



Nature, Otherness and the Death-Drive

Nature,

Otherness and the Death-Drive or the European Destruction of “Paradise”

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Preface: Allegory of the New World

Amerigo Vespucci awakens the sleeping America

(Replica by Theodor Galle after Johannes Stradanus)

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Introduction

Two main issues negatively affect the study of past colonial events.

The first one is problematized by Walter Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* when

he privileges materialist history over positive or evolutionary history because the latter tends to offer a closed, homogeneous, linear perspective of history as well as an overall belief in a continuous positive, development of civilization glorifying the “winning side” of history, while ignoring its “losing side.” He emphasizes the fact that, contrary to history’s positive evolutionism, historical materialism cannot help to notice that:

“Without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have

an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.” (Thesis VII)

He also shows that the past contains the future, that any important historical, genuine event also carries a latent yearning for redemption. The crimes of past events, even if repressed (not acknowledged, legitimated or forgiven) imply their resurgence/re-emergence in the present, albeit as guilt or unsettled debt, in symptomatic or traumatic forms. History is a text writing/narrating itself. It receives its signification retroactively via its readership. As for an individual, the past of a culture or civilization is filled out with the present which fits with the Freudian notion that the unconscious is located outside of time. Here the collective unconscious and the individual unconscious run on parallel tracks.

Slavoj
Zizek adds:

*“With Benjamin, in contrast, the ‘perspective of the Last Judgment’ is the perspective of those who have paid the price for a series of great historical triumphs; the perspective of those who had to **fail**, to miss their aim, so that the series of great historical deeds could be accomplished; the perspectives of hopes deceived, of all that have left in the text of history nothing but scattered, anonymous, meaningless traces on the margin of deeds whose ‘historical greatness’ was attested to by the ‘objective’ gaze of official history.”*

The second problematic issue is the Western obsession of separating history from anthropology, i.e. the study of the conditions of change and evolution of civilizations characterized by speed, from the study of static, conservative, native societies (“*the people without history*”) characterized by repetition. Lévi-Strauss’s use of the expression “*people without writing*” in *Totemism* or *The Savage Mind* meant to avoid this epistemic mistake by showing that so-called “primitive people” are capable of disinterested and intellectual thinking in ways similar to a Western philosopher or scientist.



So with this in mind, let us look at the different ways the “winning side of history” narrates the “losing side;” i.e. what miscellaneous explorers, historians, or authors have written about the destruction of what many called “paradise,” about the spoliation and destruction of “*those who were here first.*” We will focus especially on the destruction of Hawai’i. Using tools borrowed from psychoanalysis and phenomenology (especially the concepts of abjection linked to “otherness” and *jouissance*) we will try to understand the causes of this annihilation. We will also refuse to hypostatize or essentialize violence as such, by considering it as a relational concept and a utilitarian tool of domination.

The Western and Abrahamic Notions of Paradise

Paradise denotes a place of timeless harmony. The Abrahamic faiths associate paradise with the Garden of Eden, or the perfect state of the world prior to the “fall from grace,” that will be restored in the “World to Come,” accessible after death if one is among the “happy blessed ones.”

The word “paradise” comes from an Old Iranian word “**paridayda*” (“walled enclosure”), that the Greeks modified into *paradeisos* (“enclosed park”). In Hellenistic Greek, “*paradeisos*” (????????), was also used in the *Septuagint*. These meanings of “*paradeisos*” entered into Late Latin as “*paradisus*,” then into French and Anglo-French, and later, Middle English, as “*paradis*.” Though originally used in theological senses in English, “paradise” also referred to more earthly states and places of delight as well.

In Islam, *Firdaus* (Arabic: ?????) is the literal term meaning paradise, but the Quran generally uses the term *Jannah* symbolically referring to paradise. However “*Firdaus*” also designates the highest layer of heaven. Often compared to the Christian



concept of Heaven, *Jannah* (Arabic: ????? *Jannah*; plural *Jannat*)—literally meaning “garden,” is the mythological final abode of the righteous and the Islamic believers, and the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Hawwa lived.

There are Abrahamic ambiguities tied to paradise’s “timeless non-space,” since it refers both to a “here and now” on earth as well as to a “beyond in after-life.” It also refers to the eternal dwelling place for the righteous’ souls as well as the place of resurrection of bodies. These ambiguities are reflected in the fact that many European explorers perceived “paradise” to be of this world, i.e. on earth.

Caught between the dystopia of real life and the utopia of Imaginary solutions—what was known in Medieval times as “*le merveilleux*”, a Western myth, incarnating the contradictions inherent to Semitic civilizations, was invented *a posteriori* to explain the origins (or lack thereof) of man and woman. Paradise belongs in an everlasting present located in another realm, called “the beyond”, although many in Medieval Europe thought its location to be earth-bound as the travel-log book of Christopher Columbus’s *Third Voyage* shows. So it should not be surprising to see many European travelers describe the lands and islands upon which they happen to stumble, as being paradise on earth.

In 1445 the Portuguese navigator Dinís Dias reached the mouth

of the Sénégal, which “*men say comes from the Nile, being one of the most glorious rivers of Earth, flowing from the Garden of Eden and the earthly paradise.*”

For Christopher Columbus, the South American landmass was not a “fourth” continent, or an unknown part of the world, but rather a land already “known” by Christendom whose location was until now undiscovered: the



terrestrial paradise of Biblical tradition. In another letter (to Prince John's nurse, written

in 1500), Columbus refers to having reached a "*nuevo cielo e mundo*" ("new heavens and world") and that he had placed "*otro mundo*" ("another world") under the dominion of the Kings of Spain:

"I have found a continent in that southern part; full of animals and more populous than our Europe, or Asia, or Africa, and even more temperate and pleasant than any other region known to us."

In the log-book of his Third Voyage (1498-1500), he writes:

"Holy scriptures testifies that Our Lord made the earthly Paradise in which he placed the Tree of Life. From it there flowed four main rivers: the Ganges in India, the Tigris and the Euphrates in Asia, which cut through a mountain range and form Mesopotamia and flow into Persia, and the Nile, which rises in Ethiopia and flows into the sea at Alexandria.

I do not find and have never found any Greek or Latin writings which definitely state the worldly situation of the earthly Paradise, nor have I seen any world map which establishes its position except by deduction. Some place it at the source of the Nile in Ethiopia... Not that I believe it possible to sail to the extreme summit or that it is covered by water, or that it is even possible to go there.

For I believe that the earthly Paradise lies here, which no one can enter except by God's leave... I do not hold that the earthly Paradise has the form of a rugged mountain, as it is shown in pictures, but that it lies at the summit of what I



have described as the stalk of a pear, and that by gradually approaching it one begins, while still at a great distance, to climb towards it... All these provide great evidence of the earthly Paradise... If this river does not flow out of the earthly Paradise, the marvel is still greater... All these islands produce precious things, because of the mild climate which comes to them from heaven and because of their proximity to the highest point of the earth... I am firmly convinced that the earthly Paradise truly lies here..."

What is also interesting is that Columbus had discovered that the earth is not a perfect round sphere:

"I was greatly surprised by this behavior of the Pole Star and spent many nights making careful observations with the quadrant, but found that the plumb line always fell at the same point. I regard this as a new discovery, and it may be established that here the heavens undergo a great change in a brief space.

I have always read that the world of land and sea is spherical... I have found such great irregularities that I have come to the following conclusions concerning the world: that it is not round as they describe it, but the shape of a pear, which is round everywhere except at the stalk, where it juts out a long way; or that it is like a round ball, on part of which is something like a woman's nipple. This point on which the protuberance stands is the highest and nearest to the sky... The other hemisphere resembles the half of a round pear with a raised stalk..., like a woman's nipple on a round ball."

The discovery of what European explorers named "paradise" alternates between desire and hatred, adulation and perversion. For many, it is as if the *jouissance* contained in this "paradise on earth," exemplified by the mode of life of its native, naked, innocent inhabitants, was unbearable to them—which may explain the rape-destruction of this paradise. The texts of Montaigne, Blake, Melville,



Stevenson, London and Slavoj Zizek illustrate this peculiar and paradoxical reaction as far as the “Hawaiian paradise” is concerned.

Radical Alterity

At the end of the 15th century and during the 16th century, European voyagers and explorers encountered a radical alterity,

which produced an epistemological rift (to use a Foucauldian term borrowed from his archeological/ genealogical method) and gave rise to the invention of a new “otherness” in the Western psyche.

This invention draws our attention to the ontological topology built by the West between civilized society and non-civilized society behind which lurks wilderness, between its policed inside and its lawless outside, between the human and its nonhuman other. How does the former ban, defeat, abandon, or legitimate, domesticate, territorialize the later? More fundamentally, what does the encounter with ontological otherness bring to the notion of “the human”?

Followed by merchants and colonizers, whom William Blake will call men of “*mechanical talent*” in search of slaves and commodities (which the same Blake will call “*allegoric riches*”), Europe exploited this alterity to death (102,103). Blake, here, is the precursor (albeit in poetical form) of Weber’s critique

of instrumental reason, with his theory of rationalization, and Horkheimer and Adorno (of the Frankfurt School), with their theorizing of the world-historical processes of reification. That is to say, natives of all places

will pay an extraordinary tribute to European instrumental rationality or the cognitive-instrumental relation between subject and object (what is usually called “modernization and progress”). European



technical know-how and scientific discoveries only made the discourse of power

and knowledge more efficient, implacable, and global.

These were put at the service of a colonization with one goal: to extract the maximum gold, silver, and raw products necessary to maximize the surplus-value of the whole “Columbian exchange,”

(phrase coined by the historian Alfred Crosby,

describing the interchange of plants, animals, and diseases between the Old World and the Americas following

Columbus’ arrival in the Caribbean in 1492). This transfer and accumulation process will help Western Europe jump-start the capitalist and industrial revolution of the end of the 17th century and 18th century.

From the start, Columbus is clear. He is obsessed with finding gold using Indians as free labor:

*“The captain who went to Cibao found gold
in so many*

*places that no
one dared to guess the number... they
found it in more than fifty streams and rivers, and on dry land also.... Our
sovereigns therefore can certainly consider themselves henceforth the richest
and most prosperous on earth, for nothing comparable has [[ever]] been seen or
read of till now in the whole world. .. the ships... will be able to carry away such quantities of gold
that anyone who hears of it will be
amazed...”*

*“The Indians
returned to their obedience and again served the Christians, and goldfields
were discovered in such plenty that everyone resigned the royal service and set
up on his own account, industriously extracting gold, a third part of which was
given to the Crown..., one man extracted, in a single day, five marks of
fair-sized gold grains, and among them was one worth more than 196 ducats. The
Indians were very docile and much afraid of the Admiral. So anxious were they
to please him that, to oblige him, they voluntarily became Christians, and if*



an Indian chief had to appear before him he endeavoured to come clothed.”

This reduction of the other was also, although later, accompanied by an ontological de-centering which dislocated European culture, drove it away from its locus, and forced it to stop considering itself as the culture

of reference, as Derrida mentions while criticizing structuralism in *Writing and Difference*. From Montaigne's *Of Cannibals* (the first anthropological text) in the *Essays*, and Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Bases of Inequality Among Men*, to 19th century writers such as Melville and Stevenson, and later, theoreticians such

as Sigmund Freud with his *Totem and Taboo*, and Lévi- Strauss with his *Mythologiques*, which form the basic texts of structural anthropology, the best among Western thinkers tried to (re)define and analyze “*l'état de nature*” (“the state of nature”), the savage as “the *child [who] is father to the man*” as A.A. Brill explains in his *Preface to*

Totem and Taboo, and the notion of taboo (“holy dread”, as “uncanny, dangerous, forbidden and unclean” supplement) which forms the disturbing kernel of any culture. These philosophers, writers and anthropologists all bear witness to the obfuscated presence of an image mirroring the

existence of a dark dimension amidst the heart of our own civilization, gnawing at its underbelly. Through this interplaying reflective subject/object image, be it the Oriental civilized or Persian (i.e., the bizarre) or the “*Noble Savage*” (the innocent wild man), it is our own image which is reflected, but in an obverse fashion, showing the negative side of our “civilized nature”. Let us not forget that, as the French playwright Antonin Artaud reminds us ironically, in Asia whiteness is the color of death.



After having jumped ship in the Marquesas Islands (named in 1595 for Peru's Viceroy) and sojourning among the Typee cannibals in 1842, hence the title of his novel, Melville wrote:

"The term

"savage" is, I conceive, often misapplied, and indeed when I consider the vices, cruelties, and enormities of every kind that spring up in the tainted atmosphere of a feverish civilization, I am inclined to think that so far as the relative wickedness of the parties is concerned, four or five Marquesan Islanders sent to the United States as missionaries might be quite as useful as an equal number of Americans dispatched to the islands in a similar capacity." (145,146)

Melville
carries on:

"But the

continual happiness, which so far as I was able to judge appeared to prevail in the valley, sprung principally from that all-pervading sensation which Rousseau has told us he at one time experienced, the mere buoyant sense of a healthful physical existence" (147, 148)

The discovery, by Europe, of totally different "others" with radically opposite (and seductive) modes of existence came as an "initial surprise" to quote Michel de Certeau. Consequently, Europeans apprehended these "savage others" as something belonging to a different "human reality." But, to make matters worse, concepts inherited from the Medieval period, aggravated "natives' ontological lack" (or "soulessness") in the European mind. Timothy Reiss remarks in *The Discourse of Modernism* that the notions of "person" and "self", of "will" and "intention," "are utterly different from what will be found by the time of the Renaissance...", and "anything like discursive control of the 'other,' whether an event in the world, as object or person, or as concept humanly originated, could simply not be enunciated" (72). Pushing further what Reiss writes about the theorization of modern subjectivity and sovereignty, these concepts will

have to await the end of the Renaissance (with Montaigne and the “Valladolid question”), and later the Enlightenment period, before they produce a significant, critical, discursive dimension.

The concept of “other” is itself the result of a confusion in French between the Latin *alius* and *alter* (with the consequence that *alius* is the alien (as other of/in me) while the *alter ego* (present in the French language around 1838) is not the other in/of me but a second me (as proof of the collusion between identity and self-presence). The misrecognition, conceptual impossibility, and religious predetermination of what the other meant, explain (while, of course not justifying), the European genocide of the other. The other is in the subject, more than the subject itself, in ways unknown to the subject.

Ever since those genocidal centuries, Western conceptual thought and consciousness, pricked by guilt and haunted by the massacres it perpetrated, strained to turn the negative reality of its history into a redeeming positivity by forging the intellectual and philosophical tools of a universal liberationist discourse. Of course, modern anthropology scrutinized its object differently from previous discursive practices, but to which use could this new knowledge be put, since it was too late? We now know that we have destroyed a whole humanity and whole ways of being that could have made the total difference in the contemporary predicament our postmodern societies find themselves, as Montaigne indicates. Could we still venture to say that the “*Noble Savage*” did not die for nothing, since an ethics, a psychology, and a philosophy developed out of his sacrifice, for our own good? Most discoveries in history are destructive for the discovered.

Later, the structuralist anthropologist Lévi-Strauss affirmed in *Race and History* that anthropology, as the knowledge of conquered savage societies since the XVIth century, is “*une entreprise, renouvelant et expiant la Renaissance, pour étendre l’humanisme à la mesure de l’humanité*”—“*an expiatory enterprise renewing the Renaissance by extending humanism to the measure of the whole of humanity*”(24).



Paradise

The destruction of the other is harder to understand when we realize that the locus of the other was often described as idyllic or paradise-like. What could have corresponded with the notion of Paradise did exist not too long ago in the South Seas, the Central Pacific and the West Indies, and even the Americas.

But as soon as Paradise was acquired, it was destroyed; and, as we know, there is no Paradise regained, except, perhaps as recovery of a historical perspective as Milton's *Paradise Lost* exemplifies.

As a product of Near- and Middle-Eastern geo-cultures and mythologies, Western monotheism conveys a millennial sense of tragic doom and foreboding disaster, with its inherent and constitutive brand of imperialism and Sado-Masochism allied to the idea of a god's chosen people, as Freud explains in *Civilization and its Discontent*: "*the primal father did not attain divinity until long after he had met his death by violence*"(89). As such, it was based on a peculiar apocalyptic dimension already well-anchored in Semitic civilizations.

But these doom-based religions have nothing to do with the experience, mentalities, and sensitivities of South and Middle Pacific islanders, the West Indies and other "paradisiacal" islands. When first discovered by Europeans, Polynesians seemed to offer images of a humanity in its infancy, as writes the anthropologist Alfred Métraux in *L'Île de Pâques*. During the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the Maoris and other Polynesian groups were known in the West for leading a free and joyous life whose bliss Westerners as diverse as the American writer Melville, the French artist Paul Gauguin (ex commodity trader) and the anthropologist Victor Segalen tried to re-capture, emulate or analyze. For them, the Bible had it wrong all along with its notion of original sin. Even mixed- discourses, meaning those discourses (Foucauldian meaning) by white men who, after having "gone native" and enjoying and profiting from the style of life, sexual largesse and tolerance of



indigenous cultures, still dared to blatantly display a dismissive attitude of superiority towards natives (racism), strangely betrayed a dimension of awe and respect towards Pacific islanders' culture—as for instance, the (partly autobiographical) novels of Pierre Loti (a name bestowed to him by Tahitians); or the novels of Joseph Conrad—although Conrad never lived among natives as such. That is to say that they both inscribe themselves within a certain ambiguity, the ambiguity of desire towards the other, which Saïd doesn't recognize as such in his famous and seminal treatise *Orientalism*, meaning that he only focused on Western desire's negative side. From Melville to Mark Twain, to James Michener's *Return to Paradise* (1951), American writers were among the first to recognize that paradise existed in Hawai'ian or Tahitian waters.

What is harder to understand is the Western reaction to the discovery of Paradise in spite of what Stéphane Yerasimos masterfully explains in his Introduction to *Marco Polo: Le devisement du monde*:

“Dans la vision du monde le merveilleux perçu en tant que réel laissera sa place au réel perçu en tant que merveilleux C'est pour réaliser ce merveilleux que partiront les grands explorateurs du XVe siècle et leurs successeurs. Le réaliser, c'est-à-dire le matérialiser, le convertir en richesses à piller, en main-d'oeuvre à asservir. La vision apocalyptique de l'inconnu reculera avec les limites du merveilleux débité en colonies, protectorats et autres zones d'influence. L'apocalypse, la proclamation du bonheur sur terre, à atteindre par l'anéantissement ou l'asservissement de l'Autre, l'inconnu, l'infidèle, ne seront plus pour demain, elles s'installeront dans le quotidien.”—“In the [new] world vision, the [medieval] real of the wonderful will mutate into the wonder of reality... It is to actualize the wonder of reality that the famous explorers of the XVth century and their followers will travel. To actualize this wonderful reality, means to concretize it, to transform it into riches to pillage and labor to enslave. Confronted by the expansion of this wonderful reality turned into colonies, protectorates and zones of influence, the [medieval] apocalyptic vision of the unknown will regress. The apocalypse, the proclamation of earthly happiness and its fulfillment via the annihilation or the enslaving of the Other, the stranger or the unbeliever did not wait. They became



the daily staple” (32).

The Hawai’ian Paradise

Like any Pacific island glimpsed from far away, over
the sea, over the horizon,
Oahu offers itself like one of these drinks for which Hawai’i is famous.
Topped by green ridges
surrounded by yellow, blue, and aquamarine, it comes as a
gorgeous spectacle worthy of a dream, a psychedelic mental space, a place of escape
from everywhere and everybody, of the
type fantasized in Western art (such
as Claude Monet’s *Nymphs*). It emerges as a Western fantasy, as the arch-place of
maternal desires (What German ontology would call an “*Ur-platz*”), the “true place” that

makes Western children, when still unspoiled by our societal
mores, cry out: “it’s like paradise!”

Like an “*Image of
truth new born,*” Hawai’i comes up, from where

“*Doubt is fled & clouds of reason*

*Dark
disputes & artful teasing*” are gone,
and where

“*Folly...[and] endless maze*” are no more—or so William
Blake would have written of Hawai’i in his *Songs
of the Ancient Bard*. A Proustian time-space where time appears to have been
regained, a utopian time-warp from which fear, mediocrity, disease, and meanness



have been banned—the type of place that motivated Gauguin to emigrate to Tahiti, Hawai'i's sister- archipelago.

The fate of the Polynesian paradise (such as Hawai'i's for instance) underlines the importance of anthropological thought in the critique of totality.

Melville
wrote in *Typee*:

“In a primitive state of society, the enjoyments of life, though few and simple, are spread over a great extent, and are unalloyed; but Civilization, for every advantage she imparts, holds a hundred evils in reserve—the heart burnings, the jealousies, the social rivalries, the family dissensions, and the thousand self-inflicted discomforts of refined life, which make up in units the swelling aggregate of human misery, are unknown among these unsophisticated people” (144).

He
carries on, in quasi Rousseauistic terms,

“life is little else than an often interrupted luxurious nap. There were none of those thousand sources of irritation that man has created to mar his own felicity. There are no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no debts of honor... no deeds of any descriptions; no assault and battery attorneys... no poor relations everlastingly occupying the spare bed chamber, no destitute widows with their children starving on the cold charities of the world; no beggars, no debtors prison; no proud and hard-hearted nabobs in Typee; to sum it all up in one word—no MONEY” (151,152).

Melville's
text echoes Montaigne's descriptions:



*“It is a nation,
would I answer Plato that hath no kind of traffic like, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie; no use of service, of riches or of povertie; no contracts,*

*no successions,
no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kinred, but common, no apparel but naturall, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corne, or mettle” (220).*

As
well as Mark Twain’s sensations, in one of his speeches:

*“No alien land
in all the world has any deep, strong charm for me but that one, no other land could so lovingly and so beseechingly haunt me, sleeping and waking, through half a lifetime, as that one has done. Other things leave me, but it abides; other things change, but it always remains the same. For its balmy air is always blowing, its summer seas flashing in the sun, the pulsing of its surf-beat in my ear; I can see its garlanded crags, its leaping cascades, its plumey palms drowsing by the shore, its remote summits floating like islands above the cloud rack; I can feel the spirit of its woodland solitudes; I can hear the splash of its brooks; in my nostrils still lives the breath of flowers that perished twenty years ago”(121).*

Even, as late as 1906, Jack London wrote in *The Cruise of the Snark* upon sailing into Honolulu:

*“It was the Snark’s first
landfall—and such a landfall! For
twenty-seven days we had been on the deserted deep, and it was pretty hard to realize that there was so much life in the world. We were made dizzy by it. We could not take it all in at once. We were
like awakened Rip Van Winkles, and*



it seemed to us that we were dreaming. On one side the azure sea lapped across the horizon into the azure sky; on the other side the sea lifted itself into great breakers of emerald that fell in a snowy smother upon a white coral beach. Beyond the beach, green plantations of sugar-cane undulated gently upward to steeper slopes, which, in turn, became jagged volcanic crests, drenched with tropic showers and capped by stupendous masses of trade-wind clouds.

At any rate, it was a most beautiful dream... and then the ocean burst suddenly into life. Flying fish cleaved the air in glittering squadrons. In five minutes we saw more of them than during the whole voyage. Other fish, large ones, of various sorts, leaped into the air. There was life everywhere, on sea and shore... A big school of porpoises got under our bow and began cutting the most ridiculous capers... A big sea turtle broke the surface with his back and took a look at us. Never was there such a burgeoning of life..." (46, 47).

The French anthropologist Victor Segalen tried to recapture not only Gauguin's *Tahiti* through his trips and writings, but also the last remnants of a disappearing race under the yoke of European Christian civilization. Segalen was saving the memory of what he considered to be the ex-kingdom of happiness, the place where Westerners could have their private golden age, because, contrary to popular belief, happiness had a history as he writes to his friend Henry Manceron:

"Pendant deux ans en Polynésie, j'ai mal dormi de joie. J'ai eu des réveils à pleurer d'ivresse du jour qui montait J'ai senti de l'allégresse couler dans mes muscles." ("During two years spent in Polynesia, I couldn't sleep for joy. I often woke up crying with drunkenness at the dawning day... I felt pleasure run into my muscles.")

These paradise-like islands worked for French and European artists and aesthetes (the discontented of civilization) as "war machines" against what they felt was European petit-bourgeois mediocracy, neo-Puritanism and utilitarian ugliness. These paradise-islands allow them to



escape the boundaries of strict Judeo-Christian morals and political mores and give a freer reign to their rebellious and anti-conformist sense. Following Gauguin's example, Victor Segalen wrote *Les Immémoriaux* in order to recreate the Tahitian and Polynesian worlds that corresponded to Segalen's own golden age period. Gauguin impressed his contemporaries not only through his paintings, but also through his radical life style, as portrayed by Somerset Maugham, for instance, with his novel *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919). For Segalen, Gauguin was a *Maître-du-jour* (master of extreme pleasure—title of Segalen's "joyful drama, written in honor of Gauguin), a high priest of sensual and sexual pleasures, a restorer of ancient myths, opposed to any notion of original sin and narrow Christian morals, in touch with nature and also his quasi-"Nietzschean" super-nature; a combination of human feelings and cosmic forces, as Freud explains in *Civilization and its Discontent*:

"a feeling of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, 'oceanic'... , the feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole" (723).

But, here, before succumbing to Gauguin and Segalen's seductive discourse, we must avoid the *"fatal flaw of precipitate historicization"*, as Slavoj Žižek puts it in *The Ticklish Subject*:

"Those who want 'free sexuality delivered of the Oedipal burden of guilt and anxiety' proceed in the same way as the worker who wants to survive as a worker without a capitalist; they also fail to take into account the way their own position is 'mediated' by the Other. The well-known Mead-Malinowski myth of the free, non-inhibited sexuality reigning in the South Pacific provides an exemplary case of such an 'abstract negation'; it merely projects into the spatio-historical Other of 'primitive societies' the fantasy of a 'free sexuality' rooted in our own historical context. In this way, it is not 'historical' enough: it remains caught in the co-ordinates of one's own historical horizon precisely in its attempt to imagine a 'radical' Otherness—in short, anti-Oedipus is the ultimate Oedipal myth" (72).



After his journey and sojourn in Polynesia, Segalen (like Gauguin) became violently hostile to Christianity and to Western morality and values. For Segalen, Tahiti was a matrix of joy and beauty, but also a reason to lament because not only was Paradise being destroyed by European colonization, but the natives' decadence resulting from this destruction was used to mirror the West's own decadence (e.g., Flaubert with *Salammbô* through the mirror of Oriental decadence, Victor Segalen with his *Immémoriaux*—describing the Maoris' decadence when their language was devalued and desacralized). As Melville pointed out in *Typee*, Paradise was destroyed:

“...the Polynesian savage, surrounded by all the luxurious provisions of nature, enjoyed an infinitely happier, though certainly a less intellectual, existence than the self-complacent European... the voluptuous Indian, with every desire supplied, whom Providence has bountifully provided with all the sources of pure and natural enjoyment, and from whom are removed so many of the ills and pains of life— what has he to desire at the hands of Civilization? She may “cultivate his mind” —may “elevate his thoughts”—these I believe are the established phrases—but will he be happier? Let the once smiling and populous Hawaiian Islands, with their now diseased, starving, and dying natives, answer the question. The missionaries may seek to disguise the matter as they will, but the facts are incontrovertible; and the devoutest Christian who visits that group with an unbiased mind, must go away mournfully asking—“Are these, alas!

The fruits of twenty-five years of enlightening?

In a primitive state of society, the enjoyments of life, through few and simple, are spread over a great extent, and are unalloyed; but Civilization, for every advantage she imparts, holds a hundred evils in reserve—the heart burnings, the jealousies, the social rivalries, the family dissensions, and the thousand self-inflicted discomforts of refined life, which make up in units the swelling aggregate of human misery, are unknown among these unsophisticated people” (144, 145).



Sexual Paradise's Destruction: Civilization as "Siphylization".

The South Seas were destroyed because contrary to the Western, Christian, and like Oriental paradises, they were sexed and sexual. It, of course, allowed in a first move, the satisfaction of the pent-up prurience of white explorers and seamen and re-enforced their mythic projection on the natives—which they often perceived as a vulnerable, innocent, pliable, submissive, tender matrix of otherness; the other of m(o)ther.

In Western minds the appeal of Paradise's bounty is paradoxically set in metonymic proximity to the lure of sexual bliss, as exemplified in Pierre Loti's exotic novel *Le mariage de Pierre Loti* (1882), a strange compilation of autobiographical memories, sensual and sexual bliss and racist commentaries. This "novel" corresponds to today's novel of exploitation, a mixture of the masculine "Lolita syndrome" with Pacific innocence, sexual permissiveness and a tropical, abundant, "natural" proliferation of sensual pleasures. The myth is still prevalent as shown by the importance of Bangkok in sex tourism.

Paul

Gauguin notes in *Noa Noa* :

"This similarity of the sexes make their relations the easier. Their continual state of nakedness has kept their minds free from the dangerous pre-occupation with the "mystery" and from the excessive stress which among civilized people is laid upon the "happy accident" and the clandestine and sadistic colors of love. It has given their manners a natural innocence, a perfect purity. Man and woman are comrades, friends rather than lovers, dwelling together almost without cease, in pain as in pleasure, and even the very idea of vice is unknown to them" (47).



And
in *Oviri*:

*“Le sol tahitien
devient tout à fait français et petit à petit tout cet ancien état de choses
va disparaître. Nos missionnaires avaient déjà beaucoup apporté d’hypocrisie protestante et
enlèvent une
partie de la poésie sans compter la
vérole qui envahit toute la race (sans trop l’abîmer ma foi)»—«The Tahitian soil becomes little by
little totally
French and the ancient state of culture
is going to disappear.
Our missionaries, who had already imported Protestant hypocrisy are wiping out
poetry without taking into account syphilis, which has invaded the whole race
(without damaging it too much though)»—translation
mine (75,76).*

But sexuality, gendering and race are, as we know,
inter-related issues. After the U.S. toppled the kingdom of Hawai’i, Hawai’ian
culture and population went into a tailspin from which they never recovered.
What is left of the Hawai’ian population (resulting from what is called the
“racial de-Hawai’ianization” of the islands) is miscegenated. There are only
about 7,000 “pure” Hawai’ians left.

Like a critical stone diachronically skipping over the waters of time past, Gauguin’s
colonial critique is amplified by Dougherty’s modern comments, *“because of the white man’s
diseases
transmitted to Hawai’ian women, the act of interracial sex became a
death sport for Hawai’ians... Idyllic Polynesian love had vanished. Hawai’ian
women were rendered barren by the white man’s diseases and their bodies
bartered for cash”* (76), comments
echoing Mark Twain’s past remarks in *The
New York Tribune*:

*“The traders
brought about labor and fantasy diseases... in other words, long, deliberate,
infallible destruction, and the missionaries brought the means of grace and got
them ready. So the two forces are working harmoniously, and anybody who knows*

anything about figures can tell you exactly when the last Kanaka will be in Abraham's bosom and his islands in the hands of the whites. No doubt, in fifty years a Kanaka will be a curiosity in his own land."

Alfred Stevenson, who, like the cineaste Robert Flaherty, wanted to document the destruction of the Polynesian civilization, wrote that Calvinist missionaries

"showed a haste to get rich. The married protestant missionary makes money, he buys land, he builds houses; he dies, his son succeeds him, and the son is seen to till and sell the acres of the disinherited Hawai'ians"

Flaherty did not want to repeat the films, *Moana* (1920) and *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1928), whose stories Hollywood (MGM) had forced him to idealize and aestheticize. About the Marquesans, Flaherty was ready to tell the true story, i.e., the denunciation of the degrading impact of white civilization on the South Sea natives, as Frederick O'Brien laconically laments in *White Shadow in the South Seas*,

"They were essentially a happy people, full of dramatic feeling, emotional and with a keen sense of the ridiculous. The rule of the trader crushed all these native feelings. To this restraint was added the burden of the effort to live. With the entire Marquesan economic and social system disrupted, food was not so easily procurable, and they were driven to work by commands, taxes, fines and the novel and killing incentives of rum and opium. The whites taught the men to sell their lives, and the women to sell their charms. Happiness and wealth were destroyed because the white man came here only to gratify his cupidity" (162).

Consequently, Robert Flaherty, with Friedrich Murnau, shot *Tabu* in 1927.



Montaigne had already hit the nail on the head, in the middle of the 16th century, when, in *Of Coaches (Essays)*, he wrote about what will become the truth of the European discovery of the other:

“Our world has lately discovered another.... As large, well peopled, and fruitful, as this whereon we live; and yet so raw and childish, that we are still teaching it its ABC; ‘tis not above fifty years since it knew neither letters, weights, measures, vestments, corn nor vines; it was then quite naked in the mother’s lap, and only lived upon what she gave it...

I am very much afraid that we have greatly precipitated its declension and ruin by our contagion; and that we have sold it our opinions and our arts at a very dear rate. It was an infant world, and yet we have not whipped and subjected it to our discipline, by the advantage of our natural worth and force, neither have we won it by our justice and goodness, nor subdued it by our magnanimity. Most of their answers, and the negotiations we have had with them, witness that they were nothing behind us in pertinency and clearness of natural understanding (...) and the beauty of their manufactures, in jewels, feathers, cotton, and painting, gave ample proof that they were as little inferior to us in industry. But as to what concerns devotion, observance, of the laws, goodness, liberality, loyalty, and plain dealing, it was of use to us that we had not so much as they; for they have lost, sold, and betrayed themselves by this advantage over us.

As to boldness and courage, stability, constancy against pain, hunger, and death, I should not fear to oppose the examples I find among them, to the most famous examples of elder times, that we find in our records on this side of the world. For, as to those who subdued them, take but away the tricks and artifices they practiced to gull them, and the just astonishment it was to those nations, to see so sudden and unexpected an arrival of men with beards, differing in language, religion, shape, and countenance, from so remote a part of the world, and where they had never heard there was any habitation, mounted upon great unknown monsters, against those who had not only never seen a horse, but had never seen any other beast trained up to carry a man or any other loading;



shelled in a hard and shining skin, with a cutting and glittering weapon in his hand, against them, who, out of wonder at the brightness of a looking-glass or a knife, would truck great measures of gold and pearl; and who had neither knowledge, nor matter with which, at leisure, they could penetrate our steel: to which many be added the lightning and thunder of our cannon and harquebuses, enough to frighten Caesar himself, if surprised, with so little experience, against people naked, except where the invention of a little quilted cotton was in use, with other arms, at the most, than bows, stones, staves, and bucklers of wood; people surprised under color of friendship and good faith, by the curiosity of seeing strange and unknown things (...) Why did not so noble a conquest fall under Alexander, or the ancient Greeks and Romans; and so great a revolution and mutation of so many empires and nations, fall into hands that would have gently evolved, rooted up, and made plain and smooth whatever was rough and savage among them, and that would have

cherished and propagated the good seeds that nature had there produced; mixing not only with the culture of land and the ornament of cities, the arts of this part of the world, in what was necessary, but also the Greek and Roman virtues, with those that were original of the country? What a reparation had it been to them, and what a general good to the whole world, had our first examples and deportments in those parts allured those people to the admiration and imitation of virtue, and had begotten between them and

us a fraternal society and intelligence? How easy had it been to have made advantage of souls so innocent, and so eager to learn, having, for the most part, naturally so good

inclinations before? Whereas on the contrary, we have taken advantage of their ignorance and inexperience, with greater ease to incline them to treachery, luxury, avarice, and toward all sorts of inhumanity and cruelty, by the pattern and example of our manners. Who ever enhanced the price of merchandise at such a rate? So many cities leveled with the ground, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people fallen by the edge of the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down, for the traffic of pearls and pepper? Mechanic victories! Never did ambition, never did public animosities engage men against one another in such miserable hostilities, in such miserable



calamities" (284-286).

These famous pages constitute a blue-print for an indictment of the whole exploration and colonizing enterprise of the West and are echoed by Herman Melville's *Typee*:

"The fiendlike skill we display in the invention of all manner of death-dealing engines, the vindictiveness with which we carry on our wars, and the misery and desolation that follow in their train, are enough of themselves to distinguish the white man as the most ferocious animal on the face of earth" (145).

Melville
adds:

"But, it is needless to multiply the examples of civilized barbarity; they far exceed in the amount of misery they cause the crimes which we regard with such abhorrence in

our less enlightened fellow creature"(145).

Paradise
did not collapse because, as Greg Dening writes in

History's Anthropology:

"The Hawaiians themselves could not escape their own collapse of time. Their past of 1782-1792 was conjoined with their present of 1838 when it was inscribed in their written-down history. The Past



that I confront in making History of Hawaiian Natives and European Strangers making History is out of specific time” (11).

It happened in Hawai'i, in specific time, because of an arcane complex of grossly unequal, brutal interactions, orchestrated by Anglo-American colonial interests between: 1) the Hawai'ian monarchy itself manipulated by Westerners; 2) the Hawai'ian government as it was manipulated by local American tycoons, missionaries, and trading endeavors (whaling industry, sugar, pineapple and cattle industry); and

- British and US colonial rivalries.

In its diachronicity, the text of the colonial history of Polynesia shows the same synchronicity of effects and affects as a violent text characterized by the following rhetorical tropes: irruption, rupture, hiatus, apocope, syncope and disappearance... The same destabilizing and stultifying complex of genocidal de-culturation more or less existed, with local variants, on all other Polynesian and South Seas Islands as Melville indicates:.

“To be sure, in one of their efforts at reform they had slaughtered about a hundred and fifty of them [Tahitians] at Whitihoo.”(19).

According
to Newton A. Rowe,

“The administration of justice in Savaii during 1923 and 1924 amounted to a scandal I should think without modern parallel in a British possession” (226).

**Why
the Destruction of Paradise? Ethics and History or The**



Psychoanalytic Explanation via Psychosis and Abjection.

It is

now redundant to lament the traumatic loss of innocence as Jack London writes later in *The Cruise of the Snark*:

“Tahiti is one of the most beautiful spots in the world, inhabited by thieves and robbers and liars...” (46, 47).

One

has to analyze deeper.

The history of Hawai'i allows us to bring to the surface the symptomatic dimension of Western History (arranged in grand sequences of progress and regress by the Hegelian concept of “world spirit”), and points out the deeply neurotic (and in many instances psychotic) kernel of Western civilization. It allows us not only to map a devaluation of what has been valued so much, Western civilization, but also, more productively, to map out the latent psychological motives behind the manifest content of the ostensible economic and political act of colonization.

As we now know, public content, social causation and private psychological motives are not disconnected. The Western insistence on ethics deals with a subject that resides at the sorest spot of the body politic, of colonization. Not only because it functions as a marker of the abyss between Kantian rules and actual behavior, as if only serving to re-enforce and delineate the immense gap existing between theory and practice, the ideal and its shortcomings; but also because it underlines the complex sets of contradictions and paradoxes that are intertwined within the very Western praxis of ethics. Nowhere is this nexus more absurdly and tragically compelling than in the Occidental history of the Americas and the Pacific Islands (Polynesia).



The origin of the unconscious is sexual *and* political (since intrapersonal, intersubjective and inter-relational).

Consequently, traumas have to be brought to the surface, analyzed, remembered, and shared.

But in order for societies and subjects to learn to modify “their collective and individual cultural psychology”, in order to cast out destructive or “evil”

behavior (criminal, genocidal behavior as defined by the UN Human Rights Commission Remembering in 1947), it is not enough to remember the past., by itself, becomes easily reduced to a form of moral ‘a-toning’ or taming,

which smacks of a pedagogy of prosthetic and orthopedic morality. It “dresses things up” but does not “re-dress” anything and does not offer any explanations. It is therefore imperative to learn how to look at the traumatic past from a different perspective. It is the way the gaze is informed by critical, textual theory that is important, not only the gazed-at-object or subject.

In the Western cultural (individual and communal) super-ego, natives used to exist (and still exist up to a certain point) in a state of quasi-unconscious reproach to the precepts of this prevailing cultural super-ego. When brought to conscious knowledge (in both meanings of the word), in the 16th century (immediately after the “discovery”), “native reality” clashed with these precepts. Then, two things happened:

The spectacle of what the Europeans perceived as Indian innocence, bliss, happiness, hospitality..., seductive at the beginning (especially when Europeans benefited from it), aroused in European psyches, a fundamental lack-in- being and the loss of the Christian *jouissance/jouis-sens* (enjoyment/meaning—“sentiments” which always arouse old demons).

The unbearable, impossible, intolerable *jouissance* of the naked, “feminine,” “promiscuous,” “infantile,” “free-loving,” “unproductive” other had to be

annihilated; through, for instance, the “missionary position” which corresponds to the imposition of Christian beliefs and ethics (and work-ethics through enslavement) on Islanders. It is a Western missionaries’ super-egoic demand made on the natives’ relations towards each other. Missionaries expected that it would produce especially important results for a renewal of the Christian faith (as the Jesuits’ experiments in Paraguay show). It is as if one wanted to achieve through the other, what one could no longer achieve at home (in corrupt “old Europe”). Ethics, here, become a form of self-therapy: one actually administers the cure to oneself through the other. Again the other is but a pretext. The more the native ego seems to narcissistically enjoy, the more he is considered as rebellious, the more severe the commands and the prohibitions of the civilizing super-ego, and the more violent the super-egoic injunction of the “missionary position”. This ideological and moralistic behavior a *posteriori* explains

this famous sentence from Montaigne in his *Raimond Sebond’s Apology*:

“Notre religion est faite pour extirper le vice; elle les couvre, les nourrit, les incite” –“Our religion is made so as to wipe out vices; it covers them up, nourishes them, incites them” (283).

- Natives’ ways of being (or not being) arouse feelings of admiration or abjection in many Westerners. This testifies to the struggles of a Christian soul which can only be extolled through the utter glorification or degradation/destruction of the other’s body, since the *Grand Autre (Big Other)*, as immaterial Ideal, has no body. This paradox is constitutive of the construction of the sublime in art. It has been said by Lacanian theorists that the image is a mode of disappearance of the Other as “*Thing*,” (*das Ding*) in so far as the aesthetic object is not a thing/object but a special mode of apparition of the Other. But the “*Thing*” still lurks behind the aesthetic, valorized or canonized object. Never before has it been illustrated in such a cruel and scopically theatricalized manner by colonialism through the polar dichotomy: *bon sauvage/ “devilish savage”* as illustrated by De Bry’s

engravings. In this case, it is as if a quasi-postmodernist status (synchrony informing diachrony) seemed to inform and unify in a quasi-similar scopic regime, the Renaissance viewer and the contemporary spectator.

Primary drives invoked by these acts of utter degradation have invaded the scene of representation as if matters generally left to the repression of the unconscious had burst through the normative scene. In many cases, the Native (or Indian) is made to represent this paradoxically “terrifying” *Thing* (*das Ding*, coming out of the Lacanian *Real*) via the insertion of his/her image (often perceived as pagan-worshipper and devilish by the early Conquistadors) into the thin interstitial space, the in-between the object and *the Thing*, anxieties and discovery, the subject and his abject. Native human sacrifices and cannibalism provoked terror in the early discoverers who in turn terrorized native others. Not only were the natives put in the position of the other while at the same time forced to recover the gap (i.e. pay the price for the lack their presence opened up wider in the European psyche) “their otherness” made in the subjectivity of the European self, but the missionaries forcefully destroyed the Other of the natives (their God) and replaced it with another Other, i.e. the Christian God. Also, the encounter with the “new world” shook the European concept of God in its foundations for a while. The impact of the new territories and their creatures/inhabitants on European psyches, unlike anything seen before, caused the Europeans

to doubt God for a while, before God’s re-affirmation came back with a vengeance. Extreme violence quickly displaced the bliss and marvel of the first encounter, as the vengeance which followed Columbus first colony’s destiny shows. God suddenly appeared more powerful, impressive and mysterious, especially since He allowed the total conquest of the “child-like” Indians.

From the beginning, the native other was un-nameable (hence their nickname of Indian –i.e. from India), because it was first misrecognized (Indian in the Americas), then misnamed (savage, barbarian, pagan, uncivilized, or metonymized: *Pend d’ Oreille*, *Gros Ventre*, *Nez-Percés* ...) and misapprehended. Its peculiarity was un-sayable. Its status could not be chartered by a system already based on otherness-exclusion in the European Subject. The otherness was quickly tainted by abjection which oozed through the “molar lines” (Deleuze)

innervating the psychic and somatic body and threatening to corrupt the purity of the Occidental body of the Master, channeling through the death-drive. In order to perform this task of “ethnic cleansing”, the Indian had to be turned into a pure object of abjection (sub/ ject /ab/ject /ob/ject) and a sacrificial matrix whose hairless body was already scarified. This amounts to a liquidation of her/his body which corresponds to a psychotic disturbance at the level of the European inter-subjective relations, made possible by the intrusion of the “ob-scene” through *The Thing*. The “Medieval ob-scene”, is *mis-en-scène* (staged) a last time by Rabelais before becoming the Renaissance’s repressed. It re-emerges from the background and invades the center in the colonies or in times of war in Europe through the death- drive (i.e. extreme fatalist violence, and/or apathy to its spectacle). In Lacanian terms (schema L), what Europeans inflicted on the body of native others is caused by a regressive, infantile defense-formation itself provoked by the powerful, seductive, specular image of “Indian otherness” which made the European psyche regress to the Imaginary mirror-stage

of psychic development, when the ego, in order to defend its threatened integrity, must destroy the competing other’s image. Human aggression stems from that developmental stage and dimension. Hence the torture, bleeding, morselling, roasting of the native body. The morselled-out native body is the projection of European imaginary fear of body-dismemberment.

The problem of the objectification of the other is not a problem of object versus subject but the projection of abjection onto the other and its consequential reduction to an “abject object”. This lies at the core of the racist and fascist discourse, already a by-product of the Renaissance conquest of the New World, and tragically unites diachronically the Occidental discourse of/upon the other, from the Spanish exactions to the racial and racist Western discourses of the 19th century. The Native/ Indian was put in the working position of *anastasis*, i.e., of abolishing its own subject while expressing its otherness as object. Post-Renaissance man invented the Indian by positing him/her as an “it,” like a perspectival focal point of disappearance of the Western man’s own ego. The sacrificial Indian mirrors as in a pictorial *mise-en-abyme* (interior duplication) the Post-Renaissance man’s de-composition.

This also points to the *jouissance* of the psychotic European “Master-Subject” (be he Portuguese, Spanish, French, Protestant victim or Catholic victimizer, or *vice versa*), who is already erring in the “future” land of fascism. De Bry’s engravings for instance provide graphic examples which must not be read as the realist or even realistic rendition-depiction of an anthropological enterprise before the letter; as for instance a certain discourse on native cannibalism (The *Caribs*) which would have contaminated the Spanish and by extension, European, conquerors themselves. As Tom Conley puts it in his commentary upon De Bry’s engravings, “*a metaphoric second order of language is embedded under seemingly transparent signs which define fields of both discourse and visibility*” (23). European mythic language and obfuscated self-reflexivity speak under the surface of these “*singularities*”. Something deeper lies (in both meanings of the verb) beneath the self-enclosing and self-legitimizing capsules and is invested in the allegory of these images.

The “Image of the Indian” here functions as a pretext. Its situation of other, set in another world, topsy-turvy (at the antipodes), offers the space of a sub-text. Its liminality provides a free subliminality for the safe and securing voyeuristic enjoyment of what Europe had in fact invented and exported. To avoid going through the ordeal of looking into it himself, the European projected his own lack onto the Indian as Montaigne explains.

The collective body of the European forms a leaking vessel. It conjures up a wholeness paradoxically comprised of a fullness of holes. In certain instances, the only “solution” is to psychotically fill up where it lacks. This partly explains the violent proliferation of images of mutilation, bodily scattering, violation through orifices’ penetration, etc. The impossibility to know (of) the other is compensated by anthropophagia, which is a magical, archaic (primary) way of ingesting the other experienced as an *Imaginary* and irremediable loss and lack, (at the level of *object a*, to use Lacanian terminology). What, in the minds of the European conquistadores and colonizers, was perceived as a feminine-type of passivity in the behavior of the Indians, provoked intense psychotic

acts of aggression among the Europeans. This “ir-reason” arising from foreclosed “ir-real” drives, had to be compensated metaphorically, and also less metaphorically, i.e. metonymically at the level of the mouth, the anus and the stomach. De Bry’s representations of cannibalism among the Amerindians in fact conjure up a fantasy of cannibalism of the European onto the Amerindians.

The gentility and openness of the first Amerindian populations directly clashed with the aggressive activities culturally defining European manliness (the knight).

To repeat the words of Julia

Kristeva, the Other occupies the place of the Mother.

In the Occidental discourse, the Indian is given a strange space which tends to invert the *chora*. It is Plato’s term (*Timeus*, 48-53) standing for the prohibition placed on the maternal body (incest taboo) which tends to prevent auto-eroticism. This space ends up in producing in the Occidental conqueror and colonist an effect which tends to mix the “pleasure principle” with the “death drive.”

What the psychotic discourse tells us without mistake is that, fundamentally, the image has nothing to do with unity or identity.

- Once natives are destroyed, one witnesses feelings of Christian guilt through the redeeming of the sacrificed natives who then serve as introspective mirror for Western ontology— for instance Gauguin’s famous sentence in his equally famous painting (“*D’où venons-nous?* (Where are we coming from?), *Que sommes-nous?* (Who are we?), *Où allons-nous?* (Where are we going?). It functions as signifier of lost paradise and innocence, reminiscent of Blake’s project. This is, of course, re-enforced by the sense of guilt as explained by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*:

“...any kind of frustration, any thwarted instinctual satisfaction, results, or may result, in a heightening of the sense of guilt. A great theoretical simplification will, I think, be achieved if we regard this as applying only to the aggressive instincts, and little will be found to contradict this assumption. For how are we to account, on dynamic and economic

grounds, for an increase in the sense of guilt appearing in place of an unfulfilled erotic demand?" (85).

In order to study the Fall of man from Grace and Paradise (one's fall) one has to cause the other to fall as Greg Dening explains in *History's Anthropology*:

"Natives in anthropology were as revealing of human nature as Strangers, and that was an affront to somebody who thought human nature was enshrined in Adam Smith" (98).

- The special unbearable *jouissance* of the Aztecs and the Mayans with their rich city life and human sacrifices, of the Amerindians, of the Pacific Islanders, the tribal and ritualistic life of the African negro, brought about, in the European psyche, a confrontation with the Real (the unbearable, unspeakable hard kernel within reality—e.g. Kurtz's "*Horror*" in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*). The West was already embarked in a pursuit/discovery of the Real which amounted to a total annihilation of otherness carried on with a self-destructive fury, since the Real thing is another name for the void.

This European, unconscious passion for the Real, which is self-destructive, activates aggression—hence the infinite bodily pain (from rape and torture to genocide and enslavement) inflicted on the body of the "native other" or the Negro's body as if the slave's body was immortal in its infinite capacity to endure ill-treatment. On it was inscribed the *corps-jouissif* (enjoying body) of the native matrix.

- Two types of economy and exchange confront each other in the discovery/invention of the other. Two different modes of being, way of enjoying, and "world-sense-making" confronted each other—the European one being more restrictive, focused, and less tolerant than the other.



European civilizations are characterized by a restricted (market) economy and a symbolic exchange; the native ones by a libidinal (general) economy, or an economy of the gift—i.e., the impossible, unaccountable act that subverts the closed economy of the West.

The restricted, symbolic exchange-based and market-economy characteristic of a European civilization and closed mentalities could not make place for the libidinal, general economy of Indian civilizations more open since based on the “*dépense*” (*spending*), and the sumptuary economy of the gift (Marcel Mauss, George Bataille and structural anthropologists). By European standards, the “act of the gift” was unaccountable and subversive of European values and class-distinction; of its closed/restricted economy.

In fact, it came as a living reproach (especially when sexual); and especially since the native gift of total opening/welcome to/of the other precludes any actual counter-gift, compensation, returns or thanks—unless one practices a gift-based economy oneself. The European symbolic system and economy had no place for the native libidinal/total/excessive gift. At first, the only way Europeans paid back the Indians was to throw trinkets and bells at them: derision and mockery in exchange for “essentials,” water, food, sex, and gold. Therefore logically, this native-gift-libidinal-economy induced enjoyment and profiteering at first, then resentment, and then horror (at oneself for having benefited from their “gift,” then

at the “native others” for having let them pollute the European

self). To avoid having European subjectivity and logic blown apart, European logic had to turn the chairs around and blow the other apart; its *raison-d'être*. Then the European death-drive took over: perverse or psychotic terror directed on the Indian body accompanied by the passivity and indifference of most explorers/colonists to the spectacle of the horrors inflicted on the Indian body. The only way to re-pay an unpayable debt (a “non-economical expenditure”) was to go onto the other side of things (what Bataille calls the *part maudite*—*accursed share*).



The exchange changed nature. It left the Symbolic realm to dwell on the fringes of the Real domain; to pass onto the Other scene (i.e. the unconscious scene) not the scene of the other: blood against gold and silver—a pound of flesh against ounces of gold.

The pure gift of the native libidinal economy precluded any actual counter-gesture, allowed for no compensation, no return thanks, and, besides, cannot even be acknowledged as gift by definition. This, of course, blew European logic apart, since its economy and logic had no place for the libidinal/total/excessive gift. It induced resentment. In a way, European violence can be understood, in the unconscious scene (not the scene of the other but the Other scene) as the non-economical expenditure or repayment of an Imaginary and Symbolic debt so incurred. It then took the tragic form of an unconscious *passage à l'acte* (irrational acting out).

Conclusion

Although, if one wants to find an equivalent negative dimension in Hawai'iian and Tahitian ontology (in fact more fatalistic and realistic than negativistic), their islands (the land and its metonymy: power, autonomy, equilibrium, vital force and danger—i.e., *mana*) were always in danger of being repossessed by the sea. As

Kaopulupulu, one of the chief priests of Hawai'i (murdered in 1792 during internal tribal wars for supremacy of the islands), said to his son, while making a pact with him to die, in a strange premonition, as reported by Dening:

“Take a deep breath and give your body to the sea. The land is the sea’s” (11).

That is to say that anything that ever threatens Hawai'i (hurricanes, tsunamis, gods, white men...) can only come from the sea, from beyond the horizon:



“It was mythic History he was making. He called on deep metonymies to sustain it. “Land”—legitimate authority, native people, nurturing force—was being possessed by “sea”—usurping power, violence, strangers from afar. In the later memory, his History was seen as prophecy. Native Hawai’i would be possessed by European strangers” (54).

As Samuel Kamakau reports, Kaopulupulu prophesized, *“White men would become rulers, the native population would live like fishes in the sea [meaning landless], the line of chiefs would come to an end, and a stubborn generation would cause the native race to dwindle” (76).*

In fact, we could here add Dening’s remark:

“all over the Polynesian Pacific the European Strangers came in the lightning and thunder of their arms. All over the Pacific, and in Hawai’i, there was an easy appropriation of the myths of thunder to the Strangers. There was an easy sacramentalizing of their symbols of power to signs of divine presence” (39).

One should, however, distinguish between Hawai’ian cosmology (where sea and land interact) and a special, vague and ominous threat located beyond the horizon. In that aspect, Pacific Islanders’ beliefs were more prophetic than negative, as such, and can be compared to the Meso-American Indians’ prophecies who expected white, bearded gods to come back from the East. When Captain Cook came ashore in Hawai’i in 1779 (third voyage), he and his men were believed to be gods. In fact, Cook had willingly entered the game, pretended to be one, in body and mind:

“an impression of wonder and of dread having been made, Captain Cook and his men found little difficulty in having intercourse with the people as they chose” (21).

Hawai'ians who participated in the killing of three crew members from Cook's *Daedalus*, in Waimea bay (Oahu island), in 1792, said later:

"Say, they are groaning, perhaps they are human. And we thought they were gods because of their sparkling eyes... [upon seeing the Daedalus fire his guns in retaliation]... We probably will be saved because these gods have died or they would have stayed and all of us would have been killed," (Dening, 21).

By playing God, Cook was taunting death—and death he did receive, because there is a price to pay for playing God. By entering into the Real, he got an answer from the Real (to use a Lacanian term) but in an inversed manner. The death of God was already in the air: the French Revolution will vote the death of the King (God's representative on earth) one year later (1793). Ironically, the Pacific Islands were the last place on earth where the white man could still play God.

Cook died Feb 14th 1779 in the Kealakekua Bay on the West coast of the island of Hawai'i. Victor Segalen's quote in his *Immémoriaux* shows that official Western history clashes with numerous other Western renditions of the same event, pointing to the covering-up of the negative side of Western colonial history:

"Nous avons tous pleuré sa mort. Nous avons séparé ses os, détaché et brûlé la chair, comme nous faisons pour nos propres chefs lorsqu'ils mouraient. Nous le prenions pour le dieu Rono, nous l'adorions come tel et après sa mort nous avons vénéré ses os.» (We all cried his death. We sorted out his bones, flayed them and burned the flesh as we do for our own chiefs after their death. We thought he was the god Rono and we adored him as such. After his death we adored his bones) (249).



Although Hawai'ians were afraid to become like "*Amerindians, a race without history*," (Dening, 59), their civilization was destroyed by the same enemy and the same pattern of cause- effects. In a remote age, Moses liberated his people by giving them their religion and their laws. Westerners liberated Hawai'ians from themselves ("primitivism" and "tribalism") by bringing them Christianity, syphilis and death, i.e., "civilization", or what some French anthropologists called "*syphilization*".

Endnotes

Part of this essay was read for the Epis 2018 CONFERENCE—
from Missoula via Zoom, July 27-28 2018.

Amerigo Vespucci (~1454-1512) proved that Columbus had run into a new world and not Asia as the latter believed. In his honor, the new continent was named after him.

Slavoj Zizek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso 1989.
160, 161.

Why did the rise of Europe between 800-1400 A.D. turn into an economic and military superiority directed towards the greedy, bloody conquest of the "non-white other?" Eric Wolf's *Europe & the People Without History* (1982) criticizes Jared Diamond's response to Yali's question "Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?" in his *Guns, Germs and Steel* (1997). He criticizes Diamond who thinks that European superiority is due to pure geographical contingencies, as well as Ruth Benedict (*Patterns of Culture*) who attributes the economic/technological/cultural weaknesses of conquered peoples/cultures to their isolation. But Wolf himself ignores the socio-cultural and economic-political European framework which forged at the end of the Middle-Ages a specific mode of aggressive subjectivity and rationality and a "pre-technological," "pre-modern" capitalist system with its



inherent, implacable logic of total and global expansion/exploitation. Their conjugated effects brought to Europe wealth accumulation via free labor (slavery) and surplus-value (gold/silver/raw materials). One had to wait for Franz Fanon to initiate a long process of deconstruction indicting the whole production of Western subjectivity and colonial exploitation with its episteme of alter-ego-inferiorizing.

Kirkpatrick Sale. *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy*. Knopf. 1991. Front page inscription.

An early Greek translation of Jewish scriptures in reference to the Garden of Eden.

iii Jean Delumeau. *History of Paradise*. University of Illinois Press: Urbana. 2000.

Eric Axelson. Prince Henry the Navigator and the Discovery of the Sea Route to India. *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 127, No. 2. Jun. 1961. Blackwell and The Royal Geographical Society/ Institute of British Geographers. 145-155.

Columbus 1500's letter to the nurse (in Major, 1870. 154)— Columbus located Paradise at the mouth of the Orinoco river.

Allegory of the New World by Amerigo Vespucci. *Mundus Novus* letter. 1503.

Christopher Columbus. *The Four Voyages*. J.M. Cohen's translation. Penguin Books. 1969. 220-224.



Christopher Columbus. *The Four Voyages*. J.M. Cohen's translation. Penguin Books. 1969. 217-218.

Nasa satellite-photos of the earth, showed that the globe is not only oblate—wider at the equator than pole-to-pole, but also egg or pear shaped— slightly wider just south of the equator. “He made the earth egg-shaped.” Quran (79:30).

Longer version of a paper read at the PAMLA Conference on History/ Anthropology/ Literature criss-crossings, San Francisco State University, November 5-8 2009.

A
Memorable Fancy in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

Christopher Columbus. *The Four Voyages*. J.M. Cohen's translation. Penguin Books. 1969. 157, 259.

: “Its inhabitants [of Nukuheva, in the Marquesas] have become somehow somewhat corrupted, owing to their recent commerce with Europeans; but so far as regards their peculiar customs and general mode of life, they retain their original primitive character, remaining very nearly in the same state of nature in which they were first beheld by white men.” Herman Melville. *Typee*. New York: Signet Classic, 1964. 24.

Sigmund Freud. Preface of the Translator to *Totem and Taboo*. A Vintage Books. Knopf. New York. 1946.
P.xiv. Freud himself was guilty of reductionism, in that he believed in a Comte-like scheme of progress, postulating an early animistic phase of human civilization followed by a religious one, then superseded by the age of sciences.



Freud equates the primitivism of human societies with the childhood of individual infancy. By the same token, taboo and neurosis shared the same structure, as if obsessional neurosis was a private religion.

Montesquieu. *Les Lettres Persanes*. 1721. Antonin Artaud. *The Theatre and its Double*.

Michel de Certeau. *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*. U. of Minnesota: Minneapolis. 1986.

The “Valladolid Controversy” (1550–1551) held in Valladolid (Spain) opposed two main attitudes towards the Americas’ conquest. The Dominican friar and Bishop of Chiapas (Mexico) Bartolomé de las Casas, influenced by the School of Salamanca’s Humanism argued that the Amerindians enslaved by the *encomiendas*’ system had a soul, and consequently were free men. Since free in the natural order, they deserved the same treatment as other men, according to Catholic theology, and therefore could not be enslaved. Opposing him was the fellow Dominican Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who, also based his arguments on Humanism and Aristotle. He insists that Indians were natural slaves, and therefore could be reduced to slavery/ serfdom in accordance with Catholic theology and natural law. Natives’ humanity had already been established by the papal bull *Sublimus Dei* (1537), banning slavery, but without success. King Charles V of Spain wanted to prohibit the harming of natives, and called a Junta (Jury) of eminent theologians to issue a ruling on the controversy. Las Casas’s position found support from the monarchy and the Catholic Church, who wanted to control the power of the *encomenderos*, while Sepúlveda’s arguments defended the colonists and landowners’ interests. Las Casas objected, arguing that Aristotle’s definition of the

“barbarian” and the natural slave did not apply to the Indians, who, as rational beings, should be Christianized without coercion. In the end, both parties declared they had won the debate, but neither received the outcome they desired. The conclusions reached by the Pope’s envoy paradoxically opened up Africa to the slave-trade of Blacks by European and New World colonists, i.e. what is known as the “triangular commerce.”



For more on the topic, consult Steve Nicholls. *Paradise Found: Nature in America at the Time of Discovery*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 2009.

Letter
to Henry Manceron, Sept. 23 1911.

John Laffey. Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and its Discontented*. Black Rose books: Montreal, 1966.

Remark made by Chantal Spitz in « Rarahu iti e autre moi-même ». First published (abridged version) in the *Bulletin de la Société des Études Océaniques—285/286/287*, a special issue devoted to *The Marriage of Loti* (apr.-sept.2000), p. 219 to 226. The integral version is published in *Ile en Ile*. Print.

Gauguin wrote the romanticised journal *Noa Noa* (Tahitian for “fragrance”) accompanied by a series of ten woodcuts, to examine his Tahitian experience.

Oviri, 1894. Water color monotype heightened with gouache on Japan paper on board (private collection).

In 1960 the U.S. Census eliminated the category called Hawai’ian, and listed the few remaining Polynesians of Hawai’ian birth under the heading Others, although the U.S. census for 1990 lists 138,742 “Hawai’ians” in Hawai’i. In 1980 only 7,816 “pure” Hawai’ians were registered.

Mark Twain. *New York Tribune*. January 9, 1873. Quoted in the *California Journal*, Aug. 6, 1869. Print.



From

a never published and never finished work entitled *The South Seas*. Quoted by Michael Dougherty. *To Steal a Kingdom*. Island Style Press: Waimanalo, Hawai'i, 1992. 175. Print

Tabu (1931) is a film first conceived by two great filmmakers, but essentially made by only one, *Tabu* is the last great silent film (released four years after the end of the silent film era). *Tabu* had a complex genesis. It started with the impossible task of combining two radically different approaches: the one of Robert Flaherty (an American documentarist) and the one of F.W. Murnau (an expressionist, supernaturalist German film-maker). After selecting the location (atoll of Bora-Bora in the South Seas), collaborating on the story, and doing some preliminary photography, Flaherty withdrew, leaving Murnau to finish this tale of forbidden love and implacable retribution in an earthly paradise.

Non-trained natives were used as actors. The movie was shot in 1927. This very beautiful movie completes a spiritual trilogy begun with *Nosferatu* (1921-22) and *Sunrise* (1927--Murnau's other films of young couples drawn asunder by phantoms. The cameraman Floyd Crosby won an Academy Award® for his cinematography. Murnau was killed in a car wreck just before *Tabu*'s release. All the more tragic is the fact that Murnau's original, uncut version was never publicly seen, until Milestone Film & Video's restoration in 1990.

Illustrations by Theodor de Bry and sons of the "Spanish Black Legend" by Bartholomé de Las Casas,

Narratio

regionum indicarum per Hispanos... Frankfurt, 1598.

"I captured a very beautiful Carib woman, whom the said Lord Admiral gave to me. When I had taken her to my cabin she was naked—as was their customs. I was filled with a desire to take my pleasure with her and attempted to satisfy my desire. She was unwilling, and so treated me with her nails that I wished I had never begun. But—to cut a long story short—I then



took a piece of rope and whipped her soundly, and she let forth such incredible screams that you would not have believed your ears. Eventually we came to such terms, I assure that you would have thought she had been brought up in a school for whores.” Christopher Columbus. *The Four Voyages*. J.M. Cohen’s translation. Penguin Books. 1969. 139.

Something

Roland Joffé’s film *Mission* (1986) tried to illustrate.

De Bry’s *Grands Voyages in Brazil* and his illustration of the Spanish “Black Legend”—1596.

Julia Kristeva’s work on abjection (*Power of Horror*) provides more details on the psychotic process.

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(without intent to make a bad pun).

Victor Segalen. *Les Immémoriaux--Cycle Polynésien*. Robert Laffont: Paris, 1999 Print

Even today, one can read posters and fender-stickers claiming that Hawai’ians are not Indians, a term used by most Westerners until the mid-19th century.

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