that has not occurred¹⁸. Derrida comments that the hypothesis of a nuclear war as a premise or «as a phantasm [*fantasme*] conditions every discourse and all strategies». Nuclear war has no precedent because it has never occurred – it is a «non-event»¹⁹. Some might call it «a fable», «a pure invention», in the sense, Derrida says, in which the series «a myth, image, fiction, utopia, rhetorical figure, or phantasm are inventions»²⁰. Or, it is «*fabulously textual*»²¹ or a «fabulous speculation»²². Speculations about a nuclear war allow Derrida to assert that «reality [*réalité*]» «is constructed by the fable on the basis of an event that has never happened (except phantasmatically, [*sinon en fantasme*], and that's not nothing)»²³. Yet nuclear war, he concedes, «even if it remains a phantasmatic projection» is «the possibility of an irreversible destruction»²⁴.

At a conference with Pierre-Jean Labarrière, the proceedings of which, entitled *Altérités*, were published in March 1986, Derrida is questioned about his use of the word «Necessity». He had previously employed it in the *Post Card* with a capital letter as if it were a proper name, which he says is a manner of marking that necessity is always necessity of some singular other; it is a limit marked by the deployment of desire or of reappropriation. I write, he says, to recall this necessity. This limit is also what gives birth to desire²⁵. Derrida remarks that it is by constantly referring to this Necessity that he tries «to drive out [*débusquer*] from philosophical texts, despite all the differences, the reappearance of a logic of the phantasm [*logique du fantasme*], of a logic of desire that forgets a necessity, which does not take account of necessity – which is also a difference»²⁶. In place of Necessity some could put «*réel*», but Derrida finds «real» marred by too many marks that bother him, unless «real» is rethought. He suggests this rethinking: «Necessity is something like the real, if the real is this kind of impossibility that reminds us that simple presence, the simple living voice, and simple intuition, etc. are inaccessible; but this inaccessibility is the chance of desire»²⁷.

In *Specters of Marx* (1993) it is Derrida's intention to distinguish the specter from all the notions in the history of philosophy that it has some similarity with, for example, the icon, the idol, the image, «the Platonic *phantasma*», and «the simple simulacrum of something in general» to all of which it is nevertheless very close and with which it shares some traits²⁸. For Derrida, the Platonic tradition of philosophy displays «the constancy of an immense tradition» and a «philosophical *patrimony*»²⁹. He provides his

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 257.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 258.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 402.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 401.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 402.

²¹ Ivi, p. 401.

²² Ivi, p. 402.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 408.

²⁵ Alt, p. 92. Here I make my *mea culpa* for failure to include dozens upon dozens of references to “desire” in Derrida's writings in my article, Saghafi (2006), pp. 139-160.

²⁶ Alt, p. 93.

²⁷ Ivi, pp. 92-93. Of course, there are references to Necessity in the Freudian text.

²⁸ SM, p. 27.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 235.

most comprehensive view of terms and concepts, which have been given secondary status by philosophy throughout its history, toward the end of *Specters of Marx*. The philosophical tradition associates

the image with specter, and idol with phantasm, with the *phantasma* in its phantomatic or errant dimension as living-dead. The *phantasmata* which the *Phaedo* (81d) or the *Timaeus* (71a), do not separate from the *eidola*, are figures of dead souls, they are the souls of the dead: when they are not hanging around funeral monuments and sepulchers, they are haunting the souls of certain living persons, day and night. The survival and the return of the living dead belong to the essence of the idol. The idol appears or lets itself be determined only against the background of death³⁰.

In the same passage, Derrida refashions the specter as a «question of life or death, the question of life-death, before being a question of Being, of essence, or of existence». It would then be, he goes on further, an extension of life-death opening «onto a dimension of irreducible *sur-vival* or *sur-viving* [survivance]»³¹. It is precisely the possibility of this «spectral survival» that has enabled «the psychology of the imagination or a psychoanalysis of the imaginary» to be set up in the history of thought³².

The 1990s ushers in the new conception of virtuality that, in *Echographies of Television* (1996), Derrida states «cannot be opposed to real actuality [*actualité réelle*]»³³. This notion of virtuality is introduced to confront prevalent notions of «reality», not only in daily life but particularly as it is used in the media, for example as in «live» TV. This virtuality is such that it «makes its mark, imprints itself on the very [*s'imprime à même*] structure of the event»³⁴, but «like death, we do not see it coming»³⁵. In the conversations that make up the book, Derrida describes the event as a name for «that which, in what happens» cannot be reduced, denied, or be «subsumed under any other concept»³⁶. He adds that it is also «another name for experience itself which is always experience of the other»³⁷. With echoes of an expression that he uses in *Aporias* (from earlier in the same year), Derrida notes, «it is what we await without expecting [*attend sans attendre*]»³⁸.

Derrida's *Demeure* (1998) is a micrological reading of Blanchot's text *The Instant of My Death*, in which a narrator recounts the events that have taken place at a Château during WWII. There, the narrator, who could be Blanchot, describes what he calls the «instant of death without death»³⁹. In his text that is far from a simple commentary, Derrida explores the status of the event that Blanchot's text narrates. Aside from posing whether the event that Blanchot describes ever happened, the text also broaches the taking place of the event in general. Derrida observes that «the event described», the event referred to, «will have taken place» even in the hypothetical case of a lie, it will have taken place [...] through a phantasmaticity, thus according to a spectrality [...] that is its very law»⁴⁰. This «spectral law both constitutes and structures the abiding [*demeurant*] reference in this narrative», functioning by exceeding «the opposition between the real and the unreal, actual and virtual, factual and fictional»⁴¹. Derrida describes the relation between so-called reality and what takes place in this manner: «[The death and

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ Ec, p. 14.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 119.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 19.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 119.

³⁹ De, p. 121.

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 123.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

demourance] that the narrative speaks about have taken place even if they did not take place in what is commonly called reality»⁴². «The “without” in the “X without X [*le “sans” du “X sans X”*], he elaborates, like this taking place without taking place, «signifies this spectral necessity [*nécessité spectrale*], which overflows the opposition between reality and fiction»⁴³. Certain conditions – the conditions of the phantasm – allow what does not arrive to arrive, what one believes does not arrive to «to succeed in arriving [*arriver à arriver*]»⁴⁴. It arrives with, «a virtuality that can no longer be opposed to actual factuality [*l’effectivité virtuelle*]»⁴⁵. Just as in *No Apocalypse Not Now* where it was said of the fable that the possibility of fiction has structured what is called «real» experience, here virtuality or virtual spectrality enables the possibility of true testimony or witnessing. This condition or «constituting structure» is common to both literature and non-literature, the border between literature and its others becoming undecidable⁴⁶.

After the death of Maurice Blanchot Derrida wrote a eulogy and an essay of appreciation entitled *Maurice Blanchot est mort*, which remains still untranslated in English. It appeared in two different publications, and portions of it were presented in Derrida’s seminar⁴⁷. In this essay, which quotes long passages from different Blanchot texts, Derrida turns to the relation between *logos* and the phantasm. What particularly interests me is when he turns to Blanchot’s essay on Kafka *The Language of Fiction*. Discussing fiction and the phantasm of «buried alive» invoked by both authors, Derrida highlights two phrases: «the phantom of the event» and «an event of the phantasm»⁴⁸.

Somewhat abruptly, in his essay Derrida begins discussing «the logic of the phantasm», declaring that, properly speaking, it is not a logic at all⁴⁹. If it is a logic, he clarifies, it is one that «resists *logos*, the *legein* of *logos*, a bit like eschato-logic is at once the thing of *logos* {*belongs to logos*} and what exceeds and comes after *logos*, the logic of *logos*, at the extreme [...] already outside speech, falling outside it in the posthumous that it rightly already breathes»⁵⁰. This logic of the phantasm – what Derrida will name in a later text the «new logic of the phantasm» – «resists, it defies and dislocates *logos* and logic in all its translations and all its figures, that it is of the *logos* as reason and as logic of non-contradiction and the excluded third, of the *yes* or *no*, of the *yes* and of the *no*, of the decidable *either/or*, that is of *logos* as recollection [*reçuil*] and the power of gathering [*rassemblement*]»⁵¹. Thus, he underscores again, «there is no *logic of the phantasm*, properly speaking»⁵². Derrida appeals to Freud, when he invokes his view that the phantasm «is found on the two sides of the limit between two opposed concepts, as what Blanchot dubs, especially in *Le pas au-delà*, the *neuten*»⁵³. He then reemphasizes that there is «thus no logic or *logos* of the phantasm, of the phantom or the spectral. Unless if, the *logos* itself is precisely the phantasm, the very element, the origin and the resource of the phantasm, the form and the formation of the phantasm, that is, the revenant»⁵⁴. To put it in another way, there is no logic of the phantasm as long as, except, and only in

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ De, p. 124.

⁴⁷ Par, pp. 595-623; Par, pp. 267-300, and *BSII*, Session 7, pp. 252-271.

⁴⁸ Reference to «fantasme de l’événement», in Par, p. 293, GGGG, p. 26, *BSII*, p. 263; to «un événement du fantasme» in Par, p. 617; reference to both «fantasme de l’événement» and «événement du fantasme» in GGGG, p. 58; but especially to «fantasme de l’événement», phantasm of the event (with *de* in bold in the first, underlined in the second) in Par, p. 617, Par, p. 293.

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 292.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 293.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, first emphasis mine.

the case that, the *logos* is the phantasm (Derrida had equated the phantasm and the philosophical *logos* as far back as *Glas*). Emphasizing that here he has thinking in mind, he states that to think is

a matter of thinking the *logos* beyond [KS] *logos*, of thinking the phantasm, of *phantasmata* [fantasmata], phantoms and revenants beyond [KS] *logos* to think the phantasm as what one believes one is able to oppose to, or rigorously distinguish from actual reality [*réalité effective*] of what arrives, thus undeniable actuality [*effectivité*] of the event, it is necessary to think something like a *phantasm of the event*⁵⁵.

Commenting on Freud's description of the scene of seduction whose very reality belongs to the phantasmatic, Derrida notes that «it doesn't necessarily follow that the phantasm itself has not been, as phantasm or as phantom, a real psychic event, with real and undeniable consequences»⁵⁶.

This leads Derrida to observe that it is thus necessary to think «this thing without thing» that would be «a phantasm of the event [*un fantasme de l'événement*], but also thereby an event of the phantasm, a phantom of the event and an event, a coming or occurrence [*survenue*] of the phantom»⁵⁷. Then referring to *Au moment voulu*⁵⁸ where Blanchot's text mentions «a terrible scene» which «no one could ever say that it had already taken place [*déjà eu lieu*],» Derrida quotes a long passage that in his text terminates with a scene in which a human being [*l'homme*] becomes the «phantom of the event»⁵⁹.

Flouting what has traditionally been understood by the word «logic», Derrida's «new logic of the phantasm» urges the reader to think *logos* beyond *logos* and the phantasm beyond *logos* such that neither term observes the laws and guidelines philosophically established for them. The consequences of appealing to Blanchot are that, as in many a Blanchot text, there can be no certainty that a particular event has ever «really» occurred. This can be called «the phantasm of the event». The «taking place» of the event on both sides of the «limit», would suggest that what has occurred is «the event of the phantasm».

Further taking up his account of the event, in *University without Condition* (2001), Derrida expresses his interest in an event that «would remain perhaps [...] to come»⁶⁰. Derrida's concern is with «this troubling thing [*la chose troublante*] we do when we say «as if [*comme si*]» and the connection this troubling thing, which looks like a simulacrum, might have with what interests him⁶¹. Surveying the status of the modern university, Derrida says that «a certain «as if» mark[s] the structure and the mode of being of all objects belonging to the academic field called the Humanities»⁶². Derrida's wish is «to attempt to link this 'as if' to the thinking of an event», namely to «the thinking of this thing that *perhaps* happens [*arrive*], that is supposed to *take place* [a lieu]»⁶³. Yet for an event to happen or take place it «must interrupt the order of the «as if» and that its place must be real, effective, concrete»⁶⁴. What happens, Derrida asks, perhaps foreseeing the changes that have occurred in educational institutions post-Covid, «when the place itself becomes virtual and freed from its territorial rootedness and becomes subject to the modality of an «as if»?»⁶⁵ What characterizes the event is that it «must surprise the

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, my emphasis.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ Blanchot (1951), p. 135.

⁵⁹ Par, p. 294. Blanchot (1951), p. 135. For another reference to this, Blanchot (1953), pp. 173-174.

⁶⁰ UsC, p. 32.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² Ivi, p. 30.

⁶³ Ivi, p. 32.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

constative» and must not any longer allow itself «to be commanded by the performative speech act of a subject»⁶⁶. (In fact, Derrida will also claim that a phantasmatic performative can produce an event). It is according to the verbal mode of the conditional that this «as if» is announced, declined»⁶⁷. Derrida also supplements the definitions of the event in *Voyous* (2002), adding that the event is «unconditioned in its very eventfulness», that it is «unforeseeable», and that «it must announce itself as impossible»⁶⁸.

The phantasm is named, alongside perception, memory, and hallucination in *H.C. pour la vie, c'est-à-dire ...* (2002), where *toute-puissance* is featured, as it is in *Genèses, généalogies, genres et le génie*⁶⁹. In a passage on dreams, magic, incantation and animism Derrida brings up the phantasm, specifically the phantasm of almightiness, the relation between «the phantasm and the event, and especially what *happens or arrives* with the phantasm»⁷⁰. For what is at stake, says Derrida, is «a new logic of the phantasm and of the event, which, inseparable from a poetics of the event, may take into account an unheard-of performative might [*puissance*]»⁷¹. Any phantasmatic omnipotence of the performative draws from this «might»⁷².

Derrida describes the inextricable relation between *phainesthai* and *phantasma* thus: Each time it is a matter of an event of language that «binds and unbinds *phainesthai* insofar as it is indissociable from the *phantasma*, that is to say, both from the dream and the spectral phantom, of *revenance*, which *phantasma* also means»⁷³. One must here analyze the phantasm as much as produce the event, in the same twofold gesture. Having Freud in mind, Derrida reminds the reader that, like the indissociability of *phainesthai* and *phantasma*, «the distinction between the phantasm and so-called actual or external reality does not yet take place»⁷⁴.

What is the relationship between the taking place of the event and «reality»? The question of reality is broached once again in a lecture given at Bibliothèque Nationale de France in honor of Hélène Cixous and published as *Genèses, généalogies, genres et le génie* (2003)⁷⁵. There Derrida credits Cixous for having bestowed upon literature «an other-almightiness [*Tout-puissance-autre*]» (the first letter, like many other words intentionally capitalized)⁷⁶. Setting his sights on the word «reality» and the phrase «in reality» in Cixous's writing, he finds it noteworthy that it is in a work of fiction (*Manhattan*) that Cixous tells us about an event that has occurred «in reality [*en réalité*]»⁷⁷. Even though reality is marked by italics in Cixous's text, Derrida comments, «it remains impossible to decide whether this “in reality [*en réalité*]” is [...] reference to what in fact happened, to what really [*vraiment*] took place in this place, *in reality* [*en réalité*]»⁷⁸. It is thus in literature that italics «suspend the *reality* [*réalité*] of what is said to have taken place *in reality* [*en réalité*]»⁷⁹.

A reference to «phantasm of the event» occurs when Derrida explains that «it is this impossibility, in which the reader finds herself, of choosing between the fictive event, the invented event, the dreamt event, the fantasized event [*l'événement fantasmé*], including

⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 73.

⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 76.

⁶⁸ V, pp. 197-198.

⁶⁹ H.C., p. 18.

⁷⁰ Ivi, p. 73.

⁷¹ Ivi, p. 73.

⁷² Ivi, p. 96.

⁷³ Ivi, p. 95.

⁷⁴ Ivi, p. 99.

⁷⁵ Derrida recalls that Cixous defines Gregor as «personage réellement fabuleux» GGGG, p. 25.

⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 20.

⁷⁷ Ivi, p. 24.

⁷⁸ Ivi, p. 25.

⁷⁹ Ivi, p. 27.

the phantasm of the event»⁸⁰. He calls this impossibility «an example of undecidability»⁸¹, making «us wonder: What is reality? What is an event?»⁸². This undecidable limit «deprives you of the power and the right to divide between reality and fiction, between fiction that is always a real event, as the phantasm is also, and the so-called reality that can always only be a hyperbole of fiction»⁸³.

Given that Cixous reserves for Literature an «other-almightiness [*Toute-puissance-autre*]», [translated as «Omnipotence-other»], Derrida will go on to specify how he interprets the attribute «*autre*» in that expression⁸⁴.

This power [*puissance*] proper to literature consists of giving you (it's a gift, great, and generous), giving you to read everything while [...] denying you the power [*pouvoir*] and the right to decide, to divide [*trancher*] between reality and fiction, testimony and invention, reality [*effectivité*] and phantasm, the phantasm of the event and the event of the phantasm [*le fantasme de l'événement et l'événement du fantasme*]⁸⁵.

This power «holds you under its law, gives you power [*pouvoir*] and takes it away from you», it «gives you the ability [*pouvoir*] and the right to read, cutting you off [*en vous sevrant*] from all sovereignty»⁸⁶. Derrida notes that rather than sovereignty, a power emanating from an *ipse*, this is «a power [*puissance*] of heteronomy». Not given to us in an autonomous fashion, «it delivers us over [*nous livre*] to the experience of the wholly-other as might of the wholly-other [*puissance du tout-autre*] or other-Almightiness»⁸⁷.

In his last seminar and the first to be published, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 2* (2002-2003), Derrida remarks that during an analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* and Heidegger's 1929/30 lecture course the word «phantasm», which he differentiates from the philosophical and psychoanalytic usages of the term, «*imposed itself on him*». Calling it «the contradictory», «the inconceivable», «the unthinkable», and «the impossible», this is why, he admits, he has taken recourse in the word phantasm, to configure what he has called «living death»⁸⁸. It is worth noting that both this phantasm and the phantasm of almightiness do not conform to the criteria for the relation between the phantasm and sovereignty set by other commentators. This phantasm of living death that Derrida calls a certain «as if», is «“as if” something could *happen* to the dead one»⁸⁹. We allow ourselves to be affected by this phantasm that is «more powerful ... than ... reality»⁹⁰, to be affected «by the possibility of the impossible»⁹¹. This phantasm, which Derrida finds «terrifying and literally intolerable» [is] «this being-affected *of* the dead one and *by* the dead one»⁹². Derrida also recalls that Freud situated the undecidable phantasm between the two systems of consciousness and the unconscious.

Having examined and evaluated various references to the phantasm in Derrida's writing, several observations can be made regarding his use of this term: In his writings concerning the phantasm, Derrida uses the spellings *fantasme* and *phantasme* interchangeably and without making a distinction between them. Sometimes he even uses «phantasm» and «phantom» comparably when referring to terms associated with spectrality (*BSII* S7), while in *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy he puts phantasm and

⁸⁰ Ivi, p. 26.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² Ivi, p. 27.

⁸³ Ivi, p. 58.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁶ Ivi, p. 59.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁸ *BSII*, p. 217.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ Ivi, p. 201.

⁹¹ Ivi, p. 218.

⁹² My italics. *Ibidem*.

«spectral» together in a series⁹³. In his early writings, Derrida demonstrates the indissociability of the appearing of the phenomenon and the phantasm and that the phantasm cannot be pared away from the phenomenon. It is worth recalling that it is rare for Derrida to refer to the phantasm as a phenomenon. In addition to the relation of the phantasm to truth, he also shows its relation to what-is-called «reality». At first skeptical about this notion, to which the phantasm is opposed, he maintains that the latter cannot be judged against «reality». After indicating that by reality we mean external reality, he states that «reality» is fashioned by the fabulous, and that there can be no rigorous distinction between actual reality and fiction. By exploring the relation between the phantasm and «reality», he introduces a notion of virtuality and «fantasmatic virtuality» to think the distinctions between reality/fiction, being/non-being, life/death, and so on. In his very late writings, he signals toward a phantasm beyond *logos*. This *other* phantasm, Derrida asserts, has a *new* logic, a logic that is not in thrall to philosophical *logos* and does not obey previously established conditions set for the traditional phantasm. He suggests the possibility of a relation between the phantasm and a certain “as if”, “perhaps”, and “I don’t know”, as if, he says, something can *happen* and we are affected by it, we let ourselves be affected by it⁹⁴. Adopting the conditional and the “as if” to make use of the phantasm allows Derrida to put into question the “actual” happening of an event – one can say that, it *perhaps* happens or that the event is *to come*. This thinking of the event and the “as if” keep the happening of the event *in suspense* – it *perhaps* (*never*) happens. The event occurs or takes place phantasmatically. This event that perhaps happens, the event that will have taken place, phantasmatically happens or arrives virtually. Not an illusion, a mirage, a fabrication, the product of wishful thinking, a wished-for or unlikely outcome – the status that it has been assigned by philosophy and that philosophy has consigned it to – the phantasm observes a new logic, not bound to *logos*, and must be thought with the event. The late usage of the phantasm of “living death” and the phantasm of “almightiness”, positively associated with Cixous’s work and with an *other* almightiness, are divorced entirely from any connection to sovereignty⁹⁵.

In *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* Laplanche and Pontalis write of the revival by psychoanalysis of the French term *fantasme*, a term commonly associated with psychoanalysis that was reintroduced to contemporary France by the translators of Freud⁹⁶. In French, the word has more philosophical overtones than the German term (*die Phantasie*), which means imagination because it has a more restricted extension. *Phantasie* does not so much refer to the faculty of imagination in the philosophical sense (*Einbildungskraft*) but to the world of imagination, its contents, and the creative activity that animates it (*das Phantasieren*). *Fantasme* in contrast refers to a specific imaginary production. The term was used in medicine in 1836 to indicate a visual hallucination and it entered the *Nouveau Larousse* in 1906 to describe a chimera formed in the mind⁹⁷. Since *fantaisie* in French has connotations of whimsy, eccentricity, triviality, etc. and

⁹³ LT, p. 337.

⁹⁴ *BSII*, p. 217.

⁹⁵ An influential account associates the phantasm with a form of sovereignty – the principle of sovereignty is thus a principle of the phantasm. The phantasm is – with ominous overtones throughout – always a phantasm of power. However, this monolithic interpretation of the phantasm, which succeeds in recuperating it for philosophy, overlooks the fact that there are *many phantasms* in Derrida’s work, some of which do not have any connection to sovereignty, purity, or delusion. Despite all denials, this account of the phantasm – which forgets that, ever since *Glas*, Derrida had wanted to revitalize a non-metaphysical, *other* notion of the phantasm – is not able to disavow its lingering Platonism.

⁹⁶ Laplanche, Pontalis (1967), “Fantasme”, pp. 152-157.

⁹⁷ According to *Le Petit Robert* the term *fantasme* from *phantasme* (1891); (1836) med. “hallucination”; derived from *fantôme*, 14thC, 1190 “illusion”, Latin *phantasma*, from the Greek *phantasma*; *fantasmatique* adj. 1837, from (1604) *fantomatique*, from *fantasme*.

since *fantasy* in English has the same overtones, *phantasy* has been the preferred spelling in the Standard Edition.

Even though some of Freud's texts, state – which set the internal world (tending toward satisfaction by means of illusion) against an external world (which gradually imposes the reality principle upon the subject) – treat phantasy as a term belonging to the opposition between reality and imagination, “psychical reality” cannot be equated with the internal world. In fact, they explain that «the efforts of psychoanalytic thought are directed toward an explanation of the stability, efficacy and relatively coherent nature of the subject's phantasy life [*vie fantasmatique*]»⁹⁸. They argue that Freud «refuses to be restricted to a choice between treating phantasy [*fantasme*] as a distorted derivative of the memory of actual fortuitous events or a conception depriving phantasy of any specific reality and looking upon it merely as an imaginative expression designed to conceal the reality of the instinctual [*pulsionnelle*] dynamic»⁹⁹. Laplanche and Pontalis focus particularly on – and this would be their original contribution – the fact that Freud postulated «unconscious schemata» supposedly transmitted by heredity called *Urphantasien*, «primal phantasies [*fantasmes originaires*]»¹⁰⁰. According to certain authors the topographical position of the phantasies, whether conscious, preconscious, or unconscious, is not made clear. For Laplanche and Pontalis, it is the subject's life as a whole which is seen to be shaped and ordered by what might be called, in order to stress this structuring action, «a phantasmatic [*une fantasmatique*]».

To understand the Freudian notion of *Phantasie*, it would be helpful to distinguish its different levels. *Phantasien* are day-dreams, scenes, episodes, romances, or fictions that the subject creates and recounts to himself or herself in the waking state. In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) Freud and Breuer noted the frequency and importance of fantasmatic activity of hysterics, who were often unconscious of them¹⁰¹. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) Freud again bases his analysis of phantasies on the model of daydreams. When speaking of «unconscious phantasy», which he frequently uses, Freud does not suggest a «clearly demarcated metapsychological position» but seems to be referring to a subliminal, preconscious reverie that the subject falls into, about which it may not be aware of. Along a different line of thought, phantasy has a much more intimate relation to the unconscious (see Chapt VII *The Interpretation of Dreams*); certain fantasies operate, topographically speaking, at an unconscious level. Laplanche and Pontalis distinguish, without Freud having done so, several levels at which phantasy is dealt with – conscious, subliminal, and unconscious. Instead of distinguishing these levels, Freud's principal concern is to emphasize links between these different aspects.

In the most complete metapsychological definition of phantasy that he proposed, Freud establishes a link between those aspects that appear to be the furthest away from one another¹⁰². The Freudian problematic, according to Laplanche and Pontalis, does not authorize a natural distinction between unconscious and conscious phantasies, but intends rather «to bring forward the analogies, the close relationship which they share, and the transitions which take place between one and the other»¹⁰³.

Freud stresses phantasy's close link with desire by using the expression *Wunschphantasie*, wishful fantasy¹⁰⁴. However, Laplanche and Pontalis believe the relation between desire and phantasy is even more complex. Desire has its origin and its prototype in the *experience of satisfaction*. They note that phantasy, which has

⁹⁸ Laplanche, Pontalis (1967), p. 153.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁰ Laplanche, Pontalis (1985). Also see entry on “Fantasmes originaires” in Laplanche, Pontalis (1967), pp. 157-159.

¹⁰¹ Laplanche, Pontalis (1967), p. 153.

¹⁰² *Ivi*, p. 154-155.

¹⁰³ *Ivi*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

metapsychological status, is the setting of desire, not its object. Phantasies cannot be made reducible to an intentional aim of the desiring subject, rather, they are «scripts [scénarios] of organized scenes which are capable of dramatization – usually in a visual form»¹⁰⁵. Laplanche and Pontalis remark that these scenes often include the subject; even in the case of the «primal scene [scène originaire]» [...] not only as an observer but also as a participant, when he interrupts the parents' coitus»¹⁰⁶. «The subject imagines and aims at a *sequence*» in which the subject plays a part, with many possible «permutations of roles and attributions» (see Freud's analysis of phantasy in *A Child is Being Beaten* [1919]).

In *Fantasy: An Attempt to Define its Structure and Operation*, an unpublished manuscript, initially circulated among the participants of a series of private seminars (1959-61), Maria Torok surveys the existing definitions of fantasy [*phantasme*] in psychoanalytic literature¹⁰⁷. She refers to the influential role of the article, *The Nature and Function of Phantasy* (1948), by Susan Isaacs, a so-called disciple of Melanie Klein, who did not develop her own notion of fantasy. Isaacs proposed that two alternative spellings be used: *fantasy* to designate «conscious daydreams, fictions, and so on» and *phantasy* to indicate «the primary content of unconscious processes». Torok is not convinced by Susan Isaacs's «extremely broad and contradictory» definitions of fantasy. Laplanche and Pontalis also find this suggestion problematic and unhelpful¹⁰⁸. Torok proposes that fantasy is not behind the symptom but actually a symptom in its own right. It is worth mentioning that, in addition to other references, Lacan devoted a year of his seminar to a discussion of «the logic of fantasy [*fantasme*]»¹⁰⁹. We can summarize that in psychoanalysis the term *phantasme* (rendered in English as phantasy) consistently designates a fantasy or an illusion.

Abbreviations

- GL Derrida, J. (1974), *Glas*, Galilée, Paris, Eng. trans. by G. Bennington and D. Wills, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2021.
- Alt Derrida, J. (1986), *Altérités*, [With Pierre-Jean Labarrière], Osiris, Paris.
- Po Derrida, J. (1992), *Points de suspension: entretiens*, Selected and presented by E. Weber, Galilée, Paris.
- SM Derrida, J. (1993), *Spectres de Marx. L'Etat de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, Galilée, Paris.
- E Derrida, J. (1996), *Echographies – de la télévision (Entretiens filmés avec Bernard Stiegler)*, Galilée, Paris.
- De Derrida, J. (1998), *Demeure – Maurice Blanchot*, Galilée, Paris.
- Psy Derrida, J. (1998), *Psyché. Invention de l'autre*, t. I nouvelle édition augmentée, Galilée, Paris.
- LT Derrida, J. (2000a), *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, Galilée, Paris.
- H.C. Derrida, J. (2000b), «H.C. pour la vie, c'est à dire...» in *Hélène Cixous croisées d'une œuvre*, ed. by M. Calle-Gruber, Galilée, Paris.
- UsC Derrida, J. (2001), *L'université sans condition*, Galilée, Paris.
- CFU Derrida, J. (2003a), *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*, Galilée, Paris.
- Par Derrida, J. (2003b), *Parages*, Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée, Galilée, Paris.

¹⁰⁵ Ivi, p. 156.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁷ Torok (1994), pp. 27-36.

¹⁰⁸ Isaacs (1948), pp. 73-97.

¹⁰⁹ Lacan (1966-1967).

- Psy2 Derrida, J. (2003c), *Psyché. Invention de l'autre*, t. II (nouvelle édition augmentée), Galilée, Paris.
- GGGG Derrida, J. (2003d), *Genèses, généalogies, genres et le génie. Les secrets de l'archive*, Galilée, Paris.
- R Derrida, J. (2003e), *Voyous. Deux essais sur la raison*, Galilée, Paris.
- BSII Derrida, J. (2010), *Séminaire La bête et le souverain*, vol. II (2002-2003), Galilée Paris.

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