

Multiplicities

Thinking about the city, I recall recent places:
the taste of fish oil and coriander at night in Chả Cá,
marching with the young soldier to the mausoleum,
interview at the roofing factory, the bomb crater,
climbing the post office steps with the small child
begging, the lucky toe of the black Buddha. The city
in its entirety is unknowable; we traffic with details.

I can lose myself in the mind of Hanoi quite easily,
following this aimless street, that small dead-end alley,
stopping to watch a crowd or contemplate a jigsaw
of sky – occasionally wonder should I have brought
compass or provisions. Then, turning a corner, I find
myself in a vaguely familiar place, reading a landmark
that will lead me back to my starting point again.

This week I've walked for days – exploring the texture
of walls and colour of rain, the Revolutionary Museum,
the Happy News café. But the city is not just a place,
and can't be known simply through tracing the tracks
of the solitary mind, so sometimes I walk with a friend,
listening, or speak with passers by. At night I lie in bed,
sleeping on layers of stories, piled densely over each other.

Most evenings, I like to ride around the lake – circling
its muted reflections, its patchwork of old wars, new
economics, the persistent romance between moons
and lovers. While all cities enter memory, only a few
take hold of the heart. Though little of my own history
is in this city, here and now, tonight, it feels like home.
Travel is exploration, departure, but also, at times,
arrival, unexpected slivers of belonging.

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