

The de Brys' published work is generally divided into the *Great Voyages*, describing navigations to what was called at the time the "West Indies," namely, the Americas and Oceania, and the *Small Voyages*, dealing with the East Indies, which included India, Japan, China, and sometimes Africa. Between 1590 and 1634, some thirty volumes, of both large and small folio size, appeared under the editorship first of Theodor de Bry, then of his sons Johan Israel and Johan Theodor, and finally, of Matthäus Merian, their successor. The detailed bibliographical description of these volumes may be found in the *Manuel*, by Gustave Brunet, in the work of Armand Camus, *Mémoire sur la collection des Grands et Petits voyages* (Paris, 1802), and in the 1924 study by Henry Stevens.

The circumstances of the project led de Bry to deal with the various events in other than chronological order. His first volume, acquired from Hakluyt, described the English expedition to Virginia in 1585; the second, published in 1591, described the French Huguenot expedition to Florida in 1565. At first glance, the presentation of these illustrated narratives appears unsystematic. Only by looking back at the work as a whole can we appreciate its unity and value as a representation of the New World for the eyes of the Old.

At different times, we shall return to one part or another of the *Great Voyages*, the only group we shall examine here. Appendix 1 provides a convenient reference chart for the reader.

#### AMERICA AS SEEN BY EUROPEANS IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

In 1590, nearly a century after Columbus's discovery, the first volume of the *Great Voyages* appeared in Frankfurt. As surprising as it may seem, this work represented the first attempt to introduce in Europe and on a large scale a pictorial image of the New World as a whole. It is all the more curious because just a hundred years earlier

the *Nuremberg Chronicle* had offered a vast visual and narrative survey of the world before the discovery of America. Nothing comparable to de Bry's *Great Voyages*, the imposing group of large folio volumes illustrated by several hundred copperplate engravings, yet existed;<sup>1</sup> only some few pictures had circulated after the publication of Christopher Columbus's *Letter* in 1492. The de Brys offered a broad view of European conquests in America and the first contacts with the Amerindians.

Copperplate engraving, appearing as a technique of reproduction at the end of the sixteenth century, prompted publishers to bring out new encyclopedias. This technique, known since the fifteenth century, had until then been neglected by publishers of illustrated books because it required twice as much work as wood-engraving: narrative and illustration had to be printed separately. Copperplate engraving, however, offered a precision of line and a clarity that were infinitely superior to wood engraving. Moreover, it made it possible to reproduce plates over longer print runs. Thus the *Great Voyages* appears as the first European panorama of America. As such, the work involves a large communication network, from the publisher to his sources of information and to the places from which the work was distributed.

To understand how Europeans received their information at the time, one has only to read the account of the news and rumors collected from day to day in Augsburg by the Fuggers, the Hapsburgs' wealthy bankers.<sup>2</sup> For example, the discovery of Mexico on 30 April 1599 was announced in Venice at the end of the century in this way: "The newly arrived fleet informs us also that the Spaniards have conquered a new kingdom in the Indies called Old Mexico. It is inhabited by intelligent people who are to be instructed in the Christian faith. Very rich gold and silver mines exist there also" (Matthews 1959, p. 237).

The first account about America published in England appeared more than fifteen years after Columbus's voyage. Although published works on cross-Atlantic voyages increased substantially in number during the first half of the century, they reached so limited an audience that, according to historians, the majority of the population did not even suspect the existence of another continent. Sometimes the results of the explorations were intentionally kept secret for several years by a small number of initiates for commercial or political reasons.

Yet a few Europeans had the chance to draw near and see in the

flesh Indians whom the conquerors had brought back with them and who were exhibited as "curiosities" on the streets of several European cities. Thus the people of Seville and Barcelona were able to see a procession of Amerindians whom Columbus had brought back with him from his first voyage. When he went to Lisbon, the adventurous Genoese took along seven Indians captured in Hispaniola, now Haiti. The court of Charles V received Mexican entertainers offered by Cortez. Christopher Weiditz, a German, visiting the Spanish court in 1529, sketched them in a number of pen drawings, which, reproduced as engravings, circulated in several books throughout the sixteenth century. In 1550, the inhabitants of Rouen attended a triumphal feast in honor of Catherine de Medici and her court. On this occasion, some Norman sailors who had returned from Brazil disguised themselves as Indians and, with some authentic Tupinambás, performed a Brazilian dance.<sup>3</sup> When Montaigne went to Rouen to gather information about "cannibals," the "plain" man who helped him communicate with the Indians was probably one of those Norman sailors who had settled in Brazil even before the Protestant colonists from the Villegaignon expedition settled there. But the case of Montaigne personally going to question these Brazilian Indians with the help of an interpreter is exceptional. One may well surmise that the processions and masquerades in which the uprooted Amerindians were thus offered for exhibition scarcely let the general population gain acquaintance with the New World inhabitants as men or cultural groups. Likewise, objects brought back from America and sometimes exhibited reached only the inquisitive few. Still, Dürer deeply admired the Mexican art objects he had been able to see in Brussels: "In all my life, I have seen nothing that so delighted my heart, for I have seen some marvelous works of art there and I was enraptured by the subtle genius of men from foreign lands" (letter of 27 August—3 September 1529).<sup>4</sup>

Knowledge of the New World through pictures was even more limited.<sup>5</sup> The first representations of Amerindians were woodcuts, worked in a rudimentary way. One of the earliest known examples shows naked men and women dressed in plumed collars standing under a palm-leaf roof from which human limbs are hanging. The woodcut was probably based on a description of Brazilian Indians contained in a letter from Vespucci to Lorenzo de Medici. As late as the second half of the sixteenth century, picture books on America contained only a small number of woodcuts, rarely larger than

vignettes. These illustrations were often reproduced from earlier ones. For instance, to illustrate the description of America in Munster's *Cosmographie* (1554), the editor simply took old woodcuts that had been used for illustrating Mandeville's voyage more than a century before the discovery of America. Only with the *Singularités de la France antarctique*, by the Franciscan friar Thevet (1557), does wood-engraving illustrate systematically and artistically, perhaps after Jean Cousin, a text about the Amerindians.

#### THE *Great Voyages* AND THE PROTESTANT WORLD

It is remarkable that this technical progress in book illustration should have developed in the midst of religious struggles. The Flemish and Dutch Jesuits had quickly understood the power of copperplate engraving. The Wirix dynasty of engraver-publishers put out religious prints and illustrated booklets for the Counter-Reformation. Still, it was a Protestant, Theodor de Bry, a native of Liège exiled for his religious opinions, who first used the possibilities offered by illustration on copper to let Europe see the New World, its inhabitants, and its conquest, in pictorial form. And, in fact, the production of these pictures of Amerindians is completely bound up with the emotional, financial, and political interests of the parties engaged in the struggle with the Spanish in America. The majority of the texts comprising the collection of the *Great Voyages* deals with the settlement of Protestants in America and with their struggle against the Spanish hegemony promoted by the famous bull of Pope Alexander III, which divided the still-unexplored New World between Spain and Portugal. As for the accounts of the Spanish conquest written by Spanish or Italian Catholics, they were often cut and, moreover, contain violent attacks against Spanish methods.

All the texts had previously been published before the de Brys illustrated them and included them in their immense collection. A large number had even been directly planned and written to serve the interests of the great maritime companies financing these voyages, such as the English Virginia Company or the Dutch East India Company.

In the preface of another of his books, Theodor de Bry has left us one of the few documents about his life. There he describes his family as having been one of the most prosperous and most honored in the city of Liège, still under Spanish domination. In 1570,

accused of sympathizing with the Reformation, he had to go into exile, robbed of all his wealth. Then it was, he said, that "of the ample patrimony my parents had left me, only art remained. Neither robbers nor thieving villains could lay hands on it. Art has given me back my former fortune and reputation and has never abandoned me."<sup>6</sup>

De Bry found refuge in Strasbourg, the seat of Protestantism where many refugees in flight from persecution were welcomed. The city was to become one of the great Protestant centers of the book trade. De Bry worked there as engraver and goldsmith under the influence of Etienne Delaune, a French engraver and, like himself, a Huguenot refugee. At first he did work to order for the courts and the Protestant nobility. From the beginning of this period, he was in touch with London publishers. In 1586 and 1587, for example, he went to London to illustrate a work on the funeral procession of Sir Philip Sydney. There he met the famous Hakluyt who encouraged him to launch his project of illustrated voyages to America. Actually, a number of the narratives in the *Great Voyages* are drawn from *Principal Navigations*, collected and published by Hakluyt without illustrations, on behalf of the Virginia Company. In making his collection of texts, Hakluyt drew from the archives of commercial companies, and consulted official accounts and even private letters. Thanks to his contacts with merchants, navigators, and sailors, he was able to gather oral reports. The purpose of these documents was to promote English colonization and commerce in America, a fact particularly evident in the first two parts of the *Great Voyages*.

Thus the narrative on Virginia by Thomas Hariot was only an official report on the possibilities of colonization in the newly discovered lands; Hariot addressed himself specifically to those who wanted to invest capital in Virginia or go and live there as colonists, as the title indicates: *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia, directed to the Investors, Farmers and Wellwishers of the project of Colonizing and Planting there*.

Hariot had been sent officially to Virginia as geographer and historian by Raleigh, the instigator of the expedition. De Bry's first book reproduced copper engravings of the watercolor paintings by John White, who had plotted maps, drawn the flora and fauna, and painted the inhabitants in their own land.

Hakluyt was also the source for part 2 of the *Great Voyages*.

Before meeting Hakluyt in London, de Bry had probably read about him in Captain Laudonnière's diary of the Huguenot expedition to Florida. Basanier, the Parisian editor of this diary, pays homage to Hakluyt, "a man truly versed in geographical history and having command of the variety of languages and sciences," for having "rescued" Laudonnière's diary "from the tomb." The erudite Englishman himself published this text in his own book, *Principal Navigations*, so closely did the Huguenot venture in Florida address the English interests of the period. In fact, Catherine de Medici was the first to dare transgress in America the "status quo" resulting from the papal bull of 1493, and Grenville's expedition to Virginia, nearly twenty years after Laudonnière's expedition to Florida, owed much to that earlier French incursion over the trail opened by the Spaniards. De Bry did not publish Laudonnière's diary itself, but rather a narrative based on that expedition. At the same time he reproduced the drawings brought back from Florida by Le Moyne de Morgues. It was also Hakluyt who put de Bry in touch, in London, with Le Moyne, a refugee who survived the massacre of the Laudonnière expedition by the duke of Alba's envoys. To these prints de Bry attached explanations which are probably Hakluyt's.

Beginning with part 3 of the *Great Voyages* in 1592, de Bry became a bookseller and publisher himself. Settling finally in Frankfurt, he published the first six parts of his *Voyages* during his lifetime. His sons Johan Israel and Johan Theodor succeeded him in the business. After the father's death in 1598, the books, published at wider intervals, were of lower quality. The elder son, Johan Israel, who died in 1611, took charge of the company. He published parts 7 and 8 in 1599, and part 9 in 1602. Three others, edited by the second son, Johan Theodor, appeared in 1619. On the death of Johan Theodor his son-in-law, Matthäus Merian, editor-engraver of famous alchemical treatises, took over the business and published the last four parts. He also reissued all the earlier volumes. The business was then handed down to one of Matthäus Merian's grandsons, Wilhelm Fitzer, a London bookseller, who came to live in Frankfurt.

*Principal Navigations* continued to inspire the choice of texts for the *Great Voyages* after Theodor de Bry's death in 1598. His sons adapted several reports which had previously appeared in Hakluyt's English collection relating to English voyages to America. By con-

trast with their father's practice, they did not acquire the texts directly from England, but rather through Dutch translations. This was true for Drake's voyage around the world, compiled in part by Hakluyt himself from a variety of manuscripts; for Raleigh's and Keymis's voyage to Guyana; and finally, for Cavendish's voyage around the world. The final volumes of the collection illustrated the history of colonization in Virginia and New England with Captain John Smith's adventures and the story of the Jamestown Colony.

After 1602, the collection consisted essentially of ships' logs kept by Dutch navigators who sailed down the coasts of South America in search of new routes to the Pacific islands and the Far East. The majority of these voyages were made on behalf of the all-powerful Dutch East India Company. Before its incorporation in 1602, Dutch voyages had been financed by various syndicates. From its inception, the Dutch East India Company held a trading monopoly in the Far East. The ships' logs of Sebald de Weert, Olivier de Noort, and Georges Spielbergen reported on the progress of their expeditions and justified the capital invested; the voyage of Le Maire and Schouten published in part 11 had been undertaken by Le Maire himself, a rich merchant from Amsterdam, without the knowledge of the Dutch Company. This account justifies the voyage and at the same time reports the discovery of a new passage to the Pacific around Cape Horn—the Straits of Le Maire.

These commercial and geographical accounts form the background against which the vision of the "savage Indians" presented in the later volumes must be viewed. They mostly concern Indians from Tierra del Fuego and Polynesians, met by the Dutch in the Pacific islands. De Bry's bias for the Protestant world that supported his enormous enterprise also accounts for the distorted vision of the New World offered to the European public. This bias can be felt in the liberty taken with the texts in translating, editing, cutting them from one edition to the next. This is particularly flagrant in the only texts originally written by Spanish Catholics: one by José de Acosta, a Spanish Jesuit, the other by Antonio de Herrera (part 9 and 11). Moreover, these texts deal merely with the description of the New World and its natural and human history, leaving aside the conquest itself or the Indian-European relations. If the texts—of Dutch origin for the most part—used by the de Brys were cut, one can easily imagine that those coming from Spanish sources were no less so. All of them show the mark of anti-Spanish

sentiment. The most important one, the *History of the New World*, by Girolamo Benzoni, was written by a Catholic, but its translator, Chauveton, a Protestant theologian from Geneva, added commentary and scholia, which the de Brys reprinted in their edition. In his French translation, Chauveton included a "petition in the form of a supplication" addressed to the king of France by "the women, widows, grandchildren, orphans, and others, all relatives and in-laws of those who were so cruelly invaded by the Spaniards in the French Antarctic called Florida." Benzoni's account takes up Las Casas's indictment of the methods of Spanish colonization. At the same time, Theodor de Bry published a text by Las Casas himself, with illustrations often identical to those in the earlier parts of the *Great Voyages*. Even more than the texts, his engravings, by stressing slavery and the practice of torture, contributed to the spread in Europe of the famous "black legend," hostile to the Spanish. These pictures of Indian genocide mirrored, for the Protestant victims of the Spanish Inquisition, their own misfortune.

The same bias appears in the illustrations for the account by the German Schmidel, a mercenary on Mendoza's expedition; the Spanish are shown in the very act of cannibalism. In the *Voyage de Vespucci* (part 10), they appear not only cruel, but licentious.<sup>7</sup> The illustrations show them trying to seduce Indian women. One plate shows the *conquistadores*, with Vespucci leading, as slightly ridiculous beneficiaries of the native women's sexual hospitality; another shows them on the island of Curaçao trying to seduce three giantesses whom the Indians, armed with clubs, are coming to defend. By contrast, the British are seen observing all the forms of civility by sending an emissary from the governor to ask for the hand of the celebrated Pocahontas in marriage. It is clear, then, that among the innumerable accounts of voyages to America, the *Great Voyages* were made up, grouped, and selected with a bias toward the point of view of the Protestant countries involved in the conquest. It should be mentioned that the *Small Voyages*, concerning the East Indies, was put on the Index by the pope.

#### THE *Great Voyages*: ITS PUBLIC AND ITS SUCCESS

Beyond the Protestant world, de Bry was seeking a wider European public. To reach this public he published these volumes simultaneously in High German, which had become over the course of the sixteenth century the national literary language of the Germanic

countries, and in Latin, understood in all the Catholic countries. The first volume was published simultaneously in four editions: Latin, German, English, and French. This attempt was abandoned probably because it was not profitable. The remaining volumes, then, were published in Latin and German. The de Brys' presence in Frankfurt was also certainly instrumental in successfully distributing the volumes to European booksellers.

Who was to be found on the periphery of the communication network of the *Great Voyages*? Who read and viewed these illustrated books? First of all, there were the members of the European aristocracy and in particular the members of the German courts.<sup>8</sup> Several volumes contain a dedicatory epistle to a prince, accompanied by his coat of arms. For instance, we find the names of Maximilian, the king of Poland; of Guillaume, count Palatine; of Christian, duke of Saxony; and of Louis, *landgrave* of Hesse. These dedicatory epistles no doubt also discharged a certain debt to the patrons who had allowed the printing or had even offered some financial support. Further, the collection reached a much broader group of readers. Widely read in the world of educated people and collectors who had early become fascinated by the voyages of exploration, it was also sought by the rising class of merchants and artisans who were beginning to buy books and art objects. If the taste for accounts of cross-Atlantic voyages lasted into the late sixteenth century, it was not only because of curiosity, but also because most people, even those of modest means, had a stake in this kind of enterprise. The maritime companies collected their capital by offering stocks underwritten by a quite large segment of the public, including even the international *petite bourgeoisie*. The Dutch East India Company, for example, sold its stock not only in its own country, but also in France—in Paris, La Rochelle, and Rouen.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that these works were profusely illustrated no doubt increased considerably the size of their potential market. Thus, even people of modest means who scarcely knew how to read could become interested. It was also a common practice at the time to display frontispieces in the streets for publicity purposes. The pictures of Indians that enriched them could not fail to have attracted a wide range of customers. One may also imagine that, just as religious woodcuts were shown around at fairs by peddlers and acquired by a very large clientele, the frontispieces—not to mention the illustrations—of this new type of book were introduced by

itinerant vendors and encouraged browsers to buy the complete volumes for themselves.

The description of the communication network through which the Amerindian pictures were created thus leads us to discover a whole range of economic, political, and religious relations among quite diverse cultural and social groups. The process of picture production, dependent on a wide assortment of materials, expands this network over space and time by drawing on a very old tradition.

## *The Makeup of the Mythic Material: Collage and Bricolage*

*The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand, because it has none else at its disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual "bricolage"—which explains the relations which can be perceived between the two.*

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*

### BABEL AND LEVIATHAN IN AMERICA

When Theodor de Bry began publishing the *Voyages* he was in possession of drawings that talented artists had brought back from America. John White was attached to Grenville's expedition as cartographer; Le Moyne de Morgues to Laudonnière's expedition. These drawings provided a powerful asset for launching the collection and a model for de Bry's future undertakings.

John White was sent to Virginia and Le Moyne de Morgues to Florida. Recently, some previously unpublished works by the two artists have appeared;<sup>1</sup> their publication makes it possible to judge both how true to his models de Bry really was and what additional attraction the copperplate engravings conferred on them. The etchings made from White's drawings in volume 1 have an outstanding documentary quality. They show us wigwam life among the Algonquian, or more precisely, among the Pamlico and Secota, the southernmost branch of the Algonquian. At that time the Secota occupied the swath of land lying between Albermarle Sound and the mouth of the Pamlico River, and in addition, all the neighboring islands, that is, on the present site of Washington, Tyrrell, Dare, Beaufort, and Hyde counties in North Carolina. Secota village, painted by White, was on the left bank of the Pamlico; Pomeiock village near the mouth of Gibbs Creek. The illustrations

show Adam and Eve; some Picts (the first inhabitants of England, portrayed with their body paintings) and Bretons; and the arrival of the English in Virginia, with the natives and their surroundings. The Indian villages are fully shown: Pomeiock and Secota with their agriculture; the religious buildings—the temple of the idol Kiwa and the tombs of the Weroans—are interspersed with the totemic marks of the Virginia chiefs; a major place is also given to solemnities, festivities, dances, and games.

Cartographic landscapes, scenes of fishing and hunting, and nature plates showing specimens of animal and plant life give an idea of the topography, flora, and fauna typical of the region where Sir Richard Grenville and his colony were settled—that is, the environs of Roanoke, on the site of present-day North Carolina. The magnificent portraits of the inhabitants show the dress, tattooing, and many ornaments of the Algonquian with a wealth of detail. Some plates describe the Indians' techniques and subsistence activities: slash-and-burn technique, making canoes from a single piece of wood, smoking meat, and cooking succotash, and Algonquian dish prepared from a mixture of boiled corn and beans to which fish or meat is sometimes added.

Other plates offer a view of the Algonquian village, the inside and outside of different types of dwellings, and the layout of crops in the fields—corn, tobacco, and squash. The Indians are shown in a hierarchial order meant to acquaint Europeans with the social organization of the group but actually copied from European society: chiefs, priests, nobles, and the “common” people.

Le Moyne de Morgues's illustrations, which appear in volume 2, provide an introduction to the daily life of another tribe of the American southeast, the Timucua of Florida, an extinct tribe of the Muskogean linguistic family. Despite the fancifulness of many details, the maps of the Timucua towns and villages and the native portraits and scenes show a spirit of documentation and ethnographic observation rare in the iconography of the time. A whole native society is lavishly presented. Taken together, the illustrations describe the “scalp-hunting Timucua.” We see the arrival of the French, the natives' welcome, and the construction of the fort by the invaders. The Timucua style of war is described in detail; we see ceremonial preparation for it among the Saturiba and the Outina; then the battle line drawn between the two opponents,

the march of Outina's army, the treatment of the scalped prisoners, and the dances around the trophies after the victory. Hermaphrodites are used as beasts of burden. Widows petition the chiefs after the defeat and begin to mourn on the warriors' tombs. Other plates illustrate hunting techniques, leisure activities, feasts, and political organization. The plates emphasize the scalp-hunters' political and military organization and their various techniques of war: staged battle, guerilla warfare, defense of the town, cutting up the scalp and smoke-drying it, as well as all the ceremonies and rites that surround the preparation for war and the celebration of victory. Nor are other aspects of native life neglected: sowing, harvesting, cooking preserving food (smoke-drying and storing in public granaries), the technique of leaching inedible plants, panning for river gold, and so forth.

When left to himself, de Bry devised his iconography from the widest variety of techniques. He scorned no evidence or document and did not scruple to interpret or plagiarize every illustration he encountered whether it concerned the subject of his book directly or had only a distant relation to it. In this respect, the iconography of volume 3 is extremely interesting. This volume comprises two texts dealing with voyages to Brazil: the text by Hans Staden, the German adventurer, who belonged to Spanish, then Portuguese, galleons and was held prisoner by the Tamaio for nine months; and the text by the Protestant Jean de Léry, companion of Villegaignon on the expedition by the latter to Brazil in 1557.

De Bry altered Léry's text; his translation is only a paraphrase of the original. Neglecting the episodes of the Villegaignon expedition and the epic side of the establishment of the French colonists in Brazil, he focused his illustrations on Staden's captivity among the Tupinikin, another Tupinambá cannibal tribe. At the same time, he used Léry's striking narratives to support his illustration of warrior manners, cannibal rites, and the natives' religion. The first edition of Staden's narrative, published in Marburg in 1557, includes a few crude vignettes after the sketches Staden drew from life and those by one of the expedition's sailors. De Bry drew some of the motifs of his inspiration from them, especially the views of the stockaded Tupinambá village where the explorer was held. They show the treatment to which the prisoner was subjected and the progress of the cannibal rites. But de Bry borrowed the characteristics of his

Tupinambá and the details of their finery from Léry. Léry's *Voyage to Brazil*, published in 1578, was embellished with several woodcuts. The author sought to have one of his friends make drawings from life, and he tells how he posed a Tupinambá family that he wished to paint "from nature": "It is true that to complete this plate we have put near the Tupinambá man one of his wives holding her baby in a cotton scarf as is the custom, and the child, in turn, who is carried as the women carry them, hugs his mother's side with his legs" (1600, p. 121).

Several of these illustrations, drawn from memory in Europe, imitate those of Thevet's *Singularités de la France antarctique*. Léry, who pays homage in his account to the "truthful narrative" of his predecessor, Staden, also pokes fun at the Franciscan Thevet; it is thus certain that he knew Thevet's book, and understandable that he more or less imitated its illustrations. These were the first visual portrayals of New World inhabitants. Their authorship has been attributed to various artists of the Fontainebleau school, especially to Jean Cousin.

De Bry here used the text to create his iconographic models, following the authors' suggestions. Thus, Léry introduces the "contemplation of a savage":

Now first of all, following this description, you will want to imagine a savage. Imagine a naked man, well built and well proportioned of limb, with all his body hair plucked out, the hair of the head shorn in the way I have described (that is, like a monk), the lips and cheeks split, with pointed bones or fresh-quarried stones set into them, the ears pierced, with rings in the holes, the body daubed with paint, the arms and legs blackened with the paint they make from the *genip* tree mentioned earlier; necklaces made from innumerable tiny pieces of the large shell they call *vignol* . . . hung around the neck. You will imagine him as he usually is in his country, and his physical appearance is as you see him portrayed below, wearing only the highly polished bone crescent on his chest, the ornament in the hole in his lip, and, to keep himself in countenance, his loose bow and his arrows in his hands." [1600, pp. 119–20]

This Tupinambá appears on the frontispiece exactly this way, standing beside a woman who holds her baby in her cotton scarf, also as described by Léry. The same process will be used again in

part 8 of the *Great Voyages*, though it is devoted to Indians from a quite different part of the Americas.

With part 4, the texts are of a quite different nature. Instead of direct narratives of previous expeditions, a historical background appears and the text often loses ethnographic values for the sake of the narration.

The narration of the Spanish conquest of the New World is combined with the personal adventures of the Italian, Girolamo Benzoni. His journeys lead the reader into the Caribbean area: Hispaniola, that is, Haiti; Borichen, or Puerto Rico; and the Pearl Coast, or the coast of present-day Venezuela and Colombia. Then he takes us to Central America—Panama, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica—and from there to Peru. The geographical range makes it hard to identify the tribes. With this volume, the illustrations do not focus on the Amerindian mores as before, but rather on the Spanish conquest and mistreatment of the Indians. In the series of plates, pictures from different stages of the conquest follow one another, with descriptions of pre-Columbian Indians placed next to those of acculturated Indians held in slavery. No attempt is made to distinguish among the different tribal or cultural groups, indiscriminately grouped together in the category "Indians." Lacking real models, de Bry reproduces earlier ones and portrays these Indians consistently naked with a strip of cotton around the loins; the men still have the monk's tonsure of the Tupinambá and the women the long loose hair of the Timucua and Tupinambá women. Some new items of clothing and some new attributes whose models are found elsewhere are sometimes added to these old elements. Thus de Bry rigs out the inhabitants of Hispaniola—thus of the Arawak group—in the garb of the Peruvian Inca: the *lauyту* or *lyawo*, the vicuna-wool turban wrapped around the head several times, topped off by the *mascapaycha*, a kind of semicircular miter of birds' feathers, and a sleeveless short tunic. As the explorers brought back no iconographic models or information, de Bry obviously used all the iconographic material available at the time. The extensive *De Civitatis orbis terrarum* by Braun and Hogenberg contains models of the clothing of all the world's known peoples. It is the source of a view of the city of Cuzco (Peru), with the figure of Atahualpa, the last Inca of Peru, borne on his litter by his entourage, outlined in the foreground. De Bry reproduced the view of

Cuzco with no change, but for the figures in the foreground, which he uses elsewhere, he substituted Indian tumblers and jugglers copied from another print, that of the jugglers Cortez brought back from Mexico to the court of Charles V, drawn by the German, Christopher Weiditz, in 1529.

Old materials going back fifty years and more are thus separated from their original settings and turn up again in new arrangements. We are, then, confronted with a sort of Tower of Babel of the Amerindian peoples. Physical types, articles of ornamentation, and hairstyles, all borrowed from different cultures appear together quite incongruously in a single plate.

In a market scene of Cartagena, a region inhabited by Caribbeans, de Bry plays, as on a keyboard, with the range of exotic clothing and ornaments he has already engraved. Especially noteworthy is a collection of native hairstyles: the Algonquian cock's comb, the narrow strip of hair these Indians let grow along the center of the head, as John White painted it; the hair drawn up and tied in a chignon on the top of the head, like the Timucua warriors; the shaven heads of other men; the hair falling in a long twist down the back of Tupinambá women; beside entirely naked individuals, others are covered with feathers or skins reminiscent of the capes of the Tupinambá shamans.

This process, which leads to infinite variations in dress, physical appearance, clothing, hairstyle, and native attributes, continues and accelerates in the succeeding volumes. Indeed, the geographic itinerary of the *Voyages* becomes more and more complicated. In the absence of new iconographic documents about America, de Bry's sons attempted to revitalize the interest of the collection by offering newly discovered lands to the reader. In the titles for the volumes they frequently pointed out the fact that they contain the first descriptions of the countries seen by the explorers. Schmidel's account, which opens part 7 and appeared in 1599, is introduced with phrases of elegant promotional pomposity, such as: "The true description of several important countries and islands of the Indies which have never before been mentioned in any chronicle and which were explored for the first time and in the midst of the greatest dangers during the navigation of Ulrich Schmidel von Straubigen."

This statement is only partly accurate, since the original edition of this narrative was published in German in Frankfurt in 1567. It

deals with the Gran Chaco and the conquest of the Parañá River, in which Schmidel participated under a number of Spanish captains, including Pedro de Mendoza. In fact, his narrative is one of the oldest sources for the ethnography of these regions at the time of their discovery. It gives information especially about the clothing, physical appearance, and mores of the Timbu, related to the Guaicuru, and of the Payagua and Mbaia. Unfortunately, Schmidel returned without drawings, and the woodcuts illustrating the Dutch editions of the same date as the text, are pure fantasies, partly inspired by the pictures in earlier volumes of the de Bry collection. Ethnography is thus completely forsaken in favor of simple anecdotes about relations between the Indians and the Spanish conquerors.

The *Voyages* continue with a series of circumnavigations of the coasts of South America through the Straits of Magellan or through the newly discovered Straits of Le Maire, as reported by Schouten. The illustrations for them consist in landing incidents and show quite superficial contacts with the peoples encountered. For the most part they are devoid of ethnographic interest, with the exception of a few plates depicting Polynesians, for which the de Brys had new models at hand.

As we proceed through the collection, a greater variety of peoples comes into view, all merged under the name of "Indians," especially in the captions. Thus appear, without distinction, the inhabitants of the Canary Islands, some Africans met on the Gabon coast while the ship was in port, some Alacalufs in the Magellan archipelago, and some Micronesians and Polynesians.

Sometimes a picture of foreign peoples slips in among the Indians thanks to a digression in the text. Thus the Jesuit, José de Acosta, describing certain customs of the Aztec religion, is led to compare them with a religious practice recorded by other Jesuits living among the Japanese: the public confession of Japanese pilgrims sitting on a scales that hangs in the air (plate 9A:10). The plate illustrating this digression has an odd mixture of two different ethnic types; the penitent in his scales is, in his features and clothing, a new type, while the supposedly Japanese priests are identical to the Aztec priests who, in other plates, engage in human sacrifice.

Sometimes the description of these peoples is supplemented by the description of mythical peoples, such as the famous Inca of Manoa mentioned by Raleigh in his *Voyage to Guyana*, included in

volume 8. The de Brys show the Inca emperor being anointed with a golden oil, on feast days, while drinking an intoxicating beverage from a huge tankard (plate 7/8:15). Raleigh takes this anecdote from old sources, notably from Lopez de Gomara, the author of the *Historia general de las Indias*; he paraphrases it in his description of the legendary emperor of Guyana, linked to the Eldorado legend. Other mythical figures, inherited from Pliny and the medieval tradition, appear on a map of Guyana, supposedly drawn by one of the members of the crew. In it we see an Amazon and some representatives of a "race of men whose shoulders rise up along the sides of the head so high that the face seems to be placed in the chest." What was only a comparison in Raleigh's text is brought to life in the de Bry map in the form of headless men with faces drawn on their chests—a type of medieval monster called "Blemmye." The caption identifies them as inhabitants of "Iwapanoma."

In this strange tower of Babel, specimens of no less incongruous flora and fauna also mingle. Some give evidence of naturalistic precision and scientific realism; others are but the product of an imagination capable of begetting the monsters of the Leviathan. By contrast with the naturalistic plates reproducing White's watercolors and lying next to general-purpose landscapes used as backgrounds, notably those of Virginia and Florida, we see fantastic landscapes and animals that are reappearances of the "medieval marvels" reworked by the Baroque imagination.

We find, for example, the tree of Iron Island in the Canaries, "from whose leaves there is a perpetual flow of water," which the natives caught in jugs; the water is full of monstrous man-eating fish ready to devour shipwrecked Europeans (plate 6:28). In another plate, a gigantic bird, a kind of giant cock, upright in a strange boat, spreads his wings and covers two boatmen, one of whom is standing (plate 11B:12). In still another plate, reptiles with dragon's bodies are chained by the feet, then roasted and eaten by the Indians (plate 10:4).

In the final volumes the fantasy element reappears. The old literary or iconographic tradition and alchemical symbolism lend fullness to the narrations. Johan Theodor de Bry and Matthäus Merian both illustrated at least two alchemical texts, *Atalanta fugiens*, by M. Maier, in 1618, and the *Tractatus*, by Mylius, in 1620. Thus a plate of 1598 (12:4) evokes prodigious phenomena described by Acosta

in his chapter on "Strange portents and prodigies which happened in Mexico before the end of their empire." These prodigies were indeed strange: an immovable stone the Mexicans tried in vain to pull with ropes, the appearance of cosmic and cataclysmic phenomena, a flame in the shape of a pyramid, a comet seen in broad daylight, an inextinguishable fire heating the lake waters to boiling, and, finally, the apparition of a many-headed monster shown in one of the traditional shapes of the Lernaean hydra. In the foreground, the engravers combine two old motifs, the one coming from the Greco-Latin tradition, the other from the biblical heritage: Jupiter's eagle transporting Ganymede in his claws, and the dream of Jacob at the foot of the ladder. This singularity illustrates the last wonder described by Acosta: a Mexican peasant dreaming that a bird carried him into a grotto where Montezuma lay sleeping, with a sheaf of aromatics and flowers in his hand; the bird brings word of the dangers threatening the kingdom.

The fantastic animals of Guatemala, drawn in front of a volcanic landscape in a different plate, also come from a variety of iconographic sources (plate 12:5). The scene of an animal carrying its young on its back and hiding them under its tail is inspired by a woodcut in Thevet's *Cosmographie universelle*. Thevet showed the *su* or *sucurath* as the best example of maternal love in the animal world. Ambroise Paré, the king's surgeon, did not hesitate to borrow this curiosity from Thevet in turn, and insert it in his book, *Des monstres et prodiges*.

At the pictorial level, a real syncretism of ethnic, cultural, zoological, mythological, and biblical forms is created that does not necessarily exist at the level of the texts taken separately. It comes into being precisely because the de Brys brought together, more or less arbitrarily, a heterogeneous assortment of narratives with a view to illustrating them. It is elaborated little by little, by the process of repeating elements borrowed at times from the Timucua, at times from the Tupinambá or Peruvians, to which are added others, drawn from other traditions completely foreign to the American continent.

This fantastic ethnography and zoology is incorporated into a history of dated facts that proceeds in a certain order. Each volume of the *Great Voyages* recounts events that, for the most part, actually took place. But they treat history no better than they do geogra-

phy. The illustrated voyages constitute a mythico-historical amalgam intended to introduce America's conquest and colonization to Europeans.

#### A PICTORIAL EPIC

The events portrayed by the engravings are not presented in the chronological order in which they really occurred, but in the order in which the volumes appeared between 1590 and 1634, at fairly regular intervals of from one to seventeen years. We note the same chaos in history that we have seen in the geographical itineraries. The order of the expeditions at first moves backward in time, that is, the more recent are described before the earlier ones. The reason is simple: the de Brys chose their texts as they became available, according to the contingencies of the book market. Thus de Bry published Le Moyne de Morgues's account of the voyage to Florida as volume 2, after the Virginia voyage, although in fact it took place twenty years earlier, for de Bry was at first unable to obtain Le Moyne's drawings. Only with Benzoni's *History of the New World* (volume 4) were the early stages of the Spanish conquest related: Columbus's voyages to the West Indies, the venture of Cortez and Pizarro to Mexico and Peru. Yet these events were mixed with other, later, ones, such as those Benzoni himself witnessed during his voyage fifty years later.

A similar confusion in history occurs on several other occasions. The narrative of Vespucci's voyages (1449–1504) was published only in 1619, while the letter to Lorenzo de Medici, the famous *Novus mundus*, was translated into Latin as early as 1503. They were published by de Bry at the same time as English accounts bearing on the recent colonization of Virginia and New England in the early seventeenth century.

The collection is remarkable for its heterogeneity. Written by a variety of authors from different periods, the texts were patched together in a sequence to be illustrated. This procedure recalls more the way epics were made than myths. It brings to mind Bérard's theory about the *Odyssey* and the various speculations about the supposed authorship of the Homeric poems. In the *Great Voyages*, we find ship's logs and narratives by navigators, some written by the captain himself, as in the case of Raleigh on his return from Guyana, and others written by a secretary, such as Ralph Amor, of Captain John Smith's expedition. Some are texts by scholars, like

Thomas Hariot, author of the *Voyage to Virginia*, philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, and correspondent of Kepler, or José de Acosta, historian of the New World, who, in his *De novi orbis natura*, suggests a classification of peoples foreshadowing Lewis Henry Morgan's theory of social evolution. There are also narratives by mere adventurers, taken as mercenaries onto Spanish or Portuguese galleons, like Hans Staden, Ulrich Schmidel, or Girolamo Benzoni, later collected in works edited by priests and monks. The Spanish Jesuit, José de Acosta, leans to problems of comparative religion or theology: Léry was a Protestant pastor; Fletcher, who wrote part of Drake's voyages, a ship's chaplain. Other texts are anonymous, compiled from disparate sources by Hakluyt or Zacharias de Heynes, who, with the de Brys themselves, might be seen as Homeridae of these American voyages.

*From Text to Picture:  
Decoding the Visual  
Narrative of the Plates*

The illustrations for the *Great Voyages* depend on two different domains. On the one hand, engraving as an art draws a series of esthetic and technical conventions from the iconographic tradition. On the other hand, the narrative function of the plates uses the written text as a base. To find the semantic units in the corpus the first thing is to analyze its internal characteristics without any preconceived ideas about the nature of visual messages. Only by describing the different relations between text and picture and the organization of space within the plates, shall we be able to decide where to find the units and segments of the implicit iconographic discourse.

The grouping of the plates is the first significant link between text and picture. The de Bry collection contains groups of pictures, each of which forms a relatively autonomous whole from the point of view of the explicit meaning. To some degree, the groupings of plates depend on the texts to which they relate. Thus we can identify several types of units linking a text with a group of pictures. These units may correspond to what is called a "part" of the *Voyages aux Indes occidentales*, that is, an in-folio volume. A volume may contain a single text or several texts related by a common theme and illustrated by the engravers as a single unit. This is true of the plates of part 3, which refer equally to the two texts published in the volume (both the text of Hans Staden and that of Jean de Léry deal with life among the Tupinambá of Brazil). Or, when a single text is illustrated in several volumes, the pictures correspond to several "parts." Thus the engravings of parts 4, 5, and 6 are closely linked to the text they illustrate: Benzoni's *History of the New World*. The division into three parts corresponds to Benzoni's three books. The three different frontispieces show them as three volets of a triptych, whose subject is the Spaniards' conquest of the New World and destruction of the Indians. Yet again, the unity formed by the plates

of several parts may not be due to the text, but may result instead from the organization of plates within a single volume. Thus parts 7 and 8 are frequently published as a single volume, and, though there are four different texts in all, they are preceded by a single frontispiece, the same one used to open part 3. The illustrations follow one another in a single group. Finally, the illustrations may refer to only one section of a part: by contrast with the preceding arrangement, the illustrations are grouped by the editor into several sections, each one corresponding to one of the several texts published in the same part. The plates of the various sections may even be numbered differently and inconsistently.

In this framework, other, more direct links tie one or several selected passages of a text to the illustrations. The use of a caption makes this link more obvious. Quite apart from the narrative properly speaking, most of the engravings include a short explanatory text or caption to make them more accessible to the reader. As an exception, some engravings are embedded in the text and carry no caption, unlike the captioned plates, which each occupy a full page.

In other cases, the engravings relate to no particular passage in the narrative and may even come from quite other texts: in these cases the caption is the only description or explanation available to the reader. Two kinds of plates are found in this category. First, some are reproduced in copperplate from ready-made drawings and plates, like those of parts 1 and 2; certain plates in part 11 come from another Dutch edition. In the main, these are geographical maps to which have been added figures or specimens of flora and fauna; each of these additional elements carries a letter that corresponds to part of the caption.

Second, some illustrations inserted in the collection bear no direct relation to the text published in the volume. In fact, it was common at that time use ready-made engravings that passed from book to book. A caption added by the editor would adapt the picture to the new text. Several plates of the *Great Voyages* follow this practice. One of them, for instance, depicts the triumph of Magellan as he discovers the strait that later bore his name and is matched by another showing the triumph of Christopher Columbus. Both engravings appeared in many other books before becoming part of the *Great Voyages*. That of Magellan's triumph (illus. 29) was drawn by Jean Stradan and engraved by Jean Galle on Magellan's return in 1522. Their source is given neither in the

caption nor in Benzoni's text; we must go to Pigafetta, the chronicler of Magellan's voyage, for their accurate identification.

Sometimes the link between narrative and picture or between caption and text is even more tenuous. In fact, de Bry introduced some engravings that do not directly illustrate a passage of the published text, but that he considered appropriate for his own reasons. When this occurs, his commentary is the only explanation for the picture. This is true, for example, of the plates representing the myth of the Fall of Adam and Eve and that of Noah's Ark; de Bry himself explains why, in his view, the two biblical myths are perfectly relevant to the New World.

Elsewhere, de Bry illustrated some anecdote he read in a book on a subject related to the text he was publishing. For instance, he added two new plates to part 6 after reading two anecdotes he particularly enjoyed: "and because it is an amusing story, I decided to add it and ask you to write a caption for it, as well as for the story of the horse charging Atahualpa in the face" (Giuseppi, 1915-17, p. 220).<sup>1</sup>

But whether the engraving is based on the text published in the volume or on some other source, the added caption always introduces a new intermediary in the chain of transpositions leading from the textual account to the picture. There is, in fact, a dual transformation in meaning, from the description in the original text that inspires the artist to its graphic depiction, and from this depiction to the new description offered in the caption, which, in turn, impresses the reader with a new interpretation of the picture.

In addition to factual errors—and they are many—that slip into the captions, these captions always create a new meaning chosen from among the picture's possible signifiers. More often than not, whoever wrote the caption was as much a stranger to the making of the text as to the making of the engraving. De Bry seems to have given over this task, at least for a time, to the bookseller, Raphalengis; on sending him proofs of the engravings for part 6, he asked him to "be so kind as to write captions for each account, as usual" (Giuseppi 1915-17, p. 220).

The plates will be decoded, then, depending on the case, by following the statements in the caption, by using one or several passages from the body of the illustrated text, or by referring to a text foreign to both text and caption. In this, we shall follow Erwin Panofsky in the first two stages of his method of iconographic analysis, when decoding the meaning of a picture: identifying the

objects, figures, and events depicted in a plate, availing ourselves of all the literary sources necessary, and seeing to what segment of text [énoncé] a given sign or iconographic motif corresponds.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, engraving, as a means of expression, makes use of a spatial syntax and this syntax of space is what organizes and binds together the different segments of the graphic discourse. Thus, part of the decoding process consists in discovering the spatial orientation in which the plates must be read. To find out, one must know the different techniques the de Brys used to transfer the narrative's temporal relations into the space provided by the page and the book.

The engravers of the collection employed a variety of methods for expressing the temporal dimension. In spite of a constant regard for accuracy, they did not fail to introduce changes and create new relationships between the figures, objects, and landscapes they portray. These changes always followed from the need to transpose temporal and circumstantial information to a spatial framework. Most of the methods were not new; the first three date from the beginnings of illustration—illustration on Greek sarcophagi, papyri, and vases (Weintzmann 1947); the last is more recent and is peculiar to the printed book.

#### THE MONOSCENIC METHOD

A single action, taking place at a precise moment, is depicted in its entirety in a single plate, thus respecting a classic unity of time and place. The engravers quite often chose this method for dramatic scenes. A certain aspect of native life appears as an entertainment performed by the Indians, which the engraving lets us attend. The presence of European spectators around the scene of an Indian ceremony, rite, or council sometimes reinforces this impression. Thus Spaniards stand watching a horrible slaughter for which they themselves have given the orders: Indians eaten alive by dogs (illus. 28).

The selection from the textual narrative of a single action concentrated in one place sometimes assumes a spatial division quite similar to that of the theaters of the Elizabethan period or the Italian Renaissance, which were bounded on three sides by houses and arcades. The parallel is evident in part 3. De Bry found the model of the Tupinambá village in the illustrations for Staden's text. The long houses or *malocas*, whose vaulted roofs are covered with palm

fronds, are laid out in a square surrounded by a circular stockade. However, when the village becomes the setting for the cannibal rites, de Bry transforms its layout: he changes it to a hexagon, either bound on five sides by malocas or with only its three upstage sides visible. In fact, this arrangement re-creates the view of the stage one might have had in London's Globe Theatre, either from the top of the galleries or from the wings.<sup>3</sup>

We meet the theatrical influence again in the engravers' other methods of transposing temporal elements from the text to the space of the engraving. Whether transcribing simultaneity or the complex passage of time, they generally succeed in conveying the logical sequence of the events depicted using techniques like those offered to the dramatist by the skillful architecture of theaters at the end of the sixteenth century. Here, too, the text or caption dictates the reading of the plate.

#### SIMULTANEOUS METHOD

This method goes back to the Homeric period. A single plate portrays several actions supposedly taking place at the same time. The de Brys used this technique often and systematically when they had at hand static, ready-made portraits that told no story. In these cases—for example, in John White's portraits in part 1 of the *Great Voyages*—they add a landscape or background scene of hunting in the woods or fishing from the riverbanks. Descriptive elements that were scattered through the text are thus brought together: descriptions of landscapes, styles of life, and customs assembled in a single plate, animating a simple portrait of an Indian. In this way new links are created between the figure and his environment. This method is used also for showing group activities: a market scene, an interior scene when, during a night attack launched by the Spaniards, an Indian village is awakened and robbed; scenes of festivities combining dances, preparation of food and drink, and so forth.

The simultaneous transcription of various actions in juxtaposition sometimes leads to a complete distortion of meaning. This occurs in particular in certain plates showing a native technique misunderstood by the Europeans. For example, a plate in part 2 depicts the preparation of a Timucua feast. It brings together several groups of persons engaged in different cooking operations supposedly occurring at the same time according to the caption. As the

author of the original and witness to the scene, Le Moyne de Morgues, failed to understand its meaning, neither caption nor text suffices to link the actions logically and they thus appear incoherent. In fact the Indians are engaged in leaching, a technique they used for making edible an otherwise too-bitter plant. We can discover the sequence of events as they actually occurred in sources other than the *Great Voyages*.

The engravers used two much more efficient methods to illustrate the Indians' technical activities: a cyclic method and a serial method (Bucher 1975).

#### ROTATIVE METHOD

This consists of bringing together in a single plate actions that really occur in sequence. Several separate actions are laid out in the space of the plate, most frequently in a circular order that reproduces, by contiguity and succession, the temporal order in which they took place and which is stated in the caption. The caption tells us in what direction the plate should be read. Thus, for example, the textual statement, "A native woman has just brought a basket of fruit to the governor," is expressed in two adjacent scenes in the same plate: in the background, to the right, we see a landscape and, coming toward us, a native woman with her fruit basket on her head; in the left foreground the same woman is seen sitting inside the governor's house, with her fruit basket at her feet (illus. 8).

The period of time separating two or more scenes thus brought together in the space of a single plate may be much longer—months, or even years. For example, an engraving in part 2 illustrates Timucua therapeutic practices: fumigation, bleeding, and the use of tobacco. Beyond the depiction of these different methods, a series of iconographic motifs expresses the Indians' belief in the efficacy of their medicine. A pregnant young woman drinks blood from the gourd in which it is collected during the bleeding of a sick person by the shaman. The caption explains that the women "believe that this will make their fruit better and their children more robust." Another woman, identical to the first, nurses an infant. Near her, two small children are fighting. Thus the juxtaposition of figures and iconographic motifs allows us to see several periods of human life in the limited space of a single engraving: pregnancy, nursing, and robust childhood (plate 2:20).

## SERIAL METHOD

The most recent, this method consists in breaking up the temporal progress of the narrative into several plates, forming a series based on a theme or event, somewhat like present-day comic strips. This method can, moreover, be combined with any of the three preceding ones in any single plate, but the expression contained in each plate, even if it forms a relatively autonomous episode, continues from one plate to the next. For example, the long description of cannibal rites among the Tupinambá, described in detail by Hans Staden in part 3, covers several months, from the capture of the prisoner to the time he is eaten. The way the engravers choose to divide or group these events in one or several plates is significant in itself and implies an interpretation of the reported facts. In some cases an engraving brings different actions and details of these rites together indiscriminately, using the cyclical or simultaneous methods just discussed; on the other hand, each of several stages in the sacrifice of the prisoner—execution, preparation of the body, cutting it, cooking it, and eating it—occupies several plates, each step followed by the next, and this sequence matches the various stages of the ritual reported less systematically in the text.

One can thus see the astonishing possibilities that the de Brys were able to use skillfully in their copperplate engravings to create an episodic narrative that, like a long and successful novel published in installments, lasted nearly fifty years. These techniques allow the illustrations to express all temporal relations: simultaneity, anteriority, posteriority. Of course, to understand these temporal relations one needs an explanatory text indicating how to read the engraving, but the fact remains that with these different techniques, the engraver-publishers of the *Great Voyages* create a genuine grammar of graphic forms at the level of each plate or group of plates. This grammar of forms lets the graphic narrative develop autonomously; though supported by the written text, the message it conveys is something other than the sum of the elements that compose it.

## Constants and Variables in the Picture of the New World

## DETERMINATION OF CONSTANTS

The kaleidoscopic image of Amerindians as it appears over the thirteen parts of the *Great Voyages* seems to consist in an unlimited number of signifiers. Still, this multiplicity, so difficult to grasp, can easily be reduced to four major categories covering all the different aspects, and their variations, of the portrayal of Amerindians. Their portrayal in fact involves:

- (1) physical appearance, expressed by means of two codes: anatomical (morphology, sex, and age), and cultural (dress, finery, ornaments, and the various attributes the figures hold);
- (2) actions: their attitudes, body posture, the acts in which they engage, conveying their mores and customs;
- (3) sociological relationships, binding the figures together; and
- (4) habitat, whether natural or cultural, within which they are portrayed.

The problem is now to discover whether, given this series of constants, there is a systematic relationship among them. For instance, can correlations be found between certain anatomical variations of the Amerindian and the act in which he engages? With a change of body build, physical feature, dress, and ornament, do we detect changes of attitude with respect to the figures surrounding him? Is his physical appearance altered by even one element according to whether he is hunting, playing the flute, or mourning his dead? According to whether he offers the foreigners his women or attacks them with a burst of arrows? Or again, according to whether he is seen in his house, in a forest clearing, or in a mountain hollow?

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obvious that before we can seek systematic relations among these variables, we shall have to isolate other, finer, and more precise elements within these major categories.

#### THE PERCEPTION OF PHYSICAL TRAITS AT THE END OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

One is immediately struck by the inability of the European draftsmen to grasp the physical differences that distinguish Amerindians from Europeans or other peoples. If it were not for a few items of dress and ornamentation, and other exotic details, one would think the figures came from an artist's anatomy plates, which can be found in the painting and sculpture of that time—the statues adorning the palaces of the end of the sixteenth century, the figures of antique gods, portraits of Roman athletes, Italian Venuses with long, wavy, hair; or, at the other extreme, visions of medieval monsters, grimacing and deformed witches, headless men, dwarfs and giants of the forest.

On this point, pictorial representation of Indians, especially in engravings, lags behind the descriptions of them found in the explorers' narratives. Still, even in the texts, we rarely find the Indian classified as a particular physical category, whereas the peoples of Africa were so classified much earlier. In antiquity, the Greeks, Romans, and Etruscans perfected the likeness of Negro models with their portrayal of Ethiopians in sculpture and painting as well as in engraving on pottery and medallions.<sup>1</sup> Yet in the mid-sixteenth century, Dürer states that there are only

two species of mankind, whites and negroes; in these a difference in kind can be observed as between them and ourselves. Negro faces are seldom beautiful because of their very flat noses and thick lips; similarly their shinbones and knees, as well as their feet, are too bony, not so good to look upon as those of the whites; and so also is it with their hands. Howbeit I have seen some amongst them whose whole bodies have been so well built and handsome otherwise that I never beheld finer figures, nor can I conceive how they might be bettered, so excellent were their arms and all their parts. [Holt 1957, pp. 324–25]

When Columbus paraded the first Indians down the streets of Barcelona, the Spaniards were quite astonished to see that their hair was not kinky, and that, though different from Europeans, they did not resemble African blacks whom the Spaniards already had the

chance to see. Moreover, Dürer's opinion reveals historical and cultural modes of perception. The face and body are perceived differently. In fact, the physical differences are easier to see in the faces. The practiced eye of the German painter-engraver marks with interest anatomical details of the bone structure, especially the joints. But the whole of the body may be perfect and, as a model, a black African may attain the perfection of the nude.

The same dichotomy of body and face is found again in the perception of the Amerindians' physical features. The narrators often note that "their faces are seldom beautiful" but the body can be perfect. Thus Vespucci stands in wonder before these men, who "all go naked . . . without covering anything, no otherwise than as they came out of their mothers' wombs. They are of medium stature, and very well proportioned." Still, in spite of their fine build, "they have not very beautiful faces, because they have long eyelids, which make them look like Tartars" (Vespucci 1894).

It would be many years before the Indian's face was recognized, and especially portrayed, with its characteristic features. In the *Great Voyages*, the first and only picture of an Indian that would allow us, in the twentieth century, to identify it as such and find it a good likeness of his face, appears only in the frontispiece of part 10, that is, in 1619, among mythological figures. Yet in this impression of the "Indian profile," it is still hard to distinguish what comes specifically from physical features and what from cultural features, such as the hairstyle (the long hair smoothed over the forehead and plaited into a braid that hangs over one shoulder) and the two rings piercing the nostrils.

Still, John White's watercolors, de Bry's first models, show an attempt to express anatomical differences.<sup>2</sup> In fact, White managed to put in a few of the Oriental features of the Algonquian face: the high cheekbones, arched nose, and the women's flat faces, with the eyes slightly tipped up at the outer edge. When working from White's models, de Bry mutes or entirely omits these differentiations: he rounds out the women's flat faces and makes them chubby and even corrects the shapes of the body here and there, giving the men an athletic musculature and the women shapely legs, thus sacrificing to contemporary taste and the canons of the *beau nu*.

With the passage from watercolor to engraving one major element accenting the difference is lost, namely color. White's

Amerindians have brown and copper-colored skin, decorated with paint. The same is true of Le Moyne's portraits of the Timucua in part 2.<sup>3</sup> This brings us to the more general problem of transferring from one code to another, not only from the code of painting to the code of two-color engraving, but also from the code of textual description to that of the graphic image. Compounding the problem of direct perception, the transfer partly governs the physical depiction of the American Indian and more particularly that of his nudity.

#### TRANSFER OF PHYSICAL REPRESENTATION FROM TEXT TO IMAGE

In the transfer of various—pictorial or textual—codes to the code of copper engraving, three phenomena seem to me determinant.

##### 1. Lexical Reduction of Physical Attributes

As it is restricted to black and white, the technique of engraving must leave out one whole aspect of the exoticism of the Amerindian world that did not, however, fail to strike and amaze the explorers: the "artistically painted" colors in the ornaments of feathers or skin; body paints made from vegetable dyes (whose preparation is sometimes described by the narrators)<sup>4</sup> that stand out on their copper-colored skin, described by Vespucci as "red, like a lion's skin"; the dyed clothing of Mexicans and Peruvians; the magnificence of the frescoes in the Mayan, Aztec, and Inca temples and cities. Thus engraving entails the loss of a whole cultural dimension, perceived and described by the narrators, if not always understood or appreciated for its true worth. The tattoos and body paintings of the Timucua and Algonquian are converted into lines and dots so that, in certain engravings, it is often hard to decide whether they represent tattoos, paintings, or scarifications. The Mesoamerican temples and cities, radiant with color, are transformed into poor huts or scaffoldings—unless they are copies of European cities to which a few fanciful details have been added. The Mexicans' jewelry, so admired by Dürer,<sup>5</sup> and the Peruvians', of which Benzoni speaks so highly, are replaced by shoddy-looking objects. From this point of view, engraving degrades the image of the New World and dulls it from the outset, affecting it not only as a cultural whole but as a natural environment of tropical landscapes.

In return, what engraving loses from the viewpoint of visual

richness is made up on the level of abstraction. Thus the use of black and white causes the disappearance of one criterion for the racial and racist differentiation that later develops in America: skin color.<sup>6</sup> Precisely because of this, engraving masks the naked Indian equal at least to the European ideal of the *beau nu* if not to the European himself. Ethnic differentiation here is purely cultural and not racial.

##### 2. Loss of Negation as a Rhetorical Device

In passing from text to picture, still another change occurs that necessarily alters the textual information in a description: negation as a means of expression is lost. In fact, it is easy to describe the unknown, the never-seen, in terms of what it is not. The first accounts by Europeans returning from America made excessive use of this technique: Indians are what Europeans are not; their culture is defined by the absence of European cultural elements. It is a negative attitude ironically illustrated by Montaigne's "Eh, quoi, ils ne portent pas de hauts de chausse!" ["What! They're not wearing breeches!"] Negation is impossible in figurative drawing. Actually, in the graphic arts it is impossible to portray a thing by what it is not: it is present or absent, and if it appears, it is always positively, in a certain shape. Thus engraving, through the limits it imposes a medium, introduced, unbeknownst even to the artists themselves, a radical transformation in the vision of the New World, especially where Indian nudity was concerned. Indeed, it could not be portrayed as the absence of clothing. It was immediately incorporated in body lines and anatomy that must be drawn in a certain way. Lacking the possibility of negation, the engravers had no choice but to use the nude forms canonized in art: bodies of Roman or Greek statues and Italian virgins, or else medieval monsters, gaunt and hideous old women; dwarfs or giants. The differentiating elements—ornaments, items of clothing, and the attributes of war, hunting, and fishing—must be hung, so to speak, on these forms traditional to European art.

##### 3. From Comparison to Metaphor<sup>7</sup>

For describing and "showing" the unknown part of the New World, the engravers frequently used a second rhetorical device, that of comparison, particularly comparison with other peoples

better known in Europe. We are told that the Indians look like Tartars, Picts, or Jews in certain ways. Some aspect of their customs is "like" a custom observed in Europe or Japan. In terms of the graphic image, no equivalent has been found for the syntactic bonds that, in the verbal comparison, explicitly set up a relation between two things (whether by a conjunction or by a comparative adjective or verb). If, for example, the Indians of Virginia are compared to Picts because, like them, they decorate their bodies with designs and paintings, the only way to preserve the relation of comparison between the two is to tell in a caption why portraits of Picts should appear among engravings of Amerindians. De Bry explains that it is "to show that the inhabitants of Great Britain in the past were as savage as those of Virginia." As long as the textual commentary remains with the picture and is read, the juxtaposition of the two different peoples is metonymical, like the comparison in the text (they are partially comparable, from a certain aspect). But, if the explanatory text is omitted, the portraits of Picts become another way of portraying Indians. Thus a simple comparison becomes a substitution, pure and simple. This is what happened in other editions of texts that copied the de Brys' engravings; Pict figures are again seen among the Indians; this example illustrates how a verbal comparison is transcribed directly as a metaphor (complete assimilation of the compared term with the comparable terms): it suffices to describe a people as having "shoulders so high that the face seems to be in the chest," for a headless being to appear whose face is drawn on his chest, like the Blemmyes of antiquity and medieval times.

The transfer from a verbal code to an iconographic code, then, imposes constraints, in the sense that one speaks of grammatical constraints. In both cases these lead to making the pictures say more than the words mean: by its translation whether of negative statements or of comparisons, the picture performs a *de facto* transformation of meaning, similar to the surrealist metaphor in poetry. In the examples given, the consequences are seen in terms of the physical portrayal of the Amerindian. Within the limits imposed by their technique, the engravers had a repertoire of physical shapes and types from which to choose. This choice led to a conventional norm by which Indians can be identified, in spite of the numerous variations allowed by the convention. Let us examine more closely

the elements of this convention and the limits within which it functions.

#### THE CHOICE OF REFERENCE MOTIF

Among the many kinds of cultural styles, forms, and elements with which Amerindians are endowed, in the main, the plates portray them as physically healthy and well proportioned. Apart from the infants nursed by their mothers, the children who are able to stand are depicted as little adults. Even the captions for certain plates emphasize the vigor of the New World inhabitants. Sometimes their vigor is attributed to their moderation, a trait Virginia's first colonists, influenced by a nascent Puritanism, offered as an example to the gluttonous English in part 1;<sup>8</sup> sometimes it is attributed to their quite bloody medicinal practices, for instance, the one used by the Timucua to strengthen their pregnant women.<sup>9</sup> A yet more striking feature: even when we are shown therapeutic practices for funerary scenes, the dead and the dying lose none of their robustness.

In addition, all the Indians, men well as women, seem endowed with eternal youth. Most are portrayed as young adults. Only two plates in the entire collection show "old people"; their build is then just as imposing as that of the young adults. One of them, "the noble old man of Pomeiock," stands out from the other Virginians only by cultural elements: the "winter" wear—long skin cape and the beard that the Algonquian let grow after a certain age, according to the caption. It is, indeed, another characteristic feature of the Indian of the *Great Voyages* that he is usually shown beardless. As the texts show repeatedly, the Europeans considered "barbarian" the Indians' custom of shaving off their facial and body hair, even including their eyebrows, as the Tupinambá did. Only a few plates show the Indians as bearded and hairy. But, rather than a concern for ethnographic accuracy (and the engravings are notoriously inconsistent in this domain, even if a cultural feature is once transcribed), we would see this, too, as a stylistic convention: the nude body of anatomical plates and statues is always shown without the beard and pubic hair, just as the bare sexual parts of the women are not drawn, yet no one supposes that Indian women are without sex organs; they simply resemble statues. The appearance and form of the women (and men) vary with the different styles of

the period, but, whatever the style, the women are for the most part endowed with the ideal forms canonized by art.

Still, by contrast with anatomical quasi-perfection and especially the fixed and neutral convention applied to the Amerindian, some types, appearing sporadically, stand apart from these norms. We see giants and dwarfs; headless men; others, wild-looking, disheveled, and bearded (unlike the smooth-skinned Indian); and above all, a type of woman who appears more frequently as the series advances and whose portrayal runs against the canon of proportions observed in the pictures of the other Indian women. She is afflicted with an uncomely appearance and sagging breasts: sometimes this trait combines with the robust youth of the other women; sometimes, on the contrary, with hideous, emaciated, old women.

I have chosen to analyze this motif because it appears more frequently than the others. Moreover, it forms an iconographic motif standardized by a whole tradition. In medieval iconography and through the Renaissance, it was attributed to maleficent women, vampires, witches, demons, the incarnation of Envy and Lust, and the depiction of Death. Thus one of Agostino de Musi's engravings, from 1518, entitled "The Skeleton," depicts Death as an emaciated woman with sagging breasts, seated on the carcass of an antediluvian monster. In Ripa's *Iconologie* we find Heresy also shown in this fashion, holding a serpent in one hand in the other a book from which other serpents crawl; again, we find Famine depicted in this way in Bernard Salomon's illustrations for Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1553). The woodcut shows Eresichton condemned to an insatiable and eternal hunger. It is also one of the traditional forms of the "savage woman"; "A libidinous hag, disguised in a nice maiden, and when undisguised, is distinguished by shrunken flesh and long sagging breasts" (Bernheimer 1952, p. 35).

It is no surprise, then, to see her again among our Indian women. The problem is to understand why this standardized but deviant motif appears in the corpus of pictures of the *Great Voyages* at certain times and not at others. Is it a pure chance accident or can we discover beneath its recurrence a network of unspoken meaning, woven from differences between "normal" forms and anomalous forms? If, like the *bricoleur*, the engravers draw their material here and there from a repertoire of forms that they use and transform to suit the circumstance or mood, the result of this

*bricolage*, the rearrangement of these heteroclitic forms into a visual narrative of America, perhaps answers to an internal logic, as does myth.

In fact, as we shall see, it is no accident if the iconographic motif of the Indian with sagging breasts reappears through the *Great Voyages* over a forty-four-year period. The different variants of the same motif relate to each other through transformations organized into a coherent system, which I propose to explore.