

The Art of the Past: Before and After Archaeology

Ian Alden Russell

*The true picture of the past flits by.
The past can be seized only as an image
which flashes up at the instant when
it can be recognized and is never
seen again. . . . For every image of the
past that is not recognized by the present
as one of its own concerns threatens
to disappear irretrievably.*

—Walter Benjamin, “Theses on
The Philosophy of History”¹

*Conceptualism turns toward the past
just as the past darts by into the
future; it elegizes something at the same
instant that it points toward the
glimmering actualization of avant-garde
utopianism through technological progress.*

—Jeff Wall, “Marks of Indifference”²

1 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Walter Benjamin Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana Press, 1992 [1955]), 247.

2 Jeff Wall, “Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art,” in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, ed. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), 253.

Written in 1940, Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" is a critique of historicism and the perception of the past as a continuum of progress. For Benjamin, the past was a composition of images. These images are neither universal nor constant; they appear, shift, and transform in relation to contemporary concerns. Over time they are fashioned into "the past" through continually renewed effort. Sixty years after Benjamin, artist Jeff Wall, in considering the place of photography within conceptual art, revisited this relationship between the production of images and the past. For Wall, the pursuit of the past is not a backward-looking search for "time gone by." Rather, the pursued past resides in an idealized future that is composed in the present.

The rendering of “images of the past,” through new and progressively “better” technologies, is thus not an exact historical science but an interpretive process. In this way, the practice of archaeology is not simply about the past. It can be a search for renewal through the composition of images of the past.³



JEFF WALL, *Fieldwork. Excavation of the floor of a dwelling in a former Sto:lo nation village, Greenwood Island, Hope, British Columbia, August, 2003.* Anthony Graesch, Department of Anthropology, University of California at Los Angeles, working with Riley Lewis of the Sto:lo band, 2003. Transparency in lightbox. 86 7/8 x 86 7/8 in. (219.5 x 219.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

With intellectual and disciplinary roots in art history, early modern science, and antiquarianism, the field of archaeology exists within the arts, humanities, and sciences. Encountering things and experiencing places, archaeologists compose pasts from traces, residues, absences, and presences—appropriating, mixing, and inventing techniques and methods from across the academy.⁴ As a result, practitioners of archaeology are forever confronting

- 3 See Brian L. Molyneaux, ed., *The Cultural Life of Images* (London: Routledge, 1997); and Sam Smiles and Stephanie Moser, eds., *Envisioning the Past: Archaeology and the Image* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005). Molyneaux’s volume introduced a critical discussion about the ways human beings interpret archaeology and view objects that they perceive as having archaeological authority. Moser and Smiles’s volume has made it evidently clear that archaeological practice has an inherent quality of viewing and visualizing the past as a method of understanding or “envisioning” the origins of humanity. Thus, the past may be imagined, interpreted, understood, and then communicated visually in society.
- 4 Archaeological theorist Julian Thomas, for instance, argued for an inherent role in human consciousness for the “archaeological imagination.” See Julian Thomas, *Time, Culture and Identity: An Interpretative Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1996). See also Colin Renfrew, *Figuring It Out: What Are We? Where Do We Come From? The Parallel Visions of*

the epistemic tensions between the processes of observation, documentation, interpretation, and resolution of the image of the past, often propelled by technological progress. Although trained to apply scientific methods, the archaeologist interprets objects and experiences. In doing so, he or she composes images of a place and time to which we can never travel. By composing the past as utopia, archaeology's temporal ontology folds in upon itself. The past no longer lies behind, and the future no longer lies ahead. Rather, the past and the future become the result of a parallax view within the present, and archaeology becomes an ontic act of processing, interpreting, and composing time and materiality.⁵

Art and Antiquity

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a collection of professionals from diverse fields came together through a shared passion for encountering, documenting, and interpreting the past. In their leisure time, they articulated a sensibility toward the traces and residues of bygone eras evident in the world around them. Broadly described as antiquarians, they amassed extensive collections of objects, curiosities, and artifacts and produced libraries of publications recounting their experiences. The formalization of a systematic study of antiquity was based equally on the empirical study of artifacts, buildings, sites, and landscapes as it was on art-historical studies of aesthetics, form, and style.⁶ This leisure activity grew into a vocation known as antiquarianism, a specialization in the study of the things of the past.

Antiquarian pursuits were fostered in learned societies. Initially, the subject of study was the ancient world (i.e., Greece, Rome, Egypt), and professionals embarked on expeditions, employing new and emerging scientific techniques to

Artists and Archaeologists (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003); and Michael Shanks, *The Archaeological Imagination* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2012).

- 5 Parallax is defined as the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in the position of the observer that provides a new line of sight. For a philosophical treatment of the concept of parallax (from the perspective of dialectical materialism and Hegelian philosophy), see Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
- 6 The term *artifact*, now more commonly used to identify objects of archaeological discovery, was originally used to refer to any object made or modified by human workmanship, irrespective of its age.

record traces of ancient civilizations.⁷ Alongside an embrace of science and technology, antiquarians sought the means to translate and document the visual experience of these sites and even imagine what life may have been like in the past. It was common for antiquarians to sketch or paint scenes of the sites they visited, and, in some cases, artists were employed to produce drawings or etchings that could be featured in papers and monographs. The value of these “images of the past” was their mobility. Whether recorded in narrative, drawing, or painting, these images allowed for the transportation and communication of experiences and interpretations of places over distances and over time.⁸

During this time, as new land usages developed in Europe, antiquarians became increasingly concerned with the pasts of their own homelands. Paralleling the philosophical development of primitivism—the proposition that life and humanity were simpler and therefore better in earlier times—antiquarian study enjoyed a growing popularity within an emerging literate bourgeoisie interested in the pasts of their localities. Antiquarian practices started to focus on the condition of the European landscape and the antiquities embedded within it. In Ireland, artist and antiquarian George Victor Du Noyer was employed as part of the Irish Ordnance Survey to produce drawings and watercolors of sites being recorded as part of the vast cartographic endeavor.⁹

- 7 William Martin Leake, a geographer for the British military in Greece, pioneered the use of classical texts such as those by Pausanias, to interpret contemporary geography. Leake is credited as one of the earliest antiquarians to utilize advanced surveying techniques to fix the “images of the past” from these classical sources, generating more precise and quantifiable understandings of the ancient landscape. See Christopher Witmore, “On Multiple Fields: Between the Material World and Media: Two Cases from the Peloponnesus, Greece,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 11, no. 2 (2004): 133–64.
- 8 With the advent of the printed book and printmaking, the image of the past gained an additional value. Modern antiquarian studies advanced some of the earliest, extensive use of printed illustrations as part of their texts. Antiquarian texts, such as Thomas Wright’s *Louthiana* (1758), utilized abstracted schematic drawings of sites and places such as earth-built ringforts to create sets of images that could be used for comparative analysis of form and method of construction. For the first time, visualizations of structures, sites, and places separated by great distances could be compared alongside each other, and these comparisons could be printed and shared widely throughout the world through the libraries of learned societies.
- 9 For an in-depth consideration of the artistic work of George Victor Du Noyer, see Fionnuala Croke, *George Victor Du Noyer (1817–1869): Hidden Landscapes* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1995). This exhibition at the National Gallery of Ireland in 1995 marked the sesquicentennial of the Geological Survey of Ireland.

Du Noyer's drawings and watercolors formed a critical component of the survey. Similarly the so-called father of Irish archaeology, George Petrie, was both an antiquarian and a respected painter.¹⁰ He often depicted Romantic views of the Irish landscape. In addition to painting and leading the antiquities committee of the Royal Irish Academy, he contributed illustrations to many of the earliest tourist guidebooks to the Irish countryside. Images of derelict castles and dilapidated earthworks of unknown antiquity increasingly appeared in manuscripts as well as Romantic paintings. In time they would inspire a stylistic movement based on the philosophical notions of primitivism (e.g., Paul Gauguin and Henri Rousseau) and the sublime (e.g., J. M. W. Turner)—the smallness of humanity against the vast magnitude of nature, time, and the majesty of the world.

During the nineteenth century, images of the past were exploited by burgeoning nationalist political groups. These groups presented antiquarian studies as utopic images of the past to bolster support for the self-determination of emerging nation-states. For instance, representations of artifacts appeared on political membership cards. Many artisans and craftsmen replicated the ornamentation, workmanship, and style of artifacts, while collections of artifacts within learned societies gradually became the foundations for national museums. As visual and material expressions of nationalism, these artifacts provided aesthetic, stylistic, and formal conventions as well as symbolic and material languages for incipient national identities. To emergent European nation-states, ancient sites and artifacts were seen as unique and autochthonous. Academies and universities eventually saw value in investing in the formalization of the scientific study and production of the past based on these sites and artifacts. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the first academic chairs in archaeology were established in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—often within or alongside departments of art history.

The Work of the Past in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Within antiquarian studies, the image of the past was the product of an interpretive hand, often the artist's. The project of establishing a logic to the past

10 For an in-depth consideration of the artistic work of George Petrie in relation to his antiquarian pursuits, see Peter Murray, *George Petrie (1790–1866): The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past* (Cork: Crawford Municipal Art Gallery and Gandon Editions, 2004). This catalogue accompanied the 2004 exhibition *George Petrie: Artist and Antiquarian* at the Crawford Municipal Art Gallery in Cork. See also William Stokes, *The Life and Labours in Art and Archaeology of George Petrie* (London: Longmans Green, 1868).

(i.e., archaeology) required, however, more accurate images (and a corresponding belief in the possibility of accuracy). With the establishment of archaeology as a disciplinary specialization in the academy, the need arose to distinguish archaeological practice as a professional skill rather than an amateur passion. Scientific and technical drawing became a cornerstone of the archaeological skill set. Nascent archaeologists pursued progressively more accurate technologies to record and document the present condition of sites and artifacts in order to render as exact and “true” an image of the past as possible.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the advent of modern photography aligned with archaeological pursuits. The possibility of using light itself to draw (or capture) an image presented the illusion of being able to document an event as it had happened. As with previous technologies of capturing and creating images, archaeologists embraced photography to document, and thereby preserve through registration and inscription within a photographic image, the current condition of sites and artifacts. Photography also presented the discipline with the opportunity to document the act of archaeology itself. For example, American photographer and archaeologist John Henry Haynes returned from field expeditions across the Ottoman Empire with images not only of artifacts and sites but also of the practice of archaeology itself. Thus, his images conferred an authenticity to the truth claim of archaeological science through reportage.¹¹

Awe of the photographic image of archaeological science and the results of archaeological processes inspired belief in the possibility to quantify, measure, record, and analyze the traces of past human agency. Archaeology was acknowledged as the search for scientifically verifiable truth about the past that was made apparent through photographic documentation of excavated artifacts. Photography became part of the quest for documenting and registering a “real” past. It presented a progressive technological leap in the endeavor to capture and produce the image of the past, fostering an illusion that the past could be made to appear real, to appear *present*.

In the visual arts, there was a healthy critical discourse around technological advances in image production. Artists Man Ray and Raoul Hausmann used photographs to subvert “known” or “seen” reality, highlighting the illusion of the visually “real”—an illusion masked by the belief in technological progress.

11 See Robert Ousterhout, *John Henry Haynes: A Photographer and Archaeologist in the Ottoman Empire 1881–1900* (Istanbul, Turkey: Cornucopia Books, 2011).

Meanwhile, archaeological science enshrined photography within the pursuit of the image of the past and the endeavor of completing an archaeological record of the past. In response to ever-growing archives of the past, art movements such as Futurism issued manifestos violently calling for the end of past-oriented societies, looking instead to the future as a site of renewal.¹²



Portrait of the Futurist writer
Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, c. 1930.

Archaeologists and antiquarians in particular were singled out in F. T. E. Marinetti's 1909 manifesto, which sought to "deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries." For Marinetti and others, it was not the past but the future that offered true artistic renewal.

- 12** *The Futurist Manifesto*, written by F. T. E. Marinetti, appeared in *Le Figaro* (Paris) under the heading "Le Futurisme," February 20, 1909. This was a violent declaration of fear of the stagnating effect of an overly past-oriented society: "It is in Italy that we are issuing this manifesto of ruinous and incendiary violence, by which we today are founding Futurism, because we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries. Italy has been too long the great secondhand market. We want to get rid of the innumerable museums which cover it with innumerable cemeteries." This analogy between the museum (or historical artifacts more generally) and death, decay, and the absence of a soul is articulated by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and echoed by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Marinetti saw it as the charge of the Futurists to deliver Italy from this past-oriented society by using poetry as a means of moving society forward. For Marinetti, "poetry must be a violent assault on the unknown." Subsequent Futurist manifestos related to specific fields of human endeavor, for example painting (1910), music (1911), sculpture (1912), and literature (1912).

Where once art and the past were kindred endeavors, a rift grew between art and archaeological practice in the early twentieth century. The development of archaeology was not widely considered subject to the same criticisms of other disciplines relating to visual and material culture. While archaeologies of this period served to articulate and embed ethno-nationalistic narratives in the physical objects and landscapes of European nation-states, artworks such as Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) and René Magritte's *La trahison des images* (*The Treachery of Images*) (1928–29), called into question the ability of the object, image, or text to represent or convey authentic “truth.” Despite these critiques, some early twentieth-century European politicians, aided by some prehistorians, utilized archaeological artifacts to represent and bolster ethno-national identities and claims to territorial regions such as in Falangist Spain, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and National Socialist Germany.

After World War II, there was a reaction within archaeology to establish practices immune to nationalistic agendas. This did not, however, result in a deconstruction or revision of the epistemological underpinnings of archaeology's scientific method. Instead, archaeological scholarship deepened its commitment to empiricism and scientific objectivity in the discipline. Archaeologists who, before the war, had aligned themselves with German prehistorians' philological arguments for the establishment of an Aryan civilization, turned to “cultural historical” approaches to the study of the past based on scientific objectivity.¹³ This led eventually to a movement in archaeology known as “processualism”—a method and theory of practice based on the rigorous application of the scientific method and positivism. This commitment helped preserve the place of the discipline within the academy—adopting “harder” scientific methods of observation, documentation, and interpretation.¹⁴

13 For instance, Vere Gordon Childe, the bulk of whose published works before the end of World War II (including the first three editions of *The Dawn of European Civilization*) reference German prehistorian and nationalist Gustaf Kossinna's research and list his works in the bibliography. In the 1957 edition of his *Dawn of European Civilization*, however, all references to Kossinna were omitted. Notably, Childe published an entire volume on the Aryans in 1926. See Vere Gordon Childe, *The Aryans* (London: A. A. Knopf, 1926); and Vere Gordon Childe, *The Dawn of European Civilization*, 4th ed. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1947).

14 For example, within archaeology in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a conflict over methods for drawing stratigraphic sections. Sir Mortimer Wheeler advocated an analytical and abstracted style of drawing stratigraphic sections that created rigid typologies of soil deposits with clear divisions. Gerhard Bersu advocated for what was known as a “pictorial” style of stratigraphic section-drawing in which the divisions between soil types were

It also asserted archaeology's epistemic authority over the past, deepening the expectation for archaeology to reveal "truth" about the past.

Processualism attempted to make archaeology less subjective. This effort further removed archaeology and the exhibition of archaeological artifacts from engagements with critical discourses around art and visual cultural theory.¹⁵ While art objects and mass-produced replications and representations of art objects were being criticized by Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," archaeological objects and images were popularly accepted as unique and authentic sources of "truth" about the past and therefore not subject to deconstructive critiques. By the late 1980s, however, emboldened by readings of modern theory (including literary theory, hermeneutics, feminist theory, postcolonial theory, poststructuralism, phenomenology, and reflexive modernism), a self-critical awareness, often referred to as postprocessualism or interpretive archaeology, arose within the field. Practitioners undertook serious efforts to address the critical insights afforded by cognate disciplines in the arts and humanities, questioning the epistemic authority of archaeology over the past and the primacy of the scientific method for the production of the past.¹⁶

Art after Archaeology

During the early twentieth century, as the archaeological discipline grew and popular awareness of the practice increased, archaeological images of the past circulated more widely, and artists began to respond to the formal aesthetics of archaeological artifacts and ancient art. Sculptors such as Constantin Brancusi and Isamu Noguchi explored and interrogated formal aesthetics inspired by a supposed purity of form, style, and material found in ancient artifacts and architecture. During this time, the work of archaeology itself became a metaphor for modern thought. In the 1896 essay in which he first used the term *psychoanalysis*, Sigmund Freud expressed, at length, his passion and love for the

blurred so that it was not readily possible to determine where one began and the other ended. See Geoff Carver, "Doku-porn: Visualising Stratigraphy," in *Unquiet Past: Risk Society, Lived Cultural Heritage, Re-designing Reflexivity*, ed. Stephanie Koerner and Ian Russell (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 109–22.

15 Notably, there is no mention or treatment of archaeology in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972).

16 For a compelling overview of shifts in archaeological theory and practice over the last forty years, see William L. Rathje, Michael Shanks, and Christopher Witmore, eds., *Archaeology in the Making: Conversations Through a Discipline* (London: Routledge, 2012).

process of archaeological discovery.¹⁷ By 1932, in his paper titled “Constructions in Analysis,” Freud extended this passion for archaeological discovery to a fully formed metaphor of the archaeologist to explain psychoanalysis:

[The psychoanalyst’s] work of construction, or, if it is preferred, of reconstruction, resembles to a great extent an archaeologist’s excavation of some dwelling-place that has been destroyed and buried or of some ancient edifice. The two processes are in fact identical, except that the analyst works under better conditions and has more material at his command to assist him, since what he is dealing with is not something destroyed but something that is still alive . . . But just as the archaeologist builds up the walls of the building from the foundations that have remained standing, determines the number and position of the columns from depressions in the floor and reconstructs the mural decorations and paintings from the remains found in the debris, so does the analyst proceed when he draws his inferences from the fragments of memories, from the associations and from the behaviour of the subject of the analysis.¹⁸

When considered with Freud’s articulation of the stratification of the human psyche and the role of the psychoanalyst to peel back the layers of experience to reveal “fragments of memories,” his metaphorical use of archaeology speaks to what became, over the twentieth century, a master metaphor: depth.

Based on the theory and practice of stratigraphy, the depth metaphor proposed that, as in archaeological excavation, human thought, narrative, and material culture exist in layers, and the penetration of and peeling back of the contemporary layer can allow access to earlier layers of thought or deeper meanings. Influencing disciplines from philosophy to psychoanalysis to literary

17 Sigmund Freud, “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1962 [1896]): 191–221. Freud was an avid antiquarian himself, and his offices (both at Berggasse 19 in Vienna and 20 Maresfield Gardens in Hampstead, London) were decorated extensively with objects from antiquity. See Edmund Engelman, *Berggasse 19: Sigmund Freud’s Home and Offices, Vienna 1938: The Photographs of Edmund Engelman* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

18 Sigmund Freud, “Constructions in Analysis [1937],” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 23, ed. J. Strachey, (London: Hogarth Press, 1964): 257–69.

theory, the depth metaphor influenced artistic thought and practice.¹⁹ This influence was manifested literally in the archaeological excavation of Francis Bacon's studio at 7 Reece Mews in London in 1999. Archaeologists were employed by Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane to deconstruct the artist's studio, documenting every object, piece of rubbish, and scrap of paper, so that it could be shipped to Dublin and fully reconstructed by gallery curators. As a result, numerous, previously unknown source images for Bacon's paintings now exist in an archive and are exhibited simultaneously as art and artifact. The preserved studio stands today in The Hugh Lane as a testimony to the belief in the archaeological process's ability to sustain the aura of authenticity.²⁰



7 Reece Mews Francis Bacon Studio, 2001.
Collection Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.

Around the same time that archaeology formalized its positivist agenda in processualism, artists such as Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and Richard

- 19** Michel Foucault's methodological treatise *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) should be noted in particular for its formalization of his "archaeological method" of analysis used in his previous works *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*.
- 20** Archaeologist Blaze O'Connor, who participated in the reconstruction, offered a compelling, reflective account of this process. See Blaze O'Connor, "Dust and Debitage: An Archaeology of Francis Bacon's Studio" *UCD Scholarcast* (2008), <http://www.ucd.ie/scholarcast/scholarcast10.html>. For an account of the project, see Mary McGrath, "A Moving Experience," *Circa 92* (Summer 2000): 20–25. For an initial critical response, see Mick Wilson, "Canon-fodder?: Moving Bacon's Studio to Dublin: Does It Make Sense," *Circa 92* (Summer 2000): 26.

Long, in response to increasing formalization of artistic practice in the institutions of the studio and gallery, began to take their practice outside of these institutions and into the open landscape. The early steps taken by artists such as Moore and Hepworth were not directly related to archaeological practice, although some works did convey a mimetic response to the formal aesthetics of ancient standing stones in the landscape. Their work established a space within modern art for an exploration of environmental aesthetics that considered the relationship between people and the landscape, represented, for example, by Long's early works. Long's work in the mid-1960s marks the beginning of a shift from purely formal responses to archaeological aesthetics toward more reflective and critical treatments of the manifestation of traces of human agency in the world. Countering the progress- and productivity-based ontologies dominant in the West, Long's early works (especially *A Line Made by Walking* [1967]) presented a radically humble vision of human agency as fleeting and ephemeral, creating art that resisted commodification and art historical classification.²¹

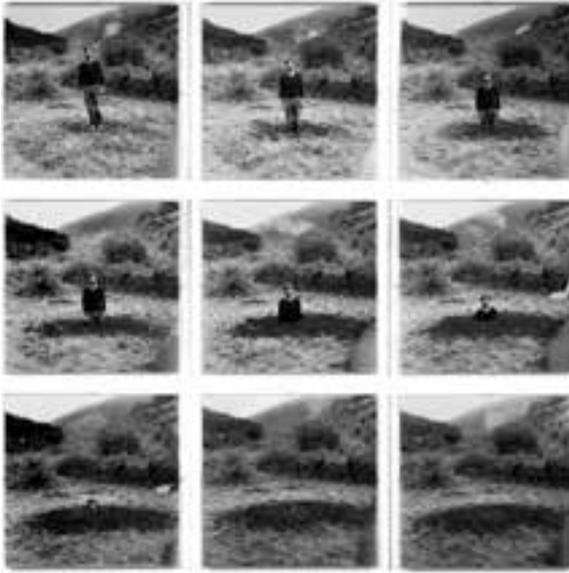
Quite opposite to Long's vision of art, large-scale land art by artists such as Robert Smithson, and later Christo and Jeanne-Claude, approached the place and duration of human agency within the landscape through spectacular demonstrations of technological and economic achievement. While not directly inspired by a specific archaeological excavation, it is difficult not to infer a possible inspiration for Smithson's large-scale land art within the interventions of large-scale archaeological excavations. Smithson's decision to place cut mirrors in various locations throughout the Yucatán (a region popularly known for its Mayan archaeological sites) in 1969 was an imposition of modern technology into the landscape for the purpose of artistic statement. His subsequent work *Spiral Jetty* (1970), while making visible the often imperceptible shifts of the environment of the Great Salt Lake, also imposes itself onto the landscape over time in a way not dissimilar to megalithic archaeological sites. It can be debated whether Smithson's intent was to emulate the temporal transcendence of archaeological sites; however, the recent calls to preserve Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* from environmental degradation perhaps point to an internal dissonance in his work.

21 It is important to note that the photographic documentation of these acts by Long, which circulate themselves as art objects, do not resist commodification or classification. Rather it is the tension between these photographs and Long's actions that constitutes a liminal space in which to consider the implications and meanings of his work. For a critical engagement with Richard Long's 1967 work, *A Line Made by Walking*, and the character of the new generation of artists contemporary with Long who explored the organic, the temporary, the nonmaterial, and the performative as means of critiquing the system of the arts, see Dieter Roelstraete, *Richard Long: A Line Made by Walking* (London: Afterall Books, 2010).



Robert Smithson building *Spiral Jetty*,
Great Salt Lake, Utah, April 1, 1970.

As a counterpoint to the *longue durée* of many traditional land art sculptures, conceptual arts movements such as Fluxus, propelled by artists such as Joseph Beuys, advocated for the resituating of artistic practice as event as opposed to object, seizing the temporal and ephemeral quality of performance. Although not expressly a response to archaeological thought or practice, the development of archaeological awareness as a mode of ecological sensibility alongside the rise of embedded performance arts practice should not go unnoted, such as in the work of artists Dieter Appelt and Keith Arnatt (especially Arnatt's *Self-Burial* [1969]). This attunement to the materiality and temporality of the world also led to concerns surrounding the systemized study and exploitation of the landscape and the social and cultural institutionalization of these processes. The title of Lanford Wilson's Obie Award-winning play *The Mound Builders* (1975), for example, references 5,000 years of prehistory in North America during which people constructed large-scale earthen mounds that persist in the landscape to this date. The play concerns an archaeological excavation in the Midwest and meditates on the relevance of archaeology to contemporary life; what constitutes a trace—artifacts or memory; and the tensions between development and conservation. Proposing an overarching moral around the futility of human achievements, the play indirectly critiques the hubristic, teleological, progress-based ethics of the modern West and, perhaps, archaeology's complicity within this project.



KEITH ARNATT *Self-Burial (Television Interference Project)*, 1969. 9 black-and-white photographs on paper, mounted on board. 18 5/8 x 18 3/8 in. (46.7 x 46.7 cm). Collection of Tate, London.

Art and Archaeology

Over the latter half of the twentieth century, archaeological productivity increased globally. An archaeological industry developed around heritage legislation in many states, which required archaeological survey (and sometimes excavations) to be undertaken before new development. A need for trained archaeologists increased, and student enrollments at university archaeology departments swelled, putting the methods and practices of archaeology in the hands of many more people. With the technique of archaeology more widely available to the public and concerns regarding the problems of modern industrial progress increasing, some artists turned away from progressive agendas, seeking renewal through an amateur approach to the past. Antony Gormley studied archaeology, anthropology, and the history of art at Trinity College, Cambridge, likely gleaning inspiration for his characteristic conceptual approaches to sculpture and the human body. Other artists such as Cornelia Parker (especially in her *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View* [1991]) incorporated overt archaeological themes in their work, such as assemblage, fragmentation, and reconstruction.²² A sensational example, Ai Weiwei received international attention for his treatment of ancient Chinese artifacts as readymades.

22 Critical thought around the process of assemblage and fragmentation owes a theoretical debt to the anthropological theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who advanced philosophical and aesthetic propositions of *bricolage*—the collecting, processing, and reworking of things one has to hand.

Some he painted, and others he destroyed as in *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995) or *Dust to Dust* (2009). Even American painter Frank Stella was inspired by ancient archaeological sites in Anatolia as part of his move from three-dimensional painting and printmaking to wall-mounted sculptural assemblages.²³ In another notable example, Mark Dion's *Tate Thames Dig* (1999), the artist himself adopted the role of archaeological director of a mass, participatory "excavation" of the Thames riverbank in London. Accompanied by the formal typological arrangement and presentation of the "finds" in antiquated exhibition vitrines, the project proposed that the epistemic structures of archaeology could form an aesthetic and that the performance of archaeology as event could constitute artwork.



MARK DION beachcombing in London, *Tate Thames Dig*, 1999.

The aesthetics and epistemic structures of archaeological practice continue to be tropes within contemporary art perhaps because archaeology remains a shared metaphor across modern thought. It could be argued that archaeology's endemic place within modern thought extends its metaphor into an allegory. Considering archaeology as allegory shifts critical engagement from rhetoric of layers, depth, and progress (as in the twentieth century) to affect, performance, and meaning-making. It might be argued that the contemporary return to the past is not a search for inspiration through the emulation of the

23 These works, such as *Can Hassan ii* (1999) were named for specific archaeological sites in contemporary Turkey.

past (as in the nineteenth century) but is a deployment of the past as a technique in itself—a search for liberation through the subaltern past as a means of resistance to and critique of the teleology of technological progress. For example, at the 2010 Frieze Art Fair in London, Simon Fujiwara realized a satirical intervention. Consisting of six installations of preserved and ongoing performative archaeological excavations, *The Frozen City* was a fabricated, metaphorical archaeology that revealed the city beneath the art fair. Relying on high-grade, professional heritage engineering (thick glass to walk over exposed “excavations”) and a large-scale set for his ongoing archaeological work at the “Roman Art Market,” Fujiwara’s installation testified to the currency of modern archaeology (and the past more generally) as a useful technique for allegorical critique within contemporary art.²⁴

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the return to the past in the arts strengthened relationships between archaeological and artistic practices. Archaeologists such as Colin Renfrew, Ruth Tringham, and Michael Shanks have endeavored to transgress the disciplinary strictures of modern archaeology, sustaining new critical, interdisciplinary work on the renewal of the past through both archaeological and artistic practices.²⁵ Responding to

24 Similarly, the recent exhibition project *Arqueológica* at Matadero Madrid, curated by Virginia Torrente, featured new commissions from artists responding directly to archaeology. The artists included were Christian Andersson, Pedro Barateiro, Mariana Castillo Deball, Mark Dion, Daniel Guzmán, Diango Hernández, Regina de Miguel, and Francisco Ruíz. Further examples of this growing allegorical appropriation include French artist Laurent Grasso’s recent exhibition in Hong Kong, *Future Archaeology* (2012); Turkish artist Sibel Horada’s accumulation, assemblage, and exhibition of extant remains of burned-out buildings in Istanbul in her exhibition *Urban Wildfire* (2012) at Daire Gallery; Belgian artist Jasper Rigole’s ongoing project *The International Institute for The Conservation, Archiving and Distribution of Other People’s Memories*; and Argentinean artist Adrian Villar Rojas’s provocative project *The Murderer of Your Heritage* (2011).

25 The first publication in postprocessual archaeology to address arts practice as a form of research in itself was Michael Shanks, *Experiencing the Past* (London: Routledge, 1991). Ten years later, the catalogue for Mark Dion’s *Tate Thames Dig* saw the involvement of one of the major archaeological figures, Colin Renfrew of Cambridge University, who was invited to write a response to Dion’s “archaeological” project. See Colin Renfrew, “It May Be Art but Is It Archaeology,” in Mark Dion et al., *Mark Dion: Archaeology* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999). A few years later, Renfrew published a memoir recounting his relationship with art and its influence on his scholarship (especially his collaborative relationship with Richard Long, teaching Antony Gormley, and as Head of Jesus College, Cambridge where he developed the college’s art collection); see Colin Renfrew, *Figuring It Out: What Are We? Where Do We Come From? The Parallel Visions of Artists and Archaeologists* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003).

the resurgence of interest in archaeological processes within contemporary arts practice, many archaeologists and museums have begun to engage artists directly through residencies and commissions to work on archaeological sites or respond to the representation of archaeological artifacts.²⁶ Collectively, there is a concerted effort to address the composition of the past—not as an end goal of technological achievement but as an ongoing effort of renewal.²⁷ Doing away with the rubric of a scientifically managed past, perhaps we may be witnessing a revival of an avant-gardist past that is not confined by disciplinary strictures or epistemic conventions, where the past is not the destination but the way.

Renfrew would go on to found a research initiative at Cambridge on the relationship between art and archaeology. The output of these arts-archaeological projects and residencies is documented in Colin Renfrew, Chris Gosden, and Elizabeth DeMarrais, *Substance, Memory, Display* (Cambridge, UK: MacDonald Institute, 2004). Meanwhile, at the University of California, Berkeley, Ruth Tringham led pioneering projects involving digital arts in the mediation of archaeological practice. See Ruth Tringham, Michael Ashley, and Steve Mills, "Senses of Places: Remediations from Text to Digital Performance," *Visual Anthropology Review* (2007): special online issue, www.academia.edu/401397/Senses_of_Places_Remediations_from_Text_to_Digital_Performance. Most recently, provocative manifestos have been issued by archaeologists within arts publications such as Michael Shanks and Alain Schnapp, "Artreality: Rethinking Art as Craft in a Knowledge Economy: A Manifesto," in *Art School: Propositions for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). Finally, there has been an equally sustained engagement between archaeology and performance arts and theater, predominantly led by Michael Shanks since the late 1990s. This can be represented in the recent volume, Nick Kaye, Gabriella Giannachi, and Michael Shanks, *Archaeologies of Presence* (London: Routledge, 2012). For a historical perspective on the possibilities of art-archaeological interdisciplinary exchange, see E. H. Gombrich, "Art and Scholarship," *College Art Journal* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1958): 342–56.

- 26** As examples, the Museum of Scotland has commissioned Eduardo Paolozzi and Andy Goldsworthy, among others; and the British Museum commissioned Grayson Perry in 2011 to produce *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, in which he exhibited his own work among artifacts of unknown authorship from the museum's collection. More recently, the British Museum's exhibition *Ice Age Art* (2013) presented Ice Age artifacts alongside modern and contemporary artworks.
- 27** I would like to pay respect to the work of Hal Foster regarding developments in art and theory since 1960. Specifically I am influenced by Foster's critical reading of the prewar and postwar avant-gardes and his proposition of a new avant-gardist moment at the end of the twentieth century. See Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

This book is published on the occasion of the exhibition *The Way of The Shovel: Art as Archaeology*, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, curated by Dieter Roelstraete in the Bergman Family Gallery at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, November 9, 2013—March 9, 2014.

Produced by the Design, Publishing, and New Media Department of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Editor

Sarah Kramer

Senior Editor

Lisa Meyerowitz

Consulting Editors

David Peak

Lauren Weinberg

Design

James Goggin

Scott Reinhard

Manager of Rights and Images

Christia Blankenship

Rights and Images Assistant

Katie Levi

Printed and bound in
the United States by Shapco

ISBN 978-0-226094-12-0

Museum of Contemporary
Art Chicago
220 East Chicago Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611
mchicago.org

Copublished and distributed by
The University of
Chicago Press
1427 East 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
www.press.uchicago.edu
773.702.7700

© 2013 by Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, in association with the University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopy, recording, or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Individual works of art appearing in this catalogue may be protected by copyright in the United States of America or elsewhere, and may not be reproduced in any form without the permission of the copyright holders (see p. 326).

Library of Congress

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

— First [edition].
pages cm.—(MCA Monographs)

This book is published on the occasion of the exhibition *The Way of the Shovel*, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, curated by Dieter Roelstraete, and presented in the Bergman Family Gallery at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, November 9, 2013—March 9, 2014.

Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-226094-12-0
(alk. paper)

Cover:

Jean-Luc Moulène

Orant from *Le Monde, Le Louvre*, 2005
Silver dye-bleach print under Diasec.
Proofs ©Jean-Luc Moulène / ADAGP.
Courtesy of the artist and
Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.

COLOPHON

Production

Printed by The Avery Group at Shapco Printing, Inc., Minneapolis.

Materials

Front and back sections printed on 55 lb Glatfelter Natural Antique Text. Plate section printed on 100 lb Sterling Premium Gloss Text. Front cover wrap printed on 80 lb CIS Litho. Buckram cloth (the last remaining supplies of PS4885 Olive Green in North America) wraps the back, spine, and part of the face of the book. White foil stamped onto spine, face, and back.

Binding

Cold-glued, Smyth-sewn with flexibind cover (60pt. boards).

End papers

Based on rock stratigraphy from J. Harlen Breitz, *Geology of the Chicago Region, Part II: The Pleistocene* (Urbana: State of Illinois, 1955).

Endpaper photo

MCA Groundbreaking Ceremony, November 30, 1993. This image is included in Pamela Bannos's *Shifting Grounds: Block 21 and Chicago's MCA*, see p. 50.

Spine

Drawing of Mark Dion's shovel by Mark Dion.

Typography

Big Caslon is a revival of an 18th century typeface, designed in 1994 by Matthew Carter based on the previously undigitized three largest metal type sizes from the H. W. Caslon & Sons foundry.

Cooper Old Style was designed in Chicago by Oswald Cooper in 1918.

Elementa was designed by Mindaugas Strockis between 1998–2002.

Franklin Gothic Condensed was designed by Morris Fuller Benton in 1906.

Johnston was designed by Edward Johnston and introduced in 1916 for the Underground Electric Railways Company of London.

Lacrima was designed in 2010 by Alexander Meyer. It is a revival of the typeface Light Italic, designed for the IBM Selectric typewriter.

NEWBERRY DETTERER WAS DESIGNED IN 1934 BY ERNST F. DETTERER AS A BINDERY TYPE FOR THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY IN CHICAGO. IT WAS DIGITIZED IN 2013 BY JAMES GOGGIN FOR THIS PUBLICATION. THE FONT—IN ITS DIGITAL FORM—WILL BE GIFTED TO THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY IN RECOGNITION OF PAUL GEHL, GEORGE AMOS POOLE II CURATOR OF RARE BOOKS AND CUSTODIAN OF THE JOHN M. WING FOUNDATION ON THE HISTORY OF PRINTING, AND HIS COLLEAGUES, IN GRATITUDE FOR THEIR PATIENCE AND INSPIRATION.

Römisch is a historic hot metal face that was traditionally used for German cartographic map production.

Strayhorn was designed in 1995 by English lettering artist and type designer Michael Harvey.



Archaeology is the study of human activity in the past, primarily through the recovery and analysis of the material culture and environmental data that they have left behind, which includes artifacts, architecture, biofacts (also known as eco-facts) and cultural landscapes (the archaeological record). The development of the field of archaeology has its roots with history and with those who were interested in the past, such as kings and queens who wanted to show past glories of their respective nations