

trum, they said, VDTs radiate in the very low frequency (VLF) range, not known to have any biological effects. The controversy died down.

But clusters of birth defects kept occurring. In October 1982, a Czech emigré biophysicist in Canada, Karel Marha, revealed that VDTs also emit extra low frequency (ELF) radiation, and noted that the East Bloc countries had strict standards for VDT emissions. In Madrid, Dr. José M. R. Delgado found that chicken embryos exposed to *pulses* of ELF radiation—similar to those emitted by VDTs—suffered abnormalities. The experts who testified before Congress in 1981 had lacked equipment capable of detecting ELF emissions. The U.S. and Canadian press reported none of this.

And so it went. Every new study pointing to hazards was dismissed by other experts—or in the case of important research sponsored by IBM in 1984, Brodeur contends, was misrepresented by

corporate spokesmen. The Reagan administration delayed a government research effort. Newspaper publishers and editors, whose employees were among the most often affected, imposed a virtual “black-out” on VDT stories.

That began to change last year, when Kaiser Permanente released a study showing that pregnant women who worked with VDTs for more than 20 hours per week were 80 percent more likely to suffer miscarriages than other women. But many in business and government continue to deny that a problem exists, Brodeur says, fearful of the costs and disruptions of remedial efforts.

He believes that a crash program of research is needed to determine if VDTs damage fetuses, eyes, or possibly cause cancer. Preventive measures need to be taken before the findings are in. Not to act now, he says, would make users of the nation's 30 million VDTs “test animals in a long-term biological experiment.”

## Ozonemania

“My Adventures in the Ozone Layer” by S. Fred Singer, in *National Review* (June 30, 1989), P.O. Box 96639, Washington, D.C. 20077-7471.

Last year's global environmental menace was the “greenhouse effect.” This year's is the “hole” in Planet Earth's ozone layer, which screens out the sun's ultraviolet rays. But it is a little premature to stock up on sun block yet, suggests Singer, an environmental scientist at the University of Virginia.

The “hole” in the planet's stratospheric ozone layer was discovered over Antarctica by British scientists in 1985. Alarms were sounded, international conferences held, and in 1987 the world's industrial nations agreed under the Montreal Protocol to begin reducing production of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). These are the industrial chemicals—used in refrigerators and air conditioners, in plastic foam-blowing, and in electronic cleaning equipment—that are said to be responsible for the missing ozone.

“The case against CFCs is based on a theory of ozone depletion, plausible but

quite incomplete,” says Singer. In March 1988, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) released amid much fanfare a study of ozone trends over 17 years. It reported that ozone was disappearing even faster than theory predicted. “This could mean that the theory is wrong, or the trend is spurious, or both,” observes Singer. But NASA cited it only as a cause for greater alarm about CFCs.

In fact, says Singer, the ozone hole may have other causes. It may, for example, be a temporary phenomenon related to cycles of solar activity.

Moreover, he argues, the evidence linking increased exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays to human illness is suspect. One scientist frightened a Congressional committee in 1987 by reporting that malignant melanoma (skin cancer) had increased by 100 percent since 1975. True enough. But the scientist neglected to point out, among other things, that skin cancer has been in-

creasing sharply since 1935, long before the ozone hole appeared.

Singer is suspicious of the motives of the scientists, government bureaucrats, and diplomats who are fanning the ozone panic. The scientists get more research grants and public attention; the bureaucrats get more power; the diplomats get

more diplomacy. "For all involved there is of course travel to pleasant places, good hotels, international fellowship, and more." Until we better understand the science behind ozone depletion, Singer concludes, some controls on CFC production are prudent. But a complete ban would be costly and premature.

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**ARTS & LETTERS**

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*Gauguin's Myth*

"Going Native" by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, in *Art in America* (July 1989), 542 Pacific Ave., Marion, Ohio 43306.

Paul Gauguin's life (1848-1903) "is the stuff of which potent cultural fantasies are created. And indeed have been."

The tale is now well-known, writes Solomon-Godeau, an art historian. In 1886, the 38-year-old former stockbroker cast off his bourgeois existence, deserting his wife and five children in Copenhagen to paint full

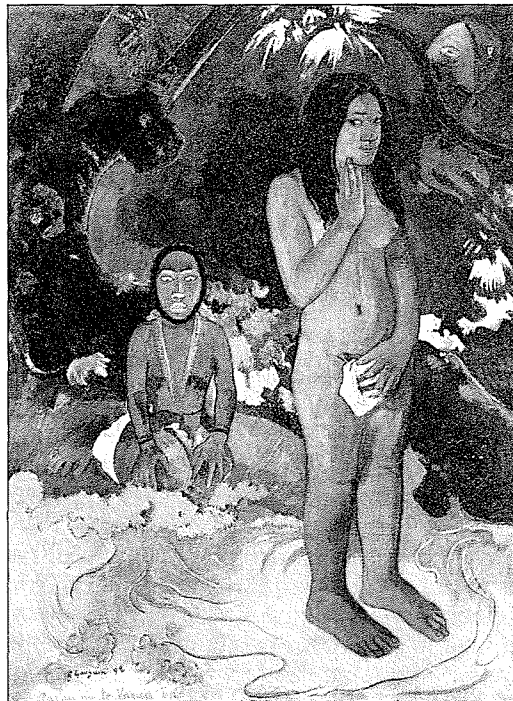
time in Paris. After a sojourn in Brittany, where he developed his style of primitive symbolic painting, he sailed for Tahiti and the islands of French Polynesia in 1891. During the next 10 years, he painted the pictures that made his myth and reputation after he died—images of a sensual Eden, "nature's plenitude reflected in the desirability and compliance of 'savage women.'"

It was all a fraud, says Solomon-Godeau.

By the time Gauguin arrived in Tahiti in 1891, "the pre-European culture had been effectively destroyed." Christian missionaries had been at work for a century—European diseases had killed off two-thirds of the population—and most of the "natives" attended church at least once a day. Gauguin never bothered to learn their language anyway, and most of his paintings' Tahitian titles were "either colonial pidgin or grammatically incorrect." Even the brightly colored clothing that (occasionally) draped Gauguin's subjects was of European design and manufacture.

Gauguin's own existence, which he portrayed as effortless and idyllic in his autobiography, *Noa Noa* (1900), was in fact wretched. He "subsisted on macaroni and tinned beef and the charity of Tahitian villagers and resident Europeans." Often, his teenaged Tahitian mistresses (one was only 13) were his meal tickets.

As for his vaunted style, Solomon-Godeau claims that it was pirated from



Paul Gauguin's *Parau na te Varua ino* (Words of the Devil) (1892).