THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION



My book, *The Archaeological Imagination*, long in gestation, will soon be out from Mitch Allen's *Left Coast Press* – [Link]



This week in Götegorg, I have been sharing some of its stories.

Set in the borders between England and Scotland, I explore the roots of so many of our contemporary attitudes towards the past. The book is, in many ways, an account of the genealogy of our contemporary heritage industry, focused upon the legacy of the past in the present, the value of the past, the way that (remains of the) past play such an active role in helping establish who we are.

And a key reference point is the life and work of Walter Scott – antiquarian and inventor of the historical novel.



Here is the framing for my talks in Göteborg:

Propositions

- the (long) 18th century saw the negotiation of new dynamic (modern/modernist) relationships between past and present – the crystallization of the antiquarian

imagination

- at the core lies the representation of the past in a political sense – who and what stands for the past now and how, reconciling claims and interests, past and present
- archaeology, the discipline, emerged as a narrow formalization of certain aspects of the antiquarian imagination, particularly in aiming to produce historiography – accounts of what happened in the past, instead, more broadly, receptions of pasts in the present
- the contemporary heritage industry subsumes archaeology and represents a (potential) revitalization of the antiquarian imagination
- academic archaeology is thus a *deviation* from the evolution of an antiquarian way of working on the past.

Michael Shanks expands the perception of archaeology to include its penetrating role in modern society. In doing so he also proposes to expand its theoretical repretoire to deal with this new “imagined territory” by taking us back to the historical origins of archaeological thinking. It is a fascinating intellectual journey that will not leave you untouched.

Kristian Kristiansen
University of Gothenburg

Michael Shanks, with all his wit, charm and smarts, shows us how the world of contemporary object studies – art history, archaeology and anthropology – is the living heir to the long thought dead antiquarian tradition. With this Copernican Revolution many old

warhorse categories fall away and new ways of thinking materiality come into clear focus.

Peter N. Miller
Dean, Bard Graduate Center:
Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture

This important book provides a much-needed critical perspective revealing the intellectual, historical and practical depths of archaeology’s embedded role within cultural production. Presenting archaeology as creative practice, Shanks frees the archaeological sensibility from its dependence on positivistic science to enjoy the riches of transdisciplinary creativity which it never should be denied. The Archaeological Imagination is a long overdue and potent source of inspiration for practitioners across the humanities, sciences and visual and material arts, reminding us that the past as narrative and image is a precious resource, but one that is renewable through well-intentioned, reflexive acts of creative mediation.

Ian Alden Russell
Curator | David Winton Bell Gallery | List Art Center | Brown University