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Andrew Cowell

THE APOCALYPSE OF PARADISE AND THE SALVATION OF THE WEST: NIGHTMARE VISIONS OF THE FUTURE IN THE PACIFIC EDEN

Abstract

This article examines representations of the Pacific in the film *Rapa Nui*, in articles from *National Geographic*, and in the academic debate on cannibalism as epitomized by Marshall Sahlins' and Gananath Obeyesekere's discussion of Cook's fate in Hawaii. While the area is typically the location of an Edenic paradise, in these texts it becomes the locus of apocalypse ending in cannibalism. Furthermore, rather than being radically 'other', the Pacific becomes a paradise whose virtues are those of the West as well, but whose very virtues lead to its destruction. The article argues that these texts use the 'apocalypse of paradise' as an allegory for the economic history and destiny of the West, such that cannibalism becomes a quintessentially Western practice. But the texts also contain mechanisms for the construction of a critical consciousness centred on Nature which is denied to the islanders themselves, and which serves in classic colonial style to institute a future alterity which will redeem the West from apocalypse.

The texts' use and subsequent undermining of the more typical paradise images, many of which can be localized in the post-Second World War era, can finally be read in the light of a late twentieth-century, leftist socio-environmental critique of the economic, political and environmental legacy of postwar America. However, the texts betray a more post-modernist sense of doubt about the reality of a rational critical consciousness. They raise important issues regarding the liminal space between self and other, threatening as they do to dissolve this distinction. But they all attempt to use cannibalism as a last bulwark for the construction of a

privileged, natural discourse which combines environmentalism, colonialism and classical humanism while resisting the full implications and limitations of postmodernism.

Keywords

Pacific; cannibalism; Nature; alterity; environmentalism; colonialism

THE ROLE OF THE PACIFIC, and especially Polynesia, as one of the archetypal locales for the Western representation of paradise is well known. It is the place where Western representations have consistently located not just an other, but a seemingly better and more perfect other. It has been the place that can perhaps save the West ('First World' western Europe and North America), as epitomized by Paul Gauguin's desire to find in Tahiti those elements of the good life which were missing from industrial France. In this article, however, I would like to look at representations of the Pacific which find in this region not paradise but decay, failure and even apocalypse. These texts include the recent film *Rapa Nui*, certain articles from the magazine *National Geographic*, the Sahlins-Obeyesekere academic debate regarding Hawaiian cannibalism and Captain Cook, and a brief excursus on Denis de Diderot's Enlightenment vision of Tahiti, the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*. All these texts feature to one extent or another the fall of paradise. Most interestingly however, that fall is depicted as being the result of the very nature of paradise itself.

In contrast to the images of paradise, there is also a long tradition of finding in the Pacific a poorer, inferior other, to be colonized and missionized by the West, and to serve as the negative model for the West's own representation of its cultural superiority. In fact, the 'paradise' image of Polynesia had its heyday for a brief period in the late eighteenth century, before being challenged by the evangelical discourse of the 'ignoble savage' and the romantic discourse of the 'primitive savage', as well as by the unpleasant realities of the deaths of Captain Cook and others.¹ But whether it is saviour or servant, the Pacific is typically imagined as radically different from the West.

Yet the depictions of a Pacific apocalypse to be considered here are striking in that they frame the positive and negative sides of paradise not in terms of some distant other, but in terms of Western society itself. Unlike either the missionary/colonial or utopian/paradise representations of Polynesia, these texts either weaken or abolish the differences between the region and the West, and the destruction of paradise can be read as a warning of the danger to the West itself of its own negative tendencies. The texts in question are thus emblematic of a more general enactment of the 'sacrifice' of paradise in order to encourage the redemption of a Western society whose faults are exactly those of paradise.²

The redemption, in fact, lies in a recognition of sameness. This recognition then allows for salvation in a future alterity based on a critical consciousness denied to the actual inhabitants of paradise. It is this sacrifice and its redemptive qualities which I will emphasize in this article. More particularly, I will argue that this redemption is tied to particular Western models of Nature and critical consciousness which are intimately linked to both contemporary leftist economic and environmental critiques and to certain classic features of colonialism. The Pacific Eden becomes the site of confluence for a unique, late twentieth-century Western combination of environmentalism, colonialism and the popular iconography of paradise.

Finally, that most horrific of apocalypses – cannibalism – will be examined in the various texts. As with paradise and its decline, cannibalism turns out to be not an icon of alterity, but a specifically Western practice. Its representation in conjunction with the Pacific allows for a postmodern critique of Hollywood films, *National Geographic*, and the contemporary academic debate over the subject in terms of their relationship to this practice. While I will carefully examine the conditions of textual production and reception of each of these discursive milieux separately, they turn out to reveal interesting contiguities to one another in their suggestion of where paradise may lie and what its future may actually be. The sacrifice of paradise and the (attempted) redemption of the West can be read as one response to an American, left-centre political and cultural sense of both future uncertainty, and criticism of America's own recent past from the Second World War to the 1970s – the era whose images of paradise are disrupted in the texts to be examined here.

The autumn 1994 release of the Kevin Reynolds/Kevin Costner film *Rapa Nui* (the Polynesian name for Easter Island) marked one of the latest instalments in the West's (and Hollywood's) fascination with Polynesia as a locus of desires for paradise. The opening scenes of the film feature many of the now standard motifs of the Polynesian fantasy – a scenically spectacular island rising from the ocean, surrounded by pounding surf in which bronzed young men happily swim and cavort, bare-breasted women dancing about a bonfire as part of a 'primitive' festival or ritual, and the complex-free satisfaction of sexual desire on the part of the film's male and female hero and heroine (played by Jason Scott Lee and Sandrine Holt) in a setting of pure nature on a grassy hillside above the ocean. To this point, the film resonates most strongly with the images of *South Pacific*, or James Michener's *Hawaii*. However, the use of Easter Island introduces, for the typical American viewer, a second set of images which work in two opposite directions. For Easter Island is also famous as the site of the giant sculpted heads known as 'Moai', associated with mystery, magical power, and even extra-terrestrial visits (in Erich von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods?*). The larger region, including Pitcairn Island (which appears in the movie) would also generally be associated with the various written and film versions of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, and older viewers would possibly

remember Thor Heyerdahl's books *Kon-Tiki* and *Aku-Aku*, claiming that Easter Island was the site of settlement from South America in pre-historic times. The sum total of these associations works to increase the sense of otherness and alien-ness of Easter Island, but at the same time it introduces elements which tend to counter-act the sense of pure, easy pleasure which tourist-poster images of Hawaiian beaches, for example, are supposed to evoke. If it is possible to suggest a generalized American cultural horizon of expectations for the film, it would be characterized by the contradictory tendencies of Pacific paradise and a mysterious, vaguely disquieting sense that something else is up as well. Thus Easter Island is particularly well suited for a representation of Polynesian paradise turning into apocalypse.

Indeed, this seeming paradise rapidly reveals itself to be a hellish world apart – food is short, the island is riven by conflict between its two tribes, the 'Long-ears' and the socially inferior 'Short-ears'. The society is dominated by tyrannical priest-kings who rule through taboos, as demonstrated graphically in a scene where one priest kills an old man for being caught with a taboo fish. The young couple, who resemble most closely Romeo and Juliet (since the woman is a member of the Short-ears, while the man is a Long-ear), find great obstacles placed in the path of their love and desire to marry. Yet the central focus of the social crisis turns out to be the problem of over-population and diminishing resources, which lie at the root of the many other problems mentioned above. The islanders are literally eating and reproducing themselves out of house and home, even as their befuddled, religiously blinded leader urges them to have more children. It is this resource shortage, combined with supposedly inflexible and unchanging modes of thought which are blind to the need for change, which bring the social crisis to a boil. The result is the revolt of the Short-ears, the decimation of the last remaining coconut groves on the island (symbolic both in the film and in Polynesian mythology of fertility), and finally the killing and eating of the Long-ears by the Short-ears, as the film ends in an orgy of cannibalism, exhaustion of resources, and the escape of the two lovers to colonize (it is suggested) the island of Pitcairn – perhaps only to begin the cycle anew.³ They leave the Short-Ears behind to feast on the charred remains of the Long-Ears.

As is typical of the 'Polynesian paradise' myth, it is sex, feasting, ritual and a timelessness which refuses to evolve towards the modern world that constitute the paradisaical nature of the island. They are emblematic of a larger practice of free indulgence of desire within the confines of an absolute, unchanging, and therefore unproblematic and unanalysed system of constraints. Ironically, such a world mirrors the Garden of Eden with its absolute freedom, constrained only by the unexplained taboo of the Tree of Knowledge. Yet even more ironically, it is the garden itself which is its own downfall in this case. It is sex, feasting and unchanging ritual which lead ultimately to the destruction of the paradise which once existed on the island, in the form of the overindulgence and over-population which cause the final catastrophe in the film. The inhabitants of paradise literally consume it and themselves.

This discourse of self-consumption, turning paradise into apocalypse, occurs widely in contemporary American culture, and certainly not just in film. Cynthia Deitering, writing on 'postnatural' novels such as Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest*, speaks of a 'toxic consciousness' which 'transmogrifies one's experience of the earth as a primal home' and confronts 'a generation poised on the precipice of epistemic rupture – between knowing the earth as "... the home in which life is set" and knowing it as toxic riskscape'.⁴ Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* likewise suggests that Nature, once a force independent of humanity, has been subsumed, if not consumed, by humans. In subsuming that which lies at our origins, we subsume ourselves as well.

Given the liberal/environmental leanings of much of the movie world in general, and of Kevin Costner in particular, *Rapa Nui* could certainly be read as a microcosm of the environmental catastrophe which potentially awaits the larger world as a whole in the face of inferior leadership blind to the need for change, and in the face of over-population and excess resource consumption. Two of Costner's subsequent films, *Waterworld* (also filmed in the Pacific), and *The Postman*, continue with themes of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic visions. This reading is enhanced by *Rapa Nui*'s opening, which features a giant rotating globe suspended in space as the outlines of the Easter Island myth are narrated by a disembodied voice. The image of the rotating globe and the voice-over, with what at first seem like low-quality production values, in fact serve to recall the use of the same image in classic 1950s apocalyptic visions of warning such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Costner himself is quoted in a review that the film seeks to emphasize a more general social message about 'this little time we occupy the planet' and the need – 'as bad as we are' – for responsibility towards it (Maslin, 1994). Thus the film can be inserted, on a metaphorical plane, into a much broader, generally leftist discourse on the environment, consumer capitalism, and most generally on Nature and our relation to it. The fundamental message of the film, from this standpoint, is twofold: first, that the behaviours of 'blind indulgence' which seem so 'natural' and emblematic of paradise are actually not natural at all, because they lead to the destruction of paradise, Nature and humanity. Or more precisely, the behaviours, untempered by a sense of critical awareness, are unnatural. Thus a true connection to Nature, and a true naturalness, is intimately tied to critical consciousness (a point to which I shall return). Second, our own superficially appealing post-industrial life-style is equally blind and dangerous, and fundamentally opposed to Nature. In using a typical Polynesian paradise – a classic emblem of the 'natural' – and having it devolve into cannibalistic self-destruction and self-consumption, the film fits perfectly into the representations of 'epistemic rupture' of which Deitering speaks, with cannibalism replacing toxicity.

The confrontation of Nature with cannibalistic destruction is enacted most powerfully in perhaps the central image of the film: the lone remaining coconut grove on the island, which is clearly a totem of fertility, reproduction and hope

for the future. This is the place where the two young lovers agree to undergo the trials necessary to allow their marriage, this is the place where pictographs representing the islanders' cultural heritage and continuity are inscribed, and it is this grove which the hero (who also argues for population limitation) tries to protect. It is the cutting down of the last of these trees – the castration of the fertility totem, one might say – in order to use them as rollers to transport the fetishized sculpted heads known as 'Moai' to their proper place near the ocean which presages the doom of the island's civilization.

This fetishized production includes within it the need for both the food and the worker population which the island can no longer sufficiently produce and support, and is itself the product of the ritualistic religion which dominates the island. The focus of this religion is the idea that the 'ancestors' will arrive with a white canoe to rescue the islanders from their speck of land – the last bit of earth remaining above the waters, according to the legend narrated in the film. But the production of the Moai is necessary to ensure this. The sculptures can thus be read in the film as both the expression of, and the doom of, the island's culture – as another aspect of the self-destructive tendency of paradise. They embody an attempt to rescue the island through a process of production which both emblemizes the island's political and sexual economy and hastens its demise.

In fact, in Marxist terms, one could say that the Moai are the reification of both the mode of production and relations of production on the island, and that their production, like that of capitalism itself, carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. This broadly Marxist echo is not part of an attempt to formulate any narrowly orthodox economic critique in the film, however, but simply reflects the diffusion of such ideas into what could be termed popular leftist economics. The main point here is that the film evokes for the typical liberal/environmentally conscious viewer an easily graspable series of analogies to the current environmentalist critique of 'capitalism' broadly conceived.⁵

More specifically, in the fetishized production which is at the same time a castration of true fertility, the film addresses a central current concern. It can be viewed in the long line of Western critiques of the 'technological solution' – the idea that technology can rescue humanity from the crises which technology itself has produced – pollution, over-population, nuclear holocaust and so forth. Thus the most potent symbol of the native culture of Rapa Nui, the Moai, is appropriated by the film as a symbol of Western-style industrial production. More generally, the culture of Easter Island becomes the stage for the representation of the Western post-industrial nightmare. We too, the film suggests, threaten to over-populate our world and exhaust its resources, and our own fetishizing of technology and large-scale production may be not the solution, but rather the embodiment and root cause of our own predicament. The self-contradictory and ultimately self-destructive culture of 'paradise' is only a metaphor for what Western culture may ultimately become, and the destruction of paradise is really a warning to the late twentieth-century post-industrial West of the danger of its

own destruction. In a final ironic twist, Polynesia becomes redefined and appropriated as the site of apocalypse, and the wisdom of self-preservation is left implicitly to the West – a culture (hopefully, according to the film) less blind to the need for cultural change.

This final twist – the implicit construction of a moment of redemptive vision in the viewer – is of course vital to the film's message. This construction succeeds because it draws simultaneously on the cinematic expectations of paradise and of the ignoble (cannibalistic) savage. Both of these, in cinematic terms, are historically emblems of alterity. They thus allow the Western viewer to recover a sense of difference from – and superiority to – the 'innocent' subjects of the film. In other words, the allegory of potential sameness is conveniently presented in an iconography which allows for the construction of a critical distance from the characters and situation depicted in the film, and consequently a critical awareness regarding the film itself. It is this distance which makes possible an appreciation of the allegorical message of the film, and which also allows a (hopefully leftist) sociopolitical response on the part of the audience.

Cannibalism in particular, in the 'popular imagination', is an eternal emblem of difference. But for *Rapa Nui* to 'work', its audience must recognize the metaphorical power of cannibalism as a point of sameness, while still retaining a horror of the actual practice as stereotypically 'different'. Correctly reading the metaphor is fundamental to the construction of a model of critical sociopolitical consciousness: one must simultaneously grasp the metaphor of similitude while recoiling from the practice. In the space between metaphor and practice is redemptive vision. If there is to be difference, it is finally up to Western textual consumers to reinstitute that difference in the future by stepping back, at the last moment, from their impending self-destruction. The step back (symbolically enacted in the reading of the metaphor), marking as it does an objectivity about present and potential future sameness which is denied to the native, becomes the differing step.⁶ It locates alterity in consciousness rather than in any specific social practice, and it locates it in the future. (See Harris (1977: xi) for a very similar take on explaining cannibalism, and the ability of this explanation to help us avoid 'a blind form of determinism'.)

In the end, it becomes apparent that the efficacy of the film's leftist eco-environmental message rests on a basis of classic colonialism. In using Easter Island as an allegory of Western economic history, the film relies on a constant tension between recognized sameness and a culturally conditioned sense of otherness. This recognition of otherness is what constitutes the critical distance from the other – and the subsequent critical awareness of oneself in relation to the other – that is fundamental to the supposed superior Western consciousness. Clearly, such allegories must always impose their familiar Western discourse on to targets which the viewer is culturally conditioned to see as radically other, for only in this way can the critical distance be achieved – thus the choice of a region like the Pacific. In addition, the greater the initial expectation of difference on

the part of the audience, the more effective the recognition of metaphorical sameness becomes. Second, the greater the distance between the two different poles of alterity, the more effective the film's message. Thus Easter Island, located between Polynesian paradise and cannibalistic apocalypse, provides access to two of the most otherly – and most mutually exclusive – icons of Western popular imagination.

This post-colonialist critique opens the possibility of a Modernist critique of the film's construction of critical consciousness as well. Potentially, the spectator's final interpretation of the film could be construed as a warning of danger, but at the same time it could be seen as the construction of a point of knowledge which effectively assures him or her that the danger is not a real threat since he or she is already at the point necessary to avoid such a catastrophe. We may recall Theodor Adorno's assertion that the cultural critic actually collaborates with his own culture by helping to lend it the pretension of 'distance' and an ability to know and critique itself, thus simply validating that culture (Adorno, 1955/1981: 20). Certainly the fact that *Rapa Nui*'s environmental awareness contains within it such a colonial blindness would tend to support such a view. In fact, according to reports from Easter Island itself, the degradation of paradise seems quite literally to have occurred at least to some extent in the making of the film *Rapa Nui*, as vast amounts of trash were left behind and island life disrupted. The filming of the movie on location could be seen as simply an explicit physical realization of the implicit visiting of Western vision and destruction on to 'paradise' as discussed above. And a second allegorical reading of the film, again from a post-colonialist perspective, would be to see it as enacting discursively the historical process of Western capitalism's self-imposition on to non-capitalist, kin- or distribution-based cultures (see Wolf, 1982). Historically, Easter Island was certainly not a capitalistic society when it constructed the Moai. The film's representation essentially misappropriates a vaguely Marxist discourse of capitalist critique and imposes it on to what was probably a distribution-based economy, just as the making of the film imposed an American capitalist model of production on to a clearly 'peripheral' and colonized area.

Tens of millions of Americans are at least vaguely aware of the depictions of Polynesia and Micronesia in *National Geographic* magazine. This magazine is in fact probably more responsible for the contemporary American view of the Pacific as the locale of a kind of paradisaical otherness than any other single source. In fact, in a 1946 article on Bikini Atoll, the writer describes his view as he approaches in terms quite similar to the presentation of *Rapa Nui*: palm trees, beaches, lagoons, outrigger canoes and boys playing in the shallows. He then writes: 'When I commented that the setting might have come out of Nordhoff and Hall's stories about the South Seas, one of the sailors in the whaleboat alongside said, "Naw, you mean the *National Geographic*"' (Markwith, 1946: 97).

Yet more recently, the images have been less sanguine. This is a topic which

has been explored in the book *Reading National Geographic* (Lutz and Collins, 1993). The book as a whole emphasizes a recent tendency of the photos in the magazine to ultimately abolish a clear otherness in favour of a subtle identity between observer and observed which nevertheless clearly preserves for the observer the place of dominance: a process which replicates that which I have discussed above. In a section on Micronesia, the authors stress the ways in which the magazine emphasizes the alterity of this region in terms of the traditional Pacific paradise (pp. 133–44). They also trace what they see as a noticeable decline in this representational tendency into the 1980s, as what was once a friendly (if still ‘other’) paradise becomes a more politically, socially and environmentally polluted and hostile region for Americans – another ‘toxic riskscape’. While, in stories from the 1960s, smiling American paternalism and influence is pervasive, in stories and photos from the 1980s, contact between Americans and Micronesians lessens, and the new climate makes for ‘a photographic response in which it is declared that, should we lose Micronesia, it would not have been worth having’ (p. 144). A photo reproduced in the book, for example, shows a beach almost entirely covered with rusting scrap metal and other detritus, with not a palm tree in sight.

The vision of the treeless beach recalls Andrew Ross’ evocation of the ‘Christian logic of destroying groves sacred to pagan rituals’, which he links with capitalist impulsions to forest destruction, all part of a Western attitude that has come back to haunt us in the form of global warming (Ross, 1991: 224). (Recall also the sacred grove of trees on Easter Island, whose destruction *Rapa Nui* enacts.) But in Ross’ case, it is clearly us destroying pagan groves populated by a pristine other. In this sense, his viewpoint is typical of a Western discourse which locates in the primitive paradise and its inhabitants – in their radical otherness (whether real or constructed) – an alternative to our problems.

In the Micronesian case on the other hand, it seems that something more subtle and insidious is occurring. What is happening is that the Micronesian other is becoming increasingly us – the beach is after all littered with Western industrial detritus, acquired by newly acquisitive-minded consumers not so different from us. It is we who have implicitly sacrificed paradise, through the person of the Micronesians who, as a key 1960s article makes abundantly clear, are our own sociocultural protégés in many ways (its title is ‘The Americanization of Micronesia’). A later article on Micronesia (October 1986) actually alternates between classic ‘paradise’ images – bounteous fruits, lush green islands in a sparkling ocean and bare-breasted maidens – and images which mark the assimilation of the Micronesians to Western socioeconomic patterns – overdeveloped islets, grandiose development schemes, and the unloading of massive quantities of consumer items (in this case beer).

A comparison of the two articles from 1967 and 1986 clearly suggests that the decay of paradise comes specifically from the willingness of its citizens to be just like us. But this welcoming openness is the very component of the Pacific

paradise which has so fascinated Westerners, particularly in its sexual expression. In the end, the two *National Geographic* articles seem to suggest, it is the very openness and friendliness of the Pacific Islanders themselves – an aspect emphasized over and over again in descriptions of the region, including the 1967 article – which has led to the region's assimilation of the mechanisms of its destruction.

But of course *National Geographic* itself is premised on the openness and friendliness of the West – both to others and to its own innovations and progress. If the article locates the fall of Micronesia in the islanders' desire and willingness to be like us, it also implicitly poses the question of whether we will ultimately choose to be just like them – just as open to the mechanisms of our own destruction. The articles reveal the magazine's own ambivalence about the universal humanism which is otherwise its guiding principle. Humanism resists the fundamental implications of alterity in favour of a universal sameness, yet this is just what seems to worry the producers of *National Geographic* in this case.

Read in their larger temporal context, these articles have further resonance on the American cultural scene. The 1967 article obviously occurs at the time of the Vietnam War – an event which *National Geographic* itself covered in several articles. The even larger context is the cold war, and the effort to 'win over' the various peoples of the world. *National Geographic* has of course always been a notoriously conservative publication, and throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s provided highly patriotic support for overseas war efforts.⁷ Of particular strategic importance in the cold war was Micronesia, with its atomic and missile test sites at Bikini and Kwajalein Atolls. Thus behind the smiling paradise images of 1967 lies the ultimate subtext of Western self-consumption – nuclear annihilation. The representational evolution which I have been discussing is in fact closely replicated in two articles on Bikini Atoll, the first from July 1946, the second from June 1986. In 1946, the Bikinians are clearly other, but at the same time they are our friendly, welcoming allies. By 1986, the article suggests, we have consumed this island paradise, our allies, and ultimately a part of ourselves in the nuclear pursuits of the cold war that was meant to save us. (For more on Bikini, nuclear testing and the sexual paradise epitomized by the bikini, see Teaiwa, 1994.)

The juxtaposition of paradise and annihilation recalls similar images of the Pacific which flooded the US during the Second World War – of horrific battles on beautiful islands, especially as captured in documentaries like the 1943 *Battle of the Beaches* (see Griffith *et al.*, 1981: 374–5), as well as numerous fictional war films. As with the choice of Easter Island, the use of the Pacific again seems especially appropriate for meditations on our own future. The huge distance between the alternative poles of cultural expectation for the region serve perfectly in this regard. This is one factor which helps explain *NG's* love of photos of rusting Japanese planes and sunken Second World War ships now covered by lush jungle and encrusted in spectacularly beautiful coral. In the 1967 article,

however, the two realms remain absolutely separate. 'Our' American paradise can still be paradise. On the other hand, the 1986 article came at a time when Micronesia was gaining an increased measure of autonomy from the US in the form of a Compact of Free Association. This was perhaps due in part, as Lutz and Collins suggest, to the fact that it was 'not worth having' any more – at least not in the form of a very closely held area which was conceived of as potentially becoming another 'America in the Pacific' on the model of Hawaii. The NGS itself had also become somewhat more open to questioning and critical examinations of political issues (Bryan, 1987: 381ff). By this time, as the juxtaposition of Western-style development and tropical fruits from photo to photo illustrates, an epistemic shift has occurred. The larger sense of the articles could be taken as a meditation on the era of the Vietnam War itself and the height of the cold war, and on whether the US partially 'consumed itself' in the fighting of this war, or whether there was in some sense a lack of critical national (or editorial!) awareness.⁸ While the 1967 article is entitled 'The Americanization of Micronesia', the 1986 article reveals that Americanizing led ironically to both scenic and economic 'contamination' and political loss. The articles enact, over the course of nineteen years, what *Rapa Nui* enacts in the confines of its running time. What we like about paradise is the part of it that likes and replicates us, but this is the part that led to its – and potentially our – destruction.

Of course, *National Geographic's* views of the Pacific enact a relatively mainstream form of national self-awareness and ambivalence, in contrast to *Rapa Nui's* more critical attitude which seems to call for the implementation of an alternative. Both do however contain within them the construction of critical consciousness: in *Rapa Nui's* case, in the reading of cannibalism, in *National Geographic*, the juxtaposition over time, as well as the photographic juxtapositions within the 1986 article which allow the viewer a sense of critical awareness again denied to the 'natives'. The key to both texts' construction of a point of departure for a future of alterity is the confrontation of culturally determined icons of the very positive and very negative. This confrontation must be readable as an allegory of similitude, whose trajectory is from the positive to the negative, and whose intertext is an imposed discourse of Western socioeconomic evolution. Yet the icons nevertheless retain their culturally established history of radical otherness, thus allowing the critical distance which provides an escape from the endpoint of the allegory.

Clearly, the concept of 'The other as us', particularly for self-criticism, is not restricted to the Pacific. Social critics from Edward Said onwards have argued that the other is finally always a construction internal to its own constructors, and a vehicle for retrospectively defining the constructing agency through its construct. It is the Pacific's cultural history within American representational contexts as a place that is radically other in both very positive and very negative senses which makes it especially privileged for such constructions. (One could also add that for various reasons – political, demographic, geographic – the

Pacific has until recently been able to generate less resistance to these constructions than some other regions of the world.) Bikini in fact, with its two associations of Eden and nuclear holocaust, is perhaps the most privileged place on the planet for such constructions.

I would now like to make a brief excursus to the origins of the Polynesian paradise myth in the Enlightenment. I do this in order to suggest certain cultural continuities between that era and our own in their use of Polynesia, Nature and cannibalism as emblems for the construction of critical consciousness. With this analysis in mind, we will see that cannibalism in particular tends to become a last bulwark of Enlightenment humanism seeking to resist the postmodern dilemma of absolute alterity and the loss of any 'natural' position which would offer the opportunity for a social critique.

The explosion of the Polynesian myth in the West dates most strongly from Bougainville's report of his voyage to Tahiti which was published in Paris in 1771. Yet the apocalypse of *Rapa Nui* finds its Enlightenment parallel in Diderot's literary response to Bougainville's report, his *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, published posthumously.⁹ This text purports to be a conversation between a French priest and a Tahitian sage, who makes a series of parallels which serve to suggest that European society was corrupt and decadent in comparison to the State of Nature in which Tahiti found itself.

Yet especially when considered in the context of the introduction and conclusion which frame it, Diderot's text actually anticipates *Rapa Nui*. A close reading of the Tahitian sage reveals that it is not really pleasure and free love which govern the society, but a utilitarian form of social engineering that seeks to maximize population and agricultural productivity.¹⁰ For example, sex is encouraged simply because it produces more children to work the land.

But this reading only masks a greater irony. Ultimately, Diderot's Tahiti is merely a reflection of his own and others' (particularly the Physiocrats') ideas for socioeconomic reform in Enlightenment France. Tahiti is not only a return to the state of pure Nature, but an ideal model for future European economic and sexual reform.¹¹ Many of the social reforms proposed by the philosophes in the *Encyclopédie*, such as their critique of celibacy and their support for divorce, as well as their fear of the 'unhealthy' cities which disfavoured stable sexual relations and the raising of healthy families (commerce, for example, 'depopulates the countryside' (Lough, 1971: xiii.101a)), can be seen in the light of this desire for a utilitarian social organization which would maximize agricultural reproduction.¹² Tahiti is in many ways simply the incarnation of the physiocratic reform ideas taken to their ultimate conclusion, and Diderot's desire for Tahiti is the projection of his own philosophic speculations on to that unsuspecting island.

Yet there is clearly a dehumanizing aspect to this idealistic imposition. In fact, humans are reduced in Tahiti to pure economic capital.¹³ Diderot himself was quite ambiguous on the question of marriage: in the eighteenth-century

sentimentalist sensibility, he recognized the limits of pure utilitarianism: 'We are no longer in the state of savage nature where all women belonged to all the men . . . our faculties have become perfected, we feel with more delicateness' (Ency viii.701b). While Tahiti may have reduced women to the status of capital and removed any sentimentality from human relations, Diderot privileges this same sentimentality as a mark of European 'improvement'. Thus Diderot, after having imposed an ideal reformist vision of European origin on to Tahiti, uses Tahiti itself to undermine that very vision, while reserving to France, and particularly to himself, the wisdom of having both surpassed the state of pure (utilitarian) nature, and the reason necessary to question a return to that state via ideal future reforms.¹⁴

The most striking aspect of the *Supplément* is the introduction. Diderot opens with a general enquiry on the arrival of humans on the islands in the middle of the Pacific, which could itself be read as a more general meditation on the arrival of humans in our own world, an island in the sea of space as depicted in the opening of the film *Rapa Nui*. Speaking of one particular island near Tahiti, which differs primarily in size, so that the Tahitian reproductive policy has reached its logical conclusion there, his fictive interlocutors ask:

B. What happens to the inhabitants as they multiply on a space no bigger than one league in diameter?

A. They exterminate themselves by eating each other; and this is perhaps a first, very ancient and natural epoch of cannibalism, which originated on islands.

B. Or multiplication is limited by some superstitious law; the child is crushed in the womb of his mother thrown under the feet of a priestess.

A. Or men with their throats slashed die under the knife of a priest; or they have recourse to castration.

(p. 460)

These remarks, which immediately follow the discussion of the arrival of animal species on isolated islands, suggest that the *terminus ad quem* of Tahiti can scarcely be different from that of the particular island here in question, the Ile des Lanciers in the Tuamotus, or from Easter Island as well.

The ultimate result of reason, utilitarian order and utopia – both Tahitian and physiocratic – is potentially catastrophic. Human reifications of their own desires threaten Hell, castration and cannibalistic self-destruction. This proto-Malthusian argument of course finds interesting echoes today not just in the words of Kevin Costner, but more generally in the environmental movement in the US, and most particularly in the question of 'limits' and the discourse of ecological catastrophe (see especially Ross, 1991 and Lasch, 1991). Fittingly, one

important critique of the Enlightenment by thinkers such as Theodor Adorno was its alienation from Nature (for much more on this, see Hochman, 1997). Of course, Diderot criticized his utopian ideals for being all too 'natural', but his critique of this utopia due to its pure utility suggests a deeper vision of a truer sentimental, romantic nature on his part which corresponds in many ways to that of many modern environmentalists. The physiocrats are in fact 'unnatural', and Nature becomes the realm of 'wisdom', or, in the terms of this article, of critical consciousness. As such, Diderot's text and Costner's film suggest that Nature and its higher dictates can offer an escape from the techno-industrial, utilitarian society which both pre- and (some) post-modernists fear. Of course, Diderot speaks from the position of a late-Enlightenment sentimentalist and pre-capitalist, falling back on essentially classical and agrarian concepts of nature, while Costner and Reynolds speak from the standpoint of late-capitalist, leftist critics relying on a vision of Nature formed by the American tradition of Thoreau, John Muir and Aldo Leopold.¹⁵ Yet both share a certain rational, humanist viewpoint which is also essentially that of *National Geographic*, and whose origin is often located in the Enlightenment.

Of course, the people who can supposedly grasp Nature as a saviour are ironically not the people living closest to the natural world, in their Polynesian paradises, but Diderot's Europeans and Costner's post-industrial Westerners. The inhabitants of paradise are engaged in 'unnatural acts'. More precisely, their acts become unnatural and destructive because of the failure to temper them with a critical vision or awareness. It would be harder to find a clearer (implicit) admission that 'Nature' as a source of salvation is a construct of Western culture for itself than this ironic situation. And indeed, Nature, since the Enlightenment, is at least partially an emblem of the Western tendency to cultivate a conscious position of observation. Nature is to be studied, described, preserved, measured and catalogued. It is one of the privileged objects of the Western cultivation of the consciousness of being an observer.¹⁶ Thus Costner and Diderot are in a sense true to their own textual logic in presenting Nature as a cultural construct more accessible to them than to the Polynesians they describe, and in locating it as the source of salvation from the blind consumption to which the Easter Islanders and Tahitians must eventually succumb. More generally, virtually all Western representations of the Polynesian Eden, no matter how plenitudinal, subtly reveal not only that this paradise is a Western representation, but that it is finally inferior to the true 'best of all possible worlds' (if not paradise itself) – the West. Nature as an entity distinct from culture is the mark of a consciousness which can at least potentially save this best of all possible worlds from its own cannibalistic cultural tendencies.

To return to an earlier point, it becomes apparent that environmental awareness of the type offered by *Rapa Nui* and *National Geographic* must necessarily be linked to colonial blindness. For Nature is virtually equivalent to critical consciousness in this discourse, and is thus intimately connected to the

colonial construction of that consciousness. Environmental awareness and colonialism, in the context of these texts, are one and the same. And both Nature and Western colonial superiority can be saved by the identical gesture. That is, by positing the endpoint of paradise's evolution as cannibalism, the texts underline the unnaturalness of the acts which lead to that endpoint. Thus the break from cannibalism, toxicity and self-consumption, which serves to establish a point of superior consciousness, also simultaneously defines the Western viewpoint as the 'natural' (anti-cannibalistic) one. All the texts examined here resist the step into the 'postnatural' and more generally, into the postmodern. Nature can still be rescued.

In closing, I would like to shift my analysis somewhat, towards the academic. Having considered both the import of *Rapa Nui* and *National Geographic* for their own generalized audiences, and critiqued these texts from what could be termed an academic standpoint, I would like to consider what the texts have to say to a specifically academic audience.

I would suggest that the fundamental image of horror, in Diderot and *Rapa Nui*, is that of cannibalism, while in *National Geographic*, the subtext of the atomic age introduces a metaphorical equivalent of this. Cannibalism's use as a point of horror, and as a mechanism for constructing consciousness, could in fact be traced at least back to the Renaissance in the form of Montaigne's 'Des Cannibales'.¹⁷ More generally, the topic of cannibalism has generated enormous academic debate in recent years (for a general summary of this debate, see Osborne, 1997). One particular nexus of this debate has been the argument between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere over the fate of that most famous of European visitors to the Polynesian paradise, Captain James Cook. The central focus of that argument is whether Cook was in fact deified by the Hawaiians as the God Lono. A subsidiary question involves whether the Hawaiians – and the Polynesians in general – were cannibals, and if so, what were the reasons for this, and specifically whether Cook himself might have potentially been eaten by the Hawaiians, as he himself had concluded that they sometimes did with their enemies.¹⁸

The larger debate between these two scholars could be understood as a debate on the 'difference' of the Hawaiians, and even more generally, on the concept of difference itself. Obeyesekere suggests that cannibalism was in large part a British imposition on to both Hawaiians and Maoris (for whom it is better documented: 1992b), and he seeks to underline the 'violent, irrational' – savage, one might say – side of Cook in his work (1992a: 8), ironically (and purposefully) assimilating him to traditional visions of 'natives'. Sahlins meanwhile accuses Obeyesekere of turning the Hawaiians into 'bourgeois realists' (1995: ix) and excessively relying on a common humanity in which all natives are alike – a humanity which erases fundamental cultural differences (1995: 4–5). As such, the debate touches on the liminal space which this article has sought to examine.

Sahlins' argument, in this debate, is really an argument for profound difference, while Obeyesekere argues for a unilaterally constructed difference which can finally be transcended through a common humanity. But both sides locate the point of debate as the potential cannibalism, which either is or is not practised by the Polynesians. The argument starts with an assumption that cannibalism is other, then goes on to argue whether either cannibalism or its associated otherness are fundamental realities. In other words, if cannibalism exists, then otherness exists, and if a culture has engaged in cannibalism, then it is irredeemably other. Cannibalism is, for the West, an emblem of absolute difference, it has been argued (Kilgour, 1997: 20–1. See also Kilgour, 1990: 7). Yet once again, to repeat my previous point, the other is us. It is really we who, metaphorically, stand accused of eating Captain Cook in the larger scheme of things. That is, it is the West itself which faces the possibility of ruining – and consuming – itself, the texts discussed in this article suggest. Metaphorically, cannibalism – or at least the potential of cannibalism which *Rapa Nui*, *National Geographic*, the postnatural novel, Diderot and Montaigne all suggest – can be read in this context as a quintessentially Western practice. The texts discussed above thus reverse the terms of the Sahlins-Obeyesekere debate: the case for cannibalism, at least in the context of the Polynesian apocalypse, is the case for sameness, not difference. The representation of cannibalism is the enactment of our own demise, and it has far less to do with difference than it would initially appear.

Of course, in a sense Obeyesekere is thus correct in his claim that cannibalism is a representation whose origins lie in the West, and that the Pacific is the field for this and other representational gestures. This same point is one of the central ideas which I have stressed here. But, as Sahlins points out, Obeyesekere's granting of a universal, practical rationality to the Pacific (in the process of denying its practising of cannibalism) is simply another such gesture. His attempt to remove the blemish of cannibalism from the Pacific reveals his own implication in the dualities of self and other which he seeks to overcome, since it suggests that cannibalism is part of a truly 'essential' otherness which must be denied in order for the Pacific 'natives' to be as rational as us.

Sahlins, meanwhile, chooses the most 'unnatural' of practices to establish a basis for essential otherness. This is a choice that implicates him in a discourse which, while claiming to be about a kind of alterity located all on a single plain without hierarchies, nevertheless leaves the Western academic discursant in the 'natural', non-cannibalism-practising position. His own discourse cannot escape the cultural determinations which cannibalism imposes on it.

The entire anthropological debate in fact replicates this conundrum. Obeyesekere's argument that cannibalism is a unilateral imposition by the West echoes William Arens's oft-discussed claims that cannibalism does not exist, and is merely a rhetorical device for asserting moral superiority over the accused (Arens, 1979). In rightly castigating Western anthropologists for ignoring contrary evidence, Arens nevertheless seems to over-reach in disturbing ways. He ironically

ends up denying a voice, or the potential of true difference, to the entirety of non-Western culture, whose historical past is reduced to nothing but a series of Western overdeterminations, and whose own claims about cannibalism are all just as false as our own, and motivated by just the same self-aggrandizing desires (1979: 145). It is the sweeping certainty with which Obeyesekere and Arens argue for an identity between us and them which gives one pause and suggests a larger agenda to deny even the possibility of difference.

On the other hand, Sahlin's argument is part of the response from a number of primarily symbolic anthropologists, notably Peggy Sanday (1986), who argue that cannibalism is simply an alternative system of formulating cultural myths and rituals of renewal and reproduction (see also Brown and Tuzin, 1983). But the cannibalistic system is characteristic of societies most concerned with domination and control, Sanday argues (1986: 26), and is absent from societies characterized by accommodation and integration – a viewpoint which conveniently leaves cannibalism as a rather unenviable form of social reproduction. The favourable position turns out once again to be the non-cannibalistic one.

One also suspects that much of the resistance to earlier materialist (Harris, 1977) and psychological (Sagan, 1974) explanations of cannibalism is due to the fact that they bring it too close to home. Eli Sagan argues that cannibalism may arise as a result of the decay of advanced societies, including Nazi Germany (Sagan, 1974: 141; see also Sanday, 1986: 10–11). Sahlins and Sanday criticize Marvin Harris for explaining Aztec cannibalism as a natural outgrowth of a 'western business mentality' (Sanday, 1986: 18, see also Arens, 1979: 168). The resistance to these explanations ironically echoes the New Guinea Arapesh's refusal to admit that Japanese cannibalism of the Second World War against the former allies of Japanese the Arapesh themselves, was motivated by hunger. To do so, one anthropologist suggests, would have been for the Arapesh to admit that they themselves, like their Japanese friends, were capable of descending to such deeds, and that such behaviour was 'natural'. Rather, they claimed that the Japanese were 'deranged' by the fear of their impending defeat and driven to madness – another form of alterity (Tuzin, 1983: 63). The 'naturalness' of cannibalism must always be hidden and denied, it seems.

In this light, both Sahlins and Obeyesekere, in positing cannibalism as the most 'otherly' practice imaginable, and implicitly as the most unnatural practice, participate in a lack of vision related to that of the popular texts we have examined. Their establishment of their own positions as the 'natural' one reveals a blindness to the fundamental self-cannibalism of the West which the popular texts expose. Indeed, the Western fascination with cannibalism in popular culture (as opposed to academic) is in large part with the way in which we are capable of this practice – Western American examples such as the Donner Party or Colorado's Alferd Packer come quickly to mind, as well as books like Piers Paul Read's *Alive*, and cannibalism has become a popular Hollywood metaphor for consumer culture (see Kilgour, 1997). While I will not seek to adjudicate the

question of whether cannibalism 'actually' occurred in Hawaii in 1778, I would suggest that the entire terms of much of the debate on the existence of cannibalism as a practice, anywhere in the world, participate in a form of academic colonialism and the construction of positions of critical consciousness which belie much of the rhetoric of the debate. Arens notes that 'anthropology has a clear-cut vested interest in maintaining some crucial cultural boundaries – of which the cannibalistic boundary is one – and constantly reinforcing subjective conclusions about the civilized and the savage' (1979: 170–1). Yet while he recognizes that this usage is not unique to the West (1979: 145), it is specifically Western anthropologists who are taken to task for their construction of a 'we–they dichotomy' to which they at least, if not the less 'complex' societies which they study, should be immune (1979: 169). Thus while Sahlins and Sanday use cannibalism as a marker of (unequal) difference, Arens and Obeyesekere use the refusal of cannibalism's existence as a marker of critical superiority.

This article has tried to show how images of Polynesia and Micronesia interact with larger issues concerning cannibalism, Nature, colonialism, leftist economic and environmental critiques, critical consciousness, and the epistemic breaks between rational humanism, modernism and postmodernism which are characteristic of late twentieth-century America. Certainly none of these interactions is independently surprising. For example, the imposition of Western intertexts on to the Pacific is relatively obvious and widespread: Peter Brooks has recently illustrated how Gauguin imposed Western pictorial intertexts on to Tahiti in his paintings, and certainly the examples could be multiplied many-fold, as Bernard Smith's more sweeping studies find in the Pacific replications of Western neo-classical and romantic aesthetics (Brooks, 1993; Smith, 1985, 1992). And no one needs to be told that the Pacific has been a heavily colonized area. But the sum total of the interactions depicted here, which serve to sacrifice paradise for the sake of the West, have their own peculiar specificity and efficacy. This specificity lies particularly in the status of Polynesia (and Micronesia to a lesser extent) as the site of an Edenic paradise in the general Western (and particularly American) cultural imagination, and even more specifically in the American imagination of the post Second World War era. The true efficacy of these texts as rationalist, critical vehicles lies in their suggestion that if even paradise is vulnerable, then everything is vulnerable, especially since this paradise is an 'artificial paradise' (to quote Baudelaire) which all too closely resembles our own comfortable Western world. And what is finally most striking about the representations examined, I believe, is their destruction of paradise specifically in terms of the very features of paradise itself.

But despite – or more precisely because of – the postmodernist critiques which can be made of these texts, they betray a moment of doubt which is itself in many ways postmodern in its questioning of the possibility of escaping from a systemic blindness which could be, some might argue, apocalyptic. In allegorically

deconstructing the recent American past and particularly one of its most cherished Edenic images, the texts attempt to recuperate the critical awareness that they suggest was missing from the postwar past that constructed those images of paradise. Yet they are faced with the postmodern dilemma that our own era may be no more able to achieve such a critical vision than was that which preceded it. In other words, they are faced with a metatextual version of that same crisis of 'sameness' which the texts examined here enact in the confines of their representations. All the discourses, both popular and academic, turn finally to the far extremes of alterity – to the most 'natural' Eden and especially to that most 'unnatural' cannibalism – to rescue the environment, post-industrial late capitalism and the West from the postmodern and the postnatural. In uniting these two extremes of stereotypical representation, they make the Pacific a sacrificial locus for the construction of a Western salvation.¹⁹

Notes

- 1 I borrow these concepts from Bernard Smith. For more on these two discourses, see especially 1985: 144ff, 318ff (on the evangelical) and 1985: 326ff (on the romantic).
- 2 Certainly such a sacrifice can be read partially in terms of the Christian discourse which has seen in Polynesia an emblem of the decline and ultimate transitoriness of golden ages and earthly life – a moralistic object lesson corresponding to Chateaubriand's use of Tahiti in his *Génie du Christianisme* (see Smith, 1985: 44ff, 153). Yet the force of the object lesson here rests not so much on the tempting but illusory perfection of the object as the actual correspondence between subject and object, us and them. It is not the desire for an illusion which is dangerous, but the fact that we and the object of danger are one and the same.
- 3 This event replicates the trajectory of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, which also ends with a flight to Pitcairn.
- 4 See Deitering 1996:200. She cites specifically John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* as 'the story of an empire voraciously consuming itself'. See p. 199 and the accompanying notes and citations on the novel as 'the story of a stomach'.
- 5 It is interesting to note in the film, however, a number of other features of a potential Marxist allegory of the historical development of capitalism. Among these are: the fetishization of both labour and the commodities it produces; the increasing alienation from Nature; the fact that the entire process is governed by a religiously oriented ideology; the class-based society of short-eared workers and long-eared 'bourgeois'; a terminal crisis of overproduction; and an economic system which includes the causes of its own demise. Of course, other requisite features are lacking (the pressure towards technological innovation typical of capitalism, the accumulation of monetary capital, and money

itself, for that matter). And to repeat, the film is clearly not an attempt at narrowly orthodox Marxism.

- 6 See Maggie Kilgour's argument (1990: 7) that the 'product of that victory [of cannibalism over communion] is the identity of the modern subject or individual'. The conflict between the two is that 'between identification and the division that creates power over another' (1990: 7).
- 7 See Bryan, 1987. Even in the mid-1970s, an effort to present a 'balanced' portrayal of Cuba led to threats and recriminations from the NGS's board of trustees (p. 389ff).
- 8 See Kluge (1991) for a similar analysis of Micronesia, especially with regard to the optimism and confidence of the early Peace Corps.
- 9 See Diderot, 1964 (Vernière): 445–516. I have previously written in detail on the dystopian character of Diderot's *Supplément* (Cowell, 1995), and what I will say here is a shorter version of those remarks. Translations into English are my own.
- 10 He states: 'Do you wish to know at all times and in all places what is good and bad? Address yourself to the nature of objects and actions, to your relations with your fellow man, to the influence of your conduct on your own personal utility and the general good' (p. 482). The Tahitians provide welfare for the aged specifically because they help care for the young (p. 485); new children constitute both a 'domestic and public joy' (p. 485); women's beauty is evaluated according to their utility, and in particular according to whether they 'promise many children' (p. 488); on the other hand, old women no longer able to bear children are condemned for engaging in sexual relations (p. 488), since this siphons sexual energy away from reproduction, and celibacy is likewise condemned; indeed Orou suggests that those who are too old or sick might reasonably be killed off (p. 502).
- 11 In particular, the 'Tahitian' idea that population constitutes the source of wealth parallels the doctrines of the Enlightenment philosophers and reformers known as the 'physiocrats'. These thinkers, who exercised an important influence on Diderot, believed that agriculture was the only reliable source of national wealth, and that given the then current labour-intensive nature of agriculture in France, only maximum human resources could produce maximum wealth ('there is no true wealth except men and the land' writes Diderot in the *Encyclopédie* (viii.278b)). (Citations from the *Encyclopédie* are taken from Lough, 1971. Translations are my own.)
- 12 Thus in criticizing the prohibition of divorce they write that 'if one of the two [persons] is not fit for generation, then the generative ability of the other is nullified and is a pure loss to society' (*Encyclopédie* xiii.92a).
- 13 This is not surprising, since the physiocrats' other principal reform proposal, after the freer exercise of sexual desire, was the free circulation of capital for the benefit of agricultural investment. The Tahitians likewise note that 'our daughters and our wives are common to us all' (p. 467) and criticize the 'tyranny of the man who converts the [sexual] possession of women into a property right' (p. 509). In other words, marriage inhibits the free circulation of human capital.

- 14 See the philosophical discussion which concludes the *Supplément*. 'A' notes that it is easier for the Tahitian to escape his excess 'rusticity' than for modern Frenchmen to go backwards in order to reform their abuses, to which B responds 'especially [for] those who believe in the union between man and woman' (pp. 505–6). Diderot is in effect using Tahiti to explore the limits of his own utilitarian and reforming vision. The dehumanizing perfection of a future 'paradise' ironically validates the inconsistent but sentimental nature of the Enlightenment present.
- 15 In fact, the position which I have elaborated for him corresponds in certain ways to that of Fredric Jameson (1991: 46), in particular for his critique of the postmodern embrace of 'salvational' technology. But *Rapa Nui* remains fundamentally humanist/pre-modernist in its apparent discursive intentions, even if its use of Nature can be critiqued from a clearly postmodernist perspective.
- 16 Foucault offers a similar analysis of Nature in the Enlightenment, though he rightly underlines the important epistemic changes which occurred after this point (1966/1994: 128ff).
- 17 *Essais*, Book I, 31. Having described in detail the cannibalistic practices of the New World, he writes that 'it does not sadden me that we should note the horrible barbarity in a practice such as theirs: what does sadden me is that, while judging correctly of their wrong-doings we should be so blind to our own. I think there is more barbarity in eating a man alive than in eating him dead' (Tr. Screech, pp. 235–6; he is specifically referring to torture). The second half of the essay stresses repeatedly the inferiority of the European to Montaigne's imagined New World precisely because of, first, the similarity between the two, and second, the European's failure to see this similarity. It is finally in his own awareness of this identity, in the critical vision, that he locates his and his readers' salvation.
- 18 See Sahlins (1985), Obeyesekere (1992a), Sahlins (1995), and especially Obeyesekere (1992b), where he discusses Cook's positive conclusions for Hawaiian cannibalism, especially in the case of defeated enemies.
- 19 See Torgovnick (1997: 6–7) for a discussion of the links between sacrifice and cannibalism, suggesting that the sacrificial strategy used by the texts in this article is finally yet another, metaphorical form of Western cannibalism.

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