



Theoretical Archaeology Seminars in Athens

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ETHNOGRAPHIES OF ABSENCE

Archaeology, in both theory and practice, constantly encounters absence; the absence of people who once lived at a site, the absence of finds and evidence, the fragmentary nature of archaeological “things”, etc. Perhaps absence is the ontological prerequisite for any attempt at doing archaeology. Or, to reverse the statement, archaeology itself is a human discursive strategy that addresses absence as the ontological basis of history and human time. Modern approaches to time have seen the temporal progress as the process of ruination, and thus archaeology develops accordingly as a technique of dealing with the ever-increasing accumulation of ruins. But the ruin itself, precisely what remains from a long-lost unity, it is formulated through absence.

Absence is not only the subject matter as one may say of archaeology, but it is also one of the ways it manifests: on the one hand, absence of material evidence of the past is as important as their presence in ranging archaeological sites in a hierarchical scale of importance within a nation state, such as Greece, with the highly iconic sites, the Parthenon for example, near the top, and less visible ones, such as peak sanctuaries, near the bottom. The seasonal nature of archaeological work in general, as well as the intermittent activity of state archaeological services, makes for a peculiar social relationship, whereby archaeology (either a discipline or as official body) is mostly experienced through its absence.

When one comes to ethnographically study the archaeological process, one constantly encounters absences on many levels. Both the absence of material, various strategies that develop around that void, and absence as the perceived distance of archaeology and public are both subject matters that are brought to the fore in an ethnographic study of places with material remains of the past.

This session of TASA led by **Dr Aris Anagnostopoulos** (*University of Kent*) aims to explore two areas:

Firstly to become itself a focus group that exchanges experiences, somatic and discursive strategies of dealing with absence. To this end, participants are invited to contribute their experiences, thoughts, emotions and sensations as examples for discussion and theorization.

Secondly, this seminar wishes to discuss:

- How is absence encountered? How is it explained in research reports? What sense does it make? What strategies are developed to fill in the voids of absence in practice and in theory?
- How do archaeologists explain absence to interested publics? How are these absences treated by the public (suspicion, complacency, indifference)? What role does this absence play in the relations between archaeology and the public?
- What can recent theoretical developments in social anthropology and the humanities tell us about this absence, especially as regards the epistemological status of archaeology?

The seminar will take place at **7pm on Thursday March 28th 2013** at the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies (IIHSA) at 51a Odos Notara, Exarcheia Athens.

Numbers are limited to 15, please RSVP by email (irishinstitute@hol.gr) to book a place and request the reading