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Thinking Language Politically: Cultural Representation and Alterity in the European Enlightenment

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**THINKING LANGUAGE POLITICALLY:
CULTURAL REPRESENTATION AND ALTERITY
IN THE EUROPEAN ENLIGHTENMENT**

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the comparative cultural discourses that emerged in works written by eighteenth-century European travelers and philosophers. As they concentrate on Hottentots, Tahitians or Native Canadians' institutions and customs, these texts also construct a system, similar to language, whose ambition is to define social interactions and to measure their respective values.

In contrast to earlier travel accounts, largely motivated by religious conviction, Enlightenment travel writing became increasingly concerned with the identification of cultural structures among "Natives" in an attempt to find a common ground that could provide a universal model of human relations. Although not always in agreement, travelers and philosophers paid specific attention to customs of hospitality, commerce, and marriage as a basis for their comparison among various nations. This dissertation proposes to examine these representations of alterity as a form of "cultural language" characteristic of the period.

The first chapter analyzes Peter Kolb's text, *L'Etat présent du cap de Bonne-Espérance*, which sums up, and adds to, western perceptions of the Hottentot society as the population most distant from Europeans. Several identifiable Hottentot institutions are shown to be ultimately untranslatable and the source of numerous cross-cultural misunderstandings (including the European naming of the "Hottentot" people). The second chapter discusses Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* and shows how his hypothetical definition of man in the state of nature would mediate all subsequent discourse on native cultures. In the following chapter, I point to the politicization of cultural language in Raynal's monumental *Histoire des deux Indes*. The last chapter revisits Bougainville's *Voyage* and Diderot's *Supplément au*

voyage de Bougainville to show that both authors dealt with the impossibility of defining universal cultural systems, prompting reflection upon the complexities of translation and cross-cultural interactions.

The conclusion suggests that the recurring appeal to customs and institutions as keys to understanding the functioning of social groups signals the emergence of a new anthropological discourse fascinated by the possibility and the limits of universal models, and preoccupied with the validity of moral comparisons.

Contents

Abstract	v
Introduction	1
1. Kolb's Hottentots: A Foray into an African Culture	
-Background to the Text and Kolb's Stated Objectives	9
-Hottentot Traditions Inherited from Ancestors	14
-Dress and Ornamentation	
-Marriage Customs	
-Death and Old Age	
-Exchange and Confronting Alterity	28
-Commerce and Money	
-Hospitality	
-Authority Structure and Conflict Resolution	
-A Plurality of European Representations of the Hottentots	
-Needs and Desires	45
-Conclusions	48
2. Rousseau's Contributions to an Emerging Anthropological Method	
-Rousseau's Interaction with Travel Writings, or How the Empirical Influenced the Theoretical	50
-The Critique of Previous Studies of Mankind	
-The Call for a New Methodology	
-A Case Study of an Ancient Culture: the <i>Lévite d'Ephraïm</i>	71
-"Cultural languages" and the Social Bond	76

-Beyond Theater: The Functioning of “Cultural languages” within Advanced Societies	83
-The Proper Management of “Cultural languages” within Republics	86
-Conclusions	94
3. Representations of Non-European Peoples in Raynal’s <i>Histoire des deux Indes</i>	
-Points of Reference: Raynal’s Textual Project	97
-Material Goods and Commodities as Cultural Signs	105
-The Incas: An Exemplary Case of Colonial Misunderstanding Involving Material Goods	
-Relations to Alterity as the Measure of a Civilization	115
-The Treatment of Prisoners	
-Hospitality	
-Natural Sociability	
-Observations on Languages, Customs, and Rituals	129
-The Brazilian Language	
-Dancing and Singing	
-Communication in North America: Speaking, Writing, and Friendship	
-Colonization	147
-Native Reactions to European Colonizers	
-Cultural Misunderstanding and Colonial Failure	
-The Formation of the Social Bond as a Semiological Process	
-Representations of a Non-European “Other”	
-Conclusions	166
4. Bougainville and Diderot: An Elusive Utopia	
-Bougainville: Navigating the Space between Observation and Representation	171
-The Circumstances Surrounding Bougainville’s Voyage	
-The Tahitian as Portrayed by Classical Esthetics	

-Relations between the Sexes on Tahiti -Inequality on Tahiti: Regulations and Customs -The Difficulties of Translation: Deciphering Tahitian Culture	
-Diderot: A Reevaluation of the Cultural Supplement through Cross-Cultural Dialogue	198
-Diderot's Aims in Modifying Bougainville -An Imaginative Rendering of Culture Shock -The Limits of Laws and Institutions -Conclusions: An Invitation to Social Dialogue	
5. Conclusion	220
-Changing Representations of Non-European Peoples: <i>Aza, ou le Nègre</i> -The Legacy of Enlightenment Cultural Analyses: Lévi-Strauss	
Bibliography	234

Introduction

Rousseau's portrait of man in the state of nature and his conjectural history of the development of human societies in the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) made the intellectual project of classifying social groups more explicit than it had been in previous centuries. For this reason, Lévi-Strauss later credited Rousseau with laying the methodological foundation for the social sciences, whom he cites at length in his *Anthropologie Structurale* :

« J'ai peine à concevoir, écrivait Rousseau, comment dans un siècle où l'on se pique de belles connaissances, il ne se trouve pas deux hommes . . . dont l'un sacrifie vingt mille écus de son bien, et l'autre dix ans de sa vie à un célèbre voyage autour du monde, pour y étudier, non toujours des pierres et des plantes, mais une fois les hommes et les mœurs . . . ». Et il s'écriait un peu plus loin : « Toute la terre est couverte de nations dont nous ne connaissons que les noms, et nous nous mêlons de juger le genre humain ! Supposons un Montesquieu, un Buffon, un Diderot, un d'Alembert, un Condillac, ou des hommes de cette trempe, voyageant pour instruire leurs compatriotes, observant et décrivant comme ils savent le faire, la Turquie, l'Egypte, la Barbarie, l'Empire du Maroc, la Guinée, le pays des Caffres, l'intérieur de l'Afrique et ses côtes orientales, les Malabares, le Mogol, les rives du Gange, les royaumes de Siam, de Pégu et d'Ava, la Chine, la Tartarie, et surtout le Japon ; puis dans l'autre hémisphère le Mexique, le Pérou, le Chili, les terres Magellaniques, sans oublier les Patagons vrais ou faux, le Tucuman, le Paraguay, s'il était possible le Brésil, enfin les Caraïbes, la Floride et toutes les contrées sauvages ; voyage le plus important de tous et qu'il faudrait faire avec le plus de soin. Supposons que ces nouveaux Hercules, de retour de ces courses mémorables, fissent ensuite à loisir l'histoire naturelle, morale et politique de ce qu'ils auroient vu, nous verrions nous-mêmes sortir un monde nouveau de dessous leur plume, et nous apprendrions ainsi à connaître le nôtre. . . » (*Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, note 10).¹

For Lévi-Strauss, Rousseau's theory of the two pre-rational impulses, *pitié* and *amour de soi*, is fundamental to anthropological study. He analyzes the way in which Rousseau's conception of *pitié* allows one to form a primordial connection to other beings, an identification that precedes the distinguishing movement of separation by which the self is formed:

¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale*, Vol. 2, Paris: Plon, 1958, 46.

Cette faculté, Rousseau n'a cessé de le répéter, c'est la pitié, découlant de l'identification à un autrui . . . L'homme commence donc par s'éprouver identique à tous ses semblables, et il n'oubliera jamais cette expérience primitive, même quand l'expansion démographique . . . l'aura contraint à diversifier ses genres de vie pour s'adapter aux milieux différents où son nombre accru l'obligeait à se répandre, et à savoir se distinguer lui-même, mais pour autant seulement à un pénible apprentissage l'instruisait à distinguer les autres : les animaux selon l'espèce, l'humanité de l'animalité, mon moi des autres moi. L'appréhension globale des hommes et des animaux comme êtres sensibles, en quoi consiste *l'identification* précède la conscience des oppositions : d'abord entre des propriétés communes ; et ensuite, seulement, entre humain et non humain.²

In cooperation with this ability to identify with others, Rousseau's theory posits *amour de soi* as a counterbalancing force that allows one to distinguish oneself from others. In terms of ethnological study, the ethnologist must be able to have the ability to identify with another culture, a process that necessitates the recognition of, and abstraction from, one's own cultural prejudices, and through this apprehension of another culture to then arrive at an articulation of cultural differences. At this final stage of differentiation, the cycle is completed as the ethnologist returns back to look at himself and his own culture from a perspective of alterity, now able to critically reevaluate the previously unreflecting self and home culture³. As eighteenth-century travel writers moved away from a religious worldview, an increasing awareness of cultural prejudice emerged as a palpable tension in texts purporting to represent Non-European peoples. Rousseau's theorization of *pitié* as an innate capacity to identify with other human beings (and, by extension, to apprehend the alterity of other cultures) thus constituted a significant development, according to Lévi-Strauss, in the nascent discourse of anthropology.

Although European explorers ventured forth into unknown regions and came into contact with foreign social groups vastly different from themselves from as early as the fifteenth century,

² Ibid., 50.

³ Ibid., 47-48.

travel writing took on a different character during the eighteenth century. Earlier representations of Non-European peoples, often referred to as *sauvages*, reflected a predominant concern with religion. Jean de Léry, in his *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Bresil* (1578), offers a portrait of the Tupinamba people that, even while presenting their simple way of life favorably, is highly mediated by religious preoccupations. For example, in Chapter VIII, Léry approves of the Brazilians' relative lack of interest in material goods and pleasures:

Tout ainsi qu'ils ne puisent, en façon que ce soit en ces sources fangeuses, ou plustot pestilenciales, dont decoulent tant de ruisseaux qui nous rongent les os, succent la moëlle, attenuent le corps, et consomment l'esprit : bref nous empoisonnent et font mourir pardeçà devant nos jours : assavoir en la desfiance, en l'avarice qui en procede, aux procez et brouilleries, en l'envie et ambition, aussi rien de tout cela ne les tourmente, moins les domine et passionne.⁴

Léry views this aspect of Tupinamba life favorably since it is compatible with the detachment from earthly concerns necessitated by a Christian life focused on otherworldly salvation. It furthermore avoids the pitfalls of becoming enslaved to the passions, a peril longtime warned against by both ancient philosophers and clergy. At one point in his account, Léry even ventures to say that it would be safer for many Europeans to live among the Brazilians than amidst the wars of religion in France:

Tellement que les ayant experimentez, je me fierois, et me tenois de fait lors plus asseuré entre ce peuple que nous appellons sauvages, que je ne ferois maintenant en quelques endroits de nostre France, avec les François desloyaux et degenez : je parle de ceux qui sont tels.⁵

Despite this apparent longing for a life of tolerance among the Brazilians, Léry consistently reiterates that the pleasantness of life among this indigenous society is merely a transitory earthly happiness and, moreover, an empty existence because devoid of God's presence.

⁴ Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Bresil*, ed. Frank Lestringant, Paris: L.G.F. le Livre de Poche, « Bibliothèque classique », 1994, Ch. VIII, 212.

⁵ Ibid., Ch. XVIII, 464.

While Montaigne's essay, *Des Cannibales*, does not contain the same strength of religious conviction, his belief in the mutability of nature translates into an analysis of cultural bias. He suggests that perhaps the Brazilians are not as barbaric as the Europeans who commit atrocities in the name of religion:

Je pense qu'il y a plus de barbarie à manger un homme vivant qu'à le manger mort, à déchirer par tourments et par géhennes un corps encore plein de sentiment, le faire rôtir par le menu, le faire mordre et meurtrir aux chiens et aux pourceaux (comme nous l'avons non seulement lu, mais vu de fraîche mémoire), non entre des ennemis anciens, mais entre des voisins et concitoyens, et, qui pis est, sous prétexte de piété et de religion), que de le rôtir et manger après qu'il est trépassé. . . . Nous les pouvons donc bien appeler barbares, eu égard aux règles de la raison, mais non pas eu égard à nous, qui les surpassons en toute sorte de barbarie.⁶

Montaigne uses the Brazilians primarily as a catalyst for reflection upon European cultural practices. The European civilizing mission was coupled with the moral imperative of religious conversion and baptism. The dual concern with religion, on the one hand, and historical progress, on the other, framed the European gaze towards other societies.

While the religious preoccupations of earlier travelers and colonizers still made themselves felt in eighteenth-century travel accounts, they gradually became eclipsed by the more modern preoccupation with studying the wide variety of customs and institutions present among the world's diverse social groups. Enlightenment writers sought to classify the increasing variety of known social groups within a scale of historical progression. Peter Kolb's early eighteenth-century text, *l'Etat présent du Cap de Bonne-Espérance* (1719), presents the Hottentots as a society which, although it exhibits several cultural institutions familiar to Europeans such as hospitality, commerce, and marriage and burial rites, is nonetheless exemplary of a variety of humanity as remote as possible from civilized human beings. Kolb's portrayal of the physical appearance of the Hottentots, described as closer to apes than to humans

⁶ Montaigne, « Des Cannibales », *Essais*, ed. Claude Pinganaud, Paris: Arléa, 2002, 158.

of advanced nations, conjointly with his apocryphal descriptions of unusual Hottentot customs, offered a representation of the Hottentot as a liminal group at the very edge of humanity, a distinctive space on the Great Chain of Being that would later be more precisely articulated by Buffon in his *Histoire Naturelle* (1766).

Following the same classificatory impulse, and clearly influenced by Rousseau's theorization of the historical development of societies, Raynal's ambitious collaborative project, *l'Histoire des deux Indes* (1770), sought to describe the various indigenous populations encountered in eighteenth-century travels by Europeans and to assess the colonization efforts of various nations. As a compilation of texts by numerous authors, including most notably Diderot, the *Histoire* contains many contradicting discourses about these peoples. The text presents, at moments, an idealizing portrayal of small societies regulated without formal laws, and at others, a condemnation of these same peoples as ignorant and full of vice, very much in need of the civilizing influence of Europeans. Similarly, colonization efforts are at times described as inhumane conquests that have frequently been poorly administered, and at others as a global expansion of power economically, politically, and socially beneficial for both the colonies and the metropolises. The multiplicity of discourses present in the *Histoire* render it a valuable document attesting to the way in which the differing perspectives of politicians, historians, economists, philosophers, and travelers channeled their way into representations of numerous Non-European populations.

As with the voyages of earlier decades, eighteenth-century expeditions to faraway regions continued to be commissioned by European monarchs. Bougainville's circumnavigation of the globe, from 1766 to 1769, was both a political mission to surrender sovereignty of the Malvinas Islands to the Spanish and, at Bougainville's insistence, a strategy to encourage Louis XV to

support French colonial expansion into the Pacific. Two years elapsed between Bougainville's return to France and the publication of his *Voyage*, a period during which he transformed his expedition journal into an appealing travel narrative that would initiate both the monarch and the French public to the charms of Tahiti. To this end, Bougainville presents the Tahitians according to an ideal characteristic of the classical esthetic, although he eventually reassesses his early judgments of the Tahitians after learning more about the culture from Aotourou, the indigenous man he brings with him back to Europe. In the process of correcting his initial misunderstandings, Bougainville's text reveals an epistemological awareness, as he incorporates ideas from current theories on language formation and racial science in order to go beyond mere observation and attempt a more analytical reflection upon the Tahitian people.

In his 1772 *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, Diderot aimed to reassess the cultural judgments of the Tahitians in Bougainville's text. Working through the form of a dialogue between two European interlocutors who are, for their own part, commenting upon an imaginary dialogue between two Tahitians and a French almoner, Diderot brings to the forefront a reflection upon the way in which cultures come to attach moral meanings to physical acts. His imaginative rendering of the conflicting social and moral codes of Tahitians and Europeans, primarily by means of a debate on sexual relations, emphasizes their conventionality and the fallibility of all human-created laws and institutions. Moreover, the doubly dialogical form's obscure genealogy and the lack of clear resolution to the debate highlight Diderot's view of societies as dynamic entities characteristic of the ever-changing configurations of nature.

In the selection of eighteenth-century texts discussed in this dissertation, a new set of priorities and analytical tools are visible which distinguish them from earlier works. Previously, texts representing Non-European populations reflected a clear conceptual divide between

Christian and Non-Christian (pagan) societies. In the past, religion served as the filtering criterion demarcating the boundary between the civilized and the savages. By the eighteenth-century, this earlier conceptual schema was no longer valid, as travelers and philosophers measured a whole series of categories common to social groups, a classificatory strategy which, whether explicitly or implicitly, relied upon the idea of a discoverable universal cultural language shared by all societies. The notion of cultural language emerges in these writings, a concept that comprehends both functionally similar elements among diverse social groups as well as their inevitable differences as signs embedded within a specific cultural context. As an analytical tool for understanding social structures, Enlightenment travel writing demonstrates the way in which this cultural language works through institutions and customs to regulate human exchanges, for example, in the areas of hospitality, commerce, sexual relations, and political hierarchy. The cultural languages discussed in the texts we will examine operate both inter-culturally (hospitality, commerce) and intra-culturally (dress and ornamentation, marriage and burial practices). A careful analysis of the way in which these cultural criteria recur throughout the representations of Non-European social groups will demonstrate that the previous model determined by religion evolved during the European Enlightenment to produce a much larger configuration that, through the study of differences, led European writers to a reflection upon their own cultural practices, initiating the beginning of ethnology as Lévi-Strauss understood it.

This theoretical framework of cultural language has, furthermore, surfaced in contemporary writing on cross-cultural encounters. In his influential work, *Nous et les autres: la réflexion française sur la diversité humaine*, Todorov argues that « l'universel est l'horizon d'entente entre deux particuliers ; on ne l'atteindra peut-être jamais, mais on a néanmoins besoin

de le postuler pour rendre intelligibles les particuliers existants »⁷. Denieuil summarizes Todorov's approach according to which « la culture est un dialogue constant entre le soi et l'autre »⁸. The recurrence in Enlightenment travel writing of an analysis of social groups as possessing cultural languages that both shape their internal and external relations is theorized by Todorov when he suggests that culture is caught up in the same movement as language, both in the formation of its signifying elements and in its practices of exchange. Through a careful examination of selected eighteenth-century texts discussing Non-European peoples, this dissertation aims, moreover, to explore the underlying theoretical framework which postulates that culture, similarly to language, constitutes a dynamic entity whereby meaning emerges from within the space of interaction between individuals and societies.

⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres: la réflexion française sur la diversité humaine*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989, 33-34.

⁸ Pierre-Noël Denieuil, *Le Sauvage et le civilisé au siècle des Lumières : essai sur les origines de la culture matérielle*, Paris : l'Harmattan, 2007, 59.

Chapter 1: Kolb's Hottentots: A Foray into An African Culture

Background to the Text and Kolb's Stated Objectives

In volume XIV of his *Histoire Naturelle* (1766), Buffon discusses various species of apes observed by explorers, many of which exhibited human-like characteristics. Buffon uses the Hottentot as a model for primitive man, a figure against which he can distinguish human-like apes from human beings:

Vous comparez, dira-t-on, fort injustement le singe des bois avec l'homme des villes ; c'est à côté de l'homme sauvage, de l'homme auquel l'éducation n'a rien transmis, qu'il faut le placer pour les juger l'un et l'autre ; et a-t-on une idée juste de l'homme dans l'état de pure Nature ? La tête couverte de cheveux hérissés, ou d'une laine crépue ; la face voilée par une longue barbe, surmontée de deux croissans de poils encore plus grossiers, qui par leur largeur et leur saillie raccourcissent le front, et lui font perdre son caractère auguste, et non-seulement mettent les yeux dans l'ombre, mais les enfoncent et les arrondissent comme ceux des animaux ; les lèvres épaisses et avancées ; le nez aplati ; le regard stupide ou farouche, les oreilles, le corps et les membres velus ; la peau dure comme un cuir noir ou tanné, les ongles longs, épais et crochus ; une semelle calleuse en forme de corne sous la plante des pieds ; et pour attributs du sexe, des mamelles longues et molles, la peau du ventre pendante jusque sur les genoux ; les enfans se vautrant dans l'ordure et se trainant à quatre ; le père et la mère assis sur leurs talons, tous hideux, tous couverts d'une crasse empestée. Et cette esquisse tirée d'après le sauvage Hottentot, est encore un portrait flatté ; car il y a plus loin de l'homme dans l'état de pure nature à l'Hottentot, que de l'Hottentot à nous.⁹

It is Buffon's contention that even between the most advanced species of ape and the most primitive human beings, there lies an unbreachable chasm. Apes may structurally resemble humans and are capable of imitating human behavior, but they will never possess the special functions of human speech and thought. Buffon enlarges his argument, measuring out the distance from the theoretical natural man, to the Hottentot, to contemporary humans, in order to render more visible the variety of the human species which, even at its most primitive point and

⁹ Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière: avec la description du Cabinet du Roy*, Tome XIV, Paris: Pietro Corsi, 1766, 30-31.

in the absence of familiar markers of contemporary human society, remains fundamentally different from other animals.

Why does the Hottentot appear in Buffon's text as a historical marker of primitive societies? As an increasing number of European explorers came into contact with different racial groups, the Hottentots became an object of public curiosity. Viewed with fascination or repulsion, myths began to circulate about the strange appearance of Hottentot bodies. It was said that Hottentot women could breastfeed by slinging a long, hanging breast over the shoulder, that they had monstrously protruding buttocks, that they applied animal fat to grease their skin and, famously, that they possessed unusual genitalia. As Linda Merian notes,

[In regard to the Khoekhoe¹⁰], the number and the content of the myths that circulated about their physical structure and bodily practices are so extraordinary that one must surmise that some factor besides faulty eyesight inspired the misrepresentations. The two most widely believed and debated mistruths, that male Khoekhoe had only one testicle and that females had an extra fatty member hanging down from various points in their groin area, suggest how eager European observers were to delimit them from the rest of the human race. Indeed what more singular proof of marginal humanity could be invented?¹¹

These myths about the female Hottentot's "apron" were also likely a technique to discourage European men from having sexual relations with them¹². Moreover, in travel accounts, nearly any potentially positive attribute was portrayed as a flaw, as for example in the case of the Hottentot love of liberty, which was described as laziness¹³.

¹⁰ The indigenous people residing at the Cape of Good Hope were called Hottentots by Europeans during the eighteenth century. Today, it is generally accepted to refer to them as Khoekhoe, Khoikhoi or Khoisan.

¹¹ Linda Merians, "What they are, who we are: Representations of the "Hottentot" in Eighteenth-Century Britain, *Eighteenth-Century Life* (Nov. 1993), 24.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Linda Merians explains this rhetorical technique: "The Khoekhoe love of liberty was a value with which the British could and clearly did identify; therefore, the case for delimiting them as African "other" was seriously weakened. In effect, this shared positive value needed to be transformed rhetorically, at least, into a negative, and specifically, racial trait. In many accounts this is accomplished by linking "Hottentot" love of liberty with indolence, which was a character flaw that directly challenged the eighteenth-century British sensibility." Ibid., 22-23.

Linda Merians argues that perhaps the most important reason that the Hottentot became such an important figure was that this indigenous people was problematic for already-established eighteenth-century European beliefs about Africans:

According to Richard H. Popkin, “racists of the eighteenth century contended that the dark complexion of the Africans was an irremediable defect that was part of a fundamental, unchangeable set of defects that made blacks inferior to whites.” . . . The relatively fair-skinned Khoekhoe posed a singular and significant challenge to the British, forcing them to reconfigure their tropes of the demonized and animal “other” and to devise linguistic expressions for Africans who did not look like those who had been classified previously as “Negroes” or “Blacks”.¹⁴

The Hottentots so fascinated the eighteenth century that when Rousseau looked for examples of observations of Non-European peoples by travelers, he relied heavily upon Kolb’s account of the Hottentots. Rousseau’s comments on the Hottentots in his *Discours sur l’inégalité* are proof that Kolb’s writing influenced his thought in a significant way.

Kolb’s *Description du Cap de Bonne Espérance*, an account of his sojourn of nearly a decade at the Cape of Good Hope, was first written in 1719 in Nuremburg, with a French edition appearing in 1741¹⁵. The translator’s preface to the first volume of the French edition informs us that Kolb « n’est point un Aventurier que la faim ait fait de venir Auteur. C’est un Savant, envoyé au Cap de la part et aux fraix de M. le Baron de Krosick, Conseiller Privé du Roi de Prusse »¹⁶. Kolb characterizes his work as that of a scholar, and we are told in the preface that this study of the Hottentot people aims to instruct fellow researchers in a wide array of fields. Of these observations, the translator assures us : « leur usage, ne se borne pas au seul amusement : les plus savans y peuvent apprendre diverses choses ; et le Théologien, le Politique, le Médecin,

¹⁴Ibid., 20.

¹⁵ The first Dutch edition was published in 1727, followed by an English version in 1731. François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar, *L’Invention du Hottentot: Histoire du regard occidental sur les Khoisan (XVe-XIXe siècle)*, Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002, 238.

¹⁶ Peter Kolb, *Description du Cap de Bonne-Espérance où l’on trouve tout ce qui concerne l’histoire-naturelle du pays ; la religion, les mœurs et les usages des Hottentots, et l’établissement des Hollandois*, Vol. 1, Amsterdam : J. Catuffe, 1741, *The Making of the Modern World*, Gale [12 Oct. 2011], Image N° 8.

le Naturaliste, y trouvent matière à réflexion »¹⁷. Despite these assurances, numerous contemporaries of Kolb (notably La Caille) and subsequent researchers have affirmed that Kolb plagiarized, perpetuated untrue rumors about the indigenous people of the Cape, and invented many anecdotes for their sensational appeal¹⁸. Discontented with the conflicting accounts he had read concerning the Hottentots, Kolb set out to witness firsthand their way of life. He says that he even bravely struck out beyond the coastal areas near the Cape settled by the Dutch, « parce qu'il s'étoit aperçu que le fréquent commerce avec les Européens, avoit rendu les Hottentots voisins du Cap moins sincères et plus défiants »¹⁹.

In contradiction to Kolb's claims to have made an extensive study of the Hottentots beyond those living near the coast (and therefore more "tainted" by interactions with foreigners), Fauvelle-Aymar invokes the historical record:

Le gouverneur Willem Adriaan Van der Stel le loge dans les jardins de la Compagnie, la même où son père avait installé les pères jésuites en 1685. Brouillé avec le gouverneur (parce qu'il se révèle incapable d'effectuer son travail et prend en outre le parti des *vrijburghers* dans le conflit qui les oppose aux officiels, Kolbe se retrouve dans une situation difficile après la mort de son employeur, en 1707. Avec le successeur de Van der Stel, il trouve finalement à s'employer pour la Compagnie à un poste de secrétaire puis, à partir de 1711, de *landrost* (magistrat) à Stellenbosch et Drakenstein. C'est là, sans s'aventurer plus loin dans l'intérieur, qu'il recueille les données qu'il conseignera

¹⁷ Ibid., Image N° 6.

¹⁸ Andrew Curran cites Fauvelle-Aymar's judgment on Kolb, claiming, « l'on peut douter de ses compétences dans un domaine autre que celui du plagiat ». Curran adds, « Il utilise en effet des textes perdus du Hollandais Grevenhoeck, qui a amassé nombre d'informations sur les Hottentots. Kolb devient ainsi une source, indirecte mais de premier ordre ». « Questions de méthodologie. Approches de l'Afrique au XVIIIe siècle », *L'Afrique du siècle des Lumières : Savoirs et représentations*, ed. Catherine Gallouët et al., SVEC, Oxford : Voltaire Foundation, 2009, 10.

Fauvelle-Aymar, in his own book, explains in historical terms why Kolb may have been the target of such harsh criticism: « Dès le XVIIIe siècle, des voyageurs ont voulu mettre en pièce une renommée selon eux indûment acquise, tantôt en dénonçant le caractère fantaisiste de certains passages de l'ouvrage, ou l'inclination trop marquée de l'auteur pour l'étrange et l'inhabituel, tantôt en affirmant que Kolbe avait plagié sans vergogne les manuscrits d'un autre résident (Grevenbroek, par ailleurs considéré comme fiable) et qu'il s'en était attribué la paternité. Manque de fiabilité ou manque de scrupules ? Les arguments paraissent opposés et pourraient à la rigueur procéder de l'exacerbation d'une double tendance qui se fait jour au cours du siècle des Lumières : d'une part la remise en question systématique des 'fables' des auteurs antérieurs, toujours suspectés de ne pas se conformer à la stricte vérité, mais de l'enrober, de la magnifier, voire de l'imaginer ; d'autre part l'affirmation croissante du besoin de reconnaissance de l'auteur, de sa propriété intellectuelle, qui s'accompagne d'une défiance grandissante à l'égard du plagiat. », op. cit., 240-241.

¹⁹ Kolb, op. cit., Image N° 6.

dans son ouvrage. Croyant devenir aveugle (c'est du moins l'argument qu'il donne) il démissionne (ou peut-être est-il révoqué) et quitte le Cap en 1713, deux mois après l'arrivée du navire qui apporte le virus de la variole, mais sans avoir pu observer les conséquences dévastatrices de cet événement. Bizarrement il recouvre la vue en retrouvant sa terre natale.²⁰

Although Kolb's claims about the breadth of his travels are contradicted by historical sources, his purpose remains nonetheless clear: in typical Enlightenment fashion, he sought to make a definitive break with previous sources of knowledge. It should be noted that Kolb's unacknowledged source, Grevenbroek, is considered very reliable by historians²¹. Moreover, the attacks on Kolb's scholarship have little bearing on the current study, insofar as we aim, not to assess the empirical accuracy of the information recounted, but rather to evaluate the text in terms of a document based on a discourse of knowledge present during the Enlightenment period.

Kolb begins his analysis of the Hottentots by attempting to identify institutions and practices among the natives that more or less roughly correspond to structures familiar to him as a member of European society. He presents the reasoning behind his method as the following:

Lorsqu'on manque de monumens, et que la tradition d'un peuple est fort obscure, tout ce qu'on peut faire de mieux est de comparer ses traditions, aussi-bien que ses coutumes, et ses institutions, avec l'histoire, les institutions et les coutumes des autres peuples plus connus, et de se ranger du côté où il y a le plus de vraisemblance. Comme nous nous trouvons dans ce cas lorsqu'il s'agit de fixer l'origine des Hottentots, je vais rapporter leurs traditions, et les coutumes qui ont du rapport avec celles des autres nations.²²

According to this methodology, cultures constitute enigmas that are to be solved through reference to a larger epistemological network. This approach will be taken up again later by Buffon, for whom individual human beings can only be understood with respect to the larger mechanism of culture of which they are a part. As Michèle Duchet notes regarding Buffon,

²⁰ Fauvelle-Aymar, 240.

²¹ Ibid., 242.

²² Kolb, Vol. 1, 39.

La société est un « moule » où les caractères communs à l'espèce se fixent *au niveau du groupe, et sont ensuite transmis par lui* . . . Nature et société se trouvent ainsi associées dans un système de signes, qui oblige à les déchiffrer l'une par l'autre, ou plutôt l'une à travers l'autre, l'être naturel de l'homme se déduisant en quelque sorte de son être social.²³

For both Kolb and Buffon, the institutions of culture that shape social life are the key to understanding a given social group and, to some extent, common elements of a human nature.

Hottentot Traditions Inherited from Ancestors

Dress and Ornamentation

Kolb's study is driven by his curiosity as he observes the Hottentots going about their daily lives. One frequent practice that interests him is the Hottentots' application of animal fat to their skin. The diligence with which they perform this act, he suggests, points to its significance. As a European, at once intrigued and repulsed by the apparent lack of hygiene among the native inhabitants of the Cape, Kolb details this purposeful procedure:

Ce qui les rend encore plus sales, c'est la coutume qu'ils ont de se frotter le corps, depuis la plante des pieds jusqu'au sommet de la tête, de beurre, ou de graisse de mouton, mêlée avec de la suie qu'ils ramassent sous leurs pots. Comme ils sont naturellement de couleur d'olive, ils veulent encore, par cette espèce de teinture, se donner une couleur plus foncée, qui à leur goût est plus belle . . . Tout cède à cet important ouvrage ; personne ne néglige une coutume si dégoûtante. Les plus pauvres se servent de beurre ou de graisse rance, qui leur donne une odeur si détestable, qu'on ne sauroit les approcher : on les sent longtems avant que de les voir. Mais ceux qui sont à leur aise, sont fort délicats la-dessus ; ils ne se frottent que de ce qu'il y a de plus frais et de meilleur. Ils graissent de même la peau qui leur couvre les épaules, et qui leur sert d'habillement, à moins qu'ils ne soient si pauvres, qu'ils ne puissent fournir à cette dépense. Plus ils sont riches, et plus ils en employent : c'est à cela que consistent tout leur luxe, c'est à cela que l'on reconnoit

²³ Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières: Buffon, Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvétius, Diderot*, Paris: F. Maspero, 1971, 245.

ceux qui ont du bien et qui aiment à faire figure : en un mot, c'est presque la seule marque de distinction entre eux.²⁴

The Hottentots devote a substantial amount of time to covering their skin with animal fat and rubbing it in until well absorbed. Kolb tells us that this emollient imbues their complexion with a darker tint, which they consider beautiful (and therefore superior to their natural state). While all members of the community participate in this practice, Kolb explains that the materials used vary, the rich using the freshest fat while the poorest must use rancid fat that makes them smell horrible. Thus, although this treatment may be perceived, at the base, as an aesthetic enhancement, its material variations constitute an outward sign of social hierarchy.

Kolb then proceeds to emphasize that the function of social distinction is actually only secondary to the custom's primary purpose. He explains:

La meilleure raison qu'on puisse donner de ces onctions, est tirée de leur manière de vivre, et du climat qu'ils habitent. Comme ils vont presque nus, s'ils ne se frottoient pas le corps de graisse, les chaleurs excessives qu'il fait dans ce pays-là les épuiseroient entièrement, selon toutes les apparences, et hâteroient par-là même leur mort ; au-lieu que cette graisse, en fermant les pores, empêche une trop grande dissipation, et tient leur peau toujours fraîche.²⁵

Kolb tells us that, over time, this custom outgrew its original utilitarian import to take on additional meaning as a sign of beauty and wealth. As the association with survival became solidified, the practice eventually became associated with specific desirable characteristics, themselves proper to an enhanced form of survival. As we will later discuss in more detail, the explanations Kolb provides of this (and other) customs should be accepted with caution, as they do not necessarily correspond to a conscious discourse within the Hottentot community itself.

Fauvelle-Aymar provides pertinent information for readers of travel writing to consider:

Peu de voyageurs, y compris jusqu'au XVIIIe siècle, fournissent une explication à ces enduits. Celles qu'ils donnent émanent peut-être davantage de leurs propres spéculations

²⁴ Kolb, Vol. 1, 84.

²⁵ Ibid., Vol. 1, 87.

que d'informations recueillies auprès des intéressés. En outre, même dans ce dernier cas, on peut imaginer que ces enduits ne possédaient pas nécessairement d'explication claire ou unique pour le Khoikhoi, mais revêtaient plutôt une série de significations sociales plus ou moins liées. De ce fait, la diversité des réponses traduit peut-être aussi la diversité des discours associés à une pratique courante et inquestionnée. On ne peut donc ici qu'enregistrer avec prudence les hypothèses transmises par les voyageurs, selon lesquels ces enduits servaient de protection (contre le soleil ou les maladies) ou bien constituaient un signe de richesse ou de beauté.²⁶

In the discussion of skin greasing, Kolb provides an account of the formation of a cultural sign. These « hypothèses transmises par les voyageurs » reveal much about the stakes motivating the representation of Non-European peoples in eighteenth-century Europe. Indeed, Linda Merians argues for the prevalence of descriptions of the skin greasing custom as a strategy to reinforce the distance between the Hottentots and Europeans:

That a “Hottentot” could be considered white under a set of particular circumstances might have been a reason why so many British representations include remarks about the Khoekhoe practice of skin greasing. . . . For many authors, these discussions partially eased the anxiety produced by the issue of skin color and race. In numerous accounts the diction suggests the authors’ surprise that the “Hottentots” would adopt a practice that would make them black.²⁷

In Kolb's text, although the skin greasing may serve a practical function, he describes the Hottentots as « sales » and refers to this practice as « une coutume si dégoûtante . . . qui leur donne une odeur si détestable, qu'on ne sauroit les approcher ».

Kolb's observations contribute to the elaboration of a detailed portrait that reflects a coherent network of cultural signifiers ordering numerous aspects of the Hottentot society. It is helpful to separate Kolb's firsthand-witness accounts of Hottentot behavior into three distinct functional categories: 1) traditions inherited from ancestors, 2) practices relating to commerce and money, and 3) practices relating to the assessment of desires and needs. Through his observations of Hottentot activity in these domains, Kolb, as he earlier stated, assesses the

²⁶ Fauvelle-Aymar, 99-100.

²⁷ Merians, 21.

Hottentots according to the European criteria of the recognizable customs and institutions that define a viable culture.

In addition to the custom of applying animal grease to the skin, Kolb mentions other inherited traditions concerning styles of dress and ornamentation. He notes, for instance, that each Hottentot wears a coat called a *krosse*. These coats are made of animal skins, and the type of skin varies according to the relative wealth or poverty of the wearer. According to Kolb, « Les Chefs des Nations, les Capitaines des *Kraals*, et les personnes riches, les font de peaux de tigres ou de chats sauvages ; et les gens du commun, de peaux de mouton »²⁸. Not merely objects of necessity, the coats can be made more elaborate with the addition of fringe and other decorations, and serve as luxury garments, especially amongst the women:

Les femmes du bel-air bordent leurs Krosses d'une espèce de frange, faite de peaux ; et quelque chétif que soit l'habillement de ces femmes, on voit parmi elles la même émulation et la même jalousie, qui règnent à cet égard parmi nos Dames Européennes. La beauté des peaux, et les provisions du sac, sont les parties principales du luxe. Elles s'étudient à donner un air galant à leurs Krosses. Elles portent leur sac ouvert, afin qu'on en remarque le contenu.²⁹

Similarly to European society, amongst the Hottentots also, garments serve a social function as vehicles of personal expression (as an outer sign of inner qualities such as creativity, simplicity, vanity or pride) and as visible reminders of one's degree of material wealth. In addition to their coats, the Hottentots also ascribe great significance to *Buchu*, a type of powder worn on ceremonial days, and to their makeup, a sort of reddish chalk, used to draw six lines on the women's faces, which they consider extremely attractive and spiritually beneficial to the wearer³⁰.

²⁸ Kolb, Vol. 1, 97.

²⁹ Ibid., Vol. 1, 101.

³⁰ « Cette poudre est très estimée : ils la regardent non seulement comme un ornement, mais comme une chose très salubre ». « La pierre, humectée de la graisse qui leur couvre toujours le corps, fait six raies rouges, qu'elles regardent comme des attraits extrêmement séduisants. », Ibid., Vol. 1, 107-108.

Another important component of the Hottentots' traditional code of dress is the wearing of rings or bands of leather by the women of the tribe. Kolb deciphers their function in the following passage:

Les Hottentottes portent ces bandes de cuir autour de leurs jambes, sur-tout pour se garantir contre les piqures et les égratignures . . . Cet ornement sert d'ailleurs à distinguer les sexes, et même les femmes de qualité : car plus elles ont de ces bandes, plus elles sont parées. Enfin ces peuples s'en servent pour appaiser leur faim, lorsqu'ils n'ont pas autre chose à manger . . . Je les ai souvent vu se régaler de ce mets détestable.³¹

Fauvelle-Aymar explains the way in which European observations of this practice encouraged a perception of the Hottentots as uncivilized³². As with the skin greasing, this element of the Hottentot dress code is at once useful and aesthetically desirable (by Hottentot standards). The bands protect the women's legs from scratches while they are working to provide for their families, but they also serve as a gender marker. Crucial to the process of securing sustenance for the family by protecting the women's legs, and a possible source of food as well, the bands are doubly symbolic of the women's role as providers for their families³³. The bands, wrapped around her legs, show that the acquisition of sustenance is inseparable from the life of the woman. Furthermore, Kolb's observation that the women work while the men lay idle presents a

³¹ Ibid., Vol. 1, 104.

³² According to Fauvelle-Aymar, such an observation is likely a distortion reflecting the European notion that the Hottentots are savages who are unable to control their desires in order to respect the appropriate order and separation of registers necessary in civilized society. Concerning a similar observation that the Hottentots hang the intestines of their prey around their necks, eating them when in need, he remarks:

« D'après les portraits, donc, les boyaux se portent et se mangent, témoignant d'habitudes qui s'inscrivent dans les registres de l'ornemental et de l'alimentaire. Registres qui se confondent, puisque ces Africains mangent leurs ornements. Ce que les voyageurs perçoivent, avec une délectation malveillante, comme un insupportable mélange des genres qui trahit un défaut de civilisation. Or cette conclusion tacite relève très probablement d'une construction : rien ne prouve que les deux actes de porter des colliers de boyaux et de les manger aient été perçus par les Khoikhoi comme s'inscrivant dans des registres distincts. Au demeurant, rien ne prouve non plus que les Khoikhoi aient réellement mangé ces colliers de boyaux. Si cette affirmation faite par certains voyageurs est fondée sur des faits, on peut penser qu'elle provient de la fusion de deux observations disjointes : d'une part que les Khoikhoi portaient des colliers de boyaux ; d'autre part qu'ils mangeaient des tripes d'animaux qui n'étaient pas forcément celles qu'ils portaient autour du cou. . . . La conjonction de ces deux observations a pu s'opérer sous l'attraction d'un schéma mental dans lequel le sauvage est 'agi' par ses sensations (ils mangent leurs colliers 'quand ils ont faim') et non pas motivé, à l'égal d'un homme civilisé, par son goût », 104-105.

³³ Kolb makes a point of discussing the inequality in the distribution of labor between men and women in the Hottentot society. Women are practically slaves, while the men lay idle as long as they please. Laziness, together with drunkenness, and uncleanness, are three main vices that Kolb pinpoints among the Hottentots. Vol. 1, 234-37.

distribution of work that conflicts with the European work ethic and paints Hottentot men as incapable and unworthy of respect.

Finally, with respect to dress, Kolb discusses the Hottentots' penchant for ornamenting their hair:

Ces peuples ont toujours beaucoup aimé à orner leur tête et leurs cheveux de petits colifichets, auxquels ils savent donner un éclat merveilleux. Aussi, à peine eurent-ils commencé d'avoir commerce avec les Européens, qu'ils marquèrent beaucoup d'empressement pour des morceaux de verre et de glaces de miroir, pour des boutons de cuivre et de petites plaques de même métal, et les Hollandois, qui s'aperçurent bientôt de ce goût, ne manquèrent pas de leur en apporter. Aujourd'hui la plupart de ces nations estiment autant ces babioles, lorsqu'elles ont été polies par leurs mains, que nous pouvons estimer les diamans de la plus belle eau et les mieux brillantes.³⁴

It is interesting to note that, although the Hottentots do not approve of amassing personal possessions³⁵, they do value having an abundance of ornaments:

Il y en a plusieurs qui portent jusques à un demi-douzaine de ces colliers, quelques-uns en ont même davantage ; et souvent ils sont si longs qu'ils tombent jusques au nombril. Les plus galans parmi eux couvrent entièrement leur avant-bras de ces brasselets, et ont autour du corps cinq ou six de ces ceintures. Plus ils ont de ces ornemens, plus ils sont considérés et respectés de leurs voisins.³⁶

The Hottentots satisfy their appetite for these shiny decorations by trading with the Dutch to obtain *nacre de perle* and other such materials. Kolb even attests to seeing them trade cattle against these goods!

Aussi sont-ce des marchandises courantes, contre lesquelles les Hottentots donnent volontiers des bestiaux en échange ; et lorsqu'ils se mettent au service des Hollandois, ils ne manquent jamais de stipuler qu'outre leurs gages, on leur donnera quelques brasselets et quelques autres petits ornemens, s'ils n'en sont pas déjà suffisamment pourvus.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., Vol. 1, 105.

³⁵ Kolb observes that the Hottentots dislike private property and the act of hoarding surplus materials for oneself. A spirit of collectivity regulates their handling of material goods, which tends towards equality: « A peine peuvent-ils se résoudre à jouir seuls de quelque avantage: pour qu'ils y trouvent quelque plaisir, il faut qu'un ou plusieurs de leurs compatriotes le partagent avec eux », Vol. 1, 62.

³⁶ Ibid., Vol. 1, 106.

³⁷ Ibid., Vol. 1, 106-107.

Given that the Hottentots are willing to part with some of their animals, so essential for their livelihood, they must attribute great value to these ornaments as an indicator of social distinction. From a European perspective, however, the Hottentot preference for trinkets over items having an exchange or use value paints them as too ignorant to understand how to help themselves. The inability of indigenous peoples to distinguish between objects of value and *pacotille* is a motif that occurs frequently in accounts of Spanish travelers to South America. In the description of the numerous Hottentot customs of dress and ornamentation, Kolb systematically represents them as occupying a cultural space as remote as possible from that governed by European criteria. For Kolb, Hottentot practices of dress and ornamentation point to a level of socially constructed code that extends beyond the basic utilitarian level of contact with materials as tools for survival. With the deciphering of social codes concerning hygiene, value and the distribution of labor, Kolb's text reflects both Enlightenment values and traditional observation of indigenous peoples.

Marriage Customs

Another set of traditions that shape Hottentot society are their marriage customs. For the marriage ritual, the parties involved cover themselves with a new coat of grease, but only after having made long scratches on themselves with their overgrown fingernails. The scratching produces abrasions through which the urine sprayed on them by the priest can better penetrate the skin.³⁸ Consistent with other Hottentot rituals, the men and women are seated forming

³⁸ Ibid., Vol. 1, 224.

separate circles. The ceremony involves the priest going back and forth between the bride and the groom, “blessing” them with his urine,

Répétant la meme cérémonie, jusqu’à ce que son eau de bénédiction soit épuisée.
Pendant l’aspersion, il donne à l’un et à l’autre, tour à tour, les bénédictions suivantes :
Puissiez-vous vivre longtemps et heureusement ensemble ! Puissiez-vous avoir un fils
avant la fin de l’année ! Puisse ce fils être toute votre consolation dans votre vieillesse !
Puisse-t-il être homme de courage et grand chasseur !³⁹

At this point in the text, Kolb only tells us that the aspersion of urine is used to confer blessings.

We will return to this question in the section on death customs, where Kolb makes a pointed inquiry into the meaning of the urine ritual.

Although Hottentots are not, in general, in favor of private property, they do have an established marriage system and do not share wives. A man may, however, take as many wives as he so chooses. When a woman’s husband dies, she is allowed to remarry, but with the following provision:

Lorsqu’une veuve se remarie, et tout autant de fois que cela lui arrive, elle est obligée de se faire couper la première jointure d’un doigt, en commençant par les petits doigts de la main gauche. Les Médecins, qui exercent en même tems la Chirurgie, font ces amputations avec tant de dextérité, qu’il n’en arrive jamais aucun accident. Je ne sais si nos Européennes voudroient se remarier à ce prix : mais pour les Hottentottes, elles ne s’en font aucune peine, et rien n’est plus ordinaire que de les voir passer successivement entre les bras de deux, de trois, et même de quatre maris.⁴⁰

When Kolb inquires into the significance of this custom, one of the Hottentots explains: « Après qu’elle s’est mutilée le doigt, elle est aux yeux d’un Hottentot comme une nouvelle femme »⁴¹.

Unlike the men of the tribe, the women are not allowed to have more than one spouse at a time.

For this reason, a woman wishing to remarry must first become a new woman before she can reenter the life of the community with a different identity as the wife of another man. There is no mention of any rules for the remarriage of widowers, and presumably there are no such

³⁹ Ibid., Vol. 1, 224-225.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Vol. 1, 229.

⁴¹ Ibid., Vol. 1, 229-230.

similar restrictions placed upon the men. The amputated fingers tell the woman's marital history for all to see. Since this does not seem to upset the Hottentot women, according to Kolb, these women appear to have a much greater freedom of self-determination than their eighteenth-century European counterparts.

Death and Old Age

Finally, passage into death is itself an elaborate ritual of great importance among Hottentot traditions. When a relative dies, the family and friends of the deceased express their grief outwardly with loud wailings and wild gesticulations. Kolb describes the event as he claims to have witnessed it:

Lorsqu'un Hottentot, homme, femme, ou enfant, est à l'agonie, ses parens et ses amis s'assemblent incessamment autour de lui, en faisant des cris et des hurlemens horribles, et frappant des pieds et des mains comme des forcenés. J'ai déjà dit ci-dessus, que ces peuples n'ont aucune idée de se préparer à la mort dans un sens spirituel : le malade expire donc au milieu de ces hurlemens, sans autre consolation que celle d'être regretté pendant quelque tems.

Dès qu'il a rendu le dernier soupir, les cris redoublent avec tant de force, qu'on peut les entendre à quelque milles de là. Ils plient son cadavre de manière que sa tête soit entre ses jambes ; dans cet état il a assez la forme d'un fœtus. On l'enveloppe dans cette posture de la peau qui le couvroit, et ils le lient de façon qu'on n'en voit rien.⁴²

To prepare the body for burial, it is curled up into the shape of a fetus and wrapped up in its animal skin. Symbolically regressed to an infantile state, the body is then returned to the earth. The deceased is removed from his hut either through a window or other opening, but is never carried out through the door. As the body is removed, the people chant « Bo, Bo », meaning « père, père ». The people seat themselves in two circles, separating males from females.

⁴² Ibid., Vol. 1, 357-358.

During the death ceremony, the parents of the deceased each spray the circle containing members of their own sex with urine. The repeated presence of the urine ritual at last brings Kolb to ask one of the Hottentots about its meaning in the following interview:

Je me suis donné beaucoup de peine, j'ai même dépensé assez d'argent, pour découvrir le but de ces aspersions d'urine et de poudre. Enfin après bien des recherches, j'ai appris de divers Hottentots, que ce déluge d'urine étoit une manière de faire un compliment de remerciement. Les vieillards remercient l'assemblée de l'honneur qu'elle a bien voulu faire au défunt, en lui rendant les derniers devoirs. 'Comment, disois-je, n'a-t-on pas d'autres manières plus naturelles de se complimenter ? Nous les ignorons, me répondoient-ils.⁴³

While the function of the urine ritual as blessing and gesture of gratitude is consistent with its presence in both the marriage and death ceremonies, why is urine the chosen medium? The response of the Hottentots to Kolb's inquiry here, and concerning many other unique customs and superstitions, is that this has always been the tradition. Despite this discussion of the origin of the custom, David Chidester points out that the urine ceremony was invented by Kolb:

Sparman and Thunberg implicitly contradicted Peter Kolb's claims about Hottentot religion. A third scientist, however, the French naturalist François Le Vaillant, who was in the Cape from 1781 to 1785, confronted the legacy of Kolb's work more directly. In conversation with Hottentots, Le Vaillant would recite passages from Kolb concerning their religion. In response, he reported, "they openly laughed in my face." Among the many fanciful features of Hottentot religion described by Kolb, the most ridiculous, according to Le Vaillant, was the Pissing Ceremony. Falsely attributed to the Hottentots, this ceremony . . . was a product of the imagination of Kolb, the "fire-side traveller", who was too much under the influence of tall tales told by local white farmers. Although Kolb seemed to think he was rehabilitating the European image of the Hottentots, Le Vaillant maintained that Kolb had only succeeded in making them seem absurd. Kolb's fantasy had proliferated through every subsequent account.⁴⁴

This inaccurate information fed already-existing negative stereotypes of the Hottentots and, unfortunately, persisted in travel writing. The disposition to denounce Africans as beasts was particularly strong, an injustice commented upon by Chidester who notes that, although rituals

⁴³ Ibid., Vol. 1, 361.

⁴⁴ David Chidester, *Savage systems: colonialism and comparative religion in southern Africa*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996, 62.

involving excrement were observed in Tibet, peoples of Asian nations were not judged as harshly as Africans⁴⁵.

In addition to the urine ritual, Kolb observes another part of the death ceremony that involves dusting ashes on all individuals present. When he asks for the reason behind this practice, he receives the following response:

‘Pour ce qui est des cendres, m’ont dit plusieurs Hottentots, on en poudre les assistans, pour les faire souvenir de l’état où la mort les réduira certainement. On veut les rendre humbles, et abaisser leur orgueil et leur vanité. On veut anéantir toutes les distinctions qu’il y a entre eux, en leur montrant que les vieux et les jeunes, les foibles et les robustes, les riches et les pauvres, ceux qui ont de la beauté et ceux qui en sont privés, seront bientôt tous égaux ; tous seront également réduits en poudre ou en cendre’.⁴⁶

Similarly to the Roman Catholic ritual of Ash Wednesday, which serves to remind members of the Church of their inescapable mortality, the ashes used in the Hottentot death ceremony symbolically efface social inequalities to bring the focus to the common mystery of life and death. The ashes serve additionally as a medium by which the priest confers his blessings onto those present to thank them for their presence in support of the recently departed. Once the ceremony has concluded, the relatives of the deceased often wear an animal carcass hanging around the neck as an outward sign of mourning⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ “From a comparative perspective, Le Vaillant observed that European commentators passed over abhorrent customs in the Far East, holding Asians in greater esteem, while they reviled the Hottentots for similar practices. Reports from Tibet, for example, related that people obtained excrement from the great Lama to be worn in amulets or sprinkled on food. Tibetans, however, were not held in contempt by Europeans as the Hottentots were for their Pissing Ceremony. Not only false, therefore, Kolb’s fantasy about the ritual use of urine had caused damage by reinforcing European prejudices against Hottentots.”, *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁶ Kolb, Vol. 1, 362. See also pg. 363: « Ces personnes m’apprirent aussi, que le vieillard en répandant les cendres, donnoit sa bénédiction à la compagnie, et que les souhaits faits dans ces occasions passoient pour très efficaces. »

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 363-364.

Another element central to the Hottentot death customs is the practice of banishing elderly people, once they are no longer useful, from the community and abandoning them to die alone⁴⁸. Of this widespread custom, Kolb writes:

Aussi longtemps qu'un homme ou une femme est en état de faire la moindre chose, quand ce ne seroit que d'amasser un peu de bois pour faire du feu, il est traité de la part de la famille et de tous ses parens, avec toute la tendresse imaginable ; . . . Mais dès qu'il n'est plus capable de rien faire, ils le bannissent de la société, et le confinent dans une hutte dressée exprès dans un lieu écarté. La coutume est de mettre devant lui et à sa portée quelques provisions ; et alors de l'abandonner entièrement, et de le laisser périr ainsi ou de vieillesse ou de faim, si auparavant il n'est pas dévoré par les bêtes féroces.⁴⁹

Kolb challenges the Hottentots, questioning the humanity of a people willing to abandon their elders and let them die of neglect. In the following passage, Kolb's interlocutor vehemently justifies this longstanding custom:

'Peut-on voir un parent ou un ami exposé à toutes les infirmités désespérées que l'âge amène, sans en être touché de compassion, et sans chercher à mettre fin à sa misère, et par conséquent sans tâcher d'abrèger ses jours infortunés ? Pourquoi prolonger une vie qui est à tous égards misérable et inutile ? Où est l'humanité de prolonger des maux sans remède ? Pour nous, nous ne la voyons pas : nous croyons au contraire que l'humanité exige de nous que nous mettions incessamment fin à une vie misérable.'⁵⁰

Kolb makes a point of telling his readers that this abandonment is yet another practice which serves to equalize all members of the community with respect to life and death. He thus attests:

⁴⁸ A similar custom has been observed in certain Eskimo communities. In Knud Rasmussen's study on the Netsilik Eskimos, a member of the indigenous community explains, "For our custom up here is that all old people who can do no more, and whom death will not take, help death to take them. And they do this not merely to be rid of a life that is no longer a pleasure, but also to relieve their nearest relations of the trouble they give them." Leighton and Hughes remark that "An important reinforcement of this clearly expressed function was the common belief that the souls of people who had died by suicide went to the best of the afterworlds, along with those who had been murdered or who had met other forms of violent death." Finally, it should be noted that "most of these Eskimo patterns . . . were relatively non-ritualized. They *tended* to be individually-performed events only occasionally supported by incipient social rules and proscriptions as to *how* the suicide should be accomplished (although there was considerable social agreement on the motives). Thus, in terms of the traditional behavior involved, most of the Eskimo patterns fall somewhere in the center of the range between extensively patterned suicides, such as the Japanese, and individualistic types, such as those in contemporary American society". Knud Rasmussen, *The Netsilik Eskimos* (Report, Fifth Thule Expedition), Vol. 8, pp. 1-542, Copenhagen, 1931), 144, cited in "Notes on Eskimo Patterns of Suicide", Alexander H. Leighton and Charles C. Hughes, *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Winter 1955), 328.

⁴⁹ Kolb, Vol. 1, 365.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Vol. 1, 366.

Je puis assurer que c'est une pratique constante chez toutes les Nations Hottentottes. Quand le vieillard decrepiti seroit le plus riche du lieu, quand il en seroit même le Capitaine, il est conduit à la hutte fatale, tout comme le plus pauvre et le dernier du village.⁵¹

Kolb's emphasis on the reduction of social disparity inherent to this custom serves as a critique of Europe as well, since the Hottentots value an individual based on what he or she can contribute to the community as an active participant in the exchange of goods and labor, instead of narrowly focusing on amassed individual wealth that is withheld from the flow of resources and services within a society.

Despite the apparent radical alterity of several of the Hottentot practices of dress and ornamentation we have seen, Kolb compares, for example, the red lines the African women draw on their faces with the rouge worn by European women. Central to nearly all of these customs of adornment is the skin. It is important to note, however, that the Hottentot methods (such as making deep scratches or removing part of a finger) are signs that are permanent, whereas many European forms of adornment are exterior to the body and reversible. These Non-European peoples internalize their cultural signs, rather than merely manipulating superficial representations. For instance, as Mircea Eliade notes, primitive man, when engaged in a ritualistic act handed down from an original model forged by his ancestors, does not merely act according to a superficial "role" (as do flatterers and wearers of makeup in eighteenth-century European society), but rather he *becomes* the figure, thereby effacing any difference between the model and his successor. Eliade explains what he terms a "primitive" ontological conception:

An object or an act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an ancestral archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is "meaningless", i.e. it lacks reality. Men would thus have a tendency to become archetypal and paradigmatic. This tendency may well appear paradoxical, in the sense that the man of a traditional culture sees himself (for a modern observer) and is satisfied with imitating and repeating the gestures of another. In other

⁵¹ Ibid., Vol. 1, 367.

words, he sees himself as real, i.e. as “truly himself”, only and precisely, insofar as he ceases to be so.⁵²

Mircea Eliade’s studies address the cosmologies, rituals and myths of various primitive social groups to differentiate a type of thought proper to pre-modern cultures⁵³. This mode according to which primitive man operates differs radically from the modern conception of the historical subject in that he instead loses himself in a role and “lives always in an atemporal present”⁵⁴.

Therefore, it becomes clear that, insofar as many of the customs of the Hottentots are ritualistic repetitions of ancestral archetypes, they entail a rapport to a model that is much more internalized than the impersonal manipulation of signifiers (often a fleeing adoption of an appearance in view of ulterior gain) that characterizes much of later Western civilization. In conclusion, owing to the numerous detailed notes taken by Kolb on Hottentot customs in the areas of dress, ornamentation, religion, marriage, and death, his text goes beyond a narrative of discovery and voyage to provide a preliminary anthropological reading of this society as a culture defined by specific codes and institutional structures.

⁵² Eliade, Mircea. *Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.

⁵³ Eliade opens this work with the following statement of purpose: “This book undertakes to study certain aspects of archaic ontology—more precisely, the conceptions of being and reality that can be read from the behavior of the man of the premodern societies. The premodern or “traditional” societies include both the world usually known as “primitive” and the ancient cultures of Asia, Europe, and America. Obviously, the metaphysical concepts of the archaic world were not always formulated in theoretical language; but the symbol, the myth, the rite, express, on different planes and through the means proper to them, a complex system of coherent affirmations about the ultimate reality of things, a system that can be regarded as constituting a metaphysics.”, *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

Exchange and Confronting Alterity

Commerce and Money

A sizable portion of Kolb's observations are comparative in nature, measuring the customs characterizing the Hottentot way of life against the habits and institutions of European society at the time. After he has painted the Hottentot as the negative of the European, he then seeks common ground between the two cultures. Kolb's detailed notes concerning the Hottentots' ways of conducting commerce cover trade relations both with their fellow tribesmen as well as with the Dutch colonists. After the arrival of the latter, the native inhabitants of this area were convinced with the help of appealing exotic goods, such as tobacco, liquor, and metal trinkets, to sign a treaty stipulating the transfer of ownership of the land surrounding the Cape to the Dutch⁵⁵. Moreover, this treaty outlined the regulations governing commerce between the Dutch and the Hottentots. While this first treaty did not last, as the Hottentots soon grew jealous of the developments of the Europeans, regretting the loss of their land and eventually going to war against the Dutch⁵⁶, a new treaty was concluded in which the two nations swore allegiance to each other for the purpose of mutual defense. This second treaty, described in the passage below, circumstantially revealed to Kolb an essential way in which the Hottentots differ from the

⁵⁵ « Il [Van Riebeeck, nommé Gouverneur du Cap par les Hollandais] chercha d'abord à se concilier la bienveillance des habitants, les *Hottentots Gunjemans*, en leur faisant quelques présents de quincaillerie, de tabac, d'eau de vie, &c. Les Hottentots furent si charmés de cette générosité, et sur-tout des manières insinuates et de la bonne humeur de cet Amiral, qu'ils firent bientôt un Traité avec lui, par lequel les Hollandois s'engagèrent de fournir une certaine quantité de quincaillerie et d'autres marchandises qui pouvoient monter à environ 50000 florins, moyennant quoi ils auroient pleine liberté de s'établir au Cap. Les peuples qui habitoient les côtes ne devoient pas *céder leurs habitations*, ni se retirer plus avant dans les *ternes*, comme le Chevalier de Forbin et Le P. Tachart le disent. Ils pouvoient y rester s'ils le vouloient, et vivre avec les Hollandois, qui n'avoient en vue que les vastes pays qui n'étoient pas habités. Les conditions que je viens de rapporter furent incessamment exécutées ; et en conséquence, les Hollandois se mirent en possession du Cap, qui leur fut livré avec de grandes cérémonies . » Kolb, Vol. 1, 24.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Vol. 1, 28.

Europeans: their commitment to integrity. Of the negotiations between the Hottentots and the Dutch, he records:

Les Hottentots n'avoient pas l'usage des lettres ; cependant ces Traités qui n'ont été faits que de bouche, ont été religieusement observés de part et d'autre jusqu'à présent. D'un côté, les Hottentots ignorent entièrement la corruption et les infidélités des Européens : leur parole est une chose sacrée, et il n'y a rien qu'ils aient plus en horreur que de rompre un engagement. De l'autre, les Gouverneurs du Cap, suivant les instructions de leurs commetans, entretiennent avec tout le soin possible l'amitié de ces Alliés. C'est à l'aimable simplicité et à la sincère probité des Hottentots, de même qu'à la bonne conduite des Gouverneurs, qu'il faut attribuer l'exactitude avec laquelle les conditions de cette alliance ont été jusqu'ici observées.⁵⁷

In this passage, Kolb associates the importance of the spoken word in Hottentot culture with their trustworthiness. He sets up a direct comparison with the *mauvaise foi* of the Europeans, offering a Rousseauian homage to simplicity and transparency in social relations. Kolb suggests that perhaps it is because of the absence of a developed system of writing that the spoken word still means something in Hottentot society: the spoken word is one with the honor and conscience of the speaker, as opposed to the spoken word's transformation into an external tool in more-advanced, writing-based societies.

Related to the Hottentot respect for the spoken word, the theme of integrity in commerce is illustrated in a unique way through Kolb's digression on speculations about the use of the name "Hottentot". He relates the following tale as one possible explanation:

Il est vrai que les natifs du Cap répètent souvent ces mots d'Hottentottum Brockqua dans leurs réjouissances ; mais ce n'est point de-là qu'ils ont été appelés Hottentots . . . Voici l'origine de cette phrase, et du fréquent usage qu'ils en font. Le Consulateur d'un vaisseau Hollandois avoit envoyé un Hottentot en quelque endroit, en lui promettant à son retour, pour sa peine, un gros morceau de pain et une certaine quantité de tabac. Le Sauvage s'acquitta fidèlement de sa commission ; mais l'Européen eut assez peu de conscience, pour lui refuser la récompense. Les Hottentots, instruits de ce manque de parole, en furent indignés : car tout sauvages qu'on les fait, ils ont en horreur la mauvaise-foi. Pour se moquer donc du Consulateur, et pour témoigner combien ils détestoient son action, ils composèrent à leur manière une chanson, dont ces mots sont comme le refrain :

⁵⁷ Ibid., Vol. 1, 29.

Hottentottum brockqua, c'est-à-dire, Donnez au Hottentot son morceau de pain. Cette chanson se répandit bientôt dans tous les endroits où l'on entendit parler de la perfidie du Consolateur ; et même ces peuples avoient accoutumé de la chanter dès qu'ils voyoient quelque étranger, comme pour se rappeler qu'ils devoient se précautionner contre les fourberies de ceux qu'ils ne connoissent pas. Cet usage est encore aujourd'hui fort commun. C'est un fait que je tiens de quelques Hottentots des plus intelligens, avec lesquels j'ai commercé pendant plusieurs années ; il m'a été aussi confirmé par plusieurs vieux Hollandois, qui connoissent très bien cette nation.⁵⁸

The above tale is particularly valuable to our study in that it creatively illustrates Kolb's previous observations of difference between the Hottentots and the Europeans with respect to their use of words as contracts regulating exchanges. According to Kolb's account, the Hottentots' disapproval of deception channels itself into a cultural production, as they compose a song based on an unfortunate encounter. Through its circulation, the song serves to communicate a warning to the entire community to be wary of foreigners. In this way, the song reinforces a link between deception and alterity, reminding the Hottentot people that outsiders are likely to use words in whatever manner will suit their purpose, since they are not concerned with maintaining the bond of trust that regulates their exchanges with a view to the good of the community. In short, the song serves as reminder, both of the threat of deception by outsiders and of the Hottentot identity as a community based upon the integrity of the word, an identity affirmed through their adoption of the song's lyrics as their name⁵⁹. Whether or not this anecdote is true is unclear, but its presence in Kolb's text suggests his continued preoccupation with customs as practices from which a culture's values can be distilled.

Kolb's anecdote explaining the circumstances surrounding the use of the Hottentot name provides an idyllic setting in which an encounter with alterity leads to cultural production and an

⁵⁸ Ibid., Vol. 1, 37-38.

⁵⁹ The notion that the word Hottentot is essential to the community's identity follows from Kolb's comments refuting those who have suggested that it was a nickname given to the native inhabitants of the Cape by European explorers. He asserts, « Ceux-là se trompent assurément, qui font envisager le nom d'*Hottentot* comme une espèce de sobriquet qu'on donne aux habitans du Cap de Bonne-Espérance. Autant qu'on peut le savoir, c'est là leur nom propre et primitif, c'est le nom par lequel ils se sont toujours désignés eux-mêmes ». Ibid., Vol. 1, 38

enhanced sense of community identity. To put this story in historical context, let us refer to François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar's book, *L'Invention du Hottentot*. He tells us that the name "Hottentot" first appeared in travel accounts written by French and Danish explorers in the first half of the seventeenth century. Later, in 1673, Jan Van Riebeeck, the first governor of the new Dutch settlement at the Cape, employed the term "Hottentot" in the colony's newsletter, the *Daghregister*, thus officially coining the term which remained in usage thereafter⁶⁰. Of the repeated appearance of this name in observations of the natives' manner of greeting European visitors, Fauvelle-Aymar asks,

Faut-il voir dans cette coïncidence le résultat d'un comportement nouveau apparu à cette date parmi les Khoikhoi de la baie de la Table, ou bien considérer que les Européens commencent seulement à prêter attention aux paroles des danses, lesquelles sont par ailleurs déjà mentionnées à plusieurs reprises ? J'incline à voir là un effet de l'allongement du questionnaire, qui se manifeste également, comme on l'a vu, par une curiosité croissante pour la langue des Khoikhoi.⁶¹

As Europeans were beginning to become more interested in Africa, a growing interest focused on identifying and studying language and other institutions presumed essential to civilization. Some historians claim that the name "Hottentot" emerged from observations of indigenous dancing when explorers heard a repetition of sounds resembling this word⁶². Dutch explorers reappropriated the sound to create a name that phonetically resembled a word in Dutch meaning "to stutter" perhaps, it is claimed, because they mistook the clicking sounds of the Hottentot language for stuttering⁶³. This act of naming (or misnaming, rather) the indigenous inhabitants

⁶⁰ Fauvelle-Aymar, op. cit., 130-131, 134.

⁶¹ Ibid., 131.

⁶² See M.D.W. Jeffreys, "The Origin of the Name Hottentot", *African Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 184, Oxford: Oxford UP (July 1947).

⁶³ « En 1668, Dapper écrit que 'ce mot est communément usité dans notre pays [les Pays-Bas], de façon moqueuse, pour celui qui bafouille et bégaye'. C'est sans doute en lisant Dapper que certains voyageurs ont pu conclure à une filiation étymologique entre le mot 'bègue' et le terme appliqué aux Khoikhoi. Curieux trajet : comme sobriquet d'abord, le mot 'Hottentot' condense les attitudes railleuses des voyageurs à l'égard des habitants du Cap. Comme nom en passe d'être 'communément usité' aux Pays-Bas, il désigne les bègues, et se retourne contre les Khoikhoi.

of the Cape is therefore likely an instance of cultural prejudice determining the representation of a Non-European other. Kolb emphasizes the Hottentot custom of regarding the spoken word as sacred, and yet this same speech was interpreted by other Europeans as an impaired form of human speech.

Among the constant comparisons Kolb makes between Hottentot and European culture, he devotes particular attention to commodities and exchange. The most fundamental difference between the two commerce systems is that the Hottentots do not use any form of money, but rather directly exchange various types of goods for one other:

Ces peuples n'ont point de monnaie, ni rien qui en tienne la place. C'est donc par voie d'échange, qu'ils négocient. Si vous en exceptez quelques-uns de ceux qui habitent parmi les Hollandois, il n'y en a point qui connoisse la valeur d'aucune pièce.⁶⁴

Rather than using money, the Hottentots demonstrate their wealth by the number of animals they have in their herd, or the number of elephant teeth they have amassed. The signs of wealth in use among the Hottentots are thus much more immediately tied to forms of sustenance and resources than are coins made of precious metals.

Jean-Joseph Goux has written extensively on the metaphorical relation between money and language in his book, *Les Monnayeurs du langage*. He details the manner in which both systems of reference evolve historically according to what he terms a « processus d'économie-politisation des rapports sociaux »⁶⁵. The Hottentots have the most immediate relation to commodities, in contrast to the Europeans, whose system is based on « la monnaie-or (ou argent), à pleine valeur intrinsèque »⁶⁶. Goux points out that as currency evolves from one form to another, « la matière de cette monnaie devient peu à peu indifférente, et elle peut être

On retrouve dans cette association d'idées le schéma mental qui veut que l'Autre, à l'exemple des *Barbaroi* soit frappé d'une infirmité de la parole. » Fauvelle-Aymar, op. cit., 134.

⁶⁴ Kolb, Vol. 1, 318.

⁶⁵ Jean-Joseph Goux, *Les Monnayeurs du langage*. Paris: Editions Galilée, 1984, 80.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 28.

remplacée par n'importe quel signe ou jeton »⁶⁷. In this way, money becomes reduced to its pure function (or “exchange value”, in the terminology of Adam Smith)⁶⁸, and the horizontal relationship to other signs within the system becomes more important than the original vertical relationship to a referent (for example, the correspondence between the weight and value of gold)⁶⁹. Accordingly, the development of a conventional currency that is a mere token is necessarily detached from the original underlying value grounding the system. Goux further argues,

Loin de ressembler à une femme orientale qui apprécie directement les métaux précieux pour leur valeur d'usage (comme belle parure) nous sommes plutôt des hommes occidentaux qui différons toute jouissance sensorielle, acceptons le détour d'échange, l'abstraction de l'« élément matériel », jusqu'à ne considérer toute monnaie que dans sa fonction métabolique : ordre pour obtenir une richesse future, par la transaction sur le marché. Ainsi le mouvement même du passage de la monnaie métallique au papier monnaie, redouble l'abstraction échangiste qui était déjà impliquée par la formation d'un équivalent général monétaire. C'est une opération de détour et de « différence » supplémentaire, qui nous fait passer de la chose à sa seule représentation.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid., 52-3.

⁶⁸ Smith outlines the difference between “use value” and “exchange value” in the following lines: “The word value, it is to be observed, has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called “value in use”; the other, “value in exchange”. The things which have the greatest value in use have frequently little or no value in exchange; and on the contrary, those which have the greatest value in exchange have frequently little or no value in use. Nothing is more useful than water; but it will purchase scarce any thing; scarce any thing can be had in exchange for it. A diamond, on the contrary, has scarce any value in use; but a very great quantity of other goods may frequently be had, in exchange for it”. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* [electronic resource of 1776 edition], London: Electric Book Co., 2001, 48.

⁶⁹ Goux makes the following distinction between *signification* and *valeur*: « Une pièce de cinq francs peut entrer dans un rapport d'échange avec une chose différente (du pain) et dans un rapport de comparaison (qui est aussi éventuellement un rapport d'échange) avec une chose semblable (monnaie du même pays, ou d'un autre pays dans le cas de l'opération de change). Une monnaie peut donc se définir suivant deux axes de comparaisons : les marchandises ou d'autres monnaies. Pareillement, dit Saussure, un mot peut être échangé contre une idée (dimension de la signification) ou être comparé avec d'autres mots (dans la synonymie par exemple, ou dans la traduction en une autre langue). Le linguiste établit donc un parallèle entre le *prix* (relation entre la pièce de monnaie et le pain) et la *signification* (relation entre le mot et l'idée), mais ce qui est remarquable est qu'il tient aussitôt cette relation (que l'on peut dire verticale) pour peu d'importance. Ce n'est pas elle qu'il va retenir, mais la relation horizontale du semblable au semblable, qui permet de comparer la monnaie avec la monnaie, et les mots avec d'autres mots. », 192-93.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 176.

As a society that deals in material goods, the Hottentot lifestyle, in contrast to that of Europeans, is not subject to the anticipatory pressure of desire that hollows out the satisfaction of the moment of possession.

Given the historical context of the eighteenth-century European economy, Kolb may have wished to portray in a favorable light a society whose wealth is grounded in material resources with an immediate use value. In 1716, the Scottish economist John Law came to France and persuaded the Duc d'Orléans to institute a new system of paper money to help ease the debt incurred by Louis XIV's wars and to increase the circulation of currency, thereby stimulating the economy. In 1720, the system went bankrupt and France returned to the use of precious metals as currency⁷¹. In this light, Kolb's text may reflect a certain anxiety about currency, considering exchange a preferable option to the potential instability that accompanies a system using money devoid of any inherent value. Despite the security of remaining attached to more concrete signs of utility, emphasizing the Hottentot's system of direct exchange also presents them as a society with a limited potential for advancement.

Hospitality

In a fashion typical of travel writing, Kolb appeals to Hottentot customs of hospitality as a point of comparison with European society. His observations describe the acts of hospitality he witnesses as a spontaneous, unreflective extension of the Hottentot spirit of collectivity and

⁷¹ Bamber Gascoigne, "The History of France", [<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?ParagraphID=kbb>], HistoryWorld, from 2001, ongoing, [accessed 28 Feb 2012].

sharing. Kolb contradicts the earlier negative stereotype depicting this people as barbaric, by putting forth the following description:

Ces peuples surpassent peut-être tous les autres, en générosité et en hospitalité. Ils prennent un singulier plaisir à se secourir, et ils se donnent des marques d'affection avec une si noble simplicité, qu'on auroit peine à en trouver des exemples ailleurs que dans les premiers âges du Monde. Le P. Tachard en avoit été lui-même surpris. Ils ont dit-il, 'plus de charité et de fidélité les uns envers les autres, qu'il ne s'en trouve ordinairement parmi les Chrétiens. Ils sont bienfaisans et secourables, ajoute-t-il plus bas : ils n'ont presque rien à eux : quand on leur donne quelque chose, si elle se peut diviser, ils en font part au premier de leurs compagnons qu'ils rencontrent ; ils le cherchent même dans ce dessein, et se réservent ordinairement la moindre partie de ce qu'ils ont.' ⁷²

The generous spirit of Hottentot daily life extends easily to strangers, as they offer aid to travelers in need. Kolb notes,

Il y a toujours beaucoup de Hottentots qui voyagent d'une nation, ou d'un village à l'autre : lorsque la nuit survient, ils se retirent fort tranquillement au prochain hameau, où on les loge et on les traite très cordialement, sans exiger de payement ni de récompense, quand même ils n'auroient entre eux aucune liaison. ⁷³

Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, gestures of hospitality that figured in biblical episodes of both the Old and New Testaments served as signs of the natural tie of humanity. Such examples provided a model of Christian charity and tolerance of alterity within the Augustinian tradition, a model whose relevance later inspired writings by seventeenth-century Protestant authors in response to the religious oppression they were experiencing in Europe⁷⁴. Kolb's special mention of hospitality among the Hottentots thus reflects a concern with hospitality as a natural virtue at a time when it was acquiring an increasingly political significance in European society.

⁷² Kolb mentions this spirit of generosity characteristic of the Hottentots several times, so it is clearly a point he wishes to emphasize. See, for example, the reformulation on the following page (p. 62): « A peine peuvent-ils se résoudre à jouir seuls de quelque avantage : pour qu'ils y trouvent quelque plaisir, il faut qu'un ou plusieurs de leurs compatriotes le partagent avec eux. » Kolb, Vol. 1, 61.

⁷³ Ibid., Vol. 1, 62-63.

⁷⁴ For a discussion of Caleb Dalechamp's *Christian Hospitality* (1632) and Pierre Bayle's « Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de Jésus-Christ : « Contrains-les d'entrer » (1686), see Lucien Nouis, « Politiques de l'hospitalité (1632-1796) », Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2006.

Within the philosophical context of the eighteenth century, the growth of commerce was identified by Montesquieu and the Chevalier de Jaucourt as a factor contributing to the increasing scarcity of genuine hospitality. Once lauded as a virtue, hospitality came to represent an imbalance insofar as it involved giving beyond measure, without expectation of return. Such generosity constituted a dynamic no longer acceptable in a commercial society that favored exactitude in all exchanges⁷⁵. Kolb eyes the hospitality of the Hottentots with nostalgia and humility, as he perceives them as closer to the virtue of the Ancients than the often self-serving refinements of European society⁷⁶.

Authority Structure and Conflict Resolution

A final major category of Kolb's comparative observations deals with Hottentot forms of government and ways of maintaining order through conflict resolution and punishment. One of the most important elements of the Hottentot authority structure is that each Hottentot nation has a chief, called a *Konque*⁷⁷. Kolb explains the criteria for this post and its limitations, stating simply, « *Cette dignité est héréditaire; mais son pouvoir est fort limité* »⁷⁸. Furthermore, he paints an idyllic portrait of the *Konque* as a selfless leader devoted to the community:

Ce Chef n'a point de revenu public, qui le récompense de ses peines et lui aide à soutenir sa dignité. Il ne lui revient d'autre avantage que celui d'être extrêmement respecté par ses sujets. On voit par-là, que le Gouvernement des Hottentots approche beaucoup de

⁷⁵ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁶ Kolb is touched and humbled by the generosity he sees among the Hottentots: « Jamais je ne me la rappelle, que je ne sente naître dans mon coeur un mélange de plaisir et de douleur ; de plaisir, en tant qu'elle me présente un noble reste de cet amour et de cette généreuse hospitalité si célèbre chez les Anciens ; de douleur, lorsque je considère que des Paiens, qu'il nous plait d'appeler sauvages, ont des sentimens d'humanité qu'on chercheroit inutilement parmi les Chrétiens ». Vol. 1, 64.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Vol. 1, 137.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Vol. 1, 138.

celui qu'Aristote loue si fort sous le nom de Gouvernement Héroïque : Gouvernement qui sans doute fut le premier qui ait eu lieu, après le Gouvernement Paternel, lorsque la corruption des hommes eut rendu ces associations nécessaires.⁷⁹

Again, Kolb nostalgically likens the Hottentots to the Ancient Greeks. In his description of the *Konque*, Kolb explains that, while the chief's powers are quite restrained, he is revered as one who maintains order, a respect outwardly expressed through elegant dress and ornamentation:

Autrefois, le Konque n'étoit distingué que par la beauté ou la magnificence de ses habits, ou plutôt de la peau qui couvroit les épaules. Jamais il ne paroissoit en public, qu'il ne fût orné de quelque riche dépouille de tigre, ou de chat, ou de quelque autre animal sauvage ; et c'étoit la seule marque de sa dignité. Mais depuis que les Hollandois, en venant s'établir au Cap, firent présent à chaque Nation d'une couronne de cuivre, le Chef la porte constamment dans toutes les occasions solennelles, lorsqu'il est à la tête de l'Armée, ou qu'il préside dans les Conseils.⁸⁰

The type of leadership in vigor among the Hottentots provides an appealing alternative to the European model of power familiar to Kolb and his readers. Although the Hottentot chief is distinguished by his fine dress, this primitive society is unfamiliar with the overabundance of elaborate customs, hierarchies, and procedures that dictate court life in eighteenth-century Europe. Once the Hottentots become acquainted with the ways of the Dutch, their chief begins to wear a crown given to him by the foreigners, and it soon becomes appropriated as a symbol of power⁸¹. The reverence initially reserved for the functional ideal of maintaining order and justice eventually becomes, through the elevation of the material crown, conferred upon the person of the leader. Kolb's observations are particularly fascinating in that they show the cultural transfer of a sign. The crown, which initially held no meaning for the Hottentots, soon becomes inseparable from the exercise of power. The perverse effect, of course, is that the

⁷⁹ Ibid., Vol. 1, 139.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Vol. 1, 139.

⁸¹ « Rien ne distinguoit autrefois les Capitaines, non plus que les *Konques*, que le manteau de peau de tigre ou de chat sauvage. Mais il y a déjà longtems que les Hollandois, lorsqu'ils traitèrent alliance avec les Hottentots, firent présent à chaque communauté ou *Kraal*, d'une canne ornée d'une pomme de cuivre ; et depuis ce tems-là, tous les Capitaines ont porté cette canne, qui à présent est regardée comme un *symbole inséparable* de leur emploi et comme le bâton de commandement. » Ibid., Vol. 1, 140-141.

Hottentots, most likely because they see the power of their foreign colonizers through their able use of arms and technology, set aside their own traditions in favor of adopting the sign of a foreign society. They quickly come to respect this new sign, as they wish to use signs whose validity will be recognized by the Europeans. In so doing, they are symbolically acknowledging respect for the foreign society and conceding that it is more closely associated with power than their own. In essence, they are assimilating a new means of communication by accepting the language of their colonizers.

While many of the passages concerning the governing of Hottentot society are idealistic in tone, containing implicit criticisms of European government, there are also numerous episodes that portray this unfamiliar society as less than praiseworthy. For example, Kolb describes in detail the Hottentot procedure for dealing with offenses of honor. Just as eighteenth-century European society has its traditions of maintaining honor and resolving conflicts through duels, the Hottentots have a custom for dealing with such issues. The following passage explains the practice in detail:

Le terme de Kutfire, qui désigne un lâche et un poltron, est une injure très grande chez ces Nations, comme chez la plupart des autres Peuples. Cette injure est même si flétrissante parmi eux, qu'elle suffit pour dégrader du rang d'homme celui qui en est diffamé. Dès que quelqu'un a ce malheur, il est flétri pour jamais ; toutes ses belles actions sont oubliées ; quelque soit son âge, il est remis au rang des enfans, banni de la société des hommes, regardé avec mépris et traité comme un coquin. . . . Pour faire cesser ces outrages, il faut s'adresser aux hommes du Kraal, qui s'assemblent pour examiner les fondemens de l'injure. La matière est bientôt décidée, et rarement elle l'est avec impartialité. . . .

L'appétit des Juges les prévient d'ordinaire contre l'injurié : car s'il est condamné, il est obligé de se faire rehabiliter, et une des circonstances inséparables de cette réhabilitation, est un festin qu'il doit donner à tous les hommes du Kraal. Pendant tout le repas, il est séparé du reste de la compagnie, et ne goûte point du mouton qu'il donne à ses convives ; il n'a pour sa portion que les entrailles de l'animal. Le repas fini, on le frotte soigneusement de la graisse du mouton qu'on vient de manger : ce n'est qu'après cela qu'il rentre dans tous les droits dont il étoit déchu, et qu'il est reconnu pour homme. Si l'Assemblée trouve l'accusation mal fondée, on n'inflige aucune peine au calomniateur :

preuve certaine que tout ce cérémonial n'est observé que pour fournir une occasion aux hommes du village d'être régalez, et de se divertir aux dépens d'autrui.⁸²

The custom dealing with rehabilitating a person's honor is certainly an intriguing case of semiology, as the estranged person must be ceremonially excluded during a meal, eating the leftover parts of the animal while the other men enjoy the prime meat. Then, when he is rubbed down with the fat from this same sheep, he is being remade as a man worthy of joining in the feast and therefore, once again, a full member of the community. Despite all these outward signs that convey a message to the community, the process, Kolb argues, has become corrupted by greed. No longer is anyone genuinely concerned with whether or not the accused was wrongfully insulted, but it is instead an opportunity to enjoy a feast and make a spectacle out of a neighbor. The account given of this custom is noteworthy in that it depicts how, apart from any foreign intervention, the customs and signs of the Hottentots have been manipulated by self-interest. What was once a symbolic reaffirmation of the tribe's standards for conduct and civic behavior has, we are told, lost its original function in lieu of serving personal desires of greed, vengeance or cruelty. With this anecdote, Kolb signals to his readers that the Hottentots, while certainly less technologically advanced by European standards, are just as subject to social and political corruption. Although many of their inherited customs are resistant to modification, the Hottentots, unlike the hypothetical natural man, live within the parameters of time and history.

⁸² Ibid., Vol. 1, 143-144.

A Plurality of European Representations of the Hottentots

The main categories of Kolb's observations that lend themselves to drawing comparisons between the Hottentots and the Europeans primarily deal with, as we have mentioned, commerce, hospitality and government. A thought-provoking juxtaposition of Europe and Africa's radically different cultures follows naturally from these episodes as they all describe the manner in which the Hottentots confront various forms of alterity. Whether it is a matter of trading animals for foreign goods with the Dutch, welcoming strangers from other tribes in the region, or reconciling disparate interests and reincorporating marginalized individuals into the community, these episodes all demonstrate that the Hottentot tribe is not an isolated community living in a Golden Age, but rather one which has constructed its own customs and institutions, practices which continue to evolve in response to interactions with outside social groups.

Indeed, historically documented cross-cultural interactions provide the foundation for Kolb's claims to truth. As previously mentioned, Kolb attests to the accuracy and truthfulness of his observations, and maintains that he wants to correct false information disseminated by previous explorers. Despite Kolb's openness to discovering unfamiliar ways, he is at times repulsed or amused and must hide his reactions, inappropriate within the Hottentot cultural context. For instance, he finds the red lines that the women paint on their faces hideous, their habit of covering themselves with animal fat disgusting, and their manner of singing at the burial ritual hilarious.⁸³ Regardless of whether or not Kolb's account is any more accurate than his

⁸³ For grease practice, see Vol.1, p. 84; for burial singing, see Vol. 1, p. 358. Despite his best efforts, Kolb cannot see the beauty of the women's preferred makeup: « La pierre, humectée de la graisse qui leur couvre toujours le corps, fait six raies rouges, qu'elles regardent comme des attraits extrêmement séduisants. Aussi, toutes les fois qu'elles doivent aller à quelque fête, ou qu'elles visent à quelque conquête, elles ne manquent jamais de se pourvoir de ces six traits assassins. Quelque idée cependant qu'elles puissent avoir d'un pareil fard, je puis assurer que jamais peintre n'imagina de figure plus affreuse et plus ridicule que l'est une femme ainsi peinte. », Vol. 1, 107-108.

predecessors', his narrative provides valuable insight into eighteenth-century European notions about Africans and their culture.

While he makes an admirable effort to enter into the Hottentot mentality, befriending many natives and showing eagerness to experience their customs and rituals firsthand, Kolb's position as an outsider is an ever-present obstacle in his quest to understand the Hottentot culture. This tremendous difficulty makes itself felt most notably when he asks a number of pointed questions about the significance of Hottentot practices: he often requests a rational explanation and, usually, the Hottentots have no such explanation to give him. For example, Kolb asks his native friends to explain why they have a ceremony in which they force their herds of animals to pass through a smoky fire. He receives the following response to his inquiry:

Nous ignorons, me dit-il, depuis quel tems notre Nation ancienne pratique cette coutume. Nous sommes dans la pensée qu'elle a toujours été observée. Je ne crois pas même que parmi nous il y ait quelqu'un qui en puisse rendre d'autre raison, que celle qui est tirée de l'autorité respectable de nos ancêtres, que nous supposons avoir été assez sages pour ne transmettre à leur postérité aucune règle qui ne fût appuyée sur de bons et solides fondemens.

Ce raisonnement est de tous les pays ; car combien de coutumes et de croyances parmi nous qui n'ont d'autre fondement, et qu'on n'ose même attaquer à cause de leur ancienneté !⁸⁴

Eventually, the Hottentot interlocutor does think of a practical purpose for this custom, saying that the smell of the smoke permeates the hides of the animals and protects them by deterring wild dogs. While many of the Hottentot customs fulfill practical functions, the members of this culture "read" these customs as the traditions comprising the identity of their community. As such, they are essential elements of their society's daily life, and any inquiry demanding justification is incomprehensible or even absurd. It is only the outsider who would demand a rational explanation because he is unfamiliar with the code that the Hottentots intuitively

⁸⁴ Ibid., Vol. 1, 316-317.

decipher. By making such a demand, he is effectively asking for the “grammar” of the Hottentot cultural language, a set of rules already assimilated by the community’s members.

Kolb’s attempts at understanding other cultures are most explicitly conveyed through his stated objective for this travel account. He confides in the reader that, having read observations of the Hottentots written by previous explorers, he is struck by how drastically his own firsthand experiences at the Cape contradict these earlier writings. He thus assigns to his project the aim of rectifying previous inaccurate and often disparaging judgments about the Hottentots. Kolb vents his frustration with the untruths spread by other explorers in the following lines:

Rien n’est plus outré, que le portrait que les voyageurs ont fait jusqu’ici des Hottentots. Ils les ont représentés comme le peuple du monde le plus sauvage et le plus brutal, incapable en quelque manière de la moindre réflexion, n’ayant nul sentiment de Dieu et de Religion, nulle idée d’ordre et d’oeconomie, ne donnant aucune marque de bon-sens ni d’humanité. Ce sont-là des exagérations publiées plutôt pour exciter la pitié, ou pour jeter du ridicule, que pour donner une idée juste de ces peuples. Ces relations ne peuvent venir que d’une malice affectée, qui se plaît à défigurer tout ce qu’elle rapporte ; ou d’une injuste vanité, qui nous porte à mépriser tout ce qui est opposé à nos usages ; ou enfin de cette précipitation condamnable, qui nous fait parler des choses, avant que de les avoir suffisamment examinées.⁸⁵

Kolb is commenting upon the proliferation among his predecessors of what Christian Marouby calls a « rhétorique de la négativité », whereby non-Europeans are described as lacking in every aspect of civilization⁸⁶. However, as we see for instance in Kolb’s commentary on Hottentot hospitality and integrity, there are moments when a positive discourse emerges. Marouby analyzes this double movement highly characteristic of primitivist texts:

Ce n’est pas seulement que le sauvage est défini par rapport à la civilisation, ou plus exactement par rapport à ses attributs, mais qu’il est défini en négatif, en une démarche qui est dès le départ essentiellement réductrice. . . . A chaque négation, c’est une barrière qui tombe, derrière laquelle apparaît de plus en plus menaçant le spectre d’une sous-humanité, dont la condition ne peut être, à la limite, qu’une « peur perpétuelle ». Et c’est ici qu’intervient le retournement primitiviste. Ce qu’il affirme, c’est qu’à la fin de cette

⁸⁵ Ibid., Vol. 1, 57.

⁸⁶ Christian Marouby, *Utopie et primitivisme: essai sur l’imaginaire anthropologique à l’âge classique*, Paris: Seuil, 1990, 113.

série de négations, il ne reste pas comme on s’y attendait un degré zéro, mais au contraire un surcroît d’humanité.⁸⁷

Kolb does not hesitate to openly challenge these old perceptions by praising the good character he sees among the Hottentot people. He attests,

L’intégrité, l’équité, et la promptitude à rendre justice, sont aussi des qualités dans lesquelles cette nation surpasse toutes les autres. On voit aussi briller parmi eux une noble simplicité dans les mœurs, qui charme tous ceux qui ne sont pas follement prévenus contre tout ce qui s’écarte des manières fardées de l’Europe.⁸⁸

Kolb at once admires the honesty of the Hottentot people and reproaches European society for creating false representations of them. Several critics today highlight the lack of consideration for historical circumstances in the debates of Enlightenment writers about the character of Non-European peoples⁸⁹. In this case, for example, Kolb does not take into account that the Africans he encounters have already been impoverished and weakened by colonization, and so are much less fierce and accustomed to dealing with Europeans by the time he arrives (as opposed to when previous explorers disembarked at the Cape). As Fauvelle-Aymar argues, once the corrupting effects of European colonization on the native Africans became more visible, they facilitated the perception of these indigenous peoples as having once been “noble savages”, fallen prey to victimization by foreigners. As such, he suggests that the innocence emphasized by some later travelers’ accounts is likely to be, in large part, a chimera produced by European minds frustrated with the corruption of their own societies⁹⁰.

Regardless of Kolb’s motivation, his inclusion of positive observations concerning the Hottentots marks a clear break with the claims of many of his predecessors. As David Johnson

⁸⁷ Ibid., 116-117.

⁸⁸ Kolb, Vol. 1, 60.

⁸⁹ Again, Fauvelle-Aymar’s work is indispensable with providing historical context. See also: David Johnson, “Representing the Cape “Hottentots”, from the French Enlightenment to Post-Apartheid South Africa”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 40, N° 4 (2007).

⁹⁰ Kolb, Vol. 1, 189, 191-193.

notes, nearly all of earlier, seventeenth-century explorers characterized the Hottentots as “beasts” or “brutes”. He writes:

The cumulative impression of these descriptions is that the “Hottentots were being inscribed in the great chain of being as intermediaries between man and beast, with allegedly “beast-like” qualities repeatedly attributed to them.”⁹¹

However, “these negative remarks . . . were moderated very slightly by occasional words of praise, mostly of their physical prowess”, a characteristic which was, of course, later emphasized by Rousseau⁹².

Kolb’s detailed descriptions of the customs and cultural codes of the Hottentots describe signifying systems which, despite physical resemblances to primates, firmly anchor them in the category of human societies. Despite the overall trajectory of increasingly positive representations of the Hottentots over the period spanning the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an overly optimistic assessment ought to be tempered, as becomes evident when the discourse is compared to the documented historical circumstances of this social group. As David Johnson pertinently suggests,

Regarding the eighteenth century, it appears that as the French travelers to the Cape were representing the Khoisan in an increasingly positive light in their writings, the Khoisan themselves were suffering a deterioration in their economic circumstances.⁹³

With Johnson, we must ask ourselves, therefore,

Do the more positive representations of the Khoisan serve a compensatory ideological function? Do such representations offset the economic devastation inflicted upon them by the expanding capitalist economy of the settlers?⁹⁴

Finally, one must take into account that the increasingly positive representations of African peoples over the eighteenth century never fully counteracted European racist attitudes, and

⁹¹ Johnson, op.cit., 528.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 527.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

indeed this latent intolerance soon resurfaced with the development of racial science during the nineteenth century.⁹⁵

Needs and Desires

A large portion of Kolb's observations emphasize the dissimilarity between the Hottentots and the Europeans in that the former are content with possessing only what is necessary to fulfill their needs, and indeed their simple life is a far cry from the greed and excess prevalent in European society. This relative lack of materialism is due, in large part, Kolb claims, to the careful attitude of the Hottentot with respect to commerce, a curious stance he describes in the lines below:

Les Hottentots pauvres, et qui cependant ne veulent pas se mettre au service des Européens, ou de quelqu'un de leur Nation, tâchent de gagner leur vie en fabriquant des anneaux, un carquois et les autres armes en usage parmi eux ; ils les vendent aux riches charitables, qui en échange leur donnent deux ou trois pièces de bétail, à proportion de leurs richesses et de la bienveillance qu'ils ont pour le vendeur. Un seul assortiment suffit souvent pour mettre à son aise l'ouvrier ; et dès-lors, content de son sort, il abandonne ce négoce. C'est à cause de cela, qu'il est si difficile à un Européen curieux de se procurer ces sortes d'armes. La charité des riches et le peu d'ambition des pauvres, sont cause qu'un homme ne fait jamais que deux armures tout au plus, une pour lui, et une pour son protecteur. Lorsque quelqu'un d'entre eux a gagné au service des Européens plus de tabac, d'eau de vie, ou de brasselets qu'il ne lui en faut, il les revend à ses concitoyens, et s'établit par-là.⁹⁶

Kolb's analysis of the Hottentots' commercial habits suggests that this nation engages in commerce in such a limited way because its people are reticent to surrender their liberty to dispose of their time as they wish in return for an agreed-upon compensation. They apparently prefer to be completely free and self-sufficient rather than having to trust that they will be justly

⁹⁵ Ibid., 537.

⁹⁶ Kolb., Vol. 1, 321-322.

rewarded for their labor. The necessary trust lying at the basis of all commercial systems is often lacking in their exchanges with foreigners, as we have just seen in the anecdote explaining the name “Hottentot”. Furthermore, even amongst their own people, the risk of commerce’s conditional trust cannot effectively compete with the greater bond of trust inherent to the Hottentot way of life, in other words, that they need not worry about amassing riches for themselves because they can always count on their fellow tribesmen to share what they have and act in the interest of the collectivity.

As for the wider import of Kolb’s observations, it is known that Rousseau was influenced by Kolb’s favorable representation of the Hottentots, as he cites this text in the midst of discussing the superior capacity of primitive man over civilized man to provide for his own needs⁹⁷.

⁹⁷The following is the paragraph in the *Second Discourse* leading up to the footnote in which Kolb is mentioned: « Le corps de l’homme sauvage étant le seul instrument qu’il connoisse, il l’emploie à divers usages, dont, par le défaut d’exercice, les autres sont incapables, et c’est notre industrie qui nous ôte la force et l’agilité que la nécessité l’oblige d’acquiescer. S’il avoit eu une hache, son poignet romproit-il de si fortes branches ? S’il avoit eu une fronde, lanceroit-il de la main une pierre avec tant de roideur ? S’il avoit eu une échelle, grimperoit-il si légèrement sur un arbre ? S’il avoit eu un Cheval, seroit-il si vite à la Course ? Laissez à l’homme civilisé le tems de rassembler toutes ces machines autour de lui, on ne peut douter qu’il ne surmonte facilement l’homme Sauvage ; mais si vous voulés voir un combat plus inégal encore, mettez-les nuds et desarmés vis-à-vis l’un de l’autre, et vous reconnoîtrez bientôt quel est l’avantage d’avoir sans cesse toutes ses forces à sa disposition, d’être toujours prêt à tout événement, et de se porter, pour ainsi dire, toujours tout entier avec soi. », Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. 3, « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », Paris : Gallimard, 1964, 135-136.

The footnote to this paragraph reads : « Toutes les Connoissances qui demandent de la réflexion, toutes celles qui ne s’acquièrent que par l’enchaînement des idées et ne se perfectionnent que successivement, semblent être tout à fait hors de la portée de l’homme Sauvage, faute de communication avec ses semblables, c’est-à-dire, faute de l’instrument qui sert à cette communication, et des besoins qui la rendent nécessaire. Son savoir et son industrie se bornent à sauter, courir, se battre, lancer une pierre, escalader un arbre. Mais s’il ne sait que ces choses, en revanche il les sait beaucoup mieux que nous qui n’en avons pas le même besoin que lui ; et comme elles dépendent uniquement de l’exercice du Corps et ne sont susceptibles d’aucune Communication ni d’aucun progrès d’un individu à l’autre, le premier homme a pu y être tout aussi habile que ses derniers descendants.

Les relations des voyageurs sont pleines d’exemples de la force et de la vigueur des hommes chez les Nations barbares et Sauvages ; elles ne vantent guères moins leur adresse et leur légèreté ; et comme il ne faut que des yeux pour observer ces choses, rien n’empêche qu’on n’ajoute foi à ce que certifient là-dessus des témoins oculaires, j’en tire au hasard quelques exemples des premiers livres qui me tombent sous la main.

« Les Hottentots, dit Kolben, entendent mieux la pêche que les Européens du Cap. Leur habileté est égale au filet, à l’hameçon et au dard, dans les anses comme dans les rivières. Ils ne prennent pas moins habilement le poisson avec la main. Ils sont d’une adresse incomparable à la nage. Leur manière de nager a quelque chose de surprenant et qui

Within the context of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau's main argument is that primitive man has the distinct advantage of fully developing (out of necessity) all of his capacities and becoming as self-sufficient as possible. Rousseau emphasizes the disadvantage in which modern man finds himself, insofar as he is very dependent upon the rest of society for the fulfillment of even his most basic needs. Kolb, like Rousseau, intends with his description of the agile, capable Hottentots, to implicitly critique his European contemporaries who have nearly lost the ability to identify genuine needs because they suffer from an excess of desire. He is clearly mulling over the fundamental trade-off of living in civilized society: Without an organized society, man is free and self-sufficient, but this comes at the price of not being able to benefit from intergenerational advancements in knowledge.

Rousseau points out that, for all higher forms of human development (i.e. those requiring reflection, and activities that are perfected by building upon sequences of improvements made by others), *communication* with one's fellow human beings is essential. Communication is necessary to collaborate and make advancements as a society. Primitive peoples, on the other hand, are unable to make progress beyond the span of an individual life. Rousseau cites Kolb (and will later move on to reference the Père du Tertre), saying that this work, even as one of the

leur est tout à fait propre. Ils nagent le corps droit et les mains étendues hors de l'eau, de sorte qu'ils paroissent marcher sur la terre. Dans la plus grande agitation de la mer et lorsque les flots forment autant de montagnes, ils dansent en quelque sorte sur le dos des vagues, montant et descendant comme un morceau de liège.

« Les Hottentots », dit encore le même Auteur, « sont d'une adresse surprenante à la chasse, et la légèreté de leur course passe l'imagination. » Il s'étonne qu'ils ne fassent pas plus souvent un mauvais usage de leur agilité, ce qui leur arrive pourtant quelquefois, comme on peut juger par l'exemple qu'il en donne : « Un matelot Hollandois en débarquant au Cap chargea, dit-il, un Hottentot de le suivre à la Ville avec un rouleau de tabac d'environ vingt livres. Lorsqu'ils furent tous deux à quelque distance de la Troupe, le Hottentot demanda au Matelot s'il savoit courir ? Courir ! répond le Hollandois, oui, fort bien. Voyons, reprit l'Affriquain, et fuyant avec le tabac il disparut presque aussitôt. Le Matelot confondu de cette merveilleuse vitesse ne pensa point à le poursuivre et ne revit jamais ni son tabac ni son porteur.

Ils ont la vûe si prompte et la main si certaine que les Européens n'en approchent point. A cent pas, ils toucheront d'un coup de pierre une marque de la grandeur d'un demi sol et ce qu'il y a de plus étonnant, c'est qu'au lieu de fixer comme nous les yeux sur le but, ils font des mouvemens et des contorsions continuelles. Il semble que leur pierre soit portée par une main invisible. » Ibid., Vol. 3, 199-200.

first books by chance within his reach, abounds in examples of the power and skill of primitive men. He emphasizes the plain evidence of these eyewitness accounts, as he wants to render his positive view of the existential wholeness of primitive man incontestable, paving the way for his larger argument of a parallel corruption of language and man as civilization leads humans farther and farther away from the pure state of nature.

Conclusions

Kolb's observations offer a representation of the Hottentot people that is more balanced than the primarily negative portrayals of pre-eighteenth-century explorers, many of whom presented them as beasts rather than human beings. Through his examination of familiar cultural institutions (such as marriage, hospitality and exchange, among others), Kolb paints a rich portrait of the Hottentot culture as a society that is ordered by a set of cultural codes. The social signs of their unique customs and rituals thus constitute a form of communication and regulation of power dynamics in a manner less rigid than formal systems of law. Hottentot social codes, firmly grounded in tradition, function as a source of stability for the community.

Kolb's text clearly invites comparisons with European culture. While the Hottentots are, of course, familiar with certain functional structures (i.e. marriage customs, religious practices, a formal justice system) that operate at a *moral* level by seeking to maintain a cultural organization that is favorable to the majority, in more advanced societies such as Europe, they also coexist

with *rational* discourses that call into question such structures and demand their justification. In the more individualistic culture of Europe, individuals are freer to go beyond the roles prescribed to them by customs, and even reject, criticize and seek to modify or destroy them. While Kolb's observations of the Hottentots rely upon implicit comparisons with European institutions, his enumeration of many Hottentot customs that are bizarre to European readers nevertheless signals an intent to convey the irreducible alterity of this African culture. In his text, he borrows from other writers and, most notably, draws upon the underlying concept of the Great Chain of Being, to situate the Hottentots among the species. Given this intellectual backdrop, which serves as the implicit third term ordering the text, Kolb posits the Hottentots as a human society, albeit one that occupies the liminal space at the point of the human species the most distant from eighteenth-century Europeans.

Chapter 2: Rousseau's Contributions to an Emerging Anthropological Method

Rousseau's Interaction with Travel Writings, or How the Empirical Influenced the Theoretical

The Critique of Previous Studies of Mankind

Rousseau's theoretical developments concerning the character of man in the state of nature are well known, but equally significant to an understanding of his contributions to a budding Enlightenment anthropological thought are his interactions with texts written by travelers and explorers. One need only glance at the *Discours sur l'inégalité* to notice the formidable presence of the many footnotes that accompany the main text. It was through reading texts written by explorers such as Kolb that Rousseau was able to gather empirical details about the indigenous peoples of numerous Non-European lands, material he needed in order to debate issues of human nature with thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke and Buffon. Furthermore, Rousseau examined the writings of his predecessors as a basis from which to make new recommendations for the study of the human species. Through his criticism of previous studies, Rousseau demonstrates an active interest in epistemology, as he seeks to delimit methodological criteria for producing valid knowledge in the nascent field of anthropology.

As he begins his *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Rousseau is quick to point out that it is not his aim to carry out a study of comparative anthropology or a history of civilizations, since the philosophical truth that he seeks touches the atemporal essence of things and concerns truths

which are not contingent upon the material circumstances of the world and history⁹⁸. Despite his invitations to set aside such information, Rousseau does appeal to the empirical findings of travelers in support of his theories about natural man. Given his misgivings as to the place of such information in his study, it is fitting that Rousseau relegates these details to a liminal position, routinely including them in the form of notes. Moreover, the impressive length of the notes proves, in itself, to be a clever formal strategy, in that their formidable yet marginal presence allows for the concurrent unfolding of two distinct forms of narrative.

Rousseau begins by commenting upon the current state of knowledge of the human species. Setting out his task in the Preface, he writes, « La plus utile et la moins avancée de toutes les connoissances humaines me paroît être celle de l'homme »⁹⁹. He notes the difficulty inherent to the study of mankind, since all people are within the object of study and are, in addition, subject to the prejudices of their own communities. Rousseau makes the crucial observation that civilization has had a profoundly *transformative* effect upon mankind¹⁰⁰. Unlike some of his predecessors who, he claims, have attributed to natural man qualities deduced from social man, he, Rousseau, will be careful to separate out the many effects of socialization and refrain from confounding them with mankind's original nature.

Let us now turn to a closer examination of the numerous footnotes of this text. Rousseau relies upon texts written by travelers as proof of the strength and overall self-sufficiency of natural man. He wants to bolster his theoretical argument that the many conveniences and

⁹⁸ As Rousseau states, « Commençons donc par écarter tous les faits, car ils ne touchent point à la question. Il ne faut pas prendre les Recherches, dans lesquelles on peut entrer sur ce Sujet, pour des vérités historiques, mais seulement pour des raisonnemens hypothétiques et conditionnels ; plus propres à éclaircir la Nature des choses qu'à montrer la véritable origine, et semblables à ceux que font tous les jours nos Physiciens sur la formation du Monde. », Ibid., Vol. 3, 132-133.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Vol. 3, 122.

¹⁰⁰ Rousseau exclaims, « Combien tu as changé de ce que tu étois! C'est pour ainsi dire la vie de ton espèce que je te vais décrire d'après les qualités que tu as reçues, que ton éducation et tes habitudes ont pu dépraver, mais qu'elles n'ont pu détruire. », Ibid., Vol. 3, 133.

technological developments of more advanced societies have the negative effect of rendering social man weak and dependent. As a lead-in to the footnote, he writes:

Laissez à l'homme civilisé le tems de rassembler toutes ces machines autour de lui, on ne peut douter qu'il ne surmonte facilement l'homme Sauvage ; mais si vous voulés voir un combat plus inegal encore, mettez-les nuds et desarmés vis-à-vis l'un de l'autre, et vous reconnoîtrez bientôt quel est l'avantage d'avoir sans cesse toutes ses forces à sa disposition, d'être toujours prêt à tout événement, et de se porter, pour ainsi dire, toujours tout entier avec soi.¹⁰¹

Rousseau who, like many Enlightenment *philosophes*, was often skeptical with regard to the truth and accuracy of travelers' claims, brings to his reader's attention that qualities such as agility and strength can be observed with the eyes (as opposed to mental capacities, for example), so he says that he has no reason not to believe the accounts of these eyewitnesses¹⁰². Then, ostensibly with the same motivation of building credibility for his sources, Rousseau writes that he will cite some accounts, simply glanced upon *au hasard*, as if to demonstrate that recorded instances of "primitive" man's physical superiority are so numerous that they must therefore be true. In this way, Rousseau appeals to eyewitness accounts of contemporary, less-advanced societies as the human beings the closest to living in a state of nature which are observable by eighteenth-century Europeans.

Rousseau first cites Kolb, who writes that the Hottentots are much more skilled at fishing than the Europeans living at the Cape and can even catch fish with their bare hands. Kolb admires their unusual manner of swimming, and also notes that they are adept hunters and runners. Rousseau does, however, provide a nuanced view true to Kolb's observations. Although Kolb « s'étonne qu'ils [les Hottentots] ne fassent pas plus souvent un mauvais usage de leur agilité »¹⁰³, Rousseau says that Kolb does acknowledge that they sometimes take

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Vol. 3, 135-136.

¹⁰² Ibid., Vol. 3, 199.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Vol. 3, 200.

advantage of the colonizers. He cites Kolb's example of a Hottentot who stole tobacco from a Dutch sailor, knowing that he could easily outrun the European¹⁰⁴.

Continuing in the same vein, Rousseau cites the Père du Tertre who, in his accounts of the indigenous people of the Antilles, makes observations similar in tone to those made by Kolb¹⁰⁵. Finally, Rousseau widens the field of applicability of his claims by stating that indigenous peoples are equally strong and self-sufficient in both the northern and southern hemispheres of America. He provides a memorable anecdote (courtesy of Gautier) about a native of Buenos Aires condemned to death who, in order to save himself, wagered with his captors that he could defeat a raging bull in front of an audience at a public festival:

En l'année 1746, un Indien de Buenos Aires, ayant été condamné aux Galères à Cadix, proposa au Gouverneur de racheter sa liberté en exposant sa vie dans une fête publique. Il promit qu'il attaqueroit seul le plus furieux Taureau sans autre arme en main qu'une corde, qu'il le terrasseroit, qu'il le saisiroit avec sa corde par telle partie qu'on indiqueroit, qu'il le selleroit, le brideroit, le monteroit, et combattoit ainsi monté deux autres Taureaux des plus furieux qu'on feroit sortir du Torillo, et qu'il les mettroit tous à mort l'un après l'autre, dans l'instant qu'on le lui commanderoit et sans le secours de personne ; ce qui lui fut accordé. L'Indien tint parole et réussit dans tout ce qu'il avoit promis.¹⁰⁶

These numerous observations of the strong physical abilities of indigenous peoples are coupled with remarks further on in the body of the text asserting that natural man has especially keen senses of sight, smell and hearing. Describing natural man's need to make the most of his bodily faculties to aid in survival, Rousseau surmises:

Sa propre conservation faisant presque son unique soin, ses facultés les plus exercées doivent être celles, qui ont pour objet principal l'attaque et la défense . . . Au contraire, les organes qui ne se perfectionnent que par la mollesse et la sensualité, doivent rester dans un état de grossièreté, qui exclut en lui toute espèce de délicatesse ; et ses sens se

¹⁰⁴ This anecdote reinforces Rousseau's commitment of fidelity to his sources, and also serves as a reminder that these indigenous peoples, while certainly closer to nature than Europeans, are nonetheless subject to the corruption of social life.

¹⁰⁵ The Père du Tertre mentions that the natives of the Antilles have the ability to hunt both birds and fish with arrows, exhibiting remarkable accuracy.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Vol. 3, 200-201. (Rousseau is citing *l'Histoire naturelle* by Gautier)

trouvant partagés sur ce point, il aura le toucher et le goût d'une rudesse extrême ; la veüe, l'ouïe et l'odorat de la plus grande subtilité : Tel est l'état animal en général, et c'est aussi, selon le rapport des Voyageurs, celui de la plupart des Peuples Sauvages. Ainsi il ne faut point s'étonner, que les Hottentots du Cap de Bonne-Espérance découvrent, à la simple veüe des Vaisseaux en haute mer d'aussi loin que les Hollandois avec des Lunettes, ni que les sauvages de l'Amérique sentissent les Espagnols à la piste comme auroient pu faire les meilleurs Chiens, ni que toutes ces Nations Barbares supportent sans peine leur nudité, aiguïssent leur goût à force de Piment, et boivent les Liqueurs Européennes comme de l'eau.¹⁰⁷

While the Hottentots and the indigenous Americans are endowed with the desirable attributes of superior vision and smell, which allow them to be self-sufficient in situations that leave their European colonizers helpless, these natural physical qualities also render them more likely to live guided by their instincts, which in the eyes of Europeans makes them resemble animals. Even worse perhaps is the fact that the Non-Europeans' well-developed natural capacities are not enough to save them from corruption and subjugation at the hands of their conquerors.

The weaknesses evident within these social groups permit Rousseau to develop his ideas about how mankind is able to evolve from a more simple social arrangement to a more advanced one over generations. He asserts that

Toutes les connoissances qui demandent de la réflexion, toutes celles qui ne s'acquièrent que par l'enchaînement des idées et ne se perfectionnent que successivement, semblent être tout à fait hors de la portée de l'homme Sauvage, faute de communication avec ses semblables.¹⁰⁸

With this statement, Rousseau appeals to the notion of perfectibility, suggesting that it is the linking of ideas through rational thought that activates a potential dormant in natural man, one that allows him to act as a free agent to pursue either good or bad ends. The main interest in Rousseau's statement is that he establishes the epistemological criteria that allow for the kind of knowledge that yields social development, uniting factors that lie both in and outside of human beings. Within human beings, he identifies the cognitive capacity to form discursive thought as

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Vol. 3, 140-141.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Vol. 3, 199.

essential to achieve the kind of knowledge that can be perfected. Next, and of prime importance for the concerns of our current study, Rousseau emphasizes that this knowledge must be able to be effectively communicated to other members of the human species. He thus places communication, or sign systems based upon convention (i.e. “languages”) at the heart of all social development. As Robert Wokler notes,

Language provides a model of the foundation of society in Rousseau’s theory, not only because property relations upon which society is built are largely linguistic in origin (stemming as they do so much from eloquence and deception), but more because language offers a general paradigm of Rousseau’s account of the transposition of physical dissimilarities into moral distinctions.¹⁰⁹

Whether for progress or for regression, the process by which initial differences between words and things are regularized in the use of linguistic signs that represent their referents, is analogous to the transformation by which conventions of reconciling natural inequalities to form society become solidified through the establishment of institutional orders. In other words, despite the naturally occurring variations in the traits of individuals, as long as they have the requisite structural characteristics and potential, these individuals are considered “human beings”. The formation of such concepts in society establishes commonalities that render certain differences negligible. In the development of society, the foundational act by which natural inequalities among human beings are symbolically effaced in favor of establishing civil equality among citizens, identical before the law, constitutes the proposed benefit that should render life in society more advantageous than solitude. This is, in many ways, the great myth of society, however, and Rousseau is keen to expose the susceptibility to corruption that threatens society and its institutions. Most notably, his *Discours sur l’inégalité* delivers an account of the process by which natural inequality among individuals becomes social (or political) inequality as

¹⁰⁹ Robert Wokler, “Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures: Rousseau’s Anthropology Revisited”, *Daedalus*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (Summer 1978), 119.

conventions and institutions are established that solidify hierarchies, thus compounding natural disadvantages by using them as a pretext for oppression. On the positive side of “perfectibility”, Rousseau argues that it is therefore only through the exchanges that take place in society, which presuppose the constant interplay of agreement and difference within a multiplicity, that progress can take place. Man in isolation cannot advance on his own, and is thereby condemned to an atemporal existence.

In addition to having the proper cognitive capacity to develop languages, conditions also had to be favorable to encourage the first social alliances, and these changes could just as easily never have taken place, according to Rousseau. Since the isolated « homme sauvage » had no need to develop language (and could not be observed in any case), Rousseau turns to observations of Non-European social groups to illustrate an intermediary stage of mankind. The customs and other sign systems described by writers such as Kolb are in fact clear indicators that these social groups possess the building blocks of culture through the use of shared mental representations and, in this way, are *fundamentally different* from the man in a state of pure nature theorized by Rousseau. Further on, we will see how Rousseau must dispute the inaccuracies of previous explorers who mistook these indigenous peoples of Non-European lands for human-like animals. We will also examine in more detail the ideal of the “Golden Age of Mankind”, and see how these foreign social groups exhibit many characteristics of this intermediary stage.

It is Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’inégalité* that allows him to position himself philosophically within the Enlightenment debate concerning how to define the “human”. In large part, he wishes to refute Hobbes’ negative view of human nature. Rousseau criticizes his

predecessor by maintaining that he mistakenly reached conclusions about natural man based on observations of man in society. Rousseau remarks,

Un Auteur célèbre calculant les biens et les maux de la vie humaine et comparant les deux sommes, a trouvé que la dernière surpassant l'autre de beaucoup et qu'à tout prendre la vie étoit pour l'homme un assés mauvais présent. Je ne suis point surpris de sa conclusion ; il a tiré tous ses raisonnemens de la constitution de l'homme Civil : s'il fût remonté jusqu'à l'homme Naturel, on peut juger qu'il eût trouvé des résultats très différens, qu'il eût apperçu que l'homme n'a guères de maux que ceux qu'il s'est donnés lui-même, et que la Nature eût été justifiée.¹¹⁰

Unlike Hobbes, Rousseau describes man in nature as a being whose actions do not yet have a moral dimension. It is only once he becomes a free agent, conscious of his liberty, a concept which can only emerge through the type of rational thought that comes with life in society, that man can act for good or evil. Rousseau laments the double-edged “curse” of human freedom, as it provides an opening for human beings not only to progress, but also to sink into a state of subhuman indignity if they become ruled by vice. In this sense, mankind is faced with a danger to which other animals are not subject. Rousseau asks,

Pourquoi l'homme seul est il sujet à devenir imbécile ? N'est ce point qu'il retourne ainsi dans son état primitif, et que, tandis que la Bête, qui n'a rien acquis et qui n'a rien non plus à perdre, reste toujours avec son instinct, l'homme reperdant par la vieillesse ou d'autres accidents tout ce que sa perfectibilité lui avoit fait acquérir, retombe ainsi plus bas que la Bête même ? Il seroit triste pour nous d'être forcés de convenir, que cette faculté distinctive, et presque illimitée, est la source de tous les malheurs de l'homme ; que c'est elle qui le tire, à force de tems, de cette condition originaire, dans laquelle il couleroit des jours tranquilles, et innocens ; que c'est elle, qui faisant éclore avec les siècles ses lumières et ses erreurs, ses vices et ses vertus, le rend à la longue le tiran de lui-même, et de la Nature.¹¹¹

Man, through his life in society and the perfectibility of rational thought that accompanies it, becomes the source of his own worst problems. Rousseau thereby places the root of vice not within the nature of mankind, but within the contingent course of the development of society. It

¹¹⁰ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Vol. 3, 202.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Vol. 3, 142.

is the combination of reason, and the passion of *amour-propre* that thrives in society, by which social life becomes a milieu of excesses and inequality¹¹².

Rousseau further reinforces the connection between social relations, exchange and rational thought, all of which are susceptible to lead human beings astray, when he appraises society as a sort of bad commerce. He points out the tension inherent to social life whereby reason's counsel for any given individual comes into conflict with the interest of the collectivity. In Rousseau's words,

Que peut on penser d'un commerce où la raison de chaque particulier lui dicte des maximes directement contraires à celles que la raison publique prêche au corps de la Société, et où chacun trouve son compte dans le malheur d'autrui ? . . . Il n'y a point de profit si légitime qui ne soit surpassé par celui qu'on peut faire illégitimement, et le tort fait au prochain est toujours plus lucratif que les services. Il ne s'agit donc plus que de trouver les moyens de s'assurer l'impunité, et c'est à quoi les puissans employent toutes leurs forces, et les foibles toutes leurs ruses.¹¹³

Echoing his previous comments on the necessity of communication for social advancement, Rousseau indicates that the key to a just society is for civil man to wisely manage his exchanges. The interplay of differences that demand resolution within the dynamic social body can take many forms, such as the distribution of resources, the exercise of tolerance, or hospitality. We will see throughout the writings of many travelers that the character of these exchanges comes to constitute a "cultural language" according to which a given social group operates.

Among other elements of his extensive criticism of "advanced" societies, Rousseau observes that habits and manners have become increasingly standardized. Elsewhere he will

¹¹² Rousseau forcefully suggests, « L'extrême inégalité dans la manière de vivre, l'excès d'oisiveté dans les uns, l'excès de travail dans les autres, la facilité d'irriter et de satisfaire nos appetits et notre sensualité, les alimens trop recherchés des riches . . . la mauvaise nourriture des Pauvres . . . les veilles, les excès de toute espèce, les transports immodérés de toutes les Passions, les fatigues, et l'épuisement d'Esprit, les chagrins, et les peines sans nombre qu'on éprouve dans tous les états, et dont les ames sont perpetuellement rongées. Voilà les funestes garands que la plupart de nos maux sont notre propre ouvrage, et que nous les aurions presque tous évités, en conservant la manière de vivre simple, uniforme, et solitaire qui nous étoit prescrite par la Nature. », Ibid., Vol. 3, 138.

¹¹³ Ibid., Vol. 3, 202-203.

equate this relative homogeneity with a lack of authenticity in communication¹¹⁴, but here he expresses regret that the wider varieties originally present within the human species are no longer observable. He muses,

[S]i l'on avoit pu faire de bonnes observations dans ces tems anciens où les peuples divers suivoient des manières de vivre plus différentes entre elles qu'ils ne font aujourd'hui, on y auroit aussi remarqué dans la figure et l'habitude du corps, des variétés beaucoup plus frappantes. Tous ces faits dont il est aisé de fournir des preuves incontestables, ne peuvent surprendre que ceux qui sont accoutumés à ne regarder que les objets qui les environnent, et qui ignorent les puissans effets de la diversité des Climats, de l'air, des alimens, de la manière de vivre, des habitudes en général, et surtout la force étonnante des mêmes causes, quand elles agissent continuellement sur de longues suites de générations. Aujourd'hui que le commerce, les Voyages et les conquêtes, réunissent davantage les Peuples divers, et que leurs manières de vivre se rapprochent sans cesse par la fréquente communication, on s'aperçoit que certaines différences nationales ont diminué. . . ¹¹⁵

This remark has a significant import for the methodology of an emerging anthropological discourse because it signals the necessity of observing a wide range of Non-European social groups, and particularly those living in remote areas (now on the verge of disappearing), in order to witness the wide variety of human types. Rousseau again brings to the forefront the danger of drawing false conclusions about the human species based upon the observation of a very limited range of peoples. Indeed, he mentions that many errors have likely been made in the past, particularly where human beings exhibiting unfamiliar characteristics were mistaken for human-like animals such as orangutans. Rousseau challenges,

Toutes ces observations sur les variétés que mille causes peuvent produire et ont produit en effet dans l'Espèce humaine, me font douter si divers animaux semblables aux hommes, pris par les voyageurs pour des Bêtes sans beaucoup d'examen, ou à cause de quelques différences qu'ils remarquoient dans la conformation extérieure, ou seulement parce que ces Animaux ne parloient pas, ne seroient point en effet de véritables hommes Sauvages, dont la race dispersée anciennement dans les bois n'avoit eu occasion de

¹¹⁴ See the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*

¹¹⁵ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Vol. 3, 208.

développer aucune de ses facultés virtuelles, n'avoit acquis aucun degré de perfection, et se trouvoit encore dans l'état primitif de Nature.¹¹⁶

According to Rousseau's theory, these *hommes sauvages* would be easily mistaken for animals because, not residing in permanent social groups, their *perfectibilité* was never activated. As such, their faculties of speech and discursive thought were never developed. Since Rousseau makes such a point to insist upon the contingency of man's entry into society, it is not surprising that he wishes to identify cases of this rare possibility where some human beings have, in fact, not fully entered into social life.

Rousseau provides further evidence of these anomalies by mentioning numerous historically documented instances of feral children who were discovered in Europe living among animals¹¹⁷. In particular, he comments upon the child found in 1694 in the forests of Lithuania, living among bears, and who provided an interesting case study for Condillac as he was developing his theory of language. Rousseau suggests that this child, if found by many of the travelers who have written accounts of the inhabitants of foreign lands, could have easily been mistaken for an animal only possessing selected human-like traits. He imagines,

Si malheureusement pour lui cet enfant fût tombé dans les mains de nos voyageurs, on ne peut douter qu'après avoir remarqué son silence et sa stupidité, ils n'eussent pris le parti de le renvoyer dans les bois ou de l'enfermer dans une Ménagerie ; après quoi ils en auroient sagement parlé dans de belles relations, comme d'une Bête fort curieuse qui ressembloit assés à l'homme.¹¹⁸

In Nancy Yousef's study on feral children discovered in the eighteenth century, she provides an intriguing analysis of the problem with equating these children isolated from human contact with Rousseau's man in the state of nature. Unlike the theoretical natural man, who possesses the capability of developing language in society (and the perfectibility of rational

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Vol. 3, 208.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. 3, 196-197.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Vol. 3, 212.

thought implied therein), Yousef cites early nineteenth-century studies documenting the condition of Victor of Aveyron (the three main reports were written by Pierre-Joseph Bonnaterre, Julien-Joseph Virey and Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard) where it was found that Victor was unable, even after introduction into society, to develop the capacity for speech, language and other cognitive skills. Although empiricists such as Condillac and Locke believed that a feral child could serve as a model for the development of speech and thought, Yousef points out the way in which Rousseau's theory of natural man actually renders the social isolation of the feral child a limit that qualifies this case as incompatible with human "perfectibility". Yousef asserts,

So closely does natural man fit this tragic case of human impairment that it is worth asking whether Rousseau's figure was ever the ideal model he has so often been seen as—whether it somehow takes the case of Victor of Aveyron to bring natural man himself into focus as a heuristic construction designed to undermine the very premise of a primitive, solitary, self-sufficient existence.¹¹⁹

Rousseau mentions feral children as easily mistakable for animals with human-like traits, but he never says that they are assimilable to natural man. On the contrary, he emphasizes the necessity of society and social interaction in order for man to fully develop his potentialities. In this sense, Rousseau is perhaps responding to what he sees as an error in empiricist methodology. As the case of Victor illustrates, a condition of complete isolation is impossible as a point of departure for theories of human development. Rather, Yousef suggests,

The cause of the stasis lies in the very isolation or autonomy that was taken as the starting point for many philosophical reflections on human origins and human development. Rousseau's natural man should not be understood as a model for what human beings might have been, but as a model for all they cannot be on their own.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Nancy Yousef, "Savage or Solitary?: The Wild Child and Rousseau's Man of Nature", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 62, No. 2, April 2001, 249.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

Despite Rousseau's focus on the radical contingency of the development of society in the first place, it is thus equally important to acknowledge its absolute necessity as the medium which allows man to fully develop and exercise his human capacities through language and thought.

Returning to the *Discours*, Rousseau makes the conjecture that a feral child could have been mistaken for a human-like animal based upon his readings of travel anecdotes mentioned by Prévost, Battel, and Dapper, among others. In the following lines, he criticizes the probable inaccuracy of these previous accounts, which may have mistakenly assessed beings who were not observed to speak as incapable of ever developing human speech:

Il est encore parlé de ces espèces d'animaux Antropoformes dans le troisième tome de la même Histoire des voyages sous le nom de *Beggos* et de *Mandrills* ; mais pour nous en tenir aux relations précédentes on trouve dans la description de ces prétendus monstres des conformités frappantes avec l'espèce humaine, et des différences moindres que celles qu'on pourroit assigner d'homme à homme. On ne voit point dans ces passages les raisons sur lesquelles les Auteurs se fondent pour refuser aux Animaux en question le nom d'hommes Sauvages, mais il est aisé de conjecturer que c'est à cause de leur stupidité, et aussi parce qu'ils ne parloient pas ; raisons foibles pour ceux qui savent que quoique l'organe de la parole soit naturel à l'homme, la parole elle même ne lui est pourtant pas naturelle, et qui connoissent jusqu'à quel point sa perfectibilité peut avoir élevé l'homme Civil au-dessus de son état originel. Le petit nombre de lignes que contiennent ces descriptions nous peut faire juger combien ces Animaux ont été mal observés et avec quels préjugés ils ont été vus.¹²¹

Rousseau suggests that the radical changes brought about in mankind due to the activation of such *facultés virtuelles* through social life cause a greater distortion from his original state in nature than the difference between orangutans and the most primitive human beings. He further illustrates the methodological difficulties inherent in the observation of unknown beings, since it is possible to draw false conclusions about mental capacities through the sole observation of physical characteristics. Rousseau reproaches Battel on precisely this account:

Dans un endroit Battel dit que les Pongos tuent les Nègres qui traversent les forêts, dans un autre Purchass ajoute qu'ils ne leur font aucun mal, même quand ils les surprennent ;

¹²¹ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Vol. 3, 210.

du moins lorsque les Nègres ne s'attachent pas à les regarder. Les Pongos s'assemblent autour des feux allumés par les Nègres, quand ceux-ci se retirent, et se retirent à leur tour quand le feu est éteint ; voilà le fait, voici maintenant le commentaire de l'observateur : *Car avec beaucoup d'adresse, ils n'ont pas assés de sens pour l'entretenir en y apportant du bois.* Je voudrais deviner comment Battel ou Purchas son compilateur a pu savoir que la retraite des Pongos étoit un effet de leur bêtise plutôt que de leur volonté.¹²²

Concerning the description of the pongo, it is essential to note, as Francis Moran III has emphasized, that Rousseau was not using Andrew Battel's original account from Samuel Purchas's *Hakluytus Posthumous, or Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625). Rousseau used Prévost's translation, a version that differed from the original in subtle yet important ways¹²³. Moran explains,

Green and Prévost make several apparently minor changes to Purchas's report which nonetheless have the important effect of creating a more human appearance for the pongo. For that matter, we find that throughout the eighteenth century, a more human-like pongo emerges the further we recede from Purchas's original.¹²⁴

Considering Rousseau's explicit skepticism with regard to sources, he may have purposely chosen texts that would liken the pongos to human beings in view of widening prevailing conceptions of the human species and in order to account for change in the human species over time, a move counter to many eighteenth-century theories such as Buffon's, based upon the fixity of species. In this way, Rousseau prepared the ground for his criticism of European society as a perversion of an original, pure nature, a criticism that would not have been possible if natural man and social man were considered two separate species.

Michèle Duchet highlights the primary differences between Buffon and Rousseau's views:

Buffon réaffirme l'idée d'une distance infinie entre ceux des animaux, qui par leur industrie ou leur forme ou leurs « associations » ressemblent le plus à l'homme, et ceux

¹²² Ibid., Vol. 3, 210-211.

¹²³ Francis Moran, III, "Of Pongos and Men: 'Orangs-Outang' in Rousseau's 'Discourse on Inequality'", *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Autumn 1995), 645.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 650.

des hommes que leur condition sauvage éloigne le moins de la vie animale . . . Nous retrouvons ici la distinction essentielle établie par Buffon entre les sociétés animales, qui n’inventent ni ne perfectionnent rien, et les sociétés humaines, où vont éclore tous les germes de la pensée. Quant aux variétés de singes qui offrent avec l’homme des ressemblances dans la « conformation extérieure », et même dans « l’organisation intérieure », il se refuse à les admettre dans l’espèce humaine . . .¹²⁵

For Buffon, as Duchet explains, « l’homme naturel et l’homme social ne font qu’un »¹²⁶ : man does not exist outside of society. Although both Buffon and Rousseau acknowledge a human capacity of “perfectibility”, Buffon denies any possibility for human society out of history while Rousseau posits a theoretical state of nature as an analytical tool. Unlike Buffon, Rousseau aims to demonstrate the superior self-sufficiency of natural man in order to show that the formation of society was not necessary. His repeated emphasis on the contingency of social development places mankind in a position of complete liberty—and thus full responsibility—for his progress or degeneration. The inequalities of European society that Rousseau criticizes developed through the course of history and not from any inherent necessity in human nature or by divine ordinance. As Moran aptly observes, Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’inégalité* should be read within an eighteenth-century context, lest we mistake our priorities for Rousseau’s. In particular, he argues that it should not be interpreted as an early version of evolutionary theory:

In Note X Rousseau is willing to accept that time, culture, and the peculiarities of local physical environments have produced variation in the species rather than different human species. This understanding was fully in accord with the idea (endorsed by Buffon as well as more religiously inclined naturalists) that species could only be created by divine dictate.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Michèle Duchet, op. cit., 241.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 244.

¹²⁷ Moran, 661.

Moran maintains that “Rousseau ingeniously appropriates the chain of being for his own political purposes”¹²⁸, and uses it to reassess what many of his contemporaries believed to be the apogee of human development, civilized man, as instead a degeneration from a pure, original nature.

The Call for a New Methodology

After highlighting the many difficulties of gaining knowledge about the human species, Rousseau makes an appeal to his contemporaries for a new type of traveler, one who will know how to overcome his own cultural prejudice in order to be an observer receptive to information that troubles his previous points of reference¹²⁹. This is a pressing need, he urges, since the types of men who have historically been the most likely to traverse the globe have either been too ignorant and narrow-minded, or too influenced by ulterior aims (such as wealth or proselytizing) to freely receive information about the “unknown” world.

A crucial component of the “traveler-scholar”’s mission will be to acknowledge differences in and among social groups as worthy of study in their own right. To this end, Rousseau puts forth the following challenge:

[J]’ai peine à concevoir comment dans un Siècle où l’on se pique de belles connoissances, il ne se trouve pas deux hommes bien unis, riches, l’un en argent, l’autre en genie, tous deux aimant la gloire et aspirant à l’immortalité, dont l’un sacrifie vingt mille écus de son bien et l’autre dix ans de sa vie à un célèbre voyage autour du monde ; pour y étudier, non toujours des pierres et des plantes, mais une fois les hommes et les mœurs, et qui, après tant de siècles employés à mesurer et considerer la maison, s’avisent enfin d’en vouloir connoître les habitants.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid., 662.

¹²⁹ Montaigne, in his famous *Essai*, « Des Cannibales », was one of the earliest French writers to acknowledge cultural prejudice as a formidable obstacle to gaining knowledge of human beings and the world.

¹³⁰ Rousseau, *Discours sur l’inégalité*, Vol. 3, 213.

Rousseau's call for a new type of exploratory voyage emphasizes that the vast array of characteristics belonging to human social groups around the globe ought to form the basis for a new type of study, one that is properly ethnographic. He criticizes previous travel writers for their reductive treatment of foreign peoples:

On n'ouvre pas un livre de voyages où l'on ne trouve des descriptions de caractères et de mœurs ; mais on est tout étonné d'y voir que ces gens qui ont tant décrit de choses, n'ont dit que ce que chacun savoit déjà, n'ont su appercevoir à l'autre bout du monde que ce qu'il n'eût tenu qu'à eux de remarquer sans sortir de leur rüe, et que ces traits vrais qui distinguent les Nations, et qui frappent les yeux faits pour voir, ont presque toujours échappé aux leurs. De là est venu ce bel adage de morale, si rebattu par la tourbe Philosophesque, que les hommes sont par tout les mêmes, qu'ayant par tout les mêmes passions et les mêmes vices, il est assés inutile de chercher à caractériser les différens Peuples ; ce qui est à peu près aussi bien raisonné que si l'on disoit qu'on ne sauroit distinguer Pierre d'avec Jaques, parce qu'ils ont tous deux un nés, une bouche et des yeux.¹³¹

Rather than continuing to minimize differences, this study will adopt the methodology of natural history, which depends upon the "specific difference" as the characteristic that permits one to distinguish the different species and forms of living beings. As Rousseau exhorts his contemporaries to extend the method of natural history to study human societies, this movement will be at once an inclusion and a differentiation. With an increasing precision of observations of human social groups, European explorers will at once expand their notions of what it means to be "human" and gain the ability to perceive the uniqueness of different social groups. As Felicity Baker remarks,

Rousseau longs for observation that would afford knowledge of men in terms of their similarities and differences, and thence, a universalizable knowledge . . . Rousseau, here as elsewhere, adopts and transfers to another context the idea behind the Port-Royal *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* (1660): that in learning several languages for comparison, and among them Latin (which provides a kind of fundamental model of our languages, one acquires a grasp of what language is, a "general grammar".¹³²

¹³¹ Ibid., Vol. 3, 212-213.

¹³² Felicity Baker, "Rousseau and the Colonies", *Eighteenth-Century Life*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1998), 181.

In other words, one should go beyond the previously-emphasized commonalities among human beings to grasp the differences in how certain functional categories manifest themselves in various given social groups. Similarly to languages, cultures possess a common “grammar” of functional elements whose particular characters vary from one culture to another. The shared grammar provides a point of comparison against which the differences can be measured. Thus, Rousseau’s call for a new methodology reflects a concern with progressing beyond the articulation of boundaries between apes and humans to arrive at a more elaborate knowledge of the field lying at the intersection between the material and the mental that encompasses the uniquely-human mode of construction known as “culture”.

Rousseau’s dissatisfaction with previous *récits de voyage* is likewise expressed in the *Emile*. He admonishes his contemporaries, writing,

C’est trop d’avoir à percer à la fois les préjugés des auteurs et les nôtres pour arriver à la vérité. J’ai passé ma vie à lire des relations de voyages, et je n’en ai jamais trouvé deux qui m’aient donné la même idée du même peuple. . . .

Mais, pour étudier les hommes, faut-il parcourir la terre entière ? Faut-il aller au Japon observer les Européens ? Pour connaître l’espèce, faut-il connaître tous les individus ? Non ; il y a des hommes qui se ressemblent si fort, que ce n’est pas la peine de les étudier séparément. Qui a vu dix Français les a vus tous. Quoiqu’on n’en puisse pas dire autant des Anglais et de quelques autres peuples, il est pourtant certain que chaque nation a son caractère propre et spécifique, qui se tire par induction, non de l’observation d’un seul de ses membres, mais de plusieurs . . .

Il ne suffit pas pour s’instruire de courir les pays ; il faut savoir voyager. Pour observer il faut avoir des yeux, et les tourner vers l’objet qu’on veut connaître. Il y a beaucoup de gens que les voyages instruisent encore moins que les livres, parce qu’ils ignorent l’art de penser, que, dans la lecture, leur esprit est au moins guidé par l’auteur, et que, dans leurs voyages, ils ne savent rien voir d’eux-mêmes.¹³³

¹³³ Rousseau, *Emile*, ed. Michel Launay, Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1966, 591-592.

Rousseau's message to his readers is clear: to gain knowledge of mankind, travel writers ought to set aside the prejudices of their own home cultures in order to see in an unhampered way the differences among cultures that emerge from within the similarities among all social groups.

Aware of the methodological shortcomings of previous travelers, the task at hand is to use a more informed perspective to observe members of Non-European social groups and discover more about the development of the human species. It is important to note the significance of the "Golden Age of Mankind" with respect to this project. Knowing, then, that one ought not to confuse human beings living in less-advanced societies with the pre-social beings theorized by Rousseau, it becomes evident that the intermediary state that they occupy within the history of social development provides a privileged setting in which to observe the positive potentials of human beings. Let us first examine the Golden Age of mankind, as described by Rousseau in his own words:

Il faut remarquer que la Société commencée et les relations déjà établies entre les hommes, exigeoient en eux des qualités différentes de celles qu'ils tenoient de leur constitution primitive ; que la moralité commençant à s'introduire dans les Actions humaines, et chacun avant les Loix étant seul juge et vengeur des offenses qu'il avoit reçues, la bonté convenable au pur état de Nature n'étoit plus celle qui convenoit à la Société naissante ; qu'il falloit que les punitions devinssent plus sévères à mesure que les occasions d'offenser devenoient plus fréquentes, et que c'étoit à la terreur des vengeances de tenir lieu du frein des Loix. Ainsi quoique les hommes fussent devenus moins endurans, et que la pitié naturelle eût déjà souffert quelque altération, cette période du développement des facultés humaines, tenant un juste milieu entre l'indolence de l'état primitif et la pétulante activité de notre amour propre, dut être l'époque la plus heureuse, et la plus durable. Plus on y réfléchit, plus on trouve que cet état étoit le moins sujet aux révolutions, le meilleur à l'homme, et qu'il n'en a du sortir que par quelque funeste hazard qui pour l'utilité commune eût dû ne jamais arriver. L'exemple des Sauvages qu'on a presque tous trouvés à ce point semble confirmer que le Genre-humain étoit fait pour y rester toujours, que cet état est la véritable jeunesse du Monde, et que tous les progrès ulterieurs ont été en apparence autant de pas vers la perfection de l'individu, et en effet vers la décrépitude de l'espèce.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Vol. 3, 170-171.

According to Rousseau, human beings were meant to remain, perhaps forever, in this peaceful state wherein social relations existed but were not yet plagued by unjust institutions or an unbridled *amour-propre*. He points out that the less advanced social groups observed by travelers have remained for so long in this tranquil state and cites the unwillingness of these non-European peoples to permanently adopt the ways of Europeans as proof of its alluring stability. As opposed to Europeans who, on occasion, have been convinced to abandon the artificial conveniences of modern civilization for a simpler life, Rousseau points out that not a single missionary ever successfully converted a Hottentot to Christianity¹³⁵. He provides the example of a Hottentot boy adopted by the Dutch Governor Van der Stel. Several years later, however, after the death of the commissioner for whom he was working, the Hottentot took the opportunity to return to live among his people. This anecdote, recounted by Prévost and Kolb alike, describes the actions of the indigenous man by staging the following scene:

« Il revint au Cap après la mort du Commissaire. Peu de jours après son retour, dans une visite qu'il rendit à quelques Hottentots de ses parens, il prit le parti de se dépouiller de sa parure Européenne pour se revêtir d'une peau de Brebis. Il retourna au Fort, dans ce nouvel ajustement, chargé d'un paquet qui contenoit ses anciens habits, et les présentant au Gouverneur il lui tint ce discours.

Ayez la bonté, Monsieur, de faire attention que je renonce pour toujours à cet appareil. Je renonce aussi pour toute ma vie à la Religion Chretienne, ma resolution est de vivre et mourir dans la Religion, les manières et les usages de mes Ancêtres. L'unique grace que je vous demande est de me laisser le Collier et le Coutelas que je porte. Je les garderai pour l'amour de vous.

Aussitôt sans attendre la réponse de Van der Stel, il se déroba par la fuite et jamais on ne le revit au Cap. » (*Histoire des voyages*, tome 5, p.175)¹³⁶

While the veracity of this account is difficult to ascertain, it is evident that among travel writers there was an interest in giving a voice to the Non-European peoples they encountered, often in view of criticizing European governmental and religious institutions. This anecdote is doubly

¹³⁵ Ibid., Vol. 3, 220-221.

¹³⁶ Ibid., Vol. 3, 221.

useful to furthering Rousseau's agenda in that it portrays a developed culture and sense of pride among a Non-European social group, one that combines the advantages of social life without the injustice of more advanced communities.

Clearly, the "Golden Age of Mankind" as an intermediary phase in the development of mankind provides a useful theoretical paradigm from which to evaluate the character and structure of Non-European social groups. Social groups in this phase place value in goods and arrangements that are intuitively beneficial to the majority. While they do not possess formalized institutions, entities whose reasoned structures often end up solidifying relationships of inequality, these early social groups do possess "cultural languages". The cultural codes and customs already present in these communities serve as the primary means of regulating the social economy, that is, the flux of energy, power and resources within the social body.

To more clearly articulate the way in which cultural languages interact with the character of a social group, it is helpful to refer to Barthes' *Elements of Semiology*, where he draws upon Saussure's language/speech (*langue/parole*) distinction¹³⁷. As semiological systems that function similarly to languages, cultural languages are involved in the same kind of dialectical relationship as the one between language and speech articulated by Barthes:

Language and speech: each of these two terms of course achieves its full definition only in the dialectical process which unites one to the other: there is no language without speech, and no speech outside language: it is in this exchange that the real linguistic *praxis* is situated, as Merleau-Ponty has pointed out. And V. Brøndel writes, 'A language is a purely abstract entity, a norm which stands above individuals, a set of essential types,

¹³⁷ "A *language* is therefore, so to speak, language minus speech: it is at the same time a social institution and a system of values . . . It is the social part of language, the individual cannot by himself either create or modify it; it is essentially a collective contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate. Moreover, this social product is autonomous, like a game with its own rules, for it can be handled only after a period of learning. . . . In contrast to the language, which is both institution and system, *speech* is essentially an individual act of selection and actualization; it is made in the first place of the 'combination thanks to which the speaking subject can use the code of the language with a view to expressing his personal thought' (this extended speech could be called *discourse*), and secondly by the 'psycho-physical mechanisms which allow him to exteriorize these combinations.'" Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, New York: Hill and Wang, 1973, 14-15.

which speech actualizes in an infinite variety of ways.’ Language and speech are therefore in a relation of reciprocal comprehensiveness. On the one hand, the language is ‘the treasure deposited by the practice of speech, in the subjects belonging to the same community’ and, since it is a collective summa of individual imprints, it must remain incomplete at the level of each isolated individual: a language does not exist perfectly except in the ‘speaking mass’; one cannot handle speech except by drawing on the language. But conversely, a language is possible only starting from speech . . .

To sum, a language is at the same time the product and the instrument of speech: their relationship is therefore a genuinely dialectical one.¹³⁸

Similarly, cultural languages reflect a social group’s values both in their current form that indicates a past “contract” and in response to changing input from individual cultural agents as these codes evolve. Much like language and all other social institutions, however, they are relatively resistant to change, and the manner in which they solidify certain relationships does certainly encourage or prohibit given social acts, according to their relative harmony or dissonance with respect to the existing social framework. It is evident that cultural languages function in more advanced societies as well, although they occupy a more significant, noticeable role in less-advanced societies as the sole means of both organizing the society and evolving to reflect the changing priorities and values of those in a position of power.

A Case Study of an Ancient Culture: The *Lévite d’Ephraïm*

Along with his discussion of travel writings on Non-European social groups, Rousseau also draws upon his knowledge of ancient cultures in support of his interest in the type of human communication that connected two souls with authenticity and passion, a powerful immediacy

¹³⁸ Ibid., 15-16.

that at times was violent in its manifestations. Among the historical examples of the earlier, more emotive type of communication mentioned by Rousseau in the *Essai*, the one that distinguishes itself from the others is the story of the Lévite d'Ephraïm¹³⁹. Based upon a biblical episode taken from the final three chapters of the book of Judges, Rousseau composed a poem in prose with the same title in 1762. In the preface, he explains that he wrote this text as a sort of vengeance in response to persecution from his contemporaries and as a call to virtue and justice. Rousseau sets the stage for this striking episode by emphasizing the biblical description of this age as one preceding the institution of laws. Of these ancient times, he writes, « il fut un tems de licence où chacun, sans reconnoître ni magistrat ni juge, étoit seul son propre maître et faisoit tout ce qui lui sembloit bon »¹⁴⁰. Rousseau's description of biblical times briefly recalls the admiration evident in his favorable descriptions of man in the Golden Age, when he mentions that « la simplicité de ses [Israël's] mœurs rendoit superflu l'empire des loix »¹⁴¹.

Rousseau retells the story of a Levite, recently married to a woman from Judah, who is unhappy and soon escapes and returns to live with her family¹⁴². After an interval of four months, the Levite goes to her family to attempt to win her back. Despite the strained relations, his wife's family receives him with great hospitality. After the Levite and his bride leave her family's home in Judah, they begin their journey back to the land of Benjamin and, on their way, want to stay the night in Gabaa, but no one will offer them lodging. This refusal of hospitality, all the more hurtful in that the Benjamites are turning their backs on their own people, provides

¹³⁹ « Quand le lévite d'Ephraïm voulut venger la mort de sa femme, il n'écrivit point aux Tribus d'Israël ; il divisa le corps en douze pièces et les leur envoya. A cet horrible aspect ils courent aux armes en criant tout d'une voix : *non, jamais rien de tel n'est arrivé dans Israël, depuis le jour que nos pères sortirent d'Egypte jusqu'à ce jour*. Et la Tribu de Benjamin fut exterminée. » Rousseau, *Essai*, op. cit., Vol. 5, 377.

¹⁴⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, « Le Lévite d'Ephraïm », *Œuvres complètes*, Vol. 2, « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », Paris : Gallimard, 1961, 1208-1209.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Vol. 2, 1209.

¹⁴² Rousseau's text differs on this point from the biblical account. In the original text, the woman from Judah is taken as a concubine by the Levite, whereas in Rousseau's version they are said to have taken an unofficial vow of marriage.

an opportunity for Rousseau to deliver a moralizing address to his contemporaries, not surprisingly, in defense of the ways of the past:

Hommes de nos jours, ne calomniez pas les mœurs de vos pères. Ces premiers tems, il est vrai, n'abondoient pas comme les vôtres en commodités de la vie ; de vils métaux n'y suffisoient pas à tout ; mais l'homme avoit des entrailles qui faisoient le reste : l'hospitalité n'étoit pas à vendre, et l'on n'y trafiquoit pas des vertus. Les fils de Jémini n'étoient pas les seuls, sans doute, dont les cœurs de fer fussent endurcis ; mais cette dureté n'étoit pas commune. Par-tout avec la patience on trouvoit des frères ; le voyageur dépourvu de tout ne manquoit de rien.¹⁴³

In these lines, Rousseau praises hospitality as a force conducive to social cohesion, one that symbolically functions as a language by *showing* through actions one's intention of inclusion of the Other. His call to hospitality, strikingly similar to Raynal's reflections on hospitality in *l'Histoire des deux Indes*¹⁴⁴, indicates that this ought to be a free exchange rather than an impersonally rendered service offered with the expectation of repayment.

Fortunately for the Levite and his wife, an old man eventually comes along and welcomes them to stay with him. Rousseau's warnings about the refusal of hospitality in the previous passage are reinforced by the words of the vicious townsmen who wish to harm the Levite's wife. Gathering outside the old man's house they boldly demand,

Livre-nous ce jeune étranger que sans congé tu reçois dans nos murs, que sa beauté nous paye le prix de cet azile, et qu'il expie ta témérité. Car ils avoient vû le Lévite sur la place, et, par un reste de respect pour le plus sacré de tous les droits, n'avoient pas voulu le loger dans leurs maisons pour lui faire violence ; mais ils avoient comploté de revenir le surprendre au milieu de la nuit, et ayant sù que le vieillard lui avoit donné retraite, ils accouroient sans justice et sans honte pour l'arracher de sa maison.¹⁴⁵

Rousseau's criticism of the way that hospitality as a social exchange has been corrupted is textually reinforced as the violent townsmen speak the language of self-interested commerce and legal obligation, employing terms such as « payer », « prix », « expier » and « droits ».

¹⁴³ Ibid., Vol. 2, 1212-1213.

¹⁴⁴ See p. 128-129 of this dissertation

¹⁴⁵ Rousseau, *Lévite*, op. cit., Vol. 2, 1213-1214.

Moreover, the old man tries to placate the evildoers, pleading, « *Ah ! ne faites pas ce mal devant le Seigneur ; n'outragez pas ainsi la nature, ne violez pas la sainte hospitalité* »¹⁴⁶.

The old man makes the ultimate sacrifice for his guest, offering to hand over his own daughter in place of the Levite's wife. The Levite cannot allow this, and so he renders his own wife to the townsmen, knowing he is sending her to her death. The next morning the Levite sees his dying wife upon the doorstep, and the sight of her suffering evokes an immediate, primordial reaction that drives him to bring her body into the house and cut it up into twelve pieces, which he then sends to the twelve tribes of Israel.

It is this act of dismembering the young woman's body to which Rousseau appeals as an illustration of the passionate character of the first languages. The violent dismembering of the body sends a clear message to the twelve tribes in a manner far more powerful than discourse: the violence done to the Levite's wife has a wider import and is equally destructive to the unity of Israel. The revolting spectacle of the dismembered body parts serves as a call to action¹⁴⁷. Rousseau's language in the following passage describes the sending of the body parts as an act that delivers not only a message but an *obligation* to its recipients:

Peuple saint, rassemble-toi ; prononce sur cet acte horrible, et décerne le prix qu'il a mérité. A de tels forfaits, celui qui détourne ses regards est un lâche, un déserteur de la justice ; la véritable humanité les envisage pour les connoître, pour les juger, pour les detester.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Vol. 2, 1214.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Kavanagh points out a key deviation between Rousseau's text and the biblical account. He writes, "Judges . . . has the Levite sending the tribes not only the dissected body, but an emissary carrying a specific verbal message which will define the corpse's significance. Whereas in Rousseau's text the body alone is a supremely eloquent and self-sufficient message, the biblical account presents it as a token, a proof, a particularly horrifying answer to the *habeas corpus* the Israelites are expected to formulate as a response to the emissaries' narrations: 'And the man whom he sent he commissioned as follows: 'Thus you shall say to every man of Israel, 'Has there ever been such a thing as this from the time the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt to this day? Put your mind to it! Take counsel and speak!'", 153. Rousseau clearly does not want to include the verbal message with the sending of the dismembered body since this detail would detract from his argument for the efficacy of visual signs. "Rousseau's *Le Lévite d'Ephraïm*: Dream, Text, and Synthesis, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Winter, 1982-1983), 153.

¹⁴⁸ Rousseau, *Lévite*, op. cit., Vol. 2, 1208.

A visual language such as the sending of the body parts, one which stimulates an emotional response in its recipient on the basis of a shared unspoken sentiment of humanity, is one that cannot be ignored. The tribes must “pronounce” upon the crime of violence, responding with a further, equally powerful action that will send an unmistakably clear message: they must seek justice as a fitting return for what has been initially rendered.

The imagery of the body continues to be woven throughout the entire biblical episode, as Rousseau describes the tribes of Israel rising up against Benjamin:

Ils vinrent tous, ils vinrent de toutes parts, de tous les cantons, tous d'accord comme un seul homme depuis Dan jusqu'à Beersabée et depuis Galaad jusqu'à Maspha.¹⁴⁹

The tribes of Israel are again described as one body, a body whose integrity has been threatened by transgression, and one that is in a divisive state of civil war. This situation of a body turning against itself, being harmed from within, was foreshadowed by historical circumstances, we are told, as Benjamin “killed” his mother while she was giving birth to him¹⁵⁰.

Furthermore, one should note that in addition to the imagery concerning the body politic, the episode of the Lévite d'Ephraïm hinges specifically upon the exchanging of women's bodies. The young woman from Judah is given over to the Levite, she is later handed over to the murderous group of men, and then, once dead, sent in pieces to the twelve tribes of Israel. The cycle continues through to the end of the episode as the tribe of Benjamin is left nearly exterminated, save 600 men, and so the tribes of Israel decide to give to the survivors the young women of their tribe who had not taken a pledge against intermarrying with Benjamites. In this way, the bloodline of the tribe of Benjamin will be allowed to continue.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Vol. 2, 1216.

¹⁵⁰ In the *Chant Premier*, we are told: « Benjamin, triste enfant de douleur, qui donnas la mort à ta mère, c'est de ton sein qu'est sorti le crime qui t'a perdu ; c'est ta race impie qui put le commettre, et qui devoit trop l'expier », Ibid., Vol. 2, 1208.

Finally, Rousseau emphasizes the evolution of modes of communication throughout history by including the scene involving the taking of an oath near the end of the episode. This public declaration of a community standard signals that Israel is progressing into a new phase now, one in which linguistic signs will acquire a more prominent role. As a whole, Rousseau's retelling of this biblical story combines two sometimes apparently contradicting strands of discourse about the ancient ways. This complex relationship to the Other is one we will see throughout all of the texts representing Non-European peoples included in this study. While Rousseau does, in his overall theory, praise the ancients for their simplicity, he also warns against the possibly harmful inclinations of the passions, and the problems that they can cause in the absence of law. His praise is thus tempered by a message of the importance of justice and the presence of certain cultural standards or institutions to safeguard it. Ultimately, however, Rousseau incorporates a reference to the Levite d'Ephraim into the *Essai* because his main concern is to emphasize the powerful force constituted by pre-linguistic forms of communication.

“Cultural Languages” and the Social Bond

Returning now to Rousseau's theoretical discussion of the first languages, pure in that men expressed themselves without needing to use words and were unmediated by self-interest, he claims furthermore that they possessed a certain emotional integrity insofar as the human beings who used them were fully invested in their social exchanges. As Starobinski notes in *La Transparence et l'Obstacle*, Rousseau's description of the first languages in the *Essai sur*

l'origine des langues reveals a nostalgia for the transparent language of the heart which once characterized human communication:

Au début, la parole n'est pas encore le signe conventionnel du sentiment ; elle est le sentiment lui-même, elle transmet la passion sans la transcrire. La parole n'est pas un paraître distinct de l'être qu'elle désigne : le langage originel est celui où le sentiment *apparaît* immédiatement tel qu'il *est*, où l'essence du sentiment et le son proféré ne font qu'un.¹⁵¹

In the *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Rousseau makes several suggestions that demarcate language as the locus in which the corrupting force of reason can begin to alter the character of social relations for the worse. Again, let us refer to Starobinski, who treats Rousseau's suspicion of reason as another variation on his preponderant concern with mediation in thought, language and, therefore, all social relations:

Rentrer en soi-même, c'est à coup sûr se rapprocher d'une plus grande clarté rationnelle et d'une évidence *immédiatement* sensible, par opposition au non-sens qui règne dans la société. Les incertitudes de Rousseau sur la valeur de la raison s'éclairent si l'on aperçoit que la raison ne lui paraît dangereuse que dans la mesure où elle prétend saisir la vérité d'une façon non immédiate, c'est-à-dire par des arguments successifs, par une suite ou une « chaîne » de raisonnements. Quand Rousseau fait le procès de la raison, il s'en prend surtout à la raison discursive. Il redevient rationaliste sitôt qu'il peut s'en remettre à une raison intuitive, capable d'illumination immédiate. Le choix essentiel ne se donne pas entre la raison et le sentiment, mais entre la voie médiate et l'accès immédiat. Rousseau opte pour l'immédiat et non pour l'irrationnel.¹⁵²

While in the *Premier Discours* Rousseau created a haunting image of the arts and sciences as realms that further the divisive tendencies of reason, in the *Second Discours* he explicitly links reason to the dangers of language. The decisive step occurs with the development of *idées générales*, made possible through the use of conventional language, because they transform an initial transparent relationship between signifier and signified into one that contains a

¹⁵¹ Jean Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'Obstacle*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, 177.

¹⁵² Ibid., 58.

judgment¹⁵³. This opening within the linguistic sign allows a particular opinion or value to subtly insert itself within the space of established convention.

As Starobinski explains, Rousseau's disdain for writing stems from his frustration at the necessarily mediated character of human communication:

Communiquer sans passer par l'intermédiaire du corps et du monde sensible : c'est un privilège qui n'appartient d'abord qu'à Dieu . . . Le domaine de l'homme n'est pas l'intuition immédiate, mais le discours, le langage, la succession et l'enchaînement des moyens. C'est là une infirmité qui fait que notre savoir est toujours incomplet, que notre pensée se transmet toujours de façon précaire et adultérée, que nos sentiments restent, dans leur fond, incompréhensibles à ceux mêmes qui croient les partager.¹⁵⁴

In the passage from Rousseau concerning writing, his postulate of a link between the form of language and political liberty is crucial in that it brings to the forefront the encroaching tendency of reason to place self-interest before concern for others, as well as the desire to impose one's way of thinking upon the other (according to what one wishes to disclose or conceal) rather than to connect with another by revealing one's authentic self. As Rousseau pertinently suggests, the language of convention that originally developed to facilitate commerce has in turn conferred a markedly utilitarian character upon all social relations.

Rousseau gives further emphasis to the sizeable implications that the "corruption" of language has on society and government by devoting the final chapter of the *Essai* to this exact issue. Contrasting European society of his day with ancient societies, he writes,

Les langues populaires nous sont devenues aussi parfaitement inutiles que l'éloquence. Les sociétés ont pris leur dernière forme ; on n'y change plus rien qu'avec du canon et des écus, et comme on n'a plus rien à dire au peuple sinon, *donnez de l'argent*, on le dit avec des placards au coin des rues ou des soldats dans les maisons ; Il ne faut assembler

¹⁵³ This judgment, engendered by the establishment of distinctions, is also what enables compassion to be possible in the first place. While it is not my primary concern here to analyze the nature of *pitié* in detail, Marcel Hénaff comments upon the crucial place of difference at the origin of the social bond. This point is of particular interest with respect to discussions of the original difference at the heart of the linguistic sign. For more information on this, see Hénaff's article, "The Cannibalistic City: Rousseau, Large Numbers, and the Abuse of the Social Bond", *SubStance*, Vol. 21, N°1, Issue 67 (1992).

¹⁵⁴ Starobinski, op. cit., 169.

personne pour cela : au contraire, il faut tenir les sujets épars ; c'est la première maxime de la politique moderne.

Il y a des langues favorables à la liberté ; ce sont les langues sonores, prosodiques, harmonieuses, dont on distingue le discours de fort loin. Les nôtres sont faites pour le bourdonnement des Divans . . .

Chez les anciens on se faisoit entendre aisément au peuple sur la place publique Qu'on suppose un homme harangant en françois le peuple de Paris dans la place de Vendosme. Qu'il crie à pleine tête, on entendra qu'il crie, on ne distinguera pas un mot . . . [J]e dis que toute langue avec laquelle on ne peut pas se faire entendre au peuple assemblé est une langue servile ; il est impossible qu'un peuple demeure libre et qu'il parle cette langue-là.¹⁵⁵

The increasing presence of rationality in language and, therefore, in all social relations, has led to an increase of miscommunication, since the nature of language itself renders it vulnerable to abuse. According to Rousseau, leaders are no longer concerned with making themselves understood to the people, but rather with holding them in a state of ignorance and apathy. The inability of contemporary language to create understanding alienates the people from participation in the political system, and is symptomatic of a widespread abuse of representation. The opacity and deception to which the linguistic sign is susceptible contains, at the formal level, the same usurpation of power that is possible at the level of society and government¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵⁵ Rousseau, *Essai*, op. cit., Vol. 5, 428-429.

¹⁵⁶ Derrida "deconstructed" Rousseau's suspicion of the linguistic sign as belonging to a "logocentrism", the previously-unspoken presupposition of the Western metaphysical tradition, an orientation he labels as "the most original and powerful ethnocentrism." (p. 3) As such, Rousseau's theory of language based upon a nostalgia of presence is in keeping with

"the history of the only metaphysics, which has . . . always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, of the truth of truth, has always been . . . the debasement of writing, and its repression outside "full" speech" (p. 3)

Rousseau clearly favors the earliest languages and other forms of communication (such as music) that remain close to the human spirit rather than more rationalized, standardized communication such as philosophical language and the manners of polite society, forms which are highly imbedded in convention and which thus require context to decipher. Within this framework of a "metaphysics of presence", then, writing is condemned as a "mediation of mediation and as a fall into the exteriority of meaning." (p. 12-13)

Derrida's analysis of Rousseau's failure to arrive at a single, pure origin that is the state of nature encapsulates the main difficulties that complicate the Enlightenment's interrogation of society, one which is, at the base, an interrogation of representation. Derrida comments upon the linguistic theories of both Saussure and

Rousseau, with the aim of demonstrating that they both adhere to a metaphysics of presence that eventually arrives at an aporia. Taking as a starting point a passage from Saussure, Derrida writes,

“Saussure: ‘But the spoken word is so intimately bound to its written image that the latter manages to usurp the main role’ . . . What is intolerable and fascinating is indeed the intimacy intertwining image and thing, graph, i.e., and phonè, to the point where by a mirroring, inventing and perverting effect, speech seems in its turn the speculum of writing, which “manages to usurp the main role.” Representation mingles with what it represents, to the point where one speaks as one writes, one thinks as if the represented were nothing more than the shadow or reflection of the representer. A dangerous promiscuity and a nefarious complicity between the reflection and the reflected which lets itself be seduced narcissistically. In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is split in itself and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a difference. What can look at itself is not one; and the law of the addition of the origin to its representation, of the thing to its image, is that one plus one makes at least three. The historical usurpation and theoretical oddity that install the image within the rights of reality are determined as the forgetting of a simple origin. By Rousseau but also for Saussure.” (p. 36-37)

Derrida pinpoints the way in which representation proved so troubling to Rousseau, that is, that “representation mingles with what it represents”. He goes further, then, and explains that the very difference (between the signifier and the signified) which makes a sign possible in the first place means that an unmediated access to a whole, original signified is forever impossible, as all of our grasping for an origin will only lead to a further play of signifiers that defers the origin *ad infinitum*. While Rousseau chose to concentrate on detailing what he saw as the progressive degradation of man’s original pure nature rather than solving the problem of bridging the gap between the atemporal state of nature and the unfolding of history, Derrida analyzes the epistemological difficulties inherent to representation which render the task impossible from the outset. He explains how signs operate according to what he calls “this strange economy of the supplement.” (p. 154) Concerning the transition from the immediate communication (gestures, “le cri de la nature”) of the state of nature to speech, which becomes more and more conventional until writing intervenes as a mediation of a mediation, Derrida explains,

“When Nature, as self-proximity, comes to be forbidden or interrupted, when speech fails to protect presence, writing becomes necessary. It must be added to the word urgently. I have identified in advance one of the forms of this addition; speech being natural or at least the natural expression of thought, the most natural form of institutions or convention for signifying thought, writing is added to it, is adjoined, as an image or representation. In that sense, it is not natural. It diverts the immediate presence of thought to speech into representation and the imagination. This recourse is not only “bizarre”, but dangerous. It is the addition of a technique, a sort of artificial and artful ruse to make speech present when it is actually absent. It is a violence done to the natural destiny of the language.” (p. 144)

Moreover, the way in which a sign supplements does not succeed in restoring the plenitude of the original signified. According to Derrida, the supplement,

“As substitute, . . . is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness.” (p. 145)

The irreducible difference at the core of the linguistic sign, and the logic of the supplement by which it signals absence even in its seeming presence, render the use of such signs all the more indispensable, Derrida suggests:

“Are things not complicated enough? The symbolic is the immediate, presence is absence, the nondeferred is deferred, pleasure is the menace of death. But one stroke must still be added to this system, to this strange economy of the supplement. . . . A terrifying menace, the supplement is also the first and surest protection against that very menace. This is why it cannot be given up.” (p. 154)

Rousseau perfectly understood that language is the first and most important human cultural product, and so he sought to master the way in which cultural sign systems, infused with the complex character of *perfectibilité*, could be carefully managed and directed as forces capable of promoting virtue and justice by strengthening human communities. It is because of the communicative function of cultural sign systems, as well as their continuity with thinking and shaping human life and worldviews (orders which vary according to the particular social group in question), that I refer to the many forms of representations produced by human beings as “cultural language”. In *Rousseau Sociologue de la Connaissance*, Gérard Namer carries out a detailed analysis of the various domains of knowledge in which a culture’s collective representations have measurable effects. Francis Fanigia’s preface to this work summarizes Namer’s approach, one that complements the approach I am adopting in my own study.

According to Fanigia,

Pour qu’une telle sociologie de la connaissance existe et puisse prétendre à quelque légitimité, il convient au préalable de reconnaître que les diverses représentations actives dans une société, que les divers savoirs constitutifs d’une culture sont, non seulement des phénomènes subjectifs, émergeant dans la conscience d’individus qui en sont auteurs ou porteurs, mais qu’ils sont aussi—en même temps et sans contradiction—des phénomènes objectifs, constitutifs par leur interaction, de la vie collective. Les connaissances sont objets d’une conscience, mais constituent aussi pour elle un milieu. Elles sont donc aussi, en tant que représentations collectives, d’authentiques phénomènes sociaux, primordiaux pour saisir la vie des peuples.¹⁵⁷

Derrida’s reading of Rousseau provides valuable insight into why cultural sign systems serve such an important function in the shaping of communities. From this point of view, all cultural productions could be viewed as a type of “writing” which seeks to render dominant a particular social order. While Derrida himself may not have been concerned with cultural productions as writing, his analysis of the logic that governs them renders explicit the susceptibility to corruption of all sign systems. Derrida’s analysis of the manner in which representation splits what it reflects reinforces Rousseau’s warnings against the theatricality of social relations. Like all cultural signs, the “self” as it emerges in society is always already split, and the act of representation itself attacks the very integrity of the human soul, a danger we will examine in greater detail further on in our reading of the *Lettre à d’Alembert*. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trad. Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

¹⁵⁷ Gérard Namer, *Rousseau Sociologue de la Connaissance: de la créativité au machiavélisme*, Paris: l’Harmattan, 1999, I-II.

I agree with Namer's view of Rousseau as a pioneer in the development of a methodology which would eventually pave the way for the social sciences, a methodology which requires a degree of distanciation from the object of study and, thus, an awareness of the many collective forms of representation that shape and mediate life within a given social group.

In the section of Namer's study that examines the interactions between society, language and knowledge, he speaks about language as a *médiateur social*, and suggests that this form of mediation is not limited to the strict sense of language. As a sociologist, his terminology and approach differ slightly from my own, and his emphasis seems to be that these "social mediators" are indeed *faits sociaux*, although their precise character and functioning are difficult to pinpoint beyond their measurable material effects. In the following lines, Namer's description of "social mediators" very nearly approaches what I refer to throughout this dissertation as "cultural language":

La sociologie de la langue modifie l'idée première de la sociologie de la connaissance comme corrélation entre la société et la connaissance. Le schéma qui s'impose est celui d'une interaction à trois termes: la société, la connaissance et le médiateur social. Dans la corrélation la plus générale entre la société et la connaissance, ce médiateur est la langue. Plus tard, nous verrons se multiplier d'autres médiations sociales de la connaissance, non seulement le roman et le théâtre mais aussi bien les institutions et les mœurs ; entre la société et la connaissance, il y aura toujours un médiateur social qui comme la langue sera toujours un système de signe et un moyen matériel de communication. Le système d'ensemble qui se prépare est celui d'une société qui transmet des connaissances et qui déforme des connaissances dans l'acte de communication effectué par le médiateur.¹⁵⁸

As Namer calls to our attention, "social mediators" distort the information that they communicate. This epistemological concern resurfaces in each of the texts examined in this study, as the writers struggle with cultural prejudices influencing their representations of Non-European peoples, since they are so intimately intertwined with thought as to perhaps determine the very conditions of possibility for what can become an object of experience for members of

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 67.

their respective cultures. Rousseau and, indeed, all of the authors in my corpus convey an awareness of the mediating effect of culture as they express their concerns with the validity of claims to knowledge.

Beyond Theater: The Functioning of “Cultural Languages” Within Advanced Societies

Throughout his entire *oeuvre*, Rousseau’s discussions of various cultural products convey warnings about the stakes of representation. The functional continuity that Rousseau establishes between linguistic and non-linguistic forms of communication, both of which I intend to encompass by using the term “cultural language”, is expressed notably by his theory that the first human languages resembled singing. In the *Essai*, he writes,

Je ne doute point qu’indépendamment du vocabulaire et de la syntaxe, la première langue si elle existoit encore n’eût gardé des caractères originaux qui la distingueroient de toutes les autres. Non seulement tous les tours de cette langue devroient être en images, en sentimens, en figures ; mais dans sa partie mécanique elle devroit répondre à son premier objet, et présenter aux sens ainsi qu’à l’entendement les impressions presque inévitables de la passion qui cherche à se communiquer.

Comme les voix naturelles sont inarticulées, les mots auroient peu d’articulations ; quelques consones interposées effaçant l’hiatus des voyelles suffiroient pour les rendre coulantes et faciles à prononcer. En revanche les sons seroient très variés, et la diversité des accens multiplieroit les mêmes voix : La quantité, le rythme seroient de nouvelles sources de combinaisons ; en sorte que les voix, les sons, l’accent, le nombre, qui sont de la nature, laissant peu de chose à faire aux articulations qui sont de convention, l’on chanteroit au lieu de parler : la plupart des mots radicaux seroient des sons imitatifs, ou de l’accent des passions, ou de l’effet des objets sensibles : L’onomatopée s’y feroit sentir continuellement.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Rousseau, *l’Essai*, op. cit., Vol. 5, 382-383.

In the previous lines, Rousseau attributes a common source to both linguistic and non-linguistic forms of communication. He explains that this original type of singing-language, in which the signifiers closely resembled their signifieds, was optimal for communicating one's passions and sentiments to another being. Further on in the *Essai*, Rousseau will contrast this original language conducive to sincerity with the modern, conventional language he sees as corrupt and harmful to the social bond. The significance of the connection that Rousseau establishes between singing and speaking is crucial in that it forms the basis for a theory of diverse modes of communication within and between social groups that constitute powerful forces capable of shaping relations of power.

Rousseau presents an in-depth argumentation of his theory of customs as powerful social signifiers in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. He heavily criticizes the worldliness of urban life, where the separation between being and appearance becomes greater and greater, a corruption that he attributes to the negative influence of theater. Rousseau is careful to specify, however, that

Par une suite de son inutilité même, le théâtre, qui ne peut rien pour corriger les mœurs, peut beaucoup pour les altérer. En favorisant tous nos penchans, il donne un nouvel ascendant à ceux qui nous dominent.¹⁶⁰

As we will see further on, theater, insofar as it is a form of symbolic communication that serves to reinforce the already prevailing *mœurs* of a people, constitutes a social force that can subtly shape, for better or for worse, the character of a social group. Rousseau uses the pretext of responding to d'Alembert's suggestion of instituting a theater in Geneva to present a theory of much wider applicability as a call to refashion the opacity and deceptiveness of social relations. As Lincoln Schlensky notes, theater functions as metonymy rather than metaphor in Rousseau's argument:

¹⁶⁰Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La Lettre à d'Alembert*, *Oeuvres complètes*, op. cit., Vol. 5, 52.

Rousseau takes the divisiveness characteristic of representation as a sign of the troubling capacity for deceptiveness inherent in any representative model; the theatre, of course, is the exemplary case of this, serving as the paradigm for all the deceptive possibilities latent in representation. Privileged as paradigm, the model of the theatre takes on those qualities that enable the Letter to extend its argument from the actual institution of the theatre (as it exists in Paris) to a hypothetically unlimited range of structurally interconnected institutions.¹⁶¹

In keeping with this structural metonymy, Rousseau compares the manners of urbanites with those of the country people, a strategy that reinforces his overall theoretical framework contrasting the simple authenticity of more “primitive” communities with the vice and division of more advanced social groups¹⁶². In contrast to the authenticity of expression in small communities, Charles Ellison remarks that it is the “expression of emotion in forms of impersonal public sociability that he [Rousseau] finds so objectionable”¹⁶³. Whether in the theater proper or in the theater of urban life, what disturbs Rousseau, according to Ellison, is the mingling of custom and sentiment in *mœurs* when the sentiment becomes couched in a social mold.

The discussion of the potential effects of theater on the customs and morals of various peoples serves as a vehicle by which Rousseau presents an idealized vision of a community who uses visual representation in the “proper” way. In small villages, Rousseau writes,

On trouve, proportion gardée, moins d’activité, sans doute, que dans une capitale : parce que les passions sont moins vives et les besoins moins pressans ; mais plus d’esprits originaux, plus d’industrie inventive, plus de choses vraiment neuves ; parce qu’on y est moins imitateur, qu’ayant peu de modèles, chacun tire plus de lui-même, et met plus du sien dans tout ce qu’il fait . . .¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Lincoln Shlensky, “Preside at their Pleasures: Rousseau, Diderot, Kafka and the Ambivalence of Representation”, *Qui Parle*, Vol. 6, N°1 (Fall/Winter 1992), 56-57.

¹⁶² Rousseau, *La Lettre à d’Alembert*, Vol. 5, 55-56.

¹⁶³ Charles E. Ellison, “Rousseau and the Modern City: The Politics of Speech and Dress”, *Political Theory*, Vol. V3, N°4 (Nov. 1985), 499-500.

¹⁶⁴ Rousseau, *La Lettre à d’Alembert*, Vol. 5, 55.

Rousseau praises the rural people for their way of investing themselves more fully in both personal pursuits and public interactions¹⁶⁵. Since they are less selfishly guarded, they render themselves more visible, more present, in their exchanges with their fellow citizens. In such a milieu, visibility serves to increase understanding and create stronger social ties rather than to manipulate visually transmitted information in order to attain self-serving ends.

Rousseau's discussion of the marked differences in character between urban and rural people helps to articulate his vision for a social bond that is conducive to justice and virtue. His emphasis on the influential power of cultural products as collective representations prepares the way for his social project according to which customs and rituals can play a fundamental role in shaping social groups.

The Proper Management of "Cultural Languages" within Republics

Rousseau does not simply find fault with theater and leave his readers at a loss as to how to respond to his criticisms. Instead, he provides models of rituals that express the positive cultural forces he wishes to mobilize, and then he makes suggestions for ways in which these can be channeled into contemporary urban settings. In effect, Rousseau passes from a treatment of the passive aspect of cultural languages as reflecting a society's character (in his analysis of Parisians, Genevans and *Montagnons* according to their customs) to a discussion of the active potential of cultural languages to influence a social group.

¹⁶⁵ As one could expect, Rousseau makes a point of praising the *Montagnons* also for their gracious hospitality. Here, as in all of the texts in the corpus, hospitality is portrayed as a type of non-linguistic communication consistent with the ways of a social group relatively unconcerned with rational self-interest. Ibid., Vol. 5, 57.

Rousseau takes as inspiration for the kind of leisure-time spectacle that is most conducive to a harmonious and free people a celebration he witnessed in his youth when accompanying his father in the village of Saint-Gervais¹⁶⁶. He recalls the scene in detail in the following lines:

Le régiment de St. Gervais avoit fait l'exercice, et selon la coutume, on avoit soupé par compagnies. La plupart de ceux qui les composoient se rassemblèrent après le Soupé dans la place de St-Gervais, et se mirent à danser tous ensemble, officiers et soldats, autour de la fontaine, sur le bassin de laquelle étoient montés les Tambours, les Fifres, et ceux qui portoient les flambeaux. Une danse de gens égayés par un long repas, sembleroit n'offrir rien de fort intéressant à voir. Cependant, l'accord de cinq ou six cens hommes en uniforme, se tenant tous par la main, et formant une longue bande qui serpentoit en cadence et sans confusion avec mille tours et retours, mille espèces d'évolutions figurées, le choix des airs qui les animoient, le bruit des Tambours, l'éclat des flambeaux, un certain appareil militaire au sein du plaisir ; tout cela formoit une sensation très vive, qu'on ne pouvoit supporter de sang-froid. Il étoit tard ; les femmes étoient couchées, toutes se relevèrent ; bientôt les fenêtres furent pleines de Spectatrices qui donnoient un nouveau zèle aux acteurs. Elles ne purent tenir longtems à leurs fenêtres ; elles descendirent ; les maîtresses venoient voir leurs maris, les servantes apportoit du vin ; les enfans même éveillés par le bruit, accoururent demi-vêtus entre les Pères et les Mères. La danse fut suspendue ; ce ne furent qu'embrassemens, ris, santés, caresses. Il résulta de tout cela un attendrissement général que je ne saurois peindre, mais que dans l'allegresse universelle, on éprouve assés naturellement au milieu de tout ce qui nous est cher. . . . Après avoir resté quelque tems encore à rire et à causer sur la place, il falut se séparer : chacun se retira paisiblement avec sa famille, et voila comment ces aimables et prudentes femmes ramenèrent leurs maris, non pas en troublant leurs plaisirs, mais en allant les partager.¹⁶⁷

Rousseau admires the villagers of Saint-Gervais for the spontaneous way in which they assemble in the open air, spending a moment of joy together in which all are welcome to participate. As several critics have noted, the structure of the circular gathering around the fountain and the importance of reciprocal gazes between individuals prefigures the architecture that Rousseau will propose in his *Contrat Social*¹⁶⁸.

While the people of the village occupy various positions in the community, they are all able to come together in a ritualistic moment that, through shared sentiment, bonds the

¹⁶⁶ As is typical throughout his works, this key illustration of Rousseau's theory is presented in a lengthy footnote.

¹⁶⁷ Rousseau, *La Lettre à d'Alembert*, Vol. 5, 123-124.

¹⁶⁸ Starobinski maintains that « l'exaltation de la fête collective a la même structure que la volonté générale du *Contrat Social* », 120.

community together in fraternity. At the end of the celebration, each party retires to his dwelling, enlivened and content with his situation. The festival at Saint-Gervais is, on many accounts, an antidote to the flaws that Rousseau sees in the theater of the capitals. While the latter perverts compassion to promote vice, and separates individuals by putting them in an enclosed, severely hierarchical space, the former allows for universal participation in a setting where inequalities are not exploited as relationships of subjection and domination. The villagers of Saint-Gervais are authentically invested in their social gathering, and this spontaneous ritual communicates shared purpose.

With the festival of Saint-Gervais in mind, Rousseau makes suggestions for ways in which free societies can engage in leisure-time spectacles, ones that will reinforce the social bond. He praises the open-air assemblies of ancient republics¹⁶⁹, and advocates the gathering of citizens in the *place publique*. He addresses his readers thus:

Quoi ! ne faut-il donc aucun Spectacle dans une République ? Au contraire, il en faut beaucoup ! C'est dans les Républiques qu'ils sont nés ; c'est dans leur sein qu'on les voit briller avec un véritable air de fête. A quels peuples convient-il mieux de s'assembler souvent et de former entre eux les doux liens du plaisir et de la joye, qu'à ceux qui ont tant de raisons de s'aimer et de rester à jamais unis ? Nous avons déjà plusieurs de ces fêtes publiques ; ayons-en davantage encore, je n'en serai que plus charmé. Mais n'adoptons point ces Spectacles exclusifs qui renferment tristement un petit nombre de gens dans un antre obscur ; qui les tiennent craintifs et immobiles dans le silence et l'inaction ; qui n'offrent aux yeux que cloisons, que pointes de fer, que soldats, qu'affligeantes images de la servitude et de l'inégalité. Non, Peuples heureux, ce ne sont pas là vos fêtes ! C'est en plein air, c'est sous le ciel qu'il faut vous rassembler et vous livrer au doux sentiment de votre bonheur. . . .

Mais quels seront enfin les objets de ces spectacles ? Qu'y montrera-t-on ? Rien, si l'on veut. Avec la liberté, partout où règne l'affluence, le bien-être y règne aussi. Plantez au milieu d'une place un piquet couronné de fleurs, rassemblez-y le peuple, et vous aurez une fête. Faites mieux encore : donnez les Spectateurs en Spectacle ; rendez-les acteurs eux-mêmes ; faites que chacun se voye et s'aime dans les autres, afin que tous en soient mieux unis.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, See Vol. 5, p. 122 for his discussion of Sparta and Lacédémone

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., Vol. 5, 114-115.

The type of festivals conducive to a Republic will allow the citizens to participate fully, in a structure whose reciprocity enhances the natural sentiment of *pitié* to unify citizens and symbolically negate the narrow perspective of self-interest. Rousseau even stipulates that it is perfectly acceptable to have spectacles that do not represent anything to the people. Clearly, the sort of spectacle proper to a Republic privileges presence over representation, in a uniting of souls that needs no further purpose or medium.

The open-air assembly of citizens in the *place publique* provides a solution to many of the problems inherent to theater, but this sort of gathering is not always practicable. With this in mind, Rousseau suggests that in the winter communities gather to hold *bals de jeunesse*. At these arranged dances, the parents of young people can oversee the introduction of young men and women to one another in view of forming compatible couples for marriage. Rousseau explains his reasoning for supporting this type of social gathering:

L'homme et la femme ont été formés l'un pour l'autre. Dieu veut qu'ils suivent leur destination, et certainement le premier et le plus saint de tous les liens de la Société est le mariage. Toutes les fausses Religions combattent la nature. La nôtre seule, qui la suit et la règle, annonce une institution divine et convenable à l'homme. Elle ne doit donc point ajouter sur le mariage, aux embarras de l'ordre civil, des difficultés que l'Evangile ne prescrit pas et que tout bon Gouvernement condamne. Mais qu'on me dise où de jeunes personnes à marier auront occasion de prendre du goût l'une pour l'autre, et de se voir avec plus de décence et de circonspection que dans une assemblée où les yeux du public incessamment ouverts sur elles les forcent à la réserve, à la modestie, à s'observer avec le plus grand soin ? En quoi Dieu est-il offensé par un exercice agréable, salutaire, propre à la vivacité des jeunes gens, qui consiste à se présenter l'un à l'autre avec grâce et bienséance, et auquel le spectateur impose une gravité dont on n'oseroit sortir un instant ? Peut-on imaginer un moyen plus honnête de ne point tromper autrui, du moins quant à la figure, et de se montrer avec les agréments et les défauts qu'on peut avoir aux gens qui ont intérêt de nous bien connoître avant de s'obliger à nous aimer ?¹⁷¹

The *bal de jeunesse*, as formulated by Rousseau, provides a setting in which young men and women can find mates, one that minimizes vice and deception. As in the open-air festival, here also the gaze serves the crucial function of regulating force, as members of the community and

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Vol. 5, 116-117.

especially the parents of the young people are witnesses to the formation of marriageable couples. The young people are allowed to benefit from a configuration that promotes honesty and respect for oneself as well as for all members of the community. The elders of the community are likewise invited to play a special role by overseeing the proceedings, and all individuals are directed to honor them on the occasion¹⁷². The participation of the entire community and the avoidance of deception and immodest behavior are conducive to the formation of stable marriages that work with Nature's inclinations to strengthen social ties.

Lorraine Piroux sees in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* an attempt by Rousseau to challenge mainstream Enlightenment epistemology by presenting the city of Geneva as an exotic spectacle. She notes the sharp contrast between Rousseau's portrait and the taxonomic presentation of d'Alembert's article in the *Encyclopédie*¹⁷³. Piroux maintains that Rousseau's text works through a performative rather than argumentative methodology in order to challenge Enlightenment epistemology in its confrontations with the Other.¹⁷⁴ The city of Geneva, she explains, constitutes in itself an epistemological sign of great magnitude, and its presentation as an exotic seaport is meant to sow doubt amidst the Encyclopedic ideology which sought to completely master otherness through imposing order on its objects of knowledge.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² « Je voudrais qu'on formât dans la salle une enceinte commode et honorable, destinée aux gens âgés de l'un et de l'autre sexe, qui ayant déjà donné des Citoyens à la patrie, verroient encore leurs petits enfans se préparer à le devenir. Je voudrais que nul n'entrât ni ne sortit sans saluer ce parquet, et que tous les couples de jeunes gens vinssent, avant de commencer leur danse et après l'avoir finie, y faire une profonde révérence, pour s'accoutumer de bonne heure à respecter la vieillesse. Je ne doute pas que cette agréable réunion des deux termes de la vie humaine ne donnât à cette assemblée un certain coup d'œil attendrissant, et qu'on ne vit quelquefois couler dans le parquet des larmes de joye et de souvenir, capables, peut-être, d'en arracher à un spectateur sensible. » Ibid., Vol. 5, 118.

¹⁷³ "There is a fundamental discursive difference between Rousseau's and d'Alembert's Geneva. The exoticized city is constructed primarily as an object of irreducible singularity so as to resist classification. . . Whereas such spectacles make Swiss life a riveting object of desire, the encyclopedic entry gives a comprehensive and rational account of Geneva using standardized methods of inquiry and exposition." Lorraine Piroux, "Staged Truth and Travel Epistemology in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*", *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, Vol. 29, 2000, 159.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 156.

¹⁷⁵ Piroux explains the way in which Rousseau's performative method of presenting Geneva threatens the Encyclopedic pretention to dominate or "tame" alterity: "A source of wonders, Rousseau's Geneva is an epistemological sign with multi-layered meanings. Not only does it insinuate the unknowable at the heart of the

Furthermore, she suggests that it is this desire for epistemological innovation that underpins Rousseau's objection to theater. She explains:

Whereas in L ry's History of a Voyage, the spectacle of Otherness eventually leads to the appropriation of the Other and its transformation into formal knowledge, Rousseau's Genevan spectacle is carefully staged so as to remain radically savage and therefore totally out of reach . . . Rousseau's rejection of theatricality hinges precisely on the issue of Otherness. Rejecting the assumption that catharsis enables the othering of the spectator's self: Rousseau argues that, in fact, theatricality only operates on the level of sameness and reinforces the natural inclinations of spectators . . .

If catharsis cannot produce change or integrate innovation, it is because all passions work together—almost structurally—to unify the self, but by the same token, they leave no room for any decentering to occur when one is confronted with the unfamiliar. Thus, according to Rousseau, the spectator's self only experiences difference on its own already familiar terms.¹⁷⁶

Since the usual division between actor and audience, seer and seen, knower and known does not further knowledge of the Other, but rather only produces a play or reflections, Rousseau wishes to refashion theatricality by dissolving these oppositions in the new structure of the festival in which roles are interchangeable. It is evident, then, that Rousseau's aim is not only to transform the relations of deceit that perpetuate rapports of domination within urban societies but also to challenge the Encyclopedic epistemology and forge a new method of accessing alterity, one which will be of particular importance in gaining knowledge of foreign cultures.

Rousseau's proposed plan for the careful direction of the theater, a strategy whose applicability is meant to extend to all the arts and sciences, is of particular interest for the modern democratic reader. As Allan Bloom aptly remarks,

Any suggestion favoring censorship in the arts and sciences is most naturally viewed by us with suspicion as arising from the illiberal interest of party or sect. The arms of repression have so long been used only to bolster corrupt and decaying regimes or to institute tyrannical ones that the free development of the arts now appears to be a

encyclopedia project whose mission was to master the sum and structure of human knowledge, it ruins all hope for such a process ever to foresee, let alone reach, its own totality. . . . Thus what is at stake in the unexpected spectacle of Geneva as a port city is the validity of philosophy's practices.” Ibid., 161.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 165-166.

necessary condition, if not the core, of a republican way of life. It is hard to believe that during the greater part of recorded history disinterested, that is to say, philosophic, men were of the opinion that republics required the greatest self-imposed restraints whereas tyrannies and other decadent regimes could often afford the greatest individual liberties.¹⁷⁷

Many western thinkers of the eighteenth-century held the view that in democratic regimes, where the people are accorded a more central role, it becomes necessary to manage and control public opinion. Voltaire, for example, in his *Essai sur les mœurs*, discusses the necessity of an Enlightened ruler and class of educated men to guide the general population. In accordance with this view, the question of public education, which included the cultivation of both civic and public virtue, emerged as a crucial issue. Rousseau's plans for the careful management of the people through customs illustrate Christian Marouby's characterization of utopias as schemas, which in their rigid architecture, easily veer towards tyranny. In Rousseau's social project, as in all utopias, the harmony and order of the social structure predominate over all other concerns:

L'unité utopique . . . ne se fera pas par la grâce de la nature humaine, mais contre elle. . . . Même si l'homme n'est pas toujours un loup pour l'homme, ses penchants naturels ne le portent pas spontanément à la sociabilité, mais à la désunion. Aussi, de Hobbes à Rousseau, la même question reste-t-elle à l'ordre du jour : étant donné l'unité constitutive de toute société, l'homme, comment fonder l'unité sociale, par quel pacte, par quel contrat sortir de l'état de discorde, sinon de guerre, qui lui est naturel ? Mais l'utopiste vise beaucoup plus haut. Il rêve de cohérence, d'harmonie, d'union sans faille.¹⁷⁸

This paradoxical tendency present in Rousseau's thought has received much critical attention¹⁷⁹. Ellison remarks that the internal cohesion achieved through Rousseau's public

¹⁷⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*, trans. Allan Bloom, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1968, xi.

¹⁷⁸ Marouby, op. cit., 67.

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, David Marshall's description of Rousseau's republican *fêtes*: "If there is transparency in these relations, it is the enforced exposure of state-controlled theatricality rather than the mutual sympathy of the utopian *fête* . . . it is not so clear that the transformation of Geneva and Genevans into spectacles is entirely pleasurable. We witness in the ball a carefully staged display of the everyday surveillance with which Genevans play spectator and censor to each other", 99. In addition, he remarks further on that " . . . if people are governed by public opinion, then the best way to govern them is to control public opinion. According to Rousseau, rather than opposing *amour-propre* and people's subservience before the eyes of the world, government should seize the apparatus of public opinion. . . . We can see now that Rousseau calls upon Genevans to prohibit the establishment of a theater in their

festivals comes at the price of enforced homogeneity within the community (paradoxical, considering Rousseau's criticism of the homogenization of social customs). He notes that, in this context,

The communal bond is antic cosmopolitan. It excludes outsiders, strangers, and anyone whose appearance or lifestyle does not fit into the community easily and without notice. Distinctive national usages and practices discipline and strengthen the patriotism of the people. Indeed, the social bond of an intimate community is so constricted that each self can or does know every other. At such an intimate scale, the self feels sufficiently secure and constrained to represent emotion directly to others, to be visible and transparent to every other.¹⁸⁰

As described in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Rousseau's *bals de jeunesse* provide a model for a public festival whose auto-regulatory structure resembles Bentham's panopticon as analyzed by Foucault in *Surveiller et punir*:

L'effet majeur du Panoptique : induire chez le détenu un état conscient et permanent de visibilité qui assure le fonctionnement automatique du pouvoir. Faire que la surveillance soit permanente dans ses effets, même si elle est discontinue dans son action . . . que cet appareil architectural soit une machine à créer et à soutenir un rapport de pouvoir indépendant de celui qui l'exerce . . . Peu importe, par conséquent, qui exerce le pouvoir . . . Celui qui est soumis à un champ de visibilité, et qui le sait, reprend à son compte les contraintes du pouvoir ; il les fait jouer spontanément sur lui-même ; il inscrit en soi le rapport de pouvoir dans lequel il joue simultanément les deux rôles ; il devient le principe de son propre assujettissement.¹⁸¹

Rather than a top-down system of authority, each individual both participates in, and is subject to, the surveillance of his fellow citizens. While there is certainly a sentiment of fraternity encouraged by the public festival, it should not be overlooked that the festival schema does not go so far as to render all citizens equal or erase difference. At the *bals de jeunesse*, community members fulfill different roles according to their respective age and station, and do not have

city not because he rejects all forms of theatrical relations and all manifestations of *amour-propre*; rather, theater is rejected because it would rival the surveillance, policing, and manipulation of *amour-propre* that serve the state."

"Rousseau and the State of Theater", *Representations*, No. 13 (Winter 1986), 100.

¹⁸⁰ Ellison, op. cit., 523.

¹⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975, 234, 236

equal say in the proceedings (namely, the elders oversee the process, not the young people)¹⁸².

Likewise, in the *fête de St.-Gervais*, at the end of the festival each man goes home to his own family, and all are content in their respective roles in the community which together produce the sort of harmony that Plato equated with the just state. The crucial distinction to be made here is that Rousseau is careful to eradicate from his ideal community the deceptive myth of equality by which abusive rapports of exploitation are allowed to go unchecked. It is precisely this cultural myth that falsely represents the reality of effective conditions to which Rousseau so fiercely objects. Finally, as suggested by Pierre St.-Amand, the strict utopian architecture of Rousseau's imaginary republic renders these festivals necessary as ritualistic escape valves that can serve to contain violence and avoid unpredictable conflict¹⁸³.

Conclusions

We can easily see how Rousseau's plan for the implementation of *bals de jeunesse* synthesizes and provides a practical application of the many arguments made throughout his

¹⁸² Furthermore, as Pierre St.-Amand aptly suggests, Rousseau's festivals encourage to some extent inequality and competition, despite their apparently egalitarian aims: "Into the midst of the festival and its supposed equality, Rousseau introduces competition or specular conflict. The examples of public festivals that he favors include public prize giving: "Every year we have reviews, public prizes, kings of the harquebus, the cannon, and sailing . . . of such kings there cannot be too many . . . Why should we not found, on the model of the military prizes, other prizes for gymnastics, wrestling, running, discus, and the various bodily exercises?" The object of the festival, even though it is symbolic, appears in all its mediating force, fomenting the reciprocal struggle of like against like." *The Laws of Hostility: politics, violence, and the Enlightenment*, trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 86-87.

¹⁸³ "The order and regularity of the festivals, which seem to stifle any spontaneity, appear in the text of the *Letter to M. d'Alembert* as a way of warding off social violence and averting any disintegration through conflict. Thus, rivalrous confrontation may appear, but only in forms that restrict real violence. Conflict is perfectly ritualized, aestheticized, René Girard underlines the ambivalence of rituals: "Rituals consist in the paradox of transforming the conflictual disintegration of the community into social collaboration." Ibid., 88-89.

work in favor of non-linguistic communication. He draws upon many cultural signifiers such as styles of dress, manners, and dancing, and couples them with a respect for the socially-stabilizing institution of marriage and the value of universal participation in important community matters. Finally, to achieve the desired end, he emphasizes that the event will constitute a spectacle that touches the deepest part of oneself as both a child of Nature and as a citizen¹⁸⁴. The *Lettre à d'Alembert* serves as an extension of Rousseau's previous theories attesting to the power of non-verbal cultural signifiers as either divisive or cohesive within social groups¹⁸⁵. Fueled by a deep dissatisfaction with the deception and divisiveness of his contemporary European culture, Rousseau chooses instead to take inspiration from Non-European peoples (such as those described by Kolb and the Père du Tertre) as he admires the simplicity and transparency of their communication, observable in the customs that shape their communities.

Let us conclude by turning our attention to Kant's perspective on Rousseau's cultural architecture, as recounted by Starobinski. According to his interpretation, Kant viewed Rousseau's social and political project as one which harnessed cultural production in service of

¹⁸⁴ For more specific analysis on the role of political language in Rousseau's republican program, see J. Patrick Dobel, "The Role of Language in Rousseau's Political Thought", *Polity*, Vol. 18, N°4 (Summer, 1986), and Christopher Kelly, "To Persuade without Convincing: The Language of Rousseau's Legislator", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 31, N°2 (May 1987).

¹⁸⁵ Indeed, as we have just seen, Rousseau's plans for an equalitarian community tend, at times, towards reinforcing the very differences they initially sought to overcome. In addition to Marcel Hénaff and Pierre St.-Amand's reflections on the persistence of difference at the core of the social bond, Richard Boyd likewise notes, "Although it is founded on the apprehension of the identity of our natures as fellow-creatures (*semblables*), even in Rousseau's account pity is inevitably bound up with relational differences that are the very antithesis of natural equality. Trying to make compassion central to democratic theory reifies the very distinctions it aims to overcome, inviting what William Connolly describes as the dialectical problem of "identity/difference" whereby any virtue creates a category of "otherness" or "difference" in those who do not possess it. Rousseau's treatment of compassion also deepens the tension between human beings as "actors"—in the dual sense of playing a role and of agents engaging in conduct—and those who passively experience the emotion of pity only as "reluctant spectators." In all these respects, Rousseau's treatment of pity underscores the moral discrepancies between compassion—conjured up by the sentiments of the heart—and liberal democratic demands for equal treatment and willful agency.", Richard Boyd, "Pity's Pathologies Portrayed: Rousseau and the Limits of Democratic Compassion", *Political Theory*, Vol. 32, N°4, (Aug. 2004), 521.

the reinvigoration of human nature, an objective attained by uniting the immediacy of semiology with the liberty of reflective human consciousness:

Kant est l'un des premiers à affirmer que la pensée de Rousseau suit un plan rationnel . . . Rousseau, selon Kant, n'a pas seulement dénoncé le conflit de la culture et de la nature, mais il en a cherché la solution. Rousseau s'est efforcé de penser les conditions d'un progrès de la culture « qui permît à l'humanité de développer ses dispositions (Anlagen) en tant qu'espèce morale (sittliche Gattung) sans désobéir à sa détermination (zu ihrer Bestimmung gehörig) de façon à surmonter le conflit qui l'oppose à elle-même en tant qu'espèce naturelle (natürliche Gattung) ». Nous retrouvons la nature, au moment où l'art et la culture atteignent leur plus haut point de perfection : « L'art achevé devient à nouveau nature. » Ce que Kant nomme art, c'est l'institution juridique, l'ordre libre et raisonnable auquel l'homme décide de conformer son existence. La fonction suprême de l'éducation et du droit, tous deux fondés sur la liberté humaine, est de permettre à la nature de s'épanouir dans la culture. Désormais (ajoutera Cassirer), les hommes retrouvent l'immédiat dont ils jouissaient auparavant dans leur existence naturelle. Mais ce qu'ils découvrent maintenant, ce n'est plus seulement l'immédiat primitif de la sensation et du sentiment, mais l'immédiat de la volonté autonome et de la conscience raisonnable.¹⁸⁶

With his social project, Rousseau developed a theoretical framework that synthesized the ideas regarding cultural sign systems circulating in Enlightenment travel writing. The key innovation of Rousseau's thought was that he not only recognized the powerful force that cultural signifiers wield, but went even further to suggest how the same elements of "cultural language" at the root of much of eighteenth-century Europe's corrupt social practices could also potentially be redirected and mobilized as vehicles of social reform. Given the potential for improvement or regression that he attributed to man's perfectibility, Rousseau's project aimed to harness the powerful forces inherent in cultural sign systems by directing them in the service of virtue.

¹⁸⁶ Starobinski, op. cit., 47. In this passage, Starobinski is referring to the following works: Immanuel Kant, *Muthmasslicher Anfang des Menschengeschichte* (*Conjectures sur les débuts de l'histoire humaine*), *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, Reimer, 1912), VIII, 107 & sq., and Ernst Cassirer, "Das Problem Jean-Jacques Rousseau", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1932, 498.

Chapter 3 : Representations of Non-European Peoples in Raynal's Histoire des deux Indes

Points of Reference : Raynal's Textual Project

The *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* first appeared in 1770 and soon caused a great deal of controversy.

Published anonymously in Amsterdam, it appeared in France in 1772, although only twenty-five copies were allowed into circulation¹⁸⁷. The 19th of December, 1772, the Conseil issued a ruling that the work was to be suppressed since it was said to contain « des propositions hardies, dangereuses, téméraires et contraires aux bonnes mœurs et aux principes de la religion »¹⁸⁸.

Despite this decree, Raynal, its main author, issued a second edition of the *Histoire* in 1774 that was even more daring than the first. As a consequence, the work was named to the Index of Forbidden Books by the Catholic Church on the 29th of August, 1774. With successive editions, the collaborative text took on an increasingly combative tone due, it is believed, to the sizeable contributions of Diderot. In fact, Hans Wolpe famously referred to Raynal's work as a « machine de guerre »¹⁸⁹ for its strong influence in the years preceding the French Revolution.

¹⁸⁷ Anatole Feugère writes of the initial appearance of the *Histoire* in France: « Publiée sans nom d'auteur, on l'attribuait généralement à Raynal. On lit dans les *Mémoires* de Bachaumont à la date du 20 mars : « Une histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes, en six volumes in-8 n'avait point encore percé dans ce pays-ci. Le gouvernement a bien voulu depuis peu en tolérer l'introduction, mais au nombre de 25 exemplaires seulement ; ce qui rend l'ouvrage extrêmement cher et recherché conséquemment » ; . . . Raynal est nommé le 22 mai ». *L'Abbé Raynal : Un précurseur de la Révolution (1713-1796)*, Genève : Slatkine, 1970, 265-266.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 267.

¹⁸⁹ Wolpe argues for the enormous impact of the *Histoire* which, he says, fed political unrest, both in Europe and in the New World. He points out that in later years, « Napoléon Bonaparte se proclamera 'zélé disciple de Raynal' et emportera *L'Histoire des deux Indes* en Egypte. » Wolpe boldly states, « Raynal a été, avec Rousseau, l'oracle de la

The *Histoire* was eventually ordered to be burned before the Parliament of Paris in 1781, as a work « impie, blasphématoire, séditieux, tendant à soulever les peuples contre l'autorité souveraine et à renverser les principes fondamentaux de l'ordre civil »¹⁹⁰.

Although Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal (often referred to as l'Abbé Raynal) assumed authorship for the *Histoire des deux Indes*, we know that Raynal assembled the multivolume work with the substantial aid of contributors, many of whom were paid for their work¹⁹¹. Hans Wolpe mentions the names of « Deleyre, le médecin Dubreuil et son ami Pechméja, Valadier, Saint-Lambert, Lagrange, Naigeon, et surtout Diderot »¹⁹².

The very complicated question of the character and extent of Diderot's contributions to the *Histoire* is one that has already been diligently researched, most notably by Duchet, Wolpe, Dieckmann, Lüsebrink, and Feugère. Once the collection of documents known as the *Fonds Vandeul* was made accessible by Diderot's descendants, these manuscripts were compared to those of the *Histoire*. Dieckmann, Duchet and Wolpe have published tables listing the recurrence of similar or identical passages¹⁹³.

Concerning the overall character of Diderot's contributions, critics have remained uncertain as to the precise date when Diderot began to work on the *Histoire*. Anatole Feugère cites a letter written by Diderot and dated December 20, 1765:

Les occupations se succèdent sans interruption. Il y avait avant-hier sur mon bureau une comédie, une tragédie, une traduction, un ouvrage politique et un mémoire, sans compter

Révolution française. Les orateurs le citaient, imitaient même ses images et ses procédés de rhétorique . . . On la lit avec avidité en Amérique du Nord, où, paraît-il, plus de vingt-cinq mille exemplaires sont distribués aux colons pour les inciter à la révolte . . . » Raynal et sa machine de guerre : *L'Histoire des deux Indes et ses perfectionnements*, Stanford : Stanford UP, 1957, 8-9.

¹⁹⁰ Feugère (citing Bachaumont), 178-179.

¹⁹¹ Feugère mentions several documentations of payment including, for example, Raynal's correspondence with the Abbé Galiani concerning the contributions of Pechméja, 178-179 and of Diderot, 187-188.

¹⁹² Wolpe, 10.

¹⁹³ Michèle Duchet, *Diderot et L'Histoire des deux Indes ou l'Ecriture Fragmentaire*, Paris: Editions A.-G. Nizet, 1978. Herbert Dieckmann, *Inventaire du Fonds Vandeul et inédits de Diderot*, Genève: Droz, 1951.

un opéra-comique . . . L'ouvrage politique est de ce pauvre abbé Raynal que je fais sécher d'impatience et d'ennui depuis six mois.¹⁹⁴

Whether Raynal's manuscript sat and collected dust on Diderot's desk until the preparation of a second edition in 1774, or whether he set to work much sooner is therefore unclear. A more recent study by Gianluigi Goggi, however, has brought to light that Diderot reviewed documents concerning debates within the French colonial administration, from as early as 1769. Goggi takes this as an indication of Diderot's preparation for working on Raynal's project, even from the first (1770) edition¹⁹⁵.

As a gigantic work (10 volumes, in 1780), it is unlikely that the *Histoire* was read in its entirety by many. And yet, the vast scope of a work divided into sections according to geographical area was an ideal format by which readers could browse and gather information about recent history and current ideas. It is perhaps owing to the "encyclopedic"¹⁹⁶ character of the project that the *Histoire* held such a particular appeal at the end of the eighteenth century. Raynal's project responded to the Enlightenment's zeal for bringing as much of the expanding areas of mankind's inquiry under the domain of reason as possible. Indeed, Michèle Duchet

¹⁹⁴ Feugère, 208. [Citing Diderot, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t. XIX]. Feugère also presents an anecdote whereby two contemporaries of Diderot confirm that the *philosophe* « leur dit en riant qu'il faisait du Raynal, que l'abbé s'était adressé à lui au moment de faire une seconde édition ».

¹⁹⁵ While questions of attribution still surround *L'Histoire*, Goggi reiterates what other Raynal scholars have described as the more general tone of reflection that distinguishes the passages penned by Diderot: « Remises dans leur contexte, les considérations de Diderot se distinguent par rapport à celles qui les précèdent, par leur caractère général très prononcé. C'est bien dans cet écart entre travail de compilation d'une part et considérations générales d'autre part, que l'on peut reconnaître l'intervention de Diderot. », 27. Gianluigi Goggi. « La Collaboration de Diderot à la première édition de *L'Histoire des deux Indes* », *Lectures de Raynal : L'Histoire des deux Indes en Europe et en Amérique au XVIIIe siècle*, SVEC #286, eds. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink et Manfred Tietz, Oxford : Voltaire Foundation, 1991.

¹⁹⁶ Bancarel and Rossi have, among others, noted that Raynal took inspiration from the Encyclopedia. Gilles Bancarel and François-Paul Rossi, *Guillaume-Thomas Raynal: philosophe des Lumières*, Toulouse: CRDP Midi-Pyrénées, 1996, 37-39.

suggests that it was by way of this encyclopedic structure that « l'image complexe et problématique du monde colonial . . . est devenu en lui-même un *objet historique* »¹⁹⁷.

As the title of the work suggests, Raynal and his collaborators sought to deliver a philosophy of history, and to pass judgment on world events, rather than to merely relay accepted historical “facts”¹⁹⁸. The bold announcement at the beginning of the *Histoire des deux Indes* aims to establish authorial credibility:

L'image auguste de la vérité m'a toujours été présente. O vérité sainte ! c'est toi seule que j'ai respectée. Si mon ouvrage trouve encore quelques lecteurs dans les siècles à venir, je veux qu'en voyant combien j'ai été dégagé de passions et de préjugés, ils ignorent la contrée où je pris naissance ; sous quel gouvernement je vivois ; quelles fonctions j'exerçois dans mon pays ; quel culte je professai : je veux qu'ils me croient tous leur concitoyen et leur ami.¹⁹⁹

Diderot embellishes Raynal's aspiration to transparency, seeking complicity with the reader²⁰⁰. Despite this assurance of veracity, neither Raynal nor Diderot traveled to any of the faraway lands mentioned in this compilation of travel narratives, but rather they relied upon the accounts of other travelers such as Léry, Charlevoix and especially Prévost. Raynal's position as compiler-historian is complicated by the dual task he has set for himself: he seeks both to deliver an impartial, truthful account and to adopt a critical stance *vis-à-vis* historical events, so that they might inspire moral and philosophical reflections capable of issuing further political

¹⁹⁷Michèle Duchet, « L'Histoire des deux Indes : sources et structure d'un texte polyphonique », *Lectures de Raynal*, SVEC 286, op. cit., 11.

¹⁹⁸Wolpe remarks, « Ce titre, en effet, est à la fois un manifeste et un programme. Raynal va dégager la philosophie que nous enseignent certains faits historiques. Cette philosophie de l'Histoire, car c'en est une, permet à l'historien de passer jugement. Du haut de son savoir, il verse : ' . . . l'imprécation et l'ignominie sur ceux qui trompent les hommes et sur ceux qui les oppriment.' (1781, I, p.3) », 21.

¹⁹⁹Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, Genève : chez J-L Pellet, 1780. *The Making of the Modern World*, [accessed 3 Mar. 2012], Vol. 1, Book 1, 4. I am using the 1780 edition of the *Histoire* recommended by the critical edition as the last edition overseen by Raynal during his lifetime. For the most current scholarship, refer to the new critical edition : Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, Ferney-Voltaire : Centre International d'Etude du XVIIIe siècle, 2010.

²⁰⁰The significance of this claim to truth is reinforced throughout the work, as it is repeated at the beginning of Book 4: « En commençant cet ouvrage, je fis le serment d'être vrai, et jusqu'ici j'ai la conscience de ne l'avoir pas oublié. Puisse ma main se dessécher, s'il arrivoit que, par une prédilection qui n'est que trop commune, je m'en imposasse à moi-même et aux autres sur les fautes de ma nation » . *HDI*, Vol. 2, Bk. 4, 271-272.

and social change. This tension within Raynal's position as historian has been described by Michel Delon as an « éloignement éloigné »²⁰¹, and by Bancarel and Rossi as the role of an intermediary operating according to a « nouveau modèle médiatique »²⁰², one whose aim was to vulgarize great political and social ideas in view of disseminating them amongst the people.

Given the multiplicity of sources assembled to form the *Histoire*, as well as the specificity of Raynal's own role as both author and intermediary, this text confronts the reader with the difficulties of unraveling meaning through different languages. The colonial context of the *Histoire* furnishes the occasion for recounting numerous intercultural exchanges, all of which nourish a deeper reflection upon the interplay of signs, meaning, culture, and power.

My reading of the *Histoire des deux Indes* will focus on “cultural language”, as I will heretofore refer to it, a term by which I intend to designate a sign system intimately bound up with the construction of, and communication through, cultural representations. Through the lens of cultural language, my study will address the following issues: In what manner does the author characterize the foreign peoples with which he comes into contact? What are the culturally-specific models that shape the *Histoire's* discourses? To what extent does the narrator demonstrate awareness of these cultural influences? How does the text itself generate the problematic of cultural language and in view of what ends do Raynal and his collaborators take up this question?

²⁰¹ Delon affirms that, for Raynal, « l'historien impartial se fait passionné, le spectateur prend part au combat. Le refus d'un déterminisme national ou religieux, de préjugés locaux va de pair avec un engagement moral et politique. » He goes further and assimilates this aspect of Raynal's stance to that of d'Holbach in compiling the *Système de la Nature*, likewise a collaborative work, 55. « L'appel au Lecteur dans *L'Histoire des deux Indes* », *Lectures de Raynal*, SVEC #286, op. cit., 54-55.

²⁰² Bancarel and Rossi posit the suitability of this new “mediatic” function for influencing the growing authority of *l'opinion publique* during the eighteenth century, op. cit., 28, 37.

The *Histoire*'s introduction highlights the ways in which the undertaking of exploratory voyages has already begun to impact relations between human beings by forcing social groups to confront each other in their differences:

Il n'y a point eu d'événement aussi intéressant pour l'espèce humaine en général, et pour les peuples de l'Europe en particulier, que la découverte du nouveau monde et le passage aux Indes par le cap de Bonne-Espérance . . . C'est à ce moment que les hommes des contrées les plus éloignées se sont rapprochés par de nouveaux rapports et de nouveaux besoins . . . par-tout les hommes ont fait un échange mutuel de leurs opinions, de leurs loix, de leurs usages, de leurs maladies, de leurs remedes, de leurs vertus et de leurs vices.²⁰³

One cannot help but recall Montaigne's *Essai* « Des Cannibales », where his description of the shifting of the continents to their current locations provides a memorable image corresponding to the epistemological revolution that emerges from his reflections on foreign lands²⁰⁴. Both Raynal and Montaigne's interpretations of cross-cultural encounters yield destabilizing results: what once seemed absolute and fixed is now revealed to be relative and shifting, blurring the frontiers between peoples and prompting them to reevaluate their own culturally-specific practices. Raynal's stated emphasis is commerce, a motif which encompasses all the functions of "cultural language", in the sense that interactions between differing social groups involve mutual exchanges where the dominant priorities on both sides stem from the value that they place in certain symbolic goods, (such as material goods, labor, laws, and religious norms, for

²⁰³ *HDI*, Vol. 1, Bk. 1, 1-2

²⁰⁴ Montaigne calls upon a number of ancient sources who have claimed to have witnessed the shifting of land masses due to both normal water flow and even a deluge. He debates whether or not the large island referred to as Atlantide could be the same as the newly-discovered land of Brazil, and ultimately concludes that it is not: « Il n'y a pas grande apparence que cette île soit ce monde nouveau que nous venons de découvrir, car elle touchait quasi l'Espagne, et ce serait un effet incroyable d'inondation de l'en avoir reculée, comme elle est, de plus de douze cents lieues, outre ce que les navigations des modernes ont déjà presque découvert que ce n'est point une île, mais terre ferme et continente avec l'Inde orientale d'un côté, et avec les terres qui sont sous les deux pôles d'autre part . . . » Immediately after drawing this negative conclusion, Montaigne links the continual flux of geological masses to that of other natural bodies, namely human beings: « Il semble qu'il y ait des mouvements, naturels les uns, les autres fiévreux, en ces grands corps comme aux nôtres. » This reflection, together with his later statement on the relativity of cultural judgments, (« je trouve . . . qu'il n'y a rien de barbare ni de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté, sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage »), reinforces his overall theme regarding the necessity of critically reevaluating one's sources of knowledge and assessing their limits. Michel de Montaigne. *Les Essais*, op. cit., 154-155.

instance). It should be noted that the term “commerce” was used, in the eighteenth century, to refer to social exchanges and communication, and was not limited to instances involving monetary exchange²⁰⁵.

A palpable moralistic tone surfaces at times in the *Histoire*. Concerning the inevitable cross-cultural conflicts resulting from the increasingly colonial character of exploratory travel, a firm distinction is announced between agreed-upon exchange and unjust seizure of property.

According to the text’s criteria,

Les échanges doivent être parfaitement libres. Si je veux arracher par la force ce qu’on me refuse, ou faire accepter violemment ce qu’on dédaigne d’acquérir, on peut légitimement ou m’enchaîner ou me chasser. Si je me jette sur la denrée étrangère, sans en offrir le prix, ou si je l’enlève furtivement, je suis un voleur que l’on peut tuer sans remords.²⁰⁶

These lines constitute a significant political stance, limiting the extent of validity of European laws and institutions to the countries in which they were conceived, while equally if not more importantly affirming the sovereign rights of foreign peoples over their own lands, rights which ought not to be alienated through colonial exploitation. A number of commentators have concentrated their studies on building a case for his anticolonialism. While this is not the primary emphasis of my study (and the collaborative nature of the text further complicates the question), it should be noted that many passages of the *Histoire* voice an opposition to the

²⁰⁵ Commerce is defined in the 4th edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1762) as « Trafic, négoce de marchandises, d’argent, soit en gros, soit en détail . . . On dit figurément d’un homme qui se mêle de quelque pratique ou intrigue qui n’est pas honnête qu’il *fait un mauvais, un méchant, un vilain commerce, un honteux commerce*. Commerce signifie aussi communication et correspondance ordinaire avec quelqu’un, soit pour la société seulement, soit aussi pour quelques affaires. . . . On dit, *Avoir commerce, être en commerce avec* . . . Et il s’entend en mauvaise part, quand on parle de différents sexes. On dit qu’*Un homme est d’un agréable commerce, d’un bon commerce* pour dire, qu’il est d’agréable société : Et d’*un commerce sur*, pour dire, qu’on peut se fier à lui, qu’on peut lui confier ses secrets. » Note that the added connotation of implying negative relations appears, for the first time in this edition, with respect to male-female relations. *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 4th edition, 1762, The ARTFL Project, « Dictionnaires d’autrefois », [<http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaires-dautrefois>], accessed 12 Oct. 2011.

²⁰⁶ *HDI*, Vol. 4, Bk. 8, 249.

mistreatment of colonized peoples and defend their rights. In particular, he criticizes European colonizers for having mistakenly presumed to understand Non-European peoples:

Alors on prit l'homme, dont on étoit entouré, pour le modèle de l'homme lointain, et l'on imagina que la législation qui convenoit à l'un convenoit également à l'autre. Dans des tems antérieurs, et peut-être même encore aujourd'hui, confondons-nous deux êtres séparés par des différences immenses, l'homme sauvage et l'homme policé ; l'homme né dans les bras de la liberté et l'homme né dans les langes de l'esclavage. L'aversion de l'homme sauvage pour nos cités naît de la maladresse avec laquelle nous sommes entrés dans la forêt.²⁰⁷

As we will see at several points in the text, Raynal and his collaborators clearly take some inspiration from Rousseau's descriptions of man in the "state of nature" who is purer because not yet subject to the negative effect of civilization that renders him more dependent, living in a world of deceiving appearances. While "civilized" man is constantly alienated from himself, since he lives in the opinions of others, and solitary, as he anxiously strives to protect his private interests, "primitive" man lives more fully in himself because he is not divided into an authentic and a social self²⁰⁸. By means of this same type of reasoning, the author of these lines arrives at an idyllic identification, concluding that man in the state of nature is not radically Other, but rather a superior form of "civilized" man²⁰⁹. The presence of the "primitive"

²⁰⁷ *HDI*, Vol. 4, Bk. 8, 345.

²⁰⁸ In the *Second Discours*, Rousseau provides a detailed description of man's existence before society was formed. The positive valorization he attributes to this "pure" state is evident particularly in the following passages: « Laissez à l'homme civilisé le tems de rassembler toutes ces machines autour de lui, on ne peut douter qu'il ne surmonte facilement l'homme Sauvage ; mais si vous voulés voir un combat plus inegal encore, mettez-les nuds et desarmés vis-à-vis l'un de l'autre, et vous reconnoîtrez bientôt quel est l'avantage d'avoir sans cesse toutes ses forces à sa disposition, d'être toujours prêt à tout événement, et de se porter, pour ainsi dire, toujours tout entier avec soi. », op. cit., Vol. 3, 135-136. By contrast, man, « en devenant sociable et Esclave, il devient foible, craintif, rampant, et sa manière de vivre molle et efféminée acheve d'énervier à la fois sa force et son courage. » Ibid., Vol. 3, 139. Furthermore, pre-civilized man is not yet haunted by *amour-propre* : « Chaque homme en particulier se regardant lui-même comme le seul Spectateur qui l'observe, comme le seul être dans l'univers qui prenne intérêt à lui, comme le seul juge de son propre mérite, il n'est pas possible qu'un sentiment qui prend sa source dans des comparaisons qu'il n'est pas à portée de faire, puisse germer dans son ame ; par la même raison cet homme ne sauroit avoir ni haine ni desir de vengeance, passions qui ne peuvent naître que de l'opinion de quelque offense reçue. . . » Ibid., Vol. 3, 219. See also the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* and the *Lettre à d'Alembert*.

²⁰⁹ This phenomenon of cultural projection, articulated by Christian Marouby, lends credence to efforts such as my own to decipher attitudes of the "home" culture (i.e. European culture) in 18c. travel narratives such as the *Histoire*. He writes, « le Nouveau Monde devient miroir des rêves ou des nostalgies de l'Ancien, support de ses fantasmes de plénitude et de bonheur. Qu'il soit à l'origine l'objet d'une réelle observation ou d'une pure création, il finit

American forces the Europeans to acknowledge a source of alterity within themselves, an unsettling encounter that will bring into question their former sense of identity.

Material Goods and Commodities as Cultural Signs

Let us first examine the portion of the *Histoire* describing the Spaniards' arrival on the island that they name San-Salvador, as this episode condenses some key insights regarding the investment of cultural values in signs, while in addition providing an interesting case for analysis of the cultural paradigm within which Raynal himself operates:

Ce fut au mois d'octobre que fut découvert le Nouveau-Monde. Colomb aborda à une des isles Lucayes, qu'il nomma San-Salvador, et dont il prit possession au nom d'Isabelle. Personne en Europe n'étoit capable de penser, qu'il pût y avoir quelque injustice de s'emparer d'un pays qui n'étoit pas habité par des chrétiens.

Les insulaires, à la vue des vaisseaux et de ces hommes si différens d'eux, furent d'abord effrayés, et prirent la fuite. Les Espagnols en arrêterent quelques-uns, qu'ils renvoyèrent, après les avoir comblés de caresses et de présens. Il n'en fallut pas davantage pour rassurer toute la nation.

Ces peuples vinrent sans armes sur le rivage. Plusieurs entrèrent dans les vaisseaux ; ils examinoient tout avec admiration. On remarquoit en eux de la confiance et de la gaieté. Ils apportoit des fruits. Ils mettoient les Espagnols sur leurs épaules, pour les aider à descendre à terre. Les habitans des isles voisines montrèrent la même douceur et les mêmes mœurs.

Les matelots que Colomb envoyoit à la découverte, étoient fêtés dans toutes les habitations. Les hommes, les femmes, les enfans leur alloient chercher des vivres. On remplissoit du coton le plus fin, les lits suspendus dans lesquels ils couchoient.

toujours par incarner les valeurs et les conceptions de la conscience à laquelle il est offert. Il devient représentation d'un idéal humain ou point de fuite d'une amère critique des sociétés européennes, reflet d'une psychologie et objet d'un désir. », op. cit., 17-18.

Lecteur, dites-moi, sont-ce des peuples civilisés qui sont descendus chez des sauvages, ou des sauvages chez des peuples civilisés ? Et qu'importe qu'ils soient nus ; qu'ils habitent le fond des forêts, qu'ils vivent sous des huttes ; qu'il n'y ait parmi eux ni code de loix, ni justice civile, ni justice criminelle ; s'ils sont doux, humains, bienfaisans, s'ils ont les vertus qui caractérisent l'homme. Hélas ! par-tout on auroit obtenu le même accueil avec les mêmes procédés. Oublions, s'il se peut, ou plutôt rappelons-nous ce moment de la découverte, cette première entrevue des deux mondes pour bien détester le nôtre.

C'était de l'or que cherchoient les Espagnols : ils en virent. Plusieurs sauvages portoient des ornemens de ce riche métal ; ils en donnerent à leurs nouveaux hôtes. Ceux-ci furent plus révoltés de la nudité, de la simplicité de ces peuples que touchés de leur bonté. Ils ne surent point reconnoître en eux l'empreinte de la nature. Etonnés de trouver des hommes couleur de cuivre, sans barbe et sans poil sur le corps, ils les regarderent comme des animaux imparfaits qu'on auroit dès lors traités inhumainement, sans l'intérêt qu'on avoit de savoir d'eux des détails importans sur les contrées voisines, et dans quel pays étoient les mines d'or.²¹⁰

The colonial seizure of San Salvador is instructive regarding the conventional system of values ordering Spanish society of the eighteenth century. While the Spaniards recognize property rights, their criteria of eligibility for such ownership requires that the individual be Christian, in other words, the same as them. The islanders' fear is dispelled as the Spaniards show them affection and offer gifts, to which the islanders respond in kind with offers of hospitality. These first acts of hospitality demonstrate the symbolic power of gestures to forge a tie of communication, and thereby trust, in cases where there is no shared language between interlocutors. However, with his address beginning « Lecteur, dites-moi... », the narrator makes a *retournement à la Montaigne*, showing how the first acts of "kindness" by the Spaniards were in reality a manipulation of signs in order to gain the trust of the San Salvador islanders. Reexamining the dominant values of contemporary European civilization, the narrator points to the folly of the Spaniards in their failure to recognize the merit and humanity of native peoples, while being distracted by their obsession for gold. Why do the Spaniards attribute such importance to clothing that they are disgusted by nudity? The Spaniards' concerns with material

²¹⁰ *HDI*, Vol. 3, Livre VI, 344-346.

appearance distract and render them blind to perceiving the culture of this foreign social group. Unable to decipher the cultural codes of the San Salvador islanders, the Spaniards are also apparently unaware of what their own investment in material commodities reveals about them.

In another related passage, this time involving an interaction between the Spaniards and the Peruvians, commodities such as gold and iron again play a significant role in the *Histoire's* reflections on cultural value systems. The narrator challenges a unilateral view of European colonization by suggesting, for instance,

Si je ris en moi-même de l'imbécillité de celui qui me donne son or pour du fer, le prétendu imbécille se rit aussi de moi qui lui cède mon fer dont il connoît toute l'utilité, pour son or qui ne lui sert à rien.²¹¹

The multiplicity of perspectives presented by the text emphasizes the cultural specificity of value systems, in view of advancing criticisms of European hegemony. According to the distinction made by Adam Smith, one could say that the Peruvians privilege “use value” over “exchange value”. Smith delineates this important distinction:

The word VALUE, it is to be observed, has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called “value in use”, the other, “value in exchange.”²¹²

While the non-Europeans place value in commodities that can directly enhance their material circumstances, the Europeans are preoccupied with amassing means of wealth and power such as gold, primarily because wealth has a surplus value as a status symbol²¹³. Europeans, unlike these “primitives”, seek wealth not just to meet their needs or even to enjoy a private, comfortable life,

²¹¹ *HDI*, Vol. 4, Bk. 8, 249.

²¹² Adam Smith, op. cit., 42.

²¹³ Wolpe articulates the way in which Raynal distinguishes between different types of commodities. For Raynal, he observes, « Toutes les richesses dérivent de la propriété. Mais, entre ces richesses, il faut distinguer : les unes sont fécondes, les autres, funestes. Raynal ne se lasse pas de flétrir l'inlassable soif de l'or qui dévore les colonisateurs . . . Raynal, selon une distinction chère aux Physiocrates, oppose les richesses « fausses » aux richesses « vraies » . . . les richesses « renaissantes », produites par la Nature, telles que la pêche, l'élevage, les cultures sont les seules réelles. Les richesses dues à l'industrie et au négoce, les richesses « circulantes » intensifient les échanges. Elles reproduisent rien, et sont, par définition, stériles. », op. cit., 67-68.

but rather out of pride: they are concerned with displaying their wealth for others to see and using it as a means to obtain power over them²¹⁴.

Rousseau harshly denounced the European obsession with luxury and appearance in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, and blamed it as a vehicle for the proliferation of vice. He laments in a nostalgic tone,

Qu'il seroit doux de vivre parmi nous, si la contenance extérieure étoit toujours l'image des dispositions du cœur . . . La parure n'est pas moins étrangère à la vertu qui est la force et la vigueur de l'âme. L'homme de bien est un Athlète qui se plaît à combattre nud : il méprise tous ces vils ornemens qui gênent l'usage de ses forces, et dont la plupart n'ont été inventés que pour cacher quelque difformité . . . Aujourd'hui . . . il règne dans nos mœurs une vile et trompeuse uniformité, et tous les esprits semblent avoir été jetés dans un même moule . . .²¹⁵

The preoccupation with appearance over substance has, Rousseau claims, introduced a dangerous opacity into all social exchanges and, moreover, has led individuals to hide behind a herd mentality where inauthenticity and exploitation are the rule. With Rousseau's well-known criticisms circulating in the background, many episodes of the *Histoire* illustrate the varied ways in which the Europeans' relationship to material commodities is a vehicle of greed, deception and corruption²¹⁶.

²¹⁴ Of course, as Rousseau would be the first to point out, the quest to amass riches paradoxically renders a man less powerful, firstly since he must depend upon another to help him protect his wealth, and secondly because he becomes dependent upon the regard of others for his own happiness. The moral and personal bankruptcy implicitly present in the intertext thereby further supports Raynal's critique by extending the argument beyond the material level at the surface of the exchange between the European and the savage.

²¹⁵ Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, Vol. 3, 7-8.

²¹⁶ Over and over again, Raynal stresses the importance of this theme and condemns the corrupt commerce at the heart of European colonization. He writes, « Le Nouveau-Monde a multiplié parmi nous les métaux. Un désir vif de les obtenir a occasionné un grand mouvement sur le globe : mais le mouvement n'est pas le bonheur. De qui l'or et l'argent ont-ils amélioré le sort ? Les nations qui les arrachent des entrailles de la terre, ne crouissent-elles pas dans l'ignorance, la superstition, la paresse, l'orgueil : ces vices les plus difficiles à déraciner, lorsqu'ils ont jeté de profondes racines ? N'ont-elles pas perdu leur agriculture et leurs ateliers ? Leur existence n'est-elle pas précaire ? Si le peuple industriel et propriétaire d'un sol fertile, s'avisait un jour de dire à l'autre peuple : Il y a trop longtemps que je fais un mauvais trafic avec vous, et je ne veux plus donner la chose pour le signe : cette loi somptuaire ne seroit-elle pas une sentence de mort contre la région qui n'a que des richesses de convention ; à moins que, dans son désespoir, celle-ci ne fermât ses mines pour ouvrir des sillons ? » , *HDI*, Vol. 10, Bk. 19, 471-472. Yet another passage in which the Spaniards' thirst for gold appears recounts the Peruvian emperor's astonishment at this foreign obsession. The Emperor is captured and imprisoned, and « Quoique étroitement gardé, l'empereur ne tarda pas à démêler la passion extrême de ses ennemis pour l'or. Cette découverte le déterminait à leur en offrir pour sa rançon

While Raynal and his collaborators judge the Spaniards particularly harshly, they are not the sole targets of criticism. Indeed, the text also lays blame with their native France, an expedient evidently taken in view of contrasting the whole of European “civilized” society with the purer, instinctual “primitive” inhabitants of the New World. Given concerns of censorship, the largest proportion of the reproaches are directed towards the Spaniards, a decision that, as Manfred Tietz explains, was motivated by the perception that Spain had retained an archaic mentality:

Pour Raynal et ses collaborateurs, les Espagnols sont l’incarnation du fanatisme, de la superstition et de l’abus du pouvoir monacal, qualités toutes négatives et surannées qui empêchent le pays d’entrer dans l’ère moderne . . . C’est cette mentalité religieuse et monacale des Espagnols qui a fait le malheur des peuples qu’ils ont conquis, lors de la découverte de l’Amérique. Les soumettant aux lois d’un christianisme fanatique, ils les ont réduits ainsi à un esclavage spirituel et physique, au lieu d’établir avec eux, sur un pied d’égalité, des relations de commerce et d’échange culturel. C’est aussi cette mentalité qui les a empêchés de participer au développement des Lumières en Europe, et qui les rend maintenant incapables d’organiser une administration effective, en métropole et dans les colonies.²¹⁷

He specifies, moreover, that the Inquisition was seen as the most blatant expression of this faulty mentality of the Spaniards.

This attitude is explicit, for instance, in the lines discussing the narrow-mindedness of the Spaniards during their explorations of Mexico. The scornful attitude of the colonizers towards the native Mexicans is denounced vehemently in the *Histoire*:

Voilà les hommes que les Espagnols ne daignoient pas admettre dans l’espèce humaine. Une des qualités qu’ils méprisoient le plus chez les Tlascaltèques, c’étoit l’amour de la liberté. Ils ne trouvoient pas que ce peuple eût un gouvernement parce qu’il n’avoit pas celui d’un seul, une police, parce qu’il n’avoit pas celle de Madrid ; ni des vertus, parce qu’il n’avoit pas leur culte, ni de l’esprit parce qu’il n’avoit pas leurs opinions. Jamais peut-être aucune nation ne fut idolâtre de ses préjugés, au point où l’étoient alors, où le sont peut-être encore aujourd’hui les Espagnols. Ces préjugés faisoient le fond de toutes

autant que sa prison . . . en pourrait contenir, jusqu’à la plus grande hauteur où le bras d’un homme pourroit atteindre. Sa proposition fut acceptée . . . », *HDI*, Vol. 4, Bk. 7, 23-24.

²¹⁷ Manfred Tietz, « L’Espagne et l’Histoire des deux Indes de l’abbé Raynal », *Lectures de Raynal*, SVEC #286, op. cit., 102-103.

leurs pensées, influoient sur leurs jugemens, formoient leur caractère. Ils n'employoient le génie ardent et vigoureux que leur a donné la nature, qu'à inventer une foule de sophismes pour s'affermir dans leurs erreurs. Jamais la déraison n'a été plus dogmatique, plus décidée, plus ferme et plus subtile. Ils étoient attachés à leurs usages comme à leurs préjugés. Ils ne reconnoissoient qu'eux dans l'univers de sensés, d'éclairés, de vertueux. Avec cet orgueil national, le plus aveugle qui fut jamais, ils auroient eu pour Athenes le mépris qu'ils avoient pour Tlascala. Ils auroient traité les Chinois comme des bêtes ; et par-tout, ils auroient outragé, opprimé, dévasté.²¹⁸

These lines, believed to be penned by Diderot, stress the fact that the Spanish, « idolâtres de leurs préjugés », fell into error by fixating on false representations rather than on what these representations signify. The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* (1762) gives the following definition of « idolâtre »:

Qui adore les idoles et leur rend des honneurs qui n'appartiennent qu'à Dieu. . . . Il se dit aussi de tous ceux qui rendent un culte divin à des créatures . . . Idolâtre s'emploie figurément en plusieurs façons de parler. Ainsi on dit qu'*Un homme est idolâtre d'une femme*, pour dire, qu'il en est follement amoureux et qu'*Une mère est idolâtre de ses enfans*, pour dire, qu'Elle les aime excessivement. Et l'on dit, qu'*Un homme est idolâtre de ses pensées, de ses opinions, de ses ouvrages*, pour dire, qu'il les estime trop, qu'il y est trop attaché . . .²¹⁹

The attribution of this passage to Diderot is consistent with his strong disapproval of organized religions, clergy, and the attendant evils of superstition, fanaticism and intolerance.

Further evidence of the Spanish colonizers' "blindness" is provided in the subsequent pages of this section, which relate colonial success to the proper management of the political economy:

O que les maîtres du monde feront de biens, qu'ils seront honorés lorsque l'or qu'ils prodiguent à un luxe gigantesque, à d'avides favoris, à de vains caprices, sera consacré à l'amélioration de leur empire ! Un hôpital sain, construit avec intelligence et bien administré ; la cessation de la mendicité ou l'emploi de l'indigence, l'extinction de la dette de l'Etat, une imposition modérée et équitablement répartie, la réforme des loix par la confection d'un code simple et clair, ces institutions feroient plus pour leur gloire que des palais magnifiques, que la conquête d'une province, après des batailles gagnées ; que tous les bronzes, tous les marbres et toutes les inscriptions de la flatterie. Si la Cour de

²¹⁸ *HDI*, Vol. 3, Bk. 6, 383-384. From « Jamais... », the passage corresponds to *Pensées détachées* p. 334-335 (Wolpe, op. cit., 231).

²¹⁹ *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, UChicago ARTFL Project, op. cit.

Madrid, à qui cet espoir est spécialement permis, fait pour Mexico ce qu'elle s'est proposé, elle verra bientôt cette cité fameuse, le siege du gouvernement, le lieu de la fabrication des monnoies, le séjour des plus grands propriétaires, le centre de toutes les affaires importantes, elle la verra prendre un plus grand essor encore, communiquer aux provinces de sa dépendance l'impulsion qu'elle aura reçue, donner de l'activité à l'industrie, à la circulation intérieure, et par une suite nécessaire, étendre ou multiplier les liaisons étrangères.²²⁰

These lines of the *Histoire* echo Rousseau's well-known article on « Economie politique » in the *Encyclopédie*. He stresses the importance of ensuring the welfare of the people as a crucial element of a just government. In Rousseau's words,

Ce n'est pas assez d'avoir des citoyens et de les protéger ; il faut encore songer à leur subsistance ; et pourvoir aux besoins publics, est une suite évidente de la volonté générale, et le troisième devoir essentiel du gouvernement.²²¹

A virtuous ruler, according to Rousseau, places the general well-being of the people above his own desire for glory, a principle whose implementation necessitates the proper distribution of resources. Furthermore, Rousseau attributes the source of potential abuse of power to the representative structure of governments:

Si le peuple se gouvernoit lui-même, et qu'il n'y eût rien d'intermédiaire entre l'administration de l'état et les citoyens, ils n'auroient qu'à se cottiser dans l'occasion, à proportion des besoins publics et des facultés des particuliers ; et comme chacun ne perdrait jamais de vue le recouvrement ni l'emploi des deniers, il ne pourroit se glisser ni fraude ni abus dans leur maniement. . . . Mais les choses ne sauroient aller ainsi ; et quelque borné que soit un état, la société civile y est toujours trop nombreuse pour pouvoir être gouvernée par tous ses membres. . . . Le peuple . . . qui s'aperçoit plutôt de l'avidité des chefs et de leurs folles dépenses, que des besoins publics, murmure de se voir dépouiller du nécessaire pour fournir au superflu d'autrui ; et quand une fois ces manœuvres l'ont aigri jusqu'à un certain point, la plus integre administration ne viendrait pas à bout de rétablir la confiance.²²²

²²⁰ *HDI*, Vol. 3, Bk. 6, 498-499.

²²¹ Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751-1772), UChicago ARTFL Project, [<http://encyclopédie.uchicago.edu>], accessed 14 Oct. 2011, Vol. 5, 344.

²²² *Ibid.*

Thus the *Histoire*, in keeping with Rousseau, advises the use of wealth to establish institutions vital to the public good rather than overinvesting in empty signs such as gold or elaborate monuments.

The Incas: An Exemplary Case of Colonial Misunderstanding Involving Material Goods

Although a thorough treatment of anti-colonialism in the *Histoire* exceeds the purpose of this study, it is worth looking at a couple of select passages in which the anti-colonialism of Raynal and his collaborators expresses itself as a critical reflection upon the cultural significance of material commodities. The numerous episodes recounting interactions between European and Non-European peoples tend to blend together, as the text gradually sifts out the differences to yield a dichotomy between the “purity” of the indigenous peoples and the artificial, corrupt reality of the Europeans. Perusing the *Histoire*, the reader can all too easily confuse details of the various cross-cultural encounters, and what emerges from the accretion of episodes is an overall picture of colonization efforts that are more often than not misguided. As we have just seen, Spain dominates throughout as the greedy, corrupt colonizer par excellence. The text provides, for instance, the following memorable image:

Les Espagnols firent comme le chien de la fable qui lâcha l’aliment qu’il portait à sa gueule pour se jeter sur son image qu’il voyait au fond des eaux où il se noya.²²³

²²³ Raynal is apparently referring to Aesop’s fable, “The Dog in the Shadow”, although in Aesop’s version the dog loses his bone in the water but does not drown. Aesop warns against “losing the substance for the shadow”, thereby warning against misplaced value and greed. Raynal’s modification of the fable (in which the dog drowns), whether intentional or not, emphasizes that the impulses of greed will ultimately result in self-destruction. *HDI*, Vol. 4, Bk. 8, 397.

In stark contrast to their colonizers, Raynal paints a much more favorable portrait of the Incas:

Les Incas avaient encore un avantage sur les Jésuites, c'est la nature de leur culte qui parlait aux sens. Il est plus aisé de faire adorer le soleil qui semble révéler lui-même sa divinité aux mortels, que de leur persuader nos dogmes et nos mystères inconcevables. Aussi les missionnaires eurent-ils la sagesse de civiliser jusqu'à un certain point les sauvages avant de penser à les convertir. Ils n'essayèrent d'en faire des chrétiens qu'après en avoir fait des hommes.²²⁴

The Spaniards, whose obsession with gold is repeatedly mentioned, are portrayed as overly concerned with culturally constructed ideals of power and wealth. Accordingly, their relationship to everything, including nature (here, in the form of water) is wholly mediated by self-interest. All else, including entire societies of people, are seen as a mere means to the fulfillment of their idealized identity. Blindness, foolishness and an impossibility of genuine human connection with other peoples follow as direct results of their obsessive selfishness. By contrast, the Incas are praised for their harmonious relationship with nature. Their simple relation to the divine, for example, is grounded in concrete entities, such as the sun and other parts of nature, whose benefits or harm are experienced in a more immediate way than the enigmatic trinity of European Christianity. In his criticism of European colonization of South America, Raynal thus targets both civil and religious forces as bearers of Spain's self-interested priorities.

In this passage of the *Histoire*, the Jesuits dismiss the Incas as uncivilized because they are unfamiliar with the religion, language and writing of their foreign visitors. The historical record has shown, however, that the Incas did possess a highly developed culture with their own varieties of these symbolic systems. The Incas spoke the quechua language and used a system of knotted cords, or *quipus*, as a form of writing. The use of *quipus* has long fascinated outsiders, and Françoise de Graffigny based her novel, *Lettres d'une péruvienne*, on an Incan princess who

²²⁴ *HDI*, Vol. 4, Bk. 8, 300-301.

used *quipus* to remain in touch with her native culture once taken away to Europe. The *quipus* provide an intriguing instance of a cultural code at work, and it is necessary to consider both their material structure and their use in order to understand their functioning. Initially, their use seemed to be limited to the documentation of quantitative information, given Graffigny's description of them as « un grand nombre de petits cordons de différentes couleurs dont les Indiens se servoient au défaut de l'écriture pour faire le payement des Troupes et le dénombrement du Peuple »²²⁵. She adds, however, that « quelques auteurs prétendent qu'ils s'en servoient aussi pour transmettre à la postérité les actions memorables de leurs Incas »²²⁶.

In Thomas Kavanagh's book on the *Aesthetics of the Moment*, he refers to Garcilaso de la Vega, whose work, *Royal Commentaries*, served as Graffigny's primary source. In keeping with the ambiguity of Graffigny's description of the *quipus*, Kavanagh notes that

Garcilaso seems to suggest that the *quipus* were used for purposes previously described as incompatible with their physical structure. Resolving this apparent contradiction requires understanding precisely how they were used. The “reading” of *quipus* was confined to a specialized group, the *quipucamayus* (those who have charge of the knots) who supplemented the knotted strings they used as mnemonic devices . . . To a visitor from outside the culture, these *quipucamayus* certainly appeared to be “reading” a *quipu*. In fact, however, the *quipu* as document was legible only to the *quipucamayus* who had memorized the verbal discourse that knots would prod him to recall.²²⁷

Kavanagh provides an insightful analysis of the *quipus*, showing the way in which their form and function completely shape (and are shaped by) the mode of experience of the Inca culture. He relates the Incan *quipus* to a culture whose experience is marked by “moments”. Kavanagh argues,

The term “moment” designates a particular intensity of the unexpected and predictable, of an event creating a chasm between the past and the future. By abolishing what preceded while allowing no anticipation of what will follow, the moment is often experienced as an instance of pure chance. Fracturing the continuities allowing the

²²⁵ Françoise de Graffigny. *Lettres d'une péruvienne*. Paris: A Peine, 1750, 10.

²²⁶ Ibid., 10.

²²⁷ Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Aesthetics of the Moment*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, 74.

subject to understand and control what has so drastically happened, the moment announces itself as an end to any previously secure sense of a symbolic order declaring itself the equivalent of law and nature.²²⁸

In this way, the knots of the *quipus* signify moments that are themselves ruptures within a continuous narrative. This code reflects a mode of experience that resists the laws of causality that reason seeks, and relegates all meaningful experience to precise, disconnected moments. This plenitude of the present and resistance to causality makes it unsurprising that the Jesuits misunderstood the Incan mode of experience, identity and history. In this episode of the *Histoire*, the appraisal of the Incas as subhuman points to an aspect of cultural codes that is problematic: insofar as they are totalizing systems like languages, they are blind to their own particularity and aspire to universal applicability. In the historical context of European colonization, the differential between cultural languages provided all too often both the pretext and the means to exploit native populations.

Relations to Alterity as the Measure of a Civilization

The Treatment of Prisoners

As we have seen, the many accounts of colonial encounters with Non-European peoples serve primarily as a vehicle for Raynal and his collaborators' criticism of European cultures, including the French culture. Like most travel writing of the eighteenth century, this text provides more insight on the modes of thinking proper to European culture than on newly

²²⁸ Ibid., 58.

discovered lands. Of particular importance for this study of cultural codes is Raynal's commentary upon cannibalism in Brazil:

Le sort des prisonniers de guerre a suivi les différens âges de la raison. Les nations les plus policées les rançonnent, les échangent ou les restituent, lorsque la paix a succédé aux hostilités. Les peuples à demi-barbares se les approprient et les réduisent en esclavage. Les sauvages ordinaires les massacrent sans les tourmenter. Les plus sauvages des hommes les tourmentent, les égorgent et les mangent. C'est leur exécration droit des gens.²²⁹

Raynal suggests that it is in the treatment of other cultures that one's level of civilization and rational advancement is measurable. The most "barbaric" societies assimilate the Other in a violent, immediate way, with no feeling of ethical obligation towards their fellow human beings. Instead, the enemy is ingested and wholly incorporated in a gesture that suppresses his independent existence. At the other extreme are the *sociétés policées* who see only a head with an exchange value. In these latter communities, the humanity of the Other is denied as he is treated as a mere pawn, completely replaceable and only prized for his exchange value. In any case, the text establishes the outsider as the essential entity whose conversion into an exchange value testifies to the progress of civilization.

According to the formulation in the quoted lines, societies undergo a historical progression by which reason also develops. Within this schema, the ideal would be a civilized society that respects the inherent value of a human being and considers all life, even that of an enemy, irreplaceable beyond any exchange value. While not named explicitly, France is being reproached in this passage as a country that engages in slavery and that, therefore, has not yet reached the most advanced level of civilization.

In keeping with this interest in societies' treatment of outsiders, the *Histoire* provides a vivid depiction of the Brazilians' physical violence toward their enemies:

²²⁹ *HDI*, Vol. 5, Bk. 9, 29.

Au Brésil, les têtes des ennemis, massacrés dans le combat ou immolés après l'action, étoient conservées très-précieusement. On les montrait avec ostentation, comme des monuments de valeur et de victoire. Les héros de ces nations féroces portoient leurs exploits gravés sur leurs membres par des incisions qui les honoraient. Plus ils étoient défigurés, et plus leur gloire étoit grande.²³⁰

This episode creates an interesting intertext with Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*. In this latter work, Rousseau cites biblical instances in which leaders sent parts of dismembered corpses to the families of their slain enemies to avenge themselves²³¹. Rousseau has a fascination for the force of such an immediate, evocative mode of communication, a stance elucidated by Kavanagh:

Living from moment to disjointed moment, savage man is unencumbered by any consciousness of the self that relies on "the linking [l'enchaînement] of ideas which are perfected only successively" (3:199). Rousseau's use of the word "enchaînement" oscillates between two senses of the word: the link that relates the present to some other moment and that link as a metonymy of all the fetters that will one day come so totally to enchain natural man. If savage man lives outside such concatenations, it is because his consciousness, limited to the present moment, remains unfissured by any awareness of what might be as opposed to what is.²³²

With a language of immediacy, man is not divided as he is in reason; rather he is present and free. In this episode of the *Histoire*, we have an idyllic portrayal of peaceful natives interrupted by a scene of carnage. The stereotype of the "noble savage" is deconstructed, as these lines bring to our attention that a language of immediacy can be cruel as well as hospitable. Moreover, the deliberate character of the Brazilians' cultural signs suggests that it ought not to be mistaken for naïveté. Raynal's account of the Brazilians' treatment of prisoners is actually much more tolerant than his source text, *L'Histoire générale des voyages* by Prévost. As Muriel Brot observes,

Le texte de Raynal dédramatise . . . l'anthropophagie. Il la dédramatise d'abord en la banalisant : mise sur le même plan que les autres traits brésiliens, l'anthropophagie paraît moins barbare. Il la dédramatise ensuite parce qu'il ne la condamne pas. A la différence

²³⁰ *HDI*, Vol. 5, Bk. 9, 30-31.

²³¹ See p. 75-80 of this dissertation for a discussion of Rousseau's *Le Lévitte d'Ephraïm*.

²³² Kavanagh, 86.

de Prévost qui n'a que la réprobation à la bouche, Raynal abandonne le point de vue des Européens pour lui préférer celui des Brésiliens.²³³

The complex character of the *Histoire* lies in its strange mixture of fascination for uncivilized ferocity coupled with the stereotype of a peaceful man in the state of nature. Two contradictory discourses are present within the *Histoire*. According to the first, small societies remote enough to be relatively untouched by outside influences are idealized as freer and happier than European nations. In these moments, the description recalls Rousseau's formulation of a Golden Age, whose time has passed in Europe, but which can still be observed in some isolated communities. Secondly, the text argues that nations undergo a historical process of civilization, and it is the responsibility of more advanced nations to help and educate the less-advanced nations to progress beyond barbarism. The presence of these contradictory views is likely a result of the collaborative nature of this textual project, and it renders the *Histoire* a valuable testimony to the multiple strands of discourse circulating in eighteenth-century Europe concerning the rights and responsibilities of European nations towards the foreign peoples with which they have come into contact.

Raynal likewise devotes considerable attention to the native Canadians' treatment of their prisoners of war. In his words,

Les heureux sont ceux qu'on choisit pour remplacer les guerriers que la nation a perdus dans l'action qui vient de se passer ou dans des occasions plus éloignées. Cette adoption

²³³ Brot also remarks that Raynal's text does not contain indications of the multiplicity of sources with which he was working, a move that differentiates him from previous compilers such as Prévost. She observes the powerful way that this affects the text's claim to authority: « En supprimant la multiplicité des sources et les origines de son information, Raynal supplante ses créanciers, passe pour l'unique auteur d'une information qui n'est pas moins exacte que celle de Prévost, mais qui ne le prouve pas et se donne pour vraie. De plus, Prévost retient généralement des citations qui relatent des anecdotes vécues, qui soulignent que Knivet et Léry ont pour le moins assisté aux événements qu'ils décrivent. En les supprimant, Raynal fait donc disparaître le 'Spectateur', le 'témoin oculaire', et ce faisant, le témoignage. Détachée d'une expérience humaine, la description des Brésiliens passe désormais pour un savoir, non seulement vrai, mais admis. Détachée du récit de voyage, elle prend les allures d'un article de dictionnaire. » Muriel Brot, « L'abbé Raynal, Lecteur de *L'Histoire générale des voyages* », *L'Histoire des deux Indes : réécriture et polygraphie*, eds. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Anthony Strugnell, SVEC #333, Oxford : Voltaire Foundation, 1995, 95, 98.

a été sagement imaginée pour perpétuer des peuples qu'un état de guerre continuelle auroit bientôt épuisés. Les prisonniers, incorporés dans une famille, y deviennent cousins, oncles, pères, frères, époux ; enfin ils y prennent tous les titres du mort qu'ils remplacent ; et ces tendres noms leur donnent tous ses droits, en même temps qu'ils leur imposent tous ses engagements. Loin de se refuser aux sentiments qu'ils doivent à la famille dont ils sont faits membres, ils n'ont pas même d'éloignement à prendre les armes contre leurs compatriotes. C'est pourtant un étrange renversement des liens de la nature. Il faut qu'ils soient bien faibles pour changer ainsi d'objet avec les vicissitudes de la fortune. C'est que la guerre en effet, semble rompre tous les nœuds du sang, et n'attacher plus l'homme qu'à lui-même.²³⁴

This custom signals an openness among the Canadians to the assimilation of other peoples into their society, one which implicitly contrasts with the attitudes of Europeans. This description indicates that the adoption of prisoners of war was not simply a matter of instinctive, unreflecting compassion, but instead served an important practical purpose, that of replenishing the population of a people often diminished by war. This future-oriented strategy nuances earlier portrayals of the Canadians as vulnerably lacking in rational motivations of self-interest. Hans Wolpe has analyzed this alternation between contrasting approaches, as Raynal passes back and forth between an ideal and his secondhand empirical details:

Quand Raynal étudie la formation et la structure des sociétés, il fait face à un problème similaire à celui que lui posait des colonies : les colonies devaient être fondées sur certains principes ; mais elles existent déjà en fait. Comment concilier les théories et le réel ? De même, les sociétés existent. Raynal entend porter remède à leurs défauts. Pour cela, il les aborde de plusieurs manières : tantôt, il construit une utopie et se plaît à bâtir des sociétés idéales ; tantôt, il étudie les sociétés telles qu'elles sont, sans s'interdire pour cela les jugements *personnels* et les grands éclats de voix. Les deux points de vue alternent, car Raynal ne présente pas ses opinions sous la forme d'un exposé suivi ; et suivant son humeur, il utilise des exemples abstraits ou puisés dans la réalité.²³⁵

Historically documented observations made by European explorers contradict idealistic impulses to construe the Other as a pure society against which we can measure the faults of our own.

While it seems that a common Eurocentric tendency would be likely to posit foreign peoples as occupying an intermediary state between a "pure" state of nature and a "corrupt" civilization that

²³⁴ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 63-64.

²³⁵ Wolpe, op. cit., 75.

blindly overinvests in culturally constructed representations, Raynal does not adopt this Rousseauist schema. Instead, he deconstructs this as a false dichotomy: while noting that the Canadians are less rigidly invested in formal institutions, he shows that they are successful at maintaining a relatively harmonious social ensemble. An admiration permeates Raynal's descriptions of the Canadians, as he emphasizes how they are not constrained by their socially constructed orders, such as family ties, but rather they appeal to them only when they promote harmony.

Raynal oscillates, then, at times portraying the Canadians as "pure" beings close to nature, and at others, as a realization of the perfect social-contract based community. The oscillation between these two ideals lays the basis for what I argue is Raynal's primary criticism of European society: European society does not manage to transcend differences in order to reach a fraternal state of genuine community. One needs look no further than the long-standing social inequalities that shocked Montaigne's Non-European visitors²³⁶, or observe the European preoccupation with status symbols. Undoubtedly, the obsession with marks of social esteem no longer tied to an underlying value arises from a strong desire to preserve and clearly delineate social distinctions, thus making impossible the type of social harmony observed among the Canadians.

Continuing with the theme of the "treatment of prisoners", what does the slavery prevalent among European nations reveal about their cultural values? The *Histoire* openly condemns the hypocrisy of European societies in their demonstrated lack of compassion, a shortcoming that undermines the stated ideals of equality on which they pride themselves:

L'Europe retentit depuis un siècle des plus saines, des plus sublimes maximes de la morale. La fraternité de tous les hommes est établie de la manière la plus touchante dans d'immortels écrits. On s'indigne des cruautés civiles ou religieuses de nos féroces

²³⁶ The Brazilians visiting Rouen in Montaigne's « Des Cannibales »

ancêtres, et l'on détourne les regards de ces siècles d'horreur et de sang. Ceux de nos voisins que les Barbaresques ont chargé de chaînes, obtiennent nos secours et notre pitié. Des malheurs même imaginaires nous arrachent des larmes dans le silence du cabinet et sur-tout au théâtre. Il n'y a que la fatale destinée des malheureux nègres qui ne nous intéresse pas. On les tyrannise, on les mutile, on les brûle, on les poignarde et nous l'entendons dire froidement et sans émotion. Les tourments d'un peuple à qui nous devons nos délices ne vont jamais jusqu'à notre cœur.²³⁷

It is important to note that these lines from the *Histoire* invoke the virtue of fraternity and denounce cruelty, but nowhere is the right of blacks to equality and liberty clearly affirmed. A cautious approach is likewise noticeable in the *Encyclopédie*. Let us compare, for example, the anonymously written article « liberté naturelle » with the article « liberté politique » written by Jaucourt. In this first anonymous article, the definition of « liberté naturelle » is expressed as follows:

Liberté naturelle, droit que la nature donne à tous les hommes de disposer de leurs personnes et de leurs biens, de la manière qu'ils jugent la plus convenable à leur bonheur, sous la restriction qu'ils le fassent dans les termes de la loi naturelle, et qu'ils n'en abusent pas au préjudice des autres hommes. . . . Le premier état que l'homme acquiert par la nature, et qu'on estime le plus précieux de tous les biens qu'il puisse posséder, est l'état de liberté ; il ne peut ni se changer contre un autre, ni se vendre, ni se perdre ; car naturellement tous les hommes naissent libres, c'est-à-dire, qu'ils ne sont pas soumis à la puissance d'un maître, et que personne n'a sur eux un droit de propriété.²³⁸

The author then proceeds to explain the progress since the times of the Romans with respect to the treatment of prisoners of war and, finally, condemns the hypocrisy of Christian nations that allow slavery:

Chez les Romains un homme perdoit sa *liberté naturelle*, lorsqu'il étoit pris par l'ennemi dans une guerre ouverte, ou que pour le punir de quelque crime, on le réduisoit à la condition d'esclave. Mais les Chrétiens ont aboli la servitude en paix et en guerre, jusques-là, que les prisonniers qu'ils font à la guerre sur les infidèles, sont censés des hommes libres ; de manière que celui qui tueroit un de ces prisonniers, seroit regardé et puni comme homicide.

De plus, toutes les puissances chrétiennes ont jugé qu'une servitude qui donneroit au maître un droit de vie et de mort sur ses esclaves, étoit incompatible avec la perfection à

²³⁷ *HDI*, Vol. 6, Bk. 11, 167.

²³⁸ *Encyclopédie*, op. cit., Vol. 9, 471.

laquelle la religion chrétienne appelle les hommes. Mais comment les puissances chrétiennes n'ont-elles pas jugé que cette même religion, indépendamment du droit naturel, réclamait contre l'esclavage des nègres ? C'est qu'elles en ont besoin pour leurs colonies, leurs plantations, et leurs mines. *Auri sacra fames !*²³⁹

By contrast, the article on « liberté politique » penned by Jaucourt is much more cautious in its approach to the issue of slavery:

La liberté politique du citoyen, est cette tranquillité d'esprit qui procède de l'opinion que chacun a de sa sûreté ; et pour qu'on ait cette sûreté, il faut que le gouvernement soit tel, qu'un citoyen ne puisse pas craindre un citoyen. De bonnes lois civiles et politiques assurent cette *liberté* ; elle triomphe encore, lorsque les lois criminelles tirent chaque peine de la nature particulière du crime.²⁴⁰

Jaucourt continues by praising England (« Il y a dans le monde une nation qui a pour objet direct de sa constitution la *liberté politique* ; et si les principes sur lesquels elle la fonde sont solides, il faut en reconnoître les avantages »), a nation whose constitutional monarchy was admired by some French thinkers, such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, and seen as more progressive.

However, Jaucourt even backpedals on his praise of England, as he nuances his compliments:

Je ne prétend point décider que les Anglois jouissent actuellement de la prérogative dont je parle ; il me suffit de dire avec M. de Montesquieu, qu'elle est établie par leurs lois, et qu'après tout, cette *liberté politique* extrême ne doit point mortifier ceux qui n'en ont qu'une modérée, parce que l'excès même de la raison n'est pas toujours desirable, et que les hommes en général s'accoutument presque toujours mieux des milieux que des extrémités.²⁴¹

Concerning the discussion about the slave trade in eighteenth-century France, the *Histoire* and the *Encyclopédie* point to a careful approach on the part of many writers, hesitant to openly denounce a slave trade that was, despite its contradiction with political and moral ideals, tolerated as a profitable industry.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., Vol. 9, 472.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

Of particular interest for our study of customs as cultural signs are the passages that reflect upon the hospitality exhibited by Non-European populations. After stating that the first European explorers were warmly greeted by the Brazilians, Raynal launches into a Rousseau-like conjectural history to explain the presence of such hospitality in a relatively simple society as well as to account for its lack in “civilized” societies:

Née de la commisération naturelle, l'hospitalité fut générale dans les premiers tems. Ce fut presque l'unique lien des nations . . .

Dans les siècles antérieurs à la civilisation, au commerce, à l'invention des signes représentatifs de la richesse, lorsque l'intérêt n'avoit point encore préparé d'asyle au voyageur, l'hospitalité y suppléa . . .

Ces mœurs touchantes se sont affoiblies à mesure que la communication des peuples s'est facilitée. Des hommes industrieux, rapaces et vils ont formé de tous côtés des établissemens, où l'on descend, où l'on ordonne, où l'on dispose des commodités de la vie, comme chez soi. Le maître de la maison ou l'hôte n'est ni votre bienfaiteur, ni votre frère, ni votre ami. C'est votre premier domestique. L'or que vous lui présentez vous autorise à le traiter comme il vous plaît. C'est de votre argent, et non de vos égards qu'il se soucie. Lorsque vous êtes sorti, il ne se souvient plus de vous ; et vous ne vous souvenez de lui qu'autant que vous en avez été mécontent ou satisfait. La sainte hospitalité, éteinte par-tout où la police et les institutions sociales ont fait des progrès, ne se retrouve plus que chez les nations sauvages et d'une manière plus marquée au Brésil que par-tout ailleurs.²⁴²

Raynal's commentary on the disappearance of genuine hospitality, that is, hospitality as a virtue and mark of sociability, closely parallels the concerns expressed by Montesquieu²⁴³ and

²⁴² *HDI*, Vol. 5, Bk. 9, 23, 25.

²⁴³ In his *Esprit des Lois*, Montesquieu notes that with the development of commerce, an increasing concern with assessing value extends itself to all values, including moral values. In this way, commerce yields both benefits and losses, as its effects differ depending on the scale of analysis: « L'effet naturel du commerce est de porter à la paix. Deux nations qui négocient ensemble se rendent réciproquement dépendantes : si l'une a intérêt d'acheter, l'autre a intérêt de vendre ; et toutes les unions sont fondées sur des besoins mutuels. Mais si l'esprit de commerce unit les nations, il n'unit pas de même les particuliers. Nous voyons que, dans les pays où l'on n'est affecté que de l'esprit de commerce, on trafique de toutes les actions humaines, et de toutes les vertus morales : les plus petites choses, celles que l'humanité demande, s'y font, ou s'y donnent pour de l'argent ». At the level of nations, commerce is conducive to peaceful exchanges and amassing wealth. For individuals, however, the increased concern with exactitude fosters an attitude of interaction based upon self-interest. The hospitality of the Ancients, often seen as a

the Chevalier de Jaucourt. The article « hospitalité » from the *Encyclopédie*, written by the Chevalier de Jaucourt, distinguishes between the effects of commerce at the level of the nation and at the level of the individual:

L'*hospitalité* s'est donc perdue naturellement dans toute l'Europe, parce que toute l'Europe est devenue voyageante et commerçante. La circulation des especes par les lettres de change, la sûreté des chemins, la facilité de se transporter en tous lieux sans danger, la commodité des vaisseaux, des postes, et autres voitures ; les hôtelleries établies dans toutes les villes, et sur toutes les routes, pour héberger les voyageurs, ont suppléé aux secours généreux de l'*hospitalité* des anciens.

L'esprit de commerce, en unissant toutes les nations, a rompu les chaînons de bienfaisance des particuliers ; il a fait beaucoup de bien et de mal ; il a produit des commodités sans nombre, des connoissances plus étendues, un luxe facile, et l'amour de l'intérêt. Cet amour a pris la place des mouvemens secrets de la nature, qui lioient autrefois les hommes par des nœuds tendres et touchans. Les gens riches y ont gagné dans leurs voyages, la jouissance de tous les agrémens du pays où ils se rendent, jointe à l'accueil poli qu'on leur accorde à proportion de leur dépense. On les voit avec plaisir, et sans attachement, comme ces fleuves qui fertilisent plus ou moins les terres par lesquelles ils passent.²⁴⁴

Describing an earlier generosity in social relations, a natural morality that preceded laws, Jaucourt explains that these « mouvemens secrets de la nature » came to be replaced by « l'amour de l'intérêt ». The natural tie between individuals that allowed for more spontaneous expressions of virtue becomes both standardized and an anticipation of repayment, as hospitality becomes an industry. Jaucourt describes this change in social relations as a movement that is in itself an exchange. His invocation of the « nœuds tendres et touchans » that characterized hospitality in the past suggest that he, like Montesquieu, considers this over-application of precise measure to be a poor replacement for the old, and this cultural change therefore constitutes an exchange made at a loss.

sacred duty²⁴³, was a matter of honor, and the host gave generously to the guest without anticipation of receiving anything in return. The imbalance created by this type of giving beyond proportion became unacceptable once the spirit of commerce established itself, rendering genuine hospitality scarce. Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1979, XX-2.

²⁴⁴*Encyclopédie*, Vol. 8, 316.

Raynal's commentary distinguishes itself from that of Jaucourt in that it explicitly refers to « l'invention des signes représentatifs de la richesse ». With the growth of commerce, wealth is amassed and displayed for others in society. Wealth no longer only provides the means to survive; it acquires a social meaning and becomes associated with identity and status. In addition, the appearance of establishments and a hospitality industry are practices that take the place of previous individual acts of generosity. The practice of hospitality is, in itself, described in the *Histoire* as a cultural gesture that, in less-developed societies like that of Brazil, has not yet become a conventional sign detached from personal expression of virtue.

Natural Sociability

Raynal's portrayals of Non-European peoples frequently mention a natural sociability that binds together their communities. He writes, for instance, in his presentation of the indigenous people of the Antilles in Volume V: « Quoique les Caraïbes n'eussent aucune espèce de gouvernement, leur tranquillité n'étoit pas troublée. Ils devoient la paix dont ils jouissoient, à cette pitié innée qui précède toute réflexion & d'où découlent les vertus sociales »²⁴⁵. A fascination for the sentiment of compassion, and its strength as a force capable of moving individuals to action, is further articulated when he ventures to speculate that it ought to be artificially cultivated in those who have suppressed its natural, pre-reflexive form (such as despotic leaders), in order to render them more humane:

Ainsi, pour humaniser les despotes, il suffiroit qu'ils fussent eux-mêmes les bourreaux des victimes qu'ils immolent à leur orgueil, et les exécuteurs des cruautés qu'ils ordonnent. . . Combien ces sortes de spectacles, ménagés à l'éducation des princes,

²⁴⁵ *HDI*, Vol. 5, Bk. 10, 251. Note that he uses Rousseau's term, *pitié*.

épargneroient de crimes et de maux aux humains ! Que les larmes des rois vaudroient de biens aux peuples !²⁴⁶

In these lines, Raynal is emphasizing the effectiveness of compassion as an immediate form of communication, a natural sociability whose energy can be harnessed, through education, to stimulate the formation of virtue. Similar to Rousseau's advice in the *Emile* to work first with concrete situations rather than abstract principles²⁴⁷, the text is favoring immediacy over representation for the teaching of morals. Common, then, to both Raynal and Rousseau is the figurative link between compassion and sociability: compassion attempts to bridge the gap between oneself and what initially appears as radical alterity by establishing an overarching unity (this corresponds to an innate capacity to respond to the other's suffering).

The process of creating a synthetic unity to minimize alterity is of course unnecessary in pre-reflective states of compassion and language, or "hospitality" in the primitive sense. In these cases, a natural sociability, or *la pitié* in Rousseau's terminology, spontaneously inspires one to reach out towards another being with whom, in the moment of suffering, one is temporarily united. The admirable quality of the genuine hospitality observed among the Brazilians and the Antillais is precisely this ungoverned meeting of souls in which one's personal resources, whose value cannot be replaced through representation, are freely given in personal interactions. If such compassion untainted by self-interest were cultivated among all, leaders would rule justly because they would consider themselves one with their people.

The Native Americans, similar to other indigenous groups commented upon by Raynal, are accustomed to living in a peaceful state. Accordingly, they extend their habitual goodwill to strangers through hospitality, although at times they withhold such kindness from European

²⁴⁶ *HDI*, Vol. 5, Bk. 10, 251-252.

²⁴⁷ See Book 4 of the *Emile* where Rousseau expands upon his previous recommendations for experiential learning, presenting a step-by-step guide for administering moral education through the cultivation of *pitié*.

visitors. Since their hospitality is grounded in a sentiment of respect for the Other, it is difficult for them to extend such sympathies to a foreign people whose customs they abhor. Raynal aims to clarify the possibly misleading, fear-inducing narratives written by some previous explorers, as he tempers them with the following explanations:

Tous les peintres des mœurs sauvages ne placent point la bienveillance dans leurs tableaux. Mais la prévention ne leur a-t-elle pas fait confondre, avec le caractère naturel, une antipathie de ressentiment ? Ces peuples n'aiment, n'estiment, ni n'accueillent les Européens. L'inégalité des conditions, que nous croyons si nécessaire pour le maintien des sociétés, est, aux yeux d'un sauvage, le comble de la démence. Ils sont également scandalisés, que chez nous, un homme ait lui seul plus de bien que plusieurs autres ; et que cette première injustice en entraîne une seconde, qui est d'attacher plus de considération à plus de richesses. Mais ce qui leur semble une bassesse, un avilissement au-dessous de la stupidité des bêtes, c'est que des hommes qui sont égaux par la nature, se dégradent jusqu'à dépendre des volontés ou des caprices d'un seul homme. Le respect que nous avons pour les titres, les dignités, et sur-tout pour la noblesse héréditaire, ils l'appellent insulte, outrage pour l'espèce humaine.²⁴⁸

Raynal takes this opportunity to present the structure of European society from an outside perspective, thereby emphasizing the lack of logical foundation for modes of organization that “civilized” people deem necessary. He shows that the severe inequality prevalent amongst Europeans is not only a complete outrage to our common humanity, but furthermore it is counterproductive: this situation of inequality often presumed so necessary for a well-ordered society is in fact quite destructive to the social tie. The perverse habit of investing value in empty signifiers such as wealth and titles not only fails to encourage civic-minded behavior, but moreover it actively forms an obstacle to a spirit of fraternity by facilitating relationships of subjection and domination. As a result, European social interactions are a power struggle whose dynamic is incompatible with open communication, respect and cooperation.

Raynal's narrative can be understood from the perspective of an encounter between social groups possessing conflicting cultural practices. As is common in travelers' accounts, exchange

²⁴⁸ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 32-33.

serves as a *topos* according to which other cultures can be contrasted with Europe. Similarly to Graffigny's Peruvians and Bougainville's Tahitians, the Native Americans of the *Histoire* are noted for the transparency that prevails in their social interactions: « Leur franchise et leur bonne-foi sont indignées des finesses et des perfidies, qui ont fait la base de notre commerce avec eux »²⁴⁹. This confrontation of differing modes of social interaction is crucial, as it reveals the attitude of trust and respect from which the Native Americans' hospitality stems. Raynal draws a sharp contrast between this attitude and the approach taken by European colonizers. In the following excerpt, he explains the 'savage' behavior observed by some travelers, and thereby takes the side of the native inhabitants:

Une foule d'autres motifs, appuyés quelquefois sur le préjugé, souvent sur la raison, ont rendu les Européens odieux aux sauvages. Ils sont devenus, par représailles, durs et cruels envers nous. L'aversion et le mépris que nous leur avons fait concevoir pour nos mœurs, les ont toujours éloignés de notre société. On n'a jamais pu façonner aucun d'eux aux délices de notre aisance ; tandis qu'on a vu des Européens renoncer à toutes les commodités de l'homme civil, pour aller prendre dans les forêts l'arc et la massue de l'homme sauvage.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 34.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Observations on Languages, Customs, and Rituals

The Brazilian Language

Raynal includes, in addition to details concerning material customs, a description of the Brazilians' language and an account of some of their conversations with the French. As previously noted, Raynal's descriptions of the Brazilians are rewritings of Prévost's *Histoire générale des voyages*. Muriel Brot notes:

[Raynal] s'abstient de décrire la spécificité brésilienne. Bien qu'il soit montré dans sa différence, plus robuste et moins vêtu, le Brésilien est uniquement décrit selon des critères étrangers à sa civilisation, et ce rapprochement qui confine à l'assimilation nuit également à sa représentation et à la valeur documentaire du texte.²⁵¹

Additionally, Brot specifies that Raynal, in contrast to Prévost, avoids employing the Brazilian terms for objects and customs in favor of translating them into French²⁵².

The text praises the Brazilians' language, in a manner reminiscent of Rousseau, while simultaneously expressing nostalgia for an earlier, purer French language. Raynal explains that Brazil had been particularly coveted by previous European explorers, and mentions that the French, although relatively unsuccessful in their endeavors in this region, did leave behind as testimony of this venture a dialogue which attests at once to the wonderful simplicity that the French language formerly possessed and to the similar admirable quality of the Brazilians' linguistic expression:

L'unique monument précieux de leurs courses infructueuses, est un dialogue qui peint d'autant mieux le bon sens naturel des sauvages, qu'il est écrit dans ce style naïf qui

²⁵¹ Brot, op. cit., 92-93.

²⁵² Ibid., 93.

caractérisoit, il y a deux siècles, la langue Française, et où l'on retrouve encore des grâces qu'elle doit regretter.²⁵³

Raynal praises the « bon sens naturel des sauvages », criticizing the French culture for allowing the language to gradually lose an earlier eloquence that instinctively penetrated clearly to the heart of the matter at hand. He reports the following conversation borrowed from Jean de Léry²⁵⁴:

Les Brésiliens, dit Léry, l'un des interlocuteurs, fort ébahis de voir les François prendre tant de peine d'aller querir leur bois, il y eut une fois un de leurs vieillards qui me fit cette demande : 'Que veut dire, que vous autres François venez de si loin querir du bois pour vous chauffer ? N'y en a-t-il point en votre terre ?' A quoi lui ayant répondu qu'oui, et en grande quantité, mais non pas de telle sorte que le leur, lequel nous ne brûlions pas comme il pensoit, ainsi comme eux-mêmes en usoient pour teindre leurs cordons et plumages, les nôtres l'amenoient pour faire la teinture. Il me répliqua : 'Voire, mais vous en faut-il tant ?' 'Oui, lui dis-je, car y ayant tel marchand en notre pays qui a plus de frises et de draps rouges que vous n'en avez jamais vu par deçà, un seul achetera tout le bois dont plusieurs navires s'en retournent chargés.' 'Ha, ha ! dit le sauvage, tu me contes merveilles !' Puis pensant bien à ce que je lui venois de dire, plus outre dit : 'Mais cet homme tant riche dont tu parles, ne meurt-il point ? Si fait, si fait, lui dis-je aussi bien que les autres.' Sur quoi, comme ils sont grands discoureurs, il me demanda de rechef : 'Et quand doncques qu'il est mort, à qui est tout le bien qu'il laisse ?' 'A ses enfans, lui dis-je, s'il en a, et à défaut d'iceux, à ses frères, sœurs ou plus prochains.' 'Vraiment, dit alors mon vieillard, à cette heure cognais-je que vous autres François êtes de grands fols, car vous faut-il tant travailler à passer la mer pour amasser des richesses à ceux qui survivent après vous, comme si la terre qui vous a nourris n'étoit pas suffisante aussi pour les nourrir ? Nous avons des enfans et des parens, lesquels, comme tu vois, nous aimons, mais parce que nous sommes assurés qu'après notre mort, la terre qui nous a nourris les nourrira, certes nous nous reposons sur cela.'

Cette philosophie, si naturelle à des peuples sauvages que la nature exempte de l'ambition, mais étrangère aux nations policées qui ont éprouvé tous les maux du luxe et de la cupidité, ne fit pas grande impression sur les François. Ils devaient succomber à la tentation des richesses, dont la soif dévorait alors tous les peuples maritimes de l'Europe.²⁵⁵

This lengthy Franco-Brazilian dialogue draws upon ideas presented in Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité*. According to Rousseau's account of the development of human societies, the

²⁵³ HDI, Vol. 5, Bk. 9, 38.

²⁵⁴ Jean de Léry (1536 – 1613) was a Huguenot minister who traveled to Brazil seeking religious freedom. His *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil (1578)* was highly influential and inspired Montaigne's essay « Des Cannibales » two years later in 1580. Léry's observations of Brazil were included in Prévost's *Histoire générale des voyages* which, in turn, served as a source text for Raynal.

²⁵⁵ HDI, Vol. 5, Bk. 9, 38-39.

Brazilians are at the stage where they are still primarily concerned with day-to-day survival. As such, they do not yet exhibit the social organization, the supporting technology and, most importantly, the concern with providing for the future that are necessary for agriculture²⁵⁶.

The main objective of Raynal's *mise en scène* of the French and Brazilians, however, is to criticize the European taste for luxury. The question of luxury was a lively debate at the time, as it was directly related to the morally questionable venture of colonization. Voltaire wrote in defense of luxury in *Le Mondain* (1736) and *La defense du Mondain* (1737), justifying it as both a philosophy of individual happiness and a stimulus of national prosperity. Voltaire himself was drawing upon the conceptual groundwork established by previous works, namely Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, Melon's *Essai politique sur le commerce*, and Letter CVI of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, all of which spoke in support of luxury as a tool for economic success²⁵⁷. Voltaire argued in *Le Mondain* in a similar vein, suggesting that luxury was beneficial as a stimulus for the circulation of currency, the development of industry, and the flourishing of foreign commerce²⁵⁸.

Likewise, the article « Luxe » in the *Encyclopédie* comes to the defense of luxury. This article, long believed to have been written by Diderot, is attributed to Saint-Lambert, and its views are considered consistent with Diderot's position. Saint-Lambert takes a different approach, as he examines the traditional arguments given for and against luxury, and

²⁵⁶ « Quant à l'agriculture, le principe en fut connu longtems avant que la pratique en fût établie, et il n'est guères possible que les hommes sans cesse occupés à tirer leur subsistance des arbres et des plantes n'eussent assés promptement l'idée des voyes que la Nature employe pour la génération des Végétaux ; mais leur industrie ne se tourna probablement que fort tard de ce côté-là . . . Devenus plus industrieux, on peut croire qu'avec des pierres aiguës, et des bâtons pointus ils commencèrent par cultiver quelques legumes ou racines autour de leurs Cabanes, longtems avant de savoir préparer le bled, et d'avoir les instrumens nécessaires pour la culture en grand, sans compter que, pour se livrer à cette occupation et ensemencer des terres, il faut se résoudre à perdre d'abord quelque chose pour gagner beaucoup dans la suite ; précaution fort éloignée du tour d'esprit de l'homme Sauvage qui, comme je l'ai dit, a bien de la peine à songer le matin à ses besoins du soir. », Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Vol. 3, 172-173.

²⁵⁷ J. Robert Vignery, "Voltaire's Economic Ideas as Revealed in the "Romans" and "Contes"", *The French Review*, Vol. 33, No. 3, Jan. 1960, 257.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 258.

demonstrates by means of historical counterexamples that the positions of both sides can be proven false. Saint-Lambert begins his defense by naturalizing luxury:

Le *luxe* a pour cause première ce mécontentement de notre état ; ce désir d'être mieux, qui est et doit être dans tous les hommes. . . . Il y a donc du *luxe* dans tous les états, dans toutes les sociétés : le sauvage a son hamac qu'il achète pour des peaux de bêtes ; l'europpéen a son canapé, son lit ; nos femmes mettent du rouge et des diamans, les femmes de la Floride mettent du bleu et des boules de verre.²⁵⁹

By associating luxury with the passions, Saint-Lambert suggests that it results from a natural tendency that, in and of itself, is not harmful. It is normal to want to better one's condition and so luxury can be found, in varying forms, in societies all over the globe. After an extensive examination of luxury among numerous societies at different moments throughout history, Saint-Lambert concludes that it is the character of a nation's government, and not luxury, which is the primary factor that determines its political destiny and the customs of its people:

Enfin partout où je verrai le *luxe* vicieux, partout où je verrai le désir des richesses et leur usage contraire aux mœurs et au bien de l'état, je dirai que l'esprit de communauté, cette base nécessaire sur laquelle doivent agir tous les ressorts de la société s'est anéanti par les fautes du gouvernement, je dirai que le *luxe* utile sous une bonne administration, ne devient dangereux que par l'ignorance ou la mauvaise volonté des administrateurs . . .²⁶⁰

While Saint-Lambert subordinates the effects of luxury on a society to the character of its government, Rousseau heartily condemns luxury as a vice that arises from the selfish mode of civilized society. For Rousseau, man in society is consumed with *amour-propre*, and so he wishes to amass representative signs of wealth to impress others. In the First Discourse, he associates it with wasting time, and criticizes the arts and sciences for needing luxury to flourish:

C'est un grand mal que l'abus du temps. D'autres maux pires encore suivent les lettres et les arts. Tel est le luxe, né comme eux de l'oisiveté et de la vanité des hommes. Le luxe va rarement sans les sciences et les arts, et jamais ils ne vont sans lui. Je sais que notre philosophie, toujours féconde en maximes singulières, prétend contre l'expérience de

²⁵⁹ *Encyclopédie*, Vol. 9, 764.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, 767.

tous les siècles, que le luxe fait la splendeur des Etats ; mais après avoir oublié la nécessité des lois somptuaires, osera-t-elle nier encore que les bonnes mœurs ne soient essentielles à la durée des empires, et que le luxe ne soit diamétralement opposé aux bonnes mœurs ? Que le luxe soit un signe certain des richesses ; qu'il serve même si l'on veut à les multiplier : Que faudra-t-il conclure de ce paradoxe si digne d'être né de nos jours ; et que deviendra la vertu, quand il faudra s'enrichir à quelque prix que ce soit ?²⁶¹

In the assessment of luxury (as with that of social and political life in general), Rousseau's primary concern is for virtue. He accords considerable power to *mœurs* to determine the success or failure of a society. In his view, luxury is a vice that contaminates other customs and is therefore extremely dangerous. In Raynal's Franco-Brazilian dialogue, he sides with Rousseau against luxury, portraying it as an illogical greed. Finally, with his mention of a « philosophie si naturelle à des peuples sauvages », he assimilates the numerous indigenous cultures of the *Histoire*, suggesting a shared way of life among them whereby each contained society provides for the good of the whole in the present and is not concerned with amassing resources as a marker of status and power.

Raynal continues his commentary on the Brazilian language, going beyond his previous praise for their eloquence and analyzing them in terms of cognitive development:

Chaque peuplade de ce vaste continent avait son idiome particulier, aucun n'avait des termes pour exprimer des idées abstraites et universelles. Cette pénurie de langage, commune à tous les peuples de l'Amérique, étoit la preuve du peu de progrès qu'y avait fait l'esprit humain. La ressemblance des mots d'une langue avec les autres, prouvoit que les transmigrations réciproques de ces sauvages avoient été fréquentes.²⁶²

Raynal's comments in this passage echo eighteenth-century theories on the development of human understanding by Locke, Condillac, and Rousseau. In light of his statements, one can assess what Raynal's description of the lack of « idées abstraites et universelles » sought to convey about Brazilian society. In the *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Rousseau proposes the following order for the development of conventional language:

²⁶¹ Rousseau, *Discours sur les arts et les sciences*, Vol. 3, 19.

²⁶² *HDI*, Vol. 5, Bk. 9, 17.

Chaque objet reçut d'abord un nom particulier, sans égard aux genres, et aux Espèces, que ces premiers Instituteurs n'étoient pas en état de distinguer ; et tous les individus se présentèrent isolés à leur esprit, comme ils le sont dans le tableau de la Nature. . . . [P]our ranger les êtres sous des dénominations communes, et génériques, il en falloit connoître les propriétés et les différences ; il falloit des observations, et des définitions, c'est-à-dire, de l'Histoire Naturelle et de la Métaphysique, beaucoup plus que les hommes de ce tems-là n'en pouvoient avoir.

D'ailleurs, les idées générales ne peuvent s'introduire dans l'Esprit qu'à l'aide des mots, et l'entendement ne les saisit que par des propositions. C'est une des raisons pourquoi les animaux ne sauroient se former de telles idées, ni jamais acquérir la perfectibilité qui en dépend. . . .

Toute idée générale est purement intellectuelle ; pour peu que l'imagination s'en mêle, l'idée devient aussitôt particulière.²⁶³

By noting that the Brazilians do not have words to describe abstract ideas in their language, Raynal is suggesting that they still operate in a state of phenomenological immediacy with respect to their surroundings and each other. That is, various empirical phenomena present themselves to the senses, but their perception is not filtered through a cognitive grill that arranges disparate phenomena into an order, such as those provided by concepts of natural history or physics. At this stage of development, the Brazilians operate in a concrete realm limited by immediacy to experiential input. Raynal's commentary implies that, even in imagination, they can form links of compassion or envision particulars, but they lack the ability of the reflective reasoning subject to differentiate oneself from objects of experience, hold them in memory and form judgments about them.

Despite this presumed lack of advancement, Raynal's observation that there is evidence, due to etymological similarities, of interactions among various peoples in this region of the Americas indicates that they will likely move beyond their current stage of development as they ameliorate their capacity for differentiation. Using the Brazilians as an exemplary case, the

²⁶³ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Vol. 3, 149-150.

Histoire suggests the use of language as a sort of diagnostic tool for assessing the character and values of a social group.

Dancing and Singing

The *Histoire* likewise discusses the Brazilians' customs of dancing and singing, a category that was typically included in travel writings as a basis of comparison between European and Non-European cultures. In this passage, the spontaneous, passionate behavior of the Brazilians is portrayed as a preferable alternative to European ways:

Ces peuples aimoient fort la danse. Leurs chansons n'étoient qu'une longue tenue, sans aucune variété de tons. Elles rouloient ordinairement sur leurs amours ou sur leurs exploits guerriers. La danse et le chant sont deux arts dans l'état policé. Au fond des forêts, ce sont presque des signes naturels de la concorde, de l'amitié, de la tendresse et du plaisir. Nous apprenons sous des maîtres à déployer notre voix, à mouvoir nos membres en cadence. Le sauvage n'a d'autre maître que sa passion, son cœur et la nature. . .

Les notions de dépendance et de soumission, qui dérivent spécialement parmi nous de la connoissance d'un être créateur, n'étoient pas arrivées jusqu'à ces peuples. Cet aveuglement et l'ignorance où ils vivoient de ce qui devoit constituer une société raisonnablement ordonnée, avoient écarté de leurs déserts tout principe de gouvernement. Jamais ils n'avoient conçu qu'un homme, quel qu'il fût, pût acquérir le droit ou former la prétention de commander à d'autres hommes . . .

Quoique la tranquillité des Brésiliens n'eût pour base des loix d'aucune espèce, rien, dans leurs petites sociétés, n'étoient si rare que des dissensions.²⁶⁴

While these lines convey admiration for the musical and artistic talents of the Brazilians, praise for such arts had become, in the eighteenth-century, a sign of condescension on the part of observers of foreign peoples. Indeed, it was not uncommon for pro-slavery writers to

²⁶⁴ *HDI*, Vol. 5, Bk. 9, 18-21.

acknowledge such talents, which attest to passionate expression and command of the body, but do not involve intellectual ability. A concession of musical talent or artistic ability thus usually signaled that the indigenous people could not surpass the physical to excel at intellectual pursuits.

On the other hand, Rousseau accorded great importance to music in his theory of the development of the arts. In his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, he expresses nostalgia for a more primitive form of language that was like singing:

Les vers, les chants, la parole ont une origine commune. Autour des fontaines . . . les premiers discours furent les premières chansons : les retours périodiques et mesurés du rythme, les inflexions mélodieuses des accens firent naître la poésie et la musique avec la langue ; ou plutôt tout cela n'étoit que la langue même pour ces heureux climats et ces heureux tems où les seuls besoins pressans qui demandoient le concours d'autrui étoient ceux que le cœur faisoit naître.

Les premières histoires, les premières harangues, les premières loix furent en vers ; la poésie fut trouvée avant la prose ; cela devoit être, puisque les passions parlèrent avant la raison.²⁶⁵

One could easily imagine the Brazilians as the early society Rousseau describes, one that communicates matters of emotional import through music. Their natural peaceable state is an extension of their musical language or, rather, it is a cultural product indicative of the character of the social group from which it arises. Similarly to the way in which Rousseau laments the over-rationalization of music, consisting of calculated ratios used to produce complex harmonies that distract from the evocative melody, Raynal criticizes the formalized ordering of institutions that come to dominate more advanced nations. Rousseau describes the concurrent degeneration of music, language and society in these terms:

A mesure que la langue se perfectionnoit, la mélodie, en s'imposant de nouvelles règles perdoit insensiblement de son ancienne énergie, et le calcul des intervalles fut substitué à la finesse des inflexions. . . . Quand les théâtres eurent pris une forme régulière, on n'y

²⁶⁵ Rousseau, *Essai*, Vol. 5, 410.

chantoit plus que sur des modes prescrits, et à mesure qu'on multiplioit les règles de l'imitation la langue imitative s'affaiblissoit.

L'étude de la philosophie et le progrès du raisonnement ayant perfectionné la grammaire, ôtèrent à la langue ce ton vif et passionné qui l'avoit d'abord rendue si chantante.²⁶⁶

Not only does language become less emotive, but individuals who use this language lose the opportunity to express themselves in an original, fully-invested manner. Raynal mentions that the Brazilians live « dans leurs petites sociétés », an observation that again echoes Rousseau's theoretical project. As a small society, the Brazilians are able to live relatively peaceably according to a more fluid, intuitive social order. In the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Rousseau reflects upon the relative originality of Swiss mountain people compared to their Parisian counterparts:

Restez quelque tems dans une petite ville, où vous aurez cru d'abord ne trouver que des automates. Non seulement vous y verrez bientôt des gens beaucoup plus sensés que vos singes des grandes villes, mais vous manquerez rarement d'y découvrir dans l'obscurité quelque homme ingénieux qui vous surprendra par ses talents . . .

Dans une petite ville, on trouve, proportion gardée, moins d'activité, sans doute, que dans une capitale : parce que les passions sont moins vives et les besoins moins pressans ; mais plus d'esprit originaux, plus d'industrie inventive, plus de choses vraiment neuves : parce qu'on y est moins imitateur, qu'ayant peu de modèles, chacun tire plus de lui-même, et met plus du sien dans tout ce qu'il fait . . .²⁶⁷

Small communities allow both for participatory rather than representative political orders and for originality. The connection between the arts and a system of social signs, explicit in Rousseau, is likewise tangible in Raynal's text, as he says that « la danse et le chant . . . ce sont presque des signes naturels de la concorde, de l'amitié, de la tendresse et du plaisir. »

In a related passage, Pierre Berthiaume notes that Raynal assimilates the dancing of the Native Americans to linguistic signs. Raynal explains, « il en est des danses comme des langues:

²⁶⁶ Ibid., Vol. 5, 424-425.

²⁶⁷ Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Vol. 5, 55.

elles deviennent abstraites, ainsi que les idées dont elles sont composées. Les signes en sont plus allégoriques, à proportion que l'esprit des peuples est plus raffiné »²⁶⁸. Berthiaume adds:

La conception linguistique de la danse, comme signe, se fonde ici sur une vision anthropologique de l'histoire : le raffinement des hommes manifeste une déperdition de leur énergie. Les signes, ceux de la langue et les figures de la danse, s'allégorisent à mesure que l'être humain pense de façon plus abstraite. Parallèlement, l'être humain perd contact avec sa nature primordiale, s'allégorise lui aussi en quelque sorte, et se mutile à mesure qu'il s'éloigne de son instinct. Raynal applique au champ historique un mode de pensée tiré de la linguistique et il fait du sauvage un signe à décoder afin de produire un sens pour l'homme policé auquel il s'adresse.²⁶⁹

It is thus evident that Raynal's text portrays certain customs as signs in a conscious strategy to convey the connection between cultural modes of expression and the historical development of a given social group.

The critique of cultural institutions present in this excerpt on singing and dancing provides significant insight into the complexity of competing forces during the Enlightenment period, the play of ambivalent attitudes towards reason and the passions. In contrast to these lines, which paint a rather favorable portrait of the passions, many of the episodes in Raynal's compilation reflect a different attitude towards colonized peoples. As Marouby notes,

Quel discours au XVIIIe siècle n'est pas 'raisonné' ? . . . Et, comme nous le verrons bientôt, ce qui est le plus souvent désigné par cet autre mot clé de 'nature', ou encore mieux, de 'loi naturelle', c'est bien la raison elle-même. Elle est la condition du bonheur, la norme de toute pensée, et le critère selon lequel la civilisation européenne va juger, pour les admirer comme pour les soumettre, les peuples qu'elle découvre autour du monde.²⁷⁰

However, as we see repeatedly in Raynal's work, this rational framework for judging foreign cultures erodes from within, as the tendency to impose European systems of order onto other cultures proves to be not only ineffective but, furthermore, oppressive. Such cultural clashes,

²⁶⁸ *L'HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 47-48.

²⁶⁹ Pierre Berthiaume "Raynal: rhétorique sauvage, l'Amerindien dans *l'Histoire des deux Indes*", *SVEC* #333, op. cit., 235.

²⁷⁰ Marouby, op. cit., 87.

then, end up moderating the “enlightened” discourse of a colonization that would help primitive peoples to advance and thereby attain happiness. Raynal’s inclusion of these problematic interactions in his text guards against a reason that can become tyrannical, and pushes Europeans to face the limitations of their own culturally-constructed sign systems. This reevaluation of institutions is symptomatic of the Enlightenment’s countermovement to constrain the supremacy of reason. Within this context, Raynal’s text emphasizes that many less-advanced cultures manage very well without European hierarchical institutions, and his many idyllic scenes of men living in a purer state of harmony with nature challenges European pretenses of superiority.

Communication in North America: Speaking, Writing, and Friendship

Raynal’s portrayal of the native inhabitants of Canada and America in Volume 7 remains consistent with the discourse of previous sections. Again, a coexistence of two seemingly contradictory discourses is present in his commentary. While on the one hand he expresses an admiration for the simple harmony that manages to prevail amongst these peoples despite the absence of organizing institutions, on the other hand he tempers his idealization of the indigenous people by noting their lack of progress. His comments regarding the languages of Canada provide a clear illustration of this latter tendency:

On trouva dans le Canada trois langues mères, l’Algonquine, la Siouse et la Huronne. On jugea que ces langues étoient primitives, parce qu’elles renfermoient chacune un grand nombre de ces mots imitatifs qui peignent les choses par le son. . . On n’y remarquoit point de termes abstraits, parce que l’esprit des sauvages, esprit encore enfant, ne s’écarte guère loin des objets et des tems présents . . . L’étonnement et l’admiration dont leur ignorance même les rendoit susceptibles, les entraînoient violemment à l’exagération.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 25-26.

This passage from the *Histoire* provides an analysis of the Native American culture consistent with circulating eighteenth-century theories of language development. Both Condillac and Rousseau describe a progression whereby instances of onomatopoeia, « ces mots imitatifs, qui peignent les choses par le son » occur prior to the development of more arbitrary linguistic signs designating abstract ideas. Following Locke, Condillac takes an empiricist approach, tracing the origin of all language (and, therefore, thought and culture) to the input of sensations whose perceptions, or impressions on the mind, produce consciousness:

As soon as memory is formed and the habit of the imagination is in our power, the signs recollected by the former, and the ideas revived by the latter, begin to free the soul from her dependence in regard to the objects by which she was surrounded. As she has it now in her power to recall the things which she has seen, she may direct all her attention towards them, and transfer it from the present object. . . . Thus we sensibly perceive in what manner reflexion arises from imagination and memory.²⁷²

In this way, signs liberate the mind from directing the consciousness solely towards what is present. As Downing Thomas notes, the sign serves as a link between sensory input and the production of culture:

The role of the sign is to provide the mind with the ability to activate, to combine the raw material of sensations. “I am convinced that the use of signs is the principle which unfolds all our ideas as they lye in the bud” . . . The physical world furnishes human beings with the raw material of knowledge, which is only awaiting the fertile touch of the sign in order to be processed into the network of culture.²⁷³

Rousseau develops a theory of language that centers around the immediacy of the human voice rather than the presence of sensations. He likewise describes the process of development in which natural cries, gestures, and onomatopoeia are used to communicate before there is sufficient social organization to institute conventional signs. To illustrate the way in which the passions played a more dominant role before humans developed higher cognitive capacities and

²⁷² Downing A. Thomas, *Music and the Origins of Language: Theories from the French Enlightenment*, New York: Cambridge UP, 1995, 59.

²⁷³ Ibid., 60.

reason came to intervene in social relations, he tells a parable about a giant in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (Ch.III). The primitive man who initially reacts out of fear and calls a stranger a “giant”, only later develops the capacity to differentiate and conclude that the unknown being is a “man”. As Rousseau explains, the changing character of languages reflects the process of development of the societies who employ them:

Comme les premiers motifs qui firent parler l’homme furent des passions, ses premières expressions furent des Tropes. Le langage figuré fut le premier à naître, le sens propre fut trouvé le dernier. On n’appella les choses de leur vrai nom que quand on les vit sous leur véritable forme. D’abord on ne parla qu’en poésie ; on ne s’avisa de raisonner que longtemps après. . . . L’image illusoire offerte par la passion se montrant la première, le langage qui lui répondoit fut aussi le premier inventé ; il devint ensuite métaphorique quand l’esprit éclairé reconnoissant sa première erreur n’en employa les expressions que dans les mêmes passions qui l’avoient produite.²⁷⁴

The North Americans portrayed in this section of the *Histoire* exhibit the use of figurative language in their « exagération ». The nostalgia for this earlier, more passionate form of expression that characterizes Rousseau’s text is absent, and the indigenous peoples of North America are represented as children who lack abstract concepts and have a penchant for exaggeration.

Despite this insistence upon the relative intellectual inferiority of indigenous peoples, Raynal’s account of the Canadians explicitly stresses the ways in which their social organization may be more just than that of European societies. He praises the Canadians in the following terms:

Au défaut du pouvoir coercitif, les mœurs, l’exemple, l’éducation, le respect pour les anciens, l’amour des parens, maintenoient en paix ces sociétés sans loix comme sans biens. La raison qui n’avoit pas été, comme parmi nous, dénaturée par les préjugés et violée par des actes de force, leur tenoit lieu de préceptes de morales, et d’ordonnance de police. La concorde et la sûreté se maintenoient sans l’entremise du gouvernement.

²⁷⁴ Rousseau, *Essai*, Vol. 5, 381-382.

Jamais l'autorité ne blessoit ce puissant instinct de la nature, l'amour de l'indépendance, qui, éclairé par la raison, produit en nous celui de l'égalité.²⁷⁵

In this passage, the social arrangement of the Native Americans, in which there is no private property or formal system of law, is guided by an instinctive sociability. Due to their « amour de l'indépendance », they prefer to keep formal regulations to a minimum, similarly to Rousseau's description of the first societies that resembled families. In the *Contrat Social*, he asserts that a love of liberty is common to mankind and stems from our nature:

Cette liberté commune est une conséquence de la nature de l'homme. Sa première loi est de veiller à sa propre conservation, ses premiers soins sont ceux qu'il se doit à lui-même. . . . La famille est donc si l'on veut le premier modèle des sociétés politiques ; le chef est l'image du père, le peuple est l'image des enfants, et tous étant nés égaux et libres n'aliènent leur liberté que pour leur utilité.²⁷⁶

The criticism of European government in these lines from the *Histoire*, which claims that reason has been « dénaturée par les préjugés et violée par des actes de force » echoes Rousseau's assertions that acts of force do not constitute legitimate authority: « La force est une puissance physique; je ne vois point quelle moralité peut résulter de ses effets. Céder à la force est un acte de nécessité, non de volonté »²⁷⁷. No man has any natural authority over another human being and it is only by convention that laws are established. Raynal's comments about the Canadians are controversial because Rousseau's *Contrat social* was not intended for peoples in an earlier stage of political development. The Native Americans are said to rely upon reason as a guide to sublimate their natural instincts, and the collective lifestyle to which they are committed provides a blanket of equality among them. The description of the Native Americans thus reflects an eighteenth-century concern with grounding political authority upon the will of human beings as

²⁷⁵ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 28

²⁷⁶ Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, ed. Bruno Bernardi, Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 2001, 47.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

free agents capable of using reason to rectify nature's shortcomings and ensure a better quality of life.

The section on the Native Americans likewise provides a portrait assembling many of the crucial elements of what Raynal and his collaborators would, I believe, consider to be a society morally superior to the modes of organization prevailing in European societies of the time. The text draws the reader's attention to the way that the Native Americans' linguistic exchanges constitute a mode of communication consistent with the ideal of preserving a maximum of personal liberty while also favoring a maximum of equality:

Chacun y arrange à son tour, selon son âge, son expérience et ses services. Jamais on n'est interrompu, ni par un reproche indécent, ni par un applaudissement déplacé. Les affaires publiques y sont maniées avec un désintéressement inconnu dans nos gouvernements, où le bien de l'état ne se fait presque jamais que par des vues personnelles ou par esprit de corps.²⁷⁸

« Ce respect mutuel »²⁷⁹, as the text refers to it, is the defining feature of communication within the native American community, one which allows for direct universal participation and genuine exchange by excluding self-interest. As Pierre-Noël Denieul notes, « L'Indien [referring here to any indigenous figure] dans *L'Histoire des deux Indes* n'est pas un être abstrait et isolé appartenant à un passé mythique. Il a l'existence positive et sociale d'un potentiel de civilisation »²⁸⁰. Denieul stresses that, although the Non-European is often presented as lacking many of the vices of advanced societies, he is not an archetype living out of society, as was Rousseau's man in the state of nature. Instead, he is a social being, one who is capable of actively participating in the workings of a just society. While this may be partially true, it seems that the indigenous peoples of the *Histoire* are at times portrayed as atemporal ideals and at

²⁷⁸ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 29.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Pierre-Noël Denieul, *op. cit.*, 18.

others as existing proof that the developmental path that Europe's society and institutions have followed is not necessarily the only, or best, alternative.

Another salient feature of this community of Canadians is that they do already exhibit a certain degree of civilized advancement by using a system of shells both to record their history and as a "constitution" founding their laws (i.e. as writing). This use of material objects as a foundation for their sign system is quite similar to that of the *quipus* used by the Peruvians in Graffigny's novel, *Lettres d'une péruvienne*. Raynal describes the function of these *coquillages* in the following excerpt:

La mesure, le poids et la couleur de ces coquillages, décident de l'importance des affaires. Ils servent de bijoux, de registres et d'annales. C'est le lien des peuples & des individus. C'est un gage inviolable et sacré, qui donne la sanction aux paroles, aux promesses, aux traités. Les chefs de bourgades sont les dépositaires de ces fastes de la nation. Ils en connoissent la signification ; ils en interprètent le sens. C'est avec ces caractères de convention, qu'ils transmettent l'histoire du pays à la génération naissante.²⁸¹

The shells form a system of writing whose aim is to represent the community's language, itself a network of signs. To apply Saussure's terminology, linguistic signs contain within them a "signifier" and a "signified" that come to be associated with each other through this conventional entity²⁸². The sign is inherently social since language, unlike the speech act, lies "outside the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community"²⁸³. As a system of writing, the shells come to take on a social significance that far outweighs their material value as objects, and this transfer of importance is typical of writing, as noted by Saussure:

Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first. The linguistic object is not both the written and the spoken forms of words; the spoken forms alone constitute the object. But the spoken

²⁸¹ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 31.

²⁸² Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966, 67.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 14.

word is so intimately bound to its written image that the latter manages to usurp the main role.²⁸⁴

As material symbols of the social group's cohesiveness, the shells serve as present reminders of the community's values, and carry with them the authority of the general will. Finally, those with the honored role of "reading" the shells are able to connect past and future, recalling the society's history and relaying the culture's values to future generations.

Another important aspect of Native American social relations discussed by Raynal is friendship. He reveals a deep admiration for their interpersonal bonds, noting the special openness of a connection that is neither the product of instinct nor of obligation by social institution:

Des liens plus durables encore chez les sauvages, ce sont ceux de l'amitié. L'amitié n'est pas précisément un devoir, puisqu'on ne peut pas la commander : mais c'est une union plus agréable, plus tendre & même plus forte que celles qui sont formées par la nature ou par les institutions sociales. . . On veut qu'elle ne puisse pas exister, sans un parfait abandon de soi-même, sans une entière renonciation à ses intérêts personnels en faveur de la personne véritablement chérie. . . Chez les sauvages, l'amitié n'est jamais altérée par cette foule d'intérêts opposés qui, dans nos sociétés, affoiblissent toutes les liaisons, sans en excepter les plus douces & les plus sacrées.²⁸⁵

This description of friendship is remarkably similar to the self-forgetting moment of fraternal fusion envisioned by Rousseau in the *fête champêtre* scenes of the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. The civic virtue of forgetting one's own particular interests in favor of a collective harmony, from which one gains a collective sense of identity, is again posited as an ideal and contrasted with the selfish inequality and lack of cohesion of European society of the time. Raynal emphasizes the problematic nature of rational self-interest, a theme developed at length by Rousseau in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*. Similarly to Rousseau's argument that reason and the development of society actually result in a reversal that weakens the social bond, due to the

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 23-24.

²⁸⁵ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 43-45.

interference of *amour-propre* and increasing opacity of social interactions that inhibits effective communication, Raynal calls attention to the way in which cultural constructions can deteriorate social ties. He emphasizes that the advantage of friendship is that it is not a social institution.

As for the Canadians, Raynal draws our attention to their close relationship with nature as a source of freedom from arbitrary social regulations. For instance, he notes their relaxed treatment of divorce:

L'idée d'un lien indissoluble n'est pas encore entrée dans l'idée de ces hommes libres jusqu'à la mort. Quand les gens mariés ne se conviennent pas, ils se séparent de concert et partagent entre eux les enfants.²⁸⁶

In the words of one of the Canadians, speaking in favor of this arrangement: « Nous ne pouvions plus bien vivre ensemble, ma femme et moi. Mon voisin n'était pas mieux avec la sienne. Nous avons changé de femme, et nous sommes tous contents »²⁸⁷.

Various strands of discourse meet in this episode to render a complex sampling of attitudes towards this indigenous social group. While the Canadians are at times described as simple-minded in their lack of fixed institutions, Raynal also suggests that this type of society can be more beneficial for the individuals comprising it than one which strictly insists upon a tightly-regulated ensemble. On the other hand, Raynal's commentary on the Canadians' relatively low rate of procreation and observed lack of the excess proper to human sexual desire reveals the difficulty of their lifestyle:

Une seule félicité manquoit aux Américains : le bonheur d'aimer passionnément les femmes. En vain ont-elles reçu de la nature une taille avantageuse, de beaux yeux, des traits agréables, des cheveux noirs, longs et bien placés. Tous ces agrémens ne sont comptés que durant le tems de leur indépendance. A peine ont-elles subi le joug de l'hymen, que l'époux même qu'elles chérissent uniquement, devient insensible à des charmes qu'elles prodiguoient avant le mariage. A la vérité, le genre de vie où cet état les condamne, n'est pas favorable à la beauté. Leurs traits s'altèrent ; elles perdent en même tems, et le desir et le pouvoir de plaire. Laborieuses, actives, infatigables, on les

²⁸⁶ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 37.

²⁸⁷ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 37-38.

voit labourer la terre, jeter la semence, faire la moisson ; tandis que leur maris, dédaignant de courber la tête et le dos sous le joug de l'agriculture, s'amuse à chasser, à pêcher, à tirer de l'arc, à exercer sur la terre l'empire de l'homme.²⁸⁸

These lines provide insight into the distribution of work among the sexes, the challenges of survival in the absence of European conveniences and the resulting lack of emphasis on desire and physical attraction in the conjugal relationship.

Throughout the many descriptions of Non-European communities, Raynal's adaptations of source texts written by travelers are particularly revealing. The customs of various social groups serve as signs, actively constructed and manipulated by Raynal, as he carries out his "mediatic"²⁸⁹ project. Raynal repeatedly eschews ethnographic specificity in favor of appealing to institutions and ideals familiar to a European readership. In short, he knows that the most effective way to influence his readers is to speak their language.

Colonization

Native Reactions to European Colonizers

Raynal sets the scene for the Canadians' reception of their European visitors by describing the defining characteristics of their community: the absence of private property and a prominent spirit of sharing that frequently manifests itself in acts of hospitality. Giving a

²⁸⁸ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 36-37.

²⁸⁹ Bancarel and Rossi, 37.

condensed statement of their selfless values, Raynal writes of the Canadians: « C'est moins par ce qu'il possède que par ce qu'il donne qu'un sauvage aspire à la considération »²⁹⁰.

The overall impression created by the text is that European "civilization" seems utterly "barbaric" when compared to the Canadians' system of values favoring the good of the community over selfish personal interest. While the community is valued by the native Canadians as an end in itself, the Europeans, by contrast, generally take an interest in the community only insofar as it can serve the self.

While Raynal, like many other Enlightenment thinkers, admired certain aspects of Non-European peoples, in this case the favorable appraisal was hardly reciprocal. According to the *Histoire*, the antipathy of the Canadians towards their European colonizers was clear:

Ces peuples n'aiment, n'estiment, ni n'accueillent les Européens. L'inégalité des conditions que nous croyons si nécessaire pour le maintien des sociétés est, aux yeux d'un sauvage, le comble de la démence. Ils sont également scandalisés, que chez nous un homme ait lui seul plus de bien que plusieurs autres ; et que cette première injustice en entraîne une seconde, qui est d'attacher plus de considération à plus de richesses. Mais ce qui leur semble une bassesse, un avilissement au-dessous de la stupidité des bêtes ; c'est que des hommes qui sont égaux par la nature, se dégradent jusqu'à dépendre des volontés ou des caprices d'un seul homme. Le respect que nous avons pour les titres, les dignités et surtout pour la noblesse héréditaire, ils l'appellent insulte, outrage pour l'espèce humaine.²⁹¹

These lines contain what is most likely a strategic description on Raynal's part. This alleged incomprehension of the foundational logic of European hierarchy is reminiscent of the episode in Montaigne's essay, *Des Cannibales*, where the native Brazilians are astonished and puzzled upon their arrival in France. In this *Essai*, Montaigne emphasizes the importance of gaining knowledge through experience rather than unquestioningly accepting tradition and *idées reçues*. He advises relying upon the testimony of witnesses who, like the « fruit sauvage », deliver frank assessments, much like children (although they, too, like all people, have a certain prejudice in

²⁹⁰ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 32.

²⁹¹ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 32-33.

relaying their accounts)²⁹². In keeping with this spirit, the observation of the foreigner can help a society see past its deliberate blind spots. Cultural prejudices affect all nations because customs are relative and « chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage »²⁹³. When the Brazilians of *Des Cannibales* arrive in Rouen at the court of Charles IX, it is not surprising that they could be shocked by French customs:

Ils dirent qu'ils trouvaient en premier lieu fort étrange que tant de grands hommes, portant barbe, forts et armés, qui étaient autour du roi (il est vraisemblable qu'ils parlaient des Suisses de sa garde) se soumissent à obéir à un enfant, et qu'on ne choisissait plutôt quelqu'un d'entre eux pour commander ; secondement (ils ont une façon de leur langage telle qu'ils nomment les hommes le moitié les uns des autres) qu'ils avaient aperçu qu'il y avait parmi nous des hommes pleins et gorgés de toutes sortes de commodités, et que leurs moitiés étaient mendiants à leurs portes, décharnés de faim et de pauvreté, et trouvaient étrange comme ces moitiés-ci nécessiteuses pouvaient souffrir une telle injustice qu'ils ne prissent les autres à la gorge ou missent le feu à leurs maisons.²⁹⁴

Similarly to Montaigne's Brazilians, the Native American's dislike of European customs recounted in the *Histoire* reinforces the notion that cultural institutions are relative and susceptible to corruption in the absence of equality.

Raynal's text recalls, for the eighteenth-century reader, Montesquieu's criticism of the reverence given to aristocratic titles, as he reflects upon the widespread abuse of these signs that, already in his day, were no longer indicative of personal merit. In the *Lettres persanes*, Rica's description of France exposes the dangers of monarchy gone awry as despotism:

Le roi de France est le plus puissant prince de l'Europe. Il n'a point de mines d'or comme le roi d'Espagne, son voisin ; mais il a plus de richesses que lui, parce qu'il les tire de la vanité de ses sujets, plus inépuisable que les mines. On lui a vu entreprendre ou soutenir de grandes guerres, n'ayant d'autre fonds que des titres d'honneur à vendre et,

²⁹² « Cet homme que j'avais était homme simple et grossier, qui est une condition propre à rendre véritable témoignage ; car les fines gens remarquent bien plus curieusement, et plus de choses, mais ils les glosent et, pour faire valoir leur interprétation et la persuader, ils ne se peuvent garder d'altérer un peu l'histoire. . . . Ou il faut un homme très fidèle, ou si simple qu'il n'ait pas de quoi bâtir et donner de la vraisemblance à des inventions fausses, qui n'ait rien épousé. Le mien était tel, et, outre cela, il m'a fait voir à diverses fois plusieurs matelots et marchands qu'il avait connus en ce voyage. Ainsi je me contente de cette information, sans m'enquérir de ce que les cosmographes en disent. » Montaigne, « Des Cannibales », op. cit., 154.

²⁹³ Ibid., 155.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 161.

par un prodige de l'orgueil humain, ses troupes se trouvaient payées, ses places, munies, et ses flottes, équipées.

D'ailleurs ce roi est un grand magicien : il exerce son empire sur l'esprit même de ses sujets ; il les fait penser comme il veut. S'il n'a qu'un million d'écus dans son trésor, et qu'il en ait besoin de deux, il n'a qu'à leur persuader qu'un écu en vaut deux, et ils le croient. S'il a une guerre difficile à soutenir, et qu'il n'ait point d'argent, il n'a qu'à leur mettre dans la tête qu'un morceau de papier est de l'argent, et ils en sont aussitôt convaincus. Il va même jusqu'à leur faire croire qu'ils les guérit de toutes sortes de maux en les touchant, tant est grande la force et la puissance qu'il a sur les esprits.²⁹⁵

Raynal further connects his observations to previous French thought by appealing to the argument of La Boétie's *Discours de la servitude volontaire*. The latter pointedly asks what motivates a group of individuals to willingly alienate themselves from their natural liberty and serve a single leader, a man in and of himself no more powerful or meritorious than any other:

Je ne voudrais sinon entendre comme il se peut faire que tant d'hommes, tant de bourgs, tant de villes, tant de nations endurent quelquefois un tyran seul, qui n'a puissance que celle qu'ils lui donnent ; qui n'a pouvoir de leur nuire, sinon qu'ils ont pouvoir de l'endurer ; qui ne saurait leur faire mal aucun, sinon lorsqu'ils aiment mieux le souffrir que lui contredire.²⁹⁶

Raynal's suggestion that the Canadians were disturbed by the inequality in European society calls attention to the way in which networks of culturally-invested signs reinforce an overall political structure, one which may appear incomprehensible to an outsider.

Raynal's account of the Canadians echoes some of his previous comments on the *Dialogue Franco-Brésilien*, once again exposing the folly and strange weakness of European colonizers. To this end, Raynal presents the Canadians' perspective on their foreign visitors :

Cette inquiétude qui nous fait passer tant de mers, pour chercher une fortune qui fuit devant nos pas, ils la croient plutôt l'effet de notre pauvreté que de notre industrie. Ils rient de nos arts, de nos manières, de tous ces usages, qui nous inspirent plus de vanité, à mesure qu'ils s'éloignent plus de la nature. Leur franchise et leur bonne-foi, sont indignées des finesses et des perfidies, qui ont fait la base de notre commerce avec eux.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Montesquieu, *Les Lettres persanes*, Lettre XXIV, Paris: Le Club Français du Livre, 1963, 58.

²⁹⁶ Etienne de la Boétie, *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, Paris: Flammarion, 1983, 132.

²⁹⁷ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 33-34.

There is an insistence upon the anxiety to which civilized man is susceptible. And yet, despite all the apparently valid reasons that the native Canadians have to avoid further connections to the Europeans, they show great compassion and offer hospitality to their colonizers when they are in need. One such instance, recounted in the following excerpt, is exemplary of the way in which the intercultural colonial relations described in the *Histoire* spawn ideological soliloquies:

Un bâtiment François s'était brisé, à l'entrée de l'hiver, sur les rochers d'Anticosti. Ceux des matelots qui, dans cette île déserte et sauvage, avoient échappé aux rigueurs des frimats et de la famine, formèrent, des débris de leur navire, un radeau qui, au printemps, les conduisit dans le continent. Une cabane de sauvages s'offrit à leurs regards expirans. *Mes frères*, leur dit affectueusement le chef de cette famille solitaire, *les malheureux ont droit à notre commisération et à notre assistance ; nous sommes hommes, et les misères de l'humanité nous touchent dans les autres comme dans nous-mêmes*. Ces expressions d'une ame tendre furent suivies de tous les secours qui étoient au pouvoir de ces généreux sauvages.

Européens, si fiers de vos gouvernemens, de vos loix, de vos institutions, de vos monumens, de tout ce que vous appelez votre sagesse, permettez que je vous arrête un moment. Je viens de vous exposer avec simplicité et sans art le tableau de la vie et des mœurs du sauvage. Je ne vous ai ni dissimulé ses vices, ni exagéré ses vertus. La sensation que mon récit vous a fait éprouver, je vous demande de la conserver jusqu'à ce que le plus beau génie, l'homme le plus éloquent d'entre vous ait apprêté ses crayons et vous ait peint avec toute la force, avec toute la magie de son coloris les biens et les maux de vos contrées si policées. Son tableau vous transportera d'admiration, je n'en doute point, mais croyez-vous qu'il laisse dans vos âmes l'émotion délicieuse que vous ressentez encore ? L'estime, l'amour, la vénération que vous venez d'accorder à des sauvages, vous l'inspirera-t-il pour vos compatriotes ? Vous ne seriez que de misérables sauvages dans les forêts ; le dernier des sauvages serait un homme respectable dans vos cités.²⁹⁸

In this passage, the hospitality shown by the Canadians is a natural sentiment of compassion for another suffering being, a feeling which spontaneously arises and is unmediated by rational self-interest. This account of the caring reception of the European explorers by the Canadians is presented as a fable. The text provides the leader of the native inhabitants with an exceptional opportunity to speak. It is particularly interesting that the Chief appeals to the concept of humanity to encourage his people to act compassionately. At other points in the text,

²⁹⁸ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 34-36.

Raynal has relied upon the reported observations of various Non-European peoples as relatively unconcerned with abstract concepts. Most of the descriptions indicate that the native Canadians have little regard for that which does not have a clear purpose or value. In the “moral” section of the fable, the narrator criticizes the many European institutions that render social actions virtually lacking in authenticity (including hospitality). Perhaps it is for this reason that Raynal makes the Canadian leader explicitly mention the concept of humanity: by employing this textual strategy to “translate” the hospitable actions of the Canadians into a more universal framework, the Chief’s words convey their message to a European readership in a familiar way.

When describing the reactions of native inhabitants to European explorers, the text does not refrain from mentioning aspects of these societies liable to elicit reactions of fear or disapproval. Such ambivalence is particularly remarkable, for instance, in the portion of the *Histoire* discussing the people native to Madagascar (les « Madécasses »). This section describes a community in which the land is worked cooperatively and where the fruits of labor are shared by all, and the tone of the text suggests approval of such an arrangement which guards against gross social inequalities²⁹⁹. Additionally, the portrait of the *Madécasses* mentions some of their beliefs that have tangible effects upon their way of life:

Ils ne soupçonnent pas l’existence d’une autre vie, et cependant ils croient aux revenans : mais doit-on chercher des idées mieux liées parmi des barbares qu’on n’en trouve chez les nations les plus éclairées ? Le plus funeste de leurs préjugés, est celui qui a établi des jours heureux et malheureux. On fait humainement mourir les enfans nés sous des auspices peu favorables. C’est une erreur cruelle, qui empêche ou détruit la population.³⁰⁰

This passage contains some elements of the prevailing colonial discourse according to which it is the mission of the European colonizers to bring civilization to enlighten these ignorant peoples who hold mistaken, confused ideas about reality. However, the narrator avoids

²⁹⁹ *HDI*, Vol. 2, Bk. 4, 297.

³⁰⁰ *HDI*, Vol. 2, Bk. 4, 299.

placing himself in a position of European superiority by pointing out that the persistence of non-rational beliefs can prove problematic even in “advanced” societies. The beliefs common among the Madécasses are shown to be just as influential in structuring their habits as formal laws or institutions would be.

Similarly to Bougainville’s *Voyage autour du monde*, and Diderot’s account of the former’s exploratory mission in his *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, Raynal deconstructs mistaken fantasies of the Madécasses as living in a pure state of nature. He remarks, for instance, « On aperçoit un commencement de lumière et d’industrie chez ces peuples », and that they even possess a system of « écriture »³⁰¹. While the *Madécasses* do not fully understand the sign systems used by their European conquerors, the inclusion of details such as the aforementioned leads to the obvious question: Is it really the case, as the text implies, that the *Madécasses* are less conceptually advanced than the Europeans, only possessing a *commencement de lumière* or, alternatively, are these indigenous people simply unaccustomed to the European cultural codes, since they have been relatively isolated and have had no need to learn about one so different from their own? At any rate, the text attests to the eighteenth-century western European belief that the level of advancement of a civilization often corresponds to its facility with the use and manipulation of abstract signifiers, usually in view of furthering its own interests, and a decreased attribution of value to concrete objects.

³⁰¹ *HDI*, Vol. 2, Bk. 4, 299.

Raynal continues to expand upon the theme that cultural codes often lead to errors in the judgment of other cultures, as he gives an explanation of the French colonial failure in Madagascar. The text criticizes this first French colonizing mission³⁰², which neglected to take measures to improve the country's economy and infrastructure, changes which could have easily persuaded the Madécasses to accept foreign domination:

Ces insulaires étoient fatigués de l'état de guerre et d'anarchie où ils vivoient continuellement. Ils soupiroient après une police qui pût les faire jouir de la paix, de la liberté. Des dispositions si favorables ne permettoient pas de douter qu'ils ne se prêtassent facilement aux efforts qu'on voudroit faire pour leur civilisation.

Rien n'étoit plus aisé que de la rendre très-avantageuse. Avec des soins suivis, Madagascar devoit produire beaucoup de denrées convenables pour les Indes, pour la Perse, pour l'Arabie et pour le continent de l'Afrique. En y attirant quelques Indiens et quelques Chinois, on y auroit naturalisé tous les arts, toutes les cultures de l'Asie. Il étoit facile d'y construire des navires, parce que les matériaux s'y trouvoient de bonne qualité et en abondance ; de les armer même, parce que les hommes s'y monstroient propres à la navigation. Toutes les innovations auroient eu une solidité que les conquêtes des Européens n'auront pas aux Indes, où les naturels du pays ne prendront jamais nos loix, nos mœurs, notre culte, ni par conséquent cette disposition favorable qui attache les peuples à une domination nouvelle.³⁰³

This first 1665 expedition to Madagascar failed to take advantage of the already weakened state of the indigenous people and bring about changes that would benefit them and the region, in addition to acquiring greater wealth for France. These lines point to the necessity of working in cooperation with the local culture in order to have success in colonization, an idea that Raynal will elaborate upon in his assessment of subsequent tactics employed in Madagascar.

³⁰² Footnote from the critical edition: « L'expédition française de 1665 à Madagascar avait été lancée par la nouvelle Compagnie des Indes orientales, formée par Colbert en 1664 par une vente d'actions et une subvention royale. Parmi les membres de l'expédition se trouvaient François Martin, futur fondateur du comptoir français de Pondichéry, Souchu de Rennefort, dont le récit sert de référence sur Madagascar par la suite, et le président du Conseil de la France orientale (Madagascar), Pierre de Beausse. Voir Souchu de Rennefort, *Premier voyage en l'isle de Madagascar*, p. 1-2, et *Hist. Voyages*, t. VIII, p. 562-563, qui sont les sources probables de ce chapitre », op. cit., 355.

³⁰³ *HDI*, Vol. 2, Bk. 4, 301-302.

Similarly, in Raynal's description of the colonization of Brazil, we find a critique of past efforts to gain control of an indigenous society. Let us first examine what Raynal sees as the missteps made by European colonizers in Brazil:

Comme on avoit découvert cette contrée [le Brésil] en se portant aux Indes, et qu'on ignoroit si elle n'en faisoit pas partie, on lui donna le même nom, comme les Espagnols avoient cru pouvoir l'attribuer aux pays qu'ils avoient antérieurement découverts. Les uns et les autres distinguèrent seulement ces régions par le surnom d'Indes Occidentales. Cette dénomination s'étendit depuis à tout le Nouveau-Monde, et les Américains furent appelés fort improprement Indiens. C'est ainsi que les noms des lieux et des choses, assignés au hasard par des ignorants, ont toujours embarrassé les philosophes qui en ont voulu chercher l'origine dans la nature même, et non dans les circonstances purement accessoires, et souvent étrangères, aux qualités physiques des objets désignés. Rien de plus bizarre que de voir l'Europe transportée et reproduite, pour ainsi dire, en Amérique, par le nom et la forme de nos villes ; par les loix, les mœurs et la religion de notre continent. Mais, tôt ou tard, le climat reprendra son empire, et rétablira les choses dans leur ordre et leur nom naturels, toutefois avec ces traces d'altération qu'une grande révolution laisse toujours après elle . . . Ainsi les hommes, et leurs connoissances, et leurs conjectures, soit vers le passé, soit vers l'avenir, sont le jouet des loix et des mouvemens de la nature entière, qui suit son cours, sans égard à nos projets et à nos pensées, peut-être même à notre existence, qui n'est qu'une suite momentanée d'un ordre passager comme elle.³⁰⁴

In these lines, Diderot relates the act of misnaming the Brazilians to a wider discussion of the unfruitful colonial endeavors of Europeans in the New World. He creates an interesting parallel, showing that, just as the native Brazilians were initially called "Indians", a name that establishes false connections between them and a land and culture completely foreign to them, the method of colonization by which European settlers sought to transpose their cultural institutions onto the Brazilian people is similarly unfitting. Many European colonizers underestimated the tenacity with which a people holds to its culture, mistakenly believing that by reproducing a model of their home culture they would be able to dominate the indigenous peoples of the New World and model them after themselves. Due to the fact that these institutions are culturally constructed, and thus culturally specific, European representations are

³⁰⁴ *HDI*, Vol. 5, Bk. 9, 7-8.

not fitting in these foreign lands, an issue examined at length by Montesquieu³⁰⁵. Just as with the act of misnaming, here also, the inappropriate imposition of elements of the European cultural code onto the Brazilians does not fulfill its communicative function of ordering the parts of the social body, but instead yields lack of understanding and disorder.

And yet, the text reminds us that these cultural codes, while powerful, are subordinate in power and duration to the ways of Nature. This passage thus constitutes a warning against human vanity and reminds readers of the limitations of manmade institutions and orders. Within the frame of this dissertation, we have been examining collective representations as cultural codes comprising a “cultural language”. These lines from the *Histoire* reinforce this metaphorical focus on language insofar as language is limited relative to the enormity of Nature: a “cultural language” or sign system, much like any language, is limited to those initiated with its signs, depends upon human beings for its continued existence, and is subject to modification by outside forces.

³⁰⁵ Raynal’s reflections that the laws, customs, and institutions of one country cannot simply be transposed onto the people of another country is a question approached from a slightly different perspective by Montesquieu in his great work, *de l’Esprit des lois*. In Books XIV and XV of the second volume, he outlines his theory of climate as a determining influence on the manners and character of a people, an influence which must be taken into account when formulating legislation. He begins by announcing his intention to examine « S’il est vrai que le caractere de l’esprit & les passions du cœur soient extrêmement différentes dans les divers climats, les *lois* doivent être relatives & à la différence de ces passions & à la différence de ces caractères. », 31. Montesquieu draws upon historical examples to support his claims, such as when he compares ineffective legislation in India and Siam to effective legislation in China. He writes,

« Les Indiens croient que le repos et le néant sont le fondement de toutes choses, et la fin où elles aboutissent. Ils regardent donc l’entière inaction comme l’état le plus parfait et l’objet de leurs désirs . . .

Dans ces pays, où la chaleur excessive énerve et accable, le repos est si délicieux, et le mouvement si pénible, que ce système de métaphysique paroît naturel ; et Foë, législateur des Indes, a suivi ce qu’il sentoit, lorsqu’il a mis les hommes dans un état extrêmement passif : mais sa doctrine, née de la paresse du climat, la favorisant à son tour, a causé mille maux.

Les législateurs de la Chine furent plus sensés, lorsque considérant les hommes, non pas dans l’état paisible où ils seront quelque jour, mais dans l’action propre leur faire remplir les devoirs de la vie, ils firent leur religion, leur philosophie et leurs lois toutes pratiques. Plus les causes physiques portent les hommes au repos, plus les causes morales les en doivent éloigner. », 41-42.

These examples illustrate Montesquieu’s statement that, in general, « les mauvais législateurs sont ceux qui ont favorisé les vices du climat, et les bons sont ceux qui s’y sont opposés » (p.41). While Montesquieu stresses that it is not possible to completely change the character (esprit) of a nation, it must be taken into account in order to expand upon its virtues and counteract its vices. *De l’Esprit des Lois*, Vol. 2, London: 1768, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, Document No. CW124083687, [accessed 14 Oct. 2011].

The Formation of the Social Bond as a Semiological Process

The problematic of signs, upon which Diderot reflected in the preceding passage on naming and the imperfection of human institutions, takes on particularly meaningful implications when considered within the context of social ties, whether they be domestic or foreign. Comparable to the manner in which the use of signs can only approach in an asymptotic manner a perfect rendering of the signified, it is in a similar way that social ties can attempt to approach a state of total identification with the Other. As Paul de Man analyzes Rousseau's parable of the giant in the *Essai*, he explains its function as an explanation of the process by which language develops from metaphorical to literal, and how this process corresponds to a similar evolution in the development of the social tie. At first, man in the state of nature possesses an innate sense of compassion (*pitié*) by which he identifies with another suffering being. Next, as man comes to use language, he names each object in nature individually, until he acquires the ability to form concepts. Rousseau explains the process by which common nouns develop after proper nouns:

Chaque objet reçut d'abord un nom particulier, sans égard aux genres, et aux espèces, que ces premiers instituteurs n'étaient pas en état de distinguer ; et tous les individus se présentèrent isolés à leur esprit, comme ils le sont dans le tableau de la nature. Si un chêne s'appelait A, un autre chêne s'appelait B . . . L'embarras de toute cette nomenclature ne put être levé facilement : car pour ranger les êtres sous des dénominations communes, et génériques, il en fallait connaître les propriétés et les différences . . . ³⁰⁶

In the process of conceptualization, the differences between individual instances are abstracted from in order to form an overarching functional unity. Paul de Man explains the role of conceptualization in Rousseau's theory:

³⁰⁶ Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, 206.

It [Rousseau's theory] describes conceptualization as substituting one verbal utterance (at the simplest level a common noun) for another on the basis of a resemblance that hides differences which permitted the existence of entities in the first place.³⁰⁷

It is evident that in both the case of conceptualization inherent to language and in the movement of identification that is compassion, a suppression of difference occurs. Derrida affirms that in the linguistic sign the signifier and the signified come to be associated so closely that “representation mingles with what it represents”³⁰⁸. Consequently, it becomes easy to forget that the presence of the sign hides the more fundamental absence of that which it imperfectly represents, a presence that is ultimately irreplaceable.

In this fashion, natural compassion is ideal in that it most nearly allows a being to know another, minimizing the separation between them. And yet, pity is also subject to limitations in Rousseau's theory, Derrida reminds us:

According to Rousseau pity does not allow the movement of identification to be simple and entire. . . . It is a question yet again of a certain *economy*.

We neither can nor should feel the pain of others immediately and absolutely, for such an interiorization or identification would be dangerous and destructive. That is why the imagination, the reflection and the judgment that arouse pity also limit its power and hold the suffering of the other at a certain distance. . . . Further, identification by interiorization would not be moral. It would not recognize suffering as the suffering of the other. Morality, respect for the other, therefore supposes a certain nonidentification.³⁰⁹

This “economy of pity”, whose limit is the minimal difference necessary for morality, regulates the social tie and can therefore operate as a natural ordering principle in the absence of formal laws and institutions. The way in which it operates to minimize differences among individuals mirrors the structure of conceptual thought and the linguistic sign itself. Within the context of Rousseau's anthropological thought, the more intuitive organization of Non-European social

³⁰⁷ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1979, 145.

³⁰⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, op. cit., 36.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 190.

groups was favored as closer to an original community of presence and minimization of difference.

Lévi-Strauss assigned a pivotal role to *pitié*, maintaining that it was Rousseau's analysis of this faculty that paved the way for the development of the anthropological method. The *philosophe* was revolutionary in his displacement of the *cogito* as the indubitable starting point for knowledge of the world, of mankind, and even of one's self. According to Lévi-Strauss,

Pour parvenir à s'accepter dans les autres, but que l'ethnologue assigne à la connaissance de l'homme, il faut d'abord se refuser en soi. C'est à Rousseau qu'on doit la découverte de ce principe, le seul sur lequel peuvent se fonder les sciences humaines, mais qui devait rester inaccessible et incompréhensible tant que régnait une philosophie qui, prenant son point de départ dans le Cogito, était la prisonnière des prétendues évidences du moi, et ne pouvait aspirer à fonder une physique qu'en renonçant à fonder une sociologie et même une biologie: Descartes croit passer directement de l'intériorité d'un homme à l'extériorité du monde, sans voir qu'entre ces deux extrêmes se placent des sociétés, des civilisations, c'est-à-dire des mondes d'hommes.³¹⁰

Lévi-Strauss explains that the privileging of a primordial identification with the Other and persistent skepticism with regard to the self grounds an apprehension of the other:

La révolution rousseauiste, préformant et amorçant la révolution ethnologique, consiste à refuser des identifications obligées, que ce soit celle d'une culture à cette culture, ou celle d'un individu, membre d'une culture, à un personnage ou à une fonction sociale que cette même culture cherche à lui imposer. Dans les deux cas, la culture ou l'individu revendiquent le droit à une identification libre, qui ne peut se réaliser qu'*au delà* de l'homme : avec tout ce qui vit et donc souffre ; et aussi, *en deçà* de la fonction ou du personnage : avec un être non déjà façonné, mais donné. Alors, le moi et l'autre, affranchis d'un antagonisme que la philosophie seule cherchait à exciter, recouvrent leur unité. Une alliance originelle enfin renouvelée leur permet de fonder ensemble le *nous* contre le *lui*, c'est-à-dire contre une société ennemie de l'homme, et que l'homme se sent d'autant mieux prêt à récuser que Rousseau, par son exemple, lui enseigne comment éluder les insupportables contradictions de la vie civilisée.³¹¹

Moreover, this metaphysical stance founds an ethic:

L'unique espoir, pour chacun de nous, de n'être pas traité en bête par ses semblables, est que tous ses semblables, lui le premier, s'éprouvent immédiatement comme êtres souffrants, et cultivent en leur for intérieur cette aptitude à la pitié qui, dans l'état de

³¹⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale II*, op. cit., 48.

³¹¹ Ibid., 52.

nature, tient lieu « de loix, de mœurs, et de vertu », et sans l'exercice de laquelle nous commençons à comprendre que, dans l'état de société, il ne peut y avoir ni loi, ni mœurs, et ni vertu.³¹²

Lévi-Strauss thus presents Rousseau's approach to the study of the world's many social groups as one that provides a step toward knowledge of the Other. He recognizes the importance Rousseau places upon the pre-linguistic "voice" of pity that Raynal likewise emphasizes in his discussion of the weakness of human institutions relative to Nature.

In a related discussion, Derrida analyzes the role of *pitié* and its relationship to institutional law according to the "logic of supplementarity". He argues,

Pity is a voice. As opposed to writing, which is *without pity*, the voice is always, in its essence, the passage of virtue and good passion. The order of pity "takes the place of law," it supplements law, that is to say instituted law. But as institutional law is also the supplement of natural law when the latter is lacking, it is clear that only the concept of the supplement allows us to think the relationship between nature and law here.³¹³

Another crucial point made by Derrida is that pity serves, in a sense, to redirect the natural "violence" of love of self (*l'amour de soi*). Pity achieves this, he posits, "perhaps less by opposing itself to it than by expressing it in an indirect way, by deferring it, since such moderation contributes to the preservation of the whole species"³¹⁴. Otherwise stated, *pitié* serves to organize society in an instinctual pre-rational way by managing the economy of energy of the passions so as to stabilize the overall system. We see throughout the *Histoire* that Raynal identifies and admires this instinctual organizing principle, even if he does not analyze it in such formal terms.

In keeping with this optic, I propose that Raynal's observations of various Non-European social groups indicate a similar concern with modes of organization that optimize the sentiment of identification found in natural compassion to reinforce the social bond. He presents these

³¹² Ibid., 54.

³¹³ Derrida, op. cit., 173.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 174-175.

societies as models to illustrate the potential of cultural signs, insofar as they operate intuitively, to engineer social dynamics. As such, these forms of social communication occupy an intermediary space between the instinctive voice of *pitié*, on one hand, and formal institutions produced by reason, on the other.

Representations of a Non-European “Other”

Another important component that inflects strongly upon Raynal’s colonial discourse is the manner in which he represents Non-European social groups. While he does describe cultural elements of these communities, the customs are always presented within the framework of cultural institutions that make sense to Europeans (for example, hospitality or marriage). Occasionally, Raynal will mention an event in its specificity, though this is usually in the case of negative observations (such as the violence of the Brazilians).

More often, however, when reading this multivolume work recounting the explorations of European travelers and their interactions with the people of newly-discovered lands, the reader is left with a confused impression in which most of the encounters blend into one primordial encounter, that is, the meeting between the “primitive” man and the “civilized” European explorer. General terms such as *primitives*, *sauvages*, and *habitants* are abundant in the text (instead of words describing a given population’s identity), and it becomes very easy to forget which particular land and society are being discussed in the section that one is presently reading. This ethnocentric figuration of an abstract Other helps Raynal to fuel his attacks on European society. For instance, in comparing Raynal’s description of the Brazilians with the account

delivered by Jean de Léry (Raynal's own source), Brot finds the former « moins abundant, moins précis, moins pittoresque que sa source », as « le texte de Raynal cherche moins à connaître et à présenter le Brésilien qu'à mettre sa description au service d'une réflexion plus générale »³¹⁵.

Raynal's general reflection is twofold: he is at once commenting upon both European society and the colonization of Non-European peoples. My reading of Raynal is that, in both his hypothetical formulations of the necessary conditions for ethical colonization and his questioning of European social and political institutions, he is exploring to what extent the development of given cultural codes contributes to the progress or deterioration of a civilization, an ethical measure most readily observable in situations where a social group is confronted with heterogeneous forces that challenge its already-established representations.

Despite numerous instances of failure, the *Histoire* does convey confidence in the power of cultural codes as a means of domination much more effective than brute force, on the condition that one work *with* rather than *against* the already existing cultural codes of the people to be colonized:

C'étoit par la voie douce de la persuasion, c'étoit par l'appât si séduisant du bonheur, c'étoit par l'attrait d'une vie tranquille ; c'étoit par les avantages de notre police, par les jouissances de notre industrie, par la supériorité de notre génie, qu'il falloit amener l'isle entière à un but également utile aux deux nations. La législation qu'il convenoit de donner à ces peuples devoit être assortie à leurs mœurs, à leur caractère, à leur climat. Elle devoit s'éloigner en tout de celle de l'Europe, corrompue et compliquée par la barbarie des coutumes féodales. Quelque simple qu'elle fût, les points divers n'en pouvoient être proposés que successivement, et à mesure que l'esprit de la nation se seroit éclairé, qu'il se seroit étendu. . . . Peut-être auroit-il fallu s'attacher uniquement aux jeunes gens qui, formés par nos institutions, seroient devenus, avec le tems des missionnaires politiques qui auroient multiplié les prosélytes du gouvernement.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Muriel Brot, op. cit., 94.

³¹⁶ *HDI*, Vol. 2, Bk. 4, 302-303.

In these lines, Raynal is alluding to renewed project for the colonization of Madagascar initiated by the Count Modave in 1768 and 1769³¹⁷. As noted in the new critical edition, « Les principes du colonialisme éclairé évoqués dans ces deux alinéas sont ceux que l'*HDI* cherche à promouvoir et à défendre. Ils contrastent de façon frappante avec la réalité historique »³¹⁸.

Raynal suggests the positive potential of culturally constructed signs to facilitate mutually beneficial cross-cultural exchanges. The mechanism of this interaction, however, does not allow for the colonized people to retain their already established orders. While Raynal does make the provision that the new institutions ought to be fitting with the character and customs of the colonized people, he still advocates a system of foreign-imposed control by which European powers will use new institutions to form new habits, “rewriting” to efface the original cultural inscription in a totalitarian system, aided by the native people themselves over generations³¹⁹. Accordingly, a key component of Modave’s *colonialisme éclairé* was to encourage interracial marriages.

Raynal is very aware of the shortcomings of « L’Europe, corrompue et compliquée par la barbarie des coutumes féodales ». Moreover, this passage conveys the paradox of European models of colonization: the domination of foreign peoples is justified by saying that they will be given a happy and quiet life, and yet they possess this already. It is precisely the arrival of foreign powers armed with their own ideas of happiness as advanced civilization that threatens the simple, more instinctive flourishing of these relatively isolated societies. The potential of cultural codes (including beliefs about happiness) for either good or evil, and the undeniable

³¹⁷ Under Choiseul, Modave sought to renew colonization efforts in Madagascar after the failure of the initial mission in 1665. (*HDI* critical edition, op. cit., notes on p. 355-358)

³¹⁸ Ibid., note 57, 356.

³¹⁹ This strategy harks back to the plan to refashion society laid out in Plato’s *Republic*.

force that they wield to influence social groups are, I would like to suggest, crucial to understanding the multiple strands that constitute Raynal's discourse on colonialism.

In spite of the *Histoire*'s criticisms of European acts of colonization, it would be inaccurate to classify it as strictly anti-colonial. In passages such as the following, Diderot imagines an ideal colonial venture by which France would introduce the order manifest in her institutions to other less advanced peoples, thereby promoting the well-being and happiness of these beneficiaries through the imposition of a more Enlightened social and political mechanism:

Quelle gloire ce seroit pour la France de retirer un peuple nombreux des horreurs de la barbarie ; de lui donner des mœurs honnêtes, une police exacte, des loix sages, une religion bienfaisante, des arts utiles et agréables ; de l'élever au rang des nations instruites et civilisées ! Hommes d'état, puissent les vœux de la philosophie, puissent les vœux d'un citoyen aller jusqu'à vous ! . . . Vous desirez que votre nom s'immortalise : songez que les monumens élevés en bronze sont plus ou moins rapidement détruits par le tems. Confiez le soin de votre réputation à des êtres qui se perpétueront, en se régénérant. Le marbre est muet, l'homme parle. Faites-le donc parler de vous avec éloge.³²⁰

What is of particular interest in this idyllic musing is that Raynal is again designating language, both in words and gestures, as a source of establishing and maintaining a given power dynamic: treating the indigenous people of Madagascar humanely will further acceptance of French colonization, as the melding of two cultures will perpetuate their bond.

The abstract schema of a juxtaposition of European and Non-European peoples is reiterated throughout this multivolume work assembling a mass of factual information regarding the exploratory voyages and colonization of numerous lands. The vague language employed by Raynal is prevalent, a technique observable in the section dealing with Native American polygamy:

Plusieurs de ces nations ont l'usage de la pluralité des femmes. Les peuples même, qui ne pratiquent pas la polygamie, se sont du moins réservé le divorce. L'idée d'un lien

³²⁰ *HDI*, Vol. 2, Bk. 4, 308-309. According to the new critical edition, the passage corresponds to Diderot, « Contributions » No. 47.

indissoluble n'est pas encore entré dans l'esprit de ces hommes libres jusqu'à la mort. Quand les gens mariés ne se conviennent pas, ils se séparent de concert, & partagent entre eux les enfans. Rien ne leur paroît plus contraire aux loix de la nature & de la raison, que le système opposé des chrétiens.³²¹

While Raynal stresses the importance of empirical detail in his study, aspiring to a fairly exhaustive presentation of colonial exploration of the period, the fact that this is not an eyewitness account, nor the work of a single author, makes itself felt in the repetitive character of the narrative. As a reader, one is less likely to retain the unique characteristics of individual social groups than to perceive a pattern of stereotyped characteristics of indigenous peoples (or, rather, to see a repetition of the same coexistence of colonialist and idealizing discourses. In sum, the style of the text has the overall effect of reducing these numerous Non-European groups to form a concept of a global Other. Thus, despite Raynal's pretensions to awareness of the prejudices and narrow-mindedness of his fellow Europeans, he nonetheless apparently falls into some of the same patterns of representation. In the end, however, the fact that Raynal alternates between harangues aimed at the European colonizers and ones addressing the native populations creates a complex dialogue, remarks Michel Delon:

Comment un livre peut-il s'adresser à la fois aux colonisateurs et aux colonisés, aux exploitants et à leurs victimes ? *L'Histoire des deux Indes* ne se contente pas de prendre à parti les premiers et d'encourager les seconds, elle pose le problème du dialogue, de l'effet du discours.³²²

In this manner, the *Histoire* facilitates debate within itself concerning the issues of slavery and colonization. Rather than arguing solely in one direction or another, it stimulates further discussion and reflects a multiplicity of contemporary viewpoints espoused by philosophers, historians and politicians in eighteenth-century Europe.

³²¹ *HDI*, Vol. 8, Bk. 15, 37.

³²² Michel Delon, « L'appel au lecteur dans *L'Histoire des deux Indes* », *Lectures de Raynal*, SVEC #286, op. cit., 60.

Conclusions

Raynal's observations constitute a sizeable contribution to eighteenth-century scholarship on social groups, as he articulates the epistemological limitations of cultural institutions, that is, a limit beyond which the order they establish fails to constitute applicable knowledge (i.e. when they are extended outside of the cultural context in which they were created). Although Raynal does not formulate the question in these terms, the problematic disconnect between cultural codes, evident in the cross-cultural encounters he describes, results from the inherent epistemological difficulty of signs, namely, that the connections they establish are arrived at through convention and yet, in the very act of representing, they posit that they *are* that for which they are merely the placeholders, thereby falsely claiming to be a natural or necessary tie based on essentialism rather than convention.

This eighteenth-century focus on the epistemological difficulties inherent to representation is a way of reexamining two main aporias of the western philosophical tradition: the mind-body separation and its logical extension of nature versus culture, or the enduring versus the ephemeral. Since both human beings and the nature of which they are a part are subject to a continual flux, there remains a tension between the stability of atemporal ideas and the materiality of the signs that represent them. This curious association was formally articulated by Saussure in his definition of the linguistic sign. According to his formulation,

The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material", it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract.³²³

³²³ Saussure, op. cit., 66.

Rousseau likewise provides an account of the genesis of conventional signs³²⁴. He explains the complex relationship between words, things, and ideas in the following passage:

Chaque objet reçut d'abord un nom particulier, sans égard aux genres, et aux Espèces, que ces premiers Instituteurs n'étoient pas en état de distinguer ; et tous les individus se présentèrent isolés à leur esprit, comme ils le sont dans le tableau de la Nature. Si un Chêne s'appeloit A, un autre Chêne s'appeloit B . . . L'embarras de toute cette Nomenclature ne put être levé facilement : car pour ranger les êtres sous des dénominations communes, et génériques, il en falloit connoître les propriétés et les différences ; il falloit des observations, et des définitions, c'est-à-dire, de l'Histoire Naturelle et de la Métaphysique, beaucoup plus que les hommes de ce tems-là n'en pouvoient avoir.³²⁵

In the above lines, Rousseau stresses the process by which thought must first perceive a multitude before arriving at a more general unity that can perceive similarity in the midst of difference.

Conventional language which, as Saussure remarks, can be seen as a “master pattern”³²⁶ for all semiological systems, goes beyond any natural affinity between signifier and signified³²⁷

³²⁴ In the Second Discourse, Rousseau explains how it became necessary for conventional language to be instituted, as a convention agreed upon to permit the communication of abstract ideas:

Comme le geste n'indique guères que les objets présents, ou faciles à décrire, et les actions visibles ; qu'il n'est pas d'un usage universel, puisque l'obscurité, ou l'interposition d'un corps le rendent inutile, et qu'il exige l'attention plutôt qu'il ne l'excite ; on s'avisait enfin de lui substituer les articulations de la voix, qui, sans avoir le même rapport avec certaines idées, sont plus propres à les représenter toutes, comme signes institués ; substitution qui ne put se faire que d'un commun consentement, et d'une manière assez difficile à pratiquer pour des hommes dont les organes grossiers n'avoient encore aucun exercice, et plus difficile encore à concevoir en elle-même, puisque cet accord unanime dut être motivé, et que la parole paroît avoir été fort nécessaire, pour établir l'usage de la parole. Op. cit., Vol. 3, 148-149.

³²⁵ Ibid., Vol. 3, 149.

³²⁶ Saussure argues, “Every means of expression used in society is based, in principle, on collective behavior or—what amounts to the same thing—on convention. Polite formulas, for instance, though often imbued with a certain natural expressiveness (as in the case of a Chinese who greets his emperor by bowing down to the ground nine times), are nonetheless fixed by rule; it is this rule and not the intrinsic value of the gestures that obliges one to use them. Signs that are wholly arbitrary realize better than the others the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the master-pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system.” (68)

³²⁷ The word *symbol* has been used to designate the linguistic sign, or more specifically, what is here called the signifier . . . One characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary; it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as a chariot.

The word *arbitrary* also calls for comment. The term should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker (we shall see below that the individual does not have the power to change a sign in any

and constitutes the arbitrary element of the linguistic sign according to the character of the particular cultural context in which it arises. It is in this way, I would argue, that cultural languages « range[nt] les êtres », as Rousseau says, or bring order to the “manifold” of nature, in Kantian terms³²⁸, by entering into the space between signifiers and signifieds. As Rousseau importantly points out, it is only by means of linguistic signs that « idées générales » can be communicated.

The concept of “cultural language” provides a privileged insight into these problematics, insofar as it occupies a liminal position, at once a cultural product and inhabited by rational concepts. It sounds the limits of human knowledge in two principal ways:

1) Insofar as it is a cultural construct, it is limited by its *particularity*: it does not have the same communicative power beyond the limits of the cultural context in which it was created, and, as Raynal notes, it is subject to greater forces in the universe which can alter or destroy it. Moreover, since it is based on the conventions of a group, we can see how, although a cultural institution is established, it is in force only because a consensus was reached and not because of any formal necessity³²⁹.

way once it has become established in the linguistic community); I mean that it is unmotivated; i.e. arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified” (68-69).

³²⁸ It is this ordering function, by which the human mind processes empirical input, which Kant defines as the understanding. As acts of understanding, languages represent the mental process of synthesis: “The manifold content in our representations can be given in an intuition which is merely sensuous—in other words, is nothing but susceptibility; and the form of this intuition can exist *à priori* in our faculty of representation, without being anything else but the mode in which the subject is affected. But the conjunction (*conjunctio*) of a manifold in intuition never can be given us by the senses; it cannot therefore be contained in the pure form of sensuous intuition, for it is a spontaneous act of the faculty of representation. And as we must, to distinguish it from sensibility, entitle this faculty *understanding*; so all conjunction—whether conscious or unconscious, be it of the manifold in intuition, sensuous or non-sensuous, or of several conceptions—is an act of the understanding. To this act we shall give the general appellation of *synthesis*, thereby to indicate, at the same time, that we cannot represent anything as conjoined in the object without having previously conjoined it ourselves. Of all mental notions, that of conjunction is the only one which cannot be given through objects, but can be originated only by the subject itself, because it is an act of its purely spontaneous activity.”, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn, New York: Prometheus Books, 1990.

³²⁹ As Saussure emphasizes, “No longer can language be identified with a contract pure and simple, and it is precisely from this viewpoint that the linguistic sign is a particularly interesting object of study; for language furnishes the best proof that a law accepted by a community is a thing that is tolerated and not a rule to which all

2) Insofar as it relates to a set of concepts, or worldview, it is limited in its *generality* since concepts can only imperfectly correspond to any specific reality.

In sum, “cultural language” characterizes the unique manner in which human social groups experience the world, a manner that encounters limitations both empirically (1), and transcendently (2). The universality of any language (a system of signs) draws its functionality from the character of cognitive thinking common to all rational beings. This sign-making activity of human beings manifests itself in many different varieties in social groups around the globe. By considering cultural codes as “cultural language”, then, this study invites reflection upon the way in which cultural codes occupy a dual space of both the universal and the particular. As such, it is key to Rousseau’s reflection upon anthropological thought:

Quand on veut étudier les hommes, il faut regarder près de soi ; mais pour étudier l’homme, il faut apprendre à porter sa vue au loin ; il faut d’abord observer les différences pour découvrir les propriétés.³³⁰

In the midst of remarking the many different customs of the world’s cultures, one is brought to identify the universal character of human beings as sign-manipulating creatures.

Why should one be concerned with any of these questions? The reason, I would like to suggest, is that whether we are talking about the operation of signs, concepts, words, customs or any other social institutions, a similar process occurs by which heterogeneous elements are gathered up and an (albeit imperfect---which is where the discussion of limits takes its relevance) agreement is reached, conventionally establishing a unity that minimizes individual differences for the benefit of the cooperative functioning of the whole. Now all of these initial differences and tensions that are overcome through the process of arriving at a convention *seemingly*

freely consent” (71). He departs from Rousseau on this point, who, in typically optimistic fashion, describes the initial agreement to form conventional language as « unanime ».

³³⁰ Rousseau, *Essai*, op. cit., Vol. 5, 394.

disappear until its functioning leads to some sort of error. The present study is concerned with the notion of “cultural language” because it captures eighteenth-century concerns with critically reevaluating both political and societal organization as well as the structure of rational thought itself, by rearticulating the sinuous ways in which power and knowledge are intertwined, and exposing the differences which, even when minimized or deferred, never really disappear.

This chapter has focused primarily upon the way in which “cultural language” affects the negotiation of relationships between cultural groups that are foreign to each other, in the context of the European colonization of the New World during the eighteenth century. In addition to the many ways in which cultural codes shape the formation of individual identities, we have seen in *L’Histoire* the ways in which “cultural language” affects national identities. The multiplicity of competing discourses within this collaborative project, concerning moments in which national identities can be either strengthened or destabilized (such as colonial ventures and domestic instability), highlights them as circumstances that invite reflection upon the limits of cultural codes and their role in shaping societies.

Chapter 4: Bougainville and Diderot: An Elusive Utopia

Bougainville: Navigating the Space between Observation and Representation

The Circumstances Surrounding Bougainville's Voyage

An account written by Bougainville to document his exploratory voyage to remote lands, including Tahiti, the *Voyage autour du monde*, published in 1771, contributed to eighteenth-century Europe's growing fascination with exotic cultures seemingly uncorrupted by civilization's evils. At once evident to the reader is the empirical intention of Bougainville's writing: as a travel log, the text purports to be factual, and there is no rousseau-esque call of « écartons tous les faits ». In fact, after having been introduced to Rousseau's 1755 *Discours sur l'inégalité* by his older brother, Jean-Pierre, and subsequently hearing it discussed at the salon of Mme. du Deffand that he frequented, Bougainville set out to respond to Rousseau's call for explorers who were not merely seasoned voyagers, but also philosophers and scholars³³¹.

Although Bougainville's *Voyage* has become well-known because of Diderot's *Supplément*, the historical circumstances motivating the expedition have not received sufficient critical attention. Bougainville aimed to increase French sailors' knowledge of the Pacific, comparing his own observations and geographical measurements with those of his predecessors

³³¹ According to Etienne Taillemite in his *Marins français à la découverte du monde : de Jacques Cartier à Dumont d'Urville*, Rousseau, « en 1754, dans le *Discours sur les origines et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, lançait un appel aux voyageurs philosophes : 'Supposons un Montesquieu, un Buffon, un Diderot, un Duclos, un d'Alembert, un Condillac ou des hommes de cette trempe voyageant pour instruire leurs compatriotes, [...] je dis que, quand de pareils observateurs affirmeront d'un tel animal que c'est un homme et d'un autre que c'est une bête, il faudra les en croire.' Ce vœu sera largement exaucé, même si nombre de marins, comme Bougainville et Lapérouse, seront plus qu'agacés par certaines théories alors à la mode. », Paris : Fayard, 1999, 198. See also *Bougainville ou l'homme de l'univers* by Thierry Boissel for mention of Mme. du Deffand's philosophical circle, Paris : O. Orban, 1991, 37.

and rectifying any inaccuracies. As Etienne Taillemite explains, exploratory voyages greatly advanced during the eighteenth century, due to improvements in navigational techniques, shipbuilding, and the increased involvement of governments in such ventures³³². The time was therefore ripe for a serious voyage such as Bougainville's, which would be coupled with an official mission on behalf of the French government to transfer control of the Falkland Islands (les Malouines) to the Spanish³³³. (It was on these islands that Bougainville had been trying to establish a settlement for French colonists from Arcadia displaced after France's loss of Canada at the conclusion of the Seven Years War.) Following the signing of the *Traité de Paris* in 1763, France lost most of its overseas possessions to England. Choiseul, the *Ministre de la Marine* at the time, sought to reverse this loss by acquiring new territories. Namely, he envisaged the Falkland Islands (les Iles Malouines) as a new base for French exploration. Eventually, however, the French were pressured by the Spaniards to turn over possession of the islands to them, as a way for the latter to protect their overseas territories in South America from the increasing threat of the British. To this end, Bougainville was sent to oversee the transfer of sovereignty in the Falklands. When Bougainville was ordered by Choiseul to abdicate possession of the colony on behalf of France, he took a strong stance by arguing that it was crucial for France to extend its powers into the area of the Southern hemisphere. Victor Suthren, in his biography of Bougainville entitled *The Sea has No End*, outlines the circumstances preceding Bougainville's circumnavigation:

Choiseul told him [Bougainville] bluntly the colony would have to be turned over to the Spanish. He set forth to Bougainville Madrid's claims, which he, the marine minister, accepted: she had not had time to colonize those islands herself because her commitments on the South American mainland were so great and pressing; if she permitted the French colony to remain, then she could not object if the British colonized other uninhabited islands off the coast.

³³² Etienne Taillemite, *Les découvreurs du Pacifique : Bougainville, Cook, Lapérouse*, Paris : Gallimard, 2004, 61.

³³³ Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Voyage autour du Monde*, preface par Jacques Proust, Gallimard, 1982, 7-8.

Bougainville was stunned, but he was not about to give up his endeavor, and what he thought it meant for France, without a fight. He wrote a passionate and reasoned document to Choiseul, arguing why the colony should be retained: the islands were the stepping stone to the Pacific world, a strategic base for French operations in the South Atlantic in support of a Spanish ally, a potential home for a superb fishery, and they had been empty—although the British, with their as yet unpopulated Port Egmont site, would debate that point. Choiseul listened, then directed Bougainville to discuss things with the Spanish, who invited him to Madrid. . . .

France had awakened to Bougainville's message about the importance of projecting itself into the Pacific, even if the Malouines—now the Malvinas—had had to be sacrificed on the altar of the Spanish alliance. The British had become more active in the South Pacific, with several circumnavigations under way, and at least one British warship had appeared off Fort St-Louis, threatening a defiant de Nerville with eviction from British territory. To carry out the Malouines transfer, France would indeed send Bougainville. . . .

³³⁴

Another point that ought to be stressed is the length of time that elapsed between Bougainville's voyage (1766-69) and the publication of his account (1771). Bougainville began writing his account at the same time that the English explorers Wallis and Cook embarked on their own circumnavigation of the globe. Given the already formidable reputation of his English counterparts, Bougainville wrote his own account of Tahiti as a move to popularize himself in public opinion as the first discoverer of the island (although Wallis actually reached Tahiti eight months before Bougainville)³³⁵. Moreover, given the Spanish occupation of the Malouines, Bougainville sought to write a text that would interest Louis XV, known for his lack of interest in colonization, in taking possession of Tahiti. Hoping to pique the interest of the French people and monarch, to justify the financing of his travels, and to incite France to compete with the colonial expansion of neighboring European nations, the *Voyage* was therefore, in many ways, a text with as much relevance politically and historically as it would have for the nascent field of anthropology.

³³⁴Victor Suthren, *The Sea Has No End: the Life of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville*, Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2004, 124-126.

³³⁵ See Victor Suthren

In keeping with these multiple aims, the text begins with a letter addressed to Louis XV in which Bougainville asserts the serious nature of his work and dedicates his efforts to France:

Avant que de commencer le récit de l'expédition qui m'a été confiée, qu'il me soit permis de prévenir qu'on ne doit pas en regarder la relation comme un ouvrage d'amusement : c'est surtout pour les marins qu'elle est faite.³³⁶

With this declaration, Bougainville is careful to dissociate himself from so-called "armchair philosophers" who develop theories about far-off lands and peoples without ever having come into contact with them. He considered such writers hypocritical, since they denigrated the sailors and explorers whose very accounts formed the basis for their own philosophical arguments. This tension between travelers and *philosophes*, brought to our attention in the following lines, is one that persisted in eighteenth-century France, despite the numerous opportunities for fruitful collaboration between *philosophes* and men of science. Bougainville boldly declares,

Je suis voyageur et marin ; c'est-à-dire, un menteur, et un imbécile aux yeux de cette classe d'écrivains paresseux et superbes qui, dans les ombres de leur cabinet, philosophent à perte de vue sur le monde et ses habitants, et soumettent impérieusement la nature à leurs imaginations. Procédé bien singulier, bien inconcevable de la part de gens qui, n'ayant rien observé par eux-mêmes, n'écrivent, ne dogmatisent que d'après des observations empruntées de ces mêmes voyageurs auxquels ils refusent la faculté de voir et de penser.³³⁷

These lines were written, according to Victor Suthren among others, as a reaction to Rousseau's cool response upon Bougainville's return to France, clearly an affront after Bougainville had put great effort into responding to Rousseau's earlier dissatisfaction with travel accounts³³⁸. We

³³⁶ Bougainville, *Voyage*, op. cit., 45.

³³⁷ Ibid., 46-47.

³³⁸ In one of the very lengthy footnotes of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau writes: « Depuis trois ou quatre cens ans que les habitants de l'Europe inondent les autres parties du monde et publient sans cesse de nouveaux recueils de voyages et de relations, je suis persuadé que nous ne connoissons d'hommes que les seuls Européens ; encore paroît-il aux préjugés ridicules qui ne sont pas éteints, même parmi les Gens de Lettres, que chacun ne fait guères sous le nom pompeux d'étude de l'homme, que celle des hommes de son pays. Les particuliers ont beau aller et venir, il semble que la Philosophie ne voyage point, aussi celle de chaque Peuple est-elle peu propre pour un autre. La cause de ceci est manifeste, au moins pour les contrées éloignées : Il n'y a guères que quatre sortes d'hommes qui fassent des voyages de long cours ; les Marins, les Marchands, les Soldats et les Missionnaires. Or, on ne doit guères s'attendre que les trois premières classes fournissent de bons Observateurs, et quant à ceux de la quatrième, occupés

shall return later to the French reception of Bougainville when examining the evolution of the latter's portrayal of the Tahitians throughout the *Voyage*.

Given the evident force of Rousseau's *Second Discourse* as a catalyst for Bougainville's ambitions, it is not surprising that the author of the *Voyage* took care to consciously evaluate his methodology. As with any encounter with other cultures, this travel narrative is constructed around a marked tension between a tendency to assimilate the Other and a tendency to reject the Other as completely dissimilar and therefore inhuman. Although travel accounts routinely rely upon the identification of shared cultural institutions in an attempt to reduce differences between social groups, they cannot be reduced to a simple dialogical model of assimilation and rejection. In addition to comparing indigenous customs with European practices, the discourse of travel writers is frequently mediated by a third term, an imaginary other. Kolb assessed the Hottentots by making both favorable and unfavorable judgments about them, as compared to Europeans, but he also identified them as the instantiation of the imaginary beings that would occupy the liminal space later rendered more explicit by Buffon, that is, as the type of human being the most remote from civilized European societies, while also fundamentally different from both theoretical natural man and other animal species. It is thus striking that, when Bougainville describes the Tahitians, he, too, calls upon an imaginary model, but of a different order. As we will see in the passages that follow, Bougainville draws upon the classical esthetic to render the Tahitians

de la vocation sublime qui les appelle, quand ils ne seroient pas sujets à des préjugés d'état comme tous les autres, on doit croire qu'ils ne se livreroient pas volontiers à des recherches qui paroissent de pure curiosité et qui les détourneraient des travaux plus importants auxquels ils se destinent. . . . On n'ouvre pas un livre de voyages où l'on ne trouve des descriptions de caractères et de mœurs ; mais on est tout étonné d'y voir que ces gens qui ont tant décrit de choses, n'ont dit que ce que chacun savait déjà, n'ont su appercevoir à l'autre bout du monde que ce qu'il n'eût tenu qu'à eux de remarquer sans sortir de leur rüe, et que ces traits vrais qui distinguent les Nations, et qui frappent les yeux faits pour voir ont presque toujours échapé aux leurs. De là est venu ce bel adage de morale, si rebattu par la tourbe Philosophesque, que les hommes sont par tout les mêmes, qu'ayant par tout les mêmes passions et les mêmes vices, il est assés inutile de chercher à caractériser les différens Peuples. . . », Vol. 3, 212-213.

sensually appealing and as belonging to a community whose otherworldly perfections escape the corruption of Europe's social evils.

In an initial gesture of seeking out similarities, Bougainville describes how he and his shipmates attempt to identify familiar cultural institutions, such as marriage, hospitality, and authority structure, within this foreign social group. We are told that the Tahitians, likewise, seek out points of familiarity with their foreign visitors, overcoming their initial fear of the French and working to establish a type of communication with them through the exchange of goods³³⁹. The European visitors are greeted by the cries of the Tahitians saying, *Tayo*, which means friend³⁴⁰, and then inviting them to choose native women and have relations with them. A similar lack of apprehension is demonstrated by the Tahitians as they eagerly seize the ship's cook:

A peine eut-il mis pied à terre, avec la belle qu'il avait choisie, qu'il se vit entouré par une foule d'Indiens qui le déshabillèrent dans un instant, et le mirent nu de la tête aux pieds. Il se crut perdu mille fois, ne sachant où aboutiraient les exclamations de ce peuple, qui examinait en tumulte toutes les parties de son corps. Après l'avoir bien considéré, ils lui rendirent ses habits, remirent dans ses poches tout ce qu'ils en avaient tiré, et firent approcher la fille en le pressant de contenter les désirs qui l'avaient amené à terre avec elle. . .³⁴¹

Again, when the rest of Bougainville's crew disembarks, they, too, are approached and inspected by curious Tahitians:

Lorsque nous fumes amarrés, je descendis à terre avec plusieurs officiers, afin de reconnaître l'aiguade. Nous y fûmes reçus par une foule immense d'hommes et de femmes qui ne se lassaient point de nous considérer ; les plus hardis venaient nous

³³⁹ As Bougainville's ship, *La Boudeuse*, nears the island of Tahiti, a fleet of pirogues has come out to meet them and one approaches: « L'une d'elles précédait les autres; elle était conduite par douze hommes nus qui nous présentèrent des branches de bananiers, et leurs démonstrations attestaient que c'était là le rameau d'olivier. Nous leur répondîmes par tous les signes d'amitié dont nous pûmes nous aviser ; alors ils accostèrent le navire, et l'un d'eux, remarquable par son énorme chevelure hérissée en rayons, nous offrit avec son rameau de paix un petit cochon et un régime de bananes. Nous acceptâmes son présent qu'il attacha à une corde qu'on lui jeta ; nous lui donnâmes des bonnets et des mouchoirs, et ces premiers présents furent le gage de notre alliance avec ce peuple. », Bougainville, 222.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 225.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 227.

toucher, ils écartaient même nos vêtements, comme pour vérifier si nous étions absolument faits comme eux. . .³⁴²

In these lines, Bougainville's text creates a mirror effect whereby the Europeans, for their part, are just as much objects of curiosity to the Tahitians as these indigenous people are to them. Interestingly, Bougainville notes that the Tahitians greet the French with friendliness even before ascertaining their identity. The French, for their part, enter into exchange immediately with the Tahitians, a move which is most likely motivated by self-interest as they need provisions, rather than by a will to extend a greeting of genuine friendship. To place Bougainville's account into historical context, it is crucial to note that the Tahitians had previous experience with European visitors, as the Englishman Wallis had landed on the island just nine months before³⁴³. At the time, however, Bougainville and his men were unaware (although they may have had suspicions) of their European predecessors. From both sides, the encounter proves troubling in that these two groups, so vastly different in their ways of lifestyle and dress, share nevertheless some common behavior. A sense of mystery emerges as each camp is confronted with a side of humanity that has been utterly unknown to them previously.

The Tahitian as Portrayed by Classical Esthetics

Many of Bougainville's observations of his commission's first encounters with the Tahitians reflect a sentiment of mystical fascination at beholding an idealized race of creatures. Bougainville and his men are welcomed by nude Tahitian women, whom he refers to as

³⁴² Ibid., 229.

³⁴³ For more detailed information, refer to Maurice de Brossard, « Le Voyage de Bougainville », *L'Importance de l'exploration maritime au siècle des Lumières*, table ronde, Paris : Editions du CNRS, 1982, 57.

« nymphes »³⁴⁴. Returning to the aforementioned moment where the Tahitians signal to the Frenchmen that they should choose a female companion from among the islanders,

Bougainville's description of the event abounds in classical imagery:

Elles nous firent d'abord, de leurs pirogues, des agaceries où, malgré leur naïveté, on découvrait quelque embarras ; soit que la nature ait partout embelli le sexe d'une timidité ingénue, soit que, même dans les pays où règne encore la franchise de l'âge d'or, les femmes paraissent ne pas vouloir ce qu'elles désirent le plus . . . Malgré toutes les précautions que nous prîmes prendre, il entra à bord une jeune fille . . . La jeune fille laisse tomber négligemment une pagne qui la couvrait et parut aux yeux de tous, telle que Vénus se fit voir au berger phrygien. Elle en avait la forme céleste. Matelots et soldats s'empressaient pour parvenir à l'écoutille, et jamais cabestan ne fut viré avec une pareille activité.³⁴⁵

Time shifts as the Tahitians are dissociated from the eighteenth-century: no longer only distanced *geographically* from Europe, they are furthermore distanced *chronologically* as they are allied with the mythological era. The description of the young Tahitian as Venus revealing herself to the *berger phrygien* is strikingly similar to Poussin's work, *Et in Arcadia Ego* (1638). Poussin's painting depicts an idealized pastoral scene in which three shepherds and a shepherdess gather around a tombstone upon which this Latin phrase, meaning "Even in Arcadia I exist", is inscribed. These words, usually interpreted as a personification of Death, signal the intrusion of mortality into the seemingly carefree utopia of Arcadia³⁴⁶. Likewise, Watteau's *Embarquement pour Cythère* (1717) portrays an allegorical love story in which couples are preparing to either go to (or depart from, according to some critics) Cythera, the island birthplace

³⁴⁴ Bougainville, 225. As a young man, Bougainville received a classical education, as did his brother, who pursued this interest by writing a text on ancient Greece and her colonies: Jean-Pierre de Bougainville, *Dissertation qui a remporté le prix de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles lettres, en l'année 1745*: "Sujet du prix: Quels étaient les droits des métropoles grecques sur les colonies ; les devoirs des colonies envers les métropoles ; et les engagements réciproques des unes et des autres », Paris, Chez Desaint & Saillant, 1745.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 226.

³⁴⁶ Scholars have disagreed as to who pronounces the words of Death: "The historian Panofsky suggests a change in interpretation of the subject, stating: 'The Louvre painting no longer represents a dramatic encounter with Death, but a contemplative meditation on the idea of mortality.' Claude Lévi-Strauss has recently suggested, rather than the inversion of the normal Latin formula, as stated by Panofsky, that it is the so static girl who represents Death or Destiny. In this sense it is she who pronounces the fateful words, suggested to us by the young shepherd on the right who turns to face her whilst pointing to the inscription.", <http://et-in-arcadia-ego.mezzo-mondo.com/et-in-arcadia-ego.html>, [accessed 22 Dec. 2011].

of Venus. Often interpreted as symbolizing the ephemeral character of love, this painting also reflects a reevaluation of classical esthetics during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whereby emotions and passions disrupt the otherwise seemingly perfect stability of utopias³⁴⁷.

The classical imagery present in Bougainville's account of the initial encounter with the Tahitian *nymphes* has been the focus of much critical attention. Bougainville's early formation in the classics is often mentioned, and his description here is often viewed as an effort to counter his fruitless attempts of finding such innocence on an earlier mission in Canada³⁴⁸. As we shall see, Bougainville's idealizing atemporal tendency that draws upon an antique model of natural nobility will become tempered by empirical observation of the historicity of this society and by discussing Tahitian customs with an indigenous man that he will befriend. Andy Martin, in his article entitled "The Enlightenment in Paradise: Bougainville, Tahiti and the Duty of Desire", provides a helpful characterization of the two competing discourses at work in the *Voyage*:

In comparison with all the other lands he visits on his travels, Bougainville romanticizes Tahiti out of all proportion. At the same time, he is a shrewd and tenacious observer, a "journalist" in the sense that he keeps a daily record of events and maritime phenomena in his Journal de navigation. Thus there are two quite different strands running through Bougainville's text and composing his erotic paradigm, the eighteenth-century summer of love: on the one hand, idealizing, on the other, skeptical and disenchanted, at once mythifying and demythifying. The section of Voyage autour du monde (first published in 1771) which focuses on Tahiti breaks down clearly into two quite distinct types of discourse: (1) Generalizations: statements which concern either the whole of the island or everyone's mentality and manners, notably with regard to sexuality; (2)

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ According to Suthren, "If the behavior of the [Native Canadian] warriors after the English surrender at Oswego constituted an atrocity for Bougainville and the other Europeans, it represented no such evil for the warriors themselves, and it was this ethical and behavioral dissonance that bedeviled the relationship of the French to their warrior allies, and which came to constitute the single most important theme of Bougainville's experience of North America and its peoples. Bougainville was, if not in fact a *philosophe*, one who was attuned to the ideas that found their clearest expression in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau . . . To this was added Bougainville's extensive knowledge of the classics, and the Arcadian concepts of a Grecian golden age . . . The Iroquois, Nipissing and Abenaki warriors alongside whose muscular, naked forms Bougainville trotted in the forest gloom or stalked the English in ambush were certainly people of a simpler society in a *philosophe*'s terms, and on their own terms displayed "happiness" to the equal of Europeans, perhaps even more so per capita, although such things were not a matter of quantitative study in the eighteenth century. Yet in warfare the warriors exhibited a cruelty that, if it made sense to their world, sorely shook the concept of the nobler, simpler man in Bougainville's mind and created a gloomy dilemma he was unable to reconcile throughout his Canadian career . . .", op. cit., 51.

Particularizations: descriptions of actual events and episodes that take place which record who does what to whom, when and how. Discourse 1, which I would label theobiological, is macro-oriented, metaphoric, taxonomic, essentializing, mythic; Discourse 2, the domain of the proairetic, is micro-oriented, metonymic, existential, typically displaying relations of causality. Discourse 1 is timeless or implies eternal recurrence; Discourse 2 tracks individuals through time and space. The first is synthetic, the second analytic.³⁴⁹

In this episode describing the unveiling of a Tahitian woman before the French explorers, one can clearly perceive the idealizing discourse at work. Martin's Discourse 1, the generalizing model, corresponds to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' understanding of classical esthetics. At this level of discourse, particular acts are presented allegorically and personages portrayed as possessing the noble simplicity that appeals to the classical European imagination. In the case of the Tahitian woman disrobing herself, her gesture is not interpreted as a move to enter into exchange as an equal partner, but rather as a form of submission that privileges the pleasure of her foreign visitor³⁵⁰.

Integral to the *Voyage*'s idyllic portrait is the harmonious relationship that the Tahitians maintain with all of nature. In the words of Bougainville,

J'ai plusieurs fois été, moi second ou troisième, me promener dans l'intérieur. Je me croyais transporté dans le jardin d'Eden ; nous parcourions une plaine de gazon, couverte de beaux arbres fruitiers et coupée de petites rivières qui entretiennent une fraîcheur délicieuse, sans aucun des inconvénients qu'entraîne l'humidité. Un peuple nombreux y jouit des trésors que la nature verse à pleines mains sur lui. Nous trouvions des troupes d'hommes et de femmes assises à l'ombre des vergers ; tous nous saluaient avec amitié ; ceux que nous rencontrions dans les chemins se rangeaient à côté pour nous laisser passer ; partout nous voyions régner l'hospitalité, le repos, une joie douce et toutes les apparences du bonheur.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Andy Martin, "The Enlightenment in Paradise: Bougainville, Tahiti and the Duty of Desire", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (January 2007), 204.

³⁵⁰ Martin includes the following pertinent historical note: "More recent anthropologists have argued that the purpose of stripping naked under the gaze of foreign sailors could be to exhibit tattoos, notably on the buttocks, thus establishing social credentials for the purpose of trading. In Bougainville this event—the one and only spontaneous exhibition of the female body in his whole account of the island—is readily interpreted as sexual overture, invitation, emblem of desire.", 205.

³⁵¹ Bougainville, 235-236.

In many of Bougainville's observations, he reiterates his admiration for the pure society of the Tahitians. His description of Tahiti as a garden of Eden creates a space of pastoral tranquility filled with the carefree happiness that accompanies abundance and self-sufficiency. Important to note in Bougainville's text is the fact that, although the islanders have no reason to trust the French, they are honest in their exchanges with them. In fact, on one occasion where a pistol belonging to one of Bougainville's men is discovered missing, it is returned by the Tahitian chief, Ereti, the following day³⁵². The good faith demonstrated by the Tahitians in their interactions with the Frenchmen is portrayed as an extension of the tacit contract that maintains order and justice within the Tahitian society. Bougainville's description of this peaceful land of abundance is again an invitation to the French to take possession of the island:

Le caractère de la nation nous a paru être doux et bienfaisant. Il ne semble pas qu'il y ait dans l'île aucune guerre civile, aucune haine particulière, quoique le pays soit divisé en petits cantons qui ont chacun leur seigneur indépendant. Il est probable que les Taitiens pratiquent entre eux une bonne foi dont ils ne doutent point. Qu'ils soient chez eux ou non, jour ou nuit, les maisons sont ouvertes. Chacun cueille les fruits sur le premier arbre qu'il rencontre, en prend dans la maison où il entre. Il paraîtrait que pour les choses absolument nécessaires à la vie, il n'y a point de propriété et que tout est à tous.³⁵³

Among the Tahitians, a system of partitioning the land has been established and appears to maintain order peacefully. As for essential resources, they are held in common, a custom whose authority is symbolically conveyed by the practice of leaving the door to one's home unlocked³⁵⁴. Perhaps the strongest gesture communicating this society's spirit of openness and generosity can be found in the hospitality that the Tahitians extend towards Bougainville and his crew. The islanders shower the French explorers with a bounty of fruits, animals and cloth, and are quick to show themselves obliging by attending to the desires of their visitors:

³⁵² « Le 7 au matin, le chef, dont le nom est Ereti vint à bord. Il nous apporta un cochon, des poules et le pistolet qui avait été pris la veille chez lui. Cet acte de justice nous en donna bonne idée ». Ibid., 231.

³⁵³ Ibid., 255.

³⁵⁴ See also p. 234

Les insulaires apportaient de toutes parts des fruits, des poules, des cochons, du poisson et des pièces de toile qu'ils échangeaient contre des clous, des outils, des perles fausses, des boutons et mille autres bagatelles qui étaient des trésors pour eux. Au reste, ils examinaient attentivement ce qui pouvait nous plaire ; ils virent que nous cueillions des plantes antiscorbutiques et qu'on s'occupait aussi à chercher des coquilles. Les femmes et les enfants ne tardèrent pas à nous apporter à l'envi des paquets des mêmes plantes qu'ils nous avaient vus ramasser et des paniers remplis de coquilles de toutes les espèces. On payait leurs peines à peu de frais.³⁵⁵

Bougainville points out that the hospitality of the Tahitians is not limited to sharing food and commodities; rather it extends further to encompass the young women of their community as objects of exchange. In emphasizing this custom, strange and offensive to European sensibilities, he gives voice to the Tahitian interpretation of this act:

Ce n'est pas à une collation légère que se borne ici la civilité des maîtres de maisons ; ils leur offraient des jeunes filles ; la case se remplissait à l'instant d'une foule curieuse d'hommes et de femmes qui faisaient un cercle autour de l'hôte et de la jeune victime du devoir hospitalier . . . Vénus est ici la déesse de l'hospitalité, son culte n'y admet point de mystères, et chaque jouissance est une fête pour la nation.³⁵⁶

The notion of sex as spectacle has been discussed at length by critics³⁵⁷. Eric Vibart, for one, calls our attention to the spectacle's function within a utopian discourse, noting,

Spontanée, immédiate et sans lendemains, la sexualité tahitienne excluait tout à la fois le jeu conventionnel de la séduction et les souffrances de l'amour. Le bonheur sauvage des Tahitiens trouvait sa justification dans l'unité apparente du groupement social, et sa célébration dans la volupté. L'acte sexuel public était à cet égard une règle de transparence essentielle . . . Se dissimuler, rechercher un peu plus d'intimité aurait été violer une loi naturelle et un crime envers la société. Ne pas partager sa volupté aurait été briser les liens unissant les Tahitiens les uns aux autres. . . A travers les récits de voyages, le désir semblait être le principe actif de la cohésion, de l'harmonie tahitienne.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 233.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 235.

³⁵⁷ See Christopher B. Balme, "Sexual Spectacles: Theatricality and the Performance of Sex in Early Encounters in the Pacific", TDR: The Drama Review, Vol. 44, N°4 (T168), Winter 2000, MIT Press, 67-85.

³⁵⁸ Eric Vibart, *Tahiti: Naissance d'un paradis au siècle des lumières(1767-1797)*, Bruxelles : Complexe, 1987, 139.

The account given by Bougainville of what he describes as Tahitian hospitality reiterates the message that Tahiti would be a desirable colonial possession for the king by once again appealing to the innocent sexuality of the Garden of Eden.

Relations Between the Sexes on Tahiti

The possibility for a marked difference between what Tahitians and Europeans might consider an acceptable offer of hospitality, brought to the forefront by Bougainville's vivid portrait of Tahitian sexual practice, points to its role as a cultural signifier. The character of sexual relations and cohabitation proves to be highly contextual, as the significance of these acts depends upon the greater network of cultural signs active within a given social group. Whether or not Bougainville's explanation of the offering of Tahitian women actually corresponds to the role it held in the insular society at the time, his description is nevertheless revealing as it points to the gendered space of inequality that characterized many Enlightenment endeavors of knowledge and discovery. The European network of cultural signifiers that developed around such ventures during the eighteenth century is skillfully articulated by Anne McClintock in her work, *Imperial Leather*:

As European men crossed the dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically feminized borders and boundaries. Female figures were planted like fetishes at the ambiguous points of contact, at the borders and orifices of the contest zone. Sailors bound wooden female figures to their ships' prows and baptized their ships—as exemplary threshold objects—with female names. Cartographers filled the blank seas of their maps with mermaids and sirens. Explorers called unknown lands “virgin” territory. Philosophers veiled “Truth” as female, then fantasized about drawing back the veil. In

myriad ways, women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge.³⁵⁹

Indeed, Bougainville's use of the term *victim* to describe the young Tahitian woman offered to the French dissolves the superficial idealized discourse, as it reveals a system of domination supported by custom and gender roles.

Despite the Tahitian gesture of offering their women to foreign visitors, it should not be concluded that women were devoid of power on the island. On the contrary, Tahiti, like other Polynesian islands, operated according to a matrilinear power structure, as Neil Gunson explains in his article, "Great Women and Friendship in Pre-Christian Tahiti":

Royal women in Polynesia had an important religious role despite the prevailing belief that men had higher *mana* (the mystical power determining rank) than women. In most instances the prerogatives of authority descended in a direct male line although much depended on the rank of the mother in determining doubtful succession. Indeed, the concept of 'status lineage' postulated by Irving Goldman seems to best describe the main Polynesian descent group. "The term 'status lineage' emphasizes its two distinctive features: (1) that linearity is primarily by status and only incidentally by sex, and (2) its hierarchical structure, by which member families and related lineage branches are all ranked. In its traditional and prototype form the status lineage has preferential patriliney, but *persons affiliate to a lineage through the maternal side if that side offers a closer link to an ancestor of high status*".³⁶⁰

In addition to the allowance for a maternal relative to determine status, Tahiti also had many high-ranking women who were served by *mahu*, a set of men similar to eunuchs. According to Gunson,

It is the Great Women who seem to decide many of the issues, who appear to be of unrivalled influence and who make many of the royal claims. It is almost as if they functioned as a kind of college of Queens from whom the mother of the 'divine king' was to be selected. It is only the Great Women who dare break the strictest of the *rahui* [food taboos] decreed for claimants to the supreme chiefly title.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest*, New York: Routledge, 1995, 23-24.

³⁶⁰ Neil Gunson, "Great Women and Friendship in Pre-Christian Tahiti", *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (March 1964), 57.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

Among the Great Women of Tahiti, the one most documented by eighteenth-century European explorers was Queen Parea. Her biographical listing in the *South Seas Companion* portrays her thus:

Parea was a high-ranking Maohi woman who in 1767-8 sought but failed to make her only son Teri-irere the pre-eminent title-holder in Tahiti and Mo-orea. In the process she attempted to further her son's cause by establishing taio [friendship] bonds with the Wallis and Endeavor voyagers. The record of her relations with the voyagers led to her being widely imagined to be the Queen of Otaheite and to her behavior being thought typical of the erotic freedom that many Europeans eagerly believed the islanders of Tahiti enjoyed.³⁶²

As Alan Frost explains, Parea was not actually a queen, but rather a woman of elevated status whose interactions with European explorers led to satirical representations, particularly in England:

The mask that is fitted to Parea's person comes to us from a variety of visitors to and observers of her native Tahiti. Samuel Wallis, Tahiti's 'discoverer', was the first to call her 'Queen'. But an English public only saw Wallis's representations of her through the eyes of the erudite but naïve Dr. John Hawkesworth, and he had Wallis refer to Parea as 'my princess'. That is when the laughing began . . .

By the time James Cook arrived in Tahiti, Parea obviously was not 'Queen' at all, though she had a presence that was a little mystifying. His companion in the Great Cabin of the *Endeavor*, Joseph Banks, had come prepared to liaise with 'Queen Oberea', but was a little disappointed at her large stature and age, and what he saw as her passing or past beauty. He quarreled, near to duelling, with Jonathan Monkhouse over their shared sexual fancies. But while he slept naked, or near naked, with Parea in her canoe, he probably did not 'sleep' with her. On that famous night, which was a gift to London satirists, he had his breeches, shirt and waistcoat 'with silver frogs' stolen. Banks's adventures with Parea, reported again by Dr. Hawkesworth, made the English laugh and laugh, not just at Banks but at the absurdity of the idea that savages could be 'queens'.³⁶³

Given the historically documented significance of women in Tahitian society, Bougainville's descriptions of a male-dominated Tahiti must therefore be read with a certain degree of critical distance. Whether or not the offering of women was a deliberate strategy on

³⁶² Paul Turnbull, *South Seas Companion*, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cs-ss-biogs-P000411> [accessed 22 Dec. 2011]

³⁶³ Alan Frost, *Pacific empires: essays in honour of Glydwr Williams*, Eds. Alan Frost and Jane Samson. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999.

the part of the Tahitians to placate their European visitors, it is part of a larger structure of cultural relations within which it may not be as paradoxical as it appears to the eyes of a foreign observer.

With this in mind, let us return to Bougainville's portrayal of gender roles in Tahiti. Within the arena of male-female relations alone, Bougainville comments upon several practices that reflect the incompatibility of Tahitian and European social principles. While polygamy is considered scandalous and unacceptable in European societies, it is highly desirable in Tahitian society, Bougainville tells us, as it garners social status. He remarks, « La polygamie paraît générale chez eux, du moins parmi les principaux. Comme leur seule passion est l'amour, le grand nombre des femmes est le seul luxe des riches. »³⁶⁴ Both Tahitian and European societies reserve a special place for luxury, whose value by definition derives from the element of the gratuitous, while the discrepancy arises in that European excess limits itself to material goods and does not accept the inclusion of women in this category of goods to be possessed. In a similar vein, numerous other customs concerning Tahitian male-female relations (as interpreted by Bougainville) push the unequal balance of power favoring the male to the extreme.

Bougainville relates,

Les femmes doivent à leurs maris une soumission entière : elles laveraient dans leur sang une infidélité commise sans l'aveu de l'époux. Son consentement, il est vrai, n'est pas difficile à obtenir, et la jalousie est ici un sentiment si étranger, que le mari est ordinairement le premier à presser sa femme de se livrer. Une fille n'éprouve à cet égard aucune gêne ; tout l'invite à suivre le penchant de son cœur ou la loi de ses sens, et les applaudissements publics honorent sa défaite.³⁶⁵

While the tolerance, and even encouragement, of adultery seem to offer women freedom from their spouses, the husband still retains the power by according or refusing permission.

Moreover, the social pressure to reproduce is in itself a strong prescriptive force defining the role

³⁶⁴ Bougainville, 258.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 258.

of females in Bougainville's Tahiti. His description of this ambivalent relationship to freedom in the arena of sexual relations and the susceptibility of such freedom to manipulation and abuse could be a way of reassuring his European readers that Tahiti is not wholly without sexual and marital regulations.

Inequality on Tahiti: Regulations and Customs

Despite the Europeans' initial impression of the islanders as subject only to nature, Bougainville and his men soon perceive that Tahitian society already operates according to a set of established rules and customs. In addition to the many customs that reinforce the foreignness of the Tahitians, Bougainville also recognizes some practices similar to those current among Europeans. He describes in detail, for example, the attentive manner in which the Tahitians adorn and cleanse themselves:

Au reste, tandis qu'en Europe les femmes se peignent en rouge les joues, celles de Taiti se peignent d'un bleu foncé les reins et les fesses ; c'est une parure et en même temps une marque de distinction. Les hommes sont soumis à la même mode . . . Un autre usage de Taiti, commun aux hommes et aux femmes, c'est de se percer les oreilles et d'y porter des perles ou des fleurs de toute espèce. La plus grande propreté embellit encore ce peuple aimable. Ils se baignent sans cesse et jamais ils ne mangent ni ne boivent sans se laver avant et après.³⁶⁶

As Bougainville gives witness to the many customs and institutions that structure the social life of the Tahitians, it becomes evident that initial impressions of this people as a pure society untouched by civilization's evils were inaccurate fantasies. Aside from the straightforward descriptions of customs and institutions, a careful reading of Bougainville's

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 254.

account reveals, moreover, numerous implicit clues that the Tahitians have had prior experience with foreign cultures. During the initial encounter between the Tahitians and the Frenchmen, for instance, the fact that the Tahitian men immediately offer up their women to strangers, as well as the nonchalance with which the Tahitian women disrobe, could indicate that they have had previous interactions with explorers or other Pacific people and have developed this strategy of exchange to favorably predispose their foreign visitors.

Our present endeavor to explore the functioning of cultural signifiers in cross-cultural encounters is indebted to Andy Martin's work on the custom of sex as spectacle in Tahitian culture. He provides a possible historical explanation for the scene witnessed by Bougainville and his men, which they described as the *devoir hospitalier*. Martin calls our attention to the "Arioi",

A class or sect of wandering troubadours, "strolling players" made up largely of displaced aristocrats who dedicate their lives to pure performance, the enactment of myth, history, and current events. . . The Arioi would have been the living incarnation of a certain strain of theobiological discourse . . . and they dramatized the sexual act, producing a spectacle, a rite with a religious rationale, a public invocation of the divine . . . From the very beginning of European contact, Tahiti was a romantic dramatization of itself . . . There is a feedback system at work that enables the Tahitians to infer French wants and for Bougainville, in turn, to replay them for a domestic audience . . . The construction comes neither from outside nor from inside Tahiti. It emerges or crystallizes in the context of the interplay—almost an artistic collaboration . . .³⁶⁷

Throughout the various descriptions of Tahitian customs that we have read, these practices are only accessible to the reader through the lens of Bougainville's writing, which is necessarily already an interpretation. The Tahitians present an image of their culture which itself comes to be influenced by European literary and artistic representations of them. We have seen, for instance, the influence of classical imagery in Bougainville's text and the paintings of Poussin and Watteau. Thus, as Martin suggests, one should not forget that the Tahitian culture,

³⁶⁷ Martin, op. cit., 211-213.

like all cultures, is a dynamic one. Its people do not merely follow their customs unconsciously and without altering them, but rather they are cultural agents who are able to act upon their own practices. As such, the Tahitians are able to manipulate cultural signifiers in order to control how others will perceive them, thus consciously representing themselves. While such signifiers certainly shape the internal power relations of a given culture, it is also evident that this function extends to its rapport with foreign social groups. Martin's unique idea that it is in the interplay of the two differing cultures that their identities are produced is of prime importance. At the heart of any sign system is its arbitrariness: the initial difference between the sign and the referent, coupled with the differences that distinguish the various signs within the system from each other, serve to produce meaning. On a larger scale, the differences between competing sign systems (here different cultures' customs) likewise produce a play of similarity and difference that is productive of meaning. We shall examine this question in further detail when discussing Diderot's use of the dialogical form as generative of a fruitful difference.

The Difficulties of Translation: Deciphering Tahitian Culture

The idealizing discourse has been slowly showing its weaknesses, and the final blow to Bougainville's artificially-crafted Tahitian landscape is delivered once he engages in conversation with Aotourou, who joins the crew aboard *La Boudeuse*. Aotourou struggles to learn to speak French, and Bougainville likewise struggles to understand the ways of Aotourou's culture, having himself no sizeable knowledge of the Tahitian language (and thus no reliable

point of access). Later, once Aotourou is living in France, many French people criticize him and think he is stupid because he cannot master their language as quickly as other foreigners they have encountered. Bougainville's text thrusts to the forefront the inherent difficulty (and sometimes impossibility) of translation, owing to the way that language and culture are inextricably bound up with each other. He contrasts the factors involved in learning French for Europeans with those that Aotourou must overcome:

D'autres, aristarques tranchants, prenaient et répandaient une forte mince idée du pauvre insulaire, sur ce qu'après un séjour de deux ans avec des Français, il parlait à peine quelques mots de la langue. Ne voyons-nous pas tous les jours, disaient-ils, des Italiens, des Anglais, des Allemands, auxquels un séjour d'un an à Paris suffit pour apprendre le français ? . . . mais . . . ces étrangers avaient une grammaire pareille à la nôtre, des idées morales, physiques, politiques, sociales, les mêmes que les nôtres et toutes exprimées par des mots dans leur langue, comme elles le sont dans la langue française. . . . [A]insi ils n'avaient qu'une traduction à confier à leur mémoire exercée dès l'enfance. Le Taitien, au contraire, n'ayant que le petit nombre d'idées relatives d'une part à la société la plus simple et la plus bornée, de l'autre à des besoins réduits au plus petit nombre possible, aurait eu à créer, pour ainsi dire, dans un esprit aussi paresseux que son corps, un monde d'idées premières, avant que de pouvoir parvenir à leur adapter les mots de notre langue qui les expriment.³⁶⁸

Bougainville indicates that while the human *capacity* for language is universal, its actual manifestations are highly dependent upon the particularities of given social groups. In the passage cited, he is rendering explicit what he has demonstrated to us in his notes on the customs of Tahiti, namely, that the meaning of cultural codes is dependent, to such a high degree, upon their relation to other signs in the system of which they are a part, that knowledge of them is only possible when approached from within.

Similarly, Condillac explains the manner in which the character of a people affects its language:

Ainsi que le gouvernement influe sur le caractère des peuples, le caractère des peuples influe sur celui des langues. Il est naturel que les hommes, toujours pressés par des besoins et agités par quelque passion, ne parlent pas des choses sans faire connoître

³⁶⁸ Bougainville, 263-264.

l'intérêt qu'ils y prennent. Il faut qu'ils attachent insensiblement aux mots des idées accessoires qui marquent la manière dont ils sont affectés, et les jugemens qu'ils portent.³⁶⁹

Inherent to the mechanism of language, sign formation involves, in addition to the association of a word and a thing or idea, a sort of cultural supplement that carries judgment. These « idées accessoires », as Condillac calls them, vary from one culture to another, and correspond to Bougainville's reference to a « monde d'idées premières », without which Aotourou could not gain mastery of the French language. These cultural elements that are specific to a given language, like other arbitrary elements of the linguistic sign, eventually become solidified conventions through habit and familiarity:

Les signes sont arbitraires la première fois qu'on les emploie : c'est peut-être ce qui a fait croire qu'ils ne sauroient avoir de caractère ; mais je demande s'il n'est pas naturel à chaque nation de combiner ses idées selon le génie qui lui est propre, et de joindre à un certain fonds d'idées principales différentes idées accessoires, selon qu'elle est différemment affectée. Or ces combinaisons, autorisées par un long usage, sont proprement ce qui constitue le génie d'une langue.³⁷⁰

Bougainville's description of Aotourou's difficulty in grasping the *génie* of the French language echoes Condillac's theories on the interconnectedness of knowledge, language and culture, but it also signals the disappointment he felt upon his unsuccessful reception once returned to France. Aotourou was not the great popular success Bougainville had hoped and his own political project for the Pacific received only a lukewarm reception³⁷¹.

Recognizing the inextricable connection of language and culture, Bougainville attempts to understand the Tahitian society in a deeper way by engaging in conversation with Aotourou. In the course of these conversations, he learns that he was mistaken in some of his judgments about the islanders. His greatest misconception arose from his desire to view the Tahitians as

³⁶⁹ Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, Auvers-sur-Oise: Editions Galilée, Collection Palimpseste, 1973, 260.

³⁷⁰ Bougainville, 266.

³⁷¹ See Victor Suthren

members of a perfect community based upon equality. After being corrected by Aotourou, Bougainville acknowledges his error before his readers:

J'ai dit plus haut que les habitants de Taiti nous avaient paru vivre dans un bonheur digne d'envie. Nous les avons cru presque égaux entre eux, ou du moins jouissant d'une liberté qui n'était soumise qu'aux lois établies par le bonheur de tous. Je me trompais ; la distinction des rangs est fort marquée à Taiti, et la disproportion cruelle. . . .

La viande et le poisson sont réservés à la table des grands ; le peuple ne vit que de légumes et de fruits. Jusqu'à la manière de s'éclairer dans la nuit différencie les états, et l'espèce de bois qui brûle pour les gens considérables n'est pas la même que celle dont il est permis au peuple de se servir.³⁷²

The inequality described by Aotourou is confirmed by Eric Vibart, who outlines the hierarchical structure of Tahitian society in place at the time of its first encounters with European society by means of Wallis and Bougainville:

La société polynésienne vivait dans le respect d'une très forte hiérarchie. La population se divisait approximativement en quatre classes : les *ari'i nui*, souverains de droit divin, les *ari'i ri'i*, chefs nobles suzerains des premiers, les *hui ra'atira*, classe moyenne et les *manahune*, plébéiens. Chaque classe était composée de gens libres dont les propriétés étaient héréditaires. Les distinctions se faisaient beaucoup plus par l'autorité et le savoir que par la richesse. Les souverains les plus puissants se devaient d'exceller dans les arts et les travaux du peuple. Une action basse ou indigne de leur rang pouvait causer la réprobation générale et leur perte d'influence. Les prêtres constituaient une classe importante de la société. Se succédant de pères en fils ou de mères en filles, ils détenaient l'essentiel du savoir et étaient la mémoire civile et religieuse du monde polynésien.³⁷³

As Bougainville describes, a whole host of cultural signifiers, including manner of dress and ornamentation, indicates the hierarchical structure maintained in this society. The type and placement of belt worn by the valets, for instance, serves to indicate the respective ranks of the men whom they serve:

Les seigneurs ont des livrées pour leurs valets ; suivant que la qualité des maîtres est plus ou moins élevée, les valets portent plus ou moins haut la pièce d'étoffe dont ils se

³⁷² Bougainville, 267.

³⁷³ Vibart, op. cit., 76-77.

ceignent. Cette ceinture pend immédiatement sous les bras aux valets des chefs, elle ne couvre que les reins aux valets de la dernière classe des nobles.³⁷⁴

Bougainville's open admission of his mistaken initial judgments of Tahiti, and his conversations with Aotourou, point to a spirit of epistemological questioning that animates Bougainville's writing. His critical stance vis-à-vis sources of knowledge penetrates his description of the European public's reaction to Aotourou, as he is quick to reproach his countrymen. Bougainville writes that, upon Aotourou's arrival,

L'empressement pour le voir a été vif, curiosité stérile qui n'a servi presque qu'à donner des idées fausses à des hommes persifleurs par état, qui ne sont jamais sortis de la capitale, qui n'approfondissent rien, et qui, livrés à des erreurs de toute espèce, ne voient que d'après leurs préjugés et décident cependant avec sévérité et sans appel.³⁷⁵

The moment of Aotourou's arrival in France harks back to the initial embarkment of Bougainville and his crew on Tahiti. Just as the indigenous Tahitians inspected their European visitors, Aotourou, for his part, becomes an object of curiosity and speculation in France. In these lines, Bougainville contrasts the kind of naïve curiosity driven by a desire to see one's own prejudicial fantasies fulfilled, an undertaking he labels "sterile", with a scientific spirit of empirical observation that seeks objectivity. Despite this overt criticism of his European contemporaries, Bougainville's own account reflects a different set of prejudices. One of the most salient examples available to his readers is his description of the two races of people comprising the native Tahitian population:

Le peuple de Taiti est composé de deux races d'hommes très différentes, qui cependant ont la même langue, les mêmes mœurs et qui paraissent se mêler ensemble sans distinction . . . La première, et c'est la plus nombreuse, produit des hommes de la plus grande taille : il est ordinaire d'en voir de six pieds et plus. Je n'ai jamais rencontré d'hommes mieux faits ni mieux proportionnés ; pour peindre Hercule et Mars, on ne trouverait nulle part d'aussi beaux modèles. Rien ne distingue leurs traits de ceux des Européens ; et s'ils vivaient moins à l'aire et au grand soleil, ils seraient aussi blancs que nous. En général, leurs cheveux sont noirs. La seconde race est d'une taille médiocre, a

³⁷⁴ Bougainville, 268.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 263.

les cheveux crépus et durs comme du crin, sa couleur et ses traits diffèrent peu de ceux des mulâtres. Le Taitien, qui s'est embarqué avec nous, est de cette seconde race, quoique son père soit chef d'un canton ; mais il possède en intelligence ce qui lui manque du côté de la beauté.³⁷⁶

Bougainville's description of the lighter-skinned race translates a tendency to identify with the Tahitian people, and the classical imagery of the idealizing discourse reappears as he compares them to the gods Hercules and Mars. Eric Vibart highlights the light color of the Tahitians' skin as one of the conditions that made them an acceptable model for the noble savage in the European psyche³⁷⁷. Aotourou, belonging to the second, darker-skinned race may not be as beautiful by European standards, although Bougainville assures us that he is more intelligent than his lighter-skinned compatriots. Bougainville's description suggests a view of nature as balancing dichotomies by distributing advantages among the races. Such speculation is hardly surprising and was, in fact, encouraged in eighteenth-century France, notably by an essay competition sponsored by the *Académie royale des sciences de Bordeaux* in 1739 as to the (cause of blackness and sources of its degeneration)³⁷⁸. Andrew Curran's insightful analysis of the submitted essays suggests that they serve as a barometer of the various nascent racial theories circulating at the time. Although much of the debate was framed in terms of the *nègre*, these same ideas are perceptible in the writing of Bougainville on the indigenous Tahitians. Curran explains how Buffon's monogenetic theory of degeneration ultimately resulted in a multiplication of speculative efforts to define the characteristics that differentiate blackness from whiteness:

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 252-253.

³⁷⁷ « Cette clarté de peau fut l'une des conditions sine qua non de la fixation et du développement du mythe du bon sauvage en Polynésie . . . Obéissant à des critères raciaux comparables à ceux des Européens, les Polynésiens représentaient à merveille pour les esprits des lumières un stade de l'évolution des sociétés humaines. La clarté de peau des Tahitiens, leur esthétique, permettaient à l'Européen de s'identifier à eux sans aucune répulsion instinctive. La blancheur ne mettait aucun frein au désir d'altérité, bien au contraire », (Vibart, 144-145).

³⁷⁸ Andrew Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011, 81.

The black African became the extreme data point around which an ongoing and much more material discussion of degeneration, degenerative anatomy, and whiteness took place in light of Buffon's theory. Ultimately, Buffon's belief in an original sameness prompted a new generation of anatomists and philosophers to think beyond his version of monogenesis and its emphasis on shared origins, and to concentrate on the specifics of the corporeal transformation that had, according to Buffon itself, separated black Africans from Europeans. This intense investigation into the material and physiological specificity of the black African was a major and unintended consequence of Buffon's environmental theory.³⁷⁹

Author #14 of the Bordeaux *concours*, for example, interpreted Buffon's theory of degeneration by speculating that

The varieties of the human species that had the greatest number of people must be the least degenerate and thus members of the original prototype group. This group could only be, in his opinion, the white race: "There is no doubt that the first species (which is to say, that of which we are the members) is the original, and thus the legitimate; and that all the others have degenerated." Although his methods and rationale were admittedly quite unsubstantiated, Author #14 nonetheless offered a speculative understanding of humankind's origins that asserted both the genealogical primacy and *legitimacy* of the white variety.³⁸⁰

Bougainville's text indicates an attempt to identify two different "races" of Tahitians who, although distinct, cohabitate the island harmoniously. The first race of lighter skinned humans is designated as the most numerous, and closer to a European prototype from which the darker variety degenerated. As for the cause of this degeneration resulting in blackness, Bougainville suggests that the air and the sun have effected these changes. Bougainville's analysis of skin color reflects climate theory, most notably articulated during the eighteenth century by Abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719). Within the larger context of the artistic and spiritual differences among the variety of the world's peoples, Dubos sought to explain a scientific cause for these variations:

To explain such divergences, the esthetic theorist put forward a mechanical explanation, singling out the effect of the air and, to a lesser degree, the "land" on the human body as the main causes. What particular groups of people breathed, according to Dubos, not

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 75-76.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 85-86.

only had a significant effect on “the physical structure of their organs” but also contributed “to the different qualities of their blood”. Indeed, the resulting differences in blood explained even deeper differences in humankind’s intellectual diversity. As he put it: “two men who have blood that is so different as to make them dissimilar on the exterior, will be even more dissimilar in terms of their minds. [What is more] they will be even more unlike in terms of temperament than in terms of coloring or body type.” According to Dubos, climatic variables were ultimately responsible—via the blood—for orienting whole nations toward “certain vices” or “certain virtues”.³⁸¹

In Bougainville’s discussion of Tahitian races, the differences in skin color and physical traits are associated with further differences in intellectual capacity, although Bougainville contradicts Dubos’s theory by asserting greater intelligence among the darker race of Tahitians. This passage from Bougainville, including its unexpected admission that darker skin is not incompatible with superior intelligence, is highly characteristic of the many contradictions present in eighteenth-century European writing on the differences among human varieties. Bougainville’s discourse reflects the multiplicity of circulating theories as writers and scientists tried to go beyond a biblical account of monogenesis towards a scientific explanation of the differences observed within the sameness of the human species³⁸².

Given the accumulation of Bougainville’s comments about the validity of certain methods of acquiring knowledge, his own admission of his errors and his efforts to correct an inaccurate rendering of the Tahitians, it is evident that this text not only concerns the Tahitian subject matter, but furthermore invites its reader to make a critical reevaluation of sources of knowledge and authority. The heft of Bougainville’s work lies not only in the ethnological answers it provides but also in the crucial questions it raises. While it was becoming more and more possible for eighteenth-century Europeans to experience newly discovered regions of the world firsthand, how did the knowledge amassed by explorers still remain so limited? How scientific are a traveler’s observations? What criteria ought to determine their validity? As we

³⁸¹ Ibid., 79-80.

³⁸² Ibid., 75.

have seen, Bougainville himself struggled with personal misconceptions, cultural prejudices and the barrier caused by a lack of understanding of the Tahitian language. Many scholars have brought attention to Bougainville's modifications of his text, a step necessary to transform his sailor's log, abounding in tedious nautical and astronomical measurements, into a work that would be more appealing to European readership³⁸³. Bougainville, similar in this respect to many other travelers, was subject to the pressure of producing a sensationalized, intriguing account of his voyage in order to justify the effort and expense that went into undertaking such a risky endeavor.

These broader epistemological questions stem from the problematic at the core of Bougainville's text. Like many other eighteenth-century thinkers, Bougainville was writing at a time when many sought to discover if there exists a universal "human nature", and, if so, in what it consists. The observations of the Tahitians relayed by Bougainville ultimately demonstrate the impossibility of apprehending man in the state of nature, a futile quest parallel to that of seeking an origin to language. The plurality of competing voices present in Bougainville's *Voyage*, and his inability (or lack of desire) to conclusively reconcile the seemingly "purer" ways of a less-modernized social group with their inevitable recourse to the corrupting systems of convention that order all civilized societies are elements which likely sparked Diderot's interest in this text. The evolution of Bougainville's perspective through the course of the *Voyage*, as his initial idealizing *noble savage* discourse deconstructs itself and gives way to methodological questioning, reflects, according to Andy Martin, "the structure of modernity in its very

³⁸³ For more detailed information, see the edition of the *Voyage autour du monde* edited by Michel Bideaux and Sonia Faessel, Paris: Presses de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2001. They discuss how the *Voyage* exaggerates the paradisiac imagery of Tahiti compared to the earlier *Journal*, and enumerate the numerous political and situational constraints that limited Bougainville's authorial liberty.

contradiction”³⁸⁴. While Bougainville has typically been portrayed by critics as a naïve traveler who became an easy target for Diderot’s parody, I propose instead that his text contains a perceptive analysis of cultural codes among the Tahitians. Moreover, given Bougainville’s awareness of Rousseau’s descriptions portraying primitive peoples discovered by European explorers as living in a Golden Age, it is perhaps Bougainville’s view that Rousseau is the naïve one. The multiplicity of competing voices present in Bougainville’s *Voyage* comprise a text that is a clear illustration of the methodological considerations that shaped an emerging strain of anthropological reflection.

Diderot: a Reevaluation of the Cultural Supplement through Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Diderot’s Aims in Modifying Bougainville

In his *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772), Diderot works within the framework of a dialogue between “A” and “B”, two abstract interlocutors who discuss and evaluate a supplementary text, purportedly written in the margins of Bougainville’s 1771 *Voyage autour du monde*³⁸⁵. In contrast to Bougainville, who announced as his objective to record

³⁸⁴ Martin, op. cit., 210.

³⁸⁵ Diderot’s *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* is part of a triptych of dialogical texts, although rarely commented upon in combination with the other two. For more on this topic, see “Reading the French Enlightenment: system and subversion” by Julie Candler Hayes, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. According to

accurate nautical and geographical measurements and to faithfully describe the climates and native inhabitants of the lands he visited, Diderot, on the other hand, is one of the so-called “armchair philosophers” who had never left the European continent. As the author of a *supplément*, his text provides an added commentary on the original text, and thus by definition seeks to improve upon the original by adding what he sees as lacking in it. Curiously enough, Diderot’s additional commentary reveals that what is missing is, precisely, a dissection of the hidden supplement already present in the way the culture has been represented by Bougainville. Diderot announces his intentions clearly in the subtitle, which reads: « *Sur l’inconvénient d’attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n’en comportent pas* ». Diderot’s project is thus to remove the moral values produced by Bougainville’s text and to seek out the origins of cultural institutions and values by exposing the process of their production. A dialogue evaluating a confrontation between two cultures that possess competing customs and moral judgments (France and Tahiti) will further this end by exposing the relativity and fallibility of such manmade institutions.

As the text begins, A and B are preparing to judge Bougainville’s *Voyage*. A thick fog has descended, which could either worsen or lift and, while waiting to see what happens, A and B read Bougainville’s work. From the very outset, Diderot is designating his text as a sort of liminal space, one in which conclusive judgment must be suspended for the time being in favor of questioning and debate. The fog surrounding A and B is perhaps intended to be reflective of

Candler Hayes, “a reevaluation of values occurs . . . in Diderot’s triptych of story-dialogues, “Ceci n’est pas un conte,” “Madame de la Carlière,” and the “Supplément au voyage de Bougainville”. Although they were written for serial publication in the *Correspondance Littéraire*, and despite various cross-references among them, these three texts are rarely treated as the triptych they represent, either by critics or by editors”, 169. She notes that “the three dialogued tales present the same pair of unnamed male interlocutors who together recount and consider the moral implications of stories concerning other people. Each dialogue sets up a rational discursive/affective economy of exchange, expectation, and the regulated circulation of objects (monetary and intellectual) and people. The friendly give-and-take of the dialogue form accentuates the mechanical aspects of the social network (society is twice referred to as a machine in the *Supplément*)”, 170. For more on the triptych, see also D.J. Adams, *A Diderot Triptych Re-Examined*, *MLA Review*, Vol. 76, N°1 (Jan. 1981), 47-59.

the place occupied by man when trying to evaluate his own culture and nature: in other words, the disorientation brought on by encountering alterity can prove fruitful as a stimulus for questioning and reflection, although it will not necessarily lead to any decisive clarity.

The opening discussion between A and B about whether or not it is a contradiction that Bougainville has changed profession from studying mathematics to embarking on a scientific voyage of discovery brings to the forefront reflections on the competing authorities of pure reason and empirical observation. Let us examine the issue in view of the following exchange:

A: Je n'entends rien à cet homme-là. L'étude des mathématiques qui suppose une vie sédentaire a rempli le temps de ses jeunes années ; et voilà qu'il passe subitement d'une condition méditative et retirée au métier actif, pénible, errant et dissipé de voyageur.

B : Nullement ; si le vaisseau n'est qu'une maison flottante, et si vous considérez le navigateur qui traverse des espaces immenses, resserré et immobile dans une enceinte assez étroite, vous le verrez faisant le tour du globe sur une planche, comme vous et moi le tour de l'univers sur notre parquet.³⁸⁶

How might we interpret these comments? Is Diderot favoring the empirical method of the natural sciences by criticizing the theoretical approach of pure mathematics, which deductively makes conclusions based on axioms dealing with pure objects that do not completely correspond to objects in nature? Or, rather, through the mouthpiece of B, is he reminding us equally of the limits of empirical observation? Although Bougainville travels far from his homeland, « le vaisseau n'est qu'une maison flottante », and he is unable to completely dissociate himself from his own European cultural context. To what extent is a voyage really an exploration, and to what extent is it merely a pretext for reflection upon ourselves, yet another experience mediated by our own cultural codes and therefore an obstacle to any possible understanding of a radically different, irreducible Other? What is the most valid way to bridge the inferential gap between self and other? By emphasizing the limits of Bougainville's observations (or those of any

³⁸⁶ Denis Diderot, *Contes et Romans*, ed. Michel Delon, « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », Paris : Gallimard, 2004, 541.

traveler for that matter), Diderot is suggesting that his own expertise is just as reliable as that of a *voyageur*.

Reading a bit further, Diderot continues his implicit critique of the Enlightenment faith in progress, as A muses,

Je croyais que les puissances européennes n'envoyaient pour commandants dans leurs possessions d'outre-mer que des âmes honnêtes, des hommes bienfaisants, des sujets remplis d'humanité et capables de compatir . . .³⁸⁷

With these comments, Diderot reproaches the naïve idealism of a certain variety of colonial ideology, a vestige of earlier travel writing such as that of Jean de Léry, which maintained that Europeans were saving “savage” peoples by bringing to them the light of Christianity³⁸⁸. His comments invalidate this earlier attitude, implicitly recalling to the reader the many documented instances of colonial abuse while, at the same time, marking a new direction for encounters with Non-European peoples.

As A and B begin to discuss Bougainville's account, they make several comments that blatantly attack the legitimacy of cultural institutions such as laws and religions. B, for example, declares,

Une observation assez constante, c'est que les institutions surnaturelles et divines se fortifient et s'éternisent en se transformant à la longue, en lois civiles et nationales, et que les institutions civiles et nationales se consacrent et dégénèrent en préceptes surnaturels et divins.³⁸⁹

In these lines, Diderot is conveying a message similar to that communicated through Rousseau's metaphor of civilization's institutions as « guirlandes de fleurs sur les chaînes de fer dont ils sont chargés »³⁹⁰. As A and B outline a series of injustices committed by the Jesuits against the

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 543.

³⁸⁸ See Frank Lestringant, *Jean de Léry ou l'Invention du sauvage : essai sur l'Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, Paris : H. Champion, 1999.

³⁸⁹ Diderot, *Supplément*, 544.

³⁹⁰ Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, op. cit., Vol. 3, 7.

native people of Paraguay³⁹¹, they suggest that the problems caused by unjust laws and religious precepts spring from a common source: as human beings begin to organize their mental view of the universe, they often turn to “supernatural and divine” sources as authorities to explain the unknown. As these transcendent sources of authority gain credence, symbolic systems spring up around them to order the mental and social lives of human beings. Once in place, these authoritarian systems become conventional, and the power relationships they define become rigid and resistant to alteration. These systems, whether customs, laws, or religions, soon take on a life of their own, and the initial benefit of order and connection that was their *raison d’être* soon becomes outweighed by the oppression of restrictive structures that limit the autonomy of individuals. At this last stage, the authorities become so ingrained in a culture’s mentality that they are no longer seen as susceptible to being challenged, at which point they are once again on the transcendent level of the “supernatural or divine”. Diderot outlines the circular progression to which sources of authority that order human societies are susceptible in order to deconstruct this fallacious logic.

An Imaginative Rendering of Culture Shock

A and B’s highly critical comments regarding cultural institutions find their concrete illustration in the recorded account of interactions between Bougainville, accompanied by his crew, and the Tahitians. “Bougainville’s text”, as discussed by A and B is, of course, Diderot’s highly imaginative rendering of Bougainville’s observations, and includes colorful anecdotes of

³⁹¹ Diderot, *Supplément*, 544.

cultural misunderstandings between the ship's chaplain and Orou, a Tahitian man. Diderot supplements Bougainville's account, in addition, by attempting to present European morals and customs through the eyes of the Tahitians³⁹², namely, through the tribal chief and Orou's condemnation of these ways as contrary to both nature and reason. Permitting the Tahitians to participate in the dialogue is a crucial move as it formally reinforces Diderot's conception of culture as exchange. In the words of Dena Goodman,

The reversals that demonstrate the equality and reciprocity between Tahitian and French men are founded in the universal reason shared by all human beings. The Vieillard's speech thus implies formally the dialogue that follows. It both establishes the Tahitian as a thinking subject rather than a mute object and it establishes the dialogue as the interaction between two thinking subjects. This interaction takes place not on the purely abstract level of thought, however, but in its concrete realization in language. And language is not only particular but one of the fundamental definitional particularities of culture. To maintain the particularity of the Vieillard as a true representative of another culture, as an authentic other, he must speak the language of that culture.³⁹³

The Chief expresses his contempt for the perverse ways of the foreign visitors in the following speech addressed to Bougainville:

Et toi, chef des brigands qui t'obéissent, écarte promptement ton vaisseau de notre rive. Nous sommes innocents, nous sommes heureux ; et tu ne peux que nuire à notre bonheur. Nous suivons le pur instinct de la nature, et tu as tenté d'effacer de nos âmes son caractère. Ici tout est à tous, et tu nous a prêché je ne sais quelle distinction du tien et du mien. Nos filles et nos femmes nous sont communes, tu as partagé ce privilège avec nous, et tu es venu allumer en elles des fureurs inconnues . . . Nous sommes libres et voilà que tu as enfoui dans notre terre le titre de notre futur esclavage. Tu n'es ni un dieu ni un démon, qui es-tu donc, pour faire des esclaves ? Orou, toi qui entends la langue de ces hommes-là, dis-nous à tous, comme tu me l'as dit à moi-même, ce qu'ils ont écrit sur

³⁹² Diderot's reflex to include the perspective of the other in his account of another culture follows in the tradition of Montaigne's Brazilians who are shocked by the material disparity in French culture and the authority given to a child monarch. According to Eliane Gandin, Montaigne's influence on Diderot has been historically documented, and his use of the dialogical form may have been influenced by (Lahontan). She writes, « Diderot était un lecteur assidu de Montaigne et on peut retrouver une influence de Montaigne qui s'était servi des Brésiliens débarqués à Rouen en 1562 pour critiquer le système politique et social du XVIème siècle dans le chapitre *Des Cannibales*. Diderot reprend aussi le modèle des *Dialogues de Lahontan* où celui-ci compare avec Adario, sauvage américain, l'état sauvage et l'état civilisé. » (Eliane Gandin, *Le Voyage dans le Pacifique de Bougainville à Giraudoux*, Paris : l'Harmattan, 1998, 49).

³⁹³ Dena Goodman, *Criticism in Action: Enlightenment Experiments in Political Writing*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989, 187-188.

cette lame de métal : *Ce pays est à nous . . . Ce pays est à toi ! et pourquoi ? Parce que tu y as mis le pied ! . . . Tu es le plus fort, et qu'est-ce que cela fait ?*³⁹⁴

In these lines, Diderot presents the Tahitians as a pure people who live in harmony with nature and share all possessions, traits which distance them from what he sees as the greed and corruption of European civilization. Diderot draws upon the formula of L  ry's *harangue du Vieillard*, also present in Pr  vost and Raynal, to emphasize the illegitimacy of French colonial seizure of Tahiti³⁹⁵. He juxtaposes the insatiable desire that constantly agitates the Europeans with the *repos* and genuine contentedness highly valued in Tahitian life. Diderot's rhetoric here echoes Rousseau's earlier claims in his *Second Discourse* that the corrupting forces of civilization actually weaken mankind as he begins to conflate superfluous desires and needs. In the language of Diderot, this aspect of the cultural supplement effectively takes away from humanity more than it adds.

The speech delivered by the Chief at the moment of departure of Bougainville and his crew represents Diderot's perception of the fundamental differences between the European and Tahitian cultures. This perceived difference in cultural values translates into many cross-cultural contradictions as the two groups compare the customs that shape daily life, with the greatest discrepancies arising with respect to practices governing marriage and reproduction. Particularly notable for its illustrative value of this clash is the episode when Orou offers his wife and daughters to the Chaplain and encourages him to have relations with them³⁹⁶. The Chaplain refuses this invitation vehemently, insisting that his religion and culture condemn such actions. Orou is quite surprised by this reaction, and offers reassurance to his visitor, explaining that

³⁹⁴ Diderot, op. cit., 547-548.

³⁹⁵ Lestringant, op. cit., 87.

³⁹⁶ While our discussion here has centered around the cultural signification of customs, the episodes of cross-cultural exchange recounted in Bougainville and Diderot, among others, have also led to interesting studies of the differing cultural interpretations of material objects. For more on this approach, see John Patrick Greene, "French Encounters with Material Culture of the South Pacific", *Eighteenth-Century Life*, Vol. 26, N  3, Fall 2002, 225-245.

offering one's women to a guest for pleasure is an important act of hospitality in Tahiti. In the words of Orou,

Je ne sais ce que c'est que la chose que tu appelles religion, mais je ne puis qu'en penser mal, puisqu'elle t'empêche de goûter un plaisir innocent auquel nature, la souveraine maîtresse, nous invite tous ; de donner l'existence à un de tes semblables ; de rendre un service que le père, la mère et les enfants te demandent ; de t'acquitter envers un hôte qui t'a fait un bon accueil, et d'enrichir une nation, en l'accroissant d'un sujet de plus. Je ne sais ce que c'est que la chose que tu appelles état ; mais ton premier devoir est d'être homme et d'être reconnaissant. Je ne te propose pas de porter dans ton pays les mœurs d'Orou, mais Orou, ton hôte et ton ami, te supplie de te prêter aux mœurs d'Otaïti.³⁹⁷

When the Chaplain explains the European concept of marital monogamy to Orou, the Tahitian responds: « Ces préceptes singuliers, je les trouve opposés à la nature, contraires à la raison »³⁹⁸.

Orou explains his objection, maintaining that such a concept of marriage treats men and women as property, as inanimate objects of commerce; it forces them to be unchanging, which is against the nature of both living beings and the material world³⁹⁹. His objection to the European custom questions why one would construe our natural yearnings as evil, and this view of social and religious customs as miserable constraints echoes B's earlier appraisal of laws as « entraves déguisées »⁴⁰⁰. While one might expect Orou to be a perfect *noble savage*, and thus to present nature as the absolute source of moral authority, it is important to note, as Herbert Dieckmann has remarked, that « Orou parle en représentant de la raison naturelle, plutôt qu'en enfant naïf de la nature »⁴⁰¹. Indeed, through the rationality present in Orou's speech, Diderot makes him speak like a European philosopher, a descendent of Socrates from Plato's *Dialogues*⁴⁰². The

³⁹⁷ Diderot, 553.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 556.

³⁹⁹ The words of Orou serve here as a vehicle of expression for Diderot's materialist philosophy, as elaborated in works such as the *Rêve d'Alembert*.

⁴⁰⁰ Diderot, 546.

⁴⁰¹ Diderot, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, ed. Herbert Dieckmann, Genève: Droz, 1955, XXXIV.

⁴⁰² Much critical attention has focused on the *prise de parole* of the Tahitian elder and Orou. See Carol Sherman, *Diderot and the Art of Dialogue*, Genève: Droz, 1976, Christie V. McDonald, "The Reading and Writing of Utopia in Denis Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*", *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1976, and Roger

preliminary rhetorical marker « Je ne sais . . . Je ne sais . . . » indicates that Orou is not European, and the repetition of « mais » signals his more profound wisdom as a philosopher concerned with a certain ideal of human nature that entails familial and civic virtue.

Diderot's Orou cannot respect the artificial constancy that European society imposes upon its members, and cannot understand why it would be objectionable for the Chaplain to sleep with his wife and daughters. After all, from the Tahitian perspective (as invented by Diderot), sexual relations are encouraged and celebrated because they serve to increase and enrich the community through new births. In fact, the Chaplain's refusal is effectively an insult to Orou and greatly upsets his youngest daughter, Thia, who is eager to elevate her social status by mothering a child. Indeed, she implores him, begging, « Honore-moi . . . élève-moi au rang de mes sœurs . . . rends-moi mère . . . »⁴⁰³. Moreover, given the role of reproduction in assuring the well-being of the community, Orou finds it strange, selfish even, that anyone would wish to adopt a religious vocation; to his mind, individuals who take a vow of celibacy are negligent with respect to their civil duty. All of these "Tahitian" views, as elaborated by Diderot, provide the *philosophe* with a convenient forum to challenge the moral stances on sexual relations that were generally held in eighteenth-century France. By positing a contradictory point of view (one that is in keeping with his materialist views of the continual flux of the universe), Diderot is championing the possibility of a viable social order that is very different from that with which his readers are familiar.

Throughout the discussion between Orou and the Chaplain, a number of obstacles to communication arise, and each interlocutor is obliged to define terms with respect to his own culture (for example, "religion", "marriage", "laws", "crime", "adultery", and "hospitality").

Célestin, *From Cannibals to Radicals: Figures and Limits of Exoticism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

⁴⁰³ Diderot, 554.

Initially, of course, the two men have great difficulty understanding each other because their languages are constructed around very different worldviews. Accordingly, the discrepancy in their definitions of certain words pertaining to cultural institutions arises because the moral import, or cultural supplement, is always already built into the sign of each word. It is in this crucial space between words and things that culture makes itself present.

It soon becomes abundantly clear that Diderot's theoretical Tahitians are not "noble savages" still living in a pure state of nature. On the contrary, the Tahitians live in a society already governed by rules and conventions. They do not live in a state of pure equality, but rather within a system of social hierarchy that is already well established. As we have just seen, for instance, wealth and status result from having progeny, and thus a woman is submitted to intense social pressure to give birth if she wishes to improve her situation. As Orou begins to detail the many customs that govern marriage and reproduction in Diderot's version of Tahitian society, any remaining vestiges of Tahitian exoticism as fantasies of a lack of restrictions on sexual relations are soon discredited. No longer merely a naïve, mute figure, the Tahitian begins to emerge in the text as a thinking, social agent to whom Diderot endows the ability to logically discuss issues of morality.

Most importantly among the regulations, as the entire system of male-female sexual relations in Diderot's Tahitian society is founded upon the cultural value of reproduction, only those who are fertile are permitted to engage in sexual relations. As we will examine more closely the customs that regulate interactions between the sexes in Diderot's Tahiti, the differences between the customs that hold authority on this island and those that reign in Europe seem to fall into two main categories: at the root of the differences in practices lies the societies' vastly different ways of operating with respect to dynamics between the individual and the

group, and, secondly, their attitudes towards nature. Returning to the Tahitian principle valuing reproduction, the discussion between Orou and the Chaplain indicates that the crucial discrepancy arises from the contrast between the individualistic European culture and the more community-centered Tahitian culture painted by Diderot. After Orou speaks about the unconditional joy that progeny confer upon the Tahitian community, the Chaplain raises an objection:

L'Aumônier: Mais des enfants sont longtemps à charge avant que de rendre service.

Orou : Nous destinons à leur entretien et à la subsistance des vieillards une sixième partie de tous les fruits du pays. Ce tribut les suit partout. Ainsi tu vois que plus la famille de l'Otaïtien est nombreuse, plus elle est riche.⁴⁰⁴

While the European views children as a possible disadvantage because they are not of immediate utility to the individual, Diderot suggests that the Tahitian views the children as part of an interconnected community that gives and takes to achieve an overall prosperity.

Next, until adolescent boys and girls reach a level of development where they are capable of reproduction, in Diderot's Tahiti they are carefully kept separate from each other and are strictly forbidden to engage in relations with the opposite sex. Orou's pronouncement on this matter is absolutely clear: « C'est l'objet principal de l'éducation domestique et le point le plus important des mœurs publiques »⁴⁰⁵. Orou then proceeds to describe the exact practices which operate by cultural signs to organize the "moral education" of the community. In his words,

Nos garçons jusqu'à l'âge de vingt-deux ans, deux ou trois ans au-delà de la puberté, restent couverts d'une longue tunique et les reins ceints d'une petite chaîne. Avant que d'être nubiles, nos filles n'oseraient sortir sans un voile blanc. Oter sa chaîne, relever son voile, est une faute qui se commet rarement, parce que nous leur en apprenons de bonne heure les fâcheuses conséquences. Mais au moment où le mâle a pris toute sa force, où les symptômes virils ont de la continuité, et où l'effusion fréquente et la qualité de la liqueur séminale nous rassurent ; au moment où la jeune fille se fane, s'ennuie, est d'une maturité propre à concevoir des désirs, à en inspirer et à les satisfaire avec utilité, le père

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 559-560.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 560.

détache la chaîne à son fils et lui coupe l'ongle du doigt du milieu de la main droite ; la mère relève le voile de sa fille. L'un peut solliciter une femme et en être sollicité ; l'autre se promener publiquement le visage découvert et la gorge nue, accepter ou refuser les caresses d'un homme ; on indique seulement d'avance au garçon les filles, à la fille les garçons qu'ils doivent préférer. C'est une grande fête que celle de l'émancipation d'une fille ou d'un garçon.⁴⁰⁶

In addition to this careful managing of adolescents in Diderot's Tahiti, sterile individuals are not allowed to engage in sexual relations. Women who cannot conceive, whether by their constitution or because they have reached menopause, must wear a black veil to signal their unavailability. Similarly, women must wear a grey veil when they are menstruating⁴⁰⁷. These outward signifiers manifest a cultural interdiction to whose authority all Tahitian women and men are subject⁴⁰⁸. Just as a woman is forbidden to solicit men while wearing the veil, so, too, any man who dares to approach a woman wearing a veil is, in turn, considered a libertine. Diderot is furthermore careful to suggest that in this Tahitian society, just as in European society, there will always be some individuals who choose to transgress the community's moral standards. In the Tahiti of the *Supplément*, however, the only punishment incurred is social reprobation. In this version of Tahiti, marriage is quite flexible, and adultery and incest are not taboo. Rather than requiring an absolute constancy, Diderot indicates that marriage in Tahiti is bound only by the rule that it must last at least a full lunar cycle. Thus, while Diderot's Tahitians possess a high degree of social liberty in the arena of marriage and sexual relations, his account defends their behavior from being construed as licentious.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 560-561.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 566.

⁴⁰⁸ Bernard Papin points to the utopian character of Diderot's Tahitian portrait, in that its precise system of order is achieved at the expense of individual autonomy. He notes the perfect adequation of sign and meaning (for instance with respect to the system of veils) as a transparency of signifiers that was satisfying for European thinkers disenchanted with the deceptions of their own society. Papin notes, « Cette 'transparence' totale qui fascine les utopistes et que l'on retrouve dans la Tahiti du *Supplément* ne ménage aucun espace de liberté pour l'individu dans sa différence . . . Collectivisme, eugénisme, refus des différences et des marginalités, recherche de la transparence, la Tahiti de Diderot affiche sans complexe son 'utopisme' ». », *Sens et fonction de l'utopie tahitienne dans l'œuvre politique de Diderot*, SVEC #251, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1988, 59.

The numerous customs and regulations mentioned by Orou in his conversation with the Chaplain indicate, as we have suggested, that Diderot's Tahitians have a highly-developed culture ordered by institutions and signs. Diderot's text contradicts visions of a Tahitian utopia and even goes so far as to perhaps mock such hypotheses by revealing several ways that the Tahitians are far from living in a pure, disinterested state, suggesting even that they may be just as shrewd and savvy in the realm of intercultural exchange as their European visitors. The Chief's outrage, as he maintains, « Nous ne connaissions qu'une maladie ; celle à laquelle l'homme, l'animal et la plante ont été condamnés, la vieillesse ; et tu nous en as apporté une autre : tu as infecté notre sang », refers to the literal corruption of venereal disease, syphilis, brought to the island by European explorers, proof that these Tahitians already have a certain degree of experience with foreign cultures⁴⁰⁹. Peter Jimack and Jenny Mander explain that as time passed from Wallis' initial discovery until Diderot's composition of the *Supplément*, the European image of Tahiti was undergoing a substantial change:

The thrust of the *Supplément* is to foreground the negative effects, not (just) of imperial colonialism, but of ostensibly benign European contact with Polynesian peoples. As Diderot forcefully suggests through his Old Man's speech, such contact had been far from beneficial to the islanders. Indeed, over the course of barely a decade, initial descriptions of Tahiti as a place of health and beauty had given way to the recognition by subsequent voyagers of the moral and physical corruption caused by previous European encounters. As is reflected in Diderot's text, Tahiti was being transformed in the public mind from an image of earthly paradise into one of vulnerability to European diseases, a transformation that, as Rod Edmond has argued, also contributed to the metaphorical conceptualization of the damaging effects of trade in terms of infection.⁴¹⁰

The social intelligence of Diderot's Tahitians is further supported by the anecdote of how they attacked and stripped a member of Bougainville's crew, a woman who had been disguised

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 549.

⁴¹⁰ Peter Jimack and Jenny Mander, "Reuniting the World: The Pacific in Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 41, N°2, Winter 2008, 200. For more detailed historical information on this topic, see Rod Edmond, "Island Transactions: Encounter and Disease in the South Pacific," in Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed., *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 2003), 251-62.

as a man. During the initial spectacle of hospitality, one member of Bougainville's crew cries out, as she believes she will be raped. The interest of this episode is highlighted by the fact that it catches the attention of A and B, who comment upon it:

- A. Quoi! Ces peuples si simples, ces sauvages, si bons, si honnêtes . . .
- B. Vous vous trompez. Ce domestique était une femme déguisée en homme. Ignorée de l'équipage entier pendant tout le temps d'une longue traversée, les Otaïtiens devinèrent son sexe au premier coup d'œil.⁴¹¹

Diderot has, through the inclusion of the above anecdote, advanced his own interpretation of the brief mention in Bougainville that the Tahitians looked under the clothes of their European visitors in order to determine if they were human beings like them⁴¹². The interesting slant that Diderot's text adds to this occurrence is that it suggests that the Tahitians, presumably because of their closer ties to nature, are able to ignore the trappings and artifice of culturally-constructed signs, such as gender roles and prescriptions of dress. The result is that the Tahitians are not misled by the disguise, but rather their adherence to nature serves as a faithful guide which accords them a superior access to truth. Diderot intensifies his criticism of European culture and colonialism by including A's comment mockingly echoing the condescending attitude shown by many Europeans towards native inhabitants of lands marked for colonization.

The Limits of Laws and Social Institutions

As the numerous aforementioned examples illustrate, even social groups relatively untouched by modernization function by means of culturally-constructed institutions that are

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 552.

⁴¹² In Bougainville's text, there is no mention of a woman traveling clandestinely among the male crew.

susceptible to abuse and corruption. Furthermore, through the voice of Orou, Diderot questions the plausibility of absolute moral values and criticizes society's appointed authorities who claim to detain access to such ideals. Orou presses the Chaplain on this point:

Hier, en soupant, tu nous as entretenus de magistrats et de prêtres. Je ne sais quels sont ces personnages que tu appelles magistrats et prêtres, dont l'autorité règle votre conduite ; mais, dis-moi, sont-ils maîtres du bien et du mal ? Peuvent-ils faire que ce qui est juste soit injuste, et que ce qui est injuste soit juste ? Dépend-il d'eux d'attacher le bien à des actions nuisibles et le mal à des actions innocentes ou utiles ? Tu ne saurais le penser, car à ce compte il n'y aurait ni vrai ni faux, ni bon ni mauvais, ni beau ni laid, du moins, que ce qu'il plairait à ton grand ouvrier, à tes magistrats, à tes prêtres de prononcer tel ; et d'un moment à l'autre tu serais obligé de changer d'idées et de conduite.⁴¹³

Laws, insofar as they are human conventions, can only ever be, at best, approximations of justice. Diderot insists upon this point by presenting a conversation between A and B at just this moment in which they discuss the affair of Miss Polly Baker⁴¹⁴. The inclusion of this fictitious anecdote in the *Supplément* serves to highlight the approximate and sometimes misguided character of society's sources of authority. A and B pursue this line of argumentation by conceiving of these authorities as falling into three categories whose regulations often contradict each other. A begins by asking B to define *moeurs*:

⁴¹³ Ibid., 556-557.

⁴¹⁴ The anecdote about Miss Polly Baker, although it appears in both Diderot's *Supplément* and Raynal's *l'Histoire des deux Indes*, has had its veracity disproved. The presence of such an anecdote, combined with several other elements such as the mysterious source of this Supplement and the purported twice-translated conversations between the Almoner and the Tahitians, among others, are ways in which Diderot sows doubt within the structure of the text. As in Bougainville, here, too, the questioning of the authority of cultural standards is further reinforced by a questioning of the authorial or textual authority as well. Anthony Strugnell examines this issue in detail, as he remarks how one of the opening exchanges between A and B suggests that perhaps this Supplement is a "fable". Furthermore, he notes, « Diderot, à travers son interlocuteur B, ne cache guère le fait que le 'Supplément' n'est pas de la main de Bougainville, mais une invention où on flairerait plutôt la main de B . . . La présence commode sur la table devant nos interlocuteurs du supplément qui ne semble être disponible nulle part ailleurs, et le refus de B. de le confier à A. nourrissent les soupçons sur sa paternité. . . Il s'agit du paradoxe, une fiction qui est vraie. L'ambivalence de la remarque de B . . . souligne à la fois la nature factice du Tahiti du *Supplément*, . . . et, néanmoins, la vérité profonde qu'elle recèle », Anthony Strugnell, « Fable et vérité : stratégies narrative et discursive dans les écrits de Diderot sur le colonialisme », *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie*, N°30, 2001, 39-40. By sowing doubt within his text, Diderot prepares, on the formal level, his reader to take an active role by working to make sense of the text and decipher the truths it contains despite elements of falsehood. See also David L. Anderson, "The Polly Baker Digression in Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*", *Diderot Studies*, Vol. 26, 1995, Librairie Droz, pp.15-27, and concerning the appearance of this anecdote in Raynal: Peter Jimack and Jenny Mander, "Reuniting the World: The Pacific in Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*. *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Winter 2008, pp. 189-202.

- A. Qu'entendez-vous donc par des mœurs ?
- B. J'entends une soumission générale et une conduite conséquente à des lois bonnes ou mauvaises. Si les lois sont bonnes, les mœurs sont bonnes ; si les lois sont mauvaises, les mœurs sont mauvaises. Si les lois, bonnes ou mauvaises, ne sont point observées, la pire condition d'une société, il n'y a point de mœurs. Or comment voulez-vous que des lois s'observent quand elles se contredisent ? Parcourez l'histoire des siècles et des nations tant anciennes que modernes, et vous trouverez les hommes assujettis à trois codes, le code de la nature, le code civil et le code religieux, et contraints d'enfreindre alternativement ces trois codes qui n'ont jamais été d'accord.⁴¹⁵

B then proceeds to show the process by which the sexual act, an act stemming from the instincts of human beings, became in turn subject to interpretation and regulation by civil and religious authorities. He concludes with the following powerful exclamation: « Combien nous sommes loins de la nature et du bonheur ! L'empire de la nature ne peut être détruit ; on aura beau le contrarier par des obstacles, il durera »⁴¹⁶.

With this statement, B is echoing the opinion that is expressed by Diderot's Tahitians. The discussion concerning male-female relations is but a pretext, a symptom of a larger problematic phenomenon. According to this critique, cultural institutions manipulate signs in order to bring about a desired distribution of power. In the space between words and things (and as we see here, the space between culturally-defined terms that already include judgments and the acts to which they refer), particular interests and motivations intervene, and exchanges become susceptible to corruption. As we will see in the conclusion, Diderot does not offer a definitive resolution to this cross-cultural debate, although he does give considerable voice to the precepts of the Tahitians, who succeed in unraveling the Chaplain's (and European society's) logic and exposing its flaws. In this way, Diderot's Tahitians show themselves to possess a reasoning power equal to that of the Europeans who intend to dominate them. Since social life lies at the intersection between several competing and often contradictory authorities, the

⁴¹⁵ Diderot, 572-573.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 577.

Tahitians advise having recourse to nature as an ultimate order that pre-dates and will outlive human societies. Orou advises,

Veux-tu savoir en tout temps et en tout lieu ce qui est bon et mauvais ? Attache-toi à la nature des choses et des actions, à tes rapports avec ton semblable, à l'influence de ta conduite sur ton utilité particulière et le bien général. Tu es en délire, si tu crois qu'il y ait rien, soit en haut, soit en bas, dans l'univers qui puisse ajouter ou retrancher aux lois de la nature. Sa volonté éternelle est que le bien soit préféré au mal et le bien général au bien particulier.⁴¹⁷

As A and B pursue their discussion, A presses B to judge whether man is better off living a solitary existence in nature or rather as a member of civilized society. B repeatedly avoids giving a definitive answer to A, and A continues to challenge B's propositions, hindering the drawing of a clear solution⁴¹⁸. Both of the interlocutors, however, make provocative statements that could possibly indicate how Diderot wanted his readers to engage with his text. B delivers a call to action to the readers, exclaiming,

J'en appelle à toutes les institutions politiques, civiles et religieuses ; examinez-les profondément . . . Méfiez-vous de celui qui veut mettre de l'ordre ; ordonner, c'est toujours se rendre le maître des autres en les gênant.⁴¹⁹

Consistent with the ever-present concept of the *supplement* in this text, Diderot again warns us of cultural constructs that do not accurately reflect a certain reality, but rather add to empirical phenomena a surplus intellectual or moral value that is then substituted for the natural order. Given the form of the text as a dialogue between A and B, who are discussing Bougainville's account of his travels, it is clear that, rather than simply accepting the explorer's narrative as a faithful relation of empirical observations, Diderot (through A and B) is discussing it, just as we, too, should critically evaluate cultural representations that purport to be objective or natural.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 557.

⁴¹⁸ « A. Ainsi vous préféreriez l'état de nature brute et sauvage ? B. Ma foi, je n'oserais prononcer ; mais je sais qu'on a vu plusieurs fois l'homme des villes se dépouiller et rentrer dans la forêt, et qu'on n'a jamais vu l'homme de la forêt se vêtir et s'établir dans la ville. » Ibid., 579.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 578-579.

While this structure can be interpreted as a call to the reader to critique cultural institutions, it does, at the same time, indicate that such questioning will not necessarily be able to reach definitive conclusions⁴²⁰. Indeed, Diderot apparently wishes to assert the impossibility of ever arriving at an objective truth, because, just like A and B, we only have access to representations, themselves created according to a subjective viewpoint.

Conclusions: An Invitation to Social Dialogue

A responds to B's call for the critique of cultural institutions with an intriguing idea, one that prevents us from reading the *Supplément* as an unequivocal condemnation of European civilization. A proposes the following:

Il m'est venu souvent dans la pensée que la somme des biens et des maux était variable pour chaque individu, mais que le bonheur ou le malheur d'une espèce animale quelconque avait sa limite qu'elle ne pouvait franchir, et que peut-être nos efforts nous rendaient en dernier résultat autant d'inconvénient que d'avantage, en sorte que nous nous étions bien tourmentés pour accroître les deux membres d'une équation entre lesquels ils subsistait une éternelle et nécessaire égalité. Cependant je ne doute pas que la vie moyenne de l'homme civilisé ne soit plus longue que la vie moyenne de l'homme sauvage.⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ Dena Goodman provides a thorough discussion of the role of the reader elicited by this text. Within her examination of this issue, she makes the following key points: "Diderot turned his attention to the rhetorical object of criticism: the reader of the critical text. In Diderot's hands, the dialogue became an extension of Montesquieu's comparative critical method, an extension that transformed criticism into a method for social and political reform. The activity of the reader which had been stimulated by the epistolary text could be redirected into the world through dialogue. For the dialogue, as Diderot conceived it, became a model of active reading, and reading critically, the model of analysis to be applied to all laws and institutions", 171. Moreover, Goodman points out that, although one can be led to see the text of the *Supplément* as a political act in itself, it was, in fact only published post-humously: "And yet the *Supplément* was not itself that political act. It was only an experiment. Ironically, . . . [a text that] demanded the most of readers by bringing them into the political arena with responsibility for reforming it . . . was not read by the public in the eighteenth century", 171.

⁴²¹ Diderot, 579.

Diderot here acknowledges that while civilized man's accomplishments have brought some positive results, on the other hand, our striving will never succeed in making us more than human because all progress entails certain dangers and limitations. The structure of the supplement is the structure of cultural production and corresponds to human desire, or *perfectibilité* in Rousseau's terminology. The asymptotic approach of our ideals which we are driven to pursue will always fall short of its ultimate aim, leaving a space that is infinitely unfillable. This drive to surpass the possible is at once the strength and weakness of man's quest for civilization.

Michèle Duchet interprets Diderot's anthropology, not as an invitation to choose between nature and society, but as centered around a *point d'équilibre*, a concept of perfection that he shares with Helvétius:

L'idée d'un *point d'équilibre* . . . Diderot le voit dans une « espèce de société moitié policée et moitié sauvage », où l'homme trouverait peut-être la félicité, et il reproche à Rousseau de n'avoir pas cherché à « imaginer » une telle société « au lieu de nous prêcher le retour dans la forêt ». A mi-distance de l'état sauvage, vraiment trop misérable, et de l'état policé, par trop corrompu, Diderot rêve d'une société où l'homme jouirait des commodités et des douceurs de la civilisation, tout en conservant la liberté et l'insouciance des sauvages.⁴²²

Within Diderot's materialistic view of the vicissitudes of the universe, he posits a state of equilibrium to which human societies eventually return, assuring the continuation of the collectivity.

To suggest that Diderot's aim in writing the *Supplément* was to deliver a straightforward condemnation of European society by idealizing the Tahitians is, thus, clearly reductive and misleading. His portrayal of the Tahitians serves to unravel the myth of the *bon sauvage* while, at the same time, putting forth certain elements of an idealized anthropological discourse. An appeal is made to the ideal of a society founded upon the good of the community, tolerance, the suppression of interest, and a close tie to nature. At the same time, Diderot's text reveals social

⁴²² Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières*, op. cit., 461-62.

injustices that can result from the Tahitians' customs legitimated by a discourse of nature, for example when sterile women are shunned. In the end, both Europe and Tahiti are criticized, and the framing dialogue between A and B concerning the *Supplément* indicates an intention of inscribing multiple viewpoints within the text. At the end of the work, for example, A and B do not reach any final conclusions but rather ask themselves what women would think of this *Supplément*, eliciting yet another perspective. By turning to the viewpoint of women, Diderot is repeating his previous gesture of giving voice to the Tahitians, again making a move subversive to a previously established hierarchical order. In so doing, he unleashes a forward movement of redefining the terms of the exchange. Diderot's hint towards further difference signals a concern with keeping in motion a dynamic relationship towards power structures.

Diderot's *Supplément* indicates that all viewpoints are partial and therefore do not have a claim on an absolute truth. Yet this should not mislead us into thinking that Diderot was advocating moral relativism, as certain practices such as colonial violence and corrupt authority figures are unequivocally condemned. The complex interweaving of viewpoints suggests the importance that language, in the form of dialogue and debate, has for the governing of a community⁴²³. Furthermore, the *poupée russe* structure of the story within a story within a story points to a splintering of origins that complicates the search for the justifications of accepted discourses. Just as there is a vanishing point between nature and culture that is impossible to

⁴²³ Numerous critics have commented upon Diderot's use of the dialogical form, among them Julie Candler Hayes, who presents an insightful view into Diderot's technique as one which is a fruitful interplay of difference, wherein the process is more important than any resolution. According to Candler Hayes, "Diderot shares with Buffon an intuition of the radical contingency of the connections that we map onto the world; both mistrust totalizing categories and classifications. Unlike Buffon, Diderot does not always attack this approach head on, nor does he have any qualms about appropriating the term "system", although, as various critics have shown, his understanding of the term is not always that of his contemporaries. Much recent scholarship points to his revision of Enlightenment systematicity in his assumption of a mobile, labyrinthine version of events. . . [For Diderot], perhaps "exploring the system" is as important as "changing" it. Nevertheless, while some of Diderot's pronouncements sound resolutely anti-systematic . . . he is intensely interested in multiplying and strengthening alternative connections, *rappports* that produce meaning rather than abolishing it.", op. cit., 142, 144.

pinpoint, there is likewise a difficulty in analyzing the functioning of social discourses that, once created, take on a life of their own. As for Bougainville, traveling in his « maison flottante », the task of evaluating one's own cultural language will always prove daunting, as we are inside the very system we are examining. Similarly, for A and B, over the course of their discussion, the fog lifts for a bit, but then eventually returns and never completely disperses. Like these two model interlocutors, we, also, are called to question the authority of established cultural orders such as customs, laws and religions. Although the words of the Tahitians promote the ideal of obeying the « lois de la nature », the impossibility of defining such standards conveys the message that, as human beings whose thinking is permeated by language, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible for us to break out of the play of signifiers and arrive back at an original stable signified⁴²⁴. In the meantime, however, Diderot does not advocate lawlessness. As Dena Goodman has noted, the law of nature proves insufficient as an authority in that it does not account for the particularities of culture. She writes,

The code of nature on which positive law must be based if the Aumônier's inner conflict is to be resolved is not engraved in our hearts but is simply the sum total of the commonality of all human beings. It is knowable through the faculty of reason, which, as common sense, is one aspect of this commonality. Opposed to this commonality, however, is the individuality of each human being and the particularity of circumstances that differentiate communities or nations. Were human beings simply their commonality, there would be no need for positive law.⁴²⁵

Diderot's call to critical evaluation suggests a proactive role with respect to current laws and customs, a stance whose aim is essentially writing in the margins, debating and amending current laws, in short, doing the best one can in the absence of absolute justice. As with Diderot's text

⁴²⁴ D. J. Adams makes a similar observation about Diderot's problematization of language in the *Supplément*: "... perhaps the greatest irony of the *Supplément* is that the knowledge which the Europeans glean from Bougainville's account of Tahiti is itself conveyed by the very same verbal means which it is one of the functions of Tahitian culture, as it appears in the *Supplément*, to call seriously in question. What is more, the uncertainties which attend the transmission of the greater part of the text amply justify the Tahitians in their distrust of the written word", op. cit., 58.

⁴²⁵ Goodman, 218.

itself, the text of civilized societies has no accessible beginning, nor a definitive ending, but rather can and perhaps should continue on and on in an indefinite process of amendment and reevaluation.

Conclusion

Changing Representations of Non-European Peoples: *Aza ou le Nègre*

As the eighteenth-century drew to a close, the political upheaval of revolutionary France and the increasingly heated debates about the status of the colonies and the institution of slavery were reflected in changes in the way that Non-European peoples were depicted in literary works. As a work of fiction whose narrator is black, *Aza* addresses the question of slavery directly whereas the looming issue was often, in large part, sidestepped in the anthropological works we have examined thus far⁴²⁶. Moreover, due to the narrative perspective, it does not operate within the common framework of comparison between European and Non-European. Instead, the representation of differences emerges from the text as an emanation of the voice of alterity speaking for itself.

Aza ou le nègre was first published chez Bailly in 1792 *sans nom d'auteur*, and an abridged version appeared later that year in the *Feuille villageoise*⁴²⁷. An *œuvre de circonstance*, it surfaced in the midst of debates at the Assemblée Nationale and in the press between the colonialist lobby of the Club de Massiac, on the one hand, and the Société des Amis des Noirs, on the other. The author cedes the starring role to an African, Aza, who tells his own story as

⁴²⁶ With the exception of Raynal/Diderot in the *Histoire des deux Indes*, whose discourse on slavery emerges in later editions as a response to political debates rather than as a concern emerging directly from observations of indigenous peoples in the colonies and their living conditions.

⁴²⁷ Loïc Thommeret, ed. *Aza ou le nègre*, MHRA Critical Texts, Vol. 27, London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2011, 1.

witness of the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue the evening of August 22, 1791, the event that sparked the beginning of the Haitian Revolution.

The slave revolt broke out as a reaction upon hearing of the colonists' refusal to acknowledge the Assembly's decree calling for political rights for free blacks residing in the colonies. After the revolt, the colonist's lobby blamed the outbreak of violence on the writings of the Société des Amis des Noirs, which they referred to as a "secte"⁴²⁸. It is in direct response to these « impressions artificieuses »⁴²⁹ that the author announces his purpose in writing this text:

C'est au désir de détruire ces impressions artificieuses, que cet opuscule a dû sa naissance. J'ai donc voulu prouver que les Noirs étaient en effet malheureux dans l'esclavage et par l'esclavage, et que l'acte de violence qui les arrache à leurs foyers était un crime dans l'ordre de la nature et de la société. J'ai voulu mettre encore, dans tout son jour cette autre vérité incontestable, que l'insurrection était le terme fatal de toute oppression extrême . . . bien plus, que les écrits des sages, loin de provoquer cet état, tendaient à le retarder, à l'empêcher même, s'il était possible, puisqu'ils n'enseignent qu'impassibilité dans les injures, que patience dans l'adverse fortune, que résignation à la nécessité, et que ni Zénon ni Epictète n'ont été des prédicateurs de révolte et de guerre.⁴³⁰

Aza's author thus clearly establishes the text as a political act in which he will appeal to the classical philosophy of the Stoics to bolster his stance.

The author's chosen medium to deliver his message is fiction, he tells us, because he wishes to reach the ears of women and children, surpassing the narrow audience of political tracts and speeches. He explains,

C'est pour eux [les femmes et les enfants] que sont faits les ouvrages d'imagination, dans lesquels la vérité se couvre du voile transparent de la fiction, présente la sagesse sous un visage moins austère, et fait aimer la vertu, même avant que le raisonnement ait appris ce que c'est que vertu ; à peu près comme dans l'étude des langues vivantes, l'acquis de la science en précède l'enseignement. Voilà ce que j'ai tenté dans ce petit ouvrage. Je n'y ai mis du mien que le fil, assez maladroit peut-être, qui lie les événements.⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 16-17.

The preceding lines may bring to mind Rousseau's comments in the *Emile* upon the power of fiction to influence minds in a more immediate way than rational argument, or his reflections in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* on the capacity of theater to reinforce the *mœurs* of a society, whether in the direction of virtue or vice. Further on, we will see how the author of this text relies heavily upon symbolic gestures and images to convey his message with powerful immediacy.

Aza's author employs a variety of techniques in order to achieve his stated objectives. First of all, he begins with an epigraph from the *Aeneid* (*sit mihi fas audita loqui*⁴³²) and appeals to the poetic figure Ossian⁴³³, thus situating himself within the epic tradition as a teller of heroic exploits of great cultural significance. These words, together with the technique of beginning the text *in media res*, as *Aza* arrives among the Wolofs to whom he will recount the story of his servitude, the slave uprising, and his escape back to Africa, firmly anchor *Aza* within the epic tradition to confer authority upon the narrative. With the use of these literary techniques, the distinction between author and narrator widens, as it is paradoxical for a black voice to cite these classical references.

Allowed to tell his story in the first person, *Aza* does not sentimentalize or soften the horrors of slavery. Unlike previous works of colonial fiction, such as Saint-Lambert's *Ziméo* (1769), there is no happy ending reuniting lovers to redeem past suffering⁴³⁴. On the contrary, *Aza*'s fiancée, Narina, is only mentioned twice, briefly, and we learn that she was raped by the ship's captain during the transatlantic voyage and then took her own life. *Aza*'s opportunity to speak allows him to express his suffering at the injustice of his condition, his love for liberty, and

⁴³² Corresponds to the French, « Qu'il me soit permis de parler des choses que j'ai entendu dire », Ibid., 15.

⁴³³ Celtic bard whose poems were claimed to have been translated from the Gaelic by eighteenth-century Scottish writer James Macpherson from 1760-1763. It was later discovered that Macpherson invented Ossian and the poems.

⁴³⁴ Among other works exemplifying the sentimental trend in colonial fiction are Olympe de Gouge's *Black Slavery; or, The Happy Shipwreck* (1786), Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788), and Germaine de Staël's *Mirza; or Letters of a Traveler*. For more on this topic, refer to Madeleine Dobie's *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2010.

his rational awareness of the hypocrisy of the European colonizers. Furthermore, as Loïc Thommeret notes in his introduction, it is by means of Aza's first-person narrative that « le récit évite . . . de subordonner l'apparence physique des héros noirs à l'esthétique européenne »⁴³⁵. In contrast to many of the earlier depictions of Non-European peoples we have seen, *Aza* attempts to free this representation of slavery from textual elements that undermine any arguments for abolition by submitting Africans to European stereotypes and justificatory sentimentalizing.

One of the most notable ways in which the author tries to refute claims that the slaves are merely violent animals and that the Société des Amis des Noirs incited their uprising is by associating both groups with stoic philosophy. After the death of Narina, Aza is overcome with grief and has no will to live until an older man on the ship advises him to be courageous. He asks,

Tout homme n'est-il pas l'esclave de la nécessité ? . . . Et ce peuple féroce même qui nous enchaîne pour son service, crois-tu qu'il en soit exempt ? N'as-tu pas vu la maladie l'atteindre comme nous, et nos rivages couverts de leurs morts ? Puisque l'infortune et la douleur sont le partage de tout homme, qu'importe la dose de nos maux ? Celui qui a beaucoup enduré, celui qui a peu souffert, se trouvent égaux au moment qui finit tout !⁴³⁶

These lines are strikingly similar to the passage in *Emile et Sophie, ou les Solitaires* in which Emile, enslaved in Algiers, contemplates his state of subjection and concludes that he is really no worse off than before, since man in society is already enslaved by its constraints, the harsh products of human passions⁴³⁷. He concludes that slavery imposed by pirates is no worse than the already necessary enslavement of human beings to the unsympathetic forces of nature.

⁴³⁵ *Aza*, 9.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 26-27.

⁴³⁷ « La première agitation cessée me laissa réfléchir sur mon changement d'état, et le sentiment qui m'occupait encore dans toute sa force me fit dire en moi-même avec une sorte de satisfaction : que m'ôtera cet événement ? Le pouvoir de faire une sottise. Je suis plus libre qu'auparavant. Emile esclave ! reprenais-je. Eh ! dans quel sens ? Qu'ai-je perdu de ma liberté primitive ? Ne naquis-je pas esclave de la nécessité ? Quel nouveau joug peuvent m'imposer les hommes ? Le travail ? Ne travaillais-je pas quand j'étais libre ? La faim ? Combien de fois je l'ai soufferte volontairement ! La douleur ? Toutes les forces humaines ne m'en donneront pas plus que ne m'en fit sentir un grain de sable. La contrainte ? Sera-t-elle plus rude que celle de mes premiers fers, et je n'en voulais pas

In a similar passage, an older man respected among the « Marrons » (the escaped slaves living up in the mountains) advises the men against joining in the uprising and amplifying the violence. In the words of the old Natacou,

Les malheureux et les opprimés ne font qu’une famille, vous voyez cette scène de vengeance et d’horreur : vos cœurs en frémissent, et votre pitié s’étend dans ce moment non seulement sur nos compatriotes, mais même sur ceux que poursuit leur fureur. . . . L’humanité plus forte dans vos cœurs que le souvenir des vieilles injures que vous avez reçues, vous dit que tous les hommes sont frères, et qu’il est plus beau de pardonner que d’assouvir sa vengeance. Mais le temps n’a pas calmé ainsi les ressentiments de nos malheureux compagnons. . . . allez donc, et descendez avec eux, non pour participer au carnage d’un ennemi commun, mais pour tarir ces ruisseaux de sang qui abreuvant la terre . . . donnez aux Blancs l’exemple de l’humanité qu’ils refusent de pratiquer envers nous : c’est aux hommes libres à montrer des vertus que ne connaissent ni les tyrans ni les esclaves.⁴³⁸

Again, in these lines, the respected authority professes the shared humanity among blacks and whites, slaves and masters, and urges compassion rather than vengeance. With these words, the author infuses the text with the theme of the common bond of humanity, one that was of major significance in the early years of the French Revolution. Natacou concludes by reminding them that while those implicated in relations of domination are often unable to recognize a shared humanity, it is the task proper to free men to promote virtue and tolerance. It is interesting to note that, at an earlier point in the text, after Aza has received an unjust punishment, his father’s spirit advises him to seek vengeance⁴³⁹. We find out at the very end of the text, however, that in fact his father is still alive. Thus, the only instance where vengeance is advised over tolerance turns out to be Aza’s imagining.

sortir. Soumis par ma naissance aux passions humaines, que leur joug me soit imposé par un autre ou par moi, ne faut-il pas toujours le porter, et qui sait de quelle part il me sera plus supportable ? J’aurais du moins toute ma raison pour les modérer dans un autre : combien de fois m’a-t-elle abandonné dans les miennes ? Qui pourra me faire porter deux chaînes ? N’en portais-je pas une auparavant ? Il n’y a de servitude réelle que celle de la nature. Les hommes n’en sont que les instruments. », Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile et Sophie, ou les Solitaires*, Paris : Rivages, 1994, 79.

⁴³⁸ *Aza*, 34-35.

⁴³⁹ His father says, « Ne crains rien . . . je suis ton père : j’ai été amené ici quelques années après toi : j’ai voulu sortir d’esclavage ; je ne l’ai pu : repris par les Blancs, j’ai été perdu à ce gibet. Bientôt tu seras libre, poursuivait-il ; je te recommande ma vengeance : adieu, souviens-toi de Farbana », Ibid., 29.

The most powerful technique employed by the author to convey his anti-slavery message to his audience consists in examples of vivid signs that constitute an immediate mode of communication. Among the emotionally charged images present in *Aza* are those involving the land. Aza kisses the earth when he finally manages to return to Africa, exclaiming,

Ô mon pays ! je te salue ; terre chérie, je te revois encore ! terre sacrée, qui n'as pu recevoir les os de mes pères, tu recevras les miens !⁴⁴⁰

The connection between the Wolofs and their land is also emphasized, as they explain that they regrettably cannot follow Aza back to his homeland, because they cannot leave the land where their ancestors are buried. This important tie between a culture and its homeland intensifies the message that slavery is not only a crime because people are divested of their free agency, but also because it forcibly takes them away from the land of their community and their ancestors.

There is also the sense, in this text, that the earth has, on the one hand, a sympathetic relationship to human suffering and, on the other, an adverse reaction to human crimes against nature. At the beginning of the text, the narrator paints a moving description of western Africa as a land that has suffered along with its people. He invites the reader thus:

Contemple cette terre naguère vierge et pure, maintenant souillée, triste et déplorable théâtre d'horreur et de désolation. Ah ! si les sépulcres te plaisent, ici la terre en est couverte : là, dans ces plaines fumantes de la sueur et du sang des hommes, des générations entières se sont ensevelies, indignement précipitées dans la tombe pour les plaisirs et la convoitise du féroce Européen.⁴⁴¹

The blood and sweat of the suffering people penetrates the earth and its soil reabsorbs their bodies, oversaturated by an exceptional number of precipitated deaths. The earth is in a relation of continuity to human beings, and likewise appears to react to their deeds. Striking images appear in the text to describe how the African land seems hostile to the Europeans, making them

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

sick with her inhospitable elements.⁴⁴² These initial sufferings prefigure the later earthquake in Saint-Domingue that will create chaos and facilitate the slave uprising. Aza describes the terrifying scene in these lines,

Pendant que je contemplais ce spectacle, immobile de saisissement, la terre se dérobait sous mes pieds ; elle tremblait, comme si une main invisible l'eût ébranlée jusque dans ses fondements. . . . En fuyant, je franchis des fentes où des hommes et des femmes étaient pris et étouffés : là, des jambes et des bras sortaient de la terre ; ailleurs, on ne voyait que les têtes déjà couvertes de la pâleur de la mort.⁴⁴³

The earth is literally swallowing up human bodies, in an apparent act of vengeance, one that must certainly have brought to eighteenth-century readers' minds the 1755 Lisbon earthquake. In return for the injustice of slavery that has disobeyed the natural order by taking human beings equally deserving of freedom and establishing domination and servitude, the earth is mixing up human bodies together in a disastrous calamity that affects all, regardless of color.

Aza represents an evolution in the representation of Africans in that it contains vestiges of the *topoi* present in earlier travel literature and redirects them to suit current political purposes. One such *topos* is Rousseau's Golden Age. The narrator describes how the Wolofs lived peacefully before the arrival of the Europeans (« ses tranquilles habitants vivaient heureux, sans commerce, sans communication avec les autres Noirs de ces régions⁴⁴⁴ »), and the later arrival of Aza upon their shore is a symbolic repetition of natural man's initial encounter with an Other, who is eventually discovered to be a fellow human being. The narrator describes how the arrival of the Europeans forced the Africans out of this idyllic state and incited increasing greed among them:

⁴⁴² « La rosée qui s'attache pendant la nuit à l'herbe longue et épaisse qui couvre les rivages, est pour eux une espèce de poison. . . . La moitié de ceux qui séjournent dans ce climat brillant y périssent ; comme si le ciel voulait punir, par un châtement anticipé, la soif sordide du gain qui les y amène. » Ibid., 25.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

Ceux-ci, toujours en état de guerre entre eux, avides de ces hochets puérils que leur portent nos vaisseaux, plus avides de ces breuvages empoisonnés qu'ils reçoivent d'eux, et que leur pays leur refuse, se livraient de continuels combats pour fournir ces marchés infâmes, où des hommes achètent des hommes, par les plus vils artifices, la cupidité de ces peuples grossiers, achète sans pudeur, pour les transformer en bestiaux, du père ses enfants, et des enfants leur propre père.⁴⁴⁵

Similar to Rousseau's description of the corruption of natural man, the narrator tells us that these Africans were happy and peaceable before the cruelty and « faux besoins »⁴⁴⁶ of Europeans led to greed and exploitation. This passage likewise recalls Montesquieu's tale of the Troglodytes in the *Lettres persanes*. The Troglodytes illustrate the danger of corruption once a naturally-occurring autonomous morality is replaced by a heteronomous law⁴⁴⁷. A similar weakening of natural virtue occurs among *Aza*'s Wolofs, as the arrival of the Europeans irreversibly perverts the order of values : luxuries became needs, and markets became places where even human beings could be assigned a price.

As in previous travel writings, *Aza* contains descriptions of various customs among the Wolofs. Upon *Aza*'s arrival, he is received with a hospitality generous while still befitting the simplicity of their lifestyle. As they receive him into their community, the Wolofs dance for *Aza* and invite him to join them. The mention of these elements signals the desire to convey that the

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁴⁷ Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, Lettres XI – XIV. Montesquieu describes how, in an earlier time, the Troglodytes live in a peaceful, harmonious community: « La Nature ne fournissait pas moins à leurs désirs qu'à leurs besoins. Dans ce pays heureux, la cupidité était étrangère : ils se faisaient des présents où celui qui donnait croyait toujours avoir l'avantage. Le peuple troglodyte se regardait comme une seule famille ; les troupeaux étaient presque toujours confondus ; la seule peine qu'on s'épargnait ordinairement, c'était de les partager. » As they grow in prosperity, however, and become subject to attacks by jealous neighboring communities, they eventually decide that they need a formal system of government. To their request that he become king, a revered elder responds, « Vous me déferez la couronne, et, si vous le voulez absolument, il faudra bien que je la prenne. Mais comptez que je mourrai de douleur d'avoir vu en naissant les Troglodytes libres et de les voir aujourd'hui assujettis. . . . Je vois bien ce que c'est, ô Troglodytes ! votre vertu commence à vous peser. Dans l'état où vous êtes, n'ayant point de chef, il faut que vous soyez vertueux malgré vous : sans cela vous ne sauriez subsister, et vous tomberiez dans le malheur de vos premiers pères. Mais ce joug vous paraît trop dur ; vous aimez mieux être soumis à un prince et obéir à ses lois, moins rigides que vos mœurs. . . . Comment se peut-il que je commande quelque chose à un Troglodyte ? Voulez-vous qu'il fasse une action vertueuse parce que je la lui commande, lui qui la ferait tout de même sans moi et par le seul penchant de la nature ? » op. cit., 31-36.

Africans possess a highly developed culture, and the symbolic value of the gestures reinforces their values of generosity and fraternity.

Among the most memorable images in the text are those related to the body. The degrading manner in which the Africans were treated by their slave masters is conveyed as we learn that they were muzzled and branded like animals. One cruel master even set up a spectacle of body parts in an iron cage, like some sort of horrific zoo, to convey his domination over his slaves even in their death⁴⁴⁸. In another instance of the body as sign, one that functions similarly to the Lévite's dismembered wife in the *Lévite d'Ephraïm*, we learn that the elder *marron*, Natacou, has a mutilated hand. His infirmity is a lasting testimony to his self-sacrifice as he resorted to an extreme means to guarantee that he would never have to serve as the executioner of his fellow men, a marker that confers upon him a special authority.

Finally, and most significantly, are the many scars and wounds upon Aza's skin, which he shows to the Wolofs⁴⁴⁹. At first, when Aza appears before the Wolofs, he is dressed like a European, but his words and his skin reveal his true identity as an African. Indeed, the scars on his flesh tell the story of his past suffering in the most powerful way. Aza's storytelling, rendered even more moving through the aid of signs and images, inscribes within the text a double of the author himself, whose story is meant to elicit the compassion of a European audience. This doubling is nevertheless a paradoxical one, as Aza recites lessons from Rousseau and appeals to the principles of the French Revolution. As such, the veil of fiction is transpierced by moments distinguishing narrator from author.

⁴⁴⁸ « Dans un autre lieu, je vis une cage de fer, où l'on avait enfermé les têtes, les mains et les pieds de plusieurs Noirs qui s'étaient tués de désespoir. Le maître, par une raillerie cruelle, insultant à la crédulité de ces malheureux, qui croyait pouvoir retourner ainsi dans leur patrie, montraient, par ce spectacle, à ceux qui survivaient, que ce moyen même ne pouvait les affranchir de sa domination, et qu'il avait trouvé le secret cruel de prolonger leur esclavage, même après la mort. » *Aza*, 28.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

The Legacy of Enlightenment Cultural Analyses: Lévi-Strauss

As is well known, Rousseau's insights into the study of mankind had a sizeable influence on the later development of anthropology and, in particular, the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908 – 2009). In Lévi-Strauss's *Anthropologie Structurale* (1958), he distinguishes the crucial innovations of Rousseau's thought in a section entitled « Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Fondateur des Sciences de l'Homme ». Lévi-Strauss comments notably upon the methodology set out by Rousseau in his *Discours sur l'inégalité*, where he argues that it is necessary to distance oneself from oneself in order to carry out a study of foreign social groups. He explains,

Cette règle de méthode que Rousseau fixe à l'ethnologie et dont elle marque l'avènement, permet aussi de surmonter ce qu'à première vue, on prendrait pour un double paradoxe : que Rousseau ait pu, simultanément, préconiser l'étude des hommes les plus lointains, mais qu'il se soit surtout adonné à celle de cet homme particulier qui semble le plus proche, c'est-à-dire lui-même ; et que, dans toute son œuvre, la volonté systématique d'identification à l'autre aille de pair avec un refus obstiné d'identification à soi.⁴⁵⁰

By positing the necessity of calling the self into question, Rousseau sought to overcome the obstacles to knowledge posed by prejudices, a concern that preoccupied thinkers since Montaigne. In the process of ethnographic study, the estranged self is able to identify with a different other and gain understanding of it, with the end result that the self ultimately reveals itself to itself as other.

The method proposed by Rousseau, which paved the way for the methodology of all of the *sciences humaines*, marked a radical break with the philosophical tradition of the *cogito*. He redirected Descartes's methodological doubt back towards the nature of the self, rendering the

⁴⁵⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale II*, op. cit., 47.

self subject to the same skepticism as the rest of the world and no longer an unshakeable foundation for knowledge. Instead of taking the self to be the sure pathway to knowledge of the outside world, as did Descartes, Lévi-Strauss asserts that Rousseau articulated better than any other the paradox that lies at the heart of anthropological discourse:

C'est dans l'enseignement proprement anthropologique de Rousseau—celui du *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*—qu'on découvre le fondement de ce doute, lequel réside dans une conception de l'homme qui met l'autre avant le moi, et dans une conception de l'humanité qui, avant les hommes, pose la vie.⁴⁵¹

While *pitié* is a pre-rational quality that makes it possible for one to recognize the human in others, it is only by passing through an experience of humans who are other that one can begin to understand one's own self.

Lévi-Strauss identifies culture as the mode of human existence proper to the liminal position that we occupy, as a bridge between contradictions:

S'il est possible de croire qu'avec l'apparition de la société se soit produit un triple passage, de la nature à la culture, du sentiment à la connaissance, de l'animalité à l'humanité—démonstration qui fait l'objet du *Discours*—ce ne peut être qu'en attribuant à l'homme, et déjà dans sa condition primitive, une faculté essentielle qui le pousse à franchir ces trois obstacles ; qui possède, par conséquent, à titre originel et de façon immédiate, des attributs contradictoires sinon précisément en elle ; qui soit, tout à la fois, naturelle et culturelle, affective et rationnelle, animale et humaine ; et qui, à la condition seulement de devenir consciente puisse se convertir d'un plan sur l'autre plan.⁴⁵²

The most crucial element of Rousseau's theory is *pitié*, since it is an innate force that drives human beings to fully engage with human beings who we initially see as similar to ourselves and, through this unhampered openness, to arrive at a genuine understanding of them as other. This crucial process of identification through *pitié* is, according to Lévi-Strauss, a repetition of the primordial identification of man with his fellow humans⁴⁵³.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 49-50.

⁴⁵³ Lévi-Strauss maintains, « L'homme commence donc par s'éprouver identique à tous ses semblables, et il n'oubliera jamais cette expérience primitive, même quand l'expansion démographique (qui joue, dans la pensée

By passing through the otherness of the other, anthropological discourse recounts the reflexive understanding of oneself that results. It is the voyage of discovery portrayed in Rousseau's fable of the giant in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, one whose movement parallels the development of language. As Lévi-Strauss explains,

Telle que Rousseau la décrit dans *l'Essai sur l'origine des langues*, la démarche du langage reproduit, à sa façon et sur son plan, celle de l'humanité, le premier stade est celui de l'identification, ici entre le sens propre et le sens figuré ; le vrai nom se dégage progressivement de la métaphore, qui confond chaque être avec d'autres êtres.⁴⁵⁴

He argues that by questioning the *cogito*, Rousseau is likewise calling into question all identifications that yield presuppositions in the process of approaching the Other. According to Lévi-Strauss,

La révolution rousseauiste, préformant et amorçant la révolution ethnologique, consiste à refuser des identifications obligées, que ce soit celle d'une culture à cette culture, ou celle d'un individu, membre d'une culture, à un personnage ou à une fonction sociale que cette même culture cherche à lui imposer. Dans les deux cas, la culture ou l'individu revendiquent le droit à une identification libre, qui ne peut se réaliser qu'*au-delà* de l'homme : avec tout ce qui vit et donc souffre ; et aussi *en deçà* de la fonction ou du personnage : avec un être non déjà façonné, mais donné. Alors, le moi et l'autre, affranchis d'un antagonisme que la philosophie seule cherchait à exciter, recouvrent leur unité.⁴⁵⁵

This skepticism constitutes a freedom, on the part of the subject to refuse forced identifications, and on the part of the object, to present itself in its "raw" form, that is, one that has not been determined in advance by any epistemological framework on behalf of the knower.

The analysis of culture according to "cultural languages" that I have developed throughout this dissertation has aimed to highlight precisely this complex character of

anthropologique de Rousseau, le rôle d'événement contingent, qui aurait pu ne pas se produire, mais dont nous devons admettre qu'il s'est produit puisque la société est) l'aura contraint à diversifier ses genres de vie pour s'adapter aux milieux différents où son nombre accru l'obligeait à se répandre, et a savoir se distinguer lui-même, mais pour autant seulement qu'un pénible apprentissage l'instruisait à *distinguer* les autres : les animaux selon l'espèce, l'humanité de l'animalité, mon moi des autres moi. L'appréhension globale des hommes et des animaux comme êtres sensibles, en quoi consiste *l'identification* précède la conscience des oppositions : d'abord entre des propriétés communes ; et ensuite, seulement, entre humain et non humain », 50.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 52.

Rousseau's theory that accounts for both the particular and the universal. While the cultural codes I have discussed do operate as "languages" by comprising certain invariants common to the networks of representations exhibited across many cultures (i.e. that all social groups live in this liminal space of culture, one that encompasses both a system of mental representations and their interactions with the physical world), it is equally important that there is not simply one cultural language. By definition, culture designates cultures, and I propose the term "cultural languages" as a concept that contains within it the constancy of certain structures of human thinking alongside the particularity of concrete manifestations varying greatly among the world's many social groups and the contingency of history.

While Rousseau's contributions have been widely discussed, Diderot's engagements reflected similar concerns, although he approached them from an entirely different perspective. For Diderot, human beings are inseparable from society, part of this larger "organism", and so they will never be observable in a pure state of nature. The hierarchy and eugenics of the Tahitians in his *Supplément* have demonstrated as much. Given his interest in taking a stance against slavery, colonization, prejudice and fanaticism, his interest in Bougainville's *Voyage* and Raynal's *L'Histoire des deux Indes* were not surprising. As a materialist, the artificial fixity of many social and political institutions (such as marriage among his Tahitians) was inherently a transgression of the ephemeral character of the flux of the universe, a crime against nature. The wide variety of customs exhibited by Non-European social groups provided a fruitful context within which to illustrate the contingency of European norms. Diderot's dialogical approach encourages a multiplicity of viewpoints that is irreducible to a neat resolution. Just as the conclusion of the *Supplément* elicits the perspective of women, inviting one to a continuation of the discussion, Diderot's real contribution lies in creating complex debates that escape definitive

conclusion. Together, Rousseau's constructive theoretical contributions and Diderot's deconstructive critical contributions provide a philosophical nexus within which to examine the most pressing issues in European Enlightenment thought as represented in travel writing.

The paradox by which *Aza*'s black narrator appeals to French literary and classical references is the same as the paradox made explicit by Lévi-Strauss's commentary on Rousseau: it is only through an understanding of peoples who are human like us and at the same time other that we can know ourselves. An analysis of exchanges in the areas of commerce and hospitality, for example, has shown them to be privileged stagings of this paradox. While this question will never yield a clear resolution, our examination of its manifestations in eighteenth-century representations of cultural languages has aimed to shed light upon the dialogical process at work in anthropological reflection.

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