The Fragments of Modernity and the Archaeologies of the Future

Response to Gregory Jusdanis

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> "Ontologies of the present demand archeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past"
> —Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity,* 2002[1]

The broken pot, the pot in fragments, the scattered shards, is the image that Gregory Jusdanis's text leaves us with, along with the dilemma of whether to reconstruct the pot or display the fragments. The implication being that archaeology desires the reconstructed whole, whereas poets, some travelers and others perhaps, would find more awe and inspiration and mystique in the fragments and ruins, as many have done in the past. His final passage nicely and poetically sums up Jusdanis's edifice, whereby archaeology stands for science and knowledge, as opposed to the romantic inspirational desire of the traveler. Yet I want to complicate the picture we are left with, revisit some the ground he has covered, and perhaps, as an archaeologist, pick up some of the fragments from the ground, and attend much more carefully to their form, detail, historical and mnemonic weight.

Interestingly, the notion of the fragment is one of the recent preoccupations of archaeological thinking. While much of earlier archaeology was preoccupied with the restoration of the whole, the re-creation of missing parts, and the reconstruction of completeness, some of us, partly inspired by Oceanic ethnographies, have started thinking about the broken shards, figurines,

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bones, objects, and artifacts, in the recent or the remote past; some of these objects point to intentional fragmentation, and to their often wide circulation among people and communities, as tokens and talismans of human relationships, as devices that linked ("enchained") people over long spatial and temporal distances;[2] at other times, these fragments may have acted as mnemonic objects that would have helped re-collect the fragments of memories, memories of events, ceremonies, and rituals; memories of people and places.[3]

Moreover, the notion of archaeology as a science which strives to save the past and pursue the objective recovery of the truth, an image that emerges from Jusdanis's text, is one that has been heavily eroded, especially in the last two decades, and one that many of its practitioners will not recognize. For them, archaeology produces various pasts, out of the fragments and traces that have survived; this is a complex process of production, intricately implicated with processes of identity, politics, institutional power, disciplinary authority, and history. Archaeologists do not just save and reconstruct: they select and valorize, but also ignore and destroy; they produce material realities, but they also tell stories; they too, like poets, are cultural producers working in the field of representation.[4]

This reexamination of archaeology's ontology has also led to the excavation of the discipline's genealogical and epistemic foundations. As Jusdanis implies, archaeology has been a key device of capitalist modernity, but one which possesses distinctive features that deserve closer examination. Even before the establishment of archaeology as an autonomous discipline, however, people were not indifferent to the material traces of the past; contrary to Jusdanis's claim that they showed "no interest in excavating the earth for its cultural treasures, other than the pursuit of the riches in graves," recent discussions have shown that in many different contexts starting from antiquity, ruins of the past aroused intense interest in people, who invested them with their own memories, meanings, and associations, often incorporated them in their own material and social lives, and produced their own narratives and stories about them. In other words they produced their own archaeologies.[5] Of course, archaeology as an autonomous discipline, a European nineteenth-century invention, established its own discourse, narrative techniques, institutional practices, and authority, often incorporating some of the premodern meanings, but shaped decisively by the national imagination; archaeology produced its object of study (the archaeological "record") in the same way that national imagination produced its object of desire, the nation-state. Travelers in the classical lands of the Mediterranean, who, for at least two centuries previously were searching for their own roots and identities, for paradise lost, cast their colonial gaze upon what they saw as ruins frozen in time, as remnants of the classical golden ages that were left undisturbed by humans (or so they thought), save for the occasional shepherd and his flock, to be discovered and enjoyed (and often plundered too), at leisure and in perfect isolation. National archaeology, which in contexts like Greece was formed at the interface between local and European discourses, practices, and institutions, came to spoil all that. It claimed the ruins primarily for the nation, purified them from the "remnants of barbarity," cleared them from the undergrowth, of-

ten rebuilt the temples from the scattered stones, erected a fence around them, and displayed the finds in museums, often in a fetishized and sanitized manner.

Archaeology thus expressed, helped bring about, and more importantly, materialized, a competing identity discourse: the panopticism of the national imagination,[6] as opposed to the colonial gaze of the romantic Western travelers. In that sense, the reaction of the latter, who lamented the loss of the perfect isolated ruin, is perfectly explainable. Archaeology was only one of a whole constellation of developments, one of the many collateral devices of modernity;[7] it can be seen as an exhibitionary device, along with museums, the grand World Fairs, and photography; display, spectacle and surveillance lie at their foundations. National (and neoclassical) aesthetics demanded purity and completeness,[8] hence the ritual cleansing of the remnants of barbarity from the Athenian Acropolis (from the Ottoman mosque inside the Parthenon—the specter of otherness for the European imagination—to the medieval tower in the Propylaia), in the same way that language (the modern Greek language, for instance) was purified from recent, polluting, "foreign" intrusions.[9] As the nation-state of Greece strove to produce its modernity, as the material signs of that modern life became more and more evident, both in the now reconstructed and managed ruins and elsewhere, the new wave of travelers, the tourists, closed their eyes to them: as the nineteenth-century Western photography of Greece shows[10] the neocolonial gaze preferred to see only the classical monuments (which as reconstructed ruins proved particularly photogenic, eternal, and timeless), not the signs of other historical periods and of modern daily life, especially the signs of Western modernity.

Archaeology shares with literature and poetry more than the desire to represent, to produce discourses and narratives, reflective or not, about sameness and otherness. The construction of the past out of fragmented traces, be they stones and broken pots or fragments of memories, is perhaps a key shared device here. The text with all its connotations, as materialized discourse, and as a product of "weaving," of producing something new out of scattered things, is another one. In nineteenth-century Greece, the re-collection of the past out of its material fragments was a constant preoccupation of authors, historians, and archaeologists alike;[11] it was, after all, the re-collection of the national dream.[12] In twentieth-century modernist poetry, this desire still prominent (as Jusdanis shows) acquired new meanings; after all, the national aesthetic discourse was reinventing itself, incorporating more recent ruins, such as the Byzantine ones, and reinstating the notion of unbroken continuity, producing thus an indigenous Hellenism: the raw materials of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Greek modernity included not only the ionic capital, but also the Byzantine crosses, and the edifice was decorated with modern naïf paintings such as the ones by Theophilos. Yet these constructions have become more and more diverse. Seferis, the high priest of Greek modernist poetry, the poet-as-nation (to recall one of the studies on him),[13] is tormented by the anxiety that his compatriots cannot communicate directly with the ancient stones and statues; they fail to discover the true essence of Hellenism. Cavafy on the other hand projects a nonessentialist, hybrid Hellenism, wide enough to include a multitude of Eastern Mediterranean identities;[14] and Calas, the Trotskyist, revolts against the bourgeois appropriation of classical antiquity.[15]

Finally, I would like to return to the cryptic quotation by Jameson that introduces this text. This passage, the final sentence in his recent study on modernity, does not refer to the discipline of archaeology; it simply follows the trend of theorists, from Freud to Benjamin and Foucault (not to mention countless recent writings) who have found archaeological metaphors of immense power. Yet his passage resonates with some of the previous discussion in more ways than one. My preferred reading of it here is not that far away from the author's intentions, as I understand them. He suggests that radical alternatives and transformations cannot be imagined within the conceptual field of the "modern" and of modernity, a term that he would prefer to see replaced with "capitalism"; he proposes instead the "displacement of the thematics of modernity by the desire called Utopia."[16] To return to the broken pot with which I started, there are more options available to us than passively to display the shards or the reconstructed whole; neither the colonial and the neocolonial gaze nor the sanitized sight of national aesthetics (be it archaeological, poetic, photographic, or whatever) is a satisfactory solution. The fragments of the pot with their materiality, sensory and mnemonic weight, and historical resonances, can offer multiple, imaginative, inspirational experiences, the utopian archaeologies of the future.

Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (New York: Verso, 2002), 215.

2. John Chapman, *Fragmentation in Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2000).

3. Yannis Hamilakis, "Eating the Dead: Mortuary Feasting and the Politics of Memory in Aegean Bronze Age Societies," in K. Branigan, ed., *Cemetery and Society in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 115–32.

4. See Hamilakis, "La Trahison des archéologues? Archaeological Practice as Intellectual Activity in Postmodernity," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 12, no. 1 (1999): 60–79.

5. Susan Alcock, *Archaeologies of the Greek Past: Landscapes, Monuments and Memories* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Byron Hamann, "The Social Life of Pre-Sunrise Things: Indigenous Mesoamerican Archaeology," *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 3 (2002): 351–82; Ioannis Kakridis, *The Ancient Greeks in Modern Greek Tradition* (in Greek) (Athens: MIET, 1999).

6. Cf. Yannis Hamilakis, "The 'Other Parthenon': Antiquity and National Memory at Makronisos," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 20 (2002): 307–38.

7. See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995).

8. See Vassilis Lambropoulos, "The Aesthetic Ideology of the Greek Quest for Identity," *Journal of Modern Hellenism* 4 (1984): 19–24.

9. See Hamilakis, "Monumental Visions: Bonfils, Classical Antiquity, and Nineteenth-Century Athenian Society," *History of Photography* 25, no. 1 (2001): 5–12, 23–43; Hamilakis and Eleana Yalouri, "Sacralising the Past: Cults of Archaeology in Modern Greece," *Archaeological Dialogues* 6, no. 2 (1999): 115–60.

10. See Hamilakis, "Monumental Visions."

11. See Michalis Chrysanthopoulos, "The Modernity of Ruin" (in Greek), *Molyvdokondylopelekitis* 7 (2000): 95–118.

12. See Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

13. Dimitris Dimiroulis, *The Poet as Nation: Aesthetics and Ideology in G. Seferis* (in Greek) (Athens: Plethron, 1997).

14. Cf. for an interesting comparison Marios Konstantinou, "The Cyprus of Seferis, the Helladic Gaze and the Cavafic Refusal of Submission: Towards a Critical Sociology of the Scopophilia of Modernism" (in Greek), *Theseis* 84 (2003): 13–75.

15. See Liana Giannakopoulou, "Perceptions of the Parthenon in Modern Greek Poetry," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 20 (2002): 241–72.

16. Jameson, *Singular Modernity,* 215.