



## FORMLESS

How the body, back then, was un-female. How the body, back then, was unmarred by the ridged PINK welts that growing into cotton binds have left. How the body, back then, had no way of knowing the relegation to secondary the bodies around it felt, the same relegation it would soon feel, under the blue suffocating sky of home. Home. How the body did not know, back then, the painted picture of home would be so dramatically shattered, by an older body growing first into female, and then this body, *the* body, being joyously, tightly bound in the same white cotton. How the body, back then, didn't know how *home* shifts beneath the feet and behind the eyes. How the protruding flesh, the bumps and spills of body, how they are then ripe for cutting, like mangos careening off the back of a motorbike. How the body did not know when it saw its fate as the green forms rolled and burst into sickly vibrant orange.

## S T A R I

The star a difficult shape to draw, I discovered, after filling a page with star-shaped mockeries. The last turn is the point of failure.

Familiarity is challenging to conjure from this body.

The form of things, the shape, that appears inherent in an existence marked by presence.

Fingers trace the shape and fail. Ridges.

Hoàn Kiếm Lake glistens with the reflection of fireworks, celebrating the thousand-year anniversary of Hà Nội.

Memory is soft, like the silk ribbon tied joyously around a forehead, with

I ♥ Việt Nam

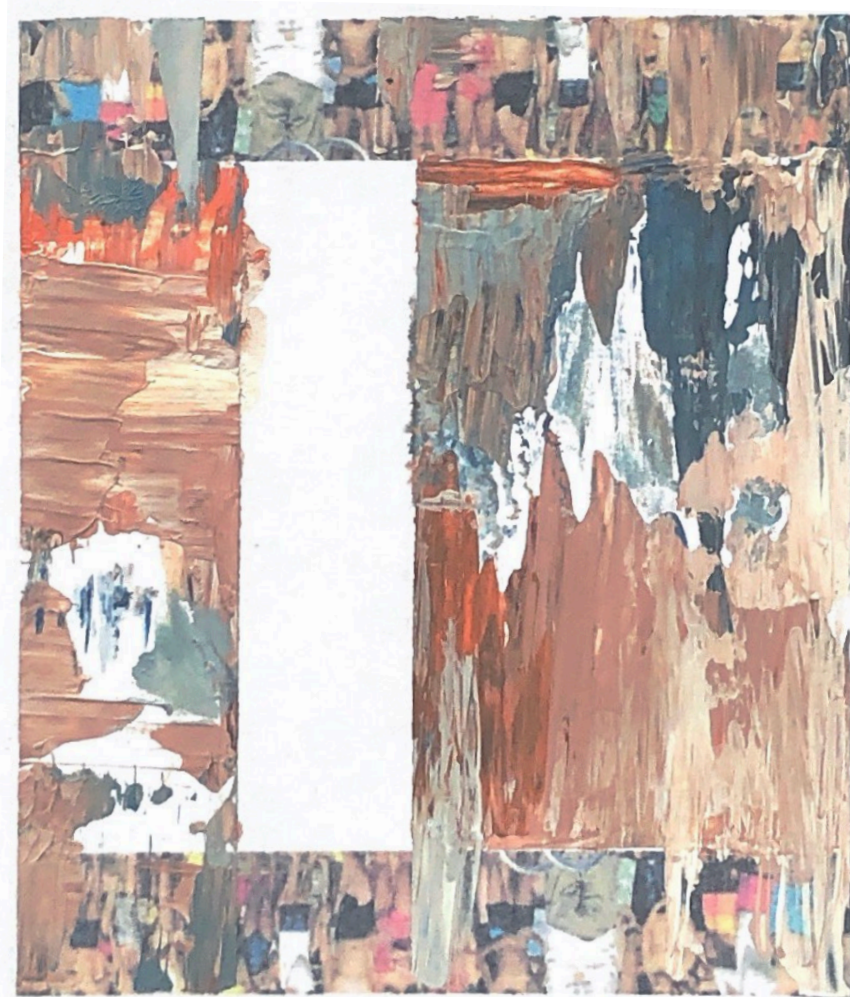
screened onto the cheap red fabric.



## RED I

The particular association of the color red with Communism can be dated to 1848...In the United States, during the period of the Cold War, the anti-Communist witch-hunt aggravated by McCarthyism became so intense that the term acquired its greatest force in formulations like the “red scare,” “reds under the bed,” and the nuclear disarmament slogan “Better Red than Dead.”...Unlike communist, which has retained a hostile but generalized currency, red is becoming obsolete...<sup>ii</sup>

W O M A N   A T   S A G   H A R B O U R <sup>1 2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> alternately titled: *what this body didn't see coming.*

<sup>2</sup> alternately titled: *v i o l e n c e in the form of art history*



## R U P T U R E <sup>iv</sup>

Sa pa is five hours outside of Hà Nội. To an eleven-year-old, this is the increment of infinity.

My bus seat was middle back, so as to leave my young mind unoccupied as the cityscape of Hà Nội melted into rurality. We stopped often to relieve ourselves. Bathroom accommodations were holes in the ground, with troughs feeding the waste backwards down and out.

We acquired sticks of sugar cane, a treat that I have never had since. The trick was to soften the fibrous reed in your mouth, so as to eventually chew through the stalk. I gulped at sweet spit; gorged myself to rupture.



## RED II

The particular association of the color red with Communism started in 1871, often called the Year of Revolutions. In that year, the most important and violent events, the Illustrated London News commented that 'Red Republicans' have justified their name: 'They have filled the streets of Paris with blood. The Working Class of Red Republicans' were imbued with the doctrine of Communism (January 7, 1848). Because communism has never posed a serious political threat in Britain, the term has never gained major currency in English political parlance; even today it is a term of abuse. However, both red and pink in the political sense of radical have often surfaced in political discussion, as is seen in this ironic passage by Thomas de Quincey a decade prior to 1848: "Amusing it is to see the... on any political work of Mr. Shepherd's... and to know... the only... of radicalism was then accounted deep, deep... (Fair's Magazine, July 2, 1837). The political definition of red in the Oxford English Dictionary is extremely broad: "a radical... or anarchist"; but is supported by very few quotations.

## S T A R II

[She] hasn't seen a star in ten years. Ten years, each day, she looks out the window  
relentlessly. [She] thought [she] saw one plastered to the wall  
through a window as the cityscape slid by, but it was just a  
communist propaganda poster, leftover from the Russian occupation  
of [Czechoslovakia].



Stars lay scattered at the feet of [her] consciousness, who is very  
pleasant (though also quite temperamental). Her skin is  
red, ripped, and pink. If you squint, you can see her  
the fog. She does not look down. [Her] hands are  
scarred from stars pressed into the palm, held outward and upward  
so as to accept the sharpness that dug twice into the heel of the hand,  
once into the calloused tissue that ridges between the thumb and  
middle palm, once into the supple exterior, where pinky and wrist  
are bridged, and once directly below the middle finger, bursting a  
blister.





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### R E D III <sup>vi</sup>

Hồ Chí Minh's dead body [is]<sup>3</sup> waxy. The men outside the mausoleum [tout] guns tipped with bayonets. The heraldry [is] typical of the armed forces seen throughout the city. Green, broad hats [are] crested with golden stars, green suits top green pants with Red<sup>4</sup> piping down the leg. The show room for his body [is] Red, floor to ceiling. Red oak siding and red oak banisters le[a]d the precession in a square through the room, pass[ing] first by the right side of his head, down to his feet, around, and out of the door on the left side of his head. Leading the infinite cortege [is] an armed guard. His green visage [is] dulled by the Red room. Flowers [are] placed distinctly around the glass encasing the body, behind the uncrossable barrier of red oak.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Verb tense has been reassessed to conform to Party values

<sup>4</sup> Capitalization structures have been followed by order of the Party

<sup>5</sup> The internet has gone down to accommodate diplomatic visitation for the weekend. Illegal access will return on Monday at 5 p.m. Be sure you have updated your version of TOR, as you will need version 6.1 to run Facebook and Skype.



## LOSS <sup>vii</sup>

My dad was fired on day 364 of his job in the center of the city.

We packed up the house, said our goodbyes, and went on.

Australia, for a moment, and then

Home.



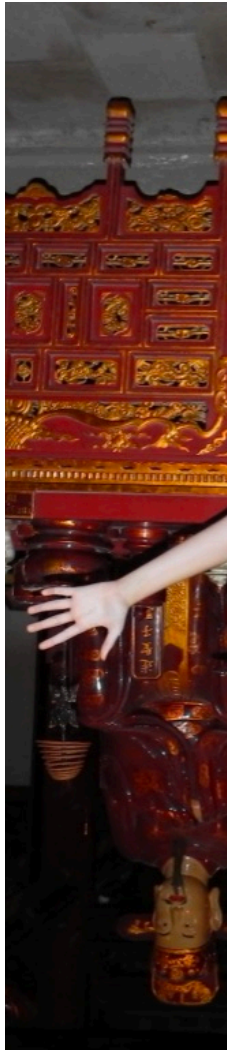
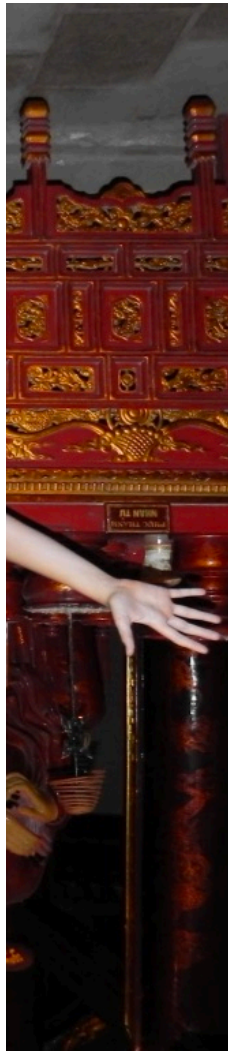
## VISIONS FROM HOME

Hank and Donna lived forty-five minutes away by taxi, fifteen by motor bike. We met them in a paint-your-own-lacquered-trinkets store set up for westerners. They live twenty minutes down the road from us, in another life.

That's all.

The lacquer has cracked in the dryness of Home.





## LUCY?

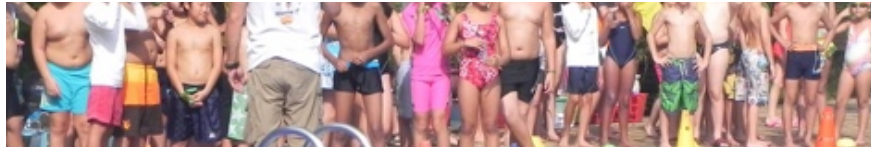
[She]<sup>viii</sup> hasn't seen a star in ten years. Ten years, each one passing relentlessly. [She] thought [she] saw one plastered to a wall, viewed through a window as the cityscape slid by, but it was just a communist propaganda poster, leftover from the Russian occupation of [Czechoslovakia]<sup>6</sup>.

Stars lay scattered at the feet of [her] consciousness, who is very small and often pleasant (though also quite temperamental). Her wings are pained, ripped, and pink. If you squint, you can see her flicker through the fog. She does not look down. [Her] hands are scarred from stars pressed into the palm, held outward and upward so as to accept the sharpness that dug twice into the heel of the hand, once into the calloused tissue that ridges between the thumb and middle palm, once into the supple exterior, where pinky and wrist are bridged, and once directly below the middle finger, bursting a blister.

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<sup>6</sup> Czechoslovakia, as requested by the Party

the metaphor Alfred Lord Tennyson in 1830 ("Blues and Reds they  
all'd of" (Blue being the symbolic color of the English  
conservative Party). A character in Humphry Ward's novel  
David Greave (1894) explains: "My father was a Red - an anarchist."  
1934). After the Russian Revolution (often referred to as "Red  
October") the term tended to be used in Britain of the militant  
Bolshevik party, and subsequently of an extreme socialist, usually  
in a sense of Tony Honan. In the United States, during the  
period of the Cold War, the anti-Communist witch-hunt aggravated  
McCarthyism became so intense that the term acquired its  
greatest force in formulations like the "red scare," "reds under the  
bed," and the nuclear disarmament slogan "Better Red than Dead."  
Hugh Rosen notes that in this paranoid period "the associations of  
red in the United States were so pejorative that some people strove  
to avoid the word even in nonpolitical contexts" (1991, 325). Unlike  
the term "blue," which has retained a hostile but generalized currency,  
red is becoming obsolete.



## LUCY

Lucy was half British, half Vietnamese. Her thick dark fringe framed bright eyes. Full lips and stock straight teeth. Her laugh was young but edged. She spoke Vietnamese with the same patterns she spoke English with; each blended with her command of the eyeroll, exhale, and the tongue click.

Memory has sloughed its pointed form onto our relationship. Even now, I am unsure of the form. Present-day-Lucy has the same teeth. Her eleven-year-old body is punctured with cigarettes.

Strange.

We were right for each other, in the way that two people can sometimes be. She was comfortable in her myriad skin and the only one in class who was better at swimming than me.

From the locker room, uneven ground winding through an ever-wet tile floor gave way to a large outdoor pool. Behind, inexplicably dry,

was a children's play area, with a green painted concrete frog that shot water from a tube in its mouth.

We sometimes message each other about the lives that could have been.

A PHOTO ESSAY ON BEHAVIOR



















# ABSENCE

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## THE PARTY<sup>7</sup>



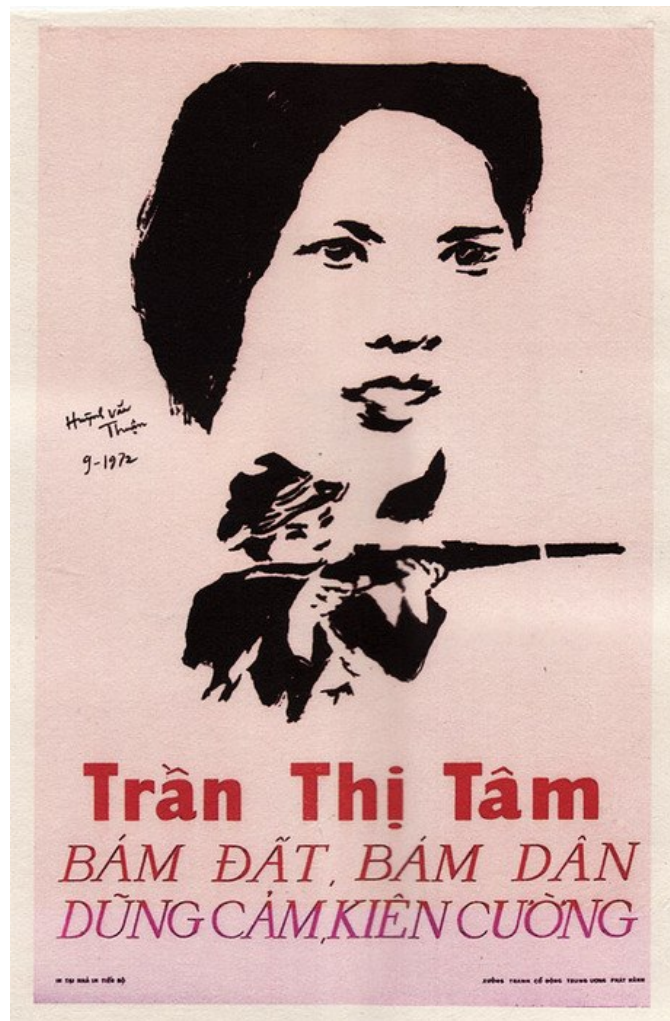
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<sup>7</sup> from the years 1954 to 1962 the U.S. Pavilion in Venice was owned by the Museum of Modern Art. This private ownership allowed for the circumvention of congressional approval for state-sanctioned propaganda. The Museum of Modern Art's international committee was then by extension given free rein to disseminate a propaganda movement consisting of a large body of Abstract Expressionism designed specifically to fight communism. The key stylistic distinction between Social Realism and Abstract Expressionism is the shape of the figure. Barnett Newman paints the human experience in the same way as Huynh Van Thuan.



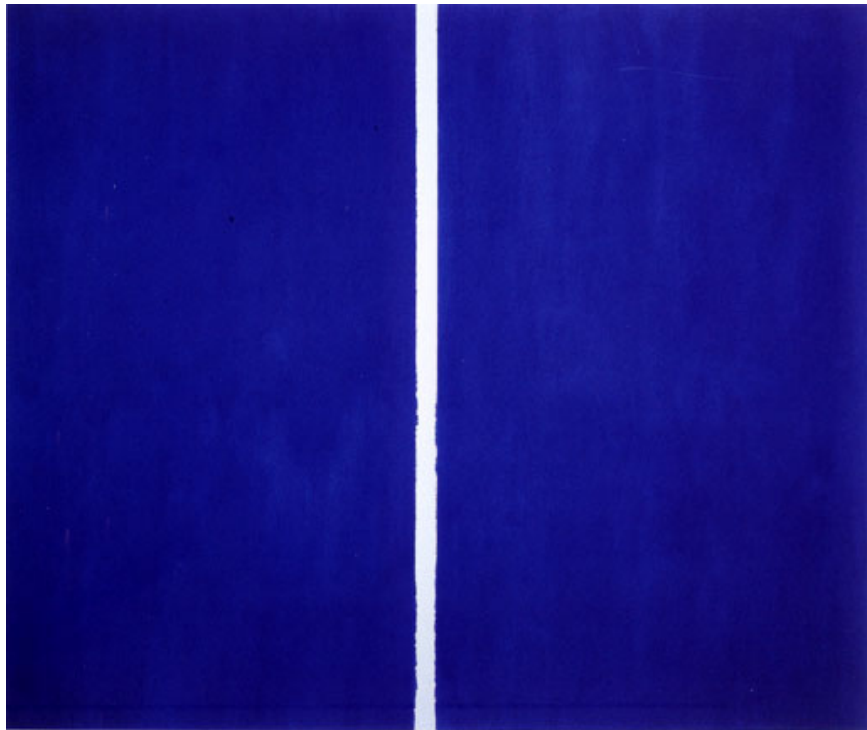




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<sup>8</sup> Vietnamese Propaganda appropriated the images and names of women such as Trần Thị Tâm, Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị who were iconographic symbols of the resistance to American incursion. How is the body (f.) used?









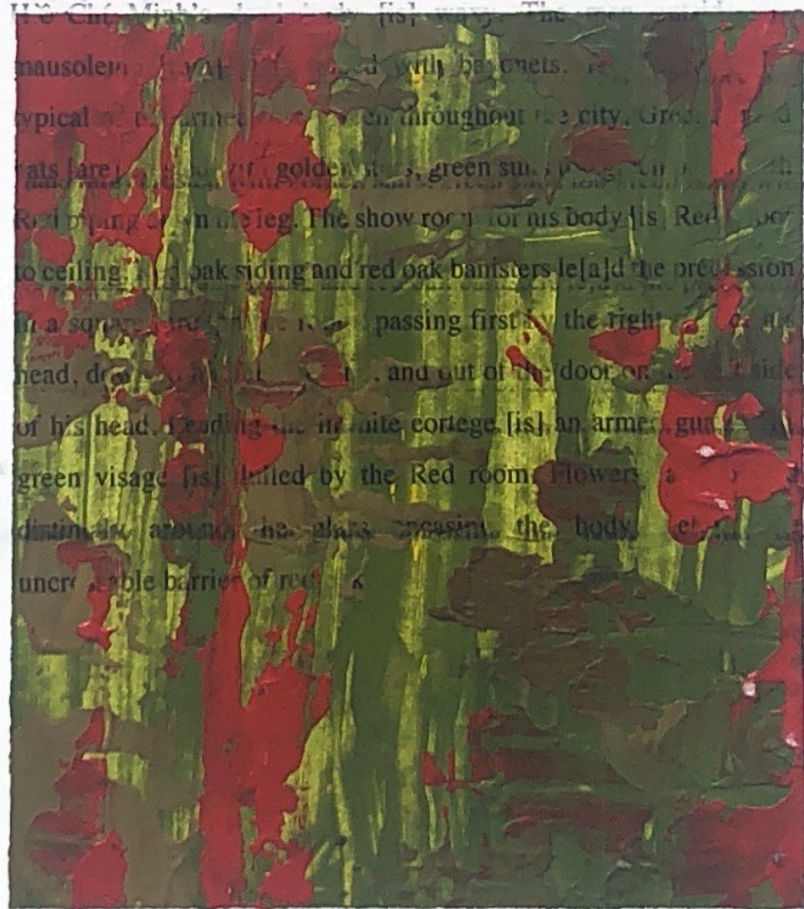


R

E

D

V





SILK SLIPS THROUGH MY FINGERS  
YEARS LATER<sup>xviii</sup>

Monsieur Bouffant was a corpulent man. He was gorged at the waist and seven feet tall. His hair and his stubble were white. He wore button up collared shirts, grey slacks, and dress shoes, which he kept on, despite the rats. He was jovial, boyish, inappropriate, and prone to indulging in life advice.

“I’ve been gone from France for eight years. Haven’t been back to see my daughter for eight years. I know it might seem like a long time to you now, but when you’re older, eight years will feel like nothing.”<sup>xix</sup>



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S T A R III

Five ridged arrow shaped scars point out

East

North West

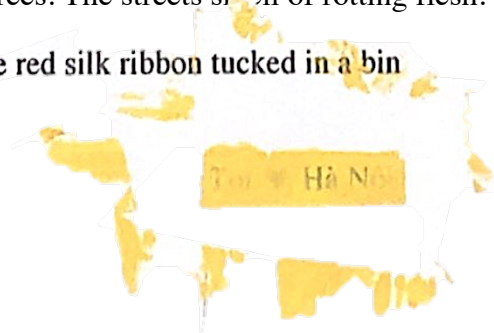
South East

South

North

scrambled from wind, mud, fire, and rain no doubt. The sound of  
rain pinging off of corrugated rooftops and pattering off waxy  
fronds of trees. The streets smell of rotting flesh.<sup>xxi</sup>

**I found the red silk ribbon tucked in a bin**



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End Notes:



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ii This section serves as a direct quote from Hughes, Geoffrey. *An Encyclopedia of Swearing: The Social History of Oaths, Profanity, Foul Language, and Ethnic Slurs in the English-Speaking World*. Routledge, 2006. Edits have been made for concise representation of the form and space. The text serves dually as an underlayer for the painted works titled RED I, II, III respectively.



<sup>iv</sup> The works of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Bhanu Kapil, bleed into this work. They ask how the body, often female, exists in a space. They are works written by women as women. This is a work written by woman as g-i-r-l in the way that that does not carry weight. But in the way it also does carry weight. This is a work on growing into identity through travel. And it is a work that does not acknowledge identity at all. It is a work on being formless during travel. It is a reflection on travel. But as I look to read and write through others, body seeps into the cracks, sharpens the edges of performance.

<sup>v</sup> “Hanoi Hilton,” explained my father as the wind rushed past my ears in our uncovered tuk-tuk ride.

<sup>vi</sup> this section speaks to heriberto yépez, the author that facilitated my first introduction to the deconstruction of grammatical structures contained an entire paragraph within brackets and asked me to consider grammar as oppression

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the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha closely followed with the visual performance of the word comma

<sup>vii</sup> “*Because markets and customers often set the price of goods and services, an alternative metric for utilization would be the final sales price divided by total production costs. In Australia, this is known as value for money (VFM). If VFM is less than 100%, it is impossible for an organization to earn a profit. A product must be sold at a price that is higher than its production costs. No producer can sell a product below cost over the long term. Reducing production costs and increasing prices can drive profitability.*” He writes furiously, cyclically, in an attempt to return home.<sup>vii</sup>

<sup>viii</sup> I have forgotten what I am writing towards. Who I am writing towards. The shifting nature of identity has caused this section to erupt. Substitutions have been made to accommodate the uncertainty of place.

<sup>ix</sup> Note here that Banu Kapil bleeds through this work. What does the vibrancy of trauma *look like*? *Ban en Banlieue* is a text I worked through during the writing of this paper. Contained on pages 18 and 19 are the color words

*rose, Ginger, dawn, black, pink-grey, red, red, peacock, earth, taxi, peacock, stained, white, red, charcoal, yellow, black, white, nude, dirt, yellow, bleeds, white, charcoal, PINK, pink lightning.*

The colors *do not stop*. They required that I interrogate my own work: how do the words look?

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<sup>xi</sup> Barnett Newman *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* 1950-51

<sup>xii</sup> Không có gì quý hơn độc lập, tự do. Poster tiếng Tây Ban Nha  
Translated: “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom.” Spanish poster. Art by Pham Guyah Giang, pencil, ink and tempera on paper; 35 1/2 x 23 1/ inches. *Image from: ĐN “Posters Tuyên Truyền Của Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng Hòa.”*

<sup>xiii</sup> 1972 poster by Huynh Van Thuan ‘*Trần Thị Tâm, Bám Đất, Bám Dân, Dũng Cảm, Kiên Cường.*’ Translated: “Tran Thi Tam bonds with the nation, bonds with

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the people, valiant, steadfast." *Image from: ĐN "Posters Tuyên Truyền Của Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng Hòa."*

<sup>xiv</sup> "Barnett Newman" *Onement VI*, 1953.

Vietnamese propaganda uses little to no blue

<sup>xv</sup> Poster by Le Tuyet in 1980 "Nobody loves Uncle Ho as children do, nobody loves children as Uncle Ho does." *Image from: ĐN "Posters Tuyên Truyền Của Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng Hòa."*

<sup>xvi</sup> Willem de Kooning *Woman at Sag Harbor*, 1964.

Alternately titled: V I O L E N C E

<sup>xvii</sup> Jasper Johns *Flag* 1954-55

<sup>xviii</sup> *But from time to time, in certain heightened states in certain individuals, the boundary between the chimeras seen in dreams and the discrete forms of waking life begin to blur. In these sudden rifts in the natural order of time, prodigies of vision in the guise of hybrid forms can appear briefly, before the critical faculty intervenes and the world rights itself again.* Teju Cole's *Blind Spot* (Page 96)

<sup>xix</sup> 2020 – 2011 = 9

<sup>xx</sup> The nature of the photographs and their ability to simultaneously inform and obfuscate can be seen in the documentary *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*. Directed by Jean-Paul Bourdier, Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Women Make Movies*, 1989. The basis on theory of photography in art comes from the book *The Beauty of a Social Problem* by Walter Benn Michaels:

*Thus the photograph establishes a distance from its subjects, and seeks to mirror that distance with the one it establishes from its viewers, making it impossible for us to identify by giving us no one to identify with, making the question of who its viewers are and how they feel as irrelevant as the question of who its subjects were and how they felt.* (Page 40-41)

<sup>xxi</sup> The star that is pervasive in Vietnamese culture represents five main classes intellectuals, farmers, workers, businessman and militaries. Additionally, Elements of Vietnamese culture originating in Taoist cosmology. The associations with Wood, Fire, Water, Metal, and Earth are varied, yet there are

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tendrils of memory of colors ascribed to each one. These memories were summoned forward in the link sent to me by my father during my preliminary research for the piece. Included with the email were two separate documents with cut and paste images. The first one, titled "Feng Shui" contained images of color-coded stars with the meanings behind each point. The second one was titled "asian-images" and included a variety of dragons, turtles, tigers, and photos of Edwards Deming. I have no idea why. I did not use these as a source.



## FORM

How the body is now, tied in knots. How the body is now, engaged with un-femaleness again. How the body now, sees art. How the body now, smells incense, and the sharp lines of age melt and the body is a child. And un-female. How the body is now, retaining. How the body is now, bound. How the mangoes from home have never been as sweet. How the body is now, breathing trauma. How the body is now, in transience. How the body is now, home-less. How the body now, knows. How the body now, has grown over the welts, leaving ugly recovery. But how the body is in recovery. How the body then insulated the body now.

