

# HAUNTING AS LOVING DISLOCATION

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## **Introduction**

In this paper I bring together two ideas which can share some common ground even though at first glance they come from different worlds. These are haunting and loving dislocation. I describe each separately and then consider the possible links. My purpose is solely to explore possibilities, believing that following one's curiosity can open up new perspectives, even when one is not necessarily certain of the direction of travel. I want to emphasise that I do not see them as coterminous, but simply on occasion they overlap and that haunting may sometimes be a loving dislocation.



## **Loving Dislocation**

The idea of the term 'loving dislocation' occurred to me some years ago (Phillips, 2008). At that time I focussed on the role of the 'helper' – counsellor, therapist, coach – and her role in somehow being a supportive, yet disruptive figure. My definition is, 'a considered intervention by the helper intended to cause discontinuity for the client, but given with respect and warmth'. The aim of the helper therefore being to prompt dislocation in order to help the client reconnect. The subsequent reconnection might take place in terms of self, self and one's body, self and one's family, self and one's community. This might include the spiritual dimension regarding core beliefs integral to one's sense of being. It might also involve stepping into or indeed creating for oneself a whole

new world. I imagine this is very familiar territory for a lot of readers, particularly those from the helping professions.

How does one go about creating such a loving dislocation? Although there are many philosophies and practices in the helping professions, a common theme, although certainly not an omnipresent one, is that of balancing support and challenge in one's interventions with the client. With this in mind, the loving dislocation offered by the helper may be seen as broadly taking place in two domains, Content and Process; the latter having two facets, Method and Way of Being. These I now elaborate.

The distinction between content and process, broadly 'the what' and 'the how', has been around for many years (Schein, 1982). For example, those pioneering the 'T' Group experience after the Second World War at the NTL Institute sought to sharpen participants' awareness of the potential differences between the words and the 'music behind the words'; that which was verbalised, contrasted with the dynamics which lay behind them. In the context of the 'helping conversation', the distinction can be made as follows.

### ***Content***

For example, the client wants to talk about her failures and is somewhat 'thrown' when the helper asks that she talk about her strengths and successes. Or in another situation, the client wants to talk about his difficulty in relating to a colleague at work. The coach instead invites him to consider his relationship with himself.

### ***Process***

- *Method*. This is about using a technique which might surprise the client or make him feel slightly disorientated. For example, he might be somebody who loves logic, debate and rationality. His counsellor wonders whether his client's cleverness with words might sometimes mean that he gets in his own way and she therefore invites him to draw a picture, using coloured crayons, to represent his concerns. (It may even be that he loves art as a hobby, but that he becomes a totally different person when he comes to work and never considers that in terms of style or sense of self he could helpfully be a bit more flexible with the boundaries of his identities).

- *Way of Being*. This is about the helper being alert to the implicit 'invitations' which the client may offer about how to be. For example, the coach to notice whether she is at risk of doing too much of the work because the client seems to put an overemphasis, directly or indirectly, on feeling totally lost. This issue is extensively covered in the worlds of the helping professions with concepts such as transference and countertransference in psychoanalysis (Dryden, 2005), symbiosis in transactional analysis (Schiff, 1975) and confluence in gestalt (Joyce & Sills, 2010). In all this the helper may or may not be explicit about what she is doing to handle the situation. For example, the therapist might appropriately decide that giving the rationale for a particular intervention is an unnecessary distraction for the client and that it might merit explanation later or indeed never. The helper and the client's journey together will almost certainly be about transition, explicitly, implicitly or both. The loving dislocation may therefore take place at any stage. It may, for example, be almost immediate – a few words, unexpected and coming from left-field may suddenly cause everything to fall into place for the client and her way ahead is crystal clear. Equally, the helper may add to the client's sense of disorientation as increasing numbers of reference points are questioned and may even disintegrate. The helper may be deliberately confusing with his interventions, in a sense forcing the client to work hard to make her own sense of things in the midst of chaos. Perhaps, for example, in a coaching context, this is the skill she, the client, needs to develop in order to contribute more effectively in an organisation beset by turbulence. I am also reminded that the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan would sometimes suddenly end his client's therapy session abruptly (Fink, 1997). Equally, I remember in the early days of my attending gestalt workshops being told that "You *must* rebel!"

In summary, loving dislocation can be seen as an intervention which may take place physically, emotionally, existentially and spiritually. In seeking to offer the reader a 'taster' of loving dislocation, below in the rest of the paper I occasionally bring forward ideas which may seem to come out of nowhere, having no clear lead up to them. Of course, there is always the possibility that the reader does not experience them this way. This has clear parallels with that which may also happen in the 'helping' conversation. For example, the client is bored and indifferent when unexpectedly faced with an invitation to engage in rebirthing. Perhaps he had done it before with his previous therapist and

found that it had little impact, even though the therapist seemed excited about it. An invitation to complete a personality profile questionnaire might have been rather more unsettling and challenging for this particular client.

As I write this I am in a café where a little girl is playing hide-and-seek with her Mum. They are offering me an insight into the nature of loving dislocation. I now move on to haunting.



## **Haunting**

In moving towards my own definition of haunting I refer to the Collins Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms which mentions 'evocative, poignant, unforgettable and indelible' (Collins, 2005). With this in mind, I stress that I do not necessarily see haunting as something scary, tormented or cursed. For example, somebody might refer to 'still being captivated by that beautifully haunting melody'. So, for the purposes of this paper I regard haunting as capable of holding both light and dark and sometimes, perhaps inevitably, blending the two. For some, it may also be a point between dreaming and wakefulness, as exemplified in the following poem.

### ***Song***

*Fly hence, shadows, that do keep  
Watchful sorrows charm'd in sleep!  
Though the eyes be overtaken  
Yet the heart doth ever waken  
Thoughts, chain'd up in busy snares  
Of continued woes and cares:*

*Love and griefs are so exprest  
As they rather sigh than rest.  
Fly hence, shadows, that do keep  
Watchful sorrows charm'd in sleep !*

John Ford 1586-1638.

My own definition is 'a transmission which resonates and lingers physically, emotionally, existentially and spiritually'. It may be focussed on just one of these elements, but it is equally possible that they are all in-play in varying combinations. My definition is inspired by Stephen Frosh's book on this topic and indeed ultimately it stimulated me to write this paper (Frosh, 2013).

The haunting may have clear and tangible origins. I visit the house I had as a child, perhaps even holding the same garden latch; an experience mentioned by Gaston Bachelard in his seminal book on the emotional and symbolic experience of the domestic space of a house (Bachelard, 1994). I may step on the very same paving slabs on which I used to play hop-scotch. The memories, vivid indeed almost tangible themselves, come flooding back. I am haunted by partly becoming that seven year old again, playful, loved, alone, excited, anxious. I fleetingly see Mum standing there, making sure I am ok before she then hurries off into the kitchen to prepare dinner for Dad. The tangible conduit may not be exactly the same as years before, but it is nevertheless a powerful reminder. For example, a passing small child may squeal with delight at a ginger cat perched on the fence and I immediately recall beloved Biscuits, who died a few years before.

The haunting may happen just once, but the repeated memory of it itself becomes the haunting.

Some hauntings may be much less evidently traceable but equally vivid in terms of their impact. For example, I recently visited Southwark Cathedral just before the start of a Sunday service and immediately burst into tears and tried to hide by moving closely to the nearby wall and looking at it. Maybe I was in some way touched by the nearby memorial to those who drowned in the Marchioness disaster, though I had not consciously gone to look at it. I truly do not know; it is currently a journey of discovery for me. Perhaps it is related to my past and the rare occasions that I went to church as a child, or the very

different attitudes held regarding religion by my mother and father. It may be more focussed on the future and my mortality. In seeking to learn more, I recently visited Manchester Cathedral and again felt tearful. I would probably have actually cried had it not been for the organ which was being tuned and the discordant, apparently random notes were jarring and unsupportive. It was certainly not a beautifully haunting melody! Despite my best efforts I was not able to experience loving dislocation.

Whilst on the theme of haunting in cathedrals, I also remember visiting Canterbury Cathedral many years ago. I walked in by chance, so to speak and began wandering around. I noticed that I started to feel increasingly sad as I moved to a particular part. Suddenly I realised that I was at the point where Thomas à Beckett was assassinated in 1170. In reflecting on this, it positions all that I have so far written as part of a spectrum within haunting. Sometimes the origins are vividly traceable. Sometimes they are elusive. Sometimes they are a mixture.

My Canterbury Cathedral experience also indicated that although a haunting is always experienced as deeply personal it may also have a profoundly collective dimension. My sadness at Canterbury was, I suspect, at least partly fuelled by the many thousands who visited the cathedral over the centuries to mourn *their*, indeed perhaps *my* loss.

The haunting may be passed on down through the generations. I am reminded of Jenny Erpenbeck writing about Richard who sensed the presence in Berlin of those who were murdered in the Third Reich and he also envisaged their unborn children and also their children's unborn children walking beside him in the street, on their way to work, visiting friends, sitting invisibly in cafes, going shopping and visiting parks and the theatre (Erpenbeck, 2015).

History may be rewritten and yet an awareness of the distortions and betrayals is passed on down through the generations through what could be called haunting. As Frosh describes, denying a heritage may reinforce it (Frosh op cit). A sense of anger, sadness and loss may be beneath the surface, but is ever more present in time if those with power seek to push it away. The attempted and sometimes apparently successful destruction of cultures and languages has been a key theme of history and yet something remains.

Such destruction has often been manifest through fundamental changes in the landscape. That which may have held the wisdom and spirits of the past may be literally uprooted. Those vital points of connection and orientation may be gone forever. Total compliance is demanded by the newly arrived powers. Such an operation may also take place where there is not the arrival of new powers, but rather acts of profound betrayal by those who were already the leaders. An example is that which took place in Scotland following the Battle of Culloden in 1746. The clan chiefs evicted their own Highlanders from the glens in order to set up lucrative sheep farms. Those who were evicted had little choice but to emigrate to foreign lands. If they stayed then often they died because of the rampant cholera and starvation (Prebble, 1969). (See also Note at the end of the paper).

A sense of betrayal can echo through the centuries. It becomes a foundation through which one sees the world without even knowing why. There may be those who urge forgiveness or insist that 'it is now time to move on'. However, in doing so they simply compound and intensify the pain since they are experienced as adding a process of betrayal to the content, that is, the history of the betrayal itself. The energy for the haunting also becomes ever more vivid when faced with those who want to bury it or deny its existence, for example through the re-writing of history. This may relate to the clearly horrifying and terrifying, such as the Holocaust. It may also relate to the creation and perpetuation of myths. For example, Peter Kingsley refers to the belief that the ancient Greeks were 'a self-enclosed people, unwilling to learn foreign languages, creating western civilization all on their own' whereas in fact there were important links with the cultures of the East (Kingsley, 1999: p18).

Also, I recently had a chance-conversation with Joshua, a barista who is a lover of ancient languages and religions. He told me that over the centuries the reinterpretations of the texts could often result in the original meaning being lost. Yet the current interpretation would be presented and protected as *the absolute and enduring truth*.

As well as the levels of the state and internationally, the rewriting of history is clearly also something that can happen in families. Painful truths may metaphorically be locked in a cupboard and become part of the given fabric of the house. In time they may be absorbed as an authentic reality until an

inquisitive family member starts, for whatever reason, investigating. She finds and unlocks the cupboard door. It might have taken great courage and tenacity simply to discover it. She had not set out with the clear intention of being a truth-finder and truth-teller, but she felt that she could not ignore the insistent hauntings. It could be that the chance discovery of a precious family object triggered her curiosity, which then became a passion; or perhaps the haunting was prompted by the much less tangible, such as an atmosphere or instinct.

‘The others laughed. Lucy-Ann often had ‘feelings’ about things, and really believed them. It was just like her to start having ‘feelings’ about the mountain, when everyone was also having uncomfortable ideas about wolves and other things.’ (Blyton, 1950).

The family history might also involve betrayal. James Hollis, building on the insights of Carl Jung, writes, ‘.....the greatest burden the child must bear is the un-lived life of the parent. That is, wherever the parent is stuck, the child will similarly be stuck and will spend his or her life seeking to overthrow such noxious stuckness.....’(Hollis, 2013: p5). This betrayal may take place outside awareness and indeed be beyond words. This itself may increase the intensity and vibrancy of the haunting. Haunting can by-pass language and this can be a crucial feature of its light and shadow, as the burden or indeed the liberation is passed on down through the generations. There may, of course be a mixture of burden and liberation, creating harmonies and cacophonies in the haunting.

Something similar may happen in organisations. This is not surprising since organisations often start as family concerns. Also, even when larger they seek to create a culture which is based upon a ‘family-feel’. The contribution of key figures in the early days of the business may be ignored or minimised. The past is not sufficiently honoured and may indeed be scorned. Nevertheless somehow the haunting continues due to a persistent need for an appropriate acknowledgement. There may well, for example, be gender, social or race divides which mean that the person making vital contributions is metaphorically left in the corner of the room. They are not invited to be centre-stage at the point of celebration. This ‘corner’ can paradoxically be a point of protection, vulnerability, invisibility or punishment. The haunting may itself be a paradox – vibrantly vague or frighteningly engaging – and can therefore sometimes help delineate paradoxes.

Having mentioned haunting in the contexts of both broader cultural history and also organisational life, I am reminded of Shoshana Zuboff's brilliant book where she draws some parallels between aspects of Google practices and those of Christopher Columbus in 1492 when he established Spanish rule over the island that became Hispaniola. Zuboff identified three phases in common in both settings, even though centuries apart: 'the invention of legalistic measures to provide the invasion with a gloss of justification, a declaration of territorial claims, and the founding of a town to legitimate and institutionalize the conquest' (Zuboff, 2019: p176). Inside or outside awareness we may embody philosophies and practices of a significantly distant past and in doing so potentially energise hauntings, including those which had been apparently denied or reframed as light when many of the real consequences were dark. To paraphrase substantially Carl Jung, 'the more vehemently we proclaim ourselves as the light, the more we enter the dark'. This then opens up that perspective offered by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon where there may be a dramatic mismatch between 'espoused values' and 'values in action' (Argyris & Schon, 1995). The possible sense of guilt about colluding in hypocrisy may increase the urgency in further concealment of the crypt. This accompanied by an equally urgent need to seek out those who are willing to collaborate in the deception. Such alliances may be formed on the basis of an implicit understanding; no explicit word is spoken, it is simply part of the furniture. The silence may become noisier over time, moving on to be a slight mumble which may then become a scream. It may only be the outsider who can hear it since she has not been inducted into the deafening rituals of groupthink (Janis, 1982).

In another setting the haunting may be a nagging and profound sense that 'something is not quite right'. The haunting may be an occasional, gentle tap on one's shoulder or a relentless presence which seems to be everywhere. I am reminded of Sigmund Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. That which is not mourned because it is lost in time or somehow buried may evolve into melancholia (Freud, 1917; Frosh. op cit.). Unexpressed grief is in one's soul. The haunting may be urging us to find the crypt, or at least acknowledge its existence. Mourning can be seen as the celebration of a life. If, for whatever reason, that mourning does not take place then melancholia may be the result. I wonder whether the haunting that can flow from melancholia may sometimes be due to the insufficient celebration of delights and successes. If so, then that which applies to crypts may also apply

to treasure chests. As already mentioned, haunting is not necessarily about pain, fear and sadness.

It seems to me that an important contribution of haunting is challenging the linearity of time, space and history. I am reminded of Rebecca Solnit's powerful and engaging book, beautifully blending support and challenge, 'A Field Guide to Getting Lost' (Solnit, 2017). She suggests that art history has often been written as if it were a simple and direct path. In her words, '....the crossroads, branchings and tangles...' are ignored (Solnit op.cit p59). One of the consequences she describes is that the contribution of women is often disregarded. Haunting may stimulate a stepping aside from one's usual trajectory of time, space and history and to allow the achievement of valuably different perspectives. A wise grandmother may be present or have a presence. At a challenging time her words of advice are brilliantly appropriate even though they were informed by an age long-gone. Isca Saltzberger-Wittenberg suggests that unresolved issues from one transition are manifest and magnified in subsequent ones (Saltzberger-Wittenberg, 2013). This may be a key source of the grandmother's wisdom. Her insight provides a story where the granddaughter's feeling of *dépaysement* is now seen as an opportunity, a time to move on from confusion to adventure; anonymity and invisibility opening new windows on a different landscape (Watt-Smith, 2016). Also, it may be that the very language used by the grandmother itself resonates with the granddaughter's soul. Consequently there is a magical combination of intimacy and distance.

Haunting may equally bring uncertainty alive whilst also suggesting that an excessive concern for understanding and explanation may sometimes be self-sabotaging.

The sense of being haunted may cause the person to seek help but not necessarily from a professional helper. It might be about exploring and talking through with friends or learning more about the treasure chests and crypts, both literal and metaphorical of one's families or cultures. In this I am reminded that feelings can remain vivid even when particular associated memories have faded or been lost. In this case, the insights of the outsider may help. This might lead to a reframe. For example, somebody might feel between cultures and be faced with the challenge of having a heightened sense of self, whilst desperately wanting to belong. A chat with a trusted

friend or even a wonderful conversation with a 'heaven-sent' stranger on a long train journey may be liberating in prompting him to look to himself for confirmation rather than being on super-alert regarding the real or imagined judgement of others. That is, he accepts that his personal haunting is at odds with the collective one. 'This culture truly is *not* for me'. I am also reminded of Diana Athill writing of the moment when, '.....familiarity had made the touch of his hand feel so much like my own that it no longer conveyed a thrill' (Athill, 2008 p23). The excitement had gone and she then faced the challenge of whether to fake it or face up to the new reality. Haunting, as mentioned can be equally tangible and in-the-moment.

I now move onto the overlap between Haunting and Loving Dislocation.



### **The Nature of Haunting as Loving Dislocation**

Before narrowing the focus I want to make some broad points about the shared nature of Haunting and Loving Dislocation.

As indicated, any haunting is likely to be experienced as personal. This, even though it may well come from a distance in terms of linear time, geography and history. This has parallels with the role of the helper in being both a part of and apart from the client's world. That is, being intimate with the world as described by the client, whilst at the same time being able to step back and be an observer of oneself and the client.

Closely linked to the point above is that with both haunting and loving dislocation boundaries are shaken up. I may suddenly flip into a time many years before; it may be from my own past or even that of earlier generations. Boundaries are reassessed, discarded, emphasised and redrawn. This may

sometimes happen as an almost out-of-body experience. False or obsolete coherences in stories and histories are exposed.

There can be an intense polarisation in terms of light and dark, good and evil, tangible and the spiritual. This may help the person find the third position, since the intensity of opposites may create a map where one can locate some solid ground in order to survey the landscape. In other words, it is a place from which she can be an observer of herself in relation her concerns and her world (Gilbert & Evans, 2000). This may, on occasion, be a route to an epistemological break – namely a fundamentally different way of seeing things (Althusser & Balibar, 2009).

Rituals, including those which can be a feature of both haunting and loving dislocation, can be a conduit for spiritual insight or a path to enduring superficiality. That is, beliefs have become mere introjections. Each may evolve into the other.

I now narrow the focus to rather more specific elements within the overlap of haunting and loving dislocation. In doing so, I simply invite the reader to notice whether anything resonates:

- A presence that indicates an absence – something precious, important is missing.
- An acidity which brings lucidity; a sharp pain which brings insight. This house is probably no longer a home and it certainly is not a sanctuary.
- Uncanny/ das Unheimlich – both strange and familiar. A reflection prompting reflection. Being between identities and cultures. Perhaps also being various ages simultaneously.
- A gentle tap on the shoulder which is also a face-to-face confrontation, and vice-versa.
- A sense of being lost in order to find oneself; needing to find oneself in order to know that one is lost.
- A chance moment which is inevitable. e.g. random gifts from the universe; sliding doors.
- A sharpened sense of self, whilst also being a representative; that is, being both subject and object, holder and held.
- A bright sunlight which enables one to see clearly, but which can be temporarily blinding if it shines directly into one's eyes.

- By holding the child within oneself one can be held by that child's wisdom.
- Sometimes one needs to embrace in order to be able to let go sufficiently.



The haunting may come from the crypt or the treasure chest, but the surrounding aura may mean that one may be mistaken for the other.

I am now sitting and writing in another café. A small girl, perhaps six years old, is smiling and carefully walking back to her Mum's table carrying a very full glass of water. Her smile broadens as she undertakes some tricky navigation. Close to her destination she gets stuck. Her Mum gets up and takes the glass from her. They both smile before sitting down at the table.

### **Conclusion**

I have been haunted by the idea of haunting for many months. I am pleased to have been able to begin to put some ideas together in this paper. There is still more to fall into and probably out of place. I look forward to it.

'And the gesture of closing is always sharper, firmer and briefer than that of opening' (Bachelard op.cit p74).

Verse from *Echo*

*Come to me in the silence of night*

*Come in the speaking silence of a dream;*

*Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright*

*As sunlight on a stream;*

*Come back in tears*

*Oh memory, hope, love of finished years.*

Christina Rossetti 1830

## Note

In the mid-1960's I worked in the Old War Office library located in the basement of the Old War Office, Whitehall. Recently I walked to the building, along a familiar route hoping to add to my vivid and happy memories. I ended up being disorientated and rather upset to discover that some extensive rebuilding work was taking place. The façade was retained, but internally a major conversion was taking place – a boutique hotel and flats. (Sometimes organisational change can be like this - the same façade, but dramatically different behind it all). Somehow I found myself haunted by the lack of haunting. An important part of my past had been lost, probably forever. The experience dramatically brought alive for me the wider and much more intense and deeper sense of loss for those who, for whatever reason, lose the landscape which had been part of their family and culture for many centuries. The sanctuaries of wise spirits lost forever.

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