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Hannah M. Tavares

Pedagogies of the Image

Photo-archives, Cultural Histories, and
Postfoundational Inquiry

Hannah M. Tavares
College of Education
University of Hawai'i
Honolulu, HI, USA

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Preface

Pedagogies of the Image was written over the span of several years during which I began to teach a graduate seminar in my department on theories around photography and the use of photographs in studies of education. By “education,” I mean it the way that Levinson (2000) does as a “situated human activity” embedded in everyday social life. The impetus for this book was aroused by a number of encounters I had with different “texts” throughout my graduate studies and later as a university professor teaching in an educational foundations department. The perceptual stimuli revolved around (1) a curiosity in the type of images, from anthropometric photography to tourist photography on ethnic groups that were used in the social science project *Temperament and Race* during the period when Hawai‘i was a territory of the United States; (2) the production, circulation, and consumption of images of “Filipinos” for the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair in America; (3) an unremitting attraction to several images from my female heritage including a reproduction of a 1897 school portrait of the first graduating class of the Kamehameha Schools for Girls; (4) the random yet profoundly disturbing encounter with the images by Philippine-born artist Manuel Ocampo and the solo exhibit on artist-scholar Ken Gonzales-Day at Las Cienegas Projects in Los Angeles, California; and (5) to a general interest with visual archives and a preoccupation with conceptualizing subjectivity, with America’s problem of the citizen-subject, with questions concerning unconscious drives and psychic wounds, with representational politics and logics of western modernity, and with the possibility of theoretic-practice in unlikely spaces. These textual encounters provoked thinking the relation of American imperialism, colonialism, modernity, and their contemporary effects in postcolonial Hawai‘i.

When I first encountered the image-texts of Gonzales-Day’s altered photomurals created from published photographs, postcards, and souvenir cards of mob violence which was used to unearth a forgotten history of lynching that took place in California perpetrated against Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans and the “hybrid vocabulary” (Noriega 1997) of Ocampo’s collaged paintings that regularly used culturally taboo symbols and grotesque scenes, I was struck by the lingering force of their image-texts. Their objects seized my attention prompting a disturbing and disorienting response. I use “disturb” not in a moralizing-judging

sense, but rather in a philosophic-social-psychoanalytic sense in a similar way that Butler (2000) has done to theorize what she deems as an interruption that overwhelms and disorients our own thought worlds. It is both a reaction and response that momentarily suspends the familiar worlds we know and take to be the self-evident. That disturbance and the spacing activated by the immediate moment and its lingering effect open up the possibility for an unfamiliar resource or a not-yet-thought-of future possibility to emerge. Formulated through this lens, to feel disturbed by something can solicit from us a subjective response. The sensations aroused have the potential to augment, enrich, and expand accustomed ways of approaching our objects, knowing our histories, experiencing our bodies and lives and our connectedness to the histories, bodies, experiences, and lives of others.

This kind of productive interruption has resonances with the way Berlant and Edelman (2014) explore the concept of relationality. For them, a disorienting aesthetic – what is conventionally experienced as “negative” or unbearable – cognitively, emotionally, psychically, socially, and so on is not necessarily apolitical or a sensation that needs overcoming and stabilizing. A disorienting aesthetic can be generative by triggering thought or releasing exchanges that can be constructively used to initiate a semantic repertoire more suitable for engaging what is disavowed in our world. It may, for example, assist in “reticulating” or “resemanticizing” the normative repertoire of seeing, saying, and acting. In other words, the space in which the disturbance operates as a “negative” space is neither natural nor necessary. Feeling disturbed or disoriented can have a different value and solicit other responses in other registers in other domains.

I mention the work of Ocampo and Gonzales-Day because the affective moods that were triggered and the visual strategies that they used to expose historical amnesia toward certain events have significance for exploring the cultural politics of the postcolonial present through a visual register. In vastly different ways, both artists’ work are prescient projects that provide a visual story of the violence and brutality of imperial and colonial projects in the Philippines and acts of racist violence in Euro-America on bodies that have been devalued and criminalized. Their aesthetic gives historical expression to bodies that are often forgotten or ignored within doctrinal content and conventional approaches of educational studies and inquiry. On a pedagogical level, Gonzales-Day uses his images in a politically imaginative way to question institutionalized scripts and stable archives related to the history of lynching in America. While Ocampo’s historically haunted and overburdened images bear witness to the colonial institutions that have marked “Filipino” identity, identification, and belonging in ways that continue to confound the present.

Though these two artists galvanized my own thinking on the confluence of the social, psychic and scopic, their work is not the focus of *Pedagogies of the Image*. This book is written of pictures taken of women in my family from different institutional spaces and moments in time. My previous essays that focused on specific processes and contexts of racial subjection were the precondition for thinking a variety of different conceptual relations. In this work, I bring together seemingly incompatible theoretical vocabularies including poststructuralism, feminist theory,

philosophies of race and ethnicity, postcolonial theory, curriculum theory, cultural histories of education, and visual cultures.

The archives I visited in Hawai‘i and elsewhere have complicated my thinking about the political nature of archives and the politics of visual images and the constitutive role of the visual realm. Critically, the archive is no longer treated simply as a space where records are collected, arranged, described, and preserved by what Brien Brothman calls, “disinterested socio-technical agents” (2004, p. 83). Additionally, the view of photography as a form of writing had released all sorts of questions typically reserved for readers of books and words rather than images. The two seminars that I taught in 2012 and 2014 were a learning space to experiment and work through the various theoretical and philosophical engagements on photography and the images they produce. The friendships that flourished among the participants in the 2012 seminar crossed over to other sites beyond the space of the classroom and eventually developed into its own form of association. As a collective, we continued our conversations about images, but we also brought to our informal gatherings, often over food and wine, our thinking on the notion of “collaboration” for which we continue to have discussions. We found that our collective, how it sustains itself, its purpose, our connectedness to each other, exceeds those experiences we recognize as “community” in the conventional sense. The experience of that atypical collaborative spirit was the start of imagining, appreciating, and looking into a form of association that was “nonsovereign” (Berlant and Edelman 2014).

Apart from teaching the two graduate seminars, I have had the good fortune to work through the central ideas for the book by the generosity of other scholars, which took the form of invitations to present my thinking on the various threads of this topic at professional meetings, conferences, and brown bag seminars. Such opportunities were precious and helped me to refine my thinking and argument. I have had critical feedback at various points from my colleagues, friends, and students. With that said, I take full responsibility for any shortcomings and flaws that my readers may find with the book. First and foremost, I thank Lynda Stone for soliciting and sustaining this book with her characteristic intelligence, vision, and kindness. At Springer, Annemarie Keur and Yoka Janssen were enormously helpful throughout the process. I also thank the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript proposal for their insightful criticisms, invaluable advice, and thoughtful recommendations. Eileen Tamura the Chair of my department generously facilitated my schedule so I would be able to do the research and complete the manuscript for publication. I thank her. My perpetual indebtedness goes to Grace Livingston for the incisive way she reads, sees, and says, and for her steadfast friendship. In addition, a number of colleagues, students, and friends have helped in thinking about this project, sometimes through the brilliance of their own work, sometimes by reading drafts and offering excellent criticism, and sometimes by just being enthusiastic about this project and what I was trying to do. I thank Bernadette Baker, Mary Chang, Jay Cradle, Patricia Halagao, Craig Howes, Richard Johnston, David Kupferman, Rod Labrador, Morris Lai, Jie Qi, Mike Shapiro, Amy Sojot, and Erin Kahunawai Wright. I am also indebted to our collective that touched my work in

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Honolulu, HI, USA

Hannah M. Tavares

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