

NWRPA Newsletter June 2021

Dr Mark Fisher

Some Hauntologies

A Zoom Webinar

Friday 11 June 2021

Summary by Frank Kelley

Dr Mark Fisher's introduction to psychoanalysis took place during the 1970s while a research fellow at Oxford University. Following an individual analysis there was group analysis and then a Lacanian analysis. For many years Mark worked within the NHS. He now runs a clinical and supervisory practice in Liverpool and online.

You may want to read about Hauntologies, and more, on Mark's blog at:

[SIMON FISHER \(simonfisher.blogspot.com\)](http://simonfisher.blogspot.com)

Hauntology is a portmanteau term joining *haunting* and *ontology* and is about the persistence of elements from the past in the manner of a ghost. It is a term introduced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his book *Spectres of Marx* (1993). Derrida used the term to refer to the temporal nature of Marxism and its tendency to *haunt Western society from beyond the grave*.

This topic reminded Mark of his Zoom seminar last month. Technical malfunctions meant images of participants appeared, disappeared and were replaced by others.

As you will know from previous seminars Mark deeply values Melanie Klein's idea that ultimately we will never have an integrated self. Written near the end of her life her paper *On the Sense of Loneliness* confirms this. It is also a reaction against the therapies which hold integration as an ideal. Like Dame Edna Everege we will never get it together.

In the *Alice in Wonderland* books we have a cat that is located in unexpected places and times, a grin without a cat, and recognition that *we are all mad here*. In an updated version of Alice (a video game) the cat's philosophy of life is distilled into a startling few lines.

Only a very few find the way, and most of them don't recognize it when they do. Delusions, too, die hard. Only the savage regard the endurance of pain as the measure of worth. Forgetting pain is convenient, remembering it... agonizing. But recovering the truth is worth the suffering and our Wonderland, though damaged, is safe in memory... for now.

The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan claims that an analyst's desires give an absolute chasm between analyst and customer. Lacan's recommendation is that *absolute difference* is a sure recipe for avoiding upsetting entanglements or destructive identifications between therapists and their customers.

Mark spoke of the 2015 film *Revenant*. It began as an update of the traditional cowboy genre whereby the American dream used to triumph over savagery. In this movie triumphalism and savagery are distributed a little more evenly. Baddies and goodies become entangled in a post-colonial revision. In this film *The Revenant* is a man left for dead. Tales about the living dead (or undead) are not new. The word *revenant* originates from an Old French verb meaning to return

Mark's first encounter with the word *revenant* was in a work by the French analyst Didier Anzieu. He attempted to reconstruct the course of Sigmund Freud's self analysis. Anzieu emphasised how as a very young boy Sigmund, thought himself to be very special to his mother, one might say her "favourite". His father Jakob was nevertheless the stronger competitor for Amelia's affections, despite being twenty years older than her. Archives suggest Sigmund also hated and despised Jakob for his weakness and particularly for what seemed cowardice towards anti-semitic bullying. The infant Freud preferred mum to dad.

The word Anzieu uses for the spectre of Jakob in Freud's dreams, thoughts, and fantasies is *revenant*. Like the Ratman, Freud was haunted by his father. One could say that Jakob became Freud's symptom.

Most zombies, vampires, revenants, golems, dibucks, ghosts, poltergeists come mainly from the past according to traditional fiction. Psychoanalysis too it would seem is about an individual's past and infancy.

Freudians have interpreted images of houses in dream and fantasy. The ground floor is the ego. Upstairs is the harsh superego. The film *Psycho* is set in the Bates Motel. At the ground floor Norman Bates is an ordinary human coming home after working in the motel. On the second floor he dialogues and argues with a bossy and threatening mother. But what is in the basement???

In a digital age we live in a world of immediacy. The immediacy demanded by digital technology allows only compressed space for future and past events. Unconscious processes possess times of their own that studiously ignore clock and digital time.

An example of temporal shifts -even in conscious life- is portrayed in the poetry and reflections of Denise Riley in *Time Lived without its Flow* where she writes about her new experience of time following the death of her adult son. A child's time *is quietly uncoiling inside your own* so when the child's life stops *the purely cognitive violence of it* freezes the parent's time, too

These descriptions of time without her son should not be reduced to euphemisms about the trauma of bereavement. The very texture of reality had changed so much that she was living in a "pocket" of time with its own timbre and characteristics.

The word hauntology is a neologism that works better in French than in English. Its two components are "haunt" and "ontology". Something about being that won't let you go.

A different Mark Fisher writes about music. He wrote *Exiting the Vampire Castle* and *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. His work highlights popular music and bands like *Joy Division*. Historians of such post-punk music suggested it is haunted by a future that never took place. After the victory of the second world war there were hopes that the welfare state and a renewed moral commitment for the good of all classes -members of which had all been bereaved- would create a New Britain.

Singing and performing in Margaret Thatcher's Britain, in which the concept of the social was being dismantled and abolished, singers like Joy Division's Ian Curtis who himself began to suffer from epilepsy and manic-depressive states, could not shake off this unfulfilled future. A haunting atmosphere is chillingly created in music and lyrics.

*Someone take these dreams away,
that point me to another day,
a duel of personalities,
that stretch all true realities.*

*That keep calling me,
they keep calling me,
keep on calling me,
they keep calling me.*

*Where figures from the past stand tall,
and mocking voices ring the halls.
imperialistic house of prayer,
conquistadors who took their share.*

*That keep calling me,
they keep calling me,
keep on calling me,
they keep calling me.*

*Calling me, calling me, calling me, calling me.
They keep calling me,
keep on calling me,
they keep calling me,
they keep calling me.*

Dead Souls by Joy Division

Mark had postscript about ending therapy.

At the end of a prolonged therapy or analysis, anxieties and fears about disintegration are very common and real. At this time the analyst is not so much seen as a support that allows an analysand to work, but rather as an absolute and enduring underpinning of everyday life. Anxieties of disintegration are so pressingly urgent, that the individual needs to believe there will always be an analyst available to shore up ones structures, like an architectural scaffold.

Another tragic anxiety is that knowledge provided by analysis, theories, and therapies is not real. The analyst is supposed to know how you can best lead your own life, the solution to life's enigmas and challenges, how to live well; or even provide an answer to social and political discontents of the day. These deep, persistent, or gnawing needs are not only present in clients or patients. They become all the more tragic when analysts, therapists, counsellors, or doctors believe themselves to actually dispense such commodities.

Thank you to Dr. Mark Fisher for giving us so much to think about.