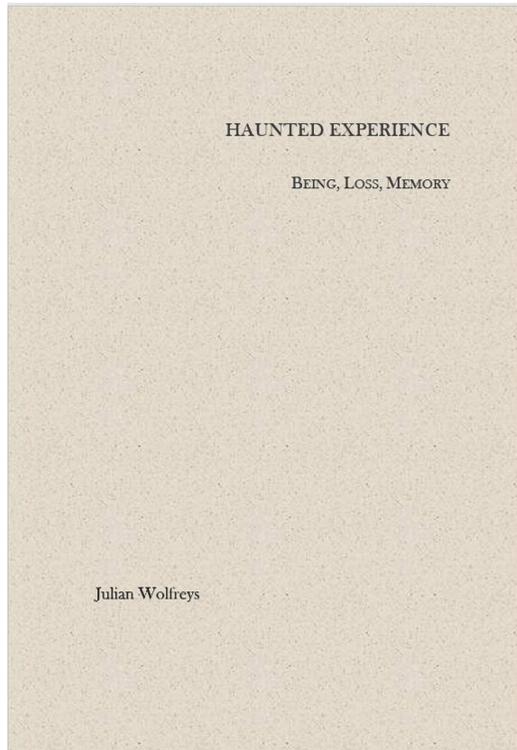


Glimpses of HAUNTED EXPERIENCE

BEING, LOSS, MEMORY

Extracts from:



Julian Wolfreys

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These extracts give an idea of the range and scope of
Haunted Experience and are drawn from many of the 35
episodes shown on the Contents page

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To Bathsheba, who made essential things known.

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PREFACE

Schumann, at the age of seventeen in a diary entry, made the remark that music “is romantic poetry for the ear ... the beautiful without a limit ... a dying sound” that fades indeterminably. “One is present at the dying away ... of a sound.”

Yet sound is multitemporal, Schumann goes on to realise, having a quality, as he puts it “of the future and the past into the present”.

Of this, Ian Bostridge observes “the very fragility of sound, its onset, its resonance, its decay ... connect the human sensorium to the mystery of time”

This temporal becoming and undoing, movement rather than moment, encapsulates in its objective fact the subjective condition, the phenomenal experience of every subject.

Music attests to the very manner of our witness, our witness to nothing less than being itself, in its coming to pass, this endless traversal.

So, why speak of loss in what is to follow, rather than absence, as a constituent dimension or aspect of Being?

Because all that we are, all we experience, all we remember, all that we forget but which leaves nevertheless a trace on us, in us, a trace that countersigns and writes us as who we are (in effect the constellated matrix of Being’s becoming): this is a process of loss.

This *just is* loss. Loss is who we are.

Being is our material condition, phenomenologically apperceived.

As Beings we exist in the world, historically.

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Being in time, we each have our own temporality.

Having temporality, every being's Being is subject to a constant, endless becoming.

Being is not static.

Though I assume a presence to myself, such presence is the illusion of a temporal reflection grounded in the always-now of the reflection on my part of my Being.

The times of a being's subjective reflection on its Being appear discrete.

The flow is, however, continuous or, rather, discontinuous, inasmuch as the I comes in and out of its temporality, revealing itself to itself and withdrawing.

There is a misrecognition of the condition of Being insofar as presence (in the present) is assumed.

The now, the seriality, the iterability of the 'now', is not apprehended. It is mistaken for the assumed constancy of presence in the present.

Subjectivity as the modern condition of the reflexive revelation of Being to the self, of being's Being, in being apprehended properly, is that experience wherein, unveiled to the self, lies the illusion of presence and absence as stable categories.

In being always already a becoming, an endless flow revealed indirectly through the coming to light of the discontinuous serial iterability of the reflexive *nun* as so many instances of the *hic et nunc*, misperceived as (self)presence in the present as the unchangeable condition of Being, every being's Being is marked not by absence, but instead haunted by loss.

Loss is authentically the necessary and inescapable inessential essence of Being.

Loss names the ghosts, the revenants of Being, Being's others.

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Neither there nor not there, loss persists as the always already becoming of the thinking of Being.

There is more than one loss.

There is no one loss.

Loss never arrives for a first time. All loss is the return of what is lost to Being's being in the world, to Being's phenomenological experience of the temporality of Being.

Loss is the revenance of Being's having become, and having become other than itself, the 'itself' as which it is mistakenly apprehended.

Loss names the dis-appearance of Being's being, without being the absence of Being as such.

Loss arrives from Old English *los*, previously Germanic and Old Norse, meaning 'destruction', becoming later a back-formation from *lost*, signifying 'perishing, or 'breaking up'.

Loss is the breaking up of Being.

Loss is the perishing of being's Being, even as Being is a becoming.

Loss is the destruction of Being.

Loss is the deconstruction of Being.

Loss is.

GLIMPSES...

BEING and BELONGING

'Being': the idea is as old as the hills, well almost. It is often bound, not to loss, but to concerns with 'identity' and 'subjectivity'. Being becomes confused with where one lives, resides; who one is becomes confused with a sense of belonging to a family, a tribe, a group, a region, a nation, an alliance, or even a state (nation state or economic union, with borders that are perceived as real or taken as cultural, juridical, economic and discursive; as for example in the idea of 'Europe'). The state of Being, the condition, is confused with a sense of belonging. As soon as there is belonging, though, there is the fear of loss, and with that there arrive the concern with inclusion, the anxiety over exclusion, and, more than these, a perpetual condition of crisis. This is the case, whether one speaks of the self, a nation or, more diffusely, an idea of something that passes for a community.

* *

When we look at the world, and the phenomena it contains, other beings, works of art, each of us is before the possibility, but never more than that, of having disclosed to us, not only the truth of Being but also the haunting experience of being unable to access the truth of Being directly; it is *there* not here; we are therefore forced to pause, in order to dwell on this, on the condition of Being's dwelling.

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EUROPE

We must remain vigilant and suspicious of the very idea that there is just one Europe or that this one Europe is a Europe with limits, with a clear definition.

* *

...the idea of Europe in any debate is haunted by its own ghosts, by the traces of those thoughts, those discourses, which have become so many European 'souvenirs', traces buried deep in the unconscious, which continue to shape discourse, thought, the formation and maintenance of institutions, without our fully realising that by which we are haunted, and which like some ghostly parasite, haunts and contaminates 'our' thinking on the idea of Europe, and 'from' which we are yet to emerge.

* *

History being for some of us a nightmare from which we wish to awaken, the narrative of Europe is the story of a haunted house; the nightmare is one crowded with ghosts, the sleep of reason producing monsters, as Goya knew.

DWELLING

Dwelling as reflective memory and dwelling as existence in a given location, having material place, in which past and present, earth, sky and existent being are connected, come together through the act of witness that is literature.

* *

The dwelling, protecting you, demands in return that you become less than human; the dwelling or habitation wherein you dwell, the abode where you abide, thus becomes, or, more precisely, always already is, not as familiar as you might have thought. Or, instead, let us say that it is the very familiarity, the economy of familiarity and habit that, strangely, disturbingly, defamiliarises us from ourselves, from consciousness of ourselves. In the dwelling, in the home, one becomes a servant, a functionary, a function. This simultaneous familiar comfort and strangeness are, in part, what Sigmund Freud defines as the uncanny, of which more shortly. But the immediate implication is that we are haunted by the inescapable recognition that the place to which we turn and return for the familiar comforts of home, the dwelling, is, equally, that which can estrange, dehumanise, even if we believe – and note the technological metaphor in idiom – that our dwellings are where we can ‘switch off’. We turn, and we return, to home, to the dwelling in order to stop having to be our public selves; as its Old High German, Norse and Old English usages signify, dwelling implies a condition not only of delaying, remaining and staying, but also, of being stunned, benumbed, torpid. To dwell means to cease, leave off, give up, even as, stranger still, there is in this familiar/unfamiliar notion a sense, as the *OED* puts it, of having gone astray, gone wrong, become perverted, to be misled or to be deceived.

CHARACTERS IN LITERATURE

What dwells in the novel, in novels, in poetry or film? *Who* dwells? When we read, or watch, is it the characters who dwell? Or is it us, as reader or audience? How might we trace this connection between the beings who are more or less 'real' and those who are invented, made up, those who are phantasms, those who have no existence other than psychic existence?

* *

After a fashion, when we read, we dwell on what does not exist as such. This dwelling is not simply the pause, the *epochē*, which reading causes, for something else is at work also. Reading a text, watching a film – and, perhaps more blatantly, playing a game on a computer, a Wii or PlayStation – we willingly decorporealise ourselves, entering into this other incorporeal world and its inhabitants. They do not see us of course; characters in a film or novel can be envisioned by us, but they cannot begin to imagine we are there, walking around with them, entering their houses, looking at their possessions, occasionally feeling for them, or, more uncannily still, feeling *with* them.

THE FUTURE

Do we know where we're going? Are we under the illusion – up to a point – that we know the direction we are taking? Is the idea that one knows where one is headed, true, strictly speaking or ever? Of course there is always death, we are all beings toward death; and in this anticipatory retrospect, in our 'future anterior' we are vouchsafed the most uncanny of 'dwellings', an inescapable authenticity in the negation of being as its ownmost inevitability. I can imagine myself, no longer a 'myself', when I am no longer even a body without organs, merely a without, without knowledge of this. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that in knowing where we are going, nothing in fact could be less certain. For while death is that which is inescapable, that which is the future therefore, and one of the few events to which one can, properly speaking, give the name 'future' as opposed to speaking of that which is to come (that which may one day arrive but which cannot be anticipated or programmed), nevertheless, I cannot experience what I call 'my death'. The authenticity of futurity is always already haunted therefore by its own inauthenticity, except in the fiction of the *als ob*, the as if; it is haunted by the impossibility of knowing ahead of time, ahead of the absence of all time, all world, and, therefore, all consciousness of dwelling.

FORGETTING

Hamlet talks about *Lethe*, and the drowsy forgetfulness of sleep. *Lethe* means forgetfulness, the condition of all of us, because we cannot be mindful of the past, of all our memories, all the time. Forgetting is intrinsic to humans. But forgetting is a condition also of losing sight of, of having the trace of the past hidden from us.

HAUNTING AND THE UNCANNY

The uncanny is that which touches us because it causes us to feel something about the nature of what it means to exist, what being consists of.

* *

The fear we feel in given situations causes us to flee, and yet the fear is a response to nothing as such but to that haunting sensation which appears fleetingly, hauntingly and spectrally, from within ourselves.

* *

If I feel haunted, this implies a structural relationship, specifically one in which proximity is felt to be paramount. Something other is near; I feel this inside myself. Of this motion within and yet other than one's being, Heidegger remarks "We then say: one feels *uncanny*... One no longer feels at home in his most familiar environment ... in dread, being-in-the-world is totally transformed into a 'not at home' purely and simply". This 'not-at-home' is, in Heidegger's text, an identification of the fundamental nature of one's being and how one dwells. Indeed, humans, taken as beings who dwell on the earth, are always haunted. To be human, to dwell as a human, means that one is always already touched by that which is uncanny about oneself, which at its simplest is expressed in one's existence.

LANGUAGE

Language is not our property, we cannot have it or possess it, because language determines us as beings. Humans exist as speaking beings, we dwell in language, and language defines the difference of our Being. Language is, therefore, not being but the attestation of existence and the trace of experience.

BEING AND HAUNTING

Being may well be what Jean Paulhan calls “l’espace sensible au coeur”, the space felt in the heart, as this comes to be experienced in particular, highly singular and charged moments of phenomenological apperception, reflection and a dawning of awareness to the self in the experience, event or encounter with the other; it may even, as Heidegger insisted, be the subject of the most fundamental of philosophical questions; yet it disappears before the ontological interrogation, in the moment of our becoming aware of our own Being as beings, or in those foolhardy attempts to define, delimit or determine. More than merely sensible, less than intelligible, neither as such, Being does not remain, but remains to come as a fleeting, and again, I insist on this, a haunting of the self.

LOSS

So, why speak of loss...? Because all that we are, all we experience, all we remember, all that we forget but which leaves nevertheless a trace on us, in us, a trace that countersigns and writes us as who we are (in effect the constellated matrix of Being's becoming): this is a process of loss. This *just is* loss. Loss is who we are.

* ~ *

Modernism ... 'realises' ... that 'loss' is not merely a condition, a symptom, but an expression of self-reflective awareness, of a phenomenal coming to consciousness of the self at the limits of Being.

**

There has been, in the history of the Western tradition of philosophy, no sustained or rigorous discourse on loss, any more than there has been on love. Loss, like love, is that which philosophy appears ill at ease in speaking about, or for which, let us be generous, philosophy is at a loss for words. And yet, what are we, as our memories constantly remind us, if not nothing other than the sum of our losses? This is not to suggest anything tragic. If anything, loss is perhaps overlooked, hardly spoken of, if at all, in the Western philosophical canon, because it is so very close to us, so very habitual, being of the *habitus* of the *ego* in its coming to consciousness, its self-appearances, the arrival of reflection. With every day that passes, I accumulate another memory, even as many seemingly inconsequential moments that form my encounter with the world, with the other, with which and to whom I am 'organically connected', go unobserved. Invisible, they vanish, are lost to me. Yet the invisible and the visible, the barely apprehended and the deeply felt, have been, and so remain as traces, memories of perceptions of experiences of events, all with the possibility of some revenance, some re-representation. They return unexpectedly, if they return at all, as spectral re-representations, as that which can cause me to feel, and feel all the more deeply because they are no more.

**

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'Loss' appears to originate in the Old English *los*, the meaning of which is destruction. This old, very English word, deriving in turn possibly from Germanic or Old Norse words, thus loses in part that strongest sense of itself; it is, from within, and from without as if worn away, buffeted smooth in being rolled across countless tongues, 'loss' loses by a process of destruction that which it seems originally to have named, signified or identified. Remaining whole seemingly, the integrity of loss is broken up, losing something of itself, losing something of its 'identity' it might be said in the course of years and in repeated usage. That the process of loss, of breaking up, wearing away, and, it must be supposed, recasting takes place is, of course, as inevitable as it is obvious. Subject to its own diminution, erosion, privation and forfeiture, *loss* survives precisely through its constant deprivation, demise; it desists, passes away, expiring without end, its worth all the time deficient, its originary senses misplaced, forgotten. Yet it is undeniable that it remains. As a sign of itself and everything no longer of the self, *loss* is its own remains, what remains, and the trace of that which no longer remains. A remainder and a reminder, therefore, a *memento mori* of all that what is called the 'English' language necessarily and inevitably undergoes – to become, constantly becoming a surviving fossil, haunted in its very form by all that it no longer is. 'Destruction' is not an ultimate, final phenomenon then. There is not a point at which one arrives to witness this 'destruction'. It is, as the complex etymology and signification of *loss* suggests, an ineluctable process. Always already ongoing, the action of such 'destruction' may be grasped as being one that is continuously undermining the very foundations on which any identity stands, on which the premises, the house of identity, might be premised, or constructed. Indeed, to go further, it is arguable that identity or ontology are not built on loss and destruction so much as they are the inevitable consequences of that which promises their erosion and decay.

* *

Loss is not some emotion, just another affect, an 'add-on', to be psychologised away, as one more expression of the self's experiences. It is, in effect, Being itself in the disappearance of an it-self.

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MEMORY AND LOSS

Turning to Jean Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence* (1997), I want to reflect on how Hyppolite, in providing a critique of Hegel, opens for us the possibility of thinking memory *as* loss. Memory is at one and the same time nothing other than the return, the re-presentation of what has gone, of what no longer is *as such*, and also, in being the phantasmic phenomena of experience, transcribed as perception's constellated traces, the reminder – and remainder, the *souvenir* – of that which no longer is, the very negation of which is given in the revenance of memory. Memory re-presents the space of experience, the space that *Dasein* knows as that in which self and world are coterminous and co-existent. But the re-presentation is also the apparition, the manifestation of that space *as* phantom, more real and more immediate because no longer there. When I am in the experience, I do not reflect in the event on that which takes place.

* *

Before it is anything else, memory is always the memory of loss. All memory may be defined as being the re-presentation of that which is no longer present as such, save for that constellation of traces that we call memory. Memory is the ghost that returns, and which, in returning, haunts. It haunts the subject even as it calls the subject to haunt the experience of the past moment or event inscribed by that mnemonic signature.

MEMORY AND PLACE

Memory is always memory of place, as well as of a taking place; and additionally, what remains as the mnemonic trace, a form of disembodied immaterial 'remains'. In that re-presentation, whether returning the day after the event or thirty years after, there is nothing there, nothing we can grasp. And yet – what a 'nothing'! For even though this echo of our past self and our others involved in the event – every other as an other and the self we narrate, remember, projecting, as ourselves, as other to the self to whom memory re-presents –; even though the phantasm is apparitional, yet it can create very real effects. It is immaterial, incorporeal, without ground: yet, it has the power to move us, its revenance erupting unexpectedly; and through all the power of indirection occasioned by chance, it can touch us as closely, and as forcefully, *as if* we were there, as if that moment and the place, wherein the perception were not yet formed, the trace not yet written, were accessible once again as experience and site. Place haunts us therefore; and in returning we are encouraged in acts of bearing witness to haunt for a while the place of the event re-presented.

BEING, BECOMING AND TIME

If it is true that I think, therefore I am, it might be more correct to say I think, therefore I become; but in becoming, I become other, and so the I shifts, flows, leaving behind the self it was, at least in part.

* *

To what extent is the experience of time, or, more precisely, the awareness of one's relation to temporality, a sign of the emergence of Being's modernity? In what ways might the subject's becoming aware of his or her relation to 'deep time' give to that subjectivity a sense of loss? In confronting however indirectly a cosmic or geological, not to say abyssal, opening of the temporal to one's self, how much does the subject grasp the authenticity of Being as always predicated on the loss of what Immanuel Kant has suggested is an 'objective stability'?

BEING AND NATURE

As soon as there is a concept of 'nature', the 'natural', and so forth, we are no longer 'natural'.

BEING AND LITERATURE

If the idea of the literary is notoriously vague, hard to define, impossible to assign concrete determinations or unimpeachable place markers to, it might nevertheless be thought, provisionally, to be the dwelling place of memory, where memory traces assemble, momentarily coalesce, and give form to some singular experience of Being, at a certain time, for a particular duration, in a given place or places.

PAST AND PRESENT

To represent something – an event, an historical moment, what is vaguely, and often mistakenly perceived as some ‘past’ – is to cause a represented other to appear. Such an appearance, manifestation or apparition is never an entirely new image or series of images structured by, and in turn, mediating, a narrative. The apparition is called up as much as it arrives unbidden, given form in some moment supposedly distinct from that ‘past’ – for now, I shall call this a ‘present’, as though the present were simple and full – and yet arriving from a ‘past’, as if it were now present, in the so-called ‘present’. Producing the apparition, conjuring it, involves therefore an act of invention, a calling and a coming, which takes effect and causes the represented other to appear, from some otherwise invisible locus; and this invention, furthermore, not producing anything new or novel, causes the apparition to come according to a work of finding what was always already there, but which had remained, until the moment of conjuration, occluded, silent, as a known, possibly misremembered in some act of cultural, ideological or historical paramnesia, or otherwise forgotten (partially or wholly), and therefore mute ghost, hitherto perceived indirectly if at all as that which is lost to ‘present’ memory.

LITERATURE AND LOSS

It is arguable that while not all texts are ghost stories as such, every story is in effect a ghostly or a spectral tale. Literature always begins with a return. Literature is many things, but it is before all else, if it is anything at all, the constellated trace of the constant response to the call of the other. As such, it is nothing other than an archive of the affirmation of Being in the form of the acknowledgement that the self is an island, understood to itself through loss. The world is gone. There is no world as such, only islands. From the first page of any novel, we are asked to dwell with those who are not there, those who have no presence, but also those who return as the traces of themselves. Not only human shadows either but places as well. We dwell in lost places. The lost place: this is the island we name literature, to which we seek to return repeatedly, like Alain-Fournier's narrator in *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913).

EXPERIENCE AND BECOMING

Each experience, if it is one worthy of being called an event, and is not merely a matter of programmed reception, of tuning into the signals one had been poorly taught to believe were there all along, *will have in it* that which is transformative; its necessity will move me, even though I do not fully understand what is taking place, even though it might create confusion or appear undecidable, *as if* this were a first time, as if one never knew the meaning of a word, or all that gives the word significance, until now.

MEANING

Making manifest or restoring meaning rests on a presupposition: that meaning can in some manner be stabilised, and may be made distinct, perhaps free, from perceptions. The assumption of, or the quest for, meaning harbours a dream of a science of knowledge, a methodology or mode of repeatable measurement, equal to the task; which, though it may prove to be a chimera, does not always acknowledge the motions of the senses irreducible to knowledge, rationality or logic, or the perceptions or apperceptions that can always arise. Meaning though is always, or almost always, a question of interpretation, which is equally susceptible of percepts.

LOVE

Love comes, if it comes at all, as the singular expression of the other; this is my perception, in the perception of the other: that love is given. Not a thing, irreducible to any ontology and therefore unavailable to deconstruction, it is the giving of perception to that place I name as myself, wherein I perceive myself loved or not loved in what is given, not given, or withdrawn, as the touching experience of the other.

* *

Love is never mine to give; it is not a gift in any conventional sense; I find myself having given love, giving love, without my consciousness taking part in that decision. I can of course decide that I believe I am withdrawing my love, but that is simply to frame my perception of the other in a particular manner, so as to save face, to turn my face away. But the truth of love is far from this; and, it might be, I come to realise that the love given was never mine to give all along.

* *

What I am suggesting is that the experience of what might provisionally be called the event of love – and with that one might add the experience of music, as being amongst the most inner, private of experiences, subjective perception being barely communicable to others directly – comes to arrive in a ghostly fashion to my perception. No hermeneutic model can account for this. Psychologism is woefully inadequate also. Though I cannot say with certainty what these experiences are, I know them when I feel them, if not see them. Before any rigorous reflection by which I believe I distance myself from the world, and so distrust my intimate relation with it, there is the primacy of perception, which is groundless, though encountered as mediated sensibility in apprehension.

* *

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Loss, like love, can render us silent on the face of things. This is why love is hard. Not simply hard to define, but just hard, difficult; as Rilke observes, it is the most difficult gift we are given, the hardest work, a remark of the poet's that echoes in a manner Freud's belief that mourning is the most difficult, if not the only 'real' work we, as beings, must pursue, never knowing if we do this correctly. Love is difficult perhaps because within its gift, as the other to that gift, is the promise of loss, the falling silent of the other, whom I survive, to whom there can no longer be anything said, but who remains in the passage of innumerable traces that have the ghostly possibility to return in that silence which haunts touchingly at that place called by Rilke the "speechless heart" – "*im sprachlosen Herzen*" (2003, 80/81).

THE OTHER

The condition of the subject's existence is a "singularity *always in relation*". That *always* must be qualified: relation comes to appear, touch takes place, and words, understanding, meaning, are found wanting, in the event of love befalling us, in the experience of loss, in the touch that music can effect.

* *

To be as faithful to the other as I can means risking not closing or completing the interpretive circle, but remaining open in a relation to the other, wherein I remain in incomprehension, in a state of unknowing;

TRACES

Experience or event: I perceive this in the moment, but perception is already a transposition of the material and empirical. In the blink of an eye, I translate. The scene becomes a reproduction, the phenomena writing themselves and being constituted in a particular way for the self. In this phenomenal refiguring, the trace writes itself.

* *

I am the memories that appear to me, in me and as the me that represents itself in the trace. Memory is the constellated bringing forth, the apparitioning that gives access to the possibility of the face-to-face with the other. This always evanescent apparitioning gives a place to my Being while, at the same time, creating in the phantasmal event a realisation that the self excludes transcendence through the coherence between different instances of 'now', which are in themselves always the expression of an immanence irreducible to presence.

BECOMING

Imagine: in that every moment of what I call ‘my’ experience comes to pass for one time and one time only, there, in that passage, and in every singular iteration hitherto and thereafter, is becoming. But becoming is also marked, made possible, even as it is touched, and so haunted, by destruction; not just destruction in general, but the destruction, the deconstruction perhaps of Being. With every becoming, there is a becoming other, and so, concomitantly, a loss. With every memory, every material experience re-inscribed as the partial narrative of experience, the mere trace of a perception returning, I recall, and so sustain what I lose.

TOUCH

Imagine then, if you will, a touch. Imagine what has been and that which is no longer, and yet 'is' otherwise; and yet remains, a memory, a trace. Between the absolute proximity of another's body and its disappearance, neither touch nor the absence of touch, there is – and yet there, there almost on the skin, the surface, there where no *there* is – the hint of the ineffable, ineffaceable remainder, the remainder as reminder, souvenir perhaps, of something not quite material and yet not wholly immaterial either. More or less than a body, and therefore a sign in memory: the ghost of touch that signals not simply corporeality, if even that, and certainly not the corporeality of another, so much as – through that sensate apprehension – the intimation of another's Being; of the singular gesturing towards Being itself in every instance of singularity: apperception without apprehension of the other.

* *

Nothing touches us though, and nothing we employ touches others, more frequently than language. Sticks and stones may break bones, but names, and all manner of words can bring about a sensible response, as physical as it is emotional, and therefore indirectly, if not directly, touching on the materiality of the body itself.

LANGUAGE AND BEING

If language *is* the House of Being, it is, without doubt, a haunted house. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that the very condition of the existence of a house is that it be haunted, that it give place, structurally, in every piece of its fabric, to the invisible registration of that which haunts, dwells and moves us, abidingly, maintaining its unseen work.

HAUNTED EXPERIENCE by Julian Wolfreys is
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