

JOHN VICTOR MURRA: A MENTOR TO WOMEN



John Victor Murra in his official portrait as the first National Science Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Smithsonian Institution (1966-67)

INTRODUCTION

*Heather Lechtman
and Freda Yancy Wolf de Romero*

In considering a contribution to the special section of *Andean Past* 9 that honors John Murra and that documents an historic era in Andean anthropology, both of us agreed that a unique contribution should come from women who were students and colleagues of John Murra. The most accurate and honest way to document the strong support and unwavering commitment Murra gave to women at various stages in their intellectual and professional lives was to ask them to write their own versions of

what it means to have been his student and colleague and to have been mentored by him.

We contacted a few women—there are many more—from North and South America and asked each to comment on the ways in which Murra affected her development and maturation as an anthropologist. We added our own perspectives. It is remarkable to see the similarities in these accounts, not having consulted with each other. As Freda notes, “How quickly we recognized him, and perhaps he us.” Some of the women whose texts appear here were students of John Murra. All of us were his colleagues.

ANTHROPOLOGY IS MY VILLAGE

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The Andean achievement is to combine such very different things into a single system.

There is a tendency in the social and human sciences to diminish differences. Then there is the other stance, which is mine, that wants to emphasize, to the point of exaggeration, the Andean achievement, the effort it took to combine all of that. Anthropology is the science of differences, whereas science in general is the systematic knowledge of uniformities. But ours, no. Ours is a paean to difference.¹

(John Murra, in Castro *et al.* 2000:140-142.
Translation by the author)

I knew John Murra for 54 years. We met in 1952, when he was a new lecturer in anthropology at Vassar College and I was a sixteen year old freshman determined to study physics there. During those 54 years I would say that the two most consequential and persistent identities he allowed himself were as a soldier in the International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War and as an anthropologist.

Murra refused to be consigned to any category, a social tendency in the U.S. that he hated. Born in Russia, he was no Russian, nor did he consider himself Romanian, though he left Romania for the United States at the age of seventeen. He did not want or need a nationality. When abroad he might respond

when questioned that he was from North America. By his east European upbringing he was culturally very much a Jew, but he avoided any affiliations, personal, political, or otherwise with Jews that might have been founded on a sense of shared roots.

Murra was a soldier in the international army that helped the people of Spain fight against fascism. The only identity card he carried with him and curated protectively throughout his life was his *Livret Militaire*, issued on 14 April 1937 by the Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, República Española, Brigadas Internacionales, Ejército de Tierra. For political party, the ministerio entered "Antifascist". For profession, "Student of Archaeology". By 15 May 1938 the carnet registers Murra as Squadron Leader in the 15th Brigade. I have Murra's International Brigade carnet and will deliver it to the Archive of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, located at the Tamiment Library, New York University.

However, it is his identity as an anthropologist that Murra's students experienced and that most of us appropriated. For Murra, anthropology was a way of life, an attitude by which one could relate to, capture the peopled world, and recognize the multiplicity of solutions humans devised to manage that world. In his several day interview with his Chilean colleagues—Victoria Castro, Carlos Aldunate, and Jorge Hidalgo (2000)—he makes his position clear. Ever since he discovered anthropology at the age of eighteen, in Radcliffe-Brown's² classes at the University of Chicago, his concerns both as a social scientist and as a political actor on this planet remained anthropological concerns. He declared himself an anthropologist, first and foremost, because he was interested in and invested in an alternative to the world in which we live presently. If there

¹ El logro de lo andino es combinar en un solo sistema cosas tan distintas. Es que hay una tendencia en las ciencias sociales y humanas a reducir diferencias. Y hay la otra posición, que es la mía, de querer enfatizar y hasta exagerar el logro, el esfuerzo que toma combinar todo esto. La Antropología es la ciencia de las Diferencias. Mientras que la ciencia en general, es la ciencia de Uniformidades. Y lo nuestro no. Lo nuestro es un canto de la diferencia.

² For Radcliffe-Brown see Barnes, this volume, note 8.

were no interest in human diversity, there would be no anthropology (2000:75).

When I studied at Vassar, from 1952 to 1956, there was one constant theme he drummed into us, regardless of the subject matter of the course: the existence and continuity of cultural differences. Murra's eye was always on the multiplicity and adaptability of solutions to what is essentially the human social condition. The responsibility of anthropology was to discover, to broadcast, and to champion human social and cultural diversity. That responsibility was not only his, he made it ours. He insisted that the fundamental contributions anthropology made to social science were the concept of culture and the methodology of field-work.

During my Vassar years Murra did not offer classes on the Andean world. After his legal battle in the federal courts to be accorded U.S. citizenship, which he won in 1950, the government still denied him a passport. He was unable to travel to the Andes until 1956 when his passport was issued. Instead, Murra taught about African societies, especially because he was seriously involved in the political viabilities of newly established nations, such as Ghana and Nigeria. He taught about the Nuer and the indigenous peoples of the North American Plains. We learned about culture.

But there was something else I recognized in Murra, long after having graduated from Vassar, that influenced my own intellectual trajectory profoundly. He was as interested in and excited by new approaches, uncommon methods by which to represent human diversity as in diversity itself. We all consider Murra an ethnohistorian. But he defined ethnohistory in his own terms: "By ethnohistory I mean that I am going to excavate but I am also going to read documents" (2000:80). It was that new combination of methodological approaches that

characterized his structuring of the Huánuco Viejo project in 1958. Archaeology and history were of a piece for Murra. He was unwilling to draw firm distinctions, to construct boundaries between them.

I had met Murra in New York briefly in 1952, one month before beginning college. I decided to enroll in one of his anthropology classes. I wound up taking every anthropology course he and Helen Codere³ taught at Vassar and graduated with a double major, in physics and anthropology. My entire career has involved an effort to mesh the two fields, to contribute to anthropology from a platform built upon the physical and engineering sciences.

Murra never tried to dissuade me from studying physics, nor did he exert pressure to focus my energies and interests solely on anthropology. He described himself as "interstitial", as operating between systems rather than wholly within them. He understood what it took me decades to realize, that being interstitial locates one at interfaces, which is where the action is. In his own way he let me know that it was O.K. to be an interstitial. His goal was to discern and present cultural diversity through the mechanisms of anthropology. Those goals became mine. I understood that I might approach them with tools that could become tools of anthropology. Developing the tools was my responsibility. It was a responsibility that could stand as my reciprocal exchange with Murra—student to teacher.

I did not continue with graduate school in cultural anthropology or in archaeology. Yet my materials engineering research that is focused on Andean prehistoric production technologies has been guided by a concern for identifying the culture of technologies. What was Andean about Andean metallurgy, and how and why did

³ For **Codere** see Barnes, this volume, note 42.

it differ from metallurgies that developed in equally sophisticated ways in other ancient social settings? Ultimately my Andean studies led me to propose not only that technologies are culture bearing and culture producing systems, but that they may represent and display ethnocategories by which people order experience. Ethnocategories are rendered through technological behavior just as they are rendered linguistically. The utility of a materials-archaeological approach, of focusing on what and how people *do* rather than on what and how they say, is that it confines us to detailed scrutiny of materials and their relationships in practice. Ethnocategories arise from patterns of technological practice, whether or not those patterns are labeled linguistically (Lechtman 1999: 223, 230).

For Murra it was much more than O.K. for me to be interstitial. It was important, and with time we both understood his ease with respect to my dual professional education and his support for the ways in which my contributions to anthropology were expressed. His support helped me focus, and it surprised neither of us that my focus aimed at discerning cultural features of Andean technological behavior.

When I introduce students to my graduate, two semester seminar and laboratory classes in the materials science of material culture, I begin my remarks by assuring them that the class in which they are enrolled is not a class in laboratory analytical procedures, nor is it a “how to” class. It is an anthropology class.

Murra hated when North Americans asked him what he did. I learned to hate the question too. Usually I respond that I am a New Yorker. Only when pressed by those I admire do I reply, “I am an anthropologist.” Murra often declared, “Anthropology is my village.” What he gave me—what he gave to all his students—was his village.

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John Victor Murra (second from viewer's left) wearing two academic decorations presented to him on his 82nd birthday, August 24, 1998, by the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos and the Universidad Nacional San Antonio Abad del Cusco. Seated outside the Centro Cultural de San Marcos (La Casona) are, from left to right, Ana María Soldi, John Murra, Heather Lechtman, and Freda Wolf (photo: courtesy of Heather Lechtman).

MENTORS AS INTELLECTUAL PARENTS

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Death ends a life. But it does not end a relationship (Robert Anderson, *I Never Sang for My Father*, 1966)

The personal relationship one has with a mentor or intellectual father or mother is often ignored. It is important to recognize that such relationships are significant in academic disciplines, as they are in life in general, and are very much part of what graduate schools advocate as scholars learning from scholars. Just as we feel some aspects of our childhood and family relationships were “good” or “bad” and these perceptions consciously or unconsciously affect how we relate to the world, they also exist in our professional and intellectual lives and what we want to accomplish and pass on, trying to improve or equal what we received from others. Teachers are important all through life to help fill the gaps and empty spaces in our experience and early family life.

I met John Murra in the spring of 1963 at the American Ethnological Society meeting at Cornell University. I was 20 and a sophomore at Barnard about to go to Mexico for a first field experience with Gary Martin, a student of Murra and Sidney Mintz¹ at Yale, who was giving a paper in the Elsie Clews Parsons² essay

¹ For **Mintz** see Barnes, this volume, note 60.

² **Elsie Clews Parsons** (1875-1941) received her doctorate in sociology from Columbia University (1899). She was a founder of the New School for Social Research and of the American School of Research, the first female president of the American Anthropological Association, and president of the American Ethnological Society. For over twenty years she was an associate of the *Journal of American Folklore*. Her publications include *The Social Organization of the Tewa of New Mexico* (1929), *Hopi and Zuni Ceremonialism* (1933), *Pueblo Indian Religion* (1939), and *Mitla:*

competition. Murra, at that point, was about to begin the Huánuco Project, about which he spoke at the AES meetings. Murra, Martin, and I drove from Ithaca back to New York City together. It was a magical trip. Murra was in his element. He was a terrific actor with a dynamic stage presence who found his best voice when he was in front of an audience, so he was in excellent form in the afterglow from the AES meetings. He also loved nothing better than a young audience who hung on his every word, which we certainly did. In addition to giving us insightful advice about our upcoming field experience and Mexico, he told us about the forthcoming multidisciplinary Huánuco project—encompassing ethnohistory, archaeology, ethnobotany, and ethnology. He talked about the Huánuco *visita* (Ortiz 1967 [1562]) and about Peru and psychoanalysis and made me see the world in a way I had never seen it before. I had also never met a 46 year old man who was so alive and open to change.

I had already recognized I was an anthropologist, which is not something you choose, but something you discover about yourself. When I heard my first lecture in physical anthropology as a freshman, I could finally put a name to what I knew I was, even though I also knew it was not physical anthropology that I wanted to do. Courses in other disciplines just seemed to be bad anthropology, and I graduated from Barnard with more than double the number of credits I needed for the major.

I served an apprenticeship with Murra on and off for several years, and in exchange I was his assistant. My own father died when I was a child and my experience with John patched over

Town of the Souls (1936). Every other year the American Ethnological Society awards the Elsie Clews Parsons prize for a graduate student paper. Her obituary by Leslie Spier and A.L. Kroeber appeared in a 1943 number of the *American Anthropologist*.

some of the paternal gap. I think of Murra as my intellectual father. I acted as a sounding board for him and helped him write, which was not a simple task. This was partly because English, which he spoke very well, was not his mother tongue, but mostly because it was very hard for him to just spill out all the information he had worked so hard to glean and understand, so that just anybody could read it, and besides, somebody might say he was wrong. This last is really more realistic than paranoid, because in anthropology there is almost nothing one can say about a culture and even less about culture or cultures in general that is not controversial. He also wrote better when he had someone to accompany him, argue with him, to rejoice with him at those “eureka” moments, and to blame when he was lit up by a possible connection which didn’t pan out. He told me he could only write with Karl Reisman,³ Irving Goldman⁴ and me. I never met the other two so cannot generalize.

We do not always choose what we learn from our mentors and our teachers. Murra once

remarked he learned how to answer the phone from Robert Redfield,⁵ to whom I think he was an assistant in the Chicago days. An anthropologist he held in great esteem was Ruth Benedict,⁶ with whom he had also worked in the early days. I think because of his own difficulties in liberating himself, he tried to help women to liberate themselves. In 1964, he gave me Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*, now a feminist classic, but at the time the novel had only been published a couple of years before. He very much approved of people creating themselves and changing their names to fit the new person they had become; he favored psychoanalysis. He had particular sympathy for women. I think he was especially sensitive to and intrigued by women because mothering was the largest gap in his own childhood. He especially sympathized with prom queens, lonely, shy intellectuals, and nuns, and others who felt trapped by what other people expected of them. He accepted you as you were, was supportive of what you wanted to do, and very good about helping you find where it fit the larger anthropological picture, and finding ways of doing it.

³ **Karl Reisman** earned a Ph.D. in social anthropology with a speciality in anthropological linguistics. He has published articles on aspects of the language and culture of the West Indies and of Africa.

⁴ **Irving Goldman** (1911-2002) was one of Franz Boas’ last students. A life-long resident of Brooklyn, he was John Murra’s neighbor for a time. From 1936 to 1942 he was a member of the Communist Party. Goldman did field-work with the Modoc of Oregon (1934), with the Alkatcho Carrier of British Columbia (1935-36), and with the Cubeo of the Amazon (1939), as well as library research on other groups. He was interested in issues of culture change and political evolution, often re-interpreting anthropological works. Among his publications are *The Cubeo: Indians of the Northwest Amazon* (1963); *Ancient Polynesian Society* (1970), an analysis of the region’s status systems, and *The Mouth of Heaven* (1975), on the Kwa-kiutl (now designated the Kwakwaka’wakw). From 1949 to 1980 he taught at Sarah Lawrence College. An obituary of Goldman by Paula Rubel and Abraham Rosman appeared in the December 2003 issue of *American Anthropologist*.

Murra always took women seriously, treating us with an intellectual respect I had not always found at Barnard, and in the beginning I was very young and knew virtually nothing about the Andes. He emphasized the importance of field-work, and of knowing the people well where you were doing field-work. This included not only the people whose culture you were studying, but also local intellectuals. It was essential to participate in the culture of anthropology in the country where you did research, and to maintain long-term relationships (read lifetime commitments) both with colleagues and informants. You could not ever really know the culture unless you spoke

⁵ For **Redfield** see Barnes, this volume, note 11.

⁶ For **Benedict** see Barnes, this volume, note 32.

the local indigenous language as well as the national language, in the latter case, well enough to perform professional acts such as giving papers, publishing results, teaching, attending professional meetings, and participating in, or helping form, the discipline of anthropology in the country where you did research. It was the way to protect anthropology, not to mention the fact that we will never have a true anthropology until we have anthropologists of all different cultural backgrounds. He believed in anthropology for its importance to the informants themselves, who were always the people who had a vested interest in their own culture and history. One of his favorite examples was how important Ruth Landes' work with the Mdewakantonwan Santee (called by others the Mystic Lake Sioux) was to the Santee themselves, when years after her field-work they realized they had lost a lot of their culture and were trying to retrieve it. He was always aware of the importance of trying to find out as much as possible about the Andean past because it was important to Andean people to know their own past, to be able to shape an authentic identity of their own. Andean peoples have only recently begun to have even limited space in the history books used in their national schools.

My own ethnohistorical work was with the sixteenth and early seventeenth century Aymara and Quechua dictionaries, grammar books, and manuals written by Catholic priests as aids in their proselytization efforts. I did a study of Aymara kinship based on the terminology and information found in these sources, kinship being a particular concern of the church. In Juli on Lake Titicaca, I copied and photographed about eighty parish books recording births, deaths, and baptisms, all in the European system but with the occasional Andean detail that made it all worthwhile, especially because most of the early books are organized in terms of Andean *ayllus* from 1621 until roughly the time

of independence (1821). Searching Catholic parish records from the former Lupaqa kingdom to study Aymara social organization historically was, of course, very much in the Murra tradition. I even found a baptism book in one of the coastal valleys where the Lupaqa had "islands" of resources where they cultivated crops that couldn't be grown in their altiplano kingdom. In the 1670s their descendants were still in the coastal valley and still claiming membership in the *ayllus* located up above in the seven divisions of the Lupaqa kingdom. In addition to the usual participation in anthropology and ethnohistory meetings in Lima and Cusco, I taught an anthropology course to young people from rural zones around Puno as part of a teacher training course in a normal school in Puno, and participated with international development teams in writing new bilingual textbooks in Aymara-Spanish and in Quechua-Spanish, teaching them anthropology, and suggesting chapters on local themes such as planting, harvesting, and fiestas.

It is sometimes surprising to realize what we have internalized from our mentors and intellectual fathers and mothers, the parts of them that live within us. I think I trained in psychoanalytic psychotherapy largely due to Murra's indirect influence, and, although my interest began with cultural anthropology and ethnohistory, it moved toward the interface of culture and psychology. While I did not follow an academic career, Murra greatly influenced the work I did in ethnohistory, my writing, work with patients, and also my personal and family life. Having married into a Peruvian family and raising children in Peru, keeping or regaining a cultural perspective certainly saved my sanity on more than one occasion. Murra looked upon everything as anthropology and was often frustrated by his departmental colleagues in the universities in which he taught because they didn't apply anthropology to themselves or the world around them. In the case of women

Murra recognized the huge difference women's reproductive cycle and child-rearing activities, as well as their culturally ascribed roles, make in their professional lives, and was good at considering individual strategies in working with these differences, as well as building on the peculiarities of personal backgrounds. He also recognized the value of the motherhood experience. I once commented to Murra about the differences between the conversations of groups of women and those of groups of men. He looked thoughtful, and said, "But at least the women talk about real things."

Murra was complex, conflictive, brilliant, and an anthropologists' anthropologist. He was true to anthropology and his friends, though often nicer behind your back than to your face. Anthropology was not just his profession or his discipline, it really was his village, although it stretched over the globe, and particularly in Europe, the United States, and Latin America, he had friends who cared deeply about him. Anthropology is where he lived, it is what he loved, what he defended. He left us a rich legacy which is internalized within us as much as it exists on library shelves and has become an integral part of our vision of the Andean world and anthropology. He never tried to persuade or dissuade us that we could or could not do anything as women, he always assumed we could. And thank heaven, he did not make being married a requirement for women to be able to go into the field as Boas did with his very famous women students Ruth Benedict, Ruth Landes,⁷ and Margaret Mead.⁸

⁷ **Ruth Landes** (1908-1991) did field-work among the Ojibwa, the Dakota, and the Potawatomi, obtaining a doctorate in 1935. On this basis she published *Ojibwa Sociology* (1937), *Ojibwa Woman* (1938), *Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin* (1968), and *The Mystic Lake Sioux* (1968). Landes pioneered the study of race and gender relations, interests reflected in her study of *candomblé*, an Afro-Brazilian religion (*City of Women* 1947). Landes had strong interests in Afro-American, Jewish, Mexican, and

AN EXTRAORDINARY TEACHER WHO TAUGHT ALL THE TIME

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I have always felt privileged to have had the opportunity to train under John Murra. That this opportunity came my way was largely his doing. We met in 1966, at a seminar at la Católica, a university in Lima where I was studying in the doctoral program in history. John was just finishing the Huánuco Project and still had research materials to hand. He sat me down to practice paleography on a microfilmed roll of notarial documents—all in *letra cadinilla*—which in the hands of sixteenth century notaries' clerks became a kind of shorthand. I could not make much progress, but my perseverance was sufficient to earn me an invitation to apply to Cornell for graduate work.

John Murra was an extraordinary teacher, and he taught all the time. The first semester of graduate school began the summer before with an intensive Quechua course where John was one of the students. He believed that knowing this language was indispensable for a full understanding of Andean culture in the present, and in the past. To an unusual degree, John directed his teaching toward students and scholars from the Andean region. That first semester we met twice a week with the late César Fonseca Martel, who had carried out ethnographic research as part of the Huánuco project. César was attempting to map out the meaning of the term *ayllu*. None of us knew at the start exactly where the full meaning lay, but John kept asking questions with exquisite patience until the moment arrived when the

Louisiana Acadian cultures. Her biography, *Ruth Landes: A Life in Anthropology* is by Sally Cooper Cole (2002).

⁸ For **Mead** see Barnes, this volume, note 33.

breakthrough in understanding finally came to César and to us all.

Above all, the lesson and the legacy which infused John's work were his profound respect for, and understanding of, the peoples of the Andes and their achievements. He celebrated their mastery of a harsh and exacting environment and the skills they demonstrated in farming, herding, water management, and weaving. Beyond the study of living people, Murra looked to colonial administrative records, particularly the *visitas*, or official inspection tours, where local leaders sought to explain their culture to the Spaniards. His honesty and rigor in the use of these materials can be seen in the way he laid out the words of Andean people in full quotation. His careful editions of colonial *visitas* and other documents, which he encouraged his former students and colleagues to publish, are his achievement and his enduring memorial to the creators of Andean civilization.

I had originally trained as an historian. Studying in Peru had opened the possibility of combining archaeology and linguistics with history in the study of the past, but I had a very hazy idea of anthropology and ethnohistory when I began to work with John Murra as a graduate student. In truth, I was a bit more ecumenical than he was comfortable with. However, one of Murra's sterling virtues as a graduate adviser was that while he insisted that you do something in a particular way, he did not stand in the way of your doing it. It is hard for bright women to realize their potential. I didn't go to graduate school in the United States until after I had "discovered" or been "discovered by" John Murra. It probably would be better to say *recognized*: we mutually recognized each other. John was remarkably patient with the travails of balancing career and family and was always kind to my children in an Old World avuncular way. This goes way beyond the formal academic

relationship and is a credit to his extraordinary humanity.

KICKING OFF A NEW PERSPECTIVE IN ETHNOHISTORY

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I had the opportunity to get to know John Victor Murra, and to speak with him extensively, during a rock art conference which took place in Huánuco, Peru in 1967. At that time I was conducting archaeological research in northwestern Argentina and had a general background in the Andean world. The date is very significant because, during these years, Murra was kicking off a new perspective in ethnohistory, approaching colonial sources with the eye of an anthropologist. Murra had been working on the interdisciplinary project of Huánuco Pampa and had analyzed the earliest *visitas* (colonial inspection tour reports). On this occasion he presented his model of "vertical control of ecological niches", or "archipelagos" as he later called them. Along with other congress participants we made an excursion to the great Inca tambo, and, without any doubt, this first direct contact with Tawantinsuyu, guided by Murra's fascinating discourse, was the first change in direction of my professional career.

From this moment we remained in contact and my research, as well as the courses I offered at the Universidad de la Plata, reflected the interdisciplinary perspective which Murra promoted. A short time later I prepared an article in which I analyzed and compared various models, presenting a global focus on social interaction in the Andean world from the double perspective of archaeology and ethnohistory (Lorandi 1977). These frameworks were Murra's model of vertical control (Murra 1972), Augusto Cardich's study of the upper limits of

cultivation (Cardich 1975), and the Huari y Llacuaz article by Pierre Duviols (Duviols 1973), an exploration of the prehispanic dual organization of farmers and herders. In the original work I also incorporated an analysis of María Rostworowski's coastal dynamics (Rostworowski 1974), but because of problems with length I had to eliminate it. Murra really appreciated my analytic approach. When, in 1971, I visited him in New York and accompanied him to Yale University where he taught at that time, he encouraged me to disseminate my work. It was subsequently published in France (Lorandi 1978) and in England (Lorandi 1986) as a synthesis. On this trip to the United States, on his advice, and through the contacts he gave me, I visited the Universities of Illinois and Michigan and gave seminars in those places.

In the following years, even though I continued with my archaeological research in Argentina, I kept abreast with developments in ethnohistory, and each encounter with Murra at different congresses, plus our frequent exchange of letters, increased my interest in the subject. However, the years I lived in Paris, 1976 to 1979, plus earlier visits, were decisive and produced a substantial change in the course of my professional career. I offered seminars at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, but, more importantly, I attended those offered by Nathan Wachtel¹ and his group in which, in 1978, John Murra also participated. Murra's pioneering teaching was the central axis of the themes tackled.

When I returned to Argentina in 1980, I began my first ethnohistorical research and progressively I abandoned archaeology. In 1984 the Universidad de Buenos Aires offered me the directorship of the Instituto de Ciencias Antropológicas of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. The following year I founded the Ethnohistory Section within the Institute. From then on I could dedicate myself completely to developing this discipline which lacked up-to-date specialists in Argentina. I devoted myself to research, but above all, to training new students who incorporated John Murra's teaching into a core understanding of the Andean world. Murra visited us in 1982 and in 1988 and participated in the First Congress of Ethnohistory (Primer Congreso de Etnohistoria) which I organized in Buenos Aires in 1989, an occasion on which he was paid a special tribute.

Murra was my tie to the academic world outside my country. Frequently I met foreign specialists who, when I presented myself, immediately told me, "Ah. John Murra has spoken to me very favorably of you!" I always had the feeling that he had been the promoter of my professional career, but, above all, that he had made a substantial change in my life. I recognize that I embraced ethnohistory with much greater passion than archaeology, perhaps because my original education in history allowed me to involve myself in a more humanistic manner with Andean society which, even though modified by the long colonial process, still retains the cultural pattern which Murra identified as the essence of "lo andino" or Andean-ness.

In personal terms I can say that in ethnohistory I found my place in the world, not only with the subjects I researched, but also through the chance to educate students, and to develop the discipline in my country. Without John Victor Murra my life would have been different. It was my good fortune that we met on life's

¹ Editors' note: **Nathan Wachtel** is Professor of History and the Anthropology of South and Meso-American Societies at the Collège de France and Director of Studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Among his published works are *Vision des vaincus: Les indiens du Pérou devant la conquête espagnole* (1971), *Anthropologie historique des sociétés andines* (edited with Jacques Revel and John V. Murra, 1978), and *Dieux et vampires: Retour à Chipaya* (1992).

road when I was just 31 years old and could re-orientate myself thanks to this great teacher of teachers.

Translated from the Spanish by Monica Barnes

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THE ABILITY TO BESTOW CONFIDENCE AND STIMULATE NEW IDEAS

VICTORIA CASTRO
Santiago de Chile

No one can doubt John Murra's ability to bestow confidence and stimulate new ideas among his students. The notable thing about this surprising relationship is that he never discriminated in this form of instruction between men and women. He simply appreciated the modesty, talent, and honesty of people.

I first met John Murra in 1971 when I was an anthropology student. On the occasion of the Congress of Archaeology we received visitors at the University of Chile and I was dazzled by two teachers, John Victor Murra and Luis Guillermo Lumbreras.¹ Both embodied a dynamic notion of history, and of the Andean world, for sure. Their commitment to work left an indelible imprint on me, and also significantly marked my path in life, as a graduate student, as a teacher, and as a researcher, up to the present.

The summer school course which John taught at the University of Chile in January 1984 included an analysis of the possibilities of the comparative method, the topic of exchange, the new work of Nathan Wachtel² in Cochabamba, Bolivia on the *collca* or storehouses of the Inca, along with criticism of Murra's own work, and the inculcation of the necessity to study and republish documents continuously. Among the themes to which he called our attention was the miracle of the potato, ethnological advances, and work in native languages up to and including recent Andean

¹ Editors' note: for **Lumbreras**, see Barnes, this volume, note 90.

² Editors' note: for **Wachtel** see Lorandi, note 1.

ethno-astronomy, to say nothing of his closest specialities such as changes in, and the expansion of, Tawantinsuyu; weavers and potters; coca fields; and *mullu* or *Spondylus* shell.

When I presented him with the proposal for my master's thesis, directed by Rolando Mellafe at the University of Chile he commented to me:

"... The thesis project. I will tell you that the plan of study seems to me to be only a first approximation... But, you also have to tell yourself that I have never studied religious phenomena, and I don't feel prepared, on one hand, but on the other hand, the fact is that these themes attract me. I have had many debates with [Pierre] Duviols³ on the theme to the point that he believes that I must occupy myself with it, an area in which I know very well that I don't have any sensibilities and I don't touch such themes. I was reared in an atmosphere in which the anti-clerical struggle was a fundamental element, and this has left psychological roots, although not intellectual ones.

Now I know through the reading of so many old papers that there was always an important struggle involving the priests and friars of the first century and a half of the colonial occupation... I believe that this isn't reflected in your project. Even though we don't have direct data on the Andean population, we can focus on the reflection of what happens in the ecclesiastical literature" (Murra, personal communication, 25 February 1986).⁴

³ Editors' note: for Duviols see Barnes, this volume, note 54.

⁴ "... el proyecto de tesis. Te diré que el programa me parece sólo un primer bosquejo... Pero también tienes que darte cuenta que yo nunca he estudiado fenómenos religiosos, ya que no me siento preparado, por un lado,

During the course of my research, on a visit to Santiago, I gave him the work to read, and so that he could comment upon the first chapter of this thesis, in which, to some extent, I had considered his suggestions. Eleven years later he wrote from Madrid, "Congratulations on having finished the thesis! And it's 530 pages!" Who else could have shared the joy, although I had delayed eleven years in finishing *Huacra muchay: Evangelización y religión andina en Charcas, Atacama colonial* (*Huaca Worship: Evangelization and Andean Religion in Charcas, Colonial Atacama*).

At some point I sent him a work on terraces, a small article in a scientific journal, and he wrote to me that,

This is a theme which merits a great deal of attention... One of the agreeable things about *Creces* is seeing your name as an author identified with the Universidad de Chile" (personal communication, 12 May 1988).⁵

At this time we were still under military government and any kind of stability was difficult.

pero por otro el hecho es que me atraen estos temas. Con Duviols he tenido muchos debates sobre el tema ya que el cree que yo tengo que ocuparme, donde yo se muy bien donde no tengo sensibilidad y no toco tales temas. He sido criado dentro de un ambiente donde la lucha anti-clerical era elemento fundamental y esto ha dejado raíces psicológicas aunque no intelectuales.

Ahora sé que la lectura de tantos papeles viejos que siempre hubo una lucha importante involucrando los sacerdotes y frailes del primer siglo y medio de la ocupación colonial—creo que esto no está reflejado en tu proyecto. Ya que no tenemos datos directos de la población andina, tenemos que fijarnos en el reflejo de lo que pasaba en la literatura eclesiástica."

⁵ Es un tema que merece mucha atención... una de las reflexiones agradables de *Creces* es ver tu nombre como autora identificado con la Universidad de Chile.

He never stopped thanking me for so much care and effort expended on the transcription of the audio tapes of the interviews which later gave form to *Nispa Ninchis*. My fellow editors Carlos Aldunate and Jorge Hidalgo and I overwhelmed him with our questions during a stay which we shared with John for this purpose in Zapallar, on the Chilean coast. During the long process of correcting these transcriptions John demonstrated infinite patience and I, after a while, learned many things. John's replies never ceased surprising us. In personal terms, like so many of us, in some way he made you a participant in his decisions and sought your opinions while relating various situations.

His correspondence provided, at the same time, lessons on the world and, especially, on people. He stimulated and pleased with his very special manner of teaching. However, without doubt the strongest aspect was the demonstration that he believed in you and your work, something which was not merely intellectual, but also involved you completely as a human being. Ever since 1983, when he listened to, and commented on, our work on the altiplano origins of the Toconce Phase (1300-1450 A.D.; Castro *et al.* 1984), he showed us his interest and approval. His opinions created in me a solid confidence in the work we were doing, as well as in my intuitions, and, along with that, a very powerful tie of friendship and trust.

I will never forget how he spoke about women he admired. For example he said that Heather Lechtman was "an extraordinary person with much imagination" (personal communication, 1977). This was praise I heard him deliver in many forms— towards his extraordinary friend and doctor Lola Hoffman,⁶

⁶ *Editors' note:* **Lola Hoffman** (d. 1988) was a psychoanalyst who treated both Murra and his friend the Peruvian novelist, essayist, poet and anthropologist, José María

and about the affection and loyalty of Freda Wolf and AnaMaría Soldi.⁷

Murra solidified my holistic comprehension of the Andean world, and of history, and gave me the certainty that by combining the separate tactics of anthropology, archaeology, ethnohistory, and ethnography one could increase the enormous complexity of its unique cultural history.

Translated from the Spanish by Monica Barnes

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THE GREEN PATCHWORK PAPER

ROLENA ADORNO
New Haven, Connecticut

As I reflect on the role that John Murra played in the development of my intellectual and professional academic life, I focus on the lessons I learned from him as a teacher. Murra was perhaps the most exciting professor I had in graduate school, but we got off to a rocky start. Having decided in 1972 that I wanted to concentrate on colonial Spanish American literature as my field of specialization in the doctoral program in Romance Studies, Spanish, at Cornell University, I was advised by faculty in my department to take a course or two on Andean ethnohistory and civilization from Professor Murra. So I went to his office at advising time, taking my turn among the students lined up to see him. When I introduced myself and told him that I was interested in

Arguedas.

⁷ *Editors' note:* for **AnaMaría Soldi**, see Barnes, this volume, note 67.

studying El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, he glowered down at me and, scowling, asked: "Why not Guaman Poma?" I shrank back, shaken, and I did not gather the courage to return until a semester later. That was the beginning of a long and productive professional and personal relationship.

As a teacher, I found John's passion for the Andean world to be both daunting and inspiring. No dilettanti welcomed in his classroom! When an undergraduate student (this was a mixed, graduate-undergraduate seminar that met in the ethereal realms of McGraw Hall) explained that he would very much like to go to the Andes for research the following summer but had no money to do so, John (glowering again) said, "Well, ask your parents to refinance their home!" He'd made his point, and no further whining or shedding of crocodile tears was tolerated. Typically, John would storm into the classroom, write the names and concepts he wanted to discuss on the blackboard, and dive in. While, according to today's demands for mentoring and the like, John seemed indifferent to students, he was, in fact, carefully cultivating them, placing before each one what he thought might reach or direct his or her interests. It was sheer mastery, and this practice bespoke the seriousness with which he engaged his students as well as his subject matter. Writing papers for his courses always resulted in his careful, thoughtful readings and pertinent written comments. When, in the course of that seminar, I told John about Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco's 1611 *Tesoro de la lengua castellana, o española*, he immediately and enthusiastically ordered several photocopies of the entire out-of-print 1943 edition to make them available for purchase by his students, complementing his active use of the Quechua-Spanish dictionaries of that era. New sources, new research tools, new questions were greatly welcomed by him. In all these ways, and many more, John Murra provided a pedagogical model

that I still strive to live up to in and outside the classroom after thirty-plus years of university teaching.

In Murra's encouragement of students' work, I was one of those on whom he focused, despite the fact that I was not an anthropologist-in-training. It was, of course, my literary-studies work with texts and literary history that he saw as promising. To stimulate my interest he placed before me his two-part article in *Natural History*, published in 1961, "Guaman Poma de Ayala: A Seventeenth-Century Indian's Account of Andean Civilization" and "The Post-Conquest Chronicle of the Inca State's Rise and Fall", not to mention the 1936 Paris facsimile edition of the *Nueva crónica y buen gobierno*. He showed me the sheaf of typewritten notes that he had taken on that work over the years, and this became the basis for the ethnological index in our print (1980, 1987) and online (2001, 2004) editions of Guaman Poma's manuscript. John encouraged my reading of the *Nueva crónica*, which resulted in my doctoral dissertation, the title of which described the *Nueva crónica* as a "lost chapter in the history of Latin American letters". Because I asked other questions than John did about Guaman Poma's writing (I was always interested in what the Andean chronicler had read, his "library"), John found my thesis only mildly interesting. Yet, after I completed my Cornell Ph.D. and was on the faculty of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Syracuse University, John suggested that I take two particular chapters of it and make it into an article for publication. It resulted in "Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala: An Andean View of the Peruvian Viceroyalty, 1565-1615" published in the *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* (1978) which, at least in my own view, has withstood the test of time.

Its writing was another story, and it is the last one I will tell here. John and I met periodically at his McGraw Hall office in Ithaca

that autumn semester, 1977 (during his famous Otoño Andino, see Barnes, this volume, p. 39), as I worked through draft after draft of the article. It was a difficult essay to write, not only because I was a novice at academic writing (it would be my second article), but also, primarily, because the article had many goals. The discrete, manageable objective was to set forth Guaman Poma's readings of the works of others, as evidenced in his chronicle, documenting them as carefully as possible. My breakthrough was having just discovered, two years post-dissertation, that Guaman Poma, without attribution, had quoted and paraphrased Fray Bartolomé de las Casas's unpublished "Tratado de las doce dudas" (1564), which was integral to the Andean chronicler's arguments about the need for Spaniards to obey Andean law (instead of vice versa) and his formulation of a proposal to restore Andean sovereignty. My discovery of Guaman Poma's unnamed source showed, among other things, that his nomination of his son as sovereign prince of "the Indies of Peru" was not sheer nonsense. It merely updated Las Casas's proposal of a half century earlier in which the Dominican had recommended the restoration of Inca sovereignty in the person of Huayna Capac's grandson, Titu Cussi Yupanqui, who in 1560, had been the reigning Inca at Vilcabamba, but whose rule, and that of his last successor, Thupaq Amaru, had ended decades before Guaman Poma wrote the *Nueva corónica*. He no doubt nominated his son precisely because the main Inca line had died out and a restoration candidate would have to be found.

Another challenge of my study was to highlight the personalities and set forth the workings of Spanish missionary culture with which Guaman Poma was directly or indirectly engaged. Historical investigation and textual analysis came together uneasily. The difficulty was to create a coherently unfolding narrative exposition. John had the solution. In reference to my antepenultimate draft and with slight

exasperation, he said, "Give it to me. I'll see what I can do." I discovered when he returned the paper to me a week later that he had carefully cut it apart (those were the days of literally cutting and pasting), composed and typed up new transitional passages and internal conclusions, and pasted the whole back together with its new patches. "Here," he said, handing it back to me, "see if this works." And he placed in my hand my paper, sticky with glue and highlighted by his typewritten patches—highlighted because he had done this editorial work using a very clever pedagogical strategy of typing his sentences on scraps of pale green paper! The green-paper draft resulted in the finest writing lesson I have ever received.

How I let this patchwork paper slip out of my files at some point over the years I do not know, and I am sorry that it is gone. But no matter. It exists in my memory as vividly as if I had it in front of me now. To my way of thinking, it represents John Murra's pedagogical personality in its toughness and its extraordinary generosity. My acknowledgment to John's memory in my *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (2007) states it best. John was breathing his last as I wrote, in October, 2006, that he was "the greatest of teachers, for the example of his single-minded devotion to the pursuit of knowledge about the ancient Andes, his intellectual generosity, and his help in teaching me to write." Here, just now, I have unlocked the secret of the last clause of that sentence. I went on to conclude, "Our collaboration in studying and editing the chronicle of Guaman Poma, which lasted from the typewriter age to the era of the Internet, stands as a testament to what I owe him." That, of course, is another story, which I have attempted to tell in the special issue of *Chungará* to be published by the University of Arica, Tarapaca, Chile, which, like this section of *Andean Past*, will be devoted to John Murra's memory and his multiple legacies.

DO ANTHROPOLOGY THE WAY THAT POETS WRITE POETRY

INGE MARIA HARMAN
North Potomac, Maryland

I remember with remarkable clarity my first encounter with John Murra. I was contemplating a graduate degree in anthropology with a special emphasis on the Andes and had traveled to Ithaca, New York specifically to meet Professor Murra and to determine what he was like, and if he was the teacher whom I and my husband, Roger Rasnake, were looking for. We thought that we would get some of our questions answered about anthropology at Cornell and learn some particulars about Professor Murra. We had been warned that he might not be interested in working with us and that we could expect him to be tough, demanding, and difficult.

Now, after nearly thirty-five years of having known him—having studied with him and worked with him, having been mentored and supervised, and edited by him, having traveled together, attended meetings together, even cooked meals together—after thirty-five years of correspondence and visits and conversation, I can say, yes, indeed, John Murra was tough and demanding and sometimes difficult. But that was only a small fraction of what he was! He was also immensely knowledgeable. He was intellectually curious and extremely politically aware. He was adventuresome, entertaining, worldly-wise, and charming! In addition to all this, he was a committed teacher who believed that it was important to maintain a real and honest relationship with his students, who were expected to be as devoted to Andean research as he was. He did not hesitate to let you know when your efforts were inadequate. However, he also was open to his students' ideas and readily recognized their contributions. He impressed upon us the great importance of studying

indigenous Andean languages and encouraged his students to devote themselves to lengthy field-work and in-depth historical investigation.

John was unlike any other teacher or college professor I ever encountered. It was not easy to convince him to take you on as a serious student. Once he did, he accepted you, not just as a student, but as a human being. He was committed to you and concerned about you as a person with a particular psychological, cultural, and social make-up. He also expected—insisted, really—that you deal with him as the complex person he was. He had a cultural heritage, a mother, a father, an intellectual formation, a political background, personal commitments, and an anthropological vision that made him the person he was, and he trusted that you would be cognizant of these things in your interactions with him.

In studying a topic in a seminar, or in preparing for field research, John expected his students to develop a depth and breadth of understanding based on historical literacy that was, for anthropologists at least, of a breathtaking scale. For John, a time frame of five hundred or even a thousand years was scarcely adequate to answer the kinds of questions he posed about Andean society, polity, and ecology. Nonetheless, even when working and thinking in very broad historical and geographical terms, John never lost sight of the individual and the idiosyncrasies that shape human behavior and decision-making. All these characteristics combined to make John Murra an exciting and inspiring teacher and colleague.

John believed that Andean cultural history was relevant for contemporary life. He felt strongly that the Andean history that he, and other like-minded scholars, were deciphering was of great relevance to social and political life in the modern Andean republics, and he communicated this understanding and this

excitement to his students and to scholars throughout the world of Andean studies. For John, every historical or archaeological revelation, every linguistic discovery, every investigation of Andean social and cultural practices contributed to the larger effort of accurately describing the Andean achievement, and each student's contributions were recognized and appreciated as part of a larger effort.

John was, undeniably, a charismatic speaker and lecturer who attracted scholars and activists—both men and women—to the cause of understanding the Andean accomplishment. It is worth pointing out that John *liked* women and enjoyed working with them. He had strong and positive relationships with many women, both students and colleagues. It never seemed to occur to him that women might be lacking in any of the physical, social, or intellectual skills that an anthropologist or historian might need to carry out her investigations. For someone of his generation, an awareness and appreciation of women as intellectual equals was not a given and was unusual even in university settings.

The stream of visitors and correspondence that found its way to John's door in his latter years is testimony to the fact that he had strong emotional ties to many women the world over. (Here I am not even considering his marriages or romantic liaisons.) It is important to note that, in my experience, John related to women, not in some sort of stereotypical, gender-driven way, but as individuals. Regardless of gender, he was challenging to work with and expected real commitment from his students, whether male or female. He was truly dedicated to the cause of Andean studies and worked best with those who shared that dedication.

As a female grad student beginning my studies with him, I observed John working in a collegial fashion with women researchers and

academics from all parts of Latin America and Europe. Of course he also dealt with male scholars, publishers, university administrators, and others, cultivating a wide circle of influence and support. As a woman in an anthropology department with an almost exclusively male faculty, I took special notice of the scholarly exchanges and collaborative relationships he maintained with women around the world. I also noticed the strong personal relationships he had with current and former students and the loyalty they felt towards him. All these things motivated me, and my husband as well, to persevere in our efforts to convince Professor Murra to chair our doctoral committees and allow us to do doctoral research under his guidance and tutelage.

After my years of class work, field-work preparations, and proposal writing at Cornell were over, John continued to maintain contact with me and my husband. During years of field research in the Andes, during dissertation writing and defense, during my first experiences of college teaching, during applied work in Bolivia, during my pregnancies and the early childhood years of my girls, John was a regular correspondent, an occasional guest in my home, and an ongoing part of my life. Remarkably, he was supportive of my decision to give up research and teaching and spend undivided time with my children. He was interested in my daughters as unique human beings and curious about the process of child rearing and socialization.

John never ceased to expect that I would eventually find time to rededicate myself to the scholarly work that I had begun with my initial research on Andean reciprocities. He told me, not too long before his death, that he had begun the work of translating *Collective Labor and Rituals of Reciprocity*, my dissertation, into Spanish. His hope was to see it made available to an Andean audience. Of course, that hope

and the obligation to share that knowledge with an Andean public are mine as well. I recognize them, however, for what they are. They are his creation—his work in me, which I acknowledge and appreciate and intend to see to completion.

One more interesting thing about John Murra is that I keep learning from him, even now after his death. Early in my sojourn at Cornell, I became aware that John had little patience with those who viewed anthropology as a “career”, a job, or a path up the academic ladder. John said more than once that we really shouldn’t expect to make a living from our anthropological inclinations. Because I was young and just starting my “career”, I found this stance a bit confusing. John made his vision a little clearer when he explained that we should do anthropology the way that poets write poetry. What he meant, of course, was that we should do it for the sheer love of it, and because we are compelled to do it. I may finally have reached a point in my life where I can truly comprehend his meaning.

EIGHT THOUSAND SOLUTIONS TO THE SAME PROBLEM

SILVIA RAQUEL PALOMEQUE
Cordoba, Argentina

I first met John Murra in 1984, soon after his retirement. He was 68 years old and I was 37. He was a professor at FLACSO, Quito (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales in Quito) in its first master’s degree program in Andean History. This was a pioneering educational experiment in the history of the Andean region, not just of individual Andean countries, in which basic principles could be re-established. Apart from one person from Spain, all of us students came from Andean countries or had lived in one of them for almost a decade. We arrived as graduates in different disciplines, and as was customary at FLACSO at that time,

we had full fellowships so that we could devote ourselves to working towards a master’s degree which was the result of an academic “Andean” project, not of institutional financial interests.

We didn’t know if John would come or not. He had only accepted us as students towards the end of the course, after we had taken classes with Luis Lumbreras,¹ Carlos Sempat Assadourian, César Fonseca Martel, Tristan Platt, Frank Salomon, Magnus Mörner,² and Segundo Moreno Yañez,³ among others. Professor Murra arrived just at the moment when the majority of students had broken not only with disciplinary boundaries, but also with our original academic areas, and, with a little awe, had begun to perceive something of the complex diversity of Andean culture, and of the specifics of the system of colonial domination, as well as the persistence and transformations of societies prior to the rupture of the colonial bond. In the

¹ *Editors’ note:* for **Lumbreras** see Barnes, this volume, note 90; For **Sempat Assadourian** see Barnes, note 49; for **Fonseca Martel** see Barnes, note 97; for **Platt** see Barnes, note 64; and for **Salomon** see Barnes, note 48, and Salomon, this volume, pp. 87-102.

² *Editors’ note:* Historian **Magnus Mörner** (b. 1924) is a prolific and multi-lingual author who has specialized in Latin America. Among his best known works are *The Expulsion of the Jesuits from Latin America* (1965), *Race and Class in Latin America* (1970), *The Andean Past: Land, Societies, and Conflict* (1985), and *The Transformation of Rural Society in the Third World* (1991).

³ *Editors’ note:* Ecuadorian **Segundo Moreno Yañez** (b. 1939) became an anthropologically oriented historian after a thorough grounding in philosophy, theology, and ancient languages. He studied at Bonn under the late Udo Oberem and wrote his dissertation on rebellions in the Audiencia de Quito. He is one of the founders of the Department of Anthropology of the Universidad Católica (Quito). He has been Director of the Sección de Antropología de la Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana and the founder of the *Revista de Antropología Ecuatoriana*. He has also held posts in the Instituto Otavaleño de Antropología and in the Banco Central del Ecuador, among other institutions.

meantime, nobody knew very clearly what to do with all this. John once told me that he had never had a dialogue with such eager students. As the years passed I realized that he appeared before us just at the point when we were ready for him.

A large proportion of us students who chose to take John's seminar had participated in the Latin American leftist militancy of the 1960s and 70s which had just been militarily defeated by right wing forces, and we were in the middle of the process of reviewing our intense and difficult prior experiences. As in the past, the study of social sciences had gone hand-in-hand with political activism. In addition, we faced serious problems with our work, and, perhaps, these had prompted us to become master's degree students. The analytic tools we knew segmented society on the basis of concepts from political economics where economic structures dominated the whole social complex and led to the classic division of society into social classes. During the 1970s, in the midst of the maelstrom of social movements, advances had been made in the critique of evolutionism and the inevitable succession of modes of production.

However, in terms of analytical instruments, we had come only to the point of accepting the existence of a political superstructure separate from an economic structure, and the idea that both could have had independent movements. That is to say, a complex of advances which did not modify the initial homogeneity put in place by economic factors only partially complicated the panorama. These instruments were not only insufficient, but also reductionist for people with militant backgrounds who did field-work or archival studies with an analysis centered on "popular" sectors or Andean campesinos. What was worse, the instruments were questionable in terms of what must be done with the knowledge attained.

When, in 2000, Victoria Castro, Carlos Aldunate, and Jorge Hidalgo published *Nispa ninchis/decimos diciendo . . .*, their 1993 interviews of John Murra, even if they reduced John's catalytic role by saying that his struggle consisted in " . . . demonstrating cultural achievements where others only saw poverty . . .",⁴ the type of battle through which John helped us to liberate ourselves in 1984 was underscored. John Murra, in the interviews, told them that in order to "show" one first had to "see", but for him "the vision" was rather obvious. "A goose has two legs. It isn't necessary to be a philosopher [to see that]. One has to see geese",⁵ he said. However, that which appeared obvious to John, his capacity to "see" and "show", two words key to his operation, were not easy for us to decipher then. I still understand that "seeing" is far from simple, and I also realize that even for him it wasn't easy to find the path towards "showing".

By 1984 we had already seen geese, but "poor geese", because that was what we leftist militants knew how to see, and because of this we felt very comfortable with John. Like him we saw geese and, without ignoring the existence of peacocks, we fixed on geese, as he did when he chose to see potatoes instead of continuing to fixate on maize. Both were political options—one tries to center oneself on something and leave the rest in the background, but without removing it from consideration. This also related to Murra's very well-known struggle with Communism. I would like to make it clear that, according to my understanding, this only had to do with the leadership of a Stalinist Communist party, or with a certain type of leader, but which absolutely had nothing to do with his former

⁴ " . . . mostrar los logros culturales donde otros sólo ven pobreza . . ." (p. 12)

⁵ "Que el ganso tiene dos patas. No hay que ser filósofo. Hay que ver gansos" (p. 24).

comrades or fellow-combatants who continued to be his friends, and were part of the network in which he lived.

However, even if we saw geese, the truth is that we hadn't seen the same geese as John, in so far as we centered ourselves on dividing the geese into the rich and the poor and according to their internal logic. We couldn't see their non-economic differences. Even when confronted with difficulties in facing the time depth of processes, the only people who could see better than us were the few anthropologists in the group. Yes, they could see, even if later they didn't know what to do with their vision. That which we non-anthropologists couldn't see was Andean societies in their diversity, with their *ayllus* or kin groups, with their important cultural achievements interrupted or disrupted by the Spanish invasion which submitted them to a regime of colonial domination that maintained their ethnic authorities because the Spaniards didn't find any other way to exploit them. For centuries the domestic units of the *ayllus* only obeyed the authorities of their own leaders, whom they elected or accepted through an internal selection process which we still don't know, and with consequences that continued after the rupture of the colonial pact, and which still have a bearing on the configuration of their dominant elites.

The power to perceive these cultural differences intertwined with colonial domination which treated indigenous *ayllus* quite differently from European peasants who were classified on the basis of the economic and social class criteria on which we based our analysis. All this was only possible thanks to the work of John Murra and his followers or close colleagues. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to go through a long year of courses and effort and deconstructing reflection which later affected our whole relationship with the world. From a historiographic perspective it was

a more than important advance which, for many of us, opened another world, the possibility of thinking about history from a perspective not only distinct from that of power (which we already had), but to begin to penetrate the logics—not the logic—of Andean societies and try to reconstruct their specifics, keeping in mind the existence of their own thinking, alternate propositions to those of the elites, and imagine what they would be. That is, to include the doubts of anthropology within historical thinking, and work together with archaeologists and ethnographers, or train ourselves to accomplish the work of recovering the best traditions of these disciplines, not all of them.

The course of Murra's critical trajectory, including his break with the leadership of the Communist Party and its politics, and his de-commissioning as a Party militant, we understood very well. Our relocation in a well-known and common territory was what let John explain to us his political life choice, to become an anthropologist in order to take a position in the militant life, in as much as there existed a form of the anthropological discipline (that which is practiced by those who learn the language of the people they study) which allows knowledge of the 8000 solutions to the same problem, from which each society chooses one.⁶

During that course, in a conversation which we had after he returned our final exams, we showed the confusion with which our future presented itself to us, perhaps looking for advice without saying so explicitly. It was a very difficult dialogue on our part due to his usual ability to leave us in the end analyzing the naturalized elements which included our own questions, before giving us a partial response which, in the end, laid out the paths to take in order to build our own reply.

⁶ "Creo que hay 8.000 soluciones al mismo problema y que cada sociedad escoge alguna" (p. 75).

I don't remember well how much he said, or how he managed to get us to make our own conclusions about the necessity of "the act of seeing" and later "the act of showing" in place of our usual "transform in the name of . . .", a problem that was not easy for him to resolve, either, according to my understanding. From that arose the necessity that in the future we would take our places, that we would reflect on the fact that we had some small power over the word which gave us a certain authority, and, perhaps, that would lead us to a sort of social listening; that after seeing and respecting, we would see how to use our power over the word to show society as a whole the cultural achievements of the diverse Andean groups, but only during the lapse of time when these groups could still not express themselves.

There, as well, we perceived that John's social utopia, his eagerly awaited goal, was a world of diverse people, accepted as such, who had the means of directly expressing their situation and their interests, and struggling for them. These are the political conclusions which I remember that we took away from this first and intense relationship with him, and it was at that point we began a personal relationship which was strong, lasting, and very significant for me in that he became a dear friend with whom I shared the same basic language in relation to the world.

In conclusion, it is important to underscore that his commitment was to the world, both as a combatant in the International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War, and in his struggle against discrimination, which he developed everywhere he lived, in support of Afro-Americans, and in solidarity with Spaniards, Africans, women, and, mainly, with Andean societies and their achievements. A central part of his life was his commitment to humanity in the search for a different future, for alternatives to build upon, a future separate from the domination by material

things and commercial success. It will be a society of solidarity where talent and the dignity of work are valued, without discrimination. I believe it will also be a world with a predominance of woman workers, creative, intelligent, living in fellowship, and with the capacity to found institutions which permit transformation to continue beyond the life of one person, by providing for the education of young people who will guarantee and make possible the re-creation and continuity of the life choice and work of unequalled value which John Murra left us as a legacy.

*Translation from the Spanish
by Monica Barnes*



*John Victor Murra in Chicago,
Spring, 1945
(Photograph courtesy of Heather Lechtman).*