



**SERRC**  
Social Epistemology  
Review & Reply Collective

<http://social-epistemology.com>  
ISSN: 2471-9560

Necro-Waste and Hauntology: Ghosts, Specters, and the Infnitive Responsibility of the Past

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West, Mark D. 2023. "Necro-Waste and Hauntology: Ghosts, Specters, and the Infnitive Responsibility of the Past." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 12 (10): 65–75.  
<https://wp.me/p1Bfg0-8dX>.

Un fantôme ne meurt jamais, il reste toujours à venir et à revenir.  
Responsabilité infinie, donc, pas de repos possible pour une quelconque  
bonne conscience—Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 19.

The disposal and meaning of human remains, or “necro-waste,” raises complex questions about how we relate to death symbolically, materially, ethically, and politically. Emerging theories of hauntology, as developed by Jacques Derrida and others, offer a valuable framework for unpacking the ghostly and uncanny dimensions of necro-waste. Hauntology posits a state of being between presence and absence, disrupting linear temporality and exploring the haunting traces left by unresolved pasts upon the present. This essay explores how theories of hauntology illuminate the spectral resonances of necro-waste, providing tools for grappling with the affective weight and ethical resonances of human remains. Tracing key strands of hauntological thought and applying them to examples of necro-waste, this essay aims to demonstrate hauntology’s conceptual value for understanding how the dead can haunt the living, individually and collectively.

We live in a world marked by the dead; a world where ossuaries and cemeteries dot the landscape, where the memorials to those long gone tower over both city and countryside. The most popular tourist sites in the world, from the pyramids to St. Denis to St. George’s Chapel, all house corpses. The dead don’t walk among us, for there is no need for that. We walk to them, bearing gifts of flowers. We are haunted, haunting ourselves with our imaginations and our memories.

To be sure, this is a part of the social landscape worthy of our study.

## Hauntology

Hauntology is a philosophical and aesthetic concept that has gained increasing prominence since its coinage in the 1990s, particularly in the fields of critical theory, cultural studies, and the arts. As formulated by Jacques Derrida in his 1993 book *Specters of Marx*, hauntology refers to the paradoxical state of being in which something is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive. More broadly, hauntology is concerned with the haunting or ghostly presence of lost futures alongside a crisis of imagining alternative futures. As such, it is bound up with a postmodern sense of an impasse in culture and history, especially relating to the predominance of neoliberal capitalism and the proclaimed “end of history” after the collapse of Soviet communism (Fisher 16).

The term hauntology itself plays on the homophony between the French words hantologie (hauntology) and ontologie (ontology), as Judith Williamson explains: “Ontology is the science or theory of being ... To replace ontology with hauntology is to supersede a metaphysics of presence with a metaphysics of absence and loss. But Derrida makes clear ...” that the lost thing is still there, as a ghostly trace” (qtd. in Fisher 378). Derrida uses hauntology and the figure of the ghost to destabilize ontological binaries like absence/presence, alive/dead, past/present, and to gesture to invisible forces of history and

oppression. As he writes in *Specters of Marx*, the specter or ghost is “something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely this is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence” (qtd. in Davis 374). The ghost is neither fully absent nor fully present, haunting the borders of knowledge and existence.

Derrida’s hauntology drew in part on earlier psychoanalytic theories of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (1994), who used the concept of the “phantom” to describe the intergenerational transmission of hidden trauma and the ghostly gaps such repression leaves behind. As Colin Davis (2005) explains, the key distinction is that “Derrida’s spectre is a deconstructive figure” that destabilizes epistemic certainty, whereas Abraham and Torok’s phantom represents a psychoanalytic enigma to be interpreted and resolved (377). The ghost that lives in family trauma bears more than a passing resemblance to the ghosts that haunt nations; the twenty years of wandering of Evita Peron’s corpse, finally ending in Cementerio de la Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina, spoke to a nation haunted by the Peron regime, to violent times in Argentina, to government death squads, to guerrilla groups targeting “agents of the state”.

Broadly, the concept of hauntology has been taken up across contemporary culture to invoke a longing for lost political and cultural projects coupled with anxiety about the future. Popular television series such as the BBC’s *Ghosts* (2019-present) play upon hauntological themes for both humor and existential unease in their portrayal of the ghostly remnants of past eras haunting the present. Columns in publications like *The Guardian* have analyzed figures ranging from the late musician David Bowie to the animated franchise Scooby-Doo through the lens of hauntology. However, some critics argue that the concept has become diluted amidst this popularization. Mark Fisher (2014) wrote that “what has happened to hauntology ... is that it has become progressively more detached from its original referents ... It has gone from being the placeholder for that which capitalism cannot accommodate to just another aesthetic commodity” (95).

Nonetheless, theorists like Fisher have tried to resurrect the more radical dimensions of hauntology as a method for cultural and political critique at a time when critical thought risks being haunted by the ghosts of past theories rather than imagining new futures. As Fisher writes, “The Future Is No Longer What It Was” (16). Although the precise meaning of hauntology remains slippery and diffuse, running through it is the melancholy awareness that the present is not what the past hoped for, coupled with the will to analyze culture and history for traces of lost potentials. It serves as an apt aesthetic and theoretical frame for understanding art and ideas in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century post-utopian malaise of late capitalism.

Davis (2005) argues that the concept of hauntology, as developed by Derrida and other poststructuralist thinkers, destabilizes epistemic certainty by privileging the figure of the ghost and the theme of secrecy, arguing that for Derrida, “the ghost’s secret is not a puzzle to be solved; it is the structural openness or address directed towards the living by the voices of the past or the not yet formulated possibilities of the future” (377). The ghostly secret is “unspeakable in a quite different sense” from a taboo—it “cannot not (yet) be articulated in

the languages available to us. The ghost pushes at the boundaries of language and thought” (377).

Davis suggests that “Derrida wants to avoid any such restoration [of the ghost to the order of knowledge] and to encounter what is strange, unheard, other, about the ghost” (377). Therefore, “the interest here ... is not in secrets, understood as puzzles to be resolved, but in secrecy, now elevated to what Castricano calls ‘the structural enigma which inaugurates the scene of writing’”(378). In this way, Davis posits, the concept of hauntology as developed by Derrida destabilizes epistemic certainty by insisting on an essential unknowability and openness to alterity in our engagement with ghosts and the dead. The secret of the ghost is not something to be discovered; it is an opening that expands to the limits of what a society can know.

### **Problematic Corpses**

Our relationship with the dead, and the material remains of the deceased, has long been fraught. As Fiddler observes, “To speak of ghosts then is to speak of the phenomenology of place” (2022, 5). The disposal and meaning of human corpses, or what might be termed “necro-waste,” raises profound questions not only about how we engage the dead symbolically and materially, but also about temporality, history, and justice. Emerging theories of hauntology provide a valuable lens for unpacking the ghostly dimensions of necro-waste, and how human remains can haunt the present.

Hauntology refers to a paradoxical state of being in which something is neither fully present nor absent, inhabiting a liminal space between being and non-being. As Fisher (2014) summarizes, “Derrida’s spectre is a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence” (19). Specters represent a troubling of linear time, embodying what Derrida calls “anachrony,” being “neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive” (Davis 2005, 374). The dead return as ghosts, and the past persists into the present. This sense of temporal disruption is central to hauntology’s value for interrogating necro-waste. Human remains, imbued with symbolic and material resonances, trouble easy historical narratives and foreground the affective weight of the past upon the present. Attending to the ghostly dimensions of corpses provides a means of reckoning with injustice and unresolved traumas tied to the dead.

Fisher outlines two key dimensions of hauntology that prove particularly salient in considering necro-waste. First, it engages with that which “is (in actuality is) no longer, but which remains effective as a virtuality,” representing the past as unsettled and incomplete (19). Second, it deals with that which “has not yet happened, but which is already effective in the virtual,” pointing to future specters that haunt the present. Both orientations unsettle linear temporality and offer ways of understanding how the dead—through their material, symbolic, and affective traces—trouble the present.

In this sense, corpses evoke complex emotional and practical responses. As John Troyer argues in “Embalmed Vision” (2007), corpses become “problematic” when they disrupt

norms around death and the treatment of the dead. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the development of new preservation technologies like embalming created “entirely new postmortem conditions for all dead bodies” by “inventing the modern corpse” (22). Before this, corpses were subject to natural decay, limiting their handling and display. With embalming, the dead could be preserved indefinitely, fundamentally changing how the living interacted with and perceived the dead.

The new ability to preserve and publicly display corpses had significant effects. As Troyer explains, embalming “produced rather ‘amazing’ postmortem subjects” that appeared lifelike for extended periods, like the “Bisga Man” used in advertisements three months after death (31). Funeral directors began charging more to make corpses look peaceful or content (35). Troyer argues this technology created an “embalmed vision” that altered perceptions of death and allowed extensive manipulation and commodification of corpses (25).

This drastic change caused regulatory issues when transporting bodies. Poorly embalmed corpses created public health risks, especially on railroads. Troyer details conferences of funeral directors seeking standardized embalming education and regulations for transporting bodies across state lines, requiring extensive procedures for containing and handling corpses (36–38). The “[c]irculation and fluidity” of bodies thus became tightly governed (35).

As Ted Malcolmson (2016) describes in his thesis excerpt “Embalmed Vision,” the 1978 Jonestown mass suicide created 913 problematic corpses that disrupted norms and forced responses from authorities. As Malcolmson explains, the Peoples Temple had complex ties to Black liberation movements, which informed their act of “revolutionary suicide” (6). However, the public and government saw the dead as outsiders and forced rapid disposal, first attempting to leave them in Guyana. As Malcolmson argues, “the bodies are treated as deviant and dangerous” due to racial anxieties and their perceived immorality (8). Legally and politically, the bodies were rendered “problematic.”

The handling of the Jonestown dead, Malcolmson argues, involved strategies of “classification and identification” that labeled them as disgusting cultists (8). Their liminal status between life and death complicated reactions. There were heated disputes over burial locations, transport, identification, and autopsies. Malcolmson argues authorities sought to “avoid contamination” from these problematic bodies (8). As Troyer’s analysis of earlier problematic corpses demonstrates, the preservation and handling of the Jonestown dead was shaped by established social norms and regulations despite their unprecedented nature.

Some of the stories of problematic corpses are tragi-comic; a cadaver nicknamed “Stoneman Willie” was a spectacle in death, his hardened corpse displayed for over a century in a Pennsylvania funeral home. In life, he was likely James Murphy, an Irish immigrant who died in 1895 while jailed for public drunkenness and burglary. His body was embalmed using an experimental formula containing arsenic, resulting in his corpse turning into a leathery, dessicated cadaver described as ‘mummified.’ This allowed the Auman Funeral Home to display his remains as a macabre curiosity. Generations visited Stoneman Willie, touching his leathery skin and marveling at his lifelike preservation. Only in 2022, 128 years after his

death, was Willie finally laid to rest. His petrified body was placed in a coffin, dressed in an antique tuxedo, and buried in a local cemetery. Though originally nameless and rejected in death, the man known as Stoneman Willie was finally given an identity and the dignity of a proper burial, his problematic corpse finally at rest after resisting decay for over a century. (Tumin 2023).

As Troyer suggests, these “problematic corpses” that resist decay due to chemical preservation can disrupt expected funerary norms. While embalming allowed extensive manipulation of Willie’s remains for spectacle, his petrified state also complicated his burial after 128 years on display. His liminal status between life and death, natural and preserved, led to uncertainty about how to properly handle his remains. Even the events surrounding his funeral suggest an resistance to final interment. Much like the “Bisga Man” advertisement promoting the lifelike preservation of corpses, Willie’s unsettling display and delayed burial reveals how chemical preservation can transform our relationship with the dead in complex ways,

Problematic corpses thus disrupt expected practices around death and force reconsideration of how the dead should be handled. As preservation technologies created new possibilities for corpses in the 19th century, regulating their circulation and treatment became necessary. The shocking deaths at Jonestown forced similar reckonings around how to transport, identify, and inter such problematic bodies. Both cases illuminate how corpses reflect and disturb social orders, requiring control and exclusion when they are marked as transgressive. As Troyer argues, our perceptions of corpses and death are constructed by technologies of preservation and regulations guiding their status and treatment. When norms break down, the management of human remains provokes both practical and existential questions about the status of the dead and how they should be handled.

### **Dead But Not Dead Enough**

In certain historical and cultural contexts, those suspected of vampirism after death posed a unique challenge when it came to burial practices and handling of remains. As several scholars have analyzed, the corpses of supposed vampires were seen as threatening contagion and death if not properly contained, requiring extreme funerary rites to prevent them from rising (Caciola 2021, 265; Wojciechowska 2017, 44; Barber 1988, 569; Newton, 2019, 113). The highly ritualized and violent treatment of these bodies reflects deep societal fears about pollution and the instability of death (Wojciechowska 2017, 37).

According to Nancy Caciola (2021), vampire panics emerged in the 18th century Enlightenment era as folk beliefs collided with empirical science, creating a “clash between tradition and modernity” (256). When plague outbreaks occurred, villagers often attributed the contagion to a vampire or revenant who rose from improper burial to prey on the living. One infamous case was the vampire panic in 1732 Kringa, Serbia, where locals unearthed several bodies looking for the culprit, beheading them and burning organs like the heart to prevent vampiric attack (259–260). Caciola argues this reveals how vampires were “embodiments of disease and vectors of contamination” in the popular imagination (274).

Similarly, Wojciechowska (2017) examines how in Poland, those believed susceptible to vampirism after death due to improper burial rites were subject to apotropaic treatments to contain the threat. This could involve staking the body, decapitating it, or placing blessed objects in the grave (41). These mutilations of the corpse reflect a “safeguard against pollution” to protect the broader community (44).

Paul Barber’s (1988) cross-cultural analysis reveals that the folkloric vampire was universally understood as a “revenant, a being that died, was buried, and then rose from the grave to disturb the living” (569). To lay these undead beings to permanent rest, such societies required violent postmortem rituals, including breaking limbs to prevent locomotion or stuffing ashes in the mouth so the vampire could not prey on victims (Barber 1988, 571–572). Barber argues these practices reflect a fundamental desire for closure and control over the uncertainty of death: “There is a strong indication that vampire burial rites served principally to ease the minds of the living ... a ritual laying to rest of the unlaidd dead” (584).

This perspective is echoed by Newton (2019), who asserts that dismembering or mutilating suspect vampire corpses “offered comfort insofar as it provided people with the impression that they were actively doing something” (128). Analyzing a 17<sup>th</sup> century mass vampire grave in Poland, Newton suggests that while modern science may cast these practices as irrational superstitions, they fulfilled a social function of psychologically managing disease and mortality (114). By violently containing the polluting potential of the vampire, communities reasserted control over the unstable boundary between life and death.

In summary, those suspected of vampirism after death posed a unique threat that required extreme mortuary rites like staking, decapitating, or dismembering their bodies. These “deviant burials” (Wojciechowska 2017, 44) reflect societal efforts to assert control over the dead and manage the existential and biological uncertainties surrounding death. The vampire represented fears of pollution, contagion, and unstable boundaries between living and dead, requiring violent treatment to neutralize their threatening potential. This made the corpses of suspected vampires uniquely problematic - they were not just dead, but undead, and capable of spreading death further if not violently contained through ritual.

### **Race, Ethnicity, and Problematicisation**

Sadly, race also creates problematic corpses. In “Death and the City: Suicide, Martyrdom, and the Constructs of the Urban Black Death”, Candice Maddox (2002) examines how black corpses have historically been treated as “problematic” in the United States. Maddox argues that “the black body has persistently struggled for ownership and control over its remains against exploitation, scientific curiosity, and willful neglect” (14). She explores how Black bodies have been “plundered” after death, including illegal grave robbing by medical students (23). Maddox asserts this reflects a racist impulse to “lay claim to the Black body unencumbered by Black humanity” (55). Overall, she concludes that “Black humanity is denied in direct proportion to society’s fixation on Black corporeality” (198).

Similarly, in “The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery”, Vincent Brown (2008) looks at how black bodies were exploited for medical education, reflecting racist perceptions. He examines how slave corpses were dug up shortly after burial and “delivered to medical colleges for dissection”, an indignity rarely suffered by whites (113). Brown argues this use of black cadavers to “advance medicine” was only possible because racist ideology allowed black bodies to be seen as mere objects, rather than human remains deserving respect (226). He concludes that “the burden of producing knowledge for medical science fell disproportionately on the bodies of the unfree” (238).

So in both analyses, the marginalized status of black Americans resulted in their corpses being treated as objects and exploited by white society, denying them dignity in death.

Historically, Jewish burial rituals and treatment of corpses have also faced exclusion and opposition that denied religious freedoms. Erin McGlothlin (2020) discusses how the Nazis disinterred and cremated buried Jewish bodies in an attempt to destroy evidence of genocide and exclude Jews from the German national community (126–131). Joshua Slocum and Lisa Carlson (2011) note cases in America where Jewish bodies have been “seized” until religious prohibitions like autopsies were violated (92-93). Gary Laderman (2003) briefly examines how Jewish burial practices were disrupted and prohibited at times in Europe and America, forcing adaptation of traditional rituals (156–158). Overall, while not subjected to the same degree of exploitation as black Americans, Jewish corpses have also been problematized by prohibiting religious burial practices. This exclusion denied religious liberties and human dignity in death.

### **Necro-Waste**

A problematic corpse is a dead body that a society perceives to pose a spiritual, biological, or social threat due to cultural attitudes, historical contexts, or circumstances of death. These corpses disrupt expected funerary norms and rituals, provoking debate over the proper treatment of remains. Problematic corpses are often the focus of exclusion, exploitation, or unusual mortuary rites as society attempts to neutralize the real or imagined danger they represent.

The designation of a “problematic corpse” ultimately reflects the views of the living more than any inherent quality of the dead. It represents an attempt to assert control, order, and meaning in the face of disturbing deaths. These corpses become sites where broader cultural tensions play out, such as racial injustice or moral panics.

In this sense, the “haunting” of the problematic corpse is experienced most acutely by the living. Problematic corpses spark fears of pollution, contagion, or unrest by resisting classification and challenging boundaries between life and death or natural and unnatural. This provokes a crisis in those seeking to maintain their vision of a stable, controlled world. Rituals of exclusion or containment reflect an attempt to tame the unruly dead and re-establish order. But the ongoing turmoil surrounding these corpses stems from the living, not the dead.



Jacques Derrida's concept of "hauntology" relates closely to the idea of the problematic corpse haunting the living.

For Derrida, hauntology suggests that the present is always haunted by spectral traces of the past, which destabilizes our sense of being and knowing. There is an uncanny sense that time is "out of joint" as the past bleeds into and disrupts the present.

This perspective aligns with how the problematic corpse represents a haunting in the form of troubling irruption of the past into the present. The improper burial, unsettled deaths, and unfulfilled funerary rites of these bodies return to haunt the living as an unresolved trauma or injustice. Dreams are disturbed, peaceful reveries interrupted by intrusive memories; a haunt is afoot.

As Derrida notes, the ghosts of the past are not something that can be conclusively exorcised - they always leave a remainder. Similarly, problematic corpses exert an uncanny presence that cannot be easily dismissed or contained through material rituals of exclusion. Their ghostly power persists.

### **The Infinite Responsibility of the Past**

This sense of ghosts as figures of temporal disruption features heavily in Fiddler's (2022) analysis of necro-waste. As he argues, the dead have historically been perceived as "out of place" when they linger, representing "a remaindering of the past being active as a force in the present" (10). Trauma collapses rigid distinctions between past, present, and future. Places where violent deaths occurred become "haunted spaces" in which time feels out of joint, with the affective weight of past suffering persisting into the present. Fiddler cites the example of 10 Rillington Place, the site of serial murders in 1940s and 50s London. Using a "diffractive methodology" that reads various historical and narrative accounts of the dwelling through one another, Fiddler argues that Rillington Place can be understood as a haunted space expressing "the complexities of the relations between past and present" (F11). The tragedies of the past continue to inhabit the site affectively.

This sense of haunted space also features in Linnemann's (2015) analysis of the 1959 murders of the Clutter family in Holcomb, Kansas. As Linnemann argues, the murders of this "ideal victim" family became a traumatic rupture imprinted on the landscape, with the ghosts of the crime "speak[ing] of the phenomenology of place" (517). The affective weight of the murders persists through the space, experienced as a form of haunting. Both Fiddler and Linnemann point to the value of hauntological approaches for capturing how past violence lingers in place, collapsing distinctions between then and now.

Hauntology also helps bring forward how regimes of visualization and (in)visibility contribute to the ghostly dimensions of necro-waste. As West (2022) notes, "encounters with the spectre can generate new models or modes of seeing and visualization" (8). He cites the example of Edmund Clark's participatory art project with prisoners using pinhole cameras to take self-portraits. The blurred, spectral images trouble the usual dynamics of

penal visibility and invisibility, providing a glimpse of the subjectivity of the incarcerated typically obscured by regimes of control. West’s analysis echoes Fiddler’s argument that adapting techniques like “spirit photography” could capture the invisible presences haunting a particular site or social context (9). Playing with practices of seeing and unseeing provides ways of surfacing latent ghosts.

The use of visual practices to render certain groups or issues invisible relates closely to what Gordon (2008) calls “ghostly matters,” the gaps left by systemic erasures and oppressions (xvi). As she argues, ghosts “are a part of our social world” and “have a social life,” emerging from histories of violence and injustice (Gordon 2008, 24). Perpetuating invisibility and marginality creates a kind of social haunting. Sharpe compellingly explores this in relation to the “ghostly figures” of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that persist in the wake of that system’s brutality and unresolved legacies, arguing “that in Black life, hauntings are routine” (15). Ongoing racism, state violence, and vigilante acts echo old horrors tied to the history of slavery and its ghosts. Social spaces become permeated by these specters of racial terror.

The violence of marginality also features in Robins’s (2021) analysis of “criminal necro-waste,” which he describes as the remains of those who “undermine not only legal codes, but threaten and disrupt moral codes, too” (2). These difficult dead, defined by their social transgressions, become ghostly figures that threaten to contaminate the spaces in which they are buried and memorialized. As Robins argues, the perceived toxicity and fear of moral hazard posed by these criminal bodies leads to practices of social exile even after death, with their burials controlled and gravesites hidden or destroyed to avoid creating sites where disturbances might emerge. He cites the hurried burial of Osama bin Laden’s corpse at sea following his assassination as an attempt to neutralize his physical remains and banish the symbolic power tied to them. The bodies of the criminalized dead become specters to be contained and disappeared through carefully managed rituals of exclusion.

This sense of necro-waste as socially ghosted highlights how marginalized groups are often the most susceptible to being made spectral. As West (2022) notes, categories of necro-waste from sanctified remains to demonized criminals reflect “attitudes toward the remains of the no-longer animate human” and the politics governing the dead’s symbolic potency (1). Whom we memorialize versus whom we erase mirrors social hierarchies of value and worth. Human bodies marked by race, gender, criminality, or disease are more apt to be disappeared and forgotten, becoming ghostly absences haunting the social order. Examining the spectral traces left by processes of marginalization brings attention to the gaps and silences permeating the present.

Derrida’s hauntology also helps illuminate the anticipatory specters tied to human remains, the ghosts of past and future breathing through the present. As Davis (2005) notes, “Where Abraham and Torok seek to return the ghost to the order of knowledge, Derrida wants to avoid any such restoration and to encounter what is strange, unheard, other about the ghost” (376). There is an ethical injunction to sit with ghosts in all their uncanniness without foreclosing their disruptive possibilities. This orientation toward radical openness proves generative for considering how even neutral or beneficent forms of necro-waste contain

spectral resonances (beneficent forms, as West argued in 2022, being those remains of the ‘hallowed dead’ used for hortatory purposes to promote praiseworthy ends).

The act of burial involves not only encapsulating the past, but opening toward unknown futures, with cemeteries becoming sites where varied temporalities coincide. As human remains decay and transform through natural processes, they gesture to forms of change beyond human control. Attending to what we can’t see within the most mundane instances of necro-waste provides glimpses of temporal vistas stretching beyond the present.

Ultimately, hauntology’s value for interrogating necro-waste lies in how it unveils the ghostly traces of past, present, and future that imbue human remains with affective force. Necro-waste condenses broader social hauntings tied to histories of violence and marginality. Burying and memorializing the dead become attempts to settle debts and make right lingering injustices that persist through time. And the dead speak beyond their finite lives, reminding the living of obligations still unfolding toward places, communities, and worlds to come. Examining necro-waste through the lens of hauntology surfaces spectral histories, ethical debts, and the strangeness of mortality that haunts every human society. Reckoning with the ghostly dimensions of necro-waste provides ways of honoring the dead that trouble and transfigure our understanding of life.

## Conclusion

Examining human remains through the lens of hauntology brings to light the complex temporalities, histories of violence, and practices of memorialization tied to the dead. Attending to the virtual within necro-waste provides glimpses into the pasts that shaped present social configurations, the obligations owed to those who suffered, and the imagined futures haunting current ethical and political horizons. A hauntological approach asks that we sit with the strangeness and uncertainty of ghosts rather than exorcise them, reckoning with human finitude and unknowability. And hauntology calls us to imagine more just futures inspired by the voices of the dead. In focusing on the spectral traces within necro-waste, we see how the past persists into the present, how violence echoes across time, and how the dead can speak beyond the end of life.

In this realm of deviant burials, criminal necro-waste, and haunts, we should not be surprised that we find ourselves saddled with the responsabilité infinie of the ghosts of the dead. Even gone, the dead reproach; we failed to see them when they were alive, and so it is only just that they haunt us now that they are dead.

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