

APOCALYPSE PAU EDITOR'S NOTES

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I have lived in Hawai'i full-time for eleven years and have been coming and going every summer since 1994. I will never forget my first visit: there were full days on O'ahu's beaches, science films in IMAX format in Waikīkī, and a day trip to the Big Island that introduced me to Pēlē the volcano goddess. It was the hottest summer I can recall in these islands, and it—in as many ways as you want to cut the following phrase—made me the blackest I have ever been.

I will never forget that summer's fourth of July. The city of Waipahu was blanketed in smoke and ash, glowed with the sparks of roman candles, multicolored spinners in the streets, and illegal aerial bursts. The air whistled and crackled constantly, and silhouettes darted across roads that headlights barely illuminated. It was totally foreign to me, other-worldly, something like the surreal Do Lung Bridge sequence in *Apocalypse Now*.

Confronted with total disorder punctuated by sudden and fierce expressions of iconoclasm and individuality, Captain Willard demands "Who's the commanding officer here?" "Ain't you?" is the first response he gets.

Though things really only get this chaotic during solar and lunar new year celebrations, I would return to this question over and over (and

eventually recognize the arrogance of the answer) as I acclimated to life as an outsider in a place that is surprisingly turbulent beneath the façade of tourism and workaday multiculturalism. Hawai'i is actually composed of mind-boggling geo-logics, singular ecologies, a deeply layered cultural histories, colonial and military burdens, and a parallel Native Hawaiian semiotic universe that—admired, appropriated and exploited—seethes behind, nurtures and gnaws at it all.

One way to grasp this complexity that is necessarily defined by the preconceptions one brings to it is to consider Hawai'i in two ways: 1) as both center and edge of the U.S. Empire, and 2) as simultaneously a decade ahead and five years behind in various aspects of that imperial culture. Hawai'i people treasure and defend the stunning natural beauty and climatic and ecological generosity of these islands; they enjoy and support progressive politics around issues like health care and LGBTQ rights, and have a state constitution that explicitly incorporates Native Hawaiian cultural values; but they also tolerate some of the sharpest expressions of the planet's income discrepancies, are in a catch-22 with an economy dependent on tourism, import almost all goods, recycle little, and live as if a physical bridge instead of a fragile maritime network connects us to the US West Coast.

I believe that only artists begin to address this abbreviated description of Hawai'i's almost unmanageable contradictions with any effectiveness. "Who's the commanding officer?"

The first year that Trisha and I lived here she curated a show called *Metrohawaii* at

thirtyninehotel, artist and disco evangelist Gelareh Khoie's pioneering multi-practical ART x CULTURE x NIGHTLIFE space (an all-in-one, consolidated approach also manifested in the majority of Hawai'i's news, media and cultural institutions). The show featured local contemporary artists' urban perspectives on O'ahu instead of more popular and celebrated nature-inspired "surf, sunsets, flowers, and palm trees" work.

Metrohawaii included local graffiti artists before the debut of Jasper Wong's Pow! Wow!, video and design by Honolulu's skaters, and vintage photographic documentation of Chinatown's gritty everyday life. It also addressed settler-colonialism: the sociopolitical contest between a "Local" culture created by 166 years of overlapping waves of majority Asian immigrant agricultural labor, a Native Hawaiian culture dating back to 1000AD, and the white corporate interests that illegally overthrew its monarchy in 1893. *Tropical Disturbance* is a reflection, extension and projection of *Metrohawaii*, cast across the Pacific to take root on a foreign shore, not unlike the seeds and nuts that birds, hurricanes and currents brought to the bare rock of these mid-Pacific volcanoes so many millennia ago.

Who, or what, is in charge here?

These writings don't explain *Tropical Disturbance* or Hawai'i, but they elucidate, complicate, ornament, harmonize and maybe even indirectly contradict the work. The writers represent a range of voices that come from Hawai'i's lifestyle, arts and culture, academic and Hawaiian cultural discourses. Each writer

engages a relationship to the temporal and spatial constraints of the islands' sometimes-antagonistic cultures, and the shared dimension of being in but not of the United States of America.

In terms of this collection of writings, the “guide” that the subtitle of the show refers to is not a map. Like Captain Willard’s trip up the fictional Nung River, this is about orienting one’s imagination and perception in relation to a destination while preconceptions unravel. Poised to enter unmapped territories Willard asks a different soldier if he knows who is in charge. The soldier indifferently replies “yeah,” and walks away.

This collection of *Tropical Disturbance* writings are a riot of precise signs that revel in burning clichés, explosions of insight, and detonated stereotypes, like a 4th of July night in Waipahu. Your narrator-guides, critical and defiant as they move fleetly through the smoke, are nevertheless trustworthy; they have Hawai‘i’s best interests—and yours—at heart.

