

Planning for Burial's Unique Historical Moment

Where the realms of shoegaze, metal, post-rock, and gloom collide, there is Planning for Burial, a musical act by Thom Wasluck. Planning for Burial has been described as "simultaneously treading the line between nostalgic and futuristic sounding,"¹ and has often been compared to bands such as Jesu, another gloomy, multi-genre musical act. However, Planning for Burial is unique in its place as a musical embodiment of one of Mark Fisher's famous concepts: Capitalist Realism.

Capitalist Realism was repurposed in Mark Fisher's book "Capitalist Realism: is There No Alternative?" In this book, Mark Fisher illustrates a world in decay; the Soviet Union had just collapsed, Reagan and Thatcher's neoliberalism is on the rise, and people are beginning to unconsciously believe that capitalism has no alternative. In Mark Fisher's harrowing perspective, the responsibility of culture's unoriginality lies squarely in the hands of capitalist realism.² One only has to look at Mark Fisher's book "Ghosts of My Life" to find an example of society's slowing:

Consider the fate of the concept of 'futuristic' music. The 'futuristic' in music has long since ceased to refer to any future that we expect to be different; it has become an established style, much like a particular typographical font. Invited to think of the futuristic, we will still come up with something like the music of Kraftwerk, even though this is now as antique as Glenn Miller's big band jazz was when the German group began experimenting with synthesizers in the early 1970s. Where is the 21st-century equivalent of Kraftwerk? If Kraftwerk's music came out of a casual intolerance of the already-established, then the present moment is marked by its extraordinary accommodation towards the past. More than that, the very distinction between past and present is breaking down. In 1981, the 1960s seemed much further away than they do today. Since then, cultural time has folded back on itself, and the impression of linear development has given way to a strange simultaneity.³

This is a terrifying realization; instead of a clear extinction event, it seems like we are slowly trickling out. This is reflected in the media we consume. One only has to take one look at the list of apocalypse films to notice how many were released in the past 2 decades. Disaster has become far more prevalent in our everyday minds than it has ever been. The end has never seemed so near, so we invented more and more end of the world scenarios as a cathartic release from the slow death we already seem to be living through. Capitalist Realism is the comfort we find in knowing that the end of the future is *here*.

Though Kraftwerk was produced by their historical moment, musicians in the past 20 years do not have this luxury. This is why Planning for Burial's etiology is so interesting. Just like Camus wrote, "all alike would be condemned to die one day; his turn, too, would come like the others',"⁴ Planning for Burial finds absurdist catharsis in the present's slow death. He reflects his own historical moment the way Kraftwerk did. He blends futuristic signs with nostalgia, his lyrics are

melancholic and cold. Only the present could produce an artist like Planning for Burial.

However, Planning for Burial is not simply reduced to the present, it is as much a ghost of the past. According to Derrida, "to haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept."⁵ In Derrida's canon, this concept of hauntology replaced the words "trace" and "difference."⁶ What this means is a hauntology depicts something that is not fully present. Instead, this ghost only exists in its relation to a subject.

When Derrida's hauntology is applied to art – notably in this case, music – we're left with a ghost that haunts a track threefold. Firstly, in the idealized form of the track. Secondly, in what was left unsaid in the track. Finally, and most relevant, the past historical moment that manifests itself in the present.⁷ One of Planning for Burial's most popular tracks, "Warmth of You," is most evidently haunted by The Cure's Pornography.⁸ Here, the historical moment of the past, being the exigence of The Cure's Pornography, haunts Warmth of You as much as its own present historical moment does; it is integral to the identity of the track. We find a similar case in the track "Verse/Chorus/Verse," sharing a name with the Nirvana outtake. While this may not be a connection beyond a reasonable doubt, both songs share a similar subject matter and dark themes. Furthermore, Wasluck is no stranger to referencing other artists throughout his discography. The method in which Nirvana haunts this track is the same as the last: the historical moment which Nirvana wrote that song gives unsaid context to Wasluck's track.

Why is this hauntology relevant to Planning for Burial? The apparition in Wasluck's work brings a new identity to his music. Not only is his music a reflection of his own decaying historical moment, but an amalgamation of several historical moments. This creates a truly unique sound, haunted by both past and present, but without a future. Beyond purely technical skills such as lyricism and production, this is how Wasluck's music accomplishes sounding simultaneously futuristic and nostalgic. The seemingly contradicting nature invents one of the most interesting projects one can find, an absurd catharsis in capitalist realism.

¹ The Native Sound. (n.d.). The Native Sound. <http://www.thenativesound.com/artists/planningforburial>

² Fisher, M. (2009). Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?

³ Riley, J. A. (2015). The Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures. Mark Fisher. Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2014. 232 pp. \$22.95 paper. The Journal of Popular Culture, 48(3), 611–614. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12289>

⁴ McCarthy, P. M. (1982). Camus: The Stranger. D.

⁵ From Spectres of Marx, by Jacques Derrida. (n.d.). <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/derrida2.htm>

⁶ Fisher, M. (2012). What Is Hauntology? Film Quarterly, 66(1), 16–24. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16>

⁷ Gallix, A. (2019, August 21). Hauntology: A not-so-new critical manifestation. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2011/jun/17/hauntology-critical>

⁸ O'Connor, A. (2019). Planning for Burial: The Intimacy of Loneliness. *Bandcamp Daily*. <https://daily.bandcamp.com/features/planning-for-burial-interview>