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Metaphors of Spectacle:

Theatricality, Perception and Performative Encounters in the Pacific

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When Louis-Antoine de Bougainville first glimpsed the high peaks and luscious vegetation of Tahiti on the 5 April 1768, probably only the second European ship's captain to do so, the metaphors that sprang to mind and that he recorded in his logbook, were theatrical ones: "The aspect of this coast, elevated like an amphitheatre, offered us the most enchanting spectacle".^[1] For the next ten days, during which the two ships, *La Boudeuse* and *L'Étoile* lay at anchor in Matavai Bay, Bougainville and his fellow shipmates and explorers encountered a seeming unbroken succession of 'scènes' and 'spectacles'. Whether of the pastoral type – two Tahitians lying under a tree with one playing an air on the noseflute, a scene "worthy of Boucher's brush"^[2] – or of an erotic nature – the famous self-presentation of a naked 'Venus' on board ship to lusty Phrygian shepherds (the French sailors) – or when describing actual dance performances, or in each case, the vocabulary is drawn from the theatre: it is almost invariably a 'scène' or 'spectacle'. When Georg Forster first glimpsed Tahiti and the sight of countless canoes, the figure he employs is at once theatrical and commercial: "Die Menge von Kanus, welche zwischen uns und der Küste ab- und zungen, stellte ein schönes Schauspiel, gewissermaßen eine neue Art von Messe, auf dem Wasser dar." (1967:103) The theatrical metaphors that abound, are, it shall be argued, not just stylistic embellishments but rather symptoms of deeper-seated fundamental categories of perception which can be embraced by the term 'theatricality'.

For the purposes of this paper, theatricality shall be broadly defined, following Elisabeth Burns, as an historically and culturally determined "mode of perception."^[3] While Burns is concerned with exploring the ways theatre and role-playing in social life are laminated, the focus here will be on the links between representation and perception. Theatricality as a mode of perception means that things and actions, peoples and places, are not in themselves theatrical, they possess no inherent theatricality, but rather are rendered such by a combination of aesthetic conventions and discursive practices, which determine in turn around which phenomena we place the 'frame' of theatrical apprehension. Theatricality can be understood as discursive practice which intersects theatre (as an institution and aesthetic form) with wider cultural contexts. The theatrical mode of perception is thus a complex one, consisting of interlocking, mutually conditioning elements from different genres and forms of representation. Expressed more concretely, theatricality is a mode of perception and representation that either

merges verbal, visual and corporeal dimensions or forms a bridge between them.

An important aspect of the concept that I wish to stress here is its metaphorical charge. The title of this paper, metaphors of spectacle, takes the notion of metaphor seriously, and most of the uses of the term theatricality will be metaphorical ones. Lexically speaking, a metaphor transfers meaning from one semantic field to another. Its effectiveness is therefore often judged by the degree of disparity or similarity between the two fields. Metaphoricity has a built-in gesture of disjunctiveness that lends itself to making the unknown known. In the context of the theatrical aspects of the internet, the German philosopher Mike Sandbothe has argued that metaphors, and the metaphorical field of theatricality in particular, are characteristic of transition periods: "Die Metapher ist ein Ausdruck, der in sich selbst changiert, d.h. den historischen Übergang als semantischen Übertragungsprozeß zur Darstellung bringt".^[4] When times or situations are 'out of joint' then metaphors may be the most accurate way of rendering comprehensible phenomena perceived which no longer correspond to pre-existing categories and scientific concepts. As Sandbothe notes: "Eine Metapher ist nicht unpräzise und schöngeistig, ein Begriff nicht per se präzise und wissenschaftlich."^[5] Moving from the internet to mid-eighteenth century voyages of discovery – and the modes of representation and perception produced by them – may seem a huge leap backwards for mankind, but in terms of the perceptual changes wrought and the discussion Bougainville's, Cook's and other explorers' reports engendered, the feeling of semantic movement and dislocation was probably fairly similar.

Concepts of Theatricality in Eighteenth Century Thought

While theatricality as a term has received a great deal of interest in the last decades,^[6] its beginnings as a discursive field go back to the eighteenth century, in fact to that period which saw the development of imperial and colonial expansion on an international scale. In the eighteenth century the word theatrical and its cognates was used within three broad semantic fields.

The first can be roughly defined as a trope for dramatic events of a particular kind. Phenomena deemed 'theatrical' appeared to be so on account of their extreme concentration and focus. The appearance of focus and concentration is engendered on the one hand by tensions produced by dramatic situations: conflicts, confrontations and the antagonistic or agonistic structure traditionally perceived as being constitutive of drama in the sense of dramatic literature defined along the Aristotelian categories of peripeteia, anagnorisis etc. On the other hand, it is constituted by the plurality of media – the interplay of bodies, sounds, colours, spaces, – constitutive of theatrical performance. The latter component conforms to the definition of theatricality as a "density of signs" made famous by Roland Barthes: "What is theatricality? it is theatre-minus-text, it is a density of signs and sensations built up on stage starting from the written argument".^[7]

A second perceptual component of theatricality developed in eighteenth century is the primacy given to things visual and, more narrowly, to the idea of the spectator. This line of thought is linked to the presence of an "impartial spectator", the term made famous by Adam Smith, but already evoked implicitly (if not occasionally explicitly) by Shaftesbury. Of interest for the present inquiry is less the precise characterization of this 'spectator' as impartial, subjective or otherwise engaged, than the "figure of theater" contained in the notion. Following David Marshall, we can say: "What is at stake is the inherently theatrical situation that Smith describes when he pictures us appearing before us as spectators and spectacles" (1986:168). The concept of spectatorship as a *moral* category on which Smith

bases his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* must be seen within a wider context embracing, philosophy, the arts and science.^[8]

There is a massive shift within eighteenth century aesthetics and philosophy from the aural to the visual, and from the level of production (normative poetics) to reception (theories of sense and sensibility). If "man is born a spectator", as proclaimed by the Abbé Batteux in his *Principes de la littérature* (1764),^[9] reinforcing the idea proclaimed by the Abbé du Bos at the beginning of the eighteenth century in his ground-breaking treatise on aesthetics, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), then sight must be the dominant sense, and things visual should be given preference in modes of perception and representation.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, aesthetic theory had linked the most visual of art forms, theatre and painting, and their representational modes so closely together that Diderot's famous call for *tableaux* in the new genre of bourgeois drama (*genre sérieux*), radical though it may seem, provided little more than the theoretical sedimentation of an on-going and well established perceptual mode. That certain types of scenes on stage should coagulate into frozen attitudes with considerable emotional impact on spectators had been already demonstrated in the genre of 'absorptive' painting,^[10] the realist mode connected with Greuze and Chardin of the 1740s and after.

The merging of the pictorial and the theatrical as variations of one and the same aesthetic and perceptual category manifests itself most clearly in the related notions of spectacle and the Picturesque. The Picturesque is a more precisely definable perceptual category within the broader notion of spectacle. Where spectacle tends to stress of the moment of suddenness and surprise with an implied tendency to suspend the passage of time, the Picturesque, while still privileging the visual, stresses the extension of time as it invites the spectator/holder to tarry and concentrate on the thing perceived.

Whereas the notion of spectacle has immediate connections with the theatre and thus with the broader category of the theatrical, the *picturesque* has been more closely related to the visual arts. Barbara Maria Stafford has demonstrated that the search for the picturesque in eighteenth century travel accounts was one of the points of tension in verbal and visual representations. On the one hand, most scientists, ship's officers and other 'gentlemen' who provided written or pictorial representations were imbued with Baconian empirical principles, on the other, they employed media of representation that still valued aesthetic conventions such as the picturesque which require recognition of and conformity to an established pattern. The "picturesqueness of natural objects depends on the fact that they recall their imitations, that is, their representations in a painting".^[11] These "representations in a painting" were in turn to a large extent defined by theatrical codes. Stafford draws attention to the "Picturesque's theatrical emphasis, its captious surface play in which art wrestles with nature's intractable and rude materials."^[12] The theatrical aspect of the picturesque went, however, beyond playing just a metaphorical role in the great nature versus art debate. Stafford traces concrete links between the conventions of stage scenery and the picturesque conventions of garden design in the eighteenth century, for example.^[13] The all pervasiveness of theatrical metaphor is nowhere more apparent than in the aesthetic theory of the Earl of Shaftesbury. It is somewhat ironic that in his critique of all things theatrical in art and manners, he cannot but help recourse to theatrical metaphors when coming down clearly on the side of nature: "nature affords an ampler *scene*, and is a nobler *spectacle* than all which art ever presented".^[14]

If nature can be perceived as a theatrical spectacle, buttressed by certain, clearly

defined conventions of pictorial representation, then the question must be asked what consequences this framing strategy had on the epistemological status of the peoples and places perceived. This question forms a bridge to the *third* and most persistent of model of theatricality current in the eighteenth century. To deem something theatrical in this period, – and this still holds true today, although with varying degrees of emphasis in different cultures and languages – was to bestow on it a number of pejorative epitheta revolving around ideas of second-handedness, deceit, and duplicity. While these notions and their links with the theatre are much older and constitute the epistemological basis of the “antitheatrical prejudice”,^[15] it was not until the eighteenth century that a broader category of perception was developed linking the aesthetic and the moral into a wider concept. Again Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* can be considered the *locus classicus* of this discourse, if for no other reason than it provides the first document of the term in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “The good painter must [...] take care that his Action be not theatrical, or at second hand; but original and drawn from Nature her-self.”^[16] For Shaftesbury, as David Marshall has shown, the theatrical condition is all pervasive, almost a norm of aesthetic representation and, more importantly, of moral and ethical intercourse. The task of the philosopher is to analyze and expose it wherever possible. The final question remaining, then, is to ask, if it is possible to discern a link between the theatrical as an aesthetic category and as a moral and/or epistemological problem: the mistrust of situations and behaviours among people that smack of the duplicity of the stage.

The first encounters between Europeans and Pacific peoples may provide an unusual bridge between theatricality as a category of aesthetic perception and as a problem of ethical and sexual intercourse. When the first European explorers arrived in Tahiti, they were confronted with an abundance of things visual that not only went beyond the bounds of their imagination but also of their notions of moral decency.

Shocking spectacles

Of all the myths surrounding the discovery of the South Seas islands, the stories of sexual promiscuity were those that most inflamed the European audience back home. The apparent uncomplicated exchange of amorous favours for iron nails was a transaction that, for the male public at least, seemed to encapsulate a sexual economy in which even the poorest sailor could be a sultan. The spectacle of overt sexual overtures and their occasional public consummation gave the term ‘theatre of love’ a new meaning.^[17]

The *locus classicus* of erotic spectacle in the sense that an invitation to sexual union was made and expected to be consummated in public can be found in Bougainville’s *Voyage autour du monde*. Perhaps because it is so famous, it ought to be quoted again, at least in part. After describing how the Tahitians in their canoes communicated by universally understood signs that the French should come ashore and form connections with their women, Bougainville relates how one very resolute young girl climbed onto the ship:

In spite of all our precautions, a young girl came on board, and placed herself upon the quarter-deck, near one of the hatchways, which was open, in order to give air to those who were heaving at the capstern below it. The girl carelessly dropped a cloth, which covered her, and appeared to the eyes of all beholders, such as Venus shewed herself to the Phrygian shepherd, having, indeed, the celestial form of that goddess. Both sailors and soldiers endeavoured to come to the hatch-way; and the capstern was never hove with more alacrity than on this occasion.^[18]

Most commentary of this scene (which has been frequently cited and commented on) has pointed to the classical allusions Bougainville employs, particularly the

figuring of Tahiti in terms of Greek mythology read via Vergil.^[19] Of more interest for the present question, and hitherto unremarked in the literature, is the sheer theatricality of the scene. While the girl's act of divesting herself of her last (or only) vestige of clothing is itself spectacular enough, one should also focus on the spacial configuration evoked. The on-looker positions are multifarious and function to reinforce the intensity of the scene (focus and concentration). At least three different groups of spectators can be identified. When the girl clambers up onto the quarterdeck (a space usually reserved for officers), she is being viewed by those sailors and officers on deck (including obviously Bougainville); by the Tahitians waiting in the surrounding canoes; and lastly, and perhaps most importantly, she is beholden from below, from the hatchway where the sailors are working the capstern and whither they scramble to look up at the sight of 'celestial' splendour. By thus emphasizing a variety of intense, and clearly erotically driven gazes, Bougainville is practicing a kind of ekphrasis, with his description deliberately echoing the theatricality of baroque or more precisely rococo history painting.^[20]

There is another theatrical emphasis implicit in the scene, if one adds to it the account of the young volunteer on board the *Boudeuse*, Charles-Félix-Pierre Fesche. He reports that Venus was not alone but accompanied by an old man and several other Tahitians. He stresses the whiteness of her skin, "the envy of most Spanish women"; and instead of standing in splendid isolation, as Bougainville suggests, Fesche writes that the French:

came closer, looked, admired, touched; soon [...] the veil was lifted, and truly much more thanks to the Indian goddess herself than by the French. She followed the customs of her country, customs that have been destroyed in France by the corruption of our morals. What brush could paint the splendours that we appraised on the happy fall of that veil? A sanctuary consecrated for cupid himself and which he would share with no other. An enchanted little wood that the god himself had doubtlessly planted. We were plunged into ecstasy; a strong and sweet warmth befell our senses, we burned [...]^[21]

Unfortunately, in Fesche's view, decency prevents the French from converting thoughts to deeds. From her reactions, Fesche interprets that the Tahitian 'Venus' left the ship in disgust, annoyed with the French for their inability to overcome their inhibitions and make a sacrifice to the goddess. One could also gloss the scene in theatrical terms that the French preferred for obvious reasons to enjoy the spectacle as spectacle and not to cross the fourth wall to enter into direct intercourse with the scene being played out before their eyes.^[22]

Landings

The theatrical scene related above was enacted aboard ship, within the semantic space of the strangers/visitors. Equally dramatic, albeit usually less erotic scenes were played out when the Europeans attempted to their first landings on the island beaches. These events and the written and iconographical representations of them reflect further variations of categories of perception we can term theatrical.

The beach is a theatrical place, as the Australian scholar of Pacific history, Greg Denning, has noted. It is the privileged arena of encounter in the Pacific, the site of first contacts and new perceptions. It is liminal in the sense of *limen*, a threshold, marking different spheres of experience and thus difference in the most palpable terms. The theatrical nature of the beach had already been grasped and utilized by indigenous peoples before the arrival of the Europeans, and, we could add, it became even more so after they arrived:

In Tahiti, the island people made beaches the mythic meeting places

between Natives and Strangers. Their beach became enclosed in the ritual space of their place of worship, consciously set between land and sea. These temples, called Taputapuatea [...] were theatres for the Tahitians' deepest plays about the origins of their power and authority. They had had such theatres long before the arrival of the European strangers in 1767. [23]

The beach in Tahiti was thus prefigured and defined according to a cultural 'grammar' based on a series of oppositions: "violence and quiet, sea and land, stranger and native, politics and cosmology. No one met on the beach at Tahiti without bending to that grammar". [24] What Denning identifies as a structural principle of cross-cultural contact in Tahiti can be extended to embrace any first encounter situation in the Pacific. The deep structural significance of the beach, and more specifically, the first landings on it, the initial moment of going ashore, was so fundamental, so loaded with symbolic energy (ranging from the sexual to the political) that these events were given special attention by artists and engravers both during and after the voyages.

Many such landing scenes can be found illustrated in the early travel accounts, nowhere more so than in Cook's own published journal of his second voyage (1777). The official artist on board, William Hodges, easily the most accomplished of the painters and draughtsmen who accompanied Cook, produced some of the most famous images to emerge from the early voyages of Pacific exploration. *The Voyage to the South Pole* contains no less than four different landing scenes produced with all the complexity and import of history paintings. I wish to concentrate here on two – *The Landing at Middleburgh* (Tonga) (Fig. 1) and *Landing at Erramanga* (Vanuatu) (Fig. 2) – which stand in symmetrical opposition to one another. The one symbolizing peaceful contact between Native and Stranger, the other antagonism and violence. Both exemplify the conventions of history painting in the most fundamental sense that they attempt to capture in one charged moment events from a narrative sequence. The narrative is in this case Cook's accounts of the landings as described in the *Voyage to the South Pole*.

For *The Landing at Middleburgh* we find the following description:

Soon after, a party of us embarked in two boats, in company with Tioony, who conducted us to a little creek formed by the rocks, right abreast of the ships, where landing was extremely easy, and the boats secure against the surf. Here we found an immense crowd of people, who welcomed us on shore with loud acclamations. Not one of them had so much as a stick, or any other weapon in their hands; an indubitable sign of their pacific intentions. They thronged so thick round the boats with cloth matting, &c. to exchange for nails, that it was some time before we could get room to land. They seemed to be more desirous to give than to receive; for many who could not get near the boats, threw into them, over the others heads, whole bales of cloth, and then retired without either asking, or waiting to get anything in return. At length the chief caused them to open to the right and left, and make room for us to land. He then conducted us up to his house, which was situated about three hundred yards from the sea, at the head of a fine lawn, and under the shade of some shaddock trees. The situation was most delightful. In front was the sea, and the ships at anchor; behind, and on each side, were plantations, in which were some of the richest productions of Nature. [25]

If the landing on the island of Eua, part of the Tongan archipelago, is related as an encounter with a *locus amoenus*, then the attempted arrival at Erramanga, one of the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), was more like a *locus terribilis*. In contrast to the "pacific" intentions of the "Friendly Islanders" who bore only coconuts and "bales of cloth", the islanders at Erramanga were armed with "clubs, spears, darts, and

bows and arrows.” Despite ostensible signs of friendship – the offer of yams and coconuts – Cook remained on his guard. Once the landing boat was near the beach, the islanders tried to haul it ashore and snatch the oars from the boatsmen:

On my pointing a musquet at them, they in some measure desisted, but returned in an instant seemingly determined to haul the boat ashore. At the head of this party was the chief; the others who could not come at the boat, stood behind with darts, stones, and bows and arrows in hand, ready to support them. Signs and threats having no effect, our own safety became the only consideration; and yet I was unwilling to fire on the multitude, and resolved to make the chief alone fall a victim to his own treachery; but my musquet at this critical moment missed fire. Whatever idea they might have formed of the arms we held in our hands, they must now have looked upon them as childish weapons, and began to let us see how much better theirs were, by throwing stones, darts, and by shooting arrows. This made it absolutely necessary for me to give orders to fire. The first discharge threw them into confusion; but a second was hardly sufficient to drive them off the beach; and after all, they continued to throw stones from behind the trees and bushes, and, every now and then, to pop out and throw a dart. Four, to all appearance, lay dead on the shore; but two of them afterwards crawled into the bushes. Happy it was for these people, that not half our musquets would go off, otherwise many more must have fallen.[\[26\]](#)

The events related, and more especially the images depicting them, although different in time, place, and nature (the one friendly, the other antagonistic) are linked by the structural principles of Denning’s theatrical grammar of the beach: the moment of dramatic encounter and conflict, the acting out of events of political and cosmological significance.[\[27\]](#)

If we now turn our attention to the images, we can find theatricality of different kinds at work. On the most obvious level, the events depicted reveal the moment of *focus and concentration* identified above as constitutive of one aspect of theatricality in 18th century modes of perception. This element is in turn a prerequisite for history painting, a genre that throughout the 17th and 18th centuries was continually linked with drama and the theatre. The history painter was always in search of the “fruchtbarer Augenblick”, to cite Lessing’s felicitous term from his essay, *Laokoon*, linking past, present and future.

The formal parallels between both pictures are obvious: the division into sections follows the same principles of composition: the bottom left section of the pictures are reserved for the European landing party with the ship hovering in the background. The larger part of the picture is reserved for the massed crowd of natives who are framed by trees and bushes. The *locus amoenus* of the house in *Middelburgh* is replaced by the threatening presence of two naked and armed islanders in *Erramanga* who given added emphasis by the dark, ill-boding foliage of a large tree.

The Australian art historian and Pacific historiographer Bernard Smith has demonstrated that, although ascribed to him, neither engraving is based on drawings or engravings by William Hodges who was on board ship. The engravings by J.K. Sherwin are in fact after drawings by G.B. Cipriani, who, while one of the foremost contemporary history painters in England, is known to have never set foot in the Pacific. Smith argues that both pictures are constructed after ‘art’ and not ‘nature’. He buttresses his argument by referring to original drawings by Cipriani (for the *Erramanga* picture) and by quoting Georg Forster’s critique of *The Landing at Middleburgh*.[\[28\]](#) Forster was aboard ship and thus indirectly at least a kind of eye-witness. In his *Reise um die Welt* (1778-80) Forster levels harsh criticism at Hodges, to whom he logically ascribed authorship of *The*

Landing at Middleburgh:

Der Vorwurf, welchen man denen zu Captain Cooks voriger Reise in Kupfer gestochenen Platten mit Recht gemacht hat, daß sie nemlich, statt indianischer Gestalten, nur schöne Figuren vorstellten, die sowohl der Form als der Drapperie nach, im Geschmack der Antike gezeichnet wären; eben dieser Vorwurf trifft auch die vorgedachte Kupfertafel dieses Werks. Ja man sollte fast glauben, daß Herr Hodges seine zu diesem Stück nach der Natur gemachte Original-Skizze verloren und bey Entdeckung dieses Verlusts, aus eleganter mahlerischer Fantasie eine neue Zeichnung bloß idealisch entworfen habe. Kenner finden in dieser Platte griechische Conture und Bildungen, dergleichen es in der Südsee nie gegeben hat; und sie bewundern ein schönes fließendes Gewand, das Kopf und Körper bedeckt, da doch in dieser Insel, die Frauensleute Schulter und Brust fast niemals bedecken. Die Figur eines alten ehrwürdigen Mannes mit einem langen weißen Barthe ist vortreflich; allein die Leuthe auf *Ea-Uwhe* lassen den Barth nicht wachsen, sondern wißen ihn mit Muschelschaalen kurz zu scheeren. [29]

Empiricism triumphs over the conventionality of art in this critique; the actuality of "Indian forms" downgrade whatever beauty Classical Greek models may have to offer. While Forster's criticisms and Smith's evidence of faulty ascription make the images less interesting as documentary records and as potential documents of visual anthropology, it increases their value as indicators of the categories of aesthetic perception brought to bear on cultural encounters in the Pacific.

When viewed outside the parameters of the great nature versus art debate, the landing pictures develop an intrinsic complexity that derives from the very theatricality that Forster and Smith criticize. The *Landing at Middleburgh* is the picture that most clearly legitimizes the scene of colonial contact by its recourse to the theatrical conventions of history painting. Both Europeans and indigenous figures are represented in the flowing dress of neo-classicism. Smith refers to "sentimentalized neo-classical versions of the noble savage drawn in the manner of Angelica Kauffmann" [30], whereby the reference to Kauffmann is clearly not intended as a compliment. The almost complete homogenization of the figures results in a curious visual effect. The expected cultural contrast in terms of dress and physiognomy is eliminated in favour of a merging of the two sides of the dramatic encounter. The blurring of difference is not just a product of iconographical conventions, as can be seen when comparing *Middleburgh* with the other landing pictures. In the latter, there is considerable effort made to produce visual contrast between Native and Stranger, even if the result is not ethnographically accurate.

An explanation for this discrepancy made found if we start to interrogate its aesthetic and ideological implications. This can only be undertaken if we can find other iconographic contexts for the picture. Smith refers in general terms to neo-classicism and in particular to Angelica Kauffmann. Unfortunately, the picture he cites in comparison, *Telemachus and Mentor in the island of Calypso*, provides only vague stylistic parallels. [31]

An alternative ideological and aesthetic contextualization of *The Landing at Middleburgh* can be found in Charles Lebrun's famous painting *The Tent of Darius* (1661) (Fig. 3). Charles Le Brun's affinity to the theatre and to a theatrical depiction on canvas has long been recognised. Interestingly, it is precisely this stage-like effect which has been criticized as evidence of excessive theatricality. In the words of the art historian Jennifer Montagu: "He deployed the figures in his pictures like actors; each must be viewed as a separate statement". [32] *The Tent of Darius*, which represents the encounter between Alexander the Great and the family of the vanquished Persian king after the battle of Issus, became a model for painter and actors alike. For history painting it represented on the narrative level the French

classical ideal of concentration and focus on one particular moment. On the figural level it was a model for the facial and gestural depiction of the passions. [33]

Iconographical parallels between the two pictures involve clothing, facial expressions, gestures and even the framing device of foliage. An ideological reading would thus place Cook's peaceful landing in a context of conquest and submission: Alexander's moment of conquest in which a largely feminized Asia bows down to a masculine Europe finds a parallel in the Friendly Islands. Here a predominantly female or geriatric group of figures offers supplication to the erect figure of Cook propped up on his musket.

The conscious or unconscious iconographical links between Europe's domination of the Orient and its acquisition of Pacific territories places the representation of first encounter within the discursive frame of what Edward Said has identified as the theatrical nature of 'orientalism':

The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe. [34]

The discourse of Orientalism, according to Said, 'theatricalizes' the East in the sense that it reduces and defines it, rendering it observable as though the East or Orient were a stage on which the basically finite set of dramatic figures peopling the Orient made their exits and entrances for the delectation and edification of the Western beholder. This notion of theatricality designates a particularly Western style of thought which ultimately was brought to bear on most of the colonized world. Taking Said's use of the term one step further, we can postulate that theatricalization and colonialism are related phenomena and that theatricalization is, as Said suggests, closely connected with containment and circumscription, the essential perceptual prerequisites for power and control. [35]

Nature Framed

Once on land, the landscape itself provided the European beholders with first encounters that led the explorers to find recourse in theatrical vocabulary. On Cook's first voyage to New Zealand, a group went ashore at Tolaga Bay, led by the ship's naturalist Joseph Banks:

We saw an extraordinary natural curiosity. In pursuing a valley bounded on each side by steep hills, *we suddenly saw* a most noble arch or cavern through the face of a rock leading directly to the sea, so that through it we had not only a view of the bay and hills on the other side, but the opportunity of imagining a ship or any other grand object opposite to it. It was certainly *the most magnificent surprise* I have ever met with; so much is pure nature superior to art in these cases. [36]

As Smith notes, "Banks's description is carefully composed like a painting: the foreground the arch, the sea behind, the hills on either side, and to give a centre to the view, an imaginary ship". [37] Perceptions of the theatrical determine the response in at least two ways. The description is a textbook example of the Picturesque: the splendid scene that conforms to preordained notions of taste, but which requires a small degree of *mise en scène* (the mental addition of a ship), to attain perfection. The scene is equally determined by notions of the spectacular. Bank's emphasis on suddenness and surprise conforms on the one hand to ideas of the Sublime, [38] on the other to a theatrical notion of the spectacular with its two counteractive tendencies. The encounter with the arched rock is both a tableau in Diderot's sense, and its "Gegenbegriff", [39] a kind of *coup de théâtre*, in

the sense of being an "incident imprévu", although lacking in the example here the dramaturgical function that Diderot ascribes to the latter.^[40] In the encounter with nature's stage, the suddenness of the *coup de théâtre* merges into a tableau and the mode of the picturesque.

The framing device of the "arched rock" – provided by nature in this case – is reminiscent not just of a picture frame (as Smith suggests) but also of a proscenium arch. While not wishing to push the comparison with Diderot's terminology too far (for example with regard to the moral valuations implied by of the two terms),^[41] it can nevertheless be argued that the moment described is governed by a tension between two almost contradictory modes of perception: the pure aesthetic of the picturesque and the implicit moment of duplicity suggested by the theatrical.

The sudden apprehension of nature framed can be better comprehended if we look at two drawings made by artists in the party (Figs. 4 and 5). While of differing artistic quality, both include the imaginary ship which in this case can only be that of the explorers' themselves, the ocular proof of their presence in the landscape. The ship thus provides not only a foreshortened vanishing point, the aesthetic convention that Banks saw in his mind's eye, but carries also an ideological implication as this virgin landscape is now marked by the sign of exploration and discovery. This act of staging the landscape, of making it conform to the controlling optic of a central perspective, could then be interpreted as the aesthetic precondition of the colonial enterprise. Not only is nature framed in terms of European perceptual categories, but it is also controlled in Said's sense and made to look more like the stage that the European mind apparently required as a prerequisite for actual conquest and control.

Conclusion

What parallels can be detected between the shocking spectacles of proffered public copulation, the dramatic moments of beach landings and the theatrical conventions of pictorial representation? In different ways they conform to notions of the spectacular; they are loaded with energy and import and function on a metaphorical level as symptoms of the readiness of the encountered peoples to be conquered and dominated. The metaphors of spectacle employed by the early voyagers to the Pacific link the three defined fields of eighteenth century notions of theatricality. The perception of events so concentrated and focused in their intensity that they appear fit for dramatic representation (and later were in fact staged); other events, particularly the sexual encounters between Native and Stranger (which were not deemed fit for the public stage), were still perceived and represented in an explicitly theatrical terms. They represented for obvious reason an intensification of viewing and seeing, the primary mode of aesthetic perception in the 18th century. Finally, the duplicitous nature of the theatrical, its strained relationship with categories such as truth, manifested themselves, albeit unconsciously, in efforts to manipulate the "empirical actuality" of things perceived: Cipriani's recourse to history painting to theatricalize events, or the efforts by Banks and the artists on board the *Endeavour* to improve nature's already impressively framed *mise en scène*. Together, these modes of perception and representation fuse to render the Pacific a "theatrical stage affixed to Europe" (Said) on which many acts of aesthetic, economic, spiritual and political appropriation would be played out.

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[1] Bougainville 1772, p. 214.

[2] Bougainville 1772, 214.

[3] Burns 1972, p.13.

[4] Sandbothe 1998, p. 583.

[5] Sandbothe 1998, p. 583.

[6] Broadly speaking, the present theatricality debate can be divided into four phases or disciplinary fields. The sociological development, initiated mainly by the writings of Erving Goffman, define social life in theatrical terms of role-playing and employ metaphors from the theatre to describe conscious or unconscious social behaviors. Taking its lead from Milton Singer and Clifford Geertz, cultural anthropology has extensively utilized theatrical terminology in its analysis of cultural phenomena. The third broad development is loosely connected with poststructuralism and its philosophical suspicion of things theatrical (see Murray 1997). A fourth development is connected with the media and the perception that processes and events are increasingly 'staged' for presentation in televisual images. There are of course connections between the fields, but one should endeavour to distinguish between them.

[7] Barthes 1982, p. 75.

[8] Vgl. auch die Arbeiten von Eleonore Kalisch (1995) zu Adam Smith und seiner Theorie des "unparteilichen Zuschauers".

[9] Marshall 1986, 168.

[10] The term stems from Michael Fried 1980.

[11] Stafford 1984, p.3.

[12] Stafford 1984, p.6.

[13] Stafford 1984, p.8-9.

[14] Cited in Stafford 1984, p. 9, (emphasis added). One of the examples Stafford cites is the

Chinese garden, which came into vogue in the 18th century and where the sublime and the theatrical merged: "It was on this premise that William Chambers founded his Western interpretation of the Chinese garden as a theater filled with sudden transitions and striking formal oppositions. However, these paradoxical contrasts, in the British or French Picturesque garden, were illusionistically contrived and produced a fabricated, not an authentic, presence" (1984: 408-09).

[15] See Barish 1981.

[16] See *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford 1989, entry 'theatrical'.

[17] For a more detailed discussion of sexuality as a form of performative encounter in the Pacific, see Balme 2000.

[18] Bougainville 1772, p. 218-219.

[19] See for example Kohl 1981, p. 208-218; and Rennie 1985, p. 87-89.

[20] See Michael Fried's (1980) definition of theatricality in connection with rococo painting: i.e. figures who seem to be highly aware of the painter or the beholder, with this self-consciousness being reinforced by beholder figures in the painting itself.

[21] Fesche 1977, p. 80. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the French are by the author.

[22] Apart from the failure of the Europeans to overcome the strictures of civilization, Fesche is also, and perhaps most concerned that the French failed as Frenchmen to live up to their popular reputation as galant and passionate lovers.

[23] Dening 1992, p. 179.

[24] Dening 1992, p. 179.

[25] Cook 1777, p. 192-93.

[26] Cook 1777, II, p. 47-48)

[27] The political significance of such landings from the European perspective is clear. The cosmological and political implications of such meetings for ancient Hawaiian society for example has been analyzed in great details by Sahlins (1985) and criticized by Obeyesekere (1992). While not wishing to generalize from Sahlins' findings for Pacific societies in general, it is certainly legitimate to speculate on the basis of them on how such encounters were received by island peoples.

[28] Smith 1985, p. 73.

[29] Forster 1967, P. 376-77.

[30] Smith 1985, P.73.

[31] Quite apart from the problem of chronology, since the engraving of the painting Smith refers to postdates the appearance of the *Voyage to the South Pole* by some nine years (Smith 1985: 73).

[32] Montagu 1969, P. 190.

[33] See for example, one of the earliest manuals for actors, Charles Gildon's, *The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton*. Gildon recommends to aspiring actors that they study the picture: "The History Painters indeed have observ'd a Decorum in their Pieces, which wants to be introduced on our Stage; for there is never any Person on the Cloth, who has not a Concern in the Action. All the very Slaves in Le Brun's Tent of Darius participate of the grand Concern of [Darius' wife and daughters]. This would render the Representation extremely solemn and beautiful." Gildon 1710, P. 36.

[34] Said 1978, P. 63.

[35] As Said himself points out, orientalism as a discursive formation is by no means restricted to the geo-cultural area of Asia, or the Pacific for that matter. Many of the patterns identified here – the feminization of the colonized land, its reduction to a finite set of figures and situations – are equally applicable to the colonization of the New World. In fact, the history of the colonization of the New World by the Spanish was very much in the minds of the ‘enlightened’ explorers to the Pacific, who frequently evoked comparisons between the two areas.

[36] Cited in Smith 1985, p.28; emphasis added.

[37] Smith 1985, p. 29.

[38] See here Stafford 1984, p. 408.

[39] Szondi 1977, p. 212.

[40] According to Diderot's use of the two terms, the *coup de théâtre* functions primarily on the dramaturgical level: it involves a sudden change in the course of the action, whereas the tableau is a scenic picture consisting of a static, painterly arrangement of persons on the stage. As Martin Meisel (1983) has demonstrated, the *coup de théâtre* could easily fuse with the tableau to form a “realization”, a frozen moment, of significant action.

[41] According to Diderot's system, the tableau is the more, truthful' form of representation: “Une disposition de ces personnages sur la scène, si naturelle et si vraie, que, rendue fidèlement par un peintre, elle me plairait sur la toile.” Cited in Szondi 1977, p. 213. Szondi interprets Diderot's critique of the *coup de théâtre* as symptomatic of bourgeois society's suspicion of the unexpected: “weil für die bürgerliche Gesellschaft des 18. Jahrhunderts das Unvorhergesehene realiter verfehlt war”, 1977, p. 213.

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ISSN 1618-2006 (für das Journal)

zuletzt bearbeitet am 14.07.11