

FUNNY KINE CLOTHES:
THE HAWAIIAN SHIRT AS POPULAR CULTURE

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Abstract

In the land of aloha, funny kine clothes is a pidgin expression that refers to a peculiar form of dress. The Hawaiian shirt is funny kine clothes. At its inception it was highly peculiar in terms of characteristics of its design and fabrication. Its contemporary status as an indigenous regional dress form is peculiar as well, for its origins are not with the indigenous people of the Islands, nor did it develop from the folk dress of any of the Islands' multi-cultural populations. But the Hawaiian shirt is funny kine clothes in other ways, as well. Few elements of dress have such strong iconic value in popular culture. No other dress form is approached with the reverence accorded the Hawaiian shirt in Hawaii's local culture. And no other form has as long a history as an object of humor and ridicule. In this paper we examine the Hawaiian shirt as an artifact through which cultural tensions are played out, and we identify the semiotic, or meaning-making, framework that supports varied interpretations of the shirt. A paradigmatic analysis (Chomsky, 1965) and interpretation of cartoon imagery, commercial photographs, and written texts wherein the shirt is associated with a tourist stereotype, a lifestyle symbol, or an artifact of Island life reveals the semiotic structure of the Hawaiian shirt in terms of three interrelated meaning clusters: one governed by the opposition Them – Us; a second governed by the opposition Different – Same; and a third by the opposition Commerce – Culture.

Key words: Hawaiian shirt, popular culture, icons, paradigmatic analysis

In the Land of Aloha *funny kine clothes* is a pidgin expression that refers to a peculiar dress form. The Hawaiian shirt is funny kine clothes. At its inception it was highly peculiar in terms of characteristics of its design and fabrication. Its contemporary status as an indigenous regional dress form is peculiar as well, for its origins are not with the indigenous people of the Islands, nor did it develop from the folk dress of any of the Islands' multi-cultural populations. But the Hawaiian shirt is funny kine clothes in other ways, as well. Few elements of dress have

such strong iconic value in popular culture. No other dress form is approached with the reverence accorded the Hawaiian shirt in local Hawai`i¹ culture. And no other form has as long a history as an object of humor and ridicule. In this paper we examine these highly divergent and highly charged meanings.

Theoretical Frame

Existing studies of the Hawaiian shirt are plentiful. These variously address the garment as an aspect in the development of a garment manufacturing industry in the Hawaiian Islands (e.g., Fundaburk, 1965); in the context of the ethnic cultures, social circumstances, and historic events that contributed to the shirt's significance in Island life (e.g., Arthur, 2000; Brown & Arthur, 2002); in terms of the social history of designers, manufacturers, and promoters who figured significantly in its creation (e.g., Hope, 2000); as a tool in marketing a fantasy vision of Hawai`i as a romantic visitor designation (e.g., Brown, 1982); as a unique form of folk art (e.g., Steele, 1984); as an example of shifts in the aesthetic value of fashion apparel (e.g., Morgado, 2003); and in terms of its commercial value as a vintage collectible (e.g., Blackburn, 2001; Schiffer, 1989; 1997; 2005). We address the shirt as a curious popular culture artifact and ask what might be learned from an examination of its varied meanings.

The examination is framed on a premise derived from Structuralism. Structuralism is an approach to semiotic analysis that is concerned with the conditions and processes that enable the production of meaning, rather than with meaning *per se*. A principle derived from this approach is that binary opposition (i.e., a positive term paired with its negation) or paired contrasts that function as oppositions are fundamental to the production of meaning (e.g., Jakobson & Halle, 1956; Saussure, 1916/1966). An underlying assumption is that binary thought is basic to the operation of the human mind and/or that it is acquired through cultural practice. A consequence is that in all cultural products "there must be some kind of a systematic and interrelated set of oppositions that can be elicited" (Berger, 1982, p. 30). The pattern of oppositions is referred to as the *paradigmatic structure* of meaning.

The paradigmatic structure is also called the *deep structure* (Chomsky, 1965) of meaning. As this phrase suggests, the conditions that give rise to and support meanings are suppressed; the binary oppositions are not readily apparent. What appears transparent are surface or superficial meanings – meanings that seem to be natural, uncontested truths.² But those meanings are neither natural nor uncontested. Rather, they represent the ideology of dominant social groups. And their seeming naturalness is an illusion that serves a tactical purpose: It perpetuates the dominant social group's preferred meanings. The objective of *paradigmatic analysis* is to identify the paradigmatic structures on which the seemingly natural meanings are framed. A result of such analyses is that one gains insight into the assumptions that shape dominant groups' intentions with regard to preferred meanings.

Review of Literature

A number of scholars have generated paradigmatic analyses relative to aspects of fashion and dress and/or have based appearance-related studies on the principle that meaning is derived from relations of difference and opposition. Barthes based his analysis of the fashion system (1983) on a dichotomy drawn between a vestimentary (clothing) code and a rhetorical (written/spoken) system. Berger (1984) constructed bipolar oppositions between elements associated with denim work clothes and contrasting elements associated with high fashion apparel. Davis (1985) constructed a similar argument in which he proposed fashion as an oppositional expression relative to clothing. Fiske (1989) analyzed generic and designer blue jeans and uncovered a paradigmatic structure based on binary oppositions such as classless – upscale, country – city, communal – socially distinctive, unchanging – transient, and traditional – contemporary. Morgado (2007) described the semiotic system of hip-hop dress in terms of binary oppositions such as size – fit, private – public, and derogatory – laudatory. Polhemus (1988) generated paradigmatic structures for each of 19 different appearance styles (e.g., Beats, Mods, Punks, Hippies, Preppies, Executives) based on expressive characteristics he associated with each of the styles. Polhemus and Proctor (1978) analyzed a dichotomy between classic styles of dress, which they referred to as antifashion, and a fashion code. Sahlins (1976) argued that socio-cultural categories are encoded in binary structures associated with the design elements of dress.

And Simmel (1957) characterized behaviors associated with fashion in terms of tensions between a bipolar system based on individuality and conformity.

Method

We identified three salient conditions wherein the Hawaiian shirt plays an iconic role as a marker of meaning: (1) humorous depictions in which the shirt is a central element of the stereotype of the tourist as sartorial clod; (2) humorous depictions of the Hawaiian shirt as preeminent symbol of casual dress or a leisurely lifestyle; and (3) serious depictions of the Hawaiian shirt as a revered icon of the spirit of local Island culture. In the fall of 2010 we conducted paradigmatic analyses of these iconic forms following examination of an extensive body of existing written and visual materials. We read descriptions of the shirt as recorded in social and economic histories, news reports, and journal and magazine articles; in advice columns and other texts concerned with dress and appearance standards; and on websites advertising Hawaiians shirts for sale. We examined hundreds of visual images in books about the shirt, in commercial photographs available on-line from Getty Images and Google Images, and in cartoons on Hawaiian shirts published in *The New Yorker* magazine. We considered descriptive terminology, physical characteristics of wearers, other aspects of the contexts in which the shirts signified, and rhetorical and visual techniques on which meanings relied. We extrapolated from the texts, photographs and cartoon images to propose terminology that captured the essence of the shirt as depicted in these works. And we generated oppositional or contrasting terminology to indicate expressions that were absent from the materials but structurally necessary to the meanings of the shirt in its various iconic forms.

Funny Kine Clothes: A Peculiar Shirt

The association of the Hawaiian shirt with souvenir products and tourist culture is a more-or-less natural consequence of both commerce and circumstance. The peculiar shirt originated in small dry goods and custom tailor shops operated by Chinese and Japanese immigrants who arrived in the Islands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to a

need for plantation labor (Fundaburk, 1965). Prototypes of the shirt were available in the early 1920s. These were wide and boxy, rather than tailored to the body, and sported unusual one-piece collars that were larger and floppier than those on ordinary men's shirts. The garments had straight hemlines, rather than shirrtails, and the shirts were worn outside of, rather than tucked into, the trousers. At the outset, these features signaled a comparative difference from typical men's wear of the time, to the extent that in the Islands, even conservative, solid-colored shirts with these style characteristics were prohibited from the workplace (Morgado, 2003, p. 79). But the printed patterns and colors that came to typify the Hawaiian shirt were even more curious.

The first print goods with motifs drawn from the local environment were tropical floral patterns. These appeared in 1935 on textiles intended as upholstery fabrics (Fundaburk, 1965, p 58; p. 71). The idea was immediately translated into textiles suitable for apparel products and, within a year, dozens of print designs featuring indigenous elements of the natural and social environments were evident. The time was not only coincident with a growing tourist trade in the Islands, but also with significant increases in the numbers of U.S. Naval personnel in Hawai'i, and the demand for Hawaiian souvenirs was substantial. By 1936, shirts in bright, radiant colors and advertised as "Specials. For Tourists!" were widely available in a plethora of unique Island print designs (pp. 64-65).

By 1939 sales of the peculiar shirt – made up in equally remarkable fabrics that sported cartoon-like images of grass shacks, hula dancers, Hawaiian words, flower leis, and scantily clad natives – had propelled the Island's garment industry into a big business (Arlen, 1940, p. 77). Most of that business was derived from overseas retail orders and local sales to tourists and military personnel. Among the resident population there was little interest in the shirt other than as a boost to the tourist trade. Furthermore, the shirt was banned for employees of City, State and Federal offices and from banks and corporate offices on grounds that its appearance would induce sloppy work habits. And businesses outside the tourist-dense Waikiki area prohibited employees from wearing the shirt, as well. Nearly a decade would pass before the Hawaiian shirt made any significant inroads into the dress of local islanders, and almost 25 years passed before it became a staple item of local Island dress (Morgado, 2003, p. 79).

We determined that from the outset, the meaning of the Hawaiian shirt revolves around its difference relative to *customary dress*, its *peculiarity*, rather than *familiarity*, in terms of design features, its *bright*, colorful nature relative to *subdued* conventional dress, and the interpretation of the garment as conducive to *sloppiness* as contrasted with *neatness*:

- Hawaiian Shirt – Customary dress
- Peculiar – Familiar
- Bright – Subdued
- Sloppy - Neat

A Shirt that Makes Us Laugh (at tourists)

By the mid-1950s tourism was rampant, and an inexorable link was established between the tourist and the Hawaiian shirt. Features associated with the shirt – its peculiarity relative to customary dress, the unusually bright colors, the curious prints, and the unconventional styling details – became associated with the tourist. And characteristics typically attributed to the tourist, such as being fat, badly dressed, and unattractive (e.g., Pearce, 2005, p. 19) became associated with the shirt (Morgado, 2003). We found multiple examples of this in both photographs and written works. For example, visual images of the Hawaiian shirted tourist as an overweight clod and/or buffoon are common in commercial photographs pictured on the Getty Images website: <http://www.gettyimages.com>. Photograph #BC8630-001 provides a classic illustration: An overweight young man attired in badly mismatched Hawaiian shirt and shorts is pictured in a ridiculous pose and a silly grin, waving to viewers as he leans against a palm tree on a sunny beach (Herholdt, n.d.[a]).³ In photo #BD7173-002 an obese, bare-chested sunbather wears Hawaiian printed swim shorts; his female companion sports a Hawaiian shirt (McClymont, n.d.).

In written works, instances wherein journalists address the Hawaiian-shirted tourist with jests, jibes, and name-calling are abundant. This version of the tourist is variously referred to as the "universal geek," the "universal clod," the "yokel," and the "hayseed" (Berendt, 1987, p. 24; Cocks, 1985, p. 88; Fujii, 1977, p. 45; 1999, p. 85; Shindler, 1979, p. 48). The garment itself is described as "flashy-trashy tourist stuff" (Cheever, 1983, p. 33), "the most obvious souvenir of

Hawai'i that anyone ever took home" (Brown, 1982, p. 106), and as "one of the world's kitschiest garments" (Barchfield, 2010). Several commercial websites offer custom and ready-made shirts marketed as "kitsch," or "tacky," or "really bad," and one such site lets consumers know that "You don't have to be crazy to wear (a Hawaiian-style shirt), but it helps!" (Tropically Yours, n.d.). In the *Encyclopedia of Bad Taste*, Stern and Stern (1991) describe Hawaiian shirts as "masterworks" of bad taste (p. 8) that "engender shrieks, belly laughs, or exasperated anger because they are so awfully inappropriate" (p. 9), and offer that "a Hawaiian shirt worn anywhere other than near a beach or swimming pool is the classic way a vulgarian announces that he is unbounded by the livery constraints of polite society" (p. 147).

A number of sources variously admonish tourists for looking "like they are going to a Hawaiian luau" (Nine ways, n.d.), for wearing Hawaiian shirts "except in Hawaii" (How to identify, n.d.), and simply for looking like tourists (How to avoid, n.d.). They advise tourists against dress code infractions that include: wearing Hawaiian shirts, wearing shirts worn hanging outside the trousers; appearing in bright Hawaiian printed garb; wearing bright colors; wearing white stockings with shorts; wearing black stockings with sandals; wearing message-printed T-shirts; wearing baseball caps; wearing hats; and carrying bags, water bottles, and cameras (e.g., Duvauchelle, n.d.; Fujii, 1999; Heckathorn, 1988; Nine ways, n.d.; How to avoid, n.d.). The humor in Shanahan's cartoon (2002) pictured in Figure 1 is largely derived from the multiplicity of tourist dress code violations: the garish Hawaiian printed shirt; the shirt worn outside the trousers; the stockings with sandals, the baseball cap, camera, water bottle, large bag, and message T-shirt – all inappropriate garb for visitors. These American tourists are perfectly disguised as American tourists.⁴

We summarized these expressions regarding the aesthetics of the Hawaiian shirt with the terms *bizarre* as compared with *ordinary*; *vulgar* as contrasted with *sophisticated*; *tawdry* rather than *fashionable*; and indicative of *bad taste* as compared with *good taste*:

- Bizarre – Ordinary
- Vulgar – Sophisticated
- Tawdry – Fashionable
- Bad taste – Good taste



I'm with the Great Satan. From *The New Yorker*, November 4, 2002, p. 81.
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Figure 1. A multiplicity of tourist dress code violations.

A particularly egregious dress code infraction involves a male – female couple dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and matching mu`umu`u⁵ (e.g., Fujii, 1999). One humorist recorded a musical number on this theme. The lyrics read:

*They wore a matching shirt and muumuu, so you knew their love was true.
With a matching shirt and muumuu, you know who belongs to who.
It's a wild and a passionate attraction. Like a flickering flame to a moth.
When they wear the very same fashion, you know they're cut from the
very same cloth (Dana, ca 1960).*

A visual image that plays on the matching shirt and mu`umu`u theme is photograph #200452491-001 (Smith, n.d.) on-line at Getty Images: A pudgy, middle aged tourist couple dressed in matching Hawaiian shirt and mu`umu`u gaze out over a tropical forest. The garments are rendered in a highly iconic print that carries additional meaning relative to the tourist stereotype: Some Hawaiian prints are considered more typical than others, and thus more indicative of a tourist, an outsider, and an unsophisticated aesthetic. The large scale *pareau* (i.e., stylized floral) motif executed in bright, primary colors is an example. Thus, while the print-matching aesthetic itself is subject to sneers (on the part of those who presume to have more sophisticated taste), particular characteristics of the textile prints in which the shirt and accompanying mu`umu`u are fabricated are also important in estimations of the tourist value or kitsch value of the garment. We summarized these expressions with the phrase *down market* as contrasted with *upscale* and *déclassé* compared with *refined*:

- Down market – Upscale
- Déclassé – Refined

Additionally, we identified *tourist* as essential to the meaning of the shirt, and paired this with the term *traveler* – a much more sophisticated tourist. And we added the contrast between *outside* and *inside* to address the idea that tourists are outside of a local context and culture:

- Tourist – Traveler
- Outsider - Insider

In the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe is a three-dimensional installation that features a larger-than-life caricature of a mule arranged in a deck chair in a laconic, human-like pose. The animal is outfitted in sunglasses, walking shorts, and a vibrantly colorful Hawaiian printed shirt. The humor is self-evident: Only a jackass on vacation would dress like this. We found that humor relative to the Hawaiian-shirted tourist was generated on techniques such as caricature, burlesque, and exaggeration, but that it also drew on ridicule, insults, over-literalness, facetiousness, and sarcasm. For example, among other techniques, the *New Yorker* cartoon illustrated in Figure 1 employs absurdity, facetiousness, and ridicule to accomplish the

humor. And all of the written works that point to the tourist as hayseed, nerd, loudmouth and vulgarian generate humor as a consequence of insults and ridicule.

Virtually all of the humorous visual images involving tourists in Hawaiian shirts rest on presentations of the tourist as foolish, dense, or obese, and in many cases, all characteristics are employed. Numerous commercial photographs available from Getty Images provide classic examples: In photo #BC8630-002 (Herholdt, n.d.[b]) the plump young man in garishly mismatched Hawaiian printed shirt and shorts also sports tourist-related dress code violations that include sandals worn with stockings and a baseball cap worn back to front. The presentation is accessorized with bright pink children's' beach toys and a very foolish facial expression. Photograph #BC7089-001 (Durfee, n.d.) pictures a silly couple in Hawaiian shirts camping it up for the camera by engaging juvenile antics. In photo #a0261-000009 (DKAR, n.d.) a vacationing couple in Hawaiian shirts sport silly sunglasses and equally silly facial expressions. And photograph #78494729 (Comstock, n.d.) pictures a young man in Hawaiian shirt who appears to be dumbfounded, as well as badly dressed.

We identified three oppositions that synthesize these ideas about physical and mental characteristics of the tourist in the Hawaiian shirt: *fat* as contrasted with *fit*, *foolish* compared with *sensible*, and *inferior* as opposed to *superior*:

- Fat – Fit
- Foolish – Sensible
- Inferior – Superior

A Shirt That Says "Relax" (under some conditions)

The second iconic form concerns the Hawaiian shirt as an emblem of leisure or a laid-back lifestyle and as the definitive symbol of casual dress. We collapse two ideas under this heading: the icon of casual dress and the icon of leisure. In their account of the history of the Hawaiian shirt, Brown and Arthur (2002) suggest that the contemporary business practice of designating Friday as casual dress day originated in Hawai'i in the mid-1960s (pp. 78-79).

Ironically, prior to that time, even solid-colored shirts with a single, tiny Hawaiian emblem embroidered on the pocket were considered inappropriate to Hawaii's business environments. A petition to the State Legislature generated by the local garment industry (along with a gift of two Hawaiian shirts to each legislator) ultimately resulted in a Legislative resolution that promoted Hawaiian shirts as appropriate business wear on the last day of the workweek. In the Islands wearing Hawaiian shirts on Fridays was institutionalized in a Legislative mandate that recognized every Friday as "Aloha Friday." Elsewhere, a permissible dress-down day at the end of the workweek is known as "Casual Friday" (pp. 78-79).

The Hawaiian shirt is typically employed as a symbol of Casual Friday. Cartoon #bsl038 at Getty Images depicts five outfits on hangers, each identified by a day of the week on which the outfit presumably is worn. The Monday through Thursday garb is portrayed as identical business suits; the image for Friday is a brilliantly colored and wildly patterned Hawaiian shirt and a pair of blue jeans (Karas, n.d.). In *New Yorker* cartoon SKU:117305 (Cullum, 1998), a penguin arrives for the day's activities wearing a Hawaiian shirt and finds the rest of the flock outfitted in their typical formal attire. The surprised bird says "You're kidding. I thought it was Friday." *New Yorker* cartoons can be accessed at cartoonbank.com.⁴ Serious work requires serious clothes: In *New Yorker* cartoon SKU:130840 (Leighton, 2007), one of a group of astronauts boarding a rocket ship wears a Hawaiian shirt; the others are dressed in space suits. The gag line comes from the Hawaiian-shirted crew member who has forgotten when the scheduled take-off is to occur. He remarks: "Oh. Is that today?" And in *New Yorker* cartoon SKU:130246 (Stevens, 2006), captioned "Casual Sunday", a priest outfitted in a Hawaiian shirt addresses his congregation with a recitation that begins "And on the seventh day ...".

We determined that the terms *leisure* as contrasted with *work*, and *inappropriate* as opposed to *appropriate* aptly summarized these characteristics attributed to the Hawaiian shirt:

- Leisure – Work
- Inappropriate – Appropriate

There is also another meaning attributed to the shirt relative to the workplace. The shirt represents not only casual dress; it is also a sign of a creative approach to the business of doing business. In *New Yorker* cartoon SKU:132619 (Diffie, 2009) a group of businessmen, appropriately dressed in suits and ties, surround a conference table. They have apparently reached consensus on a course of action. The chairman concludes the meeting with the comment: "Sounds good. Well just have to run it by the Hawaiian shirts." We understand that the reference is to the more creative professionals in the firm, and can likely assume that the "Hawaiian shirts" are members of either the creative marketing team or the information technology group. The term *creative* identifies this attribution to the Hawaiian shirt, and we paired it with the term *conforming*:

- Creative – Conforming

A noticeable difference occurs in the methods through which humor is generated relative to the lifestyle icon as compared with the icon wherein the shirt functions as a characteristic of the tourist. Humor in the tourist-related cartoons and commercial photos is characteristically predicated on ridicule and insults. But humor in cartoons wherein the Hawaiian shirt is indicative of a leisurely, laid-back lifestyle is generated through gentler techniques such as exaggeration and absurdity. An example is Mankoff's cartoon (1996) for *The New Yorker*, illustrated in Figure 2. A gentleman opens his door to find that the Grim Reaper has come to call attired in a floral printed shirt and matching beach shorts. It's awfully hard to take Death seriously when he arrives in a Hawaiian shirt. The gentleman comments: "You call this 'death with dignity'?"

Similarly, Cotham (2004) employs absurdity as a humorous device in *New Yorker* cartoon SKU:128113 wherein a businessman turns away a Hawaiian shirted, cocktail carrying beggar with the line: "You don't look like a hurricane victim to me." In Wilson's (2000) *New Yorker* cartoon SKU:119950 a doctor addresses the wife of a patient who is lying in a hospital bed wearing a Hawaiian shirt and holding a tropical drink. The doctor says "As you can see, we've transferred your husband from intensive to casual care." Zeigler's (2004) *New Yorker*



You call this 'death with dignity'? From *The New Yorker*, December 16, 1996, p. 81. Copyright 1996 by R. Mankoff. *Reprinted with permission.*

Figure 2. The Grim Reaper in Hawaiian Shirt and Beach Shorts

cartoon SKU:127593 illustrates an ordinary looking guy in Hawaiian shirt and shorts, suspended in the air over a tropical beach. Through the caption we are able to identify the flying figure as Superman, now outfitted for relaxation. The caption reads: "The Man of Steel (in retirement) hovering over the ladies' bath-house at the Sand "N" Surf Club in Boca Raton." In Maslin's (1996) comic sketch SKU:113051, mourners pass by an open coffin wherein rests a corpse dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and *lauhala* (woven fiber) hat. One passerby remarks, "Wherever he's going, I just hope they have frozen banana daiquiris." The word *play*, in contrast to the word *work* expresses the fundamental idea expressed in these cartoons:

- Play – Work

A Shirt That Is Revered (and Romanticized)

There is a context wherein death in a Hawaiian shirt is an entirely serious matter. In the Islands the Hawaiian shirt is, in fact, the definitive ritual burial garment. It is a statement of reverence – not just for the shirt, but for all that the shirt signifies. This is the third iconic form: the Hawaiian shirt as an icon of local culture.

In the Islands, the Hawaiian shirt is more commonly known as the Aloha shirt. Many people are familiar with the word *aloha* as a greeting – an equivalent for hello or goodbye. But the meaning of aloha is much deeper and more profound than the simple salutation. The word has a spiritual quality or spiritual essence. It is described as akin to the idea of "the breath of life" (To Hawaii, n.d.). The word also connotes love and self-respect. And it speaks to a psychic sense of positive energy and to life lived in harmony with others and with the environment. Aloha is a powerful word. And in its local context, the Aloha shirt is said to embody the powerful spirit of aloha. But the shirt embodies more: The shirt is closely tied to a romanticized image of old Hawai`i as a tropical paradise.

Descriptions of the garment as an icon of old Hawai`i are drawn from books and magazine articles authored by local writers and others who feel closely connected to the Islands. Their statements have a poetic quality. Consider these examples:

- "Hawaii, awash in romance, marbled by different cultures, saturated with beauty, and compelling in contrasts gave birth ... to the renowned Aloha shirt. Like a lei, the ... shirt is worn as a statement of one's love for, and connection to, a most special place" (T. Holmes, in Hope, 2000, p. v)
- "... a marvelous cultural icon, so evocative of the spirit of its home, is woven with the mystery and allure of Hawai`i and the stories of those who have lived there" (Hope, 2000, p. xiii).
- The Aloha shirt is "the history and culture of Hawai`i on fabric. ... (it) is art ... and it's laughter ... (it's) entertainment, education, aesthetics, and nostalgia. It's hard to expect more out of a single garment" (Fujii, 1999, p. 80).

- ... the essence" of the "warmth, friendliness, and pride of the Hawaiian people" (Steele, 1984, p. 8).
- "It's comfortable, casual and bright as all the colors of the rainbow – and sometimes as subtle as early dawn at the beach" (Heckathorn & Black, 1988, p. 60).
- a garment that "celebrate(s) a joy for life" (C. Shelton in Tominaga, 2000, p. 28).
- "I once theorized a workable plan for world peace ... you just issue every soldier on both sides a beautiful Hawaiian shirt ..." (Vintage Hawaiian, 2003).
- "When people go to a rack of shirts, they'll pick out the (Aloha shirt) that satisfies their soul" (D. Hope, in Simon, 2000, p. 34)
- "the warmth of the sun ... trade winds caressing your skin ... sand between your toes ... (and) the fragrance of a plumeria lei ... come together to inspire the canvas that is the (Aloha) shirt" (Hope, 2000, p. xiii).

Comparable pictorial images (e.g., Arthur, 2000; Brown, 1982; Brown & Arthur, 2002; Hope, 2000; Steele, 1985) depict the shirt in old Hollywood movie settings, replicate vintage textile prints based on old Matson ocean liner menu covers, or depict the shirt in the context of other icons and in the style of 1950s picture postcards of the Islands. These coexist alongside descriptions and depictions of the Hawaiian shirt as a central element in the image of the tourist as sartorial clod and the shirt as an emblem of leisure. Commercial photograph #79310422 (DAJ, n.d.) at Getty Images pictures a Hawaiian shirt fabricated in a classic vintage print of hibiscus blossoms on vintage rayon fabric and accompanied by a straw hat. This picture exemplifies visual images that depict the Hawaiian shirt as a romanticized icon of old Hawai'i.

Key elements of the shirt in this iconic form involved a sense of *history* (the *past*), as contrasted with the *present*, the shirt as a unique *art form*, rather than a *commodity*, a strong sense of place (i.e., the *Hawaiian Islands*), as contrasted with *elsewhere*; and the *authenticity* of the shirt as a *cultural artifact*, rather than an *inauthentic tourist souvenir*:

- History (past) – Present
- Art form – Commodity

- Hawaiian Islands – Elsewhere
- Authentic – Inauthentic
- Cultural artifact – Tourist souvenir

Conclusion: Paradigmatic Structure and Implications of the Study

The analysis resulted in three meaning clusters. But the paired opposition did not necessarily cluster as we anticipated, and the themes around which the paired terms coalesced required alternative titles. One cluster is governed by the opposition THEM – US. Oppositions in this cluster include Tourist – Traveler, Vulgar – Sophisticated; Tawdry – Fashionable; Bad taste – Good taste; Outsiders – Insiders; Down market – Upscale; Déclassé – Refined, Fat – Fit; Foolish – Sensible; and Inferior – Superior. A second cluster of meanings referenced the Hawaiian shirt and its difference as compared to ordinary or customary dress. This thematic cluster is designated DIFFERENT – SAME. Included in this theme are the oppositions Hawaiian shirt – Customary dress; Peculiar – Familiar; Bright – Subdued; Sloppy – Neat; Leisure – Business; Inappropriate – Appropriate; Creative – Conforming; and Play – Work. A third thematic cluster is designated CULTURE – COMMERCE. This theme speaks exclusively to the shirt as a revered icon of local culture. It includes the oppositions Past (history) – Present; Art – Commodity; Hawaiian Islands – Elsewhere; Authentic – Inauthentic, and Artifact – Souvenir. The paradigmatic structure of meanings associated with iconic forms of the Hawaiian shirt is illustrated in Table 1.

Our interest in examining the Hawaiian shirt was motivated by the peculiar nature of the garment: its uniqueness in terms of design and fabrication, the frequency with which it appears in humorous images and commentary about the American tourist, its function as key icon of leisure dress and a casual lifestyle, and the reverence it is accorded in local Island culture. A semiotic framework that recast the subject of our study from an examination of surface meanings to a paradigmatic analysis of the framework on which those meanings rely enabled us to move beyond the humor and the romanticism associated with the shirt and to concentrate on the deep structure that supports the meaning attributions.

Table 1. Paradigmatic Structure of Iconic Meanings Attributed to the Hawaiian Shirt

Theme #1		Theme #2		Theme #3	
THEM	US	DIFFERENT	SAME	CULTURE	COMMERCE
Tourist	Traveler	Hawaiian	Customary	Past (history)	Present
Vulgar	Sophisticated	shirt	dress	Art form	Commodity
Tawdry	Fashionable	Peculiar	Familiar	Haw'n Islands	Elsewhere
Bad taste	Good taste	Bright	Subdued	Authentic	Inauthentic
Outsiders	Insiders	Sloppy	Neat	Artifact	Souvenir
Down market	Upscale	Bizarre	Ordinary		
Déclassé	Refined	Leisure	Business		
Fat	Fit	Inappropriate	Appropriate		
Foolish	Sensible	Creative	Conforming		
Inferior	Superior	Play	Work		

Three meaning clusters emerged from the analysis, each representing a thematic paradigm: THEM – US, DIFFERENT – SAME, and CULTURE – COMMERCE.

The THEM – US theme is commonly revealed in paradigmatic analyses of cultural phenomena, and this distinction is generally understood as a natural condition of social life (e.g., Chandler. 2002, pp. 101-105). But the theme does not appear to have been directly addressed in existing analyses of fashion and appearance. It is an intuitively obvious feature of dress, and its absence suggests that the absence itself may be an interesting subject for investigation. But the most significant aspect of the theme is that the contrasting elements of the paradigm address a central issue of our theoretical frame: In this case, the surface meanings of the popular culture product are cast as good-humored jokes about aesthetics and taste, while the deep structure reveals power relationships and social group tensions. The privileged elements in the THEM – US paradigm address a social group that defines itself as sophisticated, sensible, and superior, while those outside the group are identified as vulgar, foolish, and inferior. Berger (1984) points to theories in the works of Hobbs and Freud that suggest that humor is based on feelings of superiority that arise when one openly diminishes the status of others (p. 72). Although we tend

to read humorous ridicule and insults as good-natured jests, the search for the deep structure of meanings attributed to popular phenomena suggests that we look beyond our surface interpretations in order to examine the foundations on which those meanings are structured.

The DIFFERENT – SAME theme has not been identified as such in other paradigmatic analyses of dress and appearance, although the opposition is akin to the dichotomy Davis (1985) identified between fashion and clothing, Polhemus and Proctor (1978) identified between fashion and anti-fashion, and that Morgado (2007) proposed between extraordinary and ordinary dress. The repetition of this theme in dress and appearance studies suggests it warrants further examination, especially in the postmodern context, when fashion trends that encourage expressions of uniqueness and individuality in appearance may be erasing both the distinctive and the oppositional character of unusual appearance forms.

The CULTURE – COMMERCE theme is also not apparent in other works on dress and may be unique to the contexts and circumstances surrounding the Hawaiian shirt. However other work has addressed binary oppositions that support distinctions between culturally authentic experiences and synthetic events manufactured for tourist consumption, and between legitimate cultural objects and inauthentic tourist souvenirs (e.g., Culler, 1988; MacCannell, 1976). Examinations of other apparel and appearance related souvenir products would provide additional insights on this phenomenon.

Several limitations of our analysis need to be addressed. One is that some readers may challenge the notion that meaning is constructed on the basis of binary oppositions and/or paired contrasts; that the meanings of social and cultural (or any) phenomena are better addressed as continua than as oppositions. There is, however, strong scholarly support for the idea that binary thinking is – if not an integral component of the human mind – an integral component of our language system. Furthermore, the question that must be addressed is: Have we learned anything of value from the paradigmatic analysis? If we have come to new or different understandings about the nature of meaning as a result of the analysis, there is value in the assumptions that underlie the study.

A second limitation concerns the particular binary oppositions and paired contrasts that emerged in the study. Some readers may argue that the oppositions we elicited are not properties of the structural framework that supports meanings attributed to the shirt. Rather, the oppositions are products of the authors' minds. With this, we concur. Meaning is always predicated on interpretation and interpretation was central to our discoveries. However, the results of the analysis appear to be intuitively reasonable, and other interpreters may elicit additional components of the thematic clusters we identified or may suggest alternative terminology.

It is likely that few garments are as rich in iconic value as is the funny kine clothes that originated in the commercial culture of an exotic locale. However, it is very likely that other dress forms exhibit peculiar meanings that warrant examination. The present study offers insights into the dress form that was examined. It also offers insights into the role of dress as a popular culture artifact. It suggests that eliciting the contradictory meaning clusters that surround dress forms can also provide insights into the cultures that invest those forms with meaning. And it models a form of inquiry that can be fruitful in examinations of other forms of funny kine clothes.

Notes

¹ The current practice is to write the name of the state with a diacritical mark between the first and second letter "i": Hawai`i. In older materials the name appears without the diacritical mark, and some writers continue the practice of writing without the mark: Hawaii. We use the diacritical mark, but preserve the older form when it appears in others' texts. The word "Hawaiian" never takes the diacritical mark.

² We asked students in an introductory fashion class at the University of Hawai`i to explain why Island locals appear to believe that tourists have bad taste in their selection of Hawaiian shirts. The students' overwhelming response was "Because tourists do have bad taste in Hawaiian shirts!" The response suggests that the association between tourists and bad taste in dress is a good example of a seemingly natural, uncontestable truth.

³ Commercial photographs from Getty Images that are described in this paper can be accessed on-line by entering the photo's reference number in the search box at <http://www.gettyimages.com>

⁴ Cartoons from *The New Yorker* described in this paper can be accessed on-line by entering the cartoon's reference number in the search box at the website <http://www.cartoonbank.com>

⁵ The tourists in this cartoon are obviously traveling in a Middle Eastern country that is likely Iran. The humor is based on the idea that "The Great Satan" is a derogatory epithet for the USA that appears in Iranian foreign policy statements.

⁶ The contemporary practice is to use the diacritical marks in writing the word *mu`umu`u*. In earlier works the word is written without the pronunciation marks: *muumu*.

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