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CROWD SCENES: PACIFIC COLLECTIVITY AND EUROPEAN ENCOUNTER

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This essay looks at the phenomenon of the Pacific crowd as registered within eighteenth-century voyage accounts. The experience of the crowd on the beach—an experience of being overwhelmed—was integral to European encounters with Pacific islanders. However, the impact of the crowd has been neglected within Pacific scholarship, which has not accessed the insights of crowd theory within analyses of contact. Concomitantly, crowd theory ignores the peripheral crowd scene. The crowd has been theorized as a predominantly metropolitan phenomenon and historicized in the context of (primarily industrial) urbanization. Through close textual analysis of a number of European voyage texts, particularly Bligh's account of the *Bounty* voyage, the essay asks what kinds of reading might be produced if we acknowledge the crowd as material force and rhetorical figure within imperial encounter and discourse.

Scene I: The Beach

> *Only the mass makes it possible for the sexual object to become intoxicated with the hundred stimuli which it produces.*
>
> —Walter Benjamin

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

> As we came near the shore, the number of islanders surrounding our ships encreased. The periguas were so numerous all about the

> ships, that we had much to do to warp amidst the croud of boats and the noise. . . . The periguas were full of females ... Most of these fair females were naked; for the men and the old women that accompanied them, had stripped them of the garments which they generally dress themselves in. (Bougainville 1967:217–218)

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

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

The formal landing must now figure as a reenactment of the cook's first encounter; an official public undressing that more successfully channels the narcissistic thrill produced by the fascination of the crowd, by recuperating this fascination as a form of tribute rather than recognition.

Bougainville and his crew experience arrival through a staged series of crowd scenes—in harbor and on shore, official and unofficial—that are not simply imperial triumphal displays. Against the backdrop of the crowd, in a spirit of "intoxication" that appears oblivious to the distinctions of race, class, and sex, individuals engage in a kind of competitive self-objectification that risks abashment in pursuit of exaltation. The crowd here—primarily feminine, and both importunately and generously seductive—is in distinct contrast to the version of the Tahitian crowd offered by the crew of the English vessel *Dolphin*, who beat the French to Tahiti by almost a year. In George Robertson's account of the English visit, the boats that crowd around the *Dolphin* are manned primarily by males. When women are proffered it is as a lure, which must initially be ignored in the interests of safety:

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

Robertson registers a negative experience of Tahitian curiosity, as both potentially and literally obstructive: "I was amongst the Canoes and all of them stairing at me, several of them came round me and some were so near that I hade not roum to throw the Lead" (p. 152). In Bougainville's text, threat becomes, bathetically, an isolated case of performance anxiety. The current of excitement that runs through the crowd is picked up by the crew in a movement that traces the trajectory of voyeurism. Freud argues that the scopophilic instinct shifts its focus from an extraneous object to the subject's own body, and includes a significant autoerotic element (Freud 1984:127).[1] In Bougainville's crowd scenes, the crew members rediscover an excitement or experience a panic about their own individual bodies in the light of crowd enthusiasm. Conforming to national stereotypes, the French open themselves to the embrace of the crowd while the English defend against a suspect hospitality.

In the task of translating Bougainville, we might speculate, Forster learned what to anticipate from a Polynesian arrival scene. He learned to expect to be overwhelmed. It was not until 17 August 1773, over five years after Bougainville, that the botanist experienced his own Tahitian landfall at Vaitepiha Bay on Tahiti-iti. During a difficult anchoring, he had been called upon to participate in unaccustomed deckhand labor and as a result was suffering from exhaustion and an injured foot. His account of the arrival is marginal: he writes that the pain from his exertions "& the intense heat . . . caused me a Faintness & in the night I awoke from a pain in my breast. . . . [The next morning] I saw such a crowd of people about our Ships, that it is hardly credible" (Forster 1982:326). Like Bougainville's and Robertson's, Forster's experience of the crowd channels a fluctuating sense of being physically besieged, here by fatigue and illness rather than desire or hostility. The crowd externalizes his sense of sudden self-distrust, becoming the locus of an incredulity at what his eyes witness that might otherwise reflect upon his own physical distress: "it is hardly credible."

Just over a week later, Forster's ship, the *Resolution,* reaches Matavai Bay. Forster has recovered his composure, and the encounter with the crowd

emerges as a refrain in his journal: August 26: "We came to an Anchor & saw the shore crowded with people," "had the Capt not exerted himself a whole crowd of [the Chief's] followers would have entered the boat; but we took none in but the Chief & his wife. . . . The crowd was great, but when they came too near, there were men with long poles who beat the crowd unmercifully & broke several poles upon them." August 27: "All the kings relations crowded about us." August 29: "We had a great retinue of Indians." September 1: "Our gifts carried the Admiration of the whole crowd" (Forster 1982:338–345). While Forster has come to expect crowd attendance at each scene of encounter, his journal entries, like Robertson's, disclose a number of ways in which its presence impedes rather than enhances the arrival scene. These include the introduction of violence to control the crowd, the complication of codes of gifting and trade, and the difficulty the crowd poses for establishing hierarchy and facilitating the formation of particular friendships with high-ranking individuals.

Pressing, exhilarating, unnerving as a presence within accounts of contact, the Polynesian crowd has nonetheless remained curiously elusive of critical attention. There are a couple of notable exceptions: Marshall Sahlins has focused on crowd dynamics in support of his thesis that the Hawaiian reception of Cook amounted to deification (1989:412–413; 1995:47), and Greg Dening's substantial body of work on the theatricality of Pacific encounter, to which the subheadings of this essay pay tribute, opens up a space for the examination of crowd representations.[2] Yet the Pacific crowd is the primary focus of analysis exclusively in studies of population, where accounts of crowding are scrutinized in an attempt to gauge the impact of European disease and cultural decimation upon the lives of Pacific peoples. Within this field, however, there is no consensus on the crowd. The Hawai'i State statistician, Robert Schmitt, responding to David Stannard's intervention in the Hawaiian population debate, quotes his own observation that "guesses of the size of crowds—a frequent element in . . . pre-censal estimates—are notoriously unreliable, typically producing totals two or three sizes the actual number" (Stannard 1989:115). His comment, which articulates an assumption behind much work on Pacific populations, taps into a broader conservative discourse on crowds that represents such manifestations as *inherently* unreliable, by virtue of their capacity to camouflage individual motive within collective action. Norma McArthur's early study of precontact populations equated conservative estimates with scholarly rigor (1967), and, as Stannard pointed out (1989:xvi), there has been a concomitant tendency within recent broader Pacific scholarship to reduce the dimensions of the crowd as an expression of resistance to the fatal-impact thesis. Other population studies, such as Eleanor Nordyke's *The Peopling of Hawai'i*, have repeated conserva-

tive estimates of precontact numbers to support a representation of islands under siege from post-contact population influx (1989:13–27).

Among scholars concerned to diminish the crowd, crowd scenes are implicitly presented as scenes of fantasy, to be dispelled by "realistic" computation. Stannard, on the other hand, reassesses the same documents of contact from Hawai'i to present a compelling case for maximizing estimates of pre-contact Pacific populations.[3] The same crowds, then, have been read alternatively as metonym or symptom: as part of a larger whole or as sign of a special event. This essay aligns with Stannard's work in focusing on the crowd as an absent presence within recent Pacific scholarship, that produces a contradiction in our current accounts of early contact. In addressing both the importunate materiality and subsequent invisibility of the crowd within European accounts of the Pacific, I seek to mark the silent accommodation of representation to a reality of depopulation, while also asking what it might mean for a persistent European romanticization of Pacific islands to think of them as crowded places.

Scene II: The City

The din is the applause of objects.

—Elias Canetti

Although the object of a substantial body of historical analysis and theoretical speculation, the crowd has almost exclusively been discussed as a metropolitan phenomenon. Historians and sociologists of the crowd, who seek to determine the individual composition and motivations of the crowd collective, and psychologists of the crowd, who posit a crowd mentality or will distinct from individual consciousness, tend towards political opposition but agree in representing the phenomenon as a product of urbanization. Elias Canetti proposes in *Crowds and Power* that "men might have gone on disregarding [the crowd] if the enormous increase of population in modern times, and the rapid growth of cities, had not more and more often given rise to its formation" (2000:20–21). John Plotz's *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics*, while taking Canetti to task for his evocation of a monolithic crowd mentality, concurs that, in the English context, crowds materialized in important new ways with urban expansion: "When London became the first postclassical city of one million inhabitants around 1800, quantity changed the quality of the city's life. . . . Mundane outdoor life came to include random encounters with strangers, inexplicable aggregations, sudden eruptions of violence, and permanent sites for encountering others *en masse*" (Plotz 2000:1). Other studies retain this urban focus, even while gesturing towards

an interpretation of the crowd as paradigmatic of self-other relations. Mark Harrison prefaces his *Crowds and History* with the observation:

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

However, Harrison retreats from the broader implications of this statement to focus his study on four British urban communities. His remarks counterpoint a conservative tradition that associates the crowd with the eruption of the foreign or "primitive" within urban society (Le Bon 1920:36).[4]

The historical moment that provided the impetus for later theorizations of crowd psychology, according to most recent studies of the phenomenon, was the French Revolution (Rogers 1998:2; McClelland 1989:6; van Ginneken 1992:3; Tambiah 1996:267; Nye 1975:63).[5] In the nineteenth century, seminal works by Thomas Carlyle, Hippolyte Taine, Jules Michelet, Gabriel Tarde, and most famously Gustav Le Bon attempted to account for the mass mobilization of the underclass by figuring the multiple bodies of the crowd as motivated by collective will. From assumptions about the metropolitan constitution of the crowd grew attendant claims about the effects of urban anonymity (Engels 1952:24), which found poetic embodiment in Walter Benjamin's theorization of Baudelaire's figure of the flâneur. Benjamin writes of the crowds of Berlin, Paris, and London as confluences in which the individual may seek to hide, paradoxically achieving solitude. He comments on the uniformity of bodies in the urban crowd, "in which no one is either quite transparent or quite opaque to all others" (Benjamin 1983:49).

This is of course a very different experience of crowding from that registered by European voyagers, who *stand out* in the crowd that surrounds them. The crowd has been elided so successfully with the modern city that experiences of crowding within situations of imperial contact—where the shock and pleasure for the European visitor is of being encompassed by bodies that are different rather than the same, and thus of being simultaneously singled out and engulfed—have consistently been recuperated as experiences primarily of othering rather than crowding (Pratt 1986:35). Nonetheless, the Pacific beach became in the late eighteenth century, to adopt Plotz's terminology, a "permanent site" where encounters, both staged and frighteningly random, took place, and voyagers experienced "inexplicable aggrega-

tions" and "sudden eruptions of violence." Account after account from the European literature of Pacific exploration record the experience of being inundated by the crowd: being noticed and enveloped by a mass of bodies emerges as a trope of encounter, through which visitors constitute and authorize (and indeed recognize) their experience.

The presence of peripheral crowd scenes within accounts of first contact raises a number of questions about the politics of encounter. What are the dynamics of identification that take place within the crowd and how do they figure or alter in crowds that assemble at scenes of contact? Is the dialectical relationship between the body of the individual and the body of the crowd in any way comparable to that between recognition and repudiation that takes place in confrontation with cultural difference? We might also rethink, through the crowd, the dynamics of authority and voyeurism played out in cross-cultural observation. Most often the Pacific crowd is represented as a spontaneous demonstration of curiosity about European bodies and culture. The European desire to perceive agglomeration as testimony to cultural fascination can be critiqued as self-aggrandizing, as not inconsistent with what Gananath Obeyesekere has called, in discussing Cook's encounters in Hawai'i, a "European myth of . . . apotheosis" (1992:177). Surely, though, something more complex is at stake here. If, as I intimated in my reading of Bougainville, Europeans relish as often as they are disconcerted by the experience of being sampled, fondled, of having their artifacts or their skin marveled at, they are enjoying an immediate process of objectification, not veneration. While curiosity has become an important field of inquiry for recent scholarship, the focus has been upon European curiosity about other societies: on cultures of collecting and connoisseurship, which testify to a European desire to look, to hoard, to possess (Benedict 2001; Leask 2002; Elsner and Cardinal 1994).[6] What of the desire to be valued, exposed, fingered by the curious that is the corollary of scopophilia and that is so sublimely gratified by the crowd?

Issues of value and exchange are quite explicitly at the heart of the Pacific crowd scene. Its animated collective enacts a fraught problematic of cross-cultural encounter, in which selves become identified with cultural artifacts, and evaluation is at once arbitrary and absolute. The crowd is also a market, and, as Walter Benjamin observed in the Parisian context, it inflates the commodity: "The concentration of customers which makes the market, which in turn makes the commodity into a commodity, enhances its attractiveness to the average buyer" (1983:56). So too in the Pacific. When J. R. Forster arrived in Tonga, the presence of the crowd announced the commencement of trade, heralding a feverish exchange of commodities: "The shore & rocks were crowded with people. They harraed when we came near, & immedi-

ately began trading with us, & offered us Cloth & other trifles to sell viz. Mother of Pearl Shells, which they hung on their breast; brasselets of mother of Pearl; Fishhooks; little Paddles & Stools of Clubwood; Bows & Arrows, Clubs" (1982:337). Although Forster tries to dismiss the items displayed as trifles, there is much evidence of the "unregulated desire" for acquisition that Harriet Guest has elucidated in this passage and other accounts of Tonga from Cook's voyages (Guest 2003:110–111). The crew members' desire is, indeed, unregulated in a practical sense, since the value of the items to be acquired is at the moment of contact incommensurable. To the degree, however, that either party determines what Guest calls the "terms of trade" in first contact, this is surely the prerogative of the Pacific crowd, by both virtue of numbers and the fact that it supplies items of subsistence as well as fluctuating commodities.

The crowd at the scene of contact, and its relationship to the instantiation of exchange, might be compared with the configuration Benjamin portrays as buoying the petty bourgeoisie in Baudelaire's Paris. The latter are characterized by Benjamin as not yet "aware of the commodity nature of their labour power"; they thus enjoy an identification with the commodity "with all the pleasure and uneasiness which derived from a presentiment of [their] own destiny as a class" (Benjamin 1983:59). So too the exchanges of early contact may be charged with the presentiment of a subsequent relationship of power, but these exchanges are characterized also by a pleasurable identification of self with object that turns frogs into princes, sailors into both sought-after objects and collectors of the possibly valuable foreign. Once again, this seems predicated on a dialectic of scopophilia, in which the desire to be looked at is nested in the desire to observe.[7]

Scene III: The Island

. . . among them I should be smothered by their curiosity to see me.
—William Bligh

The remainder of this essay will amplify certain issues I have sketched out here, by way of a reading of the 1792 account of William Bligh's *Bounty* voyage, with the aim to demonstrate what happens when we place the crowd at the center of interpretation. The text, though written in the first person and derived from Bligh's log, was published while Bligh was back in the Pacific completing his breadfruit mission.[8] It therefore received editorial shaping from James Burney, who had been twice in the Pacific with Cook, and whose own experience of Tahiti also resurfaces in Bligh's narrative (du Rietz 1962).[9]

The *Bounty* voyage had been undertaken at the instigation of Joseph Banks to collect and convey breadfruit cuttings to the West Indies for cultivation as a staple food for plantation slaves. Bligh negotiated with Tinah, the *ari'i rahi* or prominent chief of Tahiti, for breadfruit plants in exchange for "valuable presents" purportedly sent directly by George III (Bligh 1979:73). The officers and crew spent five and a half months on Tahiti-nui, first at Matavai and then at Pare, while the breadfruit cuttings were established. The mutiny that took place only three and a half weeks after the ship's departure was attributed by Bligh to the friendships forged during this prolonged sojourn: intimacies filtered from an initial encounter with a crowd impelled by curiosity that became indexed to specific relationships—of trade and of ceremonial and social protocol. Even as insurrectionary crowds were taking over the streets of metropolitan Paris,[10] Bligh found in Tahiti a crowd whose constitutive events and practices marked it, beyond its elemental capacity to overwhelm, as culturally coherent.

Bligh's arrival at Matavai Bay on 26 October 1788 is once again figured as a succession of crowd scenes: "As we drew near, a great number of canoes came off to us . . . [the people] crowded on board in vast numbers, notwithstanding our endeavours to prevent it, as we were working the ship in; and in less than ten minutes, the deck was so full that I could scarce find my own people" (Bligh 1979:59). As the use of the word "endeavours" perhaps unconsciously confirms, the crowd that obstructs the process of landing is an authenticating presence. Its attendance links Bligh's voyage to a tradition that includes Wallis's, Bougainville's and Cook's arrivals in Tahiti. The observation that he "could scarce find my own people" becomes resonant with hindsight, invoking the future deck-top encounter in which his crew members will declare themselves for Bligh or against him. Yet the situation is also subtly complicated in the ensuing crowd scenes on land, where the "own people" the commander has difficulty identifying among the pressing throng become pre-eminent members of the Matavai community. "The ship being anchored," he writes, "our number of visitors continued to increase; but as yet we saw no person that we could recollect to have been of much consequence. Some inferior chiefs made me presents" (Bligh 1979:61). These individuals of consequence have, of course, been singled out from the crowd on former voyages: they are the named Tahitians of previous explorers' accounts, including Cook's final voyage, on which Bligh had served as master of the *Resolution*. Identifying them within the crowd, as well as accounting for the animals and plants left by Cook, and retracing Cook's footsteps and friendships, becomes an important aspect of Bligh's project to represent himself as Cook's inheritor.[11] Bligh had been the only officer on Cook's last voyage not to receive promotion when the *Resolution* and *Discovery* returned

to London, after falling out over his handling of events leading to Cook's death with Lieutenant James King. Greg Dening has insightfully analyzed the ways in which Bligh overvalued the mission as a chance to redeem his career (1992:65). To claim relation to Cook by reforging his connections in Tahiti was surely among the overdetermined imperatives of Bligh's voyage.

The concern to identify individuals of distinction among the multitude is at the same time ironized in a number of ways within Bligh's account. After noting that "my table at dinner was generally crouded," Bligh problematizes his capacity to establish the extent of the crowd or the degree of consequence of its individual members, commenting, "Almost every individual of any consequence has several names, which makes it frequently perplexing, when the same person is spoken of, to know who is meant. Every chief has perhaps a dozen or more names in the course of thirty years; so that the person who has been spoken of by one visitor, will not perhaps be known to another, unless other circumstances lead to a discovery" (Bligh 1979:82). The individual of consequence proliferates in Tahiti into a version of what Elias Canetti terms "the invisible crowd" (2000:42–47),[12] thwarting the European's attempt to forge connections based on hierarchy established over the course of a series of significant contacts and reducing the grand task of "discovery" to the lesser project of establishing identity. In Bligh's log, a more expansive discussion of this phenomenon is prefaced by the comment, "I should speak of a variety of Chiefs from other districts who have visited us, but as it would be nothing but a catalogue of Names, it can be of no use" (1937, 1:384). Here Bligh seems to make a different kind of distinction between the crowd of the text and the physical crowd, implying that the inability to distinguish individuals is one that may persist in reading but which is overcome through the praxis of contact.

A more telling irony, however, is Bligh's identification of the disabled as immediate figures of distinction among the multitude. In a crowd scene at the house of the chief Poeno, Bligh relates, "The people . . . thronged about the house, in such numbers, that I was much incommoded by the heat, which being observed, they immediately drew back. Among the crowd I saw a man who had lost his arm just above the elbow; the stump was well covered, and the cure seemed as perfect as could be expected from the greatest professional skill" (1979:63). Here the disabled body alone stands out from the collective body of the crowd, registering as the sole figure of consequence. In his log Bligh distinguishes individuals for their obesity, a cancerous nose and jaw, a lost eye, deformed limbs, and ulcerations (1937, 1:391, 389, 403; 2:30). Despite the focus on these figures as exceptions, there is an implication that they might be representatives of a different "invisible crowd," a crowd of the ill and infected, for whom Bligh is keen to disclaim responsibility. "Scropulous Patients were I to encourage them would be innumerable," he observes,

concluding, "I do not beleive that they have superior blessings with respect to health; we already see them with dreadful Cancers, Consumptions, Fevers, Fits and the Scropula in a Shocking degree, and we may infer many incidental diseases besides. The fertile Country and delightfull Climate of the Society Islands does not therefore exempt its Inhabitants from the attendant miseries of ill health" (Bligh 1937, 2:31).

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

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

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

Some weeks later Bligh notes the waning of the crowd and explains it in terms of a waning curiosity: "The croud of natives was not so great as hitherto it had been: the curiosity of strangers was satisfied; and, as the weather began to be unsettled and rainy, they had almost all returned to their homes. . . . [O]ur supplies however were abundant; and what I considered as no small addition to our comforts, we ceased to be incommoded, when on shore, by the natives following us, and could take our walks almost unnoticed" (1979:84). There is something slightly peeved in Bligh's response, as though he misses the crowd that incommoded him. That same day he reports putting on a performance that might be regarded as an attempt to solicit the very crowd he repudiates here:

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

Here Bligh first employs rumor to produce a crowd, which he then clears from his decks, reasserting his status as object of interest by creating an object of interest and carefully working his assembled audience.[13] By creating the spectacle that draws the crowd, Bligh reinitiates and at the same time mocks the local practice of formal gift giving. Once again we might recall Benjamin's comments on the capacity of the crowd to animate the object. In the city, according to Benjamin, objects derive their charm "from the crowd that surges around and intoxicates them" (1983:56). In the Tahitian harbor this process is literalized: only the crowd can animate the painted head and invite it into the circle of exchange. Yet Bligh's jest also cuts across the very logic of reciprocity upon which his breadfruit mission is dependent. The old woman's act of humiliated hospitality, as she retracts the gift she

had extended, registers the personal cost of his purportedly crowd-pleasing antics. The published account, however, here departs tellingly from Bligh's log, which makes very clear that the Tahitians are in on the joke from the start: they are figured not as dupes but as participants in a performance (1937, 1:386). More significantly for the current argument, only in the published account is Bligh's performance linked with the waning of the crowd. The incident occurs on 5 November 1788 in both accounts; however, in Bligh's log the reduction of the Tahitian crowd and an attendant sense of the ship's decreased novelty value are not registered until 25 January 1789, when Bligh writes, "The Novelty of our being here is now wore off, so that we are not crouded with the Natives as at first" (1937, 2:23). If the juxtaposition of this awareness with Bligh's jest in the published version is an editorial intervention, it might indicate that the simultaneous push and pull of the crowd, its role as both impediment and source of affirmation, was recognized and highlighted by the first readers of Bligh's manuscript.

The departure of the *Bounty,* on 4 April 1789, is again accompanied by crowd scenes. Bligh writes that on the third, "The ship was crouded the whole day with the natives, and we were loaded with cocoa-nuts, plantains, bread-fruit, hogs, and goats." As the ship stood off, Bligh writes, "The outlet of Toahroah harbour being narrow, I could permit only a few of the natives to be on board: many others, however, attended in canoes" (1979:140: compare Bligh 1937; 2:68–69). Yet there are two important distinctions between the crowd scenes of arrival and departure, through which Bligh indexes the changed relations between crew members and Tahitians that have developed over the period of the ship's visit. The crowd on board is no longer anonymous. It is a crowd of friends: "Scarce any man belonging to the ship was without a *tyo* [friend], who brought to him presents, chiefly of provisions for a sea store" (Bligh 1979:139). Where, upon arrival, Bligh scanned the sea of faces around him for individuals made significant by other voyagers' encounters or by rank, here individuals are recognized as significant by virtue of interpersonal, albeit highly structured, relationships of intimacy. And the crowd is silent. "In the evening, there was no dancing or mirth on the beach, such as we had been accustomed to, but all was silent," he records (p. 140). The uncanny assembly of the silent crowd constitutes an act of mourning that solemnizes the moment of departure. At the same time, the silent crowd of intimates sets the scene for Bligh's analysis of the mutiny, which he will predicate upon the bonds formed between crew members and Tahitians: "for to the friendly and endearing behaviour of these people, may be ascribed the motives for that event which effected the ruin of an expedition, that there was every reason to hope, would have been completed in a most fortunate manner" (p. 141). Tahitian generosity and hospitality, sustained by a natural

abundance that facilitates bounteous gestures, is ultimately adduced as the chief cause of the failure of Bligh's imperial project.

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

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

The vision of Tahiti adumbrated here has the potential to undermine two arguments crucial to Bligh's account, both of which are founded on a notion of Tahitian natural fecundity, on a thesis of bounty. The first is that the population can easily spare the breadfruit cuttings requested by his mission: that their diversion will have an insignificant impact on Tahiti's natural abundance. When the gift of breadfruit was proposed, claims Bligh, Tinah "seemed much delighted to find it so easily in his power to send anything that would be well received by King George." Bligh emphasizes his concomitant efforts to disguise from his Tahitian hosts the worth to his party of a gift that he feels assured will cost them so little (p. 73). The second contention is that, in returning to Tahiti, the mutineers were returning to a life without labor, in which natural surplus is guaranteed without need for improved husbandry. Bligh later asserts of the mutineers that "they imagined it in their power to fix themselves in the midst of plenty, on one of the finest islands in the world, where they need not labour" (p. 162). Of course, labor-free existence cannot be promised in a society threatened by overcrowding.[14]

This passage of speculation on Tahiti's population growth, developed from some less coherent musings in Bligh's log (1937, 2:78–79), was expanded in the 1792 account into a proposal to ease the burden of potential overpopulation by encouraging Tahitian immigration to New Holland: the work of Bligh's editor, James Burney.[15] Burney had also been confronted by the prac-

tice of infanticide during his first trip to the Society Islands, on Cook's second voyage, and had, like Bligh, posited an explanation that accounted for custom via the crowd: "They have some very barbarous customs, the worst of which is, when a man has as many children as he is able to maintain, all that come after are smothered. . . . Yet notwithstanding all this, these Islands are exceedingly populous—even the Smallest being full of inhabitants & perhaps were it not for the Custom just mentioned, these would be more than the islands could well maintain" (Burney 1975:73). Burney's crowd wells up in Bligh's text, converging with Bligh's, so that his further deliberations on the subject become ventriloquized as Bligh's. At the same time, the persistent question of the crowd that Burney's interpolations serve to highlight puts Bligh's project and accompanying defense under question.

Moreover, the evocation of another Tahiti—a land of hunger and want—adumbrated within the crowd works not only against the terms of Bligh's own narrative but against the broader discourse of a romanticized Tahitian paradise—a place of easy plenty—launched by Bougainville and disseminated in Britain through popular poetry and theater.[16] The crowded Tahiti of Bligh's account might thus be said to contest an abiding trope in that exploration literature to which he was nonetheless so keen to make his contribution.

There is, indeed, a further retrospective irony to the account's speculation on a proto-Malthusian future for Tahiti. As Catherine Gallagher has argued (1986:85), the paradox of Malthus's thesis lies in the fact that the healthy body, multiplying through "the very power of its fecundity" results in the degeneration of the social whole. Healthy bodies reproduce incrementally, competing for diminished resources. In Tahiti, on the other hand, the charged sexual activity that resulted from contact facilitated the transmission of contagious diseases, which in turn led to the diminishment of the body of the Tahitian crowd and decreased indigenous pressure on resources. Where Bligh's and Burney's shared vision of an overpopulated island attests directly to the pressure of bodies that they registered surrounding them in Tahiti—to both the stimulus and constraint of contact—the material consequence of the crowd scene was to be the dwindling of the crowd.

NOTES

This essay grew out of a paper delivered at a panel on "Cultural Contacts in Polynesia since the Enlightenment" at the American Historical Association Pacific Coast Branch Annual Meeting 2003. I would like to thank Catarina Krizancic and Harry Liebersohn for inviting me to contribute to the panel, and for the productive exchanges it initiated.

1. I have discussed the scopophilic dimension of the project of "discovery"' elsewhere (Smith 2003:117).

2. Dening structures *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (1992) as a series of "Acts," to which this essay's "Scenes" in some degree correspond. His recognition of a "dialectic between audience and actors" operating within early contact entails a nuanced awareness of the dynamics of group curiosity and reactivity (Dening 1996:118).

3. That much of the debate on pre- and postcontact populations in the Pacific is focused on Hawai'i indicates the significance of the Hawaiian crowd to contemporary Pacific scholarship. While the current essay limits itself almost exclusively to the Tahitian crowd, and emphasizes the libidinal and exhibitionist dimensions of crowd scenes, the more extended work from which it draws looks at the Hawaiian crowd, and particularly the politics of reading Cook's death, as a counterpart to the crowd welcome (Smith n.d.: chap. 1). It is also important to note at this point that in the erotics of the Tahitian crowd scene were seeded its destruction as a quantitative force, through the effects of sexually transmitted disease. By concentrating on representations of the crowd at the moment of contact, this essay seeks not to diminish the effect of subsequent decimation but to account for its early dynamics.

4. An exception to the urban theorization of the crowd is George Rudé's seminal work on the crowd in the eighteenth century, which looks at rural village and market town crowds in preindustrial Britain and France. Rudé emphatically characterizes the period he discusses as transitional, however: his telos is still "the new 'industrial' society" (Rudé 1964:5). An exception to the metropolitan theorization of the crowd is Stanley Tambiah's *Leveling Crowds* (1996), which examines the role of collective violence in peripheral (South Asian) settings of ethnonationalist conflict. Yet the case studies Tambiah examines remain urban and enmeshed within global networks of political and economic power. Durkheim's discussion of the manifestations of a collective "effervescence" linking the modern crowd with totemic religious cultures avoids the metropolitan bias that underpins much writing on the crowd. Durkheim, though, adduces the crowd to an analysis of totemic religion: he is not primarily a theorist of the crowd (2001:154–162). I am grateful to Harry Liebersohn for drawing my attention to this last reference.

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

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

7. Compare with Greg Dening's discussion of the theatrics of this ambivalence (1996:101–127).

8. For an account of this second voyage, see Oliver 1988.

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

10. As Jocelyn Dunphy pointed out some years ago, the early riots of the French Revolution—characterized by some, as I mentioned earlier, as the original Crowd Scene—were coincident with the *Bounty* mutiny (1982:281–282).

11. In his log, Bligh indeed makes a point of giving "an account of some principal People and their descendants here who have been Spoke of in our earliest Voyages" (1937, 2:62–63).

12. I am adopting Canetti's term with some license here: he uses the notion of the invisible crowd to cover the hordes of the dead and of future generations, whose imagined presence or posterity influences the actions of the living.

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

14. I have discussed the relationship between Bligh's breadfruit commission and general perceptions of Oceanic bounty at greater length in Smith 2006.

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

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

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