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19

INVISIBLE AT A GLANCE

Indigenous Cultures of the Past, Ruins, Archaeological Sites, and Our Regimes of Visibility

When we think about what constitutes an archaeological site, we ask: how does such a site come into existence, and what is there in a site that makes it a site? But these questions are very difficult to answer, given the wide variety of sites in the history of archaeology as a discipline. Let us try another approach and ask instead about the way in which an archaeological site generates meaning. That is, why not think of a site as a basic unit of archaeological meaning, and ask how that meaning is produced.

Archaeological sites vary dramatically in size and shape, and many different criteria are used to define sites. However, most sites have in common a process that they undergo: excavation. And after decades of academically sponsored archaeological digs, that process has become an extremely codified practice, known as stratigraphic analysis. The practice focuses on a limited space whose dimensions vary from site to site, but which is never very big—at least, not big enough to cover a significant percentage of the surface of the site. The excavated space, with regard to both surface and depth, is but a small percentage of the site, or the unit of meaning to be deciphered.

A Concept in Ruins? The Archaeological Site and Its Relation to Material Pasts

In my experience teaching archaeological literature, I have frequently encountered an objection from students, both graduate and undergraduate: "how can archaeologists make sweeping statements about entire cultures just from the excavation of such a small sur-

face?" In this chapter I do not feel any need to explain specialists' reasons for making sweeping statements, but I would like to put myself in the shoes of my students.

In fact, it is both impressive and outrageous that archaeologists think they are capable of defining a society's subsistence pattern from the retrieval of, say, a couple of burnt seeds, or a series of tools to which they attribute agricultural uses. Yet further excavations and other technical procedures, such as radiocarbon dating and aerial photography, have often confirmed the assumptions and hypotheses that archaeologists have made based on small pieces of land and scant evidence. Of course, it should be taken into account that confirmations or refutations of hypotheses come from an interpretive system that is shared by the original excavators and those who come after them, regardless of the tools they bring to the research.

But let us forget for a moment the arbitrary nature of knowledge production, not just in archaeology but in all disciplines. Let us instead focus on the definition of a site. What is a site, after all? It could be the Acropolis, Pompeii, the pyramids of Egypt, a settlement pattern in the Amazon basin, or a mound complex in the Mississippi Valley. The first thing that must be defined is, of course, the location of a site. That is, it is necessary to solve the problem of where the site is. Once that question is decided, there is the issue of the site's size. In other words, one should ask how big the site is. I propose to leave the first question for later and tackle the second one now.

According to Ian Hodder and Scott Hutson, "archaeologists are concerned with identifying functional and symbolic meanings and structures from the arrangements of objects (and sites, etc.) over space."[1] They warn, though, that the nature of space is not a neutral variable but something that is qualitatively experienced.[2] If we accept this (as we must, unless we believe space is an objective category—which goes against all we know about it from both science and philosophy), then the issue of space becomes a problematic one. What I mean is that in the archaeological process, at the crucial moment when it is decided what area of space is to be excavated, there are factors that depend on a variable that is not only nonneutral but also extremely subjective. One does not need to be a phenomenologist to accept that our bodies do not always relate to their surroundings in the same way throughout history, across cultural boundaries, and, of course, through space.

This means that different archaeologists in different historical times may not coincide in their evaluation of what area or areas should be excavated. They may not even agree on what the boundaries of the site are. In certain cases, what was originally supposed to be a site has become a tiny part of what is now considered to be the site. That is to say, there are sites whose surfaces have grown dramati-

cally, due to the connections that later archaeologists have made between the area and other territories.

For example, let us consider the territory exploited by an ancient group of hunter-gatherers. Without certain information, archaeologists may not realize that this group included in its subsistence practices the exploitation of aquatic resources—say, the consumption of mollusks and fish. If that is the case, it is reasonable to ask: is the body of water they exploited part of the archaeological site, even if it is forty miles from the rest of the territory? What are the limits of a site? What criteria should prevail in establishing spatial boundaries for the unit of archaeological meaning? What is more important in defining the habitat of a group of humans: the distance they need to travel to get the goods they will consume, or the frequency with which they consume those goods? What conceptualization of territory did the humans have at the time they exploited the area under study? Are their practices something to be considered as archaeologists determine what site should be studied? Is a site better defined by human practices than by geographical traits?

The definition of scale is a crucial one for the kind of analysis to be conducted. This brings us back to the issue of the limits of a site: should the settlement be considered as the privileged unit of analysis? Or should the site be extended to encompass all the places exploited by a culture? For example, it is very difficult to establish the boundaries of sites in the Mississippian culture that flourished in Cahokia during the Lohmann phase. Whether one considers Cahokia a chiefdom or a state, it clearly had relationships with distant lands, as it is shown by the foreign raw materials and manufactured objects found in Cahokia, as well as by the Cahokian objects found in chiefdoms far from the settlement. Then again, what is more important: the place chosen for settlement and exploitation of the land, or the cultural ties and exchanges that a human group maintains with others?

However one answers these questions, it is clear that the delimitation of space entailed by defining an archaeological site is a very subjective endeavor. Consider, for instance, the next choice an investigator needs to make, after defining and delimiting a site: where to start the excavation. One or more very specific spot must be picked for digging, which poses the question why one spot should be preferred over another. Thanks to several factors, one of which is sheer luck, even the best-informed decisions may not lead to choosing the most productive and meaningful spot in the site. Sometimes the evidence archaeologists are looking for may lie a few meters from the main spots that are excavated. An additional problem is that the meanings attributed to the objects contained in the site are equally subject to the gaze of the observer. In other words, the patterns we see in the arrangement and distribution of objects within a site

excavated area depend a lot—perhaps too much—on what Hodder and Hutson call "externally derived hypotheses."[3] These are patterns and interpretations imposed by the methods and theories that observers bring to the object of study. In this way, the distribution patterns we see are conditioned more by the domain of the observer than by that of the object observed.

Christopher Tilley and other scholars (I am thinking especially of Felipe Criado Boado) have tried to deal with the issue of archaeological patterns and their relation to the observer.[4] Tilley, known for his phenomenological approach based very freely on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception, has tried to deal with this problem in both theoretical and practical terms. His main object of study is a series of megalithic structures in the British Isles. He tries to understand the space created by humans long ago from the vantage point of a present-day observer who walks through the space and experiences it with his own body. From that very subjective experience, Tilley attempts to restore some meaning to the structures that constitute the site. His approach does not take into account, as Hodder rightly points out, that "how one responds on such a walk would depend on who one is (for example a 'priest' or 'war captive') . . . and on a host of other social factors. These social 'meanings' would have a great effect on the perception of the person walking."[5] Thus, Tilley's proposal to focus on how human beings experience the world through their bodies is problematic not only because of the ahistorical nature of the human experience of space that it implies or presupposes—as Hodder, following Lynn Meskell, has pointed out[6]—but also because it is too strongly based on a subject-object relationship that leaves the burden of establishing patterns in the material record on the side of the subject.

Criado Boado, for his part, has tried to get out of the predicament of phenomenological analysis by putting the emphasis on the material record and on the patterns it imposes on us.[7] In order to do this, the Spanish archaeologist proposes several ways for modern observers to determine the patterns of the material evidence in some Spanish megalithic structures. One way consists of using mathematical and geometric analysis, which Criado Boado believes will help the observer to determine the topographic patterns created by the structures under study. This approach, although promising, calls for the performance of an almost impossible intellectual endeavor: to determine what constitutes a pattern that is independent of our cognitive framework and the theories we bring to the analysis, and to distinguish it from our own projections on what we observe. In spite of its problems, this respect for matter arranged by humans long ago, for a materiality that is not our own, may hold the promise of a more nuanced—at least from a philosophical point of view—approach to the meaning of the objects observed. In other words, this approach takes into

account the materiality created by humans in the distant past in a way that gives their work a weight that one cannot find in Tilley's method.

Let us go back to a question I asked earlier: how does one choose an archaeological site? That is, why does one decide that a certain location, a certain point or points in space, is an archaeological site? Archaeologists have always been interested in conspicuous monuments or series of edifices from the past. That is to say, what attracts attention is often a ruin, a material vestige from the past that is visible today. This tells us something about what we see and what we are not so likely to notice. It tells us about what can be called the regimes of visibility—that is, the rules and protocols that determine our gaze and, therefore, what we do and do not see—of our Occidental episteme. It does not tell us much, though, about how local people relate to the ruins they are surrounded by.

The Colonial Gaze, Local People, and the Creation of Ruins

It is true that some local people have, throughout history, been aware of the existence of ruins in their own quotidian lived space. However, it is no less true that in the majority of cases we know of, the locals rarely view the ruins that surround them as something that is valuable or worth knowing about. In general, locals—at least since the early modern period—have had a more pragmatic take on ruins: what can those material remains be used for? It is the gaze of the foreigner, the outsider, or the professional producer of knowledge that allocates value to that collection of matter that local people see as always having been there, inert, and possibly useless.

Let me offer a couple of examples of the attitudes I am trying to describe here. One of them will require us to go back in time to the Italian Renaissance, when the past was being rediscovered by humanists and biblical scholars alike. Humanism restored value to the achievements of a glorious distant past, some of whose material remains were still present in Rome, Florence, and many other Italian cities. However, as Stiebing has pointed out, this renewed interest in the past did not immediately put an end to centuries of neglect by the locals, who did not see a great use for the ruins with which they had grown up.[8] Nor did the renewed interest have as an immediate result the appreciation or even the protection of the ruins. On the contrary, one of the effects of the ascent of antiquarians and antiquity dealers was that Italian nobles started to search for ancient works of art to decorate their palaces. As Stiebing states, "This passion for classical beauty often resulted in the further destruction of ancient monuments. Many Renaissance buildings were constructed with blocks quarried from the ruins, and used as columns or decoration stripped from ancient structures."[9] This appropriation of the material aspect of ruins has as its correlate the incorporation of remnants of past greatness into projects in the present.

Even when the use of materials from ruins was based on a newly acquired admiration for the Roman past, it is clear that the Italians did not view those ruins solely qua ruins. Most of the buildings that had not been destroyed by nature or humans had survived because they were still in use.[10] Meanwhile, the Spaniards who had invaded Mexico and Peru were involved in similar activities. When confronted with the magnificence and beauty of Incan and Mexican architecture, the invaders allowed themselves a moment of awe and admiration and then set out to dismantle the buildings and put their stones to a more urgent, pragmatic use: the construction of their own palaces and Catholic churches. Those buildings—which were not viewed as ruins by either the local people or the invaders, because they were still in use—quickly became ruins thanks to the destructive actions of the Spaniards.

The ruins left in Europe by the classical Greeks and Romans bear testimony, to Western eyes, of a past grandeur destroyed by the forces of nature—although we know that sometimes humans caused the destruction. The ruins have an additional value, I think: they represent the interruption of that grandeur, the lack of continuity with a glorious past culture, the loss of which—and therefore its unrepeatable nature—makes it even more desirable to the eyes of the observers from the present. In the case of Incan, Mayan, or Mexican ruins, the lack of continuity—whose causes are not understood by most Westerners today—between the culture that produced the ruined edifices and the Amerindians who inhabit the continent in the present makes it even easier for the elites, descended both from local people and invaders, to incorporate such sites as Palenque and Machu Picchu into the cultural heritage they have created for themselves. The lack of continuity and its consequence, the perceived disconnection between Amerindians of the past and those of the present, makes the ruins constructed centuries ago an inoffensive tribute to cultures seen as gone forever.

This is very clear in the case of places like Machu Picchu, whose meanings in the present transcend local, ethnic, and also national boundaries. The site has become a place of pilgrimage for tourists from all over the world, but especially from affluent societies in the northern hemisphere, who appropriate the space as a locus for the sacred or the supernatural. It has also become a place revered by Peruvians in general, regardless of their class or ethnic descent. For the peasants of the region, the ruins are sacred and are used—when possible and allowed by the government—for a variety of everyday activities; for most Peruvians of European descent, the site serves as a focus for myths of national pride in the Amerindians of the past, usually identified only with the Incas.[11] It was this pride, shared by all Peruvians, that led thousands of them to protect the integrity of the site when President Alberto Fujimori attempted to build a cable car that would connect Machu Picchu with the lands below.[12]

Yet it was another politician, a more recent president, who showed how important this archaeological site is for Peruvians today. As a candidate for president, Alejandro Toledo not only promised to protect Machu Picchu from the proposed cable car, but also announced his intention to be inaugurated as president at the ancient Incan site, to show his gratitude to mother earth, known among Andean Amerindians as Pachamama. On July 29, 2001, he fulfilled his promise by participating with his wife in a ceremony dominated by Andean ritual.[13] This is just another example of how the Criollo and Mestizo populations of Latin America now view the indigenous ruins located in the territories of modern-day nation-states as the patrimony of all their citizens. As the case of these Inca ruins suggests, appropriation by the state happens at the expense of—and thus ignoring—the indigenous meanings that present-day Amerindians give them through their continued practices on those sacred lands. We saw above two different responses to monuments produced by other cultures or by ancestors of the present inhabitants. In both cases, the gaze of more recent Westerners led to further destruction of the structures. Yet in other cases, material remains are not destroyed by the foreign or nonindigenous observer. For example, the anthropologist Gastón Gordillo gave a paper at a Latin American Studies Association conference in October 2004, in which he explored the different issues raised by the discovery of the ruins of a Jesuit mission in the Chaco region of Argentina. In that paper, he tells of how he heard about the existence of a building complex that belonged to the Jesuits, and how he sought the help of local people to find and visit the site. He also explores the different attitudes of archaeologists and anthropologists, on the one hand, and the local people, on the other, toward the material remains known as ruins. He alluded repeatedly in the discussion of the panel's papers, as well as in his paper, to the indifference shown by the locals with regard to the ruins, and to their surprise at his interest in the old buildings.

Once Gordillo had been led by locals to the ruins, he witnessed the lack of interest of Juan, one of his guides. Juan not only asked Gordillo what possible interest the ruinous buildings could have for anybody, but he hit the walls to see how sturdy they were. Much to his surprise, Juan saw big chunks of stucco fall from the walls onto the floor, which only encouraged him to continue his destructive endeavor.[14] Gordillo was horrified. However, he realized that he needed to be more understanding of the gap between his view of the ruins and that of the locals.[15] He realized that they thought he was searching for a hidden treasure.[16] We see once again the locals' pragmatic view of ruins: they cannot be worth any attention unless they promise some material profit.

The different attitudes of the guide and the anthropologist should help us think about the wide variety of possible reactions by locals and others: in-

difference, newly acquired appreciation, destruction, devastation, recovery, or preservation of the material remains. But Gordillo's example does not shed light on another important issue: the creation of the ruin, or how something becomes a ruin rather than a deteriorated building or monument. In other words, how does a ruin become meaningful for local people? Let me give an example of how ruins are perceived by Western observers. As Jeffrey Himpele states in the 1997 movie he directed with Quetzil Castañeda (entitled, in parodic fashion, *Incidents of Travel in Chichén Itzá*), the Maya ruins he visited during the making of the documentary were created by the archaeologists and explorers who cleared the forest and, by doing so, allowed the Occidental imagination to conceive of that area as a city built by Amerindians from the past. That is, what those Western investigators made possible was the emergence of a new object of study and of a series of archaeological sites. The gaze that cleared the landscape to make a city and an object of study emerge is, no doubt, a colonial or neocolonial one.

That is so because of the way in which the gaze resignifies and therefore appropriates the space where an Other or Others once lived. Moreover, it appropriates the space in the name of scientific knowledge, a Western concept, and with total disregard for the views of the descendants of the people who built the ruins. The domestication of a space, used in the past by members of a different culture and ignored or revered by their descendants or other indigenous groups, is achieved through the apparatuses and institutions with which Western knowledge operates and prospers. And those apparatuses and institutions, as well as the desire to produce knowledge about that Other space, are made possible for a simple reason: there is a differential of power, of the same kind that made Orientalism possible, that situates the Western observer in a privileged position vis-à-vis the Other. In other words, there is a geopolitical situation in which a certain culture or society can impose itself on others so that it can produce knowledge on the latter. This production of knowledge is one-sided, generally disrespectful of the Other's opinions (which are often dismissed as mere folklore or superstition), and ultimately destined to educate Western subjects about the Others.

A ruin, then, is not only an object but also a process. It should be understood as both verb and noun.[17] Several agents can participate in this process, but the result is always the same: matter succumbs to the effects of time, whose agents are usually human or nature. One of the consequences of this process is, in Benjamin's words, that a ruin becomes an equivalent of death in the realm of the inorganic.[18] Yet there is, in ruins, a predominance of the inorganic: what is left is the architecture, the product of human action, which remains after its creator. Human beings, then, remain only through the persistence of the material ob-

jects they constructed. What is left for us to see and experience is the *ergon*, the product of their actions; the *energeia*, the actions that made that ergon possible and that represent the actions of those human beings at the time when the ruin was not a ruin but a lively social place, is gone forever. The phenomenological experiences of those humans from the past who walked, exploited, and gave meaning to that space—that is, who did all those things that made that space a place for them—are gone. The architectural remains, then, have lost their previous functions and meanings, their human aspects, but new ones await them thanks to the work of professional academics. Now, in this historical moment, in this context, from this domain of observation, they become ruins.[19] This domain of observation is that one that, thanks to its regimes of visibility (themselves a product of the power differential that allows the Western gaze to create a space as a ruin), allows us to see certain things but prevents us from perceiving others.

Invisible at a Glance: Western Regimes of Visibility and Indigenous Material Pasts

The determination of regimes of visibility is especially relevant when one is dealing with material pasts produced by indigenous peoples. In these cases, the Western gaze is less likely to recognize the hand of human beings in the production of the material landscape. This is why I have proposed, elsewhere, to try to account for indigenous agency in what previously looked like the work of nature. Consequently, I proposed to look at some landscapes—which we, Western subjects, usually view as natural ones—with a different gaze, informed by disciplines such as paleoethnobotany and archaeology. In this way, I intended to unearth (both literally and figuratively) the traces of indigenous agency that contributed to shape the landscapes. In order to do so, I suggested having recourse to some of the sciences that study the past—the very same sciences that have been used, traditionally, to produce or perpetuate the subalternity of indigenous peoples—in order to view the territory in a way that allows us to detect traces of indigenous activities that transformed it into what we see today.

Certain prehistorically cultivated areas in the Americas have not been recognized, until recently, as the product of human activity. A good example of these man-made landscapes are the *camellones* (raised fields) studied by Erickson in Bolivia, which are remains of an ancient form of indigenous agriculture.[20] Another case of territories not even perceived as such until recently is the "fisheries" that Erickson has discovered in the Amazon basin. These fisheries are the result of human modifications of the courses of streams in order to give the Amerindians of the area more control of the reproduction of fish in the streams.[21]

In both cases, the observers who live and produce knowledge in the frame-

work of Western culture had not been able to see a human-made landscape. It was necessary to look at the landscape in a different way in order to see it as such and to acknowledge the work of human labor in its construction. As I said earlier, the complex human labor involved was invisible not because of an impairment of our vision but because of the limits that our ideology imposes upon us. These ideological biases are at the basis of the oppression that present-day Amerindians suffer throughout the Americas. It is that prejudice that places them in a time anterior to ours and a stage of development inferior to ours—described by Fabian as the "denial of coevalness."[22] It is this worldview that makes it very difficult for us to see—sometimes literally—the modifications of nature performed by our indigenous predecessors in the territory we inhabit.

Let us now move to the discussion of two other examples that will, I hope, shed light on what I am arguing in this chapter. The first one has to do with the research conducted in the last fifteen years or so by Tom Dillehay, the archaeologist who studied and dated Monte Verde in Chile, considered to be 12,500 years old and the oldest site with evidence of human occupation in the Americas. One of the most important lines of research for the understanding of the peopling of the Americas is the study of the diet of prehistoric populations. This work suggests that the diet of some ancient peoples of North America differ considerably from the one described for the Clovis culture. This culture, bands of hunters of Pleistocene megafauna, was considered to be the oldest on the continent—which is tantamount to saying it was thought to be the culture that first crossed the Bering Strait—until the archaeological community accepted the date assigned by Dillehay to Monte Verde. The paleodiet studies conducted by Dillehay and his associates reveal that even before the Clovis hunters invented their famous fluted point—a very significant technological innovation—the Amerindians of southern Chile had developed a subsistence pattern based on foraging. The presence of plants at Monte Verde points toward a relationship between nature and humans that differs dramatically from the one proposed by the supporters of the Clovis doctrine.[23] Today, the first peoples of the Americas are represented more like astute exploiters of the environment and less like hunters whose only objective was to hunt huge herbivores for protein. The diversity of their diet reveals a higher degree of complexity in their societies.

These studies have led to the belief that without the adaptations of the late Pleistocene foragers, who settled in forested and wetland environments, the societies they formed would have been less complex, and the evidence found at Monte Verde would not have existed.[24] The picture some archaeologists present today is that of a number of societies all over the Americas that show a great diversity in their technologies, economies, and subsistence patterns.[25] Most of

the evidence that supports this picture comes from the study of plant remains, a type of evidence that archaeologists had overlooked and underestimated for years. Again, we now see material remains that went unnoticed and were not expected by our regimes of visibility until very recently.

The last case I am going to comment on may help us see a more complex image of indigenous agency in the Americas of prehistory. I am referring to silviculture in the Amazon basin. For a very long time, silviculture was thought to have been invented in the nineteenth century. However, recent studies of tropical landscapes indicate that many of the places considered to be natural tropical rain forests are, in reality, the product of human activity. Charles Peters has studied several regions and found evidence of human manipulation of tropical rain forests. In order to be able to see that evidence, Peters needed to retrain his way of viewing so that he could see what was not visible at a glance, thanks to our Occidental cultural and ideological blindness. He also needed to retrain his cognitive apparatus to overcome a strictly perceptual difficulty: the exuberance of tropical vegetation makes it very difficult to see any human activity in that environment. The traces or marks of human manipulation look subtle, and their life can be ephemeral. However, Peters has found clear evidence of land manipulation in the form of gardens maintained as annexes to the household; managed regrowth of fallow areas after shifting cultivation; tracts of forest left to recover after being cultivated for years; and managed forests, the most difficult to see of man-made landscapes because the only evidence they leave is the distribution of useful trees in a forest.[26]

According to Peters, present-day Western subjects must overcome another difficulty to see the traces of human agency on the prehistoric landscape: the fact that indigenous peoples of the present, who live in small communities and practice a subsistence level of agriculture and forest resource exploitation, have a very minor impact on the forest.[27] However, Peters avers:

> Given their population density, sociopolitical organization, and intensity of resource use, Precolumbian indigenous communities would have had a significantly larger impact on the forest than their present-day descendants. They probably applied many of the same silvicultural systems, . . . but they would have done so over larger areas of forest, for longer periods of time, at much higher intensity.[28]

It is no wonder, then, that a series of intensive agricultural practices that developed over hundreds or thousands of years has been able to leave some traces that are visible today even in the densest tropical forests, if one looks carefully.[29] To look for them is, I believe, a way of attempting to restore some human agency

to the predecessors of today's indigenous peoples. It is also a conscious endeavor whose goal is solidarity with contemporary subaltern subjects.

There exists, according to David Lentz, a common (and, I would add, subconscious) idea among modern scholars: the Americas were, until the arrival of the Europeans, a landscape undisturbed by the manipulation of human agency.[30] This is in consonance with the image of the Amazon basin as pristine rain forest and the associated view of local populations as ineffectual, which results in a representation of Amazonians as profoundly passive subjects.[31] It is also an image related to de Certeau's notion of America as a blank page on which the European subject will eventually make his or her inscription.[32] The studies I have commented on above propose a different relationship between Amerindians and nature—a more hybrid conception of a "natural-cultural" regional landscape, as Raffles and Winkler Prins would have it.[33] They are part of the same trend that can be seen in the studies of present-day indigenous peoples' manipulations of the Amazonian landscape, which has focused mostly on the terrestrial landscape, but which is now paying more attention to human transformations of rivers and streams.[34] It is from studies like these that I think we scholars who deal with the colonial encounter should get our inspiration.

Making the Invisible Visible

In sum, it is only through a change in the predominant regimes of visibility that scholars have been able to see the fisheries and the Amazonian gardens. This should not make us forget that in the origins of archaeology, and in the most common archaeological practices of today, the regimes of visibility were different. And they were different because of geopolitical reasons. Moreover, I would go so far as to say that those regimes of visibility had their origin in a form of colonialism: it was colonialism, the expansionist drive of European nation-states, that allowed the invaders of distant lands to see old monuments and entire cities in ruins. This same colonialism, which presupposes a power differential between the observer and the observed, is what allowed foreign, imperial eyes, to see and produce knowledge about those decaying material remains of societies from the past.

The archaeological site is becoming a ruin itself, not only because of its limitations from an epistemological point of view, as we saw in the first section of this chapter, but also because it owes its existence to—that is, because it is made possible, as a medium for the production of knowledge, by—a gaze, a way of seeing that can come into existence only thanks to a differential of power created by Occidental colonialism. It is a by-product or consequence of European domination. This is the same colonialism that Kraniauskas sees in Ben-

jamin's acritical relationship to Mexican antiquities.[35] According to Kraniauskas, colonialism becomes a blind spot in Benjamin's critique of modernity and progress, and I would say it is also what makes possible the knowledge produced by Western experts, knowledge developed by what we have come to know as the Enlightenment. If this is the case, then the categories that shape its mode of knowledge production are also affected by the workings of colonialism. The archaeological site, as a meaningful unit of archaeological analysis, should not be immune to this critique.

I am persuaded that it is our duty, as scholars who do not want to become colonizers of the past or the present, to pay more attention to what happened in the Americas before the time of contact with Europeans. In other words, I believe it is necessary to make an effort to perceive the modifications of the territory made by the indigenous peoples of the remote past, so that we can detect indigenous agency in what has seemed to be the work of nature. We also need to revise the ideological prejudices that make it so difficult for us to see some of those traces of human agency. The ruin, in the form of a material presence, has traditionally been the marker of what seems interesting to our Western eyes. The privilege the West has conferred to this kind of visible presence is what is behind our tendency to see other material presences as absences. That is, the limitations of our regimes of visibility are responsible for the way in which we sometimes fail to see the work of human beings who did not leave material traces that qualify as ruins.

By joining forces with practitioners of other disciplines, it will be possible to get a little closer to those local knowledges of the past understood as part of a way of life—understood as living. Past experience is perceived by scholars in the twenty-first century as materiality, vestiges of human activities that could serve as a guide to the practices that produced them. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that past experience is also interpreted by the descendants of the indigenous peoples. I am referring to the oral traditions of the Amerindians of the present, which should be considered legitimate tools to use in the recovery of indigenous pasts. This traditional lore has been acknowledged legally in the United States since the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act became law in 1990. Although the discussions about the law's scope have been vicious and will continue to be so, at least until cases such as that of Kennewick Man are solved in a way that pleases all parties involved, it is undeniable that this legislation has done a lot to establish a balance between Western and Amerindian knowledge. If we do all these things, maybe we will finally become more critical of terms such as "ruin" and "archaeological site" and at the same time keep our thinking from leading to an ethnocentric dead end or, if I may say so, to its own ruin.

Notes

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1. Hodder and Hutson, *Reading the Past*, 178.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*.
5. Hodder, *The Archaeological Process*, 136.
6. Ibid.
7. Criado Boado, "Visibilidad e interpretación del registro arqueológico"; see also Criado Boado and Victoria Villoch Vázquez, "Monumentalizing Landscape: From Present Perception to the Past Meaning of Galician Megalithism (North-West Iberian Peninsula)."
8. Stiebing, *Uncovering the Past*, 119.
9. Ibid., 145.
10. Ibid., 119.
11. Flores Ochoa, "Contemporary Significance of Machu Picchu," 110.
12. Ibid., 117.
13. Ibid., 122.
14. Gordillo, "El sedimento de la historia," 5–6.
15. Ibid., 6.
16. Ibid., 7–8.
17. Stead, "The Ruins of History," 12.
18. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 178–82.
19. See Jaguaribe, "Modernist Ruins: National Narratives and Architectural Forms."
20. For a brief description of these cultivated lands, see my "Forgotten Territorialities." For more information about the raised fields, see Erickson, "Prehistoric Landscape Management in the Andean Highlands" and "The Social Organization of Prehispanic Raised Field Agriculture in the Lake Titicaca Basin."
21. Erickson, "An Artificial Landscape-scale Fishery in the Bolivian Amazon."
22. Fabian, *Time and the Other*.
23. I call it a "doctrine" because its supporters have shown an attitude that is best described as dogmatic or doctrinaire. It is shocking to see the time and energy they have devoted to the desperate defense of the theory that proposes the precedence of Clovis culture—from both a chronological and a developmental perspective—over the other cultures that flourished across the Americas.
24. Dillehay and Rossen, "Plant Food and Its Implications for the Peopling of the New World," 237.
25. Ibid., 238.
26. Charles Peters, "Precolumbian Silviculture and Indigenous Management of Neotropical Forests."

27. Ibid., 214.
28. Ibid., 214–15.
29. Today some scholars believe that as much as 12 percent of the Amazonian forest is currently of biocultural origin. See Raffles and Winkler Prins, "Further Reflections on Amazonian Environmental History, 167.
30. Lentz, Introduction, 1.
31. Raffles and Winkler Prins, "Further Reflections on Amazonian Environmental History," 166 and 168.
32. De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, xxv.
33. Ibid., 166.
34. Ibid., 167.
35. Kraniauskas, "Beware Mexican Ruins!," 141.