Restoring ruins: Archaeological creationism

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Creationism: the belief that the universe and living organisms originate from specific acts of divine creation, as in the biblical account, rather than by natural processes such as evolution (Oxford Dictionaries 2013).

Long ago, when the world was still largely covered in soil, men began to excavate. Ruins had already been known for many centuries and were written about and venerated by theologians and intellectuals as symbols for the transient and perishable nature of earthly kingdoms versus God’s eternity, as glimpses in stone of glorious pasts. They were romantically reflected upon, frequently portrayed in paintings, lamented in poetry (Cnattingius & Cnattingius 2007; Macaulay 1953; for an illustrative insight see Goethe 1986). Yet chaos prevailed, caused by debates concerned with the larger structures and the circumference of the world. The awareness of the lingering, white spots of Earth, Heaven and the universe were irritating. It led to various actions, among which was the anchoring of history to its rightful building material. The excavator employed for the undertaking was typically entitled ‘explorer’ and was equipped with, among other things, a ship, clumsy instruments, weapons, cooks and one or two translators. He sailed to distant lands guided by a holy map and was later greatly heralded, or sometimes killed while on a mission. The chosen ruins were laboriously approached, usually by habit of digging tunnels into hills covered in shrub vegetation and sometimes defended by Bedouins. Crawling through the tunnels, the adventurous lot could pass the debris and cut out key remains of monumental character that were then taken back home, one by one. The purpose of the efforts was a matter of

Förbryllande skog
där Gud bor utan pengar.
Murarna lyste.

– Tranströmer, Den stora gäтан (2004: 57)
faith: to display and combine the massive blocks in ways that could finally prove the existence of what threatened to become mere legends; the divine creation and premiere events of the world, long confirmed in Scriptural letters. Great cities from the dawn of mankind, palaces and kings, splendour and evil destruction thus became materially verified. An unbelievable undertaking, which can be affirmed by a few, disintegrating sources. Remains of the era can still be found today, mainly in bronze or a variety of stone and located in old museums. Mythical names of its heroes re-appear in books: Paulo Emilio Botta, Austen Henry Layard, George Smith, and many others (e.g. Trolle Larsen 1996; Stiebing 1993).

Creation in chaos/axiomatic creation

However, the tunnels in the distant lands were dug further out. They curved and winded and began to expose features which were not looked for. Dangerously, they also started to undermine the disregarded ruins above. Cracks appeared that needed to be taken seriously. At first, beams were propped up. The supports were insufficient though, and the story of creation began to stretch uncontrollably in all directions. Bewildering times seem to have followed, as indicated by the various fates of the explorers and surviving books of contradictory content (e.g. Oppert 1859-1863; Place & Thomas 1867). Men stumbled on and cursed their predecessors’ relics; men gave in, or even lied. Doubt quickly grew, war broke out, and vegetation took hold until a belief in science finally gained (the) ground and radically steered a change of history in accordance with material conditions. Manifested through a growing, solemn sense – archaeology – cooks and translators were dismissed, instruments refined and weaponry reduced in size. To avoid suffocation, and perhaps out of loneliness, the archaeologist – no longer an explorer on the move – began to dig vertical shafts, trenches that effectively connected the tunnels with the surface. Now able to breathe and communicate, yet isolated in the depths, the excavating scientist took to writing voluminous reports that had the capacity to include everything. Such a wild effort predictably required a different kind of language, not primarily designed for retrieving history but to extend it infinitely.

From selected reading of the reports, I have sensed the greatness of the period. Three intermixed axioms can be distinguished: the first one I will modestly call expansion, since the ancient cities and kingdoms have since amplified significantly. The second one I will name order. Wildness was and, until recently, has been grandly approached in different climates and times, by all sorts of outfit, and full-scale removal has been achieved: the cutting of age-old forests in Cambodia, India and Peru; the laying bare of Troy; the complete clearance of Biskupin from mud. The ruins, disclosed, have been linked horizontally and vertically until scientific logic has been obtained. Faith in the order of history has guided the work and, so, the profound complexity of the legendary Machu Picchu, the engineering wonders of urban Mohenjo-daro, and the riddles of Minoan drainage pipes have been accurately handled, as has the cosmic layout of Angkor Wat and the unfathomable age of Maltese temples to name a few of today’s not so shrouded enigmas (e.g. Bingham 1951; Evans 1936; Evans 1959; Groslier & Arthaud 1957; Lahiri 2006; Ludwig 1952; Marshall 1931; Rajewski 1959; Wheeler 1968).
Soon after the takeover, an unexpected stability of the shafts further established itself, allowing the archaeologist to descend into unending depths. The past could be safely projected further backwards. When chronologies were added, history gained speed. The succession of cities and the seemingly increasing ornateness of things is by now factual, unquestionable, and rendered intelligible through the modelling of innate series of construction and desolation, settling and migration, trade and terminal blockage; the irrevocable oscillation between life and death, archaeologically enfolded and passed from one generation to the next in underground classrooms. It was a time of reconstruction and distillation, the clearance of mankind from incoherent jungle. History became monumental and is – paradoxically – in need of constant explanation ever since. Its monuments, magnificent and curiously native, bear witness to the splendour.

**Case of clarification**

A city in India, a long time in ruins, is illustrative of what I have recounted above. It is in Karnataka, and known by the name of Vijayanagara. Following the clearance of bushes and cactuses, the filling of gaps in stone walls, and the removal of fallen blocks amidst foreign forest, it was declared immense. The place is spectacular; steep, craggy ridges and hills, rocky outcroppings, giant boulders in heaps or balancing on top of each other, with caves underneath and secret chambers visited by poisonous snakes. The structural remains – the still-standing fortifications, gateways, towers and temples – were found equaling the surroundings, raised in-between and of similar, insurmountable constitution (Fig. 1).

Historians and architects, anthropologists and archaeologists have arrived in waves since the discovery. They have written lengthy reports, researched crumbled buildings and restored the order of palaces and courtyards, the succession of kings and the orientation of thoroughfares (e.g. Dallapiccola 2003; Fritz 1986; Fritz & Michell 2001; Fritz, Michell & Nagaraja Rao 1984; Frobenius 2011 [1930]; Longhurst 1981[1917]; Sewell 2006 [1900]; Stein 1989; Venkata Ratnam 1972; Verghese 2000). They have translated contemporary books filled with awe, local chronicles, the meaning of broken statues. The city, as it seems, was one of contradictory but functional content. It was sacred, courteous, and wealthy; styled and filled with soldiers temporarily not at war; the centre of a glorified kingdom, a look-out of rank; influential, influenced, eyed from afar and subsequently sacked by violent armies; burnt down and hastily abandoned, only surviving in memory. Its grandeur lasted for about 200 years, its ruined state for more than 400; chronologies are sound, reliable and often re-examined. Accordingly veiled in the history of scholars of different origin, the ruins have in fact and imperceptibly shifted in composure. The tale is symptomatic, and therefore an appropriate example. Epitomized from various, successively interlinked angles, multiplied and made indigenous – and yet, here and there in the rock it is scratched with shadowy, inexplicable patterns.

**Critical creation, critiqued**

During the period of excavation referred to, some things which were not spoken of also changed, while others did not change at all. This I typify as the third axiom, but I consider it more difficult to
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label; it has something to do with presumptions beforehand. Admittedly, a priori assumptions of the outline of history was radically rejected from the very beginning; a powerful reaction to previous, fanciful beliefs, materialized through daring approaches into unknown continents and civilizations of utmost complexity. However, the habit of grouping findings in series and the continuous discovery of time, in chronological succession, appears to have been less spoken about. In the name of science, such acting must understandably have seemed and become rather natural, that is, in accordance with (expected) order. Consequently, and despite the removal of dense vegetation at re-discovered sites, at first sight it would appear as if a merging took place, where past, human discourses were eventually overlaid with the decrees of nature – always superior, outwitting any forlorn illusions about divine steering. Thinking again though, I have deduced that the conducted restoration of ruins, brick by brick and by reinstating functional arches, steadily manifests the destruction of nature by man, the ultimate designer. The past world then, visibly humanly created, must therefore still have been perceived – per definition, and in a particular sense – as preexisting and predestined; conceivable, religion-like and finite, in all eternity. The

Fig. 1. *The Tiruvengalanatha or Achyutaraya’s temple surrounded by rocky hills, Vijayanagara. Photo: Elke Rogersdotter.*
sole condition for such a world to come into existence would be its time-consuming unveiling and re-establishment, accomplished by the archaeologist in trenches. Not explicitly articulated, and very much converted, a story of creation would accordingly cling to the scholarly advance; one that, in conclusion, cannot be violently torn.

These are not entirely my own formulated thoughts; far from it. I recapitulate things and model them into a particular form. Voices have recurrently been heard from the depths of the shafts, the latter, for the sake of ventilation, to always remain in contact with the surface in one way or other. Other introspective readers with soil on their hands, long before me and with greater wisdom, have written with concern about the axioms that I have outlined. Whether they actually can be seen as partakers in the era of magnitude just described (signifying a fourth axiom, in response to the uncovered complexities), or more or less have succeeded it, I cannot really tell from my particular, geographical location. Regardless, numerous features of the grand approaches have been brought into serious discussion. Inadequacies have been found and patched with different kinds of repairing suggestions. Truly, one of the debated topics has been the greatness of scale (in geographical, historical and mental expansionist senses). A frequently noted problem has concerned the habit of scrupulous clearance, and the construction of air shafts that cut through layers of ruins and split the past into parts; vertical reservoirs of emptiness, I would say. For, as has been argued, with the soil and the scattered miscellanies accordingly shovelled away are also thrown away numerous hidden ruins of a much smaller size than anyone can think of – really only fragments, enrichments of what was monumental, but nevertheless details that could have further cemented or even contested grand ideas regarding the latter, or could have connected particular building blocks with other, civic constructions. As scholars have repeatedly complained, the loss is irretrievable. Once cleared, the still-standing remains of the past – stony structures or axes of flint – are stripped of their historical context and, so, at risk of becoming as isolated as the archaeologist, leading the task of linking history astray. The removal of such key debris may also, as others have maintained, limit the possibilities of archaeological extension, or simplify one's apprehension of particular past humans' environmental sense and logistics. The sources of concern and solution are plentiful; one needs to be content with a few (e.g. Chapman & Gaydarska 2007; Dales 1968; Dincauze 2000; Harris 1989 [1979]; Hodder 2000; Ratnagar 2004; Stein 2005).

In documents such as these, the role of the micro-material has been especially highlighted, and made distinct through the use of various, diminutive forms of terminology: the small-sized, the mundane, the ordinary, the everyday-like, the plain, the amusing, and so on (in order to stipulate a contrast). The importance of the pure but contaminated soil has also been stressed, and ways of retrieving the barely visible features piously outlined. One of the various, suggested methods is to sift everything. Another way out is to contextualize; to situate within a functional or multi-vocal space what would otherwise have been left alone and glorified. A third method is to comprehend whole packages of debris, complete with soil and larvae, chips and
sticks and all kinds of trace elements, as containers of unending information – a matrix, as some advocates would have it. Enthusiasts have gone even further. Since, by applying these methods, what is humanly constructed has become more or less inseparable from primary produce, it has been thought that a hitherto bypassed intimacy between ruins and milieu has finally been detectable. That in turn, by extreme deduction, has been seen as a possible, contributing way to a long strived for bridging of fundamental, binary schemes, collectively known as the culture/nature divide. Although apprehended as unavoidably arising when one attempts to connect history, the divide has also been regarded as a consequence of an unbalanced, awkward model of thinking created by previous scholars; a fissure that has affected many grand ambitions of the past. From a broadened view, it is usually taken to represent a severe, hitherto not much spoken of, split in the very spine of science, so tenacious and differently labelled in different surroundings (for example termed the present/the past, or we/the Others, which among others may refer to the archaeologist versus the humans of the past, or, as for the latter, the scholarly writer versus the future readers of reports).

Yet, when taken together, the suggested pursuits seem to have ended in a problem, which is clear from their sprawling content. The problem appears to concern a fundamental maxim: that the material position is central, but ambivalent. Today, it is admittedly held by some that the state of things is one of incessant fragmentation, irrespective of what type of remain, what depth or what archaeological phase of writing one is focused upon. Although most encounters with the past are probably affected, it is particularly the case for those made through the medium of soil (or so it is believed). It is accepted as an inbuilt feature, certainly intimidating, but so natural in constitution, so needless to pronounce. Yet that particular composition (the all-affecting instability of work and it not being uttered), seems to have actually, and absurdly, led to an almost exaggerated belief in the capacity of archaeology’s intervention. By strengthened habits of clearance and disclosure, by defining ruins in a more comprehensible language, and by more efficient reduction of unfitting parts, remains have been made to look stable, have been trusted and erased alike in ingenuous, material fidelity. It has rendered an intelligible past, completely linked and inhabited by human beings of equally stable form (the thoughts are borrowed from Gero 2007; they appear to have been only articulated by a few). The remaining, solid environment, while made noble and sublime, has consequently continued to be but listened to as an echo of the habits of men. Recurrently turned into a mirror of human behaviours, it continues to be at risk of being deprived of its own biography and specific involvement in history, in ways that some scholars have already repeatedly pointed out. Polished, and in lack of a past – its prolonged, post-abandonment time that preceded its formation into a ruin (Seymour & Schiffer 1987), as well as in lack of a future – its post-depositional history of formation, when it is embedded in soil or overgrown, and after the moment when it is finally discovered (Kristiansen 1985). Inevitably then, and silenced, it continues to accompany the lords of creation.
The situation of relics and ruins and disparate solutions seems contradictory. How does one properly acknowledge stone of ancient origin? The matter is indeed indecisive. According to the above reasoning, even the smallest possible fragment would be hopelessly permeated by instability and disintegration, regardless of how much one might sift the soil. Hence, when similarly re-instating such fragments, connecting them within distanced blocks of history, they would turn up as cleaned and regulated as the monuments they are supposed to contest; as much entrapped in the grand history, as much engaged in the closing in of the past. The logic and fulfilment strived for during the great era of expansion would be reproduced, only in micro-scale and by using an explicitly positioned terminology. Thus, while sifting and contextualization would certainly enrich or counterflow a specific, previously exposed history, it seems doubtful whether it would as strongly traverse the present order of that history. The supposed bridging of humanly constructed history and nature (or of the archaeologist and the rest) would appear naïve since the latter, nature, would always be encapsulated in the former. To complicate what is already incomprehensible, I may elaborate this line of thinking based on older reasoning (Simmel 1999 [1918]): as remembered, the human history is set at a progressive speed, conceived of as in a process of continuous formation with time. Nature, on the other hand, is but supportive; a stabilized and locked content removed from time. However, since the latter, in reverse, is reluctantly perceived of as localized and imperfect, in inevitable fragmentation, it would itself appear in an unremitting course of formation, by use of the former’s fixed and immovable content. It is a question about interplay; always one transformed into the other. The abutments adopted for the joining of an envisioned abyss would accordingly be illusory, as equally asymmetrical as the original polemic constellation, and fully superfluous; a silent story of suppression, the more applied, the more horribly effected (it is found alluded to elsewhere in science; e.g. Buber 2010 [1923]; Irigaray e.g. in Rawes 2007; Riggins 1994; Rogersdotter 2011). Clearly, then, one is at a loss what to do or tempted to ask: is resurrection and reformation really that essential? That, however, would be to put meaning and purpose in serious doubt; a blasphemy against a disguised belief that the past is (re)moulded from specific acts of archaeological intervention, rather than by natural processes such as time, memory and decay.

Case of clarification

I will provide an example, again from Vijayanagara, to illuminate my thoughts. As elsewhere, features of forgotten or elementary appearance (or considered so, in relation to the grandeur) have variously been in focus, and have placed the grandiosity in more multifaceted light, or broken the city into further pieces. They include such themes as multivariate analysis of pottery remains (Sinopoli 1993); explorations of the environmental setting and larger regions of the city (Morrison 2011; Sinopoli & Morrison 2007); studies of the city’s sacred aspects (like its function as a pilgrimage centre; Mack 2010), and the city’s political dimensions, among them the process of ‘Islamicization’ (Wagoner 1996), as well as the use and manipulation of memory (Sinopoli 2003). One example that fits
the assemblage, of proper diminutive size and not extensively written about, constitutes the remains of gaming in the form of game boards, engraved in rock and stone (Fritz & Gibson 2007; Rogersdotter 2010; Sadanandan 1963; Smith 1999; Vasantha 2003). They are made of lines or pits and exhibit a multitude of types. Some of the types are used in games played today in the state of Karnataka. The names of these suggest history, variation, poetry to a foreign ear: Paggada ata/ Sett ata; Huli kavilemane ata; Ane-nayi ata; Huli-kuri ata; Thabla ata; Pagade ata; Cenne mane ata/Aluguli mane ata/Karu baruwa ata/Buleperga, the last of which appearing in many versions; Jodu perga, Thara thimbata, Hegge thimbata, Seenya mukhya, Sithata, and so on. The first one, Paggada ata, is played on a board that consists of three squares, one within the other, with four horizontally crossing lines at each side that stop at the innermost square (Fig. 2); the second one is played on a board with a 4 x 4 grid pattern forming four squares, each diagonally crossed, while triangular additions, crossed horizontally and vertically, are seen on each side of the board (Fig. 3); the third and fourth are using triangular boards crossed vertically, and horizontally with lines forming rectangles that extend on both sides of the triangle; the fifth is played on an oblong board with a 3 x 12 grid pattern; the sixth on a cruciform board where each arm consists of 3 x 7 squares; the eighth is played on a board that has 2 x 7 holes (Fig. 4) (Kulirani & Vijayendra 2011). All these forms, and many variations of them, can be found in the city as well as other types involving single-tracks of squares or pits in meandering shape (Fig. 5), or circles or pits formed in quadrangles, or pentagrams, or a variety of grid patterns (8 x 8, 4 x 4, 2 x 2...). In principle, the boards are found engraved in every corner of the city (the core of the city, which is 25 square kilometres in size); in temples and in shrines, in gateways, doorways and passages, on steps and parts of pavements, close to fortifying walls, on what remains of palaces or halls, on boulders and, occasionally, in caves. They are found either alone or in concentrations, the latter
generally more or less without spatial structure; far too close in internal character, or interfering in appearance. Some locations are protected from wind, sun or visibility; others seem odd. The age of the boards can only be approximated, their authors are largely unknown. Such diversity in form, and the strangely lateral resemblance, is naturally overwhelming and shows few signs of patterns to detect. The boards do not conform to established city zones, do not follow function or historical succession, and in fact repeatedly seem to be in somebody’s way – perhaps a distraction and disturbance for ancient vehicles and troops, or for scholarly reports commenting on war and royal manifestations.

However, through proper archaeology, they can be somewhat clarified. Firstly, one can choose the use of common, internationally recognized language to typify the boards. Instead of *Paggada ata*, for example, one can apply the term Merels board; instead of *Huli kavilemane ata*, say Alquerque board; instead of *Cenne mane ata*, adopt the name Mancala board (which may still ring foreign to a few!). Secondly, one can sort the boards according to established groups of games, long known to scholars of the subject. The groups are very old, and associated with a once undertaken, grand sorting of the totality of games in the world (an assiduous effort; Murray 1952). There are five in number: games of Alignment and configuration; Hunt-games; Mancala games; Race-games; and War-games. They diverge in ways of moving and in capturing, are military and manoeuvre-like in fashion, and incoherent when considered as a whole (the latter quality has led to accusations and critical revisions; e.g. Bell 1979; Mohan Datta 1999; de Voogt 1995). It is convenient, albeit not
fully accurate, to apply them to the case of Vijayanagara. The group termed Alignment and configuration would for example encompass all remains of Paggada ata found within the city; Hunt games would include all the boards depicting Huli kavilemane ata; Mancala games are all the kinds of Cenne mane ata; Race games comprise the boards of a meandering layout (there are also board types that would be possible to sort as War-games, and boards that would correspond to more than one of the groups depending on what game(s) were played on them; since the categories can engulf any outline in the world, each of them could in reverse include further types as well). A third step towards recognition is to use contextualization. The boards of each category of ruined buildings can be accurately quoted. The numbers of the boards and size of concentrations can then be studied in close affinity to the variety of structures (and thereby the various, interpreted functions). When observed in such a fashion, they are significantly different in accordance with the city’s separated parts of royal, military, sacred, common, or other character. Thereafter, logical reasoning can be applied. Many boards appear in temples. Their number is significant; most of them are located among columns in the halls that flank the sanctum, or in entrances to the north and south. Other boards are located in the gateways, or on top of boulders. The functions of the city as a sacred site and a military stronghold can be appropriated here for some primary deductions. The columned coolness of the temples may presumably have tempted many pilgrims (or any visitors, perhaps even after abandonment) to rest, indulge in contemplation, and play a variety of games. The range of boards in temple entries, and in gateways, may presumably in turn be linked to soldiers keeping guard; groups of men who played to bide their time, not unlike what is known from habits of the present. So far, none of this may be too far-fetched. Indistinctiveness can hence be somewhat torn, and a further bit of history within the city walls restored. The fragmented matter, then, raised to a mundane level, must not really be so affectedly in our way; rather more appear as a sort of curiosity, to be laughed at inside the serious buildings (have not men of Earth always felt delight in gaming?).

The reverse of this disclosure though, is similarly clear. The attempt to emphasize that which is small-sized is subsequently shifted, in favour of a sweeping patterning of space to establish further, identifying features of the city. The game boards, grouped and understood, are made to fit without a claim, historically unimportant amidst the civic functions. In fact, they cannot be counted fully, but that is overlooked. They cannot be viewed from a distance because of their distinctive camouflage, and may not be pushed from the course of time since they have never been in time. When so reduced and dissociated, hierarchy will follow with anarchy below. When linked to visitors of temples, or suggested as the remains of soldiers – ideas which are not at all illogical – the boards will inevitably be rated secondary. For, those visitors who played would not have played unless they primarily paid attention to the temples, and soldiers would first and foremost have been employed for war and used for keeping watch. I could have stopped in my clarification, and asked a thoughtful question: how can someone play, who is simultaneously on guard? But I did not ask, and did not need to answer.
**Ruined creation**

However, there are other, undisclosed reports, which I discovered much later, and which have obviously been written in-between the lines of the official ones. They are largely based on existential- and ruin literature, and address the same, complicated question, but without providing real solutions and with little sign of fear. They seem to have not been published, yet may distantly be known to those who speak their language. I studied one of these not long ago, in some library up north. I read, and found quotations from a text on ruins written almost a hundred years ago. Obviously, it gave some clues to the mystery of matter, and is therefore worth retelling. It holds that in the building, when it is constructed, nature is the primary produce, and the human drive the builder. It constitutes a form in balance, where two forces are at rest, and where what is humanly constructed has control. The ruin, then, is the disintegration of that form; the dismantling of its closure and the setting free of those two forces which then split in different directions. These will never halt but move continuously away, never again to obtain equilibrium and, so, forming a new entity which is the ruin. The ruin, therefore, is not only made from human drive and human ends, but is a balance of distanced antitheses; tangible and spiritual, visible and not foreseen. The entity is a world in obvious reverse, not solely because the former building is now a primary produce for nature, the new constructor, but also since it implies something that is not intended – and from the point of view of nature now conceivable – which will therefore also subsist and never come to end; something “/.../Unabschließbares, Formloses, jeden Rahmen Sprengendes” (Simmel 2008 [1919]: 39). This is also why one perceives the ruin as peacefully arranged and in order with its environment, while the building, on the other hand, originates from a completely different, not from nature granted order. When the building is in ruins, its protruding accent has been merged into a unit of belonging (Simmel 2008 [1919]).

Based on this reasoning, the report contemplates that when renovating ruins, they would be violated and robbed of their material (natural) dimension. When reconceiving order, it would be a falsified belief, engendered by the ruin and hence ostensibly natural in appearance. In reality, it would be but a removal of an order of belonging. When thinking of a fusion, it would only be a forcing into form, initiated at the sacrifice of nature. It is the problem of creation, as the report finally concludes: the modelling of ruins into monuments of archaeology. The ruins so approached would primarily emerge as symbols that are to be decoded. But science is a coded language, the perfect form of which was developed long ago, in tunnels that became converted into shafts.

Regardless of their size or state of fragmentation, the ruins cannot, then, continue to exist. Once their gaps are filled, they are but hollowed out and weakened. In my own example, the game boards, counted up, seem to meet a comparable fate. Involved in ancient city life, by law of higher order, they become restrictive and predictable, for they are but dead material. However, games cannot complete a universe. It is a sentence which I found in the report, coincidentally, from which I have inferred that the boards in my specific case cannot have solely emerged to
fulfil a range of human ends of a future and finite character (which is obviously what one believes when endeavouring to make sense of them as functional participants of the city). The sentence is derived from yet another, unexpected source (Carse 2012 [1986]), which has been used in the report; one which seems to breathe of life and is applicable to my own example. It provides some thoughts of game-like structures and arrangements. It says that while a certain game (like a game of chess) can be finite in character, which means that it is played for one or more, specific purposes (e.g. the purpose of winning), and that it accordingly will ultimately end, the game will likewise need to be infinite in character when being played, or it would stop, since infinite games hold the purpose of continuing play. That is their sole drive, and they will therefore never end. In consequence, finite games, with purposes beyond themselves, must always have infinite dimensions in order not to be extinguished. The infinite game can be silenced or be threatened by its own finite rules, and the infinite/finite game can similarly be threatened by the surrounding games of reality, which are of finite character. The infinite game can hence be interrupted, but it cannot be engulfed in the finite game, that is, it cannot be continued in subjugated form. For it is maintained by, rather than consuming its own, vital force of life, and so will re-emerge continuously and threaten the finite game in another way; solely by existing. Therefore, the infinite game cannot be interpreted as a direct response or reaction to finite games (a mirror of reality), but needs to be approached as a specific, autonomous entity which will accordingly come with other claims of specific constitutions.

At this point, the report makes a few reflections inspired by yet further works on play and gaming (among them Bornet & Burger 2012; Csikszentmihalyi & Bennett 1971; Fritz 2004; Huizinga 1955 [1938]; Wood 2012), and concludes that one such claim, an essential one, must be a demand for a territory in mind, solely existing in the present, and so without a past or a future; a space for games, voluntary but decisive, regulated but absorbing, nourished by a continuous interplay of antagonistic forces. These kinds of territories, the report argues, would be asked for from the humans of the past, but also from the archaeologist at work who can absolve them from their non-existence and make room for them. Then, and only then, can one play games in them. Accordingly, the archaeologist will be, and needs to be, as much indulged in the continuous interplay between finite and infinite dimensions as the ancient humans. In Vijayanagara, then, according to my own inference, one would need to be devoted to and meticulously follow the range of moves and spatial possibilities that are provided by the game boards in order to attain such a territorial place. That is, to acknowledge and embrace as far as it is possible, while immersed in an absolute absorbance, the distinctive, yet indeterminate rules and regulations dictated by the boards as infinite in nature.

The report continues by proposing a transparency between the document on ruins and the ones on games (this part is even underlined); the observance of the ruin in the infinite, and, conversely, the infinite in the ruin. A point is made, presumably to illustrate an unexpected power. Translated to my own example, it can be clarified as follows: an absolute devotion from the scholar’s
side would mean a corresponding incapability to take in the past remains as a conceivable totality, since one cannot, when indulged, simultaneously be at a distance and be overlooking. Indicating play, and therefore impossible to absolutely quantify, the game boards would accordingly not have to be delimited by future purposes or surrounding matter, but would continuously hold promise of yet further meaning while escapable in nature. Persistently existing, traversing history and the present order of that history alike, they would turn to ruins, and so regain that shapeless form they always had. Their infiltration, then, would start a domino effect. Infinite in nature, they would race and open gates for nothing, pull down the city’s stony walls and towered structures, duplicate and rearrange without a plan. The city would become as infinite and foreign to the order as these remains, endless in layout and impossible to fully map or shelter; similarly turned to ruins, and similarly camouflaged. The re-created story of the past would then itself be knocked, mirrored by a swelling formless city; turned tumultuous, incredible and infinite, itself of ruined substance.

Following such patterns, the monuments of archaeology would finally return to crumbling ruins; a turn not caused by any intervention or intention, but by that endless interplay of counter-moving forces, that slipping through of features from any explanation – and also through remembrance of the deeds of ancestors. In its ruined shape, and according to the dictum, the monuments are thereby highly valued, and as much important to preserve as any other ruin of the past. They verify a past inhabited by archaeologists and so protect a riddle, not yet fully excavated: what is the prestigious purpose of the clearance and disclosure, of wandering through ruins and writing lines of letters, of searching paths beyond a world that repeatedly appears to have no exits?

It is a rather common, popularly held opinion that ruins are objects in decay. They are the habitats of bats and ghosts, most tragic in appearance. Notwithstanding that, they are a constant centre of attention, visited and venerated by men in scientific costume. Is there a morbid disposition lurking, whimsical in shape? The report quotes from another text on ruins, which deals with the variety of pleasures that man may sense when approaching ruined structures. Archaeology, it says, is among the purest and most learned of these, albeit with limited access, and not for everyone (Macaulay 1953). Ruin-pleasure is a puzzling thing; it “/.../shows a note of perversity” (Henry James in Macaulay 1953: xvii). Does science simply have a melancholic fascination for what is perishable and in destruction?

**Creation in conjunction**

To that utterance, the report provides a mysterious response. I do not know if I fully understand, but I find the implications fascinating. I will do my best to summarize, and with it also end my own meandering through excavated history and its unavoidable creation. The older text on ruins is again consulted and linked to parts of memory. The report states that if dilapidation would be the most important thing in a ruin – a common, layman thought – then the past, inevitably passé, and the present would be as inevitably partitioned. There would be no past in present time but only a present focus in a world of a primitively
flattened form. However, the ruin of the past, infinite in shape, would logically not conform to such reduction. In a variety of details it concretely furnishes a present form of what has been, not out of its particular content or by what happens to remain of its bricks and mortar, but out of the past itself. In the ruin, then, the present and the past and so the corporeal and the spiritual, the observable and what is thought, converge into a single unit of inseparable tensions – and here is where one finds the fascination (Simmel 2008 [1919]).

Although at times critiqued for searching ancient truth at a considerable distance from the present, archaeology, by digging trenches that destabilize that kind of separated time, would be analogous to the ruin in this respect, and in reverse continuously be in pursuit of such an unspeakable entity. Locating ‘what has been’, what is of prime concern is thereby not the tracing of material – it is but items with no life, of no need to be recovered – but rather the exploration of what it is ‘in spite’ of all its fragmentation. A partitioning of matter and of that which is not touchable is hence of marginal importance for the devotees. What matters is to find that special architecture of ‘closely guarded images’ (Frankl 2004[1946]), kept alive in memory and so essential for existence, and therefore always so evasive in its form. The past simply as a construction is made impossible; there is a space created whose circumference is not known to man.

To Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh,
for your great power to inspire thinking.
References


**Elektroniska källor**