**DELIGHTS AND TERRORS**

**OF BETRAYAL:**

**COACHING IMPLICATIONS**

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**Setting the Scene**Betrayal, whether implicitly or explicitly, seems to have been a frequent theme in my coaching and coaching supervision for several years. Discussions with colleagues, peers and other interested parties leads me to believe I am not alone.

Some examples:

*A senior leader promises his manager steadfast support in dealing with an extensive re-structuring of her department. Suddenly the leader is unavailable at a particularly crucial phase. There is no convincing reason given for his absence; perhaps there were other truly pressing matters requiring attention; equally he may have been concerned that the restructuring might not be a success and he did not want to risk being associated in any way with apparent failure. Whatever the cause, the manager felt abandoned at a crucial time.*

*A medium sized, family-feel business was taken over by a larger rather bureaucratic organisation. Groups of employees from both companies at the crucial cross-over points were told that they had to attend half-day Belbin-based teambuilding sessions. There was no attempt to customise the training or explore underlying hopes and fears about the merger.*

The received wisdom in one particular organisation was that transparency, fairness and open competition were always crucial in recruiting members to the team. Suddenly there is a new face at the weekly team meeting. It turns out that the team leader’s boss had heard ‘good things on the grapevine’ about this possible internal candidate and pressured the leader to accept him. A corollary to the story is that the new recruit turned out to have a rich range of incompetences; his earlier boss had been so keen to get rid of him that he was given a falsely glowing report.

I am very aware that these vignettes beg many questions, such as, ‘Who was really betrayed?’, ‘Who was truly responsible?’, ‘Who was ultimately damaged?’ and even ‘Was it really about betrayal?’ I hope later to offer some defining and clarifying statements; at this stage I simply wish to begin outlining, albeit roughly, the territory.

In continuing these preliminary comments I also wish to explain my use of the words, ‘Delights’ and ‘Terrors’, in the title. As a generalisation, I suggest, those who believe themselves to have been betrayed find it a profoundly unsettling experience; it is disruptive and accompanied by a wide variety of intense feelings, including anger, disbelief and confusion1. It is then that the person has, somehow, to find sufficient energy and focus to pull various fragments together in order to write a new story, making sense of herself in her new world. Those familiar with transactional analysis will quickly see the parallels with the idea of creating of a new life script2/3. Herein lie both the delights and the terrors. It can be hard, sometimes painful to find the solid ground on which to stand and create an exciting and engaging collage of fragments. However, the new story may also ultimately, be joyous and liberating. For example the person may, inside or outside awareness, have been loath to move on from his ‘psychic prison’4; betrayal forced him to confront this uncomfortable reality. Bearing in mind the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Betrayal would have no meaning without the concept of desire’5, then perhaps these delights and terrors are inevitably intertwined.

I am also reminded of ‘loving dislocation’, something I have described on several occasions elsewhere6. Namely the role of the coach in being willing to disrupt the client’s (i.e. coachee’s) existing way of seeing the world. This disruption may take place through:

* Words; ‘You have just told me how you despise yourself for feeling an impostor. Are there ways in which feeling an impostor might actually help you in your role?’
* Method; for example, asking the clever and perhaps intellectual client to sketch a few pictures to describe the issue, rather than simply using words.
* Being; for example, by-passing the client’s invitations to keep coming up with suggestions. (e.g. being alert to avoiding negative counter-transference, such as Drama Triangle Rescuing7).

So the apparently unloving dislocation which flows from betrayal may ultimately prove to be loving after all. Perhaps it provides an opportunity for an’ epistemological break’; this was the phrase initially coined by Gaston Bachelard and later used by Louis Althusser8 to signify a completely different way of seeing the world. I think he had in mind global trends and learning; for example, the universe being re-defined by Copernicus as heliocentric. However, can one truly say that such insights are any more dramatic than John, declaring to me regarding a particularly challenging and painful time at work, “***Now*** I know who my ***true*** friends are; there are those I had regarded as respectful but rather distant colleagues, and they turned out to be the staunchest and most generous of allies. There were others I thought would inevitably reach out to me because we had worked together so closely and for so long, but they turned their backs on me as they sought to achieve some political advantage by leaving me in the lurch”?

This fundamental re-assessment may also have links with Henri Ellenberg’s idea of the creative illness. Severe illness lasting even several years may then lead to a sudden shift in terms of intellectual clarity and a sense of well being. Some suggest that Carl Jung may have experienced this following his split with Sigmund Freud9.

Since betrayal inevitably involves the challenging of assumptions it seems appropriate, indeed necessary, that I should outline those which are key to my thinking in this paper.

*Assumption 1*.   
At the core of each of us there is an inherently healthy part which is aware of our true wants and needs. That part of us often, perhaps always, makes important decisions in childhood about how to be and what to do in order to protect self and hopefully thrive. These decisions are then carried forward into adulthood and can sometimes be maintained even when they evolve into being unhelpful and even harmful. Although these ingrained habits of thoughts, feelings and behaviours may be sustained with varying degrees of awareness, nevertheless each of us, I believe, has a Wise Child within us who, given sufficient time, space and support can know what is best for self in the present. I imagine that for many of my readers my debt again to the idea again of scripting in transactional analysis will be self-evident.

*Assumption 2*.   
Supporting the learning of others, and indeed self, is often about ‘holding’ the space within which some clarity may eventually emerge. This may mean living with some quite profound ambiguities and contradictions. This can be at a number of levels:

* Tangible options; ‘I both do and do not want to take that promotion’.
* Relationships; ‘I both respect and feel uneasy about my new colleague’.
* Self; ‘I seem to swing between massive self-confidence and equally profound self-doubt.
* Life; ‘I can’t make any sense of anything and don’t know where to start; but I *know* I need to change!’

So it may be about holding the space both within and between these levels. Perhaps particularly where the potential learning is extensive and challenging.

*Assumption 3.*I subscribe to the postmodernist belief that there is not one fixed identity or self. On that basis each of us is faced with a lifelong journey of discovery. For example, there may be a moment where I feel I know myself and what I want, but that knowing is itself temporary, whether it lasts a second or years. Inevitably there will then be further uncertainties. Betrayal may, therefore simply trigger a process which was inevitable; the question was when, rather than if it would happen.

Closely allied to this is my belief that there are very few fixed truths and certainties. (I deliberately inserted the word ‘few’ in my attempt to avoid the accusation of hypocrisy. ‘My absolute truth is that there are no absolute truths’). Truths are there to be uncovered, indeed created and recreated in order to achieve a sufficiently viable consistency and coherence in the present.

The rest of this paper has five main sections:

*Mapping the Territory of Betrayal.* Here I offer broad definitions of betrayal along with some of the themes which commonly arise. I start to narrow the focus to provide a backdrop for looking at organisational coaching.

*Implications for Coaching.* Here I consider how betrayal might be an issue in the coaching room, whether directly or indirectly. For example, the ways in which the coach might, unwittingly, betray the client. I also briefly revisit some well known aspects of theory and their possible links to betrayal.

*Implications for Coaching Supervision.* Here I consider the particular role the supervisor may play in supporting or undermining the coach; I also speculate about the wider and deeper context for this topic.

*Conclusion and Appendices.* Here I offer a very brief summary of the paper. The Appendices have some models with additional theoretical perspectives*.*

*References.* This section also includes quotations, further theoretical links and musings.

**MAPPING THE TERRITORY OF BETRAYAL**

**Defining Betrayal**  
In seeking to define betrayal I first draw on ideas I took from a number of dictionaries10/11/12. One element is about a breach of trust; each party assumes they could rely on each other; this commitment to support is then breached; one of the parties fails to fulfil her or his apparent obligations.

A linked strand is where one party deliberately and in a pre-meditated way gains the trust of another with the clear intention of taking advantage of the other’s vulnerability; perhaps the confidence trickster or the spy would be the clearest examples. However, it is probably worthy of note that Kim Philby, an infamous spy uncovered in the 1960’s is quoted as saying, ‘To betray, you must first belong. I never belonged’13.

Another aspect is about unwittingly revealing feelings. It is as if the person betrays herself. ‘She did not want to let her colleague know how angry she was, but the steeliness in her gaze revealed the truth’.

As indicated in the model below, I suggest therefore that acts of betrayal can broadly be seen as flowing from Impotence (“I truly had no choice”), Incompetence (“I really messed up“) and Malevolence (“I wished you ill”).

MALEVOLENCE

IMPOTENCE

INCOMPETENCE

I have drawn the circles overlapping because:

* Sometimes it may be a blend, including occasions when a team carries out an act of betrayal and the team members may have different reasons for their involvement.
* The nature of the betrayal may evolve; for example it starts as Incompetence but the subsequent cover-up flows into Malevolence.
* Naming it may make it so. The act of Impotence is said to be Malevolence. Once categorised as such, particularly when accompanied by intense feelings, then it can become such.

I now seek to offer further clarification by moving the focus more specifically to organisational life and perspectives which may later be relevant for considering coaching.

**Key Themes**Below I further outline some major themes regarding betrayal. They are certainly not mutually exclusive, but may sometimes overlap and reinforce each other.

Here and Now There and Then

Betrayal in the present may resonate with betrayals in the past. The suddenly unavailable boss ( see first vignette above), may remind the person very strongly of a previous manager from twenty years before ; he had promised he would be available to coach her for the first month, but in reality was nowhere to be seen; she struggled and felt regularly humiliated because of her lack of knowledge. There may even be an earlier phase in the story when her father tended to side with the class teacher who said she was not really trying hard enough; neither seemed truly interested in her diminishing confidence, caused by bullying.

As a consequence the person in the ‘here and now’ may experience herself as being many different ages and having a wide variety of feelings and memories, which may flow into each other. Additionally, a current challenge may be that she has to provide clear leadership for others. Those others may also feel betrayed and she has to find ways of handling their intense feelings, whilst putting her own feelings to one side. The child within her may feel furious about being neglected......yet again14/15/16.

Specific General

There may be a specific moment when the person feels betrayed. A promise clearly made has been broken. At other times the betrayal may be experienced as rather more general; where, as in the earlier example at the start of this paper, the leadership team of the larger organisation simply pushes ahead with a predetermined and rigid approach in mounting so-called ‘team development workshops’. There is no clearly identified individual who can be seen as responsible. Rather there is a faceless and unresponsive authority at large. Indeed sometimes the apparent source of the betrayal may be even more vague than was the case in this particular story; rather there is a more general and ill-defined feeling that ‘things have changed’. Somehow, some important features of the business have almost imperceptibly evolved. Suddenly the long-serving member of staff feels very uncomfortable about it, but he can scarcely single out an individual or issue. It is perhaps similar to a personal relationship, where one of the parties suddenly realises ‘Joe is so different from the man I married, yet it is only now I realise the futility of carrying on as before’.

Betrayed by Self Betrayed by Others

There can sometimes be dramatic swings on this dimension. For example, initially the person feels profoundly betrayed by her boss who fails to deliver a promised promotion. However, she may subsequently blame herself, believing she was stupid for having trusted him. Perhaps her close friends give her support and she then reverts to blaming her boss......then she reflects and realises that her intuition had told her for a long time that he was certainly NOT 100% reliable....and she then blames herself for having been too passive in the situation as it unfolded. She moves rapidly and frequently between guilt and anger.

These swings can also happen where the betrayal is rather more general. The person at first blaming the leadership for the gradual undermining of the culture which had previously made the organisation such a great place to work. However, he may then blame himself for not noticing the signs which had in fact become increasingly evident in recent years. ‘I really let myself down by sticking with it and turning down that fantastic offer from the headhunter’.

Authentic Contrived

With authentic betrayal the person feels very clearly and sincerely that an agreement, whether explicit or implicit, has been broken. With contrived betrayal, clearly deriving from the idea of games in transactional analysis17, the person avoids responsibility. He invests himself in the role of ‘Betrayed’ and from this position seeks to explain why, for example, he failed the promotion board; he eagerly seeks and creates opportunities to blame others. He does this with varying degrees of awareness; close to his heart of hearts he may even truly believe he had done nothing wrong; but his Wise Child knows the truth.

Some further brief comments about betrayal in organisations:

* A crucial, frequently common element in the story of betrayal is that it is nearly always seen and experienced as being ‘something personal’; this is the case even when, for example, the origins are rather more generic, such as a restructuring. “How could they do this to ME?”
* It can be read into situations even when, from a Martian perspective, (i.e. the totally objective outsider18) there is absolutely no betrayal at all.
* The sense of betrayal can linger for many years, perhaps even through generations. (See later section on Supervision).
* The sense of betrayal can come as much from the *how* as the *what*; for example, not the restructuring itself, but the fact it was announced impersonally and electronically rather than face-to-face.
* It can create a powerful and ultimately destructive group mentality. For example, the leadership team may feel guilty about a major change; perhaps in their heart of hearts they accept that it was an act of betrayal. However they would not wish to acknowledge that to themselves, let alone outsiders. It therefore, in the words of Chris Argyris, becomes ‘undiscussable’ and that ‘undiscussability’ is also not discussable (i.e. skilled incompetence19). This may then produce a silo-mentality, perhaps just as the organisation is seeking to promote cross team working. The major problem is that the leadership team is not role modelling the desired new behaviour. This then adds another level to the sense of ‘we are guilty of betrayal’ within that team and it becomes even more ‘undiscussable’. It takes increasing amounts of energy to deny something which is felt ever more deeply. So the appearance and experience of hypocrisy is accentuated over time. Perhaps betrayal, whether one’s own or another’s, can never truly be forgiven.

I will now make a broader point regarding betrayal and change in order to conclude this section. Change can be highly complex. This at a time when there is often a huge desire for simplicity. Where, for example there is change but also, perhaps inevitably, something of a communication void, then that void may be filled with speculations, sometimes wild. Discomfort and uncertainty can make the idea of betrayal a seductive theme in the story of this moment; it is powerful and simple. I would argue that the betrayal flowing from malevolence is often an easier story to convey than that of betrayal flowing from impotence or incompetence which will almost certainly have more shades of grey. Also, if the leader has been triggered at a child level by the change, then he may start telling the story in some ways as a child; splitting the world into good and bad, as described by Melanie Klein20. Or he may work very hard, perhaps too hard to disguise his true feelings and goes to the extreme of being similar to ‘still face’21. The leader who seems a bit too impassive can appear like the mother within the Dr Edward Tronick experiments who caused her child to be very upset because she suddenly showed no feelings. The word ‘suddenly’ is important in this context since it means there is no space for transition; a key element within effective change management. Just when the leader needs to draw on her Child Wisdom it is crowded out by Child Delusion.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHING**

**Focus of the Work**

Here I identify the broad areas of possible focus for coaching. In this, I am not suggesting that betrayal is always the issue. My intention is to explore whether and how betrayal may be relevant, albeit directly or indirectly.

As an entry point I will introduce a model of coaching I developed some years ago22.

AWARE

CONTENT /   
 WHAT

**Social**

PROCESS /   
 HOW

**Psychological**

**Existential**

UNAWARE

**Spiritual**

Coaching which is largely based upon content is likely to focus on problem-solving: gathering data, pointing out inconsistencies, and helping the client identify options and make some decisions.

Coaching which draws on the psychological centres on the client’s unspoken and often unaware communication. This may range from saying ‘yes’ whilst shaking his head, to perhaps very slight nuances and changes of tone; it may even be that the coach has no solid or observable data on which to make her comments, but relies solely on her intuition.

Coaching at the level of the existential moves increasingly away from seeking to resolve specific, often work-related, issues. For example, it becomes less about ‘How can I show more confidence at work?’ and more about ‘What sort of work might I want to do?’ or ‘What do I want to do with my life’?

Coaching at the spiritual level is concerned with the still-broader questions of faith, destiny and life’s purpose.

The model seeks simply to indicate possible points of emphasis in the coaching; clearly the elements are not mutually exclusive and the client may move through all levels in even just one session. However it is quite likely that there will have been a centre of gravity around one of the levels described above.

The coach will often find herself working at the levels of the existential and the spiritual when handling the issue of betrayal. Helping the client find new ways of making sense of himself and his world ; perhaps re-visiting truths which had previously been assumed to be timeless and inviolable. As the coach works more towards the bottom of the triangle then she needs to make even greater use of herself. She may well be on her growing edge even though there is less space for her to be an observer of herself. Perhaps it links to the point made by Erik de Haan about coaches striving ‘to become simultaneously thinner-and thicker-skinned, in order to be well-prepared for their critical moments’23. (For other perspectives on the model, see Appendix 1).

**Further Points for the Coach**

1. The coach needs to be as clear as possible about betrayal in *her* life, just as she would with any other potentially emotionally-charged topic raised by the client. She might reflect on those she knows or believes may have betrayed her over the years. This can usefully include occasions where she felt she was or may have been the betrayer. There are two reasons for capturing this perspective. First, there is the matter of possible projection; that is, attributing to others unacknowledged aspects of self. She has not perhaps acknowledged herself as a betrayer, but has continued, inside or outside awareness, to blame others. As a consequence she may all too readily attach that label to others.

The second reason is that the duration and intensity of feelings can sometimes be as great for the betrayer as the betrayed; perhaps even more so.

1. The coach may with benefit reflect on any sense of betrayal he may have within his current and particular role as a coach. Perhaps, for example, he is an internal coach who feels he has been betrayed by the organisation, whilst he is also expected to coach others about *their* feelings of betrayal. That expectation may compound *his* feeling of betrayal. He may need to be alert to not letting his anger squirt out against the client. He will need people with whom he can safely express his anger and frustration. Without that he may suppress his true feelings, just as his clients may; they would simply be following the behaviour he role models...... or perhaps they host *his* anger and over-react24. In the latter instance they may well have particularly strong feelings because, at a child level, they may resent carrying the feelings of somebody who is supposed to be supporting them.....NOT the other way round.

Perhaps also he feels more betrayed than many of his clients. They may have never felt they really belonged (see earlier Kim Philby quote), whereas the coach was truly dedicated, giving his body and soul to his work. Consequently when the client seems unwilling or unable to express intense feelings, it is not, as the coach suspects, a matter of denial. Rather at his core he, the client, was always a bit suspicious and quietly sceptical, so he protected his vulnerability. It is in fact the coach who is really upset.

Any of the above may also apply to the external coach. External coaches can feel as intimate with the client organisation as the internal coach; perhaps on occasion even more so because they can be a bit more protected from the day-to-day operations. Their illusions have not yet been tarnished by reality.

1. The coach might also reflect on her professional development as a coach. Perhaps her current business is rather fragile. She might believe, rightly or wrongly, that she was misled, indeed betrayed, by various training and accreditation centres who led her to have exaggerated expectations about her potential income; they wanted to justify their significant level of fees.

There might be another dimension within this reflection. For example, that she was frustrated by the coach training which stressed the need to be client-centred, but did not treat *her* as a client; even though she was a paying customer, as well as an eager student. She saw herself being judged and assessed all the time and being pushed to engage in activities which were essentially imposed; there was little scope for co-creation, yet co-creation was frequently highlighted as a key feature of top quality coaching.

It could even be that eventually she learnt how to ‘play the game’, fearing that otherwise she might fail the course. Perhaps the sceptic became a convert. She then has all the passion of the neophyte, but without acknowledging her hypocrisy. Perhaps in her heart of hearts she knows that she ‘sold out’, betrayed her true self; just as, perhaps, some of her clients might feel.

Also, I am very aware that the motivation for some coaches may be that they want to heal their past. Arguably this is true for all of us to a greater or lesser extent; there may not necessarily have been deep trauma and toxicity, but some unresolved pain. Either way, the aspiring coach entered the training centre believing it was a safe and healing family. Perhaps, in some instances seeing it as a sanctuary from old but vivid betrayal. However the community was in fact, *not* the totally straightforward place offering both conditional and unconditional love. Just when script release is apparently beckoning, script confirmation is the reality, along with all the additional intensified sense of betrayal. Promised mastery becomes unyielding serfdom. Perhaps the coach is able to create a sense of belonging by becoming a hypocritical healer, but then the intensity of feelings with her current client organisation eventually makes this stance unsustainable. The Wise Child within her wants both to help and run away.

It is also possible that through reflection the coach discovers that he is between identities. This might be at the level of the present, almost problem solving. ‘I have been told that I must have a *unique signature presence*! What could that look like? Do I need to offer myself as somebody who can TRANSFORM people’s lives, who can offer magic liberation from the mundane prisons of pedestrian pain? If so, might I raise unrealistic expectations of myself and others, perhaps creating for myself yet another domain of betrayal? I might end up building my own psychic prison.....for myself!’

Perhaps also, the coach feels insufficiently held by *her* professional bodies. For example, are the hours required for accreditation truly necessary for reaching the correct level of performance or are they a reflection of unspoken competition between the bodies.....which may at the same time declare their desire and intent to collaborate?

It may also be that those who had apparently been close colleagues, indeed intimate friends, then merge into the background just when she was seeking support on a crucial ethical issue. I still remember the look of anger, anguish and disbelief on the face of the person who told me such a story. Once again the parallels with the client’s own experience are self-evident.

1. Even when betrayal is not clearly, perhaps explicitly on the agenda in the coaching room, arguably the coach might still be seen, fairly or otherwise, as having betrayed the client by losing his way in his work. Below I offer some suggestions about how this might happen. They come from my own experience of giving and receiving supervision.

- Sometimes the coach can be too quick to look for the story; is overly eager to encourage the client to start creating the collage. The story may in fact not yet be ready to surface and being premature may give an unhelpful solidity to the moment25. Also I am mindful of Roland Barthes saying that there is a close link between narrative and identity; we are both author and character26. So the client, who may be struggling with identity may feel corralled by the coach, whilst being told, “Write ***your own*** story”, with the unspoken sub-text of, ‘ You must!’.

- The coach might be encouraging interpretation too quickly; “What might this mean?”, ............”What learning do you draw from this ?”. Sometimes it is important that the client lives with the excitement, delight and confusion before seeking to give it meaning ; that is to say, living with it viscerally or spiritually before engaging cerebrally (see, Supervision section). The Wise Child often needs time to absorb the experience before being able to articulate27/28.

- Sometimes the desire for movement and completion comes from the coach’s rather than the client’s needs. It may be that, as already mentioned, the coach is between identities. This may be linked to a specific event. For example, an internal coach is faced with redundancy or is being expected to work in a way with which he is uncomfortable. Regarding this latter aspect, cost reduction measures may have meant that the prescribed coaching format has changed substantially. There are fewer, perhaps shorter sessions and they are expected to be focussed more at the level of problem solving, producing immediate behavioural change (see the model on page 8). The coach may feel less able to use a wider variety of methods which might open up the more existential dimension. The client’s needs are profound, but the coach is having to work at a level he feels is inappropriate, or unhelpful and essentially superficial. He may feel he is being forced to betray a client who may already feel betrayed.

I will now briefly cover some other ideas which can provide helpful insights into the origins, manifestations and consequences of betrayal.

**Further Potentially Relevant Concepts**

1. **Triangulation**If coaching on the theme of betrayal often involves the exploration of existential issues, then interventions may well involve the exploration of polarities. The territory of the intensity can then hopefully, helpfully be surveyed. The client is supported in finding the 3rd Position, a point through which she can both immerse herself and self-observe. Below I touch on a few of the polarities which can emerge in the context of betrayal and the possible 3rd Position which then creates the triangulation. Clearly the nature of the 3rd Position, indeed the whole process, is ultimately unique to each client.

Compliance Commitment

*Choosing*

(3rd Position)

Meaningful Meaningless

*Non-Meaning*

(3rd Position)

Transformational Culture Transactional Culture

*Transitional*

(3rd Position)

Deference Rebellion

*Affirmation*

(3rd Position)

Often, perhaps always, the client’s Wise Child will need to be present in the 3rd Position. For that to happen, the coach’s Wise Child needs to be present to offer the invitation. This raises the question of the permission, protection and potency the coach needs to offer herself in order for that to happen29. For example, permission to experiment with various methods of coaching; perhaps to be more open to the possibility of her own vulnerability and hesitancy. Protection, for example, having a flip chart in the coaching room so that either party can, as a matter of choice, move into explicit thinking and planning. Potency, for example, allowing herself excited anticipation of her skills. If she does not do it for herself, then she cannot offer it to the client. There are clear links here with the notion of Inconsistent Parenting, covered later.

The idea of triangulation is a rich one because it carries with it:

* a possible new perspective
* the creation of space and therefore movement – physical, emotional and existential
* the creation of boundaries and their flexing. Betrayal can be seen as causing a profound re-appraisal and re-working of boundaries; they can then sometimes become too rigid or too porous. For example, I build a fortress to repel the enemy or I have insignificant boundaries and allow myself to be endlessly invaded; or I vacillate between these extremes30.
* a possible dialectic ( thesis, antithesis and synthesis) where origins are acknowledged and not simply discarded. Pure script release will not come from a compulsive desire to banish the past. Such a fixation may, for example, simply postpone the process of mourning, or even the true awareness of loss. (See, Supervision section).

1. **Transition Curve**

The transition curve is, for me, an invaluable model indicating possible responses to betrayal. Since it originally, as described by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross31 indicated a possible process of grieving as a result of bereavement, then it can also be used to explore a shift of role and identities; or, if I may put it rather dramatically, the death of the Old Self.

Betrayal may trigger the transition; an intense experience raising, as already mentioned, existential issues. There may also be echoes of other betrayals which are then evident within the dynamics of the ‘Cusp’32, a point of intense ambiguities and polarities. I find that by adding the idea of the ‘Cusp’, as shown below, it can capture a point where the person may feel truly pulled in different directions, such as touched on in Assumption 2.

Cusp

This may be the point where the 3rd position finally becomes evident because of the clarity achieved through the intensity of the swings at the bottom of the curve; ‘the brighter the light, the darker the shadow’, as Sabina Spencer and John Adams wrote in their book on this topic33/34.

The coach may also be in transition and consequently, through introspection, be liable to great insight or obtuseness because of the similarities between his journey and that of his client’s. It can also describe a process which may be rapid or extend over some years. Again this seems to reflect how betrayal may have an impact. For example, slipping back down to the Cusp may be the prompted by a sudden awareness of earlier betrayals from the distant or recent past.

1. **Attachment theory**

Betrayal may be experienced as a result of a breakdown in attachment. Just as, bearing in mind the origins of John Bowlby’s thinking, the very young child may feel or fear abandonment when the mother leaves the room, whether for just a few minutes or longer.

It is also important, I suggest, to remember that Bowlby saw attachment as a need which was a feature of normal, adult life; that it was *not* inevitably a sign of current or impending emotional disturbance. ‘Briefly put, attachment behaviour is conceived as any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual, who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser. Whilst especially evident during early childhood, attachment behaviour is held to characterise human beings from the cradle to the grave’35. On that basis the coach may, on occasion, become an attachment figure. There is nothing inherently unhealthy about this. However, as mentioned earlier, betrayal often provokes existential issues and the coach will be drawing more deeply on her personal resources in order to help. As indicated in the model in Appendix 1, she encounters herself, just as she meets the other. Therefore the coach’s history of attachment may be highly relevant. For example, in certain instances, as Bowlby indicates, there can be an unhealthy role reversal between the mother and child. The child becomes the attachment figure and the mother can only feel emotionally secure when she has her child with her; the child becomes the carer. If the coach is also going through some upheaval, perhaps even being a member of the same organisation as her client then the coach may, unwittingly, use the client in a way which betrays the relationship. For example, she may blur the boundaries between her needs and those of the client; perhaps trying to insist on actions which she could, with benefit undertake herself; or, paradoxically, she may devote too much mental and emotional time to her coaching as a distraction from the fact that she needs to start looking for an alternative employer or career. Through one lens she may be seen as overly generous , denying her own needs when she tells her client that she is ‘available 24/7’; through another, the contracting conversation about role is in fact a desperate but inherently futile search for identity and intimacy.

The coach may also have had peer supervision groups to which she had a healthy attachment. These groups may also, for various reasons, begin to fragment. A crucial source of support may ebb away just at a point when the external and internal pressures on the coach are increasing. That which was needed even more is now even less available, possibly magnifying the sense of abandonment ...............and betrayal.

1. **Inconsistent parenting**The idea of inconsistent parenting has already been covered in this paper, without using that descriptor. However, it can be such a powerful factor when considering the issue of betrayal that I will briefly reprise some of the key points.

People may sometimes treat their organisation as if it were a family36; certain expectations and disappointments may then follow, manifest in inconsistent parenting:

- the leader who is simply unpredictable; “...we can never be sure what mood Dad will be in when he comes home tonight”; unpredictability can often be more corrosive, indeed toxic than consistently destructive behaviour37.

- members of the leadership team give out inconsistent messages; this is not necessarily explicit. Joe truly walks the talk of openness, whereas Jane says the right things, but sounds insincere. Dad agrees with Mum about the importance of getting qualifications, but he never sounds truly convinced.

-the culture of the organisation changes over time. What was valued, is no longer. “When we were younger, we were always being told that loyalty was important. Now Mum seems to be stressing the need to ‘look after yourself first!’ Suddenly being made redundant hit her really hard. She was so hurt.”

Inconsistent parenting can often be experienced as negative feedback. In this the recipient, even as a clever and highly competent grown up leader, may experience it profoundly and starkly within her child. With this in mind, it can be important to note that negative feedback in childhood is often experienced at the level of being, even when given for doing. There are several reasons for this:

* The dramatic difference in size, voice and power between the parent and the child.
* The child frequently takes too much responsibility for whatever happens, even when he or she is clearly, as seen by the objective outsider, a victim.
* The negative feedback may well be given whilst not offering or inviting an alternative. That is, the child is simply told, “For heaven’s sake, stop fidgeting!”

The leader, therefore may experience the negative feedback at the level of being. Consequently it can be important for the coach to encourage the client to start something to replace an activity she chooses to stop. Under these circumstances the coach’s intervention which is apparently at the level of doing, is in fact at the level of being. It is a way of by-passing that childhood void where being told simply to stop doing something can create a scary space without meaning.

As already implied, the recipient of all this may herself have staff to lead. She is inconsistently parented but seeks to offer consistent parenting to others. How, if at all, will her Wise and Furious Child work together in order to enable her to do this? Perhaps this is achieved at great personal cost at work, but at the price of discharging despair and venom at home. The betrayal is exported from the organisation. Perhaps the sense of having a choice in all this is consequently lost.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHING SUPERVISION**

Clearly many of the questions raised above for the coach may have relevance for the supervisor: reflecting on one’s sense of betrayal whether in the present or past; noticing one’s own transitions and sense of identity; being alert to the extent to which one feels subject to inconsistent parenting and the possible consequences in being an inconsistent parent oneself.

In this section I will concentrate on aspects of betrayal which are perhaps more likely to arise in the context of supervision. This betrayal may be explicit or implicit, aware or unaware or a combination of any of these aspects.

1. The supervisor may envy the supervisee. Envy can be as intense as betrayal, and perhaps lead to it. For example, I was told a story from one highly credible source about an assessor who was challenged about the assessment she had given her supervisee and eventually admitted that envy was the reason; she wanted to ‘cut her down to size’. She envied her supervisee in many ways; not just the skill with which she handled her clients, but also the fact that her business was thriving and she was fully exploiting the contribution of social media.
2. Arguably, the supervisor may, in some regards, have a greater personal concern towards the supervisee than the coach does to the client. Frequently coaches will not have detailed awareness of the work of the client; or it may be a world from which they moved on some time ago or indeed never experienced. In contrast, supervisors will, almost by definition, have a strong investment in the work of the coach. This may make it more difficult to maintain appropriate non-attachment. The supervisor may see the coach as carrying the reputation of their shared profession. This greater involvement may mean that the supervisor de-skills herself.

In this I am also mindful that another possible distinction between the role of the supervisor and the coach is that the former may appropriately see her role as one that inevitably and necessarily supports conceptualisation. It is not just about the capturing of learning but bringing forward theories for discussion and clarification. Conceptualisation can be a way of undermining positive attachment; an escape to the intellectual as a way of avoiding intense emotions. For example, she may be too quick to see a story in the client’s words, rather than waiting for it truly to emerge; she is desperate to start talking about ‘ Metaphor and Defense’, that is chapter 5 in Ellen Siegelman’s book, ‘ Metaphor and Meaning in Psychotherapy’38, or some other aspect of theory which currently excites her.

The supervisor may also not feel appropriately and consistently parented by his professional bodies.

**The Wider Perspective**

To conclude this section I consider the wider perspective, first looking at parallel process, then offering some broader speculations about the relevance of the historical and cultural context.

A potentially vital part of the supervisor’s role is to be alert to the wider system, as outlined in the model overpage:

C

U

S

E

R

T

L

U

Business Dynamics

Work Dynamics

Coaching Dynamics

Supervision Dynamics

E

S

H

I

I

R

S

T

O

By definition the word ‘system’ means interconnectedness, so the supervisor might move between the details of a specific coaching intervention through to a wider cultural consideration....and the link between the two. Perhaps the organisation is highly intellectual and values cleverness greatly. It may be that the coach has allowed himself to be seduced into this (i.e. parallel process39/40) and has got stuck at the level of thinking rather than true emotional engagement. On this basis, might the coach be seen as somehow having betrayed the client? Also, has a theme in the coaching been about betrayal? Perhaps here there is a wider business context seeping into the organization. Or it may simply be that the coach has become obsessed with the concept of betrayal and is reading it into situations where it does not exist. If so, is it purely an academic idée fixe or is it a simulacrum? ‘Thus the simulacrum is not that which hides the truth, but that which hides the absence of truth’41.

So the exploration of the ‘here and now’ in the supervision room can potentially provide insights into the wider system. What is happening in the supervision room? Does that give any indication of what might be happening in the coaching room and the client’s organisation? “If I were to betray you, then how do you think I might do that?” “If we look at how we are working with each other now, does that provide any perspectives on what you are doing in the coaching room? Might this provide insights into the challenges faced by the client organisation?” I am very aware that this adventurous journey may lead to grandiosity where the supervisor and the coach may seduce themselves into unrealistic beliefs about what they can achieve. Yet that very grandiosity, when recognised as such, may itself provide useful insights into the wider system.

I conclude this section by offering a deeper and more extensive speculation about the wider system. In this I will explore the possible impact of the historical and cultural dimensions within the present. In doing so, I honour my debt to writers such as Carl Jung42/43 , Claude Levi-Strauss44, Eric Rhode45 , Stephen Frosh46/47 and Fanita Englishop cit.

As a starting point I state the obvious that history is strewn with examples of betrayal. I shall offer a few random examples:

The Catholic priests’ sexual abuse of children and the subsequent cover-up by the Church authorities.

British Nuclear Tests at Maralinga. These were performed between 1955 and 1963 on the Aboriginal land of the Anangu people. Many were forcibly removed and 1200 had been exposed to radiation.

Holocaust denial.

The use of napalm in the Vietnam War, as well as the phrase ‘collateral damage’.

In Canada some of the children of Aboriginal communities were forcibly removed from their families and sent to residential schools. There, many were abused.

The prosecution of Alan Turing for homosexuality. Previously his pioneering code-breaking work at Bletchley Park is believed by many to have shortened the Second World War by up to two years.

Colonialism may also be often seen as betrayal. I am reminded of Claude Levi-Strauss’s description of anthropophagic (devouring/cannibalistic) and anthropoemic (expelling/vomiting) cultures. Colonialism can impose itself in these ways – absorption or ghettoisation. The colonial powers’ division of Africa where frequently borders were drawn in straight lines cutting through local tribes, cultures and ancient lands would be one of the more obvious aspects of such thinking. Sometimes organisational change, perhaps through mergers and acquisitions, can be carried out in anthropoemic and anthropophagic ways. Perhaps even having promised that it would not do so. As part of this process the past is sometimes rubbished, not honoured; this reminds me again of the futility of seeking to escape the past at all costs: such compulsiveness merely reinforces the existing underlying script.  
  
I now start to elaborate a model which pulls together some of the diverse themes within this wider context.

Cerebral

Visceral

Spiritual

My awareness of my world may be *cerebral* in the sense that I can put it into words, however inadequately, and that I have a mental map in which I can position myself. There is another level of awareness which is *visceral*; my sense of myself and my world can scarcely be articulated; a ‘gut feel’; perhaps a kaleidoscope of shapeless images which nevertheless make an impression on me in some undefined way, but which is real. Then there is *spiritual* awareness which can be very clear yet intangible. I may have a sense of purpose and destiny, but I cannot articulate my soul, perhaps because it is such an intense experience.

There may well be an ebb and flow between these aspects, since they are clearly not mutually exclusive. I may move between these with varying degrees of awareness. Personal therapy, a chance encounter, meeting a long lost relative, going on retreat, a near-miss on the motorway, the betrayal of a close colleague, the birth or death of a loved one, the discovery of a long-lost photograph album may bring distant experiences to the surface; or at least to a greater level of awareness. Equally, that which was vivid may, in time fade into oblivion. I would wish to stress that is not necessarily about repression or the pushing away of pain. That which had been delightful, loving and inspirational may also be lost in time.

I now add to the model to bring in the wider cultural and historical dimensions.

Cerebral

die   
Gedankenübertragungen

die   
Geisterübertragungen

Visceral

Spiritual

Die Gedankenübertragungen[[1]](#footnote-1); Transfers of Thoughts. The passing on of ways of thinking and behaving ; stories about life and its purpose; morality tales which are passed down through the generations; the wise old men and women who speak for a past which goes back hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. The throw-away remark from my reclusive uncle or idiosyncratic aunt may have been hugely important for me; equally the Words of the Wicked Witch or Fairy Godmother, the legends, folk songs, heroes, heroines, disasters and triumphs, even the apparently mundane from my cultural history can also be vital in helping me understand who I am and who I might become. All of this is necessarily fixed and flowing. Memories may fade and stories lost; sacred places may literally be destroyed; breakthroughs in understanding the world disappear, perhaps forever. History may, for whatever reason, be re-written. Equally, that which had been lost may be re-discovered; or the past may be re-interpreted and seen in a totally new light.

Die Geisterübertragungen[[2]](#footnote-2); Transfers of Spirits. Alongside die Gedankenübertragungen is that which is less accessible. In his book, ‘Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions’, Stephen Frosh makes a distinction between the symbolised and the encrypted. That which is symbolised is acknowledged and visible; it can, for example, be mourned. That which is encrypted is inaccessible and consequently cannot be acknowledged. That which is unacknowledged can be neither relinquished nor transformed. So, for example, with the encrypted there may be melancholia, rather than mourning. A vague sense of sadness but with no clarity about its origins. This melancholia is then passed down the generations; it is not relinquished because it has become an integral part of the collective self.

For example, Raymond Williams in his book, ‘Culture and Materialism’48 looks at the portrayal of Welsh culture in literature which describes the impact of the Depression; ‘the Welsh Industrial novel’. ‘........the family is being pulled in one direction after another and yet that family persists, but persists in a sense of defeat and loss. The bitter experience of that period – of the massive migrations to England and yet of the intense and persistent family feeling of those who stay and those who remember........the moment of very local sadness.......’.

My father left Swansea and moved to Bristol during the 1930’s. Suddenly, in reading Williams’s words I was able to have a much clearer sense of my father’s anger and frustration and his love and devotion. It was not just about immediate family relationships: a relentlessly teasing elder brother, a stern father, a heavily drinking grandfather, a domineering elder sister and a devoted, self-sacrificing mother; rather there was something broader unfolding in South Wales at that time with a deep impact at all levels.

So the coaching supervision room can be a place crowded with people, memories, thoughts and feelings, the symbolised and the encrypted. For example:

* The founding father who was betrayed by his business partner 100 years before
* The painful and challenging merger which took place 10 years ago
* The excitement and enthusiasm generated by a recent amazing technical innovation
* The wonderful tea lady who devotedly walked the corridors for 35 years, and always had a beautiful smile
* Several vibrant love stories over those years and for some the consequential family disruptions
* Some relentless rivalries which on occasion put personal interest before the interests of the business
* Events which were not truly celebrated enough – they needed more time and space to be absorbed into the soul.

With some organisations there may still exist the artefacts and objects, furniture, pictures and buildings which symbolised so much.

In proposing such a prospect, then my invitation is to allow the possibility and the possibilities which may then flow. The supervisor has a responsibility to hold the supervisee, but not the whole system. The latter is there to be acknowledged, worked and played with as seems appropriate. I am not suggesting that the supervisor necessarily structures interventions to invite in these possibilities and presences, but rather is open to whatever may or may not offer itself.

In describing the worlds of die Gedankenübertagungen and die Geisterübertragungen, I am very aware that it has many similarities with the Jungian collective unconscious. On that basis it would, I suggest, be wise for the supervisor to be aware of the archetypes she may wish to engage49.

The role of the supervisor in coaching is often regarded as having broadly three areas of attention:

*Teacher* – that is, educating the supervisee about the theory and practice of coaching

*Guardian* – that is maintaining the ethical and practical standards of the profession

*Healer* – that is, offering personal support to help the supervisee cope with the emotional challenges of the work

Clearly, each of these can be seen as an archetype. As such, each will necessarily have its own shadow. In the context of betrayal there is every possibility that the shadow may assert itself. Arguably it will be an important, indeed vital part of the collective journey.

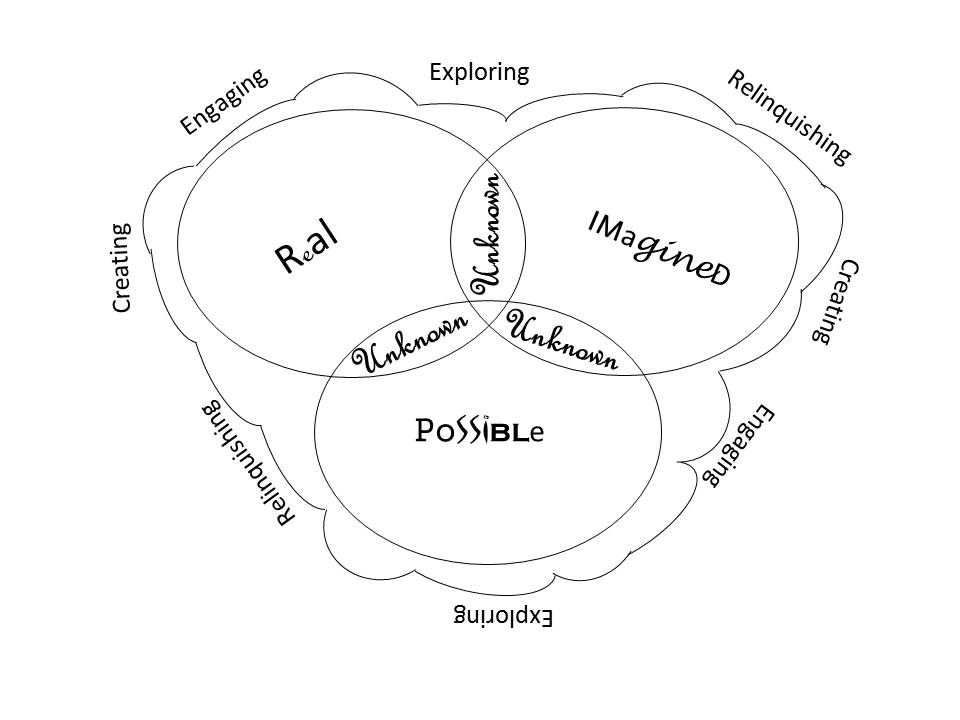
**Teacher I am the OMNISCIENT**

**Guardian I am the OMNIPOTENT**

**Healer I am the PANACEA**

What may then happen is that the supervisor loses her sense of choice as she is consumed by her role. She therefore may become increasingly superficial (not least because of her lack of true engagement) whilst believing she is offering profundity. She is likely to become increasingly less open to challenge, despite declaring otherwise. My speculation is that inevitably there will be, within her family or cultural history a Teacher, or Guardian or Healer who may be able to touch the soul of her awareness. Die Gedankenübertragungen and die Geisterübertragungen will bring such gifts, but they may remain unrecognised on this occasion. On the other hand she may, for example, enter the Cusp whilst seeking to help the supervisee be an observer of himself in that position. She is then confronted by her own shadow and becomes an insightful observer of herself.

This accentuates the importance of the supervisor having a variety of people who can hold up mirrors so she can look at herself. This can include being alert to gifts from the universe in the moment; serendipity. So I am lucky enough to be sitting here in the lobby of a beautiful hotel in Singapore; I am very aware that the walls and ceiling have many small distorting mirrors. Yet in their distortion they make me look at myself more closely; my eye squints, but then I realise for the first time that I truly do squint. I walk along the local beach and see what looks like rubbish under the trees.....but then it turns out to be blossoms which have fallen during the night.......and I feel slightly foolish for having forgotten that cleanliness and tidying up is an important part of life in Singapore.........and then I unexpectedly notice an old discarded shoe. Somehow, I keep on having to revisit my assumptions.  
  
I offer below a model which looks at what might be involved in the themes of supervision I have described. I consciously offer little explanation.



I have designed it deliberately to be a little awkward and not immediately accessible because that, I suggest, is the challenge and the joy of supervision generally, but perhaps particularly when there is betrayal in the air. I also wanted in some way to convey the idea of das Unheimlich; the uncanny; the strangely familiar; a place of potential blessings or hauntings....perhaps both (see Appendix 2). So I simply invite my readers to see what meaning and interpretation they would wish to read into it. It will certainly be as valid and useful as anything I might seek to convey.

**CONCLUSION**

Betrayal is potentially an intense experience, provoking and evoking the past whilst bringing many practical challenges in the present. Being a part of and apart from the process is vital and can be difficult. This I seek to capture in the following diagram.

**THE DANCE OF INTIMACY AND SEPARATION**

SEPARATION FROM OTHER

INTIMACY WITH SELF

INTIMACY WITH OTHER

SEPARATION FROM SELF

Here the SELF is whatever one’s role happens to be – client, coach, supervisor, friend, colleague or even curious bystander. OTHER means not just people but methods, philosophy of change, and ways of understanding others in the world. Arguably, the greater the change, the greater the need for intimacy and separation both in relation to Self and the Other. Inevitably there will sometimes be consequential feelings of abandonment and engulfment because of going too far or not far enough. As Ischa Bloomberg, the gestalt trainer and therapist once said in a group I was attending, “You have to have a bit too much in order to know when you have had enough”.

I am also reminded of a conversation I had with Ton Verdegaal, a glassmaker in Amsterdam; he loves experimenting with new approaches; sometimes it is a mistake, he said, but equally it can lead to some exciting and totally new approaches in his work.

**APPENDIX 1**

These diagrams provide a brief summary of other facets from the model.

Meeting other

D  
o  
i  
n  
g

Empirical

Be

i

n  
g

Encountering self

Hermeneutic

Problem focus

Words

Identity   
focus

Role

Beyond words

Self

**APPENDIX 2**

Perhaps das Unheimlich is a conduit between die Geisterübertragungen and die Gedankenübertragungen:

Cerebral

Visceral

die   
Gedankenübertragungen

die   
Geisterübertragungen

Spiritual

das Unheimlich

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25. This may encourage the client’s premature desire for closure, as described by Richard Erskine. It contrives the completion of something that would not otherwise make sense:

Script Decision

So, in gestalt terms, the coach colludes in an interruption to contact which denies true completion whilst apparently offering it. Quite possibly at an unspoken, even unaware level the client:

- *Introjects*; ‘I must always do what authority figures, including coaches, want of me’.

- *Is confluent*; having over-identified with his organisation, he now does the same with his coach. ‘We are truly in this together; if he wants me to move on, then that is surely what I want too’.

- *Projects*; ‘My coach must surely be anxious, so I’ll move on so he feels better’.

- *Retroflects*; the client feels angry with the coach for being pressurised to look for themes, but he does nothing about it and gets angry with himself for self-sabotaging.

It may also be that even if there is not *Deflection* between each other in this process, nevertheless they may jointly tangentially deflect the real issue; the need to live with Child confusion (for example, hope/despair, shame/guilt, taking hold/letting go ) is not acknowledged.

‘Script Cure: Behavioural, Intrapsychic and Physiological’. Richard Erskine. Transactional Analysis Journal’. 1980.

Also, ‘Though the search for meaning is a human reflex, the compulsion to meaning frequently drowns out the experience itself’.‘ Gestalt Therapy Integrated’. Erving and Miriam Polster. Vintage. 1973.

The French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan was also wary of rushing to make sense of things. He might, for example, finish a session early to ensure that the client was left ‘unfinished’ and would then have to work to make his own sense of things.

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1. This word is partially my own construction. My apologies if I have distorted the German language in any way. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This word is partially my own construction. My apologies if I have distorted the German language in any way. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)