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Publication Date

2021

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Tomándome mi tiempo, conversaciones trascendentales en la morada interior

Nuestros cuerpos son símbolos más que un hogar

Translated to

Taking my time, transcendental conversations in the interior space

Our bodies are simblos more than a home

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Maria Antonia Eguiarte

Committee in charge:

Professor Ricardo Dominguez, Chair

Professor Lisa Cartwright

Professor Anya Gallaccio

Professor Brian Goldfarb

2022

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University of California San Diego

2022

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DEDICATION

This text is a love letter, a long convoluted letter to the women that have held my hand as I grow. I write to you Guadalupe (my nanny, the women that holds my childhood heart), to you Bela (my grandmother and her blood that flows within my veins), to you Teresa (my accomplice in madness and obsession, with her eyes I look for the holy in everyday acts).

I hope that in the convolutes of eternal time this reaches your infinite ears.

I love you.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Transpecial and atemporal thank you to Guadalupe Rivera Espinosa, Teresa Martin del Campo and Santa Teresa de Jesus.

This would have not been possible without my advisor Ricardo Domiguez support and care. I'm forever grateful for our amazing conversations about the possibilities of time travel in gestures. I would also like to acknowledge Anya Gallaccio, Lisa Cartwright and Brian Goldfarb for all your time and constant support and advice.

I'm eternally grateful to my biological family: my mother Valeria Souza, my father Luis Eguiarte, my brother Felipe Eguiart; to my found family: Matty Terrones, beck heberstroh, Victor Castaneda, Erick Tlaseca and Gris Rivera Espinosa.

I would like to thank the beautiful community of Visual Arts in UCSD

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Tomándome mi tiempo, conversaciones trascendentales en la morada interior

Nuestros cuerpos son símbolos más que un hogar

Translated to

Taking my time, transcendental conversations in the interior space

Our bodies are simblos more than a home

Maria Antonia Eguiarte

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Ricardo Dominguez, Chair

In a search of re-thinking hierarchies I have continuously stumbled with the body mind divide as a core. This system prioritizes the mind as the only true and valid relationship with the world and the body as vain and animal, this system is patriarchal by nature and looks to discredit and silence the non dominant narrative of women, people of color, queer and marginalzied bodies.

As a grad student in UCSD I've focused my research on ways to challenge this divide. This has obligated me to be critical about my relationship with body and mind and ask myself: how do I relate with this binary? Am I a body without organs, organs without a body? Is my

body just a vassal for what would be my soul? Is my body just what others need it to be? I've decided to challenge this, I'm a body that's fully embodied!

This thesis is a transcendental, faith fueled conversation with three women: my caregiver Guadalupe, my grandmother Bela and the spanish 16th century nun Santa Teresa de Avila. As I learn from these women and converse with them I find my body linked with theirs. Dismembered, lost, used. More a symbol than a home.

I wish to commune with Teresa, with Guadalupe and with Bela, let them be fully embodied in my body, letting us be body, letting us be care, letting us take space. Together we reappropriate the parts of them that were dismembered, we stitch them together though time and contemplation.

Chapter 1

Us: context and introduction

What moves this thesis are a series of questions that will continuously show up throughout the text. I start this thesis with the guiding questions of: Where does my trauma come from? What is the root of this silent pain that pushes me to constantly make the same mistakes? How can I break the cycle of this trans-generational, infinite woven knots of cruelty, pleasure and care intertwine so tightly that it's almost impossible to unthread?

As I sit here, needle in hand. I slowly try to divide the threads of history and trauma, separating the strands, finding peace in this convoluted twine. I find myself sharing the twine with my mother's mother and her mother's mother, the twine that was made by centuries of silent manipulation out of a sense of duty to men and heteronormative family structure. I untangle the thread with Santa Teresa whispering in my ear, sharing impossible stories of love in pain and of visions for the Wholly Other. I sit with Guadalupe, the woman who raised me, holding my hand, sharing her warmth that was meant for somebody else but was given to me.

These three mythical women that don't exist any longer in this physical realm have become my mentors and company. With the memory of Guadalupe I've grown to understand the inherent cruelty of hierarchies of care but also with her hand on mine I see the infinite possibilities of love that expand greater than time, space and blood. Cruelty is so tightly woven into our lives sometimes it feels impossible to separate cruelty for care as "Forms of cruelty are commonly shoveled under the name of care." (Nelson #) and thought cruelty is pushed into our personal spaces, our intimate relationships, into the depths of our understanding of the world and our place in it. It's our job to identify the cruelty and break the pattern, for our holistic health and those we share the planet with.

With the trauma of my mother and her mother and her mother's mothers I have pushed through the foundational myths that have situated our role as women in the family as selfless, leaving to generations of abuse and a loss of voice. All these women reduced to whispers of perfection, more object than human.

As I read with Santa Teresa I see strength in the madness, the freedom of cruelty and the weight of abuse. When I sit with her I see the possibilities of emancipation, freedom in an

internal constant conversation with the self. I see the possibilities outside of the boundaries of time, of embodiment situated in the Other, in theory, in community, in language and in the beauty and pain of neurodivergent thinking.

We were all socialized to not know the difference between love and abuse. Santa Teresa linked her love to God with self flagilation and penece, my grandmother Bela linked love with duty and sacrifice, and for Guadalupe and I our love existed inside racist and colonialist practices. In "all about love" bell hooks says "When we understand love as the will to nurture our own and another's spiritual growth, it becomes clear that we cannot claim to love if we are hurtful and abusive, Love and abuse cannot coexist. Abuse and neglect are, by definition, the opposites of nurturance and care." (hooks 6) But she also understands how hard it is to accept this, to accept and divide love and abuse for our daily lives. "For most folks it is just too threatening to embrace a definition of love that would no longer enable us to see love as present in our families. Too many of us need to cling to a notion of love that either makes abuse acceptable or at least makes it seem that whatever happened was not that bad." (hooks 6) It took me a while to understand that love, care and cruelty are not weaved together. I believe bell hooks, but it's something that I have learned to understand. Growing up care, time, selflessness was the way we show love, and if care was not given as sacrifice then there would be no love, Maggie Nelson in her book "On freedom" talk about the innate violence in care saying "Caring and coercion often exist in a knot, with their extrication never simple, nor sometimes even possible." (Nelson 71) Learning what love is in contrast to duty becomes an active conversation, constantly looking out for cutlery and coercion, constantly relearning how to interact with each other. "The former conjures an all-too-familiar schema in which self-sufficiency and independence are valued over reliance, service, and infirmity; the latter throws the door open to all kinds of unrealistic and dysfunctional demands made of ourselves and others, bringing us into mirthless territory ranging from codependency to shaming to servitude." (Nelson 71)

As a starting point to the unweaving of generational trauma I'm confronted with the lack of autonomy I feel over my body. This is a weight of history that I carry in my navel, my belly button. This sacred hole on my body is the memory of my fist site of interaction with others, it's the site where I was connected to my mother through my umbilical cord, where she was connected to her mother, and her mother and so on. A millennial long line of guts joining all of the women of my family, all humanity, all mammals, the whole world. Guts full of blood, of fuel,

of memories and, in my mothers family case, full of trauma pushed by a sense of duty to the patriarchal canon of womanhood. I felt a need for emancipation for this timeline, to start my own line linked by mutual care and intersectional approaches to love. My first approach to this non hierarchical multidimensional travel came in the form of “*ombligogenesis*”, this was for me a new way to connect, a new way of autonomy. *Obligogenesis* is a system of gut feelings, ascetics and bodily knowledge. A system to become our own caretakers, to become our own motherland. The word *ombligogenesis* is a junction of *Obligo* and *Genesis*. It is born from the idea that the bellybutton is the start and end of humanity, this liminal space that we carry within our bodies. I explored this system during my first years in my graduate studies at UCSD via a series of performances. The first and most important being the perforation of my own navel with a sewing needle and red thread, creating a new umbilical cord that connects to myself. After this action I felt freedom to travel within my body and history, to explore new timelines and families. I was my own motherland, I became a time machine. Emancipation from the infinite line of guts may come in different ways, for me it was via “*ombligogenesis*” but I also see that emancipation in Janine Antoni and Stephen Petronio piece *Sallow* made in 2016 with the collaboration of with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, PA. Together they share a long piece of muline and they swallow it till their mouths meet joining guts into one, they become the same system of body, like a fetus and the one that carries it, they consume one and other so they can grow and survive. Antoni and Petronio become at the same time mother and child and also lover held in a kiss. *Sallow* is a symbol of a link. The art piece is only documented by the object it created and by the audio recording of the 10 people present during the gesture. This piece becomes like a myth and the object a relic.

Learning to deal with a body and a mind that feels like a curse takes a coven, a community of other cursed bodies based on care and understanding. Veronique D'entremont centers on understanding generational pain and self-discovery through magical realism. In their installation “*Her Body Became an Antenna, Transmitting the Message of God*” Veronique confronted her mothers suicide using ritualistic materials like beeswax, honeycomb, gold, familie heirlooms and radio singles to create a transgenerational, transtemporal and transspecies antenna that connects them, their mother and their legacy with the communication of bees and the beehive, the queen bee looking for her children, the bees looking for their mother the queen. In “*Her Body Became an Antenna, Transmitting the Message of God*” attention to detail secures a successful ritual,

everything has its place in the great scheme of magic and faith, a ritual to not necessarily get rid of the curse their lineage suffers but to understand it and live caring with it. Sometimes breaking the cycle of trauma is not healing past wounds but learning how not to cause new ones. Veronique D'entremont famili has a link to the magical and the mad (as they say “depending who you ask” (d’Entremont)) medically describe as bipolar disorder and they don't want to break away from that, Veronique sits with the trouble of having magic in their blood and confronts it via the schamanistic transformation of matter.

As I submerge us in this non hierarchical multidimensional travel through time, space, care and theology it's important to clarify some terms. I will talk about God, The Other, the Holy, The Wholly, Ecstasy, The Mystic and Faith. I use these terms with the full respect that they deserve and the respect that the three women that guide this text gave them. But I wish for us not to focus on the Catholic church, this institution does not own the word of God in all its versions. I want us to think of Santa Teresa's extasis as an experience that connects her to another dimension of being, to that of The Other, of Guadalupe's prayers as a hymn of care and protection not bound to one particular way of thinking. Think of my grandmother's amulets and prayer cards as a collection of ancient memories and omens protecting us through time and space.

To understand the flow and nature of this text it's important to have in mind the writing tradition of “realismo mágico” in Latin America. I have written with movement on my mind, movement across time, space, magic and reality. Fact and fiction, theory and narrative collide constantly as I remember stories told in the kitchen and books read in seminar. The lines and limits between everything disappear, nothing is solid, everything is liquid. So please have faith and walk the liminal space of mysticism and madness with me, Guadalupe, Bela and Santa Teresa.

Chapter 2

Bela, my grandmother

Patterns in bloodlines

My grandmother, us ,your grandchildren, call you Bela, your friends Piti but your name was Teresa, named in honor of Santa Teresa.

I want to start telling her story how it ends.

In September 2021 I sat next to you, with my cousin Ana, by your side. We held you in a room full of candles and flowers. We held you in your room, we lay in your bed. This is how you wanted it all.

I can hear Ana reading Emily Dickinson out loud,

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -

That perches in the soul -

And sings the tune without the words -

And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale -is heard -

And sore must be the storm -

That could abash the little Bird That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land -

And on the strangest Sea -

Yet - never - In Extremity,

It asked a crumb - of me.

(Dickinson and Danes)

We have read to you for days now, books, poetry, and prayers. We were exhausted and you were ready to let go.

Nobody tells you how hard it is to die.

But Ana and I were there, patient by your side.

You asked for lipstick till you couldn't talk, you complained about your hair and how the nurses didn't know how to style it right. (I remember your hand in the hospital full of bruises and tubes still trying to reach for your hair to fix it.)

You were dying but you were going to die how you lived your life. As a spectacle of elegance and grace, everything is perfect till the end.

I feel like no-one ever actually saw you, saw past the spectacle. But I wanted to see all the sides of you even in death, I wanted the good, the beautiful, the bad, the trauma. You didn't like this but I think you grew to appreciate how I could and wanted to see you all. You fueled my rebellion, I wanted to be seen and heard. I wanted to be whole, I wanted us to be whole.

You were born the youngest of a family of 9, since birth you had a role. You were to be beautiful and marry well and you hoped for me to follow your steps.

You were so beautiful.

You are so beautiful.

We are so beautiful.

You tried your best to follow the rules but always found little spaces of freedom. So when it was time for you to pick a husband you looked for someone from a respected family with a hefty inheritance but as an act of rebellion you found someone with chaos behind his blue eyes.

You and my grandfather, Antonio, dated for a bit before he ran away to France to become a poet. You still knew your role, so when Antonio's father told you to marry his son you did. You married and your husband was not even present in the ceremony, not even in the same continent but you are married by power¹.

Then you are shipped to France to try to control a man that you barely knew. Still a child in mind, you have been sheltered all your life. But this is what we do as women, we control uncontrollable men to please the status quo.

I don't think this was your first trauma related to men, but you never really wanted to talk about your childhood. But I know you only follow blindly when you have been conditioned by pain... I was conditioned too.

You got pregnant in France and when you were about to give birth your spouse disappeared, lost in alcohol and madness. Someone dropped you off at a convent, the safest place

¹ My grandmother Teresa Martines del Campo was married to my grandfather Antonio Souza via power of attorney. Their marriage certificate was signed by her and Antonio's father. Later it was anulde.

to give birth in postwar Europe. With labor pains you thought that you were going to die. No-one ever told you how babies were born. You thought that this child was going to pop out of your navel and you would die in the process . You were in panic and the nuns didn't know how to help you so they tied you to a wooden table, you gave birth crucified on a kitchen table, biting down on a wooden spoon.

Time and time again you were left alone, learning to be a mother and a caregiver in the middle of madness.

I can feel your fear, I have felt it too. The fear of just waiting for the man you care for to creep into your bed, eyes bloodshot seeing your naked body and understanding your duty to take them in, you weren't the first one in our lineage to put duty to the family and men first. But I will be the last, I promise. Every story I've heard about the struggles of our families sounds the same. Women working to serve and care for a family while men abuse, destroy and consume what was built by the mothers.

You gave birth on a table, with lipstick on, biting on a wooden spoon, you died with lipstick on in your silk sheets. Head held high, ready to be seen but not heard. Glamor, trauma, and shit.

I hate the fact that I didn't fight to stay with you as your body got covered with your silk sheets, the nurses just ushered us out and we obeyed so that they could clean your body. I wanted to help but I was not allowed, it's not proper for a lady to handle a dead body. But you were never a real body to me, you were a symbol all my life of the restraints of high society, of femininity, of duty. I wanted to clean your body and to make you real, make you a human, to understand that your body was a body just like mine. When I was a child I was convinced that you were a doll. I had to ask my mother if you were real, if you shited like I did .I just could imagine you having all the un-proper parts of being human, all the fluids and sounds, all the visceral feeling. Now that I think about it I never saw your body, or felt your body. When we would embrace it was only a hug and then we would hold hands but I don't remember cuddling with you, I don't remember my skin actually touching your skin. Having the opportunity to wash your body was the last time that I would have the chance to embrace you fully. I didn't think so much about this till I saw Every Ocean Hughes video piece "One Big Bag" as part of the show organized by the Hammer "Witch Hunt". For year Every has been working on death studying

under the supervision of end of life dulas ,tying to understand and approach the beautiful culmination of life in a queer way. In the video “One Big Bag” the performer resities a text written by Every in which they tell the process of taking care of a dead body, they tell about all this caring way that they have learned about approaching death with love and care. As I sat there in the museum gallery all I could think about was you, and your body and all that was happening biologically in your body at the same time that my mind was possessing your death. “One Big Bag” felt like the link I needed to unite us, your body and my mind.

I feel so ashamed that as I carried your ashes all I could think about was my new found freedom. I was finally free from duty, from the spectacle of femininity and properness. Nothing was holding me back anymore, because to be honest your opinion was the only one that mattered. I cared so much that you thought that I was doing it right, that I looked the right way, that I sat the right way, that I walked, talked, acted the part. Sorry, but this is the only way I can break the cycle. I need to break away from the blood line, I need to be feisty and strong, to be free like you couldn't.

I love you.

Machismo and violence towards women is engraved into the Mexican experience you just need to ask. Everyone has a story to share. It's engraved in every aspect of our culture. I was raised in old money, everyone in my family is well educated and we, the women, still set up the table and clean, we fetch the drinks, we manage the household and prune the delicate egos of our male counterparts. I was raised to be afraid of men, to always make space for them, make myself smaller for them. And so was my mother, and my grandmother and my great great grandmother. Guadalupe, my caretaker, was raised the same as my father's mother, every single woman I know back in Mexico. We see this in the extremes of systematic violence to women in Mexico. According to the ONU everyday an average of 10 women are killed with gender violence in Mexico.

It's a battle against century old indoctrination that we have started. I will break the cycle.

Since I found my voice in the art making process I decided that this is where I would make my trench in battle, in visual and guestral research, in art making. I remember the first time I saw Louise Bourgeois work, it was 2014 and I was 21. I had just recently decided to go into art school against my family's wishes, especially my grandmothers. Inside Bellas Artes I was

transported into another world, her world. As I walked the galleries I was walking with her, inside her, looking at the nickels and crannies for her being. I felt like an intruder but I was also invited to see, I was like a spider in the corner of the room. It was a retrospective of her work called *Petite Maman*. Louise Bourgeois work talks so openly about generational trauma, of the struggles mothers and daughters share in the complex relationship we have. Every object was made and treated with so much attention like the attention an overbearing mother has over her children, micromanaging every stitch, every fold. This was her world and I saw my world too. The imagery felt so relatable, mothers as spiders, cages as rooms, distorted mirror and parasitic bodies, bodies not as bodies but as symbols of houses.

Thinking about how we understand bodies in art, I'm reminded of Ana Mendieta's series called *Siluetas* that began in 1973 where she explores the sacredness of her body in relation to the earth. She links her feminine body to the symbolic figure archetype of women that have been represented throughout human civilization history. For her this archetype was linked to the landscape and nature. With *Siluetas* she found a link in the schamanistic that allowed her to explore her role as a woman, as a traveler, as a maker. Her communion with the elements made her body sacred but also ephemeral, all the *Siluetas* were meant to be consumed by the earth, letting the body go back to where it was from letting her body look for "one universal energy which runs through everything: from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy." (Trotman).

Chapter 3

Guadalupe, my caregiver

En el rebozo I wanted to be yours

Guadalupe and I, the cruelty of economics of care

Talking about Guadalupe is hard, because I only saw glimpses of who she was and still I've never loved someone the way I loved her.

Desde el cielo una hermosa mañana

La Guadalupana

La Guadalupana, la Guadalupana bajó al Tepeyac

Su llegada llenó de alegría

De luz y armonía

De luz y armonía y de libertad

De luz y armonía todo el Anahuatl²

She came to my life when I was 3 months old, but before that she came from Puebla, a refugee from poverty and abuse. I grew up in her arms, being carried in her rebozo feeling her heat and their heart. When I was too big she would wrap my little rebozos with my dolls, I wanted to carry them just like she carried me before.

I feel so much love.

I loved her in a way that I've never been able to love another, I loved her like John Welwood says "A soul connection is a resonance between two people who respond to the essential beauty of each other's individual natures, behind their facades, and who connect on a deeper level. This kind of mutual recognition provides the catalyst for a potent alchemy. It is a sacred alliance whose purpose is to help both partners discover and realize their deepest

² Folk song "La Guadalupana" commonly used during December 12 during pilgrimage

potentials. While a heart connection lets us appreciate those we love just as they are, a soul connection opens up a further dimension -seeing and loving them for who they could be and for who we could become under their influence.” But the sad truth is that her love for me, our love toward each other, her care came with a huge price. A price my parents paid Guadalupe monthly and the price of her own children losing her. When I grew up I became closer and closer to Gris, Guadalupe's youngest daughter. We became like sisters but it was after a lot of work from both of us. For years Gris hated me deeply and I hated her, we both had something of Guadalupe that the other wanted, I had Guadalupe's time, Gris had her unconditional love. When I was 17 Gris and I started to bond, to talk and understand each other, it's in these moments that we became aware of the complicated power dynamic that we all played a part in.

En la Tilame entre rosas pintadas
Su imagen amada
Su imagen amada se dignó a dejar
Su imagen amada
Su imagen amada se dignó a dejar
Desde entonces para el mexicano
Ser Guadalupano
Ser Guadalupano es algo esencial

If I could trace back my interest in the power of care, its cruelty and its economics it would come back to me trying to come to terms with mine and Lalupitas love. I don't doubt that she loved me but I'm also aware that the conditions in which our love grew are part of a huge problem of the politics of care. For someone to get care it's taken away from someone else. It's an exchange, love is a commodity, a currency .

Caretaking, the reparative, making life more livable and humane for us all--all of these things matter enormously (they also mattered enormously to Sontag). But, for better or worse, they are not everything. For many- perhaps even most- life feels more ample, more livable, "wider and more various," when it doesn't reduce to one long episode of caretaking or repair. It feels good when it has more texture, more space for different kinds of pursuits, compulsions, and delights, even those with no apparent use value. Despite frequent and fervent assertions to the contrary, such expansiveness is not the exclusive province or aspiration of the privileged

(Nelson 63)

I was more than a job to her, we talked about it later when I was older, she wanted me to be hers as much as I wanted her to be mine. She showed me her love by little acts of rebellion. As a child she would talk to me in her mother language of totonaco, as I learned totonaco I grew closer to her and my mother noticed. Slowly I became more like Guadalupe, talking like her, mimicking her mannerism, wanting to eat the same things as her and my mother became desperate to get her child back. So my mother slowly started setting limits to remind Lalupita that she did not birth me and Guadalupe took some steps back but never let go of my hand, sometimes it felt like she was just holding on to my pinky. I forgot how to speak totonaco because she stopped talking to me in it. In school I was bullied because of the mannerism I learned from her and my grandmother made it her job to put me back in line. But I kept holding on to Guadalupe, to her pinky. To this day I hold her, feel her warmth, remember her smell. She was a full and complete body and she took care of my body too.

Desde el cielo una hermosa mañana
La Guadalupana
La Guadalupana, la Guadalupana bajó al Tepeyac
Su llegada llenó de alegría
De luz y armonía
De luz y armonía y de libertad
De luz y armonía todo el Anahuatl

Guadalupe was named after the virgin of Guadalupe-Coatloapeub-Coatlicue-Tonantzin. The religious and cultural icon of mestizaje. “like most Chicanos, did not practice Roman Catholicism but a folk Catholicism with many pagan elements. La Virgen de Guadalupe's Indian name is Coatloapeub.” This folk Catholicism is the seed for mestizaje, a colonial tactic focuses not on the fast genocide of the original people but of a mutant cultural cancer, slowly eating the original cosmology of Meso America. But somewhere along the line the folk Catholicism became more pagan so much so that “la Virgen de Guadalupe is the single most potent religious, political and cultural image of the Chicano/mexicano. She[...] is a synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of the two races in our psyche, the conquerors and the conquered.” (Anzaldúa 52) more potent than Jesus or the Church.

La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared on el Tepeyac “the spot where the Aztec goddess, Tonantsi ("Our Lady Mother"), had been worshiped by the Nahuas and where a temple to her had stood” (Anzaldúa 50) the 9th of December of 1531. She showed herself to Juan Diego “a poor Indian crossing Tepeyac Hill, whose Indian name was *Cuautlao-huac* and who belonged to the *mazehual* class, the humblest within the Chichimeca tribe” (Anzaldúa 51) and bathed him in roses, covering his tunic with the now iconic image of the brown Virgen. Her church in el Tepeyac located north of Mexico City is to this day one of the most visited Holy stops in the world³.

Guadalupe, my caregiver, was named after our Virgin of Guadalupe. I was also named by the mother of Christ, Maria. Both our names are meant to symbolize the same thing but they don't. I'm fully mestiza, I look European in Mexico and I'm a “guera”, like the representations of the virgin Mary I'm white. This gives me a privilege that Guadalupe never had. She was fully indigenous, “morena ” like the image of the virgin of Guadalupe. The Mexico we experience was and is completely different. I want to take time to acknowledge this, that I love her with all my heart and for me writing this is a love letter to her. But I'm also using her, I never got the chance to talk to her as an adult, we were never equal. All the love in the world can't change the privilege that I have and she didn't, all this love can't change the fact that I never really knew her. I love her, I love the image and memory of her.

En la Tilame entre rosas pintadas
Su imagen amada
Su imagen amada se dignó a dejar
Su imagen amada
Su imagen amada se dignó a dejar
Desde entonces para el mexicano
Ser Guadalupano
Ser Guadalupano es algo esencial

³ When my grandmother was in the hospital, my family went on a pilgrimage to the Basilica, we asked for more time with her and we were given two more years.

Smell is one of the most primal of senses, it is the first one we start to develop and understand the world around us. Smell is how we recognize our caretakers. There's nothing I remember more than how she smelled.

Perfect combination of cal, ash, petroleum jelly and the sweetness of her sweat.

When she would bathe me, the hot water would bring out the smell from her hands and the vapor of the bathtub smelled like her. As she wash me she would sing under her breath

Desde el cielo una hermosa mañana
La Guadalupana
La Guadalupana, la Guadalupana bajó al Tepeyac
Su llegada llenó de alegría
De luz y armonía
De luz y armonía y de libertad
De luz y armonía todo el Anahuatl

She died in 2012 when I was 19, I was not allowed to go to her funeral, I had to mourn her in silence.

Chapter 4

Santa Teresa, my companion

Prayers and conversations with Santa Teresa

Santa Teresa de Avila found me in a dream.

For years Santa Teresa lived an anonymous life in my head, she only existed as depicted by Bernini in his famous sculpture *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1651). Just a body in ecstasy, just a woman in presumed pleasure made by a man. She stayed anonymous in my head till one day she spoke to me. She appeared in the background of a silly TV show and I just could not get her out of my head. She stayed in my head for days till one day I listened to her whispers.

I open a universe in her story, I have found my perfect accomplice.

Care has been a central part of my practice for years but for most of those years I cared for others by abusing myself. I followed the patterns I've learned for my mother's bloodline, be selfless and quite always beautiful and helpful. Try as hard as you can to not be a burden. With this toxic conception of care, how could I care for others in a safe way?

Coming to San Diego I was committed to break away, to learn how to take care of myself, to love myself, to be selfish. And for the first two years here I worked on that, finding emancipation in endurance based performances, in solitude but the goal as always to go back to caring for a community. I want to care for others, I love doing it but I need to learn to care for myself first and then start to introduce others to my circle of care.

Santa Teresa is the first person I invited in.

Santa Teresa de Avila was a 16th century nun from Spain. Her approach to spiritual life is one of whispers. She suggested and worked on private prayer, the importance of an inner relationship with the Wholly Other. She cared for this relationship with enormous devotion, it became her world. The famous ecstasy was a very intimate and personal moment with the Other, it's now thought that these visions, these sensual experiences were aided by partial epileptic episodes. This was the first thing that I found to connect us, and from there the list grew and our conversations became deeper. We both experience the world via a neurodivergent lens, a world full of magic and faith, seeing beauty and holiness in empty spaces. We both manage this

information by toxic coping mechanisms like self harm and purging. We both love and care for our community and found peace in order. She became the person I needed to start walking to communal care.

I can't remember the first time I traveled out of my body, the first time I became aware of this brewing madness in me. The déjà vu have been there since I have a conscience, the jumps in time and space, the shadows and whispers. I can't remember the first time but I do remember how lonely it felt, how lonely I was in all the noise. All my life what I've truly only wanted is not to feel lonely. So I worked so hard to be what others needed, I needed to be needed so I could never be alone.

I knew I needed help and I asked for it, clearly telling my parents "I think I'm going mad, I need help". Just a 9 year old aware of her lonely self in the noise inside her head but there's all this stigma, all this trauma, all this hushes around emotional help. So I was ignored, for years I kept asking with words, with action and tantrums. We are not granted autonomy over our bodies as children, I was told that I didn't understand what was going on inside me but I was inside of me aware of all. So when I wasn't even a teenager I realized that the knowledge I had over my body, of what was happening inside of me, was not good enough. I learned that some people's knowledge is more valuable than others.

Historically there's types of neurodivergent that are welcomed in the mainstream legitimate knowledge. The academic system is ment to weed us out "The instruments of exclusion are not visible or dramatic--men in white coats dragging people away--but quiet, insidious: We flunk out and drop out." Neuro divergence can be useful to create capital. The right type of madness historically is white and male, you can imagine it as a man with a vest sweater in an ivy infeste brick building in a room with blackboards from floor to ceiling, getting ready for his nobel prize. It's the madness that produces in the dark corners of institutions and its allowed as long as it's quiet and publishable. "The fondly regarded "absent-minded" or "quirky" professor is a noticeable figure, but less noticeable is the student with severe depression who drops out of school; the adjunct with autism who never manages to navigate a tenure-track job interview successfully; or the independent scholar whose written works are widely cited but who cannot adhere to the social requirements of teaching in a classroom." (Price 6) I had no idea now to be mad at school, how my divergency fitted into academia but Santa Teresa was there to help.

Santa Teresa became the first woman to be named doctor of the church. Her work is focused on time, time with yourself and The Other, time with your community, your sisters, time with words, time to discuss. Her knowledge came from her inner world, her bodily knowledge of how she experienced extasis, but in order for her mystical knowledge to be heard it needed to be validated by heads of the church. She was constantly questioned about it, even in death as priests and medics examined her corps for mystical validations of being touched by God, her knowledge was never enough. Santa Teresa was born in 1515, took her vows in 1534 died in 1582 was canonized in 1622 and was recognized as a doctor of the church till 1970. It took her more than 400 years for her voice to be validated, for her work to be intellectualized enough to be valid.

Santa Teresa died in 1582 and was buried in her convent. In 1588 she was exhumed for the first time after her sisters in the convent noted mystic events signaling to Santa Teresa holiness. Accounts of people that were present when her body was taken out of her crypt say :

“The body is erect, though bent a little forward, as with old people. It can be made to stand upright, if someone props it with a hand between the shoulders, and this is the position in which they hold it when it is to be dressed or undressed, as though it were alive. The color of the body is of the color of dates; the face darker, because the veil which was full of dust became stuck to it, and it was maltreated more than the rest; nevertheless, it is intact, and even the nose is undamaged, The head has retained all its hair, as on the day of her death. The eyes having lost their vital moisture are dried of but the eyelids are perfectly preserved. The moles on hd lace retain their lite hairs. The mouth is tightly shur and carot be opened. The flesh is that of a corpulent persol arccially on the shoulders... The shoulder from which the tow has been detached exudes a moisture which clings to the touch and exhales the same scent as the body”

(Cruz 164)

As word started spreading of the incorruptible body of the nun, people started claiming pieces of her, all man. She was slowly dismembered to become relics

“parts of the body and bits of flesh were Diacted in the name of piery and distributed throughout Europe, the foot is in the Church of Santa Maria della Scala in Rome, and a check, which was conserved in Madrid, was lost during the Civil War of 1936-39. The left hand, which was kept by the Wades Carmelitas of Ronda, was stolen by the Liberals during he same political upheaval, but during their hurried escape after their defeat, the relic was left abandoned in a valise and eventually found its way into the possession of Generalissimo Franco. Alba de Tormes, there are exposed for the veneration of the faithful, in their respective silver and crystal reliquaries, the left arm and the heart, which is of particular interest.”

(Cruz 165)

The moment they first open up her crypt and started extracting pieces of her body, Santa Teresa's corpse becomes not only a commodity to be consumed but also a political tool. She lost

her physical body and it was sold to the highest bidder. The first time they opened my body in an operation room, I also felt the loss of my bodily autonomy. Living in a divergent body makes me feel like I constantly need to prove my experience in my body valid, and I've grown to understand that my voice is not enough. When I was younger I thought that I needed to make myself smaller to be less of a burden, smaller and I'll be perfect and good. If I was small enough I could disappear this body and mind that are so complicated and messy. I worked hard to disappear but it wasn't ever good enough, as time went by and I grew up I started to need more. I needed space. Santa Teresa writes about our souls as a castle in her theological book "Las Moradas del Castillo Interior", in this inner castle that represents our soul connected to The Other, to God. Each room is open and closed via prayer, each one infinite, a deep inter-conversation with yourself and the universe, for her the universe was what she called God. Santa Teresa's interior castle although it was a mystic's place close to God it was also our body. This castle exists in a space outside of the physical realm, it exists outside of dreams, it's a space within our psyche that is infinite like the love she shared with The Other. Understanding the possibilities of infinite expansion of bodies is complicated and scary, for me it went against everything that I was taught to do as a child, sit pretty and tiny, don't be loud, don't take space. My first response to the feeling of taking space was to literally take as much space as possible and extend my body and its needs. Expanding the softness and safety of textiles became a tool of rebellion, but it was not enough. I still felt held back with the little space I gave myself in my mind. In Santa Teresa's teaching I started to find ways in which objects and gestures expanded the space in my mind and filtered into others. With her I became infinite.

Chapter 5

Me and them

The installation

In “Tomándome mi tiempo, conversaciones trascendentales en la morada interior; Nuestros cuerpos son símbolos más que un hogar” you walk into a limbo, an in-between place. In this installation I want to transport you into the liminal pocket of disfigured time and space where I meet with Santa Teresa, this is the place she showed me in her ecstasis. This room is the in-between our physical realm and the holy realm, this room is a space of dreams.

THE ROOM

“Que es considerar nuestra alma como un castillo todo de un diamante o muy claro cristal, adonde hay muchos aposentos, asi como en el cielo hay muchas moradas” (De Jesus 2)

The installation consists of a room divided by a felt curtain. The components in the room have been covered in wool that has been felted on to all the surfaces. The wool that makes the bed bleeds to the floor and to the night stand and the books on it, wool covers everything, like a layer of solid dust. Isolating, protecting, caring every single thing so much that they lose themselves. Every element plays with reality and the fuzziness of dreams.

FELT

I feel we are all felted into this world, our relationships are felted not waved. Felt is made by chaos and pressure, each fiber is rubbed and pushed and swirled between each other and in this chaos the fibers hold on tightly to each other. This creates an incredibly strong textile that can't be torn but needs to be shredded carefully. Felt has become this metaphor for living, embracing chaos, but holding on tight, being strong in the soft. Felt is my armor, my isolating, protective armor.

COPPER

Santa Teresa's hand was the first piece of her that was dismembered by the church. Missing the little finger her hand is encapsulated in metal, covered in precious stones, lavish and expensive. Her hand living a life so different to the one her living body had. The Saint took a

pledge of poverty, devoting her life to live as closely to God as possible far away from the pleasures of money, feeling that the less she needed for the world the closer she was to the Other. Would she see her hand encapsulated in metal further away from God? Closer to pride?

A hand encapsulated in metal, a mouth full of pennies, the smell of copper held in my clenched fist getting warmer. Copper remembers being held, it oxidizes with the human touch, holding on to trauma.

What does electricity taste like?

Copper remembers being touched by bodies, it oxidizes fast in contact with human sweat, holding on to the memory of old use. For its antibacterial properties it has been used for centuries in relation to our quotidian life, copper pans, copper surfaces, copper utensils, copper pennies in the nopal stew to lower the slime that comes out of the leaves, copper pots that have been in the family for more than 100 years to insure the sterile conditions for proper jam making.

Copper in my blood.

LIGHT

When I think of spaces of contemplation I think of candles. Candle light for ceremonies, for witchcraft, for pleasure, for rest.

As humans we are attracted to fire, it scares us but draws us in. Fire brought us closer to our humanity and in that way it brought us closer to God, to the invention of religion. But fire burns bright and hot, it consumes everything. We needed a more controlled version. Candlelight has a special texture to it, it glows like whispers of fire. Lighting a room but just enough to keep the mystic, the magic in the room. In a cold dark cathedral the whispers of light that candles give remind us of the world outside. Fire becomes the link between the human world and the spiritual world. In many cultures we burn offerings to send them to a different dimension of being, an afterlife, a limbo.

SMELL

Smell is one of my favorite senses, it grounds me in this physical world more than touch or sight or sound. Smell is the one sense I know I can trust.

I remember smells so well.

The smell of Guadalupe's body: cal, ash, petroleum jelly and the sweetness of her sweat. My grandmother's perfume permeated everything she touched to a molecular level: rosa water

baby powder, citrus Hermes perfume, the sweet smell of face cream, hairspray and the almost invisible smell of a body. Bela never allowed herself to be a body, a human body.

One of the signs of Santa Teresa's divine body was the smell she spread, many accounts talk about the pleasant smell her body gave the whole convent for centuries. "The delightful fragrance that frequently enveloped the Saint during her lifetime, and that was so strongly noted at the time of her death that the door and windows of her cell had to be opened, continued to emanate from the grave" I imagine her smell: rose wood and incense, the slight smell of fire and a sour after smell of vinegar.

I dream of smells.

What does the limbo smell like?

What does ecstasy smell like?

I dream of rosewood, frankincense, skin, sweat and burning wax.

SOUND

A ringing in your ears, ringing deep inside you so loud that it clouds sounds from the outside, so loud it trespasses to the outside, so loud it becomes silence. The ringing becomes everything, sounds become the link between the inside and the outside, the path between dreams and reality.

I dream of a hum that becomes a hymn, as I wake up the hymn stays with me. All day I'm haunted by the sounds, I can't work, can't think, the only thing that exists that day is the hum of my dreams leaking into everything.

VOMIT AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

In Roman Catholicism consuming the body of Christ in the ritualist breaking of the bread and communion is an essential part of the relationship between the church and the practicing catholics. Is only through the hands and words of the priest that the wafer gets consecrated by God, it's in the hands of the church to deem you worthy of the body of Christ, deem you worthy of purity.

I remember before my first communion during religion classes my teacher would bring practice wafers so I would learn to properly consume the body, letting it dissolve on my tongue, you don't chew on Christ's body. Words like: body, bread, communion, consume, melt on your tongue; lose their meaning in the ritual, they become new things. Body became an abstract idea, a symbol. Bread or the wafer became a vehicle of magic. Communion and consuming become

sensual acts of letting the body into you and the wafer melting in my tongue felt like skin. In this ritual The Other's body becomes part of my Body. Santa Teresa, my grandmother, Guadalupe and I all perform this ritual. We all became symbolic cannibals in the promise of salvation. We all lost our bodies in symbols.

“Originating in the belly, the mythic seat of the passions, vomiting is associated with psyche's tumultuous affective spewing from the depths, like so much volcanic lava. But the belly is also the locus of devouring, holding and incubation, so that vomiting becomes symbolically related to the energies of initiatory process, transformation and dramatic emergence. Vomit evokes the stuff that can't be contained, as well as what must be let go in the service of evolution.”

(Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism 736)

Magic happens in the translation of gestures. In lighting the right candle at the right time, in rocks in water, in loose hairs and dust. Magic happens in bodily fluids. In blood and tears. In this case in vomit, in the refusal of the body of Christ.

Can I build my body from the vile and half consumed body of Christ?

Can I give SantaTeresa's body back to her, her whole holy body back to her?

Can I undo what men did to her? To us? To Bela? To Guadalupe? To me?

Can magic happen in the refusal?

Chapter 6

You and me: speculation and loose threads

I opened up a wound and between the blood clots, pus and growing tissue I found a thread. I grab it between my teeth and start pulling and like an unraveling sweater it softly lets go. As I pull I feel it deep inside of me, like when you press on your navel and feel your own guts. I have unraveled in front of you, I am unraveling in front of you. This text is all the loose threads, all the starts and end of my timeline but also that of my grandmother, of Santa Teresa and Guadalupe. In this infinite pile of threads we hold each other, see patterns between us and we lose ourselves in stories and myths. We, Santa Teresa, Bela, Guadalupe and I are made up of stories, of spaces, in dreams, of limbos.

I have tried to give us our bodies back, I don't know if I succeeded. I feel lost in your dead bodies now. Santa Teresa, Bela and Guadalupe feel more like a body than a symbol now but I feel less than a body, not even a symbol but a space of translation, a transcendental whisper looking for patterns. I rest in your ears and in the hearts and shoulders of the three women and now I'm a whisper looking for other stories and myths to find myself in.

This exploration and research started out as a way to move into community work, to go back to the social practice I used to make, that consumed me and used me till there was barely anything of me left. I wanted to end this and in exchange become strong and loud and ready for the big physical world but as I wandered between the fibers I have found light in silence, I have found rebellion in whispers, autonomy in light touches.

I want to live in whispers, learn of silence, explore bodies in candlelit limbo, looking at the universe and the multiplicities of transcendental time travel.

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