

SAVAH 2019: Speaking with ghosts (Cape Town, 12–13 Sep 19)

The Faculty of Informatics and Design, Cape Peninsula University of Technology,
Bellville, Cape Town, South Africa, Sep 12–13, 2019

Deadline: Apr 1, 2019

Karen von Veh, University of Johannesburg

34th Annual SAVAHA CONFERENCE

Speaking with ghosts: Hauntology, memory, nostalgia and other ways of engaging with past/present/future.

Hauntology is a composite of 'haunting' and 'ontology' proposed by Jacques Derrida (1993) as a way of thinking about the presence of absent figures, which haunt the world in an ambiguous state of being neither alive nor dead. To use the metaphor of haunting conjures ghosts and specters, tangible but not entirely whole or extant beings, inherited from the past and discernible in the present. The 'ghost' therefore inhabits a disjointed timespace in which 'anything is possible' as the past and present co-exist on a transitory plane.

As a theme in critical theory, hauntology turns to the past in order to make sense of the present, to understand how we got to this place and to consider what's to come. To speak with ghosts, as Karen Barad (2010: 264) suggests, is not a project of reconstruction, but a means to acknowledge and be responsive to the non-contemporaneity of the present, to put oneself at risk, to risk oneself (which is never one or self), to open oneself up to indeterminacy in moving towards what is to-come.

We propose this theme as a productive framework for addressing the challenges of working with what we inherit, and for dealing with contemporary concerns around existence in transition. We invite scholars to critically engage with aspects of past and present, the notion of Hauntology, memory, nostalgia and related concepts in the visual domain, including visual art, archeology, architecture, design, and photography.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- What different ways are there for dealing with the past, present and future?
- How can academics take up the challenge to respond and take responsibility for that which we inherit?
- How do we exorcise or live with the ghosts of colonization within the decolonial project?
- What kind of insights and blindnesses are produced through spectral encounters with forms of visual and material culture?
- What happens when we admit the ghost—that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present—into meaning making?

- What are the implications of spectral encounters for pedagogical practice?
- Can art and aesthetics be instrumental in putting ghosts to rest, or should art rather invoke or agitate the ghost?
- In what ways does the past affect present and future imaginings?
- How has art been politicised by the ghosts of the past?
- What is the role of nostalgia in imaging pasts, presents and futures?

We will also invite papers from SAVAH members on current research that engages topics not included in this rubric. Please submit an abstract of between 300 and 400 words via the Savah.org.za website by 1 April 2019. Any questions to do with the conference can be sent to conference@savah.org.za or Nike Romano and Alison Kearney at savah2019@gmail.com

Reference:

CFP: SAVAH 2019: Speaking with ghosts (Cape Town, 12-13 Sep 19). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 3, 2019 (accessed Jul 12, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/20279>>.