

MY NIGHT, YOUR RADIO
MY NIGHT, YOUR RADIO
MY NIGHT, YOUR RADIO
MY NIGHT, YOUR RADIO

VEINS OF DUST: BODY, MEMORY, AND THE GHOSTLY CITY

A night time shape-shifting-
dead buildings stir back to life.
What has long been common knowledge swells into an elephant
in the room,
its weight evaded,
its silence turning into a body of ghosts.

A sigh, a brittle image,
fragments of voices, a low hum-
they scatter like decoys,
pulling me away from the pulse of the present.

Time unravels into separate scenes,
memory becomes an interface,
and in that fracture, the architectures of the dead rise again.

Ghosts return to the ruins,
the present entwines itself with history,
piercing through time,
prolonging its own presence,
resurrecting even the shape of the future.

ABSTRACT

A ghost lands in a modern city that epitomizes ancient female ghost narratives, the souls of demolished buildings, the emotions of repressed people, pseudo-diary and intertwined fictional perspective narratives that expose the tangibility of skin disorders, the faded memories of the city and the traces of modern ghosts. The research is aiming at reconstructing the relationship between the city and the body, by tools of poetry, 3d modeling, material experiments, music and AI.

In this project, I return to my lost hometown in search of a place for my body to rest. Because this city is as broken as I am, filled with allergies, weather, political situations, demolitions, and other traumatic events. Disease erodes the body, devouring emotions, the environment, the humidity of the air, and dust—these factors that land on the surface become the triggers for sensitive skin. Through the documentation of my autoimmune disorder and teenage memories, by autoethnography I interweave the body with the city, forming an intimate experience through honest and vulnerable diaries and poetry.

Artificial intelligence-generated images will be the thread that guides the narrative forward and a mirror projection of the emotions of the real chronicler - me. It is a way to escape reality, and a critical partner of reflection. It is an intermittent mechanism that covers the hometown in my memory with a vague cell membrane.

The fictional perspectives and experimental visual materials in the pseudo-diary are not meant to describe the exact same city in reality, but rather a lost, memory-filled hometown. It is constructed as a shell in the film “ANCHORS OF MEMORY”, an ideal sanctuary for the body, and a call to the homeland.

“WE TAKE RESPONSIBILITY ONLY FOR WHAT WE HAVE MADE OURSELVES—FOR A BREAK WITH THE NATURE AND CULTURE THAT FORMED US.” BORIS GROYS, THE OTHERS AND THE SAMES

RESERACH TRAJECTORY

My research began in the summer of 2023. In the winter of 2022, I was struck by a severe autoimmune skin disease, and I began searching for the sources of this uncontrollable bodily illness. As I traced back to my unwillingly recalled high school memories, I found myself returning to the industrialized city shrouded in fog that I remember—my hometown.

At the beginning of my research, I came across “ILLNESS AS METAPHOR” wrote by Susan Sontag, and I began to explore the impact of immune diseases on my body and the socialized metaphors of disease.

I find it necessary to reacquaint myself with my body, which is part of the process of embracing a treatment plan for a chronic illness. - The body is the cornerstone of life. The body is our ladder, the body is our battleground, the body is the responsive trajectory of our life behaviour. The body is the most pristine path to the self. At this stage, my work focused more on the intimacy between the self and the body. I created “BRUISES”, which combines moving images, poetry, and sound design for narration.

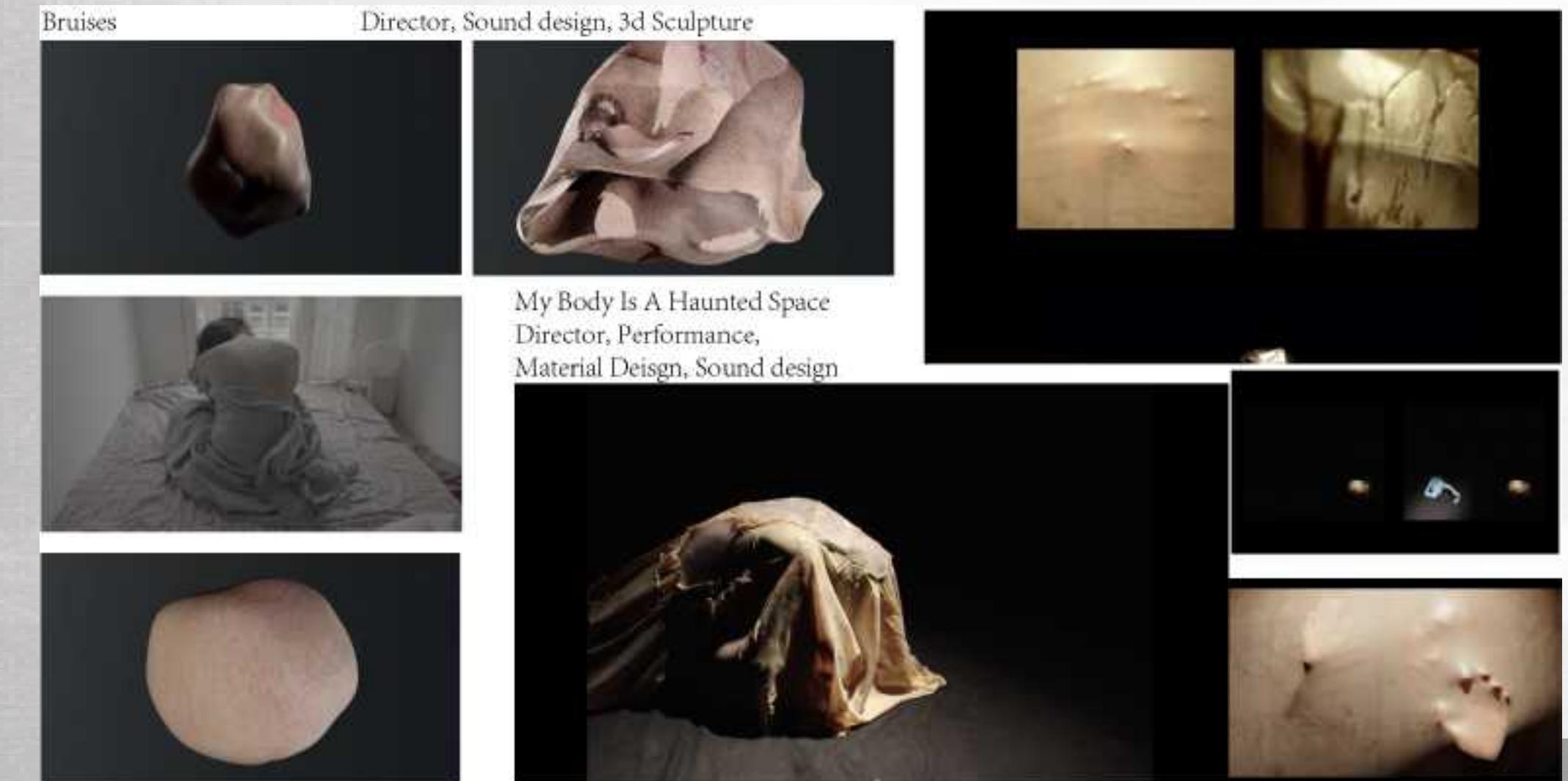
(Cinematograher: Letitia Popa).

Later on, I got fascinated by the concept of “bare life” . Bare life is a body stripped of meaning, a body stripped of humanity, a body stripped of the form and value of life, a body that is purely animal. (BARE LIFE, AGAMBEN,) It describes a disenfranchised body condition, a return to the "animal body". I felt similarly stripped when the pain of the disease was so great that it hit me. But this is not only a loss of control over my body, it is also a social isolation, I am "defined" by my illness, I become a socially alienated individual, I am no longer healthy, I am sick.

When one is ill, the pain of illness weighs on the body, and the long process of repeated treatments is a process of losing control of one's body, and thus one loses the right to own oneself.

The outbreak of my disease is rapid and violent, the alienation of my appearance by the skin disease makes it difficult for me to look at myself in the mirror during stages of my symptoms, and I went through the psychological process of rejection - pain - healing - abandonment - healing - acceptance. At one moment, I faced an eternal wrestling with myself as an outsider to myself. Through the shifting of my research trajectory, I wanted to complete some work expressing the struggles of my body. I wanted to describe the process of losing control of it, and the process for one fighting back to it. I produced “MY BODY IS A HAUNTED SPACE/ IT” , worked on poetry, performance, sound designs and material making.

(Cinematographer: Isabella).



"WHEN WILL WE BE ABLE TO DEFINE, IN THE SECRET DEPTHS OF THE BODY, THOSE STRUCTURES THAT DETERMINE THE COURSE OF ALLERGIC REACTIONS?" MICHEL FOUCAULT.

After experiencing a lack of winter sunlight, at the beginning of 2024, I suffered a renewed attack of somatisation - eczema reared its ugly head on my body. This made the subject of illness so urgent to me.

This time, I wasn't in China, I faced with the pressures of academics and housing crisis in Amsterdam, how can I heal myself again? Should my work move towards a daily depiction of physical illness? (One of the ways in which my chronic illness differs from ordinary illness is that it is lived with, that is to say, the person who is ill may not go to a designated place of isolation or treatment, or that the illness improves significantly at a certain point in time; it does not refer directly to death, or the end of life, but rather to the patient's living, experiencing a kind of chronic inflammation that has become everydayised.) Or do I continue to emphasise the manifest effects of illness on the ordinary body (i.e., the opposition of health to sickness)? At the beginning of 2024, I contemplated trying to escape the emphasis on illness, to get away from this subject of creativity - I suspect that the emphasis on the word might be exacerbating its onset.

But if I stop pointing to skin disease, where should my research go? And if it always comes back to me, how do I deal with the everydayisation of it while taking it as my research subject? The somatisation? At the end of 2023, in the midst of my treatment of illness, I othered it, and by doing so I tried to abstract it away from the self-to cope with its own otherness. But what if it always kept coming back to me? If chron-

-ic inflammation is seen as a maladaptation of the patient's approach to the external system, am I experiencing subliminal self-exploitation? How do I define slow violence against the body?

At this stage, I am fascinated by the idea of "the image on the surface of the skin." On one hand, creation is an embodied experience for me, but when the body feels disoriented, If want to maintain a certain distance from the image I will be creating. On the other hand, as I did deep research about Haptic Cinema- "Where touch is not just deep within the skin, but can be experienced on the body's surface, deep within, and anywhere in between." (THE TACTILE EYE, JENNIFER BARKER) I was exploring on how to understand the reactions of touch on the intermediary layer. The entanglement of flesh, the wandering gaze, the intervals of breathing... these occur on the surface of the screen.

As the edge between the body and the world, then, the skin functions always as both a covering and an uncovering, because of its simultaneous proximity to the public world and to the secretive inner body. (THE TACTILE EYE, JENNIFER BARKER) Yet, a translucent membrane still exists, like a baby in the womb, with a blood-and-flesh wall that remains as the interface to experiencing the world. Beneath the skin lies a secret, and the skin itself can form folds, creating pathways between the film and the audience's perception. The metaphor of folds on skin also became a way for me to shape new meanings for my hometown through memory and emotion in my following research.

“IT SHOULD BE AN EASY STEP TO BELIEVE THAT MY OWN DREAMS ARE NOT JUST A COMMUNICATION FROM MY UNCONSCIOUS TO MY CONSCIOUS SELF BUT, INSOFAR AS I CAN MAKE THEM MEANINGFUL TO YOU, YET ANOTHER LIGAMENT IN THE WORLD’ S CONNECTIVE TISSUE.” LAURA U. MARKS

My moving-image production has shifted to a stage that can be described as “skin” in exact this word. At “THE LAST SPRING”, I revisits the killing sparrows movement in the 1950s in Chinese history through a return to my family footages and personal dreams, accompanied by poetic monologues and delicate sound construction, exploring the blurring of emotions in reminiscence and the loss that often accompanies revelry in Chinese culture. At “YOU SHALL BE MY HOME”, I construct a sense of intimacy through tactile images captured by my camera, sweeping it across my personal paintings and through poetry and 1990s Hong Kong pop songs that has been banned on the mainland to explore the boundaries of intimacy and desire. For “YANGSHUI”, in Chinese, amniotic fluid means a direct translation of the goat’s water (Yangshui 羊水). Thoughts of the mother’s body formed a calling for me at the time of my sickness. I tried to write four versions of a goat story in my dream, trying to interpret the image through different perspectives and different word constructions. The real meaning of the image was dissolved in the four versions of interpretation, and turned into a dream-like ravings, just as the source of the image itself was blurred. I want the whole film to land gently as if it were sliding over the skin, as in the four story interpretations of the image, hovering over the surface of the unconscious, leaving traces of moisture. For “TUNNEL&VISION”, I created a dual-channel interactive sound and image installation by collaborating with MidJourney to produce a visual version of the goat story. Touching the smooth surface of the installation causes an echo of it.



The Last Spring
<https://youtu.be/nDf6wFnNQZQ>



you shall be my home
<https://youtu.be/8w4ik49Sfv0>



Yangshui 羊水
<https://youtu.be/ygxvAG6uJ50>



Tunnel&Vision
<https://youtu.be/KFc3rtyjzsksk>
<https://www.instagram.com/p/C8QM8Cjo1Lp/?igsh=MWw5d2V6aTBrZ3lhZg==>

During this phase, I also began practicing writing and music production. I released the album “SWEET MURMURS”, and in addition to writing concise lyrics and producing music, I tried writing dialogue in screenplays, I attempted to open the window of my inner monologue to the outside world, and returned to my hometown to shoot footage.

Sweet Murmurs
<https://open.spotify.com/album/1tEmeiOGU3OTHcvJV9gpxC>
<https://tongxinguo.bandcamp.com/>

"WHERE ARE WE TO PUT THE LIMIT BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE WORLD, SINCE THE WORLD IS FLESH?" MERLEAU-PONTY.

"THE SKIN THAT HAS BEEN TORN FROM THE BODY… REPRESENTS THE PROTECTIVE ENVELOPE, THE SHIELD, WHICH ONE MUST TAKE FROM THE OTHER IN PHANTASY EITHER SIMPLY TO HAVE IT FOR ONESELF OR TO DUPLICATE AND REINFORCE ONE'S OWN SKIN." ANZIEU, THE SKIN-EGO

In autumn of 2023, I began editing the footage I had shot. I explored hauntology as a theoretical framework to inspire my work and started organizing diaries, conversations, and poems from since I fell sick. As my research trajectory shifted, I increasingly realized that my research content was closely intertwined with my personal embodied experiences, and these lingering traumas mirrored the circumstances of my hometown. Based on my experiences during filming in my hometown, I became even more convinced of the autoethnographic approach adopted in this research. This sickness is no longer confined to my body alone but has become the body of my hometown—an unspeakable form of documentation. I believe there is a voice that needs to be expressed, even if it has been normalized and reduced to an elephant in the room. The journey of confronting these memories is also a re-interpretation of the wounds on my skin.

In this research, I experimented with various materials and media to conduct embodied research on my skin condition, including 3D modeling, photography, painting, home videos, poetry, and music. I need to specifically clarify the use of AI-generated content in this research and the significance of this tool for the study.

Hauntology is the key theoretical aspect that inspired my work. It explores the intersection of past and future, the resurrection of the deceased through imagination, and the reappearance of specific shadows in specific spaces. "Haunting can be seen as intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space. It happens when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time." (WHAT IS HAUNTOLOGY? MARK FISHER) In the middle of my research, I tried to apply hauntology to explain my research lineage, but found that it often revolved around a specific location—despite the demolition and reconstruction my hometown underwent, and the ghostly fear of surveillance I experienced in high school, it was insufficient to establish a new academic direction for my research. Nevertheless, its theoretical implications and artistic direction align with my films. I sought to describe an experience that cannot be directly narrated—a city obscured by political upheaval and modernization, and the haunting presence of bodily ailments. The uncanny, Fisher says, puts the "strange within the familiar" and "operates by always processing the outside through the gaps and impasses of the inside." Therefore, AI graphics coincided with my desire for the film's texture— weird, familiar, and uncanny.

"Images that are haunting in a number of ways that align to the conceptual framework of Hauntology: through unexpected traces and glitches; anachronism; notions of shared dreaming / remembering; and through the invocation of the poor image." (HAUNTING AND HAUNTOLOGY IN AI COLLABORATIVE IMAGE-MAKING, PAUL ROBERTS, 2023)

I conducted a large number of text experiments using the following methods:

First, I generated new works from five photos of my old works via Midjourney. This experiment sparked my interest in AI technology.

Second, I worked with Midjourney to generate the images I needed using text input.

Third, I conducted extensive text-based experiments with Recraft, employing prompts such as my diaries, shooting logs, poetry, and scene descriptions. I created these through two image generation settings: the first based on my five analogue photographic works, and the second based on the model's original image.

Aesthetic needs alone are insufficient to justify my extensive experimentation and employment of AI-generated imagery, which brings me to the reason I began collaborating with it: I wanted to generate a new narrative surface for my hometown in the way I describe it. If I cannot directly address certain issues from it, I insist on creating a new narrative layer for my hometown through imagination and memory in this research proposal. I employ this method to reshape my memories of past experiences, thereby completing my dialogue with my hometown.

The first version of ANCHORS OF MEMORY:

“ONE FUNCTION OF HAUNTOLOGY IS TO KEEP INSISTING THAT THERE ARE FUTURES BEYOND POSTMODERNITY’S TERMINAL TIME. WHEN THE PRESENT HAS GIVEN UP ON THE FUTURE, WE MUST LISTEN FOR THE RELICS OF THE FUTURE IN THE UNACTIVATED POTENTIALS OF THE PAST.” (MARK FISHER, *GHOSTS OF MY LIFE*)

The title of this publication is “My Night, Your Radio” . For me, the borderless darkness at night blends painful memories with physical suffering that seems to endlessly persist. Night conceals the wrinkles on the skin, traces of these embodied pain, thus anything would be possible; It describes the dark moments in my personal life-a bitter material that is extracted for my research and transformed into storytelling, fictionalization, image-making, generation, and regeneration.. The sounds of the night, restless fantasies, and the drifting boundaries between fiction and reality become endless echoes. AI generations recur like a glitched audio tape, looping endlessly, becoming the voice of a anonymous ghosts haunt my hometown.

Mark Fisher takes the eerie from lazy, everyday usage and gives it conceptual rigor: places are eerie; empty landscapes are eerie; abandoned structures and ruins are eerie. Something moves in these apparently empty or vacated sites that exists independently of the human subject, an agency that is cloaked or obscure. “WHAT KIND OF THING MAKES AN EERIE CRY? BECAUSE IT RISES UP FROM THE OUTSIDE, AND REMAINS THERE, IT RESISTS SIMPLE HERMENEUTIC INTERPRETATION.”

The identity of the ghost remains uncertain here; its specific name is deliberately obscured. It is omnipresent, capable of embodying anyone. It dies in the unspeakable political migrations, as the landscape shifts and buildings are demolished, and it is reborn when the story is written. I avoid discussing my hometown due to its awkward economic and political predicament, having been stripped of its resources by the political center Beijing (Shijiazhuang is the capital of Hebei Province, geographically close to Beijing, through time, educational resources, economic resources, etc. being plundered), and its rapid economic prosperity as a transportation junction (Shijiazhuang is also known as the “the city brought by trains”), and my experiences in a severe examination environment during high school (Hebei is a province with a large population, no major universities within it, leading to intense competition within the high school system), but they inevitably surge toward me, becoming part of my wounds. They are reimagined in my writing, regrowing, therefore I have gained the strength to confront my illness, my gaze is able to rest upon my body—this is the significance of my research—to write words that can be told for the unspeakable, hoping that one day, this record may become the sound of the city.

This publication will take the form of a pseudo-diary, primarily for several reasons:

Most of my written material is derived from my autoethnography research, but due to the special nature of the disease, I often tried to remove my subjectivity when writing to avoid confronting the physical pain I embedded from the outbreak of it.

In my research trajectory and visual works, the search for unnamed ghosts runs throughout. When truth cannot be told directly, the only way to seek it is through continuous experimentation with this fictional perspective, testing identities and content; The ultimate goal of this experiment is to weave a new layer of skin for my body and the body of my hometown through a narrative based on my personal memories and emotions, serving as a new membrane for the narrative and becoming a new, tellable form.



The night is an endless stream of dream material. You drive down the road with your headlights on, a continuous, unbroken path ahead. Leaves brush against the roof of your car, warm air kisses your scalp, and things recede into the past, only to reappear again. The world outside is cold. A foggy, disorienting road stretches before you; inside the car, a sealed-off space separates you from the outside world. A kiss, a hand resting on yours atop the gear shift.

In the next moment, you are walking alone. The vast darkness engulfs you, a swaying white flashlight traces jagged lines across the ground. Pebbles scatter as you kick them, rolling away into the night. You are alone. Old memories descend upon you, sharp with sourness and unease—disjointed emotions, out of place. My night becomes your voice. My night becomes your radio.

2022.12

There is an image that keeps lingering before my eyes. I reach out to help you, but you drift further away.

Watching a memory from afar, it feels like it's wrapped in cellophane or covered by a fuzzy winter window. Flames flicker behind it, and you sense danger in the air, but the scent dips away. That's what the image is like. I ask you, how does it feel?

A pitch-black glass, a cold reflection, a window with no end in sight, a long corridor, a sharp bell ringing, waking you from your dream. You and your roommate look solemn, getting dressed and cleaned up, though you are still sixteen-year-old teenagers; you are trained to climb out of bed in twenty minutes, gather downstairs in the cold early morning, and walk to school, breathing out steam.

The classroom is flanked by several floor-to-ceiling black glass panels. The whole room is brightly lit, and as you hold your books, you turn to look outside, only to find it gazing back at you in darkness.

You say that the gaze stays with you for a long time. The surveillance camera above your head, the videotapes played over and over, your hands and feet with nowhere to go, teenagers wrapped in identical tracksuits, long sleeves and long pants, covering up all the time before they became adults. A silent space, where breath, whether hot or cold, quickly fades away, becoming a whirlpool in memory. The temperature envelops the small classroom, people crowded together, you carefully hide the drafty hole in your body, where the individual is temporarily suspended, and only the collective voice remains. You let countless emotions pass through that hole, causing the body beneath the skin to slowly ferment.

You told me, be quiet, don't buzz. You have countless ways to cover it up—clothes, makeup, words, gestures. In winter, the cold creeps up your window, and you're driven to distraction by its noise. You ask me, what is your name, why are you visiting me at this moment?

In the winter of 2022, you returned to a familiar city, in a long, cold, dry season. You departed from the warm city of Xiamen, a small southern island over 2,000 kilometers to home. Sitting in the car on the way back, the bare, slender tree trunks lining both sides of the highway seemed to swarm around you, gazing at you like ghostly figures. The gray sky and roads covered the entire city, and a familiarity washed over you.

I gently turned my eyes outward, waiting for the day you would notice me again. You already knew my name; we were so intimate, and we would embrace each night from then on. That dark window waits for you eternally at that moment, and you could not escape until you can really see in the glass.

Gazing brought physical erosion, and control disappeared under surveillance, so you had to nurture that leak during your long adulthood. You struggled to crawl out of the crowd, breathing, relieved, grateful, and you looked at me. But you knew it was still there, somewhere, and at some moment, your body would collapse because of it. Sooner or later, that moment would come, and you never knew when. This winter caused that moment.

2024.06

[[I am weary, lazy, and languishing in the summer heat, like an old man. But I am still young, or middle-aged. I am still in the prime of my age, drinking water, eating, and moving around. I am changing, renewing myself. I shine at night and am busy during the day. I shed layer after layer of new skin. My body is filled with the diverse sounds of the city, which grow quieter as evening falls. People ride electric bikes in groups across the street. It was then that I discovered you, sitting on the back of a yellow motorcycle. I think I recognize you, as if I had remembered you countless times over the centuries.]]

You wrote to me:

07.31

My body is embedded within the city, yet after twenty years, it strikes back at the city. Guerrilla warfare. Picking them off one by one. The context of the body, the context of the city. The context of the self, the context of the context.

8.02

The persistent oppressive heat has forced me to remain confined at home. Except for the moments when I go out to survey the scenery, it feels almost as though I am reimagining my hometown. The dry air from my memories now feels damp, due to the August rainy season, and the hum of the dehumidifier in the house becomes a continuous fragment of voices throughout the day, interrupted now and then by the rain hitting the window outside.

The rain is chaotic, sticking to my head, unable to be shaken off. As I prepare for the short film, it feels increasingly clumsy. But there's nothing I can do. I try to set aside this frustration. The feeling of returning to my hometown is growing closer, yet I'm already here. Ac-

-ually, the film is drawing nearer. The moment when imagination and reality merge tightens my chest.

08.03

The preparation process has been drawn out for so long, and I've fallen into a state of anxiety that could explode at any moment, though I try to pretend it's calm. The photographer I've been in touch with is pregnant, three months along, and we've had three calls discussing the script already. I trust her professionalism, but another friend, who's also helping in the city, has been urging me not to hire her. "Too many unstable factors," she says while exhaling the vapor from her e-cigarette. But I've decided to trust my guts.

08.07

Yuzu is a very calm girl. I try to describe the atmosphere she creates around me. It's not just that her voice is quiet, her words are not loud, or that she rarely offers opinions—although she is indeed this kind of person. But most people in the city make me feel anxious and noisy. Desires are exposed in the air, and the sounds are loud. Yuzu is one of the few people in these years who has made me feel calm. Yuzu doesn't vape, but she often chooses to hide outside the filming house to smoke. She speaks slowly, yet with determination, but she tends to ignore things that are not within her sight, very accepting. Unless something excessive impacts her directly. I like this kind of person. I can sense in their aura the scars that were once severed by the system, the bruises from wrestling with the system, hidden under their clothes, allowing me, an outsider, to recognize them as kin.

08.10

The sound recordist is a friend of the cinematographer, and he's here to help while also working on his own thesis project, which focuses on researching the production of Chinese independent films. I hope he can complete this project successfully.

Including the actress Yuzu and my mom, the entire crew consists of just five people. Except for Yuzu, everyone is staying at my home. The shooting room is right next door. The day before, it was covered in dust, as the neighbors hadn't come back in years. Then, one unexpected afternoon, my mom suddenly came in and told me, "Your room is almost clean now."

The night before the official shooting day, a heavy downpour interrupted my sleep, just like the dry city in the script suddenly becoming wet with the thirst for water. I quietly listened to the sound of the raindrops on the leaves, and it brought me peace, even though the weather the next day might not align with what I had expected.

08.12

The first day of shooting, the sun shone brightly. The sound of cicadas echoed endlessly on the dry land. Walking across the asphalt road, tall green trees lined the sides, their leaves glistening under the sunlight—this was the effect of the midday sun. We walked beneath the trees, the cicada song occasionally booming above our heads, only to stop abruptly at certain moments—a summer rest. While I was still listening to the rhythm of the cicadas, mosquitoes had already perched on the arms and legs of the photographer and me, treating us like a feast. Yuzu ate fish, the crew ate the food my mom made, while the mosquitoes eagerly fed on us, growing from the blood of locals from

mosquitoes eagerly fed on us, growing from the blood of locals from Shijiazhuang and distant blood from Leizhou. The blood of southerners now nourished the mosquitoes in the north.

Dryness is the deepest and most vivid impression I have of my hometown. But most Chinese independent films took place in the south. The bustling, cramped Hong Kong, the damp and isolated Guizhou... The southern dialects are varied and carry a unique flavor, while the Mandarin spoken in the interior is often associated with the serious tone of news broadcasts. I once discussed this with my cinematographer. When I first started creating mood boards, I included many screenshots from southern-themed films because I always imagined low ceilings, the bluish-green glow of fish tanks, and lethargic crowds. However, when I wrote the first line of my outline: "The hot weather, sunlight shining on the wide asphalt road, a girl weaving through the city..." How could I visualize the dryness and heat of the north and give it a symbolic visual signifier? We realized that, in terms of architectural structure, southern houses are generally small, with tightly packed furniture, making the people seem cramped. On the other hand, most northern homes are more spacious, with larger rooms and fewer elements that could be symbolized, but at least they needed to be distinguished from southern homes.

08.13

We need water. The dry city needs water. The floor needs water, the fish tank needs water, and the actors swallowed a bottle of water.

The water flowed onto the floor, causing muddy water that could ruin the shot. It may be rare to see a director halfway through filming grabbing a mop from home and starting to kneel down to clean the floor.

A long-abandoned northern house was used to shoot a ghost story. The old furniture came back to life within this house. I brought in the old fish tank that had been stored in the pantry at my grandmother's house, bought a fish tank light and an oxygen pump. The old yellow was brushed into a new soft glow. The empty room was thus filled with sound.

08.16

After filming, Yuzu took me around the city on her electric bike. The city began to cool down, especially after nightfall. The e-bike has become an unpredictable mode of transport in China. In Xiamen, during my second-to-last year of study, electric bikes were not allowed to carry passengers, nor could riders go without helmets or license plates. My knee was scraped on a roadside pillar by a classmate in Xiamen, and the bruise stayed for half a month. In Shijiazhuang, as long as we wore helmets, we rarely had trouble with the police. Most of the time, we would zip through the streets at night, passing brightly lit commercial areas, lifeless apartment blocks, and streets full of small shops closing for the night, the air thick and dirty with food waste spilled on the edges of storm drains; and the aunties dancing in the park to loud music. We would pass through a mix of smells and sounds, speeding along the road.

I was often shocked by how unfamiliar I was with the streets of Shijiazhuang, and Yuzu also didn't recognize the routes. We could only confirm our tracks by asking, "Did we pass this place before?" I enjoyed the sensation of weaving through the city, feeling the wind, as it seemed to caress the whole city in my place. I brought this body back, drowsy and revived.

The city I had once observed with the eyes of a child, felt like a box that had trapped me inside, but as I breathed within it, I still don't feel like I had control. I simply began to feel that we were equal—nothing more. And so, I started to look at it anew.

[[I look at you, performing unrealistic fables about me, narrating my body and my new appearance. I begin to wonder: what do I really look like? People come and go, watering me, dismantling me with machines. Day after day, night after night, I am transformed beyond recognition, yet I have never really looked at your face.

I listen to you quietly, imagining your voice, and a fresh image created by you. I want to respond to you, but I open my mouth, and no sound comes out. I stare at you, hoping you will turn around, our eyes meet, you explain your absence to me, and I embrace you again, memorizing your face, letting it become a voice.]]

08.21

The continuous sound of construction in the script was originally meant to symbolize the decay of the city and the lingering presence of ghosts. However, midway through filming, I changed the plan and shot numerous demolition scenes. Despite being stopped by demolition workers, we still found ways to negotiate and take photos, trying every possible route to keep filming. This effort made us seem like we were shooting a documentary about urban demolition. But this approach is justifiable. When the buildings of a city are removed, the context of that place is also erased. New buildings slowly cover the area, but I always feel like the old traces will haunt somewhere; they won't completely vanish. The land is renovated, the steel is melted, objects are

moved, and new purposes emerge. We even captured a man scavenging in the rubble of a demolition site. The body of the building was taken by him.

The body of this city never stagnates; it is always changing, sprouting new things, demolishing old ones, growing and decaying, with wounds and the next wounds, in waves that rise and fall. I am no longer a child, but returning to my hometown makes me feel like one. My body has grown, and the city's body bears scars. I make films to document this scar, and when new ones emerge next time, I won't be able to care for them, but this recorded image serves as evidence of the scar's existence, I think.

09.27

When mentioning Yuzu, it is impossible not to refer to the event that connected us: initially, she was a friend of a friend, a non-professional actress, and I simply chose her based on my intuition. But as we became more familiar with each other, sitting together for meals, Yuzu shared stories about the things that had happened to her.

My high school was an invisible prison. No, in fact, it was very much a tangible one, with its square classrooms trapping us inside. Above us were surveillance cameras, and on one side of the classroom was one-way glass—how does a person develop their character while simultaneously experiencing violence against their body? I remember the teacher showing us surveillance footage during self-study lessons, pointing out which students seemed to behave and which ones did not. With shame, he bounded the students' self-esteem. Everything was for good grades. And those grades required us to study six subjects: Chi-

-nese, English, Math, Politics, History, and Geography. I'm not complaining—I don't want to complain. When everyone around you is so used to the system, you start to feel out of place. Even now, when I describe this experience, I try to downplay it to avoid the pain I endured. When everyone around you is coping well with the system, is your struggle just a personal dilemma?

I was so eager to escape this system, but I couldn't, because it held tight to my past, my history, my body, and possibly my future, trapping me in a state of constant observation. I couldn't focus on math problems; I didn't have the patience. I had to skip many questions and jump straight to the last one. Years later, I realized this might have been a sign of ADHD, but back then, I just thought I was too reckless. Breathing in this square cage meant I tended to blame myself until I couldn't bear it anymore.

Yuzu told me, "During my final days of high school, I couldn't bear the blow of secretly breaking up with my ex-boyfriend, and I was already feeling very uncomfortable. On the day of the college entrance exam, I tore up my exam paper and was asked to leave the classroom."

Later, she underwent six months of hospital treatment, including electroconvulsive therapy and medication, which left her mentally paralyzed. A year later, she still couldn't return to the university entrance exam. She lost her eligibility to obtain a score, unable to enter university or the higher education system. She drifted in the world after being screened out, occasionally working part-time jobs and occasionally attending indie punk rock concerts.

When I began searching for the ghosts of the city, searching for the phantoms of Chinese ghost stories, I realized that beneath the skin, ghosts are merely a stance, a normalized way of life.

We are all ghosts in this system.

My hometown, our bodies, broken, counterfeit, modernized, and alive. I write to you, I describe you, and I recognize your eyes countless times.







2024.11

I was floating in my dream, flying over neatly cut wheat fields, diving headfirst into the clouds, and then blinking as the squiggles on the ground were getting bigger, bigger, closer and closer There was an odd smell wafting through the air, like chemical elements mixed with the scent of rust, but it was light, and not overpowering. The further I descended, the further the moist air got away from me, and filling my nose and caressing my skin was an earthy, dry smell that tingled slightly in my nose at first, but I soon adjusted to it. I wrinkled my nose and landed lightly on the concrete and stone street, looking up to see that it was past dusk at the moment, the sun sinking at the skyscrapers on the other side of the horizon, the sky a gray-purple color. Everything was dark and gray, the lines of demarcation between the shadows weren't too clear, and I wobbled to a standstill with my feet on the hard concrete road.

I don't know if it was dusk or not, my landing didn't make many pedestrians take notice. It wasn't a wide street, clustered by staggering high-rise buildings that made the gray road seem narrow. One by one, swarms of motorized bikes passed by, blasting closer, then farther away, and they were in a hurry, as if they were in a rush to get somewhere. Were they going home? I shuffled curiously down the street, on this side of which was a tall green fence - a fence, but a green, thin sheet of metal, but one that stood out in the gray city. Pushing forward, instructions and notices are posted on the wall that extends out, and gaps in the wall reveal a vast, yellow mound of dirt, and huge mechanical vehicles. It looked like a huge, circular construction space, and whatever was circled had already been dismantled and hauled away. Construction trucks lazily parked at the edge.

I continued to walk along the wall. On the other side of the world, there was less traffic and cars, but everyone looked impatient - honking car horns, bicycle bells, loud speeches one after the other, all pouring into my ears at one point or another, distracting me. I struggled to plug my ears and try to block out the sound. The sharp sounds startled me, then dulled as my ears surrendered. But those high-pitched voices still annoyed me. I shook my head and hurried onward, and the fresh city sights along the way no longer made me happy.

The gray streetscape, trees and people brush back behind me, and I'm immersed in this high-speed life, and suddenly, I hear a sharp sob. Turning my head, a piece of flat land appeared in front of my eyes, which was said to be flat, but in actuality, it was piled up with rocks, dust, steel bars and bricks. Unlike the rest of the cityscape, this flat land was surrounded by half-demolished flat buildings, dilapidated and crumbling, staggering in this cityscape, jutting out across my eyes.

I followed the sound, surrounded by crumbling parcels of flat buildings, half-demolished buildings hanging from cracks in the window frames, looking perilous. I searched stiffly for the source of the sound, holding my breath to keep more dust from flying into my mouth.

“Why?

“What, why?” I spoke softly.

The voice was weak and tinny, as if suspended in the air, and I didn't want to take offense because she sounded grieved.

“Lost can’t find it.” A girl with short hair, she was half crouched and curled up, her face hidden in the shadows.

“What are you looking for?” I stopped near her. The tiny mass of her shadow was at her side, as if shaking in a blur of sadness. I didn’t want to come closer to break the scene.

Perhaps it was because it was getting late in the day, and the noise on the street was diminishing, or perhaps it was because I had stepped into this indentation in the city, and the crumbling walls around me wrapped me in, as if to block out the sound as well. Her voice became clearer.

“Something that used to be here.” She looked up, unable to see her features, the wet traces of tears glistening on her cheeks. Her voice was light.

She was searching for something once buried here. Precious or not, it had vanished into dust. Whatever it is, it will be filled and molded with infused cement and left behind in the ground. How can I go about consoling her?

As I was thinking this, she suddenly got up. I looked at her, and she looked away. She bent down and stepped on the unsteady rocks, mounds of earth and steel bars, and some unidentified broken plastic bags and mineral water bottles. She buried and probed around, seemingly searching for something.

I began to join in the search. Not understanding what I was looking for made me very frustrated. Still, I pretended to bend down and try to find something from the excavation site of a demolished building. I kicked my toes against the stones and rummaged around on the ground. Neither one made a muffled sound. Looking up slightly, not far away, a tree that had not yet been pushed over, slanted against the side of a half-stone and brick fence, formed the only green in the picture.

The wind blew through the tree with a rustling sound, suddenly very loud, and swooped down on me. The half-broken window, perhaps because the wind was blowing through it, buzzed in my ears too. I was taking steps on the mound and had to steady my pace so I wouldn’t put one foot on the steel.

“Hey.”

I whipped my head around to see her, and she’d climbed into the very center of the hill, wrapped in the gray hills, far away, and waved at me.

The moment my eyes met, I suddenly realized.

I looked away as the last rays of the setting sun drowned beneath the buildings in the distance, the gray and purple disappearing without my awareness. My heart suddenly thumped as the sky, the earth, and the streets around me were instantly flooded with stagnant blackness; everything went dark, and in turning my head, she had vanished like a bubble. The ground was covered in an endless green that swallowed all traces of construction into the ground and disappeared.

2025.01

01.02

With the advent of winter in the Netherlands, my eczema has returned. When I go out I wrap myself head to toe in a down jacket and a thick scarf, but my forehead and nose are still exposed, maybe this is the reason why my eczema flared up again, the dry winter wind blew on my face and it became red and flaky. Then it started to spread to my neck, my shoulders, places where I accidentally scratched.

It's hard to imagine that a few years ago I would have gone out in the winter wearing a cool trench suit, but now I just wrap myself up in a down jacket, like a cocoon of self-protection. I don't want to think too much about editing film during the winter break; I just want to let myself escape that awkward feeling of returning to my hometown. I've written a lot of poems about weather this fall and winter, and it's become commonplace to sensitively record temperature fluctuations, and dodging rain and snow and stress is one of those options that must be controlled, and sometimes I look at my friend's smooth skin and think: how comfortable should someone be living who has nothing to worry about?

3.17

I try to visualize myself as a plain, the seasons bringing turnover, as the red, swollen, molted parts ebb and flow back and forth through my body, growing and fading. My laissez-faire attitude toward life could be a key to healing.

I started taking allergy pills and went on a strict diet, eating less sugar, no gluten, no seafood or lamb, which I was told would reduce the inflammation in my body according to Chinese medicine theory. I heard celery was good for curing eczema, so I started taking celery every day, but another friend told me celery causes skin inflammation to flare up I'm lost. Didn't know who to listen to.

I used to enjoy the feeling of melting paint with my fingers, painting on paper, or pinching clay, but when my eczema broke out and the skin on the backs of my hands started to tingle, I had to protect my hands after not caring about the heat or cold, materials or ingredients of outside substances.

I couldn't pinch the air-dried clays because they stuck to my fingers and were cold. I was so worried when I used coloring powders that I would go and wash my hands for almost half an hour; I was afraid that the pigments would get into the red patches that joined together on the backs of my hands.

How can I deal with these life changes?

3.21

I never imagined that my twenty-six-year-old self could have an epiphany: to cherish what I have, always, at the moment. There are many things that you don't know how to cherish until you've lost them.

Growing up under a judgmental Chinese beauty system, I complained about my looks and felt dissatisfied, not realizing that what I once had was what I envied today. It wasn't until my eyelids were swollen, my face was red, my body was peeling, and even the sweat of my actions caused me pain, that I realized that every food that came into my mouth, all the feelings I had in the moment, my body's heat, cold, agitation, and happiness, how I treated myself, they would be refracted on my body and turn it into a huge plain.

When I just had an eczema outbreak for six months in China, I pretended to imagine that my body was the same as it had been before, that "this is just a small turning point and everything will go back to normal". I didn't dare to look at my face in the mirror but I imagined that my skin was just as smooth, as flat, as clean as it had been before, and I lived by that imagination and paralyzed myself every time I had to numb myself by facing the details head on - the wrinkles that appeared when I folded my wrists, the cracks on my skin between eyebrows, the darker marks on my body, the creases in my neck, the reduced hair volume This is not normal for my weight or age. But for the most part, I am grateful for my equanimity. As long as I am not in an eczema outburst, I can be happy.

04.06

For a girl who decided to come to a foreign country and pursue a creative career, and whose life took a rapid turn, it took about two years to embrace my body. It came at a time when I was shaping myself and therefore reshaping the way I approached the world.

Where I was bare, unafraid, embodied experience, now I had to erect a barrier between me and the world, a thin translucent membrane, the distance between viscera and flesh and blood, and bone; I was a little bit afraid of falling into immersive modes of producing, because that put me into a euphoria, and before it would have helped me, but now it affects my body and makes it start to redden. I'm still exploring a way to balance my life and career

I was once deeply obsessed with body horror. I was fascinated by the grotesque transformations of bloodied and mangled bodies, that spine-chilling sensation—I was captivated by them. After suffering from eczema for a year, I temporarily avoided watching the very type of imagery and works I once loved. I don't know why. Perhaps it was because I felt alienated, overwhelmed by the pain. Research was no longer just research; it had become deeply embedded in the very fabric of my life. I felt trapped between my past self and my present self, separated by a thin layer of tissue. Where should I go from here?

I imagined myself as a vine, curled up in the sun, breathing, undulating, as spring pigeons landed on my body like feathers.

Spring is almost here, and sunlight spreads across my room, making it look clean. I imagine myself as a vine, curling up in the sunlight, breathing, rising and falling. Spring pigeons land on me, like feathers.

There will be no flesh or pain; I am simply breathing.





2025.06

I taste the wind,
its fleeting sweetness on my tongue—
Delicious!
But the flavor drifts away,
leaving words to mend
the fractures of remembrance.

I searched for your name in a land where no history should be mentioned.

Through the rain of Europe's long winter, I arrived at the snow-covered northern plains. The tree branches towered, listless and gray, and in the mist, you were just a location.

I landed on you, the cold feet of the plane. From the roar of the metal hull, I slowly awoke. In the winter of 2023, I began to write to you.

I write, I remember. After time fades away, memory becomes a vivid path. The scent in the air awakens me—the barren plains, the dry home.

Peering at you through a distant window, what would you look like?

Your body has long since shed its skin and been reborn, leaving pale pink scars from wounds, overlaid with new scratches. You are such a body, stretching out your long arms, calling for rain in the arid air. Countless memories and emotions traverse time. You press your fin-

-gerprints onto the smudged glass window, becoming a row of evidence. My gaze follows yours, writing dozens of materials for you. Your form is covered in yellow soil and collapsed brick walls. Above the open horizon, sharp nails conceal dirt, reaching forward to pry open a window, a wall, a dust-covered windowsill, and blurred glass. I gaze at the hazy patches of color on the window, where I imagine your features.

I wrote:

I measure your warmth with my eyes, lips barren,
offering scabbed pigments to your silence.

My whispers, your eyelids, tightly shut, painted with soft light oils.
Your stone-carved lips,
unyielding,
turn kisses to unbroken stillness.

Each strand of your hair falls into my homesick sorrow, scattered on the floor, staring back darkly from the cold gleam of marble tiles.

Where do you exist?

In the cold winter bed, beneath the blue frosted windows, my gaze drifts forward. A girl moves through the city, the scorching summer making her long for rain. She walks through the modern metropolis like a newborn, gazing at the strange faces of people, feeling both familiar and strange. She has visited here before, but it is now entirely new, with old traces appearing on people's faces. So many buildings have

collapsed, elevated highways cut through wheat fields... You have vanished in the transformation of the earth, yet your footsteps continue to visit this city. Drought, barrenness, collapsed buildings, industrial fog—my gaze sweeps across the horizon. Lush grass grows into empty rooms, fish long for water, and the girl longs for rebirth. I write, "The

house sheds its walls like skin. An eagle glides—high, so high, casting a worn, stale veil over us, in the shroud of something ancient, forgotten. This room, this couch, this corridor, this wall. The peeling paint, it's the answer you left."

The echo you left me has lingered with me, always, always. It visits my dreams, leaving scars of homesickness on me. But I have never asked: How should I listen to your voice, recognize your name? How can I soothe these scars, allowing them to coexist with my body?

I recall our meeting, the death of bodily control, as I stared at you through a pitch-black glass. Your tightly closed lips never uttered a sound, even for us who were speechless.

In the second winter plagued by illness, I decided to write you a letter. I describe you from this end of the world, searching for your name. On trains, in skyscrapers, in wheat fields, in the dry, scorching summer, on people's faces. They show no signs of time's passage, yet your face flickers like a ghost in their weary, toil-worn expressions.

Looking further ahead, there lies an unspeakable truth, a truth riddled with wounds. Memories do not cut me like a sharp knife, but rather simmer my nerves in a pot over a low burn. The true nature of illness reveals itself through countless fictions, where memory and time converge, intertwining—in stories that cannot be told, you linger like an

unnnameable ghost, forever bound to this land. I seek you through writing, a remedy, a narrative thread that can be told. Even if the body dies, there is no way to face that black, hollow glass; I think of you, I think of your birth, your prosperity, and your decline.

The train pulls its line,
swaying gently,
blurring as it dives headlong into a cradle,
leaving the earth behind.

I began writing for you. It begins with buildings collapsing in the city, and a goldfish's body being buried in the rubble. The girl dies while a ghost from the theater is reborn. At theater, people is staging a ghost show from ancient Chinese stories Ghost Painted Skin. The reborn cannot speak, and she repeats the lines describing life and death in the-ater.

[[Daoist priest: This ghost is also so hard to find a human skin, living in the world I can not even bear to kill it.

Scholar: Taoist. You're confused! This ghost wants to harm me, it wants to destroy my body and eat me!

Daoist priest: You sleep with it night after night, but you can't tell the truth. You are blinded by desire. You are possessed by pleasure.

Scholar: No, please believe me. Please, save me!

Daoist priest refused him: It's your desire, it will destroy your body.

Scholar: No, no. Is this a ghost made up as a human, or a human as a ghost?]]

I write: The girl watches this scene with fascination, her yearning for life shimmers ghostly. She murmurs to herself, repeating the lines.

[[The scholar had his heart dug out.
His wife knelt down, threw herself at the beggar, and pleaded, Please,
save me. Our home is now just a broken shadow. It feels so unfamiliar.
The beggar laughed: Everyone knows what a husband is. Why should
he live?]

The wife: ... My husband had his heart torn out by a ghost. His body
lies on my bed, still retaining the warmth of dawn. Our memories keep
visiting my body.]]

In the end, the girl returned to the ruins, and the goldfish was reborn
on a hot, rainy day, leaping into her palm; like the scholar whose heart
was taken by a ghost. His wife vomited out his heart, which leaped
back into his body. The city's heart was expelled by a narrator, and the
parched land was drenched by a fictional downpour, turning the ruins
into a depression, a fishbowl of life.

Water overflowed the room, soaking the fish's body. Over months, I
created countless images for you, countless faces, countless rebirths
and deaths. Your relaxed skin, warm flesh—rain fell upon you time
and again.

My gaze slid toward you; the unspeakable became fact, and the narra-
tive constructed a new world. The intimacy between you and me. An
empty room and a window, damp fish, a water pump and a radio; you
stretched out your arms to wrap around me, spraying your breath onto
my eyelids, causing a slight sting. My eyelids grow heavy, the roar of
the plane gradually fades. In the final moment before we meet, a warm
light flickers before my eyes. I take a deep breath, forcing oxygen into
my lungs, smoothing out the wrinkles in my body. I want to write

something for you, but all I can recall is the poem I wrote when I left
you:

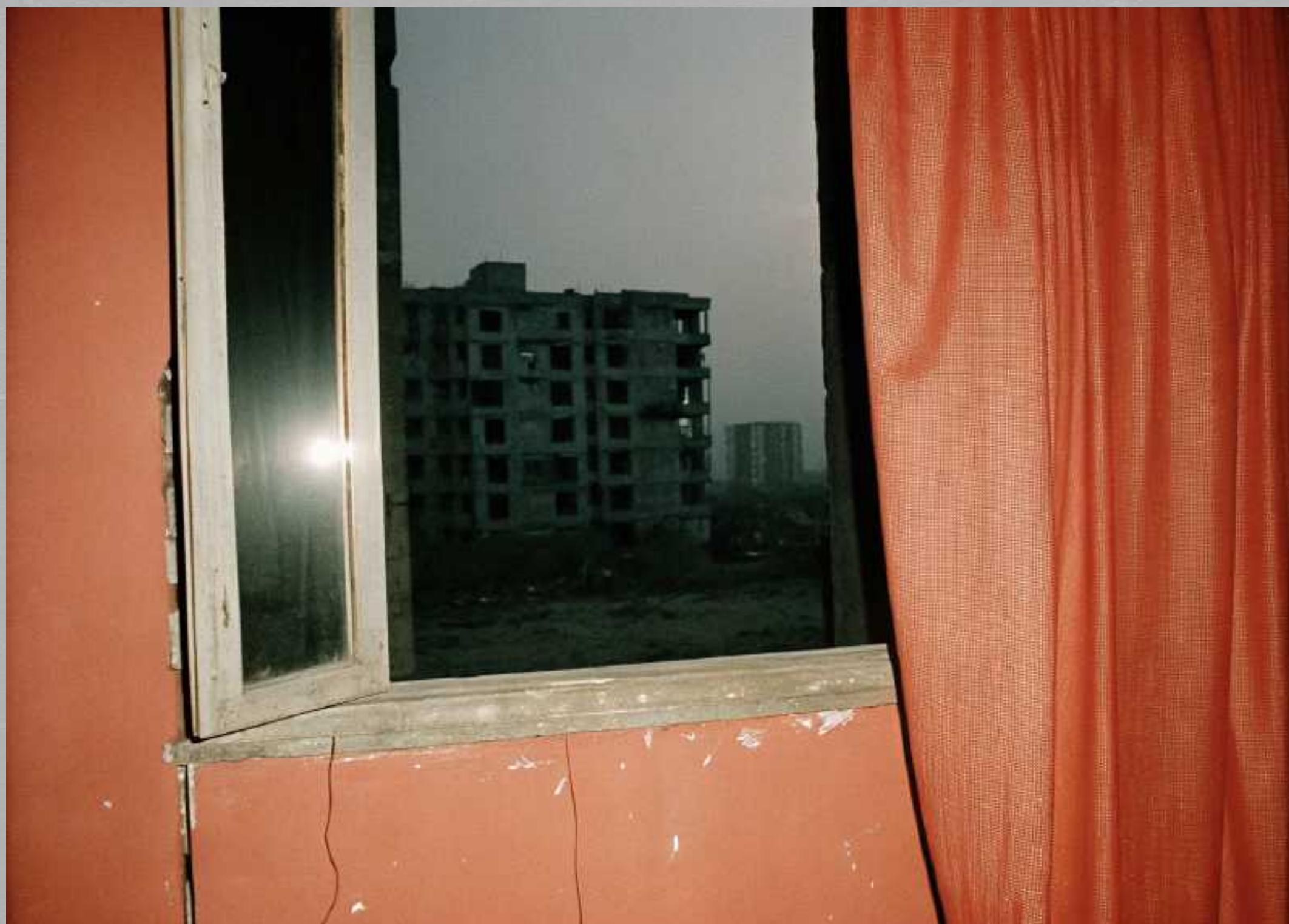
Anchors of Memory

The plane ascends,
its feet are invisible.
I hover, weightless,
unfolding starlight, crescent moons,
clouds like whispers, fields of gold—
a blue cloth to cradle the sky.
A heart that loves you,
spent recklessly.









2025.08

And what can penetrate death?
Disease, lies, and hometowns.

I watched her land on the plain, where wheat fields rose up and transformed into buildings. Time, under the intense sunlight, became a metaphor, with clear shadows cast on the asphalt road, leading to an unknown destination. On this road, the individual was dissolved into the collective; history was overturned and transformed into the modern. Disease became part of one's identity, buried beneath the tracks.

The city unfolds before her eyes, like skin riddled with sores. A mask shrouds the restless dust and traces of industrialization.

Shijiazhuang is located in the northern part of the North China Plain. It began as a small village. In 1907, the Beijing-Hankou Railway and the Zhengzhou-Taiyuan Railway intersected in Shijiazhuang, making it a major transportation hub in China. It is also known as the “city brought by trains.”

In 1970, my maternal grandfather was transferred for work and left Shijiazhuang with his wife to move to Taiyuan (Shanxi Province), where my aunt and mother were born. In late 1980, they returned to Shijiazhuang with the military transfer. At the time, my mother was in second grade, and her memories include poking wasp nests with the kids in the courtyard and then running after the older ones afterward. In 2016, I left Shijiazhuang to study and live in Xiamen, a small, hot, and humid island city. In the winter of 2022, I returned home for winter break, preparing my thesis and applications to study in Europe amid the biting cold of the northern region.

In the summer of 2024 in Amsterdam, amidst lush trees and sunlight, while my identity felt unbalanced as my ailing body struggled to breathe, I thought of her. She was a buried history, her body covered in dust.

I floated, I looked down, sweeping over vast fields of wheat, elevated highways, and urban villages, then the faces of people and the bustling traffic. I am a ship sailing backward. In my hometown, I was once weak and blurry, coughing, with swollen airways, needing to sit up to sleep at night, confined to a square room with one-way glass during the foggy winter; now I can merely smell the scent of rust, as if nothing could shake me anymore—

Can you recognize me? she asks me. She is fragile yet resilient, constantly renewing herself, migrating, transforming, healing, and hiding. She whispers, look at me once, for the gaze behind your glance makes me no longer endure.

In 1968, during the Cultural Revolution, Mao decided to relocate the capital of Hebei Province to Shijiazhuang for political security reasons.

Shijiazhuang is a lost, emotionally charged, and memory-filled city. It is an outer shell, an ideal refuge, a smooth space. Meaning is reshaped here, yet I still cannot bear to look at her directly. In the absence of dialogue and records, she is molded by me into countless varied materials, taking on a thousand forms—rumors, poetry, inspiration, and image generation.

A thin membrane I cannot pierce, a fantasy homeland.

Shijiazhuang, the name I have uttered countless times, has transformed into other words. Ghosts, stories, Europe, homeland—each word is circuitous, each word is the same name.

I know, I know, the lake of memory is smooth, ripples stirred by eye contact, meaning thus traversing the folded creases, time, future, past, I hold your fingers.

I held her cold fingers, leaping from a dark window in high school to the present, standing above the ruins. A tree on the wall swayed precariously, and as the wind blew, a strong sentiment penetrated my body. I repeated her name, searching the ruins for an excuse to mourn.

Your confirmation of ambiguity became an affirmation of my own ambiguity. I became transparent, looking down at the lake. That shadow was still me, undulating, and I wanted to smear it onto her. I am no longer the seeker; you and I have formed a new skin for the narrative. Your physical flesh is blurred here, and your identity is reshaped from memory. This skin, like mine, undergoes constant renewal, fragile yet resilient. My illness becomes yours, my fragility becomes yours. They devour emotions, the environment, the humidity of the air, dust, and chemically polluted air. Those superficial elements become the triggers for sensitive skin. Countless fragile moments in time and space, after the echoes fade, leave only memories. Memories shape the new future, becoming the flesh and blood of the narrative.

Rashes, redness, swelling, exudation—Shijiazhuang, you are as scarred as I am, aren't you? I return to your embrace. Your body is as broken, allergic, and itchy as mine. I read the noises on your images,

your voice, your historical trauma, your bodily reconstruction—will we merge into one? Images bear the weight of this gaze; narrative is my means. I am no longer a child. I gaze at you, lift my head to cast a glance at you, and your embrace envelops me like a quiet soul.



