

Time, place and narrative in an andean community

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Introduction

Andeanist anthropologists understand fairly well how the Incas made their apparently hostile mountain environment an asset rather than a liability by turning its "vertical ecology" to their advantage (MURRA 1973). Yet another aspect of the mountain environment — another natural resource, as it were — is the rugged, discontinuous nature of the landscape itself. The topography is like an immense piece of undeciphered script, whose meaning people come to know as they live in and with it. The Incas imposed their own complex and imperialistic interpretation on the landscape by drawing the Sacred Places in their empire into a huge circular system whose hub was Cuzco (ZUIDEMA 1964, 1986). In this paper I will explore the inter-relationship between place, time and narrative in an Andean community in order to better understand how contemporary Quechua-speaking peasants interpret their rugged environment.

When people talk about the way things happen, they reveal an experience of time. Understanding a narrative tradition requires sensitivity to the experience of time that narrators themselves take for granted. In the pages that follow I will explore the expression of temporality implicit in the narrative tradition of a small Quechua-speaking community in the highlands of southern Peru. Specifically, I will concentrate on the indigenous classification of these narratives into "genres", and show that it is based on a concept of "time" which is always localized and inseparable from "place".

I learned about story-telling in a Quechua-speaking community called Sonqo, located on the eastern slopes of the Andes, about seventy kilometers by road northeast of the city of Cuzco¹. Its inhabitants occupy eighty-four dispersed households in a high barren region where corn will not grow and where most of the potato fields have to lie fallow for seven years between plantings. The subsistence is based on a mixture of potato cultivation and the herding of sheep and camelids.

I lived in Sonqo for approximately a year in 1975-6 and returned for shorter visits, totalling about six months, over the next decade. During these years Sonqo changed in many respects, and yet remained remarkably the same. After the Agrarian Reform of the 1970s the Sonqoños' direct participation in Peru's market economy increased dramatically, as did their opportunities to travel by truck to major cities. Oats and barley became popular cash crops and, since the

varieties raised were good for animal feed or beer but not for food, Sonqoños for the first time began devoting a significant amount of land and labor into crops they could not eat.

In spite of all these changes, their bond with the territory — with the land and places of Sonqo — persisted with absolute constancy. The people of Sonqo experience the earth and the places of their local landscape in a direct and personal way. The topography around them is felt to be animate and active, and is treated as an extension of society. Every hill, ravine, hump, knoll, plain and lake has a name and personality. The landscape also provides a true geo-graphy, or what TAUSSIG has called an "iconography of nature" (1980: 182), for this rugged animate countryside contains a record of times past. Traditions concerning the flight of the ancestral Incas as they escaped from the Spanish to Paititi, their golden jungle city, are preserved — one might say "encoded" — in Sonqo's footpaths, streams and rock outcrops. These traces are constant reminders of the Incas with their glorious past, and also of their flight in the face of conquest. Almost five hundred years after the Conquest this natural iconography of places continues to provide Andean people with a way of speaking and thinking about themselves and their society (e.g. MARTÍNEZ 1989; RAPPAPORT 1985).

What we find in the Andes is an indigenous theory of catastrophism. Time moves in fits and starts. History is conceived as a series of more or less static worlds, each of which is destroyed to make way for the next one (see, *inter alia*, ALLEN 1984, 1988; EARLS and SILVERBLATT 1977; ORTÍZ 1973; OSSIO 1973; SALOMON 1982). A world is called *pacha*; in Sonqo it is called *timpu* as well (from Spanish *tiempo*). The word *pacha* incorporates both spatial and temporal

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aspects. On one hand, it refers to the earth in its materiality; on the other, it can refer to a moment in time. The cataclysmic event that ends one world and begins the next is called a *pachakuti*, or world-turn. The creation of the Sun, for example, was a *pachakuti*. Successive worlds differ from each other qualitatively: for example, the predecessors of the human race, called *Machukuna*, lived in the cold moonlight while *Runakuna* (human beings) live in warm daylight. Nevertheless, the two worlds exhibit a certain structural isomorphism: the *Machukuna* had a society like that of *Runakuna*.

Although the anterior worlds are destroyed, their influence continues and is in fact necessary to human well-being. And as we shall see, these anterior worlds hold the potentiality of the future — the world still in hiding, the one whose creation will destroy ours. It is this quality of eternal return that John EARLS tried to convey through the image of the *Klein bottle* (1973) and Alejandro ORTÍZ (1973), Billie Jean ISBELL (1982) and others through the language of Hegelian dialectics.

Time place and narrative

Here is a summary of the origin story of one of Sonqo's Sacred Places²

Lake Qesqay, situated in the high barren plains above Sonqo, was once a city. It would have been Cuzco if only the stingy inhabitants hadn't turned a ragged beggar away from a marriage feast. Only one woman invited the beggar to eat. The beggar, as it happened, was God. He sent away the one generous woman, telling her not to look back. But she stopped to urinate, turning her gaze back as she did so. At that moment that city was swallowed up by water, and the women turned into a huge rock with a meandering stream of water running from the base. The marriage party also turned to stone, and the fleeing priest was petrified in his tracks. During the dark of the moon (*wañunpuranpi*) it is possible to hear the submerged church bell ringing: *Kunan timpu kunanpiña uyarisqanku* ("In time present, right in the present it's said to have been heard"). And Don Inocencio Quispe, a traditional and self-righteous man, once saw the church spires in the depths. If only the city hadn't been swallowed, Sonqo would have been right on the outskirts of Cuzco instead of a rural backwater³.

I began taping narratives in Sonqo in 1975 as a kind of ethnographic supplement to my fieldwork, which focused on ritual symbolism. I sat down willing informants and asked them to tell me *kwintu* (from Spanish *cuento*, story) for the tape recorder. This was a pretty mindless way of going about it, but I did discover in the process that not all narratives qualified as *kwintu*. For example, I asked Erasmo Hualla (who is Sonqo's best storyteller and will figure rather largely in what follows) to tell me a *kwintu* about the origin of Qesqay Cocha, a nearby lake. He and his wife Cipriana both hesitated nervously and began a whispered conversation with each other. I overheard Cipriana saying, *Manan munankumanchu* ("They wouldn't like it"). Erasmo turned back to me saying that what I asked for was not a *kwintu*. Later, unrecorded, he was willing to talk about the lake and its origins.

A few days later his uncle, Luis Gutierrez, in whose house I was living, talked to me in an unrecorded conversation about a lake near Sicuani where an old man was pulled out of his boat into a beautiful submerged city. At the end of the day he emerged from the lake and died. Luis commented that although this seemed "like a *kwintu*" (*kwintu hina*), it was not. On the contrary, it was *chiqaq*, true.

As time passed Erasmo grew more relaxed about talking for the tape recorder. Shortly before I left Sonqo in 1976 he recorded what he called a *kwintu* about how a wandering *Runa* (indigenous person) met an Inca who showed him Paititi from a hilltop and gave him golden corn. Later I played this tape for Luis, who was enraged. That wasn't a *kwintu*! It was *chiqaq* (true), he said, and *timpunchismanta* ("from our *timpu*"). In fact, he insisted, it happened less than twenty years ago.

As I reflected on these incidents my interest in this *kwintu/chiqaq* distinction grew. When I returned to Sonqo in 1984 I deliberately contrived a sort of "experiment" in which I played back tapes I had recorded in previous years and asked listeners to tell me which ones were *kwintu*. I use the word "experiment" loosely, as I controlled the environment as little as possible, waiting for opportunities to arise in the course of a day's activities⁴. I confess that even so I felt rather pedantic, but my friends took to it enthusiastically, sometimes discussing the problem among themselves and prefacing or ending new recordings by announcing whether the narration was a *kwintu*. This material clearly reveals an overriding concern with how the events recounted in a narrative can be located in time. *Kwintu* are narratives which tell of events that pertain to another *timpu* (world-age); these things *could* or *did* happen in a different *timpu*, but not in ours⁵.

The distinction between *kwintu* and *chiqaq* is not simply a distinction between fiction and history, nor is the classification immutable. That these labels are context-dependent and situationally-defined became clear when I probed Erasmo about an apparent inconsistency. For in 1978 he reversed his stance on the

² Due to considerations of space, and because I am concerned here with the content of narratives, I present them in summarized form.

³ Sonqueños ascribed various motivations to God. The most common involved the rejection from the marriage feast. Don Luis, on the other hand, made no mention of the beggar and when I pressed him to give me a reason for the city's destruction he answered that it "just was". Three women independently told me that it was the fault of the urinating girl. If she had left without turning back the city would have been saved.

For other accounts of lakes in Andean oral tradition see ARGUEDAS (1947) and MOROTE BEST (1953).

⁴ I discussed the recordings with twenty-five adults and five children (counting adolescents over fifteen years old as adults). The length and scope of the discussions varied greatly.

⁵ A particularly effective *kwintu* sometimes elicits the comment, *Kwintupuni!* (That's a real story!). When I was prevailed upon to tell *kwintu* from my country, "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" elicited polite puzzlement, while "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" was declared *kwintupuni!*

Qesqay Qocha narrative and voluntarily recorded an account of the lake's origin, introducing the recording with his usual introduction for *kwintu*, *Kunan kwintuta willasayki* ("I'm going to tell you a story now"). In 1984 he again introduced it as a *kwintu*.

Disconcerted by this inconsistency, I pointed out that he had originally *denied* its *kwintu*-status. He explained that back in '75, when the tape recorder and I were still new to Sonqo, he had been afraid to talk about Sacred Places on tape. Since then, however, it had become clear that the Places had accepted me and my recording activities, and would not be angered when talking about them for the tape recorder. As for the lake's origin story, "it must be a *kwintu* because who knows in what *timpu* all that happened? Certainly not ours".

Later I will return to this statement and its ramifications. For now, I wish to emphasize that whether or not a narrative is classified as *kwintu* or *chiquaq* depends upon (1) the relationship of the speaker and of the listener(s) and (2) the quality of their various relationships with Sacred Places involved in the narrative. Narratives about Places are always ambiguous in their classification; their definition shifts according to the relationships of the various parties involved. There are, on the other hand, unambiguous narratives whose classification never varies. Let me begin with these.

Kwintu

My consultants all agreed that narratives about the interactions between humans and animals, or among animals of different species, are *kwintu*. For example, there are many *kwintu* about competitions and trickery between a Fox and a Mouse in which the Fox is invariably defeated. Then there is the Condor Son-in-Law who takes the form of a man in order to seduce a human girl. She leaves him because he eats raw meat but he follows her home. There he is tricked into the cooking pot to be boiled alive and eaten by his wife's parents (surely a tale to warm Lévi-Strauss' heart!). The longest and most widespread narrative of this kind is about the *Ukuku* (Bear) who carries off a shepherd girl. *Their* union ends when the bear-human offspring kill their father. These cubs then go on to a long series of outrageous exploits⁶. There are also *kwintu* about Star-Woman (*Ch'aska*), owner of beautiful mestiza clothes and eater of seed potatoes, who marries and then abandons an Indian man.

When I asked *why* these narratives were *kwintu*, most of my consultants explained that they were *huq timpu hina* ("like a different *timpu*"). These events could be imagined to happen in a different *timpu* but not in ours. A few older people simply said that the *kwintu* *did* happen in a different *timpu*. My late friend Basilia Gutierrez, a garrulous and passionate storyteller, used to end her narratives with a chuckle and the comment, "Well, that was the *timpu* of the (Foxes, Condenados, Machukuna, etc.)"⁷. In contrast, Basilia's son Alcides, a man in his late thirties who knows and loves the animal *kwintu*, describes them not only as *huq timpu hina* ("like a different *timpu*"), but also as *yanqa* ("without foundation, frivolous").

For Basilia the stories had a mythic quality, telling of things that happen outside time as we know it. Alcides, on the other hand, treats *kwintu* as amusing if instructive fictions. They agree, however, in that neither of them locates the *kwintu* in a human landscape of present or past experience.

Non-Kwintu: *chiquaq/sut'ipi/kunan*

Standing in opposition to the animal *kwintu* are narratives which none of my consultants consider to be *kwintu*. These tell about recent events which the narrator either experienced directly or learned about second hand. For example, an anecdote about how somebody spent a week chasing a runaway cow is not a *kwintu*. *Chiquaq* (true) narratives also are described as *sut'ipi*. This word is derived from *sut'i*, meaning "clear" or "obvious" and the locative suffix *-pi* ("in"). Its most literal translation would be something like "in clarity". When I pressed for an explanation, *sut'ipi* was glossed for me as *kunan*, which means "now; in present time". This implies that an event's proximity in time is what gives it truth and clarity. This is consistent with the characterization of non-*kwintu* as "from our time" while *kwintu* are from, or like "a different time".

Narratives of the *chiquaq/sut'ipi* type are by no means limited to routine and unremarkable events. For example, a fifteen year old youth recorded an account which he explicitly described as *sut'ipi*, *manan kwintuchu* (*sut'ipi* not a *kwintu*):

Chimor Chaca is an immense bridge in the forest, built by the Incas. It is so high that the condors fly underneath it, and it has been known to speak. Recently a *sonso gringo* ("dumb gringo") tried to go inside its foundations searching for Inca gold, but he was chased out by the great felines and amarus (huge serpents) that live inside. The gringo was taken away in a pickup truck to the nearest medical post and hasn't been heard of since. So much for *sonso gringo*!

⁶ The *Ukuku Kwintu* is of Spanish origin but spread in the New World after the Spanish Conquest. Versions may be encountered from the Southwestern United States through the Central Andes, where it was appropriated and transformed in a variety of ways. See BOAS (1912), MOROTE BEST (1957), TAGGART (1982), and ALLEN (1983). Also see Jean BARSTOW's insightful analysis of Aymara versions of the *Ukuku* (Bear) and Condor stories (1981). Also see ALLEN (1983) for my interpretation of the *Ukuku Kwintu* in its social context.

⁷ Her attitude resembles that encountered by BARSTOW (1981) and *Abercrombie* (pers. comm.) in Aymara communities, where it is commonly held that "... in the earliest stages of human history, all features of the universe were animate, and beasts of all kinds were virtually indistinguishable from people. In that era, Aymara consultants told me, the toad wore pants, the fox danced with young women, and even the walls could speak." (1981: 72)

In a similar vein, Sonqo Runakuna are fond of describing encounters with *Kukuchis*, or *Condenados*, the cannibalistic souls of the damned, who roam the glaciers of the great snowy mountains and the uninhabited puna lands, weighed down by their burden of sin and driven by their appetite for human flesh. These zombie-like creatures are very much a part of life from the Sonqoños' perspective, and in fact individuals who accumulate a sufficient burden of serious sins (*hucha*) during their lifetimes face the possibility of becoming *kukuchi* after death. Most Sonqo Runakuna can tell of their encounters with *Condenados*, or say they know of other people who met up with them and lived to tell about it. These accounts, localized in a familiar environment within the one's own memory, are not *kwintu*.

It is interesting, therefore, that *Condenados* also figure in a specific genre of *kwintu*, which are, in fact, called *Condenado Kwintu*. These stories tell of travelers who get invited into an unfamiliar but apparently normal household. There, they are tricked by their *Condenado* hosts into eating human flesh and they sometimes end up in the cooking pot themselves. Several informants placed these *kwintu* in a *Condenado Timpu* implying that *Condenado* properly belong to a different *timpu* (which in this case we might best translate as "dimension"); they are capable, however, of appearing — and wreaking havoc — in our own *timpu*.

By this time it should be clear that *timpu* is only approximately a temporal concept: it has basically a social reference. Undomesticated animals, stars, and damned souls are all located beyond the pale of human society. Their distance and difference is expressed temporally in terms of a different world-age; they do not, or should not, pertain to the here-and-now. Narratives about events of our own *timpu* are "located in clarity". Thus, the *kwintu*'s defining characteristic is that it concerns dimensions of experience that differ essentially from that of human beings. In the *kwintu* this dimension is safely separated off from our own: we only hear about it and it does not intrude on us. But this alien dimension can and sometimes *does* intrude — when travellers encounter *condenados*, when the dead seduce solitary sleepers in erotic dreams, even when a fox gets into the corral. The narratives which tell of these terrifying events are not *kwintu*; they are *sut'ipi*, pertaining to the here-and-now.

Ambiguous narratives:
ancestors, Incas and the landscape

My consultants invariably had trouble classifying narratives about Sacred Places within or near Sonqo. Lake Qesqay is one of these Places. Another is a rocky dome-shaped hill named Antaqqa (Copper Rock). Antaqqa and the ridges extending from it are covered with the ruins of small cylindrical stone structures called *chullpa*. Sonqoños say that they are the houses of the Old Ones, the *Machukuna*. Back in the *Machu Timpu* (Age of the *Machukuna*) before human beings were created and the Sun did not yet exist, there was a whole town of *Machukuna* on Antaqqa. *Machukuna* resembled human beings, but were

gigantic and rough, with deep booming voices. Their society was like that of humans, and they lived and worked as Sonqo Runakuna (People of Sonqo) do today, except that their daylight was provided by the moon. They had neither salt nor chili pepper, and only three kinds of potatoes whereas Sonqo Runakuna now cultivate over seventy⁸.

The *Machukuna* were destroyed when *Taytanchis* (Our Father, i.e. God) created the Sun. Although they tried desperately to escape into their houses, caves and springs, the unexpected heat dried them up⁹. Then the first three Runakuna of Sonqo, named *Poma*, *Chura* and *Yuqra*, emerged from three specific Places. The *Runa Timpu* — Age of Human Beings — had begun.

That was the end of the *Machu Timpu*, and it was the end of the *Machukuna* as direct participants in their own world. But it was not the end of the *Machukuna*, for their dried-up bones are reanimated on moonlit nights. Nobody wants to meet up with them then, for contact causes a draining of the life-force in the form of wasting illness or defective pregnancy. Their world is that of moonlight, dreams, shadows and indirection. At various times I have heard images on photo negatives, voices in radios, and stone statues in Cuzco, described as *Machukuna*. Sonqo Runakuna give them and their "houses" offerings of alcohol and coca, as they do to the earth and the *Tira-kuna* (Sacred Places).

Left to themselves on these moonlit nights, the *Machukuna* congregate and hold work parties to cultivate their potato fields. These fields are "just where ours are" — and yet they are not the same fields. The two sets of fields (those of the *Machukuna* and of the *Runakuna*) are nevertheless related, for the *Machukuna*'s nocturnal labors result in the fertility and productivity of the fields men work in daylight¹⁰. Every community has "its" *Machukuna*, who are considered intrinsic to its territory and crucial to its well-being.

⁸ The *Machukuna*'s three potatoes were for seed, for food and for *ch'uño* (dehydrated potatoes). According to a similar tradition collected by Roger RASNAKE and Inge HARMON in Bolivia, they cultivated stones rather than potatoes. See RASNAKE (1988); also Oscar NUÑEZ DEL PRADO (1957).

⁹ God's motivations for destroying the *Machukuna* are unclear. Some Sonqoños say he was mad at the *Machukuna*, some say he did it for the sake of the Runakuna, and some say he just felt like it. RASNAKE observes a similar vagueness in the motivations attributed to God by the Yura of northern Bolivia and comments, "... the changes seem somehow unmotivated... without further contextualization, the events seem to have happened in a vacuum" (RASNAKE 1988: 147). Also see Note 3.

¹⁰ In this nurturing aspect, the *Machukuna* are called *Machula Aulanchis* (Old Grandfathers) and are treated as ancestors (see Allen 1988).

Between the *Machu Timpu* and the *Runa Timpu* there is both discontinuity and continuity. They were destroyed to make for a new creation, yet the influence of their anterior world continues in this one. They most emphatically do not exist *sut'ipi*, in clarity. Nevertheless, they cannot be safely walled off (as it were) in another *timpu* because they have an intrinsic connection with the territory of Sonqo. This connection is necessary to Sonqo's prosperity; it must be maintained in spite of its dangers. The *Machukuna*, therefore, exist neither as *kwintu* nor as *chiquaq*. There are certain similarities between the *Machukuna* and the Incas, whom Sonqo Runakuna also treat as ancestral figures. They say that when the Spanish arrived, twelve Inca authorities fled with their retinues from Cuzco. Each followed a different footpath, building bridges and irrigation canals as they went. Some of these paths all passed through Sonqo. At a Place where three streams meet an Inca girl stopped to urinate and was left behind, transformed into stone. Nearby an Inca enchanted a Place called *Layqa Pampana* (Witch's Burial) so that anyone who tries to follow him will fall asleep there forever.

My consultants in Sonqo were divided in their opinions concerning the status of narratives about the Incas flight. There was a general feeling that these are not *kwintu* because they happened in our *timpu* — or, as Apolinar expressed it, "in our sun". Alcides disagreed, saying that the Inca's *timpu* must have been different from ours because they could do fantastic things which are impossible for us, like herding stones into walls.

Although the Incas have fled the world of immediate experience, they are not absolutely gone; they are hiding and waiting in their hidden city of Paititi. In the *pachakuti*, they will return by the same route. There is both continuity and discontinuity; the Incas exist in a potential rather than in an active state. They left their traces as a kind of promise etched into the Places who so immediately affect the Sonqeoños' lives. As with the *Machukuna*, the condition of *past-as-potential* is experienced through the medium of the landscape.

While everyone agreed that the Spaniards' arrival was *not* a *pachakuti* (world-reversal), they were equally unanimous in asserting that the Incas' return certainly *will* be a *pachakuti* — then there will be lightning, wind and earthquakes. *Amarus* will come roaring out of Antaqaqa and all the Mestizos will be chased away. The Incas will return, and they will recognize as Runakuna only those people wearing traditional clothing woven only of llama and alpaca wool. Similarly, they will reject anyone who speaks or reads Spanish.

None of the men in Sonqo and few of the women would meet the Incas' stringent criteria. As they experiment with their cash crops, herd their sheep and send their children to school, Sonqeoños balance ever more precariously on the horns of their cultural dilemma, a messianic ideology which demands that they can remain loyal to their heritage only by marginalizing themselves to the national society.

The general unwillingness to place the Incas in a *kwintu*, or consider their flight part of a *pachakuti* expresses, I believe, the Sonqeoños' need to stress

their social and moral continuity with the Incas, whom they consider to be their cultural forebears. We have seen that the distinction between *kwintu* and non-*kwintu* is not a simple difference between truth and fiction, but rather reflects a social and moral difference. The fact that most of my Sonqo consultants refuse to locate the Incas in a *kwintu timpu* shows the extent to which they still stress this continuity.

Now we can better understand the disagreement between Luis and Erasmo over the anecdote about the gold-bearing Inca from Paititi. The two men were together on the path to Paucartambo when they heard about this event from a fellow traveller. Each evaluated the anecdote differently. Luis was deeply affected, and he strongly insists that the events took place within the last twenty years, in the lowlands east of Paucartambo. He obviously has an emotional investment in the true and contemporary nature of this extraordinary meeting. Erasmo, on the other hand, is fascinated but skeptical.

Contrary to what we might expect, Erasmo is the more traditional of the two. He is deeply invested in his identity as a *qawaq* (diviner) and curer; he seldom goes to Cuzco or travels by truck; his eldest son married young and lives in Sonqo. Luis, on the other hand, is both attracted to and repulsed by the mestizo world. He has served as Presidente of the community; he can write his name; his eldest son works in Cuzco as a taxi driver. Nevertheless Luis yearns for the Incas' return and worries that he is "ruined" (*malugradu*) for the *Pachakuti*. In effect, his shaky cultural faith needs to be reaffirmed by miracles; he needs Incas to emerge into the clarity of his time and place.

It seems that Erasmo can afford to feel skeptical about anecdotes heard second-hand on the road. Nevertheless, he exhibits no such casualness concerning the Sacred Places in his immediate vicinity. His reversal on the Lake Qesqay narrative (p. 90), which he refused to record in 1975 and then recorded voluntarily in 1978, reflects, not a change in his own belief, but a changed perception of *my* relationship with the local Places.

In 1984, I specifically asked Erasmo to define the 1978 recording (summarized on p. 90) as either *kwintu* or *chiquaq*. After some deliberation, he decided that it is a *chiquaq kwintu*. It is *kwintu* because the events happened in a different *timpu*, and it is *chiquaq* because the lake and rocks are really there *sut'ipi* — "... you can go up and see them. And some people really have heard the bell ringing." Several other consultants made similar comments.

It seems, therefore, that the lake and the rocks, which clearly and immediately exist in our time, span the gap between different *timpu*. Like Antaqaqa, the *chullpas*, and the *Machukuna's* bones, they carry the power of an anterior *timpu* into our own. This continuity between world-ages, maintained through the medium of Place, characterizes narratives about the lake and the *Machukuna*, setting them apart as *kwintu* which are nevertheless "true".

Also it is interesting that Erasmo's initial discomfort with the tape recorder led him to tell me that the origin story was not a *kwintu*. Apparently the unfamiliar situation led him to focus on the lake in its

dangerous immediacy — for Lake Qesqay is described as quick tempered and “demonic” (*saqra*). In this context the narrative really could not be felt as a *kwintu*, that is, as safely belonging to another world-age¹¹.

Speech and the landscape

Erasmus takes all formal speech seriously, and never begins a recording session without calling on various Sacred Places in elaborate and lovely invocations, asking that he speak well. These invocations are, of course, accompanied with offerings of coca leaves and alcohol; in fact he insists that without coca he cannot speak well at all. Coca is the basic ingredient of all Quechua ritual; through frequent invocations over coca Runakuna maintain contact with their Sacred Places (see ALLEN 1988). Coca is also the medium through which the Places themselves speak to Runakuna in divination sessions. When a diviner throws down the coca leaves he invokes specific Sacred Places, crying “*Sut’ita willaway*” (“Tell me clearly”). Then he contemplates the configurations of leaves, to discover the Places’ response. In the *altumisa*, the greatest of divination sessions, it is said that the diviner is directly possessed by the Mountain Lords and that he speaks with their voices.

It comes as no surprise that this master storyteller is also a diviner (*paqo*), for divination is an intensified case of inspired speech. Divining or storytelling, Erasmus must keep constantly in touch with the Places around him, for it is in them that knowledge of all worlds resides.

It is worth noting that *chiqaq*, “true” in the sense of immediately perceptible, may also have the sense of “straight”¹². It is as though *kwintu* events from other *timpu*, or world ages, are displaced to one side. Some exist in the periphery of our vision; some are completely outside of it. With the aid of Sacred Places a speaker may tap the knowledge of these other *timpu* without actually unleashing their dangerous effects in our own.

I suggest that the Quechua language, as I found it used in Sonqo, should be understood as grounded (literally) in a trialogic relationship among speakers, listeners and Places. Through this dialogue the potentiality of other worlds is carried into ours to vitalize it.

¹¹ Linguistic research is consistent with my interpretation. In her studies of Ancash Quechua Rosaleen HOWARD-MALVERDE (1988) determined that the modal suffixes *-shqa kashqa* and *-naa* vary according to a criterion of evidentiality; *-shqa kashqa* is appropriate when the speaker is describing events which he himself experienced or for which he has direct evidence; *-naa*, in contrast, indicates that the event took place outside the speaker’s controlled experience. (These suffixes correspond to *-rqa-* and *-sqa* respectively, in Cuzco Quechua.) Interestingly, in two contexts speakers use *shqa kashqa* when describing events that occurred outside their controlled experience, even in a previous world-age. This occurs when they are in the Places where the events occurred, or when they have first-hand knowledge of the Places.

¹² My thanks to Xavier Izko for bringing this to my attention.

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Summary

Catherine J. Allen studies the inhabitants of Sonqo, a small Quichua community in eastern Peru. The Sonqo distinguish between the Kwintu (cuento in Spanish) which alludes to vanished universes of another timpu (tiempo in Spanish), and the chiqaq which refers to the contemporary period. To the extent that the kwintu relate themselves to times of fundamental differentiation (animals vs. people, night vs. day etc.), they escape from truth criteria; whereas chiqaq are "true" statements because they relate to our present universe. This discrimination depends more or less on the context of the narration, that is to say on the relationship between the teller and the audience — the kwintu are only kwintu for the Sonqo — and on sacred places, from which the kwintus' universe affects the actual world. Therefore the tales involving beings or places whose influence is felt up to this day are difficult to classify; such is the case of the ancestors whose action is necessary to increase crops, or the paths by which the Inca rebels fled before the Spanish at the time of the Conquest — and by which they should return one day. Finally, Allen shows how this distinction is used in daily practice and why it varies from case to case.

Resumen

Fundándose sobre el caso de los habitantes de Sonqo, una pequeña comunidad Quechua del Perú oriental, Catherine Allen examina los tipos de narraciones tradicionales. Los Sonqo distinguen entre los kwintu (del español "cuento"), que aluden a universos desaparecidos de otro timpu (del español "tiempo"), y los chiqaq que se refieren a la época contemporánea. En la medida en que los kwintu se refieren a los tiempos de las diferenciaciones fundamentales (animales/humanos, noche/día, etc.), escapan a los criterios de veracidad; en cuanto a los chiqaq, son verdaderos porque pertenecen a nuestro universo actual... Esta discriminación depende sin embargo del contexto del acto de narración: es decir, por una parte, de la relación entre el narrador y el oyente — los kwintu no son kwintu más que para los Sonqo —, y por otra parte de los lugares sagrados, por los cuales los universos de los kwintus afectan al mundo actual. Por ejemplo los relatos que invocan seres o lugares cuya influencia se perpetúa hasta nuestros días son difíciles de clasificar; es el caso de los antepasados cuya acción es necesaria para el crecimiento de las cosechas o también el de los caminos por los cuales los Incas rebeldes se escaparon de los españoles durante la Conquista — y por los que deberían volver un día. Finalmente Allen muestra como esta distinción es utilizada en la práctica cotidiana y por qué varía individualmente.

