

Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions by Stephen Frosh

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
(ISBN: 978-1-137-03127-3). 182pp.

Alexandra Campbell (University of Glasgow)

In 1975 Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok published several essays on the concept of the Transgenerational Phantom, where one can perceive the existence of a collective psychology in the unconscious of an individual. Stephen Frosh, Professor at the Department of Psychological Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London, in his latest publication (hereafter referred to as *Hauntings*) tackles similar issues. *Hauntings* is a lyrically written advancement in the field of hauntology, utilizing a psychoanalytic framework in order to examine the recurrence of themes pertaining to spectres and ghostly transmission in culture.

Over the course of seven chapters: 1) Psychoanalysis as a Ghostly system, 2) Facing the Truth about Ourselves, 3) Ghostly Psychoanalysis, 4) The Evil Eye, 5) Telepathy, 6) Transmission, and 7) Forgiveness, Frosh articulates and extends the current field of criticism regarding psychoanalysis and haunting, directing his attention to the temporal and topographical elements of ghosts and spectres, racial and postcolonial theory, ultimately displaying psychoanalysis as a redemptive and forgiving discourse.

Chapter 1 succinctly outlines the relationship between psychoanalysis and haunting, stating that 'psychoanalysis intentionally stirs up demons, it refuses to stay silent about trouble and pain, it insists on talking about the things that we would much rather hide or lay to rest' (p.3); it is this element of the vocalisation of trauma that most immediately influences Frosh's study. For Abraham and Torok the concept of the phantom relates distinctly to 'the interpersonal and trans generational consequences of silence' (Abraham & Torok 1994, p.168) where the phantom is the incorporeal embodiment of that which has been left unsaid. Frosh takes a similar angle in this work, looking at one of the most traumatic silencings of recent generations □ the Holocaust. For Frosh, the ramifications of this horror still ripple through time,

'infecting' posterity with the inexpressible utterances of past trauma. As a discourse tasked with articulating psychological wounds psychoanalysis has famously been referred to as 'the Talking Cure' (Breuer 1895, p.30), Frosh suggests that the phantom operates through a similar modality of ventriloquism, where a possessed or haunted individual may speak the unspoken and silenced horrors of a previous generation.

Beyond themes of silence and articulation, Frosh intelligently and creatively utilises psychoanalytic discourse as a framework for the study of transmission and transference (see Chapters 1, 6 and 7). The idea of transference is one that pervades the history of psychoanalysis, first outlined by Freud in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1915) regarding the relationship between analyst and patient. Extending beyond the well-worn bounds of patient/analyst, Frosh directs his attentions to the rich concepts of 'vertical' and 'horizontal' transmission, developing a captivating argument surrounding the temporality and topography of haunting. Previous critical works have dealt in abundance with the 'vertical' transmissions of the intergenerational inheritances of trauma (see Abraham & Torok 1994). Frosh, however, seeks to engage with the less popular aspects of 'vertical' transmission 'notably questions of the generational continuity of ethnic and religious identity' (p.5). This aspect of the text necessitates an engagement with postcolonial criticisms of psychoanalysis, engaging primarily with theories on otherness and national identity. This racial aspect of *Hauntings* is guided towards Jewish sources (namely Freud's personal history, Jewish folklore, and the bible) and proves to be one of the most enriching and original elements of Frosh's study (see Chapters 4 and 7).

In directing his focus to the more intimate and personal nodes of Freud's writings *Hauntings* directly engages with the latent content of psychoanalytic discourse, namely the 'specific context of Jewish emancipation into which Freud was born' (p.5). In Chapters 2 and 4, Frosh delicately addresses aspects of anti-Semitic discourse, highlighting how 'Jews were [perceived as] castrated [...] that they were "oriental" and maybe even "black", and that they were primitive in both the religious sense [as well as] psychologically, socially and racially' (p.7) relating such ideas to issues of race via the avenue of the Uncanny. He argues that ghosts have traditionally been seen as manifestations of personal injustice; lingering reminders of those that have been 'mistreated, displaced, and left unrecognised' (p.45), and thus have an obvious connection to marginalised and politically dispossessed members of society who are seen to lead (or have been forced into) a spectral existence. In this context the

theme of haunting is projected onto a vision of the 'self made strange' (p.23) where racial identities exhibit the Uncanny's modality of destabilising otherness.

Frosh's analysis of the unexplored elements of 'vertical' transmission ultimately opens a gateway into the discussion of the more mystic aspects of 'horizontal' transmission exploring 'what passes between people whether or not they are in active conscious communication with one another' (p.5). Beginning in Chapter 4 with a prolonged analysis of the penetrating gaze of the 'Evil Eye,' Frosh slips from a discussion of communication across racial distances between the self and other, into Chapters 5 and 6 where the focus is drawn to the communication between the living and the dead, as Frosh turns his attention to Freud's personal fascination with séances and telepathy. The final chapter of the text entitled 'Forgiveness' provides a manifesto of sorts, suggesting how psychoanalysis can become a redemptive discourse positing that it is an emancipatory tool, for 'if a spirit haunts, then it is not fully lost; the opportunity for repair exists, for settling what needs to be settled and provoking change where that is what has to be done' (p.167). The discourse becomes a tool of reclamation, where haunting is viewed as a social event and an invitation to action.

The text's argument is well developed and bolstered by an intelligent weaving of sources and various criticisms engaging with deconstruction, theology, and racial theory, via letters, parables, and plays. While Frosh tends to rely heavily upon Freudian analyses and texts, he also teases out arguments from a wide range of psychoanalytical thinkers such as Donald Winnicott, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, and Jacques Lacan; leading one down disquieting corridors and unnerving avenues of thought that have previously been neglected in mainstream discussions of psychoanalysis.

In *Hauntings* Frosh eloquently provides a stimulating and original contribution to the field of hauntology. The particular attention placed upon Jewish sources, does not limit Frosh's arguments, but rather provides a basis for how others may utilise theories of haunting in conjunction with post-colonial enquiries. The reader is led on a thought-provoking stroll down the more paranormal and supernatural avenues of psychoanalytic discussion and hears the voices of those areas of psychoanalysis that have long been buried and en-crypted in classic academic analysis. While each chapter is given its own specific subject matter, the text successfully weaves together threads from each argument, creating a rich tapestry of thought regarding the multitudinous

ways in which ghosts affect us all, ultimately helping us to 'recognise that we are ghosts too' (p.170).

Bibliography

Abraham, Nicholas & Torok, Maria. 1994. Secrets and Posterity: The Theory of the Transgenerational Phantom. In *The Shell and the Kernel*, edited by Nicholas Rand, pp. 165-171. London: University of Chicago Press.

Breuer, Joseph. 1895. Fraulein Anna O. In Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria 1893-1895*, trans. James Strachey. pp. 21-48. USA: Hogarth Press.

The Kelvingrove Review

www.gla.ac.uk/tkr