

The Andean World and Alternate Ontologies

- Great sense of strangeness when Spanish encountered Peru: it was an alien place.
- A “filthy wooden pole” was worshipped at one of the greatest Inca temples, the home of the oracle of Pachamac.
- A ceramic pot dressed in female was venerated as an ancestor and approached for advice.
- Mummies were fed, clothed, and asked for guidance.

Challenge to Cartesian Dualism

- Western ontological distinction between animate and inanimate, living and dead, persons and rocks, mind and matter, subject and object, future and past.
- Ontological turn in anthropology from epistemology to ontology. From description and classification of various aspects of one world “our world”, different world views to many world, many universes, which may be utterly different from ours.

Andean Astronomy

- Pillars surrounding Cusco: original effort was to determine the dates that the sun would rise behind or between them. (what was the meaning of these pillars?)
- Huacas are arranged in 42 lines in Cusco as a walk-through calendar, 328 days. (what was the meaning of these huacas? Were they alive?)
- Torreon of Machu Picchu: sun light enters a window and touches a rock: the shadow of a string in the window would determine June solstice. It was an “observatory”. (what was the meaning of the place? Was it alive)
- There are giant pits at Moray- they were an agricultural research station. (was there a deeper meaning? Could they have been animate, active, and powerful by themselves, did they need to be fed?)

Camay

- Spanish in their desire to destroy Inca culture, inadvertently revealed the inner workings of the culture.
- Huarochiri Manuscript: Quechua term Camay- to charge, to make to give form and force to animate. It animates the inanimate- rocks through the action of water, sunlight, carving can be turned into living and powerful beings

Mummies, ancestors, and the dead

- The line between the living and the dead was blurred, as it was blurred between stones and humans and between the present and the past.
- The mummies of royal personages were treated no differently as when they were alive: clothed, fed, brought out for audiences, maintained their palaces and cultivated lands, carried in processions, and asked for advice.

Huacas

- Greatly puzzled the Spanish
- Garcilaso, a Chronicler listed these strange sacred “things”: idols, altered and un altered rocks, trees, figures of men, birds, temples, corners of buildings, springs, poles----all worshipped

Huacas

- While huacas were often inanimate objects, they were living beings with extraordinary powers who were honored, fed, and consulted. Huacas were an aspect of ancestor worship of the Andes with great wisdom and the ability to influence the living world.
- Huacas had vibrant lives, participated in processions. They were fed, dressed in clothes, married, and sometimes abducted and destroyed by enemies. Their well-being relied upon a continuing flow of offerings. These offerings were understood to be necessary to maintain equilibrium and balance in the world, an expression of the symmetry and reciprocity between the living and the dead.

Animism

- Coined by Sir Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917)
- Identified as the founder of cultural anthropology.
- Animism is a belief that objects, plants, animals, places and things as well as people have souls and animating spirits- Tylor identified animism as a primitive form of religion of hunter-gatherer societies.
- Discredited in his judgment of non-western cultures as primitive, pre-Christian beliefs.

Modern animism

- Animism is a wide-spread ontology; animists do not separate themselves from the environment.
- Beings and things are all bound together and entangled, part of a web, parts of which can not be cut out.
- Graham Harvey (Handbook of Animism) the world is full of beings and only a fraction of them are human (Harvey); these other beings may have the ability to influence the world, indeed some may be immensely powerful.
- There may be some sort of symmetry between these beings: symmetrical anthropology- what we can do so can they- both may possess agency.
- Humans may establish reciprocal relationships with non-human entities such as the landscape, i.e. mountains which control weather, avalanches, thunder and lightning, water for agriculture may be very dangerous : offerings, sacrifices, respectful behavior

Entanglement and Indeterminacy

- Powerful sense of interconnectness with all things, a Buddhist recognition of the non-existence of permanence, eternal flux of being.
- Quantum mechanics- the electron only exists because it is involved in a three-way process involving a human observer, his/her measuring device, and something out there in the cosmos.
- There is no self-existent particle. It is a wave or a particle based upon the question one asks. There are no independent, individual things with pre-determined properties or identities.
- Relational anthropology- only relations exist not things.

Alternate Ontologies, Alternate Hypotheses

- Wonderful and exciting opportunities to explore the meaning of astronomy in other cultures, using these alternate ontologies in ones interpretative tool box.
- Escape from Eurocentric pre-conceptions
- Nabta Playa—oldest megalithic astronomical site—what did those stones mean?
- Machu Picchu- Torreon- animated by water and the sun- a sun door for the sun to enter, not for astronomers to peer out from; ancestors in the cave.

Alternate Hypotheses

- Horizon calendars in the American Southwest—the sun rising above features—a calendar or the sacred sun joining with the sacred landscape- a theophany?
- Stone markers for solstice—are they inert or alive? recumbent stones alive or dead? Dolmens- inert stones or living beings?
- Surya Puja in India: the date of equinox marked by the entry of the sun into the sanctuary of the temple, or the sun prostrating himself to Surya asking for forgiveness.

Alternate realities: clothed huaca in Bolivia



PAQCHA: Ritual device for encouraging the flow of water throughout the cosmos, opening up of agricultural ditches, and maintaining balance throughout the Inca world



Paqchas



Saihuite Peru

