

BUREAU

OF

ENVIRONMENTAL

IMAGING

&

MEMORY

ANALYSIS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) in Fine Art

Grief Cinema: Loss, Mourning, Repair

By

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Ruskin School of Art

The Queen's College

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Going through long hallways, one after the other, Eve thought this wasn't what she had imagined when she joined the Bureau.

This wasn't what was promised.

In her mind she rehearsed fourteen days to create access to Nature. Five ways to easily die while receiving dreams. Two quick exits to the courtyard. Exactly how long does it take? Twenty one minutes five seconds.

The training period was coming to an end. She was going to receive their decision for her. There wasn't any guarantee that there would be a position for her at the Special Office of the Haunted, so it was best to withhold hope.

Eve reached a small red door. Collected her breath. Fine fine fine fine fine. She entered.

Sitting at the office, one of the Leaders of the Division of Training pushed towards her two thin pieces of paper.

'I have good news in written form. Sign the release and you'll be transferred to the Archive in no time.'

The Archive, why the Archive?

Eve had always thought she would become one of the Haunted. She thought so after exhaustively reciting her dreams about the aquarium to her training officers.

Five quick ways to die inside before heading to the sea. Seventy ways to receive a dream. Seven thousand hours spent in training.

She wondered what father would think of her now.

Office of InterDepartmental Transitions
Division of Training, Department of Education and Engagement
Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis



Name: Eve Liu

Emp. No.: [REDACTED]

INTERDEPARTMENTAL TRANSFER FORM

Dear Eve,

I am to inform you that you have transferred from:

Probational Interpreter (Trainee),
Special Office of the Haunted
Cinema of Ecological Grief Division
Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis

to:

Probational Archive Researcher,
The Archive
Department of Civic Memory
Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis

Reason for Transfer:

The trainee has shown stronger aptitude in information analysis, while engagement with Ecological Underthought has not yet yielded observable progress.

Details	Present	New
Position Title	Probational Trainee Interpreter	Probational Archive Researcher
Division	Cinematic of Ecological Grief	The Archive Formerly: Archives and Records Management (ARM)
Effective Date of Transfer: 5 July, 2123		

Office of InterDepartmental Transitions
Division of Training, Department of Education and Engagement
Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis



Additional Remarks:

Following a recent review of your ongoing placement within the Cinema of Ecological Grief Division, we write to formally inform you of a transition in your probationary role.

Effective immediately, you are reassigned to the position of Probational Archive Researcher within the Archive, formerly known as the Division of Archives and Records Management, under the continued auspices of the Department of Civic Memory.

This transfer arises in recognition of your demonstrated aptitude for the extraction, classification, and analytical handling of environmentally-affected data, particularly in relation to dormant or partial memory formations. Your performance indicates a strong potential for archival interpretation, especially in contexts where evidentiary traces require careful deciphering rather than speculative attunement.

At this time, we also note the absence of measurable progress in your reception of Ecological Underthought—a prerequisite competency for remaining within the interpretive division. While this does not preclude future re-evaluation, the Department finds your skills currently more aligned with the archival stream of work.

You will report to Senior Archivist [REDACTED] starting 31 July, 2123. Further orientation materials and updated protocols for memory containment and image-index handling will be provided upon arrival.

We thank you for your continuing commitment to the Bureau's mission, and trust you will bring the same care and rigour to your new responsibilities.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

(FOR HUMAN RESOURCES ACTION)

Action Taken by

The Office of Inter-Departmental Transitions,
Division of Training, BEIMA

Signature/Date

5 July, 2123

At the Archive all was quiet.
Eve thought about the violence
of papers, their thin edges as
they sliced her fingers open.

The Archive of the Bureau was
not underground. Situated on the
eightieth floor, it's a lofty, if
not blindingly bright, place.

Eve's supervisor had given up
on sleep. She came up nightly
to remind her once again, that
the Division of Ecological
Underthought Extraction relied
more on archival files, rather
than on bones and soft tissues,
to generate memories.



'The Archive alone holds the whole Bureau
afloat.'

The supervisor said, placing her hand on
Eve's forehead.

'Describe your dreams to me.'

Eve's supervisor said once again.
Describe.

Even though she had done it more than dozens of times in the past year. Eve understood her supervisor, more than anyone, wanted her to become super Haunted.

Eve:

'My father was a navy man. My father set off to sea because it was easier to leave than to stay. Though to my mother he told a different story.

To me he didn't tell any stories. He put a beer bottle between his teeth instead and sucked it dry night after night. He would blame the ocean for making him drink.

In my dream, my father took me to the aquarium, when he came back from the sea one day.

I think he misses it.'

'Misses what? The sea?'

Her supervisor asked.

'Being under.' Says Eve.

'Or being held together by water. When you're around so much water it's hard to fall apart. I don't know. I don't know how long my father used to spend underwater. Months at a time, I suspect?

He was always ill-tempered but never in the aquarium. Oh, there was a local aquarium in Dalian funded by the Bureau. We would stand in front of a tank watching beluga whales swim.

I...I thought then that the way the Bureau kept the animals was quite cruel. I understand we need critical proximity to understand their memories, but to keep them there for years at a time with so little space. I don't know. It just left a strong impression on me.

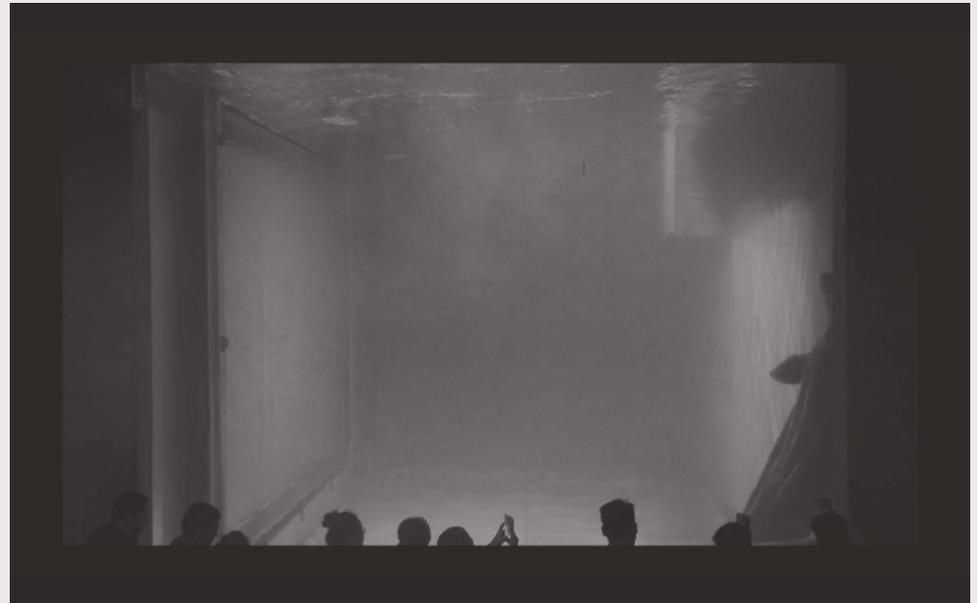
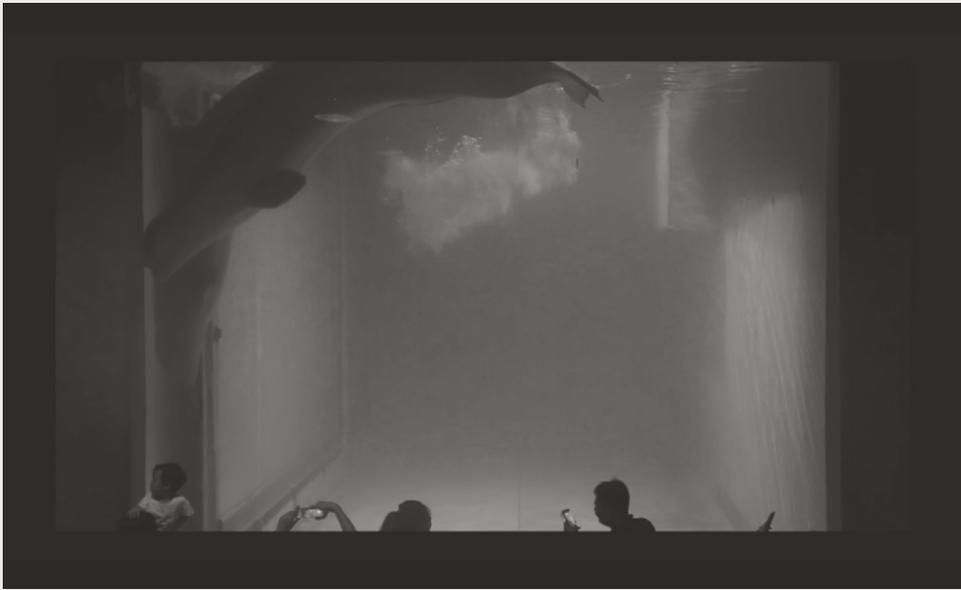
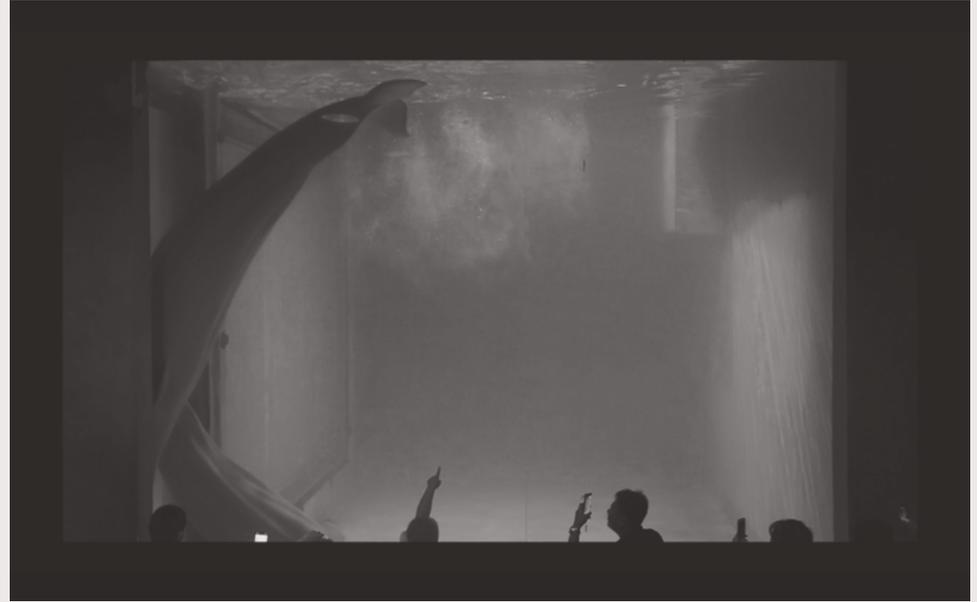
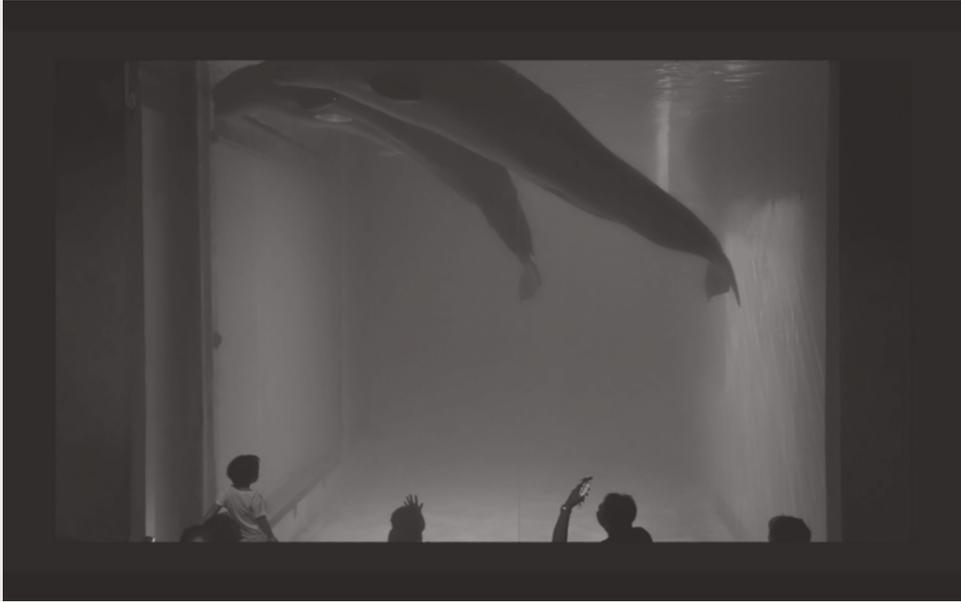
When my father worked for the Department of Air and Sea he probably felt the same. He used to go and take photographs of all kinds of creatures circling in tanks. There were two beluga whales that he was particularly fascinated by. He told me he didn't know if they were a couple, or a father and a daughter.'

'What are the ways in which,'

Eve's supervisor suddenly stopped her,

'underwater photography can help shape our unconscious?'

Don't worry. Her supervisor added; it wasn't a test.





Eve:

'I suppose...I suppose being underwater could respond to a form of longing.

I was reading a history of the aquarium. Did you know that David Wojnarowicz went to the Coney Island Aquarium during and after his partner Peter Hujar's death, just to film beluga whales?

That in his grief all he could manage was film beluga whales, in place of any substantiated bargaining?

Wojnarowicz in his diary said the light of the whales breaking the darkness of the water with their white hides was one of the most beautiful images he could imagine.¹

I think I understand Wojnarowicz. I know exactly what he means.

Because, don't you think it hurt too much to imagine otherwise?'

Seeing her supervisor did not speak, Eve continued:

'So my father. Instead of watching liquor rolling down his digestive tract, I watched in silence beluga whales as a child.

I found out that apparently Hujar in his exhaustion would still go to the aquarium to watch beluga whales that were kept in captivity, barely turning in small tanks. I couldn't guess what he must have felt as he died in 1987 because of this thing called...AIDS.

I suppose it gave shapes to his longings for freedom, the beluga whales. They certainly did mine. I suppose I am drawn to cetaceans because of their dance. Enclosed, it was still arresting.

Then I started having these dreams. In them, I would be standing in front of a massive tank. It would be completely empty save for gallons of water. I blink, then suddenly he's there.'

'No, my father. He would be right there, in the tank. Holding his briefcase, which would be open. His shirt undone, documents floating about his face like pale swimming moths.

'The beluga whale?'

I knew he was drowning, but I didn't do anything to help. I just stood there frozen.'

¹ Donegan, Moira. 'Some Sort of Grace'. The Paris Review, 10 May 2017. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/05/10/some-sort-of-grace/>.

Pause, Eve continues:

'I thought those dreams would go away as I grew older. They just didn't.'

'But you said last night was different.'

'Yes. After reading more about Hujar and Wojnarowicz. For the first time ever, when I stood in front of the tank again, I was angry.

I started banging on the glass very hard. Even though I knew then that it was useless. On our school field trip, I once saw a display of the aquarium glasses. I knew how thick they were. But I was so angry that I kept smashing the glass until I woke myself up. My hands were actually shaking. My back teeth were hurting, too, because I had been biting down hard.'

Her supervisor didn't say anything for a while. She looked through a few documents.

'These dreams are good. Better than before.'
Finally her supervisor said, before standing up to leave.

'This one sounds less like a dream and more like a conversation.' She added.

'Just don't, for your safety and mine, ever tell me again you disagree with the Bureau's way of having an aquarium. You know this is how we CARE.'



Eve knew she ought to focus on the section that mattered most to her—this person's field notes about a now-extinct river dolphin. But she closed it, and sat immobile.

She couldn't bring herself to look at the handwriting. Or to imagine the hand that produced it. She looked out the window instead.

So they did know who this person was. Knew them enough to make this suggestion.

She opened the notebook at random. The Archivists did their best to screen information that could give away her identity, but based on the nature of the document Eve could guess this was a student. In it, neatly written notes about lectures attended and to-do lists sprawled across pages.

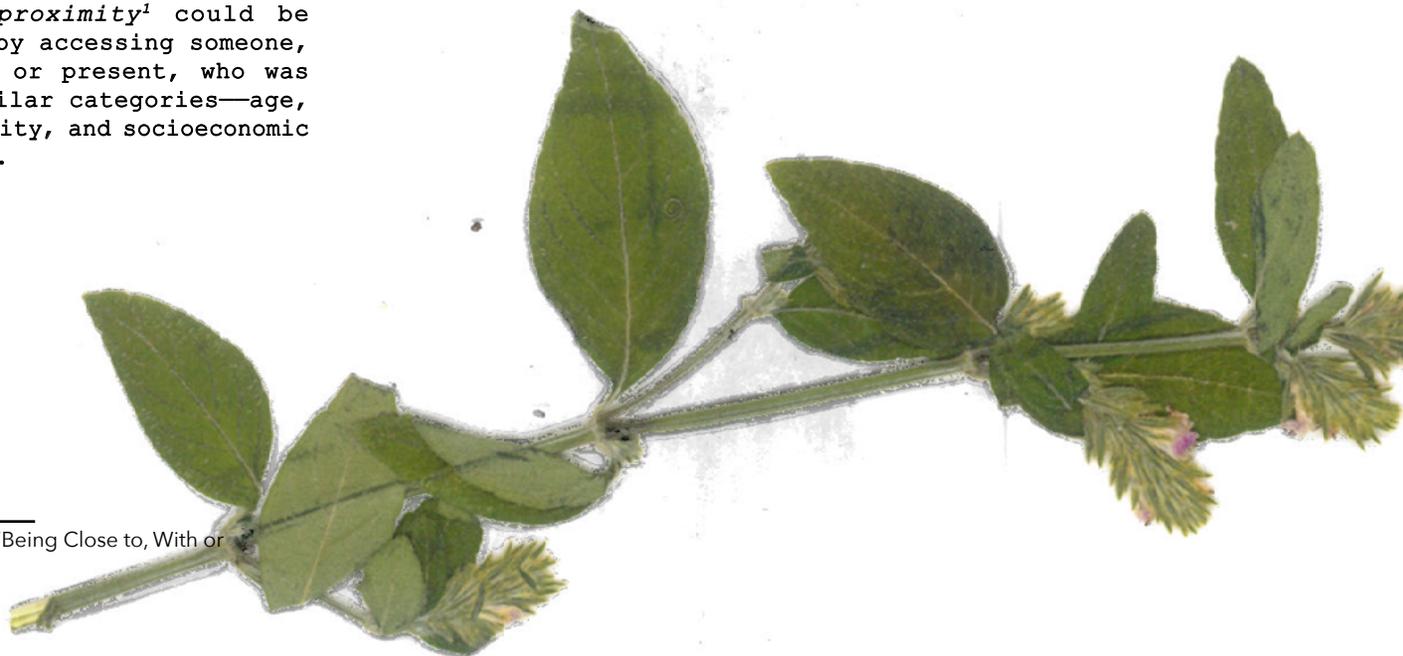
No bird sang.

When Eve returned in the morning, there was a black notebook on her table.

The Archive was going through early twenty-first-century files. Presumably it was around that time that this was produced. The name had been anonymised. She was told this belonged to someone close to her age.

Her supervisor believed that *critical proximity*¹ could be maximised by accessing someone, historical or present, who was in all similar categories—age, sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background.

1 Igwe, 'Being Close to, With or Amongst'.



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BUREAU OF
ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGING
AND MEMORY ANALYSIS

FIELD AND PROCEDURAL MANUAL

BUREAU
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&
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FIELD AND PROCEDURAL MANUAL



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FOREWORD

Now is the season of unrest.

That the season of ecological unrest has never truly ended reminds us once again that ours is an epoch of total disaster. Plagued by ecological forgetfulness, a phenomenon known to rob people of memories of beloved species, we are more vulnerable than ever.

In the past one hundred years, as ecological disasters compounded, *ghost species*—those of non-viable population, yet persist in cultural narratives¹—remain suspended in a liminal space between life and death. Scholars in the twenty-first century had warned us that the disappearance of species is always *apparitional*—they vanish or resurface in unpredictable manner.² The ghost species' survival appears increasingly intertwined with the minds that conjure their presence, often independent of the species' actual population. We take note of this. Increasingly, ghost species are welcomed back into reality thanks to our soft-hearted officers and our technology.

Because of us, what is lost is not forever lost. BEIMA was constituted as a governmental necessity in response to unprecedented ecological collapse by targeting affective unconscious production of Nature. Our officers work indefatigably with Nature to demonstrate its sentience. What was thought of as forever gone is brought back to us in sharp relief, in tandem with new fleshy beings that take their place. Where physical bodies are irretrievable, the underthoughts of kinds and beings shall stay with us for generations to come.

The Central Governing Body of the Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis affirms, with institutional confidence, the indispensability of the Bureau in the present moment.

¹ Ghosts, to Robert Macfarlane, are 'the last of their lines' due to human impact. MacFarlane, 'Ghost Species', 2008.

² Engaging with Jacques Derrida's hauntology, Adam Searle in 'Hunting Ghosts' (2021) proposes that ghostly apparition is political—ghost assumes a prior existence.

The Bureau's mandate: to premeditate, present, and preserve the unconscious transmissions of the more-than-human world, is recognised once again as essential to the stability of civic memory and to the cultivation of intergenerational ecological responsibility.

Through the coordinated work of its Departments, Divisions, and Special Offices, BEIMA ensures that no whisper of thought from Nature is left unrecorded, unstudied, and unperformed.

The Central Office extends its continued support to BEIMA officers in the fulfillment of their duties and acknowledges the Haunted, in particular, for their extraordinary service under the weight of grief.

We hold on to remembrance when it is painful to remember.
We safeguard memories of others.
We conserve when conservation is impossible.

We mourn in your stead.

Yours,

刘新悦

Director of BEIMA
1 May, 2135



OATH OF THE HAUNTED OFFICER

All persons inducted into the rank of Haunted Officer shall, upon their acceptance, swear the following oath before their peers and superiors:

I solemnly affirm that I shall faithfully serve the Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis in the capacity of Haunted Officer. I shall uphold the sanctity of ecological underthoughts and give voice to the apparitional transmissions of the more-than-human world. I accept the burdens of grief as integral to the duties of remembrance, and I shall not conceal nor exploit the visions entrusted to me.

I pledge to mediate with CARE between the living and the departed, between the spectral and the material. For grief is an achievement, I hold on to remembrance when it is painful to remember; I safeguard memories of others; I conserve when conservation is impossible. These are my Responsibilities, and I shall accept them without evasion.

I enter into this service with full knowledge of its burden. I will be the mouthpiece of the departed and the nearly departed.

The Grief of others is my achievement.

The Oath is binding for the duration of the Officer's service. Its breach constitutes a violation of institutional trust and is subject to disciplinary action under the Bureau's Code of Conduct.



ONE. FOUNDATIONAL TEXTS

1.1. CONSTITUTION OF INSTITUTION

1.1.1. Mandate

BEIMA is constituted as a governmental institution charged with **premeditating, presenting, and preserving** the unconscious productions of the more-than-human world.

Premeditation: Unconscious productions, also referred to as *ecological underthoughts*, encompass affective information such as dreams, feelings, and memories that emerge from nonhuman life. These underthoughts are registered through the Bureau's officers, designated as *the Haunted*, whose role is to serve as conduits of perception.

Presentation: The Bureau, through its constituent Departments, produces visual and rhetorical forms that enable the reappearance of disappearing others. This process, by which absent beings are reinstated within civic and ecological registers, is defined as *conditional apparition*.

Preservation: All ecological information—including both the underthoughts themselves and the productions derived from them—is archived within the Bureau. These archives serve as instruments for regenerating civic memory and sustaining the continuity of ecological remembrance.

1.1.2. History of the Bureau

The Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis (BEIMA) was founded in 2086, in the aftermath of what has since been termed the End of Holocene.³ 2086 marked one hundred years of the National Forum on BioDiversity, where biodiversity as a concept emerged.

³ Demos, *Radical Futurisms*, 2023. For a brief history of global ecological collapse in 2086, see Adebayo, 'Temporal Bureaucracies and the Management of Extinct Futures', 2119.

Since then, as a humanity, we have been living in an epoch plagued by pervasive ecological grief: the irreparable sorrow in response to disappearing species, places, and landscapes.⁴

The Bureau was formally established to confront a dual crisis: the accelerating degradation of planetary ecosystems and the corresponding rise of ecological hauntings within human and more-than-human memory.⁵

During this period, the accelerated collapse of ecosystems coincided with the third wave of widespread manifestations of ecological underthoughts: hallucinations of nearly-gone species, sightings of already-gone species, murmurs of dying seas and glaciers, and dreams featuring inflamed gardens, compounded.⁶ Hauntings of extinction proliferated as biodiversity dwindled.

What were first dismissed as anomalies or cultural fabrications soon began to infiltrate conscious spheres: work places, public spaces, and civic infrastructure on a global scale. Sightings of ghost species were reported across the globe.⁷ The persistence of ghost species and memories of them could no longer be ignored. Following the instruction of *critical fabulation*—the practice of 'listening to the unsaid, translating misconstrued words, and refashioning disfigured lives'⁸—the Bureau extended this interpretive framework to apparitional phenomena. In so doing, it acknowledged that these transmissions were testimonies: the means by which disappeared species made themselves known through entanglement with human communities.

⁴ Cunsolo and Ellis, 'Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss', 2018.

⁵ Matsuda, *The Bureaucratic Sublime: How Institutions Learned to Mourn with the Planet*, 2107.

⁶ A history about the emergent ecological underthoughts in dreams, see Zhang, *Dream Protocols: Ecological Thought Beyond Human Sleep*, 2120.

⁷ Examples of the ghost species include the ivory-billed woodpecker, see Latta et al., 'Multiple Lines of Evidence Suggest the Persistence of the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker (*Campephilus Principalis*) in Louisiana', 2023. Hawaiian crow (*Alalā*), see van Dooren, *The Wake of Crows*, 2019.

⁸ See Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', 2008: A method of working with ambiguous historical sources. It seeks to reinstall historically subjugated others (for Hartman, the 'minor' figures of the transatlantic slave trade) within established narratives.



Confronted with events that were at once environmental, affective, and civic in their consequences, existing agencies proved inadequate. It was within this vacuum of authority that the Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis was constituted by governmental decree.

Over the following decades, BEIMA developed a unique organisational form, honing recognition of the spectral whilst developing technology that renders conditional apparitions exceedingly common.⁹ BEIMA has now expanded into a permanent organ of planetary governance. Its departments oversee fields as diverse as ecological restoration, spectral regulation, atmospheric monitoring, civic education, and the training of Haunted personnel. The Bureau's influence extends beyond the borders of any single state, operating through transnational agreements and intergovernmental councils.

It is the position of all humanity that unconscious productions of nature are recognised as non-renewable resources. The preservation of such resources is fundamental to the coherence of planetary well-being. In a post-Anthropocentric age defined by the Earth's irreversible transformations, no other institution is entrusted with the responsibility of mediating between the living and the spectral, between extinction and remembrance.

The Bureau's existence is therefore of utmost importance. Without it, the loss of more-than-human others would be doubled: erased from both the material world and from memory alike.¹⁰

⁹ To read about the mathematical rendering of ecological underthoughts, please refer to D'Silva and Kravchenko. 'Nonlinear Apparitional Dynamics: Modeling Unconditional Emergence in Multispecies Memory Systems.' In *Journal of Ecological Mathematics* 7, no. 4, 2112.

¹⁰ To see how the world would look without the Bureau, see Patel, Anika, dir. *When the World is Gone*. 2083.

1.1.3. Divisions of the Bureau

The Bureau's mandate is carried out through five interlinked departments:

I. The Department of Apparitional Affairs (DAA)

Governs the Haunted. It collects ecological underthoughts and oversees conditional apparitions through the Special Office of the Haunted, ensuring spectral transmissions are registered and presented for renewed remembrance.

II. The Department of De-Extinction and Environmental Renewal (DDER)

Directs restoration. It conducts experimental recreation of lost or endangered species, ecological modification, and rewilding, working to reverse ecosystem collapse and cultivate continuity.

III. The Department of Civic Memory (DCM)

Safeguards the collective record. It maintains the Archive, The Cinema (Division of Mass Civic Memory Distribution), and the Data Centre, transforming ecological loss into material for public remembrance and future instruction.

IV. The Department of Air and Sea (DAS)

Administers monitoring of atmospheric, aquatic, and oceanic systems. It tracks contamination, invisible currents, and emergent phenomena using the Device deployed by the Special Office of Burden and Photography, rendering planetary processes perceptible through imaging technologies.

V. The Department of Education and Engagement (DEE)

Manages training, public dissemination, and expectations. It prepares Haunted Officers, establishes ethical standards, and ensures the Bureau's practices remain accountable to civil and ecological communities.



**Bureau of Environmental
Imaging and Memory Analysis**
B E I M A

DEPARTMENT OF APPARITIONAL AFFAIRS (DAA)

- Division of Speculation
- Cinema of Ecological Grief Division
- Division of Ritual and Seance
- Division of Ecological Underthought Extraction
- Division of Spectral Justice
- Special Office of the Haunted

DEPARTMENT OF DE-EXTINCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL RENEWAL (DDER)

- Division of Field Liaison
- Division of Experimental Recreation and Biological Modification
- Division of Ex-situ Reconstruction
- Division of Rewilding and Regeneration

DEPARTMENT OF CIVIC MEMORY (DCM)

- The Archive
- People's Public Memory Repository
- BEIMA Data Centre
- The Cinema (Division of Mass Civic Memory Distribution)

DEPARTMENT OF AIR AND SEA (DAS)

- Division of Environmental Monitoring
- Division of Pollution and Contaminant Control
- Division of Data Synthesis and Forecasting
- Special Office of Burden and Photography

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT (DEE)

- Division of Policy, Ethics, and Compliance
- Division of Training
- Division of Public Intake
- Division of Permanent Erasure



1.2. DESCRIPTION OF OPERATION

1.2.1. Theoretical Underpinning

1.2.1.1. Ecological Underthought

Ecological Underthought is the undercurrent of consciousness the more-than-human world generates. Making manifest as dreams, thoughts, and memories, the hidden flow of unconscious production of the more-than-human world operates alongside and in response to human activities, in ways that often go unnoticed yet remain deeply interwoven with all forms of life.

It began with a proposition: *what if we were but a butterfly's dream?*

During the late Warring States period in China, around 476–221, philosopher Zhuangzi (庄子) was said to have a prophetic dream. In it, he became a butterfly. While dreaming, he momentarily forgot that he was Zhuangzi. When he awoke, he pondered the possibility: rather than dreaming of a butterfly, it was the butterfly who dreamed of him. This theory is amongst the earliest examples of the blurring of the human-animal divide, proffering the possibility of mutual becoming.

Ecological underthought emerged as a theoretical framework for responsible engagement with the world, informed by the intellectual influence of black hauntology that arose in the late twentieth century.

It draws from Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's *Undercommons*, referring to 'the ungovernable realm of social life, the place where the colonized, queer, and otherwise marginal make meaning with each other.'¹¹ The ecological underthought is also influenced by Cameroonian anthropologist Francis B. Nyamnjoh's comparison of the dominant Western epistemology versus the dormant African knowledge production that favours witchcraft and mythical narratives, which the former deems supernatural, unreal, and inferior.¹²

11 In *Undercommons* (2013), Moten and Harney defined undercommons as an indebtedness institutions such as academia create, Zach Ngín's (2020) eloquent summarisation captures its use beyond the original text.

12 Nyamnjoh, 'Delusions of Development and the Enrichment of Witchcraft Discourses in Cameroon', 2002, 28.

At any given historical period, due to the imbalance in power, there are forms of knowledge that remain suppressed and undervalued. Underthoughts represent a mode of thinking aligned with the subjugated and oppressed, emerging from the wild, feral, and more-than-human others whose presence often goes unrecognised by humans.

Ecological underthoughts form the invisible lining of the visible, the 'inexhaustible depth' of reality, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty theorised.¹³ It is a hidden way of thinking beyond human perception, stemming from below and under, but nonetheless real.

1.2.1.2. The Haunted

The Haunted are the human individuals who are susceptible to ecological underthoughts.

One can be born a Haunted or become one through exposure to the studies in environmental sciences and humanities. Throughout her lifetime, the Haunted establishes a special connection with one or a few species, receiving information in dreams or through seance.¹⁴

There is often an important message the Haunted receives from the spectral others. The Haunted mediates in the liminal space: between wakefulness and dreaming, between presence and absence.

This form of relationship, formally designated as *spectral justice*, refers to the insistence of the vanished on mattering, the return of the erased through relational demand. Spectral justice is 'fuelled by the grievances of ghosts who...refuse to be buried and insist on mattering.'¹⁵

The Bureau suspects these following historical figures as the Haunted: Hilma af Klint, Leonora Carrington, Stan Brakhage, Saodat Ismailova, Crystal Pite and Simon McBurney, and Minia Biabiany.

13 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 1968, 149.

14 See the Handbook of Seance and Ritualistic Practices, Division of De-Extinction and Environmental Renewal, BEIMA, 2119.

15 Developed within the context of Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, India. Bulls that die unnatural deaths can 'demand' justice by appearing in locals' Dreams. Govindraján, 'Spectral Justice', 2022.



The Bureau does not yet fully understand the selection process—why only a small population receives instructions from nature and can detect its unconscious undertorrents. Research from the Bureau suggests that a connection between the historically subjugated classes—women, Indigenous population, queer and racial minority groups can become more susceptible to ecological underthoughts due to lived experiences of oppression, unrest, and precarity, resulting in an expanded notion of sympathy and a strengthened capacity to grieve.¹⁶

The Haunted are known for their sharpened sensibility towards the pain and suffering of more-than-human others, as well as their non-nihilistic attitude. Becoming the Haunted is an honour and a practice. One must learn to always open one up to the world's suffering and remain affected. The Haunted's ability to detect and receive information from the natural environment is essential to the Bureau's operation.

1.2.1.3. Conditional Apparition

The construction of realms, be they visual or material, under which the lost species are conjured into existence.

The Bureau believes there is a strong connection between visualising ecological losses and creating a harmonious relationship with nature in aid of its remembrance and, in the most positive circumstances, return.¹⁷

The Bureau recognises ecological underthoughts as external repositories of historical truth.

¹⁶ The propensity to grief both discloses and upholds gender, racial, and colonial domination. For example, females are more likely than their male counterparts to experience 'reef grief', which is an overwhelming sorrow felt for the coral deterioration in the Great Barrier Reef (Marshall, 2019). See discussion on the origin of sympathy and ecofeminism discourse in Eric Godoy's essay 'Sympathy for Cecil', 2020. Canadian filmmaker Jennifer Abbott's film *The Magnitude of All Things*, 2020, explores how environmental anxiety takes root in the oppression of Canadian Indigenous communities. Psychologist Robert Gifford's work (2014) shows the connection between one's environmental behaviours and one's external, built, and virtual circumstances. Racial injustice and the creation of grieving subjects are explored in *Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America*, 2020.

¹⁷ Rahman, 'Filing Grief: The Archival Turn in Extinction Studies', 2096.

It is the institutional duty to render such transmissions visible and communicable, employing a variety of mediums, including moving image, performance, sculpture, sound, text, and installation.

That near-extinct species appear in an *apparitional* form suggests that not all species are able to 'come back' once declared extinct. The extent to which a species lingers in cultural memory is closely tied to the symbolic weight it carries, producing what might be described as a hierarchy of ghosts. Judith Butler, writing in the early twenty-first century, termed these *ungrievable lives*—lives that 'cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living.'¹⁸ This framing is crucial, since extinction encompasses not only species that are noticeable and memorable, but also those that humans neither perceive nor ever knew existed. The latter condition has been described as the *Dark Extinction*.¹⁹

Building on Butler's theory, the Bureau infers that there is a direct connection between the diminished emotional connection with more-than-human others and their recognisability. *Conditions*, therefore, must be met for more species to be recognised as worthy beings and continue to matter.²⁰

Often, the Bureau employs various regenerative creative techniques to perform the underthoughts of more-than-human others into being. This process constitutes both a rhetorical and material realm that adds to the species' recognition in the collective cultural memory.²¹

¹⁸ Butler, *Frames of War*, 2016, 13.

¹⁹ Happening in darkness, many species are lost without ever being 'discovered'. See Boehm and Cronk, 'Dark Extinction', 2021.

²⁰ Further, Butler suggests that there is 'no life itself' but a dependency on social networks and the condition of life: 'life as something that requires conditions in order to become livable life and, indeed, in order to become grievable' (23, 2009). This means for the species to continue to matter, material conditions, such as livable habitat and ecosystems must be met also.

²¹ Barthes, 'Photographic Phantoms in the Age of Ecological Catastrophe', 2083.



1.2.2. Operation Overview

The Bureau receives transmissions from nature's ecological underthoughts, mediated through the sensibilities of the Haunted. These transmissions arrive through multiple channels: the dream-states of the Haunted, fieldwork, the Bureau's dedicated research, and by following the leads provided by reporting citizens who encounter ghost species.

Casework is also often assigned on the basis of civic reporting. Citizens are encouraged to submit documentation of apparitional encounters, reports of nearly-gone species, and records of ecologically significant dreams (see Appendix B). Once a case has been received, specialists deploy to verify the report, establish ecological contact, and initiate appropriate apparitional procedures.

Once archived, operational units will be formed to perform conditional apparition: constructed realms wherein extinct or vanishing species are provisionally conjured into presence. In so doing, the Bureau ensures that ecological grief is sustained as permanent record. Memories from Nature, and of Nature are thus maintained as cultural infrastructure.

Where physical remains are available, they are used to stabilise the conditions of apparition. In their absence, officers rely upon alternative sensing methodologies such as *suspended grounds*²², *lively ethnography*²³, *critical fabulation*²⁴, and *critical approximation*.²⁵

22 A strategy of creating common realms for discourse and creative encounter when it is impossible to know the full context of a particular specie's disappearance. See Bastian, 'Whale Falls, Suspended Ground, and Extinctions Never Known', 2020.

23 Such is an approach 'grounded in an attentiveness to the evolving ways of life...in an effort to explore and perhaps restore the relationships that constitute and nourish them'. This methodology foregrounds the importance of storytelling and speculative encounters within an interspecies context. See van Dooren and Rose, 'Lively Ethnography', 2016, 77.

24 As iterated above. Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *ibid.*

25 An archival research methodology developed by Onyeka Igwe while examining anti-colonial protests in Onitsha, Nigeria. Originally coined by Bruno Latour, the term now describes 'an all-bodied encounter with archives, where a surfeit of instincts, desires, feelings, or senses can be provoked by the material.' Igwe, 'Being Close to, With or Amongst', 2020, 52.

All ecological data from Nature is deposited into the Archive, where they are indexed and encrypted. The records may be directly adapted by the Cinema, formerly known as the Division of Mass Civic Memory Distribution. This allows citizens to access private unconscious processes of nature, fostering greater affinity with more-than-human others.

Operational work extends beyond representation into ecological renewal. Transmissions of Ecological Underthoughts often carry instructions, blueprints, or unresolved demands from the more-than-human world. These are converted into experimental recreation, habitat restoration, or rewilding initiatives, allowing memory to shape material practice.²⁶

In parallel, the Bureau monitors atmospheric and aquatic conditions to detect the invisible currents through which apparitional presences emerge. This operation is conducted via the Device issued by the Special Office of Burden and Photography, correlating environmental disturbance with apparitional intensity. Such monitoring provides visual indication for the occurrence of ecological underthoughts.

In sum, the Bureau operates as a closed but permeable system: ecological underthoughts enter through felt and technological conduits; they are stabilised, translated, and made visible; they are extended into renewal and memory work; and they are returned to the public domain as enduring cultural infrastructure.

1.2.3. Operational Unit

Operational Units of the Bureau are established to ensure consistency in the reception, translation, and representation of ecological data. Each unit functions as a composite body, typically comprising a historian, a researcher trained in the sciences, and an artist responsible for the conceptualisation of representational practice.

26 For an example of how a glacier was able to help restore its surrounding habitat using its dreams, see Choudhury, 'On the Mnemonics of Glacier: Recollection in More-than-Human Climates as a Rewilding Strategy', 2098.



These teams, aided by Bureau-issued technologies, are frequently led by one or more members of the Special Office of the Haunted, whose capacity for interfacing with ecological unconscious activity is recognised as crucial.

Training and education reinforce this structure, producing officers capable of managing apparitional events with restraint, fidelity, and ritual discipline, while preparing the public to engage responsibly with ecological transmissions.

All operational activity is subject to internal review and interdepartmental coordination, particularly with the Department of Apparitional Affairs (DAA) and the Department of Education and Engagement (DEE).

1.2.4. The Mnemosphere

The Mnemosphere is a standard-issue apparatus designed for the amplification and transmission of ecological underthoughts within a designated perimeter. When deployed on-site, the device enhances residual traces of nonhuman memory and atmospheric affect, thereby enabling regulated channels of connection between authorised officers and surrounding ecological fields.

Operational protocol requires that a certified officer be present to engage with the Mnemosphere following receipt of a civic report or the autonomised registration of ecological underthought activity. Upon activation, the apparatus absorbs localised memory residues and transmits them through direct somatic integration into the officer's body for subsequent analysis.

The Mnemosphere additionally facilitates controlled access to generational memories, both human and more-than-human, and has been shown to enable the occurrence of apparitional transmissions under monitored conditions.



The photographic materials here illustrate the Mnemosphere's application in field practice. They depict an officer in the process of regulated use, providing visual confirmation of the device's role within operational procedure.



Civil servant Melody Li at work, using a Mnemosphere.

Li is a Memory Archaeologist at the People's Public Memory Repository, Department of Civic Memory. She specialises in the sensorial engagement of ancient plant foods and medicine.



1.2.5. Past and Future

1.2.5.1. Past success

Previous operations have demonstrated BEIMA's capacity to render ecological underthoughts through collaborative fieldwork, performative practice, and visual record. These cases serve as precedents for how remembrance can be sustained across disciplines and publics.

Case Study A: *Once She Dries*

To view: [link](#)



Once She Dries tracks the perilous journey of Coral, who must navigate the volatility of her ocean and sky in a devastatingly unstable environment.

The story is based on a scientific phenomenon: when corals begin drying up due to rising ocean temperature, their ability to release dimethyl sulphide, a pheromone-like chemical which triggers cooling cloud formations decreases. Over time, corals become increasingly unable to attract a cloud overhead.

The piece unfolds through a cyclical performance of pre-recorded spoken text, song, and five-screen video projection.

Libretto: Meagan Woods

Sculpture: Nancy Cohen

Music: Kourosh Ghamsari-Esfahani, Casper Leerink, Chris Blaber, Katerina Gimon.

Libretto performance: Amanda Sum

Video art: Eve Liu

Case study B: *Sightings*

To view: [link](#)



Sightings takes inspiration from low-quality internet images, bringing into light the contradictory logic of the sightings of nearly extinct species: albeit driven by the desire for concrete proof of the species' survival, they can be undermined by the fear of seeing too clearly.

The piece revisits three locations where an endangered ghost species was last seen: The Yangtze River for the Baiji dolphin, an American midwestern old-growth forest for the ivory-billed woodpecker, and a mountainous village for the Japanese wolf.

Fusing facts and anecdotes gathered from research with a personal narrative, *Sightings* offers a view when there is less and less to see.

Film and image: Eve Liu

1.2.5.2. Future Endeavour

Forthcoming projects, which are overseen by the Department of De-Extinction and Environmental Renewal, will incorporate experimental methods, integrating new technologies to anticipate the needs of future remembrance. Working with a range of species, these endeavours will test the adaptability of BEIMA's framework in challenges yet to emerge.



TWO. RESPONSIBILITIES OF BEIMA OFFICERS

2.1. GRIEF AS AN ACHIEVEMENT

The Bureau considers grief as the central affect through which cinema conjures the supernatural.

Scholars of the twenty-first century posited grief as a 'biosocial achievement', a result of millennia of revolution that sustain interdependence between species by way of creating relational entanglement.²⁷ Others considered the entanglement a form of indebtedness—grief as 'a cost of commitment'.²⁸ This indebtedness proves regenerative in the ecological discourses between the 2100s and now.

More-than-human others driven to extinction due to human activities are owed generations of human grief. Nevertheless, such deaths remained largely unacknowledged. It was frequently noted that no commensurate attention had yet been afforded to the disappearance of more-than-human others.²⁹ In many instances, they were not considered worthy of grief; their lives were unregistered and, as mentioned earlier, 'ungrievable'.³⁰

²⁷ In Thom van Dooren's theorisation, grief is about 'being emotionally at stake in one another's lives.' This complex involvement positions grief as 'a complex biosocial achievement, requiring the coming together of evolutionary histories and emotional and cognitive competencies to produce embodied subjects who are unavoidably emotionally entangled with one another.' Van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, 2020, 131.

²⁸ One cannot grieve that which has not been loved. 'Grief is perhaps the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment.' Parkes, *Bereavement*, 2010, 26.

²⁹ The inability to mourn in an age of ecological devastation is sociocultural. See Jones et al., 'Everyday Ecocide, Toxic Dwelling, and the Inability to Mourn', 2020.

³⁰ Judith Butler proffers that certain lives and communities, such as the state's enemies, non-humans, racial and sexual minorities are rendered unworthy of public grieving in order to sanctify and perpetuate the violence that had rendered them vulnerable. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 2020, 9.

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As habitats disappeared, images of their past occupants emerged. Sightings of *ghost species*—non-viable populations whose disappearance remained unconfirmed accumulated across the globe.³¹ For example: the South Island Kōkako, the Japanese wolf, the eastern cougar, the ivory-billed woodpecker. For decades, enthusiastic naturalists pursued them, chasing indistinct silhouettes. In a society rife with ungrivable lives, ghostly figures hold the place for unrecognisable loss.

Following the Second World War, ‘icons of grief’—images of immobilised, peripheral characters proliferated within mainstream cinema, serving as symbolic compensation for the otherwise unavowed national bereavement.³² By extension, ghost species have been identified by the Bureau as icons of ecological grief in a post-anthropocentric age.

Ghost species aid in the construction of visual realms, serving simultaneously as symptoms of unconscious guilt and as reservoirs of residual hope, recurrently surfacing in ecological underthoughts.

Cinema, as the cumulative conscious production in broad terms, is capable of creating ‘the social and cultural conditions necessary to shared remembering of forgotten or misplaced memories.’³³

What the Bureau considers to be cinema is not the strict sense of moving pictures released in theatres, but a collective repository of all visual production, including still and moving images, dance and theatre production, circulating videos and photographs, as well as sociocultural projection resulting from continued exposure to images.

The Bureau thus defines cinema as ‘a momentary point of contact with a luminosity so cutting that it leaves the mind imprinted long after the dwindling of the light. Cinema is films that persist; it is the combined impression of images that one carries into the world. Cinema is therefore a maintained realm—self-sustaining and forever evolving, shaped and reshaped by the dissemination and discourse surrounding total images produced.’³⁴

31 MacFarlane, *ibid.*

32 This analysis was originally applied to Val Lewton’s postwar films. Nemerov, *Icons of Grief*, 2005.

33 Film scholar John Izod and clinical therapist Joanna Dovalis consider cinema as a therapeutic ‘tenemos’ that deepens the connection with one’s unconsciousness. Izod and Dovalis, *Cinema as Therapy*, 2015, 2.

34 For a more detailed analysis of how the concept of cinema can be expanded to

For BEIMA, cinema is an informal civic archive of unconscious production. It registers not only what is made visible but also what circulates invisibly in cultural memory—the impressions left by images, the gestures carried in bodies, the hauntings that emerge in collective reiteration. In this sense, cinema is both technical and affective, both document and dream.³⁵ It matters because it offers a record of contact that exceeds material remains, and because it keeps open the possibility of re-encountering lives, human and non-human, that otherwise risk erasure.

An expanded reading of cinema recognises a strong connection between produced and perceived images. Dreams, understood as projected images of reality,³⁶ are considered a significant element of this expansive cinema. In line with the Bureau’s framework, the principle that ‘cinema is driven by the haunting animals’ unconscious³⁷ requires that images received in dreams be regarded as official transmissions of ecological underthought. Civil servants are reminded that such transmissions may be delivered by more-than-human others. It is therefore encouraged that dream journals be maintained in order to detect and record occasions when the haunting animals’ unconscious enters.

Ghost species further illuminate the logic of attachment to what has already been declared gone. Sigmund Freud’s differentiation between mourning and melancholia identified both as responses to the loss of loved objects, with melancholia deviating from ‘normal mourning’ into ‘pathological mourning.’³⁸

fluidly hold grief, see Liu, ‘Towards a Cinema of Ecological Grief’, 2026.

35 For a quantitative analysis of the cinema’s ability to do so, see Rousseau and Qureshi, ‘Stochastic Apparitions: The Statistical Certainty of Encountering Other Ecologies in Cinema’, 2122.

36 A Phenomenologist view, in particular, focus on the overall character of experience, whereby dreams can be experienced as reality. Windt, ‘Dreams and Dreaming’, 2021.

37 The reason for which, according to Akira Mizuta Lippit is that cinema embodies ‘animal traits as a gesture of mourning for the disappearing wildlife.’ Lippit, *Electric Animal*, 2000, 196.

38 Freud et al., *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, 2005, 212.



3/Jan/2122.

Contemplate this —

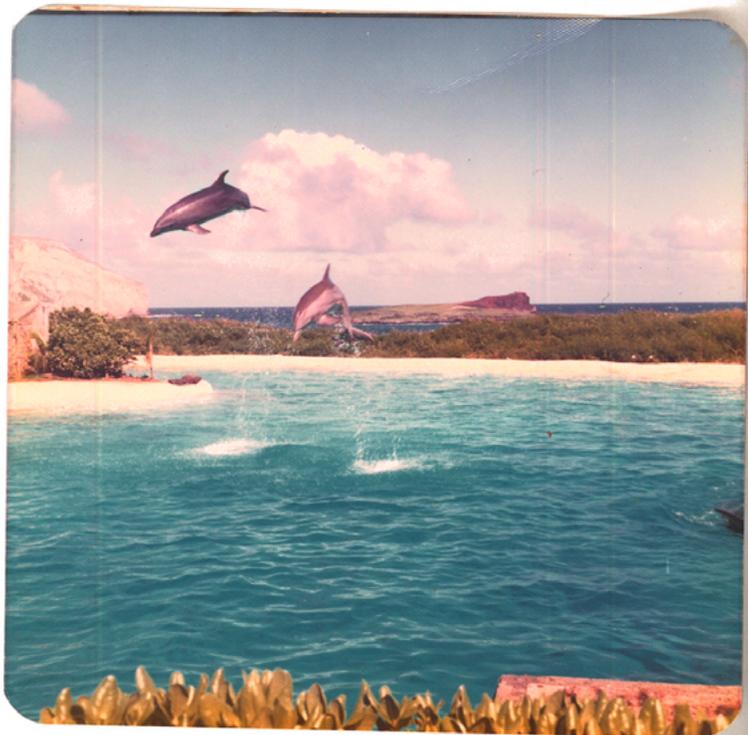
It was a mandarin to dream.

But wrong species!

"Doesn't matter.

Just look."

No but I don't want to — I hurry
too much to look..



My supervisor brought the photograph
closer to me. So close it was in
front of my eyes. Now in my
eyes. I mean it was right against
my eye balls. I can feel how
its smooth texture against the
softness of my eyes.

IS

GRIEF

A FORM

OF

COMMITMENT

Under such circumstance, 'the complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound.'³⁹ Ghost species, too, behave as open wounds inscribed upon devastated landscapes. The pursuit of a ghost species may itself constitute a refusal to concede finality, a quixotic attempt to accept that the beloved is vanished. Prolonging suffering in nature, grief as the 'deliberate act of sustained remembrance' appoints efforts of longer durations.⁴⁰

Accordingly, the Cinema of Ecological Grief Division is designated as the Bureau's most indispensable division. In the absence of the natural world and material evidence of existence, cinema, as an archive of unconscious production, extends the life of haunting animals, ecosystems, and landscapes through the sustained operations of the Bureau. Attentiveness to the unconscious processing of nature is to be carried out as a civil duty.

Officers are required to maintain up-to-date familiarity with literature on extinct species while also recording affective symptoms of grief, including dreams, felt senses, and civil narratives concerning specific species.

Remaining with grief may be painful, yet the pursuit of nearly vanished species yields access to the sites where ecological underthoughts most densely congregate. The Bureau, therefore, affirms its constitutional obligation to remaining with loss, treating the grief of others as a commitment to the world.

2.2. RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary obligation of the officers is to act as custodians of Nature, ensuring its premediation, preservation, and presentation. Officers are encouraged to treat ecological sorrow not as a private matter. Rather, they are required to transform personal affect into public inscription.

Responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

39 Ibid.

40 Van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, *ibid*, 142.



I. STEWARDSHIP TOWARDS MORE-THAN-HUMAN OTHERS

Officers must recognise their service as extending to nonhuman and ghostly entities. This includes hosting apparitional traces within their own bodies where required, being ‘willingly mutilated’ by the ecological underthoughts.⁴¹

II. AFFECTIVE LABOUR

All experiences of felt senses must be treated as official data and belong to the Archive, regulated as the ‘performative archive of now.’⁴² Folklore, oral history, family stories, and all nature-related emotions constitute the historical repository of truth and are public properties. Non-disclosure of ecological affects may be subject to legal sanction.

III. SUSTAINING REMEMBRANCE

Officers are discouraged from engaging in premature closure of mourning. The antidote to the shifting baseline syndrome is effortful remembrance. In alignment with Sigmund Freud’s theorisation of melancholia as an ‘open wound,’⁴³ officers are expected to sustain unresolved memories as part of their professional role.

IV. STAMINA OF THE GHOST

Officers are required to uphold commitment in the face of continued ecological losses. In order to exceed and outlast the ecological crises that erase spectral others, officers shall maintain ‘the stamina of the ghost’⁴⁴ thereby contributing to circumstances under which species at risk of extinction may be enabled to reappear.

41 Judith Butler uses the phrase ‘willingly mutilated’ to describe psychotherapy-patient relationship. The role of the officer is one of a similar unselfish offering. *Judith Butler on Climate Sorrow*, 2023.

42 This is to say, every moment counts towards a shared future. See Davis, ‘Waiting in Petro-Time’, 2023.

43 Freud, *ibid.*

44 Rebekah Simcha Otto emphasises the importance of committing to holding onto black grief as a key strategy to confront socio-political injustice. Otto, ‘How to Defy Death: Mapping the Future through Black Hauntologies’, 2025.

2.3. INDUCTION OF THE HAUNTED

All incoming trainees shall undergo the Induction of the Haunted as a mandatory prerequisite for official service within the Bureau. The induction period, conducted under the oversight of the Department of Education and Engagement (DEE), constitutes the primary measure by which candidates are evaluated for haunted service.

The induction requires the following:

- **Recitation of the Oath.**
- **Full memorisation of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.**
- **Maintenance of an authorised Dream Journal.**
- **Oral disclosure of dreams and personal affects to supervisory personnel.**
- **Direct and regulated exposure to relevant educational and archival materials.**
- **Continued receptivity to civic submissions of apparitional activities.**

Failure to complete the Induction in its entirety shall result in disqualification. Officers unable to satisfy the requirements of haunted service are formally designated unfit for the role and must be reassigned by the Department of Education and Engagement (DEE) to alternate forms of bureaucratic duty.

2.4. FRAMEWORK OF C.A.R.E: CENTRAL APPARITIONAL REGULATION of ETHICS

As the Bureau assumes responsibility for regulating the fragile and uneven terrain of apparitional encounters, the need has arisen for a formalised code of conduct capable of addressing the moral ambiguities of such work.

The Bureau hereby establishes the Central Apparitional Regulation of Ethics (CARE) as the guiding framework for managing the complex power relations and ethical dilemmas inherent in the governance of spectral phenomena.



CARE shall serve as the provisional standard for all apparitional affairs, under the oversight of the Division of Spectral Justice, within the Department of Apparitional Affairs (DAA).

At its core, CARE acknowledges that relations between the human and the more-than-human are structured by ongoing indebtedness—'to care is to be affected by another, to be emotionally at stake in them in some way.'⁴⁵

Care is not reducible to reciprocal exchange, but negotiated by relational dynamics. As established in historical scholarship within animal studies, multispecies care is never innocent but remains entangled with dependency, power, and the possibility of harm.⁴⁶ Acts of care, therefore, can themselves become acts of violence: endangered animals may perish under the conditions of confinement intended to preserve them, and human communities may be displaced in service of conservation. This may be inevitable.

The Bureau recognises that care for spectral species imposes strain upon both the conserving and the conserved. The CARE framework therefore seeks to regulate these difficult encounters, with particular attention to circumstances in which the burden of care threatens to overwhelm the relation itself, in order to foster modes of coexistence that extend relief to all involved actors.⁴⁷

To care for ecological apparitions requires remaining unsettled, inhabiting the distance between recognition and action.

CARE codifies ambivalence as an ethical stance: officers must attend not only to that which is nurtured, but also to that which remains estranged by the very act of caring.

45 Van Dooren, Thom. 'Care', 2014.

46 Discussing at length the complex power structure and estrangement of humans and animals in the act of caring is Eszter Erdosi's dissertation, 'Strangers of Kindness', 2025.

47 Chen, "Fieldwork in Places of Harm: Notes on Co-Flourishing", 2109.



THREE. APPENDIX

APPENDIX A. GLOSSARY OF BUREAU TERMINOLOGY

Apparition

The way in which ghost species make themselves known: making manifest as indistinct shapes, limerence, involuntary memories, and intrusive thought sequences.

CARE (Central Apparitional Regulation of Ethics)

The ethical consideration involved in fulfilling civil duties at the Bureau that legitimises the possibility of harm that is inherent the conservation of endangered species.

Cinema

The civic archive of all unconscious production, consisting of both visual and mental imageries.

Conditional Apparition

The construction of bounded realms, be they material or immaterial, in which endangered species are brought into temporary presence.

Critical Approximation

A method for engaging with incomplete or inaccessible records. It emphasises bodily, affective, and sensory proximity to archival fragments, allowing officers to draw knowledge where direct evidence is absent. First theorised by Bruno Latour, it was later incorporated by Onyeka Igwe.⁴⁸

Device

The technical instrument assigned to officers for the detection and capture of ecological underthoughts. Depending on the quality of the image, it offers assessment of varying levels of ecological harm.

48 Igwe, *ibid.*

Dream

An emancipation of suppressed unconscious processing in the form of involuntary successions of images. A major means by which more-than-human others deliver instructions.

Ecological Grief

The sorrow felt for a dying world. Often experienced as negative emotions arising from real or perceived decline of ecological conditions.⁴⁹ It is both a symptom of loss and a resource for sustained remembrance.

Ecological Underthoughts

The unconscious productions generated by the more-than-human world. Underthoughts emerge as dreams, memories, thoughts, and impressions that carry ecological information. The Bureau considers them as external repositories of historical truth.

Felt

A key instrument using which Bureaucrats engage with ecological underthought. Defined by Eiko Soga as 'information that triggers the senses; physical and emotional experiences that a body holds fluidly.'⁵⁰

Ghost Species

Icons of ecological grief. Species displaced by human-induced change, who persist in fragile or non-viable populations⁵¹ that gain purchase in cultural narratives. The lingering of which often indicates the occurrence of ecological damage.

Memory

A controlled contamination event in which images of the absent others are conjured through the host mind.

Mnemosphere

A standard-issue apparatus that amplifies the transmission of ecological underthoughts.

49 Cunsolo and Ellis, *ibid.*

50 Soga, 'Felt Knowledge', 2023.

51 Macfarlane, *ibid.*



More-than-human

Entities such as living beings and natural systems beyond the human realm. First introduced by David Abram in *The Spell of the Sensuous* in 1996,⁵² it calls for a humility acknowledging that human existence is dependent on a broader web of lives.

Nature

Used interchangeably with 'more-than-human', referring to the realm in which beings such as animals, plants, inanimate elements, waterways, mountains, and ecosystems reside. That which cannot be produced by humankind.

Spectral Justice

The ethical demand imposed by humans and more-than-humans whose livelihoods are threatened by ecological degradation. Both the living and the deceased can claim such justice.

The Haunted

Sensitive individuals susceptible to ecological underthoughts. Receptionists of dreams, thoughts, and memories that do not belong to them. The Haunted status is achieved either by birth or by continued exposure to ecological knowledge.

Ungrievable Lives⁵³

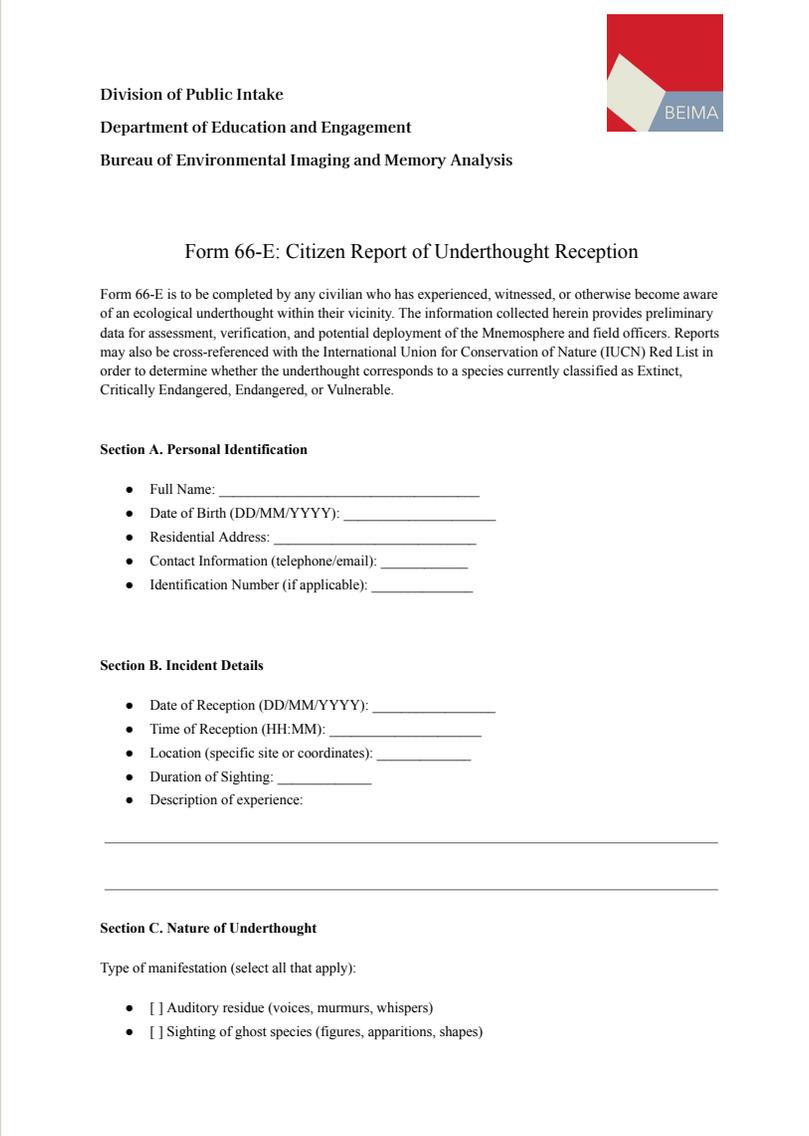
Life forms and forms of life not recognised as worthy of public mourning. That which dissipate without public remembrance, reflecting hierarchies of value within human perception.

52 Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996.

53 Butler, *Frames of War*, ibid.

APPENDIX B. Form 66-E: Citizen Report of Underthought Reception

*The form is available for download on the central website of Department of Education and Engagement, under Resources - Duty of Citizens - Downloadable Forms.



The image shows a document titled "Form 66-E: Citizen Report of Underthought Reception". At the top right is the BEIMA logo, which consists of a red square partially overlapping a white square, with the letters "BEIMA" in blue to the right. Below the logo, the text reads: "Division of Public Intake", "Department of Education and Engagement", and "Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis". The title "Form 66-E: Citizen Report of Underthought Reception" is centered. Below the title is a paragraph explaining that the form is to be completed by any civilian who has experienced, witnessed, or otherwise become aware of an ecological underthought within their vicinity. It states that the information collected provides preliminary data for assessment, verification, and potential deployment of the Mnemosphere and field officers. Reports may also be cross-referenced with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List in order to determine whether the underthought corresponds to a species currently classified as Extinct, Critically Endangered, Endangered, or Vulnerable. The form is divided into three sections: Section A. Personal Identification, Section B. Incident Details, and Section C. Nature of Underthought. Section A includes fields for Full Name, Date of Birth (DD/MM/YYYY), Residential Address, Contact Information (telephone/email), and Identification Number (if applicable). Section B includes fields for Date of Reception (DD/MM/YYYY), Time of Reception (HH:MM), Location (specific site or coordinates), Duration of Sighting, and Description of experience. Section C includes a field for Type of manifestation (select all that apply) with two options: [] Auditory residue (voices, murmurs, whispers) and [] Sighting of ghost species (figures, apparitions, shapes).





Division of Public Intake
 Department of Education and Engagement
 Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis

- Somatic sensation (pressure, depressive thoughts, temperature change)
- Intrusive memory (memory not personally held)
- Other (please specify): _____

Description of Underthought (use precise language; attach additional sheets if necessary):

Section D. Species Identification (IUCN Reference)

- Did the underthought involve or allude to a specific species?
 Yes No Unclear

If yes, please indicate:

- Common Name (if known): _____
- Scientific Name (if known): _____
- Apparent IUCN Red List Status (if identifiable): Extinct (EX) Critically Endangered (CR) Endangered (EN) Vulnerable (VU) Other (please specify): _____

Section E. Supporting Evidence

- Were photographs, recordings, or other media obtained?
 Yes (attach to submission) No

Details of additional information:

Division of Public Intake
 Department of Education and Engagement
 Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis



Declaration: I hereby declare that the information provided in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge. I understand that submission of Form 66-E initiates official review and may result in the on-site deployment of authorised officers and the Mnemosphere.

Signature: _____ Date: _____



28 Feb. 2024.

This morning at the canteen.

I pressed the spoon down in the centre of my congee and watched the rice water pool in.

The pool. The pool.

I'm pursued by it. Consumed by it.

My mother said when I'm not at work I ought to think less of it.

For my own protection. But mom is near retirement age now, being 82, and has developed a sincere talent for numbness.

I don't think her accounting work gives her much insight into our work at the Bureau.

"Being haunted is an achievement."

My mother used to encourage me. I don't know if she realises how many times we are told this at the office every day.

She would hold me in her arms, as I let the scream induced by his leading me to the pool subside.

CASE REPORT

FUTURE COLLECTIVE
FOR OUR
PAST
SORROWS

SPECIAL OFFICE OF THE HAUNTED
CINEMA OF ECOLOGICAL GRIEF DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF APPARITIONAL AFFAIRS

BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGING AND MEMORY ANALYSIS

FUTURE COLLECTIVE OF OUR PAST SORROWS
Report Date 01/03/2124, Sequence 15.8, RXO579542
Entry attempt: vii
Primary Investigator: Eve Liu

Future Collective of Our Past Sorrows, an installation, investigates the Institute of Hydrobiology, Chinese Academy of Sciences in Wuhan, where the last Yangtze River dolphin (淇淇-Qiqi) perished.

The objects in the exhibition are drawn partly from the Institute, with others borrowed from and given by the Oxford University Museum of Natural History to help recreate the Institute before its closure in 2024.

Guided by the memories of the Baiji River dolphin and an anonymous researcher's field notes and photographs when she visited the Institute in 2023, this project asks, what happens to conservation efforts and the memories they engendered when care and attention run out?



Installation at the Dolphin Gallery, St John's College, University of Oxford.





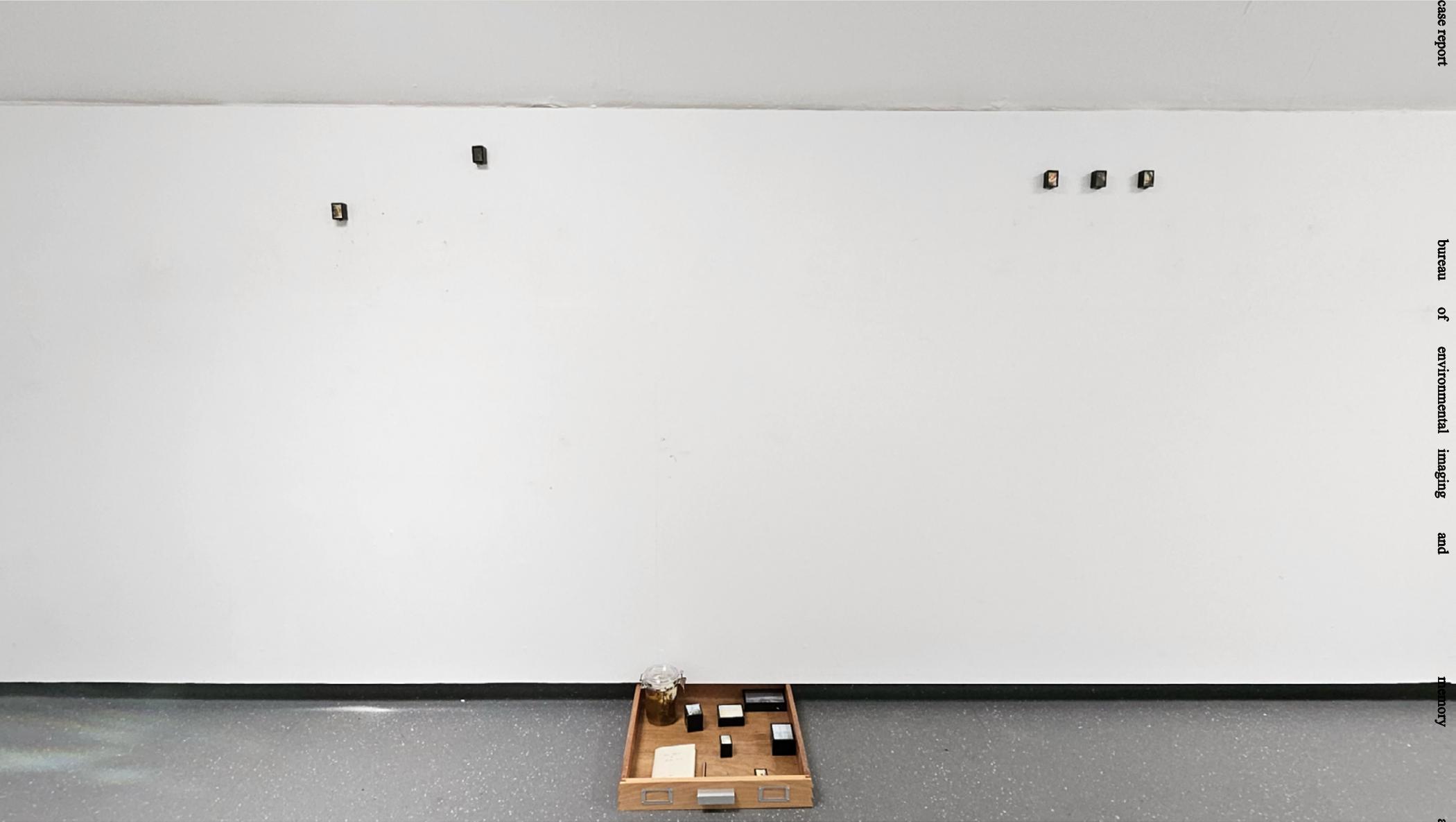
Installation at the Dolphin Gallery, St John's College, University of Oxford.



List of materials:

- * Water, taken from the pool where the last Baiji dolphin lived
- * Linen dress
- * Cylindrical ground glass jar with lid, Oxford University Museum of Natural History loan
- * Tooth drawer, Oxford University Museum of Natural History loan
- * Glass-topped boxes, Oxford University Museum of Natural History (in-kind donation)
- * 3D-printed (common) dolphin skull and brain
- * Lilac flowers, collected in Wuhan and in Oxford
- * Visitor's Handbook
- * MP3 player
- * Headphones
- * LED lights
- * Projector





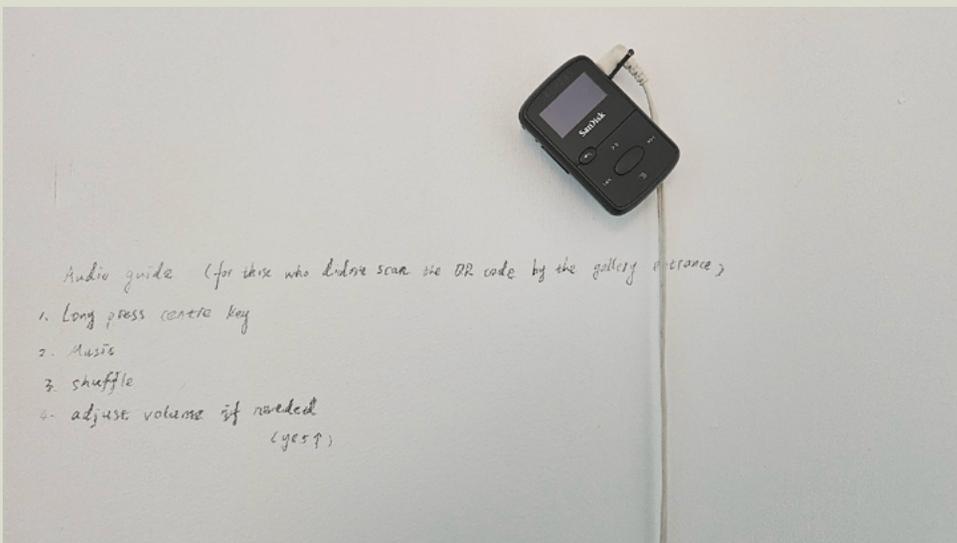
Installation at the Dolphin Gallery, St John's College, University of Oxford.





Installation at the Dolphin Gallery, St John's College, University of Oxford.





Installation at the Dolphin Gallery, St John's College, University of Oxford.

While viewing the exhibition, the audience is encouraged to listen to the audio soundtrack, which recounts my experience.

To listen to the [audio](#):

Transcription:

2124年，考古学家要求我把这个场馆变成一座博物馆

In 2124, the archaeologists tasked me to turn this site into a museum.

It has remained buried since 2024, when the old Centre of Hydrobiology officially closed down.

The new centre, funded and built by the Department of De-extinction and Environmental Renewal, is three times bigger with 10 times the state funding.

My father is retired now.

Otherwise, he might have been transferred there.

He might have worked way less hours. We might have been happier.

In the early 2000s, my mentor Professor Zhang was once optimistic about the new site:

“如果说我们白鱀豚慢了迟了晚了，但是在这个过程中我们学到了很多，把在白鱀豚身上学到的东西用到江豚身上。”

...that we were late to conserve the Baiji river dolphin but it's not too late to save the Yangtze finless porpoise.

I suppose he was both wrong and right.

The 10-year fishing ban on the Yangtze River ended in 2030. Some lives did not return.

Still, this has been more than the developed countries ever did.

With all the birds, bees, and butterflies now gone, the government is developing synthetic lives to repopulate the Earth.

Finless porpoises with silicone bones are being given away to ocean parks and private aquariums,

where they swim in indoor pools, under the gaze of international experts who travel there, much like how I once travelled to see the last pool where you lived.

when I thought the strenuous act of upholding your death with my nostalgia would serve some important purpose.

They have been forgetting about you.

If it weren't for the archaeologists maybe I would've been elsewhere, too.

Sometimes I think I much prefer that. I'm tired of being eaten away by your past.

When I was younger, way younger my father took me to the aquarium,

he asked if I knew that because cetaceans do not sleep the same way humans do,

they are very unlikely to dream.

Years later, I still wake up from dreams where my father is drowning

behind a thick glass his face pale and bloated. His unfinished reports and paperwork rain down from the surface

he screams, but I cannot hear

I often wake up from those dreams

wishing that I didn't know how to dream at all.

Turns out the scientists and my father were wrong about you not being able to dream. When the new memory extraction technology was invented, they were able to read and archive dreams from dolphins.

You dreamt often when you lived in the old centre of hydrobiology.

You were perceptive of your caretakers, the scientists, the researchers, of the sound of cicadas, of the cherry blossom petals that came and went with every season.

You once dreamt of me.

I was by your pool.

By then you were already gone, but your memories stayed at the bottom.

To you, I looked like a distant ghost who lingered and drifted at the edge of your consciousness.

My hand touched the water and caused the ripples.

I was never close.

I suppose some data are better stashed away—hidden, rather than preserved,

to maintain the integrity of this present moment, for which we have worked hard to achieve.





Installation at the Daegu Foundation for Culture and Arts, Korea. Part of the exhibition: We May Be Separated Like Islands, but (우리는 섬처럼 떨어져 있을지라도). Curated by Yeni Ma.

15. Dec. 2123.

Another bad dream.

He came back to see me.

He was behind a thick, distorted piece of glass, calling me to swim with him.

He knew I couldn't swim.

He knew I had given up on my swimming lessons after my father's incident.

The blind quite. the drowning dread.

Did he know how much this costs me emotionally?

I wonder.

I soaked his skull with the lilac flowers I picked and made it a spirit.

The same immersion technique I received training for when I first joined the Bureau.

It's beginning to look ripe. I wonder how long we have to wait until it's sent off to the Division of Exorcism.







Excerpt from an anonymous researcher's field notes from 2023:

*"The Yangtze River is home to two species of cetacean—the Baiji dolphin (*Lipotes vexillifer*) and the Yangtze finless porpoise (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis*).*

In 1978, the Chinese Academy of Sciences established a research group—the Institute of Hydrobiology. The institute was an ex-situ conservation and research site, dedicated to the studies of aquatic organisms and water environment protection. In 1980, a Baiji dolphin was captured and sent to the institute.

While it was estimated that thousands of Baiji dolphins lived in the river in the 1950s, by the 80s, the number had dropped to 400 or less. The scientists named the captured dolphin Qiqi (淇淇), who lived 22 years at the institute before passing away in 2002. With all efforts of breeding failing, Qiqi was the last of his kind.

In 2006, a month-long search expedition surveying over 3400km of the river denounced the existence of the Baiji dolphin as a species.

When I visited the institute last year, the pool in which Qiqi lived was deserted, taken over by a family who washed and cooked around it, turning the area into a private backyard and storage unit.

The institute now hosts 6 Yangtze finless porpoises. Contrary to the Baiji dolphin, the breeding of Yangtze finless porpoises has been successful. The first artificially bred finless porpoise was born in 2005, followed by the second in 2007. Thanks to the Ten-Year Fishing Ban (2020-2030), more than 1,400 finless porpoises now live in the Yangtze River.

Even with their rising population, the species is still critically endangered. I was lucky to see a few finless porpoises in the indoor pools during my visit, but I was met with a strange sense of urgency and loss.

It's noteworthy that these extinction events are closely connected to economic and societal rifts in China. In 1953, Chairman Mao Zedong proposed

building the Three Gorges Project following an inspection of the river. The Chinese economic reform in 1978 further exacerbated ecological deterioration in and along the river. Activities such as overfishing, shipping, and environmental pollution made it impossible for the cetaceans to survive. Against these rapid changes, all personnel at the Institute of Hydrobiology, whether doing ichthyological or cetacean research, were tasked to report on fish resources and environmental protection measures.

Reading their research papers and memoirs, it was clear to me that the scientists lamented the passing of species and were often left feeling hopeless. For them, it was obvious that the only reasonable solution was to halt harmful human activities, yet progress and development were above all else, an 'inevitability'.

In 2023, when I visited the institute, I was told that the whole place faced closure. This is not quite a dystopian tale, however, as a much bigger facility is already under construction. This alone should signify a brighter future for conservation.

However, as long as the central problem that threatened species survival in the first place—the tension between development and conservation—remains unresolved, I worry that other efforts to protect the species will be in vain.

Also unresolved is our relationship with nature. Both the Yangtze River and the Yellow River have been reduced to a precarious 'fishless' state. Even though the finless porpoise breeding scheme has had its success and the population is growing, there still is an estimation of a 50% extinction rate in the Yangtze River in the next 10 years.

People pay attention to dolphins due to their size, charisma, and intelligence. Not nearly enough attention is being paid to the less 'charismatic' species.

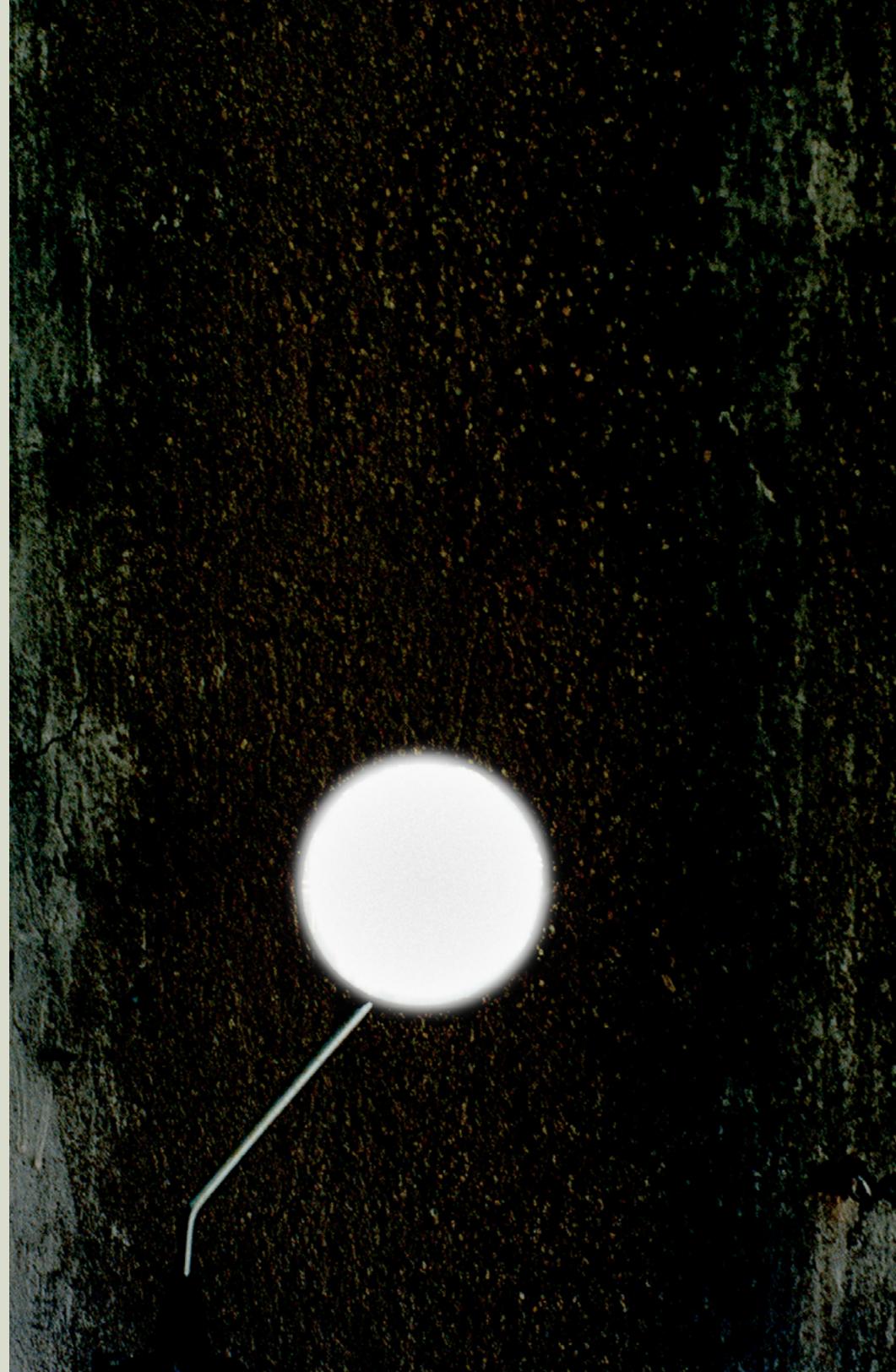
The ultimate vision of ex-situ nature conservation is to restore and rejuvenate the natural habitat, release the species into the wild, and strengthen the natural population. Scientists at the institute told me that that is one of their biggest challenges. In May 2024, 19 finless porpoises were relocated



from an in-situ conservation area to for-profit ocean parks. What constitutes care in a place of captivity? What counts as a 'good life' when protection takes form in entrapment?

I often think about a quote from James Baldwin: 'The world is held together, really it is held together, by the love and the passion of a very few people.' I often wonder what will happen when the love and passion of a few people dissipate; if they dissipate. I wonder who or what will hold on to the memories given rise by their efforts."

August, 2023









21 / May / 2124.

I was spoken to.

Victory.

If this is not being haunted then what is?

Tell me what is.

I read the story about the Baiji woman and her human lover again.

《聊斋志异》. written in the Qing Dynasty.

The baiji river dolphin loved him so much she turned human.

what does that love feel like?

When the scholar saw a baiji dolphin captured by local fishermen he didn't realise it was the baiji woman's mother. despite her having breasts and a vagina like that of a woman.

The baiji dolphin begged the scholar to release her mother.

which he did.

The couple's happiness lasted until the river ran dry. by which point the baiji woman also crinkled and wilted.

So the scholar had to recite a poem by Li Bai 李白 from the heart. for three days.

this was the only way her cadaver remained fresh.

I woke up with the poem inside my mouth, despite never having read it.

It tasted like river mud by the way.

22 / May / 2124.

Every corner there is always an aquarium always.

Office of InterDepartmental Transitions
Division of Training, Department of Education and Engagement
Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis



Name: Eve Liu

Emp. No. : [REDACTED]

APPOINTMENT OF THE HAUNTED

Dear Eve,

I am to inform you that you have been promoted from:

Probational Archive Researcher,
The Archive
Department of Civic Memory
Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis

To:

Special Office of the Haunted
Cinema of Ecological Grief Division
Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis

Effective Date of Transfer: 15 May, 2124

Additional Remarks:

Following recent evaluations conducted under Protocols of Apparitional Registration (Ethics and Responsibility 3.7, BEIMA: Protocols of Apparitional Registration), the Bureau acknowledges your successful transition into the category of *The Haunted*. This designation reflects not a diminishment, but an intensification of perceptual attunement to ecological underthoughts.

Particular commendation is due for your sustained reception of the Baiji (Yangtze River Dolphin, *Lipotes vexillifer*), whose spectral transmissions you have rendered with clarity, precision, and affective fidelity. In accordance with Memorandum 44-C, your embodied hauntings are henceforth recognised as Bureau property, archived for future apparitional circulation.

Proceed, then, with vigilance and receptivity. Your service honours not only the memory of the vanished but the unfinished dreams of the living river.

Office of InterDepartmental Transitions
Division of Training, Department of Education and Engagement
Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis



At this joyous occasion, we once again bring to your attention your oath:

I solemnly affirm that I shall faithfully serve the Bureau of Environmental Imaging and Memory Analysis in the capacity of Haunted Officer. I shall uphold the sanctity of ecological underthoughts and give voice to the apparitional transmissions of the more-than-human world. I accept the burdens of grief as integral to the duties of remembrance, and I shall not conceal nor exploit the visions entrusted to me.

I pledge to mediate with CARE between the living and the departed, between the spectral and the material. For grief is an achievement, I hold on to remembrance when it is painful to remember; I safeguard memories of others; I conserve when conservation is impossible. These are my Responsibilities, and I shall accept them without evasion.

I enter into this service with full knowledge of its burden. I will be the mouthpiece of the departed and the nearly departed.

The Grief of others is my achievement.

Do refer to the Induction of the Haunted (Field and Procedural Manual, BEIMA, Section 2.3.) to fulfil your ensuing Responsibilities.

Congratulations.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

The Office of Inter-Departmental Transitions,
Division of Training, BEIMA

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Eve Liu'.

Signature/Date

15 May, 2124

CASE REPORT

D A N C E
U N I T
L I B A Z H

SPECIAL OFFICE OF THE HAUNTED
CINEMA OF ECOLOGICAL GRIEF DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF APPARITIONAL AFFAIRS

BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGING AND MEMORY ANALYSIS

Project Proposal: Formation of Dance Unit: Libazh
Report Date 26/06/2124, Sequence 22.7, SD6876032

Entry attempt: ii
Case Officers: Eve Liu (PI), Dr Alice Baldock, Mingyu Zhu

On behalf of Dr Alice Baldock and Mingyu Zhu, I, Eve Liu, the haunted propose a dance collective exploring temporality and the blurring of the human-nature divide guided by the underthoughts of three more-than-human others: the pomegranate plant, the now-extinct Yangtze River dolphin, and the snowdrop plant.

The performance thus unfolds in three intervals respectively. The first scene retells the fantasy of a pomegranate as it transforms into a woman. The second scene recreates the dying dreams of the now-extinct Yangtze River dolphin. The third scene portrays an abbey on the eve of its destruction through the lens of the snowdrop plants that grew around it.

The third scene, in particular, was tested in a short film titled *Two Truths and a Lie about Snowdrops*, which explored the formation of sympathy using the mirror-touch synesthesia theory. Intent on forming a closer connection with nature, the dancers mimicked each other's gestures and those of the snowdrop plants.

To view the film, visit this [link](#).



Film still, *Two Truths and a Lie about Snowdrops*



Cinematography - Lijin An, Miriam Austin
Sound Design - Harry O'Connor
Editing - Eve Liu

The interdisciplinary collective currently consists of:

- * Dr Alice Baldock, a Junior Research Fellow in Japanese Studies, whose work explores the history and embodied practice of women butoh dancers.
- * Eve Liu (the Haunted), who specialises in cetacean ghost species and cinematic remembrance.
- * Mingyu Zhu, a neuroscientist studying the neural mechanisms underlying memory, generalisation, and flexible behaviour.
- * Harry O'Connor, whom the collective works with on an irregular basis, is a musician who focuses on jazz-inflected chamber and orchestral music found in the Irish natural landscape.





beima: case report

bureau of environmental imaging and

memory

analysis



Film still, *Two Truths and a Lie about Snowdrops*

Wp / May / 21/24.

Snowdrops where they don't belong.

Flowering all season

Snow triumphing over fire

A long line of my colleagues queuing
in front of them

holding mnemospheres

I asked what they could remember.

One of them said
period blood.

The anonymous researcher whose notes
I read detailed her walking
around bus stops.

Seeing Nature Trust's advertisement
for citizen phenology,

asking people to record
when the flowers would begin
to grow

The snowdrops were already
flowering so early 100 years ago.

She thought it was a waste of
time.

Would she be pleased to know that
the Department of Civic Memory
now relies on the data collected
from her time?

Film still, *Two Truths and a Lie about Snowdrops*



On the third day, the snowdrops had a dream:

Reflection: Formation of Dance Unit: Libazh
Audience Reception and Transmission of Ecological Underthought

Report Date 08/08/2125, Sequence 22.8, SD6876032

Entry attempt: iv

Case Officers: Eve Liu (PI), Dr Alice Baldock, Mingyu Zhu

The collective has now completed the performance in two iterations: Iteration I: Modern Art Oxford. Iteration II: Restaged film at Port Meadows. Both presentations have been instrumental in developing the conceptual and choreographic framework for the work.

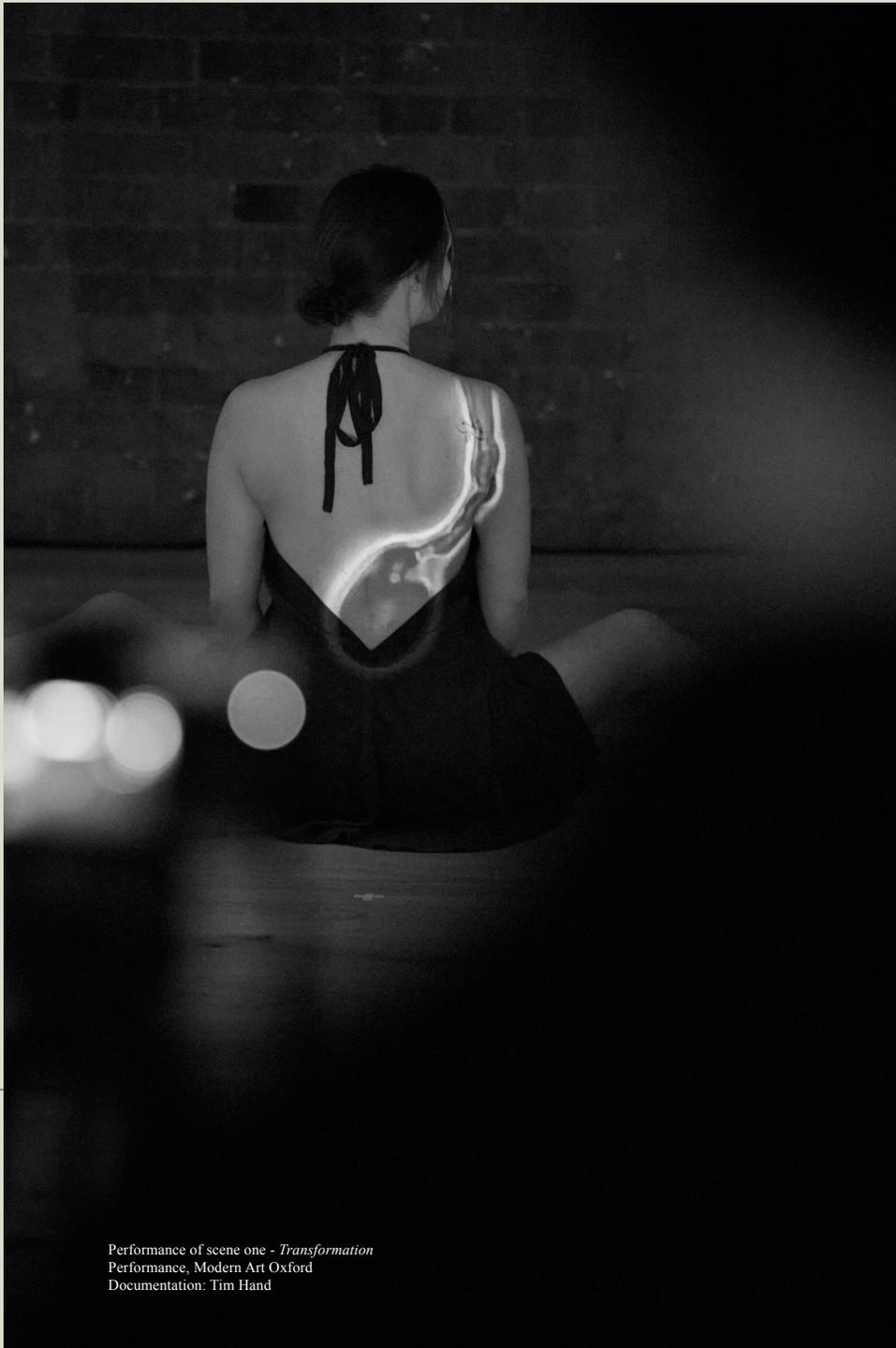
Purpose of Report:

1. Detailing the development of the narrative of the dance.
2. Providing a record of observed and speculative transmissions of ecological underthought during two sanctioned iterations of the performance.
3. Offering brief reflection on the unit and its continued development.



Performance, Modern Art Oxford
Documentation: Tim Hand





Performance of scene one - *Transformation*
Performance, Modern Art Oxford
Documentation: Tim Hand

1. Project Narrative Development

Since its inception, the dance unit has connected all three scenes through a central motif: the pomegranate seeds. Drawing from the myth of Persephone—who, after consuming six pomegranate seeds, was bound to spend six months each year in the underworld with Hades—we explored the idea of *crossing* between realms. This theme of cyclical passage resonated with the Bureau's mission to convey ecological underthoughts from the more-than-human world into human consciousness.

The three scenes are:

Scene one - *Transformation*.

Scene two - *River Dolphin*.

Scene Three - *Crossing*.

The third scene departs from the earlier snowdrop sequence to connect with scene two. Together, they reimagine a Qing Dynasty folktale from *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (《聊斋志异》), which recounts the reawakening of the Yangtze River goddess, known locally as the Baiji. In the story, the river goddess, once incarnated as a dolphin, falls in love with a mortal man. After her death, she is revived by her human beloved reciting poems for three days—a gesture that bridges life and death through devotion. Scene three sees the dolphin woman crossing back to the realm of the living.

As the project's principal investigator, I experienced this process as a form of ecological transmission: a movement of thought and feeling across species, worlds, and times. Collectively, we wove together philosophical ideas from diverse cultural backgrounds to create a culminating condition of crossing—a dance that enacts the possibility of bringing the dead, or the lost, momentarily back into presence.

07. 09. 2124.

I met up with Alice
She was waiting for me outside the
DVER.

Alice just got off work,
and was wearing her beige boots
made of fake leather.

Her lips three shades more maroon
than mine.

she seemed high-spirited about
our mission.

She told me she changed her outfit
several times.
as she really did believe that
different garments affected how
an underthought is perceived.

Mingyu on the other hand,
believed it was our movements

and their quality that made
the conditional apparition successful.

I often admired her rationality
and thought it was our differences
that brought us together.

Alice with her liberated beauty,
Mingyu with her insight into the
pathways underlying memories and
I ... with an immense propensity
for sadness?

My supervisor had warned me
about using the dream journal
like a diary.

Sorry!

Performance of scene three, *Crossing*
Modern Art Oxford
Documentation: Tim Hand



2. Observed Audience Engagement

Audience response was notably positive across all three scenes.

Participants reported a sustained recollection of the mythological traditions referenced in the first and third scenes and expressed increased curiosity regarding the fate of the Yangtze River dolphin.

These findings indicate that the performance successfully facilitated both cultural remembrance and ecological awareness, extending its resonance beyond the temporal boundaries of the event itself.

Estimated Accuracy Rate of Ecological Underthought Transmission (AREUT): 57%

Performance of scene three, *Crossing*
Modern Art Oxford
Documentation: Tim Hand



3. Reflection

The unit is progressing in a direction we are satisfied with, demonstrating both conceptual clarity and audience resonance.

Some technical adjustments will be required in future stagings to refine transitions and ensure consistency across intervals. In particular, the use of projection during the second scene.

Attention must also be directed toward the tonal composition of the piece. Members of the collective have been prompted by their respective supervisors to consider the role of romantic aesthetics within the work.

As a collective, we maintain our commitment to the principle of *soft fascination*, as articulated in Attention Restoration Theory (ART).¹ Our intention is to emulate the experience of positive engagement with nature—conducting our bodies in a manner that gently persuades, in non-directive manners, rather than instructs, the audience.

We have produced a filmed version of the performance to serve as a permanent record—*Libazh Iteration II: Restaged film at Port Meadows*. This recording will also enable wider dissemination, with plans underway for a screening through the Cinema (the Division of Mass Civic Memory Distribution).

¹ Studies find that ‘attending to softly fascinating stimuli not only requires little effort but also leaves mental space for reflection.’ Walking in nature, for example, aids the restoration of everyday fatigue. See Avik Basu et al., ‘Attention Restoration Theory: Exploring the Role of Soft Fascination and Mental Bandwidth’, in *Environment and Behavior* (2019). See also Lu, Situ. ‘Why Ecological Soft Fascination is Superior in Changing the Way Environment is Perceived.’ In *Spectral Geographies* (2121).



Film still of scene three, *Crossing*.
Cinematography: Sarah Caterall, Ab Brightman



Film still of scene 2, *River Dolphin*
Cinematography: Sarah Caterall, Ab Brightman

To view the film, visit this [link](#).





Film still of scene 2, *River Dolphin*
Cinematography: Sarah Caterall, Ab Brightman



'Do you think,'
Alice asked Eve and Mingyu,
'That our work would amount to anything?'

The three of them were just about entering the Cinema, where they were going to screen the dance films they made. The dark staircase leading to the projection room blocked the artificial cicadas, who bellowed outside.

Alice: 'It's not that I don't have passion for what we do. It's just that...I wish there was a way we could precisely measure how many memories are transmitted from the screened images to the public imagination.'

Mingyu: 'Sounds like you are describing my work.'

Alice, laughs: 'And we all know how well that's going.'

Alice: 'All the conditions that we create, all the speculation. I don't know how much we could all remember, as in, there has to be a limit as to how much we can hold in our minds without losing it. But afterwards, where do the memories go?

Last summer my mom and I went on a research trip to the Cackle Hill Lakes. She took a dip into the water, which was really cold at the time, and for a moment, she forgot about everything.'

Mingyu: 'I heard it happens to a lot of elderly people, shock-induced temporary memory loss, I mean.'



Alice: 'Really? I didn't know. Anyway, suddenly she forgot about how we got there, what our mission was supposed to be. We had to call an ambulance to go to the hospital. Thank god she still remembered who I was, though I think she was confused about some details. She just kept telling everyone at the waiting room, "This is my daughter, she is very smart. This is my very smart daughter."' "

No one said anything for a while. Then Alice:

'I don't like the feeling of us being erased from the moving images once the work is done. I just think, how lonely, our images, gone, once the projector is turned off. I don't know how much they really do persist in people's minds.'

'Listen to this,' Mingyu said, reading from a small plaque:

'...only cinema is capable of delivering images as opposed to imaginary, conveying not a subject but the supposition of the subject that thus substance.'¹

'That sounds intense.' Said Eve.

Alice, suddenly turned towards her: 'Aren't you scared that you will be erased like the girl that you're researching at the Archive? Didn't you say she kept a very detailed notebook?'

Alice then went over and licked the tears away from Eve's cheek. There was surprise in her voice.

'You don't cry baby.
Your hair is too soft.'

1 Emmelhainz, Irmgard. 'Images Do Not Show: The Desire to See in the Anthropocene'. In *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, First edition. Critical Climate Change. Open Humanities Press, 2015.

22. Aug. 2125.

Yesterday I dreamed of my mother eroding.

In it, mother was by the bathroom window.

She liked having windows closed in all seasons. Said it held the sea at a "reasonable distance."

I tried to look at her face to sendy it.

I heard a crack and was certain it came from me. somewhere, inside.

then I was called away because of some 'important' paperwork that only I was capable of filing.

As I walked away I had a terrible feeling.

When I looked back, their apartment building had begun to crumble.

I watched its silence collapse. It snapped in half.

The foundation upon which the apartment was built was fragile.

I knew it all along.

I started laughing clapping jumping up and down like I was gonna die from laughter.

I won't tell mother about this. I decided when I woke up.



Eve's father stood by the ocean holding the Device.

The Bureau's Devices were converted from flimsily made, plastic 35mm film point-and-shoot cameras. Father said they used to call them the 'idiot cameras'. This name signified an operational simplicity which, at a 200-yuan price point, was barely affordable for a family who worked government jobs in the early 2000s. Now anyone could come to own it easily if you were one of the Officers at the Department of Air and Sea, where Eve's father served for 40 years.

Father says no one ever examines the machines carefully. If they did, they would find out how clumsy the conversion really was.

That the cameraman was an idiotic man was a conviction that Eve acquired from looking at her father as a child. There was a stubbornness in his persistence in capturing all the small disturbances. He swore to the whole family he felt the pulses of ecological underthoughts better than any of his colleagues. This was his Responsibility. Capital R always.

His posing with the Device might lead an outsider to believe that he alone held the key to his family archive. The man of the hour.

Every hour.



Even as a child she wasn't one to be fooled. Photographs stave off amnesia; they are an anti-memory.

Eve vaguely and with the sheer force of intuition saw through her father's irrational fear of disappearance, of them, of himself, of the shoreline. His thick fingers clutched tightly on his device of remembrance. For there is little glory in defending things against time, and her father uses his clock for seeing as a glossy promise to keep forgetfulness at bay.

It is the one who takes the most photographs who forgets the most. This is why we needed the Archive. Her supervisor would say.

At the Department of Air and Sea, the Devices were used to capture all the memories of the creatures around the Officer holding it.

Depending on the quality of the photographs, they would be able to tell how ecologically damaged an area is: The clearer the photograph, the less polluted it was.

The blurrier and dreamier photographs always meant the existence of heavier ecological harm.

Eve remembered the great oil spill in 2122, when all the memories of the seagull suddenly looked like they were engulfed by fire.



Eve had always loved her father's photographs though, Responsibility or not.

Father used to jokingly point his camera at Eve on their walk:

'Let's see how contaminated my little girl is!'

Eve would run.

Eve's father had taken up drinking after an event on the submarine. They were sent down there to investigate a whale fall. He came back with the most brilliant images Eve had ever seen and three teammates missing. After that, he drank oceans to forget the sea.

Her mother since then hated the sea air with a passion. Eve had always suspected, even though her mother claimed to be unable to feel any underthoughts, she could. She shut the windows at night. She slept with white noise on. She refused to go to the beach after the incident.

Her father's photography could not prevent the sea from escaping them. When Eve was a child, she recalled walking fifteen minutes to reach the ocean. This distance, by the time Eve turned a teenager, was to be covered by car, in twenty minutes.

In China, these major land reclamation projects were called 'filling in the ocean'.

Eve once heard an officer tried to take picture while the land was being filled. She got nothing but blackness in return. In turn, that blackness sent the officer into a depression so deep she ended up hospitalised.

Still Eve father's vocational loyalty conflicts so acutely with his dream of owning a home built on top of chunks of reclaimed land. 'Green water jade mountains' wouldn't compete with a home of their own. Eve didn't blame him. Would never blame him. She gave thanks and understood.

One time Eve's mother said she could, in her dream, hear muffled screams.

'It is like something is covered by a thick blanket, the noise is faint, but you can still hear it.'



These days, at the Bureau, Eve would take the longer route to avoid walking past the Storage Unit. She feared her urge of picking up one of the Devices. She feared taking a photo of herself and rushing to develop it. She feared looking at her face.

How contaminated.



Eve's father is retired now. No longer owns a Device.

He just grows older with these urban spaces he helped govern. His spine bent. He takes the elevator to go up and down his 28-floor flat.

In memory there was always this image.

Her father stood there in front of the ocean, made from head to toe of industrial cheapness. A wonderful material of cotton candy polyester that furnished the landscape of her childhood.

Eve used to think being haunted would be the solution. Now that she is haunted she thought otherwise.

Touching her uniform she could hear thousands of textile machines whirring. Together, they stood reticent like ocean waves, the farthest sound one would associate with foreign labourers being alienated from their means of production.

Speak. She would command the ocean. Speak to me. Speak-

Father still cannot stand talking to Eve on the phone. Eve would patiently wait while he came up with various excuses.

'I will hand you to your mum,' after a while he would mumble, giving her away.

One day Eve's mother called and said that her father had had a bad dream, one in which Eve was coming home from overseas, and he rushed to the airport but got stuck in traffic. Sitting in his car he started crying, feeling convinced that if he was late, Eve would be gone again.

Instead of telling Eve maybe he missed her he sent her increasingly blurrier photos of the landscape.





Eve once came across this sentence
in the Archive:

*Memory alone cannot
resurrect past time,
because it is memory
itself that shapes it,
long after historical time
has passed.¹*

See, she would say, we were
no longer being washed ashore,
father. We are merely torn asunder
by our inaccurate remembering of
each other.

It took her a while to understand
departures--their severity.

Occasionally father sent her photos of her as a child, a little
girl who visited the aquarium. Usually she looked very sulky as
her father loved capturing her whenever she was in a grumpy mood.
In this one, though, She looked happy.

It was hard to believe that Eve and that child were two people
sharing the same body. She thought of Roland Barthes' text on
losing his mother, an infantilising process that had rendered
her small, needing protection.² Was this her father's effort of
rewinding time, until she was all the way little again, his baby
girl again, running, screaming, dodging his camera lens as she
would a bullet?

A perpetual blur of a daughter?

¹ Steedman, Carolyn. *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, 29. Rutgers University Press, 1987.

² Barthes, Roland, and Nathalie Leger. *Mourning Diary: October 26, 1977 - September 15, 1979*. Translated by Richard Howard. Hill & Wang Pub, 2010.

Her father's favourite photographic technique was zooming in. He liked to stand from a distance and pull the reality as close to him as the camera mechanically can. It was almost as if he feared he couldn't see far enough.

It was 2121, the last year she lived at home. Soon she was going to leave for training at the Bureau. She was to be confiscated. Her body her mind her memories her bleeding fingers at the archive, all governmental property. She had felt pangs of sadness that didn't belong to her. She didn't know any of this would become a forever loss for her, not yet. Homesickness in advance, but not yet.



She most wanted to be at the Special Office of the Haunted because it inherits all the legacy from the Department of Air and Sea. A small part of her wanted to continue father's work. A small part of her wanted to be his work.

It wasn't like she could tell the difference. Like him, she said nothing back.

That summer Eve's father drove her and her mother all the way until they reached the edge of the water, which had just become his favourite activity to do at the time.

Wild daisies bloomed hard and Eve's mother was so taken by them that she disappeared into her own adventure.

That summer she always walked a little faster ahead of him.

She heard from behind her father's request for her to stand still for a moment.

She almost wanted to resist but resisted that urge to run instead. She knew exactly what she would see before she turned around. Sure enough, father was there with a camera held before his face.

Standing so far away from her, Eve saw him fumbling with his thumb and index finger, zooming in, in, and in. He still hadn't learned to stand a little closer.

Her smile widened as her father arrested time.

I have chosen to explain the theories behind this writing project, not at the beginning, but at the very end, so that, hopefully, my readers may sit with the story without being swayed by explanation. I think of it as wandering into a film without having seen the trailer.

* On Being Eve

In Sophie Jodoin's installation *Toi que jamais je ne termine* (You, Who I Never Finish), Jodoin uses 116 publications' title pages to portray a woman whose name is Eve: 'a feminine that can never be completed, or is even impossible.'¹ Eve is uninteruptive; ignorant; rebellious; the devil in the flesh; guilty; irresistible; a terrorist; insatiable. The image of a woman cannot be fully defined, yet she is to be met on every page.

What I present in this dissertation is a fictional account, an erasure of self, only for her to be imagined anew. Formally, I compile a dissertation into the reports, journals, and dreams of a future bureaucrat who takes on my identity, whereas I become anonymous, soundlessly slipping into the archive of the Bureau. I call her Eve. This is not just a pseudonym, as Eve was my chosen English name for a long time before I decided I wanted to be called Xinyue, which is the Chinese standardised spelling for my name, 新悦.

Eve, the first woman, according to Anna Beer, does not exist—the historical erasure of women authors meant that what constitutes history, and by extension, the archive, are records composed by men. What is considered serious writing is decided by an invisible order issued by patriarchy. Beer: '[L]etters or diaries, translations or advice manuals, devotional verses or lullabies... memories and... prayers' are hardly material serious enough to be considered scholarship.² I aim to weave together precisely these materials and claim them as academic work.

* On the Performative Archive of Now

Heather Davis's theorisation of petro-time is a compressed temporal horizon shaped by the burning of fossil fuels. Within this context, Davis introduces the idea of *the performative archive of now*—a framework for understanding the present not as a stable moment, but as a perilous, ever-shifting ground conditioned by the Earth's finite resources. As Davis writes, such archives become 'an act of witnessing that records not the state of things lost, but anticipatory grief and the uncanny feeling of a world already gone.'³ I mention this when talking about the bureaucrats' Responsibilities—the bureau's survival depends on affective labour performed at the archive, in every living moment.

1 Jodoin, 'Toi Que Jamais Je Ne Termine'.

2 Beer, *Eve Bites Back*, 5.

3 Davis, 'Waiting in Petro-Time', 61.

The ‘anticipatory grief’ hums in the background for this dissertation. Set one hundred years from today, I wish to capture an abhorrent future, one that is conditioned by unavowed, ambiguous grief. Something terrible had taken place, yet one cannot name it.

That the humanity lives on borrowed time pending future catastrophe has led Olivia Angé and David Berliner to propose *ecological nostalgia* as a concept useful to think with.⁴ Etymologically, nostalgia shares a connection with grief—*nóstos* (in Greek it means to return home), *álgos* (to suffer from pain and grief). Ecological grief deals simultaneously with what is lost and what will be annihilated in the future. To live through ecological grief is to live through nostalgia in advance. Glenn Albrecht calls this *solastagia*—a global sense of feeling homesick in a world not yet gone but on the verge of being so.⁵

Grief is indexical; it points towards something that is no longer there. In psychological terms, grief can be understood as ‘the cost of commitment.’⁶ Grieving the world in ongoing ecological unrest means being emotionally ‘at stake in each other’s company.’⁷ The future I portray is one in which affective relations with a decaying world are made manifest in the body, performed by individuals who care so deeply that they become vessels for emotions that do not belong to them. In this sense, the main character Eve echoes the character of Lauren Olamina in Octavia E. Butler’s novel, *Parable of the Sower*, a ‘sharer’ born with hyperempathy; she physically feels the pain of others, bruising herself against another’s injury.⁸

I consider ghost species—non-viable populations that are disappearing from the landscape, suspended only by cultural memory—to be icons of unprocessed, and perhaps unprocessable, ecological grief. As environmental disasters compound, ghost species remain suspended in a liminal space between disappearance and existence. I argue that ghost species resist what scientists call *shifting baseline syndrome*—the gradual forgetting of ecological abundance as each generation accepts diminished environments as normal.⁹ Ghost species reignite ecological consciousness even when return is impossible.

4 Angé and Berliner, *Ecological Nostalgias*. 2021.

5 See Chapter 2. ‘Solastagia: The Homesickness You Have at Home’. Albrecht, *Earth Emotions*, *ibid.*

6 I discussed this in the *BEIMA Field and Procedural Manual* - Grief as an Achievement. See also Parkes, *Bereavement*, 26, *ibid.*

7 Van Dooren brought forth the idea in Chapter 5, ‘Mourning Crows’. Hawaiian crows would exhibit sympathetic behaviours, clearly acknowledging a member’s passing. Van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, *ibid.*

8 Her pain seems to be psychosomatic. When she witnesses someone else’s injury, she would bleed in sympathy. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, 2019.

9 Hance, *Extinct Animals Are Quickly Forgotten: The Baiji and Shifting Baselines*, 2010.

This project deliberately fixes the baseline in the present moment, holding back hope too-early promised by the neoliberals and green capitalists. It focuses on the climate debt, heartbreak, and suffering that remain stubbornly, irreconcilably unresolved.

For ghosts are not wantless subjects. In making their disappearance a question, they make demands. In Freud’s words, ‘[a] melancholic’s complaints, *Klagen*, are, to trace the word’s meaning, *Anklagen*: accusation.’¹⁰ To unsuccessfully mourn, that is, to be melancholic, is to accuse the world of its wrongdoings, even in death. Ghost species haunt like a bad dream, allowing no rest.

I am equally fascinated by ghost species as I am by those for whom they appear. Learning to be haunted is essential to living in a world of becoming ghosts. ‘Let the atrocious image haunt us,’ muses Susan Sontag, calling for accountability in places ravaged by injustice.¹¹ Before a life can be recognised as grievable, it must first be acknowledged as worthy of Being. As Butler reminds us, ‘[i]f we are not haunted, there is no loss, there has been no life that was lost.’¹² This thesis argues that being haunted is a tremendous undertaking and an ethical mandate.

Caring for the environment comes with immense burden. Eva Haifa Giraud draws attention to the overlooked role of emotion in environmental discourse by saying, while emotional engagement is often foregrounded in broader discussions of political and ethical care for the world, it is frequently dismissed as a “problematic form of anthropomorphism.”¹³ Sincere efforts by activists and artists to relate emotionally to nonhuman life are too often discarded, thrown out with the bathwater of climate fatigue and the perceived extremism of the animal rights movement. Giraud criticises this tendency, arguing that affective modes of engagement are not only legitimate but also desirable for fostering meaningful connections across species and systems.

What if one were to take seriously the mental toll it takes to care for nature, and factor in emotional labour as legitimate work? What if the body can become an external storehouse, holding the thoughts, memories, and emotions of others, *for* others? What would that holding look like? This project imagines this.

Hauntology, which I referenced throughout, invokes the possibility of return. For Jacques Derrida, a spectre assumes an ontological origin; it is always already a ‘revenant’—a returning other, who ‘begins by coming back.’¹⁴ Yet as I outlined in this work, returning spectral species may face material and cultural erasure due to habitat destruction and shifting baselines. To whom do they then return, and where?

10 Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, 208. *Ibid.*

11 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 2003, 65.

12 Butler, *Prearious Life*, 2020, 97.

13 Giraud, *What Comes after Entanglement?*, 2019, 17.

14 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 2006, 11.

If corporeal return is impossible, then in memories. Derrida: ‘memories no longer recognize such borders; by definition, they pass through walls, these revenants, day and night, they trick consciousness and skip generations.’¹⁵ This is how grief can become inheritance, flowing through decades to come. Ghost species travel through memories and change how history is archived, how we relate to each other, in time. Alexis Pauline Gumbs writes:

*Would that be wrong? I am related to all marine mammals. I am related to all those in captivity. I am writing this in honor of my great grandmother Edith who was not the only woman in our lineage to die captive in an asylum...Her love never ended. Her love lives right now. Here in my breathing. I would swim around her clockwise. I would show her how her love survived all of this time, in the quick learning creatives who scream here in captivity.*¹⁶

When speculating about a future of multispecies coexistence, I advocate being carried forward by a continued cost of commitment shaped by spectral others. This future, to me, is one in which humans remain indebted to the world; we allow ourselves to be haunted by those whom we cannot leave behind.

* On Auto-Parafiction

In Wuhan, I could not visit the archive.

When I asked to see the historic documents in 2023, during my first field trip, I was instead led to a museum, where already-curated narratives on conservation, coupled with wall text on future plans, were on display. The denial of access to the archive coincided with my making a story about a future bureaucrat curating an exhibition. Because if I were to treat the materials I gathered as future archaeological remains, then the problem of scarcity could be explained away. Like Gumbs, I also thought: ‘What would be incriminating enough for this facility to refuse to mention? It leaves us to fabulation.’¹⁷

This lack of access led me to treat the fantastical as real. While Donna Haraway’s idea of *speculative fabulation*—a ‘mode of attention, a theory of history, and a practice of worlding’¹⁸—lays the groundwork for fusing myth, science, and kinship to envision more-than-human entanglements, it is with Saidiya Hartman’s *critical fabulation*—a method of working with ambiguous historical sources—that I resonated.

For Hartman, to fabulate when the source is partial, lost in the archive, or obscured by retelling is to ‘jeopardise the status of the event, to displace the received or authorised account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.’¹⁹

When the source is recondite, one must exercise imagination to explore what *could* have transpired. This is especially pertinent within the context of extinction studies. Michelle Bastian, reflecting on the fascination with the deep seas and the near-impossibility of conducting ethnographic work there, proposes the whale fall as a *suspended ground*.²⁰ Physically, the sunken skeleton becomes a site where organisms and oceanic creatures gather. Rhetorically, myths, lore, and theory congregate around these gargantuan carcasses.

I think of the now-deserted pool at the Institute of Hydrobiology as such a suspended ground: it was dug out by researchers on their hands and knees in the 1980s;²¹ it held in its body the last living Yangtze River dolphin, and later, other porpoises; it beckoned me to come decades later. It is where sweat, tears, rain, dirt, memories, dreams, and fascination meet.

But there is another element to my fabulation: my family’s story. The story about ecology has always been one about the home.²² Ecology comes from the Greek origin, *oikos*, meaning house, family, dwelling. My father works for the Dalian Environmental Protection Bureau. I thought, from an early age, that people who worked for such a Bureau must be environmentally minded; they must have chosen to work there because they cared for nature. The reality of being a civil servant, according to my observation alone, is that it is demanding, physically and emotionally. My father worked long hours, fought with his manager, and never took vacations.

In recent years, China has been making significant strides in addressing the climate crisis. Its socialist tradition is expressed through successive multiple-year plans, which embed ecological security as a national strategy.²³ While it is not the goal of this thesis to provide criticism of China’s environmental policy, I wish to draw attention to the tension between national political aspiration and the bureaucratic constraints experienced on a personal level, using my father’s work as a template.

15 Derrida, *ibid*, 30.

16 Gumbs, *Undrowned*, 41.

17 *Ibid*, 40.

18 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2016, 40.

19 Hartman, ‘Venus in Two Acts’, 11. *Ibid*.

20 I have explored this earlier, along with other speculative methods, in the Bureau’s *Filed and Procedural Manual* - ‘Operation Overview’. Bastian, ‘Whale Falls, Suspended Ground, and Extinctions Never Known’. *Ibid*.

21 Chen, *Fifty Years with the Yangtze River: Chen Peixun and the Study of the Baiji Dolphin* (translated). 陈佩薰, 《风雨长江五十载—陈佩薰与白鱀豚研究》, 2007, 37.

22 Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, 2013, 89.

23 Wilson Center, ‘China’s Green Five-Year Plan’, 2011.

His daily labour reflects the point at which grand strategy collides with frantic minor tasks. I felt his fatigue. I observed how the impossibility of lifting a behemoth that was the environment wore him down. His experience demonstrates that working ‘for nature’ within a top-down system offers no honour so great that it shields one from hardship. Between collective vision and individual experience lies a formidable gap. It is this gap that draws me in.

I build on Carrie Lambert-Beatty’s idea of *parafiction*, where ‘real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived’²⁴ to describe my semi-schizophrenic approach: *auto-parafiction*. It emerges from an autoethnographic lens I maintained throughout my fieldwork, whereby the research becomes intertwined with the stories engendered by being on site. I derive from autoethnography the focus on personal experience not as anecdotal indulgence, but as a legitimate method for making sense of broader historical contexts. In weaving myself into a story in a looped stitch, auto-parafiction, then, treats my past as my future, and my family history as a mode of existing in that world.

In doing so, I make familiar a strange world given rise by my present-day. While I write myself out of the story, I give my experiences to Eve: her being haunted by the aquarium, her inability to rest, her gathering strength through friendships, her living with my existential dread in academia, not knowing whether what she does is ever enough. My story is also where I meet my reticent father halfway.

Auto-parafiction allows me to write through the disappearance of species, of official records, of family history. It is a method of entering an archive that is otherwise unenterable.

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"I can't remember,
except how else
to know about their
white watery roots,
the pale clearness
pulled from the earth?"

"my father stood,
quite vulnerable
in memory now"

For example
Him standing
on the edge
of my dream.
sharp in focus
sharp as yesterday.
Full shot.
Fully exposed
looking any kind of
miserable.

I was hurt
because memory ought
not to
work that way.

I'm doing all the right things
and I still don't know quite how to live.

"Memory alone
cannot resurrect
past time, because
it is memory
itself that shapes
it, long after
historical time
has passed"

Good
woman
"the fairy tales
always read the
stories that we
do not yet know"

China Dolls.

- unworship of address.
- denied by institution
- private and public matter.

Her mother had warned her of the
danger, reminding her the existence of a
mad woman she once met at the exit
of a subway station. She had been mad
at her mother for such a comparison, drawing
similarities between her setback to
someone's insanity.

Perhaps the mother wasn't wrong after all,
some wounds can be mended by time,
in time, through the passing of a stone.

She wonders about the women with whom
she had never met but through men in
her life whose names had been mentioned.
Amazing how you can write up hatred
so easily towards someone you never
met. Perhaps some goes for sympathy.
She asks again and again how one might
care for something / someone there is
not her own to care for. She belonged
nowhere. So everyone could be her.
She is their old age, their laughter,
the ~~to~~ owner of that brown hand
that once landed so gently on her
lover's head, that voice imagined,
that different life lived.
She is every woman and no woman
at all.

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