

a few of them laid them down and danced for Cook and his men. It was that moment of friendship that Webber chose to record in a beautifully balanced composition (Plate 4).



Plate 4. John Webber, 'Captain Cook's meeting with the Chukchi at St Lawrence Bay', pencil, pen, wash and some water-colour, 1778. National Maritime Museum, London.

This then is the implicit message of the Cook/Webber programme. Cook is the peacemaker, the philanthropist who is bringing the gifts of civilisation and the values of an exchange economy to the savage peoples of the Pacific. Later, after Cook's death, the same message is spelt out to all Europe, in the sixty-odd plates, upon which enormous care and attention was spent, that was included in the *Atlas to the Official Account*.

True, these grand peaceful ceremonies and occasions did occur, they were high points in a long voyage, and we might agree deserved to be recorded for posterity. They were moreover the kinds of events that suited John Webber's medium. Watercolour drawing and painting with its broad washes of transparent colour, its feeling of amplitude for the breadth and depth of space is an art surely suited to rendering peaceful scenes. So that in this instance we might want to conclude with Marshall McLuhan that the medium is indeed the message.²³ Webber portrayed the truth, but it was a highly selective truth, from which all sense of violence and tension had been removed.

Consider for a moment what a modern television camera crew, with the right to film whatever they chose, might have selected, to send by satellite back to Europe. They might have selected different events than