



## In pursuit of the voice of Venus: Listening for empathy in the History classroom

Samantha Owen

*Curtin University, Australia*

**ABSTRACT:** The focus of this article is on perspectives and empathy to consider how they operate in the leading New Zealand Māori video and installation artist, Lisa Reihana's, exhibition *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries* and specifically her piece, *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* [hereafter: *iPOVi*] which animates *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* to reimagine the voyages of exploration and the death of James Cook. In this article I consider how the ways of viewing indicated by Reihana raise possible questions of how we teach exploration and the methodologies we employ to investigate perspectives. I specifically engage with the (re)imagining of the death – murder? – of James Cook as I ask how do we shift our perspective from being determined by the 'view from the boat' and widen it to include the 'view from the shore.' Reihana does so by employing the perspective of language – by listening and hearing and thereby obtaining understanding – to know the stories of those we could perhaps see but do not give voice to as they do speak in the language of the "world navigator, explorer or trader" (ACARA, n.d., ACHASSK084). I conclude with a discussion of how using this empathic device how it might help build pluricultural History or Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) learning spaces in which all can listen and all can speak to be heard.

**KEYWORDS:** Empathy, perspective, exploration, contested histories, Captain James Cook

### Introduction

In the second week of February 1779 the HMS *Resolution*, captained by British explorer James Cook, who was on his third southern voyage, returned to Kealakekua Bay Hawai'i with a damaged mast. It was the third year of their expedition, having left Plymouth, England on 12 July 1776. Commissioned by the Royal Society at the request of King George III, the *Resolution* had sailed via the Islas Canarias (Canary Islands) to South Africa, where the HMS *Discovery* joined them. Together they set out across the South Indian Ocean, stopping at Van Dieman's land (Tasmania) before going onto Aotearoa (New Zealand). From there they went to the South Pacific, where they stopped in Otaheite (Tahiti) in 1777 to deliver cattle, sheep, hay, and corn for trade (Beaglehole, 2017).

When they reached Tōtaiete mā the official reason for the voyage was discharged: Mai, a refugee from Ra'iātea, who had been displaced by invaders from Bora Bora was returned home to Huahine. Mai had met Cook on his first voyage of discovery to Tōtaiete mā, when he had named them the Society Islands. Mai assisted on the second voyage, spent time in London under the guardianship of the naturalist and botanist for Cook's voyages, Sir Joseph Banks, and was now the subject of the third voyage as it was time for him to go home (Fullagher, 2019). After leaving Mai in Huahine they continued on in pursuit of the real reason for the trip, to find the Northwest Passage and establish a new trading route to Asia. Thus on they went north to the Hawai'ian archipelago, which Cook had named the Sandwich Islands, where

they stopped briefly and continued to Nookta Sound or King George Sound, which Cook had also renamed the year before. After a brief sojourn in the Alaskan seas the expedition turned south again as the weather was too dangerous. They sighted Maui in late-November 1778 and stayed in the bays of Hawai'i trading with those who came to the ships. In mid-January 1779 they came to Kealahou Bay and Cook and his crew went ashore during a time of peace, the festival of Makahiki, to worship the Polynesian god, Lono. The *Resolution* and the *Discovery* left the bay on 4 February 1779 to try to go north again but they were forced to return shortly afterwards (Beaglehole, 2017).

They chose Kealahou Bay but this time they were not so well received, the season had changed. On 13 February 1779 a cutter<sup>1</sup> was taken from the HMS *Discovery* and the next day Cook and a small crew of marines left the HMS *Resolution* and went ashore to demand its return. Cook tried to do so by taking Kalani'opu'u, the Ali'i nui or supreme leader of Hawai'i hostage by inviting him to come to the ship. Kalani'opu'u's supporters advised him not to go with Cook. In the resulting scuffle on the beach Cook, four Marines and 16 local people were killed (Howe, 1996; Frame, 2019). Cook's body was baked and the bones cleaned and then wrapped. Some bones and clothes were returned to his crew (Obeyesekere, 1992; Sahlins, 1995; Borofsky, 1997).

Still recovering from the horror and loss, the voyage in search of the north passage continued without the starved captain and after further mishap, the succeeding captain, Charles Clerke, died of tuberculosis, returned home on 4 October 1780 with John Gore assisted by John King in command (Beaglehole, 2017). On return home the journals from the journey were given in to the Admiralty and Dr John Douglas, Canon of St Paul's, was employed to edit Cook's and the crews' journals to produce an official account of the third voyage (Beaglehole, 2017; Currie, 2005). It was published in June 1784 in three volumes and the illustrations and plates were mostly the work of John Webber (Cook, 1784). Employed by Banks as a topographical artist, Webber had travelled on the *Resolution*. Webber submitted to the Admiralty 200 sketches, drawings, oil paintings, and engravings of the trip, many of which featured ceremonies, rituals, banquets and human sacrifices. Not included in the account was Webber's oil painting, *The Death of Captain Cook* (1781-83), which was made into an engraving by Francesco Bartolozzi and William Byrne in 1784, and is one of the best-known imaginings of Cook's death (Joppien, 1992). Webber did not see the murder but based his rendering on his experiences on the voyage. The topography of the scene is accurate and taken from a drawing he had made when he visited. The portrayals of the Hawai'ian people and their dress and weapons are also based on his previous observations. The scene makes Cook a hero: he is dominated on the beach by a crowd of weapon wielding Hawai'ians. Cook is portrayed as a man of peace – he holds out his hand to stop his men in the small cutter from firing. He is guarded by Lieutenant Molesworth Phillips lies on the ground and fires at the enemy. Behind Cook a Hawai'ian chief, identifiable by his cloak, stands poised apparently about to stab Cook in the back of the neck with a spear (Domercq, 2013). The scene is violent, desperate and carnivalesque. There is no hint that Cook has started the furious activity and had given the order to his men to fire.

After his return to Britain, and until his death in 1793, Webber travelled across Europe exhibiting. Webber's work was seen by the painter Jean-Gabriel Charvet who had been commissioned by Joseph Dufour et Cie to produce a wallpaper for the 1806 *Exposition des produits de l'industrie française* [Exhibition of French Industrial Products]. The brief was for something spectacular as it was the first major intervention into the luxury market for Dufour and his brother since they had moved from Lyon moved to the new industrial town of Mâcon (Bioletti, Ranson and Peel, 2008). Charvet produced *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*, which was 2.5metres high and 10 metres long and comprised 20 Drops, or panels, each 540 mm wide, which was the official standard of the time for wallpaper width (Bioletti, Davey and

Peel, 2008). The panoramic neoclassical wallpaper re-imagined the voyages of the Explorers of the Age of Sail – Cook, Jean-François de La Pérouse and Louis Antoine de Bougainville (Webb, 2015). The commercially focused wallpaper immediately became popular choice to adorn the walls of the aristocracy as the representational choices in the wallpaper reflected current fashions (Thomas, 2017). On each drop of the wallpaper, vignettes were not arranged either chronologically or geographically and with a focus on “delight” (Webb, 2017, p. 119) fantasy replaced reality: the rich foliage motif came from South America, where Charvet had just visited and which was the next destination for explorers, the light skin and Roman dress represented current Empire fashion trends and a new fascination with Pompeii, and Enlightenment ideals – reason, equality, civilisation and progress – determined the perspective for the depictions of encounters with First Nations peoples (Smallman, 2018; Devenport, 2017b). The only rupture is in the background to Drops VIII and IX where Charvet, drawing on Webber’s speculative imagining, depicts Cook’s death (Smallman, 2018). Here we can see Hawai’ians charging the shore, a small cutter in the water and the HMS *Discovery* and HMS *Resolution*. Cook is only a blur. Reminders of the hostile encounters Cook and his crews experienced, comprise the vignettes. Mt Yasur on the island of Tanna in the French and British colonised New Hebrides is shown billowing smoke and indicating danger, a reminder of the hostile welcome Cook received there in 1774. Identifiable by his helmet and cape, Chief Kaneena, another of Webber’s subjects, watches Cook’s death. Just behind him – and spectating from Aotearoa, sits Chief Kaora, who Cook recorded had cannibalised ten of Captain Furneaux’s crew earlier in the voyage (Beaglehole, 2017, p. 68). The positioning in the vignette reinforces Webber’s narrative and depicts “Cook as a tragic victim of his own humanity” (Looser, 2017, p. 454).

It is this image and understanding of Cook’s death which persisted and was perpetuated by the “pioneer of modern Cook studies,” the New Zealand historian, John Cawte Beaglehole (Ashley, 2007, p. 109). However, since the 1960s this view has been consistently destabilised (see, for example, Daws 1968; Obeyesekere, 1992; and Sahlins, 1995), and was directly challenged in 2004 following the ‘discovery’ of John Cleveley the Younger’s 1784 aquatint,<sup>2</sup> which was the preparation for his own, *The Death of Cook*. The preparation portrays Cook as an active participant in the battle, and with his musket pointed at the Hawai’ians on the beach (Domercq, 2013, 48). In 2017 leading New Zealand Māori video and installation artist Lisa Reihana entered the debate with her piece *in Pursuit of Venus [infected]* [hereafter: *iPOVi*], a 64-minute multichannel panoramic video installation on a 26-metre screen wall, which animates *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* to reimagine the voyages of exploration and the death of Cook.

In this article I consider how Reihana treats historical empathy and what this might offer for History and/or Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) learning spaces. Cook first appears in the Australian Curriculum in the Year 4 Humanities and Social Sciences Syllabus under the curriculum content description: “ACHASSK084: The journey(s) of AT LEAST ONE world navigator, explorer or trader up to the late eighteenth century, including their contacts with other societies and any impacts.” The elaboration for the curriculum code includes the specification, students “develop understandings about contact between societies (continuity and change, cause and effect) and its effects on people and their environments (perspectives, empathy)” (ACARA, n.d., ACHASSK084). The focus of this article is on perspectives and empathy: “understanding that people and societies think differently in different social, cultural and historical situations, including ourselves” (Allender et. al. 2019, p. xxiv). Following Yeager et al’s (1998) finding that empathy is a device by which we can see from someone’s point of view without having to hold the same values and understandings as them, I question how do we engage in new ways of knowing and understanding these explorations and colonial first contacts? How do we change from always seeing from just the

point of view of the coloniser and thereby privileging their experience? I do so by analysing how Reihana establishes empathy in *iPOVi* and how in her reimagining of the death of Cook she shifts our perspective from being determined by the view from the boat and widens it to include the view from the shore. I argue she does so by employing the perspective of language – by listening and hearing and thereby obtaining understanding – to know the stories of those we could perhaps see but do not give voice to as they do speak in the language of the “world navigator, explorer or trader” ACARA, n.d., ACHASSK084). To do so I first outline a historiography of historical empathy and historical perspective and then move to a discussion of Reihana’s work. I conclude with a consideration of how using this empathic device might help build pluricultural History or HASS learning spaces in which all voices can be heard and speak to be heard.

### Historical perspective and historical empathy

The question of how we shift our perspective from the ‘view from the boat’ and widen it to include the ‘view from the shore’ has occupied two parallel and intrinsic historiographical discussions which I shall address here: the emergence of a literature on historical empathy and historical perspective and in Australian history movements to recognise that history does not begin in 1788 with the arrival of the First Fleet. Nevertheless, I begin in England. In his seminal 1961 Trevelyan lecture, *What is history?* E.H. Carr raised the question of the place of empathy in the doing of history. He defined history as “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past” (E.H. Carr, 1961, p, 30). Later, he elaborated that history “is a social process”, the act inquiry draws into conversation “the society of today and the society of yesterday” in a manner which is authentic and meaningful (E.H. Carr, p. 32). Carr suggested that to avoid bias – inherited or otherwise – in history writing then the historian should adopt “Who, When, Why” as an inquiry formula for historical and historiographical methodology, that these questions must be asked exhaustively of all characters, landscapes and situations so as to produce the most complete historical picture. Carr warned that the effects of not doing so would be to only find a “best story”, what Peter Seixas later defined as a controlled and selected narrative which is presented as objective and unmediated in an attempt to create a collective memory for the society it serves (Seixas, 2000). Carr instead elaborated what Peter Seixas later termed the “disciplinary approach”, which relies on taught skills as disciplinary methodologies are used to assess multiple perspectives and understandings of a historical event.

Issues of perspective were raised by anthropologist W.E.H “Bill” Stanner in the 1968 Boyer Lecture, “After the Dreaming”. Stanner reflected on “the Great Australian Silence”, the absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from Australian history after European colonisation and the denial of genocide and systemic abuse (Stanner, 1969). In 1972 Henry Reynolds’s work *Aborigines and Settlers: the Australian Experience, 1788–1939* tried to rethink the colonisation of Australia from a First Nations perspective. He characterised colonisation as bloody and brutal and asserted that colonisers met with resistance (Reynolds, 1972). These massacres are still the subject of the research, for example, Lyndall Ryan (2018) published the first account of genocide in *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* in 1981 and has since been the instigator of a continent-wide massacres map (Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia, 1788-1930 <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/>). Also published in 1981 was Richard White’s *Inventing Australia*. White argued that the “idea of ‘Australia’ itself is a European invention” (p. ix) and that European views of First Nations people from the earliest landings formed an understanding of them as primitive. These views re-populated the explorers’ understandings of what they viewed and recorded, and justified invasion (White, 1981, pp. 1-16).

In the 1990s feminist and multicultural approaches to history teaching further challenged singular perspectives of history and presented the possibility that when doing history, empathy can be registered for historical actors other than the privileged white male and to appreciate “human diversity and historical ambiguity” (Kornfeld, 1992, p. 28). Adopting what Seixas defined as a “postmodern approach”, by analysing multiple narratives we question the roles each historical actor plays in contemporary society (Seixas, 2000). These historians have raised the question of how empathy is – or even can be – performed. How we can see from the point of view of historical subjects and reconstruct “others’ beliefs, values, goals, any or all of which are not necessarily those of the historical investigator” (Riley, 1998). In 2004 Barton and Levstik argued that empathy was essential to the study of history as it meant that we did not simply understand past historical actors but we also cared about them and so were invested in the events they were involved with. They therefore defined historical empathy as “perspective recognition” and they assigned five key elements:

- sense of otherness;
- shared normalcy;
- historical contextualisation;
- multiplicity of historical perspectives; and
- contextualisation of the present (2004, pp. 210-221).

They stressed that key to historical empathy was a recognition that the subject/s under study may not share our views but that their perspective holds value. They also introduced the concept of reflexivity or critical reflection: we come to historical analysis in our particular historical present.

In her 2009 essay “Venus in Two Acts” Saidiya Hartman considered the limits of disciplinary methodology: “History pledges to be faithful to the limits of fact, evidence and archive” (p. 8). In Hartman’s view violence is rendered through the promise of fidelity to the record and so she sought to alter how that was done by writing “at the limit of the unspeakable and the unknown.” The method “mimes the violence of the archive and attempts to redress it by describing as fully as possible the conditions that determine the appearance of Venus and that dictate her history” (p. 1). Hartman names “Venus” or “a Black Venus” the ubiquitous slave figure forever present in history but whom remains unnamed and unidentified (p. 2). Of Venus we can ask who she is but “it would be impossible to answer such a question. There are hundreds of thousands of other girls who share her circumstances and these circumstances have generated few stories. And the stories that exist are not about them” (p. 2). We as the viewer are in her pursuit. How do we find, see and hear her? How do we “exceed [...] the fictions of history [...] allowing the narrative track to be rerouted or broken by the sounds of memory [...] and trying to unsettle the arrangements of power”? Most importantly, how do we restore the forgotten and unseen to the “category of the human” as it was those who are seen in the “parameters of history” who judged them only for the category of waste or disposal (p. 9). Hartman pushes beyond the definition of historical empathy as the “distinctly cognitive act of reconstructing past perspectives from available historical evidence” (Brooks, 2011, p. 166) with attention to the role played by affect (*ibid.* p. 167). Hartman does so by suggesting that we engage in “speculative arguments” (2009, p. 11): read at the limits of the archive not with the aim of “recovering the lives of the enslaved” but to understand their lives as fully as possible. She asserts we do so, by presenting the known story in a new sequence, by moving around the elements, by taking contested points to present the stories. The effect of doing so is two-fold: first it displaces the “official” version and renders unstable what are thought of as established sources of truth. Second, it makes

“visible the production of disposable lives” – those who remain unreported, only appearing on the official transcripts of death. Thus we produce a “recombinant narrative’ which loops the strands of incommensurate accounts and which weaves present, past and future” (p.12).

In 2013 Jason Endacott and Sarah Brooks tried to model how this could be done by redefining the Barton and Levstik model into three parts: historical contextualisation; an affective connection; and perspective taking. The first requires deep understanding of the context and period under study (p. 43). The second looks to emotions and emotional responses and how they may have influenced the actions taken: this requires the student to accept the otherness of subjects under study even if they have different value priorities. This is what Lévesque terms the “moral judgment” dimension of historical empathy (2008). The third, perspective taking, or multiperspectivity, Seixas and Morton (2012) consider key to historical understandings. As Hartman’s piece demonstrates, it requires the historian to look not just through the eyes of those under study but also those around them and to take into account that individuals and groups hold a range of attitudes, values and beliefs. It is this practice that Australian historian Iain McCalman elaborates in *The Reef* (2013). He opens with a discussion of perspective and historical and inherited hierarchies of power which persist to organise our society, and which assigned rank on the boat he wrote from. McCalman then thinks through the mindset which justified invasions and subsequent dispossessions by reviewing the voyages of Cook. Speculating on how he viewed the Great Barrier Reef on first encounter, McCalman asked whether Cook was “a Scottish Enlightenment man of reason hoping to see the cultivated landscape of civilisation, a British imperialist scouting for economic opportunities for future colonists, or simply a nostalgic Yorkshireman [...]?” (p. 23), and how these identities determined his perspective and shaped the colonial experience in Australia.

Samia Khatun’s *Australianama: The South Asian Odyssey in Australia* (2018) built on the work of those like Henry Reynolds and directly tackled the legacy of myopic vision that only recognises British settlers/invaders as colonials. Khatun’s work started from an inquiry: why was a compendium of Bengali poetry books presumed to be the oldest copy of the Quran in Australia? To find an answer she adopted a pluricultural approach and thereby raised the question of how we restore Indigenous geographies and understand who followed them. Khatun used linguistic perspective as a way to reverse the “discursive erasure of Aboriginal peoples and their geographical imaginations – an erasure which is foundational to settler mentality” (2018, p. 19). She did so by reimagining the routes of early travellers in Australia to determine where South Asians disappeared to from early colonial and nation-building narratives and to thereby challenge the liberal multiculturalism which currently determines Australian diversity policy. She suggested treating language as a perspective: working in different languages opens new narrative possibilities. Khatun argued that the mono, in all forms, nature of Australian colonial society has limited how we read, hear, feel, and write history. Our capacity to have historical empathy for those other than the ones we expect to see. Specifically, she asserted that if our perspective is always defined by Western consciousness, as informed by Enlightenment narratives, we perpetuate the “myth at the foundation of modern Western thought: the claim that the knowledge systems of Europeans are more advanced than the epistemic traditions of the people they colonised” (2018, p. 5). Her methodology was to use non-Enlightenment historiographical traditions to write history and thereby to challenge her readers to undertake an exercise in empathy: to abandon the ways they have been conditioned to write and know history and to try to see how it can be written by using another perspective.

Khatun shifts the perspective to ‘the shore’ by using non-Western methods to retrieve and write an eclipsed history. She does so as “when non-Europeans and their knowledges are analysed through interpretive methods born of Enlightenment thought, the resulting

scholarship itself systematically works to establish the ‘positional superiority of Western knowledge’” (2018, p. 28). Hence, Khatun adds “hearing” and “listening” (2018, p. 171) to the dimensions for historical empathy. In her final chapter “To Hear” she explicitly demonstrates the role that language plays in understanding the perspective of “others” and she adopts a narrative style drawn from Bengali language to close her story. In doing so she abandons the structures of Western linear time narratives and she merges fantasy and reality. Time is circular, stories cross over, the timeline we know is corrupted. Khatun asks us to enter her dream, the imaginary, and to hear/listen as “far more extensive meanings are fleshed out in the imagery of aural discursive traditions” (2018, p. 185). Doing so releases the “colonial-modern historian” from “disciplining archives into tales of progress” open our ears to hear and to listen to the perspective of those on the shore (2018, p. 184). It is this work that Reihana does in her reimagining of the death of Cook.

### ***Emissaries: in pursuit of Venus [infected]***

On 3 February 2018 Reihana’s exhibition *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries* [hereafter, *Emissaries*] opened at John Curtin Gallery in Perth, Western Australia following a celebrated showing in the Tese dell’Issolotto at the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia.<sup>3</sup> Reihana’s work visualises the first and early contacts First Nations peoples of Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific and Canada had with Cook and his crew. *Emissaries* and *iPOVi* began with Reihana’s encounter with the woodblock designs for *Les Sauvages* at the National Gallery of Australia (Young, 2018) and the scenes of Cook’s death and colonial violence drawn from Drops 9 and 10 of the wallpaper comprise the dramatic climax of *iPOVi*. Concerned with perspectives, *Emissaries* opens with an installation of “perspectival tubes” or “spying glasses” – telescopes – which were scientific instruments used by Enlightened explorers. As the viewer squints through their vision is redirected to see figures Nookta people produced in miniature or official correspondence with Mai: fragments of lives disrupted by the violence of colonial exploration. On either side of the installation are oversized portraits of the Hawai’ian Chief Mourner and Joseph Banks, both spectacularly dressed, labelled as emissaries and appearing to channel cosmic energy. To guide the viewer to the room showing *iPOVi*, along the walls are colonial sketches of encounter, Joseph Banks’s specimen cases, a section of the Dufour et Cie wallpaper and finally a still produced on glass of Reihana’s visual speculation on the action leading to the death of Captain Cook.

*iPOVi* shows 25 frames a second and uses green-screen technology to immerse the viewer in lush leitmotif landscapes and to tell 70 vignettes. Faithful to Charvet’s wallpaper the wallpaper panorama appears as a nineteenth century Arcadian fantasy which follows the structure of Homer’s *Odyssey*. The perspective is First Nations, reimagining what have happened when Cook and his crews met people from Nootka Sound, Ra’iātea, Tonga, Tahiti, Vanuatu, Hawai’i, Aotearoa, New Caledonia, Marquesas Islands, Australia, and Palau. Mai and the other (and preferred) Ra’iātean refugee Cook took on his voyages, Tupaia, are constants in *iPOVi*, and they appear together draped in brilliantly white bark cloth, “noble savages”. As Rhana Devenport, the Curator of *Emissaries* for NZ Venice, concludes her Preface, in Reihana’s work “The Pacific Ocean [...] becomes a bed of actions for speculations on human behaviour. Greetings, exchanges, ceremonies, taints, misunderstandings, violence and untold intimacies entwine and unravel” (2017a, p. 12).

Cook and Banks are shown using new scientific knowledges and technologies to observe and record the transit of Venus in the Southern skies. However, it is not clear this is the Venus they seek: it also refers to name given to Tahiti by Bougainville, “New Cythera”, which directly alludes to the birthplace of Aphrodite of Venus, the goddess of love (Devenport, 2017a, p. 10). In the vignettes we see Banks actively pursue Hawai’ian women.

His sex is unmistakable, and on display through his amorous actions. Cook is not so clear and his breeches are pulled down to register his sex, alluding to the fact that in the Pacific, Cook's sexual identity and gender were often questioned. Some vignettes focus on the consequences of contact. In one scene a marine is flogged to the horror of those watching. Looking closely we can see the syphilis blooms on his skin, raising the suggestion that Cook ordered the flogging to try to prevent the spread of disease. By contrast, we also see First Nations men act out childbirth and breastfeeding much hilarity for all to see. The lesson is clear: intercourse has infectious consequences.

As she “explores, disrupts and reimagines notions of power, gender and representation [...] Reihana's artwork ‘recalibrates’ accepted understandings and assumed truths” (Tamati-Quennell, 2017, p. 134). Reihana's point is that the most virulent infection was spread by the colonial gaze, which has meant that “cultural histories and identities have been distorted in the South Pacific” (Young, 2018, p.149). However, as Devenport astutely recognises, Reihana's work “is not a nostalgic revisiting or a righting/re-writing of wrongs; rather, it opens fissures in codified representation and the colonial impulse to explore directly the intentions and possibilities of human encounter and exchange” (Devenport, 2017b, 23). Instead the panorama loops in an anarchic fashion and events that took place before the arrival of the Europeans follow Cook's death, there is repetition of dancing and action sequences. Reihana plays with notions of time and progress in this sequence and throughout by adopting *Tā-Vā*, a theory of time and space used across the Pacific. This is something most clearly demonstrated in *iPOVi* in the flag-raising ceremony scenes. Disordering the narrative, she shows a series of vignettes which show marines unfurl a flag and raise it, each at different stages of completion. The vignettes are not in order and so our understanding of linear progression is disrupted. So is meaning: we expect the flag to be the Union Jack. Eventually, when revealed we can identify it through the American, British and Hawai'ian symbols as the *Ka Hae Hawai'i*. The flag was commissioned in the early 1800s by King Kamehameha I and officially adopted in 1845 to represent Hawai'i as an independent, cosmopolitan kingdom. In the 1970s the flag was an icon of the Native Hawai'ian Sovereignty Movement. Here, Reihana disturbs temporal sequence and brings the history she is telling into the present, connecting to post-colonial movements and to the struggles of other First Nations people who in spatial rupture recur in the vignettes on their home territories.

### The death of Cook?

Throughout *iPOVi* Reihana presents Cook as the “inquisitive and acquisitive explorer” (Devenport, 2017b, p. 23) and it is the intent displayed by him and his crew to possess which changes the mood as in the Arcadian fantasy the scenes of paradise drop away quite abruptly and are replaced by unrest, discomfort and violence. Cook's death or “THE site of rupture” as Reihana terms it (Looser, 2017, p. 456) is presented as a misunderstanding, which is made clear in the actions which follow. In the next episode the panorama shows a Hawai'ian *ali'i* deliver Cook's hat and thigh bone:

‘This was seen as a horrific thing from the crew's perspective,’ Reihana says, ‘but the way it was wrapped and handed over was honorific: the hat is very important because it's next to your head, which in the Pacific culture is very revered. The thigh is also a revered part of the body.’ (Reihana in Jefferson, 2018)

By offering this alternative interpretation, Reihana contests what could be interpreted as horrifying cannibalism. Here Reihana points to what she is most concerned with is how the spectre of colonialism and the language of the Enlightenment has – quite literally – infected our point of view, our reading of actions and so to urge a new perspective the viewer's gaze is repositioned and refocused (Smallman, 2018). The perspective Reihana employs is “tangata



whenua view”: we always see from the point of view of the Indigenous people who are receiving foreign visitors (Looser, 2017, p. 457). This literal seeing as others do is enacted in the second 32-minute cycle of *iPOVi*. This time Cook does not simply lose his breeches momentarily, instead he is exchanged and played by a woman.

Reihana shifts our perspective from being determined by the “view from the boat” and widens it to include the “view from the shore” by telling the story from First Nations perspective and she builds empathy by employing the perspective of language. Accompanying the tableau of perspectives in *iPOVi* is the soundscape by James Pinker, which changes the mood as in the Arcadian fantasy the scenes of paradise drop away quite abruptly and are replaced by unrest, discomfort and violence. Through his soundscape echoes the sounds of birds, drumming, singing and gentle voices in several languages of the Pacific. No translation is provided; we are asked to hear them. The pacific soundscape is interrupted by a “cyclical phrase from [...] Bach”, the sound of Western Civilisation (Clifford, 2017, p. 1270). Finally, the intent to possess is echoed into the soundscape by the rhythmic tick of Cook’s clock, which he took on the second and third voyages. By listening and hearing we obtain understanding as we begin to know the stories of those we could perhaps see but do not give voice to as they do speak in the language of the “world navigator, explorer or trader” (ACARA, n.d., ACHASSK084).

### **Changing the language of empathy in the classroom**

In conclusion, the work of Reihana, following Khatun and Hartman, indicates that to decolonise the archive and our perspective we need to do more than to simply “find” the hidden histories. Reihana indicates this by analysing multiple narratives and questioning the roles each plays in contemporary society, cycling the past into the present as she does in the flag raising ceremony scenes. Reihana asks us to question the silences and the forgotten, the stories and perspectives that are unseen or not understood, so that the relevance of history and historical constructions to their present becomes clear. However, and drawing on Hartman, our efforts should be to do more than return “Venus” to the world: we also need to hear her and listen to her. We can hear her voice as well as the voice of the explorer. In *iPOVi* Reihana is seeking to unsettle and trouble the ways in which we receive and accept Enlightenment knowledges. By recalibrating what we may have previously thought were established histories we also disrupt our understandings of the Enlightenment legacies of race and colonialism and how they are embedded in our quotidian actions, understandings and practices. She asks us to question: does the Enlightenment and the speculative language of colonialism infect our vision? Reihana engages with contested histories and divided memories by asking the viewer to question what guides their perspective or point of view. Finally, she asks us to listen and to hear. The see from the perspective of the “Other” is not enough. We must also hear them and listen, giving weight to their story and not privileging that of the dominant as that is the one we know how to hear. When taken into the HASS and/or History classroom as an approach for perspective and empathy, it means agency is also voice. That our classrooms as decolonised spaces need to be linguistically and culturally pluralist. Using this empathic device might help build pluricultural History or Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) learning spaces in which all can listen and all can speak to be heard.

## References

- Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2019). *The Australian Curriculum: HASS, Year 4, How people, places and environments interact, past and present, (ACHASSK084)*.  
<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Search/?q=ACHASSK084>
- Allender, T., Clark, A., Parkes, R. (eds). (2019). *Historical Thinking for History Teachers: A new approach to engaging students and developing historical consciousness*. Allen and Unwin.
- Bartolozzi, F. Byrne, W. after John Webber. (1784) *The Death of Captain Cook* (engraving). Art Gallery of NSW.
- Barton, K. & Levstik, L. (2004) *Teaching History for the Common Good*. Erlbaum.
- Beaglehole, J.C. (Ed.) (2017). *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery: Volume III, Part I: The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery 1776-1780*. Routledge.
- Bioletti, S., Ranson, D. and Peel, R. (2008). *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique*. Made in Mâcon: Investigations into the production of wallpaper. *Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material National Conference*.  
<https://nga.gov.au/conservation/paper/lessauv.cfm>
- Borofsky, R. (1997) "Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere, and Sahlins," *Current Anthropology*. 38(2), 255-282. <https://doi.org/10.1086/204608>
- Carr, E.H. (1961) *What Is History?* Penguin.
- Carter, H. B. (2001). Note on the Drawings by an Unknown Artist from the Voyage of HMS *Endeavour*. In M. Lincoln (Ed.), *Science and Exploration in the Pacific: European Voyages to the Southern Oceans in the Eighteenth Century* (pp. 133-149). Boyell & Brewer.
- Clifford, A. (2017). Unmuting History: A Polyphonic Tableau. In Auckland Art Gallery (Ed.), *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries* (pp. 124-130). Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
- Cook, J. (1784). *A voyage to the Pacific Ocean: undertaken, by the command of His Majesty, for making discoveries in the northern hemisphere ... : performed under the direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore, in His Majesty's ships the Resolution and Discovery : in the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780 / Vol. I and II written by James Cook ; vol. III by James King*. W. and A. Strahan.
- Currie, N. E. (2005). *Constructing Colonial Discourse: Cook at Nootka Sound, 1778*. McGill-Queen's Press.
- Daws, G. (1968) *Shoal of time: A history of the Hawaiian Islands*. Macmillan.
- Devenport, R. (2017b). Emissaries: A New Pacific of the Past for Tomorrow. In Auckland Art Gallery (Ed.), *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries* (pp. 14-30). Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
- Devenport, R. (2017a). Preface. In Auckland Art Gallery (Ed.), *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries* (pp. 10-14). Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
- Domercq, J. (2013). "A Hero's Death". *Apollo*. 178(611), 44-50.

- Dufour, J. et Cie, Charvet, J-G. Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique 1805 (woodblock, printed in colour, from multiple blocks; hand-painted gouache through stencils). National Gallery of Australia
- Endacott, J., & Brooks, S. (2013). An Updated Theoretical and Practical Model for Promoting Historical Empathy. *Social Studies Research and Practice*, 8, 41-58.
- Frame, W. The third voyage of James Cook. The Voyages of Captain James Cook. *British Library*. <https://www.bl.uk/the-voyages-of-captain-james-cook/articles/the-third-voyage-of-james-cook>
- Fullagher, K. (2019). Rethinking foundational histories. *Portrait Magazine*. 61. <https://www.portrait.gov.au/magazines/61/rethinking-foundational-histories>
- Hartman, S. (2008). Venus in Two Acts. *Small Axe* 12(2), 1–14. <https://read.dukeupress.edu/small-axe/article/12/2/1/32332/Venus-in-Two-Acts>
- Howe, K.R. (1996) Review article: The making of cook's death. *The Journal of Pacific History* 31(1), 108-118, DOI: 10.1080/00223349608572810
- Jefferson, D. (2018). Lisa Reihana: a monumental, immersive new artwork reanimates the story of Captain Cook and first contact. *ABC Arts*. 31 January. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-31/lisa-reihana-in-pursuit-of-venus-reimagines-australian-history/9376114>
- John Curtin Gallery. (2018 ) *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries*. Perth, Western Australia. <https://jcg.curtin.edu.au/emissaries-lisa-reihana/>
- Joppien, R. (1992). John Webber. *Design & Art Australia Online*. <https://www.daaao.org.au/bio/john-webber/biography/>
- Khatun, S. (2018). *Australianama: The South Asian Odyssey in Australia*. Oxford University Press.
- Kornfeld, E. (1992). “The Power of Empathy: A Feminist, Multicultural Approach to Historical Pedagogy”. *The History Teacher* 26(1), 23-31.
- Lévesque, S. (2008). *Thinking Historically, Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century*. University of Toronto Press.
- Looser, D. (2017). Viewing Time and the Other: Visualizing Cross-Cultural and Trans-Temporal Encounters in Lisa Reihana’s in Pursuit of Venus [infected]. *Theatre Journal* 69(4), 449-475.
- McCalman, I. (2016) *The Reef: The Great Barrier Reef in Twelve Extraordinary Tales*. Penguin.
- Nepia, M. (2017). About the Artist: Lisa Reihana. *The Contemporary Pacific* 29(1), VII-XVI. <https://doi:10.1353/cp.2017.0000>.
- Obeyesekere, G. (1992) *The apotheosis of James Cook : European mythmaking in the Pacific*. Princeton University Press.
- Reynolds, H. (1972). *Aborigines and Settlers: the Australian Experience, 1788–1939*. Cassell Australia Limited.
- Riley, K. L. (1998). “Historical empathy and the Holocaust: Theory into practice”. *International Journal of Social Education* 13(1), 32-42.
- Ryan, L. (1981). *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*. UQ Press.

- Stanner, W.E.H. (1969). *After the dreaming: black and white Australians: an anthropologist's view*. Australian Broadcasting Commission.
- Sahlins, M. (1995) *How "Natives" Think About Captain Cook, For Example*. University of Chicago Press.
- Seixas, P. (2000) Schweigen! Die Kinder! or Does Postmodern History Have a Place in the Schools?. In P. Stearns, P. Seixas & S. S. Wineburg (Eds.) *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (pp. 19-37). New York University Press.
- Seixas, P. and Morton, T. (2012) *The big six historical thinking concepts*. Toronto: Nelson Publishing.
- Smallman, E. (2018). Interview: Why I made Captain Cook lose his breeches: Lisa Reihana on her colonial video epic. *The Guardian*. Oct. 16.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/oct/15/lisa-reihana-in-pursuit-of-venus-infected-oceania-royal-academy-london>
- Thomas, N. (2017). Lisa Reihana: Encounters in Oceania [online]. *Artlink* 37(2), 22-27.  
<https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=848432157030814;res=IELAPA>
- Webb, V. (2015). Re-animating encounter: Lisa Reihana's in pursuit of Venus [infected] [online]. *Art Monthly Australia*, 285, 20-23.  
<https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=558098885541337;res=IELLCC>
- Webb, V. (2017). *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique: A Decorative Composition in Wallpaper*. In Auckland Art Gallery (Ed.), *Lisa Reihana: Emissaries* (pp. 116-124). Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
- Webber, J. (1781) *The Death of Captain Cook* (oil painting). State Library of New South Wales.
- White, R. (1981) *Inventing Australia: images and identity 1688-1980*. Allen & Unwin.
- Yeager, Elizabeth Anne, Tim Anderson, James Winston Morris, Scott Maley and Stuart David Foster. (1998). "Why People in the Past Acted as They Did: An Exploratory Study in Historical Empathy." *International Journal of Social Education* 13, 8-24.
- Young, M. (2018). Review(s) of: Lisa Reihana: Cinemania, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney. *Art Asia Pacific* 107, 149. <https://search.informit-com-au.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=407905764819977;res=IELHSS>

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> A small rowing boat used by naval vessel in the eighteenth century for day trips.

<sup>2</sup> A print made using acid to etch copper plate to create tonal effects. Please see here for full definition: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/aquatint>

<sup>3</sup> Please see the exhibition page for the John Curtin Gallery here: <https://jcg.curtin.edu.au/emissaries-lisa-reihana/>. For an extract of the work, see 'Lisa Reihana: in Pursuit of Venus [Infected]', Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 20 July 2015, <https://youtu.be/WmMRF5nw9UI>.

---

### **About the Author**

Dr Samantha Owen is an Early Career Academic, Master of Teaching Course Coordinator and Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) Lecturer in the School of Education at Curtin University. Samantha teaches the HASS Education and Schooling and Australian Society. Samantha is a modern historian and her research interests include community, education and educators, nations and nationmaking, and trauma and she publishes in these areas. She is also a Lead of the Curtin Gender Research Network and a National Convenor of the Australian Women's History Network. Samantha sits as an elected member of the History Council WA and on the United Nations Association of WA Education Reference Group.