The Modern Ancient Greeks

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| **FROM ARCHAEOLOGY TO NEOLOGY**  ***BY ADRIAN VRETTOS & JANET MCGIFFIN***  *Adrian Vrettos is a field archaeologist whose work takes him to café-bars where he observes his fellow Athenians whom he calls “The Modern Ancient Greeks.”*  *Janet McGiffin is author of the four-book historical fiction series about the 8th Century Byzantine Empress Irini of Athens who poisoned her way to the throne of Constantinople. Janet can be reached through her website at* [*janmcgiffin.com*](https://janmcgiffin.com/)  *An earlier version of this article appears in Matt Barrett’s* [*Greecetravel.com “Modern Ancients”*](https://www.athensguide.com/journalists/articles/archaeology.htm) |
| YOU KNOW when you see people searching through rubbish bins? You may have one of two reactions: pity or disgust. Save your reactions. You could be looking at me.  I spent many hot summers as a field archaeologist which, in lay terms, means sifting through the rubbish of ancient civilisations. As I matured, I found this field overpopulated and I absolutely drew the line at grave robbing.  So I have founded the discipline of Neology, which means going through what people have thrown out on the street. As a pioneer Neologist, I have turned "field walking," which is an archaeological term for walking over fields in search of ancient pot-shard dumps, into the new art of "city-shuffling" which is searching for hopefully whole pots.  In Athens, this discipline is dominated by artists looking for canvasses to paint over, or for materials to use in their next creation.  Of course, all our work is based on original groundwork done by Neology gypsies who are the artists of the field. Because of their high standard of excavation technology, i.e. rattly old pickups wired together with materials found along the road, they leave with the big items such as mattresses, stoves, building boilers, etc. I am left with what I can carry off.  As a Modern Ancient Greek following my Ancient Greek forbearers, I am searching for truth and other odd bits and pieces. I believe that the truth of a civilisation (if that's what we call Athens today) can be unearthed, or as I prefer, "de-composed," by skilfully sifting through modern artefacts tossed into rubbish bins or, more commonly, abandoned along the street.  Indeed, sociologists worldwide have now cottoned onto the significance of Neology. They also sift through people's rubbish with the intent of analysing them. Apparently they've been quite successful; habits, psychological profile, lifestyle and diseases are being pinpointed correctly just from the contents of bins. James Bond has been spotted doing a little Neology and most detectives in films carefully look through victims' rubbish trying to find clues to a crime. Over-zealous fan clubs or leech-like reporters track down stars and take whatever bit of rubbish the idol throws out, ready to croon over, write about, or frame anything found.  My significant finds have included working colour TVs, fridges, iron beds and paintings with added extras such as bullet holes. I have found fine antiques on their last legs, or on no legs at all.  I have built excellent bookshelves with brand new shelving left by store refurbishers. For anything needing repairs, local furniture makers are usually cheap and willing to accommodate your requirements. For instance, in Kypseli's Zakinthos street, there used to be a good little shop that once upholstered a couple of chairs I excavated. On little alleys of Ermou street numerous restorers (*anakenites*) ply their trade.  My fellow Neologists are a friendly lot, given to helping each other, pointing to the best dumpsters, and sharing their latest finds with a glint of pride. On the other hand, the spirit of competition, as in archaeology, leads to hiding the most precious artefacts or not disclosing abundant sites until they have been fully excavated. Monastiraki on a Saturday evening is a great place to get your hands soiled. For any budding Neologist, there is no substitute for pavement-pounding and sometimes gut-wrenching hands-on experience. Many of our ilk have been known to hide their treasures under disgusting wet rubbish bags until they can return with retrieval equipment.  Beware! The Neologist’s nightmare: the city’s rubbish trucks with their monster equipment. Neologists pray for strikes.  My scholarly conclusions are this: Modern Ancient Greeks still follow the ancient Greek tradition of throwing things. The ancient Olympic games, where the discus and javelin were thrown recklessly over the open fields of Athens, have evolved into the Modern Ancient Greek pastime of chucking things out.  Link to [Adrian’s other articles:](https://muckrack.com/adrian-vrettos)  And more in Matt Barrett’s [Athens Guide](https://www.athensguide.com/journalists/index.htm) |