

Here is another person to say this: radio from *la jetée* has made a marked impression on me. The film starts with scrolling text as a voice plainly reads in French, *Ceci est l'histoire d'un homme marqué par une image d'enfance* — *This is the story of a man marked by an image from his childhood*. Although that film might have initiated in me the awareness of the very natural, and possessive, power of voice, ever since then, other poetry or songs of numerous kinds have made in me the same sort of marks, bereft in the aftermath of having been haunted by another mind, another voice. It is not always a pleasant experience as it is shared with the paranoia of being haunted by the wrong ghost.

When I look around—I reside in New York in October 2016, a few weeks before the presidential election in the US—, it is common to hear the rants against the rants of Donald Trump, and the shameless and repeated disownment of his own words. After living some decades a life, we learn this lesson, that people—we—do this, that is, disown, especially when there is great power at stake. Both at jobs and, to our surprise, in love, we disclaim, recant, and shift our positions to take the better of the current. One might add to the disclaimer, “things change,” and celebrate the flexible and plastic nature of being. *One mouth, two words* (一口二言). This is an adage against inconsistency in men. Evidently, it also reflects that inconsistency prevails in our speaking culture, enough for the adage to last a long time. After all, the art of acting even joyfully invites one mouth to speak many others' words. When this disownment, however, shows too radical a discrepancy from where that same mouth set on, we might start to call this speaker hypocritical, a word that drives from ὑπόκρισις, or “play-acting.” When the hypocrisy breaks the tolerance and offends more than a few mores to the point it can be virally condemned, we tend to use the word “disgusting.” When do we recall having this nausea caused by aural disorientation?

The 1992 Los Angeles riots, commonly called “the Rodney King riots,” in the Korean-American community is remembered as “Sa-I-Gu,” (transliteration of “April 29th,” or “4-2-9,” which is the first day of the four-day-long riot, uprising, unrest, or civil disturbance). I was seventeen years old, living in Korea at the time of this polyonymous event. I knew from the papers that the racial tension between the Korean immigrants and African-Americans had something to do with it, but I had not known then that out of 1 billion dollars worth of property damage, Korean-owned property damage was estimated at 400 million dollars, most of which was never recompensed in any form. I am not having a response of patriotism of either kind (Korean or American), but leafing through various documentation and essays around this incident, I underlined the words “disgust” and “contempt.” Korean immigrant merchants in South Central Los Angeles were considered a disguised form of cheap labor, capitalizing on the community of the “native” Angelenos, mainly low-income African-Americans. I am here reminded of another native, a Venetian, Antonio, spurning the Jewish merchant Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*:

*...a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.*

After living away from my birthplace for twenty years, I am compelled to question what “native,” or *where I was from* as Joan Didion puts it, is. I am compelled to digest the present by going through all the bonds from the past. For instance, the timeline of key legislation and judicial rulings in Asian American immigration sheds some light.

- The 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act prohibits immigration to the US from most of the Asian continent.
- The 1924 Immigration Act introduces quotas for immigration based on national origin, creating a quota of zero for Asian countries.
- The 1965 Immigration Act Amendments eliminates racial/nationality-based discrimination in immigration quotas.

So the 1965 Immigration Act Amendments explains the “sudden appearance” of Korean merchants in South Central Los Angeles where most of the riot occurred. Yet these bonds do not explain the Black migration to Los Angeles before they turn natives in the early and mid-20th Century, bicoastal boycotts against Korean-American delis and liquor shops in the 80’s and 90’s, or the killing of black teenager Latasha Harlins by Soon Ja Du, a Korean-American liquor store owner. This is local news that is in fact a whole universe for the groups that constitute the locality. As I summon these records, I know in the back of my mind that they are not of my own, but of where I was *not* from. Nevertheless I am compelled—what other ways am I allowed but to learn the history of feuds between these families of races when I cannot deny that I am here seen as a Korean, or at least an Asian, man? One must realize that before being compelled as I am now, my aforesaid ignorance as a seventeen-year-old prolonged and branched out to develop a rhetoric that can only be described here as alien, but remains to be my own. When is the right time to disown my own story, if I even can recollect one? When does it no longer induce *disgust* to pledge allegiance to their history, the history of the natives who lived and stayed before me? Neither altruism nor survival impulse can anoint me to go ahead free to assimilate into the culture to which I am an alien without being accused, let alone accusing myself, of hypocrisies. Baldwin says, “the culture is not a community basket-weaving project.” I will be nauseated. Baldwin continues, “... nor yet an act of God; was something neither desirable nor undesirable in itself, being inevitable, being nothing more or less than the recorded and visible effects on a body of people of the vicissitudes with which they had been forced to deal.” Shakespeare in Romeo’s voice is more succinct:

Oh dear account! My life is my foe’s debt.

I imagine a Shylockian blade excising the rotten heart from a goodly apple without a drop of blood, which is never mentioned in the bond. An excision of this heart, uncompromised, leaving the remaining healthy arteries, veins, and muscles intact and

functional, is an impossible one. Recently as I was reading *Romeo and Juliet*, it struck me that this is a fantasy around this impossible task, no different from Toni Morrison's excision of *Beloved* from an incommensurably complex history. Draw this heart, a debt to my foe. In this drawing, the participants and the bonds stay as performers and props. One looks to the moment before the bond, any bond. When two meet each other in a masquerade without knowing the color of each other's race. When love is without the knowledge of the past. When his memory is not marked by the image of his death. The two meet in joy. After joy, skipping all else, is only death.

Not having that which, having, makes them short.