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**Pollution and Hybridity: Cultural Collision in Masami Teraoka's
*McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan (1974–75)***

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In 1974, Masami Teraoka began his series of watercolor paintings entitled, *McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan*. These paintings show the intersection of Japanese and American cultures—a timely theme, considering the entrance of American multinational corporations in post-World War II Japan, as well as Teraoka's own arrival in the United States thirteen years earlier. The series, rendered in a style derived from the ukiyo-e prints of nineteenth century Japan, reflects changes in Japan following the introduction of American fast food and throwaway culture, epitomized by the entrance of McDonald's in 1971. In doing so, Teraoka grapples with issues of pollution and nationality in a framework established by the *ukiyo-e* artisans of nineteenth century Edo (present day Tokyo).

In this paper, I look at concepts of pollution inherent in the series, not only in the physical sense of refuse, but through societal changes in Japan following the introduction of McDonald's as well. Indeed, McDonald's invasion is both physical (with the actual opening of McDonald's restaurants on Japanese soil) and ideological (in the changing attitudes towards eating habits in Japan). My analysis of the pollution in the series will draw on the writings of anthropologist and cultural theorist Mary Douglas, and her discussion of pollution, boundaries and the body, to

illustrate how Teraoka's choice of theme reflects his status of "in-betweenness." I then move to elaborate on Teraoka's "in-betweenness" by utilizing Homi Bhabha's theories of postcolonial translation and Lisa Lowe's writings on hybridity and multiplicity in Asian America. Existing between and within American and Japanese cultures, the refuse and chaos in the series reflects concerns about the collision of Japanese and American cultures at large. Teraoka's status as a liminal artist provides him with the ability to act as a translator of cultures, producing a new site of modernity that combines elements of East and West, without damaging either.

In the 1970s, McDonalds represented a relatively new brand name—dating back only to 1954, its creation spurred by the mechanization of food production. It is a brand that celebrates overconsumption and represents throwaway culture. As Sidra Stich notes, "McDonalds exploited the appeal of quantity consumption. Advertisements and signs at every outlet publicized a running tally of the number of hamburgers sold, and the figure rapidly reached mind-boggling heights."¹ Chinese social critic Mandy Kwan recalls taking her young cousin to an outlet in Hong Kong, "She may perhaps be learning the Western ways and cultures of eating, but definitely she is consuming the American idea of waste and overconsumption of materials. One can imagine the papers that go to waste in a typical fast food meal."² After a meal is eaten, no plates or utensils need to be cleaned, only disposed of. Wrappers, boxes, trays and straws fill trashcans and, as Teraoka illustrates, clutter the Japanese environment.

[Slide—Hamburger and Chopsticks] *Hamburger and Chopsticks*, 1976 [Figure 1], illustrates the introduction of overconsumption and throwaway ideologies. In this work, Teraoka places a hamburger in wrapper alongside red lacquered chopsticks, beneath a branch filled with cherry blossoms. The hamburger, cropped by the right edge of the painting, can be read as encroaching on the otherwise idyllic scene. It stands in direct contrast to the pair of chopsticks

beside it, a symbol of traditional Japanese cuisine. The floral pattern of the chopsticks reflects the cherry blossom branch above it—itsself a symbol of Japanese heritage. Being lacquered, the chopsticks stand on a different level than the hamburgers, belonging to a more refined dining setting; in other words, lacquered chopsticks are permanent, to be cleansed for reuse. The chopsticks one would expect to find in a Japanese McDonald's would be manufactured in cheap bamboo, to be disposed of.

The contrast between the permanent chopsticks and disposable hamburger wrapper is indicative of the ways the introduction of fast food in Japan has affected traditional eating habits. The defeat of Japan in World War II opened the door for the Americanization of Japanese culture. Alison Bing, in her discussion of Teraoka's work, writes, "Through the Marshall Plan in Europe and Japan, children in countries decimated by World War II had developed a taste for American foods."³ Many reform-minded Japanese officials, including Den Fujita, the first president of McDonald's Japan, called for an overhaul of Japanese society, one that would align it with Western values rather than with tradition. Indeed, after the first McDonald's outlet in Japan in 1971, over 500 more open over the next 15 years.

Enumerating the traditional rules of eating in Japan, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney writes, "One must not touch food with one's hands when eating, and one must not eat while standing."⁴ The food served at McDonald's however, is meant to be eaten with the hands and the layout of many McDonald's outlets in Japan is conducive to eating while standing containing only counter space, with no seats and tables—ideal for a quick bite on the way to work. Additionally, the food served at McDonald's fails to meet traditional Japanese considerations of what consists a meal—featuring a large portion of meat and bread (which is not considered filling), instead of rice, and are meant to be eaten individually, not communally. The changes in Japanese etiquette and custom, as well as

the general Americanization of Japanese society, represents the social pollution brought about by McDonald's.

[Slide—Tokyo Ginza Shuffle] The physical pollution brought by McDonald's manifests in two forms—the presence of McDonald's outlets on Japanese soil and, as Teraoka illustrates, the potential for hamburger wrappers to litter the landscape. This is illustrated in several works in the series, such as *Tokyo Ginza Shuffle*, 1974 [Figure 2]. In this work, women clad in kimono and zori—traditional Japanese slippers—move across the page. A fallen hamburger, placed on the left side of the painting, poses a threat to the women. Although the painting is graceful and lyrical, one can imagine a woman slipping on the hamburger bun and falling, as disheveled hamburger and crumpled napkins interrupts the pattern created by zori-donned feet. This tension is especially true for the woman in the front of the procession—she appears to be a mere step away from a disastrous encounter with the hamburger. Because these women are shuffling, they are surely not lifting their feet high enough to prevent disaster.

In addition to the pollution accrued by the hamburger wrapper and bamboo chopsticks, the quality of the hamburgers served by McDonald's is also suspect. Indian social critic Vandana Shiva suggests, “[The Golden Arches suggest that] when you walk into McDonalds, you are entering heaven, that the corporation wants people around the world to view ‘the McDonald's experience’ as an immersion in celestial bliss—while they are actually eating junk.”⁵ In Japan, numerous urban legends have circulated regarding the origin of McDonald's hamburger meat. The stories, *nyan-baga-densetsu* (the lore of the catburger), imply that the meat comes from domestic animals.⁶ Hamburger buns have also been linked to earthworms.⁷ Teraoka himself lamented the quality of McDonald's' hamburgers, saying, “I mean, I've had great hamburgers in the States, and I wished someone would bring better hamburgers to Japan.”⁸ It is quite possible for one to regard

the mass-produced food McDonald's serves as trash, in addition to the packaging they serve it in, reinforcing the theme of physical pollution.

In her seminal work, *Purity and Danger*, 1966, Mary Douglas states, "The idea of society is a powerful image. [...] This image has form, it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure."⁹ Society and nationality are defined by borders—questions of what is native and what is alien and polluting, arise when these boundaries are compromised. The scenes Teraoka depicts in *McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan* depict a threatened Japanese society in two ways. Firstly, as discussed earlier, the threat is illustrated through the introduction of polluting elements (Douglas writes, "As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder"¹⁰). This pollution, taking the form of stray fries, hamburger wrappers and the like, as well as in shifting attitudes towards food and eating, signifies the dangers to Japanese tradition imposed by the American multinational corporation.

The second way the threat can be understood is through the positionality of the artist himself. His status as a liminal being, existing between and within both American and Japanese cultures, grants him a position of agency. Returning to Douglas's image of society, she writes, "There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas."¹¹ Teraoka acknowledges the impact his state of in-betweenness has on his works, maintaining an awareness of his status as a Japanese-born American and the implications stemming from that fact. In depicting traditional Japanese *ukiyo-e* scenes interspersed with American consumer icons, presented through the western watercolor medium, Teraoka is actively translating Japanese culture through a pop art lens and American consumer culture with an *ukiyo-e* one. To understand the complexity of the cross-racial, cross-national and cross-cultural interactions present in Teraoka's works, a consideration of

theories regarding translation and hybridity will be useful. To this end, I will draw on the theories of postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha and Asian American scholar Lisa Lowe.

Homi Bhabha, in his writings, seeks to deconstruct the binary structures that have dominated Western views of the world—conceptions of Oriental/Occidental, native/alien, primitive/modern. Bhabha posits, "Cultural globality is figured in the in-between spaces of double frames: its historical originality marked by a cognitive obscurity; its decentred 'subject' signified in the nervous temporality of the transition, or the emergent provisionality of the 'present'."¹² Bhabha acknowledges the agency of the postcolonial subject, who is positioned between the "past" of the colony and the "present" of the metropolis (and related concepts of modernity). Here, the post-colonial subject undergoes a process of translation, one that takes a supposedly global, yet overwhelmingly Eurocentric notion of modernity and infuses it with traces of the colonial, creating new sites of modernity that are location-specific. In this light, McDonald's can be viewed as the colonizer, in the form of the aggressive multinational corporation. A Japanese society decimated by World War II would take the place of the colony and Masami Teraoka, the postcolonial subject.

In his influential essay, "'Race,' Time and the Revision of Modernity," Bhabha compels postcolonial subjects to oppose "the framing of the white man as universal, normative." (341) In opposing the universalizing tendencies of modernity, an "interruptive time-lag [opens] in the 'progressive' myth of modernity, and enables the diasporic and the postcolonial to be represented." (344) It is in this "time-lag" that Teraoka operates, thwarting the concept that places the white man (represented by McDonald's) as contemporary and Japanese tradition as outdated. In *McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan*, Teraoka is in the process of creating cultural globality—caught in between the international space of the American multinational corporation and consumer society

and the decentered, fragmented subject that is at once both American and Japanese and neither at the same time.

[Slide—Geisha and Tattooed Woman] *Geisha and Tattooed Woman*, 1975 [Figure 3], blend concerns for pollution and boundaries with the process of ongoing translation. In this painting, the kimono-clad courtesan, representing traditional Japan, stands at the left edge of the painting, peering out from behind a screen door. She tentatively grasps a hamburger and its wrapper in her hands, with the calligraphic script in the paint in the painting's background inscribing her thoughts. It reads, as translated by Howard Link, curator emeritus of the Honolulu Academy of Arts:

The tattooed woman opens, 'Well, I'm going to start eating now.' She is countered with a query from the envious courtesan. 'Are you really going to eat that Japanese noodle soup?' The tattooed woman replies, 'Yes, I'm starved. I hope you don't mind my slurping.' The courtesan, unable to contain herself any longer, demands, 'How am I supposed to eat this? Should I just bite into it?'¹³

The geisha reflects Teraoka himself who, when offered his first hamburger, was confused as to how to eat it. Meanwhile, the tattooed woman hunches over a bowl of noodles—tonguing a single noodle dangling from her chopsticks. The characters, like Teraoka, are in the process of translating cultures. The tattooed woman, bearing an all-over kimono-patterned tattoo, displaying her ability to maneuver chopsticks and slurping her noodles (the traditional Japanese way to do so), is well into the process of cultural translation—similar to the multinational corporation who has done thorough market research. The geisha, on the other hand, is tentative about consuming the food of the

other—having it thrust upon her. The placement of the characters also betrays the power dynamic between the two women. The tattooed woman leans forward, with her elbows spread out. The geisha, on the other hand, hunches in the corner, almost pushed off frame. This, again, speaks to the ability of American modernity to overwhelm Japanese tradition.

This scene certainly nears the chaotic residing in Douglas' unstructured areas of society. The tattooed woman is sloppy in her consumption of the noodles—they slip from her chopsticks, through her hands, onto the table below. Her bowl tilts forward precariously, noodles and soup ready to pour out.¹⁴ In light of Mary Douglas' statements regarding the body—"The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system,"¹⁵ and "We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise the specially vulnerable points,"¹⁶ we can see the appropriateness of Teraoka's selection of food and eating as themes for his depiction of cultural collision. Like the placement of the characters, Teraoka's focus on the tattooed woman's mouth is especially symbolic—her tongue is extended salaciously, creating implied links to other bodily orifices. The mouths of the two women symbolize the ability of Japanese to consume American culture and the potentiality of the American corporation to devour Japanese tradition.

[Slide—Wesselmann, Kunisada] As stated earlier, Teraoka's arrival in the United States coincided with the rise of Pop Art. As a movement, Pop art both influenced and was inspired by America's burgeoning consumer culture. As art historian Cecile Whiting notes, "Pop art [not only] borrowed from consumer culture, [...] consumer culture reappropriated and disseminated Pop art. Commercial artists, designers, and photographers emulated and incorporated Pop paintings and sculptures in images presenting fashions, interior designs, and household goods." (4) Andy Warhol completed screenprints that displayed numerous Coca-Cola bottles and Campbell's Soup Cans. Claes Oldenburg created soft sculptures of French fries and hamburgers. As an art style

inextricably linked to consumerism and the mass production of food, Pop art was a logical influence on Teraoka's critique of McDonald's. Teraoka was particularly drawn to the work of Tom Wesselman, whose collages blended consumer items and areas of bold, flat color.

Wesselmann's use of flat color is paralleled in the ukiyo-e woodblock prints that Teraoka grew up with—the very same qualities that attracted European artists to the art form in the nineteenth century. Created in a reproducible medium, *ukiyo-e* was meant for mass-production and was used for advertisements as well as purely decorative purposes, reflecting the concern for consumerism embraced by the Pop artists. *Ukiyo-e* was also the art of the masses. As Sandy Kita puts it, “Because of the shogunate’s prejudice against merchants, *Ukiyo-e* is not just the art of a certain time and place. It is an art of the lower classes of Edo in the Tokugawa Period.” (29) As an art form that both spoke to and reflected the concerns of the masses, *ukiyo-e* was also an art reflective of cultural interactions between Japan and the West. While it influenced European artists, *ukiyo-e* artisans adopted Western artistic conventions, such as perspective, introduced after the opening of Japanese border. Artisans also used the medium to chronicle the arrival of foreigners in Japanese ports—creating a commentary of contemporary events. Both a reflection of popular culture and a symbol of Teraoka's cultural heritage, *ukiyo-e* was another fitting influence on *McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan*.

Through Teraoka's translation of both artistic traditions, scenes with strong visual connections to *ukiyo-e* and playful overtones of Pop art were created. With female figures inspired by *ukiyo-e* master Kunisada, Teraoka combines symbolism from both America and Japan to create scenes that critique both cultures. Returning to the themes of “Race, Time and the Revision of Modernity,” Homi Bhabha states the dangers of cultural assimilation without translation:

a transvaluation of the symbolic structure of the cultural sign is absolutely necessary so that in the renaming of modernity there may ensue that process of the active agency of translation [...] Without such a reinscription of the sign itself [...] there is the danger that the mimetic contents of a discourse will conceal the fact that the hegemonic structures of power are maintained in a position of authority through a shift of vocabulary in the position of authority. (347)

In *Geisha and Tattooed Woman*, Teraoka's warning mirrors Bhabha's. If the Japanese continue to willingly absorb Western habits and customs without question and without tradition, then Japanese tradition runs the risk of being run off frame. While the Caucasian woman has already begun the translation of Japanese culture, the geisha is overwhelmed and likely to be too submissive in the face of American cultural imperialism. The geisha has become marginalized in the composition of the painting and in the calligraphic commentary—when she asks how to eat the hamburger, she receives no response. To maintain a state of heterogeneity, of cultural diversity, minority groups must continue to assert their presence in the face of a dominating, devouring presence.

[Slide—Self Portrait] In speaking of forms of hybridity and present in Asian American communities, Lisa Lowe states:

The understanding that the general cultural terrain is one social site in which 'hegemony' is continually being both established and contested permits us to theorize about the roles that racialized immigrant groups play in the making and unmaking of culture and to explore the way that cross-race and cross-national projects may work to change the existing structure of power, the current hegemony.

In *Geisha and Tattooed Woman* and *Self Portrait*, Teraoka works to expose and thwart the power dynamic that underlies the relationship between America and Japan. In *Self Portrait*, Teraoka depicts himself ducking under a flying hamburger, unraveling as it breezes by his head. The invasion of the multinational corporation follows the invasion of guns and bombs that was World War II—“buns instead of guns,” as Bing puts it. Masami Teraoka said:

Eventually, that won't be the only American fast food, or merchandise, or culture that will be invading Japan. And not only Japan. Eventually it will invade China, and the rest of Asia, and Europe, and so on. [...] I figured out that this was the time to express my ideas about homogenization and American consumer culture.

(58)

It is this very homogenization of culture that Lisa Lowe argues against. In speaking for heterogeneity as a model to understand Asian American cultures, she writes, “The materialist argument for heterogeneity seeks to challenge the conception of difference as exclusively structured by a binary opposition between two terms.” (74) Inspired by the identity politics that developed in the 1960s, Teraoka transitioned from a non-representational style to one that was steeped in the imagery of *ukiyo-e*. He was encouraged to evidence his cultural heritage in his paintings, allowing him access to an iconographic pool that continues to enrich his work today. In *Self Portrait*, Teraoka evades a violent incursion of American consumer culture. Unlike the geisha, Teraoka is not marginalized by the introduction of Western elements—he remains at the image's front and center. Wearing a traditional *haori* coat, the artist proudly exhibits his cultural heritage—his status as an American artist born in Japan.

[Slide—Burger and Bamboo Broom] Teraoka's depiction of pollution is not completely negative—he does offer a possibility of redemption. Although pollution encroaches on Teraoka's

scenes, it is aestheticized. Indeed, finding the hamburger in *Burger and Bamboo Broom*, 1980 [Figure 4] may take some viewers a second glance. A tension exists between the broom and the hamburger: the broom, a natural, handcrafted product of Japanese tradition, and the hamburger, a mass-produced, artificial American food item. Despite the tension, both icons are presented in the same fashion, part of the same work of art. Also, although the burger is present in the scene, it does not dominate. Rather, the broom is poised to sweep the offending hamburger off the page—eliminating the polluting elements of American culture, while maintaining a Western presence through the use of the watercolor medium. This leaves the work of art, and not pollution, as evidence of the cultural collision.

In *McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan*, Teraoka challenges the binary oppositions that are often used to define societies. Blending elements from Japanese and American cultures and tradition, from Pop Art and *ukiyo-e*, and creating an iconography that is at once Japanese and American, Teraoka's work exists outside of the binary categories Eastern/Western, native/foreign, modern/traditional.¹⁷ In defining the series, the question is not whether the influence of one culture drowns the other—rather, there is delight in the way the two have been enjoined. Whereas pollution and the loss of tradition may be one result of a cultural collision, in depicting these results, Teraoka presents another. An aestheticized mixture of East and West, Teraoka has sought, and found, a balance between Japan and America and tradition and modernity.

Endnotes

¹ Sidra Stich, *Made in U.S.A.: An Americanization in Modern Art, The '50s and '60s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987): 81.

² Joe L. Kincheloe, *The Sign of the Burger: McDonald's and the Culture of Power* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002): 33.

³ Alison Bing, E. Heartney and K.A. Hoffman, *Ascending Chaos: The Art of Masami Teraoka 1966–2006* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007): 174

⁴ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, "McDonald's in Japan" in *Golden Arches East*, ed. James L. Watson, 161-182 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001): 174.

⁵ Kincheloe, 30.

⁶ Ohnuki-Tierney, 174.

⁷ It is interesting to see a reversal of the American myth that Asians eat dogs, cats and rats. In both cases, the food of another culture is viewed as a polluting substance. A discussion of American perceptions of Asian eating habits can be found in Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

⁸ Bing, 58.

⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002): 141.

¹⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹¹ Ibid, 141.

¹² Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2004): 309.

¹³ Howard A. Link, *Waves and Plagues: The Art of Masami Teraoka* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1980): 15.

¹⁴ The order present in the scene completely disintegrates in Teraoka's 1988 work, *AIDS Series/Tattooed Woman and Flying Saucers*. Here, the building collapses on the two women and the tattooed woman's noodles pour out of her bowl. Now the geisha has completely adopted the American characteristics of overconsumption and throwaway culture—she stands with hamburger in one hand and Coca Cola bottle in the other.

¹⁵ Douglas, 142.

¹⁶ Ibid, 150.

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