REVIVAL SCREENING: TRINH T. MINH-HA’S SURNAME VIET, GIVEN NAME NAM

NOVEMBER 7, 2012  8:30 PM

presented by
REDCAT
Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater
California Institute of the Arts

CALARTS
Twenty-three years after its premiere, Trinh T. Minh-ha’s film remains a post-colonial classic, tackling issues of translation and untranslatability: from a Vietnamese transcript of half-spoken voices recorded at night, to the French publication of these interviews, to their re-translation into English by a native Vietnamese speaker, to the patient efforts of ordinary Vietnamese women to memorize and utter them—then to the lyrics of Vietnamese ballads translated into English subtitles—and finally to Trinh delivering, in English, fragments of oral history, epic poems, and folk sayings about women’s role in society. What is lost and what is gained in this multiple-entry process, in this palimpsest of half-erased texts? What is not gained is a “knowledge-about” a certain object: Vietnam. And what is not lost is a certain truth about the bodies of Vietnamese women.

Surname Viet, Given Name Nam has received the Merit Award from the Bombay International Film Festival, the Film as Art Award from the Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art (SF Museum of Modern Art) and the Blue Ribbon Award at the American Film and Video Festival.

In person: Trinh T. Minh-ha

“Independent in thought and delicate in craftsmanship, the film is strung with the tensile strength of piano wire.” — Karen Jaehne, Film Comment

“Keenly intelligent, sensuously multilayered... Emotionally, Surname Viet, Given Name Nam leaves you with an impression of the courage and persistent strength of Vietnamese women, not in terms of propaganda-poster heroics but on the human level.” — Stuart Klawans, The Nation

“The tension between what is heard, read, and seen actually came about in the process of making the film. The re-enacted interviews had been carried out in Vietnamese and translated into French for publication, and then translated again by myself into English.

Instead of going back to Vietnamese for more authenticity, I rather deal with the notion of translation itself, and not claim any authentic retrieval. There is here no real desire to make people believe that what they have on screen happened (or did not happen) in Vietnam, so to have the interviews in Vietnamese would just be using the cliché.

In other words, it is like going back to the illusion of unmediated reality, evading the staging by not acknowledging it. Whereas the use of English in the context of Vietnam and of Vietnamese in the context of the U.S. already creates a displacement, and a tension arises because not only do you have to listen to these Vietnamese faces speaking English, but you also have to understand a different sound of English.” — Trinh T. Minh-ha, interview with Laleen Jayamane and Anne Rutherford, Framer Framed

Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud

Funded in part with generous support from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Born in Vietnam, Trinh T. Minh-ha is a filmmaker, writer and composer. She has traveled and lectured extensively—in the States, as well as in Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand—on film, art, feminism, and cultural politics. She taught at the National Conservatory of Music in Dakar, Senegal (1977-80); at universities such as Cornell, San Francisco State, Smith, and Harvard, Ochanomizu (Tokyo), Ritsumeikan (Kyoto), Dongguk (Seoul); and is Professor of Gender & Women’s Studies and of Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley.
Her works include:

**FILMS**
- *Night Passage* (98 mins, Digital, 2004) (fiction)
- *The Fourth Dimension* (87 mins, Digital, 2001)
- *A Tale of Love* (108 mins, 1995) (fiction)
- *Shoot for the Contents* (102 mins, 1991)
- *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* (108 mins, 1989)
- *Naked Spaces - Living is Round* (135 mins, 1985)
- *Reassemblage* (40 mins, 1982)

**BOOKS**
- *Elsewhere, Within Here* (Routledge 2010)
- *The Digital Film Event* (Routledge 2005)
- *Cinema Interval* (Routledge 1999)
- *Framer Framed* (Routledge 1992)
- *Woman, Native, Other. Writing postcoloniality and feminism* (Indiana University Press 1989)

**INSTALLATIONS**
- *Old Land New Waters*, Okinawa Fine Arts Museum (opening) November 2007; (exhibition) 2009 and Guangzhou Art Triennial, China (Sept 6 to Nov 16, 2008).
- *L’Autre marche (The Other Walk)* In collaboration with Jean Paul Bourdier, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France 9 June 2006 -2009
- *The Desert is Watching* (in coll. with Jean-Paul Bourdier, 2003, Kyoto Art Biennale)
- *Nothing But Ways* (in coll. with L. M. Kirby, 1999, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco)

**MUSIC**

The recipient of numerous awards and grants (including the “Trailblazers” Award at MIPDOC, Cannes; AFI National Independent Filmmaker Maya Deren Award, fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment of the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the American Film Institute, The Japan Foundation, and the California Arts Council), her films have been given over forty two retrospectives in the US, the UK, Brazil, Canada, Italy, Korea, Spain, the Netherlands, Slovenia, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Japan, India, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, and were exhibited at the international contemporary art exhibition Documenta 11 (2002) in Germany. They have shown widely in the States, in Canada, Senegal, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as in Europe and Asia (including in Italy, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Japan, India, Taiwan, Jerusalem, etc.

“The place from which the woman artist works is always fragile, because empowerment of the self can only be achieved by emptying, reversing and displacing power relations... She takes the plunge. She risks all or she risks nothing, because she has nothing to save. Seeing differently and hearing differently, she is bound to always challenge the ‘look’ in the cinematic apparatus – or the system of looks that distinguishes cinema from the other art forms...
To pause and look more closely than is required, to look at what one is not supposed to look at in the context of cinema action, cinema affection, cinema superproduction, upsets the established order in all its forms, to the degree that the very duration or intensity of the gaze is controlled by society. Hence, the outrageous nature of certain films when they escape this control, not because they are indecent or aggressive but simply because they foreground the ‘pose’.

— Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When The Moon Waxes Red*

In collaboration with ICAP and the Office of the Provost, as well as the Master in Aesthetics Program of the School of Critical Studies, the School of Film/Video of the California Institute of the Arts is presenting **two additional events with Trinh T. Minh-ha on the campus of the California Institute of the Arts, 24700 McBean Parkway, Valencia, CA 91355. (661)255.1050. Free parking on campus.**

**Thu Nov 8 | 7:00 pm |**  
CalArts, Bijou Auditorium  
Free and open to the entire Institute

*Shoot for the Contents*  
(USA, 102 mins, 16mm, 1991)  
The title refers in part to a Chinese guessing game, a maze of allegorical naming and storytelling. The film ponders questions of power and change, politics and culture, stemming from events at Tiananmen Square. *Shoot for the Contents* won the Jury’s Best Cinematography Award at the 1992 Sundance Film Festival and the Best Feature Documentary Award at the Athens International Film Festival, and toured internationally with the 1993 Biennale of the Whitney Museum.

**Fri Nov 9 | 4:00 pm |**  
CalArts, Bijou Auditorium  
Free and open to the entire Institute

*Naked Spaces – Living is Round*  
(USA, 135 mins, 16mm, 1985)  
Elaborating on her first film, *Reassemblage* (1982), Trinh T. Minh-ha examines the themes of postcolonial identification and the geopolitical apparatus of disempowerment to create an ethnographic essay-film on identity, the impossibility of translation, and space as a form of cultural representation. *Naked Spaces* received the Blue Ribbon Award for Best Experimental Feature at the American Int’l. Film Festival and the Golden Athena Award for Best Feature Documentary at the Athens International Film Festival in 1986; it toured nationally and internationally with the 1987 Biennial of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

**UPCOMING FILM/VIDEO PROGRAM**  
**AT REDCAT FALL 2012**

**Mon Nov 19: Thom Andersen Meets Souto de Moura: Reconversão**

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