

CONFLICTED FLOWS: 21ST CENTURY PACIFIC NARRATIVES
ACROSS MEDIA

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Abstract

Conflicted Flows looks at what I call “medial conflicts”—where stories come up against limit points in terms of medium—and their resolutions in indigenous Pacific Island literature since the turn of the 21st Century. In the Pacific Island texts, films, recordings, and electronic media that I examine, medial conflicts often present obstacles to expression, but I argue ultimately open a productive dialogic space in which media refer to and imitate one another, while bringing attention to and resisting power structures that undergird the region’s expressive culture. Because of the historical proliferation of both traditional and introduced modes of expression, I claim that medial conflicts are characteristic of Pacific expression, and they provide an analytic category for understanding how media develop as a complex chain of responses to cultural and political demands, in addition to technological advances. To tease out some of the ways that Pacific Islanders wrestle with modes of expression, each of my four chapters treats a different medial conflict: a novel centered around a frustrated mute narrator who suffers imprisonment within the representational limits of writing while gesturing toward transcendence; writers and filmmakers using their craft to support the practice of formal oratory in the contemporary global mediascape; a network of poets and musicians that record their poetry on CD, amplifying, remixing, and perpetuating the traditional roots of its stories in a contemporary aural space; and the repurposing of contemporary electronic forms to reinvigorate ancient traditions. My project counters the colonial myth of Pacific Islanders “living in the past,” and, in fact, argues that their contemporary expressions offer ethical ways of approaching new media that are rooted in a robust tradition of inventing, adapting, and contending with modes of expression.

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My family has supported me through all my unusual decisions, and I could not imagine stumbling my way to the end of this dissertation without the love and enthusiasm of my parents Linda and Charlie, my sisters Sandra and Stacie, and the extended family. They have selflessly made several trips to Honolulu to visit me. I have also drawn support from my parents-in-law Judy and Paul, and the rest of Lim and Naruse clans.

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but later moved on. Alice has been inspirational for me as a teacher and a scholar, and she really helped me shape my project in its early stages.

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Introduction

In his novel *The Missing King*, Tahitian author Moetai Brotherson includes a scene in which one of his narrators, Philippe, a French psychoanalyst, struggles to comprehend the meaning of the manuscript he has been left, which is a supernatural life story of Vaki, a Tahitian man he had known. Philippe is encouraged by another character to think about Vaki's story in the way one might approach the Rongorongo tablets, which are a set of wooden artifacts from Rapa Nui that are inscribed with glyphs that appear to be a form of writing that has never been deciphered successfully despite numerous modern attempts:

You read it from left to right, so far nothing out of the ordinary. But you also read from the bottom left corner of the tablet. As soon as you get to the edge, you have to turn the tablet and carry on. The direction of the lines alternates. To read it you have to turn it round with every new line (297–98).

In this passage, Philippe is asked to read a written text as though it were a medium that is completely beyond the horizon of his comprehension. In order to get a full understanding of Vaki's narrative, Brotherson suggests that Philippe needs to understand the form (or at least the spirit) of a pre-colonial Pacific medium that, while no longer in use, may well have influenced, through generational transmissions, the construction of Vaki's written words and his conception of the world. It takes him some time and effort, but Philippe does come to an understanding; however, it is not so much that he has deciphered the text, but rather the text has transformed and unwritten him.

Philippe's perplexity serves as an illustration of a recurring issue involving narrative in the Pacific: how to represent the richness of stories across different cultural media in ways that are true to the spirit of their original media, but also comprehensible to responsible readers. In

fact, in one of the earliest essays on Pacific literature, Albert Wendt points to the “potential” that exists in the culture of Oceania because of its diversity of forms of expression:

There are more than 1200 indigenous languages plus English, French, Hindi, Spanish, and various forms of pidgin to catch and interpret the Void with, reinterpret our past with, create new historical and sociological visions of Oceania with, compose songs and poems and plays and other oral and written literature with. Also numerous other forms of artistic expression: hundreds of dance styles; wood and stone sculpture and carvings; artifacts as various as our cultures; pottery, painting, and tattooing. A fabulous treasure house of traditional motifs, themes, styles, material which we can use in contemporary forms to express our uniqueness, identity, pain, joy, and our own visions of Oceania and earth. (1976: 57–58)

Wendt clearly sees the great number of Pacific forms of expression as a strength, but there is a lingering question as to whether the many media he mentions (in their various genres and languages)—each with its own traditions, conventions, rules, powers, and affordances—can and should be so easily transformed into “material” for contemporary forms.

Much has been made, in particular, of the idea of a “shift” from oral traditions to written literature in the Pacific. In his *South Pacific Literature: From Myth to Fabulation*, the first book-length study of Pacific literature, Subramani writes,

The shift from the oral to the written is not necessarily a change from simple to complex or from communal to individual ways of expression. Rather it is conceived as growth and proliferation. In literary terms, the change leads to the

local evolution of a repertoire of genres which offer new options in artistic form to the new writers. (ix)

Subramani's observations—as well as his subsequent analyses of the ways oral literature has influenced written texts—are based on an assumption that the dominance of oral media in the Pacific has given way to writing. While this may have held for him within the institutional space of the University of the South Pacific, it ignores the persistence of orality alongside and even in mutually supportive relation to written cultures. For instance, Tongan poet Konai Thaman insists “all of my poems are meant to be read aloud. Orality is a common feature of Tongan poetry where every poem was ultimately meant to be chanted, sung and/or performed” (46) and Samoan writer Sia Figiel explains that she was inspired by Caribbean performance poets to write with Samoan oral forms in mind: “I opened my eyes to the possibilities of su‘ifefiloi and fagogo telling. . . . The sing-song in their work triggered the su‘ifefiloi/fagogo/faleaiku/solo bug . . . which is now an intricate part of my work—of my life” (99). Moreover, Teresia Teaiwa writes of the tenacious trope, which she characterizes as “once were people without writing,” as one that ignores the significance of other Pacific media: “the persistent inscription of Pacific people’s lack of a history of writing before European contact and the correlated claim that Pacific literature emerges from the orature or oral traditions of Pacific people qualifies as a theory of monogenesis that inhibits the reception of the literature” (731). While oral media are undeniably a major node in the contemporary Pacific mediascape, it is also clear from Wendt’s statement that many other forms of media occupy crucial positions.

The preceding discussions are a point of departure for this dissertation, which seeks to consider several nodes in the contemporary indigenous Pacific mediascape, seeing them as always in a state of productive conflict with one another. My dissertation *Conflicted Flows: 21st*

Century Pacific Narratives Across Media studies what I refer to as “medial conflicts,” moments when the narrative expression reaches a limit point with respect to medium, which I show are characteristic in contemporary Pacific narrative expression. I examine how Pacific artists creatively surmount, sidestep, or deflate such obstacles, cutting new paths through the mediascape of Pacific literature, while leaving a schematic trace of the site of conflict. The term “conflict” at once conjures the sense of political clashes among Pacific Islanders and colonial powers, the putative technological incompatibility of Pacific stories with certain media, and the expressed ambivalence or “conflicted-ness” in Pacific artists who work within these bounds. Medial conflicts abound in Pacific literature in part because of the many stylized storytelling traditions that have developed and circulated in the region, which have intermingled with introduced forms resulting in a mediascape that is always inflected by multiple (sometimes seemingly incongruous) modes of expression. My project is organized around analyses of different forms, turning to novels, films, audio poetry, and electronic media and brings a broad range of contemporary Pacific Island narratives into the ongoing conversation about regional, cultural, and genealogical identities and their structural impact on aesthetic, narrative, and medial forms.

The turn of the 21st century marks a point at which networked electronic digital media, which gained popularity in the 1990s, became ubiquitous, mobile, and unavoidable, and Pacific Islanders have adopted these and other media to produce, adapt, and transmit their stories to a global audience, while contending with political problems that the so-called “Pacific Century” has seen: growing security concerns, increased militarization, environmental threats, continued dispossession of lands and resources, and global financial crisis. My project sees Pacific Island texts as always engaged in telling stories that are rooted in traditional narrative practices and

rendering them legible to a changing audience—including a substantial Pacific diaspora—while resisting the forces that threaten, subjugate, and marginalize their cultures. I argue that by taking on, exploiting, and resolving medial conflicts Pacific Island writers reveal the power structures inherent in media, as aesthetic modes of expression and sites of political resistance.

Because the 21st century has seen a proliferation of new media forms, my dissertation aims to highlight Pacific Islanders' engagement with new media, countering the colonial stereotype of indigenous people living in the past, but it also considers the continuing relevance for Pacific people of traditional media, which have always persisted in conflicted relationships with introduced forms. The field of contemporary Pacific Island media thus give scholars an understanding of how a balance between innovation and tradition can be achieved.

I have attempted to select works and theories that represent the diversity of contemporary indigenous peoples' expressions in the region. However, covering the entirety of this incredibly vast region would have been impossible, and some omissions have been necessary.

One particularly noticeable omission is that none of the major texts in this study come from Melanesia. While many great writers from Melanesia have been celebrated for their pathbreaking works of Pacific literature, the number of Melanesian works that have circulated outside the region has slowed since the turn of the 21st century. Papua New Guinean poet and scholar Steven Winduo suggests that within Papua New Guinea, the problem is a lack of governmental and institutional support:

The birth of PNG literature in the late 1960s and its development in the early 1970s had the full support of the Administration of the Territory of Papua New Guinea. In Papua New Guinea today the scenario is one of neglect. Access to publishing opportunities, writing grants and support groups is very limited in

Papua New Guinea. Russell Soaba often reminds me that the life of a Papua New Guinean writer is a difficult one because the society is a difficult one. (41)

Writers like Winduo and Soaba (who each maintain blogs), as well as Kanak writer Déwé Gorodé (who published *L'épave* [2005], translated as *The Wreck* [2011]), are still active within their spaces, but there has not been the kind of momentum that was generated by Ulli Beier and his students at the University of Papua New Guinea in the 1960s. Gorodé's *L'épave* is an experimental novel that explores the disorienting trauma of sexual abuse, but it and other 21st century Melanesian works do not formally fit in the parameters of my project. Nevertheless, I see Melanesia as a vital and connected part of the Pacific and I expect that new developments in literary production are on the horizon.

The texts I have chosen represent a great diversity in terms of political situations for the indigenous people in their places of origin. Moetai Brotherson's *The Missing King* is from French Polynesia, which is an overseas collectivity or *collectivité d'outre-mer* (COM) of France—it has a local government, but much of the major policy comes from France. The indigenous Mā'ohi people of French Polynesia have been struggling against foreign domination at least since the early 19th century, when the Tutae Auri (“hard excrement”) protested attempts at Christian conversion by tattooing themselves (Nicole 268), and the independence movement continues to this day. In many ways, the situation in French Polynesia is similar to that in the US state of Hawai'i, in which Wayne Kaumualii Westlake lived and worked. While Hawai'i as an entity has greater power, and people of Hawai'i are US citizens, the indigenous Kanaka Maoli are a demographic minority and have little control over their ancestral lands. Hawaiians have maintained a similarly persistent independence movement. Craig Santos Perez is from Guahan/Guam, a former colony of Spain and Japan, which is now an unincorporated territory of

the US; its residents are US citizens and it has some limited self-government, but it has no votes in the Electoral College and has little power over the general US elections. An independence movement is growing among the indigenous Chamorro people, who are dealing with extensive military base installations, which take up almost a third of the island's total area. Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner is from the Marshall Islands which is a sovereign state in free association with the US; its citizens can live and work in the US, but not vote in US elections. After WW2, the Marshall Islands was the site of 67 nuclear weapons tests by the US, which devastated several of its atolls and led to severe health problems for Marshallese people. Consisting of a chain of low-altitude atolls, the Marshall Islands are now under threat of being submerged with sea level rise caused by climate change. Aotearoa/New Zealand, the home of Patricia Grace, is a constitutional monarchy, and former British settler colony. While the indigenous Māori people are, like Hawaiians, a demographic minority in their homeland, their Treaty of Waitangi of 1840 guarantees the protection of certain Māori rights. Nevertheless, Māori have been historically dispossessed of their lands and political powers, but they have a long tradition of powerful resistance movements. Teresia Teaiwa is ethnically Banaban and African American, though she was born in Hawai'i, raised in Fiji, and spent much of her adult life in Aotearoa. Banaba is an island in the Republic of Kiribati, a former British colony that gained independence in 1979. Sāmoa, home of Lani Wendt Young and Tusi Tamasese, was the first Pacific colony to gain full independence in 1962, which was largely the result of many protests by the indigenous Samoan Mau ("unwavering") movement.

It is notable that all of these artists who have taken up media in innovative ways are from places that have been colonized or dominated by foreign powers and that their work is oriented by involvement in strong traditions of resistance within their communities and in support of

others. Brotherson, for example, was elected to the National Assembly of French Polynesia in 2017, representing the pro-independence party Tavini Huiraatira, which was started by Oscar Temaru. Perez, Jetnil-Kijiner, and Young all write frequently in support of various social issues on blogs, social media, and for news sites. Many of the artists are or have been educators, bringing ideas of resistance into their classrooms. In many ways, all of these artists work with and alongside the growing resistance movements in their homes.

Like media, languages in the Pacific are always sites of cultural and political conflict, which continue to change as people continue to use their languages to tell their stories. In addition to geopolitical diversity, the texts I choose are written in three different languages: English, French, and Samoan. While I can only approach Tamasese's film *The Orator* in its English translation, I have engaged both the original French and English translation of Moetai Brotherson's *The Missing King*. The consideration of texts of different languages contributes to what Kareva Mateata-Allain calls "symbolic migration," which she explains has the potential to "reinitiate the culture fluidity interrupted when colonization divided this sea of islands into separate ethnographical, political and linguistic spheres" (11). Mateata-Allain's reference to Epeli Hau'ofa's essay "Our Sea of Islands" brings forth the strength of Pacific regional unity that Hau'ofa insisted upon, which can be advanced further by scholarly projects that work across linguistic barriers.

Key Terms

In thinking about medial conflicts, it is necessary to define the term "medium" as I will be using it in this project, for which I draw on Marie-Laure Ryan's *Avatars of Story* (2006). Ryan describes three ways in which the term "medium" is understood in contemporary media studies: semiotic, material/technological, and cultural. The semiotic approach, she explains,

“looks at the codes and sensory channels that support various media” (18). Traditionally, this approach identifies “three broad media families: verbal, visual, aural” (18). The material/technological approach is concerned with the raw materials and technologies that go into producing and transmitting the narrative. The cultural approach to media considers the practices that people have developed in interacting with the medium. This approach will treat the newspaper as a separate medium from the book, for example, even though they engage the same sensory channel (written language) and are made of roughly the same material (paper) because the processes of creating, delivering, and consuming the two media types is vastly different. The use of all three of these approaches is necessary for my project because medial conflicts often occur across approaches. For example, an analysis of the medial conflicts in Teaiwa’s *I Can See Fiji* involves a semiotic approach as it offers its audience both verbal and aural versions of the poems. It furthermore involves a material approach, as the constraints of the CD liner notes are such that the written versions of the poems are printed in tiny font and unsegmented paragraphs. It also involves a cultural approach, as listening to a CD is typically done in several different (now mostly obsolete) ways that affect the level of engagement the listener will have: in the car, on a walk with a portable CD player, on a computer with liner notes.

Because the concepts of “medium” and “genre” are closely related and often conflated, it is necessary to point out that genre will not be the main focus of this dissertation, but it is unavoidably present. Like “medium,” the term “genre” has different senses: it can refer to a common form (novel, lyric, or epic) or a common theme (tragedy, comedy, history, sci-fi). In my view, a genre comprises a set of codes and conventions that constrains membership (more or less strictly or loosely) within that category (e.g. a sonnet must have 14 lines, a comedy must have a happy ending). Certainly, media also have codes and conventions, and so we might ask, do we

associate a certain constraint with a medium or a genre? Ryan suggests that media should be thought of as involving material “affordances” that have the support of technology for their transmission, whereas genres “originate in innovative texts that create a desire to duplicate their generative formula” (27–28). Thus, Albert Wendt’s *The Adventures of Vela* could be classed in the genre of epic or novel (among other possibilities) and its medium is written language (even if Wendt’s poetic art makes any such category seem inadequate).

My concept of medial conflict is developed in part from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, but it is also inflected by Pacific Island theories of media. Bolter and Grusin, updating the work of Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, define a medium recursively:

We offer this simple definition: a medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real. A medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media. (65)

While the “respect and rivalry” that Bolter and Grusin describe captures some of what Pacific media exhibit, I also draw from April Henderson’s sense of “gifted flows,” a term she draws from Albert Wendt’s poem “The Contest,” which she shows incorporates forms and ideas derived from hip-hop music and dance traditions:

The gifted flows suggested by the poem are transnational, transcultural acts of imagination; it is Vela’s “gifted flow of dream” that enables spatial and temporal worlds to be traversed, and words to be shared. As a result of this fantastical instance of cross-fertilization, Vela is rendered capable of the powerful oratory

necessary for defeating the formidable Alopese in a traditional contest of verse.

(302)

Henderson finds productive purchase in Wendt's term "gifted flows," particularly in relation to the flow of popular music into Pacific forms, including poetry, drama, and music. Wendt gives his own version of what might be called Pacific remediation or "indigenization" in the introduction to his second anthology of Pacific literature, *Nuanua*:

All cultures are becoming, changing in order to survive, absorbing foreign influences, continuing, growing. But that doesn't mean that they become any less Samoan or any less Tongan. We and our cultures have survived and adapted when we were expected to die, vanish, under the influence of supposedly stronger superior cultures and their technologies. . . . We have indigenised much that was colonial or foreign to suit ourselves, creating new blends and forms. We have even indigenised Western art forms, including the novel. (Wendt 1995, 3)

The specific cultural and political concerns of Pacific Islander media go beyond the ideas of "immediacy" and "hypermediacy" that Bolter and Grusin call the "double logic of remediation": it is about cultural survival, resistance, and a marshaling of the powerful "gifts" that have been passed down by ancestors. In a space in which so many medial forms have been forcefully suppressed, and in which introduced media carry histories of representational violence and marginalization, the careful navigation of the contemporary Pacific mediascape necessitates considerable cultural sensitivity and an awareness of the specific historical and political forces shaping individual contexts.

I have chosen the term “narrative” to take the place of “literature” because the media that I work with do not all fit within what would conventionally be called literature. Haunani-Kay Trask implicitly expresses the problem of a term like “literature” for Pacific people:

I do not perceive the world of creative writing as divided into categories of prose and poetry or fiction and non-fiction. Nor do I imagine myself crossing from political resistance into artistic creation and then back again. Life is a confluence of creativities: art is fluid political medium, as politics is metaphorical and artistic . . . Perhaps this is a traditional Polynesian, or Native, view. Our Hawaiian chiefs, for example, announced war through the use of ominous metaphor; and woe to those who misunderstood the chiefly references. (18)

On the other hand, “narrative,” as Barbara Herrnstein-Smith writes, can be defined as “Someone telling someone else that something happened” (228), which can encapsulate many different medial forms, especially if we take the term “telling” very loosely. It moreover covers a wide range of Pacific expressions.

Pacific literary studies have always been attuned to concepts of media and their significance, and Pacific Island artists and scholars in particular have understood the importance of many media (including writing) in relation to one another. Indeed, the idea of “literature” for Pacific Islanders has largely been thought of in close relation to what western thinkers would call “other” arts and areas of discourse: Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop describes Samoan people’s attempts at achieving a “written fāgogo,” a type of oral storytelling; Albert Wendt explains that his writing is influenced by his grandmother’s storytelling, he has produced an illustrated book of poems called *The Book of the Black Star*, and he has compared postcolonial writing to the Samoan art of tatau; and Emelihter Kihleng reads traditional Pohnpeian textile practices as

poetry, which she engages in her own poems as well as her critical ethnography. My dissertation sees the continuity of such relations among media, focusing particularly on contemporary conflicts among old, new, indigenous, and introduced media. As Pacific Islanders remind us, an over-investment in finding the literary in particular media forms limits our engagement with contemporary issues of narrative. Ironically, it is the field of Pacific studies, which has been implicitly (and explicitly) critiqued for an over-investment in tradition that engages a forward thinking literary studies.

Key Themes

Pacific migration is an ancient tradition and many of the texts studied in this dissertation deal with issues of the dispersal of Pacific Islanders to far-flung places. Notably, with the exception of Patricia Grace, who has always lived in Aotearoa, every one of the Pacific Islander artists whose works I study in this dissertation has spent considerable time abroad, and their experiences in the diaspora have impacted their works. These artists have used various conflicting media to establish and maintain connections with their homelands, and the new media also allow them to see their cultural works in new ways and present them to new audiences, including others in the Pacific diaspora. The remediation of traditional Pacific forms is never easy or exact, and there are always aspects that are lost and gained in the transformation; however, the net result is not a weakening of older forms, but the production of new cultural blends and an increase in the aura or mana of the traditional forms.

Epeli Hau'ofa's theory posits the contemporary Pacific diaspora (both the elites such as students, scholars, military, and businessmen; and the not-so-elites such as migrant labourers), especially in metropolitan centres such as Honolulu, Los Angeles, Auckland, and Suva, as

continuing the process of voyaging and keeping the regional network strong, both materially and conceptually. He writes:

Islanders have broken out of their confinement, are moving around and away from their homelands, not so much because their countries are poor, but because they were unnaturally confined and severed from many of their traditional sources of wealth, and because it is in their blood to be mobile. (35)

In Hau‘ofa’s theory, displacement, with its traditional negative valance, can be looked upon as an opportunity for creating a larger consciousness on a cyclic circuit of trade that will bring everybody home eventually.

Another theme that recurs in relation to the texts I work with involves the practical problems associated with creating narratives and delivering them to audiences. Subramani and Ron Crocombe were early commentators about the problems of book production and distribution in the Pacific and, while some things have changed, there are still many practical problems for Pacific Islanders to get their stories out to a global audience. While the internet has enabled Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner to reach hundreds of thousands of viewers of her YouTube poems and Craig Santos Perez has connected extensively with his readers over social media platforms, Lani Wendt Young has struggled with the labor required if one were to make a living as a writer of electronic fiction and Tusi Tamasese has also contended with the international film circuits in order to find audiences for his cinematic narratives. Outside of journal publications, Wayne Westlake published only one small collection of poems in his lifetime, but his work has found new currency in the new millennium with the work of Richard Hamasaki and his multi-medial Westlake project.

Chapter Descriptions

My first chapter, “Speak-Writing Beyond the Text,” examines *The Missing King*, a novel by Tahitian writer Moetai Brotherson, which has the distinctive feature of being narrated in the first person by a mute protagonist Vaki, whose mysterious muteness serves at once as a metaphor for the imprisonment of indigenous voices and a functional disability that he has to find strategic ways to overcome. I read the narrative in *The Missing King* as representing a multi-layered medial conflict between the story to be told and the medium of expression, but traces of stories persistently inhabit the silent interstices. Brotherson calls attention to the narrative field in which Pacific Islanders are disadvantaged at every stage by a general systemic deafness toward media that do not conform to standards set by the dominant colonial powers. This extended reading sets the scene for thinking about ways that a medium is especially salient when it does not act transparently, but unevenly refracts, deflects, distorts, and sometimes completely conceals what a narrative aims to convey.

My second chapter, “Narrating Pacific Oratory in Fiction and Film” takes up the question of how indigenous people strategically rework the medium of oratory into spaces in which they can effectively carry forth stories and their functions in traditional and innovative ways. I explore the representation of Pacific oratory, surveying its Pacific literary representations and then focusing on Patricia Grace’s novel *Dogside Story* and Tusi Tamasese’s film *The Orator*, arguing that each work represents a local tradition of Pacific oratory in the ways it functions, particularly in the responsibility of speaking for an entire community. The protagonists of both these works have physical disabilities that dis-enable them far less than their own fears and perceptions of a hostile environment, and each artist shows how a medium that faithfully represents oratory must carry its own sense of communal ethics.

My third chapter, “The Sounds of Pacific Streets: Medial Conflicts in Pacific Audio Poetry,” establishes that the practice of audio poetry, known in the Hawai‘i-centred community of practitioners as “amplified poetry,” gives listeners a way of reading and thinking about Pacific literature without privileging written text. I focus on two albums from different Pacific traditions: *Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki*, which is a collection of songs adapted from the poems of Hawaiian poet Wayne Kaumualii Westlake, produced by Richard Hamasaki and performed by various Pacific and international artists; and Banaban poet Teresia Teaiwa’s *I Can See Fiji*, produced by Hinemoana Baker. While Westlake’s vision of “waikiki” is one of gruesome horrors, Hamasaki’s album brings together artists from around the world to connect with and interpret Westlake’s poetic experience of Honolulu’s tourist district. Teaiwa’s album is, somewhat conversely, a celebration of the diversity of the streets, where migrants can have a variety of cultural experiences. The album provides conflicting textual and audio versions of poems, which challenge reader-listeners to think of the relations among media as fluid and dynamic.

In the final chapter, “Networking Stories: Electronic Narratives in the Pacific,” I turn to Pacific electronic literature that is inflected by and transmitted over the internet and, particularly, social media, arguing that the reconfiguration of narrative technology that these writers perform simultaneously invigorates Pacific traditions and counters the dominant system of world literature production. I focus on three writers who have each taken different strategic approaches to producing and sharing their stories: Samoan author Lani Wendt Young writes popular-culture inflected and Pacific centered eBooks that she promotes extensively over social media networks, approximating the Samoan storytelling form *fāgogo*; Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez includes a found poem in his traditional poetry collection that is partially generated from his own

Facebook network and a community effort to comment upon a proposed military buildup in Guam; and Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner has garnered considerable global attention to her video poems that are published on YouTube and other spreadable video streaming sites, establishing her island home as unevenly positioned against the world climate change crisis. Networked electronic media afford Pacific Island writers ways of creating and disseminating their work, and of interacting with their readers who revise the process of reading and writing.

Conclusion

As a non-indigenous outsider to the Pacific Islands region, I come to all of the texts in this dissertation without a native understanding of the cultures represented in them, so I have tried to be sensitive to my own possible misunderstandings and defer, when possible to other authorities. My work is, moreover, engaged with both Western and indigenous frameworks and it is embedded within Western institutions because of my position in an American university and in the scholarly discipline of English literature studies. I follow Paul Lyons as he states, “My own invocation of Oceanian categories in this study cannot help but mark the position of my anchorage, the conditions/conditionings of my journey, and the ends of my rope” (2006: 9). Like Lyons, I acknowledge my ignorance meaningfully, intending that “such acknowledgement includes a call to transform practices, and stimulates an understanding of the responsibility to know and understand, and the pleasures of doing so” (2006: 10). I have attempted throughout to open, rather than close lines of inquiry and I can only hope that someone else may expand upon one of the many loose threads.

In a blog post titled “We Live in the Future. Come Join Us,” which responds to the mass media discourse that characterized Native Hawaiian protesters who in 2015 opposed the

construction of the Thirty-Meter Telescope (TMT) on their sacred sites on Mauna Kea on the Big Island of Hawai‘i as “living in the past,” Hawaiian scholar Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada writes

Standing on our mountain of connections, our foundation of history and stories and love, we can see both where the path behind us has come from and where the path ahead leads. This connection assures us that when we move forward, we can never be lost because we always know how to get back home. The future is a realm we have inhabited for thousands of years. (“We Live”)

Part of what I hope my project has achieved is affirming the importance that Kuwada implies of maintaining strong connections to the past while constantly staking a claim in the future. The characteristic state of medial conflict that indigenous Pacific Island texts inhabit serves as model for the way literary studies can think of media more generally: not as transparent democratic receptacles for carrying stories or as strictly determinative, but as sites of constant struggle into which people invest considerable cultural treasures with the hopes that the forms and stories will be secured and passed down.

Chapter 1

Speak-Writing Beyond the Words: Mediation in Brotherson's *The Missing King*

In this chapter I analyze a work of fiction that explores and dramatizes major themes that circulate in Pacific Literature, from the ongoing effects of and indigenous resistances to colonialism to the transmission of languages, genealogies, cultures, histories, and stories across generations to Pacific peoples' continuing engagement with technology, colonial modernity, and alternative perspectives on modernity. Moetai Brotherson's *Le Roi Absent* (2007), translated into English (and heretofore referred to as) *The Missing King* (2012) by Jean Anderson,¹ is immersed in literature and cultures of media. The novel is a vehicle for the transmission of stories and a critical commentary on the medial conflicts of narratives as well as the intertwining of Pacific, cross-Pacific, and indigenous genealogies that activate an understanding of Mā'ohi mobility over the centuries. Samoan historian Damon Salesa points out that the complexities of multiple Pacific genealogies and conceptions of space-time call for a different type of historicizing and "an emphasis on this vision of the Pacific exposes some of the grooves of global histories" (33). In its dramatization of mediated encounters with the past, Brotherson's novel brings out some of the continuing spectral traces of history through indigenous voices that have been structurally ignored, and it imagines pathways to restoring recognition, force, meaning and audibility to them. In doing so, Brotherson awakens readers to the imaginative possibility of reading across media and across cultural systems within the bounds of the novel. Thus, I argue, *The Missing King* is a meditation on the potentials of the novel as a narrative and communicative medium,

¹ While I am referring to Anderson's translation primarily throughout this chapter, I am mindful of the additional layer it provides, especially for a novel that is so thoroughly invested in semiotics, so I am essentially reading the two versions alongside one another. Where appropriate, I refer to the original French.

considering it as a way to contain and address medial conflicts productively. At the same time, by capturing the senses of things from an Oceanian perspective, Brotherson shows that the Pacific novel as a medium depends on relations that alter the reader's understandings of production and reception, drawing on and challenging the aesthetics of multiple traditions.

Throughout the chapter, I use the term “mediation” to refer to the process by which a given medium of communication reconciles social, cultural, historical, material, and political forces and how people (and non-human actors) establish meaning and value from that medium. While the term has roots in Marxist² and other schools of thought, this definition is drawn from media studies, for which Marshall McLuhan centralized a focus on media with his well known dictum “the medium is the message.” He insisted that the ways people act in the society are significantly shaped by the means they have at their disposal:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves — result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology. (7)

McLuhan's theories are revised by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, who particularly focus on the ways that media interact with other media. They theorize a “double logic” that takes place among new media between “immediacy,”

² Marxist mediation is largely concerned with the way that capital (or other social factors) mediates between the masses and their understandings (through ideology). This is not unrelated to the media studies version or Brotherson's novel, but it is not the main focus of this chapter.

which “dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented” (6) and “hypermediacy,” which multiplies and emphasizes the media interfaces between people and their represented objects. By analyzing the ways current media are always geared toward providing greater degrees of immediacy and hypermediacy (somewhat contradictorily) with respect to other media, they show that “extensions of ourselves” are always related to other extensions:

It would seem, then, that *all* mediation is remediation. We are not claiming this as an a priori truth, but rather arguing that at this extended historical moment, all current media function as remediators and that remediation often us a means of interpreting the work of earlier media as well. Our culture conceives of each medium or constellation of media as it responds to, redeploys, competes with, and reforms other media. In the first instance, we may think of something like a historical progression, of newer media remediating older ones and in particular of digital media remediating their predecessors. But ours is a genealogy of affiliations, not a linear history, and in this genealogy, older media can also remediate newer ones. . . . No medium, it seems, can now function independently and establish its own separate and purified space of cultural meaning. (55, emphasis original)

It is within this competitive understanding of (re)mediation that I approach Brotherson’s novel, which is pitched specifically along these competitive faultlines.

Brotherson’s novel imagines manifold ways mediation takes place, including the novel’s own mediative expression, and it is nowhere simple, but always governed by complex matrices of power, convention, culture, situation, and (dis)ability. Alongside the reader, Vaki and

Philippe, the novel's two narrators, are both thoroughly engaged throughout the novel in an effort to understand a developing patchwork of cryptic messages from the past and finding ways to remediate that story in ways that maintain its fidelity but also that people can understand. I argue that Brotherson's novel imagines a process in which reveals to senders and receivers can achieve dialogue and understanding by opening their perceptions and expressions to unconventional mediated forms—and particularly marginalized or minor ones.

To approach the aesthetic complexities of this novel, I closely analyze three figures of the novel by which Brotherson gestures toward other media that enrich the storyworld, understanding throughout that each of these figures is neither self-contained nor entirely separable from the others or the novel's whole. Nevertheless, approaching each figure provides several entrances into the novel's multi-threaded, multi-directional narrative.

The first figure I examine is the novel's main narrator Vaki's most distinguishing yet strangely elusive characteristic, his muteness. Brotherson at once marks Vaki as a mute and endows him with a superbly voluble conversational narrative, giving the reader a view of the gap between interior thought and its realization in oral or textual forms. I argue that Vaki's ambiguous disability, which is paradoxically illegible in the immediacy of the text's narration and at the same time hyper-visible for the characters within Vaki's storyworld, is both a plot device and a metaphor for what has been figured as muteness of indigenous voices within colonial French Polynesian society.

The second figure I look at is the game of chess, which is a major plot element for Vaki and, I argue, is suggestive of an alternative model of communication that is competitive, nonlinguistic, and based on the reciprocal development of a relationship. Through this figure, Vaki is able to reclaim his place as the titular missing or absent king. Chess forms an important

space for the mute Vaki to develop and maintain relationships and forge an identity for himself—indeed, of the few relationships he makes with other characters, almost all are with chess partners; however, it is an abstract space that has a limited influence over the storyworld he inhabits, whose colonial narratives are difficult to overturn.

Brotherson's novel is full of mysterious elements and the third figure I take up is the repeated spectral appearance of Vaki's matrilineal ancestors, whose narratives punctuate the novel and provide a stream of allusive alternative historical accounts. Moreover, these ancestors are also mute and communicate within dreams through a semiotic system that is referred to as "the signs [les signes]," which Vaki interprets, translates, and records in French. I argue that these visitation sequences form a narrative actualization of the muted ancestral voices of trauma and protest that, Brotherson suggests, pervade the French Polynesian cultural space, but have lost their salience in the structural impositions of French colonialism. Using a multi-layered, polyglot, and multi-threaded narrative, Brotherson directs the reader's attention away from Vaki's singular narrative and toward the other discourses that haunt the novel.

Narrating Silence: Brotherson's Mute Narrator

Among the novel's creatively handled, intertextual themes is Brotherson's presentation of narrative voice through a first person narrator who is, in practical terms, without voice. Brotherson draws attention to the first level of narrative mediation—that of speech—for his main protagonist and narrator Vaki in its conspicuous absence and in the strategic mediations he employs, which not only stand in for speech, but effectively carry forward vocal traces. The trope of muteness shows us the disjunctions of communication and causes us to question the colonial structures that define normalcy in relation to literature and culture, particularly within the context of Vaki's narrative, mostly set in the official colony of French Polynesia in the end of

the 20th century, and regularly unearthing persistent muted echoes from the region's violent colonial past (including references to nuclear testing, blackbirding, disease outbreaks, and land thefts). However, against the conventional trope of wounded speech, Brotherson affirms that the idea of muteness is a western construct and furthermore indicates ways of restructuring the cultural system that make space for important silenced voices, one of which being the novel itself.

The figure of muteness is not a common trope in literature, but there are examples of works that bring out the intersection of muteness and colonialism, similarly gesturing toward a metaphor for writing, publication, and silenced subject positions. In Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the Native American narrator "Chief" Bromden strategically feigns muteness (and deafness) in order to gain access to information and undermine the institution in which he is imprisoned. Jane Campion's movie *The Piano* features an elective mute narrator who has experienced trauma as a result of being an unwilling colonial settler in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In J. M. Coetzee's novel *Foe* (1986), a re-imagining of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Friday is a mute whose tongue has been cut out, raising the question of whether the trope of muteness represents disability or silencing. Each of these works shares aspects with *The Missing King* in the way they refer metanarratively to the troubled space of writing in the presence of ongoing colonial violence and oppression.

However, Vaki's condition is marked by two features that set him apart from any of these examples. First, his muteness is not elective, neither is it a physical, intellectual, or psychological disability. It is repeatedly reinforced in the novel that he is not deaf, not pretending, and, far from being stupid, he is shown exhibiting superior mental abilities. Instead, it is suggested by Brotherson to be the result of a familial curse visited upon all of his female ancestors. Second,

Vaki is a first person narrator who tells his own story seemingly effortlessly, by way of writings in his notebook. Brotherson thus presents muteness more abstractly, that is, without the responsibility to realism that seems to govern the other examples; Vaki's muteness is more of a textual, spiritual, and figurative construct. Though Jean Anderson, Brotherson's English language translator, suggests in another work that Vaki is "perhaps [an] autistic selective mute" (9), such a diagnosis is never stated explicitly in the text, and the evidence for either Vaki's autism or selective muteness is outweighed by much to the contrary.

More pertinently, muteness or "mutisme" is a figure that has been taken up and explored by indigenous people in French Polynesia as a metaphor, largely as a metaphor for the loss and the persistent memory of the force associated with the voices of traditional orators in their indigenous languages. In considering muteness as the negative of orality or "*oraliture*"—a portmanteau of "*orale*" and "*litterature*" that is favoured by many global Francophone writers who see their writing as grounded in an oral tradition—Brotherson takes on the tradition of indigenous French Polynesian writers and scholars such as Chantal Spitz, who asserts that when she writes she explores "how to speak-write"; Flora Devatine, who terms her writing "*écriture orale*" and "*oraliture*"; and Titaua Peu, to whom Brotherson dedicates his novel, and whose novel *Mutismes* (which is mentioned in the text of *The Missing King*) explores the French colonial roots of women's silence regarding the subject of domestic violence in Tahiti. Mā'ohi scholar Kareva Mateata-Allain describes the power of oral language in the Tahitian context:

Traditional Ma'ohi worldview articulates that sounds have a lot of power. Once words are spoken, their energy is released into the atmosphere, and certain words, connotations, and pronunciations could have spiritual ramifications if the words are used incorrectly or harshly. Speaking and oration were highly privileged in

precolonial Tahitian society, and this privilege is still entrenched in ancestral memory. (104)

While Vaki's muteness is a literary trope in *The Missing King*, it is also symbolic of the structural silence of the native voice by the mechanisms of French colonialism and the ways it remains inaudible within structures of literary and historical circulation. It is through tremendous efforts by people like Dévatine, Spitz, and the other founders of the journal *Littérama'ohi* and publishers Au Vent Des Îles and Haere Pō that a small space has been carved out for these writers' work within French Polynesia, which is itself a small literary scene. While this literature does flow outward along circuits such as Francophone, Pacific, and indigenous literatures, such flows often depend on translation, promotion, critical attention, and circulation, which are all somewhat minimal. The situation is in contrast to a rich precolonial tradition of oral exchange, which Titaua Peu expresses in her novel *Mutismes*:

We only know snippets of [Mā'ohi] history because things and life itself were entrenched in orality. Naturally, words were spoken and passed down without written support in view of an ephemeral posterity . . . we were a people who told legends, who orally passed down beliefs. Today any orality is scanty. The Tahitian is now mute. (qtd. in Mateata-Allain 29)

Brotherson's novel literalizes Peu's metaphor with its mute narrator and begins the process of filling in the written support, providing a possible path to recovering the Ma'ohi oral traditions that haunt the narrative. More than imagining a "narrative prosthesis" that provides a supplement or replacement for the "absent" or "missing" voice, Brotherson's writing suggests a revision of the narrative apparatus—one that designates a central place for indigenous voices and puts a heavy burden on the receiver to understand its vibrant, complex, intertextual cultural codes.

Muteness for French Polynesians, Brotherson suggests, is not inevitable and may be misrecognized within institutions of cultural production and circulation. Even if Vaki is mute within his storyworld, he productively engages with both the characters and the reader to relate the stories, which are present in both his and our worlds, but often difficult to find and difficult to recognize because the dominant worldview is not open to their possibility.

Thus, while drawing upon the representation of muteness in several literary traditions, and particularly showing Vaki to be looked upon as a mysteriously silent and marginalized figure, Brotherson's work departs from these traditions by expressing explicitly the fullness of Vaki's interior voice and the stories transmitted to him. Moreover, the efficacy of Vaki's use of his slate—which doubles the writing surface—within the novel is such that the reader is often able to forget the presence of the slate's medium. In this way, Brotherson exposes the mediated situation and its colonially imposed conventional structures as a blockage point for the transmission of stories, but one that can be sidestepped with a certain amount of ingenuity and effort. Brotherson figures Vaki's "speaking disability" as a function of the limited medial pathways enabled by a colonial society that cannot see or consciously ignores its own privileged position.

As the first person narrator and fictional author³ of the first three quarters of the novel, Vaki writes in a voice with many distinguishing features, including a casual, conversational tone and an ingenuous attention to impossibly minute details, but one thing that is not discernible in his voice is, ironically, his muteness, which is perhaps his most distinctive characteristic as a

³ The reader is not aware of Vaki's fictional authorship of the first portion of the novel until close to its conclusion, when he reveals he had been writing it the whole time in his notebooks, which he stores in a biscuit tin. This is a characteristic example of the kind of elision I mention below.

character within the novel's story. Thus, by bringing out the disjunction between Vaki's often unbelievably complex inner monologue and the generally simplified ways he is perceived by the other characters in the novel, Brotherson cuts across the story and discourse to reveal the relationships and structures that maintain Vaki's disability.

Although Brotherson's novel opens *ab ovo* with Vaki describing the details of his own birth, Vaki assumes a relationship with his reader that is more characteristic of an *in medias res* opening because he elides certain information that he deems irrelevant from his perspective as the teller of a story in the medium of the novel. He expresses, "It was my first day on this earth and I know all about it. Even if no one will believe me, I remember every noise, every sound. And yet my mother didn't tell me a thing. She couldn't have" (1). In this passage, Vaki establishes his preternatural ability to receive, know, and remember the sights and sounds he confronts, but he is characteristically reticent in explaining them fully to his reader. While he marks his knowing, he refrains from revealing the reason his mother could not have told him anything: like Vaki, she is mute. Moreover, he refers directly to his audience in the clause "even if no one will believe me," which points at once to Vaki's self-assurance in his own sense and understanding, and also to a keen awareness of his reader's very reasonable skepticism about a child remembering minute details from the day of his birth. In the moment of Vaki's conception in both the storyworld and in the novel, Brotherson's discerning narrator indicates (and even manipulates) the relative power differential in the narrative situation between his constrained influence as a mute indigenous infant and his authority as a narrator in the novel.

Vaki is also generally reticent with respect to his own muteness, indicating his insistence on the non-interference of his condition in his narrative discursive space. In fact, his muteness is not at all apparent to the reader until seven pages into the novel—after he has well established

himself as a perspicacious observer and tale teller—when Vaki reports his teacher’s apprehension about having him as a student: “How would she manage? A mute child, she wasn’t trained for it, and how would the other children behave around a handicapped boy?” (7). It is particularly telling of Vaki’s personality and style of narration that he does not mention his muteness to the reader until it comes up as an external plot point that is unavoidable. Though he does not ostensibly conceal this aspect of himself from the reader, Vaki fails to comment upon or explain this aspect of his identity but merely reports what his teacher says. Vaki’s established forthrightness and colloquial narrative style would seem to warrant some explanation or reflection upon his disability, which has an important impact on his life and might also be a significant aspect of his identity; however, it is rare in the entirety of his narrative that Vaki gives an extended self-reflection on his muteness and it does not happen until much later.

The elisions in the narrative are furthermore suggestive of Vaki’s artistic rendering of his life story in the form of a novel. In not mentioning his muteness for the beginning portion of his narrative, Vaki employs a device that Gérard Genette calls “paralipsis,” which occurs when a narrator sidesteps, for whatever reason, a piece of information that usually gets filled in at a later time and marked as an omission. While Genette associates paralipsis with the production of suspense, Vaki narrates as though he does not consider his muteness a relevant detail to mention, as it has not interposed itself in the events he has chosen to narrate. With respect to his narration and authorship, the muteness of Vaki’s character is not a handicap. Seymour Chatman simplifies the narrative communication diagram in *Story and Discourse*, asserting that “A narrative is a communication; hence, it presupposes two parties, a sender and a receiver” (28) and within the structure of the novel Vaki’s muteness is no obstacle. The boundaries separating the two levels of narrative are certainly porous, but as a narrator of his own story, Vaki maintains a clear

distance between his “disabled” body and the hyper-enabled narratorial position he assumes in the discourse. Paralipsis recur more or less markedly throughout Brotherson’s text, and each time it reveals Vaki’s relative control over the discursive space of the novel in contrast to his lack of control within the storyworld.

Brotherson’s presentation of muteness interrupts the norms and expectations of both the reader on the discourse level and the other characters on the story level. Although the condition of muteness is mostly indecipherable within his narrative discourse, it comes through clearly by way of the position Vaki assumes in relation to the other characters. The reader senses Vaki’s “silence” indirectly through his reporting, quoting, and describing of other characters’ words and responses and through the situations he describes where his muteness affects his interactions. For example, Vaki’s teacher Madame Algoire initially perceives Vaki’s muteness as an assault on the status quo of her classroom, imagining that she will have to alter the way she conducts lessons, but she doesn’t anticipate that Vaki has already read all the textbooks and is far ahead of the other students, and he actually becomes the teacher’s pet. Thus, at the same moment in the text that the reader’s expectations of a non-mute narrator and protagonist are corrected, Madame Algoire’s expectations about the trouble of a mute student are also revised. The adjustments required in relating to Vaki as a mute—for both the reader and Madame Algoire—turn out to be rather minimal.

On the other hand, within the space of his storyworld more generally, Vaki’s muteness is a constant struggle to communicate and relate with others within the instituted structures that favour the voiced norm. Madame Algoire’s prediction about how the other children’s reactions to Vaki turns out to be prescient in that he does have problems with the other students, but probably not in the way she had imagined. He explains,

Gradually my classmates developed a real dislike for me. Was it because my hand was always up? Or was it my silence, a complete contrast to their constant yelling? I didn't pay much attention, I was there to learn, to open all the doors that hide the meaning of words from us. I became Madame Algoire's little pet and my classmates' punching bag. (7)

While not specifically identifying his muteness, Vaki's reference to his "silence" in contrast to the other characters' noisiness sets up a persistent relational feature of Vaki's storyworld which appears in the background to the telling: though he appears gregarious enough to the reader, his character is silent in the story he tells, and that is an arresting, piteous, or even repellent characteristic within the represented perspectives of other characters.

Moreover, in stating his intention "to learn, to open all the doors that hide the meaning of words from us," and implicitly criticizing his fellow students, young Vaki intuitively recognizes that part of what prevents people from understanding is this "constant yelling" or chatter that covers up some of the quiet or marginal voices and makes it difficult to hear, identify, and interpret a story in its entirety. Vaki's silence allows him to become a great listener and a keen observer, which gives into his tremendous intellect, though most of his knowledge and wisdom remains imprisoned within his consciousness. In his position as a silent learner, Vaki is rejected and brutalized by his peers, which is a common theme throughout his life. Instead of trying to find ways to "open doors" into Vaki's consciousness, most people see him as an ambiguous threat to the structure of their system. In retelling his own story in what is later specifically

identified⁴ as the form of a novel, Vaki works to open those doors for the reader, which is a “remediation” in both the sense of re-ordering his own multi-sensory experiences into the space of a different medium and providing a “remedy” less for his own “speaking disability” than for his hearers’ “listening disability.”

In order to open those doors, Brotherson suggests, sometimes it is necessary to close off others. While Vaki claims he “didn’t pay much attention” to the other children’s noise, he marks the disparity between his performance and the outside world nonchalantly, as though again it is not of crucial importance within the frame in which he is narrating. Within the novel, Vaki conveniently brackets off the other children’s chatter into a space where it need not impose upon his purposeful narration, something that is much harder to do in one’s life. Regardless whether or not Vaki pays much attention to the other children’s noise, he remarks upon it and thereby leaves a recorded trace that allows the reader to imagine a possibly persistent cacophony that he is able to ignore within his life and mute almost entirely in the discursive space in the novel.

However, Brotherson sets up another class of secondary characters who are more difficult to ignore, and who provide a further nuance to the complex relationship between Vaki’s stories and their mediation in the novel: those who treat Vaki’s muteness as a perplexing mystery to be solved and “benevolently” corrected. These characters are, ironically, more of a nuisance to Vaki than those that simply dismiss him. In one particular instance, when he is assigned to a new teacher called Monsieur Guido, Vaki describes, “He was amazed when he found out I was mute. He took it into his head to teach me sign language. To his deep disappointment, I wasn’t

⁴ In the second part of Brotherson’s novel, Philippe describes trying to publish Vaki’s papers, which are rejected repeatedly by publishers when he calls it a memoir. It is only as a novel that the narrative receives offers.

interested” (9). In this short passage, which ends all discussion of sign language in the novel, Vaki turns down, apparently rather nonchalantly, a means of communication which might have served him as roughly equivalent to speech in certain situations. In introducing and then dropping Vaki’s puzzling disinterest toward sign language, Brotherson further impresses Vaki’s insistence that his muteness is not as disabling for him as it is inconvenient for others. Even though sign language might have obviated some of Vaki’s future troubles, he seems content with his role as a mute observer, opening “the doors that hide the meaning of words from us” (7). Vaki’s acceptance of his role feels especially clear from his anterior position as a narrator who can, evidently, leave the reader hanging with such a statement and feel no inclination to explain why. Since Vaki is already established as a narrator within the novel that he is already living and writing simultaneously—and moreover because he is already equipped with multiple other sign-based languages, including a mysterious nonlinear pictographic one known throughout the novel as “the signs”—he has no need to further remediate his own communication. Vaki’s interaction with Monsieur Guido is doubled in a later scene when Norbert, the uncle of one of Vaki’s chess rivals, tries to cure Vaki’s muteness by subjecting him to medical examinations and giving him extensive singing lessons. Vaki concludes “It was patently clear: over the three months of high hopes, they’d sung a lot, and I was still mute” (82). The amazement, “high hopes,” and “deep disappointment” reveal a misplaced colonial exuberance in both Monsieur Guido and Norbert; they approach Vaki’s disabled native body as a problem to solve, cure, master, purify, and civilize. Vaki, however, is the real puzzle master of this novel and he has an understanding of his own people’s language of “the signs” massaged into his body.

In dramatizing Vaki’s troubles of communication and mediation, Brotherson metafictionally refers to the complex process of writing and narrating stories for the indigenous

people of French Polynesia. The analogy between written and spoken texts and their troubled mediation within the colonial context is a regular occurrence in the novel, but one of its most salient moments happens near the end of the novel when Philippe, a French psychologist living in Tahiti who takes over as narrator, describes his reading of Titaua Peu's novel:

I was absorbed in reading a young Polynesian woman's first novel, entitled *Mutismes*, 'silences.' I was struck by her desire to decide things for herself, without being constantly defined by other people's observations. To begin with, I was shocked by seeing it, seeing it as racism or some kind of colonial complex she hadn't got over. And then as I read on, I realised: she was simply asserting her rights, something that our French literature champions, and nothing more. And yet, to my French mind, she went a bit too far. (312)

Philippe's reflection clearly shows both his attempt to have a genuine conversation with Peu's novel and his ultimate re-silencing of Peu's voice because of the structural forces of his "French mind" and his psychoanalytic training, though he is at least able to acknowledge the way Frenchness mediates his thinking. Through the form of the novel, Philippe—who is also notably the first reader and editor of Vaki's novel—is able to read past his own diagnostic impulses and even identify with her "desire to decide things for herself," but, ironically, it is Philippe that is not in control of his own interpretation. In his representation of Philippe's self-struggle to engage with Peu's work, Brotherson provides a strong analogue of Vaki's attempts to communicate his stories—as well as the stories handed down to him by his ancestors—in his own way. If the medium of the novel is to achieve its heteroglossic potential, then the community of readers must allow for their structuring understanding of novelistic discourse to be shaken.

While Philippe is at times governed by his “French mind,” Vaki chooses him as the executor of his manuscript, which evidences Vaki’s recognition of Philippe’s ability to bridge the muted communication gap between Vaki and those he wishes to address. Indeed, Vaki names Philippe as one of his only friends, perhaps because Philippe showed genuine interest in Vaki’s abilities (rather than his disabilities). In fact, it is during one of their long “conversations” (Philippe speaking and Vaki writing) that Vaki gives one of his most significant reflections on writing as a medium:

Sometimes I envy people who talk. But all too often the immediacy, the direct availability of their expression, its spontaneity, makes them say stupid things. I, on the other hand, have to think about what I’m going to say, or rather write. And there are two reasons for this. First, I have to be careful to say everything I want to say. And second, which is trickier, I have to be careful to say only what I want to say. Sometimes there is a conflict between the two and the balance, it seems to me, is easier to find with pen in hand. (71)

Philippe offers Vaki a narrative space that makes him realize the connections that he is missing out on by not having the ability to speak. In recognizing the careful thought he can put into his responses, Vaki points to the medium of writing as one that obviates much of the misunderstanding that comes when people “say stupid things” or say more or less than they intend. While he realizes the advantage that he has “with a pen in hand,” he also senses that not all his interlocutors have the patience to wait for his undeniably quick mind to craft an appropriate response. When recast in Vaki’s writing (as well as Brotherson’s novel), Vaki is required to pause the time and action of the plot and reflect upon his medium and its relative affordances and limitations.

Though in general immediately identified as a mute or “vava” by characters in the novel, Vaki’s narration indicates that he considers his muteness not as a disability or “handicap,” but as someone afforded different communicative abilities who is in a position to make those with speech understand their privilege. Vaki’s father Maheono suggests such a view of disability when he makes an exception to his quiet, stoic character in response to Madame Algoire’s reference to Vaki as a “handicapped child” (7):

“My son is not handicapped!”

My father had shouted so loudly that the echo down the valley repeated his words four times before it died away. If there was anyone who didn’t already know, they sure did now! Later I spent ages looking for *amdicapped* in the big book. (7)

Although he cannot make such a sound himself, Vaki can be the cause for others within his community to speak “with” (rather than “for”) him. Maheono’s outburst, in clear contrast to Vaki’s silence, creates a literal and figurative resonance that cuts through the unspoken tension around disability, which is often glossed over by category words like “handicapped” that create an imaginary separate landscape for people that are different. Indeed, in Vaki’s characteristically hyperbolic narration of it, the land itself repeats and seemingly affirms Maheono’s rejection of the divisive term. Vaki, who is ostensibly the referent of the word “handicapped,” ironically does not understand it and has to look it up in a Larousse French dictionary with a misleading phonetic spelling. While Vaki considers his “big book” to be an excellent resource, it is unlikely to be able to teach him anything about his condition that he does not inherently understand by being mute, except the way that others perceive him. By making such a forceful rejection, Maheono alerts Vaki to the term’s violence and awakens Vaki’s consciousness to the language of dismissal, which Vaki passes on to the reader. Furthermore, by shouting, Maheono increases the

distance, revealed by Vaki's dictionary search, between the word and thing, signifier and signified, which in this case depends on a stable positive definition of "normal" (white, European, voiced, etc.) in order to negatively define "handicapped."

In addition to its jolting effect on Vaki's teacher and any other nearby listeners, Maheono's short shouted sentence performs and states a salient message along with Vaki's own silent performance and narration: his muteness is equally the result of the inability, unwillingness, or failure of voiced others to hear and listen to him. One of Vaki's roles as a mute narrator is to give the voiced an avenue to understanding how their own ingrained modes of speech inhibit their sense of other peoples' very different experiences. Even if the other's experience can never be adequately represented, Vaki's different means of storytelling necessitate patience and a different means of listening, which can be instructive both about one's own and the others' values and assumptions. W. J. T. Mitchell reframes the analogous sense of sight as something that prevents people from understanding the blind:

I come to realize that the sighted have a *seeing disability*. This is not because they fail to see the blind person, or to see that he or she is blind, but because they cannot see the ideal world of the blind as "ready to hand," in Martin Heidegger's words, and thus filled with dangerous displacements, removals, and disappearances. (392–93, emphasis original)

Like Mitchell's sighted, most of the people in Vaki's life are like his classmates, who focus on the gaps between their own communicative practice and his, who do not take the time to hear and understand his story and for whom Vaki becomes a "punching bag" (7)—indeed, little fists are only the beginning of a life full of tragic abuses and degradations. However, the few acquaintances who do give Vaki the time and space to tell his story, are shown a valuable

perspective different from their own. As Mitchell continues, referring to Heidegger's "being-with" (Mitsein), "what is wanted is a *seeing with*: a practical envisioning of a space-time world that only becomes visible from the viewpoint of a specific disability" (393, emphasis original). I suggest that what Brotherson offers the reader by way of Vaki is, with respect to Chantal Spitz's essays in *Littéramāohi*, the possibility of a "speak-writing-with": an engagement with the clashing mediations in French Polynesia, where disability and muteness are the result of colonial obstinacy to see, hear, and know indigenous forms. Circumventing such obstinacy, Brotherson suggests, involves recovery of stories by way of alternative forms of communication in and through inherited forms of writing, which, like the novel, is alternately both enabling and disabling.

In a scene that points to the interconnectedness of his multimodal narrative performance, Vaki—after serving time in prison—encounters a painter who paints his image, allowing him to see both the impediments he faces and the ways he has been built effective relations with others. Although Vaki's muteness makes it difficult, Brotherson gives a few important examples of people who are able to relate with Vaki in using different media to communicate with him. With Philippe it is in writing, with Vetea—as I will treat further below—it is in the game of chess, and with an unnamed woman he meets in his travels, it is in visual art. The woman, whom Vaki later realizes is a former schoolmate, is never named, but he describes her rather suggestively as "A redheaded English-speaking painter who's pro-independence and a lawyer" (221) and someone involved in an anti-nuclear march, likely the famous protest march in Papeete on September 2, 1995 led by Oscar Temaru in which thousands marched against French President Jacques Chirac's nuclear testing program in French Polynesia. After Vaki sits for his painting, she shows it to him and he describes it:

Very surprising. My dreads have turned into sharp-edged chains with multicoloured links. I'm sitting on a chessboard with the different parts of the meal spread out on the squares around me. Each food has a sex, with stylised but explicit organs. A mango with a woman's genitals looks pretty funny. The thing I like best is my tattoos. They've turned into an endless tangle of the same phrase repeated over and over again: 'I am mute but I speak to you.' She's a talented young woman. If I had a house, I'd have liked to hang the picture in my living room. (220)

This moment of self-recognition for Vaki happens as the result of an artist who seems to pluck him out from his wandering, giving him a different way of reading his own story. The image of the "sharp-edged chains with multicoloured links" suggests that Vaki's voice and identity are imprisoned within the norms and conventions of his society, and that struggling against the sharp edges of this imprisonment brings him suffering. The colours of the links suggest the chains are disguised as decorations, that the imprisonment of his expression is passed off as aesthetic refinement. The various colours may also represent various ethnicities, classes, and nationalities of people that contribute to his imprisonment, not necessarily with bad intentions. The chessboard suggests that he is in a strictly delimited field of opposition, with his identity fixed. His opponents (or allies) also have fixed identities, represented by their human genitalia, but they are all depicted as foods which suggests that they may nourish or at least promise to nourish him.

Vaki's tattoos, which were given to him while he was in prison by a fellow inmate who purportedly saw them in a dream, are rendered by the artist into the only text in the image, which reads "I am mute but I speak to you." The phrase suggests that Vaki's muteness is a part of his socially constructed imprisonment that is written on his body and that it does not preclude his

“speaking.” In Brotherson’s French, it is written as “Je suis muet, mais je vous parle,” which employs the ambiguous pronoun “vous,” which can either mean “you (plural)” or “you (singular formal),” but notably does not include the singular familiar form of “te,” which is an option for the English word “you.” While it is not clear to whom this deixis is addressed, the plural audience suggests that the multimedial conversation Vaki has with the painting, the painter, and with his own image is extended to the reader of his novel (and the reader of Brotherson’s novel). Moreover, the tattoos themselves, inscribed upon Vaki’s skin, represent a further layer of traditional indigenous textual and narrative “speak-writing” anterior to the artist’s painting.

Tellingly, however, Vaki’s own “reading” of the painting remains at the level of blunt and almost dismissive description, especially when he says he would like to have it in his living room, which suggests that he is leaving a large part of the interpretation to his reader. Although Vaki does not seem particularly conscious of it, his description of the painter’s image creates a narrative feedback loop; from the reader’s position, Vaki verbally describes a painting that represents himself visually. Moreover, Vaki’s description—especially of the fruit with genitalia—makes it very clear that the painting is an abstract, surrealist representation of him; the image is distorted in such a way as to highlight the artists’ interpretation of Vaki. While Vaki narrates little else of his encounter with this painter, the painting itself opens a rich field of discussion, particularly as it appears within a novel that recurrently foregrounds different media.

Brotherson’s scene is an example of ekphrasis, a verbal representation of visual representation, which opens a portal through which to compare the present storyworld with an altered version of itself. The difference in Brotherson’s scene is in the self-referentiality of the portal; the mute art object (the painting) represents the very poet who is describing it (who is mute in a different sense). Moreover, as Vaki narrates, the words written on the painting (and

also written with the tattoos on his represented body) assert the paradoxical statement “I am mute, but I speak to you.” The phrase appears to the reader in at least four parallel media simultaneously: in print on the page of Brotherson’s novel, in pen as recorded in Vaki’s notebook, in oil paint on the canvas, and in tattoo ink on Vaki’s body. However, none of these media is easily identifiable as a source; they are all oriented toward each other in ongoing processes of artistic and rhetorical re-interpretation and re-mediation. This ekphrasis reveals a singularity in the narrative that causes the reader to question the multiply mediated genealogies of the story. Ultimately, Vaki’s ekphrasis attests to the existence of a palimpsestic indigenous narrative “voice”—albeit battered, wrongfully imprisoned, and denigrated as “mad” or “savage”—alongside colonial mythology that both speaks and writes.

Beyond a moment of self-recognition, Brotherson’s ekphrasis also brings into relief the discourses carried by word, image, and other media. In his essay “Ekphrasis and the Other,” W. J. T. Mitchell proposes three functions of ekphrasis that he calls ekphrastic indifference, hope, and fear. Indifference refers to the belief that words will never be able to describe images, hope refers to the idea that words do (or might) convey (metaphorically, for example) some important sense of the visual, and fear refers to the ethical dimension of ekphrasis, suggesting that even though words can present visual information, perhaps such work should be left to images. Mitchell points out that the anxiety surrounding ekphrasis can be thought of phenomenologically, as beginning with “the basic relationship of the self (as a speaking and seeing subject) and the other (as the seen and silent object)” (161–62), and that furthermore the “otherness” attributed to the image/text relationship “takes on a full range of possible social relations inscribed within the field of verbal and visual representation” (162). Ekphrastic indifference is a base assumption of Brotherson’s novel, with many characters being able to see

beyond what is conventionally expressed in words—hence Vaki’s totalizing muteness—but the in this scene Brotherson exhibits the ekphrastic hope that that the reader may, through reading the novel, be able to see with Vaki, seeing himself. The ekphrastic fear of further “othering” Vaki’s indigenous voice is ever-present, but, as Brotherson suggests throughout his novel, no one is entirely outside.

In Vaki’s ekphrasis, Brotherson complicates the relationship by presenting a mute but narrating subject and a mute object (that “speaks to you”). Vaki’s role as both subject and object suggests both his fragmented and distributed identity, but also his extensive, multidirectional social relations that are inscribed upon his narrative if the reader is attentive to them. The scene brings out the complexity of Vaki’s identity and its attendant histories and genealogies, which have been smoothed over, written over, and “muted” by the dominance of colonial narratives. One very pertinent example of such a muting is the public march in protest of nuclear testing in French Polynesia, in which both the artist and Vaki participate. While the historical protest may not have stopped any nuclear tests from happening, the memory of the march continues to signify in the collective memory of French Polynesian people and in literary representations such as Brotherson’s novel. Considering the centrality of the issue of nuclear testing among Mā’ohi writers’ works, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that Temaru’s anti-nuclear demonstrations catalyzed the artistic responses that have formed a literary movement. Robert Nicole points out that “there were numerous songs composed during the 1995 anti-nuclear and pro-independence demonstrations” (273) and that the circulation of these songs has been particularly subversive. Brotherson and other Mā’ohi writers are in many ways marching, singing, and speak-writing along in alliance with their ancestors.

In addition to writing and visual media, Brotherson draws particular attention to the sounds that fill Vaki's storyworld. In re-mediating his life story as a novel, Vaki re-configures it in relation to powerful existing soundscapes, which makes the reader aware of the muted voices copresent in any medial narrative. Though he is unable to make any sound, Vaki is well attuned to the aural soundscape and its powers. In fact, Vaki's muteness dictates that he does not take for granted the privilege of voice and as such he understands implicitly the nuances of oral performance. In addition to Maheono's resounding rebuke to Madame Algoire, there are a number of striking moments in which Vaki reflects upon the limitations of his silent words in contrast to the potency of song and Tahitian oratory when it is performed skillfully and enthusiastically. When he is listening to a choir led by his singing coach Amélie, Vaki points out the disturbing possible disparity between interior beliefs and the external performance of music:

Since it was a non-religious school and several of the singers were self-proclaimed atheists, the fact that they sang gospel bothered me. Non-religious gospel was a bit of contradiction in terms, wasn't it? How could you sing the Lord's praises in that context? How could you reach the state of tremulous grace that takes hold of Harlem choirs if you didn't believe in God? And yet this cheery band, full of enthusiasm if not talent, could transport their audience to somewhere between four and six on the emotional Richter scale. (80)

Vaki's questions and ideas as expressed in this passage are both naive and incisive. While the possibility of singers mimicking the performance of religious fervour seems like little to be bothered by, his observations point to the productive non-contradiction of disbelief and emotional connection that allows for a greater community to engage with one another and share their expressive cultures. Indeed, Vaki himself, as someone who is without voice, is in this scene

able to see that such categories as “religious affiliation” and even “ability to speak” are not significant barriers to participating in the powerful expression of stories.

In presenting Vaki’s travels, in which he encounters and remediates many people’s creative contributions to the soundscape, Brotherson shows the weight of the responsibility that comes along with these stories that Vaki receives. Though he is able to communicate in other ways, he senses his own limitation especially in one scene in which Vaki is building a traditional meeting house or marae with a pair of characters, Henri and John, who conspicuously resemble the late Tahitian activist, poet, and filmmaker Henri Hiro and the actor, director, and journalist John Mairai. He reflects,

But Henri strikes me more and more as being a sorcerer himself. Or in any case he’s a magician with words. Sometimes, as we finish putting our tools away in the fare ia manaha, he does us the honour of reciting one of his many poems. It does me good to hear the music of our language, played so precisely, so strongly, so sensitively. It hurts me too, because when Henri speaks or sings, the differences between us disappear. The silence of my slate seems absolutely ridiculous and sad. (61)

Though Henri is able to meaningfully connect with Vaki through his poetry in reo mā’ohi (Tahitian language), as Vaki well recognizes, the “music” of Henri’s speech and song is an aspect that cannot be represented in either the words on his slate or the text in Brotherson’s novel. Vaki’s sentiment is reminiscent of what Socrates—a man who wrote nothing in his life—expresses by quoting the Egyptian god Thamous’s response to the god Theuth, who had invented writing:

It will atrophy people's memories. Trust in writing will make them remember things by relying on marks made by others, from outside themselves, not on their own inner resources, and so writing will make the things they have learnt disappear from their minds. (Plato 69)

There is a sense that the illocutionary force of oral discourse is lost in the medial conversion to the written word and that the force of those words is not necessarily recoverable. Still, in remediating his own experience of the music and poetry, Vaki is able to alert the reader to the limitations of his own medium (the "ekphrastic indifference") and passes on the responsibility to seek out what is missing from the writing. Vaki's "hurt" comes from his "ekphrastic fear" that his effete words will be taken as sufficient; thus, he does not reproduce any of Henri's poems, but leaves the reader (who may already be familiar with Henri Hiro's poetry and performance) to seek other avenues of reference to that experience.

However, Brotherson emphatically suggests over the course of his novel that there is an important place in the soundscape for those not conventionally considered a part of it. The historical Hiro, who was a champion in the revitalization movement for Tahitian language and culture, was a powerful orator, as is evident in his film *Marae* (1983), and though he left relatively few of his own writings, he was also a strong supporter of Tahitian literature and believed it was a way to cultural regeneration, saying in an interview, "For this renewal to continue, Polynesians must write. . . . It doesn't matter what language they use, whether it's reo mā'ohi, French, or English. The important thing is that they write, that they *do it!* And I think that in a short while we will have Tahitian authors—authors free of insecurities and able to express who we are!" (74). Brotherson echoes Hiro's sentiment in a later scene when Vaki is

remembering his usually soft-spoken Uncle Gilbert. He expresses regret that his uncle is not capable of sharing his remarkable knowledge and stories through the medium of writing:

He had poetic inspiration coming out of his crabpots, that man. When we went out in our little canoe early in the morning to pull the pots up, he would tell me the most amazing things. Legends, stories about our heroes and gods before the white man came. He knew the origin of all our placenames. He could also explain the hidden meaning of people's names. If only he'd known how to write, he could have been a great poet. (128–29)

While Vaki does not give the readers any of his uncle's stories, he gives the reader a sense of the vast artistic imagination that lies just beyond the words he expresses. Brotherson conveys Vaki's ekphrastic hope that through the written word, some of the supernatural things might have been captured, recorded, and transmitted. However, Vaki's limited definition of poetry seems to prevent him from seeing his uncle as a poet, which, based on Vaki's statement, the reader can clearly see that he was.

Furthermore, Brotherson shows that Vaki's role, alongside the powerful oratory of people like Henri and John is to write and, particularly, to read—and to read not only denotative written language, but also to read for the silent gaps to which that language points. In one of the only places that he explicitly cites *reo mā'ohi* and translates it (outside of the visitation sequences), Vaki narrates the message sent to him by Henri and John on the cover of a Tahitian language Bible:

‘E hoa ‘ino ē, i mau na ho‘i tō tāua reo i roto i teie puta, i morohi ato‘a ai tō tāua reo i muri a‘e i te tātauro a Iesu. Inaha, e huri ‘oe i te mau ‘api. Huri e, huri e, huri noa, ‘ia fā mai te hīro‘a nā roto i tō reo tupuna.’ This meant essentially: ‘This

book preserves our language but it also closes the door on our past culture. So read, read, read, and read again, to open that door and set free the full force of the words of your ancestors' language.' (192)

Vaki's "essential" translation of the passage is striking because the reo mā'ohi version contains no reference to closing and opening doors, but to "our language falling to the ground behind the cross of Jesus" and "a resemblance that will appear to the ancestors' language." Vaki's interpretation relates to his earlier professed goal "to open all the doors that hide the meaning of words from us" (7), but Vaki is also expressing, through Henri and John's statement, the parallel purpose that writing and reading can have with the copresent soundscape. Through writing, Brotherson suggests, the muted voices of the ancestors can be retrieved and transmitted, and the complex intertwining histories and genealogies can be brought out.

Brotherson further conveys the danger that either Vaki's narrative or Henri's powerful oratory can become tainted and used for ulterior motives. While Vaki's narrative is impressive and important, he feels that his written words cannot recapture or reinvigorate the traditions of his people in the face of colonialism. Indeed, the marae they are building, a sacred space where such narrative is enabled and valued, loses its government funding and gets taken over by a corporation that puts up advertising banners around it. Vaki describes the scene:

But there's something not quite right, something that doesn't fit with my memories and that's spoiling the emotion you normally feel in such a place. The flags, that's what's wrong. All around the enclosure there are metal poles. There are flags attached to cables that link the poles. They're advertising banners, publicising local products or brands. A sponsored marae, how could they do such a thing? (73)

While the power of Henri's oratorical narrative persists in the contemporary colonial world in which *The Missing King* is set, it is violently misunderstood by the governmental backers in the "Ministry of Culture" as an opportunity to sell advertisements. As the "cross of Jesus" closes the door on indigenous cultures, the modern capitalist and colonial systems that value a marae based on its advertising revenues distorts and confuses the stories that are immanent in a sacred place. The soundscape, Brotherson asserts, requires a felicitous place and for its message to be effectually sent and received.

Vaki's Language Games

Layered over and against his concern with issues of "speech"—how characters communicate in, through, and around what might be regarded as a "speech disability"—Brotherson is concerned with sign systems themselves and their imbrications in other systems of norms and delimiting rules. One way that he comments upon these themes is by foregrounding the game of chess as both a major plot driver and a metaphor for communication. However, in both chess and narrative, the game is set up in such a way that Vaki can only be recognized within a language game that the state controls and contains. In re-mediating Vaki's chess matches into the plot of the novel, Brotherson shows that the game is an imperfect metonym for Vaki's performances in life; within the game, he is unassailable and the structures are in place to insure fairness and equality, but when the game is re-mediated into his life story, he is disabled, stymied, abused, and ultimately killed within a social system that bolsters a Eurocentric hegemony.

Though Vaki has the ability to manipulate handily the outcome of any chess match, he is unable to affect the structures of the game and, indeed, such is neither necessary nor desirable for

success; however, within the sphere of his communication, Vaki is equally adept with language, but Brotherson suggests that he requires a significant overhaul to the system for his marginalized voice to be received and valued. In neither case are such changes readily accepted. Ferdinand de Saussure makes a related comparison when distinguishing internal and external elements of language:

In chess, what is external can be separated relatively easily from what is internal. The fact that the game passed from Persia to Europe is external; against that, everything having to do with its system and rules is internal. If I use ivory chessmen instead of wooden ones, the change has no effect on the system, but if I decrease or increase the number of chessmen, this change has a profound effect on the “grammar” of the game. (22–23)

The alterations that Brotherson’s novel imagines of the systems of language and literature are not only “external” features such as the geographical origins, ethnicities, and contexts of the texts that are given attention; he shows that an attention to French Polynesian texts requires an alteration of the “grammar” with which stories are read: they are mediated with different languages, symbolisms, and value systems, along different medial channels. This is not to say that French Polynesia is exceptional in this regard—certainly all regional groupings of texts will require contextualization to a greater or lesser extent—but what Brotherson draws out about this region in particular is the arresting of process of mediation that is enforced by colonialism, which “closes the doors” on words. While the game of chess can be played in more or less the same way in any cultural context, communication, narrative, and language require a much greater affordance for diverse senders and receivers.

Brotherson's novel makes a strong comparison between chess and communication, which is further suggestive of the competition for narrative representation in colonial French Polynesia. Ironically, however, while Vaki gains agency in and outside the game itself by mastering and duplicating the systematic logic that is programmed into the game of chess, he ultimately relinquishes control over the terms of competition.

The chessboard upon which Vaki stands in the painting by the woman he meets is suggestive that the game of chess is a structuring metaphor for the context in which his story occurs. Moreover, in the early chapters of Vaki's story, one of the most prominent recurring plot sequences revolves around Vaki's engagements with chess: he learns and masters the game, studies it intensely through books, computer games, and chess clubs, and plays thousands of games including several major tournaments. Like a sequence of chess games, the plot of Vaki's life is repetitive in the sense that Vaki encounters similar sequences of events to the extent that one might consider his life story to be divided into discrete serial periods that are speckled with somewhat recurring characters, events, and tropes. Although he does not directly compare his life or its narration to a series of chess matches, Vaki's contemplation of the number of possible chess matches closely resembles his approach to the communicative challenges in his life: he enumerates and memorizes whatever aspects he can and searches for patterns, recurrences, and formulas for predictable outcomes. In his characteristically precise manner, the then high-school aged Vaki reports, "By now I had played one thousand two hundred and thirteen games. Three hundred and eight against human opponents and nine hundred and five against the machine. As far as I can remember, no two of them ever the same" (29). On one hand, Vaki's statement reveals the astronomical ability he has to keep track of chess matches he has played and, on the

other, it shows his immersion into this series of chess matches as a parallel (though intersecting) storyworld.

Brotherson's novel suggests that structures of communication in French Polynesia are, like the metaphorical roles of the pieces of a chess match, imposed *a priori* and they remain fixed. Though the game has origins in India, modern chess pieces are based on images of European feudal society and the object for players is to their European king. Brotherson implicitly compares the transmission of Mā'ohi stories to the idea of playing chess with an absent or "missing" king: within the imposed hierarchical structures of Western and particularly French discourse, Mā'ohi have nothing of value to defend, and their stories are dismissed or not heard because they do not always conform to the expectations and ultimately because the European mythology is well defended.

Vaki's narration of his initial engagement with chess is promising in its potential to disrupt the colonial metaphors built into the game, given his mastery of the game's structures and his creative and playful re-mediations of the action into the plot of the novel. In narrating his first chess tournament, Vaki demonstrates his understanding of a model of intersecting storyworlds by giving an extended comparison to a cowboy gunfight, ostensibly collocating multiple represented narrative planes: western movies, chess matches, and the tournament's actual players. Upon first meeting his competitors, he notes, "The way we glare at one another reminds me of Sunday afternoon westerns. With our spurred boots jangling, hands hovering at the ready, we stride bowlegged through the red dust towards one another" (29). In fact, by imagining the tournament as a western, Vaki further alludes tenuously to the actual American west, which was, of course, quite entirely misrepresented in movies, television, radio, and literature. Indeed, Vaki's imaginative act resembles his late father Maheono's occupation as a stunt horseman,

playing Indian chiefs in Hollywood movies. Like Maheono's ability to "play" as an Indian for American audiences, though he was Marquesan, Vaki finds useful isomorphisms among various arenas, allowing him to creatively understand alternate narrative structures through imaginative participation. However, unlike his father, Vaki narrates his role as the hero, reversing the position taken by the native character against his red-haired opponent: "I tilt my hat, blow into the barrel of my six gun. Weiller just stands there, looking incredulously at the hole in his chest. The legendary killer is down" (32). Like the pieces on the chessboard, Vaki manipulates the narrative in such a way that he is able to come out victorious within the clearly defined performance space of a western shootout or a chess tournament.

In a later scene, after he has just met his Basque friend and chess coach Iñaki, Vaki narrates their first chess match in the third person, noticeably distancing himself from the action of the game and its narration. Iñaki's expressed purpose is to "make chess a 'popular sport for ordinary people'" (76), and Vaki's third person narration seems to reflect that aim by imitating the narrative style of a sports event commentary. It is also notable that this match is called a "simul" or simultaneous exhibition; Iñaki plays 9 other players at the same time, alternating moves. Vaki narrates:

It's the fifth move, Iñaki knows some fascinating openings. Vaki concentrates. Eighth move, Iñaki is walking into a trap. He doesn't realise it. Vaki doesn't let anything show. Fourteenth move, my rook is swept away by a giant hand. Iñaki smiles. Twenty-seventh move, Iñaki is jubilant. Three checkmates, one stalemate, four worried players and me. Thirtieth move, Iñaki winks with his right eye. 'Check and mate,' says Vetea.

Other than the one mention of “my rook,” Vaki’s narrative is entirely in the third person, even though he is the one playing and the one narrating. This comes as a bit of a surprise, since only a few paragraphs earlier, Vaki speaks in his usual first person and he returns to it a few paragraphs later.

Although he rarely loses a chess match, when his wins are imbedded within the context of Vaki’s larger storyworld, they do not grant him any privileges. Just as his life story is full of major wins followed by major setbacks, Vaki’s tournament victory is short-lived: the evening after his tournament, in a moment of altruism, Vaki attempts to tie up someone’s boat, his pants fall down next to a young woman and he is accused of flashing her, treated roughly, thrown in jail for the weekend, humiliated in the local papers, and his prize money is stolen. In the narrative space of the novel (as is often the case in the postcolonial world), the Native characters have a limited capacity for advancement; any aberrations are marked as such and celebrated, but then quickly negated seemingly by an invisible hand. Indeed, in the final of a prestigious regional tournament, Vaki is compelled to throw the match in order to protect the sponsor of his school (who is the father of his opponent Kevin) and when he makes it to the final of the French national tournament, Vaki becomes so heartbroken when he finds out that his romantic interest has a boyfriend (who coincidentally happens to be the same Kevin) that he winds up smoking hashish and missing the final match altogether. While the latter incident could easily be blamed on Vaki’s poor decision, Brotherson’s storyworld seems to be constructed in such a way that the game of chess (as well as the game of language communication) is only able to recognize Vaki’s performance within a state-controlled set of rules and boundaries. This ultimately leads Vaki to give up on the game of chess, saying to his former headmaster, “for me chess was just a game. The best game there was, but still just a game” (149). He appears to recognize that the game’s

rewards for him are circumscribed by the rules imposed by a colonial society; like the pieces on a chessboard, he is only allowed to move in certain ways and occupy certain positions.

The colonial structures coded into the game of chess may limit its emancipatory potential as a medium of expression, but Brotherson shows that the game has the possibility to create an allied community that communicates across conventional language and cultural barriers. Vaki's chess competitors include men, women, and children, and people ethnically French, Tahitian, Chinese, Marquesan, Basque, Malagasy, and Ukrainian. He develops a spectrum of relationships with these competitors—including the woman he falls in love with and marries—and in Vaki's negotiation of the medial conflicts around these nonverbal chess-based encounters, Brotherson asserts that a competitive notion of language can lead to mutually supportive alliances.

While Vaki, as “the missing king” Matato‘i, tries to assert control over his own life through an analogous understanding of the dynamics of chess, he finds that the structures of his life narrative are not entirely within his own control—that in order to express the story of his life and his people, he must find players willing to be taken into the rules of the game, which means forming an ongoing relationship. Vaki's friendship with his first chess partner Vetea, who teaches him the game of chess, is based on such a relationship. Vaki explains,

That's what finally convinced me he was a real friend. We played every day, I beat him every day, and every day he said thank you as he left. For the first time in my life I was seeing the other side of learning. I had become the master and Vetea was my apprentice, studious, attentive, trying to make the most of my teaching. (28)

At a young age, Vaki begins seeing the multi-directionality of learning, which contrasts his expectations to trust in authority figures, even when he sees disparities between the authority and

his observation. This leads them to a bond that is not quite describable in the form of words in the novel. Indeed, Vaki and Vetea even develop a nonverbal way of communicating that involves facial expressions that amazes their Basque chess coach Iñaki:

Iñaki asks me questions, I make my usual grimaces to Vetea who translates them into words. Iñaki is puzzled.

‘What’s this sideshow you’ve got going there? D’you really understand his funny faces?’

Vetea explains that we’ve known each other for years and that he can’t explain how, but he actually does understand. (77)

In setting up Vaki and Vetea’s relationship around chess, Brotherson shows how the intangible connection gained by playing thousands of chess matches creates a kind of prosthetic for Vaki’s speech disability. If direct oral or written communication are not getting through, Brotherson suggests, other avenues to understanding peoples’ stories need to be explored. Even if ultimately dominated by colonial forces, chess serves as a nonverbal communication between the two boys, and it becomes a means of engagement for Vaki with many others, including in his narrative to the reader. A game, a language, or a “language-game,” after Ludwig Wittgenstein, is more than its rules; it is a socially performed act in which people come to an understanding through practice. In posing chess as a metaphor for language, Brotherson brings out the conflicts and consonances of these two fields of engagement.

Magical Signs and Altered States

In contrast to the emphasis on rules and a near scientific approach to chess, Brotherson presents an intertwining magical storyworld that frequently includes elements that appear implausible or impossible within conventions of realism but may be explained by the narrator’s

altered perceptions (due to drugs or madness), by extreme coincidence, by narrative exaggeration, or by copresent magical spirits that are beyond most readers' comprehension. Often juxtaposing the world of rules with a looser fantastical mode of signification, Brotherson imagines cracks in the structures of conventional discourse in the novel that allow for polyvocal stories to flow through.

Approximately halfway through the novel, during one of the many drug-induced dream visitation sequences, the apparition of Vaki's ancestor expresses, "Maldición! Why has the fruit of hatred been planted, between the word and the signs?" (187). This embedded and translated statement begins with the Spanish curseword "Maldición" (often translated as "damn," also the word for "curse"), which demonstrates the complex disparity between word and sign; such a curseword, an embodiment of anger, contempt, and spite, derives much of its evocative, illocutionary, magical, spiritual, psychological, and cathartic force from its embodied oral performance to which the text, even with its exclamation point, provides only a muted signifier. On the other hand, the oral performance of a curse is ephemeral and has its effect on a limited group of hearers that are present and understand its language and contextual meaning, while the signs encoded in a written or visual text can reinforce a curse and retain a memory of it. Complicating this particular scene further, "the signs" to which the apparition refer are encountered throughout the novel as a non-linear pictographic language that Vaki decodes during these dream sequences. Vaki's narration and writing thus stand as the interface amongst many medial pathways carrying forth this message from the past of frustration over the history of malicious competition among sign systems. The magic that exists around, behind, inside, and alongside words is often forgotten behind those words, especially when they are recorded in a

colonial language and medium; however, Brotherson's words present frequent multilingual interruptions of magic that can hardly be dismissed or ignored.

Throughout *The Missing King*, Brotherson gives the reader the sense that there are copresent supernatural forces that inhabit both the main storyworld and several levels of its discourse, which have been forced into the background by the manifold structuring forces of the contemporary world, but which also persistently assert their ongoing presence and significance. These spiritual interruptions appear in many forms for both the novel's narrators, who have some difficulty re-mediating them into novelistic discourse, but nonetheless give evidence in their narratives of the impact of the multi-sensory messages. Early in the novel, Brotherson connects the mysterious nature of Vaki's family to several non-verbal modes of communication and manners of handing down stories. Perhaps the first indication of the novel's copresent mystery occurs when Vaki recounts frequently being spirited away by his also mute maternal Grandmother Nuku:

She would take me off to the depths of the valley, to her rundown old house. There she would undress me and lay me on the kitchen table. Next she would rub me all over with peppery-smelling oil. The first time, I waited with clenched teeth for her to add salt, garlic and some little onions before shoving me into her ahimā'a [traditional Tahitian underground] oven . . . (3)

Vaki's serio-comic fears about his own grandmother echo and ironize the tenacious stereotypical image of cannibalistic native Pacific Islanders. His observations reveal both the somatic response of his puerile terror (clenched teeth) and the ironic distance that he is able to achieve retrospectively, showing the significance of the sessions to his changing mindset. His grandmother's massages turn out to be more soporific than culinary, as he continues, "But no,

she didn't eat me. She massaged me for a long time, with her wrinkled but still very strong hands. Massaged me until every one of my muscles sent my brain the signal for lights out (3). In this passage, Vaki describes the haptic sensation of being massaged, evocatively converting very visceral feelings of strong wrinkled hands into words. However, Vaki's discourse is marked with a contrasting degree of scientific analysis when he details the anatomical process of muscles routing signals to his brain. This discourse, which the reader will come to recognize as characteristic of Vaki's narrative, is precise in a way that makes the intimate moment distant, as he objectifies and generalizes the anatomy of his own body. It is further significant that Brotherson's idiom, which Anderson translates as "lights out" is "*l'extinction des feux*" (11), has an additional referent as the French name of the familiar military tune "Taps" that is commonly played on a bugle at dusk and at funerals. Alongside his earlier cannibalistic image of his grandmother, this aural allusion gives the scene a further cartoonish image, while maintaining the association with cessation of bodily sensation as entry into a dematerialized sphere of consciousness.

In addition to the peculiar and already multi-sensory ritualistic scene that Vaki narrates, Brotherson shows that these massage sessions give way to induced dreams in which Vaki is trained to receive stories in forms that are beyond the comprehension of both him and the reader. He continues to reveal the most mysterious evocative result of Grandmother Nuku's massages:

Invariably I fell asleep into the same dream. I was naked, sitting on the table, holding a notebook and a pen. Across from me, my Grandmother Nuku was holding a plaque covered in little drawings. And soon from out of nowhere a rasping voice would start to sing, a rhythmic chanting. In spite of myself, I would

copy the drawings into my notebook. Always the same dream, never the same drawings, never the same words sung by the unknown voice. (3)

This elaborate mystical dream stands as a multi-medial platform of communication among Vaki, his grandmother, and his line of ancestors. The drawings that Vaki copies in his dream frequently re-surface throughout the novel as “the signs,” but they are never described in any detail (if such a description were possible), except in their possible similarity to hieroglyphics on the Rongorongo tablets from Rapa Nui. As a result, “the signs,” though invisible to the reader, form a visual backdrop to the narrative; they are not a directly legible component of the narrative, but the effects and understandings are transmitted through the characters’ other communicative means. Alex, Philippe’s publisher, later describes in ungrammatical French Vaki’s process, saying “he didn’t learn to decipher. The blood of the shamans ran through his veins, he felt it, *il sentir, c’est toute*. I’ve read his story, I think his grandmother only got him to memorise the signs, not decipher them” (299). Brotherson’s distinction here between the two operations of “deciphering” and “feeling” is telling of the novel’s narrative mode: unlike deciphering and converting the story entirely into a different semiotic system and discourse, “feeling” a story does not involve imposing a foreign structure, but entering its medial space and playing by its cultural rules (as one might in a chess match). Furthermore, in the original French, Brotherson uses the verb “ressentir,” which means “to feel” in an emotional way (as opposed to “sentir” which refers to the physical senses); Vaki’s understanding of the signs is beyond observational powers of the five senses and certainly beyond the grasp of the reader. While the reader is given a reference to Vaki’s emotional reception of his ancestors’ stories and wisdom, and he dutifully transcribes as much as he can, Brotherson clearly marks the presence of what seems an infinite

excess beyond the limitations of words in the novel, which even Vaki cannot always comprehend.

In addition to his grandmother's massages, the main gateway Brotherson introduces that opens Vaki to experiencing the stories of his ancestors is the use of various drugs—usually marijuana, but also magic mushrooms and morphine—which give him a glimpse beyond the words he had learned to love in the books he read as a child. However, the same drugs also lead him to many troubles, especially once their effects have worn off. Moreover, many of Vaki's drug experiences are not voluntary; in several instances he is pressured, tricked, or drugged against his will. Thus, Brotherson's novel does not unequivocally promote drug use, and it even recalls the familiar often devastating consequences of colonizers and settlers introducing drugs, alcohol, tobacco, as well as seductive ideas and practices (and even education), which produce rearrangements of desire for indigenous people. However, the novel does suggest that Vaki's use of substances allows his vision to be temporarily unfettered by the structures that constrict his understanding, which is not unlike some shamanistic traditions. Still, while Vaki's own vision is enabled by the drugs, his ability to remediate and narrate the experiences in his novel is limited to the same language games that govern all writing. The glimpses he purports to receive and ultimately comprehend of messages from his ancestors while intoxicated are not easily conveyed through the discourse of the novel, but despite this medial conflict, Brotherson makes the reader

aware of the considerable excess beyond what is written, which allows some space for imaginative production.

Brotherson sets up Vaki's drug use by initially figuring school and books as a similar kind of escape from his parochial rural life with his family to an exciting intellectual complex. Vaki imagines a stream that he crosses to get to school as a boundary between the two worlds: "On this side is real life, with its problems, its poverty, material as well as intellectual. But its warmth as well, its resilience in carrying on in spite of everything" (17). He goes on to describe the world in books, saying, "Every day as I cross the little wooden bridge, I put my normal life on hold and spend a few hours in a world where everything is possible" (17). Vaki identifies this boundary and metafictionally suggests the similar one that the reader has to cross in order to enter Brotherson's mediated storyworld. Ironically, however, the metafictional suggestion straddles that very boundary and shows its porousness; neither Vaki nor the reader is clear of reverberating effects from the other side.

Despite Vaki's ability to escape using the language written in books and taught by the colonial education system in Tahiti, Brotherson shows that the same words trap and imprison him in a discourse that is always controlled by the colonial system. Vaki makes this realization when under the intoxicating magic of Henri's poetry and song:

Another uncomfortable feeling, a more painful one, takes hold whenever, in mid sentence, an unknown word refuses to make itself understood. As these mysterious words grow in number, I realise the books that nourished my mind and taught me to express myself are all written in a language that isn't mine. I realise that I write differently from my cousins, my 'friends,' all the non-mutes who have surrounded me since childhood. (61)

Once Vaki understands the social power imbalance inherent in words—here, and also, likely, in his reading of Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* (82)—he realizes that there is a suppressed and differently mediated world of signs that exists alongside the one he has come to believe in. He recognizes that own access to this world is limited by his colonial language training, socialization, and perceptions—and his ability to transmit and remediate it even more so—but he continues to feel and express the pull of tenacious spirits.

In the storyworld of Brotherson’s novel, drugs are strongly associated with language, imprisonment, and resistance; they are keys to opening what Vaki calls the “doors that hide the meaning of words from us,” and create temporary spaces where possibility is expanded. The metaphor of language opening and closing “doors,” which Vaki employs twice in the novel, especially in relation to psychoactive drugs, is a reference to William Blake’s poem “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” which goes “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. / For the man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern” (170), which is subsequently taken up by Aldous Huxley in his nonfiction work *The Doors of Perception*, a work that reflects upon his use of the psychedelic drug mescaline. Huxley’s conclusion is particularly insightful about the ways people become imprisoned within systems of signs and symbols:

Under a more realistic, a less exclusively verbal system of education than ours, every Angel (in Blake's sense of that word) would be permitted as a sabbatical treat, would be urged and even, if necessary, compelled to take an occasional trip through some chemical Door in the Wall into the world of transcendental experience. If it terrified him, it would be unfortunate but probably salutary. If it brought him a brief but timeless illumination, so much the better. In either case

the Angel might lose a little of the confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning and the consciousness of having read all the books. (49)

Though Brotherson does not directly mention either of these works in his novel, he imagines a strikingly similar system of imprisonment in the French Polynesian context; Vaki perceives his world as closed up behind the static referents of words, behind French colonial institutions, behind the cross of Jesus. However, Brotherson departs from these authors in his novel by incorporating Polynesian ancestral spirits as the carriers of the “timeless illumination” that Vaki receives. Moreover, within a colonial society, Vaki receives very severe consequences for not playing by the rules; both Huxley and Blake assert that the structures of the world are resistant to ideas of infinite truth, but Vaki, terrified and enlightened, is also repeatedly dismissed and brutalized. In one of his last statements in his novel, Vaki addresses the reader directly, asking, “Will you take me for a madman, a compulsive liar, or just a drug addict having hallucinations? I’ve tried to be honest with you. I’ve told you everything, everything that made my life what it has been, my few moments of happiness, and of great distress” (251). Perfectly aware of his likely rhetorical ineffectiveness, considering the fantastic elements of his story paired with his drug experiences, Vaki lays bare his feeling of self-futility, knowing that many readers are content with the worldview that is imposed upon them.

Vaki further comments on the interconnections between drugs, technology, voyaging, religion and language by playfully free associating on the idea of marijuana, showing how it can be an ambiguous signifier and how its meanings need closer questioning, especially in their mediated forms. After his first experience with marijuana, and once he is told the scientific name for “pakalolo,” the Hawaiian term used by his friends, Vaki researches some of the non-psychoactive uses of the plant *Cannabis Sativa*: “Hemp was used to make ropes. So just like

paka, it could imprison, restrain, tie up body and spirit. But these ropes were also used for many years on boats, especially sailing ships” (26). Vaki’s free associations among the functions and effects of cannabis suggest a more nuanced understanding of the uses of technology. As far as being culturally defined applications of resources in the world for calculated purposes (means to ends), both marijuana and rope can be considered technological and yet the particular ends of either—like many technologies—can be either confining or freeing, depending on one’s orientation towards it. Vaki’s own drug use gets him into all sorts of trouble, but it is largely based on misunderstanding and a hypocritical legislative and judicial system that both enables and punishes drug use based on the fuzzy area of what is considered “medicine” or “recreational.” Vaki further suspects the Christian church of hypocrisy as he continues his association:

But the funniest thing in my opinion is that hemp was used for a very long time to make so-called bible paper. Imagine Pastor Teriitahi busy rolling up the Psalms after smoking Job and Esther! And all those sanctimonious prats, taking their cannabis right into the house of the Lord. . . Don’t go thinking I’m an atheist. I do believe in God. It’s all that religious kerfuffle I don’t hold with. Every religion with its own rituals. It’s like football teams: each one has its own uniform and supporters, but they all use the same ball. (27)

Vaki’s statement that drugs might have spiritual or religious significance is certainly nothing new, but his suggestion that every religion uses “the same ball” points as well to a possibility that multiple paths lead to the same ecstasy that lies beyond the words; the same medium, paper, can be used either to print the holy gospel upon, or to smoke a substance that might achieve a similar state of spiritual euphoria and understanding.

Brotherson's presentation of Vaki's drug-induced dream visitation scenes direct the reader to away from the physical text—or even its sonic referents—to the viscerally read and supernaturally encoded “signs” that represent the stories of the spectral presence of Vaki's female ancestors. Each of his trips is accompanied by a variation on a structured visitation from one of his many mute female ancestors in which she hands him “the signs” which recount alternative histories of French Polynesia and its connections with the wider world. Indeed, even after Vaki's death, Philippe begins experiencing things that shake his understanding of reality and the world, including a drug-induced dream visitation that takes the same formula as Vaki's.

By separating these scenes from the main body of his text, Brotherson suggests that they are encoded in a language that is not accessible to the reader, but viscerally experienced, recorded, and translated by Vaki. The visitations are styled in italics and each begins with the appearance of a woman in roughly the same manner: “A young woman is staring at me, she has huge but hooded eyes, very black. She's sitting cross-legged” (24). Each woman then introduces herself with the same phrase: “Without the word, I still have the signs. I am Nukutauna. The fifteenth drum fell silent with me” (24). However, each refers to a different ordinal drum between first and sixteenth and there is no mention of the fourth through eighth drums. In each scene, Vaki then tries to speak to the woman, but she instead hands him “the signs” and says “Read and know this” (24). The repeated formula of these scenes would seem to appeal to Vaki's sense of order and it also suggests that there is a meaningful structure to be understood from the spectral visitations that Vaki receives. Moreover, within these sequences, both Vaki and his female ancestors, who were all mute in their lives, seem to have the ability to speak but prefer to transmit their messages using the signs. Amazingly, while under the influence of drugs, Vaki dutifully translates, transcribes, and transmits these stories, that are encoded in the signs, often

narrated through the focalization of birds, and rife with cryptic references to historical figures and events related to French Polynesia and the Mā‘ohi people.

To record these stories and provide an open alternative living history of the region from an indigenous perspective appears to be Vaki’s purpose—aligned with Brotherson’s—as expressed to him within his last visitation from his mother:

You know now who I am and who I was, and who you are, but you must allow me to return to U‘utameini. You must write and make our story known, so that U‘utameini, the brother of the accursed one, may in turn find his sister. (235)

U‘utameini, who is mentioned throughout the visitation sequences, is probably a transliteration of the name Ousamequin, who was a Wampanoag chief better known as Massasoit, famous for meeting and assisting the Pilgrims from the Mayflower and maintaining peace with the colonists until his death, shortly after which was King Philip’s War, in which most of Ousamequin’s family was killed. Ousamequin’s first son was called Moanam (a.k.a. Alexander or Wamsutta [warm heart]), which is one of Vaki’s names. The stories of the visitation sequences connect Vaki to Ousamequin with many surprising steps in between (including Herman Melville a.k.a. Heremanu) who historically visited Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands, before writing his first novel *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*. By constructing his—albeit fictionalized and incomplete—alternative history, in which French Polynesian indigenous peoples are genealogically linked to Native Americans, Brotherson suggests a solidarity and shared experience between the two groups, both of whose lands remain occupied by European settlers (in admittedly somewhat different ways), and whose languages, cultures, and (hi)stories are marginalized, outlawed, belittled, and even erased within the dominant colonial structure. Brotherson suggests that the stories are still available to those that have the patience to “read and

know” “the signs”; while there are conflicts among the various media vying for relevance, these media, when looked at in aggregate, compose a rich narrative field.

Brotherson presents his history as an astonishingly complex array of hints, snippets, and messages in many different medial forms, which, like the scrap of paper Philippe finds inside the smallest of a set of four Matryoshka dolls at the end of the novel, are hidden, but seem to have a mysterious desire of their own to surface. The piece of paper that Philippe sees, but never reads—a Hitchcockian macguffin that could very well say “Inspected by no. 4”—directs the reader’s attention and emotional investment, spurs the implied continued action of the novel’s plot, and creates a space where an answer to some of the novel’s open questions may be answered; however, the written word, Brotherson suggests, is less important than its power to guide the reader’s senses around, under, before, after, and beyond it to the muted expressions trying to escape imprisonment.

Brotherson’s novel is an exploration of the mysteries, troubles, limitations, and possibilities of language as it is mediated in the form of the novel. Nearly every page is populated by references to silenced voices, other medial modes of communication, and inexplicable spectral presences. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the novel makes us reconsider our way of receiving stories by questioning the colonial interests of preserving the stability of the word, even the word in the novel itself. Brotherson’s re-contextualization and re-imagination of the novel through Vaki’s and Philippe’s attempts to live, write, and publish their own novel as a collaborative remediation of a multitude of voices makes us see the power of the medium of writing in general: it provides a platform on which medial conflicts can play out, and even if aspects of other media cannot be fully realized, they can be pointed out and guide readers to further investigate.

Brotherson gives us a metafictional understanding of the particular problems of the Pacific novel, whose stories remain obscured behind imposed colonial modes of expression. That his novel essentially undoes itself, unravels its own structures and languages, suggests that Brotherson insists that the conflicted media that Pacific people use to express their stories must be engaged, questioned, re-shaped, and re-made to enable the voices that have been structurally ignored. As Donna Haraway asserts in her “Cyborg Manifesto,” marginalized groups must re-code the technologies of power to make them work in concert with their own expression, “not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (175). By composing *The Missing King* as an attempt to wrestle with the problems of representing indigenous narratives that have been silenced by the dominance and limitations of Western media forms, Brotherson provides an example of how an indigenous narrative can exceed and imaginatively manipulate the affordances of the novel, becoming cyborg, and creating a space in which the ever-present suppressed stories of Pacific people are allowed to mingle, play, and assert their own powerful presence in amongst the institutions of the word.

Chapter 2

Narrating Pacific Oratory in Fiction and Film

In the villages, the orators were the people with real political power and influence. They were the poets, the song-makers, the historians, the politicians, the peacemakers (and the destroyers of peace). Many of them were barely literate; yet to listen to them—their weaving of a tapestry of image, sound, meaning, and emotion . . . was to hear the true power of poetry with the breaking open of the rich seeds of the spoken word. . . . Great orators . . . possessed the magic of the word and therefore the true power of thought and feeling.

Albert Wendt, *Sons for the Return Home*, 179–80

After a chapter discussing the idea of wounded speech as it is represented in the medium of the novel in the context of French Polynesia, this chapter takes up ideals and performances of oratory in Pacific fiction and film as both a cornerstone of all Pacific cultural practice—from greetings to decision making and governance—and a persistent trope in the literatures of indigenous peoples across Oceania. While Brotherson’s novel at times foregrounds the artistic and magical aspects of oratory as part of its exploration of communicative models—particularly in places that render chant in Mā’ohi languages as resonant with layers of a submerged epistemological space—it emphasizes the absence of Vaki’s voice and the structural gap that this absence makes apparent. In *The Missing King*, control over voice—spoken authority—is part of what is absent; within the storyworld, the function of oratory as a central means of affirming and perpetuation cultural relations has been muted or represented as submerged. By contrast, the Pacific works I look at in this chapter represent the functional ways oratory persists and adapts in

many forms of communication in contemporary Pacific communities as well as the medial conflicts that result from its influence.

The two main works I consider in this chapter, Māori novelist Patricia Grace's novel *Dogside Story* and Samoan director Tusi Tamasese's film *The Orator*, represent oratory and its imprints upon other media within two Pacific cultures, thus reflecting metafictionally and metafilmically upon the media of the novel and film in which these narratives are expressed. In other words, to the extent that oratory can be represented in another medium, these artists show that oratory is always already implicit within any Pacific Island medium because its cultural imprint is so pervasive. I show through these two texts that Pacific Islander writers and filmmakers engage their practices and protocols of oratory with the affordances of their respective media and at the same time experiment with the potentials of these media to create new spaces and protocols for traditional rhetorical and artistic purposes. Both Grace and Tamasese draw audiences' attentions to the communal ethics that are coded into the structures and protocols of oratory (that are also transmitted as formal and thematic features of the novel and film) and that ultimately bring forth the voices of community members who are physically disabled or socially dispossessed in other modes of communication.

A significant effect of representing oratory in the media of fiction and film is that the juxtaposition of media asks us to question what features can be captured, conveyed and held up for contemplation when oratory is embedded within a different medial space. As oratory in the Pacific is primarily a medium involving public speeches oriented toward social, political, religious, and cultural issues, it is a practice that is deeply immersed in the traditional values, beliefs, and ethics of each particular community, and both Grace and Tamasese emphasize that a communal ethic that maintains the strength of the relations among community members must be

open to hearing the voices, stories, and concerns of every one of its members, indicating that the tradition is less conservative and exclusive than it may seem. The implication I draw from their works is that an analogous communal ethic must be put in place among Pacific writers, filmmakers, and their audiences in order to respect and affirm the value afforded to Pacific cultures. With oratory as an analogue, the media of Pacific film and writing thus emphasize listening as an active process, and texts as educating the reader or viewer of the kinds of attentiveness and vigilance required of ethical reading.

The importance of such ethics has been explicitly a part of Pacific literature at least since its early theorizations. For example, in his essay “Towards a New Oceania,” Albert Wendt proposes that a similar ethical system—based on an idea of respecting people on their own terms—must be attached to imaginative literature about the Pacific, particularly when it is attempted by outsiders:

But the imagination must explore with love/honesty/wisdom/and compassion; writers must write with *aroha/aloha/alofa/loloma*, respecting the people they are writing about, people who may view the Void differently and who, like all other human beings, live through the pores of their flesh and mind and bone, who suffer, laugh, cry, copulate, and die. (58)

Such ethics are built into the structures and protocols of many Pacific forms of oratory, though these need to be maintained, reinforced, as well as updated with the changing concerns of the modern world. However, what many Pacific writers and artists show as they perform their messages in many different media is that these media need to be reshaped to accommodate the subtle complexities of indigenous Pacific expression. While novels, films, and other medial forms are never seen as oratory or a replacement for oratory, they can and do function alongside

more traditional forms in concomitant ways: telling stories, making arguments, registering and recording the troubles of all community members, deliberating solutions, strengthening community ties, honouring culture and traditions, and welcoming visitors. Moreover, as containers for culture, artistic forms frame, represent, and approximate oratory, keeping people in touch with its structures and values. Therefore, these forms carry on, activate, and expand the reach of oratory, even, to some extent creating a loop, as there is no doubt that contemporary skilled orators bring knowledge from other forms back into their orations.

Pacific oratory has long been celebrated as an impressive and functional medium that maintains balance, order, justice, and cultural continuance and serves as an often highly competitive arena for verbal artistry and performance. Anne Salmond observes that the traditions of Māori oratory served to give space for discussion of policies and that they remain much the same in contemporary Māori society as they were before European contact: “The Maori people are still very resistant to impositions of absolute authority, whether from European political sources or from their own leaders, and oratory remains a key technique for persuasion and policy-making” (46). Salmond further details the extensive rituals that orators go through in honing their craft and composing and delivering orations, naming the four most important properties of great Māori oratory as creativity, erudition, appropriateness, and entertainment value. Similarly, in the Samoan context, Lowell Holmes describes the main function of oratory as that of reciprocity, but also refers to its artistic, intellectual, and cultural roles: “Oratory is an institution providing still another unifying bond between village and village, family and family, wronged and wrongdoer. It provides spice for commonplace lives and a demand for excellence in intellectual endeavor. It promotes respect for family and community identity” (173). Tātupu Fa‘afetai Matā‘afa Tu‘i emphasizes the stylization and play of language as characteristic of

oratory in his study of Sāmoan lāuga (oratory), describing it as “powerful and sophisticated, the living soul of the Samoan people, epitomising their poetic character through symbol and allusion” (109) and, more specifically, seeing the practice as a key element associated with all of Samoan social interaction: “It is the main tool by which the indigenous social structure is maintained, and the principal organ of social communication, awareness and orientation. Its custodians, the orators, employ a variety of linguistic and cultural tools, incorporating genealogy, mythology and legends” (109). In both the Samoan and Māori contexts as well as many other sites across the Pacific there is a clear reverence for the power, effectiveness, subtlety, complexity, and beauty of oratory.

At the same time, the qualities of oratory that make it so foundational of order, render it open to misuse and corruption. In a sense, the nature, content and quality of oratory, as well as how it functions in society, might even be taken as indices that mark a community’s well-being, since oratory always threatens to devolve into instrumentalism, flattery, connivance, and manipulation. This danger is stressed in the work of two of the region’s most prominent novelists, Albert Wendt and Witi Ihimaera, which can be taken as representative fictional expressions of the many critical voices⁵, particularly literary, that have questioned the imbalanced power structures that govern oratory within Pacific societies, which lead to misuses, corruptions, and the exploitation of the non-dominant classes. Wendt’s *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* presents a corruption of oratory in the character of Tauilopepe, who uses both his chiefly position of power and his virtuosity with Samoan oratory (then strongly inflected by Christian oratory) to persuade the people of his village to accept his land development plans that lead to

⁵ Some examples of such fictional orators that misuse power include Doboro Thomas in Russell Soaba’s *Maiba* and Felipe in Sia Figiel’s *Where We Once Belonged*.

his own personal wealth and increased influence as well as the abandonment of traditional Samoan values. Wendt's representation of Tauiloapepe's nervous thoughts before his first speech conveys the immense weight carried by orators in his position: "Half a lifetime of trying to master the awesome skill of manipulating language and the massive and intricate heritage that went with it were now to be demonstrated before the council, before the expert, critical scrutiny of Sapepe" (36–37). While there are many factors to his rise to power, Tauiloapepe's oratorical skill is what enables him to gain the support of the village and his church sermon, titled "God, Money, and Success," is a particularly clear turning point, during which he realizes his position of control as an orator: "the pulpit was his pulpit; the church was his church; all the people in it were his people. Only his father and Toasa had been able to snare the people's attention this way" (85). Wendt places Tauiloapepe at the new nexus of colonialism, which is woven out of foreign values into neocolonialism—also symbolized by his later position as a comprador and his palagi house, haunted by the German colonist that previously lived there. By way of his oratory, Tauiloapepe allows for these foreign values to gain a foothold in his community.

Wendt depicts the villagers as very susceptible to persuasion by skillful oratory, but he ultimately vilifies Tauiloapepe, who becomes alienated from most of his family—most notably his son Pepe, who tries unsuccessfully to destroy his empire—and loses his fortune at the hands of Galupo, arguably an even more skilled as an orator and manipulator whose oratory is described as dangerously compelling: "The stranger's knowledge of Sapepe was vividly accurate, his style of oratory extremely mature for one so young. They tried not to listen to him but his voice eased past their resistance" (316). Indeed, even though he later baldly reveals his deceptions and schemes to the dying Tauiloapepe, during his oratory his words are taken as solid truth: "Most of the congregation were sure he was telling the truth. You could feel it in his

words. He was speaking from the heart and the heart never lies, they thought” (316). Wendt’s *Leaves* shows the dangers of a concept of oratory that structurally empowers the elites of a village, when a corresponding system of communal ethics is not respected.

Ihimaera’s *The Uncle’s Story* is a novel that challenges the hyper-masculinity and heteronormativity that is associated with Māori oratory, while upholding the form itself. The idea of oratory as a troublesome discursive medium is explored through the patriarch figure of Arapeta, who plies his skill at oratory to convince his people to send three young men to fight in the Vietnam War. Arapeta’s ability to influence and manipulate the people he addresses on the marae is referred to as godlike:

This was one arena in which nobody could compete with him. When he walked to the centre of the marae, all eyes were on him. He began to speak and his authority hushed the world. He ceased being a man and, instead, became a God incarnate.

(39)

While Ihimaera—by way of the focalized perspective of Sam, Arapeta’s son and the novel’s titular uncle—expresses awe at his ability and art, he is firmly critical of Arapeta’s single-minded quest to restore what he believes as the warrior spirit at the core of Māori masculinity without regard to the cost in human lives or the suffering that comes with it. For instance, he displays his power and lack of compassion at the funeral of Turei when, after he had earlier made the untenable promise that none of their sons would die in the war, Arapeta reframes Turei’s death as something to be proud of, connecting it with the spirit of Tumutauenga, the Māori God of War: “Oh, Arapeta was so good at korero. With skill, he modulated his voice and turned the thoughts of the mourners to the ideals of heroism and personal sacrifice” (171). Arapeta’s oration further ignores the context of the Vietnam Conflict—an ill-planned American-led venture to

repel the rise of communism in Asia—which could hold little relevance for any New Zealanders, let alone Māori people. Like Wendt, Ihimaera highlights the problems that arise when the medium of oratory empowers a single male heterosexual speaker to define the structure and functioning of the family group without consideration of the needs and desires of those members who do not fit into the traditionally valorized categories.

Notably, the oratorical authority of both Tauiloapepe and Arapeta is challenged by their iconoclastic younger heirs who reject the patriarchies and gesture towards manifestations of oratory that are rooted in social justice. Tauiloapepe's son Pepe, a virtuoso first person narrator—who dubs himself “a tall-teller of tales. Or is it a teller of tall-tales?” (159)—eschews his father's wealth and lavish ways, becoming the leader of a band of misfit thieves that scam tourists in the Vaipe (“dead water”) region of Apia. Pepe is an iconoclast who rebels against his father by burning down one of his stores and then turning himself in, ultimately bringing shame and dishonour to Tauiloapepe's reputation, but he dies young of tuberculosis. In some ways, Wendt suggests that Pepe's rebellion is futile, like that of his friend Tagata, whose suicide closes the chapter. However, as Pepe is a self-identified writer, his performance as both a writer and a rebel can be thought of as analogous to the plants that Tagata describes obnoxiously growing between the cracks of the lava rocks after they harden. Though they have passed away, Pepe and Tagata leave a trace of their rebellions that leads people to question the establishment of order.

Against Arapeta's authoritarian oratory, Ihimaera juxtaposes the performances of Arapeta's son Sam—the novel's titular uncle—and Sam's nephew Michael, showing that there are other spaces where alternative narratives are told that ethically must be attended to. While not an orator in the traditional sense, Sam writes a diary that composes more than half of the novel's plot, detailing Sam's love affair during his tour of duty in Vietnam with an American helicopter

pilot named Cliff. Ihimaera clearly contrasts the swift efficacy of Arapeta's oratory to Sam's silenced queer story, which was presumed to be destroyed, but was saved and hidden by his sister Pat, who gives it to their nephew Michael. Even though Arapeta attempts to obliterate any record of Sam, forbidding references to him and burying his remains in an unmarked location far from the family's marae, Ihimaera suggests that the stories of a community have a way of inhabiting the people and places involved—encoded in various media—to be defended, ultimately, in the ethically grounded discourses of that community. It is as though oratory's strong roots in communal ethics do not allow Sam's story (or his body) to be unjustly destroyed or hidden by the orator.

While reading and narrating his uncle's diary, Michael internalizes, consummates, and brings currency to Sam's suppressed narrative through his own modern queer Māori activist work. Like Pepe's, Sam's efforts to upset the intolerance built into his father's enforced ideals of Māori culture are ultimately unsuccessful, but his diary inspires Michael to stand up for his indigenous identity and for the “wonderful new gay tribe” (296) that he becomes associated with. When Michael—aided by his queer indigenous activist friend Roimata—delivers a powerful speech to an Indigenous Peoples' Conference in Ottawa, Canada, he invokes the term “warrior spirit” (327) of the people present not to fight in a foreign nation's war against the spread of communism, but to defend global indigenous peoples from oppression and exploitation: “We have been marginalised. In many places our cultures, yours and mine, have been destroyed. We occupy the borderlands of White society” (326). He later points out that queer people are relegated to the borderlands of those borderlands and speaks in their defense: “I have been cast out. Many of us, in all our cultures, have been cast out. There is nowhere for us to go except into the borderlands and there create our own tribe” (344). Through Michael's thoughts, Ihimaera

plots Michael's public presentation as the culmination point of Sam's efforts to speak out legitimately as a queer Māori man: "I thought of Uncle Sam, and I wanted to tell him that what I was doing was for him as much as for anyone else" (344). While Ihimaera perceives the medial space of Māori oratory as problematically afflicted by heteronormative and sexist power structures, he also imagines a this academic conference as a contemporary international space in which Māori and other indigenous people can draw from the tradition of oratory and be ethically responsible to the voices of marginalized people and subgroups of the community.

Wendt and Ihimaera in the above examples include scenes involving oratory in cautionary contexts in order to focus attention on its electric suasive power—as precisely a language of power susceptible to greed and narrow-mindedness. The two texts I focus on in the remainder of this chapter, Patricia Grace's *Dogside Story* and Tusi Tamasese's *The Orator* both centralize the practice of oratory as a way of maintaining the communal ethics in the contemporary world where global flows of culture and capital have tended to overpower local modes of communication. Grace and Tamasese seem to imagine that other media such as the novel and film should take on a supporting role in cultivating community alongside oratory and other traditional forms. Furthermore, both texts demonstrate that public shaming is a powerful function of oratory that externalizes and brings to light difficult obscured stories and emotions that allow a community to deliberate and address wrongs done to its weakest members, reinforcing the ethics that maintain the community's relations. Both Grace and Tamasese also show that while shaming is important, it is just important to offer forgiveness to the contrite.

Moreover, since the two narratives are rendered in different media, they carry their stories in contrasting ways that bring out the relative structures that are coded into each medium; *Dogside Story* is a printed representation of cultural events, while *The Orator* is a recorded

mimetic performance of it. However, since the centrality of oratory unites these two narratives, there is a sense that they have each worked to shift medial structures in order to approximate the empowerment and magic of oratory, emphasizing an analogous form of active listening that befits each medium.

Oratory in Patricia Grace's *Dogside Story*

In *Dogside Story*, Patricia Grace implicitly theorizes a system of communication loosely based on principles of Māori oratory or *whaikōrero* and centered spiritually and ethically on the rafters of the *wharehau* (meeting house), which constitute a literal frame around the performance of *whaikōrero* and which metaphorically gather together and record the voices, thoughts, emotions, gestures, and actions of all members of the *whānau*. While *whaikōrero* in its most traditional form is absent in this novel set at the turn into the 21st century in the fictional Māori village of Dogside, formal aspects and protocols of *whaikōrero* inflect all forms of communication and relation among Dogsideers, particularly the *hui* or *hui whakatika*, a term used for gatherings or meetings in which social issues are discussed and deliberated. Within Grace's communication system, as it is imbedded within the medial space of the novel and guided by its playful supernatural narrator, all voices are heard, registered, and deliberated. Grace's novel demonstrates that such a system has the potential for successful resolution of internal issues within the village and it also works as a strategy for solidarity in the broader global context and that the novel itself acts as a medial frame for *whaikōrero* and *hui*. Thus, Grace's representation of the practice of oratory within Dogside shows it to be a malleable tradition whose general precepts are learned and adapted in order that they inhabit more than the most formal speechmaking occasions; the rules that govern oratorical performance, which defend traditional

Māori values, find their way into various medial spaces, including informal hui and the novel's own metafictional narrative gestures toward its audience.

In its representation of oratory, Grace's novel resonates with one paradigm for indigenous novels, as elaborated Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) as it appropriates, reshapes, and repurposes the medium of the novel as a contemporary space in and through which to perform indigenous rituals. In the titular "ceremony" of Silko's novel is the ritual by which the narrator tells Thought-Woman's stories, which act as a "cure" to the evils that afflict the Laguna Pueblo people of the novel and the narrator also suggests that the rituals gain prominence and increase their aura as they move into other medial spaces: "And in the belly of this story the rituals and the ceremony are still growing" (2). Like Silko, Grace repurposes the novel as a medium that performs indigenous forms in altered contexts—hui and whaikōrero within the Māori context—both loosening the traditional structures in the space of the novel and stretching the form of the novel to bring forth the communal ethics associated with the indigenous rituals.

For Grace, in the storyworld of *Dogside Story*, the medium of oratory is a basis from which other media are extensions that draw from it an implicit communal ethic and a corresponding genealogical responsibility to carefully discover, consider, carry, and convey the concerns and stories of all the people in the whānau, including ancestors. Poia Rewi, who has done extensive interviews with Māori elders and research on whaikōrero, reports that an integral component of whaikōrero "is the connection between the speaker and the sacredness of the spiritual world, so that the orator in effect becomes the means of communication for all those who are present on that occasion" (18). Like the narrator of *Dogside Story*, the role of the whaikōrero (speaker) described in Rewi's work is not to be thought of as an individual voice, but as a representative of a community. The idea of a community of voices expressed by one person

is borne out further in the polyvocality of Rewi's own work as a collection of voices from across Aotearoa, the importance of which he illustrates using a metaphor suggested to him by an elder:

Hohepa Kereopa, an expert on Māori medicine, once provided a hint on procuring leaves for the preparation of medicine. It is preferable, he said, to refrain from gathering the leaves off one single tree or plant. The inadvertent effect of gathering leaves from one tree, he went on, means that the person who has gathered the leaves has empowered that one tree to be the sole healer. Because Māori believe that trees have a living form, similar to that of people, this gives that one tree, or plant, exceptional mana, that is, it raises the status and authority of that tree which may then become the target of jealousy and envy. This then gives root to animosity. What Hohepa proposes is that the leaves from different trees are gathered so that many trees, as opposed to one, will then have the power to heal, thereby minimising the likelihood of one tree becoming superior to others. This ensures that the mana is shared. (5)

Like the healing leaves in Kereopa's metaphor and the collection of ideas in Rewi's book, Grace's narrator draws stories from a diverse selection of people in the community without prejudice, not only avoiding the animosity of any members, but also opening up avenues for healing the relational and emotional wounds that her characters all carry. Indeed, by way of the representations of hui in *Dogside Story*, Grace suggests that the "leaves" of the novel itself have a responsibility to carry forward the voices and concerns of the complete whānau, accurately and sympathetically.

The hui space that Grace taps into by way of her novel is one that commentators have identified as a traditional forum that allows for productive and equitable dialogue within and among Māori communities. Holly Walker points to the communal ethics of the hui within Maori contexts: “In a hui situation, decisions are reached by consensus, ensuring that everyone with a stake in the matter has participated in the decision-making process, emphasising the collective focus of the community” (222–23) and she argues that in *Dogside Story* Grace promotes an ethic of “participatory development,” which gives “a greater role to ‘non-expert’ local people by promoting community-driven initiatives in which members of local communities can work together on development project” (218). Anne Salmond explains that in addition to the formal *whaikōrero*, Māori engage in more loosely structured forms of discourse within traditional hui, which allow for a greater diversity of voices to be heard and discussed. She even points out that the informal discussion spaces are where the decision-making and political actions take place:

The second or “loose” structural type of the informal discursive speeches later in the gathering (and perhaps also the *take* [issue] section of a greeting speech), presents a rather different picture. The rules are few and relaxed, the range of options open to a speaker is almost unlimited, and a wider section of the gathering (including younger men and sometimes women) may participate. Because this system is easier to play, it carries less prestige than the elaborate speeches of greeting, but because more information can be conveyed, speakers can attempt to directly influence the opinions of their audience. Confrontation, resolution and debate: the most direct political strategies are used in this context, and matters of current importance are raised. It seems that real power in local and inter-tribal

affairs resides in this casual arena, and that most adults have access to it if they want. (63)

Salmond's description at once highlights the tension between formal oratory and these "informal discursive speeches," and implicitly suggests the profound interdependence of these two registers when she points out that the speeches of this section of the hui are "easier to play," less "elaborate," and carry "less prestige," and thus are not as closely related to establishing or acknowledging mana (power, authority, control, influence), but clearly rely on and refer to the mana of the tangata whenua (hosts) and manuhiri (guests). Therefore, while Grace's novel focuses on the informal "take" sections of the hui of Dogside, the villagers' observation (as well as certain salient non-observations) of tikanga (proper procedures) indicate that the entire space of discourse (including the novel itself) is underwritten by the traditional ethics of whaikōrero, even though the protocols have been loosened and adapted for the purposes of different media and contemporary communication.

Dogside Story presents the community-building and reinforcing functions of oratory as it narrates Rua's early encounters with the practice. Grace devotes a chapter to describing in conspicuous detail the performance features governing a semi-formal oration in a flashback scene in which Rua recalls his father Tamarua being ritualistically censured by Pop Henry for impregnating another woman while Rua's mother was dying. Because the narrative's focalization is centred on Rua's consciousness when he was quite young, the scene is narrated with a certain ingenuousness that strips away the interpretations and understandings that the more experienced villagers have about the performance. As Tamarua is dressed down for his transgression, Grace reveals the oration to be more than a simple scolding; the confrontational

hui serves a communal and cultural shaming that allows all participants and observers—including the Grace’s reader—to establish a place in relation to the community. First, Rua observes that “[h]is father was jittery and pale and looked as though he’d been drinking for a week” (63), which indicates that Tamarua understood the context for this particular gathering better than his son did. As a young child, Rua does not understand the severity of his father’s transgression, but is able to mark the change in his father’s behavior and appearance. He also notes that certain things are out of order, such as “people talking in low voices” (63) though he doesn’t know how to read them: “He remembered how quiet it was, and that no one had growled at Taku and Shania or made them get down out of Aunty Wai’s coral tree. So he’d gone to join his two same-age cousins in the tree, waiting to see what would happen” (63). Positioned in the coral tree with his cousins, Rua is physically separated from the heated oratory of the hui, but still present enough to observe and begin to recognize what is going on, without having anyone explain it to him. The reader in this early scene is likewise positioned at a remove from the hui’s action, simultaneously watching Rua and watching as Rua, being socialized and initiated into the community’s oratorical mode of conveying shared values and defending the helpless—in this case Rua’s deceased mother.

The description Grace presents of Pop Henry’s angry oratory focuses almost entirely on its delivery—Pop Henry’s body language and the audience’s response—rather than the content of the message, which suggests that the performance’s emotional weight and its illocutionary force, expressing the collective frustrations and working toward healing the community’s discontents, far exceeds the straightforward message. In this scene, Grace thereby shifts the reader’s focus away from the statement made and toward what Derek Attridge argues “a literary work ‘is’: an act, an event, of reading” (59). Grace’s scene, however, is a doubly imbedded act:

the reader observes Rua observing Pop Henry's oration, which emphasizes further the scene's focus on the importance of the performance of a social gathering, as opposed to the exact text of the message, which Rua seems to have forgotten. Rua admits that "[h]e hadn't realised at first that Pop was having a go at his father" (64), but his reflection indicates that the tenor and content of Pop Henry's speech was blatant:

After a time Pop Henry had begun making noises, blowing his nose, clearing his throat and getting ready to speak—which he did on on on, stamping his feet and waving his arms about, jabbing his finger in the direction of the urupa [burial ground]. (63–64).

Rua's descriptions give a clear picture of the way Pop Henry communicates his message using nonverbal signs, foregrounding the connection of speech to the body. Gesture and physiological discomfort in this passage convey meanings, even mitigating the need for words, suggesting that the way words are voiced is as important as their content, if such a distinction can even be made. Grace brings out the way such speech performances express what is stored in the body and how it is transformed into communal and personal memory where it can be reiterated. Indeed, the only indication of what Pop Henry is actually shouting about is given as a brief indirect synopsis: "for playing around while his wife, their niece, was sick all that time, and for coming there now, today, bringing a woman who looked like a schoolgirl with a baby already more than a year old" (64). In referring to Rua's late mother Ramari as "*their* niece," Pop Henry indicates that he is speaking for more than himself, representing the collective feelings of the community, performing the sounds and motions of oratorical rituals passed down by ancestors for situations in which they are needed to restore balance. In this chapter, Grace does not directly quote any of Pop Henry's words—presumably in Māori language—which is striking, considering that he is

the only orator and apparently speaks at some length. When Pop Henry finishes, it is again his body language and the other peoples' reactions that are most communicative:

Then it was done. Pop Henry stopped and sat down on one of Wai's chairs of big flowers without even singing his song—that's how wild he was. People stopped waving at sandflies, kids stopped lugging the baby and he and his cousins had taken the opportunity to get down out of the tree. (64)

In this instance, it is actually Pop Henry's breaking of tradition—not singing after his oration—that best expresses the community's anger about Tamarua's transgression. Poia Rewi points out that “the omission of a particular component, such as declining to reply, could indicate cultural conflict between visitor and host, and be interpreted by the host or visitor as evidence that they are not being afforded due respect in such an important cultural exchange” (15) and, while Tamarua is not a visitor in the hui, the omitted gesture expresses to him that he is, in this moment, being treated with severe disrespect. It is Rua's (as well as the entire community's) recognition of Pop Henry's omission of his song that—like the exception that proves the rule—gives the statement even greater salience. This recognition is, in turn, passed on to the reader of the novel, who witnesses the event cross-sectionally along its multiple strata, seeing both the absent song and the nervously silent behavior that follows.

In addition to Pop Henry, the other key character involved in this scene that receives not a single quoted word is Tamarua, whose actual silence conveys his willing submission to the airing of upset emotions and a form of apology. Rua's focalized attention fixes on a number of details surrounding the oration, particularly his father, who is expected to take the tongue lashing as contritely as possible: “his father had sat without moving, leaning on his knees looking as though he was enduring a hangover that he'd decided was nobody's business but his own,

waiting for it to be over” (64). If the purpose of the meeting is to express disapproval, then Tamarua’s silence expresses an understanding and validation of the family’s unease, which Tamarua maintains throughout the chapter, offering no defense for his actions: “He remembered that all the eyes had been on his father to see what he would do, but his father did nothing. Eyes looked about to see if anyone else was getting up to say anything but it seemed not” (64). In this scene, Rua seems to recognize that the structures of oratory within their culture function to give voice and externalize emotions that are otherwise kept hidden below the surface; even if everybody collectively knows and understands what is being spoken, the performance of oratory opens up these emotions and allows for them to heal as a group. The effect of Grace’s focus on the scene and people’s affect rather than words is that the individual voice is replaced with a sense of collective community understanding.

The best indication of the dramatic healing effect of oratory that Grace offers in this scene is that, despite the extremity of anger in Pop Henry’s oration, once the emotion is publicly expressed to Tamarua and he is visibly contrite, his offence seems to be forgiven and the mood becomes noticeably lightened and even cheerful. Rua notes this effect when he sees his family recommencing their ordinary gathering rituals and even making fun of his father’s discomfort: “Lights went on in the house and when he went inside with his cousins, his aunties were in the kitchen slicing a cold leg, buttering bread, boiling water and laughing, ha ha, Tamarua sitting there like a kehua [ghost]” (64). The entire group shows they have moved on from their anger, especially seeing that the end result involved a birth and a forthcoming wedding, growing their family and carrying forth their values: “Everyone was laughing and slapping the bloody sandflies, shouting and having his father on, ‘Ha ha Brother, all right, when’s the wedding?’” (67). The narration of this scene shows the importance of retaining and cultivating the traditions

of oratory—despite certain transgressions and changes to the language, settings, and forms—as a process that allows for the troubled feelings to be given voice. The prevalence of the trope of healing through oratory in *Dogside Story* (not to mention throughout indigenous Pacific Literature) suggests that, more than simply representing oratorical performances, the novel provides a contemporary medium for confronting issues and healing disturbances that might otherwise be left below the surface.

The novel's first confrontation between Rua and The Sisters, Amiria and Babs, occurs during the preparations for a wedding on the marae, and it reveals that the ethics of oratory are drawn out in a dialectic with the traditional quotidian work of a community, showing that the words expressed exceed the time and place of their performance. In the novel's tightly woven structure, each confrontation is anticipated by a trail of half-expressed thoughts and Grace sets up this particular confrontation in a scene when Rua thinks about the injustice of Kid's mistreatment. Grace interlaces discontented thoughts among Rua's stream of consciousness in the latter half of chapter two:

The Sisters were probably down at the pub all done up, sitting on laps, looping themselves round dart throwers come for the tournament. Someone should do something about Kid. Someone should take her away from those two. . . .

Someone should. . . . [note that this sentence is its own paragraph.]

Arch or Wai. One of them should do something. He'd heard Auntie Wai going off at The Sisters for how they treated Kid so why didn't she do something? . . .

Shouting match. Sisters had told Wai to mind her own business. 'You had your chance, you had your chance, you all did,' that smart Babs had said, chop chopping beans and nearly sending her fingers along with them. (17–18)

By repeating parts of the sentence “someone should do something,” Grace keeps the thread about Kid just below the surface of the Rua’s consciousness and the novel’s action, bobbing up here and there until it gets a chance to be more fully expressed. Rua would prefer to avoid the issue, as he seems to push it aside in favor of his more pressing concerns—in this case pretending to sleep and getting to the pub, and getting drunk with his friends—and to try to pass the responsibility onto “someone” other than himself, even though he knows—though the reader does not—that Kid is his daughter.

Rua’s solitary monologue performance is far from oratory, but he seems unwittingly to seed and disrupt the discursive space of the community with his expression of injustice, hoping that village elders Uncle Arch and Auntie Wai will represent him in the more formal arenas. Grace represents the community’s discursive space within the novel as the metaphorical rafters of the wharehui that pick up such emotional investments and store them in the central physical hui and oratory space, where ethical discussions are made. Grace thereby suggests a parallel between the novel and the hui in their abilities—and, more importantly, their responsibilities—to collect and represent ethically and accurately the voices and thoughts of all the community members. Conversely, the community is drawn into the communal ethic by way of both the novel and the hui. The refrain recurs in a scene in which Rua attempts to agitate for Kiri’s removal from The Sisters’ care with a number of the village elders, saying “Someone’s got to. . .” (99) and “If Wai wouldn’t have Kid maybe Arch would, or there’d be someone else, because someone had to” (101). The difficult task of speaking for and defending an at risk child brings out Rua’s—and everyone’s—feelings of inadequacy and (real and metaphorical) disability, and spurs instincts to defer or pass on the issue, which, like Rua’s repeated refrain, does not go away on its own once realized and spoken. Paradoxically, Rua’s avoidance of the

tenacious issue by doing and thinking other things serves only to draw out these thoughts and ideas toward their inevitable conflict that he knows he will play an important part in.

In this section, Grace further demonstrates how the afflictive emotions of the people become drawn out and expressed nonverbally in the work they perform and deposited into the fruits of their labours, ultimately becoming part of the community's psychic fabric. Within Rua's flashback, Babs is also at work "chop chopping beans," which, like Rua's attempts at avoidance seems to draw the necessary conversation out. In the case of Babs's "chop chopping," the feelings drawn out in the talk also seem to be expressed into her work, as the passage suggests that she is distracted to the point of nearly injuring herself. Moreover, like much of the novel, the section is narrated with colloquial language such as "chop chopping," "toot toot," and "bloody late," matching the quoted voices of the characters, a leveling of registers; that is, the narrator's discourse carries no more tonal hierarchical weight than the characters' own voices, which is often not the case in the novel. Grace portrays the nested discursive spaces with work, talk, and feelings, which each leave an expressive imprint on one another and tend to bring out problems to be enunciated in gradually more public and formal spaces, suggesting that the oratory of the hui (as well, perhaps, as the novel) carries the important function of externalizing the felt problems of the variously abled people of the community, particularly a powerless child such as Kid.

In contrast to the closely focalized narrative of Rua's stream of consciousness, the confrontation between Rua and The Sisters has a more distantly focalized narrative that is punctuated with metacommentary, indicating that the larger community's involvement as a group of interpreters—including those members who do not voice an audible or official response—is a crucial aspect of Rua's oratorical confrontation in defense of Kid. When The

Sisters tell Te Rua that Kid is to go home and do some cleaning, he responds by saying, “She’s having a feed first” (30). In the paragraph that follows, Grace’s narrator metafictionally dissects Te Rua’s statement and its reception by the people present in the kitchen, explaining, “It was the first two words of Rua’s sentence that caught people by the ears—‘She’s having.’ Not asking, just telling. This was pretty sharp coming out of Rua who they knew must be wild about something” (30). In this passage, the narrator clearly speaks at a distance from Rua, which is indicated by the comments about the technical grammatical purpose of Rua’s own sentence and by the clear shift to a different consciousness marked by “who they knew.” The initially unclear referent of “they” is somewhat explained as the paragraph proceeds to give the subtle (and unsubtle) actions of the various characters present in the kitchen that indicate they are now intently watching and listening to this conversation:

Teria, who had peeled twenty-four onions and was crying and chopping them, stopped what she was doing, washed her hands in a bowl, damped down a cloth and began dabbing her eyes so she could better see what was going to happen here. Brig and Moana let up on the noise they were making counting out bowls for the salads, and Awhina cutting rewena, stopped being so vigorous about pulling and pushing the knife. Mereana paused in her tin buttering, rolled her sleeves and waited. Pita and Joyleen who had been asked to bring in a form for people to sit on came in carrying it between them. They put it down and sat. (30–31)

None of these named characters is otherwise individually significant anywhere in the novel, but in this unusual scene the narrative attention is shifted away from Rua to the many observers and eavesdroppers whose own attentions are turned from their work toward the speech. Indeed, even

outside the food preparation tent, Grace indicates that “The men at the fires also heard what was going on, lifted their eyebrows at each other and let their ears hang open” (31). Grace’s extensive description of the various audiences suggests that a function of Rua’s confrontation, intentional or not, is to interrupt the quotidian rhythms of the villagers and awaken them to the problem at hand, conscripting them to deliberate it with him. When Wai joins the fray, it is less ambiguous whether the audience is intended, as she reveals her evident strategy, reflecting that she “was glad young Rua was standing up to The Sisters. There was something she wanted to say to them too and she might as well say it in front of everybody as soon as she got a chance” (31). The work itself is an important part of this performance because it acts as a spurious excuse for avoiding the issue. Though affected, the work continues throughout the talk, carrying the emotional effects of the active confrontation.

Grace further makes it clear that this first confrontation leaves a trace on the products of the work, suggesting that, though certain issues may be left unresolved, their feelings are bound to emerge through the continuing day to day interactions of a relatively closed community. As the argument comes to an end, the work continues, but the desserts that The Sisters were working on are imbued with the feelings they felt while making them: “Babs and Amiria in their rosy aprons, their Starboks, their high-up hair came out with the foiled tins, *the angry puddings*, and stacked them in the last of the baskets” (33, emphasis added). While the discussion may have been abandoned, the narrator leaves a subtle suggestion that the “angry puddings” that are circulating among the villagers at the wedding carry an imprint of The Sisters’ discontent that is transmitted, expressed, or felt when the puddings are shared and eaten. The work that occurs alongside the confrontation, Grace suggests, is a crucial part of the performance as it both shapes the eventual hui narration and provides an additional space for registering its effects.

In the final chapter of *Dogside Story*, Grace indicates most saliently the idea that the novel as a whole adopts aspects of the structure of *whaikōrero* by expressing the need for a song to end it. This final chapter, which begins right after the intense *hui* in which a secret history of abuse is revealed, begins with the narrator's injunction for closure, which is repeated throughout the short chapter: "It's time for the song" (299). By suggesting that the novel (which itself contains representations of oratory) is itself to be imagined as an oration, Grace demonstrates the fractal self-similarity of the ethics of *whaikōrero*, which spiral inwards and outwards throughout expressions among the people of Māori communities across time, space, and medium. Paradoxically, *Dogside Story's* final call for a song is at once a gesture of closure and continuity; it puts an end to the characters' conflicts and misunderstood feelings regarding property and custody while it claims the space of the novel as functionally continuous with the traditional Māori orations.

Spending an entire chapter on the process of calling for "the song" (or *waiata*), the narrator markedly associates the novel's structure to the traditions of *whaikōrero*, and particularly to its function of ethical community discourse. Rewi describes the importance of having a song to follow an oration as involving both building on the speech through thematic references in the song and allowing greater participation of the larger group:

In addition to enhancing the oration, occasions that incorporate a song of some kind help ensure the continued transmission of knowledge and historical events contained within those compositions—compositions not specifically composed to support speeches. In addition, the song allows participation by the group. Because members of the supporting group are represented by the speaker and do not get to

speak as individuals, performing a supporting song affords them the opportunity to express the way they feel about the structure of the whaikōrero occasion. They can share in the joy, anger or poignancy of the event through their vocal and physical participation. (151–52)

As this particular hui that Grace represents involves the protection of a child and the unfair allocation of property, its ultimate goal (which becomes coterminous with the novel itself) is whakatika or “to make right” the disturbances and abuses to the community, and the ensemble singing of a song performs the collective expression of grief—for the revealed years of suffering—and relief—about the situation’s resolution. While the oratory itself had already integrated the thoughts and investments of the people, the narrator explains that some of the key speakers from the hui are emotionally exhausted from acting as the bearers of those feelings and should not take the lead in song, reserving that role for another: “It won’t be Arch or Wai or Tini to begin. They’re still recovering from their deliveries, from the hard words said, from the revelations made. They’re relieved it’s done and are free now to remember their deaths. They need time” (299–300). The performance of the song allows someone else to take the lead and the rest of the community to sing or play along, making everyone present a necessary part of the resolution. While the heated orations during the hui expressed searing criticisms and tended to isolate a certain person or group—in this case the Sisters Amiria and Babs as well as their late mother Sadie—the song functions to recall, re-enact, and reinforce the profound interdependence of the community. The healing powers of the song extend even to the wharenuī itself, where the hui takes place, where the people have tūrangawaewae (a place to stand and speak), around which the community is centered, and from which the narrator of *Dogside Story* draws stories: “It will continue until there has been enough time, and when that time has come, people will

leave at intervals and in twos and threes so that exit is not too sudden, so that the house is not left too suddenly alone” (301). The reader is, in turn, invited to inhabit the novels’ story space and the imaginary space of oratory it opens into, for as long as she deems “enough.”

Although the hui whakatika and its orations are not the formal, Grace demonstrates, through extensive deliberations in the final chapter as to who will (and will not) lead the song, that the community has its own protocols and measures in place and that these protocols lead to a rich and polyvocal community. Throughout the chapter there is a sense that there is a proper sequence and hierarchy to be adhered to in order for the song’s performance to have its desired effects. When the narrator relates Rua’s thoughts, for example, it is clear that he understands the performance rules governing the general sequence of events and the consequences for breaking them: “He’d like to be gone but the time hasn’t arrived yet when he can get up and leave, go and find his daughter. He has to see it through to a first song, then to a coming down through more talk, more songs, until it’s time” (300). Expressing a vague sense of an understood “time” at which it becomes appropriate for guests to leave, Grace shows that certain aspects of the hui are negotiated nonverbally out of a sense of when the guests are at ease in their feeling of belonging within the group. Although they can be gestured toward, such negotiations are generally impossible within the medium of the novel because the text is always printed and completed a priori to the moment of reading, but Grace points to the possibility that even a novel can be thought of as limitless and negotiated when the narrator in an earlier chapter describes how information about an incident continues to trickle in over time: “Every scrap and tatter contributed and became part of a mass that sprouted whole in the end. (But what does ‘end’ mean where there is forever the potential to add or embellish and when rafters are such inclusionists?)” (239). Like the rafters, the novel brings readers, who bring various knowledges

and understandings, to a single story about oratory whose aura continues to expand as the story continues to be read, re-read, and written about. Grace ends the novel with a reference to the rafters (heke), suggesting that the songs that bring to a close the hui and the novel continue to fill the rafters with rich stories: “The patterns on the heke-of-many-colours, of which visitors from Northside have whispered that they thought they’d come to Disneyland, swirl and spin” (301). The narrator reframes and celebrates the purported garishness of their wharenuī rafters as an ethic of openness to the flow of diverse voices.

While she does gesture toward the need for a song, the song itself is not represented in this chapter, clearly indicating that the medium of the novel is not an adequate space in which such a song can be performed and that even though the novel makes contributions to the continuance of the medium of oratory, it can never replace it entirely. Grace’s point is not to represent oratory in its most traditional form, but to establish a context in which the reader witnesses the mana that is established in oratory returning to the people of Māori communities. Part of this process, she suggests can be begun in nontraditional spaces like the novel that may play a supporting role in the community’s collective expressions. The narration in the chapter consists largely of short repeated questions—“It’s time for the song. But who will begin it? What will it be?” (299)—and abstract statements (both positive and negative) in future tense, giving the sense that the narrator understands the general rules governing the occasion for what will most likely happen and not happen, but does not state in detail what actually happens, who sings, or what is sung: “It’ll have to be Atawhai, who is old enough to understand the extent of bruising, experienced enough to read the faces and know the right moment and the right song” (300). In predicting what song will be sung, the narrator is even more tentative, employing the modal “could,” giving only the possibility that the suggested outcome will come to be: “The first

could be a love song to warm the spirit, followed by songs that will rouse it. After a time it won't matter who begins the songs as one picks up from the one before" (301). While she suggests a possible sequence, the narrator immediately undermines the importance of a precise chronology, pointing to the songs' self-perpetuating property. Grace gestures toward a conception of narrative in the novel for which, like the song and the hui she represents, "one picks up from the one before": reading (which leads to more engaged and empathetic reading, listening, seeing, and acting) reinforces the continuation of community through an ethical openness to all its members.

Cinematic Narration of Oratory in Tusi Tamasese's *The Orator*

In turning toward the cinematic narration in Tusi Tamasese's *The Orator*⁶, we enter the medial space of cinema in the context of the Pacific, a space filled with the sounds and images of a century of representations of Pacific Islanders. Moreover, in telling a story professionally through the medium of film and then having it screened on a world circuit requires a tremendous supporting apparatus, including a great diversity of labour and a great deal of money, particularly in comparison to the supports required of publishing a book. This process is even more difficult for an indigenous person who is intent on telling an indigenous story because the forms and values of the stories do not always align with the formulas that have been proven to generate revenues in major markets and, as a result, indigenous film represents a very small percentage of the movies that get made and distributed, with Pacific indigenous films representing only a portion of that number.

I argue that with his film *The Orator* Tamasese represents the Samoan practice of oratory to respond to and repurpose the discourse of cinematic tourism, which is built on an often

⁶ The Samoan title of the film is *O Le Tulafale*.

unconscious privilege of the observer/object hierarchy and a structured ignorance coded into the cinematic experience. To some extent, any story told from “inside” the Pacific critiques and possibly revises (“writes back to”) the dominant “outsider” narratives. However, in being touted as the first authentic inside representation of Sāmoa in the form of a feature film, *The Orator* bears a particularly heavy set of expectations. Centered on oratory, moreover, *The Orator* is Tamasese’s meditation on the ethics of the emergent practice of Pacific filmmaking, as it relates to the much older tradition of oratory, especially in their concomitant goals of strengthening cultural bonds among community members, healing emotional wounds, and achieving a balanced and ethical representation of a community. Like Grace does in *Dogside Story*, Tamasese forwards the viability for the tradition of oratory to be represented, refracted, and ultimately supported by a newer medium, whose traditions and forms are still being worked out, particularly in the context of the indigenous Pacific.

The obsession with the Pacific in Hollywood (also “Haole-wood”[ix], according to Rob Wilson) is significant and unshakeable, beginning with Frances and Robert Flaherty’s silent “documentary” *Moana* (1926) and still showing signs of life ninety years later with the release of *Aloha* (2015) and the Disney animated film *Moana* (2016). While much has changed since the Flahertys remade Sāmoa into the idyllic world he imagined it to be, cinematic representations of Pacific Islanders continue to confine their lives to the stereotypical expectations of the dominant moviegoing audiences. As Jeffrey Geiger points out, echoing Albert Wendt’s phrase about western literature from the introduction to *Nuanua*, western cinema has created (and continues in its re-creation of) a “whole mythology” (7) about the Pacific and its peoples and cultures that maintains a stifling matrix of expectations in the western imagination, which, Wendt explains, is “more revealing of papalagi fantasies and hang-ups, dreams and nightmares, prejudices and ways

of viewing our crippled cosmos, than of our actual islands” (58). When *Nuanua* was published in 1990, Wendt pointed out that two or more generations of Pacific artists had been reclaiming the medium of Pacific literature and Steven Winduo later referred to the ongoing process of “Unwriting Oceania” (2000), but it is also clear that Pacific filmmakers have for some time taken inspiration from their literary counterparts and built the foundations for a growing space of indigenous cinematic expression.

Indigenous Pacific Islanders have been involved in every part of the filmmaking process for some decades,⁷ creating an extensive corpus of films that represent the diverse parts of the Pacific at least partially from the perspective of the people whose ancestors inhabited the region, but the question of who serves as the primary audience for the films and how they relate to colonial structure of tourism is ever present. Surveying indigenous films of the Pacific, Houston Wood points out that some of the more recent Pacific films have abandoned an emphasis on the differences in Pacific cultures, instead making “films that fit within the recognized genres of commercial cinema” (177), suggesting that the market dictates that indigenous Pacific films are always caught between making a popular film for a global audience—that may involve fitting a Pacific story into a western framework—and an obscure local film that makes no concessions to an international viewership. While the binary that Wood suggests is perhaps overstated, as institutions such as the New Zealand Film Commission have a long history of supporting indigenous peoples’ efforts, the expense of making a high quality film for the global market is

⁷ Celebrated directors include Barry Barclay, Hinemoana Grace, Henri Hiro, Albert Toro, Lee Tamahori, Toa Fraser, Merata Mita, Vilsoni Hereniko, Taika Waititi, Tearepa Kahi, Michael Bennett, Tusi Tamasese, and Sima Urale.

undeniably immense and out of reach for many artists and, in any case, financial considerations are not possible to eschew for any filmmaker.

Another angle that has been pursued by filmmakers, particularly successfully in New Zealand, is to pitch a film as a means of drawing tourists to its locations and to solicit funds from tourism development organizations. Alfio Leotta explores the history of deep (even mutually constitutive) relationships between tourism and filmmaking in New Zealand, concluding that the two main forces underwriting the connection are, first, that the persistent colonial power imbalance dictates that European aesthetic standards remain at the centre and the “New Zealand landscape was framed by the canons of the sublime and picturesque that in turn fed the tourism industry of the time” (199) and, second, that the limited domestic economic market requires that cultural products be designed for a global market: “The subsistence of New Zealanders relies on the selling of their country, so that Aotearoa is first and foremost a tourist destination before being home or *whenua*” (199). Leotta’s points are particularly relevant to films such as *Whale Rider* (2002),⁸ which, Leotta demonstrates, was not immune to the draw of tourist dollars: “Even though the film-makers’ attitude was characterised by a genuine desire to hear the Other, dedicating attention to authenticity and respecting the sensitivity of the community, the film was explicitly packaged for the global market” (133). This tendency to present an idealized image of Aotearoa for the purpose of attracting tourists is moreover lampooned in the opening shot of the

⁸ Niki Caro, director and screenwriter of *Whale Rider*, is not an indigenous person, but the film has in many places been referred to as an “indigenous film,” since it is an adaptation of a Māori novel, Witi Ihimaera’s *The Whale Rider*, features a largely Māori cast, and deals closely with the issues of a Māori whanau. Nevertheless, the film’s status has been questioned and the film has also been heavily critiqued by prominent Māori scholars for its market concessions and diversion from Ihimaera’s novel. See, for instance, Barclay 2003 and Hokowhitu 2007.

movie *Once Were Warriors* (1994), when a pristine natural landscape shot is revealed, upon zooming out, to be the image on a billboard in a scummy urban neighborhood.

It is with this contextual backdrop of Pacific filmmaking that Tamasese's film frames the Samoan tradition of oratory for both Samoan and international audiences, which involves medial conflicts both in the cinematic representation of oratory and regarding the movie's positioning on a world stage. After his short *Va Tapuia - Sacred Spaces* (2009) and preceding his feature *One Thousand Ropes* (2016), Tamasese's *The Orator* is a movie that pays close attention to the relationships among the various speakers and listeners in the village, which are rooted in Samoan traditional hierarchy and reinforced by the practice of oratory. I argue in this section that Tamasese's movie shows that structuring discourses that make people feel small, outside, and insignificant can be reconnected with the communal ethics that demand that the voices of all people be responsibly recognized and represented. By framing Samoan oratory within his movie, Tamasese attempts to bring the spirit of oratory into the process of filmic storytelling, in its story, discourse, and even in the movie's own global positioning within the film industry. Like Sa'ili, the protagonist of *The Orator*, Tamasese makes a claim to his right to the cinematic representation of Sāmoa and its people and cultures—a claim that he is ambivalent about, but one that is symbolically as important as a claim to a body or land.

On its face, and especially in its diegetic space, there is very little in *The Orator* that gestures towards a foreign audience: it is entirely in Samoan language (with subtitles), very little about cultural practices are explained, the vast majority of the scenes represent quotidian life in rural Sāmoa, and most of the characters occupy ordinary roles within their community. However the movie was positioned in its production and release to bring a sense of Sāmoa to an international audience: it premiered at the Venice International Film Festival, it was New

Zealand's first ever entry for the category of Best Foreign Language Film at the 84th Academy Awards, and it has been referred to as the first film to represent the Samoan cultural and geographic region in Samoan language, by Samoan people. Myra McFarland-Tautau and Galumalemana Afeleti Hunkin refer the film's "central goal" as given by its position as "the first major feature film in the Samoan language to be shown in international cinemas," which "places the film squarely on a pioneering platform" (446). Indeed, most of the commentators on *The Orator* emphasize the movie's "first-ness" in a prominent way. During the press release for the film's opening at the Venice International Film Festival, the moderator opens by directly referring to the film's contextual position:

I would like to begin with Tusi with a very obvious question. This is the first feature film made in the islands of Samoa and we are all quite curious about this place and the way cinema came to this place, the way you actually managed to pull this first feature from your country. ("68th Venice Film Festival")

The film was thus framed a priori by the international film festival audience's obvious curiosity about a "new" place from which cinema is "pulled." Teresia Teaiwa and Emiliter Kihleng open their review with somewhat less personal commitment by noting that "*The Orator/O Le Tulafale has been touted* as the first full-length feature film to be written and directed by a Samoan and filmed in Sāmoa and in the Samoan language" (434, emphasis added), suggesting that the movie's "firstness" is to some extent produced for promotional purposes. Anita Purcell Sjölund, whose MA thesis closely examines the reception of the movie, points out that most of the reviews from outside Sāmoa praise the movie because it places "Samoan culture within Western cultural and social contexts" (3); that is, the movie's contextual positioning makes it such that most viewers and commentators will see the sounds and images as an exotic and foreign

experience. Tamasese himself admits that the weight of being the first is an unwanted burden, saying, “Actually, I don't really want that title—the first—because it comes with a lot of expectation. But I am very honoured to have it” (qtd. in Calder). Though the official media seems to have backed away from such language—the movie’s official website makes no mention of its being first or “pioneering”—ultimately the aura of a place that has purportedly never told its own story on film is particularly tenacious, situating the cinematic narrative within a figurative touristic frame and imposing a significant viewer/object hierarchy, which would certainly conflict with the structures of oratory.

In addition to its culturally determined situation as an authentic film from an exotic place, *The Orator* is also economically positioned within Samoa tourist economy by its funding structure that highlights its built-in demands and potentials. For instance, as the Samoan government funded ten percent of the film’s \$2.3M budget, the Deputy Prime Minister and Tourist Minister Misa Telefoni very forthrightly points out that the government expects to recoup at least that amount in tourist dollars:

The projection of Samoa as a destination wearing my Minister of Tourism hat is very very significant. The fact is all those people will be looking at this story in Samoa in the Samoan language and it will create a lot of interest. (“First ever Samoan film”)

Although the tourist minister does not mention any restrictions that were imposed on the movie, such funds—as well as the remainder of the movie’s budget, which came from the New Zealand Film Commission—would not have been granted to any film concept, and can easily be seen as part of the narrative’s partatextual structuring elements. Moreover, Tamasese confirms his

understanding the movie's place in introducing outsiders to the culture and land of Sāmoa in an interview:

It's a bit like a tour. You get thrown into this place and you are seeing things. I know it's a fine line between creating confusion and curiosity but I wanted that feel. I didn't want to explain things. I wanted people to just try and appreciate.
(Calder)

However, Tamasese's explanation is not very much like a tour in any conventional sense and certain aspects of *The Orator* are likely very confusing for many foreign viewers who do not understand Samoan customs. While the movie was distributed to the world (and is now available on several online streaming services), it was created with a Samoan front-row audience in mind, and Purcell-Sjölund points out, after reviewing many social media responses, that it was “a cultural product that resonated and encouraged similar memories [of the Fa‘a Sāmoa or Samoan way of life]” (58). Like visitors at a ceremony, outsider audiences of the movie are welcomed, but it is made clear that the movie is not primarily *for* them. Instead, the movie seeks to overcome the feeling of smallness that comes from representing a small Pacific island and claim its right to tell its own story in its own way.

The conflict in Sa‘ili's process in becoming the movie's titular tulāfale involves the hierarchically structured customs of traditional Samoan oratory. The chiefly matai system insures that only titled men may deliver lāuga or formal orations and Sa‘ili does not successfully claim his title until near the end of the movie. The exclusive structures of Samoan oratory are many and complex, in terms of its hierarchy, its stylized ceremonial verbal forms, and its physical performance rituals and the movie successfully captures the psychological weight that Sa‘ili carries as he considers the expectations on him to claim his title against his own fears and the

violent atmosphere he experiences in his society. The reason Sa‘ili does not claim his title is that he does not see himself embodying the image of a chief as a dwarf in a society that values strength, which often appears in the form of physical size and stature. Sa‘ili is objectively small, but he renders himself even smaller or even invisible, often hiding himself in tall taro plants or sitting outside of council meetings, generally avoiding contact whenever possible. It is fair to say that a large part of Sa‘ili’s outsider or outcast status within the village is self-imposed.



Figure 1 - Sa‘ili hides in taro plants

Though Sa‘ili is generally afraid of confrontation, other characters in the movie are less hesitant about the possibility of his abilities and more interested in the maintenance of community’s ethical protection of justice for all its members. In one scene he asks Va‘aiga, “Who am I? Tagaloa would never consider making me a chief.” She replies, “Why not? God gave you a mouth and a heart. That’s all you need to be a chief.” Va‘aiga’s statement metonymically strips down chiefly oratory to its essence—expression, ethics, love, and courage—in a scene in which she herself is noticeably unclothed and in which Sa‘ili is in a place

where he is not supposed to be—the women’s bathing pool. The formal structures, rules, and appearances, she suggests, are in place to enable core values to be expressed. A later scene clearly doubles Sa’ili and Va’aiga’s exchange at the pool, when Sa’ili first goes to Tagaloa asking for a title. Tagaloa explains:

Do you know why a woman avoids being an orator? She’s afraid to show her breasts in public. It’s no different for you. A chief must reveal his soul and weaknesses without fear or shame so that he can speak and ask for anything. The question is do you have any balls? Do you have the balls to be a chief?

When Sa’ili says that he does, Tagaloa tells him to show him, then stands up, turning out toward the village, and drops his own lavalava. After standing there for a while, he says, “A chiefly title is not for decoration. I’m not wasting a title on any stinky pig who just wanders in asking for one.” In addition to a mouth and a heart, Tagaloa asserts that an orator needs another two anatomical metonyms in order speak publicly. Tagaloa is telling Sa’ili roughly the same thing that his wife told him at the pool: strip off the decorations and claim your place as an orator. A state of confident nakedness, Tagaloa suggests, is a powerful position to speak from. However, Tagaloa’s point about the possibility of female orators reproduces the power of the Samoan patriarchy and indeed reinforces the degree of inequality that Sa’ili faces as a dwarf in his village, which he must overcome in order to be an orator.



Figure 2 - Tagaloa drops his lavalava to teach Sa'ili a lesson



Figure 3 - Va'aiga exhorts Sa'ili from the women's bathing pool

Considering these two “oratory lesson” scenes in relation to the larger cinematic context, I suggest that Tamasese’s film equally lays bare the anatomy of life and oratory in a Samoan cultural context, “revealing its soul and weaknesses without shame.” Tamasese calls upon the

viewer—whether insider or outsider—to respond with compassion and understanding. As a film that of necessity speaks to multiple audiences simultaneously, the idea of nakedness attains different levels of suggestions for each viewer: while the Samoan audience will likely empathize more naturally with the pressures put upon men in that society, the outsider is asked to have compassion and even discomfort at the nakedness and vulnerability asked of Sa‘ili.

Unfortunately for Sa‘ili, the people of his own community are not all welcoming, and the movie sets a generally unsympathetic and sometimes hostile environment for him. While his anxieties are partly self-imposed, many of Sa‘ili’s fellow villagers affirm and exacerbate them by at best ignoring him and at worst slinging insults—in fact, the first lines of dialogue refer to him by a word translated as “shit head.” In one scene that stands out for its uniqueness a young boy walking past him says “Talo [or hi] Sa‘ili” and Sa‘ili flashes a rare momentary smile. There is not one other scene in which he is addressed cordially, and the one person who does address him is smaller than him. The violence against Sa‘ili reaches a peak when he is threatened, insulted, and then hit in the head with a stone by three large men of the village, one of whom had impregnated his stepdaughter.



Figure 4 - Rare moment of cordiality for Sa'ili

Although most of the townspeople tower over Sa'ili, Tamasese's cinematography in *The Orator* refuses to put the viewer in a position to look down upon his small-statured protagonist—either literally or figuratively. Tamasese tends towards medium and close up shots with a stationary camera. While the camera is often at eye level, it is repeatedly positioned at Sa'ili's eye level, the result of which is that other actors' heads and upper bodies are out of the shot. Some of these are POV shots, with Sa'ili's view of other people that clearly tower over him. In such a situation, however, one might expect a lot of low angle shots with Sa'ili looking up, but there is only one such shot in the movie and it happens when he's about to be beaten and stoned. When Tamasese represents Sa'ili's POV shots, it seems that he is looking straight ahead, certainly not making eye contact, which matches his posture in most of the reverse shots. In this case the viewer is given a sense of the smallness Sa'ili experiences and performs.



Figure 5 - Shots from Sa'ili's POV

In addition to the shots from Sa'ili's point of view, many of the low camera shots of legs and sometimes torsos (without heads) are shots that frame Sa'ili next to someone, putting the viewer at Sa'ili's eye-level. *The Orator* does not ever let the viewer look down upon Sa'ili, which is literally and figuratively how he is treated by many of the people of his village. Given

the power structures built into the world cinema experience—people paying to be shown representations of others possibly far from them—it is easy to imagine the viewer seeing a Samoan village as a tourist would: poor, primitive, backwards. However, Tamasese refuses that perspective of Sa‘ili or of Sāmoa. Indeed, even some scenes in which Sa‘ili is not present are shot at his eye level, still representing lower bodies. Tamasese’s cinematic narration makes it clear that the viewer is not in a typical touristic position of power, but must go through a process of transition as Sa‘ili does.



Figure 6 - Medium shot of Sa‘ili, cutting out other character

After Sa‘ili receives his title of Leopa‘ō, which literally means “voice with a bang,” there is a marked shift in the cinematography. With about twenty minutes running time remaining in the movie, Sa‘ili is given his title in an ‘ava ceremony, which includes the very last of the “lower body shots” of the film. In one particularly moving shot, Sa‘ili emerges from the bedroom of his fale where earlier his wife had died. In this shot, he is dressed formally in a white button-up shirt and a formal black lavalava, and he is carrying a fue (or fly whisk) and a to‘oto‘o (staff), which

are the formal emblems of a chiefly orator. Moreover, the close framing that has become the norm within the film's cinematic narrative, especially in the scenes shot inside this fale, are replaced by a full shot that goes from floor to ceiling. Compared to the earlier shots of this same room, this is by far the widest shot within their fale—possibly the widest shot possible in that space. Along with Sa'ili's own expanded self-image and his authority official position as a tulāfale within his community, the viewer is now given a revised and expanded view of the particular place that Sa'ili speaks from.



Figure 7 - Sa'ili's home, floor to ceiling shot

Once Sa'ili arrives at Va'aiga's village and stands in the yard in his chiefly attire with Litia at his side, a large man approaches him to ask him who he is and kneels down before him to talk to him. Again, compared to many of the previous shots, this one includes someone that physically comes down to Sa'ili's level—similar to how the camera often does—to grant him the respect he deserves as a titled man and orator. Sa'ili still receives insults from offscreen, but in this scene he is no longer afraid or ashamed. It is particularly remarkable how long this shot lasts

with relatively little dialogue or movement. Tamasese makes the viewer wait as Sa‘ili patiently absorbs the jeers until the funeral fono finally acknowledges him.



Figure 8 - Sa‘ili as *Leopa’ō* with crouched man

As maintaining balance in the *vā tapuia*—that is, the sacred space that relates the various people, groups, and things of the world—is a crucial function of Samoan oratory (as well as a key theme of *The Orator*), Tamasese’s portrayal of traditional Samoan practices also opens up a discussion of the analogous cultural imbalance between the viewer and the filmmakers. A key moment in *The Orator*—in terms of establishing its theme, aesthetics, and plot—occurs after Sa‘ili is injured by Sio and his friends, and the ashamed *‘āiga* of these three men sets up an *ifoga* on Sa‘ili’s front lawn seeking forgiveness for their offenses. Like the chapter in *Dogside Story* in which Pop Henry condemns Tamarua’s actions, the *ifoga* scene is a moment in the movie in which a cultural mode of public shaming and contrition is put on display for the viewer, which becomes woven into the structure of oratory. While the *ifoga* in *The Orator* is not an official part

of the formal oratory, Tamasese marks the scene as a crucial moment that informs and impels Sa‘ili in his imminent oratorical confrontation.

While *The Orator* may be the first internationally distributed Samoan language film to feature it, the ifoga is a ceremony that has received significant attention from Western missionaries and anthropologists at least since the English missionary John Stair’s *Old Samoa: Or, Flotsam and Jetsam from the Pacific Ocean* (1897), suggesting that Tamasese’s inclusion of the scene is marked as a moment when the audience will encounter something particularly foreign. Margaret Mead’s study *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928)—the most popular anthropological book of its time—describes an ifoga that occurs after a case of adultery as a “ceremonial humiliation before some one whose pardon is asked” (106). The ifoga is, moreover, represented in the contemporary young adult novel series *Telesā* by Samoan author Lani Wendt Young, which I take up in chapter four. Cluny and La‘avasa Macpherson point out, the ifoga is—in Sāmoa and in the diaspora—still an active social practice for settling disputes over certain traditional offenses and holds a similar symbolic gravity: “Its performance signifies acceptance by the offender’s representatives that the enormity of the act committed by one of their number is such that the aggrieved party is reasonably entitled to kill and cook the offender and/or his or her associates” (115). They explain, however, that it is in contemporary times increasingly displaced by other means of dispensing justice, such as law courts, especially in cases where calculating the severity of the grievance is complex. Nevertheless, they surmise that “the ifoga will continue to exist alongside civil and criminal actions as occurs at present and judges may take the performance of ifoga into account in sentencing decisions” (130) and Leilani Tuala-Warren tentatively concludes her study of the ifoga as a form of dispute healing that a version of the ifoga may be adopted within the New Zealand legal system (38). Tamasese’s representation of

the ifoga in the movie thus stages a ceremony that is a vital part of Samoan cultural life, one that is unfamiliar to most foreigners, and one that is likely threatened by Western cultural hegemony.

The ifoga in *The Orator* brings the plot right into its climax. Sa‘ili’s confrontation with Sio, which Sa‘ili instigated by hitting Sio with a rolled up mat earlier in the day, is one of the few times Sa‘ili visibly stands up for himself and his ‘āiga. When he is attacked late in the night, it is clearly marked as an unfair fight that the three large attackers would not have instigated during the day. Sio’s attack is thus a grievous insult to Sa‘ili’s place in the community and the ifoga is an attempt by Sio’s ‘āiga to restore balance and acknowledge the injustices of both Sio’s attack on Sa‘ili and his irresponsible impregnation of Litia. In other words, during the ifoga, Sa‘ili is in an unusual position of relative power and recognition. However, in his anger and indignation, Sa‘ili abuses his relative power, which inhibits the restoration of balance sought by the ifoga party. He refuses to forgive the ifoga for three days, leaving them out in the hot sun and even taunting the men with his machete, despite Va‘aiga’s injunction for him to forgive them. Va‘aiga dies angry with Sa‘ili while he is outside taunting the men. As Purcell Sjölund explains, the “initial [impatient] attitude of the ifoga party and the unwillingness of Saili to forgive damage the sacredness of vā. . . . It was a moment too late when Saili finally lifted the ‘ie toga off the three offenders” (36). Though the ifoga honours Sa‘ili as matai of his ‘āiga and as someone deserving of an apology, he ultimately responds to the honour without chiefly grace.

In the ifoga scene, Tamasese gives an example of an impasse in a traditional ceremony that ultimately makes Sa‘ili feel the responsibility for an orator to show forgiveness, valuing the gestures of even those who have done him wrongs in order to restore the fabric of his community. The cinematography in this scene frames the ifoga party and Sa‘ili’s family as always separated from one another by a seemingly impermeable interface represented by the

door to Sa'ili's fale. The first indication of this interface comes when Litia notices ifoga party, seeing through the cracks in a closed window covering. When the ifoga is shown on camera later, it is largely obscured by the door and the plants that mask it. The two sides appear unable to communicate with or acknowledge the one another, until Sa'ili's short-lived flippant machete taunting. While the ifoga party's relatives are often heard shouting across the interface, their shouts are wholly ignored by Sa'ili.

It is implied that Sa'ili erects and maintains this interface when Va'aiga tells him that what he's doing is "ugly and the whole village is watching," to which he replies, "I don't care. I'm not something worthless to be kicked around." As someone who has largely been structurally cast as an outsider in the community, Sa'ili is somewhat justified in not welcoming the chance to be ceremonially brought back in; however, as Va'aiga—who often seems to speak as the voice of community ethics—suggests to him, his actions interfere with the village's relations with one another and he essentially tries to make the men feel the way he feels: small. In one scene Va'aiga, who has become very sick, tells Sa'ili to leave her alone and informs her daughter "I don't want anyone in this room," increasing the separations that divide the household and the community and showing Sa'ili that she will not be a part of his actions. Furthermore, Tamasese strongly suggests that Va'aiga's death is a form of sacrifice, setting a vivid image of Jesus Christ on a wall calendar next to her deathbed and having a member of the ifoga party address Va'aiga, saying, "It was a waste if Christ was crucified and you still can't find forgiveness." Alongside the ifoga and Poto's actions, Va'aiga's death spurs Sa'ili into claiming his title and restoring the community ethic through his oration. Markedly, the first words he speaks as an orator on Poto's lawn are, "I'm ashamed of myself. I'm ashamed too, of you." In saying this, Sa'ili appears to understand and take on Va'aiga's sacrifice and the productive

shame that comes along with it, and he hopes to pass on this message, through his oratory, to an initially unreceptive audience.

In this chapter I have argued that the two works of Pacific literature are engaged in carving out spaces for oratory and shaping those spaces in such a way that they are bound by communal ethics that support all the members of the community, arguing for the judicious use of power on all sides. The clashes of rules, conventions, and affordances of oratory within each medium allow for an ongoing dialogue that considers the possibility of a representative art that carries the correlative functions of another medium. Both these narratives call for an acceptance of the responsibility of speaking and also for people to see the responsibilities of the listener. While Grace's novel ends with a song (or at least the need for one) indicating the successful resolution of the hui, Tamasese's movie ends with a very striking image of Sa'ili and Litia at the back of a public bus with Va'aiga's wrapped body laying in the aisle between them, tacitly indicating that Sa'ili's oratory has been successful. What is even more hopeful than these two resolutions is that Pacific traditions such as oratory are represented to have real consequences in the contemporary world for social justice among indigenous groups and that their stories are being told successfully in many different media and carrying much of the spirit, function, and art of older traditions like oratory without erasing or replacing them.

Chapter 3

The Sounds of Pacific Streets: Medial Conflicts in Pacific Audio Poetry

In previous chapters I consider works that recognize the medial conflicts that result when Pacific concepts of “voice” are imagined within the structure of a novel and within representations of oratory. In this chapter I shift to texts in which Pacific Islanders work alongside such conflicts by using audio recording technologies to provide the reader/listener with an aural reproduction of voices and other sounds. In connecting audio recordings to their written works, Pacific Islanders produce and examine their own medial conflicts, and they continue to revise what it means to tell a Pacific story, which extends beyond many traditional Western ideas of literature. These multimedia works enable audiences—including those with different literacies—to hear the aural components of the narratives, opening pathways for appreciation, comprehension, and engagement with elements that are not possible to produce in textual media: pronunciation, accent, music, rhythm, tone. Moreover, because the process of audio recording is almost always an explicitly and necessarily engaged collaborative one, the works take on dimensions that are radically different from the Romantic notion of a poet as a singular isolated genius, even as they grapple with ideas like the fragmentation of Pacific societies in the wake of colonialism.

Isolation is a common trope in people’s imaginations about the Pacific Islands, as they have been both exoticized for their distance from “civilization” and belittled for being insignificant with respect to certain global capitalist standards. Tongan scholar Epeli Hau‘ofa asserts that the idea of isolation and smallness is a myth that was imposed upon Pacific Islanders by colonizers who unilaterally redefined the terms of their place in the world:

Continental men, namely Europeans, on entering the Pacific after crossing huge expanses of ocean, introduced the view of “islands in a far sea.” From this perspective the islands are tiny, isolated dots in a vast ocean. Later on, continental men—Europeans and Americans—drew imaginary lines across the sea, making the colonial boundaries that confined ocean peoples to tiny spaces for the first time. (32)

For Hau‘ofa, freedom from such confinement begins with the imaginative act of lifting the imposed structures, perspectives, and expectations, acknowledging the ancestral and continuing strength of the regional Pacific community, and fostering further connections—an aim that is not at all dissimilar from that Pacific audio poets work towards in making their words heard.

In order to examine and resolve the sense of isolation (personal and geopolitical) that attends some traditions of the written media, Pacific poets have turned to audio recordings, which are collaborative performance projects that bring about different ways of engaging audiences and establishing, expanding, and maintaining mutually supportive Pacific-centred communities. Pacific audio poets make use of the characteristics of medial conflicts across the written and audio versions of the poems, suggesting a method of reading that sees Pacific works as always in productive medial conflict along multiple lines. The conflicts indicate that single media are never sufficient for communicating a complete picture, but that they carry the potential for dialogic expansion.

While Pacific Islanders have been audio recording (or recorded) since at least the early 20th century, as early colonial and anthropological archives attest, and there have also been many rich and often commercially successful traditions of Pacific Islander music recordings and radio broadcasts (some of which have been archived), the practice of audio recording and releasing

Pacific Islander poetry largely began when Hawai‘i locals Richard Hamasaki (a.k.a. red flea) and H. Doug Matsuoka, after producing red flea’s poetry album *Virtual Fleality* (1996) and developing the sound of what they called “amplified poetry,” worked on Hawaiian poet Joe Balaz’s *Electric Laulau* (1998). This was followed by i-Kiribati and Banaban poet Teresia Teaiwa and Samoan poet Sia Figiel’s *Terenesia* (2000), and Hawaiian poet Brandy Nālani McDougall and Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez’s *Undercurrent* (2011). Hamasaki then produced the album *Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki* (2013), an adaptation of Hawaiian poet Wayne Kaumualii Westlake’s poetry sequence of the same name performed by various poets from across the Pacific and around the world. Numerous Pacific audio poetry works that fall outside the sphere of Hamasaki and Matsuoka’s direct influence were also released during this time, including *Tuwhare* (2000), a musical tribute to the poems of Māori poet Hone Tuwhare performed by musicians from Aotearoa, produced by Charlotte Yates; *Kealoha* (2004), a recording of slam poetry by the Hawaiian poet Kealoha; Māori musician and poet Hinemoana Baker’s *mātuhi | needle* (2004), a poetry collection with audio CD; Teaiwa’s poetry album *I Can See Fiji* (2008), produced by Baker; Samoan and Tuvaluan poet Selina Tusitala Marsh’s *Fast Talking PI* (2009) and *Dark Sparring* (2014), both poetry collections with CDs produced by Tim Page; Māori poet Vernice Wineera’s *Into the Luminous Tide* (2009), a poetry collection with audio readings on CD; and Craig Santos Perez’s *Crosscurrent* (2017), an online digital audio poetry album. With the increasing accessibility of video recording and distribution technologies like smart phones and YouTube, and the increasing scarcity of compact disc players, it is possible that audio albums will become less common or they will migrate to online digital platforms such as iTunes, Soundcloud, and Amazon (where many of the above albums are already available), but the current archive provides a diverse snapshot of a moment at the turn of

the century of some of the region's poetic voices that chose this medium as a way of enhancing and exceeding their written texts.

As is obvious from my brief history, much of the corpus of Pacific audio poetry is in some way influenced by Richard Hamasaki and H. Doug Matsuoka's idea of "amplified poetry." Hamasaki and Matsuoka see their work as a way of breaking through the limitations of poetic discourse and returning poetry to its lost fundamental nature in "an expression in sound, an articulation of voice" (Matsuoka, "You Just Like"). In another post, Matsuoka describes some of the techniques that distinguish their art:

The recitation of poetry over music is a traditional convention, but amplified poetry uses acoustic and amplified musical instruments, electronic recording and manipulation to create something different. The voice sometimes loops back over itself to create a canonic polyphony of voice, a voice wave created by mixing in different takes, and subjecting everything to a gentle digital audio massage.

("Ever so esoteric")

The ideas, Matsuoka points out, were influenced by the Caribbean-rooted genre of dub poetry, but that their work had its own signature sounds:

Amplified poetry is a form born from the dub poetry exemplified by Lee Scratch Perry, Adrian Sherwood, Asian Dub Foundation, Linton Kwesi Johnson, the late Gil Scott-Heron, and so many others. It takes a step beyond by treating the voice and text as worthy objects of sound engineering. ("An Undercurrent")

With amplified poetry, many Pacific poets have found ways of giving new dimensions of texture and play to their written words, while contributing their own cultural forms and virtuosity to the category's repertoire.

Drawing from African-Caribbean artists, Hamasaki and Matsuoka also attach amplified poetry to the anti-colonial resistance efforts that are a central component of dub and reggae artistic movements. Hamasaki asserts that there is a political element to his formulation of amplified poetry, as it offers a challenge to the contemporary poetry and literature scene. In a poem titled “Guerrilla Writers,” he writes, “if what’s to be written / mustn’t be forgotten / transcribe oral messages / record stories and songs / unleash a conspiracy of languages / guerrilla writer / barbarize the rules” (*Spider-Bone Diaries* 57). Written mostly in the imperative mood, Hamasaki’s poem serves as a manifesto that suggests that cultures of media are a key battleground for poets (and notably minority poets), who must—like guerrillas—use all methods available to them to get their stories heard. Hamasaki’s poem clearly echoes Wayne Kaumalii Westlake’s concrete poem “Literature is in Need of Barbarization,” which also pushes at standard boundaries of the textual poetic medium, shaping text in multiple sizes, orientations, and directions into the form of a wrecking ball, whose symbolic target could just as well be Waikiki, the main tourist district in O‘ahu, which similarly functions to occlude (or at least conveniently compartmentalize) from its tourist audiences the grotesque narratives that allow it to operate. In “amplifying” the poetry of indigenous Pacific guerrilla writers such as Westlake, Hamasaki spotlights the problems they identify and presents them with a microphone to project their words of resistance.

In contrast to the amplified poetry movement, Māori poet and producer Hinemoana Baker, who has also made considerable impact on Pacific audio poetry, identifies her production work as drawing from avant-garde and experimental music and spoken word poetry traditions, but she is also immersed in the Māori music community. She cites influences that include well known experimental artists such as “John Cage, Björk, Laurie Anderson, Tom Waits, [and]

emily xyz” (*I Can See Fiji*) and her duo Taniwha uses found objects such as cheese graters and wine racks to make new instruments, which suggests that she seeks to shatter expectations created by literary, poetic, and musical conventions. Indeed, in the notes to Teaiwa’s *I Can See Fiji*, Baker writes “There’s poetry, for sure, but not as we know it.” Furthermore, Baker’s own music and poetry includes a significant engagement with Māori language and culture, and she has hosted a Māori music radio programme. She melds multiple artistic movements, producing a sound that is both relentlessly experimental and engaged in a dialogue with local and indigenous traditions. While their sounds are recognizably distinct, both Baker and Hamasaki aim to invigorate indigenous expressions by breaking or ignoring the rules of conventional poetic discourse.

In the rest of this chapter, I analyze two works of audio poetry that come from different ends of the Pacific ocean, represent different movements in the art, yet manage to convey corresponding messages about the power of aural media to animate text and energize people’s mutual understandings across cultures: the collaborative audio adaptation of Westlake’s poems *Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki*, produced by Hamasaki, and Teaiwa’s *I Can See Fiji*, produced by Baker. I show that these albums challenge their reader-listeners to read, see, hear, and experience Pacific poetry from “street-level,” revealing at once the grotesque underbelly and the slow walk toward salvation.

To think of either of these albums of audio poetry or the written poems that correspond to them as narrative requires some consideration, as they may well be read as lyric poems, which are often contrasted to narratives. Culler describes the Romantic conception of the lyric as a work that is “mimetic of the experience of the subject. . . . The lyric poet absorbs into himself the external world and stamps it with inner consciousness, and the unity of the poem is provided by

this subjectivity” (884). Both Westlake’s and Teaiwa’s poetry can easily be read as lyrics, as they are largely interior first-person reflections on their respective worlds. There is, however, also a strong sense in which both works—particularly as audio albums—can be read to conform to Barbara Herrnstein-Smith’s succinct definition of narrative, as “Someone telling someone else that something happened” (228). The poems themselves certainly recount things happening, and the personae or poetic speakers are made more concrete by the presence of recordings of actual human voices in the audio renditions, and the inclusion of other layered sounds, such as instruments and ambient noises, as well as the use of editing techniques, such as vocal filters and remixing, multiplies our sense of who or what performs the tellings and there is even a sense sometimes that they speak to one another as a call and response. Thus, these audio poems are not, as Northrop Frye describes the lyric, “an internal mimesis of sound and imagery” (250), but works that frequently engage listeners to think about who is speaking (or conveying other types of aural messages) and to whom.

Moreover, there is also a way that narrative poems, including those of Westlake and Teaiwa, convey narrative messages in their forms of segmentation into stanzas, choruses, refrains, and other lyrical groupings. Brian McHale argues that the segmentivity of lyric poetry, a term he draws from a definition by Rachel Blau DuPlessis, corresponds with the many various gaps that segment narratives (time, voice, focalization, plot episodes, etc.), resulting in “complex interplays among segments of different scales and kinds—‘chords,’ as DuPlessis calls them” (17). While such interplays of segmentivity apply to Westlake’s and Teaiwa’s written and audio poems, there are also “chords” that are struck when someone listens while reading the text; the segmentivity is in this sense doubled for both of these works as there is a clear gap between the written and audio texts.

Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki

By recording and sharing layered acts of reading, singing, shouting, and vicariously living down on the sidewalk in Waikiki, Hamasaki's album produces an extension of Westlake's poetry that complicates traditional medial and conventional boundaries, asking listeners to consider new entry points for Westlake's poems. Whereas Westlake's "waikiki" is a vicious wasteland that is perpetually being destroyed by oblivious tourists from around the world, the audio album brings this place into dialogue with artists from other contexts, who carry their own experiences in their vocal and musical interpretations of the poems. The dialogue results in a kind of coherence that affirms and amplifies Westlake's poetic project and counters the feelings of madness, hopelessness, and isolation that his poems express. In providing an audio companion to one of Westlake's most complete poetry sequences, I argue, *Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki* directs readers (and listeners) to think about Pacific texts not merely as standalone works, but as living presences that enable a community to recognize itself and its interconnections. The album is a record of a moment in time when people from around the world channelled Westlake's words through their diverse voices and lined those words up with their own street-level experiences and emotions that come from different sites and backgrounds, but manage to find understanding and resonance.

Certainly an enigmatic and multi-faceted figure whose life ended far too soon, Westlake has become a focus of the study of Hawaiian literature in large part because of the efforts of Richard Hamasaki, a Hawai'i local of Japanese ethnicity, who was his friend, colleague, and collaborator. Westlake studied East Asian literatures at the University of Oregon and the University of Hawai'i, and, as Hamasaki notes, this education

not only nurtured an eclectic aesthetic, but fully prepared him to adapt strategies and principles by which to write on behalf of not widely known or even unpopular Hawaiian- and Pacific Islands-related issues in the late 1970s and early 1980s—a Taoist Hawaiian, indeed. (Introduction xvii)

From 1972 to 1973, while he was pursuing his B.A. in Chinese studies and working as a janitor at a Japanese tourist store in Waikīkī, Westlake composed and assembled the collection he called “Poems from Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki.” The collection (as well as hundreds of others) had been unpublished when, in 1984, at the age of 36, Westlake died from injuries suffered when an allegedly drunken driver struck his vehicle. In fact, the only collection that Westlake had published before his death was the small independent chapbook *It’s OK to Eat Lots of Rice* (1979). However, in 2009, Mei-Li Siy and Richard Hamasaki edited and published *Westlake: Poems by Wayne Kaumualii Westlake (1947–1984)*, a selection of his poems—including “Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki”—from his manuscripts, which had been stored in boxes in a shed and eaten by termites, which Hamasaki notes “probably disliking the taste of ink, nibbled through this one manuscript of short poems, but mostly avoided eating his typed words!” (Afterword 244–245). The case of Westlake’s poems reminds us of the instability of all media, which, even in the digital era, require human stewardship and continued cultivation for them to survive.

The publication of this collection of Westlake’s poems has enabled considerable interest in and critical attention to the poetry, but Hamasaki has gone several steps further in expanding and perpetuating the reach of Westlake’s words. First, he has by produced an album on an audio CD based on Westlake’s manuscript, which was released in 2013 and is the main focus of this section. The album brings together over thirty poets, artists, groups, and musicians from Hawai‘i,

the Pacific, and around the world to channel the words and spirit of Westlake into spoken words, music, and sounds, lending them a new currency and galvanizing a collective around Westlake's stories and resistance to the ongoing violence to the land and community perpetuated by the tourism industry. Second, Hamasaki produced and curated the Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki Art Invitational Exhibition at Gallery 'Iolani at Windward Community College in 2014, which featured sixteen original visual artworks inspired by Westlake's poems by sixteen different international artists. Third, he is currently at work with filmmaker Justyn Ah Chong on a series of short movies inspired by the poems and using the CD as part of the soundtrack. Finally, Hamasaki intends to seek a permanent home for Westlake's manuscripts, as he notes on his blog that

we plan on inviting one or more scholars who may be interested in possibly editing a second volume of Wayne's work. However, the stipulation from Mei-Li and the Westlake Literary Estate is that Wayne's work must first be secured, documented and carefully archived before a second volume is considered. Thereafter, restricted access to the Westlake Papers will become available physically, and hopefully via a digital repository. ("Down on the Sidewalk")

There is no question of Hamasaki's commitment to the project, and, as Paul Lyons notes, to Westlake's spirit and cause, which is invoked by the continuation of attention to his poetry:

By asserting that 'Westlake' is with him in spirit from the outset of his collection, Hamasaki performs what is for him one afterlife of collaboration. A certain spirit of 'Westlake' enjoins the reader to attend to an as-yet-unfinished process of healing and cultural reorientation. What is spoken *for Westlake* is in a sense spoken *by* or alongside of him or in alliance with his spirit. (85)

Each iteration of this project strengthens Westlake’s alliance further and wider—yet it still remains grounded “down on the sidewalk in Waikiki.” Moreover, Hamasaki’s efforts give layers and variations to the narrative elements of the poetry, including a storyworld in the bleak space of Westlake’s “waikiki,” which becomes inflected with new chords and accents. Such variations also increase the propensity for this multiplicity of voices speaking alongside Westlake to carry on the collaborative afterlife so long as there is healing to be done. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this occurs in the recording of a track called “Christmas Day,” which layers the voice of i-Kiribati poet and scholar Teresia Teaiwa with that of her son Vaitoa Mallon. In a collection that is inhabited by death and disease, this track’s multi-generational performance points towards a revitalization effort and an attempt to keep stories alive for future generations—and not simply “preserve” them.

Hamasaki’s Westlake project is not unlike what media theorist Henry Jenkins calls “transmedia storytelling,” which he defines as “a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (“Transmedia Storytelling 101”). While Westlake’s poetry sequence is not, strictly speaking, a fiction, its fictionalized narrative elements include a vivid setting, a cast of characters and character types, and a general physics of possible movements within the system, which are respected in each of the adaptations. Moreover, Westlake’s poetry is often playful and many of the musical adaptations contain very catchy melodies, but “entertainment” can only be considered a small part of the function of these poetic texts, and the potential market value, which is a large part of Jenkins’s theory, is demonstrably minuscule for Pacific poetry in any of its guises. Hamasaki’s Westlake project trades more in

appreciation, understanding, and political solidarity, rather than what Westlake identifies as a singular evil of Waikīkī: “THE NAME OF THE GAME / IS PROFIT!” (143).

The audio poetry album *Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki* contains 27 tracks, each of which corresponds to a single poem in Westlake’s poetry sequence. The text of the performed poems is mostly unchanged from Westlake’s original words in their order, though many phrases or verses are repeated by the artists for choruses or emphasis. The places of origin and styles of performance on the album vary widely—“from everything to / everything” (138) as Westlake said of experiences in Waikiki. They include some tracks that are recognizable as part of the amplified poetry tradition, some that are musical, representing experimental, rock, slack key guitar, jazz, funk, pop, folk, indie, reggae, hip-hop, and alternative genres, and others that are spoken or sung and manipulated in styles that defy easy categorization. While some tracks, like “The Name of the Game,” “Jesus Freaks,” and “They Got Me Hanging Already” represent the dreariness of Westlake’s poems with a dark, murky tone, others, like “Paid By the Sea,” “Christmas Day, 1972,” and “As Rats Climb Coconut Trees” seem to pick up on the ironic dismissiveness that Westlake’s speaker often takes by interpreting the poems as cheery upbeat songs, despite the often downright horrifying nature of the lyrics. The album does not carry the kind of cohesion that one might expect from a single artist’s album. Instead, listening to the album presents the tremendous diversity of experiences of these artists that are united around their own understanding of Westlake’s Waikiki, itself a “cracked” space full of “crippled / minds” (139) “where dirt’s / expensive / and bricks / are cheaper / than rocks” (148). Hamasaki’s album realizes Westlake’s poetry by bringing people together to interpret and creatively adapt these poems in their own accents and connecting the ideas with their own experiences, ultimately offering the listener many points of entry. It is furthermore fitting that Hamasaki’s album enlists

different people to provide the voices for Westlake's speaker when it extends the poems into the realm of audio because, while the poetic speaker is a profoundly lonely and a social pariah, the audio amplification, layering, and mixing on the album suggest that he is not alone or crazy, but one of many people who understand his story and can be possessed by his spirit.

For Westlake, the medium of poetry is characterized by a tremendous capacity to contain, represent, and record responses to everyday experience, and he describes a poem as a natural product that becomes channelled through or captured by the poet when he experiences disturbances. In an untitled poem outside of the "Sidewalk" sequence, Westlake describes poetry as being something that happens to him: "like an earthquake / my mind / begins to tremble / frantic I scribble another poem . . ." (173). It is as though the poet is like an oscilloscope recording vibrations in his mind that are in turn reactions to the horrors he experiences in Waikiki and the world. In another poem, called "On the Beach," he suggests that poems are part of nature, ready to be caught, by comparing poetry to fishing: "a poet / is a fisherman / of sorts / instead of fish / he brings home / poems" (104). His speaker goes as far as asserting "Everything Is Poetry to Me," in the poem of that title, a statement for which he discovers an unconventional method of proof: "i hang out / my dong / and piss on / a potted / palm / CONVINCED!" (105). In claiming everything as poetry, Westlake at once gives value to the low position from which things like piss are in view and brings the concept of poetry down from the pedestal upon which it is often placed.

However, Westlake brings out the conflict he sees in the medium by frequently expressing a generally cynicism about the efficacy of his poems, which he imagines being largely interior and somewhat effete in terms of what they can accomplish in the world or whether they can meaningfully engage other people. In the poem "No One Understands the

Sea—Upon Receipt of My 33rd Rejection Notice,” whose title alone conveys much of the poem’s message, Westlake repeats a number of frustrated statements about the limitations of his art: “NO ONE UNDERSTANDS MY PHILOSOPHY! / NO ONE UNDERSTANDS THE SEA! / NO ONE UNDERSTANDS HAWAII! / NO ONE UNDERSTANDS ME!” (107). Obviously somewhat of an angry rant, the poem reveals something of Westlake’s struggle against the mainstream. As ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui points out of “Pupule,” one of Westlake’s concrete poems, “it challenges readers to break out of a linear mode of thinking, and Kānaka Maoli to resist the conformity of western institutions” (59), so all of Westlake’s oeuvre asks readers to think beyond the confines and conventions of written poetry—which is a legitimate challenge when reading written poetry. His concrete poems, which stretch beyond the standards and limitations of text, represent a way that Westlake offers readers alternatives to textual meaning and Hamasaki’s audio renditions can be thought of as a further step in this direction. When Westlake declares, in his two line untitled poem, “my poems— / something hiding here” (2), he both directs the reader to look for “something” and at the same time gives its position; that is, as a poet who styles himself as an outsider who feels sorry for the many “crippled / minds / limping around” (139), the poems themselves are necessarily hidden in plain sight from a society that cannot or will not comprehend them. Westlake’s lament is particularly relevant in light of the near loss of a large part of his poetic oeuvre.

In Hamasaki’s album, as well as the other expansions he has pursued, lies a therapeutic possibility. By producing and recording an album on audio CD, Hamasaki returns Westlake’s text to a rumbling of vibrations (in both a literal and figurative sense), a process that would seem to possess the possibility of both revisiting the ongoing causes of the disturbances that and providing a restorative outlet for struggles the Hawai‘i Pacific community is still facing.

Hamasaki's album is thus a way of opening up the poems and conversing with some of the ideas hiding there.

In "Down on the Sidewalk" the speaker similarly questions the efficacy of his act of writing, often asking if the poetic medium has any meaningful effect in terms of projecting his voice or communicating to his community. Indeed, in the introduction to the sequence, the speaker explains that during his time spent as a janitor in Waikiki, "I wrote poems to keep from going insane" (138), suggesting that his poems are not to be thought of as messages directed to an audience, but necessary and possibly involuntary or automatic outpourings in response to the horrors he experiences. The writing, he claims, is then a kind of therapy that prevents his sinking deeper into that madness, as though externalizing and recording his observations on the page is a way to calm his tormented spirit.

Westlake's pessimism about poetry as a medium of communication is particularly salient in opposition to speech, which Westlake repeatedly portrays throughout his poetry as a confrontational genre. For example, in one poem the speaker describes being asked by a tourist for directions, while washing windows and "before he's finished / tell him / EAT SHIT!" (149) and in another tells a tourist to "GO STRAIGHT AS AN ARROW / TO HELL!" (153). These profane outbursts aimed at unthinking vacationers may seem rather petty, futile, and misplaced, especially as a mode of resistance to very profitable neocolonial forces, but Westlake nonetheless poses this kind of flippant shouting as perhaps the only way of awakening people to the horribly exploitative nature of the tourism industry in Hawai'i.

In the poem "Paid by the Sea," the speaker presents a parable that gives one sense of his conflicted position on written poetry. He begins by describing a scene in which he is rehearsing the invectives he will shout at tourists: "'PIGS! EAT SHIT! / HEY PIGS!' / i practice / by the

sea” (160). He follows by noting that it is the day of the “Amerikan Legion / Parade” (160), referring to the National Convention and Parade of the American Legion, which was held in Honolulu in August 1973 (“List of All”), the same year as Westlake’s poem sequence is dated—which certainly brought hundreds if not thousands of patriotic legionnaires to Waikiki. He then begins to worry that his poem, if written down could be discovered and incriminate him: “i didn’t think / i should write this / what if / maybe i get / caught— / in trouble / then what? / the Pigs / will read it / and nail me / right?” (160). Westlake’s speaker’s fear in this poem is likely a reference to the Legion’s formal historical support of Americanism, particularly its investigations into communist or un-American activities, which it shared with government institutions. However, the speaker decides to put aside his apprehensions and pen the poem: “said fuck it / sat down / and wrote it . . .” (160). Afterwards, finding money on the beach, he feels validated: “guess it was / right and the / right thing / to do / first poem / i got paid for / paid by the sea: / two dollar bills / found / right there / on the beach” (160). The poem concludes with the speaker noting that he—in the communist spirit—shares the money evenly with “the kahuna,” a homeless Hawaiian man that is a recurring character throughout the “Sidewalk” sequence.

In this poem, Westlake points ironically to the speaker’s idea that the money he finds is a payment from the sea, when it is likely fortuitous that he finds the bills immediately after writing a poem. This irony is amplified by the speaker’s explanation that it was the “first poem / i got paid for” (160), alluding to the scant monetary rewards available to poets in general. However, Westlake’s poem also suggests that “the sea,” which he elsewhere refers to as “MY MISTRESS” (116), and which he asserts, “NO ONE UNDERSTANDS,” is indeed the ultimate addressee of his poetry: the sea’s approval for the speaker represents a small moral victory for Hawai‘i and

Hawaiians, as well as their supporting community, against the overwhelming “pig parade” of Waikīkī.

The speaker compares the relative dangers and merits of two modes of expression: on one hand, he shouts obscenities at the sea and fantasizes hurling them at parading legionnaires; on the other hand, he writes a poem about the experience. While he seems uncomfortable with the idea of confronting the legionnaires—as literal representations of American military imperialism—and hence only practices his direct confrontation, he writes the poem after only a brief paranoid hesitation, and finds himself immediately rewarded for penning, rather than shouting his protest. Nevertheless, in pointing out the danger in writing a poem—for example, in its possible use against him as evidence of his un-Americanness—the speaker also hints at the permanence of the written word as a record of his protest, keeping it alive for future generations to re-interpret it, which is indeed what Hamasaki’s works do.

The album version of “Paid by the Sea,” recorded by Argentinian musician and Zen Buddhist teacher Augusto Alcalde, is a lilting and catchy melodic interpretation of the poem on ukulele and voice that softens some of the poem’s harsh lines and translates some lines into Spanish. By adapting the poem in this way as a cheerful song, Alcalde embraces the speaker’s decision to “fuck it,” that is, to write poetry despite what seems like an indomitable “legion” of apathetic non-readers as well as some more sinister adversaries. The track opens with Alcalde styling the line “PIGS! EAT SHIT! / HEY PIGS!” without any of the venom that comes through in the text; his opening could as easily be heard as the declarative statement “pigs eat shit,” which colors the song very differently than the poem from the very beginning. In fact, the sense of almost all of the lines of the poem that refer to the speaker’s conflicted feelings about the parade, the legion, and the poem are somewhat lost without the punctuation provided by the

written text. Instead, the two lines of the poem that Alcalde repeats most frequently, which form a chorus at the end of the song, both in English and Spanish, are not focused on the shouting or the paranoia, but on the happy conclusion that rewards the speaker and his friend: “Paid by the sea / pagado por el mar” and “One for the kahuna and one for me / uno para el kahuna y uno para mí.” In this way, Alcalde validates and bolsters Westlake’s (and his speaker’s) act of writing poetry by highlighting the resultant symbolic approval of the sea (as Hawai‘i) and the lifting up of degraded Hawaiian people and their culture, as represented by the homeless kahuna. Moreover, by translating Westlake’s words into Spanish, Alcalde gestures toward the promotion of a more expansive audience of people who can potentially “understand the sea”; while Argentinians like Alcalde may not have anything akin to Waikīkī, their indigenous groups have experienced dispossessions and human rights abuses that would make Westlake’s words resonate.

One way that Hamasaki’s album brings out the medial conflict that Westlake senses throughout his poetry is in further expanding the many voices that speak as, with, and alongside Westlake, who is already a complex fragmented figure in the textual version of “Down on the Sidewalk.” If we draw upon Herrnstein Smith’s definition of narrative as “Someone telling someone else that something happened” (228), it is the “someone”—the narrator or poetic speaker—that is the most mysterious presence—admittedly, among several mysterious presences—in much of Westlake’s poetry. Thinking of Westlake’s speaker as a unified subject across the sequence of poems is not a simple task, because he slips among levels of focalization, sometimes abruptly. For example, at the end of “The Name of the Game,” a gruesome narrative poem in which a dead body is found in the bathroom of the store, the speaker uses the third person to say “they gave the janitor / a ten dollar bill / for cleaning up / the mess” (145). This is

immediately followed with what appears to be the speaker's knowing identification with the janitor: "the janitor, i took it / out of my mind / and went straight to a place / called HELL / and spent it . . ." (145). As someone who repeatedly professes to be out of his mind and crazy, it is fitting that Westlake moves the speaker's grammatical and psychic subject position from one character's mind to another, as it suggests that he has lost a grip on reality and has out of body experiences.

The shifting perspective also, somewhat paradoxically, exhibits the speaker's control over this character's lack of control; he shows that he can take possession of the janitor's perspective at will—and renounce it when the janitor is overwhelmed by the horrors he observes. Rather than straightforwardly writing poems "to keep from going insane," the speaker at times embraces his seemingly perverse desire to go in and out of madness. This is also reflected in the poem "Out of Mind," in which the speaker declares "to give my poems / BITE / i sit all day / down on the / sidewalk / in waikiki / watching the / PIG PARADE / limp by . . ." (152), which brings about the appropriate amount of insanity necessary to compose his poems: "i write / i write / TOTALLY OUT OF / MY MIND" (152).

The audio version of "The Name of the Game," performed by Hans Keoni Wilhelm and Ryan Oishi, and produced by Hamasaki, amplifies the kind of dreary repetitiveness and multiplicity that the written poem exudes. The track layers a number of looped tracks including a few different simple heavy bass lines, a single repeated snare drum lick, and an electronic percussion channel, giving it a dark frenetic feel below the vocals. Oishi's voice is used for only one line in the poem, "THE NAME OF THE GAME IS PROFIT," but the track repeats it throughout, and layers it upon itself and over Wilhelm's vocals, with reverb, distortion, and echo effects. Wilhelm reads the poem's main text unhurriedly, but with a level of spiteful ferocity and

anger, and his voice also given a slight staticky filter. The track is dissonant; it is disturbing and, because of its repetitiveness, emotionally draining—it feels much longer than its duration of two minutes and twenty seconds. One might even suggest that the track represents a degree of madness.

This track, adapted from the poem in Westlake’s sequence that includes the most grotesque and literally gory details, succeeds in being one of the hardest tracks to listen to, and as such one of its most memorable for the way it brings the listener along to see the depths of capitalist depravity in this “place called HELL.” The dissonant repetition and looping here is made salient and thereby accosts the listener and resembles the cyclical “game” of capitalist reproduction represented in the poem: the debased janitor also profits from the revolting work he does and then returns that money to the main profiteers of the tourist industry. The listener is reminded that these horrors are perpetual— perhaps like a spinning compact disc—that such stories are constantly in motion under the surface, and that everyone is to some extent complicit. The audio track ends, of course, but the repetition, particularly of Oishi’s line, have a haunting effect that seems to keep coming back to this author’s sound memory.

I Can See Fiji

In her audio album *I Can See Fiji*, Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, along with producer Hinemoana Baker, delivers a meditation on the dispersed state of Pacific Islanders, which she suggests is a long slow struggle that ultimately rewards her “pedestrians” or listeners with a diversity of rich experiences. The album exploits medial conflicts quite literally by providing both written and audio versions of the poems that do not correspond to one another in simple or expected ways. I argue that In bringing out the medial conflicts that make the audio poems function, Teaiwa’s audio poetry is aimed at giving reader-listeners a method of reading Pacific

literature that does not privilege written texts, but figures them as necessarily partial fragments that can lead to a fuller story, especially by living contact with diverse people and cultures.

Both Teaiwa and Baker have had considerable experience in and influence on the Pacific audio poetry scene. Teaiwa was an influential and prolific scholar of Pacific Island studies, having published numerous articles that have shaped approaches to Pacific Island literature, culture, and history. She was also an established poet, having published the poetry collection *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa* (1995). She collaborated with Sia Figiel on the amplified poetry audio album *Terenesia* (2000), produced by Hamasaki and Matsuoka before creating *I Can See Fiji* (2006) and contributing a track, along with her son Vaitoa Mallon, to *Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki*. Baker is a poet, musician, and producer who has released two music albums—*puāwai* (2004) and, with Christine White as the group Taniwha, *snap happy* (2009)—and three collections of poetry—*mātuhi | needle* (2004), *kōiwi kōiwi | bone bone* (2010), and *waha | mouth* (2014). She contributed a track to *Tuwhare* (2000), the musical tribute to Māori poet Hone Tuwhare, and, with Christine White, one to *Down on the Sidewalk in Waikiki*. Baker was also the creator, host, and producer of the weekly Radio New Zealand programme *Waiata*, which was dedicated to Māori music and musicians.

In the producer's notes to *I Can See Fiji*, included in both the booklet and on her website, Baker reflects upon Teaiwa's initial idea for the album, saying that the poems she wrote were originally titled "Poems from Pedestria" and they are all "about walking: both the physical act and what it represents for a migrant like myself." As Teaiwa suggests in the poems, walking is something new migrants do, sometimes because they do not own a car or do not possess a valid license, but it also serves as a way of genuinely interacting with a place and its people, that driving a car seals a person off from. As someone whose life has seen her living, studying, and

working at many different cosmopolitan sites in and around the Pacific including Honolulu, Suva, Santa Cruz, and Wellington, as someone who has done extensive research on military culture in the Pacific, and as someone of mixed Banaban (i-Kiribati), and African American ancestry, Teaiwa has had tremendous exposure to migrant experiences. Subramani characterized Pacific authors (in the early 1990s) to “have contributed equally to creative writing and their own professions” (18), and Teaiwa is someone who unquestionably both “walked the walk and talked the talk,” and this audio album addresses her own wrestling with these two actions which, I would argue, she does not pose as at all separate.

Moreover, Teaiwa’s provisional title and theme strongly suggest walking as a metaphor for poetry. Like Westlake, who sees everything as poetry, Teaiwa’s poetry happens at street level, but where Westlake sees mostly grotesque human indecency on the sidewalks, Teaiwa’s street poetry observations are often enamored with the splendid and beautiful diversity of ordinary places, though they can, as she says of a neighborhood of Wellington, exude “a familiar unfriendliness.” Walking and writing are both, for Teaiwa, ways to greater understanding, which is not always easy or quick, but always feels valuable. As she writes in one of her articles, “at the end of the day, whether we are studying/writing about/reflecting on the Pacific in the Pacific or far, far away, our work must matter to us. What links all students of the Pacific, is the belief that our enquiries matter (“On Analogies” 72). By producing this album of poetry, Teaiwa suggests that what makes her believe that her poetic enquiries matter is that they are in direct contact with genuinely experienced reality as she walks through new places.

Her conjunction of writing and human locomotion recalls the line from the Old Testament book Habakkuk, in which the Lord commands, “Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it” (*King James Bible*, Hab. 2.1–2), which is God’s

marketing lesson, promoting simplicity of content and form of a message, so that it can be readily comprehended and then easily transmitted. Teaiwa's Pacific migrant audio poetry counter to this Old Testament formulation might be phrased as "she may walk that speaks and listens"; poetry, for Teaiwa, is not about speed or simplicity (or proselytizing), but a gradual movement toward many diverse ways of understanding, which can be looked at as a form of salvation. Moreover, by recording her album on audio CD, Teaiwa literally makes it possible for people to walk while hearing her poetry on a portable CD player (which was still a relatively popular device when this album released in 2008) and parts of the album are literally recorded while she was walking. Reading and writing textual poetry while walking is much more difficult, and so Teaiwa's album is the appropriate medium for migrants like herself as they move through the world at their own pace.

The composition of *I Can See Fiji* is itself a gesture towards boundary crossing, and in particular the productive medial conflicts that result from such movements. The album contains twelve audio tracks and the liner notes provide text for fourteen poems and, while the textual poems are labeled as "I Can See Fiji: The Original Poems," it is thoroughly clear that the audio versions of these poems are not straightforward adaptations of the written texts; they are not presented in the same order or with the same titles, sometimes words are added, subtracted, translated, or scrambled, and sometimes poems are combined in or split across tracks. In what is perhaps the most literal sense of the term, the album represents a medial conflict. In her review of the album, ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui remarks that this "limited continuity" between the booklet and the audio represents a challenge to "traditional approaches to reading and understanding Pacific Literature" and also "a return to the fluidity of oral tradition, where text is impermanent and words are alive and constantly morphing with the breath of the performer"

(215). Indeed, the album insistently multi-tasks; it promotes and celebrates its own paradoxical and conflicted nature and imagines several alternative routes through Pacific Literature at once.

In addition to conflicts with the audio tracks, the status of the written text of the poems is destabilized further by the limitations imposed by being printed on the small booklet that is slipped into the CD jewel case. While the booklet names these poems “original,” it immediately undermines that originality by indicating where eight of them have been previously published, some in different or fuller versions. The booklet’s presentation also alters the poems fundamentally⁹ by styling them in a minuscule font, in single paragraphs, and entirely in lower-case letters. In doing so, the booklet wipes the poems of most of their segmentivity—only spaces, punctuation, and diacritics are preserved—but, in the process of listening and reading (and re-reading and re-listening), the reader-listener is able to reconstruct the poems in unconventional and surprising ways, incorporating both the written words and the audio tracks, which are themselves segmented in multiple ways (vocal pauses and styles, percussion, audio effects). The album seems to encourage the reader-listener not to think of the written as prioritized, but to see and hear the complex interplay across the two media. While many Western theories of literature and close reading practices elevate the primary text as the object of study, the construction of *I Can See Fiji* suggestive of the idea that all literature—and particularly Pacific literature, positioned as it is across many competing traditions of media—is produced in a field of medial conflict.

⁹ Teaiwa’s poems that have been published elsewhere appear in those other publications segmented very differently into meaningful stanzas, with capitalizations. For example, the audio poem “4.30 In the Morning” was published in *Women’s Studies Quarterly* as “At 4:30 In the Morning” in a much larger version that features very striking segmentivity.

Teaiwa's album begins with the track "Ohiro Road," which serves as an introduction to the concept of a "poem from pedestria," which challenges reader-listeners to think of a poem through multiple lenses and channels all at once. The textual version of the poem takes the reader on a walk along Ohiro Road through Brooklyn, an upper class suburb of Wellington, New Zealand, making reference to some geographical features such as "happy valley" and the addresses "268 and 270." The poem begins in the first person, guided by a speaker who is a resident and very familiar with the neighborhood, as Teaiwa herself was when she first moved to Wellington and regularly walked up and down the road to work and back because she did not have a car.¹⁰ The speaker serves temporally specific features of the street ("someone left a shelf on the sidewalk with a sign saying: free for a nice home"), habitual features ("sometimes a range rover is parked outside their orange and green house"), and generalizations about the neighborhood's character ("brooklyn exudes a familiar unfriendliness"). She seems particularly focused on identifying cars, as she names a number of notably upper-end makes and models that she associates with places and people. Near the end of the poem, the speaker abruptly switches to second person, addressing an unknown addressee: "i don't know what it's like for you in the dark without the big trucks. . . . i wonder what you think about as you leave my house and take the long walk into town." These last few sentences introduce a surprising narrative to the poem, which is, up until this point largely paratactic description, without carrying much sense of a plot. With her speaker's direct address, Teaiwa leaves the reader wondering who this mysterious addressee is that is departing the speaker's house, heading towards town in the nighttime, which produces an implied ambiguous plot for the entire scene.

¹⁰ Thanks to April Henderson for providing me with a few biographical details about Teaiwa's early days in Wellington.

The introduction of a “you” within this first poem on the album also invites the reader to identify with the poem’s addressee, being sent on a metaphorical walk down Teaiwa’s familiar places, seeing them in a way she has not seen them before. In this way, Teaiwa gestures meta-poetically toward the unknown product that results from this—or indeed any—literary meeting between a poet and her audience. She contrasts the busyness, brightness, and clarity of the day and her poetic neighborhood with the murky uncertainty of night and the reader’s understanding of her poetry, which, she suggests “must be quiet and kind of creepy.” Teaiwa’s gesture towards the unknown that relates her with her reader is reminiscent of Samoan writer Albert Wendt’s many references on the Samoan concept of “vā,” which he describes in one essay as “space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things” (402). Like Wendt, Teaiwa celebrates the productive—if at times creepy—possibility of poetry in connecting people across cultures, while maintaining a sense of place.

The audio rendition of “Ohiro Road,” as mixed and edited by Baker, adds numerous layers of complexity to the written poem, which multiply the pathways for reading and receiving Teaiwa’s words. First, the track includes her brother-in-law Des Mallon’s percussion, with a number of cymbal crescendos and crashes that punctuate Teaiwa’s reading. Second, she sings the line “there is a house on Ohiro Road,” sometimes distorted with a crackly muffling effect, to the familiar tune of the opening line of the American folk song “The House of the Rising Sun,” as popularized by the British rock band The Animals.¹¹ Third, parts of the track are overlaid with

¹¹ The arrangement used by The Animals is variously considered to be influenced by arrangements recorded by Bob Dylan, Dave Van Ronk, Josh White, and Nina Simone.

street noises, including vehicles, birds, chirping and ticking pedestrian signals for the blind, people talking, wind chimes, and an extended ending in which Teaiwa walks, breathing heavily and answers a mobile phone call saying she is at Fairlie Terrace, a street in Victoria University of Wellington, where she worked. Fourth, and perhaps most obviously to a reader who is listening while following along with the text, the word order of the first part of the poem is drastically scrambled, producing sentences whose meanings are strikingly different. In effect, she takes the written text of her poem's sentences, whose semantic and grammatical meanings are very straightforward and clear, and interleaves their various words and phrases, leaving a dada-esque jumble that breaks the poem's syntactic structure and opens up different ways of reading across the sentences. Notably, however, Teaiwa reads the direct address in the last five sentences of the poem without altering the order from the written text, though her voice is given the crackly muffling effect.

Teaiwa's vocal scrambling of the text of her poem creates a kaleidoscopic effect that challenges standard mode of reading; the phrases that result have strange and unexpected words that make the walk down Ohiro road seem especially foreign. Since punctuation is not clear from where Teaiwa pauses, it is not even clear where sentences begin and end, or if the words are even meant to be organized into such units of meaning. For example, she speaks the lines "brooklyn exudes rusty saws and blades painted in the precise familiar" and "someone left a shelf of mauve on the sidewalk with a sign saying there is a house on ohiro road free for a nice fence." Because the scrambled phrases are drawn from grammatical sentences of the original poem, these lines have the semblance of sense, but it is somewhat surreal or perhaps cubist; one needs wonder what it means to "exude rusty saws" or why a house might be "free for a nice fence," or what sort of space one has entered in which these lines are sensical. In turn, the audio poem makes the

listener question the assumptions she holds in her own space and whether they might be held too tightly. Like Westlake's concrete poems, which ask readers to follow different textual paths to take many possible meanings, Teaiwa's track invites the listener to approach the poem's sense in many different ways and, perhaps, to return to it for a different experience. Just as walking up and down a road develops a person's feel for a neighborhood as she gradually sees new things each time, the audio poem's listener is given many different ways of hearing and organizing the poem in her mind, and each listen potentially reveals another enriching phrase.

This technique recalls a formally experimental essay Teaiwa published in a special issue on "Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge" of *The Contemporary Pacific* called "L(o)osing the Edge," in which she divided the page vertically into two columns, each styled in a different font, written in a different tone, and serving a different purpose. She explains from the lefthand column, "On this side of the page I am dogged by the possibility of losing the edge. On the other side of the page I loosen up notions of where the edge is" (343). By breaking from the standard formatting of scholarly work published in journals and by placing paragraphs side by side, Teaiwa asks scholars to examine their own methods, down to the way they read scholarship. When confronted with an alternative mode, she seems to ask, does the scholar or listener have the patience, intrepidity, and openness to walk slowly down that dark and creepy path? Teaiwa's "Ohiro Road" suggests that it is a rewarding journey.

Teaiwa's poem "Streets," which is the fifth track on the CD, is the clearest statement on the album of her position that the proper place of poetry is in living and walking connection with the people and this brings out the conflicts in the medium of poetry, especially as it is practiced in certain elite or exclusive spaces. For Teaiwa, the streets themselves are poetry that cannot be

adequately transformed into words, and the audio alongside the written words has a way of transmitting that sense of intransmissibility.

The written text of the poem, which appears third in the booklet, begins with the provocation that streets (the poem's title) "call into question the status of english." In this statement, Teaiwa suggests that "english," which represents a structure of rules as either the dominant colonial language throughout the Pacific or the main discipline under which poetry is studied and produced, is undermined by the reality of what actually happens when diverse people encounter one another on the streets. Despite its institutional might and standardization efforts, "english," Teaiwa seems to say, cannot capture the "noisy silence," because the sounds, shapes, and people do not conform to what its structure understands. Ironically, of course, Teaiwa's poem is entirely written in English—even grammatical English, aside from a few effective sentence fragments—but by bringing out this irony, the poem points to its own limitations in capturing and conveying the full experiences of the streets, particularly in the textual version. Teaiwa gestures to medial limitations again when she asks, "is there something in the collection of our faces, clothes, feet, that would tell the deaf or blind where we are?" If "streets" represent the poetry of "the collection of our faces, clothes, feet," then we can think of the reader as blind or deaf to such images and sounds, because "english" in its written form can only approximate the richness of that experience.

In "Streets," Teaiwa furthermore reflects on the value of walking as a way of coming into contact and conflict with a great diversity of experiences and forms. She presents something of a typology of people's walking styles based on their immigration status:

locals who walk only with the purpose of getting somewhere, or migrants who seek the comfort of a quiet coastal promenade, can't know the exile's thrill at

being caught in traffic, of seeking the busiest streets, of inhaling, exhaling, that something we make together without knowing each other: that poetry that calls into question the status of english.

In this passage, Teaiwa sets up somewhat of a hierarchy in terms of ability and desire to experience with wonder what is happening in the streets; locals, she suggests, are too accustomed and focused on their daily lives to notice, migrants prefer to be left alone, and exiles are captivated by them. Teaiwa's statement reflects comments made in an interview by Ha Jin about writing as a migrant: "An exile has a significant past: he often lives in the past, and has to define himself within the context of political power. But an immigrant gets to start from scratch. The past is not essential. He formulates his own frame of reference" (145). While Teaiwa may not have been forced to leave any of her past homes, she fits well in the category of "academic exiles," who live in various surprising places following the few available opportunities for their particular research. Moreover, she orients herself (and her speaker in this poem) in a way that maintains a strong connection with her past—without living in the past—and this connection is strengthened by contact with the busy streets that move slowly along as exiles sometimes do.

The audio version of the poem is recorded and mixed in a way that is reminiscent of Hamasaki's amplified poetry. The track is a layering of two takes of Teaiwa reading the poem, without the accompaniment of any music or other sounds. Teaiwa reads every word of the poem in order on each take, but they are slightly off in time and their relative volumes increase and decrease; sometimes one sounds like an echo of the other and at other times it jumps ahead, which results in a reading that is hard to comprehend, like two voices competing for dominance and ultimately talking over one another. However, the two voices reach unison on the particular

phrase, “without knowing each other,” from the same quote above, making it stand out against the rest of the sentence and the audio poem as a whole.

In an audio poem in which Teaiwa marvels at the beauty of disorder within busy cosmopolitan spaces full of strangers, the effects of busyness and conflict are captured in the two unsynchronized vocal tracks, that seemingly find a moment of recognition, “without knowing each other.” The audio poem celebrates the awkward dance of strangers, as Teaiwa writes and speaks, “the language of the pavement is avoidance,” suggesting that an ironic closeness can emerge from this sort of unknowing coincidence, even for seemingly conflicting voices. Because the two vocal tracks are both clearly Teaiwa’s voice, moreover, the audio poem provocatively suggests that streets can even make exiles see the unity and disunity in their fractured and developing senses of self, as they move through time and space and may no longer even know each other.

While “streets” for Teaiwa have a very literal sense in the poem, the poem can also be seen as a way of thinking about productive nature of movement around the Pacific and beyond, along routes that can be seen as analogous to Teaiwa’s streets. Indeed, what Teaiwa’s audio poem implies about streets serves as a metaphor for the routes that Epeli Hau‘ofa writes as deriving from ancient Oceanic navigation routes and which continue to nourish the people of the Pacific “without knowing each other”:

Everywhere they go—to Australia, New Zealand, Hawai‘i, the mainland United States, Canada, Europe, and elsewhere—they strike roots in new resource areas, securing employment and overseas family property, expanding kinship networks through which they circulate themselves, their relatives, their material goods, and

their stories all across their ocean, and the ocean is theirs because it has always been their home. (35)

While Hau‘ofa figures the isolation of Oceanians as a myth imposed by colonial forces, Teaiwa’s audio poem celebrates the cultural differences, distances, and conflicts as a strength; it is an opportunity for engagement and growth that would not be available if everyone stayed home.

While both Teaiwa and Westlake center their poems on the street, they see those streets very differently. For both Teaiwa and Westlake, to walk on the streets is to be exposed to a diversity of experiences, but for Westlake, the fact that “experiences ran from everything to / everything” (138) is representative of the loss to the capitalist tourism industry of control over the land and its proper uses, isolating and degrading Hawaiian people in particular. Though she characterizes the streets as “somewhat creepy” at night and in one poem shouts curses in Fijian upon hearing footsteps outside her window at 4:30 in the morning, Teaiwa’s streets are, in contrast, beautiful in their heterogeneity and they are to be reclaimed intrepidly as Pacific spaces of interaction and connections. Such connections, moreover, come about in the collaborative work of Hamasaki’s Westlake projects, as artists bring together their various and even conflicting audio interpretations of Westlake’s words, uniting in resistance to the overreaching tourism industry. These two albums both exploit medial conflicts productively, showing that there is always more to Pacific literature than can be written on a page.

Chapter 4

Networking Stories: Electronic Narratives in the Pacific

In addition to written literature, film, and audio poetry, Pacific Islanders have for some time found the internet to be a productive and conflicted medial space in which to compose, express, and distribute narratives. For example, in her poem, “Pohnpei Outer Space,” Pohnpeian poet Emelihter Kihleng describes using the once popular social networking website Myspace to maintain a network of dispersed Pohnpeian friends and relatives, creating her “space” in a way that involves Pohnpeian language and cultural references, and at the same time borrows American popular cultural slang. Many of the medial conflicts that arise in Pacific Islanders’ work in electronic literature tilts along a similar axis: on one hand there are technological affordances that enable storytelling to happen instantly, democratically, and at very low cost; on the other hand, the dominance and control of the internet by mostly US corporations and cultural producers makes it such that there are only limited ways that stories get told and heard. Nevertheless, many Pacific Islanders work with the internet’s undeniable power to get the stories out and stake a claim to the representation of their people and cultures.

Some commentators urge caution and question the ultimate compatibility of the internet with Pacific cultural forms. Terence Wesley-Smith, referring specifically to an experiment with international web-based modes of learning for Pacific Studies imagines that the technology could hasten the discipline’s ultimate objective, “to reduce the hegemony of western approaches and representations by privileging discourses more firmly rooted in the cultural landscapes of Oceania” (131), but he reports that the idea hit a number of practical obstacles and he admits that “A sense of community probably takes longer to emerge in cyberspace than in the face-to-face situation of the conventional classroom” (132–33). While Wesley-Smith’s point is specific to the

realm of education and technologies have advanced considerably since his article was published, the question remains whether internet-based forms can genuinely represent traditional knowledges and produce a “net gain” for Pacific Island communities that are also constantly urged to upgrade skills and infrastructure in order to accommodate the rapidly changing spaces of electronic media. Kanak writer Déwé Gorodé is even more pessimistic about the prospect of the internet in her poems “Drag Net” and “Netted,”¹² in which she sees a consequence of the internet as “to open the infinite doors / of the global world / with its evils of the earth / like Pandora’s Box” (154), and she compares the internet to a hostile ocean space in which Pacific Islanders as fish “will be caught and fried / leaping / tangled / netted” (156). Gorodé’s poems reveal some of the conflicts that networked electronic media introduce: foreign value systems are dominant on internet media and even hugely successful internet stars often get swallowed up in the sense that the major profits from their work go elsewhere. It is around, alongside, and against such conflicts that Pacific Islanders have performed their electronic narratives.

Despite the challenges, many Pacific Islanders—particularly young people that have lived, worked, or been educated in the diaspora—are adept with many aspects of the internet and have insisted that there are ways to use these technologies that enable them to reach international audiences and maintain and strengthen their connection to their own cultures. In availing themselves of electronic network technologies, Pacific writer-scholar-activist-artist-performers reestablish and extend old networks of discourse, storytelling, and solidarity; maintain and

¹² These titles are translations from the original French “Net” and “Dans les Mailles du Filet.” The former includes an untranslatable pun on the word “net,” which in French means “clean” or “clear” and Gorodé refers in the poem to the internet being a “place nette” or “clean sweep,” which has taken over too suddenly.

reimagine a regional Pacific-centred identity for a globally dispersed culture; and counter the dominant and lingering sense of contradiction between indigeneity and technology.

Whereas the other media that I have discussed are static, at least in the sense that the individual works will not change very much over time once completed, electronic works often involve live collaborative and interactive features that allow audiences to participate in and contribute to the developing story. These Pacific artists establish, develop, promote, and reflect upon new ways of thinking about the concept of literature as a public, socially-engaged, and communal artistic practice of sharing interactively produced and dynamic stories that reinforce existing relations and seek to produce new ones.

For the rest of this chapter, I focus on three Pacific writers who approach networked electronic literature in somewhat different ways and with different purposes, but they all develop a mode of engaging audiences to Pacific Island cultures and cultural issues.

Lani Wendt Young and the Electronic Paratext

Most well-known authors of Pacific literature have gained visibility for their work through traditional publishing structures and institutions; they have written their books, published them with large or medium-sized publishing houses, who have printed the books, distributed them to bookstores, sold them to libraries, sent out review copies to literary journals, and taken the authors on book tours. Until recently, the only alternatives to this form of literature were the likely obscurity of self-publishing or small presses. Samoan author Lani Wendt Young travels a completely different route, and she has gradually found a medium for her works in the field of Pacific literature largely by using Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) released by [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) in 2007.

However, in addition to finding an audience for telling her Pacific stories, Young reworks the ways her Pacific stories are delivered, shared, and exchanged. To promote her work, Young creates many paratextual materials, engaging cultural and technological affordances of the eBook medium that are different from those of the conventional novel, re-creating and galvanizing Pacific centered communities that enrich the textual experience with multilateral dialogue. She uses social media forms to expand and enrich the content of her eBook narratives, and she uses popular culture tropes to connect with readers who are followers of transmedia series such as *Twilight*, *X-Men*, and *Game of Thrones*. When she refracts Samoan mythology through the formal lens of American pop culture, she maintains the primacy of the myths, but places them in new kinds of reading contexts. Young takes advantage of the changing mediascape of literature and reading, which happens along multiple medial channels for audiences that are often less inclined towards traditional forms of literature.

Young's works represent a shift from the form of the traditional novel in that (1) their publication process is not associated with institutions such as presses or academies because she self-publishes them through [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)'s Kindle e-book and CreateSpace print on demand services; (2) they activate readers to participate in both reception and production by way of the electronic paratextual apparatus in the form of Young's blogging and social media performance; (3) they delineate a public space in which Young connects with readers—as opposed to the largely private novelistic realm; and (4) the self-reflexive metafictional content of the works deliberates about the potential and possibilities of electronic literature in expressing the complexities of contemporary indigenous Pacific identities that include those living in the diaspora. Her works send out connective narrative lines, binding people together with stories across spaces and times, woven like ie toga or Samoan fine mats, which are highly valued and

exchanged as symbolic representations of important events and relationships. I argue that through her engagement with electronic literature Young opens up new possibilities for the expression and exchange of contemporary indigenous Pacific narratives, making use of networking technologies with the potential to build and maintain a regional Pacific alliance.

Throughout this section, I employ the narratological term “paratext” to conceptually distinguish the text of Young’s work from the many elements that interface it with the world in various ways. The term was coined by Gérard Genette, and he gives the following metaphorical explanations:

More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold, or . . . a “vestibule” that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an “undefined zone” between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe Lejeune put it, “a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text.” (1-2)

In all of her works, Young exploits this “threshold” to a great extent, especially as she directs the production of the electronic media that surround her works. Moreover, the fuzziness of Genette’s definition is relevant to Young’s novels, which are designed to be primarily viewed on networked devices and contain hypertextual links to Young’s social media platforms, which suggests that these “threshold” spaces are indeed an important interactive part of the storytelling experience that enhances the reader’s understanding and creates a community for exchanging relevant narratives alongside the Telesā storyworld. The electronic paratexts literalize what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the novel’s “indeterminacy, a certain semantic openedness, a living

contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)” (7) by providing a readymade space for understanding and enriching the novel’s relations in the world. However, in doing so, the electronic works also open a space in pop culture and in cyberspace for indigenous Pacific performances that have preexisted and continue to exist in other medial spaces.

Self-Publishing

Young’s novel approach to Pacific literature is particularly evident in her *Telesā* series, a paranormal fantasy romance aimed at young adults that comprises three novels and one, novella, which are mainly sold in the form of Kindle eBooks, though she also self-publishes print copies for New Zealand, Fiji, and Sāmoa. While she has approached traditional publishers and has been repeatedly turned down¹³, Young embraces digital publishing as an effective means to deliver her Pacific centered stories to readers while at the same time controlling the content and at times earning enough money to support herself. She expresses these sentiments in a blog post about digital publishing:

I am passionate about seeing more of our Pacific stories taken to a global audience and believe that digital publishing is an exciting avenue to make it happen—it’s the fastest, cheapest and simplest way to get our stories to the world. Self-publishing makes it possible for the artist to be in control of every step of the creative process – from packaging, pricing, distributing, marketing to promoting their book. It makes it possible for the artist to be in control of the financial returns of that book. I do not see it as a replacement for traditional publishing—

¹³ Young notes in a blog post that “More than 30 lit agents and publishers rejected TELESA” (“So you want to”).

but rather, as another option—particularly for those of us writing for a “niche market.” (“So You Want to”)

Young’s points convincingly address some of the concerns that have been raised about the “niche market” of publishing Pacific literature for some time. For example, in “Book Distribution in the Pacific” (1985) Ron Crocombe cites small populations, low education levels, multiple languages, high book prices, and limited financial resources as impediments to book publishing in the Pacific. In contrast to the many titles—some initially successful—by indigenous Pacific authors which have tragically fallen into relative obscurity, Young’s eBooks are all readily and inexpensively¹⁴ available worldwide to anyone with an internet connection for immediate download with a computer, tablet, or e-reader. Unless she takes them down or Amazon shuts down its website, those eBooks will always be available. Moreover, eBooks can be put online at a relatively small cost and in a short amount of time, though Young points out that in order to achieve a certain degree of quality, she hires a professional editor and a cover artist (“So You Want to”), and that a successful eBook requires significant investments of work, time, money, and energy (“Seven Essentials”). She asserts that the medium fills a gap that exists within the current spread of Pacific literature:

the TELESA publishing story demonstrates what most of us already suspected, there is a hunger for stories from the Pacific. Contemporary, ‘fanciful, fun’ stories written by us, about us and for us. It’s a hunger fueled by our Pacific people

¹⁴ At the time of writing, all seven of Young’s eBooks can be purchased on Amazon.com for a total of under \$25 USD. By contrast, Patricia Grace’s novel *Baby No-Eyes* (1998) is currently listed at \$36.99 USD in paperback.

worldwide but it's also a hunger in Western readers who are intrigued by the richness of our unique cultures and mythology. ("So You Want to")

Given Young's convincing example, it is unsurprising to see that other new Pacific writers such as Sieni A. M., Tracey Poueu-Guerrero, Kristiana Kahakauwila, and L. Filloon have begun producing and publishing eBooks and cultivating their own online interactive communities that approximate "telling" in narrative. Established veteran Pacific writers such as Albert Wendt, Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace, Kiana Davenport, and Sia Figiel now offer some of their back catalogue and new writings as eBooks on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and elsewhere. The obvious power of the eBook medium makes it an attractive possibility for Pacific writers in particular, who can tell stories in their own way—and possibly in their own languages—and earn some money for them without having to worry about whether there is a significant enough market at the outset. From a reader's perspective, there are simply many more narratives available through electronic platforms—and particularly more unconventional ones—because many potential books get passed over by publishers, who need to make significant investments into any titles they pursue and must consider the potential for revenues.

In addition to distribution and production advantages, reading an eBook, particularly on a networked electronic device such as Amazon's Kindle, offers many affordances that are not available in books, which may be thought of as potential advantages for Pacific texts. Ted Striphas summarizes the particular ways that Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos repeatedly asserts that the Kindle "improves upon the book":

The e-reader's ostensible upgrades over its predecessor include: onboard third generation (3G) mobile phone technology; 3G integration with Amazon.com, allowing readers to purchase and download electronic content on the fly; memory,

capable of storing up to 3,500 e-titles depending on the model; reference features, consisting of a built-in dictionary and wireless access to Wikipedia; readerly amenities, including font resizing and, on newer models, a text-to-speech function; and wireless backup on the Amazon.com server cloud. (301)

In addition to these features, Amazon's latest devices such as the Kindle Fire series—as well as most modern tablets (e.g. Apple's iPad, Samsung's Galaxy Note), computers, and even mobile phones that people might be reading eBooks on—enable possibilities for rich content such as hypertext, audio and video, user interaction, social media integrations, and content management systems. While many of the affordances of this medium remain as potential at present, electronic literary works such as Young's novels and Solomon Enos's graphic eBook series *Polyfantastica* are opening up pathways for prospective artists and technologists in the Pacific to disseminate their works in ways that are particularly appealing to young audiences that grew up engaging with rich text in digital spaces. Works like *Telesā* meet the needs of and use the right idioms to attract a new cultural subject, who may not initially be drawn to reading books in the conventional sense or format. In this, one senses an ambivalence shared to a degree by Young, that literature is thought of as at once desirable for the undeniable cultural capital it carries and an antiquated elitist concept that we might be better off discarding entirely.

Electronically published works sidestep many of the issues of book distribution for Pacific literature, making books by Pacific authors more available across the world than ever before, but the potential also comes with significant limitations and major shifts in the ways Pacific stories are told and constructed. Young points out that corporate chain bookstores are generally uninterested in selling self-published books, noting that one New Zealand-based chain in particular could not stock any books that do not carry “the magic stamp of a traditional

publisher's approval" ("So You Want to"), which is a result of systems of distribution that need to be maintained for companies that operate under corporate structures. This problem is magnified by the ongoing battle between Amazon and the collective establishment of bookstores and publishers—a battle that Amazon appears to be winning—which creates an even greater stigma for self-published eBooks and their authors. Amazon authors are not given space to perform readings in bookstores, eBooks are currently less likely to be found in libraries, they rarely receive book reviews that they do not pay for, and they are commonly (and very easily) pirated—that is, stripped of their digital rights management (DRM) and distributed widely for free.

Hawaiian writer Kiana Davenport's book *The Spy Lover* (originally titled *The Chinese Soldier's Daughter*) was even under threat when she was, according to her blog, compelled to give up a contract with a major publishing house as well as her \$20,000 advance when they discovered that she had published a story collection on Amazon ("Sleeping with the Enemy"). The squabbles over market shares may someday be resolved and indeed may not be altogether relevant to the Pacific literature audience, which simply wants to read good stories, but Young's statement that eBook publishing allows for "the artist to be in control of the financial returns of that book" ("So You Want to") ignores the considerable power structure that exploits the tremendous labours exerted and risks taken by artists for sometimes minimal profits. The current eBook marketplace climate most often harms the people that do the most work in this scheme, the authors, and the big profits ultimately go to Amazon, who not only gets a small cut of the price of the eBook, but more importantly gains customers and information, which they can use to sell much more than the perennially low-priced eBooks—including expensive reading devices. The current system does not provide a realistic compensation platform for the majority of Pacific authors to devote

the work it takes to write, edit, format, and promote well-crafted eBooks—not to mention the time needed to develop these multifarious skills.

In addition to contending with an exploitative market, authors face problems about the ways value is assigned to their writing, which is especially troubling for Pacific Islanders investing resources to adapt and share stories of considerable cultural weight. Because prices for electronic books are generally very low, their public perception tends also in that direction. As George Packer points out, “The digital market is awash with millions of barely edited titles, most of it dreck, while readers are being conditioned to think that books are worth as little as a sandwich” (“Cheap Words”). Packer’s sentiment contrasts sharply with the power invested in words by indigenous people across the Pacific, captured succinctly in the Hawaiian ‘ōlelo no‘eau “I ka ‘ōlelo no ke ola, i ka ‘ōlelo no ka make [In the language is life. In the language is death]” (Pukui #1191, 129). Young often dismisses her own writing (perhaps somewhat facetiously) as “fanciful, fun” (“So You Want to”) or overly focused on chiseled male bodies, but she is clearly dedicated to the ideals of her writing craft, the people who benefit from it, and the traditions it draws from and keeps alive. Ultimately Young uses this medial conflict to foster a space for an extensive and ongoing circulation of stories, which are often fanciful, but also carry strong links to ancient traditions that she connects to contemporary political issues.

One alternative vision of literary valuation is given by Lō‘ihi Press, a small book publisher based in Hawai‘i and run by Robert Barclay, who identifies on the press website that he wishes to subvert quietly the publication model that currently inhibits Hawai‘i-related books from coming to fruition:

Our goal is to provide a venue for authors whose books fall outside what is fast becoming a cookie-cutter notion of “marketability” that is continuously leaving

lovers of Hawai‘i Literature with fewer and fewer real reading choices. . . . [I]t is difficult to find a Hawai‘i novel or short story collection that exceeds 300 pages, or one that deals honestly with “controversial” issues. And when such marketing and production cost decisions begin to trump the visions of local writers, then we all lose. (“About Lō‘ihi Press”)

Having an intake of “less than one book per year,” Lō‘ihi, which has recently published Sia Figiel’s novel *Freelove* (2016), offers at least one small avenue to finding and maintaining a readership for some writers in the Pacific that are not established enough to approach major houses or are working on less marketable material. By focusing on a small number of works, Barclay claims to achieve considerable results in the limited local market: “Our post-production and post-release marketing efforts are equally focused, generally leading to reviews in local publications, statewide signing and speaking appearances, other local media coverage, and placement both in Hawai‘i bookstores and on Amazon” (“About Lō‘ihi Press”). While efforts by Barclay and many other such publishers across the Pacific make literature available for readers, teachers, and students, which might not otherwise have ever been read or written, the reach of such a press is clearly limited to a small demographic. If a work develops local popularity, however, in a place like Hawai‘i, there is some possibility it will gain other audiences and its readership will grow.

The other mode is Young’s own do-it-yourself method, which requires what amounts to a full-time job attending to the various publishing and promotional tasks in addition to writing, if the author is going to sell enough books to make a living from—which is, of course, not at all guaranteed. In order to draw enough attention to her books for them to sell, Young has done a lot of work writing regular entries on all her social media outlets and her blog and responding to

requests. By relentlessly promoting her work and getting people to talk about and share their reviews, and engaging with other writers, bloggers, teachers, and students, Young has managed to build a community of readers that, as an aggregate, assign value to her work, both in terms of money and praise. Though modestly successful in this pursuit, Young announced on a January 1, 2016 blog post titled “2015 - The Year I Quit” that she will transition to being a part time writer and work as an office manager at her husband’s office because she is exhausted by the work that she has had to put in. Since then she has also co-founded the news site *Samoa Planet*, to which she is a regular contributor. She will continue to write her works at a slower pace and the community she has already begun to foster will not disappear entirely; however, she will not depend upon her book sales for her living.

Participatory Culture and Electronic Paratexts

Without the backing of a traditional publishing house, Young has taken on the bulk of promotional work on her own, managing to capture and captivate a significant following. Through her efforts she has established large community, especially for someone operating ostensibly on her own. She has a very significant social media presence, posting regularly on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, and has thousands of followers on each platform. She maintains a popular blog called *Sleepless in Samoa* on which she posts regular reflections on writing, family, Samoa, religion, food, and culture. She maintains a YouTube channel that includes a number of interviews and promotions for the series and a video playlist called “The Telesa Soundtrack,” which contains music videos for songs she imagines playing during various parts of the novel. She has at one time published a serialized set of stories called the Alofa

Covenant Chronicles that were sent electronically to paid subscribers on a regular basis.¹⁵ Young has developed such a network of friends and followers, especially around the Pacific, that she seems to have no trouble finding venues for readings and presentations—in spite of the fact that most brick and mortar bookstores do not aid in the sales and promotion of Amazon authors. For instance, I attended her reading at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa English Department in 2013, which was packed, with most of the attendees not regulars at colloquia, and the long lines afterwards at the book table resulting in a complete sellout of her book stock.

What is perhaps even more impressive than Young’s popularity, however, is the way that her works—and particularly paratextual expansions of her works—reshape the Pacific literary mediascape and redefine the rules and relationships therein. By way of the extensive electronic paratexts that accompany her writing, she reworks the craft of the novel as a medium of Pacific storytelling that she uses to bring together a community of readers for an interactive and participatory reading experience.

Telesā is a young adult fantasy romance series set in contemporary Sāmoa. The fantasy elements are loosely based on Samoan spiritual and mythological beliefs and cautionary tales, as many of the characters are “telesā,” which, along with the variant “teine sā,” is a word associated with female spirits who defend the natural world and frighten children into acting prudently. Young’s nineteen-year-old protagonist Leila Folger comes to Sāmoa after having grown up in America and discovers her latent ability to manipulate fire, a power passed down to her by her previously estranged mother Nafanua (named after the Samoan goddess of war), who can control lightning. Leila’s gift enables her (along with a group of similarly gifted friends including her

¹⁵ The series only lasted for three iterations and they are now available to read for free on wattpad.com.

bronze-bodied love interest Daniel Tahi) to battle a number of power hungry telesā who care little about the devastation they cause. The novels' action plots are closely intertwined with the Leila and Daniel's love story, as the superhuman couple struggles with threats to their relationship alongside threats to their community.

In terms of its plot structure, *Telesā* echoes many mythopoeic popular cultural narrative storyworlds aimed at young adults, such as *X-men* and *Twilight*, borrowing some tropes and intersecting them with contemporary and mythic Sāmoa and packaging the series as an ongoing and multiform electronic narrative. In doing so, Young necessarily risks sanctioning a romantic, exotic, and touristic fantasy for outsiders to indulge in. However, I argue that by maintaining the storytelling roots of her works in the Sāmoan tradition of fāgogo, and enhancing them through social media channels, she resists any essentialism by representing life in Sāmoa as a complex, modern, and multi-faceted experience.

Just as Leila's powers are rooted in ancient Sāmoan culture, Young draws not only from conventions of modern electronic communication technologies and popular young adult fiction but also tacitly from the Samoan storytelling form of fāgogo. Young writes in the back matter of the first book that her writing is partly inspired by legends:

I grew up listening to the stories which were often used as a way to 'make us' young girls behave. For example, teine Sa supposedly didn't like it when you wore your hair down, put flowers in your hair, laughed loudly, or walked around the streets after dark. . . . I've always been intrigued by the legends and nobody wanted to answer my questions when I was growing up – so I decided to take what little info we were given and give it my own unique spin. (*Telesa* 426)

While she does not use the term specifically, what Young describes matches what Richard Moyle writes of as “a type of story called *fāgogo*, told mostly at night, privately, inside individual homes” (7), involving supernatural characters coming in contact with lived reality (both contemporary and historical), and which “depict behavioural principles—immoral acts and themes are portrayed in order to demonstrate what may be categorized as being moral” (47). Moreover, Moyle explains that skilled storytellers would adapt *fāgogo* to their audiences: “It is probably no accident that the characters in the stories are taken from the same age-spectrum as those in a typical audience; self-identification on at least that ground doubtless increases audience enjoyment and assures an added degree of relevance” (47). The works in Young’s *Telesā* series take elements from *fāgogo*, including supernatural characters, subject matter, and live interactivity, and they similarly function as a way of conveying ideas about moral behaviour¹⁶, but they do so in the networked electronic medial space of the internet, where many young people feel most at home. We might therefore think of Young’s electronic writings as “*tala fa’afāgogo* (literally, stories in the style of *fāgogo*)” (Moyle 29), as they adapt and approximate the medium, with all the conflicts that process entails.

While it might seem that an age-old indigenous oral tradition is antithetical to modern expressive communications technologies, Young’s electronic extension of *fāgogo* should ultimately come as no great surprise, as Samoan writers have been incorporating and retelling their stories in foreign media for some time, indigenizing those media and inflecting their stories with changing values. Indeed, Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop argues that all Samoan literature that

¹⁶ The morals of *Telesā* are, broadly speaking, about protecting the environment, protecting victims of domestic violence, cultivating cultural identity, celebrating diversity, and supporting LGBTQ rights.

maintains an active relation to tradition is, from its origins, an attempt to reproduce in writing the artistry and authority carried in the oral storytelling form of *fāgogo*:

With the opportunity to read more widely other different styles of writing came the urge to write one's own literature and it appears that the search by Samoan writers has been to capture on paper the elusive essence of the *fagogo* art they remembered from their youth. Hence the development of an indigenous literature in Samoa became 'the search for a written *fagogo*.' (137)

What Fairbairn-Dunlop describes—the attempt to echo in the texture of language, the structure of telling, and the excitement and intimacy of a seated audience—is a tall order for writers, whose medium is not afforded the kind of presence of a live telling. In contrast to a printed novel, the Samoan tradition of *fāgogo* is interactive, with animated tellers depending on their audience's reactions as an important part of the experience. Moyle mentions a number of instances in which the *fāgogo* audience will immediately criticize the storyteller (41) and Samoan literary scholar Emma Kruse-Va'ai describes *fāgogo* as a performance in which

required periodic responses from the audience exclaiming "*Aue!*" confirm engagement and appreciation. . . . Such aspects captivated listeners and made them an integral part of the narration itself. This 'live' connection between teller and audience is therefore coveted by Samoan storytellers and writers in their own narrations even when in print or other forms. (194)

The call-and-response that Kruse-Va'ai describes is somewhat different from what occurs in the electronic social media interactions of Young and her readers, but the spaces of interaction in a dispersed and globalized world require changes to the interfaces in order to maintain cultural connection. In the ongoing and serial nature of her stories and the electronic paratextual

exchange, Young makes considerable gestures towards creating and maintaining an live community connection that approximates *fāgogo* among her and her readers, while pushing against dominant concepts of literature.

While much of the main text of *Telesā* is an electronic reproduction of a book, a notable exception occurs in the third book, *The Bone Bearer*, when Young hyperlinks the word “telesā” to a twitter hashtag search of the same word, displaying a list of all tweets that have been tagged with it. Clicking the link takes the reader into a different application and reveals a considerable archive of commentary relating to the novel from Young and her readers. Moreover, the link is an implicit call to readers to use this twitter hashtag to make comments, which will continue to be directly linked from the novel itself. The hashtag is somewhat overpowered by comments about a Mexican child actress whose stage name is Telesa, but such is a common and realistic consequence in the competitive world of popular culture hashtags, and it even allows one to imagine the intriguing, though unlikely possibility of bilingual fans crossing over and discovering a new storyworld. Nonetheless, with some careful filtering, it is clear that many users have used the #Telesa hashtag to exchange stories of their reading experiences, declare which characters they relate to (or are in love with), and to exclaim their excitement about forthcoming works. By ostensibly inviting readers to comb through and contribute to this archive, Young gestures toward a model of authorship that is strikingly different from the Enlightenment’s unique solitary singular genius and more like an ongoing electronically networked storytelling. At once she taps into the pop culture realm of Twitter and the storytelling space of *fāgogo*, where the author’s and audience’s responses feed back into the story, leaving traces for readers yet to come.

Moreover, in relation to the novel's plot, Young's gesture can be read as a call for a gathering of community across the Pacific and a recognition of shared genealogy and cultural value, despite the distances and barriers—political, economic, psychological—that separate them. The link occurs in a moment in the plot when Leila has been possessed by a powerful, tormented spirit from Hawai'i called Pele, who bears some family resemblance to the Hawaiian volcano goddess of the same name. Leila's imprisoned consciousness draws strength from the malu or traditional Samoan tattoo for women, which serves as "a reminder of her telesā ancestry, the sacred lineage of Nafanua the war goddess." By hyperlinking the word "telesā" in this sentence, Young extends the malu connection that Leila recognizes along the social media airwaves to remind the reader that she or he can take part in an active, dynamic, and supportive community. Reading the text thus becomes, potentially, a way of relating to a diverse group of people who perhaps, like Leila, feel isolated by the world's individualistic mentalities that are reinforced by the ways we often think about literature and writing.

Young expresses her desire to develop an interactive experience with readers that is markedly different from the authoritative distance many fiction writers assume. Young signs off the series with a comment in the back that expresses her understanding of this work as a live and passionate exchange: "Storytelling is my passion. Thank you for joining me on this adventure." In Young's case, this is more than a hackneyed phrase, since she gives ample evidence of being open to readers participating in the performance. She explains on a blog post titled "Why I will Never be a World Famous Best-Selling Author" that she lacks the grace and composure to leave her readers alone to contemplate her work:

No, I definitely don't have what it takes. I am that annoying, pesky author who will stalk you if she sees you reading her book in a library, on a bus, at a mall. Or

shower you with shrieking hugs if I hear you discussing the symbolism contained in chapter 5. Or butt in when you're complaining to a friend about how annoying Leila can be – so I can add my agreeing two cents worth AND my detailed explanation of why she's the way she is. (To that reader at the bookshop in Samoa...I'm sorry! I promise I'm not usually that jittery and uncool. Truly.)

(“Why I will Never”)

Of course, what Young is describing is partly a matter of scale—she has only a tiny fraction of the readership of someone like J. K. Rowling or Stephanie Meyer, who could not possibly afford the time to stalk fans. However, Young's post also contains an implicit critique of the way some authors become deified, asserting that she favors generating live connections with the people reading her work, and she does a lot to make that possible. Instead of having readers worshipping an author-god, Young suggests that these electronically enhanced Pacific stories are meant to bring together communities of tellers and listeners, even giving space for others to reveal latent powers. She reinforces this point in another post:

But then, this journey is not just about the money. Since Telesa's release, I have held regular free download promotions and given away more than twenty thousand electronic copies. Everywhere I go, I donate print books to libraries and schools. The most rewarding part of this journey has been the feedback that says, 'I hate reading, but I read your book in two days...I've never read a book before until I found Telesa...Your book has made me want to visit Samoa...This story makes me want to learn more about my heritage...' Yes, I am a writer trying to earn a living with my writing, but I am also an educator who is passionate about

nurturing a love for books, fueling creativity and igniting a fire for our culture, legends and ancestry. (“Brown People Don’t Read”)

While it cannot be ignored that her constant attention to readers over social media is an attempt to sell more eBooks (and to survive as a professional writer), Young became very much devoted to the people she was writing for and representing, even if she later gave it up out of exhaustion.

In other entries, Young asserts that her readers’ responses have shaped the ways that her continuing narrative has progressed, making the writing, serial publication, and reading process like a protracted live performance. In a post titled “How Much Attention Should Writers Pay to Bad Reviews?” Young explains that she had received “over 100 reviews on Amazon” and that they shaped the way she constructed the second book, particularly in terms of character development and pacing: “I don’t know about other authors, but I’m very glad that readers can instantly put up book feedback online. Your reviews, emails, FB and twitter messages help me in this writing journey” (“How Much Attention”). The changes in pacing and in character focus that Young mentions are very evident in the sequels: Leila’s narration of her interior struggles becomes less prominent; Simone, Leila’s hugely popular fa’afafine friend, and many other characters become a central part of the story, often narrating their own sections; and there is generally more action and open conflict. In fact, the novella *I am Daniel Tahi*, which is a retelling of the first book’s events with Daniel as the first person narrator, began as a blog post that commenters liked so much that they encouraged Young to expand into a novella. To some extent most authors probably have some analogous support system of feedback from editors, fan mail, and reviews, which directs their writing in future projects, but for Young, these public paratexts are officially encouraged, and brought into the electronic constellation of the novel.

Another example of the participatory engagement that Young elicits from her readers is an Amazon poll that Young posted after the first book was out that asked readers to weigh in on whether or not her love story should include sex. While most of the responders answered in the negative, and maintained that Daniel should continue to “protect Leila’s honour,” some were hesitantly interested in the possibility—if it could be achieved tastefully. The kind of polling that Young performs has some precedent in book publishing, as Janice Radway describes one of the major turning points in the resurgence of contemporary romance literature, particularly from a sales perspective, is the practice of “semi-programmed issue,” which

involves the selection of texts from a large variety of offered material with the idea that those texts will be distributed to informally identified readers whose requirements and preferences have been determined partially in advance. The determinations are usually made on the basis of audience response to specialized magazines or newsletters devoted to the subject that constitutes the “content” of the category. (29)

However, Young’s informal poll differs in several ways from such market research that has the express purpose to create a reliable repeat customer base for romance literature and to satisfy readers’ expectations. By contrast, Young’s poll is open and public, and it is conducted by the author, without the budget of a professional marketing team. This is not to say that Young is above the desire to sell more books and reach more readers—the continuation of her career as a writer depends, of course, on maintaining an income—but that the meaning behind her discussion board poll is overdetermined as it is also continuous with an ongoing conversation on the topic of sex (in relation to religion, marriage, sex education, writing, domestic abuse, and Samoan culture) that she carries on in her eBooks, her social media posts, her blog, and her

column with the *Samoa Observer*. Young is not only gathering data from her readers, but opening a frank discussion, directing their attentions toward a social question of representation, and involving them to participate in her writing process.

For the remainder of the main series, Young represents Daniel and Leila discussing sex at length, and though both are clearly full of sexual desire, it is Daniel who cites his own father's abandonment of him and his mother as the reason they must maintain abstinence, which they do until their wedding night at the end of the series. In the novella *I am Daniel Tahi*, Young includes a scene when Daniel describes a sexual encounter with Leila, but we subsequently learn that it did not actually happen, that he had imagined it, allowing Young to narrate the event without having to deal with the consequences. Knowing that the audience is, like the protagonists themselves, interested in the prospect of sex, Young explores the boundaries around the sex lives of teens in Sāmoa while maintaining a modicum of generic propriety for a series that is largely aimed at young adults. While the exclusion of sex in *Telesā* might seem like a strange and unrealistic repression for nineteen-year-olds who are not ostensibly bound to any religious code of conduct¹⁷, Young's exploration of the subject is an engaged inquiry into what is acceptable as a representation of Sāmoa—where Margaret Mead's hugely popular *Coming of Age in Samoa* long ago set a controversial precedent about sex lives of young Samoan women—to an international and heterogeneous audience.

Young's paratexts open critics of indigenous Pacific literature to look, listen, and read for the voices that are, even within an emergent field, often dismissed as nonliterary or

¹⁷ Young is herself a practicing Mormon (though an outspoken critic of certain policies of the LDS Church), but her teenager characters are more ambiguous in their association with religion. They often attend "church" with their families, but it is never made clear what church or what it means to them.

nontraditional. They show something of the always overdetermined sense of what is new or modern and the many traditions that it emerges from. They give new ways of thinking about the development and engagement of new readers and readerships. By directly connecting the reader to an ongoing contemporary reality in the Pacific, the *Telesā* series makes us reimagine what literature is and what it does.

Cyberspace and Pacific Diasporic Identity

In creating and maintaining a dialogue—rooted in Samoan culture, folklore, and practice—with a global community of readers and followers, Young opens a line of inquiry into the prospect of sharing stories, maintaining lines of communication, and re-engaging cultural ties with a Samoan diaspora that is dispersed across the planet and, in fact, much greater in combined population than those living in Sāmoa. Moreover, in addition to practicing this kind of connection, the self-reflexive metafictional content of the Young’s works consistently comments upon the potential and possibilities of networked electronic media in articulating a complex and robust conception of contemporary indigenous Pacific identity that includes those of mixed race and living in the diaspora.

While keeping cognizant that biographical details are not simply determinative of an author’s work, it is worth noting that Young’s own Samoan identity is characterized by a mix of many articulated facets that are expressed and complicated throughout her published writings in various media. She is of Samoan ethnicity and upbringing—though she refers to herself as a “multiracial mongrel” (“What is”)—and she was raised and now lives in Sāmoa, but has also lived in New Zealand, and the United States. She has worked as a teacher, an office manager, and of course a writer in various contexts, with literary influences that range from romance novels and chick lit to pop culture to Pacific literature to her family’s oral storytelling and beyond. She

is a member of the Mormon faith, though she has been an outspoken critic of the LDS church's non-acceptance of the LGBT members and she published an article in a collection called *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings*, which questions the church's patriarchal values, particularly in the context of Sāmoa, and its failure to address the problems of domestic violence.

She expresses her dynamic complex articulated indigenous identity, her "Samoan-ness," in a blog post titled "What is a Samoan?" in which she reflects on her son's performance of Samoan cultural ways only outside of Sāmoa:

It got me thinking. Identity and belonging can be such complicated things. And what defines you as "Samoan" or whatever other race you may be, actually varies in different countries. Samoans in New Zealand are not the same as Samoans in Samoa. ("What is")

In this blog post, Young describes a theory of Samoan identity that is open to the tremendous variance and vibrancy that the contemporary Samoan people—in Sāmoa (both Sāmoas) and dispersed across the world—perform, representing their culture and ethnicity. Yet, while her sense of identity is very open, it is never contingent; people that genuinely identify as Samoan, she implies, can be of many kinds and can even shift their performance in relation to time and space, as she says of her son:

Somehow I dont[sic] think Big Son will be dancing the siva in Samoa. Or waving a Samoan flag everywhere he goes. And he definitely won't be wearing a lavalava to town either. Because he's just not that kind of Samoan. At least not when he's in Samoa anyway. ("What is")

Young's expansive notion of identity, which coalesces around her writings in networked electronic media, is similar to Vicente Diaz's "rooted routedness," which draws upon Austronesian seafaring practices:

It is this dynamic relationality between one's constantly shifting positionality with respect to the directionality of one's home, destination, and reference islands through deep knowledge of the specifics of site and locality that makes for the mutually informing and generative relationship between the horizontal depth of "roots" and geographic and discursive reach of "routes" that in turn, in the presence and proximity of other mobile indigenes, make for the equally generative relationship between the continuation of cultural identity, similarity, and commonality, on the one hand, and differentiation through speciation, on the other. (604)

As the voyagers to whom Diaz refers use and contribute to the "deep knowledge of the specifics of site and locality," Young and her characters use the powers of electronic networks to map out pathways to new spaces while remaining connected to their origins.

Within the storyworld of the *Telesā* series, the question of how to consolidate the disparate aspects of a complex identity is a major concern, especially for its principal protagonist who, because of her American father and upbringing, is fearful about connecting culturally with people in Sāmoa. The entire pretext for Leila's journey to Sāmoa that initiates the plot is for Leila to connect with her roots, as she expresses to her aunt and uncle, "I want so much to learn about my mother's culture and her family" (8) and she reflects to herself "I wanted to find a place here" (8). Ultimately, the "place" that Leila finds is in relation to a community of loving friends and genealogical relations for which she even becomes a crucial defender and a point of

connection with the ancient beliefs and traditions. Young's implicit theory of indigeneity thus accounts for the complications and affordances of the contemporary globalized world in which transportation and communication technologies have indeed made the world smaller and easier to traverse, but have equally increased the distances between people and their communities, allowing them to easily drift apart. Actively using these technologies to recapture and maintain "roots and routes," Young suggests, is a necessary part of contemporary life and a function of her electronic literature.

Young further depicts Leila's mixed race identity as a productive non-issue; she shows that while fears around blood quantum, which have often been instilled by settler colonial logics of elimination, still live in some peoples' minds, the genealogical acceptance of mixed race people has a long history that has a function of building and strengthening regional identity along shared values. Many of *Telesā*'s characters are referred to as "afakasi," a Samoan transliteration of the term "half-caste" that refers to a mixed-race Samoan that often carries the usual derogatory sentiments. However, within the society of teenagers that Leila joins, the attitude towards ethnic identity and "purity" is more open and inclusive than she initially expects, as Simone explains to her,

Maybe it's different back where you come from, but here we're all afakasi, mixed and it's no big deal. Daniel gets teased about it all the time, especially since he's part Tongan and historically Samoans and Tongans hate each other. Today, back there, he was talking about himself, which is why everybody was laughing. (45)

The levity and acceptance that Young's characters perform in response to the common reality of ethnic mixing is surprising and heartening to Leila, whose own fears of not fitting in dominate her behaviour early in the first novel, and her interactions speak to Young's promotion of a

heterogeneous understanding of ethnic kinship, which requires modern ways of relating among contemporary indigenous people, including across electronic networked media.

In addition to imagining ways of creating and maintaining relations with members of a Samoan diaspora, *Telesā*'s Pacific network reaches out towards other groups, in a sense working towards fulfilling what Hau'ofa refers to as "world enlargement" or "the possibility of expanding Oceania progressively to cover larger areas and more peoples" and finding "common identities that are more accommodating, inclusive, and flexible than what we have today" (51). While rooted and set mostly in Sāmoa, *Telesā*'s plot contains many indigenous characters with supernatural powers including Leila's friends Daniel (Tonga), Keahi (Hawai'i), and Talei (Fiji), and the Tagaloa Covenant council, which consists of representatives from "Tonga, Fiji, Tokelau, Rarotonga, Vanuatu, Niue, Nauru, American Samoa and Hawaii" (*Bone Bearer* 189). In creating magic-wielding characters in Young's *Telesā* from across much of Polynesia¹⁸, Young depicts a regional network that imaginatively re-engages the existing ancient genealogical and trade connections among Pacific Islanders and hails her readers across the Pacific and beyond, showing them that electronic literary exchanges can be used to recover connections, maintain existing ties, and forge new relationships. It is evident from the records of many exchanges on her blog and social media, as well as the images, videos, and stories of successful tours and interviews she has done in Sāmoa, Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Hawai'i, and the US mainland that Young's work has traveled along these new and old routes and that she is right when she writes, "I believe that our Samoan and Pacific stories are powerful enough, good

¹⁸ A few notable exclusions from Young's "Covenant" include French Polynesia, Rapa Nui, Aotearoa, Wallis and Futuna, and the Cook Islands other than Rarotonga. This is not to mention, of course, Micronesia and Melanesia.

enough and unique enough for the world stage. I also believe that our stories can have a global market that goes beyond Samoans everywhere” (“Brown People Don’t”).

As Young’s stories and commentaries are spread and responded to across electronic networks, so the characters of her storyworld are powered not only by fantastic abilities to throw flames and commune with sea creatures, but also by a facility with the internet, social media platforms, and mobile network connected devices like their iPhone. By repeatedly featuring electronic communication technology, Young not only presents a realistic picture of the way young people do things; she also indicates that, analogous to the way characters discover and maintain connections to their communities and cultures, Young’s electronic expressions in the form of eBooks represent a sharable, spreadable, mobile, instant form for composing and exchanging stories with readers and responders around the world, generally heedless of national borders. In this way, the ways Young and the characters she represents exchange stories is analogous to the kinds of networks that Epeli Hau‘ofa describes as the continuation of ancient exchange routes that he sees embodied by a particular traveler who regularly travels from Tonga to Fiji to California to trade kava, modeling micro-exchanges that are often undetected by the macro-analysis of the dominant descriptive terms:

There are thousands like him, flying back and forth across national boundaries, the international dateline, and the equator, far above and completely undaunted by the deadly serious discourses below. . . , cultivating their ever-growing universe in their own ways, which is as it should be, for therein lies their independence. No one else would give it to them—or to us. (42)

While “independence” is somewhat questionable for stories that rely on the networks and infrastructure of Amazon, Young and her readers perform as a similarly networked community,

which is analogous to the metafictional networks of the characters of *Telesā*. As such, Young encourages Pacific Islanders and others to make use of the technological networks and form supportive, connected communities whose interrelations fly above dismissive discourses that see Pacific Island cultures as small, diffuse, dependent, and globally insignificant.

Young makes clear very early in the series that electronic communication is a salient aspect of the storyworld and that it is a marked way that the characters are enabled to keep in contact with one another as they travel across space. The great majority of Young's *Telesā* takes place in Sāmoa, but its super-powered teenage protagonist Leila is endowed with a believable ability to communicate with people around the world using her smartphone, a pink iPhone with "limitless credit" that was a gift from her wealthy grandmother in Washington, D. C., whom she is initially required to call on a daily basis. This iPhone serves as a plot device throughout the series: Leila and her friends—like any "linked-up" teenagers or young adults—communicate frequently over SMS, email, Skype, and social media. Just as Young uses the enormous established apparatuses and networks of major corporations such as Amazon.com, Twitter, and Facebook to share cultural stories, her protagonist relies—though somewhat reluctantly—on the wealth and reach of her grandmother and, later, her mother to defend the community that she joins from various malevolent forces. While Leila is at times suspicious of her benefactors and has an outright battle with her mother's telesā group, both these wealthy relatives are dead by the beginning of the second book and Leila comes to understand that she can use the tremendous inheritance along with her supernatural abilities to support and protect her community.

Young shows that with sufficient money and the modern technology it pays for, the distances separating her characters do not have to significantly interrupt the frequent dialogue that maintains their important relationships and the cultural ties that they have built. For

example, at the beginning of book two, Young relates that Leila’s departure from Sāmoa includes the hasty airport purchase of iPhone 4 devices that she gives to Daniel and Simone—notably the most popular characters from Book One—which allow her to keep in constant contact with her friends while she is away. When her grandmother dies, Leila explains that her phone and the contact it enabled with her friends gives her solace: “I was aimless. And lonely. The only thing that made the week bearable was my phone. More specifically, my messages from a far-away Simone. And Daniel” (*When Water Burns* 17). In addition to comfort, the iPhone gives Leila the means to flirt with Daniel and keep track of him at all times: “I was messaging him every other minute and sending him instagram pics of everything and hassling him for the same” (*When Water Burns* 17). Leila’s ability to wield communication technology and her association with a network of friends are aligned chronologically and thematically with her return to and reconnection with her ancestral homeland and her discovery of her telesā powers to manipulate fire. In repeatedly bringing salience to the now ubiquitous practices of internet and mobile phone communication in her eBook series, Young highlights the power in maintaining community connections and sharing stories with people spread across the world.

In addition to electronic media as plot devices, Young’s narrative discourse and language is often shaped by the style and affordances of electronic communication as inflected by Samoan teenager slang. Indeed, Young includes extended sections that are styled in order to indicate that they are text message exchanges. For example, at the beginning of book two, when Simone has just received his new iPhone, Young styles his exchange with Leila with locations and subject lines:

Simone, Samoa

Subject: The gift to surpass all others

AMAZEBALLS! I love my iPhone4. Love it, love it, love it. You rock. When I opened the package, I was almost more excited than the time I was in the elevator in the Central Bank building with some of the Manu Samoa team, breathing the same air as the dalashious Kahn Fotuali'i. Thank you!

Leila, Washington D.C.

Subject: You're welcome

As soon as I saw them, I knew you had to have one. Besides, now you can keep me up to date on all the latest from Samoa. (*When Water Burns* 7, bold original)

Young's formatting, here, does not mimic an SMS (small message service) message exactly, as it would appear on an iPhone 4 device, since SMS has never included location information or subject lines, but she grants her characters the appearance of a realtime back-and-forth conversation from points halfway around the world and she allows them to be playful with their subject lines. It is by way of this electronic communication that Leila is able to maintain ties with her new friends and also to continue her initiation through reading about local Samoan references and phrases. Simone's text message refers to a well-known building in Apia, the national men's rugby team, and one of its famous players, and he employs the word "dalashious," an effected mispronunciation of the word "delicious" that is one of Simone's characteristic catchwords. The exchange continues with Leila experimenting in her own SMS languages with dialectical Samoan: "Pugi. Shut up. (Like my fa'afafine slang? I'm learning)" (*When Water Burns* 8). The medial space of text messages, embedded within the space of Young's eBooks, is a zone in which the characters can exchange playful and serious messages, and it is simultaneously where Young often presents to her readers the way she understands casual banter to happen among teenagers in Sāmoa, which creates a particular stratification among her readers. Those who are familiar with

Samoan language and culture may recognize her references and feel connected by the recognition, while those who do not get the references are often given enough context to understand (or they can use the included glossary or the internet) and they can feel as though they are given a glimpse into something new. Young exploits the popularity and permissiveness of SMS language that is recognized (and sometimes lamented) as a new social dialect, often marking text messages largely with a shift in spelling, grammar, and punctuation conventions, such as when Daniel receives the clear directive from Simone: “*Get ovr here. Nw!!!!*” (*Bone Bearer* 146). Young thereby presents a hybrid intermingling of SMS conventions with the language of young Samoans, and allowing it to connect readers of her eBooks—as well as followers of her social media paratexts—around the world.

Moreover, Young shows that the language of social media inhabits even the characters’ ways of thinking and narrating their lives. In the second paragraph of Young’s spinoff novella *I am Daniel Tahi*, in which Daniel is the focalizer throughout, Young describes that, upon first laying eyes on Leila, Daniel mentally assigns to her a nickname that reveals his own immersion in social media as well as popular culture: “And then out of all the English classes on the island – she had to walk into his. Leila Folger. Or – as he named her in his head, **#AngryGirl**. With a bold caps hashtag” (8, bold original). In addition to the allusion to Bogart’s famous line in *Casablanca*, Daniel employs a hashtag in Leila’s nickname, which is a now commonplace way of indexing or categorizing a statement by “tagging” it in one’s social media post and thereby associating it with all the other posts that are similarly tagged. Thus, his calling Leila **#AngryGirl** indicates that Daniel initially sees her as a typical “angry girl” or perhaps even the epitome of that type. Daniel refers to Leila as **#AngryGirl** often in the narrative but he begins to express his understanding that **#AngryGirl** is only one facet of Leila’s personality that comes and goes: “And

just like that, Leila shuts down. #AngryGirl is back” (28). Like a hashtag used in Twitter or Instagram, Daniel’s hashtag for Leila can be dropped in and associated with a particular mood, and he once describes it as her metaphorical protective space: “The last thing I want is for her to retreat to the #AngryGirl fortress” (65). Moreover, because of the way it looks, the hashtag stands out when it appears on the page and gives even the reader of the print version a visual sense of how frequently Daniel thinks of Leila in this way. Daniel ultimately abandons the use of his #AngryGirl moniker—which seems unnecessary after they firmly establish their deep romantic relationship—but like a Twitter feed the archive of Daniel’s #AngryGirl references persists in the searchable Kindle eBook and in the minds of *Telesā* readers, who could conceivably use Daniel’s hashtag on one of many social media outlets that supports it, though I have discovered no evidence that anyone has.

Taken together, the many instances of electronic communication represented in *Telesā* dovetail with Young’s paratextual social media performances to give a compelling example of what electronic literary narrative can do to bring dispersed people together through story. While Young’s works are by no means immune to the pressures of a capitalist market that sees Pacific Island literature as having little potential for sales, she has found a way to get her stories out and even make some money doing it. With tools available, already existing infrastructure, and pioneering exemplars like Young, it is inevitable that Pacific Islanders will continue to find new ways of enabling stories to be told, shared, created, and read, adapting and reworking robust Pacific traditions for a networked community that has spread around the world.

Social Media Activism and Poetic Narrative in Contemporary Micronesian Poetry

As Young carves out her niche and convincingly shows the world that electronic networks can effectively be used for sharing Pacific stories in new Pacific ways (and that

enlisting the technology this way can even earn one a living), other artists in the Pacific have focused their internet and social media powered and inflected poetry on narrating activist stories addressing particular real world political issues¹⁹ that raise awareness and inspire participation and action for mass audiences—which also potentially become a part of the narrative. Using electronic media to create and share their poetry, two diasporic poets from Micronesia, Craig Santos Perez from Guahan (Guam) and Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner from the Marshall Islands represent the traditions and voices of their peoples as vital and threatened. In so doing they address a global audience with little knowledge of the place of Micronesia in U.S. colonial history or in Pacific literature, where it has been overshadowed by Polynesia and Melanesia²⁰.

Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez uses the internet in innovative ways to construct his poetry and create a productive feedback loop with the words of the people of Guahan and his own Facebook friends, bringing them together on the pages of his physical poetry book in a struggle to convey their political views and concerns for survival in a space where such voices often get washed out and ignored in the wake of extremely powerful forces like the US military. Like Young, Perez maintains a very active online presence on social media with thousands of

¹⁹ This is not to say that Young’s writing does not also perform political or activist functions. Indeed, her writings take on many issues such as domestic violence, cultural identity, the place of Pacific literature, environmental protections, body image, and LGBT rights.

²⁰ While several anthologies and numerous studies have been devoted to Polynesian and Melanesian literature, comparatively few have emerged on Micronesian writing. However, two projects, both by M. A. students at the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa have revealed significantly more writing and literature than is commonly known about. Mark Skinner’s 1990 thesis “Contemporary Micronesian Literature: A Preliminary Bibliography” lists contains about 800 entries by 400 authors and Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner’s 2014 thesis “IEP Jaltok: A History of Marshallese Literature” shows that the idea of literature for Marshallese peoples should be thought of as considerably larger than what is traditionally published.

friends and followers, and, in addition to maintaining his own, he has contributed to several blogs such as *Jacket2*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Poetry Foundation*, and *Ke Kaupu Hehiale*. He also recorded (with Brandy Nālani McDougall) the amplified poetry album *Undercurrent*, which is available for purchase and digital download on various internet outlets.

All of the books in Perez’s tetralogy *from Unincorporated Territory: [hacha], [saina], [guma’], and [lukao]* deal with the troubled relationship that Guahan has with the US and its military and each contains at least some reference to blogs, websites, and an email address where Perez may be contacted, but the third book *[guma’]*, which won the American Book Award in 2015, awarded by the Before Columbus Foundation, most explicitly signals its integration of web-based technologies with its poetry and traditional Chamorro language storytelling techniques by beginning and ending with references to actual activist collaborations on the internet. Just before the “map of contents” in his collection he includes a page that only contains the following text centered text:

~

hanom save hanom pagan.org hanom

~

and includes the following text on an identically styled page after the last poem:

~

hanom #ourislands hanom aresacred hanom

~

In these statements, Perez uses the Chamorro phrase “hanom hanom hanom,” which literally translates as “water water water,” and is repeated throughout Perez’s trilogy, notably as the last three words of the first book and the beginning and end of the second book. Hsuan Hsu compares

Perez’s “mantra” to T. S. Eliot’s “Shanti Shanti Shanti” at the end of “The Waste Land” and asserts that Perez “interweaves breath, body, and water into poems that traverse and interconnect the militarized and commodified spaces of Oceania” (301). By further interweaving this phrase with the fragmented website URL savepagan.org and Twitter hashtag #ourislandsaresacred, Perez introduces the idea that the water, islands, people, and language are further connected on the internet, as evidenced by these two online activist connections. The two links are textually broken, in the sense that they are each split into two parts that are literally separated by “hanom,” but the URL is further broken in the sense that it leads to a site that does not exist and it requires a further search engine request to understand that the correct URL is “savepaganisland.org,”²¹ which leads to a blog that “was created to spread awareness of the U.S. Military’s proposal to use Pagan Island for live-fire and military training” (“Save Pagan Island”), which was active from about 2011–2013. The hashtag #ourislandsaresacred, which is associated with the Twitter account @OIASMarianas and the Facebook group of almost 2500 people called “Our Islands are Sacred,” has garnered attention from supporters across the Pacific and beyond. The two web references are indices around which people and their writing gathers and is focused on specific objectives including an online petition with over 6500 signatures that was sent to decision-makers in the US military. Though his poetry tetralogy is published exclusively as a conventional softcover physical book, Perez’s two prominent social media references woven into the collection’s watery structure—like the much less prominent hashtag hyperlink in Young’s electronically published series *Telesā*—redirect users to multifarious currents of historical

²¹ This link is also now defunct, but the following links are now live (as of 22 Feb 2018): savepaganisland.wordpress.com and ginenmarianas.com

context that his poetic narrative swims within, and he invites readers to contribute to that dynamic context, particularly as supporters of the efforts to demilitarize Guahan.

Characteristic of the text in each of Perez's collections, the two statements use tildes (~) to identify, join, and separate a discrete stanza or section of the poetry, and the tilde, like the "from" or "ginen" used in all of Perez's titles, also suggests an omission, contraction, or approximation, as the symbol was devised to denote a contraction in Medieval Latin manuscripts and it is commonly used as a mathematical symbol denoting approximation. Paul Lai further points out that the tildes "mimetically represent the ocean waves that are an important aspect of islanders' worldview" (10). Perez begins and ends the book by suggesting that the narrative contained in his poetry, like Chamorro culture on Guahan that has been afflicted by social ills related to war, multiple colonizations, and military occupation, is necessarily partial, approximate, and fragmented. Still, Perez balances the incompleteness with an optimism in the idea that the damage sustained is not irreversible and that what holds together and connects these fragments is the ocean, the efforts of a strong community of activists, language, poetry, and the internet.

Perez's collection is bookended with references to its overall immersion in web based discourses, but the most salient engagement with social media in [*guma'*] is a six part poem cycle titled "*ginen* fatal impact statements" in which Perez selects most of the text from two online sources: (1) an archive of 10,323 public comments in response to the 2009 draft of the Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) by the US military for its proposed military buildup on

Guam²², some of which Perez posted on his Facebook, and (2) responses (and responses to responses) by Perez and his Facebook friends to those comments. The poem's six short installments are dispersed throughout the collection, each one or two pages long, alternating with installments from another poem cycle called "*ginen* the legends of Juan Malo [*a malologue*]"—Perez's facetious paeans to potted meats—as the last four poems of the first three sections of the collection, somewhat resembling the rhyming couplets at the end of a sonnet.

The title of the poem cycle "*ginen* fatal impact statements" is a pun that joins the term "Environmental Impact Statement," a required document that assesses the amount of damage that will be caused to the environment by a project, with the term "fatal impact theory," which, named after Alan Moorhead's *The Fatal Impact: An Account of the Invasion of the South Pacific, 1767–1840* (1966), is a strain of colonial thinking that considers the devastation of indigenous cultures to be effectively complete and irreversible, despite evidence to the contrary. This portmanteau phrase—reminiscent of a solution in the *Wheel of Fortune* "Before and After" category—suggests that the DEIS is underwritten by a fatal impact theory which substantially dismisses the presence of the Chamorro people, who have been struggling for acknowledgment and sovereignty for hundreds of years, in its bid for strategic military buildup. The cumulative effect of Perez's poem, the over 10,000 comments submitted to the DEIS, and the considerable active mobilized social media communities provides considerable undeniable evidence that the Chamorro people are present and capable of expressing their stories across various media and have indeed not succumbed to the fatal impact of the historical violences visited upon them.

²² These comments were submitted by mail, through the website, or written or delivered orally at a public hearing. The military provided a 90-day period. The entire document is available online at <www.guambuildupeis.us>.

The comments that Perez represents in “*ginen* fatal impact statements” give the reader a sense of the immensity and complexity of the process which seems designed to overwhelm the people that it most affects. Deferring explanation about the nature of the DEIS or the poem’s construction, Perez begins the first poem in the cycle with the line, “DEIS Public Comment : ‘This is a huge document to digest’” (25). This first statement responds reasonably to the difficulty in understanding the military’s DEIS, which was released in nine multipart volumes describing the impacts of the many different components of the military buildup. By opening his poem with this found statement, Perez thus signals the seemingly purposeful overwhelming effect that the DEIS, as well as its proposed actions, have on the people of Guahan, which is perceived as small, insignificant, weak, and undeveloped in comparison to the size of America’s military might, and the labyrinthine complexity of America’s documentation. In the last installment of the poem, Perez includes a comment that indicates that the commenters were indeed thoroughly and consistently puzzled by the entire process: “And I still find it hard to wrap my head around everything” (66). However, by highlighting the tremendous number of comments received and the commensurate intricate multilayered organized resistance movement launched by Chamorro people and their allies in and outside of Guahan, Perez’s poem refutes the sense of smallness, putting on display the subtlety, skill, and force of a coordinated, networked, and galvanized global community of Pacific people who are threatened with a “buildup” of their already unbearable list of dispossessions.

Perez further selects and represents testimony that indicates the perceived futility of the public comment period, which, like its overwhelming size and complexity, appears to be built into the military’s actions. One commenter expresses (employing noticeable sarcasm) his or her feeling that the entire solicitation procedure is merely ceremonial and will ultimately be

ineffectual: “First off, thank you for the false sense of participation created by the comment period. The opportunity to vent, while completely meaningless, is at very least cathartic” (25). This selected comment reveals the cynicism held by many people that are familiar with the actions of the military that already occupies over a quarter of Guahan’s land, which has been an unincorporated territory of the US since it was seized from Japan in 1944 at the end of WW2. Perez’s selection amplifies the voices that are frustrated with a process that seems likely to proceed despite the complaints and concerns expressed during this comment period. He includes at the end of the first installment a comment that questions—perhaps with genuine interest or perhaps in resignation—whether the comments will receive a significant reading: “Where are the comments to these issues sent? Who sees them? Will the public see any of these comments?” (25). The question reveals a suspicion that the comments will never be adequately considered by the military and that the people of Guahan will not be able to understand the formidable response that was made to the DEIS.

While hopelessness seems to be a legitimate response to the interests of the US military, which is backed by the most powerful coercive forces in the world, the futility expressed in some of the comments presented Perez’s poem are balanced by an understanding of the immaterial wealth of community’s response. The question about where these comments end up is, at least in part, answered by Perez’s poem; the comments are published on the government’s official website <guambuildup.us> and appended to the Final EIS, where Perez read them, and subsequently selected and transcribed them to his Facebook, then published a poetic collage of the discussion. While the military’s website has always made the comments publicly accessible, the enormity of the response prohibits most people who might be affected by the buildup to even approach the text. Nevertheless, Perez shows through his found poem and its embedded

Facebook conversations, that the Chamorro people are equipped to process and respond to the military's barrage of technical verbiage. He includes, for instance, one Facebook comment that expresses gratitude for Perez's DEIS Public Comment posts: "*—hoi...I love reading these quotes you've been putting up. Gives me strength and reminds me why we do the work that we do. Guaiya hao, p.s. gonna start stealing yr quotes and reposting*" (47, italics original). Perez shows that the increased visibility of the comments, especially along the electronic networks that ordinary people around the world connect to frequently, exemplify the way people can readily start and propagate a movement by simply activating the tools that are built into social media platforms for spreading and disseminating a story. Such a movement could even have a "fatal impact" on the military's proposed buildup²³.

Perez also gives the impression that the process of the comment period for the DEIS is—perhaps by design—set up in such a way that it constrains the expression of the Chamorro people (and other commenters) who are forced to format their response to conform with the military's requirements, which ultimately stacks the deck in favour of the buildup. Two consecutive DEIS comments that Perez includes in the final installment of "*ginen fatal impact statements*" express the sense that their voices are stifled by the online web form, one asserting, "The online comment box is too limiting," and the other asking "Why are we only limited to 2500 characters in our comments?" (66). These comments draw attention to the communicative situation of the commenters, which is entirely under the control of the US military. While the military's various EIS documents include an extensive array of text, web pages, videos, images, hyperlinks, charts,

²³ As of the time of writing, in response to lawsuits and protests, the military has already scaled back their plans and considerably reduced the number of troops they plan to station in Guahan and they have lengthened the timeline. They have also changed the location where they plan to build their live fire training facility.

and graphics, clearly produced and researched by a professionally trained and well paid team, the commenters were each allotted only 2500 characters of plain text and a 90-day period to read and respond, which prompted another commenter Perez cited to write “I request an extension of the public commenting period” (64). Perez gives, moreover, a strong sense that the US military would be unable to comprehend the subtleties of the Chamorro peoples’ expressed positions, by including the comment, “They can’t even pronounce the names of the villages right for God’s sake!” (27). The cheeky Facebook comment that Perez includes after this statement, which asserts “—*Pronunciation before colonization!*” (27), suggests that even if the US military officials were versed in Chamorro pronunciation, their buildup would still represent a dispossession for the people of Guahan. Yet, the point remains that an uneven power structure dominates the entire EIS process down to the level of language, which the US military has the choice not to learn.

Despite such insinuations of an unfair process, in the multi-leveled narrative space of Perez’s poem (as well as his entire collection), there is a consistent implicit sense that what is represented in words and text is only the tip of an immense iceberg whose narrative weight is marshaled by opening spaces for these voices. The words in his poem, including the voices from the DEIS public comments, are the tenacious fragments or remains of the fuller story of Guahan, which is concealed or overshadowed by the interests of dominant forces like the US military, as Perez explains in his introduction to the first book, “Each poem carries the ‘from’ and bears its weight and resultant incompleteness” (12). The incompleteness, within Perez’s narrative spaces is not a weakness, but a sign that stands in for a much bigger and more complex story. After the above commenter asks why the comment box is so limiting, Perez includes a Facebook comment that asks, “—*Do the blank spaces between words count as characters? Does silence give our*

words character?” (66). Setting aside this commenter’s clever pun and the point that the term “character” in the language of HTML forms always includes blank spaces as well as things like punctuation and paragraph breaks, Perez’s inclusion of this comment draws attention again to the productive possibility that lives concealed in the “spaces between words” and the silences that hold stories that have not been able to find an audience (or vice versa). The set of DEIS public comments itself serves as a record of many voices that could easily be lost in the sea of powerful discourses around this buildup, but Perez’s poems as well as his social media posts have a way of bringing enough signs to the surface to make the presence of the others felt.

The final DEIS Public Comment that Perez includes employs an intriguing metaphor of Guahan’s endangered national bird, the ko’ko’ (also known as the Guam rail), which serves also for Chamorro and other Pacific peoples’ use of electronic networked media to strengthen the connections of their global community. The comment reads “I feel like the ko’ko’ bird. My nest was on the ground. I was a flash in the forest. I took to the water” (66). The ko’ko’, a flightless bird endemic to Guahan that nests on the ground, saw a sharp decline in population in the 1960s when the brown tree snake was unintentionally introduced to their habitat, likely by military ships at the conclusion of WW2. The commenter’s metaphor thus suggests that the Chamorro people are, like these wild birds, being forced out of their homes and made to survive in different environments. While the ko’ko’ is indeed capable of swimming, I have found no evidence that it has adapted to a life on the water; the species has been protected by efforts of conservationists and raised in captivity until 2010, when they were reintroduced to the wild on Cocos Island, where predators are not present. In any case, the ko’ko’, like the people of Guahan, has survived despite considerable harm done to its habitat, unlike the Guam flycatcher, which is now extinct. By including this quote, Perez suggests that the Chamorro people, who have been squeezed into

progressively smaller portions of their own traditional lands by the US military, which claims to need the territory as a strategic position against its persistent sense of threat from increasingly powerful Asian nations, has shown a fierce resilience, exemplified by the included DEIS comment “I cannot sit back any longer. We, as a whole, need to stop being shoved around, and push back” (64). If the ko’ko’ “took to the water,” the Chamorro people have spread around the world and taken to Facebook—despite the ironic Facebook response to the above comment, which reads “*The revolution will not be on Facebook*” (64). Chamoru people maintain their connections (and are creating new ones) partially and significantly over social media, which is evident from both Perez’s poem and the DEIS public comments, which—especially considering their number and the 90-day comment period—must have been an organized effort over a popular platform like Facebook, the now de facto means of getting an activist message out to a caring community. The ability to use social networks is crucial for Chamoru people, especially since there are more of them in the diaspora than on Guahan, and many are connected to the military in ways that ensure a high level of knowledge about its actions and enable accurate contestations to be launched.

Perez’s poem, which is distributed throughout his collection like islands in the Pacific, voices the stories shared across electronically networked connections, which represent a powerful unity that is emphatically solidified against the belittling forces that are implicit in the proposed US military actions. Perez includes a comment that neatly captures the frustration that is brought forth by the military buildup and the ostensibly unusual time and method of voicing it: “This bothers me so much that I am typing this response at midnight with my cellphone” (27). This commenter’s midnight cellphone comment suggests that the community’s connection is—like social media—wireless, always on, and always ready to be called on for support—regardless

where he or she may be currently living. The military's proposed buildup assumes that the Chamorro people, like the ko'ko', both indigenous to the land, will be insignificant in relation to the important project of securing the Pacific for the progress of the world's most dominant superpower, which has, largely because of people's protests there, been forced to move troops out of Okinawa. However, as Perez shows and exemplifies, the people of Guahan indeed "took to the water" and have embraced the affordances of electronic networks to maintain, expand, and protect their homes, as Epeli Hau'ofa has claimed Pacific Islanders have done since long before the emergence and popularity of social media, and continue to do in whatever ways necessary and possible:

they strike roots in new resource areas, securing employment and overseas family property, expanding kinship networks through which they circulate themselves, their relatives, their material goods, and their stories all across their ocean, and the ocean is theirs because it has always been their home. (34)

Resisting the belittlement that sees Chamorro people as occupants of tiny islands standing futilely in the way of US interests, Perez offers his readers another level of structure to the narrative that details the value, significance, and power of Pacific Islands and their native inhabitants—and after all, as Hau'ofa asserts, "Smallness is a state of mind" (31). The poem opens up avenues to believing that the Chamorro world, centered on (but never limited to) Guahan, is a robust and thriving culture that has been able to endure enormous hardship, and continues to grow, adapt, exchange, and maintain its claim to place on the planet, as well as in cyberspace.

Like Perez, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, from the neighboring Micronesian island cluster the Marshall Islands, draws attention to indigenous Pacific Islanders, but Jetnil-Kijiner emphasizes

their extreme vulnerability to the effects of climate change, which puts many Pacific Islands at risk of losing land from rising sea levels. Through her poetry, Jetnil-Kijiner performs—visually and aurally over internet video—a reorientation of the reader’s understanding of Pacific Island cultures with respect to relative size, importance, and value; while Pacific Islands may not be global centers of economy or culture, they are firmly situated on the front lines of the environmental crisis of sea level rise, which will ultimately affect everyone and which is indirectly caused by the behaviors of people worldwide. Moreover, like Young and Perez, Jetnil-Kijiner has used the power of blogging and social media to spread her videos to people worldwide, in her case packaging her audio-visual narrative poetry as “spreadable media,” (Jenkins et al.) which enables her active audience to share the videos readily across a vast network over a very short period of time. While the digital video poems themselves do not change with their spread, they gain considerable attention and traction as more and more people—and particularly people with well-established followings—share and comment upon them, marking them with an increasing cumulative weight of popularity and endorsement.

While Jetnil-Kijiner shows clear virtuosity as a performer and her poems are subtly crafted, a large part of the popularity of her work comes from its skillful use of the medium of internet video to capture the attention of people around the world, connecting them with a grassroots cause that many have in turn shared. Spreadable media is a term used by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green to expressly counter the more popularly used “viral media,” a metaphor which they point out suggests that contagious users unconsciously pass on stories without any control or taking any responsibility for what they share, an idea that has increasingly less validity in the post-Web 2.0 dynamic social internet, in which users have much greater agency in the process of dissemination and curation. Jenkins et al. assert that “audiences

play an active role in ‘spreading’ content rather than serving as passive carriers of viral media: their choices, investments, agendas, and actions determine what gets valued” (21). Jetnil-Kijiner’s internet video poems, most of which are published for free on the popular site YouTube, have taken off partly because of their ability to be easily and sometimes algorithmically linked, tracked, recommended, shared, aggregated, embedded, and associated with relevant institutions, people, and other videos.

While literature has always been spread in an analogous way, with people sharing stories with their social networks in a variety of ways, there are at least two major differences to the way Jetnil-Kijiner’s video poems have spread around the world: (1) the speed at which sharing takes place is much faster and (2) the way the spread happens is easily and almost completely trackable. For example, while most books gain popularity over their first year on the market, Jetnil-Kijiner’s most popular video poem on YouTube, “Dear Matafele Peinam,” which was delivered to the UN Climate Summit on 23 September 2014, has received over 400,000 views in its two main versions, of which over 275,000 occurred within the first few days after the video was posted, benefitting greatly from a tweet by actor Leonardo di Caprio and feature articles in *Slate* and *The Huffington Post*. These numbers are not terribly exceptional for YouTube, whose most viewed video—Korean musician Psy’s “Gangnam Style”—has been viewed over 2.5 billion times; however, for a poetry video by a Pacific Islander, and particularly for a Marshallese woman, the performance has been groundbreaking. Indeed, it is unlikely that any single piece of Pacific literature—excepting, perhaps, songs or folktales—has been read as many times, and it

would be very difficult if not impossible to even estimate a similar statistic for, say, a novel or poem.²⁴

Alongside, but certainly not unrelated to, the circulation of her video poems, Jetnil-Kijiner has attained a phenomenal level of celebrity, particularly among the growing global community of people engaged in the discourses around climate change. After performing at the Poetry Parnassus event at London's Southbank Centre in 2012, Jetnil-Kijiner's poem "Tell Them" was made into a YouTube video by Studio Revolt. She was then invited to speak and read poems at the UN Climate Summit in 2014 and the UN Conference of Parties (COP21) on Climate Change in Paris. During COP21, she was featured in *Vogue* magazine in a photographic feature by Cameron Russell called "Climate Warriors." In 2015, she was featured on several CNN web articles and videos, including "You're Making This Island Disappear," an extended essay on the effects of climate change on the Marshall Islands by columnist John Sutter, and her video poem "2 Degrees," which is also the name of a regular CNN feature on the topic. These and other public performances over the internet have made Jetnil-Kijiner a powerful and creative voice from the Pacific, who further revises the "fatal impact" narrative to a considerable global audience, insisting that these tiny islands are more than a dispensable canary in the coal mine.

However, Jetnil-Kijiner's fame has not come without some ambivalence; the global focus of attention on the Marshall Islands is framed largely in relation to its impending catastrophe, as

²⁴ By contrast, Hawaiian slam poet Jamaica Osorio's most popular YouTube poem, "1893," from her appearance on HBO's *Brave New Voices* programme hosted by Russell Simmons, has been viewed about 125,000 times in the seven years since it was uploaded. Lani Wendt Young posted in 2012 that she had sold 11,885 books and given away about 38,000, but of course those numbers do not account for copies that were read multiple times, pirated, or never read.

opposed to the importance of the people and culture there. In many news articles²⁵, Marshallese people are figured as tragic victims of “fatal impact,” defined by the imminence of their decline, which is also similar to the “vanishing Indian” discourse that amounts to imperial nostalgia for what society is not willing to do enough to protect. Despite the clear advantages of her meteoric rise, in a blog entry Jetnil-Kijiner cautiously laments the strong association with climate change her fame has meant for her, the Marshall Islands, and possibly the entire Pacific Island region:

However, I’ve also been worried that I’ve been pigeonholed into an expectation that everything I will write about from here on out will be climate change related. That I will become “The Climate Change poet.” Nothing wrong with that, but here’s the thing: there’s more to my islands than the threat of being drowned. (“A Few Thoughts”)

Implicit in Jetnil-Kijiner’s statement seems to be the point that the world has rarely expressed much interest in the Marshall Islands before and in the unlikely event that the climate change issues are miraculously resolved—or the more likely event that the Marshallese people are forced to give up their endangered homelands and relocate—the people of the world could easily slide back into their indifference that, along with a virtual news blackout, allowed for nuclear testing, and tests of the effects of radiation on Micronesians. In expressing herself in poetry and elsewhere, Jetnil-Kijiner opens up the possibility for attention for Micronesian and Pacific expressions that extend far beyond the current most pressing concern.

²⁵ Even factual headlines such as “The Marshall Islands are Disappearing” (Davenport) and “You’re Making This Island Disappear” (Sutter) somewhat sensationalize the impending disappearance.

While there is no way to know what will happen or how they will be received, Jetnil-Kijiner's poems are not merely "climate change poems," but also self-reflexive internet video poems that weave cultural and historical references with the overtly political purposes. Indeed, before her fame as a representative for the climate, several of her spoken word poems sought to draw attention to the racism Micronesians growing up in Honolulu have faced. In her poem "2 Degrees" for CNN, whose viewership is hard to estimate because it is published on CNN's website (which does not publicly provide statistics) and aired on television in addition to a version on YouTube, Jetnil-Kijiner's main message is primarily about climate change, that the two degree Celsius increase in average ocean temperature that some have identified as a important "tipping point," is not an ambitious enough goal to prevent the submersion of the Marshall Islands and many other catastrophes²⁶. The poem, Jetnil-Kijiner writes on her blog, was written at the request of reporter John Sutter for his special section "2 Degrees" on climate change, but she also notes that she made a particular demand about the poem's message: "I agreed to do it – with a little spin of my own, by challenging the 2 degrees estimate, which actually places more islands under water, than 1.5 (which is what our island leaders have been pushing for)" ("Poem: 2 Degrees"). More than challenging the size of the number, however, the poem's narrative includes several gestures toward the idea that climate change is only one ongoing issue among many that people of the Marshall Islands face, and not an entirely new one. Nevertheless, the issue optimistically allows Jetnil-Kijiner to "fish for recognition," to attempt to

²⁶ Most climatologists agree that the two-degree number is arbitrary and has little basis in any research. However, Jaeger and Jaeger point out that it is a good enough number to focus people into action. Others, such as Tschakert, argue that at 2 degrees too much damage would be sustained and suggests 1.5 is a better target. Palmer points to the fact that 2 degrees is a number that is favoured by large, wealthy nations, who would be less affected by the rise in temperature.

engender more than the three to five minutes of attention people are willing to commit to watching a YouTube video while sitting on a bus and absentmindedly swiping through their Twitter feed. Her embodied public performance uses personal stories and evocative pronoun use to call upon the audience to think about the climate change crisis as a moment to consider the power imbalance that governs not only environmental policy, but also the way people are oriented toward such videos on the internet.

Like many of Jetnil-Kijiner's video poems, "2 Degrees"²⁷ is told in the first person and involves an intimate personal narrative, which serves to establish a human element to the problem and contrasts with the official narratives that tend to confirm the smallness of Micronesian islands. Jetnil-Kijiner's style of deeply personal and social-justice oriented performance poetry draws from the spoken word tradition made popular by performers like Russell Simmons, as well as from Pacific oral forms. She begins by describing her daughter LiPeinam's recent fever, for which she explains "We wrestled with a thermometer that read 99.8 degrees," but that the medical definition of a high fever is slightly more than that: "the doctor says technically 100.4 is a fever." However, Jetnil-Kijiner follows by suggesting that her observations of daughter's changed behaviour clearly evidence a problem, despite what the thermometer and medical standards read: "but I can see her flushed face how she drapes across my lap, listless". The scene that she narrates, to which anyone who has been to a doctor can relate, reveals the stratification of voices and understandings about a commonplace concern like a child's fever or a larger systemic one like climate change. Later in the poem, Jetnil-Kijiner

²⁷ Jetnil-Kijiner includes the text to the poem on her blog post titled "Poem: 2 Degrees," but the poem she delivers on CNN has some differences. The references I include below are transcribed from the CNN video version without indicating line breaks from the blog version. I've also added punctuation where it seems to convey Jetnil-Kijiner's vocal emphasis.

more explicitly brings out the problems of faith in voices of traditional authority and their possible oversights: “I think about the world making the same mistakes again and again since the industrial revolution since 1977 when an economist said 2 degrees was the estimate.” By drawing a straightforward analogy between LiPeinam’s fever and the problem of the two degree limit in ocean temperature increase, Jetnil-Kijiner calls on the reader to challenge received knowledge and diagnoses, especially when there is evidence that seems to contradict it, and when the least powerful people are most threatened by inaction.

By comparing the Earth’s oceans to her daughter’s body, Jetnil-Kijiner suggests, along with Hau‘ofa, that the ocean should and does serve as a powerful figure for connecting people in the Pacific and around the world. Jetnil-Kijiner suggests that LiPeinam’s health is tied to the health of the planet, which is not totally inaccurate, as the behaviours of people all around the world (which lead to the global temperature increases) connect them to the people on the smallest and most vulnerable islands and if those islands disappear, the rest of the planet’s lands are certainly in danger. The planet, Jetnil-Kijiner implies by this comparison, is like a child; it is both sensitive to its stewards’ actions and resilient if given a chance to recover. Climate change is thus a symptom of people’s disconnected view of the world, which has allowed for too much damage to happen, especially to its perceived peripheries, believing that the core will survive. Jetnil-Kijiner’s metaphor insists upon the general human interdependence with each other and with the non-human elements of the Earth. In asserting human beings’ responsibility to maintaining their home, she equally calls for attention to people and places that are likely to take on the worst effects of the world’s imprudence.

In several of her earlier poems, Jetnil-Kijiner employs slippery pronouns to shift voices and perspective, ultimately making the reader or hearer question the nature of her relative

position in the world. For instance, “Tell Them” is a framed narrative in which the speaker reads a note that she encloses in packages of handicrafts sent to her “friends in the states,” setting up a situation that is ostensibly overheard, but is easily also understood as a direct address to the reader. The speaker asks “you” (friends) to “tell them,” (the people they meet) when they wear the handicrafts she sends them, presuming that many of “them” will be unfamiliar with the Marshall Islands and its people, culture, and problems. In “Dear Matafele Peinam,” Jetnil-Kijiner begins with a clear us-them division, referring to “those hidden behind platinum titles who like to pretend that we don’t exist,” but later identifies others as “those who see us” and seems to speak with these people, saying “we are families biking, recycling, reusing, engineers dreaming, designing, building, artists painting, dancing, writing and we are spreading the word.” She ends this poem on a particularly hopeful and embracing gesture speaking directly to her daughter, which speaks with the people of the world recognizing their responsibility to some of the smallest islands and their infant inhabitant: “because we won’t let you down, you’ll see.” In both of these poems, Jetnil-Kijiner deconstructs the oppositional mentality that enables the Marshallese people to be considered insignificant residents of tiny far-flung islands.

Jetnil-Kijiner’s pronoun use in “2 Degrees” is subtle in its manipulation of the reader’s perspective, shifting between an inside and outside perspective to reveal the ease with which responsibility is shirked. This pronoun manipulation hinges on her description of a scene that brings out the difference in perspective regarding the two degree limit:

At a climate change conference a colleague tells me 2 degrees is just a benchmark for climate negotiation.

I tell him 2 degrees is a gamble. At 2 degrees my islands, the Marshall Islands, will already be under water. This is why our leaders push for 1.5.

Jetnil-Kijiner's poem uses the pronoun "him" to indicate that the reader is not complicit with the well-meaning participant who rightly points out that the number is merely a bargaining tool to give those in power something to aim for, which is better than the current situation, in which little at all is being done. Nonetheless, Jetnil-Kijiner counters this statement by giving the other side of the argument that this colleague summarily ignores. She follows by implying that "you"—this time seemingly an expansive, general "you" that equally addresses the reader—are part of the collective disenfranchisement of ostensibly peripheral nations and their people: "Seems small, like 0.5 degrees shouldn't matter, like 0.5 degrees are just crumbs, like the Marshall Islands must look on a map, just crumbs you dust off the table, wipe your hands clean of." A stanza later, however, Jetnil-Kijiner seems to bring the reader back into the fold, referring to "the world" as outside, repeating the structure of the same line but altering the pronouns asking, "will the world leave us out to rest in the sun, or will they just dust their hands of us, wipe them clean?" By shifting the narrative positionality several times in the poem, Jetnil-Kijiner does not allow her reader to settle into complacency about what can for many people feel like someone else's problem.

Although the poem is clearly focused on the issue of climate change, Jetnil-Kijiner suggests that her poetry aims to correct a more general structural—and perhaps willful—ignorance about the Marshall Islands and similar places that are at risk. Towards the end of the poem, she reflects meta-poetically upon the work that her digital video poetry accomplishes, summing it up by employing analogy with a concept her father tells her about:

I ask my father what does it take to be a leader in this story when we have so much to lose. My father told me idik, the Marshallese word for when the tide is nearest an equilibrium, is the best time for fishing.

Maybe that's what I'm doing, fishing for recognition, writing the tide towards an equilibrium, willing the world to find its balance.

The “story” that Jetnil-Kijiner asks about is climate change, but her father’s traditional metaphoric wisdom about equilibrium and fishing seems to refer to a more general theory of effective communication and power relations: he suggests that there is a moment during the constant ebb and flow of public attention at which the time is best to achieve recognition. In this reflection about the nature of her poetic contribution to the discussion, Jetnil-Kijiner suggests that the kernel of her project is not climate change but a basic recognition and valuing of her people, who, as she asserts in “Dear Matafele Peinam,” “deserve to do more than just survive; we deserve to thrive.” In “fishing for recognition,” using both indigenous fishing knowledge and technological delivery platforms, Jetnil-Kijiner ambitiously seeks to remedy the root of the “two degrees” problem, which lies in the imbalance of the world’s system of value. Her timely, accessible, and widespread video poems work to ensure that there is little excuse for the world to claim ignorance about the existence and value of the Marshall Islands or the particular dangers that the world’s actions create for them.

Even though her video poems are embedded into institutional structures represented by (but not limited to) CNN, YouTube (owned by Google), and the United Nations, and her popularity depends upon their powerful reach and technological frameworks, Jetnil-Kijiner makes use of these institutions as platforms for effectively sharing her politically charged narratives, seemingly without compromising the integrity of her perspective or her mode of narration. The world and these institutions would likely not have paid as much attention to Jetnil-Kijiner’s video poetry about the Marshall Islands if it were not for the current popularity of the

climate change cause, but she has effectively leveraged the attention as a way to gain traction for her the stories she tells by forming them in the highly spreadable medium of internet video.

In different ways, each of the three Pacific Island writers treated in this chapter has made salient in their work the integration of their stories and voice in an electronically networked community. Skillfully engaging people with blogs, social media, internet video, and eBooks, their writings and performances combat the structural belittlement of Pacific Island cultures and show that the dispersal of Pacific people around the world is not an insurmountable obstacle to maintaining a society rooted in Pacific traditions.

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