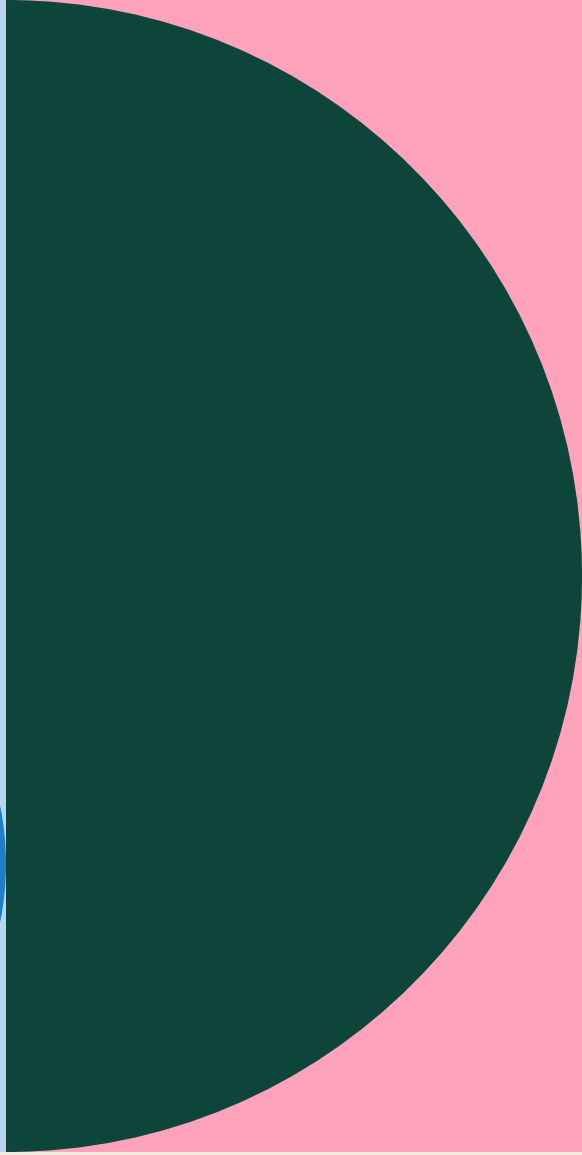
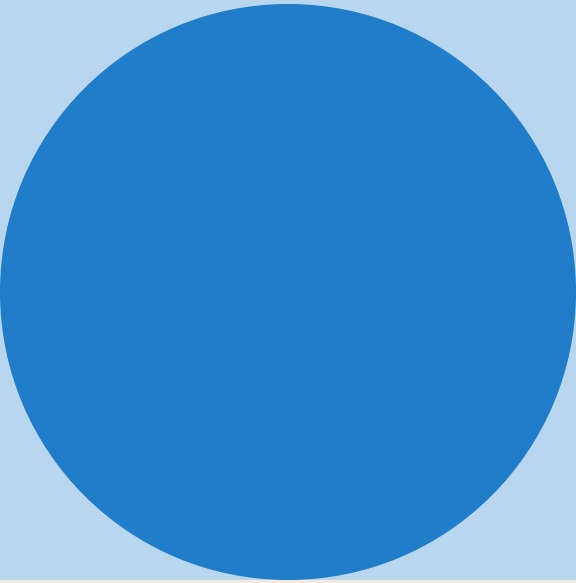


FEMINIST  
ART COALITION



NOTES ON FEMINISMS

4

TRINH T.  
MINH-HA

# TRINH T. MINH-HA

## The Walk of Multiplicity

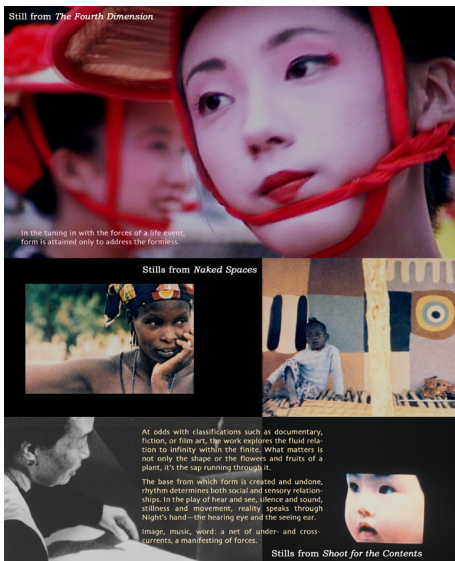


Fig. 1: Composite from Trinh T. Minh-ha's films

migrations and, with it, the sensibility for the fragile, the ephemeral, the marginal, the small, the portable, and the mobile in our everyday.

It is in this space of *an elsewhere within here*—that is, a between that breaks with a here and a there and with binary oppositional practice—that I would situate my work. Art could be the force that enables change and keeps history alive, while the poetics of the creative everyday could be both a dimension of political consciousness and a transformative mode of history. Of relevance to the times is a film and art practice in which *form is fully lived, only so as to address the vitality of the formless*. Such a practice resists consumption in its most intimate needs and often remains difficult for analysts, critics, curators, publishers, and other consumers to work with.

In today's age of migration, human migration is said to be the defining issue of the twenty-first century. The rising phenomena of displacement that used to be a problem of other parts of the world has more recently reached the shores of European countries. Political events are causing the European Union to face a mass influx of refugees from outside the region, therefore propelling it to grapple with the crisis of immigration as, first and foremost, a crisis of politics. With globalization, such events, coupled with the advent of new technology and social media, have substantially changed our sense of identity and stability, of home, family, community, and nation. What seems to pertain to our times is therefore the countercultural feel for incessant displacement and multiple

A dimension of one's consciousness, politics permeates our everyday, which remains difficult to discern because it is what we are ordinarily. The everyday eludes control; it allows no hold, no might, and no dominion; it is where the familiar could reveal itself to be most uncanny. What is thought of as banal, predictable, and routine tends to go unnoticed, but there's always the possibility of the everywo/man turning into a suspect and everyday actions turning into political statements. The distinction offered, for example, between making a political film and making films *politically* helps to widen the scope of the political, freeing it from the domain of economics and established institutions of power. The implied refocus on a caliber of consciousness in the forming/making process, or on form as inseparable from content, serves as a reminder of how works featuring progressive subjects can ultimately prove to be regressive in their unquestioned replication of structural relations of power.



Fig. 2: *Shoot for the Contents*, 1991. 16mm film, color; 102 min.



Fig. 3: *L'Autre marche (The Other Walk)*, 2006. Multimedia installation.

As the feminist struggle used to remind, the personal is political. Not because everything personal is naturally political but because everything can be politicized down to the smallest details of our daily activities. “It’s the little things citizens do. That’s what will make the difference. My little thing is planting trees,” said the late Wangari Maathai, recipient of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize and founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya; the movement became a tool to fight for women’s rights and democracy as it spread to other African countries, resulting in the planting of millions of trees.

In my films and books, I’ve been working with a range of figures of otherness such as the foreigner, the outsider, the stranger, the wanderer, the One-who-leaves—the exile, the migrant, the voluntary and involuntary immigrant, the refugee, the *inappropriate/d other*. More recently I’ve focused on what I call “the Walk of Multiplicity,” featuring the many facets of the Walker: She who walks, She who is being walked, and She the walking.

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.*

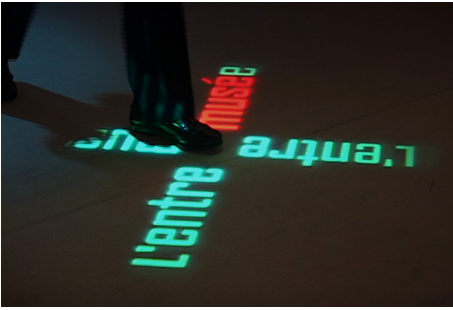


Fig. 4: *L'Autre marche (The Other Walk)*, 2006. Multimedia installation.

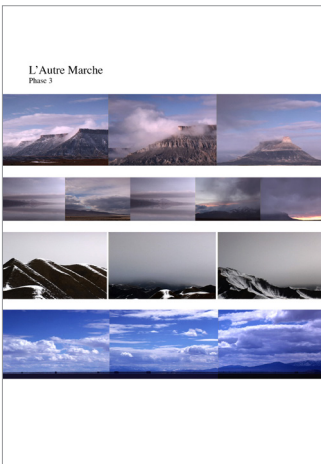


Fig. 5: *L'Autre marche (The Other Walk)*, 2006. Multimedia installation.

These are the three aphorisms that marked the three walking phases of a large-scale multimedia art installation titled *L'Autre marche* (which could be translated into English as both “The Other Walk” and “The Other Is Walking”). Conceived as a cultural rite of passage and a transformative walk along a 160-meter ramp that precedes the entrance to the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, the installation was made in collaboration with architect and artist Jean-Paul Bourdier. It was completed for the museum’s grand opening in 2006 and was kept on view until 2009.

The passage of the other into oneself, the course taken between sounds, images, and aphorisms, or between the said and the seen along the ramp, is an initiation walk that spans several cultures of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and America. This passage between—or *l'entre musée*, as I call it—is also a passage from the human to the animal, the vegetal, the mineral, and back. With each step taken, relations between passage, passerby, and passing time are mutually activated. Questions raised through sensual experience could incite the visitor to reflect on his or her present activities as spectator-researcher-visitor.

By expanding the visitor's receptive faculties through the choreography of immaterial events, *L'Autre marche* can be said to *supplement* while *standing distinctly apart* from the museum's project, which remains bound to collecting and exhibiting material objects. At the core of the installation lies the very event of *light*—outdoor and indoor, immaterial and avisual—whose changing intensities make and unmake, saturate or efface the images. The focus is on light as an event of its own, rather than as a means to visibility and legibility.

Rainy days, and the period between day and night called dusk, turned out to be this installation's best friend. For twilight—two lights, two worlds—is a moment of the day that I link with the postcolonial, transcultural, and trans feminist phases, with the aftermath of victory and of revolution, when events of the world come to the walker in multiforms—*entre chien et loup*, or between dog and wolf—and in an unplanned, unexpected, albeit tightly interrelated way.



Fig. 6: *Night Passage*, 2004. Digital, 98 min.

The spirit of the walk has led me to a whole tradition of independent walkers in ancient Asia, at the same time as it provides me with a link to women's struggles around the world. Here, "walking" is all at once a form of resistance and an activity for peace—that is, a *mode of receptivity* and a *way of apprehending the world*. It is a *creative* gesture, both physical and virtual, which I also call "Walking with the Disappeared" in my book *Lovecidal* (2016). With words and events being walked into existence, one slowly burrows one's way through the fissures of history, not by eyes only, but by ear, nose, tongue, and body contortions. This is how everyday acts of resistance thrive in feminist praxes and in struggles for justice across cultural contexts. "Lovecidal" (or the suicide of love) is a term I came up with to encapsulate the predicament of our warring time. Presented as an adjective ("lovecidal") rather than as a noun ("lovecide," like genocide, for example), it could modify an indefinite range of events, situations, and contexts.



Fig. 7: *L'Autre marche (The Other Walk)*, 2006.  
Multimedia installation.

Today, with angst sweeping across the globe, it seems necessary to recall anew the enduring strength of the Women's March across geopolitical boundaries, including the well-known "march in pink" held on January 21, 2017, in Washington, D.C.—that is, on the day following the inauguration of the newly elected president. The project was a unique collective visual statement, the first of many marches to follow, considered to be the largest single-day protest in U.S. history, which gathered an estimated half a million people in Washington and some five million more around the world.

If walking has never meant the same thing for people, walking in the street has never had the same connotations for men as for women. "The body of a woman, as soon as she leaves the state of waiting, seated, in the cloistered interior, contains a danger in its very nature. Does it move about in an open space? Suddenly all that is perceived is the staring multitude of eyes in it and on it." This statement, written by Algerian novelist Assia Djebar to address the situation of Algerian women, sounds disturbingly familiar when taken in its penetrating scope. The eye of the dominated is a site of multiplicity. In this context of the many body eyes—the breast, navel, sex organ, for example—each site offers a way of seeing or gazing back of its own. The female body that is seen in public constitutes a danger in its very nature, for a woman moving around freely, making herself vulnerable to abuse by exposing herself to every look, is always a threat to the male prerogative of scopic exclusivity.



Fig. 8: *Night Passage*, 2004. Digital, 98 min.

The way society defines and governs a woman's place can easily be recognized through the ever-refined techniques of power it develops and normalizes in controlling and administering the everyday life of politics and sexuality. Public exposure invites public harassment, which differs markedly with gender. It has never been easy for women to go out in public or to take on a public role without getting verbally or physically abused. And it has never been easy for edu-

cated women to fare well in male-controlled societies, for to survive, they must learn, in one way or another, the art of veiling themselves, whether literally or figuratively. Never showing

themselves to their full ability. Never shining too brightly under any light, not even under the one designated as properly feminine.

Each step taken is a link, in the history of walking, with those who took the act into the political sphere, vowing, as did a woman widely known to the world as Peace Pilgrim, to remain “a wanderer until mankind has learned the way of peace.” Walk she did, twenty-five thousand miles on foot and beyond, dropping her ordinary name and safer existence as an American “farm girl!” to become a walker among walkers, until her death. What may sound like a romantic vow in this age of cynicism turned out to be an act of life endurance and resistance. Alone she went, together she moved, appealing for world disarmament, for freedom, and for the sheer pleasure of feeling oneself alive.

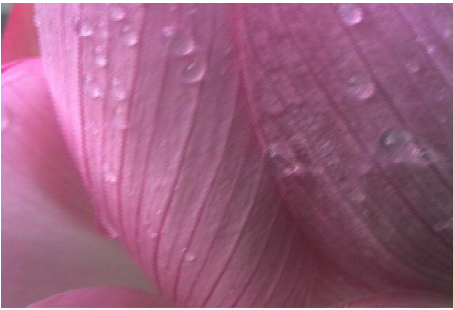


Fig. 9: *The Fourth Dimension*, 2001. Digital, 87 min.

On an International Women’s Day, March 8, 2003, the White House was unexpectedly given a color and encircled in pink. Pink marching. Over ten thousand participants came to celebrate a global peacemaking force initiated by a women’s grassroots movement. While the federal government’s color-coded terrorism alerts are based on classified degrees of manufactured fear, the CODEPINK alert, which calls for people to “wage peace,” takes as its base of action kindness, compassion, and transnational alliances,

as well as—*humor and creativity*. The *color*—a seemingly universal girly color—may at first appear as heavily gender-coded and harmlessly decorous. But as with all stereotypes whose taken-for-granted stories fall apart under scrutiny, it suffices to dwell longer with the functions and affective impact of pink to realize anew its transformative potential. Pink comes in many tints and tones, and the question remains, politically: *which pink? How pink*, when, and where?

Feminism is the new funny, so it is said by those involved. The movement’s manifold playful activities differ according to circumstances and contexts. How does it feel to be mature pink? The power of pink as initiated by women in the U.S. seems to carry at its core a long history predating their formation. It calls to mind the struggles of bereaved mothers and grandmothers around the world: the Algerian Mothers of the Disappeared, the ongoing call of the Tiananmen Mothers for a process of truth and reconciliation in China, or the more well-known struggles of the women of Juarez and Chihuahua in Mexico, and of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.

Here, as I see it, in a reverse scenario of color energies, the silent walk around the Plaza was begun by fourteen mothers in search of their missing sons and daughters on a historic Thursday afternoon in April 1977 and it has continued ever since, becoming a vital part of Argentina's modern history. The recurring scene is at once familiar and strange: to challenge their government, women young and old persist in walking quietly together for half an hour every week, wearing white bandanas recalling the diapers of their missing babies, or covering their heads in white scarves (as symbolic doves of peace). Las Madres, whose visually striking marches have been known to the world for over three decades, were thus encircling and dotting the Plaza de Mayo with white signs of motherhood, peace, and integrity, right in front the vividly pink presidential palace in downtown Buenos Aires.



Fig. 10: *The Fourth Dimension*, 2001. Digital, 87 min.

Today, some forty years later, the fight of the mothers of Argentina's disappeared continues as they still refuse to be silenced. Among the survivors, now in their eighties, those who can walk still march every Thursday and those who can't walk have been showing up in wheelchairs, holding their two thousandth rally in Buenos Aires on August 11, 2016, and marking the fortieth anniversary of their struggle in 2017.

All photos are from Trinh T. Minh-ha's installation and films, copyright Moongift Films

*Commissioned by the Feminist Art Coalition (FAC)*



Feminist Art Coalition (FAC) is a platform for art projects informed by feminisms. FAC fosters collaborations between arts institutions that aim to make public their commitment to social justice and structural change. It seeks to generate cultural awareness of feminist thought, experience, and action.

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