

1 Crowd scenes

What beings surround me?

– Hume

If ‘friend or foe’ is the implicit first question of cross-cultural contact, in the Pacific it is articulated in a context that has disappeared from view: that of the crowd.¹ In the literature of early European encounter in Oceania, crowds are everywhere, and the experience of the mass is presented as overwhelming. Gauging crowd feeling – ascertaining whether the bodies that surround one are fascinated or afraid or aggressive – is imperative to the instigation of trade, and the possibility of obtaining essential supplies. Robertson’s account of the *Dolphin* surrounded by hostile canoes at ‘King George’s Island’ in 1767 contrasts with Bougainville’s depiction of pirogues manned by clamorously friendly Tahitians crowding his vessel less than a year later, but both observers give a sense of the immediate effect of mass scrutiny and the need for interpretation it instigates. The focus of this book is the relationship for which crowd scenes set the stage: the highly particularized connection of *taio*, through which access to local resources is ultimately mediated. That term or its cognates – almost invariably the first word of early European–Oceanic encounter – emerges, again almost invariably, from the crowd scene. In European accounts, it seems, the named friendship requires the background of the unnamed mass to become distinguishable. On the other hand, as reports of the death of James Cook show, the hostile crowd remains intransigently collective: harbouring rather than surrendering up its guilty individual.

¹ Paul Lyons, discussing nineteenth-century American representations of Pacific islanders, suggests that ‘fear and friendship . . . comprise poles of the discursive continuum along which Euro-Americans anticipate and/or retrospectively organize their relations with Oceanians . . . Recurrently in the archive, “friends” are those from whom there is nothing to fear’ (Lyons 2006:98). As should already be clear, however, my own analysis seeks to acknowledge friendship as a concept charged with resonances that exceed the logic of binarism.

Pressing, exhilarating, unnerving as a presence within accounts of contact, the Oceanic crowd has nonetheless remained curiously elusive of critical attention. There are a couple of notable exceptions: Marshall Sahlins has focused on crowd dynamics in support of his thesis that the Hawaiian reception of Cook amounted to deification (I will look at his analysis later in this chapter), and Greg Dening's substantial body of work on the theatricality of Pacific encounter, with its recognition of a 'dialectic between audience and actors' (Dening 1996:118), opens up a space for the examination of group reaction.² Yet the Oceanic crowd becomes the primary focus of analysis exclusively in studies of population, where accounts of crowding are scrutinized in an attempt to gauge the impact of European disease and cultural decimation upon the lives of Pacific peoples. Within this field, however, there is no consensus. The Hawaii State statistician Robert Schmitt, responding to David Stannard's intervention in the Hawaiian population debate, quotes his own observation that 'Guesses of the size of crowds – a frequent element in . . . pre-censal estimates – are notoriously unreliable, typically producing totals two or three sizes the actual number' (Stannard 1989:115). His comment, which articulates an assumption behind much work on Oceanic populations, taps into a broader conservative discourse on crowds that represents such manifestations as *inherently* unreliable, by virtue of their capacity to camouflage individual motive within collective action. Norma McArthur's study of pre-contact population figures (McArthur 1967) equated conservative estimates with scholarly rigour, and, as Stannard pointed out, there has been a concomitant tendency within more recent Pacific scholarship to reduce the dimensions of the crowd as an expression of resistance to the fatal impact thesis (Stannard 1989:xvi). Other population studies, such as Eleanor Nordyke's *The Peopling of Hawai'i*, have repeated conservative estimates of pre-contact figures to support a representation of islands under siege from post-contact population influx (Nordyke 1989:13–27). Among scholars concerned to reduce their dimensions, crowd scenes are implicitly presented as scenes of fantasy, to be dispelled by 'realistic' computation. Stannard, on the other hand, reassesses the same documents of contact from Hawai'i to present a compelling case for maximizing estimates of pre-contact Oceanic populations. The same crowds, then, have been read alternatively as metonym or symptom: as part of a larger whole or as sign of a special event. This chapter aligns itself with Stannard's work in focusing on the crowd as an absent presence within recent Pacific

² Dening's structuring of *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (1992) as a series of 'Acts' has provided a model for this chapter's division into 'Scenes'.

scholarship, that produces a contradiction in our current account of early contact. In addressing both the importunate materiality and subsequent invisibility of the crowd within European accounts of the Pacific, I acknowledge the silent accommodation of representation to a reality of depopulation, while also asking what it might mean for a persistent European romanticization of Pacific islands to think of them as crowded places.

Retrieving a sense of the Oceanic crowd from the archive is an intricate process: and not merely because crowd scenes are composed of history's extras. Against the insistent representation of the press of bodies on the beach, of the throng and bustle of contact, must be weighed the force of a collective European imagining of islands as inherently uncrowded; the populous city's other; blank terrain for the metropolitan subject, castaway or self-exiled, to act out or self-fashion.³ The image of the desert island morphs too easily into that of the deserted or decimated Pacific island, ravaged by imported disease or weapons or intoxicants, by slaving and blackbirding. Romantic fantasies and post-contact realities converge to depopulate islands. And yet, to focus simply on the tragic history of depopulation is, ironically, frequently to reiterate other romantic tropes, of loss and lapse, and to diminish the force of new crowds active in modern Oceanic contexts.⁴ By retrieving the crowdedness of Pacific islands in this chapter, I am setting a physical scene for my discussion of cross-cultural friendships that acknowledges the robust presence of Oceanic multitudes at the time of contact. In friendship-formation, particular bodies emerge from the crowd's collective body, forging bonds that contribute to its dissolution, but also instantiate its resilience.

Scene I: The Bay

Only the mass makes it possible for the sexual object to become intoxicated with the hundred stimuli which it produces.

– Walter Benjamin

³ For an extended discussion of the European imaginative investment in islands, see Edmond and Smith 2003:1–18.

⁴ Epli Hau'ofa has made a related point in a series of important essays (1993, 1995, 1998). He argues that the tendency to perceive Pacific islands as 'tiny, isolated dots in a vast ocean' promoted the notion that 'the countries of Polynesia and Micronesia are too small, too poor and too isolated to develop any meaningful degree of autonomy'. As Hau'ofa points out, this is 'an economistic and geographic deterministic view of a very narrow kind, that overlooks culture history' (Hau'ofa 1993:7, 6). The conspicuous absence of the crowd from Pacific scholarship may be partially attributed to the same geographic determinism. A significant way in which Oceanic crowds have re-emerged as a presence in the Pacific in recent years is through protest movements of various kinds, in particular against weapons testing. This is reflected in both scholarly and fictional writing from Oceania, for example Hau'ofa 1998:400 and Morales 2002.

A year before he departed for the Pacific as botanist on James Cook's second voyage of exploration, Johann Reinhold Forster translated Bougainville's account of his arrival in Hitia'a, Tahiti in April 1768. Bougainville had described an enthusiastic welcome from the Tahitians that began in the harbour:

As we came near the shore, the number of islanders surrounding our ships increased. The periguas were so numerous all about the ships, that we had much to do to warp amidst the croud of boats and the noise . . . The periguas were full of females; . . . Most of these fair females were naked; for the men and the old women that accompanied them, had stripped them of the garments which they generally dress themselves in. (Bougainville 1967:217–18)

The ship's cook singled out a partner from the female throng, but Bougainville reported that, 'He had hardly set his feet on shore, with the fair whom he had chosen, when he was immediately surrounded by a croud of Indians, who undressed him from head to feet. He thought he was utterly lost, not knowing where the exclamations of those people would end, who were tumultuously examining every part of his body' (Bougainville 1967:219). The crowd on the beach encourages the cook to proceed with a public coupling, a task for which he has, however, been disabled by the shock of exposure. His illegitimate landing pre-empts and parodies the sanctioned arrival ceremony subsequently described by Bougainville:

When we were moored, I went on shore with several officers, to survey the watering-place. An immense croud of men and women received us there, and could not be tired with looking at us; the boldest among them came to touch us; they even pushed aside our clothes with their hands, in order to see whether we were made exactly like them . . . They sufficiently expressed their joy at our arrival. (Bougainville 1967:220)

The formal landing must now figure as a re-enactment of the cook's first encounter; an official public undressing that more successfully channels the narcissistic thrill produced by the fascination of the crowd, by explicitly retrieving this fascination as a form of tribute.

Bougainville and his crew experience arrival through a staged series of crowd scenes – in harbour and on shore, official and unofficial – that are not simply imperial triumphal. Against the backdrop of the crowd, in a spirit of 'intoxication' that appears oblivious to the distinctions of race, class and sex, individuals engage in a kind of competitive self-objectification that risks abashment in pursuit of exaltation. The crowd here – primarily feminine, and both insistently and generously seductive – is in distinct contrast to the version of the Tahitian crowd found in George Robertson's account of the *Dolphin's* visit to Tahiti the previous year. The boats that crowd around the English vessel are manned primarily by males. Where

women are proffered it is as a lure, that must initially be ignored in the interests of safety:

their [*sic*] was upwards of five hundred canoes round the ship, and at a Moderate Computation there was near four thousand men – most of the trading canoes which lay round the ship, and dealt with our people, had a fair young Girl in Each Canoe, who playd a great many droll wanton tricks, which drew all our people upon the Gunwells to see them, when they seemd to be most merry and friendly some of our people observd great numbers of stones in every canoe, this created a little suspection. (Robertson 1948:154)

In Bougainville's text, threat becomes, bathetically, an isolated case of performance anxiety. The current of excitement that runs through the crowd is picked up by the crew in a movement that traces the trajectory of voyeurism. Freud argues that the scopophilic instinct shifts its focus from an extraneous object to the subject's own body, and includes a significant auto-erotic element (Freud 1984:127).⁵ In Bougainville's crowd scenes, the French crew members rediscover an excitement or experience a panic about their individual bodies in the light of crowd enthusiasm: often simultaneously.

The crowd acts as both stimulus and prophylactic. Bougainville's surgeon Vivez writes of Tahitian women, 'as soon as we landed, they gave us half their clothing displaying every sign of passion and leaving us only with regret, and all the discomfort we felt, we who were not on our guard against this lack of scruples and the preconceptions of our climes, that we were unable to express our vulcanism in public because the crowd did not leave us' (Dunmore 2002:232). Where Vivez suggests that desire and the crowd are incompatible, the florid account of his fellow crew member, volunteer Charles-Félix-Pierre Fesche betrays a more conflicted attitude to the offer of public sex. Describing in engorged prose a scenario in which a 'young girl aged 12 or 13' offers herself explicitly while her parents look on, Fesche concludes:

The summons was very appealing and the athlete caressing her was too skilled in the art of fencing not to take her right away had not the presence of the surrounding 50 Indians, through the effect of our prejudices, put the brake on his fierce desires, but however great the ardour that drives you, it is very difficult to overcome so quickly the ideas with which you have been brought up . . . It is only someone who is doing or thinks he is doing evil who fears the light. We hide

⁵ Barbara Benedict has argued that 'rather than sexual discovery motivating the pleasure of curiosity, as Freudian thought suggests, it is the historical phenomenon of curiosity that sexualizes discovery' (Benedict 2001:8). I would suggest, however, that Freud's discussion of voyeurism makes precisely that point. I have discussed the scopophilic dimension of the project of 'discovery' elsewhere (Smith 2003:117).

in order to carry out such a natural action, they do it in public and often. Several Frenchmen, less susceptible to delicacy, found it easier, that same day, to shrug off these prejudices. (Dunmore 2002:257)

Despite his attempt to round his fable off with a moral about natural humanity, Fesche is clearly aroused as much as inhibited by the presence of the crowd. Prince Nassau-Siegen, who was a passenger on Bougainville's ship and appears to have been the experienced 'athlete' described by Fesche, also takes the event as a lesson in overcoming social shame, attempting to contextualize the ritual through a specious comparativist framework: 'If wise people carry out these ceremonies in association with the planting of seeds, why should the reproduction of the finest species of things ever created not also be a public festival?' (Dunmore 2002:283). Serge Tcherkézoff has convincingly argued that Tahitian invitations to participate in public sex can best be understood in terms of local ritual practice and mythical belief. According to Tcherkézoff these encounters were focused rather than uninhibited, reflecting the desire to acquire the *mana* of the European through conception rather than libidinal play (Tcherkézoff 2004: 405–509). Tcherkézoff's hypothesization of the Tahitian perspective focuses on the youth of the female participant and on rituals of undressing and dance, without reflecting on the role of the crowd in the libidinal economy of the scene. Yet the crowd is essential to a further dimension in which the Tahitian girls are co-opted into European desire. The presence of the crowd enables the figuration of the Tahitian girl as unselfconscious. It offers the French crew members a theatre in which to divest themselves of those purportedly cultural scruples that are the barrier between their behaviour and the 'natural'. And this rhetoric of naturalization strains in turn against a competing voyeuristic drive in the narrative that is released and fuelled by the presence of the crowd.⁶

In the task of translating Bougainville, we might speculate, Forster learned what to anticipate from an Oceanic arrival scene. He learned to expect to be overwhelmed. It wasn't until 17 August 1773, over five years after Bougainville, that the botanist experienced his own Tahitian landfall at Vaitepiha Bay on Tahiti-iti. During a difficult anchoring, he

⁶ Matt Matsuda offers a compelling and intricate analysis of the ways in which 'sensuality and erotic attraction' became 'consituents of a French presence in the Pacific': he argues that French colonialism, as a broad Pacific island and rim phenomenon, was 'amorously defined' (Matsuda 2005:3). An alternative, much discussed British scene of public sex in Tahiti, taken up by Tcherkézoff among others, is the 'Point Venus scene' described by Cook and redacted by Hawkesworth (Cook 1955:93–4; Hawkesworth 1773: II, 128). For a detailed discussion of the ambiguities of Cook's depiction of the scene, which, like Tcherkézoff's, focuses on the potentially ambivalent compliance of the female subject, see Rennie 1998.

had been called upon to participate in unaccustomed deckhand labour, and as a result was suffering from exhaustion and an injured foot. His account of the arrival is marginal: he writes that the pain from his exertions ‘& the intense heat . . . caused me a Faintness & in the night I awoke from a pain in my breast [. . . The next morning] I saw such a crowd of people about our Ships, that it is hardly credible’ (Forster 1982:326). Like Bougainville’s and Robertson’s, Forster’s experience of the crowd channels a fluctuating sense of being physically besieged; here by fatigue and illness rather than desire or hostility. The crowd externalizes his sense of sudden self-distrust, becoming the locus of an incredulity at what his eyes witness that might otherwise reflect upon his own physical distress: ‘it is hardly credible’. George Robertson observes that the varying physical and mental dispositions of crew members infected their perceptions of the crowd as hostile or benign. Noting that about thirty seamen were ill when the *Dolphin* arrived at Tahiti, he comments astutely on how resilience and temperament factored into the ways in which the promise of shore, and the generosity or aggression of its crowds, were weighed:

We past the most of this night in various reflections according to the Different dispositions of the people, the Greatest part of the Ships Company made sure of finding all sorts of refreshments, and lookd upon all the Deficultys of procuring them to be nothing. Oythurs supposed nothing could be hade without blows, and made a great many Iddle suppositions, with respect to the savage Disposition of the natives and some thought it imposable to Land here. (Robertson 1948:142)

Reading the crowd becomes a reflection, in the first instance, of the individual’s state of mind.⁷

Certainly Robertson’s own account of the crowd that surrounded his ship is prey to temperamental fluctuations. He seems concomitantly conscience-struck by the possibilities of misreading that emerge in recounting the *Dolphin*’s encounter with the crowd at sea. Initially, massed canoes are construed as threat: ‘at this time their [*sic*] was a great number of their canoes along side, and they began to be a Little surly – this made us fire a nine pound shot over their heads’; ‘we observed a great Number of Canoes surrounding her, which made us suppose they meant to Attack her, the Capt. therefor Orderd her signal to be made and fird a nine pounder’ (Robertson 1948:137, 138).

⁷ Robertson’s reflections here anticipate a later European and American literary interest in the crowd as psychological projection. Walter Benjamin’s essay on the *flâneur* references, among others, the writings of Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe in exploring the relation between mental states and the shifting shapes of the crowd (Benjamin 1983:50).

Interwoven with references to such demonstrations of violence, presented as performative in status, but more than occasionally targeted, are mentions of attempts to signal friendship; ‘making all the freindly signs that we could think of’, which are matched by Tahitian ‘signs of friendship to entice our people ashoar’ (Robertson 1948:144, 148). By the time a clear premeditated attack takes place it is so enmeshed in contradictory signals of violence and friendship on both sides that crowd behaviour becomes, in Robertson’s account, less a fulfilment of the predictable than a problem of misreading. Performances segue into violence, revealing their performative aspect, on both sides. The crowd ‘behaved freindly’, but at a signal threw stones: the sentries fired ‘in hopes that would frighten them’ but to no effect, and so the ‘Great Guns’ shoot among them. The superiority of European firepower is registered in Robertson’s subsequent description of the guns’ effect, ‘which struck such terror amongs the poor unhapy croad that it would require the pen of Milton to describe, therefore too mutch for mine’ (Robertson 1948:154). The adjectives ‘poor unhapy’, rarely associated with collectives, switch the focus from the strength of massed bodies to the broken condition of those attacked, and the crowd becomes suddenly reduced to a figure of pathos. It is not clear whether Robertson’s reference to Milton here is merely an invocation of the canonical author, or a more specific reference to the sympathetic complexities engaged by Milton’s depiction of the crowd of fallen angels: ‘So thick the aerie crowd/Swarm’d and were straitn’d; till the Signal giv’n’ (Milton 1674: Book I, ll.775–6). The *Dolphin’s* response to the Tahitian crowd was the most violent encounter ever recorded between Europeans and Tahitians, and even as Robertson attempts to justify the violence that was perpetrated, a different sense of proportion causes the crowd to shrink and shift in retrospect, its motives, then so clearly hostile, now thrown into question.

Scene II: The Beach

The people were very civil & no way molested them except their Numbers which Novelty had made follow him.

– Samuel Wallis

The crowd that surrounds and overruns the ship is only the more intrepid part of the greater multitude that lives on shore. As ships coast Pacific islands, crew members read between the crowds that venture out and those that stay on land. Captain Samuel Wallis was severely ill during a large part of the *Dolphin’s* stay at Tahiti, and thus witnessed the bloodier part of the crew’s interactions with the islanders at a

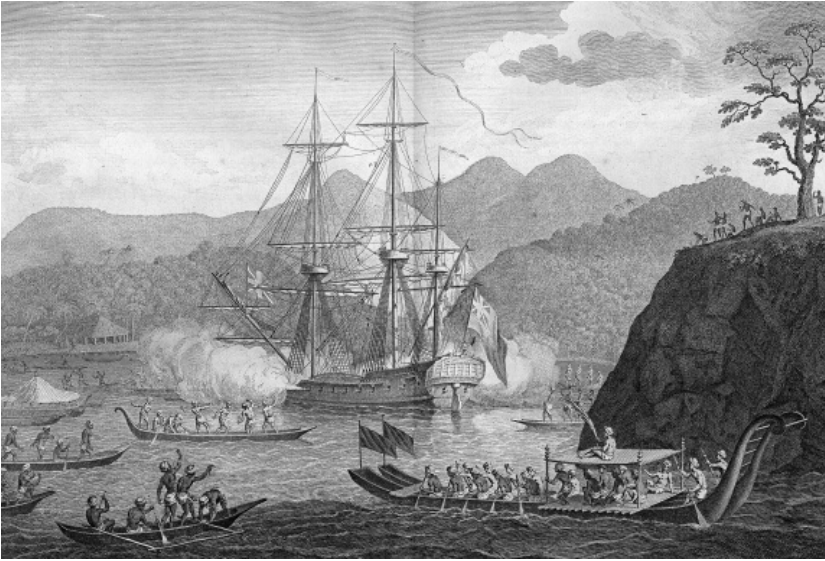


Figure 1. The crowd in the bay watched by the crowd on shore: 'A representation of the attack of Captain Wallis in the *Dolphin* by the natives of Otaheite', from John Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages undertaken by the order of His present Majesty*, 1773.

distance or vicariously. In his log, he describes his vantage point on the crowd, suggesting that its vast numbers were sufficient provocation to a violence on his crew's part that by implication becomes defensive: 'I being very ill came & looked out of the Gallery Windows':

a great Number of the Inhabitants appeared from amongst the trees on each side of the River, and approached our people that were on the Beach who made them signs to keep at a distance at the same time we saw from the Ship, vast Crouds of People coming over the Hills, from every way seeming in great haste and severall hundred canoes came round a Point about a Mile from the Ship, being full of Men, and from a Creek to the Eastward, a great Number More and they all pull'd close along shore & made directly for our Boats – On this I made the signal for the Boats to come off[f] . . . (Wallis 1766–8: I, 1, 3)

Robertson's account of the attack by and on the Tahitian canoes includes an awareness of a further crowd on shore acting as audience and goad (see Figure 1):

Whilst this skirmish lasted all the Bay and tops of the Hills round was full of Men Women and children to behold the onset and I dare say in great hopes of sheering all our nails and Toys, besides the pleasure of calling our great

Canoe their own, and having all of us at their mercy, to ill or well use us as they thought most proper – but in place of that, when they came all running down to receive their Victorious friends, how terrible must they be shocked, to see their nearest and dearest of friends Dead, and to see to pieces in such a manner as I am certain they never beheld before – to Attempt to say what this poor Ignorant creature thought of us, would be taking more upon me than I am able to perform. (Robertson 1948:156)

The crowd on shore converts the bay into an amphitheatre, allowing Robertson to imagine the sentiments of an audience disappointed of expected outcomes. Again, a level of poignant identification is achieved once the massed body of the crowd is re-envisaged in terms of particular relations of friendship. Friendship is the connection through which sympathy can be channelled. The projection of personalized relations into a scenario that overtly demonstrates the disequilibrium of European and indigenous power exemplifies a rhetorical manoeuvre described by Markman Ellis as ‘paradigmatically sentimental’: ‘troping the potentially dangerous (. . . insurrection) – a sublime figure of power – into the personal’ (M. Ellis 1996:98). Yet we might also note that where he imaginatively transforms broadscale violence into a violation of friendship, Robertson finds himself not more facile in managing the politics of encounter, but demonstratively bereft of words.

The crowd disguises status. This creates problems for Europeans in trying to establish individuals of significance with whom to parley. Bougainville eventually fixes on tattooing as a mark of distinction, one so remote from his own culture that he must stress its veracity:

As for indications of social differences, I believe (and this is not a joke) that the first one, the one that distinguishes free men from slaves, is that free men have their buttocks painted. Then the amount of paint on the buttocks and other parts of the body, the beard and moustaches, the length of the nails, hair hanging down or gathered up over the head, these nuances distinguish, I believe, the various degrees. (Dunmore 2002:64)

It is nuance that distinguishes, and the crowd is not a nuanced space. The collective body of the crowd does not disclose individual bodily difference, let alone details such as degree of buttock tattooing or nail length. Pierre Bourdieu has exhaustively and circuitously analysed the notion of distinction as a structure of relations: arguing that the system of class conditions is ‘a system of differences, differential positions’ each defined ‘by everything which distinguishes it from what it is not and from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference’ (Bourdieu 1984:170–1). The crowd does not allow for the space between subjects that renders relations and their distinctions visible. Therefore, attempts to control the crowd in Oceanic

contact scenes are partly about making hierarchies of relation apparent. In J. R. Forster's account of his arrival, the capitalized Captain and Chief work together to establish the significance of their interaction by separating themselves from the crowd: 'had the Capt not exerted himself a whole crowd of [the Chief's] followers would have entered the boat; but we took none in but the Chief & his wife . . . The crowd was great, but when they came too near, there were men with long poles who beat the crowd unmercifully & broke several poles upon them' (Forster 1982:338). The journal of Don Raimundo Bonacorsi, lieutenant on the 1772–3 voyage of the *Aguila* to ascertain the possibility of establishing a Catholic mission in Tahiti, records, by contrast, a relatively seamless movement from crowd scene to particularized friendship between high-ranking crew members and Tahitians:

When they came on board the first time, swarming up the side from their canoes and clambering in from the portholes, they kept repeating the word '*Tayo*' (which means 'friend' in our language) and were not content until we answered them with the same word and embraced them. And the 'Heris,' [*ari'i*] as they call them, or caciques, for the most part each took one of us for his particular *tayo* to such good effect that we could never separate ourselves from such an one for an instant. (Corney 1913–18: II, 51)

Extracting significant faces from the crowd is imperative to identify individuals of distinction, who control resources, and thus to convert scenarios of theft into relations of trade. The crowd is always potentially a crowd of thieves: the theft that is ubiquitous in European accounts is carried on most effectively in a press of bodies. Yet rank cannot wholly resolve the ambiguity the crowd provokes in the European mind. Bougainville, who also observed that the 'cacique . . . drives them away with a stick when they bother us', noted that the Hitia'a *ari'i* (chief) Reti 'saw the return of items stolen from us even though he himself is a great thief, but he wants to be the only one to steal in his kingdom', while the account of Caro, second-in-command of the *Étoile*, elaborates: 'The king is the first and greatest of the thieves' (Dunmore 2002:64, 206).⁸ Bonacorsi quickly identifies a general 'proneness to steal whenever an opportunity presents itself to them', adding that 'even the Chiefs were not exempt from this propensity' (Corney 1913–18: II, 57). Contact muddles relations of distinction: the individual of significance achieves, not social separation from the thief, but rather a monopoly on theft.

⁸ Bonacorsi's and Bougainville's term 'cacique' is derived from the colonial Spanish term for Latin American chiefs.

In these earliest Tahitian encounters, the segue from crowding and theft to individuated relations of trade, so effectively promoted, as we shall see, through *taio* and cognate Pacific friendships, is clumsily managed in ways that equally serve to breach hierarchies of distinction. After further reciprocal violence on land, Robertson records, the crew of the *Dolphin* seeks to commence trade with the Tahitians. Wary now of the crowd, ‘the Gunner only allowed one old man to bring a fowl and some fruit over and weaved the oythers back’ (Robertson 1948:169). Wallis gives a different account of the motivation, which he acknowledges was the result of bad behaviour on the part of a crew member: ‘Punished Wm Welch for Cheating one of the Inhabitants of a Cock, & ordered that no man should trade with them but with an Officers Leave’ (Wallis 1766–8: I, 2). Robertson, however, is intent on the ways in which the policy impedes trade: ‘as Mr Harrison allowd non but the old man to bring any trade over the River, he was not able to bring a tenth part of what they hade in the time’. The numerous potential relationships between members of the crowd and the ship are funnelled into a monopoly of exchanges between two designated individuals, with the crowd held at bay on each side:

the Captn gave strick Orders to the Gunner not to let any of our men go across the River, nor to allow above two or three of the Natives to come on our side, neather was he to allow any of the men to trade with the Natives, but to carry on all the trade himselfe, this made our trade go on but slowly and prevented discoveries of all kinds for some time. (Robertson 1948:169)

Robertson’s concern is that, in the arbitrary exchange relationship of gunner with old man, hierarchy is overridden:

Some of the Young Gentlemen who was on the spot thought oytherways, they say this gave Umbrage to oyther people of the Island, particularly to some who hade the Appearance of the first rank, and this old man was only of the middle rank, and seemd to pay a great deal of respect to some of the others, who seemd to have servants with them, and great plenty of stock, but would send non of it over by the old man. (Robertson 1948:170)

Behind two arbitrarily selected individuals, the crowd and the comestibles and curiosities, it brings bottleneck. The false hierarchy that the ‘Young Gentlemen’ identify here is a reflection of the situation of the crew. Robertson later spells out the breach of shipboard rank that may have led to the officers’ identification of infringements of status within the crowd:

[The first Lieutenant, William Clarke, would not] permitt any of the young Gentlemen to trade for any thing, this in my Oppinion was behaving very Ungentile to all the Young Gentlemen, several of them having past for Officers, and the rest all young Gentlemen ready and willing to learn the Duety of a

seaman and Officer – . . . I cannot help thinking a Gunner a very improper person to command any Gentleman that has served his time in the Navy upon the King's Quarter Deck. (Robertson 1948:175)⁹

In the mediated monopoly of these early exchanges, the crowds of both ship and shore remain crowds, unstratified and, therefore, still unknown. It is only towards the end of his account of Tahiti, when a 'queen' is identified in the high-ranking Purea, that crowd behaviour becomes properly resolved. Robertson writes, 'she laid hold of my hand and introduced me to all the principale people, and made them all shake hands with me . . . We then set out Arm in Arm for the Palace, and all the Principale part of the Inhabitance came after us. When we got in Sight of the Palace a great number of people came out to receive us' (Robertson 1948:212). As has been pointed out numerous times, the identification of Purea as 'queen' was a misconception.¹⁰ It is one that allows, however, for the definitive salvaging of crowd behaviour as homage rather than threat. In the slippage of the word 'principale' between signifying quantity and distinction, the crowd at last becomes ordered to Robertson's satisfaction (see Figure 2).

The first British and French visits to Tahiti constitute, discursively and historically, two poles of exploitative encounter: one regrettably violent, the other emphatically libidinal. Their contact does not get much beyond the crowd scene: the *Dolphin's* crew are the only Europeans in the archive of Tahitian encounter not to register the word *taiio*; the French seem more excited by public coupling than individualized sexual connection. In later accounts, however, the crowd scene emerges as one of traffic, rather than a prelude to traffic. Yet the trade relations instantiated in the crowd remain poised between potentials for theft and violence and for a novel erotics. The crowd's animated collective enacts a fraught problematic of cross-cultural encounter, in which selves become identified with cultural artifacts, and evaluation is at once arbitrary and absolute. The crowd is also a market, and, as Walter Benjamin

⁹ Robertson quibbles constantly with this figure throughout his account, whom he refers to as 'Growl' and 'Lieut. Knowall', over issues of rank and authority. As Stuart Murray recognises, 'No other journal of the late eighteenth century comes close to Robertson's for the interpenetration of these issues of text, authority and representation' (Murray 2004:72).

¹⁰ For example, Kerry Howe notes, 'Wallis took the reputation of her sovereignty back to Europe, but he was quite mistaken. She certainly had respect in the Matavai Bay region because of high family ties there, and she was married to Amo, tribal chief of Papara in the Teva-i-uta tribal coalition, who also had kin ties in the Matavai area. Purea therefore had influence . . . but was by no means a queen of the island' (Howe 1984:129). On the shared investment of Purea herself and European voyagers in the notion of Purea as queen see Arii Taimai 1976:51; Henry 1928:15; Denning 1996:148; Salmond 2003:50–5.



Figure 2. The crowd reconfigured in homage: ‘A representation of the surrender of the island of Otaheite to Captain Wallis by the supposed Queen Oberea’, from John Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages undertaken by the order of His present Majesty*, 1773.

observed, it inflates the commodity: ‘The concentration of customers which makes the market, which in turn makes the commodity into a commodity, enhances its attractiveness to the average buyer’ (Benjamin 1983:56). This was equally the case outside the metropole. When Johann Reinhold Forster arrived in Tonga, the presence of the crowd announced the commencement of trade, heralding a feverish exchange of commodities: ‘The shore & rocks were crowded with people. They harraed when we came near, & immediately began trading with us, & offered us Cloth & other trifles to sell viz. Mother of Pearl Shells, which they hung on their breast; brasselets of mother of Pearl; Fishhooks; little Paddles & Stools of Clubwood; Bows & Arrows, Clubs’ (Forster 1982:337). Although he tries to dismiss the items displayed as trifles, there is much evidence of the ‘unregulated desire’ for acquisition that Harriet Guest has elucidated in this passage and other accounts of Tonga from Cook’s voyages (Guest 2007:111–12). To the degree that either party determines what Guest calls the ‘terms of trade’ in first contact, this is surely the prerogative of the Oceanic crowd, both by virtue of numbers and by the fact that it supplies items of subsistence, as well as fluctuating commodities. Yet desire on both sides is, indeed, unregulated

in a practical sense, since the value of the items is at the moment of contact literally up for grabs. Benjamin portrayed the petty bourgeoisie of Baudelaire's Paris as not yet 'aware of the commodity nature of their labour power'; thus enjoying an identification with the commodity 'with all the pleasure and uneasiness which derived from a presentiment of its own destiny as a class' (Benjamin 1983:59). So too, the exchanges of early contact may be charged with the presentiment of a subsequent relationship of power, but they are characterized also by a pleasurable identification of self with object that turns eminent women into queens, sailors into both sought after objects and speculative connoisseurs. Once again, this seems predicated on a dialectic of scopophilia, in which the desire to be looked at is inextricable from the desire to observe.

Scene III: The City

A mixed mob of ferocious men, and of women lost to shame . . .

– Edmund Burke

Although the crowd has been the object of a substantial body of historical analysis and theoretical speculation, it has almost exclusively been discussed as a metropolitan phenomenon. Historians and sociologists who seek to determine the individual composition and motivations of the collective, and psychologists who posit a crowd mentality or will distinct from individual consciousness, though theoretically opposed, agree in representing the crowd as a product of urbanization. Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* proposed that 'Men might have gone on disregarding [the crowd] if the enormous increase of population in modern times, and the rapid growth of cities, had not more and more often given rise to its formation' (Canetti 2000:20–1). John Plotz's *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics*, while taking Canetti to task for his evocation of a monolithic crowd mentality, concurs that, in the English context, crowds materialized in important new ways with urban expansion: 'When London became the first postclassical city of one million inhabitants around 1800, quantity changed the quality of the city's life . . . Mundane outdoor life came to include random encounters with strangers, inexplicable aggregations, sudden eruptions of violence, and permanent sites for encountering others *en masse*' (Plotz 2000:1). For both Canetti and Plotz, the crowd is a phenomenon naturalized in relation to a concept of crowdedness. Once metropolitan spaces become crowded, crowds will perforce 'erupt' (Plotz 2000:1; Canetti 2000:20): they are the by-product of population density.

The challenge of this chapter, on the other hand, is to disassociate metropole and crowd: to imagine crowds aggregating in spaces not conceived of as crowded. There is little precedent for such an approach. Studies that have hitherto gestured towards an interpretation of the crowd as paradigmatic of self–other relations tend nonetheless to retain an urban focus. Mark Harrison prefaces his *Crowds and History* with the observation that

Our association of differentness and foreignness – of the alien and the threatening – with the existence of faceless far-away hordes is an aspect of human psychology with crucial implications for the formulation of social policy and foreign relations the world over. The supposed intimidation represented by mythical packs of strangers is what makes possible international and intercultural mass violence. (Harrison 1988:xiii)

Yet Harrison pulls back from the broader implications of this statement to focus his study on four British urban communities. His remarks counterpoint a conservative tradition that associates the crowd with the eruption of the foreign or ‘primitive’ within urban society (Le Bon 2004:19, 28, 32). Stanley Tambiah’s *Leveling Crowds* (1996) examines the role of collective violence in peripheral (South Asian) settings of ethnonationalist conflict, but his case studies remain urban. George Rudé’s seminal work on the crowd in the eighteenth century looks at rural village and market-town crowds in pre-industrial Britain and France. However, he emphatically characterizes the period he discusses as transitional: his telos is still ‘the new “industrial” society’ (Rudé 1964:5). Durkheim’s discussion of the manifestations of a collective ‘effervescence’ linking the modern crowd with totemic religious cultures avoids the metropolitan bias, but this is with the objective of comprehensively analysing totemic religion: he is not primarily a theorist of the crowd (Durkheim 2001:154–62).

Although crowding is typically figured as a metropolitan phenomenon, it is associated in some of its more politicized European forms with rural production and the spectre of famine. In the English context, as Walter Shelton, Thomas Ashton and Richard Sheldon, as well as Rudé, have all shown, the eighteenth century was one of chronic food rioting (Shelton 1973:21; Ashton 1959:159; Sheldon 2004:204–47; Rudé 1964:33–46).¹¹ Shelton’s particular focus is on the waves of hunger rioting in southern England in 1766, the year before Wallis laid claim to Tahiti for George III. The popular disturbances were, he argues, caused by high food prices,

¹¹ For the French side of this history, see Steven Laurence Kaplan’s discussion of cereal dependence in old regime Europe (Kaplan 1976).

coinciding with the movement of wheat to ports. Elsewhere I have argued that this economic climate provides a context for the representation of Tahiti and other Oceanic islands as spaces of bounty (Smith 2006). Yet island crowds also harboured a potential for scarcity, resisted in most voyaging accounts but occasionally surfacing in images which link famine to horrific manifestations of crowd theatre. William Pascoe Crook reports that during a famine following the failure of the breadfruit crop on Tahuata in the Marquesas in 1797:

Many perished with hunger among whom was a woman named Houo ... Her relation to the chiefs family, so far from affording her support, yeilded [*sic*] her no relief from the savage mockery of her half-starved neighbours. Her flesh being entirely wasted from her bones, her strength therefore perfectly exhausted, the natives amused themselves with giving her a slight push, which was sufficient to bring her to the Ground, against which her bones rattled like those of a Skeleton. (Crook 2007:107)

European readings of the crowd in bays and on beaches were always in part about ascertaining an issue of provision: they indexed the island's potential for bounty or scarcity. But here again the crowd could offer mixed messages. Did a mass of bodies indicate a sustaining natural fertility or competition for limited resources? Crook's description of the emaciated woman mocked by the group that surrounds her offers a horrific counterpoint to the spectacles of public sex that titillated the first European visitors to Tahiti.

The scene might also recall some of the more notorious theatre of the French Revolution, in which aristocratic ties equally, 'so far from affording ... support, yeilded ... no relief from the savage mockery of ... half-starved neighbours'. The French Revolution is generally regarded as the historical impetus for later theorizations of crowd psychology (Rogers 1998:2; McClelland 1989:6; Ginnekin 1992:3; Tambiah 1996:267; Nye 1975:63).¹² In the nineteenth century, seminal works by Thomas Carlyle, Hippolyte Taine, Jules Michelet, Gabriel Tarde and, most famously, Gustave Le Bon attempted to account for the mass mobilization of the underclass by figuring the multiple bodies of the crowd as motivated by collective will. From assumptions about the metropolitan constitution of the crowd grew attendant claims about the effects of urban anonymity (Engels 1952:24), which found poetic embodiment in Walter Benjamin's theorization of Baudelaire's figure of

¹² Susan Barrows associates later-nineteenth-century crowd theory not only with the revolution of 1789, but more specifically with its aftermath in the European revolutions of 1848, the suppressed Paris uprising of 1871 and 'the chaos of the Third Republic' in France (Barrows 1981:43, 7–42; compare Nye 1975).

the *flâneur*. Benjamin writes of the crowds of Berlin, Paris and London as confluences in which the individual may seek to hide; to achieve a paradoxical solitude. He comments on the uniformity of bodies in the urban crowd, 'in which no one is either quite transparent or quite opaque to all others' (Benjamin 1983:49). This is, of course, a very different experience of crowding from that registered by European voyagers, who *stand out* in the crowd that surrounds them. So successfully has the crowd been elided with the modern city, that experiences of crowding within situations of imperial contact, where the shock and pleasure for the European visitor is of being encompassed by bodies that are different rather than the same, and thus of being simultaneously singled out and engulfed, have consistently been interpreted as experiences of othering rather than of crowding (Pratt 1986:35). Yet to adopt Plotz's terminology, the Pacific beach became in the late eighteenth century a 'permanent site' where encounters, both staged and frighteningly random, took place, and voyagers experienced 'inexplicable aggregations' and 'sudden eruptions of violence'. Account after account records the experience of being inundated by the crowd: being noticed and enveloped by a mass of bodies emerges as a trope of encounter, through which the visitor constitutes and authorizes their experience.

The presence of peripheral crowd scenes within accounts of first contact raises a number of questions about the politics of encounter. What are the dynamics of identification that take place within the crowd, and how do they figure or alter in crowds that assemble at scenes of contact? Is the dialectical relationship between the body of the individual and the body of the crowd in any way comparable to that between recognition and repudiation that takes place in confrontation with cultural difference? We might also rethink through the crowd the dynamics of authority and voyeurism played out in cross-cultural observation. Most often the Oceanic crowd is represented as a spontaneous demonstration of curiosity about European bodies and culture. The European desire to perceive crowding as a testimony to cultural fascination might be seen as another aspect of a broad European project of self-elevation (Obeyesekere 1992:177). Yet surely something more complex is at stake here. If, as I intimated in my reading of Bougainville, Europeans relish as often as they are disconcerted by the experience of being sampled, fondled, or having their artifacts or their skin marvelled at, they are enjoying in a more immediate sense a process of objectification than of veneration. While curiosity has become an important field of inquiry for recent scholarship, the focus has been upon European curiosity about other societies: on cultures of collecting and connoisseurship, that testify to a European desire to look, to hoard, to possess (Benedict 2001;

Leask 2002; Elsner and Cardinal 1994).¹³ What of the desire to be valued, exposed, fingered by the curious, that is the corollary of scopophilia and that is so sublimely gratified by the crowd?

As Gillian Beer has observed, any concomitant withdrawal of attention was registered harshly in European discourse:

The absence of wonder or surprise was one of the phenomena that most disconcerted Western travellers in their encounters with indigenous people and which they described as most animal-like. Curiosity was so strong a driving force in Western expeditions, and so valued as a disinterested or 'scientific' incentive as opposed to the search for material gain, that the absence of an answering curiosity was felt as rebuff or even insult. (Beer 1996:62)

Scientific imperatives aside, recognizing the dialectical relationship between inattention and scopophilia can nuance our picture of the dynamics of encounter. Well into the nineteenth century, in situations where it is clear that they were not making first contact, travellers insisted on the novelty of their status as representative Europeans. The fantasy of entering territory where 'no white woman had previously set foot' recurs throughout the Fijian letters of Constance Gordon-Cumming, written between 1875 and 1877, which highlight the author's nonchalant intrepidity by depicting her capacity to conjure domesticity (*My Fijian Home*) within a recently cannibal context. Visiting a village of whose residents she claimed 'most of whom were, till within the last two years, uncompromising cannibals, and who, moreover, have never before beheld the face of a white woman' (though it had for some years been under missionary influence), Gordon-Cumming constructed a theatre space – 'I have hung up my plaid-curtain and mosquito-net, thereby greatly interesting a crowd of spectators, who had previously watched the wonderful process of consuming chocolate and biscuits' – favouring performance over hospitality as her mode of interaction (reprinted in Lamb, Smith and Thomas 2000:295, 297–8).

The same titillation at being the object of attention informs a related set piece that recurs in descriptions of Oceanic crowd scenes, where islanders purportedly marvel at the colour and texture of European skin. Melville plays with this scenario in *Typee*, his novel based on a brief sojourn on the Marquesan island of Nuku'hiva in 1842. In the valley of

¹³ The focus on curiosity as a European prerogative responds to, and to some degree rearticulates, what Harriet Guest has identified as an assumption that 'curiosity and civilization are . . . intimately intertwined'. She notes that in the late eighteenth century, 'curiosity was one of the characteristics that those allocated to the lowest rungs of the ladder of cultivation were thought to lack, whereas, in contrast, its impartial or indiscriminate avidity was seen as a hallmark of high civilization' (Guest 1996:xli).

Taipei, the protagonists Tommo and his friend Toby have ‘the whiteness of our limbs’ scanned: two sailors who have already presented themselves as a cut above the average find their pretensions confirmed when their skin is fingered with connoisseurship: ‘They felt our skin, much in the same way a silk mercer would handle a remarkably fine piece of satin.’ Melville recognizes that the desire to deduce primacy of contact from such a reception is a compelling fantasy: ‘their singular behavior almost led me to imagine that they never before had beheld a white man; but a few minutes reflection convinced me that this could not have been the case’. He has Tommo settle instead for the runner-up title of ‘first white men who ever penetrated this far back into their territories’ (Melville 1996:94–5). The nineteenth-century fantasies of first encounter Melville parodies, which seek to re-engage tropes of the crowd scene – of the surrounded and marvelled at western body – are perhaps compensatory. They reinvigorate all the Oceanic bodies that have disappeared in the interim, and wish away the bodily contacts that were responsible for their decimation. If later visitors can still imagine that their skin is being seen for the first time, they can also fantasize that their belated first contact remains pristine, unsullied by the destructive interactions that have preceded it. Such marvelling responses on the part of Oceanians may in fact equally have been gestures of mimicry or hospitality: the two faces of a canny recognition of those western fantasies of primacy that are being acted out in such scenarios. Yet given the voyeuristic excitement we have identified as an aspect of cross-cultural crowd dynamics, perhaps what is being registered here is a kind of narcissistic alienation effect, in which the European’s own body is seen *as if* for the first time, through the projected and internalized gaze of the excited mass.

Scene IV: The Rocks

Contagion is particularly dangerous in crowds.

– Montaigne

Axiomatic to crowd psychology is the notion that the crowd can turn. If massed individuals are regarded as having one mind, that mind is fickle. ‘They may be animated in succession by the most contrary sentiments’ wrote Gustave le Bon (Le Bon 2004:19). Herbert Blumer argues that, ‘not having a body of definitions or rules to guide its behavior and, instead, acting on the basis of impulse, the crowd is fickle, suggestible and irresponsible’ (Blumer 1969:73). Alan Kerckhoff, following Blumer, regards the ‘erratic behavior, and increased suggestibility’ of individuals in crowds as exemplifying an ‘hysterical

contagion' (Kerckhoff 1970:83). Charles Tilly highlights the capacity of crowds to 'shift rapidly into collective violence and then (sometimes just as rapidly) back into relatively peaceful relations' (Tilly 2003: 229). Elias Canetti discusses at length the tendencies towards 'reversal' and 'transformation' within crowds (Canetti 2000). More recently, John Plotz has summed up the arguments against crowd psychologizing, pointing in particular to an ahistoricist tendency in such crowd theories to figure 'an inarticulable essence' to the crowd. While his argument that 'claims about the innate and timeless qualities of "the" crowd were made tactically in order to describe and contain the unruly energies of suffrage-minded working-class assemblies' (Plotz 2000:4) is convincing in relation to the commonly understood metropolitan territory of the crowd, notions of mass psychology remain helpful as we begin to consider crowds outside the precincts of the city: not least because crowd psychology maps onto and incorporates a discourse of savage unknowability.¹⁴ In this section I will argue that ignoring crowd psychology in the Oceanic context reiterates a refusal to recognize Oceanic crowds, which in turn exemplifies scholarship's broader analytic compartmentalization of metropolitan and peripheral societies.

The turning of the crowd at Kaleakēkua Bay on 14 February 1779, which resulted in the death of James Cook upon the rocks of the foreshore, has in turn become a fiercely contested scene within Pacific scholarship. The thesis that Cook was identified in the Hawaiian mind with the god Lono, originally proposed by Gavan Daws (Daws 1968a; 1968b:1–29), was masterfully developed by Marshall Sahlins into an encompassing interpretation that brought together historical and structural anthropological analysis. Sahlins's detailed investigation of the correspondences between events leading up to Cook's death and those of the Hawaiian ritual calendar provoked an impassioned attack from Gananath Obeyesekere, who focused on agendas of local politics rather than mythical ritual and drew attention to the compromised nature of Sahlins's sources, which were primarily the work of mission-trained nineteenth-century Hawaiian historians (Kamakau 1992; Malo 1951). It has now become impossible for scholars engaging with Cook's legacies to avoid returning to this scene and this debate. Anne Salmond, Nicholas Thomas and John Gascoigne all assess the relevance of the Lono analogy in their studies of Cook's voyages, Rod Edmond has offered a judicious analysis of the post-colonial implications of the Sahlins/Obeyesekere debate, and recently Glyn Williams has devoted

¹⁴ Kathleen Wilson notes the widespread tendency to compare French Revolutionaries to 'savages' (K. Wilson 2003:91).



Figure 3. The crowd on the rocks: Francesco Bartolozzi, 'The Death of Captain Cook', 1784.

an entire volume to a comprehensive re-evaluation of the events and implications of the death (Salmond 2003:386–416; Thomas 2003: 386–404; Gascoigne 2007:214–19; Edmond 1997:51–61; Williams 2008). I want here, nonetheless, once again to review that scene and that debate, since it is my argument that readings of Cook's death have been stymied by the same blindness that readings of Oceanic crowds that I have identified in broader scholarship. In trying to establish whether structured ritual or universal rationalism influenced the events of Cook's reception, both Sahlins and Obeyesekere effectively systematized crowd behaviour, neglecting the ways in which ritual can devolve into unstructured activity and an encompassing irrationalism.

Sahlins's compelling analysis of Cook's reception and death in Hawaii makes sense of the crowd and the friendships and exchanges it instantiates in mythical-religious terms. He argues that Cook was received in Hawaii as the representation of the god Lono, a figure of peace and productivity, during the Makahiki festival, the time of Lono's ascendancy. In a series of remarkable coincidences, aspects of Cook's voyaging around the Hawaiian islands corresponded to the rituals of Makahiki; particularly his prolonged circumnavigation of the island

group, prior to his second Hawaiian landfall on Hawai'i island and his initial, scheduled departure. However, when the *Resolution* sprung its foremast and Cook's ships were forced back to Hawai'i to make repairs, it was the season of the warlike god Ku, Lono's rival, who was represented by the Hawaiian *ali'i*¹⁵ Kalei'opu'u. Cook/Lono became in this context a threatening figure, to be attacked rather than revered. Sahlins thus relates the crowd of welcome to the festival spirit of the Makahiki and its subsequent absence to the inappropriateness of Cook's return within the Hawaiian ritual calendar:

During the first hectic days at Kealakekua . . . 10,000 Hawaiians crowded on the waters and shores of the Bay – and all over the ships – in exuberant welcome of Lono. The welcome of 17 January 1779 had been the greatest reception any European voyager ever had in this Ocean . . . Now, on 11 February, the Bay was quiet, relatively empty of people and these, according to some accounts, showed nothing like the same amicability. (Sahlins 1972:23)

In a later version of his thesis, Sahlins describes Cook's initial welcome as the Pacific exploration crowd scene *par excellence*:

Nor in all his experience had Captain Cook ever seen so many Polynesians assembled as were here in Kealakekua Bay. Besides the innumerable canoes, Hawaiians were clambering over the *Resolution* and *Discovery*, lining the beaches, and swimming in the water 'like shoals of fish'. Perhaps there were 10,000, or five times as many people as normally lived there. (Sahlins 1985:105)

This is the apotheosis of the crowd: the most crowded crowd of Cook's experience, and one whose density is also abnormal in Polynesian terms. When it later turns hostile it will be transformed in Sahlins's prose, in a classic rhetorical move, into a 'mob exulting over him' (Sahlins 1985:106).¹⁶

What does Sahlins make of the crowd? Something pretty close to what John Plotz would recommend. He eschews psychology, and instead both historicizes and systematizes. He doesn't require a collective mentality; 'we need not suppose that all Hawaiians were convinced that Captain Cook was Lono; or, more precisely, that his being Lono meant the same to everyone' (Sahlins 1985:121). He makes a distinction between the unfolding of the event 'as individual action and as collective representation' and reads between these two planes of interpretation, asserting nonetheless the ordered logic of the group dynamic: 'those recurrent dimensions of the event in which we recognize some cultural order' (Sahlins 1985:108). Finally, he parses the crowd, eliciting from what

¹⁵ Chief: equivalent to Tahitian *ari'i*.

¹⁶ For a detailed exploration of the rhetorics of crowd and mob, see McClelland 1989.

has appeared a collective action the salient individual. For, as he notes, this has remained a resiliently collective execution: 'In historical texts dating from this day [of Cook's death] to fifty-odd years later, some eight or ten different men are identified as "the man who killed Captain Cook", referring to the one who first stabbed him with the iron dagger' (Sahlins 1985:108). Tracing social status and motive, Sahlins proceeds to identify the individual culprit from among the crowd on the Kealakekua rocks. Yet this detective work, even as it historicizes faces in the crowd in what might be regarded as an inherently politicized manoeuvre, is also a form of crowd control. The exulting 'mob' that Sahlins described earlier is reduced to one coherently motivated and manageable individual.

Gananath Obeyesekere's critique of Sahlins, which aims to 'restore . . . the dimension of reflectiveness and rationality to Hawaiian thought' (Obeyesekere 1992:95), inevitably performs a similar operation on the crowd, thus moving it further still from notions of contagious collective behaviour. Indeed the kinds of cultural presumption Sahlins highlights in his rebuttal of Obeyesekere become nowhere more apparent than in his treatment of the crowd as possessing one highly rational mind. Thus, rejecting Sahlins's interpretation of the Makahiki crowd as the definitive Oceanic crowd, Obeyesekere writes of the crowd phenomenon that greeted Cook on Hawai'i simply that 'large crowds would surely have been inevitable, because the ships had been cruising around the islands for over seven weeks, rousing the curiosity and sense of expectation of the native population'. He is concerned to represent the crowd as primarily motivated by a desire to give rather than take: as generous rather than importunate: 'The remarkable feature about the Hawaiian experience is the Hawaiians' extreme generosity with food and provisions' (Obeyesekere 1992:46). He chastises Sahlins with manipulating figures to create, from the example of a single woman, 'the impression that the decks of the ships were crowded with women gleefully shouting' as the houses of their countrymen were torched (Obeyesekere 1992:68). Conversely, he reprimands Sahlins for reducing the potential crowd of Cook's assailants to one, rightly observing that 'nice sociological distinctions' are not apparent in crowd scenes, and that individual culprits are hard to uncover: 'It should also be remembered that the melee in which Cook was killed took only a few minutes and by all accounts was a scene of confusion' (Obeyesekere 1992:185).

Sahlins's subsequent demolition of Obeyesekere's thesis, *How 'Natives' Think: About Captain Cook, for Example*, places a new emphasis on the phenomenon of the crowding that greeted Cook's ships. In an earlier article, 'Captain Cook at Hawaii', Sahlins had directed attention towards a novel source of evidence: 'the whole history of popular desire

and delight that parallels the chroniclers' descriptions of incidents and events' (Sahlins 1989:412). In particular he emphasized two facets commonly associated with metropolitan crowding: spontaneous agglomeration and democratic constitution. He represented the Makahiki crowd as a mass movement: 'it was spontaneous and popular, not just something whipped up by the powers-that-were'; 'the ordinary people, were really excited' (Sahlins 1989:412, 413). Emphatically, he recuperated this crowd for a 'history from below'.¹⁷ Dismissing 'a priori and tired ideas about how the ruling classes dupe the masses', Sahlins argued that

On the contrary, the Hawaiian celebration of Cook as Lono was from the beginning a collective movement, even as Lono was traditionally a popular god . . . Likewise, the Makahiki, which celebrated the advent of Lono as a *fête* of pleasure and *communitas*, was a popular festival, marked for a time by the eclipse of the established order, or its royal rituals and human sacrifices, by the reign of a carnival king. And in the same way again, the veneration of Captain Cook in the Makahiki season of 1778–9 was a popular demonstration, spreading spontaneously around the island of Hawai'i even faster than his ships could carry him, so that, by the time he reached Kealakekua, he was greeted by a rejoicing people. (Sahlins 1989:413–14)

The crowd Sahlins describes here is a ritual crowd, but one with a mind of its own. Its responses are structured yet voluntary. I will return to this notion shortly, but first I want to look at where this crowd takes Sahlins in his rebuttal of Obeyesekere.

In *How 'Natives' Think*, the paradox of collective spontaneity is repeatedly invoked by Sahlins to portray the particular flavour of the Makahiki festival and Cook's incorporation within it. Of Lono he writes: 'His annual return, coinciding with the return of the sun and the revival of nature, is the occasion of collective joy' (Sahlins 1995:27). He juxtaposes a call for renewed attention to Hawaiian 'attitudes, gestures and emotions' with a sense of their ritualized – that is, recurrent and collective, dimensions (Sahlins 1995:36). His culminating description of the arrival of Cook as Lono stresses its 'epiphanal dimensions', the 'tumultuous scene', the 'pandemonium', the 'shoals of people swimming about' and the jubilation of 'the people who, in great numbers, clambered aboard the ships. And on board as well as in the water, on the shore and in their canoes, people were singing, dancing, shrieking, clapping and jumping up and down' (Sahlins 1995:47). Although Sahlins is himself careful to balance a sense of the ritual and spontaneous

¹⁷ Examples of this approach to the crowd include Rudé, Thompson, and Stallybrass and White.

elements of crowd behaviour – just as his broader project is concerned to balance the mythical and historical dimensions of encounter – he quotes approvingly naval historian Richard Hough, who depicted the scene at Kealakekua as one of mass hysteria:

Neither the thieving, nor the unprecedented numbers, accounted for the hysterical element, which grew rather than diminished as this day of noise and pandemonium wore on. It was rather as if the ships had by chance arrived at some culmination in the lives of this community, a climax that would affect their destiny. Polynesian excitement was one thing, and they were familiar with that. In this bay the whole population gave the impression of being on the brink of mass madness. (Hough 1979:185; Sahlins 1995:47)

What Hough is prepared to countenance, and Sahlins will only footnote, is a notion of crowd behaviour as motivated by a collective psychology that eludes control. Hough's terminology is redolent of Canetti's typologies of crowd rhythm and discharge. It is 'on the brink' and capable of transformation. Sahlins's ritual crowd on the other hand recalls Canetti's domesticated religious crowd: 'the faithful are gathered at appointed places and times and, through performances which are always the same, they are transported into a mild state of crowd feeling sufficient to impress itself on them without becoming dangerous, and to which they grow accustomed' (Canetti 2000:25). Hough's hysterical crowd with its capacity for fickle transformation becomes, through Sahlins's analysis, an explicable, indeed logical crowd. The question it throws up: 'What did it mean?' (Sahlins 1995:47), can be answered. This ritual crowd is precisely not fickle, changeable, hysterical. It is necessarily not the same crowd that killed Cook. It is a joyous crowd that will be displaced by the inherently psychically different ritual crowd of a different ritual season.

Yet the crowd also unravels efforts at consistent interpretation. Having asserted the demographic and ideological unity of the Kealakekua crowd, Sahlins goes on to contradict this, and to refigure the crowd as a stratified, multi-vocal and socially manipulable space. He now writes:

It need not be supposed that all Hawaiians were equally convinced that Cook was Lono, or, more precisely, that his being 'Lono' meant the same to everyone . . . The special enthusiasm of the old folks . . . may not have been shared by the entire population, especially the people working priestly estates . . . The priestly herald preceding Cook and making everyone prostrate at the cry of 'Lono' was not the only indication that the Hawaiian powers-that-be had unique possibilities of objectifying their own interpretations. (Sahlins 1995:65)

Such concessions make way for the reiteration of Sahlins's thesis that the crowd surrounding Cook at his death can be reduced to

an identifiably motivated individual. In the service of his unfolding interpretation, the crowd morphs from a psychically unified to a socially constituted body.

In tracing the shifting representation of the crowd in debates about Cook's death, I hope to have given some indication of the way in which crowds remain both instrumental to and elided within Pacific scholarship. They are either extraordinary phenomenon or irrelevance. And this is because the crowd is not *seen*. Is the crowd that assembles at Kealakekua so numerically different from the thousands that Robertson estimated thronged Matavai Bay to greet the *Dolphin*, or is it simply that crowds so infrequently figure in subsequent European representation of the Pacific that *we* cannot encompass them? Sahlins's call for greater attention to the emotions of the multitude needs to be sustained across different Oceanic scenarios and beyond singular events. Where Sahlins focuses constructively on the crowd in relation to Cook's reception in Hawai'i, he loses sight of it at the scene of his death, opting to reduce the crowd to the single culprit. It is integral to Sahlins's interpretation that the crowds of Cook's reception and of his death are ritually constituted and therefore inherently different crowds, rather than one fickle body: crowds of Carnival and Lent, performing alternately rather than reacting unpredictably. What happens if we instead read Cook's death as a crowd phenomenon that exceeds the cultural particularities of ritual and exemplifies elements of a more universalized mass dynamic? In pursuing this possibility I want to sidestep rather than ignore the ethnographic particularities whose contributions to Cook's death seem to have become the sole arena for contests of interpretation, and to propose that the Hawaiian crowd might have behaved, and might be understood, like a metropolitan crowd, in terms of a crude crowd psychology. In other words as a perversely motivated collective, rather than as always a conglomerate of ethnographic subjects.

On the night of 13 February 1779, the *Discovery's* cutter was removed from the ship while anchored in Kealekekua Bay. Cook resolved to take Kalei'opu'u hostage to secure its return. Initially the *ali'i* came willingly with Cook: however, his wife and two lesser chiefs argued against his departure, and he became resistant. Meanwhile, at the other end of the bay, Marines had killed a high-ranking *ali'i* and news of his death travelled towards Cook via the crowd. I want to suggest that Cook's death was the result of crowd feeling.

The most detailed descriptions of the death come from Charles Clerke, commander of the *Discovery* and Cook's second in command, from David Samwell, surgeon's mate, and from the Marine lieutenant Molesworth Phillips, who was on shore with Cook in the period

immediately leading up to his death. These accounts, written from different perspectives on ship and shore, and with different degrees of evident narrative shaping, concur in figuring the death as a crowd event. Clerke, who watched through a spyglass from the ship – a position similar to Wallis's when the *Dolphin* attacked the Tahitian crowd – emphasizes the crowd's constituent indeterminacy and confusion: 'I could not distinguish Persons in that confused Croud', 'Capt Cook and four Marines had fallen in this confounded fray' (Cook 1967:534). His sense of the crowd appears to have been shaped by his own impotence as he watches from afar. Depicting the crowd as confounding and its actions as unpremeditated initially allows him to avoid questions of culpability. Yet ultimately he acknowledges that the crowd renders the British command culpable. Clerke concludes: 'Upon the whole I firmly believe matters would not have been carried to the extremities they were had not Capt Cook attempted to chastize a man in the midst of this multitude' (Cook 1967:538).

Samwell, on the other hand, who subsequently published *Narrative of the Death of Captain Cook* (1786), and was the most ambitious in literary terms of the three narrators, represents the crowd as a tactical body. 'It became necessary to resist the Impetuosity of the Indians who in a body of several Thousands of people were pressing upon them, and ready to seize on the first advantageous [sic] opportunity of falling upon our Men should they turn their Backs to them & retreat with Precipitation and Disorder,' he writes. After two Hawaiians were shot, 'The Ardour and Impetuosity of the Indians were by this a little repressed, they were staggered & the body of them fell back' (Cook 1967:1197). The 'staggered' Hawaiian crowd comprising a less dense body, Samwell argues, this was the moment for the Marines to have acted as one: to recognize their own crowd force. Instead they behaved as the classic panicked crowd described by Canetti: 'The individual breaks away and wants to escape from it because the crowd, as a whole, is endangered . . . the more blows he inflicts and the more he receives, the more himself he feels. The boundaries of his own person become clear to him again' (Canetti 2000:27). Cook's small crowd of Marines disintegrated before the crowd of Hawaiians: 'no sooner had the Marines made the general Discharge but the body of them flung down their pieces and threw themselves into the water, on this all was over, the Indians immediately rushed down upon them' (Cook 1967:1197–8). This scenario, in which firearms and thus Europeans lose their authority, and friends become foes as the Oceanic crowd recognizes its collective power, had been exactly anticipated by Cook in his published account of his second voyage:

Three things made them our fast friends, Their own good Natured and benevolent disposition, gentle treatment on our part, and the dread of our fire Arms; by our ceasing to observe the Second the first would have wore off[f] of Course, and the too frequent use of the latter would have excited a spirit of revenge and perhaps have taught them that fire Arms were not such terrible things as they had imagined, they are very sencible of the superiority they have over us in numbers and no one knows what an enraged multitude might do. (Cook 1969:398)

In Samwell's account, the Hawaiian crowd is impetuous, but not confused as in Clerke's view: rather, it takes strategic advantage of confusion. The Marines, on the other hand, enact and suffer the negative effects of crowd confusion: 'the boats Crew were busy in taking the Marines in who had escaped from the Indians, which creating unavoidable confusion & disorder in such a small boat prevented them entirely from using their fire arms & giving assistance' (Cook 1967:1199). Samwell's Hawaiian crowd is represented, by contrast, as achieving coordination even within confusion. This is something different from Sahlins's effort to make sense of the crowd by breaking it down to motivated individuals. Samwell emphasizes, rather, the self-reflexive force of the crowd precisely as a multitude: one that understands and utilizes its own collective capacities.

Molesworth Phillips's eyewitness report confirms that it is the unexpected ability of the Hawaiians to act together – to behave as a crowd – that contravenes his party's expectations:

The business was now a most miserable scene of confusion – the Shouts and Yells of the Indians far exceeded all the noise I ever came in the way of, these fellows instead of retiring upon being fir'd at, as Capt Cook and I believe most People concluded they would, acted so very contrary a part, that they never gave the Soldiers time to reload their Pieces but immediately broke in upon and would have kill'd every man of them . . . (Cook 1967:536)

Phillips's claim is that the ineffectualness of guns was in this context unanticipated, but what in fact emerges as truly unaccountable is the collective action of the crowd. We might compare his report with Robertson's evocation of the Tahitian first encounter with European weapons, cited earlier, where he described how the *Dolphin's* guns 'struck such terror amongs the poor unhapy croad'. If the *Dolphin's* inaugural encounter with Oceanic crowds has provided a template of crowd panic on which Cook's crew in part bases its assumptions, the Hawaiians adopt another mode of crowd behaviour. Acting as a body they revolt, thrusting confusion back against Cook and his marines, where it is registered in synaesthesia: 'all the noise I ever came in the way of'. It is as a crowd, rather than as either Sahlins's or

Obeyesekere's contingent collection of coherently motivated individuals, that Hawaiians inspire Europeans with a sense of the limits of their power.¹⁸ The descriptions of the death of Cook are descriptions of European loss of command, of European loss of control. In Canetti's words, 'no-one has been appointed executioner; the community as a whole does the killing' (Canetti 2000:50).

Scene V: The Island

Though my house is quite full in the morning, though I go down to the forum hemmed in by droves of 'friends', I can find no one out of that great crowd with whom I can freely make a joke or sigh familiarly.

– Cicero

If it seems important to recognize that a model of universalized crowd behaviour might pertain as well to islands as to cities, however, it remains necessary to acknowledge that Oceanic crowds are in many ways specific in their manifestations. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to hold both these aspects of crowd dynamics in mind through a reading of William Bligh's 1792 account of the *Bounty* voyage, a text whose constitutive events coincided with the early riots of that 'original' crowd scene, the French Revolution (Dunphy 1982:281–2). The account, though written in the first person and derived from Bligh's log, was published while he was back in the Pacific completing his breadfruit mission. It therefore received some editorial shaping from James Burney, who had been twice in the Pacific with Cook, and whose own experience of Tahiti also resurfaces in Bligh's narrative (Du Rietz 1962:115–25).¹⁹

The *Bounty* voyage had been undertaken at the instigation of Joseph Banks, to convey breadfruit cuttings to the West Indies for cultivation as a staple food for plantation slaves. At Tahiti Bligh negotiated for breadfruit plants in exchange for 'valuable presents' purportedly sent directly by George III (Bligh 1979:73). The officers and crew spent five and a half months on Tahiti-nui, first at Matavai and then at Pare, while the breadfruit cuttings were established. The mutiny that took place only

¹⁸ My interpretation here, in privileging the unstructured and uncontained, rather than ritualized, aspects of crowd behaviour and their political import, glosses the suggestion of Stallybrass and White, following Terry Eagleton, that 'the "licensed release" of carnival is ... simply a form of social control of the low by the high and therefore serves the interests of that very official culture which it apparently opposes' (Stallybrass and White 1986:13).

¹⁹ Rolf du Rietz went so far as to argue that 'Bligh's *Voyage* should henceforth be stated as having been written partly by James Burney and partly by William Bligh (on whose journal and directions Burney of course still based his compilation.)' (Du Rietz 1962:120) This suggestion does not appear to have been taken up.

three and a half weeks after the ship's departure was attributed by Bligh to the friendships forged during this prolonged sojourn: intimacies filtered from an initial encounter with a crowd impelled by curiosity that was indexed to specific relationships – of trade, of ceremonial and social protocol.

Bligh's arrival at Matavai Bay on 26 October 1788 is narrated as a now familiar succession of crowd scenes: 'As we drew near, a great number of canoes came off to us . . . They crowded on board in vast numbers, notwithstanding our endeavours to prevent it, as we were working the ship in; and in less than ten minutes, the deck was so full that I could scarce find my own people' (Bligh 1979:59). The crowd that obstructs the process of landing is an authenticating presence, as the use of the word 'endeavours' perhaps unconsciously confirms. It links Bligh's voyage to a tradition that includes Wallis's, Bougainville's and Cook's arrivals in Tahiti, while affirming the continued novelty and significance of European visits to the Tahitians. This doubled recognition offered by the agglomeration of the crowd is further complicated once the ship anchors. Now the 'own people' the commander has difficulty identifying among the pressing throng become pre-eminent members of the Matavai community. He writes, 'The ship being anchored, our number of visitors continued to increase; but as yet we saw no person that we could recollect to have been of much consequence. Some inferior chiefs made me presents' (Bligh 1979:61). These individuals of consequence have, of course, been singled out from the crowd on former voyages: they are the named Tahitians of previous explorers' accounts, including Cook's final voyage, on which Bligh had served as master of the *Resolution*. In his log, Bligh makes a point of giving 'an account of some principal People and their descendants here who have been Spoke of in our earliest Voyages' (Bligh 1937: II, 62–3). Recognizing these familiar faces within the crowd, as well as accounting for the animals and plants left by Cook, and retracing Cook's footsteps and friendships, becomes an important aspect of Bligh's project to represent himself as Cook's inheritor. He had been the only officer on Cook's last voyage not to receive promotion when the *Resolution* and *Discovery* returned to London, after falling out with Lieutenant James King over Bligh's handling of events leading up to Cook's death. Greg Dening has insightfully analysed the ways in which Bligh overvalued the mission as a chance to redeem his career (Dening 1992:65). To claim relation to Cook by reforging his connections in Tahiti was surely among the over-determined imperatives of Bligh's voyage.

The concern to identify individuals of distinction among the multitude is at the same time ironized in a number of ways in Bligh's

account. After noting that ‘my table at dinner was generally crouded’, he questions his capacity to establish the extent of the crowd or the degree of consequence of its individual members, commenting,

Almost every individual of any consequence has several names, which makes it frequently perplexing, when the same person is spoken of, to know who is meant. Every chief has perhaps a dozen or more names in the course of thirty years; so that the person who has been spoken of by one visitor, will not perhaps be known to another, unless other circumstances lead to a discovery. (Bligh 1979:82)

As I will explain in Chapter 2, practices of name exchange ensure that the individual of consequence proliferates in Tahiti, thwarting the European’s attempt to forge connections based on hierarchy established over the course of a series of significant contacts, and reducing the grand task of ‘discovery’ to the lesser project of establishing identity. In Bligh’s log, a more expansive discussion of this phenomenon is prefaced by the comment, ‘I should speak of a variety of Cheifs from other districts who have visited us, but as it would be nothing but a catalogue of Names, it can be of no use’ (Bligh 1937: I, 384). Here Bligh seems to make a different kind of distinction between the recorded crowd and the physical crowd, implying that the inability to distinguish individuals is one that may persist in reading, but which is overcome through the praxis of contact.

A more telling irony, however, is Bligh’s identification of the disabled as immediate figures of distinction among the multitude. In a crowd scene at the house of the Matavai chief Poeno, Bligh relates, ‘The people . . . thronged about the house, in such numbers, that I was much incommoded by the heat, which being observed, they immediately drew back. Among the croud I saw a man who had lost his arm just above the elbow; the stump was well covered, and the cure seemed as perfect as could be expected from the greatest professional skill’ (Bligh 1979:63). Here the disabled body alone stands out from the collective body of the crowd, registering as the sole figure of consequence. In his log, Bligh distinguishes individuals for obesity, a cancerous nose and jaw, a lost eye, deformed limbs and ulcerations (Bligh 1937: I, 391, 389, 403; II, 30). Yet despite the focus on these figures as exceptions, there is an implication that they might be representatives of a different crowd, of the ill and infected, for whom Bligh is keen to disclaim responsibility.²⁰ Observing that ‘Scropulous Patients were I to encourage them would be innumerable,’ he concludes,

²⁰ Such grotesque bodies are indeed, according to Stallybrass and White, inherently of the crowd: the grotesque aesthetic features a ‘somatic conception . . . which was usually multiple, teeming, always already part of a throng’ (Stallybrass and White 1986:21).

I do not believe that they have superior blessings with respect to health; we already see them with dreadful Cancers, Consumptions, Fevers, Fits and the Scrupula in a Shocking degree, and we may infer many incidental diseases besides. The fertile Country and delightfull Climate of the Society Islands does not therefore exempt its Inhabitants from the attendant miseries of ill health. (Bligh 1937: II, 31)²¹

During his subsequent visit in the *Providence*, Bligh would find that what was in the process of emerging as the highest-ranking Tahitian name commemorated the legacies of disease:

It surprised me to find, that both Iddeah & Tynah were called Pomarre, & on enquiring into the Cause of it, I find it owing to their having lost their Eldest Daughter Terreenoareah by an Illness called by that name, and which they describe to me by coughing. [marginal note: 'Pomarre is compounded from Po Night & Marre the name of the Disease.'] Whenever a Child dies the Parents or relations take the Name of the disease – if a dozen Children die of different diseases, the Parents have as many different Names, (or give them to their Relations) and may be called by either, but commonly by the last. (Oliver 1988:89)

Bligh encounters examples of closed, or event-specific crowds (Canetti 2000:17), particularly *heivas* (dance performances) and wrestling displays, which, as in Cook's and other exploration accounts, tremble on the edge of 'riot and confusion' (Bligh 1979:88) only to reaffirm order (see Figure 4). But his more complex responses surface when he himself figures as object of curiosity, rather than honoured viewer, the curious visitor. Though this phenomenon occurs at ceremonies of welcome and prestation, greater affirmation comes with the aggregation of a spontaneous or open crowd. Thus when Bligh perambulates around Matavai Bay he finds that, 'In my walk I had picked up a numerous attendance, for every one I met followed me; so that I had collected such a croud, that the heat was scarce bearable, every one endeavouring to get a look to satisfy their curiosity: they however carefully avoided pressing against me, and welcomed me with chearful countenances, and great good-nature' (Bligh 1979:68). Bligh's Pied Piper magnetism compensates for the discomfort caused by the throng of bodies. At the same time his rather poignant reference to 'chearful countenances, and great good-nature' suggests that he is trying to recuperate some level of intimacy from the encounter, and to emphasize the benign reception that he had received in Tahiti. The avoidance of direct touch in this instance can be attributed to the operation of *tapu*, a local practice of sacred embargo that effectively

²¹ Howard M. Smith weighs the evidence regarding the European introduction of venereal disease to Tahiti, responsibility for which was repudiated by both the British and the French (H. Smith 1975).

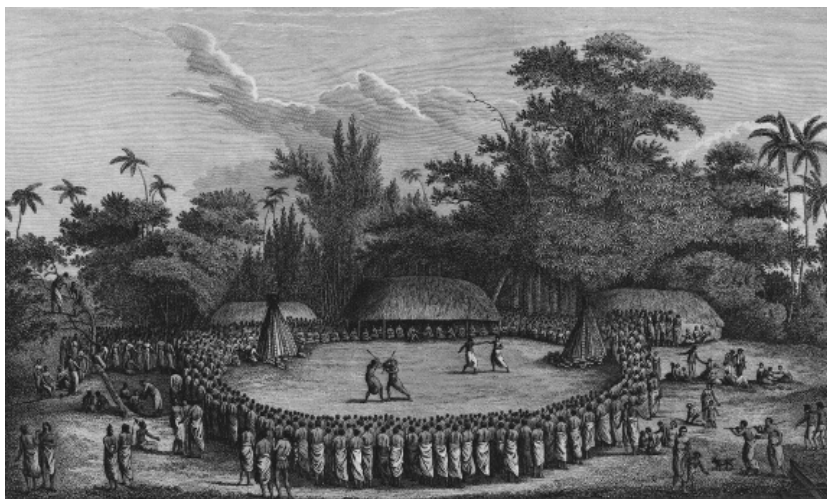


Figure 4. Crowd pleasing: an event-specific crowd in Tonga. ‘Onthaal van Kapitein Cook op het Eiland Hapae’, plate 79 in *Reizen rondom de waereld door J. Cook*, 1795–1809.

militates against a complete dissolution of boundaries and distinctions within the crowd. According to Canetti:

It is only in a crowd that Man can become free of [the] fear of being touched . . . The crowd he needs is the dense crowd, in which body is pressed to body; a crowd, too, whose physical constitution is also dense, or compact, so that he no longer notices whose body it is that presses against him. As soon as a man has surrendered himself to the crowd, he ceases to fear its touch. Ideally, all are equal there; no distinctions count, not even that of sex. (Canetti 2000:15)

In Tahiti, the laws of *tapu* create currents stronger than the spontaneous pressures of the crowd: invisible barriers that serve precisely to reinstitute distinctions of gender and hierarchy.

Some weeks later Bligh notes the waning of the crowd and explains it in terms of a waning curiosity:

The croud of natives was not so great as hitherto it had been: the curiosity of strangers was satisfied; and, as the weather began to be unsettled and rainy, they had almost all returned to their homes . . . our supplies however were abundant; and what I considered as no small addition to our comforts, we ceased to be incommoded, when on shore, by the natives following us, and could take our walks almost unnoticed. (Bligh 1979:84)

There is something slightly peeved in Bligh’s response, as though he misses the crowd that incommoded him. That same day he reports

putting on a performance that might be regarded as an attempt to solicit the very crowd he repudiates here:

The ship's barber had brought with him from London, a painted head, such as the hair-dressers have in their shops, to shew the different fashions of dressing-hair; and it being made with regular features, and well coloured, I desired him to dress it, which he did with much neatness, and with a stick, and a quantity of cloth, he formed a body. It was then reported to the natives that we had an English woman on board, and the quarter-deck was cleared of the crowd, that she might make her appearance. Being handed up the ladder, and carried to the after-part of the deck, there was a general shout of '*Huaheine no Brittanne myty.*' Huaheine signifies woman, and myty, good. Many of them thought it was living, and asked if it was my wife. One old woman ran with presents of cloth and bread-fruit, and laid them at her feet; at last they found out the cheat; but continued all delighted with it, except the old lady, who felt herself mortified, and took back her presents, for which she was laughed at exceedingly. (Bligh 1979:85)

Here Bligh first employs rumour to produce a crowd which he then clears from his decks, reasserting his status as object of interest by creating an object of interest, and carefully working his assembled audience.²² By creating the spectacle that draws the crowd, Bligh reinitiates and at the same time mocks the local practice of formal gift-giving. Once again we might recall Benjamin's comments on the capacity of the crowd to animate the object. In the city, according to Benjamin, objects derive their charm 'from the crowd that surges around and intoxicates them' (Benjamin 1983:56). In the Tahitian harbour, this process is literalized: only the crowd can animate the painted head, and invite it into the circle of exchange. Yet Bligh's jest also cuts across the very logic of reciprocity upon which his breadfruit mission is dependent. The old woman's act of mortified hospitality, as she retracts the gift she had extended, registers the personal cost of his purportedly crowd-pleasing antics. The published account, however, here departs tellingly from Bligh's log, which makes very clear that the Tahitians are in on the joke from the start: they are figured not as dupes, but as participants in a performance (Bligh 1937: I, 386). More significantly for the current argument, it is only in the published account that Bligh's performance is linked with the waning of the crowd. The incident occurs on 5 November 1788 in both accounts: however, in Bligh's log the reduction of the Tahitian crowd and an attendant sense of the ship's decreased novelty value are only registered on 25 January 1789, when Bligh writes, 'The Novelty of our being here is now wore off, so that we are not crouded with the Natives as at first' (Bligh 1937: II, 23). The reordering of events in the published

²² For a different but not unrelated analysis of this scene, see V. Smith 2004.

version may reflect an editorial awareness of the capacity of the push and pull of the crowd, its role as both impediment and source of affirmation, to drive the narrative of encounter.

The departure of the *Bounty* on 4 April 1789 is again accompanied by crowd scenes. Bligh writes that on the 3rd, 'The ship was crowded the whole day with the natives, and we were loaded with cocoa-nuts, plantains, bread-fruit, hogs, and goats.' As the ship stood off, he writes, 'The outlet of Toahroah harbour being narrow, I could permit only a few of the natives to be on board: many others, however, attended in canoes' (Bligh 1979:140; compare Bligh 1937: II, 68–9). Yet there are two important distinctions between the crowd scenes of arrival and departure, through which Bligh indexes the changed relations between crew members and Tahitians that have developed over the period of the ship's visit. The crowd on board is no longer anonymous. It is a crowd of friends: 'Scarce any man belonging to the ship was without a *tyo*, who brought to him presents, chiefly of provisions for a sea store' (Bligh 1979:139). Where, upon arrival, Bligh scanned the sea of faces around him for individuals made significant by other voyagers' encounters or by rank, here individuals are recognized as significant by virtue of relationships of intimacy. And the crowd is silent. Bligh records that 'In the evening, there was no dancing or mirth on the beach, such as we had been accustomed to, but all was silent' (Bligh 1979:140). The uncanny assembly solemnizes the moment of departure. At the same time, the silent crowd of intimates sets the scene for Bligh's analysis of the mutiny, which he will predicate upon the bonds formed between crew members and Tahitians: 'for to the friendly and endearing behaviour of these people, may be ascribed the motives for that event which effected the ruin of an expedition, that there was every reason to hope, would have been completed in a most fortunate manner' (Bligh 1979:141). Tahitian generosity and hospitality, sustained by a natural abundance that facilitates bounteous gestures, is ultimately adduced as the chief cause of the failure of Bligh's imperial project. (A closer examination of this account of motivation will be the subject of Chapter 6.)

Yet it is the Tahitian crowd that at the same time fissures Bligh's account, undermining the rationale of both his voyage and his explanation of the motives for the mutiny. Because the clamorous crowd brings with it the spectre of insufficiency, of want. Bligh's account of a performance by members of the Arioi sect, an elite troupe exempt from many Tahitian *tapus*, is followed by an attempt to justify their practice of infanticide, which develops the explanation he has been offered by 'such of the natives as I conversed with . . . that it was necessary, to prevent an over population'. This is in turn dilated into a proto-Malthusian projection:

In countries so limited as the islands in the South Seas ... it is not unnatural that an increasing population should occasion apprehensions of universal distress ... The number of inhabitants at Otaheite have been estimated at above one hundred thousand. The island, however, is not cultivated to the greatest advantage: yet, were they continually to improve in husbandry, their improvement could not, for a length of time, keep pace with an unlimited population. (Bligh 1979:79–80)

This vision of Tahiti has the potential to undermine two arguments crucial to Bligh's account, both of which are founded on a notion of Tahitian natural fecundity, on a thesis of bounty. The first is that the population can easily spare the breadfruit cuttings requested by his mission: that they will create small impact on Tahiti's natural abundance. Bligh claims that, when the gift of breadfruit was proposed, the *ari'i* Tina 'seemed much delighted to find it so easily in his power to send anything that would be well received by King George', and emphasizes his efforts to disguise from his Tahitian hosts the worth to his party of a gift that he feels assured will cost them so little (Bligh 1979:73). The second is that, in returning to Tahiti, the mutineers were returning to a life without labour, in which natural surplus is guaranteed without any need for improved husbandry. Bligh later asserts that the mutineers 'imagined it in their power to fix themselves in the midst of plenty, on one of the finest islands in the world, where they need not labour' (Bligh 1979:162). Labour-free existence cannot be promised in a society threatened by overcrowding.

This passage of speculation, developed from some less coherent musings in Bligh's log (Bligh 1937: II, 78–9), was expanded in the 1792 account into a proposal to ease the burden of potential overpopulation by encouraging Tahitian immigration to New Holland: the work of Bligh's editor, James Burney.²³ Burney had been confronted by the practice of infanticide during his first trip to the Society Islands on Cook's second voyage, and had, like Bligh, posited an explanation that accounted for custom via the crowd:

They have some very barbarous customs, the worst of which is, when a man has as many children as he is able to maintain, all that come after are smothered ... yet notwithstanding all this, these Islands are exceedingly populous – even the Smallest being full of inhabitants & perhaps were it not for the Custom just mentioned, these would be more than the islands could well maintain. (Burney 1975:73)

²³ Burney sought approval for his editorial insertions in correspondence with Joseph Banks (Du Rietz 1962:115–25). For a discussion of a proposal in favour of Tahitian emigration to New South Wales received some years earlier by Joseph Banks (SLNSW MITCHELL MSS 1786:7–9), see Smith 2003:126.

Burney's crowd wells up in Bligh's text, converging with Bligh's, so that his further deliberations on the subject become ventriloquized as Bligh's. At the same time, the persistent question of the crowd that Burney's interpolations serve to highlight puts Bligh's project and his defence under question.

Moreover the evocation of another Tahiti – a land of hunger and want – foreshadowed by the crowd, works not only against the terms of Bligh's own narrative, but against the broader discourse of a romanticized Tahitian paradise, a place of easy plenty, launched by Bougainville and disseminated in Britain through popular poetry and theatre.²⁴ The crowded Tahiti of Bligh's account might thus be said to contest an abiding trope in that exploration literature to which he was nonetheless so keen to make his contribution. There is, indeed, a further retrospective irony to the account's speculation on a proto-Malthusian future for Tahiti. As Catherine Gallagher has argued, the paradox of Malthus's thesis lies in the fact that it is the healthy body, multiplying through 'the very power of its fecundity' (Gallagher 1986:85), that results in the degeneration of the social whole. Healthy bodies reproduce incrementally, competing for diminished resources. In Tahiti, on the other hand, the charged sexual activity that resulted from contact facilitated the transmission of contagious disease, which in turn led to the diminishment of the body of the Tahitian crowd and decreased indigenous pressure upon resources. Where Bligh's and Burney's shared vision of an overpopulated island attests directly to the pressure of bodies that they registered surrounding them in Tahiti – to both the stimulus and constraint of contact – the material consequence of the crowd scene was to be the dwindling of the crowd.

²⁴ For a related discussion of the significance of an unpeopled agricultural landscape to the romanticization of the English countryside, see F. Ferguson 1988.