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“KINSMEN RESURRECTED”: JOHN VICTOR MURRA AND THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION¹

After my doctoral advisor, John V. Murra, died, I rummaged in my basement for papers to help me remember him. I found, under a stack of punch-card-era computer work, a manila folder of yellow legal-size pages that I had completely forgotten. They were my notes from Murra's 1971 Cornell University course "History of U.S. Anthropology".

In 1971, as I began graduate school, Murra gathered a few students, mostly his own advisees, twice weekly in a garret tucked under the slate mansard of Cornell's McGraw Hall. Our group was a small one and unrepresentative of Cornell anthropology as a whole, for at that time Murra's students seemed to the rest of the department to be a personalistic sect. His lectures gave unique pleasure. I loved to hear the names of our North American ancestors spoken in his Rumanian burr. His huge eyes opened wide to deal out penetrating, respect-compelling glances when he mentioned the names of the honored ones: Henry Rowe

Schoolcraft,² Lewis Henry Morgan,³ John Wesley Powell,⁴ Franz Boas,⁵ Paul Radin.⁶ . . . His

² **Henry Rowe Schoolcraft** (1793-1864) was a pioneering geographer, geologist, and ethnologist, who is credited with the identification of the source of the Mississippi River. He studied at Union College and Middlebury College. His first wife, Ojibway-speaker Jane Johnson Schoolcraft, greatly aided his research. He is the author of numerous works on American Indians. A biography of Schoolcraft, *Indian Agent and Wilderness Scholar: The Life of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft* was published in 1987 by Richard E. Bremer.

³ For **Morgan** see Barnes, this volume, note 139.

⁴ **John Wesley Powell** (1834-1902) was a noted geographer, linguist, and explorer of the American West. He was educated at Illinois College, Wheaton College, and Oberlin College but did not graduate from any of those institutions. He was a director of the U.S. Geological Survey, the founding director of the Bureau of Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution, and the founder of Washington, D.C.'s Cosmos Club. Among his best known works are *Canyons of the Colorado* (1875) and *Introduction to the Study of American Indian Languages . . .* (1877). Several book length biographies of Powell have been published.

⁵ The German-American **Franz Boas** (1858-1942) created in the U.S.A. the role of the anthropologist as a Ph.D.-trained specialist. He, himself, held a doctorate in physics from the University of Kiel (1881). Many of his students at Columbia University went on to become prominent researchers. Boas fought tirelessly against racism and criticized evolutionary frameworks as lacking cultural depth. From the 1880s Boas conducted fieldwork among Arctic peoples and tribes of the Canadian Pacific coast. He stressed the importance of cultural context and history. He propounded the four-field concept of anthropology, and was an early advocate of the participant-observer method in fieldwork. He formulated cultural relativism as a central theme of American anthropology. His numerous published works include *The Central*

¹ *Editors' note:* this article is a revised and expanded English-language version of the second part of a larger article accompanying the French translation of *Formaciones económicas y políticas del mundo andino* (1975), a collection of major early essays by John V. Murra, edited by Jacques Poloni-Simard, and to be published by École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales with the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme. It was submitted to Poloni-Simard in August 2008 and to *Andean Past* in September 2008.

lectures were often elliptical and indirect, with important points left between the lines. A semester was not enough for most of us to understand fully, but thirty-eight years might be.

The side of Murra that these lectures expressed has not been evoked in any of his many tributes and obituaries. Anthropologists know a lot about Murra's life as an Andeanist. However one should also know something about his life as an American immigrant intellectual.

By the time Murra hit Andeanist print he had given a lot of work and thought to the U.S.A. It was not the stereotyped Rumanian anti-Franco *combatiente* of 1937 who wrote his works; it was an adoptive Chicagoan, a young man acquainted with the likes of anthropologist Robert Redfield⁷ (who taught him about Lewis Henry Morgan, for Murra the totemic U.S. intellectual) and Philleo Nash (later President Kennedy's Commissioner of Indian Affairs). Saul Bellow, the novelist *par excellence* of savvy young Chicagoans on the make, knew him in the 1940s when both were financially strapped University of Chicago students. Bellow later mischievously gave his name to an accountant:

Eskimo (1888), *Kwakiutl Culture as Reflected in Mythology* (1935), *Race, Language, and Culture* (1940), *the Mind of Primitive Man* (1944), *Primitive Art* (1951), and many articles on the Indians of North America's Northwest Coast, among other topics.

⁶ **Paul Radin** (1883-1959) was a student of Franz Boas and an ethnographer of the Siouan Winnebago or Ho-Chunk tribe in Wisconsin. He also contributed to an understanding of African art and folktales. His work is characterized by emphasis on biography and attention to intellectuality in Native American cultures. Among his works are *The Method and Theory of Ethnography* (1933), *The Italians of San Francisco* (1935), *Primitive Religion: Its Nature and Origin* (1937), *Indians of South America* (1942), *The Culture of the Winnebago as Described by Themselves* (1949). He was the editor of *African Folktales and Sculpture* (1952).

⁷ For **Redfield** see Barnes, this volume, note 11.

"Murra, that well-dressed marvelous smooth expert" (Bellow 1975:36). When I asked Murra about this, he said Bellow was alluding satirically to Murra's cleverness in talking his way out of a debt to the University bursar.

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS IMMIGRANT/ THE IMMIGRANT AS ANTHROPOLOGIST

Murra's inclination to delve into the colonial and early-republican roots of U.S. and Canadian ethnology had something to do with an immigrant's curious comparing of the old country and the new, but more to do with his insistence on knowing who one is, both historically and psychoanalytically. His resulting singular view of American anthropology's past is worth a second look, now that some quarters of U.S. anthropology have once more become receptive to humanism and historicism.

The 1971 course represented an early moment in the development of inquiry into the history of the field, and an incomplete one by today's standard. Thanks to George Stocking's and Richard Handler's University of Wisconsin Press publications (*c.f.* Stocking 1992), to Regna Darnell's from the University of Nebraska Press (starting 2005)⁸ and to many other researchers published in the *History of Anthropology Newsletter* (formerly edited by Henrietta Kuklick), the history of North American anthropology today flourishes far beyond what Murra had to offer. Nonetheless his early perspective on how anthropology sat within American intellectual history was well-researched and original, and remains a durably provocative one.

When Murra spoke to Latin American audiences, and when he talked to us about his efforts to build research institutions in the Andean countries, he sometimes said that the

⁸ Darnell's *Histories of Anthropology Annual* is in its fourth volume as of 2008.

Sputnik-era U.S.A. was a good “platform” for launching various disciplinary “tactics”. However it would be completely wrong to think this meant his interest in the North American growth of the discipline—by 1971, explosive growth in terms of sheer graduate enrollment numbers—was merely instrumental. In 1974, as President of the American Ethnological Society, he had the option of dedicating a number of the *AES Publications* to any theme he chose. He decided on *American Anthropology: The Early Years*. In its preface he wrote:

I am not a historian of our craft. When I receive my copy of the *History of Anthropology Newsletter*, I nod my head in recognition or amazement. All those kinsmen resurrected, reevaluated, scrutinized. Events, influences, skullduggery, and alternative readings of the evidence are *us* because they are part of our past. . . I pretend that it [anthropology] is my only ethnic, religious, and ideologic [*sic*] affiliation. This stance may not be a scientific one, and may be the reason why I do not conduct research in the history of anthropology. But I am a committed, critical, patriotic consumer of the work of those who do (Murra 1976:3-4).

North American anthropology is not really a discipline in the usual sense, but a consortium—one can still hope, a symbiosis—of very different studies that were brought together by a common motive: inquiry into the original peoples of the Americas. The alliance among archaeologists, biologists, cultural anthropologists, and linguists seemed to Murra a great achievement, and a deep-rooted one. He showed us how it took shape in the middle nineteenth century, long before the professionalization of the discipline crystallized these as “fields” or “quadrants”. Schisms among the “quadrants” were already occurring in 1971,

as each field developed vested interests and ideological fetishes. Murra saw his course as one way to oppose a breakup. He was not exactly a conciliator; he upheld a distinctive minoritarian humanism and historicism against all comers. But he didn’t think conciliators or unifiers were really needed. In fact he commented that North Americans’ “mania to reconcile” sometimes made mush of inquiry. Rather he thought ethnographic commitment, the bond with the peoples we study, should suffice as common ground, indeed a social contract, even among scholars who disagree about everything else.

Murra’s course could be taken as a history of that pact, and it was chronologically organized. Nevertheless, time and again he circled back toward a few pervasive themes. These themes reveal something about his intellectual peculiarity as well as about anthropology, and it is these which I will sketch in the following pages.

CATHEXIS

Cathexis was always central. To this Freudian, nothing but love was strong enough to cement the ethnographic pact—though his ways of expressing love could be peculiar. The power of passions in shaping intellectual history formed a leitmotif. As Murra stated in one of his course lectures:

There is no Boas school of thought but there is a Boas emotional group and an institutional tie. Boas as a historicist is a mistake; as Kroeber⁹ says he had no

⁹ Alfred L. Kroeber (1876-1960) was an influential American anthropologist who studied under Franz Boas (Ph.D. 1901). As an archaeologist he excavated in New Mexico, Mexico, and Peru. He developed the concept of the “culture area”, a region in which societies shared certain basic traits and operated in similar natural environments. As founder of the Anthropology Department of the University of California at Berkeley, he did much to record the languages and cultures of the Indians of the

historical sense—he just got stuck in that category by not being an evolutionist. The emotional storm wasn't about his ideas, but his personality, and other personalities stirred up by the fact that his seminars, unlike others of the time, had female members.

In discussing the Columbia University graduate department he remarked that “[Intellectual history] is often the effect of Joe on Nelly.” Murra had an Old World sense of the honor of achievement and seniority, and he chastised those of us who, as he thought, callowly gossiped about major scholars. But at the same time he also had a comedic sense of the way things work. Stories of particular anthropological Joes and Nellies seemed to him both important and amusing. In class he limited himself to some dry semi-Freudian kidding about intellect's enslavement to Eros: “The unit [of Boasian academic organization] is the foreign-born Jew and the WASP woman.”

Such kidding was the visible outcrop of a larger rumination, born of psychoanalytic struggles, that Murra clearly carried on constantly yet never shared with us. It concerned relations between the passions of the subconscious and the work of intellect, including such themes as solitude and insomnia, dreaming and phobia, as well as desire. In class Murra expressed admiration for Alfred L. Kroeber's recognition of dream work in his early field research:

[Mohave] . . . raided far away, largely from curiosity. . . They had high regard for dreams and for reasoning from dreams. All this was done before 1917: that is, before Malinowski,¹⁰ and before Kroeber's own [psycho]analysis; most of it was done by 1912.”

Murra noticed something anthropologists Robert Lowie,¹¹ Radin, and Kroeber had in common:

They spent large parts of their lives alone, widowed, or divorced. It wasn't their 'isms', but their marginality in civilized life, that made the field and the museum central in their personal lives and their life callings.

Despite his theoretical insistence that vocations are unitary, fusing the scholarly with the personal, a stoic or soldierly impatience with weakness made Murra a “tough love” advisor rather than a fatherly one. Students could not count on him for much comfort amid the loneliness of fieldwork.

PROFESSIONALISM

Another axis of the course concerned democratic science and professional science. Our classroom sat barely 45 km from the lovely Cayuga Lake village of Aurora, where Lewis

American West. Among his many published works are *Animal Tales of the Eskimo* (1899), *The Arapaho* (1902-07), *The Chumash and Costanoan Languages* (1910), *Anthropology* (1936), *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America* (1938), and *The Archaeology and Pottery of Nazca, Peru . . .* (edited by Patrick H. Carmichael, 1998). Kroeber's wife Theodora published a biography of Alfred L. Kroeber in 1970 and Julian H. Stewart published one in 1973.

¹⁰ For **Malinowski** see Barnes, this volume, note 36.

¹¹ **Robert H. Lowie** (1883-1957), educated in German humanism, took his A.B. from the College of the City of New York (1901) and his Ph.D. from Columbia University (1908) under Franz Boas. He was an expert on North American Indians and, as a theorist, helped to formulate the doctrine of cultural relativism which holds cultural constructs to be interpretable only within the contexts of individual societies. Among his books are *Primitive Society* (1920), *Primitive Religion* (1924), *History of Ethnological Theory* (1937), and *The Crow Indians* (1935). An obituary of Lowie was published by Paul Radin in the *American Anthropologist* in 1958.

Henry Morgan lived and propounded ethnology long before it became a profession. More orthodox Cornell anthropologists never mentioned Morgan. I think they were embarrassed for their long-dead neighbor, then so utterly out of fashion. But like it or not, Morgan was our *genius loci*, and he was in many ways the fulcrum of Murra's thinking about U.S. anthropology.

It interested Murra a great deal that Morgan's career was a life lived in pre-academic science. Morgan grew up on 600 formerly Iroquoisan acres granted to his father after the 1779 massacre of the Cayuga. His career as a railroad lawyer and Republican state senator was to serve the transformation of upstate New York into the continent's first industrial boom area. Murra made no bones about the fact that Morgan's study of the Iroquois peoples grew directly from a "Rhodesian situation" of land theft that followed U.S. independence. (He was alluding to Ian Smith. The comparison between historic and current political situations was characteristic.)

Upstate New York's post-revolutionary culture included a citizen-scholar ethos which academic growth would later displace. College or seminary educated townfolk expected "that people would teach themselves and each other." Secret societies became the free universities of the time, offering a course upward for the humble. Morgan invited an educated Seneca man, Ely Parker¹², and Parker's wife, to join his own secret lodge: the Society of the Gordian Knot, later called Grand Order of the Iroquois. This was to be the start of important careers for both men.

At the end of Morgan's era, when the citizen-scientist ethos was under attack from

¹² **Ely Samuel Parker** (1825-1895) was a Seneca sachem, civil engineer, and Civil War general on General U.S. Grant's staff.

university elites loyal to the German graduate school model, the self-trained anthropologist Otis Mason¹³ spoke up for the older citizen-scholar tradition which had produced the likes of Schoolcraft and Morgan. Mason praised

a science in which there is no priesthood and no laity, no sacred language; but one in which you [the general educated public] are all both the investigator and the investigated (Mason quoted in Hinsley 1976: 41).

Murra thought Mason's party, though politically doomed, scientifically inadequate, and compromised by racism, still deserved respect. He taught us to esteem people for what was possible within their times; Morgan and the other "primitive ethnographers" were "no more and no less racist than their contemporaries—but they were more than that; they went beyond their racism." He likewise had sympathy for the proto-anthropologies that "Latin countries" (including Rumania) had been developing contemporaneously via non-academic self-studies in folklore and vernacular-language philology.

Looking back, one wonders if part of Murra's enjoyment of the Andean countries did not come from the circumstance that when he arrived, scholarly life in the Andes still had some of the same malleable, historically open-ended character. "When in 1886 Andrew Dickson White¹⁴ invited Lewis Henry Morgan

¹³ **Otis Tufton Mason** (1838-1908) graduated from Columbian College (now George Washington University) in 1861. He was an advocate of evolutionary theories of social development. He was a curator at the Smithsonian Institution, a founder of the Anthropological Society of Washington, and an editor of the *American Naturalist*. His books include *Summaries of Progress in Anthropology: Woman's Share in Primitive Culture* (1894) and *The Origins of Invention . . .* (1895).

¹⁴ **Andrew Dickson White** (1832-1918) was the founder, with Ezra Cornell, of Cornell University.

to Cornell”, Murra remarked, “the task of creating national intellectual models was nearly finished; [it] is now the difficult task of the Andes.”

As I was getting ready for my first Cornell-guided trip to Ecuador, Murra counseled me that I would find in Quito a situation something like Morgan’s. I never wrote down exactly what he said, but I remember the gist: since commanding research institutions and professional associations did not exist in Ecuador, I would find the most interesting talents in citizen-scholars grouped only by their own affinities.

That advice led to wonderful encounters. Olaf Holm, a Dane who had come to Ecuador to manage a cacao plantation, became a self-trained archaeologist after finding precolumbian figurines among his seedlings. Osvaldo Viteri, a painter, built a truck-mounted mobile studio whose jolting journeys brought him to undocumented prehispanic sites. Padre José María Vargas guarded in his Dominican monastic cell a huge collection of early colonial papers, a treasure trove of ethnohistory, originally compiled to defend Ecuador’s disputed borders. Costanza and Alberto di Capua, refugee Italians who built Ecuador’s first toothpaste factory, were in their off hours applying to South American papers the exacting humanist methods learned in the old country (see Bruhns, this volume, pp. 103-107). The dapper provincial aristocrat Hernán Crespo Toral made it his vocation to transform gold held by the Banco Central—precolumbian gold jewelry—into the core of a great museum. In the solarium of his mock castle, the aged oligarch Carlos Manuel Larrea pored over the papers of a vanquished seigneurial order. Meanwhile, a few blocks down the avenue at the Casa de la Cultura, the nationalist ethnohistorians Piedad and Alfredo Costales pounded out number after number of the journal *Llacta*, glorifying Quichua

groups’ struggles with the latifundist world Larrea’s peers had made.

Murra and Curtis Hinsley were right, too, to emphasize the limitations of the pre-academic, citizen-scholar scene. With no canonical way to organize debate, disagreements among scholars became feuds. Without powerful institutions, there was no way to fund gifted researchers who happened to be poor, like the tireless autodidact ethnohistorian Aquiles Pérez, whom I found hunched at a tiny desk over a cobbler’s shop. For such reasons, Murra regarded the transition to professional scholarship and university leadership as a costly, but inevitable and useful one.

Murra’s extensive teaching about Franz Boas, the “locomotive” of North American professionalization, had, then, a covert as well as an overt purpose. It was a monument to great scholarship, but also a how-to lesson in scholarly politics. Murra began by pointing out that Boas’ first festschrift (Laufer 1906) was bestowed on him for reasons that had everything to do with academic politics. It happened “before he did all the things that Leslie White¹⁵ hated,” meaning before he had created a great corpus of ethnography. What Boas had done was transform a vocation to a profession, and find for it a place in the constellations of power and money. “He was sponsored by many influential

¹⁵ **Leslie Alvin White** (1900-1975) was an American anthropologist who formulated a technology-oriented model of cultural evolution. He earned a B.A. (1923) and M.A. (1924) from Columbia University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago (1927) under Fay-Cooper Cole. He engaged in bitter academic disputes with the followers of Franz Boas. His major works are *The Science of Culture* and *The Evolution of Culture* and several monographs on American Indian cultures. A biography by Harry Elmer Barnes comprises the Forward to his festschrift *Essays in the Science of Culture* (edited by Gertrude E. Dole nad Robert L. Carneiro, 1960). An obituary of White by Elman Service, Richard K. Beardsley, and Beth Dillingham was published in the *American Anthropologist* in 1976.

non-academics including Carl Schurz,¹⁶ who saw Boas as the embodiment of the liberal aspirations of his own 1848 revolutionary generation.” In one of his lectures Murra stated:

Boas [in his contention with the old powers of the American Ethnological Society] was a meticulous scholar, but also a power wielder, an organizer. He attracted and favored New York City people, immigrants, and their children, especially women. A wheeler-dealer, spinner of nets, an anthropological tank.

Boas’ struggle to academicize anthropology via graduate schools goes on now in countries that don’t have a professional guild, like Chile and Peru. There, the self-made anthropologists want the prestige of having grad schools, but not the elitist consequences.

The past he was talking about seemed to him parallel to his present. In the Chicago 1902 fight with W. J. McGee¹⁷ and George Dorsey¹⁸ over

¹⁶ **Carl Schurz** (1829-1906) was a German-American politician and journalist, who served as a U.S. army general during the Civil War.

¹⁷ **William John McGee** (1853-1912) was a self-taught geologist and ethnologist associated with John Wesley Powell. He served as president of the American Anthropological Association, the National Geographical Society, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Among his works are *Palaeolithic Man in America: His Antiquity and Environment* (1888), *Geological Atlas of U.S.* (1894), *Maya Year* (1894), *The Seri Indians* (1898), as well as articles on the Sioux, primitive mathematics, and trepanation in Peru.

¹⁸ **George Amos Dorsey** (1868-1931) was Curator of Anthropology at Chicago’s Field Museum from 1896 to 1915. He held an A.B. from Dennison College (1888), an A.B. (1890) and Ph.D. (1894) from Harvard. He conducted excavations at Peru’s ancient Ancón cemetery and other important South American sites. Among his more than seventy-five publications on American Indians and physical anthropology are *Archaeological Investigations on the Island of La Plata* (1901), *The Arapaho Sun Dance*

writing the AAA’s charter, the latter two favored a “mass membership, no-credentialing” policy. (George Stocking 1988). According to Murra:

McGee pointed out that a “generous” policy will bring generous finances; how did Boas propose to finance? . . . McGee was really arguing for himself. McGee, John Wesley Powell, or Lewis Henry Morgan couldn’t have joined the AAA under Boas’ rules!

On my yellow legal pad I capitalized what Murra said loudly: “NOT THE DOCTRINES BUT THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROFESSION”.

EXPERIENCE

As Murra saw the 1902 AAA fight, it was one outbreak of a permanent tension in U.S. academe. American scholars inherit at the same time European esteem for intellectual credentials and American dislike of “intellectuals” as a privileged class. It seems significant that Murra’s struggle for citizenship occurred at a time when the latter sentiment was quite strong. He could take it in stride because he felt that anti-academic sentiment was one part of an American mind-set that also entailed positive historic values.

At the time Murra gave his lecture about McGee, New York was convulsed with racialized anger over what was called the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school affair. Black parents in these Brooklyn neighborhoods had seized on new school regulations to take control, expelling an entrenched and white-dominated teachers’ union. As Murra interpreted it:

(1903), and *The Cheyenne* (1905). Dorsey’s obituary was published by Fay-Cooper Cole in the *American Anthropologist* (1931).

The revolt of black parents against paper credentials and teachers' reliance on [standardized achievement] tests is a continuation of American resistance to European cumulative and bookish credentials. Only the blacks and a few others haven't been bought out by Europe. In natural science, there's no resisting it. But in social studies, in human things, we can still hold experience as the credential. To make experience the prerequisite for the institution—that's the contribution of the U.S.

This mind-set left a mark on anthropology. Long-lasting emphasis on personal and local experience stood in tension with historical perspective and with disciplinary rigor.

Maybe . . . blindness to history is a product of . . . avidity for direct experience and dislike of vicariousness. L.H.M. didn't care for anything he couldn't observe. . . The intellectual character of U.S. anthropology, and other sciences, is *self-starting* and *immediate*.

Murra sympathized with this mentality, which made Americans into field-workers (though not participant observers) long before Boas or Malinowski. In his role as an advisor of young anthropologists, Murra tried to promote Boasian professionalism without suffocating the "self-starting" habit of mind, which he liked. Unlike his deans, he made practiced ethnographers welcome regardless of diplomas.

McGee was right about the necessity for practical field experience, the dispensability of Ph.D.'s. You must be immersed at some point.

He contrasted deep fieldwork involving personal cathexis with the skimpy, narrowly programmed field excursions Cornell

administrators were used to accommodating. He scolded the social scientists for sponsoring merely "ritual fieldwork", which is forced "to fit . . . in interstices of the academic calendar. You can't see the whole culture in summer . . . Like Hawaiian pineapples, our experience is grown 'can size.'"

American museums—the Peabody at Harvard and its homonym at Yale, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, Pennsylvania's University Museum, and the Field Museum in Chicago—were often hostile to professionalization, but they did one great thing: they were able to sponsor long fieldwork unconstrained by semesters. In Murra's eyes, Kroeber, who was Berkeley's "museum man" among other things, was right to speak of:

submerging oneself in other ways of life as an act of personal liberation and self-understanding, the only "ecstasy" we will ever have from our given past and path.

Because Murra saw long, open-ended expeditions as the heart of the anthropological task, he taught respectfully about "museum men". We were expected to take their bigotry and even their entanglements in military intelligence in perspective, the better to appreciate their impact in enlarging and internationalizing field research.

The Peabody anthropologists were the first [U.S. anthropologists] to go abroad, before World War I, to Maya lands (where the spying was done), and to Africa.

Murra also credited the museums' ability to publish long works on anthropology. "Until well into the twentieth century the Smithsonian was still the only place to publish large studies; in fact the beginning of other [academic press] outlets was the beginning of its deterioration." Despite his disappointment in Julian H.

Steward's¹⁹ evolutionist manhandling of South American ethnography, Murra admired his adroit manipulation of the federal funding system to publish the *Handbook of South American Indians* as Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology reports (Steward 1946-1959). In the 1960s museums had lost ground "due to their not getting any Sputnik sauce",²⁰ and Murra took on a consultancy seeking to prevent the collapse of the Smithsonian's unique anthropological establishment.

STATECRAFT

Although Murra valued much of the North American intellectual past, he also felt that it showed some durably wrong inclinations. One of these was the search for an overarching evolutionary natural science of society. Murra remarked that although much of Morgan's evolutionary model was wrong and refuted, we would never get rid of his evolutionism.

This was not a matter of denying the validity of an evolutionary frame for understanding complexity. As a materialist, Murra acknowledged that if evolution is true of some of nature, then it is true of all nature, including socio-cultural human nature. But that only helped to define the constraints on humanity in each of its techno-environmental conditions. The neo-evolutionist Stewardian venture of ranking societies in a schema of determinately emerging adaptive complexity seemed to him the most drab, least creative program for anthropology. In a book review which caused hard feelings, he referred to Timothy Earle's²¹

¹⁹ For **Steward** see Barnes, this volume, note 37.

²⁰ Murra meant National Defense Education Act funds available after the space technology panic of 1957. These funds fueled a vast expansion of U.S. universities.

²¹ **Timothy K. Earle** (b. 1946) is known for his contributions to an understanding of the chiefdom form of political organization. He has used Hawaii as an important case

post-Stewardian approach as an "evolutionary chore" (Murra 1988:586).

The interesting thing for him—and for all his students—was how humans make changes *within* their evolutionary moments. If societies alter from one form to another, they do so historically, through what would later be called agency. This was what diachronic anthropology should study. Murra detested coarser materialists such as Leslie White and Marvin Harris²²—the latter then the predominant public voice of anthropology in the U.S.—for laying "a heavy thumb" on the scale of historical interpretation.

Just as wrong, Murra thought, was evolutionists' tendency to see the politicization and centralization of society as an inevitable and uniform process. The justification for studying the evolution of states, he thought, was not to multiply purported laws of complexity. It was on the contrary to skeptically probe "the clout of kings" and the varieties of political experience. Thinking of peoples buffeted by states, Murra asked for answers *about* states and answers *to* states. "How different it [kinship-based state society] was! What anthropology has to offer is

study. Among his major works are *Economic and Social Organization of a Complex Chiefdom . . .* (1978), *Archaeological Field Research in the Upper Mantaro, Peru, 1982-1983* (1987), and *How Chiefs Come to Power . . .* (1997).

²² **Marvin Harris** (1927-2001) was an American anthropologist who formulated theories of cultural materialism combining Karl Marx's emphasis on the means of production with the impact of demographic factors on other parts of socio-cultural systems. He studied as both an undergraduate and a graduate student at Columbia University, obtaining a Ph.D. there in 1953. He taught at Columbia from 1953 until 1980, then at the University of Florida, Gainesville from 1980 until 2000. Among his 17 books are *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (1968), *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture* (1979), and *Theories of Culture in Post-Modern Times*. An obituary of Marvin Harris by Maxine L. Margolis and Conrad Phillip Kottak was published in the *American Anthropologist* in 2003.

the proof that there was an alternative.” States, particularly precapitalist states in Africa and the Americas, were his ethnological center of gravity. In teaching about Burundi, Cameroon, or Zulu politics, however, his point was not at all to show regularities of state formation but, on the contrary, to show how surprisingly the sources and uses of political power can vary. Long after the utopian in him had perished, he argued by example and indirectly, for the unsuspected political alternative.

ETHNICITY

In the 1970s a substantial number of American sociologists and anthropologists were trying to reinvent or reabsorb the Marxian legacy, among them Murra’s great friends Eric Wolf²³ and Sidney Mintz²⁴. He had nothing but admiration for their inventive historicism, even as he hung back from their larger Marxian program. But he disliked cruder versions of Marxian social science. In his view, insistence on class as the sovereign analysis had prevented scholars, both North and South American, from writing history in cultural depth—just as frameworks of nationality and race had done earlier. The Rumanian in him insisted forever on ethnicity: more than race, more than nationality, more than stratification.

His interest in it was not limited to sweet-tempered multiculturalism, either. He regarded

ethnic friction as a normal and basic part of the human condition for better or worse. In one guise or another inter-ethnic situations provoke “primitive anthropology”, raw but fertile situations of encounter and reflection. Boas’ or Malinowski’s foreignness in his academic country seemed to Murra to be a central fact.

Boas, the foreign agitator . . . like Malinowski [advanced by] coagulating refugees and colonials into a group; Boas swiftly pulled together a tight but heterogeneous group . . . He was their rescuer and their patron.

He insisted that the battle between the “academic machine” Boas was creating around 1900 and the informal lineages of the Harvard, Pennsylvania, and New York museum sets was an ethnic battle. When the AAA in 1919 expelled Boas for dissenting against anthropological involvement in spying on Central America, of twenty who voted against Boas, fifteen were at Harvard and many were former U.S. government employees. Murra identified them as WASP upper crust.

Murra was likely speaking indirectly of himself when he agreed with Claude Lévi-Strauss²⁵ that “anthropology is a way of living with an unresolved ethnic identity.” He particularly felt empathy for anthropologists who grew this way, for example Morris

²³ Eric Robert Wolf (1923-1999) was an anthropologist well-known for his studies of peasant societies, especially in Latin America. He obtained his Ph.D. from Columbia University after World War II. An early exponent of peasant (as opposed to “primitive”) studies, he later emphasized linkages between worldwide economic systems and local ethnographic facts. Among his many influential works are *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (1959), *Peasants* (1966), and *Europe and the People Without History* (1982). An interview of Wolf by Ashraf Ghani was published in the *American Anthropologist* in 1987 and an obituary by Jane C. Schneider in the same journal in 1999.

²⁴ For Mintz see Barnes, this volume, note 60.

²⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss (b. 1908) is a French ethnologist and anthropological theorist famous for developing anthropological “structuralism”, a system that analyses a complex field in terms of formally interrelated and opposing parts. He received his doctorate from the Sorbonne (1948). He lived in Brazil in the 1930s and 40s, teaching and conducting ethnographic field-work there. He presented two theses, one on the family and social life of the Nambikwara Indians and the other *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (published in 1949). Among his other famous books are *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), *Structural Anthropology* (1958), *The Savage Mind* (1962), and the four volumes of *Mythologiques* (1969-1981). A good guide to the work of Lévi-Strauss was published by Edmund Leach in 1970.

Swadesh,²⁶ in self-exile from the then-unfriendly United States “driving the only Moskvitch car in Mexico City, alienated at home, successful abroad.”

As Boas turned to anti-racism, Sapir²⁷ turned to Jewish consciousness. . . He took his Nootka skills to Yiddish and Jewishness.

On the Peruvian side, Murra’s friendship with Peruvian anthropologist, novelist, and poet José María Arguedas rested in part on empathy with Arguedas’ lonely, out-of-the-zeitgeist ethnic loyalties (Murra and López Baralt 1996).

Murra was, however, notoriously touchy about his own “unresolved ethnic identity”. He felt that the persona he had forged in his Spanish soldiering and his profession was his only real identity and deserved to be accepted beyond questioning. He hated to hear his Jewish childhood name mentioned. As it happened I was the only overtly Jewish student in his group. When I proposed to write a seminar paper on Guaman Poma’s allusions to Hebrew scriptures, some fellow students told me it was a bad idea because religious discussions—even ethnological

²⁶ The Americanist linguist **Morris Swadesh** (1909-1967) originated glottochronology, a method for estimating chronologies of language divergence based on lexical comparison. He held a B.A. and an M.A. from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from Yale with a dissertation on the Nootka language. He published 130 articles and 17 books and monographs. An obituary by Norman A. McQuown was published in the *American Anthropologist* in 1968.

²⁷ **Edward Sapir** (1884-1939), a published poet and “Boasian” linguist who concentrated on North American Indian languages, is most famous as the co-creator of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which postulates relationship between grammar and thought patterns. He graduated from Columbia College in 1904. He continued at Columbia to study linguistics and anthropology. Ruth Benedict published an obituary of Sapir in a 1939 issue of the *American Anthropologist*. Included is a complete bibliography of Sapir’s published work prepared by Leslie Spier.

ones—always got on Murra’s nerves. But Murra liked the idea. After the paper was done, he commented in private that an outspoken Jewish identity is a good thing, but the waffling, evasive relation to Judaism he thought he saw in others (and I asked myself, only in others?) was “an ethnic neurosis”.

INDIVIDUALITY

Murra’s notion of the anthropological calling as a way to bring forth something grand—ethnography—out of something inwardly painful—alienation—has much to do with his respect for individuality. He adhered strongly, though not orthodoxly, to Freudianism because he thought it an unbudgeable fact that at every level from intimacy to nationality one lives against one’s people, as well as with them. Whether at the inner level of the psyche or the outer level of professional action, he saw the agonistic creation of the self as a basic human process. He admired “good self-documenters” like Lowie, Kroeber, Sapir, and Swadesh whose writings help us follow theirs. Murra valued Sapir, too, for being a dissenter himself and finding dissent within culture. Others might credit tribes with unanimity; Sapir said things like, “The Burucubucu say so-&-so; Two Crows denies it” (referring to Dorsey 1885:211-371).²⁸

Above all, Murra brought forward as exemplar of the anthropologist self-realized in cryptic uniqueness an earlier expatriate, Paul Radin (Radzyn), “the most historical and most European of his generation”. He returned to Radin over and over, out of proportion to the dimensions of the course. Murra pointed out that Radin, the originally Polish author of remarkable ethnographies about the Winnebago (now self-denominated Ho-Chunk) of Wisconsin:

²⁸ This phrase was later amplified as the title of a monograph on the famous Omaha kinship problem, by Robert Harrison Barnes (1984).

taught at Kenyon [College], Fisk University [a Negro campus], and at 75, Brandeis, and Black Mountain [a short-lived but profoundly influential experimental avant-garde campus]. He lived to see his books republished and popular after years on remainder tables. Radin, Murra remarked, “had no disciples in any grand school; was he a part of history, having no impact?”²⁹

Murra sympathized with Radin’s ethnographic emphasis on Winnebago (etc.) biography and autobiography (c.f. Radin 1949) because they foregrounded “the non-solidity, the non-rigidity of culture” and the self-creative powers of every person as cultural being. He liked Radin’s lack of nomothetic ambition.

The Winnebago Tribe (1990 [1923]) ends nowhere after a mountain of description, but it’s his best work. It’s more like anthology than analysis, full of big but mutually relevant quotes. Uniqueness is not reduced but put center-stage.

When Murra remarked that the obituary Radin wrote about Lowie (1958) reflected a lot of Radin’s self, we wondered if Murra were not hinting that in remembering Radin he was in turn reflecting his own sense of self. Like his fellow Cornellian the expatriate novelist Vladimir Nabokov, whom he read with admiration, though not affection, Murra sometimes tried his audience’s wit with plays of mirroring. One suspected indirect self-comment when he said of Boas, “His lack of praise to students disturbed people—he was a stern taskmaster whom everybody both loved and hated.” His comment that “[Radin] didn’t mind

being disliked but subtly demanded to be loved” had the same flavor.

“Now,” Murra said, “we are swept into the dimmer atmosphere of social science.” He despised the new, quantitativist-dominated establishments into which “midwestern deans” were forcibly relocating anthropology. He quoted with approval’s Kroeber’s famous article about anthropologists as “changelings” in the house of social science (Kroeber 1959). And Murra went on:

Do sociologists call us “bird-watchers, antiquarians?” It does not matter. We dislike the facelessness of sociological method more than we value its methodological virtues. [Anthropology] is the daughter of natural science by esthetic humanism. It started with a glowing sense of discovery in studying culture. It is truly called intellectualizing romanticism. But it is never called sterile or toneless.

In 1982, Murra ran unsuccessfully for President of the American Anthropological Association. His platform was partly a protest on the above lines, going on to speak against

Sputnik-subsidized inflation in the number of U.S. anthropologists, the vested interest of departments in “growth” without spelled-out priorities, be they regional or intellectual, the lavish federal grants . . . shoe-horning research into “mental health” and other administratively selected categories.

His candidacy was not just a protest. It was also an appeal to remember what had been vital and central in the United States’ ethnological experience. Having just finished preparing, with Nathan Wachtel and Jacques Revel, the special Andean number of *Annales*, (Murra *et al.* 1986 Revel *et al.* 1978), he reflected on the special

²⁹ But this statement referred only to the United States, the scope of the course. Murra also thought that Radin had productive dialogue with some anthropologists in other countries.

orienting role that “the epic of Native American achievement” played in New World intellectual history. He hoped the A.A.A. would expand the tradition of the same classic ethnographers his course expounded. American anthropologists should orient themselves around

documentation and comparison of the cultural history of all human societies, with a special, though not exclusive, commitment to those civilizations vanquished in the expansion of Europe and the United States . . . the “historical anthropology” approach, so new and experimental in France, is our pride and heritage—it could give a focus and a new urgency to the A.A. [*American Anthropologist*] (Murra 1982).

COSMOPOLITANISM

Murra’s interest in the United States had nothing to do with nationalism and everything to do with cosmopolitan curiosity. Had the disasters of the 1930s landed him someplace else he would surely have delved into the place and the history around him no less piercingly. In his lectures, tantalizing digressive threads pointed to other inquiries about other continents and other anthropologies, which never became full scale courses, at least not at Cornell.

Murra complained that his colleagues pushed him into “average anthropology” instead of letting him teach what he alone could teach. By this he apparently meant a cosmopolitan curriculum in ethnology. He took a strong interest in views of American ethnology from other intellectual traditions. Indeed in the first week of the course I have been evoking he had us read and debate critiques against “American anthropology” by the Swede Åke Hultkranz (1968) and the Hungarian Tamás Hofer (1968), both of whom argued against the “export” of the programs that United States foundations were

supporting. Murra could, and sometimes did, teach marvelously on the British anthropological tradition (he was an admiring friend of Raymond Firth who taught at Cornell in 1970)³⁰ and on French ethnology, especially French African researches. France, too, he often reminded us, also had nationally rooted ethnographic inquiries and anthropological societies long before it had anthropology departments.

The most original of his cosmopolitan lessons was his lecture segment (in a different course) about the ethnohistory of the Russian empire. One thing that made it compelling was comparison of imperial Russia to the United States as a particular kind of expansive formation: an early-industrial state trampling vast temperate and subarctic “tribal” hinterlands. Murra began with Stephan Krasheninnikov, who pushed Russian exploration south from Alaska to the Californian confines of the Spanish empire in 1735-1737, and ended with the fortunes of contemporary ethnographic inquiry in the Soviet Union. In connection with Boas’ Jesup Northwest expedition of 1897-1902 he talked with admiration of the Russian exile ethnographers Lev Shternberg³¹ and Vladimir Bogoraz³² (then all but forgotten in the United

³⁰ For **Firth** see Barnes, this volume, note 35.

³¹ **Lev Yakovlevitch Shternberg** (1861-1927) was a Ukrainian ethnographer who studied the peoples of the Russian northern Pacific islands and of Siberia. With Boas’s patronage he worked for the American Museum of Natural History. He was politically active in Marxist and Jewish social movements. He accomplished some of his ethnographic work while a political prisoner in Siberia.

³² **Vladimir Germanovich Bogoraz** (1865-1936), who was an associate of Lev Shternberg, and who used the pseudonym N.A. Tan, was a Russian revolutionary, essayist, novelist, poet, folklorist, and linguist who studied the Chukchi people of Siberia while in political exile. Like Shternberg he participated in the American Museum of Natural History’s Jessup Pacific Expedition (1900-1901). A bibliography of Bogoraz’s work was published by Katharina Gernet in 1999.

States). Murra's brief lessons about Chukchee or Gilyak (Nivkh) seemed outcrops of greater study. He always kept an eye out for meritorious ethnographers on the other side, urging us to have a look at *Sovietskaya Etnografiya*; "The good ones write sandwiches, you know, a slice of anthropology between two slices of Lenin."

He seemed to regret that little research had come of his strong east-European interests. After all, in the Cold War era, just about anything concerning "the Soviets" was fundable, and with his deep Russian knowledge Murra could surely have made a career of it. Indeed in 1950 Columbia had offered him paid work on Soviet ethnology. In 1951 Murra published a piece explaining to Americans the importance of "The Soviet Linguistic Controversy", the moment when Stalin seemed about to open a space for cultural research by reassigning language from "superstructure" to "base" (Murra *et al.* 1951). But the cold war burden of politics and, above all, the impossibility of unfettered fieldwork in the Soviet sphere, put Russian-language ethnohistory permanently on Murra's back burner.

Murra had a prescient sympathy for another kind of cosmopolitans, not fashionable at that time, but now widely appreciated. These were the "native" intellectuals of the empires everywhere, then sometimes called "organic intellectuals" or "evolués." Alongside Peru's "Indian chronicler" Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, or Francis La Flesche, the magnificent native ethnographer of the Omaha and Osage, he liked to put Samuel Johnson, the pioneer Yoruba-Anglican historian of Nigeria, or Jomo Kenyatta, first prime minister and president of Kenya, or the Akan intellectual J.B. Danquah, whom he knew slightly. Danquah's aristocratic hauteur seemed to Murra an amusing counterpoint to the populist tone of "decolonizing" anthropology. North American Indian interlocutors, people such as School-

craft's educated Ojibwe wife Jane Johnston, Morgan's Seneca friend and co-author Ely S. Parker, and Boas' great Amerindian collaborator George Hunt³³ never failed to loom large. There was, of course, something personal about his affection for intellectual lives lived among rather than within cultures.

TO LIVE AS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST

Awed by Murra's knack for getting along with so many kinds of people, by his charm and his polyglot savoir-faire, some of us wondered why he bound himself so tightly to the archival life of ethnohistory (*c.f.* Ortiz de Zúñiga 1967-72). He never became much of a face-to-face ethnographer. His patience for the discomforts of Andean village life had limits. It seems, looking back, that his life among South American intellectuals mattered more to him than did his outings on the puna (which is not to deny that such trips in the company of cultural and archaeological field-workers had revelatory effects on him; *c.f.* Collier and Murra 1943). The emerging institutional research life of Andean countries, not the Quechua or Aymara rural scene, was the scene in which he achieved great participant-observer insight.

He demanded his doctoral candidates build collegial and ethnographic connections as major personal commitments, not mere "contacts". He mentioned that:

German and Japanese anthropologists when they arrive [in their countries of research] usually attend local universities and develop emotional and social ties. This corresponds to humanism in anthropology. Whereas, we from the U.S.

³³ Tlingit **George Hunt** (1854-1933) was a friend and collaborator of Franz Boas. Through marriage he also became expert in Kwakiutl or Kwakwaka'wakw language and culture.

come for short noncommittal visits and objectivist purposes.

At Cornell his great institutional energies were directed not so much toward institution-building, as toward opening spaces for collegial, non-bureaucratic affinity. Murra fought continual campaigns in the graduate school for better recognition of international credentials, better funding of outgoing travelers and especially, fellowships for incoming foreign students. He invariably demanded that graduate students take part in the institutions of their host countries.

Students of other anthropological masters in Murra's generation sometimes find it hard to understand what was so compelling about him. Compared to some, Murra wrote little (and often published in relatively obscure outlets). He preferred regional, middle-level modeling to grand theory, at a time when a grand theory wave was cresting. He could be maddeningly inconclusive: invited to give the Lewis Henry Morgan lectures at Rochester University in 1969, he could not be bothered to write them up for publication.

Yet those who worked with him never cease to hear his echo in their minds. Having lived into an age when humanism, skepticism, tolerance for uncertainty, and love of the ethnographic particular are again becoming welcome in our discipline, one feels that in the end his teaching of unfashionable anthropology did make its mark. We are much the richer for it. Murra's life was not only a remarkable career in Andean research; it also demonstrated one very special way to live as an anthropologist.

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