

My Thoughts are Coming Out of My Mouth

By

Rong Xie

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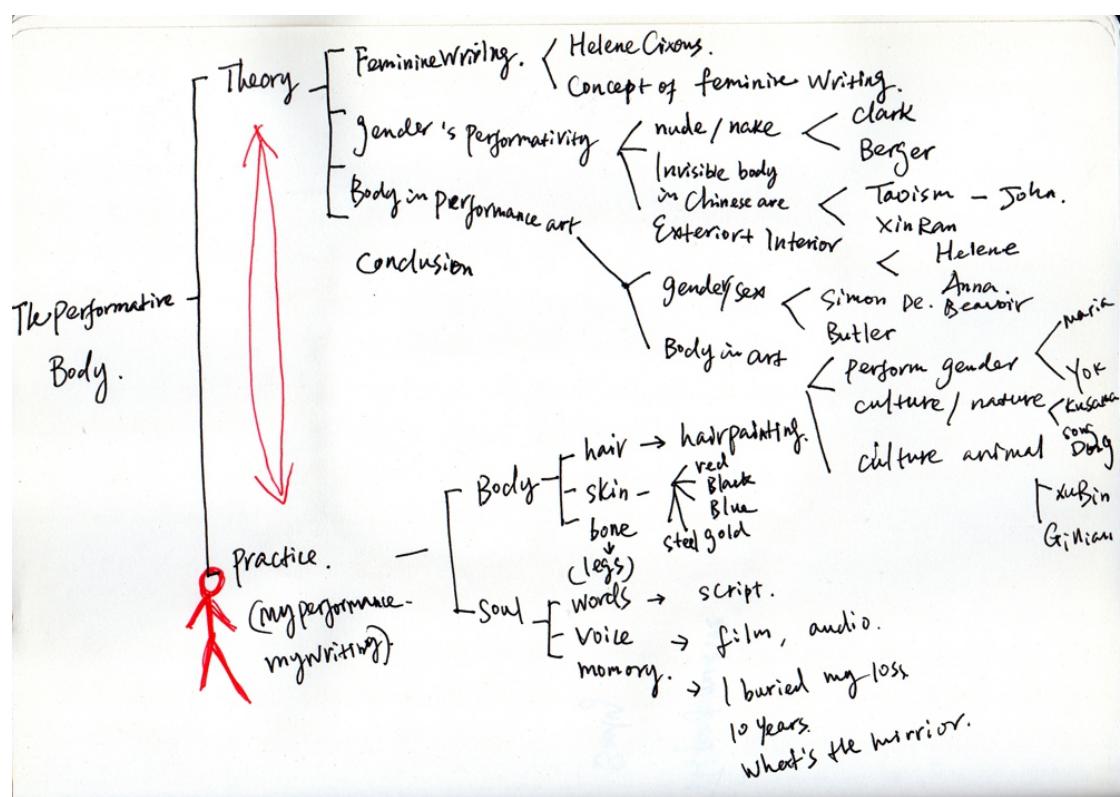
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The role of translation, the passage between **gesture, body and voice**,

the shift from **Chinese into English** and back again,

the relationship between **drawing and writing**.

Always movement across surfaces,

entering and exiting backwards and forwards.

I cannot settle on one point, I am in flux, restless.

This is my performative writing; this is my performative body.

I have **hair, skin, and a soul**. You will see my hair being used as a paint brush;

you will witness my skin covered by red lipstick,

black tights, blue and white clay and golden tapes.

I will take you to visit my dark childhood memory, to witness the loss of my first marriage
and share my curiosity as a cross-cultured young Chinese woman.

You will **read my words and hear my singing**.

Part One: Body - Hair

Story One: I Am a Brush

- 3rd of Nov, 2011,
- I painted an 11-meter long paper roll with my hair.
- I spent three and half-hours to process the drawing. It wasn't about the drama of my body movement; it was about controlling my hair as a brush.
- In my silkscreen class I found out the first ever screen for printing was made out of Chinese women's hair.
- I wore a white shirt and black trousers because I wanted to treat my performance as a formal ceremony. There were many people at the private viewing; they walked and talked around me. But my body was in my role - the brush that was lost in the sensation of dipping in the ink and spreading it out. I have drawn since I was small child but never felt so close to the medium on which I was working as on this occasion. I was surprised how difficult it was to control my soft hair. The most memorable aspect was the sound of the ink dripping from my hair on to the paper and that of my heart-beat which was increasing as a result of some of the uncomfortable poses. My body transformed into a brush, a tool, and an object.



“We know, we conceive, we even imagine only the signifying body... the body can belong to the community only by being itself meaningful.”

Jean-Luc-Nancy¹



¹ Jean-Luc Nancy (born 26 July 1940) is a French philosopher, Nancy has also written for art catalogues and international art journals, especially on contemporary art.

Historically a Chinese women brushes her hair the night before her wedding. Also, having his hair rolled up with a stick at his marriage indicates a man's maturity. The Chinese word "*married man*" is illustrated as a male body standing up with arm open and a stick in his hair. Young women often cut their hair and put it in a small sachet to give to her loved one. In Buddhism it is a tradition to shave the head as a sign of forgetting the past and of being reborn.. Using my hair to make my first piece of live art was a symbolic reflection of my personal changing life. Afterwards, I washed the ink off my hair in the shower and, when the moment the ink ran over my body I felt more alive; the fizzing water and black ink made exciting marks on my skin.

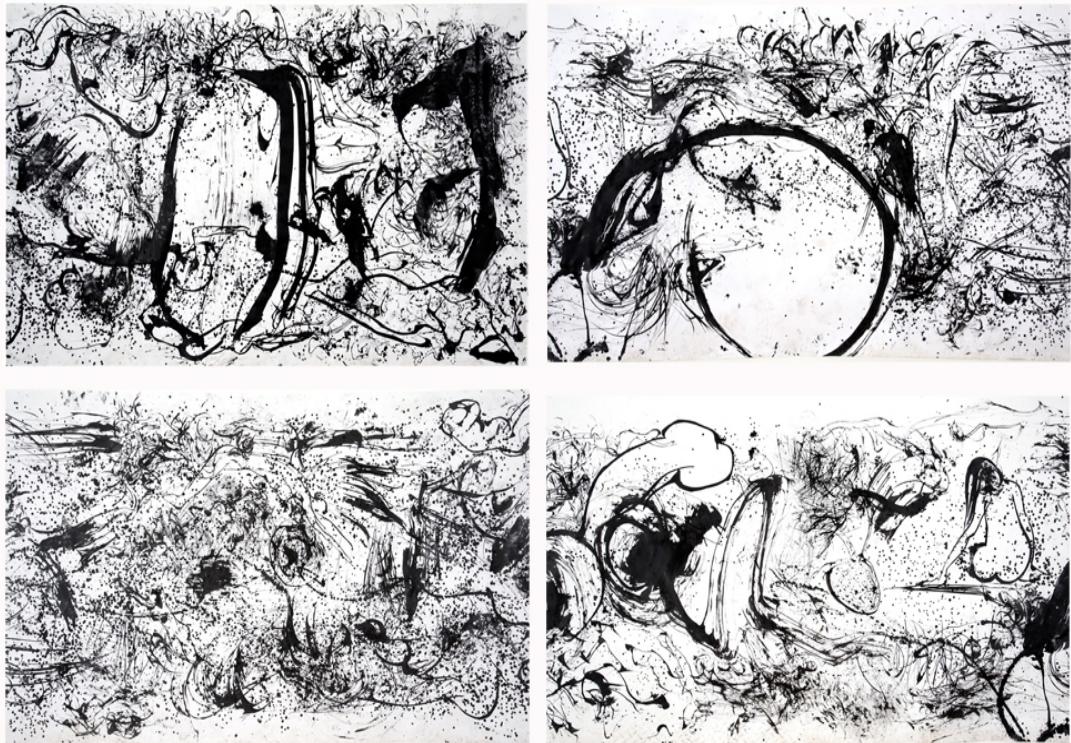


hair-skin

ink-water

during and after performance

Was it a performance or a drawing?



“The new artistic medium is a much more direct one: the human body.”
Oskar Schlemmer²

History of Body Painting

• Jackson Pollock



Kazuo Shiraga



• Yves Klein



Rachel Lachowicz



Ana Mendieta



Paul McCarthy



Janine Antoni



Rebaca Horn

² .Oskar Schlemmer (4 September 1888 – 13 April 1943) was a German painter, sculptor, designer and choreographer associated with the Bauhaus school.

Artist

Yoko Ono Lorna Simpson Chris Burden Chris Marker	Carolee schneemann Marina Abramovic	Bruce Nauman Richard Long Agnes Varda	Kiki Smith Patrick Keillor Ani Messenger	Pina Bausch Gillian Wearing Eva Hesse
Hayley Newman Eleanor Antin John Akomfra	Suzy Lake Lynn Hershman Yvonne Rainer	Helen Chadwick Shomei Tomatsu	Eikoh Hosoe Johanna Reich	Jennie Pedley Shirin Neshatt Yayoi Kusama
The seventh seal Hiroshima Mon Amour	Hollis Frampton Jo ann Kaplan	George Perec The Red Desert	BBC: Chinese vase/ Manufactured landscape	Jennet Thomas Andy Warhol

Conceptual artist, film makers,
performance artists, films ... world of narrative...

Part Two: Body - Skin

Story Two: *Nude*

March 2011

After I watched my ex-husband kissing one of my best girlfriends, he suggested we start an “open relationship”. *As art college lovers I believed Simone de Beauvoir and he admire Sartre.*

April 2011, I found him having “Skype sex” in our living room and realised that the open free liberty had already started. He moved out three weeks later and started his long desperate soul-searching driven by lust, and I enrolled in the RCA. At this point new man came into my life. He is the man behind the camera..

July 2011, this man took me to Wales, the land where he was born. Inspired by the stunning landscape we decide to take some photographs of nudity in nature. Men watch women, women watch themselves being watched by men. I questioned the relationship between the photographer and the performer, man and woman. I shaved all my body hair, I stood in the field feeling *double necked*, the wind was strong, my body was shaking. There were many thoughts in my head - going to into the wild back to nature.. I thought this might be a sign of rediscovering myself after my the break up of my marriage and of being spiritually reborn. At that moment I felt weak but strong; fragile but brave. The wild grass weaved into a powerful net surrounding me - I was a warrior! Some time later those photographs opened up deep thoughts and conversations about female nudity, body gestures and body landscape. For me it was the first time I experienced using my own body as a means of visual storytelling. *As tempted act to experience, to feel real and get close.*

Thoughtful nude:

I was a sight, I was performing my feminine identity.



“The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object-and most particularly an object of vision: a sight”

John Berger³

³ John Peter Berger (born 5 November 1926) is an English art critic, novelist, painter, poet and author. His novel *G.* won the 1972 Booker Prize, and his essay on art criticism *Ways of Seeing*, written as an accompaniment to a BBC series, is often used as a university text.

"She does not look at us.

She is of those who do not look at us.

I mean to say: those women, Bathsheba, Mary, Hendrickje,
don't look at us, don't stop living, that is to say dreaming,
that is to say leaving in order to look at us.

And we, looking at them, we see thought
taking its leave. We see thought.

Thought is not the weighty thinker seated.
It's passes, inside, distracted, traveling;
it is the foreigner, the stranger."

Helene Cixous

Story Three: Identity Skin - RED

Little Red Flower

In 1987, I was 4 years old, my beloved grandmother passed away. At the same time my mother and father divorced. I was sent to a communist boarding kindergarten, which only allowed me to see my mother on weekends. This kind of kindergarten was designed to look after children of important government employees so that they could focus on their work. My uncle was the director of local new paper so I was “lucky” to be included in such a privileged circle. My uncle’s name was Xie XiaoShu, meaning “thank you loyal to Soviet Union”. In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed so my uncle changed his name to Xie XiaoShu, which means “thank you little book”. Red has always been the national colour of China, which is historically associated with glory and power. In the 80s it symbolised “The sun”- chairman Mao⁴. I was frequently given a paper folded red flower as a record for good behavior. I was always the monitor in my class to make my mother proud . The experience away from home from 4 to 7 years-old gave me repetitive nightmares: I cried for my mother but the door was locked and covered with coiled nails. Chairman Mao’s voice in the dark, was saying: *“if you want to be my good child, you have to shut up”* I used to wake up screaming and crying in my bedroom which was full with 40 children. I was never happy in those years of disciplinary education.

As a child, I had a belief, I believed in courtesy and politeness. My believe my earliest performative act was putting my hands up at a 90-degree angle whenever I need to speak or ask a question. It became a habit. I still do it formally in casual restraints and group discussions.

⁴ .Mao Zedong, also transliterated as Mao Tse-tung [listen](#) (help·info), and commonly referred to as Chairman Mao (December 26, 1893 – September 9, 1976), was a Chinese communist revolutionary, political theorist and politician.

China Mak-eover

*"Their hair was shorn into all sorts of strange styles for the red guards ' amusement; their faces were smeared with mess of **lipsticks**; high-heeled shoes were strung together and looped around their bodies; broken pieces of all manner of foreign goods were dangled from their clothes at odd angles. The women were made to recount over and over again how they had come to possess foreign products. I was seven years old when I saw what these women went through, paraded through the street to be jeered at; I remember thinking that if there was a next life, I did not want to be reborn a woman."* *The good women of China* by Xin Ran⁵ "I love that sense of self-love in pencilling my eyebrows and applying **lipstick** and blusher. **For this I would be willing to be a woman again in my next life.**" *Shang Hai Babe* by WeiHui⁶. It's hard to believe that Wei Hui's sentence was written just 20 years after the Cultural Revolution.

Two women's writing about the symbolic **lipstick**, - one is being smeared on to a woman's face by punishment the other is being applied carefully with pleasure. And what statements they both made after witnessing the terrifying years of the Cultural Revolution. Xin ran writes: "*I did not want to be reborn a woman.*" and Wei Hui writes: "*for this I would be willing to be a woman again in my next life*". Two women's stories reflected a country's past and present.



⁶ Zhou Weihui (simplified Chinese: 周卫慧; traditional Chinese: 周衛慧; pinyin: Zhōu Wèihuì, born Ningbo, 1973) is a Chinese writer, living and working in Shanghai and New York. Her novel *Shanghai Baby* (上海宝贝) (1999) was banned in the People's Republic of China.

Story Four: Covered/Extended Skin

Room of My Roots



There is a room, room with my tools, I am a warrior, I am going to paint...



Dance! Little red flower

Story Five: Travelled Skin

Sleeping St Petersburg

*A land not mine, still forever memorable,
the waters of its ocean, chill and fresh.
Sand on the bottom whiter than chalk,
and the air drunk, like wine, late sun lays bare
the rosy limbs of the pinetrees.
Sunset in the ethereal waves:
I cannot tell if the day
is ending,
or the world,
or
if the secret of secrets
is inside me again.*

Anna Akhmatova⁷

⁷ Anna Andreyevna Gorenko was a Russian and Soviet modernist poet, one of the most acclaimed writers in the Russian canon.



In 2012 during a visit to St Petersburg, all the memories from childhood came drifting back into my heart and mind. I was looking for traces of Stalin's red Soviet. St Petersburg is famous for it's flatness. The tallest landmark is, the TV tower. once the Peter and Paul Fortress⁸,

There was a performance by a group of Chinese artist in 1995 called "To add one meter to an anonymous mountain." When we arrived in Peterhof, it was already dark and the cityscape of St Petersburg had become a single line of light. I decided to recreate the "add one meter higher" so my boyfriend lay down beneath me, then me and then our translator. Three different nationalities: Welsh, Chinese and Russian lay in the snow in the dark. The strange warmth passed through our bodies. I don't know what the significance of our action was but I will always remember it because of that warmth .

8 .The Peter and Paul Fortress is the original citadel of St. Petersburg, Russia, founded by Peter the Great in 1703 and built to Domenico Trezzini's designs from 1706-1740.



Sleeping area



This is the sleeping area on the outskirts of St Petersburg, our translator said "*historically this suburb area is where the slaves used to live, followed by workers in Stalin era now by the poorest people*". We asked to stop and I lay down on the snow. A sleeping performance.

Wound Soul- Performance by Russia artist Elena Kovylina



Story Six : Wrapped Skin

I am a Warrior

Reunion Joy

Li Yu⁹

No words, alone
climb the west steps
hooked moon
a hollow courtyard
lonely Parasol tree
locking late autumn

futile to cut
diminished by arrangement
the grief of leaving
a relish of its own
at heart

Inspired by 3D scanning and printing processes I spend two days creating a black web, similar to a spider's. I created and self-destroyed my net. fully It was a performance about dealing with memory and emotion. Most of time we all care create a self labyrinth, a net, a web. We are frequently so wound-up and bound by our own thoughts.

⁹ .Li Yu (937 - 978), historically known as Last Emperor of Southern Tang, reigned from 961 to 975, He was also a well-known poet. Li Yu's works are mostly pathetic and sorrowful, written after his surrender to Song, which depicts the scene of his overlooking afar by relying on the railing or returning back his formal life in his dream and expresses his infinite attachment and misery to the "former homeland" and "past events", including *Corn Poppy Flower*, *Waves Sift Land*, *the Midnight Crow*, and so on.



Story Seven: Skin - Blue and White

Bone China, Born China

My family name XIE, Illustrated as:

言 + 身 + 寸 = 谢
language + body + ruler = Thanks

- **The (rule) control of (language) speech and (body) behavior.**
- **My Ruler:** Family history, communist education, Chinese traditions
- **Speech:** My voice in Chinese and English
- **My Body:** Skin, materiality and performativity of body



Be the Inside of the Vase

The performance 'Be the Inside of the Vase' was divided into two parts.

The first story began with my father's attempt to commit suicide. The performance revealed my uneasy childhood and difficult relationship with my father. I was still and silent whilst my voice revealed the narrative using a pre-recorded audiotape. In the second performance the story moved towards my relationship with my mother. Through my rather brutal personal history I addressed sexually political statements such as: from my father: "*Women should be like vase, smooth, decorative and empty inside!*" From my mother: "*Don't be a vase, pretty but empty inside, be the inside, be the quality!*" From myself: "*This is my voice, my story, my childhood, I am not a vase!*"



Be the Inside of the Vase



My uncle told me :“A girl needs to read and be independent. Education can change everyone’s life.” But when I spotted *The Second Sex* by Simone De Bovoir on his shelf and asked to borrow it, he laughed and said: “ don’t ever get into the feminist shit!”

I am the four gentlemen

I have four gentlemen¹⁰ in my family; I have four gentlemen in my heart.

I want to be Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, and Chrysanthemum.

Like those four symbolic flowers I want to be noble, elegant, humble, and strong
but as a woman I always question why those four flowers are named as gentlemen?

关关雎鸠, "Fair, fair," cry the ospreys

在河之洲。on the island in the river.

窈窕淑女, Lovely is this noble beauty,

君子好逑。fit bride for our gentleman."¹¹

10 . The Four Gentlemen, also called the Four Noble Ones, in Chinese art refers to four plants: the orchid, the bamboo, the chrysanthemum, and the plum blossom. The term compares the four plants to Confucianist JunZi, or "gentlemen". They are most typically depicted in traditional ink and wash painting and they belong to the category of bird-and-flower painting in Chinese art.

11 The Analects, or Lunyu (simplified Chinese: 论语; traditional Chinese: 論語; pinyin: Lún Yǔ; literally "Selected Sayings"), also known as the Analects of Confucius, is the collection of sayings and ideas attributed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius and his contemporaries, traditionally believed to have been written by Confucius' followers.

Break the Vase

I grew up with my mum, she was my mother,
my father and my rock! She always said to me:

Don't be a flower vase, pretty but empty inside,

Be the inside of the vase!





I stood inside the vase for two hour., What I have realized is not only am I trapped and lost in my memories , so is she, my mother.

My mother had a car accident at age of 24, she carries a big scar on her leg and buttock, she always said her scar is shaped like the map of China. She carries the land in her life, she has never told anyone that she is unhappy and divorced, she has never tried to have a new partner. I use to ask her: "Does that scar make you afraid of intimate relationship?" She said:"*every relationship come done to sex life, she doesn't need a man.*



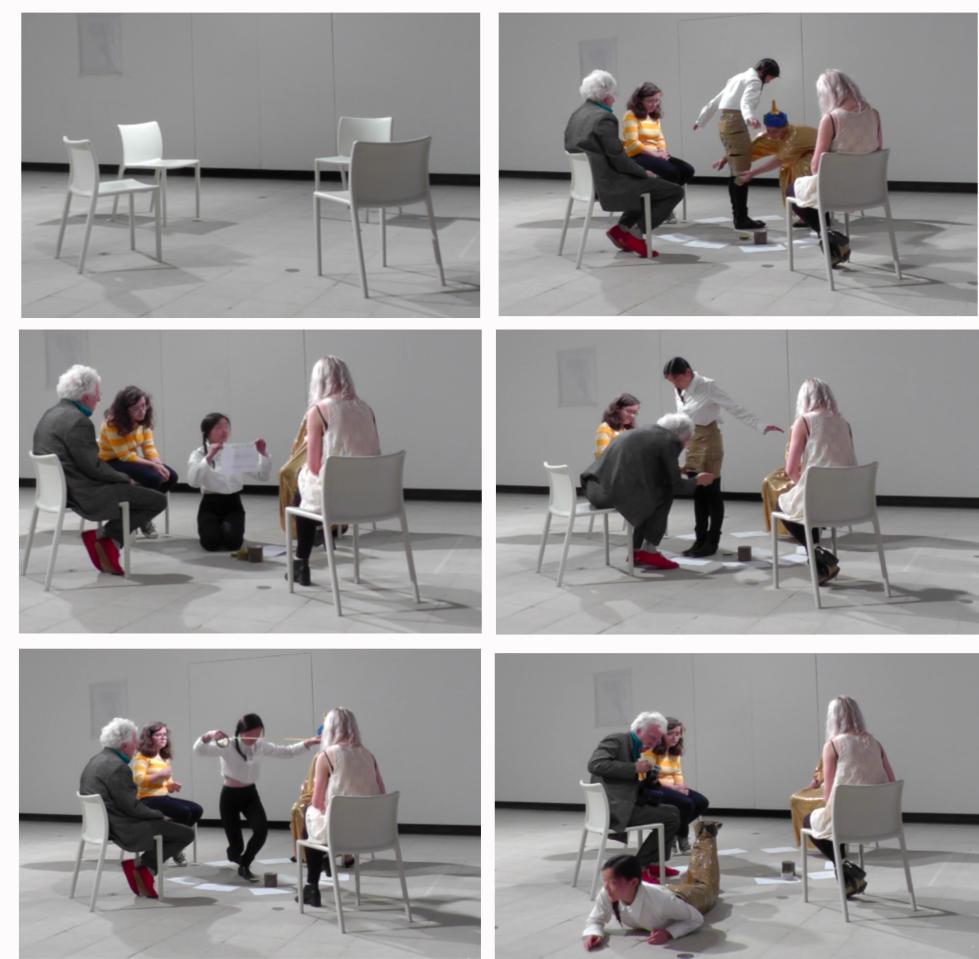
Mum, this message is for you:

Let the vase go, Let yourself free!

Part Three: Body - Legs

Story Eight: *Tape me into a mermaid*

It is a performance influenced by Greek mythology *Echo and Narcissus*¹², western fairytales *Little Mermaid*¹³ and Chinese legend *Carp Jumps Over the Dragon Gate*¹⁴



This performance transforms my body into a sculpture, I invited audiences to taping my legs

12. *Echo and Narcissus* is an episode from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a Latin mythological epic from the Augustan period. The introduction of the myth of the mountain nymph Echo into the story of Narcissus, the beautiful youth who rejected sexuality and falls in love with his own reflection, appears to have been Ovid's invention. Ovid's version influenced the presentation of the myth in later Western art and literature.

13. "*The Little Mermaid*" is a popular fairy tale by the Danish poet and author Hans Christian Andersen about a young mermaid willing to give up her life in the sea and her identity as a mermaid to gain a human soul and the love of a human prince.

14. Liyu (Carp) jumps over the Dragon Gate (Chinese: 鯉躍龍門)," an idiom that conveys a vivid image symbolizing a sudden uplifting in one's social status, as when one ascends into the upper society or has found favor with the royal or a noble family, perhaps through marriage, but in particular through success in the imperial examination.

My name is Echo,
I don't have a voice,
I can only repeat other's words,
You can give me a voice.
Please tape my legs,
I exchange my legs
for a voice.



Part Four: Soul - Memory

Story Nine: *I Buried My Loss*



" Around 5:00pm sunset, the temperature dropped, my legs began to hurt. I half closed my eyes. The song played on my wedding day sounded in my head: "sweet, sweet, your smile is so sweet, like the spring blossoms open gently in the wind..." He loved that song. Suddenly, I started to weep quietly. I heard one child's voice: "Please don't cry, I like you". An old man's voice: "Are you ok, can you talk?". A woman's voice: "Thank you for your film". A kiss on my cheek : "Echo", that was my friend. I can hear and sense my boyfriend is photographing my silence. I can image him running around, trying to capture my thoughts to include in my photo albums. I cried uncontrollably. For the first time I became a public body. I shared my loss with others. At 8:00 pm a woman's hand softly stroked my back and put a coat on me: "don't catch cold" she said: "Don't catch cold."

Albums in ruins to be respected.

It is memory itself. A place I do not return to

If we leaf through, we do it absent-mindedly

going by the open photos that fade to let me pass

I was born so far from my beginnings

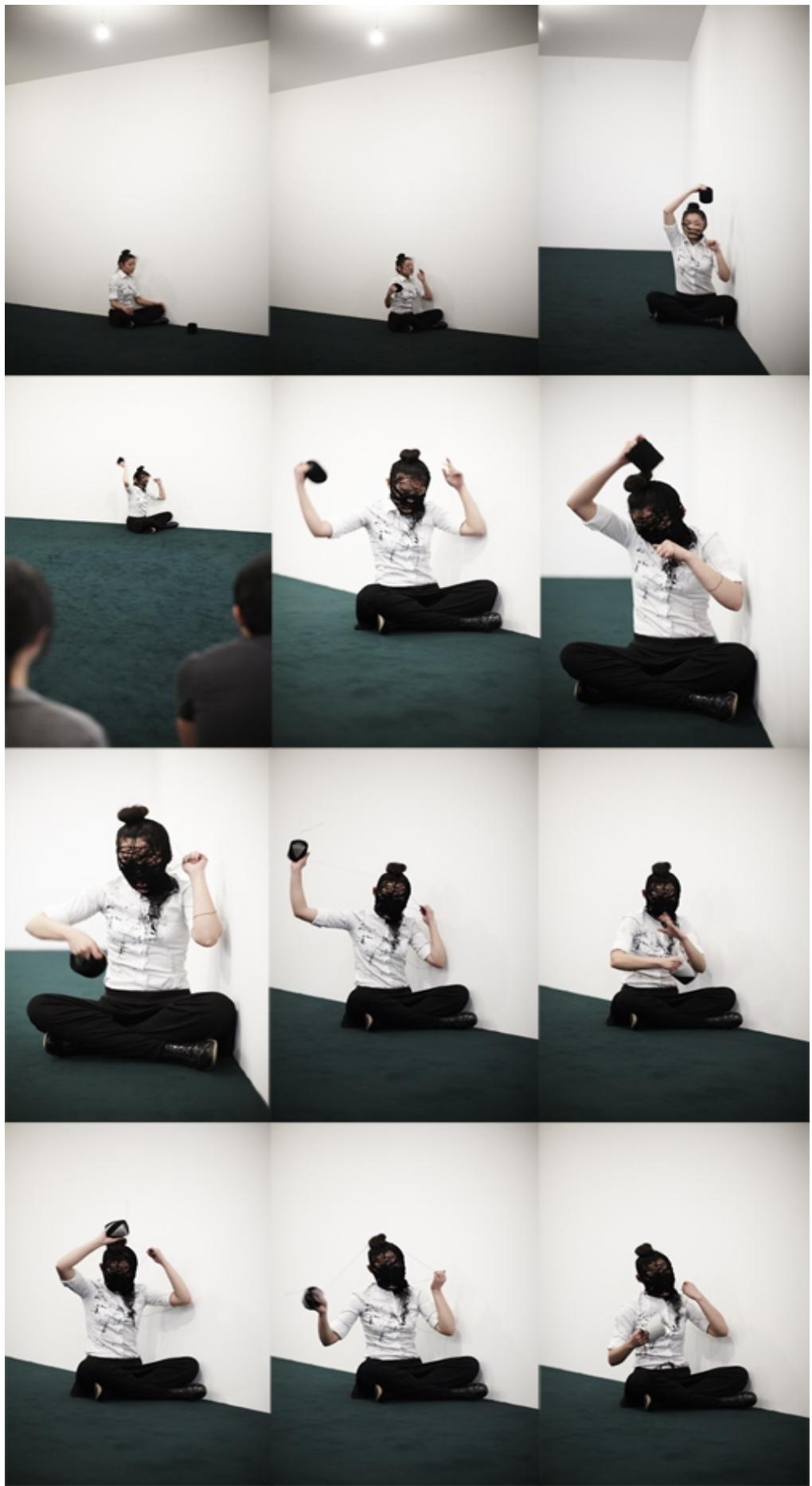
I follow the bed of the blood

My distant blood, my foreigner

what a way we have come

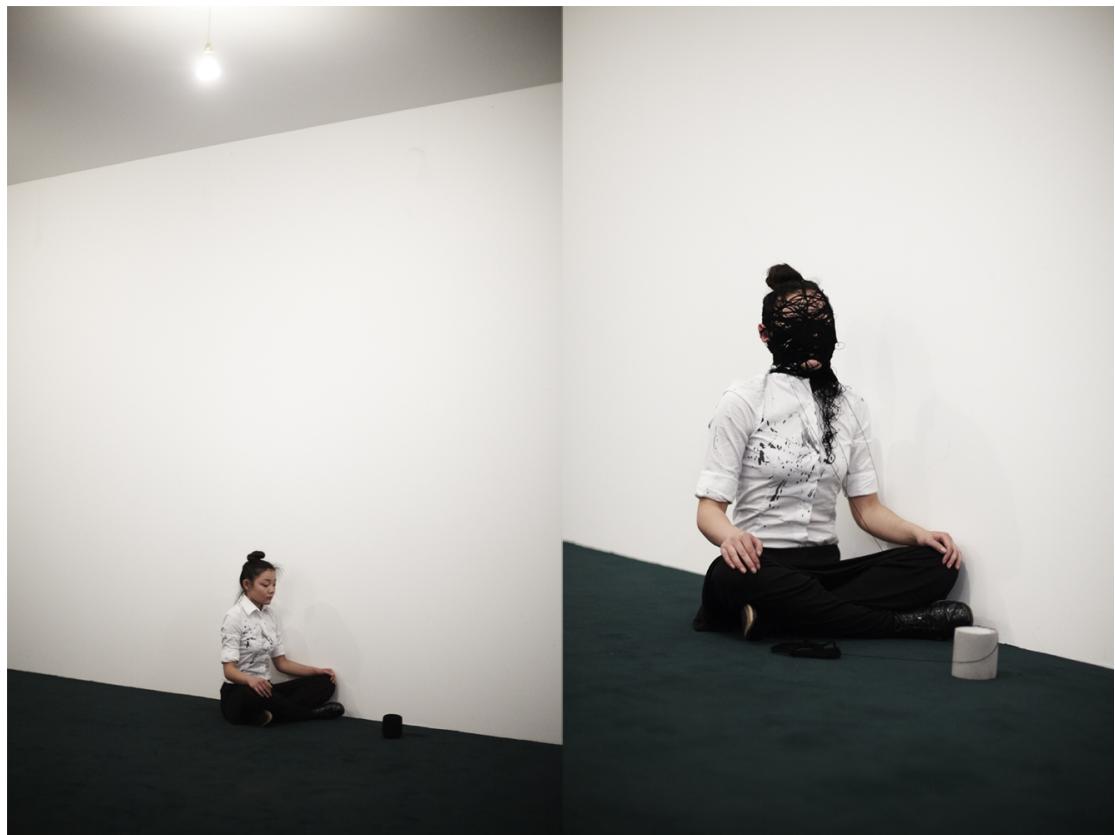
Helene Cixous¹⁵

15.Hélène Cixous (French pronunciation: [elen siks]; born 5 June 1937) is a professor, French feminist writer, poet, playwright, philosopher, literary critic and rhetorician.



Story Ten: What is in the Mirror

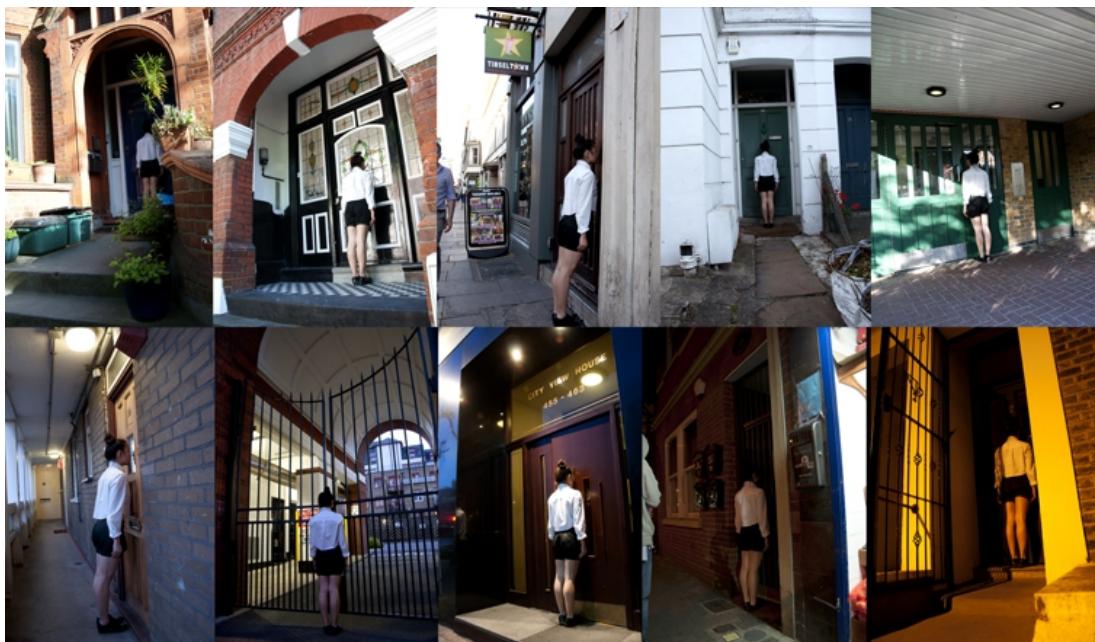
I sat in front of a ball of black string for five minutes. I then unraveled the string quickly whilst wrapping it around my face. I moved faster and faster as the ball of string became smaller and smaller. My face gradually disappeared as my breathing became more and more erratic from the physical effort. Finally I was transformed into the black ball that had originally been in front of me. My mirror is my past, my mirror is my memory, my mirror is the self-tangling, my mirror is the helpless controlling. This performance was inspired by Nigel Rolfe¹⁶'s performance The Rope.



16. Rolfe has been active as a performance artist since the 1970s, more recently moving into photography and video, though nearly always trading in images relating to his performance work, or to specific objects used in his performances.

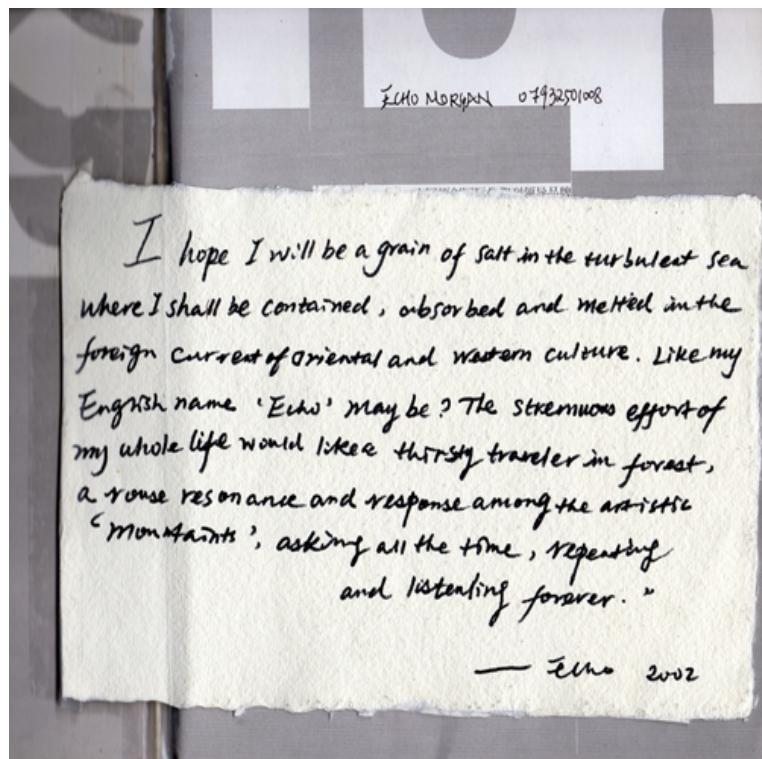
Story Eleven: 10 places, 10 minutes, 10 homes, 10 years of moving

Ten years ago I arrived in London. I have moved home 10 times. On June 28th, 2012, I decided to revisit all those "homes". I faced the 10 doors for which I no longer hold the keys..



Part Five: Soul – Drawing and Writing

Story Twelve: *Autobiography and self-portraits*



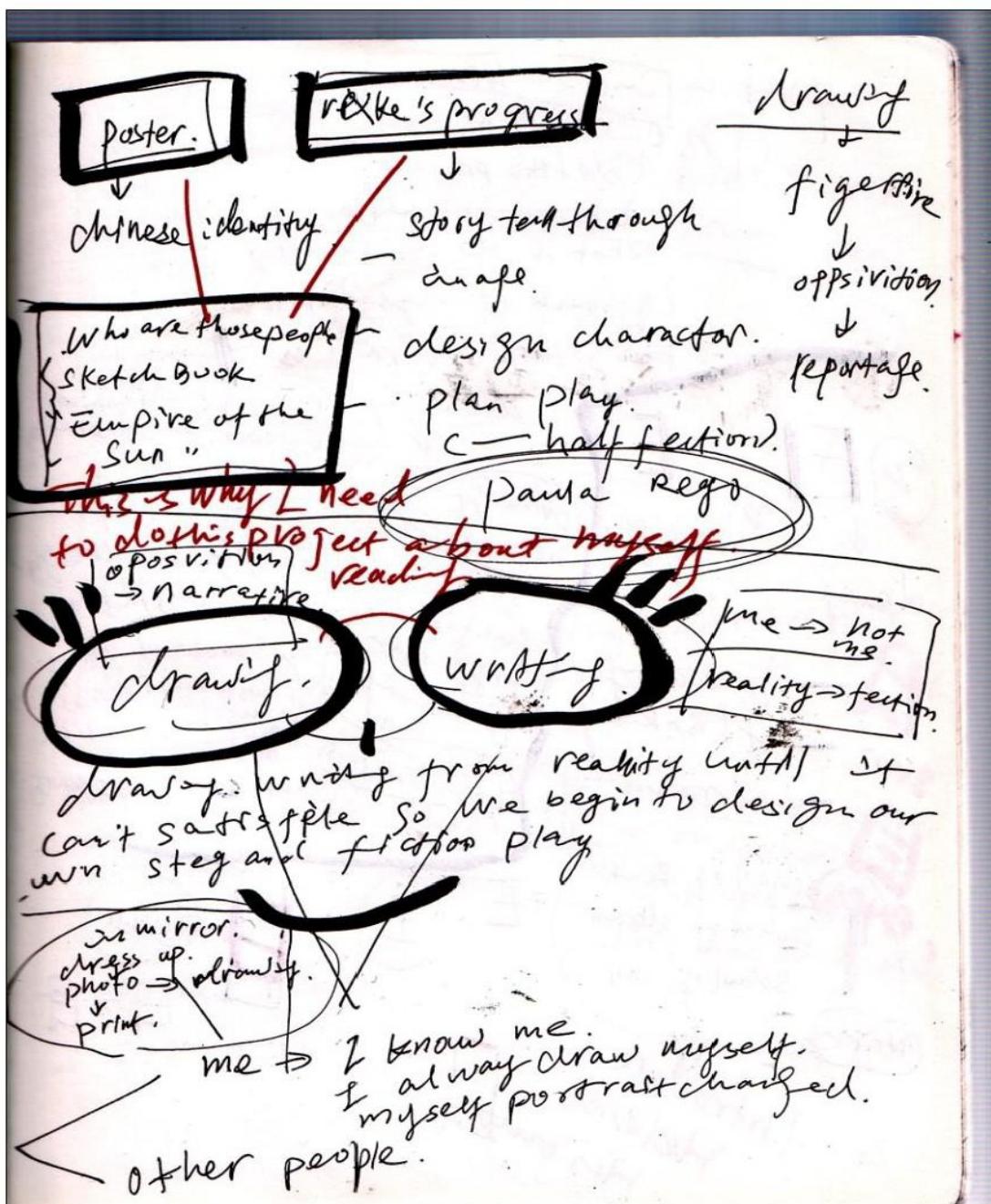
I wrote those words 10 years ago when I was in China whilst applying my foundation course. Two years later I quoted it again in my personal statement to apply for my BA course. What I find most interesting is that the writing shows my fascination with using metaphors or symbols to illustrate my appearance. Here I used **three symbols** to describe myself, they are: — *salt in the sea* symbolizing that I am aware my *multicultural identity*. — *Traveller in the mountains* symbolizes that I *cherish foreignness*. — *Echoes* symbolize a *repetitive processes or the female nymph who has lost her voice and died of a broken heart - a tragedy*. This short paragraph contains my voice and body. This contradiction acts to symbolized again both my Chinese and cross-cultural identities. These symbols capture my instinctive feeling of growth. The combination of symbols is my true identity. All the short autobiographies I wrote over the years contained a web of reflection: a relationship between east and west culture, art and design, and love and forgiveness.



Before I learned how to write, it seemed that I knew how to draw. As a little girl, I used to cut off my face from family portraits and paste it on landscapes or historical events or I drew bodies around the face such as a person in a cowboy outfit or in costumes from Qing Dynasty¹⁷. Later I even changed my Chinese name to Echo Morgan and created Echo Morgan as a symbolic — panda girl. This process continued., My face has been drawn over and over again, cut and pasted on different outfits and on various backgrounds, or covered with colours and materials - images fulfilling my curiosity of my body as a form. Like Rembrandt's dozens of self-portraits, or Van Gogh's sunflowers and Monet's water lilies, many variations of the same infinitely open subject. This act of repetition and reiteration has been at the root of my own journey - from a network of unconscious signification to the production of consciously assimilated iconic portraits of the self. In a way, **drawing** was always how I expressed myself; I never pictured **drawing and writing** in the same space. I drew two circles placed next to each other on my sketchbook recently and they become **a pair of eyes**.

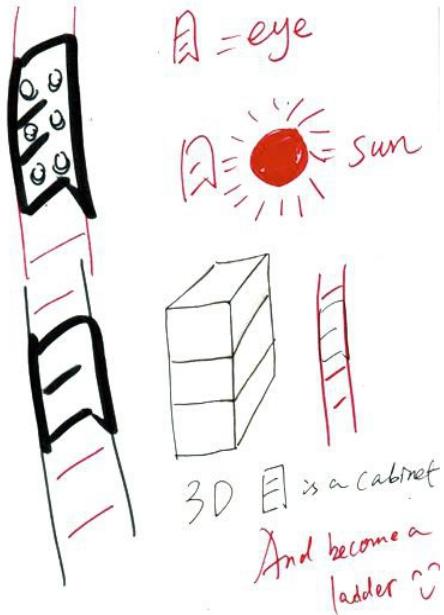
17.The Qing Dynasty was the last imperial dynasty of China, ruling from 1644 to 1912 with a brief, abortive restoration in 1917. It was preceded by the Ming Dynasty and followed by the Republic of China.

Drawing and writing become my eyes



Perhaps this points to the notion that drawing has an almost magical hold over me. However but perhaps by writing all of the above, I have started to find a more instinctive relationship

between the two .

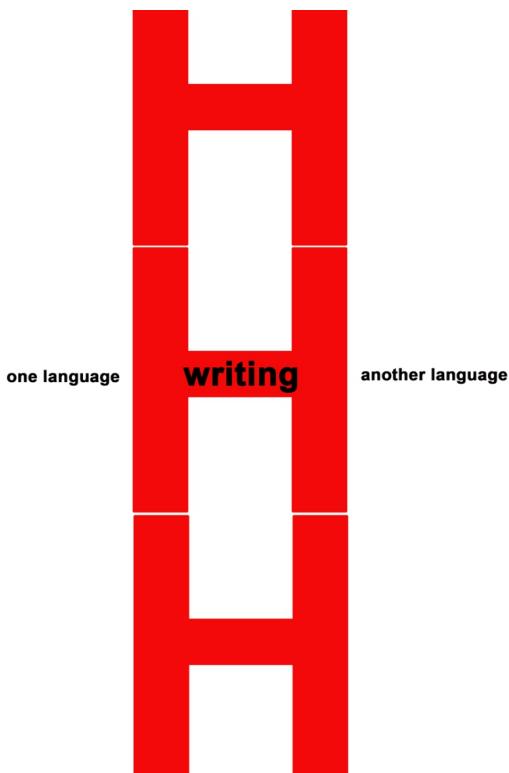


words play: Eye and Sun

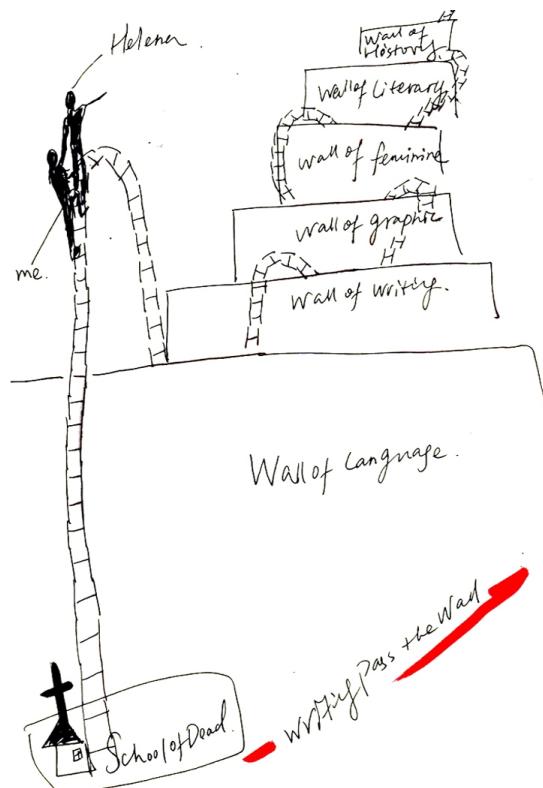
In Chinese – “eye” is written as: 目 (mù).

Drawing and writing have become my eyes for me to be able to see myself in shapes and words. Drawing and writing have become my eyes which allow me to be able to stare into the Sun; the lights! The process of change, the changing of my surroundings and myself. In Chinese, the word – “sun” is written as: 日 (ri) graphically they look similar, they both look like a cabinet or a ladder.

Helene Cixous's ladder



writing flame pass the wall



"I gather words to make a great straw-yellow fire, but if you don't put in your own flame, my fire won't take, and my words won't burst into pale yellow spark. My words will remain dead words. Without your breath on my words, there will be no mimosas." Helene Cixous.

Cixous opened the door to writing for me, I began to write, write about my grandmother, my mother, my first marriage and my childhood. My life, art and various text...friends, parents, ex-husband, boyfriend...different types of attention; different ways of being looked at or being attended to. I caught myself in the mirror and for a moment I didn't know who I was looking at. Strange.