Université de Montréal

# IDENTITY, DISPLACEMENT AND EMBODIMENT IN WOMEN'S INDEPENDENT CINEMA

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Thèse présentée à la Faculté des arts et des sciences
en vue de l'obtention du grade de Doctorat
en Littérature
option Littérature et Cinéma

August 2010

Université de Montréal
Faculté des arts et sciences

Cette thèse intitulée :

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# Résumé

Ma thèse examine les déplacements multiples – déportation, exil, voyage – et l'expérience diasporique de différentes communautés ethniques dans le cinéma indépendant de trois réalisatrices et artistes contemporaines : Julie Dash, Rea Tajiri et Trinh T. Minh-ha. J'analyse la déconstruction et reconstruction de l'identité à travers le voyage et autres déplacements physiques ainsi que les moyens d'expression et stratégies cinématographiques utilisées par ces artistes pour articuler des configurations identitaires mouvantes. Je propose de nouvelles lectures de la position des femmes dans des milieux culturels différents en considérant la danse comme une métaphore de la reconfiguration de l'identité féminine qui se différencie et s'émancipe des traditions culturelles classiques. Les expériences de l'histoire et de la mémoire, qui sont vécues dans les corps des femmes, sont aussi exprimées par le biais des relations intermédiales entre la photographie, la vidéo et le film qui proposent des images de femmes variées et complexes.

**Mots-clés** :
Histoire, voyage, danse, identité interculturelle, intermédialité.

# Abstract

My thesis examines the various forms of displacement resulting from deportation as well as the diasporic experience of dislocation from home and relocation to new socio-cultural spaces in the independent and experimental film and video of Julie Dash, Rea Tajiri, and Trinh T. Minh-ha. I highlight the deconstruction and reconstruction of intercultural identity through travel and the cinematic and narrative techniques or strategies of representations used by these artists to re-imagine identity. I propose new interpretations of women's position in different cultural settings in my consideration of dance as a metaphor for the empowerment and reconfiguration of women's identities as they distance themselves apart from inherited cultural traditions. Women's experiences of history and memory are expressed in the work of Dash, Trinh and Tajiri not only through travel and dance movements, but also in terms of intermedial relations between photography, video and film. The transfers and mutual transformations between these media result in complex depictions of women's activities in varying rhythms.

**Keywords**:
History, travel, dance, intercultural identities, intermediality.

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*I dedicate this work to my professors, family and friends who have given me great support during my learning, research and writing experiences.*

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my two professors, Livia Monnet and Silvestra Mariniello, who have given me very good advice and guidance in all the stages of my doctoral studies and especially for the compilation and organization of my thesis.

# Introduction

## PROBLEMATIC AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

This thesis explores the transformations of women's identity in contemporary experimental film and video by women. I examine the ways in which women engage in their sexual and racial identity construction through a constant repositioning across diverse spatiotemporal and socio-cultural dimensions. The complexity of women's (diasporic) dis- and re- orientations is analyzed from a variety of perspectives that depict the (criss)crossing movement between the native country and the new home through multiple layers of historical, political, religious, social and cultural interactions. Different cultural groups of women in the United States coming from Africa and Vietnam as well as third-generation Japanese-American (Sansei) have been chosen to depict their particular deportation conditions and adaptations according to their distinct histories and memories of both factual occurrences and their emotional experiences.

I address the complex situations of women's experiences through the vision of multiple forms of motion both in the physical displacement of their travels discussed in Chapter One, and in women's performance in dance in Chapter Two. Chapter Three scrutinizes the interactions between photography, video and film through which the works of Dash, Trinh and Tajiri recreate memories of the past while contesting dominant cultural representations of history. My approach to women's representations of diasporic experiences is inspired by Stuart Hall's concept of diaspora:

> I use this term here metaphorically, not literally: diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return.... The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diasporic identities are those that are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (*Diaspora and Visual Culture*, 31)

I analyze the films by Julie Dash and Trinh T. Minh-ha using this notion of diasporic identity as continuous self-redefinition in relation to change and cultural transformation. The new sociocultural situations resulting from multiple displacements create alternative visions of the present and its relations to the past according to Nicholas Mirzoeff's concept of "writing theoretical and phenomenological understanding of the multiple viewpoint of diaspora" (7). Mirzoeff advocates Homi Bhabha's view of a new art that

> demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent "in-between" space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. (*Diaspora and Visual Culture,* 6)

I propose to look at the ways in which the historical past is reinvented through alternative perceptions in Dash's, Trinh's and Tajiri's visual productions that challenge the conventions of dominant representations.

* * *

My argument starts from the premise that *representation* means different things in the experimental moving image practice of the artists I discuss. One notion of representation used in this thesis refers to the quality of a crucial site or an important event that made a mark in the history of women's lives. It evokes an aspect of racial discrimination and domination as well as more positive new values through which the female characters in the films I discuss attempt to redefine themselves. Poston Camp in Rea Tajiri's video represents the dual meaning of the site of US government's (un)justified deportation of 110,000 Japanese Americans after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour, and the Japanese contributions to the development of the site during their survival in this concentration camp. Tajiri's video *re-presentation* of Poston Camp is intended to re-call to her mother's mind the tragically suppressed site of traumatic deportation through a re-portrayal of multiple screen images of documentary government footage and Hollywood commercial films as well as photographs and sound recordings of her family members'

voices during and after internment. Thus, her video is simultaneously a critical *re-appraisal* of existing dominant cultural representations of the internment and a probing examination of the reconstruction, distortion or forgetting of this traumatic experience. Trinh T. Minh-ha's representations of women in her film *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* consist of performances which I group under two main categories. The first type consists mainly of re-enacted interviews (discussed in Chapter One) that *represent* other Vietnamese women's testimonies about their experiences of socialist government oppression. The second form of performance is women's cultural dances from diverse historical epochs. Moreover, these physical movements also point to the new positions adopted by Vietnamese women who attempt, through the graceful gestures of dance, to rise above their former oppressive conditions.

* * *

The first chapter is dedicated to the re-presentation of history through a return to women's roots by taking routes perceived as trajectories of the (diasporic) self in the bodily experience of past deportations and present transportation to and from the original site of traumatic experience. Lisa Gail Collins, writing on African American women artists' engagements with past history, refers to Paul Gilroy's insistence that "the inherently limiting search for 'roots' must shift to a more enabling search for 'routes', a search that can accommodate and reveal multiple origins, movement, change and exchange" (*The Art of History: African American Artists Engage the Past,* 64). She also cites James Clifford's view, in his book *Routes*, of an open understanding of culture as relations of transit in which roots and routes are enmeshed such that the notion of fixed roots is contested in favour of a more dynamic experience of travel in which constant displacement and re-orientations occur.

In Chapter One I endeavour to show how geographical location bears a crucial significance in the historical events of each specific culture. Collins calls attention to Julie

Dash's distinctive portrayal of the life of African Americans in the Sea Islands in *Daughters of the Dust*:

> Due to their unique history, location, and topography, [the Sea Islands] are often understood as the place where Africa is most present and Africanisms, or African retentions, most evident in the United States. ...
>
> All of these factors – the consistent presence of a black majority, the continual and extended importation of enslaved people from Africa and the Carribean, and the geographic isolation of the Sea Islands – enabled the creation of a distinct "Gullah" language and culture. ... Most contemporary researchers ... stress both West and Central African ties while understanding this unique language and culture to be an example of creolization, the result of the intermixing of various African peoples, Native Americans and Europeans during the long centuries of the Atlantic slave trade. (*The Art of History: African American Artists Engage the Past,* 67).

Other implications of the travelling culture extend to the internal *journey* of the historical self whose adaptations and re-orientations are depicted through the medium of film/video to display the multiple forms of physical and metaphorical displacements. An example of this dual representation of geographical and visual "travelling" can be found in the re-evaluation effected in and through the African-American photographer's own (re)search into the African history of deportation – in his (imagined) encounter with the prophet Muhammed in the Sea Islands – while carrying out his photographic project of the Peazant family, descendants of the slave ancestors. Dash also portrays other scenes of "travelling" in the numerous flashbacks and flashforwards that show the Unborn Child – the future child of Eli and Eula – in her various displacements back and forth from the present time with her family to the past days of slavery with her great grandfather as well as in the future, which can simultaneously be perceived as the time from which she will come. Thus, Dash invites spectators to view the multiple dimensions of diasporic experiences in the Unborn Child's fragmentary dis- and re- appearances on the screen, issuing in and out of past, present and future real(m)s. My analysis of the means of representation reflected

by modes of transportation can be viewed according to Elizabeth Bell's notion of "presence as transportation", outlined in *Theories of Performance* as follows:

> When a medium seems to create a new world, transportation happens in one of three ways: 'you are there,' 'it is here,' or 'we are together'. Storytelling is certainly a medium of communication that, at its best, transports. ... Film or television enables us to walk with dinosaurs and to watch a historical battle take place around us in a 'you are there' experience. 'It is here' transports the mediated world, into ours: the noises in our houses take on new meanings when we're watching a scary movie in the living room. (259)

The second part of the first chapter deals with the narratives of women's lives that re-present them in their new socio-cultural context of change and self-transformation. As Gloria J. Gibson-Hudson states in *Black Women Film and Video Artists*,

> Depending on context, identities are formulated and reformulated. Black women's identities are not rigid, fixed entities, but fluid – contingent upon personal, cultural, political and social variables. Identity (re)formation is a continuous process of (re)positioning within meaningful socio-historic structures. (47)

Carrying on the argument regarding travelling as displacement from Chapter One, the second chapter depicts dance as a bodily activity that further transports women's culture from their original countries in the past to their new homes in the present. In my interpretation of the expanded meaning of travel and transportation, I develop the concept of dance as both the actual and allegorical gestures of stretching across defined borders and reaching into new territories according to Jenny Robinson's theory. I am also inspired by Jacqueline Copeland-Carson's concept of the body as "the vehicle for transporting and sustaining core cultural practices through social relations and connections that transcended locality, were transnational" (*Creating Africa in America: Translocal Identity in an Emergent City,* 85).

Working from Francesca Castaldi's notion that the dancing body activates memory through the embodiment of ritual performances, I present the ways in which African trance shows the connections between the past and the present in both the physical dance and

through spiritual possession. Like Marita Sturken who maintains that memory is a narrative rather than a simple retrieval, I read Trinh's portrayal of several Vietnamese dance scenes as a historical interpretation of Vietnamese women's social conditions under diverse political regimes depicted in different styles of dress and choreography. Situated in contemporary American society, Vietnamese dance is perceived as a performance that combines preset codes with novel gestures that reinvent past cultural etiquette, according to Janet Adshead-Landsdale's theory of dance as a mixture of traditions with new outlooks. The shift in perspective in contemporary dance focuses on the body as a mobile figure that constantly negotiates between new positions, thereby challenging fixed cultural conventions.

I consider dance as a metaphor for women's refiguration of their identity through the multiple ways in which they respond to their rigidly imposed social roles by de- and re-constructing alternative positions through multiple layers of visual, sensory and kinaesthetic aspects. Polyrhythms, collective interactions and improvisational gestures are highlighted in new re-presentations of traditional dance that blend original traits with current styles. Moreover, I interpret Vietnamese women's ability to conform their bodies to meet the demands of their changing socio-political situations according to Margery J. Turner's theory of dancers' physical capacity to feel and coordinate communication to bring about (self) invention. In this reconstruction of female identity, dance enables both an emancipatory stance and a self-empowering repositioning. Dance, thus, demonstrates the mobility and fluidity of women in their resistance to fixed socio-cultural identities and representations.

Dance is therefore presented as a means through which new possibilities are offered in an opening up of the self's internal e-motion to an external motion. It is viewed in a variety of contexts ranging from "the wider political and social events of the period, to the artistic frame ... [and] the immediate dance context of the creator and receivers of the

piece" (*Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice,* 11)[1]. Furthermore, the general context of dance as diverse social events spread to sports can be perceived as "performance" – according to the theory promoted by Schechner and Appel [2] -- in a dual mind-body control and exercise of the self in the graceful poise of the Vietnamese woman's tai-chi workout in Trinh's film.

After my presentation on the physical and metaphorical displacements depicted through travels in Chapter One and dance in Chapter Two, I explore the ways in which women filmmakers experiment with the interactions between diverse media to display the passages and exchanges between different socio-cultural positions in Chapter Three. The effects resulting from the influence and the resistance of each medium give rise to interstitial spaces wherein negotiations between past and present selves take place. My discussion of the relations between intermediality and intersubjectivity is inspired by Homi Bhabha's concept of the "interstices" expressed in these terms:

> What is theoretically innovative, politically crucial, is the need to think beyond the narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments and processes that are produced in the articulation of political differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (*The Location of Culture,* 1)
>
> It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationess*, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated. (*The Location of Culture,* 2) [3]

The filmmakers develop new strategies of representing women's cultural identity through intermediality as an alternative perception of the processes of displacement of the self

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[1] See Adshead, Janet (ed.) *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice*. London: Dance Books, 1988.

[2] See Schechner and Appel, *By Means of Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1900.

[3] See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1994.

across the boundaries of a single location of culture and identity in a fixed genre and medium.

The technique of "repurposing" – taking a 'property' from one medium and reusing it in another (*Remediation,* 45) – is used by Julie Dash to express a parallel between the history of Africans in America and African aesthetics. She makes a reference to the Harlem photographer Van der Zee and his multiple photographic printing with her "dissolve" technique in which cinematic images are made from overlapping photographic images. Thus, her method of 'reuse' both renders homage to former black artists and further adapts African aesthetic tradition to her contemporary filmmaking. The dissolves also display a lingering temporal effect to evoke the memory of the past – through photographic stills – in the present flow of cinematic images. Dash also presents other influences of the past by incorporating stereoscopic black and white images of people and cars in a city. Yet she infuses these otherwise static images (as precursors of the cinematic images) with motion to introduce an innovative arrangement of a historical scene and apparatus. She further extends the photographer's conventional presentation of his static art with the vision of the Unborn Child's movement beside an immobile group of men posing for family photos.

The interstitial space can also be perceived according to Regina Lee's notion of the "disconjunction" in the simultaneous separation and unification of the 'hyphenated identity' (such as Vietnamese-American) in which the paradoxical dis- and re-location/orientation in different cultural spaces occur. This is demonstrated when viewing photographs and their diverse aspects of public and private records of history. In *Surname Viet*, Trinh contrasts the grim black and white war photos of people's suffering from injuries and held captive as prisoners of war with happy family images in photo albums. These different types of photos display private emotional memories in opposition to public objective records of facts. In her video, Tajiri zooms in onto her grandmother's face in a documentary collective photograph of the bird carving class and also presents a photo of the bird her

grandmother has carved in order to depict a form of tactile memory in which images (and sounds) appeal to the sense of touch as theorized by Laura U. Marks in *The Skin of Film*.

The materiality of bodily perception is transmitted through photography that is reworked in Tajiri's video through "remediation" – in the sense of healing or of being restored to health (according to Richard Grusin's theory originating in the Latin "*remederi")*. Through her personal re-membering (in the image of her standing in for her mother at the water faucet) through which Tajiri restores her mother's memory of the concentration camp, Tajiri also promotes political reform to redress the injustice imposed upon the Japanese by the U.S. government. Thus, her video produces "reform" by remediating U.S. government documentaries and fictional Hollywood films using the voice-over commentaries of her mother, uncle and nephew. Similarly, Trinh presents her vocal commentaries and Lan's reading of letters while viewing photographic images. This special presentation of photographs with commentaries evokes Rebecca Baron's reading of the similarities between family photographs and the diary as private forms of memory that contrast with public historical record.

As Marita Sturken asserts, the camera image participates in a process of healing through image recreation. However, in Tajiri's and Trinh's visual art, memory is reconstructed in opposition to dominant representations from fragments and historical images that counter hegemonic views. According to Grusin's notion of the "remediated self", when looking at photographs, viewers understand themselves through the reconstituted look of the photographer from the perspective of his camera. When spectators watch a film, they become the changing perspective of the camera in the cultural construction of social identity. As Grusin, confirms, the networked self is "constantly making and breaking connections, declaring allegiances and interests and then renouncing them" (*Remediation*, 232). In her video remediation of government and Hollywood films, Trinh constantly constructs her own re-interpretation with the narratives of family images and recordings.

Women filmmakers explore, through the varying temporal rhythms of slow/stop motion and normal film speed, the interconnected relations and influences between photographic and cinematic images. Whereas photography fixes time in a momentary freeze of the image that breaks up the temporal continuum, cinema moves and reorganizes separate segments into a flux of continual images. In this way, women artists denote the separation, loss and death evoked by photography that fixes images in the past, contrary to the accumulation of experiences and changes displayed through the effects of motion in film images. By contrasting and varying film speeds, Trinh depicts Vietnamese women in diverse activities, such as riding bicycles, dancing and pounding corn. In these multirhythmic images, time passages are depicted through the medium of women's bodies, which are shown at the interstices of different social, cultural and historical moments in Vietnam and the United States.

The rhythmic evocations of women's cultural subjectivities are interspersed with poetic fragments expressed as intervals within which multiple channels of communication, mediation and influences cross. The multiple effects of displacement are bridged by poetic statements that are transnational in that they express cultural movement between the singular and the universal, between the creative and the theoretical/critical, and also moving between general conditions to their specific cases. I explore the manner in which poetry reveals spaces without borders in the poetry recitation and songs in Vietnamese cultural activities in the United States such as beauty pageants and children's cultural festivals. Poetic evocations, thus, recreate cultural interactivity, agency and empowerment. Presented in between documentary interviews in Trinh's film, poetry forges new means of relating to existing paradigms about representations of subjectivity. Trinh restages alternative visions of Vietnamese women's cultural identities, both in Vietnam and the U.S., through fragments of poetic evocations in songs and well-known poems. Their recitation in Vietnamese and translation into English in both written and oral communications exposes poetry as a medium and mediator between varying ideas, concepts and positions of intercultural subjectivity.

**CORPUS**

The films I will analyse in my dissertation are Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1992) and Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1991) as well as Rea Tajiri's video *History and Memory: for Akiko and Takashige* (1989). Julie Dash was born in New York but her parents came from South Carolina, where the Gullah culture was practised. She received a BA degree in film production at the City College of New York. In 1975, she was a producing and writing fellow at the American Film Institute and in 1986, she completed an MFA in motion picture and television production at the University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA). Her filmmaking during this UCLA period resisted Hollywood narratives. Being a member of the group of black student filmmakers at UCLA which Toni Cade Bambara called "black insurgents", she was engaged, together with the other artists, in questioning existing conventions of dominant cinematic representation by showing alternative ways of presenting Black people, especially African American women.[4]

Julie Dash was among the "second wave" black artists in this movement, (according to Ntongela Masilela), along with Alile Sharon Larkin, Bernard Nichols, and Billy Woodbery.[5] She explored the relationship of history to the contemporary experiences of the black families in the Sea Islands in her experimental film *Daughters of the Dust*. It was selected by the Library of Congress for the National Film Registry in 2004 and became the first feature film by an African American woman to have a national theatrical release.

*Daughters of the Dust* is a feature film made from Julie Dash's ten-year research on Africans' multiple diasporic experiences of physical displacement and cultural change. She proposes an imaginative re-envisioning of the effects of racial and sexual discrimination using positive visual images of African women's self-empowerment in both the narratives

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[4] See Toni Cade Bambara, " Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: *Daughters of the Dust* and the Black Cinematic Movement", in *Black Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 119.

[5] See Ntongela Masilela, "The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers", in ibid., 107.

of their history and in representations of African aesthetics. Dash shows the situation of the Peazant family, descendants of the Gullahs who were deported from Africa in slave ships and arrived at Ibo Landing in the Sea Islands off the coast of North Carolina. Most of the scenes are acted out on the beach, such as the return of Yellow Mary, an emancipated African-American woman travelling back from Cuba to meet with other family members before their migration north in search for better prospects of work and education for their children. Dash depicts the Peazants' picnic celebration in 1902 as a commemoration of their ancestors' past arrival at Ibo Landing in the homage paid to the departed souls and Viola's commissioning Mr. Snead, the photographer, to take family portraits on the landing site.

Dash's innovative presentation of these Africans' past history in their present commemoration of ancient rituals such as trance dance and both African and Western religious adherences depicts what Lisa G. Collins acknowledges as

> [t]his new burst of interdisciplinary expressiveness, which included the visual arts ... was unique for its ability to work with contradictions, borrow freely from Western and black diasporic traditions, and mesh an array of influences from popular culture to high theory all while exuding a confident poise. (*The Art of History: African American Artists Engage the Past,* 7)

Dash situates the history of African cultural and aesthetic traditions amidst American mainstream social practices to show the simultaneous transition from ancient rituals to contemporary Western social and religious beliefs together with the retention of the original culture.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, a Vietnamese American who settled in the United States in 1970, did field research in Africa for the University of California, Berkeley in the 1980s. Being an ethnographer before becoming a filmmaker, she adopted an openly critical stance in both her writing and filmmaking, which resist and counter the dominant colonialist tendencies of ethnographic film. She subverts traditional strategies of conventional documentaries by exposing the original form in her exploration of the new cultural trans*form*ation. Her film

*Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* has won awards, including the Blue Ribbon Award for best experimental feature at the American International Film Festival in 1985. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster writes that "[i]n fact, no available critical paradigm adequately describes how th[is] filmmaker reinvent[s] documentary form by combining self-reflexive gestures with innovative narration".[6] Minh-ha focuses on the body as the main articulation of women's subjectivities, expressed by their presence as a resistance to all forms of containment in the objective view of women's screen images. Her other films include *The Fourth Dimension* (2001), *A Tale of Love* (1995), *Shoot for the Contents* (1991), *Reassemblage* (1982), and *Calligraphy* (1981).

Rea Rajiri, a third-generation Japanese American, received a B.A. and an M.F.A. from the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles. In 1991, she wrote, produced, and directed her first film, *History and Memory*, which immediately received numerous awards, including the Distinguished Achievement Award from the International Documentary Association and the Best Experimental Video Award at the Atlanta Film and Video Festival. *History and Memory* has since been shown on PBS and at several film festivals, art museums, and universities around the world. Tajiri followed it with *Passion for Juice* (1993), a documentary on the human rights advocate Yuri Kochiyama; *Strawberry Fields* (1997), a narrative feature; and *Little Murders* (1998), a digital video musical. Tajiri has received awards and funding from the Rockfeller Foundation, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New York Foundation for the Arts.

Questioning Hollywood fictional films and government documentary accounts of historical events after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour, Tajiri depicts an alternative view of her family's experiences in her video re-presentation of the traumatic deportation from home to Poston concentration camp. She thus posits her family members' personal

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[6] See Gwendolyn Audrey Forster, "Experiments in Ethnography" (179-191) in *Women and Experimental Filmmaking*, ed. Jean Petrolle and VirginiaWright Wexman. Chicago: U of Illinois P., 2005.

viewpoints in her remembrance, in the place of her mother's amnesia and through her father's, aunt's, uncle's and nephew's voices whose testimonies are in direct contrast to the politically justified message in the U.S. War Department archival footage.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# MODE OF TRANSPORTATION

# AND

# MEANS OF REPRESENTATION

## Introduction

I will explore in this chapter the ways in which the women filmmakers/videographers depict new visual imaginings of the diasporic experiences of dispersion/uprooting, and the eventual physical and metaphorical returns to the location of origin, which is also the site of traumatic events. My analysis is undertaken within the context of a theoretical rethinking of the concept of diaspora as multiple displacements and new approaches to notions of origin, home and cultural identity. There has also been a marked shift in perspective in the screen re-presentations of race, gender and sexual orientation, particularly from women's own subjective viewpoints, as their African/Vietnamese/Japanese cultural identity is constructed as a challenge to the dominant American culture.

* * *

# PART ONE

# DISPLACEMENTS

## *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST:*

## DEPARTURE AND RETURN HOME

In her film *Daughters of the Dust*, Julie Dash depicts African experiences of diaspora in terms of a series of displacements perceived in the images of women's travels. At the start of the film, an inscription with the words, "Ibo Landing of the Sea Islands of the South 1902" is shown on the screen to introduce Yellow Mary's return to Ibo with her friend Trula in a boat steered by two men. Yellow Mary is seen standing upright in the boat and looking ahead at the landscape. In the next scene, the audience sees Viola, a female African missionary standing on the riverbank with her photographer, Mr. Snead, and looking out for her cousin Yellow Mary. This couple joins the two women on the boat trip to the Sea Islands to meet other members of the Peazant family for a gathering before their migration north, depicted at the end of the film as groups of African-Americans leaving in sailboats. From the encounter of these reunited members travelling back from different parts of the world, Dash proposes a reconsideration of the concept of diaspora through an envisioning of the continuous displacements of Africans that mark not only the dispersal away from home but also their returns and subsequent departures. Besides reflecting on the African ancestors' original deportation from their homeland, Dash evokes further displacements of their descendants such as Yellow Mary's forced departure from her new home in the United States and subsequent travel to Cuba to work as a wet nurse and a prostitute to a white slave owner. Upon her return to the Sea Islands after slavery time, Yellow Mary plans to move to Nova Scotia to look for work, hoping that she will be well treated there, as she confides to Eula saying, "Nova Scotia will be good to me".

Dash promotes a creative re-presentation of displacement in the context of the history of slavery through the image of transportation in sea-vessels, evoking not only the initial deportation of Africans as slaves from their homeland, but the freed descendants' later travel away from and back to their new homes in the U.S. Moreover, she presents innovative images of the present return of liberated African-Americans in relation to the past deportation of their enslaved ancestors. The commanding, upright position of these women travellers strikes a contrast with the horizontal position of the bronze sculpture floating in the river. This sculpture, sometimes in the shape of a man and sometimes a woman, symbolizes the enslaved Africans who were forcefully uprooted from their African homes and transported on slave ships to the U.S.; some even drowned themselves to escape the oppressive conditions of slavery.

The African-Americans' return to the Sea Islands of their own volition further re-presents the myth reflected in the sculpture, of the Africans who walked back to their African home on the water to free themselves from bondage. In her depiction of Yellow Mary's return within the larger context of the history of slavery, Dash stages diaspora as a means of interpreting the historical experience of dispersal. Situating her film in Ibo Landing in 1902, she explores the passage from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. I read her presentation according to Ruth Simms Hamilton's theory of the concept of diaspora as

> a mode of analysis – an approach to history, a method of inquiry – rooted in historical experiences of a socially [...] dispersed and interconnected network of peoples. The concept of diaspora connotes people whose social relationships have been largely inscribed by their geographical displacement at historically significant moments. [...] This displacement occurred under [...] powerful social forces such as exile, slave bondage [...].(*Routes of Passage: Rethinking The African Diaspora,* 4 )

Dash presents diaspora not only as the complex experience of dispersal but also as a lens through which to assess the relationships between past, present and future events in history. She shows the boat trip to Ibo Landing in 1902 as the physical return to the initial landing

site of the African ancestors who were taken captives at the beginning of slavery in the sixteenth century. She attributes the meaning of diaspora to Ibo Landing as both an historical and geographical landmark of the various displacements of Africans in their numerous arrivals, departures and returns.

She also reveals hidden aspects of African dispersal not officially recorded in American history. As they are transported back to Ibo on the boat, Viola looks intensely towards the forest and cries out, "Yellow Mary, look! Uncle moved here just after the war from the plantation. Just before the war they kept boatloads of fresh Africans". Although the photographer protests by saying that the U.S. Government banned the transporting of Africans for slavery fifty years before the Civil War, Viola insists "not on these islands, they were still running and hiding, salt-water Africans, purebred, from the Yankees". Therefore, Dash delivers a critical analysis of deportation in the illegal transportation of Africans for slavery even after the official banning by the U.S. Government. Her film reworks diaspora according to the multiple levels of transportation that simultaneously take the audience back to the past through the travellers' reflections on the great impact of slavery upon their return to the Sea Islands. Through the metaphor of transportation, Dash's film investigates the past, present and future instances of diasporic displacement.

Dash also presents a re-appraisal of the return to Ibo Landing in relation to the Peazants' resettlement to the north in the near future. She gives a new meaning to diaspora as displacement, not only in relation to past history but also to future travel. This notion is described by Ruth S. Hamilton as follows: "[a]ll diasporas have defining moments of inception.... These defining moments are the major turning points in history that establish the scope, extensiveness and severity of the displacement, as well as its future significance" (*Routes of Passage,* 4). Dash re-presents the extensive travelling of African-Americans through Yellow Mary's return by looking back at the original landing site after the long voyage from Africa. Since this return prepares for the coming journey of her family up north, the gaze that Yellow Mary casts at Ibo Landing while travelling back on the boat is

not only a look back at the past deportation from Africa but also a look forward to the future migration.

Dash illustrates the wide scope of travelling over extensive stretches of time and space in the vision of the Unborn Child`s imaginary travels. Upon her great grandmother Nana`s prayers, she is sent from the ancestors' world of departed souls to appear to her parents in the present family gathering. She is shown running on the beach, symbolising the shore where her ancestors first arrived in the U.S., wearing an indigo ribbon in her hair as the mark of the slaves' dyeing work on the plantation. Her multiple travels are viewed in the film as voyages into plural dimensions – the present, to be among her parents, cousins and aunts, and also the past time and space occupied by slave workers preparing the dyes. Her historical trajectory is displaced along diverse paths to the past, symbolised by the graveyard and the vision of slave workers, as well as the present which she expresses thus: "I was distracted but I was recalled by my great-grandmother and I remember my journey home". She confirms that she has come in time to be among her family members for the celebration. Dash suggests a reconfiguration of diaspora through the crossing of spatio-temporal boundaries depicted in the Unborn Child's appearances, disappearances and reappearances in the past, present and future. Her final reunion with her mother – entering her mother's womb – paradoxically shows that she has travelled to the present not only from her past ancestors, but also from the future, awaiting her birth.

**DIASPORIC DIS- AND RE-LOCATIONS**

Through numerous travels that evoke the continuous displacements of African-Americans, Dash depicts the shifting spaces as the new, multiple locations of home. Having been violently uprooted from their home in their native land, they subsequently set up home in the U.S., first as slaves and then as liberated citizens. At first they isolated themselves on the Sea Islands far from the mainland to maintain their African culture. Hoping to find better work and living conditions, they later move inland, to the north, and

decide to assimilate into the social, economic and religious aspects of American culture. According to Geneviève Fabre, in the introduction to *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination*, the consequence of uprooting is an impossible or deferred return home. As she claims:

> Due to the traumatic experience of a violent and brutal uprooting as a result of slavery and colonialism, the relation of diaspora to Africa is characterized by the lost homeland (as the place of origin), thus a mythic site constituting a source of inspiration and consolation to which one longs to return. The notion of return raises question on the rethinking of African history and identity. (x)

Dash demonstrates the Africans' relationship to home (originally experienced as a definite separation and loss) in multiple forms of return such as Yellow Mary's and Viola's actual sailing back to Ibo Landing and also in the Unborn Child's imaginary travels in the discontinuous spaces of the past, present and future. Both these literal and metaphorical means of transportation in time and space denote the continuous activities of African-Americans who consciously or unconsciously effect some kind of return to a point of origin. Thus, Africans return to their roots through alternative routes, according to James Clifford's concept of African diaspora. The shifting context of home is depicted in *Daughters of the Dust* as a revisualization of African-Americans' relation to Africa. These descendants keep the memory of their old home alive with African cultural rituals such as Eula's water offerings to her dead mother and Nana's commemoration of her ancestors' spirits in glass jars hung on a tree.

The women teach the children African words and customs brought over from Africa. As Dash writes at the start of the film, the Gullah descendants isolated themselves to observe a distinct and imaginative African culture which they recall and recollect through the memory of these practices. Although the older generation adheres strictly to these customs, the younger family members prefer to adopt American social and religious practices. Haagar vehemently turns away from African belief in cosmic power and the world of spirits, denouncing it as voodoo, to embrace the Christian faith in God. This

generation eagerly looks forward to migrating north for better prospects. Haagar strongly decries the limitation of African ways and opts for a wider vision of the world and life beyond the Sea Islands for herself and her daughters. Through women's aspirations for a better religious and social commitment, Dash portrays the changing notion of home in the African experience of diasporic dispersal and relocation.

Contrary to the idea of departure north in search of a new home, for some Africans there is a new meaning attributed to home in Ibo as a return to the original roots. Besides Nana, the matriarchal figure embodying original African culture, Eula remains in Ibo with her husband Eli, as she strongly adheres to African culture and its ritual practices. She is portrayed as a devout descendant of African ancestors often witnessing and speaking in trance while communicating with departed spirits. Dash shows Yellow Mary's return to Ibo as her definite home to stay with Nana and Eula despite her former travels abroad and assimilation of American culture and religion. Thus, Yellow Mary is seen taking the necessary route to return to her African roots in the Sea Islands. She is happy to be reunited with her family and abandons her plan to travel to Nova Scotia with Trula. Iona shows another instance of return to her roots, leaving her mother Haagar and her sisters just before departing in the sailboat with them, to be united with St. Julian, the last member of the Cherokee tribe. She is portrayed riding on a horse with St. Julian and galloping at full speed into the interior part of the island. Like Yellow Mary, Iona is also taking the route to her roots, in the land where she has grown up with St. Julian. Therefore, she is reunited with a member of the Indian tribe who has also experienced the oppressive conditions of colonialism. The original meaning of home is maintained in the value re-attributed to the land that originally belonged to the Native Indians and is now shared by the Africans. There is a reconstruction of the meaning of home in the image of St. Julian tilling the land and preparing it for himself and his descendants. As he writes to Iona in his letter imploring her to remain with him on the islands, his idea of home is built on the sharing of a future together on this land. He claims that "we are the young, the eager up from slavery. Together with you by my side I feel all is new, all is possible". Therefore, unlike the

conventional theory of impossible return due to diasporic dispersal and continuous relocation, Dash affirms the possibility of re-establishing an ongoing, unending relationship with Africa through the upkeeping of the original meaning and value attributed to 'home' represented in her film as Ibo Landing. This home acts as a passage from Africa to America, in both the physical routes and cultural roots.

The manifold meanings and values assigned to home in the context of the multiple diasporic displacements are evoked in the Unborn Child's discontinuous travels in multiple spatio-temporal dimensions. While she is present with the children in Ibo, she is suddenly transported to a past historical epoch to be among her slave ancestors working on the plantation. In a different scene, she is connected through the stereopticon, to a past time ideal for the rich and the poor alike. The notion of the displaced home, notably during slavery and liberation, is demonstrated through oscillating movement, transposing the past, present and future moments, and back again to the present home at Ibo. As the Unborn Child herself expresses, she experiences a constant displacement in time and space as diverse distractions until her final return home to her parents in Ibo. Dash shows this shifting trajectory through the use of alternating flashbacks to the past and memory of home in former slavery days, as a contrast to the one in the later liberated time. In *Daughters of the Dust*, the disparate views of home constantly disrupt and displace one another in different historical times and geographical places, thus expressing the diasporic condition of Africans. Ruth S. Hamilton describes this notion as follows :

> The nature of the dispersion process [...] associated with enslavement and colonialism is such that there are multiple diasporic identifications with Africa that do not necessarily coincide with legal/political boundaries linked to specific nation-states, past or present. As a place, Africa in the diaspora is part of collective memory, a reference for tradition and heritage. Its symbolic and material significance lies within changing relations and ideas of homeland and diaspora – a dialectic relationship between and within Africa and its diaspora, defined by an ongoing proliferation of passages and marked by the impermanence of place and home. (*Routes of Passage,* 19)

In the flux of movement due to migration (forced or not), the continual crossing of boundaries has rendered the notion of home to mean a transient place. Home has become a social construction derived from the memory of the original home and its traditions, displaced on to present settlements. Therefore, the diasporic concept of home has dislodged the notion from a fixed locale to multiple locations over time.

Moreover, African people express different views of home in relation to their experiences of actual or planned travel. Yellow Mary's return to Ibo, her original home in the U.S., is a return to the African roots she brought over from Africa with her family. To Viola, a Baptist missionary, her notion of home has changed according to her view as a Christian convert. She expresses this new relation to her old home in these terms, "When I left these islands, I didn't know I was a sinner. But as soon as I touched the mainland, I was saved by Jesus Christ". Thus, home has become the place where she expresses a new religious consciousness of the world beyond the limited space of her original African culture in the United States. Viola values God's divine power over spirits and supernatural forces in Africans' cosmic worship and the Muslims' faith in heathen gods influencing African belief.

These differing views of home can be understood according to Ruth S. Hamilton's discussion of the changing definitions of home as follows: "People of the diaspora perceived and defined the same spaces as sites of contestation and rebellion, freedom and refuge, travel and adventure. Job acquisition and in general loci of access to a range of opportunities both within the limits placed on freedom and perceptions of life's possibilities beyond" (*Routes of Passage,* 15). Ibo Landing connotes different meanings of liberation or cultural retention to African-Americans. It perpetuates a strict adherence to African customs and religious belief for Nana and Eula and thus becomes a site of contestation for new converts to Christianity, such as Viola and Haagar. Eula and Eli, Nana's grandchildren who treasure her love and guidance for an African way of life, regard their African home on American soil as refuge from the oppression of slavery. For Yellow

Mary, it offers an opportunity to organize a new relationship with the former home she has left and to which she returns. The possibilities of travel and adventure offered to Yellow Mary in the Sea Islands differ from those longed by Viola and Haagar awaiting them in a new location. Home, thus, simultaneously denotes refuge and accommodation to some, or to others the denial of possibilities, such that access to these opportunities are located elsewhere.

Dash develops representations of the shifting concept of home in the context of the African diaspora. Due to extensive travelling, Africans continually experience a change of places such that their relationship with home has changed. Dash shows the multiple disconnections and reconnections to the place they call their home. Her film suggests a means of (re)locating the many possible venues of "home". The divergent locations are presented through images of travelling as well as (travelling) film techniques. At the beginning, Dash shows the location of Ibo Landing through a moving aerial overview of the islands. Then, there is a focusing, a zooming into an island in the centre of the picture. The static freeze on this image suggests the perception of home as firm settlement after the long passage from Africa across the Atlantic, as reflected in the travelling aerial view.

The image of the wooden signboard with the inscription, "Ibo Landing" is seen at a place near the riverbank signifying the landing site of slave ships. There is a legend of multiple landmarks with this name placed at various locations on the Sea Islands to commemorate the Africans' first arrival as slaves in the U.S. This is reflected in the scene which shows Viola in a heated argument with her photographer about the illegal capture and transportation of African slaves even after the official banning. Dash depicts this through the sweeping motion of the camera that registers a "travelling" image of the riverbank, with a forest in the background. The audience can imagine and feel the presence of the former slaves running and hiding in these trees according to Viola's narration. Dash has chosen to represent plural locations of the landing site through a reflection on another instance of deportation not recorded in official history.

In the numerous scenes revealing the Peazant family members' activities such as African women dancing in groups on the beach, children playing together, women cooking and teaching children, men working on the land, Dash depicts the multiple spaces making up African-Americans' home in the Sea Islands. Dash attempts to depict a vision of "home" through a journey, enacted in film, to explore the multiple spaces in the life of Africans as they search for ways of interacting with each other and with their home. In their various lifestyles recalling African culture through dance, songs, rituals, games, food and activities, African-Americans experience their present home as a connection to their homeland by reconstituting the memory of their past history. Their present home integrates a re-collection of the multiple aspects of African culture sustained through daily activities and practices.

However, this somewhat archaic notion of a former home displaced onto their present dwelling in the United States is observed alongside more recent developments. Ibo Landing reflects their former dwelling and work on the plantations when the Unborn Child returns to this historical period of slavery and witnesses grandfather Peazant counting the dye bricks "eene, meena, mina". As she travels forward to their contemporary home, she sees children playing with images in a Sears order magazine and using the same manner of counting the images as did their great grandfather. After having shown them the rule of this game, an African-American woman further adds to this ritual by saying "this is how my mother taught me". Thus, the audience is given a look at a cultural practice in the present that dates from the past and is passed on from one generation to the next. Ibo Landing, the Africans' contemporary dwelling, is depicted as a crossroads where past customs meet in the present. The children, uttering the same words as their great grandfather did, perpetuate the ancestors' language and habits of the old home in the new world. Although the present home in Ibo is far removed from their ancestors' plantation, the juxtaposition of the two positions shows them as interrelated spaces.

Another example of distinct and interrelated spaces shared by the older and the younger generations is the Africans' different religious practices. Yellow Mary wears the medal of St. Christopher, the Patron Saint of travellers on her return to Ibo. During the intimate reunion with her granddaughter, Nana herself ties her mother's lock of hair, as the only relic she possesses, to a Bible to offer a blessing to her descendants for their migration. Although Nana does not believe in God, she still keeps a copy of the Bible for protection.

Through divergent re-presentations of the past cultural beliefs and practices of the former homeland in the present, Dash depicts the intricate relationships between the old and the new homes of the African diaspora. Home for the African-Americans actually denotes the diversity of places, spaces and cultural practices.

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## *HISTORY AND MEMORY: FOR AIKIKO AND TAKASHIGE:*

## REVISITING POSTON CAMP

Somewhat similar to *Daughters of the Dust*, *History and Memory* depicts a return to a historical site of pain and suffering resulting from racial oppression. Yet unlike Dash's boat trip, Rea Tajiri takes a car ride back to a Second World War concentration camp. In contrast to Dash's fictional presentation of the history of slavery and migration, Tajiri produces video images recalling her family's past experience of internment in Arizona. However, she also incorporates various clips of Hollywood and official government footage of Japanese relocations to situate her personal memories in the context of dominant cultural (mis)representations of history. In this way, she locates her work in the dual context of history and film history.

To revive her mother's memory of the traumatic experience of uprootedness and dispersal from home, Rea takes her back to Poston Camp by car. She videotapes the drive, reconstructing, through images of the area, her mother's memory of her deportation by train and relocation to a concentration camp built temporarily on a native reserve site. Through her revisitation to Poston Camp, Tajiri constructs a video re-presentation of the geographical location that is simultaneously a historical site, and of U.S. Government racial oppression, in this case, of Japanese Americans. Due to the great sadness of leaving home, her mother has repressed the memory of deportation and forgets details such as the existence of a canteen at Salinas, a little village near Poston. However, the video images of these locations bring back the past. Tajiri's video re-enactment of the experience of deportation through a visit to the site serves as a means of bearing witness to historical events and places, effected through the dual physical transportation by car and the metaphorical re-presentation by video. The narrow link between transportation and representation demonstrates the way Tajiry and her mother perceive the relationship of their physical movement with the metaphorical return to the past through memory. Just as the

automobile transports the passenger to a past geographical site, the video image recalls the absent memory through the presence of the landmarks. This notion of "travelling" can be perceived according to Heather Norris Nicholson's discussion in *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity* as follows: "The travelling amateur filmmaker contributes a rich visual dimension to the study of past geographies. [...] Visual imagery is an important constituent of memory as processes of change displace and replace landscapes, cultures, [etc.]" (62). Tajiri's video, viewed from this perspective of the travelling visual artist, demonstrates how memory stages the double processes of displacing crucial landscapes from past historical and traumatic experiences, and subsequently replaces them through images. Her video depicts an alternative representation of history based on personal versions of memory. In contrast to her mother's "screen memory" that displaces the experience of Poston Camp from her mind, Rea depicts an unconscious memory of a place she has never known. She describes it in this way:

> I began searching for a history, my own history because I had known all along that the stories I had heard were not true and parts had been left out. [...] There was this place that they knew about. I had never been there, yet I had a memory for it. I could remember a time of great sadness before I was born. We had been moved, uprooted. We had lived with a lot of pain. I had no idea where these memories came from yet I knew the place.

Even though Tajiri does not know the actual location of her mother's internment before her birth, she nevertheless bears the reminiscences of the misery experienced there and has the impression as if she knew of its existence. In her depiction of the former existence of Poston Camp in her video, she reveals her attempt at a re-presentation of history to counter the dominant cultural (mis)representation. As Nicholson affirms,

> Amateur travel films are one way of tapping into people's memories about themselves as travelers and how they relate to others in contrasting settings. They offer a moving window on people's private geographies and how they give significance to the worlds they inhabit and traverse. They frame memories and experiences that complement more formal, official [...] versions of

> actuality. Home-produced travelogues bring together objective and subjective realms as filmmakers produce images that derive from interaction between physical and social reality, perception and experience. (*Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity,* 62)

Tajiri's video not only reconstructs the memory of her mother's former deportation and removal from home, but also the ways in which interpretations differ according to people's experiences, perceived in the contrasting situations of her own imaginary memory of a mysterious place and her mother's amnesia of the events. Therefore, her video offers a shifting notion of place according to the actual traversing of physical space and various memories of a historical location. Moreover, her travelling video explores the changing concept of place with regard to the sense of belonging. She questions the general injustice done to 110,000 Japanese who were interned and the particular deportation of her father's and her mother's families while her father was serving the U.S. army in the Second World War. Her video images of the return to the past site of racial discrimination interrogate the displaced notion of home in the U.S. government's policy of deporting its Japanese-American citizens. In a way, her video offers the possibility of understanding the Japanese-Americans' history from their experiences of deportation, in terms of spatial relations.

Tajiri starts and ends her video with an image of her mother filling a canteen with water from a dripping faucet in the arid space of the camp. She expresses her difficulty connecting a narrative to this image she has imagined from the story her mother told her about life in the concentration camp. She shows a further displacement from an understanding of self in relation to past historical events as an extension of her mother's inability of recalling the painful experiences of internment as a result of distancing herself from the trauma. Tajiry here encounters the problem of an incoherent and discontinuous story of her mother's and her own history. Besides returning to Poston Camp to restage her mother's deportation experiences, Rea further depicts her mother's displacement by standing in for her in the image of the woman filling the canteen with water. Tajiri's disjunctive representation of her family's experiences is perceived as a reframing of

personal memories – her own version replacing her mother's amnesic version – to disrupt the apparently coherent and unproblematic official history.

Tajiri demonstrates the disruptive quality of her historical consciousness through multiple visions of the Poston Camp. A mobile view of the vestiges of the camp and its surrounding is shown through the window of the moving car. She then repositions it historically with photos showing the construction of the barracks in Arizona in 1942. The juxtaposition of mobile and fixed images denotes the incoherent and continuously shifting focus of a historical location.

**ALTERNATIVE RE-VISION OF HISTORY**

Tajiri's re-vision of her family's experiences of internment serves as a counter-memory to the official history. In addition to the image of her mother gathering water (symbolising the Japanese irrigation to cultivate a desert), she further suggests the presence of her grandfather's ghost at the time of the removal of their home. The white words on a black screen display her grandfather's confirmation that their house was stolen despite the government's declaration of confiscation. Thus, Tajiri strongly depicts the presence of the Japanese (through the imaginary witnessing of her grandfather's ghost and the image of her mother collecting water) to counter their absence from historical representation in commercial and U.S. government war film.

Tajiri confirms the role of her mother and grandfather's ghost as special observers of the Japanese experience of racial oppression. Her video presentation of travel depicts the transitional phases of history experienced by Japanese in their deportation and relocation. She entrusts to her mother and grandfather the testimony of the various stages of racial discrimination. Furthermore, she enlists spectators, in her "travelling" video, as passengers experiencing the simultaneous vision in her car and the re-presentation of the Japanese history of internment. The spectators observe, in the mode of travelling presented by Tajiri, a means of reconnecting with the past experience of internment.

Tajiri exposes the deferential way in which her sister, much like her mother, refrains from a direct encounter with emotional experience. She further examines her sister's activity of keeping a box of photographs of white Hollywood stars in automobiles. By including these shots, she further probes the elusive nature of photographic representation, which indirectly captures movement in static shots. Both time and space are made to stand still and their progression arrested in a fixed moment and a single space of photography. These photographs further expose the way in which dominant cultural representations, featured in Hollywood commercial cinema, only present white people in a monolithic figuration, totally eclipsing other cultural expressions.

Tajiri challenges official versions of history both in Hollywood and U.S. government films justifying Japanese internment from an American viewpoint. She develops numerous strategies to counter the historical misrepresentations in mainstream cultural production and explains Hollywood films as substitutions for absent or missing historical information. These images are put in front of the screen to construct a re-presentation. However, as depicted in her sister's indirect staging of her photographic subject, the Japanese figure is objectified. This scene serves to demonstrate both the ways Hollywood films and government footage are imbued with racial discrimination and how the Japanese respond to their misrepresentation.

Tajiri's video also attempts to fill in the information missing from the official version of history. In her exploration of historical representations, she questions the ways in which events are recorded, elucidating the role of visual imagery in the reconstruction of history through memory in film. She contests both the American government's justification of the necessity of internment and Hollywood's imaginative representation of an American man defending his Japanese wife, which is described by her film critic nephew as "sentimental mush". She interrogates the viewpoints through which "the camera is watching" the historical event of internment. She counters both the visual images of real and imagined historical representation with the unofficial memory created from the witnessing by her grandfather's ghost. She thus confirms the need for such a personal historical record as a

means of constituting the memory of the Japanese experiences that have not been given any representation.

At the beginning, she establishes a superior viewpoint in her grandfather's ghost's watching events from above, suggesting her grandfather's spiritual presence witnessing her parents' quarrel over their daughter's nightmare on the event of the twentieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbour. The ghost is presented in Tajiri's video as a traveller traversing different spatio-temporal dimensions from the past to the present scene of her parents' quarrel, bearing the memory of internment. She makes innovative use of this type of collective memory to attest to American maltreatment of the Japanese. She shows the grandfather's ghost as overseer whose presence establishes a form of subjective memory in contrast to the 'objective' view in dominant cultural (mis)representations. She also depicts a far-reaching vision of history incorporating a wider perception of human experiences and relations to critique simplified presentations or simulations of the past. Japanese history, from her grandfather's perspective, is perceived as an ongoing vision of suppressed feelings that demand expression. Her grandfather's vision is presented as a reflection of the long lasting consequences of the racist American oppression of the Japanese.

Due to the permeating feeling of displacement from their home, Rea offers a non-linear view of Japanese history through collective memories to disrupt the typical flow of narrative. Both the scenes of her mother drawing water and her grandfather's imaginary presence recur twice in the video at different moments to demonstrate the notion of constant displacement and disruption in the process of historical investigation by looking back and re-evaluating omissions or suppressions. As Marita Sturken asserts in *Politics of Video Memory: Electronic Erasures in Inscriptions*, "history is a process of displacement" (182). Tajiri promotes a displaced view of history through the juxtaposition of multiple layers of official and personal/collective memory. She interweaves different forms of narrative, government footage with commercial movies as well as family photographs, recordings of her family memories, her uncle's letter which she reads in her home "movie" presentation of her return to Poston Camp and reflections on the past internment

experience. She shows the Japanese-Americans' somewhat haphazard understanding of their history in various fragments which are focused and refocused in a variety of ways. She depicts the changing views of a "travelling" (both physical and metaphorical) representation as a tool for the re-interpretation of past historical events.

She interrupts clips of *Bad Day at Black Rock*, a Hollywood fiction made in 1954, with the presentation of a *New York Times* article from August 28, 1990 showing these words, "Assemblyman Gil Ferguson, a Republican from Orange County, California, seeks to have children taught that Japanese-Americans were not interned in "concentration camps but rather were held in 'relocation' centers justified by military necessity". Tajiri reveals the contradictory aspects of historical representation through Hollywood image and the scrolling newspaper article. By juxtaposing these contrasting elements, she challenges the single viewpoint of the Hollywood and government (mis)representations of the Japanese camp experience. Moreover, she breaks up the linear chronology in the conventional narrative to enable a more open and flexible reflection of historical events. *History and Memory* promotes a new form of observation in the shifting perspective of a travelling representation. Her video can be considered as depicting a panoramic view of myriad visions of history through different and contrasting forms of representation. Her filming strategy suggests a "panorama", whereby the camera is in motion on a vehicle, either a boat or an automobile.[7] Her return route to Poston in a car physically enacts a mobile panoramic vision through the camera in motion. As the car progressively moves forward, images of landscapes are seen receding into the back. This vision inspires a continual return to the visual imagery already depicted in the video, such as the image of her mother collecting water. This image guides Tajiri on her physical journey to Poston Camp in her search for the Japanese-Americans' history of internment. At the end, she closes with it, as a connection to history through the memory she has revived in her mother. Through the receding perspective of panoramic movement of the camera Tajiri shows (as I earlier

[7] See Carol Traynor Williams, ed. in *Travel Culture: What Makes Us Go*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger,1998, p.31.

discussed) the mobile view of Poston site juxtaposed with the static, photographic image of the camp under construction in 1942.

The metaphorical implications of panoramic representation can be observed in Tajiri's discussion of an image of her grandmother's "bird carving lesson". She recounts her memory of her mother forbidding her to play with it when she was a little girl so as not to damage it. Her mother told her that her grandmother has fashioned the bird with her fingers and that Rea should not deform the bird by handling it. Therefore, the panoramic vision through the photograph is further displayed in the hand-carved bird, a relic kept as a vestige of the past since her mother and her family have moved on from the history of internment.

Rapid motion is shown in the camera reflecting the speed of the automobile advancing towards the site of past internment. This not only reveals the memory of a painful displacement from home but also the aggressive nature of deportation as a consequence of racial oppression during the Second World War. Tajiri reveals the devastated experience of 110,000 Japanese people dispossessed of their belongings and uprooted from their home to be interned in concentration camps even when though they were American citizens. As discussed by Carol Traynor in *Travel Culture: Essays on What Makes Us Go*, "[t]hese images, in which the audience is 'carried along' by both images and modes of transport, seem to act out the aggressive appropriation of space" (34). Spectators perceive, together with Tajiri and her mother, the space traversed by travelling through the camera showing rapidly moving images animated by the speed of the car. Tajiri reveals the layers of historical interpretation through various approaches that shift the focus of representation from U.S. army footage to commercial films and home movies. Spectators watching her video experience the travellers' vision of Japanese internment from multiple angles and perspectives. She therefore illustrates the displacement among the representations so as to distance the travelling spectator from a single, fixed viewpoint of any discourse. Indeed, she demonstrates the necessity of incorporating a pluralistic vision to dislodge historical representation from a monolithic interpretation.

In this way, Tajiri's video can be perceived according to Guiliana Bruno's application to film of the term *transito* coined by Italian philosopher Mario Perniola to denote moments of multifaceted circulation such as the physical and mental movement during passages, transitions and traversing. These aspects of movement and transit can be seen in the strategies Tajiri employs to escape confinement within an ideological representation. Her video enacts a panoramic view of history in order to depict not only the images of past oppressive conditions but also to offer the possibility of envisaging new means of evasion through mobility and flight.

The constant shift in angles and visions of history, mirroring the displacement from official representation to personal and collective memory, depicts "travelling" shots as an attempt to steer free of the conventional system of a linear, fixed and singular representation. The repetitions of her mother's image and her address about her search for her own history denote the displaced and disjointed nature of Japanese history due to deportation, and return as a means of reconnection with their past. The multilayered presentation of her video provides a space for the Japanese-Americans to resist their oppression amidst the dominant cultural representations in a re-envisioning of the context of racial discrimination in both history and film.

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## *SURNAME VIET, GIVEN NAME NAM:*
## DIASPORA AND CULTURAL TRANSLATION

In her film *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam*, Trinh T. Minh-ha presents an innovative view of diaspora through a two-part, contrasting presentation: staged interviews of Vietnamese women followed by a subsequent revelation of these women's real life experiences in the United States. This structural duality re-enacts the political division that separated Vietnam into northern communist and southern capitalist areas. The unification of the country into an entire communist state in 1975 after the withdrawal of American troops has created an extensive diasporic population through widespread migrations to the U.S., Germany, France and Asia. Trinh chose to focus on the Vietnamese diaspora from a multiperspectival approach by reflecting on Vietnamese culture, female subjectivity, traditional (poetic) language and history going back to the context of independence from the ancient Chinese domination as a result of the resistance of Vietnamese women whose legends continue to serve as an inspiration for female emancipation. Trinh uses the female figure metaphorically as an image of Vietnam suffering many years of devastating wars. The recurring image of a boat helmed by a woman on a stormy sea, accompanied by the sound of a female voice reciting a poem about constant struggle and loss of control depicts the causes and conditions of the 'boat peoples'. This subtle image is similar to the boat trip taken by Yellow Mary and Viola upon their return to Ibo Landing and recalls the sea passage in the deportation from Africa in *Daughters of the Dust*. It recalls the traumatic transportation of millions of Vietnamese refugees on the high sea, many of whom tragically lost their lives. Those who survived were picked up in Guam and taken to the United States. Trinh also uses an image of Vietnamese refugees floating on rafts during the 1950's to represent the massive migration of boat people in the 70's.

Trinh shows the transition from the experience of oppression under the socialist government in Vietnam to the freedom enjoyed after liberation in the United States in the duality of Vietnamese women's voices speaking for those in Vietnam and for themselves regarding their new lives. The split in the documentary form and the "real life"

presentation is suggestive of the diasporic experiences of Vietnamese women who were in Vietnam and have now migrated overseas. Yet the re-enactment by Vietnamese women who are actually living in the U.S. reveals a sharp contrast between the presence of the Vietnamese-American women and the absence of Vietnamese women for whom they speak; their voices suggest numerous possible "realities" such as imprisonment, exile or migration. The diasporic conditions are shown in the Vietnamese-American women's presence and their dual performance for others and themselves. The second part, thus, not only restages the past experiences of women in Vietnam but also further depicts the present and future of those women who have departed and are now living in the U.S. Trinh develops the strategy of mixing mise-en-scène in the first part and using formal shooting as if in normal interviews for the second part depiction – the depiction of Vietnamese women's experiences in the U.S. I perceive her transition in filming techniques as a transit in the visioning of both history and historical representation according to Perniola's notion of *transito* which I used above to discuss Tajiri's method of displacing the official record with her own (re)presentation, a personal and collective Japanese experience of internment.

By mixing staged performance with a conventional documentary style and reversing real life situations, Trinh employs a transitory method of refocusing history in order to disrupt formal cinematic and viewing expectations. She relieves what she calls the burden of representation in her decision to "act on the frame" that frees the strict question and answer form by fostering multiple possibilities that can go in many directions. As she explains, there is a displacement from reality to its representation in the illustration of interview as "a metaphorical referent to reality". If the dispersal of truth is the essential element of the documentary form, Trinh reassigns another vision of 'inter-passage', allowing for a more flexible representation in which spectators are offered alternative views of the complex diasporic situations of Vietnamese-American women. In the first part, the idea of "transit" is present in the Vietnamese-American women's words as they speak about the past experiences of those who underwent socialist reunification in Vietnam; this is further carried on in the second part when they reveal that they are acting both for the

women in Vietnam and for themselves regarding their new life in the U.S. In a way, the perception of the transit from the first to the second part of the interview can be considered metaphorically as a "panoramic" presentation of the camera which moves through the multiple facets of Vietnamese diaspora to show constant mobility in space, time, culture and language.

Trinh depicts this displacement through multiple strategies in both the representation of subject and form. As she has revealed, it is through the past that the spectators understand the history of the Vietnamese experiences of suffering – both racial domination by China and patriarchal maltreatment of women through double exploitation of sacrifice through work and a total submission to male authority. Yet I perceive a displacement in the vision of Vietnamese women's diasporic conditions from the perspective of interviews of the women in the U.S. When viewing the past through the present, an alternative vision is created of the transformation and the difference enacted by these Vietnamese-American women who subsequently reflect on their performance both in terms of their experiences in Vietnam and their status as actresses in Trinh's film.

It is through the re-enactments that spectators are shown a richer picture of Vietnamese women's past exploitation and present diasporic adaptation in America. This not only makes up for absent women whose testimonies are staged but also enables a re-interpretation of past events extended into present living conditions. The divergence from absence to presence and from past to present experiences can be understood as the diasporic displacement viewed in the gaps between the women's memories and Trinh's filming strategies. Linda Peckham describes Trinh's depiction of a gap between past interviews and present reconstruction as

> a disturbing demarcation of an abyss between the camera and the woman, between the viewer and the experience. It is when we recall that the speaker is an actress, a substitute, a "fake", that the interview style becomes in a way subversive – for the artificial subject points to the absence of a "real" speaker, as well as the survival of a witness, a record – a history. (*Screening Asian Americans,* 238)

Trinh draws the line between history as a record of past events and as a story of absent subjects such that a historical representation can be viewed as the transition from a seemingly loyal rendering to an imaginative re-envisioning. In her book *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, Trinh draws out this distinction in her concept of "a work that involves her story in history, a work that acknowledges the difference between lived experience and representation" (149). I consider that the metaphorical displacement separating the Vietnamese women's stories from history is depicted in their performances according to the figure of *prosopopeia*, the invocation of absent, inanimate or dead women by the giving of a face and a voice. Through the stage performance and the mise-en-scène animating the documentary sessions of five women lending their voice and figure, Trinh re-presents "inter-views" as the oral testimonies of women's past oppression in Vietnam similar to Tajiri's return to the internment site of the former Poston Camp in her car ride and through memory in the re-presentation of video to attest to the history of Japanese internment.

In the second part of Trinh's film, the women's revelation of their role as actresses demonstrates the (re)figuration of the absent women as a film representation of their actual experiences. One Vietnamese-American woman further reveals her intuitive tact in the lies she systematically tells for her survival. Trinh exposes an alternative image of "inter-view" in the subtle passage from truth to lies, and also in the numerous variations of the representations of the "truth". The truth demanded in the Vietnamese women's confessions of their life activities to their socialist party officials is revealed in the first part by a Vietnamese actress as a "fabricated" copy which she literally retranscribes each time, observing all the details including the commas and the periods. Trinh, thus, reveals the details of conventional representation through this testimony, as a (re)construction of authenticity that can easily be forged in a representation. Yet, as one woman in the U.S. recounts to her family members, this is but an unimaginative, fake and deceptive version to satisfy inquisitive and intruding officials. Thus, Trinh re-presents her "inter-view" as an unconventional exploration beyond the limits of an essentializing documentary form

through multiple points-of-view opening up a dialogue between a strict notion of the interview (in the first section) and a reflection on "truth" in representation (in the second part).

Trinh also portrays the gaps between the "reality" of documentary style and that of the lived experiences of Vietnamese women both in Vietnam and in multiple forms of transitions. She creates a re-envisioning of Vietnamese history through a presentation of collective memory in traditional poetry, proverbs and songs, and the relationships between images and words in filmic texts, between the visible and the audible, between repetitions and silences/pauses, etc. To depict a subversive aspect of Vietnamese history, she interrupts the formal interviews of five women with the stories of three legendary women's heroic lives and acts. She cites the bravery of two Trung sisters who engaged themselves in patriotic battles to save Vietnam from China and committed suicide when they met with defeat. Trinh also recounts Kieu's unconventional behaviour in defying the female code of conduct to become a prostitute and a nun to save her father and brother from disgrace before being reunited to her first love. Trinh thus reveals the complexity of Vietnamese women's lives in the numerous deviations from the expected norm of behaviour. For example, the heroic Vietnamese women's physical and metaphorical displacements from home and expected social roles are perceived as a challenge to conventional authenticity. Moreover, the three special female figures further extend, through a hyperbolic magnification, the absence of the five women represented through the Vietnamese-American women's personification. Therefore, the articulation of the women's oppressive experiences also reflects past history and the unwritten testimonies of former heroic female figures. Besides narrating the outstanding achievements of these key national figures, Trinh also includes the recitation of folk poetry describing the multiple forms of suffering endured by ordinary women during wars as a recollection of absent voices of women from the historical record.

Trinh also interrupts the studio performance of the interviews with documentary footage of a Vietnamese poetess who set herself aflame as a protest against continuous

warfare. The juxtaposition of these two types of performances denote the textual re-enactment of absence in presence, revealing the limits which can be perceived in the woman's death performed as a public act that ends her personal life. The visual image of her self-immolation further reflects the Trung sisters' suicide as a visible sign of female emotional turmoil and desperation in the face of unbearable suffering. Trinh exposes the deep hidden ability of interviews as the giving of voices to absent women, which ultimately reduces their existence to silence according to the conventions of *prosopopeia*. Thus, she denounces interviews as artificial re-**present**ations of past historical events through the personification of female subjects.

The frequent breaks in the formal sequence of interviews cause a rupture in the conventional documentary style and thus reflect the female heroic figures' resistance to dominant authority through their numerous forms of confrontation. These pauses re-enact their silence and non-compliance to the forceful imposition of power such as Chinese domination and the strict code of behaviour for women regulating their activities and relationship with their husbands. Moreover, the repetition of certain images, notably the lone woman navigating a boat on the sea, and songs and poems about the adverse conditions of a woman without a husband, serve to show the subversive nature of female intervention in history. Trinh displaces the original negative meaning of this traditional view of the need for women to be controlled by a male figure: a father when she is a child, a husband when she is grown, and a son when she is old. Trinh shows the dual aspects of historical representation and the repetitive activity of reflecting on history from another perspective, that of the shifting relationship between documentary form and collective memories.

Through the repetitions of numerous breaks and recurring images, Trinh presents an alternative view of history. The first time the interview is interrupted by an image accompanied by a song or a poem of female etiquette, an example of a traditional view of history is given to illustrate the women's experiences of oppression and suffering after the story of the two Trung sisters and the poetess. However, when the image is shown a

second time, spectators notice a contrasting effect in that it constitutes a challenge to both the prescriptive norm of femininity and to strict documentary representation.

In addition, the multilayered composition of the interviews incorporates a second section as a re-view of the formal presentation through comments about the staged performance and an extended view of these actresses' real life experiences. The past is displaced to the present moments, and social situations in Vietnam are extended to those in the U.S. For example, Trinh depicts the shifts in the multiple roles played by a woman who, according to her friends, becomes a well-known actress in Trinh's film while she herself articulates her complex role of adaptation to life and work in the U.S. She reveals herself as a pioneer in being the first and only woman engineer in an American firm after receiving education in the U.S. Yet she feels doubly disadvantaged as an Asian and as a woman working in an organization made up of all American male colleagues. Moreover, Trinh illustrates Vietnamese women's dual cultural experiences by showing this Vietnamese-American woman's adherence to her own traditions in the celebration of the marriage ceremony of her younger brother according to the Vietnamese ritual. Thus, Trinh exposes the shifting passages between multicultural ways of life in the representation of the (two-part) interviews as visions of the cultural transition. Trinh expresses her own development of the interview style in this way:

> The interview can certainly be an art, but it is also just one among the many possible forms of relating. If we put aside the fact that the popular use of the interviews is largely bound by an ideology of authenticity, [...] I would say that the interview is, at best, a device that interrupts the power of speaking, that creates gaps and detour, and that invites one to move in more than one direction at a time. It allows me to return to my work or to the creative process with different ears and eyes, while I try to articulate the energies, ideas, and feelings that inspire it. It is in the *interval* between interviewer and interviewee, in the movement between listening and speaking or between the spoken word and the written word, that I situate the necessity for interviews. (*Cinema Intervals*, 4).

The frequent interruptions, detours, repetitions and returns to the interviews in *Surname Viet* recall the multiple forms of representation of history and memory of Japanese

internment in *History and Memory* and also the appearances and disappearances in different spatio-temporal dimensions of the Unborn Child in *Daughters of the Dust*. In a way, Trinh employs the same strategy, as do Tajiri and Dash, of incorporating stories of and by women to challenge dominant history. These filmmakers and videographers contest a linear chronology through a presentation of female perception of cyclical time in their multigenerational narratives of history and cultural activity. To illustrate the diasporic experiences of women over time, Trinh shows that the authenticity of the boat people's experiences cannot be tied to a specific moment. She says in an interview she herself had that she has decided to show women's history not only in a fixed period but through numerous events and moments. Trinh liberates historical representation from its settled form of documentary realism through a presentation of multiple images and texts in order to reveal the deeply repressed authentic experiences of women. To expose the limits of conventional documentary style, she shows the gaps between images and sounds, and in the disparity of voices between listening and speaking and the difference between the spoken and the written word. Although these interviews are performed in the U.S., they represent the social conditions of the women in Vietnam, where the Vietnamese writer Mai Thu Van has organized a book compilation of these interviews entitled *Vietnam: un peuple, des voix*.[8] Yet the book has already displaced the original voices of women interviewed in Vietnam to the texts published in France. Thus, Trinh's re-presentation of the images and voices of women is a double displacement of the oral testimonies of the socio-political transformation in Vietnam in the 70s first to the book published by Mai Thu Van in France in 1983, and then to the film made by Trinh in the United States in 1991.

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[8] Mai Thu Van, *Vietnam: un peuple, des voix.* Paris : Pierre Horay, 1983. Mai was born in New Caledonia as a second generation exile. Her mother was sent there by force to work on nickel mines because her village members rebelled against the French colonials. Mai came to Paris to work at age twenty-three and went to Vietnam in 1978 to research Vietnamese women. A Marxist, she saw in Hanoi liberated women who have disturbed old concepts to meet socialism. Her visit to Vietnam helped to dispel the stereotypes of Vietnamese women construed by the press.

Trinh further questions the possibility of representing authenticity from a single viewpoint, either from an image or a voice in an interview. She opens up the fixed frame enclosing the interviewer-interviewee relation to engage the spectators' participation in a re-envisioning of history. She re-presents history from other eyes and other ears not only through images of women at different times and places but also invites the audience to act as viewers and readers of her work.

Linda Peckham elaborates on Trinh's re-presentation of history as a project that

> has been translated into/by a new context ... in which the alteration and manipulation of images emphasize translation as a process of reading, or rather rereading. Rereading as performed by the filmmaker (spoken, transcribed and translated) and also rereading as a task or responsibility transferred to the viewer as a self-reflexive event, where examples subtitling no longer facilitates unconscious translation/consumption, but ruptures the reading process; sometimes it is absent and part of a conversation remains inaccessible; sometimes there are two voices speaking simultaneously, giving equal importance to both, when they are in English, or English and Vietnamese.... Rereading and subtitling are taken to a literal extreme, however, in the interviews that are conducted in English, where text covers and invades the entire image. There is a rather absurd redundancy in subtitling English for an English speaking audience, especially in filling the whole frame with printed text, print that is large and too bold. (*Screening Asian Americans*, 241)

Trinh displaces the cultural context from the original French language in the book to the English language spoken by the Vietnamese-American women in the interviews in Trinh's film. Her transcription of some Vietnamese poetry and proverbs further splits the task of cultural translation from her rewriting of the Vietnamese traditional history to the audience's rereading of fragmentary subtitles. She disrupts the interviews through these digressive acts of translation to break up the normal unfolding of narrative with the intrusion of a second voice or with a printed text covering the image. The regular images and voices of women in the interviews are disturbed by the spectators' activity of listening or reading which can be considered as an addition or a redundancy of English translation of

interviews for an English speaking audience. Trinh thus shows, through the exaggerated use of translation and subtitling, the unnecessary intervention in documentary presentation of history to forge authenticity and to influence spectators' credibility.

In addition, she dispels the concomitance of sounds and images by showing fragments of texts that either anticipate or follow the voices after they have delivered the speech. The continuous relationship between the image, the voice and the text is broken to depict the notion of displaced time and space in Vietnamese diasporic conditions. Reel time is displayed as separated from "real" time to mark the transitions between the past to the present and displaced translation as adaptation to American culture after the experience of socialist oppression in Vietnam. As mentioned above, Trinh's filming technique can thus be best understood according to Giuliana Bruno's understanding of *transito* as a possibility of liberating the presentation of history from the constraints of objective realism. Together with Teshome Gabriel's notion of "travelling aesthetics" breaking up the linearity of time in a multiple vision of events, places and moments, the *transito* enables Trinh to depict lines of flight as an escape from a strict form.

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# PART TWO
# WOMEN'S (MULTI)CULTURAL IDENTITIES

## INTRODUCTION

In addition to the challenges to representation, there is a (re)construction of women's cultural identities in each of the three representations of diasporic experience. I will now further focus on the concept of mobility in the transformation of women's subjectivities according to the notion of "travelling culture". The central theme in this section is the multiple differences in women's cultural identities according to their diverse social and religious practices and beliefs. My analysis is conducted from the perspective of the relations between race, gender and sexuality in the women's narrative. I will explore the ways in which Dash, Tajiri and Trinh depict women's interactions in their socio-cultural contexts to promote their self-definition and empowerment as a resistance to oppressive external forces. I will also analyse how these three filmmakers depict alternative views of women's identities that transcend traditional social roles through the imaginative use of liberating strategies of resistance against exploitation as a challenge to the conventional portrayal of women as objects of representation in dominant patriarchal culture. These filmmakers show that the creation of new female subjectivities as possibilities is necessary for self-expression in order to change the negative perception of their prescriptive social roles.

Each artist, in her own way, challenges the linearity of historiographic periodization through the juxtaposition of visual images out of chronological order to re-articulate the palimpsestic (trans)formation in the cultural (ex)changes of diaspora. The fragmented narratives illustrate the re-presentations of multiple languages, religions and experiences of women's lives and self-expressions. The artists under consideration display multilayered

narratives with contradictory film texts and dissonance in sounds and images so as to evoke the disconnections resulting from diasporic conditions as well as the reconnection of women's subjectivities to their multicultural identities.

**AFRICAN-AMERICAN DIASPORIC SUBJECTIVITIES**

In *Daughters of the Dust*, Julie Dash situates African-American women's cultural identities in relation to their diasporic experiences of location, dislocation and relocation due to the continuous flow of movements in their travels. She presents the interactions between many generations of women through their multiple narratives and pluralistic points of view to evoke the multi-directionality in their historical trajectories. These palimpsestic narratives situate women's subjectivities at the crossroads of race, sex, gender and age/generations in a reconstruction of identities that illustrates a repositioning of the self in constantly shifting situations. Dash draws out both the literal and metaphorical aspects of travelling cultural identities through a cinematographic re-presentation of the disparate historical moments across multiple geographical locations of African-American women's mobile subjectivities.

The intersecting narratives of Nana, the Unborn Child and Eula recount the crucial experience of travelling as the main characteristic constituting the Peazants' identities. At the beginning of *Daughters of the Dust*, Nana is seen rising from the water and wearing an indigo-coloured dress, thus recalling her former deportation from Africa to the Sea Islands. She describes her complex historical identity in dualities oscillating between extreme polarities, thereby setting out the full range of diasporic conditions. She articulates her situation as follows:

> I am the first and the last
> I am the honoured one and the scorned one
> I am the whore and the holy one
> I am the wife and the virgin
> I am the barren one and many are my daughters

Belonging to the first generation of Africans transported to the United States, Nana has now become the last survivor and a liberated African-American. Although speaking about her personal experience, she may also evoke those of many African-American women who have been abused and raped by white men on the plantations where they worked. Indeed, her narrative recalls the history of many African women under the oppression of colonialism. Dash illustrates this inevitable situation in Yellow Mary's sad memories of her sexual aggression by a white man while working as a wet nurse to his children during the days of slavery. This is reflected in the revelation of Eula's rape by a white man, which is only hinted at, long after the emancipation of African slaves. However, Dash aims at an alternative presentation of African-American women – in Eula's own words, "We are all good women" – when she exhorts other women to respect Yellow Mary on her return to Ibo Landing. Although Yellow Mary is scorned by older women such as Haagar for having worked in Cuba as a prostitute for her survival and bringing disgrace to the Peazant family, she is nevertheless respected by Eula and the younger generation of women who appreciate her sending money home to save her nephew from prison. Eula speaks out not only for Yellow Mary, but also for herself and for those women who have been oppressed: "If you love yourself, love Yellow Mary". In this way, Dash situates African-American women's identities in the context of the historical alienation of women as devalued sexual objects in white patriarchal domination such that an adequate representation of their personality would reveal their complex nature as female subjects honoured for their capacity for extending love and care for those in need, although themselves victims of oppression.

Nana, the matriarch embodying African culture, is perceived as the key figure representing all African-American women in both their positive and negative experiences, over many generations, from slavery time to the twentieth century. As Gloria Gibson-Hudson claims,

> Black women as heroines, Black women in exile, Black women sold into slavery, and Black women who fight for freedom, these cultural and political identities serve to counterpoint the one-dimensional hegemonic and patriarchal images that are typically

> seen in mainstream cinema. (*Black Women Film and Video Artists*, 62)

As an independent filmmaker, Dash challenges the monolithic misrepresentation of African-American women in dominant cultural cinema with an alternative envisioning of the multiple facets of their socio-political identity. She re-presents these women in their diverse experiences of oppression and emancipation, in their dual states as both helpless victims and freedom fighters. More significantly, Dash focuses on the transformation of these women from their passive submission to an active reclamation of their socio-cultural identity. She depicts African-American women's redefinition of their own subjectivities in both Eula's and Yellow Mary's articulation of their passage from their former to their present selves in a cultural continuity. When Eula refuses to disclose to her husband, Eli, the name of her sexual aggressor, insisting that "no good would come from knowing", she struggles to establish her female sexual identity through independence from both the white and black man's domination. Nana can be seen supporting Eula's position by telling Eli that he cannot get back what he has never owned when he furiously told her that a white man has taken his wife from him. Moreover, Dash confirms Eula's integrity by showing the image of the Unborn Child, Eli's daughter, as an African girl.

Dash promotes cultural continuity in African-American women's identity through the presentation of Eula and Yellow Mary in their passages between different states as sexual objects and female subjects. Yellow Mary explains to Eula that after having been forced to work as a wet nurse by white slave owners who took her baby from her, she deliberately stopped the flow of her milk to put an end to her breast feeding service. She has consequently regained her liberty from this act of withholding the maternal function and re-established her independent identity both as a free person and a single woman from her former position as a slave and wet nurse.

Dash's presentation of the close embrace reuniting Nana and Yellow Mary in their mutual acceptance had been commented upon by Patricia Mellencamp: "Nana Peazant is the living history. The self – of the maker, of the audience, and of the ancestors – is

invoked in a spirit of cultural continuity rather than rupture. The focus is on *becoming*, on *relations*, what happens *between* experience and thought, between "sensations and ideas", between sounds and images, between cultures, between women" (*Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory and Cinema in the Third* World, 114). Women's cultural identities in history are expressed as a continuity that relates them together in their common experiences. Dash's cinematic production offers to spectators a means of participating in these relations by viewing the passages between sight and sound and between the diverse cultural experiences of African-American women. These divergent aspects illustrate the women's metamorphoses as the continual process of becoming in the representation of identity (re)formation throughout the history of African diaspora.

Nana's oral account of a series of disparate identities of African-American women simultaneously promotes a cinematographic (re)envisioning of their contradictory experiences in history. Along with the contrasting subjectivities of the whore and the holy one, as well as the wife and virgin, Dash depicts women's deep emotional experiences of scorn as well as respect. She evokes the close link between women's identities and their travelling experiences such that their rapidly shifting emotions are derived from their constant travelling and displacements. Her juxtaposition of contradictory aspects of African-American diasporic identities is effected through a re-organization of the aural and visual expressions of the shifting passage between history and representation. This cultural passage can be interpreted according to Patricia Mellencamp's consideration that

> [t]his living speech, forged in mutual experience and placed within history is [ ... perceived as] a hearing as much as a seeing, a fiction as much as a fact, a life as much as history. These films exist in the intersection between sound and image, history and experience, Art and life. Affect and intellect emerge from the relations between women. (*Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory and Cinema in the Third World,* 114)

Oral history in *Daughters of the Dust* thus links the audience to the film in a sensory experience of subjectivity through hearing and seeing. Moreover, the audio-visual stories of African-American women expressed in Nana's oral narrative display the dual strategies

of engaging a mutual interaction between Nana and the audience as well as juxtaposing narrative with the historical reality of Africans' experiences of displacement. Dash's incorporation of both the voices and images of African-American women in a reconstruction of their cultural identity in fictional narrative is different from Trinh Minh-ha's separation of sounds and images to illustrate the displacements of Vietnamese women. Dash proposes a re-interpretation of African-American women's history and identity with a view to depicting women's experiences of dispersal and their divergent, contradictory emotional states and feelings.

Dash further displays the multigenerational relations between African-American women through the extension of Nana's narrative linking cultural identity with historical trajectory to her great granddaughter's story of her journey across multiple spatio-temporal dimensions. The Unborn Child narrates her relation with her future family members as originating from the past. Her voice-over tells the audience:

> My story begins before I was born. My great, grandmother saw her family coming apart, her flowers to bloom in distant lands. Then there is the problem between my father and my mother. The old souls guide me to the new world. I came in time to meet my parents, aunties, uncles and cousins for their celebration.

Dash shows the historical connections between Nana and her great granddaughter in the visual image of the Unborn Child running on the beach with the sea in the background and wearing an indigo coloured ribbon in her hair. Like Nana, the Unborn Child also hails from the African slave ancestors, and travels to Ibo Landing from the world of departed spirits. Yet her presence anticipates her future birth signified by her fusion with her mother later in the film where she runs into her mother's womb. Thus, Dash depicts the close links across several generations of African-American women through the image of continuous motion in the Unborn Child's simultaneous presence in different realms. Alternating accelerated with normal film speed, Dash shows interactions between the Unborn Child and her family in the present in Ibo and also with her slave ancestors in the dye plantations of the past. The Unborn Child, therefore, inherits Nana's cultural identity extending from the first

generation of slave ancestors, to their present liberated descendants. Besides wearing an indigo ribbon in her hair, she has also inherited an indigo finger from her great grandmother's indigo stained fingers, as a result of the dyeing work on the plantations.

Moreover, a spiritual bond closely links the Unborn Child to Nana according to African folk beliefs. The Unborn Child focuses on this aspect of her journey as the guiding element, saying, "I was travelling on a spiritual mission but sometimes I would be distracted [...] I remember the call from my great, great grandmother. I remember and I recall. I remember my journey home." The Unborn Child's travel to her family's home is an answer from the ancestors in response to Nana's prayers. The child's meanderings through different historical epochs and geographical spaces are redirected by Nana's call as a re-orientation for her great granddaughter's route. Thus, the child is guided to Ibo by the departed ancestors and especially Nana, the last survivor. The spiritual journey, therefore, reflects the trans-generational nature of African cultural identity linking the old to the new world, in the child's passage from the past to the present. She recalls the diasporic experiences of her ancestors' deportation to the U.S. in her travelling mission to Ibo Landing to help in the problems arising from pending migration. Upon Nana's call, the Unborn Child recalls her role of fulfilling the cultural link between her great grandmother and herself by appearing to her parents to assure Eli that he is her true father after the incident of her mother's rape by a white man.

As Nana exhorts Eli, "Call on the old spirits to guide you", she points out the power of the ancestors' spirits to give descendants the strength to overcome their difficulties in the dilemma of accepting the child in Eula's womb. She assures Eli of the direct lineage of the Unborn Child from the ancestors, saying, "the old souls and the womb, they are one and the same". Dash shows that while Nana is awaiting the Unborn Child's coming, a great wind is blowing and filling the cosmos announcing the Unborn Child's arrival from the spirit world. Then Nana feels the Unborn Child's forthcoming presence and beckons her, "Come, child, come". An African man also feels a refreshing breeze, which he associates with new life, claiming, "sweet as a baby's breath". Cultural continuity is depicted in these

scenes, reflecting the African belief in the regeneration of spirits in the following generations. Dash's depiction of African spirituality is expressed by Patricia Mellencamp as follows:

> What I call the film's spirituality [...] a mode of self and historical empowerment [... relates to] Dash's system of "ancestors worship". [...T]he spiritual basis of the film [... provides] another way to think and feel and change history. Spiritually, the character of the Unborn Child, the wind, the sound track of noises, music, voice-overs, enables an identification with forces within each individual that are greater than the material world, powers that are indestructible and eternal. The spirit within each human being outruns the limits and prejudices of Western rationality and history. (*Redirecting the Gaze,* 120)

Dash promotes an alternative characterization of African-American cultural identity through African ancestor worship and religious beliefs in spirit protection in the new vision of her film that transcends the Western rational representation of history and identity. Cultural continuity is ensured through the eternal forces of the spirits watching over the descendants who continue to observe African rituals, such as keeping glass jars to house ancestors' spirits.

The African-American experience of continual dispersal is illustrated in the Unborn Child's discourse about the distractions from her main spiritual mission, which can be considered as lines of flights liberating the narrative of African cultural identity from a direct and linear structure. The Unborn Child's story of her journey reflects the African-Americans' memory of their numerous travelling experiences marking the diasporic trajectories of their identity. As Barry Curtis and Claire Pajaczkowska assert,

> The journey is a symbol of narrative. Narrative – as the structure of development, growth and change – the acquisition of knowledge and a solution of problems – is conceived as a physical process of movement, of disruption, negotiation and return. The trip constitutes a lapse in the regular rhythms of mundane existence, it leads to a place where time [...] is reversed into a utopian space of freedom, abundance and transparency. (*Travel Tales: Narrative of Home and Displacement*, 199)

Her narrative evokes the journey as the dual physical and metaphorical trajectory comprising African-Americans' cultural identity. Her story re-enacts the meandering structure of the journey in a voice-over expressing her sudden eruption into the scene while her family prepared for the picnic celebration. This is mirrored in her continual disappearance and re-appearance in other historical epochs and different geographical locations before returning home to her family in the Sea Islands.

Moreover, Dash manifests an altogether different view of historical narrative in the visual image discerned by the Unborn Child upon looking into a stereopticon. A black-and-white image of a bustling town filled with people and traffic can be seen while the Unborn Child is heard narrating that "it was a time for everyone, the rich and the poor". The narrative of the Unborn Child's physical return to the days of slavery paradoxically evokes a flight beyond, to a utopian realm, suggesting freedom and abundance in Africa before slavery. Dash promotes the vision of an imaginative return to the original home as a means of looking back to the past, beyond oppressive slavery, to liberation. She offers spectators the possibility of imaging an alternative, elated view of African history, one which accords freedom of movement to everyone, irrespective of their social class. By animating an idealized African history and culture in the otherwise fixed image of the stereopticon, Dash liberates conventional storytelling from its rigid, linear structure by showing multiple dis- and re-locations in time. This constant backtracking and reversal of narrative time can be interpreted according to Teshome Gabriel's notion of "travelling aesthetics" demonstrating a subjective experience of time through a " 'cyclic' system wherein several time frames occur simultaneously" (*Asian America Through The Lens*, 162). The interconnected narrative of Nana and of the Unborn Child display the elements of a travelling aesthetics by incorporating personal views of history in the form of a journey that is not only moving forward but also going back in time. The Unborn Child's freedom of physical movement across multiple times and spaces illustrate the co-mingling of diverse temporal and physical planes within African historical narrative. Indeed, Dash stresses her intention to reconnect with African culture, instead of adhering to European norms.

She also develops an innovative African narrative trajectory through the flexible film medium presenting interactions between different places, times and events. She dexterously reorganizes these disparate elements into a cinematic vision of interconnectedness through multiple layers of development. Dash's cinematic depiction of the Unborn Child's narrative unfolding in various spatio-temporal directions reflects not only numerous displacements but also the deliberate shift from conventional historical narration. I perceive, in the unusual juxtaposition of the black-and-white image of the stereopticon with multicolour cinematographic images, a disjointed narrative employing contradictions as interventions in the conventional representation of history. Dash reconstructs the past by making visible the conflicting versions of history, especially those which have been repressed. Her re-presentation of historical narrative can also be viewed according to Robert Stam's idea of narrative models in film as not simply reflecting historical processes since

> They are experiential grids ... through which history can be written and national identity created. Like novels, films can convey what Bakhtin calls "chronotypes", materializing time in space, mediating between the historical and the discursive, providing fictional environments where historically specific constellations of power are made visible. In both films and novel, time thickens, takes on "flesh" while space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (*Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film*, 10.)

Dash presents an unconventional narrative of African history through re (re)construction of a new image of racial identity that is non-existent in dominant representation. She combines the history of Africa with the history of cinema in the stereopticon to incorporate – in the "flicker" effect of early cinema – fiction to re-interpret history. The presence of movement as a fictive element reworks history's fixity to create a revised image with the possibility of an alternative interpretation.

Dash situates African-American cultural identity at the intersection of race, gender and sex. She also re-presents African-American women's sexual identity through the creation of a mobile view of women's continuous transformation across multiple social

roles. For example, she presents, in Eula's narrative, a multitude of women who have been sexually abused. Eula reveals to other women that, "as far as this place is concerned, we never enjoyed our womanhood. Deep inside, we believed that they ruined our mothers, and their mothers before them". She asks the other women not to scorn Yellow Mary, who also has been aggressed during slavery time, saying that if they are ashamed of Yellow Mary then how should they feel about her, as she has recently been raped. Yet Dash also suggests a positive image of the African-American female figure in the person of Eula, who strongly bears an emancipated and empowered cultural identity. Eula's narration evinces this identity as she tells other women: "Who we are, and what we have become. We carry too many scars from the past. [...] Our mothers' scars, our sisters' scars, our daughters' scars. [...] Let's live our lives without living in the fold of our old wounds." African-American women's transgenerational identity is "marked" by their racial and sexual experiences of rape, yet they stand together to confront it and achieve self-(re)definition as emancipated female subjects and outlive their former state as dominated sexual objects. Dash shows, in the African-American women's solidarity in their mutual understanding and assistance, a feminist view of African history and identity. The title *Daughters of the Dust* is a female appropriation of the Biblical version "Ye men of the dust" in the Book of Ezechiel. The link between the daughters of Africa who have been sexually abused and have struggled to live out their emancipated sexual subjectivity is presented in Dash's feminist re-interpretation of history.

Dash's intervention in the history of African-American women's sexual oppression can be considered according to Patricia Mellencamp's argument:

> Feminism is untimely history that is ongoing, never over or over there, but here and now. For women, history is not something to be recorded or even accepted but something to be used, to be changed. [...] It is passed on from one generation to the next as presence. [It] is recollected, recalled, reincarnated, its spirit given new life as living memory. (*Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory and Cinema in the Third World, 99*-100)

In their wish to forget the sexual oppression of the past, the women in *Daughters of the Dust* change African history by promoting a feminist vision of an ongoing process of self-transformation. Thus, their recollection of the past is a means of transcending history through memory.

As Viola tells Mr. Snead of the multiple names given to each woman depicting diverse aspects of women's characters, female subjectivity is re-called in different ways. Moreover, the women are shown in their relations with other women according to their roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, teachers, caregivers. The multiple facets of their sexual identity can be understood according to Gloria Gibson-Hudson's comments that

> [Black women's] cinematic images demonstrated that cultural identity is fluid, contextual and multidimensional, and that continuity exists in one's metamorphosis from "old" to "new" womenself. Most important, the films testify to the intimate relationship between representation, cultural identity and the politics of race and sex. (*Black Women Film and Video Artists,* 44)

Dash presents groups of young women dancing on the beach, mothers preparing food for their children and grandmothers teaching their grandchildren the old African language. She depicts the multiple activities in which these women engage themselves as cultural practices they keep alive in the Sea Islands to reconnect with their original home in Africa. Moreover, besides carrying on their religious beliefs and ancestor worship recounted in Eula's narrative of her communications with her dead mother in the water offering, as well as Nana's glass bottles hung on trees, some converted women refer their new Baptist religion to African rituals. Haagar cries out against spirits in the wind claiming, "when I will be on the mainland, I will no longer be in your dominion".

Eula, Yellow Mary and Trula are shown strolling on the beach, sitting on the branches of a tree laughing and smoking. They show the interactions between their different social identities revealing aspects of the old and the new selves. Yellow Mary recounts to Eula her painful memory of slavery. Yet she also reveals her capacity for change in her independence from sexual and social oppression to earn her living as a

prostitute. Yellow Mary's diverse subjectivities experienced in diaspora can be interpreted according to Gloria Gibson-Hudson:

> Depending on context identities are formulated and reformulated. Black women's identities are not rigid, fixed entities, but fluid – contingent upon personal, cultural, political and social variables. Identity (re)formation is a continuous process of (re)positioning within meaningful socio-historical cultures. (*Black Women Film and Video Artists,* 47)

To contest misrepresentation of Black women on screen, Dash emphasizes the multicultural identity of African-American women. On the boat trip back to Ibo Landing, she sets up the encounter between the new cultural identities of Viola and Yellow Mary. They are depicted as emancipated women travelling back with different cultural practices. Viola, tightly clad in a long black gown buttoned to the collar and clasping a bible close to the bosom, shows a stern appearance and looks disapprovingly at her cousin, Yellow Mary, who is shown in a contrasting white cotton dress with lace, giving the impression of lightness and style compared to Viola's heavy black missionary outfit. Yellow Mary lifts up her veil covering her large border hat to look at Viola and the photographer. After having greeted her cousin and Mr. Snead, Yellow Mary lets down her veil. From this gesture, Dash reveals Yellow Mary's act of looking as the veiling and unveiling of female sexual subjectivity, simultaneously scorned and respected. However, like Viola, Yellow Mary has been converted to Christianity and wears the medal of St. Christopher, the patron saint of travellers. Thus, both these women illustrate that African-American female identity undergoes constant transformation according to social and religious changes. The (ex)changes in these women's identities are presented in the personal viewpoint that each woman holds in relation to the other. As Stuart Hall maintains in his essay "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation", "there are many points of similarity, and there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we are': or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become' " (70). Thus, although both Yellow Mary and Viola have travelled and assimilated Western thought and religion, they

show personal differences in the way they embody their sexual identity. The sexually liberated Yellow Mary works as a prostitute, whereas Viola has become a missionary.

Dash shows further exchanges of viewpoints among older and younger women who hold different views of their migration. Haagar openly rejects Yellow Mary, treating her with disrespect on account of her (sexual) profession. She eagerly awaits migration to give a better education to her daughter according to Western thought, considering African religion as voodoo. Her generation considers Nana too old-fashioned for believing in a religion she has carried over from Africa just to keep alive the memory of home. However, Dash also portrays African cultural identity amidst new social conditions. Eula continues to adhere to African folk beliefs in her love and respect for Nana and her dead mother. Iona chooses to remain on the island, leaving her mother and sister on the boat to ride off with St. Julian. Dash shows their intermarriage as the union between two oppressed tribes, the natives and the Afrodiasporic who have shared both the land and the living experiences. Thus, she depicts intercultural mingling in the reconstitution of African-American racial and sexual identity.

The fast motion of the galloping horse carrying Iona and St. Julian back to the land of their youth defines the mobility of cultural identity in the rapidly changing socio-historical situations. The moving camera further enhances movement of identity in its various transformations over time and space. It shows the shift from the scene of the boat in the river to the horse directing at great speed towards the interior of the island. The flexibility of the camera depicts the fluidity and multiplicity of cultural identity in its continuous motion of change and re-formation.

* * *

**RE-PRESENTATION OF VIETNAMESE CULTURAL IDENTITIES**

In her film *Surname Viet*, Trinh T. Minh-ha portrays the complex cultural identity of Vietnamese women through interviews re-enacted by Vietnamese women in the United States, which she has restaged on screen from a book of interviews originally conducted in Vietnam in 1979 and published in Paris in 1983. She re-presents the voices of Vietnamese women by incorporating visual images, black and white documentary footage and photography as well as poems, songs and proverbs of the traditional Vietnamese oral history. Moreover, she intercuts women's speeches with text spread out across the screen over the images of these women. Through these various strategies, Trinh illustrates displacement in the images and voices representing Vietnamese women's diasporic identities.

In the first part of the "performed" interviews, she presents the testimonies of women's painful experiences during the reunification of Vietnam. Each woman speaks of her personal status and work as a doctor, a health technician, a fish breeder or a restaurant worker. They generally express fear, distrust and especially subordination to male authority. An old woman, revealing her grief at seeing her femininity wasted, articulates this as a common condition among young women who, under socialist regime, are encouraged to work hard in order to put their life at the service of their family and country. Another woman speaks out against the myth of the heroine, denouncing this socialist ideology as a way of imposing female sacrifice and submission to male authority.

She protested strongly, claiming that

> Socialist Vietnam venerates the mothers and the wives. The woman does not exist, she is only a labourer. The liberation of women is understood as a double exploitation: [...] they work more to eat less, to better deprive themselves. 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. [...] the Mother-in-Laws' Union, they have made up of as heroic workers, virtuous fighters. [...] Ghost

> women, with no humanity! The image of the woman is magnified like a saint!

Trinh denounces the abusive conditions experienced by all Vietnamese women who are exploited yet never obtain any recognition nor any authority over matters concerning their own life, similar to African-American women who were all sexually abused while being forced to work as slaves. The interview gives women a means to voice out their discontent of their prescribed social role as heroic workers at low pay and good women caring for their family and doing unpaid housework. Trinh delivers a feminist critique of the devalorization of women by the socialist government with the cinematic device of blotting out the woman's visual image with this text written over it:

> One has to demystify the image of the ideal woman that has been made up. [...] It is 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. (Thu Van)

Trinh deliberately spreads words over this woman's face to illustrate the female image forged by men who impart both negative work and positive glory to women who are made to serve and subscribe to the ideology of heroism while carrying out insignificant work.

However, Trinh cuts up these women's interviews and adds a deeper reflection on the heroic deeds of Vietnamese women in history. She recalls, through a female voice-over, the legend of the two Trung sisters who had raised an insurrection against the Chinese to free Vietnam from their domination. These women are honoured for their bravery since they chose to fight and die for their country, and because they committed suicide so as not to submit themselves to domination when they were defeated.

Moreover, Trinh cites the heroic case of Kieu, an honourable woman who endured prostitution and continuous self-sacrifice by becoming a concubine, a servant and a nun to save her father and brother from humiliation. She did not mind sacrificing herself to please

many men before being reunited to her first love. The multiple roles and services exercised by Vietnamese women show their flexible identity in trying times. Kieu's story is told in an epic poem, an allegory of Vietnam as a beautiful woman undergoing constant suffering from Chinese and French domination and wars. In her characterization of Vietnamese women's cultural identity in the history of political oppression, Trinh promotes a feminist appropriation similar to Dash's re-interpretation of African-American history according to women's viewpoints of their own cultural identity. Trinh denounces the misrecognition of women's social contribution to their country, which was misnamed "fatherland" by socialist government. A voice-over says,

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

However, Trinh renames Vietnam to portray its diverse characteristics in relation to regional sections, historical periods and the many internal and external influences on its original culture:

> Van-Lang, Nam-Viet, Hoang Viet, An-Nam,
> (Bac Ky – Le Tonkin; Trung Ky – An Nam; Nam Ky –
> La Cochinchine)
> French Indochina, Viet-Nam.

In her feminist re-envisioning of Vietnamese history and culture, Trinh incorporates an inclusive view of the many aspects of a nation thereby featuring women's work at all levels of social and family life. She also promotes a re-interpretation of Vietnamese women's cultural identity by according multiple names to the legendary national figure Kieu in order to address all her specific attributes according to lineage (in her family name, her gender, her age bracket, her quality of leadership as well as her simplicity). Trinh's plural (re)naming displays Vietnam's and Kieu's multiple qualities as a challenge to the reductive image of woman as a natural caregiver being her sole mission in life.

The interview enables Thu Van to voice out her thoughts on social injustice and has thereby given her a chance to act out her revolt against socialist domination. She willingly

lets go of her meagre salary and some food tickets in order to articulate her need to live out her female subjectivity. She further claims this right for all women:

> The young people think like me. I am not alone. The young people are tired of holding the gun as one holds chopsticks. Girls want to rediscover their femininity, to please, to revive desire, beauty. They call for love, for colors. Look at me. 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. (Thu Van)

In her call for the emancipation of women from the negative impact arising from their military service, which severs their strength and cuts them off from their feminine nature, Thu Van is somewhat like the African matriarch, Nana Peazant in *Daughters of the Dust,* who reflects the general conditions of sexual abuse experienced by all African-American women slaves. To give her support to Vietnamese women in their fight to reclaim their femininity, Trinh inserts an anecdote from the reactionary work of a Vietnamese poetess named Ho Xuan Huong. Her poems caused a scandal in the early nineteenth century for defying the prescribed code of conduct for women. Ho's poetry resisted – just as Thu Van's voice expresses an open revolt against – female obedience and submission. Ho decried abuses of authority and the patriarchal norms of Confucian religion, as well as polygamy. Ho put forth a feminist vision of love which displays, according to Trinh, women's understanding of their own "*labia minora* and *labia majora*" desire. Trinh further strengthens her defence of women's cultural identity by her presentation of the poetess Kim Van Kieu's unconventional lifestyle manifesting a provocative attitude toward prescribed norms of female subjectivity. Kieu's complex cultural identity is retold in *The Tale of Kieu* and recited in the 3254-line national epic poem. It is specially celebrated for the new approach to female sexuality in Kieu's free choice of bestowing her love to three men. Thus, she brought about her own re-interpretation of the Confucian principle of female chastity in order to adapt to the socio-political problems of her time. At this point, Trinh introduces the voice of Kim expressing these words in Vietnamese: "Kieu's life is very telling but it is not a singular case. I think there are hundreds, thousands of lives like hers".

Thus, many women hold the same view regarding women's ambivalent experiences of self-sacrifice amidst the social demand for chastity and loyalty.

Trinh's reflection of the particular case of Kieu is (re)situated in the context of the present twentieth century Vietnamese women's experiences of socialist patriarchal oppression in the remark of the thirty-five year old health technical cadre Thy Van: "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". The discrepancy between the image of woman forged in patriarchal Confucian norm of female behaviour and her socio-cultural identity in real life is illustrated in Kieu's paradoxical Confucian model of chastity which undergoes identity transformation to have multiple sexual experiences with several men before returning to her first man. What is more disturbing is the strict norm of behaviour governed by the four virtues demanded of women: skilful in her work, modest in her behaviour, soft-spoken in her language, and faultless in her principles.

The five women interviewed expose, in their speech, the neglect of some or most of these rules. Although the first virtue – skilful cooking and caring for husband and children – is required, the female doctor whose husband was imprisoned said she left her children unattended like orphans while trying to look for her husband and the unknown reason for his imprisonment. Gracious compliance, the second female quality, is directly challenged by the woman articulating her open defiance even if she loses her work and food tickets. Soft language addressed to the husband and his family, the third virtue, and respect for the old and self sacrifice for the husband, the fourth quality required at all times reduce women to their servile roles as wives and mothers, eclipsing their existence as women subjects of their own life and activities. This social conduct is being critiqued by the woman who lashes out against the "heroic" work of women as wives and mothers who have become "ghosts" without any human subjectivity left. Trinh depicts women's paradoxical position of submission and rebellion, shown in the case of the female doctor whose husband was

imprisoned, from the change in their own disposition of service to family and society to acts of resistance resulting from their perception of social oppression.

The flexible, ever-changing cultural identity of Vietnamese women epitomized in the poetic character Kieu is further redefined according to diverse interpretations in different historical periods. Trinh clarifies:

> 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 two hundredth anniversary, it was highly praised by the government's male official writers for its revolutionary yearning for freedom and justice in the context of 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 of the international community.

According to different historical contexts, Kieu is given a new cultural role to inspire bravery and resistance against feudal, colonial or imperial domination. Not only women but also men of authority invoke her image as a national heroic figure. Kieu's courageous acts of resistance are reflected in the repetitive image of a woman braving the stormy sea in her little boat. Along with this recurrent image, a voice sings this song in Vietnamese which is translated in English subtitles:

> 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.*)

This image also recalls the allegory of Vietnam in the figure of a woman striving to save her country from continuous wars and represents the boat people fleeing Vietnam. Therefore, the re-interpretation of Kieu bears both positive and negative connotations of

survival and dispersal. Trinh explains the plural meanings associated with this image as follows:

> A million 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.

The fluid and constantly changing female cultural identity represented in Kieu's multiple qualities denotes Vietnamese women's daily acts of socio-political resistance over different periods of history. Trinh releases this image from a single interpretation anchored in a fixed historical period. She displays multiple historical versions of female suffering and struggles to express the universal condition of women in different societies over time. In her wish to dismantle the linear representation of women's experiences in history, Trinh says that she does not just want to depict a particular period of history; she even employs a female voice-over that says, "a documentary would normally represent history as starting here or ending there". Trinh later opts for an envisioning of Vietnam as a general image of woman protecting her child and country from the ravages of continued warfare on her land. Through the critical voice of a woman arguing that "a society imposing a single way of thinking, of perceiving life cannot be a human society", Trinh implies the importance of re-envisioning Vietnamese women's socio-cultural identities from multiple perspectives in order to counter the oppressive treatment of women by dominant socialist regime.

Through the multiple viewpoints of diasporic experiences presented in the interviews, Trinh challenges the singular image of women as workers imposed by the socialist government after the reunification of Vietnam. She presents oral accounts of two female doctors, one from the north and one from the south, to depict views from both regions. She shows the socio-cultural exchange of two sisters in the story of the doctor named Anh who left her home in the north to visit her sister in the south. The text printed across the image of the doctor illustrates the separation between the two women. The northern doctor is shocked, when looking at herself in the mirror, to perceive her repressed subjectivity in

worn-out clothes and shoes. Yet her meeting with her sister in the south enables her to realize her own existence as a woman.

Trinh reveals the Vietnamese women's diasporic identities by further extending the north-south political division of Vietnam by focusing the exchange of Vietnamese culture with American culture. She develops a new vision of Vietnamese women's cultural identity by staging interviews conducted in Vietnamese through women's voices speaking in English in the first section of the film and women in the U.S. talking about their past experiences in Vietnamese. This deliberate reversal of language is used to depict the cultural displacement of Vietnamese women who act their part in the U.S. to re-present the voices of Vietnamese women. Moreover, Trinh also reverses filming strategies when she shows "unstaged" life activities of women who move about and outside the screen (which normally presents a formal shooting and posing technique) in the 'documentary' part of the film, in contrast to the "staged" fixed-camera filming of the actresses' faces and activities in the 'real life' section, where the usual strategy allows for free movement.

Through these filming devices, Trinh shows that the complex relationship between the displaced diasporic experiences of Vietnamese women and their cultural identity does not simply denote a north-south separation of Vietnam but rather a passage from one country to another. The same women are shown in two different contexts, at first wearing dark coloured and plain clothing to represent the plight of working women in socialist Vietnam and later putting on brightly coloured dresses to manifest their new happy life in the U.S. Besides the stories of five women's survival through their work in Vietnam, the personal life of these actresses is revealed in several scenes of a woman cooking, another jogging in the park, one practising Tai Chi, while another one is sitting calmly near a fish pond and yet another is presenting Vietnamese traditional costumes to students. Thus, Vietnamese women have experienced cultural identity transformation in assimilating new activities in their life in the U.S. while carrying on their own cultural practices, somewhat like some of the African-American women in *Daughters of the Dust* who have acquired new ideas and religion from the West yet still continue to respect their own traditions.

Trinh also expresses her changing role from director in the documentary section to coordinator in the second part on women's life in the U.S. She further displaces the problem of survival by women in Vietnam under socialist oppression to the cultural adaptation in the U.S. In Vietnam, women had to understand the diverse meanings of re-education camps, rehabilitation camps and concentration camps, while in the U.S., it is a matter of distinguishing between canned food for dogs and canned foods for humans. Women's experiences of life and work in the context of socialist Vietnam is neither liberating nor edifying since they are required to sacrifice themselves to their family and society, whereas the adjustment of Vietnamese women to their new life in the U.S. entails mastering elevators and escalators, and taming vending machines. In her translation of the interviews conducted in Vietnam into English, Trinh extends Vietnamese actresses' initial subjectivity to a multicultural identity. She expresses this new identity in these terms: "grafting several languages, cultures and realities onto a single body. The problem of translation, after all, is a problem of reading and identity".

Trinh represents, in a song sung by a woman in three different accents, the three cultural regions – north, south and centre – of Vietnam, that comprise the many realities of a single country. Moreover, the multiple aspects of cultural transition are embodied by a woman whose voice is heard reading a Vietnamese poem in English and then appearing later on as herself (Lan) talking to her friend about her American accent from Pennsylvania. To dismantle the clear-cut opposition between north and south, or the difference between Vietnam and the U.S. in the representation of Vietnamese women's cultural identities, Trinh presents an alternative perception of the notion of truth staged in her own documentary strategy. By incorporating the women's reflections on their staged performance of the voices of the women in Vietnam, Trinh makes explicit the general conditions of women anywhere, not just in a capitalist or socialist context. One of the actresses explains her acceptance of her role as follows:

> When I accepted to help in this film it was 'cose its subject, 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. Once I worked on my part, I wanted to do my best because I don't think it is an individual matter but one that concerns a whole community.

The quality of Vietnamese women to endure and persevere is portrayed by Trinh in both the voices speaking about the hardship of life under socialist rule in Vietnam and also the voices of the actresses talking about their adaptation to their life and work in the U.S. Two of the women reveal the difficulties they have had as women and as Asians in their work environment in the U.S. They were practically the only female being employed when they first came to the U.S. in the late 70's. The female engineer articulated the efforts of many women who gradually gained employment and social recognition for their contributions. Thus, as this actress stresses, her role exemplifies Vietnamese women's experiences of endurance as the general condition of survival for women in the U.S.

Moreover, Trinh promotes a re-visioning of women's understanding of their authentic experiences in life. From the general expression of grief at seeing their subjectivity repressed by patriarchal rule of female service and sacrifice, there is a shift to a revelation of the paradoxical construction of truth in the story of a Vietnamese woman named Khien, about her own experiences in Vietnam before migrating to America. She recounts how, when pressed by a socialist officer who regularly came to inspect her at home, she would refer to a book in her husband's re-education camp to furnish this answer:

> I believe in the government, in the chairman. We have been liberated. Why would I want to escape? I am Vietnamese. I love our country. I don't even know English. I have no education.

Trinh contests the assumed notion of truth justified in the documentary strategy of staging an "authentic" voice by expressing criticism in Khien's open discussion on her real experiences in Vietnam. In her account of her own experiences, she focuses on the way she has told lies to come up with the desired truth in order to conform to the normality demanded by male authority. In order to show that she is not lying when she was asked whether she wanted to flee Vietnam, she lied about patriotic feelings to convince the officer. However, the language of truth is made up of multiple discourses of lies, ranging

from her admiration of socialist government and its chairman, her blind acceptance of the imposed liberation from capitalist influence and finally her lack of education and ignorance of English. Moreover, Trinh depicts the passage from documentary realism to lies in critical discourse deconstructing the conventional assumption of truth, as the grafting of several realities through languages and cultures on a single body performed by Khien. She tells her nephew that because she is frail, she practised carrying a water bucket with a pole across her tiny shoulders and succeeded to convince the authorities that she was a real peasant girl. Thus, Kieu embodies several versions of truth and lies, in the diverse languages she speaks – English, to interpret women's experiences in Vietnam, and Vietnamese to recount to her family members in the U.S. about her former experiences in Vietnam. Furthermore, Khien also tells of her acts of courage in the U.S. since, being a little person, she is afraid of dealing with fire in her work. Yet encouraged by her boss to overcome fear, she finally performed her work. In this part, she speaks both English and Vietnamese to express the many different realities of her strength and fragility derived from her singular body in different cultural contexts.

Kieu's special case of physical endurance both in Vietnam and in the U.S. reflects Vietnamese women's experiences of bodily toil and sacrifice, represented in the multiple trials of other women such as the two Trung sisters. Trinh cites another example of female heroic sacrifice of the body as a desperate struggle for a noble cause with this poetic quote from the person herself:

> "I wish to use my body as a torch to awaken love among people and bring peace to Vietnam".
>
> Nhat Chi Mai poured gasoline over her body and lit the match.

Trinh presents a documentary footage of this actual scene of self-immolation to show the flames consuming Nhat's body. Thus, she illustrates Khien's story of her burning her hair and eyebrows while working near a lit oven with a historical image of a woman sacrificing her life for the love of her country. In her film, Trinh evokes diverse aspects of the female body: being sold to prostitution, toiling and labouring as a form of self-sacrifice to the

family and society, fighting in numerous wars, as well as burning and suicide as the multiple experiences of Vietnamese women's socio-cultural and political subjectivities in history.

In her alternative interpretation of Vietnamese women's history and cultural identity, Trinh promotes narrative shifts between the purely informational to the more analytic and also to the deeply reflective aspects of representation. She thus breaks with linear construction in both documentary and "real" life presentation. Trinh also incorporates letters of different historical epochs and diverse cultures within her main narrative of life in Vietnam and the U.S. The voice reading the letter written in 1975 by a woman about her camp experience with her daughter in Guam expresses a fear of physical aggression against women who had to share the space of the refugee camp with brutal men. Yet in a letter sent to her sister in Vietnam, a woman in the U.S. happily recalls the pleasure of tasting Vietnamese ice-cream which she misses in the U.S. except for the Vietnamese style restaurants run by Vietnamese communities in Houston, Texas or Santa Ana, California. Another oral communication mentions the delight at secretly eating desserts (with Vietnamese names which cannot be translated into English) sold in the streets which children are usually forbidden by their parents to eat. The personal anxieties and delights of Vietnamese women expressed in their letters further reveal the authenticity of their experiences as other types of voices besides the documentary 'talking heads' or the actresses' discussions of their life in Vietnam and the U.S.

Trinh further assembles multiple forms of voices speaking, reading or singing onto the single "body" of her film to show the experience of displacement among Vietnamese women in different historical contexts using legends, proverbs and poems. She juxtaposes the poetical language of oral tradition with political language in order to promote female resistance to male oppression in legends such as the tale of Kieu and the poetry of Ho Xuan Huong. Her presentation of unsynchronised sound and image with translated text appearing too soon or too late in relation to the voice disrupts the reading, listening or the speaking of texts. Trinh thus questions the constructed unity of image and sound as well as

subtitling time coinciding with the words spoken as the accepted notion of "authentic" experience presented in the documentary. In contrast, she shows another view of women's experiences different from the image of a subservient worker. The constantly shifting cultural identity of women who innovatively re-position themselves according to the historical and social circumstances of their life is represented through the displacement of sounds and images, as well as written and spoken texts expressing Vietnamese women's authentic experiences.

* * *

**JAPANESE-AMERICAN IDENTITY**

Rea Tajiri's video reconstruction of her mother's deportation to Poston camp features a recurrent image in which she re-enacts her mother's previous act of filling a canteen with water in the desert site of the camp. Apart from this starting and ending image, she also presents other video and photographic images and sounds of her mother's, nephew's and family members' camp experiences, either as the original event or as a re-envisioning or reflection of these images. In this way, Tajiri's re-enactment, similar to Trinh's restaging of women's voices in the absence of the women in Vietnam, describe a crucial historical moment in the (trans)formation of Japanese-American cultural identity. Tajiri stands in for her in order to revive her lost memory of the tragic experience of being uprooted from home and deported to the concentration camp by the U.S. government. Through this special image, which she has developed from the memory of a story her mother told her sister about the camp, she reconnects herself to her mother's history of internment. Tajiri depicts the strong cultural continuity that links many generations of Japanese together in the narrative of the traumatic displacement. The mysterious feeling of pervasive sadness enveloping her family before her birth continues to haunt her, such that, on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbour, she has a disturbing nightmare. This in turn affects her parents as they start to quarrel over the reason for it. This is further described as being witnessed by Tajiri's grandfather's spirit. Thus, she situates herself as the descendant of one of 110,000 Japanese-Americans who had been unjustly interned.

She goes further back in her lineage to her grandfather who is made to bear witness to the literal uprooting of her home and removal to an unknown place. Moreover, in her research for the traces of her mother's internment, Tajiri discovers a photograph of her grandmother at a bird carving class in which the interned Japanese participated. She also includes her grandmother as an important family tie reconnecting her to the past historical experience of internment. She extends her narrative of concentration camp life to her grandmother by recounting how, as a child, she was not allowed to play with the bird because her mother insisted on keeping it intact since it was made by grandmother herself.

Her mother prefers to keep this carved bird in a box, perhaps to evade the painful memory of being separated from home. In a way, Tajiri's narrative of her mother's conservation of her grandmother's bird is similar to Yellow Mary's revelation to Eula of her sad memories of enforced slavery and deportation to Cuba to work as a wet nurse. Yellow Mary imagines keeping all these painful memories in a box tightly locked with a key so that no-one knows of their existence and which she can reopen to reflect on her former personal plight. Thus, both Rea Tajiri and Julie Dash give expression to the silent, repressed memories of deportation.

Besides conjuring the presence of her grandfather's spirit, Tajiri also testifies to her grandmother's presence at camp in videographic reconstitution to revive her mother's memory. Tajiri's video serves as a metaphor for the cultural connection among many generations through the re-envisioning of the links from daughter to mother and grandmother. As Tajiri's hands clasp the canteen, she re-enacts her mother's collection of water. The direct link from mother to daughter through the image of the hands is extended to her grandmother in the narrative of the wooden bird – carved by her grandmother's hands – which Tajiri has touched with her hands in her attempt to play with it. Cultural heritage is illustrated through the image of the hands, which symbolises the handing down of cultural ties from one generation to the next. The video that Tajiri makes can be viewed as a metaphorical reconstruction of the cultural heritage through the travelling back to the experiences of the former generations in search for a repressed historical and cultural identity.

The notion of women's social contribution manifested through the hands is also explored by Julie Dash in several images showing Nana's hands stained with the indigo dye, which is inherited by the Unborn Child as a purple coloured finger symbolising the African cultural legacy of slavery. Tajiri focuses on the hands gathering water (in the scene at the opening and closing of her video) and her narrative voice-over to claim the contribution of Japanese-Americans to this undeveloped camp taken from the Natives' reserve site by bringing water to the arid land with their development of an irrigation

system. Thus, she reclaims for her parents and herself the legitimacy of their American cultural identity, especially in her critique of the U.S. Government's racist deportation and relocation of her parents' families, all while her father was serving the U.S. army during the Second World War. She also voices out the frustration of her uncle who, upon returning from his military service and finding out that his family had been interned, left the U.S. Through the images and voices of her family members' retelling the memory of their suffering from the U.S. government's unjustified racist oppression, Tajiri articulates her feelings in her video with these words, "our presence was our absence". She reveals that the Japanese-Americans were excluded from many social activities and representations of dominant American culture. She shows the visual image of an aunt who was refused accommodation at a residency when the person in charge found out that she is Japanese, although her aunt said that she is an American citizen. In the Hollywood film, *Bad Day at Black Rock*, the Japanese man for whom the detective was searching was never shown in the film. Even in the war department documentary, the Japanese experiences of deportation were interpreted as "relocation" by the U.S. government for political reasons. Both fictional and documentary film take away the Japanese voices and images, imposing a dominant viewpoint from the American cultural and political position of authority and representation.

In her reconstruction of the Japanese-American cultural identity, Tajiri's video shifts from the personal account of her family's experiences of internment to U.S. government found footage of the bombing of Pearl Harbour and the government's subsequent "relocation" of the Japanese, as well as the Hollywood fictional construction of Japanese-American relations in feature films. She has incorporated all these contradictory narratives in diverse media forms in her video to promote the interactions among them, and the re-envisioning process including her family members and the audience. Through the contrast in which she sets her own video of personal memories against the dominant cultural (mis)representations of Japanese in Hollywood and U.S. government war films, Tajiri draws out the reality of internment lived by her family as the authentic experiences.

Therefore, she uses the same device as Trinh, who juxtaposes the prescriptive image of Vietnamese women in the socialist regime with legends of extraordinary and unconventional women warriors and feminist subjects. From her mother's avowal of forgetting the details of deportation, like the existence of a canteen at Salinas near Poston upon seeing this in her video, to her nephew's comment of a Hollywood movie about an American man saving his Japanese wife from internment – as a badly presented sentimental production – Tajiri shows the ways her family reacted to the re-viewing of this political oppression. She defines the Japanese-American cultural identity in terms of the relationship between how the Japanese view their subjectivities and how they are viewed by others. From these two instances of her mother's and nephew's reflection on reconstructed images, her video criticizes the presence of the Japanese-Americans in cultural productions as an absence, since they do not identify themselves directly with these images.

Tajiri also incorporates a personal anecdote of her sister's indirect way of approaching a Japanese man she likes through his photographic representation. She shows their encounter in a photographic procedure which can be perceived as a displacement of her interest in him to his reductive images where he has to look away from the camera, upon her directives. His protest – "I don't believe this" – reveals the unnatural rendering of a Japanese subject into an object of representation and exposes the inauthenticity of a constructed image. She further exposes the eclipse of the Japanese in dominant cultural productions by focusing on photographs of white Hollywood actors and actresses, which her sister keeps in a box. Tajiri's video challenges the exclusive representation of white people on screen as a deliberate construction according to dominant ideology, somewhat like the controlled environment in her sister's photographic procedure.

Similar to Trinh's opposition to the appropriation of the heroic figure Kieu in diverse historical contexts to serve the political ideology of the time, Tajiri's autobiographic video is a contestation of the different re-interpretations justifying the deportation of the Japanese in fictional and documentary productions. Her independent video promotes her quest for

Japanese-American cultural identity through the questioning of dominant productions to enable a critical re-vision of the racist representation. Her personal work engages not only her family members' re-envisioning of past events and sites of camp life, but also the spectators' reviewing of the cultural and political framework of cinematographic representations of Japanese internment. Her video solicits the viewers' critical evaluation of the validity of mainstream representation. By showing the juxtaposition of a song "We're All for One and One for All" in the Hollywood musical film *Yankee Doodle Dandee* with a black-and-white footage in which African-Americans are seen standing at the base of the Lincoln Memorial, Tajiri reveals the ideological appropriation of racial identity to serve American mainstream production. She further contests the false representation of national unity in the catch phrase, "all for one and one for all" by exposing the reality lived by the Japanese who were deported from their homes to the concentration camps by the U.S. troops while the premiere of *Yankee Doodle Dandee* was being shown. Thus, her video reveals that reality exceeds the images forged in dominant cultural and political (mis)representations.

In a way, Tajiri's reclamation of Japanese-Americans' cultural identity is similar to Trinh's revelation that Vietnamese women's authentic subjectivities are not restricted to compliant servitude in family and society but often bypass the code of female behaviour to achieve greater agency through sexual liberation. Her video represents both images and voices of herself, her mother, her nephew, her uncle in his letter, and her aunt reflecting on past experiences. Her family members have the metaphorical function of filling in for the Japanese in mainstream society, where they were considered enemies of the state who had been interned for political reasons after the bombing of Pearl Harbour. The hypocrisy of the American ideology of national unity promulgated in dominant cinematographic productions is strongly critiqued in the case of her aunt, who is a respectable citizen and not a dangerous Japanese infiltrator. Moreover, Tajiri decries the cruel treatment of her family members, who were deported and incarcerated while both her father and her uncle were serving the U.S. army.

In her video, Tajiri claims that, "I began searching because I felt lost, ungrounded, somewhat like a ghost that floats over terrain, witnessing others living their lives and yet not having one of its own". Her video re-presentation of her family's personal experiences attest to the Japanese presence in terms of their contribution and participation in the political and cultural life of the American nation. Thus, her work is a counter-cultural reconstruction of Japanese-American identity, much like Trinh's interviews in which a Vietnamese woman critiques social alienation due to the socialist devaluation of women to model workers akin to ghosts without any humanity.

Tajiri adopts a different approach from the conventionally smooth and linear construction of narrative in the ideological representation of historical and fictional productions. Her fragmentary stories and excerpts from documentary footage and Hollywood feature films expose the limited vision in the representation of the Japanese in dominant historical discourse, which relegates the Japanese to marginal spaces of silence or absence. The disparate images from different media contexts break up the constructed coherence of official historical (mis)representation. Moreover, the racial prejudice against the Japanese in these productions is challenged by the oppositional cultural practice promoted in her video through alternative uses of visual images. Tajiri engages her historical and cultural production by juxtaposing diverse types of images and their narratives. She sets out the multiple occasions and reasons for the occurrences of images in visual representation with this explanation:

> There are things which have happened in the world while there are cameras watching, things we have images for. There are things which have happened while there are no cameras watching, which we restage in front of cameras to have images of. There are things which have happened for which the only images that exist are in the minds of the observers present at the time. While there are things which have happened for which there have been no observers, except for the spirits of the dead.

Tajiri asserts that, apart from the (mis)representation of images in documentary and fictional film, there is no other form of recording the past except the witnessing of events

by living people and departed spirits. Thus, she establishes the importance of the re-presentation of personal/collective memories as the basis for reclaiming the Japanese cultural identity.

Tajiri thus recreates her own cultural identity by constructing a picture to illustrate the experiences she has lived. Having analyzed many forms of representations of Japanese internment, she interprets her exploratory project in these terms:

> My sister used to say how funny it was when someone tells you a story you create a picture of it in your mind. Sometimes the picture will return without the story. I overheard [my mother] describing to my sister this simple action: her hands filling a canteen out in the middle of desert. For years I've been living with this picture without the story, feeling a lot of pain, now knowing how they fit together. But now I've found I could connect the picture to the story. I could forgive my mother her loss of memory, and could make this image for her.

By re-envisioning the contrasting representations of Hollywood and documentary war films with her own restaging of her family's lived experiences of internment, Tajiri can finally understand the connection between the pain of her mother's memory loss and the image derived from her mother's camp life that continually haunts her. Through her videographic revelation of the racist portrayal of the Japanese as an ideological justification of internment, she exposes the discrepancy between the representation and the reality of Japanese experiences. At the end of her video, she claims to have achieved a connection between the concentration camp images and authentic Japanese experience, contrary to those in mainstream cultural representations. She has finally aligned her mother's image to her rightful cultural identity as a legitimate citizen who has undergone the tragic experience of internment.

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# CHAPTER TWO
# DANCE

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I explore the physical aspects and metaphorical connotations of dance related to the expressions arising from women's experience of multiple diasporic displacements. My analysis of dance focuses on the concept of mobility as the inherent quality that reconfigures fixed notions of original history and culture. Central to my argument is the vision of the body as the vehicle of expression in women's performance and the communication of their cultural identities through geographical space and historical time. I present the dancing body at the crossroads of the past and present, enacting a simultaneous historical dis- and re-orientation through cultural practices. Dance further evokes women's internal emotions through their external displays of motion. Dance can also be visualized as a means of expressing both physically and metaphorically the exchange between cultures across diverse spaces and times. It represents the flexibility enabling negotiations and compromises between individuals and society. According to Jenny Robinson, dance thus manifests both the actual and allegorical gestures of stretching across defined borders and reaching into new territories, countries and communities. Women explore in their dance a new posture to bring about a shifting position in the socio-cultural relations of subordination to male authority and dominant cultural society. I analyze dance with the aim to present an alternative vision of women's activities through a detailed exploration of the specific cultural context of each filmmaker's/ videographer's choreographical presentation.

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**DANCE IN *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST***

In *Daughters of the Dust*, African-American women (re)enact a dance performance as a form of cultural practice that carries on African religious traditions. Swaying their hips to the rhythm of clapping, they set up the motion to prepare for communication with their ancestors through their bodies. I interpret this dance in the context of deportation and migration as both a means of transporting and transforming through the bodily expression of cultural experiences. Jacqueline Copeland-Carson writes, in *Creating Africa in America: Translocal Identity in an Emergent World City*, that the body is perceived as the "vehicle for transporting and sustaining core cultural practices through social relations and connections that transcended locality, were transnational" (85). Julie Dash depicts this particular aspect of women's bodies in the presentation of trance dance as a means of physically/bodily transporting cultural practices from Africa to the U.S. through the emotional transports derived from the incarnation of their ancestors' spirits. She displays a choreography featuring female dancers on the beach in order to show a view of the present movement from the perspective of the past history of deportation. From their original arrangement of two lines facing each other, the women gradually take up a central position one after another, forming a joyful parade to start their dance ritual. The dancers' bodies, gathering motion and momentum, manifest the presence of the ancestors' spirits as an expression of historical embodiment. The dancers' position on the beach in front of the sea denotes their situation at the crossroads of the departed African souls and their descendants in the United States in the early twentieth century. Dash presents the images of female dancers swirling continuously around themselves amidst their arrangement in the larger social circle to symbolize the cultural dis- and re-orientation of African diasporic people through dance rituals. The duality of this dis-connection from and re-connection to African heritage is made visible in the focus on the women's faces, which show a gradual loss of consciousness during spiritual possession of the human body. The paradox of dis- and re-connection is highlighted by the reversal of film speed that slows down to undermine the

notion of the accelerated rhythms of bodily motion, thus making visible the transformation of human corporeality through its spiritual incorporation.

I view the dancing body in a trance state – in the wider context of a journey (presented in Chapter One) – as a metaphor for diasporic displacement in its inherent capacity to portray historical mobility in terms of the circulation and expansion of peoples, ideas and cultural practices across spaces and times. In this way, dance is intricately linked to travel, which, according to Caren Kaplan, "signifies the multiple aspects of an expanded field including transportation and communication technologies and representational practices. Travel in this expanded sense leads to a theoretical practice, to theorizing subjects and meanings in relation to the varied histories of the circulation of peoples, goods and ideas", (*Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, 207). Dash holds a similar view in her depiction of the ways in which trance dance illustrates the travel of African history across the Atlantic Ocean to the Sea Islands of North Carolina by performing rituals as a means of culturally re-presenting the African-American women's communication with past generations. The dancing body acts as a medium for the circulation of physical and spiritual elements across national borders. Dance accords movement to the body, which is not a rigid entity in a fixed location, but is instead viewed as an animated figure expressing mobility to represent the transportation, circulation and expansion of peoples and cultures across diverse spatiotemporal dimensions. As Francesca Castaldi writes in *Choreographies of African Identities*:

> The dancing body proclaims the continuity between the material and the spiritual which in turn links the past and the present. Dance is memory, a memory that is not static and does not exist outside the moment of remembrance. Rather, it needs to be activated, made meaningful through the embodiment of ancestral spirits and the repetition of performance. (3)

By reactivating the connection between the departed ancestors' spirits and their living contemporary descendants, trance dance becomes an active source of memory for the body during ritual performances. Dash evokes, through the organization of movement patterns

around the simultaneously individual and social circle in the open space of the sea-side, the historical continuity between past rituals and present performance. The accumulated bodily rhythms of women dancers in double circular configurations express both the personal and collective memory of African cultural heritage. The women perform trance dance as a collective activity, developing a rhythmic pattern in unison. The circulation of bodily motion is a spontaneous group interaction that brings to the surface the deep internal e-motion rising forth from spiritual communication. The spiritual possession of the dancers is effected through a re-membering of the human body in its encounter with the ancestors' spirits. The dancers take an emotional trip during their communication with the ancestors, an expansion of the physical self into a spiritual realm.

In *Daughters of the Dust*, the images of the trance dance not only illustrate the oral narrative of Nana's historical griot, but they further manifest an alternative vision of an old African tradition as a new practice. The women dancers do not merely engage in a simple repetition an ancient ritual, but they actually create a new version to accommodate their need to bring about their own intervention in a past cult.

Shown on the sea-side in order to commemorate their landing after deportation, this trance dance features the beach as a space in between the African continent from which they hailed – portrayed in the opening scene when Nana rises up from the sea-water in her indigo dress – and American soil. Thus, the trance dance symbolizes the passage from ancient traditions to contemporary performance in both the spatial and temporal dimensions of this representation of cultural practices. Women dancers re-present trance dance in their new context, as emancipated Africans in America. This playful start, with the women's swaying bodies in a rhythmic walk, incorporates an expression of their liberation, shown through their laughter and joyful hand clapping. Thus, in this emancipation in the present, these African-American women celebrate their own liberation from their ancestors' restricted bodily experiences under slavery through their re-creation of the trance dance.

This re-vision of African dance affirms their trans*form*ation, shown specifically in the gestures and steps they have taken away from their formerly oppressive situations and

their achievement, manifest in their walking away from the sea towards the land, of an emancipated condition in their artistic and religious practices. This new version of trance dance, with its introductory steps incorporating a playful swaying of the hips, enables them to achieve mobility as it is theorized by Ann Cooper Albright in *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*

> It is my contention that contemporary dance foregrounds a responsive dancing body, one that engages with the challenges of static representations. It is through the act of choreographing these differences that the dancers [...] mobilize cultural identities, unleashing them from their overly deterministic moorings while at the same time revealing their somatic ground. (xiii)

In the contemporary staging of their revised version, the African-American women propose an ex-tension of the conventional perception of dance as constituting a culturally fixed racial and sexual identity. Their new dance sets in motion a physical and mental movement away from present-day African traditions and dominant American cultural misrepresentations as these are manifest in the rigid moulds of stereotypical sexual and racial images of African-American women as the subdued victims of black and white men's domination and aggression. Thus, the new dance depicts a radical shift, from the compliance to tradition present in the mere observation of a religious ritual, to a modern performance of an autonomous African female identity. In this way, trance dance becomes a means of accomplishing an ex-tension through the dancers' exertion, guided by their ancestors' siprits, and their internal control over their own bodies as a resistance to external forces.

The women dancers gather strength as they swirl round and round, experiencing the trance as a kind of self-transformation in which their encounters with the ancestors' spirits overwhelm them with e-motion as their dance gathers motion to set free the inner tension that is released in a swoon. According to African belief, dance cures old ills by repeating past experiences in order to bring about an understanding of both oppression and its remedy. Trance, practised in this new context, offers a means to live out a new experience of liberation as relief from former constraints, thus becoming a process of setting free an

emergent identity in response to past traditions. Taking the lead, a mature lady sways her hips with great enthusiasm to show the younger girls how to take pride in exposing their feminine curves. African dance also offers the women a means of ex-posing their sexual identities through an explicit display of their beautiful bodies to challenge stereotypical misrepresentations of African women as prostitutes or sexual victims. Julie Dash's depiction of the trance dance further portrays women's dancing bodies as defying conventional views of dominant cultural representations in which women are relegated to passive roles and imposed static codes of social behaviour. Dash promotes a historical narrative through this choreographic re-presentation of African dance as a metaphor for women's bodily expressions to display their mobile, freely progressing cultural identities. Her own perspective on dance can be detected in Albright's notion that

> [m]uch of the choreography [...] plays with, challenges, and questions idealized images (of love, femininity, family [...] etc.) and traditional narratives, consciously bringing to the audience's attention the gaps between the stereotypes and the reality of the dancers' physical lives. These dances often focus on the negotiation between how one defines one's body in the face of how that body is defined by society. Although it is *of* the body, dance is not just *about* the body, it is also about subjectivity – about how that body is positioned in the world as well as the ways in which that particular body responds to the world. By foregrounding the way identity is figured corporeally, by challenging which bodies are allowed which identities, and by fracturing the voyeuristic relationship between audience and performers, the contemporary dances refute the traditional constructions of the body.[...] Their work addresses the (dis)connections between physical bodies and their cultural identities, refiguring the relationship between the "eye" of the audience and the "I's" of the dancers in order to open up new ways of moving and being in the world. (*Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance,* 4)

These innovative gestures, these suave and sensuous female bodily ex-positions in a spontaneous reconstruction of trance dance, serve to accentuate the contrast with traditional images and narratives of conventional female African-American identity. Dash further depicts the new positions taken up by African-American women in Yellow Mary's

redefinition of a new cultural identity. African dance is stretched beyond the formal limits of cultural representation in Dash's new choreographic presentation, which traces the trajectories of a "travelling" identity, one analogous to dance, as a metaphor for the frequent shifts in positions that occur in the constant flux of movement, creating a flexible mobility of identity construction. In recounting her past experiences to Eula, Mary depicts her liberation in her negotiation of the enforced role of prostitute to a white slave owner and wet nurse to his children, and the steps she has taken to move away from sexual and racial oppression to achieve autonomy. She openly challenges the rigid socio-cultural prescription of African women's traditional role through a re-figuration of her new feminine identity. By refusing her role as a wet nurse, accomplished through the deliberate termination of her lactation (by fixing her breasts), Yellow Mary simultaneously exposes and opposes the prescriptive (mis)representation of female identity in bodily functions. She resists her imposed displacement to Cuba by engaging in voluntary travel to other countries to work as a prostitute on her own terms. Her narrative of these travels includes both her physical displacement and her disruption of conventional figurations of female identity. Moreover, she has achieved an alternative connection to her bodily experiences by defining herself through her extensive travels, which have not only allowed her to achieve freedom in her work and an independent life, but which can also be regarded metaphorically as "dance". Her travel narrative is depicted as a female dance celebrating her own liberation from the limits of cultural representation. Dash presents a special notion of 'dance' in Yellow Mary's attractive manner of walking, talking and engaging her body. In her depiction of Yellow Mary's poise, beauty and personal movements, as seen in her numerous walks on the beach with Eula and Trula, Dash suggests that feminine identity can be re-envisioned through a 'dancing' interconnectedness between diverse aspects of the female body as a response to her socio-cultural position. Yellow Mary displays openness, smiling and not taking offence against Haagar who inquired whether she herself baked the cookies which she offers. She reveals herself as a travelling and working woman who is not tied down to the home and the activities of cooking and caring for the family. She also

adopts a carefree and outgoing attitude, sharing and laughing at jokes with Trula, while sitting on a branch of a tree. Yellow Mary's joyful celebration of life manifests a wider notion of dance as a means of surmounting the negative tension of oppression, symbolized by her high position in the tree. Moreover, the dance metaphor reinforces the ability of welcoming and performing cultural exchanges alongside the preservation of one's own traditional values. Yellow Mary's easy acceptance of the Christian religion may be seen in the St. Christopher's medal she adopts for protection during her travels, even while she respects Nana's ritual of the cult of ancestors. Also, Yellow Mary's "dancing" identity can also be observed in all of her activities, ranging from her work as a prostitute to her adherence to the Christian faith, from her numerous travels with a female companion to her decision to remain on the Sea Islands and preserve ancient African customs. The continuously shifting stances adopted by Yellow Mary in her mobile identity are illuminated by the following discussion about the body:

> [...] bodies while inscribed by social practices are rarely passive receptacles of these structures. Lived bodies strain at the seam of culture's ideological fabric. Inherently unstable, the body is always in a paradoxical process of becoming – and become undone. As any dancer [...] will readily admit, the body never reaches a stable location, no matter how disciplined the training. The daily practice required to keep the body "in shape" exposes the body's instability, its amazing tendency to spill over its appropriate boundaries. Yet at the same time, [...] that daily practice also structures a physical identity of its own making. Simultaneously registering, creating, and subverting cultural conventions, embodied experience is necessarily complex. (*Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, 5).

This view of the body's refiguration in response to socio-cultural conditions reflects both the African-American women dancers and Yellow Mary, in their physical and metaphorical performances of their identities that go beyond strict social codes of behaviour. These women literally and figuratively move beyond the normal boundaries allocated to the body in their dances and cultural representations. Their bodies are unstable, figuring neither as

passive nor stationary receptacles, but as flexible and active vehicles of change and adaptation. These African-American women express their constant self-transformation in the face of diasporic displacements according to the image of dance that best depicts the paradoxical processes of their dis- and re-connection from and to their own and new cultures, their bodies paradoxically undergoing both the experiences of becoming and becoming undone. Dance signifies the ways in which these women negotiate diverse positions and subvert conventions to create new representations, using their bodies to cast (re)figurations of their own identities. Thus, Yellow Mary's multiple moves in anticipation of new challenges while she simultaneously holds on to her original culture, mark her constant shifts back and forth as expressions of a subjectivity that is continually becoming and becoming undone.

Besides mapping Yellow Mary's bodily expressions onto intercultural exchanges and continual self-transformation, Dash also presents Iona's performance of her sexual and cultural identity as a form of resistance to conventional cultural representations. Like Yellow Mary, Iona also engages in an open intercultural exchange through her relation with St. Julian, the last survivor of the original Cherokee tribe of Red Indians on the Sea Islands. Dash depicts Iona's experience of her romance with St. Julian in a form of dance in which the couple comes together as a way of showing how they surmount the difficulties of their different cultures, which they resolve through their common experiences of sharing the land and their remembrance of their ancestors' racial oppression. Meeting with St. Julian on the beach after receiving of his love letter, in which he entreats her to be by his side to rebind the union of their childhood days, Iona takes up a new position by choosing to forge her own socio-cultural identity, despite her sister's advice for her to ignore St. Julian's plea and prepare to migrate with the rest of her family.

Like Yellow Mary, Iona resists any passive acceptance of prescribed cultural roles in achieving her personal liberation by moving beyond her mother's strict code of behaviour and following the dictates of her own heart. Thus, while retaining her African roots, she moves towards a union with the Red Indian tribe in her decision to elope with St. Julian,

thereby expressing a paradoxical position of connection and disconnection from the idea of the purebred African and creating a new bond with a different cultural group. Thus, like Yellow Mary, Iona also experiences the bodily figuration of her identity as a transient dislocation from her original group through a relocation in an intercultural exchange of social relations.

The scene of her emotional (re)union with St. Julian as he arrives on horseback to the sea-side to take her away just as she is about to leave with the family to migrate north by boat can be perceived as a dramatic dance metaphor, in which her journey with St. Julian changes both the direction as well as the mode of travelling. Instead of heading north on a boat along with the fleet transporting her family inland, Iona takes a ride on St. Julian's horse as it gallops away from the beach to the interior part of the Sea Islands at full speed. Her eloping with St. Julian represents her open challenge to her mother's authority, for she ignores her mother's desperate call of her name, in order to create a new intercultural identity.

The dance image provides insight into the means of trans*form*ation through which Iona performs her emergent identity in the directional shifts from migration by boat to her own return to the interior part of the Sea Islands on horseback. Like Yellow Mary, Iona also decides to remain on the Sea Islands to preserve her own cultural identity and that of St. Julian, as well as their respective ancestors' cultural heritage. Thus, like Yellow Mary, Iona also questions any rigid perception of African identity in her intercultural experience with St. Julian.

## THE BODY AS VEHICLE FOR EXPRESSIONS THROUGH DANCE

Both Yellow Mary and Iona manifest the diverse figurations of their cultural identities using their bodies as vehicles to express their shifting feelings regarding their racial and sexual subjectivities as these are activated by the motion of their travels away from and back to the Sea Islands. Their bodies simultaneously develop the paradoxical processes of dis- and re-connection to their cultural identities as multiple re-actions to

conventional representations. The complex experiences of the body that expresses, by subverting conventional codes and creating new meanings, can be visualized according to Albright's notion of dance that

> can also tell us about the social value of the body within a particular culture. Learning to perceive the multiple layers of cultural meaning of the body in dance requires, however, a willingness to converse in different languages – both physical and verbal – at once. Thus, to understand the ways the dancing body can signify within a culture, one must engage with a variety of discourses: kinaesthetic, visual, somatic, and aesthetic as well as intellectual. (*Choreographing Difference,* 5)

The complex interactions of the physical and metaphorical aspects of dance are expressed through the narrative, which shows the interconnectedness of somatic experiences of the aural and visual as a means of literally and figuratively perceiving the meanings generated by the body in dance. The African-American women's paradoxical acts of taking on and discarding social roles denote a reversal of the values that are conventionally attributed to the body. The cultural meanings of the body are (re)generated in the context of multidimensional perspectives through the interactions between the kinaesthetic, audiovisual and aesthetic fields.

I propose an innovative view of dance as reflecting the interconnections between diverse aspects of diasporic identity reconfiguration, in which the narration of history is reconceptualized as a choreography that organizes a dynamic vision of the whole according to the motion of its multiple parts. Within the multiple rhythmic patterns of development, Nana's narrative serves as a context for the Unborn Child's story, which in turn can be considered as a metaphorical microcosmic dance within the larger dance of the African vision of the cosmos as the main rhythm that organizes all life, including that of humans and of plants. Nana's narrative of her African ancestry, highlighted by the trance dance, expresses the larger framework of ritual within which the Unborn Child performs the metaphorical dance of spiritual incorporation and reincarnation in her presence, as this is

actualized in her travels from the ancestors' world and her absence upon her return to that of the departed souls.

Similar to Yellow Mary's travel and continuous development, the Unborn Child's narrative traces an elliptical movement through her frequent dis- and re-appearances from the main storyline. Thus, she develops a sub-narrative that progresses as a tangential rhythm alongside the main development of the story. It serves to break up the narrative flow, portraying a return to slavery in the spatiotemporal displacements that are conveyed by an imaginary dance image in which the Unborn Child runs on the beach wearing an indigo ribbon that denotes her emergence from the world of departed souls. Another image of this dance can be considered in the playful way in which she disappears from a scene in the present with her family members, resurfacing to appear among the slave workers where her great-grandfather was gathering indigo into cubes and counting "eena, meena, mina". Her reappearance is later achieved through her participation with her cousins in a game of chance, pointing to figures in a picture catalogue.

I perceive a dance metaphor in the Unborn Child's extensive explorations of games as a means of discovering novel experiences in order to acquire new understanding through sensory perception of, and relation to, the environment. I base my reading on Alma M. Hawkin's ideas, expressed in *Creating through Dance* as follows:

> There is a great urge to know, relate and become in dance by using sensory experiences as a means of perceiving [one's] surroundings which are transposed into rhythm in dance. Dance enables the dancer to discover and to imagine new understanding alongside the need to separate one's cultural image. (6)

The Unborn Child relates to the multiple cultural contexts of the dance image, through which she transposes the rhythmic intonations arising from the (re)articulation of "eene, meena, mina" in its original usage in the days of slavery to its contemporary, liberated deployment as a form of play. Her geographical displacement in physical space simultaneously shifts the account from the historical time of slavery to contemporary freedom, in a game of flexible re-interpretation. The Unborn Child becomes the

embodiment of rhythm across multiple dimensions, showing a disconnection in the patterns of rhythm between her grandfather's constricted form of iteration as containment, viewed through tightly packed bricks of indigo dyes, to her cousins' new type of place, depicted in their free movement across the wide spaces of the Sears catalogue. The Unborn Child joins in the game wherein the play is enacted through the "dance of the index finger", performed by her cousins and then by herself, the special mark of the indigo colour revealing her origin in slavery.

Then, her auntie's new performance further shifts this cultural context, highlighting the commemoration of the past in a contemporary game that acts as a refiguration of past rituals through the figure of the "mother" – both herself to her children and her own mother to herself, and, more generally, with reference to the earlier generation's relation to the next generation – in the rhythms of her voice and the movements of her arm and finger over the pictures across the page. Thus, the dual aspects of perpetuating and transforming African cultural heritage are played out in the current scene of children's game with an American sales magazine.

The Unborn Child's presence in these contexts denotes the interconnected rhythms that can be thought of as a cultural "paradigm", according to W. Barnett Pearce's concept of the paradigm of communication in a culture that is constituted by the myths or stories that everyone knows (*Making Social Worlds: A Communication Perspective,* 62). In Pearce's reading, the interactions of multiple paradigms are constantly created and recreated through agents of change. I refer to his theory in my consideration of the multiple shifts in cultural rhythms in the different versions of Nana's tale, as it is retold by the Unborn Child through her frequent dis- and re-appearances in scenes from colonial slavery to post-emancipation present, as well as her participation in the narrative chain of the different usages of "eena, meena, mina". The Unborn Child's stories figure in the larger context of Nana's historical griot as the play of a new game through a re-creation of cultural heritage in current practices. The re-invention of ancient culture in a new form brings about an interaction between the little stories within the wider narrative of

emancipation from oppression, thus pushing the limits of representation through the flow of rhythms (in articulations of "eena,meena, mina") across the different layers of the tale's narrative structure.

The interactions between paradigms can also be perceived, outside the Unborn Child's interventions into her great-grandmother Nana's narrative, in her mother Eula's anecdotes of her communications with her own mother through a water offering and letters. Eula's relationship with her departed mother, whose spiritual response is obtained during her sleep, is similar to the Unborn Child's mythical relation with her mother, as it is depicted in her (re)traversing her mother's womb to continue her internal development for future birth from the present trip across multiple spaces and times. The enfolding of these multiple stories-within-stories, make the larger narrative whole function like a dance, pulling together the many social, cultural and religious threads through the manifold relationships between episodes and the many selves generated within this complex pattern of representation.

The relations between the diverse layers create a second field that is superimposed onto the first, so that new experiences arise from explorations and experimentations. The Unborn Child's multiple stories are further linked to Nana's and Eula's narratives so as to reveal the complex multivocal expressions of culture in its shared meanings and practices, as well as to express the dual experiences of cultural development as it is defined by Lev Vygotsky in *Mind in Society* as follows:

> Every function of the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intropsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to lyrical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (57)

Julie Dash reveals the Unborn Child's role in *Daughters of the Dust* as the narrative thread that links together history (as this is related by Nana) to the present story and its projection into the future. Her story enacts the dual rhythms of cultural development, first

in the social dimension with her slave ancestors and among her present-day emancipated family members, and secondly, in her individual relationship with her mother. The difference in the rhythms of these two realms is shown through film speed: the slow motion, used to depict the Unborn Child's running on the beach and meeting her aunt Haagar, signifies her coming from her ancestors' world to the present, whereas a faster pace demonstrates her return into her mother's womb, as if being sucked into her mother's body, in order to portray a direct personal relationship with her own mother.

The multiple ways of conveying the stories of the Unborn Child, Nana and Eula are viewed as elements of a dance in a choreography that re-presents diverse cultural aspects through the body's physical and verbal expressions as the rhythms of narrative flow. I consider Julie Dash's interpretation of this tripartite narrative with its own internal subplots as multilayered figuration of a single story, one ascribed to the history of Africans by mainstream representations. I further perceive the notion of choreography in Dash's ex-position of the many levels of cultural meaning expressed by the body. The encounter between Eli and his cousin can be viewed as a cultural dance, from the motion that draws them together in their salutary handshake to the wrestling fight that engages them in a confrontation before breaking them up. Dash reveals, in the notes for *The Making of Daughters of the Dust*, that beneath the external conventional handshake, the two men pass secret messages with the movement of their fingers on the inside of their palms. This is another form of play performed by the "dance of the fingers" between the two men whose conventional handshake covers up the signals emitted by secret code to deal with a larger conversation about anti-lynching campaigns. As W. Barnett Pearce has suggested in *Making Social Worlds: A Communication Perspective*,

> Messages about what episode we are performing – play, fights, games, debates, etc. – are not "in" the episode but "about" the episode; they are a different level of abstraction. Building on Bateson's ideas [that "exchanging signals ... would carry the message, this is play" (1972:179)], ... Jackson (1967) developed five axioms of communication, one of which states that all messages have both a content and a relationship meaning such that the relational meanings provide a context for the content. (141)

Just as the Unborn Child's brief presence on her former great-grandfather's plantation provides the context of past slavery, Eli's short exchange with his cousin serves as a pretext for the (c)overt expression of the socio-political conditions of African-Americans. Dash depicts, through the episodes of these games and fights, the playing out of multiple layers of cultural meaning in which, according to Janet Adstead-Landsdale in *Dancing Intertexts: Intertextuality in Interpretation* (1999), "any element of a performance – for example, an image, a movement, a sound – can be treated as a text" (9). Furthermore, Dash draws out the relationship between the content and context of each message performed by the African-Americans in their physical and allegorical notion of dance through the women's debates over the meaning of their migration north, and the Unborn Child's and Eli's play with their cousins in the games using African language and cultural codes. The plural layers of historical narrative can be viewed as intertexts through which different meanings are created in the choreography of corporeal relations of African-Americans in the performance of their identities in diverse cultural contexts. The context and pretext of these cultural messages are effected from the "text" of shifting images of the Unborn Child's dis- and re-appearances into past and present scenes, the movements of Eli and his cousin during their welcoming and parting gestures, and the sound of "eena, meena, mina" reiterated in different contexts.

The enfolding of these diverse layers, which are superimposed on each other, can be interpreted according to Janet Adshead-Landsdale's notion that

> [t]he performance text, it can be argued, is a mixture of the old and the new – an original combination within a textual structure of the pre-existing codes and [...] distinctive codes that are created anew with each performance which, in turn, transforms and reinvents codes of the cultural text. (*Dancing Intertexts,* 10)

The narrative of images, movements and sounds are performance texts which integrate innovative aspects of the contemporary scene in order to transform ancient cultural codes. The newly invented codes perform in dialogue with the conventional codes through a

playful attitude that both reiterates the cultural heritage and moves beyond it to accommodate more exploratory approaches. Within this multiple narrative scheme, the original cultural setting provides the context for the newly created messages which thereby transform the previously fixed codes through their flexible refiguration of socio-cultural meanings and values.

Historical narratives in *Daughters of the Dust* can be interpreted as performance texts that evoke polyrhythms, a concept elaborated by Francesca Castaldi in *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance and National Ballet of Senegal* as follows:

> Polyrhythms define not only a musical and choreographic strategy but also a theoretical model that articulates relationships of parts to a whole. [...] This model contrasts with the hierarchical model in which relationships of power follow a linear and centralized mode of transmission [...] A polyrhythmic model presents us with differentiated layers (nonhomologous relationships) within which different rules of improvisation apply (degrees of freedom) as well as a circular (nonlinear) mode of connection that refer to each other without claiming an absolute point of origin. Within a polyrhythmic structure separate rhythms are necessary to create an interlocking whole. (8)

The different rhythms created through the diverse narrative dimensions of *Daughters of the Dust* function as both a choreographic design and a theoretical concept of non-hierarchical relations of freely improvised rules in a pattern of circular connections that defy linearity and a fixed point of origin, as suggested by Castaldi's idea of polyrhythms.

The interconnectedness between the narratives of Nana, Eula and the Unborn Child is derived from the rhythm that links them together as intergenerational subjects through the ties of the body. The Unborn Child comes to her family during their celebration before migration, coinciding with Nana's prayer to the old souls for help in Eli's worries over Eula's rape. Her narrative is a response to Nana's griot of the problems of diasporic displacement, migration and oppression as an actualization of her great-grandmother's wish for the reconciliation between her parents. The voice-over in her narrative expresses the inner voice that links up the two historical accounts through the rhythmic development of

history when she says, “my story begins before I was born ... my great-grandmother prayed to the old souls”. There is a sharing of the rhythm that links Nana’s griot to the Unborn Child’s inner narrative. The Unborn Child’s voice echoes Nana’s oral narrative, and her physical act of running on the beach with a purple-coloured ribbon in her hair reflects Nana’s earlier emergence from the sea in her indigo dress. The Unborn Child’s narrative manifests a rhythmic flow that connects itself to Nana’s main story through a unity of action (of the voice and body). Dash portrays, through the great-grandmother’s oral griot as it is represented in her (forthcoming) great-granddaughter’s physical (re)enactment of her story, a rhythm that links the women of many generations throughout African-American history. In African belief, the notion of dance can be perceived in the great rhythmic pattern binding the cosmic to the microcosmic in a synthesis of energies. Dash depicts the metaphor of dance as a cosmic link between departed souls and living humans through Eula’s narrative of her water offering, as well as her letters to her mother which her mother responds to directly by coming to her at night in her sleep.

The synchronisation of various life rhythms is depicted by Dash as the numerous displacements of the Unborn Child in an imaginary dance across multiple spaces and times: from the slave ancestors of the past in dye plantations, to her present family’s celebration as they prepare for their migration north. The Unborn Child first circulates among her family members, tugging at her aunt Haagar’s skirt and taking her place at her father’s side for the family photograph, then goes back to the plantation where her great-grandfather made dye cubes, and finally reappears again amongst her cousins during their game with the catalogue. The Unborn Child’s narrative, considered as a dance metaphor, is perceived as the embodiment of the rhythm perpetuated across generations, from counting indigo cubes “eena, meena, mina”, as her great-grandfather did in the hard labour under slavery, to her cousins’ playful game, while their mother adds “that is what my mother taught me”, thereby indicating, through this evocative rhythm, the link between past usage and present practice in a game. Similar to the lady who leads other dancers in a suave, contemporary-

style opening to an ancient African religious dance, the African maternal figure performs, by the "dance of the finger", a modern game version of an ancient African cultural practice.

**MULTIPLE SELF RE-PRESENTATIONS IN AFRICAN DANCE**

The cultural memory promoted in African dance rituals by a complex multilayering of physical motions and oral narratives evokes a fluid re-presentation of African history, displacing the conventional monolithic and static form of written history. It can be perceived as the exploration of "various faces of African-American cultural heritage, refiguring written history in order to embody a tale of the choreographer's own making" (*Choreographies of African Identities,* 150). Dash's presentation of diverse bodily rhythms in dance performance depicts a continuous tale of past colonial deportation, present cultural re-orientation and the future possibilities of migration, encompassing the story of slavery as well as that of liberty. Thus, dance offers a re-interpretation of cultural history, figuring as "a metaphor for the physical desire to survive and the metaphysical need to fill that survival with hope [such that] the choreographers have, with the help of their collaborators, created theatrical spectacles that evoke the elegiac as well as the celebrating spirit of a people wedged in between two worlds" (*Choreographies of African Identities,* 150). African dance ritual weaves a narrative of personal and social survival across diverse spatiotemporal dimensions through the re-enactment of a cultural practice in the form of an embodied performance of dis- and re-connection from and to African identities. It infuses the African-Americans with hope in their celebration of a cultural legacy perpetuated in the ancestors' spirits through their constant guidance of the survivors' life and activities.

The historical embodiment does not impose a notion of static truth as a unique event in ancient Africa to be restaged in trance dance ritual, but instead proposes an oral version according to the African griot tradition, which thrives on a continual re-telling of the story of survival by recalling the memory of the ancestors and their guiding spirits. In Dash's choreographic representation of embodied cultural performance, spectators are invited to participate in a re-interpretation of African history by perceiving dance as alternative

images and sounds of political and religious identity. Challenging conventional notions of slavery and colonial oppression, dance depicts a tale of physical and metaphorical liberation in women's capacity to move away from the restricting limits of representation towards a self re-definition through a bodily construction that traces a far-reaching trajectory of resistance and survival. The somatic experience of identity expressed through words enables a direct relation of exchange and interplay between narrators and listeners both in the film (in Nana's historical narrative recounted to Eli) and of film (in spectators' visual and auditorial experiences of trance dance).

Just before the dance performance on the beach and the return during the dance images, the dialogue between Nana and Eli in the graveyard, symbolizing the space of encounter between the Peazant ancestors and their multigenerational descendants (Eli being Nana's great-grandson), reveals the possibility for spectators of viewing the identity (trans)formation in the negotiations between past and present conceptions of the self through bodily movement. While African-American dancers directly transpose Nana's exhortation to call upon the ancestors to come to them and touch their bodies with their spirits during trance, Nana's address to Eli establishes a visual link with the image of her hand taking the earth particles, which Eli gives her, and clasping them tightly to her bosom. Through the exchange of the soil which Eli takes from his pockets and gives to Nana, who places near her heart, a close connection to the body is felt and expressed as the principle organizing agent of African cultural identity. Thus, Dash depicts a re-vision of African history that counters racial discrimination and cultural division. This revised historical account, presented through multiple bodily rhythms, can be understood as follows:

> The complex interweaving of oral, danced and theatrical texts [...] documents our national legacy of interracial hate and gendered and ethnic inequalities. Yet this bleak history is enriched by personal narratives of love, religious faith, and spiritual transcendence. By reinterpreting classic stories and cultural stereotypes through contemporary dancing bodies [independent women filmmakers] refuse the static doneness of historical documentation, lifting the black and white printing off the page and imbuing it with the ability

> to move, to shift, and finally, to transform itself. (*Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, 153).

Dash engages the spectators in a new vision of history that reaches beyond the tragic fate of racial and sexual domination through positive images of celebratory dance rituals, as well as a dialogue of hope and encouragement between survivors. Nana's strong recommendation to Eli, that he should trust his wife Eula after she falls victim to sexual aggression by a white man, complements the view of the female dancers' loyalty to their cultural heritage through their performance. The dancers' graceful gestures suggest both their artistic abilities, as well as their physical elegance, as visible qualities of their inner strength and solidarity between women sharing social experiences of mutual understanding and support. Thus, Dash offers a new inscription of history in the female body through women's dance and oral narratives that develops a transformation of the conventionally fixed and closed structure of written documents. Her choreographic presentation of history orchestrates an animated, flexible, and shifting vision to incorporate a multidimensional approach through a polyrhythmic organization of bodily performance.

**COSMIC REPRESENTATION THROUGH AFRICAN DANCE**

According to the African belief in the wider cosmos encapsulating all life, Africans merge with the universe through trance dance, which offers a representation of their bodies as an expression of their souls in direct contact with their ancestors' spirits. Just before the dance scene, Dash shows Nana sitting at her long-departed husband's grave, advising her grandson Eli that "it's up to the living to keep in touch with the dead", since she upholds that departed Africans "just move on to another place, a place where we go and watch over our living family". The ritual of trance dance revives this link between dead and living Africans in a fusion with the greater cosmos sphere expressed, in Nana's words, as: "those in the grave and those that cross the sea with us, they're with us. They're one and the same". Spiritual incarnation during trance effects the desired re-orientation towards ancient African cultural belief through the representational practice of the dance ritual. Through

the vision of women dancers undergoing spiritual possession, Dash presents African dance as an illustration of the oneness described by Nana in her affirmation of the ancestors' presence among their living descendants. This view can be understood according to Curt Sachs's notion of the merging of the dancer with his dance image which lives on in time and space through rhythmical patterns of movements.

Dash depicts the transcendentalism of African dance through time and space in the performance of an embodied art that revives the memory of the ancestors. Images of women dancers joining their hands together in front of the sea evoke their union with the slaves' souls in order to "keep in touch with their ancestors", according to Nana's exhortation to Eli. As their feet move left and right on the beach, the women symbolically re-enact their ancestors' experience of crossing the sea and landing at Ibo, as well as the tragic fate of those who, according to legend, drowned while walking home with their feet bound in chains. Thus Dash illustrates, in Sach's sense, the oneness of African-American women dancers with their art in their experience as both subject and object of the dance through their bodily fusion with the ancestors' spirits.

African dance conveys a re-presentation of historical narrative through the evocation of the ancestors' memory. The dance scene is a visual illustration of Nana's narrative according to the oral tradition in which, as Francesca Castaldi puts it, "[t]he association of words with dance has a long history that goes back to pre-colonial West African empires and the social practices of the griots who performed as musicians, oral historians and dancers" (*Choreographies of African Identities*, 4). The close link between transcendence and Nana's oral account of history is perceived through the multiple aspects of performance in the dance gestures and bodily rhythms constituting diverse forms of griot representation.

**NARRATIVE AND MEMORY IN AFRICAN DANCE**

In their trance experience, women dancers enact Nana's exhortation as calling upon memory in their physical experience, while Nana's words in turn set up the narrative of the dance as an oral/aural performance of the griot. Dash juxtaposes images of the trance performance with Nana's words spoken to Eli: "Call on those old souls that they might guide us. They come to you, they hug you soft with the sweet wind. Let those old souls come to you". The memory of the departed ancestors is thus evoked both orally in Nana's speech, and physically in the dancers' bodily possession by spirits, thus enacting the "call on those old souls" who are thought to "come to [them] and hug [them]". Dash presents trance dance as a form of recollection of an ancient African ritual that combines speech and dance through oral and bodily rhythms. She draws on the relationship between the aural and the kinetic in the consideration of dance, perceived by Castaldi, as "a form of orality in which rhythm mediates between [...] speech and dance" (*Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance and the National Ballet of Senegal,* 4). Calling on the departed souls is carried out in the dual communication of the physical act of dance and the oral narratives that evoke, through rhythmical sensation, multiple forms of historical embodiment. The flow of Nana's narrative address to Eli also calls upon the audience to view trance dance, in association with words, as the diverse skein of bodily interaction in a performance involving voice, hands, feet, torso, head and face. The spectators are drawn into these bodily rhythms, which are enhanced by a cinematographic flow assimilating Nana's words into the dance: "Let the old souls come to you, let them touch you with the hands of time, let them feed your head with wisdom that is from this day in time". The corporeal language of dance is communicated to the audience through the rhythms emitted both in the dancers' embodied motion and Nana's oral expression. Dash's film establishes the connection between performers and audience in a ritual performance which can be understood from Jacqueline-Copeland-Carson's argument that "Africans' innate historical and cultural memory ... [is a] whole-body sensory understanding, integrating the aural, oral, visual, and kinetic into what was considered an African way of sensing the world"

(*Creating Africa in America,* 114). In their reconstruction of cultural memory, the performers engage in communication with the spectators through interaction with the multiple senses derived from the kinetic feeling of the ancestors' touch with the hands of time and the visible bodily energy flowing from the internal wisdom of spirits. The perception of these diverse sensations is promoted by the simultaneous vision of dance images with the sonority of oral narratives. The interactions of these bodily rhythms with the greater rhythm of the cosmos are evoked in Nana's narrative introduction to the dance, linking the African ancestors to their descendants through memory. She emphatically tells Eli:

> Never forget who we are and how far we've come. Our recollection, we carry them inside us. Do you think those hundreds of Africans who came here would forget everything we once knew. We carry these memories inside of us. I'm trying to learn you how to touch your own spirit. I'm fighting for my life and I'm fighting for your life.

Trance dance is an active means of remembering the Africans' original identity and the long journey from Africa through a recalling of the past, kept by ancestors' spirits, in the dancers' bodies. The spiritual rhythm is put across to spectators in the oral narrative, which offers a special link to the dance, according to African belief depicted by Alphone Tiérou Dooplé in *Loi éternelle de la danse africaine* (1989) in these terms: "toute vraie danse exprime, raconte and parle au coeur des spectateurs. La danse conte l'inexprimable, c'est une autre forme d'expression. Elle est le lien entre le corps, la Terre et la tête, le Ciel" (22). The oral and aural forms of dance are expressed in terms of a narrative revealing to the audience the invisible link of the body, as a physical element of the earth, to the head, as a spiritual aspect in cosmology. Trance dance makes use of the body which, in African practice, effects a dual trajectory in the ascension towards the macrocosm through spiritual reconnection to the cosmos, and a descent to the microcosm through the physical element of the human body. Africans' notion of their diasporic identity is experienced in trance dance through their explorations and interactions with their ancestors. The ways in which

the multiple sensorial aspects of dance are expressed by narrative elements are interpreted by Alma M. Hawkins in *Creating through Dance* as follows:

> There is great urge to know, to relate and to become in dance by using sensory experiences as a means of perceiving [the] surroundings which are transposed into rhythms in dance. Dance enables the dancer to discover and to imagine new understanding alongside the need to perpetuate one's cultural heritage. (6)

Through their bodily transmission in spiritual trance, dancers relate to their ancestors through the vibration of rhythms arising from the sensory experiences of communication between them. Their dance practices offer a means of reconnecting with their cultural heritage, as well as of developing a new orientation towards the future. Thus, dance promotes the possibility of discovering a new sense of self in relation to the ancient wisdom of the ancestors. Nana invokes the African tradition of the oral performance of history as it is related to trance dance when she says, "I'm trying to learn you how to touch your own spirit. I'm fighting for my life and I'm fighting for your life". Nana shows the importance of reconnecting with one's own spirit to obtain guidance for survival from the energy obtained from the ancestors' wisdom. She makes use of words as the main link to the sensorial language of African dance which connects dancers to other characters in the film through the "touch of the ancestors" during the trance performance and Africans' need to "touch their own spirit". The kinetic aspect of dance is enhanced by the oral/aural element of Nana's griot, which can be considered as an active performance in the following reading of African dance:

> Even language (the written and, especially, the spoken word) is conceived as a mobile concept, a shaker and a mover; with the power to effect change. Words are verbal movement – thus, traditional West African gods are dancing deities in dancing religions. Each one has its own chants, rhythms, gestures, and steps. (*Cultural Bodies: Ethnography and Theory,* 11)[9]

[9] Judith Lynne Hanna also wrote in *The Performer-Audience Connection*, "The potency of dance to persuade and to move people to social action has been recognized in many eras and places, from the antiquity of Aristotle and Plato to contemporary authorities in Africa".

In accordance with African religious beliefs, words are the principle element directly associated with dance in the movement that unites divinities with their practising worshippers through chants and the other bodily gestures that make up the rhythms that shape the dancing ritual through motion and sound. Words take on the forceful power of moving African-Americans to action in their perpetuation of African cultural traditions acted out in the trance dance.

The potential power in Nana's oral account of history, with its source in dance religious rites, serves to mobilize toward taking the necessary cultural steps toward future consolidation derived from past ancestral guidance. The mobile concept of a historical narrative depicted through dance gives a flexible view of the universe in African culture as a dynamic realm constantly in motion. Nana's exhortation serves to motivate African-Americans to reach back into their cultural heritage as a means of enhancing their sense of self in their new homes in the north. Nana says to Eli, "I'm putting my trust in you to keep the family together up North in the challenge that face us Negroes that are free. Celebrate our ways." The practice of oral and kinetic forms of griot through trance dance and its accompanying narrative provides African-Americans with an important strategy for consolidating their cultural identities in the face of continual displacement and migration north. The bodily rhythms of dance and speech unite them in the celebration of ancient ritual activities through a performance that is at once universal, collective and personal. According to Nana's advice to Eli to "celebrate our ways", trance dance is considered as a performance geared toward the cultural retention of African religious beliefs. The spiritual communication with ancestors revives the memory of their own cultural identity originating in Africa. Dash depicts the Peazants' former identity through a reconstruction of the images and sounds of a cultural performance. According to Marita Sturken, memory is a narrative rather than a replica of an experience that can be retrieved and relived. It is thus an inquiry into how cultural memories are constructed as they are recollected, and how memory acts as a form of interpretation. From Sturken's insight into memory, Dash's

interpretation of trance dance can be viewed as a form of (re)interpretation of former cultural habits.

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**VIETNAMESE DANCES**

I consider Trinh T. Minh-ha's presentation of dance in her film *Surname Viet* as not only showing the physical aspects of Vietnamese cultural practices, but also the metaphorical expressions of female identity in response to social prescriptions from classical conventions to those of the contemporary socialist regime. Trinh's film features dance to depict the re-presentation of women's subjectivities in their constantly changing roles throughout multiple experiences of oppression in Vietnamese history, from Chinese domination to French colonialism and American military presence, as well as Vietnamese socialist reorganization. Shown in fragmented scenes in the documentary, dance enables the re-thinking, through images and narrative, of the multilayered meanings of women's cultural identities. Trinh depicts the multiple facets of women's identities through the fragmentation of moving and still images, as well as through the superimposition of aural and oral texts of poems and songs over the translated texts of the re-enacted interviews. She presents both the literal and figurative images of dance as diverse interactions between multiple forms of reflexivity and the links created between them. The multiple facets of these visual and oral elements feature polyrhythmic notions of texts in relation to their contexts, as well as the multiple dimensions of the inter-, intra- and extra-textual. I will analyze the ways in which dance enables the re-figuration of the image of women in Trinh's film through the performance of the body as a vehicle for expressing their experiences.

## CULTURAL PERFORMANCES OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN'S IDENTITY

Dance plays the central role in *Surname Viet* in figuring the cultural performance of Vietnamese women's sexual identity. Trinh presents women in different costumes for various occasions in several dance scenes to depict, through her voice-over commentaries, their experiences of and contributions to diverse historical epochs. Trinh starts her film with images of a dance in which women, each clad in a differently coloured dress, move their arms gently forward and backward to the sound of water, as in a rowing motion. Standing with their backs to each other in a line, they shift positions to take a step to their left, and then start over again the same rowing movement with their arms. The images focus mainly on their bodies without showing their faces, which are only occasionally seen to show that they have shifted from their original position. At the end of this brief opening dance scene, there are thunderstorm sounds and visual effects of water rippling over the words of the title "Surname Viet, Given Name Nam". This dance introduces spectators to the image of the female body as a vehicle of expression for both the physical and metaphorical dimensions of women's complex experiences of multiple political and social oppressions. Other dances presented later in the film are also collective dances in which women move in unison with the same bodily gestures to the sound of Trinh's narrative of Vietnamese women's courageous struggles against foreign and local patriarchal domination.

After the opening dance, Trinh shows a close-up of a young fisherwoman's face while she disentangles a fish net in her boat. The translated words of a song that is being sung appear at the bottom of the screen: "Like a piece of silk my life is carried over the water." These words are shown together with an image of a woman rowing a boat on the water to express the uncertain direction a woman's life takes during wartime. Then a sad tune is heard being translated as: "My child and my country lie in a storm. I wish to use my body to protect my child but the earth is shaking". Looking at the first dance from the perspective of the image of the fisherwoman at sea, the dancers' rowing motion symbolizes

women's attempts to protect their children and families with their own bodies during the turmoil and warfare. Troubled waters also represent the conditions of the boat people evading war by braving the high sea, an image presented again in the last image of the little boat in the middle of the sea, just before the end of the film.

Similar images of this dance appear again in the second part of the film when the two actresses, who were introduced in interviews during the first part of the film, tell the story of Vietnamese women's national dress to schoolchildren in the United States. The dancers' movements are shown in slow motion to facilitate the vision, according to the lady's story, of the historical beginning of Vietnamese culture approximately four thousand years ago. The outfit worn by the dancers illustrates the lady's detailed explanation of the three-piece tunic in which one long piece is at the back while the two shorter front pieces are tied at the waist and this type of tunic was worn with long pants. This version of the dance is animated by lively music and rapid rhythm, in contrast to the simple introductory images of the same dance, depicted in silence at the start of the film.

The presence of Vietnamese history amidst contemporary American culture is shown when American children wear ancient Vietnamese costumes and headdresses in a fashion display at the American school. Duality is further evoked when spectators notice that one of the two actresses, humbly dressed in simple clothing for her role in the first part interview, is now decked out in a beautiful modern Vietnamese dress while the other lady wears an Americanized style of dress, make-up and jewellery. The repetition of the opening dance in the second part of the film further reveals the actual identity of the two Vietnamese women and their life in the U.S. by providing a broader picture of the evolution of female subjectivity over time and space. Yet, although spectators observe their transition to a contemporary American lifestyle, they are reminded, by viewing this dance, of Vietnamese women's original cultural identity.

Traditional dance promotes the preservation of Vietnamese cultural customs in its evocation of the image of female propriety, decreed by Confucian doctrine of proper behaviour for women. Through the juxtaposition of this scene of ancient Vietnamese dance

in a U.S. school parade of Vietnamese dresses with the later scene of Vietnamese beauty pageant held in the U.S., Trinh suggests a reconnection to the classical practice of Vietnamese female moral codes amidst their adaptation to American culture. She presents a Vietnamese woman's opinion that what should be preserved are the three deferments of female submission to father, husband and son during the different stages of a woman's life and her four virtues of perfect conduct toward her husband and his family. The rapid rhythm of the song accompanying this traditional dance reveals the duality of Vietnamese female identity in women's movement towards modernity in their new life in the U.S. and their simultaneous reaching back into their past by observing historical Vietnamese rules of conduct. Trinh depicts the significance of this dance for upholding ancient cultural values in Vietnamese women's diasporic experiences in the U.S. using this to support the notion that ethnicity should not be commodified when she claims, "I have problems with forms of presentation that tend to commodify ethnicity" (*Framer Framed* 1992, 194). Thus, through the literal and figurative value of the images of this dance, Trinh affirms her perception that the meaningful value of Vietnamese women's subjectivity cannot be presented in a superficial show of physical beauty in pageants, but should be reflected in its deeper moral attributes. She further extends this view in the scene of a Vietnamese woman's marriage in which the couple undergoes an elaborate procedure that includes a celebration of Vietnamese religious rites, together with the bride's ceremonial attire of Vietnamese dress and headdress.

**DANCE AND THE RE-PRESENTATION OF WOMEN**
**IN THE SCENE OF THE MARKET-PLACE.**

Women dancers wear simple white Vietnamese dresses in the next folk dance and use fans to display their graceful manners shown in slow film motion. Together with this dance performance, Trinh presents scenes of a market during which she offers insight into its multiple roles. I develop her comments to provide a more extensive view of the ways in which the image of the market-place figures in her re-presentation of Vietnamese women and their complex socio-cultural experiences.

Just after the folk dance, in which women perform little skipping steps, Trinh shows the "dance" of the camera in its movements up and down, left and right, over immobile photographs of war scenes, focusing on the hands, feet, and faces of soldiers, women, and children in their dreadful suffering. In this way, both the physical and metaphorical images of dance depict the terrible bodily experiences that Vietnamese people have had to endure during the long war years, and all the consequences thereof.

Trinh then shows a poem with these words on the lower part of the screen:

> Loving her husband she spends the other half before dawn carrying her merchandise to market. Then she later worries, the more distressed her parents are. She who is married is like a dragon with wings. She who has no husband is like a rice mill with a broken axle.

Through this poem, Trinh depicts the frightful physical and emotional burden carried by women due to the worries they feel for their husbands, mirroring the actress's re-enactment of compassion felt by the woman for her husband during his imprisonment in Vietnam. Trinh conveys the notion of despair evoked through the metaphorical image of "a rice mill with a broken axle" to express women's fragility and helplessness in the absence of their husbands. Their continual yearning for their husbands causes both physical and emotional burden in their effort, conveyed by the image of their "carrying out" merchandise to market, to support their husbands during their imprisonment.

Furthermore, Trinh presents a Vietnamese song, translated on screen as follows:

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

In the absence of their husbands, women still carry on the fight for their children's survival. Women's lamentation of their painful endurance is conveyed through the image of a stork and a song bearing the tune of its heart wrenching cry. This song sets the tone for the grim atmosphere of women's condition, as told by a woman re-enacting this testimony:

> It's terrible to live in a world of silence.
> Inhabited by terror, I discovered fear
> I didn't want to hear my own heart beating.
> I have given up all forms of resistance.
> I prefer to forget that moment when I saw my husband in prison clothes looking desperate. It is a painful memory, twenty five months in hell.
> My children were neglected like orphans. I'm not an ideal person to be interviewed.

Referring to her personal experiences as a "mixed silence", this woman articulates the pain and misery of suffering in silence out of fear for her husband's incarceration. The song also expresses the woman/mother's yearning for the absent husband/father to come back and care for their children, abandoned like orphans. To depict the effect of this "mixed silence", Trinh juxtaposes Lan's recitation of the poem about the stork with an actress re-staging an account of the unexplained absence of news about her imprisoned husband.

**THE MARKET-PLACE**

The image of women's bodies undergoing all kinds of experiences can be perceived upon a deeper reflection on Trinh's re-presentation of the market-place and the various roles it plays in the lives of Vietnamese women. Focusing on its significance as a special site for tasting Vietnamese cooking, Trinh promotes the celebration of Vietnamese culture through images of a typical Vietnamese market, where fresh fruits and foods are selected to be bought and sold. Moreover, Trinh offers another view of the market as a place for the exchange of ideas, as well as the spreading of rumours, in the daily encounters between

buyers and vendors. However, there is also a further implication that, besides fulfilling its normal function of providing a space for buying and selling food, the market evokes an extended image of the marketing and exchange of women's bodies as commodities to be bought and sold for men's pleasure as a means of survival for these women's family members. During an interview, a woman attests to this sad practice, saying:

> I will tell you the lives of women who are the misfits of history. They are by thousands who live in economic distress. They sell everything that is marketable including their bodies to support their families. They deny their dignity to survive and become prostitutes in a socialist country. You ask me if there are social services to help them. You must be dreaming.

The market can therefore be considered as a metaphorical image of the commodification of women's bodies in Trinh's evocation of the multitude of women who become prostitutes and consequently let go of their personal honour in order to survive during periods of wartime and economic hardship. Women's loss of dignity and self-respect can be sensed in the words of this Vietnamese song: "The flower has lost its fragrance. Why keep desiring it, when it no longer bears fragrance?" Thus, the image of market represents, in Trinh's film, the dual aspects of the cultural valorisation and depreciation of women's modes of conduct in the paradox of the mystified image of female virtues and the harsh reality of their survival through prostitution.

Beneath the surface image of dance as movement across space and time, Trinh develops an in-depth reflection on its metaphorical nature, presented through elaborations of the theme of the market-place, of women's evolution and adaptation of their cultural identity to suit the needs of their historical moments. Exposing the charm of their bodies, the dancers would suggest to spectators the inherent physical abilities of Vietnamese women to transform their disposition according to changing situations. As Margery J. Turner clarifies in *New Dance: Approaches to Nonliteral Choreography:*

> The [dancer's] body or instrument, is endowed with capacities to think, sense, balance, coordinate, and time. The first task of the dancer is to become aware of the tremendous expressive potential of [her] body and to develop [her] physical abilities to the

> maximum; this heightened awareness will result in greater freedom both in invention and performance. (27)

Turner's theory of the dancer's versatile qualities of bodily sensitivity and expressivity can be read conjunctively with Trinh's view, expressed in the dance images, of Vietnamese women using their physical abilities to meet the demands of a situation. Women's gradual social transposition from virtuous wives to submissive prostitutes can be imag(in)ed in the dancers' use of their bodies as vehicles for the communication of emotion, from soaring to the heights of an elevated sublimity to the subsequent drop into the depths of misery. Trinh depicts dancers' kinaesthetic sensations of movement and motion as a means of conveying women's development of their bodies to interact with their social surrounding. She promotes dance as an aesthetic re-presentation of Vietnamese women's manifold experiences of honourable and deplorable conduct in an external form of motion that expresses their deeply repressed internal emotions. Yet, their overwhelming feelings move to the surface, according to the notion that "[e]motion is inexorably linked to movement: we embrace friends, applaud success [....] The Latin *emovere* means "to move out". The word *emotion* includes the gloss "motion". Through movement, emotions announce themselves inside our bodies" (*The Performer-Audience Connection: Emotion to Metaphor in Dance and Society,* 5). The women's sadness for their husbands, driving them to seek solutions through the sacrifice of their bodies, in turn result in their emotional turmoil becoming linked to the dual physical and psychological burdens they carry. Dance enacts both the celebration of their former happy relations with their husbands and their lament for these disgraceful conditions. The overflow of joy in women is identified in the exuberant dance gestures which gradually become slow movements depicting the sorrow of suffering in wartime. Trinh highlights, through dance, the external motions of dancers as signs of the internal e-motions of Vietnamese women.

Moreover, I view her re-presentation of the market through an extrapolation of the image of the market-place from a poem, as a metaphor within a metaphor, such that the movement can be perceived as 'a dance within a dance'. This process can also be observed

in the interactions between multiple layers of historical narrative in the two-part interviews: the first part, a re-enactment of interviews made in Vietnam, becomes the context for subsequent reflections both in the second part, which features discussions by Vietnamese actresses in the U.S. and the poetic and dance re-presentations of the historical development of Vietnamese women's subjectivity.

The market-place includes images of people bartering for foodstuffs for their existence, which, on a deeper level, implies the marketing of women's bodies as a means of subsistence in hard times. Moreover, I find that, as a site developed for mutual exchange, the market is paradigmatic of cinematography in which the interaction between production and reception of (animated and still) images take place. Cinema offers, besides the apparent view of "reality", possibilities of a re-vision through a range of images, comments and critical analyses. The re-interpretations promoted by Trinh are presented as a dance pattern with meandering twists and turns around the question of women's bodies as these are shown in historical narratives and legends in diverse forms such as poetry, songs, proverbs and dance. This particular way of unravelling images as deeper metaphors beneath the surface images of the film, is Trinh's special strategy of approaching the re-presentation of women. In her book *When the Moon Waxes Red*, Trinh elaborates on feminist/postcolonial cinematic practices using the following terms:

> a re-structuring of experience and a possible rupture with patriarchal film codes and convention;
>
> difference in naming – the use of familiar words and images, and of familiar techniques in contexts whose effect is to displace, expand, or change their preconceived, hegemonically accepted meanings;
>
> difference in conceiving "depth", "development", or even "process" (processes within processes are, for example, not quite the same as a process of several linear processes);
>
> difference in understanding rhythms and repetitions – repetitions that never produce nor lead to the same ("an other among others"); (151)

I view "dance" as the pattern of creative re-presentations through which Trinh depicts the history of Vietnamese women's cultural identity according to their own experiences, which do not correspond to the fixed image present in the patriarchal conventions of both socio-cultural and cinematographic representations. She re-organizes the monolithic structure of normally accepted documentary style by challenging the objective view of reality in the "talking head" presentation of oral testimonies. Refusing to accept the closure forced on such constructed testimonies for (screen) representation, Trinh opens up "reality" for further discussion and re-examination of formulas of "truth"-making discourses in the actresses' disclosure of their "play" on truth, by showing their capacity for both understanding the socialist official's inquisitive search, and their own paradoxical play-acting to produce authenticity. Thus, she reveals to her spectators the subtle interactions between truth and lie in the dual meanings of Vietnamese women's actions, according to the situations that arise with the authorities' demands for integrity and, paradoxically, men's demand for their acquiescence to prostitution. Trinh exposes the truth behind the lie in the women's discussions of their fabricated "truths" to save their lives from cruel officials when they were in Vietnam. Such a "lie" involves the deliberate construction of "truth" in a performance when a lady reveals in the second part that, despite her small body, she was able to undertake the difficult task of carrying water pots after a little practice. Yet, the audience can remark that the courage displayed earlier in Vietnam is not unlike her courage of carrying out work in the U.S. when her hair and eyebrows were burnt by fire as a result of working near a furnace. She highlights her strong character as the motivating force behind her self-empowerment, through the training of her body to go beyond its expected normal capacity. Through this Vietnamese woman's ex-position of her claims of "truth", Trinh depicts the different positions taken up by women in the two parts of the interview, such that the "truth" in the first part documentary is a technical lie, while the truth disclosed in the second part (the lies told in Vietnam and the story of a new life in the U.S.) becomes another truth according to a changing socio-cultural context.

In her project of re-presenting words, images, and techniques differently from preconceived assumptions, Trinh shows that truth is a "dance", in the sense that it is a performance of women's bodies displaying behaviour appropriate to the situation at hand. It can either act in compliance with authority and existing social norms or in defiance or deviation in order to achieve different means of survival, such as water carrying or engaging in prostitution. Trinh's presentation of Vietnamese women's experiences is revealed through multiple dimensions of shifting social values and cultural meanings in a special choreographical re-organization that highlights the mobility of women's continual re-positioning. She thus promotes a re-vision of the image of Vietnamese women, for her interpretation through dance is not merely perceived as an exposition of superficial physical prowess, but as the exploration of deeper processes of female identity development across changing times and spaces. Dance enables women's liberation from their constricting social roles through a refiguration of their mental and bodily capacities, which adapt to their complex situations. Dance can be perceived as a metaphor for women's self-expression, through their performances of their shifting socio-cultural identities. Next to a dance scene, Trinh shows both the printed and pronounced words of a woman re-enacting an oral testimony decrying that "a society that imposes a single way of thinking and a single way of perceiving life cannot be a human society". She advocates "difference: both in women's articulation of their own viewpoint and in the perspective of representations". Therefore, she counters the narrow vision of a dominating contemporary socialist government that further enforces the strict patriarchal imposition of classical ethics according to Confucian rule of feminine conduct. Moreover, she depicts women's experiences beyond the simple expressions in interviews through the interactions between women's oral testimonies with the vocals of songs heard during dance and other images of Vietnamese people's lives. This plurivocality simultaneously challenges the prescribed single, static view limiting female identity to socio-cultural norms of male authority and representation, and offers endless possibilities for perceiving Vietnamese women according to the diverse expressions of their own experiences. In this way, Trinh makes use of the

notion of "performance art to seek self-definition and explore and express their more specific social, cultural, and ethnic concerns [through particular] memories, legends and experiences" (*Performance and Contemporary Theory,* 174). The songs, poems and dances are multiple forms of aesthetic expressions that show a cultural dis- and re-connection to Vietnamese history by depicting legends of women's courageous experiences to re-interpret their otherwise submissive social role. Trinh juxtaposes the fan dance with images of a ritual procession carried out by Vietnamese elders in traditional costumes, and women burning incense during their worship inside a temple. However, Trinh offers an alternative re-presentation of what might seem a cultural celebration of ancient customs, in her discussion of Vietnamese women's poetry, such as Ho Xuan Huong's defiance of the principle of proper speech and good manners set out for women. Thus, her incorporation of poetry in both the reading and its re-reading into the visual image of dance and its metaphorical evocation of feminine virtues and graceful disposition are means of exploring Vietnamese women's true character underlying their required mode of conduct. Trinh depicts, in the poetical imagination suggested in songs, proverbs and dance, women's ability to (re)create self-definitions according to their own aspirations.

**DANCE AS STRUGGLE AGAINST POLITICAL OPPRESSION**

A short scene in which two little girls turn round and round in a dance serves as introduction to Trinh's discussion of the two Trung sisters, whose legend is celebrated each year (both in Vietnam and in the U.S.) by a parade of two women riding on an elephant. The image of the two little dancers facilitates a narrative of Vietnam's earliest history of resistance and struggle against Chinese domination. The tragic fate of their lost battle and subsequent suicide is commemorated, together with the marks of their bravery and heroic deeds for their country. Trinh further promotes the revalorization of these women's acts that are suppressed in patriarchal society by revealing the social inequality between men and women in her observation that, "when he claps his hands, she has entertained; when she applauds, he has made contributions to his village, his town, his country". Trinh also cites another famous heroine with these words: "another cherished figure is a young peasant woman who, according to legend, was nine feet tall and led thirty battles against the Chinese. She committed suicide when defeated instead of returning to oppressive feudalism". These legends depict the heroic performances of strong women committed to the defence of their country against foreign oppression, women who gave up their life for a good cause. Trinh celebrates the memories of these women and their feats since, as she asserts, "the stories of Vietnam's beloved heroines of Vietnam's history tell about dreams of women and the fear of men who fought or heard of such accounts". Women's wish to deliver themselves and their country from political domination and patriarchal oppression is expressed in Trieu Thi Trinh's poem, which is read aloud in the film and translated as follows:

> Slay the big whales of the Eastern Sea
> Clean up frontiers and save people from drowning.
> Why should I imitate others, bowing my head,
> Stoop over and be slave to man?

This poetess is given a series of names: Trieu Thi Trinh, Trieu Thinh Vuong, Trieu Trinh, Trieu-Au, Ba-Trieu. Her multiple naming derives from people's recognition of her great

sensitivity to women's capacity for contributing not only to their families, but also to their country to save it from the dangers of foreign invasion and persecution.

**DANCE OF THE DAGGERS**

During her appraisal of the outstanding feats of Vietnamese heroines, Trinh presents images of women equipped with combat gear and performing a dance with daggers. Clad in trousers and two-piece tunics, the dancers handle two little daggers, one in each hand, moving them very rapidly in front of, and behind their bodies, as if to defend themselves from attacks. From their sitting position in a dance representing oppression, they rise up to demonstrate resistance, and brandish the two daggers in front of their chests in a continuous manoeuvre of skilful fighting and defence.

Thus, dance connotes the physical performance of women's remarkable contribution to the history of Vietnamese struggles against multiple forms of domination, from ancient times to contemporary socialist society. Trinh focuses on recurrent dance patterns in women's movements of resistance throughout different epochs of the Vietnamese history of warfare against political encroachment. She comments that, "there is a tendency to identify historical trends as this begins there and this stops here, while the same keeps on recurring as unchangeable as change itself. Life seems fragile and vulnerable. The past resurges and what is forgotten surfaces and reappears from history". Although women's heroic acts are forgotten from history due to political domination, there is a continuous renewal of memorable deeds by women in each era, such as the self-immolation of a woman who offered her life as a protest against war and an effort to end oppression. Thus, women's heroic contributions to history find expression both in their performance of social acts and in the artistic forms of poetry, song and dance. Trinh depicts the re-figuration of women through the interaction of images offered in poetry and dance. A reflection is offered in order to re-think the dances featuring women's expressions of their physical attributes and emotional qualities. She invites spectators to consider

> How tragic is women's fate in the verse of Kim Van Kieu.
> The tale of Kieu is a national epic poem.

> The misfortune of a beautiful woman is a metaphor for Vietnam's destiny. A perfect model of Confucian principle, she is forced to sell her body to save her father and her brother to become a prostitute, a concubine, a servant and a nun before returning to her first love.

Through this legend, Trinh sets up the story of Kieu's astounding experiences as a metaphor for Vietnam's entanglement in political problems causing continual suffering to Vietnamese people, especially women. She focuses on the turn of Kieu's fate, from an exemplary woman of perfect Confucian conduct to a transformed woman engaging herself in the circumstancial practice of diverse social roles in the difficult wartime situations.

**THE DANCE OF THE FANS:**
**THE VAST RANGE OF WOMEN'S SEXUAL EXPERIENCES**

The dance of the fans depicts women's experiences through a range of multiple positions in which they are forced to take up, put down, and adopt constantly changing roles by making diverse uses of their bodies in changing situations. The image of the "fan" in dance displays an array of movements and gestures open to women who develop new steps beyond their socially defined places as simple wives and mothers. Thus, the fan dance metaphorically evokes a continuum of sexual positions taken by women, represented by Kieu, in the multiple experiences of piety (as nuns), promiscuity (as prostitutes and concubines), and servitude (as servants). An actress in Trinh's film refers to an illustrative example of the typical experiences endured by a multitude of women during the course of their life. Thus, the legends of Vietnamese heroines depict not only women's imaginary aspirations, but also tell the stories of women's concrete life experiences.

I interpret Vietnamese dance, performed by dancers and explored by Trinh in her film, as a reflection the constant back and forth movements between the paradoxical positions of women's roles as nuns and prostitutes, and between the images of women as socially respectable figures and their own redefinitions of their flexible roles.

**THE DANCE OF THE HATS:**
**THE TAKING ON AND PUTTING OFF OF SOCIAL ROLES**

In another dance, women in simple white Vietnamese dresses, pants, and straw hats present a performance of graceful bodily movements. While all their gestures are performed in slow and smooth movement, their turning around is achieved in an exceptionally quick, jerky and sudden movement. The continuous loud drum sounds, suggesting women's strict observation of rhythm as a requirement of the physical dance exercise, further evokes a metaphor of submission to authority in the manifestation of their compliance to rigid codes of female behaviour.

However, women's dexterity is depicted in their smooth execution of the dance movement which nevertheless brings to the surface the deep internal tension during the swift swirl that does not follow this slow tempo. This sudden change in movement and rhythm exposes women's defiance of the expected gentle manners of execution through an abrupt transformation, exposing their unexpected changes in position.

In response to a supposition that Kieu never existed and that the poem was written by a man, Trinh strongly opposes such a devastating blow to female creativity through this query:

> Who, may we then ask, is such a feminine man who wrote about free love of women, labia majora and labia minora desire, who spoke out against polygamy and double standard patriarchal authority and religiosity?

This question simultaneously denotes women's quest of autonomous female sexual identity, which can be perceived in Kieu's constant shift in positions. As Trinh claims,

> The value of the poem lies in Kim's unorthodox approach to sexuality. Although her destiny was sadly complicated because of her beauty, she freely chooses and eagerly loves three men. The tale of Kieu is a revisionist re-interpretation of Confucian principle of chastity that governs the conduct of women.

The fan dance is deliberately juxtaposed with a scene of an ancient Vietnamese ritual carried out by male elders and female worshippers symbolizing Confucian ethical code of

conduct for women, to promote the free volition of women whose gestures communicate their own visions of life. In this way, dance further enhances women's own viewpoints concerning their lives through the physical performance of their feelings and emotions, which are also expressed in women's poetic work. The focus on the dancing body reveals the different positions in both the physical movements – shifts, turns, swirls, stooping and rising motions – and the metaphorical re-positioning of female social, cultural and sexual identities across historical time and geographical space (from Vietnam to the U.S.) in response to multiple changes of political powers, from French colonialism, American military presence, the socialist reunification in Vietnam, and a different lifestyle in the U.S.

Moreover, a revision of the patriarchal ruling over female behaviour would enable women to adapt new positions and choices that are not available, or are perceived as unacceptable according to the dominant male standard of moral judgment. Thus, dance stimulates the spectators' perception of the invisible e-motions of female sensual/sexual behaviour advocated in Trinh's re-interpretation of Kieu's unconventional gestures taken outside the normally prescribed principle of female chastity. Dance is an expressive form of bodily art through which the performance of cultural practices is enacted, demonstrating both the traditional customs passed down through generations and the creation of a new sense of female self through innovative ways of thinking and behaving, according to Elizabeth Bell's concept of cultural performance. In Trinh's re-reading of Kieu's challenge to conventional female chastity and loyalty to her husband in her liberated new sexual roles, one can infer a parallel movement in her re-interpretation of (dance) choreography, which can be thought of as "a working out of an old problem and a formulation of a new question as a means of re-contextualizing ... to be re-read in our times" (*When the Moon Waxes Red*, 108). Trinh's re-evaluation of Kieu's experiences of her multiple sexual positions outside ethical conduct re-contextualizes women's explorations of their own sexual desire and expressions, both in Vietnam and the U.S. She draws the spectators' attention to the great gap between female perception and male misrepresentation of women's real life experiences. In a restaged interview, a woman articulates that "there is

the image of women and there is her reality, sometimes the two do not match". Vietnamese women's lament over the paradoxical situation of social duty and personal flexibility in sexual roles is illustrated through dance as rigorous performance to the rhythm of drum beats, and as connotation of a range of shifting positions.

The dance with hats exposes the multiple forms of negotiations enacted by women dancers through their performance: continuously stooping forward and reclining backward, holding their straw hats in their hands, placing them in front of their bodies, and turning around with them. While they execute their dance gestures in a graceful manner, Trinh discusses these four virtues required of women under Confucianism:

> Cong: able, competent, skilful in cooking, sewing, and educating the children to serve her husband;
>
> Dung: maintaining a gracious, compliant appearance;
>
> Ngon: speaking properly and softly and never raising one's voice;
>
> Hanh: respecting elders and yielding to those who are weaker, being faithful and making sacrifices for the husband.

The dancers' execution of their physical moves connotes Vietnamese women's charming disposition to fulfill their social duties in compliance with this ethical code. The stooping motion symbolizes acquiescence to the female social position of subjugation and the hat signifies the receptacle of received ideas to be put on the head. "Putting on a hat" usually designates taking on a role to carry out a function that goes along with it. However, since it is a role imposed on women, they consequently take it off so as not to be bound by the constraining rules of moral behaviour. Their dance gestures in different positions – stooping, (meaning compliance) and then reclining, (signifying refusal) – suggest play and challenges to the conventional norms of female behaviour imposed by dominant male authority.

The choreography of Vietnamese dances in *Surname Viet* expresses Trinh's view of film that

> shows on the one hand, a political commitment and an ideological lucidity and is, on the other hand, interrogative by nature, instead of being merely prescriptive. In other words, a work that involves her story in history: a work that acknowledges the difference between lived experience and representation, a work that is careful not to turn struggle into an object of consumption, and requires that responsibility be assumed by the maker as well as by the audience without whose participation no solution emerges, for no solution exists as a given. (*When the Moon Waxes Red*, 149).

Trinh addresses women's questioning male authority in the challenge to their prescriptive, rigid social codes of feminine behaviour by negotiating the mobile positions of the liberating dance gestures and the flexible poetic expressions of an emergent female identity. The dance in which women put on and then take off their hat manifests the difference in their own lived experiences from the ideological role imposed on them and also demonstrates women's re-definition of their socio-cultural position from the preset image. In both parts of the re-enacted and live interviews, Trinh focuses on the narratives of women revealing their personal and collective experiences in history. She stresses the importance of giving multiple means of expressions to women through their voices and images, both in the documentary as well as through poetry and dance. Trinh asserts that a woman "who knows she cannot speak of [the words] without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story, also knows that she cannot make a gesture without activating the to-and-from movement of life" (*When the Moon Waxes Red*, 76). Thus, in her film, Trinh highlights the association of dance with women's expressions of their constantly shifting positions as they adapt themselves to changing historical situations. She further reveals the relations between the stories expressed by women in both their acting and their lives in an interview in 1989, published by Peter X Feng in *Identities in Motion* (2002):

> In the casting process, it was important for me to hear about their own life stories before I decided on the voices that they would be incorporating. Within the range of their personal experiences, which were sometimes worse than those they were re-enacting, they could drift in and out of their roles without too much pain. But in selecting them for who they are rather than for who they can

> play, I was not so much looking for authenticity as I was interested in seeing how they would draw the line between the different positions of living and acting. (195)

In their presentation of the oral testimonies of women in socialist Vietnam, the women living in the U.S. also refer to their own past experiences in Vietnam which they recount to Trinh during the selection process. Therefore, the anecdotes they restage constitute a simpler version of the deeper traumatic events they have undergone themselves in Vietnam. Thus, women move in and out of their dual acting and (re)living experiences. Here, the spectators can perceive dance as a metaphor for the continual movement to and from the different gestures with which Vietnamese women express narratives of their complex life experiences. In the two-part interviews, Trinh not only includes the voices of women who gave their testimonies in Vietnam but also the images of Vietnamese-American women who elaborate on their conditions in Vietnam and their adaptations to a new American lifestyle while carrying on their own customs. The multiple differences in women's acting, living and re-membering activities demonstrate Trinh's idea that

> [the historical I] is not unitary, culture has never been monolithic. [...] Differences do not only exist between outsider and insider – two entities – they are also at work within the outsider – or the insider – a single entity. This leads us to the second question in which the filmmaker is an outsider. [The filmmaker needs to consider] the inter-subjectivities and realities involved. (*When the Moon Waxes Red*, 76).

The actresses' part evokes not only the gaps between the representation of other Vietnamese women's stories and their own lives (which is worse than their roles), but also within the different roles that they play (in the second part of the film) for survival both in Vietnam and later in the U.S. after their migration.

Trinh also addresses the complex role of the filmmaker in her own voice-over commentary. Trinh talks of her choice of women for the film according to their age, work and activities while casting the roles of the three North Vietnamese and three South Vietnamese women. Her presence is manifest throughout her film in her analyses and re-

evaluation of Vietnamese women's own life experiences and their contributions to society in contrast to the ideological roles meted out to them. Trinh changes Lan's passive role as an omniscient reader of Vietnamese poems and songs in the earlier part of the film into her active figuration in the later part with her discussion with her friend about her American accent, as well as her climbing and hanging upside down a tree. In this way, Trinh reveals the multiple subjectivities and realities expressed in both the representations and life experiences of Vietnamese women in the U.S.

Trinh's re-presentation of Vietnamese women's inter-cultural affiliations across multiple subject positions can be viewed as a choreographical metaphor for the shifting performance of ancient cultural traditions of Vietnamese classical poetry and dance to the practice of contemporary American ways of life in both women's work and their leisure activities. I consider the wide array of differences manifested in Vietnamese women's continually shifting roles as the reflection of their complex historical identity as it undergoes changes and adaptations. This motion can be interpreted metaphorically as the dynamic steps of a dance taken to steer the female self physically and cinematographically in a representation of women across diverse cultural spaces and historical times. Basing my reading on Jenny Robinson's pluralist view of diasporic identity (*Development and Displacement,* 101-102), I interpret dance as a metaphor for diasporic experiences across diverse places and journeys in reconstructions of identity through spatial and historical displacements. In Trinh's film, dance can be regarded as an extended metaphor for the trajectory that the self traces across diverse cultural places and historical transformations in the external bodily gestures that render visible the complex internal experiences of diasporic identity. In her presentation of Vietnamese women's different lifestyle in the U.S., she disrupts the preset image of female propriety according to the ancient socio-cultural views in Vietnam by refiguring their emancipated personalities and open viewpoints. Thus, dance evokes the displacements of the fixed, singular female role through the de- and re-construction of Vietnamese women's diasporic subjectivities. The complex experiences of Vietnamese women in diaspora, shown in the actresses' narration

of their experiences and in Lan's new identity, are interpreted by Trinh in her notion of "translation as the grafting of multiple languages and realities onto a single body". Dance can also be understood as the expression of embodiment in which multiple layers of cultural diversity and differences feature in the performance of diasporic identity. Vietnamese women's use of English language further enhances their articulation of the plural facets of their cultural life in the U.S., for they still speak Vietnamese in their conversation among friends and families, and with Trinh regarding their acceptance of the roles in the film.

I consider translation as a form of dance according to Elizabeth Bell's argument based on the work of Susan Leigh Forster (2002) who extends the dance metaphor to include "all bodily articulation, whether spoken or moved, like walking, cooking. Bodies are always positioned in space and time, what may seem spontaneous or incidental [...] upon closer examination, signal[s] the exercise of the intelligent and creative responsiveness" (*Theories of Performance*, 127). The dance metaphor, according to Forster's notion of bodily articulation in speech and action, contributes to the understanding of movement in the translation from Vietnamese to French in the oral interviews from Mai Thu Van's book, to spoken and written English in Trinh's film. The (re)positioning of women's bodies from Vietnam to the U.S. in diasporic motion produces the development of a new language to express a new self in an alternative context of gender and cultural performances. The actress playing as a restaurant worker cuts up vegetables and speaks of the complicated methods of acquiring sugar and flour from her brother, who buys and redistributes these to other family members. While speaking in English, she refers to women's testimonies of their economic hardship in Vietnam. Here, translation is observed as the displacement of Vietnamese women's experiences in space and time from Vietnam to the U.S., and from the book in France to the film in the U.S. This double translation is further displaced by Vietnamese actresses' narration of their own new life experiences of hardship and adaptation in the U.S. at the beginning of their settlement there. These multiple displacements are connoted by the diverse expressions of selfhood, as in a dance,

through a series of translations of bodily articulations depicting the movements to a new spatial and linguistic dimension.

Moreover, apart from the adoption of the new English language in addition to their own Vietnamese language, Vietnamese women effect translation as a notion of dance in my own interpretations of Trinh's question of the problematic aspect of translation raised as follows:

> 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 aesthetics.

I regard translation as "dance" trans*positions* both in the aural/oral expression of language and in the visual images of Vietnamese women's new identity performance. Since translation depicts "dance" as movements across diverse fields of spatiotemporal trans*form*ations, it cannot successfully achieve strictly loyal rendering as in women's unconditional adherence to traditional Vietnamese traditional roles; it involves a shift in the displacement of the self from one cultural environment to another. This movement in translation reflects a conscious response to new cultural realms, mediated through the performance and representation of female diasporic identity. I discern, in the metaphorical movement of translation, a vacillation between Vietnamese women's original identities and their current American cultural lives in two opposite directions. Trinh articulates her surprise at the actresses' choice of modern Vietnamese dress to re-present themselves in their new cultural contexts, contrary to her expectations that they would adhere to a more formal style of Vietnamese thought. This cultural dis- and re-connection in women's self-expression facilitates a flexible perception of translation as the movement back and forth between shifting positions such that neither the content nor the form of Vietnamese women's original cultural identity can be preserved accurately.

Moreover, Trinh's question of translation as an activity of the eye or of the ear highlights her *form*ulation of translation as text and/or as speech. I consider her use of translation to include not only converting traditional Vietnamese poems, songs, and

proverbs into English but also entailing a trans*form*ation of the spoken, sung or recited words into the printed texts. This translation displaces the audience's sensation with their ears onto a perception with their eyes. The sounds are thus translated into images as a (re)visioning, such that there is a further translation of the written texts through the spectators' reading of the printed words. Thus, the static view of cultural identity is translated into a multiplied perception of mobile diasporic identity and its ongoing dynamic experiences. The multiple shifts in the translation from sounds to images evoke the diasporic transformations of cultural identity which can be understood according to Victor Turner's concept of a performance approach to culture which

a) reflects dynamic cultural processes,
b) enables possibilities between and within cultural practices and
c) provides opportunities for critique and transformation.

Turner's flexible notion of cultural performance can be used to interpret the dynamic processes in which the transposition of the self occurs across different realms of (aural and visual) expressions reflecting the mobile aspects of Vietnamese women's diasporic identity in their crossing back and forth between borders of different cultural spaces. This mobility provides them with greater possibilities for developing their potential shift toward another culture by expressing their own cultural innovations. Moreover, the oscillating movement of translation can also be seen in the Vietnamese women's practice of both contemporary sports like jogging and traditional cultural activities such as martial arts in Trinh's filmic depiction of their new lives in the U.S. These forms of bodily expressions can be interpreted as diverse types of cultural practices, according to Schechner and Appel's' idea that there is an "expressivity of the body across a wider range of activities: sports, music, martial arts, rituals, other arts are seen as performance" (1995). In her film, Trinh depicts a wide range of cultural performances, including traditional Vietnamese rituals of worship, beauty contests, dance and music as different forms of bodily expressivity which show the self in diasporic motion. Vietnamese women display their continually changing identities

in these activities through their re-positioning in the back and forth shifts from traditional Vietnamese customs towards more Americanized ways of life.

The transition toward embracing modern activities while going back to formal, ancient rites such as the practice of martial arts with its own tradition of discipline for the mind and the body in Trinh's presentation of Vietnamese women's mixed activities of diasporic life can be regarded as a choreography, one that

> is a rich term for performativity: bodies in movement, bodies in social relationships, bodies performing within and against historical codes and conventions are all visible in dance, sports, fashion, and their mediated representations and practices. (*Theories of Performance*, 181)

When practising tai-chi and observing Vietnamese rituals during religious ceremonies and marriages, women perform Vietnamese cultural activities within historical conventions but when they present themselves in the modern beauty pageant, they defy ancient codes of proper conduct by revealing their beauty in public. Dance also reveals the allegorical meaning of movement as a translation of the new positions manifested by women's bodies in their taking up more modern stances, performing their cultural identities against classical Vietnamese traditions.

**REFRAMING**

Trinh's re-presentation of Vietnamese women's new socio-cultural positions can be perceived through the metaphor of "choreography" as a form of performativity in which the bodily practices of sport, dance and fashion depict the simultaneous making and unmaking of culture to make room for the re-interpretation and transformation of traditional values. Trinh evokes through dance, in both its physical and metaphorical aspects, the ways in which women dancers, actresses, filmmakers and choreographers reframe cultural values. She presents the movement of a series of frames to depict the transformation of both cultural and cinematographic conventions. A photograph of a single young Vietnamese girl wearing a simple white Vietnamese dress and a straw hat is shown at the right margin of the screen, leaving the rest of the frame black, while a second photograph of a couple is shown at the centre of the screen, first with a black border around, then occupying the full screen. This second photograph, when put back in its full frame, shows the context of war surrounding the couple. The image of the Vietnamese woman as presented in the performance of a traditional Vietnamese dance, can be conjured from the appearance of the young girl in the picture, which shows her in the same attire as the artists dancing with their straw hats. Her marginalization to a very small part of the screen exposes the female condition of being framed by social conventions. This can be perceived in another cinematic image where a Vietnamese doctor giving oral testimony is pushed to the right margin while printed words of her conversation figure over the screen so that the left part of her body is elided. Her disclosure to spectators of Vietnamese women's lack of knowledge and the means of expressing their female bodily sensations to the doctor in a socialist society in which rigid supervision and control is exercised everywhere is demonstrated through the frame of representation in which Trinh exposes the marginalisation and the conventions overriding female subjectivity and expression. The image of the stethoscope usually found on a doctor's chest is here seen lying on the table, out of the doctor's reach, thus signifying the way in which women are alienated from their own feelings and their

bodies due to constraining rules of behaviour. To counter this misrepresentation of women in relation with their own bodies in the static traditional values of female propriety symbolized by fixed photographic images, Trinh produces the translation or transposition of the frame from the margin to the centre. This motion of the frame can be viewed as an allegorical dance of women's images which evokes the emancipatory movements enabling them to refocus their sexual identity. The relocation of women to the central position is set amidst an atmosphere of struggle perceptible in the larger context of war surrounding the couple in the photo who are confronted by the intolerable misery experienced by young children and people who are equipped with war ammunition. This is being reflected in a woman's testimony, in which she articulates that, "I have turned from fear to fight". This resistance can be considered as a shift in position from an earlier submission, in which a woman who suffers her husband's imprisonment in silence discloses that, by "living in terror I have discovered fear". Trinh achieves an ex-position of a moving frame of reference regarding views on Vietnamese women's cultural images and their representation through dance, as a double motion in women's cultural image and in the cinematographic displacement of the frame of representation. Besides the de- and re-centralization of the Vietnamese women's cultural image, Trinh also offers a re-visioning of the frame beyond the limits of representation. Trinh demonstrates that the left half of the Vietnamese doctor's body, which is not shown on screen, signifies her position outside the frame of conventional representation as she actively speaks out against the absence of women's intimate relations with their bodies in socialist Vietnam. She has chosen this female doctor whose work enables her to understand women's needs and bodily experiences. Trinh's re-presentation of the Vietnamese doctor outside of traditional conventions demonstrates her concept of reframing, elaborated as follows:

> Each film is a way of experiencing and experimenting with limits; it is a journey from which there is no turning back. In reversing, displacing and creating anew the gaze, her film will not be offering an object to look at but an articulation of images to consider. When she introduces the object, the latter immediately poses the question of the look and position which in traditional cinema it would so

> carefully conceal .... Seeing differently and hearing differently, she is bound always to challenge "the look" in the cinematic apparatus. (*When the Moon Waxes Red*, 114)

I consider Trinh's cinematographic strategy of displacing the image of Vietnamese women beyond normal cultural expectations as an experiment in the processes of (re)envisioning their subjectivity. She proposes a re-examination of the conventional means of representation through the paradoxical movements of framing and reframing, and thus offering her audience a re-presentation of cultural values. Her exploration, through her re-interpretation, of traditional dance and poetry (which I have examined earlier) can be viewed in terms of a journey through the flexible motion of the frame of representation as a challenge to the fixed norms. Her innovative use of Vietnamese poetry, singing and dancing displaces the traditional view to communicate a new vision of the historical transformation of Vietnamese women's cultural identity over time and across the diverse spaces of their diasporic experiences.

Trinh expresses, through multiple (literal and figurative) images of war, a (re)framing of cinematic conventions in her film. She elicits the differences between war and its (mis)representation beneath the surface images in the following discussion:

> War is a succession of special effects. The war became film 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 bigger images are the continuation of war by other means. Immersed in the machinery part of these special effects, no critical distance within separates the Vietnam war from the superfilm that was made and continues to be made about it. It was said that if the Americans lost the other, they have certainly won this one. There is no winner in a war.

War is represented in film images which are created through special effects to replicate its ravaging effects. Cinema uses the power of images to promote strategies of warfare through an extension of reality in a virtual (re)construction of war, thus transforming its outcome. In this way, the boundary between war and its cinematic representation is

blurred, such that the loss of the Vietnamese war is transformed into its victory in American films. However, Trinh challenges such misrepresentations of triumph in both actual and virtual warfare through her critical review of the cinematographic frame of representation. She focuses on the distinction between the reality of war and its representation in the relationship between multiple viewpoints. The different effects created by war images are shown in an actress's discussion of the diverse emotions evoked in response to these images. Contrary to the rejection of cruelty caused by war, there is the feeling of sympathy for the people suffering its tragic consequences. The actress explains in Vietnamese that when one sees a mother with her child, one naturally feels compassion since a women's first reaction is to protect one's child when confronted with war. She articulates the contradictory aspects of war images with an argument that, in a way, war images can arouse positive response of solidarity instead of a negative rejection. Thus, the redeployment of war using tactics of re-presentation displaces the formal conventions to transform its parameter outside the normal frame. As the actress explains,

> These images call for human compassion towards countries in war. These images are images that are emotionally moving. They can change the way you think, for example, if you don't like wars and you see images of mothers holding their child in their arms to flee the war, you will be stirred to do something to help. These images are very painful. What is often brought up is the mother's love for the child. In the war the mother always protects her child's body.

Trinh also presents a choreography in the camera's continuous motion within the frame of the same war image, focusing on soldiers' and then on civilians' legs and arms. The multiple displacements dispel a fixed anchoring in any single aspect. Trinh's re-framing devices are also observed in the second part's revelation that the first part documentary, the talking head interviews conducted in the U.S., was a re-enactment of older interviews in Vietnam. Thus, there is a continual succession of new frames that displace old ones. The conventional form of interviews, poetry and dance is reset in a new frame by Trinh's re-interpretation through scripting, choreography and (re)organization for the audience's

vision. She engages the audience's attention to this alternative framing, which enacts a break in the former frame of conventional representations of women's cultural identities.

**RE-FRAMING THROUGH THE IMAGE OF THE BOAT**

Trinh highlights women's intricate connections with war through their bodies in multiple forms of expressions. Their bodies serve as a female frame of reference for re-viewing their self-image. At the very beginning of the film, Trinh presents this particular framing using the image of a woman whose boat lies in the middle of the sea and a song whose words express a mother's wish to protect her children and her country with her body. The image of the female body as a vehicle of communication and transportation is evoked by the sight of the fisherwoman trying to steer her boat over the troubled waters, symbolizing the turmoil of war, in her effort to deliver her children safely to the shore. Various legends also praise the courage of Vietnamese heroines who have lost their lives in their long struggle over the course of many battles to save their country from foreign domination. Trinh also shows historical footage of Nhat Chi Mai's self-immolation while she reads Mai's words expressing her wish of offering her body as a sacrifice to seek peace, harmony and love in Vietnam. Trinh deliberately moves the image of war from the mere struggle for control and power to an alternative vision that portrays women's active participation in and contribution to restoring peace and harmony. Thus, she has shifted the frame of representation from images of destruction in wars to the reconstruction of humane relations, using examples of Vietnamese women's heroic deeds. Her film manifests her idea that,

> [o]ur experiences in life are complex, plural, and full of uncertainties. And this complexity can never be reduced and fitted into the rigid corners of ready made solutions and filmic conventions. By re-moving the rigid frame of representation from the preset conventions that marginalize women to tight corners, Trinh offers a flexible (re)vision of women's expressions of their subjectivity in the trials and constraints of social life. (*When the Moon Waxes Red*, 112).

A woman' insightful understanding of the women's complex emotions related to war experiences reveals her own feelings about the plight of the war she had endured earlier in Vietnam which helped her make the choice to appear in the film and present other Vietnamese women's accounts of their suffering in Vietnam. She articulates her intention, through her role in the film, to help Trinh to express women's endeavours to do their part in promoting a good image of Vietnam. Therefore, Trinh depicts, in both women's acts and words about their own identities, a shift beyond the set frame of conventions. I consider the displacement of the different frames of representation in Trinh's presentation of the actress's re-interpretation of war images to constitute the multiple dimensions of texts and their contexts, as well as the ever changing relations between the intra-, extra-, and inter-texts. This complex notion of mobility in the re-presentation of Vietnamese women's subjectivities is further apparent in Trinh's re-examination of the boat as an image for the imaginative expression of diasporic experiences of fluidity and transnationality. Trinh identifies the relationship between concrete and metaphorical images of the boat in the following discussion in *Surname Viet*:

> The boat is either a dream or a nightmare, or rather a boat is a "no place", a place without a place that exists by itself, is closed to itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea. For Western civilization, the boat has not only been a 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 civilizations without boats dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, police takes the place of pirates. Hope is alive if 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 cast aways has created a special class of refugees: the beach people.

Trinh introduces the concepts of fluidity and mobility in her presentation of the boat as an image evoking the contradictory ideas of dream and a nightmare, a place without a place in the duality of its self-enclosure and its openness to the sea, having the possibility of reaching faraway places for trade but also facing rejection from some countries. Besides

locating the boat in the space of the sea, Trinh also situates it in time from the history of early colonization and slave trade to the contemporary migration of refugees.

The image of the boat can be compared to the figure of the body as a vehicle of communications in the numerous physical and internal journeys it effects in diasporic movement. Diasporic subjects experience the duality of "being closed" to themselves due to the constraints of their original cultural traditions while they are, at the same time, undergoing constant changes in the new culture offering them infinite possibilities of self-(re)creation. Regina Lee refers to Radhakrishnan's idea that

> the diasporic subject [is] critically aware of the "hyphen", of its rootedness in more than one history, its location in the present as well as in the past (1996:354). The doubleness of diasporic identity is highlighted in the hyphen that locates the diasporic subject spatially and temporally, as existing in between two cultures (for instance [Vietnamese-American]). The former term usually denotes a place and time from which they came – an idealized homeland, usually the first-generation diasporas – while the latter term signifies their (problematic) location in a different present. (*Asian Diasporas: Cultures, Identities, Representations,* 69 )

Due to its location in time and space, the boat symbolizing the diasporic subject is related to the history of its former homeland while it is also traversing the frontiers of its present country. Thus, the subject is simultaneously disjoined from the original home and reconnected to a new culture in the diasporic location perceived by Radhakrishnan as the space that carries "an evolving relationship of one's place of origin with one's present home" (1996:xiii). There is a continual evolution from one's former identity to a different cultural subjectivity in this new space, in which "traces of where you're from" are constantly framed by "where you're at", "an evolving process that displaces fixed notions and memories, and which challenges easy resolutions and reconciliations" (Regina Lee, 72). I view this particular space as the cinematographic space of re-presentation of the "frames" in which Trinh exposes the audience's vision of the multiple trans*form*ation of cultural identity in diaspora. The Vietnamese people travelling on boats move across the

fixed boundaries of their homeland and its singular history to the diversified spaces of a new culture and hybrid subjectivity. This motion dispels the set framework of rootedness in either the past home or the present settlement, leading to a new configuration of the self in its negotiation between the tensions of a fixed location and multiple affiliations. The diasporic location, according to Robbie Goh "becomes highly problematic, the site of contested identities [...], imaginary recreations, and fluidly interactive (in Virilio's sense [1998:58-59]) subjectivities" (9). Trinh identifies this diasporic space in her film through the boat, whose (frame of) representation shifts from the limits of a single view of traditional culture to the infinite possibilities of self-reconstruction in new contexts. The boat is perceived as a paradigm of Vietnamese diasporic identity in its multiple experiences of travel and expressions of transitionality, thus destabilizing the insulation of an isolated space and enabling negotiations of plural cultural affiliations. The diasporic space is depicted, in Regina Lee's reading of Homi Bhabha's concept, as " 'the third space', an unrepresentable space which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensures that the meaning and symbols of a culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew" (Bhabha, 1994:37). Trinh exposes the ways in which meanings and values of cultural identity change and evolve during the multiple transitions of diasporic mobility, which distances the self from its original context. The boat will occupy the third space in my reading of Bhabha's term of an unfixable location in its new meaning which, besides being a vessel for trading in foreign lands, also carries the potential for imaginative re-interpretation of diasporic identity and, by extension, implies the embodiment of the complex process of re-acculturation. The "unrepresentable" space (in diaspora) is emptied of any preconceived fixed meaning or original culture, such that the boat becomes a "no place" in its location in the sea as a symbol of the flux of diasporic movement and identity transformations. Regina Lee also asserts that "this hybrid [diasporic] space (also a liminal space constituted by indeterminacy and transitionality) poses a difficulty ... because it is

"unrepresentable" (73). She ascribes this indeterminacy to the notion of unsettled (cultural) meanings according to Bhabha's concept, which she interprets as follows:

> In other words, this third space is or represents the site in which discursive practices can be disrupted, where history and culture can be reinterpreted. These possibilities mean that the space is charged with the potential to unsettle static essentialist and totalitarian conceptions of "national culture" or "national identity" with origins firmly rooted in fixed geography and common history" (Ien Ang. 1992, 13.)

In her film, Trinh highlights the constant re-framing of (pre)fixed cultural values through discursive and cinematographic means of expression. She shows, through multiple (re)framing, a challenge to the singular view of the unified identity of Vietnamese woman and her country. Trinh confirms that, in their commemoration of Trieu Thi Trinh's valorous deed of defending her nation from Chinese domination, Vietnamese people honour her by multiple names: Trieu Thy Trinh, Trieu Thinh Vuong, Trieu Trinh, Trieu Au, Ba Trieu. She is thus valorized for the multiple aspects of her identity as a woman of character and strength, a freedom-fighter and a national heroine. In this way, Trinh re-interprets Vietnamese history and culture from the perspective of liberated female expression, unsettling the static view of proper social conduct for women in the home and family. Similarly, Vietnam as a country is renamed according to the various geographical regions which refer to the different stages of its historical development, from the national division to reunification. Vietnam, therefore, bears these multiple names: Van Lang, Nam Viet, Hoang Viet, Dai Viet, An Nam, French Indochine, Nam, Vietnam, Bac Ki, Nam Ki, Trung Ki. Trinh also mentions the various names given to the places of Vietnamese people's exile, known as "rehabilitation camp, concentration camp, annihilation camp, re-education camp". These different names depict the multiple realities which they had to face in their diasporic experiences.

Moreover, she reveals that there has been an ongoing process to reappropriate the figure of Trieu for different ideological interpretations of her achievements according to the mores of diverse historical epochs. Trinh encourages her audience to re-envision Vietnam

and Vietnamese women according to the multiplicity of the historical and geographical attributes that are constantly re-interpreted by developing socio-political trends. The emergent identity of this country and its people unsettle traditional conceptions, which are further displaced by the transnational subjectivities of Vietnamese women living in the U.S. who regard Vietnam as their distant, former home and culture.

The constant re-framing of values and meanings manifests the tensions from the disconnection from one's original home and the connection to a new country, so that the relations between countries and cultures are played out in a process of translation as transition from past to present identity and language, with all the problems of instability that accompany this passage from one language to another. George Varsos draws out the implications of this tension between linguistic translation and cultural change as follows:

> Upon translation, the language of the original performs a more complex gesture: on the one hand, as a matter of course, it links its textual formation to the cultural conditions of its genesis; on the other hand, it disengages it from them and opens it onto what Benjamin call it "overlife" or "survival". The different modes of conservation, reproduction and circulation of a literary formation, along with its eventual translations do not constitute mere duplicates or copies of its original instance, more or less faithful or adequate as the case may be: they deploy different aspects of the corresponding linguistic entity.... Translation allows for the crucial insights into historicity, to the precise extent that it highlights the partial disengagement of the idea of language from that of culture and stimulates an interplay between the two facets of the question of form raised with respect to literary texts – that of human linguistic essence and that of cultural contingency. (*Intermédialités*, "Disparaître", 176)

The dual motion of dis- and re-connection from Vietnamese to American language involved not only a linguistic shift but also the question of the indeterminacy of cultural transfer. Translation therefore becomes the performance of cultural reconstruction with its inherent problem of cultural instability not only in the original language but also in the passage to the present language. The transition exposes the dual trans*form*ation of linguistic and cultural aspects in the historical experiences of diaspora, in which

multicultural subjects, described by Regina Lee as, "personifiers of ambivalence, may signify (in postmodern fashion) all or nothing at once" (71). The cultural ambivalence of translation is reflected by diasporic subjects who dis- and re-figure in the space – evoked by the boat (as a "no place", a place without a place) of this continual shift between original history and new cultural identity, as reflected in the boat's own containment and its openness to the flux of mobility in the vastness of the sea. Varsos ascribes the activity of translation to the spatial reconfiguration, writing that, "[a]s for translation, it hereby acquires a theoretically contentious significance, since its task spans not simply linguistic differences but boundaries separating distinct organisms" (172). For my analysis of Trinh's notion of translation in her film, I draw on Varsos's concept of the relationship between the linguistic and cultural boundaries separating different countries. What translation dissolves is the linguistic medium of the original text during the passage to another language that simultaneously signifies the crossing over determined boundaries into new cultural and geographical territory. The destabilization of the transcultural subject occurs not only through the linguistic indeterminacy, but also across the frontiers of socio-historical spaces. George Varsos elaborates on the difficulty of translation in these terms:

> The problem is not simply that of the distinct signifying role which specific lexical units or grammatical mechanisms play in one language or another – and with which every translation contends. There emerges, furthermore, the issue of whether the overall linguistic identity of the original has some specific character of significance that affects the linguistic shift and mark or should mark the translated text: is there something in a language which runs through its established means and techniques of eloquence, its diverse versions and usages, its modalities and rhythms of change, and which present a distinct challenge to translation. (*Intermédialités,* 167)

Trinh depicts the impossibility of translating into English the names of Vietnamese delicacies such as desserts that are prepared according to Vietnamese traditions. The Vietnamese practice of naming special tastes do not find corresponding terms in the American language. Lan articulates this difficulty saying, "how do you translate 'che dau

xanh, xi mui. che dau do' ". Moreover, the geographical locale of the new country does not present the similar atmosphere for tasting Vietnamese foods. Lan complains, in her letters to her sister in Vietnam, that the ice-cream shops of the Vietnamese community in Santa Anna, California can never reproduce the same tastes as are experienced in Vietnam. Thus, translation further spans the linguistic shift to spatial displacement of the original cultural location such that it exposes the problem of rendering both the history of Vietnamese language and the geography of Vietnamese culture accessible. By showing images of young girls enjoying exotic foods in special Vietnamese places where they gather together to share their cultural delicacies, Trinh exposes the "no-place" of translation in the absence of terms to depict either the name or the place for tasting Vietnamese foods.

Translation can be viewed in terms of the metaphorical image of the dance in its various connotations. I consider Trinh's interpretation of translation as a metaphor for a cultural dance performance that expresses the various linguistic and cultural experiences of diasporic mobility across multiple spaces. In its transit-ion to a new language, it performs the simultaneous displacement of geographical location and a corresponding replacement of new cultural space. I view translation in Trinh's film as a dual movement forward into the new cultural space, as well as reflection on the former cultural milieu from where this transition springs. Therefore, translation challenges a single view of either past or present cultural contexts by re-presenting the cultural hybridity made up of specific elements of each of the two cultures. Furthermore, Trinh reveals the complexity of translation in the transformation to a different mode of representation in her analysis:

> I am caught between two words: Is translated interviews a written or a spoken object. Documentary: truth is selected, renewed, replaced, one hundred fifty interviews: five retained in the final decision. What criteria? Age, profession, economic situation, cultural region, personality, ability. Spoken, transcribed, translated. We can cut, trim, tidy up. Spoken and read between languages of inwardness and pure surface.

Trinh raises the question of the medium of interviews, which she has translated into spoken English from French in Mai Thy Van's book (which is itself a written translation of the

oral interviews conducted in Vietnamese). Here, translation becomes a complex process of diverse performances across multiple cultural spaces and media. Translated testimonies, moreover, undergo selective conditions stemming from cultural to socioeconomic situations of the "talking heads". Trinh further reveals that in her preparation of the documentary material, the original experiences were replaced by the talking heads' performance of an oral translation, which acts as a (re)interpretation that displace deep Vietnamese cultural expressions through the articulation of English as a surface language.

Moreover, I further extend my view of translation according to Victor Turner's (1988) notion of cultural performance that "a reflection of the world as communicated in performances is flexible and nuanced with no set 'meaning' or 'interpretation'. Turner argues that:

> Cultural performances are capable of carrying many messages at once.
>
> They are capable of subverting on one level what another level seems to be saying.
>
> The full "reality" of meaning and messages is only attained through the performance. (23-24)

Trinh's presentation of cultural performance in both dance and translation carries multiple modes of expressions that bypass conventions to propose other possibilities. She represents dance not only according to historical conventions, but also in the new context of an intercultural exchange of the traditional Vietnamese dress code in contemporary American society. Thus, she has reframed classic customs in a new performance of Vietnamese women's cultural mix in the U.S., wearing not only traditional Vietnamese dress but also modern make-up. These Vietnamese women's translated presentations of their Vietnamese dressing customs into English displace both the history and geography of Vietnamese cultural values to the new milieu of American lifestyles and habits.

# CHAPTER THREE
# INTERMEDIALITY

## INTERMEDIALITY IN *SURNAME VIET*

### INTRODUCTION

Trinh starts the first part interview in her film with both a static photographic image and moving images showing a close-up of the face of the first Vietnamese actress about to perform the oral testimony of a restaurant worker in Vietnam. Later, in the second part of the film, Trinh depicts her in her real life role as a mother giving a talk on the historical development of the Vietnamese dress in her son's school in the United States. By the end of the film, she is perceived performing martial arts and exercising balance of mind and body in a harmonious rhythm of bodily gestures. In these scenes, the woman appears in various sociocultural contexts in which her roles, language of address, clothing and performance are markedly different.

The second part of the film broadens the limited documentary representation in the first part of the film by adding a narrative on the actresses' contemporary lifestyle in the United States. This nuanced view of documentary enables a series of interviews as responses to the conventions of 'realism' – responses that are staged as the actresses' discussion of their own former experiences in Vietnam (similar to those of the women they enact) and their acceptance of the roles in the film. Furthermore, by means of the Vietnamese women's stories of adjustment to American lifestyle, Trinh offers viewers a possibility of reflecting upon these women's evolving identity or on cultural identity in diaspora in general.

This multiperspectival representation in diasporic female subjects is featured in Trinh's film through multiple layers of media interacting with one another – documentary footage, black-and-white photographs, polyphonic rhythms of music, dance, poetry, and

songs – both in their original version and in English translation – as well as in the form of a critical interpretation by Trinh.

* * *

**WOMEN'S IMAGES FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES**

During her interview, the first woman is seen from the front, profile and back. This actress recounting the sad story of her husband's imprisonment is filmed from an overhead position so that her gloomy face is perceived in a tilted, low angle. Another actress is viewed from different angles through camera movement – the camera shifts from the left to the right side of her face, zooms in on her left, then her right eye and ear, moves down to her chest and to her outstretched hands, then to her dangling legs and feet and then up to her face again. A woman playing the part of a doctor is pushed to the right margin while the printed text appears (before her spoken part) on the larger part of the screen. In this way, both her image and voice undergo a physical and symbolic displacement in the depiction of her marginalised position in socialist Vietnam.

In another case, the printed words spread over the whole screen and completely obstruct the actress's face so that only her voice can be heard saying:

> Socialist Vietnam venerates the mothers and the wives. The woman does not exist, she is only a labourer. The liberation of women is understood here as a double exploitation. [The men] hold key positions of power .... There is not a single woman at the Political Bureau ..... 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.

Through the relations between the visual images and voices of Vietnamese actresses, Trinh simultaneously exposes and challenges the conventions of the cultural representation of women in socialist Vietnam – their exploitation or their roles as simple workers. The exploitation of women in Vietnam is evoked by their position at the margin or of absence from the screen images; the camera's traveling over the fragmented images of their body shows a critical perception of the cultural representation of Vietnamese women. Trinh's

depiction of Vietnamese actresses from diverse angles of vision can be understood from Douglas Kellner's notion of 'perspective' as an optic, a way of seeing, and critical methods can be interpreted as approaches that enable us to see characteristic features of cultural artifacts. Each critical method focuses on specific features of an object from a distinct perspective: the perspective of spotlights that illuminates some features of a text while ignoring others (98). The limitations of classical documentary representation of 'talking heads' is critiqued in the multiple deconstructions from frontal to the side and back views and displacements of women's heads to their other bodily parts which express other (repressed) meanings. An actress's revelation of the ambivalence of her position is perceived from the perspective of her hands spread apart to expose the gap in her difficult position in which she is caught between a capitalist and a socialist exploitation as she denounces both forms of oppression in her disclosure that "between two modes of exploitation of man by man, it is difficult for me to choose". The different perspectives at work in Trinh's film expose the practice of male oppression of women in socialist government policies while at the same time reconstruct alternative female subject positions from oppositional viewpoints. The women's articulation of their oppressive social conditions is presented in aesthetically and formally innovative interviews that clearly aim at raising the viewers' consciousness, and which challenge the rigid uniform socialist perspective evoked by the interviewees. This perspective is openly critiqued in the film when the actress denounces that "a society that imposes on its people a single way of thinking and a single way of perceiving life cannot be a human society".

**POETIC IMAGES AND SOUNDS**

Trinh deconstructs the objective image of "talking heads" and its controlling hold on the spectators' attention by integrating fragments of poetic statements in songs, proverbs, popular stories and well-known poems that make up alternative historical dimensions of the Vietnamese oral tradition. The ambivalent position of virtuous, hardworking women celebrated as heroines in socialist ideology is reflected in the paradoxical relations between these two different poems on the same theme:

> What is more beautiful than a lotus in a pond? Yellow stamens, white petals, green leaves: Always near mud, it never smells of mud.
>
> (Translated by Nguyen Ngoc Bich)

> We are absurd petals in a puff of wind drifting over a temporary and indifferent world. Even the young, spring-limbed and green, learn to stare at death through veils of white hair.
>
> Nguyen Binh Khiem

The presentation of women from both the positive perspective of their resilience in the face of suffering and the negative perspective of their fragility in an insecure world is evoked in the poetic image of the lotus petals whose movement in the wind is associated with the young women who, though healthy and strong, are nevertheless similar to the older women in their anxiety over their uncertain future and on the appearance of their hair which is rapidly turning white. The different perspective or atmosphere of the two poems – the first poem celebrating the women's strength while the second highlights their premature aging under adverse conditions – points to a questioning of the fate of women who are made to bend so as to comply with the demands of male-dominated society. This change in perspective further reflects a transformation from a concrete documentary viewpoint to an abstract dimension through a poetic transfer that situates women's experiences in the larger context of popular oral traditions of proverbs and anecdotes. The superimposition of recited poetry over spoken language – the second poem is heard while an actress gives her testimony – produces a double register of vocal sounds that give an oral/aural effect

transmitted to spectators as viewers/listeners. The simultaneous dual action of listening and viewing in the spectators' experience of sometimes hearing and at other times seeing the translated poems on the screen (together with different images of the re-enacted interviews or other documentary footage and scenes of women's daily lives) result in "a split between textual encoding and audience decoding and always the possibility of a multiplicity of readings and effects of specific texts" (Kellner, 100). Trinh has declared that she has produced readings in her work that do not control the manner of its reception, leaving to the spectators the possibility of multiple readings through different ways of interweaving the diverse narrative aspects. In the chapter "Why a Fish Pond" in her book *Framer Framed*, Trinh maintains that

> Poetical language is important to my critical work. People used to see theory and poetry as being miles apart, but I see the interaction of theoretical language and poetical language as capable of creating a new ground in which clear-cut oppositions are again thwarted. The mutual challenge between the two languages helps to alleviate the presumption and mystification existing on each side. The poetry you hear in the film is largely taken from oral traditions. The verses are proverbs and songs that help to derange the will to mean and to disrupt as well as expand language in its continuities. The narratives shift back and forth between being informational, reflective or analytical, and being emotional, trivial, absurd or anecdotal. (172-173)

Trinh incorporates poetic statements in songs and popular maxims to enlarge the viewpoint from a purely theoretical representation of documentary to a wider range of diverse contextual situations that contest the strict boundaries through interactions between different forms of oral expressions. The documentary and poetic elements intermingle and shift spectators' attention to the effects resulting from their recurrence back and forth, mixing the objective discourse with the subjective or emotional evocations. The mutually complementary and contrasting notions of poetry and documentary in Trinh's experimental representation can be viewed from William C. Wees' interpretation of the concept of "poetry film" developed by Herman Berlandt, a San Francisco poet and filmmaker as follows:

> [T]he poetry film does two seemingly contrary things at once. It expands upon the specific denotations of words and the limited iconic references of images to produce a much broader range of connotations, associations, metaphors. At the same time, it puts limits on the potentially limitless possibilities of meaning in words and images, and redirects our responses towards some concretely communable experience. It pulls the general towards the specific as it pushes the specific towards the level of generalizations. (*The Poetry-Film,* 109)

The reflexivity between the poetic-documentary/theoretical with the contrasting push and pull towards the other perspective produces multiple levels of perception which in their turn generate new forms of visions that transcend a uniform, single viewpoint. The two-way reflection created in Trinh's poetic film lifts the restrictions of words and images in their own denotations to encompass alternative metaphorical meanings. Trinh alternates between a testimony recounting the traumatic individual experience of a woman and the general female condition commemorated in poetry. The poetic expressions fill in the silence and the pain endured by the woman who talks about her 'fear' and 'despair' and who has 'a painful memory' of her husband's face in prison. This poetic intervention is heard simultaneously with the restaged interview:

> Loving her husband half of the night, she spends the other half of dawn carrying her merchandise to market.
> She who is married is like a dragon with wings, she who has no husband is like a rice-mill with a broken axle.
> Exhausting herself on the riverside while carrying rice to her husband, the stork cries dolefully.
> Come back, dear, and feed our children so that I can leave for the hills and rivers of Cao Bang.

The specific case of the woman's experience of suffering and terror is extended through the poetic image of woman as "a dragon flying with powerful wings" which symbolise her high-spirited state in her husband's presence. However, the woman's yearning for the absent husband is compared to the sad cries of the stork. Moreover, women's general condition of oppression is evoked in the image of the woman "carrying rice to the husband"

or "carrying merchandise to market". This position is also depicted in the story of Kieu, who as a perfect model of Confucian female piety, continually underwent suffering and separation from the first man she loved across several relations with other men before returning to her first love. Thus, the poetic dimension, which transforms the documentary view of past experiences is further extended to the more general context of women's real life situations in Vietnamese history – a history characterized by continuous political oppression and warfare.

## PHOTOGRAPHS AS PERSPECTIVES IN FILM IMAGES

I consider Trinh's presentation of photographs as an optic, a perspective through which to perceive the ways in which history is recorded and memory is expressed through the camera movement over the photographic images. Trinh explores the multiple levels of photographic production as evidentiary documents and as aesthetic approaches which can be viewed according to Barthes' distinction between the *studium* and the ***punctum***. The information contained in photographs from which film derives can be regarded as the *stadium*, the surface content of the photographic image. The deeper level of the *punctum* resides in the ways the pictures manifest the profound meanings of human affective experience beneath the surface of the image. Trinh exposes this *punctum* through her incorporation of voices such as Lan's reading of her sister's letter expressing her disappointment of not finding the same taste in ice-cream shops in the United States compared to those in Vietnam.

Trinh recalls the memory of the past by showing black-and-white photographs in a family album. Moreover, she depicts the separation and reunion of two sisters by first showing half a photograph with the image of a little girl and then the girl with her sister. Thus, the past and the present moments are presented and perceived as coeval, coexisting moments in the cinematic reworking of photographic images. The contrasting techniques of cinematic cut-off/montage and re-imposition of photographic images depict the simultaneous displacement of the historical past and the replacement of memory from the

perspective of the present. Through the medial interaction of film with photographs, the relation between the *studium* and the *punctum* is highlighted in the retrieval of a buried nexus of interconnected voices, things and places beneath the surface of the photograph.

**PHOTOGRAPHIC AND VERNACULAR EXPRESSIONS**

The intermedial relations of photographic images and voices which relate epistolary confidences evoke movement across distinct boundaries of photographs and texts. Rebecca Baron expresses this link as follows: "I think there is a parallel between the snapshot and the diary because they belong a private/vernacular world" (*Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography,* 121). Both the photographs and the letters are presented together to reflect the private dimension of personal memory as a contrast to the public historical record. Janet Sarbanes, in her interview with Rebecca Baron, asserts that "films use still photography as a springboard for what Baron calls 'private research', an associative process that combines official and personal accounts of events, refusing a totalizing historical narrative and emphasizing the role of change in human experience" (119)[10]. Through the animation of family photos with the personal narrative of private letters, Trinh offers an alternative viewpoint from the historical account in dominant media representation. The in-depth content of the snapshots is articulated by a female voice expressing the intimate feelings of nostalgia for Vietnamese delicacies absent in the U.S. This revelation of women's personal longing contrasts with the male voice of authority in the official reporting presented in newsreel images of the capture and surrender of women prisoners in these words: "When the smoke clears the inevitable round of prisoners, many of them seriously wounded, among them a group of women provisionally used as ammunition bearers, village infiltrators and informers were taken". Trinh further articulates her own view in her voice-off commentary in response to both the stern male

[10] Janet Sarbanes also comments on Baron's "idea of still" in her work as the way she uses still photography to foreground questions of history, memory, knowledge, and narrative in her films. (*Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography,* 120).

voice and the documentary war image with this alternative re-interpretation: "Always recurring in the prisoners' mind is the fear of time when the witnesses themselves die without witnesses, when History consists of tiny explosions of life and death without relay. The witnesses go on living to bear witness to the unbearable." Trinh presents a deeper perception into the prisoners' mind filled with the fear of losing, with the loss of their life, the memory of the experiences to which they bear witness. The film probes the emotions and feelings of war prisoners in ways that challenge mainstream repression of the latter.

*Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* also questions the documentary representation of time. Trinh's film constructs an alternative vision of history from multiple perspectives of personal, poetic, and exploratory dimensions. Trinh presents shifting perspectives through various passages from still to moving images and vice-versa and the impact created by their visual effects. She presents a metaphorical notion of poetic images in the diverse rhythms of perception of photographic stills in her cinematic images. Her film endows the photographs in family albums with movement as her camera focuses first on one part of the stills – the centre or either the right or left side and then refocuses on the complete image. The immobile images are thus transformed through the process of successive (re)framing to connote a re-contextualisation of Vietnamese people`s history from their original native location to diasporic identity in a new cultural space.

## RELATIONS BETWEEN PHOTOGRAPHIC NEGATIVES AND DEVELOPED IMAGES IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM

Trinh's method of re-envisioning photographs in filmic space can be understood according to Jean Ma's discussion of the relations between these two media as follows:

> Just as photography severs a momentary fragment of the past from the continuum of time in order to preserve it within a frozen image, so cinema displaces and reassembles durational segments of the past in its stream of images. Its depiction of life as flow in the present time of viewing is always shadowed by the other time of inscription. (*Still Moving Images,* 99)

The interconnectedness between photographic and cinematic images stems from the perception of the photograph in film in both its stationary (or still) and moving states resulting from the influence of the cinematic flow. Film simultaneously displaces and replaces photographic stills preserving segments of the historical past in the reanimated vision of the present cinematic images. In Trinh's cinematic reconstruction of history, the past is recalled from photographic stills through the presentation of a negative photographic image of a woman's face. Featured at the intersection between black-and-white photographs and colour (still and moving) images, the negative yields contrary aspects of light for the dark or coloured area of the woman's face in a positive image. Although not showing all the details of a fully developed image, the photographic negative instils memory and illuminates the remote areas in the mind. It also stands for the presence of the past in the present through its negative form as a latent photographic and cinematic image before projection on the screen.

**TIME AND ITS PASSAGE IN FILM**

In her film, Trinh exposes a special kind of look both in photographic images and in arrested/stop motion of cinematic images. This process re-directs spectators to an alternative way of looking and transforms the duration given to the viewing of these images. Both the passage of time and space can therefore be perceived during the act of viewing. Moreover, I further see, in the refocusing of photographic images and the stop motion of mobile cinematic images, an intermedial exchange. The arrested motion of film flux focuses on a single image as the main guiding view whereas the cinematic reframing of photographic images opens up to plural viewpoints. This paradoxical quality can be observed in the dual mobile/fixed images of a young woman at the centre of the screen such that, as she approaches, the camera focuses on her by temporarily freezing the content, turning her fluid movements into a series of halted images.

The discontinuity of static images within the continuous stream of moving film images underscores the notion of duration in the film. This serves to show the inverse

relation between the dual states – fixity and movement – that is represented in Trinh's film through photographic images of a woman's flexibility (in the filmic portrait of her image) and her constancy (perceived through the photographic still in cinematic flux) in a changing world. This tension between cinema and photography is theorized by Karen Beckman and Jean Ma in the following terms:

> [Filmmakers] juxtapose film and photography to illuminate one another, calling attention to the distinct practices and traditions at work within each individual medium .... In various ways, the filmmakers and artists ... unveil secret conversations between media that persist across decades and geographical realms, revealing difference between old and new without asserting its absoluteness, unveiling the question of the medium to be, among other things, a question of history, temporality, and relationality. In blurring the boundary between still and moving photographically-appearing images, these artists provoke us to articulate how media reflect or confound each other anew, and challenge us to revise our current thinking about the qualities that join or separate them ... and the temporal frameworks within which we articulate such questions. (*Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography,* 7-8.)

The private photographic stills and the documentary footage in Trinh's film are intercut with voice-over commentary and the loud reading of letters dating from a time prior to the historical events depicted in the film. Trinh demonstrates the complex experience of temporality in history through various rhythms in the screen images of women walking, dancing and riding bicycles.

By presenting various forms of static and moving images in various elaborations, Trinh calls the spectators' attention to the relation between several genres and styles and to the new spaces between them. Trinh shows, through a series of changing viewpoints, diasporic transformations which she elaborates in these terms:

> Many of the younger diasporic generations 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 ...

> 'Identity' has now become more of a point of departure than an endpoint in the struggle .... 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. (*Framer Framed,* 140)

The multiple rhythms in the perception of women's cinematic images which are continually being slowed down and brought to a halt in frozen photographic stills depict the different stages in Vietnamese women`s life in their attempts to adjust to diasporic changes and transformation. The passages between cinematic and photographic images highlight the women`s new perception of identity by positioning the self at the intersection of multiple locations and in the interstices of poetic, experimental and personal expressions. The diverse cinematic speeds animating the sequences focusing on the collective identity of the Vietnamese women – the sequences showing these women walking or playing during recreation break at school, pounding corn or dancing – are highlighted with the vocal expressions of speech, song and poetry. The different directions taken by women while riding their bicycles point to temporal variations. The forward accelerated pulsation is perceived in contrast to the slow motion depicting the smooth rhythm of movement exhibiting grace and harmony in women`s bodily activity while the sound of Lan`s voice speaks of women`s beauty in their flapping dresses flying in the wind as they ride on the bridge, past the men observing them. However, a radically rapid pulse is felt and seen in women's bodies whose movements alternate with the beat of the stick pounding on the corn. As the stick falls heavily down on the corn, women's bodies and arms rise up to prepare for the next execution. This alternating movement creates a syncopated rhythm while women's voices are heard loudly singing a Vietnamese folk song expressing the strong feelings and emotions of women's life experiences. In their diverse folk dances commemorating the valiant deeds of Vietnamese heroic women and other historical feats, slow motion enable the observation of the details of women's smiling faces and bodies performing the gestures of swaying, stooping, rising and turning around as well as

brandishing daggers in their hands. Their dance movements are accentuated by the rhythmic melody of a song fostering the emotions of the dance and promoting the spectators' appreciation of Vietnamese traditions. The different rhythms of the dance images cause tension in the slow motion of the usual steps against the normal film speed that seems to speed up the fast movements of the dancers who are perceived as if making sudden jumps.

## MULTITEMPORAL DIMENSIONS VIEWED THROUGH WOMEN'S BODIES

In the various scenes of women in their group activities and in the alternating sequences of moving, slow motion and stop-motion images which are continually de- and reactivated, Trinh articulates historical moments through relations of multiple temporalities. History, viewed in terms of time and its passage experienced through women's bodies, can be perceived in the interstices of the (spatio)temporal and medial dimensions.[11]

Trinh depicts the positions of women's bodies both within and outside the frame of objective documentary representation from the shifting perspective of the photograph-like, calm portraiture of Vietnamese women in the re-enacted interview to the wider context of these actresses' actual life in the U.S. Besides the apparent photographic fixity of the actresses' images perceived from a zooming in on their face to a larger view of their seated, immobile body from a farther angle during the interviews, their position on the screen is pushed to a margin in some images in which printed texts appear either before or during their oral testimonies. In other images, the words occupy the whole screen and obliterate the vision of their bodies, leaving only the sound of their voices. The painful experiences

[11] I am also inspired by Nelson Tollof's reading of Tarkovsky's Mirror as a perspective of time in his claim that "the subject must simply pass time in time's multiple heterogeneity, experience time as the body must experience its own generation and corruption and *become* that "middleness" or medium/milieu through which time passes and makes its passage, becoming a witness to the traces of time and an assembler of these traces – in their furrows and explosive gaps as well as in their drifting suspensions" (*Cinémas* 2003, 124)

of history they relate are thus perceived through the diverse rhythms of bodily, vocal and textual relations of screen images.

In the first part of the film, women are restricted in their movement to occasional displacements seen within the border of the frame; they are depicted with greater freedom of mobility in the second part in both their physical movements over larger areas such as the environment of their home and workplace, and also in the (symbolic) socio-cultural positions they occupy in their adoption of their new American lifestyle besides their own Vietnamese traditions.

Multiple bodily rhythms can be seen in the relatively busy periods of women's life at work, during a marriage ceremony and Vietnamese cultural festivals, in contrast to the more peaceful, meditative and recreational activities such as relaxing near a fishpond and performing tai-chi. In these scenes, historical time is depicted though the medium of women's bodies in the different rhythmic temporalities of their dis- and relocations across diverse spatial dimensions in the history of Vietnamese diaspora.

The notion of multiple rhythmic perspectives can be understood from Trinh's view that "[i]n 'acted' interviews, Vietnamese women tell of war, exile, traditions and daily lives from shifting perspectives as women, mothers, wives, Vietnamese and American. In these plurivocal formulations of identity politics, the self loses its fixed boundaries and hybridization occurs in its place" (*Framer Framed*, 86). The multiple spatiotemporal experiences of Vietnamese women in history are perceived in the interactions between the history of the past and the (re)visions of the present. These experiences are recounted through poetry, songs and dance as negotiations between classical and contemporary Vietnamese culture and rendered by means of photographs and poetic re-imag(in)ings. The multiple layers of medial interactions (re)situate the self at the crossroads of geographical, cultural, racial and generational historicities and temporalities. In her dialogue with Homi Bhabha in *Cinema Interval* Trinh asserts that the identity of the Vietnamese women she interviewed in *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* should be visualized as a threshold construction since

> the authentic Vietnamese culture ... loses itself like ripples widening on the surface of water. It's a reality that can't be contained, that always escapes .... [In *Surname Viet*], the 'you' ('even you') referred to by the women interviewed points immediately to the role of the witness – confidant – listener who, although trusted as an insider, holds a border position in relation to the culture. So there is constant shuttling across thresholds of insideness and outsideness even for someone who is from within the culture. (*Cinema Interval*s, 22)

The positionality of the Vietnamese women as at once insiders and outsiders or as border-crossers is depicted in its physical and linguistic specificity. Cultural exchanges are depicted in film interviews when Vietnamese actresses express in English the oral testimonies conducted in Vietnamese in Vietnam, while the Vietnamese-American women recount their former experiences in Vietnam in English but express their personal emotions in Vietnamese while confiding to their family members. Lan, a young Vietnamese female who is later seen in the film with her American friend, reads translated Vietnamese poems and letters in English. Trinh, as voice-off commentator speaking mainly in English in her interpretation of classical Vietnamese poetry from a feminist perspective, evokes a particular feeling of deep grief as "rotten bowels" – the metaphorical cause of death – in Vietnamese. Lan also names Vietnamese desserts in Vietnamese for lack of both literal and figurative translations of these delicacies and their special flavours. Thus, although the Vietnamese women have assimilated the English language, they nevertheless revert to their mother tongue and to Vietnamese ritual practices during official ceremonies. Timothy Corrigan describes the role of the voice-over in these terms:

> The voice-over becomes a time-traveller through a world that will always elude him and us temporally as well as spatially. The changing voices, incorporated quotations, and music and sound recordings ... describe a series of shifting subject positions surrounding and intervening in the visuals.[...] The unusual mobility of this voice exploring time between images creates, in Bazin's words, a 'montage ... forged from ear to eye'. (Bazin 2003, 44). (*Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, 57)

The voice-over addresses the changing historical situation of Vietnamese women living in the U.S. as they attempt to integrate the new host culture while preserving their original identity. The multiple genres and experimental styles used by Trinh in *Surname Viet* and the relation between on-screen and off-screen voices in the film produce an alternative vision of the diaspora as well as of Vietnamese history.

**POETIC IN(TER)FERENCE**

Trinh shows both actual images and alternative representations. She juxtaposes two poems in contrasting contexts evoking classical Vietnamese etiquette and contemporary behaviour in the U.S. in order to depict a shifting view of Vietnamese women's identity in different historical and cultural situations. While Lan balances upside down on a tree in the company of Sue, her American friend, this Vietnamese poem is heard in English in Lan's voice-off translation:

> I am like a jackfruit on a tree
> To taste you must pluck 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.

Depicting the ambiguous behaviour of a young woman who is at once flirtatious and seductive and stern and off-putting toward her male suitor, this poem reflects the former classical belief in the importance of female integrity as well as a contemporary liberated approach that is critical of premodern, traditional Vietnamese codes of behaviour. Lan's linguistic and cultural translation represent a challenge to such traditions.

**BORDER CROSSING**

The relationship of the shadow in the photographic negative to the developed image can be compared to the aspects of the black border surrounding the photographic images. Viewed from the cinematographic perspective, this space sets up the dual frame of photographic images within the film images on the screen and evokes both the camera and the gaze of the photographer and the filmmaker. Trinh calls attention to this dark area by giving it a prominent space in the space of a photograph (the one that is divided in half to mark the absence of one little sister before being reintegrated into the whole picture through montage to show the two little girls together). At the start of the film, Trinh presents a tiny photo of a Vietnamese girl at the right corner of the screen, enhancing the view of the black border that almost fills up the whole screen. This back border evokes the importance of photographic images in cinema and their original state as negative images. Evoking the inherent quality of the shadow in the undeveloped negative, the border defines the photographic referent in the recorded image as the intersection of a trace of the past and a projection of future becoming. By displaying photographs sometimes at the centre and at other times in a corner of the screen, Trinh calls attention to the diasporic experience of physical dislocation and cultural dis- and reorientation of the Vietnamese women.

Furthermore, the frame is metaphorically expressed in the relation between photographic images and cinematic images of documentary 'talking heads'. This notion of framing can be understood according to Irina O. Rajewsky's view that "[t]he placement on screen of a photographic image through a device that is iconically related to a picture frame as it 'frames' the action on screen as a reference to photography thus expressing the mise-en-scène as intermediary reference" (*Intermédialités*, automne 2005, 57). Whereas the people in the photographic image undergo a change in position on the cinematographic screen and are given voice through the commentary and the epistolary communications, the actresses re-enacting the interviews as 'talking heads' are perceived paradoxically as 'framed' in the conventional sense of the camera situating the subject. Rajewsky asserts

that, "[t]he mise-en-scène does not simply stress the framed-ness of the 'image'. More to the point, it explicitly references a defining characteristic ..." (*Intermédialités*, 59). In the case of photography, reference is made to its definition as being constrained to present an image within the bounds of its medial representation: fixed, limited according to conventional perception of documentary. To challenge conventions of documentary representation, Trinh transfers cinematic motion to photographic stills and references reframed cinematic images in the bounds of photographic portraiture of 'talking heads'. On one hand, the cinematographic mise-en-scène of oral testimonies in the first part of the film connotes the limitation arising from the fixity of the apparent photographic medium in its conventional portrayal within the border of the camera framing. On the other hand, the movement made by the cinematic camera cutting, reassembling and reshuffling the positions of photographic images reflecting the mise-en-scène of documentary images also suggests the expansion of "the representational modes of the medium: it is as if the viewer sees a picture put into motion turned to life – a "tableau vivant" in the truest sense of the term" (*Intermédialités*, 57).[12] The motion creating transformation of originally static photographic images of family members in the cinematic images denoting their separation and reunification simultaneously illustrates and is illustrated by the actress's recalling of her long absence from the north experienced by her sister before her visit there twenty years later. Thus, a double remediation is perceived through the extension of the photographic medium into the cinematic framing of interview which is further considered as a "tableau vivant" in which the images are invested with life and voice. Karl Prümm theorizes the remediation of the visual arts and other, non-cinematic media in cinema as follows:

> Le cinéma d'aujourd'hui est le lieu de transbordement des ordonnances de l'image et du caractère sensible des autres médias dont les caméramans deviennent les médiateurs et traducteurs ….. Le cinéma narratif exerce dès lors une *remédiation* multiple des

[12] In order to produce a *tableau vivant*, Körper supplements the stasis of painting with the movement of the dancers to present to spectators a painting put into motion. See *Intermédialités,* automne 2005.

> arts visuels …. Des conventions culturelles sont ainsi mises en images, certaines traditions … de la photographie gagnent une nouvelle présence, fût-ce de façon indirecte. Cette remédiation … peut donner lieu à un jeu de références …. Mais le regard de la caméra permet aussi une nouvelle perception filmique des objets d'art. (*Intermédialités automne 2005*, 66)

The changes in perspective from photographic frame to cinematic space in a film do not only reference the technical specificity of each medium but also brings about a new mutual perception in the relation between the two media. This transfer of visual characteristics is perceived as a crossing of medial borders effected by filmmakers who become translators and mediators between geographical and sociocultural boundaries in a re-presentation of diasporic identity in its constant passages between changing locations across different historical epochs.

**RELATIONS BETWEEN PHOTO-ESSAY AND ESSAY FILM:**
**SELF-REFLEXIVITY**
**RE-FRAMING BEYOND BORDERS AND MARGINS**

Lan's revelation to her American friend of her mother's adoption of American fashion is interpreted as a significant transition from Vietnamese conservative behaviour to American modern lifestyle. Lan's discussion of her mother's change in values can be viewed as a reflection of the actress's articulation, in the first part interview, of her sister's remark of her conservative style of dress in socialist convention. Dual reflexivity is perceived through Lan's verbal expression of her mother's new outlook of contemporary life in the States and her own physical gesture of climbing on trees. A contrasting notion of reflection is perceived as trans(pos)ition from an actress's marginalised position on the screen covered in printed text to Lan's comparatively more relaxed posture, lying on the floor in front of the fireplace. Her position in between the fireplace and the screen – perceived as border frame – is viewed as a revelation of her situation beyond the margin (symbolised by the shadow cast from the reflection of the flames).

Besides Lan's conversation with Sue, reflecting on her mother's changes and echoing the Vietnamese woman's disapproval of her sister's rigid attire, Mai Thu Van's communication with Trinh reveals the change in her former identity as follows:

> 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 Libération 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

Trinh presents Mai's letter in her film – a letter in which Mai confesses that she is growing distant from her Vietnamese roots – through the reflexive mode of the film-essay that relates the essayistic element in Mai's book of interviews and photographs to the cinematic representation. The interactions between the photographic depiction and cinematic re-presentation of Vietnamese identity (re)form-ation can be understood from Vivian Sobchack's distinction between

> [t]he photographic – unlike the cinematic and the electronic – functions neither as a coming-into-being (a presence always constituting itself) nor as a being-in-itself (an absolute presence). Rather, it functions to fix a being-that-has-been (a presence in the present that is always past). Paradoxically, as it objectifies and preserves in its acts of possession, the photographic has something to do with loss, with pastness, and with death, its meaning and value intimately bound within the structure and investments of nostalgia.
>
> Although dependent upon the photographic, the cinematic has something more to do with life, with the accumulation – not the loss – of experience. Cinematic technology animates the photographic and reconstitutes its visibility and verisimilitude in a difference not of degree but of kind. The *moving picture* is a visible representation not of activity finished or past, but of activity coming-into-being. ("The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic 'Presence', *Film and Theory: An Anthology,* 73-74)

The photographic stance congeals aspects of Vietnamese women's identity in a fixed image thereby confining it to a past temporality that implies loss and which differs markedly from the constant flow of images that (re)configure female subjectivity as a presence always (re)generating itself. Trinh further extends the essayistic view of Mai's expression of Vietnamese identity loss in her own voice-off commentary:

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

Trinh depicts widespread displacement through the cinematic images which can be considered as the (photographic) allegory of the death of the former self in the new perceptions of Vietnamese women's diasporic identity. She makes up for Mai's feeling of inadequacy by incorporating the letter as an essayistic element in her film to engage in an ongoing self re(e)valuation in the new diasporic context.

**MULTIPLE IDENTITY REPRESENTATIONS**

Trinh highlights the importance of viewing women's identities from multiple perspectives. She argues that, "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". Trinh's incorporation of diverse representations of the essayistic discourse in photographic and cinematic images open up the possibilities of viewing different aspects of Vietnamese women's diasporic identity from multiple perspectives as a challenge to a singular and fixed function of recording history and interpreting cultural identity from a preset code. She invites spectators to review, through the multiple layers of essayistic reflections on Lan's, Mai's and her own analysis of Vietnamese women's self-representations, the ways in which history is reinterpreted from alternative viewpoints that resist the conventional objective documentary style of talking heads' testimonies.

Women's multiple viewpoints can be interpreted from the perspective of Timothy Corrigan's reflections on the interactions between the photo-essay and the essay film.

Thus, the identity of Vietnamese women is represented in the context of diasporic transformation. Corrigan draws out these relations of change from the spaces between photographic and filmic images which depict the variety of subject positions in these terms:

> The photo-essay has taken many shapes ... translating essayistic concerns with expression, experience, and thought into a variety of formal configurations of photographic images. Rhetorically, photo-essays assume a spectrum of positions from the social and political ... through the sociological portraits and the meditative celebration of local life .... This variety shares, of course, a structural foundation, built on linkage of separate photographs whose implied relationship appears in the implicit gaps or "unsutured" interstices between those images. Often this relationship can be considered analogous to the shifting and aleatory voice or perspective of the literary essay as it attempts, provisionally, to articulate or interpolate itself within the public spaces and experiences being represented. Nor surprisingly, therefore, the photo-essay has frequently relied on the vestiges of the literary, a verbal text to dramatize and concretize that shifting perspective and its unstable relationship with the photographic images it counterpoints. (*Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography,* 47)

The constantly shifting perspectives of the photographic and cinematic representation of Vietnamese women point to the gaps between these images and to the texts/comments that articulate the changing relationship between them. The variety of different situations of Vietnamese women in the U.S. performing the re-enactment of the interviews conducted in Vietnam by Trinh shifts the documentary focus from acting out other women's experiences in Vietnam to expressing their own subject positions in American society.

Trinh further depicts another bypassing of the polar objective-subjective mode of interviews through a reflective dimension of (self)representation. She integrates an actress's assessment of her own position with regard to her part in Trinh's film in these words:

(Kim's voice off):

My son's friend who is 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 the film. I still have many friends in Vietnam. Compared with Cat Tien their condition is much worse. Some of them who were highly placed in the past are now selling treats in the streets, 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.

Trinh combines the reflections in Mai's book comprised of photographs, interviews and essays through the disconnected and loose links between the photo-essay and the essay film represented by the voices of Lan, Mai, Trinh and Kim. The Vietnamese actress Kim's own interpretation of her role in Trinh's film depicts a spectrum of social, political and personal positions of Vietnamese women in Vietnam and those in the U.S. The changing notion of truth is presented in Kim's articulation of her own view which resists the form of the interview as evidential proof of information through a re-definition of representation as a means of expressing Vietnamese women's identity both in Vietnam and in the U.S. Her active participation in Trinh's film denotes her contribution to her country through her voice as a "verbal text" that simultaneously speaks up and rejects the oppression against women in Vietnam under socialist government domination.

The shifting perspectives of Vietnamese women's images from diverse viewpoints in the two parts of the film (re)enact and further displace, across continuous changes from voice to a verbal text in Trinh's film which re-presents synchronously the actress's voice and the text of her speech on screen. Trinh's adaptation of Mai's book of interviews extends the essayistic depiction of photographic portraits (in Mai's photographic

illustration of Vietnamese women's experiences) to the photo-essay quality in Trinh's essay film.

**HYPERMEDIATION**

The diverse ways in which Trinh presents the complex interactions between media can be understood from the following argument proposed by Jay David Bolton and Richard Grusin in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*:

> On the opening page of *Understanding Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan remarked that "the content" of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph" (23-24). As his problematic examples suggest, McLuhan was not thinking of single repurposing but perhaps of a more complex kind of borrowing in which one medium is itself incorporated or represented in another medium. Dutch painters incorporated maps, globes, inscriptions, letters, and mirrors in their works. In fact, [...] examples of hypermediacy are characterized by this kind of borrowing.[...] Again, we call the representation of one medium in another *remediation* ... (45)

As can be observed from Mai's transcription of interviews in her book published in France, the oral testimonies serve as the content of her writing which in turn becomes the content of her printed book. Trinh's cinematic rewriting of Mai's book comprises multiples levels of representation consisting in plural vocal expressions such as women's re-articulation of past events and experiences of other Vietnamese women, recitation of classical Vietnamese poetry, and singing of songs whose content are words which are explicitly shown in the printed texts on the screen simultaneously with these performances.

Trinh re-appropriates the content of Mai's books made of photographs, interviews and essays together with their mediatic forms which are reworked in her experimentation on intermedial reflexivity. In an interview with Laleen Jayamanne entitled "From a hybrid place" in *Framer Framed*, Trinh refers to her multimediatic work with this claim: 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" (137). Trinh transposes

the written transcription of oral interviews in Mai's book into both images and voices of actresses whose re-enacted narratives are dramatized as fictional representation in relation to the expanded testimonies of their own experiences in Vietnam and the U.S. as actual documentaries. Thus, she stretches the limits of representation beyond the conventions of documentary to a wider vision of the social, cultural and emotional dimensions outside the normal framework. She reflects on her innovative way of perceiving and demonstrating the relations between the media in their diverse forms and contents in her address to the spectators of her film with these words:

> 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. Between a language of inwardedness and that of pure surface .... The pose is always present, and accidents on film are known as "controlled accidents". The more intimate the tone, the more successful the interview .... By choosing the most direct and spontaneous form of voicing and documenting, I find myself closer to fiction.

Across the multiple transformations of book to film in the diverse contents of words and their different mediatic forms which are further translated and transposed into language of verbal and textual expression, Trinh depicts the continuous movement of exchanges between these numerous transitions. Moreover, she exposes the shift of each of representation (from Mai's book to her own film) as inter-actions between the content – in an in-depth way – and the frame – usually perceived in a superficial manner. She signals a reversal of form in its dual aspects of presenting and exposing the artifice of the interview technique. She reveals that the attempts at depicting an authentic view of testimonials through intimate voice and tone of speech in documentary is merely surface demonstration backed by the process of montage and editing.

Thus, Trinh simultaneously presents a deeper perception of the internal process of (self)representation. She elaborates on her cinematic practice with the following words:

> ... the praxis of a politics of difference that enables one to challenge rather than to fortify the territorial mind in every imposition of

> well-defined boundaries .... When [people] come to see a documentary film, they expect information and truth .... However, I see my films more as cutting across several boundaries – boundaries of fiction, documentary, as well as experimental films .... The work of modifying and expanding frontiers operates in more than one direction at a time so these films question both their own interiority and their own exteriority to the categories mentioned. (*Framer Framed, 162*)

Trinh offers to spectators diverse views of the historical experiences of Vietnamese women through intermedial relations as a means of expanding fixed modes of representation with their preset norms separating historical documentary from fictional narrative. In *Surname Viet*, she experiments with crossing boundaries in order to show both the internal and the external aspects of a form that is not limited to its own restrictions but is open to new interpretations through interactions between multiple genres.

In response to Homi Bhabha's question regarding her historical film, Trinh asserts that

> ... concerning the antagonism you mentioned between the documentary approaching repetition as a political strategy *and* as an aesthetic device – at once as a negating and an affirming activity in its resistance to representation – is to ensure that in the making of documentary (or of any other genre), one does not censor oneself. The fact that the loudest claims to representative truth and information have been voice and legitimized through the documentary form does not mean that in order to bring about change, one has to banish it and adopt other, more adequate forms. when handled creatively, repetition is a way of affirming difference. Rather than using it routinely to reproduce the same, one can use it to continue saying what one has said, to shift a center, ... to displace a form from its settled location, and to create new passages through the coexistence of moments. (*Cinéma Intervals*, 23).

Trinh illustrates, through a repetition of Mai's interview technique to which she brings her own displacement to a new focus on the diasporic identity, a trans-position to new passages between photographic and cinematic essays of female subject (re)formation. She further

transcribes the textual (printed) interviews in Mai's book to the audio-visual registers of her cinematic essay which re-adjusts the margins of both forms in an intermedial ex-change that hybridizes the documentary mould by disassembling and reassembling moments of Vietnamese women's poetic and socio-political expressions. Moreover, she develops continual dis- and re-positioning of Vietnamese female identity in the multiple interpretive contexts of change and transformation.

Trinh has revealed in the second part interview which demonstrates, in the actresses' expressions of their own life situations in the U.S., a repetitive act of documentary from a different perspective than the staged performance in the first part. Thus, Trinh adopts a dual strategy of resistance in the simultaneously negative political and positive aesthetic representation that shifts the focus of historical truth from a fixed location to a diasporic context. This change in direction enables a new vision of Vietnamese women's identity in history through successive layers of intermediality as creative relations of intersubjectivity across time and space. Trinh opposes the notion of set boundaries in the historical representation of female identity through multiple repetitions that depict the transitions from classical to contemporary subjectivity.

## REPETITIONS OF LEITMOTIFS: "SURNAME VIET, GIVEN NAME NAM" MULTIPLE LOCATIONS OF IDENTITY REPRESENTATIONS

In the numerous reiterations of the principal leitmotif "Surname Viet, Given Name Nam", Trinh depicts Vietnamese women's engagement in their national identity across different cultural spaces and historical times. The poetic expression of Vietnamese female identity is recited by Lan in the English translation as follows:

> 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 Nam".

This classical poetic vision is expanded through a shift of perspectives that enables us to participate in the reflections on national identity:

> I keep on thinking despite our emigrating to the U.S., if our surname is Viet, our given name is 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.

Kim thus confirms the film's stance on national identity, namely the fact that the latter continues to elicit strong feelings of identification in Vietnamese immigrants, even in intercultural marriages. At the same time, *Surname Viet* also offers a critical interpretation of the role of Vietnam's North-South division in the construction of diasporic/immigrant identity:

> (Yen in Vietnamese) – when asked "What did your Vietnamese friends think when they heard you're going to be on film?
>
> "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 towards 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.

Here, Yen further complicates the film's view of Vietnamese national identity by addressing the varying positions of diasporic Vietnamese toward their divided country – Yen situates herself in a neutral in-between position. She thus seems to anticipate the multiple viewpoints and subjective transformations in the spectators. The interstitial space of Yen's position may be theorized by means of Peter Zima's observation, in his book *Literatur Intermedial,* on the effect of the Barthesian *punctum* on the spectator which Henk Oosterling interprets as follows:

> The reception-aesthetics impact of the "inter [can be considered] as an experience of the audience that cannot be reduced to a singular discipline, adopting categories from Barthes' *La Chambre Claire* (p.4-51). The locus of the analysis is shifted from intermedial "texture" and "écriture" to an intermedial "lecture". The emphasis is no longer placed on production but on ambiguous reception i.e. the working of the work and its experiential effects. Not the operator but the tensed spectator becomes his main focus. Connotatively playing with the "spectator", Barthes conceives of a photo as a 'spectre' that haunts the reality that once was its referent. The spectator is hit: affected and moved by the '*punctum*'. Barthes' *'punctum'* as an experience of the singular, escaping the studius meditation on the image – *'studium*' – is adopted as the impossible experience of the breaks between two media (*Intermédialités,* 37).

Through the juxtaposition of photographic and cinematic images, Trinh highlights Yen's position in-between her dual role as actress and spectator reviewing the representation of the North-South division. Thus, Trinh also sets up the audience's position in between the historical inscription (in the Barthesian sense of 'écriture') and the intermedial reading/interpretation (in Barthes's notion of 'lecture'). In this way, the spectators do not just browse over the photographs but engage in a deep experience resulting from the '*punctum'* as the effect of the interstitial space between the photographic and cinematic images. The slow and stop motion of the photographic intervals between the cinematic moving images of the intermarriage of a Vietnamese woman and an American man exposes the interstitial spaces between cultural and historical scenes in the transition of Vietnamese national identity to a diasporic context beyond the original limits of North and South Vietnam illustrated in intermedial boundary crossing. The intercultural space is highlighted during the slow motion in order to focus on the moments of transition from Vietnamese marriage ritual – when the Vietnamese woman wearing marriage dress and headdress burns incense for offering – in her wedding to her American husband in the United States.

The in-between spaces that cross over between the photographic and cinematic images produce an intermedial exchange of effects that develop simultaneous dis- and

relocation of the gaze in the stop motion and the corresponding displacement of the original focus to a reframing in another medial support. Moreover, through the fluid images which are constantly arrested in fixed fragments, Trinh intensifies the spectators' viewing of cinematic scenes in photographic stills. The alternation of fast and slow rhythms displace the conventional mode of representation in a regulated pace. As Timothy Corrigan suggests,

> Bridging these different forms of the essayistic, the photogram describes a conceptual borderline between the photography and film, a kind of 'stop action', since it pinpoints the transformation of film's moving image into the suspension of 'real movement and time' as a series of overlapping photographic images. (*Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, 54)

The photographic fragments, viewed from Corrigan's perspective of the 'photogram' as the essayistic link between the photographic and cinematic real(m)s reflect the inherent quality of the photographic device that constitutes film as the constant overlapping of photographic images. Corrigan's notion of the in-betweeness of the photogram that cuts up film's virtual reality into photographic stills can be read as the play on the spectators' reception of the work in its intermedial representation. This concept of the experience of the 'inter' enables a re-evaluation of Trinh's use of the essayistic reflection of the photographic medium in film images to depict historical re-inscription with differences.

Like Barthes – who appeals to viewers through the *punctum* as a 'spectre' that haunts reality with the photographic referent – Trinh establishes a new link between the photographic images and the cinematic content that dis- and replaces the original image with other poetic and socio-cultural meanings. She develops a resistance against a singular vision of the representation of identity in an essentially separate medium by extending the dominant documentary form to include a broader view of the Vietnamese actresses' own testimonies of their life experiences in the U.S. Her production of a more expansive notion of the self in new contexts and dimensions can be perceived in Kim's remark that, "One thing the man has learned to let go of while in prison, is identity: this singular naming of a

person, a race, a culture, a nation." Trinh promotes a revision of the conventional representation of Vietnamese identity as a transition between multiple socio-cultural, political and historical aspects. She has transcended the normal vision of the self by resituating the subject in the new dimension of intermedial representations that reflect a "spectral" (re)envisioning of identity transformation. I base my interpretation on Germain Lacasse's analysis of Alain Berrendoner's notion of "fantôme de vérité" in his work *Éléments de pragmatique linguistique* (1981, 59). Germain Lacasse extends Alain Berrendonner`s argument of the 'spectre' to a universal context of communications that should be considered as an *active* participant of interlocution (61) in her view that:

> Ces observations paraissent d'une grande justesse parce qu'elles concordent avec plusieurs exemples de capture et de transformation du fantôme, dont la place et la forme changent avec les vérités dont il serait l'invisible écho. Il se manifeste tout autant dans la sphère intermédiatique, où les énonciateurs essaient de le faire changer de position afin de valider leur propre vérité. (*Intermédialités* 2000*,* 85-86)

Lacasse also defines the spectral dimension in these terms, "On pourrait appeler 'sphère intermédiatique' l'espace à la fois réel et symbolique constitué par les médias et leur rapport avec les communautés" (*Intermédialités,* 86). The spectre, defined by Lacasse as constituting the intermedial sphere in which enunciating subjects change their positions and viewpoints in order to depict the authenticity of their new experiences, characterizes the media crossing in *Surname Viet* as well. Thus we see different moments bearing the trace of the earlier image of Vietnamese women's traditional values in a new context of life and intermarriage in the U.S. The opening scenes in Trinh's film showing photographs of young and old wounded habitants fleeing war and its effects are further reflected in the expression of Vietnamese people's difficult situation in this poem:

> I am like a piece of silk
> Floating in the midst of the market
> Knowing not into whose hands it will fall

*Surname Viet* also shows how the Vietnamese immigrants experience the impacts of their new diasporic condition in the United States: the Vietnamese women who have just fled the war need to readjust themselves and are therefore torn between their Asian origin and their desire to fit in American society. The reflection in the poem cited above is consequently transformed to show their position in-between two different cultures in this question:

> 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?

Classical Vietnamese traditions – as attributes of the East – appear somewhat spectral when contrasted with the modern, hectic lifestyle of industrialized Western societies. Trinh's questioning of the conventional form in *Surname Viet* through her interviews with immigrant Vietnamese women can be perceived as reflections of cross-cultural positions and cross-medial interactions.

* * *

## INTERMEDIALITY IN *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST*

In *Daughters of the Dust,* Dash visualizes the close connection between ancient and contemporary African culture by re-appropriating traditional cinematographic and photographic aesthetics. The film makes visible the relation between early Black film history and the history of African-Americans through a reconstruction of African cultural identity at the turn of the twentieth century. Dash's strategy of integrating earlier African traditions into current cultural representations also aims at tracing the historical transformation of African-American identity through the interactions of filmic and photographic media. From her extensive research into the African history of deportation and migration of Africans to the United States, Dash (re)creates the ways in which the Gullahs "recalled, remembered and recollected the African culture" in the Sea Islands. She highlights the nature of their memory as both "imaginative and original, distinct" in the opening words of her film, reflecting her own view of African traditions from the dual perspective of nostalgic recollection and innovative recreation.

*Daughters of the Dust* draws a parallel between modern African-Americans' memory of their ancestors and the legacy of early Black film in contemporary African-American filmmaking. Dash draws her inspiration from the images of baptism in a well-known film called "The Blood of Jesus" to stage her scene of the baptismal procession. In this way, she acknowledges, through her representation of emblematic scenes in former films, the influence of earlier African filmmakers on her work. Such borrowing can be interpreted as "[r]epurposing: to take a 'property' from one medium and reuse it in another. With reuse ... [t]he interplay [between media] happens ... for the reader or viewer who happens to know both versions and can compare them. (*Remediation*, 45). For the enlightened spectators, the medial reappropriation both calls attention to the borrowing of the baptismal images from earlier films and prepares the vision of new material in the present context of Dash's film. Her method of reuse can be perceived from the notion that "[r]efashioning within the medium is a special case of remediation, and it proceeds from the same

ambiguous motives of homage and rivalry, what Harold Bloom has called the 'anxiety of influence' (*Remediation*, 49).

Besides the recurrent theme of baptism, Dash further depicts religious diversity in African traditional worship and contemporary Christian conversion with the imaginary presence of the prophet Muhammed Ali who, in her film, refuses to join the procession and walks in an opposite direction, away from the group of worshippers. Thus, in her commemoration of African cultural history, Dash promotes a re-envisioning of the African history of filmmaking through an elaboration of earlier film images, further refashioning them according to an imaginative view that goes beyond the reference to past scenes.

**THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN DASH'S FILM**

Dash starts and ends her film (just before the Peazants' sailing north) with the image of the Coran Bible to the sound of Muhammed's reciting and chanting prayers therein. She expresses her conviction of his important role as the founder of the Muslim religion in Africa and depicts him in her film as the link between African past history and present adherence to an ancient religion in the vestige of a ritual practice brought over from Africa symbolized by the Coran Bible.

Moreover, Dash posits Muhammed at the conjunction of film and photography in his encounter with Mr. Snead, the photographer commissioned to record the Peazants' migration north. Dash reworks her research material on African history of deportation and combines it with her imaginative fiction in this encounter in which the photographer enriches his mere photographing assignment with a deeper insight into the origin of the Gullahs in the Sea Islands. On the advice of an elder who told him to meet with Muhammed in order to know about African people, Mr. Snead asks Muhammed in person: "What do you remember: do you remember your family, your home?" As Bilal Muhammed recounted that "they brought me here as a boy from the West Indies", Mr. Snead learns that he has come on the last slave ship called "The Wanderer". Dash revives the memory of the early history of the Gullahs by showing this conversation in French

(used in the West Indies) with English subtitles. In his search for spots near the sea-shore to install his camera and take the commemorative view of the Peazant family members, he summons them to "look! Look up and remember Ibo Landing". Thus, Dash recalls the memory of Ibo Landing through the photographic portrait of the family members – a portrait that refers simultaneously to the ancestors' landing after the Middle Passages and their descendants' current preparation for departure north from Ibo Landing. The latter event is visualized in the film as an important place in the history of sailing both in former American bondage and present emancipation.

Ibo Landing is commemorated in the dual interactions of photographic and film images in their effects on the bronze sculpture through the positive dissolves, one at the start and another near the end of the film. Represented as a symbol of the vestige of the myth of the ancestors' walking back to Africa on the high seas and their consequent drowning, the sculpture is perceived in its dual phases of appearance and disappearance - first as a photographic imprint and later in its melting in the filmic flow that ushers in another image. The nature of this sculptured image as a memory of a cherished legend is highlighted by the sounds of African drumming and singing to suggest the past experiences of pain and glory in African diasporic displacement.

The ancestors' death and the descendants' survival is reactivated in both the presence and disappearance of the image of the sculpture which is seen near the inscription "Ibo Landing". In terms of intermedial relations, the simultaneous juxtaposition and superimposition of photographic and cinematic images evokes a reflection on the paradox of life and death – experiences that are conveyed through the (apparently) contradictory nature of these different media. Régis Durand, in his essay "How to see (Photographically)" in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, analyses the divergent perception in seemingly opposing media in this way:

> How can the same image (or same type of image) carry values so radically opposed: viscosity, suture, globality for the one; tremor, inchoation,, fragmentation for the other? [...]
>
> The question which then arises is what happens to gazing and thinking when the image, instead of being swept away by the flow,

> lingers on, as it does in photography. The filmic flow turns every vision of the image into memory (even if it is the memory of something which is still in the making). Whereas the permanence of the photographic image turns it into a presence – but a presence which is fated to deceive and disappoint the reality of a 'memory without images', the memory of a scene which has already taken place and now attempts to find its representation, more or less successfully. (142)

Rendering homage to the harlem photographer Van der Zee working in the early twentieth century, Dash re-appropriates his technique of multiple printing of photographic images in her production of the dissolve effect of photography in film. In this way, she retains the memory of the ancestors through the recalling of African cultural heritage in der Zee's photographic technique of superimposing images of a daughter of a well-known African social figure from her childhood onto those of her youth as a commemoration of her short life for her funeral.

Dash's recreation of African-American history in *Daughters of the Dust* re*form*ulates the perception of photography in film through innovative images which call for a re-envisioning of the traditional method and means of considering photography as a static view of fixed conventions of representations of Africans. Another dissolve over the image of Eula's face links her to her future Unborn Child who appears immediately after as a little girl running on the beach in slow motion. The contrasting motion of a decelerating film rhythm slowing down the quickened steps give the impression of (re)animated photographic images in a succession of multiple frames that constitute the film images. In this sequence of film images made from apparent photographic images, motion is suspended between the separate strips of images filled with intervals of elliptical delay that slow down the film speed. Therefore, spectators notice the effects of medial interactions between film and photography in Dash's juxtaposition of the dissolve over Eula's face and the slackened tempo of her Unborn Child's running movements. Dash offers an explicit re-envisioning of cinematic images that are made to show photographic lapses of fragmentation and truncation of time in the filmic space as a means to reflect on the Unborn

Child as the important link between "the past and the time to come", "the tie between then and now", according to her great-grandmother Nana. This is shown in the relation between the arrested image over Eula's face in the present and the moving image of the Unborn Child's coming from the future, yet hailing from the space of the departed symbolized by the seafront.

The fascinating effects of the photographic process are demonstrated during these different, yet interrelated images of lingering and slackened tempo in Dash's film. These effects can be interpreted according to the idea proposed by Régis Durand that "photography, within a fraction of an instant, makes [identifiable] objects disappear and return" (*Fugitive Images*, 147). The retention perceived from the somewhat static (photographic) images lies in the interval between the short disappearance and quick return of the subject (the Unborn Child) in the process of instantaneous 'shots' that both delay objects in the photographs and release them in the filmic flow. The dissolve in the image of Eula promotes the perception of a delayed action, by means of "a doubling, a retentive or echoing gesture" (*Fugitive Images,* 147) of photographic imprint of duration to forestall the coming of her future child through the lingering interval that link them together.

Dash also depicts another form of remembering in the dissolve over Eli and an elder on the sea front near the end of the film. As Eli is discussing with the elder about their migration north, a dissolve freezes their distant, small figures standing on the seashore. Then, this image is brought nearer to the screen in a larger scale and is released into normal cinematic moving images to show them in action, carrying on their former discussion while the other image remains fixed behind them. Through this hypermediation of moving images over static ones, Dash draws out the relationship between living descendants (in movement) and their departed ancestors (through still images in the background) in the context of migration – both the former and current one – over the sea. The interaction between fluid cinematic images and fixed photographic ones over the seafront depict the sharing by the ancestors and their descendants of the same space. This space is

remembered through the body perceived as a medium in its dual moving and immobile images.

**THE (RE)ENVISIONING OF STEREOPTICON IMAGES IN MOTION**

The Unborn Child figures at the intersection of photography and film in the important (re)vision of motion she brings to the immobile images of the stereopticon which is imbued with moving images in Dash's re-presentation. Here, the stereopticon illustrates the link between fixed photographic images and moving cinematic images in Dash's imaginary presentation of black and white images of a bustling city with people and automobiles in circulation. This optical apparatus is visualized as a forerunner of the cinema due to its inherent capacity of depicting fixed images placed in front of its lens. Dash's remediation of the stereopticon's mobile images may also be viewed as part of a process of multiple layering of images in the context of diasporic displacement. Her film offers an intermedial revisionary representation of photography, film, stereopticon and kaleidoscope as a palimpsestic array of images that reconfigure each other to show the changing aspects of African-American cultural identity. This perspectival shift entails the crossing of fixed boundaries to represent multiple relations between the genres of autobiography, fiction, documentary and mythic experimentation of African historical narrative. The Unborn Child's brief appearance and disappearance in Mr. Snead's camera lens both depicts her presence beside her father to convince her father that she is his child and to foretell of her coming birth. The imaginary perception of the Unborn Child's mobile image in Mr. Snead's camera resembles the futuristic vision of moving images discerned by the Unborn Child in the stereopticon and transmitted to spectators. The photographic image of the Unborn Child is transcended by the cinematographic effect of movement through "hypermediation" which, according to Jonathan Crary in his influential work *Techniques of the Observer*: *On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (1990), "can be found even in the mechanical technology of reproduction of the nineteenth century". Jonathan Crary maintains that

> there was a rupture early in the nineteenth century, when the stable observation captured by the old camera obscura ... was replaced by a new goal of mobility of observation. Reflecting this goal was a new set of (now archaic) devices: the diorama, the phenakistoscope, and the stereoscope. These devices, characterized by multiple images, moving images, or sometimes moving observers, seems to have operated under both these logics at the same time, as they incorporated transparent immediacy *within* hypermediacy. The phenakistoscope [which employed movement], made the user aware of the desire for immediacy that it attempted to satisfy. The same is true of the stereoscope, which offered users a three-dimensional image that seemed to float in space. The image was eerie, and the device unwieldy so that the stereoscope too seemed to be a more or less ironic comment on the desire for immediacy. (37-38)

Viewed from Crary's perspective on motion in photographic and stereoscopic images, Dash's film appears to create linkages between different forms of imaging apparatuses which all seek to move beyond their fixed image constriction. By means of the animation of stereoscopic images, *Daughters of the Dust* shows the passage from immobility to motion in different mediatic images to illustrate the experience of double belonging in hyphenated diasporic identity. Like the diasporic subject who is "critically aware of the 'hyphen', of its rootedness in more than one history, its location in the present as well as in the past" (Radhakrishnan 1996:354). The Unborn Child in Dash's film is viewed as the offspring of parents of African descent as well as of American culture. She is the product of a history of deportation, migration, slavery and African-Americans' emancipation from this condition of enslavement, as well as of the usual representation – such as the photographs presented in the film – of these processes. The Unborn Child also anticipates the future in her imagined vision of moving images when people would enjoy emancipation from the past confinement in slavery in the modern time of free mobility and automobile transportation. Dash shows the perspectival shift from the original stereopticon's immobile images to the imagined future development of moving film images to illustrate the Unborn Child's presence spanning from the past days of slavery to the present time of liberation and free circulation in travels.

Dash's representation of the paradoxical effects of photographic arrest of film images in the dissolves and the fluid motion in stereoscopic images can be theorized in terms of Regina Lee's notion of contrasting features in cultural identity representation elaborated as:

> The hyphen that simultaneously separates while joining both terms therefore performs a double function, which I shall be referring to as a "disconjunction": constituting and identifying a break (disjunction). From this double function, an interstitial space is created, in which the dialectics of separation and unification are played out and against each other, giving rise to another equally significant consideration – the future of diasporic trajectories, or the matter of "where you're going". (*Asian Diasporas: Cultures, Identities, Representations,* 69)

Both the past and the present co-exist in the interstitial space of diasporic identity which undergoes contradictory experiences of separation from origin and assimilation to the new culture. The continual shift in identity is manifested in Dash's flexible reconfiguration of media and their interrelations which are perceived as acting on and against, influenced by, and influencing each other. Therefore, photographic and stereoscopic images become animated in film which (re)invests them with motion while the cinematic flux is temporarily delayed by the lingering effect of fixed photographic images. In this way, the memory of the past slavery resides – in the halt on static images – within the reflexive impression of future possibilities of diasporic migration perceived in the motion that bestows liberation to framed images.

Two other dissolves over images of African-American men and women on the sea-front manifest the dual aspects of past/present cultural identity trans*form*ation through intermedial passage from cinematic fluid images to photographic delayed images. As Yellow Mary and Trula head towards the seashore, Dash presents a dissolve of this event to suggest that Yellow Mary's return to the Sea Islands represents metaphorical recalling of ancestors' first arrival as captives on the shore of Ibo Landing. The photographic image captures this moment which is doubled in cinematographic representation through an imprint of several images that are being superimposed on each other to produce the retention effect in film. The sea front, (re)uniting both the living members and the

departed ancestors, is perceived as the space of intermedial relations evoking both life and death through the appearance and slow disappearance of images, which are held in the memory of the two women and in the spectators' vision. The interactions of ancestors with their descendants in this space are demonstrated in the reciprocal remediation of one medium of/by one another. As Yellow Mary revisits the Sea Islands after her earlier enforced departure and later travelling back to Ibo Landing, she experiences both ancient African tradition and modern American culture. While the photographic pose may recall former customs such as ancestor worship (in the bronze sculpture as a commemorative symbol), the cinematic flow of images ushers in a new era of belief in Christian religion. The film's remediation of photographic stills effects a shifting perspective to signify a change in African-American women's viewpoints. Viola, who has become a missionary after being converted to Baptist religion, declares that "past is prologue. I see this day as a first step towards progress, an invitation to education and wealth in the mainland." The emancipation of African-American women such as Viola, Haagar and Yellow Mary (all of whom have embraced the Christian religion, in the expression of their new faith) results in a reinterpretation of the space of the sea, (which earlier meant captivity for the enslaved ancestors), as an important route towards future success in the possibilities of education and work in the mainland, as well as conversion to the Christian religion which is considered as holding higher wisdom than the primitive Muslim observation of the moon and the stars in the Africans' cult of ancestors.

Dash highlights African-American women's own vision of their new identity in relation to their past culture through the representation of multiple medial interactions. She stages kaleidoscopic images in her film to evoke both the actual view and the metaphorical reflections arising from this dual perception. The objective view is given by Mr. Snead in a scientific definition of the kaleidoscope from the its etymological roots in the three terms

> 'Kalos': beauty, 'eidos': form and 'scopein': to view.
> When two objects are placed in front of mirrors inclined at 90 degrees from each other, an image is formed. Then these mirror images are in turn reflected, forming the appearance of four symmetrical objects.

> Beauty, simplicity and science all rolled into a tube. I think the children will love it.

Dash shows that Yellow Mary and Trula do not participate in this simplistsic view when Yellow Mary partially lifts her veil from her eyes to examine Mr. Snead while Trula does not look into it but examines the external part of it and both of them laugh at Mr. Snead in his particular way of looking at these images.

Dash features kaleidoscopic images in her film as a means of (re)presenting alternative viewing positions: the unstable, shifting shapes and colours of the kaleidoscope evoke multiple possibilities that are always being reformulated. The new configuration that quickly appears and disappears interact with the film rhythm to create the perception of cinema as an allegory of a mediated space that encourages other ways of looking and being in order to challenge the control of fixed conventions of representation and reception. Dash shows, through the response of Yellow Mary and Trula, a feminist re-appropriation of male norms of viewing. In her film entitled "*Daughters of the Dust"* as a re-appropriation of the original biblical reference to Ezechiel's "Ye, men of the dust", she presents women's multiple viewpoints of their African past and contemporary religions and socio-political relations. African-American women's perception of themselves and through other women's views, continuously interact and shift as in a kaleidoscopic trans*form*ation. The multiple facets of women are displayed in their contrasting and paradoxical image as simultaneously "virgin and whore", expressed by Nana in her opening speech and reflected in Yellow Mary's past role as prostitute and Eula's experience of rape. The kaleidoscopic images perceived in Dash's film propose to spectators ways of looking not just at, or through them at the transforming roles of women but also as a means of critically assessing the conventional view of woman as either "good" or "bad" in a monolithic vision. The array of images also present the passages in between different experiences which contest the bipolar opposition. Cinematic images double the kaleidoscopic images in the possibility of rapidly shifting the viewing positions of both players and spectators, thus enabling varieties of viewpoints from the accumulation of layers of different images

exposing diverse perspectives. The constant connection and disconnection from former cultural positions and reconnection to current affiliations are evoked through the amalgam of these multiple reconfigured images. As Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin maintain in *Remediation*,

> When we watch a film ... we become the changing point of view of the camera .... That is not to say that our identity is fully determined by media, but rather that we employ media as vehicles for defining both personal and cultural identity. As these media become simultaneously technical analogs and social expressions of our identity, we become simultaneously both the subject and object of contemporary media. New media offer new opportunities for self-definition ...
>
> Whenever our identity is mediated this way, it is also remediated, because we always understand a particular medium in relation to other past and present media. (*Remediation*, 231)

Dash's reconfiguration of stereoscopic, photographic and kaleidoscopic images in her film offers multiple (re)visions of the African-American women according to the diverse changes they experience in their cultural identity in the context of diasporic dis- and relocations. The multiple effects of intermedial relations draw out their distinct qualities and influences and thereby evoke new aspects of women's subjectivity in relation to their earlier cultural affiliations. The viewers perceive these women's diverse cultural positions from a series of relationships within all these mediatic images in their oscillation between them from one form to another technique and yet to another dimension.

Dash presents the female point of view by focusing the camera on women's body as materiality of the female self. The traditional view of the African women's body is reinvented in the indigo-coloured hands of slave ancestors working on the plantation whereas the elaborate modern hairstyle is derived from the ancient culture designating different styles for different stages of women's life from pre-puberty, adult phase (single and married) to menopause. By reworking these images to depict the reinvention of history, Dash features a remembering that simultaneously illustrates the embodiment of media and its technique of re-presenting women's cultural identity. She uses the strategy

which Laura Marks calls "haptic grazing" in her book *The Skin of Film* (162) to show the effect of film images from a camera's intimate point of view that seems to touch the women's faces in the look that closely connects the audience to their film subjects. Laura U. Marks identifies haptic visuality as moving over the surface of the images to produce the effect of vision as if through touch and bodily sensations. The representation of the African-American women's hands and faces in *Daughters of the Dust* may be theorized as a form of haptic visuality as envisioned by Marks: the vivid picture of women's indigo hands working in the dyes during slavery and preparing food for the picnic celebration in the present time is clearly haptic, grounded in the body, evoking the materiality of the women's labour.

The haptic image invites viewers to feel the experience through their own bodily senses and creates the effect of grazing "[b]ecause, according to Riegl, "a haptic composition appeals to tactile connections on the surface plane of the image" (1927:31). This type of movement of the camera produces the tactile quality in the image perception – perceived as three-dimensionality that draws the spectators into a more focused observation of women's body. Dash creates haptic sequences to propose an experimental (re)envisioning of African-American diasporan identity with its origin in slavery. Her film alludes to the legacy of slavery through experimental techniques that are frequently encountered in intercultural cinema. As Marks has suggested, the haptic visual effect produces an experimental vision – alternative ways of seeing that bypass the conventional representation of reality. Dash's re-envisioning of the African female body shows a kaleidoscopic array of images integrating both the dominant Eurocentric representation and an African aesthetics. Although Dash is aware that the dye would not remain on the hands of African-Americans, she deliberately depicts this mark in her film through haptic images to call attention to the "rememory" of history in the body as the medium of sense perception.

The constant displacement and metamorphosis of the film's images through a kaleidoscopic perspective produces an interesting, dual focus on the singularity of each

frame on one hand, and on the other hand, on the position and relations of these forms in an ensemble. The myriad aspects of African-American women's individual personality amidst their collective identity are reflected in the mosaic images evoked in the kaleidoscopic assemblage. The continual reconfiguration of African-American women's personal and social images can be conceptualized according to Wittgenstein's concept of "les maillons intermédiaries" (the intermediary links) in language as envisioned in *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus*: "c'est-à-dire des cas de figure qui donnent 'à voir' des connections entre les mots/formes d'expression et les jeux de langage/usages quotidiens, ainsi qu'entre les différentes formes d'expression entre elles''. Wittgenstein's model of linguistic intermediary links can be used to express the relations of perception during successive transformation of images. Different links between the ever changing forms of images can be referred to Wittgenstein's view of the relation between a synoptic and a synecdochal representation explored by Valeria Wagner in her essay "Marx, Wittgenstein et l'amante du mage: Remarques sur la disparition, l'évidence et le pouvoir'' (17-32): "La représentation synoptique nous procure la compréhension qui consiste à 'voir des connexions', (*Intermédialités* no. 10, automne 2007.) Wagner asserts that:

> on doit saisir en même temps les éléments d'un ensemble en tant qu'éléments individuels et en tant que participants de cet ensemble .... [Mais aussi] toujours d'un point de vue méthodologique ... Wittgenstein valorise la figuration du type *synechdocale* des rapports … : chaque élément doit évoquer d'autres éléments (les 'maillons intermédiaires' et Wittgenstein … qui sont autant de moments d'une métamorphose) et invoquer par là-même, les relations qui mettent en œuvre l'ensemble. (*Intermédialités,* 2005)

Dash puts forward a simultaneously synoptic and synechdochal perspective in her remediation of kaleidoscopic, stereoscopic and photographic images in her film. Each media is perceived in both its materiality – yielding its own form of images – and also in its relation to other media. The multiple medial interactions enable the perception of the relations of African-American women's subjectivity and their intersubjectivity in both their positions as individual and collective beings. Moreover, these medial interactions display

the effects of the disappearance of the body and the (re)appearance of other possibilities in a different form. African-American dancers express the body as a medium for both the disappearance of their human consciousness and for the appearance of ancestors' spiritual presence during trance dance. I see the disappearance and reappearance of images, shapes, forms and colours in Dash's film as a metaphorical representation of women's dancing bodies. The dance movements of women evoke various trajectories of diasporic identity. Their trance dance manifests the trans*form*ation of the physical body through a spiritual possession that renders visible the invisible connection with the ancestors' souls in the past. The spiritual incorporation of African-American women dancers bring to the surface of their body the motion that oscillates between an external disappearance of the human and an internal spiritual possession. Another dancing motion can be seen in the slow motion sequence showing the Unborn Child running: her racing is perceived as a graceful motion arising from the encounter between the former world of departed ancestors (from which she comes) and the contemporary world of her family members. The Unborn Child's running movement as seen in slow motion in a series of images that suspend her gesture as in the lapses between dancing steps expresses her trajectory as a crossing between the world of the departed spirits and the space of their living descendants.

Beside the bodily memory of the ancestors in the ritual of African dance, the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge in African traditions such as preparing and cooking food involves the sense of taste as a crucial sensory experience. The perception of this intrinsic bodily experience is interspersed with images of the practices of both contemporary life styles such as the celebration of Christian beliefs and the preservation of original customs that reside in the linguistic memory of African terms for foods such as "okra". Laura U. Marks describes the kaleidoscopic vision in the contrasting scenes of modern and traditional ways of life in *Daughters of the Dust* as follows:

> In another scene, shots of Peazant women preparing food are intercut with shots of Aunt Viola reading the Bible. The juxtaposition compares the knowledge of oral culture and the intergenerational learning of cooking with hierarchically transmitted, literary knowledge – to say nothing of the sharp

> cultural difference between Gullah and African traditional ways and Christianity. The women talk easily as they prepare shrimp, okra, chicken, and corn, foods available in Africa that African diasporic people have adapted to local agronomies. One grandmother, sitting in a circle of children, makes them laugh by giving them little horns, made of the ends of okra, which she sticks to their foreheads. She recounts to them a list of African words, which they repeat starting with 'gumbo'; finally she says, "Now, that all what Grandma remembers" (*The Skin of Film,* 229).

The quickly changing scenes between the memory of traditional African culture in foodstuffs and contemporary Christian practices of Bible reading produce screen images whose perception is akin to a kaleidoscopic view of shifting angles of vision that radically transforms the image through a series of moving perspectives. The position between these images is displaced from the present – that is perceived as the past – in the motion that brings it forward to a future vision. The transposition of these images connotes the interconnectedness of African-Americans' present diasporic experiences in relation to their historical past as a transgenerational link in the retention of original customs of cooking. Yet, this present moment stemming from the past African tradition is in turn being (re)envisioned as a projection of the Peazants' future migration north and also according to the perspective of linear teleology in the Christian perception of perpetual happiness in heaven. When an African-American woman offers a thanksgiving prayer, she says, "O Lord, the earth is swelling with food and we are reminded that the harvest lies not in the abundance of the present but in the future and the fullness thereof". The perpetual motion and kaleidoscopic images suggest that diasporic identity is not a static formation anchored in a mythical African tradition long left behind but a continually changing process that reflects the various stages of integration of Africans into American culture. The future harvest refers to the Christian souls' reaping their reward in heaven, according to Viola's belief in the promise of happiness in the afterlife. Thus, the Christian promise of future fulfillment displaces the original belief in African past traditions.

*Daughters of the Dust* clearly features multiple remediation of African traditions and the aesthetics of early photography and film. This intermedial aesthetic traces the history

of the Gullahs' arrival in the United States, their acculturation and intergenerational transmission of their traditions in the United States as well as their reconnection to the past through bodily memory and media(ted) representation.

* * *

## INTERMEDIALITY IN REA TAJIRI'S *HISTORY AND MEMORY*

In her video expressing the traumatic experience of deportation to internment camps of her family members among the 110,000 Japanese living in the U.S. during World War II as a consequence of the Japanese bombing of the Pearl Harbour, Rea Tajiri promotes a re-envisioning of the different mediatic (mis)representations of this event. She juxtaposes the voice recording of her own commentary and her family members' expression of their experiences (from their memory of forgetting) with the found footage comprised of documentaries from the National Archive and U.S. Government War Department. The multiple functions of photography and film are being re-examined in her video as a means of developing strategies of personal observation that displaces both the conventions of objective representation of reality in documentaries and fictional narrative of history in Hollywood films. Thus, Tajiri delivers references to other media as well as critical analyses through remediation and the interactions between these media.

I will analyze the ways in which Tajiri develops new means of reviewing the repressed historical experiences of the internment camps in both private/personal and public/collective representations. Central to my analysis is the exploration of the effects of displacement resulting from the Japanese experience of uprootedness through Tajiri's juxtaposition of contrasting genres that compete with each other, ranging from documentary to fiction in her own experimental work presenting diverse forms of photographic and cinematic images, as well as records of sounds and texts.

* * *

**VIDEO AS MEDIUM: SUPERNATURAL VISION IN REPRESENTATION**

In her voice-over address to her spectators, Rea Tajiri declares her aim in making her video in these words: "I began searching because I felt lost, ungrounded somewhat like a ghost that floats over terrain witnessing others living their lives and yet not having one of its own". Tajiri's video recalling her family's repressed memory of their deportation and internment can be perceived as a 'medium' in both the spiritual/emotional revival of trauma arising from the physical displacement and the material aspects of photographic, cinematic images and voices recording those experiences. Laura U. Marks maintains that, in Tajiri's reconstitution of this painful memory,

> [t]he tape is both the record and an active process of her struggle to reactivate the past from the fragments of available images. Images exist to corroborate official accounts of the internments of Japanese Americans during the war. But the unofficial histories of Tajiri's family's experiences cannot be documented, and the few artifacts they retain from the experience are silent .... It is by bringing together visual and audio images that are inadequate alone and contradictory together that Tajiri is able to evoke scenes and events that can't be reconstructed (*The Skin of Film*, 32).

I discern, in Tajiri's innovative strategy that challenges the conventional representation of history, a new meaning in the notion of 'medium' as a spiritual (re)configuration of vision. In order to revive the repressed memory of camp life, she (re)creates a perception of places and events from a supernatural view of both her own and her former grandfather's spirit as witnesses of past experiences. To fill in the absence of documented representation of her family's past internment, Tajiri depicts a scene by showing a black screen with a text that describes the following vision:

> The tops of the heads of a man and woman become visible as they move them back and forth in an animated fashion. The black hair on their heads catch and reflect light from the street lamps. The light from the street lamps has created a path for them to walk and argue.

> *The spirit of my grandfather witnesses my father and mother as they have an argument about the unexpected nightmares of their daughter on the spiritual twentieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbour.*

Tajiri reveals the supranatural dimension of her video as a 'medium' that incorporates her grandfather's witnessing of her parents' agitated concern over her nightmare of their internment experience twenty years ago. Thus, she exposes the process of reconstructing personal memory from an emotional viewpoint of three generations of Japanese-Americans as a means of countering the objectified record of history in official government archives. Tajiri's videographic medium reflects, with this evocative spiritual injunction, personal historical experiences through innovative memory re-imagi(ni)ng. As Laura Marks observes, Tajiri calls upon the spirit of the dead, namely her grandfather, to supply an image, drawing upon communal memory as a source of images when no others exist. This source of personal memory evokes the feeling of displacement experienced by the deported Japanese which Tajiri expresses through the effect of the disruptive relations of diverse mediatic representations. Along with so many other interned Japanese, Tajiri's family underwent uprootedness and dispersal from their home and as a consequence, their memories are elliptical and fragmented. Tajiri depicts the gaps both in the personal memory of displaced Japanese and in the socio-political (mis)representations in commercial and government film. Her video provides a space for reinventing new images to deal with displacement through a replacement of alternative memories. Tajiri produces what George Lipsitz terms as "counter-memory" [that] focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narrative purporting to represent universal experience" (*Time Passages,* 213). Her autobiographical presentation of her family's experiences in their own voices and her voice-off commentaries displace the documentaries silencing Japanese expression through political justification of internment. In their first-person direct address (I/they), Tajiri and her relatives counter the distanced third-person (they/them) relegated to incarcerated Japanese in dominant government historical films and commercial feature films. The multigenerational approach incorporating the plural

viewpoints of Tajiri's mother, uncle, brother and sister as well as her grandfather's spirit recover the omitted representations in the official historical record.

Tajiri also juxtaposes images of a store at Salinas near Poston with the sound recording of her mother's voice admitting her memory loss upon the reviewing of this place. In his book *Identities in Motion: Asian American Film and Video*, Peter X Feng argues that

> the footage [which] dates from 1942, [and] was shot by the U.S. Army Signal Corps, implies that it is part of a systematic documentation (that explains and justifies U.S.A. Army actions, proceeding through time in defence of its response to national 'moments'), and asserts the physical existence of a canteen in Salinas. By contrast the soundtrack dates from 1989, was recorded by Tajiri, reveals textual markers (for example, poor recording quality) that imply it is unsystematic (arbitrary, haphazard) production, and asserts that the canteen was not worth remembering (78).

The former objective record of Salinas canteen presented in the U.S. army documentary is being displaced by a more recent, subjective response from Tajiri's mother. Through the contrasting audio-visual media, Tajiri exposes the tension between personal memory versus official history. The maternal lack of memory is reflected in the poor quality of the sound recording which, however, yields an authentic communication, whereas the systematic representation of the U.S. army documentation reveals its constructed nature. The interactions created between the soundtrack and the visual image can be considered as 'remediation' since "media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media .... [R]emediation offers a means of interpreting the work of earlier media" (*Remediation*, 55). In her video, Tajiri produces a series of remediations through the sound recording of her relatives' voices delivering their interpretations of government documentaries and commercial film. She also juxtaposes her nephew's studio recorded voice commenting on a Hollywood film as 'sentimental mush' about an American man helping to free his Japanese wife from internment. The contestation of dominant cultural (mis)representation through multivocal expressions of

personal experiences is one strategy among the many forms of remediation developed by Tajiri to produce the missing narrative. The special features of an "intercultural cinema" is what Tajiri adopts in her video remediation of other media. Mark asserts that

> In the face of [the] erasures, intercultural cinema turns to a variety of sources to come up with new conditions of knowledge: written history, sometimes, the audiovisual archive; collective and personal memory; fiction; and the very lack of images or memories, itself a meaningful record of what can be expressed. Cultural knowledges are lost, found, and created anew in the temporal movement of history and in the spatial movement between places.
>
> Intercultural cinema moves backward and forward in time, inventing histories and memories in order to posit an alternative to the overwhelming erasures, silences, and lies of official histories. (*The Skin of Film,* 24)

To replace the missing links between the lived experience of internment camps and reconstructed narratives in dominant representations, Tajiri presents images and sounds of events not depicted in mainstream discourse. In her search for evidence in government archive regarding her family's incarceration, she discovers a photograph of her grandmother among a group of internees. The tiny image of her grandmother seated at the far corner of a long table with many other people becomes detached from the objective view of the official record entitled "Bird Carving Class, 1941". Tajiri zooms her camera into this image to bring it nearer to spectators who can focus on the grandmother's face so that the trauma of concentrated imprisonment can be felt.

Tajiri further shows a photographic image of a wooden bird which her mother kept in a box as a souvenir of her grandmother's carving activity in the camp. In this way, Tajiri presents her video as a medium which remediates photographic images from the official historical record in relation to those which keep the memory of her family's incarceration from a human emotional perspective. The multiple aspects of remediation can be observed in the techniques of showing photographic images sometimes as documents of historical events, and other times as the process through which the personal commemorative work is carried out.

Tajiri's video reveals the ways the Japanese historical existence is erased from dominant representation. She denounces the absence of the Japanese people from photographic and cinematic images by showing the photographs of exclusively white movie stars kept by her sister. She also shows a clip from the feature film *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1954) in which Spencer Tracy's search for the murdered Japanese man Komoto focuses on white people only, never featuring the Japanese character who is the main subject of this film. As a counter-historical stance, Tajiri supplies photographs of her relatives from her family album and images of interned Japanese made with a smuggled video. Her direct approach of revealing the Japanese faces challenge the indirect way through which both dominant representation and Japanese people evade the traumatic experiences. She films her sister who asks the Japanese man to pose for her photographs instead of directly conversing with him. Through an examination of this photographic process as a means of evading the truth of painful events, Tajiri delivers a critical comment of the filming technique as a constructed representation that obstructs au authentic vision of reality. Just as the Japanese man is asked to look down to the far left and not straight into the camera while her sister shoots, government documentary and commercial film offer a distorted vision wherein the Japanese either do not figure as real subjects or do not appear at all. To counter the oblique way in which the Japanese are (mis)represented in both government and commercial films, Tajiri develops a more personal narrative which is deeply built into the body and which is expressed through images that appeal to the sense perception.

Besides dismantling the official historical discourse with the personal memory from photographs of people and objects, Tajiri also offers another type of image she creates from her memory of her mother's narrative of camp life. She depicts the reconstituted image of her mother's experience with this declaration:

> I don't know where this came from, but I just have this fragment, this picture that's always in my mind.
> My mother, she's standing at a faucet, and it's really hot outside, and she's filling this canteen, and the water's really cold, and it feels really good. And the sun's just so hot, it's just beating down,

> and there's this dust that gets everywhere, and they're always sweeping the floors.

Tajiri undermines the official mediatic discourse with its erasures and silences of Japanese historical experiences through the production of her own image and voice restaging her mother's presence at the camp. This (memory) image depicts, from Tajiri's insistence on its recurrence on two occasions, once at the start and again near the end of her video, the forceful resistance against repression both from the official record and her mother's amnesia.

Tajiri gives expression to the image that continually haunts her mind, thereby turning her video into an imaginative recreation of historical events from the personal impression of private memory. She presents, according to Laura Marks, "a *tactile* memory", of the heat rising and the coolness of water on her hands and face. The video alludes to this level of perception through image, and especially, the gurgling sound of the running water: the tactile memory is encoded audio-visually.

Tajiri appeals to embodied memory from the sense of touch in the image of her mother's hands holding a canteen near a dripping water faucet. This image is again shown later to signify the flashes of memory that keep coming back to Tajiri's mind despite the amnesic erasure from her mother's mind. The sound of splashing water and the sense of coolness of the water on her mother's hands and face stimulate the spectators' perception through their own bodily sensation. This tactile quality of screen images can be considered according to Vivian Sobchack's notion of the dual perception and expression of cinema that mimics life. Her concept of the phenomenology of cinema, as an art which lets spectators see what is seen and hear what is heard, can be used in conjunction with the notion of the "skin" of film/video as a "materiality" that enhances perception through bodily sensation, especially visuality and tactility. As Marks argues, "*[the] skin of film* offers a metaphor to emphasize the way film signifies through its materiality, through a contact between perceiver and object represented" (*The Skin of Film,* xi). Marks also refers to Sobchack

who in "Phenomenology of Film Experience" (1992) asserts that cinema is an extension of the viewers' embodied existence.

Tajiri's video can therefore be perceived as the audiovisual medium which promotes a *re-membering* for her mother through the image and sound she has enacted with her body. The memory that she bears in her mind and expresses through the image of her body is simultaneously perceived by her mother and the audience who watch the video presentation. She offers to her mother this memory-image in order to recall the former experience of concentrated camp life which has been effaced from both personal memory and official history. She delves into an unconventional form of memory, in her depiction of her grandfather's spiritual presence and her own alternative image. Thus, her video constructs new images to restage the omitted views of personal history in the government newsreels and Hollywood fiction film. She provides a critical revision of the diverse types of historical representation according to the images constructed for several purposes. She claims that:

> There are things which have happened in the world while there were cameras watching, things we have images for.
> There are other things, which have happened while there were no cameras watching, which we restage in front of cameras to have images of.
> There are things which have happened for which the only images that exist are in the minds of observers, present at the time, while there are things which have happened for which there have been no observers, except the spirits of the dead.

Tajiri's video superimposes multiple layers of different images and sounds which are represented from diverse perspectives and which challenge each other in the capacity of recording historical memory in their specific medium. Her experimental video exploring her family's autobiographical experiences of internment displace the conventional form of government documentary and fiction film through the images depicting the personal views and the spiritual witnessing as a more authentic source of information. Both the images of her grandfather's spirit's vision and Tajiri's standing in for her mother are presented from a

bird eye's view and reflect Tajiri's own perception of historical representation through the interactions between various realms, realities and media.

These alternative personal memories challenge dominant official historical record through the discordant elements of intercultural representations analysed by Laura Marks as follows:

> The violent disjunctions in space and time that characterize diasporan experience – the physical effects of exile ... and displacement – also, I will argue, cause a disjunction in notions of truth. Intercultural films and videos offer a variety of ways of knowing and representing the world. To do this they must suspend the representational conventions ... especially the ideological presumption that cinema *can* represent reality. (*The Skin of Film,* xxi)

Tajiri's new images of memory contest the political justification of internment. She disrupts a clip of the 1954 Hollywood film *Bad Day at Black Rock* with the image of a scrolling text from an August 28, 1990 New York Times article declaring that

> Assemblyman Gil Ferguson, Republican Orange County, California, seeks to have children taught that Japanese Americans were not interned in 'concentration camps' but rather were held in 'relocation centres' justified by military necessity.

Through this disjunctive superimposition of documentary text onto fiction film from different epochs, Tajiri denounces the racist mistreatment of the Japanese and the subsequent ideological representations. She undermines their apparently smooth constructions by turning them against one another, thereby revealing the fabrication of historical truth through reinterpretation.

Besides the temporal displacement of a later text onto an earlier moving film image, Tajiri also points out the spatial disfiguration of the Japanese in dominant representations. Jun Xing, in *Asian American Through the Lens*, cites Manthia Diawara's analysis of the racial hierarchy in Hollywood film in a spatial narration that is organised according to a hierarchical disposition of objects on the screen, with the centre position allocated to the powerful whereas the background and the absence from the screen signifies the partial or

total eclipse from social representation in these films. However, Tajiri subverts this spatial centering by the obtrusive presence of the text that scrolls up the frame and draws spectators' attention to the ideological positioning of dominant discourse.

Tajiri has demonstrated, through the innovative presentation of her grandfather's and her own memory-images, as well as the disjunctive spatiotemporal relations between different sounds, images and texts figuring over and against each other, her technique or reorganizing multiple media in order to reveal the absent and the effaced experiences of Japanese internment. Laura Marks draws out the novelty in works like Tajiri's video which proposes new forms of images to present the memories of historical events from personal viewpoints in contrast to official representations. She claims that

> intercultural cinema expresses the disjunction between orders of knowledge, such as official history and private memory and by juxtaposing different orders of image, or image and sound tracks that do not correspond to each other.
>
> Intercultural cinema reveals new history as it is being formed, the new combination of words and things that cannot be read in terms of the existing languages of sound and image, but calls for new, as yet unformulated languages. (*The Skin of Film*, 31)

Tajiri's reformulation of the history of Japanese internment reactivates the experiences of displacement through a new combination of images and sounds of events which are re-contextualized in personal and social relations. In her video, she explores the possibilities of reviewing her family's past experiences to counter the limits of dominant historical representation. She presents moving images of her car ride back to Poston in 1989 to recall her mother's earlier deportation and shows the government photos of the camp under construction in the 1940's on a Native Indian Reserve site. She also incorporates the words: "On July 5, 1942 my mother went on a train to Poston" over the generics of a Hollywood image showing a train in the background. On her video image of a canteen in Salinas, she labels: "1989, Mother views footage" and incorporates her mother's voice inquiring about the existence of such a camp at the time. Thus, Tajri shows, through the redeployment of multiple mediatic expressions, new ways of rearticulating images of the

past so as to reclaim the missing parts which have been left out in a re-envisioning of the absent images and sounds of past events, places, objects and the Japanese people themselves in relation to existing images. Her video offers new means of visualizing history according to the concept of remediation as 'reform' defined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in these terms: "[t]he word remediation derives ultimately from the Latin *remederi* – 'to heal, to restore to health'. We have adapted the word to express the way in which one medium is seen by our culture are reforming or improving upon another" (59). The inadequacy of government images and Hollywood film is being redressed by the photographic and video images as well as voice recordings of Tajiri's relatives discussing their views on their past internment from the present as a hindsight to previously made documentaries and fiction films. Her video remediation of diverse mediatic images, texts and sounds can be seen as a process of reforming existing conventional representations in order to bring about an improvement such that "remediation can also imply reform in a social or political sense" (*Remediation*, 60). Tajiri's remediating strategy can be perceived as a means of improving on 'flawed' representation and ideological reconstruction of history from political justification. Tajiri's remediation is, furthermore, a reform that displaces the original material from its own mediatic expression to reorient it towards a new point of view. Yann Beauvais analyses the reorganization of experimental visual art as follows:

> Les cinéastes d'avant-garde vont s'approprier les films de reportages ou les documentaires afin de les détourner de leurs projets initiaux. Cette appropriation se retrouve chez de nombreux cinéastes qui [produisent] les films de compilations … et dans lesquels le cinéaste effectue un travail d'analyse et de montage à partir des séquences dont il n'est pas l'initiateur …. On peut appréhender cette pratique du détournement comme l'extension d'une attitude qui veut que l'on cherche, lorsqu'on n'a pas le tourner, un document photographique ou filmique qui pourrait renforcer, souligner l'argument défendu par le film. Dénaturation de cet usage illustratif au profit d'une attitude qui veut que l'on produise un film à partir des matériaux prélevés à droite et à gauche. (*La poésie en documentaire*, 65)

Beauvais's analysis enables an understanding of Tajiri's project of re-appropriating previous documentary and found footage for a re-envisioning from a different perspective. Her new compilation acts on existing photographic and cinematic images as references simultaneously to deconstruct the discourse of social injustice and thereby to reconstruct, from these same documents, the absent and silenced expressions recreated from private memory in bodily sense perception. This work of re-appropriation is necessary in the context of historical misrepresentations in order to expose the latter's limitations. The displacement and disruption result in tensions between dominant cultural representations and personal narratives which struggle to liberate the self and spectators from the negative influences of such biased discourse. Beauvais perceives, in the tensions between documentaries and experimental forms of representations, attempts at representing personal viewpoints:

> Dans le cinéma personnel et dans les journaux filmés on voit clairement le cinéma expérimental et le documentaire se croiser, se mêler, et produire des œuvres uniques qui transforment le cinéma aussi bien que notre manière d'appréhender la réalité.
> ... Le cinéma devient la manifestation d'une expression personnelle au service d'une vision particulière qui s'exprime autant dans la chose filmée que dans le travail effectué sur le ruban et qui vient transformer activement la vision. (*La poésie en documentaire,* 66)

The reforming aspects of remediation appearing in Tajiri's experimental video can be theorized by means of Beauvais's conceptualization of the interaction and mutual remediation between documentary and experimental techniques in the personal autobiographical film and film diaries. Tajiri also includes a critical evaluation of Hollywood commercial and musical films such as *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942). She focuses on cultural identity reformation in her reference to the images of Blacks and other social figures who sing "one for all and all for one" to denounce both the ideological acculturation of minority groups and the absence of Japanese from these American screen images. Thus, Tajiri's video reconstruction of the missing narrative of World War II internment camps transforms dominant representations into emotional, intimate accounts

both in autobiographical expressions and in the re-envisioning effected through the re-appropriation of earlier media.

Tajiri has achieved a new vision of the private self in the (re)creation of personal memory amidst public collective images of dominant representations. She concludes that, "for years, I have been living with this picture without the story, feeling a lot of pain but not knowing how they fit together but now I found I could connect the picture to the story. I could forgive my mother for her loss of memory and could make this image for her". Tajiri's search for the missing story of her family's deportation and displacement to concentration camps – in particular – and of the Japanese absence – in general – from official historical and fictional representation has resulted in the substitution of her own video reconstruction for this missing narrative. In a review of Tajiri's video, Marita Sturken comments that

> [t]he camera image thus participates in a process of healing, allowing through recreating, reimaging, a kind of memory closure. Yet, Tajiri makes it clear that this is a partial memory and a partial healing, one remembered and constructed in opposition, one people with multiple subjectivities, racist images, counter-images, fragments of the past, absent presences. (*Screening Asian Americans*, 180)

Tajiri has developed multiple images of contrasting discourses in an intermedial *reform*(ulation) allowing for the reconstruction of memory as well as for a partial healing of the trauma of her family's experience of internment. The artist's video has also accomplished social healing and forgiveness by means of the transformation of commercial films, as well as through representation of official records and commercial films, and through her representation of her mother's repressed 'screen memory' in the sequence showing her mother filling a canteen with water. Referring to her sister's idea that "whenever someone tells you a story, you would create an image of it in your mind", Tajiri has reorganized all the photographic and cinematic images of Japanese incarceration from different records in an attempt to illustrate her mother's narrative. However, her video medium depicts the tensions between discordant images and sounds which challenge each

other. Yann Beauvais provides a critical insight into the strategy of displacing media for the following purposes:

> ... le détournement permet d'évoquer des strates qui façonnent un individu. La juxtaposition de ces éléments disparates permet au cinéaste de proposer un kaléidoscope d'images qui sont le reflet de son identité. Cette appropriation d'images se révèle essentiellement dans la production d'une parole positive par rapport à la maladie …. Attitude active qui évoque certainement la prise en charge par les [artistes] des discours et des images qui font barrage à la production de masse d'exclusion déployée par les appareils sociaux. (*La poésie en documentaire*, 66)

Beauvais's reading can be used to interpret Tajiri's method of juxtaposing different media and their contents in order to reconstitute and reposition the repressed memory of World War II internment of Japanese-Americans through multiple layers of socio-political discourse. Her re-appropriation of dominant (mis)representations is further perceived as a reorientation towards a positive self-representation in response to the injustice resulting from both incarceration and the political justification in government documentaries.

The rapid succession of fragmentary images from different media representations depicts various aspects of Japanese internment from documentary to fictional narrative. This kaleidoscopic vision positions the interned Japanese-Americans as both objects of dominant discourse and subjects of their own self-redefinition. Tajiri demonstrates, across a wide range of perspectives, the ways in which the memory of historical experiences simultaneously resides in various media representations and obstructs the real events. She depicts, through an array of media interactions, the relation of the self to multiple discursive constructions such that memory is recreated in a constellation of audiovisual techniques reflecting the personal in the socio-political context. Tajiri's video clearly strives to produce an interstitial space between media wherein the self can find its own personal expression in relation to existing forms. This type of fragmented self-(re)presentation resonates with Bolter and Grusin's notion of the "remediated self":

> ... we see ourselves today in and through media. When we look at a traditional photograph ..., we understand ourselves as the reconstituted ... point of the photographer. When we watch a film ..., we become the changing point of view of the camera.
> ... we employ media as vehicles for defining both personal and cultural identity. (*Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 230)

Since Tajiri opposes dominant reconstructions of Japanese "relocations", she situates her family in relation to earlier media. She foregrounds the difference between government newsreels and her parents' re-envisioning of their past experiences in a personal video story. She transforms the vision of the Japanese in the film directed by Alan Parker and starred by Dennis Quaid who defends his Japanese wife by the inclusion of the voice of her nephew in her video reading his earlier review written in the Chicago Tribune that it is "well done, professional mush". She also presents her nephew's resistance to another Hollywood film, *Come See the Paradise*, whose title he changes into *Come See The Parasites*.

In her research for omitted and silenced Japanese experiences of internment, Tajiri also shows her family's previous presence in photographic and video images. She, thus, includes a view of the self in positive images in which the Japanese can identify themselves. In this way, Tajiri depicts "[the] networked self [as] constantly making and breaking connections, declaring allegiances and interest and then renouncing them" (*Remediation*, 232). She reveals the paradoxical positive and negative experiences of Japanese internment by supplying a group photo of "Watertower 1942" and a photo of Watertower without the Japanese in 1988 and her voice-off commentary to illustrate the contributions the Japanese brought by irrigating the land and planting a garden in a desert of a Native Indian Reserve at Poston turned into a concentration camp. Her video illustrates how "[t]he remediated selves stake out and occupy verbal and visual points of view through textual and graphic manifestations, but at the same time constitute their collective identities as a network of affiliations among these mediated selves". Tajiri achieves the audiovisual memory of her family's internment through the recollection of images she made with her video while driving back to Poston in a rental car and "passing

the Salinas Rodeo ground in 1989 where my mother lived in 1942". She shows the map of her mother's barrack number 2-13, 11A she has found from the national archive. Besides the objective documents recalling past events, Tajiri also includes her Uncle Shinkichi's letter which she reads out:

> You asked what I thought I gained or lost from the evacuation. Gained? Very little except a unique situation that a very tiny percentage of the American public had ever explained. What I lost was my faith in the American Constitution and it is for that reason that I left the U.S. 43 years ago, a year after I returned from war.

Thus, she incorporates her uncle's private correspondence disclosing his discouragement at his family's incarceration while he (and her father) served the U.S. army during the Second World War. Through this nexus of intermedial interactions, Tajiri depicts the self as constituted by the relations between public historical representations and private memory in images, voices and texts which yield the subjective reflections of traumatic experiences.

The remediated selves created from family diaries and letters express the ways in which Tajiri and her relatives have dealt with the social injustice and dominant misrepresentations of Japanese incarceration. Her own photos from her family album tell another narrative of painful displacement from home rather than the government archives showing a neat presentation of bird carving and other recreational activities.

* * *

# Conclusion

In my exploration of women's transnational identity experiences, I have focused on the body as a vehicle for historical embodiment expressed through travel and dance and in terms of the temporality of photographic, video and film images. I have analyzed the conceptualization of genres as new forms of sexual and textual relations in the refiguration of women's cultural identities that cross geographical and socio-political borders and blur the boundaries of documentary, experimental and fictional styles of representation. Thus, my thesis contests the notion of having a single viewpoint set by any monolithic culture with its preset codes. In the new locations of home, the body undergoes continual displacement and is perceived at the crossroads of multiple perspectives of narration, cultural practices and their differing rituals and rhythms.

Drawing upon the African oral tradition of the griot, Julie Dash has superimposed three layers of narrative voices, those of Nana, Eula and the Unborn Child in their interacting historical accounts of the spatiotemporal dimensions of the past, present and future of the Sea Islands from the times of slavery time to the modern day. African culture is preserved in the rituals of the trance dance, water cult, glass bottles symbolizing departed souls and the transmission of African language to young African-American children by conservative elders and their offspring, while assimilation into the Baptist religion and Western education is carried out by the more progressive younger generation.

In *Surname Viet*, Trinh has juxtaposed two sets of interviews featuring the same women, who present different narratives in new socio-cultural contexts. In the first part, actresses repeat the testimonies of Vietnamese women living under the socialist Vietnamese government, whereas the second part shows them in their lives in the United States, portraying their experiences of straddling two cultures.

There is a displacement of official historical records ceding to personal viewpoints through the oral accounts of Japanese family members, registered in the sound-track to make up for non-existent, unrepresented personal viewpoints. There are also displacements of particular testimonies onto larger historical events, stories of heroic deeds and poetic

commemorations of women's contributions to the resistance against oppression in Trinh's challenge to objective representations of the "real" experiences recounted by talking heads in traditional documentary styles.

I have examined the ways in which the performance of women's cultural identities are carried out through dance which is a re-figuration of the traditional social roles of women in the simultaneous presentation of past rituals and revisions of these customs through modern practices. Women present innovative performances of past cultural traditions through their presence, strongly marking their agency. In re-actualizing trance dance, African-American women incorporate, through their bodies, their ancestors' spiritual communication, as a means of self-empowerment that gives them the strength to cope with their current experiences of sexual oppression and adaptation to Western religion and education. Furthermore, dance can be perceived as a mode of emancipation and liberation from constraints and limiting social positions (such as the sexual inequality under Vietnamese socialist government run by a male bureaucracy) by engaging in an alternative use of the body in an active role that refuses the influences and oppressive conditions of patriarchal society. Thus, dance features the body in an actual subversion of social norms by performing a productive and distinctive mode of women's subjectivity, which signifies a reconstruction of their socio-political positions. In her presentation of various Vietnamese dances, Trinh promotes the critical recognition of the resistance to Chinese political domination by several courageous heroines, whose social contributions are highly valorized and appreciatively commemorated. Moreover, she celebrates, through the graceful gestures of these women dancers, the well-known poem relating the multiple trials and sacrifices undergone by a beautiful woman under Confucian precepts, whose flexibility and adaptability in wartime enabled her to experience the contradictory roles of a nun, a concubine and a prostitute before she was reunited with her first love. Thus, through dance, Trinh challenges the burdens of women's social roles by viewing their physical activity as self-actualization in their control over their own bodies' movements and actions. Furthermore, dance, as a collective activity, highlights women's experiences of solidarity and social support in their rhythmic movements performed in unison. The multiplied

effects of bodily presence are used by women in their strategic deployment of strength in artistic performance to convey political resistance and defiance.

Besides depicting the physical displacement from home to a new geography, travel also signifies an extension of historical events across wider spaces. From the perspective of travelling, dance depicts the metaphor of the self's trajectory in its cultural movement from originary traditions to a different context of new practices. Dance further exposes the continually shifting positions of the subject through multiple cultural interactions and exchanges, as can be seen in Trinh's juxtaposition of traditional dances with scenes of Vietnamese women's integration and adaptation into modern life and work in the United States while preserving their traditional customs such as the Vietnamese ritual celebration in mixed marriage. Similarly, Dash shows intercultural exchanges in trance dance performed by African-American women, starting with a modern dance rhythm created by the clapping of hands and the swaying of the bodies to this rhythm. Spiritual possession, thus, entails the ancestors' visits to their descendants' bodies in their present American identities. Historical embodiment in African and Vietnamese dances, therefore, suggests a recreation of past cultural activities in an innovative form of performance as self-refiguration in a new spatiotemporal context.

The removal of the boundaries and borders of cultural spaces and activities represented in travel and dance is further reflected in the intermedial relations of photographic stills in moving video and film images of women in their diverse historical contexts. Intercultural identity performance is visualized in the intermedial transfer of temporal duration and rhythms between photographic and cinematic images. Dash's 'dissolves' integrate Black aesthetics of multiple printing, as developed by African photographer Van der Zee, to slow down the tempo of film images. This strategic device simultaneously recalls the history of Africans from the time of slavery and the influence of Black aesthetics in Dash's contemporary cinematic style. Moreover, Dash depicts both history and future developments through the animation of the photographic images of the Unborn Child – seen by the photographer in his camera viewfinder – and the moving

images in the stereopticon – perceived by the Unborn Child. The relations between the photographic stills, comparable to photograms (as the basic units of film images), and the cinematic moving images, are revealed in their interchanging roles, such that there is a cross-over from a static medium to a mobile one. This transfer of qualities demonstrates a dialogue between the separate media that questions the conventional representation and reception of fixed media visual effects. The multimedia transformations serve to illustrate the dispersal of a monolithic culture and the contestation of fixed social roles by reframing contemporary cultural identity beyond the constraints of a single, fixed relationship to ancient historical traditions. Female visual artists such Dash, Trinh and Tajiri create dynamic and provocative re-envisioning of cultural representations by mixing poetic discourse with legends and music/dance to recreate women's experiences of the body in their continual transformations of gender roles. In these innovative forms of intermedial relations, the body figures at the intersection of gender, sexuality and dispersal/displacement in diaspora and deportation. The transmedial effects operate in the context of the expansion of geographical boundaries of the forced and voluntary migrations of African and Vietnamese peoples. In their struggles for sexual and socio-cultural empowerment, women are shown constantly moving back and forth between their traditional culture and the American spaces of inclusion and exclusion. To challenge the concept of a single cultural representation, women filmmakers promote plural readings and identifications of transnational identity through the multiple, changing roles of women – seen in Trinh's dual re-presentation of the inter-view as both re-enactment and actual life experiences. Lan's role as the reader of translated Vietnamese poetry is transformed by her actual figuration through her presence in the film relating her own and her mother's adaptations and assimilation into modern American language and lifestyle from their conservative Vietnamese culture. Trinh's and Tajiri's incorporation of photographs, letters and voice recordings of several family members' personal testimonies counter the exclusion of first-hand witnesses in official historical documentaries. The fragmentary, discontinuous narration breaks up the linear, smooth representation of dominant media to salvage emotional accounts of traumatic experiences that betray the inconsistent and

illogical nature of political oppression and social injustice. The investigations and challenges to such political discourses – through the critical re-interpretation of dominant representations which can be perceived as 'reform' in Grusin's notion of the re-appropriation of media for social improvement – depict *identity* as that which "is in part the ever-shifting historical product of interactions between the producers and the viewers of film" (*History Goes to the Movies*, 82). In their historical films, Trinh and Tajiri engage in a direct address to their audience, who are thus constructed as an extension of the emotional affects from these personal, counter-historical viewpoints. The shifting focus from official record to personal testimonies denotes the changing relations of exclusion to inclusion in the reconstruction of authentic experiences that transforms the audience's perception of history. A re-vision is thus conducted in contesting representations of authenticity, between the personal memories and documentaries' "realism" by juxtaposing government footage with personal video and film presentation backed by photos by and of minority groups. The interrelations between the diverse media in the films evoke a sense of these texts as simultaneously derived from and reshaping their contexts. There is continuous transformation of viewpoints that takes place in the interactions between media that displace the initial texts (photographs, found footage, documentaries) onto other critical assessments that make use of personal observations, such as the photo-essay and the essay film. The hypermedia effects are created not only by multiple media but also by images within the same medium in a new context. The 'hypermedial' self is thus created – in the substitutions for others when Vietnamese women re-enact other women's interviews and Tajiri acts for her mother to revive her memories of her camp life experience – as women switch between their roles from artists to specta(c)tors.

The differing modes of representation of screened events create multiple forms of reflexivity that involve reflections on interpersonal relations using media translations. A parallel position is taken up by film viewers, who may identify with the actresses by experiencing the same emotions. However, like the actresses performing other women's parts, the viewers remain themselves in their own judgments of the events. The artists' intersubjective experiences are shared by the viewing public watching the women

switching between their dual roles. This is my conclusion of the relations between the acting and viewing positions occupied by actresses, visual artists (Tajiri and Lan) and the audience from their different perspectives of historical inquiry.

The intersubjective aspects can also be perceived in the intergenerational relations created by sharing historical experiences. This is conveyed through photography which represents memory by its often excluded evidence of personal experiences. Photographs in film present the sudden halt of moving images in a freeze frame that connotes rupture, loss and probable death in the disruptive arrest of movement in film's temporal flow. The vision of the photograph in film is, therefore, spectral, due to the paradoxical notion that the presence of the photographed subject nonetheless recalls its inevitable absence since the photograph fixes the image in a past that is gone. The materiality of the medium calls attention to the transient state of historical subjects and it is evoked to suggest both the absence of evidence from history and a remedy to this situation in the re-calling of the 'dead' to act as witness to the past, as in Rea's use of her grandfather's ghost as an extra-ordinary vision of the U.S. government's removal of her mother's house.

Just as the photograph transports a fixed fragment of the past into the present of film, cinematic images are infused with movement in the reorganization of individual photograms in freeze frame. Film, like photography, is a technology of temporal dislocation through its special features of slowing down and speeding up images in the reconstitution of historical events. Besides the hallucination perceived in past witnesses' testimonies, the reincarnation of dead ancestors in living descendants is displayed through Dash's device of slowing down film images of the Unborn Child running on the beach, which symbolize her coming from the world of departed souls.

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