



Framer Framed

Trinh T. Minh-Ha

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From a Hybrid Place

with Judith Mayne

*Mayne: One of the things I admire about your work—your films as well as your book *Woman, Native, Other*—is that it resists any easy categories. Your book is a work of theory, but it is very poetic: the reader has a different relationship to it than is usually the case in theoretical writing. Your films are obviously not documentaries in any classic sense, and it's not accurate to call them "commentaries" on the documentary genre either. Could you talk about this resistance to categorization that seems to be a crucial part of your work?*

Trinh: I am always working at the borderlines of several shifting categories, stretching out to the limits of things, learning about my own limits and how to modify them. The book, for example, was completed in 1983. It took me that long to find a publisher. Ironically enough (although not surprisingly), what I went through in submitting it for publication seemed to be sadly consistent with certain repressed realities of women's writing and publishing, which I discussed in its very first chapter. The book was rejected by no less than thirty-three presses. The kind

Interview conducted by Judith Mayne in May 1990, when *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* was screened at the Wexner Center for the Arts. First published as "Feminism, Filmmaking and Postcolonialism: An Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha," in *Feminisms*, September–October (part I) and November–December (part II) 1990; and in *Afterimage* 18, no. 5, December 1990.

of problems it repeatedly encountered had precisely to do with marketable categories and disciplinary regulations; in other words, with conformist borders. Not only was the focus on postcolonial positionings and on women of color as a subject and as subjects of little interest to publishers then, but what bothered them most was the writing itself.

For academics, "scholarly" is a normative territory that they own all for themselves, hence theory is no theory if it is not dispensed in a way recognizable to and validated by them. The mixing of different modes of writing; the mutual challenge of theoretical and poetical, discursive and "non-discursive" languages; the strategic use of stereotyped expressions in exposing stereotypical thinking; all these attempts at introducing a break into the fixed norms of the Master's confident prevailing discourses are easily misread, dismissed, or obscured in the name of "good writing," of "theory," or of "scholarly work." I was continually sent back and forth from one publisher to another—commercial, academic, and small presses—each one equally convinced in its kind suggestions that the book would fit better in the other marketing context. What transpired through all the comments I received was mainly that the work never quite corresponded to what these diverse publishers were "looking for." Obviously, as they said, they were very interested in writings "from the Third World," but this one "would not fit in the series" they had or were in the process of establishing. An editor of a small press specializing in creative writing seriously felt he was being helpful when he decreed "it's not good writing because it's too impure."

It was a depressing experience. But I accept it as part of the struggle that this book is carrying on. I have to find a place for myself since I am at odds with all these categories of writings and modes of theorizing. A straight counterdiscourse is no longer threatening. It ultimately contributes to things remaining in place, because it tends more often than not to block critical thinking; it is unable to do much but repeat itself through the same anti-repressive rhetoric of modernist ideology. Let's take the example of a notion in vogue like "interdisciplinary." This notion is usually carried out in practice as the mere juxtaposition of a number of different disciplines. In such a politics of pluralist exchange and dialogue the concept of "inter-" (trans)formation and growth is typically reduced to a question of proper accumulation and acquisition. The disciplines are simply added, put next to one another with their boundaries kept intact; the participants continue happily to speak within their expertise, from a position of authority. It is rare to see such a notion stretched to the limits, so that the fences between disciplines are pulled down. Borderlines remain then strategic and contingent, as they constantly cancel themselves out. This "new" ground, always in the making, is what interests me most in everything I do. It

constitutes the site where the very idea of a discipline, a specialization, and an expertise is challenged. No single field, profession, or creator can "own" it.

I never think of my films as specifically documentary or fictional, except when I send them off to festivals. Then I have to choose my jury. It is with this jury in mind that I place the film in a category. For years, no matter which one I chose, it seemed as if I constantly made the "wrong" selection. When I chose "documentary," I knew the problem would have to do with what people expect from a documentary and the ensuing rigidity of criteria. Most of these specialized jurors not only had difficulty in accepting my films as documentaries but also hardly considered them befitting the social, educational, or ethnographic categories. The same problem occurred when I opted for "film art" or "experimental," because jurors of such a category tend to see "experimental" as a genre on its own rather than as a critical venture working upon "genre" itself. Many still hold on to a mystical concept of "visionary art," and any preoccupation with or attempt at exposing ideology is rejected as "corrupt"—lacking pure vision, hence being no real Art. Now it seems that as my work is getting better known the categories become less important. But these used to be something that completely limited the ground on which the films could circulate.

M: You mention the word "borderline" several times, and the immediate connection that comes to mind is Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands/La Frontera. That notion of a space in between conventional opposing pairs has been very important to the work of many women of color. I wonder how you see your own work in relation to that of other women writers of color?

T: I really like Anzaldua's works, and I often quote her in my own writings. I don't want to collapse all fights into one, however. I do realize the question of borderlines is particularly exigent in the Latina/Latino community because for many it remains physically an acute, everyday experience. This being said, and without forgetting the specificities of each context, I also recognize the commonalities between that border fight and the ones carried out, literally as well as figuratively, by women of color across ethnicities and cultures.

As in all struggles there are divergences among us; mostly in terms of strategy and location, I would say, but sometimes also in terms of objective and direction. What I understand of the struggle of women of color, however, is that our voices and silences across difference are so many attempts at articulating this always-emerging-already-distorted place that remains so difficult, on the one hand, for the First World even to recognize, and on the other, for our own communities to accept to venture into, for fear of losing what has been a costly gain through past struggles.

To unlearn the reactive language that promotes separatism and self-enclosure by essentializing a denied identity requires more than willingness and self-criticism. I don't mean simply to reject this language (a reactive front is at times necessary for consciousness to emerge) but rather to displace it and play with it, or to play it out like a musical score.

Many of the younger diasporic generation who come forth today, on the artistic as well as the theoretical scene, have voiced their discomfort with any safeguarding of boundaries on either side of the border. This is precisely because the repressed complexities of the politics of identity have been fully exposed. "Identity" has now become more a point of departure than an end point in the struggle. So although we understand the necessity of acknowledging this notion of identity in politicizing the personal, we also don't want to be limited to it. Dominated and marginalized people have been socialized to see always more than their own point of view. In the complex reality of postcoloniality it is therefore vital to assume one's radical "impurity" and to recognize the necessity of speaking from a hybrid place, hence of saying at least two, three things at a time.

M: *What's loosely called "French theory" has obviously influenced you.*

T: France colonized Vietnam for a long time. Despite having fiercely resisted the French colonials, someone like Ho Chi Minh would admit that he preferred the French mentality to the American one. Colonialism really has a grip on its people. At a recent conference on African cinema in San Francisco, the Mauritanian filmmaker Med Hondo started out saying a few lines in perfect English, but he immediately ruptured his speech by saying that he was colonized *first* by the French, and he went on in French for the rest of the session! "French theory" is certainly part of my hybrid reality, although I would say it is only one part among others.

M: *At one point in your book, commenting on the work of Helene Cixous, you say, "The One is the All and the All is the One; and yet the One remains the One and the All the All. Not two, not One either. This is what Zen has been repeating for centuries." I think there is something very contemplative about your films and your writing, a meditative quality. So-called "high theorists" never want to talk about a spiritual element in the text, but I sense that element very strongly in your work—specifically in the references to Zen, but more generally in your approach to representation.*

T: This is a point hardly ever discussed. Since it took so long to find a publisher for the book, I had to resort to other publishing venues. Hence, some parts excerpted for this purpose had appeared here and there, in different journals. Now

people confidently talk about earlier versions that "were later elaborated in the book," but in fact the book was written in its entirety long before any of these "articles" came out. After submitting these "excerpts" to journals, I received detailed comments from academic readers whose advice was sought by the concerned editors. Some of the readers, indeed, had a major problem with the Zen material: included, which they considered to be useless in a theoretical context. They reacted most scornfully, focusing on the "what" and turning a blind eye to the "how"—the way the materials are used and the inter-links created (as with Cixous's feminism in the example you mentioned).

I can understand such a reaction, especially living in California. I think the Zen—as it has spread in the West, especially in the 60s, with prominent names like John Cage, Alan Watts, Allen Ginsburg—has been mystified in its very demystifying practices. (This despite and *not* because of the works of the individuals mentioned.) Zen was recuperated into a dualistic and compartmentalized worldview. Speaking again of classifications and borders, you are here either "holistic" or "analytical," but you can't possibly be both, because the two are made into absolute antithetical stances. Zen has the gift to frustrate and infuriate the rational mind which hurriedly dismisses it as simply one more form of mystification. So Zen's tenets are a real problem for a number of academics; but I myself do not operate within such divisions, and I don't see why I have to be bound to them. Spirituality cannot be reified. It's difficult to talk about it, not only because it escapes the principles of logic but also because "spiritual" itself is an impossible term: disinherited and vacated in this society of reification, hence not easy to use without exacting negotiations. The first book I wrote in 1976–77, *Un Art sans oeuvre* (An art without masterpiece, published in 1981), includes a chapter relating the works of Jacques Derrida and Antonin Artaud to those of Krishnamurti and Zen Buddhism. For many of Derrida's theories, including the critique of the metaphysics of presence are forces that have been active in Zen and in other forms of Buddhism for centuries. So what he says is not really "new," but the way he puts them into discourse, the links he makes, *are*. The weaving of Zen in my text is therefore not a "return to my roots" but a grafting of several cultures onto a single body—an acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of my own cultural background.

M: *This connects to one of the issues you discussed at the screening last night, the notion of "negative space."*

T: In my films the notion of negative space has always been crucial. The "object oriented camera"—a camera that focuses only on catching the object and is eager to objectify—obscures the role of negative space. I don't mean the ground behind the

filmed subject or the field surrounding it, but rather the space that makes both composition and framing possible, that characterizes the way an image breathes. To see negative space as intensely as the figure and the field, instead of subjecting it to the latter in cinematography, mise-en-scene, and narrativity, implies a whole different way of looking at and of relating to things. This is not far from the notion of the Void in Asian philosophies. People often don't even know what you are talking about when you mention the vitality of the Void in the relationships between object and non-object, or between I and non-I. Again, they may think it's a form of mystification. This is a problem with reifying, binarist thinking: emptiness here is not merely opposed to fullness or objecthood; it is the very site that makes forms and contents possible—that is, also inseparable.

M: I'm curious how you see your most recent film in relationship to your two previous films, both of which depict the women of Africa and your relationship, as an Asian woman, to Africa. I'm thinking here especially of the term "hybridization" that you used last night to describe your approach to filmmaking.

T: The title of the film—*Surname Viet Given Name Nam*—is taken from recent socialist tradition. When a man encounters a woman, feels drawn to her, and wants to flirt with her, he teasingly asks, "Young woman, are you married yet?" If the answer is negative, instead of saying no, she will reciprocate, "Yes, his surname is Viet and his given name is Nam." In this apparently benign reply the nation-gender relationship immediately raises questions. One of the recurring motifs in the film is the *wedd-ing*, women being married: to a little boy or to a polygamous husband through family arrangements; to the cause, the fatherland, the state; to a foreigner bowing *a la* Vietnamese; then to a native man in Western outfit. The predicament of married women, which is woven here with the condition of single women insinuated or directly commented upon in poetry, proverbs, and popular stories, is unfolded in contexts of Vietnam that cut across the times before, during and after the revolution, including the periods of Chinese and French dominations, as well as the shift to life in the Vietnamese community in the United States. As one interviewee affirms toward the end of the film, whether a woman marries a foreigner or a Vietnamese, her surname will always remain "Viet" and her given name "Nam." A slight mutation of meaning occurs in that affirmation as it gets transferred from one context to another.

The question of nation and gender is opened up in a multiply layered way. The inquiry into identity provides another example. The latter can be said to develop in the film through a (re)appropriation of the inappropriate(d) body—the relations indirectly built up between the problematics of translation; the multiple (re)naming



of a country; and the plural expropriation (owning, selling, humiliating, burning, exposing, glorifying) of women's bodies. Translation, like identity, is a question of grafting several cultures onto a single body. For example, the name of Trieu Thi Trinh, one of the historical heroines who resisted Chinese domination, has at least five variations (heard and seen on screen); each of these is a different reading, a different emphasis of her attributes—her lineage (by her last name), her gender and age status, her leadership, or merely her simplicity. Similarly, each of the numerous names used to designate Vietnam (also heard and seen on screen) relates to a historical period of the nation, thereby to the diverse outside and inside influences that have contributed to what is viewed as the Vietnamese culture. So hybridization here refers to a negotiation of the difference not merely between cultures, between First World and Third World, but more importantly within the culture. This plural singularity and the problematization of the insider-outsider position are precisely what I have explored at length in my previous films, although in a way that is hardly comparable since it is so differently contextualized.

M: One of the most striking features of *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* is your exploration of different modes of storytelling, or what you described last evening as two different kinds of truth.

T: Storytelling is an ongoing field of exploration in all of my works, hence a vast subject to discuss. I'm afraid I can only cover a few aspects of it here. The interviews originally carried out by Mai Thu Van in Vietnam were published in the book *Vietnam: un peuple, des voix* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1983. Vietnam: one people, many voices). I ran across this book while browsing in a small bookstore in France some years ago. It was certainly a discovery. I was very moved, both by the stories of the women interviewed and by the personal story of the author herself. Born in New Caledonia, she is a second-generation exile, her mother having been sent there by force to work in nickel mines because her village was among those that rose in rebellion against the French colonials. Mai came to Paris at the age of twenty-three to work and study and went to Vietnam in 1978 to research Vietnamese women, which resulted in the book mentioned. Being a Marxist, she landed in Hanoi with "a plethora of images of liberated women who have disturbed old concepts to meet socialism," and her stay there, as she puts it, "had profoundly shaken [her] preconceived ideas as well as pulverized the stereotypes of [Vietnamese] women made up by the press." It took her tenacity and an almost morbid care for the truth to wait for the ice to melt, to develop trust in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, to take the blows, and to accept the eye-opening realities of women who refused to let

themselves be mystified as heroines in postrevolutionary times. In brief, it took her five years to collect the interviews in question.

So in using some of the interviews in my film, the question for me is: Which truth does one want to offer to the viewer? The truth that Mai spent five years to approach, or the truth that we can easily claim by setting up an interview situation, directing a microphone at a person (like myself right now!), and trying to skim the cream off the answers afterwards? The point at issue is somewhat different here, however, because when an interview is recorded and transcribed for publication you can work on it, and the length of the interviewee's replies is usually respected. But in film the problem of editing is much more acute, because you can't reword to condense, nor can you add to clarify; you can only cut. And you cut what you want people to be saying: you cut only the statement that will help you to make your point. So there are certain kinds of unintended surface truths that may emerge as unique to the filmed interview situation, but there are also other kinds that can never be accessible through this antiquated device of documentary—unless the element of realism is worked on.

Perhaps one can find an example in a film like *Chronique d'un été* (Chronicle of a Summer, 1961, by Jean Rouch), where an interviewer just pointed a microphone at people in the street, asking, "Are you happy?" The shallow answers might have been a reaction to such a question, but they also implied the shallowness of such an interview setup. The director must then "work on" this shallowness, that is, deliberately acknowledge it in order to further the film's inquiries. As spectators, our attitude toward interviews often proves to be naive. We tend to forget how tactical speech always is, no matter how naturally it seems to come out. To assume that testimonies filmed on the site are de jure more truthful than those reconstructed off the site is to forget how films are made. Every representation of truth involves elements of fiction, and the difference between so-called documentary and fiction in their depiction of reality is a question of degrees of fictitiousness. The more one tries to clarify the line dividing the two, the deeper one gets entangled in the artifice of boundaries.

The making of *Surname Viet* allows the practice of interviews to enter into the play of the true and the false, the real and the staged. In the first part of the film, the interviews were selected, cut, and blueprinted for reenactment. A certain length of the speech and the image was deliberately kept to preserve the autonomy of each story as it unfolded and, paradoxically, to render perceptible the play on traditional realism. The latter becomes more and more manifest as the film progresses, until further on the viewer is presented with a series of "real" interviews with the same women as in the first part, but in the explicit context of the U.S. The editing of these

last interviews comes closer to the conventions of documentary as the statements are chopped up, redistributed, and woven in the filmic text with footage of the women's "real" life-activities. By using both reenacted interviews and on-site interviews and by demarcating some of their differences (in the duration, mode of address, use of English, camera work), in other words, by presenting them to the viewer together, what is visibly addressed is the invisibility of the politics of interviews and, more generally, the relations of representation.

I am not really interested in judging which truth is better than the other, but rather in working with both together to open a critical space in the viewing of the film. Whether the viewer is knowledgeable enough in cinema to attribute some of the strategies to a questioning of the conventions of documentary authority is also not the point. The viewing situation created is such that it is likely to provoke questions and reactions. By playing with the false and the true at work in the two kinds of truth, what is usually taken for granted in interviews suddenly becomes very prominent. As a bewildered Vietnamese viewer told me: "Your film is different. I can't yet tell exactly how, but I know it's different from the documentary films I am used to seeing." The recognition that the early interviews in the film are reenactments comes at different places and stages for different viewers. This is deliberately planned, as I previously suggested. Of course, as you probably noticed at yesterday's screening, some viewers were furious because they expected to be told about it at the outset of the film (as the norms dictate). But other viewers felt that to reveal the reenactment from the start would be to give away the "plot" of the film; they were uncomfortable with the lingering uncertainty, but retroactively they loved the challenge and the intermittent discomfort. I obviously do not intend to "hide" the reenactment—on the contrary—only to delay or grade its visibility for strategic purposes. Nor do I feel compelled to flatten out the film to facilitate its consumption. Instead of being a mere illustration of a point that is evident from the beginning, a film could be a constant discovery process. Much of filmmaking and storytelling relies on an ability to withhold information as well as to let go of knowledge and intention.

M: The process of "recognition" in the film is very unsettling.

T: The distance between the written texts and the images is necessary. The women are asked both to embody other selves, other voices, and to drift back to their own selves, which are not really their "natural" selves but the selves they want to present or the images they want to project in front of the camera.

M: Another kind of distance is the discrepancy between written text and voice, sometimes small—suggesting that the text is being performed.

T: If it is unsettling, it's because the line between performance and nonperformance in these interviews is not so evident. You can't tell right away that they are staged—you do ask the question, but you can't tell for sure until you get enough "cues."

M: In conclusion, could you say something about the kind of work that has most influenced you?

*T: It's very difficult for me to talk about influence. Even with someone like Ho Xuan Huong, the early nineteenth-century poet quoted in the film: I knew of her, but she was hardly taught in school. I remember how perversely excited we (the students) were whenever a teacher announced that a poem of hers would be read in class. Not only because her poetry is known for its forbidden sexuality and explicit defiance of Confucian (male-chauvinist) mores, but mainly because she is a poet whose work we are never truly exposed to. All this to say that on the side of women you always have to do more; you have to be committed to reach out to non-mainstream works and to the writings of other women. This is one of the constraints that you necessarily assume as a feminist. The writing of *Woman, Native, Other* touches upon this specific issue. For example, the only chapter that deals exclusively with the world of white males is the chapter on anthropology. This chapter is also one, however, in which all the names of the representative famous men are replaced in the text by impersonal, stereotyped appellations ("The Great Master," "The modern anthropologist," "the wise man"). Their proper names, their "true" names, are "buried" in the footnotes.*

For me there is no such thing as a one-way influence. In (re)reading women's works—actually any work—I am not sure who influences whom, for I have the feeling that I've contributed as much as I've learned. And if I take the example of a few Western writers with whom I have affinities, such as Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Maurice Blanchot, or Derrida, sure, I find their writings uplifting and penetrating. But our actualities are undeniably different. They have their own house to empty out, their own obsessions to pursue. However, their works do provide tools of resistance that we can use on our terms. Tools that also allow me independently to rediscover, let's say, Zen Buddhism or other Asian philosophies as if I were reading them for the first time; *and vice versa*. What has become more evident to

me is that I can't settle down with any single name, any single work. The only times I felt that something could strongly inspire me, and in ways that were both moving and baffling, was when I was staying in the villages in Africa. The richness of the diverse oral traditions is humbling. Again this may seem romantic to many—although in the context of other cultures it is rather “realistic.” As a Yoruba song of divination says, “Anybody who meets beauty and does not look at it will soon be poor.” Stories, songs, music, proverbs, as well as people’s daily interactions, certainly constitute for me the most moving sources of inspiration.



Surname Viet
Given Name Nam

1989. 108 minute color and B & W film.

Directed, written and edited by: Trinh T. Minh-ha
 Mise-en-scene, lighting design, and associate producer:
 Jean-Paul Bourdier

Cinematography: Kathleen Beeler

Narrators: Lan Trinh and Trinh T. Minh-ha

With: Khien Lai, Ngo Kim Nhuy, Tran Thi Bich Yen,
 Tran Thi Hien, Lan Trinh, and Sue Whitfield

Distributed by: Women Make Movies (New York); The
 Museum of Modern Art (New York); Cinenova (London);
 Idera (Vancouver); Image Forum (Tokyo); The National
 Library of Australia (Canberra)

In this film, women speak from five places; these are represented here by different typesyles. There are
 voices-over reading in English (italic & plain); a third voice singing sayings, proverbs and poetry in
 Vietnamese (bold), with translations in a smaller typeface; interviews in Vietnamese subtitled in English;
 interviews in English synchronized with the image (indented plain and italic texts).

Than em nhu tam lua dao
 Phat pho giua cho biet vao tay ai?
 (I am like a piece of silk
 Floating in the midst of the market,
 knowing not into whose hands it will fall.)

Dat nuoc nam trong con bao to
 Con toi nam trong con bao to
 Toi muon lam sao dem than yeu nho
 tre tro con toi
 Nhung trai dat truyen rung, truyen rung
 va chiec noi con toi truyen rung, truyen rung
 (The country lies under a heavy storm
 my child lies under a heavy storm
 I wish to use my fragile body
 to protect my child
 But the earth is shaking, shaking
 and my baby's cradle is shaking, shaking) (Sister Phuong, "A Lullaby")

(Quoted on screen:)

In principle, a foreigner is already a spy . . . Even a socialist . . . Or even you. We live in constant suspicion. There is no mutual trust.

Ly, 37 years old, employee, Vietnam 1982

(Voice off:) "Our two salaries are no longer enough. I do some sewing in the evening, for the cooperatives.

(Sync:)* "We receive, from time to time, a package from my brother who lives abroad. He sends us 2 kilos of MSG, 3 kilos of wool. We sell them back in the free market and buy whatever we need [with the money]. It's a satisfying exchange! This is the same situation for almost all families. . . . How can we do otherwise? My mother lives with us. My father is departed. Six of us live in two tiny rooms. My mother is 60 years old, she is still strong and in good health to take care of the housework and to cook our meals. This leaves me some free time to do my sewing.

Note: All interviews conducted in Vietnam (here with Ly, Thu Van, Cat Tien and Anh) are excerpted and translated from the book *Vietnam, un peuple, des voix*, by Mai Thu Van (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1983). These interviews are reenacted in the film, with: Tran Thi Hien, both as Ly (her role) and as Hien (her real name); Khien Lai as Thu Van and as Khien; Ngo Kim Nhuy as Cat Tien and as Kim; Tran Thi Bich Yen as Anh and as Yen.

"Let's say that my job is better [than others]: I belong to the restaurant service. Sometimes I go to the embassies when there is a reception or a dinner. I feel less isolated. . . . I do see the foreigners coming and going. . . . [But] we can't develop any relationship with them.

"In principle, a foreigner is already a spy. . . . Even a socialist. . . . Or even you (*Ly smiles*). We live in constant suspicion: between husband and wife, between parents and children. . . . Suspicion is everywhere. There is no mutual trust.

"When a foreigner gives us something, it may be because of pure sympathy for us; but it is often thought that they want to obtain something more from us. . . . You have to know how to compose yourself to be admitted in the heart of the system.

"Sometimes I revolt against the fact that our children can't have a bit of meat or fish, whereas the foreigners can sneeze at them. But Vietnam offers whatever it has best to the international diplomats and governmental staff. They should come and see, at least once, what a meal in a Vietnamese family is composed of!" (Interview with Ly)

Trong dam gi dep bang sen

La xanh, bong trang lai chen nhi vang

Nhi vang, bong trang, la xanh,

Gan bun ma chang hoi tanh mui bun.

What is more beautiful than a lotus in a pond? . . .

Yellow stamens, white petals, green leaves:

Always near mud, it never smells of mud. (Trans. Nguyen Ngoc Bich)

He kept hold of her: "You try to run but I won't let you. Young woman, are you married yet?"

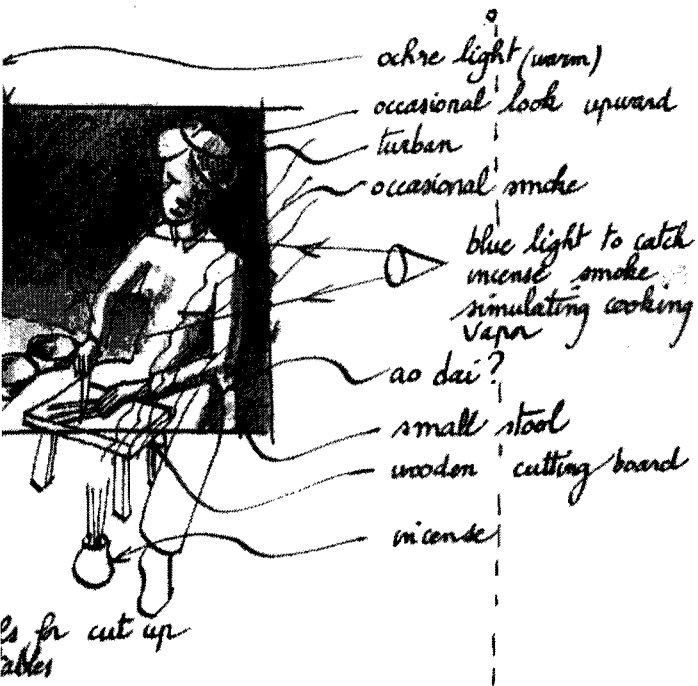
And she replied: "Easy, young man, you're spilling my rice! Yes, I am with husband, his surname is Viet and his given name is Nam"

(Voice off:)* "[When I first met the women of the South,] we looked at each other with distrust, if not with hostility. Slowly we started talking to each other. From distrust, we have come to dialogue. And this was a radical turn that changed my political understanding. Before, I learnt in the political courses that capitalism was the exploitation of man by man. Period." (Thu Van)

(Quoted on screen:)

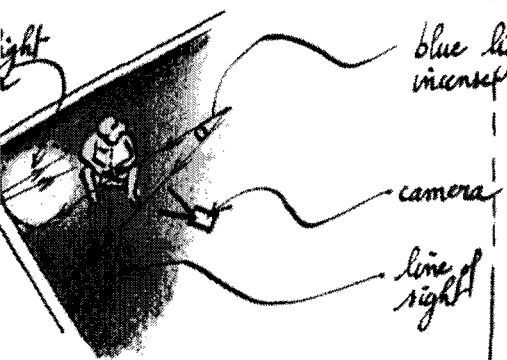
A society that imposes on its people a single way of thinking, a single way of perceiving life, cannot be a human society.

Thu Van, 35 years old, health technical cadre, Vietnam 1982



ochre light (warm)
 occasional look upward
 turban
 occasional smoke
 blue light to catch incense smoke
 simulating cooking vapor
 ao dai?
 small stool
 wooden cutting board
 incense

as for cut up tables



blue light to catch incense
 camera
 line of sight

LIGHT SEEN IN PLAN



sacrifice
 bit of mist/just
 a little sadness expressed in the gaze when looking upward

cutting green onions
 dixeron carrots etc...

stops cutting to arrange pant one right leg

Ly takes a vegetable from an adjacent place on her left

upward toward the camera and below. Her gaze is very dead, becomes a bit dead while she looks slightly right as if talking.

camera moves from (A) to (B)

camera remains in (B)

finishes cutting and some of the cut-up is in 2-3 bowls at the end of the graph)

Ly, 37 years old employee Viet

I have 3 children, that's quite a few years. Our two salaries are not enough at the end of the day to meet our needs. I do some sewing in the evening in the evening. [With much will] We receive, from time to time, a us 2 kilos of MSG, 3 kilos of wood whatever we need. [with the new situation for almost all families] My father is departed. [We are] is still strong and in good health. This leaves me some free time to

Let's say that my job is less repetitive. Sometimes I go to the embassies [isolated]. We do see the foreign relationship with them.

In principle, a foreigner is always We live in constant suspicion by children. [Suspicion] is everywhere. There is no mutual trust, so as not to betray our intimate

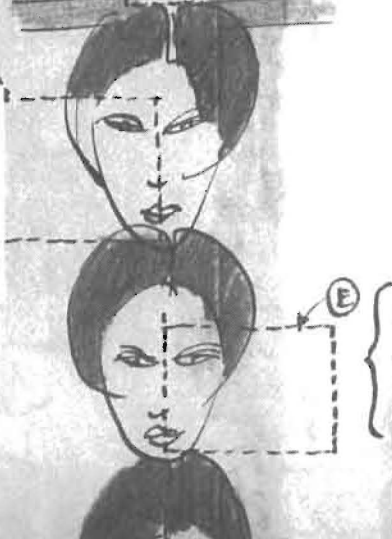
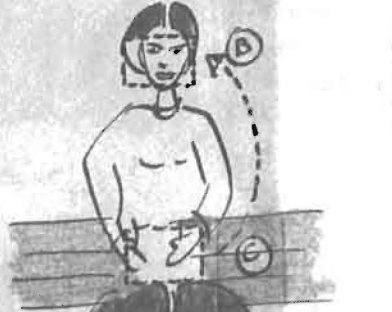
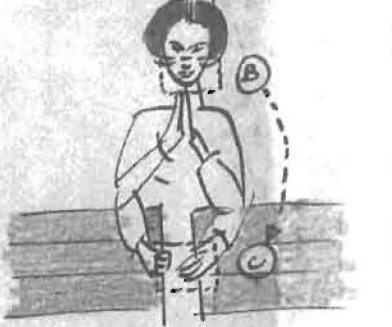
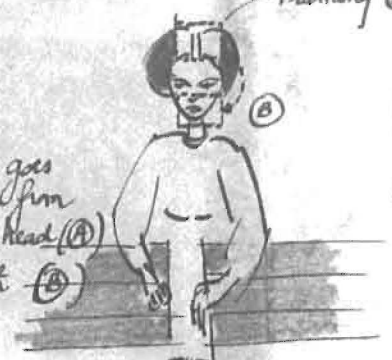
When a foreigner gives us some it is often thought that they want emphasis is laid on mutual sure to be admitted in the heart of the

Sometimes I revolt against the [whereas the foreigners can sne supposedly] because the meat is the international diplomats and once what a meal in a Vietnamese



Framing (A)

a goes by from head (A) with (B)



[When I first met the women of the South, not with hostility. Slowly the frost broke, exchanging our ideas and our lived experience into dialogue. And this was a radical turn that I had not seen before. Before, I learnt in the political courses that the role of the unions in socialist society was limited to an ideological control.

In [our] socialist society, we discard all divisions of labor, of fear and of suspicion.... A society that imposes on its people a single way of perceiving life, cannot be a human society. I don't have any immediate answer [to their questions] about its functions. I ignore its ill deeds. (Thu Van) of man by man, it is difficult for me to change

...In spite of all the years of resistance and the same principles, the same divisions of privilege



Before, I would not dare speak up to say what I thought. But today, the situation has slightly changed. (I am profoundly rebellious) I have nothing to lose other than my life. The young people think like me. I am not sure if the time of liberation will ask other more questions of the leaders.

The young people want to be other than the soldier's cloths. They are tired of the image of heroic Vietnam, but the revolution is also the obligation to advance human condition.

Girls want to rediscover their femininity. They call for love, and for colors... Look at me...



at each other with distrust, if talking to each other. In a society of distrust, we have come to dialogue. And this was a radical turn that I had not seen before. Before, I learnt in the political courses that the role of the unions in socialist society was limited to an ideological control.

I ignore how a capitalist society works between two modes of exploitation

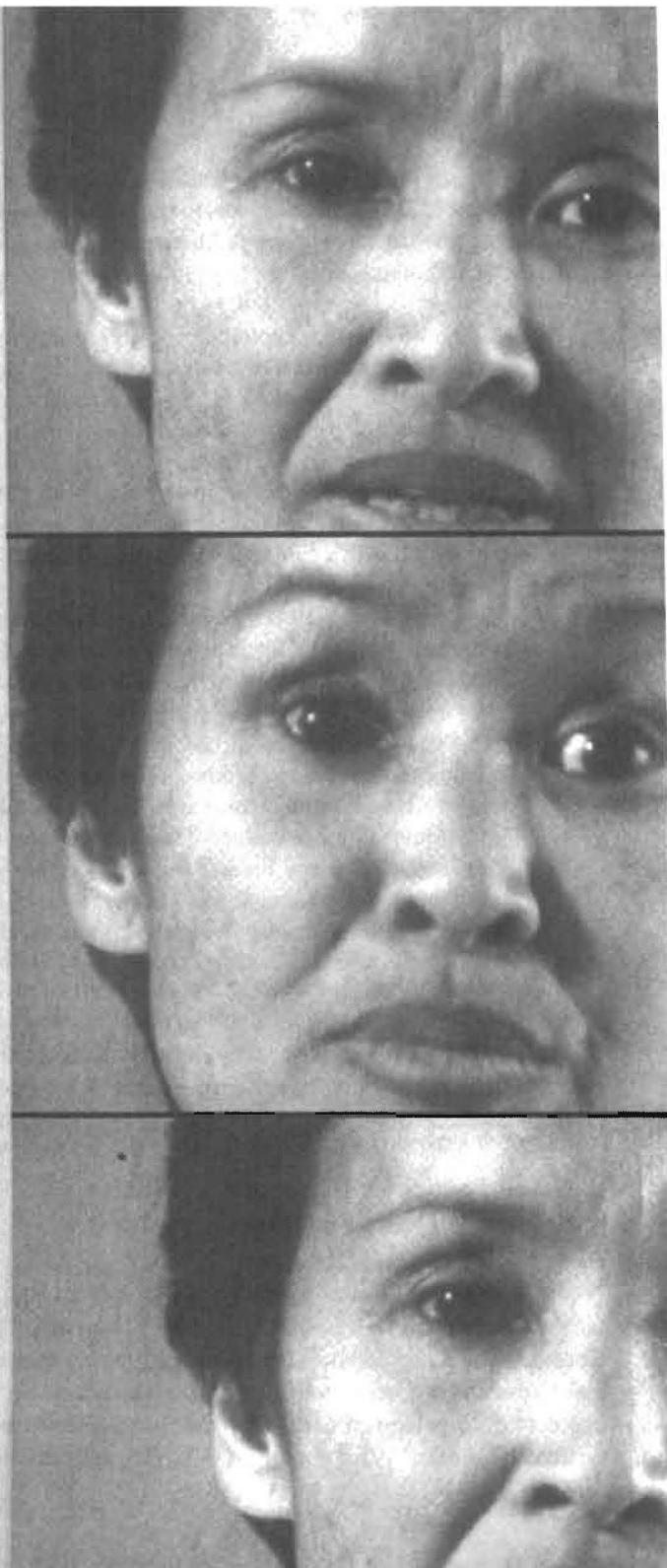
on, the same hierachical divisions of labor. We cannot deny this

ty in our elders' mind... and they are so bathed in their customs and traditions. An example. One cannot kill

But today, the situation has slightly changed. (I am profoundly rebellious) I have nothing to lose other than my life. The young people think like me. I am not sure if the time of liberation will ask other more questions of the leaders.



image of heroic Vietnam, but the revolution is also the obligation to advance human condition. They call for love, and for colors... Look at me... I have any breast, any hip... My



(Sync:) "In [our] socialist society, we discard all disturbing subjects so that we don't have to deal with them. We prefer to cultivate fear and suspicion. . . . A society that imposes on its people a single way of thinking, a single way of perceiving life, cannot be a human society.

"I ignore how a capitalist society functions, I ignore its diseases. (Thu Van smiles). . . . Between two modes of exploitation of man by man, it is difficult for me to choose! In spite of all the years of resistance and of revolution, the same hierarchical principles exist. We cannot deny what we have inherited from China. . . .

"And in spite of our own divergences with China, we are nonetheless full of their customs and political conceptions. The camps of reeducation are an example. You cannot kill man's conviction by reducing him to an animal.

"Before, I would not dare speak up to say what I thought. But today, the situation is different. [I have deeply rebelled,] and this awareness has turned fear into fight. . . . I have nothing to lose other than this ridiculous salary and some rations tickets.

"The young people think like me, I am not alone. The young people are tired of holding the gun as one holds chopsticks. The revolution is also the obligation to live and to advance human condition. Girls want to rediscover their femininity, to please . . . to revive desire, beauty. They call for love, and for colors. . . . Look at me. . . . I no longer have any breast, any hip. . . . My skin has dried up because of undernourishment. I no longer look like a woman. Our men no longer desire us. They spend their time among themselves in cafes, drinking and smoking." (Interview with Thu Van)

There is always a tendency to identify historical breaks and to say "this begins there," "this ends here," while the scene keeps on recurring, as unchangeable as change itself.

Life seems suddenly fragile and vulnerable. . . . The past surfaces and what is almost forgotten reappears from the ruins.

Nobody knows, they say, whether Ho Xuan Huong really existed or whether she was a mere name. She wrote poems in the early 19th century, but they were notorious for the scandal they caused and they continue today to defy the principles of right speech and good manner of womanhood. So some men went as far as affirming that poems signed under her name might not be hers; they might, of course, be written by a man! Who was then, we may ask, this feminine man whose womanness

was violently attacked and trashed by male poets of the time, and who wrote feminist poetry on free love, on single mothers, on *labia minora* and *labia majora* desire; who attacked polygamy and double standards of morality, who ridiculed empty male authority and religiosity, and who challenged all the norms of Confucian patriarchy?

When he claps his hands, she has entertained
When she claps her hands, he has made a significant contribution—to his village, his town, his country. The fatherland, as they call it now.

For a life to save another life
no more self-pride, no pride, no self
she kneels and begs mercy for him who is her son, her husband, her father.

(Quoted on screen:)

In the beginning, I tried to make things work [at the hospital], but slowly, we found ourselves in an atmosphere of distrust, then of suspicion! I carried out my work in a heavy silence.

Wounds do not heal with humiliation.

Cat Tien, 50 years old, doctor, Vietnam 1982

"I am a doctor, with almost 20 years of experience. . . . My husband is also a doctor. He was assigned to the military hospital of the city. [When Saigon fell on April 30th, 1975,] we were among the most moderate. Without being communists, we are not less Vietnamese; we are nationalists. I will never erase the memory of [that day] from my mind. It was [total] panic. All our friends called us to urge us to leave. . . . My husband and I did not know what to do. . . . [He] told me: 'We have nothing to blame ourselves for, we are not criminals. We are from the South. If the country is divided into two, it is not because of us!' Of course, my husband wore the uniform but he wore it in spite of himself. . . . Each government uses its citizens as it thinks best.

"My day began at 7:30 am and ended at 4:30 pm, with a break of one hour for lunch. Afterwards, I had to attend civil and political education courses. . . . Every other week, I had to write a resume of my past life. . . . I was smarter than them (laughs) I kept a copy of my first declaration. I recopied it exactly each time, respecting the commas and the periods. . . . In the beginning, I tried to make things work [at the hospital], but slowly, we found ourselves in an atmosphere of distrust, then of suspicion! I carried out my work in a heavy silence.

"I stayed in the service for two years, and would probably have stayed on, had my husband not been arrested. . . . To tell the truth, we never knew the real reasons for his arrest.

Verses below are heard voice off, simultaneous with interview:)

Ưa đem an ai cùng chồng

Ưa đem về sang gánh gồng ra đi

Loving her husband half of the night,

he spends the other half before dawn carrying her merchandise to market)

Gai chám chồng me chá khác khoái

The later she gets married, the more distressed her parents are)

Gai có chồng như rồng có vảy,

Gai không chồng như cối xay chét ngong

She who is married is like a dragon with wings,

she who has no husband is like a rice-mill with a broken axle)

"Today, we suppose it was a problem of power and of competence. The patients prefer us to the [others]. There was a kind of complicity among the people of the South. . . . When the doctors of the new regime took over the hospital, all the services worked. Two years after, it was a disaster, the equipment was paralyzed, the stock of medicines emptied, the buildings dilapidated. . . . We, the older staff of the hospital, we became cumbersome. In a way, we assisted the failure of victory.

"For a week, I didn't receive any news concerning my husband. I came up against a mixed silence around me.

Verses heard simultaneously with interview)

. . . We are absurd petals in a puff of wind

drifting over a temporary and indifferent world.

Even the young, spring-limbed and green,

earn to stare at death through veils of white hair Nguyen Binh Khiem

Con có lan loi bỏ sông

Gánh gạo đưa chồng tiếng khóc nỉ non.

Nàng về nuôi cái cùng con

Đẻ anh đi tray nước non Cao Bang.

(Exhausting herself on the riverside
while carrying rice to her husband, the stork cries dolefully,
Come back, dear, and feed our children
So I can leave for the hills and rivers of Cao Bang.)

"My colleagues greeted me but never asked any questions about my husband's disappearance. . . . Everybody sank into silence. . . . It was terrible to live in the world of silence. I was no longer used to it. From then on, I was inhabited by a feeling of terror. I discovered fear. . . . Sometimes I did not even dare breathe, for fear of myself; I didn't want to hear my own heart beat. . . . Despair settled down within me. I had given up all form of resistance. After three months in that atmosphere, I decided to quit my job. As for my husband, I was left without news. I had to find out by myself the reasons for his arrest. . . . The question that kept on coming back in my mind was: 'Why did they wait two years before sending him to that camp of reeducation?'

". . . I prefer to forget that moment when I saw my husband in his prison clothes, looking devastated and desperate. It is a painful memory.

". . . Twenty five months! twenty five months in hell. My nerves cracked. . . . My children were neglected like orphans. The only reasonable solution was to quit that job, to accept to lose the rations tickets and to live in uncertainty. I earned 80 dong per month, a salary of destitution in a bath of humiliation." (Interview with Cat Tien)

(Voice off) "Hmmm, ahem . . . I am not the ideal person [to be interviewed]. . . . I have never had a passion for politics although this does not mean that I am not interested in it." (Cat Tien)

"Kieu's life is very telling but it is not a singular case. I think there are hundreds, thousands of lives like hers." (Kim, in Vietnamese)

"How tragic is women's fate," wrote Nguyen Du. In Vietnam, almost everybody, poor or rich, use verses from the *Kim Van Kieu* fluently in their daily expressions. Also known as *The Tale of Kieu*, the national epic poem recounts the misfortunes of women in the person of a beautiful talented woman, *Kieu*, whose love life has repeatedly served as a metaphor for Vietnam's destiny. The heroine, a perfect model

of Confucian feminine loyalty and piety, was forced by circumstances, to sacrifice her life to save her father and brother from disgrace and humiliation, and to sell herself to become a prostitute, then a concubine, a servant, and a nun, before she was able to come back to her first lover. *Kim Van Kieu* was written in the early 19th century in the people's language *Nom*. Despite its length of 3,254 lines, it became so popular that it was widely cherished by all social strata only a few decades after it appeared. Illiterate people knew long passages of it by heart and recited it during evening gatherings. It has also been loved for its unorthodox approach to sexuality: although Kieu's destiny is meant to be sadly complicated because of the woman's beauty, she not only freely chooses her lover, but she also eagerly loves three men. Her life offers a revisionist interpretation of the Confucian principle of chastity that governed the conduct of women.

I wish to use my body as a torch
to dissipate the darkness
to awaken love among people
and bring peace to Viet Nam

Nhat Chi Mai poured gasoline over her body and lit the match

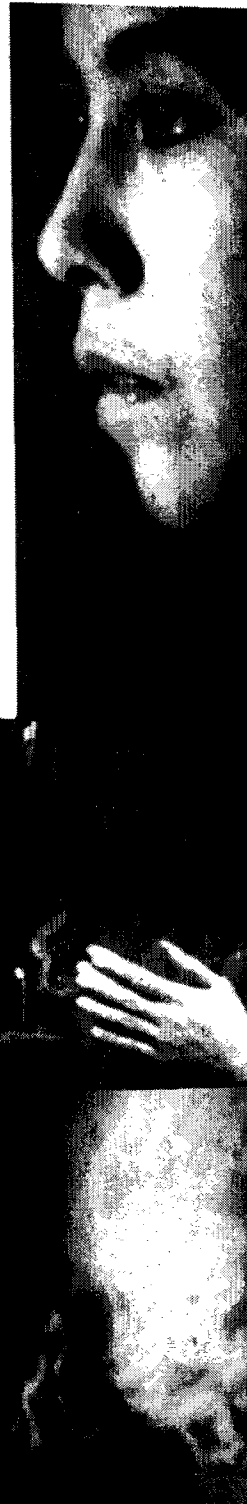
"Socialist Vietnam venerates the mothers and the wives. The woman does not exist, she is only a laborer. The liberation of women is understood here as a double exploitation.

". . . The men want to keep the better share of the cake. They hold the key positions of power, women only get the leftovers. . . . There is not a single woman at the Political Bureau. . . . The men are the only ones to discuss problems that concern us.

"[As for the Women's Union], the Mother-in-Laws' Union, they have made of us heroic workers, virtuous women. We are good mothers, good wives, heroic fighters. . . . Ghost women, with no humanity! They display us in shop-windows for foreign visitors who come to look at our lives, as if we were polite animals.

"The image of the woman is magnified like that of a saint! . . . We are only human beings. Why don't we want to admit that these women are tired of seeing their children exposed to war, deprivations, epidemics, and diseases? The very idea of heroism is monstrous!

"The woman is alone, she lives alone, she raises her children alone. She gives birth alone. It's a sea of solitude! The revolution has allowed the woman to have access to



the working world. She works to deprive herself better, to eat less. She has to get used to poverty.

"Love . . . (Thu Van smiles). When I was young, I wanted to become a writer. My parents told me: "You have to write with your heart, but don't forget your heart belongs to the Party." How to write then? I have therefore quit writing for a more scientific profession.

"Love. . . . Personally I have crossed this word from my vocabulary, I no longer want to remember. I live in total emptiness, around me, perhaps inside me. . . ."

"Yes, we have to live for love. It is an emotion that escapes men's control, that happens inside the body, a very personal intimacy. . . . I end up loving my bicycle! My old bicycle with its old tires. I have a sincere affection for it because it helps me when I am tired. It is a loyal companion. It keeps me company in my morning solitude, it takes me home in my distress in the evening. It is the only witness of my movements. . . ." (Interview with Thu Van)

(Quoted on screen:)

Socialist Vietnam venerates the mothers and the wives. The woman does not exist, she is only a laborer. The liberation of women is understood here as a double exploitation. . . .

The very idea of heroism is monstrous!

(Quoted on screen:)

. . . Life could have gone on smoothly if there had not been the liberation of the South, the reunification and my being transferred to Saigon. . . . A painful confrontation, indeed.

Thu Van, 35 years old, health technical cadre, Vietnam 1982

"I am willing to talk, but you should not have doubts about my words. There is the image of the woman and there is her reality. Sometimes the two do not go well together!

"I am 35 years old, the age of the resistance movement and the revolution! I do not know what a society of peace looks like! My childhood was that of the struggle. I am a child of the Party. My parents are high cadres. They have [fed] me with revolutionary discourses since my childhood. My childhood was secure, I was puffed up, cherished; and there were always adequate answers to my questions. I went to school

with the red scarf around my neck, and at 16 years old, I was trusted an important role. I was leader at the [Youth Organization], of my University. . . . I was taught discipline and rigor!

" . . . Life could have gone on smoothly if there had not been the liberation of the South, the reunification and my being transferred to Saigon. . . . A painful confrontation, indeed!" (Interview with Thu Van)

" . . . Even you who live in the West, if you are admired and liked, it's because we, women of Vietnam, we work so that your image may be beautiful. We contribute to the respect the world has for Vietnamese women."—Ai Tran, from Vietnam

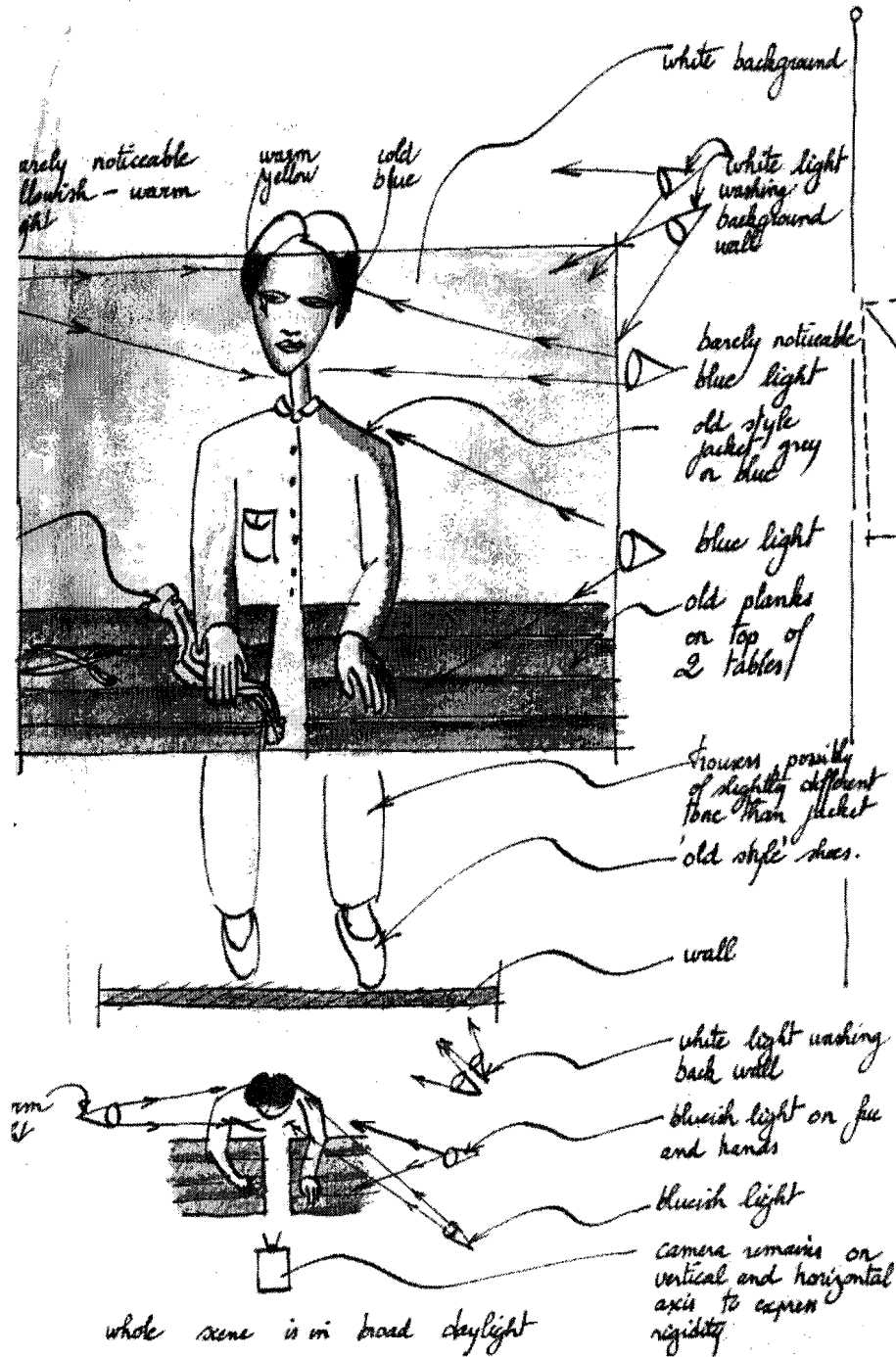
The two sisters Trung Trac and Trung Nhi of Vietnam's earliest history of resistance are proudly remembered for the uprising they led in fighting against Chinese domination. Every year in Spring time, on the sixtieth day of the second moon, young Hai Ba Trung are seen parading on their elephants in the community in L.A. It is fantasied that to conquer their female armies, the only successful strategy the Chinese soldiers finally came up with was to strip themselves to the skin and expose their "thing" shamelessly to the sight of their female opponents. The women fighters retreated in disgust and the Trung sisters committed suicide.

The stories that grew around the beloved heroines of Vietnam history tell about both the dreams of women and the fears of the men who fought or heard of such account. Popular descriptions of the physical appearance of the sisters Trung are often confusingly similar to those of Trieu Thi Trinh, another cherished figure in the memory of the Vietnamese and a young peasant woman who led thirty battles against the Chinese. She was said to be nine feet tall, with frightful breasts, three meters long, flying over her shoulders as she rode on an elephant. She too committed suicide rather than return to serfdom when her army was defeated.

"Toi muon cuoi con gio manh, dap duong song du, chem cha trang-kinh o bo Dong, quet bo coi de cuu dan ra khoi noi dam duoi chu khong them bat chuoai nguai doi cui dau cong lung lam ti-thiep cho nguai ta . . ." (Trieu Thi Trinh)
(I only want to ride the wind and walk the waves, slay the big whales of the Eastern sea, clean up frontiers, and save the people from drowning. Why should I imitate others, bow my head, stoop over and be slave to a man?)

We call her: Trieu Thi Trinh, but also Trieu Trinh Vuong, Trieu-Trinh, Trieu-Au, Ba Trieu.

SETTING & LIGHT



GENERAL IDEA

North/South duality and ambivalence expressed through gaps between tables & warm and cold light on both sides of face.

Rigidity reflected in centeredness of subject and static camera

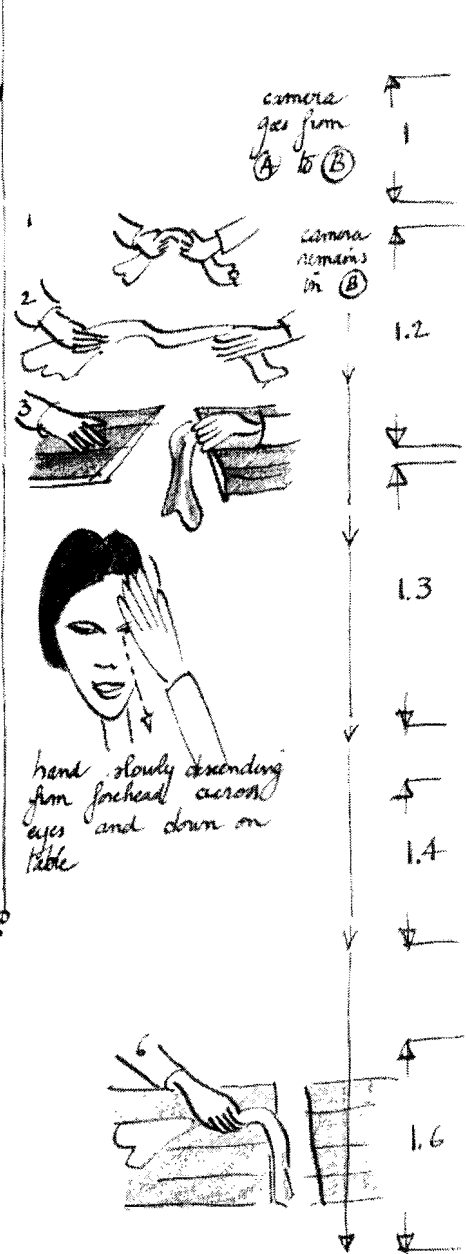
THU VAN'S GENERAL MOVEMENTS

body remains parallel to film image plane

hands and arms play freely with "red" ribbon

Thu Van looks directly at the camera

POSSIBLE SPECIFIC MOVEMENTS



Thu Van, I am not or (where I lie) experience with the Sr One can be capital, let the lives of The-Vietnam known - call You live at distress Y. of Vietnam and mental years. (Thu Van sad) I am willing image of t. together! I am 35 ye know who child of th discourses there was scarf arou leader at t taught dis ... Life con the reunion indeed! Our entire evolution thought o

during camera and all other

The market remains women's city. "It is the heart of daily life where information is exchanged, and where rumors are spread." It is also at the market that one tastes the real popular cooking of the country.

*My worthless husband gambles all day,
but if I told the world we'd both be shamed. . . .
Don't laugh, it's true, I'm the daughter
of a Confucian house. A work of art
sold to a stupid bumpkin, that's what I am.
A golden dragon bathing in a dirty pond!*

They spread, on the pavements, their baskets full of merchandises and wait patiently.

Song gui nac, that gui xuong

([to her husband's family,] Alive, she entrusts her body
Dead, she entrusts her bones)

"I will tell you the lives of women who are the misfits of history. They are by the thousands, those who live in economic distress. They sell everything that is marketable, including their bodies to support their family. They deny their dignity to survive and become prostitutes in a socialist society.

(She stares at the interviewer and says ironically:)

"[You're asking me if there are social services to help them?] You must be dreaming! . . . You underestimate the drama of the women of the South! We suffered the war like all our women compatriots. This war went on without our consent, we were swept along as in a tornado. Crushed by the machine, and nobody could stop it.

"Today, many women must demean themselves because they have no choice at all. Some accept to live with a cadre simply because of economical necessity; they obtain thereby tickets and protection. . . . Sometimes they do it with the best intention, in the hope that their husband may be liberated. Time goes by and they see nothing happening. Sometimes a woman finds herself pregnant but goes to the camp nevertheless to visit her husband. She stands there in front of him with this belly of humiliation. The latter looks down and remains silent. I will spare you of the most sordid dramas that many women live through since the existence of the reeducation camps." (Interview with Cat Tien)

thom mat nhi di roi,
thom dau nua ma nguoi uoc ao?
The fragrant flower has already lost its stamen
Why keep desiring it when it no longer bears fragrance?)

(newsreel sound): "When the smoke clears, the inevitable roundup of prisoners, many of them seriously wounded. Among the captured a large group of women, traditionally used by the enemy as ammunition bearers, village infiltrators and informers. . . ."

Always recurring in the prisoner's mind is the fear of a time when the witnesses themselves die without witnesses, when History consists of tiny explosions of life, and of deaths without relays.

The witnesses go on living to bear witness to the unbearable.

Trong tranh nhu non khong quai

Nhu thuyen khong lai, nhu ai khong chong.

Di co chong nhu gong deo co,

Gai khong chong nhu phan go long danh.

Unstable like a hat without a chin-strap,

like a boat without rudder, as she is without a husband.

He who is married wears a yoke on her neck,

but she who has no husband is like a bed whose nails have come loose.)

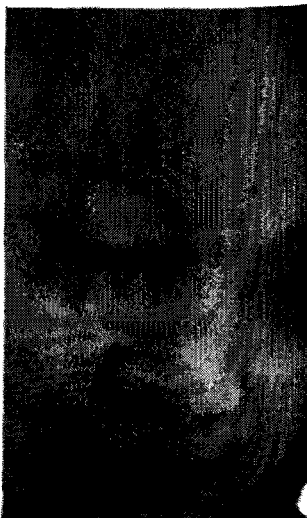
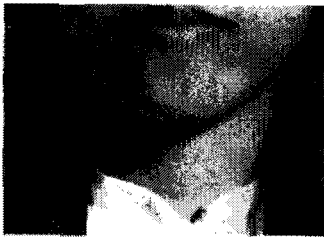
Trong bao nhieu nuoc cho vua

Bi bao nhieu vo cung chua bang long.

There is never enough water to fill the river

There is never enough women to please a young man.)

Nothing one's body remains an active trade. A Vietnamese woman journalist said: "Nothing runs in our blood except venereal disease. . . . Women do not become prostitutes for pleasure; they suffer the counter-shocks of our country's history. . . . French colonisation, American presence, long war years that have dismantled our society. . . . Today all we have left is the promise for a better society. But the sun rises every morning on anguish and uncertainty; it goes down every evening with the fear of not being able to nourish one's family."



... mother married me off to a child
 (and knows there was no lack of young men)
 now his mauling is all the love I get. . . .
 falls asleep and snores till morning.
 Ask you: What kind of spring is this?
 Sisters, how many times is a flower to bloom?

Chém cha cái kiếp lay chong chung,
 Ke dap chan bong, ke lanh lung.
 Nam thi muoi hoa nen chang cho,
 Mot thang doi lan co cung khong.
 Co dam an xoi, xoi lai ham,
 Cam bang lam muon, muon khong cong.
 Than nay vi biet duong nay nhi?
 Tha truooc thoi danh o vay xong!

Ho Xuan Huong

(One rolls in warm blankets, the other freezes:
 Damned this husband-sharing destiny!
 You're lucky ever to have him,
 He comes perhaps twice a month, or less.
 Ah—to fight for—this!
 Turned to a half-servant, an unpaid maid!
 Had I known I would have stayed single.)

(Quoted on screen:)

I gazed at my [own image] with sustained attention and realized I wore the same clothes, the same wooden shoes, for as long as I could remember. I didn't think another world existed. I was stirred to the depth of my soul by a mad anguish, and my mind became confused. I became aware of my own existence!

Anh, 60 years old, doctor, Vietnam 1982

(Voice off, simultaneous with sync, below:) "My sister lives in the South. . . . I went to see her after the reunification. . . . More than 20 years of absence. . . . of suffering and of separation. But my sister didn't choose exile. We are too attached to our family links. We couldn't say a word. (Sync:) We looked at each other in silence for a long moment, full of tears and choking with emotions. More than 20 years have separated us and it was like a miracle to find ourselves there, facing each other again. . . ."

"My sister sat still. She was staring at me as if I came from another planet. I could see a glimmer of revolt in her eyes. Suddenly her cold, grave voice told me: 'You, my little sister . . . the socialist doctor! . . .' She stood up from her chair, took my hand and led me to a mirror: "Look at yourself at least once!" I had not, indeed, looked at myself in a mirror for years, and I saw an old, worn-out woman. . . . I gazed at my [own image] with sustained attention and realized I wore the same clothes, the same wooden shoes for as long as I could remember. I didn't think another world existed. I was stirred to the depth of my soul by a mad anguish and my mind became confused. I became aware of my own existence! . . .

"Peace restored, our problems have increased, professional relations have deteriorated. Equality between men and women still figures on the program, but the relations between women themselves are more uncomfortable. The officer in charge is a woman, [but] she is not a doctor. Her function is above all political, she is there to control the ideological aspect of the profession. An irresolvable conflict has arisen between her and the health technicians. It's a problem of power—political power versus professional competence! . . .

"We have been trained to think that a woman has to please a man to the detriment of another woman. If only woman could trust woman, then we could talk about revolution." (Interview with Anh)

(Quoted on screen:)

If only men reread their history books, they would never dare send their people killing each other for ideologies. The Vietnamese people fought to [throw off] the yoke of domination. They didn't fight for some ideological principles. One should never forget this essential point.

Anh, 60 years old, doctor, Vietnam 1982

Dear sister, what we loved most at the time my girlfriends and I, was to be able to buy little snacks to pass them on secretly to each other during class. *O mai, xi mui, che dau do, che dau trang*, how would you translate these into English? I am thrilled just at naming them! It was a real treat to savor them at one of these street-vendors' carts in front of Gia-Long School, or at Nga Sau, not far from our house, where *che sam bo luong* was their specialty! I gave some private lessons then and had some pocket-money I could spend. Since mother had always forbade us to eat on the street, I felt particularly excited to do so and to taste anything that appeared novel to me. When I think about them now, they were really nothing special, but the fact that they were forbidden made all the difference!

My friend, who was from the central region, said in Hue, girls coming back from school in hats and white *ao dai*, crowded the Truong Tien bridge every afternoon, their tunics flapping softly in the wind like butterflies. Every young man had gone through a period when he would regularly find himself standing there just to look and contemplate. If he followed her on her left, she would pull her hat down on the left side of her face, if he stepped to the right, she would pull it down on the right side to prevent him looking while she kept on glancing at him at leisure. The majority of the people there wrote and appreciated poetry, perhaps because of its unforgettable landscapes, just like those in the North about which mother and father so often told us.

Gio dua canh truc la da

Tieng chuong Thien Mu, canh ga Tho Xuong

(The wind softly rocking the bamboo blends in with the bells of the Thien Mu Pagoda and the rooster's song of Tho Xuong village)

"The Vietnamese woman has two qualities I've always praised: her ability to sacrifice and to endure". (Yen, in Vietnamese)

". . . Here, everything is public. We receive our patients in a cold, large hall, in the presence of the officer in charge. It's very difficult to establish trust. How do you want a woman to disclose her intimate sufferings when there is no intimacy to preserve professional confidences? It is impossible to feel for someone's pains and sufferings when there is no complicity between a doctor and her patient. . . .

"When a woman understood nothing about her body, about hygiene or contraception, she came to see me and shyly whispered these to me. . . . The Vietnamese woman does not unburden herself easily to someone; she is caught in prejudices, inhibitions and taboos. In the old society, the body was an unnamed place, a non-existent and not-talked-of place. If the woman's body got sick, it was immediately thought that she had had sexual relations outside the norm. . . . Even today, this mentality continues to bloom in our society. . . . Ignorance drives women to a world of silence." (Interview with Anh)

To marry and have a child, how banal!

But to be pregnant without the help of a husband, what merit! Ho Xuan Huong

*Up there, a hanging panel:
The Governor's Shrine.
Oh, well, if I were turned into a man
I'd do better things than that!* Ho Xuan Huong

Doctors: women who relieve other women

As in a fairy tale, "the flowers falling from my lips are changed into toads"

She helps, he directs
She directs, he reigns

"It is a contempt for human effort to believe that we adapt ourselves, even to poverty! Our fellow people who live abroad do sometime have the same reasoning. They come back to their native land to visit their relatives, they temporarily share their promiscuity, then they go away. They can afford a small effort of heroism, and adapt themselves to the unusual surroundings.

"But for those of us who remain in the country, we have to go on living this life without any joy or pride. To say that we are courageous or heroic beings is to pay a tribute to our revolution. But to glorify us is, in a way, to deny our human limits."
(Interview with Anh)

Ai vo Binh Dinh ma coi

Dan ba cung biet cam roi di quon

(Come and see the women of Binh Dinh
who also know how to handle the rod and practice boxing)

The notorious double day flashes back in my memory: women work as a full unit of economic production *and* do all the unpaid housework and child care. Popular sayings qualify the three steps of her life and her victimization as that of a lady before marriage, that of a maid during marriage, and that of a monkey long after marriage.

"One has to demystify the image of the ideal woman that has been made up and fortified for the needs of significant moments. It is only to better hide her exploitation that they flatter her conceit. Let us take the example of the street sweepers. These women are doing repellent, very repellent work. . . . They select a few of them and they put them on the platform during a congress or a meeting. They make

them read political discourses quickly put together by men, and the trick meets with success. These women forget for a while that they are sweepers, and have the illusion of being full citizens." (Interview with Thu Van)

"I am caught between two worlds. . . ." (Thu Van)

—and I would have to affirm this uncertainty: is a translated interview a written or spoken object?

"Our bosses are often men, women assist them. . . . This is what equality amounts to! We fight very tightly for our rights, but the men always succeed to win over. Sometimes they may make a few compromises because we outweigh them in number. In meetings, women never take the floor to claim or demand, they speak but only in a feminine spirit. . . . [I mean] a spirit eager to please. To please their boss. They can't simply say "we think" or "we want" . . . they only *submit* such opinion or such solicitation. They listen and they raise their little fingers. It's very difficult to speak freely when one does not have the power.

"[The cadres of the Women's Union] are our mothers-in-law. They recite texts written by men and put women on the work market. . . ." (Ly)

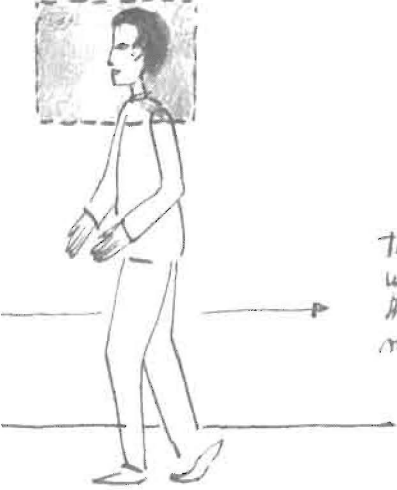
". . . We must fight for . . . a more equitable society. When we will have won the fight against bureaucracy, swept away the incompetent cadres, then we will have made a first step toward revolution. And this task also belongs to women." (Thu Van)

"Women have always been educated to sacrifice themselves. Women do not dare say they are being mistreated by their husbands. . . . Meetings are the places where adverse or different ideas are minimized. They do not allow any room for confidences on our intimate lives. . . . You have to be careful when you look at our society. There is the form and there is the content. Truth is not always found in what is visible. . . . Our reality is inhabited by silent tears and sobs. . . . Women's liberation? You are still joking, aren't you?" (Ly)

Interview: an antiquated device of documentary. Truth is selected, renewed, displaced and speech is always tactical

*So how many interviews in the overall?
Whom do you choose?*

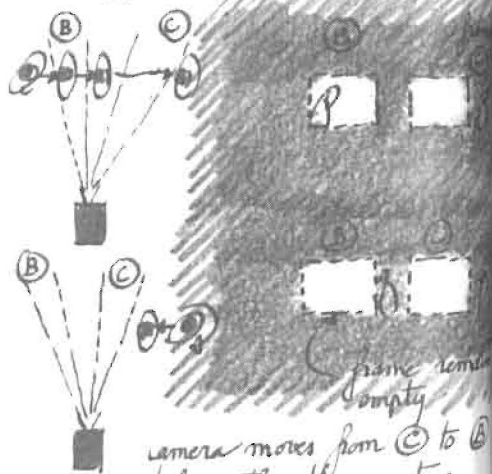
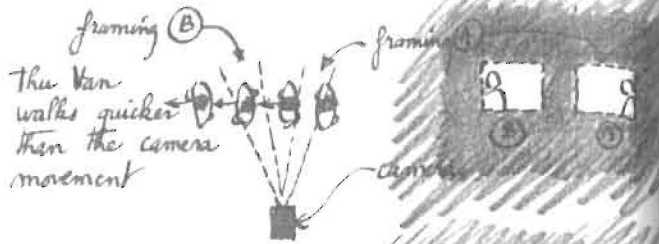
SETTING



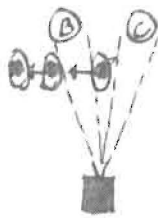
CAMERA FRAMING

camera moves right to left and vice versa but does not follow the Van's pacing

Example in plan:



camera moves from (C) to (B) before the Van enters the picture.



camera goes back to (C) contrary to the Van's main pacing direction

idea is that camera does not always on object; surrounding space is as much as object itself; empty space to engage in projecting... etc..



...only to better exploitation that they conceit. Let us take the the street sweepers. are doing a repellent job... They select a few they put them on the p a congress or a meeting them read political

One has to demystify the image of the ideal woman made of significant moments. It is only to better hide her ex conceit. Let us take the example of the street sweepers repellent, very repellent work... They select a few of the platform during a congress or a meeting. They make the quickly put together by men, and the trick meets with for a while that they are sweepers, and have the illusion

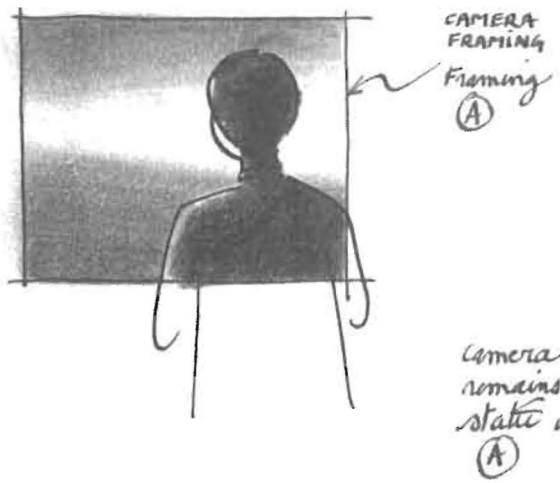
Personally, I know I will never reach the shore of socialism worlds: this socialism which I reject and the capitalism survivor with no society model. Traditional Vietnamese dismantled. There are too many contradictions. My mind so as not to ask too many questions, so as not to drown

The politics of the arbitrary has led the best elements individuals do not let themselves be impressed by ideology. We must fight for... a more equitable society. When against bureaucracy, swept away the incompetent cadres first step toward revolution. And this task also devolve

...quickly put together the trick meets with women forget for a while sweepers, and have being full citizens. between two worlds: which I reject and the which I do not know. I with no society model.



SETTING & LIGHT

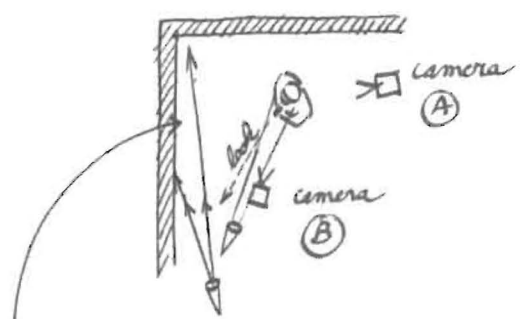


camera remains static in (A)

GENERAL IDEA

light to the left / ...
'hope'

LY GENERAL MOVEMENTS
SPEAKS someone off to the left in the line on a left hand suggest broom raised



camera in (B)!



camera goes upward very slowly and stops on face at the final sentence or slightly before

Our bosses are often men women assist not always easy we fight very tightly win over. Sometimes they may make in number. In meetings women never but only in a feminine spirit. They can't simply say "we think" or such solicitation. They listen and then speak freely when one does not have

The cadres of the Women's Union also texts written by men and put women family interests or battered women... suffering. The old customs prevail by their husbands. They are ashamed

In meetings first we talk about difficulties other problems encountered in daily are the places where address of difficulties room for confidences on our intimate

They talk a lot about equality and come together then the Vietnamese society

Today we can say that the woman has she will speak after the men. she will always been educated to sacrifice through this. Even if the laws once change our ancestors mentalities in

You have to be careful when you look the context. Truth is not always found silent tears and sobs.

(Women's Liberation) You are still in



In one case, 150 interviews were made for the film. Five were retained in the final version.

What criteria?

age, profession, economical situation, cultural regions—North, South and Center—critical ability, personal affinity.

Spoken, transcribed and translated
From listening to recording; speech to writing
You can talk, we can cut, trim, tidy up

The game often demands a response to the content, rarely to the way that content is framed

Spoken *and* read

Between a language of inwardness and that of pure surface

Dear sister, there was something particularly pleasurable in going to an ice cream place to enjoy a drink in Vietnam. I feel no such excitement here, where ice cream shops have no ambiance. To find such pleasure again, one has to go all the way to Houston, Texas, or to Santa Ana, California, where the Vietnamese communities form their own towns and villages. It sounds like getting old and outdated.

The pose is always present, and accidents on film are known as “controlled accidents.”

The more intimate the tone, the more successful the interview.

Every question she and I come up with is more or less a copy of the question we have heard before. Even if the statement is original it sounds familiar, worn, threadbare.

By choosing the most direct and spontaneous form of voicing and documenting, I find myself closer to fiction.

(Transcribed from Hien’s Ao Dai presentation, in a grade school classroom):

Hien: “Good morning teacher, good morning boys and girls. I’m Hien Tran, Vin-

cent’s Mom. Today I have a chance to talk to you about Vietnamese women’s dress, *ao dai*. We call it *ao dai*. Vietnam has over four thousand years of history. In the beginning the Vietnamese women’s dress was composed of three pieces, one in the back and two in front. The two pieces tie together. In 1744 Vietnamese King Vo, V-O, asked all Vietnamese women to dress with pants, pants like this.”

(Two American children model the traditional dress)

Khien: “We would like to show you the *ao dai* designed by Madame Nhu like Mrs. Tran just told you.”

(Transcribed from a conversation during lunch):

Khien: “Oh, I tell you, the first time in my life I never knew how to carry water across my shoulders. It [the pole] bites into me. But I had to do it. I act *real* good, and after 3 months they thought I had become a ‘country girl,’ not a Saigon person anymore. Because they were always watching us, day by day, time by time. Even at lunch. They opened the door and walked right away in my kitchen—they want to watch what I eat! But you know what, we only eat a little bit of egg (*xao xao trung*) and vegetables out of our garden.”

“I speak a little English, also my husband.”

“... Yeah. I say, No, please stop, no, I don’t want to escape. If I wanted to escape, I escape years ago, when Saigon first fell. I can go in the harbor—there are a lot of ships—and I can jump on a ship and escape. But no, I love our country. After my husband was reeducated by the government I love our country. So no, please don’t shoot me. No. He said, ‘Are you telling me the truth?’ I said, I swear!”

“But you know, I read the book my husband had in the reeducation camp. So I know how to talk, So I said, I believe in the government, I believe in the chairman. We have been liberated! Why would I want to escape? I am Vietnamese. I don’t even know English. I convinced him and he said, ‘Hey Chi Tu’—he called me Chi Tu because I changed my name, I didn’t want to be called Khien—‘What is your education, what level?’ I said, well—I only talk a lot—I said I have no education.”

(Images of Khien at the Japanese gardens with a small boy)

Khien (voice over): “Fifteen minutes. It took me fifteen days to see him for fifteen minutes. Then I had to come back to Saigon. After I listen to my husband I came home and sold everything—the TV, the radio, the furniture, good clothes, everything goes to the fleamarket and from then I became a saleslady. On the street, in the street. I buy things, resell things, get a profit to take care of my children.”

(Images of Khien and Hien sitting in a crowd, watching a show intercut with Khien at lunch)

Khien (voice off, then sync): “It was 1976. Twelve years later I work with Hills Company. They put me at the fire. They say, that one, we’ll get her. And I knew about

the fire. I talked with my supervisor, I said, no, please. He said, What's the matter? I said, everytime I look at the fire my nightmares come back and I'm thinking of the time I was in Vietnam, the bombing. And he said, Khien, be cool (he's my supervisor, and also my neighbor). He said, According to your story, you have been through a lot. What's the matter with the fire? I know you can do it. Do it Khien, don't give up! He gave me some energy, so I said, yeah, why not. Then you know what, then I do it. I was too small, then the fire goes high like this, and everytime I reached for the pole to open it I have to jump like this. And even sometimes my hair was burned, and my eyelashes burned too. I didn't know. I just tried to do the work to get the money to raise my children. Then my co-worker, she said, Khien, you burned your hair. I said, Is that right? And I touched my hair—it looks like *bun tau* and it smells. I touched my eyebrows and they were all so curly."

"They couldn't give the work to someone else?"

"No—that's what they hired me for. And I'm small but they know I'm very, very strong [tapping her temple] in here." (Transcribed from conversation)

Do you translate by eye or by ear?

Translation seeks faithfulness and accuracy and ends up always betraying either the letter of the text, its spirit, or its aesthetics

"The original text is always already an impossible translation that renders translation impossible" (Barbara Johnson).

Co chong chang duoc di dau,

Co con chang duoc dung dau mot gio

(With husband, she can't go anywhere,

With children, she can't even have peace for one hour)

Co con phai kho vi con,

Co chong phai ganh giang-son nha chong.

(With children, she would have to endure hardship,

With husband, she would have to bear her husband's patrimony.)

The exiled: "But if I don't have roots, why have my roots made me suffer so?"

Running mute among other survivors, your heartbeats echoing with each footstep, you were led by an American officer to a large deadly silent auditorium where suddenly upon opening the door, you found yourself in the company of thousands of voiceless presences—a soundless, densely packed mass of people awaiting their turns to be lifted off the ground.

In certain cases, the only way to enlighten one's surrounding was to burn oneself to death.

You ask me to write about what I remember most from my stay at the refugee camp in Guam. I shall never forget the day when we left. I was suffering from excruciating stomach pains and was getting ready to go and see the doctor, when an American officer showed up to tell us we had to leave in five minutes. As you knew, since father chose not to leave at that time, we were four women then, mother and daughters. Upon our arrival at the airport with our meager bundles of cloths, we were struck by the sight of people carrying suitcases of all sizes. Mother, who had had experience in fleeing war on foot, was convinced that not only we had to reduce our belongings to the minimal, but also, that the clothes we wore and carried be dark colored so as not to draw any attention on ourselves as women. The Americans were brash and coarse and they were yelling at us as if we were a bunch of cattle or pigs. At Guam, a limited number of tents and of folding beds were thrown at the flock. People panicked and everybody was shouting and crying. As the law of the jungle dictated, only the most physically brutal and aggressive succeeded to lay hand on these things; we could not compete with the men. We waited until nighttime before additional beds and tents were brought in. None of us could really sleep for weeks, especially mother, whose anguish in sharing a tent with others came not from the fear of theft, but from that of rape.

Most unbearable were the public washing and toilet facilities enclosed in some crudely assembled wooden structures. The latter were mere holes dug in the ground in which overflowing excrements could never be evacuated fast enough and could be smelled from miles and miles away. I was so obsessed by this that even today when I go to national parks, it is a real ordeal for me to be forced to use their restroom facilities; however distant the memory, I can hardly bear the sight and smell of these wooden cabins.

(Lan & Sue, day:)

Lan: ". . . sitting here thinking about my mom. I can't believe how much change she went through since we came here. . . . She went through so much transition from one culture to another, and, like, remember those spandex pants you bought me with the snakeskin patterns? New Year's Eve I brought them home and put them on and I didn't have a matching sweater so I asked her if she had a black or grey sweater. She said, Here, and gave me this sweater and I was going to sneak out the door so she wouldn't see me but no, she comes out: Let me see those pants—"

Sue: "I can't believe it—"

Lan: "I thought she was going to be scandalized, like, they're too tight. She said, Oh, I can't believe how much that matches! She took a look at me and said, You

know if you'd worn those a couple of months ago you'd have looked overweight, but you've lost just enough weight so you look good. I like that design."

Sue (laughing): "That's insane!"

Lan: "When I was looking in her closet for the sweater she had these leopardskin pattern silky shirts, something I could wear. I couldn't believe it—Mom's going wild. . . . But that's just one of the things. I see so much gradual change in her, her values."

Sue: "Well, you helped her a lot."

Lan: "It's not so much help—I put her through a lot!"

Sue: "Remember when you first moved out of the house after high school—that was a big drag for you."

Lan: "Yeah . . . dramatic." (Transcribed from conversation)

I am like a jackfruit on the tree.

To taste you must plug me quick, while fresh:

the skin rough, the pulp thick, yes,

but, oh, I warn you against touching—

the rich juice will gush and stain your hands. Ho Xuan Huong

Che la che lay, Con gai bay nghe:

Ngoi le la mot, / Dua cot la hai, / An khoai la ba, /

An qua la bon, / Tron viec la nam, / Hay nam la sau, /

Hay an do chau la bay.

(The seven deadly sins of a girl: one, sitting everywhere; two, leaning on pillars; three, eating sweet potatoes; four, eating treats; five, fleeing work; six, lying down too often; seven, wolfing her nephew's sweets.)

Dear Minh-ha, "Since the publication of the book, I felt like having lost a part of myself. It is very difficult for a Vietnamese woman to write about Vietnamese women. At least in France where, in spite of the Mouvement de Liberation de la Femme, maternalism remains the cornerstone of the dominant ideology. To have everything as it should be, I should have accepted a preface by Simone de Beauvoir . . . as my publisher had wished." (Mai Thu Van)

A million of Vietnamese dispersed around the globe.
It will take more than one generation for the wounds to heal

Of course, the image can neither prove what it says nor why it is worth saying it the impotence of proofs, the impossibility of a single truth in witnessing, remembering, recording, rereading

As I was about to leave her, she reached for a magazine and asked me whether I have heard or read about the refugees, especially the mountain peoples, who had passed away in their sleep without any evidence of heart attack or any other recognizable disease. "The reporters described this as one of those mysterious, inscrutable oriental phenomena, but I think they die of acute sadness." *Buon thoi ruot, sac* to the extent that one's bowels rot, as we commonly say.

(In Vietnamese, from the Miss Vietnam 1988 Pageant:) "Candidate H——— P——— please tell us what characteristics of Vietnamese culture we should preserve in American society?" "I think that, as far as women are concerned, we should preserve our Vietnamese heritage and the four virtues Cong Dung Ngon Hanh"

Phan gai tu duc ven tuyen,

Cong, dung, ngon, hanh, giu gin chang sai.

(Every young woman must fully practice and scrupulously conform to 4 virtues: be skillful in her work, modest in her behavior, soft-spoken in her language, faultless in her principles.)

Tai gia tong phu

Xuat gia tong phu

Phu tu tong tu

(Daughter, she obeys her father

Wife, she obeys her husband

Widow, she obeys her son)

Theo luan ly tam cuong ngu thuong

dan ba khi nao cung phai tuy thuoc dan ong

khi con nho thi phai theo cha

khi lay chong thi phai theo chong

khi chong chet thi phai theo con

suot doi la ke vi thanh nhan



phai dua vao mot nguoi dan ong lam chu chot
chu khong bao gio duoc doc lap

(According to the moral of the three deferments and five human virtues,
women must always depend on men
Child, she must follow her father
Married, she must follow her husband
Widowed, she must follow her son
all her life she remains a minor
depending on a man as on a central axle
and can never be self-governing)

(Kim in her office and at the substation—voice off and sync voice are heard simultaneously in Vietnamese): "In Vietnam, when I quit school, I got married and had a child. I stayed home and didn't have an outside job. But when I came to the U.S., the sponsoring church members found a few small jobs for me. For example I babysat for a month, after that I taught French at a grade school for 3 or 4 months. Then I helped in a retirement home for half a year before I applied to work for an electric company. From 1976 until now I have been doing electrical drafting for a hydro-electric power station. I am the only woman in this job."

(Kim, Sync): "At first I was very hesitant when you asked me to participate, but then I thought: why would I refuse, when I am a Vietnamese woman myself, and the role in the film speaks the truth of the Vietnamese women still in Vietnam as well as of those emigrated to the U.S.? . . . Especially since this film, unlike the commercial films is not about love stories featuring some Hollywood stars, so I didn't think there was anything excessive in my accepting to be on film. I have also read about you and your films, and am proud of your being a Vietnamese woman filmmaker."

(Kim Voice off): "My son's friend who is very fond of the Vietnamese told me 'You should take that role so as to speak up the repression of your mother and sisters in Vietnam.' So, because I care about Vietnamese women in general, I want to get involved in this film. "I still have many friends in Vietnam. Compared with Cat Tien (my role) their condition is much worse. Some of them who were highly placed in the past are now selling treats on the street, or trying small enterprises to survive with their children."

(Kim, sync): I asked my husband who saw nothing wrong and encouraged me to do my best to contribute to our native country. Otherwise I would be too shy to appear on TV, not to mention film!

(Kim, voice-over): Generally, every girl or woman in Vietnam must practice the four virtues. She must know how to sew, cook, speak and behave. Obviously, she is subject to the three submissions vis-à-vis her parents, her husband, although not always vis-à-vis her son.



Unstable like a hat
without a chin-strap.



(Kim, sync): "A friend of mine opened her eyes wide when she heard I was going to be on film: 'You've never been an actress, how can you fake it?' Another friend of my husband teased me, 'They know you can act, so they have selected the right person. Who knows, maybe you'll act so well that the Americans will notice you and you'll be a Hollywood star in the future?'"

(Kim, voice off): "I keep on thinking despite our emigrating to the U.S., if our surname is Viet, our given name ought to be Nam—Vietnam. For the Vietnamese woman, the family closest to her is her husband's; as for our native country, we all love it, young and old. We will always keep our last name Viet and first name Nam. Even when the women marry foreigners here, they are still Vietnamese, so I think your film title is very suggestive . . . very meaningful."

One thing the man said he learned to let go of while in prison, is identity: this singular naming of a person, a race, a culture, a nation.

Vietnamese adjusting to their new lives: mastering elevators and escalators, learning wristwatch-type punctuality, taming vending machines, distinguishing dog's canned foods from human canned foods, and understanding that it was not permissible to wander the streets, the hotels or anywhere outside in pyjamas.

(Yen, in Vietnamese, sync): "When I accepted to help in this film, it was because its subject, as you told me, concerned Vietnamese women. Since I have always praised their ability to sacrifice and to endure, I thought this was an opportunity to speak out, although I was going through a lot of pressure and difficulties at the time. Once I worked on my part, I wanted to give my best because I don't think it is an individual matter but one that concerns a whole community."

(Voice off): "An actress or a singer is looked down upon in traditional society. People used to say that in a respectful family, the woman cannot be involved in cinema or singing; they have many derogatory terms to qualify such a woman. But more recently, with the West's influence, cinema is considered an art and most actresses would like to play the role of a beautiful woman, so my friends were all taken aback when they heard I was acting the role of a 60 year old woman."

(Sync): "Everyday I go to work before 8 am and come home around 7 pm. Then, I hurry to cook for my husband and son. Only after that am I able to rehearse my part for this film. Once the rehearsal is completed I can eat dinner and get my son and myself ready for school and work the next day."

(Voice off): "I have been in the States for 16 years. I've been working for an electronics company for almost 10 years in chemical processing. The number of Vietnamese engineers

working for technical companies grows larger everyday. Eight, nine years ago there were only 3, 4 engineers, but since then many who came in 1975 have graduated, and there are now about 300 or 400 Vietnamese engineers at my company, but only 2 of us are women . . .

"When I started working there, I encountered lots of difficulty, first, because I am Asian, second because I am a woman. I do have to overcome these two difficulties. The Americans have always looked down on Vietnam as a second-class country. Now we Vietnamese are entering professional careers and are competing with them. So although they do not really show it, you can feel that they don't accept the fact that there are more and more Asians with Ph.Ds working in the company, especially in Research where Asians form the majority because a Ph.D is required."

(Sync): "Concerning my younger brother's wedding, it is in our family tradition that I, the eldest sister, be responsible for it since my father is no longer with us and my mother is advanced in age. That's why I was very divided during the filming week."

What did your Vietnamese friends think when they heard you're going to be on film?

(Yen, in Vietnamese, sync): "Their reaction is very different from my reasons for accepting. They all laugh and tease me, saying that I'll become a movie star and will earn enough money so I can quit my job in the future."

(Voice off): "Traditionally, the Vietnamese woman who gets married must endure many hardships. She almost never lives for herself. When she lives with her family, all decisions are made by her father. When she marries, she must obey her husband's family. All decisions belong to the husband and his family."

"Surname Viet, given name Nam. I think when a man asks a woman whether she is married or not, by such a question perhaps she is expected to wed a Vietnamese man and to keep the Vietnamese traditions. Perhaps she expects her husband to have patriotic feelings toward his country. Every woman would want her husband to be a hero for the people."

"On TV and in newspapers, the tendency most often is to side with the North; only in a few cases the siding is with the South. But I have never come across a film or an analysis that is truthful, that stands in the middle and looks at both North and South with unbiased eyes. This is very sad, because I just want to see all the good points we need to keep, and the faults we need to change in ourselves so that we can build a new Vietnamese society. As for the foreigners, of course they look at Vietnam with their own eyes. I don't even want to see films that speak only for one side or the other. I want to find a book that speaks truthfully of Vietnam because everything I read either praises or blames, but always in an absolute, black and white

clear cut manner. And I don't think there is anything absolute; each side has its rights and wrongs."

War as a succession of special effects; the war became film well before it was shot. Cinema has remained a vast machine of special effects. If the war is the continuation of politics by other means, then media images are the continuation of war by other means. Immersed in the machinery, part of the special effect, no critical distance. Nothing separates the Vietnam war and the superfilms that were made and continue to be made about it. It is said that if the Americans lost the other, they have certainly won this one. (Inspired by Jean Baudrillard)

(Kim, in Vietnamese): *"These images call for human compassion toward countries in war."*

There is no winner in a war.

(Yen, in Vietnamese): *"These are images that are emotionally moving. They can change the way you think. For example if you don't like war and you see images of mothers holding their child in their arms to flee from war you'll be moved and stirred to do something to help. These images are very painful. What is often brought up is the mother's love for her child. In war the mother always protects her child's safety."*

(Lan & Sue, fireplace)

Lan: "Here in Berkeley it's not so bad—you have so many Orientals that people recognize the difference between Oriental cultures like Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese. I don't know how many times I've run into people that, like, first of all they pretend like they're interested enough to ask you, Are you Chinese or Japanese? No, Vietnamese. Then they have the nerve to say, Oh, same difference. I find that really insulting."

Sue: "I would too. It's ridiculous"

Lan: "I wasn't so aware of it until recently, when you told me that story of—what was it?—the bus. . . . How it works both ways. What happened?"

Sue: "Oh yes. It was really funny. I was living in Taiwan and I got on the bus—the only white American—and this guy spots me from across the bus. Of course it's jammed packed and everybody's in each others' armpits and we're holding on for dear life because they're maniac drivers, and he starts making his way back. He wanted to get a little English lesson, which is fine—you like speaking English to

people when they want to learn. But it happens 24 hours a day, so you're constantly speaking English."

Lan: "That gets on your nerves."

Sue: "By that time I felt pretty comfortable with Chinese. So he comes up and starts asking me questions. I told him in Chinese that I wasn't American, that I was French. And he was like, So what, you're European, you speak everything, right? So I said no, I only speak French not English. He said, That's impossible, you're all European. So finally he said okay and he just started speaking French."

[laughter]

Lan: "'Oh actually I'm German.'"

Sue: "Oh, that was embarrassing. I just had to be snobbish."

Lan: "So that's why I like this place. When I first came to visit you, I'm walking between you and Julie, you both have blonde hair, and blue eyes. Julie's speaking Japanese, you're speaking Chinese, here I am, 'Hi, Pennsylvania,' speaking English. It was a nice change of role." (Transcribed from conversation)

For years we learnt about "our ancestors, the Gauls," we learnt that "French Indochina" was situated in Asia under a hot and humid climate.

Grafting several languages, cultures and realities onto a single body. The problem of translation, after all, is a problem of reading and of identity.

Van-Lang, Nam-Viet, Hoang Viet, Dai-Viet, An-Nam (Bac Ky—Le Tonkin; Trun; Ky—An Nam; Nam Ky—La Cochinchine), French Indochina, (Viet-Nam, 'Nam)

"Vietnam" (American Accent)—they also call it 'Nam.

Reeducation camps, rehabilitation camps, concentration camps, annihilation camps. All the distinctive features of a civilization are laid bare. The slogans continue to read: "Work liberates," "Rehabilitation through work." Here, work is a process whereby the worker no longer takes power, "for work has ceased to be his way of living and has become his way of dying" (Maurice Blanchot). Work and death are equivalents.

"In Guam I recognized a general," she said. "He [had] been one of the richest men in Vietnam. . . . One morning in the camp, a mob of women came up to him. They took off their

... wooden shoes and began beating him about the head, screaming: 'Because of you, my son, my brother, my husband was left behind.'" (Wendy Wilder Larsen & Tran Thi Nga)

"The world is like a butterfly," wrote a Japanese poet of the seventeenth century.

A woman discloses the content of a letter her father recently wrote in prison in Vietnam. A poet, looking desperately fragile on photo in his long silver hair, he did not write to complain about his politically condemned status, but only to weep over his eldest daughter's death on the very birthday of Buddha. Forty days after she died, he wrote, she came back in the form of a golden butterfly, encircling him insistently for an entire day.

Cong Dung Ngon Hanh. What are these four virtues persistently required of women? First, *Cong*: you'll have to be able, competent and skillful—in cooking, sewing, managing the household budget, caring for the husband, educating the children—all this to save the husband's face. Second, *Dung*: you'll have to maintain a gracious, compliant and cheerful appearance—first of all for the husband. Third, *Ngon*: you'll have to speak properly and softly and never raise your voice—particularly in front of the husband or his relatives. Then fourth, *Hanh*: you'll have to know where your place is; respect those older than you and yield to those younger or weaker than you—moreover, be faithful and sacrifice for the husband.

The boat is either a dream or a nightmare. Or rather, both. A no place. "A place without a place, that exists by itself [and] is closed on itself, and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea." For Western civilization the boat has not only been the great instrument of economic development, going from port to port as far as the colonies in search of treasures and slaves, but it has also been a reserve of the imagination. It is said that "in civilization without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police takes the place of pirates" (Michel Foucault).

Than em nhu tam lua dao
Phat pho giua cho biet vao tay ai?
Em ngoi canh truc, em tua canh mai,
Dong dao tay lieu, biet lay ai ban cung?

(I am like a piece of silk
Floating in the midst of the market, knowing not into whose hands it will fall
Sitting on a reed, leaning against an apricot branch
Between the peach tree to the East and the willow to the West
Who shall I befriend for a lifetime?)

Hope is alive when there is a boat, even a small boat. From shore to shore small crafts are rejected and sent back to the sea. The policy of castaways has created a special class of refugees, the "beach people."

Each government has its own interpretation of *Kieu*. Each has its peculiar way of using and appropriating women's images. *Kieu* has survived in hundreds of different contexts. First appreciated for its denunciation of oppressive and corrupt feudalism, it was later read as an allegory of the tragic fate of Vietnam under colonial rule. More recently, in a celebration of its 200th anniversary, it was highly praised by the government's male official writers for its revolutionary yearning for freedom and justice in the context of the war against American imperialism. For the Vietnamese exiled, it speaks for the exodus or silent popular movement of resistance that continues to raise problems of conscience to the international community.



I am like a piece of silk



Standing in the midst
of the market,



knowing not
into whose hands it will fall



SV

