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PREVIEW

CAST IN PRINT: THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY HAWAIIAN IMAGINARY

by

Lydia K. Kualapai

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

Under the Supervision of

Professors Sharon M. Harris and Frances W. Kaye

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 2001

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Cast in Print: The Nineteenth-Century Hawaiian Imaginary

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CAST IN PRINT: THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY HAWAIIAN IMAGINARY

Lydia K. Kualapai, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2001

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The rhetorical construction of the nineteenth-century Hawaiian imaginary is the product of U.S. imperialism and a reflection of its shifting political discourse. Native Hawaiians first enter the Western imagination in 1779 as the “murdering savages” who killed the “Great Navigator,” Capt. James Cook. The question as to whether or not Hawaiians mistook Cook for the god Lono has generated a contentious debate between anthropologists Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere. In defending their disparate interpretations, both Sahlins and Obeyesekere construct Hawaiians as the objects—rather than the agents—of articulation. I avoid these terms of the debate and return instead to Cook’s expedition journals wherein I locate a point of intervention suggesting that at least one subaltern Hawaiian man gave signs of knowing that something horrible was being visited upon Hawai‘i, and it was not Lono. I then reassess the U.S. missionary construction of Hawaiians by introducing two recovered texts, Karahman: An Owhyeean Tale (1822) and Betsey Stockton’s missionary journal (1823-25). The former contests the centrality of the missionaries’ “introduction” of Christianity to Hawai‘i; the latter, written shortly after Stockton’s 1818 manumission, rejects the (white) missionary interpellation of Hawaiians as “morally polluting savages” and instead situates Hawaiians within their own

cultural context, a narrative strategy that ultimately undermines hegemonic missionary discourse. I trace the missionary influence in the impact of mid-century travel writers, especially Samuel Clemens, and demonstrate how reiteration creates an imaginary landscape of “grass huts” and “hula hula girls,” and, at the same time, packages Hawai‘i for economic exploitation. I argue that this final rhetorical shift sustains the U.S. annexation campaign, bringing it to fruition in 1898. By exposing the inconsistencies of the dominant discourse, I destabilize the Hawaiian imaginary and, in the process, help reestablish a rhetorical space where Native Hawaiian voices can be heard on their own terms. The closing argument thus appropriately considers Queen Lili‘uokalani’s 1898 memoir, Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen.

PREVIEW

To my husband, Buddy Kualapai

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

CAST IN PRINT:
THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY HAWAIIAN IMAGINARY

Introduction

The nineteenth-century Hawaiian imaginary is both a function of U.S. imperialism and a reflection of its dominant discourse. As such, it holds very few surprises. Hawaiians assailed the Western imagination in 1779 as the “murdering savages” who killed the “Great Navigator,” Capt. James Cook. Fearing that the newly discovered “Sandwich Islanders” were little more than dangerous brutes, explorers and traders avoided Hawai‘i for nearly a decade. But as the northwest fur trade increased ship traffic in the North Pacific, Hawai‘i quickly became a popular location for ship repairs and winter layovers. Journal accounts from this relatively brief pre-missionary period describe Native Hawaiians as politically astute, militarily organized, and culturally sophisticated. But this complex construction was short-lived. In 1816, U.S. missionaries promoted the colonization of the Hawaiian Islands as the preliminary step in planting the banner of civilization in the western portion of the continent. Casting themselves as the instruments of native salvation and the herald of western expansion, the missionaries recast the “Sandwich Islanders” as both racially inferior and morally corrupt. At mid-century, U.S. travel writers began to focus on the economic implications of the hegemonic missionary construction. If, as the missionaries claimed, Hawaiians are uneducable, uninterested in industry, politically inept, and desperate for economic management, annexation, the argument went, would be in everyone’s best interest. With a few minor adjustments, this

dominant imperial discourse sustained the annexation movement and brought it to fruition in 1898.

The long-term effect of this ideological production still lingers in Hawaiian culture and Native Hawaiian literature. In his essay “On Being Hawaiian,” John Dominis Holt, for instance, identifies it as “the wreckage of the 19th century” (8). Similarly, in her poem “Hawai‘i,” Haunani-Kay Trask probes the unhealed “wounds / of catastrophe” (27-28). To what degree Native Hawaiian subjectivity reflects either the internalization or the rejection of nineteenth-century dominant discourse is the ongoing work of Native Hawaiian scholars, artists, and community activists. My work, which is informed by my experiences as a non-Hawaiian member of a Native Hawaiian family, is located at the center of the Hawaiian imaginary, that is, at its nineteenth-century point of origin in U.S. dominant discourse. Using counter-discourse strategies, I attempt to destabilize the dominant discourse and, in the process, help reestablish a space in the cultural imagination where voices such as Queen Lili‘uokalani’s can be heard on their own terms.

Discourse/Counter-Discourse: Refiguring the Imaginary

Though counter-discourses are not sovereign and do not exhaust reality, reality can neither exist nor change without them.

Richard Terdiman

To retrieve the past and place an object in something like its original setting demands a ready and vivid imagination.

M. G. Bosseront d’Anglade

Understanding the Hawaiian imaginary and its ongoing reality requires a conscious awareness of the structure and operations of dominant discourse. Richard Terdiman,

author of Discourse/Counter-Discourse, defines discourses as a culture's "determined and determining structures of representation and practice" (12). Terdiman further distinguishes dominant discourse by its "inalienable attribute of power" (13). In terms of reality, dominant discourse establishes social practices, habits of mind, and familiar expectations (16). In terms of language, "the dominant is the discourse whose presence is defined by the social impossibility of its absence" (61). It is ubiquitous, hegemonic, and seemingly imperceptible. Above all, dominant discourse defines the ordinary, the general, the commonplace, and the norm; as such, it carries out its operations with impunity. The key, then, is to look beyond what Terdiman refers to as dominant discourse's "projection of unity" and to recognize that the operation preserves itself by subverting counter-discourses, that is, discourses that threaten to undermine ordinary perception. Accordingly, argues Terdiman, "discourses of a society are structured in a shifting, multiform network of linked assertions and subversions, of normalized and heterodox speech. [. . .] Thus counter-discourses are always interlocked with the domination they contest" (16).

Dominant discourse's capacity for absorbing counter-discourse is seemingly endless. But at the same time, the process of absorption leaves dominant discourse subjected to whatever it ingests. Hence, standing in opposition to the dominant, counter-discourse exposes its structural operations, weaknesses, limitations, and vulnerabilities (Terdiman 68). Moreover, if dominant discourse absorbs large enough quantities of the same counter-discourse over a prolonged period of time, it will eventually assimilate it, normalize it, and reintroduce it as dominant discourse. In the process, reality—which is

defined by dominant discourse—is altered. Counter-discourse is thus essential in fostering cultural and political change. It is also ironic: the most effective counter-discourse eventually becomes that which it most vehemently railed against—a ubiquitous, all-absorbing dominant discourse.

In terms of historiography and postcolonial studies, the practice of counter-discourse inquiry is not invested in the outcome of competing discourses but in the excavation of processes that created the dominant discourse. The goal has little to do with either raising the counter-discourse into a position of dominance or explicating new meaning from its text. Instead, what ultimately emerges from counter-discourse analysis is an awareness and an understanding of the processes that licensed the politically dominant discourse at a particular moment in time. Achieving that awareness strips the dominant discourse of its impunity: it can, in fact, be held accountable for its methodical dominance. Once awareness is achieved, the dominant discourse loses what Terdiman identifies as its “seamless” quality. At that point, transformation occurs not in the dominant discourse but in the imagination. What changes, after all, is not the dominant discourse but one’s perception of the dominant discourse.

Conceptualizing Counter-Discourse Theory: Recasting the Variable Text

An artwork prolongs, and goes beyond, common perception. What common perception trivializes and misses, an artwork apprehends in its irreducible essence.

Emmanuel Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow”

The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things whose interrelationship is beyond direct perceptual experience.

Douglas Huebler¹

The dynamics of dominant discourse and counter-discourse can be profitably illustrated by the work of American conceptual artist Douglas Huebler (1924-1997). Conceptual Art, by definition, is the art of ideas; its aesthetic adheres not to the ephemeral material object or the staged event, but to the intangible process that creates meaning through the object or event. For the conceptual artist, “form” denotes the theoretical, rather than the material; as such, form transgresses the boundary of the frame and unfolds ad infinitum. Accordingly, the aesthetic aim is not to pronounce meaning but to disclose the process whereby meaning is produced.² In Huebler’s work, form frequently intersects the sociopolitical and destabilizes the ideological. Huebler explains the conceptual structure of his work as a “face-off” between the metonyms natural/cultural and constant/variable. “Nature”—that process whereby “every existence passes on to be replaced again and again”—is the constant; culture—the fabricated text—is the variable. Huebler, relying largely on descriptive language and photographic documentation,

¹ This brief restatement of Huebler’s much-quoted 1969 manifesto was reproduced on the title card which appeared wall-mounted to the right of Variable Piece no. 70 (In Process) Global 81, one of four Huebler pieces included in Special Collections: The Photographic Order from Pop to Now, on exhibit at the University of Nebraska Sheldon Art Gallery in 1994. The exhibition was organized by New York’s International Center of Photography.

² For a concise overview of Conceptual Art’s evolution from its inception as a 1960s “de-materialized” rejection on mid-century formalism, to the commercially pressured neo-conceptualism of the 1980s, see Robert C. Morgan’s “The Situation of Conceptual Art.” For an extended analysis, see Morgans’s Conceptual Art: An American Perspective.

attempts to shift the viewer's perception of the metonymical interplay: while the written or spoken (variable) text may comment on a specific (natural) event, it cannot "appropriate" the event. Accordingly, any meaning attached to the event is contextualized culturally (Huebler, "Return" 47). Once the cultural context is destabilized, the definition of the event inevitably collapses (Gardner 103). In other words, Huebler's work is largely a deconstruction of the familiar.³

Huebler's deconstruction process becomes a dynamic experience in Variable Piece no. 70 (In Process) Global 81 (see fig. i).⁴ The frame presents a black-and-white photograph of a marching military column; the most visible soldiers in the group are reconstructed through a set of twenty-four black-and-white-enlargements, redoubled in corresponding acrylic portraits. Mediating the visual images, Huebler's mission statement appears in the lower left register (barely discernible in fig. i):

Throughout the remainder of the artist's lifetime, he will photographically document, to the extent of his capacity, the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner. Editions of this work will be periodically issued in a variety of topical modes: "100,000 people,"

³ For a provocative discussion on the function of ephemeral materials and documentation in Huebler's work, see Lucy Lippards's "Douglas Huebler: everything about everything."

⁴ Global 81 (1973) is a subwork of a larger project, Variable Piece no. 70 (In Process) Global, begun in November 1971.

“1,000,000 people,” “look-alikes,” “over-laps,” etc.⁵

Implicated as a potential participant, the viewer/reader is thus caught up in the all-encompassing project, its discourse, and its ironic limitations. Regardless of one’s response to the concept of inclusion (e.g., anxious, enticed, unsettled), Huebler posits the possibility of participation in his human documentary.

Despite the attractive colors and boxed patterns prominent in the upper register, the column’s dark tones and diagonal position draw the viewer’s gaze into the lower register where perception is manipulated by the black-and-white photograph and its dominant one-point perspective. The column, a highly ordered configuration, appears to operate as a single unit. Unanimity, suggested by the uniforms, helmets, and boots, echoes throughout the composition in the patterned brick walls and cobblestone street. Overall, the column appears ordered and controlled. In the upper register, Huebler individualizes twenty-four soldiers, represented first by sequenced numbers and then by black-and-white enlargements extracted from the column photograph. “Through a series of darkroom procedures,” the mission statement explains, “the faces of twenty-four soldiers have been brought ‘forward’ (from the background of ‘spaces’ of one such photograph) sufficiently for each to appear as equal on the frontal plane of a group portrait.” Removed from the structured column, the individual faces, still defined by group unanimity, are grainy and indistinct. Just below each enlargement, the artist uses color portraiture to liberate each

⁵ Huebler’s mission statement appears throughout the subworks of the Variable Piece no. 70 project. Gardner notes that Huebler’s “absurdly utopian” project not only challenges the appropriation and trivialization of Conceptual Art in the early 1970s, but advances conceptualism’s attack on high modernism’s exclusivity (101).

soldier from his uniform and helmet:

The individuality of each soldier has been further enhanced through painted interpretations of how each might look without his helmet and, with their features now sharpened by the language of art, they all together represent:

AT LEAST ONE PERSON WHO HAS EVERYTHING
TO GAIN AND NOTHING TO LOSE ⁶

In illuminating his “painted interpretations,” Huebler adheres closely to original head positions and distinguishable marks such as facial hair and eye wear, but everything else—from the finer facial features to the shape of the hairline—is necessarily the result of reasonable speculation. Lastly, the varicolored backgrounds release the individuals from the monolithic black-and-white column, at which point, according to the mission statement, they are reconfigured as part of “the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner.” Notably, Huebler self-consciously delimits the definitions of authenticity and inclusivity as qualified effects determined by the “manner” of interpretation.

Through his aesthetic intervention and (re)translation, Huebler destabilizes the column’s dominant unity. Once the viewer correlates the disengaged portraits with their counterparts in the column, incongruities within the ranks become distinct: cadence slips, heads tilt at various angles, eyes focus on divergent points. Notwithstanding the illusion of a singular focus, several soldiers in fact gaze directly into the camera, suggesting that

⁶ A hallmark of his oeuvre, Huebler’s aphoristic commentary generally follows the same structure: “Represented above is at least one person who . . . ,” followed by a cliché such as “. . . is his, or her, own worst enemy.”

some level of dissension operates within the seemingly unified column. Without altering any components central to the column itself, Huebler's process of intervention exposes the incongruities and suggests that discursion among the ranks functions as an inevitable structural fault within the hegemonic configuration. In the process, the phototext disrupts the center/margin model; the discursion of soldier number eight, for instance, reveals that the "center" is neither unified nor stable but structurally faulted. Illuminating even the smallest point of dissonance undermines the hegemonic structure and its master principles.

In creating intertextuality between the portraits and the column, Huebler renders a conceptual model of hegemonic process analogous to Homi Bhabha's textual delineation:

[T]he work of hegemony is itself the process of iteration and differentiation. It depends on the production of alternative or antagonistic images that are always produced side by side and in competition with each other. It is this side-by-side nature, this partial presence, or metonymy of antagonism, and its effective signification, that give meaning (quite literally) to a politics of struggle as the struggle of identifications and the war of positions. (29)

Bhabha (as theorist and critic) and Huebler (as theorist and artist) posit similar arguments: illuminating the points of dissonance (incongruities) undermines the structure's essential dominance, subverts its ruling principles, and interrupts its political meaning. Rather than acceding to dominant structures, they look through them, Emmanuel Levinas would say,

as through a window into the world the configuration represents.⁷ In that gaze, that posture, one sees the moments behind the moment, that is, what Bhabha defines as “interstitial intimacy” and Levinas defines as “art.” It is that process of discovery that enables the artist and critic to “shatter the fixity of images” (Levinas 10).

In his discussion on the relationship between time and fiction, Levinas argues that “[t]he characters of a novel are beings that are shut up, prisoners. Their history is never finished, it still goes on, but makes no headway. A novel shuts beings up in a fate despite their freedom” (10). Time, then, cannot unfix the novel’s images, but time can unfix the culturally informed interpretation of those images. But time alone is not sufficient: whether applied to fictional characters, two-dimensional images, or historiographical figures and events, reinterpretation requires both time and critical intervention. The complexities of (re)translated images/characters/figures/texts and the worlds of meaning they access become functions of the critic’s own time-bound moment. In Huebler’s process, the fixity of the image—and its meaning—is simultaneously shattered and (re)fixed within another frame. The process of intervention is thus continuous.

The connection between Huebler’s Variable Piece no. 70 and Terdiman’s discourse/counter-discourse theory is located in their corresponding effect on the imagination. By intervening with dominant constructions of meaning, Huebler and Terdiman shift the responsibility of interpretation to the viewer and reader. In Huebler’s case, the transformation occurs by confronting the assumptions about meaning and, at the

⁷ I was led to Emmanuel Levinas’s essay, “Reality and Its Shadow,” through Bhabha’s introduction to The Location of Culture.

same time, “realizing one’s own responsibility in processing [rather than consuming] information” (Morgan 189). Similarly, for Terdiman, counter-discourse analysis disrupts the “texts of our imagination,” thereby generating critical consciousness and cultural change.

In the following chapters, I use counter-discourse intervention to expose the discursive mechanisms that not only created the nineteenth-century Hawaiian imaginary but sustain its ongoing influence. My aim is not to change what has already been cast in print but to reconfigure its context. In revealing the inherent weaknesses of the Cook/Lono myth, the missionaries’ construction of morally polluting heathens, Samuel Clemens’s “savages of the Sandwich Islands,” and the annexationists’ racially inferior “Kanakas,” the Hawaiian imaginary will be destabilized. In that process, a space will emerge for a new and politically conscious interpretation of Queen Lili‘uokalani’s Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen.

A Note on Language

With the exception of direct quotations from historical sources, modern Hawaiian orthography, including the macron and ‘okina (glottal stop), is used throughout this dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE

(Re-)Imagining the Monumental Myth

The discursive construction of Native Hawaiians originates in 1780 when news of Capt. James Cook's death at Kealahou Bay reached London newspapers. Linked to the navigator's posthumous reputation, the dominant discourse of Hawai'i's "discovery" has been built on the assumption that Native Hawaiians initially worshiped Cook as their returning god, Lono. Using counter-discourse strategies, this chapter challenges the ongoing graphic and discursive mechanisms that objectify Native Hawaiians in order to invest Cook's death with mythic qualities. In the process, discursive intervention destabilizes the Cook/Lono myth, reconfigures Cook's reception from a Hawaiian perspective, and, most importantly, clears a space through which Native Hawaiians emerge as the subjects (rather than the objects) of articulation.

A Monumental Landscape: "O-why-hee: Where Capt. Cook was kill'd"

On 10 March 1779 U.S. minister Benjamin Franklin, writing from the Court of France, issued an "earnest recommendation" to all U.S. ships commissioned in the war with Great Britain to grant safe passage to England's Capt. James Cook, thought to be homeward-bound from a three-year exploring expedition in the Pacific.¹ Franklin's concern for Cook's safety was ironically ill-timed and misplaced. Killed by Native

¹ For reprints of Franklin's letter, see Andrew Kippis (352-53) and J. C. Beaglehole (1535).