



## **From The South To The South Pacific, And Back Again: Global Pedagogies In A Southern Classroom**

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### **Abstract**

This essay explores the use of a globally-informed pedagogy as a creative methodological tool in the University classroom. My area of research, the arts of the South Pacific, can be quite unfamiliar to students in the continental United States; therefore, in my teaching I strive to forge a strong comparative relationship between the global history of the South Pacific and that of the American South. This can produce a thematic framework that draws on concepts with which the students are familiar, including histories of contact, imperialism, and exchange, and then encourages students to apply these understandings of global art production to the study of specific works of art. This essay discusses the application of this methodology in an Arts of Oceania course offered in the fall of 2004, addressing the kinds of objects presented for student inquiry, the assignments used to assess student understanding of these objects, and the students' own responses to the course. Based on the students' performance and evaluations, I have found that a globally-informed pedagogy can enable their historical and aesthetic understanding of South Pacific arts. The course materials and assignments also allowed them a space to explore their own research and creative interests, as art producers, art historians, and art educators.

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## Introduction: Bridging the South and the South Pacific

If we begin from the assertion that the American South is becoming increasingly global, how does this affect the way we teach our Southern students? How do we decenter the classroom in a historically marginalized place? And what happens if that marginalized place – in this case, the American South, with its long histories of racial, economic, and class struggles – is moving powerfully and quickly away from marginalization as a key mode of identity articulation? The 'new South' instead stresses its role as an active site of global flows of people, things, and capital.<sup>1</sup> My discussion draws on theories of globalization and global processes as they apply to university pedagogy in the South. At Appalachian State University, I teach Oceanic art history to an increasingly diverse student body that remains rooted in, or routed through, distinctive Southern cultures and Southern places.<sup>2</sup> This essay will address global teaching strategies in the Southern classroom, considering methodologies, teaching practice, and the analysis of specific examples. Through the emphasis on local, regional, and global levels of identity articulation, histories of primitivism and 'folkism,' the impact of tourism, and the development of an increasingly urban population, I've found a number of correlations between the South's experience of globalization since the 1970s and those of my area of research, the South Pacific. In this article I discuss ways I bridge these seemingly disparate locations through global perspectives in teaching practice.

As teachers, if we are to enact a radical pedagogy, our approaches and materials must engage with both historical and contemporary discourses while also allowing students to develop voices of critique and opposition.<sup>3</sup> Presenting material from a global perspective encourages students to consider the social and historical role of the visual arts through specific case studies, but also gives them a broader understanding of art objects as sites of agency, resistance, and identity formation. The following subsections define a globally-informed pedagogy and suggest course readings that may enable the presentation of a global perspective on art objects. I next address my pedagogical goals for particular objects presented for consideration, and summarize our discussion of specific objects. I then focus on students' own responses to the material, to assess the success of this methodology. Based on student comments during class discussion, the high quality of their performance on exams and written assignments, student evaluations of the course, and individual discussions with students, I found that a globally-informed methodology allowed students to approach the material creatively and actively, as well as provided them with theoretical and historical frameworks to apply to their own individual scholarly interests. Finally, I discuss the particular bridges between the South Pacific and the South itself: that is, how is all of this peculiar to a Southern classroom?

The application of a global approach to teaching has been a natural extension of my training as a scholar and researcher. My graduate work included ethnographic research in the South Pacific, and my dissertation explored the global representations of the Polynesian body through the lens of contemporary, postmodern, postcolonial art historical methodologies. My academic coursework in the realm of globalization focused on the history and critique of Pacific Rim discourses and their application to Pacific Island studies. I now find myself bringing these global perspectives into my Southern classroom, translating the theories and methodologies from my graduate studies into a critical analysis of art objects and art-making processes. Drawing on materialist approaches to the social history of art, I invite students to consider the global circulation of objects, the multiple roles they inhabit, and the discrepant audiences who respond to them. While my chief goals in an art history course are to give the students an understanding of specific objects, materials, and techniques within their particular historical, political and social context, I also strive to give students the critical and theoretical tools to recognize and speak back to dominant discourses in a variety of contexts. Henry Giroux has argued for the liberating possibilities of higher education in a number of contexts; recently, he writes that the university's "main purpose is civic education, taking seriously what it means to educate students for critical citizenship and political agency" (2001: 2). As an extension of this principle, I encourage students to consider the broader spectrum of intersecting

discourses – race, class, gender, sexuality, national identity, to name a few – in visual representation, and give them a space and a vocabulary to engage in conversation with these discourses.

### *Global Teaching: Defining a Methodology*

Global teaching methodologies can provide a strong means to this end, extending from the principles of multicultural pedagogical practice of the 1980s and 1990s. Multiculturalism stresses the importance of pluralism, particularly through a relativist approach to difference, the dismantling of canonical hierarchies, and the transformation of traditional instruction methods, valuing a dialogic relationship between teacher and student (Arthur and Shapiro, eds., 1995, Giroux and Myrsiades, eds., 2001, McLaren 1997). Enacting a transformation of higher education itself and of its implications in various social and political contexts, instructors and students have demanded that texts (including literary, visual, and material) outside the traditional canon be included for consideration and discussion alongside the more classic survey of standard Western examples. This approach undercuts traditional hierarchies of knowledge that ascribe value to certain texts over others, and considers the broader, intersectional realm in which works are produced. The implications of this are radical: although canonical works are not dismissed, a multicultural approach allows alternate voices to be considered, with nontraditional genres (such as graffiti art or hip hop music) given equal representation alongside more standard university survey materials. In this way, oppositional voices can enter the classroom, and students are given a space to address the cultural productions of their own world as valuable tools of critical representation.

A global approach further theorizes pluralism in the context of exchange, adaptation, and translation of particular texts. This pedagogical methodology is therefore inherently comparative; for my purposes in the study of visual arts, this comparative approach invites a consideration of the historical, cultural, and political context of art objects, their production, and their circulation. Because it crosses borders so easily, visual culture is a highly adaptive case study. From their research and creative interests and the examples they bring up in class discussion, I've found that students today already have a strong sense of the global circulation of things, including capital, popular culture, music, sports, and dress. They're therefore not surprised that folks in the Pacific Islands like to play rugby or wear certain brands of clothing, as their own postmodern desires draw from multiple citations and sources, and they particularly recognize the far-reaching expressions of youth culture. I invite them to consider the connection between this contemporary manifestation of globalization and the history of cross-cultural contact, European colonialism, and Indigenous anticolonial resistance in Oceania. Beginning with the familiar can allow students to recognize that they already possess tools for understanding new ideas and concepts. In the classroom, this can mean drawing on students' own understanding of contemporary mass culture, visual imagery, and cultural production to introduce a new theory, methodology, or group of artworks.

The challenge with this global perspective lies in drawing parallels between cultures, and the objects they produce, without being essentialist or ahistorical. As Peter McLaren has written of the problems of multicultural education, the stress on pluralism can result in either, or both, a homogenizing consensus or a reproduction of the structures of power which reify difference, allowing no space in either situation for oppositional voices (1997). In this sense, multiculturalism as an uncritical and uninterrogated celebration of difference thus serves to uphold the very power structures it initially strove to undo, including privileged institutions of class, race, and gender. McLaren writes, "We need, therefore, to create a new political culture in which we are encouraged to interrogate the received consensus of American values and to resist hegemonized approaches to ethnic diversity whose narrative telos is necessarily linked to a politics of premature and uncritical unity, consensus, and agreement, to the logic of liberal individualism, to political appeasement, to a stratified and hierarchically ordered polity" (1997: 296). McLaren's liberatory pedagogical model creates space for coalition-building along with interpolation and dissent. My own field of study, the arts of Oceania,

presents a particularly relevant example of the inherent problems of a blandly celebratory multiculturalism, as this approach could easily replicate the imperialist, primitivist, and commercialized relationships between the West and the cultures producing the works.

Considering this issue, I suggest ways of presenting works of art for student interpretation that situate these works firmly within a critical, reflexive history of their social life as material objects. For a study of the visual arts, this approach stresses the multiple layers of meaning produced by an artwork: the acquisition of materials, the visual language of iconography, and the meanings produced for multiple, discrepant audiences. Placing objects within the broader scope of global exchange enables a complex, intersectional, and textured reading of their historical and aesthetic value. Rather than entirely dismissing traditional art historical methods of instruction, including formal analysis and iconographic interpretations, a global approach builds upon these traditional pedagogical systems, examining the multiple social and cultural forces behind form and visual language. Global methods of teaching also draw upon a disciplinary genealogy of cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and the anthropology of art.

A further strategy for addressing the potential pitfalls of this approach involves a reflexive relationship between the practice of pedagogy and the structures of globalization. In several senses, a global approach to teaching departs from standard theories of globalization. Fredric Jameson has loosely defined globalization as "an untotizable totality which intensifies binary relations between its parts – mostly nations, but also regions and groups, which, however, continue to articulate themselves on the model of 'national identities' . . . . But what we need to now add . . . is that such relations are first and foremost ones of tension and antagonism, when not outright exclusion . . . ." (1998: xii). Not unlike Jameson's definition of postmodernism (1984), his analysis of globalization is situated within a broader framework of global capitalism and contemporary national identity formation. Certainly Jameson's thoughts on globalization are useful for an analysis of works of art, particularly those dealing specifically with issues of contemporary nation-building (either hegemonic or Indigenous), diaspora, deterritorialization, and other themes specifically connected with geopolitical identity in a global context. However, Enrique Dussel's "planetary paradigm" (1998: 4) engages more readily with the production of art objects themselves. Dussel's placement of globalization within a broader geopolitical context suggests the 'worlding' of globalization itself, as a historical and cultural formation, and of the material objects that derive from its systems. Drawing on earlier center-periphery models, Dussel considers the *act of movement* itself between these two points, as well as their various locations at various moments, as central to an understanding of global systems. Thus, rather than situating globalization solely within the domain of political studies and nationalism, a broader global model considers the relationship between specific sites. From this, we can consider the relationship between artworks produced in different locations, while retaining a political and politicized reading of these objects.

### *Course Readings: Theorizing the Global*

A key pragmatic issue with teaching a course in Oceanic art – indeed, with almost any genre of non-Western art – is that there is not a plethora of textbooks for the subject. In my Arts of Oceania course I use two survey texts, Anne D'Alleva's *Arts of the Pacific Islands* (1998), which gives a geographically-organized discussion of the arts of New Guinea, Island Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, and Wally Caruana's *Aboriginal Art* (2003). Both of these give an excellent, if brief, overview of relevant artforms, including historical context, materials, and iconographic analysis. In addition to these texts, I prepare a course reader of both topical and theoretical readings. A second issue with teaching Oceanic art is that, in my experience, students are generally quite unfamiliar with the material. Giving them theoretical and contextual readings can help them situate the art objects within the world they know. As Kristen Williams, an art history and history double major, noted, "My general unfamiliarity with geography and ethnographic distribution of peoples in the [Pacific] region meant I first had to approach topics anthropologically. Urbanization, western contact, population

distribution, cultural influences, among other things, all had to be evaluated. Knowing all of these things is fine and well, but then I have to ask myself how much I need this information to evaluate a particular object as a visual work of art. . . . Since I can never fully understand any particular culture outside of my own (and I don't completely understand my own anyway), understanding the context of a work of art becomes a part of the approach to the work" (personal communication with the author).

Several scholars whose work I have found particularly relevant for the analysis of the interconnected relationship between people and things include Stuart Hall, Arjun Appadurai, and Alfred Gell. While all write outside the discipline of art history, their writings invoke a compelling discourse on visual culture; I assign readings from their works, and in large- and small-group discussion I invite students to consider the relationship between these scholars' theoretical writings and the specific objects we have studied in class. The work of Appadurai in particular has bridged my research process and my teaching practice. In a 1990 article, Appadurai writes, "The imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (both in the sense of labor and of culturally organized practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ('individuals') and globally defined fields of possibility" (Appadurai, 1990: 5). Appadurai's focus on the agency of consumption – and the pleasure involved in this agency – is a useful way to frame the adoption of Western material culture by non-Western cultures, a key focus of my teaching. This scholar's concept of the global 'flow' of things, presented in his 1996 monograph *Modernity at Large*, is also useful for inviting students to consider the binarization of 'contemporary' and 'traditional' as judgement criteria for non-Western art, with the latter carrying the weight of authenticity and therefore, monetary value on the art market. In his analysis of the global movement of things – capital, pleasure, consumption – Appadurai uses a model of "scapes" – ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples – to describe the fluid and changing experience of modernity at distinct historical moments in distinct global locations. He writes, "These landscapes thus are the building blocks of what ... I would like to call *imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (1996: 33, emphasis in original). Appadurai's focus on movement and change and his removal of modernity from its Western-based timeframe points to modernity as an ontological construct rather than a bracketed historical period. The work of Appadurai can give students a critical vocabulary to address concepts they've already been thinking about, as mentioned previously: the global circulation of popular culture, the issue of choice in the consumption of this popular culture, and the translation of popular culture icons to very different cultural frameworks. The interconnections between this framework and the contemporary, globalized South are several; in particular, it acknowledges the fluid nature of culture in a continually changing sociopolitical landscape that is increasingly defined by migration and consumption over isolation and dependency, and the movement of material goods and cultural productions that go along with these structures.

Another method for teaching works of art from a global perspective draws on articulation theory, which considers the potential for a coalition-building between discrepant actors. My use of the term "articulation" is informed by Hall's model of an articulated lorry, what we would call a semi or tractor trailer in American English. Hall writes, "The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken. An articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time" (quoted in Grossberg, 1996: 141). Hall's model focuses around connections and unities, but these may or may not be made, as the situation requires. While students already have a strong sense of the distinction between the Indigenous and the introduced – whether the subject at hand is materials, audience, or iconography – Hall's work invites them to consider the movement of objects between the local and the global, and the way discrepant meanings can be ascribed to an object by various parties. It also invites students to consider the connections between Indigenous political movements on a global scale, and the visual images that derive from and speak to these movements, alongside the specifically local manifestations of these movements. As with Appadurai's work, Hall also considers the global

movement of things, and the particular visual and cultural power of the image; he writes, "[g]lobal mass culture is dominated by the modern means of cultural production, dominated by the image which crosses and re-crosses linguistic frontiers much more rapidly and more easily, and which speaks across languages in a much more immediate way" (1991: 27). I stress that visual images are particularly powerful modes of address precisely because their visual language is able to permeate national, linguistic, and class boundaries. Although variant meanings may be ascribed to an image by these various audiences, the ability to engage with visual images and ascribe value and meaning to their forms is an experience that crosses divides of language, culture, and location.

Gell's work departs from that of Appadurai's and Hall's postcolonial/cultural studies influence, but nevertheless proves useful for discussing the role of art objects themselves as active agents. In his monograph *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998), Gell outlines an anthropological theory of art that derives from within anthropology itself, its study of social relations, and particularly its study of objects as mediating devices for social relations. Gell writes, "The aim of anthropological theory is to make sense of behavior in the context of social relations. Correspondingly, the objective of the anthropological theory of art is to account for the production and circulation of art objects as a function of this relational context" (1998: 11). Within this model, art objects have the ability to act as social agents, mediating social relations as both agents themselves, and as material extensions of human and non-human agents. While Gell uses a nineteenth-century shield from the Asmat culture of New Guinea as an example of this phenomenon (1998: 1), I adopt his model in my discussion of the productions of contemporary Oceanic arts, particularly those deriving from anticolonial and sovereignty movements, where visual images become a powerful means of asserting political agency. Works of art are thus presented not as objects framed by Western primitivist aesthetics or as upholders of uninterpolated 'difference,' but as sites of collective identity formation, as producers of meaning, and as objects existing in complex social and political relationships with both their immediate producers and with a global economy of exchange. Together, the work of these three scholars can provide conceptual models for students to use in their own analysis of Oceanic artworks, as well as their own creative and scholarly interests.

### *Objects, Materials, and Iconography: Art History and Oceania*

The readings discussed above frame my theoretical discussion of art objects, but my primary interest lies in the art objects themselves. Although I draw on methodologies from cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and anthropology, I remain firmly rooted in the discipline of art history, with the object itself, its historical context, and aesthetic qualities as the focal point of study. This subsection discusses specific images presented for student consideration, and my pedagogical goals in using these particular images for instruction. Through a global approach to the circulation and production of arts objects, I seek to give students a new framework for understanding objects themselves and the various meanings they can produce for diverse audiences.

I began working with this approach while I was still a graduate student, teaching a course on the French artist Paul Gauguin (Waldroup, 2002). While focusing on the artist's paintings made in French Polynesia in the 1890s, I included Indigenous voices, in the form of scholarship, political activist writings, and creative writing, as a counternarrative to representations of the Pacific by outsiders. Gauguin's work, and the circulation of these images in popular spheres, has become a primary vehicle of this construction. While a number of sources can provide Western art historical analysis of his paintings, few address the history of European and American imperial presence in the islands or the Indigenous response to this presence through the visual arts, creative writing, performance, and academic discourse. An accompanying reader with texts by Epeli Hau'ofa (1993), Vilsoni Hereniko (1999), Teresia Teaiwa (1999), Albert Wendt (1999), and other Indigenous scholars gave an Island-centered history of Indigenous-Western relations. The students thereby were encouraged to situate Gauguin's productions within a more complicated matrix of discourses, including the history of Western colonialism, missionization, and assimilationist practices, in addition

to the history of avant-garde modernist art production and primitivism often referred by Western scholars to critique his work. Students also were encouraged to consider narrative forms such as poetry, the short story, and creative nonfiction as valuable modes of critique.

I've continued this form of pedagogical practice in my course on the Indigenous arts of Oceania. The goal of the course is for students to develop an understanding of the multifaceted relationship between art objects and their place of production, particularly in conversation with the social history of that place. This includes the relationships between art objects, aesthetic values, and culture contact (amongst Oceanic people and with cultural outsiders), as well as the connections between the visual arts, cultural continuity, and anticolonial resistance. I began the course with a visual analysis of a map made by a Tahitian named Tupaia in the late eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> I used Tupaia's map as an example of the Indigenous appropriation of a very Western form of knowledge production – the map, with its all-seeing viewpoint and connections with European exploration and imperialism – by a Tahitian during the early period of contact between Islanders and Europeans. As a two-dimensional rendering of space, the Western map is in direct opposition to Indigenous ways of experiencing places, which include chant, specialized forms of navigational knowledge, and sacred geography. Tupaia's strategic use of this form can therefore be seen as form of anticolonial resistance; by appropriating the visual language of the colonizer, Tupaia reinscribes the channels of power through which the map is produced. Western mapping privileges land, describing the ocean only as a mode of travel between colonial outposts, a vast emptiness to be crossed. Maps also serve the purpose of imposing names and thus erasing, at least within the context of the map itself, Indigenous relationships to place. Tupaia's map departs from this form of representation. His own island lies at the center of things, and the social and historical relationships between islands and Islanders become paramount in the imagining of his world. Finding himself at the center of a changed world, he thus produces his own knowledge about place by describing that place through adopted channels of power. By beginning the course with Tupaia's map, I invited students to consider the ways appropriation can be an act of resistance rather than a sign of cultural decline.

Although the course concentrates on Indigenous art production, I also discussed European representations of Pacific Islanders at the beginning of the term. I asked students to bring in a representation of Pacific Islanders or Pacific locations from contemporary popular culture, such as a Web site, magazine advertisement, or television. Considering their examples as a group, we talked about the similar themes that arose from them: fantasies of escape and adventure, bourgeois leisure, hedonistic pleasure in the tropics. We then discussed the origins of these themes in early contact period images, addressing the way discourses are constructed and reproduced across history and national boundaries. A key goal for this assignment is to give them a stronger understanding of the relationship between the presentation and display practices of works of art created by Islanders since the late eighteenth century, and the representation of Islanders themselves in Western popular culture. Indeed, as one student noted, her interest in the course material was based on her prior research into American popular culture: “ The course challenged me because I previously had very little knowledge of Oceanic arts. . . . My interest in the class came from limited studying of the trendy exoticism from the fifties and sixties that [is] commonly referred to [as] ‘tiki’ or ‘island’ motifs” (personal communication, Virginia Tocaben). The archive of representation of the Indigenous body shares a number of points of intersection with the representation of Oceanic art in the West: as collected curiosity, object of desire, locus of primitivism, and exotic fantasy. Students also were invited to consider the work of certain contemporary Indigenous artists as speaking back to this body of imposed images.

After discussing historical representations of Pacific people, we then moved on to address Indigenous art production since the eighteenth century. The course is divided into regional units, beginning with Australia and moving on to New Guinea, the islands of the Western Pacific, and finally the islands of the Eastern Pacific and New Zealand. For each region we covered that area's specific cosmogony, along with histories of exchange, contact, and colonialism. One image from the

course text is a shield from the Massim culture of the Trobriand Islands (D'Allema 1998: 54). Made in the nineteenth century, the shield exemplifies that objects can have different social lives for different audiences. The shield presents a particularly complex iconographic system, closely related to Trobriand understandings of death, life, sexual reproduction, and sacred geography. For the West, the shield's distinctive decorative scheme, portability, and relationship to Western sculpture contributed to its value as a collectible object. Therefore, in our class discussion of the shield I encouraged students to consider both the Indigenous meanings of the object as well as the way objects can take on different meanings outside their original site of creation. In their comments on the shield, students pointed out the very overt representation of female genitalia on the shield: both an external view of the vulva, and an x-ray view of internal reproductive organs: vagina, uterus, and fallopian tubes. We then went on to address why the Massim might have put such a design on an object meant for a male warrior to use during battle, and students mentioned their study of the connections between warfare and art production in previous courses. They then noted that the overt sexual imagery on the shield, along with its relationship to the Western sculptural tradition, may have increased its value for Western collectors in the late nineteenth century, who were invested in the value of permanent, three-dimensional artforms along with their exoticist and primitivist interest in Indigenous sexuality. In presenting this object for class consideration, I encouraged students to engage in visual analysis to unpack some of the Indigenous meanings of the object, as well as consider its relationship to a longer history of object collection by the West.

Influenced by Hau'ofa's assertion that it is imperative to consider Oceania as a place defined by connection rather than isolation (1993), throughout the course we also considered cross-cultural parallels in function, aesthetics, and conceptual relationship to art production. This comparative regional framework was then expanded to consider the global channels through which materials are acquired and aesthetics are transformed. In a second image from the course text, a young woman, Kala Wala, of the Wahgi culture of Papua New Guinea, is adorned for her bridewealth ceremony in a mixture of Indigenous materials (parrot plumes, a marsupial pelt) and imported objects (nylon rope, beads, and beer can pull tabs) (O'Hanlon, 1989; D'Allema, 1998: 19). My students and I discussed the absorption of introduced materials by Wahgi people, particularly the way the introduction of a monetary economy can endow purchased objects with a particular type of power. Rather than see Kala Wala's costume as indexical of Westernization and the erasure of Indigenous identity through the introduction of a global market, in class discussion we explored what it means to reinscribe meaning to an object, particularly through the specifically Indigenous use of these objects: for instance, the transformation of beer can pull tabs to earrings. Although her costume includes imported materials, Kala Wala's body adornment suggests a particularly Wahgi aesthetic.

In addition to exploring the production of artworks for a specifically local, Indigenous audience, we also addressed the global circulation of objects on the contemporary art market. This course takes the production of 'contemporary art' beyond a narrow definition of objects and images produced by academically-trained artists, working in metropolitan centers for a gallery market, and places contemporary art production in a more global framework. We considered issues such as the availability of materials (purchased versus locally available), discrepant location (colonial capital, port city, rural area), anticolonial movements, and the diasporic movement of Oceanic people in connection with art production since the 1970s. As many of the students were art producers themselves, I also asked them to think about the connections between their own work and a broader global definition of 'contemporary art.'

One example of contemporary art that the students easily recognize as such is the creation of dot paintings in acrylic and canvas by contemporary Aboriginal artists in Australia. Since the 1970s, artists of the Papunya School and other rural studios have transformed visual representations of the Dreaming from ephemeral surfaces, such as body and earth, to fixed ones, thus enabling their sale to outsiders (Caruana, 2003). In Australia, we also explored the work of urban-based artists trained in art schools, and discuss the different relationships to art production, tradition, and cultural identity



faced by artists of different generations, background, and geographic location. The Australian contemporary art market (including the sale of works made by rural artists) is primarily Sydney-based; we also addressed what it means to produce contemporary art in smaller, but nevertheless globally connected, markets, such as Auckland and Port Moresby, along with the work of Oceanic artists living in diaspora in the United States and elsewhere. The students particularly enjoyed discussing the works of artists that addressed the reappropriation of Western images of Pacific Islanders by contemporary Island artists. One piece in particular, Jim Vivieaere's *Six Tahitians, Two in Leningrad, Four in Papeete*, from the early 1990s, invited a long discussion of the connections between art production, Western colonialism, and historically located discourses – in this case, European primitivism.<sup>5</sup> Rather than presenting Gauguin's paintings as solely informed by the European avant-garde of *fin de siècle* France, students drew on both Pacific and European perspectives and were encouraged to form a broader understanding of the complex discourses intersecting in Gauguin's paintings themselves and the various popular narratives they have produced about Tahiti. That Vivieaere is working in a hybrid medium (college and found objects) brought up further issues for discussion around the issue of appropriation itself, and the agency enacted through the appropriation of the language (visual as well as verbal) of the colonizer. In their comments during discussion, students noted that they particularly appreciated the artist's use of humor as a tool for critique.

We also considered the importance of media in contemporary art production, and how the use of various media is often used to determine value in both Indigenous and Western contexts. As a group, I asked the students to consider what it means to adopt Western technologies of art production, such as photography or canvas and paint, to articulate issues of Indigenous identity, versus a of such methods over more traditionally Indigenous modes of visual address, such as performance or *tapa* cloth production. In their comments, students pointed out the inherent value of both strategies, and through their own postmodern sensibilities had little difficulty identifying the visual materials presented for discussion, whether it be an oil on canvas painting made for a gallery market or a large piece of *tapa* presented by Tongan women at a wedding, as 'art.' Students explained that their own visual art production takes influence from a broad variety of forms, such as graphic novels, tattooing, and anime, lending depth and breadth to their definitions of contemporary art. Nevertheless, I also wished students to consider the category of 'contemporary art' as a complicated, shifting, and often messy space.

Wanting us to step outside more traditionally Western modes of art production, and wanting not only to consider the work of artists connected to a gallery market, I used the example of women's netbag production in the Highlands of New Guinea to ask students to think about alternate forms of contemporary art production. These netbags draw on a long tradition of women's fiber art production in the Highlands (D'alleva, 1998: 43, O'Hanlon, 1989). Worn across the back from a band over the head, used to carry babies, firewood, or produce for sale at the market, the bags symbolically represent both the bride and the womb, and their creation process is closely tied with the Wahgi sense of womanhood as well as Papua New Guinea national identity (O'Hanlon, 1989; Margaret Jolly, personal communication). Originally made from fur and plant fibers, women now use purchased nylon rope, and work in pictorial imagery as well as abstract designs. The netbags also translate well to tourist art: they require a minimal monetary outlay by their producers, and their portability, visual appeal, and local use value are attractive to potential buyers. The sale of netbags at a local market, rather than through an art gallery, shapes an informal economic structure rather than the hegemonic space of urban art galleries. Existing between inside and outside, the netbags suggest the ways contemporary Wahgi women are negotiating their Indigenous identity within a global context. Students were somewhat divided in their comments on these objects; although all of them appreciated the objects as 'art,' based on the quality of their production and creativity of design, some felt that because of their location outside the hegemonic gallery market, the netbags occupied a distinct aesthetic category from works considered 'contemporary art.' Other students argued for the relationship of the netbags to a broader realm of contemporary global fiber arts

production. Overall, the netbags provided an opportunity for students to consider, and voice, their relationships to 'contemporary art,' art markets, and the relationship between insider and outsider to global art production.

A variety of contemporary Indigenous artforms were covered in the course, inviting diverse issues for discussion. Students were particularly interested in the resurgence of tattooing in Oceania since the 1970s, particularly in New Zealand. This was also an opportunity for students to consider the application of Hall's articulation theory, discussed above, to an analysis of visual arts. Because of their very striking nature, the tattoos can easily lend themselves to appropriative studies framed by the Modern Primitives movement of the 1980s and 1990s in the U.S. and Europe. Moving away from this, I drew on students' own knowledge in several areas. First, many of the students had themselves been tattooed, and in their comments in class stressed the deep-seated personal and familial commitments that go along with this form of body modification. From their general studies courses students were also aware of the history of radical politics in the U.S. of the late 1960s, such as the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement. I framed my presentation of contemporary tattooing by inviting the students to consider the *global* scale of these political movements and their relationship with anticolonial politics in various locations. As a form of articulation, anticolonial politics and their varying manifestations through visual culture were presented for the students as a coalitional space where both sides remain separate, yet draw on similar themes and purposes. I discuss below their responses to this material through their performance on assignments and comments about the course.

#### *Student Responses: Evaluating a Pedagogical Method*

Based on student performance and their responses to the course through evaluations, group discussion, and individual conversations, I feel strongly that a globally-informed teaching methodology enabled them to achieve the desired pedagogical goals for the course. In addition, students noted that the course gave them tools and concepts to apply to their own creative and professional interests that extended beyond the immediate subject matter. Students were assessed based on exams, participation in class discussion, and individual research projects with an oral and written component. On exams, students showed significant improvement throughout the semester, including their ability to comparatively analyze artworks, their understanding of the relationships between objects and broader geopolitical processes, and their engagement with the course readings. Their research projects, on a topic of their choosing, covered a variety of subjects: the history of Samoan tattooing, contemporary tattooing in New Zealand, transformations in Maori carving in the nineteenth century, twentieth-century bark paintings from Arnhem Land, Australia, and critiques of the representations of Pacific Islanders in popular film. During oral presentations on their research projects, students were particularly attentive to the work of their classmates, and posed questions that demonstrated sustained interest in active learning and sharing ideas.

During group discussion of readings and specific objects, the variety of questions asked by students, and their active participation in the discussion, also indicated their investment in the course. The types of questions asked were both concrete – for instance, focusing on the process, materials, or use of an object – and theoretical. A particularly lively discussion rose up around the Polynesian concepts of *mana*, sacred energy, and *tapu*, restrictive behaviors put in place to keep *mana* in proper check. Students were interested in the more esoteric aspects of these forces, their manifestations in contemporary culture, and their relationship to art production. They did not hesitate to ask for clarification or examples that would enhance their engagement with the material or enable their greater understanding of it. Overall, I was pleased with their level of dedication, even in the face of very difficult material and concepts.

Responses to the course from the students were quite positive. Anonymous student evaluations included the comments “excellent cultural overview of subject [and] great choice of material” and “the material was foreign and the lectures so interesting that I never wanted to miss class.” On course evaluations, the median scores for both the instructor’s ability to clearly explain course materials and the overall effectiveness of the course was 4.9 out of 5; in comparison, the departmental medians for these categories are 4.4 and 4.6 out of 5, respectively. Beyond their more general thoughts about the course, I was particularly pleased that the students noted the way the course informed their broader educational goals. Students in the course were primarily from the art department, but with a variety of specializations, including art history, art education, graphic design, and studio art. One student noted in an anonymous course evaluation, “it was great to learn about a different region for art history and it will be very helpful in [my own] teaching.” Virginia Tocaben, a studio art student with a dual focus in metals and fibers, explained, “ I think the ideas and themes absorbed more into my life than into my art work. The course did not inspire the exact objects that I make as much as my will to make art. . . . I am also enjoying finding similar traits from Oceanic art in other arts” (personal communication with the author). Jeff Cain, a student of graphic design, said of the course’s overall impact on his educational goals, “ Through the art of Oceania, [I] opened myself to a new way of thinking, outside of ‘westernized’ box. . . . I went from knowing absolutely nothing about Oceania, besides where it was on the map, to [having] an intimate respect for the various people and art of the different areas” (personal communication with the author). Kristen Williams said that she has found fewer direct influences between the themes of the course and her current professional and intellectual interests. However, she noted that the relevance of the course continued around her ability to recognize specific artforms; her response is very telling of the diverse cultural milieu of the small town in North Carolina where she now lives:

The part [of the course] that I have used the most is probably information on tattooing/*tatau*. I know people who have tattoos inspired by Samoan and other Pacific Island cultures, and I am able to recognize some of the images. There is a girl I work with here in town, her grandparents and her father are (I think) Samoan. Her grandmother stores a really long . . . woven mat under her bed. . . . She didn’t have to explain to me why because I knew about *mana*, etc. She also said that her grandmother was going to be rolled in the mat when she is buried. I found it interesting to find something relevant to the class in this little town (personal communication with the author).

Critiques of the course especially noted the emphasis placed on lecture materials, and students suggested a variety of ways to transform this; in an evaluation one student suggested the inclusion of “movies, live performances or actual objects, [and] activities creating similar art.” Kristen Williams also added that she found the shift from Aboriginal arts to the arts of Island Oceania, including Melanesia and Polynesia, to be abrupt, as it required her to make an ontological leap between the art of people “closely tied to . . . massive expanses of land” to the art of people “closely tied to the sea” (personal communication with the author). Taking all of these responses and suggestions into consideration, in the future I intended to shift the course to primarily discussion-based learning, with assessment based primarily on written and oral projects. I also am continuing to think about the cultures that I will include in the course; with Kristen Williams’ comments in mind, I may also split the course into a two-semester study, separating the Australian materials into their own course.

### *Conclusion: South Pacific Studies in the Global South*

The introduction to this essay stressed the parallels between the American South and the South Pacific, and would like to return to this analysis in my conclusion, specifically, how a comparative analysis of these two areas can foster student learning. Drawing on students’ own understandings of local-global articulations and global processes can enable their understanding of new material. As Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake have argued, globalization is a form of cultural production that is multiply and simultaneously located: “The geopolitics of global cultural formations and local sites are shifting under the pressures of this new ‘spatial dialectic’ obtaining between mobile processes of

*transnationalization* and strategies of *localization* or regional coalition" (1996: 2). James Clifford has extended this thought to the connections between globalization itself and its specific manifestations in a South Pacific context, teasing out what it means to be, at once, Indigenous and diasporic, local and global (2001). My Southern students come from a New South that is not at all new to them. While many of my students have told me of the interconnections of their family histories with North Carolina's rural labor history, in textile mills and on tobacco farms, their placed-based identity draws on the continually changing cultural landscapes of urban Raleigh, Charlotte, and Atlanta.

The students had no difficulty arguing for photography and oil paint as contemporary Indigenous art media, any more than they have difficulty accepting the role of reggae and tattooing as cultural products with roots in the South Pacific and elsewhere. My students haven't been to Oceania (yet), but through the more immediate dissemination of popular culture in an increasingly global world they are already intellectually and politically savvy about lived experiences outside their immediate one. In the increasingly global South, with an increasingly multicultural student body, I ask students to consider the production of a hegemonic global imaginary alongside Indigenous perspectives on land, material objects, and visibility. The multisited, multiply situated localization through which I present the South Pacific to my students parallels the newly global mapping of the American South. An invocation of the global movement of things interrupts the centrality of Western historical narratives and calls for more radical historical analysis. Primitivist and developmental discourses have couched Island cultures as living in isolation, or dependent upon Western resources. A more global approach recognizes the past, present, and future connections between Pacific Islanders on a local, regional, and global level. Based on student performance and responses, I have found that a global approach to the study of art objects has been particularly effective for teaching South Pacific art, and could easily be extended to other disciplines.

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## End Notes

1 For an excellent discussion of the contemporary manifestations of globalization in the South, see Peacock et al, eds., 2005 .

2 My roots/routes metaphor is borrowed from James Clifford (1997).

3 For an excellent pedagogical model, see Norton 2001.

4 For a reproduction of this image, see Thomas 1997.

5 For a reproduction of this image, see Thomas 1995, figure 179.

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