

**RECIT DE VOYAGE / TRAVEL WRITING**

**ON LOCATION, OR WHY GO ?  
REFLECTIONS OF A TRAVELING ART HISTORIAN**

*Sur le terrain, ou pourquoi partir ?  
Réflexions d'une historienne de l'art voyageuse*

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**Résumé :** *l'auteur a beaucoup voyagé en Polynésie lors de son étude sur la carrière de Paul Gauguin. Elle examine la perspicacité de vue gagnée en voyageant dans les régions géographiques où elle a vécu ; ce qu'elle a appris lors des rencontres interculturelles en effectuant cette recherche ; et comment l'expérience de la voyageuse, de la touriste et de l'érudite américaine qu'elle est, lui a appris à regarder différemment l'art de Gauguin.*

**Mots-clés :** *Gauguin, voyage, exotisme, Tahiti, Polynésie française, histoire de l'art.*

**Abstract:** *The author has traveled extensively in Polynesia while studying the career of Paul Gauguin. She examines the insights gained from travel to the geographical regions where he lived; what she has learned in cross-cultural encounters while doing this research; and how the experience of being a traveler, a tourist and an American scholar abroad has taught her to look differently at Gauguin's art. Keywords: Gauguin, travel, exoticism, Tahiti, Polynesia, art history.*

There will be several disclosures in this essay. The first, and most important for readers of these pages, is that I am not a geographer. I am an art history professor, and I teach classes that require me for the most part to stay in one place during the academic year, and then to fit a flurry of research and personal trips into a cramped summer vacation. My second disclosure is that I have long been interested in the European and American artistic practice, or cultural habit, of exoticism—in artists and writers who either traveled to distant places in order to find creative

stimulation and to represent their perceptions in image or text, or traveled simply in their imaginations to realms of the unknown and the strange. These artists' stories are embedded in larger stories in the modern history of exploration, imperialism, colonial expansion, world trade, militaristic and diplomatic initiative, and I strive to place their aesthetic production in these larger historical frames. But I must admit that studying artistic habits of nomadism and exoticism somehow also assuages some personal desire to be that avid traveler myself. As much as I love research in and of itself, I suspect that I am addicted to the acts of travel that make it possible.

One artist who has long captured my interest is that master of displacement and exotic longings conceived in the service of modern art - Paul Gauguin (Paris, 1848 - Marquesas Islands, 1903). This post-impressionist artist's career was strategically defined within the Parisian avant-garde by his spectacular "going away" from Paris, and from Europe, and his mythologized arrivals in a series of earthly paradises -- most notably, Martinique, Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands. I value the art itself for its central role in the history of European modernism, especially in this artist's development of a Symbolist language of simplified form, his reinvention of the woodcut, his interventions into the coloristic formulas of a tame impressionism. Gauguin would not have sustained my interest if his art had not been of enormous visual interest, formal intricacy, and importance to a larger art historical narrative. His work reveals much about late nineteenth-century ideas of modernity, nostalgia, aesthetic primitivism, avant-gardism, and the artistic critique of bourgeois artistic culture. To understand it all better, I have traveled the globe. I have been to see Gauguin's art in museums, private collections and auction houses from Paris to Honolulu. I have been to the sites - the street of his Paris home, the placid river in the Bois d'Amour in Brittany where he painted with fellow artists, the site of the Yellow House he shared with Van Gogh in Arles, the coastal shore of his Tahitian home, and the spectacular hillside location of his final resting place in Atuona, in the Marquesas Islands. I have met different kinds of specialists in Gauguin's work - collectors, curators, professors, art dealers, biographers, film makers, and even relatives of the artist. I have

no claims to knowledge gained by what an anthropologist might call ethnographic field work in the scientific sense, nor have I ever “gone native,” either of my own accord, or in some attempt to recreate Gauguin’s artist’s experience. My excursions are those of a scholar, a visitor, and sometimes those of a well-informed tourist. What role can such travel and purposeful dislocation play in the scholarly life of an art historian?

I want to look at three general issues, some in more detail than others. First comes the question of desire for travel in the first place. What were the ostensible reasons not only for “going away” but also for “going to” a particular place, in this instance, Gauguin’s choice to move to Tahiti and the Marquesas? Second, I want to consider how the act of travel to the Pacific offered me significant insights and experiences as an historian. I then want to evaluate the benefits of travel to a particular place: what the few historical remnants of Gauguin’s life could teach me; what the importance was of my encounter with the physical region; and what I learned from encounters with the local cultures. Third, I want to consider more subjective insights, what I learned from the experience of being a foreigner in Polynesia, and what this self-awareness has taught me about Gauguin’s art and career.

First, on the desire for travel. Here, a century separates me as historian and traveler from the Papeete and Atuona of Gauguin’s time. As an ambitious artist who sought to distinguish himself from a generation of Impressionists who made pictures of urban and suburban themes, Gauguin chose to be in “the country.” He chose first the Breton countryside, and then, sites within the French colonial sphere. In going to Tahiti, he sought short-term immigration to facilitate finding a unique subject matter for his brand of modern art. That his first stay in Polynesia lasted almost two years was more a function of accident (he could not get the fare for repatriation) than plan. He would have been content with a several month stay followed by a glorious return to Paris to show his recent art at galleries sympathetic to the avant-garde. But he also had personal reasons to leave: no money, a strained family life, and a love of seeing the world gained during his days as a merchant mariner all contributed to his choice. My reasons were much simpler — a desire to

see the locations where he lived and worked, to see what traces of that career might still be discerned. But I also admit that I would not have been attracted to the subject in the first place had I not already been interested in Pacific cultures, and in the history of European expansion in the Pacific.

I am vastly separated from my subject by modern modes of travel. Gauguin moved slowly between France and Polynesia in 1891, 1893, and 1895, using a combination of trains, slow steam ships, and once on the islands, horse drawn carriages. My flying time from St. Louis to Papeete is less than 24 hours, although to me, by modern standards, this seems a very long trip. My process of dislocation is not as gradual as Gauguin's, and once in Tahiti, I feel surely less cut off from the rest of the world. When I made my first trip in 1991, it still took me about two months to get a piece of mail from a correspondent in Tahiti: I remember an unjustified sense of marvel that the mail came at all. Now, my trips are punctuated with daily checks of my email account, and I feel only as cut off from the routines of my daily life as I allow myself to be. But for Gauguin, the sense of separation from Europe must have been extreme, and the sense of alienation from the familiar, profound.

In spite of the obvious speed-up of travel, and the impact of global technologies on how we communicate with other parts of the world, there are ways in which my own experience of travel echoes some of what Gauguin and artists of his time endured on these world voyages. To begin with, serendipity still plays an enormous role in any voyage. I could offer many personal instances of missed planes, stolen purses, and unexpected severe weather that kept me longer somewhere than I ever expected to be (my favorite instance was my need to stay in Barcelona once after my passport was stolen; I became, as a consequence, a great fan of Gaudi's architecture). For Gauguin, perhaps one of the greatest accidents of travel is that his expected layover of two or three days in Auckland, New Zealand in 1895, on a return voyage to Tahiti, became a stay of nine days, due to mechanical difficulties with the ship. As a consequence, he visited the Auckland museums, and discovered with great passion the rich visual legacy of the Maori. He made a sketchbook

of that intense and distinctive Polynesian art, and drew from its wealth until his death, eight years later. Serendipity was generous to this artist with an open imagination and a sketchbook.

Voyages on modern day ships, which still take impressive amounts of time to achieve, can help one recapture the impact and isolation of being so far away. I once traveled between Tahiti and the Marquesas on the Aranui, a freighter that takes vacation passengers, and that stops at every island in the Marquesas and unloads its staples at the local port. It was a sharp lesson in how distinct the different parts of Polynesia are, and how very different Gauguin's last island home of Atuona in the Marquesas was from the bustling capital port of Papeete in Tahiti. I had read he had "retreated" at the end of his life, seeking an ever more remote spot to work. I had not realized how different the places were, how distinct the languages, how very remote that final refuge was, and how its choice was an emphatic critique and rejection of Papeete, which had become by 1901 a Europeanized and international port city. A fine lesson in how many Polynesian islands lie within the borders of the *territoire d'outre mer* now called Polynésie française.

Once one has finally arrived on location, the next obvious question for the traveling art historian is what remains of the historical subject. What are the remnants of the "real" historical presence left today? In the case of Gauguin, there is slim hard evidence, and a great deal of myth. In Tahiti, it is the absence of art by Gauguin upon which tourists most often remark. That is because unlike the artist, the art traveled back to Europe and stayed there. Or, it was sold to the non-Polynesian art-buying world. Due to his ongoing relationship with dealers, collectors and critics in Paris, he either shipped back his artistic output, or took it back himself on his one return sojourn to Paris in 1895. And from Paris it went, via the dealers, to the museums and art collectors of London, Moscow, New York. From the daily life of the artist, little also remains. The thatched home he made in Punaauia vanished long ago, and with it the wooden sculpture he erected in the garden. His few possessions—the guitar, the accordion, the books by Flora Tristan, the issues of *Mercur de France* he read avidly, were all sold by the colonial government at an estate sale

in 1903, to help repay his debts. French writer Victor Ségalen picked up a few documents, but he repatriated these to France, and most remain there in museums and private archives. A very few works, handled by the great auction houses of Paris and London, have made it back to Tahiti to the homes of the most wealthy elite, but these works are mostly kept at home, and are seldom seen in the local museum. (In 1991, when I asked a prominent local collector of art and artifacts why he did not lend more to the local museums, he responded with a quip that for me encapsulated the ultimate colonial sense of privilege: “Madame, it is as if you have a beautiful wife. Do you put her on display in the marketplace for all to see? Or do you keep her at home in your bedroom, in her slip, for your own private pleasure ?” (I exaggerate not...) And while the Gauguin museum on the south shore of the island, near the site of Gauguin’s home in 1891, is a tribute to the artist, it is full of photographic copies of works of art and copies of documents. Perhaps its most distinctive attribute is its research library, compiled over years by the Director Gilles Artur. But this is a resource for scholars, not one used by the average visitor to the island.

Some of the old city of Papeete Gauguin knew is the same — a few buildings, a few civic landmarks, the tomb of the King Pomare who died after his arrival. But the city has of course dramatically and irreversibly moved on. Yet for all this absence, there are some rather dramatic physical traces of the name and person of Paul Gauguin, who arrived in Papeete in 1891. As Tahitian poet Chantal Spitz has observed with some anger, the name it seems is everywhere. It is there in the name of a grade school, built and funded by the French, at which Tahitian children learn the language of the colonizer. There are the souvenirs by the bundle in the local market: my favorites include the soaps, the beach towels, and the bottles of spring water that all bear images of Gauguin’s paintings. In America and Europe, merchants carefully observe the laws of copyright, and only copy paintings onto “souvenirs” following legal procedure. In Papeete, it is a visual free for all. Anyone with the technology to copy a painting does. The copyright officers of the Musée d’Orsay would surely faint if they were to stroll through the public market (Fig. 1), or the

beaches of Atuona, where poorly colored details of museum masterpiece grace the towels for sale under the trees.



Fig. 1: Souvenir goods for sale in the Papeete market, Tahiti.

And of course Gauguin is there in the post cards, and in the painted reproductions for sale in upscale hotel lobbies like that of the Meridian (Fig. 2).

There is also the most lavish incarnation of the name, in the body of the luxury cruise liner, the MS Paul Gauguin, that takes off out of Papeete almost every week to sail to a range of Polynesian islands, delivering both adventure and fantasy to privileged travelers who come mostly from the US and France. On board, visitors listen to island songs performed by attractive young hostesses from these islands, part of a troop dubbed “Les Gauguines” by the entrepreneurial ship owners. These young women are of course not *vahine*, but rather are diverse and interesting individuals who are using the tourist industry as a way to get

off their island homes (such as the remote archipelago of the Tuamotus) to see a larger world.



Fig. 2: Painted reproduction of *D'où venons-nous, que sommes-nous, où allons-nous*, for sale at the Hotel Méridien, Tahiti, 2003.

One hostess reported to me her goal of learning English and saving money in order to attend UCLA to study business in a few years.

These young women observe strict etiquette in not being overly familiar with passengers, and they offer educational lectures on the modern cultures of their various islands. On stage in their dance costumes of shells and grass skirts, however, they invoke and perform the fantasy of feminine grace and generous island hospitality that in part drew Gauguin to Tahiti in the first place. On occasion, they even end a musical performance with a *tableaux vivant* performance, imitating the exact poses of one of the better known Gauguin paintings. It is a tourist fantasy in which the distant, most famous paintings (often from the Musée d'Orsay or the Metropolitan Museum of Art) come to life, thus



perversely authenticating the audience's experience of the real performers. The simulacrum of the art leads the audience to believe, however crassly or subliminally, that they have genuinely arrived in the Land of Gauguin. As with Flaubert floating down the Nile and recalling the scenery as if he "were suddenly coming upon old forgotten dreams" (Steegmüller, 1972:75), this audience relies on the memory of the European images - the well known-paintings of Tahiti - to mediate the first-hand experience. And the present tense thus fuses with some nostalgic past moment of cross-cultural encounter between the artist and his (now world famous) subjects.

This is the Gauguin Spectacle, made for easy touristic consumption on the surface of a complex hybrid culture, aware of both its traditions and its modern markets. There is a historical Gauguin to be encountered as well, but its access is far more obscure and idiosyncratic. There are some remnants of his historic presence. In Papeete, one can visit the tomb of Pomare V, the Tahitian king who died as Gauguin arrived and whose funeral procession the artist joined; but most of the stores and businesses he frequented are long gone. In the Marquesas, the site of his home is now the site of a careful full-scale reproduction of his so-called *Maison du Joueur* (Fig. 3), where his well has been excavated to reveal the medicines and libations that eased his final painful days of syphilis. And in Auckland, New Zealand, one can visit in the Auckland War Memorial Museum an impressive display of the same Maori sculptures that so impressed Gauguin on his visit to that city in 1895.

But outside of these buildings, the real education of Gauguin is to be found in the topography and in the physicality of Tahiti itself. The most obvious and overwhelming sensation is that of being on an island. Tahiti and Hiva Oa both are volcanic islands, and the center of the islands are dominated by formidable peaks and almost impenetrable forest. The vegetation crushes out human existence, and for the most part, habitation occurs in a relatively narrow strip of earth between the forest and the sea. One is thus deeply humbled by nature's presence, aware of its infinitude, its endurance, and yet also its tolerance, in allowing humans to hug the

shores of the constantly replenishing sea. Creatures of the earth tend to be the domesticated animals brought by Europeans.



Fig. 3: Reproduction of Gauguin's home, Maison du jour, in Atuona, Hiva Oa, Marquesas.

It is the fish, in their astonishing color, variety, complexity that overwhelm the senses. The markets are full of this exceptional bounty. And the fish in Gauguin's paintings—in the cliffs of *Pape Moe* (Basel, private collection), in the pages of the notebooks, are evidence of a worldly paradise both generous and strange. The animals on shore can seem fantastic to the foreign eye: the multi-colored rooster in *D'où venons-nous ? Que sommes-nous ? Où allons nous ?* is, in fact, as colorful in real life as in the masterpiece in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The little Gecko lizards that crawl through the margins of many paintings are a very real presence in this Eden. And their presence may be curious but not welcome: one of my first overnights out of Papeete was in a picturesque over-water bungalow built into a tree near Faaone.

An unforgettable shock was to look up from the bed and to discover the ceiling covered as with a blanket of the little creatures. When they started to plop onto the bed itself, I found their charm had vanished, and so had the allure of the Gauguinesque hut by the sea.

Yet the light of the tropics was exceptional, and merits the praise almost every travel writer gives it. In late afternoon, deep hues of purple and green emerge in the valleys and areas of vegetation, a time of day American painter John LaFarge called the hour of purple. These hues, when mixed with the very high key tones of ubiquitous red and orange flowers, echo the hues of paintings I see annually at the Art Institute of Chicago. It may be a post-impressionist palette, but it is one grounded in the observation of a tropical biosphere that nurtures spectacularly colorful flora, unknown to most European gardens.

There is also the issue of confronting the moist, fragrance-laden atmosphere in Polynesia. As one steps off the plane, the humidity strikes. It is denser, almost suffocating, as one travels toward the equator at the Marquesas. In such an environment, where one's clothes cling desperately to the body, one is quick to understand why people prefer skimpier clothes, and why Gauguin went "native" in this climate, and found himself arrested for bathing nude, having violated French colonial law. One's relationship to the air is more intense, and perhaps one is more acutely aware of the physical environment than in Paris. And finally, and simply, no place on earth smells like Tahiti or the Marquesas. Prime among these are distinctive fragrances of the tiare gardenia, with which modern visitors are greeted at the airport today, or the ylang-ylang flowers in the Marquesas flower garlands that are so overpowering as to cause nausea in the novice visitor. And the pervasive smell on the streets of *monoi* oil slathered on the skin of local and tourist alike, a mixture of coconut oil and smashed *tiare* flowers, is unlike any perfumed mixture in America. My greatest regret now, each time I leave Tahiti, is to leave behind these scents; it is with sad reluctance I turn over my flower and fruit necklaces to Los Angeles "food and drug" authorities who strictly limit their introduction to America. I admit that I once smuggled a dozen tiare flowers into the US for a special birthday

party, and parsed them out like gold to friends who still comment on the intensity of the fragrance. With these sensations infusing my memory, rereading *Noa Noa*, (Gauguin's fictional travel journal written in France in 1893 after his first Tahitian voyage) is a different experience (Gauguin, 1985). The very title means fragrant in Tahitian. And after travel to Polynesia, one can no longer see this text, written back in Paris in 1893, as primarily a document of the taste for Symbolist synaesthesia. Rather, Gauguin's references to the heady smells of Polynesia register deeply as non-visual touchstones of a markedly different physical realm, one where sensations of the nose demand attention in concert with, even in priority over, the sensations of the eye.

There is also in Polynesia vast inspiration for a sculptor attracted to distinctive natural materials. An education room at a nature preserve I toured in the Marquesas had samples of dozens of unusually colored and textured woods for our inspection. Gauguin may have known of such amazing exotic stuffs in advance of his travels (especially from colonial displays at the World's Fair of 1889; Tréhin, 2003:63), but his sustained confrontation with them in situ and in great abundance resulted in new artistic applications. His use of nacre (mother of pearl) or of the rose wood or iron wood in his sculptures shows him making an art OF the islands themselves, as much as ABOUT his experience there. A striking case in point is *Idol with a shell* of 1893 (Musée d'Orsay). Moreover, Gauguin's use of a rough jute material (like burlap) from local copra sacking, rather than imported linen canvas, as the support for such major canvases as *D'où venons-nous ? Que sommes-nous ? Où allons-nous ?* testifies not only to his impoverished budget, but also to his inventiveness in using local materials while seeking a new art. He advanced his modernist primitivist aesthetic by literally working his way through the materials of the islands.

For all of these encounters with a dominant and alluring physical nature, it was Gauguin's encounters with Polynesian people and culture that profoundly marked his artistic production. Indeed today, one still observes a range of skin tones and island types in any Polynesian airport, mixed in with the Asian and white populations that were already

dominant in Gauguin's time. Papeete is a tourist and business center with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century amenities one would now expect. Yet if one drives out of the city to the back villages of the island, one still sees women wearing nothing but a western-style bra and a pareu wrap, bathing at mid day in the rivers that run to the sea. The visual snapshots echo some of Gauguin's motifs, until one spots the cars, satellite dishes, or the American police shows on the T.V. screens visible through the front doors. Some of my Tahitian acquaintances still worry about the presence of tupapau spirits once it is dark; as a historian, one has a new respect for local traditions of spirituality, when one sees it still has the power to scare children and unnerve old men. And some of the civil ceremonies of Gauguin's time continue, with modern vitality. Notable among these is the annual Bastille Day heiva, or dance festival, on Bastille Day. The festival is introduced by an initial parade of French military power (cannon salutes included), and then is followed by days of exuberant dance spectacles performed by troops from all of the French Polynesian islands. The dances have recuperated, or have re-invented, some of the sexual energies the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries attempted to eradicate from the art form. But today's contests still reveal that colonial tension between the frame of the French national holiday and the exuberant explosion of local identities.

Behind these varied encounters with travel, one that underlies them all is the inescapable encounter with subjectivity - with the self, as one discovers the elsewhere. On these trips, I have often experienced what I would call a double foreignness. On a recent business trip to Honolulu, the continuities with American mainland culture are so numerous that at times I forgot I was in Polynesia (on an island the Americans ripped from the Hawaiians in a shocking coup). In contrast, the experience of being an American in French Polynesia is quite distinct. The infrastructure of the French colonial government is always there - the banks, the post office, the military. I suspect Gauguin felt as at home in Papeete in ways I feel at home in Honolulu. Perhaps my sensations - of feeling doubly foreign in Tahiti - allows me to realize how Gauguin may have experienced Auckland, a city with notable British inflection, in which he responded to the visual legacies of the Maori through the

overlay of an intermediate British presence. A double layer of unfamiliarity may have invited a more intense response from him, on this, his second trip to Polynesia. Moreover, being such a double foreigner can have its advantages. I have found repeatedly that my American status made it easier for Tahitian collectors to show me objects they would prefer to keep “secret” from local French museum authorities. And certainly the American status of historian Henry Adams and John LaFarge made it easier for them to gain the trust and collaboration the Teva-line family including Queen Marau, as they compiled their history of local ruling families in 1893 (Childs, 2008).

Travel can alter not just the intensity of one’s perceptions, but the nature of attention itself. When one travels, one reads differently. What you read at home in the library or café, often makes sense in a different way when read at the very location where it was written, or at the site the text describes. Reading travel accounts by Cook is far more riveting when done in Tahiti – as both John LaFarge and I know. The experience of place opens up the capacity for localized memories. On site, the experiences of the text are now sharply relevant, and the local names are vibrantly present in the front of one’s consciousness. I think here of Gauguin’s absorption with Moerenhout’s account of life in the South Seas, a Dutch-authored ethnography he devoured during his first year in Tahiti (Moerenhout, 1837). For me, the experience of landing in New Zealand on the very day Sir Edmund Hillary died in January 2008, and then going to the local museum on a day they opened a tribute exhibition of flowers and memory books devoted to this local hero of mountaineering and international diplomacy seemed to require of me that I read about his heroic climb of Mt Everest with Tenzing Norgay in 1953. I could not stop reading about it on the plane on the way home. I am sure I had never given Everest a second thought before that experience. This is perhaps a variation of the rule of the power of serendipity in the traveler’s experience.

If texts make a place seem more alive, encounters with people who are links to local history are even more compelling. This is simply the impact of spontaneous scholarly generosity and good will, and it is the

kind of exchange that makes one love one's work. On my first trip to do research, I was greatly aided by my many conversations with a local authority, Swedish anthropologist Bengt Danielsson (Fig. 4). He provided introductions, loaned me texts, and raised questions of historical interest. He had, in the 1950s, interviewed many Polynesians who had known Gauguin's family and friends, and he thus seemed a semi-direct source to the prime subjects of my study. For my husband John Klein, who came along in 1991 to work on Matisse's trip to Tahiti of 1930, history was even kinder. We enjoyed, through Danielsson, an introduction to Mme Pauline Schyle, Matisse's Tahitian guide who still had a good memory and a gracious spirit in 1991. These extended interviews with key local voices brought the historical picture sharply into focus in a way that enhanced our scholarship and our memories immeasurably.



Fig. 4: The author with anthropologist Bengt Danielsson in his study in Tahiti, 1990 (Photo credit: John Klein).

And then of course there is the immediate power of the indigenous art one encounters on site. A basic premise of Gauguin studies is that his modernist primitivism was an aesthetic agenda greatly inspired by his extended encounter with Marquesan, Tahitian and Easter Island art and also with the art of the Maori of New Zealand (Peltier, 2003). I teach these connections in my most basic survey classes on modern art. But it took going to Auckland and standing in the galleries of the Auckland Museum where I could study the pieces Gauguin saw himself in 1895, to make a direct connection between the imposing Maori storehouse Te Puawai o Te Arawa that he studied, and the distinctive sculptures he later made to place in front of his own *Maison du jouir* in Atuona. Confronting in person the scale, the color, the mother-of-pearl inset eyes of the decorated Maori houseposts allowed me to perceive a critical resemblance between those stylized ancestral Maori figures, and the sculptures Gauguin carved of a local priest, whom Gauguin dubbed *Père Paillard*, and his lover, *Thérèse* (Washington, National Gallery D.C. and private collection). In the library, I had drawn the connection instead to Easter Island *moai*. I was, simply, way off the mark.

Another insight into Gauguin's late career came recently as I made my way home from a conference in Melbourne and a brief research trip to New Zealand. It was, in short, a dreadful trip, one punctuated by cancelled planes, overcrowded airports and long delays, and resulted in an odyssey of 72 miserable hours in transit home. I swore I'd never travel again, anywhere. Then I realized how simple this trip was, in comparison to the many arduous world voyages made by Gauguin. The literature usually portrays his final two years in Hiva Oa as his last chosen retreat. Yet his letters reveal he was thinking seriously of returning to Spain and France (Gauguin, 1922:164). Given his deteriorating health, I think it likely it was the sheer logistics and fiendish impediments of travel in 1903 that kept him in the Marquesas those last two years. A final reflection on travel is that, in general, it is simply far easier not to do it. And doing so much of it was, I now understand, an inherent part of Gauguin's overall artistic project. And with that, I am off to the library, to bury myself for a while in research, before daring to pack my bags again.



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