

## ***A Letter to Her***

By and with Jia-Ling Hsu

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▣... **CLICK** ([next slide](#))

Hola!

My name is Hsu Jia-Ling, I do performance, as a way to respond to both my inner emotion and the outer surroundings. ▣

**I**

I am from Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan, an island country about three hundred and eighty kilometers in length and one-hundred and forty kilometers in width. If there is a world map as big as this wall, Taiwan is about this **【measure with fingers】** —like a green pepper in one of those packs with a one-euro sticker on it.

I live in my parents' apartment...we live different floors but in the same building. For my living, I do acting and usually do written translation between Madarin and English. Since most of the time I can work at home, my room is the center of my world: just a few-minute walk for grocery shopping, a fifteen-minute bus-ride to hospital, and an elevator distance to say hello to my parents.

I don't remember which happened first in my mind: Did I decided to stay at home because it is a good option to save the rent...Or, I would better stayed at home because I didn't want to provoke my father, who, most of the time in my life, would get furious or super disappointed when either of his children was not around him as he expected...Or, because I needed to protect and take care of my mom.

Since November, 2015, my mother had a stroke. ▣

**BLACK**

She had a brain surgery in 2013, removing the tumor in the right side of her brain that had been spread from lung cancer. And after that, she underwent radiation therapy, which helped to kill cancer cells and meanwhile made her blood vessel of brain FRAGILE, that caused her stroke and Parkinson's disease as well. The stroke was an outcome of a long-suffering.

Her left-brain, which controls language and communication, is rather “ok.” It is a RELATIVELY good situation for me and the rest of my family, since she is able to recognize us and understand what we talk to her. HOWEVER, I feel sad as well because as a human being like her, intelligent and creative, it must be very painful to face the GAP between “what I want to say” and “my ability to express myself.” ▣

## I

As being one of the children she had been supportive of, AND, as SOMEONE who had shared part of her that seeks our value through sharing our thoughts..., under this situation, I gave myself a mission to be the “BRIDGE” between her and the outer world, especially the people she loved. ▣

## —

Two years ago, when she was still able to hold something, I set up her tools for drawing, which had been one of her favorite interests. I saw her making her choices and moving the pastel; meanwhile, if I want to do something for her, I would ask questions with answer One and Two, for example, “Do you want to have your curtain closed? If “Yes,” show one; If “No,” show two...,”and she would respond like 【finger movement simulating mom’s movement】;（有意思，這個手勢跟我剛剛寫好的——倒下的 1 成為橋非常相似）

*（It's interesting that this gesture is similar to what I just wrote: a horizontal '1', like a fallen pillar becoming a bridge.）*

Once in a while, I would video called her eldest sister, whom I called Dua-Yi, the eldest aunty, and she usually started like this,

「阿雲，哩舞 Tieah dio bo? 舞 Tieah dio deh bi 1…」

【finger movement simulating mom's movement】

and Dua-Yi would ask her sister to play “Jian-Ghen-Bon” and so to stimulate her mind to move her body;

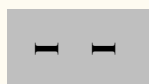
Later, when we found it's getting harder for her to make choices through giving us “this kind of” gestures, my brother, little sister and I would ask “OK or no” questions.

“I am going to adopt a stray cat...,” my sister asked, “Mom, if you also want to have her in our home, just show us ‘OK.’ ”

【finger geture: O】

And then, when we found that she could hardly control her fingers anymore, we discovered that we could ask her to move her toe if she wants to say “Yes.”

Gradually but continuously, she lost her ability to express, first oral, then the rest part of her body. At the time when I left Taipei in September, I read her mind through her eyes through a clear blink as “Yes” or “Ok.” ▣



## II

On the way to the airport, I felt satisfied and a relief. I felt relief not because I left, but because I know my mother will be still under good care...without me.

For the past three years, I have built up a system of her healthcare matters. Before I left Taipei, I broke my work into various tasks for whoever would like to participate.

The term “SYSTEM” is what I call it now when I look back. There was NO such an idea at the beginning when I involved the situation that happened to my mom.

On the measurement scale, her abilities of various kind of performance is a strait O

【gesture】, so she was eligible for hiring two caretakers. Besides the one, Siti, that she already had, we hired another girl, Ani, who is also from Indonesia. When Ani came, one of the items on the “to-do list” was “checked,” and then a new one is coming:

—What kind of BED do we need that is the best for her?

—How do we arrange mom’s room that could fit in three people, making comfortable for both mom and her caretakers? □

■

—How do we apply financial support from the government?

—How do we move her from BED to the HOSPITAL for appointments with doctors and therapists?

.....As the urgent moment passed, we went back to our normal life: Father runs his office as a lawyer; Brother has his job and a family of wife and two children; little sister has her job as a light designer, and I...have...a task in front of me, for myself, to prepare Mother a better living. She deserved it and it just needed some...body...to do it.

So as time goes by, the questions for “we,” gradually became questions that I ask myself: □

■

—How do I arrange her schedule that could meet various appointments with doctors and therapists?

—How do I arrange Siti and Ani’s workflow, so they can still save energy when the new tasks are coming?

—How do I teach Ani Mandarin since she always depends on Siti to translate, and even doesn’t pay attention to what I am saying?

—What kind of food can I provide for mom? Do I want her to have only formula milk?...No! But what else can we put directly into the tube for her stomach? And how?

There was one question after one question, and no operating manual to follow.

It’s an unknown realm. Maybe...the situation was similar to what my mom had confronted with when she first had a baby, or, when she became somebody’s wife. It’s something that I

can only find my own answer through doing it, to experiment, to imagine a possibility with the unknown, and to figure out the way to communicate...Like a performer do. ▣

老照片 45

雲英歌唱（我覺得這張以後可改為媽媽騎著腳踏車，前面菜籃是哥哥）  
Yun-Ying sings. ( This photo could be replaced with the one where Mom is riding a bicycle with ge-ge in the front basket. )

I ask her nurse, Ms., Lee for recipe for tube feeding, and adjusted it according to mother's weight. And make this shopping into my weekly schedule. ▣

【個別的食材】 each slide shows an individual ingredient

食材 1

食材 2

食材 3

食材 4

食材 5

食材 6

食材 7

I felt myself was building a garden in the ruins. Even though the land of her body was collapsed, there was a body to be constructed...in another form—▣

食材 8 (工具)

食材 9 (蘋果)

BLACK

A body with a steady daily rhythm, that hopefully to be the base for supporting her inner peace and self-fulfillment beyond this physical decay. ▣

食物汁在提鍋

blended food in the container

Besides formula liquid, everyday she is nourished with fresh food, blended and filtered.

食材團照\_彩色

a group portrait of the ingredients

One of my pleasure when I went grocery shopping, was being aware the change of the season THROUGH the change of vegetables and fruits in the market.

BLACK

【打桑椹與灌食的照片】 [making mulberry juice and feeding via tube](#)

Through the food, she is able to ■...I HOPE...she is able to connect to the world outside, ■...connect to the present surroundings, ■...connect to the fruit of the nature, through eyes, through stomach, and through a little taste on the surface of tongue. ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

桑椹汁過程 1

桑椹汁過程 2

桑椹汁過程 3

桑椹汁過程 4

桑椹汁過程 5

桑椹汁過程 6

桑椹汁過程 7

桑椹汁過程 8

桑椹汁過程 9

Bit by bit, the workflow is set up, ■ the chaos slowed down, ■ and my world is ready to give me a break. ■ ■

桑椹汁過程 10

桑椹汁過程 11

桑椹汁過程 12

桑椹汁過程 13

BLACK

III

On the day when I departed Taiwan in September 10th.

I arrived the airport, gave my passport to the customer service, expecting to fly to Hong Kong, Hong Kong to Doha airport in Qatar, Qatar to Barcelona...■

剛好呼應三個站立的III ( [Coincidentally, three cities—each a point on the map—echo the three upright 'I's in the title.](#) )

But instead, she said that she was not able to process my ticket. ■

超連結台灣地圖

打字這件事就是相當於櫃檯人員作業過程

*The gesture of typing echoes the procedural rhythm of front desk work.*

<https://geology.com/world/asia-satellite-image.shtml>

【直接點選中國地圖】 [Click on the map of China](#)

“I think it’s because it’s over ninety days between your tickets. Do you have a working visa?”

“No. I’ve asked the office of Spain in Taiwan before. They said that my situation is not considered as ‘work’ for working visa...And, well...I am not just there for travel, I rent a studio there...um, I know that some people who have similar situation, they would change their plan while they are already in Europe.”

【直接點選亞洲地圖】 [Click on the map of Asia](#)

“Well..., now the computer even wouldn’t let me print out your boarding pass. I am afraid that there is nothing I can do.”

I called my travel agent and told her my situation.

“...I see. Let me book you a round ticket in Europe...say...from Barcelona to London.

When do you want to go and when do you want to come back?”

And we calculated the days on the phone.

“November first to November thirtieth....”

【直接點選歐洲地圖】 [Click on the map of Europe](#)

“Sure!”


About in ten minutes, as soon as the ticket was booked, my boarding pass from Taipei was printed out.

Besides when to go and when to leave, I had no idea about my plan in UK. In fact, I even didn’t plan to travel around during my residency in Barcelona. I just needed a break, a distance from home to breathe. And that’s fancy enough.

【直接點選英國地圖】 [Click on the map of England](#)

I didn't know at that time, that this was just a start of an IMPROVISATION between me and the world around.

BLACK

I didn't know that I would also visit Dublin,  sitting on the street and chatting with a musician, Declan, who later taught me to play his music of spoons.



Cut to 都柏林街頭

[Slide: cut to the streets of Dublin](#)

Musician\_1

Musician\_2

Musician\_3

Musician\_4

Musician\_5

I didn't know that I would had a cup of coffee with a new friend from Korea, Hyejin, whom I met in the apartment that I needed to pass five doors from the entrance of the building to get to my bed.

Jialing\_cafe\_1

Hyejin\_cafe\_2

Hyejin\_cafe\_3

I didn't know at that time, either, that I would met a lady in west Yorkshire, who walked with me on the way to Bronte Waterfall, and shared her story with me, that her father HAD A STROKE in late 2015, just like my mom did.

Linda\_1

Linda\_2

And I didn't know at that time...that in November, this COLD, LOW season for travel, it's often to I find myself ALONE on the way with wind and rain.



Selfie\_1

Selfie\_2

Selfie\_3

Selfie\_4

Selfie\_5

No other company...but the face of nature: Green, orange, grey, white, sepia, pale blue... the color of massive landscapes covered on top of each other IN MY MIND as I moved forward.

Blurcolor\_1

從第 6 張開始慢慢可以辨識，第 11 張是一張清晰的「什麼」

From slide 6, the image gradually becomes recognizable, until slide 11 clearly shows a 'something.'

When I walked in the valley of Glendalough, Ireland, I felt inside my mind a piece of black image: heavy, rich and sticky, like lava. It's invisible, but still blocked my mind from enjoying the surroundings. I knew it's connected to my "anger." The anger was connected to something that my brother's wife, my sister in law, told me before I left Taipei.  
"Congratulations that you got the offer...."

Blurcolor\_2

How could you say that so easily as you never asked me, for the past few years, things like  
"How are you, are you ok?"  
And not to mention: "Anything I can do? Anything I can help? Do you need anything..."  
Not a single time.

Blurcolor\_3

When I look back, it seemed the ANGER was coming from the GAP between my ANTICIPATION and the REALITY. My anticipation of what a family member should know or should do for this unexpected and unwanted situation in the family, is often found far away from my reality.

Blurcolor\_4

Take my father for example, in my impression, most of the time when a new challenge had come, what he would do was keeping saying “what should I do what should I do what should I do...,” yet not interested in hearing my idea or working together to figure out the way. And after everything was settled down, without him, he would come back and tell me like “Rehabilitation is a routine so...you go with things like that. For the appointments with doctors, I think it still needs me to be there, I know people....”

Blurcolor\_5

Take my cousin for example, when she visited my mom, the first thing she told me was, “It must been a hard work for you dad.”

Blurcolor\_6

Take Siti and Ani for example, they always called my mom “AUNTY” and my dad “BOSS” even though it’s my mom who actually paid their wage. When I explained the situation, and told them that my mom is the one whom they should call “Boss,” they giggled and said to her like playing with a child “老闆....” Maybe the agent didn’t teach them, or maybe in their culture, there is word to describe employer’s wife but no such a term for calling an employer’s husband.

Blurcolor\_7

Take one of my mom’s sisters Amy, for example, who is the wife of a doctor. When she visited my mom, all she said was “Why don’t you put the bed this way...?” After I explained the reasons that we’ve discussed in our family meeting already and chose to put the bed in this way, she just repeated “It’s very easy to just turn 90 degree....”

Blurcolor\_8

I explained and explained, try to communicate, but it seemed that they were not here to understand something new for them. They just want to show their “good intention.” Then I got frustrated and angry.

Blurcolor\_9

“Take it easy...Jia-Ling. Don't you think the atmosphere gets intense when you are mad? It doesn't do any good for mom...” said my sister-in-law.

Blurcolor\_10

It seems that when I treated this healthcare matters as a job and profession, one of it's challenges was to confront people around me that see this..., merely part of “domestic matters,” a “house work” ...that a FATHER or HUSBAND could take it as part of his achievement...with support of other women from similar background; Or, an experienced housewife could assume that it's something very simple and she can easily make a comment on.

Blur no more\_11

It seems that at the one hand I am planting a garden, and on the other hand I am fighting in a battlefield. THE BATTLEFIELD in which I wanted to protect my voice to clarify the real situation that happened during this period of time.

THE VOICE is not justified because I am a SENIOR PERSON in the family, not because I have some important JOB TITLE in the society, and not because I get some LICENSE to prove my profession. The voice is justified and deserves respect because it's formed through the process of what I did.

I cheered myself up by yelling, Jialing, looked, it's all for you, the gift from the high above. Look at it: the tree, the stone, the whole surrounded nature, open your eyes!

It was about 4pm and it was getting dark, drizzling, and my cellphone had battery less than 20 percent. I walked fast down the path, focusing on my steps. At the same time, I felt the back impression inside my mind flowing down away from me to the stone under my feet. It seemed that the shadow of anger had flown away BEFORE it became a real tumor in my brain.

羊咩咩

clear image of a lamb

The layers of memories, with different times:

The TIME when I walked in the valley of Glendalough, Ireland;

The TIME when I took the images in Yorkshire, England; ☐

BLACK

The TIME when I told the story;

The TIME when I am speaking now...

the layers of time on top of each other.

**Like the colors in my memory on top of each other. ☐**

黑白醫院

醫院與桑椹\_1

醫院與桑椹\_2

醫院與桑椹\_3

**One of the layer is pink, the color of mother's room. ☐**

→ 停頓一下再按 (Pause for a moment before clicking.)

醫院與桑椹\_4

回家

hospital, mulberries, and going home

## →【系列照片】

以〈雲英的門診暨復健行程〉表單為例，介紹我所建立的「系統」，包含了各種層次的「時間」的堆疊，而每張照片都有一個跟時間有關的資訊。

A series of photos : Take “Yun-Ying’s Clinic and Rehabilitation Schedule” form as an example to introduce the system I’ve built—composed of multiple layers of time. Every photo carries a time-related detail.

做表\_1

做表\_2

做表\_3

1. 多久做一次表？

2. 表的内容？

門診的時間、復健的時間、做檢查的時間、車子來回的時間、訂車的時間

3. 做表需要：未來三個月的日期，以及過去的兩個月的行程做參考

How often is the schedule created?

What does this schedule include?

- ☐ Time for medical consultations
- ☐ Time for physical rehabilitation sessions
- ☐ Time for medical tests
- ☐ Round-trip transportation time
- ☐ Time to arrange and confirm transportation services

What is needed to make the schedule?

- ☐ A calendar of the upcoming three months
- ☐ A review of the previous two months' activities as a reference

姑姑\_1

姑姑\_2

看護\_1

看護\_2

目前是姑姑幫忙訂車

我把行程告訴看護

看護抄下來，大家的時間可以 Sync。

- ☐ Currently, it's "koo-koo" (aunty) who helps call the car service.
- ☐ I give the schedule to the caregivers—both of them write it down. This way, everyone's time can stay in sync.

看護\_1

看護\_2

看護\_3

現在她們也會運用媽媽的 Crayon and pastel，用顏色來整理她們的工作。

They've also started using Mom's crayons and pastels—color-coding their tasks.

貓咪愛馬

Emma the cat

(PAUSE 5 秒)

愛馬黑白

Emma the cat

The day when I booked the flight ticket to leave Spain for one month...At that time, I didn't know that I would be standing in the field behind a house, in which, nearly two hundred years ago, lived Emily Brontë, the English poet and novelist who, in her thirty years of life, never been married, and wrote her passion, her love and her intimate relationship with the nature into her words, including the novel, *Wuthering Height*.

I leaned against the stone wall, tried to hold my cellphone steady to capture the movement of the trees in the rain and wind.

The wind was pretty strong. And I believe that if the words from my mouth have a body, they can be sent far away.

V

How to translate feelings into words?

How to translate nature into action?

How to translate between different languages?

How to translate between different people?

BLACK

燈轉方向到中央，和 Joanna 交換位置。請 Joanna 朗讀西班牙文版本的文字。

Shift the light to center. Switch places with Joanna. Invite her to read the Spanish version of the text, translated by Christina from my English draft.

(2018.12.20 註：以下的英文與西文都是最早寫的，西文也是現場請 Joana 朗讀的版本，後來給皮拉米動的版本是再跟克里絲汀討論後的版本。)

Note from 2018.12.20: The following English and Spanish texts are the earliest versions. The Spanish version was the one I invited Joana to read aloud during the performance. The version later given to Piramidón was revised after further discussion with Christina who helps to translate from English to Spanish version.

### *A Letter to Her*

By Jia-Ling Hsu / Translated by Christina Schultz

Querida,

Tu sobrevives

Eres una sobreviviente.

Sobreviviendo. del encarcelamiento por parte de quienes solían contarte,

“DEBES... porque te quiero.”

La cadena se rompe junto con el vaso roto en tu cerebro.

Has sido testigo del cambio de tu familia y de tu esposo, que ha sido malcriado por tu generación, y que ahora aprende todos los días cómo ser TU MARIDO.

Has sido testigo de diferentes tiempos todos los días,

Has sido testigo de un gatito cajero siendo dulce compañía a tu lado,

Has sido testigo de la lucha entre tu mente y tu cuerpo y

de tu propio coraje

de llevarlo bien.

Pierdes control de tu orgullo, pero tu dignidad crece por sí sola.

Tu cerebro está dañado, pero tu voluntad es brillante y resistente,

Mi querida,

no puedo hablar por ti

no puedo hablar por ti que SI ... ENTONCES no necesitabas sufrir,

Pero quiero decir que, mientras respires, compartiré tu aliento.

Tu sobrevives

Eres una sobreviviente.

My dear,

You survive,

You are a survivor.

Survive from the imprisonment by those who used to tell you,

“You SHOULD...because I love you.”

The chain is broken along with the broken vessel in your brain.

You’ve witness the change of your family, and your husband, who had been spoiled by your generation, now learning day by day on how to be YOUR HUSBAND.

You’ve witnessed different weather everyday,

You’ve witnessed a baby cat from the street to be one of your sweet company aside,

You’ve witnessed the struggle between your mind and body, and your own courage to get along with it.

You lose control of your pride, but your dignity grows by itself.

Your brain is damaged, but your will is bright and resilient,

My dear,

I can’t speak for you,

I can’t speak for you that IF...THEN you didn’t need to suffer,

But I want to say, as long as you breathe, I will share your breath away!

You survive,

You are a survivor.

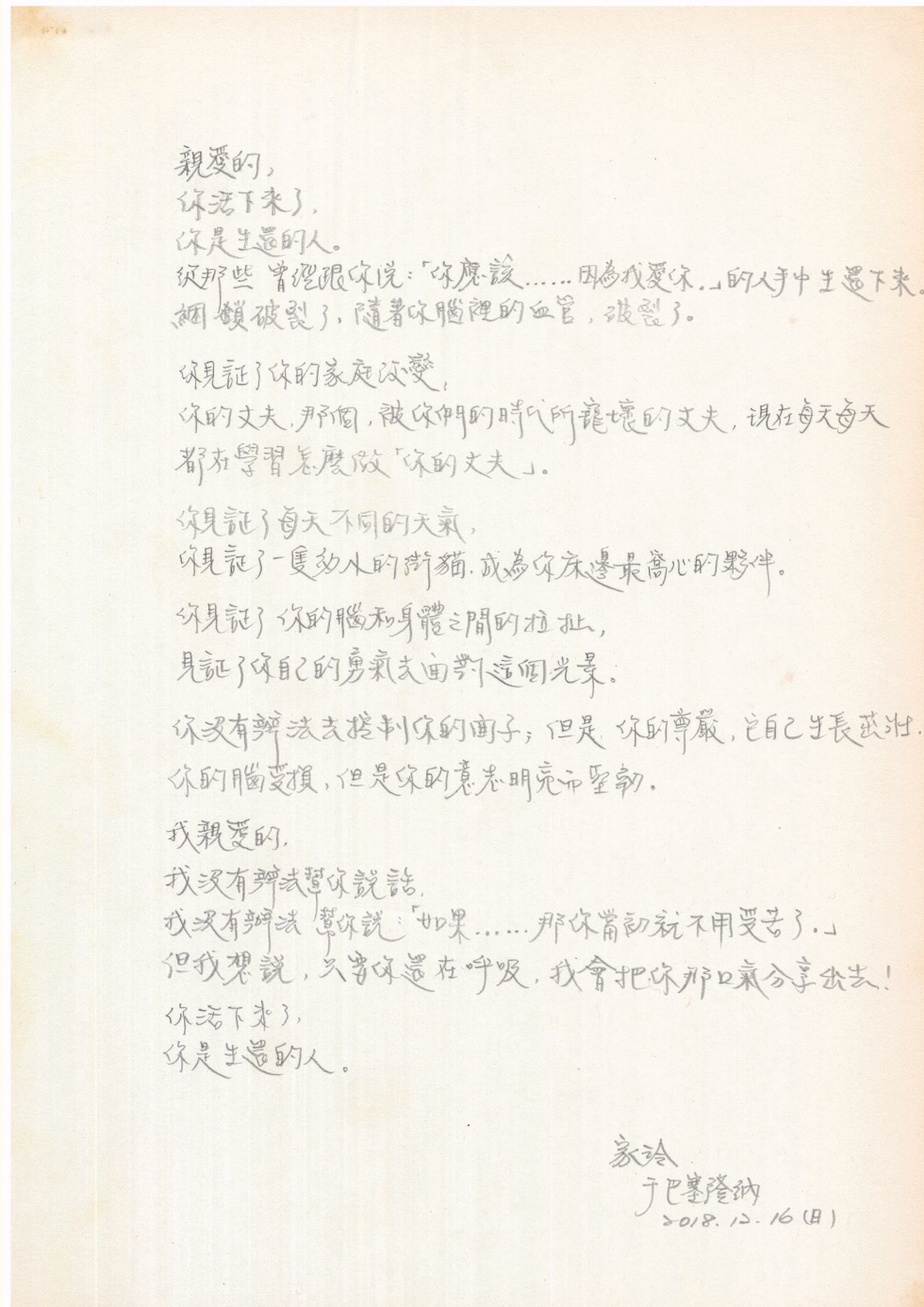
【關燈 → 拿中文原稿，記得背後要貼好粘土 → 播放影像 → 在第一排觀眾中間或前面面對影像、跪在地上，讓背部吃到投影】

Turn off the light → Take the original script written in Mandarin, making sure the clay is firmly attached to the back of the script → Play the video → Kneel on the floor in front of or among the first row of the audience, facing the screen, so that the projection also falls on my back.



家玲念中文稿，可大聲喊。朗讀的聲音在影像的風聲中，也能被觀眾聽到。

Read the Mandarin scrip aloud—feel free to project the voice. My voice should cut through the wind in the video.



念完，把稿子貼在牆上。

After finishing, display the script on the wall.

Last Friday morning, I sat on my table, working on a message to my Aunty Amy, my mom's third sister, who told my other aunt before...that it's difficult for her to visit my mom because Jia-Ling had BAD temper and got very intense when she gave advice on "how to do it in a better way" with good intention. I wrote the message to describe my situation, and hope that it would help us to understand each other. I don't know how she will respond to it.

However, when I was writing it, MY ROOM, at that time, gave me signs about something I don't know yet: the bright sunshine, little chillness, and the voice from behind the wall of my studio. A SONG that repeat and repeat while I was writing my message:

【播放】[Play the sound.](#)

→ recording from my studio, the sound from the next door : 2018.12.07 O'sole mio

→ 黑暗中



夜景

最後一段：

演講的最後回到媽媽的眼睛：媽媽的眨眼：認同我來。▣

[Final section: Return to 'Mother's Eyes' — mimic her blinking as a gesture of recognition, affirming my departure from home to be here."](#)

BLACK

【開燈】▣ [Turn on the light](#)

媽

[Mom](#)

【按鍵：媽媽像 20 秒後會出現】

鞠躬。 ([bow](#))