

negative pasts

Categories : [ruins and remains](#), [the shape of history](#)

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Earlier today I mentioned *an abhorrent positivity* in those archaeologies that see the past as mirror to the present and ignore the mess and suffering of history.

Here are some comments of mine on negative archaeology from an article with Bill Rathje and David Platt that is about to appear in the journal [Modernism/Modernity](#).

It is not that the archaeological past is absent. It is more precisely not present. Or, we might say the trace means the past is absent in its presence. Archaeology is a dynamic of presence and absence.

In this dynamic, all historical culture is residual. There is a negativity represented by the loss of the past, its absence. **This negativity is the only condition for knowledge of the past - waste and garbage are the condition of historical insight and knowledge.** And more, or worse. The **trauma** of waste and loss is a basic archaeological condition. This is our historicity, our sense of history, the historical condition.