Perspectivism in Archaeology

Perspectivism in Archaeology explores recurring features in Amerindian mythology and cosmology in the past, as well as distinctions and similarities between humans, non-humans and material culture. It offers a range of possibilities for the reconstruction of ancient ontological approaches, as well as new ways of thinking in archaeology, notably how ancient ontological approaches can be reconciled with current archaeological theories. In this volume, Andrés Laguens contributes a new set of approaches that incorporate Indigenous theories of reality into an understanding of the South American archaeological record. He analyses perspectivism as a step-by-step theory with clear explanations and examples, and shows how it can be implemented in archaeological research and merged with ontological approaches. Exploring the foundations of Amerindian perspectivism and its theoretical and methodological possibilities, he also demonstrates applications of its precepts through case studies of ancient societies of the Andes and Patagonia.

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Insights into Indigenous Theories of Reality

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For Julia, Paz and Josefina

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Foreword

Parts of this book were written while Andrés Laguens was a visitor at Stanford University, in the Archaeology Center. I thus had ample opportunity to watch the project grow, mature and take form. It seemed to me then, and now, to be a tremendously exciting project. There has of course been much discussion of relationality, ontologies and perspectivism in archaeology over recent years. But here was someone steeped in the knowledge of Amazonian ontologies and excited about producing a book-length examination of the issues, problems and potentials. Most archaeological applications of the core ideas of perspectivism had drawn a fairly narrow frame. But Laguens was able and willing to look outwards more broadly. The book includes fascinating application of the ideas of perspectivism to archaeological case studies, but Laguens is also interested in looking at the overall impact of such ideas on archaeological thinking, in a decidedly decolonizing move. He asks how a native ontology from the Amazon can be used to rethink the archaeological more broadly. Laguens does not shy away from the methodological issues that are raised by the use of perspectivism in archaeology, but he strives honestly and openly to explore ways forward. This is a radical embrace of difference and otherness that challenges what we take for granted as archaeologists.

Is perspectivism the same as animism, and if not, what is the difference? Are there societies other than in the Amazon that have a perspectivist ontology? How can one provide archaeological evidence for a theory in which material things have subjectivity? How can archaeologists show that social relations are seen in terms of predation? These questions have always swirled around my head

when thinking about perspectivism, especially on a trip I made to visit Andrés in Córdoba in 2011. The book answers these and many other questions and in doing so raises the potential of Amazonian ontologies to transform the ways in which we all as archaeologists think and work.

Ian Hodder

Preface

This book originates from concerns I have always had about the archaeological record and how archaeology is carried out, accompanied by a sense of discomfort or dissatisfaction with what I have written about the people of the past. These concerns became more concrete for me while conducting archaeology in Ambato, a mountain valley in the Andean region of northern Argentina. Over the course of several seasons, a team of researchers from the University of Córdoba in Argentina and I studied the ways in which material culture and people participated in local processes of social differentiation around the seventh century AD. It was the encounter with that specific archaeological record in the field that led me to the conclusion that, despite years of work, something important remained to be said. The theoretical and methodological tools at hand, however, were not up to the task of capturing what was missing. The issue was not about unanswered questions or bad reconstructions of the past, or even the uncertainty of the record (cf. Hodder 1986). Rather, it was a sense of the limitations in how I related to an archaeological record that seemed to resist new interpretations, to being thought of in other ways. Of course, it was not the record itself that limited me. I am simply giving expression to my own limitations when faced with a latent yet perceived possibility that I could not find a way to talk about without feeling that I was somehow 'betraying' the record or forcing it to speak (or perhaps, more appropriately, to be silent). This uncertainty grew into the feeling that the archaeological record exceeded me. Surprisingly, however, the distancing and resistance it imposed had an enchanting effect: it attracted and challenged me too.

This excess presented by the record made it difficult to grasp what I intuited in the material qualities of things, and their

associations and contexts, but which I could not see at that moment. It went beyond current categories and conceptions of the material and the archaeological record. Even working from the outset with a relational perspective (my general theoretical approach) that emphasized materials, things, people, the environment and their mutual interrelationships, the reconstructions and interpretations I developed were not sufficient to fully understand this record. In truth, the archaeological record in part overwhelmed me, making it impossible to think about it clearly. It was not that I was eager to recover a world that was supposed to be gone, nor that I was naively thinking about 'the' past. Rather, I wanted to understand and open up to something that seemed unthinkable whilst simultaneously being more respectful of past 'Otherness'. That is, I was wary of annulling differences or imposing interpretations, models and ideas conceived in other contexts on the record, which often ends up homogenizing the past. It occurred to me that my own gaze could have been unintentionally annulling difference and alterity, the voiceless others from the past whose vitality nonetheless remained in material things and their relations. The research project 'Times, things, spaces and people in relation: The shaping of the world in the Aguada groups of the Ambato Valley' on inequality and social differentiation was aimed, therefore, at not homogenizing the archaeological record and, at the same time, asking more about the 'what and how it was' than 'how it happened'. By 'not homogenizing', I mean, on the one hand, putting the focus on differences or on what emerges from differences and, on the other hand, avoiding the erasure of possibilities due to theoretical prejudices that blind us ontologically and epistemologically. The project, instead, intended to be thoughtful, critical and alert to such prejudices. Furthermore, focusing on inequality and social differentiation rather than 'social complexity' implied a concern per se with differences, even subtle ones, which might escape one's gaze, and an interest in developing research methodologies to access them. I agree with Blaser and de la Cadena (2009: 4), who wrote: 'The knowledge of an era not only creates

possibilities of thought; it also eliminates possibilities by creating "impossible" spaces to think.' That is, we not only construct worlds with concepts, but we also either ignore other possible ones or construct absences. I have even questioned to what extent the pre-eminence of a given epistemology and theory was overriding something that remained in that same archaeological record, but which was difficult to understand, difficult to think about, but nonetheless seemed to fit our world of possibilities and so remained disguised by them. In one way or another, it fitted into established narratives (Trouillot 1995). As Bourdieu (1980: 14) argues, 'in the unthinkable of an epoch, there is everything that cannot be thought for lack of ethical or political dispositions that incline one to take it into account and into consideration, but also that which cannot be thought for lack of instruments of thought such as problematics, concepts, methods, techniques'.

Following Blaser and de la Cadena (2009: 9), who paraphrase Marylin Strathern in saying that 'it matters what concepts we use to think concepts', I began to ask: what concepts do we use in archaeology that make things both thinkable and unthinkable?

So began the search for a new approach to the specific archaeological record of Ambato, in which I tried to imagine it from another point of view. This new approach arises not only from feeling surpassed by the record, wanting to grapple with the unthinkable and a concern for reflexivity in fieldwork and discourse, but it is also nourished by recent theoretical movements in both the natural and human sciences that share a language and concerns in common (Biset 2022). I draw from three such cross-disciplinary movements that seem to me of utmost importance and that inspired me to ponder the unthinkable: the new conceptions of matter and the material (e.g., Barad 2003, 2007; Bennett 2010; Bogost 2012; Coole and Frost 2010; Witmore 2014, among others), the allowance of the belief in, or the verisimilitude or possibility of, other worlds (e.g., Alberti 2006; Blaser 2009b; Blaser and de la Cadena 2009; Pina Cabral 2014, 2017) and the recognition that native ontologies are other theories or anthropologies

of the world, on a par with our own (Viveiros de Castro 2003, 2010a, 2014). (None of 'belief', 'truth' and 'possibility' are adequate terms, since they imply an authoritarian position that grants something to others, but for the lack of more precise ones, I use these for now.)

During this personal journey of intellectual growth, an event that paved the way for new inquiries from an ontological point of view was a postdoctoral course taught by Philippe Descola at the Centro de Altos Estudios at the University of Córdoba in 2004. Descola's perspective was very close to my undergraduate training in anthropology and my initial line of research. Hearing in his own words the proposal for the different modes of relation and identification, an updated understanding of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, at that moment was something that, quite literally, opened my mind to thinking about the material in a new way. In the paper I wrote for the course, I made a first attempt at interpreting the archaeological record from another point of view, contemplating the possible ontologies that could have been in force in the societies that inhabited the Ambato Valley, based on the analysis of their material culture and archaeological contexts. I must confess, I have always thought that Descola did not much like the paper (although he did pass it!), but I was not put off and continued to investigate the possibilities of an ontological approach to past societies. I was already working from a relational perspective, one that considered that the interrelationships between the histories of people, things, times, spaces and landscapes lay at the heart of the process of life's unfolding. Reflecting on the impact of Descola's work made me realize, however, that I had not considered how native ways of understanding and being in the world were also implied. I became convinced that I could access such ways of being through the archaeological record.

The challenge of understanding archaeological material from a native ontology found greater expression through two experiences: first, the results of the paper I had written for Descola that suggested that Amazonian perspectivism was one of the ontologies in force in Ambato; and second, discovering in the writing of Eduardo Viveiros de

Castro the argument that other peoples' theories of the world are on a par with those of the anthropologist and that the theory of perspectivism, to which he has contributed so much, opened a path towards the decolonization of thought. The challenge to my archaeology had grown. I was led to critically review all my theories and methodologies, as well as the ways I understood the material and its relationships – and even the idea of the 'human'. A material and relational perspective was always a concern of my work and had been the theme of the courses on material culture I had taught at the University of Córdoba for almost twenty years. Through teaching and writing, I was able to constantly develop and enrich a multidimensional view of things, that they are one and many at the same time. Beyond their participation in the wefts of relationships, in turn, things in their multiplicity have their own vitality, their own ability to produce affects, as New Materialism suggests. But importantly, this affective ability, I argue, is cut across by the particular ontology from which they are conceived, be it our own or that of others. The questions then become: how do we interpret the Ambato record if we know that there are other ways of understanding matter and other local, native theories with which we should be in dialogue? How do we do archaeology from, and with, other ontologies? Thus, in a similar way in which post-processual archaeology posed the challenge of double (or more) hermeneutics, I felt that an ontological gaze now posed the challenge of a double (or more) ontology.

An approach to the general archaeological record of the valley was accordingly taking shape, in which the local ontology was to be considered as a theory about the world on a par with our own archaeological theory. The goal was to see where and how far we could go with this 'thought experiment' (Viveiros de Castro 2014). I also tried experimenting with thinking the impossible, of not annulling differences. I do not mean getting rid of our categories, which in fact we need, but rather submitting them to criticism, analysing the epistemic violence they may cause and being open to new conceptualizations that could emerge from the dynamics of the

interrelation between two ontologies. As a consequence of the experience and results of the Ambato research project, I became hopeful that Amazonian perspectivism – or the 'theory of multinatural perspectivism', to use Viveiros de Castro's (2011c: 7) preferred terminology – as a South American native theory about the world could help to understand that part of the archaeological record that eluded me (and, admittedly, continues to), and by which I felt both overwhelmed and enchanted.

Viveiros de Castro's theoretical proposal also appealed to me because it was a local South American theory and might be closer ontologically to that of past Ambato peoples. How close was a matter of research, but certainly closer than the ontology behind my previous work on this archaeological record. For many years, I had used Bourdieu's ideas of social space and capitals to study social inequality in the past (e.g., Laguens 2006, 2014b, 2014d), with results that I found satisfactory. Rather than using the idea of social classes to study inequalities, Bourdieu's concepts involved thinking about groups of individuals who differentially shared a structure and distribution of social, political and material capitals. They participated in society from different relative positions and shared dispositions and habitus to differing degrees. All were materialized in the archaeological record and were informative of inequalities established between people. However, I was always cognizant of using a theory, with implicit ontological underpinnings, developed by Bourdieu for problems in 1960s France. By using it to interpret my case study, I appeared to be confirming its validity for first-millennium Ambato too – a time and place that, needless to say, had little to do with 1960s French socio-political reality. I felt that not only was I projecting a world of the present onto the past, but I was also universalizing in time and space this author's theoretical standpoint. Bourdieu's work is excellent, a very intelligent way of understanding contemporary Western societies from a relational perspective, and it fit my research questions and case study very well. Equally, however, it did not add up; its use for understanding non-modern societies left me in an uncomfortable

position, though one common to archaeologists. Consequently, experimenting with perspectivism as a theory that better fit a South American archaeological record offered the chance to shift that discomfort and provide a more respectful encounter with the others I was trying to understand from archaeology. More respectful insofar as it was an attempt not to impose other ontologies on a past society, thus exercising a little less epistemic violence from my position in the academy. A 'little less', because I could not do without my ontology, though I did believe that I could at least establish a dialogue of sorts with the material vestiges of the life of past Ambato people – of their world – even when they could not speak to or question me. This dialogue also implied epistemological issues – revising my own categories and understandings of the archaeological when working within this 'double ontology'.

This new approach is more coherent with the standpoint from which I research and write. I live and work in South America. But today, dear reader, you find me writing in English – a language that is neither my 'home of writing' (Haber 2004) nor of thinking. But publishing abroad is also an opportunity, as were my stays at Stanford University, where, thanks to the support of Ian Hodder, much of this book was written. But even when there, I wrote from Argentina, from Córdoba, a city in the interior of the country, inserted in an academic archaeological tradition that has been nourished historically by theories generated in the United States and western Europe, with which we try always to be up to date. As such, my colleagues and I take for granted that as professionals we are an equal part of this broader world. In practice, however, it is less so. The colonial mentality that makes us believe that we write from the First World is historically embodied in the inhabitants of much of Argentina. In the academy in particular, it can be witnessed in very subtle – and not so subtle – ways: reviewers of articles asking for English to be corrected or commenting that the research topic is very local for an 'international' audience. I agree with Walter Mignolo (in Delgado and Romero 2001: 26) when he states that one can write in a language other than one's own, but

most likely one carries in one's writing the 'noises' and the 'dust' of one's own language in its various dimensions. That is, I cannot move my writing away from where I live. My own translation followed by revisions by a native English speaker help to lessen the distance between my home of writing and English, although they do not completely eliminate the 'noise and dust' of my native language. This generates tension for me, of course, in terms of both my intermediate position as colonized and the possibilities of a frontier knowledge between a Western epistemology incorporated into contemporary archaeological theories and the local or subaltern epistemologies with which I would like to approach the archaeological record. I am educated in the academy from a perspective of the dominant countries, and I inhabit a scientific-technological system of colonized countries. Yet I do not belong to an Indigenous American community and do not believe myself to be part of a subalternized group. Nevertheless, I use the theory shared by many native groups to write from South America. No doubt this upsets or unsettles the position from which I write. I try, therefore, to move away from the established place of enunciation, following Argentinian archaeologist Alejandro Haber (2021: 116), who writes: 'the decolonization of archaeological thought should not be understood as the beginning of a new school of academic theory . . . or a new avant-garde, but as a movement towards abandoning the hegemonic view of archaeological knowledge'.

I do not succeed in abandoning conventional archaeological thought entirely in the way advocated by Haber (I do not think I could), but I try, at least, to displace it. Moreover, I find in the theory of Amazonian perspectivism the possibility of 'decolonizing thought', as Viveiros de Castro (2014) puts it: a decolonization that subverts not only established categories, but also established theories. Perspectivism, as theory, offers the possibility of tearing the past away from the lens of dominant archaeological theories that, even if unintentionally, impose the gaze of a single world and silence even the possibility of others. Amazonian perspectivism is thus political.

Several authors have pointed out the close relationship between ontology and politics in anthropology (Biset 2020; Blaser 2009a; Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro 2014; Ramos 2012, among others). According to Blaser, political ontology can be spoken of in two distinct ways: 'On the one hand, it refers to the politics involved in the practices that shape a particular world or ontology. On the other hand, it refers to a field of study that focuses on the conflicts that arise when different worlds or ontologies strive to sustain their own existence while interacting and mixing with each other' (Blaser 2009a: 877; see also Blaser 2009b).

Perspectivism in particular is political beyond the ethnographic and the struggle of native peoples in the present. It is also political in its proposal for the decolonization of thought and in its multinaturalist foundation, which insists on the possibility of different worlds (and multiple ontologies), all products of historically situated practices. The consequent conceptual opening up of the human and other entities of the world and the conflicts generated by the acceptance of alterity present a challenge to concrete contemporary policies. As Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro (2014) argue:

> Ontologically-inflected anthropology is abidingly oriented towards the production of difference, or 'alterity', as such. Regardless . . . of the political goals to which it may lend itself, anthropology is ontologically political inasmuch as its operation presupposes, and is an attempt experimentally to 'do', difference as such. This is an anthropology that is constitutively anti-authoritarian, making it its business to generate alternative vantages from which established forms of thinking are put under relentless pressure by alterity itself, and perhaps changed.

Obliterating difference is not a problem unique to anthropology or hegemonic political practices – it also belongs to archaeology. In general, archaeology tends to deny difference by delegating the interpretation of the archaeological record to non-native theories (read: ontologies). Archaeology ends up producing a homogenized past, even when

describing variability, which results in the denial of ontological difference, a political fact (de la Cadena 2009: 143). This political fact reproduces power relations – the relations between modernity and coloniality, between the hegemonic and the subaltern – that trap the mark of colonial difference in the archaeological records of peripheral countries. Breaking with this tendency by using native ontologies in archaeology is also political. The ontological perspective from more situated or localized positions can be understood as a way of doing politics, insofar as it is about not eliminating difference, opening ourselves up to thinking the unthinkable, making visible and present other worlds and thus alternatives to our own.

As Biset (2020) argues, political ontology is not only about a politically oriented anthropological practice that incorporates difference. Rather:

> The question is to analyse how the differences are not reduced to a cultural diversity, but how there is always at stake a way of defining what exists and its modes. With different accents, and with important disputes, each one shows that the central question is 'what is it that exists', that is to say, the entities that count for each world. This displacement makes it possible to show how certain divisions or classifications are assumed over and over again: the nature/culture and non-human/human differences. This makes it possible to advance a political discussion beyond those divisions, a politics of the diverse existents: the multiple worlds in the world. I understand this second perspective can be synthesized as: *the demand that the ontological question poses to politics*.
>
> *(Biset 2020: 340–341; emphasis added)*

Arguably, this position is also valid for an ontological archaeology, one that brings us closer to other worlds, to those 'multiple worlds in the world' and to other ontologies and theories (or anthropologies) of the world. In turn, we are led to rethink our own academic ontology, thus reconfiguring our position in the world as social scientists.

BOOK OUTLINE

I should clarify that this is not a book about ontology and archaeology, though I occasionally turn to broader issues that involve ontology. What I propose is an approach to the understanding of past relationships between humans and other entities that populate the world, specifically from a South American cosmology encapsulated by the theory of perspectivism – a cosmology that, both as a specific ontology and as a theory about the world and people, can have consequences for understanding the past and archaeological theories, when considered on a par with own. As such, throughout the book I develop ways of incorporating this native theory of reality into our understanding of the archaeological record, as an alternative and complementary ontology. Through specific case studies, I explore how to combine the concepts of materiality and humanity implied by perspectivism with accepted archaeological approaches to bring us closer to a more situated way of doing archaeology.

Readers will often find the terms 'native' and 'Indigenous' used – sometimes interchangeably – without reference to any particular group but in a general way and as adjectives. There is no intention to generalize and treat the beliefs of Indigenous peoples as a homogeneous whole. The intention is rather to emphasize the existence of ways of life and thought among particular areas and peoples, from South America or elsewhere, that stand beside and contrast with the perspective or thinking centred on Western science and philosophy. And it is in recognizing these contrasts and differences that the possibility of dialogue between these different ways of thinking in archaeology arises.

For the past twenty years, archaeologists influenced by the so-called ontological turn have debated how to reconstruct approximations of past ontologies and generate new ways of thinking in archaeology. However, challenges still remain when trying to recover past ontologies or when orienting research ontologically. Above all, interesting theoretical challenges arise in terms of how

a native ontological approach can be made compatible with our current theories. As one such alternative theory, perspectivism is based on an ontology typical of the native peoples of the Amazon, though the same underlying principles are also found in the cosmologies of societies in other parts of the world, including Siberia, North America and Indochina. Perspectivism has been popularized internationally in anthropology mainly due to the ethnographic and theoretical work of the Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros de Castro (2004a, 2005, 2012a), but also through the work of authors such as Lima (1999a), Vilaça (2005) and Willerslev (2007). The theory has reached archaeology. Perspectivist-influenced research has been published on a perspectivist account of the relationship of people with animals as beings dotted with subjectivity and agency (Betts, Blair and Black 2012; Betts, Hardenberg and Stirling 2015; Conneller 2004; Desjardins 2017; Hill 2019; Hussain and Floss 2015; Živaljević 2015); on objects (Alberti 2006, 2012, 2013a; Borić 2013; Laguens and Gastaldi 2008; Nastri 2008; Weismantel 2013, 2015); on the body (Alberti 2006; Muro Ynoñán 2018; Muro, Castillo and Tomasto-Cacigao 2019); and even on the landscape (Alberti and Laguens 2019; Laguens and Alberti 2019) and ways of constructing otherness (Lau 2012, 2013). According to perspectivism, all entities that inhabit the world – spirits, the dead, plants and some objects – are capable of subjectivity, like humans, and see the world from their own point of view. Other entities see humans and themselves very differently from the way humans see animals and those other entities. Animals as subjects see themselves as humans, although other humans rarely see them in this way. Their external animal appearance is nothing more than an envelope that hides an inner human form, one only visible to members of the same species and to shamans. If something has a body, it has subjectivity and a point of view. This point of view – or perspective – given by the body ensures that a subject (such as an animal) will see in a 'human' way but that the referent of their vision will appear differently to that seen by other subjectivities. That is, a subject will see an object or person from the perspective of their own

cultural world. For example, what is blood for humans is maize beer for jaguars. Predation is the basic principle guiding relationships in the world: anyone can be hunted, eaten or transformed by another, whether by conventional means or by the ontological predation of their 'soul' (an anthropological gloss for the human essence of all subjects, Viveiros de Castro 2004a, 2011a). The exchange of perspectives, or points of view, between species is the mechanism of predation, and the definition of otherness through difference one of the results. Things can also have bodies (points of view) and souls (a human essence) and are therefore subject to the exchange of perspectives. Relations between humans and material culture can, consequently, become dangerous.

The theory of perspectivism shares characteristics with a variety of alternative ontologies, principally animism, and includes theoretical assumptions and influences from other disciplines, mainly the philosophical works of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Jacques Derrida. Primarily, these anthropological and philosophical approaches have in common a relational, non-representational perspective and influences both from post-humanism and New Materialism. In essence, such approaches understand that things make sense in networks of relations, and that the social is an effect of both human actions and non-human agents in the unstable and continuous mutual constitution of objects and subjects. Thinking about past relationships between humans and things through the lens of perspectivism can challenge several taken-for-granted assumptions in archaeology. For example, if some things are subjects, the relations between humans and artefacts are not only material but also social and, consequently, there is no realm that can be considered purely material. Moreover, how do we get at other theories of reality that lie behind the archaeological record? How do we incorporate alternative conceptions of materiality and humanity into our work? How do we translate other theories of the world into the terms of our own theories without 'betraying' them? As Viveiros de Castro (2004b) writes, to translate is to betray.

These issues are addressed in the following chapters, where the possibilities, limitations and scope of a perspectivist ontology are put to the test. I discuss in detail the fundamentals of Amerindian perspectivism and the theoretical and methodological possibilities implied by a perspectivist archaeology, exemplified by my own research carried out in the Andes and other archaeological studies. Chapter 1 introduces the key tenets of perspectivism, describes its main characteristics and principles and introduces the problems and challenges it poses for archaeology. A brief account of the genesis of perspectivism as a theory is provided, drawing principally on Viveiros de Castro's writings, and it is compared to other ontologies, particularly animism. The key perspectivist characteristics shared by many Amerindian populations are detailed. These include the internal quality of many entities of possessing a human soul, the importance of the body as the distinctive mark of subjects, seeing the world from a human point of view and predation as the model for human relationships. These are fundamental cosmological premises that derive from a set of underlying metaphysical principles with consequences for social practices, and all of which are relevant for thinking about the archaeological record.

Perspectivism as an anthropological theory on a par with our own is the subject of Chapter 2. As an Indigenous theory about reality, of being in the world and of humanity, it is in particular an anthropology of the place of humans in the world. The implications for archaeology of taking it as a theory on a par with our own are developed through a type of 'thought experiment', conceived as the thoughtful access to the experience of others rather than as a mental exercise. I am not trying to 'think like a native', but rather exploring how we need to think to conceive the world as others do. This thought experiment starts from a different way of encountering things: objects, after all, may be subjects, according to perspectivism. The consequences of such an experiment for the understanding and interpretation of the archaeological record are played through. Chapter 2 also provides an overview of the manifestation of

perspectivism in areas beyond the Amazon, including ethnographic cases from Mesoamerica, North America, Siberia, Scandinavia, Malaysia and Oceania, and archaeological cases from different historical and geographical periods and place, such as the European Palaeolithic and Neolithic, the South America Andes and Arctic hunter-gatherers. These cases exemplify how research has incorporated perspectivism – from understanding it as a native ontology to using only some of its principles to understand the archaeological record to applying it as a theory to interpret the past. The chapter does not attempt to propose methodological solutions but rather reflects on the importance of approaching the archaeological record from perspectivism in general. Three alternative avenues for research based on perspectivism are proposed. The first is to reconstruct past ontologies through searching for ontological principles in force in the past, whether perspectivist, animist, totemist or other. Ontology here is conceived as another dimension of culture; the ideas is to discover and describe past ontologies, much as one would religion or other forms of belief. The ontology uncovered is a step towards the second avenue for research, which builds on it: that already-revealed or inferred ontology is used as an interpretative framework in particular. The third avenue, rather than working through inference as the first two do, applies an ontology heuristically using local ethnographies as analogies. This third is a situated approach, without the need for prior archaeological exploration to discover the past ontology. Other ontologies can also be 'taken seriously', that is, treated as theories of reality in their own right, and not as mistaken perspectives on a pre-given reality. In any of these approaches, the principles of native ontologies intervene in the interpretation of the archaeological record, either after their inference or from the beginning of the investigation. In addition, two methodological issues become apparent in the chapter: how to translate other ontologies into our terms and how such a thought experiment can be put into practice when interpreting the archaeological record (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

Chapter 3 describes perspectivism's world of objects and its concept of materiality, including the material implications of its notion of reality and the practices in which the material plays a key role. While in the early theoretical development of perspectivism objects were of little interest, it has since become clear that they too are entities with the capacity for subjectivity. Not only can objects be or become subjects, but materiality, in general, plays a central role in perspectivist ontology. Materiality is omnipresent, from the physicality of bodies themselves to the importance accorded things that are transformed into objects by the point of view of an other. Objects can also be instruments of the metamorphosis from one entity to another and thus of the creation of identities or alterities. By taking seriously the conception of matter in perspectivism and putting it in dialogue with theories of matter in material culture studies, I revise assumptions about materiality in archaeology. Lacking a native concept of materiality proper to Ambato, perspectivism provides a stand-in; its concept of objects as possessing their own qualities, and instances in which they are in active relations with humans and other non-humans, enable the analysis of the ontological status of objects to be understood as having both the potential for subjecthood and, consequently, multiple modes of existence. In Chapter 3, the important question of material agency in perspectivism is also taken up, including the possibility of object agency as such (rather than as an intermediary or secondary function of human agency). Agency in perspectivism has generally been thought of as limited to subjects acting as primary agents, object agency being secondary and thus always traceable back to a subject. I argue, in contrast, that objects and materiality, under certain circumstances and in specific relational contexts, affect humans and non-humans through a capacity – that is, agency – that belongs to them. Moreover, it becomes apparent that perspectivism requires embodiment, a material presence. The effect of this materiality is crucial. Two additional agencies in relation to objects can therefore be identified: the first, proper to objects as things, is their capacity as intermediaries between humans and non-humans;