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Ttuantin-suyo

Alphonso Lingis

The planet studded with computers capable of storing the contents of the world's libraries, which you can tap into from your home keyboard, locating anything ever formulated in signs with a few taps of your search key. On your screen you can delete and combine all calculations, all discourses. Extinct henceforth the tete-a-tete with the traveler, the explorer, the guru. The pagan learning and language of the Mayas burnt in 1526 by the first Bishop of Mexico, Don Juan de Zumarraga, decoded after five centuries on a computer; the human species traced back to one aboriginal pair not by faith in Biblical revelation but by genetic decoding on the supercomputer. All details of the nuclear winter not revealed by seers and prophets but by digital computation at the Max Planck Institute and Cornell University.

Our brains, our sense organs, our feelings are now massively invested with information-bits. Before going to make contact, with the Aztec ruins or with the migratory whales, we tap the search key on our computers and file in our brains the content of all the relevant library shelves on the topic. A few years ago it still seemed strange to us to notice all those tourists not viewing the urban monuments and the landscapes by the eye, but peering in their cameras viewing rather the preview of the snapshot of the urban monuments and the landscapes. We still thought viewing things directly could tell you something. We have given all that up. What could any of us learn from looking at Maya inscriptions? From looking at an occasional whale on high seas? The viewing is only an emotional indulgence. All we learn about these things we learn from our computer screen.

But it is about things that we can learn anything. Our brains process signs. The texts refer to other texts. There is no hors-texte, Derrida says, there is no perception. What we call perception is not the raw given, it is informed, formed by signs. Signs are significant only in contexts. The history of Egypt is the history of Egyptology. The statement Water boils at 100 degrees C is not a law of nature, neither decreed nor obeyed; it is a definition. Physics is a discourse whose terms and rules for formulation are derived out of earlier discourses called physics or natural philosophy. Matter and energy are not things you can encounter by looking; they are formulas in a tableau of calculations and illustrated by graphs on the coordinates of electronic screens. Images are from the first matrices for reproduction; the image we see on our television screens, our billboards, on the walls of our homes in indefinite reproduction is not a copy of an original. Nature is the set of images we have seen on television specials, rain-forest and coral-sea, hummingbird’s-eye and creeping-amoeba images
whose colors are those of cathode-ray tubes, images cropped and spliced by graphics designers, and made significant by a narrative in the vocabulary and logic and rhetoric of the current scientific and technological paradigms. There is no difference between a political act and its image; the political campaign was a series of photo opportunities, as are the subsequent meetings with heads of state. The state today functions to protect and support the national market economy; its main role is to produce media-events which generate national confidence and pride and the national consumption of images of national products. The things we imagine, seek out, encounter, accumulate are products generated by programs in unending reproduction; the pilot industry of postindustrial postindustrious production is human engineering, that is, the production in the heads of consumers of images of products and images of those consumers wanting them. Images are produced by information-bits fed into programs; as they flicker across our receptor cells our minds process signs, our cerebral circuitry formats, edits, files, networks.

It is now inconceivable to us that there could be a silent civilization, a civilization divested of all signs.

What there is left to contemplate is the Inca walls. What there is of Qosqo, Navel of the Earth, is the wall of the residence of the Inca Roca on Calle Hatunrumiyoc, upon which the palace of the Marquis of Buenavista was cemented. What else can you do to find the world of the Incas; there are no inscriptions, they had no writing, the astronomy, cosmology, theology, social order was in the heads of the nobility who were all massacred or Christianized, and the Quechoa-speaking people of today (a third of the population of Peru) retain no traces of it in their shamanist nature-cults. Archaeologists search in vain for statues, idols; they were all of gold and were the first things to be smelted down by the Conquistadors—all but the Punchao, the sacred sun disc of gold and precious stones, which was rescued by the last furious Inca assault on the Conquistadors and spirited away to their retreat in the Andes and never located since. After the Great Rebellion of 1536 and the final conquest of Qosqo by Pizarro, Manco Inca built a new capital in the inaccessible fastness of Vilcabamba; four Incas reigned there until the Inca Tupac Amaru was lured out for battle, hunted down in the Amazon jungle, brought to Qosqo and executed in 1572. This last Inca capital, buried in jungle for four centuries, has to this day never been unearthed. The first Inca Pizarro encountered, and captured by treachery, Atahualpa, was told he had the choice of being burnt alive as a pagan or strangled as a Christian. He accepted baptism for the sake of his wife and children, whom Pizarro promised to spare if they were baptized. The last Inca, Tupac Amaru, was given written assurances by the King of Spain that if he surrendered he would be treated as a prisoner of war. He surrendered to save the lives of his people, and

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was then dragged in triumph to Qosqo where in the Cathedral Square under the eyes of the Viceroy Francisco de Toledo and the bishop and the priests of the Inquisition his wife was mangled before his eyes and his own head cut off and placed on a pole in the great plaza before the cathedral rising on the foundations of the palace of Inca Viracocha. In the year that followed all Inca nobles who had not been baptized and given in marriage to Conquistadors were slaughtered. Toledo launched a vast program to round up the people from their settlements in the high Andes, and relocate them in the new strategic towns, the reductones, he ordered built in the lowlands and about the mines. “It is something very convenient and necessary for the increase of the Indians, so that they could be better instructed in the articles of our Holy Catholic Faith and would not wander scattered and missing in the wilds, living bestially and worshiping their idols.”

There remain the walls, foundation walls upon which the Conquistadors built their palaces in Qosqo, deserted terrace walls, aqueducts, and canals of Inca agriculture in the high Andes.

In 1911 the North American adventurer and later Senator Hiram Bingham announced that he had identified the citadel of Machu Picchu with Vilcabamba, the capital of the last four Incas, lost for 400 years. Machu Picchu was built on a rock pinnacle three of whose sides drop vertically 2000 feet into the rapids of the Urubamba river, traversable only over a vine suspension bridge, and whose fourth side rises abruptly into the Huayna Picchu peak. The city was accessible only by a narrow path cut into the cliff wall, where two men could stop an army. No military attack had depopulated Machu Picchu; the entire city is intact, save for the roofs, all made of braided and colored thatching, which had rotted away. Within the city a great rock thrusts up high over all the buildings; it was carved in terraces and a plaza flattened on top about the intihuatana, abstractly carved figure whose function—altar? idol? astronomical instrument?—cannot be determined, but which is intact, the sole one in all Peru which was not smashed by the Catholic priests. But Machu Picchu could not be Vilcabamba. Its round Qorikancha temple is one of the greatest temples of any civilization, its walls and those of the city too perfectly carved to have been able to have been built in the thirty-six years during which the last four Incas survived after the fall of Qosqo. As the Conquistadors were able to obtain, by torture, complete information of all the citadels of the Inca empire, it is almost certain that Machu Picchu had been depopulated and its very location effaced from the memory of the quipucamayus, the Inca state chroniclers, by the time of the Spanish conquest of Ttuantin-suyo. There are no statues or gold walls, though the tombs are intact and there are no signs of the deserted city having been plundered. There are no inscriptions, no carved reliefs on these walls. Today, eighty years after the jungle mantle was cleared from it, no one knows when it was built, by whom, or when it was abandoned. Bingham paid great attention to the cracked and crystallized great rock
upon which the Qorikancha temple was built, effects which could only have been caused by enormous heat. He searched in vain for traces of ashes of sacrificial fires. Archeologist Marino Orlando Sanchez Macedo² has recently concluded that the gold-plated walls had attracted a catastrophic bolt of lightning, supreme evil omen for the Incas, ritual purification of the site abandoned it taking with them all its ritual treasures. Excavation of the burial caves revealed there were twelve times as many women as men. One-sixth of these women were dwarfs. The mummies were embalmed with hieratic ritual objects: Machu Picchu was not a fortress but a sanctuary of priestesses and sorceresses. An entire city whose discourse is irremediably irrational to us, bewitched signs even if we could recover them unrecordable on our software, impermeable to us. Most likely the six hundred terraces on the cliffs above and below the city grew mainly coca, to supply the sacred rites of Qosqo; the word Picchu in Aymara means a portion of coca. The contents of all the burial caves, mummies and ritual objects, as well as all the pottery and domestic implements found in Bingham’s excavations in 1912 financed by the Harvard Peabody Institute were shipped off to Boston, and nothing has been to this day returned. Anyone in search of the world of the Incas can only contemplate the walls of Machu Picchu.

The grandeur of the Inca civilization was in its walls, not only in the walls of its sacred cities, but in the terrace walls in the heights of the Andes. The great power of the Inca civilization was its mastery of agriculture in the Andes through incomparable botanical knowledge and through vast centrally planned systems of irrigation of terraced mountain slopes via aqueducts and underground canals; it was this that made the people prosper and attracted more and more adjacent kingdoms to join the Inca Ttuantin-suyo, the Four Quarters of the World. When the Conquistadors arrived, they found a population abundantly nourished, working one-third of the year on their own crops, one-third on public works, and one-third on works for the gods.³ The population, enslaved by the Spanish on the encomendias and chained in the mines, was reduced from 32 million in 1530 to 5 million by 1548; the Spanish had to import tens of thousands of slaves through Brazil from black Africa. Today the population of Peru has after four centuries recovered to 22 million and imports 20% of its food; the Indian population stands at 7 million, their diet is 40% below acceptable levels calculated by the World Health Organization.

In the sacred cities and ceremonial sites the walls impose themselves outside of all agricultural utility, walls far in excess of anything that the function of supporting dwellings or defending a city could motivate. Saqsaywaman, the puma-head of the city of Qosqo, is not a fortress but a temple, and has three outer walls 1200 feet long and 70 feet high built with stones that weigh up to over 300 tons each. Anyone in search of the Incas can only go himself to those walls, and confront there

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a mystery upon which the mind can hook none of its conceptual schemes, its explanations, its notions borrowed from other cultures, none of its relations with other things. In the density of these stones one is confronted with the absolute.

The wall running the full length of Calle Hatunrumiyoc, great granite ashlars of absolutely uniform color and grain, a silvery blue-gray, without any alignment in tiers, cut but not in cubes, a jigsaw puzzle of polygons, fitted together so tightly there is no space for mortar, stones fitted so definitively in position over a twenty-foot deep foundation of small ball-bearing stones that a thousand years of earthquakes that have several times leveled eighty percent of the buildings of Colonial Qosqo have not opened a fissure anywhere in the wall. There are no decorative friezes or cut rims. There are no blazons or inscriptions of any kind.

The great temple of Qorikancha was not, as popular imagination has it, a temple of the Sun-worship of the Inca; all the deities of the peoples of the Ttuantinsuyo were enshrined in it. Not effigies of anthropomorphic deities or divinized ancestors and heroes: rocks from the Apus, the sacred mountains, emblems of the heavenly bodies, lithic seals of the sacred itself lithic. It was in the positioning of the stones that the quasitotality of Inca high culture and spirituality was invested. This impresses itself on the mind if one spends but an hour contemplating one of the stones of the Sacred Plaza at Machu Picchu. As one comes to realize the time and labor devoted to cutting thirty-two corners into this rock weighing two hundred tons to absolute precision to fit in with the adjacent rocks, it becomes clear that, as specialist Jean-Pierre Protzen wrote, the endless patience and profound spiritual reverence for the stone itself are inconceivable today or in any civilization of which we are acquainted. It is in just this devotion and reverence not in stamping signs of human computation or graven images to glorify man’s own transient flesh, but in the emplacement of stone itself that the essence of Inca spirituality lies.

Everything about the wall is impenetrable. The stones of Saqsaywaman weigh up to 360 tons each. The Inca workers used no metal chisels or saws but quarried and cut and polished the rocks with stones. They were quarried 40 miles away. The Inca workers had no pack animals (but the llama which can carry a maximum of 90 pounds) and no wheels. These titanic stones were transported across canyons and treacherous icy rivers. They were not cut at the quarry in standard sizes and shapes, but cut on the site itself to fit into the previously laid stones. The lines of fit are so precision-cut that one cannot slide a razor blade anywhere between them. As to how this was done specialists today have not been able to produce any explanation. The American Fawcett recently made extensive inquiries among the Quechoa-speaking people of the Andes today, and came up with the explanation that the Inca masons had a herb from the Amazon capable of dissolving stone. He marshalled an extensive expedition of botanists and anthropologists to the Amazon without finding such an herb. Nineteenth-century archeologists believed that the
walls dated from the megalithic period, the age of Stonehenge, the Easter Island, Mycenaean Greece, and Olmec Mexico. One knows the recent speculations about extra-terrestrial colonists landing at the plains of the Nazca lines, who would have been responsible for the walls. The Spanish who found they were not able to dismantle them to build their churches and palaces concluded that they were the work of demons.

After Pizarro pillaged and burnt the Inca city he immediately set the Inca masons to build over it the capital of New Spain. It is enough to look across the lane at the cathedral (the Inca Roca wall today supports the Palace of the Archbishop) to see indeed that the spirituality of Inca high civilization is in its walls, and that when it was destroyed, the very same masons can no longer build the walls. The cathedral walls which do not recede inward but now rise vertical in Christian transcendence have lost the sense of color and form of the Andes, the stones assembled without regard to color and grain, chiseled into standardized cubes and laid in tiers, cemented with mortar. The cathedral collapsed by earthquake before it was finished, was rebuilt, today is covered with scaffolding repairing after the 1986 earthquake, in which every single Spanish church in Qosqo was gravely damaged.

At Machu Picchu one can contemplate the walls without any subsequent Spanish constructions cemented on them, and cleared now of the four centuries of jungle. One can also contemplate them without tourists, photographers, tour-guides, and their spurious explanations. It is one of the advantages of going to countries full of what the corporate press calls “terrorists”, that is, armed guerrillas fighting for the overthrow of a US supported capitalist regime. Tourists are terrified of terrorists. I was alone waiting for and watching the sun rise over Machu Picchu.

I thought that never again will anything as sublime as Machu Picchu be built on our planet. On the one hand, the eye is unable to distinguish the grandeur of the city from that of the cliffs, canyons, jungle and glaciers. In the city the great boulders that were there remain jutting up in the midst of the integrated geometry that regulates all the squares and buildings; the buildings were built not to dominate them but to glorify them. The plane surfaces were reserved for plazas and temples; the buildings were set on the edges of the cliffs dropping vertically 2000 feet and were designed to keep the people in view of the gorges below. On the top edges of the Huayna Picchu summit accessible only by a path cut into the cliff there are high-walled terraces so small and so inaccessible they could not have been used for crops and could only have been built for plants to be seen from the city below and that would draw the eye upward to the summits. This kind of aesthetics can never again occur. In the now planetwide gene-splitting gene-splicing, atomfissioning atom-fusioning technology in the service of the now planetwide corporate market economy, Nature is henceforth a program of signs digitally decoded; it can never again be

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confronted with unmediated awe.

On the other hand, Machu Picchu is a work of labor, labor of a whole population, a work of a people who lived and died toiling with their hands and arms and backs on the materiality of the stones. Who had a reverence for the substance of the stone, a fervor before it that alone could sustain the staggering amount of time and toil that they put into matching, carving and fitting the stones with such perfection. "One of the stairways [of Machu Picchu] is fantastically wedged in between two huge granite rocks which are so close together that it would have been impossible for a fat man to use it at all... Considering the fact that the only tools obtainable for a job of this kind were cobblestones or pebbles of diorite which could be obtained in the bed of the roaring rapids two thousand feet below, it must have taken somebody a long, long while and a good deal of effort to carve these steps out of the living rock. At any rate, the stone cutter had the satisfaction of knowing that his work would achieve something as near immortality as anything made by the hands of man," Bingham wrote. Words of a Yankee who had the satisfaction of immortalizing himself in the exhibition in Cambridge he made of all he dug up and could remove from Machu Picchu. But the Inca cutter did not seek the satisfaction of immortalizing his image on the stone; neither the stonemason nor the Inca himself marked any stone in all of Ttuantin-suyo with his name. It was in the absolute position of the stone itself that all his devotion and all his fervor were transported, and it is the absolute of the stone that remains. Heidegger speaks of the stone of the hellenic temple, whose steadfastness brings forth the restlessness of the sea, whose dense and closed mass brings forth the vast openness of the skies, whose gleaming marble white brings out the darkness of night—the stone that gathers about itself and reveals the world. The stone, Heidegger says, belongs to earth, the terrestrial element, and the rift with which the artistry disengages it reveals the world. But here the stone is not disengaged from the terrestrial, one cannot decide whether the savage enormity of the rocks in its midst reveals the geometry of the city or rather that the geometry of the city reveals the enormity of the uncut boulders in its squares, streets and buildings. The stone is not disengaged from the Andes, and engages the inhabitants of the city, the sorceresses and the masons, in the Andes. The only worship there was of the Apu, the sacred summits, the caves, the gorges, the rapids, and the cold stellar fires inaccessible in the cosmic nights. In Heidegger's words, I would say that the stones do not function to reveal the focus of the directions and the directives about which a world, a clearing, opens, but rather that they function as absolute condensation of the terrestrial. In them the whole labor, the whole life, the identity of the artisans was absorbed without leaving signs. We know them only as they knew themselves as laborious bodies, bodies devoted to effacing the traces of geological accidents, the signs of human intervention, from the surfaces of the stones, bodies becoming patient, impenetrable, indecipherable as the stones,
adamantine bodies. This degree of reverence for the materiality of stone is henceforth inconceivable. And this labor. Our labor has been for a very long time now either manipulation programmed with signs and calculated for the economizing of effort, or prestige contests with one another. The maximum expenditure of corporeal effort in our civilization is in athletic competitions with one another for celebrity. That is, for the satellite broadcast of our name and the data in our file onto all the television screens.

Beyond the deserted citadels, scattered far in the high Andes, the people of Tiatin-suyo. Why go? Out of the way places, devilishly hard to get to, dangerous. Sendero Luminoso, Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, terrorists. The army. When you get there nothing to see. Scenery, of course, like anywhere along the Andes, the Mexican Cordillera, the North American Rockies. No trees, empty scenery. The people live in hamlets made of mud huts. They speak Quechoa. You don’t.

The people of Huancayo are not lost in the cold mists of the high Andes. Everything they do, the water they carry from distant mountain springs, the clothing they weave from alpaca wool (the last vicunas, hunted by the Spanish to the verge of extinction, having been collected in ranches where they are shorn for the world market, their wool sold for $2500 a yard in Paris and Hong Kong), the hushed and guarded and coded things they say to one another while keeping an eye out for military informers, the coca plants they raise or do not raise, is determined by the banks in Arequippa and Medellin and Luzerne and Singapore and the chanceries in Lima and Washington and Berlin, by the one world, the world power network. They and we are each coded, identified, determined in one vocabulary and grammar and rhetoric, each shifting in his own post in the system of supply and consumer demand, in the system of the official empire and the MedellinMafia second government, in that dyadic system of ally and enemy which is the polis, the political order, power.

You buy diamox in Qosqo before you go; the altitudes rise to three miles, and everybody who is not born there gets soroche—heart trepidations, fibrillations, nausea, vomiting, you can well die. Then, as soon as the plane lands an old woman hands you mate de coca, a tea of coca leaves which regularizes the heart. So at once you are in touch with them, and they hand you coca.

The mountains are savage outcroppings of the tortured continental crust, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions trouble them. Cold, barren, enshrouded unrelentingly with cold fog. Since the Conquest the surviving remnants of the Quechoa people have fled higher and higher, denuded the barren soil to plant potatoes and quinoa, the gritty soil thinner, more sterile each season, each rain.

So there is nothing there. Nothing but the people. They speak Quechoa and you do not. But nothing would, nothing could be learned from them, if you
understood what they said. Everything they said they would have to code, or you would have to recode, in the language of truth, that is, in the vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric of the established discourse, that of science, of political economy, of psychology, of sociology, of anthropology. But they are already identified, coded; everything they say, in hushed and guarded and elusive formulations, is determined by the established world discourse, everything they do is determined by the one-world power network. You know this code. It is enough to look at them, to see how they move, to observe their huts, their cooking, their labor to know. But you already know. You knew already, sitting at your television set and Fax machine wherever you were.

Why then did you go yourself to Ayacucho? You yourself did not know, could not say. See them. Their bodies. No, touch them.

Bodies capable of growing coca on slopes of the Andes at over 15,000 feet. The bodies you, the truth of the world discourse identified, the bodies transported, relocated, tortured, massacred, exterminated, rotted in mass graves, most of which will never be found. Bodies whose names, ages, numbers are not recorded in the newspapers of Lima, in the files of the police and the army, bodies whose names, ages, numbers are not recorded even in the master computers of the Pentagon, where they figure only as zones cleared, cleared of coca, cleared of the Sendero Luminoso. Bodies you will never see, as you walk Ayacucho. Bodies that haunt you, that press against your language, your thoughts, your bad nights in Ayacucho.

Bodies of twenty-seven million Quechoa people exterminated in the first eighteen years of the Conquest, bodies expired in building the enormous fortress churches of Catholic Peru, enormous tombs for the body of Jesus. What there is to see, in every Church in Peru, is the agonizing body of Jesus. A body fraught with meaning, word incarnate, for in sacrifice the body sacrificed forms the body of the Christian community. These bodies you sought in Ayacucho were, are sacrificed for nothing, were not, are not sacrificed, are exterminated. The meaning they have in the codes of discourse of the world community marked them to be liquidated, they are piles and ditches of the massacred, masses.

You see the weight of their bodies. Bent over climbing rocky precipices. Laid on the ground, by the blazing mountain sun, by the fatigue, by the hunger and the weariness. Braced on the ground against the cold wind. Leaning seated against a hut while pounding corn or quinoa.

The very poverty of implements and gear, the poverty of gestures and operations, the simplicity and clarity and routine of the things done make reading of them too easy, too immediate, at once you recognize and code what they do, move on. There remain their bodies as it were reduced to themselves, held with frayed threads to an instrumental field, heavy with their own mass. A body not a means to the ends in the instrumental field, not the end of an instrumental array. A body whose
own parts are not means and ends. You see the mass of the body, not the anatomy. Not the organs and the functions, being dialectically dismembered before your eyes by its dexterous manipulations and agile movements. The mass of the cheeks, of the forearms, of the stomach, the rump, the flanks, the wrinkles, the coarse hairs, the moles. When we look at one another we face one another; our eye catches on to the groomed eyebrows, shadowed eyes, patina’d complexion, the careful framing of the hair, the individual style of facial expression, we look at the ridges, contours, the design, the choreography of eye movements, raised eyebrows, the cultured mouth muscles. Supporting our faces we see design, expressivity, adroitness, style, not mass. You look at their inexpressive, mute, unstylized, ungroomed, unwashed faces, you see their faces like you see their arms, their thick hands, their feet.

The mass of the body up against all its surfaces. The bared face, arms, legs, feet give no sign and express nothing, only show the exposedness of flesh. Mute, inoperative, inexpressive, exposed to the elements, to the grit of the wind and the harsh sun, exposed to violence and violation. When you think of what it is that you are you think of your self as a center of decisions, evaluations and initiatives. When you look at them and think of what it is that you are a body, you think that to be a body is to be vulnerable and susceptible, exposed to appeals and to demands, exposed to wounds and outrage. What the body exposes is not that self, that center of decisions, evaluations, and initiatives, but itself. All that it is is exposed. Its mass weighs upon itself in the exposure to the clay and the rocks that push against its feet, to the wind and the sun that push against its limbs and redden its surfaces compacted with dense blood. Two quarts more blood in their bodies than in those of the lowlanders, than in yours, blood containing 8,000,000 red blood corpuscles as compared with 5,000,000 per cubic millimeter in yours. All its weight is up against its surfaces of exposure; to encounter a body is to see skin, which is not a container, a hide or protection, but a surface of susceptibility. Your eyes approach them obliquely, pass on quickly. The glance at the skin grazes it already. The face is not a barrier, shield or mask which detaches the self from the world, a screen upon which the self expresses only what its decision, evaluation, and initiative determine; the face exposes the body to the world, attaches it to the world. The harsh sunlight, the wind, the damp, the lithic silence push against it. The hand, the stomach, the breast, the knee are extensions where the mass of the body is held in surfaces of exposure and vulnerability.

The body inasmuch as it is not upheld by anything, is there, imposed, exposed. There in the weight of tissue, pulp, fiber, gelatinous substance, turgescence, weight of blood, heavy as murky water. Weight of age: one does not know if these bodies are heavy with eighty years of being there, or thirty years old heavy already with eighty years. A weight that is unmeasurable, weight that augments with the weight of age, with the weight of the age of the rocks and the winds and the sun and the

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mountains, weight of the body sinking into mass graves. A body is the elevation of mass on an extension of surfaces. There is not an interiority or a foundation that supports this weight. A weight of the body that weighs without weighing, without measuring itself. The sense of the weight of the body is a sense of the body as an absolute. You sense the weight on the face, on the surfaces, by seeing the surfaces. Your glance, your touch which makes contact with these surfaces is afflicted, weighed down with this insupportable weight.

The words, the codes, the vocabulary, the grammar, the rhetoric wound the body. The words of the established discourse, the established truth of anatomy, physiology, social engineering, economics, geopolitical strategy pillage the body for signs, lacerate and torment the body. The words of phenomenology, those that inscribe the mass of the body with words of intentionality, postural diagram, gesture, operation, prakognosis hide the mass of the body, inscribe diagrams on its raw flesh, cover its wounds with coded uniforms, deliver over the body perceived to the understanding and uses of the perceiver, recuperate its meanings and its intentions, hide the mass of the body, bury the bodies in mass graves.

One sees the wounds. The wounds of Jesus are stigmata, signs fraught with meaning. In the opening of wounds on the body of Jesus the body of Jesus opens to incorporate the mystical body of the Christian community, a community of signs, pledges and passwords. Here each wound, each scar, each laceration stiffens, tumefies the flesh, making it the more mute and inexpressive. These wounds are not marks expressing an identity, marks inscribing a significance. One looks at these wounds left by the lacerating storms, the brush, the stumblings, the falls, the infections, the blows, one does not see a surface inscribed with meaning. The wounds are only the endurance, the ineffaceability of pain, open to more pain. They are not the sign of a sickness, as though one knew where their health lay. They are not the sign of a malediction, a fate intelligible in an established system of signs. Wounds opening only upon themselves, and upon more pain. Wounds opening upon the body. A body that is a wound, a lesion in the tissue of words and discourses and the networks of powers. A body disfigured and flailed by the forces of the established discourse, the discourse established as true. It is not animal instincts but truth that tortures bodies. The order to torture is made by the order of the established discourse, is made by each one who orders his discourse by the order of the internationally established and programmed code, vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric, that of science, of political economy, of psychology, of sociology, of anthropology. Bodies lacerated by signs, scarred, pustulant, bodies to be cleared away by the codes, the bulldozers, buried in the high Andes under clay and rocks where their decomposition will not fertilize coca plants.

Masses of bodies, exposing one another, touching, penetrating, withdrawing. Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 1993
Bodies in Huallaga that do not circulate in a system, an economic, political, social system, that wander in exhaustion and stupor, that stumble, that drop to the ground, that are dropped into bulldozed-out ditches in the clay and the rocks. Bodies that are in the way, of progress, of development, of projects to build roads across the Andes into the oil-fields and timber of the Amazon, of political treaties about narcotics and arms between nations, of political programs for Peru and for free trade on legitimately controlled world markets.

Bodies without spirit, without useful skills, without intelligence, closed in their illiteracy and recalcitrance, bodies old already at twenty, too old to be educated, recycled in the channels of information and production. Bodies with glazedover eyes scummed with fog and clay dust, with indexterous hands like leprous stumps. Eyes to see what, hands to touch what? To see nothing, to touch nothing, lips to say nothing, eyes without weeping, throats without sobs, eyes turning into scar tissue, hands turning into rheumatic stumps in the cold fog. Bodies that exist for what? Bodies that exist to exist. Bodies that exist to be bodies. They are not there to signal to you. No signs emanate from them that concern the others, that concern you.

Why then did you go yourself to Huancayo? You yourself did not know, could not say. See them. Their bodies. No, touch them.

These wounds expose these bodies, these bodies expose wounds. Exposed to the touch. But one has to touch them. With one’s hands that are organs of apprehension, of appropriation, bony hooks. One’s hands that are dexterous, manipulative, that conduct, control, manage, engineer. One’s hands that are sense organs, that explore, that gather information. One’s hands that are expressive, that gesticulate, that speak. One’s hands that are the advance-organs of one’s force, that block, that push, that drive, that pound, that plummet. One’s hands that are also organs of tact and tenderness. Movements that do not direct themselves, that are moved, moved by the passivity, the suffering of the other. Hands that are afflicted by the contact with the exposed wounds of the other. One has to touch these bodies, these wounds. With hands impotent to heal, to restore. Hands that, upon contact with these wounds, lose their will to bend the other into directions one fixes, lose their will to communicate the truth one knows. Hands that hold the body of the other in its absoluteness.

These bodies pressed against other bodies, enjoy being touched, held, weighed, weight pressing against surfaces enjoying being caressed by thick indexterous hands. An opaque enjoyment that is not the gratification of a mind, for one has no knowledge and skill to give, no relief to promise. Secret, silent, opaque joy in the body touched, pressed, clasped, embraced, held. A joy not in the whole body, that stirs within the cheek kissed, the hand held, the legs pushed against other legs in the bodies jostled on the back of a truck in a mountain road. An enjoyment that diffuses,
fuses in the dense warmth, the damp, the odors and musks of unwashed bodies, the breaths that push against faces like hot gusts of winds. A carnal joy that has no meaning, is not a sign of understanding, knowledge, solutions. But also a joy that is not closed in itself, a sign only of itself. The joy is each time momentary, agitated, always in a hurry to displace itself elsewhere, to recur elsewhere. The mass of the body in a craving to know this joy, in the hands, in the arms, in the shoulders, in the lips, in the thigh pressed of its own weight against yours. Your fingers touch these broken fingernails, these scarred knuckles, these hairs on the hand, the joy displaces itself within, not able to communicate anything, not having anything to communicate to you, save this same joy. This joy is the exposition of the body, its materialization, its absoluteness. It is in touching another body that a body knows the enjoyment of its own mass, its own weight, its exposed surfaces.

One has to touch these bodies, graze them, palpate them, squeeze, stroke, knead, scratch, tickle, pinch, caress, bite, suck, lick, press, embrace, bear their weight, breathe their exhalations, become wet with their sweat and tears.

It is very difficult to touch these bodies; tact and tenderness themselves prohibit it. Out of courtesy, they withdraw their unwashed hands, their filthy clothes from your clean hand. They withdraw their foul breath from contact with your cheek. At rare and ephemeral and unguarded moments the touch occurs. A child who touches your leg, a somnolent old man on a truck whose body touches yours when the truck reels on a curve. An old woman who stumbles, and your arm goes by itself to hold her. The old woman whose gnarled hand grazed yours when she handed you a cup of mate de coca in the rarefied air that left your heart pounding against your ribs. Rare moments. Days go by, nights go by when your hands touch only your own body. But moments when you know you came for this, had to come for this. You touch the stones of Saqsaywaman their bodies had touched with such labor and such joy. You wander down the rocky paths across deserted distances that end up in cliffs and gorges, stumble, stop, your lungs suffering with the dust and the thin air, heavy with exhaustion over doing nothing, mind empty, hands groping.

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Notes

1He was led to the city by a Quechoa boy whose father had gone to farm some of the still fertile terraces, a boy whose name Bingham did not record. Research on maps and archives revealed the site had long been recorded with the local name Machu Picchu.


3Anthropologist Alan Kolata, who worked for ten years on Tiwanaku site in Bolivia, taught the local population the techniques of canals and raised fields developed by the Tiwanaku civilization by 1000 B.C. They then produced seven times the amount of food they had been growing with modern techniques.


6Qosqo legends of the imperial period tell that Manko Qhapaq was turned to stone, as also Ayar Kachi and Ayar Auka. Qosqo mythology tells of the conversion of the sons of the sun into stone, as also, conversely, stones converted into soldiers called “Puruaukas” who defended the Incas when