

Living on Phantasms

Re-evaluating the Figure of the Phantasm in Jacques Derrida's Late Seminars

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Abstract

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This paper investigates the figure of the *'phantasm'* in Jacques Derrida's last seminars, explicating this notion in terms of his argument for life's constitution as originally other-oriented and inflected by a non-present, finite temporality. Since this constitutive differential and finite condition demands the living organism affirm its survival *as itself*, I contend that the phantasm is generated as the anticipatory projection of life's re-identification with itself, thus turning away from finitude and relational interdependence. Yet, I argue that it couldn't be otherwise – that there couldn't be a life without such a phantasm – since the disappropriative effects of its constitutive conditions only allow for lived identity as *re-identification* across an innately finite temporality and aleatory relationality. Moreover, the projected, phantasmatic *'return'* of self-identification is required to establish any relation to the other from the outset: without the living being's anticipated survival, no difference of self from other, and hence no relationality, would be established. Therefore, the phantasm is engendered *by* life's differential constitution despite being unrealizable due to these very conditions. If my contention holds, then two major implications follow: first, the phantasm is irreducible in Derrida's account; second, his *'deconstruction'* of the phantasm cannot amount to its renunciation for the supposed unconditionality of such anterior differential-relational conditions. Rather, deconstruction entails an affirmative engagement with the phantasm as inseparable from an anterior acquiescence or *'promise'* to the other, from which derives a constitutive normative exigency in life.

Acknowledgments

Jacques Derrida claims that one's being is inextricable from an often-unchosen and formative inheritance that one must nonetheless *respond to* and *take responsibility for* (1994 18). In light of this, I open by acknowledging that the formative stages of this paper along with my undergraduate and graduate education at Concordia University have taken place on the unceded, stolen lands of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) people. Indigenous communities in so-called Canada and across the continent continue to suffer genocidal violence that is inseparable from the enabling conditions and privileges I have inherited as a settler in this land. I struggle daily with the responsibility of this irrecoverable debt.

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Introduction

In the tenth session of his first seminar on the death penalty (2013), Jacques Derrida asserts that both the supporter of capital punishment and the abolitionist opposed to them are sustained by a “phantasm of infinitization at the heart of finitude, of an infinitization of survival assured by calculation itself” (258). This phantasm is secured by “the cutting decision of the death penalty” which, “by putting an end to life, seems, paradoxically, to put an end to finitude; it affirms its power over time; it masters the future; it protects against the irruption of the other” (258). Derrida returns to this motif at length in his final seminar (2011a), where he elaborates the phantasm as a certain ““as if,” “perhaps,” “I do not know,” [by which] we allow ourselves to have an impression made on us, we allow ourselves to be affected, for this is an affect, a feeling, a tonality of pathos, we allow ourselves really to be affected by a possibility of the impossible” (149): *as if* we could decide upon the moment of death, whether another’s or our own, thus putting an end to finitude as the *mortality of one or another’s life*. This phantasm of mastering finitude in the machine of the death penalty is “the other side of an infinitization ... [that is] constitutive of finitude” (2013 257-258), of life itself as indissociably mortal, always already undergoing death in a *survivance* (2011a 130-32) or *living-on* (2011b 104-5).

In the following, I intend to clarify the distinction and relation between these two senses of infinitization by way of Derrida’s early work on *différance* and the trace as the differential conditions for life. On the one hand, these conditions denote an “interruptive finitude” (2005e 146) of mortality and relationality that exposes the living to the unanticipatable alterity of the other or the event, thus ‘infinitizing’ finite life by rendering it open to a future beyond its finite or conditional horizons of expectation. On the other hand, the “phantasm of infinitization” (2013 258) illustrates the living being’s desire for survival and re-identification with itself spurred by

the corrosive effects of alteration and finitude, ‘infinitely’ projecting its finite identity ahead of itself. I contend that the quasi-transcendental status of its differential and finite condition engenders the anticipated or ‘promised’ return of the living organism to itself in response to this original disappropriation of presence by *différance*. Not only does its originary disappropriation constitutively demand that the living organism seek to return to itself and reaffirm its continuity or survival; moreover, my argument implies that *différance* *requires* this repetition in self-affirmation, thus generating the phantasm in lived experience despite rendering any complete self-identification impossible.¹ Against Michael Naas’ claim that deconstruction seeks to relinquish the phantasm for the unconditionality of *différance* (2008 188), I argue that deconstruction rather reveals precisely that phantasm’s irreducibility in lived experience: Derrida confirms this in the above-quoted session of his first death penalty seminar, asserting that the phantasm of infinitization “is at work in us all the time” (258).

Moreover, I argue that the “auto-hetero-affective dimension” of the phantasm (2011a 170) is the condition for the promise and testimony on Derrida’s account, implying a fundamental necessity of faith alongside the threat of perversion that it introduces. Deconstruction, I conclude, doesn’t seek to relinquish the phantasm as the elision of a performative-fictional ‘*as if*’ for a constative-descriptive ‘*as such*’, as Naas claims (2008 200); rather, it reveals that the register of truthfulness or the ‘*as such*’ of lived experience originates in the acquiescence of belief or faith where the integrity of said experience is committed to interminable finitude and dissemination by *différance* (Derrida 2005c 76-77). This is to say that the truth of experience ‘*as such*’, alongside the possibility of the apophantic register of speech (2011a 242), is always tendered on a tacit ‘*as if*’, that this ‘*as such*’ is only ever anticipated or *promised* by language, testimony or memory. Likewise, this testimonial and the promissory structure would be empty if it was not oriented

towards a future-anterior '*as such*' in experience, that the promise and testimony are faithfully taken as *true*. The anticipation of a constative-descriptive '*as such*' in the performative-fictional '*as if*' thus belongs to the very testimonial, promissory structure of lived identity, communication, and relationality, underlying any "presumed, anticipated unity of the world" (2011a 265). Derrida's account of the promise and testimony thus reveals the other face of the phantasmatic which, like Kant's transcendental illusion, is regulative yet always already commits life to disjuncture (1994 22), errancy, or going astray.

1. Quasi-transcendental Différance and Infnitization

In the following section, I argue that what is at stake in Derrida's first seminar on the death penalty (2013) is a double sense of infinitization in the constitutive, quasi-transcendental conditions for life. The first sense denotes the "interruptive finitude" (2005e 146) that exposes one to an unanticipatable future and the alterity of others, thus 'infnitizing' mortal, finite life. On the other hand, this first sense of infinitization demands that one seek to return to oneself *qua* oneself, thus projecting or 'infnitizing' one's finite identity. This double movement is clarified through Derrida's early work on différance and the trace as the constitutively differential, other-oriented, and mortal conditions for life. Specifically, I argue that the quasi-transcendental status of these conditions both *demand*s and *require*s the attempt to return to oneself and reconstitute one's identity in response to a constitutive disappropriation of self-presence by différance: in brief, the two sides of infinitization are aporetically concomitant. Likewise, this account of the quasi-transcendental clarifies Derrida's assertion that '*infinite* différance is *finite*' insofar as différance affords finite life the constitutive possibility of alterity and futurity while generating the desire for what it bars – namely, *infinite* survival or the self-presence of a "voice without différance" (1973 102). Specifically, the "phantasm of infinitization" (2013 258) refers to the projected, anticipated survival of self *qua* self that is engendered by the quasi-transcendental of its constitutive conditions.

Drawing on his early engagements with Heidegger, Husserl, Freud, Nietzsche, and Saussure, Derrida's neologism 'différance' indicates life's constitutive condition as other-oriented, finite and inflected towards a non-present temporality. In his eponymous essay (1982), différance is initially defined as the "becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time" (8) or the minimum synchronic relationality (*differing*) and diachronic temporization (*deferral*)

required for any determinate self-relation, hence for any possible identity,² to be established. Derrida's play on the French *différer* in *différance*, which implies both dissimilarity or non-identity and delay, lapse or detour, indicates such a constitutive coimplication of relational *differing* and temporal *deferral*. This means that every identity of self *qua* self is afforded first by way of its relations to and differences from others. Hence, an identity is never given outright but is only established by relating to what it is not, i.e. to another (hence, to 'differ') that itself is never fully present or presented as such (1998a 47), since this other is also constituted relationally and thereby subject to a deferral of presence. By implication of such constitutive relationality, the first is also related to all its 'other's others,' so on *ad infinitum*. Due to the infinite regress of its constitutive relations, lived identity is displaced by alterity from the outset and thus fails to be fixed or fully established. Since its identity is never *given* outright but is already disappropriated by its very enabling conditions, one must affirm itself *as* itself and apart from its others in order to establish a self-relation; moreover, this self-relation is *only* to be had as its affirmation. Such constitutive relationality therefore demands self-affirmation as the precondition for identity to persist in relational difference. However, since every relation is also temporal, self-affirmation is also marked by an interval during which one's constitutive relations have altered, barring any complete return of identification with oneself. Thus, the 'return' of self-affirmation is never finally established. Rather, this return is always 'to come,' referred to a future moment (hence, its 'deferral'). Insofar as constitutive relationality means that one's self-relation is only ascertained on their self-affirmation, the delay of temporalization renders self-affirmation into *re*-affirmation. Insofar as *différance* indicates the irreducibility of deferral and repetition, it thereby also interrupts any simple self-relation, rendering it finite and exposed to alteration alongside forgetting, dissolution, or death: in short, *différance* commits lived identity

to ‘dissemination’ (1981 304) in the same stroke that makes it possible. Due to its constitutive differing with respect to others and temporal deferral, identity is only to be had on the anticipated or ‘promised’ return of its self-reference.

Différance thereby commits what it constitutes to an *aporia* or double bind from the outset. This constitutive aporia unfolds in four moments: (I) any identity or meaningful, determinate content of experience is only given by way of its relations and differences. Moreover, this constitutive differential relationality is originally incomplete since every other to which one relates is also constituted relationally, thus opening onto a possibly indefinite or ‘infinite’ regression of constitutive relations: the initial constitutive relation to one’s other extends out to the ‘other’s others’ *ad infinitum*. (II) If every relation to the other is temporally-inflected, then all of one’s constitutive relations are transitive and *aleatory* rather than fixed and secure. Since one is related to such temporally-inflected and relationally-instituted others, then one is already *outpaced* or exceeded by their constitutive relations and subject to an always changing relational milieu. (III) Due to this dependence on an indeterminately open relationality, an identity is barred by the very condition that makes possible identification. Therefore, one must reiterate their identity anew: this is to say that identity is constitutively referred to its successive reiterations. (IV) Since every reiteration of one’s identity occurs within an irrevocably altered relational context, then an identity’s completely self-same return is impossible from the outset since the relations that initiated it have always already altered. Therefore, the instance of self-reference is likewise always deferred to a non-present, past or future moment; moreover, since the process of differentiation and temporization are constitutive, one’s identity is never initially given but only to be had as the anticipation or ‘promise’ of its future reiteration.

Through the interplay between the relational and temporal dimensions of *différance*, one's identity is thereby understood as a finite, aleatory 'trace' of an indefinitely open, 'in-finite' referentiality. The differential character of this self-relation is further captured by Derrida's subsequent notion of the *trace*: indeed, Derrida asserts that "*the pure trace is différance*" (1998a 62). Here, the *trace* indicates that any identity, as essentially finite and relational, *points beyond itself*, constitutively referencing both the alterity of others and its past and future reiterations. This reference or 'retention' of alterity, both of the other in the self and of the self as other, reveals that 'the pure trace' of *différance* is the *survival* of the self *through alternation* and *in alterity*, since "without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear" (1998a 62).

A tripartite picture of self-identification is thus established: (I) identity is constitutively referred to what it *is not* (there is a *turn* towards alterity that makes possible identity); yet, (II) in order for an identity to be established, it must also refer back to itself (there is an attempted *return* of self-reference away from the other); (III) simultaneously, there is an interval, lapse or spacing (a constant differing from the other and deferral of self-reference to a non-present time) that makes possible (I) & (II) while bracketing an identity's self-same repetition. This indicates that one's self-referential return is an instance of their alteration both from others but also from oneself *as other-than-self*. If, as Derrida claims in *Of Grammatology*, 'auto-affection,' or the minimum capacity for such a self-relation, "is the universal structure of [lived] experience" (165), then it is opened and inhabited by hetero-affection due to the constitutive relationality of *différance* (2008b 95). Yet, auto-affection is necessary for any relation to the "other in general" (1998a 165), since any relation to the alterity of the other requires some differentiation of self

from other, thus some minimum identification of self *qua* self. Self-reference and other-reference are thereby rendered ‘undecidable’, mutually necessary and impossible, due to the spacing-temporizing of *différance*: auto-affection is always already ‘auto-*hetero*-affection’ (2005a 180, 292; 2011a 170), or the lived time of one’s self-relation is always tendered on the ‘given time’ of alterity that can never be fully assimilated or appropriated by the self (1991). The trace of *différance* *unfolds* as this auto-*hetero*-affective structure of affirmation, which means that the indefinite dissemination of differences only manifests through the interrupted self-reference afforded by temporal finitude and the relation to alterity.

This indicates the quasi-transcendental status of *différance* which, as Derrida writes in *Limited Inc.* (1988), “[belongs] without belonging to the class of concepts of which it must render an accounting, to the theoretical space that it organizes” (127). As the spacing-temporizing of differences between determinate elements, *différance* is solely the interval between the elements that it constitutes and cannot be abstracted from their specific relation (hence, the prefix ‘*quasi-*’)³: as such, one cannot give a general account of quasi-transcendental *différance* without regressively referring it back to the particular relational milieu that it constitutes and organizes. *Différance* must therefore be sought out anew in every new concrete context. Yet, as above, *différance* always already ‘interrupts’ while constituting identity and determinate relationality, thus committing what it brings into being to finitude, alteration, and the alterity of a future beyond any present horizon of expectation or condition of possibility. In this sense, *différance* exceeds without being transcendent or transcendental, that is, it is neither *prior* to nor *separable from* that which it conditions. *Différance* therefore can neither be subsumed into the logic of identity and non-contradiction nor can it be theorized as an object within the terms of what it constitutes, as Derrida contended in his early critique of structural linguistics:

“temporalization as well as [the] relationship with the other and language, cannot, as the condition of all linguistic systems, form a part of the linguistic system itself and be situated as an object in its field” (1998a 60). In *Glas* (1986), this argument is dramatically restated:

And what if what cannot be assimilated, the absolute indigestible, played a fundamental role in the system, an abyssal role rather, the abyss playing an almost tran- ... scendental role [*une rôle quasi transcendental*] ... Isn't there always an element excluded from the system that assures the system's space of possibility? The transcendental has always been, strictly, a transcategorial, what could be received, formed, terminated in none of the categories intrinsic to the system. The system's vomit. (151-162)⁴

In other words, quasi-transcendental *différance* “produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible” (1998a 143)⁵: as the differential condition for one's self-relation, it is also the condition of impossibility for any consummate self-relation. Spacing and temporizing thus suspend the self-relation that they afford, interrupted by an irreducible heteronomy (2008b 95) even when one attempts to return to oneself and expunge the alterity of the other. If life's self-relation *could* ever be fully recovered, then its constitutive conditions – relational difference and temporal delay – would be effaced. Moreover, this “interruptive finitude” spurs an “infinite process” (2005e 146) of repetition and reaffirmation in alteration, or what Derrida calls an “essential iterability (repetition/alterity)” (1988 9). As Derrida asserts regarding Husserl's phenomenology (1973 101),⁶ the teleology in question is thus *originally* interrupted and deferred *ad infinitum*.⁷ Likewise, quasi-transcendentality entails that *différance* is coextensive and coterminous with the finitude of what it constitutes. That is, without the anticipated, ‘promised’ return of life's auto-affective self-reference, no constitutive relation to alterity could be established (1998a 165). Insofar as this self-reference is triggered by an

originary disappropriation by *différance*, the promise of an auto-affective self-relation is also necessitated in lived experience by affording alterity and relationality. Otherwise, *différance*, as just the finite opening of the relation to alterity, would spill over into “an impassive, intangible, and eternal presence” indistinguishable from full absence: “infinite *différance*, God or death” (1998a 131).⁸ Or, as Derrida infamously claims, “*infinite* *différance* is *finite*” (1973 102), “the infinite makes itself finite, it comes to an end [*l’infini se finit*]” (2017b 81).

2. Capital Punishment and the Phantasm of Infnitization

Derrida opens the tenth session of his first *Death Penalty* seminar by addressing a previous question regarding his *interest* in opposing the death penalty and whether a deconstructive abolitionism would be as *disinterested* as the Kantian categorical imperative. In response, he interrogates the presumed terms and limits defining what one takes to be such *interest*, in particular between *self-interest* and one's interest *for* another. A long, lucid passage from this session illustrates the imbrication of *self* and *other-interest* in a deconstructive abolitionism:

Only a living being as finite being can have a future, can be exposed to a future, to an incalculable and undecidable future that s/he does not have at his/her disposal like a master and that comes to him or to her from some other, from the heart of the other. So much so that when I say 'my life', or even my 'living present', here, I have already named the other in me ... which means that I protect my heart, I protest in the name of my heart when I fight [*en me battant*] so that the heart of the other will continue to beat [*battre*]—in me before me, after me, or even without me. (257)⁹

Insofar as Derrida militates *against* the death penalty, what motivates him is not a maxim purified of any particular, individual or phenomenal interest in preserving his own life, as Kant would seek to establish by way of the categorical imperative; rather, Derrida's motivation stems from an interest in his life as always already "invested" by the life of the other, "the other who nonetheless lets me be me, the other whose heart is more interior to my heart than my heart itself" (257). Likewise, the interest that Derrida seeks to affirm is not "a general preference of life" in "quasi-tautological opposition" to death; rather, it is necessary to move "to a more specific opposition: no longer simply to the opposition to death but to the opposition to the death *penalty*" (256). This opposition is not taken up for the "inviolability" (121) of an abstract notion

of life divorced from its constitutive conditions of finitude and relational interdependence, but rather the very ecstatic, other-oriented and indeterminately open, nature of the living *as* finite, *as* mortal, and *as* constitutively relational. As I will elaborate in the following, this shift in emphasis involves recasting the very terms by which one opposes the death penalty, a recasting that puts into question our very understanding of life in ‘quasi-tautological opposition’ with death.

This is because “it belongs to life not necessarily to be immortal but to have a future, thus *some life before it*, some event to come only where death, the instant of death, is not calculable, is not the object of a calculable decision” (2013 256). The simultaneous inescapability and irreducible unanticipatability of death haunts life as a ‘condemnation to die,’ but not yet a ‘condemnation to death,’ to death at a *fixed* and *calculable* moment, as the penalty to death (253). Likewise, the possibility of a future of *some life to-come* is afforded by this essential incalculability and unpredictability of one’s death: “it is because my life is finite, ‘finished’ in a certain sense, that I do not know, and that I neither can nor want to know, when I am going to die” (256-57). This futural indeterminacy opened by life’s mortal finitude affords the capacity to form meaningful horizons for decision and action, but only on the condition that these horizons might be interrupted and severed at any moment by death. Mortal time, in brief, is the condition for any meaningful projection into the future and the opening of the movement of auto-affection and self-affirmation.

Likewise, as this basic condition of incalculability, indeterminacy, and unpredictability, mortality exposes one to the unforeseeable coming of the event, to radical difference and heterogeneity – all this to say that it affords us a relationship to alterity that is incalculable and unconditional, exceeding any presumed or projected return of reidentification with oneself (2013 256). The unanticipatability of one’s death and indeterminacy of one’s finite condition implies

that one's lived time is afforded by the interruption of an *alterity* and the insistent possibility of *surprise*: death and our relation to the alterity of others are inseparably co-implicated for Derrida, *pace* Levinas.¹⁰ As such, the indeterminacy of mortality and exposure to alterity affords the possibility of projecting a future for oneself and, moreover, of projecting oneself *into the future*. It is by way of the indeterminacy of one's mortal future that one can possibly strive to return to oneself, an indeterminacy that likewise installs alterity at the foundation or 'heart' of selfhood.

As the decision on the event of the condemned one's death, capital punishment is therefore premised on the possibility of deciding upon, determining or *mastering* this "principle of indetermination" opened by mortality (2013 256). By seemingly translating the moment of death into a calculable, foreseeable, determined "instant" (222), capital punishment thus threatens foreclosing one's mortal time or "finitude-as-indetermination" (Jerade 110)¹¹; therefore, this decision gives the impression of effacing the unanticipatability of the future alongside all that this futurity affords us – the ability to plan, to decide, to project conditional horizons of anticipation ahead of the present alongside, crucially, projecting or reaffirming *oneself* as oneself. Moreover, this 'condemnation to death' apparently closes that temporal and phenomenological openness through which one otherwise comes to be affected by "the unconditional coming of the other, its event without possible anticipation and without horizon, its death or death itself" (2002c 278). In brief, by presuming to calculate upon and decide the event of the condemned one's death, capital punishment threatens to foreclose the 'interrupted teleology' of *re-identification* in *re-affirmation*. Insofar as the quasi-transcendental, constitutive condition of *différance* complicates – while enabling – the distinction of life from death, by presuming to "calculate and produce, in so-called objective time, the deadline [of death] to within a second" (2013 220), capital punishment is premised on the further presumption of

nullifying the constitutive and hyperbolic imbrication of death in life: “the concept of the death penalty supposes,” Derrida asserts, “that the state, the judges, society, the bourreaux and executioners, that is, third parties, have mastery over the time of life of the condemned one ... This knowledge, this mastery over the time of life and death, this mastering and calculating knowledge of the time of life of the subject is presupposed, alleged, presumed in the very concept of the death penalty” (2013 220).

During his discussion of the guillotine’s anaesthetic instantaneity (2013 222-226), Derrida demonstrates that this presumption to master lived time is evinced even by the tendency to focus almost exclusively on reducing or nullifying the *cruelty* of the death penalty, both on the side of the abolitionist and by those seeking to justify capital punishment. To suffer cruelty, as a specific manner of being affected by the other, *takes time*: time is precisely this receptive capacity of being affected by alterity. In the ninth session, Derrida reminds us that, from Kant through to Heidegger, time is understood as “sensibility or receptivity, affection,” and to passively *undergo* sensibility “can already be interpreted as the suffering of a punishment: *sensibility is in itself a punishment*” (2013 225-26). The reduce the cruelty of the punishment by reducing the suffering of the commended – which is also to attempt to nullify the lived experience of suffering in death, so crisply summarized by the idea of achieving a ‘painless death’ sought out by every technological innovation of the death penalty since the guillotine (223) – is inseparable from the attempt to immunize against, nullify or master the auto-hetero-affectivity of lived time: “if you suppress time, you will suppress sensibility” (226).¹² In this sense, the ‘cruelty argument’ at best fails to recognize and challenge the “principle of capital punishment” (50) but, in so failing, remains within the logic of this principle.¹³

Capital punishment, in presuming to fix and master the moment of death, thus “deprives me [Derrida speaking here *as* or *for* the condemned one] of my own finitude; it exonerates me, even, of my experience of finitude” (2013 257). In a tangential remark, Derrida underscores that this is “the infinite perversity, properly infinite and infinitizing, of the death penalty” (2013 257 fn. 24). In foreclosing the life’s ‘principle of indetermination’ by allegedly determining the instant of death, capital punishment threatens to deny the condemned one the interruptive experience of finitude and, consequently, auto-hetero-affectivity: “the calculating decision, by putting an end to life, seems, paradoxically, to put an end to finitude; it affirms its power over time; it masters the future; it protects against the irruption of the other” (2013 258).

Yet, this determining decision on death and the subsequent putting to end of finitude are *alleged* or *presumed* but “remain *phantasms*,” that is, they remain *impossible*, since “an end will never put an end to finitude, for only a finite being can be condemned to death” (258). This is to say that insofar as life *is*, it is undeniably and constitutively finite. It is only on the condition of the incalculable, unanticipatable, and unmasterable ‘condemnation to die’ that a living being can even be *presumed* to be ‘condemned to death’ by another, whether in murder or in capital punishment. Moreover, as I have argued in at the end of the preceding section, this lived condition commits finite life to a regressive or *infinitizing* deferral of relationality, alteration, and thereby of self-reference, *demanding* that one attempt to return to and reaffirm their finite identity, thus protectively ‘*infinitizing*’ oneself into the future: it initiates an ‘interrupted teleology’ or “infinitization” (2013 258) of life *qua* finitude, *qua* interruption, and thus an “infinitude” (1981 253) of the time of life. The phantasm of putting an end to finitude, this phantasm in the “anonymity of clockwork” and “the machine of the death penalty” (2013 257), is

therefore “the other side of an infinitization” which is always already at work in our very lived experience of interruptive finitude:

Since this experience is constitutive of finitude, of mortality, since this phantasm is at work in us all the time, even outside any real scene of verdict and death penalty ... a calculating decision on the subject of our death cherishes the dream of an infinitization and thus of an infinite survival assured by interruption itself. (2013 258)

3. Re-evaluating the Phantasm

Posing the question of what might *begin after* the closure of the history of metaphysics – what will, in other words, *survive* the death of a voice-without-différance in absolute knowledge – Derrida wrote in 1967 that such new beginnings are “to be heard in the openness of an unheard-of question that opens neither upon knowledge nor upon some nonknowledge which is a knowledge to come. In the openness of this question we no longer know” (1973 103). Beginning at the closure of knowledge, which is also the impossibility of any opposition between knowledge and non-knowledge, truth and fiction or the ‘as such’ and the ‘as if’, will become a major theme nearly a quarter of a century later in the course of Derrida’s last seminar, *The Beast and the Sovereign Vol. II* (2011a). In the second session, Derrida declares “on n’en sait trop rien” (44)¹⁴ in response to the question of the path to be taken or *decided upon* for the following year’s seminar. The possibility for a decision to be taken, Derrida clarifies, already implies a constitutive limit on our knowledge. For, if one knew in advance ‘the path’ or ‘the map’, indeed the best or right path to be taken, then there wouldn’t be any space for reflection, deliberation or justification, and hence no possibility of decision in the fullest sense: “It is decided in advance, so there is no decision to be taken” (2011a 44). The decision, which Derrida emphasizes is the hallmark of sovereignty (2013 86), therefore implies an impassable limit and irresolvable tension in the knowledge, self-knowledge, and justification of such sovereignty: it already begins with a tacit ‘I don’t know,’ the experience of constitutive *aporia* that quasi-transcendental différance commits us to.

In the sixth session of this seminar, Derrida returns to this generative suspension of knowledge but this time on the heels of his discussion of Crusoe’s fear of dying a living death. Here, Derrida offers his first direct exposition of the phantasm: “what I called the ‘phantasm’ in

this context is indeed the inconceivable, the contradictory, the unthinkable, the impossible. But I insisted on the zone in which the impossible is named, desired, apprehended. Where it affects us” (2011a 148). In other words, where the experience of the aporia suspends our knowledge, the phantasm begins working on us. The ‘*on n’en sait trop rien*’ or ‘I don’t know’ in response to our experience of aporia thereby has an intimate relationship with the phantasm through which this impossibility gains a hold over us. What I seek to demonstrate in the following is that if the phantasm is borne out of this aporetic suspension of knowledge, self-knowledge or auto-affectation by the very constitutive quasi-transcendental conditions of their possibility, then the phantasm is irreducible and unrelinquishable in lived experience. Moreover, the phantasmatic would be as much the condition for lived experience as the spacing-temporization of *différance*.

In “*Comme si, comme ça*” (2008), his influential essay on the phantasm in Derrida’s work, Michael Naas distinguishes the phantasm from ‘spectrality’ or the differing-deferral of presence by *différance*. While ‘spectrality’, Naas argues, is the “condition of phenomenality,” the phantasm is defined as the purported phenomenon of full self-presence detached from spectrality (190). The phantasm is thus defined as the projection of a self-present, self-sufficient ipseity not dependent on *différance*. Yet, Naas argues that the phantasm must be evaluated by its “power and affect” rather than its ontological status since it presents “us not with the way things are or are not but... the way we wish them to be and, thus, the way we assume them to be” (200). In other words, the phantasm must be understood by way of life’s desire for survival, self-identification, and its attendant effects rather than through truth-functional standards of evaluation. Moreover, the presumption of such an objective truth independent of one’s desire is “precisely one of the effects of the phantasm” (200) through which it gains its power or sway. Thus, to extrapolate on Naas’ point, the opposition of the phantasm, fantasy or *phantasma* to a

putatively independent truth or ontological foundation that it subsequently obscures or distorts – such as the ideality of Plato’s forms that are distorted by their mimetic and *phantasmatic* representation in the world of appearances – is symptomatic of the phantasm itself, of the “real almightiness of what thus presents itself to fantasy” (Derrida 2011a 130).

I follow Naas insofar as he evaluates the phantasm by its ‘regenerative’ (200) power in life rather than a putatively independent standard of truth or reality to which it would then be opposed. However, I contend that his essay is critically incomplete in not accounting for the implications of the quasi-transcendental status of the conditions that he groups under the term ‘spectrality.’¹⁵ In brief, Naas fails to consider the necessity of the capacity for auto-affection as one’s re-identification with oneself, thereby failing to recognize the impassability and unrelinquishable character of the phantasm generated by this desire in lived experience. Derrida’s quasi-transcendental argument, as I’ve argued above, means that as conditions of possibility for presence, experience, meaning, identity or life, *différance* and the trace are inseparable from what they condition or bring into being: if they could be isolated from their effects, as Kant had hoped, such conditions of possibility would be inefficacious and empty. Thus, as the quasi-transcendental conditions for life or lived experience, they are implicated in and concomitant with the desire for presence, self-identity, and unperturbed survival in life, despite barring its satisfaction. Insofar as the phantasm is generated by this desire on the part of the living, it would be irreducible and inseparable from *différance* and the trace due to their quasi-transcendentality.

This lapse is most apparent when Naas asserts that the deconstruction of the phantasm amounts to its relinquishing for the “*unconditionality* of the event or... the coming of the other” (2008 188). This implies that the ‘unconditional,’ constitutive relation to alterity could be

separated from the phantasm. Rather, the phantasm as the projected return of auto-affection and survival of life's identity is required for the 'unconditional': if, as above, life's finitude and subsequent desire to return to itself sustain *différance*, then the phantasm, as the projection of its self-identity, is its irrevocable result. Without auto-affection and the anticipated return of self-identification in response to the living's original disappropriation by *différance*, there couldn't be a self to relate to the coming of the event or the other, and hence no possibility for the unconditional. The unconditional or unanticipatable coming of the event *requires* the anticipated, conditional return of self-identity that is nonetheless constituted and interrupted by the former.¹⁶ To repeat, the hetero-affective turn towards the other and, likewise, the auto-affective return to oneself are undecidable on account of *différance*; moreover, this undecidability points to their aporetic concomitancy. This is because the unconditionality of the constitutive, anterior relation to alterity and futurity is afforded by the anticipated or promised return to oneself. Thus, the possibility of the phantasm in Naas' account always already goes along with the unconditional. The injunction that deconstruction seeks to relinquish the phantasm is premised on the failure to attend to its quasi-transcendental necessitation for the living. For his part, Naas anticipated such reservations regarding the possibility of fully relinquishing the phantasm, questioning whether we can think the anteriority of the other "without phantasm, without some silhouette – whether his or hers – casting its shadow over us, without even the "phantasm of a signature"" (212).

The figure of the phantasm, I contend, thus plays a parallel role for Derrida to Kant's transcendental illusion in the first *Critique* (1998) that, being immanent with the very architectonic of reason which enables and organizes the possibility of knowledge in experience, likewise implacably threatens reason with transcendental errancy in overstepping its epistemic finitude – a threat thus immanent with the very possibility for knowledge of any order (384-

390).¹⁷ Likewise, I have contended that on the register of lived experience and affectivity, the phantasm always already *haunts* Derrida's quasi-transcendental conditions. Infinite survival, a voice without *différance* or an ipsocratic, sovereignly self-present subject free from its differential and finite constitution – such impossible projections of the phantasm are borne out of the quasi-transcendental demand that the living seek to return to itself and reconstitute its self-identity against its persistent disappropriation. As I sought to demonstrate in §1, the exigency of this desire for re-identification with oneself is necessary for the continuation or survival of one's lived identity in response to its originary disappropriation. Since *différance* commits whatever it constitutes to alteration and repetition, and hence to iterability, on the register of lived identity this exigency manifests in the desire for presence, auto-affection or self-affirmation. Moreover, this *interrupted* and *repeated* self-affirmation is demanded by *différance* insofar as particular, lived identities can only be constituted *qua* other particular identities, thus requiring some minimal continuance or survival on the part of each in order to institute any determinate difference of self and other in the first place (1998a 62). The exigent, minimal continuance manifests in the living as the reaffirmation of its identity, inevitably turning away from its relational, mortal constitution and protectively 'infinitezing' its finite identity. As a matter of fact, *life couldn't do otherwise* without succumbing to the disappropriative effects of its constitutive conditions, thus folding over to a mute death or 'infinite *différance*' (1998a 131). Thus, quasi-transcendental *différance* already engenders a certain *phantasm* of infinitization as this projection or 'promise' of survival and re-identification with oneself.

Yet, this phantasm of infinitization "is one with God" (2013 262), that is, the dream of "eternal presence" or ipseity, thus the other face of death as unalloyed, "infinite *différance*" (1998a 131). Because *différance* disappropriates life of self-presence, it likewise must give rise

to the inescapable drive to suspend this constitutive disappropriation. It therefore renders the living beset by a Janus-faced ‘infinite différance,’ either in the persistent threat of life’s dissolution or ‘dissemination’ into its constitutive, differential milieu, or in the phantasmatic projection of infinite survival or self-presence detached from this milieu: that is, either “God or death” (1998a 131). In other words, the finite infinity of différance and the phantasm of an infinite survival (2013 258) or unalloyed ‘infinite différance’ are inseparable yet aporetically concomitant, both compossible *and* co-impossible.

This aporetic concomitancy points to Derrida’s account of *autoimmunity* in *Faith and Knowledge* (2002a): the phantasm haunts the quasi-transcendental constitution of the living “like the hyperbole of its own possibility ... As always, the risk charges itself twice, the same finite risk. Two times rather than one: with a menace and with a chance” (82). This is to say that différance, in committing one to alterity and indefinite relationality, also demands that one seek to return to and reaffirm oneself *as* oneself, thus turning back toward oneself and away from alterity: it demands severance from the other, thus severing, or presuming to sever, one’s constitutive relation to alterity. In this sense, différance generates life’s desire for a self-identity or self-presence that would annul its constitutive relationality: the living being’s self-recognition is premised on the unavoidable misrecognition of its own differential constitution. Yet, without the teleology of an auto-affective “immunitary survival” (2002a 82), without the movement thereby generating the phantasm, no constitutive relationality could be established, and no living trace could be instituted. In this sense, différance is *always already* autoimmune, and this autoimmunity renders the phantasm irreducible in lived experience. The phantasm thus presents a risk doubly charged, both a menace and a chance, as at once the possibility for one’s *reengagement* with alterity alongside the condition of unavoidable errancy.¹⁸

4. Testimony and The Promise of the ‘As Such’

The sixth and final characteristic of the phantasm that Naas identifies in “*Comme si, comme ça*” (2008) is its tendency “to try to pass off what is always a historically conditioned performative fiction as a constative or objective observation,” eliding a *comme si*, a performative-fictional *as if*, for a *comme ça*, a constative-descriptive *like this* (200). The phantasm, on Naas’ account, is therefore not strictly synonymous with the speculative register of the *as if*; moreover, it implies that this register is presumed to be a description of the state of the world or the self *as such*. If, as Naas asserts, “all sovereignties are fictions or phantasms,” then the source of the affective power of such phantasms in lived experience is their elision of such fictional, historically contingent, and artificial origins as natural or ahistorical (200): sovereignty presents itself as completely unconditioned and self-sufficient where, in fact, it is conditioned by ostensibly marginal or historical factors and is therefore thoroughly conditioned.

Insofar as he identifies the centrality of the ‘*as if*’ in Derrida’s thought, I follow Naas. However, I question his subsequent treatment of the phantasm as essentially an elision of the *as if* for an *as such* alongside the subsequent, tacit assumption that such constitutive performative fictions could possibly do without the anticipatory ‘promise’ of the ‘*as such*’. In his essay on Paul Celan’s “Aschenglorie,” Derrida maintains that the ““as such” is presupposed by language” (2005c 77), by any testimony or promise. This presupposition holds despite the fact that the ‘structural threat’ of finitude, quasi-transcendental *différance* and the trace, disappropriates any simple or given access to the *as such* of experience:

For the witness is not present ... to what he recalls, he is not present to it in the mode of perception, to the extent that he bears witness, at the moment when he bears witness; he is no longer present, now, to what he says he was present to, to what he says he perceived; he

is no longer present, even if he says he is present, presently present, here and now, through what is called memory, memory articulated in a language, to his having-been present. (2005c 76)

This ‘structural threat of finitude’, the ‘condition of possibility’ as ‘condition of impossibility’ for lived experience, *really does foreclose* access to the ‘as such’ by the addressee of testimony alongside the witness themselves, both in their recounting and in the very experience of witnessing. Yet, another sense of the necessity for an *as such* is revealed by the aporetic structure of testimony. This necessity “is not theoretical but performative-pragmatic” (2005c 76): it appeals to the exigency of belief, an appeal that ‘you must believe me’, rather than the binding necessity of “the conclusion of a syllogism or to the production of proof” (2005c 77). Thus, the aporia of witnessing that Derrida explicates doesn’t simply demonstrate the impossibility of accessing the ‘as such’ of another or one’s own experience; rather, Derrida reveals this ‘as such’ as always tendered on a tacit acquiescence of belief, faith or credit ‘as if’ it was the case. Likewise, the possibility of bearing witness and giving testimony is necessarily oriented towards the ‘as such’, for “we will not, in general, call “bearing witness” something that is not open to the order of the *comme tel* [as such], of the present or having-been-present *comme tel, en tant que tel*, of the *as such*” (2005c 77). Insofar as the ‘as such’ is always tendered on a performative ‘as if’, the latter is necessarily oriented towards the *promise* of the former and this promise is always destined for another, whether that be another-than-oneself or oneself-as-another. This is explicated clearly in Derrida’s response to the pragmatist appropriation of deconstruction, emphasizing the promise of truth-telling as the condition for dialogue:

There is no language without the performative dimension of the promise, the minute I open my mouth I am in the promise. Even if I say that ‘I don’t believe in truth’ or

whatever, the minute I open my mouth there is a ‘believe me’ at work. Even when I lie, and perhaps especially when I lie, there is a ‘believe me’ in play. And this ‘I promise you that I am speaking the truth’ is a messianic a priori, a promise which, even if it is not kept, even if one knows that it cannot be kept, takes place and *qua* promise is messianic. (1996 84)

Far from simply obscuring an anterior, performative fiction under an apparently constative statement, Derrida thus demonstrates that the promise of the ‘*as such*’ is shown to always inhabit the ‘*as if*’ underlying any relation to the other or lived experience. How, then, does this anticipatory *comme tel* of testimony and the promise fit into Michael Naas’ account of the phantasm as an elision of a *comme si* for a *comme ça*? Furthermore, would Derridean deconstruction seek to relinquish this promise of the *as such* contained in testimony as Naas avers regarding the phantasm? Is the promise of this *as such* in the same register as the elision that Naas diagnoses in the phantasm? If one accepts not only the unavoidability but also the *affirmative* necessity of the ‘*as such*’ in the promise of testimony that we are committed to from the outset, then the terms by which Naas defines the phantasm and his subsequent injunction to relinquish the phantasm for the unconditionality of *différance* must be re-evaluated. I propose that an answer is found in Derrida’s late engagement with Paul Celan’s passage from *Breathturn* (2014), ‘die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen’ (412) or ‘the world is gone, I have to carry you’ (174),¹⁹ revealing a necessary affirmation of the ‘*as such*’ presupposed and promised by the ‘*as if*’ which is *constitutive* to life yet always threatens the possibility of errancy or going astray:

Where there is no world, where the world is not here or there, but *fort*, infinitely distant over there, that which I must do, with you and carrying you, is make it that there be precisely a world, just a world, if not a just world, or to do things so as to

make *as if* there were just a world, and to make the world come to the world, to make *as if* – for you, to give it to you, to bear it toward you, destined for you, to address it to you – I made the world come into the world, as though there ought to be a world where presently there is none, to make the gift or present of this *as if* come up poetically, *which is the only thing that – during the finite time of such an impossible voyage between two non-shores where nothing happens – the only thing that can make it possible that I can live and have or let you live ...* (2011a 268)

The promise to make ‘the world come to the world’ is inseparable from the anterior and unconditional possibility of a being-*there* “beyond my death” (2011a 131) that Derrida designates to the structure of survival as ‘survivance,’ in other words, of “*another* here-and-now, of another transcendental present, of *another* origin of the world appearing as such, presenting itself as irreducible absence within the presence of the trace” (1998a 47). This is the promise of an ‘*as such*’ or *being-there* beyond any conditional horizon of expectation or return on self-identity. As with *différance*, this account of the promise indicates its constitutive, enabling aporia. On the one hand, before promising anything in particular, one promises oneself to realize the pledge made to the other; in other words, one promises to keep their promise and thus promises *oneself*. The promissory structure, like testimony, requires the self-affirmation of the promisor, an ‘I will be there, I will fulfill my word’ for another. Likewise, the self-affirmation of this promissory vow also affirms one’s relation to the other. Yet, this self-affirmation is itself deferred to a future instant, committed to reaffirmation and repetition by its very finitude. This is because one’s finitude not only separates self from other, but also divides and interrupts the promisor from themselves, committing every self-affirmation to re-affirmation. Because this re-affirmation references an irretrievably lost past and altered future, it is always already turned

over to an affirmation of oneself-as-other. The promise is therefore constitutively unrealizable because, on the one hand, the self-affirmation that it commits the promisor to is suspended by the very interval of deferral that enjoins them to promising. On the other hand, if it could be realized, then the constitutive conditions for promising in finitude, repetition, and reaffirmation would be annulled. The promise would no longer be exigent *here-and-now* since the interval of delay between the vow and its actualization would be closed. As Derrida writes in his discussion of the Demiurge,

the promise must always be at once, at the same time infinite and finite in its very principle: infinite because it must be capable of carrying itself beyond any possible program, and because in promising what is calculable and certain one no longer promises; *finite* because in promising the infinite ad infinitum one no longer promises anything presentable, and therefore one no longer promises. (2017a 27)

This is to say that, as *transcendental*, the promise is committed to an unconditional horizon, to infinite regress, which thereby divests it of any manifest determinacy. As such, on its own, this unconditionality effaces what it promises: the *transcendental condition of its possibility* is also *the condition of its impossibility*. The unconditionality of the promise or its ‘infinity’ effaces itself or is, in a sense, *finite* and *mortal*. Not only does one always commit oneself to the other in promising; moreover, one is always already *committed* to promising due to their finite constitution. Self-affirmation is rendered *promissory* as well as *testimonial* from the outset, and this promissory-testimonial structure shares in the auto-hetero-affective dimension of the phantasm. Différance grants both, inseparably.

Concluding Remarks

In the preceding, I sought to demonstrate that quasi-transcendental *différance* demands that the living attempt to return to itself and reaffirm its identity in response to an originary disappropriation of self-identity; moreover the ‘interrupted teleology’ of this reaffirmation engenders an irreducible ‘phantasm of infinitization’ in the lived experience of finitude and relational difference; and, finally, that the auto-hetero-affective dimension of this phantasm is inseparable from an anterior promise or acquiescence to alterity that *différance* likewise commits us to. In doing so, I’ve skirted a number of other open questions in Derrida’s expansive work, indicated throughout the endnotes. However, as I’ve already suggested, the figure of the phantasm in Derrida’s later thought is oriented in particular by his engagement with Kant’s regulative modality of the ‘*as if*’ and the transcendental illusion alongside his more widely discussed dealings with Freud on the death drive and repetition compulsion (1979, 1998b, 2019).²⁰ At the end of *The Beast and the Sovereign II*, Derrida indicates the centrality of the question of Kant’s ‘as if’ in what could be read as a promissory note of his own: “I would be tempted, incapable of doing so here now, to follow very far and on the most adventurous and dangerous paths the stakes of a serious debate between what Heidegger calls – we’ve talked about it enough as the major concept of our seminar – the *als-Struktur* [‘as-structure’] and what for my part I shall nickname Kant’s *Alsobstruktur* [‘as-if structure’]” (2011a 269). This would prove to be Derrida’s final seminar before his death in October 2004, leaving ‘the most adventurous and dangerous paths’ of this promise under-explored by Derrida himself and under-elaborated in the secondary literature to follow. If I can anticipate a path for future work on the figure of the phantasm, I believe that it requires a serious engagement with the implications of

this *Alsobstruktur* and the transcendental illusion, one which, unfortunately, I am unable to fulfill in the present work.

Endnotes

1. Here, I open onto the seismic and pressing question of whether *différance* is coextensive and coterminous with lived experience or organic life more generally, implying that if there was no life, there would be no *différance*. While I cannot address this question directly or adequately, I do not want to make the strong claim that *différance* is restricted to what is identified as life – often inadequately as opposed to death or inanimate matter, anticipating Derrida’s long deconstructive engagement with this opposition from his 1975 seminar *La Vie La Mort* (2019) until his final *Beast and the Sovereign* seminar (2011a), discussed below. Rather, I justify restricting scope of my current argument to lived identity and experience by the quasi-transcendental status of *différance*, which means that one cannot give an account of quasi-transcendental conditions abstracted or generalized from the concrete context or register that they constitute. Rather, one must seek out such conditions anew in every such context, register, or repetition, accounting for the variance in the local effects produced through repeatability. In this sense, it would be mistaken to make a strong general claim about *différance* apart from its constituting, *in lieu* “play” (1982 7); moreover, such quasi-transcendentality would resist ‘strong claims’ as such regarding the proper place or essence of *différance*. Insofar as my primary question is of *différance* in relation the phantasm, which is inseparable from the *capacity to be affected* (2011a 148), my argument regarding *différance* is at the register of lived experience and the constituting play of *différance* therein. For extensive accounts of the relation between deconstruction and biology, I refer to Derrida’s aforementioned 1975 seminar (2019), alongside recent developments under the heading of ‘*biodeconstruction*’ – subject of a two-part special issue of *Postmodern Culture* (Obodiac 2018a, 2018b) – and exhaustive studies by Francesco Vitale (2018), Dawn McCance (2019), and Phil Lynes (2018).

2. Here, I acknowledge the problem that arise with the use of a concept of ‘identity’. Insofar as the principle of identity is self-sameness and correlative with the principle of non-contradiction, Derrida asserts that the thought of *différance* and the trace is “contradictory and not acceptable within the logic of identity” (1998a 61). Likewise, he emphasizes that the common account of lived experience “has always designated the relationship with a presence” and therefore “participates in the movement of the reduction of the trace” (1998a 61). For the purpose of clarity and for lack of more appropriate and commonly accessible terms, I use these concepts while attending to the problems or *aporias* that Derrida reveals at their foundation. In this sense, following Derrida, ‘identity’ and ‘experience’ should here be understood as ‘under erasure’ insofar as they are both made possible and debarred by *différance*.

3. See in particular Gasché (1986), Bennington (1993), and Fritsch (2005, 2011) for explications of this sense of the quasi-transcendental.

4. The English edition of *Glas* (1986) translates “*une rôle quasi transcendental*” (1974 183) as “an almost tran-... scendental role” (1986 151-162) and shifts a several page-long gap in the text to the word ‘tran/scendental’. While I cannot extrapolate on the possible complications of this translation, I preserve the original ‘quasi transcendental’ for my purposes in this paper. See also Derrida (1974 171-183; 1988b 127-128, 152; 2008a 234-235, 239).

5. See Bennington (1988) and Kramer (2014). Sina Kramer has focused in particular on the quasi-transcendental as a form of ‘constitutive exclusion’ in which a body or system is determined by that which it is unable to assimilate or identify with and is thereby driven to exclude and repress (523). While I agree with Kramer’s account insofar as she explicates the quasi-transcendental in terms of a body’s productive tension with an inassimilable excess or alterity that complicates its constitutive boundaries, I question the restriction of this tension to an

exclusionary structure which retains the Hegelian equation of difference with negation and contradiction. Despite Kramer's argument that the constitutive nature of the exclusion exceeds and resists its constriction into the dialectical moments of contradiction and sublation, I argue that the constitutive relation with an inassimilable alterity is as much characterized by exclusion as it is by a fundamental condition of 'minimal *aimance*' (Derrida 2005d) or 'hospitality' (Derrida 2000). Here, I refer in particular to Matthias Fritsch's critique of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's 'agonistic' interpretation of deconstruction (2008) alongside his recent elaboration of a constitutive normativity of deconstructive critique through '*minimal aimance*' and double affirmation (2019).

6. In *Speech and Phenomena* (1973), Derrida seeks to demonstrate that the 'essential distinctions' of Husserl's phenomenological investigations – between, for instance, “the sign and the nonsign, linguistic sign and nonlinguistic sign, expression and indication, ideality and nonideality, subject and object” – these essential distinctions “live only from the difference between fact and right, reality and ideality” (101) where they are *in fact* and *by right* rendered impossible. For, if actuality exactly reflected the Husserl's idealities, then the difference from actuality on which such idealities depend *as ideal* would collapse, thus effacing their very condition of its possibility. Derrida writes, “*de facto* and *realiter* [the essential distinctions] are never respected ... *de jure* and *idealiter* they vanish” (101). The “teleological structure” of Husserl's distinctions is thus shown to be self-effacing, or “their possibility is their impossibility” (101). Without dwelling further on Derrida's engagement with Husserl, what I want to emphasize is that the *condition of possibility as impossibility* of Husserl's 'essential distinctions', the hallmark of quasi-transcendental *différance*, constitutively defers their realization *ad infinitum*.

7. Geoffrey Bennington argues in “Rigor; or, Stupid Uselessness” (2012) that the same aporia between guides Derrida’s engagement with Kant in the *Death Penalty* seminars, insofar as the *jus talionis* as the categorical imperative or rational core of the moral law depends on the failure of rationality as *human rationality* to achieve its end and realize this principle, lest it be indistinguishable from the law of necessity governing phenomenal nature (35). The ideality of the moral law thus depends on its *impossibility*, that is, the impossibility of human reason to actually achieve it.

8. I am particularly indebted here to Alexander García Düttmann’s recent account of the finite infinity of *différance* (2018). Yet, I question his contention that infinite *différance*, ‘God or death’, designates the non-economic ground of finite *différance*, the ‘organization of life’ as an ‘economy of death’, thus implying that there is a ‘god’ of deconstruction (141). I would contrast this claim to its quasi-transcendentality, which ‘*a priori*’ excludes the possibility that *différance* could grow infinite (Derrida 1998a 131). I bracket a full explication for future work.

9. Peggy Kamuf (2013) has offered a previous, extended commentary on these pages from DPI, arguing convincingly that they make up the crux of Derrida’s “philosophical argument against the death penalty” (244).

10. I refer here to Levinas’ argument in *Totality and Infinity* (1969) that mortality is only ever disclosed by the interruption of alterity in the “face of the other” that carries the commandment ‘*thou shall not kill (me, the singular, concrete, vulnerable other)*’ (199). One is exposed to mortality and death by way of a primordial and constitutive relation to the singular other that likewise grants one the possibility for selfhood and action. In sum, there is no relation to mortality and hence no possibility of selfhood without alterity: the interruptive injunction of the other on the self to not kill the other, or what Levinas later designates as an ‘anarchic

responsibility' (1998a 153), takes precedence over any existential phenomenology of the self as *Dasein* or being-towards-death. While I cannot elaborate on this here, a possible comparison could be drawn here between Levinas' thesis that the interruptive relation to the other precedes one's comprehension of mortality – both another's and one's own – and Freud's thesis in "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" (1915) that "in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality" (289), discussed by Derrida in the sixth session of the second *Beast and the Sovereign* seminar (2011a 157-59).

11. In "*Mors certa, hora incerta*" (2017), Miriam Jerade offers a lucid explication of Derrida's "deconstruction of death from mortality-as-finitude in the death penalty ... [through] the machinic dimension of the death penalty as the closure of finitude-as-indetermination" (110).

12. Kelly Oliver (2016) has commented on this complicity at length. Specifically, Oliver interrogates cases in the United States in which prisoners on death row have died before their execution by the state, thus, on the logic of the sovereign decision, depriving the possibility of death being rendered as a punishment by the sovereign decision. Such cases, Oliver argues, make clear that "the death penalty is not just about death, but also about death rendered as punishment" (140). This guarantee of death rendered as punishment is inseparable from the attempt to minimize the time of the execution, acting likewise as a measure of the undo cruelty of the punishment: "Cruelty, then, has been reduced to the duration of death. Within this logic, cruelty can be measured in milliseconds. A 'good' death is one that happens instantly" (141).

13. Derrida states this clearly already in the second session of this seminar: "this argument against the cruelty rather than against the principle of the death penalty is both strong and weak, strong because it moves and thus motivates, provides a good psychological motivation for the abolition of the death penalty; but it is weak because it concerns only the modality of application,

not the principle of the death penalty, and it becomes impotent in the face of what claims to be an incremental softening, an anesthesia that tends toward the general, or even a humanization of the death penalty that would spare the cruelty to both the condemned one and the witnesses, all the while maintaining the principle of capital punishment” (2013 50).

14. The translators note that Derrida plays on the French idiom ‘je n’en sais trop rien’, literally translated as ‘I don’t know too much nothing about it’, which means ‘I don’t know too much about it’ or ‘I really don’t know anything about it’ (2011a 44 fn. 24).

15. Kas Saghafi also interrogates Naas’ failure to distinguish the phantasm of sovereign ipseity from that of “dying alive” (2015 21), the fantasy of experiencing and continuing to be affected after one’s death (Derrida 2011a 149). Saghafi emphasizes that the latter is inseparable from our insistent condition of ‘dying alive’ in a survivance that is ‘intolerable’ to the exigencies of life (19). Like the differential, quasi-transcendental conditions of *différance* and the trace, the notion of survivance indicates the constitution of the living as *survival* or ‘living-on’ (2011b) and as embedded in the “weave” (132) of relations with others. Therefore, survivance broaches the inchoate complicity of life with death: it is “neither life nor death pure and simple, a sense that is not thinkable on the basis of the opposition between life and death,” yet “from which are detached, identified, and opposed what we think we can identify ... [as] death properly so-called as opposed to some life properly so-called” (2011a 130-31). One is therefore always-already committed to “living to death, or to death as survivance” (2011a 132), and therefore to the phantasm of *dying alive* by Saghafi’s account. Saghafi thus asks “whether “dying alive” is a phantasm like that of sovereignty, or that of a pure origin, ipseity, uncontaminated presence, and the self-coinciding self ... if deconstruction is, as Naas argues, the deconstruction of the phantasm, does the phantasm of “dying alive” need to be deconstructed too” (21). Further to

Saghafi's interrogation of Naas, the distinction between the phantasm of sovereign ipseity or self-identity and that of 'dying alive' or survivance is questionable since the projection of sovereign ipseity is only possible through the survival indicated by the trace (1998a 62).

16. Matthias Fritsch raises this point regarding the co-implication of conditional and unconditional horizons: "[due to] the very fact that a self-relation ... is never given in advance but only to be had by relating to the other-than-self, [différance] demands that the self seeks to come back to itself" (Fritsch 2011 458). Further, I argue that one is only exposed to the unconditional, "indefinite and infinite deferral of meaning" (Fritsch 2011 458), by way of one's anticipated, projected self-relation.

17. Derrida insists in a number of writings on the regulative *als ob* ('*as-if*') of Kant's 'transcendental illusion' (1981 296-297; 2002b 209-215, 230-237; 2005f 85, 120-121, 133-135; 2011a 269-277). While §3 addresses the relation of the '*as if*' to testimony, the promise, and the phantasm, there is much more to be worked out regarding the Kantian illusion, the Transcendental Dialectic itself defined by Kant in the first critique as the "logic of illusion" (1998 384), as it is taken up, radicalized, and possibly critiqued by Derrida's through the various logics of hauntology (1994 10), spectrality (1994 30), autoimmunity (2002a, 2005f), or the phantasm. For the sake of brevity, I bracket an adequate account and elaboration of Derrida's engagement with Kant for future work. Suffice it to contend that there is a salient disagreement regarding the limits of possibility for knowledge or experience despite their deep affinities. Kant seeks to explicate the 'logic of illusion' in the antinomies of the Transcendental Dialectic in order to prescribe the limits of possible knowledge and rein in reason's inevitable propensity to overstep its finite capacities; by contrast, Derrida's elaboration of such aporetic conditions is precisely to "desertify" or suspend the purported sovereignty of reason, knowledge, or any power

of a performative ‘I can’ in order to expose it to the “unconditional coming of the other, its event without possible anticipation and without horizon” (2002c 278). In brief, I would pit Kant’s project of amortizing the antimoniactal double binds of reason by hemming in its speculative activity against Derrida’s prescient demonstration that it is only out of such transcendental double binds that any decision, responsibility or promise, to name just a few instances, are possible: any noumenal freedom that Kant seeks to assign to reason would actually be borne out of the antinomies which prevent its activity from being merely the application of a categorial or transcendental program, which bracket its sovereignty and expose it to the unconditionality of the aporia.

18. In “Staging Survivance” (2018), Sarah Kathryn Marshall has raised a similar point, arguing that since “survivance designates the impossibility of being, identification, definition or delimitation, and presence-to-self, it *can only be thought otherwise than it-self*.” In the case of the death penalty, survivance is rendered “as an unscathed survival staged through a self-effacing performance of sacrificial indemnification” (104). While Marshall focuses on the concomitancy between survivance and the sacrificial vocation of capital punishment that Derrida identifies as the organizing principle of sovereignty, I have sought to extend this line of thinking to the organization of life in general. In doing so, further to Marshall’s conclusion that survivance must always be thought otherwise than itself, I argue that survivance, like *différance*, *requires* and is *sustained by* the auto-affective teleology generating such phantasmatic projections of unscathed survival and self-presence. The implications of this contention run deep, since, if survivance or *différance* cannot do without these phantasms that likewise instigate such ‘auto-immune’ sacrificial vocations as the death penalty, then the autoimmunity of such phantasms would go along with *différance* and survivance from the outset. In brief, the reactive, autoimmune

teleology and life's differential constitution, as other-oriented and finite, would be inseparable. The motivation behind deconstructing the death penalty, its "impossible task" (Derrida 2013 259), couldn't then be restricted to opening our thought to "the other as other" (Kathryn 104), since precisely one side of this phantasm is the apparent securing of the limit between self and other there where survivance insistently complicates and undermines this limit. Rather, as I argue in the subsequent section, such a deconstruction would seek to excavate the "auto-hetero-affective dimension" (Derrida 2011a 170) of the phantasm that is inseparable from *différance* and thus from an anterior acquiescence or promise to the other.

19. Derrida returns to this line of poetry in Celan many times throughout his later work, most notably in his second *Beast and the Sovereign* seminar (2011a 104-105, 258-290) and "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue—Between Two Infinities, The Poem" (2005e). Likewise, a parallel problematic is at play in *Advances* (2017a) where, despite not directly citing the Celan passage, Derrida explicitly explicates the promise as the promise of the world.

20. Here, I refer in particular to lucid studies by Elizabeth Rottenberg (2018) and Robert Trumbull (2012).

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