



***A balloon and a diamond. An epilogue to What does care support?***

*We have been educated to respect fear more  
than our need for language and definition,  
but if we wait in silence for courage to come,  
the weight of silence will drown us.*

Audre Lorde

I

I set out to write an essay and that activated a problem-creating mechanism which led that very writing to be postponed. Truthfully, the trigger to this all was having accepted the job to create *something* from the *¿Qué sostienen los cuidados?* (What does care support?) conferences, which took place at the Huarte Center over the months of October, November and December 2021. The job is open-ended, but I interpret that what is expected of me, as an artist, is that I give an account of the days with *something more* than a utilitarian record. And here the mechanism is churning out the first problem: that *extra*. Something indefinite, indefinable, a touch of a magic wand that turns something already seen into something new.

I'm deciding to start with the simple *thing*: record the audio from the conferences and then transcribe them, about 15 hours in total. This step, far from solving the problem, entails another, in this case more perceptive one, which is that I have the feeling that the *something*, pages and pages of things said by others, is already *more*, much more than what I can offer or

say. However, I feel that the strategy of transcribing – of postponing – is not entirely paralysing. I'm hopeful that, by writing the words of the others, I can *in-rotate them*, and in that process of absorption-digestion, they will become working material.

However, I have a third problem, which is that if I take the subject of the conference seriously, I think I should apply some care to this whole process. For example, I think I should do this without exploiting myself. So no shutting myself in at home all day in front of the computer screen, feeding my anxiety and forcing myself to write. However, I have already set myself several deadlines and missed all of them. *As always, I would rather not do it.* I imagine turning down the job, but I dare not. That's why it's so good when I say no in time. I convince myself that I can't, but at the same time I have to, I need to be able to. The thought of not doing it alleviates my anxiety for a while, but faced with the prospect of not receiving the commission for this job, my anxiety only grows and becomes more aggressive. So I reconsider the third problem and tone down my self-imposed demands. I'm not going to pretend that I can write this without high doses of guilt, laziness, and fear. Nor will I pretend that in return I do not receive some degree of confessional pleasure. These are the parts of my psychological and material patchwork right now. This is the words of those others already claiming their place.

II

How can one name names without over-narrating? Luisa Fuentes Guaza, the facilitator-articulator-backbone of the conference, mentioned the over-narration of care several times. They are assiduously narrated within the institutions, including arts institutions. Or rather, they are named and perhaps over-narrated, and from insisting so much on their signifier, their significance becomes diluted. For Luisa, *care is a tailor's drawer, where an enormous amount of different jobs requiring specification accumulates. What they need, she says, is for us to delve into the different natures of these jobs; and we have to name them, put words and material and symbolic conditions to them to make them liveable; to structure a whole legal, political, economic system, so that care does not keep on accumulating in the same ever more precarious bodies, subjected to conditions of slavery and disease.* These conferences, without a doubt, shed light on that drawer. And each voice, each body, with its implacable specificity, has helped to turn that morass of hidden jobs into a plot wherein each fibre is discernible, as are the junctions where they intertwine. I do not intend, in this essay, to make each of these fibres and junctions visible. I cannot make a literal translation of what happened there. I can't show *that much* because I have to show *something else*.

If I don't wrap up this writing, I postpone it, for example, by painting. In this case, painting the words of the others has served a twofold purpose: to calm the anxiety that I get from working, by working. A balloon and a diamond. On the first day Irati Mogollón, spoke of a deflated balloon to describe something very concrete: *the rare form that some social movements acquire after having grown very fast and diminished just as quickly*. Irati told us that *life's sustainability options are part of everyday life*, and that this entails a *challenge*, because *as time passes, the political erotica vanishes* and people lose interest, motivation, energy, desire. To procrastinate is sometimes to wish in another direction. As I paint I also think of a tired or sick body, of a body that cares in precarious conditions because it has no other choice.

Then comes another image. That of splendour. Luisa had asked the speakers from the first session to think about the wealth generated by the bodies they care for and Erika Irusta imagined that her body housed diamonds, riches that she was unable to see, because *her eyes, her ability to feel proud, and the possibility of letting them be, had been stolen*. And she wondered, *must we extract our wealth? Does the relationship with wealth in care always have to be extractive? Do I have to produce with it?* For Erika, '*plundered plunderer*', what the white-colonial-cisheteropatriarchal system does with maternal bodies and the bodies they care for is *plunder their many riches*, those necessary to sustain life and the continuity of the system itself.

III

*June 2020*

*"With what time I have left, silence doesn't pay off"*

*I bought a cane. I did so because I had a hard time walking. I needed it for any distance of more than 100m, to go up and down the stairs at home.*

*At first I also clung tightly to the table top to get up from the sofa. I leaned on the walls to unload weight from my bad hip.*

*This happened a little before and a little after the diagnosis: My breast cancer of just eleven years, has metastasised in my bones. My vertebrae, ribs and pelvis are affected.*

*The cancer is back, this time to stay.*

*Suddenly last night, insomnia again. It seemed to me that I had to declare war, no actually, to neglect silence and the mind block that have prevented me from writing for so long. Whatever I may have to say.*

*For example: life and cancer end at the same point.*

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I transcribe my mother's words, too. I took them from a notebook with a green cover and yellowish pages entitled '*Crónica del cáncer*' (Cancer journal). My mother had always written diaries, but by then she hadn't done so for quite some time. She had realised that she had been subtly self-censoring everything written —*a substrate of nunnish shyness cleaning everything, polishing even the deepest nooks*— and then she decided to stop writing. However, getting sick again and rereading Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* made her start again.

A short time later the cancer advanced to her spinal cord, taking away her mobility and sensitivity from the waist down. She was admitted to the oncology emergency unit and treated with radiotherapy, in addition to chemotherapy. Later on she would be transferred to palliative care until she was able to return home, where she died in the early hours of January 27, 2021.

She left me her words as an inheritance, scattered in a pile of diaries.

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*I sense that no particularly interesting reflection will come out of this journal, or none that have not already been expressed otherwise.*

*However, I won't let that be the reason that I remain in silence. It is important that I tell myself that which does not usually fit into everyday conversations, with family or friends, that breaks down the façade of normality for which each day I pay a price.*

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*Nor are silences the same. That of Audre Lorde, black woman, poet, feminist, mother, lesbian, lover, warrior, is much more urgent to turn into words than mine: white woman, heterosexual,*

*conformist, survivor of many wars, large and small ... She says, "And, of course, I'm afraid because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger."*

*"We can stay in our safe nooks, mute like bottles, and even then our fear will not wane."*

*She chose activism as a commitment to language. I am a mute bottle. Mute and unconscious, maybe because I've buried my fears so that they won't reveal anything uncomfortable to me.*

*I'm tired.*

\*

*October 2020*

*It had been smelling like sewer for several days.*

*The bag of pee and its tubes filled with sediment had a bitter effect on my sense of smell. They changed it this afternoon. Finally, a break! I don't know what we are inside, but it isn't much to get excited about!*

*I'm writing freehand. I don't even know how to hold the notebook anymore. There is no way of adopting a normal posture to write in this soft notebook in bed, it keeps slipping away from me.*

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*It is very simple: if the body is weak, your mood wanes.*

*I resist even that simple premise. I always want to be strong, I always want to be well. I have a hard time accepting these moments of weakness and apathy.*

*These past few days I felt like I was hitting rock bottom: not wanting anything, worried even because my friends were going to come to take care of me, unable to relax, what bad times I've had. I confess it openly: I have had a really bad time, to the point of doubting, of losing confidence in the process...*

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*November 2020*

*Just gratitude, always, despite the confinement of the room and the inconveniences of being hospitalised. What weighed on me the most was a feeling of claustrophobia, as I say, and sadness that was saturating me more and more, every day. Looking at drawings or flowers was no longer relieving me... I just wanted to get out of there. Perhaps that could be interpreted as a sign of recovery. I don't know. It's true that in the end I have been stronger. And that now I really appreciate spending the post-chemo phase at home.*

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*Meanwhile, my routine hasn't changed much. Keep on assimilating disability, fundamentally, with all the limitations that it entails and, in turn, realise the enormous care with which I am being treated. With the immense gift of love from mine and those close by.*

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*January 2021*

*Every day it is harder for me to write.*

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I have a hard time writing, but silence isn't paying off. I question my discomfort to name it. If I say anxiety I open another tailor's drawer without a light to shine on it. Nor do I call it depression because I got rid of the productive framework that I could use to face it. It is an ordinary and generalised discomfort that I don't know where to place, whether inside or outside the body. I think it must be in a liminal, interstitial and mobile space, because when I think that I've identified it, it dissolves and escapes, and leaves me shapeless and without splendour. It may have to do with grief, or it may not.

There was something very rewarding about providing care. Without a doubt, accompanying my mother's illness and death has been my privilege. The most urgent form of self-care. And even so, it took many more bodies, money and time to make the process liveable and dignified. In my case, I ended up quitting the job that provided me with a steady income. I wish I had a social support, one that didn't go through the medical institution, because needing to take

care of someone isn't a disease. I wish that the process to get dependency aid were shorter, as they didn't arrive on time. It's clear to me that there were avoidable difficulties. And I would've liked to have had an alternative to quitting my job, or an alternative to guilt for not being able to handle everything.

But caring has been my privilege. I am only grateful to the bodies that accompanied us through this process that was so beautiful and at the same time so hard, and especially to my mother, Carmen, who took care (of me) her whole life, until the last day, making it so that taking care of her was a pleasure.

IV

Accompany.

Listen.

Be present.

Empty the pee bag.

Change the nappy.

Clean a body that cannot move.

Dress it.

Hydrate it.

Handle a crane to move it.

Massage feet that do not feel.

Be typing fingers that transcribe.

Be her legs.

Clean under the bed.

Clean around it.

Hold the spoon.

Kiss a beloved body.

Kiss a body that dies.

Inject morphine, midazolam, haloperidol.

Hold her hand.

Caress her hand.  
Release her hand.

Embrace a dead beloved body.

V

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Restore dignity and value to care work.

Write the Statute of Care.

Amend the Dependency Law.

Repeal the Aliens Act.

Abolish intern work.

End racist abuse and aggression in Spanish homes.

Differentiate home work from care work.

Draft a specific law for the care work of dependent persons at home.

Guarantee the right of dependent people to decide how they want to be cared for.

Recompense maternal plundering.

Guarantee psycho-emotional support during the postnatal period.

Make amends for plundering migrated bodies.

Create an urban fabric from the bodies they care for and the bodies that need to be cared for.

Implement the Universal Basic Income.

Compensate care.

Extend permits to care for dependent and terminally ill people.

Extend leave for the death of a loved one. Ensure the right to grieve.

Politicise discomfort. Depathologise it.

Reduce bureaucracy.

Work on epic everyday narratives.

Establish the limits of sustaining life.

Work on feminist reciprocity.

Shoulder the struggles of all.

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Thanks to Luisa, Irati, Erika, María, Irene, Sarah, Mary, Ana, Alexia, Cristina, Gabriela, Paloma, Blanca, Zarys, Lara, Anita and many others, for not settling with silence.