'Why not Leeloh?' and Other Disasters: Children's Computer Games as a Site of Cultural Contestation, Corporate Corruption and, Despite all that, Cognitive Development.

Daphne Desser

The intellectual need to which this article responds is articulated well by Kathryn C. Montgomery, co-founder and President of the Center for Media Education (CME), a D.C.-based nonprofit organization public interest group dedicated to ensuring that the electronic media serve the needs of children and families; she writes:

> A comprehensive, multidisciplinary research agenda is urgently needed to guide the development of digital children's media, including systematic studies that begin to assess the ways in which children interact with the new media and the impact on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Unfortunately, although market research for new media products and services for children and adolescents is growing at a fast pace, formal academic research on the impact of this emerging new media culture is lagging behind. (160-161)

The emotional need to which this article responds is less easily pinned down, but to simplify, let me say that I intend to respond to the following quotation taken from user-reviewer "TxMike Houston, Tx, USA, Earth" on IMDb, the Internet Movie Database.

> Our granddaughter is visiting this week so one of the DVD rentals was "*Lilo & Stitch*." My first question, why didn't they spell her name 'Leeloh'? That would have been easier to pronounce correctly…..Secondarily, while I in general like the animation style used, all of the Hawiians [sic] were drawn with these rounded pig-like noses and very heavy legs which are not attractive at all.

WORKS AND DAYS 43/44, Vol. 22, Nos. 1&2, 2004

While it might seem mean-spirited of me to use this passage as a starting point for my discussion of Disney's *Lilo & Stitch* computer game for Playstation One, I have to say that studying the creative process behind this computer game—which began as an idea for a children's book set in Kansas (a boy and his alien dog type story) and eventually morphed into a multi-million dollar marketing campaign with significant buy-ins from the Hawaii Tourist Bureau and in which the boy from Kansas becomes a Hawaiian girl and the lost alien finds a home in Kauai for no compelling reason beyond a tour guide's cheesy explanation of the Hawaiian term *ohana* to one of the writers who was vacationing in Hawaii at the time—has not put me in a generous mood (Fischer).

There is a long history of American revulsion toward Hawaiian or Native Hawaiian bodies that TxMike's passage expresses. Similar descriptions of fear and disgust at encounters with Native Hawaiian women's differing presentations of their bodily and rhetorical selves appear in letters from missionary women. This is from Nancy Ruggles, a missionary woman who arrived in 1820 with the first boat, the *Thaddeus*:

> Had a visit from the chief, his two wives, and two widows of Tamahahaha, with numerous train of attendants. The chief was dressed in English attire and appeared well. The wives and Queens were dressed in China dresses on account of our being on board. They generally go almost naked. The Queens are monstrous women, judged to weigh about 400 pounds each…Their heads were crowned with a wreath of yellow feathers. The sight of white women was a novelty to them. They expressed a desire to become acquainted with our customs, were much pleased at the idea of writing, tried themselves, and succeeded very well. They ate with all the simplicity of untaught barbarians, without politeness, or even decency.

Any analysis of the computer game *Lilo & Stitch* cannot be separated from the history of American colonization, illegal annexation, and consumption of Hawaii as an object of touristic desire, and thus the latter part of this article will address the particular historical and cultural injustices this seemingly innocent computer game perpetuates, making of its players accomplices in such crimes.

I've had a strong (perhaps exaggerated) sense of social responsibility (although one, perhaps, that Montgomery might approve of) associated with this article since I first described it to my daughter's preschool teacher. "Oh, so many of our parents don't think about whether the computer games should be played at all. Perhaps you could come talk about your research for one of our parent-education nights," she enthused. Whether or not I ever dare to follow up on this invitation, the parents of my daughter's classmates in Hawaii have been my imagined secondary audience for this piece. What would I say to them on such a parent-education night, know-

ing that most of these parents would likely feel ambivalent at best at being lectured on something of local concern by a mainland white person from the university, that they tend to examine popular culture less critically than myself, and that they, unlike myself, have become accustomed to portrayals of Hawaii in the popular media that serve to bring attention and dollars to the islands while, in exchange, they endure stereotypical responses such as the one illustrated by "Texas Mike" above?

For me, a still relatively new assistant professor at the University of Hawaii, reconciling my own lived experience here as my place of work and homebuilding and child raising with my growing awareness of Hawaii's fixture in the popular imagination as an object of touristic desire remains a riddle of which, on most days, I can make little sense. Reading work by E San Juan, Jr. helps. He writes:

> Hawaii is one those words/terms so thoroughly fetishised that is seems impossible any more to grasp what its referent is, if that has not been completely erased by its status as a signifier fashioning its own signified. Michener's *Hawaii*, the film *South Pacific*, and an avalanche of tourist brochures, travel promotions and advertisements in magazines and on the Internet have all guaranteed to fix and sanctify Hawaii as an icon of the exotic, pleasure-filled Otherness or 'Fantasy Island' and to reproduce infinitely. (71)

Try writing from this lost referent and you begin to feel the movement of the islands beneath you. It's not firm ground. Nevertheless, it's from this location that I intend to argue that the cognitive (and other) skills gained when children play computer games, whether or not they are transferable to other arenas, do have pedagogical value, but that these skills are acquired in representational settings in which stereotypical notions of gender, race, and ethnicity are often perpetuated and in which children are not just constructed as consumers, but as consumers of such reductionist stereotyping. I analyze Disney's *Lilo & Stitch* Playstation One computer game—which additionally constructs its locale, i.e. Hawaii, as an object of fantasy, desire and touristic consumption—to illustrate how this complex of reduction works to constrain the pedagogical value of current computer game technology for young children.

Cognitive Skills and Computer Games: At what Cost?

Underlying the academic debates on the potential cognitive value of computer games is the back and forth between those who look down on computer games and see them as obstacles to traditional and more respectable avenues for children's growth and development and those who, despite all the academic jargon brought forth to the task, ultimately are saying; "Yeah, but, computer games are fun. They're challenging. Have you actually tried

one lately? I bet you get sucked in." The latter approach is the one I find most appealing since it is the most true to my experience. I found my first attempt at playing a computer game exhilarating, frustrating, humiliating, challenging and fun. However, computer games are considered suspect intellectually, much like comic books were before them. Healy, author of best selling books such as *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds—For Better and Worse* poses the question this way: "Could children's mental habits, such as internally generated motivation, attention, oral expression, listening skill, imagination, visual and verbal imagery, inner speech, or sequential analysis be affected by having their brains externally engaged by more holistic, fast-paced visual 'games' in which language use is frequently absent? And would this development be positive or negative?" ("Five Commentaries" 172). Healy's answer is that this development is negative and that it would be preferable if children did not come near a computer until they are at least seven (173).

Kaveri Subrahmanyam, on the other hand, has done a fair amount of research examining the potential positive benefits of computer gaming for children. In "The Impact of Interactive Technology on Children's and Adolescents' Cognitive and Social Skills," he summarizes research on development of cognitive skills through the use of computer games, and while he notes that much of the research in this area is outdated, he introduces three areas of potential cognitive development: spatial representation skills (mental rotation, spatial visualization, and the ability to deal with two-dimensional images) iconic skills (ability to "read" images), and visual attention skills (the ability to keep track of many things at the same time) (125-27). Subrahmanyam further notes that research shows development in ability to perform better in computer games with extended use, but it is unclear whether this development transfers to the arenas outside of the game. He does speculate that this increase in ability may be related to documented increases in performance on non-verbal components of the IQ test. He writes: "Greenfield has pointed out that many computer games seem to utilize the very same skills tested in the nonverbal sections of the IQ tests such as the Wechsler and the Stanford Binet" (127). However, Subrahmanyam cautiously does not push the implications of Greenfield's work too far, stating: "all the studies examined only the immediate effect of game playing and we really do not have any evidence on the cumulative impact of interactive games on cognition" (128). After playing even such a simple game as *Lilo & Stitch*, I am inclined to believe that playing computer games teaches hand-eye coordination, quick decision-making, motor skills, spatial skills, and strategizing.

For example, the *Lilo & Stitch* game requires that the player move the stick with her left hand to move Lilo forward while she watches the screen to read directions on which buttons to press in order to pick objects up, to destroy them, to walk around them, or to jump—all of which involve hand-eye coordination. In order to jump on floating slabs of wood and avoid falling in the water, the

player has to be able to correctly judge how hard and far to push the joystick in order to have Lilo move in the direction she wants her to, which requires good motor skills and spatial judgment. Finally, as the player moves Lilo along her narrowly constructed digital path, there are split-second decisions to make; for example, the player can either decide to karate-chop a large insect, to pick up a barrel of dynamite for later use, to pick up a flower for bonus points, or, most desirable of all, to do all three in one split-second. This involves quick strategizing on the player's part. In addition, *Lilo & Stitch* is constructed in such a way to encourage learning from past mistakes since a player cannot move on to the next section of the game until the first level is completed successfully. This teaches the need to practice, to return to the site of one's mistakes, and to analyze error in order to improve one's performance.

However, the concern that quickly arose for me while playing the *Lilo & Stitch* game was that while I am inclined to believe that some cognitive development does take place while playing this and similar games, the context in which these skills are developed is disturbing. We have seen from other areas of pedagogical research, such as recent scholarship in composition and rhetoric, that epistemic development does not occur in vacuum, but rather that all learning takes places in culturally defined arenas that work to mark that pedagogical space in particular socio-political ways (cf. Reynolds and Payne). Thus the conscientious user of computer games would want to analyze the dominant ideologies perpetuated by the game to determine whether the potential cognitive skills gained are worth the ideological package they come in. And this is where the trouble begins.

Early in this piece I noted how the original tale of a boy from Kansas and his pet dog was transported to Hawaii, with minimal attention paid to the cultural complications of performing such a move. My goal in this section is to describe the ways in which this superimposition of continental American culture upon the virtual setting of Kauai, creates situations in which Lilo, the Native Hawaiian girl in appearance, acts more like a white kid from the mainland. Let me begin with the seemingly innocent image of Lilo as she readies herself to begin down the path of "Koa Wood," the first segment. A sharp contrast is created between the soft and harmonious surroundings retained from the film and the harsh, unimaginative storyline of the game, which involves not much more than the capture and destruction of objects and animals. The player quickly realizes that while the depictions of Hawaii are nostalgically washed in romanticized watercolors, the drive of the narrative has not shifted from the typical gamer's goal: to destroy anything in his path for his own benefit. Lilo is technologically designed to move only on the path in front of her; she cannot veer from it. On this path, her primary purpose is to move forward, collect points, and destroy any animal or object that blocks her progress.

This purpose does not suit the game's alleged theme, which is ostensibly about the value of cooperation. The blurb on the back of video game promise its readers that: "throughout the game you

play as Lilo or Stitch as they run, jump, and fight their way past scores of menacing creatures, collect items, and learn the true meaning of ohana." In the game, however, Lilo acts in isolation. She is not cooperating with anyone, nor is she working on behalf of anyone's interests besides her own. The game's message, that Lilo must learn to ignore the beautiful setting around her, to be willing to use dynamite to thwart her enemies, and that the ultimate purpose of her journey is to amass points regardless of the cost to her environment does not jive well with Native Hawaiian values, not even the watered-down Hollywood version that the *Lilo & Stitch* enterprise purports to honor and promote. Rather, the narrative of the game seems to borrow from the values of cultural theft and selfish motive that characterize the story of the *Lilo & Stitch* empire, as if its authors could not help but reveal their real motives for economic power and cultural dominance through vapid interpretations of Native Hawaiian values, including cooperation, honoring the land, and commitment to extended and adopted family.

After playing *Lilo & Stitch* exhaustively to write this piece, for days afterward I could not shake the uncomfortable feeling that I was being watched and that my progress (or lack thereof) was being monitored by some anonymous and judgmental power. I eventually traced this feeling to the endless tallying and reporting of numbers that goes on as one plays the game. Each time Lilo collects a flower or destroys an animal or sets off dynamite, numbers appear in the top portion of the screen. One can see in this obsession with enumerating one's progress at every turn an American fixation with competition and with measuring consumption; which is, once again, superimposed upon a setting, culture, and character that in reality would call such values into question. A capitalist mode of venture and destroy with anonymous superiors ceaselessly monitoring one's "progress of destruction" does not fit well with historical Native Hawaiian resistance to colonization (see Noenoe Silva's recent work) or with current resistance to ongoing militarization (such as efforts by the grassroots Hawaii chapters of Not in Our Name and Refuse and Resist), nor with ongoing struggles for Native Hawaiian sovereignty (as described by such scholars of indigenous resistance as Haunani-Kay Trask.

Objects of Misunderstanding and Desire

My argument that this Disney product unreflectively perpetuates racist and sexist images should not exactly come as a surprise to my readers, so let me highlight this insidious twist: in the *Lilo & Stitch* game. As I have mentioned earlier, there is the additional lure of Hawaii as the object of the tourist's gaze, in which Hawaii itself is offered up as a target of consumption. In other words, the selling of Hawaii is linked inextricably with the expressions of sexism and racism in the game that I will detail. Kauai, as it is constructed in the computer game *Lilo & Stitch*, is island beauty romanticized; there is no urban build-up, no hotels, no poverty, no ice epidemic—nothing but quaint, rustic, rural beauty. All negative

effects of colonization have been erased. The objects that Lilo and Stitch are meant to collect in sequences such as "Kaona Road" and "Mea Kanu Trail" are standard Hawaii tourist fare—pineapples, flowers, coffee, etc. The "Surf Shack" sequence is meant to sell Hawaii's beach culture, even if the syncopated surfer tunes are reminiscent of California's Dick Dale. The lives and struggles of actual residents of Kauai are absent from the game. The game designers chose instead to rely upon the iconic image of Hawaii that has no real referent. In their desire to use Hawaii for their own economic profit, they recreate a warped version of Hawaii to be bought and sold on the marketplace. Mainland desire for Hawaii is often shot through with racist and sexist blindness toward its actual residents: conjure up here the sensuous hula girl, the rippled surfer. So too, in this game, there is evidence of such blindness.

The game designers seem to have relied unthinkingly on stereotypical notions of the exotic "other," without giving much thought to what distinguishes either Native Hawaiian or local Hawaiian culture (see Fujikane on the difference between the two) from other Polynesian cultures, or even African culture. Furthest afield is the voodoo power Lilo can amass by breaking open barrels. There is no particular reason to associate Hawaiian or Native Hawaiian culture with voodoo. The effect or impression created is that the game's designers threw in any clichéd symbol of exotic non-white power without considering its appropriateness for Hawaii. In the "Koa Wood" sequence of the game, Lilo comes across clichéd versions of tiki god sculptures. This hints at a lack of distinction among Native Hawaiian current cultural attitudes, ancient religious traditions, and similar practices in other Polynesian cultures. More disturbing is rather than have Lilo show the appropriate reverence for such images, the designers have created a situation in which she must violently attack the sculptures and destroy them in order to win points.

The cultural and/or religious significance of the tiki for contemporary Hawaiian culture is admittedly tough to pin down. Undeniably, the tiki has taken on a life of its own, as von Busack describes:

> In the South Pacific, other carvings—from life-size figures on the Marquesas Islands to the fierce stone gods of Hawaii and the intricate greenstone charms of the Maoris of New Zealand—give evidence of art and religion spanning a trans-Pacific culture….somehow, the art of these nations, thousands of miles apart, became slurped into a cultural Mix Master and poured over the United States for a brief period of cultural history, roughly 1945-65, known as "tiki," a word which literally translated means both "God" and "statue." On the islands themselves there is enough sensitivity to the original religious significance of tiki gods that in 2000 Christian groups in Waianae forced the removal of a tiki god sculpture from the front of a local public school, claiming that the image was religious and therefore inappropriate. ("Return Tiki")

The argument for keeping the tiki god, that it expressed pride in Native Hawaiian culture and history, illustrates the tiki's significance for those interested in preserving and nurturing Native Hawaiian culture and pride. Whether tiki sculptures are seen by residents of Hawaii as retaining religious significance or as symbolizing current advocacy for Native Hawaiian rights and recognition, it is inappropriate to have a local girl be rewarded for their destruction. Furthermore, Lilo's reactions to the explosions when they backfire and injure her provide a glance into gender stereotyping in the game.

The assumption in the computer game industry is that computer games for girls should be different from computer games for boys. Successful girl games, game scholars Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Greenfield and Gross argue, are ones in which girls dramatize real life. The authors provide the following illustration: Barbie games in which girls shop for clothes for Barbie and dress her in the latest fashions. The authors contend that boys, on the other hand, prefer games that are played out in fantasy (130). However Subrahmanyam et. al. fail to acknowledge that the world of Barbie is a world of fantasy. How many girls look like Barbie? How many of them can afford to buy clothes like the ones she wears? There is much more to the issue of girls, computer game usage, and gender stereotyping than I can go into in this article, but since *Lilo & Stitch* is one of the few computer games with a female protagonist and additionally one in which the female protagonist neither shops for clothes nor has anyone try them on, it is worth briefly discussing the construction of gender performance in this game.

The most innovative aspect of the *Lilo & Stitch* game is its use of a girl as action figure; game reviewers and game scholars have pointed out the lack of female protagonists in computer games, as well as the lower percentages of girls playing computer games than boys (cf. Land and Landi). However, this seemingly progressive choice does not result in an expansion of available roles for girls. Rather than embracing the idea of a young heroine as bold, decisive, brave and/or physically powerful as is typical of the young male hero, the game designers have gone out of their way to revise the traditional hallmarks of male game protagonists to accommodate stereotypical notions of female behavior. For example, when a player makes a mistake and has Lilo approach a dynamite barrel too slowly, Lilo is hurt by the blast. When this happens, Lilo falls down on the floor and begins to whimper. As a rule, male game action figures don't cry when they are hurt, but even more odd is that when Lilo is hurt, she collapses to the ground and stomps her little hands and feet the way a toddler who has just been refused a candy bar might. The game designers' goal cannot have been to portray a realistic response to violence. After all, the violence she encounters is horrifying, immense, and deadly. A realistic portrayal would have had Lilo running away and screaming in pain and terror.

We are accustomed to male action figures' responses to violence being emotionally unsound, but in the stylized approach to violence that computer games rely upon, at least the male protago-

nists' emotional responses make sense within the conventions of the genre. In Lilo's case, there is a revision of the classic emotional response of brave stoicism; Lilo, as a girl, is weak, slow, and petty. The game designers create Lilo's responses to injury and violence in a stereotypical and thus demeaning way, contrasting her whiny and childish response with the stoic courage exhibited by boy protagonists in the same situation. This makes the game appear off kilter since Lilo's reactions to the violence she faces don't make emotional sense, to say nothing of the damage they do in terms of perpetuating unhelpful and inaccurate characterizations of so-called feminine behavior.

Constructing the Child Gamer as Consumer

The concerns I'm expressing here about stereotyping and their corresponding social injustices are exacerbated by the fact that such stereotyping takes place on an enormous scale, since computer games are usually one small part of a massive cross-merchandising campaign. Children's computer games are often part of huge promotional campaigns that include not only tie-ins with films, toys, books, and Happy Meals, but also media based websites and product-based sites that function as direct advertising and selling operations aimed at children. Unfortunately, most children do not have the critical tools necessary to extract whatever pedagogical value there might be in playing computer games from the frontal attack corporations impose, inducing them to become lifelong consumers of particular products.

Montgomery describes the situation in precise, horrifying detail: "almost all of the major companies that advertise and market to children have created their own websites, designed as "destinations" for children on the Web. At the Digital Kids conference, participants spoke proudly of "branded communities" for teens—Web sites built around products—invoking the slogan, "Love my community, love my brand…. Companies such as Hasbro, Mattel, Frito-Lay, and Lego are just a few that have created sites for children" (153). These sites often include games and, most insidiously, also advertising and on-line sales.

Direct advertising and on-line sales pitched at children are of particular concern because they represent a new vulnerability of children to the corporate influence, without the mediating factors of parental guidance. Montgomery warns: "Marketers' direct access to children represents a different kind of interaction, one that warrants much more attention…. Studies by one marketing expert have found that children under age 12 now control or influence the spending of almost $500 billion" (157). Children represent a target audience that is easily manipulated, unsophisticated, and with access to a tremendous amount of disposable income. This sounds like a marketer's dream, and sure enough, companies are integrating advertising and Website content using the unique capabilities of the Internet to promote brand awareness and loyalty at a very early age, in ways that were not previously conceivable

(157). It's not likely that in America the average person could be convinced that our children need protection from such onslaughts of corporate greed. In Norway, by way of contrast, direct advertising to children on television has been illegal for years ("Norway Ban on Advertising to Children").

The development of children's media in the United States is thus inextricably linked with "technological breakthroughs and market forces that are driving the formation of the larger digital delivery system" (Montgomery 146). This system does not pause to consider the pedagogical implications of its technological innovation and corporate expansion, although there is a great deal of intellectual and creative effort being spent on finding ever more effective ways of inducing children to consume. Montgomery addresses this as well:

> The intense focus on research within the new media industries has produced a wealth of information about children's preferences as consumers, much of it proprietary, which is guiding the development of digital content and services for children. It has also raised questions about the appropriateness of some of the strategies being used to target children as consumers in this way. (Montgomery 157)

Montgomery then cites the work of McNeal who speculates that branding occurs during preschool for both child- and adult- oriented products and is rooted in children's developmental need to belong (affiliation) and have order in their increasingly complex lives (157). As a parent of a preschooler, I can attest to my daughter's burgeoning needs for belonging and order but am horrified that corporate culture—rather than parents, extended family, school, and neighborhood—is plotting to meet these needs.

Three specific strategies cause Montgomery particular concern:

> *banner ads, which send children to games. These are considered "sticky" because they are places where children will stay for a long time and will return to.
> *one-to-one marketing sites, which ask for a child's address, name, friends' names, e-mail in order to participate in games.
> *direct sales (such as the site "Icanbuy.com"), which feature on-line selling to children. (157-8)

Games play a uniquely insidious role in marketing to children because, on the face of it, they are not selling anything at all. However, marketing specialists use banner ads to direct children to games because they know the power of the game to capture the child's imagination. The idea is that children will come to identify with the characters represented in the games, and will thus want to buy anything related to the characters and the game. Under these circumstances, children will give out any private information asked

of them in order to play. In discussing adult players of computer games, Ruggill, McAllister, and Menchaca argue that "gamers actively help create the narrative, thematic, and ideological structures that determine the artifactual experience even while they reproduce or consent to other ideologies embedded within the artifact itself" (8). My concern is that child gamers are so vulnerable to the ideologies of consumption in the games that target them that their ability to co-construct narrative, theme, and ideology are severely constrained.

To be fair, The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) was passed in 1998, the main goal of which is to protect the privacy of children using the Internet. Under this new rule, many commercial Web sites are required to obtain parental consent before collecting, using or disclosing personal information from children under the age of thirteen ("Children's Online"). COPPA is having some effect on corporate marketing strategies. Beth Cox describes in her recent article "A Sweet Victory for Kids' Privacy" how Mrs. Fields Cookies and Hershey Food Corp were both cited by the Federal Trade Commission for illegally obtaining personal information from children under COPPA. Both companies will pay substantive fines ($100,000 and $ 85,000 respectively) and will be forced to revise their practice of requiring children to give their personal information in order to receive membership in clubs that give away coupons for chocolate and cookies. There is now some industry speculation that COPPA has had an effect; a 2000 article on Internetnews.com reports that: "research showed a strong 96 percent increase in online advertising by businesses targeting families between May 2000 and August 2000, while advertising by companies targeting children declined 56 percent in the same period" ("AdRelevance"). The article cites COPPA as one major reason for the decrease in child-targeted advertising. However, while COPPA does serve to limit corporations' ability to extract children's personal information, it does little to check the overwhelming forces of cross-merchandizing of which computer games play a significant part in luring children to the Internet where they can be caught by various forms of on-line advertising.

It is important to emphasize the specific role computer games play in mass-marketing campaigns. First, games function to invite children into larger cross-merchandising schemes. Thus, not only is the content of the games at issue, but so too is the fact that games function to bring children to other sites that are specifically designed to promote consumption. Second, games are "sticky," which means that children will stay on the computer for a long time while playing them and that they are likely to bookmark these places so that they can return to them easily. Advertisers prize computer games as prime opportunities to reach an audience that is pre-selected, likely to linger, and that has been primed for future consumption.

The Marketing of *Lilo & Stitch*

> Before singing, [American Idol] contestants revealed their favorite film, along with a reason why. Trias,

> dressed in a pink top, white rhinestone-accented blue jeans and her trademark faux flower tucked over her left ear, made good on her mission of spreading the message of Hawaii to the world. She named "*Lilo & Stitch*" as her choice, mentioning "'ohana is family and that's what Hawaii is all about. (Harada, "Jasmine")

I chose the above quotation to illustrate the ways in which the marketing of the *Lilo & Stitch* enterprise has been made possible by local Hawaiians' complicity in selling Hawaii to the mainland. In an economy that remains one typical of colonized countries, Hawaii is overly dependant upon attracting mainland tourists and their dollars. As Paul Lyons points out, this is a project with increasingly diminished returns; the more Hawaii sells itself as an object of passion and desire—an untouched paradise to be experienced by jaded sophisticates, the less it is able to maintain its illusion of purity. He writes:

> if what tourists re-cognize (when perception approaches preconception) as 'front' appears to be cliché, they nonetheless believe it has a connection to a hidden reality; they approach this engagement by being guided 'behind' touristic fronts, with an implied hierarchy arranged around the difficulty of escape from the 'packaged.' (48)

This desire for an ever more authentic experience that seeks to avoid the position of tourist characterizes the atmosphere in which the decision to place *Lilo & Stitch* in Hawaii was made. As I mentioned earlier, the original plan was to set the story in Kansas. However, one of the writers, Chris Saunders, vacationed in Kauai, was introduced to the concept of *ohana* by a tour guide, and rewrote the story from there (Harada, "Lilo"). Later, he attempted to pass on his experience with the "authentic" to members of the press, as reported in the *Honolulu Advertiser*:

> DeBlois and Sanders were in the Islands in December for an international DVD kickoff for '*Lilo & Stitch*,' bringing about 20 reporters to Hawai'i for the launch. 'We wanted the media to experience some of the *authentic* Hawaii we did, so there was little of the hotel lu'au stuff and more off-the-beaten path kind of things, including traditional hula done at the Volcanoes National Park,' DeBlois said. (Harada, "Creators," italics mine).

Similarly, the primary illustrator, Andreas Deja, spent a few weeks in Kauai attempting to get a feel for the setting. He describes his desire for a "more authentic" experience of Hawaii in an interview with *Animation World Magazine*:

> People had this idea I might want to check into a local school that teaches Hawaiian tradition and language.

> We had this Hawaiian tour guide who said, "Well, I don't know if we'll be able to get in because they're very protective of their heritage." But I talked to the teachers a little bit, with the kids looking out of the door, thinking, "Who's this person?" I explained that I worked for Disney and that I worked on these movies and the kids were all going, "Yeah!"
> After I was led in, the kids did drawings for me and I sketched for them before class. At one point the teacher said, "The kids would like to greet you now." I thought they would all line up and shake my hand or something. Instead, they stood in front of me and sang the most beautiful Hawaiian greeting song. Just witnessing this, I almost became teary-eyed. It was so genuine and emotional and I felt so privileged. I think that feeling carried over into the movie characters. There was something so honest and uncomplicated about the Hawaiian culture, the way people communicate. (Osmond)

The condescension expressed in the last paragraph is underscored by a graphic accompanying this portion of the interview; an illustration of Lilo dancing hula with her *halau* has the following caption: "During a research trip to Hawaii, Deja was impressed by the honest and uncomplicated way Hawaiians communicate." I doubt I need to belabor the ways in which this caption is offensive—it makes no distinctions between Native Hawaiians and residents of the state of Hawaii, it casts "Hawaiians" (sic) as having a primitive and therefore more pure form of communication, and lastly has the nerve to call the mass production of such misconceptions "research." Deja's impression that he has, in a quick business trip, managed to understand and capture "Hawaiian" culture, however, is only small part of the problem. If ever confronted with the ways his actions have contributed to worldwide misconceptions of Hawaii, he might claim, as other writer/promoters before him have, that Hawaii ought to thank him. That is, according to Asia/Pacific Studies scholar Rob Wilson, what writers such as Maugham and Theroux have claimed:

> [they] had sanctified a place by using it as a setting; [they] had done the islands a great favor—made them seem exotic and interesting. Without 'sanctification' by the cultural capital and mythology of Western writers, painters, anthropologists, travelers, and film-makers, these 'places without history' in the Pacific do not exist—that is the mind-boggling claim. (360)

This argument has become so pervasive and absorbed into local culture that a young woman like Jasmine Trias takes it upon her self to sell *ohana* to the world. There may not appear to be much of a crime involved in this act, but to Native Hawaiian activist Haunani-Kay Trask this sort of parceling out of Hawaiian culture and language for profit is precisely the problem:

> predictably, theft of Native status parallels the resurgence of racism against our indigenous people. Part of this racism can be seen in the cheap misuse by the tourist industry and local politicians of Hawaiian cultural values like *aloha*. (168)

The explicit ways in which the tourist industry and local politicians capitalized on the opportunity to sell Hawaii can be found in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* and the *Honolulu Advertiser*'s descriptions of the Hawaii Tourism Authority and the Hawaii Visitors & Convention Bureau's deal makings with Disney. The HVCB, which markets Hawaii on a $45 million-a-year contract under the auspices of the HTA, reached what was termed an unprecedented agreement with Disney. Initially the contract was to involve a 3.9 million dollar payment over three years to Disney, which in return would help Hawaii market itself through TV promotions, DVD inserts on the Hawaiian islands, a *Lilo & Stitch* "Island Favorites" album, interactive games, a film score CD, and a *Lilo & Stitch* CD Read-Along with a 24-page multimedia storyteller that can be used on stereos and computers. *Lilo & Stitch* characters were to perform at Disneyland and Disney World, where the company's Polynesian-themed restaurants were to be decorated with surfboards carrying the *Lilo & Stitch* logo. Other companies involved in the agreement were Hilton, Hilo Hattie, and Hawaiian, United and Japan airlines. In fact, Hawaiian Airlines won a Reggie Award for its marketing campaign as the movie's exclusive domestic airline partner in 2002:

> The Reggie Awards, whose name is derived from "cash register," are to marketing promotions what the Oscars are to movies, rewarding excellence in planning, creativity, and execution. (Ryan)

However, since the HVCB was under severe scrutiny by the HTA for possible mismanagement of public funds, the timing was not optimal for a long-term contract. In the end, the HVCB backed out of the three year deal with Disney. The 1.7 million dollar payment of one year's worth of Disney-sponsored promotion of Hawaii through *Lilo & Stitch* products was honored. Although 1.7 million dollars of public money was spent in promoting *Lilo & Stitch*, it was reported by the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* that:

> HVCB and Disney have agreed to keep the terms of their arrangement confidential from the public, though the authority will discuss the contract in a closed executive session. (Ruel)

Ironically, the film and its related products received a fair amount of credit for their "more accurate" portrayal of life on the islands, which shows the extent to which the people of Hawaii have become accustomed to the Hollywood constructions and the tourist brochures. You begin to believe, as Jasmine Trias apparent-

ly does, that Hawaii does have the aloha spirit, a message of ohana to spread to the world, and that it's better for all involved if we just keep the tourists entertained. In the words of one resident of Hawaii, Patrick Nielson of Makakilo: "It was a pretty good interpretation as far as Hawaii goes. It didn't make us look too stupid…" (Fujimori). This comment may help explain why, two years after its initial release, I could still find copies of *Lilo & Stitch*, a mediocre game even by industry standards, at the local video store. Although the image may be neither accurate nor flattering, and the motives of the designer far from pure, few of us can resist seeing ourselves on the techno-screen.

What Would I Say at Parents' Education Night?

The ultimate question for me, and for the parents at my imaginary preschool education night, is: would I let my daughter play this game? The answer is yes. If I forbid my daughter to play *Lilo & Stitch*, she'll want nothing more than to play it. If I attempt to protect her from ever hearing or knowing about *Lilo & Stitch* and she discovers it on her own, she'll have no defenses against it. Better to expose her early and often and to trust that everything else that she has learned from me will cause her to reach similar conclusions about the game's misrepresentations. I can't save my daughter from the selling of Hawaii to mainland tourists or from the bizarre complicity economic dependence demands of Hawaii residents, nor can I protect her from racist, sexist commentary from people like Texas Mike any more than I can explain to her why Lilo whimpers when she is hurt and Stitch doesn't. What I can do is watch her confidence soar as she masters the joystick, avoids water pits and wild boars, cheer her on when the mysterious number-cruncher informs her she's got one life left, and in exposing her to such crazy creations of corporate corruption and cultural theft as *Lilo & Stitch*, hope she's one kid-consumer who's got her eye on the digitized path and her money tucked safely in her pocket.

Works Cited

"AdRelevance Reports Shift in On-Line Advertising." *Internetnews.com*. 12 Sept. 2000. Accessed 20 Oct 2004 <http://www.internetnews.com/bus-news/article.php/457601>.

Blitz Games. *Disney's Lilo & Stitch*. Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc. and Disney Interactive. 2002.

"Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA)." *Center for Democracy and Technology*. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://www.cdt.org/legislation/105th/privacy/coppa.html>.

Cox, Beth. "A Sweet Victory for Kids' Privacy." *Internetnews.com*. 27 Feb. 2003. Accessed 20 Oct 2004 <http://www.internetnews.com/bus-news/article.php/1730941>.

Fischer, John. "Lilo & Stitch and the Spirit of Hawaii." *About.com*. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://gohawaii.about.com/cs/hawaiifilms/a/lilo_and_stitch.htm>.

Fujikane, Candace and Jonathan Okamura, eds. "Whose Vision? Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawaii." *Amerasia Journal* 26.2 (2000).

Fujimori, Leila. "Hawaii-Themed 'Lilo' Is a Big Hit Nationwide." *Starbulletin.com*. 24 June 2002. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://starbulletin.com/2002/06/24/news/story4.html>.

Harada, Wayne. "Creators of 'Lilo& Stitch' Enjoying the Oscar Nod." *Honolulu Advertiser.com*. 21 Feb. 2003. Accessed 20 Oct 2004. <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2003/Feb/21/il/il02a.html>.

_____. " 'Lilo& Stitch' Creators Fall for Hawaii's Ohana." *HonoluluAdvertiser.com*. 1 May 2002. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2002/May/01/il/il01a.html>.

_____. "Jasmine Faces a New Obstacle." *HonoluluAdvertiser.com* 15 Apr. 2004. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004. <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Apr/15/il/il03a.html>.

Healy, Jane M. *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds—For Better and Worse*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

_____. "Five Commentaries: Looking to the Future" *The Future of Children* 10.2 (2000): 168-180. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://www.futureofchildren.org/pubs-info2825/pubs-info.htm?doc_id=69787>.

Land, M. J. "Evidence of Gender Disparity in Children's Computer Use and Activities." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. New Orleans, LA, August 4-7, 1999.

Landi, Gil. "Disney's Lilo & Stitch." *Ign.com*. 19 June 2002. 20 Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://psx.ign.com/articles/362/362774p1.html>.

Lyons, Paul. "Pacific Scholarship, Literary Criticism, and Touristic Desire: The Specter of A. Grove Day." *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture* 24.2 (1997): 47-78.

McNeal, J.U. *Kids as Consumers*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1992.

Montgomery, Kathryn C. "Children's Media Culture in the New Millennium: Mapping the Digital Landscape." *The Future of Children* 10.2 (2000): 145-167. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://www.futureofchildren.org/pubs-info2825/pubs-info.htm?doc_id=69787>.

"Norway Ban on Advertising to Children." *Newrules.org*. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://www.newrules.org/info/norban.html>.

Osmond, Andrew. "Lilo & Stitch Revisited: Part II." *Animation World Magazine*. 9 Jan. 2003. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://mag.awn.com/index.php?ltype=pageone&article_no=1593>.

Payne, Darin. "English Studies in Levittown: Rhetorics of Space and Technology in Course Management Software." *College English*. Forthcoming March 2005.

"Return Tiki Expelled from Waianae School." Editorial. *Star-Bulletin.com*. 27 April 2000. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://starbulletin.com/2000/04/27/editorial/editorials.html>.

Reynolds, Nedra. *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*. Carbondale, IL: SIUP, 2004.

Ruel, Tim. "Tourism Authority Recommends Marketing Deal Despite Concerns." *Starbulletin.com*. 13 June 2002. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://starbulletin.com/2002/06/13/business/story1.html>.

Ruggill, Judd Ethan, Ken S. McAllister and David Menchaca. "The Gamework." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1.4 (December 2004): 297-312.

Ruggles, Nancy. Letter. 1 April 1820. Hawaiian Mission Society's archive under "Missionary Letters."

Ryan, Tim. "Alien Invasion." *Starbulletin.com*. 13 June 2002. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://starbulletin.com/2002/06/13/business/story1.html>.

San Juan, E. Jr. "Cultural Studies amongst the Sharks: The Struggle over Hawaii." *Third Text: Third World Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture*. 6.1 (2002): 71-8.

Silva, Noenoe. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.

Subrahmanyam, Kaveri. "The Impact of Interactive Technology on Children's and Adolescents' Cognitive and Social Skills." Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association. San Francisco, CA, August 24-28, 2001.

Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Robert E, Greenfield, Patrica M Gross, Elisheva F. "The Impact of Home Computer Use on Children's Activities and Development." *The Future of Children* 10.2 (2000): 123-144. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://www.future-ofchildren.org/pubs-info2825/pubs-info.htm?doc_id=69787>.

Tighe, Lori."Waianae Students Want Kanaloa Tiki to Rise Again." *Starbulletin.com*. 27 April 2000. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://starbulletin.com/2000/04/27/news/story4.html>.

Trask, Haunani-Kay. "Decolonizing Hawaiian Literature." *Inside out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*. Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson, ed. Lanham, MD : Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.

_____. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii*. Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993.

TxMike from Houston, Tx, USA, Earth. "IMDb user comments for *Lilo & Stitch*." *IMDb, the Internet Movie Database*. Posted 19 April 2003. Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0275847/usercomments-261>.

Von Busack, Richard. "Tiki it to the Limit" *Metro: Silicon Valley Weekly Newspaper*. Jan. 4-10, 1996.Accessed 20 Oct. 2004 <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/01.04.96/tiki-9601.html>.

Wilson, Rob. "Bloody Mary Meets Lois-Ann Yamanaka: Imagining Hawaiian Locality from South Pacific to Bamboo Ridge." *Public Culture* 8.1 (1995): 127-58.


TEKKEN
WING COMMANDER
An Action-Packed Thrill Ride!
TOMB RAIDER
ULTIMATE SUPERHEROS
MORTAL KOMBAT
THE ANIMATED VIDEO
THE JOURNEY BEGINS
HIDDEN INSIDE!
FINAL FANTASY
UNLEASH A NEW REALITY
"TWO BIG THUMBS UP!"