

## Promiscuous Time Traveling (on Leaving and Returns): A Conversation with Lin + Lam and Việt Lê

**LAURA KINA**

*On August 6, 2014, Laura Kina talked with the New York-based artist collaborative Lin + Lam (Lana Lin and H. Lan Thao Lam) about their 2010 installation Tomorrow I Leave and San Francisco-based artist Việt Lê about his 2012 Love Bang! music video. Their discussion explored queering time and their proximity to and distance from Vietnamese history and memory.*

**LAURA KINA:** Can you each introduce yourself?

**H. LAN THAO LAM:** Lin + Lam was “born” in 2000, so we are teenagers!

**LANA LIN:** We began working together as a multidisciplinary collaborative in New York City.

**HLL:** When we met in 2000, a conversation began, and we found that we share similar interests and politics having to do with feminism, postcoloniality, and critical discourse. What cinched our collaboration together was the way in which our varied backgrounds overlap, inform, and fill each other’s gaps. I studied architecture, and then I switched over to sculpture/installation, completing my MFA at CalArts in 1998. My practice has been interdisciplinary, but I hadn’t ventured into time except using some sound work in my installation. I hadn’t used moving images. Working with Lana helped me understand that relationship much better since her background is in experimental film and video. Currently, I teach at Goddard College MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts program.

**LL:** We shared a lot of mutual friends as well from going through the Whitney independent study program, which we did at different times. The first collaboration was what became *Unidentified Vietnam* (2006), which was based on these propaganda films in the South Vietnam Collection at the Library of Congress. That work was in progress when I received a Fulbright Grant to

make a project in Taiwan, which ended up being called *Departure* (2006) and was based around three postcolonial cities: Taipei, Shanghai, and Hanoi.

**HRTL:** I was born in 1968 in My Tho during the Tet Offensive. We moved around a tiny little bit; the last place we lived was Saigon. I left Vietnam with my father and three sisters in 1980. We landed in Malaysia, Pulau Bidong. Then we were transferred to Kuala Lumpur. We then settled in Vancouver, Canada. In 1986, my mother and my younger sister joined us in Vancouver. We then moved to Toronto, where the rest of my family still is.

**LL:** I was born in Montreal, Canada, in 1966. When I was two years old, my family moved to Naperville, Illinois, which is a suburb of Chicago. I went to University of Iowa in Iowa City for my undergrad. In 1988 I came to New York and was working for the Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation on a documentary, and I did some film production assistant jobs. Then I decided to go to Bard College to study film, where I earned my MFA in 1996. I was studying psychoanalysis for a number of years at a psychoanalytic institute, and I wanted to bring that into my art and research. I am currently in the doctoral program in media, culture, and communication at New York University. I've also been teaching at Vermont College of Fine Arts since 2006.

**LAURA KINA:** How did the two of you meet Việt Lê?

**HRTL:** We met Việt through Yong Soon Min when they were curating *TransPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix* [an international traveling exhibition, which included work by Lin + Lam and opened first at ARKO Arts Center, Seoul, Korea, 2007].

**VIỆT LÊ:** I'm an artist, academic, and curator. I was born in Sài Gòn or Hồ Chí Minh City, in Việt Nam in 1976 and then immigrated to the United States around 1980. I was a "boat refugee." My dad went to the United States to study, and then my mom and I escaped on our own and joined him in Orange County after we left Thailand, where we were at an educational camp for six months. I did my MFA at University of California, Irvine, in 2001 and was teaching there for a bit in the studio art department and did some residencies. I earned my PhD from the University of Southern California in 2011 from the Department of American Studies and Ethnicity. I was living in Asia for a while—five or six years—[and] Europe for about a year. Part of it was for research. I was in Việt Nam for a Fulbright, then Cambodia at the Center for Khmer Studies and in Taiwan for a postdoc at Academia Sinica. I recently moved to San Francisco, for the past two years, to teach at the California College of the Arts. I'm in the visual studies program and the visual and critical studies graduate program.

**LK:** I found it interesting that in all of your biographies, it's transnational. There are multiple countries you have each lived in and many different ways you could position yourselves. I'm curious how each of you identifies at this moment in time?

**HLL:** It is a seemingly simple question, but it is also deeply complicated. I don't think I can identify myself as Asian American because I'm not an American citizen. I'm a Canadian citizen. I'm not a Vietnamese citizen anymore, but I never feel connected to the Canadian Asian community either. Queering is very much the way I negotiate the spaces of the politics of nationality and identity.

**LL:** In terms of nationality, I identify as Asian American or Taiwanese American, though I recently did recover my Canadian citizenship because I was born in Canada. In terms of gender, I identify as queer. In terms of practice, I identify as an artist/scholar. But identity is very fluid and constantly changing.

**LK:** Lana and Lan Thao, earlier you mentioned that feminism was a connection for your practices. Is that something you form your own identity around as well?

**LL:** If asked, I would always claim being a feminist. But I don't identify, for instance, as a feminist artist. Nor do I identify as a queer artist or an Asian artist. I like to think about these terms more independently, and my art practice and scholarship independently from the other identities that I have and occupy.

**HLL:** Yeah, I don't think it would be possible for me to claim one identity. I also don't identify myself as an artist as Asian American or even Asian Canadian. In my work I don't find that I am showing in the queer community either.

**VL:** I'm always thinking through identifications, plural, and disidentification à la José Muñoz and thinking about my subject position.<sup>1</sup> As a cultural arts organizer, I also think about how cultural producers or academics position themselves or get positioned. It's something I am constantly questioning or queering. Depending on the situation and location, I do identify as a queer Vietnamese, or Vietnamese American, artist-scholar-cultural activist. It changes. It's fluid and morphing. In Việt Nam, I and other Southeast Asian artists are called to represent a geographic location (i.e., Việt Nam or Cambodia). There are a lot of artists who were educated in the United States or born in the United States who move elsewhere and get positioned as a representative of that country. Sometimes that happens to me. Sometimes I'm seen as Vietnamese. Sometimes I'm Vietnamese American. In terms of my academic work, a lot of the work deals with trauma and modernization—the traumas of history and modernity. Although I address gender in my academic

work, I deal more with queer issues in my creative work. There's a sort of bifurcation there. I'm also questioning the politics of identity and having to negotiate that; what institutions and structures situate you—it's something that I'm always "queering," and also resistant to.

**LK:** I want to talk about queering time and ask about your artwork: Việt, your 2012 music video *Love Bang!* (plates 11, 12), which you have described as a "time traveling, trans, love triangle," and Lin + Lam, your 2010 work *Tomorrow I Leave* (plate 9), which is about thanatourism (death tourism) but the title is also based on a song. I think there is a connection between your works in terms of music and how that relates to time.

**VL:** *Love Bang!* comes from some of my curatorial work and also my academic work, trying to figure out what is the gap between historical trauma and pop culture, particularly pan-Asian popular culture. It seems like many people don't talk about past wars, but there is such an obsession with pop music, and I was wondering what was the relationship. I had been making these faux Asian boy band posters [*boy bang / gang band* series] looking at desire, transnational audiences, and (homoerotic) affect. To echo anthropologist Lisa Rofel, what is the relationship between national and consumer desires?<sup>2</sup> What's the connection between the body and the political body? Baudrillard's "hyperreal"—more real than the real—meets realpolitik.<sup>3</sup>

So I decided to make a real fake music video trilogy. This is the first installment. It's trilingual "hip pop"—a fictitious cross between hip hop and pop. The allegorical characters represent the triangulated relationship between Vietnam, Cambodia, and the United States. I was thinking about how time and space is compressed and there are these ever-present pasts. Even though the video is a very fluffy pop video, these traumatic vestiges are still there. I was reading "Bliss" Cua Lim and thinking about conceptions of time and "Jack" Halberstam's conception of queer time—it's not necessarily a linear teleological time, but it's disjunctured time.<sup>4</sup>

In the video the characters move back and forth in time. The main character, she's a nightclub singer but she imagines her ideal lover, who is fighting this war back forty years ago—this year is the fortieth anniversary of the Việt Nam War—and they reunite in the future. It's this congestion and compression of time that I think happens in both developing countries and developed countries—also thinking about discrepant modernities and how that works. There's not one vision or version of modernization.

**LK:** Việt, could you describe the narrative arch and the aesthetics of the video? I'm particularly interested in the "Charlie's Angels (of History)" scene and poster for the video (plate 11).

**VL:** *Charlie* was a term for a communist that was used by US soldiers during the Vietnam War. I was thinking about the seventies television show and of Benjamin's "angel of history"<sup>5</sup>—how do we think about history in the present moment? He talks about this wreckage of the past. There are these trans performers at my favorite nightclub in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Classic Night, and they do a sort of ethnic play—so they're Khmer performers but they sometimes perform in Vietnamese, South Asian, or Thai costumes or outfits. I was just thinking about how this play or "drag" is rehearsed and how people identify or disidentify. There are a lot of Chinese as well as Vietnamese, Americans, Thai, Australians, and Koreans, among others—living, working, and investing—in Cambodia. I am compelled by the interrelated relationships between these countries, transnationally and regionally.

In terms of the visual, I was interested in developing this hyper pop, saccharine aesthetic to talk about this overlay of popular culture but then using humor or parody or play as a strategy to think about the twin traumas of history and rapid development of a society. It's a sort of veneer. For instance, in Vietnam there are all of these "propatainment" films that are about sexy supermodels or love stories and are "innocent," but they really talk about some other issues with these moralistic story lines. The video is intentionally disjunctured so there is not a real narrative. When I was working to come up with an original song with the songwriter—the music producer—I told him it was basically a love triangle narrative. The Khmer performer has a Vietnamese club manager (a cameo by yours truly) who is abusive, and she thinks about the past and this ideal dream lover, and they all reunite. It's this disjunctured narrative. I was thinking about how people think about their place living in Asia or even here in the United States—everything butts up against each other. There is no "this is the past, this is the present, this is the future." I think it's all in one space—third worlds exist in first worlds, etc. I was really interested in that mash-up. It's a temporal mash-up and musical mash-up. I use different songs . . . Khánh Ly—this Nancy Sinatra song she covered in French in Vietnamese, and other different covers—Stevie Nicks, that kind of stuff.<sup>6</sup>

**LK:** And the video is in three different languages.

**VL:** I directed it in Cambodian, in Khmer—the rap part is in Khmer. The first opening sequence is in Vietnamese, this Vietnamese song. The refrain is in English. Part of the beat is from a Stevie Nicks song from the seventies. It talks about this transnational movement of culture, memory, cultural production—how it gets absorbed and then reconfigured.

**LK:** The "ideal lover" is this figure with horns right?

**VL:** Yeah, ideal or imaginary or past. It's a metaphor for the relationship between those countries and the relationship between the past, present, and future and trying to reconcile that.

**LK:** The video is shot in several different settings, and one of them is this amazing architectural space (plate 12).

**VL:** That is actually supposed to be this sci-fi space. It was built by this Japanese architect, and it is this library that is housed on the grounds of a Buddhist temple. There is this traditional temple and then this space, and it's actually not being used as a library—other people use it as a space for rehearsal, things like that. Parts of it are still unbuilt. It was built in seventies. So there are a lot of modernist gems in Phnom Penh by Khmer “starchitects” such as Vann Molivann. So thinking about that past, this idea of the vision of the future back then in the seventies and what modernism meant and this building boom and then looking at it now—what this idea of futurity means. It's an amazing building. Parts of it were filmed in the nightclub. Parts of it were filmed in Koh Pich, “Diamond Island,” where there is the sand and it's also being developed—that part. Thinking about trauma—people being displaced to have these mega high rises and strip malls built.

**HLTL:** I was actually really curious about the architecture because of this kind of modern ruins.

**VL:** It's also this projected fantasy space. For me, the architecture and settings were also characters—the nightclub or this space; you can't pinpoint what it is. I wasn't interested in saying, “This is Cambodia or Vietnam.” It can be anywhere—this imaginary setting. What are the ruins when you think about discourses on modernity? What happens after social political change? What happens when regimes change and these discourses shift? I was interested in thinking about that as well. This idea of ruins is also relevant in Lin + Lam's pieces *Even the Trees Would Leave* (2005) in these former refugee sites, and *Tomorrow I Leave* as well. I was wondering about the relationship of modern ruins in your practice.

**HLTL:** We are both really drawn to it. It's a kind of space that the residue, the marker of time, history, and experiences can be seen but also not seen until you focus on it. At the refugee camp on Pulau Bidong, with all of those ruins, we were actually able to enter the buildings, which, from what I could surmise, were houses reserved for the Malaysian officers—spaces where Vietnamese refugees were not permitted. Now that they are ruins, I can enter.

**LL:** What's interesting to me about the ruin is that it carries at least two different temporal positions—both the present and the past simultaneously. When we go to these sites of ruin, they are so charged with history, but we are there in the present moment documenting their current space.

**VL:** And it's interesting that these are also trauma tourist sites. I haven't been back to the refugee camp where I left, but Lana, I think you were talking about thanatourism [at a lecture at Vermont College of Fine Arts], and then oftentimes in these sites. . . . Other people have written about how the past or the politics of the past get evacuated, like the Củ Chi Tunnels, so it becomes this site in some ways for people who didn't go through that trauma, a site of spectacle or of projection. I'm not sure what you feel about these thanatourism sites or that discourse around trauma?

**LL:** I think that's absolutely true about those certain sites like the Củ Chi Tunnels because they definitely are marketed as tourist sites. The ones that Lan Thao and I have visited are a little more complicated because they are not so explicitly marketed as tourist sites, though there are reunion tours returning to former refugee camps in Malaysia. But they seem more layered because there isn't a huge commercial production going into reconstructing those sites or marketing them. The former refugee camps in Hong Kong are tourist sites for a different purpose. They've been transformed into golf driving, recreational centers.

**HLTL:** It becomes more of a space that is reclaimed for Hong Kong people. At Pillar Point, which is in the New Territories area of Hong Kong, it seems to me to be very complicated. One of the reasons why we wanted to visit these former refugee camps is to see what they are like now, while also looking for what was there. For *Tomorrow I Leave*, the notion of returning and tourism was very much on our minds. We made postcards from photographs we took at former refugee camps in Malaysia and then sent them back to the exhibition in Hong Kong. In that way, we utilized this touristic medium of the postal service, before e-mail and Twitter and Facebook was popular. Also that was a mode of communication for some Vietnamese refugees. It was the quickest way to let people know you have safely escaped.

The other component in the installation is the video, which includes Khánh Ly singing "Biển nhớ." This song played regularly over the camp intercom as people left and arrived on Pulau Bidong. From my research, it seems like other camps in Malaysia also used that tune. It's such a heart-wrenching emblem of Vietnamese 1970s pop music and was banned after the war ended. The first line of the song is "Ngày mai em đi," or "Tomorrow I leave." It's about a calling, a recognition and letting go, and yet thinking about the ones left behind.

**LK:** You created this installation in 2010. Where was the exhibition at?

**LL:** It was at 1-A Space in Hong Kong. That's where we sent the postcards from Malaysia, to this gallery space, which is part of the Cattle Depot Artist Village in Hong Kong.

**LK:** What inspired you to make this piece as a collaborative team? I know you both have independent practices as well. How do you know when it needs to be a piece you make together?

**LL:** We had already made a piece called *Even the Trees Would Leave* (2005) that Việt referred to, which documented how former refugee camps in Hong Kong have been transformed into driving ranges and family barbecue recreation centers. That came about just because we were in Hong Kong in 2005 and somebody had told us that the Pillar Point refugee camp in the New Territories had closed in 2000. We were really curious, and we made the trip out to the New Territories, and we got off at the bus stop where the bus stop sign still had the name "Pillar Point Refugee Camp" on it even though it had been closed for five years. That project was a photo and text narrative piece. When we had the opportunity to come back to Hong Kong in 2010, we had read about the reunion tours where former refugees were returning to visit their camps. So we thought we would visit Lan Thao's former camp in Malaysia. That's how that project came about. In terms of "queering time," we gravitated towards the title *Tomorrow I Leave* because in thinking about the ways in which people are returning, it's thinking about a time in the past but which always held this promise for the future—this hope to be leaving and find a home somewhere else. The project speaks to this duality, or maybe even more than duality, between present, past, future—this multiplicity in temporality.

**LK:** Lan Thao, what was that experience like returning to the refugee camps, and do we see your personal perspective on that in the installation?

**HLTL:** Because we did a lot of research online, gleaning from people's blogs about their experiences of returning to the camps or seeing for the first time the camps where their parents were interned, I don't think it was emotional for me in the same way because I was already thinking about these issues, and I wasn't there that long. I was at each of the camps just a few months, although it was a very formative experience for me. I did learn a lot about community organizing and activism. Seeing the island from the other side, seeing Pulau Bidong from the main island, that was actually probably the strangest experience because of the distance and also proximity to the past. Also it was strange knowing I was on the other side looking at this side some thirty years ago. I arrived on the island late May 1980 and we were there in June 2010, so it was almost an anniversary.

There were a couple of things that happened when we were in Malaysia. We tried to contact the tour operator to take us to Pulau Bidong, but just the two of us wouldn't be worthwhile for them to take us. Also we needed more time on the island. The tour would be a package with snorkeling and lunch somewhere else, but all we were interested in was Pulau Bidong. In Kuala Lumpur, by chance we met one of the architects who built some of the structures at the transit camp, Sungei Besi, in Kuala Lumpur. At that time, during the eighties, he was an architecture student. He made some drawings for us of what he could remember of the corrugated-metal two-story housing that was the main mess hall, where we had the kitchen cafeteria and community center. He was in his late eighties and a retired architect that we just happened to meet through word of mouth when people were asking us why we were in Kuala Lumpur but not interested in other tourist sites. We ended up hiring a cab to drive us around to look at these empty parking lots with a lot of jackfruit trees that have grown around the perimeter, and they were just ripe and for the taking and I was like, "But we have to shoot the video!"

**LK:** You were twelve years old when you left. How long were you there?

**HLTL:** For each camp, a few months. We got to Canada in the fall of 1980, so maybe six months.

**LK:** Did seeing the camps thirty years later change your original memories?

**HLTL:** No, because one is now a parking lot that is hardly used. The other is in total ruins that I couldn't navigate. We could only get to certain parts—nature had reclaimed the island in this incredible way that bore little resemblance to what I knew. Being a twelve-year-old, I remember snorkeling and seeing the fish.

**LL:** Certain continuities remain. There were some things that remained the same, from what you've told me, like the seashells. We actually collected some of the seashells and rocks from the island for the installation.

**LK:** In seeing the ruins overtaken by the jungle, I'm wondering if you had any feelings about your own age and mortality and how much time has passed?

**HLTL:** We made two or three trips to Pulau Bidong. We hired a local fisherman with a little motorboat to take us there and back, and we paid him for his time. On that last trip, the weather was perfect—clear skies—but then they raced around and looked for us and told us a storm was coming. We quickly wrapped up our gear, put it into waterproof bags, and got back on the boat. The sea did change. The weather got windier, the waves got really rocky—we felt every single wave and bump, and I remember hanging onto the boat and thinking, "If I die here, it'd be really absurd and I'll be really, really mad! Here

again, thirty years later, I'm just here to do an art project and what would happen if the boat flipped, and we are both not strong swimmers." That moment of mortality was very clear to me.

**LK:** Việt, can you address how your work challenges representations of contemporary Vietnam in relation to the Vietnam War?

**VK:** This year is the fortieth anniversary of the Việt Nam War, or the American War. I grew up with all of these stereotypes of the Việt Nam War because I don't actually have any memories, only embodied memories, of the war. My memories are from American films about the war—*Apocalypse Now*, *Deer Hunter*, that kind of stuff. As Marita Sturken writes about it, for a lot of North Americans and a large part of the world, those depictions are engrained in popular consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Living in Việt Nam and then having to come back and thinking about the communities that have left and returned, I'm thinking again about this idea of return. I was interested in what that looked like. In my video piece, which is also an installation, I really wanted to play with these expectations of what this topography would look like—rethinking what love, "trauma," and popular culture would look like and also playing with form.

We were talking about Khánh Ly—the original song was a cover of Nancy Sinatra's "Bang Bang" (1966), but in her song it's this metaphor for war, this lover of hers and the violence of war. That song was also banned. It's called "Golden Music"; thinking about the communities who would listen to that song when it was banned during the war but then subsequently in diasporic communities and what these songs or this mass media means—it's a connection but also a disconnection. I also think about the Việt Nam War, other past wars and US military occupations, our current wars in the Middle East and their overdetermined connections (between Việt Nam and the Middle East). US military engagement and occupation—past and present—and those connections are something I really ruminate on besides the hypervisible representations of people suffering and dying—this spectacularization of violence; thinking about the mundane or other sites of these traumas we don't normally think about—popular culture, and the different audiences for them.

**LL:** Việt, it's really interesting that you used "Bang Bang," because we also used it in our earlier work *Unidentified Vietnam* (figure 2.1, plate 8).

**VL:** I think Nguyễn Tân Hoàng, the experimental filmmaker, has also used Khánh Ly's "Bang, Bang" and "Biển nhớ"—it's a popular genre.

**HLL:** In *Unidentified Vietnam*, we use the version by Thanh Lan, and she sang it in French. We also used Cher's cover. Her music video was filmed on the Intrepid in New York, which is so bizarre.

I guess I can't really speak so well or as fluently as Viêt on contemporary Vietnam. I came back once during the time we were in Southeast Asia in 2005. When we were working on *Departure*, I went to Hanoi and Saigon and visited family. I think my position as an artist has been that when I make a work about the Vietnam War—it is such a contested space—that I'm not representing the past as the history has been written but to find some crevices. Maybe this is what queering it has meant for me—to find a different place rather than the binary opposition.

**LL:** Lan Thao, your work *Tracing Echoes* (1998–2008), a solo piece, really brings up this notion of how memory is variable and contested, so that there is no one memory that captures the authoritative version of the past. Just to add to the use of the song “Bang Bang,” similarly we like to cite or to appropriate because we are interested in notions around translation, which parallel the idea that memory isn't fixed—that there are different translations, different interpretations of the past and present.

**LK:** Viêt, earlier you talked about the veneer of pop, and in Lin + Lam's *Tomorrow I Leave* there is a look of anthropology with the display of artifacts. Viêt, you distribute your video on YouTube, so if someone just stumbled across it, they would probably just consume it at face value. I also saw it as part of an installation in *Past, Present, Future Imperatives: Queer Space Time* at Sabina Lee Gallery in 2012 in Los Angeles. What experience are you hoping to elicit from your viewers?

**VL:** I'm interested in questions of audience and questions of translation, so like the multiple platforms and reads that it has, so some people who don't have access to Khmer or Vietnamese on a certain level can have a take on what it is, and I was hoping that on YouTube it would go viral and function as a straight-up music video. In film festivals, it's done a lot of experimental, queer film festivals, and that's a different read, and thinking about this idea of queer or queering Asian / Asian America or Asian Canada, I was thinking also about how the term *queer* and gay identities are situated within Southeast Asia or Asia and coupled with national discourse, and how that rises and its development, especially thinking about Western queer identity shifts in different other contexts in Asia and Southeast Asia. It's a different form of identification than what we think of as these identities that we have now in terms of queer politics—that there are these multiple identifications.

**LK:** Viêt, you used the phrase *drag* earlier in reference to the three trans characters in the video. Can you tell me what terms you would use to describe them?

**VL:** Well, I was talking about ethnic drag, mainly. They take on different ethnic identities. That was just a way for me to think about the interrelated

investments. In Cambodia, Koreans are the number one tourists in the region, and there is Japanese and Vietnamese investment, as well as Americans spending dollars, so these regional/transregional interactions. Of course, I'm interested in trans and queer identities/identifications, but I'm also thinking about transformation and change within the region as well.

**LK:** Is there anything culturally specific I need to understand—is this burlesque, is this drag, or a whole other thing?

**VL:** When you speak to the performers, they might identify in different ways. You know in Vietnam or the Philippines there isn't this "gay, straight, queer," there's *baklá*, some people do identify as queer or gay, but then in different contexts they identify as different things. This discourse around visibility and rights may shift. In Cambodia there is a lot of queer LGBT visibility, and some of that is through NGOs, but there is also resistance to it. There is this discourse of this Western gay/lesbian hegemonic identity that's being imported, so discussions around that and what does that mean? What does that look like? Being careful to think about the situated politics in the region—that's not one thing, that's multiple and shifting. And other people have written about it. Eng-Beng Lim writes about Singaporean queer identity as being this pink capital that is being used by the state to cover other human rights discourses.<sup>8</sup> Việt Nam is similar. Over ten years ago, gays were officially seen as a "social evil," along with gambling, prostitution, AIDS, things like that. But now there is an embrace of LGB, queer, and trans identity to embrace the pink dollar and pink capital, and also to address human rights discourse. Going back to this veneer, what are these discourses around sexuality, gender, pop culture—what does it cover up? It's a sort of soft power or soft politics.

**LK:** Lan Thao, you were saying earlier that your queer identity isn't present in your collaborative process, but it's more about a strategy or process or intellectual engagement.

**HRTL:** We haven't made any explicitly queer art. I do self-identify as queer.

**LL:** We worked with drag in *Unidentified Vietnam*. Lan Thao reenacted different female and male parts from these propaganda films. We thought of this in the conventional sense of drag but also a temporal drag.

**HRTL:** The way in which we work is very project specific and research driven, so decisions about the ways in which we form the project are informed by the material, by the information that we gather, and then our conversation with each other and also with the material. In that way, I think we are also queering collaboration too, because we have an open relationship when it comes to collaboration. At every beginning of a project, or a kernel of an idea, we check

in with each other, and there is a discussion if the other person is interested—whether, in fact, this is a Lin + Lam or a solo project. So I'd never expect that Lana will be working on something that I find more interesting.

**LK:** Do you collaborate with other people?

**LTL:** I have in the past but not since I met Lana and we've been working together.

**LK:** So maybe it's a "common law" collaboration at this point?

**HLL:** Yes, I guess we are not so promiscuous!