

Un-Disciplining Archaeology

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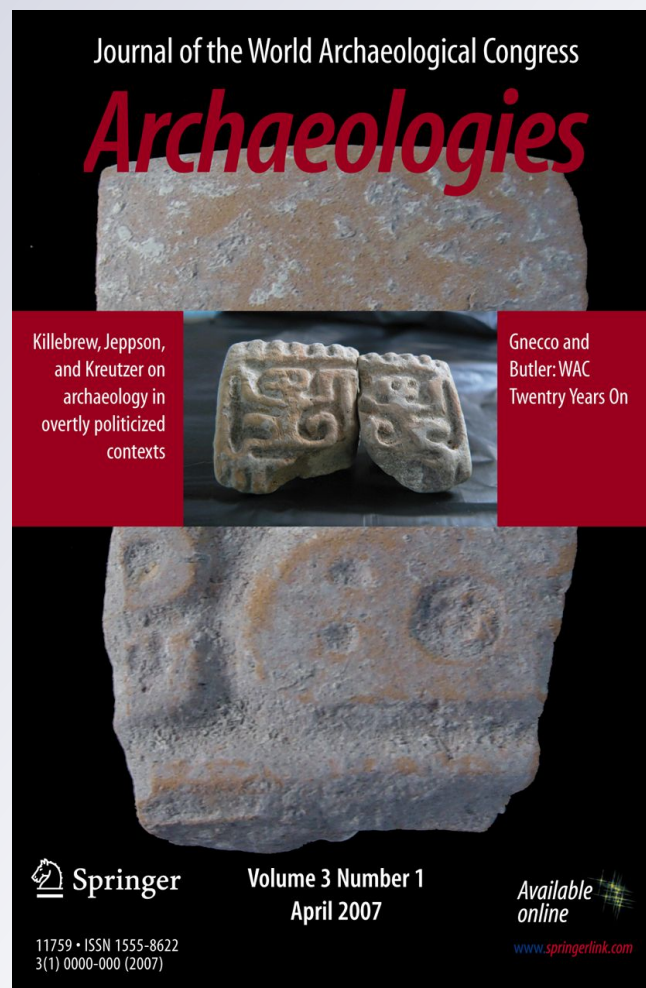
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Un-Disciplining Archaeology

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ABSTRACT

We can think of a kind of archaeological colonialism in terms of the exportation of metropolitan theories and/or methodologies to peripheral countries/regions, or in the way metropolitan academic institutions/archaeologists conduct archaeology in peripheral countries/regions. But even if we manage to stop those kinds of colonial bonds, archaeology would remain being an imperial weapon. And, moreover, it can be said that colonialism is not dependant on the overseas provenance of archaeologies and/or theories. Beyond theoretical and methodological variability, it is archaeology itself what happens to recapitulate colonialist relationships; and this seems to happen even when archaeology is openly and deliberately oriented towards indigenous peoples' empowerment, social justice, and peace. It seems that theoretical and methodological paradigms and political intentions operate at a surface level, while colonialism is equipped with stronger streams operating below the floor where archaeologists stand. What is there below our feet, making us move in one direction even when we walk in the other? Neither being the theories, neither the methods, nor the political intentions and nationality, what is that hidden force that govern the sense of archaeology in the contemporary post-colonial world? My argument is that the hidden force it is not hidden at all, but remains unseen because it is too obvious. The disciplinary framework of archaeology itself -that is, its basic subject matter and method—beyond the theoretical and methodological paradigms and the political orientation in which we aim to proceed, or our nationality or whatever, recapitulates coloniality. Without implying that theoretical and methodological debate within archaeological discipline is in vain, I dedicate this piece to write not within, but about the discipline. In short, this will include talking about disciplining, its recapitulation in post-disciplinary contexts, and the implied proposal of un-disciplining archaeology.

Résumé: Il est possible d'identifier un type de colonialisme archéologique en termes d'exportation des théories et/ou méthodologies métropolitaines

vers des pays/régions périphériques, ou dans la manière dont les institutions académiques et les archéologues métropolitains conduisent les opérations d'archéologie dans les pays/régions périphériques. Mais même si nous parvenons à mettre un terme à ces types de liens coloniaux, l'archéologie demeurerait une arme impériale. Et de plus, on peut alléguer que le colonialisme n'est pas dépendant de la provenance étrangère des archéologies et/ou des théories. Au-delà de la variabilité théorique et méthodologique, c'est l'archéologie elle-même qui semble réinstaurer les relations colonialistes; et ceci semble se produire même lorsque l'archéologie est ouvertement et délibérément orientée vers l'autonomie, la justice sociale et la paix en faveur des peuples autochtones. Il apparaît que les paradigmes théoriques et méthodologiques ainsi que les intentions politiques fonctionnent à un niveau de surface, alors que le colonialisme est doté de flux plus puissants s'exerçant sous le sol où se tiennent les archéologues. Qu'est-ce qui se trouve sous nos pieds, nous incitant à prendre une direction et ceci même alors que nous nous déplaçons vers une autre ? Ne s'agissant pas des théories, des méthodes ni des intentions politiques et de la nationalité, quelle est donc cette force cachée régissant l'orientation de l'archéologie dans le monde post-colonial contemporain ? Mon argument est que cette force cachée ne l'est pas du tout, mais demeure invisible parce qu'elle est trop évidente. Il s'agit du cadre disciplinaire de l'archéologie lui-même, à savoir son sujet et sa méthode de base, au-delà des paradigmes théoriques et méthodologiques et de l'orientation politique dont nous visons la poursuite, de notre nationalité ou de tout élément réinstaurant la colonialité. Sans suggérer que le débat théorique et méthodologique au sein de la discipline archéologique est vain, je consacre cet article à une étude non pas dans le cadre de ladite discipline mais sur cette dernière. En bref, ceci impliquera d'évoquer la mise en place d'une discipline, sa récapitulation dans des contextes post-disciplinaires, et la proposition implicite d'une archéologie exempte de discipline.

Resumen: Podemos pensar en un tipo de colonialismo arqueológico en términos de la exportación de teorías y/o metodologías metropolitanas a países/regiones periféricas, o en la manera en la que instituciones académicas y/o arqueólogos metropolitanos realizan arqueología en países/regiones periféricos. Mas aún si nos arregláramos para detener tales tipos de lazos coloniales, la arqueología seguiría siendo un arma imperial. E, incluso, puede decirse que el colonialismo no depende de la procedencia extranjera de las arqueologías y/o las teorías. Más allá de la variabilidad teórica y/o metodológica, es la arqueología en sí la que recapitula las relaciones colonialistas; y esto sucede incluso cuando la arqueología se

orienta abierta y deliberadamente hacia el apoderamiento de los pueblos indígenas, la justicia social y la paz. Pareciera que los paradigmas teóricos y metodológicos y las intenciones políticas operasen en un nivel superficial, mientras que el colonialismo está equipado con corrientes más fuertes que operan debajo del suelo en el que se paran los arqueólogos. ¿Qué es lo que está bajo nuestros pies, haciéndonos mover en una dirección aún cuando caminamos en otra? Si no son las teorías, ni los métodos, ni las intenciones políticas ni la nacionalidad, cuál es esa fuerza oculta que gobierna el sentido de la arqueología en el mundo poscolonial contemporáneo? Mi planteo es que esa fuerza no está para nada oculta, aunque resulta invisible porque es demasiado obvia. El marco disciplinario de la propia arqueología, es decir, el objeto y el método básicos, recapitula la colonialidad más allá de los paradigmas teóricos y metodológicos y la orientación política en la cual pretendemos proceder, o la nacionalidad o lo que sea. Sin pretender que el debate teórico y metodológico sea vano, dedico este texto a escribir no dentro sino acerca de la disciplina. En breve, esto incluye hablar del disciplinamiento, su recapitulación en contextos posdisciplinarios, la implícita propuesta de indisciplinar la arqueología.

KEY WORDS

Disciplining, Post-coloniality, Decolonial, Epistemology, Ontology

We can think of a kind of archaeological colonialism in terms of the exportation of metropolitan theories and/or methodologies to peripheral countries/regions. We can also think of colonialism in the way in which metropolitan academic institutions/archaeologists conduct archaeology in peripheral countries/regions. But even if we manage to stop these kinds of colonial bonds, archaeology would remain an imperial weapon. Moreover, it can be said that colonialism is not dependant on the overseas provenance of archaeologies and/or theories. Beyond theoretical and methodological variability, it is archaeology itself that recapitulates colonialist relationships; and this seems to be the case even when archaeology is openly and deliberately oriented towards indigenous peoples' empowerment, social justice, and peace. It seems that theoretical and methodological paradigms and political intentions operate at a surface level, while colonialism is equipped with stronger streams operating below the floor where archaeologists stand. What is there below our feet, making us move in one direction even when we walk in the other? If it is not the theories, nor the methods, or the political intentions and nationality, what is that hidden force that governs the sense of archaeology in the contemporary

post-colonial world? My argument is that the hidden force is not hidden at all, but remains unseen because it is too obvious. The disciplinary framework of archaeology itself -that is, its basic subject matter and method—beyond the theoretical and methodological paradigms and the political orientation in which we aim to proceed, or our nationality or whatever, recapitulates coloniality (Mignolo 2006).¹ Without implying that theoretical and methodological debate within archaeological discipline is in vain, I would like to dedicate this piece to write not within, but about the discipline. In short, this will include talking about disciplining, its recapitulation in post-disciplinary contexts, and the implied proposal of un-disciplining archaeology (Haber 2008).

Simply written, archaeology is about knowing the past through the study of its material remains. There is a time called 'past' that has gone before we came. Something material has remained from it, and even if it has not remained as it then was, something has remained from that original material. Studying those material remains in the inverse trend we can know how those things were in the past, and knowing them we can also know how the past was. How did the past work; what were the forces governing it and the relationships between them; how should we consider the amount and quality of the original material remaining in the remains, and of the past remaining in the material? These are among the many theoretical and methodological specificities that amount towards one or another 'theory' *within* the archaeological discipline.² The disciplinary framework, that is, the basic set of common understandings about the subject matter and the method, keep the theoretical debate under the umbrella of the same discipline. It is the common understanding that makes one say that a particular piece of work is archaeology, beyond the increasing variability of ways of doing archaeology. Names and definitions of the subject matter—the 'archaeological-it'—can change from one 'theory' to another (for instance, archaeological record, material culture, archaeological culture, material past, material remains, etc.; or hypothesis testing, interpretation, inference, etc.), but beyond such variability some common sense is kept (Haber 2007).

As time has passed, the past is gone; a common representation of the passage of time from past to present to future is the timeline, whose natural manifestation is stratigraphy. We are in the present separated from the past by a measurable distance on the timeline. Part of the matter that existed in the past remained till the present, hence the 'material remains'. Studying those material remains the practitioners of the discipline can know the past from when they remain. These are the obvious common basic principles of the discipline, and they sound obvious to a disciplinary readership because it is a cultural (naturalized) language. In what follows I develop an external gaze on such disciplinary language.

Disciplining

Looking at the discipline from outside, it appears that its methodological definition of the subject matter (knowing the past through material remains) implies a divide between the knower (us, the archaeologists) and the knowable past, and a transcendence of the divide through archaeological method (a way of obtaining knowledge). Within the archaeological discipline (i.e., within that game of language), my relationship with the archaeological-it (the past and the remains) is an epistemological one, and not ontological.³ Thus the disciplinary pretension is that my relationship with the archaeological-it affects my self as knower, not as being. Within that language, a metaphysical gap separates the knower and the known beings as if they were within different orders of being. And once the disciplinary language becomes the accepted language, the gap—now in the objective world—can only be bridged by an asymmetrical knowledge relationship. The contribution of the discipline to coloniality is the disciplinary objectification of a former divide: the colonial difference between knower/colonizer and known/colonized. Separated and held apart within colonial subjectivities, such modes of being are recapitulated in disciplinary method. In this way, the hard wiring of coloniality is reproduced in the modern disciplinary representations of (pre-colonial) history and of the correct ways of dealing with its remains.

The idea of material remains, that is, something that remained in its materiality, implies that it has not remained in a non-material quality, or that what has remained not being material is not conducive to knowledge (the normal relationship) about the past. Thus, the past can only be known and dealt with through its materiality, i.e., excluding its non-materiality. At the same time, the material remains from the past can only be mediated by the search of knowledge. The definition of material remains excludes other-than-material remains from the past: descent and memory. Kinship and memory are built in the disciplinary metaphysics as *apart* from the relationship of the discipline to its 'it'. If they exist, they are non-disciplinary relationships. To be related to the past by kinship and/or memory is not something that can happen to me in my capacity as archaeologist (or as a disciplined individual).

Kinship and memory are fundamental kinds of relationships within a capitalist society. They make it possible to transfer property from one generation to the next, transforming capitalist relationships (property of capital) into class relationships. *Within* capitalism, through kinship and memory—the immaterial remains from the past—the relationship to the past is not just a relationship of knowledge; it affects the being of the individuals and collectives. But *across* the archaeological metaphysical gap, the

disciplined relationship with the past and its remains is only mediated by knowledge via the archaeological method. This explains how the disciplinary framework recapitulates the colonial difference: the condition of possibility of the discipline is the exclusion of immaterial remains from the licit (normal) relationship. It can only exist on the basis of the exclusion of its other⁴ (Castro-Gómez 2000).

The discipline constructs its other as the *pre-disciplinary phase*, variedly called speculative, beginnings, lay, folk, etc.; 'pre-disciplinary' is understood by the discipline as a period in time superseded by the arrival of the discipline. Persistent others are usually considered looters or *huaqueros*, and thus excluded and punished, as abnormal or subnormal. The discipline represents its own history as a progressive line from ignorance to knowledge, wiring in its own genealogy the reproduction of colonial difference and epistemic violence, and at the same time naturalizing its own understanding of history. To write in the past tense about the past that is its subject matter is the main role of archaeology within coloniality (historic preterizing), and this is possible when the Other's approaches to the same 'subject matter' are themselves written in the past tense (epistemic preterizing).

Although in material terms it can be said that the discipline is a thing (literature, language, laws, etc.), the performative aspect of the discipline—that is, in a pragmatist perspective—implies seeing *disciplining* as a continued trend towards the discipline. Disciplining happens also before the institutionalization of the discipline and in post-disciplinary contexts. It can be said that the major accomplishment of the discipline has been to transform its own language (preterization) into the hegemonic relationship to the 'archaeological-it', thus disciplining the way society deals with the past and its remains. The disciplinary metaphysics were socialized in law, in international treaties, in school, in media, etc., as a disciplining process that began in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries. It can be said that it is the hegemonic relationship to the past in international relationships and in the majority of the national cultures since the last decades.⁵

New challenges for disciplinary archaeology were posed by post-colonial contexts. These consist in the renewed expansion of market-place relationships, including the expansion over new or abandoned geographical areas for the exploitation of resources (by capital investment), the building of infrastructure for expanded capitalism (energy and goods transportation), and the development of new 'immaterial' goods mainly in the area of tourism. Within those contexts, the discipline is transformed in ways where knowledge is not any more an end in itself, but part of administrative procedures or commodities development oriented towards capitalist expansion (Escobar 2005). At the same time, the political and cultural empowerment of indigenous peoples and social movements implied new scenarios where the disciplinary monologue was not possible any more. The discipline

accommodated itself to deal with these postcolonial contexts: CRM, heritage tourism, and indigenous archaeology developed as subfields of intervention. Transcending the knowledge-search relationships, archaeology dialogues with other values (development, social justice, peace) governing *post-disciplinary archaeology*, as we might call the transformation of archaeology in order to be able to participate in post-colonial contexts.

Post-Disciplinary Archaeology

In this form of archaeology, disciplinary metaphysics are put into dialogue with capital investment prospects, engineering strategies, and indigenous politics. Post-disciplinary archaeology is flexible enough to accommodate itself to different scenarios, and the extraordinary diversity of fields of intervention as can be seen in any of the major national, multinational or international archaeological forums is a measure of its flexibility of contexts of intervention (and not only theoretical variability). What remains from archaeological discipline is its metaphysical framework (the very condition of possibility of post-disciplinary archaeology).

Archaeology sets the game of language that frames the dialogues with other forces (for instance, ancestors, gods, territory). CRM⁶ is an example. It is about measuring a project's effects on archaeological remains, and quantifying costs and priorities for its conservation. The disciplinary idea of archaeological remains is recapitulated (with the aforementioned implications for the reproduction of the disciplinary metaphysics). But also the archaeological idea of time and history as lineal is reproduced: by its inclusion within an administrative procedure oriented towards the implementation of a capitalist development project, it implicitly assumes the inevitability of capitalist development, as governed by the progression of time.

Indigenous archaeology is another field where archaeological metaphysics are usually (but not always) recapitulated. Entering into a dialogue with indigenous communities usually means the development of asymmetrical relationships (archaeologists teaching locals, locals participating in the archaeological team, archaeologists helping indigenous, indigenous transforming themselves into archaeologists, etc.). What is usually not challenged is the archaeological episteme, its very foundations: the materiality of archaeological finds, its quality as media for knowing the past.⁷

In post-disciplinary archaeology the theoretical focus is displaced *from epistemology to ethics*, and issues of 'good practice' are put to the fore. As epistemology was the framing of theory within disciplinary archaeology, it is the turn of ethics to frame theory within post-disciplinary archaeology. But theory stops when the frames are reached. The metaphysics of differ-

ence are thus recapitulated, including the recapitulation of the colonial difference within hegemonic relationships.

The recapitulation of coloniality has little to do with political and/or ethical intentions of individuals conducting archaeology. Even when a horizontal dialogue is searched, that dialogue is already framed in one particular language (a game of language) assumed to be the natural language that describes the world (the hegemonic position). To undermine the hegemonic place from where archaeology disciplines the relationships with the past and its remains implies listening and learning from subaltern relationships to the past and its remains, moving the home address of writing, and developing positions for *un-disciplining archaeology* from its disciplinary metaphysics.

Un-Disciplining Archaeology

Un-disciplining archaeology is not a new theoretical trend to be followed, but a mandatory task within a decolonial (political) project. In this sense, it is a part of a project of life, of good life. Time, materiality, and otherness are the three main areas for un-disciplining archaeology. Instead of the basic assumptions of archaeological discipline, un-disciplining archaeology implies un-rooting its ontology and epistemology from coloniality. In this sense, *time* is not a lineal dimension that simply elapses while some event is occurring, but a place woven by relationships of care. *Materiality* is not in opposition to spirituality, neither in ontological nor in epistemological terms, but an existential grounding, a home address. And *otherness* is not a stable category for classifying peoples, times and territories, but the conditioning of regimes of care. Given that un-disciplining archaeology involves local conversations it always retains a local grounding. Notwithstanding, the shared oppositional vocation, in the sense of a departure from Western ontology and the role of archaeological discipline within it, can be considered a common ground that is fed by networking locales and experiences.

Anatomizing the discipline⁸ and networking localities against global discourses are both important tasks within the project of un-disciplining archaeology. These are not academic tasks to be done in isolation, but conversations to develop in the borderlands. The conversation about the hegemonic place of archaeological discourse helps *localizing* archaeological metaphysics. It may produce a move towards local epistemes (considering conversations with local theories of history, ontologies, and regimes of care; and accepting the instability implied in being-in those conversations). In that case, it may be necessary to develop *writings* that afford moving their home address to post-Western border regions of thinking and writing. Such writings are written in a language other than the (hegemonic)

game; and they are focused, at least partially, in writing their *move*. Instead of searching for greater objectivity, it is about expanding *subjectivity across* former gaps, weaving relationships with history through memory, descent and care. In conversation with popular cultures, indigenous peoples, and social movements, it implies identifying challenges to coloniality-constituted securities of the self.

The *border*, not the discipline, is the place for un-disciplining archaeological theory. The border is the objective territory of colonial friction, and also the subjective territory of colonial difference (Mignolo 2003). Language is constituted in hegemony, and at the same time it is reproduced and subverted in the border. Social movements, local communities, indigenous peoples, popular cultures, are already mixing and weaving relationships, and producing counter-hegemonic theorization from the exteriority of the West. Theory in the border is not just about knowing, but about life. Thus it is not enclosed in the academy but in conversation among inhabitants, dwellers. Theory is in the varied, subversively intense, and expressive ways (music, dance, literature, poetry, etc.), and in the conversations (in alphabetic writing or otherwise) about that intensity. Theory is about the world (that includes the object of archaeology, but within a set of networks other than the disciplinary one, where memory and kinship have as much importance as materiality), and on the world (being both part of the conversation and about the conversation). Theory in the border is not Western. This is not a pretension of originality, but a departure from the West as a political and cultural platform.

Summarizing and Beyond

There is a disciplinary hard core that frames what is called archaeology, who are the archaeologists, and what object is named as archaeological. That core is a basic network of concepts included in the idea of knowing the gone past through its material remains. It includes several epistemic assumptions, as the idea of a lineal and measurable time that goes from the gone past, to the recent past, to the present and then the future. It also includes both the idea of materiality as condensing non-linguistic information and conserving it in its pure materiality, and the idea of knowledge as the main relationship for bridging the gap between the gone past (that is, the time not symbolically related to the knower) and the knower him/herself. This symbolic network operates excluding other existing networks, confining them to a pre-disciplinary phase or lay knowledge. The discipline itself operates as a device for the constitution of such set of assumptions as hegemonic. This doesn't mean that the repressed symbolic networks simply disappear: they remain in the popular cultures as subaltern epistemes,

becoming visible in certain moments and through not necessarily linguistic discursive expressiveness, and turning themselves invisible for official and repressor eyes. At the same time, the hegemonic episteme, including archaeological language, neglects popular semiopraxis and considers itself as being in the place of normality.

Within post-colonial contexts, where the disciplinary metaphysics is pushed to prioritize other values than knowledge, including development, social justice, peace, etc., archaeology undergoes a major transformation, but its fundamental hard core remains the same. Post-colonial contexts tend to take archaeology away from its academic buildings and to put it in situations of negotiation with non-academic actors and collectives. But the archaeological discipline intervenes in these interactions already equipped with its own language and its assumption of normality, therefore lacking many chances to do something else than reproducing its own hegemonic position.

My argument here is for un-disciplining archaeology from its own metaphysics. To anatomize the discipline, to turn to itself its scrutinizing gaze, seems to be a way for un-disciplining archaeology. To say what remains unsaid within archaeological language appears as a necessary step. To de-link the place of normality of the disciplinary assumed frameworks may be an important counter-hegemonic strategy. But these tasks cannot be conducted enclosed within the walls of the academy if un-disciplining archaeology remains to be its goal. It has to be done in conversation, not merely with other colleagues, already participants of the same disciplinary faith, but with non-academic actors and collectives. These, through their intercultural relationships with the hegemonic episteme, are already doing the political and poetical job of a critical theorizing. And that is what I mean by the borderland as the place of theory.

It is not that we should go to the encounter with an original and pristine other, enclosed in a different ontology, and let ourselves to be converted from one thing to another completely different thing. The different epistemes are not enclosed but interculturally constituted, through the kind of relations I mentioned before as heteroglosia and hegemony. Border theories are not necessarily linguistic; they developed different kinds of discursive expressiveness, such as dance, music, textiles, gestures, and material culture (Arnold et al. 2000). Given that the place of utterance remains within the hegemonic position, such semiopractical expressions are usually non-said—in linguistic terms—but elaborate parallel and subversive texts sustained by non-Western theories of relatedness. These are implicitly or explicitly critical of Western conceptions of time and materiality that are functional to capitalism and colonialism, contributing to the exposition of capitalist expansion under the shape of development and of colonialism under the shape of missionizing and helping others. It is myself, already

socialized and institutionally consecrated within the discipline, who needs to learn about the disciplinary episteme and its assumed place of normality, and is in that sense that I say that un-disciplining archaeology may imply an abandonment of the West as a cultural and political platform. As with learning, when one allows oneself to be touched, something may happen to oneself, and to the securities provided by epistemology to the discipline and its practitioners. In conversation in the borderland, the former securities become instabilities, as one goes from hegemony to heteroglossia.

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Notes

1. Within post-colonial South American theory (self-named as coloniality/modernity program) this is related to what has been called ‘coloniality’, which implies at least three inter-related dimensions (Mignolo 2006): coloniality of power implies the recapitulation of colonialism beyond formal colonial political bonds; coloniality of being entails the operation of people in former colonial countries both as colonized and as colonizers; coloniality of knowledge includes the colonial genealogy and present colonial operation of academic disciplines.
2. I acknowledge the importance of this discussion, but because I believe that focusing the discussion on the ‘theories’ that variedly ‘fill in’ the content of the discipline ends leaving no unscrutinised the disciplinary ‘container’, in this paper I will prefer to focus myself on the disciplinary framework. It is in this methodological sense that I place myself externally to the discipline.
3. An epistemologically mediated ontological relationship.

4. 'Epistemic violence', according to Castro-Gómez (2000).
5. Maybe the onset of the UNESCO's Heritage of Humanity program in 1972 can be considered as a landmark in this trend.
6. And its equivalent designations.
7. I acknowledge, nevertheless, the great importance of indigenous archaeology for an un-disciplining project, when it prompts consequent challenges to the disciplinary metaphysics.
8. I borrowed this expression from Nick Shepherd (pers. comm.).

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