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Bodies and Objects in the Hispanic Occupation of Tahiti

Viceroy Amat's Ceremony of Seduction

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Abstract

Focusing on the Spanish occupation of Tahiti (1772–1776), this text deals with the plan devised by Viceroy Manuel Amat to subdue the will of the islanders. My perspective takes the analysis into the realm of seduction, emphasising the key role of objects and bodies in the project. From a wide range of colonial sources, I address the specific forms taken by technologies of domination in particular contexts, the role played by the arrangement of bodies and objects in them, and the assumptions that made it possible to think of particular bodies as mouldable *raw material* in the Hispanic setting of the late 18th century.

Keywords

Enlightenment – cross-cultural encounters – sensibility

Cross-cultural encounters are a privileged space for observing the ambiguous potency of objects in action. In a context of asymmetrical encounters between radically different cultures, objects can put in touch different worlds while affirming the irreducible boundaries that separate them. Focusing on the Hispanic occupation of Tahiti in the late 18th century, this text analyses the colonising project devised by Manuel Amat, Viceroy of Peru between 1761 and 1776, in order to persuade the Tahitians of the benefits of European civilisa-

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tion under Hispanic rule.¹ The operation involved the performance of correct masculinity by the explorers and the offering of propitiatory gifts, but also the objectification of the Tahitians as *human artefacts* that embodied both civilising values and their gender assumptions. The campaign, which lasted from 1772 to 1776, took the form of three naval expeditions and the setting up of a Franciscan mission in 1774, which was abandoned after a year.

My approach is inspired by the rich scholarship that, from different disciplines, has shown the quality of bodies and objects—or of material culture in a broader sense—to capture and transmit values, ideas and meanings, with the potential to stimulate affective and emotional states through sensory contact with them.² Yet sensory perception neither refers to a universal quality nor operates in a symbolic vacuum. On the contrary, scholars agree on the socially constructed, historically and culturally specific character of sensory orders. Therefore, a cultural approach to concepts such as *persuasion*, *perception* and *sensibility* is necessary.³ This draws attention to the variety of affective states that objects and bodies can elicit—even within the same broad cultural framework—depending on individual and collective experiences.

With these ideas in mind, and starting from the particular persuasive texture of the plan devised by Viceroy Amat, my intention in the following pages is to take the analysis of the Spanish intervention in Tahiti into the territory of seduction. To do so, I draw on the theorisation of the sociologist Gilles

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- 1 On the Spanish occupation of Tahiti, see Francisco Mellén Blanco, *Las expediciones marítimas del virrey Amat a la isla de Tahiti, 1772–1775* (Madrid: Gondo, 2011); Salvador Bernabéu Albert, *El Pacífico ilustrado. Del lago español a las grandes expediciones* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992), 190–203; Mercedes Maroto Camino, *Exploring the Explorers: Spaniards in Oceania, 1519–1794* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 133–180, and “Mission to Tahiti: Cultural Translations in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Journals and Coastal Views,” in *Old World, New Worlds: European Cultural Encounters, c. 1000–c. 1750*, ed. Lisa Bailey, Lindsay Diggelmann, and Kim M. Phillips (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 183–210; Anne Salmond, *Aphrodite’s Island: The European Discovery of Tahiti* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 236–256 and 319–384.
 - 2 Jo Labanyi, “Doing Things: Emotion, Affect, and Materiality,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2010): 223–233; Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles, eds., *Feeling Things. Objects and Emotions through History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain 1760–1900: Bodies, Emotion and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 2004), and *Strange Encounters. Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
 - 3 Kathryn Linn Geurts, *Culture and the Senses. Bodily Ways of Knowing in African Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3–19; David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses. The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2005); David Howes and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing. Understanding the Senses in Society* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Constance Classen, ed., *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Lipovetsky, who understands *seduction* as a way of acting on people's behaviour and governing them that has been gaining ground in Western societies since the 18th century.⁴ It is not only a technique at the service of desire, that is, a repertoire of behaviours involving attitudes, gestures, body grooming—even the “hyperbolic design of oneself”—or gifts. For Lipovetsky, seduction is also “an immediate datum of sensory and affective experience” that involves the senses; it is “a productive power of desiring and imaginary forces, the cause of real actions in the world” that arises from a state of felt emotional affection. To be seduced is “to be pleasantly affected, to be attracted to something or someone as a source of imaginary representation and pleasure.” For all this to happen, there must be a *phenomenon of attraction*—an object, a being—that “pleases and excites” the subject with a particular force; a kind of affectation that, as Lipovetsky points out, evokes the motto of classical rhetoric—*docere, delectare, movere*—and underlines the theatrical essence of the principle of seduction.

Adopting this perspective allows us to address the complex articulation of the performative and perceptual dimensions of technologies of domination in a particular context, emphasising the centrality of bodies and objects—and their entanglement—in processes of historical change.⁵ Addressing the ways in which artefacts potentially relate to affect, I analyse the material expression of the Hispanic Enlightenment's imaginary of civilisation, the performative effects attributed to visual materials and their limits in colonial settings far away from the metropolis. This essay considers a wide range of colonial sources concerning the Hispanic intervention on Tahiti, published by Francisco Mellén Blanco in 2011.⁶ We find thirteen diaries or reports from the explorers and missionaries, as well as inventories of objects and other sources of administrative nature. The diary of the interpreter Máximo Rodríguez and the accounts of the friars Gerónimo Clota and Narciso González are of special interest since they stayed for a year on the island living with the Tahitians. I analyse them addressing the specific forms taken by technologies of domination in particular contexts, the role played by the arrangement of bodies and objects in them, and the

4 Gilles Lipovetsky, *Gustar y emocionar. Ensayo sobre la sociedad de seducción*, trans. Cristina Zelich (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2020), 22–29.

5 Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16–49.

6 Mellén Blanco, *Las expediciones marítimas*, 121–883 [MB hereinafter]. An English translation of the repertory exists in Bolton G. Corney, *The Quest and Occupation of Tahiti by Emissaries of Spain During the Years 1772–1776*, 3 vols. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1913, 1915 and 1919), although I have not used it because in most cases the proposed translation does not include nuances that are important for the argument I am developing.

assumptions that made it possible to think of particular bodies as mouldable *raw material* in the Hispanic setting of the late 18th century. This last problem leads us to consider the body as *contact zone*, that is, as the arena in which the tensions, conflicts and negotiations that are characteristic of cross-cultural encounters occur.⁷

1 Sensuous Ways of Power: The Touching Plan of Amat

“We have returned to the sixteenth-century spirit of discoveries and conquests!”⁸ These words, addressed by Manuel Amat (1704–1772) to the Secretary of State for the Indies Julián de Arriaga, express very well the mood of the viceroy of Peru in the face of the prospects opened up by the exploration of the Pacific in the second half of the 18th century. The increasing number of scientific expeditions—such as those of Wallis (1767), Bougainville (1768) and Cook (1769, 1773 and 1777)—is indicative of the interest aroused by the so-called South Sea, a geographical area still little known to Europeans at that time. For the Hispanic Monarchy, the presence of the British or French in the area challenged its hegemony in what the historian Pierre Chaunu dubbed the *Spanish Lake*, understood as a natural extension of the American vicerealties. Specifically, it was the concern about the possible consolidation of British colonies in the South Pacific that prompted Charles III to undertake the oceanic campaigns that Amat celebrated so much.⁹ The initiative was totally in line with the reformist policy developed by the enlightened king in the colonies, aimed at increasing both productive efficiency and the monarchy’s control over the territory, a process that has been significantly interpreted by specialists as a *second conquest of America*, this time of a bureaucratic nature. The protection of the colonies from the English threat after the Spanish defeat in the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) and the acquisition of a better knowledge of the American territories were significant aspects of this policy of control.¹⁰ The project

7 Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991): 33–40.

8 Quoted in Rainer F. Buschmann, *Iberian Visions of the Pacific Ocean 1507–1899* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 120.

9 Ibid., 116–123; Bernabeu Albert, *El Pacífico ilustrado*, 57–90; Oskar H.K. Spate, *The Spanish Lake* (1st ed. 1979; Canberra: Australia National University, 2004).

10 John Lynch, “La segunda conquista de América, 1765–1808,” *Historia* 16, no. 9 (1977): 60–70; Sergio Rivera-Ayala, *El discurso colonial en textos novohispanos. Espacio, cuerpo y poder* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2009). On the enlightened reformism of Charles III, see Agustín Guimerá, ed., *El reformismo borbónico: una visión interdisciplinaria* (Madrid: Alianza, 1996); Ignacio Gómez de Liaño, *El reino de las luces. Carlos III entre el viejo y el nuevo mundo*

of occupation of Tahiti must be understood in this context. The question is not a minor one, since the Catholic Monarchy saw in Britain not only a political but also a religious rival. As will be seen throughout the text, Hispanic agents were careful to emphasise the specifically Catholic—and Spanish—nature of their colonial proposal, which gave a particular character to their intervention in Tahiti.

Preparations for the campaign began in late 1771. The first reconnaissance expedition, composed of soldiers, sailors, and two Franciscan friars under the command of Domingo Bonechea, left the port of Callao on September 26, 1772. Officially it was bound for Easter Island, but it carried secret orders to visit Tahiti as well and prepare the ground for the establishment of a colony on the island. The aim was to prevent a British settlement by taking possession of the place, which implied that the natives accepted two indissoluble conditions in the Hispanic imagination: the sovereignty of Charles III and the Catholic religion, with special concern for the latter.¹¹ The *Águila's* explorers arrived in Tahiti in November 1772 and made their way back to Lima a month later, after inspecting the island and establishing contact with the local *ari'i*—or chiefs. In view of the information gained, a second voyage was undertaken in September 1774, this time with the intention of establishing a permanent mission on the island. Again, the *Aguila* crew commanded by Bonechea headed for Tahiti, with José Andía's paquebot *Júpiter* joining the expedition. The ships returned to Peru at the beginning of 1775, after the inauguration of the mission, which remained in operation until November of that same year. At that time, the arrival on the island of a third expedition commanded by Cayetano de Lángara meant the cancellation of the project of Spanish occupation of Tahiti.

In view of the nostalgic enthusiasm of the quotation that opens this epigraph, it is clear that Amat symbolically linked the new Pacific campaigns with the myth of the past glory of the American conquest, which gave the project of exploration and colonisation of Tahiti a certain air of familiarity. Under the ideal of the civilising mission—shared by all European explorers—the explicit objective remained the subjugation of the native population. However, times were no longer the same. By the end of the 18th century, the form of domination envisaged by the Hispanic authorities moved away from military conquest into the territory of persuasion. This is obvious in the orders issued by Secre-

(Madrid: Alianza, 2016); Karen Stolley, *Domesticating Empire: Enlightenment in Spanish America* (Nashville: Vanderbilt, 2014); Gabriel Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform in Spain and its Empire 1759–1808* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

11 From the Minister of State to the Viceroy of Peru, December 11, 1771. MB, 124–125.

tary of State Arriaga to Amat in connection with the Pacific campaign.¹² We see how he is concerned to bring the natives out of their “unfortunate idolatry” and insists on the need to attract them with “discreet and soft means.” To this end, he recommends offering them gifts and flattering them with “hospitality and affectionate treatment.” Every care should be taken in order not to “sour the spirits of those natives.”¹³

The recommendations for good treatment of the natives and the exchange of gifts were by no means new in the colonising and evangelising experience in America, but they took on a new meaning in the cultural context of the late 18th century.¹⁴ To understand the scope of Arriaga’s indications at the time, it is necessary to refer to the emergence of a new way of understanding the exercise of authority within the framework of the culture of Enlightened sensibility. The rise of this emotional style entailed the valuing of reasonable affections as the substance of life in common, based on the consideration of sensibility as the human moral capacity to experience emotions out of sympathy.¹⁵ Humanitarian attitudes such as benevolence, pity or compassion were considered to belong to *sensitive souls*—with a marked elitist and often masculine bias—and were a source of specific personal satisfactions related to the *pleasure of doing good*. Understood as a novel and modern ethical—and aesthetic—proposal, proper to civilised countries, the culture of sensibility also prescribed and legitimised new affective forms of both the exercise of authority and the masculinities associated with it. The reworking of the image of the Enlightened monarch as an affectionate father is a good example of how the code of sensibility operated in the 18th century.¹⁶ The negative perception of brutal or violent forms of

12 Arriaga refers initially to the expedition to Easter Island, although the two campaigns were later undertaken together.

13 MB, 123–124.

14 We can observe the question of the good treatment of the natives from the debate opened by Bartolomé de las Casas in the 16th century, and we find it both in the ordinances of the Indies and other texts by Jesuits and other ecclesiastics. It is the case of the indications to the Indian parish priests of Alonso de la Peña Montenegro, bishop of Quito, written in the 17th century but which, significantly, were not published until the 18th century. See Alonso de la Peña Montenegro, *Itinerario para párrocos de indios* (Madrid: Oficina de Pedro Marín, 1771).

15 William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

16 Mónica Bolufer, “En torno a la sensibilidad dieciochesca: discursos, prácticas, paradojas,” in *Las mujeres y las emociones en Europa y América: siglos XVII–XIX*, ed. María Luisa Candau (Santander: Universidad de Cantabria, 2016), 29–56, and “‘Hombres de bien’: modelos de masculinidad y expectativas femeninas, entre la ficción y la realidad,” *Cuadernos de la Ilustración y el Romanticismo* 15 (2007): 7–31; Carolyn D. Williams: “The Luxury of Doing

exercising power, understood as *inhuman* in the framework of Enlightenment humanitarian rhetoric, is very visible in the advance of attitudes such as the rejection of torture or slavery, but also in the reworking of the old heroic visions of the Hispanic conquest of America in a very negative key. Condemnations of the cruelty of the conquest were not new in European literature, but their arguments were strongly renewed in connection with the emergence of the *American question* in the second half of the 18th century, stirred up by highly influential authors such as the Abbé Raynal and Cornelius de Pauw. In this sense, Arriaga's indications were not only entirely in keeping with the culture of sensibility but also responded to the political need of the Spanish monarchy to counteract these criticisms.¹⁷

In this cultural context, the technology of domination deployed by Amat acquires a particular sensual texture that speaks of the sensory order that governs his affective ideal, privileging “sweetness” and “softness” as sources of pleasant affections. This is very visible in the instructions he gave to the explorers, in which he insists time and again on two fundamental elements of his persuasive strategy: the conduct to be observed with the natives and the propitiatory gifts to be distributed to them. On the one hand, the natives were to be treated in the “most affable and benign manner within the limits of Christianity.” The “submission and condescension” of these “miserable savages” was to be the work of “*caresses* and flattery and not of rigour and severity,” so he specified that no one was to “treat the inhabitants of the country badly in word or deed,” under severe punishment.¹⁸ Amat's argument about the explorers' conduct and its serious implications is summed up in the specific instructions he addressed to the Franciscan friars José Amich and Juan Bonamó.¹⁹ He expressly instructed them to induce “our people to behave with the islanders in a civil and Christian

Good: Benevolence, Sensibility, and the Royal Humane Society,” in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 77–107.

17 Philip Deacon, “Ilustración y nuevo humanismo en la España dieciochesca,” *Cuadernos De Estudios Del Siglo XVIII* 28 (2018): 29–50; Luigi Contadini, “Pedro Montegón y la visión de la conquista de América en el contexto del debate dieciochista sobre la leyenda negra,” in *España y el continente americano en el siglo XVIII*, ed. Gloria Franco, Natalia González, and Elena de Lorenzo (Gijón: Trea, 2017), 915–927; Nuria Soriano, “More Than One Modernity: North and South America in Enlightenment Debates on Empire, Gender and Nation,” in *European Modernity and the Passionate South. Gender and Nation in Spain and Italy in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mónica Bolufer and Xavier Andreu (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 56–72.

18 Instructions to Bonechea, no. 18, 19 and 20. MB, 129–130. Italics mine.

19 The two embarked with the initial—and unsuccessful—aim of testing the ground for a small colony on Easter Island.

manner,” that is, “not only to treat them with the kindness and *sweetness* that natural reason dictates, but also to give them a good example in their behaviour, gestures and encounters, so as to attract them by means of *softness*.”²⁰ The garri-son and the seamen were to be the object of special vigilance, as they were considered more prone to certain excesses.

On the other hand, Amat ordered the correct distribution of the gifts that were taken for this purpose, taking into account the hierarchies of the islanders to avoid jealousies; even a list was to be kept with the name of each subject and the amount of gifts given.²¹ The objects, according to the list that was sent to the metropolitan authorities, were bought and shipped specifically to serve as incentive for the achievement of the Royal intentions.²² In a letter to Secretary Arriaga, the viceroy specified the function of these gifts and objects, which were to reinforce the effect of the explorers’ persuasive conduct. They carried with them “as facilitating means *to caress* them [the natives] a considerable portion of those gifts and trinkets that the uneducated inhabitants of such remote countries are most keen to possess, and [...] some clothes and seeds, with which to present them and instruct them in the first notions of tillage and civil life.”²³

In view of the rhetoric employed by Amat, the particular tactile quality of the intended effect on the Tahitians is striking. It is clear that the aim is to awaken a pleasant feeling in the islanders, to overcome any reticence by procuring an inner movement, sponsored by an external impact with a very particular texture: a caress [*caricia*]. The repeated use of the verb *caress* [*acariciar*], linked to *sweetness* and *softness*, refers to the symbolic use of the senses as a metaphor of the lived experience, which also implies the hypothetical foreknowledge of the emotional affection that this particular way of touching can potentially cause. This metaphorical use of *touch*, understood as persuasion, is found in the *Diccionario de Autoridades* (1739). In its fifth meaning—among the twenty-five possible ones—, it is said of the verb *to touch* that “Metaphorically, it means to inspire, or persuade in the interior: and so it is said, God touched him in the heart. Lat. *Movere. Tangere*.”²⁴ The Latin etymology, in any case, leaves no doubt as to the specifically moving dimension of the metaphorical use of *touch* in this

20 Instructions to the Reverend Fathers, no. 6. MB, 134. Italics mine.

21 Instructions to Bonechea, no. 28. MB, 131.

22 Amat to Arriaga, December 3, 1772. MB, 144–145.

23 Amat to Arriaga, October 2, 1772. MB, 143. The emphasis on promoting agriculture and the benefits of the work involved is significant, as it was seen as the first step on the civilising ladder.

24 “Metaphoricamente vale inspirar, ò persuadir en lo interior: y assi se dice, Le tocó Dios en el corazón. Lat. *Movere. Tangere*.”

cultural context. Obviously, Amat's instructions deepen that meaning, making the logic of *pleasing* and *exciting* the structuring element of the Hispanic intervention in Tahiti. In his plan, the explorers themselves and the chosen gifts act as a *phenomenon of attraction* in the framework of a perfectly orchestrated spectacle of civilisation, with the aim of awakening the natives' desire and encouraging their imagination about the benefits they could obtain if they submitted to Hispanic rule.

This last aspect, the arousal of desire and imagination through the material display of the Hispanic civilising ideal, relates to the last key piece of the viceroy's strategy on this first voyage of exploration. With these means, he commissioned both the commander Bonechea and the Franciscans to *recruit* some boys to take them to Lima, making them see the "advantageous condition" that awaited them and how much their "luck, life and temperament" would improve. Together with the "gifts and presents," these arguments would awake the "desire to travel" in other native boys or men, who, once instructed "not only in the Spanish language, but principally in the rudiments of our sacred religion," they would return to Tahiti to join the future colony. In Amat's opinion, the example of these returning from civilized lands would be of great help in advancing the catechisation of the natives—"those unfortunates."²⁵ Thus, Tahitians also had a reserved place in the spectacle of civilization orchestrated by the viceroy Amat. The success of the operation, as can be guessed, demanded that the boys transferred to Lima correctly learn—and internalize—the Catholic values of the empire, as well as their role as agents of civilization. These would necessarily imply the remodelling of their bodies as a material expression of their spiritual transformation.

In the view of the above, it seems clear that Amat's touching plan also sought in gestures and affections a space of *commensurability* that would make it possible to transcend the barrier of linguistic incomprehension, at least in the initial stages of the encounter with the Tahitians.²⁶ The problems arising from translation between radically different cultural and linguistic universes were already well known to the Hispanic authorities in the American vicerealties, especially with regard to the translatability—or not—of the mysteries of the

25 Instructions to Bonechea, no. 29 and Instructions to the Reverend Fathers, no. 9. MB, 131 and 135.

26 Hansung Hsiung, "The *Circle of Knowledge*: Radical Commensurability and the Deaf Textbook," in *The Global Histories of Books: Methods and Practices*, ed. Elleke Boehmer, Rouven Kunstmann, Priyasha Mukhopadhyay, and Asha Rogers (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 163. Cf. Lydia H. Liu, "Introduction," in *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, ed. Lydia H. Liu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 2–12.

Catholic faith.²⁷ In fact, Amat warned of these dangers and insistently commissioned the elaboration of a Spanish-Tahitian vocabulary that would allow communication to progress; to a large extent, the transfer of the Tahitian boys to Lima also had to do with this circumstance.²⁸ In a way, the universal sensitive openness to the world shared by all beings was supposed to provide a framework for intuitive access to knowledge that appealed to affections, desires and imagination. In the long run, however, the *reduction* of the natives implied the suppression of their way of being in the world and their integration into a specifically Hispanic and Catholic emotional community.²⁹ The scope and limits of this plan, faithfully executed by Amat's men, are analysed in the following sections.

2 A (Masculine) Spectacle of Civilization I: On Men and Gifts

As already noted, the ceremony of seduction prepared by Amat began in the very bodies of the explorers, who had to modulate their behaviour according to the civilising ideal of sensibility and the gendered meanings that organised it. It is evident that the operation of *pleasing* and *exciting* demanded the performance of a correct and respectable masculinity that should not only *touch* the Tahitians by its benevolent attitudes and gestures, but also by its exemplarity, an aspect that involved manners and morals. At this point, it is important to highlight an issue that informs this notion of male respectability and that relates directly to the control of passions as a civilising marker. Amat's orders were very clear on this point: the Tahitians were to be treated gently and affectionately, but under no circumstances were they to practice "the slightest discomfort or hint of impropriety" with the women. It was not allowed to take them on board the ship, nor was it allowed to take any woman to Lima. For Amat, any dealings with Tahitian women constituted a bad example that could displease the natives, with the consequent danger of hindering or delaying their "reduction." This virtuous conduct, which was prescribed for all "the educated nations of the world," was to be especially observed by "the vassals

27 Esperanza López Parada, *El botón de seda negra: traducción religiosa y cultura material en las Indias* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2018).

28 Instructions to Bonechea, no. 19 and 27, and Instructions to the Reverend Fathers, MB 129–130, 131 and 134.

29 Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 2.

of a Catholic prince.”³⁰ In European cultures, this conception of a restrained masculinity was related to a virtuous body, capable of regulating its passions through feelings such as shame or guilt, although the cultures of the Catholic tradition had the particularity of understanding the body as a prison for the soul and a source of sin, in its capacity as a sensual body.³¹

Indeed, the Spaniards’ sexual restraint was one of the aspects that surprised the Tahitians. The testimonies coincide in pointing out the express warnings of commander Bonechea to the garrison and the sailors to display “good treatment” with the inhabitants, but “completely depriving them of friendship with women, on pain of a cannon.”³² The opening of a space of gestural *commensurability* was, in principle, organised along gender lines, although exceptions were made for the women of the elite. References to the hospitality and patience with which the Tahitians, eager to see and touch everything the Spaniards brought—and wore—are treated, are constant in the documentation. The descriptions are not very specific, but the displays of friendship and affectionate treatment, especially with the *ari’i* who dominated each area, were expressed in the exchange of gifts and the profusion of hugs and kisses that were regularly dispensed. This is how Tomás Gayangos described his first meeting with the *ari’i* Tu:

As soon as I reached him he greeted me with the voice of *Tayo*, which they generally use to express their friendship: I reciprocated with the same, and he immediately embraced me and kissed my temples, and taking off a blanket [...] with which he was covered, he put it over my shoulders. The women at his side made the same demonstration of affection [...] and I took out the trifles that I had for this purpose and distributed them to him and to them, and they were very fond of them, especially the mirrors.³³

30 Instructions to Bonechea, no. 19 and 31. MB, 129–130 and 132.

31 George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), and *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Mónica Bolufer, *Arte y artificio de la vida en común: los modelos de comportamiento y sus tensiones en el Siglo de las Luces* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2019); Bakarne Altonaga Begoña, *Cuerpos en tránsito. Los significados del género en la crisis del Antiguo Régimen en el País Vasco* (Granada: Comares, 2021), and the classic study of Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978).

32 See the entries for November 15, 1774, in the diaries of Andía and Pantoja. MB, 594 and 636.

33 Gayangos Report. MB, 304.

The passage underlines the value given to certain sensuous acts—embraces, kisses—as a common space in which to recognise affection and friendship based on lived experience. And all this under the influence of a word that would become omnipresent in the soundscape surrounding the Spaniards in Tahiti: *taio*, friend. In fact, what for the Spaniards was simple friendship, for the Tahitians meant a much deeper bond. The *taio* relationship implied a political alliance, as well as the exchange of names and membership in the family, including sexual access to women, if they agreed.³⁴ The Spanish did not understand this implication. Perhaps for this reason the Tahitians were puzzled when, according to the accounts, they systematically rejected the women offered to them. Islanders were also surprised when a sailor was severely punished for having sex with a Tahitian woman. The explorers' accounts do not fail to underline the difference the Tahitians appreciated between this behaviour and that of the British, who had sexual intercourse with native women, and the Spaniards took the opportunity to point out to them “the difference in religion between the two nations.”³⁵ In general, the *humane treatment* given to the natives—in the sense that none suffered any harm during the Spanish occupation—is invoked on several occasions to argue for Catholic superiority.³⁶

It is significant that the performance of this virtuous, benevolent and restrained masculinity, which presented itself as specifically Catholic and Spanish one, also operates in the view of Tahiti conveyed by the expeditionaries. If knowledge depended entirely on the explorers' senses, it is noteworthy that we find not a hint of sensuality denoting deep affectation in the Spanish descriptions.³⁷ Unlike in Bougainville's and Cook's accounts, there are no evo-

34 Anne D'Alleva, “Elite Clothing and the Social Fabric of Pre-Colonial Tahiti,” in *The Art of Clothing: A Pacific Experience*, ed. Susanne Küchler and Graeme Were (London: UCL Press, 2005), 47–60; Vanessa Smith, *Intimate Strangers: Friendship, Exchange and Pacific Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–20; Salmond, *Aphrodite's Island*, 33. They explicitly refer to Máximo Rodríguez's exchange of names with the *ari'i* Hinoi, Tomás Gayangos's with Tetupaia-i-Hauri and Raimundo Bonacorsi's with the *ari'i* Titorea. In MB, 678–679, 774 and 391.

35 Pantoja's Diary, MB, 638 and 650; Bonechea's Diary, *ibid.* 306–307; Hervé's Diary, *ibid.*, 408; Extract, *ibid.*, 781–782.

36 See, for example, the Prologue to Máximo Rodríguez's Diary, *ibid.*, 674–676.

37 Dorinda Outram, “On Being Perseus: New Knowledge, Dislocation and Enlightenment Exploration,” in *Geography and Enlightenment*, ed. David N. Livingstone and Charles W.J. Withers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 281–284; Tcherkézoff, “La construction du corps sexualisé de la Polynésienne dans l'imaginaire européen,” in *Sexualités, identité & corps colonisés. xv^e siècle–xxi^e siècle*, ed. Gilles Böetsch et al. (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2019), 67–76.

cations of ancient culture, no Venus or Aphrodite, no reference to a delightful paradise populated by sensual naked women governed by the law of love.³⁸ Opinions differ in this respect. Some, like the captain José Andía, acknowledge that the women are beautiful and of “great attractiveness,” but while there are “some dissolute harlots, as everywhere, those who are not of this kind are modest in their dress, countenance and treatment.” For the naval officer Blas de Barreda, there were “a few somewhat good-looking ones, but the rest are rather disagreeable.”³⁹ After the first expedition, the notable differences in the description of the manners led Amat to think that this was not the same place that Bougainville had christened the *Nouvelle Cythère*. The Spanish explorers did not make drawings of the Tahitians, but their descriptions inspired the plates that accompanied the Tahiti part of the well-known travel collection *El viagero universal*, published in 1798 (Figs. 1 and 2). Pedro de Estala, the author of the compilation, could only attribute these differences to a “sensory deprivation” of the European explorers, dazed after their long ocean voyage.⁴⁰ Rather, I argue that this modulation of the *colonial gaze* was related to the self-image constructed by each of the colonial powers, with the cultural and gender implications discussed above.

This self-referential image is also perceptible in the second *phenomenon of attraction* envisaged by the viceroy, that is, the repertoire of gifts he chose especially to feed the desire and imagination of the Tahitians. A glance at the lists of objects shipped for that purpose denotes not only the civilising ideal that guided the Hispanic authorities, but also their imaginary of the generic and undifferentiated *savage* [*salvaje*].⁴¹ The objects are varied, but they can be grouped according to their use. Firstly, we find articles of clothing and items for making clothes. There are a good number of men’s and women’s shirts—more than five hundred in each consignment—as well as a large number of

38 However, we do find allusions to this sensuality in Malaspina’s later expedition (1789–1794), in Manuel Burón Díaz, “La Venus profana. Mujer y transgresión en los primeros encuentros del Pacífico Sur,” *Revista Complutense de Historia de América* 49 (2023): 191–214. On Malaspina’s expedition, see Juan Pimentel, *La física de la Monarquía. Ciencia y política en el pensamiento colonial de Alejandro Malaspina (1754–1810)* (Aranjuez: Doce Calles, 1998).

39 Andía’s Diary, MB, 598, and Barreda Report, *ibid.*, 854.

40 Amat to Arriaga, March 31, 1773, MB, 156; Buschmann, *Iberian Visions of the Pacific Ocean*, 145–152.

41 The lists in MB, 145–146 and 197–198. The designation *savage* is profusely used by the Hispanic authorities—especially in the documentation referring to the first expedition—and also sometimes by the Franciscans—who use *barbarians* [*bárbaros*] more frequently—but in no case by the explorers, who refer to the Tahitians as *islanders*, *Indians* or *natives* [*isleños, indios, naturales*].



FIGURE 1
“Hombre de Otaheti,” in Pedro de Estala, *El viajero universal*, vol. XVII, 1798



FIGURE 2
“Muger de Otaheti,” in Pedro de Estala, *El viajero universal*, vol. XVII, 1798

needles and sewing thread, in addition to other objects that can be related to body grooming, such as scissors, combs and mirrors. Secondly, a specifically Catholic article of devotion, the rosary, stands out. It is significant that the documentation explicitly links this object with the shirts—the rosaries must be “computed to the number of shirts”—, so that the respective quantities are roughly adjusted in each consignment. Thirdly, decorative objects such as brass rings and earrings, as well as many little bells—six million—and glass or crystal beads of various colours. Finally, we find metal utensils such as knives and razors, as well as an abundance of fishing hooks and tools for cultivating the land, to which can be added a good variety of seeds for cultivation.

This whole panorama points to the horizon of transformation desired by the Hispanic authorities. Some objects seem to have no other function than to surprise or captivate the senses through the pleasure that their joyful sound, their brightness and colours or their shapes can provide. Others, such as metal

utensils, could arouse desire and imagination through their efficiency and rarity. However, of interest here are the garments intended to cover the body and their explicit link with Catholic devotion, which can be related to the virtuous modesty—and the shame and guilt—that corresponded to a body aware of the dangers of its carnal sensuality. The remodelling of the body as a material expression of spiritual transformation is here perfectly formulated, although the Spanish authorities were aware of the fact that this required learning and internalising the Catholic emotional code, and that this would take time. For the time being, however, the particular texture, tailoring and colours of the garments—they were white, yellow, blue, green, and made of cotton and wool—could well, by their very materiality, have the desired fascinating effect on the Tahitians. It is also obvious that, although there were no explicit instructions in this sense, the repertoire of gifts contained an implicit gender organisation in a European cultural key. Although he does not specify what was given to whom, the navy pilot Juan Pantoja explains how Gayangos gathered all the *ari'i* with their families on board the frigate to distribute the gifts, just before the second expedition set out on its return journey to Lima. The commander separated the men and women, “giving each one his place and equal shares.”⁴² As inferred from previous gift-giving, the men were most likely given useful objects such as knives, axes and metal utensils, while the women were given mirrors, bells and coloured beads. No explicit reference is made, by the way, to the distribution of rosaries.⁴³

The arrival of Spaniards, as well as other Europeans before them, brought the islanders into contact with a new sensory universe that manifested itself in shapes, textures, smells, tastes, and sounds hitherto unknown. Textiles, food, tools, weapons: there were objects of all kinds, whose novelty and effectiveness were associated with male bodies that were different from their own, and which had a different way of moving and valued attitudes other than those that shaped their way of being in the world. However, it is not easy to grasp from the available sources the particular way in which the objects sent by the viceroy *pleased* and *excited* the Tahitians, beyond the unanimous observations of how happy, contented or pleased the natives were with the objects given to them, or of their appreciation of them, deduced from the repeated hugs and other expressions. However, the explorers' diaries report two practices around objects that allow an approach to this question that, moreover, transcends the controlled sphere of gift-giving devised by Amat. First, the exchanges of

42 Pantoja's Diary, MB, 66o.

43 Gayangos Report, MB, 303 and 305; Anonymous Diary, *ibid.*, 547.

objects of common use between Tahitians and sailors were constant. Lieutenant Raimundo Bonacorsi—a member of the first expedition in 1772—states in his report what these daily exchanges were like, with Tahitians coming to the frigate in canoes with fruit, birds, bark-cloth blankets, shells or snails to exchange for “what they lack.” What they valued most, he continues, were knives, axes, nails or “any piece of iron,” as well as cloth and shirts.⁴⁴ Indeed, during the second Hispanic expedition’s stay on the island in 1774, the commander had to forbid the sailors to change their clothes, as they needed them for the return voyage.⁴⁵ Secondly, the theft of objects by the Tahitians was also constant, especially the robbery of clothing from the sailors, which led to several conflicts, some of them quite serious.⁴⁶

These practices tell us of the desire for Spanish artefacts among Tahitians, although we may wonder to what extent the fascination with the objects and the pleasure of their possession implied a modulation of their identities or values that facilitated their *reduction*. According to Barreda, the Tahitians recognised the power of the Catholic god, as they said that theirs “did not give them the ability to manufacture things like ours.”⁴⁷ However, we also find some aspect of Tahitian practices that responded to other motivations. Pantoja refers to the Spaniards’ curiosity to know what the Tahitians did with the objects and clothes they were given or exchanged, because they were not seen with them. The doubt was dispelled on the occasion of a scuffle among the Tahitians, since those who marched to battle presented themselves “all with their shirts and some with two;” a special sensation was caused by the *ari’i* Hinoi, who presented himself with “an old uniform jacket that a gentleman officer had given him, and at the same time the two epaulettes, which by forgetfulness were left in the pockets.” When asked about the case, they replied that they kept these objects for use on feast days or war days. On that day, “many disguises” were seen, as each Tahitian brought out for the occasion what he had: “there was a waistcoat that was worn by three, because one had one sleeve, another had another, and another had the rest; others had a pair of pants with a single stocking; others had a very torn shirt.”⁴⁸ In the same way, the interpreter Máximo Rodríguez was surprised to find before the deathbed of the *ari’i* Vehiatua

44 Bonacorsi Report, MB, 326–327.

45 Bonechea-Gayangos’ Diary, MB, 563.

46 See, for example, the conflicts over clothing in Bonechea-Gayangos’ Diary, MB, 561, 564 ff. Accusations of treachery are also common in the accounts of the British and French explorers. Smith, *Intimate Strangers*, 33–37.

47 Barreda’s Report, MB, 862.

48 Pantoja’s Diary, MB, 651.

a “large apparatus of trifles and junk [...] that looked like a storehouse of merchandise;” there was even an English book of mathematics. All the objects came from the various European ships that had passed through the island and, when Máximo asked about them, he was told that “Vehiatua had offered everything he had that was most precious to his God.”⁴⁹ Clearly, the power of the objects acquired new meanings in the Tahitian world and, therefore, new ritual uses unsuspected by the Spaniards.⁵⁰

All in all, Amat’s touching plan had some effect, and it seems that the combination of the performance of correct masculinity with the distribution of gifts had a pleasant effect on the Tahitians. Beyond the repeated Hispanic references to the islanders’ affectionate treatment and sincere friendship, and even familiarity, we find allusions to their fond memories of the Spaniards in the journals of Cook’s third voyage in 1777.⁵¹ The *ari’i* came to accept the sovereignty of Charles III, though it is doubtful that they fully understood what this implied. The task of Catholicising the Tahitians was more complicated. As will be seen below, the complete failure of the Franciscan mission and its abandonment at the end of 1775 draws attention to the limits of Amat’s particular strategy of seduction.

3 A (Masculine) Spectacle of Civilization II: Pautu and Tetuanui, or the Body as *Contact Zone*

The fulfilment of the viceroy’s plan resulted in the transfer of some Tahitian young men to Lima. In all, eight islanders travelled to late colonial Peru at different times: Tipitipia, Heiao, Pautu and Tetuanui left with Bonechea’s first expedition in 1772, while Varvarua, Puhoro and two other natives sailed with the second one in 1775. Of these, only Pautu, Tetuanui and Puhoro returned after spending some time in Lima under the protection of the viceroy. The rest of the Tahitians died, most of them of smallpox, except for one who apparently

49 Máximo Rodríguez’s Diary, MB, 722–724.

50 On these questions, see Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in The Pacific* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 83–124.

51 Máximo was recognised as a relative of the *ari’i* Tu. He himself refers to the weeping that caused his departure and that “those who said they were my relatives did not want to let me go.” In MB, 781 and 767. A commentary on Cook’s allusions, in the Prologue to Maximo Rodríguez’s Diary. See David A. Chappell, *Double Ghosts: Oceanian Voyagers on Euroamerican Ships* (London: Routledge, 1997), 152.

decided not to return to Tahiti.⁵² It seems significant that the first travellers were all commoners, while the second ones were men of distinction—Puhoro was a navigation pilot and Varvarua was a relative of the *ari'i* Tu—which may imply a certain initial distrust of the explorers' proposals. In fact, everything seems to suggest that, with the exception of Tetuanui, the rest of the Tahitians who joined the first expedition did not do so spontaneously or voluntarily.⁵³ The disposition towards the second expedition was different. This meant the safe return of Pautu and Tetuanui as well as the settlement of the mission on the island at the end of 1774, which implied a prolonged stay among the Tahitians of the interpreter Máximo Rodríguez and the Franciscans Narciso González and Gerónimo Clota, who were also joined by the sailor Francisco Pérez as a servant. On this occasion, there were many who wanted to embark for Lima, and it was even necessary to search the ship to prevent any of them from hiding.⁵⁴

We know little about Puhoro and his life after his return to the island at the end of 1775, coinciding with the end of the mission.⁵⁵ I will concentrate here on the figures of Pautu, a married man already in his 30s, and Tetuanui, a boy about 10 years old who travelled with permission of his parents. Both had converted to Catholicism during the time they spent in Lima between May 1773 and September 1774. It is precisely the specific religious conversion programme of the Tahitians that differentiates the Hispanic experience from that of other Polynesians who travelled to Europe at the same time. Consider the case of the famous Omai and Aoutourou, who aroused great interest in London and Paris and were the subject of philosophical debate about the *mondes sauvages* and the varieties of the human species.⁵⁶ Apparently, Pautu and Tetuanui did not arouse as much expectation in Lima at the end of the 18th century, a colonial city with a notable indigenous, African and *mestizo* population. We hardly have any news of their stay in Peru beyond the fact that, according to Hispanic reports, life in the viceregal court made a strong impression on them. Apparently, they expressed their desire to bring their families there, although it seemed impossible to them that a lord of the viceroy's greatness could be a vassal of the king of Spain.⁵⁷ We know that Amat took them into his palace, where

52 Salmond, *Aphrodite's Island*, 236–256, 319–324, 349–357; MB, 17–23; Chappell, *Double Ghosts*, 150–152.

53 Bonechea's Diary, MB, 316; Bonacorsi's Diary, *ibid.*, 330; Hervé's Diary, *ibid.*, 403; Fray Narciso González's Diary, *ibid.*, 825.

54 Bonechea-Gayangos' Diary, *ibid.*, 574.

55 See Chappell, *Double Ghosts*, 152.

56 Giordana Charuty, "Les métamorphoses d'Omai," *Gradhiva* 13 (2011): 183–203.

57 Anonymous Diary, MB, 549.

they lived while they were instructed in the Castilian language, in the European way of life practised in the viceroyalty and, above all, in the mysteries of the Catholic faith, in which they were baptised under the names of Tomás (Pautu) and Manuel (Tetuanui) in the cathedral of Lima in October 1773.⁵⁸ They therefore lived for at least a year as Catholics in Peru and as such embarked back to Tahiti in September 1774. According to plan, the *neophytes* seemed ready to play the role assigned to them in the spectacle of civilisation devised by Amat two years earlier. They would help the Franciscans set up the mission and remain with them, working to evangelise the natives. However, their return to Tahiti turned out to be dramatic. Plunged into a hybrid and boundary condition, their bodies suffered from the tensions resulting from their *civilisation* process and the expectations placed on them as *civilising weapons*.

When they left Tahiti, Pautu and Tetuanui could not have known the role Amat had assigned them in his plan, nor the implications of their apprenticeship in Lima. Their case shows the way in which the viceroy's particular technology of domination was intended to penetrate the bodies of the islanders, through the internalisation of a Hispanic and Catholic way of being in the world that shaped all aspects of life. In the viceregal context of the late 18th century, the operation takes on its full significance within the framework of a civilising ideal that is based on specific racial assumptions, as well as on the conceptions of gender already alluded to in the preceding pages. The conceptualisation of the Tahitians as *savage Indians*, which emerges repeatedly in the documentation of the Hispanic authorities, not only circumscribes Amat's actions—and those of the Spaniards in general—to a place of compassion, very much in keeping with Enlightenment sensibility, but also endows the civilising action with an essentially evangelising meaning. The Tahitians were thus subsumed in the image of the *poor Indian*, a racial stereotype that had been constructed since the conquest but which, in Enlightened Lima, reinforced its arguments in the context of the European debate on the American question and its racial implications.⁵⁹ The consideration of the Indians as pitiable and

58 Salmond, *Aphrodite's Island*, 319–324; Chappell, *Double Ghosts*, 150–152.

59 Manuel A. Garcia, *De peruanos e indios. La figura del indígena en la intelectualidad y política criollas (Perú: siglos XVIII–XIX)* (Huelva: Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, 2007), 21–85; Carlos López Beltrán, “Hippocratic Bodies. Temperament and Castas in Spanish America (1570–1820),” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 8, no. 2 (2007): 253–289. The image of the *poor Indian* is not unique to the Hispanic context. See Laura M. Stevens, *The Poor Indians: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). It should be noted that the image of the *poor Indian* coexisted with other images of the *savage* common in the

also as living objects had a long history, which made possible their reification and conceptualisation as mouldable and empty *raw material*.⁶⁰ The echoes of this conception resound clearly in Amat's thinking when, shortly before embarking on the Tahitian campaign, he sent to Madrid a series of *casta* paintings that he had ordered to be painted to contribute to the formation of the Cabinet of Natural History. In an accompanying letter, he explained to Secretary of State Arriaga that "the notable mutation of appearance, figure and colour, which results in successive generations from the mixture of Indians and Blacks" were "one of the principal branches of *rare productions* that these domains offer."⁶¹ The series showed a genealogy of racial *improvement*—that is, whitening—through the successive interbreeding of the *castas* with Spanish men.⁶² The first painting—in very poor condition today—corresponds to the stereotype of the *unfaithful Indian*, represented by a couple with a small child, accompanied by a missionary. The second depicts a *civilised Indian* couple walking alone with only their child; he reads a score while she spins. It is noteworthy that while the *unfaithful Indians* show their bare arms, the *civilised* ones are modestly dressed, with their arms and heads covered (Figs. 3 and 4).

This same logic must have governed the transformation of Pautu and Tetuanui under the viceroy's supervision. The understanding of the boys as *raw material* in the hands of sensitive and civilised souls, ready to be moulded in their image and likeness, made possible their transformation into *human artefacts* embodying the Hispanic ideal of civilisation, at least in theory. We cannot guess whether their transformation was conflictual, or at least we do not find any reference to it in the viceroy's reports. In any case, their conversion meant their entry into civilisation and this changed the Spaniards' view of them, as well as their expectations of their way of life. As *neophytes*, they were expected to observe a regime of behaviour governed by Catholic values and guided by a correct religious sentiment, visible in moral as well as

literature of the time, such as the enlightened myth of the *good savage* or the old representation of the *cannibal savage*. See in this respect, Carlos Jáuregui, *Canibalia. Canibalismo, calibanismo, antropofagia cultural y consumo en América Latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2008); Roger Bartra, *El mito del salvaje* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011).

60 Beatrice Schuchardt, "La esclavitud en el espejo de la Ilustración, la religión y el liberalismo. El negro sensible (1798/1825) como secuela transatlántica," *Dieciocho* 44, no. 2 (2021): 357.

61 Quoted in Natalia Majluf, ed., *Los cuadros de mestizaje del Virrey Amat. La representación etnográfica en el Perú colonial* (Lima: Museo de Arte de Lima, 2000), 22. Italics mine.

62 López Beltrán, "Hippocratic Bodies," 257.



FIGURE 3 “Unfaithful Indians,” Viceroy Amat’s *casta* paintings, no. 1, 1770

in everyday habits, including a certain grooming of the body as an outward expression of their redemption. Of course, all this included the performance of a modest and virtuous masculinity, as well as the entanglement of their native bodies with practices, behaviours and objects that the rest of Tahitians in the island associated to the fascinating—but alien and distant—world of the Spaniards. For the Spaniards, the conversion of Pautu and Tetuanui could be presented as an unproblematic—or little problematic—process. But, for them, it demanded a radical renunciation of the individual past and of their own experience, as well as their relocation in power relations that were alien to those of Tahitian society. If the gaze of others also shapes behaviour we observe in a given circumstance, it is quite possible that Pautu and Tetuanui performed their new catholicity quite well during their year in Lima. The problem, as noted above, arose on their return to Tahiti as members of the small missionary company.

As planned, Pautu and Tetuanui were to live at the mission with the interpreter Máximo and the *padres* Narciso and Gerónimo. A glance at the general packing lists of “all the utensils, provisions and other supplies” that were shipped for the subsistence of all of them for a year, including the two Tahiti-



FIGURE 4 “Civilised Indians,” Viceroy Amat’s *casta* paintings, no. 2, 1770

tians, gives an idea of the extent to which the mission constituted a piece of *civilisation* transplanted to Tahiti.⁶³ As in other cases of Christianisation under the auspices of European empires, the establishment of the mission caused a “sensory revolution” on the island far more shocking than any previous expedition.⁶⁴ Unlike other missionary experiences of the time, the mission house itself was brought from Lima ready-made: its furnishings were impressive.⁶⁵ The variety of food brought not only introduced new flavours—salt, sugar, chocolate—but also new ways of preparing and consuming food that especially pleased the *ari’i* Vehiatua, chief of the province where the mission was established.⁶⁶ The introduction of medicines of all kinds, coupled with the

63 MB, 204–213.

64 Classen, *A Cultural History of the Senses*, 12. See esp. David Morgan’s chapter, “The Senses in Religion: Migrations of Sacred and Sensory Values,” 89–111.

65 Tony Ballantyne, *Entanglements of Empire. Missionaries, Māori, and the Question of the Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

66 Bonechea-Gayangos’ Diary, MB, 559. It’s particularly interesting the preparation of meals for Vehiatua during the illness that finally caused his death, as well as the administration of medicines. In Máximo Rodríguez’s Diary, *passim*.

medical explanations given by the *padres* and Máximo, at times altered the relationship of some Tahitians with the cosmos and called into question the efficacy of the *tahua*—or priests. There are many examples, but the case of some Tahitians who, faced with the death of a relative, asked Máximo if he had any “remedy to bring her back to life,” is striking. When they were refused, they asked *padre* Geronimo to “pray for her,” which was also refused because they were not Christians.⁶⁷ Elements such as the bell or the rockets, carried with the intention of firing three every Sunday in honour of the Holy Trinity—“so that with this harmony they could see that we had a distribution of weeks, dedicating Sundays to teach those people what the law of God is”⁶⁸—, delimited the sonorous space of civilisation and marked its rhythm. A variety of precious objects—silks, velvets, satins—were used for new rituals of astonishing magnificence.

The mission also housed a portable chapel equipped with everything necessary for worship, adorned with a canvas of “Our Lady of Monserrate,” a stained-glass window with a *San Antonio*, and a *Santiago Apóstol*. The latter figure is striking for its belligerence, since in America there was continuity between the figure of the *Santiago Matamoros*, conqueror of the infidels, and the *Santiago mata-indios*.⁶⁹ Finally, this spectacle of civilisation was completed with a cross of about three metres with the inscription “Christus Venzit: Carolus III Imperit. 1774,” a portrait of Charles III and another of the pope which were placed in a visible place. In this connection, it is important to note the “performance [*función*]”—the unanimous use of this theatrical metaphor is no coincidence—that was held to place the cross and inaugurate the mission on January 1, 1775. The event consisted of a procession with the officers and troops, with the big cross in front accompanied by the two Franciscan friars and the ship’s two chaplains, while the litanies of the Saints were sung. Afterwards, the first mass was celebrated on land and the *Salve Regina* was sung. Three salvoes of artillery were fired from the ship, the last when the royal flag was raised. This generated moments of panic and flight among the Tahitians but, after being reassured, they seem to have followed the rite “with admiration,” saying they had “never seen a more solemn performance [*función*].” Their reaction is not comparable, of course, to the deep feeling narrated by *padre* Narciso: “my companion and I began to sing the litany of the Saints, and the joy we felt in our

67 Máximo Rodríguez’s Diary, MB, 716.

68 *Ibid.*, 731.

69 Olaya Sanfuentes, “Inventiones iconográficas en América. El caso de Santo Tomás y el de Santiago mata-indios,” *Diálogo Andino* 32 (2008): 45–58.



FIGURE 5
Pierre Subleyras, *Portrait of Young Boy on Hungarian Dress*,
18th century

hearts was so great that it did not catch in our chests and tears welled up in our eyes.⁷⁰ Perhaps other Spaniards did not share the exalted emotionality of the *padres*, but certainly the ritual would appeal to the religious sentiment of all of them, showing that they belonged to an emotional community of which the Tahitians were not a part.

To a large extent, the evangelising task was to extend that community, and this is where Pautu and Tetuanui were expected to come into the picture. Their belonging to the *civilised world* of the mission was not in question, with all the implications that this entailed, from daily habits and moral judgements to the religious emotional bond. This condition was to be inscribed on their bodies both in gestures—in all aspects—and in a Catholic, modest and virtuous attitude, although its most visible expression was in clothing and devotional objects. Unfortunately, the general packing lists do not detail the contents of Pautu's and Tetuanui's personal chests, but it should not be very different from Puhoro's one. Puhoro, in addition to carpentry tools, was provided with garments to cover his body: shirts, breeches, stockings, garters, shoes, buckles and handkerchiefs.⁷¹ In addition, we know from some references that Pautu, as an adult man, carried a sword and some arms in his chest, as well as medals, rosaries and other devotional objects. Tetuanui, for his part, was carrying a Hungarian-style costume that had been made for him in Lima for religious feast days.⁷² The surprising presence of this luxurious garment among the boy's belongings expresses very well the extent to which the intended transformation of the *neophytes* reached, as well as the expectations regarding their behaviour, conduct and manners (Fig. 5).

70 Pantoja's Diary, MB, 654; Fray Narciso González's Diary, *ibid.*, 826.

71 MB, 239.

72 Franciscan *Padres'* Diary, MB, 794; Fray Narciso González's Diary, *ibid.*, 828.

The tension soon became visible. Rather than acting as mediators, it would soon become apparent that the *neophytes* themselves embodied the conflictive and contested space of the *contact zone*.⁷³ Like Dafoe's Robinson Crusoe, Pautu and Tetuanui had also brought Tahiti with them to Lima two years earlier, and it was in their own subjectivity that the encounter between the two cultures took place. Back on the island, their unstable boundary condition was revealed in the play of crossed gazes between the Tahitians and the Spaniards. Perhaps they had even become incomprehensible to their own people. If the *colonial gaze* that Máximo and the *padres* held over them appealed to their belonging to the Catholic and *civilised* world, the *domestic gaze* addressed to them by the islanders—their families, the *ari'i*—was by no means devoid of power and appealed to their behaviour as Tahitian men. In this sense, a scene in which Pautu is standing next to his *ari'i* Vehiatua and is approached by Máximo is very significant. As Máximo explains, “he was still wearing a shirt and a waistcoat, but rolled up to his shoulders, and when he saw me he covered the side I could see, leaving the other side uncovered.”⁷⁴ From the very beginning, Pautu showed signs of recognition of Vehiatua's power. Following Tahitian custom, he uncovered himself in the *ari'i's* presence and insisted on making him an offering of both his own clothes and those of the late Heiao, who had passed away in Lima. According to captain Andía, Pautu soon warned the *ari'i* against the intentions of the Spaniards: “[Pautu] told [the *ari'i*] not to trust us because all the affection we showed them, the gifts and offers we made [...] were all to deceive them and make us lords of the island and reduce them to slavery.”⁷⁵

For his part, the young Tetuanui was soon surrounded by the men of his family, who even slept with him at the mission and pressured him to return home. It seems that in his case he did not offer his clothes to the *ari'i* and, perhaps for this reason, Opo—Vehiatua's mother and a woman of great authority—wanted to requisition the Hungarian costume for her young son. The incident opened a conflict with the *padres* that Máximo tried to solve, but he could not prevent Opo from taking a sash and other things. Somehow, their belonging to the *civilised world* invested the *neophytes* with a status and moral authority that, as commoners, no one recognised in Tahiti. In the end, tensions were resolved by reintegrating Pautu and Tetuanui into island dynamics. The *neophytes* left the missionary company and returned to the Tahitian way of life, not without occasional moments of regret when they would reminisce with

73 Maroto Camino, “Mission to Tahiti,” 183–184; Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” 33–40.

74 Máximo Rodríguez's Diary, MB, 692.

75 Andía's Diary, MB, 614.



FIGURE 6 Francesco Bartolozzi, *The Cession of the District of Matavai in the Island of Otaheite to Captain James Wilson for the Use of the Missionaries Sent Thither by that Society in the Ship Duff*, 1801

Maximo or the *padres* about their life in Lima, amidst effusive embraces and abundant tears. It is surprising to what extent this remodelling of the body was for the Spaniards an outward sign of redemption. When the *neophytes* returned to Tahitian customs and beliefs a few weeks after arriving on the island, each and every Spaniard identified the moment of *betrayal* with the abandonment of their new clothes and the return to the loincloth.

On this occasion, Amat's plan failed dismally. In contrast to the soft treatment and the gifts, the *neophytes* were not able to embody in a sustained way the *phenomenon of attraction* that the viceroy wanted. Nor were the Franciscans able to play their assigned role to any great extent. Although the mission aroused much curiosity among Tahitians, the *padres* were fearful and avoided venturing beyond their hospice, haunted by previous experiences of martyrdom and death suffered by other Franciscans on the mainland.⁷⁶ The configuration of the Catholic mission as a strictly masculine space must not have helped the enterprise either. This differentiates the Hispanic experience on the island from later successful ones. The real Christianisation of Tahiti began in 1797 with the arrival of missionary families—men, women and children—from the *London Missionary Society*, who considered it essential to involve Tahitian

76 Fray Gerónimo Clota and Fray Narciso González to Lángara, November 4, 1775, MB, 842.

women in their civilising and evangelising work (Fig. 6).⁷⁷ On the contrary, in the light of the celibacy they observed, the *padres* understood that the Catholic *good example* they were to set involved forbidding women access to the mission house; they could only enter “as honestly as possible” accompanied by Opo.⁷⁸ This absence of female example—and appeal—can be seen as a further limit to Amat’s *touching* plan. Abandoned by Pautu and Tetuanui, the *padres* gave up the evangelising attempt and requested their return to Lima at the end of 1775. Despite the Tahitians’ desire to see, neither the crosses, nor the objects of devotion, nor the very presence of the mission and its men proved capable of reducing those “blind souls” to obedience to the Catholic faith.⁷⁹

4 Conclusions

The Spanish intervention in Tahiti involved the deployment of a calculated ceremony of seduction based on a repertoire of behaviour involving attitudes, gestures and gifts. The combination of all this meant the material expression of a specifically Hispanic and Catholic ideal of civilisation which, in the context of strong rivalry between colonial powers to dominate the South Sea, sought to present itself as a more desirable option for domination than the British alternative. The logic of *pleasing* and *exciting* that structured the Spanish campaign in Tahiti draws attention to the historically specific forms of technologies of domination, as well as to the sensory order that governs the understanding of pleasurable affects in specific contexts. In a context of asymmetrical cross-cultural encounter, the search for pleasing affection through correct masculine gestures and the offering of gifts was effective, although the particular motivations of Tahitians also contributed to constructing the desirability of Hispanic objects. On the contrary, the transformation of Tahitian young men into *human artefacts* in Lima, isolated from their social context, did not produce the desired result. Caught between *colonial gaze* and *domestic gaze*, the *neophytes* themselves embody the conflicted space of the *contact zone*, where the cross-cultural encounter takes place. The consideration of their own individuality and experience as something dispensable is seen as the greatest limit to Amat’s touching

77 Richard Eves, “Colonialism, Corporeality and Character: Methodist Missions and the Refashioning of Bodies in the Pacific,” *History and Anthropology* 10, no. 1 (1996): 85–138.

78 Fray Gerónimo Clota and Fray Narciso González to Amat, February 18, 1776, MB, 845.

79 *Ibid.*, 844.

plan, although the marked male bias of the intervention and the absence of an appeal to women can be seen as another limit that contributed to the final failure of the operation.

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