**Joint Second Prize**

**Entry in English**

**Tom Trevor**

**Cook’s New Clothes, Cook’s New Clothes**

Royal William Yard

Plymouth, UK

28.09.2018 – 21.10. 2018

On a windy afternoon in late September 2018 a strange parade; part funerary

procession, part protest rally; slowly snaked its way around the Devil’s Point

peninsula in the Stonehouse district of Plymouth, in the South West of

England. The Second Procession for Tupaia took the form of a cavalcade of

customized ‘gilet jaunes’ hoisted high overhead on fluorescent poles as

ceremonial banners. Loudly proclaiming its presence through a hypnotic

Javanese dirge, played on an array of Indonesian wind instruments made

from recycled rubbish, the main body of marchers pounded out a relentless

rhythm on a makeshift gamelan of plastic bottles and gongs. Occasionally

this noisy ‘hi viz’ throng would come to a grinding halt to bear witness, in

solemn silence, to a series of symbolic rituals, performed against the

backdrop of Plymouth Sound, looking out to the Atlantic Ocean beyond.

Along with local participants and passers-by, the gathering included artists,

writers and musicians from across the Pacific, as well as Europe. The occasion

being marked was the death of Tupaia, the Ra’iatean priest and star navigator

who accompanied Captain Cook on his first voyage from Tahiti in 1769, in

search of the fabled ‘Great Southern Continent’, but who died a year later on

11 November 1770 in Batavia (now Jakarta), in the Dutch East Indies

(Indonesia).

The first version of this processional performance had taken place a week

earlier in Greenwich, in South East London, setting out from the National

Maritime Museum and wending its way through the English rain to the banks

of the River Thames, where Pacific waka canoes waited to transport the

dancing ghost of Cook away to the sea. Adapted in response to the

prohibitions of the Royal Museums Greenwich, the central object of

institutional anxiety in this closely monitored parade was a dog-skin naval

uniform, which had been tailored for the occasion in Australia as a symbolic

gift for Tupaia. In order to avoid ‘contamination’ of museum property by the

dingo fur, however, the Greenwich authorities had insisted that the cloak

should be vacuum-sealed in plastic, bestowing a whole new set of symbolic

associations on this gift from the South Pacific. At the same time, the

museum’s health and safety guidelines required the performers to wear high

visibility vests if they were to process beyond the grounds of the institution;

a prescriptive stipulation which, in response, was adopted as the central

visual motif of the parade.

Gathered under the overall title of Cook’s New Clothes, this multi-faceted

project also incorporated an installation in the vast, dilapidated Melville

Building in the Royal Navy’s former victualling depot in Plymouth’s Royal

William Yard, as part of The Atlantic Project, along with related performance

lectures, Stubb’s Dingo and Museopiracy, in implicated sites across the city.

Conceived and directed by Austro-Australian artist, Khadija von Zinnenburg

Carroll, in collaboration with Maori weaver Keren Ruki, Cook’s New Clothes

brought together a cast of participants from across the globe, including

choreographer Kirill Burlov, performance artist Nikolaus Gansterer,

composer Mo'ong Santoso Pribadi and Indigenous Australian scholars,

Tamara Murdoch and Jessyca Hutchens, amongst others.

250 years earlier, on 26 August 1768, Captain Cook’s Endeavour set sail from

Plymouth, ostensibly to record the transit of Venus from the vantage point of

Tahiti, in the South Pacific, but tasked with a greater secret objective; to seek

out and claim the Terra Australis Incognita for King George III. Whilst the

250th anniversary of Cook’s first voyage has received much scholarly

attention in recent times, with significant investment in the re-narration of this

formative encounter between Pacific and European civilisations, the

recognition of Tupaia’s role in this and the commemoration of his death are

still largely overlooked. For a quarter of a millennium, the two-way dialogue

facilitated through Tupaia’s translation and cultural mediation has

consistently been recast as a monologue of Western ‘discovery’. As with the

critique of anthropology, it is the mutual ‘coeval’ nature of communicative

exchange that has been systematically denied in the ensuing discourse.

When Cook encountered Oceanic peoples in the course of his three voyages

to the Pacific between 1768 and 1780, he was astonished not only by their

diversity and the extent of their dispersal across the Pacific Ocean - covering

one third of the Earth’s surface - but even more so by their evident links and

commonalities. The similarity of languages, ceremonial spaces, maritime

technologies, religious practices and trading networks pointed to a

civilisation with a complex history of voyaging and exchange that had existed

in parallel with, but virtually unknown to the West, for thousands of years.

On joining the Endeavour in July 1769, as an ‘ariori priest (a devotee of ‘Oro, the

god of fertility and war, with a long tradition of maritime exploration), Tupaia

was able to list hundreds of named islands, stretching over a vast area of the

central Pacific. Working closely with the Europeans, Tupaia went on to

transcribe them onto a map. While Cook, as a leading hydrographer, used

instrumental measurements to fix the islands in Cartesian space, gridded by

latitude and longitude, Tupaia located them in a relational universe of

Polynesian space-time, with star, wind and human ancestors linked to

particular people and places in expansive, dynamic kin networks.

One of the most distinctive commonalities of Oceanic culture is the gift

economy. It is no coincidence that the seminal early twentieth-century

anthropological study, The Gift by Marcel Mauss (1925), was inspired by

instances from the Pacific. Often ancestral treasures of great mana (spiritual

power), such as a ceremonial cloak, were deliberately gifted to foreigners

with whom the Islanders wished to inaugurate relationships. The significance

of the dog-skin uniform in Cook's New Clothes, along with a cloak made from

shredded plastic detritus reclaimed from the Pacific Ocean, is that Cook did

not appear to have any such offering within his own collection, as one might

have supposed he would. When the Endeavour made landfall at Turanga-nuia-

Kiwi (Gisborne) – the first European ship to arrive in Aotearoa (New

Zealand) – it was Tupaia who led the dialogue, telling the local people that

they had sailed from Ra’iatea, in the Society Islands, an ancestral homeland

of the Maori. Thus, it was Tupaia, as the leader of an ‘ariol expedition, not the

European, Cook, who was ceremonially welcomed as a tohunga (expert), with

the gift of a valuable dog-skin cloak.

It seems that Tupaia’s cloak was subsequently inherited, after his death in Batavia, by Joseph Banks, the wealthy young leader of the Royal Society party of botanists and artists on board the Endeavour, who was later famously painted wearing the very same Maori accoutrement by Benjamin West. This powerful artefact now resides in the Pitt Rivers Museum, as part of the University of Oxford’s ethnological collection. It was Banks who had insisted that Tupaia should be welcomed aboard the Endeavour in Tahiti, even

though Cook had been reluctant, refusing to support the Ra’iatean or grant

him a uniform. In his journal (1769), Banks wrote of Tupaia, “I do not know

why I may not keep him as a curiosity, as well as some of my neighbours do

lions and tigers at a larger expense.”

“How to commemorate Tupaia?” asks the narrator in the voice-over to Khadija

von Zinnenburg Carroll’s film, Processions for Tupaia (2018), documenting the

events in Greenwich and Plymouth. How to restore subjectivity to this

marginalised figure? “How to return ghosts to the future?” In Johannes

Fabian’s book Time and the Other (1983), the ethnographer analyses a

central device in the making of the object of anthropology as “temporal

distancing”. Situating the Other in a geographically remote and a distant time,

such as an “archaic past”, is central to how modern Western institutions have

created the image of the superiority of the history that they represent. But we

know that the Oceanic civilisation Cook encountered was not ‘pre-modern’

or primitive. Indeed, it was highly sophisticated, with a complex history of

maritime trade and cultural exchange across more than one third of the

Earth’s surface. One way of honouring Tupaia’s legacy, therefore, would be to

start by calling out the Western fantasy of ‘discovery’ which still persists today,

emphasizing instead the reciprocity of the dialogue that took place between

European and Pacific cultures, facilitated by this remarkable intermediary.

If one were to take the logic of translation further, however, and to understand

Tupaia’s map as a re-interpretation of the Atlantic world view from an Oceanic

perspective, the question arises: how might this challenge to the (Mercator)

projection of Western universalism begin to conjure a vision of what

decolonisation might look like today? How can Tupaia’s map help to divest

Eurocentric modernity of its normative positionality?

At the final station of the Second Procession for Tupaia on Devil’s Point, the

gathering watched in silence as Cook walked out into the waters of the

Plymouth Sound. The last sighting was of a figure disappearing into the sea,

accompanied by the sound of the wind, seagulls and the rhythmic swell of

the Atlantic Ocean beyond.