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# **The subject in transmission – the phantomic origins of (dual) unity and the birth of the self.**

Abraham and Torok's (1994) clinical concept of the *phantom* can be rethought in extended terms to account for the challenges inherent in giving birth to oneself. The author re-examines the question of the ghost in terms of the individual's separation from the mother-child unity. This is a traumatic process that vacillates between the threat of loss and the intrusion of the mother, now constituted as an object. We manage this experience through the symbol, with the process of introjection differentiating the child and substituting the mother with psychical representatives. Incorporation is the refusal of the symbol, creating cryptic mechanisms that destroy meaning and produce resilient pathologies. Where Abraham and Torok oppose and separate these processes, the author follows Derrida in questioning the purity of this distinction. Something cryptic necessarily intervenes in our accession to the symbol as we negotiate the enigmas and inconsistencies of the mother-child union. Ours foundations are haunted by gaps that we must continually negotiate in the birth and maintenance of subjectivity. Phantoms are transmitted as we constitute an internal frame, formulate repression and use maternal words to articulate our separation. We are subject to and subjects of transmission, incompletely individuated as we endlessly repeat through the symbol and into the future a dynamic of clinging to and separating from the mother.

Keywords: Abraham & Torok; the phantom; dual unity; haunting; individuation; maternal legacy

The movement of interiorization keeps within us the life, thought, body, voice, look or soul of the other, but in the form of those hypomnemata, memoranda, signs or symbols, images or mnesic representations which are only lacunary fragments, detached and dispersed – only “parts” of the departed other.

Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, p.37

The concept of the phantom (*le fantôme*) was introduced into psychoanalytic parlance in the final collaborative works of psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham (1919-75) and Maria Torok (1925-98). It was the culmination of a project to renew Freudian metapsychology and technique in the face of institutional dogmatism and complex cases that were not accounted for in the traditional analytic frame. These cases (now typically referred to as borderline) could not be reduced to neurotic or even psychotic structures and were often characterized by a resilience to analytic intervention. For Abraham and Torok, this signalled a patient’s possession by an inaccessible traumatic event that carved out in them a fundamental emptiness which also seemed impossible to locate. The question of trauma is central to Abraham and Torok’s theorising, especially its undigestible aspects that are too overwhelming to encounter face on, resulting in “real puzzles or oddities” (Abraham, 2016, p.20) in the symptomatology of some of their patients. They first theorised the mechanisms of a *crypt* to account for individuals who had been directly affected by trauma, hypothesising a symbolic machinery that constructs and maintains key experiences of distress as silenced and secret. This keeps trauma as an open wound in a structure that fractures

meanings alluding to it but that also cannot let it go. The phantom extends this postulate to consider the possibility that crypts can be transferred between individuals, especially down generational lines within a family.<sup>1</sup> The haunting effects of trauma, therefore, take on an important transgenerational dimension that has implications for the way psychoanalysis constructs the limits of psychopathology and the subject this inhabits.

Abraham and Torok keep their notions of the crypt and phantom largely within the clinical realm to denote specific pathological phenomena and suggest how they can be worked through. Although therapeutically useful, this has led to criticism for the rigid binary it can institute between healthy and pathological processes (Derrida, 1986; Lane, 1997; Royle 2003). The crypt and the phantom tie the symbolic operation indissociably to what it cannot comprehend leaving a traumatic trace in every possible articulation. This introduces into psychoanalysis a new problematic of mourning as the psyche is forced to contend with an alterity that exceeds our ability to contain and assimilate it into the structures of self. What I will argue here is that this problematic can be extended beyond pathological cases to consider the very constitution of selfhood in the haunted terms that Abraham and Torok reserve for alterity's most extreme disruptions. Where we encounter symbols, therefore, we also encounter ghosts; liminal figures poised between presence and absence (the typical referents of "natural" language explanations), inside and outside, known and unknown.

Abraham and Torok's rethinking of metapsychology in terms of haunting introduces-or reawakens (Luckhurst, 1999)-a ghostly logic into the psychoanalytic edifice that, with Abraham's untimely death in 1975, has been accounted for and developed in a posthumous context. It is Abraham's close friend, Jacques Derrida who first frames the limitations of thinking the crypt and phantom in exclusively clinical terms and begins to reimagine their implications

beyond this (Derrida, 1986; 1988; 1994). Derrida's notion of spectrality in his later work is indebted to Abraham and Torok's thinking, and for my purposes, complicates the process of mourning - central to the emergence of subjectivity - through reflection on how alterity should be included within the self (or related symbolic structures). Detailed in his meditation on mourning after the death of his friend Paul de Man, Derrida places this process-like Freud, like Abraham and Torok-at the heart of self-constitution and interiorization. For him, "the 'within me' and the 'within us' acquire their sense and their bearing only by carrying within themselves the death and memory of the other; of an other who is greater than them" (1989, 33). Something of this other, furthermore "must remain nonreappropriable, nonsubjectivable and in a certain way nonidentifiable, a sheer opposition" (1988, 276), such that mourning and interiorization, while essential, become impossible tasks. "Faithful interiorization," he qualifies "bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead" (1989, 35). It is the recognition that we deal continually with revenants and the complications this introduces into thinking that has been at the basis of a "spectral turn" in recent critical theory (Buse and Stott, 1999; Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, 2013).

This turn has created greater recognition for Abraham and Torok's work but has also repositioned it problematically as a superseded stage in the development of philosophical deconstruction. What I argue here is that relegating their insights in this way neglects rich strands of thought that were already emerging in their final texts as they engaged implicitly with Derrida's interrogation and reformulation of the ghost, but that were cut short before their substantive elaboration. The questions that I reopen here concern the difficulties of individuation that Abraham and Torok place at the heart of psychoanalysis and complicate through their pathologies of haunting. It is thus an implicit dialogue with the wider philosophical debates

around the *principium individuationis* (the “principle of individuation”) that have a centuries long tradition but are articulated with the greatest relevance in Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*. This text borrows Arthur Schopenhauer’s image of a sailor “in a small boat in a boundless raging sea” (Nietzsche, 2000, 21) to picture the relationship between rational Apollonian tendencies as the “apotheosis of the *principium individuationis*” (ibid., 31) and the Dionysian forces that underpin, yet threaten to consume this. Life is thus a continual tension between the formation of identity, framed increasingly through psychological concepts, and subjective dissolution. The latter is the essence of the Dionysian, a horrifying and yet rapturous intoxication that touches “a universal spiritual community uniting human beings with nature” (ibid., xvi). For Nietzsche, the Dionysian is the original impulse, enjoying a privileged relation to the truth of existence. The Apollonian gives it form, cementing human autonomy and rational society, but also stifling its productive and often troubling potential. Nietzsche goes so far as to render individuation a deceitful myth that separates humans from the world and each other, veiling a greater truth of inchoate forces, creativity and mutual implication.

The dual and antagonistic nature that Nietzsche places at the heart of human existence is a clear forbear to the psychoanalytic conception of subjectivity. The division of the subject into consciousness and unconscious realms is the principle axis of psychoanalysis, although Freud’s more sustained consideration of the *principium individuationis* develops after his reflections on metapsychology from 1914 when his focus turns to the ego. This newly conceived structure manages the demands of reality alongside id drives and their alloying with excessive parental expectation in the superego. From initially radical roots in his challenge to the Cartesian model centred on self-consciousness, Freud’s work on the ego is seen by some as a retrograde step, especially as it birthed ego psychology in the United States (Lacan, 2006; Laplanche, 1999).

Here, there is an increasing dismissal of the Dionysian, as drives are bracketed out as essential human motives and the focus turns instead to ego formation and its defences. The result of this is a social conservatism that pays for cohesion and security with conformity and repression. It was the French context surrounding Abraham and Torok's work, where critiques of this model were most vociferous, mobilizing Jacques Lacan's attacks on ego psychology and his re-imagining of the subject de-centred through language as the defining moment for generations of Francophone psychoanalysts (Lacan, 2006).

Abraham and Torok engage the *principium individuationis* from a comparable suspicion of the integrated self and its clear discrimination from origins. This is different from Lacan, however, whose work they "cultivated an ignorance of" (Roudinesco, 1990, 598), as they rethink the process of individuation through a symbol that is as much a product of the careful negotiations of the infant with its mother as it is the socio-linguistic imposition of an external and phallogocentric culture.<sup>ii</sup> As the literal and metaphorical origins of selfhood, this maternal relation reconfigures the Dionysian away from Nietzsche's essentialist mythology (repeated in Freud's final drive model through his appeal to Eros and Thanatos) to the concrete interactions of an infinitely variable yet observable bond. For Abraham and Torok, the birth of the self is structured around the *dual unity* of the mother-child relation and the legacy this leaves in the individuating child. Explored in Abraham's 1974-5 "Seminar on the Dual Unity and the Phantom" (hereafter, the *Seminar*) the dual unity is the basis for explaining the pathological transmission of phantoms, but, for my purposes, also provides a means for thinking beyond this into an extended conception of haunting. My argument is that the notion of dual unity reveals a propensity for disruption at the heart of individuation that is not limited to pathological cases.



The mother-child union is fraught with enigmas and inconsistencies which destabilise the first context for growth. A new-born's sense of helplessness can quickly become traumatic as they negotiate the presence and absence of the first object; a series of tensions that crystallise around the necessity of separation and its (imperfect) management through external and internal resources. The inscription of trauma in the psyche is therefore inevitable, although, as I will demonstrate, a cryptic logic intervenes into this so that trauma is not a simple causal structure in the birth of the self but is folded into its mechanisms and continually reenvisioned. This allows for very different responses to the maternal context and its legacy in the individual to be imagined. Trauma functions as a foreign body in the continuity of care and existence, whose uncertain form and content we cannot rescind but struggle to appropriate. It is the lure and terror of the as yet inchoate maternal base as our origins (a transposition of the Dionysian) that is mediated by and differentiated through the symbol (the Apollonian tendency) encoding it with varying success. This process of maternal push and pull is never finished and full of compromises, drawing together what had previously been distinguished more clearly as healthy and pathological operations. By reconsidering Abraham's dual unity in these terms, my thesis extends the phantom beyond the narrow confines of the clinic to reflect on the process of individuation more generally; a generality, as I will explore, that refuses the notion of a fixed foundation, functioning instead through a haunted structure. Building on Abraham and Torok's therapeutic insights, especially as these are refracted through Derrida's work, the model of subjectivity I construct is always somehow haunted, sundered between enigmatic demands from the past that saturate the dual unity and the promise of their resolution in an unrealizable future. The individual is endlessly differentiating from a phantom legacy that it still clings to, repeats and reprojects, but this is a legacy that also offers it the breaks and spacing to be constituted

otherwise. Here, in the inherent instability of the *principium individuationis* we find the subject in transmission.

### **The symbolic mediation of subjectivity**

From Abraham's key 1962 text "*Le symbole*," his collaborative work with Torok explored the symbolic character of being, claiming that "being or identity is only possible in a symbolic mode" (1978a, p.38, translations from this text my own). The symbol is thus at the heart of theory and is defined in terms of trauma to form a foundational binary in which the symbol issues from and is the overcoming of trauma, and trauma is consequently "the inhibition of [the symbolic] operation" (1978a, p.36). The symbol is at the heart of individuation and allows the infant to negotiate the complexities and inconsistencies of a first environment by replacing the immediate care of others with internal representations. The success of these is determined by their ability to mediate trauma when failures occur in this provision. For Abraham and Torok symbols are hewn from the material of the world, as objects substitute other objects (the thumb for the breast), imagos substitute objects and these internal object-traces are given meaning through interactions with caregivers and the wider world. The birth of subjectivity is a symbolic operation that transforms elements of the world into subjective experience through a complex ciphering mechanism. The symbol, however, is not simply a tool for thinking, but in creating representative distance, allows for differentiation and thus separation of the infant from its mother.

In "*Le symbole*," Abraham considers being as the constant articulation of itself against what it is not or, more formally, "A is A only if it implies B in the form of a negation, that is to say, if A

symbolizes with B” (1978a, p.38). Individuation is conceived in the same terms with the self differentiating from an imbroglia background and forming distinctions between what is proper to it and what is other. This negotiation of meanings is according to a synchronic axis that allows for a differential self-narrative to be created. This defines who I am and how I experience the world, and also connects to a diachronic axis as I appropriate, reflect on and reimagine my past in a process that aims to attain knowledge of my origins as an essence to be mapped and included in who I am.

Abraham further explored and problematised these aspects of symbolic being in his 1968 text “The shell and the kernel,” introducing the key notion of “*différencement*” (1994a, p.92) to show the mutual implication of synchronic and diachronic axes in constructing a new understanding of the symbolic operation. Here he uses the figure of a *shell-kernel* couplet to denote the relationship between what is presented phenomenally (the *shell* as the symbolic construction of perceptible and understandable links) and what he denotes as a “transphenomenal” realm (1994a, p.93) that underpins and yet is beyond the phenomenological realm of the *shell*. This is the *kernel* of sense, or strictly speaking the non-sense out of which sense arises; an a-semantic domain that cannot be defined or grasped other than through its relation to the *shell*. Abraham characterises psychoanalytic discourse through the neologism *anasemia* to denote its interrogation of these unconscious (hence unknown and uncertain) sources of signification through tools and conceptions that are necessary but always inadequate. The symbol is one such notion, mediating the *shell-kernel* relation by binding with other symbols to create the *shell* of differential meaning and being. The symbol relates the *shell* to the *kernel* by inscribing any signifying act with its source in a diachronic relationship. Abraham’s reflections on the *kernel* mean that this source is no longer a stable referent but is instead our inability to locate this in a

signifying system. It is non-being, the traumatic failure of the symbol. The symbol is significant at the level of the *shell* because it is continually articulating what it is not. At the level of the *kernel*, it is constituted in relation to the transphenomenal that inscribes its difference from the failure of symbolization. For Abraham, it is this process underpinning the *shell-kernel* distinction (where function and structure are indistinguishable) that defines *différencement* as a pulsion, a differentiating without end (or origin as will become apparent) that is at the heart of symbolic being.

Devoid of any clear and stable referent, the symbol constructs meaning in spite of this. It is impelled by the failure that marks it traumatically to produce ever-more elaborate signification to replace a unity with what it describes that never existed. For Abraham, the symbol is an analogue of “that which is cut and the cut itself” (2016, p.15), meaning that it is structured by what it has been broken from as a perfect complement and by the trauma of this separation that necessitates a continual searching for what has been lost. In this way, he understands the symbol based on its etymological foundations in the Greek terms *symbolon* and *symbollein*, meaning respectively a “token serving as proof of identity” and “to throw together, dash together” (Liddell and Scott, 1910). The symbol functions as both a marker of identity and an operation of becoming significant through “symbolizing with” (1978a, p.38) a complement (cosymbol) that is lost in the separation. It is by joining with its cosymbol that a symbol completes itself and refinds the original unity yearned for in its striving towards meaning. As Abraham determines from the outset, however, such a moment of perfect completion is fictional and hence non-original. Both the origin and the later reconnection of symbol and cosymbol are described in terms of *metaphor*; a process of signification and substitution that replaces what never was nor will be there. The cosymbol does not exist before or separately from the symbol whose motivation it

describes. It can only be known through the traces that it leaves in the symbol, and its form must be recreated from these marks. The symbol has thus never been part of a whole it strives to achieve and always marks a foundational division which keeps it in interminable pursuit of the missing part traced and continually reformulated in its operation.

Where it allows for differentiation from an entangled background of existence, the symbolic operation is also necessary for including contents in the psyche; a second process essential for individuation. In their 1968 text “Mourning *or* melancholia,” Abraham and Torok present two processes of internalisation that are opposed in terms of how much they facilitate or obstruct psychological development. The first of these is *introjection*, the productive appropriation of reality through a mediating object. Predicated on the “good enough mother” (Winnicott, 1953), objects can transform unformulated infantile trauma into manageable and digestible experiences through maternal care. Rents in the fabric of being are not only tolerated but become platforms for development as mediating objects are increasingly internalised to make up for external inconsistencies. Symbolic operations are built on these foundations, giving introjection its true character and extending its reach to transform “the psyche by inflicting a topographical shift on it” (Abraham and Torok, 1994b, p.125). Abraham and Torok oppose introjection to a second (although not secondary) process of *incorporation* where gaps in care cannot be mediated symbolically and the object and the drive it elicits must be included more corporeally through a fantasy structure. This is a mechanism of symbolic denial that keeps the traumas of the first environment secreted in the self to maintain the experience of continuous care, but at arms-length so that psychical status quo is not disturbed. Abraham and Torok describe this in terms of fantasy because as “essentially narcissistic; it tends to transform the world rather than inflict injury on the subject” (ibid., p.125).

Introjection and incorporation both allow us to include reality and mediate this around subjective origins that are inscribed traumatically. Incorporation, however, is a more primal process and introjection emerges from this once individuation is on the way and the subject accedes to a symbolic existence. The two processes are therefore indiscernible until the symbolic operation forces a distinction upon them. Once this is underway, however, their functions are more clearly marked with introjection describing an enriching process of self-creation and expansion.

Incorporation, on the other hand is regressive, obstructing the normal operation of the symbol and producing melancholic-type pathologies in the form of a crypt or phantom, where a sense of emptiness pervades symptomatology.

To identify the shared foundations of introjection and incorporation is to recognise their later entanglement in operations that are never as pure as theoretical descriptions. Abraham's notion of *différencement* is useful here as the articulation of one process against the other can never be secured once and for all. The implications of this for understanding individuation are considerable, reflecting Derrida's assertion that incorporation and introjection work together according to "all sorts of original compromises" (1986, p.xviii). The figures of pathological incorporation never achieve their desired defence against loss and are inherently structured by the possibility of introjection.

"incorporation is never finished...for the following general reason: It is worked through by introjection. An inaccessible introjection, but for which the process of incorporation always carries within it, inscribed in its very possibility, the "nostalgic vocation"" (Derrida, 1986, p.xxi).

More importantly for my consideration, is how operations usually associated with pathological formations underpin and compromise the normal operations of separation and the constitution of independent subjectivity. In this way we are reminded of psychoanalysis's function as a "clinical anthropology", where "pathology reveals the hidden structure of normality" (Van Haute and Geyskens, 2007, p.xi). In my argument, the birth of the self is a far more threatened process than is often credited, with differentiation inherently unrelenting and compromised. Added to this is the implication of primitive structures that are never left behind, which Abraham and Torok figure through the crypt and phantom as pathologies. For my purposes, these expose inevitable and necessary structures in ordinary psychical life that we can also understand in terms of haunting and the logic of the ghost. Using the crypt and phantom as new loci, Abraham's explorations of the dual unity allow me to reframe how we consider the processes of individuation.

### **The clinical anthropology of haunting: Structural implications of the crypt and phantom**

The patients that troubled Abraham and Torok were possessed by unspeakable traumas and the "inventions of the mind" generated to maintain yet deny these. Fantasies of incorporation:

"rest on some 'gaping wound,' ... disguised by a fantasmic and secret construction in place of the very thing from which, through the loss, the ego was severed. In all cases, the goal of this type of construction is to disguise the wound because it is unspeakable, because to state it openly would prove fatal to the entire topography" (Abraham and Torok, 1994b, p.142).

The crypt is tied specifically to mechanisms of symbolisation and language, generating meaning in order to hide other more important meanings and destroy linkages. Patients hold onto a gaping

wound connected to some significant object-loss where both the wound and connection are disavowed, creating a strange yet sacred core of being. Crypts are necessitated when objectal absences or disappointments are of a type that social, inter-personal, or even intra-personal processes necessitate their denial in an urgent and resolute manner (incest is exemplary). Losses, negligence, frustrations are therefore not mediated through the usual symbolic networks and incorporated instead as unprocessed experience. The cutting of links that keeps the trauma quiet only allows it to work more insidiously and symptomatically as its silence breaks and works through the symbol system that maintains it. Abraham and Torok refers to these constructed silences as “exquisite corpses” (Torok, 1994) because in the lacuna they open, the contours of “the objectal correlative of [a] loss” are traced within the symbolic system as if “buried alive” (Abraham and Torok, 1994a, 130). The exquisite corpse retains its foreignness to the self, functioning like “a fully-fledged person, complete with its own topography,” leading within us a “separate and concealed existence.” (ibid., p.130). As such, its draw is deathly, fracturing symbols (Abraham and Torok refer to these broken symbols as *cryptonyms*) and standing the haunted individual empty and on the precipice of non-meaning.

The crypt disrupts topography and the logic in which representations are believed to derive from and map a central truth that is *a priori* and potentially available in its immanence. In his introduction to Abraham and Torok’s text *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*, Derrida reflects on the structure of the crypt and describes its inseparable characteristics as “*topoi, death, cipher*” (1986, p.xiii). *Topoi* is the plural form of *topos* and refers to the mathematical mapping of shapes that do not exist in topological space. The crypt is one such formation that does not conform to the axioms of stable Euclidean geometry. Indeed, the plural form is also revealing as the qualities of shape are multiplied and overlaid in such a way that vertices, their connections and how we



view them are ever shifting. The crypt hides its content through labyrinths of deceit and misdirection, where strange, angled partitions fracture connections and parietal surfaces shift and become porous. Any referent is endlessly displaced as the crypt shifts it across the surface of signification and into what Derrida describes as multiple “non-lieu” (“beyond places” or “no-places”) (1986, p.xxi). It is here, in the non-localizable and hence traumatic source of signification that the crypt equates with *death*.

The crypt also disturbs temporal logic by folding precedent and antecedent conditions into each other. In this way it resembles Freud’s concept of *nachträglichkeit* (deferred action), whereby a formative episode is reworked through later impacts, but the crypt transforms the logical time of trauma further. Where we ordinarily presume that a shock event will produce a traumatized psychological response, *nachträglichkeit* is a psychical reconfiguration that traumatises after-the-fact. The crypt, however, puts the very status of an original event in question as what ails the haunted melancholic is a gap in both knowledge and being that does not map an available experience. The origin and truth of “what happened” to the traumatised individual is always unknown and this uncertainty feeds through any sense of a primal event, its reconfiguration or interpretation. It is a truth that no longer simply reflects an external reality but is now linked to a psychical function where truth and fiction have considerable overlap.<sup>iii</sup>

Where the crypt structures experiences of trauma that are a direct consequence of an individual’s interactions with reality, especially primary figures, Abraham and Torok introduce the phantom as a later construct to account for psychical rents that have been produced at a distance. The concept of the phantom extends the reach of our pathological enthrallment to the silenced object-traces that haunt us, to consider the possible impact on our self-coherence of the crypts of others. Having first introduced the phantom to account for the haunting of an analyst by crypts in a

patient (Abraham and Torok, 1994b, p.140-1), the concept gains its metapsychological weight and importance for my thesis, when considered in terms of the child's formative relationships with parents and other important caregivers. Its final elaboration in Abraham and Torok's shared oeuvre specifically associates it with "the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a love object's life" (Abraham, 1994b, p.171). It designates a mechanism of transmission in which traumatic silences are passed down generations to haunt in the present without any possible awareness from the legatee. Parents and carers with their own encrypted secrets and "whose speech is not exactly complementary to their unstated repressions" transmit to the child "a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognized knowledge – a nescience – subjected to a form of "repression" before the fact" (Abraham and Torok, 1994b, p.140, fn.1). This can persist down generations and haunt entire family lines.

The phantom figures gaps within the self at the very foundations of the emergence of subjectivity that persist in their foreignness to the host. Although this is introduced to redraw the boundaries of psychopathology, accounting for patients who act as if possessed by secrets that have no place in personal experience, its implications stretch beyond this. As Abraham and Torok recognize, it firstly introduces further proximal displacements into the topography of the crypt by posing the question of their inheritance from others. This extends the parameters of pathology beyond the supposed spatial and temporal limits of subjectivity to consider origins that are even more removed. Secondly, this ghostly logic has ramifications beyond pathological instances which are not developed by Abraham and Torok (and only obliquely and for different purposes in Derrida) but that are central to my argument. For me, the birth of subjectivity is itself a complex *ciphering* mechanism (the final element Derrida's cryptic trinity) that mediates and includes our origins as the causal point that gives value to existence. These origins, however, are continually put in

question through Abraham and Torok's reflections on the *shell-kernel* relation, and their inclusion in the self is further complicated by both the compromises necessary between operations of introjection and incorporation that are still indistinct, and the additional displacements of the phantom.

The origins of subjectivity are synonymous with a (necessary) cut in the first relationship that is traumatic, whether experienced as such at the time or through *nachträglichkeit*. Although it is the symbol that ultimately manages trauma, in the early infant-mother relationship its abstract, ciphering quality is still bound up with incorporation of the object in fantasy. It is this encroachment of functions that leads Abraham to posit a novel iteration of the divided self in terms of dual unity and allows my argument to reconceive the crypt and phantom away from their exclusively pathological registers. Even in the smoothest transitions to independence, separation is never quite complete, leaving us all necessarily hostage to "the other's enigmatic embrace ... [an other that] founds us, creating those enigmatic strands that link what is most central in the psyche to what is extrinsic to it" (Frosh, 2013, p.46). Abraham and Torok reframe alterity as a continual question of origins that the psyche must learn to deal with and somehow assimilate. The traumatic cause of subjectivity cannot be located once and for all in a cut that forces the child from the maternal environment, marking the developmental process in terms of how successfully the child (facilitated by maternal care) is able to suture this and establish its independent boundaries. It is an alterity that even before it denotes the catastrophic loss of the mother is being articulated in the *différencement* of symbolic representation from its failure. Trauma is transformed through the symbol that manages it so that its precedence as cause is always in question. Individuation is a question of "true mourning" (Derrida, 1989) that is continually haunted by an alterity that exceeds our ability to accommodate it. In introjection this

becomes a driving force for self-elaboration, while it is denied in incorporation, speaking only through symptoms. In the formulation of a meaningful and coherent existence that most of us maintain - even if the scope and duration of this is only ever partial – neither of these processes can lay ghost effects to rest.

There has similarly never been an undifferentiated matrix between mother and infant that is suddenly changed. The first relationship is always already riddled with gaps from, among other things, the wounds and traumas that the mother and other caregivers bring to the relationship. As these wounds feed into the mother-infant matrix, they become part of the child’s psychical landscape and colour a first moment (itself a non-original reconstruction) of subjective existence, the trauma of which is reformulated again and again according to new contexts. As the infant confronts these flawed foundations through its own compromised operations of inclusion – between introjection and incorporation - something cryptic necessarily intervenes so that the “first cut” is continually reframed and its truth multiplied across the symbolic operation. This sacred place of subjective truth is now a displaced foreign body, amplified further in its alterity through (pathological and non-pathological) phantoms that connect us to venerable silences in the others that form our first environment.

What we also learn about subjectivity from its pathological forms is how its haunted constitution is complicated even more through idiosyncratic operations of ciphering. “The phantom” as Abraham qualifies, “is sustained by secreted words, invisible gnomes whose aim is to wreak havoc.” (1994, p.175). Recognising this signifying dimension helps us avoid the temptation of using haunting as a blank analogue for our subjective foundations, as a traumatic structural absence folds into specific historical moments of loss. Processes unfurl, therefore, from a traumatic (non-)origin that cannot be fixed (situated or mended), through the vagaries of a life

lived that re-signify this, into a future that has no endpoint because the foreignness of our origins means that their assimilation is always incomplete.

### **Dual unity and the haunted/haunting maternal legacy**

It is in the *Seminar* that Abraham explores these insights concretely in relation to the specific mechanisms of individuation that characterise the human lot. Here he develops the dual unity from its initial sense as an account of the transmission, symptoms and treatment of phantomic pathologies, to speculate more generally “on one or more ‘foreign bodies’ in the dynamic unconscious” (2016, p.11-12) that haunt us all. The dual unity describes subjectivity as the always incomplete separation from the mother. Individuation is an act of “de-maternalization” where we continually battle with the legacy of maternal care, transforming “the dualistic mother-child union into the inner dualistic union of the unconscious and the ego” (ibid., p.7). Inner unity is a fabrication, founded on “a separation within us” (ibid., p.4) that forms the unconscious as the “phylo- and ontogenetic repression of the desire to form a dual unity with the mother” (ibid., p.28). It is this idea of a basal matrix from which separation is ambivalently ventured that allows me to posit maternal haunting as a more general structure, although this generality is complicated each time through the particularity of unrepeatably symbolic processes that personalize individual experience.

Abraham evokes the reflections of compatriot Imré Hermann on the *païdo-méter* - the “unity of the unseparated mother-child” (ibid., p.16) – as the most entrenched psychoanalytic myth of origins. For both Hermann and Abraham, we are always already separating to avoid the relational inequalities with a world we cannot manage and the figuration of this through the

mother who also cares for us. Traumatic experiences belong structurally to the world of childhood attachment, as Freud recognised, using the common term *hilflosigkeit* across his work to designate a state of radical passivity and “helplessness [that] is the prototype of the traumatic situation” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, p.189). The shortcomings of parental care are immediately apparent in the child’s environment as it is prematurely separated from the mother at birth and faces continual assaults from its own instincts and the outside world; realms that are folded together in early infancy. The continuity of the child is secured by the mother, but this is compromised from the outset as she disappears and reappears, gratifies and frustrates. Small rents in the child’s sense of cohesion can be mended by the mother’s presence using physical interaction as a symbol for the lost unity. Longer breaks in care, however, are traumatising.

The very notion of the mother is complicated through Abraham’s dual unity, becoming an ensemble metapsychological concept that is not only unshackled from biological constraints (the primary object can be various figures) but also extends beyond earlier psychoanalytic formulations, typical of Freudian and Kleinian thinking, that reduce her to a mere object-function. In the Kleinian model, for example, the breast is often used synonymously with the mother as the first whole object whose nourishment and frustration of the infant is the basis of their experience of the world and the divisions and relationships that create the building blocks of what the child will become. Although clearly important for a child’s physical and psychological development, this limited object-role does not recognise what André Green describes as “the thousand other components that ‘make up’ the mother.” (1997, p.148). Green is referring here specifically to Donald Winnicott’s idea of a maternal environment, where the mother is “a growth enhancing, emotional atmosphere contributed to, and/or created by, the real [maternal] object” (Levine and Migliozi, 2018, p.35). Here, the maternal environment is less

physically specific and may be shaped by others surrounding the mother-child couple. Indeed, there are many instances imaginable where the real mother doesn't contribute and yet a primary object and maternal environment is still constituted. It is in this sense that I will continue to use the term "mother".

Abraham's formulation of the phantom in the *Seminar* extends Winnicott's conception of the subjectivity of the mother (or others) implicit in the notion of the maternal environment (Winnicott, 1965). The phantom demonstrates how the maternal environment is not simply characterised by the physical and mental holding of the child. It is also shot through with ambiguous and unformulated meanings, silences and de-signification from the numerous subjects and objects that contribute to its richness. The dual unity teems with symbols which function in tandem with more immediate physical and affective concerns to contain the child and allow for assimilation of the world. Symbols are predicated on primitive mechanisms of mediation that before contributing to direct knowledge and individuation, imprint the mother's "gestures, her emotional being with its harmonies and contradictions" (Abraham, 2016, p.26). As the child deals viscerally with the maternal relation, this first platform of existence imposes the subjectivity of others and the cryptic messages they convey as a further excess to be negotiated. Where the prototype of trauma is typically taken as the moment of separation, we see here that the supposedly secure foundations of the mother-child unity is already haunted by specific discontinuities and the unknown demands of others. This includes the ambivalences that the mother feels towards separation, but also carries her wounds, "unnameable catastrophes that have happened in another life 'beyond me'" (Abraham, 2016, p.26). The notion of a first (hence causal) traumatic moment is thus complicated by the inherent instability of the base.

To individuate, we must continually come to terms with the mother (or her substitute) as a basal matrix. Where the symbol is facilitated, the concrete maternal environment can be substituted by processes that create representative distance. Splitting the world into subject and object, the traumatising absences of the real mother can now be managed through internal operations. Generating the mother as a specific and key object, the symbol also manages her proximity as she can overwhelm the infant with the fusion that, once longed for, now threatens. When the symbol fails, the materiality of the pre-verbal world rears its head once more, although it is transformed in its traumatic impact as the object-mother and her function are also reformulated through the symbol. Not only are phantoms inscribed in gaps in even the most secure maternal environment, but this foundation itself becomes ghostly as individuation produces and must manage the alterity of a wounding absence and an object that has become too present. While the mother aids in the creation of the symbol and supports boundaries, she also threatens these relentlessly through the separating subject never ultimately being able to situate or quell her *as* apparition.

It is in these terms that the importance of the maternal object and environment is reiterated but also questioned as a pure and *a priori* category. The maternal has a ghostly side that persistently haunts the subject and engages it in a dynamic of clinging and separation that has no resolution. It is this dynamic that Abraham takes up in the *Seminar* in reference to Hermann's thinking on the *filial instinct* and that I extend further by drawing out its implications in terms of dual unity and the phantom. For Abraham, "Hermann distinguishes two kinds of instinct: those which relate to the maternal relation and those which relate to the genital relation" (1978b, p.370, translations from this text my own). All the infant's early instincts are directed towards the mother and are modelled on clinging as the primary dimension of human subjectivity. This is later reformed as a



more general instinct of filiation and is opposed to a demand for separation that Hermann puts at the basis of the genital instinct, underpinned in its developmental quality by the anxious need to cling. The construction of two primal instincts – a “filial” clinging and a “genital” searching – does not therefore have the purity that their opposed directions suggest.

This allows me to rethink Freud’s *hilflosigkeit* in a more vital way that resonates with Abraham’s notion of *différencement*. Hermann introduces the term *haltlosigkeit* to refer to a sense of ungrounding in the child that produces bipolar responses of clinging on one hand and the trauma of abandonment on the other (Van Haute and Geyskens, 2007). The implications of the term are different from *hilflosigkeit* as it transforms the notion of an undifferentiated experience – trauma as a static cause – into a principle of differentiation that creates in its pulsation both trauma and the activity of overcoming it. *Haltlosigkeit* includes *hilflosigkeit* as the universal experience of having nothing to hold onto; a loss of grip and stable ground when the object is absent or fails us.<sup>iv</sup> This, however, is no longer an original position of trauma because it includes in this failure the effort to search beyond an otherwise passive suffering and facilitate the pleasure and growth (introjection through filial and genital means) that psychoanalysis generally subsumes to a sexual principle.

Filial and genital instincts are each underpinned by phantasmatic representations of lost unity. The filial instinct is nostalgic, seeking in different and sometimes oblique ways to grasp the maternal object and establish the perfect first relation that never was. Separation is imposed on the child as a cultural demand which is unwanted at the filial level and its force is felt traumatically. Ungrounded *haltlosigkeit* engenders active grasping and transforms into *hilflosigkeit* if attachment or separation are handled poorly (or a later trauma intervenes). Being a cultural demand, separation is managed through symbols that impose the cut and give it sense,

allowing the binding of anxiety. These symbols also mark the clinging instinct as shameful, forcing us to search elsewhere and otherwise for substitutes. For Abraham, “the decisive moments of any evolution include a deprivation of the filial instinct” (1978b, p.371). The genital instinct emerges to re-find unity through the symbol in an active, often pleasurable, but still anxious manner as it carries in its searching traces of traumatic separation and the urge to cling. The symbol only provides partial answers to the subject’s ungrounding, but then so did the instinct to cling. The traumatic wound has always already been made and no (instinctual) object, satisfaction, nor representation can entirely cover it over. Far from substituting what has been lost through a perfect complement, symbols instead reveal the fiction inherent in an original unity and its possible re-finding.

The subject begins and remains out of joint. The trauma at the heart of individuation is dynamic, a shattered event from which only fragments of memory and the sense of a gap in experience remains. Self-knowledge arrives after-the-fact, using introjection to transform our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute experience into productive (and mostly gratifying) narrative that searches endlessly for a lost unity. This loss, however, is irretrievable. The symbol can at best interpret or translate the traumatic moment (never in pristine form) that has made explication necessary and yet continually exceeds this. The child’s introjection of the world is founded on this aporia and engages in what is ultimately an “impossible mourning” (Derrida, 1989, p.6) where inclusion can never be complete as alterity haunts what is inserted inside, problematising self-boundaries.

Attempts to grasp the separated mother are continual, transforming the initial mother-child dual unity through individuation into the inseparable vestiges of that first relationship traced into the unconscious. For Abraham, subjectivity has a “fundamentally dual character” in that separation

marks us as “divided-indivisibles” (2016, p.18). While managing the traumatic effects of maternal cleavage, symbolic being also fosters de-maternalization through successive repressions of the mother creating “a whole stratification of maternal “imagos” ... in the dynamic unconscious” (ibid., p.18). We can imagine these imagos as the relinquished nursing mother or the more demanding mother of weaning or potty-training; each a structure that is recreated as the repressed and complementary underside of a symbolic existence that assumes more complex forms.

The complements here mark conceded forms as gaps that are bridged through the production of cosymbols to recreate what has been withdrawn. This projects the maternal complement into a deferred “spectral” future to be re-found through increasingly sophisticated, although still inadequate symbolic forms. The play of keeping the mother as a stratification of superseded imagos-figuring pleasures and frustrations-and as an idealized promise of future resolution is the operation of introjection as it endlessly transforms symbols into metaphors as a substitute for unity. We are all, according to Abraham, “*mutilés de mère*” (ibid., p.17), mother amputees for whom the eclipsed maternal environment has the status of a lost limb. As the superseded forms of the phantasmatic maternal unity are rendered unconscious and already carry prefigured rents in the dual unity, losses accrete in the child such that symbolic development becomes a succession of idiosyncratic new ways of recapturing or memorialising what has been lost and fantasizing future moments in which unity will be restored. It is important to note, that despite the pessimistic tone here, searching beyond the mother typically brings the rewards of a pleasurable existence as symbolic grasping provides more sublimated satisfactions, while also keeping dissolution at bay; the mother, after all, is as much a source of pleasure and satisfaction as she is impending trauma. The anxieties of maternal loss can then be experienced as curiosity,

interest, creativity, productive impetus and the (part-)resolutions that provide extension and meaning to a sense of self that is predicated on introjection.

### **The uncanny inscription of the mother as ghostly substrate**

The mutual dependency of introjection and incorporation, indicated earlier, is revealed more concretely when we consider the breaking of the *païdo-méter* as exemplary of their proximal relation. In my argument, the symbolic mediation of individuation just described is predicated on a more fundamental clenching of the maternal environment in which, paradoxically, separation from the mother is only possible through her incorporation. Incorporation of the mother is the first attempt to deal with separation and is essential in creating the psychological frame out of which independent subjectivity can emerge. Modelled on the oral function in which the child ingests a sense of the maternal environment along with the milk that is swallowed, incorporation constitutes a framing structure that supports the child's internal world through the experience of maternal care.<sup>v</sup> Providing security in the absence of the mother, this frame also necessitates individuation to keep this mother at a safe distance and assuage the threat of her intrusion.

Abraham and Torok understand incorporation as involving both “oral-cannibalistic and anal-evacuative processes,” (Torok, 1994, p.111) so that what is swallowed by the primitive psyche can be expelled if necessary. As the ambivalent object at the foundations of subjectivity, the mother is too important to be simply evacuated, so other processes of negotiation and negation are required. Here, I draw on André Green's insights on the framing structure to develop what is only intimated in Abraham and Torok's notion of incorporation. Green posits an essential work of negation in transforming the maternal context into a productive internal support. The

incorporation of the mother becomes intolerable unless she can be remodelled as an absence that can be substituted by a mode of representing her. Green relates this key structural move to “the negative hallucination of the mother” (1997, p.55), a psychological mechanism used to “suppress the perception of an object” (1999, p.162). This allows the mother to be constructed as a non-perception, but also prevents her from being destroyed. The maternal environment can thus constitute an internal frame, while the intrusive maternal object can be kept at a distance. It is a process that is also the basis of symbolization, as Rosine Perelberg qualifies, creating “a potential space for the representation and investment of new objects and the conditions in which the activities of thinking and symbolization can take place” (2017, p.51).

Anal-evacuative processes bound to incorporation of the mother negate the maternal frame to allow the space and distance for symbolic thinking. This forms the first maternal imago that is continually reconfigured and repressed through successive symbolic representations. These two variants of the individuating dual unity—the concrete incorporation of the mother and her management through introjection—offer considerable scope for recreating phantom effects in the subject. Firstly, gaps can be produced viscerally through failures in care or transgenerational wounds, and secondly, they can be created through failures in the symbolic operation. These are related of course, as what sustains the incorporated mother, repressing her to the unconscious and allowing movement beyond her, is maternal words that cling as they represent her.

Abraham questions the transparency of language to unproblematically mediate the world beyond the mother and thus effect a complete separation from her. As a pure process, introjection presumes the metaphorical function of words to designate and thus separate from a context (initially the maternal context) to form evermore elaborate and independent self-constructions. Before they function as symbols, however, words are a “*bout-de-mère*” [piece of mother]

(Abraham, 2016, p.26), a fragment of the maternal environment. There are clear parallels here with Winnicott's notion of transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 1953), the prototype of a material-object-become-symbol, but connecting these directly to the mother as environment and object means they are not free from concrete and affective burden.<sup>vi</sup> For Abraham and Torok, words never escape an oblique yet foundational reference to the mother who resonates within and encumbers their structure as an intimate secret (whether this is through repression, or more radically through encryption). Underpinning the distinction between introjection and incorporation, the transformation from *bout-de-mère* to symbol is never completed as words that liberate are also drawn back to the maternal body from where lines of occluded signification and affect reverberate in the child's world. A "material" legacy underpins (and undermines) symbolic activity, such that "the word has its 'dead' in the same way as the subject does" (Abraham, 2016, p.31).

In the *Seminar*, Abraham too frequently glosses over differences in the repression of the maternal unconscious and the foundational incorporation of mother that I highlight here; he either presumes the similarity of these processes or reserves the latter for specific pathologies of haunting. A more radical reflection on the bipolar structure of words that cling to and search beyond the mother, would allow Abraham to disturb even further the introjection-incorporation distinction. All children inherit words whose objective handling of reality is encumbered by an "artificial unconscious" (ibid., p.32) which cripples, through deliberate obfuscation, the productive articulation of self. Such obstructions elicit and keep in circulation hidden stories of exquisite trauma behind words that have otherwise become hollow, stifled and deathly. Using words that carry their dead, the child is permanently suspended between the metaphorical function of introjection and the concrete resonances of the maternal context that fill this with

enigmatic communications and silenced affects. This unknowable, material quality cannot be digested through symbolic articulation and sits unformulated at the corporeal intersection with the psyche, awaiting activation through some future event or dynamic.

In my argument, the rendering of personal experience is as much a puzzled response to unspoken dramas from the maternal relation as it is the enriching articulation of self and reality. The subject deals perpetually with an unknowable legacy that is retransmitted in its own formulation; subjected to and a subject in transmission, as is my titular statement. The notions of crypt and phantom can no longer be reserved just for those afflicted by specific illnesses of mourning. Haunting is implicated in the very substrate of “normal” subjectivity, where pathological forms merely build on and expose the compromises underpinning the operations of everyday symbolic living. Let us also not forget that maternal words are themselves taken from a speaking context of social definitions and affects that exist before the mother and function alongside her. Although the mother-figure is central in the child’s world she conveys a larger milieu that she cannot contain. The cultural prohibition of clinging, for example, echoes Oedipal mechanisms but in a far more cryptic way as these resonate through strained demands, ambivalent instructions, uncertain sensuality and fraught innervation that fills the maternal context with ghosts beyond the capacity and awareness of a single figure. It is here that we can recognize the huge impact of cultural diversity on the birth of the self and, within cultures, the implicit messages that a child encodes about its race, gender, sexuality, ability and other differences. Important as these are, they are not the focus of this particular argument.

Despite Abraham’s consistent claims in the *Seminar* that phantom pathologies have an exceptional nature, it is telling that his ultimate rendering of its mechanism and effects are taken from a scene of normal development in a child. He reconsiders the game of fort-da that Freud

had observed his grandson Ernst playing (1920, pp.14-7), when he throws away a reel accompanied with the sound “o-o” (Freud hears this as “fort” [“gone”]) and then retrieves it to the delighted expression of “a-a” (“da” [“there”]). For Freud, this is Ernst’s attempt at dealing with his mother’s absence by replacing her loss with the cognizance of her absence and mastery of the trauma through repetition. Abraham, however, reads this event differently by hearing the phonemes of Ernst’s utterances—the vowels “o-o-a-a”—before Freud imposes his meanings and tying these to the grandson’s relation with his mother. Symbolic activity operates in the game that connects to Ernst’s internal situation, but the specific vowels used point towards processes other than the delineation of presence and absence. For Abraham, they signify a confusion that is not originally his. Ernst’s father is away, “gone” to war, and he feels the wound this absence causes in his mother. The father is replaced by the attentive grandfather Sigmund Freud whose daughter is Ernst’s mother Sophie. Grandfather is “Opa” and his father is the “photographer Halberstadt,” revealing a saturation of “o”s and “a”s (Abraham, 2016, p.28). For Abraham, when Ernst says “baby o-o-o-o” (baby gone) on an occasion of his Mother’s return, instead of “baby a-a-a-a” (denoting him or her as present) this exposes another situation. Sophie yearns for her missing husband. When she returns to her child, she is still “gone” in her preoccupation. There is also ambivalence in this separation because her father “Opa,” the model of her male love object, provides a substitute for the husband (and father for Ernst), which partially sutures her wound. For Ernst, his mother has “a problem with o-a” in the confusion of their roles which leads her to repress “that the grandfather and father are not the same” (ibid., p.28). Through the words and phonemes that resonate in the mother with the trauma of hidden losses and erotic confusion, Ernst inherits silenced strands of signification that cannot be freed from his language. He unwittingly bears the burden of a secret maternal drama that colors his subjectivity.



Such a multilayered communication between mother and child is not only commonplace but also essential as the mother manages the child's world through the selective filtering of knowledge. Indeed, Freud speaks of Ernst as being a "good little boy" (1920, p.14) who develops according to expectation. The holding capacity of words in introjection is also a withholding, and as such, their bipolarity transfers to the child silenced and broken aspects of maternal topography that bristle with an unspeakable inheritance that permeates the foundations of symbolic life. Words are ghostly, suspended between the material *bouts-de-mère* and the ideal of perfect metaphor; a "trace" - to use Derrida's (1976) terminology – that endlessly repeats the moment of traumatic separation in its overcoming. The symbol that creates us keeps us haunted in a "paradox of the phantom," to cite Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, whereby "the dead [are] kept alive in us ... from the beginning and all over again" (1999, p.138). This not only questions the distinctiveness of pathological mechanisms, but also collapses the neat distinction between origins and their repetition.<sup>vii</sup>

Signalling "the impossibility of origins and ... the interminability of the end" (ibid., p.137), the phantom is always between and beyond limits; comprising yet compromising borders. In my extension of Abraham and Torok's conception, the phantom is the legacy of the dual unity that first exists as a concrete maternal connection and then the incorporation of the mother as an internal frame. The hollowing of this through anal-expulsive negation allows for substitutive representation and the capacity for introjection to form an inner dual unity. This, however, is also enthralled to the maternal relation as it anxiously grasps replacement complements through symbols that are themselves haunted yet promise a future unity. The phantom figures our connection to the gap at the heart of individuation which cannot be located, although it insists continually. It denotes our origins as the uncanny inscription of a maternal other who is beyond

comprehension and haunts through her own silences and those of a shared legacy. We cannot safely position this alterity, as both the absence and presence of the maternal aspect in the dual unity reveal something excessive and threatening. Even when we generally forget these origins through incorporation or repression, the symbol that holds and conceals the traumatic cut through advancing self-narratives is ever poised to fail, recreating the phantom *all over again*. As the alterity that haunts the symbol, however, the phantom is also what keeps it reaching into the future as it calls for continual interpretative work. To cite Andrea Hurst, the revenant haunts the symbolic operation as an “unspeakable ‘remaining behind’ that keeps calling again and again” (2008, p.42) producing not only trauma but a structural openness that defers our completion as a subject until at least the point of death. This formulates the subject in transmission as not simply a possessed automaton, but, in my argument, as a subject whose repetitions manifest the demands of unformulated ground (*haltlosigkeit*) that is still yet to be decided.

## **Conclusions**

To conclude, the notion of dual unity that Abraham introduces in the *Seminar* reformulates the haunting of subjectivity (Derrida’s formulation of *death*) as a general condition (*topoi*) but one that emerges from the specific action of symbols (*cipher*) as they retrace and compound the incorporation of the maternal context. In my argument, existence emerges through the symbol to recapitulate through metaphor a unity that was always divided and displaced in the first place. What makes us singular is the continual attempt to appropriate this original cut that refuses to be placed and unfolds through our personal history and into pre-history. This is an ongoing effort that gives the specific quality to individual existence as the question of impossible origins opens

a future figured by projects, interests and desires (Russell, p.109-10). Having first grasped the maternal frame through incorporation, anal-expulsive negation hollows this as a potential space, transforming the filial instinct into a symbolic re-finding of the mother that also searches beyond her.

It is the draw of this (non-originary) origin that determines the extent to which the phantom creates pathology. When silences and the refusal of meaning dominate first relationships, the infant anxiously clings to what it can, relying on the fantasy of incorporation to plug the gaps in the internal structure. This fixes psychical topography and reality in the child to prevent further disintegration of an already dissolute structure. Symbols are formed to enable some self-development through introjection, but these are fractured and de-metaphorized to hide contents and appear largely empty. The motive to expand the psyche is weak as the self becomes a “cemetery guard” watching the “comings and goings” of all who “might claim access to the tomb” (Abraham and Torok, 1994c, p.159), especially its own inquiries. Protecting its ghosts through fractured symbols, the self is condemned to orbit the trauma it maintains, incorporated, in secret. Here, the mother can be likened to a *strange attractor*,<sup>viii</sup> an organising principle without fixed reference that frames the subjective birth of the individual but also shatters this into symbolic chaos as she also imparts rents into the child’s psychical fabric. A pathological phantom can be born from failure in the early mother-child relation just as it can be reconstituted after-the-fact as later events (such as specific traumas) create fractures in the symbolic operation. Broken and de-metaphorized symbols hold the self-structure together, but always precariously as symbolic building blocks become concrete objects to plug holes and deflect attention. Without representative mediation, the subject is enthralled to a maternal structure that it cannot negotiate other than as a threat. The desperate shoring up of the walls of the crypt are in hope that this

maternal inclusion can be clung to so it doesn't leave, but also to keep it (impossibly) in its place so that it cannot intrude. Everything becomes fixed and static, bolstered to prevent any inward collapse, but the phantom is unrelenting, inhibiting metaphor, contracting the limits of the self and restricting access to the world. The subject is rendered helpless in the face of trauma, transforming *haltlosigkeit* to *hilflosigkeit* over and over.

What offers a more active and expansive processing of *haltlosigkeit* is a dynamic of clinging and separation that replaces the concrete relation with the mother with the symbolic grasping of her through introjection. Trauma still motivates this process as the symbolic operation is always inscribed with its potential failure, but searching and living beyond the unity brings the pleasure of its overcoming and substitution. This marks individuation as the continual process of differentiation from origins that always escape us and that we can only temporarily grasp in their future projections. Metaphor contains the ungrounded subject as it grasps for novel, creative, and more capable symbolic forms. As trauma underpins the dual unity, so the symbol carries its own dead, the *bouts-de-mère* that resonate with maternal comfort and threat, meaning and silence. Introjection is never uninhibited as the impetus for action is also the threat of non-being; a maternal fusion that is feared and longed for, a phantom that cannot be exorcised.

With origins in distinct pathologies of mourning, it is my argument that phantoms haunt us all. Occluded aspects of the mother-child matrix inscribe the symbolic foundation of every child as they manage the traumatic cut(s) at the heart of individuation. Symbols can never separate the infant once and for all from the contextual structures we incorporate as a frame. The helpful distinctions that Abraham and Torok use to formulate the phantom as a discrete pathology cannot be drawn so clearly at the metapsychological level. Phantoms show the fractures inherent in a selfhood that is also a dual unity, marking us all as disoriented and hostage to our most intimate

supporting objects. The legacies they transmit, however, are not simply known demands. They are also the unformulated gaps and silences that ask what we are to do with them; shut them off to hopefully (and hopelessly) minimize their impact – encrypting them as an open wound - or opening them in a different way through the metaphorical capability of the symbol. Here the future is an unrealizable promise to which the subject re-transmits the uncertainty of origins and telos endlessly and otherwise. With no purity either way, the subject in transmission becomes the ever-haunted locus of the question.

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<sup>i</sup> Working in Paris, many of Abraham and Torok's patients had been Jews; bereft, displaced, shamed and threatened by the Nazi horror of a generation before. Some were direct Holocaust survivors or had hidden in occupied Europe, but many were also their children.

<sup>ii</sup> There are similarities between Abraham and Torok's approach to the symbol and work emerging in 1970s Paris by Julia Kristeva on the semiotic (1984) and Andre Green (1997) who criticised Lacan's language theories for being limited (and outdated) in ignoring the considerable impact of affect on signification.

<sup>iii</sup> Freud introduces his concept of *nachträglichkeit* in his case study of the Wolf Man (1918 [1914]) and it is in their reflections on this patient that Abraham and Torok also develop the concept of the crypt. The resilience of the Wolf Man's symptoms to intervention and the seemingly interminable nature of his treatment necessitated considerable effort from Freud and later analysts to comprehend what was going on in his psyche. These efforts also appear to be in vain as the Wolf Man was beleaguered by symptoms until his death in 1972. The transformation of logical structure and time were necessitated by the Wolf Man's core-being where a knot in meaning only seemed to entangle more as it was approached through classical psychoanalytic technique. Freud's attempt to locate a primal scene; a formative event that really happened to the Wolf Man, were doomed to failure yet produced exceptional innovation – *nachträglichkeit*, the primal phantasy etc. – that allows us to reformulate the nature of psychical truth.

<sup>iv</sup> In *l'instinct filial*, Hermann replicates Ferenczi's hypothesis of phylogenetic catastrophes from *Thalassa* to speculate on the species trauma of the loss of body hair on our primate ancestors. This prevented the literal clinging of an infant to its mother producing a greater threat of groundlessness and abandonment.

<sup>v</sup> There are clear parallels here with Winnicott's (1965a) notion of an internal holding environment.

<sup>vi</sup> For Winnicott, the typical transitional object is crucially something that is external to the mother and child (a blanket or teddy) that can be used to represent connection and separation. This is different enough from what it represents to be relatively free from maternal affect.

<sup>vii</sup> Parkin-Gounelas elicits Freud's work on the *unheimlich* to show its attachment to the formulation of origins, be that in terms of the mother's genitals (the most *unheimlich* of all) or ancient knowledge that "belong[s] to the prehistory of the individual and of the race." (Freud, 1919, p.245 in Parkin-Gounelas, 1999, p.132). Where Freud linked the *unheimlich* to the return of repressed material (the old but familiar stranger), Abraham and Torok redefine this as a troubling sense of being ungrounded (*haltlosigkeit*) in the face of a gap (in us, in the other), an alterity, a "bizarre foreign body" (Abraham, 1994b, p.175), a new class of the unfamiliar that is figured by the phantom.

<sup>viii</sup> Derived from chaos theory, the strange attractor gives some coherence to complex and sensitive systems. It imparts a long-term pattern on the system that does not depend upon a fixed orbit. Without being deterministic, the concept allows us to understand the emergence of related patterns in development even if the initial conditions (i.e. the dual unity) are different.