

For as long as I can remember I have sorely disliked reading novel-length books. The discontinuity disturbs me; by the time I return to a book, for example after a night of sleep, I already feel like a completely different person. Having to retrace my steps in order to enter the text again, noticing my utterly different orientation towards it, forces me to remember that I am constantly fighting, doggedly, angrily, against the fragmentation of my conception of myself. Flowing through my life, having discrete experiences like films or meals or short stories, I can attribute the differences in my consciousness to the differences in those discrete experiences. Of course dinner is not like a visit to the drugstore, so of course I am still the same me that I was earlier. A long text reminds me that you can never see something completely. It reminds me that observing quantum particles causes them to become something else, which remembered in passing makes me uneasy.

The first novel I read after college, several years after, is called *Kafka on the Shore*. A young man who named himself Kafka goes on an elaborate, bizarre journey that eventually intersects with the story of an older man who can speak to cats. The psychological conflicts that Kafka has carried since childhood are played out as surreal interactions with magical characters.

In the early days of our relationship, I read *Kafka on the Shore* because Puppies Puppies suggested it to me. He said that he saw an article in *Newsweek Magazine* about the novel during his adolescence, and that he identified profoundly with certain aspects of Kafka and his life. As a boy in Texas, he was captivated by a feeling of intimacy with a boy from Japan. I wanted to know as much about Puppies Puppies as possible, and so I relished the opportunity to learn from something so deeply lodged in his heart.

We've talked many times in passing about Puppies Puppies' longstanding interest in Colonel Sanders, and I lazily attributed it to its association with the cherished *Kafka on the Shore*. A ghostly pimp takes Sanders' form in the book and becomes a sort of guide for Kafka. Murakami's Colonel Sanders describes himself as a "concept." That idea is strange enough to be interesting on its own. I have never asked Puppies Puppies why Colonel Sanders in Japan is so interesting to him, but I think that I have an idea, that he stands in for an unknown figure from the past.

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Puppies Puppies' grandmother, Toyoko, was Japanese, and his grandfather Donald was a member of the American armed forces in the Pacific theater during and after World War II, stationed in Tokyo during the occupation. His mother, born in Japan, moved to the United States when she was a young child. There is an echo of history in the story of his family: two people, one American and one Japanese, were brought together by war, and yet fell in love and formed a new family. The immense complexity and contradictory emotions surrounding the occupation and partnership between America and Japan after the war are likewise echoed in Puppies Puppies' family.

On the one hand, Puppies Puppies is definitely an American. He was born and raised in America, and his family is deeply integrated into American culture. When Toyoko and Donald moved to Texas in the 1960's, they mostly adopted an American way of life. When I met Puppies Puppies, he had very little experience of Japanese culture, and had even less familiarity with Japanese food than most of my American friends. He knows of no relatives living in Japan.

On the other hand, Puppies Puppies has a special relationship to his Japanese identity. I first glimpsed this early in our relationship— he referred to his mother simply as Japanese, and himself as simply half-Japanese, half-Puerto Rican, leaving out his Irish-American grandfather Donald from the equation completely. Even though she had a very tough, even abrasive manner, I could always sense that Toyoko held a special perch inside his mind, and that it meant quite a lot to him that she favored him over his two brothers. He says that she liked him the most because he looks the most Japanese in his family, perhaps even more so than his mother, a fact that he told me with an air of pride but also of mystery. Puppies Puppies, prior to his exhibition at XYZ Collective, has only visited Japan once, for a period of only a few hours, confined to Narita airport on his way to another country. But I have heard much more about this visit to the airport, about the unexpected emotional gravity of setting foot on Japanese soil, than I heard about the three weeks spent at his final destination. There is a powerful, unseen connection between Puppies Puppies, his mother, Toyoko, and the country of Japan.

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From what I've read online, Colonel Harland Sanders, after working on railroads, selling insurance, and beginning several failed businesses, started selling fried chicken from his gas station in the early 1930s. A competing businessman painted over the highway sign directing travelers to Sanders' station, which prompted a gun fight involving both of them. The competitor murdered someone from Sanders' side, resulting in a murder conviction, jail time, and less competition for the business that would eventually become KFC. Sanders' early businesses struggled during World War II, because of taxes on gasoline, but began to grow steadily immediately after the war. While Puppies Puppies' family was beginning in Japan, Colonel Sanders was building an ever-larger franchise business. Apparently, Sanders sold Kentucky Fried Chicken in 1968 because he felt too overwhelmed by the new international scale of his business. KFC entered Japan in 1970, and became overwhelmingly popular after an advertising campaign in 1974 convinced the Japanese public that chicken was the best food for celebrating an American, secular version of Christmas. An ideal example of economic collaboration between the two countries, KFC Japan enriched both the American parent corporation and the Japanese franchise owners, aggressively spreading American cultural influence to Japan but also inflecting it through a Japanese lens. In Japan, Colonel Sanders seems like a white American military grandfather to me, a cultural ambassador using mutual economic incentives to cover over any historical animosity. Colonel Sanders will stand as a sentinel, watching over the streets of Japan, sometimes wearing his suit, sometimes wearing a yukata.

This concept is the model for a successful global consumer business: all of the efficiencies of an operation of enormous scale to produce the products, but differentiated local marketing to sell those products to each country. Today, the KFC divisions for many countries have their own Instagram accounts, which give an easy window into this kind of locally targeted marketing. Puppies Puppies has appropriated material from several of these accounts, but is especially fond of KFC Philippines for example, which produces surreal images that are often completely inexplicable, at least out of context. There is a great deal of freedom given to each country's KFC divisions to market what is a very simple, accessible product in any market: fried chicken.

Unlike a major international conglomerate, Puppies Puppies does not segment his audience into various regional markets. His artworks are generally exhibited in a similar

manner in the various countries to which he sends them, or they are presented online simultaneously to an inherently international audience. Therefore, he often incorporates content that can be understood by as many cultures as possible, for example popular mythologies like Harry Potter or The Lord of the Rings, which have achieved ubiquity in countries around the world. KFC serves this purpose, too— people all over the world will be able to read “Colonel Sanders” as an image because there are KFC franchise restaurants all over the world. (Puppies Puppies has exhibited KFC-related artworks on three continents, as well as on the internet, so far.) Just as you can visualize the totality of a Felix Gonzalez-Torres candy sculpture as an earth-shaped sphere of scattered, digested and undigested sugar molecules, distributed in pockets and through toilets over the course of many years, you can imagine KFC as an earth-shaped sphere of scattered boxy buildings, and the remains of a nearly infinite procession of digested and undigested dead chicken bodies. For me, this line of thinking displays the ambition of Puppies Puppies most clearly, a kind of world domination via image association. If I am made to think of Puppies Puppies every time I see a KFC, then I have 19,000 occasions in 118 countries to think of Puppies Puppies. Owning the world is generally the aspiration of empires, of competing sides in a world war, or of multinational corporations, rather than of artists.

In addition to the selection of works related to “Puppies Puppies’ KFC,” which are located outside the main gallery space, visitors to XYZ collective will find a single piece of bread on the floor of the gallery. Although it is true that bread is often served together with fried chicken, this bread has another purpose, as part of a global-scale artwork called *Earth Sandwich*. A similar piece of bread was released into the ocean off of the coast of Uruguay, roughly the place directly across the earth from XYZ Collective’s building in Tokyo. The piece of bread on the floor and the piece of bread in the ocean parenthetically surround the entire planet, containing it within a single work within the oeuvre of Puppies Puppies. Again, it is possible to see this as an absurdly grandiose gesture toward conquering the earth, which jarringly contrasts with the humble experience of encountering a single piece of bread on the floor of the gallery. However, I remember the first time that Puppies Puppies exhibited a work related to the entire earth, at Important Projects in Oakland, California. He included a copy of a work by Martin Creed, vinyl text on the wall: “the whole world + the work = the whole world.” In other words, the world cannot be conquered.

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“Listen—God only exists in people’s minds. Especially in Japan, God’s always been kind of a flexible concept. Look at what happened after the war. Douglas MacArthur ordered the divine emperor to quit being God, and he did, making a speech saying he was just an ordinary person.” - Colonel Sanders in *Kafka on the Shore*