

THE CONCEPT OF PHANTASM IN THE WORK OF DERRIDA

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Abstract The article offers a reconstruction of Derrida's concept of phantasm with a stress on the discussion of the phantasm in *Glas* (1974) and his final seminar (2002 – 2003). I argue that the main characteristic of the phantasm is that it is placed on both sides of a border or a frontier. In this, it produces the believe that one can stand on both sides of a divide while remaining on one of them. In this way, phantasm becomes a phantasm of power, an illusion for pure auto-affectivity. Yet, the phantasm also disrupts the illusion of mastery and opens the way to the other in an unpredictable manner, becoming an event that cannot be simply opposed to reality or truth.

Keywords: Derrida; phantasm; life; death; child

In the text that follows I will offer a reconstruction of Derrida's concept of phantasm. I argue that notwithstanding the various uses of the word 'phantasm' that can be found in his work, Derrida developed a strict conception of phantasm, which he developed and employed in a coherent manner from the 1970s. The text is a part of a larger project for rethinking phantasm.

There are two things that should be pointed out at the beginning. The first is that the word "phantasm" was often used by Derrida and it was placed in apposition to phantom, specter, revenant, ghost, fantasy, and fiction. Yet it was also distinguished from the other terms. The second thing is that phantasm was not just an operative concept.¹ It was thematized rather early on and often its use was accompanied with discussions of its meaning. However, the research on the concept of phantasm in Derrida is quite limited, not much has been done when it comes to its role in contradistinction to fiction and phantom, spirit and specter. To my knowledge, apart from two important texts (Naas 2008; Saghafi 2021), to which I will return, the critical attention as a whole has passed over the notion in silence, or – which amounts to the same – reducing it to the general theme of spectrality (Lucy 2004; Royle 2003; Castricano 2001).

Derrida's own use of phantasm in the texts from the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s is marked mainly by the notion of simulacra without a model

in Plato's sense (Derrida 2000, pp. 138, 143, 168, 186n14, 187, 206 – 207, 324).² Derrida has used the word earlier as well albeit in a different sense and hardly as a specific notion. For example, in his recently published course from 1960 – 1961, the word “fantasmes” appears three times as a synonym of illusion (Derrida 2022, pp. 22, 30, 71). In his works on Husserl, where the French word is rarely employed, the German *Phantasie* occupies a place close to that of imagination, on the one hand, and that of representation, on the other.³

Researchers have pointed out that “Derrida uses the spellings *fantasme* and *phantasme* interchangeably and without making a distinction between them.” (Saghafi 2021, p. 156). Both versions, written with a “f” or a “ph”, indeed appear sometime as synonyms for phantom, ghost, and specter (which is one of the meanings of the Greek word), but also fantasy or fiction. And yet, I would argue that at least since *Glas* on (Derrida 1974) Derrida thematized the concept of phantasm on its own and developed his own conception of it. This has already been pointed out by Michael Naas in his “Comme si, comme ça” (Naas 2008, pp. 187 – 212). Kas Saghafi suggested more recently that there is not a single concept claiming that phantasm “has many significations throughout different periods of Derrida's writing” and that “there are many phantasms in Derrida's work” (Saghafi 2021, p. 147, 157).

Naas distinguishes the phantasm from the phantom and fiction, and shows how phantasm is an “as if” (*comme si*) that tries to pass as “as so” or “as such”, veiling itself and its operation (Naas 2008, p. 188). A reaction to originary spectrality, Naas claims, the phantasm, or the phenomenon of phantasm, is a “repression of the phantasm as phenomenon” (Naas 2008, p. 191). It maintains in this sense the illusion, a phenomenological illusion, of the “as such”, of a self-identity before and apart from any difference and iteration, “an ipseity with power” (Naas 2008, pp. 207 – 208). This is why “deconstruction would thus be, first and foremost, a deconstruction of the phantasm” (Naas 2008, p. 191, see also p. 199). Naas goes on to show how this characteristic of the phantasm makes it function in an autoimmune way feeding the phantasmatic idea of pure immunity, and reveals in what way every phantasm is a phantasm of power. As a counter-move he offers an interpretation of *khora* as that which escapes the lures and traps of the phantasm. (Naas 2008, p. 202) Tracing the concept of phantasm from *Monolingualism of the Other* (Derrida 1996) and *Faith and Knowledge* (Derrida 2001) back to *Glas* he ends his genealogy with a discussion of paternity and maternity and the way in which the phantasm implies an immaculate conception where the omnipotent father and virgin-mother in their opposition can go and do without each other, “self-seeding and self-bearing” (204).

Published in 2008, Naas's text remains to this day, to my knowledge, the most careful analysis of the phantasm in Derrida's oeuvre. In 2021 Kas Saghafi criticized Naas's interpretation that the “phantasm is – with ominous overtones throughout – always a phantasm of power” (Saghafi 2021, p. 157) and insisted that especially in the late writings of Derrida there is a different logic of phantasm, signaling “a phan-

tasm beyond *logos*", which does not present the "as if" as a "as such" but maintains the dimension of the "as if" and relates the "as if" to the virtual aspect of the event. "The event occurs or takes place phantasmatically." (Saghafi 2021, p. 157). Derrida's last seminar, which is very important for Saghafi's discussion, was not published by the time Naas's book appeared and he did not comment on it. In a later text (Naas 2012) he addressed precisely the question of phantasm in it without however drawing on his earlier discussion.

My own interpretation can be seen as a prolongation of that of Naas and of Saghafi, a prolongation accompanied by a displacement of accent. What, in my view, makes such an interpretative supplement necessary, is that unlike Naas, and in agreement with Saghafi, I do not think that Derrida's concept of phantasm can and should be reduced to a phantasm of power; but unlike Saghafi, and perhaps in agreement with Naas, I do not think that it is just a question of the many different significations of "phantasm" and that one should "resist a unitary definition" (Saghafi 2021, p. 147). As I will try to demonstrate, Derrida's concept allows for both Naas's and Saghafi's readings because of the mode of operation of the phantasm.

In the first part of the article I will address Derrida's discussion of the phantasm in his last seminar, the second part of *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2002-2003), and in the second I will turn to *Glas*.

In the second part of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, while reading parallelly Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Heidegger's *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Derrida dedicated a lot of time to the discussion of burial and cremation as two widespread cultural practices to deal with the body of the deceased (Naas 2012). The alternative between inhumation and incineration was described there not just as an alternative between two forms of mourning but also as one between two phantasms of mourning and two phantasms of one's own death (Derrida 2011, p. 92). The question of the phantasm was taken up again and again throughout the seminar. In this sense, what was discussed in the seminar could and should be seen, among other things, as a development and further complication of an insistent theme in Derrida, the theme of life death and of *survie*, living on.⁴

In Derrida's works from the 1980s and the 1990s mourning is conceived as something that does not wait the other's eventual death, as the very possibility of it triggers the mechanism of mourning. In *Aporias* Derrida argued against Heidegger that the death of the other is always first and that it is the only death in the syntagm "my death" (Derrida 1993, p. 76). That led him to the deconstruction of the Heideggerian *Jemeinigkeit* and the logic of "as such", death "as such" being the impossibility of the 'as such' "as such" (Derrida 1993, p. 75). Yusuke Miyazaki has demonstrated how life itself (*vie*) in Derrida is already its own transcendence, it is living on (*survie*) (Miyazaki 2020, pp. 242 – 243). This means that the boundary between life and death but also any boundary, is put into question, and that there is a *survivre*, a living on beyond life *in* life itself. Originary mourning points to

this aspect of 'living on'. *Survie* is a way to put into question the idea of clearcut boundaries, limits, frontiers.

The discussion on the phantasm in Derrida's last seminar can and should be read against this background. The phantasm in *The Beast and the Sovereign* is introduced in relation to the great themes of nostalgia (Derrida 2011, p. 32), *Unheimlichkeit*, and *revenge* (Derrida 2011, p. 48) but the thematization of the phantasm itself begins with the topic of thinking about one's own death, and more specifically, Robinson Crusoe's fear that he might be eaten by the other. "That is the great phantasm, the fundamental phantasm or the phantasm of the fundamental: he can think only of being eaten and drunk by the other, he thinks of it as a threat but with such compulsion that one wonders if the threat is not also nurtured like a promise, and therefore a desire." (Derrida 2011, p. 77) This phantasm just like all phantasms of one's own burial suggests that one considers not only death but the dead body and what happens to it. Derrida argues in the sixth session that both in the case of inhumation and in that of incineration there is an autoimmune aspect to this phantasm (confirming Naas's hypothesis about the autoimmune nature of the phantasm). With inhumation there is the desire for a certain preservation, a time and a place for the corpse that does not get destroyed and all this can and has been associated with the religious conception of a resurrection. And yet, inhumation, as humane as it seems, brings the possibility of being buried alive and, therefore, of suffocation, as well as the inevitability of the slow decomposition of the corpse. (Derrida 2011, pp. 160 – 167) With incineration, while suffocation and decomposition are evaded, this evasion comes at the cost of transforming death into an annihilation, of destroying all trace of what was once a living being (Derrida 2011, pp. 167 – 168). In both cases the work of mourning is faced with an impossibility, it is ruined, says Derrida, and with it the very relation to the other, as far as mourning "is the very essence of the experience of the other as other" (Derrida 2011, p. 168). In both phantasms there is a betrayal of the dead – and to keep the lost one comes down to lose them.

What draws Derrida's attention is not just the paralyzing work of the phantasm but rather the very position phantasm puts us in. Perhaps Derrida could have argued about the autoimmune structure of the different ways to deal with the dead body and indicated the dead-ends of mourning without talking about phantasms. What is it that the phantasm does and why talk of phantasms? The answer comes in the seventh session. *The phantasm is what allows one to stand on both sides of a boundary*, on both sides of the dividing line between two opposed concepts. In his own words, the phantasm "is to be found on both sides of the limit between two opposing concepts" ("se trouve des deux côtés de la limite entre deux concepts opposées") (Derrida 2011, p. 185/ Derrida 2010, p. 262). For example, on the side of the living *and* on the side of the dead. Or, on the side of the dead and the side of the work of mourning. Death thought as the ultimate limit, the phantasm of being dead, that creates and maintains the position of the living dead, both here and away,

reveals in the most telling way this characteristic of the phantasm. One cannot be alive and dead *at the same time*, according to the common sense. One cannot be alive *and* dead simultaneously, except in the phantasm of one's own death. The phantasm covers the side of the living and the side of the dead, and in the phantasm of one's own death, or of what happens to one's own corpse, one is living *and* dead, a breathing corpse, a dead living, a living dead.

This would be also the foundation of the relation between phantasm and power. Power – or as Derrida puts it, “power as phantasm” (Derrida 2011, p. 78) – is ultimately the control over the both sides and the very manner in which the boundary between them is drawn. We can see how it is “the force of the phantasm that imposes the same on the other, with an unconditional all- powerful self-determination” (Derrida 2011, p 78). Phantasm involves not just control over oneself but also over the other and the outside, for this would be the only way to make the auto-determination unconditional. Power needs domination over the border and the phantasm is what gives it – in a phantasmatic way. This is why the question of sovereignty is ineluctably linked to that of the phantasm.

To repeat, what is characteristic of phantasms is that they are placed (and place what could be called “the subject of phantasm”) on both sides of a border, a boundary, a limit, a frontier. When there is a border, a limitation, the phantasm lets one on the other side. For Derrida even before a question about national borders and political frontiers, this is a question about (1) the very concepts we think with and (2) our finitude as living beings (Derrida 1993). If phantasms stay on both sides of the border between two opposed concepts, for the phantasms the border, the limit will be properly speaking, undecidable. That is why in his seminar Derrida claims that there is no *logic of the phantasm*. Phantasm will be in the logos and outside of it. “There is therefore no logic or *logos* of the phantasm or of the ghost or of the spectral.” (Derrida 2011, 185). And Derrida adds: unless the logos itself is the phantasm.

The operation of the phantasm sets it really close to all other concepts in Derrida that escape and put into question the clearcut boundaries, and thus it does not come as a surprise that at the end of the passage on the logic of phantasm referred to, the phantasm and the spectral, the phantasm and the revenant appear together, next to each other. But what would be the point, then, to distinguish them? What good would it be to distinguish the phantasm and the phantom, for example, if they are operating according to the same logic, or according to the same ruination of logic, being present and absent, here and nowhere, dead and alive? And as Derrida points out, the Greek *phantasmata* refers both to phantasms and to the phantoms (Derrida 2011, pp. 49, 136, 185 – 186),⁵ and he himself often uses them together. How is then phantasm different?

Right after the long development on the phantasms of inhumation and incineration, Derrida does something intriguing and to an extent surprising – he asks again what a phantasm is, but aligning it not with the phantom and spectrality but with

image and imagination: “The question: what is the phantasm? What does phantasm, *phantasma*, revenant, fantasia, imagination, fantastic imagination, mean?” (Derrida 2011, p. 170) He then refers to Heidegger’s discussion of the death mask in the *Kantbuch* and ends the session with a long quotation from there. In other words, he associates the question of the phantasm with that of imagination, and not with any imagination but with the radical transcendental productive imagination.

Here it is not the place to ask about the role of imagination in deconstruction and in Derrida’s work, nor can I offer a reading of what I see as a covert allusion to Jean-Luc Nancy’s “Masked Imagination” published first in 2002 (Nancy 2005).⁶ I will just indicate few aspects of what Derrida’s writings on the imagination suggest. Imagination has auto-hetero-affective structure. This is also explicitly said in the seminar and I will come back to this. Already in *Of Grammatology* Derrida says that imagination is “the other name of différance as auto-affectation” (Derrida 1997a, p. 187). Imagination as auto-affectation introduces the other in the self, making the other constitutive for the self, making auto-affectation possible on the basis of hetero-affectation. Next, imagination is inextricably bound to death and time. “Imagination is at bottom the relationship with death. [*L’imagination est dans son fond le rapport à la mort.*]” (Derrida 1997a, p. 184/ Derrida 1967, p. 261). Being the relationship to death, imagination has to do with the fact that death has no “as such” and puts the “as such” into question. In *Of Grammatology* it is said that “[t]he relation with the other and the relation with death are one and the same opening” (Derrida 1997a, p. 187), and we can argue that imagination, being the relation without relation to death “as such” is therefore also at the basis of the relation to the other. Finally, however, it should be noted that the imagination operates a stricture, it de-limits itself (Derrida 1987a, p. 140) and thus leaves the impression that the subject is in control, that the subject “has” imagination as a faculty. Imagination is thus an impersonal transcendental that opens up the transcendental field to be determined by death and the other.

At this point we can return to the phantasm. In the second part of *The Beast and the Sovereign* it is said that our experience of the corpse, its essence and non-essence, our experience of the living dead, touches upon the auto-hetero-affective structure of the phantasm (Derrida 2011, p. 170), and it is here that Derrida turns to the problem of imagination. The phantasm, therefore should not be thought of as something purely subjective, as a whim of the subject who would thus fulfill their desire to be self-identical. In the phantasm about one’s own burial one is already affected by the other in one’s relation to oneself. If this is the case, then there is something of death, of death proper, as it were, in the phantasm. The impossibility of death takes place as impossibility in the phantasm making it ineluctably auto-immune but also allowing through it the other to play the defining role.

Here one starts noticing the peculiarity of the phantasm. The phantasm is phantasm because it allows one to believe to stand on both sides of a border, for ex-

ample, allowing one to imagine one's own corpse while being still alive. In this, it is obviously different from the phantom and the specter. While in their case with the visor effect, where we don't see who or what is looking at us (Derrida 1994, pp. 6 – 7; Derrida, Stiegler 2002, p. 120 – 123), they make palpable that the other comes before me, in the case of phantasms, it seems that the other is excluded or at least is under the control of the self and thus the illusion of self-identity, of pure auto-affection, of ipseity is maintained – hence the phantasm of power. And yet, paradoxically, the phantasm really is on the both sides of the border, it includes something phantom-like, something spectral. As Kas Saghafi has justly pointed out, phantasm and reality are not opposed, they could not be precisely because of this double nature of the phantasm (Saghafi 2021).

What is “real”, what would have been the “real” or “reality” in this context? There is a passage in *Echographies* where Derrida puts it in a way that could serve as a guiding point: “If the “reality effect” is ineluctable, it is not simply because there is something real that is undecomposable, or not synthesizable, some “thing” that was there. It is because there is something other that watches or concerns me. This Thing is the other insofar as it was already there – before me – ahead of me, beating me to it, I who am before it, I who am because of it, owing to it. [...] The “reality effect” stems from the irreducible alterity of another origin of the world. It is another origin of the world.” (Derrida, Stiegler 2002, p. 123) Reality understood in this way is not opposed to the phantom as the alterity of the phantom is what makes reality real. But it won't be opposed to the phantasm either as in a sense the phantasm is what introduces the heterogeneous other in the self. Unlike the phantom however, the phantasm disturbs the binary logic of oppositions being on the two sides of the border while at the same time producing in the self the illusion of being on the two sides of the border granting thus a sense of power and control, on the one hand, and a sense of reality as something that the phantasm is distanced from, on the other. This is perhaps one of the reasons Derrida chose to speak of phantasm in the seminar (Derrida 2011, p. 149).

The phantasm is not opposed to truth either. In *Glas* Derrida goes as far as to say that “[t]ruth is the phantasm itself” (Derrida 1986, p. 224a). If we turn our attention to *Glas* now, we would not fail to notice the basic feature of the phantasm as described in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, already outlined there. With a different accent. Derrida writes:

As soon as the difference is determined as opposition, no longer can the phantasm (a word to be determined) of the IC be avoided: to wit, a *phantasm of infinite mastery of the two sides of the oppositional relation*. The virgin-mother does without the actual father, both in order to come and to conceive. The father in (it)self, the real author, subject of the conception, verily of the annunciation, does without the woman, without that in which he only passes without touching. All the oppositions that link themselves around the difference as opposition (active/ passive, reason/ heart, beyond/ here-below,

and so on) have as cause and effect the immaculate maintenance of each of the terms, their independence, and consequently their absolute mastery. Absolute mastery that they see conferred on themselves phantasmatically the very moment they are reversed and subordinated.” (Derrida 1986, p. 223a; italics mine – D. T.)

One can see here phantasm defined again as what is on the both sides of opposing concepts, and again this is related to mastery. The phantasm is a phantasm of mastery over the two sides and it is what keeps the two opposing elements as if pure and not infected by the other.

In the passage Derrida puts a stress on the opposition. Opposition was mentioned also in the last seminar but it was not much discussed whereas here its discussion plays an important role in defining the phantasm. The phantasm appears when difference is determined as opposition. And a large part of the column on Hegel is dedicated to the definition of sexual difference as opposition. For Hegel that is important because difference as opposition opens up the path for contradictions in a dialectics that will lead to the eventual sublation of difference. But beyond that, as Derrida’s early deconstruction of oppositions demonstrates, the oppositional thinking was a form of mastering difference throughout the history of European thought. Phantasm is unavoidable, says Derrida, as soon as we think of difference in terms of opposition, and the phantasm will be a phantasm of mastery.

This phantasm does not belong to either of the opposed terms, for example, the mother and the father, for example the holy mother and the holy father, it is not their phantasm, and yet as soon as it appears – and Derrida suggests that the whole phenomenology of the spirit is the story of this phantasm (Derrida 1986, p.224a) – as soon as it appears, the phantasm is shared by each of the terms, each of the terms gains absolute mastery and remains intact, not infected by the other term, immaculate. The example of the mother and the father, it goes without saying, is not just any example. Michael Naas has written eloquently on the place of the father and the mother in relation to the phantasm, so I do not need to develop this line (Naas 2008, p. 204). I will simply point that the immaculate conception would mean that the father and the mother can do without each other in the begetting, in the conception.⁷ In contrast to the second part of the *Beast and the Sovereign*, where it was discussed in relation to death and the way we think about what happens *after* life, here in *Glas* the phantasm turns up when Hegel talks about what comes *before* life, the very act of begetting, of conception, which is just as impossible. And to add to the difficulty, it is not just conception in the sense of fertilization but more importantly “the concept’s nonconceptual conception” (Derrida 1986, pp. 80-81a) and its story is the story of the spirit. Yet, according to the common sense, both *before life* and *after life* remain strictly unthinkable, unrepresentable and unrepresentable (Derrida 2011, p. 149). The thinking of conception in this sense leads in the phantasm to an origin before the difference or despite the difference, an origin without difference, hence the immaculate conception, while it is precisely

difference that makes the origin and the conception possible. ‘Before life’ and ‘after life’ are in contrast but are not opposite, nor are they symmetrical, they point to one and the same opening that the phantasm indicates and erases.

In *Glas* the specific position of the phantasm thus is that of being on either side of the opposition and on both sides at the same time. This affects each of the sides, each term on each side, affects their desire, makes them fantasize. The desire here is “a desire of the return to self” (Derrida 1986, p. 224a) and that means that for each of the parents the child “comes back to me all by myself” (Derrida 1986, p. 224a). Can we say, then, that the phantasm fulfills the desire and at the same time diverts it? Each term of the opposition fantasizes and in its phantasy the mastery is on its side, yet the phantasm does not remain there, it goes beyond the particular positions and even perhaps beyond positionality, and does something else, different from the desired end and still overlapping with it. If the desire is fulfilled, if there is a return to myself by myself, “that would be the limit of the phantasm” (Derrida 1986, p. 224a), the phantasm would be limited to one of the sides that begins dominating the whole (and each term fantasizes about that). The phantasm will in this way delimit itself, and it always delimits itself (Derrida 1986, p. 223a), this is the phantasmatical stricture maintaining the illusion of ipseity and power.

At the same time, however, the phantasm is not reducible to either of the opposed terms, it goes beyond them. In the context of the discussion on Hegel, the resolution of the opposition, the sublation of the contradiction between the parents, the father-knowledge and the mother-affect, the divine and the human, is in the child. The child would have been the delimitation of the phantasm, the child that is God and man simultaneously, as a transition from absolute religion to absolute knowledge, not the absolute religion but the transition. “This difference determined as contradiction or opposition, isn’t it justly the religion (the representation) resolved in *Sa*? Does *Sa* not permit, precisely, thinking the limit of this limit, of making this limit appear as such, of *seeing* the phantasm, as its truth [*en sa vérité*]? *Sa*, resolution of the absolute opposition, reconciliation of the in-(it)self and for-(it)self, of the father and the mother, isn’t the very *Sa* of the phantasm, is it?” (Derrida 1986, pp. 224a-225a) Absolute knowledge, *Sa* (savoir absolu and Id) does not belong to either of the terms, it transcends them and reconciles their opposition. In this sense, it would reveal the phantasm as phantasm and show its limit. In absolute knowledge the child would have been the delimitation of the phantasm. But it is not, and for a fantastic reason. Absolute knowledge reaching itself, getting to itself repeats the movement of the phantasm, it reveals itself to be “the final accomplishment of the phantasm” (Derrida 1986, p. 225a) and thus it makes the phantasm infinite. Absolute knowledge is an absolute phantasm. “The absolute phantasm: *Sa*.” (Derrida 1986, p. 225a). The phantasm now reigns over the very opposition between the finite and the infinite. And on the side of the infinite the phantasm itself is infinitized. It is from this point on that the phantasm stops

being “nothing but a phantasm”. “As soon as *Sa* attains itself, everything that is equivalent to it is infinite. No longer can it be said of an infinite phantasm that it is *nothing but*. *Sa*’s discourse disqualifies the *nothing-but*.” (Derrida 1986, p. 225a). Phantasm as absolute is no longer opposable to reality, to true knowledge, etc.

It is in this sense that Derrida sees the phantasm as giving “the truth of truth” in Hegel, as giving “the measure of truth itself”, as “the revelation of truth.” (Derrida 1986, p. 224a). This means not only that representation can never be fully sublated in presence but also that it is from the vantage point of the phantasm that something like truth is defined. “Then the (absolute) phantasm of the *IC* as (absolute) phantasm is (absolute) truth. Truth is the phantasm itself.” (Derrida 1986, p. 224a) The gesture of pointing at something as being a phantasm is captured in the phantasmatic movement, the movement of the phantasm delimiting and de-limiting itself. The infinitization of the phantasm is thus a phantasmatical trick generating a different illusion of mastery.

Still, the stricture of the phantasm and the generalized phantasm it presupposes do not cancel completely the possibility to point at something as a phantasm, even to criticize it as such, though they make problematic the position from which one does this.

The phantasm sides neither with knowledge, nor with affect, neither with life nor with death, neither with finitude nor with infinitude neither with the mother, nor with the father, although it determines them in their most intimate desires. The phantasm hinges on the child. The child is the phantasm, the phantasm in which the oppositions and contradictions will be resolved, the phantasm as the fulfilment of the desire. But also, the phantasm as something very different than the desired fulfilment, something else, an introduction of the other in this fantastically deferred relation to oneself. The child is the not-yet of the transition to absolute knowledge (Derrida 1986, p. 227a), it remains outside. The phantasm of the immaculate conception suggests that the effect, the child comes back to myself all by myself, that it closes “the absolute family circle”, and yet in its phantasmatic movement the child does also something absolutely different.

In *The Post Card* Derrida writes: “As long as you don’t know what a child is, you won’t know what a fantasy [phantasme] is, nor, of course, by the same token, what knowledge is.” (Derrida 1987, p. 39/ Derrida 1980, p. 45). Why the child? Why the phantasm of the child? In the figure of the child, we see the alignment of the idea of a beginning, innocence, not-yet, of a “before”, on the one hand, and the idea for a prolongation, filiation, heritage, tradition, of an “after”. The child comprises the before and the after, the origin and the telos, it figures the before-life and the after-life. In this, it is the fulfillment of desires to transcend one’s own finitude. And yet the child is not infinite, is all but infinite, it is fragile, uncertain, and it happens always otherwise. The child thus indicates the two sides of the phantasm, the side of mastery and the side of non-mastery. Deconstruction would have always been a child.

NOTES

1. On Derrida's use of Eugen Fink's notion of operative concepts, see (Terzi 2019).
2. On Derrida's use of phantasm in the sense of simulacrum, as well as Derrida's understanding of ghosts and specters, see (Saghafi 2010).
3. Naas rightly points out however that phantasm as it was later analyzed by Derrida has to do with the auto-affective structure of identity as described precisely in *Speech and Phenomenon* (Naas 2008, pp. 191 – 193).
4. On Derrida's understanding of survival, see (Miyazaki 2020; Trumbull 2022).
5. See also (Derrida, 1994, pp. 39, 122, 129 – 130; 1997b, pp. 266, 287; 1998, p. 25; 2001, p. 47, 62, 83).
6. I have tried to do this elsewhere (Tenev 2013, pp. 91 – 140).
7. I would point however that neither Naas, nor Saghafi in their discussion of *Glas* discuss the child.

Acknowledgements

This study is financed by the European Union-NextGenerationEU, through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, project SUMMIT BG-RRP-2.004-0008-C01.

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