

MEANING IN THE MULTIPLE

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Tropical Disturbance is purposefully disparate: artistic iterations on multiple themes, transience, mistranslation, authenticity, diaspora, nativity, and movement between. Many of the pieces consider place as constructed through practice and traverse, how meaning shifts as it passes through multiple contexts, like a plane flying through unstable air. One theme spoke strongly to me as a historian: the turbulence caused when images of paradise distort one's experience of Hawai'i as home place. My eyes were drawn to the work of Alison Beste, who crafted a series on light trespass, "unnecessary or unwanted light exposure at night." The creation of tonal patterns created by the mixing of light pollution, gradients of darkness and "nature" no longer visible, moved me to consider the various pō (darknesses) enumerated in the Kumulipo (source in deep darkness.) Can we see colors so newly emergent that they lack names? And as climates change and information moves at lightning speed through the air around us, do meanings ever coalesce into substance? Where does memory alight, how do we experience each other and ourselves in places whose meanings are always over determined or contested?

As a historian, I have come to appreciate that Pacific island and oceanic narratives grow out of different mana (versions), and it is this preference for multiplicity that continues to shape my writing on Hawai'i.

As a kid raised in small town urban Honolulu, I practically lived in Kam Bowl. By the age of twelve, I was queen of videogames: Asteroids, Ladybug, Mappy. I would play for hours against my friend Robert, an older hapa kid who chain-smoked. He would laugh quietly whenever I beat him. My friends and I would skitter down the back stairs and lay on the hood of my dad's car. We'd point up at the clouds at sunset and play: what do you see? A dragon; the cloud city Bepin; the face of a woman, red

tinted in the sky's glow. When my dad bowled until midnight, I would lay my head down on the counter, and slumber enveloped by the fading sound of crashing pins, the most comforting blanket of sound. I remember the day the alley down was torn down. My father cried when they interviewed him for the news. He asked, "Where will the old folks gather now?" That place gave birth to so many relationships, like the Fil-Am league that traveled to PI to bowl. Photos tell the story - people bowling, posing for a group shot outside proudly wearing their matching royal blue and white bowling shirts; a photo in Malacangan Palace, my grandfather reaching to shake Marcos' hand, my father smiling on in disbelief. All the aunties and uncles I saw every week went their way when the lanes closed. Mak Bowl was a place of community for old and young, a social club for light exercise and talk story, a place for working people. Now the old folks gather in the McDonald's across the street - a place that was once Kenny's Burger House - as if waiting for the day when the lanes are miraculously reopened.

Chain stores now occupy the places in our memory - homogeneous, monolithic, effacing the local urban realities of our shared experience. The stores we grew up with are gone: Shirokiya, Liberty House, McInerney's, replaced by generic global luxury brands: Neiman Marcus, Burberry, Chanel. We are priced out of our home places of leisure into spaces we are asked to clean, or serve in, a population of puka-pocket tour guides. Memories of a community now permeable on all fronts - the portion of place given to a transient sense of the islands as "paradise" - disturbs the coalescence of old and new memories. I used to beg my dad to take me crayfishing up Nu'uano, it was my favorite thing to do with—just—him. We would go to what appeared like a river but was probably a rivulet, a stream of small proportion, a micro world of splashing water, a child's laughter, sunlight diffused through leaves. I hop from bank to bank, little red net in hand, pouncing on desperate crayfish, capturing them in my cupped palms. I'm afraid to return with my kids; what if it's not there anymore? What if the places I remember can only be communicated through speech or these words on a page. What if these places are so widely shared on

Instahit or Facebook that when we go we meet busloads of tourists? How do I reconstitute my sense of place...the relationships I experienced through them—if they are stored only in memory, and every place now seems disturbed by irruptions of a non-volcanic nature?

These impressions are not mere nostalgia for a youth since passed. Rather, they may be read as further investigating “maoli” both in the native and real sense; a reassertion of the lehulehu, the manomano, the possibility for us to thrive when we search for meaning in the multiple, rather than authenticity narrowed to a singular point of origin, or indeed, return.

This piece originally ran in Summit Magazine's December issue as part of coverage for Tropical Disturbance. Mahalos!
<http://www.summitzine.com/posts/meaning-in-the-multiple-tropical-disturbance-reflects-hawaii-in-flux/>