

FROM PŌ TO AŌ:

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF FILMMAKING IN THE PACIFIC

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ABSTRACT

The Pacific islands have long been at the heart of European and American imaginations. Since 1898 these isles, real and imaginary, have been the background for every kind of ethnological inquiry, moral play, idyll, and adventure on film. Today, on the cusp of the centenary of Pacific filmmaking, for those not living in it, the Pacific is known almost exclusively through the cinema. This thesis investigates this century's Pacific films to reveal a tension between the factual and fictional. This interplay is not without meaning in an age of decolonization and is mirrored in the frequent disparity between non-indigenous visions of the Pacific as fantasy and alternate visions of islands as home. The persistence of such concerns over time and space suggests that this body of film be understood as an *oceanic cinema* which maintains and transforms our perception of the Pacific and of Pacific Islanders. Thus, this cinema has a currency in the political economy of Pacific places, and my analysis opens a window on our contemporary situation and a perspective on the past.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCING AN OCEANIC CINEMA

Deep in Manoa valley, it is difficult not to get used to rainbows falling like so many drops of rain and the illusory play of light makes a colorful screen of the sky. While linguists and semioticians fight tooth, claw, and flipper over whether language structures thought or language is thought, a less contentious query can be posed as a basic litmus test of cultural affinity. Are such symbolic and perceptual distinctions, as culture and language impose, translated into structural differences in technologies of representation? Intuitively, the answer is yes. Without moving too far from the spectral play of light, one feels wholly assured, therefore, noting that the category of Pacific islands film is a natural research object. What the perimeters of this category are, how the practice of filmic production differs for those who are indigenous to the region from those who are not, and how the products of Pacific islands filmmaking might be understood to affect and engage global economies of representation are primary concerns for the research course here laid out. This thesis builds toward a broader understanding of filmmaking in the Pacific. In it, I attempt to examine the recent trends, especially that of Pacific islander filmmaking in Polynesia, which are now recasting and often inverting many of the expectations about what constitutes the Pacific in and on film.

Of initial significance to this inquiry is the very idea of the Pacific and of the Pacific islands. By claiming Pacific islands filmmaking as my research object, I maintain an opposition to the idea of the primacy of local, national, or cultural concerns. Categorizations based on these levels of abstraction may less reflect reality than the need to subdivide complex wholes into simplified parts in the purely human quest for meaning. Part of me readily accepts this kind of objectification because of the difficulties inherent in investigating cultural differences and their ontology. Such terms as Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia are, thus, meaningful to me, if problematic. However, recent critical and theoretical movements—most notably in physics and

abstract mathematics—have created a vocabulary and paradigm for holistically modeling a complex reality. This trend is interestingly paralleled by social and political movements within and without the academy such as is well represented in Hau`ofa's *Our Sea of Islands*. Hau`ofa notes that such terms as Polynesia though initially arbitrary have become ensconced in (neo)colonial systems of power and meaning. Following Hau`ofa's lead, this thesis attempts to remain sensitive to issues of power and distinction, and to eschew the construction of simple meanings for complex localities. In so doing, I navigate between the still waters of specificity which best clarify the particulars of historical objects such as peoples, islands, and culture areas and between the rather more stormy waters of complex systems which may offer occasional perspectives outside the necessary but arbitrary boundaries of my inquiry.

As editor of the *Moving Images* guide, I have access to a comprehensive and growing textual database of films made in and about the Pacific. Trends which emerge from this body of data corroborate this sense that there are substantial conventions and genres which have been evoked without regard to national and cultural boundaries. This data also runs counter to previous perceptions of Pacific filmmaking such as Douglas's assertion that "films about the Pacific Islands do not lend themselves all that readily to generalization or categorization, and perhaps for this reason have been, with a few exceptions, largely neglected as a field of study." From my last year of work with this record—films produced in the region between 1898 and 1996—it is clear that the themes and tropes, shots and visions, trends and genres also run the gamut of this century's film production. I do not, however, expect the boundaries between genres to be always easily distinguished. For instance, it is important to note how the conventions of Hollywood's vision of the 'South Seas' sometimes interpenetrate well-intended works in realist styles by social scientists and conversely, how Hollywood appropriates ethnographic conventions to legitimate mythical or fantastic visions. Such trends as encompass the scope of this film production need be commented on if only so the categories which they

delineate can be questioned. Because these trends have not been well documented or appreciated in the past, their comparison is essential to understanding local and regional filmmaking.

I use the term *oceanic cinema* to express the idea that the history of Pacific filmmaking resulted in a unified, if complexly related, body of film. Much of my argument may be understood as an analysis of why the idea of an oceanic cinema is both accurate and appropriate. For instance, the conventions of place in the cinematic imagination of the Pacific—maintaining subtle differences based on pre-existing and somewhat external systems of meaning production and circulation, such as the western notion of ‘race’—demonstrate that while the real Pacific is not monolithic in culture or history, the imaginary Pacific may be. In the imaginary Pacific—and any familiarity with the principles of Pacific places as represented on film in *Gilligan’s Island* bears this out—the imponderable vastness of the sea and the physical distances and variable cultural and social spaces which separate and distinguish one people from another is reduced to an (in)comprehensible singularity. Because of such transpositions in film, the Pacific is both real and imaginary.

When I think of the Pacific islands, the *image* of Oceania and its inclusive realms Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia is never far afield. What basis in reality does this vision possess? Is it complimentary or contradictory to the *idea* of such areas? Imagined geocultural spaces are defined by multiple discourses within and without the region. For instance, the anthropological constructions of cultural difference and affinity among Pacific peoples have been in circulation in western minds since Magellan’s voyage. The significance of the interplay of images and region-defining ideas of Oceania to this inquiry on Pacific film is interpretive. Whatever the role of any single film image or progression of images, Pacific films as a whole define, maintain, and transform the idea of Oceania, of a single mythical Pacific, as an emergent, durable, and unique cultural space.

Anthropologists have often modeled culture, and the social spaces established by the systems of its usage, in terms of a shared body of values, beliefs, and practices. The assumption has always been that cultural sharing is circumscribed by the boundaries of the tribe, clan, or people under investigation. In the classic mode of ethnological analysis, the model allowed little or no room for perceiving how memes—tokens of meaning—could circulate within and without group boundaries. This ceaseless circulation is, however, precisely the character of the idea of Oceania. In a very real sense, this idea is shared by those who experience it through academic abstraction or theatrical imagination and by those for whom it informs a sense of identity and practice in daily life. How, exactly, this semiotic system of interaction functions in the day to day is beyond the scope of this thesis, although a feeling for some of this system's ebbs and flows might emerge through an examination of the history of Pacific filmmaking.

Because one can perceive that the idea of a cultural space is shared and because of the intensely political nature of history, the geocultural ideas created by a century's Pacific filmmaking need to be decolonized. This is so not least because many Pacific films were funded or otherwise supported by colonial regimes. Recently, many Pacific islander and pakeha filmmakers alike have begun to examine and challenge (neo)colonial entanglement in the production of their films. Hopefully, by being sensitive to this issue and by illuminating aspects of this history which may intersect with the colonial endeavors of various metropolitan governments, this thesis contributes to a process of decolonization in its own small way.

Some elements, such as class or gender, may be cross-cutting or intrusive in all films and might be seen as focal points for decolonizing efforts. Current trends in film studies including recent theories of third world and other cinemas of opposition use these elements to offer the perspective of global context. While I embrace such possibilities of comparison (especially where they reveal characteristics of colonial enterprises independent of local specificities), I am not writing this paper within film studies and will not be examining the

critical film theory used by scholars in that discipline. Thus, I do not set out in Chapter Two, where I most closely examine individual films, to formulate a formal film grammar such as Worth and Adair achieve in their seminal *Through Navajo Eyes*. This would be a fertile and useful research project in Pacific filmmaking. Somewhat differently, this thesis takes for its model an interdisciplinary approach. My analysis is three-pronged: historical, textual and critical, with each chapter devoted to one direction.

In the second chapter, I examine the historical context of the filmic reproduction of the 'real' in the region and document among other trends the ever more frequent production of Pacific islander made films. Beginning with general statements concerning the history of film globally, the chapter essays into the particulars of regional film production including works by non-indigenous filmmakers. There has not been a great deal of work on the history of film in the region generally, although the history of filmmaking in a few places (Australia most notably but recently including Hawaii and New Zealand) is now being recorded. The last decade has seen a number of papers presented at various conferences covering a range of topics related to regional film production, including Pacific islander filmmaking. There are some texts pertaining to particular film titles and directors who have worked in the region as well as a growing body of reviews and criticism including seminal works by filmmakers working in their own communities in New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tahiti, and elsewhere in the Pacific. Even so, the near-absolute analytical neglect of film production, distribution, and consumption in and about the Pacific reveals an unexpected facet of the cultural politics of small communities during an era of decolonization and globalization. Indeed, one might interpret such neglect as a rather sinister example of the strange collaboration of the academy with processes of neo-colonialism.

Most cogently to the wider thesis, this chapter lays the foundations for a history of Pacific filmmaking to which the category of *Pacific islander filmmaking* can be opposed,

compared, and challenged in an attempt to qualify what is meant, at least by this author, by this term and why this term might be understood as helpful at all. Some might argue Pacific islander filmmaking would be better subdivided into categories such as Maori film, Tahitian film, Papua New Guinea film. However, such distinctions neglect the numerous thematic and compositional similarities in works from across the region. For instance, the use of video recording equipment in local communities across the region may follow certain pan-Pacific trends as may filmmakers' motivations and responses to previous films. The third chapter will use this ground to approach the practice of Pacific islander filmmaking in island communities and to show in detail how the production of tropes, frames, and other filmic conventions may lead to a series of cultural, national, or regional cinema which are distinct if not wholly independent from the continental cinema. Certainly, some understanding of video production in the region is necessary for any understanding of Pacific film and filmmaking after 1980.

The third chapter addresses the minimum of anthropological and film theory necessary to examine specific instances of Pacific islands film as closely as is necessary to engage the global and local discourses mentioned above. Some discipline informed questions pertinent to this chapter are: what is identity? How is identity created and circulated in (re)presentations? How would and do members of communities film human practices differently than transient visitors? Do visitor's intentions play a role in lessening the difference? For instance, would an anthropologist film an event any differently than a tourist? How does the camera capture and record the practices of daily life and those elusive atmospheres which color any interpretation of them in the Pacific? What is the relation between the purely real and the politics of imagination? No one can hope to answer definitively any of these questions, however such responses as are generated will help to formulate opinions on issues which do need to be addressed. This brief essay plunges into the coralline depths of specificity in order to investigate Pacific filmmakers' actual film texts.

The fourth chapter is a minor phenomenology of film. This section offers a frame in which the narrative and political practice of filmmaking with utmost significance for epistemologies of perception, interpretation, and cultural transmission may be explored without treading too heavily on the contested ground of elder disciplines. Of the questions which a phenomenological approach should help resolve, the most significant is: which techniques in the filmmaker's toolbox are susceptible to variation on the basis of cultural identity? The goal here is to articulate the boundaries of what can be described as Pacific islander filmmaking.

This chapter brings together all the disparate tangents which a mind and writer is likely to have wandered off on during the course of any project and places the result in the global context of cinematic production. I do not presume to believe that any complete explanations for regional filmmaking phenomena is found, or that any objective truth come to over the course of this work. I do hope that a clearer picture of trends in the history of regional and island based filmmaking emerges alongside a greater appreciation for the category of Pacific islander made film and its roots and directions on both celluloid and video. Most importantly, this chapter addresses the central question of the thesis. How is the changing relation between non-indigenous visions of the Pacific islander as *other* in largely imaginary lands and alternate visions of islanders as *self* in real locales revealed in the ongoing tension between competing conventions of representation in filmic productions? The answer is not without challenges to others' and this author's own understanding. At best, I hope to induce the reader to consider for herself the questions and material presented herein regardless of collusion with any of my conclusions. At worst, I hope to share with her a few potent draughts of the ocean's cinematic grog.

A note on the selection of films is appropriate here. Throughout this thesis, I focus on films which are likely to be readily available to, or already viewed by, potential readers. The extensive use of esoteric

or not easily acquired films would require lengthy descriptions of each film in order to adequately contextualize my arguments—space better devoted to analysis and interpretation. Where I introduce films less likely to be familiar to readers, I attempt to provide a brief description of what I perceive as the cogent features either within the text or within the footnotes. While any analysis of a history, in this case of Pacific filmmaking, which addresses anything less than every single atom in its quantum dance is less-than-complete and therefore to some extent arbitrary, my hope is that readers' own experiences of this body of film will provide sufficient grist for the mills of corroboration and exception.

CHAPTER II
NEGOTIATING THE PŌ

This world that people believe they want so much is only true in the movies because people make the movies.

—Albert Wendt in *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*

In the increasingly hypermediated nineties, there is no doubt that film has become the medium of human representation for this century and perhaps the most powerful tool of social influence yet conceived. What aspect of daily life across the globe has been left unmarked with the imprimata of the moving image? The superimposition of filmic over literary, graphic, and even photographic conventions bespeaks that the potency of the form lies in a method of communication which differs from previous techniques in depth as well as breadth¹. If this situation of contemporary epistemology is even partially as dependent on understanding the moving image as I have begun to suggest, then the essential necessity of exploring the representations and conventions constitutive of the Pacific islands in film is immediately obvious for anyone interested in Pacific history or Pacific studies since, in such an age, the islands are essentially *known*, for those who do not live in them, as they are mediated by the moving image.

That such an understanding could be undertaken in the form of a historical essay seems wholly appropriate. The ideas of the Pacific which are currently engendered by films do not spring from the minds of this decade's directors independently of past productions. Rather, contemporary images of the Pacific are repetitions, reformations, and reversals of past representations. The problems of this research are thus historiographical and textual. These two areas of concern find a common ground in the general lack of previous work on the interpretation of Pacific films as constitutive of a textual genre—a *cinema* in film terminology.

¹ Depth characterizes the quality of meaningful expression while breadth suggests the notion of *broadcasting*, of reaching the masses en masse. Only thirty years ago, in *On Writing* and related texts, Derrida argued convincingly that the very nature of post (pre?) Guttenburg human thought was graphic. I wonder if our increasingly millenarian perspective suggests, rather differently, that the basic logics of thought now follow cinematic conventions? Do I laugh with Seinfeld because he is fundamentally humorous or because of the conventions of his positionality? The qualities of Seinfeld's framing, posturing, complex and ironically acomplex social relations—the filmic conventions of the field of images which constitute the show *Seinfeld*—may be primarily responsible for my apprehension of his humor.

Film texts from and of the Pacific have, for the most part, been interpreted and understood idiosyncratically. It is the historiographic task of this chapter to show that these films were not produced singularly but followed trends and patterns which both structured and were structured by broader social and cultural conditions. It is the textual work of this thesis to establish some possible directions and understandings of the relation between historical trends in Pacific films and the social-cultural matrix which produced them diachronically.

The essence of the relation between the system of image production and the real and daily lives of peoples in the Pacific islands as mediated by film is not the grail of my research though it is the central problem for visual anthropology. The substance of film may be such that it is impossible to work backwards from film to the “real and daily lives” of Pacific peoples. Film is a simulacra—something which stands in place of and (re)presents—whose relation to the original reality is that of the good man wrongfully blamed for crimes committed by his evil long-lost and unimagined twin (Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images*). My intention in this chapter is to critically, respectfully, and intertextually attempt to map out some of the boundaries, conventions, and limitations of what I term an *oceanic cinema* as it developed over time. By which I mean that interdependent body of work which resulted from the process of filmmaking in the islands over the last ninety-nine years. I am aware that in some disciplines the term *oceanic* may refer to ocean life and marine worlds broadly, regardless of geographical location. I use this term in the fashion of the discipline of anthropology in which it refers to Pacific peoples and places. However, in that Pacific image production creates representations of island life that extend beyond purely geographical boundaries, the term’s delocalized connotations may also be appropriate. With this in mind, my method in this thesis is to examine the textual and contextual history of filmmaking in the Pacific in order to suggest the character of the diachronic semiotic process bridging the physical and experiential gaps between island, image, and global imagination.

As I began to outline the flow of this chapter and the essential tenor of its thesis, it occurred to me that the most appropriate organizational logic is genealogical. However, as they would in any historical phylogeny, the themes did not follow strictly genotypical directions. At times, they branched and followed tangents. Attempting to be conscious of the need to reign in the divergent tendencies of my argument, I begin with an examination of previous analyses of filmmaking in the region. Next, I turn to the technical mechanics of the production of the moving image and how the system of image production found its way into the islands. This section is followed by my own surveys of film production in the islands by decade, sensitive to location. The scope of this survey is neither infinite nor exhaustive, rather being limited to first steps and suggestions.

The Pacific islands have never been far from the beating heart of western imaginations of the exotic, romantic, and dangerous. Even so, little attention has been paid to the history of films made in and about the region. The last eight years have seen virtually all the analysis of oceanic film as has been produced. Most notable among writings on Pacific filmmaking are Mellon's *Images of Micronesia on Film and Video* (1992), a brief survey of Micronesian filmmaking; Reyes' *Made in Paradise* (1995) which looks most closely at Hawaii and also touches briefly, if somewhat inaccurately, on the history of "South Seas" filmmaking²; and Norman Douglas' *Electric Shadows in the South Seas* (1993) which attempts a comprehensive general history of filmmaking in the region. A number of other publications have recently focused on individual filmmakers, especially in New Zealand, and their work. And there has been, since the twenties, critical and scholarly interest in name-brand directors like Flaherty, Murnau, and Ford who, for one reason or another, produced films in the Pacific. However, none of these analysts found any broader context for Pacific films than local and occasionally tribal concerns. For instance, Maori filmmaker Merata Mita's films *Bastion Point* (1980) and

² Reyes uses this term to describe any Pacific location not in the State of Hawaii, regardless of relation to actual equatorial delineations.

Patu! (1983) have received critical attention from documentary filmmakers in Australia, England, and the United States for their radical feminist, humanist, and liberationist messages and their appropriationist techniques. Mita combines evening-newsish footage with still photos to create a powerful visual focus overdubbed with a radio announcer's narration. Similarly, the films of Barry Barclay and Lee Tamahori, two other Maori directors, have been much commented on though not to the extent of the pakeha film *The Piano* (1993). However, there is no attempt to ascribe to these films any broader cinematic category than New Zealand 'Maori' filmmakers in spite of the similarities of their themes to those of other products of the late twentieth century cultural renaissance throughout the Pacific. In the mainstream, films like *South Pacific* (1957) have generated a lot of commentary, and certainly influenced a vision of the Pacific in my grandparent's generation—many of whom had seen a very different place during the actual war. Yet, the hundreds of films which might be said to belong to this genre have gone uncommented on as a body of work despite a universal awareness of genre boundaries as demonstrated by the well-understood idea of the 'Pacific war film' or 'south sea romance.'

Perhaps most striking in these three essays on Pacific filmmaking is the absence of any systematic critical attention to, or common articulation of, films produced in this region as constituting a set of genres. These authors, who would seem to have much to gain from some kind of systematic and holistic analysis of Pacific filmmaking tend to examine films like *Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age* (1926), *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1927), and *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas* (1931), even when they do so in detail, within the aesthetic context of Flaherty's or Murnau's work rather than as responding to and mediating a set of ongoing and uniquely local and regional concerns. For the majority of Pacific films, the conventional wisdom seems to be that there is no expectation of any kind of meditation of local concerns since, until recently, most Pacific films were not made for local populations but expressly for global and

metropolitan ones, often in a Hollywood studio lot. However, this seems a base sort of analysis, since even the briefest of glimpses at almost any Pacific film should indicate to anyone at all familiar with Pacific studies that these films were either archetypes for future filmic and social conventions or engaged in a discourse with already existing conventions. Norman Douglas summarizes his position on a systematic analysis of Pacific films quite clearly:

Films about the Pacific islands do not lend themselves all that readily to generalization or categorization, and perhaps for this reason have been, with a few exceptions, largely neglected as a field of study. They do not, after all, constitute a "national cinema" in the sense that Italian, French, British, or German films do; nor do they even display enough unity of purpose to constitute a "regional cinema" in the sense in which that term is sometimes applied to Asian films. The most obvious reason for this, of course, is that the films are overwhelmingly made by outsiders, a condition that is likely to continue, despite the emergence of a small number of Islanders working in the field. Indeed, although one is obliged to use it for the sake of convenience, even the imposition of the expression "Pacific islands films" imparts an artificial sense of unity on a subject of tremendous diversity in approaches, attitudes, techniques, and concerns. (Douglas, 18).

He clarifies the rewards of such an articulation, writing:

The purpose of this survey has not been to impose a single critical perspective on [the films] but to show by some illustrations the remarkable range of material available for study and to hint at some of the ways in which the process of understanding might be advanced. (Douglas, 18).

Without wishing to be overly critical of what is clearly a sensitive statement from a scholar who writes from the high ground of passionate interest in a much neglected area of study, I cannot help but wonder whether Douglas is too modest? too humble? too cautious? here. We are all familiar with such genres as 'the south seas romance,' 'the atoll ethnography,' 'the tapa-making demonstration' and 'the research film into the practice of daily life on an, invariably, small island.' That we all understand such categories immediately defies the first aspect of Douglas' assertion. Furthermore, Douglas neglects to take into account the common experience of the system of colonialism and the process of decolonization. Even acknowledging the innumerable specific differences in the experience of colonialism in different parts of the region, one might reasonably argue that there were an equally innumerable number of similarities. More recently,

the processes of globalism, transnationalism, the rise in regional elites, neo-colonialism, and migration also establish commonalities of experience between island peoples and places.

Although this argument might also be used to define an even broader category, such as Third World cinema, what is important about the processes of modernity here is that they establish contemporary linkages, physical and symbolic, between Pacific peoples.

Historically and representationally, Douglas' analysis also fails to account for the process of creating the Pacific as a object of European and American fascination in a tripartite configuration of difference—Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia—familiar to every westerner since the age of 'Discovery.' The subsequent collapsing of that system of representational differentiation onto singular linguistic signs and ideological symbols such as 'the south-seas,' 'oceania,' '*Polynesia*,' further established commonalities of representation which created the possibility of filming *Bird of Paradise* (1932)³, *Rain* (1932)⁴, and their many subsequent incarnations. In film, Polynesia no longer signifies in opposition to other well-defined culture areas for the lay person, rather, like the term 'south seas', it now stands for some largely mythical idea of a place that had never existed. What is important about *Bird of Paradise* is precisely that it does not express the real reality of some locale but that it establishes and in-itself legitimates what we now perceive as a colonial image of the local.

The same process of inscription and attribution of certain *conventional* expressions of 'islanderness' and 'islandness' prefigured the possibility of producing ethnographic and feature films. In Western traditions, the idea and image of 'islanderness' is a received tradition from

³ A Sailor falls in love with a native girl but loses her to island tradition. This is the tale of love which introduced western audiences to the theme of heroic sacrifice to a fiery volcano god. It has since been remade several times, most notably in 1951, and was recently spoofed in *Joe vs. the Volcano*.

⁴ The second of many translations to the screen of Somerset Maugham's tortured tale of sin and redemption in a paradise lost. The first *Rain* (1928) featured silent star Gloria Swanson and was produced in the States. This (1932) version starred Joan Crawford as Sadie and was filmed on location in Pago Pago with sound. Remade again in 1953 as *Miss Sadie Thomson*, starring Rita Hayworth, this story probably competes with the Bounty for sustained studio and audience interest.

such historically diverse sources as Homer and Shakespeare which includes prototypical cultural debates. For instance, the problem of the noble or not so noble savage is perfectly foreshadowed by Polythemus or Caliban. World War II feature films which take into account any sense of actual places as habitat—in opposition to the militarized and completely uncultured space of the battlefield or navalfield—similarly draw on this tradition of ‘islandness’ (the dangerous fecundity and mystery of the island jungle and people, for example) to facilitate the communication of interpretive frames for diverse audiences.

Reyes, quite differently from Douglas, does not hesitate to delineate genre boundaries or to proceed with a categorization of Pacific films. As the title of his work *Made in Paradise* suggests, it is the location of the filming which serves as a primary indicator of genre for Reyes. This should not be surprising since Reyes is foremost a scholar of film and only somewhere down the line a Pacific scholar, if at all. For film theorists, the location of filming is primary since it is believed that film can never, really, escape (in the sense of ‘communicate more than’) the conditions of its production. These conditions, however, vary greatly and offer Reyes’ perspective fine shadings and distinctions. Place, cast, director, score, and cinematography, film stock, and hue all signify as categorical indicators.

There are several notable characteristics of Reyes’ analysis. Foremost is the apprehension that what he terms a *South Seas Cinema* is a historical process. Though he does not speak explicitly of colonialism, Reyes’ assumption appears to be that this process is currently resulting in the production of Pacific islander filmmakers who are now producing their own visions and versions of the Pacific. Implicit in this notion is an idea that many previous cinematic visions of the Pacific were less than accurate. Reyes explores this idea in a chapter titled *Hawaii and the South Seas: Myth vs. Reality*. However, Reyes approaches the myth of the Pacific in essentially the same manner an American might approach the myths of Paul Bunyon, Johnny Appleseed, or ancient Greece—as textual oddities or impotent fantasies, never as invidious realities which feed

back into the daily lives of islanders and intercultural and international relations. Unfortunately, Reyes participates in this discourse of mythification. Of one topic he writes:

Myth: Cannibalism was a prominent Pacific Island practice: Cannibalism, like human sacrifice, was rarely practiced in Polynesia. It usually involved a powerful enemy who was ingested for his spiritual or cosmological power. Although it was practiced in the Fiji Islands, Marquesas and Papua New Guinea, whose inhabitants are Melanesian, not Polynesian, the stereotypical image of natives with bones through their noses cooking people in pots is a fantasy. (pg. 5)

We could easily spend pages taking this one paragraph apart but Sahlins, Denning, and many others have already done so in great detail elsewhere.⁵ A few observations may serve to distinguish Reyes' impoverished writing style: the Marquesas are Melanesian islands, sacrifice and cannibalism are unrelated practices void of any social matrix of relations, cannibalism can be understood solely in terms of western notions of psychological deviance in the vein of *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and my favorite, Pacific cannibals didn't use pots and wore their bones elsewhere. Without doubt, this paragraph is indicative of the grasp and tenor of Reyes' fascinating logic.

Reyes' analysis of south-seas film myths does provide a set of thematic conventions which may, in no small part, begin to distinguish an oceanic cinema. His list includes: human sacrifice, volcano gods, cannibalism, free-love, sloth, exploitation of natural resources⁶, islanders' lack of culture, the association between contact and material progress, tourism, and the fetishization of the female islander (usually Polynesian) body. The obvious themes missing from this list include those of lost paradise, colonial exploitation (usually through commercial traders and merchant whalers), and the Pacific war (which essentially recast the other conventions in a martial setting, a contemporary manichean conflict for control of islanders' souls).

Unfortunately, Reyes does not systematically explore these themes or the boundaries of this cinema, he prefers simple descriptions of each film and the persons involved in its production.

⁵ By which I mean to suggest that the academic project of these scholars might be understood as the attempt to eradicate the possibility of writing such a text.

⁶ Unbelievably, Reyes lists this as a myth!

However, again I do not wish to be too critical since Reyes well establishes the persistence over time and film a set of conventional concerns even if he does not detail the importance of these concerns outside film buff's minds.

Mellon's approach is somewhat more pointed. Like Reyes, he ponders the possibility of a regional cinema. Mellon suggests that there are four categories into which films made in and about Micronesia fall and that together they could be read as a film literature—a cinema.

Ethnographic and documentary films make up the first category, including purely ethnographic films such as *Voelkenkunliche Film Dokumente Aus Der Sudsee*⁷ (1910) and documentary films of general social criticism such as O'Rourke's *Yap, How Did You Know We'd Like TV?* (1982).⁸

War films including films surrounding the post-war nuclear-military industrial complex such as *Hell in the Pacific* (1968)⁹ or *The Marshall Islands: Living with the Bomb* (1983)¹⁰, in which

Micronesia is more often backdrop than foreground, constitute the second category. Scientific, educational, and research documentaries focusing on the flora, fauna, and geology of the area have also contributed an important aspect to film production in the region such as *Aliens from*

Inner Space (1984).¹¹ Finally, the slowly-growing number of local narrative features and video productions such as the Chuukese *Nothing to Do, Nowhere to Go* (1977) are a radical departure from previous films and need to be accounted for.¹² Mellon's categories, however, are only

broadly thematic and do not distinguish methods of representation of peoples and places, for example, into genres.

⁷ This documentary film features ceremonies, dances, and artistic production from the cultures of the German controlled Pacific.

⁸ In O'Rourke, all the conventions of objectification common to ethnography are inverted so that it is the culture of the filmmaker instead of the filmed which might be said to be on trial.

⁹ Mortal enemies Lee Marvin and the Japanese master-actor Toshiro Mifune learn to depend on each other when stranded together on a small island after a WWII conflict. Filmed entirely in Palau, the film was remade in science fiction as *My Enemy My Ally* (1986) in the eighties when it again won critical acclaim.

¹⁰ Very much an expose into the institution of (non)support for islands and islanders dealing with the effects of massive radiation.

¹¹ An IMAX feature on the lifecosystems of corals and other bathic polyps.

In an age of verdant textuality and intense interest in the study of culture, the Pacific islands may be the only remaining area of the globe not afforded the recognition of regional or national cinemas despite the now well over four thousand films produced in, about, and increasingly by Pacific islanders. Fully half of these films are produced or set in the Pacific islands excluding Hawaii (at least two thousand feature films are made in or about Hawaii alone). Considering the number of films in question, the idea that something constituting a regional cinema is identifiable seems wholly likely. The next step is to establish this cinema's actuality from its probability. To do this one can ask, what issues, problems, techniques, and conventions are found in the practice of oceanic cinema? Though Reyes foreshadowed the answer, to get at these ponderables further it is necessary to delve into the history of filmmaking as a technical, artistic, and meaning-making practice.

A general history of filmmaking

It almost goes without saying that the history of filmmaking has roots as deeply entwined in human imaginations and communicative conventions as any art. Plato, a deeply post-modern philosopher and already writing in an epoch of frission, pastiche, and montage, seems to have well understood the character of filmic representation in his descriptions of the semiotic cave. In this limestone theater of images, a slave is positioned facing a wall onto which a flickering lanternlight's play of light and shadow is cast. Bound to his seat, the slave is fastened in such a way that he is unable to turn his head and thus cannot determine whether the projection results from the backlighting of actual events occurring out of view or represents the illusory sleight of hand of some shadow puppeteer. Indeed, perhaps this is the relation of the individual to culture generally. As human beings awash in a sea of information we are all bound to perceive the world through a cultural lens synchronized to our movements so as to prohibit any looking back through the glass.

¹² Filmed by student of Xavier High School in Chuuk, the film tackles issues of expectation and education on a Pacific island.

Now, on the cusp of the centenary of filmmaking in the Pacific—and almost a century after the first film festival in the region, held in the Auckland opera house in 1898, incidentally the same year Edison produced the first film in the Pacific with a short from Hawaii—any glance or engagement with representations and images of Pacific islanders and their cultures reveals precisely the limitations Plato describes above. Filmmakers and anthropologists, actors and audiences are all forced to struggle with communicating deeply subjective human experiences. As if this were not problematic enough, contemporary film production does not occur in a historical vacuum. Rather, new films may be seen as focal points for all that has past in the same vein. For Pacific peoples the juxtaposition of past and present is particularly troubled since, as anyone who has ever pondered *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1927)¹³, *South Pacific* (1957)¹⁴, or *Cannibal Tours* (1987)¹⁵ knows, so rarely has the camera allowed what we all, consciously or not, wish to believe—that the image on the screen is shadow and not illusion.

The tension between these two elements has more to it than some film critic's debate over the ontogeny and communication of meaning in works of mechanical reproduction. The essence of Plato's cavern of images is both the anticipation of the epistemological quandary of an audience *and* the suggestion that a critical facet of the film experience is the matrix of power relations enlaced by mediations of moving images.

An aspect of these relations is the circulation and distribution of films. The notice paid, the audiences captivated. In the film industry, metaphorically generalized to some single signifying process, festivals such as the Hawaii International Film Festival, the New Zealand

¹³ Robert Flaherty left this, his second project in the Pacific, because of artistic differences with the co-producer. The film eventually won an academy award for cinematography and was based loosely on an autobiographical trilogy by Tahiti aficionado Frederick O'Brien.

¹⁴ This is a loosely based rewrite of the Madam Butterfly story. Set in the linguistically improbable and physically mythical Bali Hai, it is a war-time tale of gender, power, and miscengenization—an ugly word, an ugly film, and a painfully infectious musical score.

¹⁵ A self-reflexive documentary (ethnographic) film by O'Rourke.

International Film Festival, and the much less publicized South Seas Film Festival¹⁶ are responsible for reinterpreting and reversing the cinematic illusions of culture and place created by the institutionalized centers of film production in Hollywood, London, Bombay, and Hong Kong. However, through the global success of their systems of distribution, these metropolitan centers of image production are far more likely to sway our perceptions of the world. How did this state of affairs come about and from what series of events did the image production system of the industrial age—Marx’s opiate and McLuhan’s *massage* of the masses—arise are questions which may be totally relevant here. One might ponder the answers to these questions all day without scratching their much debated surface. Indeed, these are two of the fundamental questions of contemporary sociology and media studies and are really the focus of an entirely different thesis.¹⁷ Pertinent here is the acknowledgment of the system of mass distribution and rapid circulation of images, including filmic images, and the representations which they signify.

The technology of filmic reproduction did not long post-date the art of photography. Its roots lie entangled in enlightenment and pre-industrial mechanistic toys. Most impressive of these was the *zootrope*, a spinning chamber into which a slit was cut in such a way that the user could peer through the slit in order to see the inner wall of the spinning chamber on which was painted a series of images. As the chamber rotated, the user perceived the motion of the painted images as they moved past the slit in a kind of stroboscopic effect. American inventors such as Edison and his European counterparts did not dally long in extending the photographic image from two to four dimensions through such technical innovations. It was a matter of only a few years between the emergence of film’s inventors and their art from garages and studios in New Jersey, Paris, and Berlin into the light of day and the descent of camera wielding filmographers

¹⁶ Since 1991, held annually in the Academy of Arts, Honolulu, by the South Seas Cinema Society, this festival features rare footage and archival films. In 1995, this festival screened the 1933 *In the Wake of the Bounty* (unbelievably the second Bounty movie filmed *before* Nordoff and Hall’s much ballyhooed book; nothing remains of the Australian original but stills) which gave New Zealander Erol Flynn his first film role.

onto global populations.¹⁸ Of course, the euroamerican interest in ‘imagining’ and ‘mediating’ the other was, in itself, nothing new. Bernard Smith and others have described the process by which western imaginations of the Pacific were formulated via the productive praxis of painting, writing, photography, and stereoscopy, in and about the Pacific islands. Of the Pacific, Smith notes that the practice of painting, photography, stereoscopy, and filmmaking in and about the real islands did not result in the mechanical reproduction of region. A modest survey of these films will begin to unfold what actually was produced.

A brief contextual survey of films in and about the Pacific Islands

Since context implies that which is *with* but not *in* any given text, the idea of context may be seen to operate relatively. The context for a film may include its location, date, director’s personality, and social movements such as world war. More broadly, the context for a film may also be the matrix of meanings established over time in which an audience’s interpretation is situated. With this in mind, before I attempt to examine the history of oceanic cinema through some of its texts, it is necessary to address the historical context in which their production is located.

The two main currents in the history of Pacific filmmaking—those films which are expressly fictional and those which claim to document reality in the manner of ethnography—are generally thought to be easily distinguished. However, the distinctions between these two modes of filmic representation have been blurred by recent theoretical positions, including my own, which suggest that all reality is filtered by cultural and personal lenses.¹⁹ The question of objective reality aside, the significant differences between the intentions of filmmakers who produce documentary films and those who produce fictional ones may not, in themselves, have

¹⁷ See anything by Baudrillard or about McLuhan’s arguments, or Bordieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* for relevant bibliographies.

¹⁸ Edison in New Jersey, the Lumieres and Melies brothers in Paris, for instance.

¹⁹ Cinema theorists might come to the same conclusion by pointing to the failure of Rouch, Marin and the genre of *Cinema Verite* to establish compelling conventions of real reality as opposed to a kind of simulated reality.

led to the production of two wholly distinct bodies of film. Despite filmmakers' intentions, the blurring of fictive and factual modes of production affects any attempt at discrete interpretation. The *exotic* or 'primitive' matter of both modes results in something like a doubling of the suspension of disbelief. When truth is as strange as fiction, then fiction becomes as potent a representation of an (un)reality as truth.

The first films produced in the region—by Edison in Hawaii in 1896 and by one of the Melies brothers in Australia circa 1900, and the several short features taken by itinerant film artists and scientific expeditions circumambulating the globe—all possessed a documentary quality. Simultaneously, these films all maintain an aura of unreality, they cultivate an atmosphere of romantic otherness. This tension between narrative and documentary styles is the most poignant conventions of Pacific filmmaking and the most significant characteristic of oceanic cinema.

Pre 1920s

Prior to 1920, films were only produced sporadically about or throughout the Pacific islands. As I mentioned above, the American filmic intrusion in the region began in 1898, when Edison's film crews took a beautiful sequence in Hawaii consisting of a long pan, probably from boat or canoe, from the wharf area of Aloha Towers to the Moana Surfrider.²⁰ The pan was later cross-cut with sequences of haole vacationers and Hawaiians playing together at the beach adorned in the bathing costumes of the day and a short shot of an outrigger catching a wave into shore.²¹ It is difficult to imagine a more prescient archetype for filmmaking in Hawaii and elsewhere in the Pacific. Indeed, it could not have been easy then to imagine the extent to which the post-Kingdom fate of Hawaii would become entangled in tourism. It is much easier to imagine, however, that such images of Victorian release and native pleasure were precisely the

²⁰ Possibly the *Royal Hawaiian*?

²¹ While this study explicitly focuses on the Pacific Islands other than Hawaii, the relation between films of Hawaii and elsewhere in the Pacific needs to be further examined.

desired quantity by early American theater-goers.²² European filmmakers also entered the region in 1898. Self-described “professors,” Gousman and Hou, brought a moving picture show to Auckland in that year and held a ‘film festival’ in the Opera House.²³ The early European passion for film is reflected in the record. Films made in the teens were produced in German occupied Micronesia and New Guinea and in New Zealand. The film *Neu-Guinea* (1904 - 1906) offers a view of life among the people of German New Guinea in the first years of this century. *Voelkenkunliche Filmmodokumente Aus Der Sudsee* (1910) documents aspects of the cultures of the Pacific under German control including various ceremonial dances of the Caroline Islands, Chuuk, and the Bismark Archipelago. The latter part of this short film focuses on pottery, weaving, and fire making. In New Zealand, *Poi Dances at Whakarewarewa* (1910) is a two minute fragment showing haka poi (dance performed with poi balls—small globes swung dexterously from the end of cords of varying lengths) performed at Whakarewarewa. The first world war intervened in any sustained film production in the Pacific through most of the teens. However, 1919 saw the production of several films of Maori life. *He Pito Whakaatua A Te Maori Na James McDonald* contains footage taken by James McDonald for the Dominion (now the National) Museum starting in 1907 with some kind of break during the war and resuming again between 1919-1923 (the years the prints were released). The films include various scenic attractions for the Tourist Department and ethnographic studies for the museum. *Te Hui Aroha Ki Turanga/Gisborn Hui Aroha* (1919) is a record of the week-long Hui Aroha celebration in honor of the returning Maori Pioneer Battalion. The surviving 10 minutes show poi dances and

²² Lutz and Collins describe the play between consumer desires, colonialism, and the image in *Reading National Geographic*. In this text, they demonstrate how the seemingly ‘innocuous’ photographic image creates hierarchies and power relations which, despite their symbolic character, affect the ‘real’ world. Also, in *Gone Primitive*, Torgovnic shows how the psychological desires of individual ethnographers and other writers on ‘the primitive’ circumscribed their work and led to the formulation of power differences between peoples.

²³ Many such early cineastes were theater cross-overs and frequently all-around film enthusiasts. I do not have any information on whether these particular gentlemen were in the possession of a camera, but it seems likely. Information is from a brochure from the New Zealand Film Archive (in author’s possession).

string games. Australian interest in the Pacific during this period included Raymond Longford's pioneering *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1916) from which only stills survive. However, all this decade's films were not produced in the region and early Hollywood made a few steps into Pacific film. *The Shark God* (1913) depicts a Hawaiian shark God's powers and love affair with an arii woman. Robert Louis Stevenson's tale appeared on the screens twice, as Robinson Crusoe in 1916 and 1917. Perhaps the single most famous American director of his time, D.W. Griffith filmed *The Idol Dancer* (1919) in which a drunken beachcomber is resuscitated and sustained by a young woman in a South Sea village.

1920s

Films made in the 20s increasingly reflect the interests of escapist, romance and adventure seeking American audiences. *Adventure* (1925) is a Jack London inspired story of another island woman who saves a European colonist in the Solomon islands from disease and failure. Other well known authors' works also found their way to the screen such as Somerset Maugham's story "Rain" first appeared on the screen as *Sadie Thompson* (1928). Robinson Crusoe was re-filmed at least four times during this decade: 1921, 1924, 1925, and in 1927. Interest in Pacific themes also motivated technical innovations in film production itself. *Vengeance of the Deep* (1923) attracted audiences with the first-ever underwater action footage. The most often cited films of this decade appear after 1925. *Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age* (1926) and *White Shadows in the South Seas* (1929) and *The Pagan* (1929) all possessed a 'documentary' quality of depicting the lifeways of an already much-romanticized people for American and European audiences which struck reviews of the day as wholly new. However, these films also utilized narrative conventions borrowed from the novel to play with ideas of romance and authority, tradition and religion, oceanic treasure and taboo. Films from New Guinea and Tahiti also highlight a relation between romance, traditional authority, and intervention of western economies such as the pearling industry. Australian photographer Frank

Hurley's ethnographic classic *Pearls and Savages* (1921 revised for 1924) and his feature *Pearl of the South Seas* (1926) grapple with this industry by combining compelling bites of fact with gilded bits of fiction. The western quest for material gain, resource exploitation is a major facet of many of these early Pacific films and is certainly not confined to pearling. Also shot entirely on location in Papua New Guinea, *The Jungle Woman* (1926) is the story of the hero's search for gold and romance with a native girl. *The Romance of Hine-Moa* (1927) takes the romantic feature in a different direction. Here a Dutch director, on location around Lake Rotorua, shot a version of the Hinemoa legend in collaboration with the local community. Unfortunately, only one reel survives. New Zealand films of this period generally seem to focus on pakeha wishes to understand the Maori through film. *He Pito Whakaatu I Te Noho A Te Maori I Te Awa A Whanganui* (1921) depicts scenes of Maori life on the Whanganui river, while *He Murimuri Aroha Ki Nga Morehu O Maungapohatu* (1928) is a film of the Maori prophetic leader, Rua Kenana (1896-1937) whose vision included economic independence from pakeha, the return of all Maori land, the departure of the pakeha, and the coming of the Maori millennium. Pakeha films of the decade like *The Maori as He Was* (1928) illustrate an interest in Maori things and lifeways and offer a clear record of the pakeha communities' attempts to come to terms with and better understand their Maori neighbors. Somewhat cynically, but perhaps with some justification, one might suggest the purpose of these films was to nominalize and delimit Maori culture for purposes of control and economic exploitation via the nascent and growing tourist industry. Indeed, films such as *He Pito Whakaatu I te Hui I Rotorua*²⁴ (1920) seem to prefigure a kind of ongoing interest in 'spreading the word' about Maori culture as a means of tourist attraction.

²⁴ *Scenes of Maori Life at the Rotorua Hui* seems to be ethnographic, however knowledge of the famous Victorian natural baths and health resort there (also, one of the worlds wonders, the 'pink-cliffs,' later destroyed by volcanic eruption suggest a second and tourist oriented reading of this film. The resort was later abandoned, used for the recuperation of shell-shock victims of one (or both?) great wars, abandoned again. Now, tourism has returned to Rotorua with a new generation of mud-bath and hot mineral water seekers. Recollected from three days there.

1930s

This decade's films are marked by the continued expansion and sophistication of feature films. *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas* (1931) and the first Pacific film to win an Academy award (for cinematography), is soon followed by *In the Wake of the Bounty* (1933) and *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935).²⁵ Interest in the Robinson Crusoe story remained strong, Douglas Fairbanks Sr. starred in *Mr. Robinson Crusoe* (1932). A colorful "talkie" version of Maugham's *Rain* (1932)²⁶ appears. *The Hurricane* (1937)²⁷ and *Typhoon Treasure* (1938)²⁸ establish a connection between themes of human corruption (in Tahiti and Papua New Guinea respectively) and redemption through the destructive and cleansing forces of nature. Films like *Typhoon Treasure* also mark the beginning of the Hollywood monopoly of Pacific films. One of the most interesting facets of the first twenty-five years of filmmaking is that Pacific films tended, by an overwhelming majority, to be actually filmed in the islands. By the end of the thirties few films are actually produced on islands other than Kauai and Oahu. Why this came to pass is an interesting question. A good argument could be made based on the production needs of the "talkie." While cameras are fairly portable, sound equipment makes studio production a necessity for all but the best-budgeted films. Maori themes in 30s again centered around an exotic daily life of particular interest to European travelers, frequently recorded in the Rotorua area. Such films included *The Maori: Everyone Bathes on Washing Day at Rotorua* (1930) and *Rotorua N.Z.* (1930). Australian expansion into Papua New Guinea was also recorded on film. *Guinea Gold - A Romance of Australian Enterprise* (1932)²⁹, *Death Drums of New Guinean*

²⁵ The third Bounty film and the first to use Nordoff and Hall's text.

²⁶ The impact of film versions of Maugham's ideas into u.s. culture generally on the basis might be gauged by the Jodie Foster character Sexy Saddle in the eighties' *The Accused*.

²⁷ Director John Ford won an Academy Award for this picture which featured phenomenal special effects.

²⁸ Virtually the same plot as *Hurricane*. An adventurer attempts to recover valuable pearls from the ocean and encounters a number of dangers, most notably the typhoon.

²⁹ An account of gold mining in Papua which focuses on the mechanics of exploitation such as discovery and transportation of machinery.

(1932)³⁰, and *Air Road to Gold* (1932)³¹ detail the Australian penetration into Papua New Guinea in search of riches and political dominion. The first French film in the region, *Ill de Paques* (1935), rather oddly, is a record of the Franco-Belgian expedition to the remote island Rapa Nui in the 1930s. This film has additional interest to scholars outside Pacific studies since it has been read as a kind of metaphor for the troubled condition of Europe at the time.³²

1940s

War films enter as a new genre in both fictional and documentary form. Feature after feature depicting the Pacific war begin to appear on the silver screen after 1941, a trend which continued into the sixties. Generally, these films are emotional thrillers such as *Wake Island* (1942) whose function as propaganda was to rouse public opinion. These films tended towards abstraction and an absence of details—there were already far too many in the real world of the Pacific theater. Islands take on new meanings in these films as do the vast distances between them in races for refueling or repair stations and submarine chases. *Wings Over New Guinea* (1942)³³, *East Coast District Nurse* (1946)³⁴, and *Jungle Patrol* (1944)³⁵ among others document the details of war in the Pacific islands as it occurs at ground level. The films feature islanders in a completely new light. Pacific islanders are no longer the ‘others’ in possession of exploitable resources or objects of sexual desire. Islanders become invisible pawns in a vast Manichean conflict between Axis aggression and Allied liberation. This is not the only way in which islanders are refigured during the forties. During this decade, something like a standard methodology of visual anthropology appears as American researchers formulate ethnographic

³⁰ Record of the Kollie expedition up the Fly river in Papua featuring the circumstances and details of the “devil dance.”

³¹ Shows the transportation of men and machinery into Papua’s mountainous gold fields.

³² The film begins as a rather standard documentary but becomes increasingly ‘arty’ and Rapa Nui comes to metaphorically stand for Europe and the collapse of civilization which is total war.

³³ A typical day in the RAAF, Papua, during the war.

³⁴ This film presents a day in the life of a rural nurse in remote coastal areas of New Guinea at the end of the war.

³⁵ The daily adventures and obstacles of an eight-man Australian patrol seeking to take a Japanese-held ridge.

classics like *The Polynesians of Kapingamarangi* (begun in 1947) and *Mokil* (1948).³⁶ In a bizarre reversal of almost forty years of cinematic representation these films present atoll peoples in a state of perpetual cultural fixity. Oceanic cinema to this point, with the exception of *Moana*, has tended to focus on plot elements of change, cultural fluidity and hybridity. Also like *Moana*, these films depict island life as idyllic and uncomplicated rather than as tempestuous and complex. These two films begin by telling us that the depicted cultures (despite, in the case of *Kapingamarangi*, almost *four hundred years* of contact) have remained essentially unchanged over time and are living in the manner of their ancestors. In the 40s, there is also a continuation of the pakeha film theme of scenes of Maori daily life with films such as *Maori Village* (1945) and *Maori School* (1947). Hollywood's presentation of a mythical or historically fictitious Pacific is still apparent with more Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence* (1942). However, this theme is largely overshadowed, for the time being, by the events of the Pacific war.

1950s

The beginning of new film period generally, the 1950s are perhaps most notable for the pinnacle of classic island representations *South Pacific* (1957), and for the seminal events surrounding the nuclear tests in the Marshall islands. Indeed, at the time of the Bravo tests the greatest portion of the world's entire film stock was located in the Marshall islands in anticipation of the biggest show on Earth³⁷. Much of this footage, 6000 hours, was only declassified in early 1997. With a large output of Pacific fantasies with and without WWII plot elements, perhaps the newest theme of the decade is a growing confusion and ambivalence concerning the moral and economic right of the westerner in the Pacific. While the idea of western corruption of a traditionally Pacific paradise is not new to the decade³⁸, the use of this

³⁶ Both of these films depict the traditional lifeways of a Polynesian and Micronesian atoll people and are released in the early fifties.

³⁷ Notes from a lecture by Dr. Kiste.

³⁸ *South of Pago Pago* (1940) featured part-Tahitian John Hall romancing a white woman, quite an inversion of the standard western male's gaze, and also focused on the corruption of the central European trader. The hero, Hall, is forced by fate to return to his native lover when the

thematic element as anything other than a shocker or plot twist is. Validated by UN mandates, the theme is taken on by films such as *Colonialism: Ogre or Angel?* (1957) which examine British colonies on the eve of self-determination in the Pacific and elsewhere. War films proliferate during this decade including many we've all sat through at one point or another. *Between Heaven and Hell* (1956) and *Mr. Roberts* (1955) are exemplary of this trend.³⁹ The ethnographic trend that began a few years earlier with work on Mokil and Kapingamarangi continued in the fifties with films such as *Tonga, the Last Polynesian Kingdom* (1956) and other films in the US sponsored Pacific Islands Series which centered around the idea of cultural preservation. Most filmmaking in the region has also been characterized by foreign or outsider direction. The talented John Kneubuhl—Samoan and German born, Punahou and Yale schooled—wrote and directed the first Pacific islander made film, *Damien* (1950) about the father's fatal mission on Molokai. However, it isn't until the Pacific culture renaissance of the 1970s and the emergence of a number of talented Maori filmmakers, most notably Barry Barclay in 1974, that a genre of Pacific islander-made films can be said to exist.

1960s

The political and cultural revolutions that jolted the 1960s in metropolitan and Pacific centers forever altered the practice of filmmaking and the study of film. As a medium, film was itself radicalized and the decade was characterized by a renewed interest in redefining film conventions. At the same time, film audiences in the US and elsewhere, largely because of the political polarization of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war, became more sensitive to film messages. The study of film also underwent a radical change. As film critics and scholars took a new seriousness to their work they found themselves singled-out by more traditional

white woman dies. Similar plot elements are only found in the earliest Pacific features such as *White Shadows* before screen conventions of inter-racial sexual and economic relations had been fixed. In any event, all of these films seem to uphold the dictum of "fish of a fin should swim together".

disciplines as lacking a rigorous method or theoretical ground. For this reason, the emergent film schools embraced literary theorists and began to articulate films as texts, what Perry calls “independent artifacts of prevailing cultural mores.” As part of this new interest in film and visual media more films than ever before were produced during this decade. No doubt this process was spurred on by the growing presence of television. Indeed, three fourths as many films of the Pacific were made in the sixties as all films made previously. This is the golden age of the ethnographic film as smaller cameras and relatively portable sound recording equipment made filmmaking an affordable possibility for more researchers. War films such as *PT-109* (1963) and spoofs like *Ensign Pulver* (1964)⁴⁰ continued to be produced. The biggest feature of this decade is almost certainly *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962). A new genre appears on the scene in the mid-sixties when California audiences desires propel the extension of surf movies’ production into Pacific locales in such films as *Endless Summer* (1965). This genre and its close association with a popular youth culture combined old ideas and images of islands with new motifs of adventure, mystery, spirituality, and fear born of ecstasy.

1970s

Interest in Pacific film continued to skyrocket in the 1970s.⁴¹ The most important development in this decade is the birth of an indigenous film aesthetic and the emergence of a talented group of Pacific islander filmmakers. A few of the Micronesian Transition Series which began in 1969 were produced by Micronesian writers and directors under American supervision although none of these filmmakers appears to have produced films for a commercial audience. The series focuses on the changing lifeways of Micronesian peoples while emphasizing the persistence of tradition on the islands. Maori director Barry Barclay came onto the global film

³⁹ *Between* featured stages assaults, marine landings, and epic combats with the entire Oahu based marine corps as extras. *Mr. Roberts* brought many of the stars of the day to one film of a world and a ship gone mad. This film has an interesting cargo-cult tie-in as well.

⁴⁰ *PT-109* is the story of Kennedy’s experiences in the Solomon Islands and *Ensign Pulver* is the sequel to the popular *Mr. Roberts*.

⁴¹ As many films were made in the 70s as in all previous decades excluding the sixties.

scene in 1974 with his series of films about Maori traditions, *Tangata Whenua*. In New Zealand feature film, sympathy for a more openly political film agenda is not limited to young Maori directors. A pakeha director's *Sleeping Dogs* (1977) brought Maori issues to the feature mainstream on film. In the U.S., John Kneubuhl⁴² came into prominence as a writer and director in the 70s with the success of the show *Hawaii 5-O*.⁴³ Films of newly independent nations are an important dynamic in the 70s and need to be addressed. *In Mi Nao: Solomon Islands Regain Independence* (1979) examines the culture and lifeways of Solomon islanders at this critical juncture in their history through their comments, song, dance, and culture. Dennis O'Rourke's first film, *Ileksen: Politics in Papua New Guinea* (1978) records the exuberance of independence and inaugurate the age of post-modern ethnographies.

1980s

For documentary films this is the decade of the new ethnography of which O'Rourke is the patron saint globally. His works *Yap: How Did You Know We'd Like TV?* (1982), *Half Life: A Parable of the Nuclear Age* (1986), and *Cannibal Tours* (1987) have brought the Pacific to the world's classrooms in a new way. This decade is also marked with further explorations by islander filmmakers especially in New Zealand where film equipment is relatively easily accessed. Merata Mita in *Bastion Point* (1981) and *Patu* (1984)⁴⁴ and Lee Tamahori in a series of critically acclaimed commercials emerged during this decade and, with Barry Barclay, came into their own. The first island-centered feature films from Melanesia arrive. Australian Chris Owen's *Jakupa* (1981) is the story of a village man from Papua whose art takes him abroad to Australia. Islander writer and director Albert Toro's *Tukuna* (1984) depicts the tension between tradition and personal ambition and shows how the resulting pressure can become too much for a young

⁴² Belittled by Reyes as "Johnny Kneubuhl"?

⁴³ Kneubuhl did a great deal of other work writing, producing, and directing for Hollywood and TV. See *Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing* 5:1.

⁴⁴ Both of these documentaries appropriate news-ish images to create alternate readings of a national event. The Bastion Point protesters sought to regain valuable land in Auckland and

man who turns to grog. Both films are in Tok Pisin and have reached global audiences. *Tukuna*, a Papuan *The Harder They Come* (1973),⁴⁵ offers a Papuan play on the universal theme of alienation from one's elders and their expectations. The eighties are also notable for the increased quality, availability, and affordability of video equipment. This boom is most notable in Hawaii—where a group of thirty videographers has emerged as a potent force of local political expression—but is occurring throughout the region.

1990s and beyond

In a climate of intense interest in film and a growing body of film criticism and resource material, the plain fact that Flaherty and Murnau's work in the region continue to show up in the film encyclopedias as the only entries on Pacific film needs to be addressed. Pacific islander filmmakers like Barclay, Mita, and Tamahori are doing precisely this. By challenging, recasting, and inverting customary conventions of Pacific film, and by creating new representations to stand in their place, Barclay and Mita are decolonizing minds globally. Such images as they present must be seen as active and potent and as operating semiotically in the same manner as the many euroamerican films which have come before. Alternatively, Tamahori—so well recognized as the director of *Once Were Warriors* (1994)—is now working within the Hollywood mainstream and potentially brings a Maori aesthetic to non-Maori works including *Muholland Falls* (1995) and *Bookworm* (in production). However, this is not a period entirely free of cultural impositions. More sophisticated subversions and re-colonizations such as the Japanese film *Piliialoha* (1996) continue to be produced, frequently in the guise of cultural sensitivity. In *Piliialoha*, a young Japanese boy is magically transported by his computer through time and space to Kauai where he befriends a young Hawaiian boy of the same age. The two boys set off on a quest to find a magical herb to save the Hawaiian boy's dying mother. After a series of adventures, they find the herb and only one challenge remains. One of the boys must

occupied the site for many months before police removed them. *Patu* records the visit of the South African rugby team in the years prior to the end of apartheid.

climb down a dangerous cliff to pick the herb from the side of the pali. Defying all sensible narrative conventions, it is the Japanese boy who finds the courage to scale the cliff. The symbol of the superior tourist-hero is nothing new in Pacific film, here the western has been replaced by the eastern hero and the whole has been disguised under the patina of youth. Nor has Hollywood abandoned its addiction to a certain perspective of the Pacific. In an era of fashionable retro, films from the Pacific's past have also been resurrected. From the genre of war movies *Mchale's Navy* (1996) and *Up Periscope* (1996) reproduce their now middle-aged sixties parents. A never far-from-screen mythical Oceania returns with *The Island of Dr. Moreaux* (1996) in its fifth (at least) incarnation and yet another *Robinson Crusoe* (not yet released). These two films are joined by Kevin Costner's historical fiction *Rapa Nui* (1994) and somewhat more fanciful *Waterworld* (1995).

Clearly the role of Pacific filmmaking continues to expand, reform, and play in the image fields of our minds. If we are to understand this process at all in the present, our gaze must be somehow Janus-faced, with one-eye (lens) always directed at the past. What such a gaze finds is not a disunified body of pop-cultural and ethnographicly esoteric texts which have no bearing on contemporary lifeways and systems of cultural and society. Rather, what lies behind and all around is an oceanic cinema which needs further explication and constant attention lest the reigns of its control be left in the hands of those who do not care for the life of the islands but merely the monetary value of their representation.

⁴⁵ A dreadlock-western starring reggae singer Jimmy Cliff

CHAPTER III
READING THE AŌ

We are born, so to speak, provisionally, it doesn't matter where. It is only gradually that we compose within ourselves our true place of origin so that we may be born there retrospectively and each day more definitely.

—Ranier Maria Rilke

A new cinema of Oceanic identity is emerging, joining the ranks of other oppositional cinemas of cultural identity in our post and neo-colonial world⁴⁶. At the forefront of this dawning regional cinema are a growing number of Pacific islander filmmakers who receive critical attention at home and abroad. Though each of these filmmakers is concerned with the specific history, politics, cultural issues, and community needs of her own place, they are united by a common articulation of the importance of asserting local cultural identity as fundamental to the process of decolonization.

If the previous work of this thesis was to show how filmmakers have negotiated the pō (the dark) in the world's theaters over the decades, then it is the goal of this chapter to investigate how the aō (the light) of some Pacific films might be interpreted. The division of film into works which explicitly seek to document reality as ethnographic film and works which feature a reality whose consistency is solely internal seems commonsensical. Yet, it has been the claim of this thesis that oceanic cinema is characterized by a melding of the qualities of these two methods. The following chapter is a textual analysis of the work of eight directors across the history and two main currents of Pacific filmmaking. While my choice of films is arbitrary, it is also conscious. I chose works which I know to be broadly distributed and readily accessible, and which are likely to have been already viewed by readers. My intent is not to document the plots

of lesser-known films from the region, rather I seek to illuminate certain patterns of interpretation which are cinematic and not singular.

Among ethnographic (documentary) films, I selected Flaherty's *Moana: a Romance of the Golden Age* (1926), Kenneth Emory's *The Polynesians of Kapingamarangi* (1950), and Dennis O'Rourke's *Shark Callers of Kontu* (1988). Among fictional films, I focus on Carol Reed and Lewis Milestone's epic *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), and John Shanley's romance *Joe vs. the Volcano* (1990). I also examine works by three contemporary Pacific islander filmmakers: Barry Barclay, Merata Mita, both in New Zealand, and Eddie Kamae in Hawaii. In order to understand what such islander directors are working with and in opposition to, in terms of filmic and narrative conventions, it is necessary to examine representations of islanders across time and place including those works by non-indigenous filmmakers. Before detailing these film texts it is also necessary to outline the lens through which they are viewed.

What follows is not a 'close' reading of a selection of Pacific films in the sense of literary criticism. Rather, I examine these films somewhat broadly and focus on different elements of each. Analytically, I am interested in how these films represent islanders and how these representations create structures of power. Such an examination offers a feeling for shifts in power relations between mainstream media institutions and their ability to (mis)represent islanders and their islands to the world. Since these representations are essential elements of political relations between nations, cultures, and persons, a greater sensitivity to and understanding of alternate—to those of the industrial image machines—representations of Pacific islander identities should illustrate, if only in part⁴⁷, the intermediating role of film in the experience of identity in the contemporary Pacific.

Identifying the Other

⁴⁶ To paraphrase Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, pg. 1.

⁴⁷ Since I only focus on certain films, I am aware that my arguments may apply to some areas only generally or not at all.

Robert Flaherty's *Moana: a Romance of the Golden Age* is one of the most cited and discussed films of the Pacific. It begins with feature-like credits which glorify the film's creators and producers without comment on the persons filmed. Intertitles follow, the first reads, "In British Samoa, the mandate of New Zealand, was this film produced." Both wording and content signify a didactic mode of interpretation for audiences. The proceeding titles give further locational, historical, and cultural information about Samoa and Samoans. 'Flaherty lived with the people for two years,' 'they still live traditionally,' 'the people are kind, generous, good.' All of these messages are communicated to the thunderous booming of an organ score recently added to the video version of the film by Monica Flaherty (Robert's daughter) and a council of matai. The first scene is of Fa`angae, the highest ranked maiden in the village, binding broad taro fronds for her housekeeping. Next, the Mother Tu`ungaita, and her two sons, the heroes Le'a and Moana, are seen in a different part of the 'jungle' pulling taro. They are all dressed in lava-lava and wear lei around their heads. The work day done, the shot changes to show many Samoans leaving the jungle for their village by the shore. The next shot shows the boys making animal traps which they use to capture a very large pua'a (boar). Moana demonstrates further jungle survival techniques when he finds a vine which holds cool sparkling water.

The camera then follows the boys down a path to the coast. A breathtaking pan across the coast reveals a Greco-Roman seeming village by the sea. Visually, everything on land is contrasted with the ocean. Of this space a title reads, "the sea, warm as air and gentle as the soul." Moana (whose name literally means 'sea') and his brother next engage in a series of aqueous adventures. The boys go paddling and swimming, Moana 'swims like a fish.' Flaherty captures images of coral and spear fishing and films the brothers collecting a maiden who has been harvesting plant and marine life at water's edge in their outrigger. As the wet and partially nude maiden is transfixed by the boys and the camera, something interesting happens to our

gaze. For the boys, the girl is quite obviously a comrade and friend. However, the camera work—in an appropriation of certain qualities of gender and culture—focuses on glistening breasts, hands, and hair. At the moment the girl is objectified as the object of some lascivious Western gaze, the film itself ceases to be objective—no longer documentary but fantastic. This precisely the kind of camera work which doubles ethnographic and feature modes of film production.

Back in the village, a tapa-dress making scene combined with intertitle instructions melds into shots of the brothers harvesting coconuts, climbing a palm, paddling, and game hunting. Such scenes leave little room to wonder as to why the term ‘documentary film’ was first applied to this film. However, as we have already seen, parts of this film signify as fiction. The paid-for traditional tattoo scene is relevant here. What might be understood of the idea of staged reality? Flaherty’s beliefs about adversity and culture—that Samoans create cultural adversity to regulate the total daily gratification of every existential need—are another aspect of the film’s production which taints the perfect transposition of reality implicit in the documentary idea. Is there any ethnographic methodology of film which is completely free of this quality of staged-reality?

Parts of *The Polynesians of Kapingamarangi* are quite similar to *Moana*. The opening credits again feature as much information about the film’s creators as they do of the people filmed. The film was produced as part of a Bishop Museum sponsored cultural salvage expedition led by Emory in 1947 and 1950 and was originally released for the nation’s classrooms in 1953. It was “intended to capture the last vestiges of Polynesian culture.” Structurally, the film’s opening is interesting. The atoll is seen from the air (transcendent view of the westerners, an impossible view for the traditional islanders), next from the beach (reminiscent of Denning’s metaphor of islands and beaches) and finally from water (where we later learn the atoll islanders make their living). The reason for the film, the viewer learns, is the

loss of Polynesian culture due to the introduction of western ways. This comes across as a weird tension in the film, as if Emory couldn't decide—the audience isn't presented with any intentional examples of social or material change—whether to acknowledge any change in island lifestyle since the eighteenth century. Ironically, the narrator actually comments on the lack of change while a canvas-rigged outrigger is in full view of the camera. As in *Moana*, we are greeted with numerous depictions of the events of daily life connected by a narrative of the everyday. Notable are the numerous scenes of relaxation, tool use (nets, looms, tapa pounders, huskers, canoes, paddle carving), cultivation (taro, yam, coconut), games (singing, dancing), and community (caring for the aged, group work, house building, cooking).

I am intrigued by the way scenes of the natural world are spliced between the different depictions of cultural activity. Scientific explications of coral polyps, for instance, are communicated in precisely the same tone and modulation as that used to explain the cultural world of the Kapingamarangi. Similarly, the strangest event of the film is a spirit possession which is narrated away without further explanation as common in this part of the world. The film also ends on a questionable note. Essentially, we've seen a people work and play themselves into symbolic exhaustion over the course of seventy minutes, the narration and the day-in-the-life ends with this line, "all will lie down at peace with themselves and the world." Is this paradise? Are the Kapingas creatures of nature or culture or some intermediary position? Is there a monolithic Pacific culture as evidenced by the spirit possession comment and if so is it really disappearing?

Dennis O'Rourke's *Shark Callers of Kontu* is an example of a radical departure from the traditions of ethnographic film established between the 1930s and the 1980s. The depiction of intense colonization and cross-cultural contact is explicit and some of the power relations between cultures and economies are laid bare. Foremost among the changes is the foregrounding of islander voices, Papua New Guineans speak for themselves about themselves

and others. Constant juxtaposition of the new and old (radio and village sounds) preempts the possibility of viewing these people as caught in a static past. For instance, children and adults with dark skins are framed in order to stress blond and red as well as black hair colors. O'Rourke speaks Tok Pisin throughout and people being filmed engage in dialogue with him. The Kontu talk about the process of being filmed while being filmed, openly reflecting on the relation between action and spectatorship. O'Rourke participates in the taboos and dangers of the cultural phenomenon he observes. However, the theme of culture loss is also present and central when O'Rourke intercuts repeatedly between old-timers talking of *kastom* and traditional learning and scenes of schoolrooms and young teachers. So, the audience gets a sense of both the current investigation and the uniquely local set of issues and approaches to which he also had to respond. Quite differently from *Moana*, however, there appear to be no external inconsistencies, no paid actors or staged scenes. Rather, everything appears to be filmed in the real reality of the moment. Clearly, this kind of filmmaking communicates an entirely different sense of 'islandness' than previous ethnographic films.

The Bounty story is among the most persistent of oceanic tales. Why does it fascinate us so? Different readings of the mutiny suggest alternate interpretations of its essential meaning. Gentility, freedom, discipline, control, and survival all come to mind as central points of thematic condensation. Recently, Denning stressed systems of miscommunication as a major theme. Less of a sexploitation film than most other fictional Pacific films of its time or previously, Reed and Milestone's *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), the fourth of five Bounty films, nevertheless reveals without apology (revels in) the encounter between sailors and Tahitian women. Something unexpected happens, however, when the bodies of the Englishmen in addition to those of the Tahitian women are objectified and fetishized. The film explicitly plays with this notion for a few minutes before abandoning it. As a viewer I am not quite sure what the effect was, but I wonder if it served as a justification for male lasciviousness. When the sexual

objectification is transferred to semi-clothed Tahitian women it again points to a connection between fictional and non-fictional modes of film production, here through exception to representational conventions of nudity. White breasts are, in contrast, completely unacceptable in both ethnographic and feature films, except as pornography.⁴⁸

The first reel of the film establishes the inhuman condition of ship's life in almost tedious and painful detail. Martial thoughts of discipline and punishment are never far from Bligh's lips or actions. The result, conscious or not, is effective. When the *Bounty* arrives at Tahiti, we see the islands as the sailors might have. Haven, heaven, respite from lash and leash. Just after the ship's arrival one of the film's telling lines is delivered. Bligh addresses a crew anxious to land and feels it necessary to speak of the moral play inherent in any system of cultural difference, noting "it is a matter of but supernatural indifference to me whether you contaminate the natives or they contaminate you." Of course, the debate over the truth of this statement has characterized much of Pacific islands studies since Cook's age. Bligh's indifference, however, raises the interesting possibility of a relatively amoral cross-cultural moral frame.

Joe vs. the Volcano (1991) offers us a stereotypical portrayal of almost every major theme in Pacific film. Joe Banks⁴⁹ dying of a brain cloud—metaphor for the condition of alienation and anomie—agrees to sacrifice himself to a Volcano in order to help an entrepreneur secure the mineral rights for a superconducting metal found only on the remote isle of Waponi Woo. Little different from the travels of Melville or Conrad's various midshipmen, Joe's journey is one of self-discovery from metropolis to island. The trip culminates in a yachting voyage between Los Angeles and the island. En route, the yacht sinks during a lightning-filled tempest and Joe and Meg are left stranded in the middle of the Pacific with Joe's unsinkable luggage for a life raft. Miraculously, the luggage floats the couple to the island where a small flotilla of

⁴⁸ See Lutz in *Reading National Geographic*.

outriggers rushes out to greet them. The elaborate greeting ritual is reminiscent of Cook's descriptions of arrival at Tahiti.

The Waiponi Woo, we learn, are complexly descended from long-ago shipwrecked Celts, Romans and Jews who married into a pre-existent Polynesian community. Ruled theocratically, the islanders' paradise is only threatened by a centennially angry volcano-god and their constant desire for Orange Crush soda beverage. The entire island is run on an economy of citrus-flavored bubble-bev which brings to mind western fascinations with cargo-cultism and shell or stone monetary systems come to mind. The natives are so enamored of Orange Crush that none are willing to sacrifice themselves to the volcano, thus Joe is treated as a national hero. In the climactic scenes, Joe and Meg are pampered and prepared for the feast which neither can enjoy having just found love and the discovery that Joe is actually the main course for the volcano, the Big Woo. In the final twist, Meg's character joins Joe in self-sacrifice to the volcano only to be rejected together and blown out of the crater. Falling into the ocean, they watch the island and islanders sink into oblivion. Having found love and discovered along the way the improbability of a brain cloud "A brain cloud? Didn't you get a second opinion?" Joe and Meg float into the romantic moonrise, the Pacific equivalent of the setting-sun happy-ending even though all the Waiponi Woo perish.

Oddly, this description only skims the surface of a dense network of plot elements. Indeed, this film may be pure plot, playing on every cliché and convention of Pacific films, a perfect vehicle for the romantic duo and dreams of escape from metropolitan alienation. Since Pacific films are notably vehicles for conventional inversions of western cultural and social norms, *Joe vs. the Volcano* may be the single (ab)perfect Pacific film for including every plot convention and element one could imagine. Structurally, the film plays with the repetition of

⁴⁹ The reference to Cook's botanist who made a huge splash in Europe on account of his affair with a Tahitian Ari'i is pure camp for students of Pacific history.

elements, and the literary trope of the sleeper.⁵⁰ Islanders are simultaneously figured as complex and facile. This is an ambivalent almost ambiguous portrayal which suggests they are no better off, or worse, than westerners in the metropolitan centers. How then does one interpret the islanders demise? Are they betrayed by tradition or by their own volcano? By a cultural lack of virtue? By the West, represented by the orange-flavored soda-beverage? If there is one single relevance of this modestly successful film for Pacific studies, it is the revelation that the same oceanic themes which fascinated western audiences and studios through the first seventy years of the century continue to hold interest after a decade of serious critical reappraisal of cultural and national relations.

Shadows of Identity

In three of the four films in the Hawaiian Legacy series, Eddie Kamae (in collaboration with his wife Myrna and the haole fiction writer James Houston) presents a consistent directorial vision. While Kamae visibly ages between the three videos *Listen to the Forest* (1991), *The Hawaiian Way* (1993), and *Words, Earth and Aloha* (1995) the lucidity of his message hardly changes. In all three of these films, the communicative event between Kamae and his audience, mediated by the structure of the film, begins with a uniquely Hawaiian, a genealogical flavor. “In the beginning” Kamae nearly chants, over scenes of immense natural beauty, in *Listen to the Forest*, the Hawaiian cosmogony and creation story followed by a haole and scientific explanation of the birth of these islands. In *Hawaiian Way*, this introduction becomes a comment on the primal unit of Hawaiian identity—the family. In *Words, Earth, Aloha*, the narrative begins with a genealogical statement about Hawaiian music as a kind of metaphor for Hawaiian persons. “In Hawaii, music has always been about more than just music” From the first cell in each of his films, Kamae instills in the willing but unknowing viewer what

⁵⁰ From Tolstoy’s *Russia* to Frank Herbert’s *Dune*, the idea that only a few rarefied individuals are awake to the world, to an existential and psychological reality, is a prominent literary trope. Escape to and invigoration by a many-colored world, that of the flower-filled island jungle or

Kame`leihiwa describes in her seminal *Native Lands, Foreign Desires*, as the most fundamental aspect of Hawaiian knowledge, of knowing things in the Hawaiian way. This is a genealogical knowledge, a way of knowing things from beginnings and of tracing them over time and through lineages of meaning. Kamae masterfully turns this ontogenological imperative into a narrative convention. And it is precisely through such conventions that a local identity is crafted in his films.

Throughout Kamae's work, images of youth and old age are juxtaposed. Kamae seems to suggest that these two groups form the strength of the Hawaiian community, the past and the future. While the focus of the camera's lens on these two age groups is related to the genealogical logics described above, it plays a dual role since it demands the viewer's understanding that *being* Hawaiian is about caring for and listening to these two groups. Another aspect of Kamae's films is also doubled here. The films are explicitly didactic, in that they seek to educate the viewer, the old are seen teaching the young onscreen. The films' imagery, thus, reinforces the functional role of the content of their messages. The viewer being educated is presumed to be Hawaiian. With this in mind, it is clear that the identity being shared or created, for the viewers, is their *own* identity. Subtle interplays of identity such as these mark Kamae's filmwork with a kind of skillfulness it is easy to admire.

Another convention which Kamae takes careful advantage of is the scenery in which persons are found. Usually, in these three films, persons are shot in front of scenes of immense natural beauty. When a man-made structure appears, the decor is rustic, almost idealized. This kind of visual connection to nature is echoed throughout as a source of inspiration for chants, slack-key, and as a literal source for human well-being, in the words of Henry Auwae the Kuhuna La`au Lapa`au:

scintillating coral reef, has its place in this trope as seen in the works of Gaugin, Stevenson, and London.

To the Hawaiians, the aina, the forest, the trees, the birds, the la`ua, all the medicine and the herbs that grow on the ground, that weave up the trees—all that is important to the Hawaiian people. Because that's the way of life. That's the way of malama aina.

For Kamae, Hawaiian identity is to be found at the nexus of a certain set of relations: to the land, between age and youth, and to a practice of daily living (as exemplified by the hula dancers in *Listen* and by the slack-key players in *Hawaiian Way*).

Merata Mita takes a wholly different set of documentary conventions to establish a potent and communicable sense of Maori identity. In *Bastion Point* (1981) and *Patu!* (1984), Mita blends still photography, evening news clips, and radio announcer's patter to convey linear tales of governmental and institutional⁵¹ oppression and Maori resistance. What Mita evokes out of such banal material, is an inestimable sense of how Maori resistance to oppression functions in the everyday. Like the bullhorns, signs, and deep powerful voices of protesters, Mita's films demonstrate loudly and clearly that Maori identity is active. Being Maori is not, for Mita, about being the passive subject of invisible but omnipresent colonial and neo-colonial forces. In Mita's films we see the intimate detail of Maori agency in the political state and a thousand different (one for each of her protesters) variations and substantiations of resistance to the agents of oppression.

Mita's films also hint at the depth of the complexity of the interaction between acts of resistance and acts of oppression. Clearly, there are gradients of engagement between multiple forces in Mita's films: between non-harassed sign wielders, un-easy rugby players, and limply passive protesters being dragged off to jail or between the crowd pushing up against—a fine-line, a border almost crossed—but not fighting with the wall of police in *Bastion Point*. Mita's position on, and positioning of, Maori identity seems best illustrated by the words of a Bastion protester whose face is lost in the crowd: "world of darkness, world of light." Mita shows, perhaps more realistically than any other filmmaker, the quality of light formed when those two

⁵¹ The institution of racism, for example.

worlds collide. However, she does not further explore the nature of the melding, juxtaposition, and confused fusion of the worlds.

This seems to be what Barry Barclay does best. In both *Ngati* (1987) and *Te Rua* (1991) Barclay shares incredibly complex social and cultural relations between people, groups, and selves. Set in two different time periods, both these films evidence Barclay's sensitivity to human surroundings.

In *Ngati*, for instance, Barclay shares incredibly complex social and cultural relations between people, groups, and selves. Set in the rural Maori community of Kapua in 1948, this is the story of a young Australian doctor finding identity across cultures and of a culture negotiating its identity with broader political and economic worlds. Unlike *Joe vs. the Volcano*, which is essentially plot, Barclay's film is a carefully nuanced and rigorously structured film which might be best examined in terms of its non-narrative qualities. *Ngati* evidences Barclay's sensitivity to human surroundings. Whether inside a rural bar, by the shore, or inside a dying boy's bedroom, Barclay is able to evoke the humanness of our reaction to the space. Barclay iterates certain physical cultural practices again and again in order to establish the identity of his characters through a process of cultural difference. Is this different from the investigation of tool use and cultural practices in ethnographic works like *The Polynesians of Kapingamarangi* and *Moana*? For Barclay it is the commonness, the 'smallness', the daily practices of a group, such as a hongi greeting or water-flick prayer for the dead, which carry the joy and profundity of their culture. He seems wholly concerned to explore psychological questions and experiences through social interaction. His films are full of personal silences. I will not investigate here and thus risk reifying, in some orientalist discourse, the implicit difference of artistic methods which feature a denial of interiority from those, such as are common in American films, which expressly reveal character's mental states.

However, what one finds in Barclay, one finds in Mita and Kamae as well, if somewhat differently. Kamae directs his wisdom toward the Hawaiian community and Mita, I believe, to a pakeha community which she feels needs to learn about *its* contemporary brutality. Barclay seems wholly concerned to explore more personal and psychological questions and experiences. In so doing he raises issues regarding the role of media in cultural reflection on experience and subjectivity in modernity. My intent is not to catalogue exhaustively the conventions by which any of this is accomplished, a few observations serve my general points nicely. Barclay, for instance, iterates certain physical cultural practices again and again in order to establish the identity of his characters through a process of cultural difference. In *Te Rua* we see the hongī greeting time and again in Berlin where it is cast in stark contrast to the restrained, almost self-conscious handshakes of Europeans. The quality of this portrayal of a certain cultural trait, the hongī, as a convention of identity is actually clarified by examining another film. In *Ngati*, set in Aotearoa, the hongī only appears once and then only at the end of the film. These two films stand apart from Mita's and Kamae's because they seem to be less immediately concerned with pedagogy.

What is immediately interesting about Barclay's artistic method in terms of these concerns is his denial of the audience of any interiority into his characters. It is as if he does not allow us to move inside his characters in order to protect the very qualities which make them who they are. In Barclay, identification and even empathy with the heroes seems permissible, but I wonder if the kind of transference which has been said to typify Hollywood films (i.e. the viewer experiences the film *as* Rambo or Schwarzenegger) ever occurs? Seemingly, we only ever get to know his characters as these fully developed persons, people one might meet walking around town, never as they know themselves. Not once, in either film, did a Barclay character stop to explain his or her action or behavior. It is all taken for granted. Barclay also uses the phrase "World of Darkness, World of Light," however, here more than in Mita, it is clear that

this phrase does not refer to some simple mirror or inversion of European attitudes and smug beliefs of their own hierarchical cultural superiority. Rather, “the World of Light” which Maori identity represents—to the farm community, to the “new-Maori” pakeha who has just discovered his mother’s heritage—is shown to be a deeply felt and cosmologically rooted truth.

Mita’s documentaries also leave little insight into the psychological or individual states of persons filmed. Her editing constructs a sense of group identity through narrative. This is a potent and anonymous identity, if somewhat ironic considering the number of close-up still shots of Maori faces in her work. Mita develops a montage of human faces in order to demonstrate a shared and politically unequal national character between Maori and pakeha. In sharp contrast, Kamae’s interviewees don’t share anything with the audience other than interior perspectives. His message may be that being Hawaiian can be learned by the young generation through the emulation and understanding of their elders viewpoints. Having laid out some of the characteristics of islander and non-islander filmmaking, I want to begin a comparison in order to better appreciate the relation between these film styles, the filmmakers’ intentions, and the global and local audiences which they affect.

Beyond Shadows

Film may be a superseding media, one which has created a revolution in perception and its superimposition of filmic over literary, graphic, and even photographic conventions bespeaks the potency of the form. Perhaps it is film’s appearance as an ‘objective’ method of communication, the quality of photo-realism, which differs from previous representational techniques. Regardless, today, for those not living in it, the Pacific is known almost exclusively through the cinema. There are many themes which might be used to explore the characteristics of this claim, I do so with the question: what is the character and role of identity within the medium of film generally?

In Pacific Islands Studies, we puzzle over the many facets of personal, cultural, national, and regional identity. I found more questions and uneasy compromises in this process than answers. Of the basis of personal and cultural identity, for instance, it is easy to argue that it could be either biological or entirely environmental. However, since the daily experience of one's own self or of some other is always a negotiation between nature and nurture, perspectives which favor one of these origins of identity seem tenuous, subjective, and incomplete. For instance, the biological color of a person's skin and the linguistic accent by which that person talks are essential components of how she will be received by other persons within and without her community based on perceived similarities and differences and the often fluid and changeable weights of importance placed upon them. Systematically, how a person is received by others will to some extent define how she perceives herself and thus how she presents herself in the future and so on in an infinite chain of identification. However, there does seem to be some basis for an objective analysis, if only partial, of identity and especially identity as communicated through and mediated in images. Of this Bhabba writes:

The question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image. The demand of identification—that is, to be for an Other—entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness. Identification is always the return of an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes. (Bhabba, pg. 45).

What Bhabba is articulating here is a logic of identity formation. A binary ontology for a self which must always be defined in opposition to some other. Moreover, Bhabba here problematizes the project of self-identification since the act of defining one's self implies an Other for whom this identity is intended. Clearly, one need not define oneself for oneself since one always already *is* who one is. This is the strategy which Barclay pursues in his films. The potency of this method lies in the undivided relation between peoples while maintaining an unanswerability to any other for the cultural self.

Alternate formulations of identity emerge and may be seen to reflect equally powerful logics. In Kamae's films a strong sense of self-identification *for* Hawaiians and *not for* some haole Other emerges in that the films are clearly intended primarily for Hawaiian audiences. Why he cultivates this method is a question I'll seek to address below. However, a sense of my answer is anticipated by Hall who writes,

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (Hall, pg. 222).

Like Rilke in the quotation introducing this chapter, Hall articulates a sense of identity as always being formed within a sphere of community. This sphere of identity production is not divided between an outside and inside, between a self and other as Bhabba describes, rather it is uniquely formulated to serve as the nexus of purely local needs, as he explains again:

We have been trying to theorize identity as constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak. (Hall, pg. 237).

The difference between these two perspectives is politically quite clear and well articulated by a Canadian writing on a form of American imperialism "How do you avoid American (or any Other's) ownership in your own film?" (Heath, pg. 180). If, as Bhabba suggests, identity formation is *always* a two-party event than the ownership of one's very self might be shared with some other.

No act of identification, whether filmic or otherwise, occurs in a political vacuum. Thus, the two very different views on the process of identity formation have important ramifications for any political reality. Barclay shows that his complex perspective full of fusion, hybridity, and entanglement (between Maori and Pakeha, local and global, rural and corporate)

can still *empower* Maori. While this is not a chapter on the political economy⁵² of islander cultural identity, it seems perfectly clear that every act of identification, mis-identification, re-identification has a currency in this economy. I use the term identification, and its variants, to signify the processes by which meaning is communicated by the artist, in this case the filmmaker, to the audience. It is through the process of identifying oneself to an other through the artistic medium, film, that one's own identity is systematically formed. In my typology, self-identification would be considered in opposition to the (mis)identifications typical of Hollywood films. The term re-identification suggests to me a re-appropriation of conventions, stereotypes, and ideas back from industrial image-producers into the hands of community based filmmakers and other artists. Furthermore, this political economy has a direct, if difficult to perceive, bearing on both the global system of relations between peoples and the daily lives of Pacific islanders.

However, the ideas of ethnic, national, or regional cinema may not be the only or most appropriate models for the participation of Pacific islander filmmakers in the neo-colonial economy of signs. For the reasons that the specific character of neo-colonialism would be difficult for us to agree on I have not attempted to model it here. But my sense of some of the perimeters of neo-colonialism include the formulation of a new and corporate idea of State—one which may not always be the same as national or regional governments. This new system of relations might include the disintegration of the nation-state as the source of hegemony and oppression; a weakening of the relation between secular and sacral authority such that the various religions (which are still extremely powerful and utterly important in many persons' daily lives) do not have the same affect on relations between individuals and State authority; and the

⁵² For me, political economy invokes a metaphor for the system of control over the process of identification. Other metaphors may be equally appropriate. The currency of this particular economy lies in signs, representations, and images. And, the effects of the system can be found in the daily relations of islanders to national governments and trans-national companies. Essentially this metaphor speaks to the processes I described earlier in this chapter and which have been written on by Jolly, Sharrard, Smith, and others.

emergence of trans-national corporations as the centers of identity and culture production not only in the West but all over the world. In a neo-colonial era, it is likely one will continue to feel as if the markers of her deepest personal identity are being manipulated and manufactured outside the boundaries of her locale, however it will be increasingly difficult for her to point a finger at any one political identity such as 'America,' 'Paris,' or 'Hollywood'.

Cinema theorists have developed the term Third Cinema to refer to the parts of the global institution of film production which attempt to devalue the currency of mainstream film perspectives. Willamen describes the three cinemas:

First cinema expresses imperialist, capitalist, bourgeois ideas Big monopoly capital finances big spectacle cinema as well as authorial and informational cinema. Any cinematographic expression likely to respond to the aspirations of big capital, I call first cinema... Second cinema is often nihilistic, mystificatory. It runs in circles. It is cut off from all reality... Third Cinema is the expression of a new culture and of social changes. Generally speaking, Third Cinema gives an account of reality and history. It is also linked with national culture. (Willamen, pg. 183).

I bring up the question and idea of the three cinemas to demonstrate the experience of filmmaking in the Pacific may be examined in global as well as local terms. In the same way that colonialism was a global system of control with multiple centers maintaining complex relations with numerous nodes, local film productions now play on global screens. The very fact of my own watching and writing on these films demonstrates part of this process since I retain a memory of these filmmaker's messages. It would be hard to estimate the impact of the Hawaiian International Film Festival on political and cultural consciousness across the globe, however we can be sure it has one, even if only complexly in the manner of affecting the individual consciousness of film festival goers.

I have no simple answer to the meaning of the schema of First, Second and Third cinema for the films I examine in this chapter. Hollywood's films of the Pacific and classic ethnographic documentaries certainly operate within the First cinema. Mita's documentaries, quite differently, fall into the Third cinema. Though Kamae's documentaries are intended as

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members of a Hawaiian Third Cinema, I can also see how they might easily be appropriated by audiences of the second cinema (persons interested in the art of Hawaiian music generally, or the arcane knowledge of slack-key specifically who nevertheless pursue this interest outside the corporate economy of film). Similarly, Barclay's works are full of powerful tokens of local reference and community, yet they possess a relevance to cosmopolitan peoples of various cultures. Thus, they sometimes signify within the First cinema. This seems especially true when they are broadly shown at international film festivals. Kamae is best known locally and Mita regionally.

Hereniko writes, in *Representations of Cultural Identities*, "Once colonized the mind can never be truly decolonized" (pg. 418). Perhaps this is so, however, by twisting slightly the idea of how identity is produced, as some authors and filmmakers are doing, one may believe it is possible to re-colonize the mind, from *within*. As Wendt says, "Art influences our lives deeply and permanently, and will continue to do so as long as that art is read, retold, shown, or performed." (Wendt, 81) If artists such as Barclay and Mita, and the generations of islander filmmakers to come, continue to formulate and articulate identities which empower, re-localize cultural production, and speak for themselves they will establish potent and durable linkages to the taproot of their own cultures. From ancestors to descendants, the mis-identifying and dis-empowering representations and imaginings of this century's regional outsiders might, then, be turned away from, neglected, and forgotten. As Wendt suggests, this is the purest form of power for Pacific islander artists, one which returns the mana which Hollywood, and other image-producing communities, stole through their (mis)imaginings.

CHAPTER IV

WORLD OF DARKNESS, WORLD OF LIGHT

Over the years the camera becomes like a friend, something you learn to take with pride into places of great power and the humblest of villages. Yet, which of us is not anxious walking with a friend into a new world? Will your friend be relaxed in strange company? Perhaps some unwitting breach of manners will spoil the occasion?

—Barry Barclay

The characteristics and conventions of an oceanic cinema are as varied as currents in the sea. However, there is a set of thematic plot elements, character types, constructed social spaces, and resolutions which is consistent across the entire range of Pacific films and which is wholly distinct from the products of other regional cinemas. This is not to deny the arbitrariness of the boundary created by the idea of an oceanic cinema. One might, for instance, sensibly articulate a cinema of colonization in which films of the Australian occupation of Papua and New Guinea in the 20s and 30s on film are closely aligned with the film record of the colonization of non-Pacific locales. However, even where particular thematic elements appear to be cross-cutting cinematic boundaries, there are characteristics and features unique to Pacific films which stem from the singularities of Pacific locales. Together these elements act to (re)present Pacific peoples and places across time and space.

I might tentatively categorize these elements of Pacific islands film into frames of signification. These frames are filters through which similarities between films from different genres and different times in the history of Pacific filmmaking may be compared. In theory, there is no limit to the nature or number of such frames which a researcher might focus on, but they do not form some immutable topology of significant characteristics. In practice, a handful

of human existential phenomena serve as research hermeneutics. Such aspects of human being (*Dasein*) as the feeling of the sacred, the pleasure of bodies, the exploitation of the physical world, and the articulation of aggression are universal if everywhere differently appreciated. It is in this sense that I perceive these frames—Sacral, Sexual, Material, and Martial—as anchors for better understanding representations of the Pacific in film as well as the flow of images, imaginations, and associated structures of power.

From the very first, Europeans sought to understand and shortly thereafter to control Pacific islanders' sense of the sacred. So intense was the radical European fascination with islander observances of sacredness that a word borrowed from Polynesian systems of earthly and otherworldly control, taboo, entered into a truly global vernacular where it remains today. It is not surprising, then, that the fascination with aspects of islander spirituality, religion, and their intersection with human practice became a primary focus of Pacific film plots in this century. Sacral elements constitute one of the most durable elements of Pacific films. Images of idolatry, human sacrifice to volcano or sea gods, and taboo appear again and again in Pacific films. What is more, these images are used to locate (to frame) Europeans and islanders in systems of religious belief and practice which create and legitimate disparities in power relations. For instance, islander taboos are frequently glossed as superstitious and irrational while western taboos are used to define proper standards of behavior and moral fortitude.

In a perverse example of art imitating life, twentieth century Euro-Americans sought the same titillation from cinematic encounters with Pacific islanders—men and women—as did our symbolic seafaring ancestors. The sexual character of the Pacific islands has been much represented and much commented on (in film and other media). The fetishization of the female and usually Polynesian body is notable (Jolly, 1996). Ideas of free or easy love, images of sandy lovemaking, dreams of scantily clad men and women and an implicit psychological comfort with the quality of nudity also appear to be universally attributed to islanders. When Europeans are

transplanted to islands many (but not all) western taboos about the acceptability of certain practices are relaxed and the quality of 'islandness' is invoked as in *Heaven Knows Mr. Allison* (1957). Aspects of the sexualization of the Pacific on film which beg further investigation include the fetishization of the male body and the creation and circulation of a certain masculine body-image in the western consciousness. Bare and barrel-chested part-Tahitian actor John Hall comes to mind, as does pakeha Errol Flynn. The impact of male and female expressions of sexuality in Pacific films on the American consciousness during the 20s and 30s and the reaction of women's Christian movements to maintain standards of decency in the media is a critical research question for American studies. The interplay between the bodies of actual peoples, imaged ethnicities, and extra-regional fantasies also remains to be well addressed. In *His Majesty O'Keefe*, Fijian women play the parts of Palauan and Yapese. *All the Brothers Were Valiant* features European women speaking near-grammatical Tahitian to portray I-Kiribati. One might thus question how the shifting image of the Micronesian body functions in an economy of representations

Material themes in Pacific films may mirror colonial rationales. The exploitation of natural resources which serves as a primary plot element resembles nothing less than the motivations of early Spanish explorations for King Solomon's mine, or the sandalwood, whale oil, and copra economic drives of later finance-minded captains. The association between contact and material progress and individual prosperity is not limited to a particular material item or time period. Contemporary tourism might be understood as the recent inheritor of the same system of appropriation and exploitation of local Pacific resources. The relation between the purely mercantile use of Pacific materials and the tourist's enjoyment of the region's environment more broadly is visible through their counterpoint in the idea of a paradise lost.

A final element of an oceanic cinema, in this introductory analysis, might be termed Martial. In the earliest Pacific films, forces of nature and forces of human corruption are

conflated. Alternatively, European control—especially aboard sailing ships such as the *Bounty*—of the body and the right to discipline the body stands in stark contrast to the absolute abandon and release represented by island populations. Much of the imagery of exploration in Melanesia, especially in the dense jungles and mountainous terrain of New Guinea, builds on ideas of danger and personal courage to legitimate a certain kind of colonial person and associated colonial behaviors. Later, the Pacific war and subsequent nuclear testing recast and magnified many of the same themes.

The persistence of these elements through the decades is wholly noteworthy. Even more striking is the occurrence of the same elements and associated attitudes across place and genre. Even a passing familiarity with Pacific films should, at least, suggest the very real possibility that when Flaherty frames the bare-chested Saavai maiden at the shore his representation is the same frame which focuses our attention on bare-chested Dolores Del Rio or Brooke Shields, in this case modestly covered by glued or taped hair. Clearly, a separate politics of the body is invoked to cover some women and not others. Similarly, America views its perennial fascination with *Robinson Crusoe* through the same frame which delineates the structure of a classic Pacific ethnographic (documentary) film—the pounding of tapa, the production of clothing and shelter, the twining of coconut thread, spear fishing on a coral reef. Essentially, these films signify from the same frame and fascinate us, again and again, for the same reason. This notion of the confluence of certain conventional representations of the physical and psycho-sexual worlds of persons and the varied interests of global populations is exactly what I mean to elicit from the idea of an oceanic cinema. Other frames—such as space or place represented in the characteristics of ships, villages, volcano tops, and marae, for instance—might be selected for future investigation. Such an inquiry, I posit, would again uncover certain persistent elements which suggest the coherency of this regional cinema.

The history complex

The complexity theory of *sensitive dependence on initial conditions* demands that we recognize that dramatic results are caused by an infinite number of seemingly minor conditions. The relevance of this theory to historiographical research is telling if somewhat disturbing. Though it may be methodologically impossible to trace the result of any given historical cause one is forced to accept the conclusion that historical actuality is an effect of the finite⁵³ interactions of all causes.

This systematic process of meaning production, circulation, and interpretation is what I mean by semiosis. The relation between film images and human experience is correspondent. Film images inform and create the broader world in which any one of us lives. This is equally true for those who do not have daily access to films. Filmmakers and audiences do not come to the act of producing or viewing film as *tabula rasa*. Rather, these persons bring to the experience of a film a system of beliefs and values which exposure to richly coded film images either supports or modifies. The importance of such intangibles as beliefs and values is that they actively, if unconsciously structure intra and inter-cultural practices across the range of human endeavor: political, economic, artistic. So, the basis of this semiotic process is a play between traditions of held meaning, conventional modes of communication, and production of novel perspectives or new shades of meaning.⁵⁴

The critical facet for understanding the historical relevance of this semiosis, is that islanders' experiences of themselves are also touched and to some extent mediated by the same processes of meaning distribution which play in the global consciousness such as those which fuel tourist imaginations and economic realities. One person, in a matrix of conscious and unconscious psychological processes, may choose to visit Fiji on the strength of a viewing of

⁵³ The actual character of this number is best described as finite and infinitely approaching infinity. One imagines a cosmic bean counter capable of tallying up the existence and actions of every constituent and fundamental sub-atomic particle would finish with quite a probability burrito.

⁵⁴ Passive, active, and creative, does this resemble Sahlin's "structure of conjuncture?"

Blue Lagoon (1948, 1980).⁵⁵ Such screenings may also affect the treatment of the Fijian tourist experience in a *certain* way—as attenuated by screenings of this film and perhaps two or three dozen other films set in the Pacific much like it which one might have been, commonly and unknowingly, infected by growing up after World War II.⁵⁶ One quite easily apprehends that a million or, in this age of mass-distribution, hundreds of millions of experiences such as this may have profound ramifications for the reality, experience, imagination, and study of the Pacific islands. The impossibility of tracing results back to conditions does not remove the fact of the semiotic process by which ideas and practices are constituted.⁵⁷

I am not in a position here to do anything other than imagine some possible aspects of this process. However, I do not mean to suggest that positive knowledge of complex systems—such as the system of representations—is so improbable as to suggest throwing up one’s hands in academic hubris. Rather, such processes leave traces which may, under proper lighting, reveal a great deal of the truth of the system. Meaning abhors a vacuum and movie theaters may be little more than human bubble chambers in which the normally invisible traces of the interaction of meaning and image radiate in the play of the screen’s light.

The Pacific Islands have long been a nexus of global imaginations of the exotic. As history played out, the colonial era of political, economic, and social dominion in the Pacific began not long after the regular arrival of European ships in the 1700s. Did representations of Pacific islanders and locales play a role in the establishment of the region’s colonial regimes and their self-legitimizing logics? Even a cursory examination of the history of European

⁵⁵ In these films, young castaways come of age on a remote Fijian island where, aside from fears of native cannibalistic intrusion into the site of paradise, the character’s only worry seems to be the immediacy of their next sexual encounter.

⁵⁶ In terms of the economic relations between peoples and cultures, the Burt Lancaster film *His Majesty O’Keefe* (1954) comes to mind. Filmed on the Fijian island Viti Levu, *His Majesty* explores the fine line between stone-age and cash-age economies. The perennial favorite *South Pacific* (1958) affirms, under the pretext of subverting, the sexual economy of transculturalism. See Jolly, *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure* (1996) for a good discussion of this theme.

⁵⁷ Consider the subaltern studies scholar’s interests in establishing an ‘autonomy’ of the colonized.

engagement with the islands shows the remarkable interest, mediation, and re-inscription of Oceanic peoples, ideas, and things. Consider the furor over publications of Cook's, Wallis', Bank's, Bligh's, and Bougainville's journals, and the objects, persons, and practices which they described. How else might one interpret, in light of the colonial (dis)order which followed the arrival of westerners in the islands, the 'intellectual' fascination with and 'cultural' appropriation of Pacific islanders and islandness in European metropolitan centers⁵⁸, except as constituting an opening gambit in the circumvention of islander autonomy? A sense of the immediacy and centrality which representations and imaginations of Oceania played in establishing, over time, durable and disparate relations between western and Pacific peoples is formed from this data.⁵⁹

This process was also paralleled in other parts of the European-colonized world. In the introduction to *Africa on Film*, Cameron writes "Africa is a very old site for European projection, a location of myths and fantasies for which the North seemed not to have the uncharted space." (Cameron, pg. 11) Throughout Cameron's work and other texts and essays on filmmaking about Africa, a specific catalogue of themes and (mis)identifications used by Europeans to establish the particular myths and fantasies about the places of that continent emerged. The cinematic process of mythification of that continent was binary in that when films identified a certain theme or value about Africa and African lives, they did so in opposition to some alternate and implicitly better European or American cultural truth. Culture vs. Nature. Civilization vs. Savagery. Logic and Reason vs. Magic and Irrationality. Light vs. Dark. Maturity

⁵⁸ Recent publications have returned to the topic of the reception of such persons including "Prince Boo" of Pelau and Omai of Tahiti. That these works do not themselves enter into a critique of the relation between the relocation and reception of Pacific islanders and the economic and political systems rapidly empowered does not suggest their stories cannot be read in this manner since it is clear that colonial regimes took as central legitimization for their role in the Pacific some sort of implicit heirarchization of cultural and racial identity based on perceived notions of fundamental differences between western and non-western peoples.

⁵⁹ In a powerful and troubling novel, *The Island of the Day Before*, Umberto Eco recreates the impact of Oceanic images, objects, and practices on Enlightenment thinkers and European military and political power-brokers of that age. Alternatively, one might turn, almost indiscriminately, to the pages of Rousseau, Swift, or Bacon for a sense of the impact of Oceanic ideas on moral, ethical, social, and scientific debates of the day.

vs. Childishness. Neither are these oppositions limited to the Tarzan movies of the twenties and thirties, rather they continue to be recreated for new audiences by such widely received films such as *Out of Africa* (1986), *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, and recently, *The Ghost and the Darkness* (1996). Perhaps the formulation and communication of such oppositions is the very goal of colonialism. This seems likely given the clear correspondence between political and economic power and the moral imperative to rule, “the white man’s burden,” which the ideology of these oppositions legitimates. With this in mind, the character of neo-colonialism may be perceived to include the more subtle modes of maintenance of the implicit hierarchies which these ideas structure. The cinematic treatment of other colonized peoples, especially those in Africa, clearly parallels the processes of filmmaking in the Pacific.

It is the possible truth of the model which emerged from my historical survey—the idea that visual representations of islanders and islands may have currency in real economies and politics—which makes the writing of a history of Pacific films and the proposition of the existence of an oceanic cinema at all meaningful in a period of decolonization. The African scholar Ngugi Wa Thiongo, writes of colonialism:

The real aim of colonialism, was to control... the entire realm of the language of real life... But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. (quoted in *Black African Cinema*, Ukadike pg. 35).

Clearly, the academic project is not entirely innocent of, at the very least, complicity with this process which may continue today in the guise of neo-colonialism.

Sharrad offers a glimpse of some of the complexities of the tangled threads of oceanic peoples, places, and things in western imaginations. He offers that the process of identification in the Pacific did not result in the same understandings and representations of all Pacific peoples as a single people. Early European accounts of the region were marked by,

The hysterical glorification of [the Polynesian’s] world... hospitable local customs and apparent tropical abundance... despite latter moralizing and fixations on cannibal savagery that came with the death of Cook and birth of missions, there remained a sense of kindred feeling for the Polynesian... There is a sense of common cause against

the vastness of the sea; the figuring of the Polynesians as successful navigators in the Western tradition (the ‘Vikings of the Sunrise’) not only gives them a dignity consistent with the Western tendency to privilege them over the darker and ‘more savage’ Melanesians, but also allows them to be contained within Western conceptual frames and creates a common tradition that validates European voyaging and settlement in the Pacific. (Sharrad, pg. 601)

Here it is clear, ironically and darkly, that the very attributes which Europeans used to privilege certain Pacific peoples over others were appropriated and subverted by the colonial process of settlement.⁶⁰ Certain perceptions and interpretations of images of the Pacific (signifiers) and the peoples, practices, and things they represent (signified) are, thus, embedded in the region’s history.

While the explication of the European process of representation, identification, and colonization is a far more challenging project than is possible in this chapter, what I hope to have suggested above is, first, that images of the Pacific were not merely limited to visual reproductions of reality but were reiterated in the imaginations of millions of Europeans and their political and economic policy-makers through literary and performance media beginning in the 1500s⁶¹ and increasing in number and kind from the 1700s on. Second, I hope it is clear that images and imaginations, intangible and seemingly insubstantial, were intimately engaged in the process of colonization in a fundamentally potent manner. The importance of such a ground for this thesis lies in establishing some sense of just how deeply rooted and tangled—

⁶⁰ Bernard Smith, in *European Vision and the South Pacific*, and others have focused intensely on precisely this topic. For instance, in *From Point Venus to Bali H`ai*, Margaret Jolly seeks to “explore some earlier manifestations of connections between bodily revelation (i.e. Pacific islander lasciviousness and sexually relaxed moral standards) and imperial might in the Pacific islander, and ponder if and how we can posit such a close connection between eroticism, exoticism and political and military colonization.” (Jolly, pg. 1).

⁶¹ I use earlier date because Diaz, Rogers, and other historians of Chamorro relations with Spain have argued that the story of Guam, though unique in historical specificity, can be read as both archetypal and metaphorical for what was to happen to many Pacific peoples: contact, depopulation, disease, military conflict and resistance, conversion to Christianity and syncretism with pre-existing religious and cultural practices, the establishment of local landed elites, and the alienation of many indigenous peoples from the land along with the general abuse of the land resulting in the loss of flora and fauna, and most recently the increased entanglement of local populations with tourism and movements for increased local political autonomy.

following the complexity model—western conventions portraying Pacific cultures, identity, and peoples *are*.

Pacific islander filmmakers are to some extent working in direct opposition to the continued propagation and exploitation of their islands' cultural and economic resources as a direct result of such 'innocuous' creatures of imagination. Ginsburg writes of this process,

The capabilities of media to transcend boundaries of time, space, and even language are being used effectively to mediate, literally, historically produced social ruptures and to help construct identities that link past and present in ways appropriate to contemporary conditions. (Ginsburg, pg. 358)

This is precisely the situation one finds in the recent works of islander and, ever more frequently, western filmmakers across the Pacific. What Ginsburg lays out here is a method of decolonization, a roadmap to the future. By examining over time the interaction of elements within such frames as I proposed above one finds in the history of Pacific film a sense of evolution and of movement towards a new image and imagination of Pacific locales. The world of darkness established in the black and white features of the first years of this century and largely maintained throughout, is steadily becoming a world of light.

CHRONOLOGY OF SELECT FILMS

Neu Guinea 1904 - 1906
Poi Dances at Whakarewarewa 1910
Voelkenkunliche Film Dokumente Aus Der Sudsee 1910
Shark God (The) 1913
Mutiny on the Bounty 1916
Robinson Crusoe 1916
Robinson Crusoe 1917
Idol Dancer 1919
Te Hui Aroha Ki Turanga/Gisborn Hui Aroha 1919
He Pito Whakaatu I Te Hui I Rotorua 1920
He Pito Whakaatu I Te Noho A Te Maori I Te Awa A Whanganui 1921
Pearls and Savages 1921
He Pito Whakaatua A Te Maori Na James McDonald 1923
Vengeance of the Deep 1923
Adventure 1925
Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age 1926
Pearl of the South Seas 1926
Jungle Woman (The) 1926
Romance of Hine-moa 1927
White Shadows of the South Seas 1927
He Murimuri Aroha Ki Nga Morehu O Maugapohatu 1928
Maori as He Was (The) 1928
Rain 1928
Sadie Thompson 1928
Maori: Everyone Bathes on Washing Day at Rotorua (The) 1930
Rotorua, N.Z. 1930
Tabu: A Story of the South Seas 1931
Air Road to Gold 1932
Bird of Paradise 1932
Death Drums of New Guinean 1932
Guinea Gold - A Romance of Australian Enterprise 1932
Rain 1932
Mr. Robinson Crusoe 1932
In the Wake of the Bounty 1933
Ill de Paques 1935
Mutiny on the Bounty 1935
Hurricane 1937
Typhoon Treasure 1938
South of Pago Pago 1940
Moon and Sixpence (The) 1942

Wings Over New Guinea 1942
Jungle Patrol 1944
Maori Village 1945
East Coast District Nurse 1946
Maori School 1947
Polynesians of Kapingamarangi 1951
Mokil 1953
Damien 1950
Miss Sadie Thomson 1953
Mr. Roberts 1955
Between Heaven and Hell 1956
Tonga, the Last Polynesian Kingdom 1956
Colonialism: Ogre or Angel? 1957
Heaven Knows Mr. Allison 1957
South Pacific 1957
Mutiny on the Bounty 1962
PT-109 1963
Ensign Pulber 1964
Endless Summer 1965
Hell in the Pacific 1968
The Harder They Come 1973
Nothing to Do, Nowhere to Go 1977
Sleeping Dogs 1977
Ileksen: Politics in Papua New Guinea 1978
In Mi Nao: Solomon Islands Regain Independence 1979
Jakupa 1981
Bastion Point 1981
Yap, How Did You Know We'd Like TV? 1982
Angels of War 1983
First Contact 1983
Marshall Islands: Living with the Bomb (The) 1983
Tukuna 1984
Patu! 1984
Aliens from Inner Space 1984
Half Life: A Parable for the Nuclear Age 1986
My Enemy, My Ally 1986
Out of Africa 1986
Cannibal Tours 1987
Ngati 1987
Silence of the Lambs 1991
Accused (The) 1991
Te Rua 1991

The Piano 1993
Rapa Nui 1993
Once Were Warriors 1994
Waterworld 1995
Island of Doctor Moreaux 1996
Piliialoha 1996
Up Periscope 1996
McHale's Navy 1997
Godzilla (in production 1997-1998)
Robinson Crusoe (in production 1997)

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