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“Vilcashuamán: Telling Stories in Ruins”

an American ruin

There is no such thing as an ancient ruin, for the ruin is always a modern concept. Ruination and modernity go hand in hand, as the modern displaces the ancient, marking it as irredeemably part of the past precisely by construing it as ruined. Ruins are the site of what we have left behind. But at the same time they remain front and center: for modernity occasions a sometimes anxious reflection on the conditions and effects of “progress,” on this process of temporal displacement for which the ruin serves as *memento mori*. Modernity creates the ruin as something both to be discarded and also to be read, its story retold obsessively. We moderns construct and interpret ruins as judgment on the past and warning for the future. “Men moralize among ruins,” observed Benjamin Disraeli, “or, in the throng and tumult of successful cities, recall past visions of urban desolation for prophetic warning. London is a modern Babylon; Paris has aped imperial Rome, and may share its catastrophe” (138). A sign of modernity’s success and vitality is that past civilizations are in ruins all around; but they remind us that there can be no guarantee that today’s proud edifices will not, in turn, fall to rack and ruin. Ruins demonstrate that whole cultures, just like the lives of mortals, are transient. Hence they are invented by cultures that feel their own transience. And no culture feels more transient than the American.

Though the Americas have been envisaged as the “New World,” and despite Goethe’s assertion that “America, you have it better / Than our old continent; / You have no ruined castles / And no primordial stones” (qtd. Lowenthal 110), in fact the hemisphere has more than its share of ruins. This should be no surprise: modernity was after all abruptly conceived in the encounter between Old and New Worlds, and built upon the ruins of the civilizations first encountered by the Spanish conquistadors. The traces of imperial grandeur are now themselves ruined, and where there are no

ruins easily to hand, they have often enough been built from scratch or substitutes have rapidly been found. From Hearst Castle or campus gothic (steps made of soft stone so they wear down quickly) to the dinosaur bones patronized by tycoons such as Andrew Carnegie, as the US became the dominant world power at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth, it increasingly sought out its own ruins. Frequently, those ruins were south of the border: this was also the heyday of a burgeoning archaeology, and the discovery of "lost" cities in rainforests and remote valleys the length and breadth of the continent. Today, ruins are big business (Tikal, Tenochtitlan), even as big business leaves its own ruins behind (from the Rust Belt to reclaimed factories).

In this essay I focus on what is now the small Peruvian village of Vilcashuamán. This village is built in and around the ruins of what was once an important Inca site. But its continued importance for a range of political projects has been underlined and re-invoked by a series of stories and discourses, from those told by the Incas themselves, to the Spanish conquistadors, on to republican nationalists, and even in a somewhat bizarre dialogue between Maoist guerrillas and the contemporary state. Residues of these stories linger on, and so Vilcashuamán's ruins carry a trace of the distinct pasts that they narrate, of their continuities sustained by the continued material presence of the ruins themselves, and also of their discontinuities and dislocations. I trace how these ruins in this quiet corner of Ayacucho province shed light onto the pasts that they have served to memorialize or represent. I am interested in the ways in which these ruins have provided the occasion for memorialization itself; in how they conjure up multilayered, and sometimes contradictory, narratives of American modernity; in what they tell us of the sacrifices and silences inherent in the modernization process; in the traces of alternative modernities that they preserve, however faintly; and in the diverse readings of history that they offer. Above all I am interested in what these ruins tell us about power and sovereignty in American modernity, and in the relationship between their brute materiality and the more tenuous stories that aim to secure a power that is no less brutal. For to talk of ruins is always immediately to talk of power. Ruins inspire and legitimate narratives of power, if also sometimes of counter-power. But perhaps our task--the task of what I term "posthegemony"--might be their denarrativization, their further ruination. Perhaps these ruins are not yet ruined enough.

history, narrative, posthegemony

My three guiding concepts are history, narrative, and posthegemony. First, the ruin emerges from and sustains a particular way of thinking historically, although it also undercuts the very notion of history that it establishes. Ruins are presented as foundation, and ruination as the necessary clearing of ground for the birth of the new. Ruins legitimate and ground the structures that are built upon them. Sometimes this foundation is very literal, as when the very stones of earlier constructions are built over or recycled for new construction. But it is this recycling that threatens to undercut the linearity of the history that it otherwise anchors. For if one civilization can fall to ruin, then so perhaps can--or must--each subsequent one. And the succeeding cycles of construction and ruination may suggest that all progress is always in danger of being reclaimed by the desert, the jungle, and the creeping threat of what Walter Benjamin termed "irresistible decay" (178). Ruins incarnate the persistence of the past as much as its obsolescence, and the possibility that the past may at any time catch up with the present, returning us to some new stone age or reinvigorated barbarism. They can imply that all the talk of progress is but another unfounded story. (And we should not forget that in Spanish, the language of most of the discourses I will be discussing, *historia* can mean fictional story, as much as it also means supposedly factual history.)

There is another tie between ruination and history. For if the ruin is itself a concept invented and reinvented by cultures at particular times and in particular places, then we can also map that concept's changing fortunes through time--perhaps even the concept's contemporary ruination. Walter Benjamin famously notes "the baroque cult of the ruin" (178). But it is in Romanticism that ruins come into their own. Think of Shelley's "Ozymandias" or Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," to take but two examples of the Romantic obsession with these temporal remnants, history become nature. Still, it is not as though the Romantics treated the objects of their obsession with great respect: Byron notoriously inscribed his name into the stone of the Temple of Poseidon at Sounion. Such cavalier attitudes would change as, in the nineteenth century, ruins become the object of scientific study, with the invention of archaeology as a discipline. In the early twentieth century, burgeoning popular interest created celebrities of figures such as Howard Carter, the excavator of Tutankhamen's tomb. Then the First and (above all) the Second World Wars produced ruins of their own, some of which, such as

Coventry Cathedral or Berlin's Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche, were preserved as an exercise of public memorialization. Today, ruins are financial investments for collectors and the heritage industry alike, and also a matter of political controversy. The claims of literature or science upon the ruin are disputed, in very different ways, by commerce and mass tourism, and by the descendants of those whose cultures modernity ruined. In short, the concept of the ruin should itself be historicized, by examining the different stories that it provokes or enables at different times.

For, second, ruins inspire narrative. This is the obverse of Benjamin's observation that "allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (178). As should already be evident in the stress that I am putting on the stories told about and around ruins, like allegories ruins are incessantly seen as pointing beyond themselves, to some absent totality. That totality has then to be narrated. Stories fill in the gaps evidently left by the ruin's material remains, to provide the tale of the splendor that once was, and the catastrophe or slow decline that led to its downfall. Ruins are not themselves immediately legible: they have to be spoken for, to be interpreted and supplemented by a guided tour, a cautionary inscription, an informative notice, a tale of historical drama. These narratives restore the ruins before our very eyes, allowing us to imagine them, once again, complete, and to understand and learn from the process that led them to their current dilapidated state. Hence a paradox: though stubbornly material, the mute remainder of a culture whose representatives may now be missing, though they do not come with a narrative of their own, ruins have consistently to be ventriloquized. Narrative accretes around them, purporting to complete them. It is as though we can never see the trees for the wood.

The stories that ruins are made to tell are almost always stories of power. Precisely in their incompleteness, in their fragmentariness, ruins invoke the sublime. The narratives that purport to complete the ruin can sketch out a totality all the more awe-inspiring in that it is the work of the imagination. To quote Benjamin yet again, "in the ruins of great buildings the idea of the plan speaks more impressively than in lesser buildings, however well preserved they are" (235). The discrepancy between the ruin, with its absences plainly present, and the totality whose presence is felt through those absences, magnifies still further the grandeur of the absent whole. In a ruined abbey whose roof is no more, one can imagine the walls continuing up to the skies. There is no limit to the sublime dimensions of the edifice that ruins imply. So in evoking such

dreams of totality and sublimity, ruins have been read as particularly vivid allegories of power and sovereignty--and their vicissitudes. Shelley's "Ozymandias," for instance, relates the tale of the toppled remains of a vast sculpture of power, on whose pedestal is inscribed: "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" (11). The mighty could now be tempted to perceive in the fallen desolation of the broken monument the temporary nature of even the most overweening despotism. But the fact that this declaration, however ruined, endures even as all around the civilization over which Ozymandias presided has faded without trace, could also be seen to bear out the truth of the sentiment: that the signs of transcendence prevail over the most calamitous of social and natural catastrophes.

Is this chain of associations, linking ruins to hegemonic projects, an inevitable one? Can we forestall the narrative seduction that seems so relentlessly to convert material fragment into ineffable sovereignty? In what follows I offer a posthegemonic analysis of American ruins. By "posthegemony" I mean two things: first, that discourses that aim to secure hegemony no longer have the purchase that they once had now that we inhabit a cynical, post-ideological age. In Slavoj Žižek's formulation, we "know very well" what we are doing, "but still, [we] are doing it" (29). Ruins can no longer be relied upon to serve as the material supports of an intangible totality that we "know very well" to be impossible. Their legitimating power is weaker than ever before, in part because of the Babelic confusion of competing discourses that have built up around them. Rather than securing hegemony, ruins are now equally troubling reminders of an alternative modernity that the dominant would rather ignore. They are mute witnesses rather than vital points of articulation. In these neoliberal times, ruins function more as a fragment of an inexpressive real: an excrescence that indicates the absences and exclusions of social and political projects that fail to achieve even the illusion of hegemonic fullness. And to understand the persistence of social order (the problem to which the concept of hegemony sets out to respond), we should turn to other concepts, such as affect and habit. But why then assume that these other forces were not also operative in a preceding era in which hegemony appeared to offer some explanation? Why concede the notion that hegemonic projects were *ever* viable or effective? Second, then, by "posthegemony" I further mean a radical skepticism towards *all* claims for hegemony as an explanatory concept, even before the advent of contemporary cynical consciousness. So, drawing on the lessons learned from our

current epoch in which hegemonic projects clearly no longer convince, I question the efficacy of the narratives spun around "primordial stones" also in the past. Perhaps the stories that ruins provoked were never really hegemonic, though they may have offered a simulacrum of something like hegemony. Indeed, the ruin offers a case study for the failures of hegemony, for its stubbornly material limits. For these stories of power soon became ruined themselves, while there were always other ways of inhabiting or cohabiting with material ruination, and the affects and habits that it induces. This is the underside of modernity's grand claims. And in archaeological spirit, to reach that underside I scrape off layers of discourse to reveal the ruins in themselves.

Vilcashuamán

But I start with a story of my own. Having some time to spare in Vilcashuamán, Ayacucho, highland Peru, I climbed the pyramid that looms over the small town. Vilcashuamán (also known simply as Vilcas) was once a significant Inca cultural and administrative center, occupying a strategic location at the crossroads of the various trade routes that crisscrossed the Inca empire: it was the point at which the road from Cuzco to the Pacific met the Empire's main North-South highway. Moreover, according to Spanish chronicler Pedro Cieza de León's reports of native accounts, the town was at the geographical midpoint of the Tawantisuyu, the Inca Empire: "for they state that it is the same distance from Quito to Vilcas as from Vilcas to Chile, the limits of their empire" (126). But Vilcas is now a town full of ruins--though one might also say that the place is a set of ruins that enclose a town, as it can be hard to say where the ruins end and the town starts, and *vice versa*. Houses and shops nestle up against or are perched upon Inca walls and stones, and are themselves made of this same recycled material. As a result, the site is, in Gasparini and Margolies's words, in an "advanced state of destruction and deformation" (112). It remains, however, undeniably impressive, in part because here you are everywhere up against and on top of the ruins, like it or not. There is no measured distance between contemporary life and sacrosanct historical artifact: no ropes, no fences marking off the museal from the everyday. The ruins of Vilcashuamán are fully if sparsely inhabited; they show no signs of their exceptionality. In John Hemming's words, conjuring up a scene of desolation, "Vilcashuamán is now a small village, remote on its hill-top, perched on the ruins of the great Inca city whose temples have been pillaged for building blocks, and surrounded

by rolling, hilly country with few trees and little population" (*Monuments of the Incas* 187). History seems to have passed it by, to have set it free from whatever stories it once inspired. Certainly, when I had been taken to Vilcas for the day, with a group of anthropologists and aid workers, I had had no idea I would end up climbing a pyramid.

Indeed, these are in no way the most famous ruins in Peru, and are far from being the most visited, meriting at best a couple of lines in the guidebooks. Rather, that honor goes to Machu Picchu, now perhaps South America's foremost tourist attraction, which attracts around 450,000 visitors a year, up to 2,000 a day. Machu Picchu stands synecdochically for Peru, and often enough for Latin America as a whole. Arguably, Machu Picchu is a more "modern" set of ruins, being "discovered" (better, *invented*) only in the early twentieth century, with Hiram Bingham's Yale-sponsored expedition of 1911. Bingham was fêted for having discovered the "lost city of the Incas." That claim, however, rings rather hollow when it is realized not only that it was a local tavern proprietor and landlord, Melchor Arteaga, who led him to the site "with the promise of a whole silver dollar," but also that Bingham himself noted graffiti on the stones: "the name, 'Lizarraga,' and the year, '1902'" (Alfred Bingham 6, 13). Bingham gave this Lizarraga credit for the "discoveries" in his first book about the expedition, *Inca Land*; yet by the time of his later account, *Lost City of the Incas*, Lizarraga's name disappears (Alfred Bingham 26). Meanwhile, Bingham's opinion of indigenous knowledge can be inferred from his own comment that "readers of *Inca Land* will remember that Professor Harry W. Foote and I had often been obliged to add, when discussing reports of 'noteworthy and important ruins' -- 'but he may have been lying'" (Hiram Bingham 10). He observes that the local campesinos do not mark the ruins in any particular way: "Presumably, to him and his kind, Inca ruins of temples and palaces built by their remote kindred are not in themselves interesting but merely evidence that the latter found the land worth occupying and cultivating" (10). In this sense, Bingham's achievement was to put Machu Picchu into discourse: to *articulate* its stones, to make them speak in the recognizably modern idiom of ruination.

This, then, is where Vilcashuamán is different. For the ruins of Vilcas have, without entering the narratives of international tourism, and despite not being excavated until the 1980s, a much longer history of being repeatedly articulated and rearticulated to competing stories about Peruvian modernity, from almost the very moment of Spanish conquest and so their initial fall into ruin. We might therefore say

that Vilcas is more eloquent about Peru's modernity than Machu Picchu, especially now that the latter has assumed the status of a brand, a signifier almost without content--like the Nike swoosh or McDonalds' golden arches. Machu Picchu says "Peru," or says "Latin America," but says almost nothing *about* these places. By contrast, in the to and fro of the conflicting versions of what Vilcas's ruins might be made to say, a whole series of narratives have been advanced about historicity and hegemony, modernity and, more to the point, the (still essentially modern) lament that Peru has *failed* to become modern. Mario Vargas Llosa notoriously opens his monumental novel *Conversation in the Cathedral* with the question "At what precise moment had Peru fucked itself up?" (3). We might not know *when*; but it would not be far-fetched to argue that Vilcashuamán is a contender for a precise place *where* Peru fucked itself up. It is a place marked by the series of interruptions that, for a writer such as Vargas Llosa, indicate the fuck-ups that have (he would claim) stalled progress towards modernity. Interruptions, symbolized or, better, materialized in the strewn stones of the former Inca edifices, that have served as fissures within which variously confident, wistful, and messianic narratives have sought firm footing, like weeds in the dirt. Yet these interruptions have also, in almost the same moment, brought these stories to their own ruination, their disarticulation.

Incas and Chancas

But let us go back. Vilcas's initial significance arises because it was built upon the site of the destroyed capital of the Incas' now somewhat mysterious enemies, the Chanca confederation, in the first period of Inca expansion. Ruins upon ruins: the discourse of ruins knows no other foundation. The Chancas (also "Chankas") gave the Inca empire its own founding narrative. Philip Means provides the traditional account, that the Chanca were "a strong and warlike folk [. . .] a numerous and a bellicose people" (237). The story continues that sometime after 1400, while the Inca were still confined to the territory around Cuzco, the Chancas assembled an army and "with a savage brandishing of weapons and a wild chorus of battle cries" set out to destroy the Inca heartland (244). The people abandoned their city, leaving only eight warriors, among them the future Inca Pachakuti, who would become the most important figure in Inca historiography and mythology. Aided by the god Viracocha, who sent warriors to their aid as if from nowhere, Pachakuti and his men succeeded in beating back the Chanca

challenge. Over the course of the subsequent so-called Chanca wars the Incas then advanced into their enemies' territory, initiating thereafter further conquest and so their own rapid rise and territorial expansion, converting a city state into an empire, and even (as María Rostworowski argues) establishing the Inca state *per se*. But against this traditional story, we should set the fact that, as Terence D'Altroy notes, "despite the many accounts of the Chanka wars, scholars disagree about their authenticity." Some even suggest that "the Chankas may have been built up as the consummate but largely mythical foil, used to glorify Pachakuti and to provide a divinely inspired foundation for the empire." D'Altroy himself tends to agree that "the sagas of the Chanka wars may still be mostly a glorious epic invoked to burnish the image of the empire's father" (65). In Rostworowski's words, "the legend of the Chanca wars met the Incas' need to explain a reality, to account for the events that gave rise to Inca expansion. [. . .] So the story is somewhere between myth and reality," providing justification for "an elite of capable men who were able to take advantage of circumstances to advance the rise of a powerful state" (12).

Fortified by this narrative of divine blessing and elite heroism, the Incas took over the territory to their north and re-territorialized what had been the Chanca capital, establishing in the place they now called Vilcashuamán (meaning "sacred falcon") a complex of buildings including the pyramid I climbed, also known as an "ushnu" and according to John Hemming "the only surviving Inca structure of its kind" (*The Conquest of the Incas* 103), one of several aspects of Vilcas's architecture found nowhere else. For Reiner Zuidema, the ushnu at Vilcas was "perhaps the most splendid of the Incas" (qtd. Gasparini and Margolies 269); and "in the conquered and subjugated territories," the ushnu "was supposed to produce a visual impact that would evoke the power of the Incas" (Gasparini and Margolies 280). In addition there were (and remain, in ruins) temples to the Sun and the Moon and between them a large plaza. All this marked Vilcas's special place within the empire: Vilcashuamán became a key link within the "long rosary of the *qhapaq-ñan*," the road between Quito and Cuzco (Gasparini and Margolies 99). It therefore became the site of an large military garrison (of up to 30,000 soldiers according to some accounts, though D'Altroy questions that figure [210]), with we are told 700 storehouses. Accompanying therefore the legitimating myth of heroic conquest, and on the ruins of the Chanca town, the Incas mobilized formidable works of civil and military engineering.

But again, as well as physical power, the place encoded and concentrated symbolic power. It was the site of significant festive and ritual occasions reinforcing the tenets of Tawantisuyu social structure. On feast days and celebrations up to 20,000 people would gather in the plaza at Vilcas, to witness animal and human offerings conducted on a sacrificial stone. It is said that the pyramid was the site of an ornate throne, covered in gold, on which the Inca himself and his wife would sit to preside over the ceremonies. The entire space was marked out as a repository and stage for the performance of symbolic, religious, cultural, and juridical power: the lineaments of that power were expressed in its monumental architectural configuration as well as in the ornamentation it sported and the treasure that it held. Cieza de León, who frequently refers to Vilcas and underscores its importance, tells us that:

The temple to the sun was large and finely built. [. . .] To one side [. . .], toward the rising sun, there was a shrine for the Lord-Incas, of stone, from which small terraces emerged, about six feet wide, where other enclosures came together, and at the center there was a bench where the Lord-Inca sat to pray, all of a single stone so large that it was eleven feet long and seven feet wide [. . .]. They say this stone used to be covered with jewels of gold and precious stones to adorn this place they so venerated and esteemed. [. . .] The *Orejones* and other Indians tell that the image of the sun was of enormous value, and that there was great treasure both in the temple and buried, and that these palaces had at their service over forty thousand Indians. ()

Size, quality of workmanship, the presence of the Inca himself, the use of precious metals, the value of specific objects, and the population dedicated to the complex's upkeep: all confirm the chronicler's interest. They are designed to dazzle and to impress. Moreover, it is clear that the Incas had thoroughly obliterated whatever ruins of the Chanca capital remained. What counts is the presence of these monuments of Inca prestige. Any Chanca "real" had soon faded into the currency of a mythic prehistory. For the Incas, it seems, stone could mean only permanence, a bedrock for power, rather than the anxious reminder of their own possible transience.

Spaniards

The Spaniards encountered Vilcas early--naturally enough given its strategic position. It was site of an ambush that caught Hernando de Soto and his men by surprise in their initial 1533 march on Cuzco (Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas* 103-104). But the Incas' "bold attack" was ultimately futile, killing only one Spanish horse, wounding another,

and also wounding one of the men (103). By contrast, and as was typical of the one-sided combat that characterized the conquest, the Spaniards killed over 600 indigenous soldiers, and advanced by descending the canyons that plunge below the citadel while the Inca army retreated back towards their capital, which fell within ten days of the battle of Vilcas. As Hemming notes, "the four battles on the road to Cuzco--Jauja, Vilcashuaman, Vilcacongo, and the pass above Cuzco--had demonstrated the immense superiority of mounted, armoured Spaniards over native warriors" (109). Vilcas thereby became a watchword for indigenous defeat, and for the futility of armed resistance. When, later, in the "great rebellion" of 1536, the Inca Manco did attempt a counter-attack, the Spaniards took advantage of Vilcas's strategic location to station a garrison there while reprisals were underway (199). A "determined attack" was beaten off nearby as the rebellion continued through 1537 (215). And though Manco continued to represent a menace from his stronghold in nearby Vilcabamba on up until his assassination in the mid 1540s, Vilcas remained securely in the conquistadors' hands the whole time.

But the Spaniards took no care to maintain the architectural heritage they had taken over. By the end of Manco's rebellion, Vilcas must already have been in ruins, as Cieza de León, writing around 1550, is already fascinated by how rapidly its monuments had degenerated. It is the ruins that fascinate. Or rather, if it is not the site's glory that is of most interest, it is the contrast between that recent glory and the place's current sorry state. Having provided his account of the rituals and splendor he learns had been regularly on display, Cieza de León ends with a salutary commentary on the discrepancy between splendor past and ruination in the present:

What can be seen are the foundations of the buildings, and the walls and enclosures of the shrines, the stones I have mentioned, and the temple with its stairways, even though it has fallen into ruins and is overgrown with grass and the storehouses have fallen down. In a word, it was once what it no longer is, and by what it is, we can judge what it was. (126-127)

Already, then, fewer than thirty years after the initial conquest, and less than a decade after the pacification of what would become the province of Ayacucho, Vilcashuamán is marked as a site of lament, even for those who brought down the regime that had constructed and populated the buildings that are now no more than ruins, "overgrown with grass." "It was once what it no longer is," writes Cieza de León: Vilcas is the site of an interruption, an indication (already) of the pastness of the past. It is a *momento*

mori indicating the traumatizing effects of the clash between what can now be cast as ancient and what is emerging as modern.

From being the site of the Inca's judgments, then, the ruins of Vilcashuamán become a sight to enable judgment on the Inca: "by what it is, we can judge what it was." One story is now over; another has begun, and can claim to correct the earlier narrative's errors precisely because the ruins signal the silencing of that narrative--and in their irreversible ruination, the impossibility of any appeal. In their finality, ruins enable an assessment of the past, but also imply that history has already been judged, already been found wanting. As nature overtakes the temples and terraces, the Spanish judgment on Inca civilization is itself naturalized. The residues of that civilization offer up what is (literally) an object lesson on the way in which history has passed by Inca culture. The ruins confirm that the Spanish interruption into Peruvian history is irrecoverable: the legacy of this most central of Inca sites is only an overgrown residue that serves as moral pedagogy. As such, however, the ruins can and should be preserved: the Spaniards seldom attempted to eradicate entirely the traces of what they had themselves overturned; far from it, they were usually keen to take advantage of and (literally and figuratively) build upon the ruins of what they had supplanted. Spanish modernity was never presented as a creation *ex nihilo*; it took the interruption that indigenous ruins represented as foundation, but a foundation that had to be permanently on display. Less mythic bedrock, then, than tangible reminder of history's lesson. It is with this historical consciousness, forged for the Spaniards themselves in their encounter with the civilizations of the Americas, that the ruin as ruin comes into its own. And whereas, for Peter Fritzsche, in Europe it is only in the nineteenth century and after the French Revolution that the ruin comes to be seen as "the debris of quite specific historical disasters, not simply the general devastation of time" (96), surely in the Americas the new masters of Vilcas already recognized the historicity of ruination almost 300 years previously. Nature's encroachment on the ruins confirms Spanish ascendancy, but also provokes a somewhat melancholy reflection on history.

Of course, the Spanish Empire hardly allowed itself to wallow in such melancholia: that would be the specific contribution of a romantic sensibility still to come. Rather, they constructed new rituals, albeit now in ways that incorporated and acknowledged the ruins over which they held sway. For the Spaniards seemed to recognize the power of place, and particularly the power of this place. Before long the

invaders would return in rather different circumstances, and in their own way to rejuvenate the overgrown remains of former Inca glory. Indigenous chronicler Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala tells us that in 1570 the viceroy Francisco de Toledo came to the province, visited Vilcashuamán, ascended the steps of the same pyramid that had been the focus of Inca celebrations, sat on the Inca throne, and "was received by the principal lords as though he were the Inca himself" (447). In part, this was a response to the visit that Manco Inca's son had made the site a mere two years earlier, when "the natives paid homage and tried to relive their glorious past" (Hemming, *Monuments of the Incas* 186). Toledo was demonstrating that the privileges of power had now passed on to the Europeans: he told his own narrative of continuity and rupture in the overgrown stones of Vilcas. Likewise recoding or overcoding the town's spatial architecture, and with it also the geography of power in the region, the Spaniards built a church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist directly on top of the Inca temple to the Sun. The colonial church lording it over the remains of the Inca temple served as another history lesson, a constant reminder of indigenous defeat and Spanish dominance. Or, as Valerie Fraser puts it, by recycling the stone from indigenous temples and building upon them, the Spaniards "effectively suppressed not only idolatry but native culture and society as well" (68). Yet Fraser also notes that the colonial silence about this practice may betray a certain anxiety, "related to the whole prickly question of the Spaniards' right to conquer by force of arms" (68). Or the anxiety may rather relate to the limits of their force as a whole. For as well as appropriating the ruins, by building upon them the Spaniards thereby fixed them: keeping them in place, confirming their durability and strength. And in the case of Vilcas in particular, the church is rather precariously perched on what is still a very solid and much larger indigenous base. So precarious is the church's perch, indeed, that as Gasparini and Margolies report, around the end of the nineteenth century the entire colonial structure could be, and was, reoriented by ninety degrees so that it now faces towards the ancient plaza, rather than parallel to it (115). A twist in the tale, one might say, of the Spanish effort to situate a hegemonic project on Inca ruins.

Peruvians

For a long time thereafter, the contemplation of Inca ruins, and the ruins at Vilcashuamán in particular, was an exercise in lamentation and nostalgia at best. Over

the centuries following Viceroy Toledo's visit, Vilcashuamán was little more than a backwater in one of Peru's poorest and most overlooked provinces. Modernity would seem to be taking place elsewhere, anywhere but this increasingly remote corner of the increasingly remote province of Ayacucho, whose name fittingly translates as "the corner of the dead." The region's population remained overwhelmingly Quechua-speaking indigenous peasants, barely surviving on subsistence agriculture or small-scale animal husbandry. The town lived in the disparity between the former glories indexed by the presence of its ruins and the reality of its impoverished present. Rundown houses still nestle between and around these ruins and the inevitable comparisons they attract. When I visited, the young NGO worker who was accompanying me and with whom I climbed the pyramid commented on the apparent contradiction, pointing to the indigenous kids scrambling on the stones around us, many selling chewing gum, coca cola, ornaments, or simply asking for small change. "Look," he said, "can it be that we are the same people who built these monuments so long ago?" The question expresses a sense of cognitive dissonance: the Inca ruins indicate a history of uneven development, of repression and stagnation, that breaks with conventional understandings of causality and temporal sequence. (The Austrian Erich Von Daniken provided a fantastic because over-literal resolution to this dissonance in his suggestion that Inca monuments were the work not of the indigenous, but of Ancient Astronauts who may likewise have marked out the Nazca lines on the coast as the runways for their spaceships: another interruption, this time on an interplanetary scale.) Somehow Peru must have fucked itself up.

The Romantics put these things more delicately, but their consternation was no less heartfelt. With the end of Empire, and precisely for its remoteness, its poverty, and its isolation, Vilcas become central to a discourse of lament that encrusted itself over the ruins and the shabbiness of Inca and Spanish masonry alike. As a matter of fact, the battle that signaled the final victory of South America's struggle for independence took place not far away, but this never turned Ayacucho into a place of celebration. Rather, Vilcas came to symbolize now not Inca power, nor Spanish modernity, but the failure of the Peruvian nation, its inability to assert its own supremacy or arrive at its own modernity. By the early twentieth century, Vilcashuamán had become something like a *locus classicus* of lament for Peruvian cultural nationalists. So, for instance, for the writer and politician José de la Riva Agüero, grandson of one of Peru's first presidents, who

toured the southern Peruvian Andes on muleback in 1912, Vilcas occupies a central role in his resultant book, *Paisajes Peruanos* [Peruvian Landscapes]. On the occasion of his visit to the village, it is as though time and space themselves reflected and intensified the misery and disgrace of the ruins, viewed "in the luminous sadness of a June afternoon" (70). Riva Agüero provides the standard narratives of Vilcas's former glory (a narrative he takes mostly from Cieza de León), which he then proceeds to contrast with its current degradation. All around is filth and dirt. It is as though, he tells us, the contemporary inhabitants had forgotten completely all habits of hygiene and cleanliness. "It is possible," Riva Agüero suggests, that as in the fall from Ancient Rome to the European Dark Ages, "degradation should have caused them to lose the habit of cleanliness" (71). So the material ruination of the built environment leads, as though by contagion, to the moral as well as physical decline of a whole people.

Riva Agüero's observations of Vilcas's ruins, and the ways in which he claims they have in turn led to a people in ruin, leads then to a sustained meditation on this empty heart or dead centre of the Peruvian nation. Ian Baucom, discussing contemporary British postcolonial melancholia, claims that "in some strange way to be English is, often, to be a member of a cult of the dead, or, at the very least, a member of a cult of ruin" (175). But such a melancholic sense of nationhood grips Peruvian cultural identity more strongly still, not least in that it was forged in the throes of a crushing military defeat, at the hands of Chile in the War of the Pacific (1875-1884). Not thirty years later, Riva Agüero could retreat to the Andean *Perú Profundo* or "deepest Peru" and still find no solace. From the vibrant core of the Inca Empire, Vilcas has become the deserted desolation of the present republic, itself literally in ruins as fragments (the provinces of Tacna and Arica) were parceled out to its southern neighbor, its history emptied out as the entire contents of the national library were shipped south to Santiago. Peru can be understood, Riva Agüero suggests, in the combination of former wealth and contemporary degradation for which Vilcas's ruins provide a striking synecdoche.

I have never felt such a piercing and heartrending sensation of decadence. The village's silence was deep, because almost all its inhabitants were still in the fields. Only the warble of birds, the humble noise of the animal pens, the cackle of hens, and the footfalls of a mule train disturbed the solitude that had once listened to songs of adoration to the Sun and frenetic praise for the Inca. [. . .] Remains of a great historic shipwreck under the light of the setting sun, one

could say that the ruins of Vilcas sounded out a desperate melody, more destitute and anguished than the music of the native panpipes. Extinct opulence, and a legendary, mournful sorrow, two notes that sum up the soul of the Peruvian Andes. (71-72)

The whole landscape, the whole region, therefore, resonates with the "desperate melody" provoked by Vilcas's ruins. Precisely perhaps because of the place's emptiness, it serves all the better as a sounding board within which laments for a failed modernity reverberate. Riva Agüero conjures up the ghosts of those who had filled the space, and suggests that Vilcas was also the site where the Spaniards' downfall was sealed: he recounts the story that it was in Vilcas, in the midst of a thunderstorm, that Pizarro was confronted with a condor that settled on his baggage train full of title deeds and letters, all the bureaucracy of imperial reterritorialization. The condor represented, we are told, a "funereal omen," and though "Pizarro laughed the augury off, with his taciturn indifference" (76), he was to die but a year later, victim of mutiny among his own men. "Peru," Riva Agüero concludes his chapter on Vilcas, "has always been the country of tragic outcomes" (77). No wonder the book is lacking its final pages, and that it should have remained unpublished in the author's lifetime. How could it end but in the tragedy foretold by the melancholy ruins at Vilcashuamán? Modernity had failed precisely because, as in Ranajit Guha's formulation about India, of the "historic failure of the nation to come to its own" (43): it had failed to secure a hegemonic project that would bind (literally and figuratively) the nation together. And the pain of that failure could be felt most keenly at Vilcas.

liberators (I)

Let us turn briefly from Vilcas to examine two mid-twentieth century accounts of Inca ruins, which combine to provide three narratives of messianic redemption: three more layers of discourse, which now dig into the stone to eke out possibilities of liberation. These are counter-histories, that claim alternative lineages from interrupted Inca legacies. Though oriented firmly towards the future, they draw upon the (ruinous) material provided by the past, claiming to find a power that outlasts the Spanish and (subsequently) national capitalist recoding and reterritorialization. They focus on Cuzco, Sacsayhuamán, and Machu Picchu.

The indigenist author José María Arguedas offers two of these possibilities in his semi-autobiographical novel *Deep Rivers*. This opens with its child narrator, Ernesto,

arriving in what was once the Inca capital of Cuzco, where he is entranced by the indigenous stonework on which the town's Spanish churches and mansions are built. Far from being the mournful reminders of defeat, however, for Ernesto these ruins maintain their vivacity and power: "The lines of the wall frolicked in the sun; the stones had neither angles nor straight lines; each one was like a beast that moved in the sunlight, making me want to rejoice, to run shouting with joy" (18-19). The stonework is compared to a river, "undulating and unpredictable [. . .]. The wall was stationary but all its lines were seething and its surface was as changeable as that of the flooding summer rivers" (6, 7). Implicitly, the contrast between the vibrant indigenous foundations and the sterile colonial structures (whitewashed and windowless, silent and regimented) built over them, is also an analogue to the colonial and neocolonial elite's dependency on indigenous labor power. Even the cathedral, towering incarnation of Spanish force and inculcator of European custom, is built "with the Inca stones and the hands of the Indians" (10), for as Ernesto's father observes "what other stones would the Spaniards have used in Cuzco, son?" (11). The Spaniards imposed form upon these indigenous raw materials, chiseling them to remove their "enchantment." But that neutralization could never be fully successful. The power contained in these remnants of Inca civilization might still one day threaten those who appropriate its strength: the image of the ruins as "flooding summer rivers," as "*yawar mayu*" or "bloody river" (7), anticipates the social uprising described at the novel's conclusion, in a chapter entitled, precisely, "Yawar Mayu." For in Arguedas's vision, far from indicating a judgment already pronounced, these vibrant residues of an inextinguishable cultural power foretell a reckoning still to come. No wonder the narrator asks of these structures' inhabitants: "Aren't the people who live in there afraid?" (9).

So through Ernesto, Arguedas invokes a counter-history that appeals to the ongoing presence of pre-colonial foundations beneath the precarious veneer of Spanish cultural imposition. The emphasis here is on transculturation and hybridity, and the subterranean persistence of alternative traditions (perhaps therefore also alternative modernities?) within and beneath imposed cultural forms. Ernesto's father, on the other hand, offers a somewhat different story of the future portents held by the ruinous past. As father and son leave Cuzco, fleeing their humiliation at the hands of a heartless, landowning uncle, they contemplate the remains of Sacsayhuamán, the

ancient fortress overlooking the town. At first sight these walls seem to blend into their natural surroundings:

In broken ranks the walls settled into the gray, grassy slope. [. . .] My father saw me contemplating the ruins and did not speak to me. Farther up, when Sacsayhuaman appeared, encircling the mountains, and I could distinguish the rounded, blunt profile of the angles of the walls, he said to me, "They are like the Inca Roca's stones. They say they will last until Judgment Day, and that the archangel will blow his trumpet here." (21)

In this story, what we could term a postmodern celebration of hybridity is replaced with what we might tentatively describe as a premodern (but Christianized) Andean messianism. For Ernesto's father, at issue is less the continuing spiritedness of the rocks and stones, than the possibility of a vengeful deity returning on their and the (ruined) people's behalf. In other words, where Ernesto perceives an immanent disturbance already alive in the Inca stones, his father expects a transcendent judgment at the end of time, and is prepared to wait for the messianic justice that will arrive when the archangel finally blows his trumpet. Moreover, this difference also defines the contrasting ways in which the two move through social space: the father (an itinerant lawyer) is solitary and nomadic, refusing commitment; the son wants always to participate, to submerge himself in the activity all around him. While for the father, the ruins demand respect and silence, the son's instinct is to "run shouting with joy" or to get closer, to touch "the stone with [his] hands, following the line" even though "the lines [he] had touched between the stones burned on the palms of [his] hands" (6). For the father, the stones are monument and prophecy of what is to come; for the son, they invite contact with what already is. For Ernesto, the ruins are already resonant, but the melody they sing out is not the unimaginably mournful dirge suggested by Riva Agüero, rather a joyful, warlike song of power; for the father, Sacsayhuamán still awaits its resurrection with the archangel's trumpet. The difference is that between contact and (divine) contract. In either case, however, European modernity is an interruption, but only temporarily so; the persistence of the Inca ruins, the fact that they are never fully obliterated, indicates the possibility of their future fulfillment, and so (re-)completion, if no doubt in different form. The irony is that this fulfillment must pass through further destruction, further ruination: either the bloody river imagined by Ernesto, or the equally apocalyptic judgment from on high of which his father dreams.

Meanwhile, in what is undoubtedly the most famous literary invocation of ruins in the Latin American canon, Pablo Neruda's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* also announces the imminent redemption of Inca ruins, but here it is the poet himself who takes up the role of archangel sounding the last trumpet's call. For Neruda, the stone walls of the mountain citadel are indeed dead; they are if anything the epitome of death, and synecdoche (as with Riva Agüero's reflections on Vilcas) for the cultural massacre of an entire people. But for Neruda precisely this monumental finality contrasts favorably with the humdrum fate of life in contemporary modernity, in which people suffer "their brief and daily death," learning to live with "each day a little death: dust, maggot, lamp, / drenched in the mire of the suburbs" (13). Against this "little death without a requiem" Machu Picchu offers the facticity of a "grave death, raptor of iron plumage" (23; translation modified). It is precisely the hard materiality of the ruins that Neruda emphasizes, the way in which all that was once fragile and delicate is now resolutely stony: "Triangular tunic, pollen of stone. / Granite lamp, bread of stone. / Mineral snake, rose of stone. / Ship-burial, source of stone. / Horse in the moon, stone light" (47). Flowers, pollen, animals, even light itself, all are cast into stone. There is something heroically inspiring about the evidence of historical disaster that Inca ruins provide. And it calls forth a heroic response, in which the poet positions himself as ventriloquist and savior. First, and in what is as we have seen is the response that ruins so often provoke, he seeks to tell stories to spin around their otherwise opaque silence: "Stone within stone, and man, where was he? / Air within air, and man, where was he? / [. . .] allow me, architecture, / to fret stone stamens with a little stick, / climb all the steps of air into the emptiness, / scrape the intestine until I touch mankind" (57). Second, however, Neruda claims the power to reincarnate a past that is otherwise so long gone: "Arise to birth with me, my brother" (67). In the most striking declaration of the intellectual as semi-divine agent of redemption, he famously cries out: "I come to speak for your dead mouths. / Throughout the earth / let dead lips congregate, / out of the depths spin this long night to me / as if I rode at anchor here with you. / [. . .] Come quickly to my veins and to my mouth. / Speak through my speech, and through my blood" (69-71). The power of prosopopoeial narrative, which aims to humanize and give voice, faces the stony ruin as its ultimate challenge, and claims to rise above it. As it does so, the ruin becomes "the very foundation of the self-enabling voice of the

redemptive poet" (Moreiras 223). But then, did not the ruin always seem to seek completion through narrative?

liberators (II)

Back now to Vilcashuamán, and a final set of stories woven around its battered stones, in a strange dialogue or fable that might perhaps have put an halt, however temporary, to all such fables. After its long isolation, Vilcas only came back into the news (and then only barely) in the early 1980s, when it was the site of some early armed engagements between the Maoist guerrillas of Sendero Luminoso and the forces of law and order. Vilcas was one of the very first places that Sendero gained support and organization (as is revealed by an intelligence report from 1979, when the war had yet to break out). It is therefore unsurprising that it should prove to be a flashpoint in the initial period before the state's regular forces essentially deserted the rural highlands, and while the government still claimed to be upholding a national project motivated by Enlightenment modernity. One engagement in particular found a special place within Sendero's own mythology, and Vilcas found itself site of a remarkable dialogue between state and guerrilla, an exchange of symbols in this most symbolic of places, a dialogue and strangely revealing manifestation by this most intransigent, silent, and invisible of guerrilla groups. In late March 1982, a brief skirmish in Vilcas left one policeman slightly wounded. Impulsively, Peruvian president Fernando Belaunde, against the advice of his staff, decided he would visit Ayacucho, from where he took an unannounced helicopter flight to land at Vilcashuamán. With his interior minister, General José Gagliardi, and others, he made his way to the central square. As Gustavo Gorriti reports, "their arrival was so unexpected that no one went to meet them." Quickly, once they realized that the president had paid them this unexpected honor, the police raised the national flag and the troops presented themselves for review. Belaunde then "met briefly with some local people at the entrance to the ruins of the temple of the Sun" (Gorriti 221). There he delivered the following remarkable assurance that he was personally committed to keeping the town and its ruins within the light:

They told me that there was alarm the night before in Vilcashuamán. That the town was in darkness--its electrical generator blown up by terrorists a year ago--and that these elements took advantage of the shadows to attack once again with

sharpshooters, skilled in marksmanship, quick to escape. I could not resist the impulse to come and see them without delay to tell them that I am with them and those who defend order. (qtd. Gorriti 221)

Vilcas becomes once more the symbolic heart of the nation, here of all that has to be defended against the new threat of violence, fleeting and shadowy. To defend Vilcas is to side with modernity against barbarism, to uphold the integrity of the nation against its impending fragmentation. The temple of the Sun is the site of a renewed proclamation of authority and hegemony: the Peruvian president takes up the place occupied first by the Inca then by Toledo, to announce a power that in fact turns out to be little more than symbolic.

For by way of reply, on August 22, 1982, Sendero attacked and over-ran the police station, killing four policemen and wounding three. By contrast with the president's declaration, the guerrilla demonstrated the real physical as well as ideological weakness of the Peruvian state in these remote parts of the central highlands. But a strange discovery in the wake of the attack showed that there was something more to this flexing of muscle. Next to the destroyed police station, a bag was found containing some of the personal effects of Abimael Guzmán, Sendero's mysterious leader of whom at that stage very little was known, and of whom there were as yet no photographs in public circulation. The bag contained Guzman's "university identification, issued by the University of Huamanga, two copies of his law degree, and a certificate of conditional freedom, renewed by the police department's judicial Zone II" (Gorriti 229). In response to Belaunde's personal visit to the ruins of Vilcas, and his declaration of order, the bag left behind by Sendero indicated that Guzmán had also visited Vilcas in person, to take up and return the challenge. But that return in person was also a depersonalization, a shedding of the legal accoutrements of identity and professional qualification. The former university professor now went by the nom de guerre was Comandante Gonzalo, maximum leader of the Revolution. Guzmán, suffering from altitude-exacerbated psoriasis, was himself in a state of physical semi-ruination, taking creams to ensure he did not shed his skin. But in this ruinous site of so many narratives of identity, nationhood, and justice, he happily cast off the skin of official identity, to become mythic, to become the avenging angel that would truly, once and for all, bring the country to ruin. Far from the enlightenment that Belaunde

asserted, Gorriti portrays the effect of this clandestine exchange as a visible darkening over the Andes:

What scene better describes that violent encounter after centuries of neglect than to see that square that Riva Agüero had imagined beautiful, shining, and filled with thousands worshipping the Inca [. . .] submerged in shadow even in the midst of light, alone and arrayed only in private fears and furtive glances. And the scarlet tint was not sacred, but, in that still-smoking building, the blood of two dead guardsmen, humble, hurting, defeated. (229-230)

But Gorriti shares in Riva Agüero's romanticism. The centuries of blood and neglect that had been shed at Vilcas, before and after the coming of the Inca, could not be so simply excised by Belaunde's *fiat lux*. As the police pulled out and the guerrilla and, soon afterwards, the state's counter-insurgency troops moved in, small towns and villages such as Vilcashuamán became the scene of atrocities committed by both sides in an increasingly dirty war of attrition and intimidation. For most of the 1980s rural Ayacucho became a no-go area, as any image of postcolonial serenity was shattered, and rural economies, livelihoods, and customs were devastated. Ruins upon ruins.

Many years later, in 2003 at the close of the civil war, and in the wake of the 70,000 lives lost in the conflict, in conjunction with issuing its final report on the crimes committed during the war, Peru's truth and reconciliation commission decided to organize a photography exhibition featuring press and other pictures of the violence that had wracked the country. Its purpose was particularly to tell those who lived in the capital the story of a conflict that long went relatively unremarked and unreported on the coast--a coast that has always counted itself more modern than the Andes, with its physical and social ruination. The exhibition's title was "Yuyanapaq," Quechua for "To Remember." It was curated in an old colonial house in Chorrillos, a former fishing village now a fairly upscale suburb of Lima. The house, a mansion overlooking the ocean now owned by the Universidad Católica, was in a state of severe disrepair. As Juan Forero notes in his review of the exhibition, "the plaster is peeling, the floors are made of cement and the walls rot." The place was, in short, a complete ruin. "But Peru's past is alive here," continues Forero, "in riveting, raw photographs intended to recall the horrors of a 20-year terror war." Again, then, ruination and violence, life and death, storytelling and memory, come together in the same place. "The walls are part of the exhibition," the curator is reported to have said. "The house permits you to see and understand the images. There is a marriage between the house and the images." The

house itself is named after its most distinguished former owner and occupant, a writer and politician: it is the Casa Riva Agüero. Among the largest photographs, covering "an entire wall" of one of the mansion's rooms, is a picture of ruins, of the rubble of a bombed-out municipal headquarters "where a diligent worker rolls up a huge photograph of Fernando Belaunde, then the president, after a Shining Path attack. 'It's symbolic because it's complete destruction and amid the rubble a peasant is trying to care for his president.'" The name of the village where this photograph was taken is, of course, Vilcashuamán.

clambering

"Do not indulge in storytelling," Louis Althusser enjoins us. "As far as I'm concerned, this formula is still the one and only definition of materialism" (221; translation modified). But perhaps we can reach the same end by different means. Showing the proliferation of stories that have accreted around a particular ruin demonstrates these narratives' precariousness, their contingency. Though in one way or another, all these stories claim the ruins as their foundation, and derive their modernity from their curious simultaneous embrace and rejection of ruination, in fact their hold on the ruin is tenuous at best. They barely touch, let alone scratch, the stones' surface. Ruins are good sites for storytelling, but precisely for that fact each successive story becomes but another layer of soil that covers the stones beneath, preserving rather than fundamentally altering what makes them different--what makes them real, rather than merely symbolic. Stubbornly, the ruins endure much the same as ever. And the ever presumptuous narratives of hegemonic power, which gradually lose their shape even as they attempt to adapt to the shape of the monuments they surround, and as they set out to shape the lives and beliefs of the people around, become less telling over time, not more. In some ways it is rather odd that ruins should seem to attract narrative so, in that it becomes increasingly evident that the narrative never quite sticks to them.

The fundamental incompatibility between ruin and narrative should be plain to see. But that great architect of our contemporary modernity, Sigmund Freud, in a late essay, offers perhaps a clue as to why we so often refuse to acknowledge the stubborn materialism that ruins, of all objects, incarnate above all. Though Freud often compared the unconscious to buried ruins, and the task of the analyst to that of the archaeologist, uncovering ever deeper strata for the prizes hidden in the depths, in "A Disturbance of

Memory on the Acropolis," he turns this metaphor on its head. Here, ruins stand for what is clearly in view, in front of the analyst's face. And the issue here is why what is so straightforwardly visible, uncompromisingly material, should be strangely denied or disavowed. Written in 1936, "A Disturbance of Memory" is a rather melancholy birthday present, dedicated to the Nobel Prize-winning writer Romain Rolland for his seventieth birthday. Freud, ten years older still, clearly feels himself something of a ruin, his "powers of production [. . .] at an end" (447). The essay's topic is a recollection from 1904 that has "kept on recurring to [his] mind" (447). It is the story of a Mediterranean holiday Freud took with his brother, in which they headed off to Corfu. Stopping in Trieste, however, the brothers' plans changed. An acquaintance advises against Corfu and strongly suggests that the two sail for Athens, instead. Strangely disconsolate, they book a passage for Athens, and on arrival set out to see the sights. On the Acropolis, Freud's reaction to the ruins of which he has heard so much is, he admits, decidedly curious:

A surprising thought suddenly entered my mind: "So all this really *does* exist, just as we learnt at school!" To describe the situation more accurately, the person who gave expression to the remark was divided, far more sharply than was usually noticeable, from another person who took cognizance of the remark; and both were astonished, though not by the same thing. The first behaved as though he were obliged, under the impact of an unequivocal observation, to believe in something the reality of which had hitherto seemed doubtful. [. . .] The second person, on the other hand, was justifiably astonished, because he had been unaware that the real existence of Athens, the Acropolis, and the landscape around it had ever been objects of doubt. What he had been expecting was rather some expression of delight or admiration. (449; emphasis in original)

The ruins are an instance of what is incontrovertible, plainly in front of Freud's face, but whose reality for some reason some part of him chooses to doubt. What should be a source of affirmation ("delight or admiration") becomes instead the occasion for a deep scission within the self.

Freud goes on to describe this denial of the evident as a "feeling of derealization" (453), and explains it in terms of the super-ego's injunction derived from guilt that he has superseded his own father's achievements by coming "such a long way" (455). But what is of interest here, is first the way in which contemplating the split rocks of the ruin induces in Freud a split subjectivity: between a person subject to derealization, and another person "justifiably astonished" at this denial. The story Freud himself tells focuses on the first of these, to establish once again the usual melancholy story of

parental admonition and oedipal trauma. And Freud observes that what is "truly paradoxical" about his own behavior on the Acropolis is that, far from denying or repressing a trauma or displeasure, his defense mechanism serves to ward off "something which, on the contrary, promises to bring a high degree of pleasure." At last, a dream attained: why deny it, as though it were "too good to be true" (450)? So, second, why not side with the other aspect of Freud's split subject, the one who takes a still childish delight in fulfilling the long-held desire to be there, in front of the ruins themselves. As in Arguedas's *Deep Rivers*, rather than accepting the father's warning of judgment to come, the other possibility is the child's desire to touch up close, for an immanent contact with the stones themselves. Is there not, in other words, some other mode of inhabiting or coexisting with our ruins of modernity, that does not involve distant gazes or presumptuous declarations? Why not affirm the ruin as it is, and the pleasure it provokes, a pleasure best appreciated by getting up close, losing one's self in its twists and turns, clambering over it even at the cost of perhaps dislodging a stone or two of modernity's precarious foundations? Let us choose reality, an affirmation, a literal reading of what stares the analyst straight in the face but which he chooses rather to deny. Let us, finally, affirm a youthful spirit, all the more so with the American ruins of the New World, leaving the stories behind to join in with rather than judge the kids scrambling over the pyramids at the myriad sites such as Vilcashuamán.

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