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Ghosts That Connect

Invisible Presences, Unfinished Bonds and the Architecture of Human Continuity

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Abstract--Ghosts are usually imagined as remnants that disturb the living, yet many of the most enduring human bonds are sustained by presences that no longer possess a body, a voice or even a continuing place in everyday life. The dead remain active through memory, inherited language, ritual, family resemblance, unfinished conversation, moral obligation, artistic influence and the emotional habits they helped create. The absent likewise exert force: a childhood friend, a vanished homeland, an estranged parent, a departed lover or a former self may continue to organise present feeling long after direct contact has ceased. This paper develops the idea of ghosts that connect as a psychological, philosophical, sociological and literary category. Such ghosts are distinguished from superstition and paranormal claims; they are understood instead as enduring relational structures. Drawing upon grief theory, attachment, continuing-bonds research, collective memory, transgenerational transmission, psychoanalysis and literary representations of haunting, the discussion argues that human identity is partly assembled from relationships that survive their own disappearance. The dead do not simply remain behind us; they remain within our speech, gestures, fears, loyalties and expectations. Yet connection through ghosts is not always benign. Memory can console, but it can also imprison; inheritance can orient, but it can also repeat trauma; reverence can preserve meaning, but it can inhibit the living from becoming fully alive. The central proposition is that human continuity depends upon learning neither to banish ghosts nor to submit to them, but to transform haunting into relationship.

Keywords-- Ghosts; memory; grief; continuing bonds; absence; attachment; mourning; inheritance; collective memory; family history; transgenerational trauma; nostalgia; identity; haunting; psychoanalysis; literature; ritual; bereavement; unfinished relationships; human continuity

I. INTRODUCTION — THE PRESENCE OF WHAT IS NO LONGER PRESENT

Every human life is crowded with absences.

We carry the dead in our vocabulary, the departed in our habits, lost places in our imagination, former loves in our expectations, childhood homes in our sense of shelter, and unfinished conversations in the private chambers of thought.

The world appears to be populated by the living.

The mind knows otherwise.

A mother who died decades earlier may still determine how a person cooks, worries, apologises or arranges a room. A teacher may continue speaking through a pupil's standards. A vanished city may govern the dreams of an exile. A dead friend may remain the invisible audience before whom one measures courage.

These are not supernatural claims.

They are facts of relational existence.

Human beings do not cease to matter merely because they cease to be physically present. Nor does influence obey the boundaries of death, distance or estrangement.

A ghost, in this broader sense, is **a relationship that has lost its body but not its power.**

Some ghosts divide.

Others connect.

This paper is concerned with the latter.

II. WHAT IS A CONNECTING GHOST?

A connecting ghost is an absent person, place, experience or inherited memory that continues to sustain relationship among the living.

It may connect:

- an individual to a deceased loved one;
- siblings to a shared parent;
- a family to its ancestry;
- a community to its history;
- an exile to a homeland;
- an artist to a tradition;
- a nation to its founding trauma;
- one generation to another.

The ghost is not necessarily mournful.



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It may appear through humour, repeated sayings, recipes, gestures, music, photographs, heirlooms, annual rituals or remembered advice.

A family member remarks:

“That is exactly what Father would have said.”

At once, the absent person re-enters the room—not as hallucination, but as a shared point of recognition.

The ghost connects because several people continue to orient themselves around the same absence.

III. GRIEF AND THE OLD DEMAND TO LET GO

For much of modern psychological history, successful mourning was often understood as a process of detachment.

The bereaved person was expected to withdraw emotional energy from the dead, accept reality and reinvest in the living world [1–3].

This model contained important truths, particularly the necessity of acknowledging irreversible loss.

Yet it could also imply that continued attachment represented failure.

Later research challenged this assumption.

The theory of **continuing bonds** proposed that healthy grief does not always require severing the relationship with the deceased. Instead, the bond may change form [4–7].

The dead person no longer answers.

But the relationship can continue through memory, internal dialogue, values and symbolic presence.

One may ask:

“What would she advise?”

Or:

“Would he have approved?”

Such questions do not necessarily indicate denial.

They may represent the normal continuation of attachment within changed conditions.

Death ends interaction.

It does not automatically end relationship.

IV. THE INTERNALISATION OF THE BELOVED

Attachment does not remain entirely external.

Through repeated experience, important people become internal models.

We learn their responses, anticipate their expressions, absorb their judgments and incorporate elements of their emotional world [8–11].

A child gradually carries the parent inward.

A student internalises the teacher.

A lover becomes part of the lover's emotional vocabulary.

When the person disappears, the internal representation does not vanish.

This is one reason grief feels so paradoxical. The bereaved simultaneously knows that the loved one is gone and experiences that person as psychologically present.

The mind continues to prepare for a voice that will not come.

It still forms sentences addressed to someone who cannot reply.

This is not irrationality in a crude sense.

It is the persistence of a relational system built across years.

The ghost connects because part of the other person has become part of the self.

V. MEMORY IS NOT STORAGE

Human memory is often imagined as an archive.

It is more accurately a reconstruction.

We do not retrieve the past exactly as it happened. We rebuild it from emotional significance, later experience, narrative need and present identity [12–15].

This means that ghosts change.

The father remembered at twenty is not the father remembered at sixty.

The first love remembered after betrayal is not the same as the first love remembered after forgiveness.

The homeland remembered in exile may acquire a perfection it never possessed in reality.

Ghosts therefore do not merely preserve the past.

They evolve with the living.

This can be comforting.

It can also be dangerous.



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Memory may become truer emotionally while becoming less exact historically.

The ghost can connect by giving shared meaning.

It can also connect people to a past partly created by longing.

VI. THE FAMILY GHOST

Families are among the principal manufacturers of ghosts.

Every family possesses stories repeated so often that they become structural.

There was the grandfather who built everything from nothing.

The aunt who sacrificed her ambitions.

The uncle whose disgrace must never be mentioned.

The child who died young.

The migration that changed the family forever.

The property lost.

The betrayal forgiven—or never forgiven.

These stories shape descendants who did not witness the original events.

A grandchild may inherit pride, fear, silence or resentment from people never personally known.

This is transgenerational transmission [16–20].

Not all inheritance is genetic or financial.

Families pass down emotional instructions:

Do not trust outsiders.

Never show weakness.

Education is salvation.

Money disappears.

Men abandon.

Women endure.

Such beliefs may survive because an ancestor once had reason to adopt them.

The original danger passes.

The protective rule remains.

The ghost continues governing.

VII. GHOSTS OF TRAUMA

Traumatic events are particularly capable of producing connecting ghosts.

War, forced migration, genocide, imprisonment, famine, communal violence and political persecution frequently reverberate across generations.

The descendants may inherit not the precise memory, but the atmosphere surrounding it.

A family becomes vigilant.

Silence surrounds certain names.

Documents are preserved obsessively.

Food is never wasted.

Authority is feared.

Departure is always anticipated.

Research on trauma transmission has examined how narratives, attachment patterns, stress responses and family behaviour may communicate the aftermath of catastrophe [17–21].

The ghost connects because all members of the family organise themselves around an event that may have occurred before some of them were born.

The absence becomes communal.

But trauma ghosts can become tyrannical.

The descendants may be required to remain loyal to a wound they did not suffer.

Healing can then feel like betrayal.

VIII. THE GHOST OF THE HOMELAND

Exile creates one of the most powerful connecting ghosts: the lost homeland.

A homeland need not be literally destroyed to become ghostly.

It can disappear through migration, political division, war, urban transformation or the passage of time.

The emigrant remembers streets that have changed.

The refugee remembers a house now occupied by strangers.

The elderly return to a village and discover that geography survives while belonging does not.



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Diasporic communities often sustain the absent homeland through food, language, music, religion, naming practices and family memory [22–25].

Children born elsewhere inherit a place they have never fully known.

The homeland becomes both real and imagined.

It connects the community.

It can also burden it.

The inherited homeland may become a standard against which no present place is permitted to suffice.

The ghost nourishes identity while making settlement emotionally incomplete.

IX. PHOTOGRAPHS — SMALL DOORS FOR THE DEAD

Photographs are among the most powerful technologies of haunting.

They make absence visible.

A photograph says simultaneously:

This person was here.

and

This moment is gone.

Roland Barthes famously described the peculiar wound created by the photograph's testimony to past existence [26].

The photograph does not resurrect.

It certifies disappearance.

Yet families use photographs to connect generations.

A child studies the face of a grandmother never met.

Siblings gather around an image and remember different versions of the same day.

The dead remain frozen at one age while the living continue growing older.

Photographs therefore create an asymmetrical relationship.

We change before them.

They do not change before us.

The ghost is preserved.

The viewer becomes the one passing through time.

X. 10. OBJECTS THAT REMEMBER

Sometimes ghosts inhabit objects.

A watch.

A letter.

A fountain pen.

A shawl.

A military medal.

A wedding ring.

A battered book with annotations in the margin.

The object becomes valuable not merely because of what it is, but because of whose hand touched it.

Material culture carries relational memory [27–29].

The object appears to compress time.

Holding it produces an illusion of contact across absence.

This explains why disputes over inherited objects can become surprisingly intense.

The quarrel is rarely about market value alone.

It concerns access to memory.

Who possesses the father's watch may seem to possess a privileged fragment of the father.

Objects become secular relics.

They connect the living to the dead and sometimes divide the living from one another.

XI. LANGUAGE AS HAUNTING

The dead survive magnificently in language.

We inherit expressions, jokes, proverbs, mispronunciations, terms of affection and family idioms.

A person may suddenly hear a parent's sentence emerge from their own mouth.

The experience can be startling.

For years, we imagine ourselves becoming independent.

Then the ghost speaks through us.

Language is one of the most democratic forms of immortality.

Most people do not leave monuments.

They leave phrases.



A grandmother's peculiar description of the weather may survive in descendants for a century.

The origin may eventually be forgotten.

The expression remains.

Thus a human voice can outlive its owner without anyone noticing that survival has occurred.

XII. The Ghost In Love

Former lovers often become powerful connecting ghosts.

A relationship ends, yet it may continue influencing later intimacy.

The former lover teaches what one seeks, fears, avoids or mistrusts.

New relationships are entered carrying the emotional architecture of old ones.

The absent person may become:

- a comparison;
- a warning;
- an ideal;
- a wound;
- a secret audience;
- an unfinished alternative life.

This ghost can connect a person to a former self.

The lover is remembered not only as another individual, but as the person one was while loving them.

Sometimes the real object of nostalgia is therefore not the departed beloved.

It is the vanished self.

One does not merely miss **you**.

One misses **who I was with you**.

XIII. Unfinished Conversations

Some ghosts persist because something remained unsaid.

An apology was never offered.

A question was never asked.

A truth was concealed.

A final meeting did not occur.

The sudden death of a loved one can leave the bereaved with dialogue still active.

The conversation continues internally because external completion became impossible.

Therapeutic practices sometimes encourage symbolic communication through letters, imagined dialogue or ritual [30–33].

Such methods do not pretend the dead can answer.

They permit the living to complete emotional acts that reality interrupted.

The ghost connects because language seeks an addressee.

Where the addressee is absent, the mind creates a chamber in which speech may continue.

XIV. COLLECTIVE GHOSTS

Groups possess ghosts as surely as individuals do.

Nations remember revolutions, defeats, partitions, massacres, founders, martyrs and betrayals.

These memories are institutionalised through monuments, anniversaries, school curricula, museums and public ritual [34–38].

A collective ghost can provide continuity.

It can explain who “we” are.

But collective memory is always selective.

Some dead become national ancestors.

Others disappear.

Some wounds receive monuments.

Others receive silence.

The politics of memory is therefore the politics of authorised haunting.

Who may return?

Who must remain buried?

Which past is permitted to speak in the present?

A nation may become united around a ghost.

It may also become imprisoned by one.

XV. LITERATURE — THE REPUBLIC OF THE DEAD

Literature is perhaps humanity's grandest machinery for allowing ghosts to connect.

Every book permits the voice of someone absent to enter another consciousness.



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The author may be dead.

The reader may live centuries later.

Yet the sentence crosses the interval.

Homer speaks.

Shakespeare speaks.

Woolf speaks.

Tolstoy speaks.

The dead enter the room through print.

This is not metaphor alone.

Reading creates a peculiar form of intimacy between minds that never meet.

The reader encounters not the author directly, but a structured trace of thought.

Literature therefore constitutes a republic in which biological death does not terminate participation.

The library is full of ghosts.

Most are exceptionally talkative.

XVI. HAMLET AND THE COMMANDING GHOST

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* gives us one of literature's most dangerous connecting ghosts [39].

The dead king returns and demands remembrance through revenge.

The ghost connects son to father.

It also binds the living to an unresolved crime.

Hamlet becomes unable to separate mourning from obligation.

The dead father governs the son's future.

This is the darker side of connection.

The ghost may preserve love while commandeering life.

A memory becomes tyrannical when it permits no new identity beyond loyalty to the past.

The dead should remain part of the living.

They should not become their jailers.

XVII. BELOVED AND THE GHOST OF HISTORICAL VIOLENCE

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* offers perhaps the most profound modern representation of haunting as historical memory [40].

The ghost is both personal and collective.

She embodies maternal grief, slavery, violence, guilt and the return of a past that society would prefer to forget.

The novel demonstrates that what is not mourned or acknowledged does not disappear.

It returns in distorted form.

The ghost connects because repression has failed.

History insists upon relationship.

The lesson extends beyond literature.

Communities that suppress trauma do not achieve forgetting.

They produce haunting.

XVIII. THE FRIENDLY GHOST

Not every ghost is tragic.

Some connect through humour.

A family remembers how a deceased relative would have mocked a solemn occasion.

Someone tells the old story again.

The room laughs.

For a moment, the dead person participates.

This is one of grief's gentlest transformations.

Initially, memory produces pain because it emphasises absence.

Later, the same memory may produce warmth because it restores presence symbolically.

The ghost changes from wound to companion.

This does not mean grief is complete.

It means grief has learned another language.



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XIX. DIGITAL GHOSTS

Modern technology has created unprecedented forms of posthumous presence.

The dead remain in:

- social-media profiles;
- voice recordings;
- videos;
- emails;
- text-message histories;
- cloud archives;
- search results;
- algorithmic reminders.

A birthday notification may appear for someone who has died.

A voice note can restore cadence and laughter with almost unbearable immediacy.

Digital memory differs from older forms because it preserves behaviour at extraordinary density [41–44].

Future generations may know the dead not through a few photographs but through thousands of images, messages and recordings.

This raises difficult questions.

Who controls a digital afterlife?

Should platforms continue presenting the dead as active users?

Can artificial systems simulate their speech?

At what point does remembrance become imitation?

The digital ghost may connect.

It may also prevent the finality upon which mourning partly depends.

XX. ARTIFICIAL RESURRECTION AND ITS ETHICAL BOUNDARY

Recent technologies make possible increasingly persuasive reconstructions of deceased individuals through voice synthesis, image generation and conversational systems.

These developments may comfort some mourners.

They may also create serious ethical and psychological risks.

A simulation is not the person.

It is a model assembled from traces.

The danger lies not merely in deception but in relational substitution.

Grief involves adapting to the fact that the loved one can no longer participate unpredictably in the world.

A simulation may answer.

But it cannot possess the original person's living freedom.

Connection becomes ethically troubling when the ghost is manufactured to satisfy the survivor's needs without the consent or agency of the deceased.

The memory of a person should not be confused with ownership of their likeness.

XXI. Ghosts of the Future

Not all ghosts come from the past.

Human beings are also haunted by unrealised futures.

The child never born.

The career never pursued.

The city never reached.

The marriage that might have been.

The version of oneself that seemed possible at twenty.

These are **prospective ghosts**—lives imagined but not lived.

They connect the present self to abandoned possibility.

Such ghosts can inspire.

They can also torment.

A person may remain loyal to a future that no longer exists.

The unlived life becomes more perfect because reality never had the opportunity to disappoint it.

The ghost of possibility therefore competes unfairly with the imperfections of the actual.

XXII. THE GHOST OF THE FORMER SELF

We are also haunted by who we once were.

The child.

The student.



The believer.

The revolutionary.

The athlete.

The lover.

The ambitious young professional.

Identity changes, but earlier selves rarely disappear completely.

They remain as internal witnesses.

Sometimes we seek their approval.

Sometimes we feel ashamed before them.

Sometimes we grieve them.

The former self connects different stages of one life.

Without that connection, identity would fragment.

Yet too much loyalty to the past self can prevent necessary transformation.

One must remember who one was without being sentenced to remain that person.

XXIII. 23. RITUAL — GIVING GHOSTS A PLACE

Ritual provides ghosts with boundaries.

Funerals, anniversaries, memorial meals, grave visits, prayers, candles and commemorations establish times and places in which absence may be acknowledged [45–47].

Ritual says:

You are gone, but you are not nothing.

It permits grief to become shared.

Without ritual, haunting may remain private and unstructured.

Ritual does not eliminate sorrow.

It gives sorrow architecture.

It also protects the living by distinguishing ordinary time from memorial time.

The ghost is welcomed.

Then the living return to life.

XXIV. WHEN GHOSTS CONNECT TOO STRONGLY

Connection can become captivity.

A bereaved person may feel forbidden to experience joy.

A child may organise an entire life around fulfilling a dead parent's ambitions.

A nation may continually reactivate ancient grievance.

A family may repeat a trauma because abandoning it would threaten collective identity.

The ghost then ceases to be a bridge.

It becomes an anchor.

The ethical question is not whether to remember.

It is how to remember without sacrificing the present.

Healthy connection allows the dead to influence life.

Unhealthy haunting requires life to remain a monument to the dead.

XXV. FORGETTING AS A FORM OF MERCY

Memory is usually treated as a moral virtue.

Forgetting can also be necessary.

No mind can retain everything.

Selective forgetting allows emotional systems to loosen.

Details fade.

The sharpness of pain diminishes.

A lost person's final illness may recede while earlier vitality returns.

This is not betrayal.

It is one of memory's mercies.

The ghost becomes less exact but more bearable.

We do not keep the dead alive by preserving every wound.

Sometimes we honour them best by allowing suffering to lose its dominance.

XXVI. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The present analysis yields several principal conclusions.

First, human relationships can survive physical absence through internalised attachment, memory, language, ritual and shared narrative.



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Second, continuing bonds with the dead are not inherently pathological; they can support meaning, identity and emotional continuity.

Third, families transmit not only explicit stories but also emotional rules, silences and protective habits originating in previous generations.

Fourth, ghosts connect communities by organising collective memory around shared losses, founders, traumas and symbols.

Fifth, objects, photographs and language act as material and symbolic carriers of presence.

Sixth, unresolved conversation is a major source of haunting because relational acts interrupted by death or separation continue seeking completion.

Seventh, literature functions as an institutionalised encounter with absent minds, permitting the dead to participate in the present.

Eighth, digital technologies intensify posthumous presence while creating new ethical difficulties concerning consent, simulation and emotional dependence.

Ninth, ghosts need not originate in death; abandoned futures and former selves can haunt with equal force.

Tenth, healthy remembrance requires transformation: the absent must remain connected without becoming sovereign over the living.

XXVII. THE CENTRAL PARADOX

The connecting ghost presents a fundamental paradox.

To remain human, we must accept loss.

To remain continuous, we must resist total disappearance.

We therefore perform two acts simultaneously.

We say:

You are gone.

And:

You remain with me.

Grief becomes destructive when either statement is denied.

If we deny departure, we cannot adapt.

If we deny continuing presence, we mutilate attachment.

Mature mourning holds both truths.

The body is absent.

The relationship has changed.

The significance survives.

28. CONCLUSION — THE INVISIBLE COMPANY

No one walks through life alone.

Even the solitary are accompanied.

We move among remembered voices, inherited gestures, unfinished conversations, ancestral fears, literary companions, vanished rooms and former selves.

Some of these presences wound us.

Some warn us.

Some demand too much.

But others steady the hand.

They remind us how to behave, what to endure, what not to repeat, whom we have loved and what kind of person we once hoped to become.

A connecting ghost is therefore not merely a remnant of loss.

It is a structure of continuity.

The dead remain in the living not because time has failed, but because relationship is larger than physical proximity.

We do not carry people forward exactly as they were.

We carry fragments:

a sentence;

a habit;

a standard;

a laugh;

a warning;

a recipe;

a melody;

a way of entering a room.

These fragments assemble themselves quietly within us.

And then, one day, someone hears us speak, watches us gesture, notices an expression crossing our face and says:

“For a moment, you looked exactly like them.”

At that instant the ghost has connected again.

Not by returning from the dead.

By revealing that it never entirely left the living.

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