

“What I’m Not Supposed to Say, in this Profoundly Hopeful Place”

Comments, Closing Roundtable, **Creating Futures Rooted in Wonder:
Bridges Between Indigenous, Science Fiction, and Fairy Tale Studies**
Symposium, held at the University of Hawai`i

Ida Yoshinaga, Honolulu, September 19, 2015

“Writin’ is Fightin’”—Ishmael Reed

Writing, filmmaking, game designing, web video directing, graphic novel illustration...these activities are not for wimps. For your artistic self-defense, you’ll need a keen critical awareness to live through the battle royale known as global capitalism. For story innovation is not produced in a void: it’s toughed out, fought for, with punches thrown, blood spraying, guts spilled out.

Artists! Film directors! Writers! Gamers!: Are you ready to rumble?

Some questions for you creative warriors, based on what I’m calling—

The 10 Battles for Industrial Innovation
Fought by Fantastic Storytellers in a Transmedial Era¹

BATTLE THE FIRST: Ownership and control of media, a fight over institutionalized access to powerful storytelling opportunities. Paraphrasing sometime [sci-fi novelist John Ridley](#), who’s also the creator of acclaimed TV series, *American Crime*, and the Academy-Award-winning screenwriter of historical drama, *12 Years a Slave: Do you [“own your shit?”](#) Do you control rights to it, in different media forms?*

BATTLE THE SECOND: Workplace narrative autonomy, a fight over managerial practices that might censor, or lessen, the quality of artists’ story ideas. *What degree of freedom of speech have you surrendered to your studio bosses, corporate financiers, or other funders?* Are you like the Coen Brothers, crime genre directors who, early in their career, learned to [solicit cinematic production funds from Minnesotan small businesses](#), gaining independence from media conglomerates over film content? Do you, like the director of *The Pa Boys*, [Himiona Grace](#), benefit from a professional support network—i.e. his makeshift “Maori film commission” organized by the late, great producer Merata Mita—to help you hold strong to your artistic vision through the tough financing process?

BATTLE THE THIRD: Profits/proceeds/“back-ends,” a fight over sharing the money that artists’ sold—or re-sold—Intellectual Property will yield in diverse markets

¹ Excerpted from my doctoral dissertation (forthcoming, 2016), *Not the Obvious Story: Fantastic Narrative Auteurs, Genre Mixing, and the 10 Battles for Industrial Innovation in a Transmedial Era*

and media. *Do you have your “merch” licensing locked down*, like George Lucas, whose [toy empire sales](#) helped bankroll his less profitable films, and freed him up to tell the later *Star Wars* tales in ways he’d desired (not that this was great for fans). Never mind the arty [prints](#) being sold on Solomon and Meredith Enos’ website: I’m looking forward to [Polyfantastica](#) action figures and t-shirts. These would not only cultivate the imagination of young local children and indigenous teenage artists away from corporate-produced, blockbuster-inflated [superhero dreck](#), but also support that Hawaiian artist family’s creative endeavors into the future.

BATTLE THE FOURTH: Spin, a fight over brand, status, and reputation management by both artists and corporations, within a hyper-mediated, virally meme-ing, news world. *Unlike the once-respected, now-under-appreciated cinematic genius M. Night Shyamalan, do you protect your [artist’s image as part of your storyworld’s market value](#)? How to know when you’re nourishing true connections with fans—[dis-inter-mediation, sans studio middlemen](#)—versus that relationship becoming exploited for a company’s “indie” branding?*

BATTLE THE FIFTH: Reality, a fight over [representation and diversity](#) in speculative genre tales, amidst our national cultural politics of authenticity. Director Cameron Crowe took a chance in his much-maligned *Aloha*, a romantic drama with science fictional themes, such as the occupation of space by the U.S. military and global capitalism: he’d cast Native Hawaiian sovereignty leader Bumpy Kanahale as himself, [speaking about the illegal occupation of Hawai’i by the U.S.](#) Crowe also made a fatal error, choosing blonde Emma Stone as a Hawaiian Air Force officer, something reviewers hated so much, they missed the first, more important, casting choice. *Whose lives might your stories affect deeply (like it or not), and what’ll you risk to prove you give a shit about that community?*

BATTLE THE SIXTH: Reproduction, a fight over a story’s transformation during the distribution and exhibition stages, as it’s revised by P&A (print and advertising) efforts that market it to new populations. *Can you, like Peruvian-American director [Alex Rivera of well-reviewed indie sf film Sleep Dealer, use social media](#) to turn a box-office bomb and theatrical-distribution failure, into a cult success on streaming video—then negotiate for its re-release on digital platforms, via online fundraising?*

BATTLE THE SEVENTH: Subversion, a fight over the symbolically meaningful transgression of form—including “new” genre mixes and mash-ups—and how these experiments can transform genre structure in politically (even economically!) significant ways. Like Skawennati’s aboriginal “machinima,” [Time Traveller™](#); or the feminist “fan remix” videos curated by [Anne Kustritz](#); or the [decolonizing street art](#) drawn by Lianne Charlie; *how far can you elevate genre form, by collaging, [détournement](#), [rasquache-ing](#)—that is, by disrupting its mainstream aesthetic assumptions?*

BATTLE THE EIGHTH: Evaluation, a fight over criticism and counting, such as how industry awards, strong reviews, and relatively good sales/ratings/box office, may heighten a story’s exchange value. Let’s take up the anti-diversity challenge posed

by the recent [Hugo-Awards “puppy fight.”](#) *Can we scholars leave behind the safety of academic panels and big-city publishers, to risk talking with the American public, about the rich promise of indigenous “wonder works”?* The creationism-subscribing, Donald-Trump-voting, these-colors-don’t-run bumper-stickering public? Now more than ever, is the time for public intellectuals to speak to communities of about our collective need to nurture an enriched—rather than impoverished—cultural repertoire of fantasy, science fiction, horror, and fairy tales/folk tales.

BATTLE THE NINTH: Impact/re-mediation, a fight over audience/participant reception to a story and the real-world effects of its regionalized/racialized/classed/gendered interpretation. Will your work be like James Cameron’s *Avatar*, itself a conventional sf film about white men encountering lost worlds on exotic planets, but which, [in the hands of global indigenous activists](#), became a persuasive set of symbols for anti-development organizing? *What’s your story’s political use value, in reality?*

BATTLE THE TENTH: Body, a fight over the artist’s physical, spiritual, and cultural health, as the other battles exact a personal toll. *To what self-care will you commit, to ensure long enjoyment of your art, for you but also for your family and community?*