

TEACHING GAUGUIN: PACIFIC STUDIES AND POST-IMPRESSIONISM

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FOREWORD

Perhaps it's because I'm looking for him, but Paul Gauguin seems to follow me everywhere. I am standing in line at a bank on Rarotonga when a European woman behind me comments that the bank tellers "look just like a Gauguin painting"; her companion murmurs in agreement. In North America and Europe, Gauguin's paintings have become the defining, and inescapable, vision of the Pacific. Replicas of his images appear in the Disney Polynesian Resort in Kissimmee, Florida; in a bath products shop in California's Silicon Valley; in ads for Tahitian tourism: brown, lounging women, wrapped (or unwrapped) in brightly-colored *pareu* and adorned with flowers (Figure 1). The employees of a Bank in Avarua, professionally dressed in crisp white blouses and dark skirts like businesswomen in many parts of the world, transform in European eyes trained in looking through Gauguin's lens, and begin to "look like" not themselves, but like women in paintings created by a Frenchman living in another archipelago, one hundred years ago.



Figure 1. Gauguin at a gift shop in the Disney Polynesian Resort, Kissimmee, Florida. Disney offers a sanitized version of the painting; in the original, *Woman with a Fan* of 1902 (Wildenstein catalogue No. 609), the woman's breasts are uncovered. In this reproduction, the model's hair is changed from its original red to black. Photo by the author.

The exoticism, mystery and intimacy afforded by Gauguin's images no doubt partially accounts for their primacy in popular spaces. I had first approached Gauguin's paintings of Pacific Island women as a possible Masters Degree thesis topic at the beginning of my second year in an art history graduate program. I can't deny that part of my desire to work with the images lay in their sheer beauty and sensate tactility: their throbbing, almost florescent color; the serpentine lines and

decorative forms; Gauguin's incorporation of a vast image-bank of iconography, from 18th-dynasty Egypt, medieval Europe, 8th-century Java. I find myself simultaneously transfixed by the seductiveness of his aesthetics and repelled by the colonizing gaze this seduction implies. Gauguin's paintings are a rich source for analysis, as they bring together discourses of Primitivism and Symbolism with studies of gender and colonialism in *fin-de-siècle* French visual culture. Initially, I believed that a discussion of his images from French Polynesia would provide a way for me to draw together my interests in French Post-Impressionism, representations of women, Pacific textiles, feminism, and the history of photography.

In the end, however, I found that Gauguin was not a neatly contained unit; he occupied an immense, sprawling labyrinth composed of questions, complications, and contradictions. Gauguin was, in fact, a monster. In my attempts to unpack the nature of this monster, I determined that his monstrousness was not synonymous with 'hybridity', either in Homi Bhabha's original (1985) or the version taken up by Stephen Eisenman (1997) in his argument for the artist's multiple layers of liminality. Rather, Gauguin's monster was a messy signifier, a body constructed from disparate parts, from bodies of theory and bodies of history, from geographies of the West and of the Pacific. Gauguin's monstrous body has engendered its own discourse, which I have come to call "Gauguinism". Abigail Solomon-Godeau has used this term to describe the narratives arising from "the continuing desire to both naturalize and make 'innocent' the artist's sexual relations with very young girls" (1989:127). Solomon-Godeau focuses on Gauguin's couplings with young Pacific Island women, and while these are highly problematic, and indeed could be called monstrous, there nevertheless is more to Gauguin than his history of sexual encounters. I offer my own definition for the term, which encompasses the discursive constructions of Gauguin's life and lifestyle as well as the continual circulation of Gauguin's images, often in non-Pacific settings, the meanings they are assigned, and the reappropriation of his imagery by contemporary Pacific Island artists.

After discovering that I was dealing with a much larger monster than I originally had thought, for my Masters thesis I chose to unlock the door of the labyrinth, and survey what was going on in the first room.

My doctoral work at the University of California, Santa Cruz has allowed me to pursue my fascination with this monster within an interdisciplinary framework, as I examine the intersections of Gauguin's history with postcolonial politics, contemporary image-making, and globalization in the Pacific. As I work through the processes of reading, writing, and teaching, I have developed an upper-division undergraduate course entitled Gauguin: Representing 'Polynesia'. The course functions as a way to deconstruct "Gauguinism" as much as it addresses Gauguin's own artwork. Exploring the ways cultural studies of Gau-

guin can be performed, this course takes a pedagogical approach to the artist that acknowledges the complexities of Pacific history since the late eighteenth century, and the counter-narratives produced by and through Gauguin's images. The course examines Gauguin within the history of Euro-American representations of the Pacific and enables his placement within the social history of Pacific contact, colonialism, and resistance. Countering the lounging, scantily-clad, mango-eating woman of tourist fantasies, contemporary visual artists, filmmakers, scholars, and museum professionals in the Pacific and living in diaspora are challenging the Gauguinesque body by creating their own narrative of the Pacific body through image-making practices, academic discourse, museum display, and performance.

In this combination of essay and syllabus, I present my approach to teaching this course. Both the course and my thesis are works in progress; through this essay, I hope to sketch out some of the spaces of overlap between the two, the ways I can approach questions I encounter in my own writing process by presenting these questions in a classroom setting. The course is an intensive immersion in the art of Gauguin, with a concentration on the works created by the artist between 1891 and 1893 during his first voyage to Tahiti. Students are encouraged to think critically about the way Gauguin represented the women in his paintings, to be aware of Gauguin's appropriation of Oceanic art into his own works, and to compare Gauguin's works with other visual representations of Pacific Islanders. Throughout the course, students consider the ways Gauguin is constructed as an artist as well as the ways in which "Polynesia" and the "Polynesian" body have been produced by Western texts, including writings, visual imagery, and film. We also discuss contemporary representations of Pacific Islanders and Native resistance to Gauguinistic imagery. Students are expected to have some prior knowledge of Western art history and art historical methodologies, and preferably some familiarity with non-Western art as well.

While the course uses traditional art historical pedagogical methods, it also departs from this format. Lectures follow a conventional style: formal analyses of images, their historical context, explanation of iconography and color symbolism, readings from the artist's letters and writings along with contemporary criticism, and student response to and discussion of images. Many of the film clips for the course fall into the standard 'representations of the Pacific' category, such as *South Pacific* (Joshua Logan, 1958) and *Mutiny on the Bounty* (Lewis Milestone, 1962), in order to encourage the students to consider ways Pacific bodies are discursively constructed across a variety of media. However, some of the readings, media materials, and student presentations counteract these discourses. Readings from scholars such as Vilsoni Hereniko, Albert Wendt, and Teresia Teaiwa and films such as *Sacred Vessels: Navigating Tradition and Identity in Micronesia* (Christina Taitano DeLisle and Vicente Diaz, 1997) provide alternate ways of thinking about Pacific places and bodies. An assignment to critique a website having something to do with "Polynesia", broadly defined, also allows the students to explore the vast range of experiences and expressions found on the Internet.

I have offered this course twice at UC Santa Cruz, during the summers of 1999 and 2001. While the lectures retained a

similar focus, for the 2001 course I substantially revised the reading material to focus on scholarship from contemporary Pacific Cultural Studies, with a limited number of key art historical texts. While students occasionally felt at odds with the Pacific Cultural Studies readings, expressing frustration at unfamiliar terminology or the sense that they were not the "primary audience" for the writing, overall both they and I were pleased to find themselves engaging with new material. When I offered the course in summer 2001 I was intrigued to find that it came to be an extended discussion of two questions, both posed by students: "what are natives supposed to look like?" and "how do they represent their own bodies?" I also found students challenging their own understandings of what it meant to be located in the Pacific. While one student enrolled in my summer 2001 course had spent a year at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji, for many of the students the Pacific was a place they had previously visited only on family holidays or surfing excursions, and these experiences had primarily been limited to the islands of Hawai'i. The students were able to use skills they already possessed, including textual analysis, the deconstruction of materials from popular culture, and visual sensibilities, to explore Gauguin's role in the construction of Pacific spaces and bodies. Together, we used a critique of Gauguin as a way into Pacific Studies, using an art history of Post-Impressionism as a conduit to broader questions exploring the West's presence in the Pacific since the late nineteenth century, as well as the pervasiveness of his imagery and ways it can be reclaimed and recoded.

INTRODUCTION: REMAPPING 'POLYNESIA'

Reading: Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands"; Selina Tusitala Marsh, "Statued (stat you?) Tradition".

This class meeting begins with an introduction to several texts that suggest potential ways of reading Gauguin's images. I address Michel Foucault's definition of discourse from *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* and Edward Said's *Orientalism* as a useful tools for thinking about the production of cultural texts. Foucault explains, "It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. . . . Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault 1978:100-101). Foucault's notion of discourse enables us to consider that images are produced and situated within power structures as well as historical conditions, that image-making articulates with knowledge production, and that discourses are situated in multiple sites: texts, images, systems of movement, cartography, surveillance. I also express to the students that the classroom itself can be a discursive site, as we perform an intertextual and intersectional analysis of Gauguin's global presence using distinct narrative frameworks of written text, visual imagery, and film.

Edward Said draws from Foucault's notion of discourse in his own analysis. Said stresses, "Orientalism . . . is not an airy

European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been considerable material investment" (1978:6). The translation of Orientalism to a Pacific framework acknowledges that these images can function simultaneously as articulations of sexual desire as well as being material expressions of European colonial interests. Analyses of Gauguin's work and other images of the Pacific based around primitivism focus on time and temporal distancing as the defining element of difference, in which the Other becomes the atavistic, anti-modern precursor to the 'civilized' and industrialized West. Examining these representations using bifocal lenses of Orientalism and primitivism allows for a more multidimensional understanding of these productions as situated along dual axes of time and space. While Foucault and Said focus their analyses on texts, the application of their models to visual materials enhances a consideration of visuality, the gaze, and the erotics of the image by reading these discourses through frameworks of knowledge, power, and histories of imperial and colonial interests.

Alongside this discussion of ways of viewing images, the students are introduced to several texts from Native Pacific Cultural Studies. Epeli Hau'ofa's model of a pan-Pacific "Sea of Islands" undercuts Western anthropological, taxonomic divisions of the Pacific into Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, which deny histories of navigation and sever connections and connectivities past and present. Hau'ofa writes of his frustration with Western constructions of the Pacific Islands as dependent, underdeveloped MIRAB (migration, remittance, aid, and bureaucracy) nations, which reinforce the smallness of Pacific land bases and of being a Pacific Islander. Hau'ofa asks, "What kind of teaching is it to stand in front of young people from your own region, people you claim as your own, who have come to university with high hopes for the future, and to tell them that their countries are hopeless?" (1999:29). Inspired by seeing a volcano erupting on Hawai'i's Big Island, a process eternally shifting the landscape and creating new land, Hau'ofa proposes a regionalist view of the Pacific based on connectivity across expanding spaces: "Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us" (1999:37). Hau'ofa's model is one of travel as well as rootedness; his Pacific includes land and sea, the native and the diasporic.

Drawing from Hau'ofa's assertion of a Native-claimed space in the Pacific, students read a poem by Selina Tusitala Marsh. Marsh's performative poem provokes the students to critically consider their own position as tourists and outsiders viewing Pacific spaces and bodies, as well as Gauguin's stakes in the construction of this image: "she wears lei/around Gauguinesque/blossoming breasts/sweeping brown/round and around/looping above/firm flat belly button/peeking over/see-thru hula skirt/(not from her island - but what does it hurt?)" (1997:52). Marsh's poem also underscores the gendering of the exotic body: in her poem critiquing the hegemonic representation of Pacific Islanders' bodies, seen through touristic lenses, the Pacific body is gendered female. We will continue to discuss the gendering of Pacific bodies in constructed as well as reclaimed representations throughout the course.

CONSTRUCTING GAUGUIN

Reading: Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native"; Nathalie Heinich, "Presence as a Medium of Atonement: The Procession to Van Gogh's Body", in *The Glory of Van Gogh: An Anthropology of Admiration*. Film clip: *Lust for Life* (Vincente Minnelli, 1956)

How are myths of artists created, and how can we deconstruct these myths? Both van Gogh and Gauguin are useful examples for a discussion of the historical production of artistic figures. Abigail Solomon-Godeau poses several compelling questions about the mythology surrounding Gauguin: "Is it the historic Gauguin that so perfectly incarnates this mythology, or is it the mythology that so perfectly incarnates Gauguin? Did Gauguin produce this discourse, or did the discourse produce him?" (1989:120). Solomon-Godeau examines Gauguin's connections with modernist primitivism, noting that such an analysis "needs to reckon both with Gauguin's own production – literary as well as artistic – and with the successive levels and layers of discourse generated around it" (1989:121). While asking a number of valid questions about who has the power to invent the primitive and why, I ultimately am dissatisfied with her attempts to answer these questions. Most notably, Solomon-Godeau's argument is weakened by her insistence upon the pollution of Tahitian culture by introduced Western goods, rendering inherently inauthentic the "Tahiti" Gauguin sought to represent. Solomon-Godeau believes that "the pre-European culture had been effectively destroyed [by the presence of missionaries]. . . . Not only had the indigenous religion been eradicated, but the handicrafts, barkcloth production, art of tattoo and music had equally succumbed to the interdiction of the missionaries or the penetration of European products" (1989:125). A central focus of this course is to place Gauguin within a more historically complicated account of the contact zone of the Pacific in the 1890s. While Solomon-Godeau dismisses Gauguin's genius as an artist, I would like students to engage a bit more with the slipperiness of this genius, to discuss the ways his paintings can be considered formally and aesthetically complex while also acknowledging the problematic aspects of the images.

In her 1996 monograph *The Glory of Van Gogh: An Anthropology of Admiration*, Nathalie Heinich deconstructs the legend of van Gogh and its dependence upon narratives of madness, tortured heroism, asceticism, mysticism, chastity, and sacrifice, recalling medieval hagiographies. In the chapter presented for students to read, Heinich recounts the ceremonies held for the one hundredth anniversary of van Gogh's death at Auvers-sur-Oise, France, a procession ending at his shrine-like final resting place, allowing communal participation in a performance of memory and reverence. The author compares this tourist structure with medieval pilgrimages to the sites of reliquaries. Where van Gogh's mythology lies in his suffering and self-sacrifice, Gauguin's is one of hedonistic pleasure in the tropics, a quest for proximity to or knowledge of the authentic primitive. The lecture portion of this class addresses van Gogh and Gauguin's artistic relationship. In group discussions the students unpack the popular construction of these artists, particularly in the film *Lust for Life*. The students are particularly

aware of the recurring themes used in the creation of the two artists: van Gogh childlike in his insanity, Gauguin driven by masculinist sexuality.

Returning to Said's assertion that Orientalism is not a transparent fantasy but a material discourse, students can begin to think about the production of myths through texts and images, and Gauguin's role in the construction of his own body. As I stress throughout the course, Gauguin's representations of his own body tell us as much about his understanding of the world as do his representations of Other bodies. Heinrich stresses that a central aspect of the hagiography of van Gogh focuses around his defective, incomplete body: his severed ear, his mental illness. Gauguin's syphilitic body is continually addressed in the literature as everything from colonizing agent of disease to his source of suffering, resulting in his employment of Christian iconography of martyrdom and betrayal. Gauguin's monstrous body is infectious, a locus both of menace and decay.

REPRESENTING TAHITI: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Reading: Margaret Jolly, "Desire, Difference, and Disease: Sexual and Venereal Exchanges on Cook's Voyages in the Pacific"; Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing, Masculinity, and Nationality in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific." Film clips: *Mutiny on the Bounty*; *South Pacific*.

In their articles, Margaret Jolly and Harriet Guest set the scene for the century predating Gauguin's arrival on Tahiti Nui. Both authors use bodies as a point of departure for their discussions of the theatre of the Pacific in the late eighteenth century, exploring the intersections between European colonial interests and representations of Pacific bodies in both visual and written texts. Their articles provide students with a sense of the history of exchange and display during this period, particularly the notion that European imperialism in the Pacific was marked by the metaphor of sexual transactions between European men and Native women. Jolly explores both European and Pacific readings of the spread of venereal disease and resulting bodily degeneration during Cook's voyages. Stressing the interconnections between sexual and material exchange, Jolly analyses the workings of disease within narratives of encounter. In her article, Guest addresses representations of Omai, a Tahitian from Rai'atea who traveled to Britain with Joseph Banks in 1774. Placing Joshua Reynolds' painting of Omai within the framework of Reynolds' *Discourses*, Guest argues that Omai's body is feminized through ornamentation, which for Reynolds signifies difference, corruption, and the uncivilized. For Guest, the feminization of Omai's body through tattooing undercuts his authoritative posture and casts him within the realm of the curious and the decorative.

Film clips encourage students to explore the ways colonial interests can be inscribed onto bodies and read as sexual desire. In particular, the students point out the recurring trope of the 'arrival' scene in films set in the Pacific, in which scantily-clad women swim out to greet arriving European ships, seen in both the above films. The students' discussion turns towards this commingling of Asian and Pacific women's bodies in *South Pacific*. In the film it is the body of the non-European woman,

not specifically marked as either Asian or Pacific Islander, who is the object of mysterious desire in contrast to Nellie, the spunky American army nurse. While the character of the young woman Liat is Asian rather than Polynesian, the film often collapses the distinctions between her and the chorus of Pacific Island women surrounding her: like them, she dresses in brightly colored sarongs and adorns herself in flowers, and is physically constructed as generically exotic, dwelling on the equally generically exotic, dislocated island Bali Ha'i. Drawing the discussion back to Gauguin, I note that this synthetic approach to the construction of non-Western women is one aspect of Gauguin's own appropriation of geographically and formally disparate bodies and iconography – Egyptian, Javanese, Tahitian – as he created his vision of Tahiti.

TOURIST INTERACTIONS

Reading: Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Color of Art History*; Malek Alloula, "The Orient as Stereotype and Phantasm", in *The Colonial Harem*.

In her extended essay, Pollock explores the connections between Gauguin's history and discourses of tourism in nineteenth-century France. Using the representation of Gauguin and van Gogh in the film *Lust for Life* as a point of departure, Pollock's analysis is based around a tripartite way of seeing for the French avant-garde of the late nineteenth century: reference, deference and difference. Pollock's feminist-materialist critique of the visual culture of European Modernism challenges bourgeois, masculinist, heterosexist, and imperialist narratives. She explains, "There is a work of deconstruction to be done which starts with naming the whiteness of power, a 'whiteness' which renders itself invisible by marking its exploited social and cultural others with excessive signs of difference" (1992:10-11). For Pollock, French *fin de siècle* art involved a series of gambits: reference to a history of canonical artworks, deference to an established master, and establishing a system of difference through which the individual avant-garde artist could be recognized and distinguished (Pollock 1992:14).

Pollock's model is useful for helping students think about Gauguin's relationship with European art and the articulations of capitalism, tourism, and bourgeois leisure during this historical period. As Elizabeth Childs has noted in a recent essay, Pollock's piece also reconsiders the subject position of the young Pacific Island woman, Teha'amana, with whom Gauguin lived during his first period in Tahiti. Childs writes, "Pollock does respectfully consider the position of the subaltern – raising questions of what we can and cannot know about the historical Teha'amana...in the face of a limited historical account" (Childs 2000:77). In her monograph Pollock includes the oft-published photograph which may or may not be Teha'amana and notes, "This photograph is included not as a confirmed likeness, but as an indication of Teha'amana's existence, other than in Gauguin's paintings" (1992:11). The students in the course also pointed out that they respected Pollock's comments concerning this young woman, whose subjectivity so often is focused only around her adolescent sexual relationship and cohabitation with a European painter who later became famous. However, Pollock

does not go on to discuss what Teha'amana's existence may have been like, what factors might have influenced Teha'amana's natural and adoptive mothers to offer their daughter to this middle-aged Frenchman, and why indeed Teha'amana may have chosen to stay with Gauguin, if indeed this was her decision. While her argument is developed more thoroughly than Solomon-Godeau's, Pollock also furthers the avoidance of Pacific social history in the scholarship around the artist. For Pollock, Gauguin's representations are manifestations of a "tourist fantasy. . . ." The reality is that anything the Europeans have touched is contaminated by their money and disciplined by their gaze, imprinted with their power, and shaped by their desire (1992: 72).

The students and I will address the subjectivity of Teha'amana in a later class that focuses on Gauguin's images of her. In this lecture, I address the primacy of travel for the development of Gauguin's technique and the shaping of his visual vocabulary. Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk's 1983 monograph *Paradise Reviewed* has addressed Gauguin's paintings as evidence of his engagement with the complex intersections of indigenous and introduced artforms in Tahiti of the 1890s, as well as his ethnographic insights into the many cultures he visited. Gauguin believed that his own primitivist aesthetic would be developed by contact, enacted through his body, with specifically located, although globally distributed, cultures: Brittany, Martinique, Tahiti. The development of his primitivist technique coincides with the several extended journeys he made to Brittany in the late 1880s. Gauguin believed the Breton lifestyle to be rustic and pious, and this understanding was absorbed into his formal aesthetics and technique. In his movement from the decorative to the monumental, his use of materials such as wood, rough canvas and wax medium, and his brushstroke style, including painting freehand rather than adhering to preparatory drawings, his alignment with what he understood to be primitive emerged.

Gauguin's paintings, and his placement of his own body within both his visual and written creations, reveal a great deal about his understandings of primitivity and Otherness. Pollock acknowledges the connections between Gauguin and the act of traveling in the nineteenth century; one purpose of this

course is to further explore the cultural complexities of these encounters between traveling and located bodies (Figure 2).

As a way of thinking about the epistemological and historical complexities of travel, Alloula's text reintroduces the students to Orientalism. *The Colonial Harem* is a study of the erotics of the postcard, the visual record of travel, possession, and colonial contact. An Algerian scholar, Alloula performs a Barthesian re-reading of postcards featuring photographs of Algerian women from the early twentieth century. The images represent Arabic and Bedouin women in extremes of dress, either heavily veiled or seminude, though always draped with ornate jewelry and embroidered textiles. Some women in the postcards lounge on couches, Odalisque-style; others dance or play music. Alloula writes, "it is the nature of pleasure to scrutinize its object detail by detail, to take possession of it in both a total and fragmentary fashion" (1986:49), and indeed it is the nature of the photographic postcard itself, and its articulations with the erotics of the private, which enhances the scopophilic desires around collection and commodification of colonized cultures. Alloula's text proves useful for an understanding of Gauguin's representations of the Pacific through the author's unpacking of the iconography of the exotic and his discussion of issues which arise when looking at images of subaltern subjects.

GAUGUIN, 1891-1893: REPRESENTING TAHITI

Reading: Vilsoni Hereniko, "Representations of Cultural Identities"; Virginia-Lee Webb, "Manipulated Images: European Photographs of Pacific Peoples".

How can historical knowledge disrupt aesthetic pleasure? Looking at Gauguin's paintings, my own thoughts echo the words of contemporary visual artist Emma Amos, who borrows Gauguin's drawing *Te Nave Nave Fenua* for her 1995 work *Models*. Amos has written, "Gauguin was my hero when I was growing up, because he made the only images of beautiful brown women that I saw in the art history books of my youth. But later, after reading his misogynist journals, I considered him anew. . . ." (Amos 1999:39). Her words resonate with my own attempts to reconcile my knowledge of Gauguin's interactions with the women in his life with my appreciation for the sheer beauty of the images he created of these women. As Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson have noted in their introduction to *Rethinking Popular Culture*, images must be considered within the framework of their conditions of production: "The power of an individual image to define reality may emanate in part from its compelling use of a powerful aesthetic, but that too emanates from a social reality it helps to reproduce" (Mukerji and Schudson 1991:43). Many of the students in the course, particularly the studio art majors, pointed out their affinity for the luminosity and brilliance of Gauguin's forms and colors. His subject matter troubled them, and their contradictory responses of sense and intellect left them on a shaky ground. It was this very shaky ground that I used as a point of departure for our discussion of the artist. This lecture focuses on Gauguin's representations of women in this period, and I discuss the iconography and technique of Gauguin's paintings alongside issues of sexualization, intimacy, and access. While the students



Figure 2. Gauguin in Brittany: A gallery in Pont-Aven, France, bearing the image and title of Gauguin's 1889 painting (Wildenstein catalogue No. 315). Photo by the author.

acknowledged the visual complexity of Gauguin's paintings, they also used their knowledge of feminist and postcolonial methodologies to address themes beyond the frame of his artistic creations.

The readings assigned with this lecture topic take up the issue of the representation of Pacific bodies from both native and non-native perspectives. Webb's article examines manipulated photographic representations of the Pacific from the late nineteenth century, providing the students with a view of some images being created of Pacific Islanders at the same time Gauguin was forming his own vision. Addressing the poses, props, compositions, and retouching techniques used by Westerners in their photographs of Pacific Islanders, Webb explores the creation of a European imaginary around this space, drawn from primitivist and Orientalist discourses and realized through the photographic process. Hereniko's essay provides an alternate view of the textual construction of Pacific history in the West, which often uses contact with Europeans as a defining moment from which all future narratives must emerge. Seeing "cultural identity [as] process, not product" (Hereniko 1999:138), Hereniko divides Pacific history into three phases: the time of darkness, the time of light, and the new time. For the author, this temporal organization is distinctly different from the Western precontact, colonial, and postcolonial model, in that he organizes his understanding of Pacific time around indigenous ontologies rather than using Western activity as a point of reference and catalyst for change. Hereniko also stresses the indigenization of Christianity as well as locally developed articulations of political activism and secondary education with systems of representation, such as nationalist architecture and public performance. The author concludes with the metaphor of *tāhroro*, a green coconut containing strips of coconut meat and salt water which is left to ferment for several weeks, creating a flavorful sauce. Hereniko writes, "This transformation from white flesh to an amorphous, fused concoction symbolizes the diversity of elements that constitute Pacific identities" (1999:162).

PACIFIC BODIES: INSIDE / OUT

Reading: Teresia Teaiwa, "Bikinis and Other S/pacific N/oceans"; Miriam Kahn, "Tahiti Intertwined: Ancestral Land, Tourist Postcard, and Nuclear Test Site".

In this class, students are introduced to the politics of nuclear testing in the Pacific and its representation through visual imagery. In her article, Teaiwa explores the dynamics enacted by juxtaposing the sexualized, bikini-clad female body in popular representations with the deterritorialized and cancer-ridden body of the indigenous people of the Pacific affected by this environmental racism. For the author, the fetishization of the bikini-wearing, commodified, and generically sexualized woman's body masks the "s/pacific" violence and dispossession experienced by the residents of Bikini Atoll. Teaiwa proposes the concept of "s/pacific n/oceans" which "honor the specificities of Islander experience, recognize the generic effects of (neo)colonialism on all Islanders, and are committed to political and cultural cooperation at the regional level" (Teaiwa 1994:

102-3). Kahn also looks to the experiences of islanders in her article. The author borrows the concept of a 'thirdspace' from Henri Lefebvre, who describes a social, lived space which "embraces a multitude of intersections" (2000:7). The 'thirdspace' is dwelled in by both outsiders and natives, allowing for movement in and out, and contact as well as locatedness to particular places through ancestral ties. Kahn employs the 'thirdspace' to describe a Tahiti both real and imaginary, lived and constructed: "whether quietly coexisting, or violently colliding, local Tahitian perspective and global political agendas are not separate, independently operating realms. They are in constant, daily, intertwined dialogue" (2000: 21).

Students also were encouraged to explore Gauguin's connections with contemporary representations of the Pacific in popular culture. For this class, an assignment to critique a website having something to do with 'Polynesia', broadly defined, resulted in students discovering websites for travel agencies, Hawaiian sovereignty issues, and chants posted by Islanders, reinforcing the discursive nature of Pacific representations as both constructed and claimed. In my several years working as a teaching assistant and instructor at UCSC I have been impressed by the multimedia talents of the students, and wanted them to use their familiarity with technology and its vocabularies to critically consider the Internet as a site of both representation and resistance, where subaltern voices can be heard alongside hegemonic ones. Several students examined the representation of Gauguin on the Internet, looking at sites such as one advertising cruises on the ship *MS Paul Gauguin* or the Gauguin entry on the website Encyclopedia.com. Students drew on the readings by Webb, Hereniko, Teaiwa, and Kahn in their discussions, considering both the history of representation of Islanders by photographic technologies as well as the ways Islander identity is reclaimed within a contemporary context. An animated discussion emerged from an image of a tattooed man draped in flowered garlands on a website promoting Tahitian tourism. The students were divided amongst those who saw the marks as primitivizing and feminizing and those who chose to see resistance in the man's posture and his reclaiming of traditional *tatau* designs. The students realized that their own idea of what a 'native' was supposed to look like, how this body should be clothed and posed, was partially informed by discourses of exoticism and tourism, and they began to challenge their own understandings of what it meant to inhabit a "native" body.

TEHA'AMANA: INSCRIBING THE 'POLYNESIAN' BODY, RECLAIMING THE 'POSTCOLONIAL' BODY

Reading: Teresia Teaiwa, "Reading Gauguin's *Noa Noa* with Epeli Hau'ofa's *Nederends*: 'Militourism,' Feminism, and the 'Polynesian' Body;" Albert Wendt, "Afterword: Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body."

With the introduction of a young woman named Teha'amana and a discussion of Gauguin's relationship with her, the students became divided into two camps: those who found his actions inexcusable and dismissed him altogether, and those who continued to accept his artwork as culturally valuable while acknowledging the problematical way he chose to live his

personal life. The students had previously addressed the importance of allowing for Teha'amana's agency through Pollock's article. I present her history as I have come to know it. In *Noa Noa*, the artist related the events of a trip he made to the district of Fa'aone "to find a wife", whom he calls Tehura in the text (Gauguin n.d.:64). We have Gauguin's side of the story in *Noa Noa*, but not hers. The young woman's subjectivity remains elusive, and her existence is difficult to trace or even prove. Working on the island of Tahiti Nui in the 1950s, Bengt Danielsson is one of the few people to have looked for traces of her, and his 1965 text *Gauguin in the South Seas* is useful for the archival research it reveals. Teha'amana's family was probably from Rarotonga, Cook Islands, and she was born on Huahine, where her family lived before coming to Tahiti Nui. She was about 13 years old at the inception of her relationship with Gauguin (Danielsson 1965:116).

It is through the representation of Teha'amana's body, in the paintings for which she most likely modeled, that Gauguin's own engagement with primitivist desires and Orientalist longings are most revealed. Exploring Gauguin's relationships with Ingres and Manet, it is not difficult to read the language of seduction in paintings such as *Manao Tupapau* (Wildenstein catalogue No. 457), as Solomon-Godeau and Pollock have done. Considering Teha'amana's position within a Pacific framework perhaps invites more complexities. In her article, Teaiwa moves "from reading to writing" and allows for Teha'amana's subjectivity beyond her relationship with Gauguin, as Pollock desires to do but does not complete (1999:259). As a woman of mixed African American and Pacific Islander heritage, Teaiwa explains that she at once identifies with and rejects the light-skinned, straight-haired image of "Polynesian" woman as represented in Gauguin's paintings and perpetuated in Western popular culture. Teaiwa concludes her essay by writing a new history for Teha'amana and re-inscribing her body, as sexual agent, as decolonizing cultural performer, forming alliances with a fictional character from Hau'ofa's novel *Kisses in the Nederends*.

Wendt's essay also addresses the inscription of the Pacific body, and his language is dually internal: both through his use of the Samoan language, not always translated, in his writing, as well as his incorporation of the visual language of *tatau*. During their website presentations, students had pointed out the continual appearance of heavily tattooed individuals, particularly male, in ads for companies offering tour packages to the Pacific Islands. For the students, the use of the tattooed body in these sites served to further the exoticisation of Pacific Islanders. However, Wendt explores the contemporary use of *tatau* by Pacific Islanders as "an analogue of post-colonial literature" (1999:400), as a text working against hegemonic and neo-colonial forces. Wendt writes that the post-colonial body is "a body 'becoming' defining itself, clearing a space for itself among and alongside other bodies, in this case alongside other literatures. By giving it a Samoan *tatau*, what am I doing, saying? I'm saying it is a body coming out of the Pacific, not a body being imposed on the Pacific" (1999:410). Wendt's and Teaiwa's essays form a lucid counter-discourse to Gauguin's paintings presented for consideration during this class meeting.

GAUGUIN'S RETURN TO FRANCE; LATER TAHITIAN IMAGES; MOVE TO THE MARQUESAS ISLANDS

Reading: Sue Taylor, "Oviri: Gauguin's Savage Woman"; Deborah Elliston, "The Place of Difference in Polynesian Nationalism". Film clip: *The Wolf at the Door* (Henning Carlsen, 1987)

This class includes a close analysis of two images: Gauguin's *Oviri* sculpture, made during his return to France in 1894-5, and the 1897 painting *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* (Wildenstein catalogue No. 561) Taylor's article allowed the students to practice the skill of performing a close reading of a single image while engaging with issues of gender, sexuality, and primitivism. Looking at paintings from this period, such as *Mahana No Atua* (Wildenstein catalogue No. 513), the students pointed out the distinct shifts in Gauguin's palette, iconography, and arrangement of space during this trip to France. Although reworking previous forms and themes, such as the Hina figure and the cyclical nature of life, Gauguin moved from intense, almost florescent, color to more muted tones, and worked with a strongly Symbolist iconographic system rather than the ethnographic elements of many of his paintings from 1891-1893. In this period of Gauguin's art he also began to explore the iconography of the diseased, syphilitic body, which is contained in the *Oviri* image and to which the students had been introduced through Jolly's article. As Taylor points out, the *Oviri* image embodies Gauguin's dialectical relationship with women as both creators and destroyers. She writes, "The wolf in *Oviri*, exhausted and bloody, is a symbol of Gauguin himself, victimized by forces personified by a menacing female" (1993:199).

The 1987 film *The Wolf at the Door* chronicles Gauguin's life during this period as well, focusing on his relationship with Judith Molard, the 13-year-old daughter of his Parisian landlords. Students were encouraged to critically consider the use of Gauguin's paintings in the film as well as the construction of Gauguin as tortured hero. While students were appreciative of Donald Sutherland's nuanced portrayal of the artist, they were simultaneously disturbed by the representation of his relationship with the young woman known to us only as Annah the Javanese. This woman, probably of Malaysian heritage, served as his model for the 1893-1894 painting, *Aita tamari vahine Judith te parari* (Wildenstein catalogue No. 508); she lived with Gauguin for several months during this time. A seemingly gratuitous sex scene between Annah and Gauguin was particularly distressing to the students, as was the oscillation of her character between the extremes of timid and treacherous.

Gauguin's return to Theosophist and Symbolist elements in his later artwork is particularly evident in the painting *Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?* I shared Gauguin's own description of the painting's allegorical subject matter, from an 1898 letter to his friend Daniel de Monfreid (Amishai-Maisels 1985:227), as well as noting the connections between the painting and Gauguin's suicide attempt of New Year's Eve, 1897. The students also express that the painting seems to be the most "complete" or self-contained of Gauguin's paintings, that its narrative unfolds diachronically across the canvas rather than offering the unfulfilled or unintelligible nar-

ratives of many of his other canvases. The students also were intrigued by Elliston's article, which offers an alternate reading of the painting. She offers a Tahitian perspective on the gender of place-ness, national identities, and the meaning of being located in, or "from", the Society Islands. To account for the more visible role of men in French Polynesian nationalist movements, Elliston stresses that gendered national identities are articulated with spatialized practices and native epistemologies of knowing and dwelling in places. Borrowing from Jolly's model of women being "of the place", Elliston argues that in Tahiti women have served as "guardians of the land" while men traditionally have engaged in movement between islands, giving rise to a broader sense of "Society Island-ness" among men that is less prevalent for women (Jolly 1994, Elliston 2000). Without reducing this idea to a structuralist binary of women solely as occupiers of domestic spaces to men's movement within exteriors, Elliston critically analyzes the gendered social differences and practices of dwelling and locating oneself in a particularized space of Tahiti. Elliston's article invokes a number of questions from the students regarding Gauguin's place in the contemporary Pacific (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Gauguin's place in the contemporary Pacific: A street sign in Pape'ete, Tahiti Nui. Photo by the author.

MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL CENTERS IN AND OUT OF THE PACIFIC: TOURISM, DISPLAY, AND THE 'NATIVE' BODY

Film screening: *Sacred Vessels: Navigating Tradition and Identity in Micronesia*.

I use this session as an opportunity to present some of my own work-in-progress around Pacific museums and cultural centers. Architectural sites such as the Tonga National Centre, the Cook Islands Cultural Village, the Museum of Tahiti and its Islands, and the Disney Polynesian Resort frame very different sorts of Pacific bodies. In particular, I share with the students the primacy of the performing body within these spaces. I also introduce them to the Gauguin Museum in Papeari, Tahiti Nui (Figure 4). Drawing from the theme of the performative, the students readdress their own experiences as tourists and viewers, sharing of their own stories as well as topics discussed in

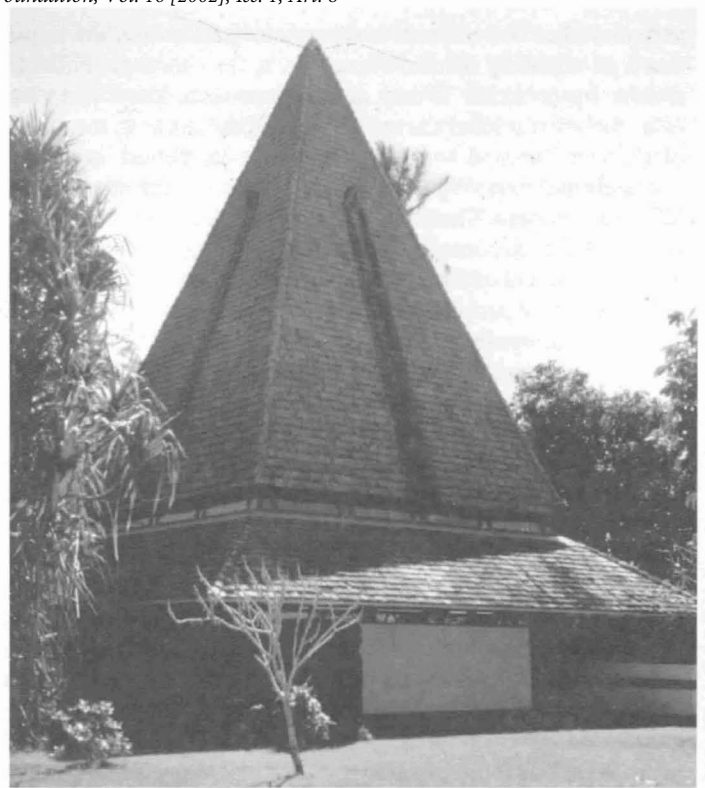


Figure 4. The Gauguin Museum, Papeari, Tahiti Nui. Photo by the author.

their term papers with the other members of the class. In their final papers, some students were heavily critical of Gauguin's representations of Pacific Island women, drawing on historical texts discussing his relationships with these women. Other students acknowledged their own ambiguous feelings towards Gauguin, based around a sense of unease with his personal history while finding his artwork intellectually and aesthetically valuable. What the students particularly brought to the class were their abilities to recognize and complicate popular representations within postcolonial and gendered frameworks. As they analyzed newspaper photographs from the Pape'ete riots of 1995, my slides from a national parade in Tonga from 1996, and Tahitian postcards showing topless *demi* women lounging on the beach, they found themselves challenging their own understandings of what it meant to dwell in Pacific places, and some ways Pacific Islanders have chosen to represent themselves. My aim in teaching this course was not to forgive Gauguin, but to complicate him. As post-twentieth-century viewers looking at Gauguin's images, we may never completely solve the riddle of this artist. Still, it is my hope that this course offered a site for alternate readings of the artist which both acknowledge that his images have found a place of permanence within our popular visual culture while also trying to tease out some of the reasons for that permanence.

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