

FROM LONGITUDE TO EMPIRE:

THE ARTICULATIONS OF PLACE IN THE VOYAGES  
OF CAPTAIN COOK

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## **Acknowledgements**

In the length of time it took to complete this dissertation, Captain Cook had travelled around the world twice, and was about half way through his third voyage. I have pretty much stayed in one place. I would like to thank Colleen Fox, Dr. Debbie Halbert, Aquiles Garro-Jiminez, Neil Reimer, Dr. Sandy Schram, Dr. James Tiles, Dr. Karen Peacock, and especially Dr. Noenoe Silva for all of their help and patience in this project. The dissertation is dedicated to Gordon, whose love for the sea was matched only by his love for his family.

## Abstract

Captain Cook was the first explorer who could accurately determine longitude at sea. What were the concepts, and specifically the social and political concepts, that were implicated in this new ability? By relying on European political and scientific institutions, and on technological changes such as the development of an accurate chronometer, Cook's voyages recreated the Pacific and the world. The world became a field of islands, a series of natural containers, that were both oceanic and geometric. The result was an image of the world where fixed mathematical and astronomical points are woven throughout, and where every place becomes located in a single geographical, textual and tabular system. People, as members of clear and distinct nations, became connected to, and identified by, the places where they live, in much the same way that animals were connected to habitats. While the voyages reworked the concept of nation, they also reworked the concept of the state. Unlike early-modern political philosophers, such as Locke and Hobbes, Cook's voyages narrate the origins of the political system by starting with a natural territorial space in which nationality and sovereignty come to exist. Separate territorial nation-states are also placed together, first into collections, and then into empires. Just as the island became an idealized image of the territorial nation-state, the collection became an idealized image of the empire. Nineteenth Century empires were fragmented chunks of space around the world; they were discontinuous, but there were clear and distinct boundaries everywhere. Empires became like stamp collections. But the voyages also created a sense of the collector, of Cook himself. He is not tied to any particular place, but is rather the one who moves between places. This is also an image of empire, where the scope of activity is not limited to the inside, and the goal is not the acquisition of specific places so much as the

influence over and transformation of every place, of the world as an articulated whole. Longitude and empire thus exist in Cook's voyages as edges of a conceptual system that links mathematics, nationality, and global political power.

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We should note the force, effect, and consequences of inventions which are nowhere more conspicuous than in those three which were unknown to the ancients, namely, printing, gunpowder, and the compass. For these three have changed the appearance and state of the whole world....

Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Aphorism 129