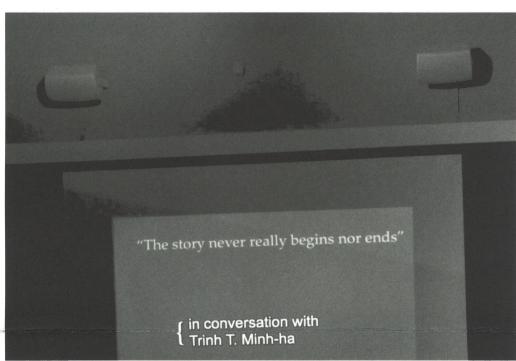
### TRINH T. MINH-HA

#### 06-15-17-19-2020

At some point this spring, as the cinemas were closing and it became clear that they wouldn't reopen any time soon, we met to figure out how to continue to present moving images publically when the world stops (and then doesn't really stop anyway). Instead of migrating online and engaging with the hyper-acceleration of streaming services, previously private Vimeo links made accessible, and archives "opened" to the public, we decided to just postpone all screenings that were planned for the spring and summer. To get our spirits up, our conversation turned to what we would want to screen and watch together when the cinemas opened again. We spent our time thinking and talking about artists who work in multiple presents at once and whatever direction we went in we kept ending up at Trinh T. Minh-ha. Her radical intimacy seemed so necessary as the world socially distanced. Realizing that there had never been a retrospective of her works presented in Copenhagen we started working on a programme that we could present as soon as there was a big screen being projected on here. First we wanted to show her films in the beginning of August, then at the end, then in the middle of September. Somehow the urgency to meet and see these films together only grew as the weeks and months passed. Now it's the 1st of October and on Tuesday the series with Trinh T. Minh-ha's films start at Cinemateket. Why show these films now? Why do we keep thinking of Minh-ha and her films? We hope and think the answer lies somewhere in these three evenings and six films



Speaking, writing, and discoursing are not mere acts of communication; they are above all acts of compulsion. Please follow me. Trust me, for deep feeling and understanding require total commitment.

#### THE WALK OF MULTIPLICITY

Images, sounds, words, and meanings move with walking, and as it is often said in Asia, what is miraculous is not to walk on water, but to walk on earth. Walking is an experience of indefiniteness, and traveling in this context does not, as commonly understood, lead to the "discovery" of the world—a term so endearing to the colonial quest and conquest. Rather, the focus is all on the ability to receive and the expansive nature of reception.

With each step forward, the world comes to us.

With each step forward, a flower blooms under our feet.

With each step forward, one receives wide open and deep into oneself, the gifts of the universe. Learning how to walk anew.

An objective constantly claimed by those who 'seek to reveal one society to another' is 'to grasp the native's point of view' and 'to realise his vision of his world'. Fomenting much discord, in terms of methodology and approach, among specialists in the directly concerned fields of anthropology and ethnographic film-making in the last decade, such a goal is also diversely taken to heart by many of us who consider it our mission to represent others, and to be their loyal interpreters. The injunction to see things from the native's point of view speaks for a definite ideology of truth and authenticity; it lies at the centre of every polemical discussion on 'reality' in its relation to 'beauty' and 'truth'. To raise the question of representing the Other is, therefore, to reopen endlessly the fundamental issue of science and art; documentary and fiction; universal and personal; objectivity and subjectivity; masculine and feminine; outsider and insider.

Knowledge about often gives the illusion of knowledge

# Documentary Is/Not a Name

Reassemblage (1983, ProRes-file, 40 min.)

# Trinh T. Minh-ha: An Interview (Pat Falkenberg, 1989, VHS, 33 min.)

There is no such thing as documentary—whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques. This assertion—as old and as fundamental as the antagonism between names and reality—needs incessantly to be restated, despite the very visible existence of a documentary tradition. In film, such a tradition, far from undergoing crisis today, is likely to fortify itself through its very recurrence of declines and rebirths. The narratives that attempt to unify/purify its practices by positing evolution and continuity from one period to the next are numerous indeed, relying heavily on traditional historicist concepts of periodization.

In a completely catalogued world, cinema is often reified into a corpus of traditions. On the one hand, truth is produced, induced, and extended according to the regime in power. On the other, truth lies in between all regimes of truth. To question the image of a historicist account of documentary as a continuous unfolding does not necessarily mean championing discontinuity; and to resist meaning does not necessarily lead to its mere denial. Truth, even when "caught on the run," does not yield itself either in names or in filmic frames; and meaning should be prevented from coming to closure at either what is said or what is shown. Truth and meaning: the two are likely to be equated with one another. Yet, what is put forth as truth is often nothing more than a meaning. And what persists between the meaning of something and its truth is the interval, a break without which meaning would be fixed and truth congealed. This is perhaps why it is so difficult to talk about it, the interval. About the cinema. About. The words will not ring true. Not true; for what is one to do with films that set out to determine truth from falsity while the visibility of this truth lies precisely in the fact that it is false? How is one to cope with a "film theory" that can never theorize "about" film, but only with concepts that film raises in relation to concepts of other practices?

Struggles of resistance and liberation, like the women's movement or the gay and lesbian movement for example, are not struggles that can thrive on oppositions strategically set up; they are struggles that cross more than one border in modifying our consciousness. Hence the widespread introduction, for example, of the notion of the "trans", something that goes over, that cuts both ways.

"Transgender," "transpolitics," "transnational." All these "trans" notions deal with the crossing. Rather than having to deny one side or the other, the crossing allows us more freedom of movement and hence, of no movement as well. We can shuttle back and forth, being more mobile in what we do, even though that mobility— as we can see in the current political world events—can be turned around against us as

# Naked Spaces: Living is Round (1985, 16mm, 135 min.)

(Text written for three women's voices, represented here by three types of printed letters. The low voice [bold], the only one that can sound assertive, quotes the villagers' sayings and statements, as well as African writers' works. The high-range voice [plain] informs according to Western logic and mainly cites Western thinkers. The medium-range voice [italics] speaks in the first person and relates personal feelings and observations. Words in parentheses are not heard on film; the names of nations and of peoples appear as burnt-in subtitles on the lower corner of the film frames.)

# Framer Framed

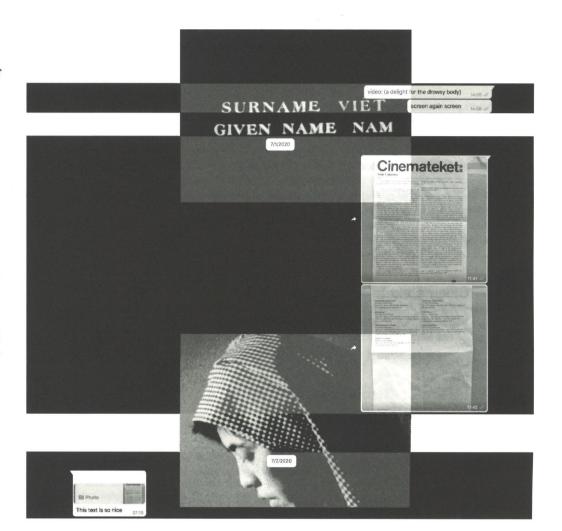
- Silences are holes in the sound wall/SOUNDS are bubbles on the surface of silence. Sound like silence is both opening and filling/concave and convex/life and death. Sound like silence may freeze or free the image.
- While the images reach a high stage of deconstruction (or do they?), the sound is satisfied with tying some pop, rock tunes, reintroducing thereby in a forceful manner the mainstream devices (of description, expression, association, identification) the images attempt at undermining.
  INTERNALIZED AESTHETIC CLAP-TRAP.
- Silence and repetitions can play an important role. Cutting a sentence at different places, for example, assembling it with holes, repeating it in slightly different forms and in ever-changing verbal and visual contexts help to produce a constant shift and dislocation in meanings.
- WE SHOULD NOT STAMMER, so goes the reasoning (...) After many years of confusions, of suppressed voice and INARTICULATE SOUNDS, holes, blanks, black-outs, jump-cuts, out-of-focus visions, I FINALLY SAY NO: yes, sounds are sounds and should above all be released as sounds. Everything is in the releasing. There is no score to follow, no hidden dimension from the visuals to disclose, and endless thread to weave anew.

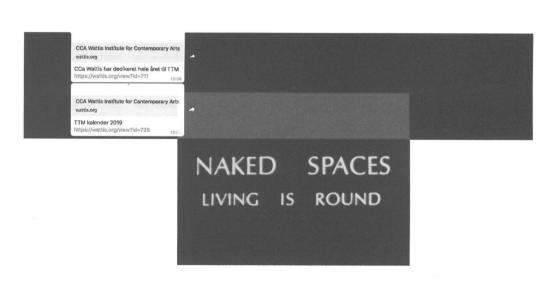
as I lived it during my stay in Japan and as realized in *The Fourth Dimension*, is very precise. As a joke, the length of this digital film is very precisely 86 minutes and 40 seconds. This is the longest length tolerated for mainstream TV broadcasting in the U.S. But being "well aware that television prefers, in any case, programs of half an hour or of less than an hour, I use this TV timeframe simply as an empty ritual. No matter how one may view it, the reality that I present in *The Fourth Dimension* is that of a digitalized Japan. My turning to video in working with Japanese culture is not a mere coincidence.



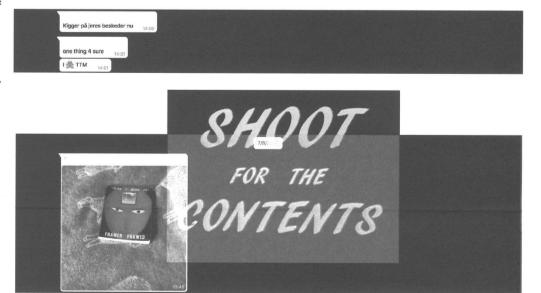
















Surname Viet Given Name Nam 1989. ProRes-file, 408-min. saufice mistrus culting for little 1995 Johnson 1 Bellened in the gray carotty iter when Looking We receive, from time to time unwards us 2 kilos of MSG 3 kilosof we Shoot for Contents (199 16mm, 101 min.) Making films so as to make real, to persist and to resist what has come to be accepted as real. To show 4 real while questioning who, what, how that real-I could be. Digital technology offers the possibility of working intensely with time in its liquidity and with indefinitely coexisting layers of temporalities, as ancient and modern meer on the light canvas, But in times of coercive politics and transnational terror, slowing down so as to learn to listen anew is a necessity. This is particularly relevant as one turns to digital systems in filmmaking, for the digital is here a may (of living) rather than a mere technology and the Looks upward toward the question is not so much to produce a new image as to provoke, facilitate and It of the comera and below that . Her you is very and beard solicit a new seeing. In the interplay of hear-and see, silence and sound, stillness and movement, the hearing eye and the speaking car are constantly solicited, Whards while she looks sligh to the right as if talking and form and formless are the two facets of a single process of other and APPECY LIGHT SEEN IN PLAN from A to B When a foreigner gives us som it is often thought that they wa An image is powerful not necessarily because of anything specific it offers the viewer, but because of everything it apparently also takes away from the viewer and the v to be admitted in the heart of th 10 The Fourth Dimension (2001, BetaSP, 37 min.) Today, when one goes on a journey, the travel is ritualized through the visual ma coming alive in time as it frames time, is there where the actual and virtual meet. In the process of ritualizing Japan's "hundred flowers," it is the encounter between self and other, human and machine, viewer and image, fact and fancy that determines the field of relations in which new interactions between past and present are made possible. Shown in their widespread functions and manifestations, including

Non being is what we use in working with being . . . when we start taking care of this utter silence, life speaks to us in a different language, one in which we catch glimpses of stillness in movement and feel movement arising in stillness. Velocity in stillness. Some viewers have spoken at length on such dynamics and on what they see as unexpected moments of stillness in the midst of rapid cuts and movements in The Fourth Dimension. Speed is here not opposed to slowness, for it is in stillness that one may be said to truly find speed. And rather than merely going against speed, still ness contains speed and determines its quality. Speed at its best in digital imaging is still speed. The speed of a flower mind.

more evident loci such as festival, religious rite and theatrical performance, "rituals" involve not only the regularity in the structure of everyday life, but also the dynamic agents in the ongoing process of creating digital images at the speed of light.

Problems and issues change all the time, with each single moment. What we are witnessing today . . . if we do not think in terms of linear progress, but rather in terms of a spiraling, multidimensional here and now—where everything in the present carries with it its past and its future. The seed of the future is always already there, in the present, in the past. Problems and issues change all the time, with each single moment. What we are witnessing today . . . if

we do not think in terms of linear progress, but rather in terms of a spiraling, multidimensional here\_and\_now—where everything in the present carries with it its past and its future. The seed of the future is always already there, in the present, in the past. If we think of it in that way, inclusively rather than exclusively, spatially and spirally rather than only linearly, then the time we live (in) is rich and full of potential. It's just the way things are being directed that leads us to the thought of impasse and to the helpless or cynical feeling that everywhere we turn we meet with an impasse.

The first question to Minh-ha came from a man, who asked, vehemently: 'Who is this film for? Who's the audience for this film?' Minh-ha took a moment, then said: 'I make films for sensitive people.' Her audience fell silent, maybe stunned by her brilliant tactic, which leaped over patterned responses. Minh-ha allowed for the contemplation of positions, by escaping the usual discursive traps. It's the hardest thing to do, and in art and politics the most imaginative and stimulating.

## Terrassen 06-15-17.10.20

## Cinenateket, Gothersgade 55, 1123 (KBH)

that space as they wish. Such is not opposed to the non-evidenced in the thousands an approach gives freedom, human. Your comment on of rivers and waters that criss-cross the country and voice-over declares: 'I do not intend to speak account for it being taken up book, Lovecidal: Walking the three huge rivers that just speak nearby. Ly filmmakers who recognize with the Disappeared define it: the Red River in the does this mean? Till strong unital stance. (2016) When addresses the Jorth, the Perfume River in about; just speak nearby.' By not trying to assume climate disasters we are now the centre and the Mekong or

Trinh T. Minh-ha: If you are a position of authority in experiencing. Something the Nine Dragon River in the close to someone, like your Nakes apaces, John Williams of South. This water flows deep lover or your mother, and you actually freeing yourself from Forgetting Vietnam when I and wide, from the Tibetan quite difficult. Every time you claim and its hierarchies a woman rower who takes with Vietnam as primarily speak about them, you can knowledge. While this seemle from one shore to the hear the other person's voice the speak about them, you can knowledge. While this seemle from one shore to the water, the two forces catching the hear the other person's voice the speak about them, you can knowledge. While this seemle from one shore to the water, the two forces catching my eye in the film are the challenging and protesting: possibilities in positioning physically or spiritually -'No, I'm not like that. What's the voice of the film it is also the shore can be that of life human and the non-human. wrong with you?' My mother, most demanding in its plaxes. The shore can Here, it's not the person in for instance, would certainly not recognize herself, she EB: One of the pairs that defining your ego or your nor the boat passenger - but you balance in Forgetting small self, or something very would deny, talk back and try to rectify. When you decide to speak nearby, swater I was type interested much the speak about, the interested much telling that in vielnamese we are not the centre of the rather than speak about, the

first thing you need to do is within your practice - one to acknowledge the possible gap between you and those who populate your film: in What do you think feminism other words, to leave the contributes to questions of environmentalism, ecology space of representation open so that, although you're or the anthropocene today? very close to your subject, And, to reverse the question: you're also committed to not what do ecology and the speaking on their behalf, in anthropocene bring to a their place or on top of them. decolonial feminist practice? You can only speak nearby, in proximity (whether the

TM: The answer is related to other is physically present what I said before about the or absent), which requires many tools at our disposal that you deliberately suspend and the forces of nature. meaning, preventing it from When you do not conceive merely closing and hence of these in binary opposition, leaving a gap in the formation but rather as forces that coperson to come in and fill one another, then the human as a body of water. This is

sea and the boat: again, the be something very small, the boat - neither the boater actually the boat itself and Vietnam is the land and the large, where you are in tune the sea. It's a way of shifting

> world. Sometimes, viewers tell me they can't identify with the people in the film, which turns out to be mainly a reaction to the absence point in the film; the woman of interviews and personal stories. But this film is not prominent at the end. But, about an individual story or about individual lives as project in 2012, my father was representative of the culture I was not presenting characters or the story of a few selected individuals. It's very much about water (or Nuócthe name that also refers and the 'water way' in relation define Vietnam, Her people

> > and Her culture.

popular sayings and songs, of many threads that we as well as in legends and find throughout the film. myths, the rower is, most of the time, a woman. You can still recognize this starting is in the songs and is very by the time I returned to the very sick. And, in the process of completing the film, I lost him. The journey toward his death and his passing opened a door for me to what I call the non-human. Not to 'country' in Vietnamese) that it was not there before, but his departure made it to the forces of nature as they very intense for me. So, the process. This allows the other exist and mutually sustain film shifts toward Vietnam

through

sayings

nonofficial,

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the latter's situation

of

popular memory, of immortality in many Asian cultures, the dragon is evoked with its "bold omissions and minute depictions"; through here in its multiplicity and perpetual metamorphoses, through songs proverbs and numerous both through functions, particularly telling names, as to appearances, and through the stories that indirectly comment the situations they struggle with; in other words, through on the political transmutations undervalues of China. As one proceeds information. with the film, the moves or Many times I have been the gestures one makes asked why I showed footage of invent the movement and the the Vietnamese refugees in the trajectory one is to take. To fifties, and not of those in the paint a dragon is to paint a form of power, which is in itself seventies, when I was dealing a multiplicity of powers. But to And I have also been asked paint a dragon without clouds, why, in focusing on arts and as the calligrapher reminded politics in China in Shoot for me during the shoot, is to the Contents, I did not make miss the point and to paint no dragon at all (hence the shot, in a film more specifically, let's say, on "Madame Mao", as a the closing section of the film, viewer puts it, on the cultural of the man and his brushwork revolution, or on the post-Mao showing a dragon with water and clouds). Dragons are period. For me, there are many ways to approach history - here thunder and rainmakers: they are feared and revered for their power to control the waters or to make themselves

while apprehending it in its hybrid dynamics, its density, multilayered thickness When one deals with such vast culture and country as China, it is necessary - at least for me, for example - to confront such giant, mythical, and political figures as Mao and Confucius, not as individuals, but at once as two passé cultural monuments and as two overlapping fields of historical forces that continue to define China's faces today. Although for anyone caught in the binds of linear history it may appear very contradictory to put these two names together, for me it is clear that Mao ruled through the repetition and adaptation of old popular sayings, or "through the power of rhymes and proverbs turned into snugly capsuled slogans" as one of the narrators in the film said. Because he deliberately resorted to oral traditions to convince the people, he can sometimes sound exactly like Confucius whose "feudal" vestiges he tried so hard to extinguish. Both of them returned to this treasure of ancient Chinese stories, songs

open vields new possibilities of times spaces in the most For this, showing the but continually

accordingly visible or invisible So without clouds, a dragon lacks dimension, substance and reality. Deprived of the essential elements to survive and to create, it can, literally speaking, neither dive deep nor rise high to take flight. The same holds true for the nature of power. To paint or assume power, one has to paint and assume the elements of change. Otherwise, as a statement in the film says. "the five colors will blind a man's sight." Since the five colors refer to the dragon one can translate, "power will blind a man's sight"; and since filmmaking involves both a play of colors and the power to direct and create, one can further translate, "the five colors, the dragon/power will blind a filmmaker's/film viewer's sight ' Keeping in mind how power appears from a painting, I'll take up the question you

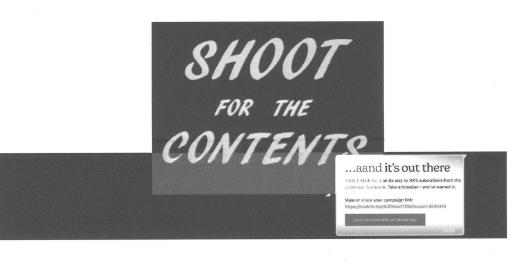
raised concerning the way women occupy a liminal space and how this fits too easily with the formal procedures of the two films. I certainly agree that reality is always more complex than whatever we come up with to frame it. But I would say first, that in my work form and content are inseparable So to have women fare primarily and precariously in that liminal space is as much a political as an aesthetic choice - a choice that invites rather than excludes other possibilities (even when they seem contradictory) and other occupations by marginalized social groups. The many links suggestion these possibilities are constantly evoked, some of which tend to situate the others turn out to be liberating despite the difficulties involved. For example, in Shoot for the Contents the dragon not always associated with women, even though the important roles of the translator and the narrators are deliberately given to women The same may be said of the color red whose meanings are multifold, and while it is stated that "the word 'red' (in Chinese) is a symbol for woman," such a statement adds dimensions rather than excludes them for

SURNAME VIÊT GIVEN NAME NAM











Trinh T. Minh-ha: What you have just seen is an excerpt from a film that is quite long, and it takes almost two hours to build up precisely this sense of what you were talking about Homi, the sense of specificities and of differences within the culture, like the many names that Vietnam has had. The sense also that the more one looks into one's own culture, the more one sees there is no such thing as a place that one can just return to safely. Every time one tries to retrieve or to rescue what is thought to be retrievable and representable authentic Vietnamese culture, for example, - it loses itself like ripples widening on the surface of water It's a reality that cannot be contained, that always escapes, but that one cannot escape. In this very short excerpt, the "you" ("even you") referred to by the women interviewed points immediately to the role of a witnessconfidante-listener although trusted as an insider, holds a border position in relation to the culture. So there is this constant shuttling across thresholds of insideness and outsideness even for someone who is from within the culture: Just as one exiles oneself from one's culture to inhabit it anew, one also returns to it as a guest, rather than as a host or an owner. to hear its voices afresh

Homi Bhabha: At the formal level, I find the way in which what I call this re-inscriptive history (which I think is really shown by the film), the formal way in which it occurs across a range of films made about specific cultural locations. minority groups, or diasporic narratives, is in antagonism documentary the form, that is documentary as a mimetic or realist form which presented, but informationally, institutionally, and conceptually, this notion emergent cultures or of emergent peoples as belonging to a culture. From there you begin to have the pluralistic multicultural history documentary filmmaking and even anthropological filmmaking where distance was established. But the difference was always kept at bay, because those communities were always seen to be somehow self-contained. What I find both in Surname Viet and in Shoot as well for the Contents as in a number of films by

British filmmakers, Asian-British filmmakers too, is the use of documentary and then this re-inscription, taking it apart, not obscuring, not saving that that moment does not exist historically, cinematically in representation. it does exist, but continually hybridizing it, righting its margins, disassembling it and so on. in your films, and also in the excerpt you showed us, is the way in which it is women

Vietnam by an insider - and with the film. Rather than reassembling, constructing one (even when based on several) homogenous What's very interesting insider's point of view, or a firstperson "unmediated" account of the culture, the film engages the politics of the interview who play this liminal role. The entering Vietnam's moment in which the repetition history through collective and individual gaps. That is, not in goes out and then comes back in, that turn, or fold, in the an easily recognizable way, through chronology, linear repetitions, is really a liminal space, which is occupied accumulation, and succession much by women. of facts on Vietnam (this is what I'm thinking specifically, one can find in any book of Vietnamese history); but rather

the two films, of the woman at the end of Surname Viet who says "our history is always at the borderline." Sorry, I'm speaking in her voice, in a way much less poetic than hers, but it's something like "our history is always on the borderline of this north and south, but I speak from somewhere in both places, in between, and I will not accept this division, and I will not think truth decides itself in that way." In Shoot for the Contents there is a continual calligraphic marking, remarking and unmarking of the dragon, which is being painted, and think somewhere, both in Surname Viet as well as Shoot for the Contents, but even more explicitly in Surname, there is a notion of woman and dragon, and Chinese history and dragon. It's almost as if the indirection of Chinese history which you talk about and the liberating indirection of the woman as witness on this liminal borderline come together. The question that arises is this: Does this liminal woman too easily fit in to the formal procedures of the film, in terms of the woman as liminal witness and the way in which we witness the pleasure that the film gives, form that

we come back to this question of repetition and difference and one way, as suggested by the film, is to see it not so much as a succession of periods and of governing individual names (through which history is often reduced to neat, straight lines and to a finality) but rather as a manifested field of interrelated creative energies and social cusp-like moment. Do vou individuated forces across think somebody could say that specific times and places. Such an approach allows it all fits in too easily and the one to unsettle the terms of reality is much more grainy and gritty than that? established hierarchies and to continually reinscribe history First, concerning the antagonism you mentioned between the documentary form and the activity of re-inscriptive history, I think one of the ways of 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 voiced 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 lighten the burden of representation, to displace a form from its settled location. and to create new passages through the coexistence of moments. For example, as and sayings while blazing new paths. It was through many viewers have expressed in their feedback, there is a disjunction between what one this "verbal struggle", as Mao could expect from Surname called it, that Mao succeeded in spreading his words widely Viet - or from a so-called documentary portrayal of among the peasantry and to create his own version of Marxism. I think it's important what one actually experiences to show this intensity of experience and density of history which, when

> familiar realities of the culture. changing calligraphic painting and unpainting of the dragon you've mentioned seems most adequate. As a creation it refers specifically to one of the many mutually dependent of people's imagination, an allegory of both power and possibilities of red. change, a symbol of the Word creator, as well as a guardian