overhearing water

Mong Lan
overhearing water

ears pressed i listen
the drowsy delta
sea-salt deep in my nostrils
used for the morning & evening meals
water pumped from the sewage the streets
rush down legs
& alleyways (rooms wet from thought)
clink against
sodden sidewalks odored
with my hair as i wash upon rising
clothes washed scrubbed
sound of tubs
agreeing in the sudsy hands
of a woman her willful children about her
i want to dream but i hear
women pailing men pumping
ion luring ion
electron repulsing electron gurgling
feet always wet faces hands

winter comes
we wash in the cold
in doused nights
seasick the straw mat on which at midnight a cat tramples
i want to breathe but what breath

a woman still washes her husband's and daughter's clothes
wringing the clothes hushed

between life & death
i hear poured into round tubs
emptied choke
of water tub against concrete
the woman rinses her hands & feet
between day & night  
sounds of gravity  
at 5:30 the first person wakes  
to rinse her phlegm mouth  
noise of work begins  
with an avalanche of insomnia  
morning drunkenness slippers  
& mothers prodding their children to school  
i see the wash of smoke & tv ash radio  
music bellowing  
the seventies the eighties Brothers in Arms  
a dusky voice like a flower hanging  
& the girl downstairs begins to wash her endless  
ebony hair  

the walkway leading to the 22 families' houses  
rivulets roving down roof  
concrete algae-green  

overhearing water  
Hà Nội's innards alchemize to jade