ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	OBJECTS OF MEMORY: PAUL GAUGUIN AND STILL-LIFE PAINTING, 1880-1901
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Memory plays a profound role in the aesthetic philosophy and still-life painting of French Symbolist artist Paul Gauguin (1848-1903). Throughout Gauguin's career, memory and imagination served him as an artistic tool, a personal resource, and a metaphor for the freedom of artistic expression. These themes recur in his writing, and this dissertation locates their visual expression in Gauguin's still-life painting, wherein he gave tangible form to his theories through reflection upon and manipulation of objects. In chronologically-arranged case studies, I examine three types of memory: visual memory, nostalgia, and the ephemeral nature of autobiographical memory, situating each within nineteenth-century and present-day science. In so doing, I perform a type of interdisciplinary methodology called "cognitive historicism" that is new to art history.

Art historians have long noted the exceptional qualities of several of Gauguin's still lifes, but have not to date identified what in particular sets the genre apart. My research has located and articulated the achievement of Gauguin's still life as a body of work in which he repeatedly grappled with memory, its processes, and its meaning. A concentrated analysis of period beliefs about memory and the ways memory appears in Gauguin's visual art and writing reveals the depth and significance of the relationship

between aesthetic Symbolism and the nineteenth-century interest in individual, autobiographical memory. In turn, this study contributes to a larger historical inquiry into the meaning of memory to the late-nineteenth-century mind. As Gauguin was explicitly attuned to the scientific developments of his time, he functions as a lens through which to consider the art and science of memory. While I ground my investigation in theories proposed during Gauguin's lifetime, I situate historical intellectual developments in the context of recent science. This project thereby constitutes an exploration of interdisciplinary methodologies that bridge science and the humanities in a way that privileges the artwork and its historical circumstances. It demonstrates the rich but previously untapped potential of this method that uses frameworks and vocabulary derived from cognitive science to inform art historical inquiry, which promises to provide new directions for the discipline.

OBJECTS OF MEMORY:
PAUL GAUGUIN AND STILL LIFE PAINTING, 1880-1901

By

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Dedication

To my family, with love and gratitude.

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I owe the realization of this dissertation to the support of countless individuals. My advisor, Professor June Hargrove, stands foremost among them. From the beginning of my graduate career she has encouraged my interest in interdisciplinary art history, providing at once the freedom to explore and a steady hand to guide. I have reaped the rewards of her careful attention to, and tremendous advocacy of, my work. Her ideas and their beautiful expression in her writing have been an inspiration to me, and I am both fortunate and honored to stand as her last doctoral advisee.

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Finally, my family has given me the courage to imagine what is possible. From early on my mother instilled in me sense of wonder in visiting museums, and my father, a hunger for exploration and discovery. My sisters were my very first attentive listeners; they made me want to spend my life learning and sharing what I've learned with others. During the writing of this dissertation, my husband has been a daily witness to my triumphs and struggles, and an engaged partner in the development my ideas. His patience, encouragement, and unflinching confidence in me and my work has been my source of power and joy in carrying out this project. For all of this and more than I could ever enumerate, I thank my family for their unconditional love and support.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

Objects of Memory

This dissertation argues that a selection of still-life paintings by Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) served the artist as a site of inquiry through which he probed theories of memory and their role in the creative process. Still life and memory are the two objects of my investigation, and the dissertation's title, "Objects of Memory," speaks to this dual purpose through the double-meaning of the noun "object." The most common usage of "object" is to describe something material that can be seen and held. Objects often become containers of memory, tangible references for times or events of the past. As I will show, Gauguin's still lifes often depicted objects that carried potent memories. Secondly, "object" may be used synonymously with "subject"—of an investigation, or of one's affection, for example. "Object," however, implies a more goal-driven attitude than does "subject." One might describe the subject of an investigation, but one actively pursues the object of an investigation. I also employ "objects of memory" in this sense: as an active search—on my part and Gauguin's—for the purpose or objective of memory and its role in the artistic process.

Still-life paintings afford a privileged view into Gauguin's theories of memory for two reasons. First, as I argue in chapter one, Gauguin thought through the process of painting from memory, or from the imagination as he also called it, in a series of canvases that picture the act of looking. In these works, the object of the pictured subject's gaze is always a still life. Still life is a genre that an artist can easily paint from life rather than from memory, which allowed Gauguin to call attention all the more emphatically to his rejection of the observed model. Thus from the beginning, still life

occupied a privileged place in Gauguin's painted inquests into the role of memory. Second, as I show in chapters two and three, from the time he left for Tahiti to the end of his career, Gauguin's still lifes are often charged with references to other artists who were separated from him by distance, death, or ruptured relationships. Still life was for Gauguin, then, a site of perpetually renewed confrontation with the past, and in this way, an arena in which he repeatedly grappled with memory, its processes, and its meaning.

This dissertation comprises an introduction and three case studies. Each case study examines a set of still-life paintings through the lens of a different nineteenth-century theory of memory. I contextualize the canvases with respect to Gauguin's life and artistic career. Throughout, I mine Gauguin's letters and manuscripts as well as period literature, from poetry to science, to show how Gauguin expressed the period's deep concerns with memory through these works. Related studies from the present-day science of memory inform and structure my examination of period memory in each chapter.

My interest lies less in Gauguin's memories per se, and more in Gauguin's engagement with the faculty of memory itself. Gauguin notoriously wove myths and manipulated his memories, which from my perspective demonstrates the awareness and purposefulness with which he approached his relationship with the past. While we normally associate memory with truth, and imagination with fantasy or myth, these pairings are false. Scientists are just coming to understand what Gauguin knew well: imagination and memory are largely interchangeable, and together they give birth to

creativity. Indeed even the ancient Greeks knew of this relationship, as Mnemosyne (Memory) was the mother of the nine Muses.[1]

The significance of this project takes varied forms. Art historians have long noted the exceptional qualities of several of Gauguin's still lifes, but have not to date identified what in particular sets the genre apart. My work locates and articulates the achievement of Gauguin's still life as a body of work that is fundamentally about the processes and meaning of memory, concepts he investigated through objects. Secondly, this dissertation uncovers the relationship between the nineteenth-century interest in individual, autobiographical memory and the visual art of the period. This is a major concept that resonates with and can be applied to the work of other artists in the period, particularly the Symbolist painters. Outside art history, this study contributes to a larger historical inquiry into the meaning of memory to the late-nineteenth-century mind. As Gauguin was explicitly attuned to the scientific developments of his time, he functions as an ideal case study through which to consider the art and science of memory—a subject of much recent scholarly consideration. While I ground my analysis in theories proposed during Gauguin's lifetime, I situate historical intellectual developments in the context of present-day science. Thus at a third level, my project is an exploration of interdisciplinary methodologies that bridge science and the humanities in a way that privileges the art object and its historical context. I bring these bodies of knowledge together using a methodology known in literary studies as "cognitive historicism," which I will further describe below.

[1] "Mnemosyne." *Encarta Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*. 2nd U.S. ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), 1213.

The sections that follow will discuss why still life would have been an attractive genre for Gauguin and a genre worthy of scholarly consideration; a brief history of still life and how Gauguin aligns with and departs from its traditions; Gauguin's early development of still life; and a theorization of how to define Gauguin's early achievement in the genre. These sections are more heavily focused upon still life than upon memory. This is because I will treat specific histories of memory and provide separate backgrounds relevant to each of the case studies within my chapters. Still life's history and theory for my purposes need not be segmented in the way that memory studies must, and so I have chosen to take this opportunity in the introduction to provide a brief history and theory of still-life painting. The final sections of the introduction present chapter summaries, a literature review, and methods.

Why Still Life?

Still lifes number among Gauguin's earliest and latest canvases. He painted in this genre throughout his career, though the frequency varied. At times it constituted a quarter of his output, while in other periods he made few or none. In all he painted approximately 110 still lifes, constituting about fifteen percent of his works on canvas.[2]

That Gauguin would engage deeply with this genre at all comes initially as a surprise. For centuries still-life painting catered to bourgeois patronage, and yet Gauguin constantly took steps to divorce himself from his own bourgeois businessman background in order to ally with the artistic avant-garde. Yet certain aspects of the still-

[2] I count 110 still lifes defined as canvases in which objects are the primary focus. Beatrice Lovis includes more "hybrid" canvases where a still life element is included but plays a clearly secondary role, and with this parameter she arrives at 130 canvases, which raises the genre to almost twenty percent of Gauguin's painted oeuvre. Béatrice Lovis, "Les natures mortes de Paul Gauguin: une production picturale méconnue," *Artibus et Historiae* 30.59 (2009), 159.

life tradition would have appealed deeply to Gauguin's theoretical interests. Here I will offer an overview of these qualities, long considered intrinsic to the genre.

To begin, still life has traditionally served as an allegory of the creative process itself. Gauguin thought deeply about the creative process and artistic freedom and expressed these thoughts regularly in his art and writing.[3] This notion of artistic liberty through still life derives from the artist's full creative control in crafting his model, from selecting the subject to arranging the components. In this sense, the artist composes a still life twice: once on the table, once on the canvas.[4] Gauguin took this liberty further by placing his still life compositions in unusual places such as upon a chair, or by disregarding the bounds of genre and including, for example, an interior scene with figures in the background of a still life.

As the original home of trompe-l'oeil painting, still life has historically allowed artists to exploit the boundary between reality and artifice in a way that parallels Gauguin's penchant for intermingling truth and myth. The oldest of these tales of deceptive still lifes comes from the story of the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasios in Pliny's *Natural History*. After Zeuxis' grapes proved so realistic that they deceived the birds, he

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[3] References to the creative process and Gauguin's interest in the viewer's soul are indebted to June Hargrove's articles and seminar discussions on these concepts. For example, June Hargrove, "'Woman with a Fan': Paul Gauguin's Heavenly Vairaumati: A Parable of Immortality," *The Art Bulletin* 88.3 (Sep., 2006), 552-566. June Hargrove, "Paul Gauguin and his Muses: The Feminine Ideal as 'Other' in the Myth of the Artist," in *L'Artiste et sa muse: Mythification du créateur et de son modèle XIX-XX siècles*, ed. Christiane Dotal and Alexandre Dratwicki (Rome: Académie de France, 2006), 117-139. June Hargrove, "Paul Gauguin: Sensing the Infinite," in Sally Promey, ed., *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven, CT ; London: Yale Univ. Press, 2014), 341-54.

[4] This is an often-repeated point in still life literature, for example: Charles Sterling, "En préparant l'exposition de la Nature Morte," *La Revue des arts* 2.1 (March 1952), 32; Meyer Schapiro, "The Apples of Cézanne: An essay on the meaning of still life," in *Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries- Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1979), 13; George L. Mauner, *Manet: The Still-Life Paintings* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2000), 36; Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, "Gauguin Creates his World: The Object in a World of Myth and Dream," in *Paul Gauguin: Artist of Myth and Dream,* ed. Stephen Eisenman, Charles F. Stuckey, and Suzanne Branciforte (Milan, Italy: Skira, 2007), 35.

turned to Parrhasios, his competitor, and called for him to pull back the curtain on his painting. The curtain, however, was Parrhasios' painting, and Zeuxis admitted that his opponent had achieved the greater deception. As Norman Bryson points out, the entire competition takes place in the space of a theatre, thereby doubling the layers of artifice inherent in this narrative.[5] Bryson further argues for the genre's power by suggesting that still life's flirtation with reality and artifice is likely why the Cubists embraced the genre and later achieved the ultimate trompe l'oeil in the form of collage.[6] Still life became a pivotal genre for the twentieth-century avant-garde, and it is unsurprising that Gauguin would have exploited its theoretical potential in his own ways in the final decades of the nineteenth century. He continued a legacy of interrogating, through still life, what it means to represent.

A more prosaic attraction to still life comes in its accessibility, as it is cheap to assemble, disposable, and it stays still. As I will demonstrate, however, Gauguin approached this very available and easily observable genre through memory, imagination, and the brain. Gauguin disdained the slavish imitation of nature—and derided Zeuxis for it[7]—and so when he painted the genre most famed and praised for precisely such imitation, he undermined that quality of direct observation and imitation by insisting

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[5] Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), 30-2. Also on the relationship between still life and deception, Shapiro, "Apples," 19-21; Victor Ieronim Stoichița, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4, 29; and S. Ebert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe L'oeil Painting* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002).

[6] Bryson 1990, 83.

[7] Paul Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, facsimile reproduction in *Gauguin écrivain, Ancien culte mahorie, Noa Noa, Diverses choses*, ed. Isabelle Cahn. [DVD] (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2003), 213. "L'imitation de la nature, quel qu'exacte qu'elle soit, n'autorise personne à prendre le titre sacré d'Artiste. Les grappes de Zeuxis n'avaient rien d'artistique si ce n'est à vol d'oiseau."

upon working from memory instead. This was a tension that Gauguin created and pressed upon, approaching it in different ways at different times over his career. What remains constant is the air of mystery and creative exploration evoked as Gauguin put his own spin on the genre of reality and illusion.

In addition to these theoretical attractions that still life arguably held for Gauguin, there are several personal reasons for which the genre was of interest to him. For one, Gauguin worked closely with both Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne, among the nineteenth century's most respected painters of still life, at pivotal points in his career. Given Gauguin's admiration of these artists, it follows that still life would occupy a favored site of continued return and reflection. As early as 1880 Gauguin's art was inspired by Cézanne, whose *Still Life with Fruit Dish* (see fig. 0.12) he owned and continually revisited through his work. In the months before and for two years after Gauguin's stay with van Gogh in Arles in 1888, Gauguin's still life production spiked, and he continued making visual allusions to van Gogh's still lifes in his own still life canvases for the rest of his career.

Still life is the first genre in which Gauguin represented other artworks within his paintings, beginning in 1884 (fig. 0.1) and continuing throughout his career (for example, among several others not illustrated here, see fig. 3.3).[8] A competitive man and artist, Gauguin would not allude so directly to the work of another artist without considering how his own work compared. These visual quotations were not purely homages, but

[8] The National Gallery of Art's *Still Life with Peonies*, 1884, is the first. It includes a drawing of a dancer by Degas that Gauguin owned. Daniel Wildenstein, Sylvie Crussard, and Martine Heudron, *Gauguin: A Savage in the Making: Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings (1873-1888)* (Milan: Skira, 2002), 163. On this topic see also Isabelle Cahn, "Les Gauguin dans Gauguin: peintures et céramiques dans le tableau," in *Gauguin: actes du Colloque Gauguin, Musée d'Orsay, 11-13 janvier 1989* (Paris: La Documentation francaise, 1991), 172-84.

rather sites of competition.[9] Whether a direct visual quotation, as in a painting of an existing painting or drawing, or a less direct allusion, these reflections upon other artists and their work occur with particular frequency in still-life paintings as compared to other genres. Therefore these works are the result of moments of reflection by the artist upon his standing among his colleagues, and thereby upon his career. These types of homages change over time, ranging from stylistic adaptations to collage-like combinations of his colleagues' iconic images.

What's in a Name?

The type of painting that we call still life existed before it was named.[10] Though widely practiced by seventeenth-century Dutch painters, the compositions were not grouped into a genre but referred to only by what they contained: a flower piece, a fruit painting, a banquet. Around mid-century, Dutch studios streamlined these many types into a single genre, which they called *still-leven*. While today *leven* translates as "life," in studio jargon at the time it meant "model." The term, then, simply meant "still model" as opposed to a person or animal that moved. The French struggled to adopt a term for another century. At times they used a literal translation of the Dutch, *vie coye*, and later the more elegant *nature reposée*, but the terms did not stick. Charles Sterling argues that *nature morte* suggests a degree of contempt and, for that reason, may have arisen in French academic circles that were "anti-Baroque." The term appeared in the mid-

[9] June Hargrove makes this argument with respect to Gauguin's 1901 sunflower still lifes. June Hargrove, "Paul Gauguin, *Sunflowers in an Armchair*," in *Mélanges offerts à Arnauld Brejon de Lavergnée*, (Paris: Maison de la Science, 2012), 202-03.

[10] S. Ebert-Schifferer, *Still Life: A History* (New York: Abrams, 1999), 12.

eighteenth century, likely because Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin's success pressured critics to settle upon a name for the genre.[11]

With or without a name, Bryson argues that still life has endured as a genre because the objects themselves have endured. Vessels, platters, and fruit have existed and attracted the eye of artists since the ancient Greeks, through the Dutch Republic, to the French Impressionists and the present-day. Thus still life holds together not only as a category named and constructed by critics, but by the continuity of the objects it represents. Those objects, he points out, may be culturally determined in their shape, material, use, and symbolic meaning (if any), but nonetheless their forms cut across time and nationality.[12]

A still-life painting most conservatively defined is a representation of a group of objects—and only objects—which are selected and arranged by an artist.[13] Responding to the Salon des Refusés in 1863, Jules-Antoine Castagnary predicted that, "si l'ordre académique s'écroule un jour, ce sera que les peintres de nature morte, dans les bas-fonds, en auront corrodé un à un tous les étais."[14] The painters who precipitated that collapse indeed achieved several strong still lifes in the mid-1860s, among them Henri Fantin-Latour, Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Frédéric Bazille, Alfred

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[11] This etymology and early history is from Charles Sterling, *Still Life Painting: From Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 63-64.

[12] Bryson 1990, 12-13.

[13] Ebert-Schifferer (1999, 13) offered this definition, and yet included in his exhibition paintings that do not fit under his restrictive rubric.

[14] Jules-Antoine Castagnary, "Salon des refusés, 1863" in *Salons (1857-1870)* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1892), 161. "Should the academic order one day collapse, it will be because the still-life painters, working underground, will have little by little eaten away all its supports." This statement followed his assertion that, "De fait, ils [les peintres de nature morte] se multiplient dans une proportion effrayante. Les rats des égouts de Paris sont moins nombreux et moins menaçants." This is an often-cited quote in the literature on Impressionist still life.

Sisley, Camille Pissarro, and Cézanne.[15] At the same time that they challenged the Academy, they also chipped away at the traditional definitions of the genres, still life included. Gustave Caillebotte, for example, had no hand in physically arranging the model for his *Fruit Displayed on a Stand* (1881-82, MFA Boston). Liberated from the Academy, several of these artists composed paintings that cracked open the boundaries of genre, for example Monet's *Dejeuner* (1873, Musée d'Orsay) or Degas' *A Woman Seated beside a Vase of Flowers* (see fig. 2.5), which include figures in works that contain a major still-life component.

Through his titles specifically, Gauguin made clear that his engagement with this genre was purposefully explorative. He gave still lifes untraditional titles such as *Pour faire un bouquet* and *Sur une chaise,* while bestowing compositions not traditionally considered still life with titles such as *Fleurs, nature morte* (see fig. 0.3, 0.4, and 0.6). Gauguin and his Impressionist forbearers require a revised and expanded definition of still life from the one offered above. Still life as I will use it is a painting in which inanimate objects constitute the primary focus of the composition.

Gauguin's Early Still Lifes at the Impressionist Exhibitions

My goal in this section is to demonstrate still life's role as an early site of experimentation for Gauguin, which I do through an examination of his exhibition practices in the fifth, sixth, and seventh Impressionist exhibitions between 1880 and 1882. I will not weave memory into the discussion of these canvases; rather I wish to discuss them specifically in order to establish the importance of this genre in Gauguin's

[15] George Shackelford, "Impressionism and the Still Life Tradition," in Eliza E., Rathbone and George T. M. Shackelford, *Impressionist Still Life* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2001), 21.

development as an artist and to pave the way for my later arguments on the role of still life in his explorations of memory and creativity.

The first still life that Gauguin exhibited was at the 1880 Impressionist exhibition under the title *Nature morte* (now *Wood Tankard and Metal Pitcher*, fig. 0.2).[16] Of the eight canvases he exhibited, this and only one other was singled out for review by Henri Trianon, who commented favorably upon its brushwork and "couleur vigoureuse."[17] This painting shows several of the features that Gauguin would continue to develop in his still lifes. The two objects exist in dynamic tension with each other; their material, relative size, curves, and even their handles seem to place them in an anthropomorphic dialogue. The broken brushwork and sets of complimentary colors (green and red-orange, yellow and violet) point to Gauguin's employment of Impressionist techniques. Perhaps most interestingly, Richard Brettell has suggested that Gauguin's placement of his signature on the table alludes to the idea of the artist as double-composer of still life, both on the table and on the canvas.[18] Brettell expresses unbridled praise of this canvas, calling it "profoundly original" and "extraordinarily inventive"[19]—and this was only Gauguin's first exhibited attempt in the genre.

Gauguin must have felt encouraged by his exhibition of the Chicago canvas, as the following year (1881) he sent three still lifes to the Impressionist exhibition. The titles

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[16] Sylvie Crussard suggests this canvas was the still life exhibited that year (Wildenstein and Crussard, 67); and Brettell (2005) argues in favor of this suggestion (p. 93). In this section I am using original exhibition titles, derived from Ruth Berson, *The New Painting: Impressionism, 1874-1886: Documentation*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996). Exhibited works are listed in volume II.

[17] Henri Trianon, "Cinquième Exposition par un groupe d'artistes indépendants (10 rue des Pyramides)," *Le Constitutionnel* (April 8, 1880), 203. Reprinted in Berson, I: 314.

[18] Richard R. Brettell and Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, *Gauguin and Impressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 94.

[19] Brettell 2005, 93, 95.

he gave them form a set: *Pour faire un bouquet*, *Sur une chaise*, and *Fleurs et tapis* (fig. 0.3, 0.4, 0.5). Each names, respectively, process, location, and content, while leaving out the explicit "nature morte" designation. Trianon commented again upon one of the still lifes. While he began his review of Gauguin by comparing him favorably to Degas, he remarked negatively on *Fleurs et tapis* but in a way that Gauguin may well have appreciated: Gauguin, Trianon wrote, had let himself fall to the "rébus" of Impressionism with this "incompréhensible tableau."[20] He fared better with J.-K. Huysmans, who wrote positively on *Pour faire un bouquet.*[21] Gauguin would also have been proud of the provenance of two of these paintings. Famed Impressionist collector Dr. Georges de Bellio lent *Fleurs et tapis*, and Degas *Sur une chaise*.[22] Moving beyond their titles, this set of three still lifes is highly innovative. Gauguin's displacement of the still life from the table onto a chair may be the first time an artist did so,[23] and even more playfully, in *Pour faire un bouquet* he alluded to the process of composing a still life by placing the freshly-cut flowers in a basket, with a door open to the garden from which they were picked. Like his signature on the table in the Chicago still life, again he employed this genre to highlight the artist's hand in composing. For each of these flower compositions, their placement, treatment of space, tight cropping, brushwork, color, and sheer inventiveness of the subject matter makes them an innovation in the genre. Their thematic

[20] Henry Trianon, "Sixième Exposition de peinture par un groupe d'artistes: 35, boulevard des Capucines," *Le Constitutionnel* (April 24, 1881), 2-3. Reprinted in Berson, I: 368.

[21] J.-K. Huysmans, "L'Exposition des indépendants en 1881," *L'Art moderne* (Paris : G. Charpentier, 1883), 225-257. Reprinted in Berson, I: 352.

[22] *Fleurs et tapis* was given by Gauguin as a gift to de Bellio (Brettell 2005, 112). Degas acquired *Sur une chaise* in an exchange with Gauguin for a pastel of a ballerina. The exchange of this flower still life seeded a new flower still life: the pastel Gauguin received from Degas in this transaction appears in the background of The National Gallery of Art's *Still Life with Peonies*, 1884. Wildenstein and Crussard, 163.

[23] Brettell 2005, 113.

naming takes this creativity a step further, making clear Gauguin's desire to call attention to his ambition in this genre.[24]

Gauguin made even more of a statement with still life at the 1882 Impressionist exhibition, where the first work listed under his name was a 130-by-162 centimeter canvas titled *Fleurs, nature morte* (fig. 0.6). Gauguin challenged the rules of genre by giving this title to an interior scene with figures, but his original defiance is lost in the painting's current title, *Interior of the Painter's House, rue Carcel*. As in 1881, Gauguin again insisted upon the unity of his still lifes by naming them according to an integrated scheme. In addition to *Fleurs, nature morte* he also exhibited canvases titled *Oranges, nature morte; Fleurs et tapis, nature morte*; and *À la fenêtre, nature morte* (fig. 0.7, 0.8, 0.9). Whereas in 1881 he exhibited arrangements consisting only of objects but did not name them *nature morte*, in 1882 he twice titled compositions with figures as still lifes: the abovementioned *Fleurs*, as well as *Oranges, nature morte*.

Fleurs, nature morte has the size and ambition of a masterpiece, yet Gauguin did not provide his viewers with an easy piece to digest, riddled as it is with enigma. The title itself caused confusion among reviewers. While one referred to it by name, another called it a studio interior.[25] The space of the room is unsettling as the walls project and recede with nooks and corners that are difficult to resolve. The folding screen that stands

[24] Brettell continues to heap praise upon these canvases. Of *Fleurs et tapis* he writes that "there is simply no true precedent for this remarkable painting," and he deems *Pour faire un bouquet* "one of the most charming titles in the history of still life painting." He concludes that "when he worked on a small scale in the genre of still life, Gauguin unleashed his greatest powers of invention." Brettell 2005, 112-14.

[25] Jean de Nivelle referred to it by its title: "Voyez ces *Fleurs, nature morte* de M. Gauguin. On les dirait prises, à travers le brouillard, dans un magasin de Londres, ou tout au moins vues à travers une buée qui en mange les couleurs." Jean de Nivelle, "Les Peintres indépendants," *Le Soleil* (March 4, 1882), 1-2. Reprinted in Berson, I: 406. Huysmans wrote only: "Quant à son intérieur d'atelier, il est d'une couleur teigneuse et sourde…" J.-K. Huysmans, "Appendice," *L'Art moderne* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1883), 261-277. Reprinted in Berson, I: 397.

between the table and the piano further complicates the space. While some art historians have suggested that the figures are loosely based off of Gauguin and his wife Mette, no definitive identification has been made and they are likely intended more as characters in a vignette than as portraits.[26] The flowers are the liveliest part of the composition, and the eye cannot help but return constantly to them. They are the brightest and most colorful element, set off against the dark background of the folding screen and highlighted by the bright white tablecloth. Layered in color and thickly painted, the flowers are far more worked up than any other part of the composition. The vase, too, swirls with animation and mimics the colors and forms of the flowers as well as the tablecloth. The vase is positioned at approximately eye level, such that the viewer looks up from the table as if sitting at it. Yet no space exists for the viewer here, neither in the foreground, where the table is cropped at an angle, nor in the foreboding empty chair which blocks the route to the activity going on behind the screen. Through this painting, Gauguin made manifest that he would be no ordinary painter of still life.

Oranges, nature morte works according to a similar system, but on a smaller and simpler scale.[27] This scene takes place behind the folding screen in the previous painting,

[26] Wildenstein and Crussard, 88-89.

[27] This canvas is in a private collection, presently on long-term loan to the Museums Sheffield. Sylvie Crussard gives strong evidence that the exhibited painting was not *Nature morte aux oranges* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes) as has long been believed, but rather this canvas (Wildenstein and Crussard, 89). It is certain that the Sheffield canvas was exhibited at the 1882 Impressionist exhibition because J. de Nivelle described a canvas in which a child is "occupé à peler des oranges qui ressemblent à des jaunes d'œufs." (J. de Nivelle, "Les Peintres indépendants," *Le Soleil*, 4 March 1882, p. 2, reproduced in Berson, 406.) Berson suggested that this description referred to the exhibited canvas titled *La Petite s'amuse*, however Crussard recently identified a different canvas of a child playing with grass in a field that better fits that title. Further, critic Louis Leroy discussed *Oranges, nature morte* in a way that better fits the Sheffield canvas than the Rennes one. He described little drops of dirty grey filling rings of color that do not resemble an orange's colors. Then, "Devant ce barbouillage incompréhensible, le devineur de rébus, surpris, consulte le catalogue et lit: 'Oranges.' Alors sourires, exclamations, étonnement d'une si singulière interprétation de la nature… et le tour est joué." (L. Leroy, "Exposition des impressionnistes," *Le Charivari* (March 17, 1882), 2. Reprinted in Berson, I: 402.) The Sheffield canvas indeed includes colors other than orange in the "ring"

as the same pipe in the corner is visible. Sitting behind a looming table with larger-than-life oranges that appear to be the size of grapefruit, Gauguin's daughter Aline holds one orange in her hands, as if lost in thought. This, too, is a highly enigmatic composition and appears to predict Gauguin's future Symbolist work. The composition builds in concentric circles from the oranges, to the bowl, the disk-like table, and the embracing curvature of the couch. The oranges, almost the size of the girl's head, seem to assert their presence. Like the flowers in *Fleurs, nature morte,* the oranges are the most thickly-worked part of the composition, far more so than the face of the artist's daughter. Aline respects this stillness, with her head bowed in what feels like quiet contemplation of the scene at hand. The landscape-like design painted on the bowl and the inexplicable leaf at the front of the table add to the air of mystery.

Influences on Gauguin's Early Still Life

Chardin looms over much of the history of still-life painting in nineteenth-century France. Around the end of the July Monarchy art historians and collectors took an interest in his work, resulting in a Chardin revival by mid-century. An exhibition of eighteenth-century French paintings and drawings in 1860 included over forty of his works, the Goncourt brothers published a major study of his life and work in 1863, and the Louvre had been steadily acquiring his canvases.[28] Important as Chardin was for Edouard Manet,

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of the oranges—including red, green, and blue, whereas the Rennes canvas includes oranges that are more orange in color and appropriately sized, as well as one that is cut open. It is hard to imagine that a viewer would be surprised to learn that the Rennes oranges were in fact oranges, whereas that is an understandable response to the Sheffield canvas. In addition, this name mimics the naming scheme used for *Fleurs, nature morte* in the same exhibition. Had he titled the Sheffield canvas *La Petite s'amuse*, that would have broken his four-time repeated use of "nature morte" to describe both still lifes and hybrid scenes.

[28] Shackelford 2001, 20-22; Henri Loyrette, "Still Life," in Gary Tinterow and Henri Loyrette, *Origins of Impressionism* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 160; Samuel Vitali and Uliana Zanetti, "Revivals and Transformations of the Still Life in Contemporary Art: A Survey," in Peter Weiermair, *The Nature of Still Life: From Manet to the Present Day* (Milano: Electa, 2001), 26.

Cézanne, and several Impressionists who began still-life painting in the 1860s, by the time Gauguin took up the brush in the 1870s Chardin was only one among several models he could turn to. While a small number of Gauguin's canvases from 1875 and 1876 show the direct influence of Chardin, equally evident in the same years and much longer lasting are the influence of Eugène Delacroix and Manet. By the time Gauguin emerged on the still life scene at the 1880 and 1881 Impressionist exhibitions, he had abandoned these influences to conceive the highly inventive canvases that he exhibited in those years which, as discussed above, have no clear precedent in western art.[29]

By 1882, Gauguin had absorbed certain lessons from his Impressionist colleagues' canvases both in and outside the still-life genre. This was a strong year for still lifes by other artists showing at the exhibition. Caillebotte exhibited his *Fruit Displayed on a Stand* (then *Fruits*), Renoir showed five still lifes, and Monet six, all of them flowers. It was also a year of large paintings. Brettell contextualizes Gauguin's *Fleurs, nature morte* among Caillebotte's *A Game of Bezique* (1880, private collection) and Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1880-81, Phillips Collection) in order to point to the strangeness of the Gauguin, particularly regarding the relative degrees of sociability.[30] Yet a better match in this psychological sense, if not in size, are Caillebotte's interior scenes with couples, such as *Interior, Woman Reading* (then *Intérieur*, 1880, private collection), exhibited in 1880, where the formidable furniture adds to the palpable interpersonal tension in a similar way to the Gauguin. Interesting

[29] I agree on this with Brettell (2005), who repeatedly and unreservedly argues this point, describing the four canvases exhibited in these first two years as: "unprecedented and extraordinarily inventive" (95); "simply no true precedent for this remarkable painting"; "all but unprecedented" (113); "again, one struggles to find a prototype in the history of still life painting." (114)

[30] Brettell 2005, 154-55.

precedent for the Sheffield *Oranges, nature morte* could be found in two canvases that were also exhibited at the 1880 exhibition. Caillebotte sent a still life of oranges and apples (fig. 0.10) surrounded by sentinel-like glassware, which achieves a disconcerting effect. Shown the same year, Mary Cassatt's *The Tea* (fig. 0.11) pins the figures on a couch behind an eminently strange assortment of objects in a way that anticipates Gauguin's *Oranges*. The Impressionists, then, provided ample food for thought in their still lifes and related hybrid compositions, leading Gauguin to take the genre head-on as a site of innovation and large statements.

Gauguin spent time working with Cézanne in the early 1880s and deeply admired his still lifes, one of which he owned. Cézanne's *Still Life with Fruit Dish* (fig. 0.12) was the pride of Gauguin's collection, and he held on to it until 1897 when dire financial circumstances forced him to sell it.[31] Gauguin was an enthusiastic proponent of Cézanne's particular style of brushwork, and this may have been his longest-lasting lesson from his idol. In this brushwork, straight, diagonal, parallel bands of color are placed in sets on the canvas, allowing color rather than contour or shade to model the form. By applying the same brushwork to different surfaces, his textures and forms

[31] The dating of Gauguin's and Cézanne's earliest encounter is debated. Crussard suggests that they must have met by the summer of 1881, based on Gauguin's letter to Pissarro that July in which he asks Pissarro to induce Cézanne to reveal his secrets of painting in his sleep. Wildenstein and Crussard, 584. The letter is: Gauguin to Pissarro, July 1881. *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: documents, témoignages*, vol. 1, ed. Victor Merlhès (Paris: Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1984), 21. Merlhès himself notes that there is no evidence for such a meeting in 1881 (page 350, note 56.) Brettell suggests that they must have been together in the summer of 1882, though he also affirms that there is no evidence for this. Brettell 2005, 171.

Gauguin likely acquired Cézanne's *Still Life with Fruit Dish* between 1879 and 1883. Merete Bodelsen, "Gauguin, the Collector," *The Burlington Magazine* 112.810 (September 1870), 590, 598. He wrote to Schuffenecker in 1888 regarding this painting, "Le Césanne [sic] que vous me demandez est une perle exceptionnelle et j'en ai déjà refusé 300f: j'y tiens comme à la prunelle de mes yeux et à moins de nécessité absolue je m'en déferai après ma dernière chemise." Gauguin to Schuffenecker, June 1888. Merlhès, 182. On Gauguin's sale in 1897, Bodelsen 1970, 606.

departed from representation, flattened spatial depth, and gave the canvas an overall unity. *Tomatoes and Pewter Tankard on a Table* (fig. 0.13) of 1883 is the first still life in which Gauguin clearly incorporated several lessons from Cézanne. The composition and content mimic Cézanne's still lifes with the simple table, crumpled white tablecloth, fruit, and blue background. (With a degree of playfulness, Gauguin took the knife—typically placed perpendicular to the picture plane in order to lead the eye back into space and invite the viewer to grab it—and rotated it ninety degrees such that it parallels the picture plane, negating both of its traditional purposes.) The Cézannesque brushstroke appears in the wallpaper and on the table in particular. The blue background itself was an element that Gauguin greatly admired, as he believed that Cézanne's backgrounds were "aussi imaginatifs que réels".[32] The different colors within this wallpaper and the undulating forms at the top only begin to approximate Cézanne's highly animated backgrounds. Gauguin went further in this direction with *Clovis Asleep* (fig. 0.14), in which the birds appear to take flight. Comparison of the tankard in this composition alongside the tankard's first appearance in the Chicago still life demonstrates the change in brushwork that Gauguin took up in the intervening years, as the later canvas reveals the more patterned and rhythmic stroke of Cézanne (fig. 0.15). The same structured brushwork occurs in *Still Life with a Mandolin* (fig. 0.16), in which Gauguin applied the color in a uniformly vertical direction.[33] The first application of this stroke to fruit occurs in *Still Life with Laval,* with which I begin the first chapter (see fig. 1.1).

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[32] Gauguin to Émile Schuffenecker, January 14, 1885. Merlhès, 88. "…as imaginative as real."

[33] This is a still life charged with symbolic meaning, with more significance than the brushwork alone. Due to the nature of my dissertation as a set of case studies, this is one of many compelling still lifes by Gauguin that I do not have the opportunity to fully discuss. It will likely play a role, however, in an expanded future project on Gauguin's still life. Many of Gauguin's still lifes address the senses, most often through the taste of fruit and the fragrance of flowers. I would like to consider the role of the multisensorial

Another less-often attributed influence of Cézanne on Gauguin's still lifes is Cézanne's penchant for quoting his and other artists' work within his paintings. In what was probably Cézanne's first such incorporation of a painting into a painting, he included his own still life in the background of a portrait of his father (*The Artist's Father, Reading "L'Événement"*, 1866, National Gallery of Art), thereby using a still life as a stand-in for himself. Cézanne continued painting pictures in pictures, most often in the realm of still life, for example in *Still Life with Soup Tureen* (1884, Musée d'Orsay), which includes a landscape based roughly on a Pissarro painting.[34] Gauguin's first such incorporation was in *Still Life with Peonies*, 1884, where he painted a Degas pastel which he had exchanged several years earlier for his still life *Sur une chaise*. Gauguin continued to incorporate pictures into his backgrounds through the early 1890s, and then returned to the practice in 1901 with *Still Life with Hope*, which I discuss in chapter three. Thus even when Gauguin quotes an artist such as Degas or Puvis, the practice itself acts as a nod to Cézanne.[35]

Still Life as Paintings of "Things"

What allowed Gauguin to liberate his still lifes from the table, to give them unconventional titles, and even to add figures, and yet still know that they retained their integrity as still lifes? I will argue that Gauguin recognized the possibility of this break with convention by perceiving and depicting the "thingness" of the objects in his still

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experience in Gauguin's still life, and this painting addresses the subject forthrightly, combining the music of the mandolin, the fragrance of the flowers, the various textures of these objects, and the visual beauty of them all.

[34] Theodore Reff, "The pictures within Cézanne's pictures," *Arts Magazine* 53.10 (June 1979), 92-95.

[35] While I have focused my attention here on the aspects of brushwork and composition that Gauguin gleaned from Cézanne's still life, an expanded inquiry beyond the purely formal may prove enlightening. For example, it would be interesting to consider if and how Cézanne and Degas engage with memory in their still life oeuvre, and how this translates into Gauguin's work.

lifes. Still life by its very nature captures the thingness of objects. As Schapiro wrote, the genre "engages the painter (and also the observer […]) in a steady looking that discloses new and elusive aspects of the stable object. At first commonplace in appearance, it may become in the course of that contemplation a mystery, a source of metaphysical wonder."[36] This engagement has little to do with where the objects are placed or whether there are figures involved. Certainly the viewer's connection with the object is facilitated by eliminating any distracting details, but Gauguin's success, I believe, lies in his ability to elicit that same "metaphysical wonder" from his objects even when they are surrounded by narrative details.

A discussion of the thingness of still life must begin with Martin Heidegger. The discussion that follows, however, is not a philosophical engagement with thingness but rather a strategic and narrowly-focused look at his use of the still-life genre. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," he locates the artwork on one side of a spectrum whose other side is things. In between things and artworks lies equipment. In order to distinguish the difference between things and works, he attempts to identify the nature of equipment.[37] Seeking a description of equipment, he looks for a "pictorial presentation" and for this, turns to a van Gogh painting of shoes, which Heidegger identifies as a peasant woman's shoes (for example, fig. 0.17). Their equipmental nature confronts us, he explains, in the process of their usage—the less the woman thinks about her shoes and simply uses them, the more they are their essence as equipment. At first, it seems that we cannot learn about the woman through these shoes, removed as they are from their context on her feet and in

[36] Schapiro, "Apples," 20.

[37] Martin Heidegger, "On the Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed., trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-4, 10.

the field. “And yet.” With this turn of phrase, Heidegger enters into his famously evocative description of the shoes’ worn leather, the dampness and richness of the soil ground into it, and the shoe’s soles, under which “slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls.”[38] Heidegger eventually arrives at the equipmental being of the equipment, and he gets there, as he points out, not through an actual pair of shoes, or by looking at how they are made, but through a painting of shoes—an artwork. The work of art made us look at them from a place we are not used to being.[39] The artwork “is concerned to reproduce the general essence of things,” and, stated in the inverse, “the thingly substructure is what proved to be the most evident reality in the work.”[40]

The most salient feature in this essay for my purposes is not Heidegger’s end-goal, the origin of the work of art, but rather the fact that he chose to enter into this inquiry using a still life. In addition to offering the artist a double-opportunity to compose (on the table and on the canvas), still life offers the philosopher a double-thing, that is, painting *as* a material object, and painting *of* a material object. Of further interest is Heidegger’s selection not just of a still life but, out of the whole history of art, his selection of a late-nineteenth-century still life. Had he looked earlier, the moralizing symbolism that burdens Baroque still lifes would have obstructed his reading. Had he looked only a few decades later, the advent of collage had turned the “thingness” of still life back upon itself. The artists of the late-nineteenth-century arrived at a peak of sophistication in their interrogation of thingness in the still life, which reached a breaking

[38] Heidegger, “Origin,” 14.

[39] Heidegger, “Origin,” 15.

[40] Heidegger, “Origin,” 16-17.

point shortly thereafter. Thus as I will go on to discuss, thingness is native to the still-life genre, but was foregrounded to a new degree by Gauguin and his colleagues.

Recently, Bill Brown has taken a long history of the philosophy of "things" and placed it in a twenty-first century context. Things, he explains, are objects that we notice, objects whose material qualities become apparent. Any object can become a thing, and this most commonly occurs when the object is confronted outside of its normal context. Objects can become things through their own insistence, Brown writes, asserting themselves "as fact, as interruption, as summons."[41] For example, when objects stop working we are forced to confront their thingness—a broken car becomes a heavy heap of metal that must be moved by means other than driving it; a dirty window becomes something we look at rather than through; broken glass threatens to cut the skin.[42] But objects can also become things through human agency, such as when we notice a striking detail that is not part of the object's primary function.[43] Ultimately an object's thingness "is the outcome of an interaction […] between subject and object. The thing thus names a subject-object relation."[44]

Brown's two-fold conceptualization of the thing, as an object that we notice through either interruption or attention to material detail, serves as an apt framework for understanding thingness in Gauguin's early still lifes. The Sheffield *Oranges, nature*

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[41] Bill Brown, *Other Things* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 23.

[42] Bill Brown, *Things* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

[43] Brown 2015, 22.

[44] Brown 2015, 22. Brown recently addressed still lifes in his essay, "Object Cultures and the Life of Things," in *The Art of American Still Life: Audubon to Warhol*, ed. Mark D. Mitchell (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2015). This essay offers encouragement that thing theory is indeed an applicable theorization for still life paintings, and it opens with a discussion of still life as a medium that "extracts objects" from their "object cultures." (54) His primary focus, however, is upon the privileged place of "things" in the history of American material culture.

morte, for example, illustrates the thingness of the orange through Aline's arrested interaction with it. She has pierced the orange's thick skin with her thumb, and yet she appears motionless, as if the end goal is not so much to eat the fruit as to hold and to feel it. Paralleling Aline's meditative focus, Gauguin lavished his own painterly attention on the brushwork of these oranges. The painting turns the oranges into things as we notice their size and imagine their weight and texture. Gauguin marshals the same attention and focus through the unusually close cropping of both *Fleurs et tapis* compositions (1880 and 1881). Through this forcibly close looking, he makes these familiar and delightful flowers strange. The flowers in *Fleurs, nature morte* achieve their thingness differently, more "as interruption, as summons." In this composition the mind attempts to decipher the scene in the background, and yet is constantly interrupted by the eye's insistent return to the flowers. These flowers are the gravitational center of the composition; around them, the mysteriousness of the composition revolves. As they succeed at winning our attention we are forced to look and to notice, at which point they become strange—and become things.

While Gauguin was indebted to Manet for the style and composition of several of his early still lifes, the two artsits share something deeper in their approach to the genre. In George Mauner's book on Manet's still life oeuvre, he singles out Gauguin's work in the genre for comparison to Manet's, writing that Gauguin "left a mystery in his still lifes that is a link with Manet's work."[45] Surrounded as Gauguin was by artists far more famous for their still lifes, it is unusual to find such a comparison. I believe, however, that the comparison goes beyond this sense of mystery. In 1872, Manet sent a painting of a

[45] Mauner, 49.

bouquet of violets alongside a note as a thank-you gift to Berthe Morisot (fig. 0.18). He sent another painting, this time of a single asparagus, as thanks to his patron Charles Ephrussi in 1880 (fig. 0.19). Ephrussi had compensated Manet generously for a still life of a bunch of asparagus, and so in response, Manet sent this canvas with a note that there was one asparagus missing from his original bunch. Mauner writes that with these two works—a gift of flowers and a missing asparagus—Manet blurred the boundary between painting and the real thing.[46] While Mauner was not drawing from any particular theory of things, we can nonetheless see how thingness connects these works with Gauguin's. Both artists elicit a confrontation with the painted object, prompting the viewer to pause and consider its painted and material realities.[47]

Gauguin's still-life paintings evolved along with his artistic theories over the course of his career. Beginning in 1886, these canvases became more theoretical, and at times, the objects even seem to detach themselves from this world (for example, in different ways, *Still Life with Puppies* or *Tahitian Oranges*, see fig. 1.23 and 2.7). Nonetheless, even as they come to represent ideas, the fundamental relationship between pictured object and viewing subject endures—the viewer is summoned to confront these objects, to grapple with their presence and their meaning.

[46] Mauner, 48.

[47] Given that both of these paintings, as gifts to friends, went straight into private collections, Gauguin was unlikely to have known them, and so this resemblance is more a case of resonance than direct influence. One other serendipitous comparison between still life for Manet and Gauguin is their selection of the genre for frontispieces: Manet included a print version of his *Hat and Guitar* as the frontispiece to an album of prints, and Gauguin placed a watercolor still life of a bouquet of flowers as the frontispiece to his manuscript *Noa Noa*. Both artists, then, used still life as an introduction to their work.

Chapter Summaries

My first chapter exposes the consequences of Gauguin's insistence that artists should paint "from memory"—that is, without a model—by analyzing his writings, his sources, and the ways he manifested these ideas in his still-life paintings early in his career. Versed in the theories of visual memory that abounded in the artistic, literary, philosophical, and psychological literature of the 1880s, Gauguin's letters, manuscripts, and notebooks reveal his belief that by tapping the memory, the artist could access a higher form of reality, divorcing himself from the particulars of the profane world. I link these writings to his painting by arguing that, in a series of canvases that depict artists in the act of observing a still life, Gauguin found visual form to express his ideas about the consequences of painting from memory. Gauguin's theory of painting from memory lies at the beginning of his career-long quest to touch the soul of the viewer through the abstraction of form and color. My work situates the still-life genre at the center of this theory, which reveals hitherto unrecognized layers of meaning in his and his colleagues' art and writing from this period.

The second chapter treats three still-life paintings created in Tahiti that engage with nostalgia. In these works, Gauguin made stylistic and iconographic references to artists in France, both living and dead. While previous scholars have commented in passing upon the nostalgic quality of these paintings, my investigation moves beyond simple description to probe the forces at play beneath this apparent sentiment. In the nineteenth century, the concept of nostalgia shifted from a medically-diagnosable disease to a more romanticized notion of desire, popularized in period poetry and novels. In the twentieth century, nostalgia was understood as a reactionary and backward-looking

longing; however, present-day experimental psychology and cultural theory show that nostalgia for one's personal past is a positive emotional resource that affirms the present and promotes optimism for the future. This notion existed in Gauguin's period as well; many writers of the time recognized that warm reminiscence upon the past confers benefits in the present. By examining these paintings through the framework provided by psychology, I show that, in *The Flowers of France* and *Tahitian Oranges*, Gauguin's painted references to the past in France are not a mournful longing for what is lost, but rather a productive and hopeful meditation on his new life and artistic practice in Tahiti. The third painting, *The Royal End*, appears on the surface to lament the loss of Tahiti's cultural traditions. In his writing, Gauguin modeled his experience in Tahiti after the rich literary tradition of voyages in which paradise is always already lost. What emerges in both the writing and painting, however, is that Gauguin's Tahiti is not doomed but vibrant, complex, and ambivalent. He mimicked a reactionary form of nostalgia for lost paradise in order to subvert its assumptions from within. Through this structure, *The Royal End* emerges as a powerful and forward-looking form of nostalgia. The present-day psychological understanding of nostalgia thus unites these three still lifes in their structure of meaning. This alternative approach to nostalgia has far-reaching potential for art historians to consider the capacity for optimism and growth in artistic representations of the past.

The third chapter centers upon Gauguin's late series of four paintings of sunflowers. Painted from Tahiti as he looked back upon a lifetime of artistic friendships, these canvases involve autobiographical memory. Scientists now understand memory to be inherently mutable and linked to the imagination. Memory is an adaptive function that

draws upon past experiences, modifies them based upon new experiences in the present, and employs them to imagine and prepare for future situations. The sunflowers, which Gauguin planted from seeds mailed from France, recall the months he spent living with Vincent Van Gogh in Arles thirteen years prior. In this chapter I argue that the concept of mutable memory informed these paintings, in which Gauguin paid homage to artists who were fundamental to his artistic growth. Yet like memory itself, he transformed these references with an inflection based in his present moment in Tahiti. Painted just before his departure for the Marquesas Islands, in these works the past is regenerative, producing a new art, which draws upon the past to imagine a new future.

Literature Review

Despite the wealth of scholarly interest in Paul Gauguin, his still-life painting is an under-studied field. As individual paintings, still lifes typically receive much less attention than the artist's other genres such as figure painting and landscape. Moreover, this body of work as a whole has never received a dedicated book-length study. When it is addressed, it is included as part of larger exhibitions on Gauguin and Impressionism or Impressionist still life.[48] Only on the scale of single chapters or articles have scholars positioned Gauguin's still lifes as the subject of a study.[49]

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[48] Shackelford and Rathbone, *Impressionist Still Life*, 2001; Brettell and Fonsmark, *Gauguin and Impressionism*, 2005.

In this literature review section, when citing references already cited in full above, I will give a longer version of the short-form citation that includes titles and dates in order to facilitate viewing the references together as a list.

[49] Lovis, "Les natures mortes de Paul Gauguin: une production picturale méconnue," 2009; Fonsmark "Gauguin Creates his World: The Object in a World of Myth and Dream," 2007; Cahn, "Les Gauguin dans Gauguin: peintures et céramiques dans le tableau," 1991.

Much has changed in the scholarly treatment of still life in the last quarter-century. Writing in 1990, Norman Bryson described still life as the least theorized of the genres of painting. In Sir Joshua Reynold's time as in his own time, Bryson insisted, still life would not be recommended as the subject of a painting nor of a dissertation.[50] His work on the topic marked the beginning of a wave of scholarship that turned its attention to the genre. Bryson and Victor Stoichita each focused their studies tightly, yielding intriguing insights both for the specific Renaissance and Baroque paintings they studied and for their field more broadly.[51] Several more publications dedicated to still life prioritized the breadth of coverage and did not achieve the same theoretical depth.[52] Focusing in on the late-nineteenth-century, the period's still lifes have become the topic of dissertations—one a period study, one on Cézanne, and most recently, one on van Gogh.[53] Exhibitions on the topic of modern still life have proliferated, ranging in scope from a single artist (Manet, Bonnard, Morandi), to a movement (Impressionism), to the entire modern period and beyond (e.g., "Van Gogh to Koons").[54] In the two years since I

[50] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 1990, 8. At least one dissertation on still-life painting, however, was undertaken against this tide: John McCoubrey, *Studies in French Still-Life Painting Theory and Criticism, 1660-1860* (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1958).

[51] Stoichița, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, 1997.

[52] Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier and Françoise Dupuis-Testenoire, *Les Peintres de natures mortes en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Amateur, 1998); Ebert-Schifferer, *Still Life: A History*, 1999; Neil Cox, *In the Presence of Things: Four Centuries of European Still-Life Painting. Part Two: 19th-20th Centuries (1840-1955)* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2011).

[53] Jeannene Przyblyski, *Le Parti Pris des Choses: French Still Life and Modem Painting, 1848-1876* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1995); Lesley Stevenson, *Still Life, Modernism and Cezanne* (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2000); Laura Coyle, *The Still-Life Paintings of Vincent Van Gogh and Their Context* (Ph. D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2007).

[54] Margit Rowell, *Objects of Desire: The Modern Still life* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1997); Mauner, *Manet: The Still Life Paintings*, 2000; Rathbone and Shackelford, *Impressionist Still Life*, 2001; Weiermair, *The Nature of Still Life: From Manet to the Present Day*, 2001; Ebert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe L'oeil Painting*, 2002; Louisana Museum for Moderne Kunst and Fondation Beyeler, *Flower myth: Vincent van Gogh to Jeff Koons* (Wofratshausen: Edition Minerva, 2005);

began this project on Gauguin, there have been two probing exhibitions and associated catalogues on still life: one on Max Beckmann and one on American still life.[55] Art historians have clearly realized the latent potential of scholarship focused upon the still-life genre, and my study of Gauguin contributes to this growing field both by theorizing the still life as I have done above (itself an approach I have not found elsewhere), and by considering the role of memory in still-life painting, which may well prove productive for scholars of other artists.

By approaching still life through the lens of memory, I shed light not only on the individual works in this dissertation, but also upon larger questions on the meaning of memory to Gauguin and the *fin-de-siècle* mind. The first chapter concerns the idea of "painting from memory." Petra Chu is in the final stages of a book project on visual memory in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, which will include Gauguin among several other artists.[56] I have built upon the extensive archival work that she has performed on the period's interest in visual memory by applying it to Gauguin and his milieu more specifically.[57] While several authors have taken an interest in Gauguin and

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Fergonzi, Flavio, and Elisabetta Barisoni. *Morandi: Master of Modern Still Life* (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Collection, 2009); Dita Amory, Nicole R. Myers, and Allison Stielau, *Pierre Bonnard: The Late Still Lifes and Interiors* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009).

[55] Schick, Karin and Hubertus Gassner. *Max Beckmann: The Still Lifes* (Munich: Prestel, 2014); Mark D. Mitchell, *The Art of American Still Life: Audubon to Warhol*, 2015.

[56] As communicated by e-mail, 7 August 2014. To date she has published three essays on the subject: Petra Chu, "Lecoq de Boisbaudran and Memory Drawing: A Teaching course between Idealism and Naturalism," in *The European Realist Tradition*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Petra Chu, "Creativity and Memory: A Nineteenth-Century Debate," in *El proceso creative*, Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte, and Alberto Dallal (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2006); Petra Chu, *Sixteenth Horst Gerson Memorial Lecture: Eye, Memory, Hand: The Nineteenth-Century Debate About the Role of Visual Memory in the Creative Process* (Groningen: Gerson Lectures Foundation, 2011).

[57] Filiz Eda Burhan's work is also invaluable for its trove of primary source documentation on the psychology of association. Filiz Eda Burhan, *Vision and Visionaries: Nineteenth Century Psychological*

visual memory given his vocal debates with van Gogh in Arles on this topic precisely, no one has directly linked visual memory to Gauguin's still life practice.[58]

The second and third chapters take up Gauguin's awareness of the function of memory, expanding beyond visual memory to autobiographical memory. I contextualize these subjects with respect to period science and literature, and assess how Gauguin's writings resonate with other authors who had a known interest in memory. Linda Goddard's work on Gauguin's writing informs and supports my ideas on this topic; however she only briefly speaks to the role of memory.[59] Dario Gamboni argues in his recent book on Gauguin, published shortly after I began this project, that the artist was keenly aware of his period's science of the mind and that Gauguin incorporated his understanding of the brain and perception into his work. Gamboni's insightful work has provided support for my arguments and fruitful directions of inquiry.[60] Scholars of nineteenth-century literature have shown much interest in the types of memory I investigate, including nostalgia and a distrust of the stability of memory, therefore their studies have supplied invaluable guidance in this domain.[61] At the core of my project is

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Theory, the Occult Sciences, and the Formation of the Symbolist Aesthetic in France (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1979).

[58] For example, Douglas W. Druick, et al., *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2001), 195-205; Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, *Paul Gauguin in the Context of Symbolism* (New York: Garland Pub, 1978), 109; Naomi E. Maurer, *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom: The Thought and Art of Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 80.

[59] Linda Goddard, "Gauguin's Writing and the Myth of the Primitive," in *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*, ed. Belinda Thomson, Tamar Garb, and Philippe Dagen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Linda Goddard, "'Scattered Notes': Authorship and Originality in Paul Gauguin's *Diverses choses*" *Art History* 34.2 (April 2011), 352-369; Linda Goddard, *Aesthetic Rivalries Word and Image in France, 1880-1926* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012).

[60] Dario Gamboni, *Paul Gauguin: The Mysterious Centre of Thought* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014).

[61] Nicolae Babuts, *Memory, Metaphors, and Meaning: Reading Literary Texts* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2009); Nicolae Babuts, *Mimesis in a Cognitive Perspective: Mallarmé, Flaubert, and Eminescu* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011); Susan Harrow and Andrew

an understanding of the centrality of the creative process for Gauguin and the ways in which he expressed it through his art and writing. I owe my grasp of this concept to June Hargrove's work on Gauguin.[62] Throughout the dissertation I will continue to reference and discuss the scholars whose work has informed my study.[63]

As I will discuss in the chapters that follow, memory is fundamentally unreliable. It is not just occasionally wrong, rather its mutability is built into its system. Humanist scholars including art historians have studied the implications of this phenomenon, particularly in the realm of cultural and collective memory. For several decades they have produced important work on the ability of art and monuments in particular—*lieux de mémoire*—to shape the way the past is constructed and remembered.[64] In the past ten to fifteen years, scientists have found empirical evidence that helps to explain memory's volatility, and only since then has it drawn the attention of the wider public. The legal community, for example, is just now beginning to re-shape the way it employs eye-witness testimony, a highly corruptible form of memory long regarded as unassailable. Advances in the scientific study of memory now, in turn, inform studies of cultural

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Watts, *Mapping memory in nineteenth-century French literature and culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012); Christophe Ippolito, *Narrative Memory in Flaubert's Works* (New York: P. Lang, 2001); Alan Richardson, "Memory and Imagination in Romantic Fiction," in *The Memory Process: Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives*, ed. Suzanne Nalbantian, Paul M. Matthews, and James L. McClelland, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), 285-86; Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Emily T. Troscianko, "The Cognitive Realism of Memory in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*," *The Modern Language Review* 107.3 (July 2012), 772-795.

[62] For example, June Hargrove, "'Woman with a Fan': Paul Gauguin's Heavenly Vairaumati: A Parable of Immortality," 2006; June Hargrove, "Paul Gauguin and his Muses: The Feminine Ideal as 'Other' in the Myth of the Artist," 2006; June Hargrove, "Paul Gauguin: Sensing the Infinite," 2014.

[63] Elizabeth Childs does not treat still life or memory directly, but I would nonetheless like to mention her work here. Her scholarship has informed the way I conceive of Gauguin and his project, particularly with respect to issues of exoticism. I find her discussions of such challenging concepts illuminating, and I draw upon them regularly in my teaching.

[64] I have been inspired by the work of faculty in my own department on this topic, including June Hargrove and Renée Ater. *Lieux de mémoire* is in reference to Pierre Nora's extensive work in this domain.

memory. In this dissertation I focus upon individual memory as it applies to a single artist, therefore I do not make explicit reference in my chapters to studies of cultural memory. Nonetheless my work is made possible by the scholarship on this subject. Thanks to this body of research, there exists a history of the urgency of memory in the nineteenth century, and a long-running awareness in the humanities of memory's adaptability. By positioning Gauguin as a figure who directly confronted memory's vicissitudes, I hope to shed light on many of the same questions from a new angle.

Methods, with a Note on Cognitive Historicism

The three case studies in this dissertation each follow a similar methodological approach. I draw from frameworks offered by several disciplines, from French literature to cognitive science. I begin each case study with a visual analysis of the paintings themselves. My scope expands to Gauguin's writings of the same period, in the form of letters, manuscripts, and notes. I then examine period sources on the subject of memory, ranging from developments in science as reported by the popular press, to novels and poetry by authors Gauguin is known to have admired. I situate these period views within the context of present-day cultural and scientific theories in order to expand the vocabulary and conceptual structure of my research. Using this approach, I have uncovered the pivotal position the still-life genre occupied in Gauguin's oeuvre and aesthetic philosophy. In addition, this concentrated analysis of period beliefs about memory and the ways memory appears in Gauguin's visual art and writing reveals the depth and significance of the Symbolist engagement with the science and philosophy of memory. While I maintain the primacy of still life, the concepts regarding memory in the

nineteenth century—and the methods I use to articulate them—are capable of more broadly illuminating Gauguin's practice and that of his Symbolist colleagues.

As case studies, this work does not aim at a comprehensive or representative survey of Gauguin's still life oeuvre. Instead it specifically considers the important role that still life played in Gauguin's explorations of memory and the creative process. The ways in which Gauguin approached these themes through still life varied over the course of his career, as did his work in this genre generally. Still life is not the only genre through which Gauguin treated this theme, nor is memory a unifying theme across the genre. Nonetheless, still life offers insights into the theories treated here that other genres cannot.

The use of cognitive science as a framework is not a widespread practice in art history, and so here I will discuss my rationale and guiding principles. Some work has been done in art history using the science of perception, in which scholars consider viewer response through a cognitive lens.[65] Much less has been done to apply the science of mind to specific artists.[66] Putting the artist "on the couch," so to speak, has a checkered

[65] For example David Freedberg has studied empathy in the viewer response and grounded it in period-specific context. Dario Gamboni's 2014 book on Gauguin focuses heavily upon viewer response and Gauguin's specific intention to incorporate the science of perception into his work. His incorporation of period science is excellent, but he makes only a brief mention of present-day scientific studies, and the theories he draws upon have come under scrutiny in the past fifteen years by much of the cognitive science community. Ellen Spolsky's work, dating back two decades, also treats artists' interest in perception and the viewer response to images. She considers how artists take advantage of the mind's methods of processing movement and body language: Ellen Spolsky, "Elaborated Knowledge: Reading Kinesis in Pictures," *Poetics Today* 17.2 (Summer 1996), 157-180. I am leaving out studies in neuro art history and neuroaesthetics, which I will briefly discuss below.

[66] There are some exceptions, which actually tend to date to before the development of "cognitive historicism" in literary studies. For example, Claude Cernuschi examines the cognitive science of perception and uses it to inform interpretation and meaning in the works at hand. *"Not an Illustration But the Equivalent": A Cognitive Approach to Abstract Expressionism* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997). In addition, recent work has been done on the role of the senses in art, which incorporates cognitive science to varying degrees. Examples by June Hargrove, Yui Suzuki, and Meredith

history in art history. I believe my project is fundamentally different from psychoanalytical art history, however, because each of the phenomena I discuss is a normal and every-day aspect of the human experience; I do not "diagnose" the artist with deviant behaviors. Psychology instead provides an entry point and vocabulary to discuss the types of memory that I explore. More recently, "neuro art history" has taken the union of art history and psychology in the opposite direction, which can result in a universalizing attitude toward art and its history, erasing cultural, historical, and personal specificity. Philosopher Alva Noë has offered an alternative and potentially more productive type of relationship for art history and neuroscience. Neuroscience, he writes, should not be used as a kind of "intellectual imperialism" that attempts to construct a brain-based theory of humanity. Rather, the study of art can help to "articulate a more plausible conception of ourselves, one suitable […] for laying the ground for a better neuroscience." He sees art as "a mode of investigation, a style of research, into the crucial questions that interest us, e.g., our human nature."[67] This idea of art as a "mode of investigation" into who we are rings true for the scholar of Gauguin, an artist who titled his masterpiece, *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* In this dissertation, I position Gauguin's approach to still life as precisely that type of investigation into the processes of memory.

Gill appear in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally Promey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

[67] Alva Noë, *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015), 125. Building off of John Dewey's pronouncement that "art is experience," Noë's central argument in this book is that art is not "a phenomenon to be explained," but rather art is itself a "mode or activity of trying to explain," and in this way, art and philosophy become "species of the same genus." 133.

While bringing current cognitive science to bear upon art historical questions is rather new in this discipline, the practice is over a decade old in the field of literary studies. The work of these scholars has provided me with both justification and guidance as I have explored what this type of alliance should look like in art history. By way of justification, Alan Richardson, a scholar of Romantic literature, writes that recent science on the brain and mind can help historians "perceive distinctions, register nuances, and appreciate moral and philosophical repercussions" which, without this awareness of present-day science, "might have seemed non-existent, elusive, or simply not worth pursuing."[68] The parallels between past and present are just that—the questions being asked are not identical, but comparable, and by pointing to the parallelism we can sharpen our understanding of the issue and better convey its richness. He continues: "Indeed, I have become convinced that informed comparison with models, findings, and controversies from the present are needed to help bring certain Romantic-era developments and debates into focus. It is less a matter of insisting on resemblance than of listening for resonance, and allowing that resonance to help reopen avenues for scholarly investigation that have long remained untrodden."[69] The point of incorporating science, he explains, is not to champion an author or artist of the past as a "prophet" of future science, but to "elicit several initial hunches from the consonance" between their ideas and those of our time.[70] The former scenario is not a useful one for the humanist scholar; it points only to coincidence and does not amount to analysis. The deeper goal is

[68] Richardson 2001, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, 3.

[69] Richardson 2001, 3. I would, of course, make the same argument for late-nineteenth-century era developments.

[70] Richardson 2001, 5.

for the science to help uncover a richer understanding of the historian's subject.[71] In this way, science can offer the humanist a rigorous framework through which to understand the artist's achievement.

This method of using present-day science to help identify and understand questions and concerns of the past is called "cognitive historicism." Rather than using brain science to make universalizing statements, cognitive historicism grounds the present-day understanding in the period under consideration. Richardson has set out a series of questions for the scholar engaging with this methodology, which I have adopted as a type of check on my work. The questions that follow are near-quotations of his, but I have excluded quotation marks to avoid the awkwardness of brackets when adapting his words for Gauguin:

1. What about the social, philosophical, and scientific discourses of Gauguin's time made it possible for him to observe certain behaviors and to think them worth representing in his art?
2. Can one find analogous representations in the early psychological thought of the period, whether or not one can establish conclusively that Gauguin had read such accounts?
3. Was there anything in Gauguin's personal experience, for example as an expatriate, that would have encouraged his observation of the mental behaviors in question?

[71] Alan Richardson, *The Neural Sublime: Cognitive Theories and Romantic Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 15.

4. Can one relate Gauguin's alleged depiction of, for example, "painting from memory" to contemporary developments in the practice of artistic representation, such as the recent interest in abstraction?[72]

Richardson explains that the success of a cognitive historicist approach is based not on the "neatness of fit between past and present representations, […] but from careful scholarship."[73] This approach offers a host of new directions and inquiries to the art historian, and I hope that the work that follows proves both a responsible and fertile illustration of this endeavor.

[72] Richardson 2010, 15. His original questions are: "What, if anything, in the social, philosophical, and scientific discourses of the time made it possible for Austen to observe these behaviors as such and to think them worth representing in her fiction? Can one find analogous representations in the early psychological thought of the period, whether or not one can establish conclusively that Austen had read such accounts? Was there anything about Austen's particular experience as a woman, as femininity was then constructed, that would have encouraged her observation of the mental behaviors in question? Can one relate Austen's alleged depiction of "theory of mind" behaviors to contemporary developments in the practice of fictional representation, such as the recent invention (sometimes attributed to Austen herself) of free indirect discourse?"

[73] Richardson 2010, 15.

Chapter 1. Painting from Memory: Looking at Still Lifes, 1886-1888

This chapter argues that, in a series of canvases of "pictured looking" that date from 1886 to 1888, Paul Gauguin explored the implications of painting from memory through the genre of still life specifically.[1] This is a playful and even subversive gambit on his part because still lifes are traditionally the genre most likely to be painted from life given the artist's ability to create his own model. Gauguin therefore thought through the idea of painting without a model in a genre that allows the artist to invent his model. In so doing he engaged with the concept of visual memory, a term used in aesthetic debates of the nineteenth century and today to describe the memory of images stored in the mind.

This chapter begins with an analysis of three paintings that picture the act of looking at still life arrangements: *Still Life with Profile of Laval*, *Vincent van Gogh Painting Sunflowers*, and *Still Life with Fruit* (see fig. 1.1, 1.6, 1.16). After a brief historical background on the history and theory of painting from memory, I then set these paintings in the context of Gauguin's letters and period literature on visual memory. Nineteenth-century Academicians, avant-garde artists, scientists, psychologists, and philosophers alike widely discussed this type of memory and its relationship to the imagination. I then turn to a fourth painting, *Still Life with Puppies* (see fig. 1.23), to suggest that Gauguin put the theory of his "pictured looking" paintings into practice through this painting. By conceiving of and creating these still lifes, Gauguin performed

[1] I first formulated the content of this chapter as a seminar paper, which was centered upon Gauguin's theory of painting from memory. My exploration of memory led me to this set of paintings of pictured looking, and through them, to still life paintings. For this chapter I have expanded my primary source material to include additional correspondence between Gauguin, van Gogh, and Bernard, further discussion of the historical debate within the visual arts on memory and the imagination, and a deeper examination of the role of Charles Baudelaire in Gauguin's theories of memory. I also further examine van Gogh's impact upon Gauguin's still lifes during this period, as Gauguin would reference van Gogh through still life painting for the rest of his career, long after the latter had died.

his first of many career-long experiments that attempted to touch the soul of his viewer through painting. In this way, he gave pictorial form to his sophisticated ideas on memory, imagination, and abstraction.[2]

I. Pictured Looking

Still Life with Profile of Laval

When this painting was first exhibited in 1906, it appeared under the title *Still Life with Profile of the Painter Charles Laval* (fig. 1.1).[3] Similar to Gauguin's earlier works that blended genre scenes with still life, in this composition the artist merged portraiture with still life. Unlike other canvases that have the same portrait and still-life pairing (for example, *Madame Alexandre Kohler* (1887/88, National Gallery of Art) and *Clovis Sleeping* (see fig. 0.14), in this composition the still life engrosses the portrait subject.

Gauguin makes reference to several artists in this composition. He spent the summer of 1886 with Charles Laval and probably painted this portrait of him in the final weeks of the year, shortly after his return to Paris in October. That fall, he began to create highly innovative ceramics in Ernest Chaplet's workshop, one of which appears in *Still Life with Laval*, as the object of Laval's gaze.[4] In a parallel manner to Laval's admiration

[2] References to the creative process and Gauguin's interest in the viewer's soul are indebted to June Hargrove's articles and seminar discussions on these concepts. For example, June Hargrove, "'Woman with a Fan': Paul Gauguin's Heavenly Vairaumati: A Parable of Immortality," *The Art Bulletin* 88.3 (September 2006): 552-566. June Hargrove, "Paul Gauguin and his Muses: The Feminine Ideal as 'Other' in the Myth of the Artist," in *L'Artiste et sa muse: Mythification du créateur et de son modèle XIX-XX siècles*, ed. Christiane Dotal and Alexandre Dratwicki (Rome: Académie de France, 2006), 117-139. June Hargrove, "Paul Gauguin: Sensing the Infinite," in Sally Promey, ed., *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 341-54.

[3] Richard Brettell and Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, *Gauguin and Impressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 334-36.

[4] Daniel Wildenstein, Sylvie Crussard, and Martine Heudron. *Gauguin: A Savage in the Making: Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings (1873-1888)* (Milan: Skira, 2002), vol. 2, 304-08. Ronald Pickvance, *Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven* (London: Apollo, 1994), 34-35.

of Gauguin's artwork, Gauguin expressed his respect for Paul Cézanne and Edgar Degas by employing their styles. Gauguin's most prized possession was his Cézanne still life of fruit on a table, compositionally mirrored here in the stacked apples arranged on a white cloth, the patterned wallpaper, and the hatch mark-like brushstrokes applied here, for the first time, to the fruit. The looming head of Laval, entering from the right as a severely-cropped profile, recalls the Degas pastel *Behind the Scenes* (fig. 1.2), shown in 1881 at the sixth Impressionist exhibition.[5]

The inclusion of Gauguin's ceramic represents the first time he incorporated his own work into a composition.[6] Though the ceramic is now lost, Gauguin must have valued it as he wrote to his wife Mette to ask if she had it with her in Copenhagen and noted that it was worth one hundred francs.[7] Gauguin depicted this pot with the utmost care, rendering it in a veritable symphony of colors. Though its color reads as shades of grey-brown from a distance, strokes of bright green, red, and blue create the effects of light and shadow in the upper portion, while the base features a rich mauve. The ceramic takes on anthropomorphic forms: the cavity resembles a hollow belly, with a head and arms extending out the sides. Alternatively one may view the cavity as a face, with large ears, a hat, and a wide tongue.[8] In this view, it appears as though the clown-like face licks

[5] Comparison made by Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers, et al., *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2001), 69.

[6] Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 304-08; Pickvance, 34-35.

[7] Gauguin to Mette, 6 December 1887. Merlhès, 167.

[8] Jeanne Schuffenecker later identified the ceramic as an object originally in her father's collection under the title *Tête d'un Clown*. Christopher Gray, *Sculpture and Ceramics of Paul Gauguin* (John Hopkins Press: 1963), 122.

the oblong form in front of it. Infrared images as well as observation in raking light reveal that Gauguin painted the ceramic in full before adding this oval form.[9]

Scholars have tried in vain for decades to definitively identify the oval-shaped object in front of the ceramic. Ideas have included an un-ripe mango, a wood bowl, or perhaps if the red and yellow curves are plugged into this form, it depicts a type of coconut-shell container.[10] The red curves serve as a visual contrast against the green apple. On the left, these red lines indeed appear to connect with the brown oval. While the ropes suggest a kind of purse, the idea of a sculpture "licking" the object steers more toward a reading as fruit. Such ambiguity is central to this painting, as it is to the entirety of Gauguin's oeuvre.[11]

The composition's tricks of the eye continue with the apples which, on the right side, appear to be impossibly stacked, too round to hold the top apple without rolling apart. The top-most fruit most resembles an apple, with a stem and red to yellow coloration. While green, yellow, and pink-orange are reasonable colors for apples, the deep green and brown of the front-most fruit are atypical and resist a reading as apples.

Like the apples, the white cloth becomes strange the closer one looks (fig. 1.3). While it lies flat toward the back of the table, as it approaches the picture plane it grows

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[9] Indianapolis Museum of Art Curator Ellen Lee pulled technical analysis images from the conservation file, which we reviewed together on 26 March, 2015. In addition to the infrared which shows the tongue of the pot fully painted behind the "eggplant" (so-called by conservators in reports), an x-ray image shows three long spike forms in the area of the ceramic as well. It does not appear, however, that there is a different painting underneath to which these spikes correspond. At this time it is unknown what they may have represented.

[10] Brettell and Fonsmark, 334-36.

[11] Gauguin purposefully incorporated ambiguity into his work as a way of inviting the viewer's participation in the interpretation of the work. Symbolist writers such as Stéphane Mallarmé sought to do the same in their work, for example by suggesting rather than naming an object or idea. I will continue to highlight the occurrence and role of ambiguity in Gauguin's paintings, which functions as part of my analysis of the works.

increasingly animated, morphing into a seascape of crashing waves atop the table. Shades of blue, green, and orange together compose the white cloth, adding to its highlights and shadows, and the front-most corner defies the texture of a flat cloth with a small triangle of thick white and green impasto. The wood of the table similarly morphs before the viewer's eyes, as the planks are delineated on the right side, but meld into an amorphous pool of green and orange on the left.

The impossibility of definitively resolving aspects of this painting continues with the background—the area which has drawn the most attention from scholars in their attempt to interpret the space. Many see the darker blue-toned area as a mirror, as it appears to reflect the head of Laval and an arm (or ear) of the ceramic. The brighter yellow panels, then, are the walls of the room, decorated with Cézanne-esque floral wallpaper. This view fails to account for several factors, however. For example, the bright yellow panel on the left side has more decorative forms than the right side. In addition, there is a darker band of yellow-blue on the right side that the reading as a mirror cannot explain. One may resolve these issues by reading the left panel, the blue center panel, and the darker strip as a folding screen, and the right-most side as an un-papered wall. Even so, the orientation of the table to the wall (are they parallel or situated at an angle?) and Laval's place between them remains inexplicable (fig. 1.4, blue lines). This space is an invented one, its conceptualization complicated by the presence of a folding screen and its ambiguity heightened by the repetition of foreground and background forms that tantalizingly suggest a mirror.

The figure of Laval protrudes into the side of the painting. His black garment appears oddly rectilinear, and appears to bear the weight of his leaning head. The boxy

nature of this garment reinforces the geometric quality of his entire head: the top of his hair forms a right angle with his very linear face, confining his entire appearance within the shape of a right triangle (see fig. 1.4, orange lines). His likeness, however, is anything but rigid. Shades of maroon, violet, and orange speckle his hair. This thick black hair contrasts with his wiry goatee and moustache, while his ear is non-existent, or undefined. His profile, outlined in grey, contrasts with the yellow wall that glows behind him. We then arrive at Laval's closed eye (fig. 1.5). A single stroke of grey defines this closed eye, and when one extends a line perpendicular to his face from his eye, it lands precisely in the center of the cavity of Gauguin's ceramic (see fig. 1.4). Most importantly, Laval not only "looks" with closed eyes at an artwork, but further, he arches his eyebrow as if intrigued by what he "sees." But if he sees nothing at this moment, then his thoughts, his imagination, or his memory must be the source of his piqued interest.

The careful treatment of light on the interior of the sculpture in this painting, as well as Laval's focus upon its cavity, invites a comparison between the artist's mind and the interior space of the ceramic.[12] By closing his eyes before the object he examines, Gauguin presents Laval as an artist who draws upon his memory rather than observation. In this way, Laval perceives not the physical form of the objects, but their neoplatonic "Idea."[13] Painting from memory resonates with contemporaneous neoplatonic notions of a higher, abstracted realm of ideas, as well as period debates in psychology concerning

[12] Dario Gamboni, *Paul Gauguin: The Mysterious Centre of Thought* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 18, 29. My early thoughts on this painting are indebted to Raino Isto, "Shaping the Void: Hollowness and Openness in Paul Gauguin's Ceramics," seminar presentation, November 18, 2013.

[13] Several authors have made this observation, for example Françoise Cachin, *Gauguin* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), 44; Mark A. Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 19-20; Gamboni, 18, 29, 101. I will maintain Cheetham's use of the lowercase "n" in neoplatonic to designate to the nineteenth-century version of Renaissance Neoplatonism.

memory. The ideal type, several psychologists believed, was accessible through visual memory. As I will discuss below, Gauguin himself described these ideas in letters and notebooks, especially in 1885 and 1888. By closing Laval's eyes, Gauguin presents him as an artist capable of creating true Art by drawing upon his memory rather than observation.

Gauguin portrays Laval not only as an artist who works from memory, but simultaneously as the ideal viewer, who seeks the Idea of an art object over its forms. For these reasons, scholars widely agree that this painting stands as an early "artistic manifesto," an "allegory of art," and a "meditation on artistic interrelationship" that is "actually *about* art."[14] Further, it represents the "first of a number of canvases thematizing the challenges of creativity" in which Gauguin has "invited us to speculate on his next move."[15] These scholars, however, overlook the centrality of still life to this early "manifesto" as well as the genre's repeated presence in another painting that depicts that "next move" precisely.

Vincent van Gogh Painting Sunflowers

The second canvas in which Gauguin pictured an artist in the act of looking at a still life is also widely understood as a meditation on the creative act, and specifically on the process of painting from memory. In *Vincent van Gogh Painting Sunflowers* (fig. 1.6), Gauguin pictures his artist-colleague, friend, and cohabitant observing a still life with half-closed eyes. Gauguin portrayed van Gogh in the process of painting, thus

[14] Respectively: Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 304-08; Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, "Gauguin Creates his World: The Object in a World of Myth and Dream," in Eisenman, ed., *Gauguin: Artist of Myth and Dream* (Milan: Skira, 2007), 35; Brettell and Fonsmark, 334-36.

[15] Druick and Zegers, 70.

positioning him more clearly as an artist than he did with Laval in the earlier portrait. Van Gogh looks not at the canvas but at the flower arrangement, pointing yet again to the act of observation. Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo around the first of December, 1888 that the portrait was in progress, and Gauguin sent it to Theo around the third week of the same month.[16]

This painting participates in a dialogue with two other portraits painted earlier in the year at van Gogh's request: Gauguin's *Self-Portrait with Portrait of Émile Bernard (Les Misérables)* and Émile Bernard's *Self-portrait with Portrait of Gauguin* (fig. 1.7, 1.8). Van Gogh envisioned an exchange of portraits by and of his fellow artists. Despite his request that Bernard paint Gauguin and Gauguin paint Bernard, both artists instead created self-portraits that included a drawing of the other hanging on the wall. Bernard's self-portrait shows Gauguin with closed eyes, and Gauguin's self-portrait includes Bernard with half-closed eyes (fig. 1.9). Thus the "eyes-closed motif"[17] that Gauguin inaugurated with *Laval* in 1886 continued to circulate in these three paintings of 1888. Based upon technical analysis and style, Vojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski has suggested that Gauguin in fact painted his self-portrait in the Bernard canvas, and vice-versa.[18] Before deciding to paint their own portraits, Gauguin wrote to van Gogh, "J'observe le petit

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[16] Vincent Van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, c. 1 December 1888. *Vincent van Gogh - The Letters*, ed. Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten, and Nienke Bakker (Amsterdam & The Hague: Van Gogh Museum & Huygens ING, 2010), www.vangoghletters.org, letter 723. For Gauguin's letter to Theo announcing its completion, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: documents, témoignages*, vol. 1, ed. Victor Merlès (Paris: Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1984), 302. (I will use "van Gogh" to refer to Vincent van Gogh and "Theo" to refer to Theo van Gogh.)

[17] This is Cheetham's term. While I too will explore closed eyes as a meaningful motif, I do not subscribe to Cheetham's position that it is solely neoplatonic in nature. Cheetham, 19-20. The symbolic significance of closed eyes is treated by Gamboni, 29-33, 101.

[18] Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, *Technique and Meaning in the Paintings of Paul Gauguin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 107. If this is true, then even though Bernard's eyes are half-open in Gauguin's painting, Gauguin painted his own eyes as fully closed in his colleague's canvas.

Bernard et je ne le possède pas encore. Je le ferai peut être de mémoire mais en tous cas ce sera une abstraction."[19] The repeated presence of closed eyes suggests it was a point of discussion among the three artists in the summer and fall of 1888, and Gauguin's reflection that he would "perhaps do it from memory" links the theory to the practice.

Scholars have interpreted the representation of van Gogh in *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers* in several different ways. Traditionally it was understood as a derogatory depiction. Gauguin's sketch for the composition (fig. 1.10) reveals that he originally gave his sitter simian facial features, recalling a tradition of painting in which monkeys "ape" human behavior. In this way, van Gogh mindlessly "apes" nature by copying it directly onto his canvas. Yet, as art historians have more recently noted, the painting has a more complex relationship with the question of copying from nature versus composing from the imagination. Gauguin painted this canvas in December, and so he pictures an impossible scene as van Gogh did not have access to fresh sunflowers in the winter. Van Gogh did paint sunflowers that winter, but he used his canvases completed in the summer as a model. Therefore both van Gogh and Gauguin worked not from nature itself but from a motif already transformed by van Gogh's imagination.[20] Continued visual analysis further reinforces this ambivalent view.

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[19] Gauguin to van Gogh, 26 September 1888. Jansen letter 688. "I'm studying young Bernard, and I don't have him yet. I shall perhaps do it from memory, but in any case it will be an abstraction." All translations of van Gogh correspondence are from Jansen et al.

[20] Druick and Zegers, 239-40 and citations therein. Whether van Gogh painted one of his copies of the August sunflower paintings in December 1888 or January 1889 remains contested. At stake is whether or not Gauguin observed van Gogh painting sunflowers. Druick and Zegers argue for a December date based, among other factors, on the weave of the canvas, which reveals that it came from the same bolt that Gauguin and van Gogh used in November and December. Laura Coyle tends to agree with them for these and additional considerations including the lack of signature and the style of painting. Laura Coyle, *The Still-Life Paintings of Vincent Van Gogh and Their Context* (Ph. D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2007), 439-41.

In this composition, van Gogh sits in the Yellow House studio. Though the house's walls were white, van Gogh and Gauguin regularly depicted them in colors that suited their aesthetic needs.[21] The same pale-blue walls in this painting occur as well in other Arles works by both artists.[22] Gauguin's *Blue Trees* (1888, Ordrupgaard) hangs on the wall behind him. While Gauguin surely would have witnessed van Gogh painting in the Yellow House studio, the scene depicted here is an imagined one.[23]

The composition of *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers*, like *Still Life with Laval*, creates a sense of spatial disorientation. For example, the floor is not visible which makes the scene seem to float in this blue space. Looking to the area of van Gogh's legs, he appears to be sitting lower than the chair on which the sunflowers rest. His palette and the chair are immediately adjacent, paralleling each other, which makes their relative height with respect to each other imperceptible. Van Gogh appears to sit so close to the chair that he straddles it, and yet this would position him quite far away from his canvas. Van Gogh's body is massive in form, occupying one-third of the composition's width. The large size of the canvas, in combination with these spatial devices, conveys a sense of crowding, as if the viewer were a voyeur standing too close for comfort. The visual

[21] Van Gogh described the Arles house's walls as "whitewashed" in three letters dated to May, June, and September 1888: Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 1 May 1888, Jansen letter 602; Vincent to Willemien van Gogh, 16-20 June 1888, Jansen letter 626; and Vincent to Willemien van Gogh, 9-14 September 1888, Jansen letter 678. Van Gogh Museum Senior Researcher Teio Meedendorp verbally confirmed that the Arles house's walls were most likely entirely white and that the artists changed the color in their paintings, April 4, 2016.

[22] In addition to the painting in question and *Van Gogh's Chair* by van Gogh, Gauguin's *Portrait of Mme Roulin* and *Portrait of a Man* (Van Gogh Museum) all include walls that appear blue. The walls in van Gogh's *Bedroom* series are violet, and his portrait of Gauguin, green.

[23] This is a widely-shared interpretation, see for example Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, "Painting from Nature versus Painting from Memory," in *A Closer Look: Technical and Art-Historical Studies on Works by Van Gogh and Gauguin*, ed. Cornelia Peres, M. Hoyle, and Louis van Tilborgh (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 1991), 95-97.

disjunctures reinforce the understanding that this setting was not observed, but remembered or imagined.

The sunflowers themselves add to the imagined rather than observed quality of this scene. They do not correspond precisely to any of the versions van Gogh painted in August; however, Jirat-Wasiutynski suggests that the arrangement comes closest to the Munich Neue Pinakothek version (fig. 1.11) which was one of two sunflower paintings that hung in Gauguin's room.[24] Aside from their resemblance or lack thereof to the August sunflower canvases, several other features point to the non-reality of the sunflowers, as real flowers or as paintings. The eye and eyebrow in the top-most flower give it an otherworldly anthropomorphism. The yellow petals on the lower-left side of the bouquet lack an outline and any internal modelling. Unlike the other petals, these are painted over the blue background and, therefore, were added later, perhaps to make the bouquet fuller. The three petal-less flowers on the right have sharp external contours that outline hazy, undefined interiors, making them appear like floating, biomorphic orbs. Whereas van Gogh defined these seeded pods with the texture of his thick impasto, Gauguin insists on their flatness. The vase is itself an invention as well. Gauguin derived its decorative markings from a majolica jug in the yellow house, which van Gogh had depicted over the spring and summer holding wild flowers, zinnias, and oleanders (see fig. 1.31 and 2.2).[25] Yet Gauguin removed the jug's lower half, turning the bulbous

[24] The other was the version in the National Gallery, London (see fig. 1.33). On the sunflowers hung in Gauguin's room: Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 28 January 1889, Jansen letter 743, note 2 identifies the two sunflower canvases as the Munich and London versions. For the comparison to this painting, Jirat-Wasiutynski 1991, 97.

[25] Jirat-Wasiutynski 1991, 97. See also Jan Hulsker, *The New Complete Van Gogh: Paintings, Drawings, Sketches: Revised and Enlarged Edition of the Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of Vincent Van Gogh* (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1996), no. 1424, 1426, 1566, 1567, and 1568.

pitcher into a low and wide vessel that could not possibly support the sunflowers that it purports to hold. The stems do not rest on the vase, but rather stand up independently of the rim, floating as if of their own accord. Their heavy tops threaten to topple the small bowl. The foreshortened quality of the flowers makes them appear to reach for the viewer, as if growing toward the sun. As a result, the faces of the five flowers turn not toward van Gogh, who would presumably wish to see them, but to the viewer, pointing all the more to the inventedness of this scene.

Gauguin's representation of van Gogh offers further insight into Gauguin's commentary on his colleague and on the theory of painting from memory. From a distance, van Gogh's eyes appear closed. Upon closer inspection, one sees that they are half-closed (fig. 1.12). While the half-closed eyes have been read negatively, in the sense that he squints and strains to observe the details of nature, the alternate view holds that his eyes are half-closed in order to blur and abstract, to turn inward and work from the imagination.[26] Gauguin did not paint "crow's-feet" wrinkles at the edges of van Gogh's eyes, which would have been the most obvious suggestion of squinting. On the other hand, the smudge of grey between his eyebrows evokes a furrowed brow and horizontal lines of wrinkles stretch across his forehead. In the preparatory sketch (see fig. 1.10), van Gogh's left eye is wide open and appears to look, somewhat brazenly even, at the viewer. In the painting, van Gogh's left eye looks down and away from the viewer, toward the sunflowers. His right eye is closed or half-closed. In the painting, as compared to the sketch, Gauguin reigned in the simian quality of the face, as well as the bravura

[26] Several scholars make this observation, including Jirat-Wasiutynski 1991, 95-97; Druick and Zegers, 329-40; Gamboni, 166-67.

suggested in the drawing by van Gogh's eye contact, rolled-back shoulders, and rigid arm. Van Gogh therefore appears more pensive in the canvas, as if lost in thought. Perhaps metaphorically, while he opens his left eye to the sunflowers and thereby to nature, he closes his right eye before his painting.

There are several correspondences between van Gogh, his accoutrements, and the sunflowers he paints. Jirat-Wasiutynski notes that van Gogh's face shares both the color and the shape of the sunflowers, and I would add that and that his jacket, trimmed in blue, mirrors the blue vase that contains the flowers. Jirat-Wasiutynski argues that the yellow band of the painting behind van Gogh connects his head to the easel, as if "to diagram the ideal projection of the mental image from the artist's imagination to the canvas surface in Gauguin's conceptual approach."[27] One noteworthy lack of correspondence between the sunflowers and van Gogh occurs in the artist's palette. The large swath of light-blue on the palette appears only in the smallest dab of a highlight in the sunflowers. This calls into question what else the light blue on the palette represents. It could possibly suggest that van Gogh was painting a blue background for his sunflowers, which would match the Munich version of sunflowers hanging in Gauguin's room at the time. More interestingly, it could represent Gauguin's own palette, as the same colors appear in the composition as a whole, including a large portion of light blue. This would serve to intensify the question that animates this canvas, of what is real and what exists only in the artist's imagination. Jirat-Wasiutynski and Gamboni find the same question represented in the single line that designates van Gogh's canvas on the easel, which merges with the petal of the uppermost sunflower (fig. 1.13). Together the canvas and petal continue a downward trajectory,

[27] Jirat-Wasiutynski 1991, 99, and quote, p. 101; Gamboni, 166.

meeting at van Gogh's brush and fingers. Gauguin thereby created the illusion that van Gogh paints not the canvas, but the sunflowers themselves. Gamboni concludes that in this way, van Gogh "does not merely represent a piece of nature but genuinely brings it into being."[28]

There remains still more to make of this triple-union between canvas, brush, and flower. On closer inspection, the petal's edge does not simply merge with the canvas; rather its jagged but gently-curving edge is cropped by the rigidly straight edge of the canvas, as if the petal has yet to be painted (see fig. 1.13). At the tip of the petal, the canvas ends as well. A space of light blue appears in the gap between the grey line of the canvas and the green leaf beneath it (fig. 1.14). Thus van Gogh's brush lands at the very bottom of the canvas, which would not include the heads of the sunflowers at which he ostensibly looks. Close attention to this area also reveals that van Gogh's fingers appear behind the line of the canvas/ petal. At the same time, the brush becomes so thin, merging with the blue-grey shadows between his fingers, that it dissolves. All that remains to be seen are his three fingers, which touch, almost hold, the flower's petal. For van Gogh's fingers to appear on the far side of the canvas-turned-petal indicates that it could not be the canvas that he touches, but must be the petal. The foreshortening of his arm further suggests that he reaches across his body and toward the picture plane, toward the flowers rather than the canvas. Van Gogh's fourth finger, the pinky, also makes contact with the green leaf of the flower. This arrangement of fingers, with three straight and the pinky bent, is rather awkward and suggests that the points of contact with the flower and leaf

[28] Gamboni, 165; Jirat-Wasiutynski 1991, 101.

are deliberate.[29] Gauguin's emphatic attention to fingers and touch highlights the simultaneous materiality and immateriality of the sunflowers. The pre-existence of the model, of nature, is called into question in the act of creating the sunflowers before the viewer's eyes.[30] Indeed, the tips of the lower-right petals on the same sunflower are not complete—they simply dissolve, as if van Gogh has yet to paint them (fig. 1.15). Thus instead of depicting the slavish imitation of nature, Gauguin pictures van Gogh, eyes half-closed, conjuring a still life from within himself, within his mind. He is not painting his canvas, but inventing the model. Gauguin wrote to van Gogh weeks later to request one of the sunflower canvases, which he called "une page parfaite d'un style essentiellement Vincent."[31]

This composition fundamentally concerns Gauguin's and van Gogh's debates on the process of painting from memory versus from observation. Scholars agree widely upon this point,[32] however, as with *Still Life with Laval*, they have overlooked that still lifes occupy the metaphorical center of these compositions.[33] Gauguin's still life of fruit

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[29] Van Gogh Museum Senior Paintings Conservator René Boitelle examined this area in response to my inquiry regarding what appeared to be a pentimento. He determined that the placement of the fingers was determined from the beginning and has not been changed. The area of blue between the middle fingers and the pinky finger was painted in last, with a "dirty brush" that contained the blue as well as the "ochre" color used in the fingers. E-mail communication with the author, 10 October 2016.

[30] This bears relation to Baudelaire's notion that nature does not exist until the artist imagines it, which I will address below. I cannot help but note the conceptual similarity of this painting to René Magritte's *Attempting the Impossible*, 1928, in which an artist paints a model into being, her arm not yet complete.

[31] Gauguin to Van Gogh, c. 8-16 January 1889, Jansen letter 734. "A perfect page of an essential 'Vincent' style." Only part of this letter is preserved, and it is believed that Gauguin requested the canvas in the missing part of the letter, as van Gogh replied to Gauguin declining to exchange a sunflower canvas with him in a letter of 21 January 1889 (Jansen letter 739). Vincent also wrote to Theo van Gogh that Gauguin had proposed this exchange, 17 January 1889, (Jansen letter 736, canvas identified in note 12).

[32] Jirat-Wasiutynski 1991, 98-101; Coyle, 442; Druick and Zegers, 239-40; Gamboni, 165.

[33] I will return to this painting in the context of van Gogh's and Gauguin's mutual influence upon each other in Arles, at which time I will further discuss the role of the sunflowers and chair as still lifes.

in *Laval*, for example, does not evoke real fruit but rather Cézanne's paintings of fruit. Likewise, van Gogh's sunflowers do not look like real sunflowers, but like paintings of sunflowers. The still lifes, therefore, call attention to their own paintedness. The fact that each artist-viewer closes or half-closes his eyes upon inspecting these already-artful arrangements suggests that they see not the real objects, but rather ideas borne of the artist's imagination. These observing figures activate the question of what is real and imagined, observed and painted from memory.

Still Life with Fruit

Still Life with Fruit is dated to September or October 1888, based on the probability that Gauguin gave the painting to Laval before leaving for Arles (fig. 1.16).[34] Most of the scholarship on this work positions the female figure as a personification of temptation: she looks longingly over an abundant array of fruit, and she anticipates the figure Gauguin would place at the center of his *The Wine Harvest, Human Misery* in the following months (fig. 1.17).[35] This interpretation, however, is overly simplistic, particularly when one considers this painting alongside *Still Life with Laval*. In each composition, a figure peers from the side of a table over an arrangement of fruit, with an accompanying ceramic. Although Gaugin completed these canvases two years apart, his dedication of *Still Life with Fruit* to Laval insinuates a dialogue between them. As in *Still*

[34] Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 492.

[35] Richard Brettell, *The Art of Paul Gauguin* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1988), 111-12; Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutynski, *Paul Gauguin in the Context of Symbolism*, (New York: Garland Pub, 1978), 160; Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 492-97. Jirat-Wasiutynski and Wildenstein and Crussard equate the female figure with Madeleine Bernard, and all three specifically discuss the theme of temptation in *Fruit*. These scholars are divided as to whether the figure in *Fruit* is the first representation of the so-called "Peruvian mummy" that so interested Gauguin at the Musée d'Ethnographie. The first author to discover the link between Gauguin's Eves and the "Peruvian mummy" was Wayne Andersen, and he too leaves ambiguous whether or not the mummy was a direct influence on *Fruit*. Wayne V. Andersen, "Gauguin and a Peruvian Mummy," *The Burlington Magazine* 109.769 (April, 1967): 241.

Life with Laval and *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers*, I argue that the presence of a figure in this canvas likewise calls attention to the processes of observation versus imagination.

A reading of *Still Life with Fruit* in dialogue with the Laval portrait could serve to reinforce the traditional interpretation: a woman, the weaker sex, looks upon a still life with open eyes. Unlike Laval, her attention at first appears to be directed toward the luscious fruit rather than the ceramic, the *objet d'art*. By fixating upon the material, she succumbs to worldly desires.

I propose a subtler reading of this painting, however, which gives way to the opposite conclusion—that the woman is Laval's equal, rather than his antithesis. Gauguin expressed the equality of the sexes around the same time, in a letter to Madeleine Bernard: "Les vertus d'une femme sont semblables (entièrement) à celles de l'homme."[36] As in the *Still Life with Laval,* the charged inner space of the ceramic container mirrors the mind of the painted subject. While this relationship is most striking in the Laval portrait, where the comparison is between an artist's mind (Laval's) and the product of an artist's hand (Gauguin's ceramic), Gauguin's oeuvre contains similar analogies between the mind of non-artists and household objects, such as *Clovis Sleeping* (see fig. 0.14). Along with the allusion to the child's mind through the dream-like figures on the wallpaper, the distortion of scale between the child's head and the jug activates the space contained within each. By reading *Still Life with Fruit* in this way, a link emerges between the woman and the pot at her side, which is reinforced by the suggestion of a

[36] Gauguin to Madeleine Bernard, 15-20 October 1888. *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: documents, témoignages*, vol. 1, ed. Victor Merlhès (Paris: Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1984), 256. "The virtues of a woman are exactly the same as the virtues of a man." Translated in *Paul Gauguin: Letters to his wife and friends*, ed. Maurice Malingue, trans. Henry J. Stenning (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1949), 103.

face on the pot. This potential face mimics the woman's, with one open eye and the other closed. While the woman opens the eye that looks sharply toward the ceramic, she closes the eye that would look over the fruit, like Laval's closed eyes. The relationship between figure and ceramic that operates in *Fruit* as it does in *Still Life with Laval* and *Clovis Sleeping*, then, draws attention in each case to the stimulated mind.

The pose of the hands of the woman in *Fruit* iconographically implies meditation as it inevitably recalls Albrecht Dürer's *Melancolia*—the female personification of this ailment, widely attributed to male artists during Gauguin's time (fig. 1.18). Like the figure in *Fruit*, Durer's melancholic female also sports flowing locks of hair and rests her cheek on curled fingers while looking over an array of objects.[37] Thus the figure in *Still Life with Fruit* need not be miserable because of worldly temptation as other scholars have held, but instead she shares in the misery of the intellectual artist-martyr.

The female figure in *Fruit* also bears the attributes of Madeleine Bernard, Émile Bernard's sister who visited the artists in Pont-Aven from mid-August to mid-October, 1888. During this time Gauguin made a portrait of her (fig. 1.19), in which he gave her the same smirking red lips, elongated eyes, and blue dress as the figure in *Fruit*.[38] Gauguin was infatuated with Madeleine, and her brother, with some bitterness, claimed

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[37] June Hargrove discusses the period interest in this pose, and compares Durer's *Melancolia* to the pose of Meijer de Haan in his portrait by Gauguin. "Gauguin's maverick sage: Meijer de Haan," in *Visions: Gauguin and His Time*, ed. Belinda Thomson (Zwolle: Waanders, 2010), 94. Béatrice Lovis also links De Haan's pose to *Melancolia* through Rodin's *Thinker*, exhibited in Paris the same year (Béatrice Lovis, "Les natures mortes de Paul Gauguin: une production picturale méconnue," *Artibus et Historiae* 30.59 (2009), 172). In *Fruit*, however, the comparison is even closer in that the gender is maintained and the fingers are curled.

[38] The differences in hair color may be telling. In reality Madeleine was blonde (Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 447). In her portrait, she is represented with brown hair, but the figure in *Fruit* has golden red hair. In a departure from much of Western art history in which red hair connotes sexual promiscuity, Gauguin's red-haired women represent life-giving force. (Hargrove 2010, 36, n. 48.) This change in hair color in *Fruit* is therefore likely a positive change.

(decades later) that Gauguin would have married her if he could.[39] Thus Madeleine's role in *Fruit* is typically interpreted as that of the *femme fatale*, both tempted and tempting.[40] Yet again, the opposite interpretation stands to reason as well, which finds support in Gauguin's correspondence with Madeleine after her departure. In the same letter quoted above, Gauguin wrote to Madeleine that if she wanted to be materialistic and live without goals or reason, she may do that. He continued,

> Si au contraire vous voulez être *quelqu'un*, avoir pour unique Bonheur celui qui est le résultat de votre indépendance et de votre conscience il n'est que temps d'y penser. […] L'âme, le cœur, tout ce qui est divin enfin ne doit pas être *esclave* de la matière c'est-à-dire du corps. […] Nous autres artistes nous avons besoin aussi de votre défense de votre aide et vous pouvez persuader. Ce serait donc bienfait pour bienfait, un échange de deux forces différentes.[41]

Thus while Gauguin may have seen Madeleine as a temptress, he also tried to recruit her as a fellow comrade in arms, fighting to free art from the same materialistic pursuit that scholars read in this painting. In his letter, Gauguin presented these options to Madeleine as a choice. When understood in this context, *Fruit* represents the same choice: between materiality, nature, and observation on the one hand, and overcoming those base qualities by way of art and imagination, on the other. By understanding *Fruit* as a still life in

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[39] Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 449.

[40] Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 492-96.

[41] Gauguin to Madeleine Bernard, 15-20 October 1888, Merlhès, 256. Emphasis is Gauguin's. "If, on the other hand, you want to *be someone*, to find happiness solely in your independence and your conscience, it is now time to think about these things. […] Heart and soul, in short all that is divine, must not be the slave of matter, that is of the body. […] We artists also are in need of your defence, of your aid, and you can be persuasive. We should thus render each other mutual service—bring about an exchange of different qualities." Trans. Malingue, 103.

dialogue with similar figure-still life compositions, the female figure becomes, like Madeleine, both an artist-muse and the ideal viewer, directing us with her eyes to close our own before the products of nature and look instead upon the creations of man.

This still life is resolutely imaginative. Like the fruit in *Laval* and the flowers in *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers*, here the entire tableau insists upon its paintedness. The fruit on the left and the ceramic are rendered in Cézanne-esque strokes, evoking the artist more so than actual fruit. The entire table is a color field of pastel hues on which the plates and bowls float; it hardly seems to indicate a solid support. The shadows cast in different directions and the various viewing angles of the containers reinforce this sense: the bowl on the left tilts right as the basket and ceramic on the right lean left. Whereas Cézanne's multiple viewing angles are about vision, here the technique imparts a disorienting quality that detaches the scene from reality. The female figure's face is cartoon-like, her mouth simplified down to a brilliant red slice. The entire scene, it seems, could exist as a figment of her imagination. The grapes are rich in their color but deny us a sense of their form and texture. The blurriness of these grapes could represent a response to Zeuxis' grapes—Gauguin makes sure that no bird would be tricked into eating these, and in so doing, separates himself from the tradition of still life that endeavors to mimic nature. The grapes declare themselves to exist only in the memory of the artist, not as observed facts of nature. The rather small dimensions of this canvas make the viewing experience an intimate one. It comes across as a small experiment or a cordial dialogue on the nature of looking, imagining, and creating.

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In each of these three paintings, people look at objects. As objects that are noticed, this relationship invites the question of "thingness" discussed in the introduction. And yet Gauguin has already complicated that question by injecting artworks into the scenes at hand. Laval and the female figure in *Fruit* both look at fruit as well as ceramics. *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers* further intertwines the nature of objects and art because the sunflowers hover between real flowers and a copy of van Gogh's painting of flowers. In each of these canvases the fruit, ceramics, and flowers are thing-like in the level of attention the painted figure affords them. But artworks naturally claim this level of attention—one is expected to look closely and carefully at them, to notice them. Thus Gauguin further interrogates the thingness of still life by exploring the boundary between artworks and things.

II. History and Theory of Painting from Memory

The three canvases of pictured looking at still lifes discussed above are part of a theoretical and practical debate waged throughout the nineteenth century and across disciplines, which concerned the use of visual memory in the arts. The topic embroiled philosophers, psychologists, writers, critics, and, within the visual arts, the Academy and avant-garde alike. In the first section I will provide a broad overview of this history in the fine arts, and in the following section, I will more deeply consider Gauguin's ideas on this topic and place them within the context of period sources including Baudelaire's writing and popular psychology.

Nineteenth-century Debates on Painting from Memory

Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran was a vocal and dedicated proponent of painting from memory. He was a contemporary of Eugène Delacroix and although he belonged to

the Romantic age, he most influenced the Realist and Naturalist generation.[42] Lecoq developed a robust program of education to train young artists' visual memory, which he published in 1848 as a pamphlet titled *L'Education de la mémoire pittoresque*. The initial stages of his teaching method had more in common with what might be called memorization: students were given drawn, engraved, sculpted, and eventually live models which they had to observe and remember using notes or drawings, and then later re-draw from memory precisely, given increasingly less time to do so. Once they mastered (memorized) one model, they moved on to another.[43] Lecoq's goal for the first stage, then, was to hone the student's memory, to make it more complete. This was not an end goal but a means to eventually capture fleeting effects of nature or bodily movement. For a short time before he exhausted his funds, Lecoq would take his most advanced students to a forest, where hired nude models would run through the trees. The students were to observe, and then use their memory to sketch these "fleeting effects." According to Lecoq, a well-trained memory was the greatest tool to stock the imagination.[44]

Debates on painting from memory made strange bedfellows among artists in the nineteenth century. Those in favor of the practice included Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Delacroix, Honoré Daumier, Constantin Guys, James McNeill Whistler, Édouard Manet, Degas, and Gauguin, while those against it included Academics such as Jean-

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[42] Petra Chu, "Lecoq de Boisbaudran and Memory Drawing: A Teaching course between Idealism and Naturalism," in *The European Realist Tradition*, ed. by Gabriel P. Weisberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 277. Lecoq taught as an assistant professor at the Ecole Royale et Spéciale de Dessin et de Mathématique, considered a kind of prep school for the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, for twenty-eight years. (243) Petra Chu has published three articles on the history of painting from memory and, as of 2014, is preparing a book manuscript on the subject. (Email communication, 7 August 2014.)

[43] Chu 1982, 277.

[44] Chu 1982, 279-80.

Léon Gérôme and Alexandre Cabanel, naturalists, the Impressionists, and van Gogh.[45] Thus these debates did not follow the traditional divisions between Romantic, Realist, and Symbolist, nor between academic and avant-garde. The Academy valued the technique as a way of achieving the ideal in art. Students were to copy from the model, and then use their memory to select the greatest qualities. This was certainly not a new idea, as sixteenth-century artists and theoreticians widely discussed and employed the practice.[46] The moment in which the debate became most heated was when the Impressionists rejected the practice in favor of painting directly in front of the model. Following Thomas Hobbes' theory that memory decays with time, Claude Monet wished to transfer the observed scene onto his canvas exactly as it struck his eye, in the most direct possible experience, such that the image would not "decay" at all.[47] Around the same time, the future Symbolist generation of artists took interest in the use of memory to their advantage. Their understanding of the theory, however, departed from Lecoq's. In concert with artists such as Daumier and Guys, artists ranging from Degas to Gauguin did not feel the need to "stock" their imagination with memorized models. Instead, they valued the reductive power of memory, which would later become a theory of abstraction. As Petra Chu explains, for Lecoq as opposed to the Symbolists, visual memory "was a precision instrument rather than a sieve."[48] In Chu's brief discussion of

[45] Petra Chu, "Creativity and Memory: A Nineteenth-Century Debate," in *El proceso creativo*, published by Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte, and Alberto Dallal (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2006), 415.

[46] E-mail communication from Anthony Colantuono, Oct. 16, 2013. Dr. Colantuono writes that Mannerist theorists advocated painting images directly from the imagination. Baroque practice involved drawing after nature but painting a synthesis of these natural models from memory.

[47] Chu 2006, 416-17.

[48] Chu 1982, 286-87.

Gauguin, she writes that he and Lecoq nonetheless shared a belief in memory's power to combine observation and imagination.[49]

Gauguin's Theories and Sources on Painting from Memory

Gauguin first alluded to the idea of painting without a model in a January 1885 letter to fellow artist Émile Schuffenecker, in which he advised, "Surtout ne transpirez pas sur un tableau, un grand sentiment peut être traduit immédiatement rêvez dessus et cherchez-en la forme la plus simple."[50] The same year, Gauguin circulated among his friends a manual on painting, purportedly by a Turkish poet named Vehbi-Zunbul-Zadi, but now known to be Gauguin's own invention. In this "manual," Gauguin made specific mention of memory for the first time: "Il est bon pour les jeunes gens d'avoir un modèle, mais qu'ils tirent le rideau sur lui pendant qu'ils le peignent. Mieux est de peindre de mémoire." For Gauguin, the process had important ramifications: "Ainsi votre œuvre sera votre, votre sensation, votre intelligence et votre âme survivront alors à l'œil de l'amateur. Il va dans son écurie quand il veut compter les poils de son âne voir combien il en a à chaque oreille et déterminer la place de chacun."[51] Painting from memory, as Gauguin saw it, would ensure that an artist's work came from within himself.

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[49] Chu 1982, 286-87. She explains that while Gauguin was probably not directly familiar with Lecoq's work, he likely derived a "residual influence" from the widespread circulation of these ideas.

[50] Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 14 January, 1885. Merlhès, 89. "Above all, do not sweat over a painting; a great sentiment can be rendered immediately. Dream on it and look for the simplest form in which you can express it." Translated in *The Writings of a Savage*, ed. Daniel Guérin (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 5.

[51] Gauguin, "Zadi" text. The French quoted here is from the original version of this text held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits (NAF 14903, ff.43–6). It also appears in *Diverses Choses* and with slight variations in the *Cahier pour Aline*. The original text is dated to 1885 in Prather and Stuckey (cited with translation below). Gauguin purportedly had shared this manual with Seurat by 1886. See Robert L. Herbert, "Seurat in Chicago and New York," *The Burlington Magazine* 100.662 (May 1958): 151, note 21. On its authorship see Linda Goddard, "'Scattered Notes': Authorship and Originality in Paul Gauguin's *Diverses choses*," *Art History* 34.2 (April 2011), 367-68, note 31.

"It is well for young people to have a model so long as they draw a curtain over it while they are painting. It is better to paint from memory, thus your work will be your own; your sensation, your

Painting from memory resonates with the ideals of the Symbolist movement. Symbolist artists rejected naturalism in favor of subjectivity, emphasized emotion and ideas, and sought to echo nature's process of creation rather than copying its forms. Painting from memory, was for Gauguin and his colleagues, the way in which the artist could create imaginatively, like nature. While many art historians have recognized this resonance, the role of literary Symbolists in the relationship between aesthetic Symbolism and memory has been overlooked. Scholars of literature have written extensively on the centrality of memory for Charles Baudelaire (though not a Symbolist, a crucial progenitor of the movement), Edgar Allan Poe, and, as I will discuss in later chapters, Stéphane Mallarmé. Their interest in memory and their pride of place in literary Symbolism speak to the important but previously under-investigated role of memory in aesthetic Symbolism.

Charles Baudelaire

Baudelaire treated the subject of memory in much of his art criticism. One of his most famous commentaries on painting from memory appears in his essay "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," an edition of which was published in 1885—a pivotal year for Gauguin and many of his colleagues.[52] While scholars have long argued for the influence of Baudelaire's work on Gauguin, memory is often absent from these discussions. For example, Filiz Eda Burhan and others have carefully examined Baudelaire's role in

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intelligence and your soul will then survive the scrutiny of the amateur. He goes to his stable if he wishes to count the hairs of his donkey and to determine the place of each of them." Translated in Van Wyck Brooks, *The Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin* (London: KPI, 1985), 32-33; and Marla Prather and Charles F. Stuckey (New York: H.L. Levin Associates, 1987), 57-58.

[52] It appeared as the third volume in Calmann Lévy's series of Baudelaire's *Œuvres Complètes*. Charles Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire: L'art romantique*, vol. 3 (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), 51-114.

Gauguin's interest in correspondences of the senses, pointing specifically to the influence of his essay, the *Salon of 1846*, on Gauguin's 1885 manuscript, *Notes Synthetiques*.[53] While Baudelaire treats the subject of memory in that *Salon,* Burhan's concern lies elsewhere. Hans Rookmaaker notes that Gauguin's interest in painting from memory comes from Delacroix and Baudelaire, but does not further explore these implications.[54] Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutynski attributes the Baudelarian qualities of Gauguin's 1888 statements on memory to Bernard's reading of Baudelaire that spring, despite the work of art historians who had already connected Gauguin and Baudelaire by 1885, through the *Notes Synthetiques*.[55]

Baudelaire's influence on Gauguin's concept of painting from memory takes several forms, chief among them the relationship between memory and imagination.[56] In a footnote within a chapter on Horace Vernet, Baudelaire directly linked memory and the imagination:

> La véritable mémoire, considérée sous un point de vue philosophique, ne consiste, je pense, que dans une imagination très vive, facile à émouvoir, et par conséquent

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[53] Filiz Eda Burhan, *Vision and Visionaries: Nineteenth Century Psychological Theory, the Occult Sciences, and the Formation of the Symbolist Aesthetic in France* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1979), 133-36, and references therein. See also June Hargrove, "Les *Contes barbares* de Paul Gauguin," *Revue de l'art* 169 (2010), 26-28 and notes.

[54] Rookmaaker paraphrases one of Baudelaire's passages that refers to memory, but in such a way that deflects attention from the parallel between Baudelaire's and Gauguin's shared interest. On Gauguin and Baudelaire more generally, Rookmaaker writes that in addition to Baudelaire's introductions to translations of Poe, Gauguin would have "acquainted himself" with Baudelaire's *Curiosités Esthétiques,* which includes his commentaries on the Salons of 1846 and 1859. H. R. Rookmaaker, *Gauguin and 19th Century Art Theory* (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1972), 32 and 120.

[55] Jirat-Wasiutynski 1978, 91-97.

[56] Below, I will argue that Gauguin incorporated Baudelarian concepts of memory into his theories in 1885 but did not give them visual form in his work until 1888. While considering the following passages it is worth keeping in mind his paintings of 1888 such as *Still Life with Puppies* (see fig. 1.23). I suggest not a one-to-one correlation between this painting and the earlier theories, but a resonance that the artist perhaps digested over time.

> susceptible d'évoquer à l'appui de chaque sensation les scènes du passé, en les douant, comme par enchantement, de la vie et du caractère propres à chacune d'elles; du moins j'ai entendu soutenir cette thèse par l'un de mes anciens maîtres, qui avait une mémoire prodigieuse quoiqu'il ne pût retenir une date, ni un nom propre.[57]

This connection between imagination and memory is fundamental to Gauguin's work as well, and recurs in different permutations throughout his career. He used "painting from memory" in a way that was interchangeable with painting from the imagination. Further, Baudelaire's appreciation of the memory of experiences over memorized dates and names constitutes an important distinction, which Gauguin expressed, albeit more obliquely, in his letters. For example, while Gauguin would describe memories of his

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[57] Baudelaire, "Salon de 1846" in *Œuvres Complètes* vol. 2, 160. This footnote in the *Salon* is a close transcription from E.T.A. Hoffmann's novel, "A Report on the Latest Adventures of the Dog Berganza." Berganza, a talking dog, is asked how he so vividly remembers an episode of being attacked by witches. He responds, "It was not just that they shrieked the verses a hundred times; the powerful effect and the agony of their futile magic tricks were all deeply imprinted on me, and in addition, my all-too-accurate memory must have come to my aid. I think that precise recollection is a function of a very vivid, active imagination that, at the moment of its stimulation, is able to conjure up every image of the past, with all its individual colors and all the associated details. At least, that is the speculation I heard from one of my former masters, who had an astonishing memory even though he could seldom recollect names and dates." His interlocutor agrees: "Your master was right. It may be that the words and speeches that press into the deepest part of our being behave differently at this profound personal level from those vocabularies acquired through rote memorization." (E.T.A. Hoffmann, trans. Joseph M. Hayse. "A Report on the Latest Adventures of the Dog Berganza." In *Fantasy Pieces In Callot's Manner: Pages from the Diary of A Traveling Romantic* (Union College Press: Schenectady, NY, 1996), 75.)

The relationship posited between memory and imagination here is interesting—at the moment when the memory is recalled, the imagination kicks in, flooding Berganza with sensorial recollections. This concept of memory anticipates Marcel Proust's, but with a twist: the imagination is needed at the precise moment of recall to summon those details. Also of interest is the manner in which Baudelaire incorporates this quotation, taken from a novel and inserted as a footnote into his art criticism like a citation, including "(Hoffman)" at the end of it.

Translation of Baudelaire's passage: "True memory, considered from a philosophical angle, consists, I suppose, only in a very lively imagination, easy to stimulate and, in consequence, able to evoke in support of every sensation the scenes of the past, endowing them, as if by magic, with life and character appropriate to each; at least I have heard the thesis developed by one of my former teachers, who had a prodigious memory, although he could not remember a single date or a single proper name." Trans. Charvet, 88.

childhood or his travels in rich, sensorial detail, he attributed a stronger memory for dates, names, and languages to his wife Mette.[58] Gauguin also believed that the type of memory that relates to imagination differs from memorized information.

The contempt for copying as opposed to working from memory, evinced in Gauguin's chiding of the amateur artist who "counts the hairs of his donkey," is a commonly repeated feature of Baudelaire's commentary on painting from memory, particularly in the *Salon of 1846*. Dripping with disdain and a healthy dose of sarcasm, Baudelaire described the work of Horace Vernet:

> M. Horace Vernet est un militaire qui fait de la peinture. […] Je hais cet homme parce que ses tableaux ne sont point de la peinture, mais une masturbation agile et fréquente une irritation de l'épiderme français. […] Pour définir M. Horace Vernet d'une manière claire ; il est l'antithèse absolue de l'artiste ; il substitue le *chic* au dessin. […] Qui sait mieux que lui combien il y a de boutons dans chaque uniforme?[59]

Waxing more philosophical and, more directly, Baudelaire expressed in the same *Salon*, "J'ai déjà remarqué que le souvenir était le grand criterium de l'art ; l'art est une mnémotechnie du beau: or, l'imitation exacte gâte le souvenir. […] Trop particulariser ou trop généraliser empêchent également le souvenir."[60] Finally, in a passage that seems to

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[58] Gauguin to Mette, July 1891, Guérin, 53; and, Gauguin to Mette, February 1887, Merlhès, 145.

[59] Baudelaire, "Salon de 1846" in *Œuvres Complètes* vol. 2, 159-60. "M. Horace Vernet is a soldier who busies himself with painting. […] I hate this man because his pictures are not painting but a sort of agile and frequent masturbation, an irritation of the French epidermis. […] To define M. Horace Vernet clearly, he is the antithesis of the artist; he substitutes *chic* for drawing… Who better than he knows how many buttons there are on every sort of uniform…?" Trans. Charvet, 87-88.

[60] Baudelaire, "Salon de 1846" in *Œuvres Complètes* vol. 2, 138. "I have already noted that memory is the great criterion of art; art is a kind of mnemotechny of beauty; and slavish imitation interferes with

respond to Lecoq in the negative, he explained, "Le *chic* est l'abus de la mémoire; encore le *chic* est-il plutôt une mémoire de la main qu'une mémoire du cerveau ; car il est des artistes doués d'une mémoire profonde des caractères et des formes—Delacroix ou Daumier—et qui n'ont rien à démêler avec le *chic*."[61] In these passages, Baudelaire expresses that memory lies at the core of the highest form of art, but specifies that this memory must come from the brain and not from a type of muscle memory that itself derives from copying and memorization.

Gauguin's interest in memory returned with renewed vigor in the spring and summer of 1888, following his period in Martinique in 1887 during which he had shifted his attention away from the topic. Beginning in 1888, Gauguin tied his statements on painting from memory to two important elements: the concepts of abstraction and creation. He alluded to this idea in a July 1888 letter to van Gogh: "Je viens de lire votre lettre intéressante et je suis tout à fait d'accord avec vous sur le peu d'importance que l'exactitude apporte en art.–L'art est une abstraction, malheureusement on devient de plus en plus incompris."[62] In August he expressed a similar connection to Schuffenecker, with additional instruction on how to achieve abstraction: "Un conseil, ne copies pas trop d'après nature. L'art est une abstraction; tirez-la de la nature en revenant devant et pensez plus à la creation qu'au résultat c'est le seul moyen de monter vers Dieu en faisant

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memory… Too much attention to detail or too much generalization alike interfere [*sic*] with memory." Trans. Charvet, 77.

[61] Baudelaire, "Salon de 1846" in *Œuvres Complètes* vol. 2, 156. "Chic is the abuse of memory; chic means memory of the hand rather than memory of the brain; for there are artists endowed with a retentive memory for characters and shapes—Delacroix, Daumier—who have no truck with chic." Trans. Charvet, 87.

[62] Gauguin to van Gogh, 22 July 1888, Jansen letter 646. The letter from van Gogh to which Gauguin was responding is not preserved. "I've just read your interesting letter and I entirely agree with you on the slight importance that accuracy contributes to art. Art is an abstraction; unfortunately we're becoming increasingly misunderstood."

comme notre divin maître créer."[63] These statements retain the rejection of copying seen in Baudelaire's *Salon of 1846*, but they also reflect new insights, perhaps in part the result of rekindled engagement with Baudelaire's work. Émile Bernard likely brought Baudelaire's art criticism with him to Pont-Aven in the summer of 1888.[64] Scholars of French literature describe Baudelaire's *Salon of 1859* as a deeper and more mature treatise on the power of the imagination,[65] as seen in passages such as this, which anticipate Gauguin's idea of imaginative artistic creation as divine creation:

> Par imagination, je ne veux pas seulement exprimer l'idée commune impliquée dans ce mot dont on fait si grand abus, laquelle est simplement *fantaisie*, mais bien l'imagination *créatrice*, qui est une fonction beaucoup plus élevée, et qui, en tant que l'homme est fait à la ressemblance de Dieu, garde un rapport éloigné avec cette puissance sublime par laquelle le Créateur conçoit, crée et entretient son univers.[66]

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[63] Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 14 August 1888. Merlhès, 210. "Some advice: do not paint too much after nature. Art is an abstraction; derive this abstraction from nature while dreaming before it, and think more of the creation which will result than of nature. Creating like our Divine Master is the only way of rising toward God." Trans. Herschel Browning Chipp, Peter Selz, and Joshua C. Taylor, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 60.

[64] Jirat-Wasiutynski 2000, 92.

[65] Margaret Gilman, *Baudelaire, the Critic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 128; Hans-Jost Frey, *Studies in poetic discourse: Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Hölderlin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 62-65; Karen Frances Quandt, *Landscape and the Imagination: Expressive Aesthetics in French Romantic Poetry* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2011), 272-74.

[66] In this passage, Baudelaire is quoting from *The Night Side of Nature*, by Catherine (Stevens) Crowe, whom he identifies as a novelist, short story writer, and spiritualist. Baudelaire, "Salon de 1859," in *Œuvres Complètes* vol. 2, 269-70. "By imagination, I do not simply mean to convey the common notion implied by that much abused word, which is only fancy, but the constructive [or creative] imagination, which is a much higher function, and which, inasmuch as man is made in the likeness of God, bears a distant relation to that sublime power by which the creator projects, and upholds his universe." Trans. Charvet, 303. Gilman and others translate *imagination créatrice* as the creative imagination, rather than Charvet's constructive imagination. Gilman, 128.

The *Salon of 1859* brings to the fore Baudelaire's interest in the intersection between imagination and creation, which he directly opposes to copying nature. Baudelaire wrote rather lyrically, "L'imagination est la reine du vrai, et le possible est une des provinces du vrai."[67] Here, Baudelaire inverts the traditional understanding of reality as the basis for imagination, positing instead that reality builds upon imagination, and that imagination governs what is possible.[68] French literature scholar Hans-Jost Frey argues that Baudelaire's qualm with copying nature lies in the practice's underlying assumption that nature exists as something capable of being copied. He suggests that in Baudelaire's conception, nature is a human construct, and therefore cannot be copied until it is first imagined. Frey explains, "If nature is not rendered as it is but as what we see, then it is not predetermined. It does not constitute itself as predetermined until it is seen. Since what is seen is dependent on seeing, it can no longer be understood as something that precedes it."[69] This preoccupation with seeing recalls Gauguin's paintings of pictured looking. One could read the still life in *Still Life with Laval* as the figment of Laval's imagination, nonexistent until the artist brings it into being. The metaphor applies more directly to *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers*. Gauguin gives form to Baudelaire's

[67] Baudelaire, "Salon de 1859," in *Œuvres Complètes* vol. 2, 265. "Imagination is the queen of truth, and the possible is one of the provinces of truth." Trans. Charvet, 300.

[68] An important and recurring concept for Gauguin's theories on memory and imagination as well, this claim is not just poetic; it is in fact a relationship for which scientists are beginning to find evidence. I will further discuss this type of relationship between memory, reality, and imagination in chapter three.

[69] Frey, 65. Frey continues, "The dream creates the image. The image comes out of the dream." (73) One of the passages from Baudelaire's *Salon of 1859* that he uses to ground his argument is: "A good painting, faithful and equal to the dream that conceived it, must be produced like a world. Just as creation, as we view it, is the result of several creations whose preceding ones are always completed by the next, so a harmoniously conducted painting consists in a series of superposed paintings, each new layer lending more reality to the dream and raising it one degree closer to perfection." Quoted and translated in Frey, 72.

ideas by calling into question the existence of the sunflowers—of the model, of nature—prior to van Gogh's creative act.

Edgar Allan Poe

Vojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski writes that for Gauguin, working from memory "may subsume the process of abstraction," but that it became "primarily a process designed to liberate the imaginative faculties of the artist… the equivalent of free association in psychoanalysis."[70] Jirat-Wasiutynski and Mark Cheetham both discuss the neoplatonic aspects of Gauguin's interest in working from memory, but they leave out of their interpretations the more embodied quality of memory that arises with Gauguin's references to the brain, which occurred alongside his 1885 statements on memory. Though this correlation is less apparent in the 1888 statements, as Edward Powers has argued, matter and materiality were of concern to Gauguin throughout his career. Powers contends that Jirat-Wasiutynski and Cheetham neglect the corporeal elements of Gauguin's theory and practice in favor of the spiritual and immaterial, however his reading goes too far in the opposite direction, reifying the physicality of Gauguin's work.[71] Gauguin delighted in duality throughout his career: life and death, male and female, corporeal and incorporeal. Memory begins as an experience of the body through the senses, and Gauguin relished in the physicality of the brain that gave way to the spirituality of higher truths. This duality is implicit in the process of painting from memory, and thereby extends to Gauguin's theory of abstraction. This notion may shed some light upon his description of *Les Misérables* in simultaneously immaterial and

[70] Jirat-Wasiutynski 1978, 96-97.

[71] Edward D. Powers, "From Eternity to Here: Paul Gauguin and the Word Made Flesh," *Oxford Art Journal* 25.2 (2002): 87-106. For his critique of Cheetham and Jirat-Wasiutynski, see p. 91.

affective terms, as both an “abstraction complète” and “un vague souvenir de ma poterie tordue par le grand feu.”[72]

These dualities were of special interest to Edgar Allan Poe, a hero to Symbolist artists such as Gauguin. A scholar of Baudelaire and Poe writes that, “since [Poe] never strayed from the movements of the heart *and* mind, Poe had the best hold on the creative imagination.”[73] Under Poe’s influence, Baudelaire “relocated the source of art from the heart to the mind… contain[ing] the imagination within the folds of the poet’s brain.”[74] *Mesmeric Revelation* is the first of Poe’s stories that Baudelaire translated,[75] and Gauguin almost certainly knew the essay.[76] In this story, a sleepwalker explains God, the soul, and the human body to the narrator:

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[72] Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 8 October 1888. Merlhès, 249. “The way it's drawn is altogether special, complete abstraction. […] The colors are colors remote from nature; just picture a vague memory of pottery twisted by a fierce fire!” Trans. Guérin, 23.

The duality of body and mind has become a topic of significant interest in the cognitive sciences, from neuroscience to philosophy. In the past twenty years, researchers in this field have rejected the long-prevailing computational model of the brain as a sort of disembodied machine in favor of new models that posit the mind and body as fundamentally intertwined. For a general summary of this field, called embodied cognition, see Robert A. Wilson and Lucia Foglia, "Embodied Cognition," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2016 Edition), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/embodied-cognition/.

[73] Quandt, 273.

[74] Quandt, 225.

[75] Quandt, 280.

[76] In December 1888 Gauguin made reference to the life of Poe in a letter to Schuffenecker, and later in the same letter, attributed his thoughts to magnetic currents: “Pour beaucoup j’ai tort et peut-être tout celà est dans mon imagination, mais cependant si je suscite chez vous le sentiment du au-delà, c’est peut-être par ce courant magnétique de la pensée dont on ne connaît plus la marche absolue mais qu’on devine.” Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 20 December 1888, Merlhès, 305-06. Baudelaire’s translation of this Poe story was *Révélation Magnétique*, likely accounting for Gauguin’s use here of the idea of magnetism. Around the same time, Gauguin wrote in a notebook dated c. 1888-89, “Intelligence et non métier. Consulter Edg. Poe. Simplicité, originalité sont des crimes.” Gauguin, *Album Walter*, held in the Musée du Louvre, Département des arts graphiques, "Album Gauguin Paul 5" (RF 30569).

Burhan writes that Baudelaire singled out *Révélation Magnétique* for description in his essay, "Edgar Allan Poe, Sa Vie et Ses Ouvrages" and that “there is every reason to believe” that Gaugiun knew the Poe essay. Burhan, 311.

> Motion is the action of *mind*—not of *thinking*. The unparticled matter, or God, in quiescence, is (as nearly as we can conceive it) what men call mind. […] But the unparticled matter, set in motion by a law, or quality, existing within itself, is thinking. […] The matter of which I speak is, in all respects, the very "mind" or "spirit" of the schools, so far as regards its high capacities, and is, moreover, the "matter" of these schools at the same time. God, with all the powers attributed to spirit, is but the perfection of matter.[77]

In *Notes Synthetiques*, Gauguin seems to agree with Poe's elision of spirit and matter: "Et dire que la pensée se nomme esprit, tandis que les instincts, les nerfs, le cœur font partie de la matière. Quelle ironie ! Le plus vague, le plus indéfinissable, le plus varié, c'est justement la matière. La pensée est esclave des sensations."[78] Poe's sleepwalker goes on: "A luminous body imparts vibration to the luminiferous ether. The vibrations generate similar ones within the retina; these again communicate similar ones to the optic nerve. The nerve conveys similar ones to the brain; the brain, also, similar ones to the unparticled matter which permeates it. The motion of this latter is thought."[79] Using similar language, Gauguin insisted that "tous nos 5 sens arrivent *directement au*

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[77] Edgar Allan Poe, "Mesmeric Revelation," in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Nathan Haskell Dole (Akron: Werner Co, 1908), vol. 2, 246-250.

[78] Gauguin, *Notes Synthetiques*, 1885. Original manuscript held by The National Gallery of Art, Washington (1991.217.48.a., 1991.217.50.b.) Published as a facsimile, transcription, and translation in Raymond Cogniat and John Rewald, *Paul Gauguin: A Sketchbook* (New York: Hammer Galleries, 1962). "And to say that thought is called spirit, whereas the instincts, the nerves, and the heart are part of matter. What irony! The vaguest, the most undefinable, the most varied is precisely matter. Thought is a slave of sensations." Trans. Cogniat and Rewald, vol. 1, 60. Cogniat and Rewald date *Notes Synthetiques* to Gauguin's stay in Rouen or Copenhagen in 1885. (Vol. 1, 18.)

[79] Poe, 252.

cerveau."[80] In *Still Life with Laval,* the duality of clay and void in the sculpture resonates with the same duality of memory, through which the flesh of the brain produces the ideas of the mind.

Gauguin's and Poe's fascination with the brain and its processes derived from period debates in popular psychological literature concerning the nature and location of the soul in the body. Important as Baudelaire, and through him, Poe, are in understanding Gauguin's concept of painting from memory, they are not his only sources.[81] For example, over Baudelaire's career he understood memory increasingly more as a tool of the imagination, and less its equal,[82] placing him closer to Lecoq's point of view. For Gauguin, these concepts remained joint rulers of the faculties. One senses in reading Gauguin and Baudelaire that the artist absorbed the poet's ideas deeply enough that that he did not superficially regurgitate them but rather assimilated them into his own formulations, even disagreeing at times. Baudelaire was an important influence but not the sole guiding force of Gauguin's ideas on memory. Therefore, in the following section I turn to period sources in psychology and philosophy.

Psychology and Philosophy

A number of Gauguin's 1885 statements regarding memory involve the brain, and by studying these statements several possible sources emerge. Gauguin's manual penned

[80] Gauguin to Schuffenecker, Jan 14, 1885. Merlhès, 88. "All our five senses arrive directly at the brain." Trans. Chipp, 59.

[81] Burhan makes a parallel argument in her discussion of Baudelaire's influence on Gauguin's interest in correspondences. She verifies his importance before turning to other sources, and this section of the chapter follows her lead in this respect. (33, 136)

[82] Gilman, 154.

under the name of his fictional poet Zadi considers the role of the brain in the painting process:

> Pourquoi embellir à plaisir et de propos délibéré; ainsi la vérité, l'odeur de chaque personnalité, fleur, homme ou arbre disparaît, tout s'efface dans une même note de joli qui soulève le cœur du connaisseur. Ce n'est point à dire qu'il faille bannir le sujet gracieux mais il est préférable de rendre comme et tel que vous voyez que de couler votre couleur et votre dessin dans le moule d'une théorie préparée à l'avance dans votre cerveau.[83]

Returning as well to the January 1885 letter to Schuffenecker, Gauguin wrote, "Et pour moi le grand artiste est la formule de la plus grande intelligence, à lui arrivent les sentiments les traductions les plus délicates et par suite les plus invisibles du cerveau."[84] Together with his advice to Schuffenecker to dream on his paintings, these writings suggest that while paintings are to come from the brain, they must emerge not from rational judgment but from a deeper, more intuitive part of the brain. He continued in this same letter, a fragment of which was quoted in reference to Poe, "Pourquoi avez-vous le dégoût de toucher un rat et beaucoup d'autres choses semblables; il n'y a pas de raisonnement qui tienne devant ces sentiments. Tous nos 5 sens arrivent *directement au cerveau* impressionés [*sic*] par une infinité de choses et qu'aucune éducation ne peut

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[83] Gauguin, Zadi manuscript. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits (NAF 14903, ff.43–6) "Why embellish things gratuitously and of set purpose? By this means the true flavor of each person, flower, man or tree disappears; everything is effaced in the same note of prettiness that nauseates the connoisseur. That does not mean that you must banish the graceful subject, but that it is preferable to render it just as you see it rather than to pour your color and your design into the mold of a theory prepared in advance in your brain." Trans. Van Wyck Brooks, 33.

[84] Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 14 January 1885, Merlhès, 87. "In my opinion the great artist is the embodiment of the greatest intelligence. The sentiments and renderings which occur to him are the most delicate and, consequently, the most invisible products of the human brain." Trans. Guérin, 4.

détruire."[85] In these statements Gauguin repeatedly intertwined the brain with intelligence and the invisible, as well as with the senses and instincts. The brain, understood then as now as physical matter, an organ of flesh, lies at the center of his interest in materiality and immateriality. We find not a claim to mind over matter or matter over mind, but instead an insistence upon their mutual interconnectedness.

The brain and memory were the subjects of an intense debate in the 1880s concerning the characteristics of the soul. A key participant in this debate was Théodule-Armand Ribot, who was also an important figure for the Symbolists. He published multiple translations of Schopenhauer with commentary and was a renowned French psychologist.[86] In his book *The Maladies of Memory*, published in 1881, Ribot argued that memory was localized in the brain, and was therefore material in nature. This sparked a backlash of studies arguing that, to the contrary, memory was spiritual in nature.[87] Ribot's scientific interests were presumably driven in part by his familiarity with Schopenhauer's philosophy. As Ribot paraphrased in his 1874 *Philosophie de Schopenhauer*, "On embaume le cœur des héros, non leur cerveau; on conserve le crâne des poètes et des philosophes. Sur quoi repose l'identité de la personne? […] L'homme est enfoncé dans le cœur, non dans la tête."[88] Gauguin's 1885 manuscript *Notes Synthetiques*

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[85] Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 14 January 1885. Merlhès, 88, "Why does it disgust you to touch a rat and many other such things: it is not reason behind these feelings. All our five senses arrive directly at the brain, conditioned by an infinity of things which no education can destroy." Trans. Chipp, 59.

[86] Symbolist poet Remy de Gourmont attributed the Symbolists' understanding of Schopenhauer directly to Ribot, and writer Téodore de Wyzewa recommended Ribot's *Philosophie de Schopenhauer* to his Symbolist circle as well. Cheetham, 17. Further expansion of this project may involve additional consideration of affinities between Gauguin and Schopenhauer through Ribot.

[87] Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas About the Mind* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 84-85.

[88] Théodule Armand Ribot, *La philosophie de Schopenhauer* (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière, 1874), 72. "One embalms the heart of heroes, not their brain; one conserves the skull of poets and philosophers. Where does the identity of a person lie? … Man is embedded in the heart, not the head." Translations are

appears to respond to this debate. As in his letter to Schuffenecker of the same year, in this manuscript Gauguin argued for the interconnectedness of spirit and matter. He insisted that fear, enthusiasm, and love are sensations of the heart that cannot be formulated by the rational mind. He rejected the dichotomy of the thinking spirit versus the feeling, material heart. Thought, he argued, is therefore not independent of matter; rather it is a slave to the body.[89] Seven years later he would write to his wife Mette, "mon centre artistique est dans mon cerveau et pas ailleurs."[90] Even if Gauguin did not learn about this debate on the material or immaterial nature of memory by reading Ribot directly, he would have found the same ideas digested in the *Revue des deux Mondes*.[91] An article entitled "La survivance et la sélection des idées dans la mémoire" appeared in the May 1885 issue. In this article the author insisted that the mind and sensation are inseparable, and that memory is "indivisiblement physique et mentale"[92] The author

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my own unless otherwise noted (excepting translations of van Gogh letters which, as previously noted, come from Jansen et al.).

[89] Gauguin, *Notes Synthetiques,* 1885. Full quote, which is partially quoted above: "Toute idée se formule, il n'en est pas de même de la sensation du cœur. Que d'efforts pour se rendre maître de la peur, d'un moment d'enthousiasme ; l'amour n'est-il pas souvent instantané et presque toujours aveugle? Et dire que la pensée se nomme esprit, tandis que les instincts, les nerfs, le cœur font partie de la matière. Quelle ironie! Le plus vague, le plus indéfinissable, le plus varié, c'est justement la matière. La pensée est esclave des sensations."

[90] Gauguin to Mette, March 1892. *Lettres à sa femme et à ses amis,* ed. Maurice Malingue (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1992), 225. "My artistic center is in my brain and not elsewhere." Trans. Malingue, 165. The context of this letter is that his "artistic center" is within him, rather than in Paris, but the fact that he chose his brain as the location of this bodily center is telling.

[91] Gauguin and van Gogh both discussed articles published in the *Revue des deux Mondes* between June and September 1888 (Merlhès cites specific articles in the *Revue* as sources, see notes on pages 486, 498, 499, 500, 504). While such direct references are not offered for Gauguin's correspondence in 1885, as I argue below his manuscripts and letters suggest an awareness of the subjects treated in the periodical, which in 1885 was growing in its subscriptions (with 26,000 subscribers that year) and its intellectual authority. See Jean-Claude Yon, *Histoire culturelle de la France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), 170.

[92] Alfred Fouillée, "La survivance et la sélection des idées dans la mémoire," *Revue des deux mondes* 69.5 (May 15, 1885): 360, 388-89. "Indivisibly physical and mental."

further maintained that great artists contemplate their model, but then paint from memory.[93]

Ribot remarked upon Schopenhauer's views of genius and madness, bringing these intelligences to bear upon memory and perception:

> La folie et le génie n'ont pas de mémoire : ils ne vivent que du présent, l'intuition est leur seule faculté, et les images s'offrent toujours à eux dans leur dessin le plus concret et leur couleur la plus vive. Leur faculté de sensations semble toute neuve, ils paraissent voisins encore de l'enfance […] le génie et souvent la folie sont le résultat d'une lutte prolongée entre les notions abstraites et les perceptions immédiates. Cette lutte, au reste, se trahit dans l'état physiologique du cerveau.[94]

Although this passage does not perfectly align with the theories of Gauguin and Baudelaire since they believed the artist-genius works from memory, it nonetheless circles around the same ideas of abstraction and perception, conceived as a struggle in the brain. Further, the description of "concrete outline and lively color" resonates with Gauguin's call for strong contours in the Zadi manuscript, using rather Schopenhauerian

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The article opens with a list of the following books: Th. Ribot, *Les Maladies de la mémoire*, 2eme édition; James Sully, *les Illusions des sens et de l'esprit* ; Louis Ferri, *la Psychologie de l'association* ; Bain, *les Sens et l'Intelligence*, Ch. Richet, *l'Homme et l'Intelligence*. This article was one of a two-part series on the nature of memory. The same author published an article six weeks later entitled "Memoire et reconnaissance des souvenirs," *Revue des deux Mondes* 70.7 (July 1, 1885) : 131-162.

[93] Fouillée, May 15 1885, 359-60.

[94] Ribot, *Schopenhauer*, 100-01. "The madman and the genius do not have memory: they only live in the present, intuition is their sole faculty, and images are offered to them in their most concrete outline and most lively color. Their faculty of sensations seems entirely new, they seem cousins from birth […] the genius and often the madman are the result of a prolonged battle between abstract notions and immediate perceptions. This battle is found in the physiologic state of the brain."

language: “la netteté du contour est l’apanage de la main qu’aucune hésitation de volonté n’affadit.”[95]

In a remarkable confluence of nineteenth-century science and art, Ribot quoted the painter Eugène Fromentin, who commented on the fortuitousness of memory’s alterations. This occurred a decade and a half after the period in question, in Ribot’s *Essai sur l’imagination créatrice* (1900), but points nonetheless to the bi-directional flow of ideas between science and art in the nineteenth century. Ribot wrote and quoted:

> Le peintre Fromentin […] fait […] l’aveu suivant: “Mon souvenir des choses, quoique très fidèle, n’a jamais la certitude admissible pour tous d’un document. Plus il s’affaiblit, plus il se transforme en devant la propriété de ma mémoire et mieux il vaut pour l’emploi que je lui destine. A mesure que la forme exacte s’altère, il en vient une autre, moitié réelle et moitié imaginaire, que je crois préférable."[96]

Ribot goes on to note that the speaker he quotes is “doué d’une rare mémoire visuelle,” but that his memory was nonetheless subject to alterations. [97] Ribot writes that this is to

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[95] Gauguin, Zadi manuscript, 1885. “Distinctness of outline is the attribute of the hand that is not enfeebled by any hesitation of the will.” Trans. Van Wyck Brooks, 33. It is interesting to note that Emmanuel Swedenborg, another widely acknowledged source for Gauguin’s mysticism, was also a scientist. Before turning to mysticism, he wrote a number of startlingly prescient theories of brain localization. (See Charles G. Gross, *Brain, Vision, Memory: Tales in the History of Neuroscience* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998), 123-31.) My brief examination of Swedenborg’s texts did not reveal any convincing comparisons between his theories of memory and those discussed by Baudelaire, Ribot, or Gauguin, but given his massive output, further study may prove to be fruitful.

[96] Théodule Ribot, *Essai sur l’Imagination créatrice* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1900), 14-15. “The painter Fromentin […] makes […] the following confession: ‘My memory of things although very faithful has never the certainty admissible as documentary evidence. The weaker it grows the more is it changed in becoming the property of my memory and the more valuable is it for the work that I intend for it. In proportion as exact form becomes altered another form, partly real, partly imaginary, which I believe preferable, takes its place.’” Trans. Albert H.N. Baron, *Essay on the Creative Imagination* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1906), 18.

[97] *Ibid.*, 15. “Endowed with an unusual visual memory.” Trans. Baron, 18.

be expected in light of recent investigations showing that images in memory undergo change. He explains that the mind gradually transforms its memory of everyday objects (giving the example of a rosebush, pin, or cigarette). This type of image, "dépouillée peu à peu de ses caractères propres, n'est plus qu'une ombre. Elle est devenue cette forme de transition entre la représentation et le pur concept, que l'on désigne actuellement sous le nom d'image générique, ou qui du moins s'en rapproche."[98] The idea that we remember not specific details of objects but rather "generic images" of them resonates with the way present-day scientists describe "prototypical images," which I will discuss in the following section.

While Baudelaire and Schopenhauer (the latter through Ribot) rank among the most widely-acknowledged sources for Gauguin's theories, Filiz Eda Burhan has uncovered a vast trove of psychological and philosophical texts that also had important ramifications in Symbolist theory.[99] With these texts she locates an emphasis upon theories of association, which leads to her discussion of the role of hypnosis and suggestion in Gauguin's *Vision after the Sermon.* Many of the same texts, however, reveal a parallel discourse that sheds light upon the meaning of memory in late-nineteenth century psychology and philosophy. These theories circulate around the neoplatonic notion that the mind stores some ideal, essential, or generalized version of

[98] Ribot, *Imagination créatrice*, 16. The image, "deprived little by little of its own characteristics, is nothing more than a shadow. It has become that transitional form between image and pure concept that we now term 'generic image,' or one that at least resembles the latter." Trans., 18.

[99] Most recently, Gamboni has also emphasized Gauguin's awareness of period psychology. Burhan's dissertation is an authoritative source upon which he relies. Gamboni, 52-54.

the particulars of reality, which are accessible through memory.[100] Hermann von Helmholtz, a scientist best known in an art-historical context for the Neo-Impressionists' interest in his theories of optics, expressed this notion of memory as a path to the ideal: "une œuvre d'art [doit…] nous montrer dans une image vivante tous les traits d'un type idéal, gisant dispersés dans notre mémoire en fragments isolés et couverts par la végétation."[101] Philosopher Edouard von Hartmann similarly discussed "sensuous imagining and artistic combination": "If a result is to be arrived at, the right idea must readily offer itself at the right time from the storehouse of the memory; and that it is just the right idea which appears, for that the Unconscious alone can make provision."[102] Again, Gauguin need not have read the original texts to come across similar ideas. In the same article discussed above from the *Revue des deux Mondes*, the author explained that the mind combines successive images into "une idée générale et typique." He continued,

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[100] Like Gauguin, scientists and philosophers often used memory and the imagination interchangeably. For example, "Comme la mémoire, l'imagination est dominé par la loi de l'association des idées." Meiller, *Leçons de Philosophie*, 1885, quoted in Burhan, 108.

[101] Von Helmholtz, Hermann. "L'Optique de la Peinture," in Ernst Brucke, *Principes Scientifiques des Beaux Arts*, 1878. Quoted in Burhan, 104. "A work of art [ought to…] reveal to us in an image all the features of an ideal type, lying dispersed in our memory in isolated fragments covered by vegetation."

In this description, Helmholtz comes remarkably close to the present-day neuroscientific understanding of memory, which holds that memories are stored in isolated neurons. They do not exist as "memories" as such until the moment of recollection, when the isolated fragments are (re)united. This view is increasingly widespread among neuroscientists. For an early literature review on the subject: Natalie C. Tronson and Jane R. Taylor, "Molecular Mechanisms of Memory Reconsolidation," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 8 (April 2007): 262-75.

[102] Eduard Von Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, original in German, translated to French in 1877. Quoted in English in Burhan, 104. In a similar vein, Elie Rabier wrote in *Leçons de Philosophie*, 1884, "Alors, en vertu des lois connues de l'association, sont évoqués tous les souvenirs ayant quelque rapport avec cette idée et pourront servir à l'exprimer. Une idée, fixée dans l'intelligence, est déjà bien puissante pour grouper autour d'elle, en vertu de la contiguïté ou de la rassemblance, tous les souvenirs qui s'y rapportent." Quoted in Burhan, 111. ("Then, in virtue of the known laws of association, all the memories are evoked, having some relationship with this idea and being able to express it. An idea, fixed in the *intelligence*, is already quite powerful for grouping around it, in virtue of contiguity or resemblance, all the memories that are related to it.")

"La généralisation spontanée s'accomplit mécaniquement par la fusion des images dans la mémoire."[103] Thus there existed a certain resonance between scientific and philosophical theories of memory, and Gauguin drew from and modified several of these diverse sources, mixing them with Baudelaire and Poe, to formulate his own concept of painting from memory.

III. Painting from Memory in Practice

The Neuroscience of Visual Memory

The nineteenth-century notion of an image stored in memory as a distilled, generalized idea of the particulars of reality parallels the present-day understanding of the memory of images, called visual memory. In an informal experiment, neuroscientist Robert Solso asked his class to draw a teacup without a model, meaning from memory. The results are pictured in fig. 1.20. The similarity and simplicity of these drawings, he explains, derive from the way images are stored in visual memory. The brain does not store the details of every teacup it has encountered, but instead it remembers only one distilled version, called a "prototypical" representation.[104] When drawing from memory, we are therefore accessing generalities, not particulars. Solso believes that drawings such as these teacups reflect the type of image stored in long-term memory.[105] They are the visible products, then, of drawing from memory. Thus when Gauguin insisted upon

[103] Fouillée, 15 May 1885, 364-65. "This spontaneous generalization is accomplished mechanically by the fusion of images in the memory."

[104] Robert L. Solso, *Cognition and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994), 236-37. While much has changed in the twenty years since this text was published, the findings remain current today and continue to be described in recent texts, one of which by Stephen Reed I cite below.

[105] *Ibid.*, 237.

painting from memory in order to achieve a simpler form, he was engaging an intrinsic function of the brain.

Solso's research finds that not only does visual memory create generalized or "prototypical" images, but further, the brain is more apt to recognize such an image, which it already has "on file," so to speak. For example, participants in one experiment claimed to remember a face that they had actually never seen, because that face was calculated to be the prototypical representation that their brain would generate from an amalgamation of faces that they were shown (fig. 1.21).[106] Similarly, participants in another experiment most quickly recognized views of a horse that aligned with the prototypical view of a horse—that is, when it was shown from the same viewing angle that the brain is most likely to generate and store (fig. 1.22).[107] More recently-published texts have continued to affirm findings similar to those Solso cited. Psychologist Stephen Reed describes experiments performed over several decades which demonstrate that the creation of a prototypical image is the most frequently-employed strategy that participants used to help them remember and later classify particular patterns. He describes the prototype strategy as taking a set of distinct images and from them, creating an abstract image to represent their category as a whole. This method was only employed, however, when participants were required to rely upon their memory. If they could perform the tasks with the original patterns in front of them, their mind did not go through the effort of creating an abstraction.[108] Gauguin sought to induce that process through his reliance upon memory—he knew that in order to abstract from nature, one

[106] Described in Solso, 251-253.

[107] Described in Solso, 242.

[108] Stephen K. Reed, *Thinking Visually* (New York: Psychology Press, 2010), 51-53.

cannot consult the original model, thus his advice to the amateur artist to draw the curtain over the model when it comes time to paint.[109]

The above experiments suggest that if an artist produces an image from memory, it will ease the burden on the viewer's memory of recognizing that image. In his 1885 manuscript *Notes Synthetiques*, Gauguin similarly expressed that painting should be immediately and effortlessly absorbed by the viewer:

> La peinture est le plus beau de tous les arts; en lui se résument toutes les sensations, à son aspect chacun peut, au gré de son imagination, créer le roman, d'un seul coup d'œil avoir l'âme envahie par les plus profonds souvenirs ; point d'effort de mémoire, tout résumé en un seul instant. […] En peinture on obtient une unité impossible en musique où les accords viennent les uns après les autres, et le jugement éprouve alors une fatigue incessante s'il veut réunir la fin au commencement. […] La littérature et la musique demandent un effort de mémoire pour apprécier l'ensemble.[110]

While the artist must work from his memory in order to paint, the viewer should require "no effort of memory." Note that Gauguin did not write that no memory is required; rather he referred twice to the level of effort that is required. As the above experiment with prototypical-image recognition has demonstrated, painting should be able to ease the effort of memory so long as the artist works from his own memory. To be clear, Gauguin

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[109] Quoted above, Gauguin, "Zadi" text.

[110] Gauguin, *Notes Synthetiques.* "Painting is the most beautiful of all arts. In it, all sensations are condensed; contemplating it, everyone can create a story at the will of his imagination and—with a single glance—have his soul invaded by the most profound recollections; no effort of memory, everything is summed up in one instant. […] In painting a unity is obtained which is not possible in music, where the accords follow one another, so that the judgment experiences a continuous fatigue if it wants to reunite the end with the beginning. […] Literature and music require an effort of memory for the appreciation of the whole." Trans. Chipp, 61-62. Guérin dates the manuscript to 1884-85, p. 8.

did not make this link explicitly; he discussed the process of painting from memory in a letter to Schuffenecker, and in the same year he wrote the above passage in *Notes Synthetiques*. Baudelaire, however, made precisely this connection between the artist's and viewer's memory in the *Salon of 1846*:

> Pour E. Delacroix, la nature est un vaste dictionnaire dont il roule et consulte les feuillets avec un œil sûr et profond; et cette peinture, qui procède surtout du souvenir, parle surtout au souvenir. L'effet produit sur l'âme du spectateur est analogue aux moyens de l'artiste.[111]

As Baudelaire describes, an artist who paints from memory speaks directly to the memory and even the soul of his viewer. Just under a decade later, Achille Delaroche noted how Gauguin's painting could spark the viewer's imagination. Gauguin's work, he wrote, was laudable for its "vertu suggestive, propre à aider l'essor imaginatif, ou comme décorateur de notre rêve, ouvrant une porte nouvelle sur l'infini et le mystère."[112] Gauguin would remain consumed with his quest to find the most direct means by which to touch the soul of his viewer for the rest of his career. I argue that he connected his

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[111] Baudelaire, "Salon de 1846" in *Œuvres Complètes* vol. 2, 105. "For Eugène Delacroix, nature is a vast dictionary, and he turns and consults its pages with a sure and penetrating eye; and his painting, which flows largely from the memory, appeals largely to the memory. The impact produced on the soul of the viewer is in direct relation to the means the artist uses." Trans. Charvet, 66-7. This discussion comes in the chapter on Delacroix, which Gauguin would have read with particular interest. Recall that based on the interest in correspondences and music, many scholars consider the "Salon of 1846" a direct source for *Notes Synthetiques*. Despite the intriguing possibilities that this quote presents for Gauguin's theories on memory, neither Burhan nor Jirat-Wasiutynski include it in their discussion of Baudelaire. Rookmaaker includes a poor paraphrase of the passage that does not capture its implications regarding memory (32).

[112] Achille Delaroche, "D'un point de vue esthétique: A propos du peintre Paul Gauguin," *L'Ermitage* 8.1 (January 1894), 37. A "power of suggestion that is capable of aiding the flight of the imagination or of serving as the decorator of our own dreams, opening a new door onto the infinite and the mystery of things." Translated in Gamboni, 17. Gauguin copied a clipping of this article into *Diverses choses*.

earliest manifestation of this endeavor, through Baudelaire, to the process of painting from memory.

Still Life with Puppies

In Gauguin's canvases of pictured looking, he explored the implications of painting from memory through still lifes. This repetition of ostensibly-observing figures with closed or diverted eyes was a rather literal way to give pictorial form to his and Baudelaire's sophisticated ideas on memory, imagination, and abstraction, but through it, we capture a glimpse of Gauguin's struggle in this ongoing endeavor. It follows, therefore, that his first attempt not to visually narrate the process but to put it into practice it would take the form of a still life.

Jirat-Wasiutynski identifies *Still Life with Puppies*, dated to August 1888, as Gauguin's first attempt to make a painting "from memory," and several scholars emphasize its highly experimental quality (fig. 1.23).[113] Gauguin's choice of still life as the genre through which to investigate painting from memory declares his insistence upon the value of the method in itself: he paints from memory not out of necessity or convenience but because he has deliberately elected to do so. *Still Life with Puppies* calls attention to this apparent discrepancy between the potential ease of painting a still life from a model and his refusal to do so. With its repeating objects and impossibly well-behaved puppies, it is decidedly not an arrangement that he observed from life but a

[113] Dated to August by Crussard, based on its similarity with *Fruit*: both have the same bowl, both use Prussian blue outlines, and feature a large round table with a monochrome surface, not to mention the similarity in subject matter.On its status as the first painting from memory: Jirat-Wasiutynski 1978, 92. On its experimental quality, see: Denys Sutton, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven Group* (London: Tate, Arts Council, 1966), 20; Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 492; Lovis, 165.

Gauguin completed the canvas around the same time as *Still Life with Fruits*, but if we consider the pictured-looking paintings as explorations of the idea rather than manifestations of the process itself, then the positioning of *Puppies* as the first painting 'from memory' (rather than *about* memory) holds true.

product of his memory and imagination.[114] One quickly notes the strangeness of this panel. The arrangement of objects, positioned as if plotted on a grid, take on a diagrammatic quality heightened by the disorienting lack of perspectival space. Like many of Gauguin's earlier still lifes, this composition pushes on the definition of the genre, but it also questions the bounds of painting itself as fine art, flirting with the aesthetic of Epinal prints and children's book illustrations.

Still Life with Puppies is identified as Gauguin's first attempt to create a painting from memory based on formal analysis, particularly the repeated juxtaposition of an object from different points of view. In this way, Jirat-Wasiutynski sees the painting as an emphasis upon the "psychological process of vision," becoming "a recreation of an experience with the help of memory."[115] This painting "from memory" visually recalls the forceful silhouettes and contours of the teacups that Solso's students drew from memory, as well as the diverse viewing angles of the series of horses that subjects were asked to identify. Images stored in memory are now known to take on these features, but Gauguin was well aware of this tendency and did not need scientific experimentation to prove it. He was capable of intuiting the relationship on his own and would have found confirmation in the writings of Baudelaire and other nineteenth-century psychologists and philosophers who also wrote eloquently about contour and silhouette.[116] The painting

[114] In this way the painting anticipates the work of Henri Matisse not only for its formal qualities but also in his exploration of art and nature in *The Red Studio*, in which the only objects that are "real," that is, possessing color and dimension, are objects of art and of nature. Suggested by June Hargrove in seminar discussion, 9 December 2013.

[115] Jirat-Wasiutynski 1978, 92.

[116] Baudelaire wrote, for example, "la faculté de la mémoire qui a pris l'habitude d'absorber vivement la couleur générale et la silhouette, l'arabesque du contour." Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," in *Œuvres Complètes* vol. 3, 75.

seems to follow Gauguin's own advice from the Zadi manuscript, quoted in part above for its resonance with Baudelaire, Ribot, and Schopenhauer: "Évitez la pose en mouvement. Chacun de vos personnages doit être à l'état statique. […] Appliquez-vous à la silhouette de chaque objet ; la netteté du contour est l'apanage de la main qu'aucune hésitation de volonté n'affadit."[117] Gauguin had also recently employed a thick red outline in his portrait of Bernard, with half-closed eyes, in *Les Misérables,* for which he wrote that he would perhaps do Bernard "from memory."[118] Gauguin's writing and painting, together with his sources, imply that he associated these aesthetic properties with painting from memory.

Beyond the silhouettes, forceful contour lines, and prototypical viewing angles featured in this painting that connect it with visual memory in the scientific sense, the painting also exudes an imaginative, playful, or dream-like quality. The puppies, for example, while immediately recognizable as puppies, are upon closer inspection quite deformed. The left-most puppy has two large blue eyes that barely fit its face and are askew, more closely resembling the brown spots than eyes. This dog's ears appear as if they are flopped across his head. Even the placement of the head on the body is misaligned. Its bright pink tongue looks more like a foreign object than an organic extension of its body. The snout of the puppy on the right is either similarly distorted or buried in the milk. The puppies' brown spots have a calligraphic quality, with the center

[117] Gauguin, Zadi manuscript. "Also avoid motion in a pose. Each of your figures ought to be in a static position… Study the silhouette of every object; distinctness of outline is the attribute of the hand that is not enfeebled by any hesitation of the will." Trans. Van Wyck Brooks, 33.

[118] Or, if following Jirat-Wasiutynski's analysis (cited above, Jirat-Wasiutyński 2000, 107), Bernard and Gauguin painted their own portraits in each other's paintings, then Gauguin used a thick blue outline to paint his portrait in Bernard's canvas.

puppy bearing an asterisk on its back. The wood grain of the panel shows through the paint in places, and a knot underlies the center puppy's face just to the right of its nose. Gauguin incorporated this knot into the puppy's face, giving it, too, a slight distortion. He applied the strokes that suggest the grey fur as well as the milk in a swirling, seemingly haphazard motion, so thin in places that the brown underpainting shows through. One senses that Gauguin was trying to suggest the schematization of a dog more so than a real dog, while experimenting with the degree to which he could simplify and distort a form and still instantly evoke the essence of happy puppies lapping up their milk.

Repetition of forms—or lack thereof—continues in the center of the composition. The deep blue glasses are the most smoothly painted objects in the entire composition, their regular and gradually-modeled strokes effecting the glint of glass. Nonetheless, they appear oriented at different angles—an impossibility for a supposedly circular form. Their oblong rims and different reflections of light and shadow make them seem to turn in different directions. The strangeness of their physical properties calls attention to their materiality, making the glasses thing-like in a way that harkens back to Gauguin's early still lifes. While the right-two glasses are roughly equal in their size, the left one has a larger base and sits out of line with the others, denying the ability to perceive their spatial relationship to each other. Their size with respect to the objects at their base is also indeterminate. The glasses may be drinking glasses or egg cups, but in the latter case the cups are far too large, or the "eggs" too small. These three spherical objects are similarly enigmatic. The right-most form, with its dimple and its rosy pink to bright yellow-green coloration suggests a piece of small fruit, as does the piece next to it, which bares three shades of green and the suggestion of a stem. Yet the left-most object more closely

resembles an egg than fruit given its decidedly oblong shape and pink and purple hues. Gauguin thwarts the desire to find repetition yet again.

Gauguin applied a quintessentially Cézanne-esque hatch-mark stroke to the fruit and white napkin at the bottom of the composition, marking a departure from the haphazard strokes that define the puppies and the evenly delineated strokes of the blue glasses. Even so, these fruit lack the solidity of Cézanne's fruit. The yellow pear on the napkin appears to have been pulled and twisted like clay, and its blue shadow inexplicably veers left, poking into the adjacent pear. The stemmed tip of the left-most pear in the bowl appears to buckle under the pressure of leaning against the green pear. This precariously-perched fruit begs the viewer to turn it upright, or at least nestle it within the bowl such that it does not teeter on the rim.

The table and tablecloth play the greatest role in warping the composition's space. The table is viewed from above at a ninety-degree angle, evidenced by the curved edge at the bottom of the panel. This viewing angle contrasts with the lower angle at which one views the puppies and fruit. Blue and white strokes define the tablecloth, but over them Gauguin added broad, pale pink, dash-like strokes in a grid-like pattern. This pattern remains consistent from the top to the bottom of the canvas, which adds to the denial of spatial recession that the viewer would naturally anticipate. The blue fruit patterns, presumably a woven texture in the tablecloth, also defy one-point perspective. Yet the cloth hanging over the edge of the table in the lower right corner suggests that, like the other objects, we see the table from the side. The blue fruit of the tablecloth add to the surreal quality of this scene, as shadowy pineapples and leaves appear to grow out of the "real" objects and float toward the canvas's upper edge. In these playful ways, the artist's

imagination invites the viewer's to run. At the same time, the prototypical images, drawn from the artist's memory, require no effort of memory on the viewer's part to recognize them.

Painting like a Child

Several authors have noted the child-like qualities of *Still Life with Puppies*, both in the form, which evokes children's book illustrations by Randolph Caldecott or Kate Greenway, as well as its content, which is reminiscent of a child's counting rhyme.[119] Indeed, shortly after Gauguin had completed this painting, Van Gogh wrote to Theo that "Gauguin et Bernard parlent maintenant de faire 'de la peinture d'enfant'."[120] *Still Life with Puppies* thus unites two of Gauguin's great interests during the summer of 1888: painting from memory and painting like a child. These interests were themselves related, as period psychologists believed that children innately draw from memory.

Gauguin took an avid interest in children. They are the most recurrent motif in his sketchbook of 1884 to 1888,[121] and he completed three paintings of children in the summer of 1888 alone.[122] He was a staunch advocate of Randolph Caldecott's drawings for children as an important and legitimate form of art, and the geese that Gauguin

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[119] On Caldecott: Brettell 1988, 110-11; Belinda Thomson, Tamar Garb, and Philippe Dagen, *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 95; Françoise Cachin, *Gauguin* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), 71. On Greenway: from an essay in the Museum of Modern Art object file, identified as part of the publication, "Gifts of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim, Vol 2," but undated. The flatness and outlines of this painting derive from Japanese and Epinal prints as well.

[120] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 23-24 August 1888. Jansen letter 668. "Gauguin and Bernard are now talking about doing 'children's painting.'"

[121] Based on observation of the unbound sketchbook at the National Gallery of Art, Washington (1991.217), which also contains his manuscript *Notes Synthetiques*.

[122] Crussard notes this repetition of children as a subject, but suggests the rather unsatisfying explanations that children were easier models to obtain, or that he missed his own children whom he had left behind. (Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 367.)

adapted from Caldecott appear repeatedly alongside children in the Brittany sketchbook as well as in several paintings.[123] In Gauguin's earliest years as a painter, his children served as his first models. The whimsical forms on the wallpaper in the two canvases of his children sleeping suggest his interest not only in their minds but in their dreams (*Aline Sleeping*, 1881, and *Clovis Sleeping*, 1884). Only in the 1880s did psychologists and the public at large come to understand children as fundamentally different from adults, giving way to a number of publications on what would eventually be called child psychology.[124] A few of these studies focused on children's creativity and their art, and Gauguin evinced familiarity with these ideas in an 1891 interview with Jules Huret before his departure for Tahiti. Huret quoted Gauguin as saying that he was leaving for Tahiti because "Je ne veux faire que de l'art simple, très simple; pour cela, j'ai besoin de me retremper dans la nature vierge, de ne voir que des sauvages, de vivre de leur vie, sans autre préoccupation que de rendre, comme le ferait un enfant, les conceptions de mon cerveau."[125] Gauguin therefore equated art that is simple and formed in his brain—that is, from memory—to children's art.

Solso points out that when children are asked to draw, they do so from memory; they do not naturally seek a model.[126] Nineteenth-century psychologists were aware of this tendency, and their studies describe children's art in a way that would have piqued

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[123] As Prather and Stuckey note, Caldecott was discussed in *L'Art Moderne* by Huysmans in 1883, and his work was illustrated in April 1886 in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. (73)

[124] The scientific interest was a result of evolutionary theory, and Darwin was among the first to write on children. Burhan, 237-38, 246-49.

[125] Gauguin as quoted in Jules Huret, "Paul Gauguin devant ses tableaux," *L'Echo de Paris* (23 February, 1891), 2. "I only want to do simple, very simple art, and to be able to do that, I have to immerse myself in virgin nature, see no one but savages, live their life, with no other thought in mind but to render, the way a child would, the concepts formed in my brain." Trans. Guérin, 48.

[126] Solso, 240.

Gauguin's interest should he have come across them. As Rodolphe Töpffer explained in *Reflections et menus propos d'un peintre genevois*, republished in 1886 in a volume on his life and work, a child begins to draw by including "quelque chose de lui, son idée, sa fantaisie, sa rudimentaire conception de beauté," but once he is corrupted by exercises in school, "il ne met absolument que sa préoccupation de reproduire avec exactitude tous les linéaments d'un modèle." The drawings that he first made in a natural and purer process are eclipsed by the exercises in school, which the child forms rationally.[127]

The title alone of Bernard Perez's 1888 book, *L'art et la poésie chez l'enfant: la psychologie de l'enfant* would have drawn the Symbolists' interest. In a rather parable-like manner, Perez described a boy who was incredibly talented at drawing locomotives from a model, but could not draw anything else. As an experiment, his uncle took him on a walk one day and asked him to make careful observations of a face, a dress, a tree, an animal, and a house. He asked the child about what he saw again that night, and the following morning, asked him to draw them. "L'enfant s'habitua ainsi à retrouver dans sa mémoire l'expression des visages et des attitudes, la forme caractéristique des objets, et jusqu'à la composition d'une scène vue en passant."[128] When the child mastered drawing these diverse scenes from memory, the uncle finally allowed him to go to drawing school. He gave the following advice: "Ne crains pas de représenter les choses comme tu les vois au premier coup d'œil, ou comme tu crois, ou plutôt comme tu veux les voir. Regarde et

[127] Pierre Maxime Relave, *La vie et les œuvres de Töpffer d'après des documents inédits: suivies de fragments de littérature et de critique inédits ou inconnus* (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1886), 230. "…something of himself, his ideas, his fantasies, his rudimentary conception of beauty," and, "he is preoccupied with the exact reproduction of all the lines of a model."

[128] Bernard Perez, *L'art et la poésie chez l'enfant : la psychologie de l'enfant* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1888), 201. "The child thus began to find in his memory the expression of faces and attitudes, the characteristic form of objects, and the composition of a scene viewed in passing."

choisis, compose et imagine: tu seras toujours assez exact et assez précis."[129] Perez's descriptions of the formal qualities of children's art resonate with Gauguin's writings on painting from memory, and with his first visual attempt at such a painting, *Still Life with Puppies*. For example Perez wrote of children's art that, "c'est, d'abord, la réduction ou concentration des formes, la simplicité linéaire, l'évolution vers l'intégrité, qui le caractérisent."[130] Perez also explained that children's art lacks precision and steadiness of line, and violates rules of perspective and proportion.[131] In an earlier article he wrote that Epinal prints, one possible source for the aesthetic of *Still Life with Puppies*, render children "fou de joie."[132]

This interest in children and naïveté spread beyond psychological literature. Baudelaire, for example, took interest in the power of children's imagination as well, writing,

> Les enfants témoignent par leurs jeux de leur grande faculté d'abstraction et de leur haute puissance imaginative. Ils jouent sans joujoux. […] Cette facilité à contenter son imagination témoigne de la spiritualité de l'enfance dans ses conceptions artistiques. Le joujou est la première initiation de l'enfant à l'art.[133]

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[129] Perez, 201. "Do not be afraid to represent things as you see them in a glance, or as you believe them to be, or perhaps as you want them to be. Look and choose, compose and imagine: in this way you will always be exact and precise."

[130] Perez, 197. "It is above all the reduction or concentration of forms, linear simplicity, evolution towards integrity, that characterizes [children's art]."

[131] Perez, 196-99.

[132] Berard Perez, "L'Education du sens esthétique chez le petit enfant," *La Revue philosophique* 8 (1879), 589. This passage is quoted in Burhan, 250.

[133] Baudelaire, "Morale du joujou," in *Œuvres Complètes* vol. 3, 142. This appeared in the *Art Romantique* volume of the *Œuvres Complètes*, an edition of which was published in 1885. Quoted in Quandt, 246-47. "Children show through their games their great capacity for abstraction and their elevated imaginative power. They play without toys. […] This ability to satisfy their imagination testifies to the spirituality of childhood in its artistic conceptions. The toy is the child's first introduction to art."

Inflected by these diverse sources and brought to bear in his painting, the creative process was for Gauguin analogous to creating like a child by working from memory.

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Still Life with Puppies was not the only radically experimental still life of August 1888. Sylvie Crussard dates Gauguin's *Still Life: Fête Gloanec* (fig. 1.24) to the same time as his August 14 letter to Schuffenecker, in which he reminded his fellow artist that art is an abstraction, and to dream before nature.[134] Many scholars view *Fête Gloanec* as a major step toward abstraction, due in part to the introduction of a dramatically unmodulated background color, and, like *Puppies*, the combination of several different viewing angles.[135] If Crussard is correct to view this painting as a type of illustration of the concepts in the Schuffenecker letter, then this marks another example in which Gauguin privileged still life as an experimental genre for paintings from memory. Gauguin painted the fruit, marigolds, and Breton tart for the saint's day celebration of the innkeeper Marie-Jeanne Gloanec.[136] As Maurice Denis explained several years later, fearing that Mme Gloanec would reject his canvas as a sham, Gauguin signed Madeleine Bernard's name with the hope that it would pass as the work of a "débutante et novice dans l'art de peindre."[137] As with *Puppies*, Gauguin again related abstraction to naïveté, and did so in the form of a still life.

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[134] Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 435. Letter quoted above, Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 14 August 1888. Merlhès, 210.

[135] Lovis, 165; Eliza E., Rathbone and George T. M. Shackelford, *Impressionist Still Life* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2001), 172.

[136] Rathbone and Shackelford, 172.

[137] Maurice Denis, *Journal*, Paris, 1957, vol 2, p 21-23, August 1905.

IV. Still Life Provenance, 1886-1888

Of the four paintings featured in this chapter, none was exhibited during Gauguin's lifetime, and as a result, there exists no known period commentary on them. Facing this lack of period reception, I turn here to the history of ownership of these pieces, allowing their provenance to speak as its own form of response. Gauguin cared deeply about the fate of his paintings. Knowing that many art connoisseurs and critics did not understand them as he intended, he took pains to make sure they landed in the hands of people who appreciated his project. He asked Theo, for example, "s'il n'y a pas indiscrétion je serais assez heureux de savoir autant que possible le nom des acheteurs de mes tableaux. J'aime assez à savoir où ils sont."[138]

The still lifes in this chapter were primarily given as gifts to friends. Gauguin gave *Still Life with Laval* as well as *Still Life with Fruit* to Laval. He sent *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers* to Theo van Gogh immediately upon finishing it.[139] *Still Life with Puppies* is more difficult to place. Its provenance goes back to Jeanne Schuffenecker, who inherited both her father Émile's and her uncle Amédée's collections. While Gauguin gave many paintings as gifts to his friend Émile, Amédée was a dealer who purchased several Gauguin canvases after the artist's death, and so this canvas could have gone to either Schuffenecker brother.[140] Adding one more still life of interest to this list,

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[138] Gauguin to Theo, 14 November 1888. Merlhès, 282-3. "If it's not an indiscretion, I would be pleased to know to the extent possible the names of those who purchase my paintings."

[139] Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 308, 497, and 546-47, respectively. Crussard cites a letter from Theo to Johanna van Gogh stating that Gauguin gave *The Painter of Sunflowers* to Theo.

[140] Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 491. Claude-Émile Schuffenecker's brother was Amédée. He was an art dealer, mostly interested in speculation. Émile and his wife Louise divorced in 1899, and it became official in 1904. Louise received half of Émile's estate in the divorce, including half of the painting collection. She wished to sell her half quickly for the income, and as it is told by a third party, Amédée stepped in to "save" the collection. The works in fact went into his dealing business, and he gradually sold most of the major pieces in the collection. Émile and Louise's daughter, Jeanne, was the sole inheritor of

Gauguin gave *Fête Gloanec* to Marie-Jeanne Gloanec, the innkeeper where he painted it. Maurice Denis, an artist known for his cerebral theories of painting, purchased the canvas from her in 1905.[141]

To better understand the significance of the provenance of these five paintings, I expanded my study to Gauguin's oeuvre between 1886 and 1888 in an effort to compare provenance across genres. An analysis of provenance records of ninety-three paintings documented by Martine Heudron in the Wildenstein catalogue shows that still life and portraiture are the two genres that Gauguin most often gave as gifts, and was least likely to sell.[142] Inversely, he most commonly sold landscape and figure paintings, rarely giving them as gifts.[143] While it comes as no surprise that Gauguin would often give portraits as gifts, the fact that still life shares this designation suggests that he intended these works not as saleable canvases but as part of a conversation among friends. Other canvases that he gave as gifts partake in this sort of "conversation." His portrait of Mme Kohler, given as a gift to the sitter, includes two of his own artworks.[144] Of the two landscapes he gifted (out of thirty painted), one was *Rocks on the Coast*. He gave it to

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Amédée's estate, so she ended up with many of the paintings that Amédée did not sell. Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 1, 222.

[141] Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 439.

[142] *Nature morte a l'ami Jacob* (W261) was a gift to Captain Jacob, *Fête Gloanec*, *Still Life with Laval*, and *Still Life with Fruit* as listed above, were also gifts, *Puppies* went to the Schuffenecker family in an undocumented transaction or gift, and *Still Life with Print after Delacroix* (W257) was purchased in 1906 by from "Schaffenhozer", which Heudron writes may be a misspelling of Schuffenecker. The only still life made in this period that sold during Gauguin's lifetime was *Still Life with Fruit Bowl* (W263), by Mette after an 1893 exhibition in Copenhagen. Of the fifteen still lifes painted from 1886-1888, this was also the only one that was exhibited during his lifetime. Six other still lifes dated to this period have a provenance that begins after Gauguin's death.

[143] To give the most straightforward example, of thirty-one paintings put on deposit with Bussod et Valadon between 1888 and 1891, eleven were figures and twenty were landscape. None were still life.

[144] Wildenstein and Crussard cat. no. 258.

fellow artist Henry Moret, with whom he probably visited the site. Thus the gift commemorates their time working together.[145] Gauguin gave *Cottages on Mount Sainte-Marguerite* to Mme Gloanec,[146] and the other two paintings he offered to her were both still lifes. One of those was *Fête Gloanec*, and Maurice Denis' later purchase of the canvas testifies to its ability to spark interest among artists. As I have argued above, the fact that Gauguin chose still life, and not another genre, to include as part of his portraits of fellow artists such as van Gogh and Laval is significant. The incorporation of still life in these portraits testifies to the ability Gauguin conferred upon this genre to illustrate a concept—namely, painting from memory.

V. Conversations and Influences

After a relatively fertile period of still-life production from 1880 to 1886, Gauguin's interest in the genre dwindled in Martinique. He approached it with renewed enthusiasm, however, beginning in the summer of 1888, while he worked alongside Émile Bernard and corresponded with Vincent van Gogh. The same is true of his discussion of painting from memory: it peaked in 1885, and again in 1888. Therefore one must consider the role these two artists may have had in reinvigorating Gauguin's interest in this genre and theories of memory.

Émile Bernard

Gauguin and Bernard spent the months of August to October, 1888 together in Pont-Aven, and scholars have long debated the question of their influence upon each other. After initially assuming that Gauguin had the upper hand in their relationship and

[145] Wildenstein and Crussard cat. no. 289.

[146] Wildenstein and Crussard cat. no. 266.

in matters of influence, art historians began to take seriously Bernard's claims that he, not Gauguin, was the progenitor of the Synthetist style of painting. More recently they have dismissed his claims because Bernard presented them decades after the period in question, and long after Gauguin had died. Technical analysis of their canvases supports this view, suggesting that it was Bernard who began to mimic Gauguin's techniques in the summer of 1888, and not the other way around.[147]

A similar pendulum swing in the scholarship occurred with respect to the two artists' theories, particularly concerning memory. Jirat-Wasiutynski, Hans Rookmaaker, and Cheetham attributed Gauguin's formation of the painting-from-memory concept to the influence of Bernard during the summer of 1888.[148] I contend, however, that Bernard served as the source for Gauguin's *renewed* interest in the subject in 1888, since Gauguin had engaged with the concept three years prior. Their privileging of Bernard is likely because they each overlook Gauguin's 1885 writings. Jirat-Wasiutynski discusses the January 14, 1885 letter to Schuffenecker and *Notes Synthetiques*, but does not consider their implications on painting from memory.[149] He does not reference the Zadi

[147] Jirat-Wasiutynski 2000, which represents a reversal from his 1978 thesis, in which he argued for a greater role for Bernard both in theory and in practice. Whereas in the earlier text Jirat-Wasiutynski suggested Gauguin's ideas on memory derived from Bernard, memory is not mentioned in the chapter on Bernard in the newer text. As far as technique, Jirat-Wasiutynski (2000) goes to great lengths to demonstrate that, contrary to Bernard's later claims that Gauguin's *Vision* copied the techniques of his *Breton Women in a Meadow*, Bernard was, rather, mimicking Gauguin's techniques. Based on the date of the Breton Pardon after which Bernard likely made his painting, and a letter in which Gauguin reported finishing his, Jirat-Wasiutynski suggests that the two paintings were "exactly contemporary." (101) In addition, while Bernard claimed that he had taught Gauguin the use of Prussian blue and his technique of painting up to his outlines but not over them, the use of the latter technique "seems to be exceptional in Bernard's works" before the summer of 1888, whereas Gauguin had learned both techniques from Pissarro a decade earlier. (102-04) Discussion of the practice of painting from memory itself is, in the later book, confined to the chapter on Gauguin and van Gogh. Overall there is less analysis of the theory in this book, which is why I cite his 1978 book below.

[148] Jirat-Wasiutynski 1978, 91-97; Rookmaaker, 127-28; Cheetham, 18.

[149] Jirat-Wasiutynski 1978, 25-26 and 18-20, respectively.

manuscript, perhaps because it was not yet clear that Gauguin authored this text. Cheetham does not give the dates for many of his quotations, whether they belong to Gauguin or Bernard, thus he does not account for the pre-Bernard appearance of the concept in Gauguin's writings. For example, Cheetham quotes a statement by Bernard as evidence of the latter's introduction of painting from memory to Gauguin.[150] Cheetham's source, however, is not Bernard's original text but a secondary source (Rookmaaker), which obscures the date of the primary source. The quotation in fact comes from Bernard's *Souvenirs inédits sur l'artiste peintre Paul Gauguin et ses compagnons lors de leur séjour à Pont-Aven et au Pouldu*, published in 1939. Given Bernard's penchant for back-dating paintings, a statement he made in 1939 cannot be used as evidence for ideas he formed in 1888. In his introduction to a volume of Bernard's correspondence, Neil McWilliam also quotes from Bernard's 1939 autobiography regarding matters that occurred fifty years prior. He includes as well a 1904 statement by Odilon Redon, in which the artist, not present during the period in question, claimed that Gauguin was an assimilator and impulsive, quick to incorporate Bernard's ideas.[151] Similar to the early historiography of Cézanne, Gauguin's many colleagues who outlived him by decades propagated a legend—admittedly constructed by Gauguin himself—that he was naïve and impetuous. Only recently have Gauguin scholars begun to take his writing seriously,

[150] The quote that he uses is: "Since the idea is the form of things acquired by the imagination, one should not paint in front of things but by calling back into the imagination that had acquired them, which preserved them in the idea." Cheetham, 23.

[151] *Émile Bernard: les lettres d'un artiste, 1884-1941*, ed. Neil McWilliam, Laure Harscoët-Maire, and Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2012), 17-24. McWilliam cites a letter Redon wrote to Andries Bonger, 5 February 1904.

enabling a view of the artist as a widely-read (if sarcastic) intellectual, capable of formulating, as opposed to stealing, the theories he and Bernard discussed.

Bernard's letters of the 1880s do not reveal ideas that are as complex and nuanced as those of Gauguin in the same period.[152] In a letter dated 3 June 1886, Bernard wrote to his parents that the sunsets in Paramé were beautiful. He continued, "J'ai l'intention d'en peindre un, mais il est presqu'impossible de le faire d'après nature, car l'éclat trop violent du soleil empêche le travailleur de voir son ouvrage et l'on ne sait pas ce que l'on fait."[153] Gauguin had already written a year earlier, both in the Turkish Painter's Manual and to Schuffenecker, that the artist should not paint from nature. Here, Bernard complains to his parents of the almost comical scenario in which he attempts to paint a sunset while observing it, with the afterimage still burning in his eyes. This struggle is the opposite of painting from memory. He did write, later that month, that he was interested in finishing his paintings from memory: "puis je veux finir, pousser, sans document, avec la mémoire et l'observation pour guide."[154] The letters of this period also reveal how his own egotism would have easily clashed with Gauguin's. The young artist wrote to his parents in the same letter, "J'en suis devenu légendaire ici, je crois que j'y demeurerai éternellement vivant dans leur mémoire, car ils ne parlent plus que par moi. Le *parisien* par-ci, le

[152] McWilliam explains that after Bernard's mother and sister joined him in Pont-Aven in the summer of 1888 he wrote fewer letters, but if as Bernard claimed he formulated these ideas prior to his arrival in Pont-Aven, then the slow-down in letter writing that summer does not explain why they do not appear at any earlier point.

[153] Bernard to his parents, 3 June 1886. McWilliam, 41. "I intend to paint one, but it's almost impossible to do it after nature, because the violent glare of the sun prevents the worker from seeing his work and one does not know what one is doing."

[154] Bernard to his parents, 29 June 1886. McWilliam, 43. "And so, I want to finish, to push through, without document, with memory and observation as a guide."

parisien par-là."[155] From early on, one can see how Bernard's pride in believing that he had discovered a technique entirely on his own would later become a belief that Gauguin stole the idea from him: "…Gauguin appelle cela le mélange optique. Il est très étonné et ne veut pas croire que cela me soit venu tout seul, cette chose-là. J'en suis d'autant plus fier que je suis intérieurement sûr de l'avoir fait absolument de moi."[156]

Leading up to the summer of 1888, Bernard discussed his techniques and theories in letters with his parents, but did not treat the idea of memory, or any of the concepts he would later claim to have invented, until 1889. His first mention of *synthetisme* in his correspondence occured in a letter of August 1889 to his mother.[157] Around the same time, he wrote to Gauguin,

> J'ai comme une idée vague que la peinture est plus qu'une résultante de sensations synthétisées, mais aussi un art absolument rattaché à des procédés techniques, tels que pâte, solidité, fluidité, qualité spéciale de chaque chose, en un mot qu'elle n'est que peinture en tant que matière et transcription, en tant que sensation.[158]

This is one of Bernard's more interesting passages, yet in a characteristic example of Gauguin's greater facility with these concepts and their verbal expression, the latter more

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[155] *Ibid.* "I am becoming a legend here, I think I will live eternally in their memory, as they talk only of me. The *Parisian* here, the *Parisian* there."

[156] Bernard to his parents, 20 August 1886. McWilliam, 55. "Gauguin calls this optical mixing. He is quite surprised and does not want to believe that this idea occurred to me on my own. I am equally as proud as I am inwardly sure of it coming entirely from me."

[157] Bernard to his mother, August 1889, McWilliam, 93.

[158] Bernard to Gauguin, August 1889, McWilliam letter 39, p. 95. "I have a wild idea that painting is the result of synthesized sensations, but also an art completely tied to technical processes, such as texture, solidity, fluidity, the special qualities of everything, in a word, it is not so much painting as it is matter and transcription, or sensation."

eloquently responded, “Au fond la peinture est comme l’homme, mortel mais vivant toujours en lutte avec la matière.”[159] Bernard would later believe that Gauguin stole such ideas from him, when in reality, Gauguin had expressed these ideas in writing as early as 1885, and the year before, in 1888. The most likely scenario is that each artist had a mutual interest in the concepts of materiality and painting from memory. They shared their sources and their ideas, and helped put each other’s thoughts in motion.

The same may be said of Bernard’s still lifes. He made several interesting canvases in this genre, some of which are quite bold in their employment of the cloissonist style and simplification of form. It is therefore necessary to consider to what extent Bernard influenced Gauguin’s reconnection with still life in 1888. Unfortunately, as with Bernard’s much-later claims to concepts, he often added a signature and date to his paintings decades after painting them, at a time when he felt embittered that Gauguin had “stolen” his ideas and techniques. Jean-Jacques Luthi, the author of the Bernard catalogue raisonné, explains, “since he wasn’t very sure then of the moment when he finished them and since he had a tendency to forget, one finds a confusion of dates [of his paintings].”[160] More skeptical scholars understand the ante-dating of some of his works as a late-life attempt to reclaim the recognition that Bernard felt he had been denied. While Luthi writes that he attempted to reconstruct the history of the paintings and make changes when possible, he made no change to still lifes dated by Bernard to 1887-1888, which causes one to question how critical Luthi in fact was of the dates Bernard assigned

[159] Gauguin to Bernard, August 1889. McWilliam, 94-5. (Malingue dates this letter to September 1889, p. 166.) "Deep down, painting is like man, mortal but always living in conflict with matter."

[160] Jean-Jacques Luthi, and Armand Israël. *Émile Bernard: instigateur de l'école de Pont-Aven, précurseur de l'art moderne: sa vie, son œuvre: catalogue raisonné* (Paris: Editions des Catalogues raisonnés 2014), 15.

to them. Only two of these still lifes can be reliably tied to the year assigned to them through letters.

Stoneware Pot and Apples (fig. 1.25) is an innovative still life dated to 1887 through a letter from van Gogh to Bernard. It features an earth-toned color palette, a dark green Quimper pitcher in profile, a pot with a floral pattern whose handle is turned away from the viewer, two apples, and two smaller pieces of fruit. Black or Prussian blue outlines the ceramics and fruit. Other still lifes dated to this year and the next appear more Impressionist in their lack of outline, their brighter color palette, and their sense of setting, as seen for example in *Still Life with Cherries and Figs* (fig. 1.26). *Stoneware Pot,* on the other hand, crops the composition so tightly that the viewer has no sense of the surrounding space, and therefore can focus only, and intently, on the objects. The space, however, is quite simple: the objects, which have a believable relationship with each other, are arranged on a table that is pushed against a wall. The blue-green table and yellow wall reappear in a canvas of the same year, *Still Life with Cherries and Figs*, which boasts a similar palette and brushwork.

Still Life with Orange and Pitcher (fig. 1.27) and *Still Life with Orange and Cyclamen* (fig. 1.28), however, represent radical departures from the other works of that year if they do indeed date to 1887.[161] Their palette includes high-keyed orange and yellow-green, contrasted with deep blues and greens. The shapes are difficult to identify, making them appear otherworldly. The oranges are near perfect circles, so much so that they seem to hover on the surface, unbound by the laws of gravity. *Orange and Cyclamen*

[161] Luthi gives no explanation for why these two canvases share the same catalogue number (114 and 114b, respectively). They are not recto and verso, as they belong to different collections.

includes two light purple egg-like forms that anticipate Gauguin's *Still Life with Puppies* of 1888. In addition, it is set on a half-circle table against a wall, which closely resembles Bernard's *Still Life (bowl, fruit, and pitcher)* (fig. 1.29), signed 1888. The heart-shaped leaf of the cyclamen plant reaches out of the pot and appears to rest on the table as if it were an independent object, creating a jarring juxtaposition with the fruit and eggs.

If Bernard painted these canvases in 1887, they do speak to a certain boldness and willingness to depart from convention. If Gauguin had an opportunity to see them, the originality of their form could indeed have induced him to revisit the genre. Yet it also seems possible, if indeed these works were haphazardly dated, that Bernard brought his interest and innovations in still life with him to Pont-Aven in the summer of 1888, and made these canvases alongside Gauguin. This could explain the unusual occurrence of purple "eggs" in Gauguin's *Puppies* and Bernard's *Orange and Cyclamen*, as well as the repetition of the half-circle table in Bernard's *Cyclamen* and *Bowl, Fruit, and Pitcher* signed 1888, which parallels Gauguin's use of a circular table in *Puppies* and *Fête Gloanec*.

Even at Bernard's best, he does not achieve the subtle complexity of Gauguin's still lifes of 1888. For example, the strangest of his works still place the objects in a comfortable, discernable space. Further, there is no narrative to these canvases. The objects sit on the table, and while the viewer's mind may struggle to identify them, these objects are not an invitation to break open the imagination. Gauguin's puppies, eccentric as they are, are as instantly recognizable as Bernard's cyclamen leaf is alien. This difference is perhaps rooted in Baudelaire's description of the artist whose work "qui

procède surtout du souvenir, parle surtout au souvenir." [162] One experiences a mental block upon first confronting Bernard's *Orange and Pitcher* and *Orange and Cyclamen*. This barrier to entry invites contemplation of color, line, and form, but does not move beyond that. Gauguin's *Puppies*, on the other hand, delights in a fable-like quality. As Gauguin later wrote to Bernard,

> Je n'ai pas beaucoup donner de conseils (c'est si délicat) et cependant je crois que vous ferez bien pendant quelques temps de faire des études selon votre gré poussées puisque vous croyez en ce moment que cet art est absolument rattaché à des procédés techniques. Tels que pâte, fluidite, etc… Si plus tard vous devenez comme moi sceptique à cet égard vous ferez autre chose.[163]

Both in their paintings and in their writings, Bernard was concerned with process and form, whereas Gauguin took greater interest in meaning and symbolism.

Still life was a topic of conversation between van Gogh and Bernard in May and June of 1888, when van Gogh sent Bernard a sketch (fig. 1.30) of his painting *Still Life with Coffee Pot* (fig. 1.31), which prompted Bernard to paint his own very similar version (fig. 1.32). After describing his painting to Bernard in detail, Van Gogh concluded, "C'est donc une variation de bleus égayée par une serie de jaunes qui vont jusqu'à l'orangé."[164] Bernard dramatically simplified the forms, creating a more tightly-cropped

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[162] Quoted above, Baudelaire, "Salon de 1846."

[163] Gauguin to Bernard, August/ early September 1889. Malingue, 166. "I am chary of giving advice (which is always a delicate matter) and yet I think that you would do well for some time to study according to your inclinations, since you believe at the moment that art is absolutely bound up with technical processes. If later you become, like me, skeptical in this respect, you will do something else." Trans. Malingue, 124.

[164] Van Gogh to Bernard, 22 May 1888, Jansen letter 612. "It's thus a variation of blues enlivened by a series of yellows ranging all the way to orange."

composition in which the lines and curves of the deep blue coffee pot project forward from the stark white napkin crumpled behind it. He too features complementary shades of blue in the pot and table, and orange in the walls and fruit. Like his canvases discussed above, he successfully assembled a visually compelling arrangement of form and color, but the viewer's engagement with the canvas stops there. Most importantly, however, this verbal and visual dialogue between van Gogh and Bernard positions still life as a genre of interest immediately prior to Bernard's time with Gauguin in Pont-Aven.

Vincent Van Gogh

Still life appears to have created an unspoken tension between Gauguin and van Gogh during their two months together in Arles. Both artists produced a spate of canvases in the genre in the months prior to and following this period, and yet each made very few from October to December. That fall they ventured out into Arles together, painting the same landscapes, the same models, and the same cafes. It would have been easy to set up an arrangement of objects on a rainy day and paint the same still life, but they never did. I have argued thus far that Gauguin wittily undermined the idea of transcribing nature in the very genre that is easiest to copy from a model. Gauguin repeatedly harped upon van Gogh to cease working from a model, and yet, upon his arrival in Arles he would have been confronted with van Gogh's still lifes of that summer, which are some of the most innovative and, today, recognizable still lifes of the nineteenth century.[165] The sunflowers (for example fig. 1.33 and see fig. 1.11), painted in August, did indeed achieve precisely what Gauguin sought in paintings from memory:

[165] Laura Coyle writes that van Gogh produced the most "significant and ambitious still lifes of his career in Arles." 369.

the idea of a higher form, the Ideal. Facing these canvases, Gauguin is said to have stammered, "cà – .. c'est.. la fleur."[166] Gauguin also wrote to van Gogh after their time together, "J'ai vu avec beaucoup d'attention vos travaux depuis que nous nous sommes quittés. […] Je vous fais mon sincère compliment, et pour beaucoup d'artistes vous êtes dans l'exposition le plus remarquable. Avec des choses de nature vous êtes là le *seul qui pense*."[167] Shortly after Gauguin expressed high praise for van Gogh's sunflowers, both artists began working, for the first time since moving in together, on still lifes.[168] My explanation for this sequence of events, which can never be more than a suggestion at best, is as follows: Upon arriving in Arles and viewing van Gogh's highly successful still lifes, which achieved more elegantly that which Gauguin had sought in compositions such as *Puppies* and *Fête Gloanec*, Gauguin withdrew from the genre for a time, focusing instead on figure painting and landscape—genres in which he felt he maintained the upper hand. At the same time, as van Gogh struggled in earnest to follow Gauguin's advice to paint from memory, as Coyle suggests he did, he avoided the genre that seemed most obviously to lend itself to copying a model, "in deference" to his mentor.[169] Once a

[166] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, January 22, 1889, reported after Gauguin had left. Jansen letter 741. Written above as transcribed in the source (including *cà* rather than *ça*.) Translated as "'that — ... that's... the flower'." Gauguin's admiration of these canvases, which he evinced elsewhere, gives no reason to doubt that he felt this way about them.

[167] Gauguin to van Gogh, 20 March 1889, Jansen letter 859. Emphasis is Gauguin's. "I've looked most attentively at your works since we parted. […] I offer you my sincere compliments, and for many artists you are the most remarkable in the exhibition. With things from nature, you're the *only one there who thinks*."

[168] Based on Jansen letter 721, Van Gogh To Theo, 19 November 1888, quoted below.

[169] Coyle, 443. Coyle also writes, separately, that "Van Gogh's sunflowers welcomed Gauguin, but they also intentionally challenged him." (411) She sees van Gogh's reengagement in still life in the form of the chair paintings as an act of defiance toward Gauguin, but this does not account for the warmth with which van Gogh continued to describe Gauguin in the letter announcing the chair compositions, as well as the rather obvious homage that van Gogh pays Gauguin in *Gauguin's Chair*. Nor does she consider Gauguin's simultaneous reengagement with still life. On this matter I agree more with S. Ebert-Schifferer, who

conversation about still life opened between them, they set to painting in the genre. This eventually culminated in the canvas most widely recognized as Gauguin's treatise on painting from memory, which features not one but two still lifes: *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers.* In what follows, I will chart the course of van Gogh's interest in painting from memory, and then place the above hypothesis within the context of both artists' Arles still lifes. This will shed additional light upon the situation that led to *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers*, and illustrate the important influence of van Gogh upon Gauguin's still life production.

Like Gauguin, van Gogh's interest in painting from memory dates several years prior to the summer of 1888. For van Gogh, working from memory or the imagination had several different meanings. Often when he sent a sketch along with a letter, in order to emphasize that the sketch did not necessarily do the painting justice, he would write that it was sketched from memory.[170] At other times he insisted that he almost never worked from memory in his paintings.[171] He regularly expressed that he wished he could work from memory for the sake of convenience, to circumvent the need to go outside or find models. Artists who work from memory, he believed, could be more productive for

attributes some of Gauguin's "most moving" still lifes to his acquaintance with van Gogh. S. Ebert-Schifferer, *Still Life: A History* (New York: Abrams, 1999), 318.

[170] Van Gogh to Theo, December 1884, Jansen letters 475 and 476; to Anthon van Rappard, July 1885, letter 516; to Émile Bernard, October 1888, letter 698.

[171] Van Gogh to Anthon van Rappard, March 1884, Jansen letter 437, and in the same letter as *ibid*, to Bernard, letter 698.

this reason.[172] He maintained this attitude even through the summer of 1888, when he, Gauguin, and Bernard were in close contact through writing.[173]

There are exceptions, however, to van Gogh's mostly-prosaic conception of working from memory. In April 1885, as he worked on *The Potato Eaters*, he wrote to Theo,

> Still, it's coming along, and I think there'll be something very different in it from what you can ever have seen by me. At least that clearly.
>
> I mean the *life* especially. I'm painting this FROM MEMORY *on the painting itself*.
>
> But you know yourself how many times I've painted the heads!
>
> And furthermore I keep going and looking every evening, to redraw sections on the spot. But in the painting I let my own head, in the sense of *idea* or *imagination*, work, which isn't so much the case with *studies*, where no creative process *may* take place, but where one obtains *food* for one's imagination from reality so that it becomes right.[174]

It seems, quite remarkably, that Gauguin and van Gogh arrived at this understanding of memory independently but from similar sources. Later in this same letter van Gogh referred to Delacroix's practice of working from memory:

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[172] Van Gogh to Theo, February 1886, Jansen letter 558; September 1888, letters 686 and 687; November 1888, letter 718.

[173] As with all my references to correspondence, these claims can of course only include surviving letters. Van Gogh wrote nine letters to Gauguin before mid-August 1888, and Gauguin wrote five to van Gogh. Of these fourteen, only two letters survive, both by Gauguin. (Wildenstein and Crussard, vol 2, 366-67.) Perhaps the lost letters contained a more dynamic exchange.

[174] Van Gogh to Theo, 28 April 1885, Jansen letter 496. Original text is in Dutch. Formatting is from the source.

> It's the *second* time that I've derived a great deal from something Delacroix said. The first was his theory of colour, but I also read a conversation that he had with other painters about the making, that is the *creation*, of a painting. He asserted that one made the best paintings — from memory. *By heart!* he said.[175]

At this time van Gogh was reading Charles Blanc who, like Baudelaire, derived his theories on painting from Delacroix's writings.[176] While Gauguin abandoned his discussion of memory between 1886 and 1887, van Gogh retained the term but used it, as outlined above, in a more practical sense.

The next time that van Gogh engaged meaningfully with the concept of painting from memory was in July of 1888, while living in Arles and exchanging a flurry of letters with Bernard and Gauguin. In this instance, the artist who inspired him was not Delacroix but Rembrandt:

> Ainsi Rembrandt a peint des anges – il fait un portrait de soi-meme vieux, édenté, ridé, coiffé d'un bonnet de coton – 1° tableau d'après nature dans un miroir – il rêve, rêve et sa brosse recommence son propre portrait mais de tête, et l'expression en devient plus navree et plus navrante, il rêve, rêve encore et pourquoi ou comment, je ne sais, mais ainsi que Socrate et Mahomet avaient un

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[175] *Ibid.* Note that, in Dutch, van Gogh used a phrase for painting from memory that translates as "from the heart," while in French, the phrase van Gogh used is "de tête," literally, from the head. Jansen and several other scholars consistently translate "de tête" as "from memory." This ambivalence between head and heart again places ideas concerning memory and imagination squarely within contemporaneous debates on the location and nature of the mind and the soul.

In a letter written two days later, van Gogh would continue: "Although I'll have painted the actual painting in a relatively short time, and largely from memory, it's taken a whole winter of painting studies of heads and hands. And as for the few days in which I've painted it now — it's consequently been a formidable fight, but one for which I have great enthusiasm. Although at times I feared that it wouldn't come off. But painting is also 'act and create'." Van Gogh to Theo, 30 April 1885, Jansen letter 497.

[176] Jansen, letter 496, n.6.

> genie familier, Rembrandt, derriere ce vieillard qui a une ressemblanse avec lui-même, peint un ange surnaturel au sourire à la Vinci.
>
> Je vous montre un peintre qui rêve et qui peint d'imagination. […]
>
> Suis je illogique – non.– *Rembrandt* n'a rien inventé et cet ange et ce Christ etrange, c'est – qu'il les connaissait, les *sentait* là.[177]

Thus months before Gauguin even set foot in Arles, van Gogh was thinking about Rembrandt's success in painting from memory and the imagination.

After Gauguin's arrival, Van Gogh articulated that "les toiles de tête sont toujours moins gauches et ont un air plus artistique que les etudes sur nature,"[178] and "Gauguin me donne courage d'imaginer et les choses d'imagination certes prennent un caractère plus mysterieux."[179] These statements seem to value a particular visual aesthetic, and that aesthetic is what van Gogh sought in the paintings he claimed to have painted from memory under Gauguin's tutelage, such as *Memory of the Garden at Etten*. Whereas Gauguin saw memory as a process intended to achieve a certain effect or sensation, but not necessarily a specific aesthetic, van Gogh does not seem to have internalized this difference. Instead, his deepest reflections on memory occurred in the months and years

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[177] Van Gogh to Bernard, 29 July 1888, Jansen letter 649. (All van Gogh letters quoted here maintain the artist's misspellings and omitted accent marks as transcribed from the original letters by Jansen et al.) "So, Rembrandt painted angels — he makes a portrait of himself as an old man, toothless, wrinkled, wearing a cotton cap — first, painting from life in a mirror — he dreams, dreams, and his brush begins his own portrait again, but from memory, and its expression becomes sadder and more saddening; he dreams, dreams on, and why or how I do not know, but just as Socrates and Mohammed had a familiar genie, Rembrandt, behind this old man who bears a resemblance to himself, paints a supernatural angel with a Da Vinci smile. / I'm showing you a painter who dreams and who paints from the imagination. […] / Am I illogical? No. *Rembrandt* invented nothing, and that angel and that strange Christ; it's — that he knew them, *felt* them there."

[178] Van Gogh to Theo, November 1888, Jansen letter 718. "The canvases done from memory are always less awkward and have a more artistic look than the studies from nature."

[179] Van Gogh to Theo, December 1888, Jansen letter 719. "Gauguin gives me courage to imagine, and the things of the imagination do indeed take on a more mysterious character."

before his direct contact with Gauguin, and afterwards, when he used the term with greater significance and more often. In paintings that he claimed to do from memory after Gauguin's departure, he expressed that in them he saw a way to "exprimer mieux l'harmonie des tons," a "consonnance de couleurs qui sont dans le sentiment," "un vague souvenir adouci par le temps," and a work capable of achieving "plus de poesie."[180]

Van Gogh's return to painting still life during Gauguin's visit coincided with his resolution to finally work from memory, and with Gauguin's compliment of his sunflowers. Van Gogh addressed all of these topics in his letter to Theo of 19 November 1888:

> Gauguin malgré lui et malgré moi m'a un peu demontré qu'il etait temps que je varie un peu – je commence à composer de tête et pour ce travail-là toutes mes etudes me seront toujours utiles lorsqu'elles me rappelleront d'anciennes chôses vues. […]
>
> Gauguin me disait l'autre jour – qu'il avait vu de Claude Monet un tableau de tournesols dans un grand vase japonais très beau [fig. 1.34]. mais – il aime mieux les miens.–
>
> Je ne suis pas de cet avis – seulement ne crois pas que je sois en train de faiblir. Je regrette comme toujours, ainsi que cela t'est connu, la rareté des modèles, les mille contrarietes pour vaincre cette difficulté-là. […]
>
> Donc persévérance.

[180] Jansen letters 790, 805, 829, and 830, respectively. They date from July to December 1889. "…a way better to express the harmony of the tones," a "consonance of colors that are in the same sentiment," "a vague memory softened by time," and a work capable of achieving "more poetry."

> En attendant je peux toujours te dire que les deux dernieres etudes sont assez drôle. Toiles de 30, *une chaise* en bois et en paille toute jaune sur des carreaux rouges contre un mur (le *jour*). Ensuite le fauteuil de Gauguin rouge et vert, effet de nuit, mur et plancher rouge et vert aussi, sur le siege deux romans et une chandelle.[181]

Two days later, van Gogh announced that Gauguin was at work on a still life of his own: "une grande nature morte de potiron orangé" with a "fond et avantplan jaune."[182]

Thus after a dry spell of still life production and following a positive discussion of his sunflower paintings, van Gogh set to painting *Van Gogh's Chair* and *Gauguin's Chair* (fig. 1.35, 1.36). Gauguin had arranged still lifes on chairs several years before, and would return to doing so several years later. In van Gogh's compositions, however, the chair is less the stage for the tableau and more the object of contemplation itself. The chairs, like van Gogh's shoes and flowers, are anthropomorphic, standing in for a portrait of the "sitter" they commonly hold. The objects on the chairs also represent their sitters. The lighted candle and book in *Gauguin's Chair* symbolized knowledge. Together with its nocturnal setting and van Gogh's association of the nighttime with imagination, the

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[181] Van Gogh To Theo, 19 November 1888, Jansen letter 721. "Gauguin, in spite of himself and in spite of me, has proved to me a little that it was time for me to vary things a bit – I'm beginning to compose from memory, and all my studies will still be useful to me for that work, as they remind me of former things I've seen. […] / Gauguin was telling me the other day — that he'd seen a painting by Claude Monet of sunflowers in a large Japanese vase, very fine. But — he likes mine better. / I'm not of that opinion — only don't think that I'm weakening. I regret as always, as you know, the scarcity of models, the thousand obstacles to overcome that difficulty. […] / So, perseverance. / In the meantime I can tell you anyway that the last two studies are rather funny [*assez drôle*]. No. 30 canvases, a wooden and strawchair all yellow on red tiles against a wall (*daytime*). Then Gauguin's armchair, red and green, night effect, on the seat two novels and a candle."

[182] Van Gogh to Theo, 21 November 1888, Jansen letter 722. "A big still life of an orange pumpkin" with "a yellow background and foreground."

scene suggests Gauguin's method of working.[183] Van Gogh considered the pipe and tobacco depicted on his chair one of life's pleasures which, unlike women and alcohol, he considered a lesser vice. He also connected pipe smoking to other artists and poets, such as Baudelaire, who believed that it enhanced creativity.[184]

Gauguin had combined the genres of still life and portraiture in *Still Life with Laval* and would do so again in a matter of weeks with *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers*. In van Gogh's chairs, however, the object stands in for the person, and becomes greater than itself. As with his still lifes of shoes and flowers, van Gogh pushed at the boundaries of what an object could be and could accomplish in a painting. Gauguin's early still lifes, such as those with the tine, have a type of anthropomorphic energy to them. Van Gogh's anthropomorphism, however, has a more personal tone. This could relate to van Gogh's personal investment in these objects themselves. He thought and wrote about the purchase of the chairs, and incorporated them into the Yellow House with pride. Coyle writes that van Gogh purchased no less than fourteen chairs for the Yellow House, despite his lack of funds. He took care to select particularly sturdy ones, and thoughtfully arranged them throughout the house.[185] Thus the chairs had a very material presence in van Gogh's life, as visualized in his painted representations.

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[183] Petra Chu, "Emblems for a Modern Age: Vincent van Gogh's Still Life and the Nineteenth-century Vignette Tradition," in *The Object As Subject: Studies in the Interpretation of Still Life*, ed. Anne W. Lowenthal (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 91-92. She argues that one may draw a similar parallel between *The Poet* (Musée d'Orsay) and *The Peasant* (private collection), and *Gauguin's Chair* and *Van Gogh's Chair*, respectively. Both pairs have a night-day juxtaposition to characterize two opposing ways of life that relate to the contrasting personalities (97, note 34).

[184] Chu 1996, 92.

[185] She cites letters from 9 September 1888 and 10 May 1888. Coyle, 417, 423. Petra Chu also discusses the "personality cult" around furniture in the nineteenth century: Chu 1996, 93.

Only days after describing to Theo the chair paintings, van Gogh reported that "Gauguin a en train […] une grande nature morte de potiron orangé et des pommes et du linge blanc sur fond et avantplan jaune."[186] Van Gogh was quite happy to see this painting in progress, writing later to Theo, "J'aime beaucoup une nature morte à fond et avant plan jaunes."[187] Gauguin admired van Gogh's yellow-on-yellow compositions, including his sunflowers against a yellow wall.[188] For him to undertake the same yellow color scheme in a still life was a compliment to his colleague. The painting van Gogh described in these two letters was long believed lost or destroyed, however Sylvie Crussard and Leo Jansen suggest that this yellow on yellow painting was in fact *Little Cat*, cut down from its original version (fig. 1.37).[189] This is quite possible—the pale yellow areas set against a deeper gold could denote the linens to which van Gogh referred, and based on the scale of the cat and the undulating tops of the gourds, they could reasonably be considered pumpkins. Missing are the apples, and van Gogh made no mention of the cat, but the apples could have been cropped away, and the cat added later.

[186] Van Gogh to Theo, 21 November 1888, Jansen letter 722. "Gauguin's working on […] a big still life of an orange pumpkin and some apples and white linen on a yellow background and foreground."

[187] Van Gogh to Theo, c. 1 December 1888, Jansen letter 723. "I very much like a still life with yellow fore- and backgrounds."

[188] After their time together in Arles, Gauguin praised the yellow-on-yellow sunflowers that hung in his room there, and attempted to orchestrate an exchange for them. Gauguin to Vincent Van Gogh, c. 8-16 January 1889, Jansen letter 734, identified as the London version in note 1. Vincent wrote to Theo van Gogh that Gauguin had proposed an exchange for the same *Sunflowers* canvas, 17 January 1889, Jansen letter 736 (identified in note 12), and responded to Gauguin directly regarding this request on 21 January 1889, Jansen letter 739 (identified in note 3). I will return to Gauguin's high opinion of these paintings, and its impact on his later work, in chapter two.

[189] Jansen letter 722 note 10; Wildenstein and Crussard vol. 2, 533. Gamboni agrees with these suggestions (165).

Scholars have suggested that the same lost or cropped yellow-on-yellow still life described in the above letters appears on the easel in Van Gogh's portrait of Gauguin (fig. 1.38).[190] Martin Bailey believes this small portrait was a study for a larger portrait, never achieved, that van Gogh may have intended as a pendant to Gauguin's *Painter of Sunflowers.* He notes that Gauguin was working on his yellow-on-yellow still life at the same time as his portrait of van Gogh, and so it holds that van Gogh may have begun a study for his portrait of Gauguin at that time as well.[191] If van Gogh indeed chose to represent Gauguin at work on a still life—the only dedicated still life Gauguin made in Arles—this supports my case for the important position that the genre occupied for the artists in Arles. Van Gogh's chairs and Gauguin's pumpkins arguably represent the most metaphorical homages that each artist paid to the other during their time working together. The unusual break in still life production followed by such mutually reverent canvases suggests that the genre occupied a charged site of negotiation of the two artists' theories on memory versus observation during this period. Several years after van Gogh's

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[190] Jansen letter 722, note 10. Martin Bailey, "Van Gogh's Portrait of Gauguin," *Apollo* 144.413 (July 1996), 52. Druick and Zegers date this portrait to c. 1 December, at which time Gauguin was at work on the "yellow on yellow" still life. They give this date because the composition is painted on jute prepared with the same "idiosyncratic barium ground" that both artists had experimented with in November, as well as stylistic similarities to other paintings of this time. (236) They do not, however, connect the canvas pictured in this portrait to *A Little Cat*, which was not in the exhibition.

[191] Van Gogh to Theo, c. 1 December 1888, Jansen letter 723; Bailey, 54. Louis van Tilborgh supports Bailey's arguments in a typed manuscript in the Van Gogh Museum object file for this painting, dated 1 February 2002. Van Tilborgh further suggests that the still life with pumpkins described in the letter is part of a four-way conversation between Gauguin's *Painter of Sunflowers*, van Gogh's portrait of Gauguin, and van Gogh's Tokyo version of the sunflowers with a yellow wall, which is a repetition of the London canvas.

Continuing in the spirit of exchange, the van Gogh portrait of Gauguin is notable for van Gogh's use of several of Gauguin's techniques. The unmodulated planes of color are typical of the older artist, as is the way van Gogh painted each plane up to the dividing contour lines but not over them, allowing the underlying drawing layer to show through. In addition, van Gogh evidently changed the wall color from pale blue to the present green, as the blue is visible around the edges of and beneath the green. By selecting green, the wall becomes a complement to the red beret and an allied color to the yellow canvas.

death, Gauguin penned an essay about his deceased friend and colleague titled "Natures mortes," which described their time together in Arles. Despite the vacuum of still life production in Arles, the genre evidently remained a salient memory of this period.[192]

Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers, widely held as a manifesto on the practice of painting from memory versus copying after nature, paid homage to two of van Gogh's still-life paintings and came on the heels of the two artists' return to still life production. In this canvas, Gauguin made reference not only to van Gogh's esteemed sunflowers, but also to *Van Gogh's Chair*, using it as the sunflowers' table. Just as the chairs and the items on them represented van Gogh and Gauguin, here the sunflowers stand in for van Gogh, as if he were painting himself.[193] Quite possibly, Gauguin conceived of the idea for *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers* while watching van Gogh paint his chair, which would ground the painting all the more in conversations surrounding still life. In this case, by replacing the smoking pipe with sunflowers, Gauguin equated his fellow artist not with his vices but with his art, his true passion.

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This chapter has demonstrated the pivotal position occupied by the genre of still life in Gauguin's early exploration of his theory and practice of painting from memory. For the remainder of his career, Gauguin continued to insist on distancing himself from nature and relying upon the imagination. In *Diverses choses* he wrote, "devant la nature elle-même, c'est notre imagination qui fait le tableau,"[194] and he copied lines from his

[192] Paul Gauguin, "Natures mortes," *Essais d'art libre* 4 (1894), 273-75. I will further discuss this essay in the second chapter.

[193] Gamboni, 166.

[194] Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 222. "When we look upon nature itself, our imagination does the painting," Trans., Guérin, 129.

Zadi manuscript into *Diverses choses* and *Cahier pour Aline* years later: "Il est bon pour les jeunes gens d'avoir un modèle, mais qu'ils tirent le rideau sur lui pendant qu'ils le peignent. Mieux est de peindre de mémoire."[195] While visualizing the process of looking may have been a rather modest first attempt to give form to his ideas on painting from memory, as his career progressed so too did his ability to unite body and soul in the process of painting and beholding a work of art. In this lifelong pursuit, Gauguin would eventually succeed in marshalling the senses through synaesthetic evocations alongside musical rhythms of color and line to achieve what he had set out to do decades earlier, in *Notes Synthetiques*: to create an art in which "chacun peut, au gré de son imagination, créer le roman, d'un seul coup d'œil avoir l'âme envahie par les plus profonds souvenirs; point d'effort de mémoire, tout résumé en un seul instant."[196] Significantly, he connected his earliest manifestation of this endeavor to the process of painting from memory, and he did so in the form of still life.

[195] Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 210. "It is good for young people to have a model, but they should forgo looking at the model while they paint." Trans., Guérin, 66.

[196] Quoted and translated above, Gauguin, *Notes Synthetiques.* See also Hargrove 2014.

In future work I would like to consider the phenomenological qualities underlying Gauguin's interest in embodied perception, which is reflected in quotes such as this one, and in his belief that thought should follow after emotion in the viewer's response to art. These notions, alongside Gauguin's resistance to the separation of mind and body, resonate with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. As mentioned above (this chapter, note 74), cognitive scientists now strongly believe in the interconnection of mind, body, and environment, as expressed through what they now call embodied cognition. I am interested in the relationship between this current model of cognition, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, and Gauguin's theories of perception and memory.

Chapter 2. Nostalgia in Paradise: Tahiti Still Lifes, 1891-1892

As Gauguin's aesthetic theories of painting from memory extended beyond his experimental still lifes of 1888 into his entire oeuvre, the role of the still-life genre in his work shifted. Less a witty repartee among friends, it instead became a site of remembrance of those same colleagues following his move to Tahiti. In this chapter and the next, I examine the form that this memory takes. In the present chapter, I focus upon a selection of still lifes that Gauguin created during his first trip to Tahiti, which I interpret through the framework of nostalgia. These paintings are *The Flowers of France, Still Life with Tahitian Oranges,* and *The Royal End* (see fig. 2.1, 2.7, 2.11).

The term "nostalgia" has a volatile history, and during Gauguin's lifetime its meaning shifted not only in the medical and psychological field but also in literature. Within the past ten years, the scientific study of nostalgia has rescued the concept from a maligned synonym for homesickness, redefining it as a constructive and agency-granting emotion. Evidence suggests that even if this was not how doctors and psychiatrists understood nostalgia in the nineteenth century, writers and other scientists were well aware of the positive power of warm memories of the past. This chapter analyzes the mechanisms by which nostalgia functions in the three paintings under consideration. I perform this analysis by using methodologies from present-day social psychological science which, in combination with cultural theory, provides a robust structure through which to expand the paintings' interpretation within the context of Gauguin's letters, manuscripts, and period literature. The definition that I have selected to underlie my use of the term "nostalgia" in this chapter is "sentimentality for the past,"[1] a characterization

[1] M. Vess et al., "Nostalgia as a resource for the self," *Self and Identity* 11.3 (November 2012): 273.

derived from social psychology. The simplicity of this definition belies the vastly different meanings the term has shouldered historically and across disciplines, which I will address throughout the chapter.

The three canvases studied in this chapter show sentimentality for rather different "pasts." In the more traditional sense, *The Flowers of France* and *Tahitian Oranges* refer to Gauguin's personal past in France, most specifically in Arles, where he and Vincent van Gogh lived together in a house they called the "Studio of the South." *The Royal End*, on the other hand, expresses a longing for Tahiti's past—a past more imagined and invented than real. At its most basic level, the scientific framework I employ reveals a bi-directional structure in which sentimentality for the past produces positive outcomes for the present and optimism for the future. As I will show in the fourth and fifth sections, this structure applies to and thereby unites all three still lifes. As still lifes, these three canvases could hardly be more different, as they range from flowers and fruit to a decapitated head. And yet, as three of the very few still lifes that Gauguin painted in this first trip to Tahiti, they are nonetheless tied to each other as paintings of objects on tables.[2] A theme I will return to in this chapter concerns the role of the object in these works, or otherwise stated, why the still-life genre is a particularly efficient vehicle for nostalgic reminiscence.

This chapter begins with visual analyses of each of the three featured paintings. In the following two sections I situate the term nostalgia historically and up to the present. The fourth section breaks down the components of nostalgia—its triggers and

[2] The number of still lifes painted in this first trip cannot be definitively determined because a handful are undated and difficult to assign to a year. Counting *Le Repas* (Musée d'Orsay), the minimum number of still lifes during the first trip is four. There are approximately three undated canvases that could also belong to this period, bringing the total up to seven, but I am inclined toward the minimum number.

functions—as they are understood by psychologists, and locates Gauguin's writings within this schema. In the same section I revisit *The Flowers of France* and *Tahitian Oranges* to further consider their meaning in this context. The final section returns to *The Royal End* separately to compare it with the history of voyage narratives and demonstrate that in its subversion of those narratives, it functions in a manner similar to the fruit and flower still lifes.

I. Fruit, Flowers, and Severed Heads

The Flowers of France (Te tiare farani)

Gauguin arrived in Tahiti in June of 1891, and painted *The Flowers of France* (fig. 2.1) by the end of the year. He inscribed the Tahitian title *Te tiare farani* on the lower left of the canvas and supplied the translation "Fleurs françaises."[3] Scholars have noted the implicit nostalgia of the title, but tend not to extend that finding to the painting itself—a task this chapter adopts.[4]

The most important but as-yet unremarked homage that Gauguin made in this composition is to Vincent van Gogh. The bouquet of oleanders in Gauguin's *The Flowers*

[3] It is recorded as "Tiare farani (Fleurs françaises)," number 24, in the listing of sale prices following the sale on 18 February 1895 at the Hôtel Drouot, Paris. "Après l'enchère : Vente de tableaux et dessins par Paul Gauguin. MM. Sarms et Bernheim jeune. Hôtel Drouot le 18 février [1895]" *Repertoire des ventes* 1.19 (26 February 1895): 298-299. This is the literal translation from Tahitian, as "tiare" means flowers and "farani," France. Asya Kantor-Gukovskaya and Marina Bessonova note that one of his earliest uses of a Tahitian title in fact makes reference to France. This is one of nine canvases dated to 1891 that bear a Tahitian title. Asya Kantor-Gukovskaya and Marina Bessonova, *Paul Gauguin in Soviet Museums* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1988), 61.

[4] Charles Stuckey wrote that it "does seem to indicate a sardonic nostalgia for his own culture," but then concludes that the painting "might be understood as a statement of Gauguin's priority of relationships of color and form over logical subject matter." (Charles Stuckey in *The Art of Paul Gauguin* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1988), 220.) Anne Distel, on the other hand, considers it a masterwork of the early Tahiti period, and calls it "intriguant par son titre nostalgique." (Anne Distel, *De Renoir à Matisse: 22 chefs-d'œuvre des musées soviétiques et français*. Exh. cat., Grand-Palais. Paris, 1978, 30.) Kantor-Gukovskaya and Bessonova make a similar claim (60-61). Françoise Cachin also writes that this painting "must be counted amongst his finest," but gives little reason as to why. (Françoise Cachin, *Gauguin* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), 154.)

of France recall van Gogh's *Oleanders*, painted in August 1888 (fig. 2.2).[5] Van Gogh's oleanders, like Gauguin's, stretch out of their vase, as if reaching for the edges of the canvas. The color and texture of van Gogh's soft blossoms are set in contrast to the sharp, tongue-like leaves, and Gauguin similarly capitalized upon this juxtaposition. If van Gogh used the same fugitive red lake pigment that he employed in several canvases of this period, then the pale pink of his flowers would have more closely matched the deep pink of Gauguin's at the time the former was painted.[6] In section four I will examine the layers of symbolism that are uncovered by this comparison.

The Flowers of France constitutes a patchwork of references to other French artists as well. As early as 1906 a critic compared it to Edouard Manet's *Luncheon in the Studio* (fig. 2.3), pointing to the similarity between the reclining pose of the male figures each outfitted with a straw hat.[7] The woman in front of a blue background recalls Paul

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[5] I have looked for this comparison in the Gauguin literature, and also in the object file for van Gogh's *Oleanders*, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is quite exhaustive, but does not include any references that compare it to *Flowers of France*. While the yellow wall is pointed to as a symbol of the yellow house, the oleanders themselves are not.

The provenance for this painting begins in 1906, when the painting was in the collection of Theo's widow. (Provenance as listed on the museum website: Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Collection: *Oleanders*," s.v. Vincent van Gogh, *http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436530* (accessed September 12, 2016).) Therefore it remained in the van Gogh family's hands, meaning Gauguin could have seen it in Arles, or, if van Gogh sent it to his brother before Gauguin's arrival, then Gauguin could have seen it in Theo's studio during his frequent visits there in 1889.

[6] Charlotte Hale, Conservator of Paintings, Metropolitan Museum of Art, has indicated that while detailed technical analysis has not been performed on this painting, "it does appear that fading has occurred in *Oleanders*." E-mail communication with the author, 15 July 2016. Extensive analysis has been done on van Gogh's use of geranium lake and other red paints that contain the pigment eosin, which causes dramatic fading due to severe light sensitivity. Van Gogh began using geranium lake when he arrived in Arles in February 1888. See for example Muriel Geldof, Matthijs de Keijzer, Maarten van Bommel, Kathrin Pilz, Johanna Salvant, Henk van Keulen, and Luc Megans, "Van Gogh's Geranium Lake," in *Van Gogh's Studio Practice*, ed. Marije Vellekoop, et al. (New Haven and London: Van Gogh Museum, Mercatorfonds, distributed by Yale University Press, 2013), 268-289.

[7] "Parmi ceux que nous montre l'exposition du Grand Palais, les plus anciens des tableaux exécutés à Tahiti sont de 1891: par exemple, la belle *Nature morte* (appartenant à M. Vollard), où l'on voit un gros bouquet sur une table, et, à côté, en buste, deux personnages qui trahissent une curieuse influence de Manet, une

Cézanne's portraits of his wife (for example, fig. 2.4),[8] and the hatch mark-like stroke used throughout the composition, visible especially in the flowers, the boy's clothing, and the foliage, also pays homage to Cézanne's brushwork.

Gauguin's canvas echoes Edgar Degas' *A Woman Seated beside a Vase of Flowers* (fig. 2.5), in which a resplendent bouquet similarly overwhelms the sitter, who is pushed to the side and disengaged from the floral display beside her.[9] At the time that Theo van Gogh purchased it from Degas for Goupil in 1887, it was the second-highest price Degas had garnered for a canvas.[10] The painting would surely have captured Gauguin's attention during his frequent visits to Degas' studio,[11] not least because of Gauguin's earlier interest in still life objects that similarly compete in presence and life force with the figures themselves (for example, *Interior, Rue Carcel*, see fig. 0.6). Behind

femme avec un homme coiffé d'un chapeau de paille." Paul Jamot, "Le Salon d'automne." *Gazette des beaux-arts* 35.594 (1 December 1906), 467-68.

Asya Kantor-Gukovskaya and Marina Bessonova make the same comparison but do not cite this review. They note that the Manet and Gauguin canvases share a similar "visual effect," perhaps referring to the contemplative mood of each. Kantor-Gukovskaya and Bessonova, 60-61.

Jean-Baptiste Faure, an opera singer renowned for his collection of Impressionist painting, owned Manet's *Luncheon in the Studio* from 1873 to 1894. (Françoise Cachin and Charles S. Moffett, *Manet: 1832-1883* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983), 294.) Therefore if Gauguin saw it, he must have had access to Faure's collection. Speculating on whether Gauguin saw another Manet canvas in Faure's collection, Richard Brettell writes that it was indeed possible because Faure was a friend of Gustave Arosa, who was a guardian figure to Gauguin. Richard Brettell and Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, *Gauguin and Impressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 38.

[8] Charles Stuckey suggests the example illustrated here. Charles F. Stuckey, "The First Tahitian Years," in *The Art of Paul Gauguin*, ed. Richard Brettell (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1988), 221 n.3.

[9] The first to make this comparison was Anne Distel, *De Renoir à Matisse: 22 chefs-d'œuvre des musées soviétiques et français*, exh. cat. (Grand-Palais. Paris, 1978), 30.

[10] Jennifer A. Greenhill in Eliza E. Rathbone and George T. M. Shackelford. *Impressionist Still Life*. Exh. cat., Phillips Collection, Washington. New York, 2001, 205–6. This was Theo van Gogh's first purchase from Degas. John Rewald. "Théo van Gogh, Goupil, and the Impressionists." *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 6.81 (January 1973), 8.

[11] Françoise Cachin writes that Gauguin also could have seen it after it was sold, between 1887 and 1888, when Theo van Gogh stored the canvas. Françoise Cachin, "Degas and Gauguin," in *The Private Collection of Edgar Degas*, ed. Ann Dumas (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 231.

Degas' sitter is an entry into another room, which anticipates Gauguin's framed female figure. The various planes in this recessed room also present an interpretive challenge to the viewer, but they eventually resolve into an open window with the white plane projecting perpendicularly out from the wall. Gauguin would have taken note of this strange interior space, which he employed to an amplified enigmatic effect in *Flowers of France*.

Flowers of France also engages with Gauguin's 1881 *Fleurs, nature morte* (see fig. 0.6). These two compelling bouquets demand the viewer's attention while the painted figures overlook or ignore them. This tension between their indifference and the viewer's compulsion is the opposite of the relationship seen in the pictured-looking paintings of the first chapter, where the viewer's attention is sharpened by the painted figure's gaze. While the flowers in the earlier canvas interrupt our glance as we peer into the background, the oleanders by contrast dominate their space, unfurling across the canvas. Both bouquets succeed in overtaking the human presence and thus are objects that assert their presence, and in this way, insist on their thingness.

Despite its several references to French artists, *The Flowers of France* does not evoke France but instead represents an imagined space, floating between Tahiti, Arles, and Paris. In order to liberate this composition from the firm grounding in the tropics enjoyed by most of Gauguin's other works of this period, he constructed a space that is impossible to resolve, inviting a sense of dislocation. The oleanders overwhelm the European vase that contains them, threatening to topple the delicate vessel. Placed just right of center in the canvas, atop a wooden table, these flowers are the focal point of the composition. Beside them, the young Tahitian male leans against an unidentifiable

support, with his head and eyes turned to the viewer. Behind him appears a woman's face in front of a sky-blue background. Gauguin sketched both of these faces in his sketchbook that dates to this trip (fig. 2.6). The female figure appears to be surrounded by a frame. While some scholars read this frame as a window, it more plausibly represents a framed painting, given its height relative to the boy and table (it does not make sense as a door or window) as well as the balcony grate or gate that blocks the woman. In addition, her eyes look sharply to the left, behind the male figure, supporting the view that she is a painted rather than real figure.[12] Behind the boy's head a patch of green resembles foliage, but this is incongruent with the furniture that otherwise suggests an interior. The yellow-orange wall on the right side of the composition truncates both the yellow-green wall behind the frame and the frame itself. This, too, confuses one's sense of space, as it suggests the yellow plane stands in front of the green plane and brown frame. In turn, the undulating blue and yellow colonial textile stretches to the left, past the yellow wall and in front of the framed picture. A layer of red paint underlies the right half of the painting and several flower blossoms are painted out. On the left side, the male figure appears to be painted over the balcony grate and the female figure's hair, suggesting that Gauguin altered his plan for the composition in color as well as arrangement. This invented space confounds the viewer the longer and closer he or she looks and resists a firm reading as "tropical," "exotic," or "Tahitian." While it likely appeared in the 1893 Durand-Ruel exhibition in Paris, critics did not review the canvas.[13]

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[12] Scholars are undecided as to whether it is a window or painting. See Isabelle Cahn, "Les Gauguin dans Gauguin: peintures et ceramiques dans le tableau," in *Gauguin: actes du Colloque Gauguin, Musée d'Orsay, 11-13 janvier 1989* (1989): 178, 181; and Frèches-Thory, 221.

[13] Listed as number 41 in the catalogue of the 1893 Durand-Ruel exhibition of Gauguin's work is a painting titled "Bouquet de fleurs" within the Tahitian canvases section, which is generally assumed to be this canvas (e.g. Stuckey in *The Art of Paul Gauguin,* 220). "Exposition d'Œuvres récentes de Paul Gauguin,"

In addition to these stylistic and iconographic odes to former colleagues in France who were separated from Gauguin by distance or death, the painting evokes nostalgia in less tangible ways. A sense of absence and longing, alongside a tender sentimentality, pervades the canvas. The absence is less depicted than felt, for example in the way the boy shrinks back from the scene at hand, creating an arc of space between his concave body and the matching convex curve of the bouquet. The yellow wall and pink oleanders (which are highlighted with orange, yellow, and red strokes) create a splash of warm color on the right, while the blues and greens on the left, together with the muted tone of the faces (modeled with shades of green and mauve), constitute cooler shades. These warm and cool colors amplify the bright but mournful atmosphere of the image. The boy looks out to the viewer and the woman looks away, leaving the dazzling oleanders, a powerful invocation of van Gogh, unnoticed. Van Gogh's presence, in this way, reinforces his absence. Despite this interplay of presence and absence, a certain hopefulness prevails, captured in the brilliant yellow wall, but also within the oleanders themselves. Oleanders are a flower that grew naturally in both France and Tahiti,[14] and their potent fragrance would have evoked precisely this kind of nostalgia—an acutely felt presence of times past, and at the same time, an awareness of their loss.[15] This bittersweet

exh. cat., Durand-Ruel, Paris, November 1893. Given Gauguin's widely-professed claims of total immersion in Tahitian life upon his return to France, perhaps he chose to obscure the nostalgic reference in his title by leaving "Te tiare farani" untranslated, offering instead the more generic "bouquet of flowers" for its title. No critical response to this painting in 1893 survives. If this was the painting exhibited, as one of forty-one exhibited canvases from the trip to Tahiti, it was likely less compelling to reviewers as compared to the brilliantly colored landscapes and figure paintings shown at the same time.

[14] On their presence in Tahiti, Gilbert Cuzent, *Îles de la société Tahiti: considérations géologiques, météorologiques et botaniques sur l'île* (Rochefort: Impr. Thèze, 1860), 235.

[15] Several scientific studies demonstrate this centuries-old knowledge, for example: Simon Chu and John J. Downes, "Proust nose best: odors are better cues of autobiographical memory," *Memory & Cognition* 30.4 (2002): 511–518.

duality of nostalgia encapsulates the balance that Gauguin strikes in the *Flowers of France*.

Still Life with Tahitian Oranges

Like *Flowers of France*, the setting of *Still Life with Tahitian Oranges* (fig. 2.7) is dislocated; here it is not only imagined, but ethereal. The unevenly circular table floats in an undefined setting against a brilliant yellow backdrop. These oranges, like Gauguin's fruit still lifes of 1888, are too spherical to be real. The top-most fruit denies the laws of gravity, hovering over the others. The vantage point floats inches above the table, offering a view simultaneously downward and across at the oranges. The uppermost orange breaks the horizon line of the table, which confers an air of monumentality. Other details contribute to the painting's strangeness, such as the red triangle between the two green leaves, the right-most leaf that appears to perfectly follow the contour of the adjacent orange, and most baffling of all, Gauguin's upside-down signature at the lower left.

While nothing in the title of *Tahitian Oranges* is nostalgic, the painting itself evokes van Gogh in myriad ways, with the type of sentimental longing that characterizes nostalgia. Although there are references to Cézanne—such as the vaguely botanical pattern of the table cloth that recalls his wallpaper and the hatch-mark strokes that define the oranges—this harmony in yellow is above all an homage to van Gogh. Following Gauguin's return to Paris in 1894, he published an essay dedicated to van Gogh titled *Natures Mortes*, which began:

> Dans ma chambre jaune, -- des fleurs de soleil, aux yeux pourpres, se détachent sur un fond jaune; elles se baignent le pied dans un pot jaune, sur une table jaune.

– Dans un coin du tableau, la signature du peintre : Vincent. Et le soleil jaune, qui passe à travers les rideaux jaunes de ma chambre, inonde d'or toute cette floraison, et le matin, de mon lit, quand je me réveille, je m'imagine que tout cela sent très bon.

Oh ! oui, il l'a aimé le jaune, ce bon Vincent, ce peintre de Hollande ; lueurs de soleil qui réchauffaient son âme ; en horreur du brouillard. Un besoin de chaleur. Quand nous étions tous deux, à Arles, fous tous deux, en guerre continuelle pour les belles couleurs, moi, j'adorais le rouge ; où trouver un vermillon parfait?[16]

The gleaming spectrum of yellows featured in *Tahitian Oranges* parallels the emphatic repetition of the word yellow in the essay. Gauguin's personal identification with red suggests his presence in the painted ode to van Gogh, in the form of red peppers: Gauguin is to van Gogh as red is to yellow, as hot is to sweet. [17] The nostalgic reminiscence in the essay to the days when they lived together in the yellow house emerges in the canvas as well. Nostalgia's bittersweetness occurs in the sting of the peppers, softened by the sweetness of the oranges. George Shackelford has also taken the essay as an interpretive lens for the painting, musing, "Was the painting, with its brilliant yellow background, a conscious reference to a lost friend? […Gauguin] may only have

[16] Paul Gauguin, "Natures mortes," *Essais d'art libre* 4 (1894), 273-75. "In my yellow room, sunflowers with purple eyes stand out against a yellow background; the ends of their stalks bathe in a yellow pot on a yellow table. In one corner of the painting, the painter's signature: Vincent. And the yellow sun, coming through the yellow curtains of my room, floods all this flowering with gold, and in the morning, when I wake up in my bed, I have the impression that it all smells very good. Oh yes! he loved yellow, did good Vincent, the painter from Holland, gleams of sunlight warming his soul, which detested fog. A craving [or need] for warmth. When the two of us were together in Arles, both of us insane, and constantly at war over beautiful colors, I adored red; where could I find a perfect vermilion?" Translation from *Paul Gauguin: The Writings of a Savage*, ed. Daniel Guérin, trans. Eleanor Levieux (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 246-47.

[17] Christie's New York. *Impressionist and Modern Art: Evening Sale, Tuesday 6 November 2007* (New York: Christie's, 2007) lot 15 similarly compares Gauguin to the spicy peppers, but without the association with red and the *Natures Mortes* essay.

been trying to satisfy, with brilliant color, 'the need for warmth.'"[18] While Shackelford does not explicitly call the canvas nostalgic, his suggestion that it might satisfy a *besoin de chaleur* for Gauguin in the form of a warm memory is a metaphor that scientists recently discovered is rooted in physiology. In a testament to the relationship between mind and body, research shows that nostalgia not only warms the soul, but that it warms the body as well.[19]

Van Gogh painted at least three still lifes of oranges, lemons, and yellow apples that anticipate *Tahitian Oranges*. He completed *Quinces, Lemons, Pears and Grapes* (fig. 2.8) in Paris in 1887, and *Basket of Oranges* (fig. 2.9) in Arles in 1888, which he sent to Theo in May of that year.[20] Gauguin visited Theo in January 1889 and wrote to Vincent that he had seen his "nature morte jaune, pommes et citrons."[21] After receiving this letter, van Gogh reported that he had finished a new still life—*Still Life of Oranges and Lemons with Blue Gloves* (fig. 2.10). This still life bears traces of Gauguin's influence, particularly in van Gogh's use of contour lines around the fruit and gloves. Gauguin

[18] George Shackelford in Eliza E., Rathbone and George T. M. Shackelford, *Impressionist Still Life* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2001), 182. This painting is not widely discussed in the secondary literature, and not at all in the primary literature. In addition to Shackelford's account, see also Naomi E. Maurer, *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom: The Thought and Art of Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 58. The canvas was not exhibited during Gauguin's lifetime.

[19] Indeed, in laboratory psychological experiments, nostalgic reminiscing was correlated with increased perception of warmth. Described in Constantine Sedikedes et al., "To Nostalgize: Mixing Memory with Affect and Desire," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 51 (2015): 247-248, 254, based upon references therein.

The only color that I discuss for its nostalgic resonance is yellow; however future work may look into whether Gauguin's use of color was itself mnemonic or nostalgic by further exploring his color symbolism, his writing on color, and the specific pigments he used in Tahiti when referencing France.

[20] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 7 May 1888, Jansen letter 606.

[21] Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh, 16 Jan 1889, Jansen letter 734. The still life Gauguin saw is identified in note 3 as *Quinces, lemons, pears and grapes*. "A yellow still life, apples and lemons."

could have seen this canvas as well, as van Gogh sent it to Theo in May 1889.[22] Gauguin continued to pay visits to Theo, one of which he described in a letter the following March: “J’ai vu avec beaucoup d’attention vos travaux depuis que nous nous sommes quittés; chez votre frère d’abord et à l’exposition des Indépendants. […] Je vous fais mon sincère compliment, et pour beaucoup d’artistes vous êtes dans l’exposition le plus remarquable. Avec des choses de nature vous êtes là le *seul qui pense*."[23] Thus Gauguin had expressed his approval of these works to van Gogh during his lifetime, and, based on the style, van Gogh kept Gauguin in mind as he made the final version in January of 1889—just after Gauguin had left Arles. Gauguin, in turn, thought of van Gogh years later as he made his own attempt at a still life of yellow fruit.

Tahitian Oranges evokes van Gogh’s sunflower still lifes as well, most clearly in their shared yellow-on-yellow color scheme (see fig. 1.33). Gauguin thought highly of the sunflowers, regarding them as “une page parfaite d’un style essentiellement Vincent.”[24] Van Gogh had in fact conceived of his sunflowers as a permutation of his yellow fruit still lifes. He wrote to Theo, "Les tournesols avancent, il y a un nouveau bouquet de 14 fleurs sur fond jaune vert, c’est donc exactement le même effet – mais en plus grand format, toile de 30 – qu’une nature morte de coings et de citrons que tu as

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[22] Provenance as listed on the museum website: National Gallery of Art, “The Collection: *Still Life of Oranges and Lemons with Blue Gloves*,” s.v. Vincent van Gogh, *http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.164923.html* (accessed July 18, 2016).

[23] Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh, 20 March 1890, Jansen letter 859. “I’ve looked most attentively at your works since we parted; first at your brother’s place... I offer you my sincere compliments, and for many artists you are the most remarkable in the exhibition. With things from nature you’re the *only one there who thinks*.” All translations of van Gogh correspondence are from Jansen et al.

[24] Gauguin to Vincent Van Gogh, c. 8-16 January 1889, Jansen letter 734. “A perfect page of an essential ‘Vincent’ style.” Vincent wrote to Theo van Gogh that Gauguin had proposed an exchange for a *Sunflowers* canvas, 17 January 1889, Jansen letter 736.

déjà mais dans les tournesols la peinture est bien plus simple."[25] Gauguin achieved with his *Tahitian Oranges* what van Gogh had set out to do with his sunflowers: to transform van Gogh's original still lifes of fruit into something "bien plus simple." This dialogue again reveals still life as a site of exchange between van Gogh and Gauguin, carried out largely after but in memory of their time in Arles.

Oranges, like oleanders, grew naturally in both France and Tahiti. Gauguin's choice of fruit and flowers available in both locations, distant as they are, highlights the connection he drew between his homeland and Tahiti in the still-life genre. Not native to any Oceanic island, oranges were imported to Tahiti from Europe. During the nineteenth century it was believed that Captain Cook himself brought the seeds to Tahiti and planted them on the *Pointe Vénus*.[26] Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century a plague struck the orange trees and, alongside aggressive exportation of the fruit, they became increasingly difficult to find in easily accessible locations.[27] Members of the local population went on days-long treks to gather oranges, carrying filled sacks home on their backs. Gauguin did not have access to fresh fruit, and his diet consisted instead of canned and imported goods purchased from the local Chinese grocer.[28] Thus, even in this tropical paradise, the

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[25] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 26 August 1888. Jansen letter 669. "The sunflowers are progressing; there's a new bouquet of 14 flowers on a green-yellow background, so it's exactly the same effect — but in larger format, no. 30 canvas — as a still life of quinces and lemons that you already have, but in the sunflowers the painting is much simpler."

[26] As reported in Cuzent 1860, 199. According to the annotated 1983 edition of this text, this is an often-repeated error. Gilbert Cuzent and Jacques Florence, *Archipel de Tahiti: recherches sur les principales productions végétales* (Papeete, Tahiti: Éditions Haere Po No Tahiti, 1983), 129.

[27] Cuzent 1860, 202-03. Gauguin also noted that orange trees grow only in specific parts of the island in a passage of *Les Guêpes* titled "L'Agriculture": "Pense-t-on bien ce que peut être Tahiti en ce qui concerne sa bande de terre cultivable? Ici c'est le taro, là c'est le sous-bois propice à la vanille, au café. Là les orangers pousseront *là seulement* et *non pas ici*." Gauguin, "L'Agriculture," *Les Guêpes* 17 (12 June 1900). Reprinted in Paul Gauguin, *Gauguin Journaliste à Tahiti et ses articles des "Guêpes"*, ed. Bengt Danielsson and Patrick O'Reilly (Paris: Société Des Océanistes, 1966), 46.

[28] David Sweetman, *Paul Gauguin: A Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 298.

orange was for Gauguin a forbidden fruit, corrupted by a plague that, perhaps metaphorical in his eyes for the Tahitian peoples themselves, threatened their existence in all but the most remote of locations. This local history is reflected in the way Gauguin depicted the oranges. The composition shares with religious icons a golden tone and stark simplicity that seemingly separates it from the earthly world. In this way the oranges are treated not as a part of Gauguin's diet but as objects of reverence and remembrance.

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Gauguin's still-life painting before Tahiti was self-referential: it was about itself and the creative process, and even when he referenced other artists and friends such as Degas, Cézanne, Charles Laval, Émile Bernard, Madeleine Bernard, Madame Gloanec, or Meijer de Haan, he did so in the present tense, without evoking the passage of time. In *Tahitian Oranges* and *Flowers of France*, Gauguin incorporated objects that were entirely of his present moment—local children, oleanders, oranges—and yet at the same time they refer emphatically to the past in France. This type of hybridity is one of Gauguin's most compelling achievements of this period, and it recurs in his greatest works, most notably *Ia Orana Maria* (1891, Metropolitan Museum of Art).[29] As opposed to figure paintings, in the still lifes Gauguin marshaled the power of these multivalent objects not only to join the cultures of distant locales, but to bridge time, as well. In *Ia Orana Maria*, Gauguin juxtaposed Eastern and Western spirituality. In *Te Nave Nave Fenua* (1892, Ohara Museum of Art) and *Parau na te varua ino* (1892, National Gallery of Art), Europe and Oceania are opposed through their constructions of female beauty. In

[29] Stuckey writes that *The Flowers of France* "functions first and foremost as the West in the East-meets-West images that form a group apart in Gauguin's early Tahitian paintings." Others he accords this distinction are *Faaturuma; Ia Orana Maria; Te Nave Nave Fenua; Parau na te varua ino*. Stuckey in *The Art of Paul Gauguin*, 220.

the still lifes, however, this binary refers to the artist's personal experience spanning these two locales. The genre that began as clever and playful experimentation shared among friends became the genre in which to remember and commemorate those friends.

The Royal End (Arii Matamoe)

Gauguin inscribed his Tahitian title, *Arii Matamoe,* on this canvas in the patterned textile background and supplied the translation, *La Fin royale* (fig. 2.11).[30] *Arii* refers to Tahitian chiefs or a person with high-ranking status, or as Gauguin has it, royalty. The translation "*fin*" or "end" for *matamoe* is less obvious. *Matamoe* is a compound word consisting of "mata," meaning eyes and "moe" which means sleeping or closed. Together the word implies closed or sleeping eyes. Scott Allan suggests that Gauguin's source for this compound word and its meaning was Pierre Loti's *Mariage de Loti*. In the climactic moment when the protagonist, Loti, meets his deceased brother's Tahitian widow, she refers to her late husband as, "le marin *dont les yeux sommeillent* (*mata moé*), c'est à dire: qui n'est plus…"[31] This explains Gauguin's association of the word with death.

As a "royal end," the title refers obliquely to the death of King Pomare V, the Tahitian head of state, who died of alcoholism days after Gauguin's arrival in Tahiti.[32] Gauguin reported two years later in his pseudo-autobiographical memoire *Noa Noa* that "Il n'y avait qu'un roi de moins. Avec lui disparaissaient les derniers vestiges des

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[30] The painting was listed as number 12, "*Arii matamoe*. (La Fin royale)" in the catalogue accompanying the 1893 Durand-Ruel exhibition. "Exposition d'Œuvres récentes de Paul Gauguin," exh. cat., Durand-Ruel, Paris, November 1893.

[31] Pierre Loti, *Le mariage de Loti* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1903 [original 1878]), 193. Italics and ellipses in the original. This source is identified by and quoted in Scott Allan, "'A Pretty Piece of Painting': Gauguin's 'Arii Matamoe'," *Getty Research Journal* 4 (2012), 80. Allan also explains the literal translations of *mata* and *moe*, 79.

[32] Allan, 80.

habitudes et des grandeurs anciennes. Avec lui la tradition maorie était morte."[33] When the king first died, however, Gauguin's attitude was less foreboding and more that of an intrigued observer. He described in detail to his wife the melodious songs and a mule-drawn hearse that accompanied the funeral procession.[34] Gauguin's narrative of disappointment upon arrival in a vanished paradise was a performed one that derived from a long-running literary tradition of travel writing in which paradise is always already lost. The most famous authors in this genre wrote about Tahiti specifically, beginning with Louis Antoine de Bougainville and Denis Diderot, and most recently in Gauguin's time, Pierre Loti in his best-selling novel *Le Mariage de Loti*.[35]

Gauguin formulated his notion of pre-colonial Tahitian funerary practices from J.-A. Moerenhout's book, *Voyages aux îles du grand océan*, which he borrowed from the library of Auguste Goupil in Papeete in 1891.[36] Moerenhout explained that the corpse was displayed in a funerary chamber for several days during which family and friends would visit and mourn the deceased. This room was decorated with fabrics in order to create a somber atmosphere.[37] The body would remain above-ground for a period of time until it began to decay, at which point, in certain circumstances, the head was separated from the body and kept in "cavernes inaccessibles et secrètes" in the mountains along

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[33] Paul Gauguin, "Le conteur parle," chapter two of *Noa Noa*, Louvre manuscript. *Gauguin écrivain, Ancien culte mahorie, Noa Noa, Diverses choses*, ed. Isabelle Cahn [DVD] (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2003), 32. "There was one king fewer. With him had disappeared the last vestiges of ancient customs. With him Maori history had died." Guérin, 78, with modifications.

[34] Gauguin to Mette, July 1891. Paul Gauguin, *Lettres à sa femme et à ses amis*, ed. Maurice Malingue. (Paris: Grasset, 1992), 221-22.

[35] I will more closely examine this literary tradition when I return to this painting in section V.

[36] Gilles Manceron, "Koké and Tépéva: Victor Segalen in Gauguin's Footsteps," in *Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. George Shackelford and Claire Frèches-Thory (Boston: MFA Publications, 2004), 278.

[37] Jacques Antoine Moerenhout, *Voyages aux îles du Grand océan* (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1837), 547.

with the heads of previously deceased family members.[38] Gauguin appears to have combined these separate stages in the painting, which depicts the decorated funerary chamber and mourning guests along with the severed head.

The Royal End appears on its surface to perpetuate the myth of lost paradise, symbolizing the demise of Tahitian culture. To depict the head of state decapitated in this way suggested, as Gauguin later wrote in *Noa Noa*, that the Tahitian way of life had died along with the king. Some scholars have continued to interpret the painting as well as *Noa Noa* along these lines.[39] While Gauguin's supportive critics did indeed make that claim, it should not be taken at face value. Other scholars have shown that, instead of a straightforward rehearsal of the voyage narrative tradition that rues a lost paradise, the text and the painting in fact critiqued it.[40]

In this way, *Arii Matamoe* encapsulates a different, more romantic kind of nostalgia, in which longing is expressed not for one's own past, but for a past time or place that one never even knew. Edmond de Goncourt evoked this type of nostalgia in a journal entry in his *Mémoires de la vie littéraire*: "Nous sommes pleins de nostalgies. Et puis quand à la nostalgie d'un pays se joint la nostalgie d'un temps… comme vous par exemple du XVIIIe siècle… comme moi de la Venise de Casanova, avec embranchement

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[38] Moerenhout, 554. "Inaccessible and secret caverns." Scott Allan refers to both of these passages in Moerenhout. Scott Allan, "'A Pretty Piece of Painting': Gauguin's 'Arii Matamoe'," *Getty Research Journal* 4 (2012), 82.

[39] Vincent Gille, "The last orientalist: portrait of the artist as Mohican," in *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*, ed. Belinda Thomson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 51; Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk, *Paradise Reviewed: An Interpretation of Gauguin's Polynesian Symbolism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 62-63; Ronald Pickvance, *Gauguin* (Martigny: Fondation Pierre Gianadda, 1998), 283.

[40] Linda Goddard, "Gauguin's Guidebooks: Noa Noa in the Context of Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing," in *Strange Sisters: Literature and Aesthetics in the Nineteenth Century,* ed. Francesca Orestano and Francesca Frigerio (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 241. Also Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20.

sur Chypre, oh! alors, c'est complet…"[41] Along similar lines, the critic Claude Roger-Marx referred to this type of nostalgia when he wrote that Gauguin "s'était rencontrée cette nostalgie des pays de rêve à peine entrevus, inoubliablement aimés."[42] I will return to this painting, and alternative readings of it, after more deeply examining the voyage narrative tradition in section V.

II. Nostalgia Then

While I have sketched above the role of nostalgia in the three paintings under consideration, a deeper understanding of nostalgia historically, culturally, and scientifically can further reveal how the concept operates within and structures these works. In this section, I will offer a broad history of nostalgia, followed by its evolution within the medical and psychiatric profession in the nineteenth century. Gauguin lived at a pivotal time for nostalgia, during which it fell out of medical diagnostic manuals and migrated into literature. Here, I will address its earliest manifestations in literature, but will leave its role in travel literature for section V. In order to speculate upon the meaning nostalgia held for Gauguin, I will look to letters written by the artist and by Vincent van Gogh, as well as to art criticism of Gauguin's work.

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[41] Entry dated 23 August [1862]. Ellipses in the original when not in brackets. Edmond de Goncourt, *Journals des Goncourt: Mémoires de la vie littéraire* vol. 2 (Paris: G. Charpentier et cie, 1888-92), 51. "We are full of nostalgia. And when nostalgia for a place joins nostalgia for a time… like you for example for the eighteenth century… like me for the Venice of Casanova, with a side route to Cyprus, oh! then, it is complete." Translations are my own unless otherwise noted or cited (except, as noted above, in the case of all van Gogh correspondence, which is translated by Jansen et al.)

[42] Claude Roger-Marx, "Revue artistique: Exposition Paul Gauguin," *Revue Encyclopédique* 4.7 (1 February 1894), 34. "Gauguin had already encountered this nostalgia for lands of his dreams, barely glimpsed, unforgettably loved." I will further historically and culturally situate this type of nostalgia in the following section.

General History

The word nostalgia was created by a Swiss doctor in the seventeenth century to diagnose what he perceived as an illness afflicting soldiers and housekeepers who travelled far from home. He derived the word from Greek roots: "nostos," or return home, and "algia," longing.[43] The inspiration for this Greek construction was likely Homer's Odysseus, who fought gods, monsters, and possessive lovers, and nonetheless continued his quest to return home to his wife Penelope and son Telemachus, and to reclaim his kingdom.[44] During the nineteenth century, *nostalgie* was often used interchangeably with *mal du pays*, or homesickness. Along with amnesia and its antithesis hypermnesia, nostalgia was considered pathological, a *maladie de la mémoire*, largely constructed as part of an attempt to stake out what was "normal" in opposition to the allegedly pathological.[45] Nostalgia remained a diagnosable disease for much of the century, and the best cure was to send the patient back to his or her longed-for home. When this was not possible, doctors tried to distract patients with other hobbies or passions, but were perplexed when, more often than not, patients did not want to be "cured," but rather found their greatest satisfaction in indulging and preserving the "illness" itself.[46]

Nineteenth-century French doctors treated nostalgia with the utmost concern and respect as evidenced by its appearance in medical treatises and encyclopedias throughout

[43] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii.

[44] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 191.

[45] Michael S. Roth, *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

[46] Roth 2012, 10-11.

the century. This so-called disease was deemed potentially fatal, and regularly considered a cause of death.[47] The painful condition was described in an encyclopedia of medical sciences as late as 1879:

> Les souvenirs d'enfance les plus éloignés et depuis longtemps éteints, viennent assaillir comme un essaim d'abeilles l'esprit du nostomane pour le cribler d'aiguillons douloureux. Tel individu qui depuis de longues années a quitté le pays natal […] qui a visité les contrées les plus riantes et les plus pittoresques, se prend à regretter soudain, surtout s'il vient à être malade, la vie et les habitudes de son enfance.[48]

The military and navy were the professions considered most pre-disposed to nostalgia, and this subset of the population received particular attention in publications on the subject. For example, the same encyclopedia described the danger of too many soldiers from the same region serving in a single brigade, which could cause an "epidemie de nostalgie" among them. Legislators addressed and eliminated this threat, the entry explained, with an 1832 law requiring geographic diversity in each brigade.[49] Gauguin was a sailor in the 1860s[50] and given the widespread concern nostalgia continued to elicit at mid-century, he was likely aware of the "dangers" of extended travel away from home.

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[47] Roth 2012, chapter 2: "Dying of the past: Medical studies of nostalgia in nineteenth-century France," especially p. 34. See also the encyclopedia citations that follow below.

[48] V. Widal, "Nostalgie," in *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences médicales*, vol. 13 (Paris: Asselin, 1879), 365. "Memories from childhood can suddenly attack like a swarm of bees, assailing the victim with painful stings. A person who has long been gone from his home country, who has lived in the most pleasurable and picturesque places in the world, especially if he becomes sick, will suddenly miss the life and habits of his childhood."

[49] Widal, 359-60. The same concern appears as late as 1895: Jules Eugène Rochard, "Hygiène Navale," in *Encyclopédie d'hygiène et de médecine publique* vol. 7 [1895] (Paris: Lecrosnier et Babé, 1890-97), 652.

[50] Sweetman, 41-44.

Nostalgia was tied to concepts of nationhood and colonization. It was considered an evolutionary necessity for humankind: if people were willing to live anywhere, they would all migrate to the most desirable location, abandoning some regions and overwhelming others.[51] Scientists thus acknowledged the belief that people of all nations have nostalgia for their own homeland, but nonetheless, “Parmi les peuples civilisés, le Français et le Suisse sont ceux qui fournissent le plus de nostalgiques. Ils aiment leur pays et ne l’abandonnent pas volontiers; ils se laissent plus facilement retenir par les liens de la famille et l’attrait du sol natal."[52] It was due to this attachment to their homeland, doctors insisted, that the French were weak colonizers while the English, who had nothing to miss at home, were the strongest colonizers.[53] As late as 1895, the *Encyclopédie d'hygiène et de médecine publique* described the threat of nostalgia for those living in colonies.[54] As Gauguin scanned the exhibits of French colonies on display to visitors of 1889 Universal Exposition, his interest in moving to one of them would have been understood to serve not only his own personal and professional interests, but patriotic ones as well.

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[51] "Chacun ici-bas, a dit Alibert s'imagine que son pays natal est distingué des autres par des faveurs singulières, par des attributs rares et particuliers. La nature a eu besoin de cette illusion pour retenir chaque homme dans ses foyers’ et aussi, ajouterons-nous, pour éviter l'entassement de tous les habitants du globe dans les climats tempérés et dans un espace trop restreint pour les commodités de l'existence. Voilà pourquoi la nostalgie est de tous les pays, quel que soit le degré de civilisation de leurs habitants, quelque aride que soit la contrée où ils ont été bien élevés." Widal 1879, 360-61.

[52] Raoul Chenu, *De la nostalgie* (Paris: Impr. de A. Parent, 1877), 33. "Among civilized peoples, the French and the Swiss are those who become the most nostalgic. They love their country and never abandon it willingly; they allow themselves to cling to familial ties and the attraction of their native soil."

[53] As it was put by Widal in his encyclopedia entry, which is based on Chenu’s treatise, “L’Anglais est rarement nostalgique. Son amour des voyages son esprit aventureux et cosmopolite ses préoccupations commerciales le mettent à l’abri de ce mal sans lui ôter rien de son attachement pour son pays dont il désire la grandeur sans en regretter le sol n’est-ce pas là le secret de son génie colonisateur ?" Widal, 362.

[54] Rochard, "Hygiène générale," in *Encyclopédie d'hygiène et de médecine publique* vol. 1 [1890], 447.

Doctors largely agreed that nostalgia was on the decline by the 1870s, but they disagreed on the reason for this decline. While a minority claimed the disease never existed, the more widespread view held that it was indeed a disease that had ravaged France, but thanks to progress in medical science as well as industrialization—connecting people with their hometowns through steam engines, telegraphs, and faster mail service—the ailment was conquered. This allowed doctors to claim a dual victory for their profession and for France.[55]

Despite the overwhelming majority of doctors who identified nostalgia as an illness despite the apparent pleasure it afforded their patients, some scientists of note departed from this view and emphasized the positive byproducts of longing for the past. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Charles Darwin considered "the vivid recollection of our former home, or of long-past happy days" as part of the family of tender emotions, of which he wrote: "The feelings which are called tender are difficult to analyze; they seem to be compounded of affection, joy, and especially of sympathy. These feelings are in themselves of a pleasurable nature."[56] Later in the century, French psychologist Théodule Ribot put forward the controversial belief that the past is not something real and readily accessible, but exists only in the brain, as a construction. He understood the continuity between memory and consciousness as an essential feature in

[55] The same Encyclopedia of Hygiene claimed, "La réduction considérable de la durée des campagnes, la rapidité des traversées, la facilité des correspondances et, sans doute aussi, la diffusion de l'instruction, l'élévation continue du niveau intellectuel dans les moindres communes de notre pays ont presque fait disparaître la nostalgie, cette navrante maladie morale, aux progrès irrésistibles de laquelle on assistait désarmé et impuissant quand on ne pouvait pas rapatrier ceux qui en étaient atteints." Jules Eugène Rochard. *Encyclopédie d'hygiène et de médecine publique*. Paris: Lecrosnier et Babé, 1890-97. Tome 7 [1895] p. 652. For this attitude as a widely-held belief, see Roth (2012), 35, 57.

[56] Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (New York: D. Appleton, 1873), 216-17, as quoted in Sedikides et al. (2015, 192), who made this connection between Darwin's description of tender emotions and nostalgia.

forging selfhood,[57] which anticipates the present-day understanding of nostalgia as a resource in promoting perceptions of self-continuity.

Literary Appropriation

The sentimental side of nostalgia, largely ignored within the medical profession, gained greater prominence once novelists, poets, and critics adopted the term. Moïse Le Yanouac identifies Honoré de Balzac as the first to couple the word "nostalgia" with this type of romantic longing, described since Homer's time but as yet unconnected to the medical term. Le Yanouac describes two types of nostalgia that operate as pendants to each other in Balzac's *Splendeurs et Misères des courtisanes*, published in 1838 under the title *La Torpille*. One, which he calls "nostalgie érotique" transforms nostalgia from a longing for a specific place into a longing for love; while the other, "nostalgie gastrique," pertains to food. In this way, Balzac expanded the idea of nostalgia from a strictly medical diagnosis of yearning for home to a more generalized notion of desire.[58] This comes increasingly close to the type of nostalgia seen in Gauguin's fruit and flower still lifes: it is not a sickness or a debilitating longing for France itself, but a sentimental yearning for a time lost to the past.

Édouard Shuré, a theosophist whose work Gauguin admired, published an installation of his "Paysages Historiques de France" in August 1891, in which he referred to nostalgia twice in the span of fifteen pages: "Le génie païen et le génie chrétien, qui

[57] For example, Ribot writes, "Notre moi de chaque moment, ce présent perpétuellement renouvelé, est en grande partie alimenté par la mémoire, c'est-à-dire qu'à l'état présent s'associent d'autres états qui, rejetés et localisés dans le passé, constituent notre personne telle qu'elle s'apparait à chaque instant." Théodule Armand Ribot, *Les Maladies de la mémoire* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1895), 83. See also Roth 2012, 11.

[58] Moïse Le Yaouanc, *Nosographie de l'humanité balzacienne* (Paris: Librairie Maloine, 1959), 422-23; and Lisa O'Sullivan, "Lost Imagination: French Nostalgia and the Turn to Memory," *Memory Studies* 3.3 (July 2010), 193.

sont entrés dans la substance de son être, lutteront en lui sans pouvoir se vaincre. Il sera torturé à la fois par le désir de la terre et par la nostalgie du ciel, et il mourra fou de ne pouvoir les étreindre dans une même possession," and, "Il est travaillé par le désir de l'âme celtique, la nostalgie de la nature et de la femme, dans la prison du dogme et du couvent."[59] His use of the word shows how expansively it was employed to refer to an abstract form of longing.

In his *Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, Edmond de Goncourt employed "nostalgie" in a variety of ways. The first, quoted above, described his nostalgia for a place and time that he never knew—the eighteenth century, or the Venice of Casanova.[60] This quite liberal use of nostalgia is the opposite of the very traditional way he employed the term three months into the Siege of Paris, on December 25, 1870:

> En ce moment une grande mortalité à Paris. Elle n'est pas absolument produite par la faim. Et les morts ne se composent pas uniquement des malades et des maladifs, achevés par le régime, les privations continuelles. Cette mortalité est faite beaucoup par le chagrin, le déplacement, la nostalgie du chez soi, du coin de soleil que possédaient les gens des environs de Paris. Dans la petite émigration de Croissy-Beaubourg (vingt-cinq personnes au plus), il y a déjà cinq morts.[61]

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[59] Édouard Shuré, "Paysages Historiques de France. IV: Les Légendes de La Bretagne et le Génie Celtique, Saint Patrice, Merlin, Taliésinn," *Revue des deux mondes* 106 (15 August 1891), 879, 894. "The pagan genius and the Christian genius, who entered the substance of his being, will fight within himself without being able to win. He will be tortured at the same time by the desire for earth and by nostalgia for the sky, and he will die crazy from never being able to grasp both in a single possession." And, "He is wrought by the desire of the Celtic soul, nostalgia for nature and for women, in the prison of dogma and of the convent."

[60] Quoted and translated above, *Journals des Goncourt*, 51 ("… comme vous par exemple du XVIIIe siècle… comme moi de la Venise de Casanova.")

[61] Edmond de Goncourt, *Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, 163-64. "In this moment, a grand mortality in Paris. It is not entirely generated by hunger. And the dead do not consist solely of the sick and diseased, finished off by the regime, by continual deprivation. This mortality is brought about more by sorrow, displacement,

Here, he returned to the medical conception of nostalgia, as a pain even more threatening than hunger, a desire to return home so strong that it may result in death.

An *Encyclopedie universelle* of 1892 similarly cited both conceptions of nostalgia. On the one hand, it was a "maladie causée par un désir violent dé retourner dans sa patrie. […] Ce n'est qu'un trouble psychique, mais ce trouble peut amener la mort." The author went on to quote a passage from Charles Baudelaire as a literary example, in which this *maladie* can have *bonheurs inconnus*: "Nous fumâmes longuement quelques cigares dont la saveur et le parfum incomparables donnaient à l'âme la nostalgie de pays et de bonheurs inconnus."[62] Baudelaire's connection of taste and smell to a nostalgic sensation, over forty years before Marcel Proust wrote about a madeleine, is not only a common experience but a scientific reality, of which Gauguin was well aware. Baudelaire described a sensation of nostalgia for an "unknown pleasure" that resembles de Goncourt's nostalgia for the Venice of Cassanova, or Gauguin's for an

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nostalgia for one's home, for the corner of the sun that the people on the environs of Paris once had. In the small emigration from Croissy-Beaubourg (twenty-five people at the most), there are already five dead."

[62] Paul Guérin, *Lettres, sciences, arts; encyclopédie universelle, dictionnaire des dictionnaires* vol. 5 (Paris: Librairie des imprimeries réunies [1892]), 396. An "illness caused by a violent desire to return to one's homeland. […] This is only a psychological problem, but this problem can cause death." The Baudelaire quotation is from "Le Joueur généreux," in *Petits Poèmes en prose*. "We smoked at length a few cigars whose incomparable flavor and aroma gave the soul nostalgia for one's country and for unknown pleasures."

In this chapter I only address French literature that specifically employs the term "nostalgie." More work has been done on literature in which nostalgia is modeled without being named. Robert Cohn, for example, discusses how Stéphane Mallarmé often locates beauty in a distant or lost past. (Robert Cohn, "'O quel lointain': Memory in Mallarmé," *Romanic Review* 70.2 (March 1, 1979), 135-36.) Christophe Ippolito describes a character in Gustave Flaubert's *Voyage à Carthage* who feels he is forgetting his voyage and in response, is compelled to write a book, as if to hold on to the memory. (Christophe Ippolito, *Narrative Memory in Flaubert's Works* (New York: P. Lang, 2001), 27.) Nicholas Dames argues that "a peculiarity unique to Victorian narratives" is "the equation of remembrance to a pleasurable sort of forgetting." Characters in these novels enact a type of selective forgetting in order to seal off their memories from the contamination of less-pleasurable details. (Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-6.) An expansion of my project may include deeper consideration of these types of texts and how they inform the expression of nostalgia that I discuss in Gauguin's work.

untainted Tahiti. This dictionary entry, like the de Goncourt memoires, brings together the medical and literary concepts of nostalgia, showing that it was not uncommon in the late-nineteenth century, as the term was in transition, to understand nostalgia in both senses.

Use by Gauguin and his Critics

Inspection of Gauguin's, van Gogh's, and critics' use of nostalgia in their writing reveals a dual understanding of nostalgia in medical and literary contexts. In November 1888, van Gogh wrote to Theo from Arles, "Gauguin tout en travaillant dur ici a toujours la nostalgie des pays chauds."[63] Gauguin echoed the same desire to Theo the following month: "J'ai de plus en plus la nostalgie des Antilles et naturellement aussitôt que j'aurai vendu un peu j'irai là-bas."[64] Nostalgia for "hot countries" was evidently a topic of discussion that winter in Arles. A year later, having spent several months in and out of hospitals, van Gogh expressed a much more melancholic version of nostalgia:

> Cela m'a fait beaucoup penser à des peintres belges de ces jours ci et durant ma maladie, que tu me disais que Maus avait été voir mes toiles. Alors des souvenirs me viennent comme une avalanche et je cherche à me reconstruire toute cette école d'artistes modernes flamands jusqu'à en avoir le mal du pays comme un Suisse. Ce qui n'est pas bien car notre chemin est – en avant – et retourner sur ses

[63] Vincent to Theo Van Gogh, 3 November 1888, Jansen letter 717. "Gauguin, while he works hard here, always has a nostalgic longing for hot countries."

[64] Gauguin to Theo van Gogh, 3rd week of December 1888. *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: documents, témoignages*, vol. 1., ed. Victor Merlhès (Paris: Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1984), 302. "I have more and more nostalgia for the Caribbean, and naturally as soon as I sell something I will go back."

> pas c'est défendu et impossible. C. à dire on pourrait y penser sans s'abimer dans le passé d'une nostalgie trop melancolique.[65]

His reference to feeling "homesick as a Swiss" reveals his awareness of the medical origin of the term, and the negative connotation he bestows upon it aligns with this older history.

Gauguin's critics ascribed to him a more romanticized brand of literary nostalgia. Gustave Geffroy used nostalgia to describe Gauguin's motivation: "Paul Gauguin […] m'apparaît ainsi: Une inquiétude et une volonté—une recherche fébrile, une nostalgie de grand art, un désir violent d'échapper à l'art du passé, à l'art des originaux contemporains."[66] In Octave Mirbeau's article on Gauguin in *L'Echo de Paris*, published just prior to Gauguin's departure for Tahiti, the critic mused, "Le rêve ne se repose jamais dans cet ardent cerveau; il grandit et s'exalte à mesure qu'il se formule davantage. Et voilà que la nostalgie lui revient de ces pays où s'égrenèrent ses premiers songes."[67] Again, this is an expression of nostalgia for a never-known land of dreams and fantasies, much like Roger-Marx's claim three years later that Gauguin "s'était rencontrée cette nostalgie des pays de rêve à peine entrevus, inoubliablement aimés."[68]

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[65] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 5 and 6 Sept 1889, Jansen letter 800. "What you told me about Maus having been to see my canvases has made me think a lot about Belgian painters lately and during my illness. Then memories come to me like an avalanche, and I try to rebuild for myself that whole school of modern Flemish artists to the point of being as homesick as a Swiss. Which isn't good, for our path is – onward – and retracing one's steps is forbidden and impossible. That's to say that one could think about it without getting lost in the past through an over-melancholy nostalgia."

[66] Gustave Geffroy, "Paul Gauguin," *Le Journal* (12 November 1893): 1. "Paul Gauguin appears to me like so: an anxiety and a passion—a feverish search, a nostalgia for great art, a fierce desire to escape from the art of the past, to the art of the original contemporaries."

[67] Octave Mirbeau, "Paul Gauguin," *L'Echo de Paris* (16 February 1891): 1. Gauguin subsequently pasted a clipping of the review in his *Cahier pour Aline*. "The dream never rests in this ardent brain; it grows and excites as it expresses itself ever more. And now nostalgia returns to him from these countries where he spread his first dreams."

[68] Quoted and translated above, Roger-Marx, 34.

III. Nostalgia Now

The historical overview above reveals the many meanings of nostalgia in operation during Gauguin's lifetime, as well as the artist's and his critics' multifaceted understanding of it. In section III, I introduce the present-day conception of nostalgia and in section IV, further explicate its psychological mechanisms. I offer this extended discussion of present-day nostalgia because I believe that, much like Baudelaire's and Proust's pre-neuroscientific awareness of the mnemonic power of taste and smell, Gauguin and his contemporaries were peripherally aware of the positive functions of nostalgia even if they did not codify them as clearly as scientists do today. Consequently, the psychological understanding of nostalgia today offers a framework through which to understand and interpret the nostalgia that seems to dwell in Gauguin's paintings.

Beginning near the end of the nineteenth century and continuing well into the twentieth, the treatment of nostalgia shifted out of the domain of medical doctors and into that of psychologists. It was still considered synonymous with homesickness, closely associated with depression, and deemed a barrier to progress.[69] Not until the turn of the twenty-first century did scientists heed the ever-present "sweet" side of nostalgia's bittersweetness. Experimental psychologist Constantine Sedikedes sees this recent turn as a return to the ancient roots of nostalgia in Homer's Odyssey. According to Sedikedes, Odysseus' nostalgia was a motivational force that kept him on track toward his goal, despite tempting and trying circumstances that may have otherwise led him astray. In this way, Homer represented nostalgia as a "psychological resource" that can help individuals

[69] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 193.

through life's challenges.[70] As Stephen Eisenman points out, Odysseus' story would have been attractive to Gauguin—the Greek hero travelled to a distant paradise, was seduced there by a woman, but "nevertheless yearned for home."[71]

Nostalgia is now considered an emotion, which psychologists define very simply as "sentimentality for the past."[72] It is not an illness or disorder, but rather an entirely normal and constructive aspect of daily life. Based on a survey of dictionaries, definitions emphasize sentimental longing, bittersweetness, and positivity.[73] Dictionary definitions correspond closely with "layperson definitions," which view nostalgia as "a predominantly positive, social, and past-oriented emotion." Nostalgic thoughts are typically centered upon a personally meaningful event, and are almost always social in nature, conjuring the memory of a close relationship. These reminiscences are seen "through rose-colored glasses," making the person feel "most often happy but with a tinge of longing." The most common subjects of nostalgic memories are important relationships, settings, or periods in one's life. Taken together, laypersons today understand nostalgia as "a past-oriented, self-conscious (i.e., personally meaningful), keenly social, and bittersweet, albeit predominantly positive, emotion."[74] Nostalgia can arise from internal triggers such as feelings of loneliness, meaninglessness, fear of death, or discontinuity between one's former and present selves. External or environmental

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[70] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 191.

[71] Stephen Eisenman, *Paul Gauguin* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2010), 45. Eisenman makes this argument as part of his discussion of Gauguin's *Black Pigs*, 1891, which he writes may derive from the story of Circe turning Odysseus's crew into pigs.

[72] Vess 2012, 273 .

[73] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 194-95, 207.

[74] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 201-02. These findings are repeated in several studies, including Cheung et al.; Vess et al.; Juhl et al.; and Wildschut et al.

triggers of nostalgia range from music and song lyrics, to smells, tastes, and objects.[75] Researchers find these trends consistent across cultures, conducting experiments in eighteen countries on five continents. Their findings are generalizable across different age groups as well, including children, teens, and adults aged eighteen to ninety-one. [76] The longevity and pervasiveness of nostalgia, dating as psychologists believe back to Homer and across cultures, was recently accounted for in this way: "What is so special about nostalgia that it has remained a central and universal aspect of the human experience? Emerging research points to a provocative answer: Nostalgia promotes psychological health and well-being." [77] The author goes on to explain that nostalgia offers consolation in times of distress and can bolster one's sense of meaning in life, self-esteem, and feelings of social connectedness. In what follows, I will further discuss these and other functions of nostalgia in the context of Gauguin's writing and painting.

IV. Reflections in Yellow: The Studio of the South Revisited

While Gauguin rarely waxed nostalgic in his letters to his wife and friends, he was surrounded by warm memories of the past in the form of photographs of his family and paintings by artists he admired in France.[78] When Mette sent him a new photograph of the children, he responded, "Je te remercie de la photographie. Comme les enfants changent chaque jour. Tantôt ils ont une physionomie; tantôt une autre. Maintenant Clovis me ressemble quand j'avais son âge."[79] Through Gauguin's paintings, particularly

[75] Compiled by Sedikedes et al. 2015, 207, from a wide-ranging survey of studies by other authors.

[76] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 198-200, 207, based on their own research and studies by other authors.

[77] Matthew Baldwin, et al., "Remembering the Real Me: Nostalgia Offers a Window to the Intrinsic Self." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 108.1 (2015): 129.

[78] Gauguin to Mette, early April 1893. Malingue, 244.

[79] Gauguin to Mette, July 1892. Malingue, 234. "Thank you for the photograph. How the children are changing every day. Now Clovis looks like me at his age." All translations of Malingue's volume are from

Flowers of France and *Tahitian Oranges*, he most directly engaged with and indulged in nostalgic reminiscences. As I have suggested above, the nostalgic quality in his fruit and flower still lifes is not predominantly negative, but rather positive, and as I will argue below, forward-looking. These still lifes embody the duality of longing and hopefulness that defines nostalgia. If the paintings are the site of Gauguin's negotiation of nostalgia, in his letters we can locate both the triggers and the positive effects of this emotion. In this way, the psychology that I present here will act as scaffolding, a point of entry through which to examine and interpret the artist's letters and canvases.

As was introduced in the above description of nostalgia, it is an emotion that arises in response to "triggers" or "threats" (e.g. loneliness, awareness of mortality, fears of meaninglessness), and results in "functions"—the ensuing impact of experiencing the emotion, which are most often positive in nature (e.g. sociality, self-positivity, optimism, a sense of meaning in life). Sedikedes explains this "regulatory model," in which nostalgia is an emotion that promotes homeostasis, in this way:

> A noxious stimulus or aversive psychological/physiological state will have a negative influence on an outcome (e.g., function), but it will also trigger nostalgia. Nostalgia, in turn, will alleviate this negative influence. Accordingly, the negative direct influence of the noxious stimulus is attenuated or counteracted by its positive indirect influence via nostalgia."[80]

Strikingly, these threats and functions are often dually present in Gauguin's letters: he often expressed bitter loneliness, and yet also insistent optimism for his future. In a letter

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Paul Gauguin: Letters to his wife and friends, ed. Maurice Malingue, trans. Henry J. Stenning (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1949), 172.

[80] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 233.

to Mette that began with the complaint that she wrote too seldom, leaving him lonely and anxious about his family, he continued with the self-positive assessment, “Je suis assez content de mes derniers travaux et je sens que commence à posséder le caractère océanien et je puis assurer que ce que je fais ici n’a été fait par personne et qu’on ne connaît pas en France cela."[81] The following passage addresses this type of duality, bringing together findings from different studies:

> The human need for both growth and security is ‘a longstanding irony in human motivation,’ as they can oppose each other. A few attempts to integrate theories of growth and security claim that a person is constantly balancing between these two motives. […] Our current research suggests the possibility that nostalgia is a resource for balancing these opposing needs. Because nostalgia reminds people of who they “truly” are, it minimizes the need to meet extrinsic standards of value and “frees” people to explore and grow without experiencing anxiety associated with the need for extrinsic security. Perhaps this dynamic downplaying of security while also highlighting growth is why nostalgia gives people a sense of hope and optimism for the future.[82]

In this section, I will first discuss the social triggers and functions of nostalgia, contextualizing them with additional examples from Gauguin’s letters. I will then do the same with the self-oriented triggers and functions. After examining Gauguin’s letters in

[81] Gauguin to Mette, June 1892. Malingue, 231. “I am fairly pleased with my last works and feel there is dawning in me an Oceanic character, and I can assert that what I am doing here has not been done by anyone else and nothing like it is known in France.” Trans., 170.

[82] Baldwin 2015, 144.

the framework of nostalgia as scientists define it today, I will revisit the paintings to show how this lens inflects the interpretation of his work.

Social threats and functions of nostalgia

Several studies have shown that loneliness is the most common emotional trigger of nostalgia and that "lonely persons seek refuge in nostalgia."[83] In Gauguin's letters, loneliness proves an ever-present and potent feeling.[84] His letters to Mette and Daniel de Monfreid read as a litany: "Je commence à croire que tout le monde m'oublie à Paris."[85] "Heureusement que votre lettre m'est arrivé sinon mon courrier serait nul. Aucune nouvelle d'Europe."[86] "Voilà plusieurs courrier de suite que tu manques, ton silence est loin d'être affectueux."[87] "Ce mois-ci je n'ai aucune lettre de vous—du reste pas une—de personne."[88] "Ce mois-ci aucune lettre de France, ce n'est pas gai. Il faut avouer que tu n'aimes pas beaucoup écrire."[89] "Vous ne pouvez vous imaginer comme c'est triste de ne

[83] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 241-43.

[84] While Gauguin's letters, or any of his writing for that matter, should not be taken at face value, there are not strong external pressures for Gauguin to falsely claim loneliness and estrangement. This goes instead against his goal of projecting that he was fully immersed in Tahitian life and becoming "savage."

[85] Gauguin to Monfreid, 7 November 1891. *Lettres De Paul Gauguin à Georges-Daniel De Monfreid,* preface by Victor Segalen (Paris: Éditions Georges Crès et Cie, 1919), 80. "I am beginning to think that everyone in Paris is forgetting me." All translations of this volume are from *Letters of Paul Gauguin to Georges Daniel de Monfreid*, trans. Ruth Pielkovo, forward by Frederick O'Brien (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1923), 24.

[86] Gauguin to Monfreid, June 1892. *Lettres à Monfreid,* 90. "I was so glad to receive your letter, for otherwise my mailbag would have been empty. No news from Europe." Trans., 29.

[87] Gauguin to Mette, August 1892. Malingue, 234. ("Corrieur" is singular in the source.) "Several mails have come with no letter from you; your silence is the reverse of affectionate." Trans. 173.

[88] Gauguin to Monfreid, 8 December 1892. *Lettres à Monfreid*, 97; "This month no letter from you, or, for that matter, from anyone." Trans. 37.

[89] Gauguin to Mette, 8 December 1892. Malingue, 239. "No letter from France this month, which is not cheering. It must be confessed that you do not much like writing." Trans. 176.

pas recevoir de lettres quand on est si loin."[90] "Je reçois enfin une lettre de toi. C'est que j'ai toujours peur d'un Malheur quand je suis longtemps sans recevoir des nouvelles de toi et des enfants. Ta lettre est affectueuse mais bien triste. […] Néanmoins je suis bien seul."[91] Loneliness decreases the level of perceived social support, and these letters make clear that Gauguin indeed did not feel supported. Researchers find that nostalgia is a coping strategy that individuals can employ when "suitable interaction partners are unavailable,"—that is, when Gauguin's friends and family were an ocean away, and he did not speak the local language. In nostalgic reverie, "the mind is 'peopled,' as important figures from one's past are brought to life and become part of one's present."[92] In other words, in response to the decrease in perceived social support that loneliness triggers, nostalgia makes one imagine past friends, increasing perception of social support if not actual support. Yet Gauguin's letters consistently express the same lack of perceived support over the course of his two-year stay in Tahiti, growing to "le marasme le plus complet"[93] by December of 1892. It appears, then, that even if his loneliness induced nostalgia, the nostalgia did not have a mitigating effect, as the model predicts it should.

Psychologists allow for individual difference in the experience of nostalgia. One important trait that diminishes the positive effects of nostalgia in response to loneliness is

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[90] To Monfreid, 31 March 1893. *Lettres à Monfreid*, 112. "You cannot imagine how sad it is to not receive letters when one is so far away." On some occasions including this one, passages in the French edition are left out of the English edition, in which the translation is my own.

[91] To Mette, April 1893. Malingue, 242-44. "At last I have a letter from you. I am always afraid there has been an accident when I go so long without news of you and the children. Your letter is affectionate but melancholy… I am very much alone." Trans. 180.

[92] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 219, also 243-45.

[93] Gauguin to Monfreid, late December 1892. *Lettres à Monfreid*, 101. "Utter despair." Trans. 40. This despair is with respect to finances.

excessive self-centeredness upon one's personal goals: narcissism. Studies show that narcissistic participants do not derive the sociality-based benefits of nostalgia, such as perceptions of support in response to loneliness. These participants did experience the self-positive benefits of nostalgia, which I address in the following section.[94] Given Gauguin's single-minded and self-centered focus upon his art, this could explain his unceasing expressions of loneliness alongside his unflagging optimism: while nostalgia could not buffer the impact of his lack of social support, it could still foster a positive outlook.

Self-oriented threats and functions of nostalgia

Research into nostalgia, combined with findings from a field called terror management theory, posits that temporal consciousness—the human ability to think in terms of time—heightens the human awareness of mortality, but can also help reduce the negative effects of death-awareness.[95] This research finds that "mortality salience" is a threat that triggers nostalgia. Nostalgia heightens one's personal sense of meaning and self-esteem, which have a buffering effect on mortality salience. Therefore, as with loneliness, death-awareness induces nostalgia and is then diminished by it.[96] Individuals who are made acutely aware of their mortality will find a lack of meaning in their life, but not when they are protected by nostalgic reminiscing, in which case they retain this sense of meaning.[97] This mitigating effect can be as simple as the prevention of "death thoughts

[94] Sedikedes et al. 2015, 229-30, based on studies cited therein.

[95] Clay Routledge, Jamie Arndt, Constantine Sedikides, and Tim Wildschut. "A blast from the past: The terror management function of nostalgia." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44 (2008): 132.

[96] Routledge et al., 2008, 132-33, 137.

[97] Jacob Juhl and Clay Routledge, "Nostalgia Bolsters Perceptions of a Meaningful Self in a Meaningful World," in *The Experience of Meaning in Life Classical Perspectives, Emerging Themes, and Controversies*, ed. Joshua A. Hicks and Clay Routledge (Dordrecht, NY: Springer, 2013), 217-20.

from turning into death fears," so that individuals may be aware of their mortality but not crippled by anxiety; or it can go further, to instill life with a sense of purpose.[98]

Gauguin's correspondence reveals this type of mortality salience alongside a sense of purpose. In March of 1892, Gauguin left his hospital stay against the advice of his doctors, still quite ill and vomiting blood, but unable to afford their care.[99] That month, he wrote to Mette, "Chaque jour, je me dis, voilà un jour de gagné. Ai-je fait mon devoir ? Bien, allons-nous coucher maintenant, demain je serai peut-être mort."[100] At the same time, he expressed a similar sentiment to Monfreid: "Au lieu de perdre mes forces en travaux et inquiétudes du lendemain j'ai mis toutes mes forces dans la journée même. Tel de lutter qui ne remue son corps qu'au moment où il lutte. Quand je me couche le soir je me dis: voilà encore un journée de gagnée, demain je serai peut-être mort."[101] There is a certain casualness about his claims that "tomorrow I may be dead" that suggests he was not deeply anxious about his mortality, but rather resolved to continue his work. Two months later Gauguin sent a letter to Mette in which he reported on the deteriorating condition of his heart,[102] but also expressed a sense of the significance of his artistic endeavors in spite of this fear: "J'ai toujours la crainte d'être vieux gaga avant d'avoir terminé ce que j'ai entrepris."[103] There may indeed be a performative quality to these

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[98] Juhl 2013, 218; Sedikedes et al. 2015, 240.

[99] Gauguin to Monfreid, 11 March 1892, *Lettres à Monfreid*, 86.

[100] Gauguin to Mette, March 1892. Malingue, 226-27. "Every day, I say to myself, here is another day gained. Have I done my duty? Good, then let us retire to rest, for tomorrow I may be dead." Trans. 166.

[101] Gauguin to Monfreid, 11 March 1892. *Lettres à Monfreid*, 84. "Instead of wasting my strength working and worrying about tomorrow, I put everything into the present, like a fighter who does not move until the moment of the struggle. When I go to bed at night I say to myself—one more day gained, tomorrow I may be dead." Trans. 26-27.

[102] Gauguin to Mette, May 1892. Malingue, 230.

[103] *Ibid*. "I am always afraid of becoming senile before I have finished what I have undertaken."

statements, but they nonetheless express a desire to carry on with his project in the face of very real threats to his health and ability to work, pointing to the sense of meaning in response to the awareness of death that nostalgia can produce. The self-oriented function of nostalgia, however, goes far beyond assuaging fears of death.

Nostalgic reminiscence results in a host of "self-affirmation resources" that can be set off by any number of triggers. Psychologists have found a correlative relationship between feelings of nostalgia and disruptive life events such as health problems, changes in living conditions, and marital issues,[104] all of which would apply to Gauguin at this time. "Triggers," however, need not always come in the form of "threats."[105] For example, experiments simply using song lyrics or smells showed that both induced nostalgia and increased self-esteem.[106]

Nostalgia's strength lies in its ability to create harmony between a person's sense of self in the past and in the present by offering an image of their "intrinsic and authentic self." This inner, "intrinsic" sense of self is then integrated into the person's present self-concept.[107] By reminding oneself of a past that one remembers as positive, nostalgia boosts an individual's self-esteem in the present, which in turn promotes optimism for the future. It does so in a socially and psychologically healthy manner, not by avoiding or denying negative feedback, but by fostering honest self-assessment.[108] In this respect, the

[104] Baldwin 2015, 129.

[105] Vess 2012, 275.

[106] Sedikides 2015, 212.

[107] Baldwin et al. 2015, 130. Nostalgia is "thought to increase the positivity of self-conceptions and self-esteem by prompting a return to an idealized past and by 'bestowing an endearing luster on past selves that may not have seemed all that lustrous at the time'." Sedikides 2015, 210.

[108] Wing-Yee Cheung et al., "Back to the Future: Nostalgia Increases Optimism." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 39 (2013): 1493.

scientific study of nostalgia dovetails with the most recent theories in the cultural study of nostalgia. Cultural theorists Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering write that it is "possible to reclaim nostalgia as a mode of memory which is not singularly oriented to the past," but which allows "for possible transformation in the future."[109] They write as well that nostalgia is marked by a "straining towards a wholeness or unity of experience,"[110] and psychologists agree, finding that nostalgia actively forges the perception of continuity between past and present selves.[111]

These forms of optimism and self-esteem are ever-present in Gauguin's letters. In the same letter to Mette of March 1892 quoted above, in which he writes that "tomorrow I may be dead," he responds with confidence to his wife's concerns that he was doing his career a disservice by living so far away:

> Car je suis un artiste et tu as raison, tu n'es pas folle je suis un grand artiste et je le sais. C'est parce que je le suis que j'ai tellement enduré de souffrances. […] Tu me dis que j'ai tort de rester éloigné du centre artiste. Non, j'ai raison, je sais depuis longtemps ce que je fais et pourquoi je le fais. Mon centre artistique est dans mon cerveau et pas ailleurs et je suis fort parce que je ne suis jamais dérouté par les autres et que je fais ce qui est en moi.[112]

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[109] Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, "The Reclamation of Nostalgia," in *Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 118.

[110] Keightley and Pickering, 123-5.

[111] Baldwin 2015, 133-34; also Sedikides 2015, 212-15, based on a compilation of several studies.

[112] Gauguin to Mette, March 1892. Malingue, 224-25. "For I am an artist and you are right, you are not mad, I am a great artist and I know it. It is because I am that I have endured such sufferings. … You tell me that I am wrong to remain far away from the artistic center. No, I am right, I have known for a long time what I am doing, and why I do it. My artistic center is in my brain and not elsewhere and I am strong because I am never sidetracked by others, and do what is in me." Trans. 165.

In November 1892, just before the depths of his "despair" that would come that winter upon his inability to gather the funds to return to France, he wrote to Mette of his optimism for the future and the necessity of hope:

> Mais il faut que je continue la lutte, toujours, toujours. Et la faute retombe sur la Société. Tu n'as pas de confiance dans l'avenir ; mais moi j'ai de la confiance *parce que je veux en avoir*. Sans cela il y a longtemps que je me serais fait sauter le caisson. Espérer c'est presque vivre. Il me faut vivre pour faire mon devoir jusqu'au bout et je ne le peux qu'en forçant mes illusions, en me créant dans le rêve des espérances.[113]

Gauguin copied a similar statement on the power of positive thinking and one's individual agency in choosing happiness into his *Cahier pour Aline,* c.1892-93. In the section titled "De Richard Wagner," he transcribed, "Je veux être heureux, et celui-là seul l'est qui est libre."[114] What follows corresponds with the concept of nostalgia as a "window into the intrinsic self," which promotes continuity between past and future selves, and increases one's sense of self-determination and authenticity:[115] "Il s'ensuit que celui qui satisfait à l'intime nécessité de son être est libre, parce qu'il sent qu'il s'appartient, parce que tous ses actes correspondent à sa nature, à ses réelles

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[113] To Mette, 5 November 1892. Malingue, 238. "It is necessary that I continue the struggle always, always. And the fault again rebounds on Society. You have no confidence in the future; but as for me, I have confidence because I want to have it. Without that I would have blown my brains out a long time ago. To hope is almost to live. I must live in order to do my duty up to the end and I can do it only by forcing my illusions, by creating hopes in the dream." Translated in Maurer, 41.

[114] Paul Gauguin, *Cahier pour Aline. Fac-similé intégral du manuscrit original conservé à la Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie de l'Université de Paris, Fondation Jacques Doucet*. Casablanca, Morocco: Jacomet, 1963 [original 1892-93], n.p. "I want to be happy, and he alone who is happy is free."

[115] Baldwin 2015, 144; Sedikides 2015, 216.

exigences."[116] While these letters and manuscripts offer evidence of Gauguin's deep convictions regarding his hopes and dreams for the future, the source of this optimism derives not from his writing but from his artwork, to which I turn in the following section.

Oleanders, Oranges, and Nostalgia

Nostalgia, as described by Keightley and Pickering, is a "process of retreat and retrieval" that engages the past "as a locus of possibility and source of aspiration." In this way, nostalgia becomes "an action rather than an attitude."[117] In a related fashion, Nicholas Dames calls for scholars of nostalgia to employ the concept not simply and superficially as a "diagnosis," but instead as a tool for "functional analysis."[118] Viewing *Tahitian Oranges* and *Flowers of France* through the framework of nostalgia enables this type of "functional analysis," as it reveals in them the deeply positive and constructive quality of nostalgia. They have a forward-looking vitality, which is inherent in the structure of nostalgia itself. They look back, to France, to Arles and Paris, to van Gogh and Degas, but they are also a constructive way of negotiating life in the present. It seems natural that for Gauguin, looking back from Tahiti, the Studio of the South in Arles represented all of the most common themes of nostalgia: a close relationship, a special setting, as well as a period that for him was positive and productive, but bitterly missed. With these paintings, Gauguin re-envisions the Studio of the South as his Studio of the Tropics.

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[116] Gauguin, *Cahier pour Aline*. "It follows that one who satisfies the intimate necessity of his being is free, because he feels that he belongs to himself, because all his acts correspond to his nature, to his genuine needs."

[117] Keightley and Pickering, 137.

[118] Nicholas Dames, "Nostalgia and its Disciplines: A Response," *Memory Studies* 3.3 (July 2010): 273.

Further investigation into the symbolic meaning of van Gogh's *Oleanders* sharpens the relationship of Gauguin's *Flowers of France* with the structure of nostalgia. Oleanders held a special place for van Gogh during his time in Arles, and they took on several layers of significance. A month after he announced to Theo that he planned to do a study of oleanders, presumed to be this painting, he planted them in pots outside the front door of the yellow house.[119] In a letter to fellow painter Eugène Boch, van Gogh referred to Arles as the "pays des lauriers roses et du soleil de souffre."[120] Yet oleanders are poisonous flowers, a fact that van Gogh appears to have known based on a letter to Theo van Gogh in which he described one of his landscape paintings:

> La rangée de buissons dans le fond sont tous des laurier roses fous furieux. Ces sacrés plantes fleurissent d'une façon que certes elles pourraient attraper une ataxie locomotrice. Elles sont chargées de fleurs fraiches et puis de tas de fleurs fanées, leur verdure également se renouvelle par de vigoureux jets nouveaux, inépuisable en apparence.[121]

As this passage suggests, van Gogh understood their poisonous quality to occur alongside their raging fecundity.[122]

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[119] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 13 August 1888, Jansen letter 660, followed by 21 September 1888, Jansen letter 685.

[120] Vincent van Gogh to Eugène Boch, 2 October 1888, Jansen letter 693. "The region of oleanders and the sulphur sun."

[121] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 26 September 1888, Jansen letter 689. "The line of bushes in the background are all raving mad oleanders. These bloody plants flower in such a way that they could surely catch locomotor ataxia! They're covered in fresh blooms, and then in masses of faded blooms; their foliage also keeps on putting out strong new shoots, apparently inexhaustibly." The painting van Gogh describes in this letter is not known, but he identified *The Poet's Garden* (Art Institute of Chicago) as its pendant. (Notes 3 and 4.) This pendant is a landscape that also depicts an oleander bush, and it hung in Gauguin's bedroom. Of the decorations in Gauguin's room, van Gogh explained to Gauguin, "j'ai cherché à démêler l'essentiel de ce qui constitue le caractère immuable du pays." Van Gogh to Gauguin, 3 October 1888. Jansen letter 695, identified in note 13.

[122] Martin Gayford, "Ploughed Fields of Paint," *Apollo* 169 (July 2006), 71.

Oleanders had still greater meaning for van Gogh, as he associated them with idyllic paradises. Shortly after painting the still life in August 1888, he wrote to Theo, "lorsque tu auras vu les cyprès, les laurier roses, le soleil d'ici – et ce jour-là viendra, sois tranquille. Encore plus souvent tu penseras aux beaux Puvis de Chavannes, *Doux pays* et tant d'autres."[123] And the following year he further clarified what he saw as the role of the oleanders in the same Puvis painting: "Le laurier rose – ah – cela parle amour et c'est beau comme le Lesbos de Puvis de chavannes où il y avait les femmes au bord de la mer."[124] Puvis' pink blossoms on thin branches with spiky leaves grow along the shoreline and are scattered alongside fruit at the feet of the seated women (fig. 2.12). In this way, van Gogh identified the oleander with love in an arcadian idyll. Around the time that van Gogh conceived of his oleanders still life he completed *La Mousmé*, in which the sitter holds an oleander branch (fig. 2.13).[125] Van Gogh wrote to Theo that he adopted the title from Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthemum*, in which the protagonist is a Japanese girl whom the author refers to as a *mousmé*.[126] In Loti's novel the oleander

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On another occasion, van Gogh juxtaposed the oleander to other flowers which he considered moral and chaste: "Ce côté-là du jardin est d'ailleurs pour la même raison de chasteté ou de morale, dégarni d'arbustes en fleur tel que le laurier rose." Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 18 September 1888, Jansen letter 683.

[123] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 18 September 1888, Jansen letter 683. "When you've seen the cypresses, the oleanders, the sun down here — and that day will come, don't worry — you'll think even more often of beautiful works by Puvis de Chavannes: *Pleasant land* and so many others."

[124] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 28 April 1889, Jansen letter 763. "The oleander – ah – it speaks of love and it's as beautiful as Puvis de Chavannes' Lesbos, where there were women beside the sea." Note 7 identifies the Puvis as *Pleasant Land*. Gauguin had this painting on his mind, as he mimicked a figure from Puvis' *Pleasant Land* in his *Young Wrestlers*, painted shortly before joining van Gogh in Arles.

[125] *La Mousmé* was sent from Vincent to Theo in August 1888 (Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 13 August 1888, Jansen letter 660), and Vincent was proud of it, asking Theo to stretch it and show it (Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 3 September 1888, Jansen letter 773). He later listed it as one of the canvases that he would like sent to the Independents exhibition (Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 3 February 1889, Jansen letter 745).

[126] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 29 August 1888, Jansen letter 650.

symbolizes an exotic land, and so both through the title and the oleander, Van Gogh's *mousmé* becomes the personification of his imagined paradise.[127] Lastly, Émile Zola's *Joie de vivre* sits prominently alongside van Gogh's vase of oleanders. Van Gogh associated the "inexhaustible" oleander with the commitment to hope in the face of adversity exemplified by the novel's protagonist Pauline. This is the same type of hope van Gogh held for the future of his studio as he laid the plans for Gauguin to join him.[128] Together, these associations—from the oleander's fragrance and fecundity to Puvis, Loti, and Zola—show that for van Gogh, the oleander was a symbol of hope alongside a dream of exotic lands.[129]

Gauguin's allusion to van Gogh's oleanders, then, refers not necessarily to the time he and van Gogh were together in Arles, but to the time when van Gogh was preparing their studio and envisioning its future, as Gauguin would have done in the first months of his Tahiti sojourn. By echoing van Gogh's arcadian overtones, *The Flowers of France* becomes Gauguin's homage not simply to van Gogh's memory, but to his aspirations. Through this nostalgic reflection, Gauguin connects his present self to his past self, specifically his past self at a time when he believed "il circule en ce moment parmi *les artistes* un vent favorable très prononcé *pour moi*"[130] and had many followers,

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[127] Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers, et al., *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2001), 127.

[128] Naomi Maurer makes this comparison between the oleanders' symbolism for van Gogh and the novel's theme. Naomi E. Maurer, *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom: The Thought and Art of Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), 75.

[129] Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers, et al., *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2001), 126-28, 339; Tsukasa Kodera, *Vincent van Gogh: Christianity versus Nature* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Publishing Co., 1990), 46.

[130] Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 16 October 1888. Merlhès, 255. "…a wind is blowing among *artists* which is all in *my favor*." Emphasis is Gauguin's. Trans. Belinda Thomson, *Gauguin by Himself* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 93.

the most adoring of whom was his housemate. By connecting with this "intrinsic self," Gauguin could re-envision the Studio of the South and determine what this past would mean for him in the present, and what his artistic practice would become in the future. For Gauguin to call upon van Gogh's *Oleanders* within his first six months of life in Tahiti, and with it van Gogh's associations with an artist community, suggests that Gauguin was not only looking backward, with a hint of longing and desire for the time when he was the leader of a colony of two, but further, that he was re-imagining his present and looking forward, to determine how to make this dream of his deceased friend and colleague a reality.

Still Life with Tahitian Oranges operates in a similar manner. It expresses a certain longing for the past, but its brilliant colors communicate in an insistently optimistic tone. It represents the latter of two types of nostalgia that cultural theorist Svetlana Boym distinguishes: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. These terms "do not explain the nature of longing nor its psychological makeup," rather, "they are about the ways we make sense of [longing]… ways of giving shape and meaning to longing."[131] Restorative nostalgia, she explains, obsessively attempts to reconstruct the home or the past, it longs for return. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, activates the past by inserting it into the present so that the act of memory, not the return itself, matters most to the reflective nostalgic.[132] The rhapsody in yellow that is *Tahitian Oranges*

[131] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

[132] Boym, 50. Boym's present-day cultural theory on nostalgia in fact draws from nineteenth-century French science—she writes that she derived this formulation from Henri Bergson's 1896 book *Matière et mémoire*, in which he explained, "Notre passé est […] ce qui n'agit plus, mais pourrait agir, ce qui agira en s'insérant dans une sensation présente dont il empruntera la vitalité." Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: Alcan, 1896), 269.

invokes van Gogh, but does not restore him, nor Arles, or France. It does not represent an unproductive desire for return or unhealthy attachment to a lost past; rather it has the potential to operate as a renewed assessment of the present that creates an optimistic outlook for the future—"Espérer c'est presque vivre."[133]

In the sections that follow, I will continue to employ Boym's dichotomy, but with an adjustment. While the psychology of nostalgia pioneered by Sedikedes and his colleagues relied in part upon Boym's work, writing in 2001 she did not have the benefit of theirs. Her "reflective" nostalgia anticipates their findings on the self-positive qualities of nostalgia, but it does not encompass the future-oriented optimism that nostalgia is now known to confer. I will therefore refer to "redemptive" nostalgia in place of her "reflective" nostalgia. My use of the word redemptive comes from a 2006 study by Tim Windschut and colleagues, which found that nostalgic narratives tend to have a "redemptive" sequence. In such a sequence, the narrative moves from a negative scene to a positive one. For example, mitigating circumstances in the past, such as living in poverty, a strained relationship, or a recent death are recalled as ultimately having a positive outcome, a type of triumph despite the obstacles.[134] By using this term as a modifier for the concept of nostalgia itself, I intend to emphasize the regenerating and renewing qualities that scientists associate with nostalgia. While psychologists refer to this optimistic and future-oriented longing simply as "nostalgia," I will call it

[133] Quoted and translated above, Gauguin to Mette, 5 November 1892. Malingue, 238.

[134] Tim Wildschut et al., "Nostalgia: Content, Triggers, Functions," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91.5 (2006): 976-78. The authors give an example of a redemptive narrative sequence from one of their participants: "My Nan died that weekend and even though it was awful, it was a type of relief for my Nan and us. When I look back at this in my mind, I feel so proud of my Mum and the way she coped, it showed her immense love and devotion to her own mother." (978)

"redemptive nostalgia" in order to distinguish it from what Boym describes as "restorative nostalgia."[135]

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As is so often the case, the scientists of the twenty-first century are not the first to recognize that nostalgia confers benefits in the present and insight for the future. In Ernest Hello's philosophical essay *L'Homme*, first published in 1871 and in its seventh edition by 1905, the writer connected antiquity with the future and eternity: "La haute antiquité rappelle l'extrême avenir, et celui-ci rappelle l'éternité… Ces choses, qui excitent et soulagent à la fois la nostalgie de l'homme, doivent dominer les considérations qui vont suivre."[136] A decade later, Fyodor Dostoyesky's fictional hero Alyosha Karamazov reflects upon the importance of memory for one's present and future:

> You must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home. People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good, sacred memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education. If a man carries many such memories with him into life, he is safe to

[135] Further complicating the unmodified use of "nostalgia" in this chapter that spans disciplines is the wide use of the term by several theorists to refer to a past-oriented, negative, even reactionary type of nostalgia. Susan Stewart, for example, writing in 1984, understood nostalgia predominantly in this negative way (cited below). Her concept of nostalgia aligns with what Boym calls restorative nostalgia; therefore, writing at the turn of the twenty-first century, Boym's distinction was and remains a useful one.

[136] Ernest Hello, *L'Homme*, (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1872), 339. "High antiquity recalls the extreme future, which itself recalls eternity… These things, which at once excite and relieve nostalgia in man, should dominate the considerations that follow."

> the end of his days, and if one has only one good memory left in one's heart, even that may sometime be the means of saving us.[137]

Thus Gauguin was entirely capable, like these great minds of his time, of comprehending nostalgia in the way I propose.

Objects of Desire

Consideration of the relationship between still-life paintings and nostalgia proves an informative exercise. Objects are frequently relied upon as containers of memories—we call such objects souvenirs. Susan Stewart writes that the souvenir "is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia. […] The double function of the souvenir is to authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, to discredit the present."[138] The past-directed way in which Stewart discusses nostalgia and the souvenir aligns with Boym's description of restorative nostalgia. Stewart continues, "it is in this gap between resemblance and identity that nostalgic desire arises. The nostalgic is enamored of distance, not of the referent itself."[139] Conversely, Gauguin's objects refer simultaneously to both the past and the present, in a way authenticating both. For Gauguin in Tahiti, the oranges and oleanders that referred to the past also constituted a presently-lived experience. Thus these dynamic objects were not borne of the gap between resemblance and identity, but rather close that gap, and thereby re-direct the

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[137] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers*, trans. Constance Garnett (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), 868. Dostoyevsky's text was first published in 1880. I owe this reference to Sedikedes et al. 2015, 190.

[138] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 135, 139. [First published 1984.]

[139] Stewart, 145.

nostalgic experience from the past to the present and future. Through this alternative approach to Stewart's foreboding description of the souvenir, the fruit and flowers become objects not of longing for restoration but for redemption, moving from Boym's restorative nostalgia to redemptive nostalgia.[140]

A similar relationship between restorative and redemptive nostalgia occurs in the comparison of Gauguin's still lifes to other quintessentially nostalgic still lifes by William Harnett such as *Old Models* (fig. 2.14). David Lubin describes how Harnett's trompe-l'oeil still lifes were able to "summon the past—and not just any past, but the right one."[141] By depicting time-worn but well-loved objects, Harnett harkened back to a sentimental past and elicited the warm pleasure of nostalgia. However, Lubin notes that not all of Harnett's objects were old (for example, fig. 2.15). Even a still-smoldering pipe or chilled mug of beer could evoke nostalgia, because "objects need not actually have been old to have conveyed a comforting sense of age and permanence; they need only to have appeared enduring and stable in contrast to the unsettling flux of the present."[142] For this reason, Harnett painted "long-lived, man-made objects […which] suggested a former

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[140] This works with paintings of objects in a way that a landscape painting could not have accomplished—while oleanders and oranges grew naturally in both Arles and Tahiti, Gauguin could not have evoked the same continuity so easily with a landscape, which would have differed between these distant locales.

[141] David Lubin, "Masculinity, Nostalgia, and the Trompe l'Oeil Still-Life Paintings of William Harnett," in *Picturing a Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 308. Though Harnett's and Gauguin's careers were contemporaneous, I discuss Harnett not to suggest that he and Gauguin were aware of each other's work, but as a point of comparison that can help articulate certain aspects of Gauguin's work.

There are additional studies which also discuss the role of nostalgia in works by other nineteenth-century artists: Albert Boime, "Manet's *A bar at the Folies-Bergère* as an allegory of nostalgia," in *12 Views of Manet's Bar*. Edited by Bradford Collins. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. Maura Coughlin, "Millet's Milkmaids," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 2.1 (Winter 2003), n.p. Fratello, Bradley. "Footsteps in Normandy: Jean-François Millet and provincial nostalgia in late-nineteenth-century France." In *Soil and stone: Impressionism, urbanism, environment*. Edited by Frances Fowle and Richard Thomson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003). Jeannene Przyblyski, *Le Parti Pris des Choses: French Still Life and Modem Painting, 1848-1876* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1995), 57, 159.

[142] Lubin, 308.

way of life that could usefully endure into the present."[143] Gauguin's fruit and flowers are not objects that endure; to the contrary, they are ephemeral. They do not dwell in that past as do Harnett's age-old symbols, but instead, as organic objects that burst with life, they celebrate renewal. The oleanders are in full bloom, and several of the fruit are not yet ripe—the passage of time will make them all the more succulent. Harnett's nostalgia longs for return; it sentimentalizes the past at the expense of the present, and in this way, pictures restorative nostalgia. Gauguin, on the other hand, mimics the structure of redemptive nostalgia itself: the fruit and flowers may reference the past in their evocation of other artists, but in their vitality, they are self-affirming in the present.

V. Yearning for Cythera

I return here to the romanticized nostalgia for lost paradise discussed above, which in its desire to restore a past that no longer, and likely never, existed, aligns with restorative nostalgia. As recently as the 2010 *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* exhibition, some scholars have continued to find that in *Noa Noa,* "Gauguin's journey acquires one of the characteristics of voyages to the 'Orient' that, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, were always a return to origins, a nostalgic dream of a paradise lost."[144] This could seem a natural conclusion to draw from the claims of Gauguin and his supportive critics who bought the story that the artist sold, claiming, for example, that "s'était rencontrée cette nostalgie des pays de rêve."[145] Other scholars have shown that, far from a naïve imitation of the "Voyage en Orient" tradition, *Noa Noa* instead critiqued that

[143] Lubin, 314. I discuss Harnett here as a point of comparison that can help articulate certain aspects of Gauguin's work.

[144] Vincent Gille, "The last orientalist: portrait of the artist as Mohican," in *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*, ed. Belinda Thomson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 51.

[145] Quoted and translated above, Claude Roger-Marx, 34.

tradition.[146] Thus the brand of restorative nostalgia expressed by the voyage narrative tradition was not felt by Gauguin, but rather performed and then undermined, resulting instead in a type of redemptive nostalgia. The same conversion of nostalgic structures occurs in *The Royal End*. On the surface, it takes part in, and visualizes, a long literary tradition of arrival in a paradise that is already lost, slaughtered, even, by corrupting contact with the West. Gauguin, however, unravels this tradition through the painting's symbolism, redirecting its mood from mournful to hopeful.

To fully explicate the re-creative quality of *The Royal End*, this section begins with a brief overview of the voyage narrative tradition and the ways Gauguin engaged it. Baudelaire was a complicit if more cynical participant in this tradition, and I will make reference to his work as well. Following a review of Linda Goddard's and Rod Edmond's arguments that Gauguin challenged these traditions in *Noa Noa*, I highlight passages that I believe Gauguin penned in dialogue with *The Royal End*. I propose that this subversion is similar to the redemptive narrative Naomi Maurer finds in *The Royal End*. By linking the literary tradition based in restorative nostalgia to the more nuanced views of the manuscript and painting offered by these scholars, I will demonstrate how *The Royal End* ultimately operates according to the structure of redemptive nostalgia.

The Voyage Narrative Tradition

Long before Gauguin set foot in Tahiti, he was well aware of the centuries-long tradition of romantic travel literature, and informed as well by imperialist writing that encouraged emigration to France's colonies. He and van Gogh together dreamt of tropical locations for their future artist colony, during which time they read Pierre Loti's best-

[146] Goddard, 241; and Edmond, 20.

selling novel, *Mariage de Loti,* which is a fictionalized account of the author's voyage to Tahiti. The following year Gauguin visited the 1889 Universal Exposition, where he gathered pamphlets released by colonial authorities and observed with delight the performed customs of native peoples from around the world, collapsed into the space of the fair grounds.[147]

The romantic tradition of writing about Tahiti began with Louis de Bougainville, who was among the first European travelers to arrive on the island in 1767. He was followed two years later by James Cook. In their voyage narratives, European travelers represented Tahiti as an island of bounty—Bougainville told of a woman who approached his ship and dropped her clothing, and Cook's journal described the island's plentiful fruit.[148] Yet in the wake of Bougainville's celebration of Tahiti as the "new Cythera" in his 1771 *Voyage autour du monde*, each successive narrative increasingly portrayed Tahiti as a victim of contact with the west.[149] This type of "fatal impact narrative"[150] culminated with Loti's *Mariage de Loti*, published in 1878. In this novel, Loti expressed nostalgia for a paradise that he knew only from the voyage narratives of those who travelled there before him. In this way his text aligns with reactionary narratives that, as Susan Stewart writes, rely upon the structure of (restorative) nostalgia: "Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never

[147] Goddard 2009, 242. Also Elizabeth C. Childs, "Polynesia in Paris: Paul Gauguin in search of the exotic at the Exposition Universelle of 1889," in *Vanishing Paradise: Art and Exoticism in Colonial Tahiti* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 54-90.

[148] Rod Edmond, "The Pacific, Tahiti: Queen of the South Sea isles," in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 139-43.

[149] Goddard 2009, 241.

[150] Edmond 2002, 151.

existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, the past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack."[151]

Charles Baudelaire was regularly cited in the nineteenth century for his expressions of nostalgia. As noted above he was quoted in an encyclopedia entry, and Roger-Marx directly compared Baudelaire's nostalgia to Gauguin's, calling Baudelaire's "Les Projets" the "annonciateur fidèle des hantises de Gauguin."[152] *Les Fleurs du mal* contained several poems which, in dialogue with the voyage narrative tradition, similarly enacted hope and subsequent disappointment in a fictional paradise that is always already lost. "Voyage to Cythera" points to the tradition of writing on Tahiti, but with an outlook grimmer than its forbearers. Baudelaire opens, as many do, with great hope:

> Mon coeur, comme un oiseau, voltigeait tout joyeux
> Et planait librement à l'entour des cordages;
> Le navire roulait sous un ciel sans nuages;
> Comme un ange enivré d'un soleil radieux.[153]

Instantly upon his arrival, in the following verse, the narrator finds that the paradise is not what he dreamed:

> Quelle est cette île triste et noire? — C'est Cythère,
> Nous dit-on, un pays fameux dans les chansons
> Eldorado banal de tous les vieux garçons.

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[151] Stewart, 23.

[152] Roger-Marx, 34. The "faithful harbinger of the hauntings of Gauguin." His passage regarding "nostalgie des pays de rêve," quoted several times above, describes both Gauguin and Baudelaire. The passage from "Les Projets" that Roger-Marx quotes is more descriptive of Gauguin's Tahiti scenes than it is a model of nostalgic longing. The poems I quote below fit more directly within the voyage narrative structure.

[153] Charles Baudelaire, "Un Voyage à Cythère," *Œuvres Complètes de Charles Baudelaire: Les Fleurs du mal*, vol. 1 (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1869), 319.
"My heart like a bird was fluttering joyously
And soaring freely around the rigging;
Beneath a cloudless sky the ship was rolling
Like an angel drunken with the radiant sun."
Charles Baudelaire, "A Voyage to Cythera," in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. William Aggeler (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954), accessed 31 August 2016, http://fleursdumal.org/poem/187.

Regardez, après tout, c'est une pauvre terre.[154]

"The Voyage" similarly opens with an image of innocence:

Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.
Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit![155]

Yet Baudelaire reveals that "mémoires" of paradise are only made "d'astres et d'éthers" which "Faites … passer sur nos esprits, tendus comme une toile."[156] And thus,

Amer savoir, celui qu'on tire du voyage!
Le monde, monotone et petit, aujourd'hui,
Hier, demain, toujours, nous fait voir notre image:
Une oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui![157]

For Baudelaire, paradise is not just always already lost, but was only ever a mirage.

While Gauguin may have adopted Baudelaire's cynicism toward naïve revelry in non-existent paradises, *Noa Noa* very purposefully mimics the structure and content of Loti's *Mariage*. For example, both Loti and Gauguin expressed that their very act of

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[154] *Ibid*, 319.
"What is this black, gloomy island? — It's Cythera,
They tell us, a country celebrated in song,
The banal Eldorado of old bachelors.
Look at it; after all, it is a wretched land." Trans. *ibid.*

[155] Charles Baudelaire, "Le Voyage," *Œuvres Complètes de Charles Baudelaire: Les Fleurs du mal*, vol. 1 (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1869), 344.
"To a child who is fond of maps and engravings
The universe is the size of his immense hunger.
Ah! how vast is the world in the light of a lamp!
In memory's eyes how small the world is!"
Charles Baudelaire, "The Voyage," in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. William Aggeler (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954), accessed 31 August 2016, http://fleursdumal.org/poem/231.

[156] *Ibid*., 346-47.
"Memories… of ether and stars" … "Pass across our minds stretched like canvasses." Trans. *ibid.*

[157] *Ibid*., 349.
"Bitter is the knowledge one gains from voyaging!
The world, monotonous and small, today,
Yesterday, tomorrow, always, shows us our image:
An oasis of horror in a desert of ennui!" Trans. *ibid.*

arrival shattered the image they held in their imagination, as both claimed to be disappointed by the heavy European presence they found.[158] Yet Goddard and Edmond argue that Gauguin was well aware that life would likely not be easy in Tahiti, and that it would be populated with French and British emigres.[159] They further demonstrate how the entirety of *Noa Noa* acts as a cunning twist on Loti's narrative. Where Loti's *vahine* is feminine, passive, and permissive, Gauguin's Tehamana is masculine, active, and intimidating. Loti quickly and easily acclimatizes to native life and customs, while Gauguin emphasizes his own other-ness and inability to find acceptance. Rarahu dies of tuberculosis as Loti's ship sails away; Tehamana waves goodbye as a flower wilts.[160] Thus one must not take at face value Gauguin's claim that the past was lost and the present was useless. Rather, this reactionary form of nostalgia was a performance that Gauguin enacted to subvert its assumptions from within. Gauguin's disruption of the paradise myth makes visible his challenges at cultural integration, questions the balance of power evinced in fatal impact narratives, and offers a subtler picture of his contact with the Tahitian people.[161]

Death and Rebirth in *Noa Noa*

Because *The Royal End* invokes a royal death, it begs comparison with Gauguin's story of King Pomare V's death and funeral in the opening pages of *Noa Noa*. Yet Gauguin's description of the westernized funeral bears little resemblance to the painting. According to Gauguin's account in *Noa Noa,* the king lay in state in the dress of an

[158] As compared in Edmond 2002, 151.

[159] Goddard 2009, 246.

[160] As compared in Goddard 2009, 245-5 and Edmond 1997, 251.

[161] Goddard 2009, 244, 247-48.

admiral, and the funerary rites surrounding his burial were western in tone and practice.[162] The text and painting share not their content but their structure, which is the structure of redemptive nostalgia.

Following Gauguin's description of the king's funeral is an often-quoted expression of his bitter disappointment upon arrival: "Une tristesse profonde s'empara de moi. Avoir fait tant de chemin pour trouver cela, cela même que je fuyais! Le rêve qui m'amenait à Tahiti était cruellement démenti par le présent: c'est la Tahiti d'autrefois que j'aimais."[163] One may recognize this statement as restorative nostalgia—Gauguin yearns for the past and in so doing, scorns the present. The narrative surrounding this line, however, is much more complex.

The newly-widowed queen is the fulcrum of Gauguin's shift from regret to optimism. Gauguin begins his account of the king's funeral by describing how he enjoyed watching the queen decorating the funerary chamber. But she quickly becomes an embodiment of his frustration: "Déçu comme je l'étais par des êtres et des choses si différents de ce que j'avais désiré, écœuré par toute cette trivialité européenne, […]

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[162] Gauguin, *Noa Noa* Louvre manuscript. On lying in state, 28-29. On the burial, including his description a parade in which the heads of each district marched with the French flag, 31.

It is important to note that *Noa Noa* did not serve as a source for *Arii Matamoe*, because Gauguin wrote the text the following year, in September 1893, after his return to France. Gauguin wrote to Mette in October that he was preparing a book on Tahiti "qui sera très utile pour faire comprendre ma peinture." (Gauguin to Mette, October 1893. Malingue, 253.) *Noa Noa* can be understood as an explanation for the painting, or at the very least, a text that exists in dialogue with the painting. For a timeline of Gauguin's work on this text, see: Isabelle Cahn, "Noa Noa: Voyage to Tahiti," in *Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Shackelford and Frèches-Thory (Boston: MFA Publications, 2004), 91-113.

[163] Gauguin, *Noa Noa* Louvre manuscript, 32-33. I have chosen to quote from the second manuscript, which Gauguin worked on in collaboration with Charles Morice in the months following his first (Getty) draft of the manuscript, because it contains more description than the first. The narratives in both manuscripts follow the same arc and express the same concepts. Linda Goddard has argued convincingly that Gauguin retained authorial control in the second manuscript to a much greater degree than was previously believed. Linda Goddard, "'The Writings of a Savage?' Literary Strategies in Paul Gauguin's "Noa Noa"," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 71 (2008): 277-93.

j'étais en quelque sorte aveugle. Aussi ne vis-je dans cette reine, d'un âge déjà mûr, qu'une épaisse femme ordinaire, avec de beaux restes."[164] Calling himself "somewhat blind," Gauguin employs rather repentant language surrounding his judgment of the queen in this passage. He goes on to explain that he would later revise this opinion:

> Plus tard, quand je la revis, je compris son charme Maorie. Le sang tahitien reprenait le dessus. Le souvenir de l'aïeul, le grand chef Tati, donnait à cette femme, comme à son frère, comme à toute sa famille, un caractère de grandeur, vraiment imposant. Elle avait cette majestueuse forme sculpturale de là-bas […] —construction corporelle qui évoque invinciblement dans ma pensée le grand triangle de la *Trinité*. Dans ses yeux brillait parfois comme un pressentiment vague des passions qui s'allument brusquement et embrasent aussitôt la vie alentour. Et c'est ainsi que l'*Île* elle-même a surgi de l'Océan et que les plantes y ont fleuri au rayon du premier soleil.[165]

The agency that Gauguin observes in the queen bears the signs of redemptive nostalgia. Her imposing character of grandeur derives from her memories of ancestors, and within her eyes the passion that gave birth to the life around her still shines. The memories

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[164] Gauguin, *Noa Noa* Louvre manuscript, 29. "Having arrived only recently, feeling rather disillusioned because things were so different from what I had wished for and especially imagined, sickened by all this European triviality […], I was blind, so to speak. Thus I saw in this queen, already somewhat mature in years, only a commonplace stout woman with traces of noble beauty." Translation derived from a combination of: Guérin, 77; and *Noa Noa: The Tahitian Journal*, trans. Nicholas Brown and O. F. Theis (New York: Dover Publications, 1985), 3.

[165] Gauguin, *Noa Noa* Louvre manuscript, 30. "When I saw her again later, I understood her Maori charm; the Tahitian blood was still very pure in her. The memory of her ancestor, the great chief Tati, gave her, her brother, and the whole family a truly imposing grandeur. She had the majestic sculptural form of her race […]—a bodily form that inevitably evoked the triangle of the *Trinity*. In her eyes there sometimes burned something like a vague presentiment of passions which flared up suddenly and set aflame all the life round about. Perhaps it is thus that the island itself once rose from the ocean, and the plants upon it burst into flower under the first rays of the sun." Trans. Guérin, 77 (excerpts only); and Brown, 3.

affirm the present and, through the imagery of the surging island, give hope for the future. Following this passage, Gauguin returns to the more distant past of his arrival on the island to describe the funeral and his "tristesse profonde" quoted above. Only then does he give a hint of the same capacity for redemptive nostalgia within himself:

> Mais les traces de ce passé si lointain, si mystérieux, quand elles subsisteraient encore, comment les découvrir, tout seul, sans indication, sans aucun appui ? Retrouver le foyer éteint, raviver le feu au milieu de toutes ces cendres… Si fort que je sois abattu, je n'ai pas coutume de quitter la partie sans avoir tout tenté et aussi l'impossible. Ma résolution fut bientôt prise.[166]

He ceases to mourn Tahiti's lost past and instead resolves to find its fire burning in the present. His longing becomes a resolution to act, which is precisely the source of reflective nostalgia's agentive power.

Thus quite to the contrary of the superficial yearning for a dying race that Gauguin purports, *Noa Noa* operates along the lines of redemptive nostalgia—both on the macro-scale of the text as a whole and on the micro-scale of individual episodes. The text aligns with Boym's description of reflective nostalgia as "ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary," with "a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness."[167] Defying the trends of the voyage narrative that start off with disappointment and end in death or disaster, in Gauguin's account Tahiti is not ill but vibrant, not facile but complex and

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[166] Gauguin, *Noa Noa* Louvre manuscript, 33. "But how was I, all by myself, to find the traces of this past if any such traces remained? How was I to recognize them without guidance? How to relight the fire the very ashes of which are scattered? However depressed I may be I am not in the habit of giving up a project without having tried everything, even the 'impossible,' to gain my end. My mind was soon made up." Trans. Guérin, 79; and Brown, 7.

[167] Boym, 50.

ambivalent. *Noa Noa* thereby dons the mask of restorative nostalgia, but ultimately functions as redemptive nostalgia. *The Royal End* operates according to a similar structure, appearing on its surface to long for a lost paradise in the form of restorative nostalgia, but upon further inspection, emerging as a powerful and forward-looking form of redemptive nostalgia.

Narrative and Invention in *The Royal End*

The Royal End appears to function, on one level, as a kind of postcard for audiences at home, a souvenir that reports the death of the king. Gauguin reinforced this quality when he pasted a reproduction of it in his second version (Louvre manuscript) of *Noa Noa*, one of the few paintings he gave this distinction. In this way, Stewart's description of the souvenir resonates with the painting: "We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative."[168] This marks one more way in which the still life appears to operate as restorative nostalgia.

Despite the souvenir-like quality of *The Royal End*, Gauguin was also well aware of the many degrees of invention in his painting, which turns restorative nostalgia's reportage on its head. The nostalgia Stewart describes is not self-reflective, ironic, or critical, but further analysis of *The Royal End* shows that the painting bears just these qualities. The only surviving discussion of this painting by Gauguin comes from a letter to Monfreid, with a jocular tone that has an air of irony:

[168] Stewart, 146.

> Je viens de terminer une tête de canaque coupée bien arrangée sur un cousin blanc dans un palais de mon invention et gardée par des femmes de mon invention aussi. Je crois que c'est un joli morceau de peinture. Il n'est pas tout-à-fait de moi car je l'ai volé dans une planche de sapin. Il ne faudra rien dire mais que voulez-vous, on fait ce qu'on peut, et quand les marbres ou le bois vous dessinent une tête c'est joliment tentant de voler.[169]

Several scholars have chipped away at Gauguin's very specific claims to his own "inventions": The geometric motif decorating the wall behind the head comes from a Maori ear ornament called a *taiana*, and the lamp-like object above the head of the mummy figure is the stopper of the *taiana*.[170] The female figures derive from various sources as well, such as the Peruvian mummy that Gauguin first saw in an ethnographic museum.[171] The point of this list is not to suggest that Gauguin "stole" these motifs too, but rather to demonstrate that he was manipulating the very idea of originality, invention, and authenticity. He did so both in the painting's visual motifs as described in the letter to Monfreid, as well as in the implied narrative of pre-colonial funerary practices surrounding the death of royalty. Thus this canvas purports to operate like a souvenir of a reportable event, yet Gauguin wittily undermined that quality by revealing the painting, within days of finishing it, as a combination of invented and stolen motifs.

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[169] Gauguin to Monfreid, June 1892. *Lettres à Monfreid*, 92. "I have just finished a severed kanak head nicely arranged on a white cushion in a palace of my invention and guarded by women also of my invention. I believe it is a pretty piece of painting. It is not quite mine since I stole it from a pine board. Perhaps I shouldn't mention it, but there it is. One does what one can, and when marble or wood draws a head for you it's very tempting to steal it." Trans. Allan, 76.

[170] Teilhet-Fisk, 64 and, for the stopper as the lamp, Dario Gamboni, *Paul Gauguin: The Mysterious Centre of Thought* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 337.

[171] Wayne Andersen, "Gauguin and a Peruvian Mummy," *Burlington Magazine* 109.769 (April 1967): 238-43; also Pickvance, 283; Allan, 78.

After freeing the painting from its surface-level ties to restorative nostalgia, further analysis reveals its affinity with redemptive nostalgia: *The Royal End*'s message is one not of death but of renewal.[172] First, while Gauguin's translation of the title suggests death, *matamoe* more literally refers to sleep, and therefore reawakening.[173] The flower on the pillow and the open and closed blossoms in the upper right corner symbolize new growth following destruction. The motif of Ondine, the woman diving into the background, symbolizes the leap of faith into the unknown required to live a meaningful life. While the Peruvian mummy figure is a recurrent symbol for death, when paired with Ondine, together they signify the cycle of life, death, and rebirth.[174] The double-figure statue on the floor at right echoes the same iconography of renewal. Gauguin illustrated a story of the gods Hina and Fatou in their eternal dialogue on destruction, death, rebirth, and regeneration with the same figural group as this statue in his manuscript *Ancien culte mahorie* (fig. 2.16), and their appearance here conveys the same symbolism.[175] The two red stars inscribed in green circles on the pillow appear

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[172] On the centrality of the theme of renewal and regeneration to Gauguin's oeuvre as expressed in other paintings, see June Hargrove, "'Woman with a Fan': Paul Gauguin's Heavenly Vairaumati: A Parable of Immortality," *The Art Bulletin* 88.3 (September, 2006): 562; and June Hargrove, "Paul Gauguin: Sensing the Infinite," in Sally Promey, ed., *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale Univ. Press, 2014), 341-54.

[173] Maurer, 156.

[174] On these symbols as they appear in this painting specifically, Maurer, 156; and Allan, 79.

[175] In Gauguin's manuscript *Ancien culte mahorie* (much of which he transcribed from Moerenhout's book beginning in 1891), he described the story of Hina and Fatou and illustrated this account with drawings of figures derived from his wood "tiki" sculptures. Following the story of Hina and Fatou in Tahitian is an illustration of two figures facing the same direction (on page 7), like the group in *The Royal End*. His more commonly-employed iconography for Hina and Fatou is two figures facing each other, which derives from an illustration that appears following the French translation of the same story (on page 13 of the manuscript, see fig. 2.17). Gauguin drew these figures facing the same direction (*Ancien culte mahorie* page 7 and in *The Royal End*) from the figure groups flanking his *Idol with a Shell* sculpture. Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Gauguin's Religious Themes* (New York: Garland, 1985), 352. This figure group appears as well in *Vairaoumati Tei Oa*, *Nave Nave Moe*, and *La Cène*. Georges Wildenstein, *Gauguin* (Paris: Beaux-Arts, 1964), 181, no. 453. The corresponding paintings are, respectively, numbers 450, 512, 580.

alongside another illustration of this story (fig. 2.17), reinforcing its significance for the painting. The severed head evokes that of the poet Orpheus, which continued to sing as it floated down the river following his death by dismemberment at the hands of those who did not appreciate his music. The theme of decapitation evokes the martyrdom of John the Baptist as well, and both point to the eternal life of artists and prophets.[176] Maurer suggests that together, these emblems of renewal "convey the idea that the challenges of change and loss can be met either by shutting oneself into grief for the past, or by throwing oneself into the life of the present."[177] This is precisely the distinction between restorative and redemptive nostalgia, and the painting's symbols ultimately point to the latter.

By placing *The Royal End* in this context, it shares in the same response to and critique of the reactionary 'nostalgia for lost paradise' tradition as does *Noa Noa*. Just as redemptive nostalgia mitigates the perceived threat of death for an individual, the text and painting each combat the "fatal impact narrative" at a personal and societal level. The framework of redemptive nostalgia situates *The Royal End* within the same structure as *Flowers of France* and *Tahitian Oranges*. Each of these three still lifes looks to a past,

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[176] There exists a rich history of artistic representation of decapitated heads in old master paintings, and Symbolist artists and writers were enfatuated with the motif. Maurer, 156. Also June Hargrove, Gauguin seminar, 7 October 2013. The theme of decapitation also evokes Judith and Holofernes, but that story's connotations differ from the martyrdom and promise of eternal life evoked by John the Baptist and Orpheus.

While Gauguin made the painting in 1892, it was exhibited in Paris in 1893, which coincided with the centennial of Louis XVI's beheading. (Mary Morton, cited in Allan, 83 and 89 n. 48.) Future work may explore possible relationships between the painting, nationalism, and French nostalgia for the monarchy at this time. Such a study would also consider the role of Poussin and Neoclassicism.

[177] Maurer, 156. Allan similarly argues that it "ultimately intimated hopes of renewal and rebirth" (75), but he concludes at the end of his article with a slightly different angle, suggesting that the artist's symbolic martyrdom is "the necessary price to be paid for the artistic regeneration of the future." Allan, 85.

whether real, imagined, or invented—the difference may itself be a mirage—and uses this reflection to imagine a path forward.

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By moving past a mere description of *The Flowers of France*, *Tahitian Oranges*, and *The Royal End* as "nostalgic" in order to analyze the forces at play beneath this apparent sentiment, this chapter has put forth a more specific and meaningful understanding of this particular form of memory and its relationship with these paintings during Gauguin's first trip to Tahiti. The framework of nostalgia, derived from present-day psychological research and cultural theory, and grounded in nineteenth-century medicine and literature, reveals that these three still lifes share not only a quality of sentimentality for the past, but also the dualities inherent in this type of reminiscence: past and future, desire and hope, memory and imagination. In this way, past-directed longing becomes an imaginative and creative meditation upon the present and future. Still life was for Gauguin, then, a site of perpetually renewed confrontation with the past in which he repeatedly grappled with memory, its processes, and its meaning.

Chapter 3. Souvenirs de l'avenir: The Sunflower Still Lifes, 1901

> *On se souvient de son enfance : se souvient-on de l'avenir ? Mémoire d'avant. Peut-être mémoire d'après, je ne saurais préciser. Dire: « Il fera beau demain. » N'est-ce pas se souvenir d'auparavant ; expériences qui déterminent une raison.*
> - Paul Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 1903[1]

In the summer of 1901, ten years since the death of Vincent van Gogh, Gauguin turned again to Arles for a subject. On this occassion he addressed van Gogh head-on: instead of oleanders or oranges, for the first time he created paintings fully devoted to the motif of sunflowers. He dedicated four canvases to this theme: *Still Life with Sunflowers in an Armchair I* and *II*, *Still Life with Hope*, and *Still Life with Sunflowers and Mangoes* (fig. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4). He painted these sunflowers from life—they were almost certainly the product of his request for seeds three years prior.[2] These canvases forcefully evoked the memory of van Gogh and other artists from Gauguin's past in France. They occur at a pivotal moment for Gauguin, when he was about to leave Tahiti for the Marquesas Islands—a nine-hundred mile journey he knew would be his last. As evidenced by the epigraph, Gauguin was thoughtful regarding the nature of memory and its relationship with the past and future. In this chapter, I consider what is at stake in the meditation upon memory enacted in his four sunflower still lifes, painted at a time when he looked forward to achieving his dream of reaching the Marquesas, but was nonetheless aware of

[1] Paul Gauguin, *Avant et après: avec les vingt-sept dessins du manuscrit* original (Paris: G. Crès, 1923 [Original 1903]), 112. All subsequent references to *Avant et après* are to this volume. "One remembers one's childhood—does one remember the future? Memory of the before, memory, perhaps of the after? I do not know for sure. To say 'it will be nice tomorrow,' is that not memory of the before, experiences that determine a reason?"

[2] Gauguin to Monfreid, October 1898. "Je voudrais que vous m'envoyiez quelques tubercules et graines de fleurs. Dahlias simples, capucines, soleils variés, les fleurs qui supportent les pays chauds — à votre idée: je voudrais embellir ma petite plantation, et comme vous savez, j'adore les fleurs." Paul Gauguin, *Lettres De Paul Gauguin à Georges-Daniel De Monfreid*, preface by Victor Segalen (Paris: Éditions Georges Crès et Cie, 1919), 226.

his impending death.[3] I will argue that these canvases are an artistic expression of, and about, his theories on memory and imagination, past and future, creativity and invention. They visually capture the thoughts that he would put into words two years later in a manuscript whose title itself evokes the same duality: *Avant et après*.

Gauguin painted this series during a period of transition. Leading up to the summer of 1901, he had been sick for months. He reported to his friend Daniel de Monfreid in September 1900 that he had influenza, but did not have the money to go to the hospital. The same was true in November, until he finally received payment for two paintings in December, and wrote immediately that he was going to admit himself. In January 1901 he wrote from the hospital, where he was being treated for eczema on his feet and influenza. He left the hospital in February, not quite healed. In April he was sick again, and despaired at not knowing when he would be able to get back to work. The flu, he said, was ravaging everyone in Tahiti. On top of that, the bubonic plague threatened to come in from San Francisco, making imported merchandise triple the price. He announced his intention to move to the Marquesas in April, before he had recovered from the flu. In June he reported that he sold his property, which had been complicated by a Tahitian legal requirement to show proof of his wife's permission to sell.[4] In May he notified his dealer, Ambroise Vollard, that all mail and supplies should be forwarded to the Marquesas, he wrote of his imminent departure in August, and he finally set sail in

[3] Gauguin began to experience the symptoms of syphilis around 1892. The disease and related symptoms plagued him for the rest of his life. David Sweetman, *Paul Gauguin: A Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 306, 425.

[4] Gauguin to Montfreid, September 1900-June 1901. *Lettres à Monfreid*, 290-318.

September 1901.[5] The paintings were thus made on the heels of his recovery and on the eve of his departure, at a time when the past and future of his career's trajectory would quite reasonably have been on his mind.

This chapter opens with visual analyses of each of the four sunflower paintings. Part one also includes an examination of Gauguin's attitudes toward flower painting and a sub-section that transitions into this chapter's treatment of memory. Parts two and three, which comprise the principal themes of the chapter, are each structured around topics that concern memory's mutability. Part two treats *Still Life with Hope* alongside concepts of layering, originality, and invention. Part three considers *Sunflowers on an Armchair I* and *II* in the context of memory and self-identity. Building upon present-day science, each part then looks to period science and literature to provide a new lens through which to examine the respective paintings. At the end of each part I return to the paintings in order to reassess the role of memory through the framework I propose.

I. Gauguin's Sunflowers

Art historians have long recognized the role of memory in these paintings. Writing several decades ago, Francoise Cachin called them a "more or less conscious homage […] obviously inspired by van Gogh."[6] Gary Tinterow describes them as "a reminder of [Gauguin's] distant past" with flowers that were "inextricably linked with Vincent and his life in France."[7] More recently, Maria Grazia Messina suggests that they

[5] Gauguin to Vollard, May, August, and September 1901. Paul Gauguin, *Letters to Ambroise Vollard & André Fontainas*, ed. John Rewald (San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1943), 46-48.

[6] Françoise Cachin, *Gauguin* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), 242.

[7] Gary Tinterow, "Still Life with Sunflowers and the Painting *Hope* by Puvis de Chavannes," in *Recent Acquisitions: A Selection, 1986-1987* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 42.

"accomplish a return, especially over time."[8] June Hargrove positions them not simply as a memory and homage to van Gogh but further, as "a meditation on that relationship and the creative process."[9] These paintings are rooted in memory and imagination, and analyzing them through a framework that models the relationship between those faculties reveals another layer in the pivotal position they hold for Gauguin's theorizations of these concepts.

Gauguin's four sunflower paintings evoke his colleagues in France in several ways. They refer most noticeably to van Gogh and his sunflower paintings, and I treat references to van Gogh individually for each painting, below. The hatch-mark brushstroke that appears in parts of each canvas—including the walls, tables, and vases—alludes to Cézanne who, like van Gogh, permeates much of Gauguin's still life oeuvre. Odilon Redon, a rarer reference in Gauguin's still lifes, here features prominently through the eye-flower motif seen in *Armchair I* and *Sunflowers and Mangoes*. Gauguin cites works by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Edgar Degas through painted reproductions of their work in *Still Life with Hope*.

Despite these many citations and allusions to French artists, the canvases nonetheless refer forcefully back to Gauguin and Tahiti. The geometric and figure motifs on the wooden vessels, the horizontal format, the mangoes, and the ethereal motifs such as eye-flowers and colorful apparitions place them outside of the Western flower painting tradition. Sunflowers themselves are not French but, like Gauguin, Peruvian in their

[8] Maria Grazia Messina, *Paul Gauguin, Un Esotismo Controverso* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2006), 151. Others who make similar arguments, including George Shackelford, Dario Gamboni, and Claire Freches-Thory, will be cited below.

[9] June Hargrove, "Paul Gauguin, *Sunflowers in an Armchair*," in *Mélanges offerts à Arnauld Brejon de Lavergnée* (Paris: Maison de la Science, 2012), 202.

ancestry.[10] They take on a life of their own, peering out of the basket like periscopes. Many of the flowers have squared petals rather than the more common pointed or rounded petals seen in van Gogh's paintings. This squared-off quality rhymes with the geometric patterns on the wood vessels, such that the flowers themselves arouse non-Western associations, as if infused with the Tahitian soil in which they grew.

Still Life with Sunflowers on an Armchair I and *II*

Gauguin composed this sub-set of two paintings in direct dialogue, or "creative competition," with van Gogh (fig. 3.1, 3.2).[11] By invoking van Gogh and his sunflowers, Gauguin re-litigates the debates on painting from memory versus painting from imagination that the two artists waged in Arles. The placement of the flowers on a chair is a charged referent that exemplifies this competition. The European wood chair used in both canvases recalls *Gauguin's Chair* (see fig. 1.36), which van Gogh painted during Gauguin's stay in Arles in 1888. In the two chair paintings, van Gogh compared the artists' respective personalities and aesthetic theories. Gauguin's chair and its gas-lit interior were refined, with a burning candle that referred to the imagination. Van Gogh's chair was by contrast understated (see fig. 1.35). Flooded with daylight, it pointed to his preference for painting from observation. Like the chair paintings, these two sunflower canvases are set during the day and night. The daytime canvas references van Gogh and observation, with an Impressionist-like landscape painting that points to what Gauguin saw as van Gogh's infatuation with that group at the time he arrived in Arles.[12] In both

[10] Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers, et al., *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2001), 85.

[11] Hargrove 2012, 202. Hargrove's argument positioning these paintings as a meditation on the creative process forms the foundation for my theories that follow.

[12] Hargrove 2012, 202-03.

canvases, the yellow-orange flowers and blue walls, as well as the orange flecks within the blue walls, refer to van Gogh's interest in color theory, which Gauguin also found excessive and not sufficiently symbolic.[13] In addition, the red, blue, and yellow form at the upper left of the daytime painting may allude to a parrot, a bird known then as now for its impressive memory yet mindless imitation.[14] Such comparisons harken back to Gauguin's drawing of van Gogh as an "ape of nature" in his 1888 preparatory sketch (see fig. 1.10) for the *Painter of Sunflowers* portrait (see fig. 1.6). In this portrait, Gauguin also placed sunflowers atop a wicker chair—the same chair van Gogh painted in *Van Gogh's Chair*.[15] The 1901 canvases thus refer in manifold ways to the artists' electric conversations on memory and imagination in Arles.

The nighttime canvas exudes an air of mystery that heightens its association with the imagination. To begin, the looming eye-flower replaces the parrot. As the only "eye" in the entire composition that looks out to the viewer, its direct gaze is juxtaposed with the real flowers that face every direction. While the daylight flowers obediently face the same direction, the evening flowers break free of nature's circadian rhythm. Some of the evening flowers bear wide-open petals like popping eyes, bursting and vivacious. Those

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[13] Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, "Gauguin Creates his World: The Object in a World of Myth and Dream," in Eisenman, ed., *Gauguin: Artist of Myth and Dream* (Milan: Skira, 2007), 372.

[14] Gamboni sees the bird motif as confirmation of "the appeal to the imagination of the spectator." Gamboni, 356. Parrots, however, traditionally refer more to imitation than imagination. This interpretation of the bird is in keeping with Hargrove's argument for the canvas generally. The Rimatara Lorikeet is a parrot native to Tahiti with similar red, blue, and yellow-green markings. A detail view of the area between the colored form and the chair reveals orange-yellow lines which must be legs and feet. On parrots and imitation in the nineteenth century, see Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 144.

[15] Several scholars point to the comparison with chairs in Arles. Hargrove 2012, 202-3; Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, *Technique and Meaning in the Paintings of Paul Gauguin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 124; Dario Gamboni, *Paul Gauguin: The Mysterious Centre of Thought* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 356.

that droop under their own weight do so gracefully, their petals nestled into parallel curves. Given the large size of this canvas and the placement of the sunflowers in the upper half of the composition, the sunflowers have the effect of towering over the viewer. The woman at right is detached from the scene at hand and bears a pensive look. She also appears in an oil transfer drawing of three Tahitian figures from the same period (fig. 3.5). The only connection between the woman and the interior occurs through the right-most sunflower whose petals reach across the threshold of the frame and pierce her plane. With her raised right eyebrow and lowered pupil, she looks surprised by something in her environment or her own thoughts. The many peering eyes and the daydreaming figure give the evening painting a sense of quiet stillness and even timelessness, broken only by the petal captured in a fleeting moment as it falls.

In both canvases, the placement of these flowers on a chair reaches deeper still into Gauguin's past, recalling still lifes that date back to 1880 (see fig. 0.3, 0.4). As discussed in the Introduction, those still lifes were themselves an early exploration of the creative process. Here, however, the white cloth draped over the chair makes the scene appear highly posed, as opposed to the seemingly haphazard settings of the earlier works. The sunflowers have been described as portrait-like,[16] placed reverently on a chair that has the "aura of an altar."[17] Gauguin likely intended to conjure all of these associations, suspending the painting and its possible interpretations between several possibilities.

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[16] "As if they had the status of a human being sitting for a portrait, in this case perhaps an elegiac portrait of years past." Fonsmark, 372.

[17] Hargrove 2012, 202. Furthering the spiritual aura, van Gogh's coffin was draped in white and surrounded with sunflowers, but given that Gauguin did not attend his funeral, he may or may not have known this. Monica Bohm-Duchen, *The Private Life of a Masterpiece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 142. Based on a letter from Émile Bernard to Albert Aurier, August 1, 1890. On Gauguin not attending the funeral, Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 375.

The same ambivalence extends to the framed scenes to the right of each chair. They may be windows or paintings, but the most plausible explanation is that Gauguin purposefully obfuscated this point.[18] The different landscapes as well as the slightly different frames suggest that these could not be depictions of scenes outside the same window, implying they are paintings. Yet the light in each tableau matches the daylight and twilight that illuminates the respective interiors. The warm glow of a low-hanging sun glistens off of the left-side armrest in the nighttime composition. The petals of the upper-right sunflower glow in pink and fuchsia hues. This light casts a square on the floor that seems to project from the window-painting. The white cloth glows with warm tones of pink streaked with blue, periwinkle, and teal, suggesting that it reflects the setting sun. In the daylight composition, the cloth similarly captures the same colors reflected in the water outside. The lack of a shadow on the more brightly-illuminated floor suggests the sun sits higher in the sky. Each of these interpretations are both possible and impossible, which serves to heighten Gauguin's experimentation with imagination and observation in these canvases. As this chapter will demonstrate, in these paintings, which are already charged with references to Gauguin's past, the debate with van Gogh on imagination and memory takes on more layered meaning.

Still Life with Hope

Like *Sunflowers on an Armchair I* and *II*, *Still Life with Hope* also makes autobiographical reference to artists from Gauguin's past, but it does so in a different manner. Here, Gauguin engaged in more direct quotation of Puvis and Degas by painting copies of works by them into his painting. The first time Gauguin incorporated a specific

[18] Hargrove (2012, 202) suggests they are canvases, but that ultimately they may be either.

artwork in his own canvas occurred in the form of a still life, which also made reference to Degas: *Still Life with Peonies* of 1885 (see fig. 0.1). Gauguin continued this practice in his still lifes through the late-1880s up to 1890, with *Woman in Front of a Still Life by Cézanne* (1890, Art Institute of Chicago). Although he had reproductions with him throughout his stay in Tahiti, eleven years went by before he returned to the practice with *Still Life with Hope* in 1901.

Degas occupies a privileged position as both the first and the last artist whose work Gauguin painted into his still lifes. *Still Life with Peonies* includes a pastel of a dancer whose graceful but limp skirt parallels the drooping petals of the peonies on the table in front of the drawing. In *Still Life with Hope*, Gauguin reproduced Degas' drypoint *The Little Dressing Room* (fig. 3.6). Gary Tinterow speculates that, given the exchange of works the two artists enjoyed in the 1880s, Gauguin could have had an original print with him in Tahiti.[19] Gauguin thought highly of Degas' nudes, writing in *Avant et après*, "et regardant ces nus, je m'écrie: 'Maintenant il est debout.'"[20] Gauguin recaptured the awkward pose of the woman's body and the contours of the room, including details such as the white ceiling, the sink, and the couch behind the woman.

The reference to Puvis' *Hope* (fig. 3.7) is much more recognizable than the relatively obscure Degas print, but Gauguin made several adjustments to this painting in his version (fig. 3.8). He had a photograph of *Hope* with him in Tahiti, visible in the upper-left of a photo taken a year later in his *Maison du jouir* in the Marquesas (fig. 3.9). While this photo and the original Degas print were both black and white, Gauguin chose

[19] Tinterow, 42.

[20] Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 118. "In looking at these nudes, I cry, 'Now it begins.'"

to colorize each. Gauguin's choice of colors for the Puvis departs from the verdant grass and pink-violet sky of Puvis' original canvas. Puvis' canvas and its larger, clothed version symbolized the desire for a return of hope and peace as France recovered from the Franco-Prussian war. While Puvis' clothed version held an oak branch, symbolizing hope (fig. 3.10), the nude version held an olive branch for peace, with an oak sprig growing near her right hand and silhouetted against the white blanket. Gauguin appears to have substituted the plump and spare leaves of the oak branch for the thinner and more abundant leaves of the olive branch in his reproduction, swapping the versions. At the same time, his browns betray a landscape that is bleaker than Puvis', the vegetation sparser. Hope, it seems, still waits for renewal. Gauguin also turned Hope's head away. Instead of looking out to confront the viewer, as if affirming the present moment, Gauguin's Hope looks back, while reaching her oak branch forward. The turned head appears as well in a drawing Gauguin made of the painting for the *Mercure de France* in 1895. In the drawing he incorporated the bottom of a crucifix with a mourner at Christ's feet, and substituted the oak branch with a lily or lotus flower.[21] Gauguin held Puvis in high regard, writing in 1899 that "certes Puvis m'écrase par son talent, et l'expérience que je n'ai pas."[22] In July 1901, however, around the same time he made this painting, he used Puvis' *Hope* as a foil by which to compare himself much more favorably to Puvis,

[21] June Hargrove, "'Woman with a Fan': Paul Gauguin's Heavenly Vairaumati: A Parable of Immortality," *The Art Bulletin* 88.3 (September, 2006): 562.

[22] Gauguin to Fontainas, March 1999. Paul Gauguin, *Lettres De Gauguin à André Fontainas* (Paris: F. Sant'Andrea Et L. Marcerou, 1921), 11. "Certain Puvis's crush me with their talent, and the experience that I do not have."

positioning himself as the artist who paints, rather than explains, his ideas.[23] As with van Gogh, a current of rivalry runs through this painting.

While the sunflowers allude to van Gogh, Gauguin transforms the reference through his non-Western take on the theme.[24] Indeed, Gauguin appears to go out of his way to emphasize the Peruvian origins of the sunflowers in this painting. The stems are thicker than those seen in *Sunflowers on an Armchair II* and the petals shorter and more squared at their tips, especially in the flower on the table and on the far left. The flowers are guarded by two stylized figures with folded arms and stern eyes that adorn the wood vessel. This vessel also departs visibly from European tradition. Its provenance goes back to Gauguin, but whether Gauguin or a local craftsman carved it remains unknown (fig. 3.11).[25] In the painting, Gauguin drastically simplified the geometric motifs of the bowl and depicted it as deeper, though he remained faithful to the decorative figures. The two colors of this vessel recall van Gogh's sunflower vases, which he consistently painted in two tones divided across the center (for example, see fig. 1.11, 1.33). Van Gogh, however, did not include objects in his sunflower canvases as Gauguin did here.[26]

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[23] Gauguin to Charles Morice, July 1901. "Puvis explique son idée, oui, mais il ne la peint pas. Il est grec tandis que moi je suis un sauvage, un loup dans les bois sans collier. Puvis intitulera un tableau *Pureté* et pour l'expliquer peindra une jeune vierge avec un lys à la main—Symbole connu ; donc on le comprend. Gauguin au titre Pureté peindra un paysage aux eaux limpides ; aucune souillure de l'homme civilisé, peut-être un personnage. Sans rentrer dans des détails il y a tout un monde entre Puvis et moi. Puvis comme peintre est un lettré et non un homme de lettres tandis que moi je ne suis pas un lettré mais peut-être un homme de lettres." Malingue, 304-05.

[24] To my knowledge Gauguin never reproduced a painting by van Gogh in the way he reproduced the above works by Puvis and Degas (and, in other cases, Cézanne). This makes sense: Gauguin necessarily saw Puvis, Degas, and Cézanne as his elders, whereas van Gogh was a contemporary whose influence upon his work Gauguin downplayed or denied in his writing.

[25] Christopher Gray, *Sculpture and Ceramics of Paul Gauguin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), 314. Gray writes that the current private owner reported that Edward Petit claimed to purchase the bowl from Gauguin, but that Petit may alternatively have acquired it from the 1903 sale of Gauguin's estate.

[26] The small painted dish next to the larger vessel is likely the same small bowl in *Still Life with Mangoes*. June Hargrove has pointed out that the other two objects on the table could represent cigarettes and

Unlike the *Armchair* paintings that contrast the orange sunflowers with their blue complement on the walls, in *Hope* the orange-brown wall harmonizes with the orange-yellow flowers. In a 1902 letter to Fontainas, Gauguin wrote that while van Gogh had been overly interested in proceeding "toujours par grandes oppositions du ton" prior to their time together in Arles, after offering van Gogh "mes conseils et mon enseignement, il procéda tout autrement." Gauguin gives as an example van Gogh's yellow sunflowers on a yellow background, in which "il apprit l'orchestration d'un ton pur par tous les dérivés de ce ton."[27] Gauguin's suggestion that he encouraged van Gogh's yellow-on-yellow sunflowers is untenable. While van Gogh's first sunflowers were painted against a blue wall, he incorporated a yellow wall for the first time in August 1888, months before Gauguin's arrival, and explained to Theo van Gogh that he got the idea for the composition from his *Quinces, lemons, pears and grapes* (see fig. 2.8), which he completed the year prior.[28] Putting aside the veracity of Gauguin's claim, this painting's matching flowers and background constitutes his version of what he considered his greatest contribution to van Gogh's work.

Still Life with Sunflowers and Mangoes

Gauguin came closest to echoing van Gogh's sunflower compositions with this canvas. The vertical composition results from Gauguin's use of a narrow-necked vase

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matches. Van Gogh enjoyed smoking and depicted a pipe and tobacco as a stand-in for himself in *Van Gogh's Chair*, 1888 (see chapter one and fig. 1.35), in which case these objects may allude to van Gogh.

[27] Gauguin to Fontainas, September 1902. *Lettres à Fontainas*, 22. Van Gogh was "producing grand oppositions of tone," but after "my councils and teaching, he proceeded quite otherwise." And "he learned the orchestration of a pure tone."

[28] Vincent to Theo van Gogh, 24 August 1888, quoted from *Vincent van Gogh - The Letters*, ed. Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten, and Nienke Bakker (Amsterdam & The Hague: Van Gogh Museum & Huygens ING, 2010), www.vangoghletters.org, letter 668.

that holds the sunflowers upright rather than sprawling out to the sides. The flowers cascade down and across the canvas and give a sense of abundance, with reason—the approximately twenty flowers here exceed by one-third the maximum number that van Gogh painted. In this abundance, which is topped off with a floating eye-flower, Gauguin's work insists on its origin in his imagination rather than from observation. While van Gogh's flowers may have towered precariously high over their vase, they are always clearly connected to a stem. Gauguin's on the other hand burst like fireworks out and away from the central bouquet in a gravity-defying arrangement.

Other factors align this canvas with Gauguin's previous still lifes and with his Tahitian setting. The bright yellow tone of the flowers—unchecked by the deeper brown that inflects the other canvases—harmonizes with the pink wall. The pink wall and the violet table are a study in allied colors, as are the yellow petals and lime-green leaves. These colors' brightness makes the space all the more ethereal, like *Tahitian Oranges* (see fig. 2.7). A curved horizon line that presumably denotes a circular table also obscures the sense of space in a manner that evokes Gauguin's own still lifes of 1888: *Still Life with Puppies* and *Fête Gloanec* (see fig. 1.23, 1.24), as well as *Flowers and Fruit on a Table* from 1894 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). The way the pink wall and violet table meet but do not touch, allowing the dark under-drawing to show through and mark the boundary, manifests another technique that was particularly prominent in Gauguin's work around 1888. The vase has been identified as a bowl (*kumete*) in the collection of the Auckland Museum, which Gauguin visited during a stopover on his second trip to Tahiti (fig. 3.12). Gauguin must have kept a photograph or postcard of this

bowl, as he later incorporated its motifs into several of his paintings.[29] In the present painting, he altered the bowl's shape to suit his needs in the composition, but remained quite faithful to the form of the figures and the geometric eye motif with its mother-of-pearl inlay. Despite these many stylistic and compositional references to his and van Gogh's work in France, the work remains grounded in Tahiti with the carved wooden vessel and the tropical fruit.

Gauguin's Thoughts on Flowers

Gauguin's thoughts on flowers and flower paintings proved erratic, and his professed disinterest in the genre must be addressed in any prolonged consideration of its relationship to his artistic theory. In April 1899 he wrote to Monfreid, "si je n'ai plus d'imagination je ferai quelques études de fleurs: Bref c'est pour moi un grand plaisir et j'en ai besoin, ma vie est si triste avec cette maladie qui annule toutes mes forces."[30] While he suggests that flower painting requires little imagination, of equal interest is that they provide him pleasure. He wrote along the same lines but in a very different tone to his dealer Ambroise Vollard a few months later, in January 1900: "Vous me parlez de fleurs peintes, je ne sais vraiment pas lesquelles malgré le petit nombre que j'en fais: et cela tient (comme vous avez pu le voir sans doute) que je ne suis pas un peintre d'après nature—aujourd'hui moins qu'avant. Tout chez moi se passe en ma folle imagination. Et

[29] The bowl, made in the mid-nineteenth century by a highly-regarded Maori artist, was carved as a presentation piece for the Governor of New Zealand. No sketches of the bowl survive, but elements of it appear in *Faa iheihe* and *Te reroia* in addition to the still life. Bronwen Nicholson, "Gauguin's Auckland Visit," in *Gauguin: Polynesia*, ed. Suzanne Greub (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2011), 251-52, 260-62.

[30] Gauguin to Monfreid, April 1899. *Lettres à Monfreid*, 244. "If I have no more imagination I shall do some studies of flowers. In brief, it is a great pleasure for me, and I need it, for this illness, which takes all my strength, makes my life miserable." *Letters of Paul Gauguin to Georges Daniel de Monfreid*, trans. Ruth Pielkovo (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1923), 117-18. The illness he refers to was likely a flare-up of eczema related to his syphilis, for which doctors treated him two months earlier. (Gauguin to Monfreid, 22 February 1899. *Lettres à Monfreid*, 239.)

quand je suis fatigué de faire des figures (ma prédilection) je commence une nature morte que je termine d'ailleurs sans modèle."[31] In this letter Gauguin was heatedly responding to Vollard's specific request for drawings on a particular kind of paper and for more flower paintings. Gauguin retorted that such demands would shackle his creativity, and that he does not produce art for the market—were that his goal, he maintained that he would be a much wealthier man. Regarding the state of his garden itself, he wrote to Monfreid in the same April 1899 letter quoted above that "Les iris, les dahlias, glaïeuls, viennent vite et à merveille… Tout cela joint à beaucoup d'arbustes à fleurs de Tahiti va faire autour de ma case un véritable éden,"[32] yet seven months later he ended the above tirade to Vollard with, "Puis ici, ce n'est vraiment pas le pays des fleurs."[33] The mildest of his comments came in *Diverses choses*, where he asserted that one should be able to recognize an artist's hand even in his paintings of flowers.[34] His qualification—"quoique caché derrière"—suggests that flower paintings are not easily indicative of an artist's style.

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[31] Gauguin to Vollard, January 1900. Malingue, 300. Malingue marks the correspondent as Emmanuel Bibesco and dates it to July 1900, but Vollard is the more widely agreed-upon recipient, for example, in Rewald, 31-32 and Paul Gauguin, *The Writings of a Savage*, ed. Daniel Guérin (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 204. "You mention flower paintings. I really don't know which ones you mean; although I have done only a few; and that is because (as you have doubtless perceived) I do not copy nature—today even less than formerly. With me, everything happens in my exuberant imagination, and when I tire of painting figures (which I like best) I begin a still life and finish it without any model." Trans. Rewald, 32.

[32] Gauguin to Monfreid, April 1899. *Lettres à Monfreid,* 244. "The irises, dahlias, and gladioli are growing quickly and wonderfully… All of this together with the many Tahitian flowering shrubs will make a veritable Eden outside my house."

[33] Gauguin to Vollard, January 1900. Malingue, 300. "Besides, this is not really a land of flowers." Trans. Rewald, 32.

[34] Paul Gauguin, *Gauguin écrivain, Ancien culte mahorie, Noa Noa, Diverses choses*, ed. Isabelle Cahn. [DVD] (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2003), 208. "Je ne sais plus quel auteur anglais a dit qu'on devait reconnaître le roi quoique nu dans une foule de baigneurs. Il en est de même pour l'artiste, on doit le distinguer quoique caché derrière les fleurs qu'il a peintes." All subsequent references to *Diverses choses* are to this edition.

While Cachin takes these claims at face value,[35] the sunflower paintings may instead represent a rejection of the type of easily-marketable flower painting that Vollard sought. Gauguin turned the European tradition on its side by composing three of the four canvases horizontally rather than the more standard vertical format. Further, he placed the sunflowers in vessels that are low and wide, departing from the elongated, narrow-necked European vases seen in countless Impressionist flower paintings. Even in the more conventionally composed vertical canvas, the vessel's geometric pattern and primitivized figures, not to mention its construction from wood, are distinctly non-European. In the same way, the mangoes replace traditional apples with a more "exotic" counterpart. These paintings, then, are more a refutation of Vollard's request for marketable flower paintings than a concession to it. As for Gauguin's suggestion to Monfreid that he would paint studies of flowers when he had no more imagination, these works escape such a classification since they are certainly not "studies" and, further, they use the flower painting genre only as a platform for a deeper inquiry.

Flowers of Memory

As the opening look at the paintings in this chapter reveals, these works circulate around issues of narrating the past. In the nineteenth century as today, memory was understood as an integral component of self-identity. In these works we witness Gauguin in the process of constructing his identity from the past and for the future. In this way, Gauguin was participating in the formation of the modern self. At the same time, the works also address the concept of layered citation, and by extension, originality,

[35] "Everything about him at the time betrays the weakening of his imagination and the deepening of his angst." Cachin, 242.

invention, and their relationship to plagiarism. These concepts were understood in terms of memory in the nineteenth century as they are today. Thus the canvases not only revisit the debates on painting from memory versus the imagination with which van Gogh and Gauguin wrestled thirteen years prior; they interrogate memory at a deeper level as well, going beyond visual memory of images to autobiographical memory of one's past. Yet still, even in this new domain, memory remains in dynamic tension with imagination.

Scholars of nineteenth-century literature and historians of science have demonstrated that individual memory was a pervasive concern and interest in the period. For some, this came as a disconcerting mistrust of memory and its unreliability. For others, the same lack of reliability was seen as a liberating freedom, since a capricious memory could not be responsible for attributing sources or staying true to any precise record of events. Instead memory was seen as imaginative, creative, and constructive; it foretold the future.[36] While art historians have focused the study of memory in the nineteenth century on visual memory and collective memory, it stands to reason that artists, like their peers in literature, would also have grappled with concerns about individual memory.

In what follows, I will present period understandings of autobiographical memory in literature and science as a structure through which we can interpret its operation within Gauguin's paintings. I employ models from the present-day science of memory to help identify aspects of the period literature that we might otherwise overlook. Alan

[36] Literature scholar Robert Cohn goes so far as to say that, "with Mallarmé, the role of memory (which runs through the nineteenth century prominently […]) reaches its peak of sophistication." Robert Greer Cohn, "'O quel lointain': Memory in Mallarmé," *Romanic Review* 70.2 (March 1, 1979): 143. The parenthetical clause is his. I will cite several more scholars of literature and history when I discuss these topics more specifically below.

Richardson, whom I quoted in the Introduction regarding methods of "cognitive historicism," details the possible avenues opened by drawing from scientific studies of the mind. He contends that they reveal "a wealth of productive new ways to think about language, the imagination, narrative, aesthetic response, rhetoric, poetics, and literary creativity, as well as providing fresh perspectives on authorship, subject formation, individual agency, and consciousness."[37] Those same issues of narrative, creativity, authorship, and agency lie, as I will argue, at the center of the sunflower paintings, making the cognitive sciences a fitting starting point for my investigations.

II. Hope: Memory as Palimpsest

Gauguin's reproductions in *Still Life with Hope*—and thereby the theme of reproduction itself—are key components of the composition. For one, they occupy significant visual weight. *Hope* appears in the top corner, and as the lightest part of the composition, the eye is repeatedly drawn in its direction. The asymmetrical position of the sunflowers produces the same effect: they are arranged as if the flowers draw back to reveal the works behind them. Further, the reproductions are direct quotations of known works by other artists, which represents a re-visitation of a practice Gauguin had abandoned for eleven years. These reproductions themselves replicate another type of reproduction. The Degas represents a print—an inherently reproductive medium—and the Puvis is a painting of a photograph of a painting. These layered references evoke the palimpsest, which was a popular metaphor in the late-nineteenth century. The reproduction and repetition intrinsic to print and photographic media reinforce the idea of

[37] Alan Richardson, *The Neural Sublime: Cognitive Theories and Romantic Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 10.

direct citation. As a result the painting raises questions of authorship, originality, and the fluctuating attitudes toward these issues during the *fin de siècle.* After discussing the palimpsest model of memory, I will consider its relationship with authorship and originality as understood today and in Gauguin's period. As June Hargrove demonstrates regarding Gauguin's repetition of the *Vairaumati* motif, which itself derives from Puvis' *Hope*, "the premise of transposition is the linchpin of Gauguin's creative process, which demands unfettered freedom to achieve true originality."[38] In the last section of Part II, I will discuss the role of these concepts as they relate to memory in *Still Life with Hope*.

Palimpsest: The Fear and Liberation of Overwriting

A palimpsest by its original definition is a surface that has been overwritten, with some of the underlying writing incompletely erased. By "metaphoric extension," it has come to mean "any object, place, or area that reflects or imaginatively incorporates its own history."[39] The palimpsest is a surface that changes and preserves a record of those changes for the future.[40] As such, it suspends temporality by collapsing the past, present, and future onto the same plane. As Sara Dillon writes, "it determines how we view the past and the present, and embodies within itself the promise of the future."[41] The

[38] Hargrove 2006, 552. Hargrove's discussion of transposition and its relationship with originality and liberty is central to my argument on the role of these concepts in the sunflower still lifes.

[39] Mark J. Bruhn, "Time as Space in the Structure of (Literary) Experience," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 606. See also Yadin Duadi, "Palimpsest," in *Memory from A to Z: Keywords, Concepts, and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 184.

[40] Josephine McDonagh, "Writings on the mind: Thomas De Quincey and the importance of the palimpsest in nineteenth-century thought," *Prose Studies* 10.1 (1987): 212.

[41] Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*, Continuum Literary Studies (New York: Continuum, 2007), 9.

palimpsest also functions as a model in which the old and the new merge to form a third version, a unique creation independent of the old and the new.

Ancient palimpsests were sheets of vellum which, due to the rarity of the material, were erased through chemical methods or physical scraping and then reused. By the eighteenth century, some chemical erasures had degraded such that pieces of the original text revealed themselves. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a chemical procedure was discovered that allowed a "palimpsest editor" to reverse the erasure and reveal the formerly effaced older layers. Several ancient texts thought to have been lost or destroyed were uncovered with this method. Lost texts were revealed to have existed all along, accessible to those who knew how to find them.[42] With this new understanding of a palimpsest's properties of incomplete erasure came the symbolic extension of its meaning. Thomas De Quincey was the first to use the palimpsest as a metaphorical concept in an essay published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1845, and later as part of *Suspira de Profundis*, which he conceived as a sequel to his earlier autobiography, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*.[43] De Quincey's discussion of the palimpsest made its way to France through Charles Baudelaire, whose *Les Paradis Artificiels* (1860) responded to and translated passages of *Confessions* and *Suspira*. The palimpsest remained an object of popular fascination in the following decades, evidenced for

[42] McDonagh, 210.

[43] Dillon, 1. While Thomas Carlyle wrote on the palimpsest with a degree of symbolism in 1830, Dillon positions De Quincey as the first to fully free the concept of the palimpsest from the physical object, writing that he inaugurated the "substantive concept of the palimpsest." I will go on to discuss both writers' essays below.

example in an article titled “Le Palimpseste” in the *Mercure de France* in 1887, which told a fictional story of a palimpsest editor with some degree of humor and mockery.[44]

Present-day science

The fact that memory undergoes constant change is by no means a new concept. Scientists now understand, however, that the overwriting and alteration of memory is not a flaw in the system but rather a primary function of it. Were memory’s purpose to store an accurate record of our past experiences, then it would indeed be a failed system. Instead, scientists argue, memory is a pool of knowledge that helps us imagine and prepare for our future based on our past. For this reason, new experiences are constantly stirred into this pool that we call memory in order to update it for the future. Like a Janus face, memory looks both backward and forward.[45] Since future events are not replicas of past events, a solidified memory that runs like a video reel would not prove useful in the imagined simulation of future events. Instead, episodic memories, which describe the recollection of events from one’s own life, are stored not as full episodes but as discrete parts. The “constructive episodic simulation” model proposed by Daniel Schacter and Donna Rose Addis allows these parts of memory to be rearranged, retaining the “gist” of our experiences if not all of their original detail. “Critically,” they write, “it can flexibly

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[44] Gilbert Augustin-Thierry, "Le Palimpseste," *Revue des deux mondes* 80 (March 15, 1887), 241-301. In this passage, an official contacts M. Chéraval to tell him he has been chosen to work on a newly-discovered palimpsest:

> --Monsieur Chéraval ! s’écria-t-il, la France emprunte aujourd’hui ma faible voix pour parler à votre patriotisme ! Elle réclame impérieusement de vous un grand, un immense service ! […] Oui, la France vous demande, monsieur, de l’aider à reconstituer son trésor national ! Elle veut recouvrer un objet non pareil, joyau perdu, -- que dis-je volé peut être. Un manuscrit rarissime,.. un palimpseste !
>
> --Un palimpseste! et je me levai frémissant. […] Un palimpseste authentique et inconnu ? […] Et dans quelle bibliothèque ignorée se cache une semblable merveille ? (241-42)

[45] Yadin Duadi and Mary Carruthers, “The Janus Face of Mnemosyne,” *Nature* 434 (March 31, 2005): 567.

extract, recombine and reassemble these elements in a way that allows us to simulate, imagine or 'pre-experience' events that have never occurred previously," and prepare for them in the future.[46] A memory goes through these changes each time the mind recalls it, summoning with each successive recollection not the original memory, but the version created the last time it was retrieved and re-encoded. Different types of studies support this finding. For example, developmental psychologists find that children tend to develop the ability to imagine the future around the same time they develop personal memories, and aging adults tend to lose both abilities around the same time, pointing to the role of imagination in recollection. Neuroscientists likewise point to "significant overlap" in the neural mechanisms that facilitate recollection and future-directed imagination.[47] This quality of flexible extraction and reassembly is key to the late-nineteenth century's (and Gauguin's) concept of originality and invention, as will become clear below.

Neuroscientist Yadin Duadi has discussed this mutable and re-combinatory understanding of memory using the metaphor of the palimpsest, and points out that the palimpsest has served as a model for the brain and the mind since the Romantic period.[48] He describes the "palimpsestic memory system" as one in which a new memory "is superimposed on the old one(s) to yield a representation that is different from both old

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[46] Daniel Schacter and Donna Rose Addis, "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Constructive Memory: Remembering the Past and Imagining the Future," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 362 (2007), 778. Schacter and Addis seem to have been among the first to propose, in 2007, that a major adaptive advantage of the memory system is "to draw on past experiences in a way that allows us to imagine and simulate episodes that might occur in our personal futures."

[47] Sally C. Prebble, Donna Rose Addis, and Lynette J. Tippett, "Autobiographical Memory and Sense of Self," *Psychological Bulletin* 139.4 (2013), 829, and studies cited therein. Prebble's article is primarily a literature review examining the state of the relationship between remembering the past and imagining the future, and thus compiles several studies that support the same idea.

[48] Duadi 2002, 184. From the humanities side, Alan Richardson (cited above) has done extensive work on Romantic-era literature that incorporates models of the brain and mind.

and new." He adds that both theoretical and experimental findings support this process, in that "new experience interacts with previous ones to generate new internal representations."[49] This means that our present state at the moment we recall a memory—from our emotions to our motivational agendas—inflects the way we arrange and retrieve that memory, which in turn informs the subsequent recollection.

Nineteenth-century science: The problem of testimony

While scientists now recognize the adaptive advantage of a mutable memory as a mechanism for imagining the future, many in the nineteenth century experienced this discovery as a loss or even a threat. Historians of science describe "a very noticeable increase in the amount, but also in the nature, of attention devoted to the topic of memory,"[50] which led to a "radically new" understanding of a type of memory that was "highly mediated and potentially misleading."[51] A fear of this kind of overwriting pervaded studies of memory, particularly in the courtroom. Whereas jurisprudence systems long held that witness testimony was either truthful or purposefully deceptive, the rise of psychology in the nineteenth century opened the door to a third, far more problematic possibility: honest self-deception. Swearing under oath could no longer

[49] Duadi 2002, 184. See also Duadi's entry on "Engram" in the same volume, pp. 87-89, and Yadin Duadi, "The Engram Revisited: On the Elusive Permanence of Memory," in *The Memory Process: Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives*, ed. Suzanne Nalbantian, Paul M. Matthews, and James L. McClelland (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), 29-40, which includes a section on "The Engram as Palimpsest."

[50] Kurt Danziger, *Marking the Mind: A History of Memory* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 108.

[51] Lisa O'Sullivan, "Lost Imagination: French Nostalgia and the Turn to Memory," *Memory Studies* 3.3 (July 2010), 193.

guarantee the truth, and in response to this crisis of truth and memory, psychologists across Europe developed "the science of testimony."[52]

In France, Alfred Binet pioneered studies of corrupted memory. Binet studied misremembered events, and believed that recollection was not an individual process but a social one. Memory's integrity could be compromised by the power of "suggestion" from others, overwriting the original and truthful memory with a new one, which the subject honestly believed was real and accurate. Binet performed experiments in which the adult facilitator was capable of altering the child subject's recall of a staged event. He also took interest in "hypermnesia," which he considered an illness in which one recalled an event that never happened, and "paramnesia," which was said to distort the original experience at the moment of recollection. Binet's theories of suggestibility found that women and children were most vulnerable to suggestion. The distortions Binet studied are now understood as normal, not pathological, and driven by internal as well as social processes. Yet by labeling them as pathological, Binet and his colleagues could cling to their belief in the innocence of memory, which they maintained was only corrupted by suggestion or illness.[53]

German psychologist William Stern and his wife Clara Stern studied their own children using "naturalistic observation." This technique, as opposed to controlled experiments in a laboratory setting, was made popular by Charles Darwin.[54] They

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[52] Matt Matsuda derives this term from E. Paulus, *Du témoinage suspect* (Paris: A. Rousseau, 1912), 10. Paulus noted in this 1912 text that a "science of testimony" was "flourishing" over the past two decades. Quoted and translated in Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 103. Matsuda calls this a "pan-European framework." See also Danziger, 193.

[53] Danziger, 194-95. Notably, Binet's *La Suggestibilité* was reviewed in the February 1901 issue of the *Mercure de France* (no. 134, pp. 497-99), to which Gauguin subscribed.

[54] Danziger, 195. William Stern is best known for developing the Intelligence Quotient, or IQ, test.

recorded and examined the truthfulness of their children's statements in comparison to each other and over the course of their childhood. They often showed their children a picture, and would, after varying periods of time, ask their children to describe it. In one example, the child described a black and white photograph in color. They note that their daughter was not lying, but was honestly deceived by her memory.[55] In another case, after a walk on which they would normally see swans but on this day did not, Clara Stern asked her daughter what they saw, and the daughter included the swans in her story.[56] The Sterns recognized that children do not distinguish between reality and fantasy, or memory and imagination.[57] They therefore went beyond Binet to conclude that, in life as in courtroom testimony, "error-free recollection is not the rule but the exception."[58]

Other psychologists in France went on to understand memory's mutability as a natural and inevitable process as well. André Fribourg, for example, argued that witness testimony depends more on the way in which we are invited to recall an event than the original experience of that event.[59] Édouard Claparède argued that even if a majority of witnesses agree, that does not prove that their memory is more correct than a minority. He demonstrated this by asking his students whether or not there existed a particular type

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[55] Clara Stern and William Stern, *Recollection, Testimony, and Lying in Early Childhood*, trans. James T. Lamiell (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999 [Original 1909]), 29-32.

[56] Stern 1999/1909, 29.

[57] "What the child says is often only an expression of his or her momentary subjective imagination, whether this happens to match some objective past reality or not. […] The entire life of our child was characterized by confabulations without harming her healthy ability to give objective accounts. […] It would be a complete distortion of the facts to characterize these as instances of lying, because when seriousness and play are still not separated in the life of the child, truth and lying cannot be separated either." Stern 1999/1909, 34-5. Also discussed in Danziger, 196.

[58] William Stern, quoted and translated in Siegfried Ludwig Sporer, "A brief history of the psychology of testimony," *Current Psychological Reviews* 2 (1982): 327.

[59] Described in Matsuda, 110.

of window outside their lecture hall, which they passed every day. Of his class, forty-four students said no, eight said yes, and two said they didn't know. The window did indeed exist, pointing to the fallibility of the majority. This type of anecdotal experiment that included educated males—not the supposedly suggestible classes of women and children—brought the awareness of memory's universal unreliability to a new height.[60]

Frances Power Cobbe was a professional American journalist who wrote with remarkable prescience about memory for a general audience. Though she was not a professional scientist, the psychologists she wrote about corresponded with her, suggesting the relevance of her ideas.[61] Far more than Binet and even the Sterns, Cobbe understood memory to be inherently unstable: "our remembrance is habitually, not merely fallible, but faulty."[62] As one example she points out that even in the courtroom, when "the most honest witnesses" have sworn under oath to tell the truth, they nonetheless contradict each other and "thereby prove the inaccuracy of memory."[63] Her conclusions offer a candid glimpse into the anxiety underlying discoveries of memory's instability:

> The conclusions to which this brief review of the failures and weaknesses of memory must lead us are undoubtedly painful. To be deceived a hundred times, and misled even in important matters, by a wrong estimate of our powers, seems less sad than to be compelled to admit that the powers themselves are

[60] Quoted and discussed in Matsuda, 110.

[61] Jenny Bourne Taylor, "Fallacies of memory in nineteenth-century psychology: Henry Holland, William Carpenter and Frances Power Cobbe," *Victorian Review* 26.1 (2000): 100.

[62] Frances Power Cobbe, "The fallacies of memory," in *Hours of Work and Play* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1867), 87.

[63] Cobbe, 96-8.

> untrustworthy. 'To be weak is to be miserable,' in this as in all other things; but to find Memory weak is to be not only feeble in the present, but to lose our grasp of the past. That dear Past! the past by whose grave we are standing all our later life, is doubly lost to us if we must cover it up in dust and oblivion. To know that what we deem we recall so vividly is but a poor, shifting reflex—hardly of the thing itself, only of our earlier remembrance of the thing—this is sad and mournful.[64]

Nineteenth-century science: Metamorphosis, erasure, addition

While the courtroom proved the most urgent and practical application of new studies in memory, Henri Bergson and Théodule Ribot studied the subject from a more theoretical angle. The palimpsest model of memory most clearly resonates in their language. They recognized how each new memory could overlie or overwrite an old one, moving ever-further from the original memory and creating a new, "composite" version of that memory. Bergson, for example, explained "que les images successivement développées par chaque lecture se recouvrent entre elles, et que la leçon une fois apprise n'est que l'image composite résultant de la superposition de toutes les autres."[65] As Ribot described four years later in *L'Imagination Créatrice*, memory's image "est donc soumise à un travail incessant de métamorphose, de suppressions et d'additions, de dissociation et de corrosion."[66] The palimpsest metaphor hovers amidst these descriptions

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[64] Cobbe, 111.

[65] Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit.* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1896), 77. "The images successively developed by each repetition overlie each other, so that the lesson once learned is but the composite image in which all readings are blended." Translations of Bergson 1896 are from *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1929 [Original 1896]), 90.

[66] Théodule Armand Ribot, *Essai sur l'imagination créatrice* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1900), 16. "The image, then, is subject to an unending process of change, of suppression and addition, of dissociation and corrosion."

of blending, erasure, and addition. Ribot continues, "C'est qu'elle n'est pas une chose morte; elle ne ressemble pas à un cliché photographique dont on peut indéfiniment reproduire des copies. Dépendante de l'état du cerveau, elle change comme tout ce qui est vivant, elle est sujette à des gains et à des pertes—surtout à des pertes."[67] Memory, he suggests, depends less on the original experience than on one's state at the moment in which the experience is recalled. Amateur readers as well as professionals took interest in Ribot's work, and the *Mercure de France*, to which Gauguin subscribed while in Tahiti, reviewed this book and cited it as one of the best of the year in the January and March 1901 issues.[68]

Cobbe's discussion of these concepts precedes Bergson's and Ribot's by three decades and further highlights the palimpsestic notion of memory in the nineteenth century. Pointing to memory's rebirth and renewal in the moment of recall, and its reference not to the original event but only to the prior recollection, she writes,

> Memory is neither an impression made, once for all, like an engraving on a tablet, nor yet safe for an hour from obliteration or modification, after being formed. Rather is memory a finger-mark traced on shifting sand, ever exposed to obliteration when left unrenewed; and if renewed, then modified, and made, not the same, but a fresh and different mark. Beyond the first time of recalling a place

English translations of Ribot 1900 are from *Essay on the Creative Imagination*, trans. Albert Baron (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 19.

[67] Ribot 1900, 16. "This means that it is not a dead thing; it is not at all like a photographic plate with which one may reproduce copies indefinitely. Being dependent on the state of the brain, the image undergoes change like all living substance,--it is subject to gains and losses, especially losses." Trans., 19.

[68] Reviewed by Louis Weber, *Mercure de France* 143 (February 1901), 491-93. Discussed as one of the year's best books in "La France Jugée à l'Étranger," 134 (January 1901), 579. On Gauguin's subscription to this periodical in Tahiti, letter to Fontainas, August 1899. Gauguin, *Lettres à Fontainas*, 18. Several Gauguin scholars refer to his avid reading of the *Mercure* throughout his time in Tahiti.

> or event, it is rare to remember again actually the place or the event. We remember, not the things themselves, but the first recollection of them, and then the second and the third, always the latest recollection of them.[69]

Just as the palimpsest, once overwritten, is indelibly altered from its original form, in memory, "it is easy to go back over the impression we have renewed with a fresh mark, but to descend beneath and clear up the original impression is extremely difficult. […] In all and every case the original mark is ere long essentially changed." Our mind "reproduces, not the event it assumes to record, but that idea of it which, after twenty modifying repetitions, has left for the moment the uppermost trace in our minds."[70] While Cobbe, Ribot, and Bergson did not invoke the palimpsest specifically, French and British writers of the period did flesh out this metaphor. I have highlighted the imagery of the trace, mark, repetition, obliteration, and decent in the scientific writing, all of which circulates around the structure of palimpsest, in order to underscore contemporaneous echoes among the literary community in the section that follows.

Nineteenth-century literature

Unlike some who feared or mourned the loss of trust in memory, many writers saw the repetition, erasure, and overwriting of memory as a compelling metaphor for their own work. Some writers discussed the palimpsest outright, and many also took it as a structure for their narratives. As introduced above, De Quincey was the first to employ the palimpsest in a metaphorical sense, and Baudelaire brought this model to the French

[69] Cobbe, 104.

[70] Cobbe, 104-5.

reading public in 1860 with *Les Paradis artificiels*.[71] Baudelaire opened his section on the palimpsest with a paraphrased quotation from De Quincey: “Mon cerveau est un palimpseste et le vôtre aussi, lecteur.”[72] He then went on to quote De Quincey’s famous passage on moments in which forgotten memories flood the mind: “tout l’immense et compliqué palimpseste de la mémoire se déroule d’un seul coup, avec toutes ses couches superposées de sentiments défunts, mystérieusement embaumés dans ce que nous appelons l’oubli."[73] I will return to more thoroughly discuss this text in Part III, but for the moment it stands as an important example of the memory-as-palimpsest metaphor in French literature.

De Quincey’s fellow Briton Thomas Carlyle discussed the palimpsest in his 1830 essay, “On History.” In this passage, Carlyle positioned the palimpsest as a site of exchange between the past and the future:

> Let us search more and more into the Past; let all men explore it, as the true fountain of knowledge; by whose light alone, consciously or unconsciously employed, can the Present and the Future be interpreted or guessed at. For though the whole meaning lies far beyond our ken; yet in that complex Manuscript, covered over with formless inextricably entangled unknown characters,—nay,

[71] Dillon, 32. Dillon traces the lasting influence of De Quincey (via Baudelaire) in the work of Gide, Proust, and Genette, among others.

[72] Charles Baudelaire, "Visions d’Oxford," chapter VIII of *Les Paradis Artificiels*, in *Oeuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire IV: Petits poëmes en prose. Les paradis artificiels* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1899), 329. “My brain is a palimpsest and so too is yours, reader.”

[73] Baudelaire, *Oeuvres completes* 1899, 330. “The whole immense and complicated palimpsest of memory unrolls in in a single instant, with all the superimposed layers of past feelings mysteriously embalmed in that which we call forgetting.”

> which is a *Palimpsest*, and had once prophetic writing still dimly legible there,—some letters, some words, may be deciphered.[74]

British literature scholar Brecht De Groot argues that Carlyle constructed *Sartor Resartus* as a palimpsest. In the novel, a fictional editor (of the magazine in which the story originally appeared serially) narrates his experience attempting to reconstruct the life and theories of a German philosopher, Professor Teufelsdröckh. By including Carlyle as the narrator of the editor's experience, the novel becomes a triple re-telling of the professor's life (as told by the professor, the editor, and the author). In this way, De Groot writes, "Carlyle's concept of memory writing […] involves repeated erasures or destructions."[75] Carlyle reveals the transitory nature of memory, which, like a palimpsest, creates structures as it destroys others. *Sartor Resartus* then becomes Carlyle's "prolonged examination" of what the palimpsestic nature of memory means "for the practice of reading, writing and interpreting."[76] De Groot concludes that the origin, or the remembered experience, "is less a thing found than it is a thing created."[77] This points to an important property of memory as palimpsest: the inherently creative nature of the act of recollection. Gauguin very likely read *Sartor Resartus* while in Tahiti, when the *Mercure de France* published a serialized version of the book between 1895 and 1897.[78]

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[74] Thomas Carlyle, "On History," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays: Collected and Republished*, vol. 2 (London: James Fraser), 251.

[75] Brecht De Groote, "The Palimpsest as a Double Structure of Memory: The Rhetoric of Time, Memory and Origins in Thomas De Quincey and Thomas Carlyle," *Orbis Litterarum* 69.2 (2014): 111.

[76] De Groot, 117, see also 112.

[77] De Groot, 119.

[78] Philippe Verdier, "Un manuscrit de Gauguin: L'Esprit Moderne et le Catholicisme," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 46 (1985): 283. Gauguin was aware of *Sartor Resartus* as far back as 1888, when it appeared in his portrait of Meyer de Haan.

Like Carlyle, Gustave Flaubert used palimpsestic imagery in his writing and incorporated its structure into his work. In his "Voyage en famille," after noting that "on écrit ses souvenirs pour les mêler à d'autres souvenirs," Flaubert goes on to recollect how, on his last journey to Toulouse, he was constantly "obsessed" with memories of his first trip. The distance between the present experience and the memory seemed to be erased, such that they existed together.[79] Much like a palimpsest, he described his experiences as layered yet existing on the same surface. But also, the act of mixing these layers causes them to become something new: "les ombres et les lumières se mêlent, tout prend même teinte, comme dans les vieux tableaux: les jours tristes se colorent des jours gais, les jours heureux s'alanguissent un peu de la mélancolie des autres."[80] As these memories combine, the old ones are made warmer and their perceived verisimilitude substitutes for the original experience. These layers reappear in a passage on Corsica, in which the narrator is: "ébouli, étourdi de tant de soleil, de tant d'images, et de toutes les pensées qui arrivaient les unes sur les autres, sereines et limpides comme des flots sur des flots."[81] Again, these thoughts are layered yet ephemeral, disappearing like waves. In a

[79] Gustave Flaubert, "Voyage en famille," in *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert. Notes de Voyages: Italie, Égypte, Palestine, Rhodes*, vol. 9 (Paris: Louis Conard, 1910), 11-12. "Partout, jusqu'à Toulon, j'ai été obsédé, surtout quand j'y repense, par les souvenirs de mon premier voyage ; la distance qui les sépare s'efface, ils se posent toujours en parallèle et se mettent au même niveau, si bien que déjà ils me semblent presque à même éloignement." I learned of the Flaubert passages that I quote in this section through Christophe Ippolito, *Narrative Memory in Flaubert's Works* (New York: P. Lang, 2001), 95-97, who dedicates a chapter to the palimpsestic qualities of Flaubert's writing.

[80] Flaubert, *Œuvres complètes* vol. 9, 13. "The shadows and light mix, everything takes on the same tone like in old paintings: the sad days are tinged like the good days; the happy days languish a bit from the melancholy of the others."

[81] Gustave Flaubert, *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert. Par les champs et par les grèves*; *Pyrénées, Corse*, vol. 11 (Paris: Louis Conard, 1910), 461. "Dazzled and dazed by so much sun, so many images, and all the thoughts that arrive one upon the other, serene and clear like waves upon waves." In another similar passage from *Par les champs et par les grèves*, Flaubert writes that "L'histoire est, comme la mer, belle par ce qu'elle efface." *Ibid*, 16.

passage that allegorizes the dependence of authors upon writers of the past, Flaubert writes, "Les voies romaines, où roulaient les chars consulaires, ne servent plus depuis longtemps, mille nouveaux sentiers les traversent, les champs se sont élevés dessus, le blé y pousse, mais on en aperçoit encore la trace, et leurs grosses pierres ébrèchent les charrues quand on laboure."[82] For as much as history overwrites the past, if new authors do not heed the trace of those who came before them, the old stones (or old masters) will chip their plows. Literary theorist Christophe Ippolito demonstrates that these allusions to layers, traces, and erasure drift between memory and the writing process, pointing to the palimpsestic nature of authors building upon the work of their predecessors.[83]

Ippolito argues that Flaubert also practiced palimpsestic layering in his fiction. One method Flaubert used often was the incorporation of a text into another text, for example through characters who read or discuss a text within the narrative.[84] In another technique, Flaubert created social "types" who "participate in a mnemonic effect" both through their recurrence throughout the narrative, and in their resemblance to types that Flaubert "imported" from another author. Balzac's *femme de trente ans*, for example, becomes Flaubert's *femme de quarante ans*, who then shows up in several of Flaubert's

[82] Gustave Flaubert, *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert. Œuvres de Jeunesse inédites (1839-42); Oeuvres diverses, Novembre,* vol. 17 (Paris: Louis Conard, 1910), 236. "Roman roads, where consular chariots once rolled, no longer serve; thousands of new paths cross them, fields are planted above them, wheat grows upon them, but one can still see the trace, and their large stones chip the plows when one works." This image of Roman roads with chariots, imbued with a nostalgic tinge, brings to mind paintings such as Nicolas Poussin's *Funeral of Phocion*. That work, as well as *Et in Arcadia Ego*, similarly evoke the passage of time in layers.

[83] Ippolito, 97.

[84] Ippolito, 98-100.

works. Ippolito calls this "intellectual bricolage."[85] Gauguin was also considered a *bricoleur*, and below I will discuss the palimpsestic qualities of his bricolage.

Arriving finally at literary Symbolism, Nicolae Babuts discusses Stéphane Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* as a poem built upon memory and layering.[86] Mallarmé spent decades on this poem; he began in 1864 and it was unfinished at the time of his death in 1898. The task the poet set out for himself at the start was to invent a new language, "peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit."[87] Babuts argues that memory played a central role in Mallarmé's efforts. He points to affinities that Mallarmé's Hérodiade shares with a woman from a Baudelaire poem and another from a Flaubert novel (*Salammbô*), on top of its origins in the Bible. These "echoes and reflections," Babuts writes, are "not an imitation… but true mimesis, mnemonic and creative in nature."[88] In addition to the layers of sources, Hérodiade herself represents a fusion of Salomé and her mother Herodias into a third, new composite figure. Hérodiade "is neither the innocent dancer […] nor the calculating Herodias, but a new being that represents an idea."[89] The palimpsestic quality of the poem, then, extends to the construction of the protagonist herself, as the act of layering results in a third version that signifies neither of the original

[85] First in *Par les champs et par les greves*, and again in *La Education sentimentale* and *Voyage en Italie et en Suisse*. Ippolito, 105-10.

[86] Nicolae Babuts, *Mimesis in a Cognitive Perspective: Mallarmé, Flaubert, and Eminescu* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 111, 123.

[87] Mallarmé to Henri Cazalis, October 1864. Quoted and translated in Babuts 2011, 111. "To depict not the thing, but the effect it produces."

[88] Babuts 2011, 114, also 112-113.

[89] Babuts 2011, 118.

two but a new invention. Despite Gauguin's oft-professed disdain for writers, he held great respect for Mallarmé and his work.[90]

Gauguin's palimpsestic writing

Gauguin also layered his sources in his writing as in his art.[91] While I will address this quality in his art below, here I will point to the palimpsestic nature of his manuscripts, in which he amassed diverse sources and quotations from his own written oeuvre and from other authors. Henri Dorra and more recently, Linda Goddard, have carefully catalogued, attributed, and analyzed Gauguin's writings, honing in on repeated passages and identifying their original authors.[92] For example, Gauguin transcribed passages from a book on Richard Wagner on three occasions. While he gave no attribution in his first transcription in an 1885 manuscript, he later labeled the lengthy passages "De Richard Wagner" in *Cahier pour Aline* (1893) and *Diverses choses* (1896-98).[93] Gauguin also repeated advice on painting that he claimed to have learned from the manuscript of an ancient Turkish painter. In the same 1885 manuscript as the Wagner text, he introduced this advice as text that was, "Tiré du livre des métiers de Vehbi-

[90] Linda Goddard writes that Gauguin and Mallarmé were both influenced by Poe, Baudelaire, and Manet, and that Mallarmé was "perhaps the only writer to whom [Gauguin] referred in consistently positive terms." Linda Goddard, "Birds of a Feather?: Gauguin's Ambivalent Relationship with Literary Symbolism," *Immediations* 2 (2005): 63-4, 72. In addition, Gauguin quoted Mallarmé in a letter to Fontainas in March 1899. (Gauguin, *Lettres à Fontainas*, 10.) Yves Peyré connects Gauguin directly to Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* by asserting that Gauguin's *The Royal End* is an homage to the poem. Yves Peyré, *Mallarmé, 1842-1898: Un Destin d'écriture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 104.

[91] This is widely agreed upon, see for example Hargrove 2006, 554 and Linda Goddard, "'Scattered Notes': Authorship and Originality in Paul Gauguin's *Diverses choses*," *Art History* 34.2 (April 2011): 353.

[92] Henri Dorra, "Le texte Wagner de Gauguin," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de l'art français* (1984), 281–8; Goddard 2011, 364-65.

[93] Gauguin, Wagner manuscript, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits (NAF 14903, ff.43–6); Gauguin, *Cahier pour Aline*, 5-8; Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 209-212.

Zunbul-Zadi. Ainsi parle Mani, le peintre donneur des préceptes."[94] He included just a few of these lines in *Cahier pour Aline*, which he called "Paroles de Zunbul-Zadi."[95] Then in *Diverses choses* and *Avant et après* (1902-03), he transformed the "livre des métiers" into a description of an ancient sermon. He opened, "Ce fut à l'époque des Tamerlan, je crois, en l'an X avant ou après Jésus Christ. […] Si vous êtes curieux de savoir ce que pouvait dire cet artiste en des temps barbares, écoutez : Il disait: [...]."[96] By interjecting "je crois," Gauguin made it seem all the more like an actual event whose details he struggles to recall. Yet Gauguin penned this passage himself—the advice as well as the name were his own invention.[97] Interwoven throughout Gauguin's manuscripts and letters are allusions to and direct transcriptions of countless authors, from anthropologists, to Edgar Allan Poe, Mallarmé, and Baudelaire. In the text Gauguin incorporated from Poe's *Marginalia*, Poe comments upon and quotes other authors, making Gauguin's use of them particularly palimpsestic.[98] Gauguin's interest in highlighting rather than obscuring his sources corresponds with period science on memory and was a common literary practice in the work of the authors Gauguin admired. It derives as well from the late-nineteenth century interest in collective authorship. After

[94] The Zadi manuscript quoted here immediately follows the Wagner passage cited above, and is the same manuscript quoted above in chapter one. Gauguin, Zadi manuscript, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits (NAF 14903, ff.43–6). "Drawn from the book of métiers of Vehbi-Zunbul-Zadi. Thus spoke Mani, the painter-preacher of precepts."

[95] Gauguin, *Cahier pour Aline*, 8. "Words of Zunbul-Zadi."

[96] Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 209-212; Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 55-59. "This was in the age of Tamerlan, I believe, in the year X before or after Jesus Christ. […] If you are curious to know what this artist could have said in these heathen times, listen. He said: …"

[97] Recall as well that Gauguin successfully passed this text off as authentic to his friends, including Seurat (see chapter one, note 51).

[98] Goddard 2011, 364.

exploring ideas on originality and plagiarism in the *fin de siècle*, I will demonstrate how *Still Life with Hope* stands as a particularly apt exploration of this concept.

The Inventive Memory: Creativity, Originality, and Plagiarism

Along with the concept of palimpsestic layering comes the question of the relationship of those layers to one another. Even as overwriting seemed to threaten society's understanding of its past, many writers and artists saw instead a liberating potential in the inherently creative and imaginative qualities of memory. As the Romantic value of pure creation from within the individual artistic "genius" shifted toward a desire for a more collective notion of artistic invention that revealed rather than obscured its sources, the scientific community increasingly found that memory was not duplicative—instead it had the power of an artist to combine, rearrange, and invent.

Present-day and nineteenth-century science

The "constructive episodic simulation" model proposed by Schacter and Addis and introduced above maintains that episodic memory's role is to "flexibly extract, recombine and reassemble" elements from past experience.[99] This form of memory is therefore "a fundamentally constructive, rather than reproductive, process."[100] They explain that the brain encodes and stores memories in discrete parts. At the time of retrieval, or recollection, these parts are often re-combined in a new way, or when several different memories have a similar gist, they are falsely associated. This results in the formation of a memory composed of different parts that indeed occurred but not together, or a memory in which one cannot recall how or when it was acquired.[101] These findings

[99] Schacter and Addis 2007, 778.

[100] Schacter and Addis 2007, 773.

[101] Schacter and Addis 2007, 774.

echo a similar understanding of memory in both the scientific and literary communities of the late-nineteenth century. As I will argue below, the same concept is fundamental to Gauguin's theory of the creative process, which he illustrates in *Still Life with Hope*.

Over the course of the nineteenth century scientists moved away from an idea of memory as a site of storage and toward a concept of memory as a dynamic interaction among nerve centers, thoughts, and actions.[102] Ribot described memory as "formée de petits groupes plus ou moins cohérents: celle-ci est plastique et apte à entrer dans des combinaisons nouvelles."[103] This process of combination, he argued, was "un travail incessant de métamorphose, de suppressions et d'additions, de dissociation et de corrosion."[104] The present-day understanding of memory similarly understands it as a system of discrete units that are actively recombined and reassembled. For Bergson, memory operated through active selection among possible resemblances,[105] and according to Matsuda, this newly understood agency in memory was even linked with republicanism and civicism[106]—a metaphor Gauguin himself applied toward artistic liberty.[107] Bergson ends his book *Matière et mémoire* with this connection by linking the mind's activity to freedom: "L'esprit emprunte à la matière les perceptions d'où il tire sa

[102] Matsuda, 98.

[103] Ribot 1900, 19. "…composed of small more or less coherent groups. This kind of memory is plastic and capable of becoming combined in new ways." Trans., 22.

[104] Ribot 1900, 16. "A process of change, of suppression and addition, of dissociation and corrosion." Trans., 19.

[105] "Le choix de une ressemblance parmi beaucoup de ressemblances […] ne s'opère donc pas au hasard." Bergson 1896, 272. Matsuda writes that by seeing memory as an active choice, Bergson followed Paul Broca and Flinders Petrie, who were earlier innovators in the field of memory. Matsuda, 96.

[106] Matsuda, 98.

[107] Hargrove 2006. I will further discuss this below.

nourriture, et les lui rend sous forme de mouvement, où il a imprimé sa liberté."[108] Using language that more closely approaches that of the writers I will examine next, Dr. Fauvelle discussed memory in terms of sources, writing that nerve currents produce a series of ideas, some of which can disappear such that, even as the idea remains in our mind, we come to ignore its source and believe the idea was innate to us.[109]

Nineteenth-century literature

As scientists reconceived of memory as an active entity, artists and writers reformulated the role of works from the past in their creative philosophies. Gauguin opened *Diverses choses* with a description of his text as, "Notes éparses, sans suite comme les Rêves, comme la vie, toute faite de morceaux: Et de ce fait que plusieurs y collaborent…"[110] This concept aligns with period and present-day science that understands memories—the artist's sources—as discrete parts, or *morceaux.* Throughout the literary theories that follow there rings an insistence on the artist's role in selection and arrangement, which resonates with Gauguin's ideas on creativity, such as, "Une belle pensée, une belle phrase, gagnent ou perdent de leur valeur selon la place qu'elles

[108] Bergson 1896, 279. "Spirit borrows from matter the perceptions on which it feeds, and restores them to matter in the form of movements which it has stamped with its own freedom." Trans., 332. Matsuda calls attention to this passage, 95.

[109] Fauvelle, "Des idées et de la mémoire." *Bulletins et mémoires de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris* 3.8 (Paris, V. Masson, 1885), 485-507. "Lorsque des courants nerveux réunis ont produit une série d'idées, toutes ne persistent pas avec la même intensité; les premières sensations originelles peuvent même disparaître, si bien que nous ignorons souvent la source de telle idée qui persiste dans notre esprit. Nous avons vu que c'était ainsi qu'avait pris naissance la croyance à l'innéité ; c'est surtout lorsque cette idée a été incomplète et vague qu'elle prend cet aspect." (502-03) Matsuda also discusses Fauvelle's work, pp. 84, 92.

[110] Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 205; *Avant et après*, 24. "Scattered notes, without sequence like dreams, like life all made up of fragments; and because others have collaborated in it…"

occupent."[111] While I will further examine Gauguin's writings below, these quotations serve as points of reference for the review of nineteenth-century literature that follows.

In his book on the history of plagiarism, Robert MacFarlane charts theories of originality onto a spectrum with two poles: creativity and invention. The romantic notion of an artist or author whose inspiration derives spontaneously from an "influence-proofed chamber of his or her own imagination" lies at the "creativity" side of the spectrum. From this conceptualization of art comes the idea that one can privatize and own their work, words, or ideas. On the other side of this spectrum lies invention, wherein the artist combines inherited ideas just as the inventor combines parts, resulting in a new creation derived from existing materials. This concept of depersonalized authorship reached its height in the twentieth century, but MacFarlane locates the shift away from the creativity pole and toward invention between 1859 and 1900, at which time "indebtedness, borrowedness, textual messiness and overlap" became features to celebrate rather than hide.[112]

MacFarlane goes on to describe the role of a growing interest in the unconscious in fighting ideas of ownership and originality. In the unconscious, writers argued, one could not be held accountable for associations made without their conscious awareness. De Quincey's palimpsest became a metaphor for ideas that existed unseen but latent in

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[111] Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 338. "A beautiful thought, a beautiful sentence, gains or loses value according to where it is placed." Translated in Goddard 2011, 363 and 368 note 52.

[112] MacFarlane, 2-7, quoted list on page 9. In keeping with MacFarlane's chronology but moving back in time before his study, the same idea of invention rather than creation circulated during the Enlightenment, as captured in Voltaire's discussion of the source of imagination: "L'imagination active est celle qui joint la réflexion, la combinaison à la mémoire… Elle semble créer quand elle ne fait qu'arranger: car il n'est pas donné à l'homme de se faire des idées ; il ne peut que les modifier." Voltaire, "Imagination," *Dictionnaire philosophique,* ed. Garnier, XIX, 429. Quoted in Margaret Gilman, *Baudelaire, the Critic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 123-4.

the mind, passing in re-combined pieces from unconscious to conscious recollection.[113] In an 1866 study of the brain and poetry, an author explained to his readers that the mind "appropriates mechanically, like a magpie stealing a silver spoon… The memory cannot help itself. It is a kleptomaniac, and lets nothing go by."[114] In this way, writers and artists of the late-nineteenth century justified their newly-staked right to allusion and incorporation, whether attributed or not.

Although Delacroix was a Romantic painter rather than a post-Romantic writer, he serves as a fitting starting point for the transition from originality as creativity to invention. His extensive writings included insights on memory and imagination that captured the attention of Baudelaire and the Symbolists, and Gauguin continued to draw inspiration from Delacroix's Journals through his time in Tahiti and the Marquesas. Delacroix was an early proponent of the notion that the artist's imagination serves above all to combine and compose: "L'imagination chez l'artiste ne se représente pas seulement tels ou tels objets, elle les combine pour la fin qu'il veut obtenir; elle fait des tableaux, des images qu'il compose à son gré."[115] And similarly, "dans la pensée, quand elle se souvient des émotions du Coeur, […] la faculté créatrice s'empare d'elle pour animer le

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[113] MacFarlane, 78. I am interested in continuing to study the role of suggestion and association in concepts of artistic "invention" given the widespread interest among Gauguin and his peers in the same ideas. Feliz Eda Burhan wrote extensively about suggestion in Symbolist art, and consideration of her findings through the lens of authorship and ownership would likely prove fruitful. Filiz Eda Burhan, *Vision and Visionaries: Nineteenth Century Psychological Theory, the Occult Sciences, and the Formation of the Symbolist Aesthetic in France* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1979).

[114] Eneas Sweetland Dallas, *The Gay Science* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866), 216. Quoted in MacFarlane, 80. Dallas goes on to describe memory as part of a "genuine creative process" (220) and concludes that "all great poets, all great artists, all great inventors are men of great memory." (222)

[115] Eugène Delacroix, *Journal de Eugène Delacroix*, vol. 3 (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et cie, 1895), 242. Resonances between Delacroix, Baudelaire, and Gauguin are widely commented upon in the Gauguin literature. The passages I have highlighted here are quoted by Baudelaire scholar Margaret Gilman (126). "The artist's imagination does not simply represent such and such an object, it combines them for the end it wants to achieve; the imagination makes paintings, images that it composes at will."

monde réel et en tirer des tableaux d'imagination. Elle compose, c'est-à-dire qu'elle idéalise et choisit."[116] This idea that to compose is to idealize and to choose, rather than to create from nothing, aligns with the artist-as-inventor concept. In *Diverses choses*, Gauguin paraphrased Delacroix: "Le génie même n'est que le don de généraliser et de choisir."[117]

Flaubert's palimpsestic model of memory and composition dovetails with this concept of arrangement. Here, the layers of sources become a string of pearls: "Les perles composent le collier, mais c'est le fil qui fait le collier, or enfiler les perles sans en perdue une seule et toujours tenir son fil de l'autre main, voilà la malice."[118] Just as his metaphors of waves and evolving landscapes pointed to the value of layers, in this instance the value of the pearls—in the form of literary details or sources—is not simply in their accumulation, but in the art of their combination and arrangement.

Symbolist poet Paul Valéry's career only briefly overlapped with Gauguin's, who was twenty years Valéry's senior, but they nonetheless shared similar ideas. As if in response to Gauguin's question, "Qui peut m'assurer que telle pensée, telle lecture, telle jouissance n'ait point influencé quelques années plus tard une de mes œuvres?"[119] Valéry

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[116] Eugène Delacroix and E. A. Piron, *Eugéne Delacroix: sa vie et ses œuvres* (Paris: Jules Claye, 1865), 463. "In thought, when it recalls the emotions of the heart, […] the creative faculty takes hold of it to animate the real world and pull paintings from the imagination. It composes, which is to say, it idealizes and chooses."

[117] Gauguin, "Notes de Delacroix," *Diverses choses,* 221. "Genius itself is no more than the ability to generalize and to choose."

[118] Gustave Flaubert, *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert. Correspondance (1850-1854),* vol. 3 (Paris: Louis Conard, 1910), 348. Quoted and interpreted in Ippolito, 133. "The pearls compose the necklace, but it is the thread that makes the necklace, yet to string the pearls without losing a single one while always holding the thread in the other hand—that's the trick."

[119] Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 208. "Who can say for certain that some thought, some reading, some pleasure has not at all influenced, some years later, one of my works?"

writes, "Nous disons qu'un auteur est *original* quand nous sommes dans l'ignorance des transformations cachées qui changèrent les autres en lui."[120] He suggests not that writers attempt to avoid such hidden transformations, but rather that the critic should acknowledge and embrace their possibility, because "le développement séparé d'une qualité de l'un par toute la puissance de l'autre manqué rarement d'engendrer des effets d'*extrême originalité*."[121] The study of this very transformation or development, he believed, should be the central preoccupation of critical analysis.[122] Speaking both to the importance of sources and to their arrangement in the final composition, he mused, "L'instinct de cette valeur mnémonique de la forme paraît très sûr chez Mallarmé de qui les vers se retiennent si aisément."[123]

Gauguin met Symbolist writer Anatole France at a banquet in 1891, the same year that France had published an article in *Le Temps* titled "Apologie pour le plagiat." Consonant with Valéry's ideas on form, France similarly wrote that an idea is only valuable for its form, and further, that all of art amounts to nothing more than "donner une forme nouvelle à une vieille idée." For this reason, he wrote, no man can reasonably believe that he has thought of something that was never thought of before him. Ideas

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[120] Paul Valéry, "Lettre sur Mallarmé," in *Œuvres*, vol. 1, ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 634-35. "We say that an author is original when we cannot trace the hidden transformation that others underwent in his mind." Trans. *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé*, vol. 8, ed. Jackson Mathews. Bollingen Series, 45 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956), 241.

[121] Valéry, "Lettre sur Mallarmé," in *Œuvres*, 635. Emphasis is Valéry's. "The development of a single quality of one person by the full talent of another seldom fails to produce results marked by an *extreme originality*." Trans. Valéry, *Collected Works*, 242.

[122] "Rien toutefois dans l'examen de nos productions qui intéresse plus philosophiquement l'intellect et le doive plus exciter à l'analyse que cette modification progressive d'un esprit par l'œuvre d'un autre." Valéry, *ibid.*, 634.

[123] Paul Valéry, "Je disais quelquefois à Stéphane Mallarmé," in *Œuvres*, vol. 1, ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 651. "An instinct for the mnemonic value of form appears to be very strong and sure in Mallarmé, whose verses are so easy to remember." Trans. Valéry, *Collected Works*, 281.

belong to everyone, and thus no one can claim "this is mine."[124] France described an anecdote in which a very old landscape painter wanders out one morning to a countryside he has painted many times, where he finds a young artist who claims that the view before them belongs to him. A situation or a scene, France concludes, belongs not to the author or artist who found it first, but to the one who most successfully fixed it in the memory of his audience.[125] Gauguin would have been especially receptive to this idea in the 1890s when he was under attack from colleagues such as Émile Bernard who claimed he had stolen their ideas, but the notion stayed with him, and he would continue to expound on it through his last manuscript, where he insisted "que tout s'enchaîne, et qu'on est jamais sûr d'avoir inventé."[126]

Gauguin on invention

Gauguin penned a sweeping expression of the collective nature of artistic invention for the opening passage of *Diverses choses*, quoted in part above. He repeated it verbatim in his final manuscript, *Avant et après*: "Notes éparses, sans suite comme les Rêves, comme la vie, toute faite de morceaux: Et de ce fait que plusieurs y collaborent, l'amour des belles choses aperçues dans la maison du prochain."[127] The placement of this passage in each manuscript is telling. In *Diverses choses* it appears beneath a pasted-in

[124] "Aucun homme ne peut se flatter raisonnablement de penser quelque chose qu'un autre home n'ait pas déjà pensé avant lui. Il sait que les idées sont à tout le monde et qu'on ne peut dire : « Celle-ci est mienne » […] Il sait enfin qu'une et que donner une forme nouvelle à une vieille idée, c'est tout l'art, et la seule création possible à l'humanité." Anatole France, "Apologie pour le plagiat," *Le Temps* (4 January 1891), n.p.

[125] France, n.p.

[126] Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 157. "Everything is connected, one is never sure of having invented."

[127] Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 205; *Avant et après*, 24. Quoted in part above. "Scattered notes, without sequence like dreams, like life all made up of fragments; and because others have collaborated in it: the love of beautiful things glimpsed in a neighbor's house."

drawing by van Gogh of his painting *La Mousmé,* which he had mailed to Gauguin. In *Avant et après* the statement follows Gauguin's lengthy defense of his stay with van Gogh in Arles, wherein Gauguin "corrects" the rumors and asserts that any similarity in their style resulted from his influence upon van Gogh and not the reverse.[128] In each manuscript, he positions the above passage as an indirect response to the memory of van Gogh. In *Avant et après* it actually undermines the preceding passage, defending his work as a collective rather than an independent achievement. The text functions more harmoniously in its original setting in *Diverses choses,* where the pasted-in drawing illustrates the collaborative nature of Gauguin's work that the passage describes. In either case, the "love of beautiful things glimpsed in a neighbor's house" may refer directly to Arles, to the Studio of the South where Gauguin indeed glimpsed beautiful things.

Gauguin continued the passage in both manuscripts by further describing his "notes éparses" as thoughts that are "en défiance de mauvaise mémoire, et tout de rayons jusqu'au centre vital de mon art. […] J'estime que la pensée qui a pu guider mon œuvre ou une œuvre partielle est liée très mystérieusement à mille autres, soit miennes, soit entendues d'autres."[129] In a later section of *Avant et après*, he elaborated: "Différents épisodes, maintes réflexions, certaines boutades, arrivent en ce recueil, venant d'on ne

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[128] Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 23-24. I will further discuss that passage in Part III.

[129] Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 206; *Avant et après*, 24-25. In *Diverses choses* this passage begins on the second page of the manuscript, whereas in *Avant et après* it immediately follows the above passage. "In defiance of poor memory, and all the rays going to the vital center of my art. […] I feel that the thought that has guided my work or a part of my work is very mysteriously linked to a thousand other works, whether my own or heard from others."

The passages I have quoted here and above are identical in *Diverses choses* and *Avant et après*. In *Racontars de Rapin* (1902), Gauguin expressed the same idea this way: "Les idées sont comme les rêves un assemblage plus ou moins formé de choses ou pensées entrevues : sait-on bien d'où viennent ?" Paul Gauguin, *Racontars de Rapin* (Paris: Falaize, 1951), 46. Subsequent citations of *Racontars de Rapin* refer to this volume. "Ideas are like dreams an assemblage more or less formed from things or thoughts glimpsed: do we really know where they come from?" Translated in Hargrove 2006, 558.

sait où, convergent et s'éloignent; jeu d'enfant, figures de kaléidoscope."[130] What began as *morceaux* that were scattered but ultimately "linked very mysteriously to a thousand others," here become episodes and reflections that converge and separate like a kaleidoscope—or like memory itself. These reflections, with their mysterious links and fragments that converge and separate, also circulate around the metaphor of memory as palimpsest. Gauguin followed this kaleidoscope metaphor with the question that opened this chapter: "On se souvient de son enfance: se souvient-on de l'avenir ?"[131] The memory-as-palimpsest framework accommodates the layers of reference and re-arrangement practiced by Gauguin and his colleagues, and it also presupposes that one's own work will serve as a model for the future, leaving a trace that will be re-inscribed. Gauguin's "maison du prochain" may, then, have a double meaning. Most commonly understood as the house of a neighbor, in the context of these passages it could also mean the house of the future. By drawing from scattered thoughts and different episodes, one recalls the past in order to catch a glimpse of the future.

Still Life with Hope Revisited

As demonstrated in the earlier section on "Gauguin's palimpsestic writing," Gauguin expressed the fragmented and mnemonic quality of his work through his practice of writing as well as in his theory. His repeated quotations, at times unattributed and misattributed, purposefully and not, his paraphrases, and his pasted-in passages all perform before the reader's eyes the creative process that he describes. The citations and

[130] Gauguin, *Avant et après,* 111-112. "Different episodes, numerous reflections, a few jests, appear in this volume, from who knows where, come together and retreat; a child's game, images in a kaleidoscope." Translated in Goddard 2011, 356.

[131] Gauguin, *Avant et après,* 111-112. Translated above.

repetitions turn his written oeuvre into a palimpsest in which he borrows, transforms, and rearranges inspiration from other authors whose work speaks to him. This act of "transposition" slides easily between his writing and his painting.[132] Gauguin quoted Jean Dolent in *Racontars de Rapin*: "Tout transposer pour pouvoir tout dire, et emprunter à tous modèles sans trahison et sans injure : le geste d'un ami, le visage d'un ami." Gauguin adds, "Et l'artiste se reconnaît à la qualité de la transposition. Transposer ce n'est pas changer la couleur des jarretières…"[133] Gestures, poses, and faces appear layered, transformed, and rearranged throughout Gauguin's painting as in his writing. A prime example of this practice occurs in the transposition of the pose in Puvis' *Hope* onto Gauguin's representation of the Tahitian mortal-turned-immortal, Vairaumati. As Hargrove demonstrates, Hope's leaning posture appears in several of Gauguin's canvases over the course of many years, carrying with it the same symbolic significance—namely, artistic liberty.[134]

Gauguin's *Still Life with Hope* is less an example of this type of palimpsestic layering than a painting about the process itself. By including painted representations of existing artworks, like the clippings pasted into Gauguin's manuscripts, the painting thematizes the act of borrowing. But to this citation Gauguin adds a twist. Puvis, Degas, and van Gogh are not resurrected as they were, but as they are, at this moment, to Gauguin. The Puvis is not a stretched and framed canvas but a sheet of paper, and it is not

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[132] Hargrove 2006, 552.

[133] Gauguin, *Racontars de Rapin*, 46. "Transpose all to be able to say all, and borrow from all the models without treason and without injury; the gesture of a friend, the face of a friend." And, "the artist is recognized by the quality of the transposition. To transpose isn't to change the color of the cheeks." Translated in Hargrove 2006, 558.

[134] Hargrove 2006.

a photograph due to its coloration. Hope does not look out, but instead looks backwards, perhaps to the past, as she reaches the oak branch forward into the future. The Degas does not evoke the crisp lines of a drypoint print but looks streaked, like the trace left after a wave has receded. The leathery leaves and squared petals of the sunflowers give them a vitality that make van Gogh's appear frazzled in comparison. These references are emphatically fragments, taken out of their time and context and imported into this time, leaving behind the war, the Salon, the Impressionist exhibitions, and the Yellow house. They are rearranged and combined, their significance drawn from their collective unification, strung together artfully like Flaubert's pearls. Despite this transformation and rearrangement, they are still citations—the most direct citations Gauguin would make in Tahiti in any painting. For these reasons, this painting engages with the nineteenth-century concept of authorship, ownership, and originality—at the center of which sat the question of memory's power to overwrite and transform. In this work, Gauguin thought through the stakes of artistic quotation and creativity in the same way that he used his paintings of pictured looking (chapter 1) to think through the process of painting from memory. Like the pictured looking paintings, this work may not be his most elegant example of palimpsestic reference, rather it is about the nature and significance of such reference. It represents the visual expression of his written theories, positioned in time between *Diverses choses* and *Avant et après*, in which scattered pieces become a meditation on the past and future.

The references that Gauguin made here are not only professional and artistic but personal, as well. Degas was a close friend in the early days of Gauguin's career, and continued to silently support Gauguin from a distance by purchasing his canvases.

Influence and personal memory would be difficult to separate in the case of van Gogh given their highly productive time together in Arles. And yet this canvas does not mourn the "double loss" of the past that occurs with overwrittten memory. It gives no sense of "That dear Past! the past by whose grave we are standing all our later life," as expressed by Frances Cobbe.[135] For Gauguin, this palimpsest of memory is vital, hopeful, and forward-reaching. It looks forward to the next (Marquesan) iteration of the Studio of the Tropics by looking back to his origins, which he recalls and overwrites with an inflection based in his present moment. This duality of past and future was, like many dualities, a recurrent theme in Gauguin's thought and work, captured in titles such as *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* and *Avant et après.* As expressed here, layers of personal memory and artistic citation collapse onto one surface, which is prepared to receive future inscriptions.

III. Memory as Self-narrative in Sunflowers on Armchairs

Celebratory and referential as they may at first seem toward van Gogh, *Sunflowers on an Armchair I* and *II* are riddled with tension, particularly in comparison with *Still Life with Hope*. The sunflowers more closely resemble van Gogh's sunflowers and, as discussed above, these paintings specifically reference van Gogh's techniques such as complimentary color contrasts (in the walls) and Impressionist brushwork (in the seascape) in order to engage them in competition.[136] The series of sunflower canvases likely began in part as a response to the positive critical review in the *Mercure de France* of three of van Gogh's sunflower paintings which were exhibited at the time in Paris.[137]

[135] Cobbe, 111. Quoted above.

[136] Hargrove 2012, 202.

[137] André Fontainas, "Art Moderne," *Mercure de France* 38.136 (April 1901), 239-40; and Tinterow, 42.

Paired with Gauguin's patronizing description of their time together in Arles in *Avant et après* and his claim in a letter to Fontainas that he encouraged van Gogh's yellow-on-yellow sunflower compositions, the painting operates as part of Gauguin's campaign to reassert his supremacy and overwrite the story of their time together in Arles. Unlike Gauguin's Tahitian figure and landscape paintings, in which links to French artists lie beneath the surface of a Tahitian or Maori theme, in these paintings Gauguin's personal past sits on the surface, crafting a narrative that he offers as a memory.

Art historians have written much on Gauguin's self-mythologization and his propensity for intertwining truth and myth into what he calls memories. This was the subject of the 2010 exhibition, *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*, in which Belinda Thomson used the term "narrative strategies" to describe the myths that Gauguin wove through his art and writing, as well as the greater "apparatus" through which he figured himself in the public consciousness. Yet Thomson ultimately points to a meta-narrative in which, she suggests, the artist is "only semi-consciously" implicated.[138] This only semi-conscious awareness of self-construction removes Gauguin's agency in the process. Arguments that place the responsibility for Gauguin's self-mythologization squarely upon his shoulders are more convincing. Elizabeth Childs writes of *Avant et après*, for example, that "Gauguin does not write to set the record straight with firm truths and documentation, but to weave a myth, to start a rumour, to shape a memory or to conjure a dream on the matter of his relations with fellow artists and on much else."[139] This rings truer, but in

[138] Belinda Thomson, Tamar Garb, and Philippe Dagen. *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 10-12.

[139] Elizabeth Childs, "Gauguin as author: writing the Studio of the Tropics." *Van Gogh Museum Journal* (2003): 87.

what follows I aim to introduce into this conversation a selection of scientific vocabulary and theory in order to deepen our understanding of the relationship between self, narrative, and memory, and thereby better understand how those issues operate within the *Sunflowers on an Armchair* paintings.

Constructing the Self

Present-day and nineteenth-century science

My discussion of the "self" relies upon the following definition: "Sense of self consists of the processes that unify disparate experiences, levels of consciousness, behaviors, cognitions, and mental representations into a coherent, unified whole."[140] A central component of selfhood, scientists agree, is a sense of unity in the present moment and across time. In life, however, we have not always acted in a manner consistent with our current self-concept (one's internal conceptualization of whom he or she is). Thus a sense of self is inherently a construction: one recalls memories of the past in such a way as to make them consistent with how one understands oneself in the present. The organization of personal memory in discrete parts that can be "extracted and recombined in a variety of ways" serves this need.[141] Thus memory's mutability serves, as discussed above, to help imagine and prepare for future situations, but its flexibility also facilitates the unity of the self.

Identity cannot be reduced to autobiographical memory (one's memories of their own life) alone, but autobiographical memory does provide the "raw material" that

[140] Prebble, 818.

[141] Prebble, 818.

constructs identity.[142] Psychologists divide autobiographical memory into two types. Semantic memory includes abstract information about oneself, such as traits (e.g. hard-working, kind) and identities (e.g. an academic, an athlete). Episodic memory refers to stories or specific events that describe one's life experiences and carry with them sensorial and emotional detail.[143] Both play an important role in forming the self-concept. Episodic memories provide the events, details, and behaviors that are woven by semantic memory into a coherent and continuous self-concept. Semantic memory is responsible for reducing discrepancies between past events and one's current self. As part of that effort, it "plays an active role in memory encoding, construction, storage, and retrieval." Encoding occurs as one experiences an event, and retrieval when one remembers it. In both of these processes, "executive control is used to shape memories to be consistent with the individual's goals and beliefs about the self." Autobiographical memories are thus drawn upon to construct our sense of self, and in turn, the resulting self-concept "informs the way memories are accessed, stored, and constructed."[144] This means that our sense of self shapes the way we store our experiences as memories and also re-shapes or inflects a memory in the moment at which it is recalled, based on the circumstances of that moment.[145]

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[142] Donna Rose Addis and Lynette J. Tippett. "The Contributions of Autobiographical Memory to the Content and Continuity of Identity: A Social-Cognitive Neuroscience Approach," in *Self Continuity: Individual and Collective Perspectives,* ed. Fabio Sani (New York: Psychology Press, 2008), 71.

[143] Addis and Tippett 2008, 71.

[144] Prebble, 819. This has been found consistent in psychological and in neuroscientific studies. Demiray and Bluck, for example, found that on separate occasions, themes of participants' self-concept were reflected in their autobiographical memories. (990) Addis and Tippett (2008) describe a study in which researchers found that brain regions associated with self-processing (such as self-reflection tasks or trait judgments) overlap with some of the regions activated by autobiographical memory retrieval. (79-80)

[145] Discussed in the above studies and in Duadi 2002, 89.

Scientists studying memory and identity today are aware of the late-nineteenth century and Enlightenment roots of their work. Sally Prebble, for example, cites William James' *The Principles of Psychology*, published in 1890, for the origins of the distinction between different types of self-knowledge, which was discussed above in terms of semantic and episodic memory.[146] The notion that identity develops from memory goes back to the Enlightenment. Locke discussed identity in terms of "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking." He clarifies that "consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought." Philosophers understand this backward extension as memory, suggesting that Locke saw memory as a key component of identity.[147]

One factor that separates Locke's requirement of mnemonic continuity for identity from the present-day science is an understanding that memory morphs to accommodate the self-concept, which itself changes over the course of one's lifetime. Théodule Ribot seems to have captured this nuance in his 1881 book *Maladies de la mémoire*. He begins by explaining that the self "consiste en une somme d'états de conscience," and these states are constantly supplanted by new states as the self goes through change and renewal:

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[146] Prebble, 817. The text is William James, *The principles of psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Holt, 1890). In future work on my I am interested in further examination of James' text, which includes sections on memory as well as one titled "The feeling of past time is a present feeling." James and Bergson knew of and promoted each other's work.

[147] Quoted in and discussed in Patricia Kitcher, "Kant's philosophy of the cognitive mind," *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 172-3. Richard Terdiman also points to this "long tradition," in which Locke, Diderot, Kant, and Husserl all positioned memory as the key to self-identity and continuity. Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 108. See also Prebble, 829.

> Notre moi de chaque moment, ce présent perpétuellement renouvelé, est en grande partie alimenté par la mémoire, c'est-à-dire qu'à l'état présent s'associent d'autres états qui, rejetés et localisés dans le passé, constituent notre personne telle qu'elle s'apparait à chaque instant. En un mot, le moi peut être considéré de deux manières : ou bien sous sa forme actuelle, et alors il est la somme des états de conscience actuels ; ou bien dans sa continuité avec son passé, et alors il est formé par la mémoire suivant un mécanisme que nous avons décrit plus haut.[148]

Memory, Ribot argues, nourishes the "perpetually renewed" present self and maintains continuity with the past by a process of replacement. Ribot's conceptualization grants a degree of agency to the faculty of memory in its ability to forge a narrative that affirms the self in the present moment. This remarkably perceptive understanding of the relationship between self-identity and memory resonates in the work of several nineteenth-century writers who approached their investigation of memory artistically and arrived at similar conclusions.

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[148] Théodule Armand Ribot, *Les Maladies de la mémoire* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1895 [original 1881]), 83. "The Ego, its present perpetually renewed, is for the most part nourished by the memory; that is to say, the present state is associated with others which, thrown back and localized in the past, constitute at each moment what we regard as our personality. In brief, the Ego may be considered in two ways: either in its actual form, and then it is the sum of existing conscious states; or, in its continuity with the past, and then it is formed by the memory according to the process outlined above." Translations from Ribot 1895/1881 are from: Théodule Armand Ribot, *Diseases of Memory: An Essay in the Positive Psychology*, trans. William Huntington Smith (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887), 107-108.

Ribot continues by expressing that memory is responsible for making associations between the past and present self possible, and maintaining these associations: "C'est lui qui sert de support à ce moi conscient que la mémoire constitue; c'est lui qui rend les associations possibles et les maintient. L'unité du moi n'est donc pas celle d'un point mathématique, mais celle d'une machine très compliquée." Ribot 1895/1881, 84.

Nineteenth-century literature and Gauguin's texts

Several texts evidence Baudelaire's belief in a harmonious relationship between memory and the self, which he discusses in a way that resonates with the science above. Returning to Baudelaire's response to De Quincey's "The Palimpsest," Baudelaire writes: "La fatalité du tempérament met forcément une harmonie parmi les éléments les plus disparates. Quelque incohérente que soit une existence, l'unité humaine n'en est pas troublée. Tous les échos de la mémoire, si on pouvait les réveiller simultanément, formeraient un concert, agréable ou douloureux, mais logique et sans dissonances."[149] The poet indicates that memory is not a copy but a composition which, at the moment of recollection, creates a concert out of formerly disparate elements.[150] Baudelaire puts this theory to practice in "Benediction." Nicolae Babuts argues that the poem's unity represents "the coherence of the Baudelairean self." The poem opens by declaring the poet damned from birth and closes with a prayer for redemption for those who suffer.[151]

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[149] Baudelaire, *Les Paradis Artificiels* in *Oeuvres complètes*, 1899, 330. "…Temperament necessarily creates a harmony between the most diverse elements. However incoherent a given existence may be, its human unity is not thereby disturbed. If one were to reawaken them simultaneously, all the echoes of memory would form a concert, perhaps pleasant, perhaps disagreeable, but logical and without dissonance." Translated in Terdiman, 109.

[150] Terdiman, 109 interprets the essay in this way.

[151] Babuts gives these examples from the poem "Benediction" and their translation: "Lorsque, par un décret des puissances suprêmes,/ Le Poète apparaît en ce monde ennuyé,/ Sa mère épouvantée et pleine de blasphèmes/ Crispe ses poings vers Dieu, qui la prend en pitié." ["When by a decree of the supreme powers/ The poet appears in this tedious world/ His frightened mother loudly blaspheming/ Clenches her fists toward God, who takes pity on her."] And the prayer, "Soyez béni, mon Dieu, qui donnez la souffrance/ Comme un divin remède à nos impuretés/ Et comme la meilleure et la plus pure essence/ Qui prépare les forts aux saintes voluptés!" ["Blessed are Thou O Lord, who givest suffering/ As a divine remedy to our impurities/ And as the best and the purest essence/ Which prepares the strong for the saintly pleasures!] Nicolae Babuts, "Baudelaire and Identity of the Self." *Mosaic: A Journal for The Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 47.3 (September 2014): 160. For the full poem, Charles Baudelaire, "Bénédiction," *Œuvres Complètes de Charles Baudelaire: Les Fleurs du mal*, vol. 1 (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1869), 85-88.

In between, the poet's life unrolls as fate predicts, with misfortune and pain.[152] As opposed to the explanation of memory in "Le Palimpseste," here Baudelaire's poem operates according to the system he describes. To create his poem, Babuts argues, Baudelaire takes his "matériaux amassés"[153] from his life and from his own readings, which are then "transformed and transfigured by the creative process and lifted onto the level of art."[154] This assemblage of parts represents neither his life nor his readings, but a third and entirely new creation. In both instances, Baudelaire represents memory as a process of arrangement and transformation that supports a coherent self.

Delacroix was incisive on this subject as well, demonstrating in his *Journal* that he actively reflected upon memory and its power to change: "En réfléchissant sur la fraîcheur des souvenirs, sur la couleur enchantée qu'ils revêtent dans un passé lointain, j'admirais ce travail involontaire de l'âme qui écarte et supprime, dans le ressouvenir de moments agréables, tout ce qui en diminuait le charme, au moment où on les traversait. Je comparais cette espèce d'idéalisation, car c'en est une, à l'effet des beaux ouvrages de l'imagination."[155] Pleasurable recollections, he suggests, do not necessarily recall an originally pleasurable experience; rather, at the moment of recall, the mind "diverts and removes" anything in conflict with that pleasure. He links this function of memory to

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[152] The woman who feels cursed by the poet's presence in her life transfers from the mother to the wife, who cries: "Et, quand je m'ennuierai de ces farces impies, / Je poserai sur lui ma frêle et forte main; / Et mes ongles, pareils aux ongles des harpies, / Sauront jusqu'à son coeur se frayer un chemin." Baudelaire, "Bénédiction," *Œuvres Complètes*, 87.

[153] Babuts adopts this term from Baudelaire's "Salon de 1859." Babuts 2014, 161.

[154] Babuts 2014, 161.

[155] Eugène Delacroix, *Journal de Eugène Delacroix*, vol. 2 (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et cie, 1895), 342-43. Quoted in Gilman, 153. "Reflecting on the freshness of memories, on the enchanted color they assume in a distant past, I admired this involuntary labor of the soul which, in the recollection of pleasant moments, diverts and removes anything that lessened their charm, in the moment that we came upon them. I compared this kind of idealization, because it is one, to the effect of fine works of the imagination."

beautiful works of the imagination. Delacroix therefore understood memory and imagination to be related not only in terms of the visual memory of images, but also in the personal sense—that memories of one's past are imaginatively re-created when they are recalled in the present.

In *Avant et après*, Gauguin similarly expressed memory's tendency to alter itself in favor the positive: "On a souffert, mais on a joui et si peu que cela soit c'est encore de cela qu'on se souvient."[156] Later in the manuscript he returned to this idea in a more wistful and metaphorical sense : "Le souvenir du mal en fumée s'évanouit, le velours sur la conscience cache les épines, adoucit les morsures. […] C'est si bon la solitude, si rassérénant l'oubli quand consciencieux du péché, on désire la délivrance tout en redoutant l'Après inconnu."[157] Memory in his view is not stable but evanescent, and over time, the positive overwrites the negative.

Gauguin performed remembering and forgetting throughout *Avant et après.* The manuscript at times takes on the quality of a confessional, and he twice invokes Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, the first within the first few pages: "Des mémoires ! c'est de l'histoire. C'est une date. Tout y est intéressant. Sauf l'auteur. Et il [f]aut dire qui on est et d'où l'on vient. Se confesser: après Jean-Jacques Rousseau c'est une grave affaire."[158] Swimming against the current of the grave affair of confessing, *Avant et après*

[156] Gauguin, *Avant et après,* 3. "One has suffered, but one has enjoyed, and as rare as joy may be, that is nonetheless what we remember."

[157] Gauguin, *Avant et après,* 60-61. "Bad memories vanish in smoke, velvet on the conscience hides the thorns, softens the bite. […] Loneliness is so good, forgetting so calming when, conscious of sin, we want release while fearing the unknown After[life]."

[158] Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 2. The second time he discusses Rousseau's *Confessions* is on page 228. "Memories! This is history, it is a date. Everything is interesting. Except the author. And one ought to say who one is and where one comes from. To confess: according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau it is a serious affair."

is filled, almost rhythmically, with statements that he remembers something or that he has forgotten something.[159] His regular repetition of "je me souviens…" draws the text away from an autobiographical narrative, in which the author receives the benefit of the doubt that he remembers, without having to let the reader know. Rousseau also repeats "je me souviens" with a similar frequency in his *Confessions*, making this mutual performance of memory itself palimpsestic.[160] This frank confrontation with memory and forgetting marks another way in which Gauguin showed that he was not a victim of mutable memory, but instead actively examined and exploited its capricious qualities.

Twisting narratives

Self-defining memories are those memories that play a major role in the formation of one's self-concept. Studies show that self-defining memories are "highly accessible" in middle-aged and older adults—that is, they are more often recalled, and when recalled they seem clear, less occluded by time than other memories.[161] Yet precisely because these memories are so often recalled, processed, and integrated into one's life story, they are also the most susceptible to change.[162] Life stories are therefore a "hypothetical construct" comprised of the ways by which we constantly rearrange and reinterpret

[159] Gauguin in *Avant et après*, select examples: "Je me souviens de mon premier séjour à Paris, en 1876." (29) "Je me souviens de cette naïveté d'un président du tribunal à Papeete." (92) "Je me souviens de l'une d'elles, très jolie Écossaise." (105) "Je me souviens qu'un jour…" (136) "Je me souviens du temps où le public jugeant le dessin des cartons Puvis de Chavannes…" (183) "Je me souviens, à la salle Hyacinte à Paris, d'un instituteur de première force aux armes." (190) "Je me souviens de ce temps…" (195)

[160] I compared the frequency of memory-related terms by performing searches of the digitized full texts of *Avant et après* and Rousseau's *Confessions* and calculating their recurrence with respect to the relative lengths of each text.

[161] Prebble, 827, also Addis and Tippett 2008, 77; and Zoë J. Chessell, Clare J. Rathbone, Celine Souchay, Lara Charlesworth & Chris J. A. Moulin, "Autobiographical Memory, Past and Future Events, and Self-images in Younger and Older Adults," *Self and Identity* 13.4 (2014): 382.

[162] Prebble, 827.

information about our life in concert with social, cultural, or professional demands. The life story acts as the organizing principle by which the mind stores and processes autobiographical memory. The "transformation of memories […] through reinterpretation and editing" to fit into the life story creates narrative continuity and a sense of self-continuity.[163] This natural, not pathological, function of memory happens to all people, even if, as Frances Cobbe reflected, we would rather be "deceived a hundred times" than admit that our memories are inherently untrustworthy.[164] Cobbe also commented upon the role of one's "theory" in inflecting the way we store, recall, and re-tell memories.[165]

For Gauguin, his time with van Gogh in Arles would logically play an outsized role in his identity formation, as it was a time of growing recognition of his avant-garde credentials and he had several "disciples," as he called them, who were eager to work alongside him. It was certainly a story he retold often, providing ample opportunity for it to gradually morph to fit into his self-concept as an avant-garde artist who served as leader and mentor to his peers, including van Gogh. In *Avant et après*, Gauguin described that upon his arrival to the yellow house, the house, its finances, and even van Gogh's artistic theory were in disarray—"il n'arrivait qu'à de douces harmonies incomplètes et monotones; le son du clairon y manquait." Gauguin claims to have taught van Gogh his own techniques, which suited him well: "Dès ce jour mon Van Gogh fit des progrès étonnants ; il semblait entrevoir tout ce qui était en lui et de là toute cette série de soleils

[163] Prebble, 831-2. This process of transformation is called "autobiographical reasoning."

[164] Cobbe, 111.

[165] Cobbe, 107. "The fact is, we can never witness any transaction without making some theory of the motives, sentiments, and purposes of the agents; and, in telling the history thereof, we inevitably work out this theory in our description."

sur soleils, en plein soleil."[166] In keeping with this theory of their relationship, as mentioned above, around the same time Gauguin claimed in a letter to Fontainas that the yellow-on-yellow sunflowers were his idea. In the manuscript Gauguin went on to absolve himself of any wrongdoing on the night van Gogh sliced his ear, and during their stay generally.[167] It is impossible to know whether Gauguin purposefully fabricated this narrative to chip away at and ultimately usurp van Gogh's rising status, whether the machinations of memory convinced him that this was true, or if he was aware that this memory was one that had evolved with him, one for which "le velours sur la conscience cache les épines."[168]

Remembering the Future

The co-existence of past, present, and future moments that I will discuss in this section parallels the metaphor of the palimpsest, in which the palimpsest's present condition is constituted by superimposed texts from the past and the possibility of continued inscription in the future.[169] Put another way, the palimpsest "feigns a sense of depth" while always functioning on a shared surface. The historical distance collapses, "their temporal distance slipping away in an eternal presence that is somehow completed in the presence of the original ancient text."[170] Past, present, and future are linked in the palimpsest not through a relationship of vertical depth, but one of "circular […]

[166] Gauguin, *Avant et après,* 18. "He only achieved sweet harmonies that were incomplete and dreary; the sound of the clarion was lacking." And, "from this day forward my van Gogh made astonishing progress; he seemed to capture all that was within him and from there came the whole series of sunflowers upon sunflowers, in full sunlight."

[167] Gauguin, *Avant et après,* 20-24.

[168] Gauguin, *Avant et après,* 60-61, quoted in full above. "Velvet on the conscience hides the thorns."

[169] Theorized in Dillon, 37.

[170] McDonagh, 211.

reiteration."[171] Below we will see how scientists, writers, and artists conceive of this circular relationship between time and memory.

Present-day and nineteenth-century science

Memory's role in self-continuity is, like other functions of memory, also future-directed. Self-continuity implies that one's self-concept has been consistent across time, but also that it will remain consistent in the future. This sense of continuity in the past and into the future has been shown to underpin several features of social behavior, including one's ability to act as a moral agent who is responsible for their actions in the past and future.[172] Autobiographical memory not only helps one imagine and prepare for future situations, it also acts as the unifying feature of one's past, present, and future self-concepts.[173] As discussed above, the similar mechanisms by which memory and imagination operate make this possible.

Nineteenth-century scientists also recognized the interchangeability of past, present, and future as they relate to memory. Roden Noel expressed that "Memory's restoration of the past is, at the same time indeed, the intelligent reason's feeling after, and creation of, the future."[174] For Ribot, "Notre connaissance de l'avenir ne peut être qu'une copie du passé." Ribot describes an anecdote in which a man pictures the country house that he visits annually and will continue to visit. The image he pictures in his mind, "est également matière à souvenir et à avenir."[175] Often this notion of continuity was

[171] De Groot, 119.

[172] Prebble, 829.

[173] Chessell, 382. See also Addis & Tippett 2008, 73.

[174] Roden Noel, "Memory and Personal Identity," *Modern Review* 4 (April 1883), 383.

[175] Ribot 1881, 39-40. "Our knowledge of the future can only be a copy of the past." The image of his house "is equally an object of remembrance and of the future." Trans., 53-4.

expressed through the fleetingness of the present moment—in Noel's words, that "the 'present' is but a vanishing-point of the past and future."[176] As De Quincey similarly expressed in *Suspira de Profundis*, "You see, therefore, how narrow, how incalculably narrow, is the true and actual present. Of that time which we call present, hardly a hundredth part but belongs either to a past which has fled, or to a future which is still on the wing. It has perished, or it is not born. It was, or it is not."[177]

In the early-twentieth century Bergson developed the correspondence between the present, past, and future into the concept of "simultaneity," but he developed the underlying ideas for it earlier, dating back to his 1896 *Matter and Memory*. For Bergson, simultaneity in part describes the co-existence of the past and the future in the present moment. For example, "Tout moment […] consiste dans cette scission même, car l'instant présent, toujours en marche, limite fuyante entre le passé immédiat qui n'est déjà plus et l'avenir immédiat qui n'est pas encore, se réduit à une simple abstraction s'il n'était précisément le miroir mobile qui réfléchit sans cesse la perception en souvenir."[178] He further explains the relationship between memory and perception: "Notre passé est au contraire ce qui n'agit plus, mais pourrait agir, ce qui agira en s'insérant dans une

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[176] Noel, 383.

[177] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Suspira de Profundis* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851), 254-55. Quoted in Dillon, 137.

[178] Henri Bergson, *L'énergie spirituelle: Nouvelle édition augmentée* (E-published: Arvensa Éditions, 2015 [Original 1919]), 97. "Each moment […] consists in this very splitting, for the present moment, always going forward, fleeting limit between the immediate past which is now no more and the immediate future which is not yet, would be a mere abstraction were it not the moving mirror which continually reflects perception as a memory." Translated in Mark Currie, *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and the Philosophy of Surprise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 62.

In *Matière et mémoire,* Bergson similarly writes, "nous pouvons parler du corps comme d'une limite mouvante entre l'avenir et le passé, comme d'une pointe mobile que notre passé pousserait incessamment dans notre avenir" (Bergson 1896, 74) and "cette mémoire elle-même, avec la totalité de notre passé, exerce une poussée en avant pour insérer dans l'action présente la plus grande partie possible d'elle-même." (184)

sensation présente dont il empruntera la vitalité. Il est vrai qu'au moment où le souvenir s'actualise ainsi en agissant, il cesse d'être souvenir, il redevient perception."[179] Gauguin's thoughts in this chapter's epigraph show that he similarly conceived of the present as an ever-fleeting boundary between the past and future. In what follows I situate his writing among Romantic and Symbolist authors, to reveal their mutual expression of these progressive conceptions of memory, bringing them to bear in the end on *Sunflowers on an Armchair*.

Nineteenth-century literature and Gauguin's texts

Symbolist writers including Valéry and Mallarmé are known for their transposition of past and future. According to Harald Weinrich, Valéry conceived of memory as something that "intervenes" in the past in order to shape it to fit the needs of the present.[180] Robert Cohn describes the "Edenic dimension" in Mallarmé's poetry as one in which the past, present, and future are "profoundly interchangeable," as his Edens are located in any or all of these tenses.[181] Cohn finds that in Mallarme's poem *Les Fenêtres*, the past and present are "transcended" in an "eternal present." The poem describes an old man looking out his window and back through time. Cohn locates the climax of the poem in the line "ivre, il vit," (drunk, he lives [or in the past tense, he saw]), further arguing that for Mallarmé, "it is surely no accident that a *vitre* is a place

[179] Bergson 1896, 269. "Our past, on the contrary, is that which acts no longer but which might act, and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation of which it borrows the vitality. It is true that, from the moment when the recollection actualizes itself in this manner, it ceases to be a recollection and becomes once more a perception." Trans., 320.

[180] Weinrich, 144.

[181] Cohn, 134-35. Cohn compares this interchangeability to the way the past and future replace each other in Proust's work, and writes that "this quality characterizes major texts from Flaubert on." An expanded study on this subject might encompass Proust's relationship to these same concepts and resonances between the work of Proust, Gauguin, and Bergson, particularly regarding memory.

where one lives (*vit*), keenly feels the presence of *vie*."[182] Throughout the poem the old man looks forward to "l'horizon de lumière gorgé" and yet he does so with "un grand nonchaloir chargé de souvenir".[183] The poem is filled with moments in which the old man looks back and ahead, such that the text moves beyond mere reference to memories and becomes a poem *about* memory and its transcendence.

In *Sartor Resartus,* Carlyle expressed a similar kind of interchangeability between past and future, memory and hope. Here he speaks through the magazine editor who quotes Professor Teufelsdröckh in a passage titled "Natural Supernaturalism":

> 'Or thinkest thou it were impossible unimaginable? Is the Past annihilated, then, or only past; is the Future non extant or only future? Those mystic faculties of thine Memory and Hope, already answer: already through those mystic avenues, thou the Earth blinded summonest both Past and Future, and communest with them, though as yet darkly, and with mute beckonings. The curtains of Yesterday drop down, the curtains of Tomorrow roll up; but Yesterday and Tomorrow both *are*.'[184]

Somewhere between the quiet hopefulness of the old man in Mallarmé's *Fenêtres* and the mighty pronouncement of Professor Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor Resartus* lie Gauguin's reflective comments on the past and future, which he made over the course of decades. Dating back to 1888, he expressed to Schuffenecker that, "En peinture une main qui tient

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[182] Cohn, 137. For the poem, Stéphane Mallarmé, "Les Fenêtres," in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 9-10.

[183] Mallarmé, "Les Fenêtres," 9-10, and Cohn, 138. "The horizon saturated with light," with "a grand nonchalance laden with memory."

[184] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896), 208.

un mouchoir peut exprimer le sentiment qui l'anime, toute la vie passée comme la vie à venir."[185] In his *Notes de Delacroix* in *Diverses choses,* he wrote, "Ma jouissance se compose donc à la fois de la situation où je me trouve et de celle que je me rappelle."[186]

The Future Anterior

The last framework I would like to present before turning back to the paintings is the future anterior, which connects to and in cases coincides with the ideas presented above. The future anterior designates a grammatical tense defined as "the anticipation of retrospection."[187] It describes the experience of the present as a moment that "will have been" or "will have happened."[188] This can occur when, from a time in the past, one looks forward to the future, or a future time when one will look back to the present, which then will be the past. Sara Dillon gives as an example a fictional female character who wonders, each time she meets a man, if he is the person she will marry, in which case she will spend her future looking back to the present moment in which she is meeting him. Thus in that present moment, she thinks of a future in which that present will be her recollected past.[189] Poe employs a similar structure in *Marginalia*: "It is by no

[185] Gauguin to Schuffenecker, 20 December 1888. *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: documents, témoignages*, vol. 1, ed. Victor Merlhès (Paris: Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1984), 306. "In painting a hand that holds a handkerchief can express the sentiment that animates it, as much the past life as the life to come."

[186] Gauguin, *Diverses choses*, 219. "My pleasure consists of both the situation in which I find myself and of that which I remember."

[187] Dillon, 99.

[188] Currie, 63.

[189] Dillon, 100.

means an irrational fancy that, in a future existence, we shall look upon what we think our present existence, as a dream."[190]

Mark Currie positions both Bergson and Mallarmé as prime exemplars of the future anterior. He quotes a passage cited above, in which Bergson explains that each successive moment exists at the "fleeting limit" between the past and future.[191] Currie conceives of this tense as the elision of destination and destiny, where destination describes future projection, and destiny expresses the inevitability of the future based on the past—"the folding back into the past of the future perfect."[192] Currie finds that Mallarmé's use of the future perfect in his poem "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" remains a paradigm, and it has been described as "the most perfect of future perfects."[193] The balance of "never" and "will" in the poem's line "rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu" illustrates Mallarmé's insistence elsewhere that "un present n'existe pas."[194] Gauguin similarly paired "never" with the future in *Avant et après*: "Au présent on peut dire jamais. / Pour l'avenir ce serait présomptueux. / Dire toujours, c'est de la fidélité."[195]

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[190] Edgar Allan Poe, "Marginalia," *Southern Literary Messenger* (June 1849), 336-338. Transcribed and digitized by The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, http://www.eapoe.org/. Gauguin cited a different passage of the same installment in *Diverses choses* according to Goddard 2011, 386 n.62.

The future anterior was employed by Romantic writers, perhaps most famously in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. Alan Richardson discusses this in Alan Richardson, "Memory and Imagination in Romantic Fiction," in *The Memory Process: Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives*, ed. Suzanne Nalbantian, Paul M. Matthews, and James L. McClelland, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 285-86.

[191] Currie, 62.

[192] Currie, 71.

[193] Currie, 72.

[194] Currie, 72-73. The poem's title in English is "A throw of the dice will never abolish chance." The often-quoted statement that "a present does not exist" is from "L'action restreinte," printed in French and English in Jacques Rancière, *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren*, trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2011), 77-79.

[195] Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 154-5. "At present one can say never. / For the future it would be presumptuous. / To say always, that is commitment."

Sunflowers on an Armchair Reframed

Still Life with Sunflowers on an Armchair I and *II* are composed in the future anterior. They inject the past into the present, and in so doing, open the present to the future. They look back to a time when Gauguin and van Gogh looked forward to their futures, and from the present they look forward to a future in which Gauguin's legacy would be shaped by admirers who look back to this moment and this painting. Gauguin invoked the future anterior in thought if not in tense when discussing his legacy in *Avant et après*. He described how, when an artist dies, his heirs divide all of his art and belongings, dealing with everything from copyrights to auctions. "Le voilà déshabillé complètement. Pensant à cela, je me déshabille auparavant, ça soulage."[196]

Despite how heavily I and other scholars have relied upon *Avant et après* as an interpretive device for the sunflower paintings, here I want to momentarily consider the canvases divorced from the manuscript. They were, after all, composed at rather different moments for Gauguin: the paintings when he was about to depart for the Marquesas, recently recovered from illness, confident that he had a mission still to accomplish, work still to be done. The manuscript, however, he penned in the final months of his life, at times too weak to stand and paint. The future glimpsed from the painting is productive and hopeful; the future that follows the manuscript lies primarily in his legacy.[197]

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[196] Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 321. "There he is stripped naked. With this in mind, I strip myself beforehand. That is a comfort." Partially translated in Childs 2003, 87.

[197] Hargrove discusses the importance Gauguin placed on shaping his legacy, which is important for my discussion of the future-oriented qualities of the sunflower paintings. In this article she argues that *Woman with a Fan* is the synthesis of Gauguin's ideas on creative liberty, and a benchmark by which posterity will judge his accomplishments. Hargrove 2006, 563. *Woman with a Fan* is contemporaneous with *Avant et après*, both of which express this concern for his legacy. The sunflower still lifes seem to have his current and future reputation in mind, but with less urgency, at a time when his mortality and therefore his immortality may not have been as central to him as they were in the Marquesas.

Sunflowers on an Armchair are about competition and legacy, but they are also about time, memory, and identity in a pivotal moment. To make this shift, I propose an alternate boundary. Rather than discussing the paintings as units in juxtaposition with each other, they can also be divided across the two zones they both share: interior and exterior. Each of the interior spaces looks backward and inward. They are both darker than but illuminated by the light presumably cast through the metaphorical window. The sunflowers act as a physical point of contact with the past, yet in each canvas an otherworldly presence hovers over the tangible memory, drawing it away from the realm of the observed world and into that of the imagination. Next to the parrot that represents the feats of memorization, whisps of white strokes form a negative image of the eye-flower in the corresponding canvas. This smoke-like form is as evanescent as an apparition, fading like washed-over markings in the sand, vanishing like a memory.[198] As opposed to this zone where memory and imagination intermingle in the past, outside each window Gauguin alludes to the Tahitian life that moves forward: a local woman directs her gaze outside the canvas, involved in her own world, and two figures wade through the water alongside a boat. The white-skinned figure who appears with the darker-skinned man wearing a pareu in my view represents Gauguin himself, living out some event in the present moment (fig. 3.13). This present will become the past when he records it in the book on the windowsill at a future time. The windowsill thus represents a potent intermediary zone of contact between interior and exterior, past and future, upon which

[198] Apparitions were a popular subject among Symbolist artists and writers, and in future work I would like to further consider this faded sunflower in light of such representations as well as period science on the subject.

lie the instruments of writing—a journal and inkstand.[199] Writing, then, mediates between inner and outer; past and future; memory, imagination, and observation. The life of the outside becomes mythologized in Gauguin's text; his memories become the creative fuel for his imagination. These paintings probe the relationship between "memory of the future" and the self.

Gauguin was in the process of selling his Studio of the Tropics, thinking back to the Studio of the South as he imagined his *Maison du jouir*—the "maison du prochain" in the Marquesas. The Studio of the South represented a memory that was central to Gauguin's self-concept as an avant-garde artist, and as such it would play a role in the maintenance of self-continuity. One's image of the future, he knew, is a reflection of one's memories of the past. When we believe "Il fera beau demain," our prediction arises from "expériences qui déterminent une raison."[200] As Gauguin looked out the window, the *vitre* which, in Tahiti, was likely *sans verre*, like Mallarme's old man, *il vit*—he saw and he lives, with fear and hope as he looked both outward and backward.

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Just as Gauguin's written sources became his own when he (re)wrote them, similarly in the four sunflower still lifes, the collage of "quoted" artworks by van Gogh,

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[199] I am interpreting this book as one of Gauguin's manuscripts. Its hefty size corresponds with the size of his second edition of *Noa Noa* and *Diverses choses*, which occupy the same notebook. Gauguin had also begun writing *Racontars de Rapin* at this time. The book could alternatively represent a more abstract idea of a journal rather than a specific one, or it could represent a published book that he would read rather than write in. In that case, the book acts as a source rather than a record, which also retains interesting implications for memory and identity.

Regarding the inkstand, Charles F. Stuckey identifies the object as such in his catalogue entry in *Paul Gauguin: Artist of Myth and Dream*, ed. Stephen Eisenman, Charles F. Stuckey, and Suzanne Branciforte (Milan, Italy: Skira, 2007), 372. The object is admittedly ambiguous and cannot definitively be called an inkstand, particularly in the absence of a dip pen. If it is not an inkstand, this too would support the book as an object of reading rather than writing.

[200] Quoted and translated above. Gauguin, *Avant et après*, 112.

Puvis, Degas, and Redon become Gauguin's own work. These artists are not just a "source;" they have been repurposed as his own creative center. The original artworks take on a new existence, inflected by the moment in which Gauguin made them. The presence of Puvis' *Hope* symbolizes the regenerative potential of the past. As both homage and a form of creative competition, the overwriting inherent in the mnemonic process gives way to a new creation, which is wholly Gauguin's.

The correspondence between memory and imagination embedded in these paintings and found throughout Gauguin's writings underlines the artist's dedication to creativity. Memory is not merely reproductive, it is a "fundamentally constructive" process and is future-directed.[201] Gauguin was truly imaginative with his memories, manipulating them like pawns to create his mythic narratives and his art. He not only re-litigated the debates with van Gogh on working from memory through these sunflower still lifes; going further, the relationship itself between memory and the imagination has taken on greater depth. Their intersection constitutes more than an artistic process or aesthetic philosophy; it represents a meditation on life as a creative process. The paintings are about this process—the role of sources in invention and inspiration, the role of memory in their transformation and arrangement, and the continuity of identity over time. As such these works are reflective upon the past, charged with meaning in the present, and speak to the future.

[201] Schacter and Addis 2007, 773.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout Gauguin's career, he turned to the genre of still life in order to probe his theories of memory through his paintings of objects. In the late-1880s, he pictured the act of painting from memory by depicting artists ostensibly observing still-life arrangements with closed eyes. He soon removed the observing figures to focus on the still life itself and the aesthetic of working from memory. The resulting still lifes are considered his earliest forays into abstraction. On the heels of creating these paintings Gauguin spent three months living with van Gogh in Arles where their electric debates on painting from memory appear to have circulated around the still-life genre, resulting in each artist painting the other's portrait in the act of painting a still-life canvas—even though they created very few such canvases during their time together.

Gauguin turned again to still life three years later when, upon his arrival in Tahiti, he reflected upon the dreams of the Studio of the South as he built his plans for his new Studio of the Tropics. As he worked through his spatial and temporal dislocation, he figured the longing and hope that were inherent to nostalgia in the form of oranges and oleanders. These objects were common to both Arles and Tahiti, and were both subjects in van Gogh's work. As the brightness and vibrancy in these canvases convey, through nostalgic reminiscence the past becomes a resource for the future. The same duality of nostalgic longing surfaces in *The Royal End*, in which mourning for the loss of Maori cultural traditions gives way to faith in the resilience of the people.

Still lifes poignantly mark the beginning and the end of Gauguin's time in Tahiti, as he called upon the genre in the months before his final departure from the island. Gauguin finally confronted van Gogh on the latter's home turf—in the domain of

sunflowers. He couched this competition amidst more direct references to Puvis and Degas—a level of homage never accorded to van Gogh—and in so doing, explored the relationship between memory, creativity, invention, and originality. In the same series he evoked the passage of time through the juxtaposition of sunflowers with the life of the present outside a metaphorical window. The inside and outside become domains onto which memory and imagination, past and future, are projected. Over the course of Gauguin's career, memory and imagination served him as an artistic tool, a personal resource, and a metaphor for the freedom of artistic expression.

The theme of memory and its relationship with imagination recurs in Gauguin's writing, and this dissertation locates their visual expression in his still-life painting. He gave tangible form to his theories through his manipulation of objects. Positioning them as models or as souvenirs, they participate in the tradition of still-life painting in which the artist composes his painting twice—on the table and on the canvas. Gauguin also continued the legacy of still life as the genre that questions the boundary between life and art, between the real and imaginary. By looking to present-day science, these case studies have identified and linked threads in Gauguin's art and writing on the subject of memory that have up to now been overlooked. Each of these subjects, including visual memory, nostalgia, and the mutability of memory, has the potential for widespread application to other artists, especially the Symbolists. Further, the methodology of cognitive historicism that I have used to investigate this subject models a new mode of art historical inquiry. The issues of memory and imagination identified in this dissertation, together with the interdisciplinary methods I have used to study them, offer a new mode of engagement with Gauguin's work and the meaning of memory to the *fin-de-siècle* mind.

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