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## Gordillo, Gastón. *Rubble: the Afterlife of Destruction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

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**Gordillo, Gastón. *Rubble: the Afterlife of Destruction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.**

*Rubble: the Afterlife of Destruction* is a fascinating and remarkable monograph. It employs an ethnographic approach to examine both the history of and the contemporary state of ruin in the Argentinian region of Chaco. The ruins of Chaco themselves and the narratives that are and are not produced about them become Dr. Gordillo's guides to the understanding of the contemporary form and production of social space and, more importantly, to the comprehension of how previous forms of social space were destroyed. The construct of ruins, in other words, allows him to establish a theoretical dialogue between production and destruction in which violence, symbolic and physical, becomes a central articulating concept. *Rubble* is also captivating because by focusing our gaze on ruins, the book forces us to discuss the materiality of history while pushing us to connect matter to politics, economy, and identity. Gordillo masterfully succeeds in transcending the materiality of subjective history.

Gordillo is dissatisfied with the fetishized notion of "ruin" that dominates the heritage industry and the conceptualization of the past reified by modernity in general. He prefers "rubble," as it is a concept that is more capable of describing the stratigraphy of experiences that comprise history. His goal is to tackle the palimpsest that is any given landscape. This is a book also about territoriality: about the imprints that the territorializing efforts (and conflicts) leave over the land in the form of ruins and text. Gordillo's book, in a way, is joining an admirable, old intellectual genealogy that connects the works of people as diverse as Polanyi, Foucault, Scott, or Peluso, to name a few, in their efforts to understand the impacts of the deployment of a market- and state-driven modernity over land and people.

In this fashion, this book is a study not only on how space becomes place(s) but also about how some places are destroyed by the implementation of processes of progressive abstraction inherent to most modernizing territorialization schemes. Gordillo, from a theoretical perspective, draws from diverse sources connecting the conceptualizations of materialists such as Marx, Adorno, Lefebvre, or even Badiou, with those of phenomenologists, like Merleau-Ponty, hermeneutics, such as Heidegger, or current post-structural thinkers, like Tsing, Stoler, or Latour. As emphasized in his subtitle, *The Afterlife of Destruction*, Gordillo relies heavily on Benjamin and his concept of "afterlife." Gordillo builds upon Benjamin's approach to art to highlight the independent social life that (inanimate) matter has achieved across history thanks to successive re-interpretations, embodiments, and re-inventions. This book also offers a first rate ethnographic study of the processes of social production (and reproduction) of history. Gordillo creates for the reader a historical genealogy that connects the devastation brought upon the early Spanish settlements by the indigenous insurrections, the Imperial and Argentinian native genocide, the rise and fall of the railway system and the cattle industry, the vanishing Gaucho geographies, and the environmental destruction unleashed by the current soy boom. The historical succession that Gordillo succeeds in unfolding is comprehensive and, in its analysis, pays special attention to both the environmental consequences and the morphology of the landscapes under each "exploitative" regime, making, in fact, this monograph an excellent political ecology study examining the cultural identities made and unmade across these centuries in the Chaco.

*Rubble* provides a vast quantity of historical material to reflect on the essence of capitalism, especially its emphasis on two intrinsic and interrelated characteristics: mobility and connectivity. The whims of capitalism are ephemeral, always on the move, searching for the best rates of profit. A factory or a plantation might be established in a locale to take advantage of

some specific raw material or commodity that makes an investing venture profitable, but as soon as the same commodity or material can be found elsewhere at a lower cost, the original factory or the plantation will be abandoned. Territories that experience the connection to the capitalist market and the industrial productive system are changed forever. When such territories fall from the capitalistic grid, when they are disconnected from its global networks because they cannot compete with other sites of production, they are already changed forever, and the environments and people affiliated with such abandoned territories cannot go back to a pre-connected stage, the environment often ruined, and the economic life monetized, making the old ways of life unsustainable.

Anthropology, with its original emphasis on recording everything about societies that after contact with the modern world were on the brink of disappearing, has more often than not focused on the study of the impact of modernity on “traditional” communities. The use of ruins as a key heuristic device to approach bygone social projects has allowed Gordillo to relocate the analytical lens to focus on what happens to human communities when modernity “leaves” traditional communities, *i.e.*, when the market withdraws from a locality—one of his goals being understanding what is left after the disconnection; Gordillo’s text seeks to understand life within the communities that find themselves in a “post-industrial vacuum.” Gordillo places special importance on the recollection and analyses of the narratives of modernity that fostered the processes of territorialization of Chaco, narratives dominated by a powerful trope: that of “national progress.” The state territorialization of Chaco did occur, and now, the territory is a clearly integrated part of Argentina; ironically, however, its economic territorialization as a place of wealth and progress did fail when the merciless logic of capitalistic mobility, dominated by the cost-benefit curve, re-sent the Chaco to its peripheral position in the global capitalistic networks.

Gordillo shows us how the historical vagaries that the Chaco territory has suffered during the last five hundred years cannot be disentangled from its connection to constellations of phenomena at much larger scales, *e.g.*, regional, national, and global. *Rubble*, then, is an excellent monograph that will be of the utmost interest to scholars concerned with the study of the idea of space and history, their interactions, and their social production (and destruction), with special emphasis on a critique of the capitalistic and modernist views of history, and of space as a receptacle for disposable people and resources.

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